Sephora's Starter Witch Kit

Identity Construction through Social Media Protests of Commodified Religion

Chris Miller

ABSTRACT: In late summer 2018, beauty chain Sephora announced the release of a "Starter Witch Kit" in collaboration with fragrance company Pinrose. By September, Sephora announced it was cancelling the product after receiving extensive criticism on social media, particularly from Modern Witches. This article examines the uproar surrounding Sephora's Starter Witch Kit as it played out on Twitter. The debate on Twitter included Witches protesting the appropriation and commodification of their sacred traditions, as well as outsiders who questioned the right of Witches to complain about spiritual theft. This Twitter debate was an opportunity for Modern Witches to substantiate and legitimize their identities as Witches. Witches distinguished their identities as "authentic" by mocking certain products and consumers, and demarcated practices/traditions as distinctive of Witchcraft by calling them sacred. By accusing Sephora of spiritual theft, Witches also largely elided their own engagement with appropriation from religious traditions.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary Paganism, Modern Witchcraft, cultural appropriation, commodification, commercialization, Twitter, social media

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In August 2018, beauty chain Sephora, in collaboration with fragrance company Pinrose, announced the release of a "Starter Witch Kit" that included tarot cards, white sage, a rose quartz crystal, fragrances, and an instructional guide advising how to "create and cleanse your ceremony space, charge your crystal, read your tarot card and anoint your fragrance."[1] Similar to beauty and wellness companies like *goop,* Sephora's marketing intertwined consumption and religious practice (often coded as "spirituality" in advertising).[2] The imagery and language used to promote this product simultaneously built on stereotypes of witches as wicked, green-skinned sorceresses and the popularity of commercialized New Age spirituality. The promotion of Witchcraft and "ceremony space" transformed an everyday beauty routine into a meaningful ritual, and distinguished the Starter Witch Kit from more mundane fragrance sets. In September, however, Sephora cancelled the Starter Witch Kit (hereafter referred to as simply "the Kit") after receiving extensive criticism, largely through social media. Several religious communities accused Sephora of appropriating their practices, but I focus on the Modern Witchcraft community, broadly defined.

I use a broad definition of Modern Witchcraft to recognize the diversity among contemporary Pagan Witches, but some unifying characteristics include polytheism, reverence for nature, and valuing ancient knowledge.[3] The Pagan community is difficult to delineate, especially since many practitioners are fluid in their self-identifications, or dislike labels.[4] Offline, some Witches self-identify as Pagans or Wiccans, and consider this a religious identity. Other Witches do not consider this to be a religious identity. Some Twitter users in this online debate identified as Wiccans, and others as Witches. Wicca was referred to as a culture in some Twitter responses, and a religion in others. Some even used the Starter Witch Kit debate to proclaim their outlook on the issue of whether Witchcraft is a religion or a culture. For example, @anne_theriault wrote, "Being a witch isn't a religion. There are no induction rites."[5] In contrast, @stellathered wrote, "Witchcraft or Paganism (or however you refer to it) is a religion. One with actual practices and guidelines."[6] There was little consensus on what those people participating in this debate called themselves (e.g., Witches or Wiccans), or to what exactly they belonged (a religion or a culture), but taking a stance on the Kit allowed adherents to define Witchcraft's elusive boundaries.

Although many different groups expressed distaste for Sephora's Witch Kit online, this article primarily focuses on tweets from self-identified Witches who consider Witchcraft to be a religious practice, and who framed their offense using the language of religion or sacred practices.[7] This Twitter debate performed several significant tasks for those involved. By demanding others to respect their religion, Witches asserted the legitimacy of Witchcraft. Modern Witches also made claims

for tarot cards, sage, and other products as exclusively belonging to Witchcraft. Finally, individual Witches substantiated and distinguished their identities by articulating criteria for what constitutes an "authentic" Witch.

Scholar of South Asian religions Tanisha Ramachandran identifies a pattern—whereby companies produce products, communities express offense, and companies apologize—which she calls a "discourse of protest." Through cycles of protest and apology, communities put forth "assertions of authenticity, ownership, identity, and authoritative claims."[8] Taking the Twitter debate about Sephora's Witch Kit as a case study, I apply discourse analysis to reveal how issues such as appropriation, ownership, authenticity, and commercialization operate in Modern Witchcraft. Philosophers Jeremy Carrette and Richard King suggest the importance of analyzing who benefits from commercialized constructions of spirituality.[9] Although Sephora attempted to exploit spirituality for profit, the ensuing debate allowed Witches to benefit, as protesting the Kit legitimized their identities and authenticity. Modern Witchcraft has fluid borders as to who belongs, what Witches believe or practice, and ongoing debates regarding appropriate sources for inspiration. For alternative religions lacking clearly articulated doctrines, online discourse reveals the negotiated process of establishing orthodoxy. Vague boundaries of orthodoxy are more explicitly delineated during periods of controversy.[10] In this article, I demonstrate that Witches' complaints about the Kit functioned to police the borders of Witchcraft. Although Witches may occasionally struggle to define explicitly what all community members practice or believe, in this debate, Witches posting on Twitter pointed out what *Witchcraft is not*.

Previous studies have analyzed how practitioners reconcile Witchcraft's relationship with commercialism.[11] Building on analyses of Pagan responses to books, movies, and television shows, I demonstrate how core themes still resonate as Witchcraft representations emerge in the beauty industry.[12] This study is broad in that there were few criteria for inclusion beyond simply posting a tweet, but narrow in that I only analyzed responses concerning a specific product (the Starter Witch Kit) and community (Witches). Witches remain divided over commercialism. Religious studies scholar Todd LeVasseur argues, for example, that Reverend Billy's Church of Stop Shopping is oriented against "an oppressive capitalist, white supremacist, speciesist system" that exploits "the poor, communities of color, and Earth."[13] Many Witches posting on Twitter denounced Sephora with similar language, aligning themselves with other oppressed communities. However, the counter-promotion on Twitter of "real" Witchcraft stores demonstrated the impossibility of entirely escaping consumerism and highlighted that Modern Witches still integrate commercial consumption into their identities—they simply wish to do so on their own terms.

The Starter Witch Kit debate differed from past debates over commercialized Witchcraft in that cultural appropriation became a central theme. "Appropriation" became an effective term for asserting ownership over practices and allowed Witches to express victimization. However, while Witches accused Sephora of misappropriation, some critics accused Witches of doing the same. The role of appropriation in discourse among Witches is significant for understanding the broader development of contemporary spiritualities, many of which claim to draw from "diverse but internally interconnected fields of practices."[14] Following sociologist of religion David Feltmate's "social possibilities" paradigm for studying new religious movements, the Starter Witch Kit episode deepens understanding of how communities approach practices that they do not solely possess.[15] In this case, Witches posting on Twitter asserted ownership of certain practices, and by claiming that these traditions were *sacred* and *theirs*, they sought to restrict access to outsiders and legitimize their claims of ownership. Growing conversations regarding cultural appropriation impact debates surrounding commercialism. I demonstrate how individuals seek to assert exclusive ownership over traditions and practices, and in some cases, side-step their own accusations of appropriation.

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND ONLINE DISCOURSE

Modern Witchcraft's minimal organizational structures prompt researchers to look to practitioners rather than leaders, which is useful for understanding any diffuse community. Further, the internet enables scholars "to reach hidden populations."[16] Some Witches are still in the "broom closet," and even those who are not necessarily hidden represent an "imagined community," defined by political scientist Benedict Anderson as configurations of people who may never meet each other, but who imagine themselves as constituting a cohesive group.[17] Many Witches are solitary practitioners, and those who are not belong to small, loosely structured groups.[18] Although Witches may physically interact with their co-religionists infrequently, virtual spaces allow individuals to connect with the larger Witchcraft community by expressing their views and having their opinions validated.[19] Discourse analysis of tweets shows how an imagined community collectively responds to larger issues. In this particular online debate, Witches negotiated authenticity by defining who could be a vendor of Witchcraft products and labelling potential purchasers of Sephora's Witch Kit as inauthentic.

