



Who's at the Counter? :

A Gendered Analysis of Workspaces in Cosmetic Shops

Authors

Mihika Jain
Paarth Pande
Vidarshna Mehrotra

Editor

Madhulina Sonowal



www.mandonnaresearch.com



info@mandonnaresearch.com



Mandonna Research Consultants



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ABSTRACT

The beauty industry, traditionally associated with femininity, has played a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles and norms. Cosmetic shops, as integral components of this industry, has served as both a reflection and a reinforcement of entrenched gender norms and societal expectations. However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in the gender composition of the cosmetic retail sector with more men entering this traditionally female-dominated field. While this transformation initially appears to challenge the prescribed gender performances and underscore the evolving gender dynamics in the workspaces, it is crucial to recognize the overarching influence of the neoliberal capitalist economy in driving and shaping this paradigm shift.

Keeping such changing trends as the central concern, this research project aims to conduct an analysis of the experiences and motivations of male employees in cosmetic stores to highlight the shift in gender representation and its effects on altering perceptions of beauty, femininity and masculinity. It analyses whether the introduction of men into roles traditionally held by women marks a social transformation or if it merely serves as a strategic response to market demands and profitability considerations within the neoliberal capitalist framework. Thus, the paper aims at highlighting the complex interplay between social change, market and gender.

KEYWORDS

Cosmetic Industry, Gender, Market, Retail, Workspace

INTRODUCTION

The cosmetic retail sector's landscape is complicated and dynamic, formed by the different experiences and motives of its personnel. The cosmetics industry, which encompasses the creation and dissemination of beauty products, comprises a diverse spectrum of product categories, including colour cosmetics like foundation and eyeliner, skincare items such as moisturisers and serums, haircare products like shampoos, conditioners, and hair dyes, and personal care essentials including bath products and soap. While manufacturing in this industry is primarily under the control of a handful of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) dating back to the early 20th century, the distribution and retail of cosmetic products are handled by a wide range of smaller businesses. Today, the cosmetic industry represents a pivotal economic sector, not only for its substantial contribution to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also for its profound impact on lifestyle trends and consumer behaviour across diverse societies (Kumar, 2004). Contrary to common perception, the cosmetic industry encompasses an extensive array of categories beyond the commonly associated makeup segment, which constitutes a mere 19% of the overall personal care market (Schmitt, 2002). Notably, this industry has witnessed substantial growth in recent times, with the products shedding their erstwhile characterisation as mere 'frivolities' to instead, gaining recognition as essential components of consumers' daily routines (de Cerqueira, de Oliveira, Honório, & de Macedo Bergamo, 2013). This transformation has culminated in the democratisation of cosmetic product usage, transcending social classes and spanning both genders (de Cerqueira, de Oliveira, Honório, & de Macedo Bergamo, 2013). Many studies have revealed how contrary to prevailing misconceptions, people identifying as females and males, both exhibit comparable behaviours concerning the frequency of cosmetic product usage (Carter, 1998).

The modern male consumer has emerged as a distinct demographic in the contemporary neoliberal era, typified by youth, education, professional engagement, and a penchant for shopping experiences (Dholakia, 1999; Piper & Capella, 1993). This consumer exhibits brand consciousness and a strong association with fashion, not only investing their time into it but also recorded to have been making impulsive purchases, irrespective of cost. Given the shift in consumer profile, today we witness not only the inclusion of male-oriented products across various categories but also the inclusion of more male employees in the retail sector (Kotzé, North, Stols, & Venter, 2012).

Such a changing landscape has prompted an in-depth investigation of the nature of the cosmetics retail industry which this research aims to highlight through interviews with personnel from various beauty establishments. Their stories unravel the nuances of the industry, delving into the complex web of challenges associated with career decisions, workplace biases, and the evolving dynamics within the cosmetic retail sector. This research draws on theoretical frameworks such as Judith Butler's gender performance theory and Belk's "extended self" concept to provide a deeper understanding of the interplay between market forces and the evolution of gender norms in contemporary times. The sections that follow will elaborate on these results, providing insights into the complex tapestry of motivations, problems, and trends affecting the cosmetic retail business.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research aims to assess the motivations and experiences of employees, particularly male employees, working in cosmetic retail. By analysing the challenges and opportunities that male employees encounter in a traditionally female-dominated industry, it aims to investigate whether the presence of male employees influences or subverts traditional gender norms within beauty shops. It provides insights into whether the inclusion of men in the industry serves as a

calculated response to market demands and profit-driven considerations inherent to the neoliberal capitalist framework.

