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Social Media and the Rise of "Sephora Kids"

Gender Performance and Beauty Practices among Female Children

by

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Abstract

Keywords: Children and Consumption, Children and Social Media, Sephora Kids, Kidfluencer Culture, Digital Consumer Culture, Beauty Norms, Gender Socialisation, Gender Performativity, Social Media, TikTok

Thesis aim: The aim of this study is to explore how young children perform beauty practices on social media platforms. Particularly, this study aims to deepen the understanding of the phenomena of Sephora Kids and how gender norms and beauty ideals are constructed on digital platforms.

Theoretical Perspective: The three main theoretical perspectives used are Butler's Gender Performativity (1990), Goffman's Theory of Performativity (1959) and the Meme Theory by Dawkins (1976).

Methodology: A qualitative research method was chosen for the study, and 50 TikTok videos were analysed. The empirical results were collected and analysed with the help of the theories and research on the topics of children and consumption, children and social media and gender in consumer research.

Main Findings & Contributions: This study defines three themes through which female Sephora Kids perform beauty practices on social media: *Embodied Emulation*, *Gendered Socialisation*, and *Commercialised Self-Care*. The research shows that female children navigate digital consumer culture from a young age, particularly through beauty practices and brand promotion as kidfluencers. Through the beauty routines, female children face an early gender socialisation, with the mothers playing an important role in reinforcing femininity and beauty consumption at an early age, while digital platforms serve as amplifiers of gender and beauty norms. In addition, the research contributes to how children's engagement with beauty products influences their understanding of their body and their need to meet societal expectations through their appearance.

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1 Introduction

In the first chapter, we introduce the phenomenon of Sephora Kids and explain children's consumption of social media. In the subchapter ‘Problem Formulation’ we present the existing literature on the topics of ‘Children and Consumption,’ ‘Children and Social Media,’ and ‘Gender in Consumer Research’ and how it will be applied in our master's thesis. Finally, we describe the research context, the research motivation, the aimed theoretical contributions, the aimed practical contributions and the thesis outline in the following subchapters.

1.1 Background

Known as the ‘Sephora Kids’, the phenomenon describes children under the age of 13 years who buy expensive skincare products and make-up from beauty retailers and then promote them on their social media channels. Due to concerns regarding the potential harm of the products on children’s skin, the age of this new generation of consumers, and complaints about the behaviour of the Sephora Kids in beauty retail stores, particularly in Sephora stores in the United States, the trend gained a lot of attention among media outlets and dermatologists. As these children primarily purchase their products from the beauty retailer Sephora, the store’s name was included to describe the phenomenon (Khare et al. 2024).

In the United States, Sephora is the industry leader in cosmetic products. As part of its product range, Sephora offers both its own line and exclusive beauty products in the higher-priced category. (Sephora, 2025). As part of its marketing efforts, the brand has created its own community, named the ‘Sephora Squad’, to support content creators from diverse backgrounds on social media with exclusive benefits and its own alumni programme (Sephora Squad, n.d.).

Sephora’s original target audience were women in their 20s and 30s from the upper middle class (Tariq, 2021). However, for some time now, the retailer has been targeting much younger consumers since the emergence of the Sephora Kids. The trend emerged between the years 2023 and 2024 in the United States and became widely known when the hashtag #SephoraKids appeared on social media, as parties involved started to share their experiences at outlets across the country. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram have amplified this trend and have become particularly popular among the younger generation, who have started to use the hashtag to share their own beauty routines on social media (Khare et al. 2024).

The Sephora Kids phenomenon represents a development in kidfluencer culture, which became popular from 2010 and describes children under the age of 13 who share their own content on social media or promote brands, earning money with the content they create (Fernández-Gómez et al. 2021). As the minimum age for using social media in the United States is 13, these profiles are usually run by their parents (Hudders et al., 2024). The parents share content about their children and introduce them to the kidfluencer culture at a young

age, raising concerns as to how the parent's role influences their children's media consumption (Halapa & Djuranovic, 2021). Children creating their own content display a preference for certain brands and develop brand loyalty to form their own identity and their social standing (Núñez-Gómez et al. 2020).

However, the trend of promoting beauty products for female consumers is not new. In fact, beauty ideals have always been put upon women by media and advertisements (Visconti et al. 2018). Beauty is seen as a way to enhance and modify the body, to seek social validation and meet societal norms and ideals (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995). Research has also shown that traditional gender stereotypes are more pronounced on social media than in traditional media (Santoniccolo et al. 2023; Döring et al. 2016). Despite these external influences, both women and female children have been underlooked in consumption studies (Cook, 2008).

The phenomenon of 'Sephora Kids' is important to understand and relevant to this study, as underage girls in particular are being pressured to engage in beauty practices on social media at an increasingly young age, and this trend is growing rapidly. What is worrying is that this content is often shared under maternal supervision or even under the guidance of mothers. The mothers of these children encourage and push them to do so, rather than protecting them from the influences of social media and societal expectations regarding the fulfilment of certain beauty standards. Beauty practices among underage girls are thus normalised and trivialised on digital platforms. This raises concerns about the vulnerability and rights of children on digital platforms. It is therefore important to understand how these practices are carried out and reinforced in order to protect children from exploitation. To understand this phenomenon, this study examines the beauty practices of female Sephora Kids on social media.

1.2 Problem Formulation

In order to investigate the Sephora Kids phenomenon, we have positioned our study within the field of marketing and the literature streams of Children and Consumption, Children and Social Media and Gender in Consumer Research. The Sephora Kids phenomenon lies at the intersection of these three areas, as the trend concerns children's consumer behaviour, which is gender-specific and linked to beauty ideals that are reinforced on social media (Khare et al. 2024).

The literature stream 'Children and Consumption' provides a framework for understanding how children's consumption behaviour develops. Researchers have examined how children are taught to consume products (Ågren, 2020; Cook, 2017), how they make purchasing decisions (Roedder John, 1999; Gunter & Furnham, 1998; Cody, 2012), and how marketing plays a significant role in shaping children's consumer behaviour, with advertisements promoting harmful stereotypes (Armstrong & Brucks, 1988; Seitler, 1993). The results of the studies show that children's consumer behaviour develops with increasing age. While the influence of parents and peers plays a role at a younger age, the media in particular has a significant influence on children as they get older (Roedder John, 1999; Gunter & Furnham,

1998). Children develop consumer competencies during the cognitive and social phase, such as an understanding of brands or comparing prices (Armstrong & Brucks, 1988; Seiter, 1993).

While existing literature has extensively examined children's consumer behaviour and development (John, 1999; Gunter & Furnham, 1998; Cook, 2017), these studies predominantly focus on children aged above 13 and rely on pre-digital era frameworks. The studies examine aspects such as games, food and goods in relation to children and fail to recognise how important and influential digital landscapes have become for children. Furthermore, children are still seen as passive participants in the digital market in these studies, and there is no recognition that they are now active market participants who actively shape their relationship with brands. Therefore there is limitation in understanding how children under the age of 13 navigate consumption in today's digital marketplace, particularly through social media platforms.

With the second literature stream, ‘Children and Social Media’, we contribute to the understanding of the role that children play on digital platforms and how they have evolved from passive to active participants on social media. Researchers have investigated how early media consumption influences consumer behaviour, brand awareness and brand loyalty (Halapa & Djuranovic, 2021; Núñez-Gómez et al. 2020; Glynn & Jones, 2019), how children use social media to express their social role and identity (Tufte & Ekström, 2007; Wernholm & Reneland-Forsman, 2019; Berg et al. 2024), what influence kidfluencers exert on the consumption preferences and behaviour of their followers (Fernández-Gómez et al. 2021; Hudders & Beuckels, 2024, Lestari et al. 2024; Kacprzak, 2022) and what ethical concerns and challenges exist regarding the commodification of children (Clark & Jno-Charles, 2025; Lenander, 2023; LePage, 2023). The results of the studies (Halapa & Djuranovic, 2021; Núñez-Gómez et al. 2020; Glynn & Jones, 2019) show that children between the ages of 8 and 12 are particularly prone to being influenced in their consumer behaviour and that early media use has a decisive influence on children's consumer behaviour and brand relationships. Although digital media can help children to improve cognitive skills and promote their creativity, it can also lead to physical and mental health problems (Tufte & Ekström, 2007; Clark & Jno-Charles, 2025).

Although research on children as social media participants has grown (Halapa & Djuranovic, 2021; Núñez-Gómez et al., 2020), limitations remain in understanding children under 13 years who increasingly access these platforms despite age restrictions. Current studies treat beauty-related content superficially, overlooking how such content shapes identity formation and gender socialization and also platform-specific affordances. They fail to capture the performative nature of children's digital self-presentation, missing insights into how beauty practices function as identity work rather than mere play. Particularly TikTok's unique algorithm and short-form video format, remains underexplored. Current research neglects to represent how algorithmic recommendations and viral trends reshape children's consumer socialisation processes, moving beyond traditional influencers like family and peers to include digital platform architectures and online communities.

Through the ‘Gender in Consumer Research’ stream of literature, we can examine how the phenomenon of Sephora Kids is shaped by social structures that place different expectations on girls and boys (Santoniccolo et al. 2023). This perspective allows us to look at beauty practices not just as aesthetic choices but as formative experiences through which young girls learn what it means to be a woman in society.

Studies on gender have explored how gender has evolved from a demographic variable to a performative, fluid construct (Butler, 1990; De Beauvoir, 1956), how feminist waves have deconstructed traditional role models (Penaloza, 1994; Davis et al. 2006) and how masculinity is recognised as socially constructed (Visconti et al. 2018). Furthermore, consumer research examines how advertising and brand building are influenced by gender (Visconti, Maclaran & Bettany, 2018), how consumer culture and consumption habits are shaped by gender (Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Kacen, 2000), how gender has been used as a psychological construct to separate consumers and develop products based on this (Dobscha, 2019; Fournier, 2002; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995) and how gender is understood today as a fluid cultural concept (Coleman, 2012; Bettany et al. 2010; Zayer et al. 2012).

Visconti et al. (2018) describe three main trends emerging from consumer research that need to be taken into account. Gender differences (1) describe how early research linked gender to biological sex and derived demographic and socio-economic variables from this. Gender-specific experiences (2) examine gender-specific experiences of people that were rated as unpleasant. Market-related research on gender inequality (3) examines marketing practices that reproduce inequalities. Research has also shown that consumers do not passively adopt gender identities but actively construct them through symbolic consumption. There are three possible future scenarios for gender identity: its disappearance in cyberspace, the resumption of traditional gender roles, or the development of gender as something self-determined and free (Kacen, 2000). Gender studies have contributed significantly to differentiated approaches and now cover a broad spectrum of topics and promote methodological innovations. In addition, they are increasingly focusing on masculinity, queer theory and feminist approaches (Bettany et al. 2010).

Despite theoretical advances in understanding gender as performative and socially constructed (Butler, 1990; Visconti et al., 2018), marketing research has inadequately examined how digital platforms serve as new sites for gender socialisation among very young children. Limitation exists in understanding how beauty consumption practices function as gendered socialisation mechanisms for girls under 13, particularly in algorithm-mediated environments. Current research overlooks how platform architectures and recommendation systems amplify gendered content that intensifies beauty norms at unprecedented early ages. This represents a concerning development, because gender identity formation through consumption now begins before children develop critical media literacy skills.

At the intersection of these three streams we lack understanding of how girls under 13 years of age perform beauty practices on digital platforms as a form of early gender socialisation.

While existing literature addresses these areas separately, little research has examined the convergence of (1) increasingly younger consumer participants, (2) algorithm-driven social media platforms, and (3) beauty consumption as gendered as the 'Sephora Kids' phenomenon. It is important to examine this phenomenon, where children as young as toddlers engage in sophisticated beauty routines for digital audiences, blurring boundaries between play, performance, and problematic gender socialisation. These practices represent not merely an earlier adoption of beauty practices but a shift in how gender identity is constructed through platformised consumption performances.

To fill this gap and contribute to existing research, our master's thesis aims to answer the following question: *How do female Sephora Kids perform beauty practices on social media?*

Research into the topic is of great importance in order to understand the impact that early exposure to beauty norms on social media has on the understanding of femininity. We want to critically examine that beauty routines that were once mainly practised by adults are now part of children's everyday lives and whether this has negative consequences for children's development. Our study aims to provide results that will support parents in choosing social media content for their children. We also want to help create framework conditions that protect children in their social media consumption.

1.3 Research Context

Younger and younger users are utilising digital platforms and social media to create engaging content and express themselves. The popularity of short videos has increased particularly in recent years, with TikTok leading the way. The study examines beauty practices that are practised by girls under the age of 13 on social media and shared via tutorials. TikTok plays an influential role in connection with Sephora Kids, as it has significantly changed the way users consume content (Shutsko, 2020). The study focuses on the US, where this trend originated and is widespread (Khare et al. 2024). Studies show that users on the social media platforms TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat are also actively used by children under the age of 13 years, although there is a clear age restriction of 13 years. According to this study, children between the ages of 8 and 12 years spend an average of 5 hours and 33 minutes a day in front of screens for entertainment purposes. While this represents their total screen time, social media platforms take up a significant proportion of this time (Nagata et al. 2024).

In this research, we will explore how female Sephora Kids perform beauty practices on social media, focusing on children under the age of 13. Our study aims to understand the relationship between beauty consumption on digital platforms at a young age and meeting societal expectations of beauty standards for women.

1.4 Research Motivation

In recent years, skincare and make-up products have become a cultural phenomenon among Generation Alpha. This generation is defined as people born between 2010 and 2025 (Cambridge University Press, 2025). Beauty products that used to be aimed primarily at teenagers and adults now also appeal to children. Such practices manifest in elaborate beauty routines that are practised at a young age (Arefin, 2025). This development raises questions about how female children perform beauty practices on social media. The motivation for this research is fulfilled by various related factors.

Firstly, an increase in active social media usage by children, particularly within the US, is motivating this research. Up to 95% of young people aged 13 to 17 use social media and a third of these young people use it almost constantly. Although the minimum age for social media platforms in the US is usually 13, almost 40% of children aged 8 to 12 engage with it. In addition, children under the age of 13 spend over 5 hours a day on screens (Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, 2023).

Secondly, the range of beauty products for young children has developed strongly. Retailers in the beauty industry notice an increase in a younger age group buying beauty products in shops at higher price points. As a result of this development, global beauty brands are pursuing a new strategy (Forbes, 2025). The total global share of cosmetics for children amounted to USD 7.5 billion in 2021, with growth of 6.2 % by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2023). The development has also been fuelled by the importance of personal care for consumers, which has risen from beauty trends on social media.

Thirdly, although there are studies on children and social media, there are few studies on how female Sephora Kids under the age of 13 perform beauty practices on social media. This research gap is important in order to investigate how children's development, portrayed beauty practices and social media are related and what challenges this poses for minors.

1.5 Aimed Theoretical Contributions

Through this research, we aim to contribute to the literature streams of ‘Children and Consumption’, ‘Children and Social media’ and ‘Gender in Consumer Research’. First of all, this study aims to provide a better theoretical understanding of how children actively participate in digital consumer culture from a very young age (Cook, 2004, 2008; Zelizer, 2002; John, 1999; Cross, 2004), and to what external influences such as parents and market dynamics play a role in the navigation of digital consumption and beauty products (Ågren, 2020; Cook, 2004; Buckingham, 2007; Cook’s 2017; Schor, 2004; Linn, 2004; Quart, 2003; Martens et al. 2004; Seiter, 1993). We also want to shed light on the roles of mothers in their daughters’ early engagement with digital platforms and beauty products (Halapa & Djuranovic, 2021; Hudders & Beuckels, 2024), the children’s awareness of their position as beauty kidfluencers (Fernández-Gómez et al. 2021; Clark & Jno-Charles, 2025), and how loyal they are to certain brands from a young age on (Núñez-Gómez et al. 2020; Tufte &

Ekström, 2007; Cody, 2012). Another important contribution is to how female children reinforce gender representations through beauty routines (Dobscha, 2019; Visconti et al. 2018; Knoll et al. 2011) and how beauty norms are maintained through digital platforms (Döring et al. 2016; Fernandez & Manon, 2022; Santoniccolo et al. 2023). In addition, this research aims to provide an understanding of the role of social media in seeking external validation for the appearance (Gurrieri & Drenten, 2019; Morton & Treviño, 2019) and which role the beauty practices play for the children with regards to their bodies (Featherstone, 1991; Askegaard et al. 2002; Fournier, 2002). Lastly, as this study focuses on female children, we aim to contribute to how beauty practices are gendered processes (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Stevens and Ostberg, 2011).

1.6 Aimed Practical Contributions

Our master's thesis aims to deepen our understanding of the relationship between social media and beauty practices and to gain practical insights for various interest groups. These stakeholders include parents and educators, as well as policymakers and brands, who can benefit from our research. Firstly, we aim to help parents deal responsibly with their children's social media consumption and keep themselves informed about current trends on social media. Furthermore, we want to help parents create a shared and healthy routine for using these platforms with their children and inform them about the dangers of these platforms at an early age.