A discourse-centered analysis reveals how orthodoxy is constructed and how boundaries of belonging are formulated. Reflecting Witchcraft's emphasis on personal spirituality, sociologists Helen A. Berger and Douglas Ezzy argue that Witches are their own "ultimate

authority," adding that "no central authority . . . can excommunicate or deny an individual the right to claim that [they are] a Witch."[20] The internet's similarly decentralized nature produces "the phenomenon of 'instant experts.'"[21] Within decentralized communities/spaces, "the real work of aligning with or distancing from other users occurs in discourse."[22] The Starter Witch Kit debate revealed which vendors, ideas, and traditions Modern Witches wished to align with or distance themselves from. Witches used Twitter to express their belonging to Witchcraft, articulate their visions for why Witches should (or should not) protest the Kit, and outline Witchcraft's "authentic" characteristics. Religious organizations are "discursively and materially co-enacted by various actors" through performances in digital spaces as Twitter users speak for themselves but also claim to speak on behalf of and represent all Witches.[23] (Throughout this article, I use the term "user" as a shortened version of "Twitter user," or more specifically, people who voiced their opinion about Sephora's Starter Witch Kit using this social media platform.) Identity affirmation and boundary negotiation are particularly important for members of new religions.[24] Digital and social media allow people to "articulate their identities and subvert existing identity representations."[25] Discourse analysis of the constellation of Twitter responses helps to understand how orthodoxy and identity is constructed within Witchcraft. In this particular Twitter debate, Witches distinguished their identities in contrast to what they perceived as a trivializing depiction put forth by Sephora. By rejecting the stereotypes embodied by the Kit, including green-skinned sorceresses who are powerful (but also feared) and superficial spiritual seekers, users opposed their community's representation by Sephora and Pinrose and offered preferred visions of authentic Witchcraft.

METHODOLOGY

Discourse analyst Stephen Pihlaja's "discourse-centred approach" in digital spaces begins by identifying "drama," or spaces/topics where debate occurs.[26] Drama episodes allow scholars to place specific debates within larger contexts of community interactions. Identifying the Kit as a drama episode, I entered "Sephora Witch Kit" into Twitter's search function and monitored activity from 31 August 2018 to 1 December 2018.[27] During the first two weeks, around one hundred new relevant posts appeared per day. The rate declined considerably over September, with only one new post per day by October. I monitored activity over the following weeks, but the debate mostly occurred in the immediate days after the Kit was announced and following its cancellation.

All tweets (1,619) addressing Sephora's Witch Kit were coded according to different categories. I was concerned with patterns of

argumentation, such as reasons for opposition/support, the language used to position identity, and calls for action. Most of the users participating in the debate expressed distaste for the Kit, with 1,145 tweets coded as negative. Within this category of negative tweets, 332 accused Sephora of appropriation, 66 tried to redirect business towards other vendors, and 261 mocked the Kit's potential purchasers. Only fifty tweets were coded as positive, with some of these suggesting that the Kit was potentially valuable for improving the public's perception of Witchcraft. Sixty-one tweets with no clear stance were coded as "unclear."

Several news articles also provided brief glimpses into the Twitter uproar.[28] Considering that some users re-tweeted these articles, they also likely spread awareness about the Kit. Sixty-two users re-tweeted articles reflecting no clear stance on the Kit, while 390 users disseminated stories coded as negative.[29] In terms of discourse analysis, such articles rarely offered new information, and most simply quoted users' tweets. The debate also played out on Witchcraft-centric sites such as *The Wild Hunt* and Pagan blogs on *Patheos*.[30] While these stories offer important reactions, they largely echo the same themes found on Twitter, and are not this article's primary focus.

Employing discourse analysis, I compared tweets within and across each category to understand how individual opinions contributed to an overall community outlook among Modern Witches.[31] Recognizing the need to contextualize discourse-centered online ethnographies with additional data, in this article, I draw on studies of similar quarrels (i.e., commercialism or appropriation) to explore this debate about the Starter Witch Kit.[32]

I relied on self-identification to discern which responses came from Witches. In some cases, self-identification was explicit, such as @Kendra_theSleepy, who wrote, "Myself and other ACTUAL witches find this incredibly disrespectful."[33] In other cases, identity was inferred based on how a user framed their reason for disliking the Kit. For example, @noimalex wrote, "@Sephora is trash for . . . selling these. . . . It's so disrespectful to the craft."[34] It seems reasonable to assume that @noimalex felt disrespected, identified as a "follower" of the craft, and therefore is likely a Witch. This debate involved participants with diverse and complex identities. Some identified as *practitioners* of Witchcraft, but not as belonging to a particular religion. Others identified as practitioners of African-derived traditions like Haitian Vodou, which can—but does not always—fit under Paganism's umbrella. Some protests came from members of indigenous communities, many of whom would not consider themselves Pagans. How Paganism overlaps with these groups is the subject of ongoing discussions,[35] but I confine my analysis here to responses that specifically invoked Witches, including responses *from* Witches and those who *criticized* Witches for feeling offended by the Kit and its advertising.

POSITIONING PAGAN IDENTITY

This section introduces the online debate by presenting several tweets representative of the negative responses from Witches. On 10 September 2018, @MaidenBarbara wrote, "Fuck off co-opting, appropriating & trying to sell fake spirituality . . . you don't get to cash in on witches."[36] Another user, @astrolyss, wrote, "DO NOT appropriate a culture as sacred as Wicca. . . . Wiccans don't practice our religion for the attention of looking 'cool.'"[37] Many Witches invoked the term "sacred" in their tweets to claim ownership of, and thereby protect, certain practices. Kathryn Lofton, a specialist in religion and popular culture, argues that scholars should pay more attention to "what believers (and consumers) consider sacred."[38] While objects are not inherently sacred, this debate reveals how and why this status is sometimes ascribed. Without specifically identifying what makes Witchcraft sacred, Witches on Twitter who called their traditions sacred could more easily justify feeling offended that the Kit was being marketed to "outsiders." Although Witches held no *formal* ownership over the Kit's contents, on social media, simply *asserting* that traditions are sacred was a popular (and arguably effective) protest strategy.

Amid Witches protesting Sephora's misappropriation of Witchcraft, some Twitter users (101 tweets) pointed out that Witches have similarly engaged in appropriation. The Starter Witch Kit's white sage was the focal point for this aspect of the debate. Prominently used in some indigenous communities, some Witches also integrate sage smudging into their practices.[39] Although some Witches acknowledged that multiple communities/traditions use the materials included in the Kit, most, like @MaidenBarbara—who wrote, "you don't get to cash in on witches"—suggested that these practices belong exclusively to Witchcraft.[40] Some Witches even defended this ownership claim through an ancestral lineage, such as @astrolyss, who wrote, "this is NOT what the ancestors of our religion would want."[41] Sociologist Courtney Bender similarly observes among spiritual practitioners that ironically, individuals who themselves combine diverse traditions to construct their identities simultaneously critique others for appropriation. Protesting the Starter Witch Kit became a means of asserting ownership, as Witches demarcated certain practices and materials, including tarot or sage, as exclusive to Witchcraft, eliding that some of these practices (as some users noted on Twitter) were adopted from other religions or cultures.

Competing ownership claims partly result from Witchcraft's outlook on borrowing. Sociologist of religion Douglas E. Cowan describes Wicca as an "open-source" religion.[42] Members justify this ideology in numerous ways. For some, deities of different pantheons are interpreted as "different manifestations of the same forces."[43] For others, belief in

reincarnation means one's current ethnicity is not all that important.[44] Suzanne Owen, who specializes in contemporary indigenous traditions, explains that some Druids see Lakota traditions as "living examples" of what *may* have occurred in ancient Europe, offering models for constructing new rituals.[45] Among spiritual practitioners in the diffuse metaphysical movement, Courtney Bender finds similar strategies of past lives and "nostalgic imaginaries" to justify borrowing from cultures to which one does not immediately appear to belong.[46] Connecting themselves to religions and traditions across time and space, Witches do not see themselves as appropriating but rather as part of an oppressed group whose practices have been stolen (in this case, by Sephora).

