A University of Sussex PhD thesis

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details
The business of beauty: online beauty entrepreneurs, femininity and whiteness in Thailand

BY

Nunnapan Puathanawat

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Sussex for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2022
Abstract

This thesis examines the business of beauty blogging by Thai beauty influencers. Although work on beauty culture is central to understanding Thai culture in the international context, little research has examined the emergence of online beauty cultures and the digital economy of social media influencers in Thailand. Therefore, this thesis aims to make an original contribution to the field by examining the work of Thai beauty influencers who circulate social and economic capital by constructing online personas that can be commodified and monetized.

The multi-method research is based on 11 semi-structured interviews and an analysis of 42 Instagram accounts. These materials are produced by Thai beauty influencers, aged between 23-45, living in Bangkok Thailand, with between 10,000 and 1 million followers (at the time of writing). Through this combination of visual digital media analysis and semi-structured interviews, I examine the ways in which Thai beauty influencers engage in these online forms of commerce. In doing so, I explore how they have come to work and collaborate with brands in ways that balance tensions between managing their self-representation as authentic and the demands of sponsors.

I argue that beauty blogging and its associated practices embody a form of mediated entrepreneurism, through practices of negotiating and collaborating with brands on social media platforms (such as Instagram). These Thai beauty influencers have challenged traditional representations of femininity in Thai public discourse, through practices of creating online beauty-related content and engaging with brands. These practices have enabled them to develop brand identities, which embody independence and strength, and challenge assumptions. The construction of successful brand identities has become an integral part of adapting to modern ways of life, offering a range of possible femininities in the emerging phenomenon of the Thai online beauty industry.

In particular, I identify and focus on the labour practices involved. Thai beauty influencers have come to engage and collaborate with beauty brands that allow them to establish forms of business. I argue that these online forms of labour are premised on the enactment of productive creativities that are particularly concerned with bodily displays and the constant negotiations of constructing beauty practices. The analysis also focuses on the integration of discourses of beauty, which incorporates how the idea of authenticity and whiteness play out in the Thai context. The analysis
seeks to identify how Thai beauty influencers discuss these ideas that contribute to further our understanding of the discourses of beauty. Specifically, this thesis examines how these sets of practices have been constructed and whether they inform, negotiate, and shape the changing trends of beauty and our ideas about femininity and whiteness within the Thai digital economy.
Acknowledgements

I would like to firstly thank my supervisors Professor Dr. Kate O’Riordan, Dr. Naaz Rashid and Assist. Prof. Dr. Simidele Dosekun for their guidance, support and constructive feedback they have provided throughout every stage of my research project. Their support has been invaluable, and I am deeply grateful that they took me on a journey of learning and continued to guide me over the years. Without their understanding and support, this thesis would not have been completed. Thank you to the School of Media, Film and Music and the University of Sussex library for the support and provided productive use of resources. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Mahidol University International College for the funding opportunity that allowed me to undertake my PhD studies. This would not have been possible without a kind assistance of Assist. Prof. Dr. Wankwan Polachan who has provided me the life changing opportunity to take part in this PhD journey. I feel blessed and truly grateful for her help and support on this.

I would also like to thank my parents and family for their love and support throughout my PhD process. Thank you for the encouragement and for believing in me. A special thanks to my husband and my three children for always being there for me and understanding me, especially during the difficult times. I am forever grateful for their patience, and I look forward to being able to spend quality time with them all.

Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants who took part in this thesis. Without their contributions, this thesis would not have been completed. Thank you for providing such valuable insights that allowed me to learn and share with others.
Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Name: Nunnapan Puathanawat

Date: 30/11/22
# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 9
Research Aims and Objectives ..................................................................................................... 10
Background .................................................................................................................................. 11
Defining the Roles and Performance of Social Media Influencers .............................................. 13
Instagram as a Platform ................................................................................................................ 14
Thesis Structure ............................................................................................................................ 16
Conclusion ................................................................................................................................... 19

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................................. 21
Introduction ................................................................................................................................... 21
Understanding the Concept of Micro-Celebrity ......................................................................... 22
From Internet Celebrities to Influencers ...................................................................................... 23
Contextualising the Influencer Industry ......................................................................................... 25
Understanding Labour Conditions in the Digital Economy .......................................................... 27
Emotional, Aspirational, Visibility, and Glamour Labour ............................................................... 29
Understanding Aesthetic Labour .................................................................................................... 32
Authenticity, Staging Amateurism, and Technology ..................................................................... 34
Representations of Authenticity on Instagram and YouTube ........................................................ 37
The Idealisation of Beauty in Thailand ............................................................................................ 41
Understanding the Discourses of Whiteness in Thailand ............................................................... 42
The Emphases on Skin Complexion ............................................................................................... 45
The Embodiment of Plastic Surgery ............................................................................................... 46
The Portrayals of Korean and Westernised Beauty Ideals ............................................................... 47
Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................... 48

Chapter Three: Methodology ...................................................................................................... 50
Methodological Approach .............................................................................................................. 51
Chapter One: Introduction

Appearance matters. Beautiful appearances matter even more. In Thailand, beauty can override family connections, money, or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women and, to a lesser degree, men (Van Esterik, 2000, p. 129).

This statement describes the importance of beauty and physical appearance in Thai society. It suggests that the concept of beauty determines social acceptance and is an important factor for economic opportunity among both men and women in Thailand. People are often judged by their appearance and image as well as clothing, accessories, style, language, manners, and overall demeanour (Ibid.). Although significant in the cultural context, beauty norms are perhaps nowhere more explicitly foregrounded than in Thailand. The importance of attaining beauty standards and ideals raises questions about the embodiment of beauty trends shaping the idealisation of beauty practices in Thailand. However, the enactments of these trends vary, and the representation of Thai beauty norms are yet to be clearly identified. Kang (2021) stated that “the spectrum of beauty and body modification practices in Thailand is quite diverse with various regional, religious, and subcultural norms” (p. 272). The diversity of these beauty practices is an important motivating factor in examining the idealisation of beauty to understand the dominant discourses considered beautiful in modern Thai society. Specifically, how femininity is negotiated and performed throughout Thai social media discourses and how the concept of beauty is shaped by the changing dynamics of cultural trends signalling the country’s development and establishment of the online beauty industry (e.g., Kang, 2021). I argue here that the negotiations of contemporary beauty ideals are intensifying throughout Thai social media discourses, and these ideals are significant in signalling social and economic approval in Thailand.

In understanding the embodiments of beauty trends, this thesis traces how and why beauty influencers rise to fame and examines the ways in which they cultivate their beauty personas on social media. It seeks to examine how young Thai women negotiate the values and practices of beauty and the complex process of gender identity in a contradictory media environment whereby the concept of beauty has become increasingly valorised. The paper focuses on extended practices and social dynamics in which the idealisation of beauty is associated with monetisation and other opportunities that demonstrate how these young Thai women engage and collaborate with brands to establish an online business. This study analyses the embodiments of beauty trends and the way in which influencers construct their online personas to commodify and monetise them. In addition, the notion of authenticity and Thai beauty norms that meet the idealised image of
feminine beauty are observed in this study. Furthermore, this study examines how complexion and skin tones are negotiated and performed and how undergoing plastic surgery help in understanding the overall beautification process. Specifically, it reflects on the stereotypical assumptions about women, perceived norms of attractiveness, and motives behind the modification processes involved in altering facial features.

**Research Aims and Objectives**

Women’s beauty practices in Thailand have been linked to the construction of national identity, race, ethnicity, globalisation and migration, and a reconfigured labour market; sexualisation and the sex industry; and plastic surgery (Enteen, 2013; Van Esterik, 2000). This study aims to make an original contribution to the field by examining the work of Thai beauty influencers who circulate social and economic capital by constructing online personas. This will contribute to the understanding of entrepreneurial practices conducted by online beauty cultures in Thailand and beyond. This study demonstrates that Thai beauty influencers embody a form of mediated entrepreneurism, particularly in relation to the practices of negotiating and collaborating with brands through social media sites such as Instagram.

This study explores the representation of feminine beauty, the negotiation of brand identity, and the cultivation of social media discourses that reflect an engagement with brands within the Thai digital economy. In examining influencers’ practices, I aim to explore the gender roles of the beauty influencers and how they work and collaborate with brands in ways that balance tensions between authenticity and sponsorship. I also explore how discourses of whiteness and the cultivation of tanned skin play into this and can be factored within the Thai context. The embodiments of beauty trends are concerned with the modification processes involved in altering facial features to meet the expectations of what is understood to be beautiful and desirable in Thailand (e.g., Chaipraditkul, 2013; Kang, 2021). In addition, I examine the cultivation of what can be seen as realistic sets of practices as well as the dominant discourses of feminine beauty, adding a further dimension to current debates concerning the notion of authenticity, whiteness, and femininity in Thailand. Specifically, I consider how the embodied forms of beauty have been constructed and whether they inform, negotiate, or shape the changing trends of beauty and society’s ideas about femininity and whiteness within the Thai digital economy.
The aims of this study:

• To examine the phenomenon of an emerging entrepreneurial online beauty culture in Thailand
• To examine the construction of Thai beauty influencers’ identity online
• To understand the current norms of beauty culture as well as authenticity and whiteness within the Thai context

These aims are achieved through the following objectives:

• An analysis of the digital media culture of influences (primarily through selected Instagram activity)
• Interviews with selected Thai beauty influencers to understand how they experience and account for their practices
• Secondary analysis of relevant beauty industries and the rise in digital media cultures
• Synthesis of the media analysis, interviews, and secondary literature emerging from the research process

Background

The current phenomenon of Instagram beauty influencers is built on a history of Internet idols. Two main phases can be identified, and social media developments have been crucial in shaping them. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, some young Thai women emerged into the public spotlight through the use of Thai Internet discussion boards such as Pantip.com, Dek-D.com, Bloggang.com, and Jeban.com (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). This group of women were recognised for their online fame as “Internet idols” or “net idols”, a term that can be applied to those who receive significant public attention throughout the Thai Internet scene (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 1). The phenomenon of Internet idols has been used to classify certain groups of people within the Thai context. Originally, the term “idol” referred to a person who has been extremely successful in their chosen field. This success may lead to adoration among certain groups of people (Putnark, 2016, as cited in Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 96). During the pre-social media era, the phenomenon of Internet idols manifested throughout Thai schools and universities as a fan-base strategy. These were often represented by those considered to have outstanding personalities, such as athletes, prom queens, cheerleaders, etc. (Kemasingki, 2016).
Relatedly, Abidin (2018) refers to these groups of people as having “extraordinary achievements, talented skills, or a prominent position in society” (p. 5). In this vein, Abidin and Limkangvanmongkol (2018, p. 96) noted that the first generation of net idols were recognised primarily for their appearance, makeover skills, and certain types of accomplishments within the school community. As they put it, “the first generation of net idols were often conscientiously catalogued and promoted by popular media and even memorialised as lovely schoolgirls” (Guruclub, 2012, as cited in Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 96). Prior research has categorised Thai Internet idols as old-fashioned, teen, artistic, and so on (Kemasingki, 2016).

As Thailand engages with social media, the number of Internet idols continues to expand dramatically, especially over the last few decades (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Kemasingki, 2016). This newer generation of Internet idols became famous through the use of various social media platforms and primarily known for their specific appearances. Instead of being recognised for specific sets of skills as in the past, the newer generation are primarily known for their experiences in undergoing plastic surgery on their faces and bodies or marking their bodies with tattoos as well as different types of makeup styles, looks, etc. (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Kemasingki, 2016). This explains the importance of social media practices that position Instagram as one of the most popular social media platforms contributing to the emergence of an online business that has proliferated in the Thai social media scene over recent years. The rise in prominence of beauty trends has led to increasing engagement in online fame, where users adopt the use of strategies to disseminate various types of beauty related content and collaborate with brands online (e.g., Abidin, 2016; Hund & McGuigan, 2019). Given the importance, this study aims to demonstrate the significant portrayal of beauty trends that contribute to the understanding of brand engagement with a specific focus on examining the idealisation of beauty practices on Instagram.

In understanding the rise of beauty influencers in Thailand, their social media sites enable young Thai women to visit and follow them to learn how to engage in beauty practices. These Thai beauty influencers are considered to be among the most successful groups of people, enjoying a prominent social media status with a significant number of followers, ranging from tens of thousands to millions throughout the Thai social media scene (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). I am particularly interested in how these individuals rose to fame and continue to flourish in the online influencer industry within the Thai digital economy. Accordingly, this study aims to contribute to the body of work offering an alternative understanding regarding
the emerging phenomenon of Thai beauty culture and details the labour processes involved in developing the online businesses appearing on the Thai social media scene. Through the examination of their online personas, this study demonstrates how Thai beauty influencers incorporate the values of beauty developing through the cultural lenses that combine the traditional values of Thai cultural beliefs and the circulation of contemporary media images disseminated throughout the modern Thai digital economy.

**Defining the Roles and Performance of Social Media Influencers**

In relation to the practices of social media influencers, Senft (2008) introduced the study topic of camgirls and the ways in which they broadcast themselves online (e.g., Marwick, 2016; Senft, 2008, 2013). She introduced the concept of micro-celebrity, a term used to define the practices of camgirls and the way in which they construct their online personas with the use of Internet access to accumulate online fame through a fan-base strategy (Senft, 2008). Similarly, Marwick (2016) described the notion of micro-celebrities as “a self-presentation technique in which people view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans” (p. 333). The notion of micro-celebrities has been widely developed and discussed in various contexts through the use of several social media platforms (e.g., Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2015; Marwick, 2016). In extending the academic work on camgirls, Abidin (2016) introduced the concept of digital influencers, which can be used to describe people with the ability to negotiate and influence others on social media. Accordingly, Abidin (2016) defines influencers in the following way:

> They are every day, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyle, engage with their following by integrating “advertorials” into their blog or social media posts and making physical appearances at events (p. 3).

The distinction between micro-celebrities and influencers might be that influencers are recognised for collaborating with brands, which in turn, helps to develop their online personas by monetising sponsored content on social media (Ibid.). However, these forms are all related and build on each other. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that some of the participants refer to themselves as bloggers and others as influencers. This can be explained by some participants being previously known for creating and disseminating blogs rather than social media content. Therefore, the construction of their social media
practices varies depending on the emergence of their social media images, reflecting the entrepreneurial trends in the Thai digital economy. In this study, I refer to these Thai women as beauty influencers since the embodiment of their practices explains the drive to achieve social and economic capital, whereby their engagement and practices fit with the criteria of social media influencers described by Abidin (2016), particularly in relation to collaborating with brands, resulting in the exchange of income. Specifically, this study focuses on the practices of Thai beauty influencers who consistently engage in creating beauty-related content to influence other women and shape their skills in using beauty and cosmetics products on a daily basis while earning an income. Through the creation of online beauty content, conducting product reviews, and creating online beauty tutorials, these Thai beauty influencers have succeeded in accumulating online fame, securing both social and economic capital through the Thai social media scene (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). Influencer success is demonstrated through a large number of followers, the portrayal of luxurious lifestyles and items, and the use of high-end cosmetics and beauty-branded products in relation to which they circulate sponsored content on sites such as Instagram. All these elements indicate the idealisation of achieving what Duffy and Hund (2015, p. 1) describe as “having it all” on social media. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the ways in which Thai beauty influencers cultivate their online personas, allowing them to achieve online recognition and establish an online business in the digital economy. In the following section, I provide information on Instagram as a platform and the traditional concept of Thai beauty norms to conceptualise hegemonic beauty within Thai society.

**Instagram as a Platform**

Thai women have embraced the “technological affordance” of Instagram to cultivate their online personas, which have become increasingly visible throughout social media (Cunningham & Craig, 2017, p. 72). This suggests that the online beauty community has become much more expansive since the emergence of the Internet idols in the last decade. In this context, Instagram is recognised as one of the most popular social media platforms in Thailand, with over 13,628,000 users, accounting for over 19% of the total population in 2018 (Thailand, 2018). It has also been noted that Thai women aged between 18 and 24 are among the most likely to post content on lifestyles, food, healthy living, beauty, etc., on Instagram (Statista, 2021). This has given these young Thai women the opportunity to become recognised as influencers in the social media sphere.
In this context, it is important to contextualise the aesthetics of Instagram features, and how this facet is used among social media influencers. Given the importance of influencers’ practices, one of the most notable functions of Instagram is its ability to capture online images resonating with the functions of Polaroid cameras (Leaver et al., 2020). However, one of the significant changes in the aesthetics of Instagram images from its introduction in 2010 is the limited functions and low resolution offered to users (i.e., filters, frame, and overall image quality) (Leaver et al., 2020). Since then, Instagram has developed its functions to allow all users to enjoy a wide range of capabilities, i.e., filters, graphics, and video, as well as stories that allow all users to engage in creating video and real-time content. As a result, some social media users employ Instagram as a platform to construct their online personas to attract followers and brands (e.g., Abidin, 2018). Such practices reflect the changing trends in cultural labour, allowing users to visually explore the digital image capabilities, which in turns, give ordinary media users the full access to take and share photos with others when on the move (Marwick, 2015). The mobility component of Instagram affects the practices among different types of social media users as well as influencers as they negotiate how they work and collaborate with brands online. In this context, Serafinelli (2018) described the use of Instagram as “everything is perceived as a photo opportunity, and this constant state of mind produces new forms of experience in everyday life” (p. 8).

In addition to the aesthetics of Instagram functions, its affordances play a crucial role in understanding the social practices of influencers through social media platforms (Busher & Helmond, 2018). Through these practices, Busher and Helmond (2018, p. 13) offered ways to understand the level of affordance by explaining the multiple functions of online engagement on sites such as Instagram. Drawing upon this concept, Busher and Helmond (2018, p. 12) identified two levels of affordance, “high-level” and “low-level”, demonstrating the social practices facilitating the use of social media.

In particular, the “high-level affordance” of technological devices allows for wider access to social media platforms and what this offers to its users (Busher & Helmond 2018, p. 12). These levels of affordance include the various components which shape users’ engagement with media, such as “persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability” (Boyd, 2011, p. 39, as cited in Busher & Helmond, 2018, p. 12). These are important for determining the curated display of social media practices as they shape the scales of “visibility” (Treem & Leonardi, 2012, p. 147, as cited in Busher & Helmond, 2018, p. 12). Comparably, Busher and Helmond (2018, p. 14) described the concept
of “low-level affordance” as the technical features available through the use of a specific product. In understanding this concept, “low-level affordance” on Instagram allows users to engage with specific features that encourage the users “to create, share, modify and move content, stories, and images from one means to another” (Serafinelli, 2018, p. 8). Such features include photo editing functions (filters) and other effects (boomerang), which allow users to socialise with others on the site. To better understand the levels of affordance on social media, Hurley (2019) critically examined the concept of affordance and how it intersects with the use of social media sites such as Instagram. This involved social practices such as people’s engagements on social media, their use of language, and social activities through the available platform features. This sheds light on an area of influencers’ works, which is critical for understanding the vast changing technologies that impact influencers’ practices and the embodied forms of labour throughout the use of social media platforms (Hurley, 2019, p. 2).

**Thesis Structure**

This paper consists of seven chapters: an introduction, a critical review of the literature and context, a methodology chapter, three primary analysis chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter Two provides a critical review of the important frameworks for understanding the business of beauty blogging as a cultural phenomenon and the debates contained in the academic literature. It traces back to the Internet Idol phenomenon and explains how women rose to fame prior to the social media era. In addition, the chapter highlights the ways in which Thai beauty influencers engage in an online form of work, characterised by different forms of labour. Specifically, the aesthetics, reproductive, aspirational, emotional, immaterial, and glamour aspects are discussed and examined to understand the different forms of labour involved in contemporary media culture (e.g., Duffy, 2015; Elias et al., 2017; Hochschild, 1983; Jarrett, 2014; Lazzarato, 1996; Wissinger, 2016). Moreover, Chapter Two maps the expression of “authentic acts” (Gannon & Prothero, 2006, p. 5), that reveal different levels of authenticating practices among influencers on social media. This aspect of social practices is critical to our understanding of the uses of techniques that these Thai beauty influencers enact in the Thai beauty industry. The chapter concludes by discussing the concept of beauty, discourse of whiteness, promotion of tanned skin, and the modification processes involved in altering a person’s overall facial features. The construction of these beauty practices align with the cultural trend that incorporates the Asianised image enacted throughout Asian communities (Kang, 2021). The enactment of these beauty practices points to a changing set of ideals that require adaptation and labour to negotiate combinations of contemporary ideals.
These ideals are important since they contribute significantly to the changing trends of beauty practices and the portrayal of Thai beauty norms. These norms reflect the changing dynamics of cultural trends which signal the country’s development and establishment of the online beauty industry in Thailand (e.g., Kang, 2021).

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology in which I reflect on my overall experience of this research. The chapter outlines the qualitative research process and presents an analysis of the Instagram materials. I interviewed 11 beauty influencers and analysed 42 Instagram images. The chapter also provides details of the interview procedures prior to, during, and after the interviews. In particular, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations involved when interviewing the influencers and the decisions made in terms of selecting Instagram images and participants for the study.

The three analysis chapters are based on three chosen themes. These themes reveal how and why Thai beauty influencers have risen to fame and explain the labour practices involved in the performance of their social media discourses. These discourses highlight how they engage in an online business and explain the marketability of establishing an online career on social media sites such as Instagram. Understanding the starting point of this theme is important for providing insight into the phenomenon of the emerging online beauty culture in Thailand. In addition, the analysis focuses on the notion of authenticity and explains the enactment of beauty practices among Thai beauty influencers on social media. This theme is particularly relevant because it articulates the extensive practices involved in the curated display of the influencers’ beautified images, which reflect the extent to which they are perceived as real on social media (Gannon & Prothero, 2006). This emphasises the importance of maintaining positive relationships that affect the maintenance of their businesses on Instagram. The analysis also focuses on the integration of beauty discourses and the idealisation of beauty with an emphasis on whiteness and the negotiation of competing beauty ideals in contemporary Thailand. This theme aids the understanding of beauty ideals currently dominant in Thailand. It explains the portrayal of Thai beauty norms that illustrate the embodiment of beauty trends on Thai social media discourses. Each of these themes are central to the understanding of online beauty culture and the influencer industry being increasingly valorised in modern Thai society.
Chapter Four, the business of beauty blogging, focuses on the labour practices involved in establishing and engaging in an online business on Instagram. The chapter argues that the discourse of beauty and the marketability of establishing an online career are premised on the enactment of productive creativity resulting from the changing beauty trends within Thai society. The chapter demonstrates the entire process of how selected Thai women acquired fame and became known as beauty influencers. Drawing upon different forms of labour, the chapter analyses different sets of practices enacted by Thai beauty influencers to promote beauty products and cosmetics on Instagram. The chapter is organised under the themes of youth, entrepreneurism, and self-branding.

Chapter Five discusses beauty influencers’ engagement with the notion of authenticity and realness in the Thai context. The chapter argues that, in their efforts to maintain online popularity, Thai beauty influencers often construct semi-staged online personas. The first section of the chapter discusses the process of constructing an aesthetic of realness on Instagram by posting real and unedited images of themselves. Section two discusses how this is reinforced by the revealing behind-the-scenes images and the use of the Instagram story function that allows the influencers’ followers to see their routine activities on a daily basis. Section three discusses the use of biographical content and details of their lives prior to and since becoming beauty influencers. All these practices are thus examined to determine an affective relationship that informs the idea of authenticity throughout the Thai digital economy.

Chapter Six examines how Thai beauty influencers construct an idealisation of beauty, emphasising the discourse of whiteness, its contradictions, and tensions, such as the trends relating to tanned skin and the modification of facial features. This chapter argues that the idealisation of beauty in Thailand is heavily influenced by the cultural trend of adopting Northeast Asian and Western styles of beauty, categorised into two sets of practices. These sets of practices play out through negotiation of the whiteness concept, incorporating the trend of Northeast Asian ideals and the promotion of tanned skin that signals a rise in the promotion of Western-style feminine beauty. Both these portrayals cultivate the value of beauty, which reinforce the idealisation of feminine beauty in modern Thailand. Section one of the chapter discusses an overview of Thai cultural norms, which focuses on feminine beauty trends. This includes how whiteness is incorporated into the Thai context and the ways in which Thai beauty influencers embed themselves into the country’s beauty norms that reflect the cultural traditions of beauty practices. Section two highlights the idealisation of beauty, featuring the integration of Korean and Western standards of
feminine beauty ideals. The final section of the chapter discusses the values of beauty involving the practice of plastic surgery. Here, I examine how undergoing plastic surgery contributes to the shift in preferences of Thai women regarding their engagement in beauty practices.

**Conclusion**

The key themes and findings on which I argue in this paper define the quality of Thai femininity, reconfigured through the digital economy whereby the cultural trends of beauty practices are increasingly influenced by the Northeast Asian and Western styles of femininity. I also argue that the negotiation of contemporary beauty ideals is intensifying through Thai social media discourses and significant in signalling social and economic approval in Thailand. This paper discusses Thai beauty influencers’ practices that promote understanding in relation to the construction of national identity, race, ethnicity, and plastic surgery, thus signalling a rise in the prominence of globalised discourses of beauty that function in Thai society. The construction of beautified media images suggest that Thailand is characterised by the increasing phenomenon of hybridised notion of femininity, whereby the idealised concept of beauty is driven by the embodiment of Northeast Asian (e.g., Korean style of beauty) and Westernised concepts, for example, where tanned skin signals a beauty ideal (Kang, 2021). These idealisations of beauty challenge the traditional concept of feminine beauty characterised by the idea of “Oriental womanhood”, which is “associated with exotic commodities of the Thai tourist trade such as silk, and traditional dance forms of Buddhist representations of goddess” (Aizura, 2009, p. 307). Although some of these social media images remain in the traditionalised context of Thai femininity, the vast majority have been impacted by the rising flow of cultural influences, characterised by the increasing portrayals in media images. These have resulted in the practice of plastic surgery, with the aim of shaping the idealised images of beautiful and desirable features that represent the modernised concept of feminine beauty ideals. In this context, the analysis also presents the emerging phenomenon of beauty practices that provide monetisation opportunities for these women to work and collaborate with brands, enabling them to become known as beauty influencers. I examine their use of strategies, the labour practices involved, and the use of self-branding techniques representing the emerging online beauty culture in Thailand. In addition, I offer insight into the notion of authenticity and the extent to which these practices are real online. Accordingly, the analysis demonstrates how authenticity is maintained through the construction of semi-staged images whereby emphasis is placed on being real. I also reveal behind-the-scenes images and discuss real issues that reflect a sense of intimate
relationships online. The goal of this study is to examine an emerging online culture to provide insight into how young Thai beauty influencers navigate impossible contradictory discourses of feminine beauty to understand the entrepreneurial practices of the online beauty culture in Thailand. Through an examination of media analysis and interview material, I demonstrate the importance of discourses of feminine beauty, establishment of online businesses, and the concept of authenticity that speaks to the negotiation of cultural and social practices. This paper promotes the understanding of the work performed by Thai beauty influencers and the circulation of beautified media images that reflect the changing phenomenon of Thai beauty ideals. It suggests complexity in the cultural practices that signal the country’s development and establishment of the online beauty industry. Examining these aspects of influencers’ works are important since they demonstrate the intensification of commodified discourses of beauty and the entrepreneurial practices involved in the construction of femininity, enabling influencers to achieve social and economic approval in Thailand.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents an analytical framework for understanding the business of beauty blogging and examining the emerging online culture in the Thai context. The framework is built on a review of the literature relating to academic debates based on four different themes.

Firstly, the rise of net idols, tracking back to the Internet idol phenomenon in Thailand, explaining how Thai women rose to fame prior to the social media era. This theme provides some historical context for understanding the contemporary shift into a social media age, examining the shifting practices under the concept of micro-celebrity, Internet celebrity, and influencers (e.g., Abidin, 2018; Senft, 2008).

Secondly, a review of the literature highlights the relevant conceptual frameworks for understanding labour debates. This theme is important because it contributes to the understanding of how the online beauty industry operates and the process through which Thai beauty influencers collaborate with brands and advertise beauty and cosmetic products in the mode of business/entrepreneurship on Instagram. The labour conditions of influencers’ practices provide critical insight into a wide array of online advertorial techniques, pointing to how influencers curate beauty images online. This theme encompasses various aspects of their work, such as the curative display of promotional materials, enactment of beauty trends, negotiation with brands in exchange for income and the emotional value of influencers’ experiences, and so on. These factors shape the overall curation of beauty techniques, which negotiate how the influencer industry operates through the Thai digital economy (e.g., Duffy, 2015; Iqani, 2019).

Thirdly, the notion of authenticity and realness is considered to understand influencers’ practices in cultivating their online personas on Instagram. The chapter provides a review of the scholarship concerned with the expression of “authentic acts” (Gannon & Prothero, 2006, p. 5), which allows influencers to maintain their popularity and long-term relationships with followers and brands on social media.
Fourthly, the chapter examines the idealised media images of beauty in Thai culture and the specific norms and ideals valorised at different times. It demonstrates how the idealisation of beauty has been negotiated and embraced throughout Thai and Asian countries. Drawing on the existing literature, I explain the discourses of beauty, the emphasis on gender and femininity in Thailand, and the extent to which these ideas negotiate and reinforce beauty norms in an increasingly globalised media environment. Specific norms are upheld and negotiated through this idealisation of beauty through the signifiers of whiteness and ethnicity. Youth and health are important in this context and explored in further chapters.

**Understanding the Concept of Micro-Celebrity**

In understanding the contemporary shift in online culture, Senft (2008) provided a useful theoretical framework for examining the use of webcams to explain the concept of micro-celebrity in the mid-2000s. The concept relates to social media engagement and the techniques used by individuals as they strive for fame and attempt to capture public attention on social media (Marwick & Boyd, 2010; Senft 2008). Furthermore, the construction of self-performance embraces the use of self-branding techniques, which negotiate an online connection between these young influencers and their fans (Senft, 2008, 2013). This aspect of their performance “involves people ‘amping up’ [for] popularity using Web technologies like videos, blogs, and networking sites” (Senft, 2008, p. 25) to cultivate online personas with the aim of attracting significant public attention on social media and other online platforms (e.g., Marwick, 2013). In this context, Marwick (2015) examined the construction of social media practices among a group of micro-celebrities on Instagram. She states that the concept of “Instafame” is relevant to the understanding of social media practices, specifically describing the cultivation of people who “tend to be conventionally good looking, work in ‘cool’ industries such as modelling or tattoo artistry and emulating the tropes and symbols of traditional celebrity culture such as glamorous self-portraits, designer goods, or luxury cars” (Ibid., p. 139). This demonstrates the way in which famous online people present images of themselves to attract large numbers of followers, reflecting the rise in their popularity on social media. These self-branding practices are relevant to the cultivation of online personas, which allow for an examination of the rising phenomenon of online beauty culture, foregrounding the establishment of online identity, and public engagement with micro-celebrity and influencers. The construction of social media practices, thus, help to understand how some social media users strive for fame and ultimately become famous through the digital economy (Marwick, 2013; 2015a)
In the context of influencers’ practices, Marwick (2013) conceptualised the study of micro-celebrity in Silicon Valley between 2006 and 2010, in which she examined the users’ management of the self, which can be assessed through the cultivation of public personas on social media. She observed how prolific social media users strive for fame through specific platform affordances that attract certain groups of fan-based followers online (Ibid.). In a similar vein, Marwick and Boyd (2011) examined how famous celebrities engage with their fans on Twitter. The authors stated that the shift in the new media landscape has changed how people connect with celebrities and how the idea of celebrity is practised on social media (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). They reveal how “popularity [can be] maintained through ongoing fan-based management, [which describes how] self-presentation is carefully constructed to be consumed by others” (Marwick & Boyd, 2011, p. 140). As Marwick (2013, p. 399) suggests, these performances describe what “something one does, rather than one is” (Marwick, 2016, p. 39), which is indicative of self-disclosure, determined by the number of followers and how celebrities maintain intimate relationships with their fans on the Internet (Marwick, 2013; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Given the popularity of the social media landscape, the concept of micro-celebrities constitutes practices that are premised on the constant exposure of self-representation, with popularised social media engagements constructed through personas publicised through the Internet (Marwick, 2013; Senft 2008, 2012).

From Internet Celebrities to Influencers

With the rise in social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, social media users construct online personas, which enabled them to become well-known throughout the social media scene (e.g., Abidin, 2017; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Reade, 2020). The increasing pervasiveness of social media sites such as Instagram has contributed to the accumulation of online fame proliferating in the Thai social media scene over recent years (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). Central to this study is the narration of curating beauty personas, such as the performances of developing online beauty tutorials and creating “how-to” beauty videos that enable social media users to garner fame, thereby promoting their online business (e.g., Banet-Weis, 2017; Duffy & Hund, 2015).

In this vein, Abidin (2018) extended the concept of micro-celebrity to understand the contemporary shift in practices which contributes to the change in the concept of micro-celebrity culture. While the traditional concept of micro-celebrity is limited to reaching and maintaining relationships with a niche group of people, Abidin (2018, p. 16) states that the rise in prominence of Internet celebrities has grown to a global scale, with the use of social media becoming a place
for people to generate online content that extends beyond social media ecologies. This suggests a shifting phenomenon, which contributes to the change in scales of social and cultural practices in which the performance of individuals is inhabited by the changing nature of the digital media environment (Ibid.). The construction of these social media practices relates to the use of digital technology, predominantly operating through online platforms focusing on the “circulat[i]on and amplif[i]cation] [of] content for maximum visibility and reach” (Leaver et al., 2020, p. 104).

In being recognised as Internet celebrities, Abidin (2018) has identified the major characteristics of these people as those who:

are mainly known for their high visibility, whether this be attributed to fame or infamy, positive or negative attention, talent and skill or otherwise, and whether it be sustained or transient, intentional or by happenstance, monetized or not. More crucially, Internet celebrity has to be received, watched, and acknowledged by an audience - someone who expends great efforts to put out quality content on the Internet but is not watched and validated by anyone will not become an Internet celebrity. (p. 16)

The concept of Internet celebrities allows one to understand the wide uptake of the creation and development of the influencer industry, which has shifted significantly in the last decades (Ibid.). This concept signals the emerging trends of entrepreneurial practices, which place particular emphasis on the curation of lifestyles to promote and advertise commercialised content through social media platforms (Abidin, 2018; Hund & McGuigan, 2019; Hurley, 2019; Reade, 2020). It also details the formation of an emerging online culture that offers insight into the social practice of marketing styles that are prevalent in the influencer industry (e.g., Abidin, 2018; Hund & McGuigan, 2019). In extending the concept of Internet Celebrity, I focus on the use of Instagram since it is predominantly utilised among women who are highly popular on the Thai social media scene. For the purpose of this study, I consider young Thai women who are highly recognised on social media as beauty influencers since they embody beauty practices that enable them to generate social and economic capital through various types of social media platforms.

In this connection, several media scholars have examined the way in which social media influencers cultivate online personas and embrace social media sites such as Instagram to become famous (e.g., Abidin, 2016, 2017; Iqani, 2019; Reade, 2020). In her work on Singaporean influencers,
Abidin (2016) examined the way in which they engage with the practice of taking selfies on Instagram. She conducted 173 interviews between December 2012 and July 2013, along with a combination of participant observation and analysis of Instagram images to uncover how the Singaporean influencer industry operated (Abidin, 2015b, as cited in Abidin, 2016). Throughout her analysis, Abidin focused on gendered labour to understand how Singaporean influencers established the social and economic capital popularised via Instagram. She provided insight into how the practice of taking selfies is important for understanding the use of strategies in curating advertorial labour and the overall practices involved. In this context, Abidin (2016) stated that “female influencers have been renarrativising the moral panic surrounding selfies to such a successful extent that good selfies and selfie-taking skills are a prized asset in the influencer industry” (p. 15). She also demonstrated the ways in which the practice of taking selfies contributes significantly to the commercialisation of generating online content, as opposed to the cultural logic that previously described selfie practices as having an “undercurrent of subversive frivolity at work” (Senft & Baym, 2015, as cited in Abidin, 2016, p. 2) but instead pointed to the increasing opportunities of establishing an online business with a guaranteed income for influencers. Examining the practices of selfies, therefore, aids in identifying the techniques influencers enact and perform and how they commodify themselves in the influencer industry.

Contextualising the Influencer Industry

In understanding the influencer industry, Hurley (2019, p. 3) addressed the importance of examining the cultural meanings that can be applied to the visual economy on Instagram. She provided critical understanding of the practices of female Gulf-Arab social media influencers, which revealed how Instagram affordances functioned in accordance with the technological infrastructure of the platform (Ibid.). These forms of affordances relate to their social interactivity, such as the use of texts, comments, the constructions of visual images, and the portrayal of lifestyles that shape the understanding of influencers’ practices on social media (Ibid., p. 2). In this context, Hurley (2019) provided an interesting insight into understanding the concept of “fantastical authenticity”, in which she described the term as “versions of authenticity occurring at imaginary levels” (p. 11). This aspect of influencers’ practices reveals the different dimensions of influencers’ techniques and the way in which they negotiate the social conditions which foster their relationships with followers and brands on social media (Ibid.). Examining this aspect of influencers’ practices is important since it entails the “depict[ion] [of] a state of mind, imagination, and fantasy” (Ibid., p. 12), which conceptualises the notion of authenticity that influencers enacted.
on Instagram. Understanding the cultural practices involved in the influencer industry is important for this study, as they provide additional meaning to the commercialised activities which point to the curation of generating positive online images among influencers and brands. The promotional materials used in self-branding also inform how influencers carefully strategise techniques and the embodiment of their online personas, which shape the enactment of social media activities throughout media discourses (Ibid.).

In extending the concept of the influencer industry, Hund and McGuigan (2019, p. 1) provided a critical analysis concerning the logic of “shoppability”, in which they explained the process of self-branding techniques undertaken by influencers to offer a site of interactivity which represent an online marketplace. The construction of these practices involves a branded persona to establish social and economic capital on social media (Ibid.). In this context, Hund and McGuigan define the term “shoppability” as “a set of affordances enabling users to instantly purchase products that appear in the advertisements and professionally produced or user-generated content they access via Internet-equipped devices, platforms, and applications” (p. 2). Their analysis consisted of a broad perspective on influencers, brands, retailers, etc., incorporating all aspects of personal branding techniques with the aim of stimulating the desire for what they term the “shoppable life” (Ibid., p. 2). Specifically, the term “shoppable life” is “meant to capture both the idea that social media users perform and document aspirational lifestyles whose constituent elements can be bought instantly” (Ibid., p. 3). As the empirical material demonstrates, beauty ideals can be bought, but in the case of the most successful influencers, they must also be worked on and maintained over time. Through the analysis of Instagram images and information gathered from the interviews, I highlight the enactment of social media practices that offer insight into understanding the business of beauty blogging, which encompasses social activities that informs one’s understanding of the influencer industry and social media entrepreneurship in Thailand.

Meanwhile, Duffy and Hund’s (2015, p. 1) qualitative analysis of visual and textual content provides insight into examining how bloggers represent themselves, which reveals the ideal image of “having it all” on social media. Through the promotion of social media images, the authors suggested that bloggers highlight the display of a set of practices that can be characterised as “predestined passionate work, staging the glam life and carefully curated social sharing” (Ibid., p. 2). The results suggest the creative display of social media activities that informs the entrepreneurial practice of engaging in the creative labour industry (Ibid.). They reveal the importance of the cultivation of online images that document the way in which lifestyles and fashion bloggers
represent the gendered form of femininity that “obsures the labour, discipline, and capital necessary to emulate these standards” (Ibid., p. 2). The concept of entrepreneurial femininity, as identified by Duffy and Hund, represents the increasing demands of work, signalling the pursuit of visibility which travel across contemporary media culture (ibid.).

The work of influencers is also closely intertwined with the cultivation of luxurious lifestyle personas, largely popularised on sites such as Instagram (e.g., Iqani, 2019). In this context, Iqani (2019, p. 219) explored the concept of “cultural labour” among six African “brand ambassadors” who broadcast luxury items through the African marketplace on Instagram. This is evident by their portrayal of expensive cars, expensive skincare brands such as La Mer, drinking champagne, and so on, all of which are indicative of lifestyles suggesting the benefits of promoting luxurious brand items (ibid.). Despite the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the African region, Iqani’s (2019, p. 230) article provides insight into the rising economic opportunities in the online cultural industry, exhibiting relationships between the influencer industry and influencers’ relationship with sponsored brands. The images selected by brand ambassadors illustrate the values of cultural production, which follow the styles of portraits of those who have previously risen to fame in the mainstream media industry. Through the portrayal of luxurious lifestyles and practices, Iqani (2019) argues that “the visual work undertaken online by social media influencers contributes in significant ways to the value of global brands, and this should be contextualised within the unique socio-economic aspirations of consumers based in the global south” (p. 229). Thus, this aspect of influencers’ work reveals the value of promoting luxurious media images, which provides insight into understanding the cultural values and the negotiation of promoting global trends, exhibited through the online digital economy.

**Understanding Labour Conditions in the Digital Economy**

This section provides scholarship on the processes involved in engaging in an online form of labour. It details different functions of labour involved in the enactment of beauty practices (e.g., Banet-Weiser, 2017; Elias et al., 2017; Entwistle & Wissinger, 2016; Lazar, 2017). The concept of labour can be broadly defined as the “exertion of the body or mind…usually used to describe activities that have some sort of compulsion attached to them” (Hesmondhalgh, 2010, p. 276). According to Hesmondhalgh (2010), the concept of user-generated content provides a useful lens for understanding the cultural industry and the way in which free or unpaid labour applies to the conception of labour in modern society. He discussed several issues relating to the unpaid
conditions existing throughout the online digital economy. While it has been noted that the phenomenon of an emerging online culture allows participants to engage in the accumulation of social and economic capital (e.g., Duguay 2019), Hesmondhalgh (2010) pointed out significant issues in relation to ideas such as capitalism, exploitation, power, and freedom, which together represent the concept of “free labour” (ibid., p. 271) that takes place online (ibid., p. 276).