Secondly, we propose educators to integrate media education for young children under the age of 13 into the curriculum and to incorporate practical examples into their lessons. This can help children learn how to use social media responsibly and critically from an early age, enabling them to navigate these platforms critically.

The third interest group concerns political decision-makers. With our study, we want to make them aware of the dangers of kidfluencer practices and motivate them to introduce preventive measures in schools to educate children about social media platforms as early as possible.

Finally, our goal is to encourage brands to engage in ethically responsible partnerships with kidfluencers and to put the well-being of children first. Accordingly, ethical guidelines should be incorporated into marketing strategies.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. In the first chapter, the research topic is introduced to the reader, positioning the study in the literature streams and problematising existing literature. Throughout the second chapter, the focus lies on the literature streams that have been outlined as relevant to this study, ending each stream with a critical view to reflect on the presented works. As part of the third chapter, three theories are presented which will be used as theoretical underpinnings in the analysis of the data: Butler’s (1990) Theory on

Gender Performativity, Goffman's (1959) Theory of Performativity, and the Meme Theory by Dawkins (1976). This is followed by the chapter on the methodology, in which the data collection method chosen for this study is described as well as the reasoning behind the selected method for the research question. The fifth chapter deals with the findings, which are divided into three themes. In the sixth chapter, the results are discussed by focusing on the theoretical contributions of this research, namely how it contributes to limitations from previous findings. The final chapter concludes this study by summarising the main findings, practical implications as well as the limitations and suggestions for future research.

It is essential to clarify that throughout this research, the terms "Sephora Kids", "Kidfluencers" and "female children" will be used interchangeably. Similarly, "social media" and "digital platforms" will be used interchangeably.

2 Review of Previous Literature

This chapter provides a concise review of the literature outlined as relevant for this study by focusing on three literature streams. The first subchapter focuses on children and consumption, while the second one deals with children and social media, and the third one covers gender in consumer research.

In the first subchapter, the focus lies on children and consumption. The summary of prior literature, both its history and development, is essential to understand how children consume and how their consumer culture is structured.

The second subchapter deals with the topic of children and social media. We show how children have developed from active to passive participants on digital platforms and the ethical concerns associated with this development.

The third subchapter takes a look at gender, namely gender in consumer research. This outline of gender studies plays a core role in this study, as it provides an understanding of how gender ideologies are portrayed in different parts of marketing and how consumers navigate these.

2.1 Children and Consumption

To introduce the literature stream on children and consumption, first a historical overview of previous research on the field is provided to outline how the scholarship has developed. In the second subchapter, a closer look at the different and contrasting views on children as consumers is provided, highlighting the discrepancies among scholars. This is followed by the part on children's consumer culture, including studies on the parties involved in this consumer culture and how it has expanded to the digital world. Before taking a critical perspective on this stream, research on the impact of marketing efforts on children is examined.

2.1.1 Historical Development of Children and Consumption Scholarship

Although the commercialisation of childhood has steadily increased, Cook (2008) argues that the role of children within theories of consumption and consumer culture has been largely overlooked. Despite the increase in research on children's consumer behaviour, preferences and exposure to commercial life in recent decades, these studies remain fragmented instead of being integrated into a distinct academic field. The author shows that existing studies examined children's participation in consumer culture and their media consumption. Cook (2008) further emphasises that a key challenge in studying children's consumer behaviour is that childhood itself is a constantly evolving stage of life, which makes it difficult to fit children into existing theoretical frameworks. Their marginalisation in consumer research parallels the historical invisibility of women in consumer studies. Cook (2008) further highlights that the concept of the 'child consumer' in today's society is shaped before birth, as marketing strategies attempt to anticipate and construct the needs of future consumers.

In an earlier study, Cook (2004) shows that children's consumer culture can be traced back to the early 20th century. At first, brands primarily directed their advertising at mothers. However, with the development of marketing, children themselves were recognised as independent consumers. The author points out that this change has led to the idea of the child as an autonomous market participant whose specific needs must be recognised and served by companies. The rise of a child-focused consumer market was further reinforced by advertisers appealing to children's desires as well as the latent ambitions of their parents (Cross, 2004). Moreover, the culture of "cool" became a tool for marketers to appeal to children. Despite parents' attempts to control it, only explicit content could be censored, while materialistic and consumer-orientated incentives still continued to influence children.

Martens et al. (2004) argue that children's participation in consumption and how it impacts their daily lives and social development still remains largely unresearched. Bridging the fields of childhood and consumption, the authors propose four key subjects to understand children's consumption behaviour: their understanding of consumption, the role of consumption in their identity construction, their interactions with material goods, and the dynamics between parents and children.

2.1.2 Perspectives on Children as Consumers

Concerns over the commercial exploitation of young consumers have emerged as a result of advertisers' growing attempts to target children directly rather than merely their parents (Schor, 2004; Linn, 2004; Quart, 2003). Advertising is seen as harmful to children's wellbeing since it reinforces gender roles and materialistic attitudes. The debate over children's role in consumer culture is increased by the growing sophistication of advertising strategies, which appeal to children at increasingly younger ages. Buckingham (2007) highlights that scholars have different views on children as consumers: While some see them as powerless targets of a manipulative consumer culture, others argue that they are capable participants in the marketplace. In this consumer culture, children are seen as autonomous

decision-makers who are aware of advertising tactics and are difficult to please. Meanwhile, parents are often portrayed as secondary figures in the marketplace. Buckingham (2000) further states that children's consumption patterns have been further altered by the rise of digital media. This raises concerns that screens and electronic entertainment could dominate children's lives.

John (1999) argues that children develop into consumers over several phases and acquire the abilities necessary for consumption during these phases. In addition, Gunter and Furnham (1998) highlight how consumer socialisation shapes the way in which children understand the market, make purchasing decisions and develop a consumer identity. Cody (2012) outlines that their engagement with various consumption practices helps them to construct their identity and navigate social environments.

Historically, children's participation in consumption has often been overlooked or seen as morally concerning. However, Zelizer (2002) points out that children are actively involved in economic activities, not only as consumers but also as producers and distributors. The author argues that their economic involvement is influenced by their interactions within households, with external organisations, and with peer groups.

2.1.3 Children’s Consumer Culture

Children’s consumer culture refers to established, tangible and figurative structures that shape children’s early experiences with commercial life (Cook, 2017). The author argues that this type of consumer culture has evolved significantly since the 1980s. It includes the products that children consume, the broader network of parties who create and promote goods for them and those who play a regulatory role in shaping children’s consumption habits. However, Cook (2017) points out that children are seen as particularly vulnerable to exploitation by advertisers and marketers due to their innocence, which raises concerns over the existence of this consumer culture.

Ågren (2020) analyses how children navigate digital consumer culture and how it has influenced their consumption habits. According to the author, children utilise their understanding of digital media to position themselves among their peers and to form their identity. Hence, children are not oblivious to consumer culture, as it influences how they experience and understand social norms and values.

2.1.4 Impact of Marketing Efforts on Children

While some scholars argue that advertising promotes stereotypes and unfavourable consumption patterns (Armstrong & Brucks, 1988), other researchers such as Seiter (1993) object to this view. He emphasises that commerce plays an important role in modern culture and that both children and parents participate in it. The focus should not solely be on limiting children's exposure to advertising but also on examining how women and children are portrayed in promotional material. The author argues that advertisements for children often

construct an idealistic world in which excitement and the empowerment of children are of significant importance.

Similarly, Cross (2002) examines how marketing efforts towards children have developed over the past decades. In contrast to suggestions from prior models, he argues that they remain complex and often controversial. To protect children from advertisers' attempts to influence them, regulations have been implemented on advertisements.

2.1.5 Critical View on Children and Consumption

Opinions on children's navigation of consumption still remain divided despite the increase in research in this literature stream. While some scholars see them as victims of the market, others argue that they are independent consumers who are aware of consumption mechanisms. Buckingham (2011) believes that the focus of the discussion should be changed, as he argues that children's understanding of consumption lies in between. He proposes a sociocultural perspective that recognises the complex nature of modern consumption and the mutually shaped relationship between children and marketers. Thus, marketers depend on children's creation of a market, while children's choices are limited to the market's offerings. The author emphasises that consumption plays an essential role in children's everyday life, challenging the idea that childhood can exist with any commercial influences. Instead, Buckingham (2011) underlines the importance of avoiding exaggerated narratives in research.

2.2 Children and Social Media

The chapter 'Children and Social Media' deals with the relationship between social media platforms and their influence on children. Within the children and social media literature stream, the undercurrents of children as social media consumers and kidfluencer culture are discussed. In these sub-chapters, the role of children as social media consumers is examined, and the phenomenon of kidfluencer culture is analysed.

2.2.1 Children as Social Media Consumers

The growth of the digital landscape has changed how we use social media and how it accompanies us in our everyday lives. However, this change affects not only adults but also children. Today's children grow up with digital media from an early age. Generation Z, children born between the late 1990s and 2010, and Generation Alpha, children born between 2010 and 2025, are particularly affected. As a result, children are no longer passive users of media, but have become active participants in the digital landscape. Their consumption ranges from television to tablets and smartphones. It can also be observed that they are engaging with social media at an increasingly early age (Núñez-Gómez et al. 2020). The social media platform TikTok, which features short videos, is particularly popular among children. Its algorithm is unique and manages to collect more information about users in a very short time than other apps and recommends content or personalised advertising to users, tailored to their preferences (Schellewald, 2023). According to TikTok's policies, children

under the age of 13 are not allowed to post videos or comment on other content. In addition, the content displayed to children under 13 is tailored to their age and TikTok also offers parental controls. While this sounds reassuring, the reality is somewhat different. Children often open accounts with false information because there is no verification system, or they use their parents' accounts to consume content (Pedrouzo & Krynski, 2022).

One would assume that the parents of affected children would set boundaries in such cases and take a close interest in their children's media consumption. However, studies (Halapa & Djuranovic, 2021; Lestari et al. 2024) show that this is not the case. Parents exert considerable influence on their children's media behaviour. They allow their children to use social media platforms and even share pictures and videos of their children on their own accounts.

Early media use also has a decisive influence on their consumption behaviour and their relationship with brands. In addition to an interest in the content of others, the creation of their own content plays an important role, which has an impact on brand preference and brand loyalty. Although children aged 12 to 14 show a higher attachment to brand content, the degree of brand loyalty and brand preference is similar across all age groups. Like adults, children use products and brands to negotiate social roles, relationships with peers and their personal identity (Núñez-Gómez et al. 2020). This also applies to tweens, children aged 8 to 12 who have grown up with digital technologies. Brands classify them as an easily influenced consumer group (Tufte & Ekström, 2007). It shows that, in addition to creating their own content, children primarily create and share brand-related videos such as unboxing videos, product reviews, tutorials and store visits on their accounts. According to Morton and Treviño (2019), the main motivating factors for children are entertainment, recognition and the desire to create personal memories. It is also striking that children seek social recognition on social media and achieve this through metrics such as likes and followers (Morton & Treviño, 2019).

2.2.2 Kidfluencer Culture

Kidfluencers are minors who act as influencers on social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok and earn money with the content they create. It is striking that more and more young children and even newborns are active as kidfluencers on social media. Kidfluencer content is dominated by five categories: scripted stories, competitions linked to brand campaigns, introductions to toys, vlogs about their daily routines and other formats such as lip-syncs or unboxings (Fernández-Gómez et al. 2021). The aim of kidfluencers is to generate as many followers as possible and to earn money with sponsored content and brand partnerships. As a minimum age of 13 is required to create a social media account, the account must be managed by the kidfluencer's legal guardians, who are also responsible for contracts and sponsors (Hudders & Beuckels, 2024).

Kidfluencing is directly linked to entrepreneurship, family labour and digital media. While it is often dismissed as harmless family fun, and positive aspects such as children's creative

expression, earning money and achieving fame are emphasised, it is necessary to mention the risks to children's rights and welfare. Kidfluencing is an under-regulated form of child labour that falls into a legal loophole. The problem is that there are no clear laws regulating who is ultimately entitled to this income. This means that the children are often legally unprotected and frequently do not receive the money they earn, as their parents claim all of the income for themselves. Clark & Jno-Charles (2025) have identified five ethical risks with regard to kidfluencers that need to be considered. These are interlinked and increase the more successful a kidfluencer's brand becomes.

‘The Right to Consent’ explains that children's consent to film is seen as problematic, as children are often still too young to understand the full implications of this content. In addition, there is often a power dynamic between parents and children, in which parents offer their children incentives such as toys to fuel their kidfluencer careers.

‘The Right to Privacy’ describes how children are often filmed in private or emotional moments without their consent and without being able to control it.

‘Freedom from Economic Exploitation’ illustrates how children are involved in the time-consuming and structured production of content. Furthermore, the guise of family fun often hides the oppressive fact that children are being taught from home in order to pursue their work.

‘Freedom from Harm’ is taken to mean that the role as a kidfluencer can lead to stress and anxiety due to the work associated with stress. In some extreme cases, parents have been accused of abuse in connection with the creation of excessive or inappropriate content. ‘Freedom of Expression’ describes how children's freedom and creativity are suppressed and manipulated by parental instructions and expectations (Clark & Jno-Charles, 2025).

Lenander (2023) refers to the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular Articles 3 (best interests of the child), 17 (access to appropriate information and protection from harmful content) and 32 (protection from economic exploitation). Accordingly, kidfluencing practices do not fulfil these standards.

The fact that kidfluencing is in a grey area urgently needs to be taken into account in existing child protection laws in order to ensure the protection of children and protect them from potential dangers. In addition, the role of parents needs to be looked at more closely and adapted to the needs of children. Platforms and policymakers also need to be involved to ensure that children are not exploited.

2.2.3 Critical View on Children and Social Media

Research on children and media, especially in relation to children and social media, has grown. Nevertheless, there are some limitations that must be taken into account.

Firstly, it is striking that studies on children and social media largely include children over the age of 13 in their investigations. Young children are not considered in most studies, even though they represent a vulnerable age group. However, this could also be due to the fact that the official age for using social media is 13. Nevertheless, children have access to social media, whether through their parents, siblings or friends. The critical issue here is that children of this age are still developing their cognitive abilities and may not be able to recognise the dangers of social media use or critically question content. It is therefore all the more important to include different age groups in studies, as general studies may overlook important differences in preferences and requirements.

Secondly, there is a limitation in the analysis of social media content in this context. As already mentioned, there are many studies on children and social media. However, the content analysed is usually treated superficially and the categorisation of content is only approximate. Specific content and messages cannot be analysed in this way. Content about beauty practices or beauty products is often dismissed as harmless, but analysis could yield important information about beauty ideals, consumer behaviour and gender roles. These, in turn, can have a strong influence on children's development.

Thirdly, the studies consider social media as something general and do not go into detail about the individual social media platforms. This is a limitation, as each social platform has specific functions and technological differences that need to be considered.

2.3 Gender in Consumer Research

The literature stream on gender in consumer research provides an important framework for understanding the phenomenon of Sephora Kids and its connection to social dynamics and cultural pressures. It helps to position the research within theories of how gender is socially constructed and performed. Furthermore, the literature contributes to interpreting beauty practices not only as aesthetic choices but also as formative experiences.

2.3.1 Historical Development of Gender Studies

The term ‘gender’ was introduced in feminist parlance in the 1970s to emphasise the distinction between biological and social gender and thus develop an approach that focuses on the changeability of gender. In order to better understand the concept of gender in its complexity, it is important to explain other central concepts that are related to it. While the term sex refers to the biological categorisation of male and female, the term gender is associated with activities, behavioural patterns and roles. Sexual orientation, on the other hand, describes who a person feels attracted to. In this context, the term gender identity is also important, which explains a person's feeling of being male, female or a combination of the two. In addition, there is the term gender roles, which describes male and female behaviours influenced by social norms (Visconti et al. 2018).

The feminist philosopher Judith Butler (1990) is considered a pioneer in the field of gender studies. The concept of gender performativity coined by Butler (1990) is based on the idea that gender identity is formed and maintained through repeated social actions. According to this view, there is no homogenous group of ‘women’ or ‘men’ and no definition of what it means to be male or female. Gender roles are not a biological phenomenon, but rather represent social attributions. They are constructed in social interactions and symbolic orders and are therefore changeable.

Peñaloza (1994) and Davis et al. (2006) build on this research and explain how gender is shaped by external influences such as environment, work and politics and is constantly changing. Their work makes it clear that gender is not fixed but constantly changing according to time, culture and individual experience.

2.3.2 Gender in Marketing

Throughout history, certain characteristics have been assigned to men or women, and the consumer culture and practices have been shaped by gender (Avery, 2012; Bristor & Fischer, 1993; Kacen, 2000). While gender was originally used as a psychological construct to structure consumers, products were soon developed that differ based on it (Dobscha, 2019). The segmentation of a market is also influenced by masculinity and femininity. Gender-specific segmentation has become widely accepted in areas as diverse as the automotive, cosmetics, fashion and epilator markets (Visconti et al. 2018).

