

RHETOR, AUDIENCE, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSPECTIVE:  
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE VIRTUAL  
CONSULTATION IN COSMETOLOGY

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my sister, Kristina, who inspired me to appreciate the technical skill, artistry, communication, and care that goes into a good hair style. You are a hair surgeon and a color chemist. Thank you for being my muse.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Description</b>
DM	Direct Message
SSBC	Salon Summit Business Center
VC	Virtual Consultation(s)

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis presents a rhetorical analysis of the virtual consultation in cosmetology to better understand the role of perspective and audience in rhetorical situations. I examine the communication work of Katie West, a stylist who regularly conducts virtual consultations on Instagram. I supplement my analysis of West's professional Instagram profile with a Facebook Live interview where she discusses her performance of virtual consultations with salon professional, Michael Cole. I use invitational rhetoric to guide my analysis, considering how West offers her perspectives, how she solicits the perspectives of her audience, and how she creates conditions of safety, value, and freedom to create a virtual space that seeks to fulfill the needs of all parties. The results demonstrate the importance of both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to establish the rhetor's perspective and solicit the audience's perspective, e.g., presenting options verbally, textually, and visually; incorporating features for dialogue and image sharing; and creating conditions of safety, value, and freedom to encourage audience participation. Because this study focused on the rhetor's strategies to facilitate perspective sharing, future research should examine the audience's response to these strategies and whether they believe their perspectives contribute to the rhetorical situation. Nonetheless, this analysis offers practical implications to inform consultations in virtual spaces by demonstrating that audience is not merely a constituent of the rhetorical situation that the rhetor must navigate but a contributor with perspectives that inform the situation and its outcomes.

## I. INTRODUCTION

When we think about technical communication—what it is and where it occurs—we tend to associate certain professions: science and engineering, medicine, the technology industry. These professions certainly dominate our field, but technical communication is not bound to these areas. Past attempts to define technical communication led Allen (1990) to argue for “an extensive and flexible definition that will represent... current technical-writing practices...[as well as] those of the twenty first century” (p. 76). We are now well into the twenty-first century, and although certain professions still dominate our field, scholars have acknowledged that new technologies, e.g., social media, have led to rhetorical situations wherein *anyone* can communicate and share knowledge about technical topics. As a result, Kimball (2017) argues that “we are all technical communicators” who perform technical communication in various contexts in our daily lives (p. 342). This perspective opens the door for communication activities that have not yet received the attention of scholars in our field, but which can broaden our understanding of rhetoric and inform our best practices.

In this thesis, I present a rhetorical analysis of the virtual consultation in cosmetology, a technical communication practice that I argue offers insight into the role of perspective and audience in rhetorical situations. Cosmetology may be unconventional in technical communication scholarship but examining the communication practices of cosmetologists is appropriate for multiple reasons. First, cosmetology is undoubtedly a technical industry. Cosmetologists employ technical skills that are learned through formal training. They handle professional grade implements and mix and apply chemical solutions to a person’s hair and skin. The outcome is a “look,” a beauty product, that is

created by a technician through a technical process. Further, communication is essential to that process. The stylist's ability to assess the situation and make an informed recommendation depends on the consultation that occurs between stylist and client prior to service. Today, many stylists offer this pre-service consultation virtually as well as in person. As a result, the virtual consultation in cosmetology addresses two core criteria that the Society for Technical Communication (2021) uses to define technical communication: 1) communicates about technical or specialized topics and 2) communicates by using technology. In light of this definition, the virtual consultation in cosmetology is well positioned to provide insight into effective rhetorical strategies and best practices for our field.

Examining cosmetology through a technical communication framework follows the work of feminist scholars who addressed the absence of women and work associated with women in technical communication scholarship. Scholars such as Durack (1997), Koerber (2000), Lay (2004) addressed this absence by arguing for a broader definition of technical communication to include activities outside the traditional scope of science and technology. More specifically, Koerber (2000) sought to reclaim the role of technical communication in "technologies traditionally affiliated with women's concern's (p. 63), while Lay (2004) and Durack (1997) sought to expand the scope of technical communication by giving warrant to technologies and rhetorical strategies that had been unconsidered in our field—those associated with women. Cosmetology is an industry associated with and run by women, with women composing over 90% of hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). As such, examining cosmetology through a technical communication framework

continues a line of research that welcomes technical work associated with women into the scholarship on technical communication.

While scholars have examined communication activities that occur in salons and barbershops, these studies have not examined cosmetology as technical communication, specifically. Rather, previous studies have focused on the construction and maintenance of gendered identities in salons and barbershops (Franks, 2015; Gimlin, 1996; Lawson, 1999), the therapeutic dynamics of client-stylist interaction (Gokdag, 2016), the negotiation of roles during the haircutting session (Oshima, 2014), and the importance of communication and commercial friendship during in-person consultations (Ritchie, 2016). No studies have examined the *virtual* consultation in cosmetology. Virtual consultations are an emerging phenomenon in the industry and, as such, may offer insight into consultation strategies in virtual platforms more broadly.

We have seen evidence that examining beauty work through a technical communication framework is a valuable endeavor. In recent years, Kimball (2017) argued that nearly *everyone* performs technical communication due to advancements in technologies that support our day-to-day activities (p. 331). Kimball asked us to consider the lessons we can learn from “amateur” technical communicators and, as a result, he opened the door for recent scholarship on YouTube beauty tutorials (Chong, 2018; Ledbetter, 2018; and Li, 2019). Chong (2018) argued that these tutorials reflect the technical communication genre of instructional video. Her analysis of beauty tutorials produced by “amateur technical communicators” revealed the effectiveness of rhetorical strategies such as truthfulness, personal narratives, and humor—strategies not typically considered best practices within the genre (p. 293). Ledbetter (2018) also examined the

rhetorical work of YouTube's beauty community and found that storytelling and instruction are central to establishing credibility and building identity and relationships in a space that is global and diverse (p. 297). And finally, Li (2019) examined beauty vlogs (video blogs) produced by amateur technical communicators to determine effective techniques employed in these videos. Her study showed that beauty vloggers use music, color, text, voiceover, close-ups, characterization, and tactics based in personal experience to illicit pathos and create "a more humanistic ethos" (p. 236). Together, these studies reveal rhetorical strategies that fall outside the recognized best practices for instructional videos, and, therefore, teach us about rhetoric and effective strategies for engaging a broad, virtual audience.

I argue that the communication strategies of cosmetologists and their approach to virtual consultations in cosmetology, specifically, warrant attention as a technical communication phenomenon that can inform our understanding of rhetoric in virtual spaces and, importantly, the role of perspective and audience in rhetorical situations. While cosmetology, generally, and the virtual consultation in cosmetology, specifically, have not been examined through a technical communication framework, virtual consultations in other technical industries, e.g., medicine, have been studied extensively. Cosmetology is not medicine, and cosmetologists are not medical practitioners; however, both practices require an examination, a diagnosis, and a treatment plan. These needs are fulfilled by the consultation. Additionally, consultations now occur both in person and in virtual platforms. Examining virtual consultations in cosmetology through a technical communication framework may inform virtual consultations in other industries, including medicine.

The primary aim of this study is to examine the virtual consultation in cosmetology by analyzing the rhetorical strategies of a stylist who has developed artifacts for and who regularly conducts virtual consultations. My analysis focuses on the communication work of Katie West, a stylist associated with Salon Summit Business Center (SSBC). Specifically, I analyze West's Instagram profile, which is the artifact that she uses to conduct virtual consultations. I supplement my analysis with a Facebook Live interview where West discusses her performance of virtual consultations with industry leader, Michael Cole. Both West and Cole are affiliated with SSBC, which has over 25 years of experience as "the world's largest consulting company focused on elevating the beauty industry" (SSBC, 2021d). Cole is an SSBC facilitator with over 30 years of experience in the industry (SSBC, 2021c), while West is an SSBC consultant who specializes in social media and associate training (SSBC, 2021b). Together, their two artifacts—West's Instagram profile and Cole's Facebook Live interview with West—offer critical insight into industry standards and best practices for virtual consultations. The findings of this rhetorical analysis result in a formative, preliminary case study on virtual consultations that can inform future research on an emerging phenomenon in the cosmetology industry. This study seeks to identify how technical communication occurs in an industry that is not currently represented in our field. The results may help us better understand effective rhetorical strategies for virtual consultations in cosmetology as well as other industries.

## II. THE (VIRTUAL) CONSULTATION IN COSMETOLOGY

### *The Consultation*

Although this thesis is not a generic analysis, I begin with an overview of the consultation genre to establish the similarities between virtual consultations in cosmetology and other technical fields—specifically, medicine. The consultation facilitates the request and delivery of services in countless fields. In his landmark study of the consultation in medical practice, Paul ten Have (2016) presented the genre as “a specific kind of service provision established in society” (p. 118). The need to request, determine, and, subsequently, deliver services constitutes a rhetorical exigence—a need that can be modified through discourse. ten Have’s study focused on the genre of consultation, or the generic sequence of moves that provides structure to address the exigence. His study is valuable because it provides a baseline to compare consultations in two distinct industries.

The generic sequence of the consultation is stable and yet flexible in its execution. Execution of the sequence will follow the “typical” social forms of the setting and will be “locally negotiated through and through, each time again” (ten Have, 2016, p. 115). While the genre does follow an “Ideal Sequence” (p. 118), the community that applies the genre, the local context, and the rhetorical situation will all influence and shape the consultation in practice. Based on this understanding of consultation as genre, we can assume that consultations in medicine and consultations in cosmetology follow a similar structure that is differentiated by the community of practice, local context, and rhetorical situation.



Comparing the generic sequence of consultations in medicine to that of consultations in cosmetology demonstrates that examining one field may inform the other. According to ten Haves (2016), the “Ideal Sequence” of the medical consultation includes the following steps: 1) opening, 2) complaint, 3) examination or test, 4) diagnosis, 5) treatment or advice, 6) closing. The author goes on to specify that “phases 2 to 5...are the ones specific for the occasion [and] usually include some sort of ‘discussion’ of what is proposed or to be done” (p. 118). The consultation in cosmetology reflects this generic format. In *Milady’s Standard Cosmetology*, which is the industry standard for cosmetology textbooks, industry professionals present a 10-step method for conducting the client consultation: 1) Review the [client] intake form. 2) Perform a needs assessment. 3) Determine and rate the client’s preferences. 4) Analyze the client’s hair. 5) Review the client’s lifestyle. 6) Show and tell. 7) Make recommendations as part of the needs assessment. 8) Make color recommendations. 9) Discuss upkeep and maintenance. 10) Review the consultation (Backe et al., 2016, pp. 55-58). This 10-step method maps to ten Haves’ Ideal Sequence for medical consultations.

**Table 1**

*Generic sequence of medical consultation versus cosmetology consultation*

<b>Medical Consultation</b>	<b>Cosmetology Consultation</b>
1. Opening	1. Review the [client] intake form.
2. Complaint	2. Perform a needs assessment. 3. Determine and rate the client’s preferences.
3. Examination or test	4. Analyze the client’s hair. 5. Review the client’s lifestyle. 6. Show and tell.
4. Diagnosis	7. Make recommendations during needs assessment. 8. Make color recommendations.
5. Treatment or advice	9. Discuss upkeep and maintenance.
6. Closing	10. Review the consultation.

Table 1 demonstrates that the consultation in cosmetology follows the same generic sequence as the consultation in medicine with additional steps in phases 2 through 4, which ten Have (2016) confirms as being “specific for the occasion” (p. 118). First, reviewing the client’s intake form provides an opening to initiate the transaction. Next, the needs assessment and client preferences constitute a complaint—the client’s problem and their desired outcome. The stylist then performs an examination by analyzing the client’s hair, reviewing their lifestyle, and showing/telling the client what can or cannot be done. A diagnosis follows with a recommendation for services. The stylist offers advice for upkeep and maintenance—a long-term treatment plan. Finally, the stylist closes the consultation by reviewing what has been discussed and agreed upon. This generic sequence demonstrates that consultations in cosmetology are similar to consultations in medicine and, therefore, examining one may inform the other.

Yet, despite these similarities, the literature demonstrates a privilege for the study of medical consultations and ignores consultations in cosmetology. I argue that both should be studied and that the latter may offer insight into how we approach the former. Examining the virtual consultation in cosmetology may uncover rhetorical strategies that expand upon or even contradict best practices for virtual consultations in medicine.