In this vein, the concept of “free labour” may be regarded as unpaid conditions of work or “freely given work” (Andrejevic, 2009, as cited in Hesmondhalgh, 2010, p. 271). While several scholars have examined the relationship between the concept of exploitation and the way in which free labour functions online (e.g., Arvidsson, 2005; Terranova, 2004), Hesmondhalgh (2010, p. 271) argues that there is no correlation between the concept of exploitation and the term free labour since it is rather unconvincing to consider them together. From this perspective, the concept of free labour can be used to describe influencers’ practices and the construction of online images to attract potential brands and gain larger numbers of followers on social media. The enactment of free labour in this context involves the dissemination of Instagram and social media posts, requiring the use of techniques that enable influencers to gain public attention throughout the Thai social media scene. These techniques may include reviewing online beauty and cosmetic products, the construction of still and moving social media images, and short video clips curated with the intent to capture the attention of followers and brands. The importance of these practices speaks to the unpaid conditions of work that characterise the emergence of entrepreneurial trends in online beauty culture in Thailand and elsewhere. Meanwhile, Jarrett (2014, p. 16) discussed the concept of reproductive labour in relation to the conditions of “women’s work”. She emphasised the importance of maintaining “social conditions” that allow for labouring conditions to take place in the capitalist economy (Ibid., p. 23). Reproductive labour in this context refers to nonmaterial goods in opposition to material products such as food, clothing, and so on (Ibid., p. 16). The concept was extended to understand the disciplining conditions of reproductive labour. In this context, Jarrett referred specifically to consumers/citizens who engage in creating a sense of freedom whereby people can freely discuss different contexts in the contemporary capitalist media culture (Ibid., p. 23). Exploring the concept of reproductive labour allows for further examination of the social interaction between influencers and their followers taking place on sites such as Instagram. This form of labour offers insight into understanding women’s experiences and social sets of practices enacted and performed in a contemporary labour culture (Jarrett, 2014).
Regarding the concept of immaterial labour, Lazzarato (1996) also provided a useful discussion in terms of how the technical composition of work functions in the creative labour industry. He defined the term as “the labour that produces the information and cultural content of the commodity” (Ibid., p. 133). On the one hand, he referred to the concept as “the informational content”, which applies directly to a wide range of skills involved in the overall process of conducting work (Ibid., p. 133). On the other hand, he referred to the concept as “the cultural content of the commodity” (Ibid., p. 133), which conceptualises a set of activities that represent cultural standards and can be applied to works in the digital economy (Ibid., p. 133). In this vein, Hardt and Negri (2000) extended the concept into defining the term as “labour that produces immaterial goods such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, and communication” (p. 290). This perspective provides insight into the creativity and imagination of influencers and how they embody online promotional materials in disseminating beauty-related content through Instagram. Immaterial labour in this context, thus, negotiates the extent to which the business of beauty blogging operates in contemporary capitalist society (Hardy & Negri, 2000; Lazzarato, 1996).

**Emotional, Aspirational, Visibility, and Glamour Labour**

While the concept of free and reproductive labour provides a useful lens for understanding the immaterial and unpaid conditions of women’s work and how creative labour functions in the digital era, the concept of emotional labour also offers useful contextualisation for understanding the service sector in the digital economy. In this context, Hochschild (1983) defined the term as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (as cited in de Castro et al., 2004, p. 109), which relates to the service sector where workers are required to always maintain their professional manners (Hochschild, 1983). The term “sold for a wage” refers to a process in which workers are engaged in exchange for income (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in de Castro et al., 2004, p. 110). In this instance, workers are constantly in direct contact with those who have paid for their services (Hochschild 1983, as cited in de Castro et al., 2004, p. 109). This technique characterises the various modes of online personas, and the promotional materials influencers disseminate online. The emphasis here speaks to the way in which influencers construct their online images and the emotional process of negotiating branded images in exchange of income, which entailed various aspects of emotional processes involved. This concept of labour provides a better understanding of the emotions involved in engaging in online work, particularly in an advertorial format where influencers are in direct contact with brands and their followers on social media. This extends our understanding into examining the construction of influencers’
online images such as the use of captions, tags, hashtags, that negotiate the construction of social relations and so on. Emotional labour is also prevalent in the construction of beauty practices, which enable Thai beauty influencers to negotiate and perform techniques to determine their emotional value. This, in turn, shapes the social relations among influencers, followers, and brands, exhibited through the Thai digital economy.

In addition, scholars have examined the ways in which the concept of emotional labour can be understood through the lens of digital intimacy (Dobson et al., 2018). These authors considered the ways in which online forms of intimacy are enacted and developed through social interactions that shape people's relationships online through the exchange of online conversations, texts, images, comments, direct messages, and so on (Ibid., 2018). On platforms such as Instagram, the performative display of establishing positive relationships among influencers and followers is imperative in building connections and networks. This may include the use of captions, tags, hashtags, comments, reactions, and direct messages. Examining an online form of intimacy allows one to understand how affective relationships are maintained and the way in which influencers engage in various forms of labour to reproduce social relations through Thai social discourses. These practices are important since they reveal all aspects of the emotions involved in building close and intimate relationships with followers and brands through social media. Therefore, the concept of emotional labour contributes significantly to paid conditions resulting from the engagement of intimacy and the curation of intimate relationships through the digital economy (Ibid., 2018).

In relation to the concept of emotional labour, Duffy (2015) introduced the concept of “aspirational labour”, in which she examined the methods used by social media producers to create online content in terms of “highly feminised sites” (p. 442), which in this instance, refers to fashion, retail, and beauty. In this context, she described the concept of aspirational labour as “the discourses of authenticity, community, building, and brand devotion that they draw on [as being] symptomatic of a highly gendered, forward-looking entrepreneurial enactment of creativity” (Ibid., p. 442). During her analysis, three major aspects were emphasised: the notion of authenticity, which seeks to exemplify the idea of “realness”; and the construction of “affective relationships”, drawing upon the concept of “emotional labour” (Hochschild, 2003, as cited in Duffy, 2015, p. 449), negotiating a sense of relationship with followers. Lastly, she considers the entrepreneurial practice of working with brands, analysing the strategy of self-branding commonly utilised among aspirational labourers (Duffy, 2015, p. 451). In extending the understanding of aspirational labour,
Abidin (2016) provided useful insight into the social media practices conceptualised as “visibility labour” (p. 90). This type of labour refers to the work of the online creative industry, featuring examples of fashion brands. Abidin (2016) described this type of labour as “the work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for favourable ends” (p. 90). For Thai beauty influencers, achieving a high level of popularity is an important component in generating revenue. The enactment of these practices involves the promotion of various types of online images, which points to the proliferation of Thai beauty norms. This is important since it also points to the use of strategies and techniques in shaping social media images and the extent to which influencers extend their visibility throughout social media platforms.

Furthermore, Duguay (2019, p. 1) examined the micro-celebrity practices that explain the enactment of online labour among LGBTQ influencers on Instagram and Vine. Online labour demonstrates the importance of building intimate relationships, which requires the use of techniques in shaping affective forms of communications on social media. In engaging in online labour, Duguay (2019, p. 5) proposes that influencers engage in three modes of self-branding practices that are significant in building their fame on social media. These consist of 1) building “intimate affective labour”, 2) engaging in “developmental aesthetic labour”, and 3) performing “aspiring relational labour” (Ibid., p. 5). The enactment of these social practices negotiates the consistent personas of promoting online images that maintain positive relationships among influencers and followers online. Through promoting online video tutorials and showing personal, intimate, and behind-the-scenes images, influencers can build fame and capture a significant degree of attention, which can be developed into generating strong and positive engagement with various participants on social media. These aspects of online labour are closely aligned with the ways in which Thai beauty influencers construct their online personas that reveal intimate aspects of their relationships with brands and followers on Instagram. Examining this aspect of their practices, thus, facilitates the understanding of the labour processes involved in the construction of online personas that is critical in maintaining positive outlooks throughout the Thai digital economy.

In line with the notion of aspirational labour, Wissinger (2016, p. 145) introduced the concept of “glamour labour”, in which she examined the Kim Kardashian phenomenon and how she showcases her glamorous lifestyle to the public in the digital media age. In understanding this concept, Wissinger (2016) identified the term as “a phenomenon of the Internet age. It is the work of investing time and effort into editing the body and self to appear as fascinating and polished in
person as one does in one’s highly scripted, filtered, and manipulated online life” (p. 145). While her previous work focused on the nature of modelling, the concept of glamour labour refers to the lengths to which Thai beauty influencers will go to create a desirable appearance. This includes undergoing plastic surgery which points to the attainments of achieving beauty status (e.g., Rongmuang et al., 2011), as well as engaging in all kinds of aesthetic practices to be perceived as having a beautiful face and appearance. Throughout Instagram images, broadcasting a glamorous lifestyle requires influencers to attend fashion and beauty events, showcasing different trends of makeup, as well as revealing behind-the-scenes images, depicting them at exclusive events and showcasing expensive items, and so on (e.g., Abidin, 2016; Duffy & Hund, 2015). The construction of a glamorous lifestyle in this context, thus, reflects the significant value of beauty and the portrayal of media images that are critical to the understanding of labour conditions and the performative display of beauty work through the Thai digital economy.

Understanding Aesthetic Labour

The different forms of labour mentioned previously provide useful contextualisation on the realm of paid and unpaid conditions in the digital economy and the scholarship of how engagement in the beauty blogging business is performed online. In this study, the concept of aesthetic labour is important as it speaks to the way in which immaterial and reproductive labour functions in modern society (e.g., Jarrett, 2014; Lazzataro, 1996). Different forms of labour provide a critical understanding of the ways in which Thai beauty influencers build their online status and consistently produce online beauty content as part of a cultural production that may not be traditionally perceived as work (e.g., Lazzarato, 1996). In this vein, Mears (2014, p. 2) stated that aesthetic labour extends the logic of emotions by focusing on the complexity of gaining commercial benefits among employees. In this instance, scholars have examined aesthetic labour in relation to employee recruitment (Nickson et al., 2001, as cited in Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018, p. 121). Meanwhile, Brydges and Sjöholm (2018) introduced the concept of “aesthetic labour 2.0”, which positions influencers in “complex, elusive, and often precarious social structures, where they have the ability to negotiate demands not just from a single employer, but from manifold actors and networks” (p. 122). Despite the instability of online working conditions, this description reflects the rise in prominence of works that provide influencers with the opportunity to negotiate demand, giving rise to them to collaborate with brands. The construction of these practices includes all forms of promotional materials, which enable influencers to extend their popularity.
and career trajectory, especially those who wish to maintain an Internet celebrity status online (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018). This aspect of aesthetic labour is important since it sheds light on how and why influencers consistently display social media images depicting collaborations with several brands, expanding their popularity through social media platforms (Ibid.).

While previous studies have examined the context of labour in relation to employment, the practices of influencers participating in this study align with the concept of aesthetic labour in that they concern the social media productions encompassing the construction of beauty works. This is particularly relevant to the Thai context, where the idealisation of beauty is dominant, and the exhibition and performance of labour in beauty practices are as important as successfully achieving or shaping beauty ideals. In this vein, aesthetic labour is developed through the practice of cultivating online fame, such as by posting images of makeup tutorials, conducting product reviews, and interacting with followers, which reflects the negotiation of beauty norms cultivated through the Thai social media scene (e.g., Elias et al., 2017). Recent studies have examined aesthetic labour in relation to the politics of beauty and the forms in which beauty norms and practices manifest through digital images (Ibid.). Lazar (2017), for instance, provided a useful discussion on the notion of beauty work. She noted that women are likely to participate and perform aesthetic labour on their bodies as part of “heterosexual femininity” (Lazar 2017, p. 51), which involves significant time and effort and, at times, leading to physical pain that affects their health. According to Gill and Scharff (2011), “beauty as labour is not a novel idea in itself; however, it is taken up within a neoliberal postfeminist culture in newer ways” (Gill & Scharff, 2011, as cited in Lazar, 2017, p. 51). Lazar (2017) pointed out that the fast-growing trends of aesthetic labour could be described as “what women want and can achieve” (p. 52). This aspect of aesthetic labour responds to the practices of beauty influencers in Thailand and elsewhere since they are highly visible on social media and consistently broadcast themselves in different styles and looks. In this context, the emphasis lies upon the productive ways Thai beauty influencers invest their time and efforts into creating “how-to” and tutorial videos that enhance women’s beauty practices and skills by applying a different range of makeup techniques online (e.g., Elias et al., 2017). The aesthetic labour in this context, therefore, involves the engagement of beauty practices, representing a pathway for achieving fame and online popularity prominent in a social media setting (e.g., Elias et al., 2017).

Similarly, Banet-Weiser (2017, p. 271) examined the notion of female empowerment and the confident girl campaign through a series of advertising campaigns broadcast on mainstream and
social media. She argued that “[the] corporate confidence campaigns and beauty vlogging together produced a gendered logic that is not contradictory but rather complementary” (Ibid., p. 266). The notion of female empowerment in this context emphasises the entrepreneurial concept, which invites women to engage and perform aesthetic labour, encouraging them to believe in themselves and their capabilities. Throughout the campaigns, Banet-Weiser detailed the methods through which the ads feature famous celebrities to encourage girls to celebrate their beauty ideals. The ads focus on messages such as “girls can” as it signifies the connotation of “girls who can” (Ibid., p. 271). Meanwhile, she also addressed the importance of curating digital media productions as part of engaging in aesthetic labour since the embodiment of these practices gives rise to cultural productions that enable young women to appreciate the construction of beauty practices (Ibid.). These are concerned with the embodiment of beauty trends, intersecting with ideas that allow girls to feel “empowered” while also drawing on what she describes as “entrepreneurial” behaviours, securing both economic and social capital (Ibid., p. 266) in the digital economy.

Meanwhile, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) examined the notion of aesthetic labour in New York and London, in which they link the concept to understanding the ways in which freelance models negotiate “the effort of keep[ing] up their appearances” (p. 774). They argued that “the main proponents of aesthetic labour have a poorly conceived notion of embodiment and that the current conceptualisations produce a reductive account of the aesthetic labourer as a ‘cardboard cut-out’, and aesthetic labour as superficial work on the body’s surface” (Ibid., p. 774). Aesthetic labour in this context involves both physical (i.e., the work to maintain physical appearances that conform to the beauty norms) and emotional efforts in engaging in such practices (Hochschild, 1983, as cited in Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006, p. 774). Like freelance models, Thai beauty influencers must also put effort into keeping themselves up to date with current beauty and fashion trends. This background further contextualises online labour through the Internet setting, where most works are enacted on a contractual basis (e.g., Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006). While these authors examined the importance of freelance models, it is important to consider the enactment of beauty practices in which Thai beauty influencers engage to understand how and why aesthetic labour intersects with the concept of emotional labour among influencers in the Thai digital economy.

**Authenticity, Staging Amateurism, and Technology**

In understanding the notion of authenticity in relation to debates about labour, it is important to think about the ways in which labour is expressive. Goffman (1956, p. 2) stated that the likeliness
of a person’s perception towards realness lies indirectly in “involuntary expressive behaviour” (p. 3). In this instance, he extended the concept by suggesting that there are two sets of activities. The first being “the expression that he gives”, communicated with the use of symbols and limited to a narrow form of communication (Ibid., p. 2). While he describes the second type of activity as “the expression that he gives off”, which is concerned with a set of actions allowing individuals to perform and express emotions. As Goffman put it, “the individual does, of course, intentionally convey misinformation by means of both of these types of communication, the first involving deceit, the second feigning” (Ibid., p. 2). The statement is relevant to concerns regarding the extent to which authenticity is practised and expressed online since it defines the ways in which Thai beauty influencers communicate and express their feelings and emotions through online conversations, such as through captions, comments, direct messages, the use of emojis, and so on.

In comparison to Goffman’s (1956) theories of the presentation of the self, Abidin (2017, p. 1) examined two groups of family influencers and the narratives of their lifestyles, emphasised their enactment of social practices portrayed on social media. In this context, Abidin introduced the concept of “calibrated amateurism” in which she referred to the term as “a practice and aesthetic in which actors in an attention economy labour specifically over crafting contrived authenticity that portrays the raw aesthetic of an amateur, whether or not they really are amateurs by status or practice” (Ibid., p. 1). This concept demonstrates the authentic nature of curating “filler” and “anchor” content in which influencers engage online. In this instance, the cultivation of filler content demonstrates the expressive acts featuring influencers’ activities on a daily basis (Ibid.). As Abidin (2017) put it, “filler material focuses on family influencers’ domestic lives, their daily operations as a household, and their cultural norms and practices” (p. 4). In addition, the cultivation of anchor content demonstrates a careful performance, featuring the overall production of influencers’ work. In extending the concept of authenticity, Lobinger and Brantner (2015, p. 1850) discussed various forms of authenticity, particularly in relation to the practices of taking selfies. The concept of authenticity in this context demonstrates the importance of practices which reveal aspects of self-photographs, negotiating the construction of online images that reflect the authenticating acts online. They differentiate authenticity into two sets of perspectives: the first being “nominal authenticity”, which refers to “the correct identification of [a person]”; the second is “expressive authenticity”, which refers to “the relationship between a person and his or her visual representation” (Ibid., p. 1850). The second type of authenticity in this context demonstrates the expressive values and beliefs that can be interpreted through the construction of online personas, which determines real aspects of one’s personality to inform the understanding of real and authentic images online (Ibid., p. 1850). This aspect of authenticity is important since it relates
to how Thai beauty influencers broadcast themselves and negotiate authenticating acts through Thai social media discourses. Examining the practice of taking selfies in the social media context is therefore important to understanding the authenticating acts among influencers, representing the way in which they construct expressive online images that facilitate social trends through the Thai digital economy (Ibid., p. 1850).

In a similar vein, Gannon and Prothero (2016) also revealed eight sub-types of selfie-taking practices: “tutorial/before and after selfie; product fail selfie; body part selfie; self-deprecating selfie; natural light selfie; budget buy selfie; tagged post selfies and meet-up ‘groupie’” (p. 1866). Specifically, authenticity in this context describes the way in which women share and present images of themselves in what has been described as an “unstaged way” where they intend to “keep it real” (Ibid., p. 1866). Through the cultivation of online images, they have been seen to present images of body parts, showcasing different styles of beauty ideals such as demonstrating “how-to” makeup tutorials, performing “swatch blog posts”, and so on. This aspect of influencers’ practices is important since it reflects alternative experiences of how influencers negotiate authentic images. It also extends knowledge of the performance of their work, reflecting the notion of authenticity and realness currently enacted on Instagram (e.g., García-Rapp, 2017; Reade, 2020).

In addition, several media scholars have examined the notion of authenticity concerning the use of technology and how identities are presented online (e.g., Abidin, 2017, 2018b; Kuehn, 2016; Marwick, 2013a; Reade, 2020). Marwick (2013a), for instance, examined how fashion bloggers utilised the notion of authenticity to position themselves through online blogs. In this connection, Marwick (2013a) defined authenticity from three different perspectives. First, as “a palpable sense of truthful expression”; second, as “a connection with and responsiveness to the audience” and third, as “an honest engagement with commodity goods and brands” (Marwick, 2013a, p. 3). Here, authenticity can be conceptualised as strategies and performative practices that enable influencers to foster a sense of connectedness and affective relationships that, in turn, benefit audiences and brands (Ibid.). In relation to examining authenticating practices, Kuehn (2016, p. 3) provided insight into understanding consumer reviewing practices on Yelp.com. She argued that “consumer evaluations serve as a form of productive and participatory consumption inextricably tied to the market-driven practice of self-branding” (Kuehn, 2016, p. 3). Self-branding in this context demonstrates the authenticating practices involved in the reviewing process that determines the overall reputation of brand images online (Ibid.). The construction of these types of media images is important since they negotiate the values that strengthen the overall brand image, which can be
further extended into achieving “reputational status” on Yelp.com and other platforms. In this instance, Kuehn (2016) stated that “reputational status is achieved through the construction of an identifiable, consistent brand persona with an appropriate affective position” (p. 6). This aspect of self-branding is important as it demonstrates the promotional values, which points to the important practice of maintaining “reliability”, “credibility”, and “trustworthiness” (Ibid., p. 6). These factors can help illuminate influencers’ online personas and their level of credibility negotiated on Instagram. These aspects of authenticity are aligned with the construction of promotional materials broadcast among the influencers represented in this study, whereby the enactment of collaborating with brands and maintaining truthfulness and honest engagement is important for the performance of online business, significantly played out on Instagram.

Relatedly, Arnould and Price (2000) examined the notion of authenticity from a consumer-based perspective, that is, “authenticating acts that are an expression of our true selves as we see them” (Arnould & Price, 2000, as cited in Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1890). Here, authenticity is embedded in honest expressions that conform to the narrative of life events (Arnould & Price, 2000, as cited in Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1890). Meanwhile, they also suggest that authenticity can be understood within the context of “authoritative performances”, which refers to the way in which “cultural events or activities that express group values, offer opportunities to integrate with the group and are produced by the group through participation” (Arnould & Price, 2000, as cited in Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1860). In this context, authenticity is negotiated through a socially constructed set of practices that can be applied to understanding the performances of influencers in a larger industry (Arnould & Price, 2000, as cited in Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1860). Examining these aspects of authenticity is important since they relate to how influencers cultivate brand image in ways that reflect their real and honest experiences, which in turn, determine the accumulation of online fame and social relationships among followers and brands on Instagram.

**Representations of Authenticity on Instagram and YouTube**

Recent research has also examined the representation of authenticity on social media sites such as Instagram and YouTube (García-Rapp, 2017; Hurley, 2019; Reade, 2020). Reade, for instance, (2020, p. 2) examined the way in which young Australian social media fitness influencers create social media content that align with what she described as a “raw” quality on Instagram. Through the analysis of Instagram images, Reade (2020) discussed the notion of authenticity in terms of a) posting unedited self-images, b) sharing everyday stories, and c) engaging in sensitive topics, referred to as “real talk” (Ibid., p. 2). In this context, Reade (2020, p. 8) detailed the importance of
posting unedited images of young women on Instagram. Given this, she added, “cultural standards of beauty and desirable feminine aesthetics do still circulate within the raw assemblage and shape practices of inclusion and erasure” (Ibid., p. 9). Raw in this context refers to the unedited images of loose skin, cellulite, and blisters, all of which showcase realistic parts of bodies. She suggested that showcasing realistic parts of women’s bodies signals truthfulness among influencers and their followers through the social media scene. Meanwhile, Reade’s (2020) participants also detailed the importance of showcasing authenticating practices, such as revealing daily routine activities through the Instagram story function. This includes stories of influencers with their friends and families or when working out at the gym, and so on. As Reade (2020) put it, “capturing the banality of everyday life and including family members, friends, and pets in posts correspond with visual conventions to achieve perceptions of authenticity” (p. 12). Through the curative display of Instagram posts and stories, the notion of authenticity in this context gives followers an impression of responsiveness, marking the influencer as an “ordinary person” who can be perceived as genuine and authentic (Ibid., p. 12). Continuing with posting Instagram stories, Reade (2020, p. 14) also detailed the importance of sharing “real talk” with followers. The practice of “real talk” describes the discussion of topics such as illness, health, body image, and so on (Ibid., p. 16). The discussions on real issues suggest the importance of negotiating authenticity, which affects the relationship influencers have with their followers on social media. Revealing what is perceived to be real aspects of life appears to attract a significant number of followers on Instagram (Ibid.). Meanwhile, Abidin (2018b) states that negotiating a high level of relatability is believed to maintain authenticity in the context of social media, given that “all self-presentation in digital and physical spaces is curated and controlled” (Ibid., para. 4). Therefore, to be perceived as “real, unfiltered, unmediated, and uncurated”, it is imperative that digital media influencers create a sense of relatability throughout online platforms (Ibid., para. 3). This aspect of social media practices can be varied depending on the curation of the influencer’s online performance, including online communication such as direct messaging or commenting, sharing intimate stories, or revealing behind-the-scenes practices, and so on. According to Abidin (2018b), “in their usage, relatability is a vague description that assigns value to styles of writing, the management of situations, and the performance of personas without prescribing a particular formula” (Ibid., para. 5). In understanding the online performance of influencers, Scolere et al. (2018, p. 1) provided insight into the construction of “digital self-branding practices” on social media. The self-branding practices here refer to the way in which influencers construct different versions of themselves to engage in online self-promotion based on the level of affordance on social media platforms (Van Dijck, 2013b, as cited in Scolere et al., 2018, p. 2). In this context, Scolere et al. (2018, p. 2) revealed
that the construction of online performance is based on three different perspectives: “1) platform affordances, 2) the audience, and 3) the producer’s own self-concept” (Ibid., p. 2). This aspect of online performance needs further examination since it points to the understanding of self-branding techniques which facilitate the construction of the influencer’s performance and the extent to which they appear to be real and authentic on sites such as Instagram.

The relevance of authenticity has also been examined through the practice of creating online beauty content on YouTube (García-Rapp, 2017). In this context, García-Rapp (2017) focused on the case of a well-known British-Chinese beauty guru called Bubz, who is known for creating online beauty videos such as beauty tutorials on skincare, hair styles, and so on (Ibid., p. 123). She examined how the guru developed a strategy that fostered a positive image, which in turn, generated online popularity. In this context, García-Rapp (2017) argued that providing links to sponsored products is very important for creating a trustworthy persona on the Internet. As García-Rapp (2017) put it, “the relevance of authenticity for the beauty community dictates that through the display of an authentic self, gurus are allowed to continue deploying self-branding strategies in order to remain visible and valuable without losing face or being fake” (p. 124).

In addition, Dekavalla (2019) provided insight into understanding the construction of social media practices among content creators on YouTube. The relevance of these practices is concerned with the curation of online content that negotiates the idea of “transparency”, which enable the creators to negotiate a sense of real, open, and authentic experiences online (Ibid., p. 75). In this instance, she suggests that online content creators cultivate a high level of transparency by revealing accessible, identifiable information on social media. Examining the aspect of transparency is important as the idea serves to negotiate a sense of authentic practices, which enables content creators to foster real and intimate relationships with followers online (Ibid.). As Dekavalla (2019) explained, “transparency serves to reveal to audiences the complexities of generating media content and to protect professionals from suggestions that they are deceiving audiences” (Ibid., p. 78). Meanwhile, Song (2018) examined the notion of micro-celebrity and the way in which micro-celebrities strategise the use of techniques in broadcasting live performances in the South Korean context. She argued that “popular micro-celebrities of AfreecaTV present a self-branding tactic of staged personas that are often exaggerated and aggressive rather than presenting themselves as intimate and ordinary figures who interact immediately with their fans” (Song, 2018, p. 1). In this study, I focus on the construction of online images that negotiate a sense of authentic practices, which aims to enhance the impression of authenticity on Instagram and other social media
platforms. Examining this aspect of influencers’ online image extends the understanding of the social media influencers’ performance, discussed in accordance with the overall personas of Thai beauty influencers who advertise and promote beauty products that capture their followers’ attention on sites such as Instagram.

In a similar vein, Banet-Weiser (2017) also described the way in which the engagement of authenticity is key to the success of the beauty vlog business. She detailed the forms in which Michelle Phan, a famous beauty guru, manifested authenticity through the amateur quality of her online beauty videos, widely publicised on YouTube (Ibid.). Through the exchange of online beauty experiences, Phan was able to align herself with the notion of authenticity, reassuring her followers that she was “just like them” (Ibid., p. 277). As Banet-Weiser (2017) described, “celebrity culture has changed in an era of network media, where traditional control and management mechanisms have shifted so that creating and maintaining a celebrity is now something ordinary people who aren’t conventionally famous can now access” (p. 277). In Chapter Five, I aim to extend this discussion by analysing the shifting trends of technologies that inform our understanding of how young Thai women cultivate celebrity personas on Instagram. These are important as they reveal how these Thai beauty influencers create online beauty videos that negotiate the authenticating acts, which in turns, foster positive relationships among participants throughout the Thai digital economy (Ibid.).

Hurley (2019) drew upon the affordances of Instagram to understand how female Gulf-Arab social media influencers have engaged in the notion of authenticity as part of their curation of beauty practices on Instagram. Through texts and images, the notion of authenticity was examined through the cultivation of influencers’ online beauty personas by displaying props, decorations, clothing, makeup, and so on. These outputs highlight the various aspects of social media affordances that reveal the importance of the beauty concept utilised on Instagram (Ibid.). Through the analysis of her Instagram posts, Hurley (2019) emphasised the concept of “fantastical authenticity”, in which she defined the term as “[different] versions of authenticity occurring at imaginary levels” (Ibid., p. 11). This aspect of authenticity is unique since it concerns the practice of “highly scripted, choreographed, staged, digitally manipulated processes, involving extensive architectures of digital labour” (Ibid., p. 3). This aspect of authenticity sheds light on the construction of imaginative relationships, enhancing knowledge on the cultivation of influencers’ online images, thereby conveying a sense of illusiveness which plays out on Instagram to a significant degree. The notion of authenticity and realness in this context will be discussed in
Chapter Five, where I will examine the overall practices of how Thai beauty influencers cultivate online fame, reflecting their authentic practices and the extent to which the constructions of their practices are curated and performed on social media.

**The Idealisation of Beauty in Thailand**

In understanding the concept of beauty, this section examines the idealisation of beauty in the Thai context. It draws on historical and contemporary concepts of Thai beauty culture to determine how the idealisation of beauty is understood and negotiated in Thailand. In this context, I define the idealisation of beauty as the attainment of highly constructed media images that homogenise the cultural representation of Thai beauty ideals. These ideals reinforce the global standard of Westernised and Northeast Asian styles of beauty, emphasising the curative displays of light and tanned skin, a high nose bridge, and a v-shaped face (e.g., Rongmuang et al., 2011). These ideals follow the trends emerging through the cultivation of Thai media images, which shape Thai women’s perspectives of a desirable appearance. The idealisation of beauty in this context, therefore, illuminates the increasing enhancement of beautified media images intertwined with the technological development of social and economic opportunities, which have become increasingly commodified and monetised on social media sites, such as Instagram. This chapter aims to address the importance attached to the portrayal of beauty ideals, contributing to the understanding of the idealisation of beauty practices and the extent to which these ideals are engaged and performed throughout Thai social media discourses. In this context, Van Esterik (2000) stated that “appearance matters. Beautiful appearances matter even more. In Thailand, beauty can override family connections, money, or class as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women” (Ibid., p. 129). Beauty is directly related to virtue and morality. In this instance, the traditional concept of idealisation of beauty is closely related to Buddhism, whereby attaining a desirable and beautiful appearance is believed to be the result of an individual’s good deeds, passed on from one’s past lives (Ibid.). Van Esterik (2000) reiterated the importance of attaining beauty ideals stating, “Clarity of complexion, grace, and serenity were reflections of moral goodness, one guide to knowing merit store. Ugliness, unfortunately, conveyed the opposite…” (p. 84). In addition, Aizura (2009) stated that the traditional portrayal of the beauty ideal in Thailand is characterised by the concept of “Oriental womanhood”, “associated with exotic commodities of the Thai tourist trade, such as silk, traditional dances forms, or Buddhist representations of goddesses” (p. 307). The embodiment of beauty practices is expected to be portrayed alongside the characteristic representation of wai; the way of showing signs of respect and good manners towards others (Kuppako, 2017, p. 146). According to Kuppako (2017), “[in] ancient Thai tradition, since
childhood, the Thais are brought up to pay respect to the elders, know to respect one another and showing filial devotion and obedience to all benefactors” (p. 147). These concepts offer insight into understanding the cultural and religious beliefs and the meaning of beauty in the Thai context.

In addition, it is important to highlight the significance of idealisation of beauty that plays out through contemporary media wherein the popularisation of beauty trends is increasingly valorised and enacted throughout modern Thailand. In this context, Singhakowinta (2014, p. 4) stated that the idealisation of beauty in Thailand is shaped by the increasing portrayal of media images through various forms of advertisements. Given this, he added, “the multiplicity of beauty-enhancing product and service advertisements may indicate, to an extent, the tough competition for market share as well as a significant sign of the increasing size of the market for the beauty industries’ products” (Singhakowinta, 2014, p 2). In relation to the portrayals of Thai beauty norms, Yan and Bissell (2014) provided insight into the portrayal of beauty through the examination of female beauty magazines across 12 countries. They highlighted the increasing popularity of beautified media images emphasising the Westernisation of beauty ideals. These ideals are said to be at the forefront of beauty trends in contemporary society, portrayed through the dissemination of magazine images which focus on specific beauty styles and looks (Yan & Bissell, 2014). In this context, Yan and Bissell (2014) pointed out that the increasing portrayal of beautified media images can lead to the perceived trends of “ideal-beauty uniformity” (p. 196), increasingly portrayed across different countries. These ideals indicate “a fairly narrow story-telling divide that limited the ideal images to external rather than internal beauty” (Yan & Bissell, 2014, p. 206). To understand the construction of beauty ideals, I focus on the attainment of undergoing plastic surgery, the portrayal of certain skin complexions, and the negotiation of beauty images emphasising the idealisation of youth, thinness, and whiteness. These aspects of beauty practices are directly associated with the idealisation of beautified media images, demonstrating the enactment of beauty ideals that are currently dominant in contemporary Thailand.

Understanding the Discourses of Whiteness in Thailand

Scholars have examined the ways in which the discourses of whiteness play out in the Thai context (e.g., Aizura, 2009; Rongmuang et al., 2011; Singhakowinta, 2014). For instance, Rongmuang et al. (2011) examined the characteristics of Thai women in four different regions of Thailand. Their study suggested that some of these women tended to pay close attention to physical appearances, particularly the discourse of whiteness (Rongmuang et al., 2011), placing emphasis on the construction of “fair skin, an oval face, a high and narrow nose bridge, wide eyes, and tall stature”
(Hesse-Swain, 2006, as cited in Rongmuang et al., 2011, p. 107). Meanwhile, Singhakowinta (2014) examined how the representation of femininity is presented and disseminated through Thai media images. His analysis revealed a close relationship between the embodiment of beauty ideals and the discourses of whiteness in which the attainment of having light or fair skin is considered significant in understanding how femininity is portrayed and understood in Thailand (Singhakowinta, 2014). Poompruek et al. (2014) discussed how the representation of beauty ideals is negotiated among Thai transgender women. They reflect on the importance of overall physical appearances – specifically maintaining slimness and desirable skin. In this instance, they addressed how “[the discourses of] whiteness, fairness, brightness, aura, glow and firmness” (Poompruek et al., 2014, p. 801) are associated with the importance of having slim and slender figures in determining social approval in Thailand. These discourses signal the need to achieve a desirable image whereby “beauty is a basic necessity and a requirement for being complete” (Poompruek et al., 2014, p. 800).

In their study, “Why Do Young Thai Women Desire White Skin?”, Cuny and Opaswongkarn (2017) revealed three reasons for women engaging in the discourses of whiteness. 1) “to maintain men’s loyalty”, 2) “[to] enhance self-esteem”, and 3) “[to] guarantee career success” (Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017, p. 556). These elements all contribute to the understanding of why some young Thai women desire white skin, demonstrating the portrayal of beauty ideals. The embodiment of these beauty practices is also concerned with the cultural representation of the local origins that differentiate the skin tone of women based on race, class, ethnicity, and social status within Thai society (Ibid.). Scholars have pointed out that “white skin might be associated with an urban origin stereotype, whereas dark skin might be associated with a rural ‘Lao Isaan’ image” (Hesse-Swain, 2006, as cited in Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017, p. 557). This context of whiteness resonates with the aesthetics of white as a mark of a higher-class status (Chaipraditkul, 2013, Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). As noted by Abidin and Limkangvanmongkol, “representations of white skin are thus markers of better social status, while those of dark skin are associated with poverty and the working class” (2018, p. 103). These interpretations are also consistent with the study by Yip et al. (2019), who noted, “white skin, accordingly, serves as a form of symbolic or racial capital that enhances a person’s life chances” (p. 76). On the other hand, the “Lao Isaan image” consists of characteristic facial features such as having a flatter nose bridge and browner skin tones, reflecting the appearance of someone from the Northeast, known in Thailand as the “Isaan” part of the country (Hesse-Swain, 2006, as cited in Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017). These portrayals are least preferred among Thai women because they are opposite to the idealised
media images displayed through mainstream and social media (e.g., Singhakowinta, 2014). Therefore, examining social media practices helps to understand how and why some Thai people feel the need to modify their appearance in accordance with Thai beauty norms and the extent to which these subsequent portrayals are exhibited throughout the influencer industry in Thailand.

In terms of competitiveness in the work environment, Cuny and Opaswongkarn (2017, p. 557) highlighted that those with lighter/fairer skin tend to have more chance of being accepted into their desired roles, thereby increasing employment opportunities (Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017). This is consistent with the findings of Sarawasti (2010), who detailed that “skin-whitening products become an object necessary for a good life; happiness is [therefore] coded as cosmopolitan whiteness” (Sarawasti, 2010, p. 28). Meanwhile, polygamy is said to be the cause of insecurity, threatening some Thai women and their relationships. This pressure has led women to have low self-esteem, affecting their overall self-confidence. Therefore, the attainment of whiteness offers them the chance to overcome their insecurities (Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017). These perspectives emphasise the discourses of whiteness, reflecting the importance of achieving a desired image that influences the idealisation of beauty practices among women in Thailand. Given this, Kang (2017) highlighted an idiom contributing to the discourses of whiteness in Thailand, suggesting that “khon khao”, also known as “white person”, signifies the “civilisational status” indicating the contemporary standards of feminine beauty in Thai society (Kang, 2017, as cited in Kang, 2021, p. 274). It positions those with lighter skin in a privileged status, marking their appearance as an idealised form of beauty, achievable through certain beauty practices in Thailand (Kang, 2021). In these cases, the concept of whiteness signals the desire for an image perceived as beautiful (Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017). The increasing embodiment of beauty practices suggests that Thais are consistently exposed to stereotypical images of whiteness, fair skin, and a tall nose bridge, which together contribute significantly to the normative practices of how femininities are negotiated and portrayed in modern Thailand (Aizura, 2009; Rongmuang et al., 2011; Singhakowinta, 2014). Through these lenses, whiteness in Thailand suggests the cultural distinctions that negotiate the signification of skin colour to which Thai women aspire. The attainment of whiteness reveals the competitive framework in the social trends which affects an individual’s status in the Thai context. In understanding the pursuit of whiteness, I examine the emerging phenomenon that impacts the portrayal of Thai beauty norms and whether these norms negotiate or challenge the idealisation of beauty practices being engaged and performed through the Thai digital economy.
The Emphases on Skin Complexion

Singhakowinta (2014) provided a useful discussion on the discursive practices of skin complexions, illustrating the importance of portraying Thai beauty ideals. He stated that the portrayal of the traditional Thai beauty culture has been regarded as “[the attainment of] having a healthy yellow skin complexion as if painted by gold, a slender figure, and hair as black as bumblebee wings” (Sareechantalerk, 2008, as cited in Singhakowinta, 2014, p. 4). This attainment is negotiated with the intent to signal idealised media images embedded in the portrayal of Thai beauty norms (Singhakowinta, 2014). He suggests that the portrayal of these norms is associated with women’s status, determining their accomplishments and economic opportunities (Singhakowinta, 2014, p. 3). In addition, Kang (2021) stated that “the changes in skin colour, skin complexion, weight, grooming, and style are public topics, particularly among women and femininely identified people” (p. 277). This aspect of beauty demonstrates how skin colour/complexion shapes the enactment of beautified images, which requires flexibility and adaptation in the negotiation of beauty trends that have become valorised in Thailand. In addressing this gap, I will highlight the importance of body and facial modification to contextualise the gendered practices of how femininity is negotiated and performed through the contemporary digital economy.

Relatedly, Xie and Zhang (2013) provided an important analysis to understand the significance of skin complexion as expressed through skin beauty advertisements in Asian and European contexts. They focused specifically on the comparison of skin tone preferences in China and the US to examine and determine the cultural difference in women’s preferences towards skin tone (Xie & Zhang, 2013). Their analysis revealed the significance of beautified images in advertisements that emphasise the discourses of whiteness and a white skin tone – in this instance, in the Chinese context. The authors stated that the use of wording incorporated in the ads often consisted of terms such as “brighten, whiten, lighten, and illuminate their yellow-toned skins” (Bray, 2002, p. 2, as cited in Xie & Zhang, 2013, p. 539). This illustrates the value of beauty, consistent with Chinese traditional values and beliefs that convey whiteness as the representative form of “translucency, delicacy, smoothness, and fairness” in China (Xie & Zhang, 2013, p. 541). Meanwhile, the results also suggest the preference towards a tanned skin tone among beauty advertisements published in the US. They noted, “tanning has become fashionable in the US since the 1920s, and mainstream American culture and the beauty industry has been constantly, if not increasingly, promoting the tanned beauty ideal for women” (Xie & Zhang, 2013, p. 549). This suggests a cultural difference between China and the US, which speaks to the cultural trends coinciding with the standards of beauty exhibited in these two countries. This context of beauty
will be examined to determine how skin tone plays out in Thailand and to what extent beauty influencers promote the idealised images adhering to the changing trends of beauty in Thailand.

**The Embodiment of Plastic Surgery**

In understanding the processes involved in the modification practice of plastic surgery among Thai women, Kang (2021) argued that “bodily enhancements are not optional practices, but social responsibilities linked to the appropriate cultivation and presentation of the self that demonstrates actual and aspirational class status” (p. 273). This emphasises the increasing portrayal of beautified media images resonating with the attainment of whiteness, signalling the achievement of a higher-class status. The increase in such portrayals involves the curative display of plastic surgery procedures associated with the pursuit of beauty intended to enhance a person’s physical appearance (Kang, 2021). In this instance, the empirical chapters demonstrate the extent to which beauty practices emerge as social responsibilities such that the beauty work itself becomes a virtue. Kang (2021) detailed that this aspect of beauty practices is exemplified by two different categories. He suggests that the first category relates to the practice of “looking at or watching something and nurturing it”, translated into Thai as “đu-la’e” (Kang, 2021, p. 276) or looking after. The first category reflects a set of practices demonstrating a sense of the relationship between mother and daughter or the social practices that can be applied to understand the interpersonal relationships among people. The second category relates to the physical outlook, emphasising the idea of the way in which a person looks after themself that is deemed presentable in the eyes of the public (Kang, 2021). Rongmuang et al. (2011) identified the importance of processes for altering physical features, which involves the modification of certain facial features such as eyes, noses, lips, cheekbones, jawlines, and so on. The facial and body modification processes, thus, demonstrate the changing trends in beauty ideals, which then becomes a requirement for maintaining the standards of what is perceived to be beautiful among women in Thailand (Kang, 2021).

In a similar vein, scholars have also highlighted the important process of facial modification in shaping the idealised image of “Pan-Asian looks” (Yip et al., 2019). In this context, Frith et al. (2005) describe this look as “a look that places particular emphasis on the face (rather than the body) and a distinctly ‘Asian’ white skin tone with characteristic blending of Asian and European/Western features” (Frith et al., 2005, as cited in Yip et al., 2019, p. 74). To achieve this beauty ideal, Yip et al. (2019, p. 79) stated that these practices involve undergoing plastic surgery, such as blepharoplasty and rhinoplasty, with the aim of altering the appearance in response to Asian beauty ideals. Their analysis revealed that the traditional portrayal of Asian features (eyes
and nose) was regarded as a “racial deficit” that can be transformed through plastic surgery procedures (Yip et al., 2019, p. 80). In this instance, they aligned the modification practices with the enactments of beauty trends that illustrate the portrayal of “white people” (Yip et al., 2019, p. 80). This aspect of beauty practices illustrates the pursuit of beauty whereby the contemporary negotiations of Thai beauty resonate with how femininity is negotiated and performed. These practices also point to the idealisation of beauty that informs the understanding of how the online beauty industry operates in Thailand.