METHODOLOGY

The study is situated in New Delhi, India. Field surveys were conducted on 6th November 2023 across six different cosmetic stores, including Kiko Milano, Mac Cosmetics, NewU, Nykaa, Sephora and SS Beauty Store in Saket Area, South Delhi. The research utilised the tool of semi-structured interviews with nine male employees to gain insights into their views and experiences in the industry.

Additionally, an exhaustive list of secondary resources has been utilised to provide a strong theoretical foundation for the primary data collected and aid the analysis of gender dynamics in the cosmetics industry.

MARKETING, GENDER & COSMETICS

Gender has historically been a fundamental parameter in marketing, primarily due to its accessibility and profitability (Tifferet & Herstein, 2012). Consequently, consumer behaviour has been rigidly gendered, dictated by normative sexual binaries (Kacen, 2000; Palan et al., 2011). Many cosmetics brands and products remain entrenched in gendered identities, involving both masculine and feminine connotations that are legitimised and shared within society (Jung, 2006; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004; Ulrich & Tissier-Desbordes, 2018).

Grohmann and Azar classify brands into four gender categories, mirroring the spectrum of individual gender identities: feminine, masculine, androgynous, and undifferentiated. Examining cosmetics brands reveals a preponderance under the feminine category, a growing presence in the masculine category, and a smaller representation in the remaining two categories. This inclination may be attributed to the symbolism of masculinity and femininity as

personality traits that play a pivotal role in reinforcing individual gender identities (Grohmann, 2009). Cosmetic products, predominantly associated with femininity, serve as symbolic artefacts reflecting and reinforcing gender identities within the realm of consumer culture. This inclination finds resonance in Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance, where the stylisation of the body becomes a key element in the construction of gender identity. In cosmetic shops, the array of products and their marketing often perpetuate societal expectations and norms surrounding femininity wherein the application of makeup and the use of beauty products are performative acts contributing to the creation of a gendered self.

According to Butler, the mundane gestures involved in these practices constitute the illusion of a persistent and identifiable gendered identity (Butler, 1988). The selection and use of cosmetics become a visible manifestation of one's adherence to or deviation from societal expectations regarding feminine expression. This aligns with Belk's "extended self" theory, which posits that our possessions reflect and bolster our identities. Marketing communications, including advertising and market segmentation, play a significant role in perpetuating these identity meanings (Belk, 1988). Moreover, media, especially advertising, significantly influences gender-related behaviours, identity, and expectations with children learning much of their gender-related conduct through media exposure (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). Even in adulthood, advertising influences consumers' perceptions of gender identity and expectations leading to further reinforcement and legitimisation of prescribed gender performances (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Schroeder & Borgerson, 1998). This is most notable in the case of women, wherein the idealised representations of beauty in cosmetics advertising have heavily influenced the self-perception of female viewers (Apaolaza-Ibáñez et al., 2011)

Against this background of fairly rigid gender binaries and performances within the traditionally women-dominated realm of the

cosmetics industry, the emergence of brands exclusively targeting male consumers and even employing male workers presents a peculiar situation that demands a closer investigation. This study addresses a notable gap in the existing literature by focusing on the gendered dynamics within beauty shops and the experiences of male employees, particularly in the context of cosmetic retail.

While gender analysis in the workplace has garnered substantial attention in recent years, the beauty industry remains underexplored in terms of male representation and the implications it holds for challenging or perpetuating traditional gender norms. The limited research in this domain has primarily concentrated on consumer behaviour and preferences, leaving the experiences and motivations of male employees in cosmetic retail largely uncharted. Understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by male employees in this predominantly female-dominated industry can provide valuable insights into whether their presence has the potential to reshape or reinforce established gender norms within beauty shops.