Advertising also utilises the traditional personality traits of men and women. For example, women in advertising are typically portrayed as caring, vulnerable and soft, while men are depicted as self-confident, strong and ambitious (Åkestam, 2017; Visconti et al. 2018; Grau & Zotos, 2016). These stereotypical portrayals of women and men are still a significant part of marketing. Advertising, branding, positioning and segmentation are highly influenced by considerations of gender (Visconti et al. 2018).

Gender research in CCT has evolved to be more orientated towards sociology and anthropology. While earlier research on gender and consumption often only distinguished between men and women, gender is now understood as a complex and fluid cultural concept that reveals the meaning people give to their own consumption (Coleman, 2012; Bettany et al., 2010; Zayer et al., 2012).

Bettany et al. (2010) and Visconti et al. (2018) analyse this development and explain that gender identities are not simply fixed but are created, displayed and negotiated through consumption and interaction with brands. Their research makes it clear that markets and brands can support old ideas of gender, but they can also create space for new, different forms of expression. This dual role leads to tensions: on the one hand, there are expectations of how one ‘should’ be, but on the other hand, people have the opportunity to decide for themselves how they show themselves.

Fischer (2015) and Dobscha & Ostberg (2021) describe how gender research has developed in relation to marketing over the last two decades. However, they show that there are still inequalities between genders in society and that marketing practices play a significant role in maintaining gender inequality. They emphasise that research is not about eliminating differences between men and women but rather about making the complex interdependencies of social inequalities visible.

2.3.3 Gender in Advertising

Grau and Zotos (2016) provide an overview of the research on gender stereotypes in advertising in the last five decades. The authors argue that due to the changing role of women in society over the last five decades, the representation of men and women in advertisements has also changed. They point out that although the portrayal of women has turned less traditional, whereas for men it has changed towards a softer and more egalitarian role, it is still far from equal.

Goffman (1987) examines how gender is portrayed in advertising and how it contributes to society's view on male and female roles by both constructing and maintaining gender expectations and cultural norms. Similarly, studies of advertisements in fashion magazines by Schroeder and Borgerson (1998) show that female bodies have continuously been depicted subordinately in advertisements, serving as a visual illustration of societal power dynamics and stereotypes regarding gender. Knoll et al. (2011) outline that gender stereotypes are still present in advertisements although society and gender roles have changed.

At the same time, research by Chu et al. (2016) has shown that recent advertisements feature male bodies for typically female products and conversely, depicting broader societal changes of gender roles. The recent trend of female empowerment advertising shows a shift towards an empowering portrayal of women in advertisements, which receives a more positive perception among female consumers and confronts long-standing stereotypical advertising of women (Åkestam et al. 2017). Humour also plays a role in advertisements, as research by Eisend et al. (2014) outlines that advertising without a humorous tone usually depicts traditional stereotypes of women, which is why female consumers favour gender portrayals in humorous advertisements.

A lot of research in the scholarship studies the portrayal of men in advertisements (Grau & Zotos, 2016), from the depiction of men in advertising as a representation of their role in society (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004), over men still being portrayed in stereotypical traditional roles compared to women (Gentry & Harrison, 2010), to male bodies using traditionally female products to challenge masculinity (Harrison, 2008).

2.3.4 Gender in Social Media

Gender representation in the media has gone through many stages of development in recent decades. The portrayal of gender was originally mainly controlled by media actors and media

institutions in traditional media such as television, magazines and posters. These representations have reflected stereotypical, objectifying and sexualising gender norms and reinforced existing power structures (Visconti et al. 2018). The development of social media platforms has led to a shift. Users can now create and share content themselves and are actively involved in the construction of gender representations.

Social media has significantly decentralised the power to shape gender norms. This leads to a greater diversity of perspectives and challenges traditional norms. On the other hand, this can also lead to traditional gender stereotypes being reinforced. Social media platforms are anything but neutral but represent a highly gendered environment in which content and interactions reinforce traditional gender expectations. Although these platforms have the potential to disrupt these traditional gender representations, they continue to be reproduced through user content. While the gatekeepers of traditional media originally controlled the content, algorithms now act as gatekeepers. These often favour polarising content that generates engagement through controversy or the reinforcement of existing beliefs about gender (Santoniccolo et al. 2023). Algorithms in social media are designed to be dependent on binary gender classification systems and can only distinguish between ‘male’ and ‘female’. Thus, the diversity of gender identities is not taken into account, and the assumption that gender is divided into only two categories is still maintained (Fosch-Villaronga et al. 2021).

As mentioned, gender stereotypes are present in social media and are particularly evident in images of women. In this context, research has been conducted into the psychological and sociocultural effects of the increasing spread of ‘selfies’. Social media and its platform architecture enable consumers to present themselves publicly with self-portraits and to obtain feedback by means of evaluation criteria such as likes and comments. Researchers have found that selfies are a way for users to show their gender and origin and to communicate with others. Selfies therefore serve to create identity on platforms, communicate it and have it judged by others (Grogan et al. 2018; Murray, 2015; Williams & Marquez, 2015). According to research, women present themselves more frequently in sexualised posts on social media, while men tend to adopt dominant postures in images. The analysis shows that social media creates space for gender-specific representations and reinforces beauty norms on these platforms. However, the analysis also shows that awareness of these patterns is growing on social media, beauty norms are being questioned and new forms of expression are becoming increasingly popular. The break with traditional gender roles and beauty norms was triggered by targeted activism and body positivity movements. Content creators on social media are also contributing to this change by critically questioning beauty norms (Döring et al. 2016; Fernandez & Menon, 2022).

2.3.5 Gender and Bodies

The intersection of gender and bodies has been a significant area of consumer research in its own right but is particularly relevant for understanding how notions of beauty are constructed in digital contexts. Social media platforms share messages about how female bodies should look and be presented and reflect gendered expectations in society. This is not just about beauty norms but also about gender norms that are reproduced on social media. Without examining this intersection, our analysis would remain superficial, treating beauty practices as merely aesthetic choices rather than recognising them as formative experiences through which young girls learn what it means to be a woman in society (Visconti et al. 2018). This literature review examines the ways in which bodies serve as places in which gender identities are performed, regulated and transformed as a result of different consumption practices.

Featherstone's (1991) research demonstrates that the body is an essential element of consumer culture. He explains that the body is seen as a product, and the appearance of the body is used to achieve personal and social fulfilment. Consumer culture thus shares the view that the body is to be seen as a project that must be constantly changed and improved through consumption. Building on this, Askegaard et al. (2002) examine how decisions to change the body are influenced by marketing discourses and social pressures relating to appearance and ageing. Particularly significant is their finding that cosmetic procedures are attempts to harmonise physical appearance with inner self-perception, showing how deeply embedded in consumer culture is the notion that identity should be made visible through the body. Fournier (2002) explores this in more detail and explains how women construct their gendered identity around their bodies and around the social conventions and expectations to which they are subjected. Thompson and Hirschman (1995) elaborate and explain how the concept of beauty is associated with modifications and improvements to the body. With that in mind, they share how people seek to balance a desire to be unique with a need to be seen and accepted through acts of self-care.

Stevens and Ostberg (2011) analyse the role of the media in the construction of gender-specific bodies. They show how bodies are depicted in advertising and transformed into consumable objects and what role idealised gender images play in this. Gurrieri and Drenten (2019) extend the research by focusing on the digital sphere and examining how social media users present their gender and body through hashtags and visual content. They analyse how digital platforms simultaneously enable different forms of gender expression but, at the same time, increase the pressure to conform to idealised body images.

2.3.6 Critical View on Gender in Consumer Research

Research on gender in consumer research has developed considerably in recent decades. It has transformed from the original understanding of gender as a binary concept to a

multifaceted concept of gender as performative and socially constructed. Although the topic of gender has undergone great development in consumer research in recent decades, there may be limitations to this stream of literature. While gender was initially seen as binary, it has been recognised in theory as fluid and performative (Visconti et al. 2018). While we have made progress towards gender equality and more inclusive gender identities have been socially accepted, inequality remains high. Women are still marginalised, even in Western countries. Recent movements by far-right and conservative parties that undermine the rights that have been hard-won also challenge this development. They illustrate that gender equality is by no means assured and that it must continue to be fought for (Korpi et al. 2013).

The study of digital platforms also poses a challenge. Although research in the field of social media has increased significantly, the influence of algorithms on the amplification of gendered content has not yet been sufficiently researched. This research gap is worth addressing, as today's world is characterised by digital content that dominates our everyday lives. Social media and its algorithms control how gender representations are presented, consumed, and reproduced.

3 Theoretical Underpinnings

This chapter introduces the theoretical frameworks that will be used to interpret the empirical materials: Butler's (1990) Gender Performativity theory, Goffman's (1959) Theory of Performativity, and the Meme Theory by Dawkins (1976).

3.1 Theories of Performativity

There are two influential theories to describe the performance aspect: the Gender Performativity theory by Judith Butler (1990) and the Theory of Performativity by Erving Goffman (1959). Both theories are not only compatible with each other due to the shared focus on performativity, but also as both depict identity, gender identity and social identity respectively, as constructed through social norms and interactions rather than as a fixed unit. While Butler (1990) focuses on the societal structure that influences gender performance, Goffman (1959) emphasises the situational impacts on the behaviour during a performance, thus complementing each other. Though potential theoretical tensions between the frameworks need to be considered, as Butler (1990) sees the performance as something that an individual is forced into by society and that gender identity as a whole is subject to this performance, while Goffman (1959) argues that people are aware that they perform in a certain way to meet the expectations of the audience and that they have a possibility to step back into their true selves. In the following two sub-chapters, the theoretical frameworks are described in greater detail and applied to the research topic.

3.1.1 Butler's Gender Performativity

In the scholarly work "Gender Trouble" from 1990, Judith Butler first introduces the theory on gender performativity, changing how gender roles and identity were perceived until then.

The author argues that gender is not a fixed part of a person's identity and sexuality but socially constructed and reproduced through performative acts, meaning that gender identity is formed through repeated actions. Butler (1990) explains further that these behaviours are based on cultural norms and societal expectations related to gender, for example, in the ways individuals dress, speak or move. Through constant repetitions of these societal behaviours, someone appears like a woman or a man, which makes gender seem like something given and natural, although it can never be truly embodied.

In "Bodies That Matter", Butler (1993) questions traditional gender norms and recognises the fluidity of identity, as it is constantly constructed. The author argues that both gender and biological sex are, to a certain extent, socially constructed through performance. Even before a human being is born into the world, a social distinction is made regarding the sex of an infant and later reinforced verbally through language (e.g., "It's a girl"). While growing up, the repetition of this distinction helps to enforce a cultural norm that links sex and gender to support the idea of heterosexuality as the expected identity in society, which Butler (1993) terms the "heterosexual matrix". Thus, the author argues that individuals do not choose femininity freely, as it is a compelled repetition of cultural norms that are historically tied to self-control, restraint and correction.

As this research focuses on female Sephora Kids, the theory on Gender Performativity helps to understand how they perform their gender through beauty practices on social media. Using Butler's (1990) theory, we can examine how Sephora Kids do not treat gender as something natural but rather shape it through their practices, language and content. Inconspicuous actions, such as applying facial care products or lip gloss, can thus be interpreted as gender-specific actions. Furthermore, these beauty practices can be understood not only as a hobby or interest of the child but as a means of achieving social expectations. As the data mainly includes females and as the beauty practices depicted in the analysed videos focus on daily routines, the theory is applied to provide an explanation as to how the Sephora Kids internalise femininity and repeat gendered behaviours as a possibly subconscious response to gender norms and expectations.

3.1.2 Goffman's Theory of Performativity

Erving Goffman offers his own theory on performativity in his work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" from 1959. His study examines the processes and meanings involved in everyday social interactions and provides a better understanding of both the nature of human social behaviour and the psychological mechanisms.

Central to this perspective is the idea that social interaction resembles a performance, formed by the surroundings and observers. Individuals engage in this performance to convey impressions that align with their personal goals and how they want to be perceived by others, termed as 'impression management'. Thus, identity is not fixed in this framework but a dynamic construct developed through interaction with others. Through the exchange of information, individuals define themselves and their actions in more specific ways. The

establishment of social identity is linked to what Goffman (1959) refers to as the "front", in which individuals perform for others by consciously managing their appearance and behaviour. This front enables the audience to interpret the individual's behaviour through cultural symbols and traits. In addition, the front incorporates elements such as an appropriate context, look and attitude, all of which must align to communicate the adopted social role effectively. Through verbal and non-verbal cues, the individual tries to appear convincing. As a result, individuals tend to portray themselves in a way that conforms more closely to societal norms and expectations rather than how they would actually act privately. Information that conflicts with this idealised image, such as manners or traits that are socially unacceptable, is typically hidden from others. Goffman (1959) further explores the spatial dimension of performance through the concept of "region", dividing social settings into "front", "back", and "outside" areas. The public performance takes place on the front stage, while the backstage offers performers space to step out of their character and act more like their true selves (Goffman, 1959).

Goffman's (1959) theory is relevant to this study as it helps to analyse the performance aspect of the beauty practices. The Sephora Kids appear in their videos in front of an audience, namely other social media users. Their entire performance looks like they are on stage, as they pay meticulous attention to the backdrop, their gestures and facial expressions. Goffman's (1959) theory will help us in our analysis to distinguish more clearly between the children's actual identities and the roles they portray in the videos. With the help of this theoretical framework, we can distinguish between the behaviour and appearance of the Sephora Kids when performing for the viewers of the videos and their actual childlike personalities behind the scenes. Furthermore, this theoretical lens allows us to examine how these videos are not just a leisure activity for the children, but rather a conscious and often exaggerated form of role-playing.

3.2 Meme Theory by Dawkins

While the first two theories presented in this chapter focus on performativity, the third focuses on the meme theory by Dawkins (1976). Though not obvious at first, the theory is compatible with the other two. All three see human behaviour as learned and repeated as a response to external factors, which underlines that the meme theory indirectly includes a performance aspect. Dawkins (1976) compliments the frameworks of Butler (1990) and Goffman (1959) by adding an explanation of the transmission of cultural elements, as memes can reinforce gender norms and as memes can be performed to impress others. Some tensions between the theories might arise, as Dawkins (1976) sees individuals as an instrument for memes to be transmitted and as he takes a more evolutionary approach, while the other authors have a social-constructionist view.

The term 'meme' is first introduced in Richard Dawkins's book *The Selfish Gene* from 1976. Originally coming from the Greek 'mimeme', which stands for imitation, Dawkins (1976) shortened the term to make it sound similar to gene as he uses parallels to genetics to explain his theory on memes. According to him, "memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by

leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation" (Dawkins, 1976, p. 206). Memes are transmitted from person to person through emulation and can include concepts, attitudes or capabilities. As culture evolves, these are altered and transformed into new inventions. According to Dawkins (1976), the meme, like the gene, is capable of reproducing itself and provides an explanation for the development of culture and the way people act. The author argues that many aspects of human culture, such as music or fashion, can be described as reproductions. Humans have evolved into effective imitators of information and behaviours, who pass on memes between each other. They get adjusted over time as humans emulate memes and connect them with other gathered memes to generate new ones, rather than duplicating perfect versions. Memes that survive this cultural evolution and are still used by later generations hence go through a similar process as genes in natural selection, as the culturally most meaningful ones succeed. Dawkins (1976) further highlights that as long as the current society has a culture, it will still be influenced by historical figures from centuries ago.

The memetic logic described by Dawkins (1976) is applicable to digital platforms. Social media users conform with the behaviour of others, which results in a structured consumer culture that is reproduced and integrated through memes (Schöps et al. 2023). Those who create their own content and promote brands reinforce a memetic logic by following the pattern of other creators and only deviating minimally from the emulated post, resulting in a platformised culture (Cailandro & Anselmi, 2021).

As the Sephora Kids perform the beauty practices as kidfluencers on social media, the theory by Dawkins (1976) provides a better understanding as to what extent they emulate the behaviour and language of adult beauty influencers on social media. We can also gain a better understanding of how the behaviour of Sephora Kids is not something individual, but rather part of a collective cultural transmission. Furthermore, Dawkins' (1976) theory contributes to our investigation by providing a framework for understanding how Sephora Kids often unconsciously become part of cultural meme content. Additionally, it can provide an explanation for other aspects that the children copy from outside the beauty influencer culture. Taking Schöps et al. (2023) and Cailandro and Anselmi (2021) into consideration to understand the theory by Dawkins (1976) in the context of digital platforms, social media homogenises content and thus spreads memes between content creators. These aspects provide an explanation for the similar behaviour between the Sephora Kids and how they behave in the same way as others on the digital platforms.

4 Methodology

In the following chapter, we present the methodology chosen for our master's thesis. The chapter begins with an explanation of the basic research philosophy, followed by our research approach and an overview of qualitative methods. We then explain the sampling method, survey method and analysis process used in our study. Finally, we discuss ethical concerns regarding our thesis and explain the methodological limitations.