The Portrayals of Korean and Westernised Beauty Ideals

In understanding the cultural influences of Thai beauty norms, previous studies suggest that Thai women have been overwhelmingly exposed to both Hollywood and Korean popularised media images in both mainstream and social media (Siriyuvasak & Shin, 2007). These media images have extended into the cultivation of online beauty personas, popularised through the Thai social media scene (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). Seo et al. (2020, p. 5) suggested that the ideal concept of K-beauty can be examined from two broad perspectives. The first perspective being how K-beauty is negotiated and consumed in relation to other cultures, particularly in comparison to Western culture (Seo et al., 2020, p. 5). The second perspective concerns the examination of how the concept of K-beauty shapes the changing trends in beauty practices that influence the cultural trends exhibited in Korea (Seo et al., 2020, p. 5). The curated display of Koreanness usually entails idealised images that “[highlight the features of] submissiveness, pureness, and cuteness” (Oh, 2014, p. 6), considered to be core aspects in understanding the characteristics of Korean beauty. However, it is important to note that the pursuit of beauty is dependent on the process of “semantic flexibility”, which varies based on personality, characteristics, features, and experiences (Lukacs, 2015, as cited in Pham, 2015, p. 48). Given this, Yip et al. (2019, p. 77) argued that “the promotion of a particular white skin tone as part of the Pan-Asian ideal privileges some racial subgroups (people of Northeast Asian origin encompassing Japan, South Korea, and China) over others” (p. 77). These promotional practices demonstrate the important values of K-beauty, explaining the shifting norms of traditional beauty in Thailand.

While the concept of K-beauty is significant in understanding current beauty trends, scholars have examined the portrayal of feminine beauty that demonstrates the embodiment of attaining tanned skin beauty ideals (Martin et al., 2009, as cited in Xie & Zhang, 2013, p. 542). These ideals are associated with the Western context of femininity, which signalling how “the American beauty industry continues to promote tanning cosmetics and encourages excessive sun exposure,
pervasively portraying a golden tan as fashionable, healthy, and luxurious” (Dixon et al., 2008, as cited in Xie & Zhang, 2013, p. 542). Van Esterik (2000) stated that “[in Thai culture] light, bright skin [is] coveted by both rural and urban women, partly as proof that they are exempted from work in the sun” (Van Esterik, 2000, as cited in Aizura, 2009, p. 309). Therefore, it is important to examine this aspect of feminine beauty to understand the cultural practices involved in the enactment of beauty trends exhibited among women in Thailand. In reflecting on the enactment of beauty ideals, the celebration of tanned skin appears to be increasingly involved with “beach addiction, travel savvy, and hedonism” (Coconuts Bangkok, 2015), promoted and influenced by the portrayal of feminine beauty through the Thai Internet scene.

Van Esterik (2000) also stated that national beauty pageants such as Miss Thailand World can be used to demonstrate the value of the national image, representing the dominant discourses of feminine beauty. These beauty ideals are characterised by the portrayal of “tall, slim, and curvaceous [with the] advantage [of being] English speakers” (Ibid., p. 146). The showcasing of tanned skin media images highlights the transformation of beauty trends, intensifying and impacting the social and cultural idealistic images that signal the diversity of beauty trends in Thai society (e.g., Kang, 2021). This aspect of feminine beauty is under-researched in Thailand. Therefore, it is important to examine the influence of beauty trends to determine the current norms of beauty and the hybridisation of beauty practices incorporating the “local-global” (Seo et al., 2020, p. 8) discourses of feminine beauty in contemporary Thai media culture.

**Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrates that the construction of beauty ideals is intensifying throughout Thai social media discourses and the significance of these ideals determines social approval and economic opportunities in Thailand. The influences of these ideals are portrayed through the enactment of labour practices in the negotiation of online beauty personas, resulting in the accumulation of online fame through social media. In understanding the construction of influencers’ practices, this chapter reviews the literature based on four different themes. Each theme provides a framework for understanding the construction of an online beauty culture that has become increasingly valorised in Thailand. The first theme discusses the rise of net idols, explaining how Thai women rose to fame prior to the social media era, focusing on micro-celebrity and influencers’ practices. This is significant in relation to the empirical material as several study participants have direct experience of the longer timeline concerning the change in media platforms, and some of their success is connected to cross-platform audiences. The second theme
contributes to the conceptual framework in terms of labour debates on both beauty influencing as an industry (income and work) and the understanding of the idealisation of beauty work on the self (beauty practices as virtuous). It provides insight into the modes of business and online forms of entrepreneurship that explain the enactment of influencers’ practices in generating social and economic capital through social media. Understanding different forms of labour is important for contextualising the functions of paid and unpaid conditions, which reflects the way online beauty portrayals can be performed online. The third theme relates to the notion of authenticity. The literature on scholarship is reviewed in relation to the expression of “authentic acts” (Gannon & Prothero, 2006, p. 5). These acts negotiate how influencers work to maintain both popularity and long-term relationships with followers and brands on social media. The body of this chapter highlights the social, cultural, and economic frameworks involved in understanding the phenomenon of Internet celebrities and influencers’ practices and the extent to which they are perceived as real on social media. This aspect on their practices point to the discussion in examining the staged persona, played out on Instagram. The relevance of authenticity is important in understanding the establishment of online forms of business as it contributes to the understanding of the strategies used and the accumulation of fame resulting in their popularity on Instagram. It also explains the nature of online work and the emotions involved in the construction of the influencers’ practices. The last theme provides scholarship on how beauty ideals and the idealisation of beauty practices intersect and are practised through social media discourses. The scholarship demonstrates the enactment of gendered practices involved in the notion of femininity and the shifting trends in Thai beauty ideals. These include various practices such as undergoing plastic surgery, the attainment of certain complexions, and the negotiation of beauty portrayals that reflect the importance of youth and thinness. These ideals reflect the increasing portrayal of Thai feminine beauty, highlighting the rising phenomenon of Korean and Westernisation beauty ideals. These ideals become a form of social responsibility, which requires influencers to engage and perform throughout social media platforms. The increasing portrayal of beauty trends reflects the gendered practices among young Thai women, which have become recognised as Thai beauty norms. These norms are highly valued and practised to the extent that they point to the idealisation of beauty practices, shaping the notion of femininity, currently circulated through contemporary Thailand.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This thesis maps and interrogates the online culture of beauty entrepreneurs in the Thai context. It investigates the social roles and practices in the beauty genre to understand how Thai beauty influencers have accumulated large numbers of followers on social media and how they collaborate with several beauty brands and larger industries. It aims to expand the understanding of how Thai beauty influencers utilise social media platforms such as Instagram to cultivate their online personas and facilitate the business of beauty blogging in Thailand. The construction of these practices provides critical insights into the proliferation of social media images that shape and impact the lives of people throughout the Thai digital economy. It was the embodiment of social media practices that motivated me to engage in this research project; this also enabled me to understand the monetisation process involved and how identities are constructed in the Thai online beauty industry. It is important to recognise, while collecting online data, that Instagram is distinct from other social media platforms, in that it was among the first to provide users with filters while capturing images of themselves to share and post on the app (Leaver et al., 2020). Hence, the platform is one of the most popular social media platforms with over one billion users worldwide (Statista, 2021). In addition, its communicative platform features, such as the story function, have also become increasingly popular and enabled users to capture their daily activities while interacting with others in real time. These activities, alongside the integration of platform features (i.e., memes, GIFs, filters, hashtags, emojis, and other in-app activities), provide a foundation to critically examine the visuality of platform images. These features contribute to the understanding of social media images and the way in which these beauty practices are engaged in and performed on Instagram (Hand, 2018; Rose, 2014). The body of this chapter presents an overview of my research methodology. The first section of the chapter explains the method I used to generate research material. Thereafter, I explain the details of analyses that combine media analysis of Instagram data and semi-structured interviews with Thai beauty influencers. The last section discusses ethical issues related to the process of data collection, focusing on the ethical guidelines that have been followed throughout the thesis. The chapter concludes by providing information about Thai beauty influencers and an overall summary of the chapter.
Methodological Approach

This section provides an overview of the broad qualitative approaches I adopted to analyse Instagram material, and the use of semi-structured interviews with Thai beauty influencers. Through understanding the effective network of social media sites such as Instagram, I examined how Thai beauty influencers produce and disseminate content that enables them to become famous on social media and the extent to which they gain fame through the cultivation of authentic personas (Reade, 2020). These practices also led to my understanding of the specific Thai beauty ideals that are being circulated on the Thai social media platforms. To this end, I used a qualitative research method in order to determine the social media activities that are taking place on Instagram (Salmons, 2016). In understanding the proliferations of social media images, Rose (2016) examined material from four visual media sites to understand the construction process of social media images on Instagram. This method includes “the site(s) of production, the site(s) of the image itself, the site(s) of circulation, and the site(s) of audiencing” (Ibid., p. 38). In this context, Rose (2016) refers to the site of production as how images and representations are made and portrayed to the public, while the site(s) of image refers to the meaning of the visual image itself. Nonetheless, she is also concerned with the technological tools used to pass an image from one place to another and how the site could affect and shape the economic, social, and political roles of those images (Ibid.). Lastly, she highlighted the sites of audiencing as those who decode the image based on their knowledge and experience in given contexts (Ibid.).

In this context, the qualitative research method reveals how social practices are exhibited through the communicative platform of digital technology (Salmons, 2016). Salmons (2014) explained that the use of qualitative research provides insights into the diversity of “one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many interactions between users who archive and retrieve user-generated content [online]” (Salmons, 2014, as cited in Salmons, 2016, p. 5). Andreotta et al. (2019) also emphasised the diversity of social media networks, suggesting “social media data emerges from real-world social environments encompassing a large and diverse range of people” (p. 56). Given the diversity of social media data, a certain level of complexity is involved in accessing a wide array of social media images created and shared throughout social media scenes. By reflecting on the influencers’ social media practices examined in this study, I have been able to fully focus on the production of social media research and the way in which these interactions take place online.

In focusing on the functionality of social media images on Instagram, Hand (2018, p. 8) stressed the importance of taking into account the “visual object” in examining the data on social media research. He suggested that the images can be viewed through either “realist” or “constructionist”
terms (Ibid., p. 7). While he suggested that the “realist” term is specifically concerned with the object of representation, e.g., what is being represented in the image and how it is being represented, he also referred to the “constructionist” term as being particularly concerned with the values embedded within the images, allowing the viewer to understand the construction of social environments.

In this instance, he stated:

> On the one hand, the image is an evidential document of something else (communities, identities, events), whereas, on the other hand, the image is more like an inter-textual site of discursive relationship. Both approaches may treat images as representational or pictorial forms, meaning that images are taken to represent something regardless of whether this is thought to “mirror” or “construct” that object (Ibid., p. 7).

The distinction between visual images provides useful insight into the functionality of social media images that explain the narratives of self-display and self-representation generated via Instagram posts (Ibid.). This helps to understand how and why the images have been circulated and the extent to which they shape the online form of engagement between influencers, brands, and their followers. In addition to understanding the narratives displayed through social media images, Highfield and Leaver (2016) provided useful contextualisation when examining the competencies of platform affordances. They argued that “the ubiquity of the visual within everyday social media content and practices has led to (and been encouraged by) new technological capabilities and platform affordances, and a critical part of online communication” (Highfield & Leaver, 2016, p. 49).

Examining visual media images on Instagram has enabled me to explore the influencers’ characteristics and the way in which they cultivate their online personas through the narrative of social media images. Through the examination of online data, I identified social media photos that align with each of the topics discussed in the empirical chapter. The images were selected on the basis of their popularity, which highlights the cultural context of the research themes: 1) the cultivation of their online personas, 2) authenticity and realness, and 3) the construction of beauty ideals. In doing so, I immersed myself into exploring Instagram images from both “insider” and “outsider” perspectives (Salmons, 2016, p. 5). Salmons (2016) stated that “any researcher may choose to look at a research problem from an *emic* position to examine issues revealed from within
the case or from an etic position to look at issues drawn from outside the case” (Stake, 1995, as cited in Salmons, 2016, p. 5).

To obtain an insider perspective, I examined social media activities in depth by following influencer Instagram pages. These practices enabled me to remain up to date with their daily routine activities and examine how they created online beauty content. I could also observe the interactions between influencers and followers and the ways in which positive relationships are maintained, including understanding how they negotiate beauty trends with followers while collaborating with brands online. In addition, engaging in both face-to-face and online interviews with Thai beauty influencers enabled me to gain an outsider perspective. I believe my lack of experience in engaging with the influencer industry encouraged influencers to share information not available through social media. This includes details of how they have created online content, the rate card that defines the categorisations of influencers, their strategies, and understanding how they typically engage in behind-the-scenes practices on Instagram. The interviews were shaped by the commercialisation involved in creating beauty-related content on social media. Influencers discussed how they came to create commercialised beauty content while conveying a sense of authenticity and realness, their use of specific techniques in promoting beauty trends, the negotiation of online personas and so on. These methodological practices allowed me to learn from influencers’ direct experiences and the process through which they engage with brands and their cultural production in establishing an online form of business. Thus, I gained a credible perspective on the examination of digital media images and the embodiment of Thai beauty influencers’ practices within the Thai digital economy.

**Process of Selecting Online Visual Materials**

In examining online visual materials, I selected both still and moving images relating to Thai beauty influencers during two broad periods. The first period consisted of a six-month timeframe from December 2018 to May 2019, while the second period ranged from December 2019 to March 2020. This would enable me to remain up to date with the influencers’ practices that reflected the significant portrayal of media images on Instagram. During the first period, I initially searched for the keywords “top Thai beauty bloggers/influencers” on the Internet database. After obtaining the list of influencers, I then searched for their profiles on Instagram. Through this process, I explored numerous influencers and examined their use of hashtags which enabled me to “indicate participation in a community to provide context for an image” (Laestadius, 2018, p. 5). The selections of these practices ranged from terms such as #Thaibeautyblogger,
#Thaibeautyinfluencers, #Beautyinfluencerthailand, and #Thaibeautytip, etc. In this context, Galman (2009) illustrated that “visual methods can present ways to address representational concerns in qualitative research by balancing the dual researcher roles as artist and messenger – often presenting multiple voices and ideology instead of an authorial researcher monologue” (p. 198). In determining the important aspects of their practices, the influencers were shortlisted on the basis of a) the practices used for creating online beauty content, b) the style of such beauty practices, c) the practices used for collaborating with beauty brands, d) the extent to which they advertise and promote online beauty products, e) their engagement with followers and fellow influencers through likes, comments, and the use of emojis, and f) the number of followers. After shortlisting the participants, I selected those who were widely known on both mainstream and the Thai social media scene, measured by the frequency of mentions through tags and hashtags on Instagram as well as the frequency of their social media posts. In addition, their beauty styles and the curative display of social media images were taken into account. In total, six prominent influencers were selected from Instagram. I then used a similar process for the second period, revisiting the profiles of the selected influencers and examining their social media images and practices from December 2019–March 2020. This process enabled me to keep up to date with the latest trends and examine the values of beauty exhibited throughout the Thai digital economy.

The texts and images revealed two distinct styles of beauty portrayal, consistently broadcast by influencers on Instagram, the first of which negotiated the trends signalling a Korean style of beauty, and the second the Westernisation of beauty ideals. For the Korean style, the looks mainly comprised light, glowing skin that appeared natural and flawless with a childlike quality. For the Western style, the looks mainly comprised the heavier use of foundation and face contouring with an emphasis on darker eye shadow. In this context, filters were also commonly used among selected participants, with the aim of enhancing the moods and tones of their overall looks. Among the six beauty influencers selected, two also participated in the interviews, while the other four were selected based on the results of the search engine. This was because those who participated in the interviews fitted the aforementioned criteria, and their images aligned with the trends of beauty practices representing the portrayal of Thai beauty ideals. Glaw et al. (2017) demonstrated that the examination of online visual images can provide “different layers of meaning [that] can be discovered as the method evokes deep emotions, memories, and ideas” (p. 1). These materials are important since they inform our understanding of practices relating to the construction of beauty portrayals broadcast by influencers on Instagram. Such practices contribute to the understanding of how online beauty culture in Thailand operates in contemporary Thai society.
In total, 42 Instagram images posted between December 2018 and March 2020 were analysed. Of these, 13 were screenshots of Instagram stories, with the remaining 29 captured from screenshots of Instagram images. Throughout the course of the fieldwork, I captured screenshots of each Instagram image and carefully examined the posts using the visual method of analysis (e.g., Rose, 2014; 2016). Rose (2014) stated that “visual materials are central to the dissemination of research results using some visual research methods” (p. 25). This description explains the important process through which selected Instagram images are circulated on Instagram. In addition, my engagement with Instagram extended into the examination of the same beauty-related content posted by the participants and shared on sites such as YouTube and Facebook pages. This usually involves an extended version of the influencers’ video tutorials in which they invite their followers to watch the full content on sites such as YouTube. However, the main focus of my analysis is the use of influencers’ Instagram materials, posted in a combination of English and Thai languages. In this context, the Instagram images comprise the curated displays of both local and international products representing the influencers’ practices when engaging with brands. The focus of their posts is shaped by the cultivation of beauty personas, ranging from casual day-to-day looks to glamorous lifestyles emphasising the portrayal of beauty practices reflecting the digital aspect of their work that informed my understanding of the beauty practices highlighted on Instagram.

**Method of Analysing Instagram Materials**

As mentioned, Rose (2016, p. 38) suggested that the site of production refers to how the image is created, such as the type of technologies used to construct such an image. For example, it is crucial to understand the kind of camera and the developing process used to make a particular photograph visually accessible to audiences (Rose, 2016, p. 40). The purpose of the visual research method is “not to assess their accuracy in revealing the real, but rather to evaluate the consequences of their specific [data sets]” (Rose, 2014, p. 27). Given this context, I carefully examined the ways in which participants constructed their personas and the methods through which they posted visual media images on Instagram. Through online observation, I discovered a consistent timeline that revealed how Thai beauty influencers post and share their visual Instagram images. All participants updated their stories and revealed highlights on a daily basis. However, the curation of beauty trends tended to be created twice to three times per week, while those who are highly popular created different styles and looks daily. It also became clear that participants applied the use of filters with the aim of brightening and enhancing their facial complexion – the subsequent images were publicised on Instagram profiles. These images were mostly modified and altered using the editing function.
provided by social media tools. This is in line with the findings of Hand (2018), who noted that social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram were “never a fixed state”, with images being constantly “altered” and “circulated” (p. 10) through algorithm software. In terms of understanding the production process of visual media on Instagram, it is important to highlight the way in which influencers construct their work. Specifically, the practice of applying makeup, the use of lighting, the recording process, the use of electronic devices, and so on (e.g., Rose, 2016). These practices enabled me to evaluate the performance and portrayal of beauty trends that reflect the dominant discourse of feminine beauty. In identifying their images, I selected between 10–15 posts that represent the curated display of beauty ideals. In particular, the enactment of beauty practices determined by the construction of images as well as the number of likes and comments influencers receive on Instagram and other social media platforms. After collecting the images, I combined the most-liked images from each of the influencers and examined their practices, including the way in which they cultivated beauty trends and represented their online beauty personas on Instagram.

As well as the site of production, I also took into account the site of image. According to Rose (2016), every image has its “technologies, social, and economic [components]” (p. 46). For example, the type of technology used by producers to create an image. Given this, she states, “a visual technology can be relevant to how an image is made but also how it travels and how it is displayed [online]” (Ibid., p. 38). This site of the image aspect is particularly relevant to how social media images are shared throughout social media platforms. Specifically, the social and economic aspects in these contexts represent the influencers’ style of posts, their engagement with brands, and the extent to which they generate income as part of sharing visual images on social media sites (Abidin, 2018). Taking these aspects into account allowed me to understand the different features of how and why beauty bloggers/influencers create images for broadcasting online. Given this, I noted that the dominant discourses of beauty and themes are specifically concerned with whiteness and tanned skin since these images tend to emerge as the dominant themes throughout this research. These aspects of social media images therefore informed my understanding of Thai beauty ideals examined throughout this paper.

Moving on from the site of the image, I also drew upon the site of circulation, which relates to how images travel from one place to another (Rose, 2016). Rose (2016) addresses the need to examine the mobility of images circulated on social media platforms, stating, “digital technologies are ubiquitous. They saturate everyday life” (p. 351). Examples include iMessages, WhatsApp,
Snapchat, Instagram, and Facebook photos, etc. (Ibid.). These platforms are often correlated, and the circulation of images allows social media users to share and disseminate them. Accordingly, I am particularly concerned with the circulation of social media images and how they are shared through Instagram to other social media platforms (Ibid.). It is apparent that most of the participants’ Instagram images are associated with the construction of their Facebook posts. The findings of this research also revealed that the use of Instagram stories is associated with other sites, such as YouTube, whereby followers can click on the “swipe up” function to see the remainder of influencers’ videos. These practices highlight which influencers’ Instagram images are circulated through social media platforms. In addition, Hand (2018, p. 9) discussed the process of “algorithmic” procedures that function through the front page of social media feeds and the challenges faced by researchers resulting from the redistribution of different social media image types. Despite this, I found the algorithm process on Instagram particularly useful and was able to discover similar types of social media content appearing on my news feeds and keep up to date with beauty influencers’ posts on a daily basis. I examined the ways in which they shared both still and moving images through their Instagram and other social media profiles. Examining such practices has enabled me to determine the originality of social media images and the extent to which they are circulated on social media. As Rose (2016) suggested, “thinking about this movement as a site of circulation is to focus on how and where that movement takes place” (p. 50). Engaging in the method I used has allowed me to consider how beauty influencers handle the “movement” of still and moving images on their social media sites. I followed them and subscribed to all their social media pages throughout the data collection process. I also created snapshots of still and moving Instagram images (e.g., story function), saving them into different folders. By saving these datasets, I could remain up to date with the beauty trends being circulated through online social media images that influencers curated and shared through social media platforms (Rose, 2016).

Finally, I drew upon work in relation to the site of audience to examine the ways in which Thai beauty influencers interact and engage with their followers on Instagram. In this context, it is important to note that the audiences of beauty influencers are likely to expand onto the global scale, involving a wide range of people such as “loyal followers, casual viewers, and chance watchers alike with the help of social media algorithms” (Abidin, 2018, p. 15). In understanding the site of audiencing, I noted that followers often used words such as sis or mom (terms used with someone whom they highly adore and respect) when referring to their influencers. In particular, Rose (2016) created a framework to understand the concept of audiences’ interpretation
of media texts and media products. She first discussed the “compositionality of the image”, which comprises different elements that influence how the picture is interpreted and seen by the audience (Rose, 2016, p. 53). She suggested that it is important to consider how the image is organised since it directly affects the perception of those exposed to it (Rose, 2016, p. 53). Prior to taking a snapshot of the Instagram data, I selected the images that received the most likes and comments and made a note of how and why they happened to garner significant popularity. I established that it was mainly due to the methods through which influencers constantly publish beauty-related content to meet beauty norms (i.e., publishing images of themselves in a Korean style known in Thai as “sai kao lee” or showcasing makeup in brownish/tanned skin tones, known in Thai as “sai for”). In addition, I discovered instability in the number of followers through Instagram profiles. While taking into account the engagement and relationships between influencers and followers, I also observed the issues causing beauty influencers to lose their likes and number of their followers and, thus, the opportunity to collaborate with sponsored content. These issues emerged in the form of captions, hashtags, consistency in posting beauty-related images, or the use of words that followers may have interpreted in a negative way (this is usually revealed through the use of a hashtag). These factors, therefore, have a significant impact on understanding the site of audiencing on Instagram profiles (Rose, 2016).

**Process of Selecting Interview Materials**

To understand the methodological starting point of this research, I begin by discussing the recruitment process and the method of gathering information before generating empirical data, including the selection of participants for interview. Adopting these practices, I interviewed a total number of 11 beauty influencers who are widely recognised for creating online beauty content on Instagram and other social media platforms. I focused specifically on young Thai women aged between 18–45 who lived and worked in Thailand at the time of this research. After collecting online visual materials, I identified two categories of online beauty influencers: (1) those emerging in the pre-social media era and widely recognised throughout the Internet discussion boards; and (2) those achieving fame in recent years through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube and refer to themselves as beauty blogger/beauty influencers on social media profiles. Both categories of influencers operate in a cross-platform way. However, this study focuses mainly on Instagram due to the visualisation of media images which also speak to the trends of beauty practices and the use of engagement with the platform during the research period. Since it is an image-based platform, influencers respond to the emerging trends by posting both still and moving images alongside the use of tags, hashtags, captions, @mentions, comments, and so on (Marwick,
Analysing an image-driven app would therefore allow me to understand how meanings are conveyed in the visual media environment (Rose, 2014). Among the participants under study, those who became famous prior to the social media era proved to have a significant number of followers and were widely recognised on several social media platforms. While those becoming famous more recently may have slightly fewer followers, both categories demonstrated their ability to negotiate and influence their followers through social media. To understand their practices, analysis must be conducted on the construction of social media images that engage through the elements of social sharing. In this context, Highfield and Leaver (2016) stated that “the visual is critical to story-telling and meaning-making, and on social media, this variously incorporates the original image, the edited and collaged media, and the appropriate visual” (p. 53). Therefore, to obtain the data, I adopted the same process as identified in the selection of Instagram materials and also used a search engine to identify Thai beauty influencers, some of whom I had followed prior to the emergence of Instagram. The overall data came from a combination of the Internet database and these existing followers on Instagram. The majority of these influencers appeared to be famous and are recognised for creating beauty-related content on other sites, such as YouTube, Facebook and TikTok. Through this process, it became clear that the construction of their posts was accompanied by the use of hashtags and tagging information with terms such as #Thaiblogger, #Thaibeautyinfluencers, #Influencer, #Beautyblogger. These uses of hashtag directed me to discover additional influencers on Instagram, broadening the scope of participants in this subject. In this vein, I used a search engine to identify the indicative hashtags of #Thaiblogger, #Thaibeautyinfluencers, #Influencer, and #Beautyblogger. I discovered a large number of influencers, all of whom incorporated the values of beauty on social media. At that point, I found it difficult to determine the appropriate group of beauty influencers for this research and therefore decided to narrow the scope of participants by setting aside those specifically referring to themselves as beauty bloggers/influencers on their Instagram profiles and recognised for disseminating beauty-related content in Thailand. A specific group of beauty influencers was selected for this study based on the following criteria: a) Thai citizens who engage and create beauty-related content and are based in Thailand; b) have a minimum of 10,000 followers; and c) engage and work with brands for commercialising purposes (indicated by hashtags and tagging information). Additionally, their responses to online engagement, such as comments, number of likes, the use of emojis, and other forms of social media interactions, were all taken into account. After determining and gathering online material, I then proceeded to recruit beauty influencers to participate in the interviews. During this process, I initially sent direct messages to over 20 selected participants on Instagram from December 2018–April 2019. The majority of these participants
posted their Line ID on the Instagram pages (a similar platform to WhatsApp), allowing me to add and send a message to them directly. In the message, I introduced myself and stated the purpose of my PhD project. This process was particularly useful since all participants read and acknowledged the message I sent. The majority of participants responded in a positive manner and showed interest in participating in the project. Two of these influencers directly stated that they had no interest in participating in the project and preferred not to engage in an interview. I then contacted my friends, requesting them to put me in touch with Thai beauty influencers, particularly those recognised for creating online beauty content on Instagram. These were mainly high school friends who post images of widely-recognised beauty influencers on their social media profiles. I thought this would give me a good opportunity to be put in contact with these influencers. During this process, my friends passed on the influencers’ Line details and provided links to their social media profiles. I was given contact to various types of influencers, enabling me to discover the enactment of their practices. However, for the purposes of this study, I decided to narrow down the contacts by selecting only those who refer to themselves as beauty influencers on their Instagram profiles and contacted three beauty influencers through direct messaging. I quickly befriended these influencers on my personal Facebook page and followed them on their Instagram profiles. After introducing myself and informing them that I was contacting them through our mutual friends, they all agreed to be interviewed. After arranging a suitable date and time for the interviews, I shared the details of this research with the participants. Contacting participants through my own network of friends has enabled me to develop positive relationships with them, and they were willing to share more inside information during the interview. This process has also helped to extend my own network of friends on my social media space.

From the 20 participants selected, 11 agreed to be interviewed. Four agreed to be interviewed face-to-face, and the remainder through Skype. Among the 11 participants, two are recognised throughout the Thai social media scene as being highly popular social media influencers with close to 1,000,000 followers on Instagram. The remaining nine engage specifically in creating online beauty content with between 7,000 and 300,000 followers. While the majority of participants were cisgender women, I managed to interview two Thai trans women, who provided significant insight into understanding the different perspectives of the Thai beauty industry. Given this, most of the participants considered the practice of creating online beauty content as a full-time career, while others were in the process of establishing their own beauty brands in the Thai market.
List of Beauty Influencers

As mentioned in the above section, the empirical data in this study consisted of a combination of Instagram image analysis and the use of semi-structured interviews involving 11 participants widely recognised for creating online beauty content on Instagram and other social media platforms. As summarised in the methodological approach section, the details of each influencer interviewed during the data collection process are presented as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nisamane_nutt or commonly known as Nutt (770k followers on Instagram)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nutt is a well-known Thai trans woman who emerged onto the Internet scene as a net idol through Dek-D.com and Pantip.com discussion boards in the early 2000s (e.g., Abidin &amp; Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). As a Thai Internet idol in both digital and mainstream media, Nutt is an example of someone who has successfully transformed herself into a reputable beauty influencer in the Thai social media context. Since rising to fame as a beauty influencer, she has attained a large number of followers on all her social media pages. At present, Nutt’s Instagram profile consists of over 770k followers. Her defining characteristic is the ability to create content and broadcast in different ranges of makeup and lifestyles, specifically relating to beauty, fashion, travel, and food. Nutt’s content is typically associated with endorsements of beauty and cosmetic products, emphasising several styles and looks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alie.blackcobra (352k followers on Instagram)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alie.blackcobra, also known in Thai as Toon, is a widely-recognised Thai trans woman who consistently engages in creating beauty-related content on Instagram. As friends, she and Nutt are often seen curating beauty-related content and feature in various types of cultural productions widely publicised on social media. At present, she is a shared owner of the Zhe cosmetics beauty brand, which markets various styles of cosmetic products such as foundation, powder, blushers, and lipsticks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Fahsarka (631k followers on Instagram)**
Fah Sarika, also known as Fah, is recognised as a Thai mainstream celebrity and former singer who emerged onto the social media scene through the creation of her YouTube channel. She is often seen portraying various beauty practices on Instagram. Several of her Instagram posts also showcase the curation of her lifestyle, aligning with the trends of beauty influencers’ practices. Fah is known for her distinctive facial appearance due to recent plastic surgery procedures to reshape the size of her jawbones. This makeover process has captured the attention of her followers and fans. She consistently promotes her Internet celebrity status through the creation of branded personas with her business partners.

**Tyffyt (25k followers on Instagram)**
Tyffyt, also known in Thai as Tip, is a well-recognised Thai blogger/influencer famous for her role as a brand ambassador for Suwalsoo, a Korean cosmetic brand. During the interview process, she detailed her sponsored trip to Korea, undergoing eye plastic surgery as part of her brand partnership agreement. On her Instagram profile, she consistently engages in product reviews, which she highlighted during the interview. These product reviews give her the opportunity to receive monetary gains.

**Ae_bong (31.2k followers on Instagram)**
Ae_bong, also known by her nickname Ae, is a Thai beauty influencer, very much like others who consistently engage in product reviews. Ae’s Instagram photos mainly consist of the cultivation of beauty personas that align her with both local and international beauty brands.

**Pariyinwonderland (35k followers on Instagram)**
Pariyinwonderland, also known by her nickname Prae, is a former 2009 Thai supermodel contestant. As a former model, she captures significant attention from her followers through both mainstream and social media. She is known for creating fashion, beauty, travel, and lifestyle posts with a wide variety of looks. The prominent feature of her Instagram persona is its cultural production, involving the combination of both Korean and Western styles of beauty. Prae is also consistently updating her Instagram story on a daily basis and offers insight into the Thai online beauty industry.
**Maynessa.k (12.4k followers on Instagram)**

Maynessa.k, also known by her nickname May, is a Thai beauty influencer emerging onto the Thai social media scene in recent years. At the time of the interview, she was a young university graduate sharing stories of how she came to create beauty-related content on YouTube and gained attention throughout the Thai online beauty industry. May’s persona draws on the style of Korean celebrities – her Instagram profile and YouTube channel are often seen to promote this type of look.

**Pekkytheangel (15.8k followers on Instagram)**

Pekkytheangel, also known by her nickname Pekky, is a former flight attendant who creates various styles and promotes beauty personas on Instagram. Since resigning from her full-time job as a flight attendant, she has transformed herself into a full-time beauty blogger/beauty influencer, enabling her to establish an online business by creating her own beauty brand. She provided insight into the process of becoming a beauty influencer and the rate card that details how the beauty blogging business operates within the Thai beauty industry.

**Onnbaby (52.1k followers on Instagram)**

Onnbaby, also known by her nickname Onn, is a widely-recognised Thai beauty influencer known for creating several styles or looks on Instagram. Presently, her Instagram profile consists of several lifestyle posts showing images of herself on the beach, appearing to mimic those on magazine covers. She is also the owner of the flawlessmethailand makeup brand, which markets various types of beauty and cosmetic products. Onn is among the first group of Thai beauty influencers to create her own brand, capturing attention throughout the Thai beauty industry.

**Praew (298k followers on Instagram, pseudonym and has requested that her details remain confidential)**

**Ann (300k followers on Instagram, pseudonym and has requested that her details remain confidential)**
Nine of the participant influencers mentioned above gave permission for their real name to be publicised. The remaining two participants requested that the information remain confidential, and therefore pseudonyms are used. As can be observed, each of these Thai beauty influencers has their own characteristics and style of beauty practices. They routinely construct their online personas through still images, videos, and live streaming. They also receive comments and emojis, creating story functions that portray various styles of beauty practices on Instagram. Each of the influencers performs different types of beauty practices on social media. While some are known for creating Korean and natural everyday styles, others are recognised for introducing international brands that promote Western beauty practices. All possess the ability to influence young Thai women to perform similar kinds of beauty practices and have accumulated large numbers of followers on social media. Such practices speak to the trends of feminine beauty played out in contemporary Thai society. In particular, these Thai beauty influencers represent the dominant discourses of feminine beauty engagement in Thailand, which played out through the construction of social media images negotiating the combination of both Western and Northeast Asian beauty styles. Both trends are consistently constructed and disseminated among the selected influencers analysed in this study. The construction of these practices points to the significant development of the emerging trends which shape the enactment of beauty discourses and monetisation opportunities among young women in modern Thailand.

The Use of In-Depth Qualitative Interviews

The semi-structured interview format is used in this study to learn from young Thai beauty influencers and the way in which they accumulate followers and establish their online business through social media scenes. In doing so, I drew upon Kvale’s (2009) “guide” to the design, analysis, and verification of the qualitative research interview. Kvale (1996) defines the qualitative interview as “an attempt to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, and uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanation” (p. 1). This type of interview method allowed me to learn about the experiences of Thai beauty influencers and the way in which they strive for online fame through the social media setting. To understand influencers’ practices, the interview question covered the influencers’ personal lives to elicit responses on how they became beauty bloggers/beauty influencers; their inspirations in creating online beauty content; the duration of their fame; the way in which they collaborate with brands, their relationships with followers, and so on. The data were gathered through informal conversations with the interviewees (recorded and subsequently transcribed). While the use of
semi-structured interviews enabled me to gain insight and a deeper understanding of how Thai beauty influencers engage and perform in an online setting, the process presents certain challenges. As Adams (2015) noted, “semi-structured interviews are time-consuming, labour intensive, and require interviewer sophistication” (p. 493). However, the use of semi-structured interviews is the most appropriate research method for this study since it allows participants to open up about their ideas with the intention of encouraging “researchers to give voice to personal, experimental, and emotional aspects of existence” (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2011, p. 12). Thus, this method permits researchers to be flexible in setting their own agenda and addressing the issues important to them (Kvale, 1996).

**Interviewing Procedure**

Upon conducting the interviews, I studied the individual components of each participant through their Instagram profiles to contemplate their practices in establishing an online business. Particular attention was paid to the practice of collaborating with brands to help inform my understanding of the cultivation of beauty work. The constructions of social media images were prominent on influencers’ Instagram profiles. This suggested the communicative efforts involved in achieving successful economic outcomes, which revealed influencers’ career trajectory, enabling them to establish and expand their online business on sites such as Instagram and other social media platforms. In this context, I scheduled face-to-face interviews with four of the study participants in December 2018. All of the interviews were conducted in Bangkok, Thailand. Two of the face-to-face interviews were conducted at a quiet restaurant in the heart of Bangkok, and the other two in a department store café. These locations were selected by mutual agreement. When agreeing to the locations, I ensured that all locations were easy to access, with an environment conducive to interviews. Each interview took between one and two hours, with the conversations digitally recorded using electronic devices. Prior to the interview process, I explained my research plan to the participants. I began the interview by asking the participants some broad questions to allow them to explain how they became known throughout social media (e.g., what made them decide to become a beauty blogger/how they came to create beauty-related content, etc.). During the process, I tried to ensure I asked open-ended questions to develop the conversation. (e.g., tell me about your experience of becoming a beauty influencer, how did you start, and what inspired you to create beauty content online). Both face-to-face and online conversations were informal. Participants detailed their experiences prior to becoming well-known on the social media scene and first brand collaboration. I then moved on to more specific questions, highlighting trends,
styles of beauty, the ways in which they engage with brands, and their future projections regarding online beauty work. The participants provided details of their online engagement in generating social media activities and explained the processes, practices, and strategies involved in accumulating social and economic capital on Instagram. In particular, one of the participants I met for lunch at a restaurant made me feel comfortable about asking her questions and was very relaxed and eager to respond. At that point, my perspective and knowledge of the business of beauty blogging was very limited due to a lack of experience in the industry. However, listening to the stories of these Thai beauty influencers during the interviews gave me a new perspective on the emerging online beauty culture in Thailand. I learnt more about their online businesses and the relationships they have with brands and followers. In particular, I was fascinated by the desires and passions of these beauty influencers, reflected in the effort they put into creating social media content. In addition, engaging with participants in a physical setting enabled me to see their facial expressions, reactions towards the topics, and body language, resulting in a positive interviewing experience. In this vein, the participants often referred to their childhood and life prior to creating online beauty content. Such practices informed, “the value found in the complementarity of knowledge gained from research that uses the insider perspective to provide a concrete grounding in the research problem in a particular context” (Van deVen, 2007, as cited in Salmons, 2018, p. 5). During the interviews, participants often reflected on their experiences and the pressures they had to deal with since becoming beauty influencers. Specifically, the complexities here are particularly concerned with low level of recognition on social media, which affected the establishment of an online career. This led to the issues in strategising social media engagement to meet social media expectations. The participants also pointed to several challenges relating to the discussions in this study. These include the precarious conditions of online work, the commodification of maintaining a youthful and desirable appearance, the extent to which influencers are being authentic in digitally mediated spaces, and so on. All these concerns revealed the tensions involved in labour processes and the influencers’ practices, which, in this case, were described as both rewarding and challenging. The interviews enable me to gain deeper insight into the complexities of engaging in the online beauty industry and the extent to which Thai beauty influencers respond to the emerging trends that contribute to understanding the cultural production of the influencer industry. Although the face-to-face interviews gave me useful insight, the online interviews provided useful discussions to enhance my understanding of the online beauty influencer industry. In this context, Chambers (2013) noted that “sites are designed to display real-world identities; this doesn’t mean that it is impossible to invent an online identity, but, importantly, the site tools encourage us to communicate features of our offline selves” (p. 62).
The use of a webcam enabled me to see the participants’ facial interactions and listen to real-life experiences that informed the way in which they collaborate with brands online, given that “the site tools encourage us to communicate features of our offline selves” (Chambers, 2013, p. 63). Boyd (2011) suggested that constructing relationships online allows us to absorb the “behavioural norms” in understanding “imagined audience [behaviour]” (Boyd, 2011, as cited in Chambers, 2013, p. 63). While the “imagined audience” may be implied as friends with whom we communicate online, in this context, this terminology may also be applied to the construction of online relationships I have formed with beauty influencers (Boyd, 2011). By employing these practices, conversations went smoothly, and all participants openly discussed the strategies used to create online content, current trends, and their plans for future engagement.

Savage (2013, p. 5) discussed the “social life of methods”, involving the examination of theoretical questions relating to social practices. The method allows researchers to engage in a wide array of practices when conducting social research projects. In understanding this context, the study participants provided a critical perspective on the labour associated with the construction of beauty work through social media sites, such as Instagram. This aspect of social practice extended my knowledge of the beauty blogging business to gain an understanding of the influencer’s engagement with brands and followers, the construction of beauty work, the ways in which online personas are cultivated to generate income, and so on. The visual analysis method for examining Instagram material is discussed in the following section.

**Ethical Considerations**

Various ethical considerations and issues occurred during the fieldwork. Prior to conducting the fieldwork, I submitted an ethical review application which included the participants’ consent, overseas travel safety, and security risk assessment forms. The Social Sciences & Arts C-REC of the University of Sussex approved my ethical review application, and I was granted an ethical review certificate. I included the informed consent form when contacting the participants, stating that I would ensure their privacy and confidentiality during my research. I explained the procedures and the important aspects of the information sheet to the participants, and I reiterated that the interview was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw at any time. I also informed the participants that the interview was to be digitally recorded for educational purposes. In this context, Beninger (2018) stated that “doing research ethically is not about finding a set of rules to follow, nor is it about completing a checklist; rather, researchers need to work through a set of context-specific decisions on a case-by-case basis and be guided by core ethical principles” (p. 3).
I critically reflected on the “ethical principles” applied throughout the course of my fieldwork. Beninger (2018) outlined “ethical principles” as understanding the practices of “recruiting, collecting, generating, and analysing data” (p. 3). I followed these procedures, informing participants of the interview process and the use of their publicly available data on Instagram. Gaining insight directly from the interviews with participants has enabled me to learn from their real-life experiences and the process involved in establishing an online business, and how the influencers negotiate beauty trends and practices through social media. These practices demonstrate that human information can be accessed “through interactions with that individual or with private information that identifies that person” (LeCompte, 2008, p. 805). This is particularly useful because it represents the human interactivity that facilitates social interaction, such as between the influencers and me.