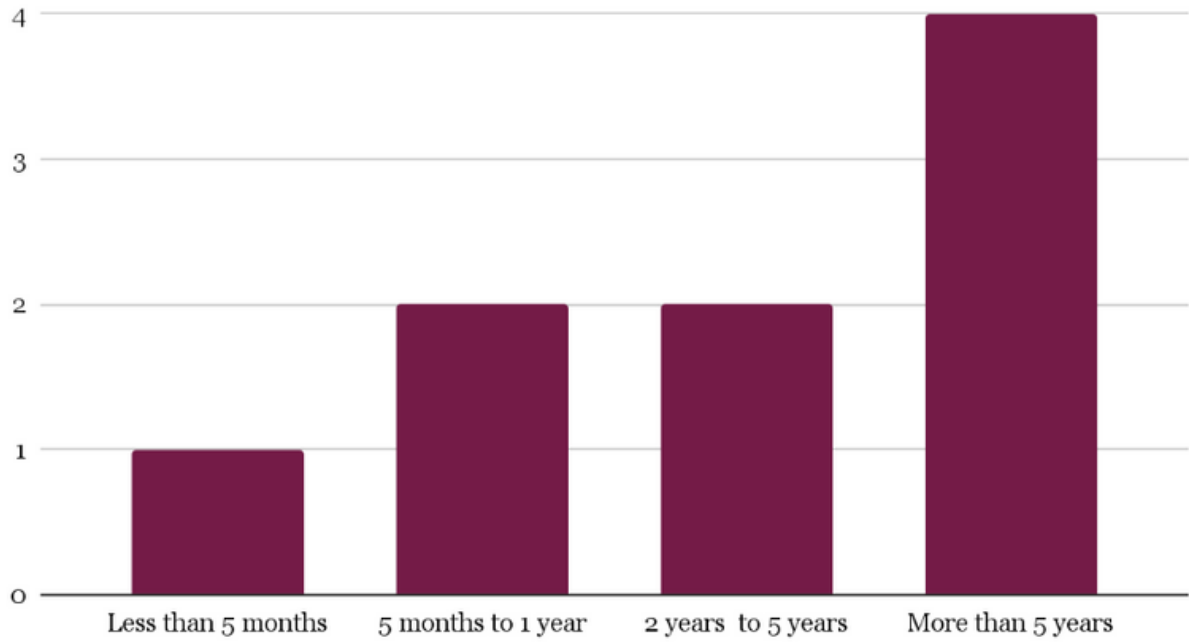
Moreover, the investigation into whether the inclusion of men in roles traditionally occupied by women is driven by market demands and profit-oriented motives rooted in the neoliberal capitalist framework adds an essential layer of analysis to the broader discourse on gender and the workplace. This research bridges these gaps in the literature and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between gender, employment, and market dynamics in the context of cosmetic retail. The following section encapsulates the responses gathered from the field survey, offering crucial insights that contribute significantly to our understanding.

DATA INSIGHTS: FINDINGS FROM FIELD SURVEY

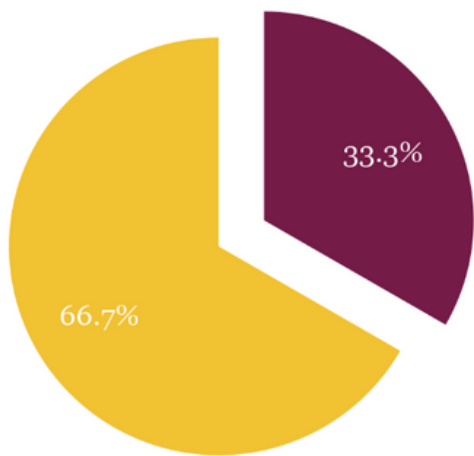
Employee of Store/Brand	Time Spent in the Industry	Motivation for Joining the Industry	Future Career plans in the Industry	Has there been a change in the influx of male employees in recent years?	Experience of differences, gender-based bias or discrimination in Customer Engagement
SS BEAUTY SHOP	5 years	Limited job opportunities available at the time. Didn't have a specific interest in makeup and beauty, just found the industry intriguing.	Job currently satisfactory, but open to exploring other opportunities in the future.	Believes that there is an increasing number of men entering the industry due to better pay, diverse experiences and opportunities outside of India.	Yes
MAC COSMETICS	8 months	Applied due to their five years of experience as a makeup artist , the appeal of the brand, and the platform it provides. Interest in makeup and beauty, and the drive to gain customer connections	Motivated by the prospect of foreign opportunities, especially events like Paris Fashion Week.	Observed a higher proportion of male staff at Mac, and a supportive atmosphere for the LGBTQ community.	Yes
NYKAA	3 years	Joined for the simplicity of the job and with a long-term perspective in mind.	-	Believes that while there is an increase in the number of male employees over the years, female employees still dominate in number.	Yes
NYKAA	3-4 months	Finds the job enjoyable , and believes that the beauty industry provides a stable and lean job in the long term as well.	-	-	-