### ***COVID-19 and Going Virtual***

I have demonstrated the relationship between consultations in medicine and consultations in cosmetology, but I now introduce the *virtual* consultation as a feature in both practices. Using technology to meet patients remotely is not new and happens often in the medical field. Telemedicine has existed in various capacities for some time and has proven to be an effective medium for delivering patient-centered care that is “cost-

effective, improve[s] health outcomes, and enhance[s] patient satisfaction” (Jenkins & Oyama, 2020, p. 341). However, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the necessity of telemedicine and, specifically, the virtual consultation to negate the spread of coronavirus and reduce infection rates. (Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Kilvert et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Malik and Sadler, 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2020). The influx in virtual consultations in response to the pandemic resulted in multiple studies on the benefits, limitations, and best practices for virtual consultations. These findings and others are discussed in the literature review that follows.

However, in cosmetology, the virtual consultation is a relatively new phenomenon. The most recent edition of *Milady's Standard Cosmetology* (Backe, et al., 2016)—the industry standard for cosmetology textbooks—discusses the consultation but makes no mention of the *virtual* consultation. When virtual consultations did emerge in the industry, they were largely video-based and were considered innovative and rare—the exception and not the rule (Cole, 2019a; Cole, 2019b; Cole, 2019c). But the onset of COVID-19 led to the lockdown of nonessential businesses and, subsequently, safety protocols for reopening. In Texas, the safety protocols for salons included strict social distancing and limitations on in-person gatherings (Fernandez, 2020; Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, 2021). Virtual consultations suddenly served a new purpose. Industry consultants, such as Salon Summit Business Center (SSBC) recommended virtual consultations to streamline the reopening process and provided virtual consultation checklists to help stylists prepare for their appointments (SSBC, 2020a; SSBC, 2020b). In the months that followed, popular news sources began covering the virtual consultation. Allure magazine reported “Hair Colorists Are Offering Virtual

Consultations, Sending Custom Hair Dye Kits to Clients in the Mail” (Prinzivalli, 2020). The Atlantic asked, “Is the FaceTime Haircut Here to Stay?” (Stern, 2020). Stylists offered best practices for the virtual consultation in their blog posts: “3 Tips for a Great Virtual Consultation” (Redkin, 2020), “8 Questions for an Effective Digital Consultation” (Salt Society Education, 2020), “The Virtual Consultation: A Win for You and Your Client” (Valenzuala, 2020). Today, a Google search for “virtual consultation hair salon” produces pages of results for virtual consultations in cosmetology, demonstrating the significance of this transition in relation to both industry and customer expectations.

This new, innovative approach to consultations created buzz not only in the salon industry but among the public, who suddenly realized how much they needed their hair stylists when they could no longer access their stylists in person. This experience—the realization that we could not drive to a salon and have our hair done by our favorite stylist—made the pandemic seem “real” in a very specific way, eliminating a service that is rooted in cultural, historical, and sociological experiences. Our hair is a symbol of self-expression, identity, culture, and politics (Ashby, 2016; Lester, 2000; Synnott, 1987; Tete, 2017). For many, hair is central to how we navigate our world and how we present ourselves to that world. Our shared experience during the pandemic, as evidenced, for example, by the movement to embrace the gray of one’s “COVID hair” (Mead and Carucci, 2021), underscores what our hair means to us personally and culturally. Although deemed “nonessential,” salons and, as a result, our hair became a point of reference to help us understand the implications of the pandemic and how it affected our day-to-day lives.

The virtual consultation in cosmetology emerged as a mechanism to continue stylist-client relationships during shutdown, to prepare for reopening, and to provide alternative opportunities for stylist-client engagement in the midst of a pandemic. As a result, this communication phenomenon both continued and expanded services that many rely on in relation to their hair and their identity. Scholars have not examined this phenomenon, and they certainly have not done so through a technical communication framework. Examining the virtual consultation in cosmetology offers a unique viewpoint to understand virtual consultations generally and may provide insight into strategies for engaging audiences in virtual platforms.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As I have already stated, the virtual consultation in cosmetology has not been examined in the literature; however, virtual consultations in medicine have been studied extensively in medical communication, which is an accepted subfield of technical communication. Therefore, this review considers the virtual consultation in medicine to provide a baseline understanding of the consultation in a virtual setting. Much of the literature that follows responded to the increase in virtual consultations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies sought to understand the virtual consultation in practice: the benefits and constraints of the medium and the strategies that medical professionals use to navigate remote interaction. Therefore, this review provides an overview of the constraints and benefits of virtual consultations, including strategies that are known to be effective or necessary in a virtual space. The findings provide insight into the nature of virtual consultations, generally, and how practitioners approach them in medicine, specifically.

Understanding constraints and benefits helps us understand the rhetorical situation and can inform approaches to virtual consultations across industries, as many of these constraints and benefits exist in relation to the medium itself. My presentation of constraints and benefits draws from traditional rhetorical theorist Lloyd Bitzer (1968), who identified three constituents within all rhetorical situations: exigence, audience, and constraints. A more thorough discussion of Bitzer's theory follows in the theoretical framework of this thesis. Two of Bitzer's constituents—audience and constraints—are reflected in the literature review. First, by considering constraints, I bring attention to factors that must be dealt with and/or managed to accomplish the exigence that drives

virtual consultations. By considering benefits, I highlight opportunities to engage the audience. The literature supports this framework, as most studies highlight how medical practitioners approach virtual consultations and the types of issues and benefits they encounter executing the genre in practice.

However, to challenge traditional theories of rhetoric such as Bitzer's, I also consider the concept of perspective. Perspective represents a point of view. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), rhetoric should consider the perspectives of all parties—rhetor and audience—because varying perspectives present new ways of thinking and can inform decision making (p. 8). Although the studies included in this review are objective in nature, perspective is not objective. The rhetor and the audience may view the same constraints and benefits differently because they approach these constraints and benefits from different points of view. In Bitzer's rhetorical situation, constraints are viewed from the perspective of the rhetor and reflect how the rhetor perceives the situation. But rhetorical situations are not one-sided. Benefits and constraints affect the audience, as well, and their interpretation of benefits and constraints can help us better understand the complexity of rhetorical situations. Foss and Griffin (1995) argue that one way to understand the perspectives of all parties is to create conditions—to develop strategies—that illicit those perspectives (p. 10). By creating conditions that promote the sharing of perspectives, a rhetor attempts to see the situation not only through their own perspective but through that of their audience. This approach recognizes the audience as more than a constituent of the rhetorical situation but as a contributor to the preferred outcome. I will expand on this concept later when I introduce Foss and Griffin's theory of invitational

rhetoric, which is the theoretical framework that guides my analysis of the virtual consultation in cosmetology.

To introduce the importance of perspective, I conclude the following sections with tables that demonstrate how the constraints and benefits identified in the literature might be perceived by both rhetor and patient. Although these interpretations are based in the literature, they reflect my own perspectives and are, therefore, subjective. Nonetheless, these interpretations provide a glimpse into the ways that multiple perspectives affect aspects of the rhetorical situation.

### ***Constraints of the Virtual Consultation***

**Technology, Access, and Lack of Physical Contact.** The virtual consultation presents basic limitations relating to the use of technology and the absence of physical contact. Perhaps most critically, patients must have access to a device and reliable internet service, and they must feel comfortable interacting with technology (Almathami et al., 2020; Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Islind et al., 2019; Kilvert et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Malik & Sadler, 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020). Additionally, the virtual platform increases concerns related to data security, privacy, and legality (Almathami et al., 2020; Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2020). Finally, the lack of physical contact makes physical examination, diagnosis, and recommendations for treatment inherently more difficult (Li et al., 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2020). These finding imply that patients need access not only to technology but to technology that feels safe and familiar—a virtual space in which both practitioner *and* patient feel protected and yet is equipped to transfer sensitive information that will facilitate accurate diagnosis and recommendations for treatment.



**Timing, Condition, and Audience Profiles.** Researchers also identified factors that influence the appropriateness of virtual consultations, i.e., *when* virtual consultations should be used and *for whom*. These factors provide important considerations for implementing the virtual consultation in practice. For example, Scarborough et al. (2020) found that practitioners were using virtual consultations for both first-time and follow-up consultations, while Sinha et al. (2020) found plastic surgeons preferred virtual consultations primarily for first-time or low-risk patients. Alternatively, Kilvert et al. (2020) and Li et al. (2020) found that both practitioners and patients preferred face-to-face consultations for initial visits. Further, the virtual consultation was not an appropriate option for all patients, particularly those with limited mobility, complex social problems, cognitive impairment, vision or hearing problems, language barriers, learning or physical disabilities, and mental health issues (Almathami et al., 2020; Malik & Sadler, 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020). According to Scarborough et al. (2020), additional research is needed to determine the conditions and patients who are appropriate candidates for virtual consultations. These variations in the literature suggest the importance of contextual factors that may influence the appropriateness of virtual consultations in relation to a particular condition or treatment.

**Tools and Modalities.** Research identified tools that medical practitioners use to perform virtual consultations as well as important considerations for modality, both of which can inform the development of virtual consultation platforms. Sinha et al. (2020) found that most surgeons used Zoom, Facetime, Skype, or some combination of video and telephone to communicate with patients. However, these researchers indicate a need for multimodal approaches that include real-time communication, image sharing, and

documenting messages (p. 6). Multiple studies reiterated the necessity of image sharing for accurate diagnosis (De La Cruz Monroy & Mosahebi, 2019; Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Malik & Sadler, 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020). In the absence of physical examination, the ability for a patient to share photos of their condition is integral to diagnosis; the patient must be equipped to offer visual evidence of their complaint. Therefore, the digital platform must include a mechanism that allows patients to submit photos to their provider. Fortunately, smartphones provide adequate photo quality and can be used to facilitate this process (Scarborough et al., 2020). Finally, screensharing emerged as a modality that practitioners can use to present information about a patient's condition or treatment plan (Gillman-Wells et al., 2020). These findings indicate that virtual consultations require modalities beyond basic conferencing software and that a suite of features should be considered to fulfill the needs of the consultation.

Fortunately, smartphone apps provide a mechanism that can increase information sharing between patient and practitioner in the virtual platform. In their study of smartphone apps used to facilitate communication with surgical patients, De La Cruz Monroy and Mosahebi (2019) identified benefits of information exchange in a digital environment. For example, file sharing through an app eliminates the need for instructional or informative handouts that are normally distributed face-to-face. Additionally, apps can be programmed to advise patients on certain aspects of their condition without directly involving the practitioner (p. 253). Other researchers identified the necessity of a chat feature to support communication in the digital space (Islind et al., 2019) and documentation features to record outcomes (Malik & Sadler, 2019). According to Malik and Sadler (2019), documentation is critical to continuity of care and can protect

practitioners from liability issues that emerge from miscommunication (p. 105).

Documentation is necessary for maintaining accurate patient records; a built-in documentation feature would help facilitate this process.

In a similar vein, multiple researchers argued that virtual consultations could be improved by integrating the practice into exiting workflows (Almathami et al., 2020; Islind et al., 2019; Sinha et al., 2020). For example, integrating electronic patient records (EPR) into the virtual consultation could streamline workflows by reducing prep time prior to the appointment. Such integration increases the value of the EPR in consultation practice (Islind et al., 2019, p. 454) and addresses the need for rigorous documentation by providing a mechanism to report outcomes as they occur. While the literature focuses on practitioner benefits, integrating virtual consultations into existing workflows could also benefit the patient by streamlining their experience and connecting various aspects of their treatment plan, from scheduling appointments to accessing prescriptions.

Together, these results illuminate the necessity of a multimodal approach to the virtual consultation and demonstrate a need for software or digital apps that incorporate video conferencing, text-based chat, screensharing, image sharing, recording, and file transfer. Further, this software could be integrated with existing electronic systems to increase the efficiency of the overall workflow for both practitioner and patient.

**Limitations of the Medium.** While timing, conditions, tools, and modalities are important to the effectiveness of virtual consultations, the digital medium also presents challenges that affect communication and understanding between patient and practitioner. For example, comfort and familiarity are integral to a patient's willingness to participate in a virtual consultation as well as their willingness to participate in follow-up

appointments (Almathami et al., 2020; Kilvert et al., 2020; Xing et al., 2019).

