BEAUTY AND THE HYPE BEASTS

From Glossier umbrellas to must-have palettes, they've got it all. But what can the biggest beauty-brand worshippers teach us about our own cravings for beauty merch and the hype that surrounds it? ›

Words KATE PASOLA Photographs TARYN RAE-LEE

Please reserve your judgement, because it does very much feel like, in this moment, the umbrella will fix my life.

It's first thing in the morning at the launch of Glossier's hotly anticipated London pop-up shop, and though the room is bursting with Britain's beauty *haut monde*, it's fair to say everyone present has lost any sense of professionalism (and, to an extent, their minds).

Grown women use their elbows to jab their way closer to CEO and founder Emily Weiss, who's in, y'know, casual attendance. I'm Augustus Gloop-ing my way round all of the photo opps (or "shareable moments", if you will), frenzied by the temporary shop's carnation-coloured sculptures and floral carpets. The champagne goes flat, unsipped, not because of the time of day (it isn't even 10am), but because we're all too busy drinking up the Glossier, Glossier, Glossier.

Meanwhile, 7,000 miles away in the Philippines, a 19-year-old called Jonas is in his bedroom, hammering the location tag for this very building, poised like a heist artist. He's ready to make his move.

I know I want the umbrella. It's the latest in Glossier's list of covetable merch offerings, following extremely limited releases of keyrings, water bottles, baseball caps and more at each of the brand's global pop-up shops in Miami, Seattle, Boston and beyond. That said, I sense I don't want the umbrella as much as some people – like the high-profile beauty journalist I see furtively pleading at the merchandise hatch, met with a polite refusal (they aren't yet on sale and nobody's getting special treatment). It's not even raining.

For now, I snap a picture and post it to my Story. It's almost automatic, like genuflecting at an altar. It's at that moment that an Instagram DM rips me out of my daze: a reply to my Story, from Jonas, who until this moment I never knew existed.

"OMG!!!" it reads. "Is this for sale?"

Perhaps his slew of messages – which are strewn with emojis of shooting stars and desperate faces – strums my heartstrings. Or maybe I'm just excited about the status I feel in having been identified as an international Glossier correspondent. I take the bait. I fill him in.

The regret comes immediately and lasts for hours while he interrogates me further, with every exclamation mark another vibration in my pocket. "It's so cute! I really like to buy

"THE BRAND IS A HAPPY PILL. IT BOOSTS THE HAPPINESS HORMONES IN MY BODY"

Glossier stuff! I'll pay international shipping and any expenses at all!"

The pings keep coming.

"Is it limited stock only? Do you know someone who could buy it for me and ship it to me?!" In so many words, he's asking me to name my price. "Were you able to source me one?" he asks. I breathe deeply. Then, minutes later, another notification. "OMG, please let me know!"

I snap. "Please stop! Just assume I'll let you know if I have good news."

He apologises, mortified – and that's when it occurs to me. This isn't actually about an umbrella at all.

UNLEASH THE BEASTS

To Jonas, bargaining with strangers for access to merchandise is run-of-the-mill behaviour. He's a hypebeast, after all. And where pop-star superfans queue outside arenas to meet their idols, hypebeasts queue online and outside shops, waiting to lay their hands on a new launch; be that the latest streetwear, a groundbreaking gadget or, in Jonas's case, make-up and beauty merch.

Hypebeasts are clever, tenacious and gasping for novelty. And if the object of their updated desire sells out, they'll often turn to resell apps like Depop and Ebay, or even strangers on Instagram who could be bribed to stick it in a bubble-wrap envelope. They will stop at nothing. The result? Besides mega-capitalistic mania, a total rewiring of beauty shopping as we know it.

According to his Instagram, Jonas doesn't even wear make-up. But he tells me that in his eyes, Glossier is more than a brand. "It's a happy pill that you need. It boosts my happiness hormones in my body." Whether he uses it or not, Jonas tells me he owns every product the brand has ever launched, displaying them in his "vanity room", "for cuteness purposes".

It's no mean feat, considering the brand doesn't retail in or ship to the Philippines. Instead, he purchases online, having his wares delivered to family members and friends in the USA, and waits patiently for an opportunity to arise in which they'll bring the products to the Philippines (or pays through the nose to have them shipped).

THE HYPE CYCLE

Yet the question remains: why would someone who doesn't wear make-up be so motivated to mail Glossier products and merchandise across the world, no expenses spared? The answer is but a four-letter word: hype.

Hype-marketing is nothing new – the likes of Apple, Nike and Beyoncé have all teased devotees into submission using unexpected product drops, secretive marketing and cult-building behaviours for years. Cast your mind to hypothermic iPhone fanatics camping outside Apple stores, and the Beyhive's ability to predict new albums through collective conspiracy theories.