Employee of Store/Brand	Time Spent in the Industry	Motivation for Joining the Industry	Future Career plans in the Industry	Has there been a change in the influx of male employees in recent years?	Experience of differences, gender-based bias or discrimination in Customer Engagement
NEW U	6 years	No specific decision point , but stayed because there was continuous growth. Explained a hierarchy within the industry - adviser to beauty expert to in-store makeup artist / supervisor	Wants to gather and use this experience to work in duty-free beauty stores at airports, which offer a higher pay.	Observes a gradual increase in male employees, driven by an attraction towards the industry, especially from women.	Yes
NEW U	7 years	Entered the beauty industry with a higher-level position in mind, driven by a passion for the field . Family members in the salon line	-	-	-
KIKO MILANO	10 years	Influenced by a personal liking for make-up since a long time	-	Noticed an increase in male employees over the years.	No
SEPHORA	7 years	Joined upon a friend's recommendation, attracted by the growth opportunities and salary .	-	More male employees are joining, and their prevalence depends on age and personal preferences. Reveals that the industry favours men who have a "glow" on their faces, thus preferring to hire young men.	Yes
SEPHORA	11 months	Driven more by the salary rather than a passion	Short-term	-	-

Duration of Work

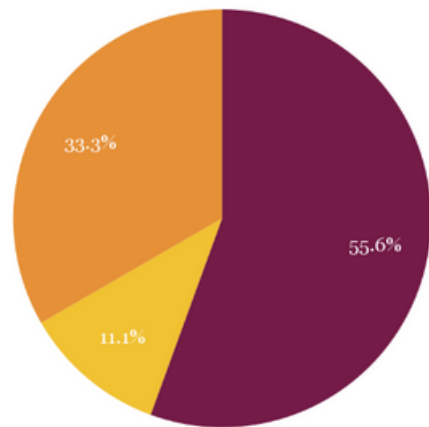


Motivation for joining the Industry



● Interest/Passion in the Industry ● Salary motives

Experience of gender-based bias/discrimination in workplace



● Yes ● No ● Ambiguous

ANALYSING GENDER DYNAMICS: MALE EMPLOYEES IN COSMETIC RETAIL

A detailed examination of interviews with nine male employees from six beauty stores, namely Kiko Milano, Mac Cosmetics, NewU, Nykaa, Sephora and SS Beauty Store, reveals a complex tapestry of motives, problems, and trends within the cosmetics retail business. These observations are based on the experiences of people working in the industry, anywhere from between three to four months up to 10 years. The survey covered a range of themes from the motivation behind joining the profession, experiences of gender-based biases and/or discrimination in the workplace, the surge of male employees into the beauty industry to initiatives towards gender diversity and equality, and future alterations in client demographics. Each interview captures a different aspect of the cosmetic shop industry, from neutral encounters at SS Beauty Shop to the noteworthy growth of male personnel at MAC. The research that follows digs into important topics, extracting significant themes that explain the industry's intricacies, ranging from worries about discrimination to initiatives to promote gender diversity and the changing consumer and staff demographics defining the future of cosmetic retail.