The participants in this study were selected by sending them direct messages on Instagram. While this technique has enabled me to successfully recruit participants, I also encountered situations where potential participants refused to be interviewed, claiming they were away or did not want to engage in such practices. In this instance, I respected their decision and continued to look for other participants who would agree to take part in the research. Those who agreed to be interviewed were very positive and friendly during the conversations, and this helped to facilitate a sense of friendship and connectedness between the influencers and myself. However, I was concerned about meeting the participants in person, my reaction, and how I would ensure the flow of overall interaction. Reade (2020) stated that approaching participants from the perspective of “openness, kindness, and mutuality” (p. 6) helps to maintain positive relationships between participants, particularly when it applies to face-to-face interaction. To overcome these concerns, I carefully considered this approach by maintaining a socially interactive process and providing the opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences of engaging in the influencer industry. Overall, I found this technique to be effective, and participants were happy to speak about their experiences, helping the communication to run smoothly throughout the interview procedure.

The interview process was important because it informed the embodied practices of how the influencers created and maintained consistent online images through the Thai social media scene. During the interviews, participants shared different aspects of their lives, shaping my overall understanding of an emerging online culture that reveals the specific contexts examined in this study. Crucially, scholars have raised concerns regarding the privacy of online data, suggesting the use of pseudonyms throughout the research process (Allmark et al., 2009). In this study, I have
used pseudonyms for those who wished to remain anonymous, and the real names stated on their Instagram profiles for participants who agreed to waive their anonymity for research purposes only. This is because they are widely known and active in the public sphere and have given their full consent. Accordingly, I reassured the participants during the interviews that the use of their online information would be examined for educational purposes only.

It is also important to consider ethical considerations when examining social media images on Instagram. Scholars have discussed the extent to which social media images should be shared, given that the information is publicly visible on the Internet (Beninger, 2018). In particular, Beninger (2018, p. 6) pointed out that these practices can be viewed using two different perspectives: one is that the platform owns the data, and therefore, data are available for the widespread use of social sharing. On the other hand, it has been noted that it is the content creators who take control over the usage of their social media images and have full ownership of their posts (Beninger, 2018). This raises concerns about the extent to which I can use social media images to analyse my research findings. In addition, Hand (2018, p. 10) stated that social media researchers are becoming more exposed to online visual data available through screens. In taking these arguments into consideration, I have decided to keep original images that reveal information about Thai beauty influencers, given that their profiles are publicly accessible online. However, I carefully followed the ethical guidelines and upheld the ethical principles during the overall process of data collection and media analysis (Beninger, 2018).

**Conclusion**

For this study, I interviewed 11 beauty influencers and examined 42 visual outputs on Instagram. The qualitative research method was employed, comprising the analysis of Instagram materials and the use of semi-structured interviews. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I examined the influencers’ strategies and their use of techniques in relation to the way in which Thai beauty influencers work and collaborate with brands. These practices were particularly useful since they pointed to the dominant discourses of beauty that negotiate the significant trends in Thai society. In addition, the use of the qualitative method has enabled me to examine how beauty practices perform, engage, and interact with influencers, brands, and followers on Instagram (Salmons, 2016). This method has demonstrated how the online digital economy operates and the overall labour practices involved. Consistent with the labour practices, the visual analysis results of Instagram images have led to the discovery of different aspects of beauty trends that emphasise the representative forms of an online beauty community. The construction of these practices showcased various aspects of beauty trends, which provided cultural meaning in understanding
the shifting responses of the emergence of online business, curated, and performed by Thai beauty influencers. The curative display of influencers’ performances has been extended into examining the emerging trends, shaping the idealisation of beauty practices in Thailand. Through a combination of interviews and the analysis of Instagram materials, the following chapters present the findings specifically concerned with the business of beauty blogging (Chapter Four), authenticity and realness (Chapter Five), and discourses of beauty and whiteness (Chapter Six).
Chapter Four: The Business of Beauty Blogging

This chapter discusses the business of beauty blogging and examines the emerging cultural phenomenon of Thai beauty influencers, who have gained recognition and developed an increasingly monetised form of business on Instagram (e.g., Abidin, 2016a, 2018; Marwick, 2013b). This includes the integration practices of circulating Instagram posts and stories that extend the commercialised media messages, resulting in the accumulation of fame and large numbers of followers on social media (e.g., Abidin, 2016). These accumulations have assured the outcome of maintaining their Internet Celebrity status throughout the Thai social media scene. By outlining these practices, this chapter discusses aesthetic labour and the forms involved in the commodification of online beauty businesses that point to the trajectory of establishing online careers (e.g., Duffy & Hund, 2015; Scharff, 2015). The chapter draws on a range of discourses concerned with self-direction and the capability to maintain an online business that reflects the neoliberal subject of femininity (Scharff, 2015). The entrepreneurial practices in this context are situated in precarious and complex structures, characterised by freelance or agency-mediated work and people who are largely self-employed. The constructions of these social media practices are driven by capital accumulation strategies and forms of labour that can be commodified and monetised. This chapter aims to answer the question: What is the structure of blogging as a business, and how do Thai beauty influencers participate in this? To date, little research has been done on aesthetic labour and the way in which online work has given rise to the beauty blogging business in Thailand. Therefore, it is important to examine the type of work contributing towards the phenomenon of an online career in the beauty industry. Drawing upon the concept of aesthetic labour, this chapter argues that the business of beauty blogging and the marketability of establishing an online career promotes the understanding of labour in relation to feminine beauty within the Thai digital economy. In addition, the chapter argues that the labour conditions of beauty practices are premised on the enactment of productive creativity concerned with the embodiment of beauty trends, which reflects the significant portrayal of beauty practices that have become increasingly available online. The enactment of these social media practices demonstrates a gendered relationship, which shape the portrayal of beauty norms among beauty influencers in Thailand. It points to the idealisation of beauty, negotiated and practised through the representation of media images and changing trends. Specifically, it promotes understanding of both contemporary beauty ideals and the idealisation of beauty, playing out through the circulation of social media images among beauty influencers in Thailand.
Through a discussion of the qualitative interviews and visual analysis of the Instagram images, the first section of the chapter introduces the functions of business opportunities and examines the categorisation of beauty influencers and the way in which they have risen to fame on social media. The aesthetic, immaterial, and emotional labour of online beauty works are examined, followed by a discussion on the different features and strategies employed by influencers to promote themselves on Instagram through the use of both still images and the story function. The second section investigates the way in which beauty influencers collaborate with brands, driven by capital accumulation strategies and forms of labour that can be commodified and monetised. In this instance, I examine the practices of product placement, dividing them into three subcategories: the construction of online paid partnerships; before-and-after practices; direct monetisation through product placement and reviews. These strategies will be elaborated upon in the following sections. In particular, I offer an analysis of how beauty influencers participate in online work, focusing on the use of their strategies in brand placement and how they engage with the advertorial formats of their Instagram posts. In the final section of the chapter, the aspirational narrative of a travelling lifestyle is examined to understand the aspects of the influencer’s life, depicting their marketable personas manifested in the genre of travelling.

Section I The Rise of Beauty Blogging

This section discusses the rise in beauty influencers and the features of an online form of business that illustrates the way in which participants negotiate and work with brands. Based on the information gathered during the interviews, I discovered that the phenomenon of an emerging online culture in Thailand can be traced back to the late 1990s to early 2000s. Through the use of Internet discussion boards such as Dek-d.com, Pantip.com, Bloggang.com, and Jeban.com, users posted and shared information on beauty and cosmetic products on the Internet (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Guru Club, 2012; Juntiwasarakij, 2016). Through the practice of showing product reviews and experiences, several participants in this were originally recognised as “Internet idols” (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). However, the level of popularity and their online recognition varied based on their experiences on the Internet scene. The phenomenon of the Internet idol has also been used to classify certain groups of people within the Thai context.

During the pre-social media era, the phenomenon of Internet idols emerged throughout Thai schools and universities as a fan-base strategy, often represented by those considered to have outstanding personalities, such as athletes, prom queens, cheerleaders, etc. (Kemasingki, 2016). Originally, the term “idol” referred to an extremely successful person in their chosen field. This
success may lead to adoration among certain groups of people (Putnark, 2016, as cited in Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 96). Abidin (2018) referred to these groups of people as having “extraordinary achievements, talented skills, or [a] prominent position in society” (p. 5). Given this, the interview data revealed that their photos were often being taken and shared on discussion boards such as Dek-D.com, Pantip.com, Bloggang.com, and Jeban.com by people, including high-school students, who admired them. Hence, Abidin and Limkangvanmongkol (2018, p. 96) noted that the first generations of net idols were recognised primarily for their appearance, makeover skills, and certain types of accomplishments within the school community. As they put it, “the first generation of net idols were often conscientiously catalogued and promoted by popular media and even memorialised as lovely schoolgirls” (Guruclub, 2012, as cited in Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 96). Prior research has categorised Thai Internet idols as old-fashioned idols, teen idols, artistic idols, and so on (Kemasingki, 2016). While previous studies have identified various types of idols, this chapter focuses specifically on those transforming themselves into beauty bloggers and influencers.

During the interviews with participants, those rising to online fame over a decade ago used similar phrases, such as, “I started creating beauty content through online beauty discussion boards such as Jeban.com, Pantip.com, and Bloggang.com, long before social media emerged” or “people followed and knew me from Jeban.com and called me an Internet idol due to my looks” and “I have always had a passion for beauty and love buying makeup products for review”. During the interviews, several participants revealed that they had developed an online business through “the narrative of career passion” (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 4), resulting from the use of Internet discussion boards on the Thai Internet scene. These women utilised online forums as a platform to share their experiences of beauty and cosmetic products, which in turn, offered several pathways for them to become known and gain online recognition on social media. The construction of online discussion forum exemplifies the concept of “entrepreneurial subjectivities” (Scharff, 2015, p. 1), which revealed how these women developed the use of online platforms, that led them to establishing a career. This online trajectory resonates with the entrepreneurial practices reflecting the working conditions in the online beauty industry and the complexity of creative work that takes place across social media. As Elias et al. (2017) noted, “to be an entrepreneur means that one is forward thinking with a vision of how self-starting in one media platform can lead to another” (p. 279).
In this context, Nutt, who has managed to gain up to 610k followers (at the time of writing) on Instagram and over 1.5m followers on Facebook, stated during the interview that she has been primarily known as a net idol through Dek-D.com and Pantip.com discussion boards since the mid-2000s. As a trans woman, Nutt created her own channel on Facebook and YouTube, where she broadcasts herself in a wide range of makeup styles, that inspired large numbers of followers on social media. The embodiment of her beauty practices ranges from the curative display of showcasing everyday makeup styles to revealing behind-the-scenes images of herself undergoing plastic surgery procedures. She also presents her day-to-day activities, which enabled her to achieve Internet Celebrity status throughout Thai social media. To Nutt, the curative display of different forms of beauty portrayal represents her efforts in generating online beauty personas that, in turn, enable her to earn an income and follow the trajectory to online career development. In addition, the instructions she provides on social media offer an opportunity for her followers to engage with beauty trends and enhance their skills in engaging similar practices. The portrayal of social media images provides a framework for understanding the process of physical alteration that negotiates the significance of beauty culture in Thailand. While Nutt provided detailed explanations from the pre-social media era perspectives, Pekky, on the other hand, explained how she found the opportunity to engage and collaborate with brands by cultivating online beauty content on social media. Given this, she said, “I remember filming myself when still working as a flight attendant. I feel it is important to create and get content out there, particularly throughout online platforms” (Pekky, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Ae detailed the trajectory that enabled her to become recognised on social media. Given this, she added, “I started creating a page with less than 100 followers, and it took me years to become recognised by brands and followers. I would say that I am very consistent with all my posts. Fame has never come easy, but all the hard work paid off” (Ae, translated from Thai). These narratives reflect the important starting point in the emergence of an online business which enabled these beauty influencers to construct the enactment of beauty work leading them to pursue an online career. These practices revealed that the construction of beauty work is consistent with “the labour of social media creation” (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 4), which represents the economic conditions of the online beauty industry. In this case, the practices of applying makeup, the demonstration of promoting beauty tutorials, and the curative displays of step-by-step process in engaging in product reviews are all contribute to understanding the aesthetic labour activities employed by these young Thai women. This aspect of social media practices requires women to “discipline themselves in conventional hetero-feminine ways” (Banet-Weiser, 2017, p. 267). The practices mentioned above are repetitively constructed in ways that enable Thai beauty influencers to negotiate the trends and showcase the overall concept of beauty
exhibited in Thai society. It is the construction of promoting beauty trends in various uses of techniques that enable influencers to build social and economic capital. Thus, leading to the entrepreneurial trends of disseminating beauty-related content throughout social media platforms.

**The Aesthetic Labour of Online Beauty Work**

In understanding the labour process of online beauty work, it is important to identify the business features which constitute the online working conditions, detailing the way in which participants negotiate and collaborate with brands on Instagram. The proliferation of online beauty images and the embodiment of beauty trends point to the increasing development of aesthetic labour conditions operating across a variety of online platforms (e.g., Elias et al., 2017). These media images entail the construction of social media practices that encourage women to manage their overall appearance representing “the body of work” (Wissinger, 2015, p. 4), pointing to the ideal concept of beauty exhibited in Thai society. This includes the promotional materials used in creating “how-to” beauty tutorial videos which showcase the influencer’s performance in promoting discourses of beauty on social media. Understanding aesthetic labour in this context involves the overall process of “social interaction” as well as “the materialities, emotions, and personal experiences that shape [the production of overall beauty] process [of work]” (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020, p. 122). Through their performative displays on digitised media space, all participants highlighted that they heavily engage with the construction of creating online beauty content across Instagram and other social media platforms. This includes posting still and moving images, creating video content, and the use of the story function that enables followers to witness different aspects of influencers’ lives and snippets of their beauty practices in real time. The importance of labour in this context suggests an entrepreneurial process of work that extends beyond the traditional service industry (e.g., Duffy, 2015; Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020). Accordingly, it can be said that the labour process in the Thai online beauty industry requires influencers to work on themselves in ways that shape their appearance, that in turn enables them to become recognised by brands and followers on social media. Thus, aesthetic labour in this context demonstrates the process through which “[influencers] rely on themselves not only maintaining their body and image but also exposing these ‘behind-the-scenes’ practices to their audiences” (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020, p.123). Here, the focus on aesthetic labour provides critical understanding of the commodification process of online working conditions, which positions influencers in a precarious situation that can lead to the establishment of an online business (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020). Lazar (2017, p. 51) provided useful insight into understanding aesthetic labour regarding women and beauty work. She stated that “women, as part of
heterosexual femininity, are expected to undertake seriously aesthetic labour on their bodies, which involves time, money, skill, effort, physical discomfort, and sometimes even health risks” (Lazar, 2017, p. 51). This aspect of aesthetic labour corresponds to the practices of beauty influencers in Thailand since they are widely recognised for curating various types of beauty trends that demonstrate the embodiment of beauty portrayed through various personas. As previously mentioned, the construction of beautified media images is usually conveyed through the creation of promotional material such as “how-to”, and other types of short videos consistently curated and performed for influencers to attract fame and maintain their popularity on social media. In this instance, Prae revealed the importance of curating beauty displays, stating that “I tend to receive a large number of likes when I showcase the latest trends in beauty brands and products, so I would say it is definitely important to be on trend and consistently keep myself up to date with beauty practices. Having the ability to showcase various beauty skills has allowed me to maintain online popularity in the influencer industry” (Prae, translated from Thai). In addition, participants revealed the mechanics of the commercialisation process and provided insight into understanding how they engage with brands. Given this, Ae added, “It is important for influencers to establish fame and popularity on all social media platforms since this is the first thing that determines the influencers’ career opportunities. Brands tend to contact me through DM and Line, the details of which can be found on my Instagram profile. I feel that the greater my popularity, the higher the possibility of me negotiating an influencer fee, so it is important to consistently maintain my appearance” (Ae, translated from Thai). Ann, another participant, added, “as I continued to broadcast various styles of beauty, I noticed my popularity rising through the Internet discussion boards. People started to recognise me from my posts and continued to share my images which really helped me to become known on various platforms” (Ann, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Toon stated that “I feel it is important to look good because it is the looks that attract people out there” (Toon, translated from Thai). These insights speak to the labour conditions of social media practices, which reflects the aesthetic standards of feminine beauty increasingly played out in the Thai digital economy. The embodiment of beauty trends provides critical understanding of the aesthetic values of beauty, which includes the overall narrative of beautified media images that negotiate the significance beauty trends in the Thai digital economy. Aesthetic labour in this context, therefore, exemplifies the rise in prominence of beauty appearances specifically concerned with the development of bodily display, online personas, dissemination of beauty content on various platforms as well as the constant negotiation with brands contributing towards the monetisation process (e.g., Elias et al., 2017). In particular, aesthetic labour in this context describes the commodification process, which requires influencers
to respond to the increasing demand for maintaining a precarious and complex structure throughout the Thai digital economy. As Entwistle and Wissinger (2006) put it, “it is not just organisations for whom aesthetic labour is ‘hardware’; workers seeking employment in aesthetic industries or occupations might also come to see their bodies as the ‘hardware’ and perform aesthetic labour to gain/maintain employment” (p. 781). Therefore, adhering to the aesthetic standards of beauty represents a major contribution to the work carried out throughout the Thai influencer industry.

The Narrative of Aspirational and Immaterial Labour of Online Space

In understanding the creative work of the online industry, Duffy (2015, p. 451) provided an important framework for the concept of “aspirational labour”. This type of labour has been defined as sets of “forward-looking practices, carefully orchestrated, and an entrepreneurial form of creative cultural production” (Duffy 2015, p. 446). This statement can be used to describe beauty influencers’ practices since it reveals the creative use of strategies that points to how they work and engage with brands. As Duffy (2015, p. 446) put it, “aspirational labourers seek to mark themselves as creative producers who will one day be compensated for their talents”. In this vein, the performance of influencers in negotiating the aspirational narrative of engaging in social practices, characterised by the constant negotiation of self-branding techniques, is being increasingly played out on Instagram (e.g., Marwick, 2015). In particular, emphasis is placed on the influencers’ eagerness to negotiate and maintain their Internet celebrity status on social media. In this context, Prae detailed, “being a professional model for the last 10 years, people always associate me with fashion, and I have tried to change that perception by blending my image with the creation of beauty work so that I can extend my potential and become recognised by brands” (Prae, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Toon also said that “being known as a beauty influencer, I have always made sure I adapt my image to match the current beauty trends” (Toon, translated from Thai). Ann also stated that “I have always had a passion for beauty and love putting it out there for my followers to see. I always get questions on different styles of beauty which I think really helps to extend my potential” (Ann, translated from Thai). For these beauty influencers, the curative dissemination of online beauty personas plays a major role in the monetisation process, enabling them to reveal aspirational narratives which extend their brand engagement with followers throughout social media (Duffy, 2015). The aspirational narratives in this context provide critical values, which represents the negotiation of cultural trends that explains the concept of “entrepreneurial brand devotion” taking place online (Duffy, 2015, p. 451). The term “devotion” in this context is used to describe the practices of “women [who] are uniquely social
and are willing to promote branded goods” despite the uncertain structure of online working conditions throughout the online digital economy (Duffy, 2015, p. 451).

Given the rise in prominence of the increasing demand for creative work environments, the concept of immaterial labour also provides a critical understanding of how social relationships are enacted and performed among influencers and followers throughout social media. This aspect of online working conditions is concerned with influencers’ practices in “producing immaterial goods such as a service, cultural product, knowledge, and communication” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 209). It also points to the increasing development of ideas in the creation of “informational content” (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 133) disseminated online. The cultivation of ideas and values can thus be applied directly to a wide range of skills involved in the overall process of reinforcing beauty trends, extending business opportunities on Instagram. Understanding immaterial labour in this context involves the overall process of developing different aspects of digital media production that entail a wide array of beauty work, representing the cultural facets of the influencer industry (Lazzarato, 1996). In this vein, the concept of “cultural content” also provides an alternative to understanding the commodification processes involved in the generation of branded content, which speaks to the practice of engaging and collaborating with brands on social media (Lazzarato, 1996). In this context, Lazzarato (1996) stated that immaterial labour is specifically concerned with “the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumers norms, and, more strategically, public opinion” (p. 133). Therefore, examining immaterial labour in the context of social media highlights the widespread demand for the curation of online media images, exemplifying cultural aspects of branded content which, in turn, enables influencers to generate social and economic capital online. Regarding the influencers’ practices, Pekky revealed insight into understanding the strategic use of techniques among influencers, adding that “almost every piece of online content is strategically planned by either the clients or influencers themselves. I would say that this includes everything we see from makeup/no makeup looks to revealing behind the scenes images and the portrayal of makeup styles, all of which entail the strategic process of cultivating popularised media content on social media” (Pekky, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Ae added that “I always come up with new content to post as it generates the production of my image and fosters positive relationships and outcomes” (Ae, translated from Thai). As can be observed, incorporating the immaterial aspect of labour requires a specific set of skills, which extends the potential of influencers on social media. It is the type of labour that speaks to the fast-changing environment of the beauty influencer industry. As the foregoing narratives make clear, engaging in the immaterial aspect of online working conditions
also exemplifies the reproductive process of generating positive online images which accentuate intimate relationships among influencers and followers on Instagram (e.g., Dobson et al., 2018). In extending the understanding of immaterial labour, Dobson et al. (2018, p.10) described the digital intimacy of online working conditions as “intimate labour of care and of producing and maintaining shared feelings, affects, and intimate and social relations”. This statement reveals the online working conditions, which point to the importance of digital media reproduction and the garnering of social relationships taking place online. Examining the social conditions of online media images allows one to understand the affective process of both paid and unpaid conditions of the work enacted through the digitisation of social media space (Dobson et al., 2018). In this context, the findings reveal that participants consistently engage in fostering intimate conditions through social media posts. As Fah noted, “while I may be recognised on mainstream media, I always respond to my followers’ comments on my profile and engage in Q&A during my live streaming sessions” (Fah, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Nutt revealed that she has gained online recognition through exercising the online form of intimacy, stating, “since being known on the Internet discussion board since the early 2000s, I always maintain consistency in my posts, and that really helps to boost my image and relationships with followers” (Nutt, translated from Thai).

As can be seen from the foregoing examples, generating a positive online image builds upon the reproductive process of negotiating “intimate life, emotions, care, and social relations” (Dobson et al., 2018, p.12). To understand the different levels of intimacy, it is important to identify different types of influencers and the emergence of online fame, which determines various aspects of intimate relationships among influencers and followers online. The three categories of influencers are as follows:

The first category falls under what Ruiz-Gomez (2019) refers to as micro-influencers, which describes those with between 1,000 and 10,000 followers on their Instagram profiles. Despite the small number of followers, I discovered that this type of influencer is considered very influential since they possess a sense of authenticity, identified by their social practices in creating beauty-related content online (e.g., Duffy, 2015; Reade, 2020). This authentic act (discussed in Chapter Five) involves the practice of “being oneself in public, seeming to speak and act sincerely, openly, and genuinely as a ‘real person’” (Dekavalla, 2019, p. 78), enabling influencers to attract a wide group of people on social media.
Given this, the research participant May shared her experience:

As I focus mainly on a Western style of beauty, several of my followers have messaged me and asked for tips and advice, stating that they prefer the content on my pages and style of beauty to anyone else’s. (May, translated from Thai)

The second category falls under what Ruiz-Gomez (2019) refers to as macro-influencers. This type of influencer tends to have between 30,000 and 300k followers on Instagram. Since they have managed to gain a sizeable number of followers, they are widely known for collaborating with several beauty and cosmetic brands, ensuring their income and online visibility. In this instance, Ae demonstrated how she took the time to build her followers over the years. She stated:

It took me about five-six years to build my online reputation…it hasn’t been easy, but it is definitely worth it now, and I feel very privileged and fortunate to be able to work with several brands and [appreciate] that people have started to recognise me for what I do. (Ae, translated from Thai)

While it may take a long time for some Thai beauty influencers to garner online popularity, other participants detailed how they were able to curate their online personas to quickly attract people’s attention on Instagram. In this instance, Toon added:

It hasn’t taken me that long to become recognised online. I think it also depends on the type of content you create. If it is something catchy, you can easily get people’s attention and generate massive views on the Internet. (Toon, translated from Thai)

The last category falls under what Ruiz-Gomez (2019) refers to as mega-influencers. This type of influencer has between 500k to over a million followers across different demographic groups. In this regard, Nutt stated during the interview that her followers consist of high-school students as well as parents, young adults, and trans individuals who follow her profile. Due to their significantly high number of followers, these mega-influencers are incredibly well known, exhibiting online fame and the ability to negotiate with brands (e.g., Abidin, 2018). It is the cultivation of their online beauty personas that enable them to achieve “Instafame”, negotiating “the condition of having a relatively high number of followers on the app” (Marwick, 2015, p. 137). This type of influencer is widely recognised and among the most influential group of influencers who have the ability to generate social relationships among followers and brands through social media platforms.
Section II Understanding the Business Features and the Visibility Labour

This section investigates the way in which Thai beauty influencers collaborate with brands and how advertorial media images embody different forms of labour on social media sites such as Instagram. The labour conditions in social media involve the use of self-branding techniques, such as promotional material containing influencers’ online images and how they generate the curative display of beauty online. Importantly, their practices “[negotiate] identity, reputation, and lifestyles in commodity” (Hund & Mcguigan, 2019, p. 5) that can be bought and sold on social media. Through the curation of texts and images, the prominence of influencers’ practices highlights the entrepreneurial conditions involved in the “cultural quality of cool, creativity, autonomy, self-investment, compulsory net-working, portfolio evaluation, international competition, and a foreshortened career” (Neff et al., 2005, p. 207). Their practices incorporate various aspects of the overall planning process, such as the type of media content, mood and tone of the products, use of captions, hashtags, and tagging information, enabling influencers to extend their image and generate income on social media (e.g., Marwick, 2015). The use of these techniques points to the online working conditions that extend beyond the traditional beauty blogs previously confined to the Internet discussion board (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Guru Club, 2012; Juntiwasarakij, 2016). In this vein, Abidin (2016) provides useful insight into understanding the creativity of public work environments, which entails the influencers’ use of techniques and strategies for the dissemination of branded persona throughout social media. She defined the concept “visibility labour” as “the work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of self-conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for a favourable end. It is the work individuals do when they self-posture and curate their self-presentation so as to be noticeable” (Abidin, 2016, p. 90). Examining visibility in the realm of digital media would provide a critical understanding of influencers’ practices, including the enactment of product placement and showcasing product reviews, the curation of influencers’ online images as well as the use of captions, hashtags, and the management of social relations among influencers and followers. This concept of labour also allows critical understanding of the creative works in the online beauty industry, which details the way in which influencers manage and extend their fame online.
In examining the enactment of beauty practices among Thai beauty influencers, it is also important to understand the business features available on Instagram. According to Instagram, “businesses can choose how they want their customers to get in touch with them: call, text, or email with a tap of the contact button, as well as get directions. Business profiles also unlock access to insights and the ability to promote” (Instagram, 2021). This sentence describes the ways in which Instagram provides its users with the ability to promote products, enabling them to attract brands and engage in the creative labour industry. Participants revealed the important components to understanding the business features and labour practices among influencers. For Thai beauty influencers, every step, from planning, shooting, and putting the content together, are considered important components in understanding the influencers’ online presence. The emphasis on a creative work environment promotes critical understanding of the overall planning process, type of media content, mood and tone of the products, use of captions, hashtags, tagging information, and so on. These types of labour practices enable Thai beauty influencers to generate significant media images and enhance their visibility which can then be bought and sold on social media. In understanding influencers’ practices, the findings of this study indicate the importance of techniques in extending their visibility on social media. For example, Nutt stated, “I find that content is the key to attracting people, as they like to see what is new and in trend, and I am the one leading that trend on social media” (Nutt, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, May stated that “participating in a challenge or creating unusual content works better for me. People like to see something new and different, and this sometimes is not an easy task” (May, translated from Thai). In addition, Ann stated that “it depends on the type of content each influencer creates because people can now guess what is being said, and it can then become mass-produced and boring” (Ann, translated from Thai). This demonstrates the importance of creating new beauty-related content that enables influencers to generate their visibility online. In other words, these beauty influencers must consistently engage in “attention-getting techniques” in order to “increasingly, and occasionally improbably, use them to increase their online popularity” (Marwick, 2015, p. 138).

In particular, the findings of this study reveal that managers play an important role in the production and dissemination of media images. In this connection, Ann stated that “my manager is the one who oversees the overall process of my work. She negotiates the fees and deals with the clients prior to a formal agreement” (Ann, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Toon revealed that “the manager knows the ins and outs of the work, and which platform to promote in addition to Instagram” (Toon, translated from Thai). These statements demonstrate the influencers’ overall work process, including the way in which they work and collaborate with brands. While a lot of their posts are promotional, the participants indicate that a considerable amount contains non-
sponsored material created to enhance the opportunity to attract brands and increase the number of followers on social media. As Ae noted, “creating day-to-day content is an alternative way of maintaining social status and widening my visibility online” (Ae, translated from Thai). In a similar vein, Pekky indicated that “as important as generating sponsored posts, sharing non-sponsored material such as on food and lifestyles also increases social traffic and fosters positive bonding” (Pekky, translated from Thai). It is clear from the narratives that publicity in the online working environment requires the use of various techniques emphasising the visualisation of media images which demonstrate the “enactment and staging of an amateur aesthetic [that] is highly rewarding for influencers” (Abidin, 2017, p. 6). The foregoing narratives suggest that influencers must utilise different strategies to enable them to maintain their Internet celebrity status on social media. The construction of influencers’ practices can thus be said to characterise “the cultural forces” exemplifying “a mania for digital documentation, the proliferation of celebrity and micro-celebrity culture, and conspicuous consumption” (Marwick, 2015, p. 139) significantly played out through the Thai digital economy.

While the foregoing narratives explain the concept of visibility labour in the Thai influencer industry, it is also important to examine the techniques influencers use to negotiate “commercial, interactive, reciprocal, and disclosure” practices with followers online (Abidin, 2016, p. 89). These are exemplified by the use of tagging, @mentioning, hashtags, and well-written captions, as well as in-app features that enable influencers to expand their access throughout social media (e.g., Abidin, 2016; Instagram, 2021). These techniques are important for understanding the use of strategies involved with the influencer’s performance in negotiating online “advertorial” content played out on social media (Abidin, 2015a, as cited in Abidin, 2016, p. 3). The term advertorial content is used to describe the combination of “advertisements” and “editorials” representing the “highly personalised, opinion-laden promotion of products/services that influencers appear to personally experience and endorse for a fee” (Abidin, 2015a, as cited in Abidin, 2016, p. 3). Participation in such practices represents the different aspects of the influencer’s strategies, extending one’s understanding of the “neoliberal notions of individual efficacy and responsibility” fundamental to the influencer industry (Khamis et al., 2017, p. 10). In reinforcing “brand culture” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 4) in a creative work environment, participants revealed the importance of using techniques that enable them to maintain their visibility on social media. Prae, for instance, stated that “a prominent mode [in maintaining a public persona] is tagging because it is the starting point to introducing the brand and a technique that encourages people to find out more about the [promotional materials], so I think it is very important and effective for all types of Instagram
influencers” (Prae, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Ae added that “it really depends on agreements and occasions. Sometimes I tag the products, other times I tag the location, but both are common [practices] and necessary when collaborating with brands” (Ae, translated from Thai). In addition, Fah said, “I always use @mentions and add other influencers in the caption because I think it ensures visibility and gives a sense of the positive relationships existing between influencers and brands” (Fah, translated from Thai). These narratives demonstrate the online working conditions and the techniques used to maintain a public persona in the Thai influencer industry. In this vein, the study findings indicate the specific use of skills required by influencers to negotiate demand and effectively generate various types of beauty content on social media, as evidenced by the prevalence of tags and @mentions. This aspect of labour practices is important for extending the “visual interaction” of social media images to accentuate “values, ideas, and cultural associations” (Hurley, 2019, p. 9) throughout the Thai digital economy.

In addition to tagging and @mentioning practices, participants stated that the use of hashtags is common and among the most important practices in collaborating with brands, enabling them to generate online visibility throughout social media. The use of hashtags emphasises the sharing of branded content widely available online (e.g., Zappavigna, 2012). The most common hashtags used by Thai beauty influencers are #Thaibeautyblogger, #beautyinfluencer, and #beautyblogging, while other influencers use hashtags as a specific way to represent their collaboration with brands on social media. In understanding the use of strategies, the following example of an Instagram image exemplifies the way in which a Thai beauty influencer promotes a skincare product on Instagram in the form of an online “advertorial” (Abidin, 2016b, p. 3). The use of this technique emphasises the labour involved in online working conditions and the specific practices employed in “digital self-branding” techniques (Scolere et al., 2018, p. 7). These can be observed through the promotional material used in the creation of the influencer’s online content to appeal to followers and brands. In this context, the image showcases the way in which @Nobluk promoted an Olay skincare product by placing particular emphasis on the curation of her overall image and use of the skincare item. Throughout text and images, @Nobluk introduces her followers to the Olay cosmetic product in a seemingly casual manner. This is illustrated by her use of a caption, entailing her personal experience after using the item. The focus of her post is the use of tagging information, which reads “paid partnership with proxolay” along with a caption detailing her overall result after using the item. Hashtags such as #FromDAY1, #ProXTH, and #OlayThailand are also used. The material used to promote @Nobluk’s Instagram image is representative of an emotive process, demonstrated through the lens of digital intimacy on social media (Dobson et al.,
digital intimacy involves reproducing social relations as data and transcribing social relations into a database”. Here, the reflection of @Nobluk’s overall experience after using the product are detailed in the storylines, which enabled her to develop an affective relationship that fosters a positive branded image among herself, her followers, and brands. Participants emphasised the importance of maintaining positive online images since these contributed significantly to the monetisation opportunities in the creative work environment. Throughout the course of the interviews, participants mentioned that appealing to followers in casual and informal narratives has enabled them to blur the boundaries of work, thereby enhancing their online visibility and leading to greater exposure and the opportunity to earn income on social media. The practice of tagging and placing an image of oneself next to the branded product is considered to be the most prominent form of labour among influencers in Thailand, as clearly indicated by the tagging information provided as part of the platform feature and effective for those with a significant number of followers on Instagram.

Furthermore, participants revealed that the use of tagging information signals the status of influencers, particularly if they have a high number of followers on social media. Examining influencer’s practices in this context can thus be said to “combine the outer-directed labour of performing a branded self that commands recognition, prestige, and economic value, with the existential work of creating personal and professional identities that meet one’s own standard of integrity and self-actualisation” (Hund and McGuigan 2019, p. 6). Being known as an influencer has enabled participants to attract potential brands, which extended the opportunity to enhance their work throughout the creative labour industry. Participants described the mode of tagging information as an “official” format since it required them to demonstrate the use of products as well as promoting their brand partners (as indicated by the tagging information). This advertorial format provides an extended opportunity for brands and influencers to advertise their images in the following way: “tagged business partners will be able to see the reach and engagement of these feed posts” (Instagram, 2021), determining the business opportunities for their social media practice. This form of brand engagement is significant in understanding the emerging forms of online business and demonstrating the extended opportunities that allow influencers to generate their online content. However, the findings of this study indicate that this type of brand engagement remains limited to specific groups of influencers in Thailand and is particularly effective for those who have established a significant amount of fame in the Thai digital economy.
In addition to providing a personal narrative on Instagram as part of brand engagement, several participants provided information on the process of promoting beauty and cosmetic products that demonstrate the free labour conditions of social media. These labour practices explain how the “immaterial, emotional, and affective labour of social reproduction offers a foundation for conceptualising digital intimacy as labour” (Dobson et al., 2018, p.4). May, for instance, revealed that many cosmetic items were sent to her under no contractual obligation but with the intention that she promote them online. Given this, she said: “brands send me their products all the time, and I think this is common practice, but I have not had a chance to use them all. I try to help promote some of them on my stories if I think they are good and [offer] value for money. Although I do not get paid for this, I still benefit by using the products” (May, translated from Thai).

Meanwhile, Ann pointed out that being known as an influencer is a privilege, which enabled her to receive free beauty items as a mark of her Internet Celebrity status on social media. Given this, she added, “the advantage of being an influencer is that you will always get invitations to events and experience new items. Although this depends on the working conditions and contract agreement with brands, I feel a sense of privilege by achieving this status” (Ann, translated from Thai). Prae, meanwhile, stated that “I have tons and tons of beauty items and have run out of places to keep them. I feel appreciated and highly valued because the brands trust me to promote their products, despite having no contractual agreement” (Prae, translated from Thai). These
narratives provide an understanding of the concept of labour, aligning with the free or unpaid conditions of online work (Hesmondhalgh, 2010, p. 276). The free labour in this context relates to how influencers receive complementary items, which sometimes result in unpaid work on social media. From this perspective, the promotion of beauty-related content may be seen as “exploitation” (Andrejevic, 2011, p. 91) resulting from the unpaid curation of beauty-related content online. However, the foregoing narratives suggest an alternative perspective of “freely given work” (Andrejevic, 2009, as cited in Hesmondalgh, 2010, p. 271). In this context, free work refers to the attainment of Internet Celebrity status, which places influencers in a privileged position of receiving complementary items. The depiction of access to beauty and cosmetic products, particularly prior to launch, tends to play out significantly in the Thai social media space. As evidenced by the participants’ narratives, the promotional value of unpaid work can help illuminate how influencers “maintain shared feelings, affects, and intimate and social relations that become more productive under conditions of digital capitalism” (Dobson et al., 2018, p.18). In this context, the study findings suggest that engaging in the continuous practice of promoting online products extends the opportunity for influencers to receive free items while also enhancing their career opportunities through Thai social media spaces. In this instance, the findings also reveal that those who have recently risen to fame may need to consistently create beauty-related content in order to receive complimentary items. In both cases, all participants mentioned that they had generated non-sponsored products for free, regardless of their popularity. Examining this aspect of labour conditions reveals the critical perspective involved in pursuing branded images and explains how the creative work environment engages with these influencers through the Thai digital economy.

With relevance to the free labour conditions of online work, Jarrett (2014, p. 16) discussed the concept of reproductive labour in relation to the conditions of “women’s work”. She emphasised the importance of maintaining “social conditions” that allow for the labouring conditions in a capitalist economy (Jarrett, 2014, p. 32). Reproductive labour in this context refers to nonmaterial goods in opposition to material products such as food, clothing, etc. (Jarrett, 2014, p. 16). This aspect of labour can be used to understand the construction of the influencer’s online images entailing women’s experiences as well as the amount of time and effort that influencers invest into the production of creative works online (Jarrett, 2014). It points to how influencers maintain social relations, which enabled them to sustain connection and positive relationships with followers and brands throughout social media. As Jarrett (2014, p. 19) put it, “the very particular relationship with the capitalist exchange of this labour and the inalienable use-values that are its products
provides a model for understanding the contributions of consumers to capitalism in digital media industries”. In this instance, Ann pointed out that “it does not just take one post to become recognised, these works require a continuous amount of time and effort” (Ann, translated from Thai). Participants also revealed how specific skills are critical to the productive process of social media work. As Fah put it, “I think once you become known, people expect to see new things all the time; it is one thing after another and so I think it is important to have specific skills in negotiating beauty trends and collaborating with brands” (Fah, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Pekky revealed that “I think one of the challenges is to keep up with the social status, as that attracts brands, so for me it is the continuous process of work and takes time” (Pekky, translated from Thai). As can be seen from their interview responses, participants placed particular emphasis on the importance of keeping up with the reproductive process in the creation of beauty work. Consistently posting online images and disseminating beauty-related content contributes to “social reproduction” (Dobson et al., 2018, p.5), enabling influencers to maintain their online persona throughout the Thai digital economy. In this instance, several participants revealed that they each have a “rate card” specifying the rate for each type of influencer based on their online popularity. This emphasises the different types of services offered as part of the commodification process on social media. These include the expected level of brand engagement, the type of still and moving media images, the use of platforms, the dissemination and reach of social media content, and so on. According to the participants, they mostly operate on a “contract-by-contract basis” (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006, p. 782). Occasionally, this means that the work is assigned by the brand the influencers are hired to advertise. In such cases, the influencer is required to tag the brand to showcase it on their Instagram profile, and the level of popularity determines the charge for each social media post. As an example, Ann reported that she usually charges 15,000 baht (GBP 400) for reviewing cosmetics on Facebook and Instagram. However, if a brand requires her to write blogs and include photos, she usually charges 25,000 baht (GBP 550) and a minimum of 30,000 baht (GBP 600) for each tutorial video. On the other hand, those who are highly popular on social media and have acquired a full-blown Internet celebrity status tend to charge a minimum rate of 80,000 baht (GBP 2,000) for each beauty-related item they post. During the interviews, one participant revealed that she can earn up to 200,000–400,000 baht (GBP 5,000–10,000) for each sponsored product, such as by engaging in a promotional video requiring a storyline and production team. Based on the interview material, influencers with significant numbers of followers tend to generate positive outcomes through likes and comments, enabling brands to monetise their content online. This aspect of social media requires consistent management, entailing a considerable amount of effort from influencers to maintain positive online images. In
the performative display of social media work, the price influencers charge varies according to the level of popularity, measured by the number of followers they have on social media. The fact that the influencer's income relies heavily on the level of popularity further indicates the importance of maintaining social relations in negotiating demand to keep up with their online persona. This aspect of the influencer's work is important since the level of brand engagement affects their income. It also helps in understanding the complex structure of online working conditions, which reaffirms the reproductive labour process influencers must enact in order to achieve a high level of recognition throughout the Thai digital economy.