It's streetwear brand Supreme (and by extension the streetwear community) that is often credited for refining hype-marketing to the point of surgical precision. New Supreme products are dropped in-store weekly, in limited numbers, and to be warned of new product drops, customers must subscribe to a newsletter, the link to which is buried on the brand's minimalist website. Order online and you'll be lucky to even receive confirmation of your purchase. Cavalier and borderline thoughtless, Supreme's marketing techniques read like the behaviour of a f*ckboy who sends "you up?" at midnight, but ›

RINGS, PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM TOP: HAND ONE (TOP), PANDORA (INDEX FINGER), CLAIRE'S (RING FINGER), BRACELET, OLIVIA BURTON; HAND TWO, OLIVIA BURTON (INDEX FINGER), DINNY HALL (RING FINGER), CLAIRE'S (RING FINGER), BRACELET, OLIVIA BURTON; HAND THREE, CLAIRE'S; HAND FOUR, PANDORA (MIDDLE FINGER), ALL CLAIRE'S (LITTLE FINGER); HAND FIVE, ACCESSORIZE (JUST SEEN); HAND SIX, BY ALONA; HAND SEVEN (FAR LEFT), PANDORA; HAND EIGHT, OLIVIA BURTON.
THIS PAGE: RINGS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: HAND ONE (TOP), OLIVIA BURTON (THUMB), PANDORA (MIDDLE FINGER, JUST SEEN); HAND TWO, OLIVIA BURTON; HAND THREE AND HAND FOUR, ALL PANDORA

falls asleep before you arrive at his house. Unpredictable, unavailable – and because of that, utterly addictive.

You may have heard of the Supreme-branded brick (that's right, a red construction brick) that had fans queuing for hours and parting with £28 for the privilege. That Supreme could whip up such enthusiasm for possibly the dullest object imaginable feels almost like a joke, flexing their ability to sell, well, anything at all. That said, the butt of the joke is certainly not the hypebeasts who queued to nab the bricks – at peak hype, they were reselling them on Ebay for £750.

That's not to say, of course, that the sumptuous offerings of hyped brands like Glossier, Fenty, Jeffree Star or Pat McGrath are in any way comparable to a construction brick. But perhaps it helps to explain, in part, Jonas's commitment to collecting products, merchandise and even packaging from Glossier, like holy relics.

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

But that devotion can get expensive. Melissa, a beauty enthusiast from North Carolina, began her love affair with Jeffree Star's eponymous cosmetics brand in 2016. She's a true collector; cleaning every palette after using it in order to keep it looking as pristine as possible. "When the Jeffree Star and Shane Dawson Conspiracy collaboration comes back out, I will have to get it again," she divulges. "It was so beautiful that I need one that's untouched."

Essex-based Patsy, 26, feels the same about her Fenty Beauty limited-edition "Dirty Thirty" Killawatt highlighter, released to celebrate Rihanna's 30th birthday. "I haven't used it, and never will!" she pledges. "I'm going to make sure my future kids know to bury me with [it] when I pass." Patsy wears a full-face of Fenty every day.

Melissa and Patsy have spent thousands of pounds on keeping up-to-date with their favourite brands' many launches. I ask Melissa whether she feels like an addict. She replies, "Oh, absolutely, all the time." I'm shocked at her candour. "[It] kind of plays with your emotions," she explains, telling me she often wonders, "Am I sane or insane with this make-up thing?" Her words echo those of Jonas. "You don't know how many times I've said, 'Please, Glossier, stop releasing skincare – I'm going broke!'" He's semi-joking, but I worry it's irresponsible of me to laugh along.

Patsy's devotion to Fenty earned her a ticket to hang out with Rihanna at the 2016 Harvey Nichols Fenty Beauty launch, and she's been a committed supporter since. "I devote a huge chunk of my time and my finances to supporting Rihanna and her lines," she tells me. "But I never see it as a task or inconvenience… When you love something and are passionate about it, it will never feel like work." She thinks Fenty Beauty launches are spaced far enough apart to allow fans to "build up finances", if necessary, and praises Fentybeauty.com's scheme in which customers can pay in monthly instalments.

But, along with the financial lurches hypebeasts face, there's also the emotional toll it takes. Melissa tells me it's "more of a frustration than a depression" that she suffers when she can't successfully buy new Jeffree Star launches due to websites crashing or high demand. It strikes me as odd that a hobby or passion could induce such fear and stress. And though she is aware of the deliberately limited availability of hyped products, she seems to feel a responsibility to at least try. "I'd feel too guilty," Melissa tells me when I ask if she could ever opt out. "I feel such a personal bond with Jeffree's brand."