In terms of the workplace composition, the interviews with the staff from various cosmetic retail businesses reveal definite trends towards employing more male workers in the industry- with an average tenure of eight months, MAC employees have reported a larger number of male personnel entering the sector, aided by the welcoming environment created for the LGBTQ community. New U workers with varied years of experience also describe a progressive increase in male employees, which they attribute to a rising interest in the beauty sector. Indeed, a major reason for such changing trends, as highlighted by the workers themselves, could be the notable shift in the larger societal attitudes in which the traditional perceptions of beauty-

related professions as being exclusively female-centric have come to be challenged increasingly. As discourses evolve and new conversations arise, more men feel empowered to pursue careers in fields that were historically dominated by women. Aiding this process is also the rise of male beauty influencers and makeup artists on social media platforms, which has played a pivotal role in normalizing men's involvement in the cosmetics industry. These influencers showcase their skills, share beauty tips, and challenge stereotypes, inspiring others to follow suit. As the makeup industry itself has come to recognise the diverse beauty standards and attempted to cater to a broader audience, the space for the use of cosmetics has expanded, encouraging men to explore and participate in the makeup cosmetic sales sector without immediate fear of stigmatization.

In terms of the duration of employment of the male workers in the cosmetics retail sector, the results varied from a few months to a few years. Employees had a variety of viewpoints, with some highlighting a long-term commitment and others seeing the work as a new and exciting chance but temporary. This is largely due to the varied motivations of male employees behind joining the cosmetics retail sector- some male employees state that the major reason for entering the field was due to the high competition for employment and the lack of alternative job opportunities. Although they lacked any specific interest in makeup and beauty initially, they were nonetheless drawn to the industry. However, there are also other male employees with a background of makeup artistry and experience who applied due to the appeal of the brand and the platform it offered. Their motivation included an interest in makeup and beauty, as well as the desire to establish connections with customers. Thus, the reasons for joining the sector lie mostly within the two categories of personal interest versus salary/employment considerations. The research reveals

that 66.7% of the workers interviewed had joined cosmetics retail for the purpose of having stable employment and stability. The job's 'simplicity' and possibility for growth to higher positions have led a lot of men to join the field irrespective of their personal interest in it. Even though they do find enjoyment in their work, their main consideration still remains the stability and promise of a career path in the cosmetics business. For these individuals, continuous growth served as a factor in their decision to stay.

“The motivation behind joining was primarily the limited job opportunities available at the time.” **(Employee at SS Beauty Shop)**

“In my experience, the cosmetic field has been neutral. However, from out-of-India retail resources, we've seen an influx of more male employees, possibly attracted by higher pay and diverse experiences.” **(Employee at SS Beauty)**

“I joined upon a friend's recommendation, attracted by the growth opportunities and salary.” **(Employee at Sephora)**

Conversely, certain individuals aspired to climb the hierarchy within the beauty industry, starting from roles like adviser to eventually becoming an in-store makeup artist or supervisor. Their entry into the beauty industry was fueled by a passion for the field and a desire to hold higher-level positions. Another group joined the industry due to familial ties, influenced by family members already working in the salon line. Personal affinity for makeup also played a role, and in some cases, recommendations from friends acted as catalysts for entry. Thus, overall, while salary was a significant motivating factor, passion for the work varied among this group, with some being more salary-driven while others were genuinely passionate about the beauty industry.

“I applied due to my five years of experience as a makeup artist, the appeal of the brand, and the platform it provides. My interest in makeup and beauty, coupled with the prospect of foreign opportunities, especially events like Paris Fashion Week, influenced my decision.” **(Employee at MAC)**

“My entry was not guided by a particular reason but rather by a personal liking for makeup” **(Employee at Kiko Milano)**

Interestingly, while male employees in the cosmetic retail industry express overall job satisfaction in their current roles, they remain open to exploring new opportunities in the future. Looking ahead, these individuals aim to leverage their accumulated experience to transition into roles within duty-free beauty stores at airports. Thus, the allure of such positions lies not only in the potential for further professional growth but also in the promise of higher remuneration. This strategic career move aligns with their ambitions for upward mobility within the cosmetic retail sector, demonstrating a proactive approach to shaping their professional trajectory.

In the cosmetic retail sector, male employees exhibit a spectrum of perspectives concerning their job commitment, offering valuable insights into their professional motivations. A few of the respondents underscore long-term dedication to the field, contingent upon the fulfilment derived from their roles and incentives for rewards. They state that their entry into the beauty industry stems from their ambitions for higher-level positions as well as a genuine passion for the field. Those committed to the long term perceive the cosmetic retail sector as a stimulating and novel opportunity, expressing eagerness for continual challenges and personal development. Conversely, some perceive their current engagement as short-term, suggesting a temporary alignment with their career objectives or a

preference for adaptability in their roles. They characterize their career journey as an ongoing evolution without a distinct decision point, with some even stating that they joined the industry due to limited job opportunities at the time. The diverse array of responses underscores the diversity of motivations and career paths of male employees in cosmetic retail, warranting a deeper analysis to comprehend the nuances of individual perspectives and aspirations within this dynamic industry.