Several Twitter users pointed out a double standard, since Modern Witches may have engaged in borrowing the very practices and sacred items they accused Sephora of stealing. One lamented, "The layers of hypocrisy and denial it must take to be a white girl witch who is mad about the Sephora witch kits."[47] In a frequently re-tweeted blog post, Adrienne Keene discusses a larger history of appropriation in which Pagans have served as culprits, adding that Etsy returns almost two thousand hits on a search for "smudge kit" (a portion of which comes from Pagan vendors).[48] Echoing this outlook, @avraham suggested on Twitter that Modern Witchcraft "is largely based on cultural appropriation. . . . [Witches] took and twisted indigenous culture to make it a white [people] trend."[49] Similarly, @boxerhole added, "Crazy how a bunch of white women are getting mad . . . like their entire religion isn't frankenstined voudu [*sic*]/bruja/Native American religious aspects that they appropriated."[50] Although many more tweets (332) accused Sephora of appropriating Witchcraft than accused Witches of committing appropriation (101 tweets), this debate suggests a future challenge for practitioners who draw on diverse traditions.

Witchcraft's open-source model faces challenges when outsiders (i.e., Sephora) appropriate what insiders see as "their" symbols. Protesting Sephora's Kit on Twitter, @Kendra_theSleepy wrote, "Wicca/witchcraft IS NOT [a] trend. . . . Keep to your beauty and we will keep to our OWN practice."[51] Those who asserted that "Witchcraft is not a trend" or who insulted Sephora's targeted audience of "spiritual dabblers" sought to reinforce their own authenticity. Anthropologist of religion Laurel Zwissler calls Paganism a "ritual-laundering outfit, removing the baggage of cultural misappropriation from ritual elements outside . . . white, Western culture."[52] Just as Druids reinterpret Lakota traditions, Paganism is used by others to justify borrowing. Sephora's Starter Witch Kit represented another instance of "laundering," as upon purchase, one could borrow smudging from Witches rather than indigenous communities. In their protests against the Kit, Witches marked various practices as sacred, and most importantly, as belonging to Witchcraft, firmly stating that these practices are not a trend that

outsiders can adopt or borrow. Claiming to be victims of appropriation also allowed Witches on Twitter to side-step allegations of their own appropriations from other traditions. This strategy bolstered Witchcraft's legitimacy, by declaring that it is a religion worthy of respect, but it also presented drawbacks. If Witches argue that outsiders should avoid appropriating traditions that insiders deem sacred, then as critics note, Witches must also refrain from co-opting others' traditions.

COMMODIFICATION OF THE CRAFT

The commercialization of Modern Witchcraft, from popular books for beginners, fictional movies featuring witches, or the fragrance Kit under discussion here, represents an ongoing, complex debate among Witches. Pagan author Lucie DuFresne encapsulates the tension that frames this issue: "Does our embracing of popular culture really strengthen our movement and public acceptance . . . or does it eat away at the edges of our credibility and draw others to the community for the wrong reason?"[53] While acknowledging some benefits of Witchcraft becoming more popular and visible, DuFresne does not clarify what might be considered to be the "right" reasons to practice Witchcraft, or more importantly, who sets the rules. Sociologist Douglas Ezzy defines "consumerist Witches" as "those who are not feminist, do not question contemporary attitudes towards sexuality . . . [and] do not raise concerns about the environment," implicitly outlining several "right" values of Witchcraft.[54] In this section, I analyze Twitter responses to the Kit that traversed a spectrum from "Witchcraft should never be sold" to "big companies can help our image." Near the center of this spectrum, and significant for constructing orthodoxy and authenticity, are Witches who protested Sephora specifically as a vendor, claiming instead that "only *these* places" can/should sell Witchcraft.

Witchcraft has been described as a reaction to disenchantment, or the rise of science and rationalism in modernity, which eliminated appeals to magic or religion to explain phenomena.[55] Many Witches respond to disenchantment by rediscovering magic, seeking to make the world more meaningful and mystical, and by rejecting aspects of the mainstream world, such as commercialism. At one extreme, some Witches on Twitter declared Witchcraft as distinct from commercialism, such as, @Kendra_theSleepy, who accused Sephora of "using an ACTUAL RELIGION for profit," calling this "outrageous & offensive."[56] The distinction that this user and others draw between religion and profit intends to elevate Witchcraft as a "legitimate" or "real" religion, and therefore distinct from commercialism. Beyond the obvious reality that material goods must be purchased to facilitate certain religious practices (and that commercial activity may result in profit at various

points in the supply chain), protests against Sephora highlight ongoing tension among Witches concerning appropriate relationships between religion and commercialism.

Many users argued that Sephora's Kit, emblematic of commodified spirituality, represented a lack of respect for Witchcraft, especially as many Modern Witches are still "mocked, judged and threatened" based on their identities.[57] To accent Witchcraft's marginalization, twenty-one tweets glibly noted that Sephora would never sell a Catholic, Muslim, or Buddhist Starter Kit, but readily commodified Witchcraft. These parody Kits referenced in several tweets represent "culture jamming," or "strategically using satire . . . and reimagining dominant messages about consumption" to accentuate that Witchcraft was being unfairly disrespected.[58] In regards to other religions whose traditions are mass-marketed to outsiders, Ramachandran highlights several cases in which companies have co-opted Hindu imagery.[59] One also finds Buddha statues as decorative commodities at stores throughout North America.[60] Regarding postural yoga, religious studies scholar Andrea Jain notes that commercialized practices sometimes preserve connections to religion, but the two are often divorced entirely.[61] Resembling these and other cases, Witches protested their religion being commodified and mass-marketed, arguing that this represented a lack of respect for Witchcraft as a religion.

Religion is shaped by complicated commercial processes, and the evaluations that communities make concerning consumption. Anthropologist Laurel Kendall observes that among East and Southeast Asian communities, factors like craftspersons' training or quality of materials determine an object's "subsequent career as an ensouled and agentive thing," with higher-quality products having greater significance.[62] Responses from Witches on Twitter to Sephora's Kit reveal further interconnections (and tensions) between religion and commerce. Among Witches, some popular authors are celebrated for promoting Witchcraft's public acceptance.[63] Other authors however, and in particular, one who targeted their books at a younger teen audience, have been criticized as greedy and inauthentic.[64] More broadly, some Witches are religious entrepreneurs who write books, offer classes, and profit by selling supplies.[65] However, not all such figures are judged equally. While market success can potentially increase one's religious authority and influence, success occasionally decreases credibility. The Starter Witch Kit debate further demonstrates how commercialism intersects with presumed authenticity. Although Sephora—a large company with no connections to Witchcraft—was quite easily dismissed as inauthentic, the way that potential purchasers of the Witch Kit were delegitimized, or the way that alternative products/vendors were legitimized, reveals how authenticity and relationships to commercial consumption are negotiated among Witches.

SEPARATING THE REAL FROM THE "FLUFFY"

Beyond complaints about Witchcraft being commodified, some Witches also used the Twitter debate to distinguish their identities as authentic. Sociologists Phillip Vannini and J. Patrick Williams describe authenticity as a set of qualities determined as ideal by people in particular times and spaces.[66] Witchcraft's authentic features do not exist objectively but are constructed through intra-community debates. Anthropologist James S. Bielo calls authenticity "an organizing trope" among evangelical Christians, and it played a similar role in this episode.[67] Sephora's Kit became an easy target to critique inauthentic Witches, thereby revealing the ongoing process of negotiating authenticity.