4.1 Research Philosophy

Social science research requires consideration of ontology and epistemology, which form an important philosophical foundation for our master's thesis. While ontology deals with the nature of reality and what constitutes the social world, epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and how we understand the world (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). In our master's thesis, we assume that Sephora Kids and the beauty practices they engage in are constructed through social processes and reinforced by social media platforms and other users.

Our study is based on a social constructivist philosophy. This assumes that social reality is constructed and that people acquire knowledge based on interpretations. This knowledge is therefore dependent on people's worldviews and is subject to a dynamic process (Charmaz, 2001). This perspective is relevant to our study, which focuses on children and social media, as social media users are constantly negotiating and shaping new forms of reality and truth. Based on this position, we use a qualitative digital methodology to collect comprehensive data and diverse perspectives on how children engage in beauty practices on social media.

The social constructivist perspective was of great importance in formulating our research question and provided us with a basis for investigating how beauty content is practised on social media.

4.2 Research Approach

The study uses a general inductive approach, a systematic method of analysing qualitative data in which the raw data is coded and evaluated from the ground up in order to analyse the results and the complexity of the subject matter. We chose this approach because it allows us to document categories and findings from the collected data. In addition, the inductive approach minimises bias and is considered trustworthy in qualitative research (Thomas, 2006). A deductive approach with a predetermined theoretical framework would potentially limit us in our work, as it would not be able to capture the full dimension of the trend. The inductive approach helps us to be flexible in data collection, which is very valuable for analysing digital content and specific characteristics. It allowed us to gain contextualised insights, examine qualitative raw data, identify clear patterns and understand the phenomenon in depth (Azungah, 2018). Therefore, the inductive approach is an effective approach for our master's thesis to investigate how social media shapes female children's perceptions of beauty ideals. The assumptions are explained and analysed in more detail using qualitative data analysis. This involves summarising and condensing the extensive raw data, making connections and clear links between the results of the data and the research objectives, and developing a structured framework for dealing with the data.

4.3 Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research is a scientific approach to understanding and interpreting experiences, meanings, behaviours and social phenomena. The focus of qualitative research is on placing oneself in an 'ethnographic situation' and gaining a deep understanding of meanings, perspectives and behaviours (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015). The qualitative approach is a suitable method for our master's thesis on several levels to investigate the phenomenon of Sephora Kids. Firstly, qualitative research allows us to study the phenomenon without predetermined variables and thus provides more depth and breadth in the study of the combination of images, language and behaviour on TikTok. Secondly, the qualitative approach allows us to remain flexible in our research, to be able to react quickly to new developments and to further develop our master's thesis if necessary (Rennstagm & Wästerfors, 2015). As social media is a fast-moving digital landscape and trends therefore evolve rapidly, it is important to be able to maintain this flexibility. Thirdly, our master's thesis deals with the influence of social media on the perception of beauty. As this is a socially constructed process, the thesis requires tools that examine how beauty norms are created, negotiated and internalised through social interaction.

Although the qualitative methodology in our research allows us to gain deeper insights into the phenomenon and motivation of Sephora Kids, there are also limitations to this methodology. The analysis of the videos has a one-sided character, as the analysis was carried out by us researchers without direct contact with the group under investigation. Mwita (2022) notes that in the qualitative approach, researchers often have to interpret meanings without being able to have them confirmed by the research groups. Analysing videos also means that there is no further contextual information about the motivation and influence of the Sephora Kids. Therefore, there is a risk that our analysis develops incomplete conclusions on the topic. Another challenge is the bias and subjectivity during data collection and analysis. This can influence how knowledge is understood, constructed and negotiated. Both types can lead to inaccurate and misleading results (Mwita, 2022). For our study, we set ourselves the task of interpreting only what we actually heard and saw in the videos and not relying on personal attitudes and values.

4.4 Data Collection Method

To gather empirical data, a netnographic approach is used in this study. Netnography, a form of ethnography, seeks to understand the cultural influences embedded in the practices, networks and systems of digital platforms. It enables the systematic observation and analysis of interactions without the direct involvement of participants (Easterby-Smith et al. 2021). According to Kozinets (2015), netnography is the study of online cultures and communities through online interactions. Netnography is similar to traditional ethnography but involves immersion in the online environment, with the recording and interpretation of cultural (re-)productions that occur within a particular online platform

We chose this approach for our study because it is the most suitable method for observing children's behaviour on TikTok without influencing them. As Rennstam & Wästerfors (2021) describe, the unobtrusive nature of the method means that uninfluenced and unbiased information can be obtained. The approach thus offers us the opportunity to observe how children present themselves in TikTok content and deal with beauty products.

Despite its advantages, netnography contains several methodological challenges, which we systematically addressed in our research design. One major limitation is the lack of direct testimony from the group under study, which prevents us from asking clarifying questions or exploring motivations beyond what is seen in the videos. Another limitation is researching the content of underage children. We have decided against using content from private accounts and have limited ourselves to publicly accessible content and have also checked this with great care. We have also ensured that all content creator content is anonymised.

We chose the social media platform TikTok for the study due to several factors. Firstly, TikTok has established itself as a dynamic platform for short videos and has been instrumental in the rise in popularity of short videos on social media. Secondly, the platform and its algorithmic system mean that content is spread quickly and trends are adopted that are then practised by communities (Schellewald, 2023). This includes the Sephora Kids trend, which originated on TikTok (Khare et al. 2024). Thirdly, the TikTok platform is particularly popular with children and young adults, which is reflected in the usage figures compared to other social media platforms (Nagata et al. 2024). As we consider children in our study who are in the age group of up to 13 years, TikTok is a suitable platform for our study.

In order to collect TikTok videos on the Sephora Kids phenomenon, a targeted sample was carried out. The data in qualitative studies contain between 1 and 30 informants, whereby the sample size should be selected on the basis of the need for information (Bengtsson, 2016). We decided on 50 videos that are between one and two minutes long. This number of videos was chosen to ensure both depth and breadth in the study. This results in a manageable yet representative sample that allows for in-depth analysis while capturing patterns and diversity across multiple pieces of content from each creator. The videos were identified and collected using the hashtags #sephorakids, #kidsskincare, #kidsbeauty and #tweenskincare. These hashtags were selected because up to 500,000 posts were published on TikTok, in which children share their skincare and beauty routines. It is important to note that the vast majority of videos feature kidfluencers from the United States. This demographic concentration was not intentional and resulted from our search using the hashtags. It also confirms that the trend is predominantly observed in the USA.

The sample was drawn between March and May 2025 to ensure that the trend is still visible and that the data has a variety of content. For each video, metadata such as date of publication, duration of the video, number of views, number of comments, number of likes and description of the content was recorded. The following table provides an overview of the subjects featured in the videos using key demographic data such as anonymised name, age category, peer presence, brand visibility and brand name. We have differentiated the age

categories as follows: Infant (0-2 years), Toddler (3-5 years), Child (6-9 years) and Pre-Teen (10-13 years).

Table 4.3 Overview of analyzed video participants

	Code Name	**Age Category**	**Peer Presence**	**Brand Visibility**	**Code Name Sister**	**Brand Name**
1	Anna	Toddler	Mother, sister	Yes	Ruth	Evereden
2	Ivy	Pre-Teen	Mother	Yes	-	Evereden
3	Julia	Toddler	-	Yes	-	Evereden
4	Hannah	Pre-Teen	-	Yes	-	Evereden
5	Emma	Pre-Teen	-	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare
6	Grace	Pre-Teen	-	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare
7	Nora	Child	Mother and sister	Yes	Stella	Drunk Elephant
8	Olivia	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare
9	Sara	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Glow recipe
10	Zoe	Child	-	Yes	-	Byoma
11	Alice	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare, ColourPop Cosmetics, Essence, Sol de Janeiro, Rare Beauty, Saie, Sephora
12	Violet	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare
13	Kristina	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Evereden
14	Gia	Child	Mother	-	-	Milk Skincare
15	Mila	Toddler	Mother	Yes	-	Evereden
16	Piper	Toddler	-	-	-	-
17	Nina	Toddler	-	Yes	-	Evereden
18	Kim	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Dr Dennis Gross, Evereden, La Roche Posay
19	Cecilia	Toddler	Mother	Yes	-	CeraVe, Garnier
20	Esther	Toddler	-	Yes		Evereden
21	Lila	Child	Mother, sister	Yes	Lucia	Evereden
22	Helena	Child	-	Yes	-	Evereden
23	Selma	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare

24	Thea	Child	Sister	Yes	Josie	La Roche Posay
25	Lena	Child	Mother	Yes	-	
26	Penelope	Infant	-	Yes	-	Evereden
27	Yasmin	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Evereden, Garnier, Glow Recipe
28	Amara	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Evereden
29	Daphne	Toddler	Sister	Yes	Evelyn	Evereden
30	Elisa	Child	Mother, sister	Yes	Inez	Evereden
31	Frida	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare, Glow Recipe
32	Gloria	Child	Mother	Yes	-	ColourPop, One/Size, Tarte Cosmetics, Youthforia, Yves Saint Laurent
33	Lisa	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Illyoon
34	Sophia	Child	Mother	Yes	-	Tarte Cosmetics, Yves Saint Laurent
35	Maren	Pre-Teen	Mother	Yes	-	Drunk Elephant, Weleda
36	Lilli	Pre-Teen	Mother	Yes	-	Alleyoop, Avenue Beauty, Dior, Djerf, e.l.f., Pixie, Rare Beauty
37	Alina	Pre-Teen	-	Yes	-	EOS, Gisou, Hairitage by Mindi
38	Greta	Toddler	Mother	Yes	-	Evereden
39	Chloe	Pre-Teen	-	-	-	-
40	Liana	Toddler	Mother	Yes	-	Aveeno, Dove
41	Agnes	Infant	Aunt	-	-	-
42	Elina	Pre-Teen	-	-	-	-
43	Felicia	Child	Sister	Yes	Elodie	Caitlyn Johnson, Drunk Elephant, Evion, Glow, Kosas Recipe, Laneige, Mario Badescu

44	Ida	Pre-Teen	Mother	Yes	-	Bubble Skincare, Sol de Janeiro,Laneige, Urban Skin Rx
45	Wilma	Toddler	-	Yes	-	e.l.f.
46	Isabell	Child	Girlfriends	Yes	-	Indeed Labs
47	Maja	Child	Mother, Sister	Yes	Anaya	Drunk Elephant, Low Recipe, Paula's choice
48	Ronja	Child	Mother, sister	Yes	Camila	Bubble Skincare, Brandify, Drunk Elephant, Low Recipe, Laneige
49	Livia	Toddler	-	Yes	-	e.l.f., Ulta Beauty
50	Matilda	Child	Mother, sister	Yes	Ayla	Bubble Skincare, Laneige, Glow Recipe

4.5 Data Analysis

To gain deep insights in the videos, the content analysis was chosen for this study in order to identify patterns, themes and meanings (Bengtsson, 2016). We opted for this approach because it ensures both flexibility and analytical precision. It also helped us to systematically identify patterns as well as individual contextual elements in the videos and to analyse the collected data. It thus offered deep insights into manifest and latent meanings that are included in this content. With the help of the content analysis, it was possible to examine how children are portrayed in TikTok videos and how they behave in the videos. The content analysis of the TikTok videos can be divided into four phases.

In the first phase, the decontextualisation phase, we viewed the videos several times in order to familiarise ourselves with the material. In this phase, we also identified units of meaning and inductively created a coding system from the material. It was important to design the coding list in detail and with explanations to ensure the reliability of the study. The second phase is the recontextualisation phase, in which we checked the completeness of the analysis and aspects. To do this, we compared the coding list with the video material and excluded material that was not relevant to our study. In the subsequent phase, the categorisation phase, we condensed the identified units of meaning and created superordinate categories. Here, similar codes were grouped into categories (Bengtsson, 2016).

During the coding process, we ensured that theoretical saturation was achieved. To guarantee this, we carried out an iterative sampling process. This method requires the data to be coded in several rounds, which allows us to refine our understanding and discover new themes (Saunders et al. 2017). During the coding process, we began with the initial coding. First, we created preliminary codes for observable elements and themes based on our initial impressions. At the beginning, we agreed on a sample of 20 videos, analysed them and summarised patterns. We then collected further data in groups of 10 videos. The sampling process was continued until we could no longer identify any new patterns or deviations in the video material. From video 40 to video 50, no new content structures were identified in the material examined. We then applied axial coding and linked, summarised and expanded the codes, which enabled us to gain new insights. In the final step, we used selective coding to group the codes into categories and subcategories so that they formed a coherent whole. The following figure illustrates our coding process, from initial coding to axial coding, selective coding and final categories and subcategories.

Figure 4.5 Overview of the Coding Process

During the analysis of the videos, we identified the following final categories and subcategories: Embodied Emulation, Gendered Socialisation and Commercialised Self-Care. Subcategories were also defined for each supercategory. The category ‘Embodied Emulation’ includes the subcategories ‘Youthful Roleplay’, ‘Routines’ and ‘Bodily Transformation’. The category ‘Gendered Socialisation’ is divided into the subcategories ‘Female Bonding’, ‘Societal Expectations on Women’ and ‘Commodification of Children’. The category ‘Commercialised Self-Care’ contains the subcategories ‘Health and Wellness’, ‘Product Justification’ and ‘Marketized Discourses’.

After conducting the data collection, the results are analysed using theoretical approaches in order to gain a deeper understanding of the formation of beauty norms on social media. In a first step, Judith Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity is used to analyse how social media users reproduce gender roles on social media. Then, through the lens of Goffman (1959), we analyse how people consciously stage their identity in social interactions. Finally, we use Dawkins' Meme Theory (1976) to analyse how beauty practices spread and reproduce on social media.

4.6 Reliability and Validity

In order to ensure trustworthiness and validity in our study, the two most important criteria from Lincoln and Guba (1985) are used for this study. They suggest using the criteria ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘authenticity’ instead of the conventional quantitative evaluation criteria ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’. The reason for this is that the classic terms assume a clear and objective truth. However, our study does not aim to find an absolute truth but to show how we understand reality. In the following, we present Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, reliability and confirmability.

Credibility describes how reliable and trustworthy a study is perceived by others and whether it is recognised by others. To ensure credibility in our study, we have endeavoured to keep the materials used for this work transparent for the reader. Furthermore, we ensure credibility by properly understanding the reality under investigation. This is a challenge in our study, as the interpretation of reality can be characterised by subjectivity.

Transferability means that the results of a study can also be transferred to other cases. In qualitative research, this means that the results can be used in other research processes. In order to ensure the transferability of Lincoln and Guba (1985), we have created a detailed description of the research context. This description contains information about the selected videos, as well as the visual and textual content of the analysed material. In this way, the readers of this study receive sufficient information and can decide whether the results of the study are also relevant for other research purposes.

Dependability in research is achieved by ensuring that the research process is logical, comprehensible and clearly documented.We ensured this criterion by clearly and thoroughly documenting our methodological decisions, such as the coding framework, coding process and interpretation of the collected data, throughout the entire study.

Confirmability describes the achievement of credibility, transferability and reliability. If these components have been achieved, the interpretations and results can be clearly derived (Norwell, 2017). We based our interpretation of the collected data on clearly defined codes and themes and always approached it critically.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

As the study examines the behaviour of minors, it is an ethical obligation to analyse their content with care and recognise that children need additional protection. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the social media platform TikTok creates tension, as the published content is freely accessible to everyone.

Due to the large number of digital platforms, the debate surrounding the use of public data on digital platforms for research purposes has also grown. Kozinets (2015) describes that a distinction must be made between public and private data and that social media is a grey area.

Although public posts are accessible to everyone, there are different opinions about who should actually use them, as users post content without considering who will actually see it. Usually, participants' consent is obtained for research purposes. When examining online data, this is usually omitted. Kozinets notes that in such cases, careful consideration should be given to whether consent is required and that researchers should handle the data sensitively. He also notes that researchers have a power advantage over those being studied.

No direct consent was obtained from the creators for the study, but we still handle the public data carefully and anonymise the content. The methodology used in the study avoids direct interaction with the children and only uses public content posted on TikTok. The results of the study are anonymised and do not use any identifying information about the content creators, and we avoid using judgemental language about the minors in our study. The aim of the present study is to gain valuable results that should lead to social media platforms being a safe environment for young people and to improve the information policy for social media platforms.

4.8 Limitations

While the netnographic approach provides valuable insights, several methodological limitations arise. Firstly, TikTok's algorithm might pose challenges to the right data selection. The videos used in this research might not be truly representative of the broader landscape of the Sephora Kids phenomenon by showing algorithmically favoured videos first in searches and feeds.

Secondly, ethical considerations must be taken into particular account, as this study uses empirical data that includes children. Although the analysed TikTok videos are publicly available and anonymised for this study, they still feature minors. It is therefore important to consider in this research that the children might not be aware of the consequences of sharing content online.