Establishing rapport is critical, which is why Kilvert et al. (2020) recommend initial consultations occur face-to-face (p. 143). Additionally, non-verbal communication, such as eye contact and body language, is more difficult to gauge in a virtual environment and can reduce the practitioner's ability to recognize distress (Almathami et al., 2020; Kilvert et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2020). Therefore, the clinician must use patient-centered communication (Malik & Sadler, 2020), be verbally explicit, communicate their actions (Islind et al., 2019), and interview the patient in a way that solicits targeted information about the patient's condition to inform diagnosis (Almathami et al., 2020). Practitioners should apply the same levels of empathy, attentiveness, responsiveness, professionalism, and respect that they would in face-to-face consultations (Malik & Sadler, 2020; Stommel et al., 2019; Xing et al., 2019). In fact, using basic, prosocial questions such as "How are you?" can help establish attentiveness and reduce nonverbal communication barriers in the virtual environment (Stommel et al., 2019). Finally, practitioners must provide adequate information to address the patient's problem (Chang et al., 2019) and make sure the patient feels equally involved in the exchange (Xing et al., 2019). If a practitioner feels unsure about their ability to diagnosis a condition—perhaps due to technology or communication barriers that emerge during the consultation—then language-based mitigation strategies can help the practitioner remain uncommitted to a diagnosis, reduce liability, and demonstrate the need for further, in-person examination (Mao & Zhao, 2020). These findings highlight the necessity of rhetorical strategies that increase comfort, establish rapport, and engage the patient while simultaneously leaving the door open for alternative approaches if the virtual consultation does not produce

satisfactory outcomes.

While the practitioner's communication efforts are integral to the success of the virtual consultation, communication efforts on the patient's end are equally important. The patient must be able to communicate their condition in a way that facilitates accurate diagnosis (Almathami et al., 2020). They must understand and be able to use the technologies associated with the virtual consultation and provide their informed consent to be recorded and have their images stored, particularly if these media will be used for trainings or purposes beyond diagnosis (Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Malik & Sadler, 2020). As a result, some level of patient training is necessary (Almathami et al., 2020), including basic instructions such as how to take adequate photos for image sharing and diagnosis (Gillman-Wells et al., 2020). These audience-related concerns require specific strategies to ensure patients are equipped to engage in the consultation and feel comfortable doing so.

**Constraints as Perspectives.** The following table presents the constraints detailed above through both the rhetor and audience's perspective. While there is clear overlap, the individual perspectives add nuance to the constraints. For example, the practitioner knows that the patient needs a device and reliable internet service to participate, but the audience may have a variety of reasons as to why they do or do not have access. These perspectives are not merely constraints that the rhetor must navigate; rather, the audience's perspectives help create the rhetorical situation and how it should be approached—not only to the benefit of the rhetor but to the benefit of the audience, as well. Further, the audience's perspectives are likely to create unique situations that are similar and yet different depending on the particular needs of that audience.

**Table 2***Constraints: Competing perspectives*

<b>Constraint</b>	<b>Rhetor's perspective</b>	<b>Audience's perspective</b>
Technology and access	The patient needs access to a device and secure internet and feel comfortable with technology.	<p>I have an iPhone, so I can participate.</p> <p>I have a device, but I don't have reliable internet.</p> <p>I don't have a device or reliable internet.</p> <p>I am not used to virtual communication.</p>
Technology and access: Data security	There are legal and ethical implications for data security.	<p>What if the doctor loses or exposes my personal data?</p> <p>What if my internet connection is hacked?</p>
Lack of physical contact	Lack of contact makes it difficult to diagnosis.	Lack of contact limits my ability to explain my complaint.
Audience profiles	Certain patients/conditions are more appropriate for virtual consultations.	My personal preference informs whether I will engage virtually.
Tools and modalities: Image sharing	I need to see images of the patient's complaint to make an accurate diagnosis.	I need to show the doctor my complaint so they will understand.
Tools and modalities: Information sharing	I need to share information about the patient's condition and treatment plan.	I need to understand my condition and how to treat it.
Tools and modalities: Documentation requirements	I need to document the encounter for the patient's file and to prevent liability.	I want to be able to review the information my doctor shared after my appointment.
Tools and modalities: Workflow issues	I want to integrate virtual consultations into my workflow to streamline my process.	I need to understand the bigger picture in order to navigate my experience as a patient.
Limitations of the medium: Comfort	I need to make the patient feel comfortable so they will participate.	I want to feel comfortable and familiar with this process if I'm going to participate.
Limitations of the medium: Rapport	It's more difficult to establish rapport with the patient.	If it's virtual, will they pay attention to me and what I have to say?
Limitations of the medium: Distress	It's difficult to recognize patient distress (eye contact, body language).	The doctor is ignoring my distress.
Limitations of the medium: Difficult to diagnose	I can't make an accurate diagnosis with the information I've been given.	The doctor doesn't understand my complaint.

Understanding the audience's perspectives can help identify approaches to unique situations by helping identify new constraints—or new perspectives regarding the same constraints—and, therefore, new ways to manage those constraints. In my previous example, I demonstrated that a practitioner may know the patient needs a device and reliable internet, but they may not know the factors limiting the patient's access or their preferences relating to remote interaction. Similarly, reasons to employ certain tools, e.g., image sharing, screenshare, and documentation features, take on new meaning when viewed through the patient's perspective: the practitioner needs to see the patient's condition, share information, and document the exchange, but the patient needs mechanisms to explain their condition, learn about their options, and review their treatment plan. Finally, the practitioner may be aware of communication limitations in the virtual medium, e.g., the difficulty to establish rapport or recognize distress, but these same constraints affect the patient differently: a lack of rapport or recognition of distress may result in the patient feeling ignored and unwilling to engage. Table 2 attempts to demonstrate the nuance that perspective adds to constraints of the virtual consultation.

### ***Benefits of the Virtual Consultation***

While constraints dominate the literature, research has demonstrated benefits of the virtual consultation, as well, offering reasons for both medical professionals and cosmetologists to continue the practice in a post-pandemic environment. In general, most practitioners feel satisfied with the virtual consultation and will continue to use it (Almathami et al., 2020; Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2020), and many feel their communication skills are similar in face-to-face and virtual environments (Almathami et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2020). Virtual consultations are

convenient and cost effective, allow flexible scheduling, save time, and reduce travel and wait times in the clinic (Almathami et al., 2020; De La Cruz Monroy & Mosahebi, 2019; Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Kilvert et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020; Malik & Sadler, 2020). Positive experiences during the virtual consultation can increase follow up-appointments and improve patient retention (Xing et al., 2019). Further, patient satisfaction in one channel can increase satisfaction in other channels, which means a positive virtual experience can actually increase a patient's satisfaction in follow-up, face-to-face appointments (Chang et al., 2019). These benefits are encouraging and give practitioners reasons to consider the virtual consultation as part of their ongoing practice. Intentionally promote these benefits may also encourage patients to participate in virtual consultations.

**Benefits as Perspectives.** The table below presents these benefits as perspectives of both rhetor and audience. Again, viewing benefits as perspectives adds nuance by demonstrating that the rhetorical situation is not one-sided.

**Table 3**

*Benefits: Competing perspectives*

Benefits	Rhetor's perspective	Audience's perspective
Transferable communication skills	My communication style is similar face-to-face and virtually so I can easily conduct virtual consultations.	I am / am not comfortable communicating virtually.  It's difficult to understand my doctor in a virtual space.
Convenient and flexible	VCs reduce the number of patients in the clinic, leaving room for more serious cases.	VCs are convenient. I can do them at home and reduce my travel / time in the clinic.
Patient retention	A positive experience will improve patient retention.	I'll do this again if I have a positive experience.

For example, although practitioners may view their communication style as similar in both face-to-face and virtual environments, the patient may be uncomfortable



communicating virtually or they may have a more difficult time understanding their doctor in a virtual environment. The practitioner may consider the convenience and flexibility of virtual consultations and the impact on patient retention as reasons to continue the practice. However, to ensure these benefits are actually benefits *to the patient*, the practitioner must understand the audience's perspective and how that benefit affects them. Such understanding of the audience's perspectives is critical to the situation, not merely as a constraint but as a unique contribution to the situation.

### ***Creating Conditions to Share Perspectives***

As demonstrated in Tables 2 and 3, the constraints and benefits of the virtual consultation can be viewed from multiple perspectives and, therefore, may require more than one approach to navigate the rhetorical situation. The ability to uncover and understand these perspectives, particularly as they relate to the patient's condition and outcomes, is integral to the consultation. The patient must offer their perspective (how they perceive their condition and its impact) and the practitioner must offer theirs (what they know about the condition) to diagnose the problem and recommend treatment. Without a thorough understanding of the patient's complaint and symptoms, the practitioner cannot make an accurate diagnosis. And without a thorough understanding of the practitioner's recommendations and how to implement them, the patient cannot proceed with treatment. In the end, the patient and the practitioner must end in agreement for the consultation to succeed, whether that agreement results in a treatment plan, additional observation, or a second opinion. Both parties—audience and rhetor, patient and practitioner—contribute to the rhetorical situation and, ultimately, to its outcome.

The aforementioned studies highlight a variety of technical features to encourage

sharing perspectives. First, multiple studies demonstrate that image sharing is critical to diagnosis (De La Cruz Monroy & Mosahebi, 2019; Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Malik & Sadler, 2020; Scarborough et al., 2020). The ability to share photos (Scarborough et al., 2020) offers the patient a way to share and validate their perspective—to clearly demonstrate their complaint and the reason they need medical care. Similarly, screensharing (Gillman-Wells et al., 2020) enhances the medical practitioner’s ability to share their perspective, offering a mechanism to provide guidance or evidence to support their diagnosis. Finally, a chat feature (Islind et al., 2019) creates the opportunity for both parties to engage in dialogue, which can help uncover the audience’s needs (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p. 8). The patient shares and explains their symptoms while the provider shares their interpretation of the symptoms and provides recommendations for treatment. Encouraging the audience to share their perspectives and creating a space to facilitate such sharing may increase the potential for success.

The studies also hint at rhetorical strategies that promote sharing of perspectives. Using explicit communication strategies (Islind et al., 2019) and providing adequate information about the patient’s condition (Chang et al., 2019) help ensure that the patient understands the practitioner’s perspective. Targeted interview questions (Almathami et al., 2020) help the practitioner uncover the patient’s perspective—how they perceive the severity of their symptoms and what they are willing to do or not do in terms of treatment. Finally, if the practitioner cannot make an accurate diagnosis or an adequate outcome is unlikely, the practitioner might remain uncommitted to the diagnosis and recommend in-person examination (Mao & Zhao, 2020). Foss and Griffin (1995) call this strategy “re-sourcement” or offering alternatives when an appropriate outcome is unlikely

(p. 9). These strategies encourage both parties to share their perspectives, highlight the value of exchange, and demonstrate the importance of identifying alternatives when the consultation is likely to fail.

As mentioned previously, many of the constraints and benefits can be addressed by understanding the nuance of the rhetorical situation—how the constraints and benefits affect not only the rhetor’s approach but the audience’s approach to the rhetorical situation. One way to uncover this nuance is to promote audience engagement to uncover their perspectives. For example, increasing patients’ comfort with technology could be accomplished by creating a digital space that patients find familiar. Instructing or training the patient on what to expect and how to engage in the virtual consultation gives them the tools and self-confidence to feel comfortable with the exchange. Having patients provide their informed consent to be recorded or have their images stored is critical not only for legal purposes, but to ensure that patients understand their rights and feel protected. These strategies create a safe environment that empowers the patient to engage in the consultation and share their perspectives. Additionally, using patient-centered communication (Malik & Sadler, 2020) demonstrates that the patient’s perspective is valued. Practitioners should not dominate the consultation and patients should feel equally involved in the exchange (Xing et al., 2019). Finally, practitioners might highlight the benefits that virtual consultations offer patients in relation to medical care: flexible scheduling, reduced travel and wait times, the ability to meet their provider whenever and wherever is most convenient. But, in doing so, the practitioner must demonstrate that they understand these benefits from the point of view of their patients. Such understanding requires the patient to share their point of view with their provider.

#### **IV. THEORETICAL CONCERNS AND LINGERING QUESTIONS**

The literature on virtual consultations in medicine provides insight into the ways that practitioners approach virtual consultations, the constraints and benefits that affect that approach, and the strategies that practitioners employ to engage audiences in a digital space. Constraints and benefits exist relating to technology, access, lack of physical contact, timing, condition, audience profiles, tools, and modalities, all of which affect how (and whether) the audience engages in the virtual consultation. However, the literature does not consider the importance of individual perspectives on the constraints and benefits. Additionally, although the literature identifies strategies that can help navigate the limitations of consulting remotely, it falls short on how to holistically deploy these strategies in a way that encourages audience participation in a virtual space.

