

COULD COPYCAT COSMETICS RE-IGNITE CREATIVITY IN BEAUTY?

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In an age when dupe brands offer consumers the same product for less, is there an opportunity for cosmetics brands to reclaim originality and innovation?



Counterfeit Beauty

‘ Creative copyright has become the hot topic in the cosmetics industry, with social media users becoming whistleblowers. ’

— *Carla Seipp, foresight writer, The Future Laboratory*

Fake make-up is as problematic as fake news, claims journalist Macaela Mackenzie's [article](#) for Allure. The reason? Its detrimental impact not only on corporate sales figures, but on its ability to dupe consumers. In 2017, the US government seized more than **2.8m** fake beauty products, including Estée Lauder and MAC Cosmetics knock-offs, with speculation that the actual counterfeit beauty trade could be 10 times that figure.

Yet, with consumers increasingly looking for cheaper equivalent products, cleverly duplicated goods are becoming a goldmine. As the popularity of disruptor brands like The Ordinary and The Inkey List show, high-performing, industry-backed products at accessible prices hold vast appeal – and could help to assuage the impact of counterfeit purchases.

Driving this shift are social media channels that help those on a budget find well-performing products. Dupethat, a website focused on finding cheaper duplicates to cult higher-end products, now has 1.2m followers on Instagram. Some **90%** of beauty brand interactions took place on Instagram in 2015, according to L2.

But while these savvy shoppers compare ingredients and prices, they have also ignited the debate about cloned cosmetics. Because, although these products might be price-friendly, their branding and formulations have become *the* hot topic in the cosmetics industry, with social media users becoming vigilant whistleblowers.

In 2018 alone, Huda Beauty has been **criticised** for copying the campaign of indie brand Beauty Bakerie. South Korean skincare brand Glowlab heavily **borrowed** from Glossier's packaging and branding, while Bella Thorne's Filthy Fangs make-up range was immediately accused of copying the packaging of Juvia's Place. Sharp-eyed social media users also spotted that KKW Beauty's Cherry Blossom Collection eyeshadow palette and Urban Decay's Naked Cherry palette – launched within months of each other – had identical colour combinations.

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With multiple brands sharing the same manufacturers, and customised design costs being too high for start-up brands, some of these instances feel unavoidable. Perhaps the main issue is a lack of innovation. In a production cycle so fast that producers don't have the time, or desire, to come up with original ideas, the problem goes beyond creative licensing.

As make-up artist Kevin James Bennett **states**: 'The cosmetics industry has been overtaken by a disturbing phenomenon where innovation is replaced by imitation. It's easier to copy the competition's successes than risk launching an innovative new product that might not produce guaranteed sales.'

And while companies like Makeup Revolution and Los Angeles-based newcomer Bad Habit are building successful businesses by offering consumers product duplicates at lower price points, they have attracted an equal amount of **criticism** from the companies they are inspired by. At present, however, trademark law only protects product design and packaging if it can be legally proven to be specific to a brand in the eyes of the consumer – think Louboutin's red heels and Tiffany & Co's blue boxes.

Further, as independent law and business culture blog The Fashion Law **notes**: 'Many consumers... are seemingly pleased with the diversity and accessibility of products that are similar to higher-priced products.'

As the myriad examples of copycat cosmetics highlight, there is a need for greater regulation on product development and branding in the beauty sector. But there is a silver lining: amid the accusations of cloned products, there is a chance for beauty companies to stand up, stand out and breathe new life into this oversaturated market.