On Twitter, many Witches objected to the stereotypical perceptions that Sephora exploited, with twenty tweets highlighting the Kit's release coinciding with Halloween.[68] One user, @Katerina wrote, "These are sacred tools, used for sacred practices. Not your fun Halloween entertainment."[69] The dislike that some Witches already hold towards Halloween icons—like black cats or women riding broomsticks—was exacerbated by an out-group's attempt to exploit a sacred holiday for marketing.

Another thread running through the debate was something known as the "fluffy bunny" stereotype, which describes practitioners considered juvenile, inauthentic, and only attracted to the "aesthetics" of Witchcraft. Witches often blame teens and commercial retailers "for reducing witchcraft to a sweet, bland, harmless ritual practice."[70] Scholars Angela Coco and Ian Woodward, who study consumption and authenticity, recall a Pagan gathering in which "fluffies" were discussed, noting: "Implicit in the discussion was a sense of a 'them' who were seduced by media images . . . and a (serious, authentic) 'us' who presumably distanced themselves from such things."[71] The Kit became a marker of inauthenticity, separating "fluffy" from serious practitioners. Satirically characterizing the Kit's targeted audience, @postmortem called them, "white girls . . . watching [*American Horror Story: Coven*] once before deciding theyre [*sic*] totally a witch now."[72] Similarly comparing the Kit to a popular show, @jaxlynp called Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* "the netflix/tv equivalent of a . . . skinny white christian girl . . . thinking its [*sic*] cool to buy the Sephora witch kit."[73] These comparisons mark a distinction between "real" Witches versus those fictional witches seen in popular media, or relatedly, those inauthentic practitioners who draw inspiration from such programs or purchase from improper sources. Many users deployed terms like "Becky" or "white girls" to insult anyone who would potentially consider purchasing a Starter Witch Kit.[74] Sephora's Kit was thereby combined with other popular insults to demarcate between authentic and inauthentic practitioners of Witchcraft.

These reactions also point to larger issues of age, gender, and experience within Witchcraft. Critiques of "Beckys" and "white girls" are noteworthy considering that Modern Witches are predominantly female and white.[75] These critiques of the Kit weaponized Witchcraft's dominant demographic (white women) to assert insincerity and inauthenticity. Comparing Paganism to New Age groups, sociologist Helen A. Berger notes that the latter are often associated with white, middle-class women "selfishly focusing on themselves." In contrast, she emphasizes that "no money is required to learn [Pagan] techniques, rituals, and magical practices."[76] Although demographically these communities are quite similar, Witches often distinguish their authenticity in contrast to New Age practitioners.[77] Ezzy and Berger find that when Witches recall their process of becoming Witches, they reflect upon commercialism dismissively. While Witches describe their current practice as serious and mature, they describe their introduction (through films, television, or what one informant called a "tacky" spell kit) as juvenile.[78] Although Ezzy and Berger argue that no central authority can deny one's claim to be a Witch, this does not stop Witches from mocking others.

This reflects historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith's assertion that "near neighbors" most often require sharp distinctions.[79] Jason Ānanda Josephson similarly describes "exclusive similarity," or "those acts of othering that work by excluding on the basis of reputed similarity."[80] Among yoga practitioners, Jain notes that those who attend donation-based classes or ones that do not require mats construct these traditions as "better signifying" yoga's authentic meaning.[81] Authenticity is not just something that one inertly *holds* but rather something that can be *held over others*.[82] For older, more experienced Witches, "fluffies" (described in this debate on Twitter as "white girls") represent a "near-neighbor" against which to define one's authenticity. In the context of religion in Japan, Josephson suggests that heresy "can be used to fix borders, to denigrate difference, and to produce otherness."[83] Within the Sephora debate, Witches posting on Twitter critiqued commercial products to mark fluffies as heretical and assemble borders on a fluid religion. This Twitter debate enabled gatekeeping, by deeming certain products and consumers inauthentic. Through these reflective practices, Modern Witches dismissed newcomers to legitimize their own current identities. Mocking anyone who would buy the Kit on Twitter allowed critics to legitimize and elevate their own identities, practices, and chosen products.

"SHOP HERE INSTEAD"

Among the 1,145 negative tweets, sixty-six tweets also encouraged people to buy from different vendors instead of Sephora. Scholar of

popular culture Jacqueline Botterill argues that consumer culture "is not bereft of the rhetorics of authenticity, but saturated with it."[84] Indeed, Sephora's Kit was intended to be a more genuine or authentic way to put on fragrances each day, compared to other products. Sephora's attempt to appeal to consumers on a deeper, spiritually affirming, level backfired because Witches deemed the product inauthentic. By recommending other vendors in their tweets about Sephora's Kit, Witches distinguished authentic from inauthentic products. The issue was not necessarily *whether* Witchcraft products can be sold, but rather who can serve as a vendor. Urging people to "buy tarot decks directly from artists," @SamGuayArt tweeted links to his favorites.[85] Similarly, @crimsonwitch offered to promote other vendors by re-tweeting their products, adding, "I want people interested in witchcraft to buy from good sources."[86] Another user, @mykaylah56, used the trending hashtag #sephorawitchkit as a platform for self-promotion, hoping to promote others also in the "non-commercialized witch community."[87] In this instance, "non-commercialized" did not refer to businesses that eschew profit, but to demarcate certain companies (generally smaller ones) as more authentic. The alternatives to Sephora that Witches promoted on Twitter represented a rejection of mainstream commercial manipulation and instead demarcated and promoted "authentic" vendors for Witchcraft-related goods.

Many Witches posting on Twitter claimed that these alternatives were superior to Sephora, but there was little consensus over the precise *reasons* why certain businesses were superior.[88] Unlike the East and Southeast Asian traditions that Kendall explores, in which high-quality materials or a craftsperson's skill contribute to shaping an object's efficacy/value, Witches on Twitter did not present any clear criteria. One product made in response to Sephora's Kit—The Ethical Starter Witch Kit from Canadian company TheWitchery—demonstrates this lack of clear criteria.[89] Although some cited Sephora's price ($42 USD) as a reason for opposition—@DJCallohan called this "a massive rip-off!"[90]—TheWitchery's Ethical Starter Witch Kit (advertised as a $80 value "for only $65") suggested this was a great price for roughly the same products.[91] Some claimed that selling white sage was a reason to boycott Sephora, but TheWitchery simply stressed the ethically sourced nature of the white sage included in its own Kit.[92] Pointing to another alternative vendor, @itsdolores wrote, "hit up Divine Intervention Collective! It literally has the best prices of any spiritual shop," and added that "its staff is basically entirely queer."[93] Offering further reasons to boycott Sephora, @postmortem posted that "small stores with ACTUAL witchcraft things are DYING because of shit like this!!!!" without clarifying how/why those products are "actual" Witchcraft things.[94] Religious studies scholar Robert Puckett raises an important detail regarding small-scale shops heralded as more authentic. "While the retailers of such

merchandise are almost always fellow Wiccans . . . the manufacturers may or may not be, and thus may not ascribe any value to these objects other than their profit potential."[95] In other words, not all shops harvest raw materials. Many buy goods from manufacturers and simply turn those materials into products that can be marketed to Witches, highlighting that even among "authentic" Witchcraft vendors, profit is a major factor at many points in the supply chain. A very small number of Witches (five tweets) took issue with the outpouring of self-promotion. Tweets proclaiming "if your response . . . is 'don't buy this, buy THIS instead' you have completely missed the point"[96] were in the minority compared to tweets announcing other places where authentic goods could supposedly be bought.