“I’m in it for the long term, considering it a fresh and exciting opportunity.” **(Employee at Nykaa)**

“My journey has been a continuous growth, with no specific decision point.” **(Employee at NewU)**

“My commitment to the job is as long as it remains fulfilling.” **(Employee at Sephora)**

Opinions on changes in the employee composition of the cosmetic retail industry vary among respondents. While some assert a significant rise in the presence of men in the industry, citing factors like improved pay, exposure to diverse experiences, and job opportunities beyond India as major motivations, others suggest that the industry itself has started to hire more young men, given their “radiant appearance”. Additionally, workers point out that the industry has also made significant efforts to create a supportive atmosphere for LGBTQ community members, promoting diversity and inclusivity. This is seen in the way brands are increasingly taking visible stands on LGBTQ issues through their marketing and public relations efforts- campaigns that feature LGBTQ individuals, support relevant causes, or celebrate Pride Month contribute to a more inclusive industry image. These efforts not only resonate positively with consumers but also enhance the industry's reputation as one that

is socially conscious and supportive. As such, the brands are starting to employ more people of different gender identities. However, even with the noticeable rise in male employees, respondents contend that their entry into the industry is significantly shaped by factors such as age and personal preferences. Additionally, it's important to note that women continue to outnumber men in the cosmetic retail industry.

“More male employees are present, and their prevalence depends on age and personal preferences. The company also favours men who have a “glow” on their faces, and the company prefer young men.”
(Employee at Sephora)

“I've noticed more female employees than male.” **(Employee at Nykaa)**

The data on workplace discrimination and biases faced by male employees in the cosmetic retail industry reveals an interesting pattern- 55.6% of the respondents acknowledged having experienced some form of discrimination, 11.1% of them denied any such experiences, while 33.3% provided ambiguous responses. For those who had not experienced an explicit difference or bias in customer engagement or workplace ethics, there is an indication of a relatively positive and inclusive working environment where gender does not play a significant role in customer interactions.

On the contrary, some other respondents detailed instances of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination from customers in smaller cities, pointing to a concerning reality of the industry. There is still an existence of discriminatory attitudes in certain regions, possibly driven by cultural factors or lack of exposure to diverse perspectives.

Certain other gender-based biases short of discrimination also operate in the sector with some respondents stating that customer interactions with employees not only depend on individual

preferences but also on gender stereotypes and societal perceptions of 'trust'. One of the respondents even highlighted how some customers prefer being attended to by male employees, considering them as more "trustworthy" sellers than women. This bias not only affects the professional experiences of male employees but also perpetuates stereotypical notions about trustworthiness based on gender. Conversely, some respondents saw this differential treatment in a positive light highlighting that being a male employee allowed them to attract higher engagement from female customers.

“My engagement with female customers is higher, and even the industry tends to prefer younger male employees.” **(Employee at Sephora)**

“I’ve noticed that some customers express a preference for being attended to by male employees.” **(Employee at NewU)**

Thus, these findings highlight the necessity for comprehensive industry-wide measures that promote diversity, address discrimination issues, and negotiate changing worker dynamics in the ever-changing cosmetic retail sector. The in-depth study of interviews with personnel from various cosmetic retail stores gives a full picture of the dynamics in the beauty sector.

ROLE OF THE MARKET: BEAUTY OR CAPITALISM?

In order to fully grasp the underlying rationale behind the growing influx of male workers in the beauty retail industry, it is important to examine this phenomenon through the lens of the neoliberal capitalist economy. Historically, the beauty industry was by and large an amalgamation of “large numbers of small and medium-sized

entrepreneurial firms” rather than of “capital-intensive, mass marketing and mass production industries” (Jones, 2010). It became a globalised mass-industry only by the 1920s and 1930s (Black, 2004). At present, the beauty retail industry is a multi-billion dollar enterprise, expecting to generate approximately \$580 billion by 2027, while growing at a projected 6% every year (Amed, et.al., 2023). This colossal projected growth puts the industry among the front-runners in the global market economy, thus inviting a cascading series of marketing plans and pattern changes in order to make it further thrive within the capitalistic framework, which is known to value profit above much else.