Patsy agrees when it comes to Fenty. "It may sound super-dramatic, but it really does trigger anxiety and worry, that it will sell out… But I must admit, 99.9% of the time I'm usually first in line to purchase," she explains. "The thought of not owning a product, and potentially never being able to get it, is terrifying… But it's only happened to me once so far in two years."

Theresa Yee, senior beauty editor at trend forecasting agency WGSN, cites a "see now, want now" attitude as being responsible for hypebeasts' passionate shopping habits. "It's the FOMO mindset kicking in." She also thinks the rise of "clean-face beauty" could answer for beauty brands' extra efforts in marketing make-up, and for their pivot to selling skincare and lifestyle items. Kardashian-esque cut-creases, razor-sharp contouring, painted brows and overlined lips, though still popular, are challenged by an emerging appreciation of make-up minimalism: dewy, clean lids, rosy cheekbones and lipbalm. To satisfy those consumers, is it any wonder that brands are stretching their legs into lifestyle merch, and that the likes of Kylie Jenner and Huda have turned to skincare?

"THE THOUGHT OF NEVER OWNING A CERTAIN PRODUCT IS TERRIFYING"

GOODBYE TO HYPE?

Five weeks later, and Jonas is very close to owning the umbrella. He paid over triple the original price to a seller in London, who posted it to a friend in Texas, who'll bring it to him within a matter of months. I'm almost jealous of the satisfaction he'll feel when it arrives at his doorstep. I thought my foray into the world of hypebeasts would be very different from my own relationship to beauty, but I learned that their fanaticism isn't particularly rare; it's just the far end of a spectrum we're all occupying some part of.

Though hype culture is in full swing right now, Yee doesn't think it will stick around for more than a year or so, heralding 2021 as "the end of more". She predicts that we'll begin to focus more on functional, result-driven and high-performance products over novelty. "We'll see a move away from hype products as consumers start to shift their mindset towards buying less, but better, as a way to save the planet." After all, there's a very real consequence of our addiction to newness. The vast majority of make-up packaging is still unrecyclable, and international shipping adds exorbitantly to carbon footprints.

Excess worship of a beauty-brand idol is a fun distraction from the difficulties of modern life – we all have our crutches and vices. But how far is too far? What innovations could we see if brands had breathing space to formulate something game-changing? And in what treasures could we indulge if we weren't spending our overdrafts on identikit technicolour palettes? The beauty industry has proved its credentials in building hype – now let's just hope it doesn't fall for its creation. ◆



MODELS PAIGE, MIRABEL, NADIA, NADINE M AND TOLU, ALL AT HIRED HANDS MODELS. NAILS MICHELLE CLASS AT STELLA CREATIVE, USING BIO SCULPTURE. MAKE-UP JOLANDA COETZER AT LHA REPRESENTS. PHOTOGRAPHER'S ASSISTANT MICHELLE MORGAN. FASHION ASSISTANT FEDERICA POLISE. NAILS ASSISTANT SASHA GODDARD. UMBRELLA, GLOSSIER (AVAILABLE UNTIL STOCKS LAST). "BEAST" MIRROR, ANASTASIA BEVERLY HILLS X ALYSSA EDWARDS, ANASTASIABEVERLYHILLS.CO.UK. HOLOGRAPHIC MAKE-UP BAG, JEFFREE STAR COSMETICS. RINGS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: HAND ONE (TOP), CLAIRE'S; HAND TWO, CLAIRE'S; HAND THREE, BOTH PANDORA; HAND FOUR, CLAIRE'S; HAND FIVE (BOTTOM), OLIVIA BURTON (RING FINGER), BOTH PANDORA (INDEX FINGER); HAND SIX, OLIVIA BURTON; HAND SEVEN, ALL PANDORA. *ALSO COMES WITH A LIPBALM

THE FIGHT FOR HYPE

SOME OF BEAUTY HISTORY'S MOST ANTICIPATED LAUNCHES

Shane Dawson x Jeffree Star Conspiracy Palette



What's better than one batch of YouTube drama to fuel a palette launch? Two, obviously. The pair reportedly sold over a million palettes in 30 minutes.

Pat McGrath x Star Wars



The mother of make-up joining forces with the equally hyped *Star Wars* franchise was big news – the Gilded Decadence Kit (left*) is now being sold on Ebay for heartbreakingly high prices. "I do feel a responsibility, now that we have this wonderful community, not to disappoint them," McGrath told us.

Fenty Beauty Foundation



The Navy (RiRi's fans) did not let her down when she launched Fenty Beauty, buying up her foundation in record time – especially in the darker shades, teaching the industry an important lesson.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Kate Pasola

"Cosmo's own deputy beauty editor, Laura Capon, is a secret hypebeast. All the merch in the shoot was prised out of her stash for the day! I have no idea how she maintains her fandom for so many different brands. It's inspirational."