By directing others *away* from Sephora and *towards* their preferred retailers, Witches on Twitter were gatekeeping Witchcraft's authenticity. Most seized upon *some* reason to denounce the Starter Witch Kit, but beyond linking authenticity as inversely related to the size or economic success of a retailer, there was little clear substantiation for *why* Sephora's Kit was inauthentic. Witch-owned businesses were classified as "non-commercialized." Sephora's "outrageous price" would be reasonable at an "actual" Witchcraft store. Witches could elevate the value of goods from small-scale retailers and affirm their own authenticity simply by calling Sephora's Kit "fake" or inauthentic. Through this discourse, Witches protesting the Kit embodied the anti-capitalist typology of spirituality outlined by Carrette and King, namely, that the pursuit of profit *can* be combined with spiritual, religious, or ethical dimensions.[97] However, as Witches on Twitter demonstrated, there are perceived wrong ways to combine religion and commercialism (evidenced by Sephora) and right ways to do so (evidenced by smaller, Witch-owned companies).

In contrast to the many Witches opposing Sephora's Starter Witch Kit, a small segment of Twitter users (fifty tweets) viewed it positively. One user suggested that mysticism in general is popular among millennials, and that Sephora was wisely targeting a growing market.[98] Sangeeta Singh-Kurtz began her 31 August 2018 article on the business news site *Quartz* by announcing: "In some good news for area witches, Sephora will soon emerge as a mainstream purveyor of witchy accouterments."[99] For a community that protests its marginalization, a major company entering the Witchcraft market could suggest a positive shift. Balancing the competing tensions, @BlackGriffin wrote, "it's shitty when a belief system gets merchandised. But that also presumes acceptance."[100] Singh-Kurtz's conclusion—"it'll be a perfect stocking-stuffer for the aspiring witch in your life"—highlighted an important aspect of commercialized witchcraft.[101] Since most Witchcraft practitioners are converts, Witches must begin their spiritual journey somewhere. In interviews with teenage Witches, Berger and Ezzy found that

while few became Witches because of *Charmed* or similar television programs, many teen Witches *knew* about them and most had seen at least one episode.[102] These admittedly inaccurate media depictions introduce and reinforce key concepts about Witchcraft upon which novices can build.[103] Recommending Sephora's Starter Kit as a gift for aspiring Witches, Singh-Kurtz hints that the beauty and wellness industry could be added to movies, books, and television shows as things that introduce Witchcraft to larger audiences.

While many Witches attacked Sephora on Twitter because it is a multi-national corporation, others suggested that this Kit could have been beneficial specifically due to Sephora's size. For example, @latishabev wrote, "witchcraft culture is hard to come by in the Bible Belt and suburbia so let these little witches get their start where they can."[104] With over 2,500 locations and an online store, Sephora is far more accessible than grassroots occult shops.[105] Suggesting that the Kit could have improved the public perception of Witchcraft, Singh-Kurtz added that "witches have been having a moment" through the growing popularity of certain practices, objects, and a general beauty/fashion aesthetic.[106] A mainstream company (Sephora) marketing products to a marginal community (Witches)—and to some who may wish to join or emulate that community—may precipitate a shift in broader public acceptance. Some Witches even expressed that they enjoyed seeing their identity prominently displayed by a large company. Unbothered by the Kit, @iamkylie added, "I love that . . . witchcraft gets . . . extra time in the spotlight around Halloween."[107] Although noteworthy, these positive sentiments were in the minority, indicating that Witches are still largely averse to mainstream commodification of Witchcraft.

CONCLUSION: COMMUNITY-BUILDING IN ACTION

Considering that many tweets complaining about the Starter Witch Kit were framed as calls to respect Witchcraft, some interpreted Sephora's decision to cancel the Kit as a victory for Witchcraft. Some articles even attributed the product's cancellation to the online protests from Witches.[108] One detail that went largely unaddressed was why this particular product elicited such a targeted response. Kat Von D's "Fetish" makeup line (carried by Sephora) contains blush with titles like "Coven" and "Magick," yet did not elicit any major protest. In 2018, Anthropologie carried a "Love Ritual Kit" and a "Spell Kit" (different varieties of which included rose quartz crystals, sage, and a ritual guide book), but again, received little to no outcry.[109] Expressing frustration with this reaction, @SpeaksAngie wrote, "It really bothers me that this community only gets riled up about capitalism when it directly effects [*sic*] their sense of identity."[110] Although this user expressed

disappointment in debates surrounding the Kit, it is common for members of subcultures to protest transgressions against their own community but remain silent on other issues.[111] This self-interest would explain vitriolic reactions to Sephora's Kit and silence on "Witchcraft-adjacent" products. Due to the Starter Witch Kit's specific language, Witches felt targeted in a way that more vague references avoid. The term "Starter" in the Kit's title also likely triggered controversy. This negative reaction reflects an age and experience divide in Witchcraft. Due to their presumed lack of sophistication, young and inexperienced practitioners offer a foil against which older, more experienced Witches can contrast their authenticity. Tweets in the debate mocking "white girls" seemed less concerned with "saving" them from buying this product than with legitimizing the poster's own identity.

Coco and Woodward suggest that Pagans "reflexively create meaning-structures around the production and consumption" of popular Pagan goods.[112] That Witches embrace certain products while rejecting others indicates selective encounters with capitalist consumption. Religious studies scholar Nicole Karapanagiotis compares two International Society for Krishna Consciousness temples in the United States to highlight competing views regarding the use of digital technology to attract newcomers.[113] While some ISKCON temples permit "diluted" means of introduction to foster mass appeal, in the Twitter debate about the Starter Witch Kit, Witches overwhelmingly suggested that mainstream attraction was entirely inappropriate and undesirable.[114] Although Witches profess an open and malleable religion, the Witches posting on Twitter about the Kit demonstrated allegiance to a more rigid selection of permissible practices and vendors.

The Starter Witch Kit debate highlights how many young, predominantly female, practitioners position their religious identities relative to capitalist consumption. Lofton suggests that the success of Oprah Winfrey's marketing is based on eschewing "religion" in favor of nondogmatic "spirituality."[115] Similarly, Sephora sought to capitalize on a market of spiritual seekers, marketing its Starter Witch Kit using such vague "spiritual" terms as ceremony, cleansing, and anointing. However, Witches tweeting in protest of Sephora's attempt to profit from "real religion" demonstrated that this approach backfired, at least among one community, and revealed that some Witches value a more rigid adherence to religion (over spirituality). Demanding that Sephora and other outsiders respect their distinct religious tradition, Witches used Twitter to assert Witchcraft's legitimacy. Sacredness operated as an effective, 280-character means to assert legitimacy and explain why their traditions should be respected.

Cultural studies scholar Galen Watts argues that self-spirituality is less individualistic and narcissistic than many scholars assert, and has an "ambivalent rather than congenial" relationship to capitalism.[116] The

uproar among Witches concerning this product reveals this community's ambivalent relationship towards capitalism. Modern Witches used the Twitter debate about the Kit to define their authenticity, which was expressed through (selectively) rejecting commercialism, or rather, rejecting one large company while promoting many small ones.

The growth of self-spirituality suggests that more individuals will build their identities by borrowing from and blending diverse traditions. Similar to Witchcraft, Watts argues that "spiritual but not religious" millennials are defined by a belief that all religions are the same at their core, drawing on multiple traditions to construct a spiritual identity, and emphasizing personal intuition as a means of authority.[117] As practitioners of new religions blend and borrow to construct practices and identities, members of those religions from which they borrow may protest this appropriation. The Starter Witch Kit debate reveals how practitioners may defend, or rather side-step, their practices of borrowing. Through their protests on Twitter, Witches staked a claim for tarot, sage, and other practices as belonging to Witchcraft. Any potential allegations of appropriation against Witches were avoided by declaring ownership over these practices, and positioning Witchcraft as a marginalized victim of oppressive forces—in this case, Sephora. There was little explicit reflection regarding Witchcraft's roots as a spiritual path that promotes borrowing. Instead, Witches re-purposed the Kit as a marker of their marginality and a rallying cry to end this marginalization.