It can be successfully theorised by way of association that this focus of the capitalistic economy on quick and long-term market expansion often sits at odds with the traditional notion of the gendered division of labour. Up to the middle of the twentieth century, the ‘male breadwinner’ model of employment and family articulation was underpinned by extensive gender segregation in both the ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres of work. This gendered division of labour in capitalism has had twofold consequences in the beauty industry. Firstly, beautification practices came to be more and more linked with femininity as the domestic duties of middle-class bourgeoisie women came to be associated with representational values as the woman became the “prestige object” of the household and became the index of the husband’s economic situation. Secondly, the services and products of the beauty industry come under the ambit of a continuously expanding service sector, which relies for its functioning on a kind of “aesthetic labour” - for which the required skills and features are traditionally coded as feminine. (Ruck, 2018)

However, this division of labour by gender clashes with the very idea of a neoliberal capitalist framework that emphasises informal and readily available labour to increase production and subsequent profits. Today we observe a re-evaluation of these entrenched gender norms

as male workers are readily welcomed into the beauty industry in pursuit of financial gain and market expansion. In the survey conducted for our primary research, an employee at Sephora enlightened the conception that the industry prefers to hire young men in order to appeal to their largely female clientele.

Another motive for the influx of men into a traditionally female-dominated industry is the difficulties faced in acquiring stable jobs due to the globalisation of markets and the outsourcing of jobs under neoliberal capitalism. This statement was corroborated by two of the respondents who claimed to have joined beauty retail due to limited job opportunities elsewhere and the promise of a stable salary in this industry. Economic incentives in the form of job security, thus play a crucial role in men choosing occupations historically associated with women. This economic motivation highlights the dynamic interplay between the market and social values, revealing how economic factors can either reinforce or challenge entrenched gender norms.

The emphasis on “hustle” under capitalism gives workers an incentive to find opportunities in fields where their skills are transferable - a statement again supported by the respondents who wanted to use their time in the beauty retail industry to gain enough experience to pursue their larger ambitions in the future. Thus, in a neoliberal context where “relevance” in the market becomes a key factor, the beauty industry can no longer afford to limit the entry of a male workforce- it has to adapt and respond to the changing societal attitudes to stay on the board. Therefore, while this changing nature of the workforce in the cosmetic space is indeed a challenge to entrenched gender norms and a sign of evolving gender dynamics, particularly in large cities - it is equally important to view this change not just as a breakdown of the gendered division of labour but also as a direct outcome of the conditionalities created under a capitalist economic framework.

The market, with its dynamic and adaptable nature, can present itself as a liberating space for marginalized identities, providing opportunities for diversity and inclusion to flourish. However, this apparent liberation is a double-edged sword, as it carries the inherent risk of appropriation and superficial inclusion without any substantial structural change. The market's role in shaping and reflecting changing gender norms is complex and multifaceted- it can both reinforce hegemonic ideas on beauty and masculinity/femininity as well as challenge them through an introduction of hitherto marginalised identities into the forefront.

However, such mainstreaming of identities and perspectives from the margins needs to be on the constant lookout for the potential threat to the domestication of their radicality. The concern arises when the market's apparent changes are merely cosmetic, providing the illusion of progress without addressing deeper structural issues. The risk of appropriation looms large when businesses exploit marginalized identities for profit without genuinely committing to dismantling discriminatory practices or fostering an inclusive workplace. In such cases, the market may be more of a reflective surface, mirroring societal expectations rather than actively driving transformative change. Thus, a critical examination of the market's role in shaping gender norms is necessary.

While it can serve as a catalyst for positive change, there is a need to scrutinize whether these changes are embedded in the structures or if they are surface-level adaptations that maintain underlying inequalities. The market's impact on gender norms is an intricate interplay between societal expectations, corporate initiatives, and genuine efforts towards inclusivity, requiring careful analysis to distinguish between symbolic gestures and substantive transformation.