Another limitation concerns the authenticity of the content. TikTok videos are often deliberately staged to convey certain messages and depict promotional content. These factors might make it difficult to interpret the data and children's performance of beauty correctly. Interviews with female children in the same age group as the ones depicted in the videos might provide additional context to further understand personal beliefs as well as parental and peer-group influence.

As a final point, it is important that the potential for researcher bias is taken into account. We bring our own perspectives and assumptions to the interpretation of the data, which in turn could influence the results. Since children are being studied in this research, behaviours that might have different meanings within peer contexts could be misinterpreted.

In summary, throughout the data collection process, we have endeavoured to ensure the Lincoln and Guba (1985) quality criteria to ensure that our research findings are authentic, credible and valid.

5 Findings and Analysis

In the following chapter, we analyse our findings gained during the research process. The results are divided into three main themes: (1) Embodied Emulation, (2) Gendered Socialisation and (3) Commercialised Self-Care, which are divided into further sub-categories. These categories were outlined during the data collection process as common themes between the videos and are analysed under the theoretical lense of Butler's (1993) Gender Performativity, Goffman's (1959) Theory of Performativity, and the Meme Theory by Dawkins (1976).

Figure 5 Overview of the Three Main Themes

5.1 Embodied Emulation

The following chapter, 'Embodied Emulation', describes how children attempt to perform beauty routines in their content through performative behaviour using gestures and aesthetics associated with adult influencers. The theme is divided into the sub-chapters 'Youthful Roleplay', 'Routines' and 'Bodily Transformation'. Together, these sub-themes form an understanding of how Sephora Kids represent beauty as a learnt and embodied practice on social media. A table was created to better visualise the chapter and subchapters and to ensure analytical transparency. Further, it shows relevant quotes from the data material as well as the respective code and description.

Table 5.1 Overview of Data Segment

Theme	Data Segment	Code	Explanation	Video
Embodied Emulation	*"Do you guys have any plans?"*	Youthful Roleplay	Interacts with the viewers.	7
	"I hope you guys liked this video."	Youthful Roleplay	Interacts with the viewers.	10

	“I’m gonna do a run down of where all my favourite products are from.”	Youthful Roleplay	The child demonstrates a structured beauty routine and mimics adult influencer formats.	11
	“Look at my skin guys.”	Youthful Roleplay	Interacts with the viewers.	14
	“Alright guys, that was my prank for my face. Go to part 2 for my makeup routine.”	Youthful Roleplay	The child explains her skincare routine with a humorous twist and mimics adult influencer formats.	23
	“I’m gonna ride my horse to the roads, I’m gonna ride my horse to the roads.”	Youthful Roleplay	Sings in front of the camera and performs for the viewers.	31
	“Do I put my face first up? A little bit.” / “Now you just scrub. Good girl, yeah.” / “You see this little thing right here? And then you press it. Okay. A little too much. And then wipe it all out.”	Youthful Roleplay	Explains to the audience how to apply the product and receives help from her sister in doing so.	38
	“I’m applying this blush which is from my mom, but just a bit. Normally, I don’t apply anything.”	Youthful Roleplay	Admits to applying more than she would usually wear.	42
	"Last step is Evereden SPF."	Routines	The child demonstrates a structured skincare routine.	1
	“Get ready with me for school.”	Routines	The child explains her morning routine.	9
	“First we’re going to start by washing my face…”	Routines	The child demonstrates a structured skincare routine.	10
	“This is something like a dream come true to her. Something she’s always wanted to do	Routines	The mother emphasises how important these beauty routines are for the child.	14

	and we finally got it to work."			
	"Get unready with me."	Routines	The child explains her bedtime routine.	22
	"Hey guys, today is picture day at my school so I'm gonna straighten my hair, do my clothes and stuff. So now I'm gonna be doing makeup. I'm just gonna be explaining to you guys as we go."	Routines	The child describes her morning skincare routine.	25
	"I already washed my face with Evereden… Then I put sunscreen on… Then I put on some moisturizer."	Routines	The child describes her morning skincare routine.	27
	"*First we cleanse, then we tighten.*"	Routines	The child describes her morning skincare routine.	
	"I already washed my face with Evereden… Then I put sunscreen on… Then I put on some moisturizer."	Routines	The child describes her morning skincare routine.	27
	"Made my face so glowy and all I did was literally wash it."	Bodily Transformation	The child describes the effect of the product on her skin.	2
	"This smells like peaches."	Bodily Transformation	The child describes the smell of the product used for the skincare routine.	2
	"Look, my skin is beautiful, because I put this on."	Bodily Transformation	The child emphasises how radiant her skin looks after using the products.	6
	"Can we just appreciate how glowy that looks? Ah!"	Bodily Transformation	The child shows that radiant skin is something to strive for.	6
	"I love the smell of it. It smells so good."	Bodily Transformation	The child describes the smell of the product used for	7

			the skincare routine.	
	“My cheeks are going to be amazing.”	Bodily Transformation	The child explains how her skincare routine will positively change the appearance of her cheeks.	7
	"My lips are so chapped."	Bodily Transformation	The child monitors her face and notices a flaw in a specific facial area.	9
	"It's smooth as a baby's bum."	Bodily Transformation	The child describes the ideal skin texture as smooth and soft.	9
	"I gotta keep those wrinkles away."	Bodily Transformation	The child describes the ideal skin as something without wrinkles and implies that ageing is something negative.	9
	“Feels like jello.”	Bodily Transformation	The child describes the feeling of the beauty product.	14
	My skin is particularly dry.”	Bodily Transformation	The child evaluates her skin’s condition.	48
	“So refreshing.”	Bodily Transformation	The child emphasises how fresh her skin feels after using the products.	21
	“Massage your skin… don’t forget your nose.”	Bodily Transformation	The child points out the nose as focus area of her skincare routine.	24
	“Look at that shine. Your skin really needed this.”	Bodily Transformation	The child emphasises how radiant her skin looks after using the products.	33
	“Make sure to get that forehead. You should know, you should know, lady.”	Bodily Transformation	The child explains that the forehead is being pointed out as a specific area that requires attention.	33

	"Highlighter... right here, right here, and a little on the nose."	Bodily Transformation	The child demonstrates precise attention to facial zones, the cheekbones and nose, and breaks down the different techniques.	36
	"I use my EOS moisturizer and this smells so sweet and like, good."	Bodily Transformation	The child explains the smell of the moisturizer used in the video.	37
	"This blemish mist and then some pimple patches."	Bodily Transformation	Framed as preventative care.	47

5.1.1 Youthful Roleplay

The first sub-theme that has been outlined is 'Youthful Roleplay'. In the analysed videos, the female children perform their skincare routines for the camera through roleplay, mimicking the behaviour of adult beauty influencers and adults in general.

To make their content similar to beauty influencers, the videos are filmed in domestic settings and often include coordinated elements, such as matching pyjama sets, skincare headbands, and wrist towels. These visual aspects have an important role in making the whole play more credible and in communicating the role of the influencer more effectively (Goffman, 1959).

According to Goffman (1959), not only appearance is of importance in performing a role, but also the verbal and non-verbal cues. Throughout the videos, the children often use phrases to catch the audience's attention. Selma, for example, first shows her skincare routine and then refers to another video for her makeup routine. Similarly, Alice presents her favourite beauty products to influence others in their buying decisions.

> *"Alright, guys, that was my prank for my face. Go to part 2 for my makeup routine."* (Selma)

> *"I'm gonna do a run down of where all my favourite products are from."* (Alice)

As part of the non-verbal cues (Goffman, 1959), the children use the beauty products during the videos, showing the products to the camera and how to use them. After applying the products, some pose and smile exceedingly for the camera, bringing in the promotional aspect of selling the product to the audience. Here, the products also form part of the visual aspect of the role play, while the habits of showcasing every product are part of the behavioural aspects of a performance (Goffman, 1959). Furthermore, both the verbal and

non-verbal cues demonstrate imitations of the influencer culture on social media and show how the children are emulating the behaviour of beauty influencers in their own way, as they believe that they are expected to act in that manner (Dawkins, 1976).

As mentioned before, the children address the audience directly, for instance, by asking questions or showing their gratitude for watching their videos. These children perform their beauty routines for others, seeking social validation for their imitational role play of influencers. Although they cannot physically see them, the viewers still play an important role for the children as they perform their skincare routines for them (Goffman, 1959).

In the videos, the real and childish personality behind the act also appears at times. Greta, for example, explains to the viewers how to use a product that is part of her nighttime routine, shortly after following instructions from her sister on how to use it. Additionally, singing and dancing are present in some of the videos.

> *"Do I put my face first up? A little bit." (Greta) / "Now you just scrub. Good girl, yeah." (Greta's sister) / "You see this little thing right here? And then you press it. Okay. A little too much. And then wipe it all out." (Greta)*

While some of these moments are to gain the attention of the viewer, they also allow the children to be themselves for a moment and take a step back from the performance, to receive advice as they are still learning new things and to act like their true childish selves. Connecting these findings to Goffman's (1959) region, the roleplay and performance of the beauty practices can be seen as the "front" area, while the moments where the children take a break from that performance presents the "back" area, underlining a detachment between their performance and actual interests.

In addition, the routines often blur the boundaries between role play, personal ritual and performance. Elina openly admits to applying more makeup for the camera than she would normally wear:

> *"I'm applying this blush, which is from my mom, but just a bit. Normally, I don't apply anything." (Elina)*

Here, the performance aspect for the camera becomes apparent as she tries to align with the societal expectations of beauty-related videos (Goffman, 1959), compared to how much product she would apply privately if the camera was not there. In the presented example, Elina is aware of this aspect; however, it is questionable whether this is also the case for other analysed children. Conforming to societal norms and expectations for the role play can make it difficult to step back into their actual personalities and be aware of what their own beliefs are (Goffman, 1959).

All in all, the findings show that the children perform a role play through which they imitate influencers and adults. They do so through visual aspects as well as verbal and non-verbal cues that make their play more convincing for the viewers. As such, the audience plays an

important role in their performance as they address them directly. Still, there are moments in which they take a step back from the act to be their true selves again.

5.1.2 Routines

The subchapter ‘Routines’ demonstrates how beauty routines can be described as transformations that represent far more than simple product application but ritualised practices with a social meaning.

The analysed videos represent structured processes with clear boundaries such as ‘before’ and ‘after’ sequences. Furthermore, children's sentences such as

> *“first things first”, “the next step”* and *“the last step”*

portray the videos as disciplined rituals with precise timings and steps that represent a process. The content usually starts with an unprepared face and ends with a ‘radiant’ and ‘finished’ look. It is clear that beauty is something that can only be achieved through discipline and effort. The children describe their skincare routine with phrases such as *“first we're going to start by washing my face.”* (Zoe), *“[...] then I put on some moisturiser.”* (Yasmin), *“last step is Evereden SPF.”* (Anna) as a structured, ceremonial activity.

In the context of Judith Butler's Gender Performativity (1990), these routines can be explained not only as an expression of gender but also as that children learn how to behave as girls through the repetition of these actions. Gender is not revealed here as something natural, but as a socially learnt and media-mediated action that is repeatedly produced through standardised rituals. Additionally, the research findings of our study show that the female children also exhibit performative behaviours that mimic adult beauty influencers. Indeed, the studied beauty routines on TikTok function as what Butler (1993) refers to as ‘citational practices’. They are characterised by regular, repetitive actions that quote and confirm gender norms. The result shows that the products used in the videos are not only intended to be ‘applied’, but are predominantly ritualised sequences. These are based on socially constructed female beauty standards and beauty practices.

Some videos show beauty routines that are carried out at specific times, such as getting ready in the morning (*“Get ready for school”*), undressing in the evening (*“Get unready”*) or preparing for special occasions (*“Picture day”*). According to Butler (1990), the children thus become gender-readable subjects through the repeated performance of their beauty routine. This chronological sequence encourages early patterns of embellishment. In the ‘before’ and ‘after’ sequences, children not only describe their physical change but also their emotional change, such as ‘from tired to refreshed’, ‘from ordinary to confident’ or ‘from unprepared to prepared’. This shows that beauty routines not only have a positive influence on appearance but can also provide emotional support. This finding describes how even at a young age there is a connection between changes in appearance and emotional well-being.

The analysed videos can also be understood as milestones in the development from childhood to pre-puberty phase. Comments such as

> *"This is something like a dream come true to her. Something she's always wanted to do, and we finally got it to work."* (mother of Gia)

or the depiction of routines as something that children 'grow into' positions beauty practices as developmental achievements and signs of maturation. In addition, the children in the videos also mention future routines that they practise for later stages of their lives or products that they may use later. This future-orientated framework establishes beauty practices as preparatory acts for idealised future identities, potentially accelerating children's desire to engage with adult beauty norms.

The aspects of these performances, including posed facial expressions, choreographed routines and direct audience involvement, also show a link to Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach applicable to digital environments. The videos show children presenting themselves to their audience as a front stage with a script, props (beauty products) and costumes (matching pyjama sets and accessories). This performance starts at a young age, with even toddlers being guided by their parents to perform beauty routines for digital audiences. The results show that self-presentation in videos is directly linked to the use of beauty products and beauty practices. Furthermore, it is evident that even at very early stages of development, children associate their self-worth with improving their appearance. Beauty routines can therefore not just be dismissed as harmless play, but are experiences that shape children's gender identity and self-concept. The children's knowledge of beauty routines raises important questions in the context of school-based consumer education. Because children have these so-called beauty repositories at such an early age, they are already competent consumers, able to evaluate marketing claims or reconcile the decommodified interests of beauty standards long before cognitive development. What is worrying is that the children observed do not carry out these routines in an experimental and playful way, but with a regularity and precision that is reminiscent of the behaviour of adult influencers.

5.1.3 Bodily Transformation

The subchapter 'Bodily Transformation' examines how children focus on certain body parts during their beauty routine and what meaning they attribute to them. It also describes how children perceive their bodies not only as part of their beauty routine but also as an active site of aesthetic work and change. The analysed videos clearly reveal that particular attention is paid to certain facial features of the children. Statements such as:

> *"Highlighter... right here, right here, and a little on the nose."* (Lilli),
>
> *"Massage your skin… don't forget your nose."* (Thea) or
>
> *"Make sure to get that forehead. You should know, lady."* (Lisa)

emphasise the importance of the face and its categorised beauty zones, such as the nose, eyes, forehead, lips and cheeks. These areas are described by the children as areas that require particular attention and improvement. This prioritisation of the face establishes an early understanding of the face as the primary canvas for beauty care and self-expression. Following Featherstone (1991), who describes the body as a central part of consumer culture, it is possible to explain how the children studied understand their bodies from an early age as a project on which they must make targeted improvements and optimisations in order to achieve social fulfilment.

It is important to highlight that even at a young age, children observe their bodies in a frightening way and judge them as inadequate or aesthetic. In some cases, children praise the effect of a product: *"Can we just appreciate how glowy that looks? Ah!"* (Grace), while in other cases they express concerns, *"My skin is particularly dry."* (Ronja), "*I gotta keep those wrinkles away.*" (Sara). These statements reflect a burgeoning body image awareness in which beauty is seen as desirable and flaws as correctable.

In addition, the children describe their body parts in the videos based on the interaction of products and use physical sensations to demonstrate the effectiveness of a product. This observation ranges from tactile observations such as

> *"Feels like jello"* (Livia), *"So refreshing"* (Nora), or *"Smooth as a baby's bum"* (Sara),

to olfactory experiences like *"smells like peaches"* (Ivy), *"I love the smell of it."* (Nora) and visual assessments like *"Look at that shine"* (Lisa) or *"[...] so sweet."* (Alina).

Of particular concern is how children at a young age define problem areas on their bodies that they want to improve or eliminate. In their research, Stevens and Ostberg (2011) focus on how representations in the media portray the body as a consumer object, which leads to a reinforcement of classic gender roles. The analysis of the data shows that this process begins very early on. The way children behave and articulate themselves in the videos shows how they categorise their bodies in different areas. Askegaard et al. (2002) describe this process as a product of decisions about body modifications identified through marketing discourses.

The application of the products in the videos is described with sensory and aesthetic adjectives such as:

> *"My cheeks are going to be amazing."* (Nora) and *"Look, my skin is beautiful, because I put this on."* (Grace)

Problem areas such as

> *" [...] pimples."* (Maja) and *"My lips are so chapped."* (Sara)

are discussed at a young age and need to be treated and improved.

The children's statements reflect what Visconti et al. (2018) describe as formative experiences in which young girls learn how to behave and present themselves as girls in society and how

these beauty practices can be understood as gender-specific socialisation processes. The data show that children attribute their value to their appearance. The question *“Do I look beautiful?”* (Gia) reveals an emerging consciousness in which external validation of appearance is central to self-worth, a process that Gurrieri and Drenten (2019) identify as particularly intense in digital contexts where appearance is constantly evaluated.

Overall, the children in the analysed videos seem very proud to be able to perform their routines independently. The focus on certain areas of the body such as the face in the videos illustrates how societal beauty standards emphasise the appearance of the face and promote physical self-discipline. Furthermore, the statements made in the videos are more than a playful description of routine, but point to an emerging body image consciousness that is characterised by ideals of beauty. Alarmingly, this reflects a cultural climate in which the child's body is no longer protected from aesthetic scrutiny.