The Starter Witch Kit debate was also significant for allowing Witches on Twitter to assert their authentic selves. Matthew W. King, who specializes in Buddhism, proposes that scholars of religion and economics should center desire in their analyses.[118] Witches reacted specifically because they *did not* desire the Kit. However, that the Kit was undesirable can be read inversely to understand what Witches *do* desire, such as authenticity, and local businesses owned by Witches. While Lofton highlights the community-building power of joining others "in their liking," this episode demonstrated how community can equally be formed through shared disdain.[119] In this Twitter debate, various targets (e.g., Sephora or "Beckys") were denounced, and Witches asserted authenticity by stating what they were *not*. By denouncing certain products or identities, Witches legitimate their current practices and authenticity.

Media and cultural studies scholar Andrew Ventimiglia uses the analogy of religion as a binding agent to explain how intellectual property helps to form, solidify, and define a surrounding community.[120] Unlike the Urantia Book and community on which Ventimiglia's comments are based, Witches lack formalized structures. Witchcraft may be persistently challenged by the fact that no single organization or author can claim to "own" the materials, practices, or ideas that the community values. However, the Starter Witch Kit protest on Twitter operated as a temporary binding agent. This debate was not long-lasting, evidenced by the

initial high volume of tweets about the Kit, and a subsequent decline of interest after several weeks. Pagan studies scholar Wendy Griffin argues that public displays even in brief episodes provide "a form of legitimacy that comes from perceiving oneself to be part of an ongoing, productive, visible group."[121] Scholar of digital religion Heidi Campbell suggests that blogging is also a way to construct and perform identity through a process of self-identification.[122] Posting tweets about an issue and engaging in discourse with other Witches helps to confirm identity and facilitates a process of solidifying a sense of belonging. In the span of about a week (and with no central institution directing traffic), Witches on Twitter largely decided that the Starter Witch Kit was problematic. Despite minor strands of discord in the debate (e.g., is Witchcraft a religion or just a practice, is it appropriate for Witches to use white sage, from where else should Witches buy their materials), Witches tended to agree that the Kit amounted to a disrespectful appropriation of Witchcraft. This discourse on Twitter provided a "trending topic" or focal point, allowing Witches to chime in, thereby asserting identity, belonging, and authenticity.

Discussing The Family International's migration to digital spaces, Claire Borowik suggests that online community models place fewer demands on members and deconstruct traditional boundaries of membership. The lines between insider and outsider become blurred as digital spaces transform the degree to which people belong to and participate in new religions.[123] This blurred organizational model already partly describes Witchcraft's decentralized nature. The suggestion that other religious communities will adopt this structure with the increase of digital connectedness highlights the importance of the Starter Witch Kit debate on Twitter in understanding community and identity in digital spaces. The Starter Witch Kit debate offers one example of how community is discursively formed online. Berger notes that despite a lack of centralized institutions, "through reading the same books, people come to share a life world in which the terms of discourse, the way covens are organized, and the way rituals are enacted . . . become increasingly similar."[124] Social media provide additional platforms through which consensus-building can occur, as intra-community discourse constructs Witchcraft's worldview regarding appropriation, commercialism, and identity.

Chris Miller, University of Waterloo, chris.miller@uwaterloo.ca

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ENDNOTES

[1] Emma Sandler, "Beauty Brands Are Delving Deeper into Mysticism to Engage Customers," *Glossy*, 28 August 2018, https://www.glossy.co/beauty/beauty-brands-are-delving-deeper-into-mysticism-to-engage-customers?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=glossydis&utm_source=daily&utm_content=180828.

[2] Dana W. Logan, "The Lean Closet: Asceticism in Postindustrial Consumer Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 3 (2017): 600–28. See also Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2005). In a similar fashion, Kathryn Lofton argues that the "soul-salving signification" suggestively attached to Oprah Winfrey's recommendations separates her recommended products from others. See Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 23.

[3] For a more explicit definition of Witchcraft, three core beliefs include the sacredness of nature, the immanence of divinity, and one's ability to interact with the universe's processes and energies. See Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley, *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 162. Modern Witches are often subsumed within studies of Neopaganism, and for this reason, this article occasionally draws on research or terminology that addresses Paganism more broadly, rather than Witchcraft specifically. For an in-depth study of Witchcraft, see Helen A. Berger, *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

[4] Jon P. Bloch, *New Spirituality, Self, and Belonging: How New Agers and Neo-Pagans Talk about Themselves* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 1.

[5] Anne Thériault (@anne_theriault), "Being a witch isn't . . . ," Twitter, 3 September 2018.

[6] Stellathered (@stellathered), "Witchcraft or Paganism," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[7] An important direction for future research includes people who identify as Witches or practitioners of Witchcraft, while rejecting what they interpret as negative connotations associated with religion, visible both in this debate, and in the Witchcraft community more broadly.

[8] Tanisha Ramachandran, "A Call to Multiple Arms! Protesting the Commoditization of Hindu Imagery in Western Society," *Material Religion* 10, no. 1 (2014): 59, 71.

[9] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 3.

[10] For a similar digital ethnography of a debate among Modern Witches negotiating boundaries of authenticity, see Sabina Magliocco, "Witchcraft as Political Resistance: Magical Responses to the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States," *Nova Religio* 23, no. 4 (May 2020): 43–68.

[11] For an examination of reactions to popular culture depictions of Witchcraft, see Denise Cush, "Consumer Witchcraft: Are Teenage Witches a Creation of Commercial Interests?" *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 28, no. 1 (2007): 45–53. For an analysis of commercialism's impact on the construction of knowledge within

Witchcraft, see David Waldron, "Witchcraft for Sale! Commodity vs. Community in the Neopagan Movement," *Nova Religio* 9, no. 1 (August 2005): 32–48.

[12] Although my focus is on Witchcraft, I defer to other scholars' chosen terminology when referring to their work, resulting in occasional references to Pagans or Pagan Witches.

[13] Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping is an anti-consumerist radical performance community that stages guerilla theatre-style protests. See Todd LeVasseur, "Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping: Contemporary Religious Production on a Planet Passing Tipping Points," *Nova Religio* 23, no. 3 (February 2020): 93.

[14] Carine Plancke, "Re-Envisioning Female Power: Wildness as a Transformative Re-Source in Contemporary Women's Spirituality," *Nova Religio* 23, no. 3 (February 2020): 18.

[15] David Feltmate, "Perspective: Rethinking New Religious Movements beyond a Social Problems Paradigm," *Nova Religio* 20, no. 2 (November 2016): 82–96.

[16] Victoria A. Springer, Peter J. Martini, and James T. Richardson, "Online Crowdsourcing Methods for Identifying and Studying Religious Groups as Special Populations," in *Digital Methodologies in the Sociology of Religion,* ed. Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor and Suha Shakkour (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 28.

[17] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

[18] Helen A. Berger, *Solitary Pagans: Contemporary Witches, Wiccans, and Others Who Practice Alone* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019).

[19] Chris Allen, "Facebook as Anti-social Media: Using Facebook Groups to Engage Opponents to the Building of Dudley Mosque," in Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, *Digital Methodologies*, 47.

[20] Helen A. Berger and Douglas Ezzy, "The Internet as Virtual Spiritual Community: Teen Witches in the United States and Australia," in *Religion Online: Finding Faith on the Internet,* ed. Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan (New York: Routledge, 2004), 177.

[21] Lorne L. Dawson and Douglas E. Cowan, "Introduction," in Dawson and Cowan, *Religion Online*, 2.

[22] Stephen Pihlaja, "Truck Stops and Fashion Shows: A Case Study of the Discursive Performance of Evangelical Christian Group Affiliation on YouTube," in *Social Media and Religious Change*, ed. Marie Gillespie, David Eric John Herbert, and Anita Greenhill (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2013), 166.

[23] Pauline Hope Cheong, Boris H. J. M. Brummans, and Jennie M. Hwang, "Researching Authority in Religious Organizations from a Communicative Perspective: A Connective Online-Offline Approach," in Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, *Digital Methodologies*, 138.

[24] Claire Borowik, "From Radical Communalism to Virtual Community: The Digital Transformation of the Family International," *Nova Religio* 22, no. 1 (August 2018): 69.