Consistent with the reproductive labour conditions, the concept of emotional labour can also be applied to understand the emotions involved in the beauty personas influencers curate online (e.g., Hochschild, 1983). In this context, emotional labour involves “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7), which demonstrates how influencers manage the emotional values aligning with the branded performances played out on social media. Here, emotional labour provides critical understanding of how influencers strategise the use of techniques to maintain social interactions with followers and brands online. The findings of this study indicate that influencers tend to reveal personal narratives that reflect their personal experiences of using branded products through the curative display of social media images. The informal use of language also invites followers to share their experiences online in the form of comments on Instagram. May, for instance, stated during the interview that “I find that followers tend to be more interested in my personal experience and lifestyle rather than just focusing on my IG posts, so I always add narratives of my personal experiences online. It really helps me gain positive feedback and comments” (May, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Prae exerted emotive display as part of her online working conditions, adding, “I have agreed to promote skincare products, but then it turned out I got some really bad allergic reactions, so I decided to share my whole experiences with followers to maintain my long-term relationship with them” (Prae, translated from Thai). Despite collaborating with brands in exchange for income, the narratives here emphasise the value of generating positive friendships that enable influencers to maintain positive online images, which reflects the working conditions of Thai beauty influencers. Consequently, maintaining positive relationships shapes the core values of emotional work, which is considered to be a crucial aspect of the Thai digital economy. The findings also indicate that influencers develop and form positive images through the exchange of online conversations as well as the use of texts, images, comments, hashtags, and direct messages through various platforms on social media. Nutt, for instance, indicated that the use of the live streaming function
was particularly useful since it enabled her to communicate and respond to followers’ questions in real time. She highlighted, “I often go live once or twice a week and perform makeup practices which have helped me to understand people’s preferences and trends, and I love being able to communicate with them instantly” (Nutt, translated from Thai). Ann, meanwhile, stated that “it is crucial to keep the conversation going with followers. It reflects the popularity of my reputation and how I work and collaborate with brands” (Ann, translated from Thai). As the narratives make clear, revealing the real experience of using cosmetic products, communicating with followers via the live streaming function, and inviting them to participate in an online discussion forum through comments, all contribute to the emotive process in which beauty influencers engage to maintain positive online images through the Thai digital economy.

While maintaining positive relationships among followers is important, several participants also talked about the important practice of circulating a luxurious and glamorous persona, inviting followers to witness part of the influencers’ social media activities. In this context, Wissinger (2014, p. 145) introduced the concept of “glamour labour”, examining the Kim Kardashian phenomenon and the way in which she showcases her lifestyle, attracting public attention in the age of social media. Wissinger (2016) identified the term as “a phenomenon of the Internet age. It involves investing time and effort into editing the body and self to appear as fascinating and polished in person as in one’s highly scripted, filtered and manipulated online life” (p. 145). Participants stated that engaging in this labour process provided them with the extended opportunity to appeal to brands. In this instance, one of the influencers, Tip, shared her story of being selected to undergo plastic surgery sponsored by the Sulwhasoo brand. Given this, she said:

I saw this advertisement encouraging beauty influencers to join a contest by sending video content. This was part of a marketing campaign between Suwalsoo and Elle magazine. The winner would get to undergo plastic surgery and become a brand ambassador for Sulwhasoo for one year. I still cannot believe I won the contest. I felt privileged and very proud. (Tip, translated from Thai)

Tip’s story is an example of the type of opportunity afforded to influencers, with several describing it as a “privilege”, allowing them to achieve and experience a celebrity lifestyle. Meanwhile, Nutt mentioned that “when I last shared images of my branded bags, most of the followers commented ‘wow’. I feel they look up to me and value my creativity and work. I really appreciate that, and it also opens up many opportunities” (Nutt, translated from Thai). The foregoing narratives signify the overall concept of “glamour labour” wherein influencers are consistently cultivating glamorous
lifestyles, associating themselves with luxurious brand name products (Wissinger, 2016). This kind of radical modification – engaging in plastic surgery as work and depicting images of themselves using brand name products and attending exclusive events – is normalised in the current discourse of Thai beauty blogging. This links their work to the beauty industry as a whole, especially in Thailand and the region.

In the following section, I discuss in further detail the ways in which influencers work and collaborate with brands. Such practices are driven by strategies of capital accumulation and forms of labour that can be commodified and monetised. For example, in this instance, four advertorial strategies illustrate how Thai beauty influencers collaborate with brands, including the construction of online paid partnerships, the review of before-and-after practices, direct monetisation through product placement, and the construction of social mobility.

**Section II – The Entrepreneurialism of Establishing an Online Business**

This section examines the strategies which contributes to the understanding of how Thai beauty influencers develop an online business and engage and collaborate with brands that can be commodified and monetised on Instagram. The overall process of online working conditions is considered, along with the practices relating to the integration of branded content on social media. This aspect of work is important since it allows beauty influencers to become widely recognised and maintain an image on social media to make a living, potentially leading to the establishment of a business in the Thai digital economy. The strategies used by Thai beauty influencers include the construction of online paid partnerships, review of before-and-after practices, and direct monetisation through product placement and review (e.g., Abidin, 2018). A specific set of practices are revealed, contributing to the development of Instagram personas and the functions of the online market. The depiction of beauty-related content also demonstrates the importance of engaging in online work, positioning influencers in “complex, elusive and often precarious social structures” where they “must be self-governed and take full responsibility for their career and personal image in the face of high levels of uncertainty” (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018, p. 131).

In understanding the nature of online work, the majority of participants in this research tend to be recognised for their reviews on skincare products, while others create beauty blogs on their social media pages, or share the results after undergoing plastic surgery, etc. As mentioned in the previous section, social media posts mainly focus on showcasing the latest trends and styles of beauty
recently launched or due to be introduced. Through the curative display of social media images, analysis of interviews, and the online observation of Instagram images and stories, several participants in my research revealed that they had already acquired a substantial number of followers on the Internet scene prior to becoming recognised as beauty influencers while others recently came to fame with the increasing popularity of social media. Some of the participants had experience of direct engagement with the mainstream entertainment industry, while others attained online fame as Internet idols or creating “how-to” videos and beauty-related content, enabling them to collaborate with brands, eventually becoming known as beauty influencers. In other words, the accumulation of cultural capital over time and the maintenance of brand are important here.

In examining their practices, the influencers detailed the process of collaborating with brands, considered a form of entrepreneurism in establishing an online business. This type of business reveals how influencers “celebrate individual choice, [and] independence” (Duffy and Hund, 2015, p. 3) by consistently depicting images of themselves showcasing and reviewing various types of beauty and cosmetic products through the Thai social media scene. They provided details of the overall process of their work, such as how they have been approached by brands, form of engagement, and how they construct online images that match the themes requested by the brands, etc. The curative display of these practices provides aspirational narratives of self-expression, which reveals the dynamics of online working conditions and how the business of beauty blogging operates in the Thai digital media space. As participants became more familiar with advertorial practices, they were able to embed the concepts and their experiences, resulting in the successful generation of branded personas. In this context, Pekky shared her experience of collaborating with brands:

For me, one of the recurring requests I have had from clients is the review of “before” and “after” using beauty and skincare products. For instance, one client contacted me and requested I use a white colour theme that gives the impression of a natural look. Firstly, I took a photo of myself prior to using the product wearing the requested colour theme and stated the claims of the products to my followers. After using the product for a certain period, I then take a photo of the results, making sure I state the results in the most accurate manner possible. Both images must depict me wearing white clothing and exhibiting light fingernails while shooting against a white backdrop with the products placed in the centre
of the image so that both images are clearly visible to the public. (Pekky, translated from Thai)

The way in which Pekky reviewed the products before-and-after in this context demonstrates the enactment of social practices by influencers to generate the logic of “shoppability” to encourage followers to make online purchases on social media (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 1). This aspect of Pekky’s online performance represents the cultural production of beauty blogs which invite followers to engage and interact with influencers and brands by sharing and leaving comments online. This notion promotes the understanding of how influencers generate and capture public attention on social media. It indicates the extensiveness of the commoditisation process, which extends beyond the traditional forms of blogging emerging before the social media era. The foregoing narrative above also incorporates the major aspects of online businesses that stimulate people’s desire to purchase online, representing the concept of a “shoppable life” (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 2). Specifically, the term “shoppable life” is “meant to capture both the idea that social media users perform and document the aspirational lifestyles whose constituent elements can be bought instantly” (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 3). As the empirical material demonstrates, beauty ideals can be bought, but in the case of the most successful influencers, they must also be worked on and maintained over time. In this instance, Prae also discusses the production process, mentioning that it may take several stages before content is published on social media. This process focuses on the site of production and the way in which influencers construct their work, such as the application of makeup, use of lighting, recording process, use of electronic devices, and so on (Rose, 2016). This process is important since it incorporates the concept of labour, combining the knowledge of the creative labour industry with the skills involved in the aesthetic practice of curating social media images (e.g., Lazar, 2017). In addition, Rose (2016, p. 46) demonstrates the site of the image, suggesting that every image has its own components, i.e., “technologies, social, and economic” facets. As she puts it, “a visual technology can be relevant to how an image is made but also how it travels and how it is displayed [online]” (Rose, 2016, p. 38). This site of the image aspect is relevant to the production process, which also extends into understanding how the circulation of social media images relates to how they are shared over social media platforms. Given this, Prae added, “if the clients are not satisfied with the advertorial content, then it may take a while to edit and revise the overall production. However, in the case of an Instagram story, it can just be an instant mention that lasts for 24 hours” (Prae, translated from Thai). This narrative suggests the complexity of curating social media images which is also reflective of the commodification process in performing beauty works. It reveals the social and
economic aspects of the site of the image, demonstrating the influencer’s decision to curate different styles in their posts to generate income as part of their promotional material. During the interviews, most participants expressed that they tended to have similar experiences to Pekky and Prae, where understanding the use of technology shapes the negotiation of social media images throughout the digitised media space. Fah, for instance, stated that “I was never any good at editing images and filters, but the app feature is a big help” (Fah, translated from Thai). In addition, Toon stated that “it is part of the job to know how to work on the image so that you are not out of trend” (Toon, translated from Thai). This aspect is characteristic of online work that influencers must govern to maintain their status on the Thai social media scene.

Interestingly, when presenting an online advertorial, all participants were aware of evaluating the results after using a branded product. The participants indicated that they would only state their honest opinion despite being paid to collaborate with the brand and refuse to review products believed to be of poor quality, which could also result in a negative effect on consumer health. In this connection, May shared her experience of a negative effect after using a sponsored beauty product, which she described as “disastrous”. She said:

After using the product, I started to have a bad experience, probably because my skin was sensitive, but I had a terrible allergic reaction, and it took me over four months to fully recover. I told the brand that I wanted to share my honest experience with my followers despite being paid so that they can be aware of the side effects. The client was not happy, but I felt it was something I had to do (May, translated from Thai)

To alleviate the precarious conditions of online work, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006, p. 781) suggest that it is important for online workers to “commodify themselves” – thus giving them credibility among their followers (e.g., Marwick, 2013). This implies that it would be difficult to be critical of sponsors or brands. Engaging in such practices not only responds to the idea of authenticity (discussed in Chapter Five) but also suggests the extent to which these Thai beauty influencers are independent opinion leaders, which in turn enables them to establish online credibility, thereby maintaining their online personas and positive relationships with followers.
The Cultivation of Beauty Practices on Instagram

For most social media users, posting photos of themselves applying makeup products may be seen as a way of sharing their images and communicating with others on the Internet. However, for beauty influencers, it is a form of embodiment, aesthetically created to attract the attention of followers, leading to collaboration opportunities with brands (e.g., Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020). In understanding the embodiment of beauty practices, it became apparent to me that almost all social media posts are examples of self-branding techniques, allowing influencers to encompass the functions of beauty work.

Figure 2. @ Nutt’s comparison of before-and-after looks.

The image in Figure 2 focuses on the importance of maintaining youthful looks. Accordingly, Nutt’s caption states, “the makeup that makes me look 10 years younger, let’s get started!!! – for the full clip, refer to YouTube: Nisamenee” 1(Nutt, translated from Thai). Here, the aesthetic labour offered by Nutt is associated with the curation of a “how-to” beauty video, with the aim of encouraging her followers to maintain a youthful appearance, which in turn further extends the

---

1 For the full clip, refer to YouTube: Nisamenee
promotional material involved in a branded image, feeding to the production of beauty-related content on Instagram. In this context, Entwistle and Wissinger (2006, p. 785) exemplified the notion of the “body project” and the labour conditions concerned with slim bodies and the anti-ageing process. They pointed to an example of how a model was being “measured, assessed, criticised” (Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006, p. 785) on her facial appearance and how she was being judged for having “baby fat” on her face, despite having a very slim body. This perspective reveals the importance of maintaining bodily displays of work that must be consistently managed and performed to meet the aesthetic standards of online working conditions in the creative environment. While the image in Figure 2 does not focus on the body, the way in which Nutt portrays herself is consistent with the labour conditions, which suggests the importance of conforming to beauty norms wherein the construction of maintaining a favourable facial appearance is vital to the production of beauty work (e.g., Entwistle & Wissinger, 2016). The image shows a comparison between Nutt’s appearance at 18 and 28 years old, encouraging her followers to strive for a youthful look. This also indicates the significant portrayal of beauty, which emphasised the idealisation of beauty practices among women in Thailand. The significance of this image is underlined by the comparison of Nutt’s post, in which she refers to the one on the left as having “aunty status”, portraying herself as a middle-aged woman, while the other image suggests “freshy”, portraying the perceived ideal of a freshman. The latter image exemplifies the ideal of having a youthful appearance. Such an image generates an aesthetic standard that points to the construction of beauty practices, significantly played out in the Thai digital economy. To extend the understanding of the images, Nutt appeals to her audience by creating a young, feminine, and youthful image to attract a large number of followers, in this case, indicated by the number of likes and comments. During the interviews, participants stated that “keeping young” is the ideal image of beauty. Ann mentioned that “as much as it is important to maintain a light skin colour, I think the important component of beauty is to maintain a youthful look” (Ann, translated from Thai). In this context, aesthetic labour is reflected through the portrayal of “bodily display” (Banet-Weiser, 2017, p. 271), requiring young Thai women to modulate and keep up with their beauty routine to maintain a youthful appearance (e.g., Banet-Weiser, 2017). The aesthetic labour in this respect focuses specifically on self-improvement, portraying that Thai women should constantly put effort into their appearance to meet the perceived beauty norms. This Instagram image demonstrates the bond Nutt has formed with her followers, illustrated through comments such as “I really love this look” or “your skin is so pretty” – all of which contribute to building online fame and conforming to what Elias et al. (2017) regard as the “aesthetic entrepreneur” (p. 5), whereby
influencers are required to engage in the labour of curating beauty in ways that can be commodified and monetised throughout the Thai digital economy.

In addition to revealing before-and-after images on Instagram, the story function is central to the promotional practice of generating online beauty content. This aspect of labour demonstrates the importance of the site of circulation, involving the mobility of social media images and how they travel from one point to another (Rose, 2016). As Rose (2016) puts it, “digital technologies are ubiquitous; they saturate everyday life” (p. 351). In this context, the site of circulation can be used to demonstrate the way in which influencers circulate correlated images (Rose, 2016). In this connection, I discovered that all the participants in this study had used the story function on Instagram. This function allows users to upload both still and moving images that have a 24-hour lifespan, share them, and construct online representations in ways that are noticeable among their followers and brands (Instagram, 2016). In doing so, they tend to link their stories with other social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. All participants employed this technique to engage in advertorial practices with the aim of generating product reviews. In doing so, participants revealed that rather than merely promoting advertorials through blogs and Instagram posts, they had been approached by brands to use the story function specifically. In this context, May stated that “Instagram is a quick way of sharing beauty images, and they can be sent out within seconds” (May, translated from Thai). Like May, Fah revealed that “instead of posting fully edited images twice a week, the story function on Instagram allows me to upload beauty-related content daily, and it is becoming an alternative way for influencers to earn money” (Fah, translated from Thai).

These narratives suggest that the aesthetic performance of beauty trends is embedded in the circulation of a fast-changing media environment, wherein the instant exposure of social media posts is in high demand throughout the Thai beauty industry. According to Leaver et al. (2020), “stories are promoted at the top of the app above all other content in a feed, highlighting their short lifespan and advising the necessity of viewing” (p. 80). Given this, interviews with participating influencers revealed two sets of practices in the Instagram story function. First, broadcasting temporary daily activities through Instagram stories allows their followers to see snippets of the images that showcase the influencers’ lifestyles in ways that adhere to branded cosmetic and beauty products. Second, engaging in online advertorials by posting interactive stories inviting their followers to engage with them directly. This includes invitations for followers to answer polls on beauty-related questions. Influencers may also insert the “swipe-up” feature, allowing their followers to swipe the page directing them to see the full beauty tutorial on YouTube or link to the product pages of official brand websites. Participants stated during the interviews
that they found such practices particularly useful and have opened up several opportunities for them to cooperate and engage with brands on Instagram. They also stated that each story can cost 100,000 baht (GBP 2,500) or more per post.

In an effort to cultivate their online personas, the following examples reveal a snapshot of the influencers’ Instagram stories, focusing on the “swipe-up” feature. Participants mentioned that this practice is designed to direct followers to a wider repertoire of beauty-related content, such as YouTube material or official brand websites. The influencers mentioned that the story function had enabled them to extend their monetised content into other social media platforms such as YouTube. In this instance, the examples show images of Nutt and Kaycee, incorporating the “swipe-up” feature to generate brand engagement through social media.

_Figures 3 and 4. Kaycee and Nutt._

*THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS*
In this context, Figure 3 shows Kaycee questioning the efficacy of the cosmetic product; she writes, “Is this really going to work? Check out the craziest review” (Kaycee, translated from Thai). Another example (Figure 4) reveals Nutt’s Instagram story, which showcases an image of her with friends. It demonstrates the practice of highlighting snippets of the images, featuring their lifestyles in ways that blur the line of online working conditions. Although the work is emphasised by the term “review” since the caption states, “is it really going to work? This is the craziest product review”. This narrative reveals the process contributing to the cultural dissemination of beauty-related content currently exhibited on Instagram. In addition, both stories invite their followers to click on the “swipe-up” feature, directing them to explore the post in full detail. The participant influencers mentioned during the interviews that the swipe-up feature has enabled them to generate online fame and, ultimately, income generation. In comparison to the regular Instagram posts, participants described the swipe-up feature as fun, enjoyable, and interactive, serving the purpose of extending their online visibility on Instagram. In addition to the swipe feature, influencers in this study use Instagram stories to encourage their followers to participate in Q&A sessions involving the influencers’ lifestyles and their use of cosmetics and beauty products. This feature gives the followers the opportunity to ask influencers questions, and the responses are then posted on their stories. These techniques contribute to the changing trends in the media landscape, commoditising online promotional materials on Instagram. In this connection, Ae revealed that “followers often ask about anything related to beauty” (Ae, translated from Thai). Similarly, Prae stated that “people often want to know something personal like my diet, beauty tips, lifestyle, and so on. Consequently, the use of Q&A really helps to boost audience engagement” (Prae, translated from Thai). According to the narratives, it is clear that the enactment of online labour extends beyond specific beauty practices, which have traditionally been limited on social media. Thus, examining the influencers’ practices in this context reveals the structure of entrepreneurism, which points to the process of establishing an online business and further highlights the commodification of social media practices online. The participants mentioned that some of their followers have also been highly responsive to the use of the Instagram story function, as evidenced by the responses to the poll questions embedded in the Q&A session. For example, Fah mentioned during the interview that she often set up a poll question to assess her followers’ preferences for beauty brands or items/colours. As she put it, “using a poll on the story is very effective as I tend to receive immediate responses from my followers; it gives me an idea of what is going on in the market” (Fah, translated from Thai). Not only does it enable the influencers to portray themselves in ways that correspond to the latest Instagram trend, but it also provides a greater opportunity for them
to establish strong, reputable personas that are highly commoditised throughout modern Thai society.

As the findings of this study demonstrate, influencers use several techniques to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills for maintaining the entrepreneurial trends played out on social media. To this end, it can be said that the use of the Instagram story function, swipe-up feature, and Q&A feature further promote the practice of self-branding techniques, thereby enhancing online engagement and visibility among Thai beauty influencers on Instagram.

The Utilisation of Professionalised Instagram Images

In addition to using the Instagram story feature, influencers also carefully broadcast Instagram images that are seemingly professionalised. The professionalisation of social media images in this context is closely associated with the cultivation and promotion of a luxurious lifestyle, revealing the cultural practices among Thai beauty influencers. These social media images are characterised by the curation of beauty and cosmetic products depicting the aspirational narratives of expensive branded items online. Through a variety of techniques, the following examples demonstrate the ways in which Thai beauty influencers curate branded products signifying professionalised images which represent the status of Internet celebrities at the frontier of a “luxurious commodity lifestyle” (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 10). In this context, an article by Iqani (2019, p. 230) provides insight into examining the rising economic opportunities of online cultural industries, exhibiting relationships between the influencer industry and their sponsored brands. Given this, she argues that “the visual work undertaken online by social media influencers contributes in significant ways to the production of the value of global brands, and this should be contextualised within the unique socio-economic aspirations of consumers based in the global south” (Iqani, 2019, p. 229). In this context, Thai beauty influencers appear to contribute to constructing professionalised images, characterised by the portrayal of expensive branded beauty items on their Instagram profiles. These are also accompanied by captions, hashtags, and @mention, potentially increasing brand visibility on social media. In this instance, the following two images illustrate @Sononui’s Instagram images showcasing La Mer and Marc Jacobs cosmetics items.
Sononui’s first caption states, “What is your favourite La Mer product? Investing in your skin is never a risk. Which La Mer product is your favourite? If this is your first La Mer item, I would personally recommend the Mint Balm, which helps to regenerate dry lips really well…(@matoomteera has also recommended this item to me because she uses it while applying makeup on brides all the time). At the moment, I am also trying out La Mer Eye Cream and will come back soon to update you all on the results” – loveeee #sono_beauete #lamerthail.

The curation of Sononui’s Instagram image suggests a technique that is visually appealing to her followers. This is indicated by the overall visual representation of her social media image, focusing on the curation of La Mer items. Specifically, the aspirational narrative of Sononui’s caption also reveals that she is sharing her personal experience of using La Mer products, describing them to be her favourite skincare items. The participant influencers mentioned during the interviews that reflecting on personal experience tends to encourage followers to share instant feedback. This is particularly useful to themselves and the brands since it enables influencers to determine the popularity of their images. This, in turn, provides influencers with the opportunity to share their strategic use of beauty techniques that not only enable them to maintain consumers’ overall satisfaction but also attract more brands.
In this instance, the use of the abovementioned technique can enhance the public visibility of Sononui’s Instagram profile in four distinct ways. Firstly, the Instagram images are set in a position that articulates brand visibility on social media (e.g., the position of La Mer products), combining the curation of the posts with the use of props, filters, and beauty products. Secondly, the use of hashtags, namely #lamer, #lamerstory, #lovelamer, #sonobeaut, and #sono_lamer, allowing Sononui’s followers to click through the pages, guiding them to several other posts promoting La Mer products on their Instagram pages. Thirdly, by using #lamerthailand, @Sononui is simply referring to La Mer products sold specifically in Thailand. This indicates that Thais value the promotional material derived from global brands, relating to the development of beauty ideals throughout the Thai influencer industry. Such practices also allow her followers to share their experiences of the products, particularly in the form of comments, redirecting other followers to see the products available for sale in the country. Lastly, Sononui constructs her own self-curated hashtags, such as #sono_beaut and #sono_lamer that not only redirect her followers to see all her other beauty-related Instagram posts but also the La Mer items she has posted. All these practices are indicative of Sononui’s collaboration with the La Mer brand, which encompasses the aesthetic labour of feminine beauty, encouraging followers to participate in similar kinds of beauty practices (e.g., Elias et al., 2017). This means keeping up to date with the latest beauty trends and inviting followers to purchase the advertised beauty products and follow the global trends of beauty currently exhibited in Thai society.
Figure 6. @Sononui’s Instagram profile.

Figure 6 shows another example of how @Sononui depicts an Instagram image associated with the current trend of beauty. Here, both text and image are representative of aesthetic labour, demonstrating how influencers place particular emphasis on the performative display of idealised media images of beauty styles and looks. The emphasis here is on how influencers position branded images commonly accompanied by captions which, in this instance, reads “Massive love to @marcjacobsbeauty for sending these special complimentary items to me; which look next? […..] What sort of looks do [you] think I should create?” Several of her followers responded by stating phrases such as “Wow! I really want this set”, “this is super expensive”, and “I would much prefer to see dating looks for date night”. These statements illustrate the aesthetic standards of feminine beauty, which points to how influencers negotiate “feminised entrepreneurial identity” (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020, p. 128), representing how they work and collaborate with brands. Evidently, other participants have pointed out entrepreneurial practices as part of the process of engaging with brands. Praew, for instance, explained, “quite often, I get loads of makeup and cosmetic products, and these items are obviously sent with the expectation that they will be mentioned on Instagram and other social media pages. It is mainly down to us to create appealing content” (Praew, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Ae explained, “I tend to choose newly launched products to showcase on my page because the feedback I get is quite overwhelming – people love to know what’s new” (Ae, translated from Thai). Here, the practice of revealing newly launched
cosmetic products is carried out with the intention to promote branded items, ultimately resulting in the monetisation of content and attracting more followers on Instagram (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018). In these instances, it is clear that influencers must maintain the professionalisation of social media images, representing the embodiment of work generating social and economic capital through the Thai social media scene. The curation of this type of media image is representative of “brand culture” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 4), which points to the dynamic process of generating branded images, thus extending the commercialisation process traditionally taking place offline. The articulation of this image and caption also negotiates the emotional form of labour referred to by Duffy (2015), who stated that “aspirants recognise the instrumental value of their affective relations as they try to increase their followers and likes to improve rankings and rethink approaches to content based upon feedback provided by their readers” (p. 449). By revealing a set of the latest beauty items, the foregoing narratives point to the ability of these Thai beauty influencers to articulate the promotional material emphasising the importance of maintaining professionalised branded images, which in turn, provide them with the opportunity to expand their visibility, leading to financial success (e.g., Marwick, 2013). As the above image demonstrates, curating an online persona allows followers and the general public to be exposed to various brands, which resulted in the expansion of visibility and generating influencers’ status/fame through social media platforms.

The Practices of Showcasing Skincare Products and Cosmetics

Another similar way of engaging in online advertorials is by influencers incorporating their use of beauty products and cosmetics in the captions. Through these practices, influencers post an image of themselves positioned with the product while indicating their personal feelings, experiences, and perspectives of the products used. This type of narrative navigates a personal reflection, requiring effort and time. In this instance, the image in Figure 7 illuminates the narrative of online promotional material. The influencer writes:

I would just like to recap on the development of my skin. After 28 days of using the products, from the first day until the day of Icepadie’s wedding, I noticed that the red spots on my face became less prominent, and the skin feels much smoother and brighter; the makeup also tends to stay on longer as well #OlayThailand, #Olay28dayschallenge, #thebridesmaidconfession. (@Nobluk, translated from Thai)

104
In her Instagram post, @Nobluk focuses mainly on the results she experienced from engaging in aesthetic practices. The labour of beauty work in this context is aesthetically managed and curated to reflect her overall experience, demonstrating that influencers must be consistent in their level of work. Here, Nobluk elaborates on her use of the product for a certain period, emphasising the duration of her timeline with the hashtag #28dayschallenge. The participants pointed out that this is one of the most common forms of an Instagram advertorial. As Praew stated during the interview:

I was contacted to collaborate with several beauty brands, and I knew several others who had been paid to do this. It has become a popular trend because people can see that the influencer has actually used the product, making it trustworthy and real. It is definitely one of the common practices among Thai beauty influencers (Praew, translated from Thai)

While this may be seen as an obvious form of advertorial, the influencers mentioned that writing a long narrative of their experience on Instagram is a very appealing and effective way to expose followers to a brand. In this instance, the majority of participants described this practice as “one of the most effective ways” to generate promotional material and maintain a consistent online persona on Instagram.
In another example, the participant beauty influencers also developed their Instagram images by acknowledging the brands in accordance with the aesthetic of beauty blogging practices. These are often generated by hashtags as a form of labelling branded items, such as #OlayThailand, #LaMer #marcjacobbeauty, and so on. In this instance, the influencers usually decide on the makeup styles before sharing them with the public. These are often published once every three to four weeks, with details of every cosmetic product being featured by the influencers.

In this context, the influencers revealed that the practice of tagging [branded items] increases the opportunity for generating brand visibility on Instagram. As May put it, “sharing favourite beauty items on Instagram is another common way to attract followers and brands, especially when curating the latest styles of fashion and beauty” (May, translated from Thai). Nutt, meanwhile, stated that “tagging is a must as it can easily direct followers and potential buyers to visit the official online store for cosmetic products. This is most common for all sponsored posts” (Nutt, translated from Thai). As can be seen, the use of the tagging function provides the opportunity for people to encounter the latest beauty items and invite followers to pay attention to commercial brands,
which in turn, offers a marketing opportunity for both sponsored and non-sponsored beauty items by advertising them online.

Simultaneously, the following examples illustrate @Architasiri and @Sononui in two different makeup tones. The first makeup tone depicts @Architasiri in bright red lipstick, which is visibly prominent in her Instagram image. Her caption states that the makeup style (rose emoji) represents the colour of red roses along with the hashtag #Architamakeup, which is added to all her makeup collection displayed on her Instagram profile. Along similar lines, @Sononui posted an image of herself in a brownish/orange tone. Both images are indicated by tagging the relevant information on each of the beauty and cosmetic products used by both influencers. The use of these techniques points to how influencers extend the commercialisation of branded images underlining the online working conditions and visualisation of the aesthetic standards of feminine beauty increasingly played out across the Thai digital economy. During the interviews, the participating influencers emphasised that the use of hashtags, @mentions, and tagging information is the most recognisable form of advertorial, which enabled them to represent images to align themselves with brands.

Given this, Onn added:

The use of @mentioning [and tagging] branded cosmetic products is also becoming a current trend where influencers give specific details of the products used – people also perceive us as gurus who know which products are best. Based on my experience, brands like to be acknowledged in this way since it gives them more opportunities for exposure, which enhances marketability on social media. This works for both influencers and brands (Onn, translated from Thai)
Figure 8. @Architasiri Instagram’s profile

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASON

Figure 9. @Sononui’s Instagram profile

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASON
While the use of tags, hashtags, and @mentions are common among posts containing still images, the following examples (Figures 10 and 11) reveal the Instagram stories of Nutt and @Sononui, showcasing images of themselves promoting cosmetic and skincare products through the discursive display of tags, hashtags, and @mentions. The study participants revealed that the use of Instagram stories is a common practice, particularly those associated with the curation of beauty style personas, such as the application of makeup or cosmetics and skincare products in real time. In understanding this context, the image in Figure 10 showcases an Instagram story of Nutt promoting an @zhecosmetics product with the use of hashtag #getmecum, negotiating the performance of online labour, following the self-branding technique (e.g., Marwick, 2013). A similar practice is also illustrated in Figure 11, which showcases an Instagram story of @Sononui applying a mask on her face. The image also incorporates the caption “So hydrated!” along with the tagging of brand information @neuraderm.official. In both texts and images, Nutt and @Sononui appear to be reinforcing the enactment of cultural trends which negotiate the demand for curating the promotional material prevalent in the Thai influencer industry. The participants mentioned that story function is considered to be among the most common and simplest forms of advertorial. Part of the reason for this is that it is a technique that can be used instantly, without the need for a long production process, as in the case of promotional videos. The participant influencers revealed that payment for an Instagram story can range from 5,000–100,000 baht (GBP 100–2,000) depending on the level of the influencer’s popularity. Others also said they were quite happy to do it for free. Examining the use of the story function contributes to the understanding of how influencers generate cultural and informational products shaping the curative display of social practices, which reflect the intensification of the influencer’s beauty persona online. The participants stated during the interviews that the use of the story function tends to stimulate the interactive demands central to the commodification process of online beauty work. This is also incorporated into the promotional material showing aspects of the influencers’ lifestyles, aligning with their online persona. Prae, for instance, mentioned that “I often use an IG story to promote branded cosmetic products as I can then showcase how I apply makeup in real time” (Prae, translated from Thai). May, meanwhile, stated that “instead of taking days and days to edit an online tutorial video, I can just use the filter on my IG story to promote beauty and cosmetic products, which give me instant content” (May, translated from Thai). As the narratives demonstrate, the participants emphasise the importance of generating instant exposure for media images, revealing the performance of the influencers’ work enacted through the Thai social media scene. Incorporating the performative display of the story function, accompanied by the use of hashtags, tagging, and @mention can be seen as an alternative technique for shaping the
accumulation of social and economic capital significantly played out through the Thai digital economy.

Section III – The Aspirational Narratives of Promoting a Travelling Lifestyle

In this section, I present examples of case studies that represent the aspirational narratives involved in promoting travelling lifestyles, reflecting the commodifying trends among the Thai influencer industry. The construction of these images is exemplified by the curation of Instagram images visually manifested in the genre of travel, associated with luxury global lifestyle aspirants, reflecting the influencers’ practice of collaborating with brands. In addition, this section demonstrates how Thai beauty influencers depict and monetise the lifestyles that facilitate their marketability for
collaborating with brands through both still and moving images using Instagram stories, thereby highlighting one of the business strategies utilised on Instagram.

**Travelling Lifestyle**

As previously mentioned, one of the strategies commonly used among Thai beauty influencers is depicting the lifestyle of travelling as part of their collaboration with brands. It incorporates a form of culture privilege, enabling Thai beauty influencers to reiterate the depiction of lifestyles and travelling while showing branded cosmetic products that call attention to their enactment of bodily display, inviting their followers to engage in beauty practices depicted on Instagram (e.g., Hund & McGuigan, 2019). This aspect of their work conceptualises the idealisation of a glamorous lifestyle, representing the concept of “glamour labour” (Wissinger, 2016, p. 141). Glamour labour in this context demonstrates “the work to edit the self and body so that one appears to be a highly scripted, filtered, and carefully constructed image, which so many work so hard to create and present online” (Wissinger, 2015, as cited in Wissinger, 2016, p. 141).

In this context, the following examples draw parallels between the depiction of a glamorous lifestyle and the production of commercialised content (e.g., Duffy & Hund, 2015). Through these practices, Figure 12 depicts @Sononui curating a sponsored post for THREE cosmetic products. In the image, she appears to be focusing on her finished look after applying the THREE all-in-one makeup palette. This brings attention to the product she is using through the inclusion of the hashtag #musthave item. In her caption, she writes: “I made the right choice in bringing with me the all-in-one THREE limited edition palette. I can simply use it on my eyes, cheeks, and lips. Those who are frequent travellers should definitely buy it” (@Sononui, translated from Thai). Her caption is accompanied by hashtags such as #musthave, #threecosmetics, #sonokorea, #sono_beaut @threecosmeticsthailand, and #wakeupandmakeup, along with her @mention of @threecosmeticsthailand.
Figure 12. @Sononui’s Instagram profile
THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASON

Figure 13. @Sononui’s Instagram profile
THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASON
Also prominent in this image is Sononui’s use of geotagging, suggests that the image was taken during her trip to Seoul, South Korea. On several occasions, the participants revealed that the geotagging location and visual narratives of online media images were agreed upon between influencers and brands. As Tip put it, “sometimes it is part of the contractual agreement between influencers and brands, other times they just bring the products to align with the visual narrative of the theme. However, from my experience, all these aspects must be agreed upon first” (Tip, translated from Thai). Fah, meanwhile, indicated that “the visual narratives highlighted on Instagram are mainly intended to capture the followers’ attention, so showcasing something out of the ordinary helps to generate more attention on social media” (Fah, translated from Thai). The participants stated that the aim of this was to generate a sense of luxury conveyed through travel images to garner people’s attention online. These types of media images are often accompanied by the curation of overall objects such as a hat, coat, bag, and style, all of which are indicative of luxurious brand name products, conveying the aspirational narrative of social sharing. As the participating influencers demonstrate, the glamorous aspect of online labour requires constant management of self, enabling them to align with brands (e.g., Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006). While the traditional concept of microcelebrity tends to focus on the construction taking place in local settings (e.g., Senft, 2008), the analysis reveals that participants strategise the “cultivation of marketable persona[s]” (Hund & McGuigan, 2019, p. 5) that speak to the changing trends of social media activities, whereby the portrayal of feminine beauty resonates with the mobilisation of a travelling lifestyle extending beyond local communities. This process demonstrates the significant use of strategy and how “digital labour involves constantly evolving spaces of work both in physical and virtual space” (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020, p. 130).

Figure 13 demonstrates an example of commercialised content which aims to influence customers’ purchasing decisions. Given this, Sononui’s caption states, “those of you who are constant travellers should [definitely] buy @somerissay.ceo powder; it is long-lasting and can be used on both dry and oily skin. If you take it with you on your trip, you definitely won’t be disappointed” (@Sononui, translated from Thai), along with the hashtag #sono_korea and the geotagging location adding to the collection of her Korea trip.

As indicated by the narrative of her caption, the lifestyle of travelling is central to the depiction of a marketable persona, pointing to the performance quality of the influencers’ work aimed at generating visibility through social media. It is clear that influencers associate work and leisure
through the embodiment of curating beautified media images that not only enable followers to witness their experience but also extend the ideal concept of how they negotiate the “staging of glam life” (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 6) as characterised by the visual narratives of the travelling lifestyle and the curative display of promoting branded items on Instagram. The curation of these types of media images reiterates the notion that “[influencers] are part of a larger group of precarious workers that professionally must be self-governing and take full responsibility for their careers” (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2020, p. 131). This demonstrates the cultural aspect of social media practices as part of the idealistic standards for achieving the conventions of “entrepreneurial femininity” (Duffy & Hund 2015, p. 1), currently exhibited throughout modern Thai society. It also reveals the crucial aspect of work which must be maintained and negotiated over time. Broadcasting the visual aesthetics of personal life and lifestyle, therefore, demonstrates the importance of curating social media activities, enabling followers to be exposed to brands that can be commodified and monetised on Instagram. As Hund and McGuigan (2019) suggested, “the portrayal of luxurious commodity lifestyles on blogs and social media provides a venue for people to encounter stories, browse assorted wares, and cultivate desires for an attractive life and its trappings, in a mediated environment that makes the wares and associated lifestyle seem immediately accessible” (p. 10).

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the business of beauty blogging and examines the phenomenon of an emerging culture, namely Thai beauty influencers, who gain recognition and develop a business on Instagram that has become increasingly monetised (Abidin, 2016a, 2018; Marwick, 2013b). The foci of these practices relate to the integration of still images along with the use of Instagram stories to extend the commercialised media messages circulated via the influencers’ Instagram posts and stories. The influencers’ overall practices have resulted in the accumulation of online fame and followers while maintaining an established set of business practices. Such practices have become increasingly valorised on social media. In understanding the work of Thai beauty influencers, the first section of the chapter introduces the functions of business opportunities, categorising influencers based on their popularity. By emphasising the different features of their work, the overall processes involved in understanding how they rose to fame and their engagement with brands on social media are revealed. Illustrating the important sets of practices allows one to understand the nature of online beauty work, aiding the construction of online personas on Instagram. In addition, the second section of the chapter reveals the overall labour strategies and
how they are capitalised, accumulated, commodified, and monetised. This section focuses specifically on the construction of online paid partnerships, review of before-and-after practices, and direct monetisation through product placement and reviews. These strategies highlight the concept of brand positioning and how the influencers engage with the advertorial formats of their Instagram posts using both still images and promotional Instagram stories. The final section of the chapter demonstrates the aspirational narratives promoting travelling lifestyles to project marketable personas visually manifested in accordance with beauty practices. The construction of these images is exemplified by the curation of Instagram images, visually manifested in the genre of travel associated with a luxury global lifestyle that reflects the influencers’ practice of collaborating with brands. Examining these aspects of influencers’ works are important since they demonstrate the shifting trends whereby the curation of online images extends the opportunity for influencers to collaborate with brands. This, in turn, alters the overall experience of the online influencer industry. In particular, this chapter argues that the business of beauty blogging and the marketability of establishing an online career promotes the understanding of feminine beauty labour within the Thai digital economy. In addition, the chapter argues that the labour conditions of beauty practices are premised on the enactment of productive creativity specifically concerned with the embodiment of beauty trends, practices, and portrayals that have become increasingly available online. There is an inherent gendered relationship, shaping the portrayal of beauty norms enacted and performed as part of an emerging online business that enables Thai beauty influencers to build an online career on social media sites, such as Instagram.
Chapter Five: Authenticity and Realness

This chapter discusses how Thai beauty influencers engage with ideas of authenticity and realness, specifically within the Thai context. The analysis negotiates a set of practices that determine the relationship between these Thai beauty influencers and their followers. The chapter contrasts with the previous one, which emphasises an online form of business that negotiates the practice of monetary gain and the processes involved in establishing an online career. On the one hand, influencers are known for collaborating with brands in exchange for monetary gain (e.g., Abidin, 2018b; Banet-Weiser, 2017). On the other hand, they are also perceived as people who authentically create online content, displaying realistic parts of their lives widely available on social media. Therefore, this chapter focuses on how Thai beauty influencers broadcast themselves on sites such as Instagram, examining the way in which they generate seemingly real beauty-related content that have become increasingly available online. It negotiates a set of practices that appear to be real and authentic to others (e.g., Dekavalla, 2019; Gannon & Prothero, 2016). This reflects what Dekavalla (2019) refers to as “being oneself in public, seeming to speak and act sincerely, openly, and genuinely as a ‘real person’ [on Instagram]” (p. 78). These themes are central to the business identity of beauty influencers, arising as key concerns during the interviews. In understanding the influencers’ practices, I examine how they cultivate the notion of authenticity on Instagram. These are exemplified by acts of engaging with product reviews as well as broadcasting parts of their daily lives and activities perceived to be “[more] real, unfiltered, unmediated, and uncurated” (Abidin, 2018, para. 3) versions of themselves on social media.

This chapter argues that, in their effort to maintain online popularity, Thai beauty influencers construct online personas that are often semi-staged. Although the extent to which the participants in this research staged themselves varied, this often played out through the premise of engaging in product reviews, storying their daily activities, revealing behind-the-scenes aspects, and discussing what they frame as intimate and real issues online. Scholars have argued that, like self-presentation in other forms of everyday life (Goffman, 1956), “all self-presentation in digital and physical spaces is curated and controlled” (Abidin, 2018, p. 6, as cited in Reade, 2020, p. 3). In this instance, Goffman (1956, p. 2) stated that the likeliness of a person’s perception towards realness lies indirectly in “involuntary expressive behaviour” (Ibid., p. 3). He extended the concept by suggesting that there are two sets of activities. The first being “the expression that he gives” is communicated with the use of symbols and limited to a narrow form of communication. The
second type of activity, namely “the expression that he gives off”, is concerned with a set of actions that allow individuals to perform and express emotions. He suggested, “the individual does, of course, intentionally convey misinformation by means of both of these types of communication, the first involving deceit, the second feigning” (Ibid., p. 2). This statement is relevant to understanding the concept of authenticity and the way in which influencers construct their online images using text, comments, direct messages, captions, emojis, and so on. In a similar vein, Reade (2020, p. 3) examined Australian influencers’ practices on Instagram, stating that “practices informed by a desire to be ‘real’ and relatable were described as ‘raw’ [on social media]”. The construction of these practices tends to visually play out through the curation of both text and images, revealing aspects of influencers’ lives which may then be perceived as something “real” and genuine to the audiences. Meanwhile, Abidin (2018b, para. 5) also suggested that the purpose of being “more real” allows influencers to cultivate the impression of being someone “relatable”, particularly on social media platforms. Banet-Weiser (2017) noted, “celebrity culture has changed in an era of network media, where traditional control and management mechanisms have shifted so that creating and maintaining a celebrity persona is now something ordinary people who are not conventionally famous can now access” (p. 277). I define semi-staged here as a set of practices constructed in a way that creates the impression of imagined relationships among influencers and their followers (e.g., Abidin, 2016b).