5.2 Gendered Socialisation

The chapter ‘Gendered Socialisation’ explores the relationship between gender-specific expectations and commercial interests in relation to children's beauty practices on social media. The theme is divided into the sub-themes ‘Female Bonding’, ‘Societal Expectations on Women’ and ‘Commodification of Children’. Together they form an understanding of the influence that female family members and the joint practice of beauty practices exert on the children. In addition, the social expectations placed on women in connection with beauty practices are addressed. A table was created to better visualise the chapter and subchapters and to ensure analytical transparency. This shows relevant quotes from the data material as well as the respective code and description.

Table 5.2 Overview of Data Segment

Theme	Data Segment	Code	Explanation	Video
Commercialising Gender-specific Interactions	*"I'm so proud of you girls for having a good morning routine."*	Female Bonding	The mother emphasises how great she thinks it is that her children already have a skincare routine at a young age.	1
	“I love that my girly is such a girly girl and that she loves skincare products just as much as I do.”	Female Bonding	The mum is proud of her daughter for starting a skincare routine at an early age.	15
	“We both get super dry and eczema in the winter time...”	Female Bonding	Shows that mother and daughter have the same skin needs and therefore do a routine together.	19

	“We do it every night together…”	Female Bonding	Mother and daughter showing their bedtime skincare routine.	30
	“The fact that an 8-year-old has a skincare routine is shocking to me.”	Female Bonding	Sisters doing their skincare routine together.	43
	“You look so beautiful honey.”	Societal Expectations on Women	Mother compliments her daughter’s appearance after applying the products.	1
	"Everybody has been complimenting me on my glowy skin."	Societal Expectations on Women	External validation is used to justify and reinforce beauty practices.	4
	“No, I don’t need it yet so I use it for decoration too and I’ll use it when I get older. These two are mine. I asked my mom for permission, if I can use these.”	Societal Expectations on Women	Reveals that the child already sees beauty product use as part of their future role as a woman.	8
	“This brand is harmless. It’s like play skincare.”	Societal Expectations on Women	The mother justifies her daughter’s skincare routine.	14
	“Let’s get into my toddler’s skincare routine using Evereden, and before you get crazy in the comments, using skincare products isn’t safe, yes it is. Evereden is 100% safe. I researched these products myself to make sure they are safe for my daughter’s skin.”	Societal Expectations on Women	The justification reaffirms that if the products are “safe,” then the practice is acceptable.	15
	“I love how I’m so kind and get more friends, I have a big heart.” / “I love that I’m supported. I’m kind to everyone and I have friends that I care about.”	Societal Expectations on Women	The sisters share what they love about themselves, focusing on their inner values.	21

	“It is my responsibility as a parent […] to do my due diligence.”	Societal Expectations on Women	Shows that the mother checks the products used.	26
	“No! No, my skin was perfectly fine. I only need a little bit. And you need a lot.”	Societal Expectations on Women	Tells her mother that her skin does not much as she is still young, whereas her mother is in need of it.	33
	“I mean, I can't even do the stuff she does at night…”	Societal Expectations on Women	Mother complains that her daughter is much more disciplined than her.	39
	“How do I look? Good.”	Societal Expectations on Women	Gives herself a compliment for her look.	45
	“This is what you do guys before you go to bed, you gotta do your skincare.”	Societal Expectations on Women	The mother frames skincare not as optional or playful, but as a daily responsibility.	46
	"If everything I just said sounds like you or even interest you, apply to be a Bubble ambassador today!"	Commodification of Children	The child invitates others to “apply to be a Bubble ambassador” an recruits into a role that blurs the line between user and promoter.	6
	“I was in New York City for my best friend's birthday party [...] Sephora was like a block away from where we were staying, so they let us go by ourselves and joined after [...] We had to get the Drunk Elephant sunscreen as part of the scavenger hunt."	Commodification of Children	This reflects a broader trend where youth social events are layered with marketing potential.	12
	“You can find these products in the TikTok shop, click the orange link below...”	Commodification of Children	Viewers are encouraged to buy products.	15
	“Evereden sent us their Cloud Face Wash and their protective Mineral Face Cream, and	Commodification of Children	Demonstrates how the child and the mother become part of a branded marketing ecosystem.	28

	we couldn't be more excited."			
	"Some of that stuff they see advertised... I'm like no, it's not for kids. This is for kids. Safe, fun for everybody."	Commodification of Children	The mother tries to explain and justify herself by emphasising that her child is only allowed to use child-friendly products.	30
	"A lot of y'all were wondering about the details of my 5-year-old's face routine so let's get into it."	Commodification of Children	The mother introduces her daughter's skincare routine.	40
	"Went to Sephora yesterday. She was going crazy with the solution arrows, just touching everything."	Commodification of Children	This reflects how children are being socialized into consumer behaviors at a very young age.	43

5.2.1 Female Bonding

An important sub-theme of this category is 'Female Bonding'. As already described in the previous theme, many videos feature female relatives such as mothers, sisters or aunts doing the beauty routines together with the children. Hence, beauty allows female individuals to connect and bond.

The mothers featured in the videos take on different roles. Some just present their daughters' routines by filming them and describing every step through a voiceover, or they are present in the background to oversee everything that is happening. Most of them, however, take on active roles in the videos. The ones who fall into the latter category typically do the beauty routines with their daughters together (e.g., *"We do it every night together…",* Elisa's mother). In the videos, they act as advisors during the application process, highlight the kid-friendliness of the products, and ask their daughters questions about the products to educate both the children and the viewers. Anna's mother, for example, takes the opportunity to show how proud she is of her daughters for going through with the routine so thoroughly despite their young age. Additionally Mila's mother expresses how her daughter love beauty products just as much as she does. Cecilia's mother shares throughout the routine that her daughter has the same skin as her, which is why she has created a skincare routine for her despite only being a toddler.

"I'm so proud of you girls for having a good morning routine." (Anna's mother)

> *"I love that my girly is such a girly girl and that she loves skincare products just as much as I do."* (Mila's mother)

> *"We both get super dry and eczema in the winter time..."* (Cecilia's mother)

Two videos also feature older sisters switching routines with their much younger sisters. Both Felicia and Maja switch their beauty products with their older sisters, using their products instead of their own. While both older sisters are astonished by the fact that their much younger sisters already have a skincare routine, it also allows them to share this interest.

> *"The fact that an 8-year-old has a skincare routine is shocking to me."* (Felicia's sister Elodie)

All these findings underline the aspect of female bonding over beauty, allowing the children to learn from the skincare practices of other females while beauty norms are being passed on between generations. However, none of these videos have any male presence, which makes the beauty routines highly gendered. Especially as the videos only feature female children. Connecting these findings to Butler (1993), the children are shown by the sole presence of female relatives that gender is connected to beauty routines and that these routines play a part in making them appear as female. Indirectly, the children are being forced into femininity by their female relatives, especially by their mothers, who project their interest in beauty onto their daughters. Thus, the children reinforce cultural norms through the beauty practices (Butler, 1993).

To sum up, while the beauty routines allow the children to bond with other females and to learn the positive aspects for their skin, it also reinforces their gender and forces them into femininity from a young age on. The mothers play a significant role in reinforcing these norms, as there is a male absence in the videos and as the children are not fully aware of the impact.

5.2.2 Societal Expectations on Women

The previous findings are connected to the next sub-theme, as beauty is impacted by the societal expectations on women to meet certain standards. Comments and behaviours in the videos show that this pressure is already present among the children.

During the routines, the children receive compliments on their appearance, as, for example, Anna from her mother (*"You look so beautiful honey"*), Hannah from peers (*"Everybody has been complimenting me on my glowy skin because I actually have been using their products since I was a kid"*), or Wilma from herself (*"How do I look? Good."*). This shows that they are aware of how beauty products and personal care are linked to how they are perceived, both by themselves and others. Additionally, skincare and makeup products not only become tools to enhance the physical appearance but also to boost self-confidence.

Throughout the videos, they often mention that they do their beauty routine every morning or night, as their mothers pressure them into doing the routine daily. For example, Isabell's mother tells her daughter and her daughter's girlfriends, who are having a sleepover, that they should have a beauty routine before going to bed.

> *"This is what you do guys before you go to bed, you gotta do your skincare."* (Isabell's mother)

Thus, the mothers pass on the need to look a certain way onto their daughters, reinforcing societal norms for the appearance of female individuals (Butler, 1990).

In Lisa's video, the societal pressure of maintaining a youthful appearance plays a role, as she indirectly mocks her mother's "older" skin after both apply the same moisturiser, telling her:

> *"No, my skin was perfectly fine. I only need a little bit. And you need a lot."* (Lisa)

This underlines that she is aware of the fact that youthful skin is seen as more desirable in society, whereas ageing skin is seen as more flawed and in need of product treatment. Similarly, Sara uses a serum in her morning routine, whereafter she explains that she uses it to keep wrinkles away from her skin.

> *"Next step my Glow Recipe Firm Serum. I gotta keep those wrinkles away."* (Sara)

Although it is likely that she does not fully understand the meaning behind the term and only uses the product for long-term effects, it is still concerning that a child at such a young age is already worried about wrinkles and even knows about the term. These behaviours are connected to the expectations on her gender to look a certain way (Butler, 1990).

Societal pressure is not only apparent among the children but also among the mothers. Chloe's mother, for example, films her daughter's nighttime routine, noting that her daughter is more disciplined in maintaining her appearance than she is:

> *"I mean, I can't even do the stuff she does at night."* (Chloe's mother)

Hence, mothers nowadays not only feel pressure from society but also from their own daughters to conform with beauty ideals.

While all these aspects highlight the physical aspect of beauty, none of them consider that beauty should also come from within. Only in one video, the sisters Lila and Lucia are asked by their mother what they love about themselves after having applied their skincare products.

> *"I love how I'm so kind and get more friends, I have a big heart."* (Lila)

Here, the understanding of self-worth is connected to both internal and external attributes. However, in almost all videos, beauty seems to be connected to physical aspects and to meeting a certain beauty ideal, rather than focusing on personal qualities. The children are

taught that they will be accepted by the viewers and thus society if they maintain a certain appearance (Butler, 1990), rather than focusing on themselves and how they can be the best version of themselves. This underlines the tension of meeting the ideas of a certain gender while finding their own ways for who they are in the interaction with the beauty products (Bettany et al. 2010; Visconti et al. 2018). All in all, these findings show that the children feel the societal pressure to conform with beauty standards, as their mothers make them use the beauty products to maintain a youthful physical appearance. Thus, they reinforce aspirational beauty standards and cultural norms that are connected to females while neglecting the aspect of beauty coming from within.

5.2.3 Commodification of Children

The sub-chapter 'Commodification of Children' examines how parents influence the beauty content of their children and utilise it for their own benefit. It also sheds light on how children are positioned as consumer objects in the course of beauty culture.

The term 'commodification' describes the process of commercialisation and thus the transformation into a good or service (McKendrick et al. 2000). In the case of the Sephora Kids phenomenon, this can be seen in the commercialisation of their experiences and social relationships. The connection between children and brands goes beyond pure product use, as they develop brand loyalty at an early age, as this statement shows: *"I actually have been using their products since I was a kid."* (Hannah). This describes how belonging to a brand and owning a product become part of children's self-image and illustrates how deeply commercial relationships can become embedded in identity formation during childhood.

Buckingham (2007) looks at different scientific perspectives on children as consumers. On the one hand, they can be described as powerless puppets in consumer culture, and on the other, as capable market participants. The videos analysed reinforce the latter view, namely that children are active participants in the market.

The data shows a worrying pattern in which children are not just passive consumers but act as promoters for the respective brand. Statements such as "*If everything I just said sounds like you or even interests you, apply to be a Bubble ambassador today!"* and *"You can find these products in the TikTok shop; click the orange link below."* (Mila) show how children encourage their followers to enter into a relationship with the brand and how this is reinforced by reward systems.

Fears expressed by Schor (2004), Linn (2004) and Quart (2003) regarding the commercial exploitation of young children are found in the data material analysed. The videos show how brands attempt to address and recruit not only parents but also their children directly and with targeted messages. The phenomenon described by Zelizer (2002) that children not only act in their role as consumers but are actively involved in the production of marketing content and used as distributors for brands is a cause for concern.

The behaviours observed in the videos can also be examined in more detail using memetic theory (Dawkins, 1976). The repeated statements regarding the brand messages function as successful memes that are passed on and reinforced from child to child on social media. This works so well because although the children's beauty practices are personalised, the core message remains unchanged.

What is worrying is the crucial role played by the family when it comes to integrating brands into children's lives. The videos analysed make it clear that the content is not only created by the children, but that they are often accompanied and moderated by their mothers, sisters or aunts. As previously outlined, it is striking that only female protagonists appear in the videos. The data shows how brands are actively introduced into everyday family life:

> *"Evereden sent us their Cloud Face Wash and their protective Mineral Face Cream, and we couldn't be more excited."* (Amara's mother)

This statement emphasises the position of the family as a place where brands are integrated and promoted. In many videos, the beauty routines carried out together are dismissed as quality time with the family and portrayed as something harmless:

> *"A lot of y'all were wondering about the details of my 5-year-old's face routine so let's get into it."* (Liana's mother)

In some videos, children express interest in their mothers' beauty products. Some mothers make statements such as *"Some of that stuff they see advertised... I'm like no, it's not for kids. This is for kids. Safe, fun for everybody."* (Elisa's mother) to reassure their children that they should only use products designed for children. However, this also reinforces the assumption that mothers want to protect themselves and in no way critically question the fact that their children are commercialised and come into contact with the beauty marketing system at such an early age. Some videos also describe how children take trips to beauty shops with their mums or sisters and dismiss this as an everyday activity. These shopping trips are described as follows:

> "*Went to Sephora yesterday. She was going crazy with the solution arrows, just touching everything."* (Elodie)

Even social events, such as a friend's birthday party, are accompanied by brands, as this statement makes clear:

> *"I was in New York City for my best friend's birthday party [...] Sephora was like a block away from where we were staying, so they let us go by ourselves and joined after [...] We had to get the Drunk Elephant sunscreen as part of the scavenger hunt."* (Violet)

Trips with family or friends thus become a story about the exploration and consumption of brands.

Dawkins (1976) explains how successful memes tie in with basic needs for belonging. Brand reward systems utilise psychological mechanisms and create a memetic cycle in which children become active propagators of brand memes.

The commoditization of children described above is a worrying situation and raises ethical concerns. Early exposure to brands can have a negative impact on children's commercial understanding. While adults are able to recognise and critically question marketing strategies, children may not be able to understand the full implications due to their developmental stage. It is also questionable to what extent children can still develop freely and creatively when brands play such a large part in their lives.

While parents should be first in line when it comes to protecting their children from commercial influences and premature exposure to beauty practices, the data unfortunately shows a different picture. Mothers are transforming from parental protection to parental promotion of this content in the videos. They actively participate, and it appears as if they are pushing their children to create this content. Sadly, there is no difference between the age groups analysed. Mothers of toddlers, children and pre-teens all actively support this content. The videos also show a clear pattern of safety precautions in relation to the products used. Mothers cover up the psychological and developmental impact on their vulnerable children by relying on the physical safety of the products.

According to Dawkins' theory (1976), mothers act as meme hosts, passing on cultural information to their children and thus promoting the memetic spread of beauty practices in a protected space. This can be clearly seen in the fact that mothers integrate brands into everyday family life as a matter of course and normalise their use. Memetic immunity is also important to mention in this context. This describes the critical awareness of commercialisation that seems to be lacking among the mothers observed. Instead of protecting their children from early commercialisation, they justify it with weak explanations and thus protect themselves from the effects of the early commercialisation of their children.

5.3 Commercialised Self-Care

The last theme, ‘Commercialised Self-Care’, deals with health-related lifestyles and discourses around the topic of beauty. There are three sub-chapters in this theme, ‘Health and Wellness’, ‘Product Justification’ and ‘Marketised Discourses’. The subchapters provide an understanding of how beauty is seen as a lifestyle of attaining healthy skin and the influence of advertising on children that creates a preference for certain products. Before getting into the findings and analysis of this chapter, a table visualises quotes from the gathered data as well as the matching code and description to better visualise the theme and ensure analytical transparency.