Importantly, the literature provides insight into virtual consultations in a field that relies on visual and sometimes haptic processes to diagnosis and prescribe treatment. In the absence of physical contact, additional measures must be taken to identify the problem and how to proceed. The virtual consultation requires participation from both parties; in fact, it is critical that both practitioner and patient participate in the exchange for the consultation to succeed. On one hand, the literature does demonstrate some of the ways that practitioners engage their patients in the absence in-person contact. However, it is unclear how these findings will translate to the virtual consultation in cosmetology and how stylists navigate a similar and yet strikingly different rhetorical situation. In general, more information is needed to understand how rhetors might engage audiences in virtual consultations by creating conditions that promote audience participation.

Finally, traditional theories of the rhetorical situation often focus on constraints and audience as viewed through the lens of the rhetor. And yet, constraints, benefits, and exigences affect both rhetor and audience. Without understanding the audience's perspective, the rhetor might not recognize constraints that limit the audience's participation. Similarly, they might not recognize benefits that encourage audience participation. One way to uncover all relevant aspects of the rhetorical situation—as viewed by both parties—is to encourage the sharing of perspectives. This strategy helps ensure that both the rhetor's and audience's goals are equally understood and addressed in the exchange. The virtual consultation in cosmetology may offer insight into the ways that rhetors can create conditions that encourage audience participation and solicit their perspectives while clearly establishing the perspectives of the rhetor. Such a holistic approach to the rhetorical situation—one where the goal is to understand both rhetor and audience and to illicit understanding between their perspectives—may inform our approach to not only the virtual consultation but to rhetorical situations more generally.

## V. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis seeks to answer the following research questions: *How do stylists approach the virtual consultation in cosmetology? How do stylists create conditions that establish their perspectives, solicit their audience's perspectives, and promote understanding between the two?* Ultimately, the aim of this study is to identify strategies used to perform virtual consultations in cosmetology and how those strategies, particularly as they relate to perspective and audience participation in the rhetorical situation, might inform virtual consultations in other industries.

## VI. METHODS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Methods*

My rhetorical analysis centers on the communication work of stylist Katie West. First, I perform a rhetorical analysis of West's professional Instagram profile, which she uses to conduct virtual consultations. I supplement my analysis with a Facebook Live video interview where West discusses her methods with Michael Cole, a leading consultant in the salon industry. Both Cole and West are affiliated with the Salon Summit Business Center (SSBC), a world recognized business consulting firm that works in partnership with L'Oréal Professional Products (SSBC, 2021d). According to their website, SSBC offers over 25 years of experience and is the "world's largest consulting company focused on elevating the beauty industry" (SSBC, 2020d). SSBC includes a team of over 70 consultants who work with salons, spas, barbershops, and cosmetology schools on topics that range from guest services to associate training to accounting to web development (SSBC, 2021a). West is an SSBC consultant and certified social media trainer (SSBC, 2021b) with an Instagram following of over 5,300 followers (West, n.d.f). Cole is an SSBC facilitator with over 30 years of experience in the industry (SSBC, 2021c) and a public following of over 70,000 (Cole, n.d.). His Facebook page hosts over 300 educational videos for salon professions (Cole, n.d.), including his Facebook Live interview with West. These videos represent macro-level data reflecting industry-supported strategies and best practices. On the other hand, West's Instagram profile (West, n.d.f) provides an intimate look into the strategies used by a stylist who performs virtual consultations on a regular basis. Together, these two artifacts—West's Instagram

profile and Cole's Facebook interview with West—offer an intimate look into virtual consultations in cosmetology.

Cole posted his Facebook video interview with West in September 2020, five months into the COVID-19 pandemic, as part of his “Discover the Power” “Zoominar” series (Cole and Cole, 2020a). The timeframe represents a moment when virtual consultations surged to address the “new normal” of the pandemic. Virtual consultations were not entirely unheard of in the industry, but they were a fringe practice. Cole's Facebook page includes three pre-pandemic videos that discuss virtual consultations as a new, emerging practice in the industry (Cole, 2019a; Cole, 2019b; Cole, 2019c). However, as state and local governments enforced safety guidelines that limited occupancy, required social distancing, and reduced in-person contact (Fernandez, 2020; Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, 2021), businesses like the SSBC began recommending virtual consultations as a mechanism to continue client services, prepare for re-openings, and protect the health and well-being of stylists and their clients (SSBC, 2020a; SSBC, 2020b). In the months following the onset of the pandemic, Cole featured seven new video interviews in his Facebook Live series as well as three iterations of West's interview in his “Discovery the Power” series, all dedicated to the virtual consultation (Cole, 2020a; Cole, 2020b; Cole, 2020c; Cole, 2020d; Cole, 2020e; Cole, 2020f; Cole, 2020g; Cole and Cole, 2020a; Cole and Cole, 2020b; Cole and Cole, 2020c). Although the virtual consultation did not develop in response to COVID-19, the genre did provide a response to this new exigence.

West's Facebook interview with Cole is particularly valuable because it focuses on virtual consultations, specifically, and provides detailed descriptions, screenshots, and



testimony about her experience executing this new genre in her practice. Although West is featured in multiple video interviews on Cole's Facebook page, the information she shares regarding virtual consultations is reiterated across videos. Therefore, to avoid duplication, I limited my analysis to the first iteration of West's interview in Cole's "Discover the Power" series. The video is approximately one-hour long, dedicated solely to the virtual consultation, and, although it constitutes secondary data, provides critical insight into the strategies that West uses to engage clients in virtual consultations—strategies that are evident on her Instagram profile. West shares her methods for conducting virtual consultations on Instagram with both potential and returning clients. Her methods provide a snapshot into the ways that stylists use social media, particularly Instagram, to create an information stream that facilitates consultations, referrals, booking, and branding in a single, exceptionally curated virtual space. West shares her recommendations and reasons for conducting virtual consultations and provides screenshots of her interactions with clients during the virtual consultation, which she conducts over Instagram direct message (DM). The inclusion of screenshots increases the value of this video interview for rhetorical analysis; the ability to examine real dialogue between West and her clients adds a richness to the secondary data that is not available by solely examining her Instagram profile.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The framework for this analysis uses Foss and Griffin's (1995) theory of invitational rhetoric. Invitational rhetoric has its origin in feminist rhetorical theories (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p. 4), which makes it suitable for examining an industry that has been historically associated with women: cosmetology. To situate invitational rhetoric as

the framework for this study, I first consider traditional theories of rhetoric to highlight why these theories do not work for the case in question. I then explain why invitational rhetoric closes the gap and offers a more suitable theory for examining the virtual consultation in cosmetology. I conclude with a detailed explanation of invitational rhetoric to unpack the theoretical framework that guides my analysis.

In traditional theories of rhetoric, a rhetor engages an audience with the “conscious intent to change” (Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 2) that audience’s opinions, beliefs, or behaviors. These traditional theories define rhetoric as the art of persuasion, or the means to “produce action or change in the world” (Bitzer, 1968, p. 4). The rhetor creates discourse to modify an exigence and does so by persuading or moving the audience to the rhetor’s intended outcome: an outcome that the rhetor believes will resolve the exigence. This rhetoric focuses on the role of the rhetor, how they perceive the rhetorical situation, and how they attempt to achieve their desired outcome.

Traditional theories, such as Lloyd Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation, can be helpful for considering why and how a rhetor engages their audience. Bitzer (1968) situates the rhetorical situation as the guiding force for rhetorical discourse. His situation is objective; it exists in the world, can be observed, and is characterized by three constituents—exigence, audience, and constraints. The rhetor enters the situation, observes these constituents, and develops a response by considering and navigating the constituents. Bitzer’s first constituent is exigence: the thing that needs to be done or the need that discourse can modify. Although multiple exigences can coexist, there will always be at least one exigence that “functions as the organizing principle” (p. 8). This exigence drives the aim of the discourse. Importantly, Bitzer’s rhetorical situation comes

into existence because of this exigence; the exigence reflects a phenomenon that exists in the world, a need that must be fulfilled. In this way, Bitzer's exigence is not subjective, but an objective phenomenon that can be observed by anyone. Bitzer's second constituent is audience. For Bitzer, the audience consists of those individuals who can affect the exigence that the discourse seeks to modify (p. 8). The audience is another observable constituent of the situation, and the rhetor seeks to understand that audience only to incite their influence on the exigence. In this way, Bitzer's audience exists as it is perceived by the rhetor. While both the exigence and the audience influence the particulars of the situation, it is the third constituent that presents the most variables: the constraints. Bitzer defines constraints as the "persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (p. 8). Constraints are factors that must be dealt with and/or managed as part of the discourse in order to address the exigence. Constraints might involve technologies, tools, or access, as we saw in the literature review on virtual consultations in medicine. However, Bitzer's constraints also involve the attitudes, beliefs, or perceptions of the audience. In Bitzer's rhetorical situation, the audience's perspectives are mere constituents that the rhetor must navigate to achieve the exigence. The rhetor enters a rhetorical situation, observes the exigence, the audience, the constraints, and then develops "a fitting response" (p. 6). In this sense, Bitzer's rhetoric is contingent upon observable factors of a situation—factors that are observed by the rhetor as they enter the rhetorical situation.

Bitzer's theory provides some insight into virtual consultations, and, in fact, the findings presented in the literature on virtual consultations reflect Bitzer's constituents of

audience and constraints. However, Bitzer falls short when it comes to the virtual consultation in cosmetology. First, Bitzer (1968) requires a real, definable rhetorical situation, “objective and publicly observable facts in the world we experience, [that] are therefore available for scrutiny by an observer” (p. 11). This observable situation calls for and subsequently guides the rhetor’s response and interaction with their audience. If virtual consultations emerged solely in response to the COVID-19 pandemic—which represents an observable, definable, objective situation—then Bitzer’s theory might work. Virtual consultations did provide a response to the pandemic, but they did not develop in response to the pandemic, as evidenced by the salon industry’s interest in virtual consultations prior to the pandemic (Cole, 2019a; Cole, 2019b; Cole, 2019c). The pandemic was not the guiding force but rather the reason to promote and utilize a genre that already existed. Further, the exigence that virtual consultations seek to modify can vary by person and by audience. While the ultimate goal of the consultation is to develop an agreed upon service/treatment plan, the exigences that drive this goal can vary dramatically. Stylists want to build a solid cliental, to increase sales, to test new skills. Clients might want to feel confident for a job interview, to make a drastic change after a breakup, or to simplify their style and ease their morning routine. These various exigences—exigences derived from both stylist and audience—add nuance and variability to rhetorical situations that virtual consultations attempt to mediate. Importantly, these exigences reveal differing perspectives regarding the intent and outcome of the consultation.

Next, and more significantly, Bitzer’s theory does not sufficiently credit the audience as a *contributor* who helps define the outcome of the rhetorical situation.

Bitzer's audience presents constraints, but these constraints can be navigated to achieve the rhetor's intent. But virtual consultations in cosmetology rely heavily on input from the client, not only to achieve the exigence as defined by the stylist but also to achieve the exigence as defined by the client. Without drawing the necessary information from the client, the cosmetologist cannot recommend a service. And critically, in determining the appropriate service, the client's preferences and goals are as important as the stylist's. Without understanding the client's perspective—not merely as a constraint that must be navigated but as a contribution to the outcome—the virtual consultation in cosmetology will fail. Further, the audience may experience their own constraints, and these constraints are just as important to the rhetorical situation as those perceived by the rhetor. While Bitzer acknowledges the role of the audience as a constituent in the rhetorical situation, he does not acknowledge the audience's role in defining the scope of the rhetorical situation and, ultimately, in determining its outcome. Bitzer's flattening of the role of audience makes his theory inadequate for examining the virtual consultation in cosmetology.