In addition, this chapter argues that the notion of authenticity is distinctly shaped by the experiences the influencers have of creating beauty content. This is largely due to the amount of time and effort they put into building up their image over the years. During the fieldwork, I learnt that those emerging onto the Internet scene prior to the social media era have already established a strong sense of relationship with followers through blog posts (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018) and are therefore believed to be more experienced and highly recognised on social media. This enables them to create a good rapport and maintain positive relationships between themselves and their followers. However, this is not to say that those recently emerging onto the Internet scene are unable to attain fame and maintain positive relationships. In this context, the chapter explores the participants’ narratives from the interviews and provides a visual analysis of their Instagram images to answer the research question: To what extent do beauty influencers offer sites of authenticity and realness that can be understood within the Thai context?
The chapter comprises three sections. Section one discusses the way in which influencers review beauty products, often claiming to feature real and unedited images of themselves (e.g., Reade, 2020). This includes posting images without wearing makeup or showing the results after using certain cosmetics, showcasing themselves after going through plastic surgery, and so on. Section two investigates the beauty influencers’ strategies in broadcasting behind-the-scenes images and examines how they detail their day-to-day activities by employing the story and live-streaming function on Instagram to establish a sense of “familiarity” (Abidin, 2017, p. 7). Section three provides an analysis of personal topics, such as how influencers detail their struggles and achievements after becoming known as beauty influencers. The discussion also includes issues concerned with the risks involved in conforming to beauty practices and how doing so affects the influencers’ mental health in the long run.

Section I – Posting Real Images

When discussing the process of reviewing beauty products during the interviews, beauty influencers often mentioned different methods of engaging with advertorial practices. These include the enactment of posting real images that reflect on their personal experiences during and after using beauty items. In the first instance, the influencers often receive complimentary products which they may or may not be required to review. While this is not always a requirement for influencers, those who have chosen to review products often emphasised phrases during the interviews such as “I would usually use the products for a certain period of time before sharing the results with my followers to ensure their accuracy” (translated from Thai). While others would add similar phrases such as “I make sure I share my experience openly and [if] the products are good quality and worth the money”. By emphasising “accurate” quality and their real experiences to the followers, influencers are accentuating the decision to maintain authentic choices, thereby cultivating a sense of sincerity on social media, enabling them to maintain a sense of authenticity (Gannon & Prothero, 2016) rather than being seen as someone who engages in online work merely for monetary gain. In the second instance, this review technique usually includes revealing before-and-after states when using beauty products and cosmetics, posting swatches on Instagram (where influencers apply different types/shades of cosmetic products on their skin). Influencers are usually required to showcase their bare faces, followed by a full demonstration of a step-by-step process for applying makeup. The use of these techniques demonstrates the notion of authenticity from the consumer-based perspective as part of the “authenticating acts that are an expression of our true selves as we see them” (Arnould & Price, 2000, as cited in Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1890). Here, influencers embed the concept of authenticity through honest expression, revealing
the narrative of the technique used to feature aspects of their beauty practices and lifestyles. In this instance, Nutt, commonly known for creating different ranges of looks on a daily basis and recognised on social media as an expert in all aspects of beauty, detailed how she curates online personas that reflect her real personality:

Some influencers are very pretentious, but I’m not like that and try to be myself throughout my videos. I think that’s why I have accumulated so many followers over the years. Although I may use informal language and often mess around during the tutorials, my followers get to see the real me, and I always give them tips on different styles of beauty practices (Nutt, translated from Thai)

Figure 14 shows a before-and-after makeup application image posted by Nutt on Instagram, detailing a list of all the cosmetic products used during her beauty tutorial. By presenting herself in this way, she has successfully secured a position as someone who is easily relatable (Abidin, 2016b). This has also led Nutt to gain greater credibility, enabling her to achieve what Kuehn (2016, p. 6) refers to as “reputational status” among her followers. As Kuehn (2016) notes, “reputational status is achieved through the construction of an identifiable, consistent brand persona with an appropriate affective positioning”, which, in this case, is tied to the concepts of “reliability, credibility, trustworthiness” (p. 6), reflected through Nutt’s self-curation on Instagram.
In understanding the construction of authenticity, aligned with the use of technology, Marwick (2013a) examined how fashion bloggers represent themselves on blogs through three different perspectives. These consist of “a palpable sense of truthful expression”, “a connection with and responsiveness to the audience”, and “an honest engagement with commodity and brands” (Marwick, 2013, p. 3). The concept of authenticity in this context is demonstrated in Figure 15, whereby Architasiri’s Instagram image showcases the constructions of before-and-after engagement in beauty practices. Her caption states: “before and after using perfect foundation”. She then writes in Thai: “Why do the images look like before and after I have undergone plastic surgery when really this is just the result of applying makeup [on my face]” (translated from Thai).

While this can be seen as a performative technique among influencers, the way in which Architasiri represents herself can be said to foster a sense of connectedness and affective relationships among followers, benefitting both influencers and brands (Marwick, 2013a). Here, influencers make it clear that the principal aim of before-and-after images is to reveal images that showcase the realistic marks, spots, blemishes, and scars visible on their faces. The majority of participants in this research stated that they would prefer to be seen in a natural style since it makes them feel more “comfortable”. Other participants admitted that they rarely use filter applications since they want to be seen as they really are. The use of these techniques further accentuates the core value of generating beauty-related content where emphasis is placed on the curation of an honest persona on social media. In examining the influencers’ practices, Abidin (2017) introduced the concept of
“calibrated amateurism”, in which she refers to “a practice and aesthetic in which actors in an attention economy labour specifically over crafting contrived authenticity that portrays the raw aesthetic of an amateur, whether or not they really are amateurs by status or practice” (p. 7). Authenticity in this context is demonstrated through the online mode of social media activity, conveying a sense of informal and ordinariness that allows for the impression of an amateur aesthetic to take place on Instagram (e.g., Abidin, 2017). This is characterised by the curative display of promoting an unedited Instagram image that further negotiates the authenticating practices on social media. While it could be said that beauty influencers purposefully invoke the notion of authenticity, revealing unedited facial images validates the impression of truthfulness among their followers. Here, the semi-staged performance is evident through the honesty of Architasiri sharing an image of her face, despite participating in online promotional material for her brand.

In relation to the foregoing practices, influencers authenticate their online image by showing parts of their face, mouth, lips, hands, eyelashes, and so on. As noted by Gannon and Prothero (2016), “the intention [of showing body parts] is to show the products in a natural context and on the blogger’s particular skin type” (p. 12). Here, @Nobluk is seen applying different shades of lipstick to her arm (Figure 16). She writes: “These are my five favourite colours from Bobbi Brown. Actually, there are more colours, and I’d love to do a swatch video, does anyone want to see it?????” (Nobluk, translated from Thai). In the image, @Nobluk applies different coloured lipsticks to her arm to authenticate her admiration towards the lipstick colours. Meanwhile, @Architasiri can also be seen engaging in a similar kind of practice, showcasing herself applying a facemask to her face (Figure 17). Her caption reads: “Applying this facemask before going out would definitely give you glowing skin; see you guys soon” (translated from Thai). Through both texts and images, @Architasiri and @Nobluk are seen to be creating a sense of transparency, achieved by demonstrating the use of cosmetic products through the curation of their Instagram persona. The authenticating performances in this context are identified by the influencers’ personal reflections, revealing their experience after using branded beauty items (i.e., Bobbi Brown and Ponds). These visual narratives reveal the promotional materials these beauty influencers use to curate their Instagram content in ways that establish a sense of trust, further enhancing social interaction among themselves and brands on social media. As Dekavalla (2020) put it, “[social media content] creators make transparent relationships with corporate brands as sources for content” (p. 76). While such practices may indicate the promotional material involved in collaborating with brands, they also suggest that both @Nobluk and @Architasiri serve to negotiate a sense of genuine
engagement, reaffirming a sense of belonging and accentuating the intimacy of relationships between themselves and their followers on Instagram (Vainikka et al., 2017). The foregoing narratives suggest that the notion of authenticity is achieved through visualisation, which in turn, establishes a sense of “intimacy, interaction, and disclosure” (Hurley, 2019, p. 9).

Figure 16. Nobluk’s Instagram profile.

Figure 17. Architasiri’s Instagram profile

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASON
In addition to showcasing the real aspects of Instagram media images, during the interviews, influencers discussed authenticity from the perspective of pain and discomfort resulting from participating in aesthetic procedures. This applies to both non-invasive and invasive beauty practices. Crucially, participants referred to non-invasive practices as cosmetic procedures such as lipo-filling (a technique for fat transfer), injecting botox and filler, as well as undergoing thread lifts. According to the participants, these techniques are usually performed under local anaesthesia where patients are able to go home after their procedures. These practices appear to be commonplace among the participants in this study, and they showcase snippets of their images during the procedures. Participants also refer to major invasive procedures such as undergoing double eyelid surgery, receiving breast implants, rhinoplasty, jawbone surgery, etc. Through these practices, the materiality of Instagram images often includes the whole process of sharing before, during, and after the procedures. For instance, Pekky used both Instagram images and the story function to reveal information about her cosmetic procedures. In doing so, she tagged the clinic and doctor’s name and posted a photo of the after-care process she experienced. In response to this, the image in Figure 18 features a snapshot of Pekky’s Instagram story, depicting herself prior to receiving treatment. Importantly, the curation of this type of media image is representative of the promotional materials used to position influencers in a privileged status, showcasing how they are able to reveal cosmetic procedures that may not be widely accessible to regular users through the use of online platforms. Thus, this type of media image promotes the integration between work and personal narratives of the influencer’s experiences, capturing the real aspects of the curative display of social media and negotiating the authentic practices highlighted on Instagram.
Through the curative display of authenticating practices, Pekky began by greeting her followers and telling them that she was at the Classy clinic and about to receive lipofilling treatment from Dr June. “I’m very excited about sharing this with everyone; let’s see what I am about to do next” (Pekky, translated from Thai), accompanied by a caption indicating she is now “ready”. Engaging with followers in this way is very important because it not only cultivates a positive and honest impression but also works to maintain the notion of authenticity among followers (e.g., Gannon & Prothero, 2016; Reade, 2020). In this instance, the analysis by Gannon and Prothero (2016) on the practices of taking selfies provides a useful understanding in relation to social media images that reveal the way in which influencers construct and circulate images online. These practices focus on the cultivation of Instagram images that demonstrate an “unstaged [version of oneself]”, suggesting that influencers intend to “keep it real” on social media (Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1866). In this context, the unstaged image of Pekky includes the open narratives of her caption, the use of the Instagram function where she broadcasts herself in real time, and the curation of her overall Instagram posts. The image in Figure 20 features another snapshot of her Instagram story – the lines marked on her face. She states that the doctor is about to begin the procedure, lifting and tightening her skin before injecting the fat transferred from her leg into several parts of her face. In describing the procedure, she continues to post another video on her Instagram story where she openly reveals her face right after the doctor completes the process. As can be observed...
in Figure 21, Pekky addresses her followers with: “Wow, I look much younger already, and my skin is so glowing. I will keep you guys updated every day” (Pekky, translated from Thai).

Figures 21 and 22. Pekkytheangel’s Instagram Profile.

These statements reinforce Pekky’s sense of honesty and consistency in her online sharing. They reaffirm the importance of showcasing aspects of real images that appear to be real and authentic on Instagram (e.g., Hurley, 2019). Pekky continued to post images of herself daily, with captions such as “I woke up like this”, “My skin looks much better as a result of the stem cell transplant”, “baby face”, and “I don’t see any swelling, the doctor must have tricked me” (Pekky, translated from Thai). The images and captions in Figure 22 tend to appear throughout her posts. The emphasis here is on her truthful expression to followers, which in this case, is strategically constructed through her realistic persona, as opposed to those who stage images with the aim of enhancing their online presence. Pekky continued to share the progress of her images through both posts and the Instagram story function. The images shown here focus on the pain and swelling she experiences as part of her post-surgery procedures. Given this context, Figures 23 and 24 reveal unedited images of Pekky three weeks after the procedures. The caption in Figure 23 states: “Update using front iPhone camera with no app three weeks after lipofilling and thread lift
with Dr June at the Classy clinic, I literally look much younger” (Pekky, translated from Thai). Accordingly, Figure 24 reveals a similar version of the previous post, with the bruise under Pekky’s eye becoming increasingly prominent. In her caption, she marks the result as 10/10, suggesting that Pekky is very satisfied with the outcome. In particular, she repeatedly promotes Dr June and the Classy clinic in her caption: “[a result of] lipofilling and thread lift by Dr June at the Classy clinic” (Pekky, translated from Thai).

**Figure 23.** Pekkytheangel’s Instagram profile.

**Figure 24.** Pekkytheangel’s Instagram profile.
In this context, Reade (2020, p. 8) provided useful insight into understanding the aesthetics of curating “raw” images on Instagram. The construction of “raw” in this context is exemplified by images of the bruising, expression of pain, as well as the long process of recovery, emphasising her overall experience of undergoing aesthetic procedures (e.g., Reade, 2020). As Reade (2020) articulates, “cultural standards of beauty and desirable feminine aesthetics do still circulate within the raw assemblage and shape practices of inclusion and erasure” (p. 9). While there is no indication of Pekky being paid to undergo this cosmetic surgery, the fact that she repeatedly tagged the name of the clinic along with the name of the doctor could potentially bring her authenticity into question. Nevertheless, all her followers posted positive comments while recognising that she may have shared her experience as part of an advertorial agreement. As García-Rapp (2017) noted, “the relevance of authenticity for the beauty community dictates that through the display of an authentic self, gurus are allowed to continue deploying self-branding strategies in order to remain visible and valuable without losing face or being fake” (p. 124). Given this context, several of Pekky’s followers mentioned in the comment section: “You really look much younger. I’m also interested. Could you do the review in comparison to how much it costs in Korea?”, and “How long will it take you to recover”? In the meantime, other followers wrote positive comments such as “You look so beautiful” (translated from Thai). In this respect, all Pekky’s followers comment positively on her posts and the outcome of undergoing aesthetic procedures. This may be due to Pekky’s practice of sharing realistic images of her experiences, positioning her image as an “ordinary person” (Reade, 2020, p. 14). Overall, the sequence of Pekky’s posts generated a significant number of likes and comments, increasing her popularity on Instagram, which in turn, suggests something genuine about her personality and online persona. Pekky’s role here is consistent with what Lobinger and Brantner (2015) refer to as “expressive authenticity” (p. 1850), concerning “the relationship between a person and his or her visual representation and is achieved when ‘things are true to their own nature’” (Banks, 2013, p. 161, as cited in Lobinger & Brantner 2015, p. 1850). Accordingly, Pekky has strategically constructed her online persona in a way that could be described as semi-staged, which in this case, provides narratives of the “imperfect natural self” (Reade, 2020, p. 11), enabling her followers to participate in what Abidin (2015b) describes as “exclusive, [and] intimate exchange” (p. 278) through the Thai digital economy.
Section II – Behind the Scenes and Use of the Story Function

In this section, I examine beauty influencers’ strategies in broadcasting behind-the-scenes images and examine how they detail their day-to-day activities by employing the story and live-streaming functions on Instagram. In this context, participants discussed the importance of broadcasting themselves in ways that enable them to communicate with their followers in real time. While regular social media users may use this function for entertainment or socialising purposes, I have discovered that all the participants employ this technique to authenticate themselves. Such authentication could potentially increase the number of likes and expand their online fame and popularity through the digital economy (e.g., Marwick, 2013). In understanding this context, Marwick (2015) examined the construction of social media practices among a group of microcelebrities on Instagram, stating that the concept of “Instafame” is relevant to our understanding of social media practices. Similarly, Duffy and Hund (2015, p. 3) illustrate the idea of “having it all”, referring to creative work that requires women to broadcast an “always-on” persona. These authors detail how their participants have the privilege of attending fashion events and access to high-end cosmetic products. These practices have been continuously broadcast, enabling influencers to maintain their online consistency on social media platforms. This aspect of the influencers’ performance is relevant to the cultivation of online personas, allowing the rising phenomenon of the influencer industry to be examined. In particular, the curative display of promoting global travel while showcasing behind-the-scenes snippets are also important since they foreground the establishment of online identities, shaping the understanding of how some of these people strive for fame, leading them to become famous throughout the digital economy (Marwick, 2013, 2015a; Duffy & Hund, 2015).

To demonstrate how beauty influencers strategise their online personas, I first examine the way in which they detail the practice of revealing behind-the-scenes images and how they engage with their followers through both online images and the story function on Instagram. I then discuss the way in which they detail their day-to-day routine activities, their favourite skincare products, meeting with fans in the flesh, applying makeup, and so on.
Broadcasting Behind the Scenes Images

In tandem with the shift in contemporary media culture, participants discussed showcasing behind-the-scenes images as a way of invoking an impression of sincerity, particularly through the use of the Instagram story function. As mentioned in the previous chapter, participants often broadcast daily activities on the Instagram story function, allowing followers to see snippets of their lifestyles in ways that adhere to branded cosmetic and beauty products. Several participants asserted during the interviews that the promotional materials used to curate oneself in real time are growing trends throughout online platforms, extending the opportunity to attract brands and potential sponsors. In this instance, Ann, who consistently uses the Instagram story function to showcase her daily beauty routine, described the use of the story function as “fast, real, and effective” despite lasting for only 24 hours. Meanwhile, Prae added that the Instagram story function allows her to reveal “sneak-peak” images as well as “glimpses” of her daily activities, which are much loved by brands, followers, and herself. Given this context, beauty influencers often reveal parts of their lives that are seemingly real while demonstrating beauty practices on social media. In doing so, they allow their followers to experience behind-the-scenes activities often occurring in real time using the story function. To illustrate the notion of authenticity, the following images reveal snapshots of Nutt’s recent Instagram image and her Instagram story.

![Figure 25. Nutt’s Instagram profile.](image-url)
Here, the materiality of revealing behind-the-scenes images in which Nutt broadcasts herself collaborating with a high-value, reputable brand such as L’Oréal Thailand reaffirms the notion of authenticity, which in turn creates “a trustworthy persona” (García-Rapp 2017, p. 125) and enhances her credibility among followers (as seen in Figure 25). Through her caption, Nutt tells her followers about being given an opportunity to collaborate with the brand. This collaboration also features Chompoo Areeya, a Thai “superstar”, domestically and internationally recognised by both mainstream and social media. Nutt disclosed: “I have not dyed my hair in three years as I love my black hair very much, but when L’Oréal contacted me to collaborate with the brand featuring Chompoo, I just had to say yes! I am so happy and honoured to be part of L’Oréal, working alongside Chompoo. I was very excited on the day, and Chompoo was so nice to work with” (Nutt, translated from Thai).

She then stated in her caption: “#I have a behind-the-scenes clip of making a commercial video – does anyone want to see it?” (Nutt, translated from Thai). Here, Nutt authenticates herself by inviting her followers to experience what could be defined as “backstage” (Goffman, 1956, as cited...
in Abidin, 2017, p. 7), curated to capture the audience’s attention. Through the use of the story function (as seen in Figure 26), Nutt detailed the step-by-step production process involved in creating a commercial video, introducing her followers to the production crewmembers, including a stylist, producer, director, and their teams. These practices demonstrate the shifting enactment of social media, revealing how “celebrity culture has changed in an era of network media, where traditional control and management mechanisms have shifted so that creating and maintaining a celebrity persona is now something ordinary people who aren’t conventionally famous can now access” (Banet-Weiser, 2017, p. 277). Similarly, the way in which Nutt reveals behind-the-scenes images is also consistent and corresponds to the image of a lifestyle blogger, establishing a sense of “familiarity” (Abidin, 2017, p. 7). Such actions enabled Nutt to attract her followers’ attention, as indicated by the large number of likes and comments she received (as indicated in Figure 25). As Nutt introduced the crewmembers through the post, she started to jokingly describe a mistake during the shooting process. She said: “I could [only] make a mistake if there was only me on the scene, but there are scenes where I must work with the superstar. I was so nervous that I repeatedly made a lot of mistakes” (Nutt, translated from Thai). Like every other influencer, Nutt is known for collaborating with brands and creating online content for monetary gain (e.g., Abidin, 2018). Nevertheless, the fact that she portrayed herself as an individual who also makes mistakes portrays a sense of authenticity among her followers – she is “just like them” (Banet-Weiser, 2017, p. 277). In addition, the content of Nutt’s post includes advice: “things that you should and shouldn’t do in the workplace” (Nutt, translated from Thai). Given this, she added: “These are my tips: [you know] your clients always expect 100% from you, but you have to give it 120%, 130%, you must be filled with energy [in order] to impress your clients” (Nutt, translated from Thai). This aspect of Nutt’s personality, coupled with her transparent quality of revealing behind-the-scenes images, means that not only is she perceived as authentic but also emits a sense of transparency (Dekavalla, 2019). As Dekavalla (2019) explained, “transparency serves to reveal to audiences the complexities of generating media content and to protect professionals from suggestions that they are deceiving audiences” (p. 78).
Similar to Nutt, @Nobluk (Figure 27), a widely recognised beauty influencer within the Thai Internet scene, also broadcasts behind-the-scenes images of herself. In Figure 27, @Nobluk is standing in front of a camera in a set-like context, giving the impression she is engaging in some form of work. Her caption states: “Good Afternoon” (translated from Thai). @Nobluk does not include any details of the type of work she is engaging in despite receiving a substantial number of likes, as indicated by her post. All the participants asserted during the interviews that capturing images of the moment and posting them on a platform such as Instagram is the most practical and fastest way to gain followers’ attention. By revealing an image of herself in this way, it could be said that @Nobluk is managing her online persona with the intention of fostering popularity, resulting in the expansion of her online visibility and creating positive relationships with her
followers. However, it could also be said that @Nobluk exemplifies a highly staged image, functioning in association with the discourses of “visibility labour” (Abidin, 2016b, p. 90). Abidin (2016b) described this form of labour as “the work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of self-conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for favourable ends” (p. 90). “Visibility labour”, in this case, is conveyed through what is seemingly fun, enjoyable, and effortless, as shown by @Nobluk’s posture and smile. The temporal activities of projecting influencers’ professional activities can thus be understood as part of a strategy for strengthening their relationships with followers, which in turn, provides an understanding of the extent to which these Thai beauty influencers cultivate authentic personas on Instagram (e.g., Reade, 2020).

**Broadcasting Their Day-to-Day Lives**

To create an impression of authenticity, several participants in this study also described the importance of broadcasting a realistic version of themselves, revealing aspects of their lives (e.g., Reade, 2020). All the participants stated that this form of interaction often involves updating their daily routine activities by using the Instagram story function to portray a sense of “ordinariness” (Banet-Weiser, 2017, p. 276) as an online form of communication. Portraying snippets of the influencers’ routine acts can demonstrate what Abidin (2018) describes as “the diary-like reportage of people’s everyday lives” (p. 5), which in this case, is becoming an increasing trend among the participants in this research, and more specifically, other Thai beauty influencers. While all participants appeared to engage in advertorials through the Instagram function, they also address how “the challenge” has been commonly utilised. This is illustrated in Figure 28, which reveals a snapshot of influencers accepting the “show me something real, no retouch” challenge. In this instance, the influencers in this research tended to believe that such practices emphasised a sense of friendliness, helping to maintain their relatability among other influencers and followers (e.g., Abidin, 2018b). This aspect of relatability reflects the construction of online images that foster a sense of relatability among influencers and their followers on Instagram (Abidin, 2018b).
As can be observed, influencers showcase images of themselves, for example, sunbathing, eating, having their teeth improved at the dentist and idiosyncrasies; one influencer even placed a lizard on her face. These all work to authenticate their playfully realistic personas, projecting themselves as “someone real”. The participant influencers in this research believe these sets of practices cultivate the combination of an “intimate affective [form of] labour”, fostering connectivity, approachability, and intimacy, in building an affective bond or relationship to maintain trust with followers (Duguay, 2019, p.5). As Duguay (2019) described, “intimate affective labour [is the type of labour that is] expended in sharing and managing intimate personal details about oneself with others” (p. 5).

While some influencers consider it important to display this form of “ordinariness” to their followers, others, such as @Architasiri and @Sononui, also combine the notion of authenticity by expressing their love and admiration for cosmetics and skincare products with “digital self-branding practices” (Scolere et al., 2018, p. 1). The self-branding practices here refer to the way in which influencers construct different versions of themselves with the intent to engage in online
self-promotion based on the level of affordance on social media platforms (Van Dijck, 2013b, as cited in Scolere et al., 2018, p. 2). In this context, Hearn (2010) explained, self-branding practices represent “a form of affective, immaterial labour that is purposefully undertaken by individuals to garner attention, reputation, and potentially profit” (Hearn 2010, p. 427, as cited in Scolere et al., 2018, p. 1). These sets of practices are conveyed through the affordances of the platform, enabling influencers to showcase what is perceived to be a real experience of using certain cosmetics and skincare products while broadcasting what is perceived to be a realistic version of themselves (e.g., Reade, 2020; Scolere et al., 2018). This is illustrated by Architasiri’s Instagram story (Figure 29), where she posts an image of herself packing products due to be delivered to customers. Her caption states: “This is what it is like in real life” and “Thank you, everyone, for your support” (translated from Thai). She then tagged her official Instagram account @Archita_official, created specifically for selling her own branded cosmetics. She also shares another Instagram story involving her experience of using a skincare product. She writes: “During this trip to Japan, I make sure I bring Architasiri cream with me because its texture feels so good and makes my skin feel so smooth. It is definitely worth buying – I would totally recommend it” (translated from Thai). This caption is also accompanied by the hashtag of her brand, @archita_official. In a similar vein, @Sononui created a collection of her Instagram stories, highlighted under the name “my fav”. In contrast to @Architasiri’s realistic persona, manifesting through the broadcasting of behind-the-scenes recordings, @Sononui displays a carefully curated arrangement of fresh skincare products through her Instagram story (Figure 30). Her caption states:

I must admit that some of these items are overly expensive, but they have really got my skin under control. I reviewed these five masks in my blogs. If any of you are having skin problems, please feel free to check them out (Sononui, translated from Thai).
By revealing images of themselves in this way, both @Architasiri and @Sononui automatically endorse the branded products. This embodies what Scolere et al. (2018) term “platform-specific self-branding” (p. 4), capturing followers’ attention while enabling both influencers to enhance their credibility online. As can be observed, the participants in this research meditate their authenticity by projecting images of realness and transparency despite being involved in an online advertorial (Dekevalla, 2019). Essentially, other participants also describe Instagram stories as the most effective way to feature beauty products since the platform allows users to add functions such as polls and voting, as well as hyperlinks to redirect followers to other websites such as YouTube. Onn, who also owns a cosmetics brand, explained: “These functions allow me to build positive relationships with my followers and brands because they give me the option to have a sort of one-on-one conversation” (Onn, translated from Thai). In this context, all participants in this research stated that they would go live in order to run a Q&A session at least once a week. This would allow followers to interact, ask questions, or participate in a giveaway contest. This form of
interaction articulates intimacy and establishes a sense of trust among influencers and followers (e.g., Duguay, 2019). It reveals the importance of maintaining authentication standards, enabling influencers to negotiate a sense of familiarity among themselves and brands. As Hurley (2019) put it, “giving a performance of ‘authentic’ life is the important thing as authenticity itself becomes commodified” (p. 11). Meanwhile, other participants highlighted the importance of maintaining consistency in their posts. Given this, Prae added: “I post a minimum of 7–10 stories a day [because I like to keep track] of my posts given that it only lasts 24 hours” (Prae, translated from Thai). Similarly, May detailed: “I don’t know about other influencers, but for me, the best time to post is between 4–7 pm”. This view is also reaffirmed by Praew, who described how “the peak period for me is probably around 4–8 pm” (Praew, translated from Thai). Accordingly, assumptions about online engagement and the extent to which creating online content to post and share appear to be increasingly important among participants in this research. These practices can be described as “the acquisition and practice of technical skills and bodily comportment, carried out to achieve a certain appearance and garner desired attention” (Duguay, 2019, p. 5). During the interviews, participants disclose that they hardly ever receive negative comments from followers, which in turn, gives the impression of what they describe as “positive energy” in encouraging them to create more content to post online. The majority of participants stated that followers often find their online content inspiring and are aware of the advertorial posts but still find it trustworthy. In this regard, the participant influencers describe their experience of using Instagram stories as “the most authenticable platform for being themselves” and that it is far from “being fake” (e.g., Hurley, 2019, p. 10). As Tip stated during the interview:

If I want to get a message out fast, I will use IG story because it saves me a lot of time. With still images and videos, it can take two to three days or, sometimes, over a week to edit all the content and get the final approval from my sponsors before uploading them onto my page. But with IG story, it allows followers to see exactly what I am doing in real time (Tip, translated from Thai).

The use of sentences such as “to see exactly what I am doing” negotiates an example of transparency, providing constant access and allowing Tip’s followers to witness her daily activities online (e.g., Dekavalla, 2019). Perhaps, what is more relevant here is when Prae expresses during the interview: “I share nearly every aspect of my life on Instagram story, from waking up in the morning to the end of the day; I also often share tips on beauty practices” (translated from Thai). Using the Instagram story function, therefore, articulates a strong sense of intimacy (e.g., García-
Rapp, 2017) and a consistent relationship among influencers and followers, which in turn, enables them to generate a realistic lifestyle, shaping the performance of their online images and providing realistic aspects of their social media practices on Instagram (e.g., Duguay, 2019; García-Rapp, 2017).

Influencer Meet and Greet

In addition to maintaining a consistent relationship with their followers, the participants in this research discussed organising events, inviting followers to meet with them. In this context, two main strategies are commonly utilised among the research participants. The first is what participants refer to as an influencer meet and greet, which involves sending out invitations to followers to join events on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, New Year, etc. For example, Nutt invited her followers to an event celebrating the achievement of 1,000,000 YouTube subscribers. She discussed during the interview that setting up a meeting would allow her to be closer to people and give them the opportunity to feel acknowledged by appearing on social media (e.g., Abidin, 2016b). In this instance, those who participate in online activities such as reposting and sharing influencers’ original posts, and others who write comments to attract influencers’ attention, will be selected to join the event. To illustrate, the following two images reveal Nutt’s Instagram posts featuring her in a long white dress, emulating an iconic character. The first image correlates with the overall characteristics of typical female influencers, who focus on projecting “hegemonic ideals of beauty” (Hurley, 2019, p. 7), which in Nutt’s case applies to makeup, clothing, props, and a seemingly high-fashion shoot, representing her in an “economically privileged lifestyle” (Hurley, 2019, p. 7). In this context, Nutt mentioned during the interview that because people tend to have high expectations of her in terms of creating online content, to keep up with the demand, she must continuously come up with something interesting to gain attention, ultimately leading to positive relationships with followers. This is an important component in the influencer industry since it points to how influencers focus on generating valuable relationships and negotiating real and authentic personas on social media. Figure 31 sees Nutt cuddling one of her followers, with both of them smiling.
The construction of this type of image represents a seemingly passionate relationship with the public – projecting a strong sense of accessibility and friendliness (e.g., Abidin, 2018b), which also works to reaffirm positive disclosure with Nutt’s social media followers (e.g., Abidin, 2015). Her caption states: “#nisafanmeet… thank you to everyone for all your support, allowing me to become who I am today [all of this] really means a lot to me. I really appreciate [the fact that] some people took a day off work, and others missed their classes and travelled a long way to meet me today. Also, thanks to all the teams, my family for their lovely meals, and my fan clubs. I wasn’t going to cry, but I really can’t hold it in” (Nutt, translated from Thai). She then ended the sentence by including the following hashtag: “#for those who did not join the event. I have created a clip for you all to see” (translated from Thai), which in this case, suggests that she has put effort into creating a video to keep her followers updated. This also reinforces a sense of connectivity among
them. Through close contact and intimate conversations, Nutt has developed a sense of belonging (e.g., Reade, 2020), enabling her to cultivate a relatable image, which is an important element in conveying an authentic persona through the digital economy. In addition, the participants discussed how they exchanged and demonstrated tips and ideas on beauty practices during these meet-and-greet events, creating an active form of face-to-face interaction among influencers and their followers.

While engaging with followers is considered one of the most effective strategies for maintaining an authentic persona, the participants also discussed the importance of attending beauty events where they are invited to promote beauty products and brands, much like celebrities in the traditional entertainment industry. A distinctive feature of this type of meeting is that, according to the participant influencers in this study, it is common for sponsors to pay for the event. While some influencers have been invited to attend local branded events, others mention that they have been invited to join international campaigns, requiring them to travel abroad (as illustrated in Chapter Four). This is particularly common among those demonstrating the ability to construct images that not only enable them to maintain positive relationships with followers online but also attract brands, extending their advertorial opportunities. For these Thai beauty influencers, attending beauty events and displaying images while keeping in close contact with their followers are considered to be among the most effective ways to maintain long-term relationships with followers and brands, promoting a sense of authenticity. This genre of posting is evident in @Architasiri’s Instagram story, in which she displays an image of herself surrounded by a group of people that look to be supporting her outside the media scene (Figure 32).
In this sense, @Architasiri carefully crafted her online persona by promoting her own cosmetic brand through tagging @archita_official as well as geotagging the location she was at, namely Eveandboy (a well-known cosmetics shop popular among young Thai women). Despite attending sponsored events as part of her promotional material, the way @Architasiri is seen engaging with followers through the story function gives an impression of inclusivity, accentuating the interactive disclosure among influencers and followers (e.g., Abidin, 2016; Duguay, 2019). Prae discussed her recent visit to a Sephora-sponsored event, “I was so amazed to meet so many of my followers. We felt so related and had so many things in common. It was such a great opportunity to meet so many people” (Prae, translated from Thai). The perception of authenticity is thus articulated through direct interaction and social engagement, allowing influencers to strive for online fame
while also maintaining intimate relationships and self-disclosure through the Internet scene (e.g., García-Rapp, 2017).

**Section III – Discussing Real Issues**

To maintain an effective relationship with followers, influencers in this research addressed the issue of authenticity in terms of their life stories resulting from engaging in beauty practices. Authenticity in this context refers to the elements of real, intimate, and personal issues in relation to topics such as the influencers’ struggle to gain online recognition, the results of their accomplishments, and the risk of engaging in beauty practices. Through the concept of “familiarity” (Abidin, 2017, p. 7), influencers in this research frequently expressed what Abidin (2017) refers to as a “back region”, involving topics which may be “private”, “unseen”, “secret”, and related to their “personal lives” (Abidin, 2013, as cited in Abidin, 2017, p. 7). Such topics typically involve emotional, sensitive, and heartfelt issues resulting from the influencers maintaining consistent personas and intimate disclosure. In this context, influencers create both Instagram stories and still images, redirecting their followers to full versions of the content on YouTube, where they often highlight stories of their lives and the effort it took for them to become known on the Internet scene. Among the participant beauty influencers, one of the most common practices is to reveal images of their homes and personal lives, enabling them to express seemingly realistic images, instilling a sense of believability in their followers.

In doing so, influencers often use signposts such as “home tour” or “open house”, creating a number of episodes on Instagram. These images are also accompanied by personal narratives such as “this is something I have never revealed before” or “I would love you all to see this real aspect of me”. Such practices are believed to foster the impression of connectedness, establishing a sense of “fantastical authenticity”, referred to as “[different] versions of authenticity occurring at imaginary levels” (Hurley, 2019, p. 11). This aspect of authenticity is unique since it involves the influencer’s practice of “highly scripted, choreographed, staged, digitally manipulated processes, involving extensive architectures of digital labour” (Hurley 2019, p. 3). It reveals the construction of imaginative relationships, enhancing knowledge on the cultivation of images, including the extent to which they are real and authentic on Instagram. In this instance, the authenticity crafted by Nutt and Kaycee is used as a case study in this research. On several social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, Nutt announced via video that she was about to reveal an aspect of her life that had never been seen before. It transpired that this was part of a challenge
involving a collaboration with the Vienna brand, where she was requested to reveal the most secretive part of her life to the Internet scene. Given this, she said:

After giving you a glimpse of my first house, it turned out that many people wanted to know how I grew up in that dilapidated, dirty, messy house. [As part of this] I accepted the challenge from Vienna to speak to you all openly about my secret, something I never thought I would have to share with anyone (Nutt, translated from Thai).

She then began by taking the opportunity to promote Vienna’s product, trying on a bra as part of the advertorial. The scene then moved to Nutt, giving a tour of the house where she used to live. This genre of posting allowed her followers to witness each of the rooms, where she explained how hard life had been for her growing up. For example, while showing the kitchen, she stated, “This was our dining table. We all ate on this table, which has been with us for over ten years” (Nutt, translated from Thai). The room featured a very small dining table that she and the rest of her household had to share. Despite engaging in promotional material, authenticity in this context provides Nutt’s followers with aspects of realness, aligning with her intention to produce transparency in this mediated environment. She then moved on to showcasing other parts of the house, such as the living room, bathroom, bedroom, and so on, all of which created the impression that life prior to becoming a beauty influencer had been difficult for Nutt. In this respect, she also detailed the lower standard of living in terms of how she used to live, emphasising how “dilapidated” her house was. For instance, she mentioned, “We don’t know when the house is going to collapse and fall apart. The step is broken – if you step on it, it will fall down”. In the remainder of the video, Nutt recalled how she first created beauty tutorials, reflecting on how much things have changed over time and how she needed to work hard to buy a new house to support everyone in her family. Words such as poor, poverty, difficulties, and hardship were frequently mentioned throughout the video. It is this practice of sharing honest information about her life that allows Nutt to establish a sense of closeness, creating inspirational value among other influencers and her followers, meaning she is perceived as a role model (e.g., Abidin, 2017). This is reaffirmed by some of the comments she received. For instance, one of her followers commented: “I love you 90% more. You really are my idol”, while others added similar comments, such as “I like you even more, I get to see the real you and your loving family”, “You are so trustworthy. I love your family”. Nutt and other participants in this research considered revealing their experiences of dealing with difficulties to be an authenticating practice, captivating followers’ attention and thus maintaining “the modes of realism and documentary style images” (Hurley,
2019, p. 3) available on the Thai social media scene. In a similar vein, Kaycee has also been seen to cultivate intimate disclosure with her followers on Instagram. She posted a video with the intention of opening herself up to her followers, allowing them to know other aspects of her life. These practices reveal different areas of Kaycee’s house, accompanied by personal narratives of her background and where she came from. This aspect of her practices demonstrates the way in which “newer media forms, and specifically self-employed content creators, also translate transparency into identifiable features, through a systematic ‘performance’ which aims to earn trust” (Dekavalla, 2019, p. 75). In this context, Kaycee managed her authenticity by revealing what is believed to be the private side of her life to the public. Filming in her bedroom, Kaycee opened the conversation by saying:

I’m not usually a public person who speaks about every aspect of my private life. This is mainly because I’m the kind of person who values privacy and has had a very tough childhood, and it is something I am not proud of. It has always been in the back of my mind, even after all this time. However, since I have been on the social media scene for 4–5 years now, I would like to open up a little bit more. I want everyone to know me more as a person and not just a beauty influencer constantly engaging in beauty practices (Kaycee, translated from Thai)

Reflecting on her childhood, Kaycee began by highlighting how she grew up in a place she referred to as a “slum”. She added: “I grew up living in a slum, and life was very, very hard at the time. I never had money to do anything. I nearly had to drop out of education because my mother was struggling” (Kaycee, translated from Thai). Throughout her post, Kaycee recounted how she never had the opportunity to go out or have a social life like other people her age and how she had to work harder to accomplish things. Kaycee then went on to justify why she started creating online beauty content, claiming that she had always wanted to do something she loved and took a chance by resigning from her full-time job. At the end of the video, Kaycee concluded by expressing gratitude for the opportunity she had been given and how she could now afford to buy her family a home and support them as a result of engaging in beauty practice. Throughout the video, Kaycee emphasised her private life, which signifies the real issues as a form of “real talk” (Reade 2020, p. 14) with her followers. Thus, these posting circuits work to authenticate Kaycee’s public persona, helping her to maintain a positive online image (e.g., Abidin, 2018b; Duguay, 2019). In particular, the expression of doing something she loves correlates with the discourse of aesthetic labour
(Banet-Weiser, 2017, p. 276). As Banet-Weiser (2017) explained, “aesthetic labour is expressed in earnest terms as just doing something one loves to do, as the focus on love and ordinariness obscures the mechanisms that are needed to produce these videos” (p. 276).

Through the exchange of closeness and intimate conversation, at the end of the video, Kaycee said that the main purpose of sharing her life story was not for people to feel sympathetic towards her. Rather, she wanted to encourage people to keep positive by pointing out that it is part of life to have obstacles, and a person can always work to overcome them. As a result, the majority of feedback Kaycee received was overwhelmingly positive, as indicated by phrases such as “I love you and I love everything about you, you are a real fighter and even give me and others positive energy to carry on” as well as “This is so encouraging to see. I’m so proud for your family. Thank you for sharing” and “Thank you for sharing. I can just feel that you are such a loving person and not fake. I promise I will always support your work. Love you so much” (translated from Thai).

