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Introduction

In my analysis, I perform a life cycle case study of the spreadable content created by UltraViolet for their Drop Flock campaign. To understand the connections between ideology and affordances when the content is spread, I will first look at the original source material. The first site of analysis is the "Hey Ulta" Instagram post. This post and caption establishes UltraViolet's signature style of simple and straightforward design choices paired with interpellating language that turns their audience from individual to subject. Should the subject recognize the hail, they will identify as a member of the campaign with the agency to spread the message themselves as it adheres to the affordances of the platform. Next, I will look to the UltraViolet website to analyze the expanded communication through actionable opportunities on the Drop Flock subpage. With the source text established, I will move into the next stages of the life cycle by examining how online users appropriate and spread UV's content to TikTok where interpellation and appropriation happens again. Performing my analysis in this way shows that UltraViolet creates succinct graphics that aim to interpellate a subject to appropriate the content themselves, taking up and spreading the message while also growing and adapting the ideological concept. Producing content made to spread and interpellate audiences as a feminist organization in the fourth wave ultimately prioritizes sensationalization and knowledge in numbers rather than nuanced understanding and direct change.

Visual Design and Interpellation in "Hey Ulta" Post

UltraViolet's introductory Ulta and Flock post uses sleek designs that position Flock cameras in the beauty context of Ulta. The image, posted August 26, 2026, is the first instance I will analyze of UV's Drop Flock campaign as this is where their ideology takes shape and they begin to interpellate individuals. The graphic adheres to the typical dimensions of an Instagram post with a few short lines of text and minimal design elements. In the left middle of the image, bolded, capital letters in a sans serif font are left-justified. They read "Hey Ulta: Mass Surveillance Isn't Pretty." Underneath "isn't pretty" are inky hand drawn lines that mimic a makeup product like liquid eyeliner. The background is a top to bottom gradient from soft pink to light peach. The transitioning color brings the eye down to the bottom of the image where five black mascara wands stick up in an evenly spaced row. The row is interrupted on the right side with a Flock camera in place of one of the wands. The camera is angled so that it is pointed slightly off center from the audience's point of view. Behind the camera and mascara wands, orange Ulta Beauty branded ribbon is placed diagonally across the top right and bottom right corners.

The image is designed to be understood by a wide audience; however, addressing the brand Ulta Beauty and consequently their customers, UltraViolet's graphic design purposefully reflects the vast majority of the client base–women. As a digital-first feminist organization fighting for gender-based justice, UV aims their spreadable content towards feminists and particularly women. Because the use of Flock cameras at Ulta could affect women, the team at UV works to spread knowledge and actionable opportunities to fight the collaboration. The campaign focuses on interpellating a community of women to take-up their messages.

The graphic directly addresses the brand and issue: Ulta and mass surveillance respectively with 6 words and identifiable representations of each. Being understandable and visually appealing, the image lends itself to the digital sharing methods afforded to an Instagram user. To interpolate a user, UltraViolet explains the issue and why their audience should care to spread the message in the caption of the post.

The caption opens with “you stop at Ulta Beauty on your way home for mascara. You quickly park, pay, and leave. But Flock (also called Flock Safety) is watching.” By directly addressing the reader, UltraViolet aims to instill urgency and alarm. This tactic is not only important for retaining attention and serving the Instagram algorithm which thrives on sustained user interactions, but for hailing the reader to identify as an UltraViolet community member who can further the campaign. The crucial axis of hailing in Althusser’s theory of interpellation, is the conversion of an individual to a subject. While one may remain an individual when seeing the graphic, the caption serves as the transformative site where the subject is called. As I trace the life cycle of the graphic, it will become apparent what happens to the embedded ideology as the graphic is spread, and what new ideas are communicated in the process.

The caption works to construct a specific narrative around Flock and Ulta. Details about the purpose of Flock cameras are used by saying “your license plate is scanned, your location recorded, and your movements become searchable in a massive database.” Here, the individual is placed into a broader context by situating the subject's private information exposure with many others who are targeted by the same technology. Not only is the individual in danger, women around them are as well. UltraViolet portrays the Flock cameras as potentially dangerous by claiming that "once that surveillance exists, it can easily be turned against you.” They provide examples that “aren’t hypothetical” because they are instances where Flock has “already been

abused to harm women." All five examples provided in the caption continue to address the reader as 'you' and as the victim in cases where Flock could be used by a "security guard," "abusive ex," "ICE," and others for the purpose of stalking, deportation, reproductive investigations, or in a case of wrongful accusation. The caption ends by addressing the increase in mass surveillance and the consequences of it, claiming "we shouldn't have to trade our privacy and safety for a trip to Ulta." By the end of reading the post, an intended subject would find their place in the UV community of people against the issue presented. The language choices strategically go from 'you' to 'we' and 'our.' The "Hey Ulta" graphic works to associate the issue with women on a group and individual level through gendered colors, language, and objects. UltraViolet further establishes the issue as a feminist one on their website. Anything here about we/our/you language?