[25] Heidi A. Campbell and Giulia Evolvi, "Contextualizing Current Digital Religion Research on Emerging Technologies," *Human Behaviors and Emerging Technologies* 2 (2020): 9.

[26] Stephen Pihlaja, "Analysing YouTube Interaction: A Discourse-centred Approach," in Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour, *Digital Methodologies*, 52.

[27] I continued to monitor the term "Sephora Witch Kit" intermittently throughout 2019. The term remained a topic of conversation, although infrequent, months after the product's cancellation. Some recent tweets are even oblivious to the fact that it was never actually released.

[28] Popular websites that included stories about the Kit included *Refinery29*, *Vox*, and *Quartz*. See, for example, Sangeeta Singh-Kurtz, "Sephora Will Start Selling Entry-level Witch Kits in October," *Quartz*, 31 August 2018, https://qz.com/quartzy/1372344/sephoras-starter-witch-kit-by-pinrose-has-crystals-sage-and-tarot-cards/.

[29] See, for example, Rachel Krause, "Sephora Won't Sell That 'Starter Witch Kit' After All," *Refinery29*, 10 September 2018, https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2018/09/209453/pinrose-starter-witch-kit-sephora-canceled; Nadra Nittle, "The Occult Is Having a Moment. Companies Want In, But Not If Witches Can Help It," *Vox*, 31 October 2018, https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/10/31/18042850/sephora-witch-kit-sage-urban-outfitters-magic-tarot; Sangeeta Singh-Kurtz, "After Outcry from Actual Witches, Sephora's 'Starter Witch Kit' is Cancelled," *Quartz*, 7 September 2018, https://qz.com/quartzy/1382521/sephoras-starter-witch-kit-by-pinrose-has-been-canceled/.

[30] See, for example, Heather Greene, "Witch Starter Kit Hits Mainstream; Angers Modern Witches," *The Wild Hunt*, 6 September 2018, https://wildhunt.org/2018/09/witch-starter-kit-hits-mainstream-angers-modern-witches.html; Jason Mankey, "The Witch & Sephora: The Selling of Magick," *Patheos*, 4 September 2018, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/panmankey/2018/09/sephora-witch/#disqus_thread; and Jessica Ripley, "Sephora's Witch Kit Will Not Make You a Witch," *Patheos,* 2 September 2018, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nightowlmeditations/2018/09/sephoras-witch-kit-will-not-make-you-a-witch/.

Appearing in digital spaces populated by Witches, these stories represent potentially useful sources for analysis. However, exploring these stories (and comment sections) revealed similar responses as found on Twitter. Commenters on these stories seemed slightly less enraged by the Kit, and more commenters acknowledged that their own introduction to Witchcraft often came through commercial sources. However, most still suggested that the Kit was an undesirable product. That such websites have no character limits on comments (unlike Twitter) is one possible explanation for a comparatively calmer discourse.

[31] I reached out to all users for permission to cite their tweets. Those users who did not respond have been cited pseudonymously.

[32] Jannis Androutsopoulos, "Potentials and Limitations of Discourse-Centred Online Ethnography," *language@internet* 5 (2008): 16.

[33] Kendra_theSleepy (@Kendra_theSleepy) [pseudonym], "Myself and other ACTUAL . . . ," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[34] Holiday Daddy (@noimalex), "@Sephora is trash . . . ," Twitter, 3 September 2018.

[35] See Ethan Doyle White, "Theoretical, Terminological, and Taxonomic Trouble in the Academic Study of Contemporary Paganism: A Case for Reform," *The Pomegranate* 18, no. 1 (2016): 31–59; Lee Gilmore, "Pagan and Indigenous Communities in Interreligious Contexts: Interrogating Identity, Power, and Authenticity," *The Pomegranate* 20, no. 2 (2018): 179–207.

[36] MaidenBarbara (@MaidenBarbara) [pseudonym], "My hot/deeply nuanced . . . ," Twitter, 10 September 2018.

[37] The Fool (@astrolyss), "DO NOT appropriate," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[38] Lofton, *Oprah*, 10.

[39] In ritual smudging, sage is lit, the fire blown out, and the smoke waved over a space to cleanse thoughts/energy. Although I do not seek to collapse diverse indigenous traditions into a single overarching culture, scholars have examined the use of sage among many communities. See Lee Irwin, "Walking the Line: Pipe and Sweat Ceremonies in Prison," *Nova Religio* 9, no. 3 (February 2006): 39–60; and Melissa A. Pflüg, "Pimadaziwin: Contemporary Rituals in Odawa Community," in *Native American Spirituality: A Critical Reader*, ed. Lee Irwin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 121–144. Suzanne Owen writes that herbs like sage and sweetgrass have become "pan-Indian," blurring easy demarcations over which groups integrate this practice, in *The Appropriation of Native American Spirituality* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 15. Regarding the use of sage among Pagans, see Scott Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2007), 177.

[40] @MaidenBarbara, "My hot/deeply nuanced. . . . "

[41] The Fool (@astrolyss), "The amount of disrespect . . . ," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[42] Douglas E. Cowan, *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 30–31.

[43] Berger, *Community of Witches*, 16.

[44] Barbara Jane Davy, *Introduction to Pagan Studies* (Toronto: AltaMira Press, 2007), 170.

[45] Owen, *Appropriation of Native American Spirituality*, 105.

[46] Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 161, 166.

[47] TwittrGoddess (@TwittrGoddess) [pseudonym], "Layers of hypocrisy . . . ," Twitter, 3 November 2018.

[48] Adrienne Keene, "Sephora's 'Starter Witch Kit' and Spiritual Theft," *Native Appropriations,* 5 September 2018, http://nativeappropriations.com/2018/09/sephoras-starter-witch-kit-and-spiritual-theft.html.

[49] Avraham (@avraham) [pseudonym], "Modern 'witchcraft' . . . ," Twitter, 1 September 2018.

[50] One Week Remains (@boxerhole), "Crazy how . . . ," Twitter, 1 September 2018.

[51] KendratheSleepy (@KendratheSleepy) [pseudonym], "Disgusting . . . ," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[52] Laurel Zwissler, "Second Nature: Contemporary Pagan Ritual Borrowing in Progressive Christian Communities," *Canadian Woman Studies* 29, nos. 1–2 (2011): 18–20.

[53] As cited by Waldron, "Witchcraft for Sale!" 41.

[54] Douglas Ezzy, "White Witches and Black Magic: Ethics and Consumerism in Contemporary Witchcraft," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 21, no. 1 (2006): 22–23.

[55] Robert Puckett, "Re-Enchanting the World: A Weberian Analysis of Wiccan Charisma," in *Handbook of Contemporary Paganism*, ed. Murphy Pizza and James R. Lewis (Boston: Brill, 2008), 121–52.

[56] Kendra_theSleepy, "Myself and other ACTUAL. . . . "

[57] Samantha Brame (@BlackEyedWitchh), "This damn Sephora . . . ," Twitter, 5 September 2018.

[58] LeVasseur, "The Church of Stop Shopping," 98.

[59] Ramachandran, "Call to Multiple Arms!"

[60] A search on Wayfair.ca in September 2021, for example, returned almost 350 results.

[61] Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Regarding the multiple religious communities who protest commercialized yoga, see also Andrea R. Jain, "The Malleability of Yoga: A Response to Christian and Hindu Opponents of the Popularization of Yoga," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 25 (2012): 1–9.

[62] Laurel Kendall, "Things Fall Apart: Material Religion and the Problem of Decay," *Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 4 (November 2017): 865.

[63] Ezzy, "White Witches and Black Magic," 22–23.

[64] Stephanie Martin, "Teen Witchcraft and Silver RavenWolf: The Internet and its Impact on Community Opinion," in *The New Generation Witches: Teenage Witchcraft in Contemporary Culture*, ed. Hannah E. Johnston and Peg Aloi (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 129–138.