Critics of Bitzer's theory highlight some of the issues discussed above and offer alternative approaches. For example, Vatz (1981) disagreed with Bitzer's definition of an objective, observable situation. For Vatz, the situation is arbitrary: "arbitrary creations [that] may reflect [the] arbitrary perception" of the rhetor (p. 96). The situation does not dictate the response but, rather, the rhetor's *interpretation* of the situation dictates the response. However, Vatz still focuses on the rhetor and ignores the contributions of the audience, i.e., *their* interpretation of the situation. Similarly, Consigny (1974) argued that rhetorical theory should focus on the rhetor's ability to "become engaged in [a] novel and

indeterminate situation and yet have a means of making sense of it” (p. 179). For Consigny, rhetoric is an art and not the product of an objective, existing situation. Here, the rhetor’s *strategies* become the highlight of analysis, focusing on the rhetor’s ability to make sense of what is happening in evolving situations and to develop an appropriate response to those unique situations. Here again, however, the focus is on the rhetor. Gorell (1997) summarizes the approaches of these three theorists beautifully: “Bitzer’s rhetor enters problems; Vatz’s rhetor invents problems; Consigny’s rhetor solves problems” (p. 398). In all three cases, the rhetor is at the helm and the audience is a constituent that the rhetor seeks to understand “in an effort to change that audience” (p. 401). But Gorell points out an important aspect of the situation that the other theorists neglect: “the audience is [also] participatory and...change is likely to occur in the rhetor as well as in the audience through engagement in the rhetorical situation” (p. 401). According to Gorell, the audience is more than a constituent that the rhetor must persuade; the audience is a *participant* with their own motives. For rhetoric to succeed, the motives of both audience and rhetor must align (p. 405-406). Gorell forces us to consider the role of audience as agent and the strategies that a rhetor must employ to align their motives with those of their audience.

Enter Foss and Griffin and their theory of invitational rhetoric. Invitational rhetoric offers a framework to unpack the virtual consultation in cosmetology because it highlights the role of the audience and the negotiation that occurs between audience and rhetor. Foss and Griffin (1995) presented invitational rhetoric to challenge traditional theories of rhetoric as persuasion or “the conscious intent to change others” (p. 2). Traditional theories place the rhetor in the driver’s seat; the rhetor’s goal is to dominate

the argument and offer the right perspective. Attempts to establish authority or ethos are the rhetor's attempts to establish superiority and to demonstrate that they have more knowledge or greater insight than their audience. This perspective discounts the audience's ability to know what is right for themselves. In medicine, this position might be evident in a doctor diagnosing a patient's condition and prescribing treatment without considering the patient's lifestyle, beliefs, preferences, or holistic experience. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), a rhetorical audience has the right "to act in ways they believe are best for them" (p. 3). As a result, invitational rhetoric promotes equality, immanent value, and self-determinism (p. 4). The goal is to create a relationship between rhetor and audience that reflects these values.

**Operationalizing Invitational Rhetoric.** Invitational rhetoric operates by offering perspectives and creating external conditions that encourage the audience to share their perspectives. Perspectives represent a point of view; they are personal and reflect the perceptions, experiences, and circumstances of unique individuals. The rhetor enters a situation with their own perspectives regarding constraints, benefits, goals, the needs of their audience; however, the audience enters the situation with their own perspectives, which may differ dramatically from the rhetor's, but which the rhetor must nonetheless recognize and respect. Both perspectives are important to the exchange and, ultimately, to facilitating agreement regarding an outcome.

Offering perspectives is exactly what it seems: The rhetor offers their perspective without forcing it on their audience. The rhetor establishes their perspective while welcoming the audience to provide theirs (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p. 7). The purpose is not to dominate but to show the audience what the rhetor brings to the table. This strategy

recognizes that the audience knows what is best for themselves and that the rhetor cannot determine the outcome without their input. In the end, the rhetor and audience may not agree, so the rhetor must be willing to yield (p. 7). Ultimately, offering perspectives provides a mechanism for negotiation.

According to Foss and Griffin (1995), offering can involve both verbal and nonverbal strategies. Rhetors may use traditional rhetorical strategies, e.g., personal narratives, to support their perspective (p. 7). They may use discourse strategies to propose options while avoiding authoritative statements (p. 8). They may engage in dialogue to uncover the audience's needs. Above all, the goal is to understand the perspectives of all parties and present new ways of thinking about the topic to inform decision making (p. 8). The rhetor engages a holistic approach to share their perspective—who the rhetor is, what they represent, and what they bring to the table. In doing so, the rhetor establishes options for the audience to align with their own desires.

Foss and Griffin's (1995) final strategy for offering perspectives is re-sourcement. A rhetor will employ re-sourcement when negotiations might otherwise fail or result in frustration for either party. Re-sourcement reframes the issue and diverts the audience to a new line of thinking (p. 9). In these situations, the rhetor may offer alternative solutions to open "up possibilities for future rhetorical choices [and] provid[e] more options...than previously available" (p. 9). Re-sourcement demonstrates that there is no single solution to the situation and that the rhetor's desired outcome might not be the appropriate outcome.

Once the rhetor has established their perspectives, they must encourage the audience to share theirs. Invitational rhetoric involves creating external conditions that



not only encourage the audience to share their perspectives but welcomes those perspectives. Creating conditions is a rhetorical strategy, a mediator that seeks to uncover the audience's perspectives and bridge the gap between rhetor and audience. In the literature on virtual consultations in medicine, I identified a variety of constraints and benefits while arguing that these constraints and benefits were actually situated in the unique perspectives of the practitioner and patient. Tables 2 and 3 attempted to identify how the individual constraints and benefits might be viewed by both parties. In the table that follows, I demonstrate how to create conditions by way of options, features, or other mechanisms that intentionally solicit the patient's perspective.

**Table 4**

*Creating Conditions to Mediate Perspectives*

<b>Bitzer: Constraints</b>	<b>Rhetor's Perspective</b>	<b>Audience's Perspective</b>	<b>Foss and Griffin: Creating Conditions</b>
Access to technology and internet	The patient needs access to a device and secure internet and feel comfortable with technology.	I have an iPhone, so I can participate.  I have a device, but unreliable internet.  I don't have a device or internet.	Perspectives: Offer options (e.g., smartphone app, pre-paid device, patient portal on practitioner's website, in-person access)
Data security	There are legal and ethical implications for data security.	What if the doctor loses or exposes my personal data? What if my internet is hacked?	Perspectives: Provide instructions / disclaimers
Lack of physical contact	Lack of contact makes it difficult to diagnosis.	Lack of contact will limit my ability to explain my complaint.	Perspectives: Provide instructions. Use a multimodal approach.
Image sharing	I need to see images to make an accurate diagnosis.	I need to show the doctor my complaint so they will understand.	Verbal-nonverbal: Offer multimodal approach (e.g., image sharing)
Information sharing	I need to share information about the patient's treatment plan.	I need to understand my condition and how to treat it.	Verbal-nonverbal: Offer multimodal approach (screen/file sharing)

Documentation requirements	I need to document the encounter for the patient's file and to prevent liability.	I want to be able to review the information my doctor shared after my appointment.	Verbal-nonverbal: Offer multimodal approach (chat feature, built-in documentation feature)
Comfort	I need to make the patient feel comfortable so they will participate.	I want to feel comfortable and familiar with this process if I'm going to participate.	Verbal-nonverbal: Provide instructions. Use familiar tools and technologies.
Rapport	It's more difficult to establish rapport with the patient.	If it's virtual, will they pay attention to me and what I have to say?	Perspectives: Be attentive, responsive, empathetic. Provide information. Involve patient in the exchange.
Distress	It's difficult to recognize patient distress (eye contact, body language).	The doctor is ignoring my distress.	Perspectives: Use patient-centered, explicit communication. Communicate actions.

Table 4 demonstrates how Bitzer's constraints, as identified in the literature on virtual consultations in medicine, can be approached by creating external conditions that illicit the perspective of the audience. For example, a condition to illicit the patient's perspective might include a variety of options for connecting virtually—an app on the patient's smart phone, a patient portal on the practitioner's website, or in-person options if the patient simply cannot connect virtually. To establish the practitioner's perspective on data security and illicit that of the patient, the practitioner should provide instructions and disclaimers regarding risk and protection and offer the option *not* to engage virtually if the patient desires. To address constraints relating to image sharing, information sharing, and documentation, the practitioner should use a multi-modal approach that is designed to solicit the audience's perspective of their condition, share the practitioner's perspective, and document the exchange so both parties can reference the outcomes. And finally, to establish rapport, comfort, and awareness of distress, the practitioner should use familiar tools and processes, use a patient center-approach to communication, and

involve the patient in all aspects of the exchange. The conditions detailed in Table 4 can help bridge perspectives and fulfill the needs of both parties.

According to Foss and Griffin (1995), three external conditions should be created to engage the audience: safety, value, and freedom (p. 10). By creating conditions of safety, value, and freedom, the rhetor relays to their audience that their perspectives are both important and necessary and that the rhetor cannot determine an outcome without their input. By utilizing this strategy, the rhetor recognizes that the audience helps create the situation by helping define the goals of the exchange; the audience is a contributor to the ideal outcome.

First, the rhetor must ensure the audience feels safe. Foss and Griffin's (1995) condition of safety ensures that the audience feels comfortable approaching the rhetor and sharing their perspectives. By creating "a feeling of security and freedom from danger" (p. 10), the rhetor welcomes the audience to share their perspectives without judgement. Traditional strategies that we normally identify as building ethos might also create the condition of safety; if the audience knows they can trust the rhetor, they may be more likely to approach them. If the audience does not feel safe, they may be less likely to engage substantially with the rhetor, they may hedge or avoid sharing their perspectives regarding the situation, and, in the end, they may exit the situation dissatisfied. On the other hand, they may completely avoid the interaction and the rhetorical situation will cease to exist. Because invitational rhetoric seeks to address the needs of both parties, these outcomes would be considered failures.

Next, the rhetor must demonstrate that they value the audience. In invitational rhetoric, the rhetor affirms the audience's perspective as both worthy of consideration

and important to the outcome. Audiences are comprised of unique individuals with unique perspectives. By valuing those perspectives, the rhetor is positioned to achieve an outcome that benefits all. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), rhetors can achieve the condition of value by listening to their audience without interjecting their own opinions or ideas (p. 12). Once again, the goal is to help the audience come to their own decisions. Rhetors can also achieve the condition of value by considering the situation from the audience member's perspective. This approach shows the audience that the rhetor "care[s] about them, understand[s] their ideas" and values their contribution to the exchange (p. 12). If the audience does not feel valued, they may be unwilling to engage with the rhetor or they may get defensive when the rhetor proposes alternatives. The rhetor must show the audience that they have the audience's interest at heart to determine the best outcome.

Finally, the rhetor must establish the condition of freedom. The audience must hold agency and power to decide what is best for them. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), freedom is established "when a rhetor provides opportunities for others to develop and choose options from alternatives" (p. 12). The rhetor helps the audience work through their perspectives and, in doing so, creates options. The audience then has the freedom to determine which option is best for them. Developing options and then giving the audience freedom to choose from those options is not a traditional approach to rhetoric, "where rhetors seek to limit the options of audiences and encourage them to select the one they advocate" (p. 12). However, in invitational rhetoric, the goal is to find an outcome that benefits all parties—even if it involves a rejection of the rhetor's perspective. The rhetor is not "offended, disappointed, or angry if the audience members

choose not to adopt a particular perspective” (p. 12). The rhetor might yield or they may use re-sourcement, but no matter the outcome, they will still value the audience. And, importantly, the audience will know the rhetor still values and respects them because the rhetor will make it clear.

**Criticisms of Invitational Rhetoric.** Foss and Griffin’s invitational rhetoric offers an alternative theory to understand the dynamics and goals of rhetorical situations, but their theory is not without criticism. Most significantly, invitational rhetoric operates on “good faith”; that is, both parties must be willing to listen, collaborate, and work together to achieve a shared goal, even if each party defines that goal differently. Invitational rhetoric is situated in concepts of imminent value and equality, which are certainly ideals to pursue, but which are not realized in all cases. Lozano-Reich and Cloud (2009) criticized invitational rhetoric’s assumption of “economic, political, and social equality among interlocutors” (p. 220), arguing that these conditions are rare. According to these scholars, we should be especially cautious of invitational rhetoric in situations where power dynamics *do* exist (p. 221). In such cases, invitational rhetoric could be used to gloss over or even discount power dynamics.

Another criticism is that invitational rhetoric is not appropriate for all situations. For example, the rhetorical situation posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to vaccinate the public cannot be solved through invitational rhetoric. Invitational rhetoric defines outcomes in collaboration with one’s audience and, therefore, is inappropriate in cases where outcomes cannot be negotiated due to public health, safety, or similar concerns. Invitational rhetoric *could* be used to identify individual perspectives on vaccine hesitancy; however, invitational rhetoric’s guiding principle of self-determinism

eliminates its appropriateness for situations that extend beyond the individual. That is, by centering a rhetorical audience's right "to act in ways they believe are best for them" (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p.3), invitational rhetoric eliminates the shared responsibility those individuals have to collective crisis. Invitational rhetoric offers *one* approach to rhetoric, but not *the* approach. Therefore, it is important to view invitational rhetoric as an alternative approach to the right *type* of rhetorical situation but not to all (Bone et al., 2008, p. 441).