Table 5.3 Overview of Data Segment

Theme	Data Segment	Code	Explanation	Video
Health-focused discourses	*"Why do we put on SPF?" / "To protect your skin." / "And what are you protecting your skin from?" / "The sun rays."*	Health and Wellness	Mother educates her daughters on the importance of applying sunscreen.	1
	"All of their products are non-toxic and safe for sensitive skin and this is very good for young skin."	Health and Wellness	Mother lists ingredients that help healthy skin.	13
	"It's never too early to teach your kids self-care."	Health and Wellness	Mother emphasises that beauty and self-care are connected.	15
	"Okay girls, so why is it important that we wash our face?" / "Because you gotta get that dirt off your face and the germs."	Health and Wellness	Mother teaches her daughters the importance of maintaining healthy skin.	21
	"Vitamin C... you already know girl... gotta keep that skin good."	Health and Wellness	Child uses products with specific ingredients for skin health.	23
	"Non-toxic, plant-based, all-natural ingredients…"	Health and Wellness	Mother lists "healthy" ingredients.	26
	"It instills healthy habits early on, teaching her the importance of self-care and hygiene. By learning to cleanse and moisturize her skin regularly, she will develop habits at contribute to long term skin health."	Health and Wellness	The mother frames skincare for a child not as a daily responsibility.	28

	“Establishing a skincare routine will empower her to take control of her health and well-being, fostering confidence and self-esteem from a young age.”	Health and Wellness	Mother emphasises that starting a beauty routine at a young age is connected to health and self-confidence.	28
	“Let’s get into my toddler’s skincare routine using Evereden, and before you get crazy in the comments, using skincare products isn’t safe, yes it is. Evereden is 100% safe. I researched these products myself to make sure they are safe for my daughter’s skin.”	Product Justification	The mother tries to defend herself and her child by citing scientific arguments about the products.	15
	“This brand is harmless. It’s like play skincare.”	Product Justification	The mother compares beauty products to toys.	14
	“It is my responsibility as a parent of a toddler to do my due diligence to make sure that everything that touches her precious face is the best of the best.”	Product Justification	The mother defends her daughter's use of beauty products and points out that she takes great care to ensure that her child uses appropriate products.	26
	“No, I don’t need it yet so I use it for decoration too and I’ll use it when I get older. These two are mine. I asked my mom for permission, if I can use these.”	Product Justification	The child points out that products for older people are only for decoration and makes it clear that they have not yet used these products.	8
	“Their products are non-toxic and good for the whole family.”	Product Justification	The mother tries to defend herself and her child by citing scientific arguments about the products.	13
	"This Drunk Elephant, I have to rate you, 10 out of 10."	Marketised Discourses	The child evaluates the product using a rating scale.	7

	"So this is my Sol de Janeiro body mist, it smells amazing."	Marketised Discourses	The child presents a product and refers to the good odour of the product.	11
	"It's only five dollars and that's a lot cheaper than thirty."	Marketised Discourses	The child emphasises the low price of the product and justifies her purchase.	11
	"This is my Saie bronzing drops. It literally looks the same as Drunk Elephant, but it's a lot cheaper and just gives you that bronze look."	Marketised Discourses	The child emphasises the low price of the product and justifies her purchase.	11
	"You can find this at Ulta, Target, Walmart, you can find it anywhere."	Marketised Discourses	Children describe where to purchase the products used in the video.	11
	"I love this Glow Recipe. I saw that it was um gonna be new and then I wanted it really much."	Marketised Discourses	The child describes the urgent desire for the new product, which describes the desirability of the product.	31
	"She's using the Laneige mask… We're gonna take her to Sephora again so she can get her perfume and her Laneige that she wants so bad."	Marketised Discourses	The statement describes the child's desire for trendy brands and products.	43

5.3.1 Health and Wellness

The first sub-theme deals with the portrayal of beauty as a lifestyle. Health and wellness are provided as reasons for using beauty products from a young age on, suggesting that beauty is not only related to the aspect of physical appearance but also health-related.

Throughout the videos, mothers and other female relatives include educational messages that highlight the importance of hygiene to maintain skin health. During their skincare routine, Lila and her sister are asked by their mother about the importance of washing their face.

> *"Okay girls, so why is it important that we wash our face?"* (Lila's mother)
> *"Because you gotta get that dirt off your face and the germs."* (Lila)

Similarly, the importance of sun protection to prevent skin damage is underlined, as Anna is asked by her mother why it is important to use the sunscreen that she is applying.

> *"Why do we put on SPF?"* (Anna's mother)
> *"To protect your skin."* (Anna)
> *"And what are you protecting your skin from?"* (Anna's mother)
> *"The sun rays."* (Anna)

Through the questions, both the viewers and the children are educated on skin health. Additionally, the health-beneficial elements and ingredients of the products themselves are also presented, particularly to the viewers. These findings connect to the memetic logic of Dawkins (1976), as they underline that the aspects of health in relation to beauty products are learned through consumer culture and passed on to other social media users, as social media facilitates a platformised culture (Cailandro & Anselmi, 2021).

Both Kristina's and Penelope's mother emphasise that her daughters' products have ingredients that are beneficial for young skin by listing several beauty-related terms. The children themselves are also aware of the benefits of certain ingredients for their skin health, as Selma, for instance, points out the importance of applying Vitamin C onto the skin.

> *"All of their products are non-toxic and safe for sensitive skin and this is very good for young skin."* (Kristina's mother)

> *"Non-toxic, plant-based, all-natural ingredients…"* (Penelope's mother)

> *"Vitamin C... you already know girl... gotta keep that skin good."* (Selma)

Furthermore, the children in the videos are taught that beauty is a life-long process in which products must be adapted to the stage the skin is in. Some show an early understanding of the age restriction of products and that they should be used at the correct time to support the skin, as, for example, Olivia mentions that she is only allowed to use certain products when she gets older.

The mothers play an important role in creating a healthy lifestyle for their daughters through the beauty routines. While filming the routine, Amara's mother mentions that the skincare routine is important for her daughter's health and to form self-care habits from a young age on. Similarly, Mila's mother points out that there is no minimum age for children to learn the importance of self-care.

> *"It instills healthy habits early on, teaching her the importance of self-care and hygiene [...]. Establishing a skincare routine will empower her to take control of her health and well-being, fostering confidence and self-esteem from a young age."* (Amara's mother)

> *"It's never too early to teach your kids self-care."* (Mila's mother)

All these findings underline that skincare is not only used for aesthetic purposes but also for hygienic and health-related issues. In this context, beauty is branded as health-care and wellness. The educational messages and the emphasis on using products with certain ingredients are based on beliefs from the beauty culture, which have been passed on between individuals over generations. By continuing these practices, the health-oriented lifestyle is reinforced in the current society and promoted both among the young generation and the viewers who watch the videos (Dawkins, 1976). Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on self-care and health, these habits still reinforce a lifestyle that follows a certain appearance of non-damaged and smooth skin, which pressures the children into existing cultural norms (Butler, 1990).

5.3.2 Product Justification

Another sub-theme that is related to societal expectations on women and appears in the videos is the justification of using beauty products on children, particularly by mothers. In several videos, mothers of the Sephora Kids mention how they use products that are child-friendly and that they would not use the products otherwise. Mila's mother, for example, defends her toddler's skincare products in the voiceover while Mila applies the products. Similarly, Gia's mother and Penelope's mother explain that the products are safe to use and that they, as parents, know their responsibility to keep their children safe from any harm.

> *"Let's get into my toddler's skincare routine using Evereden, and before you get crazy in the comments, using skincare products isn't safe, yes it is. Evereden is 100% safe. I researched these products myself to make sure they are safe for my daughter's skin."* (Mila's mother)

This statement shows that the mother is already concerned about negative reactions and is responding preventively with scientific statements (*"100% safe"*) about the products and the brand. It also gives the impression that the mother is well informed and cautious when it comes to her daughter's beauty practices. To better understand this statement, we can apply Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959). The role that the mother plays in the videos can be described by Goffman's (1959) "impression management". This describes how she shapes her truth in such a way that she is perceived on stage and in front of her social media audience as a caring and credible parent in order to meet expectations.

Gia's mother shares a similar statement:

> *"This brand is harmless. It's like play skincare."* (Gia's mother)

It is also clear that children's beauty routines are seen as much more than just play, and not as a questionable leisure activity. Penelope's mother says:

> *"It is my responsibility as a parent of a toddler to do my due diligence to make sure that everything that touches her precious face is the best of the best."* (Penelope's mother)

The statements made by the mothers paint a picture in which mothers do not question the questionable structures behind these products, but instead urge their children to consume them. This justification appears paradoxical, as on the one hand, the mothers in the videos think that their daughters need to meet societal beauty norms by applying beauty products at a young age, while on the other hand, they have to justify the use of these products. Instead of questioning the societal expectations to meet beauty norms as a female (Butler, 1990), they try to conform with them and put their daughters into the routines at even younger ages. Instead of questioning society's expectations of women to conform to beauty standards (Butler, 1990), they try to adapt to them and involve their daughters in these routines at an even younger age. They therefore contribute to the repetition of the perception of femininity through beauty practices. This is because they not only support their daughters' beauty routines, but also live out the femininity that society considers to be correct and desirable. In doing so, they contribute to the reinforcement of gender-specific expectations rather than breaking them down. Hard-won counter-movements are weakened as a result and move back in a direction where traditional gender roles are recognised. Especially when considering that, most notably, the toddlers are too young to fully understand the purpose of some of the products. For example, after being asked about some products that she has on her desk, Olivia mentions that they are just for decoration, as she is not allowed to use them yet, without knowing why.

> *"No, I don't need it yet so I use it for decoration too and I'll use it when I get older. These two are mine. I asked my mom for permission, if I can use these."* (Olivia)

However, it should be important that the children know that the beauty routines are indirectly connected to gender identities, which in turn are based on cultural and societal norms (Butler, 1990). It is also striking that both children and mothers believe that the products used are safe and child-friendly, i.e. based on scientific evidence, and that there is therefore no cause for concern:

> *"Their products are non-toxic and good for the whole family."* (Kristina's mother)

It seems as though mothers have already thoroughly studied and internalised the brand messages of the products they use in order to convince others, but also themselves, that there is no cause for concern. They focus solely on the external application of the products, but in doing so risk their children suffering profound psychological effects from using these products. Beauty practices are not understood by mothers as beauty care, but as a requirement for their children to take care of themselves. For them, it is therefore a process in their development. Beauty care is thus equated with health and discipline.

5.3.3 Marketised Discourses

In the following subchapter, 'Marketised Discourses', we explain the influence of advertising and brands on children and the embedding of consumption in the beauty practices of the analysed videos. The examined data is used to describe how shopping for beauty products is normalised as a female activity, how children advertise these products and brands and how they internalise the consumer culture. Many of the children featured in the videos use brand reward systems or promote specific products. The products mentioned in the videos usually come from high-priced brands that the children praise and explicitly recommend. In the analysed videos, we found that children usually describe the products used using characteristics such as packaging, texture, and fragrance. Phrases such as

> *"This Drunk Elephant, I have to rate you, 10 out of 10."* (Nora),
>
> *"So this is my Sol de Janeiro body mist, it smells amazing."* (Alice)

emphasise how children are participants in an active marketing culture that promotes brand loyalty, product advertising and aesthetic consumption from a young age. The children's consumer behaviour is also reflected in the statements that address the desirability and scarcity of the product. Statements such as

> *"I love this Glow Recipe. I saw that it was um [...] gonna be new and then I wanted it really much."* (Frida)
>
> *"She's using the Laneige mask [...] We're gonna take her to Sephora again so she can get her perfume and her Laneige that she wants so bad."* (Felicia)

show the extent to which children have already internalised the language of the market through statements on trends and product evaluations.

Furthermore, it is clear that children also enjoy purchasing the products. The excitement about affordability, like *"It's only five dollars, and that's a lot cheaper than thirty."* (Alice) or about gifted products, signals how emotionally and socially enriching brand acquisition is. In several videos, beauty products are presented as achievements and are thus part of a broader, emerging economy in which consumption is equated with success and happiness. Statements like

> *"This is my Saie bronzing drops. It literally looks the same as Drunk Elephant, but it's a lot cheaper and just gives you that bronze look."* (Alice)

reveal not only product familiarity, but also price consciousness and comparative analysis, which is commonly associated with adult consumer behaviour.

The analysed videos cannot be dismissed as harmless but show a worrying development. Commercial interests are encroaching on children's lives, and children see themselves as active participants in the area of consumption. The data gives the impression that children

measure their worth by the products and brands they use and are no longer allowed to be children. Their statements in the videos are questionable, as they can hardly be distinguished from those of adult influencers. It is also questionable whether the children are actually expressing their opinions freely or whether their thinking and language are influenced by the mechanisms of the market.

6 Discussion

This chapter focuses on the theoretical contributions of our research. We will describe how our study contributes to the limitations of previous literature by further expanding the understanding within the literature streams relevant to this study.. The discussion is divided into the two main contributions of this study, with two sub-chapters for each. The first contribution starts with children's active participation in consumer culture, followed by their engagement with digital platforms as consumers and kidfluencers. In the second main contribution, we discuss how beauty practices influence early gender socialisation among children and how their appearance is connected to gender reinforcements and external validation.

6.1 Children's Active Role in the Digital Consumer Landscape

Current studies still perceive children as passive participants in the digital consumer culture and predominantly focus on children aged above 13. The main focus of these studies is on traditional fields associated with children, such as games, food and goods, using outdated frameworks rooted in pre-digital times. Only a small amount of research recognises how important the digital landscape has become for children, how they navigate digital consumer culture and how children shape brand relationships actively, while still being influenced by external forces. We contribute to these limitations in the following sub-chapters.

6.1.1 Children's Active Participation in Consumer Culture

Our findings contribute to Cook (2004; 2008) and Zelizer (2002), who argue that children are active participants in consumer culture. We further advance this view by underlining that children actively participate in digital consumer culture as well, through beauty routines and brand promotions on TikTok, and that they start to engage with this culture at a very young age. While John (1999) argues that children's awareness of consumption develops over several phases, our observation of beauty routines as developmental achievements and signs of maturity enrichens this understanding. Our data underline that children's participation in digital consumer culture is largely influenced by the mothers' objectives to bring their children into this role, which adds on to Cross (2004), who argues that the consumer market for children appeals to both children and parents. Though, the mothers in our findings do not aim to protect their children from market influences.

This research deepens the understanding of how children's engagement with digital consumer culture helps them in shaping their social roles, as argued by Ågren (2020). While she argues

that children are aware of digital consumer culture and its influences on their understanding of social norms, our findings rather emphasise how they are to some extent manipulated by it.

Martens et al. (2004) suggest four research areas to better understand children's consumption behaviour, one of which deals with the dynamics between parents and children. Our findings contribute to this research area, as we outline that the mothers introduced their children to the consumption of beauty products. These findings also strengthen Seiter's (1993) view that both children and parents participate in consumer culture, as our data underline that family and consumption are intertwined, with the mothers and daughters creating their routines around product use. Another research area that Martens et al. (2004) propose is children's interaction with material goods. We contribute to this research area, as we show that beauty products are not only seen as consumer goods but as tools for health, both mentally and physically, and that children develop preferences for specific brands.

While Cook (2004) and Buckingham (2007) see children as entirely autonomous market participants, our findings show that they still try to conform with socially constructed norms and feel pressure to meet beauty expectations. Rather than making consumption choices independently, as both authors argue, our findings show that female relatives and marketing messages influence their decisions and behaviours. We therefore question the degree of awareness and independence that children possess, especially at a very young age. The research of Schor (2004), Linn (2004) and Quart (2003) deals with the commercial exploitation of young children that reinforces gender roles and materialistic attitudes, which our findings expand on by showing how beauty brands attempt to address and recruit not only parents but also their children directly, which affects how they perceive beauty. However, our findings highlight as well that children participate in their roles as influencers and brand promoters, which suggests that the impact is not as harmful as suggested by the authors but a give and take on both sides. Additionally, Cook's (2017) point that children's innocence makes them particularly vulnerable to being exploited by marketers both aligns and contradicts with our findings. On the one hand, the research adds to concerns about how children navigate these influences by internalising beauty ideals and participating in beauty practices that are presented as self-care and health, while on the other hand, the Sephora Kids are to some extent still able to make up their own perceptions with guidance from female adults.The research of Schor (2004), Linn (2004) and Quart (2003) deals with the commercial exploitation of young children that reinforces gender roles and materialistic attitudes, which our findings expand on by showing how beauty brands attempt to address and recruit not only parents but also their children directly. However, our findings also highlight that children participate in their roles as influencers and brand promoters, which suggests that the impact is not as harmful as suggested by the authors but a give and take on both sides. Additionally, Cook's (2017) point that children's innocence makes them particularly vulnerable to being exploited by marketers both aligns and contradicts with our findings. On the one hand, the research adds to concerns about how children navigate these influences by internalising beauty ideals and participating in beauty practices that are presented as self-care and health, while on the other hand, the Sephora Kids are to some extent still able to make up their own perceptions with guidance from female adults.

6.1.2 Engagement with Digital Platforms

This study has shown that Sephora Kids actively act like influencers by promoting products and utilising market language, contributing to the notion of kidfluencers by Fernández-Gómez et al. (2021) with insights on beauty kidfluencers. Additionally, our findings support the work by Halapa and Djuranovic (2021) on parental involvement in posting their children on social media. While the authors argue that parents influence how their children interact with digital platforms, we find that most of the children in this study are featured in videos with their mothers, who make them a part of these platforms at a very young age. Halapa and Djuranovic (2021) also argue that children are exposed to media on screens from birth, which is consistent with our research as some of the children under analysis are of preschool age or even infants. We add to this view by highlighting that Sephora Kids are not only exposed to media from a very young age but also form part of it by acting as kidfluencers.