[65] Diego Rinallo, Pauline Maclaran, and Lorna Stevens, "A Mixed Blessing: Market-mediated Religious Authority in Neopaganism," *Journal of Macromarketing* 36, no. 4 (2016): 429.

[66] Phillip Vannini and J. Patrick Williams, "Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society," in *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, ed. Phillip Vannini and J. Patrick Williams (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 3.

[67] James S. Bielo, *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 16.

[68] Halloween also marks Samhain, one of eight annual sabbaths celebrated by some Witches.

[69] Katerina (@Katerina) [pseudonym], "Okay @Sephora . . . ," Twitter, 5 September 2018.

[70] Cush, "Consumer Witchcraft," 47.

[71] Angela Coco and Ian Woodward, "Discourses of Authenticity within a Pagan Community: The Emergence of the 'Fluffy Bunny' Sanction," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 36, no. 5 (2007): 480.

[72] Postmortem (@postmortem), "the literal peak . . . ," Twitter, 31 August 2018.

[73] j (@jaxlynp), "it's pretty much . . . ," Twitter, 29 October 2018.

[74] "Becky" is a term used to disparage white women who are ignorant of their racial/class privilege. For an overview of this term's evolution and use, see Laura T. Hamilton, Elizabeth A. Armstrong, J. Lotus Seeley, and Elizabeth M. Armstrong, "Hegemonic Femininities and Intersectional Domination," *Sociological Theory* 37, no. 4 (2019): 315–41. Notably, these terms were also used to criticize and delegitimize the concerns of Witches who were offended by the Kit. On social media, these terms have the power to designate a person or group as inauthentic, and thereby delegitimize their concerns.

[75] According to Berger, *Solitary Pagans*, 21, females make up roughly 70 percent of practitioners. Other studies suggest that Paganism is predominantly Euro-American. See Sabina Magliocco, *Witching Culture: Folklore and Neo-Paganism in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 61.

[76] Berger, *Solitary Pagans*, 163.

[77] Magliocco, *Witching Culture*, 84–85.

[78] Douglas Ezzy and Helen A. Berger, "Becoming a Witch: Changing Paths of Conversion in Contemporary Witchcraft," in Johnston and Aloi, *The New Generation Witches*, 50.

[79] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other," *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 245.

[80] Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 24.

[81] Jain, *Selling Yoga*, 81.

[82] Vannini and Williams "Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society," 3.

[83] Josephson, *Invention of Religion in Japan*, 38.

[84] Jacqueline Botterill, "Cowboys, Outlaws and Artists: The Rhetoric of Authenticity and Contemporary Jeans and Sneaker Advertisements," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7, no. 1 (2007): 106.

[85] Sam Guay (@SamGuayArt), "Wild Thought . . . ," Twitter, 1 September 2018.

[86] Crimsonwitch (@crimsonwitch), "In light of . . . ," Twitter, 31 August 2018.

[87] MyKayla Hill (@mykaylah56), "if you make . . . ," Twitter, 6 September 2018.

[88] Similarly, in their study of punks, sociologists Philip Lewin and J. Patrick Williams found that when asked to distinguish between "real punks" and those who were merely "performing," informants rarely had concrete answers. A common response was "you can just tell." Philip Lewin and J. Patrick Williams, "The Ideology and Practice of Authenticity in Punk Subculture," in Vannini and Williams, *Authenticity in Culture, Self, and Society*, 73–74. On Twitter, while Witches were similarly quick to identify Sephora's Kit as inauthentic, identifying reasons why was more complicated.

[89] "Ethical Starter Witch Kit," *TheWitchery.Ca*, https://www.thewitchery.ca/?product=ethical-starter-witch-kit, accessed 8 September 2018.

[90] DJCallohan (@DJCallohan) [pseudonym], "it's $42 . . . ," Twitter, 2 September 2018.

[91] "Ethical Starter Witch Kit." Figures cited are in CAD. As of 23 August 2021, the Ethical Starter Witch Kit had been reduced from roughly $63.00 USD to roughly $51.00 USD.

[92] Notably, however, Pinrose also stated that the sage it used was "sustainably harvested and sold by Native American owned and operated businesses," which makes TheWitchery's claims of a "more ethical" product unclear. See "9.5.18 A Note from Pinrose on the 'Starter Witch Kit,'" Pinrose, 5 September 2018, https://pinrose.com/pages/note, accessed 1 October 2018, page no longer exists.

[93] Itsdolores (@itsdolores) [pseudonym], "Hey friends . . . ," Twitter, 1 September 2018.

[94] Post-mortem (@postmortem) [pseudonym], "small stores . . . ," Twitter, 31 August 2018.

[95] Puckett, "Re-Enchanting the World," 138.

[96] Knifewitch (@knifewitch) [pseudonym], "if your response . . . ," Twitter, 1 September 2018.

[97] Carrette and King, *Selling Spirituality*, 17–18.

[98] Valerie Mesa (@mystival), "Everyone really needs . . . ," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[99] Singh-Kurtz, "Sephora Will Start Selling Witch Kits."

[100] BlackGriffin (@BlackGriffin) [pseudonym], "I'm not sure . . . ," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[101] Singh-Kurtz, "Sephora Will Start Selling Witch Kits."

[102] Helen A. Berger and Douglas Ezzy, *Teenage Witches: Magical Youth and the Search for the Self* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 74.

[103] Berger and Ezzy, *Teenage Witches,* 58.

[104] Wino forever (@latishabev), "I see so many . . . ," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[105] "About Sephora," Sephora, https://www.sephora.com/beauty/about-us, accessed 21 August 2021.

[106] Singh-Kurtz, "Sephora Will Start Selling Witch Kits." In regards to the broader integration of spirituality in the beauty industry, see Logan's "The Lean Closet," where she argues that the appeal of *goop*, created by Gwyneth Paltrow, can be understood through a Calvinist lens.

[107] Iamkylie (@iamkylie) [pseudonym], "I love that . . . ," Twitter, 22 October 2018.

[108] Sangeeta Singh-Kurtz, "After Outcry from Witches, 'Starter Witch Kit' Is Cancelled," *Quartz* 7 September 2018, https://qz.com/quartzy/1382521/sephoras-starter-witch-kit-by-pinrose-has-been-canceled/.

[109] Both products are currently unavailable, however, descriptions and list of contents can still be found at "Elements of Aura Love Ritual Kit," *Anthroplogie*, https://www.anthropologie.com/shop/elements-of-aura-love-ritual-kit2; and "Species by the Thousands Spell Kit," https://www.anthropologie.com/shop/species-by-the-thousands-spell-kit, as of 15 September 2021.

[110] Angie Speaks (@SpeaksAngie), "It really bothers . . . ," Twitter, 4 September 2018.

[111] Political scientist Joshua Ozymy, for example, describes self-interest as a motivating factor in student activism and protest participation. See Joshua Ozymy, "The Poverty of Participation: Self-Interest, Student Loans, and Student Activism," *Political Behavior* 34, no. 1 (March 2012): 103–16. Sociologist Wini Breines discusses the historical and ongoing separation between white and black feminist movements. See Wini Breines, "What's Love Got to Do with It? White Women, Black Women, and Feminism in the Movement Years," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (Summer 2002): 1095–1133.

[112] Coco and Woodward, "Discourses of Authenticity," 483.

[113] Nicole Karapanagiotis, "Of Digital Images and Digital Media: Approaches to Marketing in American ISKCON," *Nova Religio* 21, no. 3 (February 2018): 74–102.

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[117] Watts, "Politics of Self-spirituality," 346.

[118] Matthew W. King, "Desire," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 87, no. 3 (September 2019): 625–34.

[119] Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 5.

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[122] Heidi A. Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (March 2012): 72.

[123] Borowik, "From Radical Communalism to Virtual Community," 63, 69.

[124] Berger, *A Community of Witches*, 76.