A final critique involves invitational rhetoric as an alternative to persuasion. Persuasive elements inevitably exist in the presentation and counter of options between rhetor and audience. Bone et al. (2008) attempt to establish a distinction: "In rhetoric as persuasion, agency is present when a person tries to change another person; in rhetoric as invitation, agency is present when a rhetor tries to understand another rhetor, even if they do not agree." (p. 446). An important point can be drawn from this comment: In rhetoric as persuasion, there is rhetor and audience. In rhetoric as invitation, there are two rhetors. Both might employ persuasion, but the goal is to understand. As a result of this criticism, an analysis based in invitational rhetoric should focus on invitational rhetoric's potential for collaboration, rather than attempting to highlight non-persuasive elements.

**Relevance to Technical Communication.** Despite the limitations identified above, invitational rhetoric nonetheless offers a framework for technical communication, particularly in rhetorical situations that involve collaboration. Technical communicators recognize the importance of audience and our responsibility to attend to their needs. In this vein, Johnson (1997) promoted the "active, collaborative, and negotiated nature" of involving audience in our approaches (p. 361). Invitational rhetoric offers a mechanism to

involve our audience and promote collaboration in our work. Further, invitational rhetoric has made an appearance in technical communication scholarship in recent years. For example, Jarvis (2021) applied concepts from invitational rhetoric to examine how knowledge about infertility, as shared by women, develops outside traditional medical spaces, e.g., in online forums (p. 1). Durá (2018) highlighted invitational rhetoric as a mechanism for participatory research where “participants are seen as co-contributors... not just clients but whole persons with agentic value” (p. 27). Durá argued that such an approach reflects basic concepts in technical communication, usability, and user-centered design (p. 27), thereby establishing invitational rhetoric as an approach to the type of work we already do. Finally, Murtarelli et al. (2021) referenced invitational rhetoric as a strategy to develop effective and ethical chatbot-human interactions (p. 932). Together, these examples offer insight into the ways that invitational rhetoric can inform theoretical approaches and best practices in technical communication.

In summary, invitational rhetoric seeks to create options and highlights the necessity of working with the audience to create and identify an outcome to the rhetorical situation. By creating external conditions of safety, value, and freedom, the rhetor engages their audience and encourages them to share their perspectives. Ultimately, the rhetor seeks an outcome that is preferred by all. As a framework for technical communication, invitational rhetoric provides a mechanism for collaboration and is an appropriate framework for the virtual consultation in cosmetology, where the guiding exigence goes beyond the intent of the rhetor. The virtual consultation in cosmetology seeks to establish realistic goals that will deliver outcomes benefiting the stylist *and* the client. Invitational rhetoric offers a mechanism to achieve these collaborative goals.

## VII. RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

The rhetorical analysis that follows focuses on West's Instagram profile (West, n.d.f), which is the artifact that she uses to conduct virtual consultations. The analysis is supplemented by an hour-long, in-depth Facebook Live video interview where West discusses her strategies with Michael Cole of Summit Salon Business Center (SSBC) (Cole and Cole, 2020a). By examining West's approach to the virtual consultation, we can better understand how stylists approach consultations in virtual spaces. We can also see how this particular stylist presents her perspectives, or what she brings to the table, while welcoming the perspectives of her clients and, ultimately, how the two work together to arrive at an outcome that addresses both of their needs. Stylists wants to develop good relationships that result in happy, loyal clients and appropriate pay for their services. Clients want to look and feel good at the end of their appointment and, importantly, they want to feel comfortable with the price. Each participant—rhetor and audience—has an agenda and a successful outcome depends on whether these agendas come together.

This analysis does not attempt to identify constraints or benefits of the virtual consultation in cosmetology or expand upon those identified in the literature. Rather, this analysis expands on the concept of perspective, as presented in the literature review, and how to create conditions that promote the sharing of perspectives. Perspectives result in constraints, benefits, exigences, and desired outcomes; therefore, understanding how invitational rhetoric helps create conditions that promote the sharing of perspectives can help us better understand the nuance of rhetorical situations and the role of both rhetor *and* audience in creating these situations. West's Instagram account and her discussion of



the virtual consultation offer insight into how rhetors establish their own perspectives while encouraging the audience to share *their* perspectives, both of which are necessary to fully understand a rhetorical situation and to identify outcomes that benefit all.

However, by solely focusing on West, my analysis is limited. I present a sustained examination of one-side of the rhetorical situation—the rhetor’s perspective—but I do not provide sufficient insight into the audience’s perspective. A comprehensive analysis of the virtual consultation in cosmetology, one that is situated in invitational rhetoric and that considers the perspectives of all parties, must examine both sides—rhetor and audience—and their individual contributions to the rhetorical situation. As a result, this analysis can be considered Phase 1 of a multi-phase study; Phase 2 would focus on the audience’s perspective, how they respond to West’s efforts, and, importantly, whether they believe their perspectives contribute to and affect the outcome of the rhetorical situation.

Despite this limitation, West’s approach to the virtual consultation in cosmetology offers rich insight into the role of the rhetor in invitational rhetoric and displays the hallmarks of Foss and Griffin’s theory. Therefore, my rhetorical analysis is organized into sections that align with this theory: 1) offering perspectives and 2) creating external conditions. First, I consider how West establishes her own perspectives, how she solicits the perspectives of her audience, and how she attempts to bring these perspectives into agreement. Next, I look for evidence of Foss and Griffin’s external conditions of safety, value, and freedom, and I consider how West creates these conditions to encourage her clients to share their perspectives. The findings offer insight into how rhetors and audiences work together to create complex, nuanced rhetorical situations that are guided

by the perspectives of both rhetor and audience, and where appropriate outcomes must address the needs and exigences of both parties.

### ***Offering Perspectives***

First and foremost, invitational rhetoric centers on offering perspectives, which can be accomplished through both verbal and non-verbal rhetorical strategies. As a reminder, a perspective is a point of view, a way of looking at the world or a particular situation. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), “Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor’s world and to see it as the rhetor does” (p. 5). West invites her audience into her world via her Instagram account to build a complex picture of her point of view—what she knows and what she offers her clients. By offering her perspective, West creates options for her clients. She uses both text-based and visual features to create a holistic picture of what she brings to the table, and, ultimately, to point new *and* existing clients to request a virtual consultation. Her bio includes the welcoming tagline, “Our industry is a gift”—a gift that West offers her clients (West, n.d.f). She presents a series of “Story Highlights,” which Instagram defines as “a quick, easy way to share moments and experiences” and which incorporate a variety of media: videos, text, music, etc. (Instagram, 2021). West’s Story Highlights introduce clients to the trainings she conducts for SSBC, her associates/apprentices, and her happy, post-appointment clients (West, n.d.a; West, n.d.d; West, n.d.g). She highlights the measures her salon takes to protect clients from COVID-19, and she introduces her methods for booking appointments (West, n.d.b; West, n.d.c). These Stories create a “virtual world” that invites clients into her space, giving them a preview of her work and encouraging them to contact her for a virtual consultation.

West's Instagram profile includes other features, including an image grid, which showcases her work through client "after shots" (West, n.d.f), and an IGTV, which features instructional and promotional videos of her and her associates at work in the salon (West, n.d.e). The Story Highlights, grid, and IGTV work together, "wrapping around the givee," welcoming them (virtually) into the salon and demonstrating that West is "available to [them] without insisting" (Gearhart, 1982, p.198). The latter, being available without insisting, is then exemplified by offering the virtual consultation through Instagram's direct message (DM) feature. West strategically includes the phrase "Virtual Consultations" in her Instagram bio, so it is one of the first things new clients see on her profile (West, n.d.f). By including this phrase in such a dominate location, West establishes a precedent—virtual consultations are part of her process. Further, West argues that highlighting virtual consultations in her bio often sparks conversations with clients, who wonder "What's a virtual consultation?" (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 1:35). Her bio offers insight into her process—her perspective, the process as she sees it—while reminding her audience to offer *their* perspective. She goes on to include a Story Highlight that formally introduces the virtual consultation and details her perspective regarding the goals of the exchange (West, n.d.h). West immediately establishes her point of view regarding her work: she offers industry experience, a happy cliental, a well-trained team of associates *as well as* one-on-one consultations to welcome and understand *her client's* perspective. In doing so, she invites clients into her world and formally welcomes them to her table at their own convenience.

Similarly, West enters her clients' worlds by following them back on Instagram. West states that engaging with her clients on social media allows her to get to know them

(Cole and Cole, 2020a, 5:48-6:10). This effort, in combination with a pre-appointment virtual consultation, eliminates the nervousness new clients may feel when they first sit in her chair. The virtual consultation constitutes a “first visit,” so when clients come to the salon for their first “real” appointment, there is room for a more personal and intimate interaction. West already knows their lifestyle and the things going on in their life, “whether they were going on vacation or trying a new recipe or hanging out with their kiddos at home” (5:30-5:44). By entering her client’s world and welcoming them into hers, West establishes a personal relationship that makes her client feel like they already know each other. Further, following clients on social media can help stylists approach hair and product recommendations based on the unique needs or characteristics of that client. According to *Milady Standard Cosmetology*, reviewing the client’s lifestyle is an integral step in the consultation and should inform the stylist’s recommendations (Backe et al., 2016, pp. 55-58). West eliminates this step—or effectively reduces the time spent on it—by doing the homework herself. By following her clients on social media, she gets to know them on a more personal level. In doing so, she positions herself to better understand her client’s perspectives, where they are coming from, and what might inform their decision making.

West centers her communication efforts on understanding the needs of her clients. This focus on audience is typical of invitational rhetoric, where “rhetors recognize the valuable contributions audience members make to the rhetor’s own thinking and understanding” (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p. 6). In her “Virtual Consultation” Story Highlight, West shares the following: “What do I need from you? Your past 3-year hair story. 2-3 inspiration photos. Photos of your hair in natural light: front, back, and both

sides” (West, n.d.h). West immediately establishes the content she needs from her clients; in doing so, she equips her audience for the consultation and relays the message that without their input, she cannot proceed with recommendations for an appropriate service. Further, the first line is posed as a question: “What do I need from you?” This statement immediately establishes the potential for dialogue, presupposing that the audience has a question and that West is prepared to answer it. West avoids authoritative statements, e.g., “I need...” in favor of an inquiring tone that elicits the audience’s perspective regarding the state of their hair and their desired outcome.

Ultimately, the virtual consultation offers clients the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their stylist and help develop their treatment plan. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), engaging in dialogue helps uncover the audience’s needs (p. 8). Dialogue, therefore, is critical to the outcome. West’s virtual consultation uses text-based dialogue with the addition of visual elements to supplement and clarify the discourse. The client initiates the transaction via a direct message (DM) on Instagram, following prompts West has established on her profile. These prompts reduce the number of questions that West has to ask during the consultation (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 3:25-3:55). Because West has equipped the client with information they need prior to the consultation, the dialogue in the DM is audience driven; that is, the dialogue is initiated by the audience and immediately reflects their perspective—what *they* want to achieve.

West provides two detailed examples of virtual consultations with new clients in her Facebook Live interview with Cole. In the first example, a client reaches out to West via DM and immediately provides the information that West requests in her “Virtual Consultation” Story Highlight (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 2:33-3:55). The client provides

their perspective: the problem as they see it, the current state of their hair, what they hope to achieve, along with current images of their hair and inspiration pictures for their desired outcome (3:06-4:33). West reviews the client's information to see what is possible and then follows up with an "explanation of what's gonna happen, how this can work, and if it's doable for her" (4:54-5:00). That last statement is important. Regardless of West's perspective on the situation—what she thinks is best for the client or what she recommends—she also recognizes that the client may say no. Or, at the very least, West recognizes that the client may require an alternative option. In the second example, a new client contacts West via DM and asks if West prefers virtual consultations prior to hair cut appointments, clarifying whether virtual consultations are limited to color appointments. West responds, "If you would like to!" (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 21:20-21:32). Here, again, West avoids authoritative statements, highlighting her client's agency and her desire to meet their needs. In both cases, the clients approach West and immediately share their perspective because they have been encouraged and equipped to do so.