The positive bonding in this context reaffirms the sense of familiarity, extending the positive relationships between Kaycee and her followers (e.g., Abidin, 2017). It reveals the extent to which Thai beauty influencers generate affective relationships, cultivating positive and authentic images on social media. To this end, speaking about real issues reiterates the sense of commitment in authenticating influencers’ public personas. The expression that anyone can do this allows the understanding of personal disclosures generated through “inspirational personas” (Reade, 2020, p. 15) on social media. In this instance, reflecting on their life experiences demonstrates the influencers’ determination, foregrounding the narratives to understand their life experiences. The sharing of the foregoing narratives, therefore, plays a central role in understanding the influencers’ practices and the way in which they maintain online fame and positive relationships with their followers on Instagram. This, in turn, shapes the understanding concerning the notion of authenticity and the extent to which Thai beauty influencers manage and maintain positive online images that are perceived as real and authentic online.
**Risks of Engaging in Beauty Practices**

As part of their collaboration with several sponsored brands, the participants in this research discussed authenticity from the perspective of the risks involved in engaging with beauty practices. Risk in this context is associated with the after-effects of using beauty and skincare items, potentially affecting the curation of the influencers’ images or, at times, their appearances. Here, participants reveal the importance of reflecting on their true experiences to avoid being seen as fake and dishonest by their followers (e.g., Hurley, 2019). This expression offers insight into understanding the sense of authenticity that must be strictly applied within the digital economy. Drawing on Arnould and Price’s (2000) perspectives, Gannon and Prothero (2016) explored the concept of consumer authenticity, described as having two distinct purposes: the first being truthful to oneself and others while the second is expressing true values to the public (Arnould & Price, 2000, as cited in Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 1860). Given the importance of maintaining an authentic persona, most of the interviewees highlight the need to disclose honest information as a result of conducting product reviews. These may include both positive and negative experiences and come in the form of what they described as “risks”. As previously mentioned, risks in this instance often emerge in the form of allergic reactions to the use of cosmetics and skincare products. To take an example, during one of my interview conversations with Prae, she discussed her allergic reaction resulting from the use of a counter-brand toner. She added: “After using the counter-brand toner for quite some time, I started to have a bad allergic reaction, so I had to cancel other forms of work. It took me over four months to finally recover, so I am very conscious when given free products to use.” She also added: “Even though it was a sponsored product, and I was paid to use it, I informed them (the clients) that I had to give my honest experience to followers because it could give unpleasant results to others, and you know the last thing I want is to damage my reputation by lying to my followers” (Prae, translated from Thai).

Here, Prae balanced her consistent image by admitting to the use of sponsored products and providing an honest review, which reflects her genuine intention to warn others. This, in turn, worked to maintain her trustworthy persona by emphasising the values of authenticity on the Internet scene (e.g., García-Rapp, 2017). In addition, the materiality of Prae’s image, such as her bad allergic reaction and long recovery, works to validate her credibility, stemming from the sharing of intimate information. Revealing real aspects of her image allows Prae to solidify relationships with her followers. Like Prae, Ae encountered a similar experience, detailing her negative experience of using sponsored products. She said: “After using the cream that was supposed to enhance my skin, I ended up with spots all over my face, the brand did not take any
responsibility, and I spent a fortune trying to bring my skin back to normal. It was not worth it at all” (Ae, translated from Thai). When reflecting on the situation, Ae believed that the long-term damage affected her self-confidence. She added: “I did not go out for about three months because I always had a complex about my skin but felt I needed to share the results with my followers so that they were aware and could understand why I had to disappear for a while” (Ae, translated from Thai). Song (2018) suggested “only a snippet of a microcelebrity’s life and personality – often shown in a positive light – makes it onto his or her social media” (p. 2). The participants in this research, on the other hand, revealed the tendency to speak openly about their negative experiences, which could be said to help generate long-term effects, contributing to the maintenance of their authenticity (e.g., Reade, 2020). As García-Rapp (2017) stated, “it is namely their perceived honesty and openness that ultimately protects their legitimacy and authority as admired online personalities” (p. 127).

While the foregoing narratives above apply to several of the participants in this research, it is also important to note that not all participants encountered negative experiences when engaging in product reviews. In this instance, Tip disclosed: “I don’t accept every job I am offered. I always make sure that the products are safe and recognised by the Thai FDA authority” (Tip, translated from Thai). Similarly, Onn, who owns a cosmetics brand, suggested: “I always ensure the safety and quality of all my products. I know all the ingredients and use them myself before introducing the products to customers” (Onn, translated from Thai). It is the reassurance of safety along with quality that negotiates the sense of a trustworthy persona. This online form of expression thus illuminates what I describe as a semi-staged character, which in this case, is affirmed by the influencers’ intent to cultivate realistic experiences despite receiving monetary rewards for engaging in such works. Examining authenticity in this context contributes to the understanding of how Thai beauty influencers maintain a strong sense of relationship, enabling them to cultivate trustworthy and intimate disclosure with followers and brands online (e.g., Abidin, 2017; Duguay, 2019; Reade, 2020).
Conclusion

This chapter discusses how Thai beauty influencers convey an impression of authenticity and realness, specifically within the Thai context. Through both texts and images, it is clear that these beauty influencers tend to maintain the real and authentic practices conveyed through the expression of their “authentic acts” (Gannon & Prothero, 2016, p. 5), as negotiated through the curated display of their Instagram posts. As I argue, Thai beauty influencers construct their online personas, often semi-staged and played out through the premise of engaging in product reviews, storying their daily activities, revealing behind-the-scenes occurrences, and discussing what they claim to be intimate and real issues online. Through these practices, I first examine the way in which Thai beauty influencers review beauty products, often claiming to be featuring real and unedited images of themselves. By emphasising “accurate” quality and their real experience to followers, influencers reflect on the importance of maintaining authentic images and cultivating a sense of sincerity on social media. Such practices enable influencers to maintain their authentic image (Gannon & Prothero, 2016) rather than being seen as someone who engages in online work mainly for monetary gain. I demonstrate how Thai beauty influencers strategise the practice of revealing behind-the-scenes images and examine how they detail their day-to-day activities by employing the story and live function on Instagram. Interviews with participating influencers reveal two sets of practices in the Instagram story function. Firstly, broadcasting branded products or revealing behind-the-scenes photos that allow followers to see what influencers are doing or where they are going. Secondly, allowing their followers to communicate with them directly by posting online questions, which influencers will answer, usually live on Instagram and using the poll question function. This highlights the importance of authenticity in broadcasting various aspects of the influencers’ online identities in which they claim to reflect a realistic version of themselves, revealing who they really are in real life. Such practices also promote a combination of connectivity, approachability, and intimacy, solidifying an effective relationship for maintaining trust (e.g., Duguay, 2019) with followers. The last section of the chapter demonstrates the influencers’ authenticity by revealing real and emotional aspects of their lives, contributing to the understanding towards the curation of authentic images as well as identifying the risk of engaging in product reviews. The majority of participants in this research revealed different aspects of their lives prior to becoming known as influencers. The story and narratives of their personal lives facilitate intimate relationships among followers, offering insights into the different perspectives of influencers and their practices prior to pursuing an online career. The discussion also extends to understanding the importance of honesty, suggesting the idea of being truthful to oneself while expressing true values to the public (Arnould & Price, 2000, as cited in Gannon & Prothero, 2016,
To summarise, Thai beauty influencers offer sites of authenticity and realness, conveyed through what I consider to be semi-staged practices. Brand collaboration, follower numbers, and income are at the centre of this type of work. However, the interview results and visual analysis suggest that part of the engagement must include a commitment to authenticity. The participants in this research work to develop a sense of connectedness, facilitating their professional role in the Thai digital economy.
Chapter Six: Beauty Ideals, and the Idealisation of Beauty, Whiteness, Tanning and Plastic Surgery

Having examined the business of beauty blogging and the notion of authenticity in Chapters Four and Five, this chapter further examines how the idealisation of beauty practices is enacted and performed throughout the Thai influencer industry. It demonstrates how the enactment of beauty practices such as makeup, tanning, and plastic/cosmetic surgery point to the changing portrayal of Thai beauty ideals. The beautification of these practices is important since it negotiates a wide array of preferred beauty ideals, pointing to the pursuit of beauty which is highly valued in modern Thai society. In addition, the modification of facial features and plastic surgery are common practices among Thai women and point to the idealisation of beauty itself. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the idealisation of beauty in this context describes the attainments of strong media images, homogenising the cultural representation of Thai beauty ideals. It illuminates the enhancement of beautified media images intertwined with the technological development and modification of beauty work (i.e., undergoing plastic surgery). Thus, the idealisation of beauty describes the increasing enactment of beauty as labour, necessary for these young Thai women to attain beauty ideals. These beautification processes must be flexibly maintained since they are associated with the commodification of beauty work only, requiring commitment, time, and effort in performing the right aesthetic ideals of beauty currently dominant throughout Thai society. In examining the enactment of beauty practices among Thai beauty influencers, it becomes clear that beauty ideals in Thailand are a combination of Asian and Western representations of femininity with an emphasis on discourses of whiteness. Contemporary beauty media culture illustrates the embodiment of a racialised “white Asian” image, situated within the Northeast Asian region (Kang, 2017, as cited in Kang, 2021, p. 273) together with the rising trend of adopting tanned skin beauty ideals (e.g., Xie & Zheng, 2013). These ideals reflect the diversity of beauty practices, extending beyond the notions existing within the Southeast Asian region. In understanding both the contemporary beauty ideals and the idealisation of beauty practices among Thai beauty influencers, this chapter aims to answer the research questions: What are the dominant discourses of feminine beauty and whiteness in this context? How are they constructed? How are they circulated and taken up on Instagram? The chapter highlights how beauty ideals are constructed and displayed and how the ideas relate to the concept of whiteness in negotiating cultural and social practices in the Thai context. This chapter argues that the idealisation of beauty in Thailand is heavily influenced by the cultural trend of adopting Northeast Asian and Western styles of beauty, categorised into two sets of practices. These sets of practices are exemplified by the labour
conditions of online beauty work, extending to the modification in a person’s facial or overall appearance, ultimately leading to the attainment of beauty. This points to a changing set of ideals, requiring flexibility and adaptation in the negotiation of traditional Thai and Chinese ideals, as well as Korean and Western styles.

The Concept of Beauty Culture in Thailand

Van Esterik (2000, p. 5) stated that physical appearance is considered very important in Thai society. People are judged based on their appearance, such as clothing, accessories, styles, language, manners, and overall demeanour (Van Esterik, 2000). These surface attributes determine a person’s social status and how others evaluate their attractiveness (Van Esterik, 2000). These physical conditions are correlated with Thai beauty norms and intersect with the idealisation of feminine beauty: white/tanned/high nose bridge/big doll eyes/higher/lower cheekbones, and so on. The construction of these beautified media images is reflected through the women’s skin tone. (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Phakdeephasook, 2009). These representations of skin tone reveal a set of standards derived from the increasing influence of Northeast Asian and European/Western ideals of beauty currently exhibited throughout Asian countries (e.g., Kang, 2021). On the one hand, scholars have suggested that the idealisation of beauty is an indicative form of the rising trend derived from the Northeast Asian regions whereby the concept of whiteness is associated with “distinctly Asian white skin” (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Kang, 2021; Yip et al., 2019, p. 74). These characteristics denote the ideal image of having “white, clear, and radiant skin, e.g., Japanese-like, Korean-like, or White-like skin types [skin tones]” (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 103). On the other hand, the representation of a Caucasian style of beauty is highlighted by the cultivation of tanned skin. These trends are considered indicative forms of beauty, proliferated throughout contemporary Thai society. Van Esterik (2000) reiterated the importance of attaining beauty ideals. She stated, “clarity of complexion, grace, and serenity were reflections of moral goodness; one guide to knowing the merit store. Ugliness, unfortunately, conveyed the opposite…” (p. 84). In this vein, the portrayal of a beautified media image demonstrates the significant values of cultural and religious beliefs embedded in modern Thai society. I view modern Thai beauty practices as shifting responses to the emerging trends of beauty that have become widely publicised through mainstream media and the beauty industry in Thailand. This may result from the import of Northeast Asian and Western cosmetic and beauty products, generally stimulating the desire for beauty among Thai women (e.g., Yip et al., p. 2019). As Singhakowinta (2014) pointed out, “the multiplicity of beauty-enhancing product and service advertisements may indicate, to an extent, the tough competition for market
share as well as a significant sign of the increasing size of the market for the beauty industry products” (p. 4). The idealisation of beauty practices, therefore, contributes significantly to the enactment of beauty practices, pointing to the increasing portrayal of shifting responses in Thai beauty ideals curated by Thai influencers in contemporary Thai society.

I identify two main idioms promoting the understanding of the idealised image of beauty in Thailand: sai kao-lee (Korean style) and sai-for (Western style). These signify the appearance of beauty currently exhibited and performed by Thai beauty influencers through the Thai digital economy. Notably, sai-kao-lee focuses on the Korean icons of feminine beauty, following the trends of all things Korean. This constitutes the media assumptions and beauty portrayal that place emphasis on a natural style of beauty and dewy finished look. Meanwhile, sai-for entails the pursuit of beauty that emphasises Western perspectives of beauty, highlighting the use of face contouring and darker colour makeup, reflecting the ideal of tanned skin. According to the results of this research, the embodiment of beauty trends is consistently cultivated and showcased alongside the discourses of whiteness and the attainment of tanned skin, exhibited in various styles of beauty persona. These personas range from the promotion of day-to-day images to the curation of beauty pageants and the styles and looks of Korean pop idols. Such beauty portrayals are constantly broadcast among Thai beauty influencers and Thai women in both urban and rural areas of the country. These discourses play out in various contexts of beauty portrayal, reflecting the current perception of Thai beauty norms, positioning Thailand in a “transnational racialised economy” (Airura, 2009, p. 303). The representation of beauty in this context, therefore, indicates the multiplicity of changing trends contributing to the understanding of how Thai beauty influencers engage in online work while also pointing to the diverse perspectives of beauty. Specifically, these broader transformations suggest the increasing importance of globalisation, impacting Thai society and culture, including its beauty ideals, extending beyond the simple narrative of Westernisation (Kang, 2021).

This chapter comprises of three sections. Section one provides an overview of Thai cultural norms that speak to the trends of feminine beauty exhibited within Thai society. This includes how whiteness is incorporated into the Thai context and the way in which Thai beauty influencers use the country’s beauty norms that reflect the cultural traditions of beauty practices. Section two highlights the idealisation of beauty, featuring the integration of Korean and Western standards of feminine beauty ideals. Here, I discuss how skin colour preferences are enacted in Thailand and the way in which these idealisations of beauty speak to the changing trends of beauty practices.
The last section of the chapter discusses the important values of beauty and the practice of plastic surgery, and the modification processes involved. Here, I examine how plastic surgery practices contribute to the pursuit of beauty, demonstrating the importance of achieving beauty ideals. The chapter highlights the labour required for these Thai women to attain their beauty ideals and the importance of changing preferences. It reveals the dominant media images shaping ideas on contemporary forms of femininity and the stereotypical assumptions about Thai women in modern Thai society.

Section I – Understanding the Normative Practice and Traditional Values of Beauty in Thailand

This section demonstrates the portrayal of feminine beauty, providing insights into the representations of Thai beauty ideals. It investigates a set of practices showcasing the cultivation of media images reflecting a white skin tone. Indeed, it focuses on the way in which Thai beauty influencers construct the representational form of media images from the concept of whiteness, signalling the portrayal of beauty exhibited on Instagram influencer profiles. Thai beauty influencers broadcast their beauty personas in ways that signal both traditional and contemporary forms of beauty practices. These beauty portrayals play out through the analysis of their images, revealing the comparison of beauty trends between the pre-modern and modern eras in Thailand. The section demonstrates how these portrayals of feminine beauty inform one’s ideas on the concept of whiteness and how femininity is enacted among influencers in modern Thailand.

To understand the cultural practices in the Thai context, Kang (2017) highlighted an idiom relating to the concept of whiteness in Thailand. He suggested that “khon khao”, also known as “white person”, signifies the “civilisational status”, signalling the contemporary standards of feminine beauty prevalent in Thai society (Kang, 2017, as cited in Kang, 2021, p. 274). It positions those with a lighter skin colour in a privileged status, marking their appearance as the attainment of the beauty ideal (Kang, 2021). This ideal is also supported by the assumption that “white skin might be associated with an urban origin stereotype, whereas dark skin might be associated with a rural ‘Lao Issan’ image” (Hesse-Swain, 2006, as cited in Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017, p. 557). Similarly, Poompruek et al. (2014) discussed how the representation of beauty ideals is negotiated among Thai transgender women. They reflected on the importance of overall physical appearance, characterised by the importance of maintaining slimness and desirable skin features. Given this, they added, “[the discourses of] whiteness, fairness, brightness, aura, glow, and firmness” (Poompruek et al., 2014, p. 801) are associated with having a slim figure, important for determining
social approval in Thailand. This suggests the importance of cultural practices negotiating the values of beauty, giving rise to the cultivation of light-skinned beauty ideals. These ideals have been circulated on both Thai mainstream and social media, garnering public attention through Thai media discourse (e.g., Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017; Poompruek et al., 2014; Singhakowinta, 2014). In this context, the study participants pointed out the values of beauty that define the characteristics of beautiful Thai women. For example, one participant described the idealisation of beauty as: “Anything related to whiteness would be considered beautiful in traditional Thai culture” (Onn, translated from Thai). She added that this beauty norm has “been deeply embraced through Thai cultural beliefs that have become stereotypical assumptions among young Thai women for a long period of time” (Onn, translated from Thai). This illustrates the concept of whiteness, informing the condition of having beautiful and desirable features (Phakdeephasook, 2009, p. 68). In addition, Onn stated: “When I went to the beach, my grandmother would tell me not to be out in the sun or [my skin will become] dark” (Onn, translated from Thai). Notably, Onn illustrated that having dark skin signals a poorer status of people in Thai society, whereas light skin tones signify “wealth”. This interpretation suggests that the study participants exhibit a strong preference for having a lighter skin tone. This idealised concept of whiteness is consistent with the opinion expressed by Yip et al. (2019), “white skin, accordingly, serves as a form of symbolic or racial capital that enhances a person’s life chances” (p. 76). Examining the concept of whiteness in this context, therefore, reveals the importance of signalling higher class status, constituting the online working conditions in the Thai digital economy.

In a similar vein, May added: “I think the majority of Thai women perceive [the conception] of light skin as a perfect standard of beauty”. This statement is also supported by Toon, who added: “The trend of [having a light skin tone] has also been applied to embrace the complexity of [whiteness] – it has always been a beauty trend” (Toon, translated from Thai). Similarly, Tip emphasised that “throughout my blogging career, the only trend remaining popular among young Thai women is whiteness [which signifies brighter skin tones]. Thai women seem to believe that white is good, white is beautiful, and having white skin leads to success” (Tip, translated from Thai).

These statements from participants echo the findings of similar literature in the field. For instance, Sarawasti (2010) described how “skin-whitening products become the objects necessary for a good life; happiness is [therefore] coded as cosmopolitan whiteness” (p. 28). The concept of attaining whiteness in this context also demonstrates the requirement for Thai women to achieve desirable
images, tending to believe that “beauty is a basic necessity and a requirement for being complete” (Poompruek, 2014, p. 800). These statements convey the perception of women’s preferences for maintaining white and lighter skin tones. It highlights the significance of aspirations that resonate with the aesthetics of white as a mark of a higher-class status (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018; Chaipraditkul, 2013). As Abidin and Limkangvanmongkol (2018) noted, “representations of white skin are thus markers of better social status, while those of darker skin are associated with poverty and working class” (p. 2013).

In this context, Figure 33 represents a striking aspect of the discourse of whiteness, playing out through the portrayal of light-skin beauty ideals (e.g., Li et al., 2008). The image informs the understanding of the Thai values of beauty, embracing traditional Thai beauty ideals. In this image, @Nobluk appears to be standing in front of the camera with her body facing 45 degrees to the left. Her makeup style appears to be based upon cultural practices, signifying the characteristic representation of Thai nationhood embodied by the wai. In Thai culture, people are advised to greet one another by “pressing two hands together” as a way of showing respect and good manners (Kuppako, 2017, p. 146). According to Kuppako, “[in] ancient Thai tradition, since childhood, the Thais are brought up to pay respect to the elders, know to respect one another, and show filial devotion and obedience to all benefactors” (p. 142). The idea of desirable features is also portrayed through the traditional Thai costume as a representative form of Nang Noppramart, “[the] alleged consort of King Ramkhamhaeng”, believed to be the first woman to represent the Loy Kratong tradition during the Sukhothai period (Van Estark, 2000, p. 43). During this era, Thai people were invited to celebrate the tradition by floating kratong (floating lanterns made from banana leaves) to pay respect to the water goddess in the hope that it would take away the negativity in their lives. Through the embodiment of these beauty practices, women would wear traditional Thai dress, exhibiting the traditional culture and the representation of women from past eras. In this context, the caption states: “Happy Loy Kratong day everyone”, along with the use of the hashtag #Nangnoppramart, which can be translated as the Noppamart queen as well as #loykratong2019, symbolising the festive traditional Thai culture. The image reveals how cultural values are embedded in her Instagram image, signifying Thai beauty ideals.
Here, the emphasis is on the attributes of @Nobluk’s physical appearance, focusing on her white skin tone, costume, and background colour. The construction of @Nobluk’s overall image reveals how Thai beauty influencers work to maintain and develop a style of beauty that meets the expectations of traditional and contemporary standards of feminine beauty ideals (Singhakowinta, 2014). Her Instagram image can be understood as an attempt to reaffirm the modernisation of femininity, emphasising the ideal pre-modern feminine beauty still existing and practised in the modern Thai era.
In similarity to @Nobluk, other influencers such as @Architasiri also post Instagram images of herself, extending beyond the traditional culture of Thai beauty ideals. The significance of @Architasiri’s post suggests that Thai beauty influencers pay close attention to following traditional Asian values. In this context, Kang (2021) stated that “‘Asian’ refers to the broader East Asian region, but ‘white Asian’ specifically delimits the racialised category of contemporary developed Asian nations” (p. 275). Here, the Instagram image shows @Architasiri in a traditional Chinese costume. Her practice signals the influences prioritising whiteness as a cultural trend derived from the “Asianised” concept of the feminine beauty ideal (Kang, 2021:274). Several of the study participants pointed out that Thai women find similarities in following Asian skin tones and the advertorial context of promoting white, light, bright, and flawless skin specifically compatible with their styles of beauty (e.g., Li et al., 2008). In this context, Tip stated: “I find Asian styles of beauty to be more suitable for Thai women’s skin colour because I think it is easily adaptable and matches with Thai women’s skin tones” (Tip, translated from Thai). In understanding the current trend of Thai beauty ideals, the Instagram image reflects the cultivation of white glowing skin, focusing on the slightly lighter makeup on her face and the prominent red lipstick. It demonstrates the cultural influence on the portrayal of beauty within Northeast Asian culture (Kang, 2021). In addition, the caption and @Nobluk’s geotagging location signal the celebration of Chinese New Year traditions (her location shows she is in China Town), while the caption written in Thai and Chinese reads: “Happy Chinese New Year”. The image serves to discursively formulate the mixture of Thai and Chinese traditional values, indicating a marked preference for a white glowing skin tone, which may be due to her Thai Chinese heritage. This example reflects different dimensions of whiteness, emphasising the portrayal of “smooth, young, pore-less, line-free, bright, transparent, white, full and fine” (Li et al., 2008, p. 446), conveyed through a gendered display of the Chinese portrayal of beauty. This interconnectedness of whiteness suggests the spread of cultural influence at the forefront of standardised depictions of femininity circulated throughout the Thai digital economy.
In addition to following the traditional values of Asian feminine beauty, @Architasiri also posted an image of herself, emphasising the contemporary quality of a fair skin tone. The participants described this type of skin tone as “the preference that reveals the complexion of Asian beauty”. During the interviews, the majority of participants described their preferred Thai beauty ideals as “glowing”, “radiant”, and “bright”, reflecting healthy skin tones. In this context, Prae explained that “healthy skin doesn’t always have to be white but should be smooth, flawless, and moisturised” (Prae, translated from Thai). Similarly, Ae noted that the importance of this beauty value in Thailand is reflected through skin health. Given this, she added: “I think in Thailand, beauty always comes with having white skin but for me, it doesn’t matter if the skin is white as long as it is healthy and glowing. It comes from the condition of being healthy” (Ae, translated from Thai).

In this vein, Figure 35 illustrates the importance of beauty values that reveal the conditions for attaining desired skin complexions. In this image, her caption reads: “Well it is half done!!! ARCHITA SATIN MOISTURE CREAM; a moisturiser that can be used in the morning and before bed. I used it this morning before applying makeup to brighten up my skin, making it glow, radiant, and moisturised throughout the day (price 750 baht)” (@Architasiri, translated from Thai). Having glowing and radiant skin is a dominant form of beauty negotiated by influencers. The image suggests the sense of value towards beauty can be developed through the application of skincare products that promise to improve women’s skin tone. The emphasis on terms such as “radiant” and “glowing” highlights the aesthetic standards of beauty people aspire to achieve in
Thai society (e.g., Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018). It reveals how Thai women are influenced by the aesthetic standards of what beautiful skin should be like. The comparison between her before-and-after image can also be said to convey a sense of “Japanese-white” and “Korean-white” (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 103) images, reflecting the perceived trend of “natural beauty” (Li et al., 2008, p. 448). Therefore, it can be said that the representation of @Architasiri’s Instagram image highlights the portrayal of commodified beauty, negotiating a modernised version of femininity which reveals how beauty ideals can be achieved within modern Thai society.

In addition to understanding skin tone, Nutt also incorporated the values of beauty following global brands operating in both Asian and Western society. Yip et al. (2019) stated that “these products target the desire to preserve or enhance naturally fair skin as well as lightening darker or uneven skin tones” (p. 76). The embodiment of beauty practices in this context is shaped by influencers’ preference to promote global branded products that suggest the homogenisation of women’s preferred beauty ideals, increasingly played out in Thailand. This is illustrated by Nutt’s caption in Figure 36.

Number 1 product in keeping glowing, healthy, radiant skin. After using the product, I have to say I am really impressed with the quality of Olay Regenerist Retinol 24-night serum; it brings a healthy look to my skin. This is due to its main quality ingredients comprising a Retinol 24 complex (Vitamin B3) that not only helps to reduce marks and wrinkles but also generates healthy skin within 28 days! I woke up this morning feeling like I have had eight hours’ sleep when I have only slept for two. This product has really kept my skin healthy and radiant despite my long working hours. It keeps my skin fresh and soft like a baby, I can confirm! (Nutt, translated from Thai)
This image is distinctive because it highlights the regeneration of skin tone. Thai beauty influencers cultivate their online images to portray youthfulness, articulating feminine beauty ideals. In this context, Pekky stated during the interview that “maintaining youthfulness is something that must be prioritised in contemporary Thai culture” (Pekky, translated from Thai). This is often accompanied by words such as “glowing”, “healthy”, “radiant” skin, signifying the hegemonic mode of feminine beauty integral to conceptualising the attainment of beauty ideals. Rongmuang et al. (2011) stated that Thai women aspire to achieve the ideal appearance of having “[light] skin, an oval face, a high nose bridge, wide eyes, and tall stature” (Rongmuang et al., 2011, p. 107) since these features speak to the modernised version of femininity, meeting women’s needs in a consumerist society (Yip et al., 2019). In addition, the participants stated during the interviews that the trends of beauty in Thailand always revolve around the promotional practice of using terms such as “lighten”, “brighten up”, “remove blemishes”, and “maintain a youthful appearance”. For instance, Ann mentioned during the interview that the use of these words is associated with the concept of whiteness. She stated: “My followers often think that to be perceived as beautiful, one must always brighten up skin colour [like the lighter, the better]. Maintaining a youthful look must come with having light skin” (Ann, translated from Thai). These narratives demonstrate the importance of maintaining the aesthetic standards of beauty highly valued in Thai society. The narratives also reflect the notion of “clear skin involves a number of qualities, including lack of blemishes or spots, small pores, smoothness, and a plump or moist texture associated with ‘dewy’ Korean skin” (Kang, 2021, p. 277). This statement highlights the contribution of different elements to the understanding of Thai women’s pursuit of beauty. It negotiates the relationship
between keeping up with aesthetic standards, pointing to the attainment of beauty ideals. In this sense, it can be said that the popular practice of promoting global beauty brands in Thailand is influenced by the cultural trends of beauty that aim to maintain the natural complexion of beauty exhibited in Thai society. The following section highlights the idealisation of beauty, featuring the integration of Korean and Western standards of feminine beauty ideals. Here, I discuss how skin colour preferences are enacted in Thailand and the extent to which these idealisations of beauty speak to the conditions of beauty work performance. The section investigates a set of practices showcasing media images of white skin. Indeed, it focuses on the way in which Thai beauty influencers construct media images that represent the concept of whiteness, which signals the pursuit of beauty exhibited in modern Thai society.

**Section II – The Hybridisation of Asian and Western Feminine Beauty**

This section investigates how contemporary beauty ideals are constructed and displayed through social media images and how they shape the idealisation of beauty practices in Thailand. In this context, the term beauty practices are used to describe the enactment of beauty as labour, played out through the dominant discourses of feminine beauty, representing the hybridisation of Korean and Western beauty ideals. These ideals are constructed through the portrayal of whiteness representing a Northeast Asian style of femininity (e.g., Kang, 2021) and tanned skin (e.g., Xie & Zhang, 2013). The participant interviews and an analysis of Instagram images on social media reveal that both portrayals are considered dominant discourses of feminine beauty, contributing to the attainment of beauty ideals. These ideals are portrayed through the images of “an oval face, a high and narrow nose bridge, wide eyes, and tall stature” (Rongmuang et al., 2011, p. 107) and light skin, reflecting the appearance of “Korean-like” features (Abidin & Limkangvanmongkol, 2018, p. 103). In addition, the emphasis on tanned skin is also incorporated into the Western trend of femininity, contributing to the understanding of Thai social media discourses. The embodiment of these beauty practices signals the rising phenomenon of a global community, which encompasses the increase in opportunities for Thai women to experience and witness “ideal-beauty uniformity”, disseminated through mainstream and social media (Bissell & Yan, 2014, p. 196). These discourses demonstrate the embodiment of beauty, requiring skills, flexibility, and adaptation in the negotiation of dominant beauty trends in modern Thailand.
The participant influencer's Instagram image in Figure 37 showcases Nutt and her enactment of beauty practices on Instagram. The focus of this image is the emulation of different forms of beauty, portrayed by four Blackpink band members. The caption indicates her admiration for the brand, stating that: “BLACKPINK!!!” following the hashtag, “#which one of these figures is your favourite singer, full clip of [how-to video] will be posted at 4 o'clock” (Nutt, translated from Thai). Using both text and image, Nutt negotiates the corporeality of Koreanness, demonstrated through the curation of Korean beauty portrayal, as identified by a wide array of beauty personas emulating Korean beauty styles and looks. This includes makeup, hairstyle, posture, and so on. This Koreanness is recognised as a beauty trend among Thai women and one of the most dominant forms of beauty portrayal in the negotiation of online beauty work. This aspect of online working conditions demonstrates how the idealisation of beauty practices is developed and practised through the commodifying process of the influencers’ work. The interviews with participants also reveal that the majority of Thai women pay close attention to Lisa, a successful Thai singer and a reputable Blackpink band member. She is widely recognised throughout both Thai and international mainstream and online media. At the time of writing, her Instagram profile showed over 52.7 million followers worldwide. The influencer’s use of techniques presented in the top two images of Figure 37 emphasise the cultivation of an idealised image of feminine beauty through the use of red lipstick and the prominent representation of hair colour. The significance of these portrayals is also indicated by the style of Lisa’s makeup, clothing, and posture, reflecting the sophisticated display of two opposing styles, contributing to the attainment of Korean beauty ideals. Both images reveal exemplary forms of ideal femininity, speaking to the contemporary trends of individual practices that negotiate the dynamic display of racial identity within Asian countries (e.g., Kang, 2021). The bottom two images in Figure 37 also suggest the representative form of cuteness that contributes to Korean beauty ideals. These are highlighted by the curation of big round eyes, a high nose bridge, and a fringe that enhances Lisa’s charismatic Korean style and looks (e.g., Rongmuang et al., 2011). These beauty portrayals demonstrate a set of bodily displays that emphasise a seemingly girlish personality, signalling the passivity of Korean femininity (Seo et al., 2020, p. 7). They also reiterate the perceived norm of Koreanness that “prioritises the submissiveness, pureness, and cuteness” (Oh, 2014, p. 6) of idealised images, contributing to the portrayal of Korean beauty ideals. These beauty practices are indicative forms of the “hyper [style of] femininity” (Seo et al., 2020, p. 7), combining the curated display of assertiveness, youthfulness, and independence while aligning with the ideals of “submissiveness, pureness, and cuteness” (Oh, 2014, p. 56) that have become popularised throughout the Thai social media scene. The construction of these practices is important since it reveals the increasing
enactment of beauty in negotiating the current trends of Thai beauty ideals. These ideals also reflect standardised media images, revealing how influencers strive for fame and extend their popularity on social media. Thus, examining the curation of Koreanness promotes the understanding of how Thai women follow norms in their pursuit of beauty, which is becoming increasingly prominent throughout the Thai influencer industry.

Figure 37. Nutt’s Instagram image.

Figure 38. Nobluk’s Instagram image

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN REMOVED BY THE AUTHOR OF THIS THESIS FOR COPYRIGHT REASON
To understand the idealisation of beauty in Thailand, Figure 38 suggests a representative form of the Korean style of beauty, drawing heavily on a flawlessly white complexion central to Asian beauty ideals. Significantly, the post includes the curated display of @Nobluk emulating the looks of Lisa, a member of the Blackpink K-Pop band, illustrated in Figure 38. Her caption states: “[I’m] going”, along with the hashtags #respectsLisa, #minddmakeup, #blackpinkthaiarea, and #blackpink2019worldtour, all of which are indicative of @Nobluk’s support for the K-Pop band and the portrayal of her Instagram image reflects this. In understanding the Korean style of beauty, the study participants described these key features as “healthy-white”, “glowing child-like skin”, “cute”, and “naturally flawless”, denoting the idealised image of a “makeup no-make-up” style and look. This pursuit of beauty also suggests a close relationship with the concept of cuteness, which describes the process of “semantic flexibility” (Lukacs, 2015, as cited in Pham, 2015, p. 48), differing in accordance with one’s personality, characteristics, features, and experiences. As Lukacs (2015) put it, “cute is a signifier that accommodates” (Lukacs, 2015, as cited in Pham, 2015, p. 48).

In this vein, Tip emphasised during the interviews that “the Korean beauty style often embeds cuteness to a certain extent, portrayed through the use of big eyes, contact lenses, pink or peach colour blush, and a light lipstick colour” (Tip, translated from Thai). Prae also added: “I would say that the trend of wearing peach/pink, light eye shadow is a signifier of Korean beauty ideals and definitely on trend among Thai women at the moment” (Prae, translated from Thai). The promotion of cuteness in this context is embodied through the portrayal of beauty that gives rise to women conforming to Korean beauty ideals (Lukacs, 2015, as cited in Pham, 2015, p. 48). Pham (2015) also related the concept of cuteness to the phenomenon of Japanese net idols, adding:

The phenomenon of Japanese net idols and Asian super bloggers indicates that cute culture – and the digital technologies and cultural practices now so integral to its production and circulation – has extended and strengthened the link between Asian women and [the accommodation of labour] (p. 49)

This statement explains the relationship between social media influencers and their contribution to producing and disseminating online work related to beauty. It reveals the integration of the style
of cuteness and the digital activities circulating via social media. However, it is also important to note that the pursuit of beauty is dependent on the process of “semantic flexibility”, which varies based on one’s personality, characteristics, features, and experiences (Lukacs, 2015, as cited in Pham, 2015, p. 48). Each of the 11 participants interviewed described the Korean style of beauty as being significant in contributing to the current trends of ideal beauty in Thailand. The participants also added that the cultivation of a Korean style of beauty negotiates current beauty trends in Thai society. Given this, Onn added: “I think the Korean trend really attracts people’s attention in Thailand, and I prefer Korean cosmetic products because the ingredients and quality give an amazing result for Asian skin tones” (Onn, translated from Thai). In addition, Ann added: “I like to use Korean cosmetic products because of their reputation for helping to maintain flawless skin” (Ann, translated from Thai). During her interview, Fah highlighted that “in order to attain the complexion of naturalness, it’s a process of applying a makeup base, foundation, concealer, and selecting the right colour makeup shade that touches up every little detail, creating the ‘makeup no-makeup’ style of look” (Fah, translated from Thai). In a similar vein, Pekky shared her experience of a night out during which she discovered that wearing heavy makeup was outdated among Thai women. Given this, she added: “[I went on a night out] and I was so surprised to see most of the girls seemingly didn’t wear hardly any makeup – everything appeared to be so light like their eye shadow, blusher, and lipstick colour. They have definitely adopted this from the Korean style of beauty” (Pekky, translated from Thai). Here, the interpretation of a Korean style of beauty is embodied by a naturalness that appears effortless (Seo et al., 2020). Participants revealed that attaining the desired state of Koreanness reflects the cultural practices that enable them to gain more popularity, which translates into the production of Korean beauty ideals. The embodiment of these beauty specific beauty portrayal describes how the idealisation of beauty practices is negotiated through Thai social media discourses. It also points to how the commodification of beauty practices is performed to the extent that promotes the increasing ideals of beauty currently exhibited in Thai society. Maintaining a natural, flawless complexion, therefore, demonstrates the expectations of a beautiful appearance, positioning beauty influencers to occupy a fundamental role in reinforcing the engagement of beauty norms in modern Thailand.
The Embodiment of the Tanned Skin Beauty Ideal

While the preference for the Korean style of beauty is prominent among young Thai women, several research participants also broadcast idealised images of the tanned skin beauty ideal. This beauty preference has been described as a new beauty trend recently emerging in Thai society. Despite various scholars having noted that this beauty ideal has long been desired in the West (Martin et al., 2009, as cited in Xie & Zhang, 2013, p. 542), the majority of participants interviewed highlight the increasing promotion of tanned skin, reflecting its popularity. Practices involving the curation of beauty, specifically related to tanned skin, are popular in the West. Each study participant referred to this cultivation of femininity as the Western style of beauty, in contrast to the concept of whiteness in the Western context (Kang, 2021). In understanding the curative display of these practices, the study participants emphasised the use of darker foundation to attain tanned skin. The participants described how this style of complexion shapes the overall quality of skin colour. In this instance, Ann stated: “I always add highlighter to emphasise the appearance of my cheekbones and apply bronzer on both sides of my lower cheeks” (Ann, translated from Thai). She pointed out that the use of bronzer and highlighter signifies the beauty ideal of sun-kissed skin. These conceptions negotiate an emerging trend, offering an alternative which extends beyond the mere concept of whiteness within the Western context. In this instance, scholars have noted: “The American beauty industry continues to promote tanning cosmetics and encourage excessive sun exposure, pervasively portraying a golden tan as fashionable, healthy, and luxurious” (Dixon et al., 2008, as cited in Xie & Zhang, 2013, p. 542). All participants described the promotion of this version of beauty as the idealised image, understood to be a modernised concept, signalling the development of national beauty ideals. As Toon pointed out: “I think trends of fashion and beauty in Thailand have changed so much over the years, and people are so much more open to accepting different skin tones other than white” (Toon, translated from Thai). This ideal demonstrates the value of beauty, challenging the normative practices of traditional Thai femininity, which differentiated women on the basis of skin colour.
In this light, Figure 39 reveals a representative form of the tanned beauty ideal. The defining feature in this image is the tan line, negotiating a sense of feminine beauty popularised in Thai society. In this instance, the caption reads: “I so like the tan lines as it shows that I have been enjoying my time at the beach. The vlog from my trip with my boyfriend in Koh Chang has been released. Have you watched it?” (Kaycee, translated from Thai). In examining Kaycee’s performance, it is noticeable that the focus of her post is the lines on her shoulder, underlined by a pink crop top and glowing makeup, reflecting her skin tone. The influencer purposefully constructs an alternative online image, negotiating the cultural trend of the universal standards derived from the Western context of feminine beauty ideals (Xie & Zheng, 2013). The positionality of her image demonstrates the cultural trend of conveying a sense of assertiveness, independence, and desirable femininity, thereby shifting the normative display of idealisation in beauty practices (e.g., Kang, 2021). Kaycee’s Instagram image signals the challenge of normative beauty practices whereby tanned skin signals a rise in the prominence of social privilege in modern Thai society (e.g., Chaipraditkul, 2013). This aspect of beautification is usually accompanied by the use of heavy makeup, constructed through imported beauty brands which have become increasingly popularised among women in modern Thailand. The study participants detailed how brands such as Chanel, Dior, Narz, Tom Ford, Urban Decay, MAC, etc., contribute to our understanding of the changing Thai cultural trends in feminine beauty values.
In addition to promoting tan lines, several participants also incorporated similar images into the promotion of tanned beauty ideals. These sets of practices are reflected through the participants’ engagement in makeup and the cultivation of their overall personas. Tip, for instance, stated that “my style of tanning is to apply shading and contouring to my face, nose, cheekbones, and forehead. It makes me look like a different person. I use it to add extra dimensions to my face” (Tip, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Prae described the enactment of enhancing tanned skin as “beautiful”; since it reflects a strong aspect of Western femininity (e.g., Xie & Zheng, 2013).

During interviews, participants revealed their developing preferences towards the pursuit of enhancing tanned skin, enabling them to align with international standards of beauty. In this context, national beauty pageants are popular in Thailand and are important for signalling social approval of changing beauty ideals. Many of the research participants engaged with the iconography of pageants in different ways. For example, Ann stated: “I have had tons and tons of requests to do a “how-to” video featuring Miss Thailand World looks” (Ann, translated from Thai). Toon also highlighted that national beauty pageants tend to have significant influence on current beauty trends in Thai society. Meanwhile, other participants described similar phrases, such as, “I think beauty pageant competitions have a big influence on beauty trends in Thailand”. They view beauty pageants as an opportunity for women to attain idealistic images that speak to the changing beauty trends in Thai society.

![Figure 40. Nutt’s Instagram image.](image)

In this context, Figure 40 is an example of contemporary standards of beauty, reflecting the tanned skin beauty ideal. The example here reveals Nutt dressed as Nicolene, a mixed Thai American
woman who was crowned the first runner-up at the Miss World competition in 2018. Here, Nutt is dressed in a long white dress, emulating the stereotypical beauty pageant contestant. Her caption states: “[I’m] happy and very proud of Nicolene, so I’ve [decided] to feature her looks”, along with the hashtag “#was so excited to see you win the crown last night” (Nutt, translated from Thai). This aspect of feminine beauty highlights the increasing portrayal of what Yip et al. (2020, p. 74) refer to as the “Pan-Asian ideal”, exhibiting the value of beauty by combining the characteristics of both Asian and Western features.