LIMITATIONS

A limitation of the research stems from the challenges faced by the researchers during their primary data collection process. Initial visits to some stores were met with reluctance from supervisors to allow employee interactions, citing the need for managerial approval. However, after clarifying that the focus was on individual experiences rather than the company itself, most supervisors eventually permitted the researchers to engage with the employees. There were difficulties in conducting interviews given the limited presence of male employees in the stores targeted for the study. Moreover, the time constraints of fieldwork occurring predominantly at the close of office hours contributed to the challenge of crowded stores, restricting the researchers' ability to interact with a more extensive sample of employees and gather comprehensive information. Another obstacle involved certain employees displaying disinterest in providing detailed and well-thought-out answers. This lack of enthusiasm was attributed to either their limited experience in the job, a general lack of commitment to their roles or the difficulties in building a rapport with the respondents within a short duration. Despite these challenges, the researchers navigated through these obstacles to gain valuable insights into the experiences of male employees in the cosmetic retail sector.

One potential limitation of this research lies in its limited sample size and coverage, focusing on the cosmetic retail sector as a microcosm of evolving gender dynamics and thereby, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings to other industries. The transformation in gender representation within cosmetic shops may not fully capture the broader spectrum of occupational shifts in diverse workplaces. Moreover, the study's reliance on experiences and motivations introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may tailor their responses to align with perceived societal expectations or the evolving image of the cosmetic retail sector. Addressing this limitation

may require a triangulation of data sources, such as observational methods or interviews with supervisors, to enhance the credibility of the findings. This is a possible point for future interventions in the field.

Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the research project offers valuable insights into the intersection of gender dynamics and the capitalist economy within a specific industry, contributing to the broader discourse on the evolving nature of work and gender roles in contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

The existing literature on consumer behaviour and gender as a performance unveils the distinctions and evolution between feminine and masculine associations and encapsulates the industry's development. The symbolic power of cosmetics, traditionally tethered to femininity, becomes a performative act in the construction of gender identity and showcases the intricacies involved in the fusion of gender, retail and marketing ever since its inception.

In analysing the realms of marketing, gender dynamics, and the cosmetic retail industry, the research study has illuminated a complex landscape, wherein the hitherto rigid field of cosmetics appears to make way for the entry of diverse identities. Combining theoretical underpinnings with the lived experiences of male employees in various cosmetic shops, this research has shed light on how the marketing of cosmetics, historically confined to rigid gender norms, can today be viewed as a dynamic force, playing a role as both a reflection and a creator of societal expectations. But while the increasing entry of male employees in contemporary times appears to challenge the historical divisions of labour, presenting opportunities for diversity, there are unfortunate pitfalls of tokenism under the umbrella of marketing. The industry's acceptance of male employees

runs the risk of merely functioning as a reaction to new market demands for diverse skill sets rather than a genuine commitment to social transformation. Thus, the cosmetic market's position is multifaceted, potentially perpetuating surface-level changes without addressing deeper structural issues- this delicate interplay between profit-driven adaptation and genuine societal transformation is evident from the interviews and data collected.

Going beyond the cosmetic sector, forthcoming research could uncover shifts in occupations across various industries, shedding light on the changing dynamics of gender roles in a contemporary society entangled in a web of neoliberal gig economy practices. In a context where industries adopt appropriation, tokenism and exploitation under the banner of breaking traditional societal and gender norms, the need for industry-wide measures fostering diversity and dismantling discriminatory practices becomes paramount to ensure genuine societal transformation. Our exploration of the industry's evolving landscape, informed by theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, underscores the intricate relationship between gender, marketing, and employment dynamics. The cosmetic industry, once emblematic of rigid gender norms, now represents changing attitudes and opportunities. The challenge lies in ensuring that this transformation goes beyond surface-level changes and extends to the foundational structures shaping our understanding of gender in the dynamic intersection of beauty and commerce. Therefore, the next time we inquire about "who's at the counter," we must go beyond mere appearances to a deeper reflection on the broader structures at play.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mihika Jain is a 2nd-year student at Miranda House, studying Political Science.

Paarth Pande is a liberal arts graduate from Symbiosis University (Pune).

Vidarshna Mehrotra is a 3rd-year student at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, studying History

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Madhulina Sonowal is a 3rd-year student at Lady Shri Ram College for Women, studying Political Science.

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