While engaging in dialogue is at the core of West's virtual consultation, other non-verbal rhetorical strategies are integral to her overall approach. Foss and Griffin (1995) state that offering can also be visual (p. 9). West's Instagram profile and her interactions with her clients apply non-verbal strategies to provide evidence of her perspective and supplement her client's ability to offer theirs. First, West uses visual testimonies from her existing clients to promote her work. Clients are encouraged to post "after" selfies on their own Instagram accounts using the hashtag #bettyselfie. West then reposts these "selfies from happy clients" (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 23:18-24:18) and add

them to her “Client Selfies” Story Highlights. At present, her “Client Selfies” highlight contains over 80 posts (West, n.d.d). West demonstrates what she offers her clients by sharing the perspectives of her existing clients—what they think and feel after their experience with her. These visual testimonies are rhetorically effective not only because they build ethos but because they create a sense of security, demonstrating to new clients what she has already offered *existing* clients. The client selfies showcase her work and highlight how happy her clients are with the results. By including “Client Selfies” in her Story Highlights, West tells her clients that they are in good hands. Further, by highlighting these outcomes, West demonstrates that, for her, the optimal outcome is exceeding her clients’ expectations. Her perspective is clear: her goal, a happy client.

Next, West’s Instagram grid is largely composed of “after” shots from her client appointments (West, n.d.f). The grid does two things: 1) it showcases her work and 2) it provides inspiration photos, a remediation of the classic “look books” formerly found in salons. Clients can peruse West’s grid to see the styles she offers and to find inspiration photos to share with her during their virtual consultation. West offers her clients visual evidence of her perspective, the looks she considers her best work, while also providing a mechanism for her clients to visually explain their preferred look. And, importantly, the grid *offers options*. It is both informational and inspirational, a showcase of the looks that West creates and a prompt to contact her for a virtual consultation.

Similarly, clients use non-verbal strategies to offer their perspective regarding their hair and, ultimately, their desired outcome. In both examples that West provides of virtual consultations with real clients, the client shares photos of their hair in its current state (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 3:30-3:33; 22:06-22:08). These images are critical to the

virtual consultation. In-person consultations involve haptic processes; the stylist can see, touch, and feel the client's hair to determine its texture, health, history, etc. But these haptic processes are not possible in a virtual consultation. By sharing images of their hair in its current state, the client offers evidence to support the description of their three-year hair history, as requested by West in her "Virtual Consultation" Story Highlight (West, n.d.h). West can zoom in on these pictures to see the client's hair in detail, develop a road map, and determine a realistic outcome (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 4:00-4:09). Clients also send images to share their perspective on what they *want* to achieve. In West's first example of a virtual consultation in action, the client sends three inspirational photos that she pulled from West's grid (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 4:14-4:18). West then uses these inspiration photos to deconstruct the client's perspective. She can "see," for example, that the client wants more dimension and "can tell from these three photos different pieces that she's wanting" (4:17-4:31). By pulling inspiration from West's grid, the client aligns their perspective with West's; that is, the client points directly to an option that West has already offered, aligning their needs (or their perspective) to what West considers her best work (her perspective).

**Willingness to Yield and Re-Sourcement.** In invitational rhetoric, offering perspectives seeks to identify a solution that works for all parties. Therefore, at its core, offering perspectives relies on a willingness to yield (Foss and Griffin, 1995, p. 7). In her Facebook Live interview with Cole, West addresses her willingness to yield when the client is not ready or prepared for the services that are required to achieve their desired outcome. In these cases, the client and West cannot come to an agreement about the service or, importantly, the price of the service. West says, "I have no hard feelings, I



don't feel bad about it. That's why I give people price quotes" (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 11:30-11:35). This potential outcome—and West's response to it—is typical of invitational rhetoric. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), rhetors who use invitational rhetoric are not "offended, disappointed, or angry if the audience members choose not to adopt a particular perspective" (p. 12). These rhetors accept that an ideal outcome for all parties may not be possible.

However, to remedy these situations, West uses another rhetorical strategy that is typical of invitational rhetoric: re-sourcement. In these cases, West recommends an alternative approach, offering options based on the client's needs and steering them toward a realistic outcome that is as close to their desired look as possible. West may recommend an alternative style, for example, or multiple sessions to keep the cost down and "take baby steps" toward the client's goal (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 10:35-10:55). The client may have to yield, as well, acknowledging that what they want is not possible or may be difficult to achieve. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), "[C]hange occurs in the audience or rhetor or both as a result of new understanding and insights gained in the exchange of ideas" (p. 6). West and her client may have to negotiate outcomes as more information and more options come to light. Ultimately, if the alternatives she proposes are unacceptable, West will recommend the client to her associates, who are more affordable and who "do hair just like I do. I train them, and I feel very confident with sending people to them" (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 11:03-11:15). By promoting her associates' work in her Story Highlights (West, n.d.a), West has already laid the foundation for re-sourcement in cases where it is necessary. Importantly, the virtual consultation provides an opportunity for re-sourcement before the client gets to the salon,

ensuring that clients know their options, understand what to expect, agree to the treatment, and are prepared for the final ticket. West highlights how important the virtual consultation is to this outcome: If the client is already in the stylist's chair and is not happy with what is being proposed, they may feel "trapped" and forced to proceed (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 11:25-12:16). The virtual consultation and sharing of perspectives that precedes the appointment eliminates the risk of clients arriving for their appointment, going through the process, and leaving dissatisfied.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that the information West provides on her Instagram profile creates options and demonstrates what she offers her clients, reflecting her perspective regarding her work and her skillset. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), "insight that is persuasive is offered by a rhetor not to support the superiority of a particular perspective but to contribute to the understanding by all participants of the issue and of one another" (p. 6). West's Story Highlights are strategically placed on her profile: Associates, Summit, Client Selfies, Virtual Consultations (West, n.d.f). Together, these stories build what would traditionally be considered *ethos* or authority. But West's Stories do more than that: they create an image of West that make clients feel comfortable approaching her. By highlighting her associates, she demonstrates her role as an instructor who cares about her team and who values their work as much as her own. These personal narratives provide an intimate look into her day-to-day work. By using her Stories to highlight her role as a consultant for Salon Summit Business Center (SSBC), West demonstrates that she brings insight not only to her work but to the work of others. Her perspective can be trusted because it is trusted by the industry. By highlighting client selfies, she offers insight into work she's already done and clients who

have benefited from that work. All of these Stories lead to the virtual consultation, where West solicits the perspective of her client. By welcoming clients into her world, West demonstrates why clients can trust her perspective and what she proposes. She provides evidence to support her perspective while soliciting the perspective of her clients and trying to understand what they can and cannot agree to accept.

### ***Creating External Conditions***

The previous section demonstrated ways that West establishes her perspective using both visual and non-visual means while also offering her clients a mechanism (the virtual consultation) and the necessary guidance and tools to offer theirs. However, West also creates the external conditions of safety, value, and freedom that Foss and Griffin (1995) identify as integral to invitational rhetoric. West's clients must feel safe to share their perspectives. They should feel that their perspectives will be valued, that they *themselves* are valued. And finally, they must have the freedom to determine the outcome that works best for them. West effectively creates these conditions of safety, value, and freedom to welcome clients to her profile, invite them to a virtual consultation, build rapport, and identify outcomes that benefit her *and* her client.

**Safety.** West uses a variety of strategies to create the condition of safety, encouraging clients to reach out to her for a virtual consultation, to feel comfortable sharing their perspective, and to help her identify an appropriate outcome. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), "Safety involves the creation of a feeling of security and freedom from danger (p. 10)." From the client's perspective, approaching a stranger for a virtual consultation, requesting a specific outcome, and then haggling over that outcome (or the price of that outcome) is not dangerous in the traditional sense, but it *can* be

intimidating. If the client doesn't feel "safe," they may be hesitant to share what they truly desire or to express discomfort with the outcome West proposes. Or they may avoid the encounter completely. In each case, West risks losing a client and the client risks losing their time and money on an outcome they didn't want. Creating the condition of safety can eliminate these issues by encouraging clients to speak their mind during the virtual consultation.

Much of West's approach to offering perspectives creates the condition of safety. As mentioned previously, her Instagram profile highlights her industry experience, existing cliental, and team of associates (West, n.d.a; West, n.d.d; West, n.d.g). She includes instructional videos on her IGTV to give her followers a detailed look into her process (West, n.d.e). She highlights safety protocols that her salon takes to protect clients from COVID-19 (West, n.d.c). By including visual testimonies shared by existing clients, West invites her audience to join her community. These features on her Instagram profile work together to send her clients a message: "No worries, you're in good hands." Further, using Instagram to conduct virtual consultations increases her clients' sense of safety; Instagram is a familiar tool, a platform they engage with daily and are comfortable using. These strategies make West feel approachable and "safe."

Importantly, West preps her clients by providing the information they need to engage in a virtual consultation. Her "Virtual Consultation" Story Highlight (West, n.d.h) demonstrates that client perspectives are both welcome and necessary to the outcome. West needs to understand how they see their hair in its current state and what they desire in terms of price, style, and upkeep. More critically, the highlight instructs clients on what *they* need to provide during the exchange, equipping them for the encounter. The

“Virtual Consultation” highlight creates a sense of security because it offers a preview into the exchange; new clients know what to expect and the type of information they need to bring to the table.

West also creates the condition of safety by positioning herself as “a friend” and by highlighting the benefits of consulting virtually instead of in-person. In her “Virtual Consultation” highlight, West defines the virtual consultation as “a previsit reservation that happens from the comfort of your own home” (West, n.d.h). As we saw in the literature on virtual consultations in medicine, there are multiple benefits for engaging in a consultation at home—reduced travel, time savings, etc. (Kilvert et al., 2020; Gillman-Wells et al., 2020; Almathami et al., 2020; Malik & Sadler, 2020; Li et al., 2020; De La Cruz Monroy & Mosahebi, 2019). However, in this case, the statement “from the comfort of your own home” immediately creates a sense of security. The client will engage from their own space and on their own accord. West highlights a benefit of virtual consultations while also highlighting the “comfort” that this benefit offers her clients. West goes on to position herself as a friend, immediately establishing an intimate relationship with her client even though she has never met them. In her Story Highlights, West says that virtual consultations are “as easy as setting up brunch with your friends! How fun?!” (West, n.d.h). The image of “brunch with friends” offers a safe, carefree, welcoming environment where opinions can be shared without judgement. By including this phrase, West creates a sense of friendship and, as a result, a sense of safety.

Finally, and importantly, West is transparent. She does not over promise, she offers realistic options, and she does not downplay critical information, such as risk and cost. Transparency eliminates surprises and creates a sense of security because, once

again, clients know what to expect. In the first example she provides of a DM virtual consultation, West texts with her client what the proposed service will entail:

That is definitely doable, but will take us a few times (2-3) to get it perfect for you. Because you are so solid now, adding dimension takes more than once for it to stay in your hair! Something that is absolutely doable, and our first time together we will get to a great spot; just being transparent about the process! (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 4:47).

She goes on to text, “With all of this being said, we are going into a color correction. The price for your first reservation is going to be \$515-555. If you have any further questions or problems...please reach out!” (9:37-9:51). West reiterates the importance of “back and forth” communication and transparency (8:08-8:12). By disclosing what her clients should expect, she offers them a safe space to refuse her offer before they get to the salon or to voice lingering questions or concerns. Finally, West loops back to the friendship/brunch concept by telling her client, “It’s going to be so fun!” (9:19-9:22). By offering her client the information they need to make an informed decision, and by reiterating the “friendly” experience she offers, West creates a space that feels safe and welcoming to her clients.

**Value.** Valuing her clients’ needs, time, expectations, etc. is at the center of West’s approach to the virtual consultation. West offers her own perspectives throughout her Instagram account—in her Story Highlights, her grid, her IGTV, etc. But by offering the option for a one-on-one virtual consultation in the same digital space, she demonstrates that she also values her *client’s* perspective. By creating a space for dialogue, West reminds her clients that she is available to them and prepared to hear their

concerns. The option to initiate and engage in a virtual consultation provides evidence that the client's perspective is valuable and necessary to the outcome.