Van Esterik (2000) noted that national beauty pageants such as Miss Thailand World can be used to describe the important values of beauty, demonstrating the increasing portrayal of significant beauty ideals. This aspect of beauty portrayal has exposed young Thai women to national beauty standards, broadcast and celebrated throughout the Thai media scene. In the image, the significance of Nutt’s post is the cultivation of her beauty persona, indicated by the style of her beauty practices: the tone of her skin, the use of bronzing on her cheeks, and highlights on her nose and forehead. All participants stated that this aspect of beauty conceptualises the idealisation of a Western style of beauty, offering Thai women the opportunity to broadcast an alternative online image which is empowering and inspiring. Thus, this beauty practice speaks to the emerging trends of cultural values, reinforcing the contemporary form of beauty which enhances social roles, reflecting the portrayal of Thai beauty ideals. It can be said that the promotion of tanned skin negotiates the cultural dimensions associated with a Western style of femininity, extending beyond the traditional values of Thai beauty ideals. Therefore, attaining brown skin and applying darker colour makeup, shading, and contouring reflects a sophisticated outcome, signalling strength, sophistication, and independence, all of which have become highly valued among young Thai women in contemporary Thai society.

Section III – The Practice of Undergoing Plastic Surgery

As demonstrated in the previous section, contemporary beauty ideals are contradictory, requiring the flexible negotiation of Thai, Chinese, Korean, and Western styles, with contradictions between whiteness/tanning and different Asian and Western features. However, as well as enacting beauty ideals, participants also reproduce the idealisation of beauty practices themselves. One such beauty practice is plastic surgery. To promote the idealisation of feminine beauty, several participants in this research discussed undergoing plastic surgery, enabling them to align with the aesthetic standards of beauty in Thailand (e.g., Aizura, 2009). This idealisation of beauty reinforces the stereotypical assumption of women’s perceived norms of attractiveness,
played out through Instagram images. The explicit promotion of labour in plastic surgery and details of the processes involved in achieving beauty ideals highlights the idealisation of beauty itself. Plastic surgery in this context involves the modification of certain facial features such as eyes, noses, lips, cheekbones, jawlines, and so on (e.g., Rongmuang et al., 2011). The modification process focuses on the emerging notions of Western and Northeast Asian facial aesthetics of feminine beauty (Kang, 2021; Yip et al., 2020), widely expressed and reiterated by Thai media. The study participants emphasised the importance of adopting the Korean style of beauty, while others highlighted trends following the Western beauty ideal. The promotion of modified media images reinforces the cultural trends, reflecting the changing representations of beauty portrayal among young women in Thailand. These trends tend to emphasise facial appearances, which can be addressed, rectified, and flexibly maintained by the development of surgical procedures in Thailand and elsewhere (Yip et al., 2020).

In understanding the importance of plastic surgery procedures, all participants asserted that they had undergone plastic surgery to enhance certain facial features. The majority revealed that rhinoplasty and blepharoplasty were the most popular types of plastic surgery among Thai women, aligning with the characteristics of beautiful and desirable features in Thailand (e.g., Chaipraditkul, 2013; Phakdeephasook, 2009; Rongmuang et al., 2011). Other types of plastic surgery, such as reducing the size of the lips, jawlines, and cheekbones, also contribute to the understanding of the curative display of beauty practices. For these beauty influencers, the practice of undergoing plastic surgery enables them to engage in the extended discourses of beauty, altering their image and shaping the beauty norms exhibited in Thailand. Given this, Ann added: “I think the most important features that attract people are big round eyes and a tall nose bridge. This represents the idea of looking good among women” (Ann, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, other participants reasoned that the practice of undergoing plastic surgery is beneficial since they rely heavily on their physical appearance adhering to the brand image. In this context, they addressed how big round eyes and tall nose bridges represent the idealistic standards of feminine beauty exhibited in modern Thai society (e.g., Rongmuang et al., 2011). In this vein, Ae detailed that “Thai women pay close attention to looks, especially eyes, nose, and the overall shape of the face” (Ae, translated from Thai). Given this context, Tip shared her experiences of undergoing plastic surgery in Korea, adding: “It was part of the contract that I had to undergo double eyelid surgery, and they flew me to Korea to become the brand ambassador. It was definitely a worthwhile experience” (Tip, translated from Thai). This suggests the strategic efforts involved in revealing important beauty values foster the commercial potential
between influencers and brands, played out through idealistic beauty images on social media sites such as Instagram.

In addition, participants also detailed that plastic surgery was very addictive and needs maintaining over time. Plastic surgery, like other aesthetic practices, involves the extended process of modifying different facial features. Fah, for instance, explained: “I decided to reduce the size of my jawline as I didn’t want to have Botox, and when onscreen, my overall face looked big, so I had 1cm of the jawline removed [in order to] keep up with the desired look” (Fah, translated from Thai). Meanwhile, Onn added: “I find the aesthetic practice of beauty an ongoing process that needs to be maintained regularly” (Onn, translated from Thai). Similarly, May detailed: “If your looks are in line with beauty trends, you are more likely to attract brands and gain more followers” (May, translated from Thai). In these instances, the ways in which Thai beauty influencers express themselves suggest the important value of beauty, which requires an ongoing process of continuous maintenance in order to meet the desired images of beauty ideals. These narratives describe the attainment of an acceptable online beauty persona. This illuminates the processes involved in the idealisation of beauty practices as labour, requiring significant effort, consistent management, and maintenance over time. The foregoing narratives also reveal different aspects of desired images that “highlight and rectify particular facial features [which] are commonly connected to Asian racial phenotypes” (Yip et al., 2019, p. 79). This aspect of influencers’ practices shapes the overall performance of beauty discourses, revealing how influencers embody the idealisation of beautified media images that negotiate the process of achieving beauty ideals among women in Thailand.
To extend the understanding of plastic surgery procedures, Figure 41 illustrates Nutt showcasing her preference for a high nose bridge, suggesting that she is about to undergo rhinoplasty. Her caption states: “Who wants to undergo rhinoplasty for free?” along with the hashtag “#has anyone seen the clip that I made, let’s have a chat” (Nutt, translated from Thai). Here, the caption suggests that she is promoting the practice of plastic surgery, emphasising the aspirational narratives of achieving Thai beauty ideals by undergoing the modification process of beauty work. Through the promotional material used in her Instagram image, Nutt received several comments from her followers, such as: “I would love to [get a nose job], my nose is so flat” as well as “I’m just looking for a place to do my nose”. The majority of study participants stated that revealing images of their surgery is pertinent and significant in demonstrating the idealisation of beauty practices in Thailand. This involves the curated display of images showcasing both invasive and non-invasive procedures, ranging from small injections to major surgery. In this instance, the participants highlight that a successful plastic surgery outcome tends to mark the status of beauty ideals and practices, which are highly valuable among young Thai women. These values of beauty are closely associated with success, fame, and employment opportunities, demonstrating the aspirational values of some young Thai women (e.g., Cuny & Opaswongkarn, 2017). The embodiment of beauty trends in this context demonstrates the importance of modification practices in altering facial images that shape the increasing portrayal of Thai beauty ideals. These are exemplified by the characteristics of images identified in the foregoing section – that is, having big doll eyes, a high nose bridge, and a beautiful face shape. The construction identified in the previous section negotiates the importance of maintaining a desirable media
image that requires the flexible negotiation of beauty trends enacted through contemporary Thai media culture.

In response to the changing trends of beauty, the study participants also revealed that the main purpose of undergoing plastic surgery was to “improve” their appearance to conform with cultural trends, signalled by the adoption of both Asian and Western stereotypes (i.e., having big round eyes, a high nose bridge, bigger lips, and higher cheekbones). Given this, May added: “I had a nose job because I [wanted] to enhance the size of my nose to match the Korean style of beauty” (May, translated from Thai). Similarly, Pekky detailed that “engaging in plastic surgery really shapes the aesthetic standards [that align with the contemporary trends] of beauty in Thailand” (Pekky, translated from Thai). These narratives explain the participants’ perspectives and desires, revealing how the concept of beauty intersects with the embodiment of plastic surgery. It also reflects the shifting responses towards the cultural integration of Northeast Asian and Western styles of femininity increasingly enacted through Thai social media discourses.

Figure 42 represents the beauty trends which point to the idealisation of beauty practices and how they are developed and formed as a result of cheekbone reduction surgery. This aspect of the influencer’s online image negotiates the important aspect of how beauty as labour is performed to achieve the beauty ideal. In this context, Kaycee posted an image of her recovery process showcasing an image of herself from day three until day 14. Her caption states:

It’s been 14 days, and the swelling has got so much better. The bruising under my eyes has got better too. It should get even better within the next month also. As for my
cheekbones, the doctor said it would take six months to one year to be properly healed. The doctor said it may take around six months for the skin to tighten up properly. So now I can’t really chew and eat hard stuff. Now I drink pumpkin juice twice a day to help with the swelling. I use @pumpkin_juices shop and will take photos with the review later on. My new face may or may not impress all of you. My old face was quite sharp and had a lot of dimensions, but the new face will definitely make me look much younger, as I’m nearly 30 now and want to keep my youthful looks. I will always keep up with the quality of my product reviews of both cosmetic and skincare products. This Sunday 26th, the doctor will fly to Thailand. Please feel free to seek advice if you are interested (Kaycee, translated from Thai).

Through both text and image, Kaycee negotiates a sense of feminine beauty, accentuating her appreciation towards the overall outcome of the procedure. Her view on the outcome suggests a transformative display, reflecting the significance attached to the value of maintaining a youthful self-image portrayed through the process of cosmetic surgery. In this context, Kaycee’s caption points out that such procedures are performed to alter and shape a person’s appearance with the aim of achieving an attractive and desirable image (e.g., Aizura, 2009). These portrayals support the viewpoint that “appearance matters”, which is consistent with what Van Esterik (2000) suggests, namely that “beauty can override family connections, money, or class, as well as other ascribed and achieved attributes of women” (p. 129). However, although the outcome is important, successful beauty doesn’t come naturally; it is worked at, and the labour and practices involved in achieving beauty ideals are also highly regarded and rewarded. In this vein, beautiful features are a mark of the idealisation of beauty, with which beauty influencers must consistently engage and perform through the Thai influencer industry. Thus, images prioritising the exhibition of pain and a long recovery process following plastic surgery homogenise the cultural representation of Thai beauty ideals. This suggests that performative practices explain the extended discourses of beauty, whereby the pursuit of beauty plays a significant role in contributing to the attainment of fame and popularity in the influencer industry in Thailand. Therefore, posting a newly beautified image of the self has become the norm in Thai society, whereby the trends of flexible beauty can be shaped and rectified by the cosmetic surgery process. This aspect of beautified media images reflects the significance of beauty portrayal in Thailand, whereby cosmetic surgery plays an important role in shaping the overall Thai beauty ideal, speaking to the aesthetic standards of beauty in modern Thai society.
Conclusion

This chapter examines the media representation of beauty influencers and the discourse of beauty, specifically within the Thai context. It focuses on the way in which Thai beauty influencers participate in the attainment of changing beauty ideals by promoting the idealisation of beauty practices prominently displayed through Thai social media discourses. In particular, the discourse of whiteness and the trends in promoting tanned skin come into play. In understanding the changing representation of Thai beauty ideals, this chapter argues that beauty ideals in Thailand are heavily influenced by the cultural trend of adopting Northeast Asian and Western styles of beauty, categorising the idealisation of beauty into several sets of practices. These sets of practices play out through the negotiation of whiteness, incorporating the trends of the Northeast Asian ideal and the promotion of tanned skin, signalling a rise in promoting Western styles of feminine beauty. Both these portrayals reinforce the idealisation of feminine beauty practices in modern Thailand. In understanding the influencers’ practices, the first section of the chapter offers an overview of Thai cultural norms, providing insight into how Thai beauty influencers exhibit the discourses of beauty associated with the concept of whiteness. The interview data suggest that the concept of whiteness is associated with the traditional values that play a significant part in understanding Thai beauty norms. The data reveals that Thai beauty influencers are embedded into the country’s beauty norms, reflected through the cultural traditions of beauty practices. In addition, the data also reveals that the concept of whiteness can be extended beyond the traditional culture of Thai beauty ideals. Through Instagram materials, the results show that Thai beauty influencers pay close attention to promoting the Asianised value of beauty, deeply enacted throughout the Asian region. These practices include the promotion of white, light, and bright, signalling the idealised media image of flawless and glowing skin, broadcast throughout the Northeast Asian region. The following section highlights the idealisation of beauty practices, featuring the integration of Korean and Western standards of feminine beauty ideals. Here, I discuss how preferences of skin colour are enacted in Thailand and the way in which these ideals speak to the changing trends of beauty practices. The results suggest that the trend of portraying idealised media images such as “submissiveness, pureness, and cuteness” are considered core aspects of the Korean style of beauty, highlighting the prominent portrayal of Korean beauty ideals. Nonetheless, the representation of Western-style feminine beauty has also become increasingly popular and contributes to the emerging phenomenon of the flexible online beauty culture in Thailand. Lastly, the final section of the chapter demonstrates the promotion of the feminine beauty idealisation associated with the practice of undergoing plastic surgery. This plastic surgery involves the modification of certain facial features such as eyes, nose, lips, cheekbones,
jawlines, etc. (e.g., Rongmuang et al., 2011). In these cases, all the participants in this research stated that they had undergone at least one plastic surgery procedure in order to modify certain parts of their appearance. For these beauty influencers, undergoing plastic surgery is considered key to their engagement in the extended discourses of beauty, enabling them to alter their appearance and shape the values of beauty exhibited in Thailand. To summarise, beauty ideals in Thailand are influenced by the cultural flows of Northeast Asian and Western styles of beauty. These ideals reveal the shifting preferences enabling influencers to shape the core values of beauty, which are important for maintaining popularity and status throughout the influencer industry in Thailand. In these instances, beauty ideals are achieved through the flexible negotiation of beauty trends, regarded and rewarded through Thai social media discourses. The attainment of international standards of beauty is, therefore, the crux of the idealisation of beauty practices currently exhibited and circulated through contemporary Thai media culture.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study examines the emergence of an online beauty culture that focuses on beauty influencers’ practices. It considers how Thai beauty influencers rise to fame and become highly recognised in promoting monetised beauty-related content on platforms such as Instagram. The central aspects of this thesis are related to the negotiations of beauty practices that reveal various aspects of values of beauty, currently exhibited in the Thai society. The negotiations of beauty practices promote the understanding of mediated entrepreneurship involved in the dominant discourses of Thai beauty ideals. The aim of this study is to provide an understanding of the current norms which reflects the entrepreneurial practices of influencers. The analysis of media materials has also been extended to examine the notion of authenticity and discourses of beauty in relation to whiteness, which points to the construction of online identities and the idealisation of beauty practices that are dominant in Thailand. In addition, this analysis focuses on the labour processes involved in the construction of beauty practices, how they are negotiated and performed, and how Thai beauty influencers flexibly represent themselves through Thai social media discourses. This has also led to an understanding of the dominant discourses of feminine beauty and the idealisation of beauty practices, reflecting the attainment of beauty, which shapes the changing trends in Thai beauty norms and values of femininity that are prevalent in modern Thai society.

Three main themes are identified in this paper: the business of beauty blogging; the notion of authenticity; and the idealisation of beauty, which reflect the shifting preferences in Thai beauty ideals. As mentioned in the introduction, very little research has been conducted on the emergence of online beauty cultures and the digital economy of social media influencers in Thailand. Therefore, this study makes an original contribution to the field by examining the work of Thai beauty influencers who circulate social and economic capital through the construction of online personas that can be commodified and monetised on Instagram. Through a combination of visual digital media analysis and semi-structured interviews, I examined Instagram accounts and engaged in interviews with Thai beauty influencers. The average age of the participant beauty influencers was 23–45, living in Bangkok, Thailand, with between 10,000 and 1 million followers (at the time of writing). I argue that beauty blogging and its associated practices embody a form of mediated entrepreneurship, through the practice of negotiating and collaborating with brands on social media platforms. These Thai beauty influencers challenge the traditional representation of femininity in Thai public discourses by creating online beauty-related content and engaging with brands. This study offers insight into the construction of successful brand identities, which reveals how Thai beauty influencers have adapted themselves to represent the shifting trends in Thai beauty ideals,
thus offering a range of possible femininities in the emerging phenomenon of the Thai online beauty industry.

I begin by providing summary accounts representing the main themes of the overall paper. In doing so, I provide a summary of each chapter, including details of how Thai beauty influencers become famous and how they engage and collaborate with beauty-related brands on Instagram. Following on from this, I discuss the representational practice of authenticity, examining the ways in which beauty influencers present themselves to foster intimate and positive disclosure on social media. I finalise the discussion by highlighting the idealisation of beauty and changing trends in Thai beauty ideals. These are represented through the embodiment of tanning, enhancing skin complexion, and undergoing plastic surgery procedures. In addition, I reflect on the research questions underpinning the key areas under study. The chapter then concludes with the limitations of this study and also addresses the key areas for enhancing the opportunity for further research within the influencer industry in Thailand.

**Discussion of the Findings**

The analysis developed in Chapter Four focuses on business practices and provides insight into understanding the emergence of online businesses. This analysis centred around the ways in which Thai beauty influencers work and negotiate with brands on Instagram. Although this is the dominant platform at the start of this research, multiple platforms also feature in the industry. The promotion of beauty and cosmetic products and negotiation of brand identities are important since they demonstrate various forms of labour central to understanding how the online beauty industry operates through Thai social media discourses. These discourses of beauty point to the proliferation of beauty practices correlated with the notion of Internet Celebrity and the work of influencer industry as a whole (e.g., Abidin, 2018). The developing phenomenon of influencers’ practices contributes to the understanding of the emerging online beauty culture, signalling economic opportunities that have become increasingly valorised through the digital economy in Thailand.

The findings reveal the significant contribution of social media discourses that go into understanding different labour conditions in online beauty work. These include the enactment of aesthetic labour (e.g., Elias et al., 2017), correlating with other forms of labour such as immaterial (Lazzarato, 1996), emotional (Hochschild, 1983), aspirational (Duffy, 2015), and glamour (Wissinger, 2016). My synthesis of the literature in this area created a platform for the analysis.
These forms of intersected labour are demonstrated through the enactment of beauty trends, pointing to the ways in which influencers curate and maintain business practices that offer a range of possible femininities, highlighted on Instagram.

In understanding the emergence of the online beauty culture, the chapter argues that the business of beauty blogging and a marketable online career permits the understanding of labour in the context of feminine beauty within the Thai digital economy. The chapter also argues that the labour conditions of beauty practices are premised on the enactment of productive creativities relating to the embodiment of beauty trends widely visible online. The findings revealed that the earlier net idol phenomenon was a relevant starting point in prefiguring social media practices in Thailand. It was part of the interviewees’ experiences and the cultural phenomenon of how and why they have become known as beauty influencers. The data reveals a significant contribution to the entrepreneurialism of online business, including the construction of online paid partnerships, the review of before-and-after practices, and the direct monetisation of product placement and review (e.g., Abidin, 2018). The findings suggest that Thai beauty influencers utilise different uses of strategies to engage with brands and negotiate their online performance in order to maintain highly professionalised businesses on Instagram.

The findings on the influencers’ practices demonstrate that the cultivation of online beauty images is part of the labour process in understanding the development of online working conditions through Thai social media discourses. Influencers navigate a complex environment, emphasising the increasing demand for the enhancement of physical appearances negotiating beauty ideals. These ideals reveal the increasing impact of beauty trends, requiring influencers to consistently engage and perform. The enactment of beauty practices demonstrates the aesthetic forms of labour, which speak to the demand for women to enhance their appearance and have become increasingly valorised in Thailand (e.g., Elias et al., 2017). The performance of aesthetic labour in this context demonstrates the requirements involved in the modification of online beauty images. The construction of these social media images demonstrates the curation of trends. The outcomes are young, feminine, and beautified images that encourage follower participation. The rise in prominence of beautifying practices demonstrates the construction of promotional materials that enabled influencers to broadcast several types of sometimes conflicting beauty and cosmetic products, leading them to monetise their content on Instagram. The embodiment of curating online media images exemplifies how Thai beauty influencers professionalise their Instagram images that place emphasis on the use of cosmetic and beauty products to attract brands. This
aspect of labour is important since it signals the idealisation of beauty practices shaping the values of feminine beauty in Thailand.

In relation to aesthetic labour, the findings detail the ways in which influencers navigate forms of emotional labour and incorporate experiences to indicate their personal feelings and perspectives in the negotiation of branded content on Instagram. The study participants highlight the importance of incorporating their personal feelings into personal experiences, revealed through various online beauty images. These values are developed through the exchange of online conversations involving texts, comments, and direct messages, shaping the entrepreneurial trends of their practices, and enabling them to maintain positive online images with their followers on Instagram (e.g., Dobson et al., 2018). The results of these social media practices are important and proven to be an effective way to broadcast beauty-related content, strengthening positive relationships with their followers and brands. In this instance, the analysis also highlights the importance of influencers acquiring skills and knowledge to enhance their knowledge in the performance of cultural productions. In this context, Lazzarato’s concept of understanding immaterial labour is applied to examine the process through which these practices are performed. The findings show that this type of labour is important since it requires influencers to consistently keep themselves up to date with the current beauty trends, demonstrated through their performance on social media (Lazzarato, 1996). This work of constantly updating the self is demonstrated through the creation of “how-to” beauty videos as well as the curation of different beauty styles and looks. In addition, the findings also demonstrate the curation of a travelling lifestyle, pointing to the important practices of negotiating and advertising products for brands. These practices are exemplified through the promotional materials of travelling and lifestyle images, extending the opportunities that enable them to reveal other aspects of their lives in addition to the normative display of beauty practices. The cultivation of depicting the lifestyle of travelling is proven to be appealing since they explain the way in which influencers “work[ed] to edit the self and body so that one appears to be [a] highly scripted, filtered and carefully constructed image” (Wissinger, 2015, as cited in Wissinger, 2016, p. 141).

Accordingly, the findings of this study demonstrate that the construction of beauty practices generates different forms of labour, revealing the use of techniques which enable influencers to accumulate fame and extend their opportunities to monetise content. The enactments of their social media practices reveal the importance of generating “social conditions” (Jarrett, 2014, p.32), allowing them to maintain social and relatable persona that must be maintained on social media.
The findings also reveal that the negotiation of beauty trends requires flexibility in managing online personas on sites such as Instagram. In particular, the enactment of beautified media images responds to the entrepreneurial trends of influencers’ work, providing insight into the structure of online businesses and social media discourses. The enactment of the influencers’ overall practices such as the performances of engaging in product reviews, the negotiations of beauty trends, the interactions and social media engagements are all critical contributions to the establishment of online business in the Thai digital economy. The construction of their social media images, thus, emphasises the significance of how the business of beauty blogging operates in the Thai digital economy.

The analysis developed in Chapter Five provides insight into the notion of authenticity and realness, both of which are central to the influencer industry. It aims to provide an illustrative account to understand how influencers cultivate online personas and the extent to which they construct images in order to appeal to brands and followers on Instagram. The chapter examines three interrelated themes: 1) the enactment of posting real, unedited images, 2) the showcasing of behind-the-scenes activities, and 3) the discussion of sensitive topics reflecting the issues of risks and mental health (e.g., Reade, 2020). The chapter demonstrates how influencers construct their online images to maintain positive, genuine relationships between themselves and followers, providing them with the opportunity to attract brands and generate positive relationships online. The concept of authenticity is crucial because it determines the influencer’s success and how it should be navigated in this industry. The chapter argues that, in their efforts to maintain their online popularity, Thai beauty influencers often construct semi-staged online personas, facilitating a particular performance and playing with authenticity. The chapter highlights the extent to which influencers stage themselves and the way this varies according to the overall context of their beauty practices, and the terms agreed upon between brands and clients. In addition, the chapter also argues that the notion of authenticity is distinctly shaped by influencers’ experiences, resulting from the length of time taken to build their fame. The curation of authentic online images must be consistently performed and reworked over time. Revealing aspects of real life and authentic images are important factors in enabling influencers to generate fame and positive relationships on Instagram.

Influencers anchor their authenticity by reflecting on their own experiences of using beauty and cosmetic products on Instagram. Authenticity in this context is associated with the sharing of real experiences that showcase the practice of using beauty and cosmetic products. The findings show
that these practices range from the influencers showcasing images of themselves without makeup to realistic demonstrations on parts of their bodies. These are important since they capture the attention of followers to negotiate a sense of genuine experience curated through the Thai social media scene. Curating real aspects of their images provides influencers with the opportunity to generate their credibility, thus securing social capital through the construction of social media discourses. In this vein, the findings also indicate that influencers openly discuss their lives and personal issues, such as the trajectory involved in establishing an online career. This reinforces a sense of honesty, generating positive relationships that enable influencers to become positively recognised on Instagram (Kuehn, 2016). It is these practices that help influencers to achieve a “reputational status” (Kuehn, 2016, p. 6), authenticated through the construction of their social media images. The narratives of these practices offer insight into understanding the notion of authenticity that enables Thai beauty influencers to generate personas of “relatability, credibility, and trustworthiness” (Kuehn, 2016, p. 6) on Instagram.

While the findings demonstrate the importance of managing real and authentic images revealing aspects of genuine experiences in curating beauty practices, influencers also focus on broadcasting behind-the-scenes images to give a sense of real and authentic personas online. These practices emphasise “backstage” activities, demonstrating realistic experiences of different influencers’ practices portrayed on social media. While revealing behind-the-scenes images is part of the dynamics of a staged performance (e.g., Hurley, 2019), the analysis of Instagram images reveals that participants can generate positive feedback to enhance their “trustworthy personas” (García-Rapp, 2017, p. 125), strengthening positive relationships with brands and followers on Instagram. This is negotiated through the influencers’ online performance, involving captions, social interaction with followers, snippets of their online images, and so on. The findings also indicate that the practice of revealing behind-the-scenes images is proven to be effective and an important component for influencers in negotiating brand identity, generating public visibility, and a sense of connectedness between themselves and their followers on Instagram. In addition, the performative expression of authenticating practices extends to the cultivation of day-to-day activities that reveal snippets of the influencers’ lifestyles. According to the findings, influencers tend to showcase aspects of their lives, reflecting “the-diary-like reportage of people’s everyday lives” (Abidin, 2018, p. 5) on Instagram. The curated display of influencers’ online images focuses on the notion of generating real images that demonstrate their routine activities, such as revealing images of themselves without makeup or while on holiday, and so on. These types of online images have become highly valued and practised online, suggesting a sense of “ordinariness” and
demonstrating how influencers authenticate themselves and relate to followers (e.g., Abidin, 2016). This mode of authenticity plays a vital role in understanding the construction of the influencers’ online personas, facilitating a sense of approachability and intimacy to generate bonds and positive relationships with followers on Instagram and social media platforms (Duguay, 2019).

Lastly, during the interviews, the participant influencers also shared aspects of their lives, described as “real issues” (e.g., Reade, 2020), such as stories involving “private”, “unseen”, and “secret” topics and those relating to their “personal lives” (Abidin, 2013, as cited in Abidin, 2017, p. 7) consisting of emotional, sensitive, and heartfelt issues. The results indicate that followers tend to react positively towards such issues and the revelation of the influencers’ activities in real life. This aspect of social media content often relates to the trajectory of the influencers’ online careers and the inspirational narratives that facilitate close and intimate disclosure among followers. During the interviews, the participants revealed that they shared these stories to develop positive relationships, inspire others, and generate positive vibes. The findings also demonstrate the concept of authenticity relating to the risks that influencers share with their followers. For instance, they demonstrate their experience of using certain types of cosmetic products that result in negative outcomes. These practices demonstrated how influencers give honest reviews to validate their credibility on Instagram (e.g., Hurley, 2019). The participant influencers reveal a tendency to speak openly about their experiences, contributing significantly to the concept of authenticity (e.g., Reade, 2020) enacted on Instagram. Such practices offer positive reassurance, which not only enables influencers to collaborate with brands but also maintain their trustworthy personas online. This demonstrates how the concept of authenticity can be applied to understanding beauty influencers’ practices in the Thai context. The study findings reaffirmed that the influencers’ practices are often semi-staged. However, the extent to which this occurs can vary, depending on their experiences and the promotional materials involved. The results of these practices demonstrate that influencers tend to construct images that enable them to build on their fame and popularity. Taken together, these practices promote the understanding of how the beauty blogging business operates on Instagram.

The analysis developed in Chapter Six provides insight into the construction of dominant beauty practices in Thailand. The chapter demonstrates how beauty ideals are created and the extent to which the idealisation of beauty shapes the attainment of beauty trends among women in Thailand. The analysis highlights various aspects of beauty practices, demonstrating the value of beauty as well as the application of makeup and tanning products, the process of undergoing
plastic/cosmetic surgery, and so on. The cultivation of beautified media images is important since it reveals certain preferences that reflect the shifting responses of beauty trends portraying the contrasting phenomenon of Thai beauty discourses. The study findings indicate that the discourse of whiteness is closely associated with the traditionalised concept of cultural values and beliefs. These are portrayed through the broadcasting of images showing traditional Thai national dress and other images exhibiting the value of beauty within the Asian region. These results are consistent with those of Kang (2021) who states that “‘Asian’ refers to the broader East Asian region but ‘white Asian’ specifically delimits the racialised category of contemporary developed Asian nations” (p. 275). The values of beauty practices in this context have also been extended to the curation of idealised media images that mark the strong preference for a white complexion. The examples demonstrate various dimensions of whiteness, emphasising the portrayals of “smooth, young, poreless, line-free, bright, transparent white, full and fine” images (Li et al., 2008, p. 446). These values of beauty reflect the rise in prominence of Thai beauty ideals, suggesting that having white/light skin is indicative of cultural privilege, potentially leading to the achievement of a higher-class status (e.g., Kang, 2021).

The hybridisation of femininity, combining the portrayal of Korean and Westernisation beauty ideals, is also analysed in this study. These ideals are important since they demonstrate the shifting response to cultural trends, reflecting the contrasting preferences of Thai beauty discourses. The findings reveal that these two major trends are regularly adopted and performed online by Thai beauty influencers. The idealisation of Korean beauty in this context is characterised by the portrayal of trends such as having big round eyes, a high nose bridge, and a V-shaped face (Rongmuang et al., 2011, p. 107), emphasising the use of lighter makeup. Taken together, these signal the increasing prominence of beauty ideals represented through the Thai digital economy (e.g., Yip et al., 2019). This aspect of beauty portrayal negotiates the cultural meanings and reveals the importance of idealising beauty practices, enabling Thai beauty influencers to extend their economic opportunities to attain social and economic approval in Thailand and elsewhere. In addition, the findings reveal that emphasis is placed on the value of a Western style of feminine beauty (e.g., Xie & Zhang, 2013). This type of ideal appearance tends to focus on the adoption of tanned skin, characterised by dark-coloured foundation, dark-coloured eye shadow, nude lipstick, and so on. The representation of these types of media images is associated with the portrayal of national beauty pageants, shifting the enactment of beauty practices among women in Thailand. Here, the construction of an online persona demonstrates a beautified appearance, contributing significantly to the contemporary discourses of feminine beauty which challenge the traditional
representation of femininity in Thai public discourse. This speaks to how some young Thai women have adopted a modern way of life, signalling a range of possible femininities. Thus, this contributes significantly to the emerging trend of adopting Westernised beauty ideals, providing an alternative concept of beauty in modern Thailand.

Lastly, the chapter concludes by demonstrating the importance of flexibility in negotiating beauty trends among women in Thailand. The enactment of these practices focuses on the influencers altering their appearance to meet the aesthetic standards of beauty in Thai society. The findings indicate a wide range of processes, such as undergoing rhinoplasty or blepharoplasty, as well as invasive aesthetic procedures such as injecting filler, Botox, and so on. This aspect of beauty practices is integral to influencers in meeting the standards of beauty which reflect the idealisation of beauty in Thai social media discourse. The findings demonstrate that all influencers engage in the modification process with the intent to enhance their appearance, enabling them to attract brands and promote online recognition. It is apparent that modifying facial appearance is important in portraying beauty ideals that can be achieved through the flexible negotiation of beauty trends enacted among women in Thailand. This, in turn, promotes the idealisation of feminine beauty, currently exhibited through the Thai influencer industry. The process of promoting modified media images, therefore, demonstrates the need for influencers to maintain beautified images, highlighting the idealisation of beauty itself. Such images are important for understanding how contemporary beauty ideals are engaged and the extent to which the modification process of beauty work reinforces the cultural trends, reflecting the changing representations of beauty portrayal among young women in Thailand.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The findings of this study help to understand the emerging online beauty culture in Thailand. The study examines the rise in prominence of beauty trends and provides an in-depth understanding of how the emergence of the online beauty industry operates through Thai social media discourse. The influencers also negotiate the curation of idealised media images critical to understanding the portrayal of Thai beauty norms. These norms reveal the significant values of beauty, determining social acceptance and ultimately affecting the economic status of both men and women in Thailand. These are vital to understanding the contemporary moments pointing to the various portrayals of femininity, shedding light on the online beauty industry, and specifically, the construction of online personas on social media. The findings of this study make a significant contribution to understanding the various perspectives of social media practices, highlighting the
increasing opportunities available in curating commercialised media content (e.g., Abidin, 2016b, 2018). These are relevant to understanding the emerging trends of the online beauty industry and the extent to which the beauty influencer industry currently operates through the Thai digital economy.

While the findings provide a critical understanding of the emerging online beauty culture in Thailand, the results in this field are still very limited, and the data in this study is only applicable to the enactment of beauty practices by a specific type of influencer. Crucially, the results of this analysis are limited to the use of one social media platform, which may not represent the overall aspects of beauty practices throughout Thai social media. This aspect is important and remains under-researched in Thailand. Furthermore, due to the limited number of previous studies in this area, the findings of this study are based mainly on two types of beauty influencers: those who became famous prior to the social media era and those who have recently risen to fame on social media. The results may therefore limit the understanding of how the online beauty industry operates through the online digital economy and the commodification and monetisation strategies of other types of beauty influencers in Thailand. To extend this field of study, further research could involve the exploration of influencers’ practices that respond to the changing trends in the media environment and the cultivation of beauty practices through other social media platforms. This would shed light on the commodification practices and monetisation opportunities involved in understanding the extended use of platform features. To contribute to this field of research, an alternative analysis could be conducted on different forms of labour to understand the different social media discourses involved. In addition, further research could examine a wider array of influencers’ practices, focusing on those who actively construct online images conveying the shifting influence of beauty ideals in Thailand. Accordingly, more studies are needed in this area to determine the significance of beauty portrayals and the emerging phenomenon of femininity in contemporary Thailand. These sets of practices are important and contribute significantly to the understanding of current debates on beauty and the idealisation of beauty practices consistently changing throughout the Thai digital economy.
References


Duffy, B. (2017). (Not) getting paid to do what you love: Gender, social media, and aspirational work. Yale University Press.


Quan-Haase, A. The SAGE handbook of social media research methods (pp. 215-231). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473983847.n14


Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview questions

- How did you first get into blogging? Why did you choose beauty content in particular? How did you get into it?
- What do you do in your spare time, in addition to blogging? How much time do you spend on blogging?
- Can you tell me what your make up routine is? Where do you get the idea from?
- Can you tell me how do you have such a large number of followers?
- How long did it take you to build these numbers?
- Can you tell me about your make up brand? How did you start? (in the case that they advertise their own brands on Instagram page, I will ask this question)
- Can you tell me how did you start collaborating with different make-up brands? What is the process? What do you benefit from it?
- How do you choose which product to review?
- When you represent each brand, Who is your target audience for different products?
- What trend do you think is popular at the moment? Has it changed over the years?
- What sort of style do you think attract the Thai audiences?
- What sort of style that you think work for you personally?
- Can you tell me what is happening with the online beauty industry? How is it doing as a whole?
- How do you see it happening in the next few years?
- Would you consider blogging as your main profession or just hobby?
- Do you have professional team to help editing the content or did you do it all by yourself?
- Do you use other platforms to communicate to your followers apart from replying to their comments on your Instagram?
- How do you manage the selection of your Instagram posts?
- In terms of gaining popularity, what strategy did you think was the most effective? Does it help you gain the number of followers?
- How would you describe your relationships with followers and brands?
- How do you maintain positive relationships with followers and brands? Have there been issues that affected the relationship?
- What type of content do you think people tend to follow the most?
- Is there anything in particular that you would not review?
- What is your perceptions on the idealization of beauty practices in Thailand? Do you think the trends of promoting whiteness are still prominent in the Thai society? Are there alternative trends, if so, how influential among young Thai women?
- What are your thoughts on the whitening related products? Are there any positives or negatives impact on young Thai women? If so, how?
- Have you heard of a recent slogan of whitening ads that stated “whiteness makes you win”, what do you think about it? How do you think it affects young Thai women?
- Do you think whitening products are harmful?
- What are your perceptions on the idealization of beauty practices in Thailand? Do you think the trends of promoting whiteness are still prominent in the Thai society? Are there alternative trends, if so, how influential among young Thai women?
- Do you think attaining white/light skin are still prominent in Thailand?
- What are your perceptions on attaining tanned skin? Would you consider promoting this type of ideals among young Thai women?
- What do you think are the main factors in influencing values of beauty among Thai women?
- Personally, do you think Thai women are open to other trends, in addition to the concept of whiteness?
Appendix B: Participant Participation Form

Researcher: Nunnapan Puathanawat - School of Media, Film and Music (Media and Communication Studies); Email: N.Puathanawat@sussex.ac.uk

Supervision: Professor Kate O’Riordan – School of Media, Film and Music (Media Studies); Email: K.O’Riordan@sussex.ac.uk

Dr. Simidele Dosekun – School of Media, Film and Music (Media Studies); Email: S.Dosekun@sussex.ac.uk

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS’ INFORMATION SHEET

STUDY TITLE: The business of beauty: online beauty entrepreneurs, femininity and whiteness in Thailand

Invitation to participate in the study

This research focuses on women who are promoting beauty products on social media sites and I would like to invite you to take part in this research project. Before making a decision, please take time to read the information below carefully. It is important that you fully understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you to be taking part in this study.

ORGANISATION, FUNDING AND APPROVAL OF THE RESEARCH

I am conducting this research as a doctoral researcher at the School of Media, Film and Music at the University of Sussex. The research is funded by Mahidol University International College (MUIC).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to find out about your experience in becoming a beauty entrepreneur /influencer, and to explore the relationship between yourself and consumers in regard to your engagement with beauty practices on social media platforms. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding and in-depth knowledge of how you position yourself and how you influence other women to perform and engage in beauty practices through the use of social media.
Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this research project because I believe that your knowledge, experience and expertise will make a huge contribution to this research. While your involvement is significant to the aims of this project, you reserve the right to make a decision whether or not to take part. If you agree to take part, you will be given this information sheet and will be asked to sign a consent form. As a participant, you are also able to withdraw at anytime until the end of my fieldwork (30/04/2019).

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

By agreeing to take part in this research, you will be involved in participating in the interview at a time and place that is convenient for both participants. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your roles, and experiences of being a beauty entrepreneur/influencer as well as your thoughts and comment regarding the dominant ideas about feminine beauty and whiteness in the Thai context.

The interview is expected to be between 1-2 hours.

THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE RESEARCH

Your involvement of this research project will make a huge contribution towards further understanding on the emerging online cultures of beauty entrepreneurs in the Thai context.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

Your personal information will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher and the University of Sussex. All interviews will use pseudonyms and your personal information will not be linked to your social media profile.

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

The interview will be recorded by using a digital voice recorder, which will be carefully transcribed. To protect the data, all information will be stored on a password protected hard drive.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The results of the research will be analysed as part of a thesis in a degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and the work may be published as an academic book or an article. The participants will be
able to obtain a copy if they wish to. Please kindly contact the researcher on the contact email stated in this information sheet.

**WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?**

Should you require further information, please contact Professor Kate O’Riordan or Dr. Simidele Dosekun (Supervisors) using the above email address. Lastly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and I look forward to your participant in this research project.

Nunnapan Puathanawat
15/10/2018
Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: The business of beauty: online beauty entrepreneurs, femininity and whiteness in Thailand

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the above research project. The interview will take approximately 1-2 hours. It is important that you understand the purpose of your participation and that you are fully aware of the terms and conditions of the interview process. Please read the information below and sign the form to certify that you fully understand and approve the following:

- I voluntarily agree to take part in this research project and understand that the interview will be anonymous. Given this, I have the right to withdraw anytime until the end of the fieldwork period. (30/04/2019)

- I allow for the interview to be recorded as part of the research process and understand that my personal information will be treated as strictly confidential.

- I allow for the content to be used in research publication and ensuing materials.

- I understand that my words may be quoted both directly and indirectly but the information will not be attributed and associated to my personal profile.

- I consent to the processing of my personal information and data for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016.

Name of Participant                                      Signature                          Date

Name of Researcher                                       Signature                          Date
Appendix D: The Certificate of approval for Ethical Review

Social Sciences & Arts C-REC
c-recss@admin.susx.ac.uk

Certificate of Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Number</th>
<th>ER/NP276/1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Of Project</td>
<td>The business of beauty: online beauty entrepreneurs, femininity and whiteness in Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator (PI):</td>
<td>Nunnapan Puathanawat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Nunnapan Puathanawat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration Of Approval</td>
<td>2 years, 9 months, 26 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Start Date</td>
<td>04-Dec-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Of Approval</td>
<td>04-Dec-2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Expired Date</td>
<td>30-Sep-2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved By</td>
<td>Vacancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Authorised Signatory</td>
<td>Liz McDonnell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>04-Dec-2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NB. If the actual project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures.

Please note and follow the requirements for approved submissions:

Amendments to protocol
- Any changes or amendments to approved protocols must be submitted to the C-REC for authorisation prior to implementation.

Feedback regarding the status and conduct of approved projects
- Any incidents with ethical implications that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported immediately to the Chair of the C-REC.

Feedback regarding any adverse(1) and unexpected events(2)
- Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences and Arts C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.

Monitoring of Approved studies
The University may undertake periodic monitoring of approved studies. Researchers will be requested to report on the outcomes of research activity in relation to approvals that were granted (full applications and amendments).

Research Standards
Failure to conduct University research in alignment with the Code of Practice for Research may be investigated under the Procedure for the Investigation of Allegations of Misconduct in Research or other appropriate internal mechanisms (3). Any queries can be addressed to the Research Governance Office: rgoffice@sussex.ac.uk

(1) An *adverse event* is one that occurs during the course of a research protocol that either causes physical or psychological harm, or increases the risk of physical or psychological harm, or results in a loss of privacy and/or confidentiality to research participant or others.

(2) An *unexpected event* is an occurrence or situation during the course of a research project that was a) harmful to a participant taking part in the research, or b) increased the probability of harm to participants taking part in the research.

(3) http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/nqi/policy/research-policy