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BUF 4700 Contemporary Issues In Fashion

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Beauty and Consumer Culture

Beauty and consumer culture have been connected to modern life, with changing social values, new technology, and how people see themselves for a long time. There was a change in the early 20th century in how beauty was marketed and consumed. This change was shaped by industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of mass media. The beauty industry made money off of these innovations by marketing beauty products as essential to modern identity. The beauty industry is always changing and evolving the idea of modern beauty through diversity, sustainability, and advances in technology.

Industrial progress, urban expansion, and the rise of consumer culture characterized the modern world today in the early 1900s. To be modern many changes had to happen such as accepting new social freedoms, getting rid of old mentalities, and the creation of new products with these new values. Beauty was a big part of this change because cosmetic companies marketed their products as empowering, progressive, and confident. The beauty industry defined modern womanhood by making its products a sign of self-expression for women.

Mass-produced beauty products is one way beauty reflects modern times. In “Venus Envy Chapter 3”, it explains that there was an increase in demand for makeup, skincare, and haircare products among women who wanted to define themselves outside of traditional gender roles. Cosmetics used to be considered “inappropriate” for women, but then became a sign of confidence in modern society. For example, Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden profited

from these changes because they branded their products as self-improvement and success for women.

Advertising played a big role in shaping the view of modern beauty. The rise of newspapers, radio, and television helped beauty brands promote the idea of modern women. In Chapter 3 of “Hope in a Jar”, it describes how brands like Pond’s would use famous actors to show that beauty was a big part of modern life and promote their products. Modernity and celebrity culture promoted the idea that modernity was about looking stylish. But later down the line, social media changed this.

Another example of modern beauty culture in the early 20th century is the rise of African American beauty entrepreneurs such as Madam C.J. Walker. In “Black is Profitable” by Susannah Walker, she discusses how African American women looked for modernity in beauty products that are made for their specific needs. Walker’s success signified a move towards success and self-growth, showing that beauty was more than looks.

Today, modernity focuses on diversity, social media, and sustainability. Instead they embrace differences, use technology, and have a focus on ethical product development. Before beauty standards were stricts and mainly Eurocentric, but changed to modern beauty values such as the inclusivity of all races, genders, and body types.

Inclusivity is one of the most significant ways the beauty industry shows its shift to modern times. For example, in 2017 Rihanna launched her beauty brand, Fenty Beauty, that offered 40 different shades of foundation, which revolutionized the industry. New standards were set due to her launch, forcing other brands to expand their range in shades and come up with new ways to market themselves. There was now a bigger focus on equality and representation, showing that modern beauty is about accepting differences.

Technology also played a big role in shaping modern beauty, for example, social media changed how beauty products get marketed and consumed. Influencers now replaced celebrity endorsements, with real-time reviews and tutorials that relate with a variety of different audiences. Brands such as Glossier and Kylie Cosmetics built themselves through digital marketing and e-commerce entirely. This shows how the online presence is needed for modern beauty brands.

Sustainability and ethical consumption are another big part of modernity today. Today, people are more concerned with environmental issues, therefore beauty brands have incorporated that into the industry by using eco-friendly packaging, cruelty-free products, and sustainable sourcing. For example, The Body Shop uses ethical production methods whereas Ilia, which is a clean beauty brand, uses non-toxic ingredients. This change is part of a larger movement towards responsible shopping, where modernity means smart and ethical decisions.

The idea of modern beauty changed a lot from the early 1900s to how it is today. In the 20th century being modern meant industrial growth, consumer culture, and changing ideas about femininity through beauty items. Helena Rubinstein, Elizabeth Arden, and Madam C.J. Walker influenced beauty culture by promoting makeup as a way to feel confident. Modern beauty today is characterized by inclusivity, advances in technology, and sustainability. There are many brands with these values that show how beauty is constantly changing along with culture and technology.