Ideology and Interpellation on UltraViolet's Website

UltraViolet's website operates like many other organizations with sections for their story, work, donations, and contacts. On the "Our Work" page, the life cycle for the Drop Flock campaign continues its stage of sharing their ideology and interpellating users. The heading of the campaign page of the website reads "Ulta: Mass Surveillance Isn't Pretty. 💋Drop Flock Now! 💄" The emojis, mascara wands, and pink background all contribute to the idea that the communication on this page is meant to address women by way of the gender norms and stereotypes these visual design elements carry. Further down on the page are sections for frequently asked questions, actions to take, and shareable graphics to be downloaded. The FAQ section begins with a description for its purpose, telling the reader it is provided to "explain how Flock and similar mass surveillance systems are harming women and what YOU can do to push

back." Like in the caption of their "Hey Ulta" instagram post, an audience member is directly addressed with 'you', hailing them as they turn from individual to subject. Not only are they directly acknowledged, they are welcomed into the direct action UltraViolet is taking, making them a member of the group and encouraging them to do something beyond merely gaining knowledge about Flock.

The FAQs, ten in total, start with what Flock is and how it works. Then, UV addresses Flock as a feminist issue saying "Flock's massive network of surveillance cameras serves to monitor, control, and punish, rather than actually keep us safe." Furthering the in-group mentality by continuing to use us/we language, UV says "Flock's mass surveillance network puts women and gender-expansive people at risk by making it easier to track where we go, including when seeking normal reproductive care or exercising our right to protest." They give further examples of feminist issues where Flock might play a role such as stalking and immigration enforcement, similar to the real stories provided in the "Hey Ulta" Instagram post. Additionally, UV frames Flock as an issue of consent, claiming "Women already disproportionately face scenarios in which their consent is taken from them. UltraViolet believes that having Flock cameras constantly follow our cars and movements, in many cases without our knowledge, is a new form of stripping us of consent." In the FAQs, UV addresses many current issues like that of consent, which circulate heavily in fourth wave feminism discourse. Presenting their ideology through the question and answer format is a tactic that aims to speak to the personal beliefs of their community, providing them with the knowledge they would need to take-up the issue themselves. If a reader also believes that consent is an important thing, spreading the issue in their social circle is one relevant way to address it. UV is painting a larger picture that Flock is

an unhelpful, potentially harmful tool that can negatively impact women and does not further the efforts of the feminist cause.

It could be argued that a subject engaging with UltraViolet's ideology would find and act on an oppositional reading. Just as people are interpellated and answer a hail to take up the campaign message, others may answer a similar call to oppose the campaign itself. This would be a worthy site of analysis, yet examples of this potential stage in the life cycle were not available during my research. Instead, UltraViolet's emphasis on taking action seems to reach individuals who are receptive to the campaign mission.

The "Take Action" section includes invitations to "sign the petition" and "join the storm." This is where, in the live cycle of the Drop Flock campaign, UltraViolet begins to directly invite audience appropriation. The petition asks the reader to "join us in calling on Ulta Beauty to sever all ties with Flock and shut off Flock cameras in its parking lots immediately." Visually, the design calls back to the "Hey Ulta: Mass Surveillance Isn't Pretty" saying and reuses the graphic from the Instagram post. The comment storm encourages those who believe in UV's mission to follow links to LinkedIn and Instagram posts made by Ulta and company executives. There are prewritten comments that can be 'personalized' with AI. When a unique message is generated the user is encouraged to copy the comment and paste it into the comment section of posts made by Ulta executives. Under the comment storm action section of the UV website, there is a different graphic with the same "mass surveillance isn't pretty" catchphrase. The image features a box, modeled off of beauty packaging branded with the Flock camera. The camera itself leans up against the box with an uncapped lipstick on the other side. The background is light peach. The graphic is continuing to brand the issue as one that concerns women and is therefore feminist.