Our findings also enrich those from Hudders and Beuckels (2024), who argue that the accounts of children under 13 must be managed by legal guardians who take responsibility for brand deals. In the videos, the mothers are usually the ones who highlight product benefits and ingredients, suggesting that they not only manage the business side but are also actively involved in promoting their children's influencer roles. Throughout our analysis, the question of the children's awareness and understanding of their commodification arises, which underscores the arguments of Clark and Jno-Charles (2025) that kidfluencers are partaking in child labour without any regulations or laws protecting them. We contribute to this view as, despite the presence of mothers and other female relatives, the data suggest that the children are indirectly being forced into their influencer roles and rather unaware of their commodification.

The children analysed in this research not only use the products but also display brand loyalty and promotion for specific beauty products at an early age, which contributes to Núñez-Gómez et al. (2020), who argue that children that create their own content on social media show higher levels of brand engagement and brand preference. In addition, the children's interaction with the beauty products shows that they use brands to express their social standing among peers. Tufte and Ekström (2007) argue that this is especially common among tweens who use brands to express identity and gain social recognition, though our findings show that these habits are already observable among even younger age groups. By showing that the analysed children have formed deep relationships with brands, our findings add to Cody (2012), who argues that consumption practices play an important role in children's navigation of social environments. We suggest that the reason for these brand relationships may be more driven by social or media influences rather than genuine personal connections, which underlines that children are not completely independent in their navigation.

6.2 Social Construction of Femininity in Digital Childhood

Studies on gender in consumer research mainly focus on women rather than female children. Limitations exist as they overlook how beauty practices by girls under 13 years serve as an early form of gender socialisation. Additionally, research neglects the role digital platforms play in this process and how their systems reinforce beauty norms from a young age on. A better understanding of the role of mothers in this context needs to be provided as well. These gaps are addressed by the theoretical contributions made in this study in the following two sub-chapters.

6.2.1 Early Gender Socialisation Through Digital Beauty Practices

Visconti et al. (2018) argue that social media users who share content online are actively involved in the construction of gender representations. Our findings contribute to this understanding by underlining that not only adults do so but that female children reinforce these as well, as the beauty routines represent gendered socialisation processes through which they learn how to act and present themselves as females. While Dobscha (2019) and Visconti et al. (2018) argue that products are developed based on gender and that segmentation is influenced by masculinity and femininity, our findings show that beauty products are only used by female individuals and thus highly gendered products which reinforce femininity from an early age on. While Thompson & Üstüner (2015) focus on how gender socialisation influences women and offers opportunities to challenge gender norms, our study adds a new contribution to early gender socialisation of female children through beauty practices. We emphasise the involvement of mothers in reinforcing femininity and beauty norms by forcing their daughters into the beauty practices at a young age. positioning the mothers as gender mediators.

Our data show that gender norms are maintained through the beauty routines as only females are present and that digital media enhance these norms even more, which in turn contributes to Knoll et al. (2011), who argue that gender stereotypes are still present in media portrayals. While Döring et al. (2016) as well as Fernandez and Menon (2022) argue that beauty norms are being questioned by content creators on social media, our findings show that in the case of the Sephora Kids, beauty norms are still being reinforced instead of being questioned, particularly as the mothers of these children push the norms onto the children through the beauty routines. Santoniccolo et al. (2023) argue that social media creates a highly gendered space in which content and exchanges reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, to which we add on by showing how this reinforcement occurs on TikTok and with young female consumers.

6.2.2 Gendered Bodies Meeting Societal Expectations

Gurrieri and Drenten (2019) argue that particularly in digital media, appearance is continuously assessed. Our findings contribute to how children conform to idealised body images and seek external validation for their appearance in digital spaces to increase their

self-worth. By creating their own content, Sephora Kids influence gender perceptions and societal expectations of other female children. While Morton and Treviño (2019) argue that children strive for social recognition on social media through metrics such as likes and followers, our study emphasizes that they engage with the viewers directly and seek their attention and recognition for their beauty practices, which underlines their understanding of these aspects at a young age.

The beauty routines performed by the children display both an emotional and physical change as they verbalise a transformation. Where Featherstone (1991) argues that consumer culture sees the body as a project that must constantly be altered through consumption to achieve personal and social achievement, we argue that the children's focus lies on their appearance, particularly their facial features, and their fear of ageing from an early age on, while seeing beauty routines as aesthetic and health-related practices. As Askegaard et al. (2002) argue that social pressures on appearance and ageing are related to showing one's identity through the body, our findings expand this notion onto children, as Sephora Kids are aware of healthy skin ideals and how product consumption meets a certain beauty image.

Through the beauty routines, the children aim to meet societal expectations associated with the female appearance, which underlines that not only women form their gendered identities around their bodies by using consumption to be accepted by society, as argued by Fournier (2002). Despite their young age, the analysed behaviour and comments of the Sephora Kids suggest that they already have an understanding of this aspect. The construction of their gendered identities is also influenced by the solely female presence in the videos, which makes beauty highly gendered and thus expands our understanding of Fournier's (2002) research.

Additionally, our findings agree with the research proposed by Thompson and Hirschman (1995), who show that beauty is used to improve the body to, on the one hand, distinguish oneself from others while, on the other hand, seeking social acceptance by performing self-care measures. The data contribute to this view, as the analysed children follow a lifestyle of health and self-care, following existing beliefs. Our research also contributes to Stevens and Ostberg (2011), who argue that the portrayal of the body as a consumer object in media reinforces traditional gender roles, as our findings show that this process starts from a young age on and that the beauty routines are highly gendered due to the sole female presence.

6.3 Conceptual Framework for Understanding Female Sephora Kids on Social Media

As part of our contribution to existing literature, we developed a conceptual framework based on our empirical data to deepen the understanding of how female Sephora Kids perform beauty practices on social media. The framework visualizes our findings by incorporating the different key themes and sub-themes to explain how they are interrelated in explaining a central phenomenon. Through this conceptual framework, we consider digital platforms and female children under the age of 13 years, enhancing outdated frameworks that disregard these aspects.

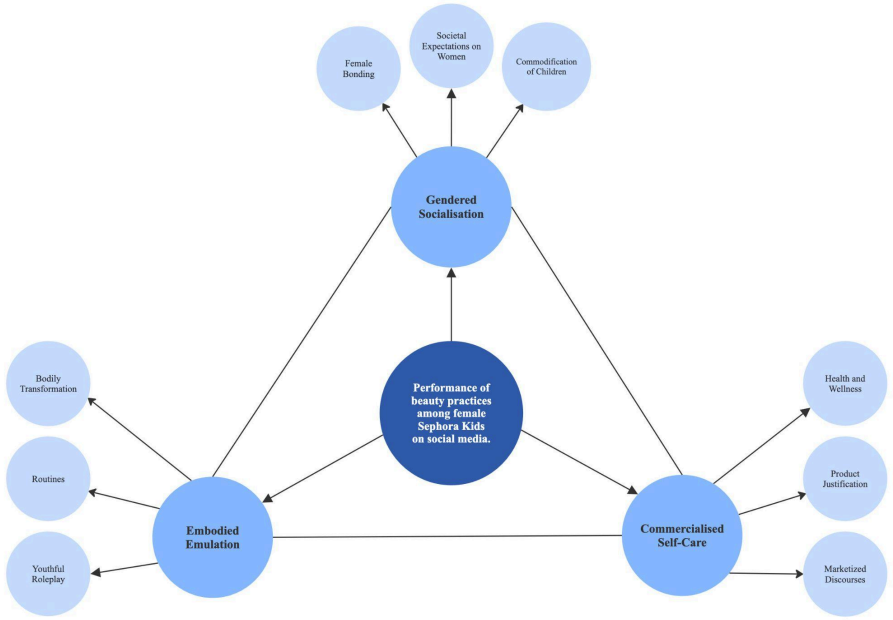

Figure 6.3 Visualisation of the Performance of Beauty Practices

The core of this framework is 'Performance of beauty practices among female Sephora Kids on social media'. Therefrom three interconnected concepts support the central focus: Embodied Emulation, Gendered Socialisation, and Commercialised Self-Care. On the left, Embodied Emulation includes Youthful Roleplay, Routines, and Bodily Transformation. In Gendered Socialisation on the top, Female Bonding, Societal Expectations on Women, and Commodification of Children are incorporated. Lastly, for Commercialised Self-Care on the right, Health and Wellness, Product Justification, and Marketised Discourses are included. As these themes have overlapping elements and mutually shape the performance, each theme is interlinked with each other in the framework. These combined influences are portrayed by arrows and depict how changes in other themes impact others.

The framework can be applied in academic research when analysing the social media behaviour and gendered socialisation of female kidfluencers. Additionally, marketers may

apply this framework in their aims to better understand this consumer group and in marketing campaigns for beauty products that are targeted towards female children to undermine the reinforcement of gender norms. Policymakers and other people in power might find this framework of particular importance to identify the impacts digital platforms and beauty practices place on female children with regards to gender stereotypes and beauty norms in order to create regulations that stop these.

However, there are some limitations to this framework, which give room for improvement and potential future research. Foremost, the framework is based on the findings on a specific phenomenon and might need adjustments to generalize it for other contexts. In addition, the boundaries between the three themes might be more undefined than depicted in the framework. Other influential factors that shape the phenomenon as well might not have been included in the sub-themes. Lastly, the basic structure of the framework should also be considered, as the relationship between the elements might be more complex than displayed.

7 Conclusion

As part of our concluding chapter, we will summarise the main findings of our research and how they are relevant to our initial research question by concluding our findings. We will then present the practical implications from our study, as well as its limitations and suggestions for potential future research.

7.1 Summary and Conclusion of Findings

This research focused on the performance of beauty practices on social media by female Sephora Kids. Through the theoretical lenses of Butler's (1990) Gender Performativity Theory, Goffman's (1959) Theory of Performativity and the Meme Theory by Dawkins (1976), in addition to the most important literature on children and consumption, children and social media, and gender in consumer research, we aimed to answer our research question: How do female Sephora Kids perform beauty practices on social media?

The empirical findings reveal that Sephora Kids perform beauty practices on social media in various ways. Through roleplay, they mimic the behaviour of adult beauty influencers by interacting with the audience and seeking their external validation. Additionally, they not only participate in consumer culture but also promote the products, showing an awareness of the commercial aspect of influencer culture. By repeatedly performing their beauty routines, the female children learn how to behave like girls and how to conform with gender norms. Throughout the videos, the Sephora Kids focus on their facial features and how the products affect their appearance, underlining an understanding of which beauty ideals are desirable and which are not.

Of importance in the beauty performance are the female relatives, particularly the mothers, and how the children bond with them over the routines. They take on different roles in the videos to guide their daughters through the practices and educate them on the matter. Through the application of beauty products, the Sephora Kids are able to meet societal expectations of women, as they show an awareness of how beauty products are linked to how they are perceived by society and by themselves. The pressure to meet these beauty ideals is emphasised by the mothers, who pressure their daughters into the routines at a young age by justifying that the beauty products are beneficial for them. This aspect is linked to the commodification of the children, as the beauty practices are depicted as family time and everyday activities.

Furthermore, the Sephora Kids show brand loyalty for certain products and actively promote them to the viewers, showing an awareness of the commercial side of brand promotion and influencer culture. By dismissing the beauty products as self-care and wellness-related and thus harmless, the children are introduced into a health-focused lifestyle by their mothers, who highlight the importance of skin health and a routine from a young age on to strengthen their confidence and well-being. Lastly, female Sephora Kids perform beauty practices on social media through marketised discourses, showing an internalisation of market language at a young age and recommending products that are popular in influencer culture.

To conclude the findings, several implications arise. Children actively participate in consumer culture by engaging with products and promoting them on digital platforms. Their knowledge of products and market terminology underlines that they are capable consumers. However, their consumption is not entirely based on individual choices but rather influenced by external factors such as mothers who indirectly pressure their children into the consumer role from a young age on. By participating in digital consumer culture, children learn how to conform with societal expectations, though it is questionable whether they are aware of this aspect. The findings emphasise that beauty is highly gendered and that the practices shape children's gender socialisation. Through the standardised and repeated beauty routines, female children are socially reinforced into femininity by their mothers. Additionally, female children see their own bodies as objects that need to be modified through beauty products, underlining that the aim to meet societal expectations and achieve external validation is already present at a young age and particularly in digital contexts. Their focus lies on their appearance and meeting beauty ideals, rather than on their inner values and personality.

However, it is questionable to what extent the analysed children are aware of the beauty practices' impacts on their consumption and gender and how these are in turn based on societal norms. As they are exposed to beauty brands and digital platforms at such a young age, it is also debatable whether they are still able to express their opinions freely when their lives are largely influenced by the mechanisms of the market and other external factors. Especially when considering that the findings show that Sephora Kids base their self-worth on the products and how they affect their appearance, rather than on inner values. As shown, social media provides an environment that fosters these traditional gender roles even more. Nevertheless, the most concerning point is the role of the mothers and other adult female

relatives. The data show that none of the children are aware of the bad sides of their mothers' behaviour, particularly when considering that some of the analysed Sephora Kids are infants or toddlers. Instead of protecting their daughters from these influences and questioning the beauty expectations society places on women, they put their daughters into both the consumer and promoter roles from a very young age to conform with the norms. This is underscored by their emphasis on the health-related and kid-friendliness of the products, dismissing the psychological and developmental impacts the beauty practices have on their children.

7.2 Practical Implications

Our master's thesis improves both our understanding of the relationship between social media and beauty practices and practical insights for various stakeholders such as parents, politicians, educators and beauty brands.

Our findings from the study provide parents with a basis for critically engaging with beauty content on social media. They highlight the influence that beauty content and social media have on young children. We offer a framework for critically examining the beauty content consumed by children, recognising risks and setting boundaries for children's social media consumption.

In our study, we also emphasise the importance of introducing the regulations and legal framework for kidfluencer practices that are currently lacking. We highlight the ethical concerns surrounding these practices and call for greater protection and the introduction of safeguards for underage content creators.

It is also important to involve beauty brands that actively support the kidfluencer trend, leverage it for their own benefit, and even offer their own loyalty programmes and partnerships for young children. These brands must be held accountable when it comes to ethical strategies and the well-being of children. Finally, educators are required to provide children with an appropriate media education. This enables them to use social media consciously, question content critically and recognise dangers.

In summary, our study emphasises that kidfluencer practices are by no means a harmless trend, but rather a serious situation. This is because children are simply exposed to this content on social media without understanding the impact it can have on their development. It is therefore essential to introduce regulations and framework conditions for kidfluencer practices. It also requires coordinated cooperation between the stakeholders mentioned above to protect children from the negative effects of this content.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

Our study attempts to answer how beauty practices are performed by young girls on the social media platform TikTok. However, certain limitations of our study must be taken into account. To mitigate these limitations and further investigate the topics, we summarise the following recommendations for future research.

In terms of methodology, we opted for a qualitative analysis of TikTok videos. The qualitative nature of our study represents a limitation, as the results are derived from the researchers' interpretation. Subjectivity can also have a negative impact on the study and is a common problem in qualitative research (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Therefore, despite our efforts to be objective, the results of our analysis may be distorted by subjective interpretations. Future research could mitigate this limitation by pursuing a multi-method approach, such as combining video analysis and interviews. In this way, accurate insights into the motivation behind the practices in relation to parents and children could be investigated. Furthermore, there is a limitation in the choice of social media platform TikTok for the study. We chose this platform because it is a pioneer in short videos and the Sephora Kids phenomenon originated on TikTok. However, future studies could also use platforms such as YouTube and Instagram to investigate the topic in order to gain even deeper insights into the phenomenon. Moreover, we focused our analysis of videos on TikTok accounts belonging to children from the United States, as kid influencers are particularly widespread in this country. Extending the study to other countries could provide even more complex information and enrich the data. Another limitation is the analysis of underage children, whereby we took great care to ensure that the material examined was anonymised and that the data was handled sensitively.

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9 Use of AI

In this master's thesis, we have utilised the advantages of artificial intelligence while always striving to maintain academic integrity and critical thinking.

AI was used in our master's thesis to generate ideas and research various topics related to our theme of Sephora Kids. It is important to note that we did not use any references and always approached AI's suggestions critically. AI was also used to generate ideas for the initial structure and outline of our master's thesis. This basic framework was subsequently reviewed for content and formatting in consultation with our supervisor and continuously adapted.

During our literature review, we used AI as a starting point to find approaches and ideas for relevant scientific theories and literature. However, we conducted the actual literature review ourselves and did not use any AI-generated sources.

Finally, we used AI to check our sources for alphabetical order and correct citation according to LUSEM’s Harvard referencing style. The sources, analyses and arguments used in the study are based entirely on the authors’ research and interpretation of the evaluated data.