The last section of the webpage invites the audience to share the content. UltraViolet says "download these graphics and share them with friends, family, and your community. Every share helps push back against the normalization of AI-powered mass surveillance technology." Three images are downloadable, the "Hey Ulta" Instagram post graphic, the flock makeup box from the take action section, and a new one that addresses a home improvement brand called Lowe's. The Lowe's graphic stands out in stark contrast to the previous images. It is a completely different color pallet, using dark blues and yellows instead of pink and peach. With the 'isn't pretty' saying not being relevant anymore, the Lowe's graphic uses a new phrase "A New Low For Lowe's: Lowes is the largest purchaser of Flock's AI license plate readers." The graphic shows a ceiling camera pointed at the viewer and a background depicting the interior of a Lowe's store. As a feminist organization, UV plays into stereotypical design elements that ultimately genders the work they're doing and creates a divide in the audiences of their spreadable material. The hyperfeminine elements of their Ulta campaign would likely hail a different user than that of their Lowe's graphics. However, what the subject is asked to do with the content remains the same–spread it.

Downloading graphics, signing petitions, and leaving comments addressing the issues to corporate executives is what UltraViolet says they want from their audience. The graphics are made to adhere to the affordances of nearly all social media platforms as well as text messaging, emailing, and any other form of online digital communication. Their messages are short and simple, getting to the point of the issue while reinforcing the subject of the campaign in the design elements. By prepopulating and personalizing comments for the comment storm, UltraViolet has designed their campaign to be easy for a hailed subject to take-up and appropriate. Next, I will analyze the next stage of the life cycle–an example of a TikTok user

who was interpellated, took up the message of UV's content, appropriated the message with her own ideology, and interpellated others with her post.

Appropriation and Affordances in Rachel's TikTok

Rachel LaPointe, or @rachel_mle on TikTok, responded to the Instagram post from UltraViolet in a short video where she appropriates the message and interpellates others. Rachel is a "gender-based violence social worker" who graduated from Columbia University with a Master of Social Work and lives in New York City (LaPointe). She has nearly 200,000 followers on TikTok. In her videos, she addresses the camera directly while speaking about political, social, and cultural issues she cares about. On August 31, 2026, Rachel posted a video with the caption "Ulta. For the love of god. You do not need to be one of Flock's biggest Customers. Do Better" (Rachel L). In the video, she applies makeup as she argues against the use of Flock at Ulta locations. With verbal emphasis, she explains that "Ulta Beauty is one of Flock's biggest commercial customers" (Rachel L). As she poses her argument, she puts on makeup in a 'get ready with me' style popular on TikTok. She specifically addresses women who shop at Ulta who, with the presence of Flock, could be watched by police whenever they want, tracked by an "abusive ex who's a cop," or a cop who "thought you were hot and wanted to track you down" (Rachel L). She describes that the abuse of Flock could harm women when they only "needed shampoo and [they] snatch you up at Ulta" or when "cops from states away track you every time you need mascara" (Rachel L). At the end of the video, she invites viewers to join her as she signs the petition for Ulta to stop using Flock cameras.

Rachel's video does a few things highly important to the life cycle of UltraViolet's initial campaign materials. She exposes her audience to the "Hey Ulta" graphic, imaged on the screen

at the beginning of her video. Strategically using the eye-catching visual creates an appealing introduction for the TikTok algorithm. By speaking emphatically about the issue, she identifies herself as an interpellated subject of the material. Doing her makeup in the first half of the video appeals to an audience that could also be recognized as a hailed subject. The graphic and her makeup application plays into the femininity of the issue. The subject of UltraViolet and Rachel's hail is an individual who feels innocent about their routine Ulta consumerism and fears the potential harms of Flock while they shop. She addresses a subject with 'you' like UV does in their content, however her examples of the dangers of Flock differ slightly from UltraViolet's. Her examples focus mostly on stalking and police officers abusing the technology, whereas UltraViolet covers a much wider array of issues. This shows that UltraViolet's content is not only made to spread, but the affordances of the online platform the material is spread on inherently invites the perspectives and ideologies of users engaging with the content.

Rachel furthers the reach of UltraViolet's campaign, but she also smuggles in her own ideology, expanding the issues and therefore the ways in which another user might find themselves responding to a hail. UltraViolet's content then, in part, becomes Rachel's content. The graphic is resituated in her casual getting ready context where police surveillance becomes the central issue. The UV petition also becomes partially her own when, at the end of her video, she says, "if you'd like to join me, I'm putting a petition from the non profit UltraViolet at the top of my page to tell Ulta Beauty to cut ties" (Rachel L). She not only persuades the audience by establishing her own argument and concerns, she brings the efforts back to the UV campaign and calls the audience to action. A distinct pattern emerges as the original UltraViolet content gets shared. There is a distinct and traceable hail, appropriation, and call to action that, if taken-up, repeats the cycle in a new context with adjusted meaning.

Appropriation in Essence's TikTok

Essence, a beauty and lifestyle TikToker by the username @essensicle, furthers the life cycle of UltraViolet's original campaign by being an interpellated subject from Rachel's video. On September 1, 2026 she posted a video with the caption "disappointed but not surprised, Ulta this is horrifying" (Essence). In her TikTok, she addresses Ulta's use of Flock cameras and directly references the video made by Rachel saying "I came across this TikTok from this lovely creator talking about how Ulta has such a large contract with the same company behind Flock cameras" (Essence). Essence adheres to the affordances of TikTok as a social media platform by embedding images into her video. When she references Rachel's TikTok, she includes a screenshot of the video to communicate a clear conversation between herself and Rachel. Showing examples of individuals who responded to UltraViolet's initial hail creates another entry point where TikTok users can find themselves the subject of the Drop Flock campaign.

Essence situates her argument as an extended take on Rachel's, appropriating the message to not only address Ulta's need to drop flock, but for customers to do so as well. Her video provides advice regarding how to shop without purchasing from a beauty store like Ulta. Essence suggests "if you guys don't want to shop at Ulta I definitely suggest going straight to the brand you love and having it shipped to you" (Essence). Her own ideology as a creator is revealed, sharing with her audience an urgency to extend the issue response from informative graphics and petitions to customer boycotts. Essence and Rachel's videos are evidence that UltraViolet's content is built to be spread. When the content is spread, audiences are interpellated and appropriated messages are incorporated into the overall campaign message.

While Essence does not directly address the UltraViolet campaign, the comment section on the post does reference UV. One commenter by the name "Lyd💍🖤" used the photo comment feature afforded by TikTok to share the UltraViolet "Hey Ulta" graphic. The graphic is created so that it can be downloaded and shared on nearly any social media platform. By creating an image that easily appeals to the design of online platforms, UltraViolet's campaign has more opportunity to interpellate individuals to subjects. Throughout the life cycle of the content, the initial graphic is clearly built to resonate with people and lead back to actionable engagement opportunities.

Conclusion

My analysis has followed the life cycle of Ultra Violet's Drop Flock campaign from its first publication on Instagram, to the activism group's webpage where the ideology is expanded upon and the interpellated subject is called on to appropriate the message. I followed the materials as they were taken-up and spread across platforms to TikTok. On TikTok, the central message of the campaign was directly engaged with while also resituating the content amongst a creator's personal perspectives and ideology. This appropriation created and revealed a new site for a hailed subject. I tracked one example where that video was appropriated and continued to spread the message of UltraViolet within new contexts.

Given the evasive nature of the internet, it is nearly impossible to determine an exact endpoint to the life cycle of content as it can always be privately shared amongst users or continuously rediscovered. So while not every interaction or appropriation of the material can be accounted for, my case study hopes to demonstrate an example of how content is made to spread, interpellate, and is then appropriated all in the constraints of a digital platform's affordances.

UltraViolet strategically implores simplistic yet bold graphic design to make legible images that communicate the core issue addressed by their activism campaign. Their message presents a specific ideology that they aim for their audience to take up themselves. When the content moves, new ideological frameworks are combined and the original content becomes that of the appropriator. The cycle of interpellation can happen repeatedly. Ultimately, UltraViolet's work in digital-first activism is reflective of many other organizations whose campaigns could also be tracked in this way. This pattern reveals an important tactic and brand strategy which has become so common that it is contributing to the fundamental characteristics of the fourth wave of feminism. Further research and analysis could address similar organizations and the ways in which feminist activism versus another form of activism work may interpellate subjects differently, a point of comparison my research is unable to make in this paper.

Honor Code

I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not. /s/ Lillian Metzler

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