Importantly, West centers her clients throughout the exchange. She reiterates the importance of being available and responding quickly when a client reaches out. If she can't respond immediately, she says why. In the first example West provides of a virtual consultation over DM, West tells her client, "Thank you for reaching out! Sorry it took me a minute to reach back out! It's been a busy weekend!" (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 4:38-4:46). She highlights the importance of "recognizing... hey, I'm sorry I didn't respond immediately" (4:46-4:51). By either responding immediately or providing a reason for her delay, West reiterates to her clients that she values their time. Further, West recognizes that the DM format is not one size fits all and that a digital call may be necessary for some clients (17:10-17:23). The option to change mediums demonstrates that West is responsive to her client's needs. Further, her willingness to adjust shows her client that they are central to the exchange and, therefore, she is willing to do whatever is needed to gather and understand their perspective.

Further, the virtual consultation offers clients a preliminary visit to facilitate information exchange and consensus *before* the client enter the salon, opening the door for more personal rapport when the client *does* enter the salon. During the virtual consultation, West collects technical information—the client's hair history, the current state of their hair, their hair goals. She negotiates what is/is not possible, works with the client to develop a workplan, and gives them a price for services (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 2:45-5:00; 9:00-9:51). With the completion of a virtual "first visit," West has now engaged with her client on social media, followed them back, and familiarized herself

with the client's lifestyle. During the client's first appointment, which is now a "second visit," she can reference real events in their life, e.g., vacation plans or activities with their kids (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 5:30-5:44). West shows her customers that she values them by spending time to get to know them and by building a personal relationship with them before they sit down in her chair. While the goal of the virtual consultation is to collect information, negotiate outcomes, and build consensus, the virtual consultation also creates the condition of value by initiating personal rapport that is integral to future, in-person exchanges and client retention.

Finally, West highlights the importance of effective communication and transparency in virtual consultations and the subsequent effect this approach has on client relationships. The virtual consultation offers a "customized" experience for each client, demonstrating that they are special and "not just another guest in the chair to hit your numbers" (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 8:08-8:42). West says she will often loop back to the exchange she had in a virtual consultation, following up with her now-committed client to say, "Hey, I was thinking about our virtual consultation last night, and this is what... I'm inspired by" (8:25-8:30). By offering this customized experience, West creates the condition of value by centering her clients and encouraging them to share their needs so she can craft a personalized experience for them. West goes on to say that, after the virtual consultation, her new client is "now a forever client" because of the "communication...and transparency and openness" of their exchange (8:00-8:14). Promoting transparency, particularly as it relates to realistic outcomes and price, demonstrates that, no matter the client's perspective, West will value it. And she doesn't stop there: she continues to value the client even when they are no longer hers. If West is



forced to use re-sourcing and send a client to one of her associates, she makes a point to compliment the outcome. She makes a point to remind clients that she values them, whether they decided to book with her or not, that she hasn't "forgotten about them and that just because they couldn't afford me, doesn't mean I don't care about them" (13:35-14:25). Although the primary exigence of the virtual consultation is to collect information and develop consensus regarding an outcome, a successful virtual consultation will result in much more—a lasting relationship in which the client feels both valued and respected.

**Freedom.** The final condition of invitational rhetoric is the condition of freedom. At the end of the day, the client holds agency to determine what is best for them. As rhetor, West offers options to help the client make this determination. According to Foss and Griffin (1995), "Perspectives are articulated as a means to widen options—to generate more ideas than either rhetors or audience had initially—in contrast to traditional rhetoric, where rhetors seek to limit the options of audiences and encourage them to select the one they advocate" (p. 12). West presents a variety of options throughout her Instagram profile. Her grid presents image after image of styles that her clients can choose from (West, n.d.f). Her Story Highlights promote her associates, introducing clients to their work and providing additional options when they need a stylist (West, n.d.a). West does not limit virtual consultations to "office hours"; she offers clients the freedom to contact her via DM whenever and wherever is most convenient for them. And although West prefers conducting virtual consultations over DM, she recognizes that some clients need more personal attention: "If you need to hop on a digital call, absolutely, I've done that," (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 17:15-17:20). She shows her clients that she values their needs by offering them the freedom to choose the

platform they feel comfortable using. West continuously defers to the needs of her client: the outcome of the virtual consultation always depends on whether West's recommendations are "doable for [them]" (4:58-4:59). If the options she offers are *not* doable, then West offers more, leaving the option for negotiation or refusal if their perspectives don't "click."

Oftentimes, what is or is not doable centers on price. West knows the value of her services, and she won't back down on price; however, she will not force her clients, potential or existing, to accept services that they aren't comfortable paying for. The client has the agency to accept or not to accept, and, either way, West will respect their decision. She tells Cole that she too has experienced sticker shock and wishes someone would have "talked about what the best options for me were" before she committed to the service (Cole and Cole, 2020a, 11:36-11:54). And although West is not willing to yield on price, she is willing to yield her services or apply re-sourcing, redirecting the exchange to offer her clients *more* options. As mentioned previously, West will start by offering alternatives depending on what the client wants, doing her best to keep the cost down, and, if all else fails, referring the client to her associates, who offer similar services at a reduced rate (10:32-11:17). By being transparent and ensuring her clients know their options *before* they book their service, West gains her client's trust (11:53-12:02). More importantly, she offers them the freedom to determine an appropriate outcome for themselves.

## VIII. SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

This rhetorical analysis sought to answer the following questions: *How do stylists approach the virtual consultation in cosmetology? How do stylists create conditions that establish their perspectives, solicit their audience's perspectives, and promote understanding between the two?*

First, this study provides a case study of how stylists approach virtual consultations and particularly how they create digital spaces to engage audiences and facilitate sharing of perspectives. Significantly, West uses a familiar tool—a popular social media platform—to engage her clients. She incorporates all features of Instagram—Story Highlights, grid, IGTV, direct messages, etc.—to create a “virtual world” for her clients to enter. This “virtual world” connects all aspects of her workflow, from trainings to scheduling to post-appointment client selfies, and offers a look into the options she offers her clients and what they will experience if they purchase her services. Next, by using the Instagram direct message (DM) feature to conduct consultations, she creates a space for dialogue to uncover her clients’ needs—dialogue that is documented and which can be accessed after the fact. She offers prompts and instructions that clients can reference to guide their dialogue. The option to DM is always available, so clients can initiate a consultation at their own convenience. Further, although the DM is her preference, she is not bound to it and will engage in digital calls in response to the unique needs of her clients. Her approach to the virtual consultation centers on her client; she makes sure they have all options necessary to make an informed decision and that they understand the commitment they are making. If at any point the client does not feel comfortable proceeding, West is prepared to yield or to use re-sourcing; that is, she

will continue to offer alternative options until the client is satisfied with the outcome. She uses both verbal and nonverbal communication strategies to facilitate information sharing, including direct messaging, image sharing, instructional videos, and other features.

In response to the second research question, a variety of strategies emerged for establishing the rhetor's perspective, uncovering the audience's perspective, and promoting understanding between both. First, West does not wait for the virtual consultation to establish her perspective; her point of view, her "world" as she sees it, is built into the various elements of her Instagram profile. She showcases her best work in her image grid, she provides instructional videos that demonstrate her work in action, she highlights her happy clients, and she offers insight into the processes that make it all possible: professional trainings, booking tools, safety protocols, and virtual consultations. When clients stumble upon her Instagram profile, they are immediately introduced to who she is, what she offers, and how she works.

Next, West provides a mechanism that is specifically geared to gather her client's perspective: the virtual consultation. West anticipates the information that clients will want/need to know and provides that information upfront. In doing so, she eliminates some of the back and forth that could otherwise overtake the virtual consultation and, instead, focuses the consultation on the task at hand: uncovering the client's needs and desires. As mentioned previously, her approach to the virtual consultation centers on her client. She educates them on the virtual consultation process as well as their role in that process—and she demonstrates how important the latter is to the outcome. By educating her clients, she equips them to engage in the virtual consultation and creates the

necessary conditions for them to immediately offer their perspectives. This approach, along with features that establish her own perspective, creates a space that welcomes clients into her world and encourages them to contact her for a virtual consultation.

Finally, West engages her clients by creating the conditions of safety, value, and freedom, all of which encourage them to reach out, trust her, and share their perspectives. She builds trust by highlighting her trainings, her team, her cliental, and her work. But these trust-building strategies serve another purpose: they create a sense of security, make new clients feel comfortable contacting her, and make them feel like they are joining a community. She avoids the learning curve of a customized platform by using something her clients already know and feel comfortable using: Instagram. She preps them with instructions, videos, and images, so they enter the exchange knowing what to expect. She is transparent throughout so her clients know exactly what to expect. And perhaps most significantly, West positions herself as a friend. She immediately establishes rapport, offering her clients a safe and friendly encounter where they can engage without judgement or fear. She demonstrates that she values her clients and the perspective they bring to the table by creating a place for dialogue and reiterating the importance of that dialogue to the outcome. She responds quickly when they contact her or she provides an explanation if she is unable to do so. She gets to know her client, using social networks to understand their lifestyle and to develop a relationship before they enter her salon, demonstrating that they are a person and not just a number on her books. And finally, she offers them the freedom to determine the outcome, options to inform their decision, more options if they don't like the initial offer, and even more options if she is forced to yield. In offering these options, West reiterates to her clients that she values and respects their

decision, no matter the outcome.

The results of this rhetorical analysis offer practical implications to inform consultations in virtual spaces by demonstrating that audience is not merely a constituent that the rhetor must navigate but a contributor with perspectives that inform the situation. More significantly, this analysis demonstrated how rhetors can create conditions that solicit audience perspectives to develop and achieve outcomes that respond to the goals of all parties. The virtual consultation in cosmetology demonstrated a variety of approaches that encourage sharing of perspectives in digital spaces, e.g., presenting options verbally, textually, and visually; providing instructions; incorporating features for dialogue and image sharing; and creating conditions of safety, value, and freedom to encourage participation. Similar features were identified in the literature: image sharing (Scarborough et al., 2020), screen sharing (Gillman-Wells et al., 2020), and chat features (Islind et al., 2019). My analysis demonstrated the necessity of presenting adequate information to guide discourse and visual resources that establish the rhetor's perspective while also providing a reference for the audience to present theirs. Finally, my analysis highlighted the importance of centering the client and being responsive to their needs. Again, the literature supported these findings by highlighting the necessity of involving patients equally in the exchange (Xing et al., 2019) and creating conditions of comfort and familiarity (Almathami et al., 2020; Kilvert et al., 2020; Xing et al., 2019), rapport (Kilvert et al., 2020), empathy, attentiveness, responsiveness, respect, and professionalism (Malik & Sadler, 2020; Stommel et al., 2019; Xing et al., 2019). This combination of features and strategies—both verbal and nonverbal—can help facilitate the sharing of perspectives and, thereby, improve the audience's engagement in and

contribution to the virtual consultation.

From a theoretical standpoint, this analysis demonstrates that rhetors do not always respond to an existing, observable rhetorical situation, as define by Bitzer (1968), nor does the rhetorical situation develop solely from the rhetor's interpretation of the situation (Vatz, 1981), nor does the rhetorical situation merely reflect the rhetor's approach to evolving situations (Consigny, 1974). Rather, in some rhetorical situations, rhetors collaborate with their audience to co-create rhetorical situations and determine outcomes that benefit all. While this study was limited in its observation of audience response to the rhetorical situation, the study did demonstrate strategies that rhetors can take to create conditions that allow for co-creation of rhetorical situations with their audience. The audience is not merely a constituent that the rhetor must consider but a contributor to the outcome, a co-creator of the situation, who the rhetor must work with to fulfill not only their own intentions but the intentions of their audience. To understand the audience's intentions, the rhetor must understand the audience's perspectives and, therefore, must create conditions that welcome those perspectives.

## IX. CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this analysis was to identify strategies used to perform virtual consultations in cosmetology, an industry that some might consider “unconventional” in technical communication scholarship. By considering the similarities between virtual consultations in cosmetology and virtual consultations in medicine, I attempted to demonstrate how uncovering strategies in one industry might inform the other. In examining one stylist’s approach to the virtual consultation, I found evidence of the importance of perspective and the role audience in defining the rhetorical situation. The audience’s perspective adds nuance to the situation and reminds us that, in many cases, an approach that views the situation solely through the rhetor’s perspective is not the best approach. Creating conditions that solicit the audience’s perspective can help us better approach rhetorical situations where the goal is to identify outcomes that benefit all.

This study presented a number of limitations, however, that affect the implications of its findings, but which can inform future research. First, this study involved a rhetorical analysis of a single case and, therefore, the findings are not generalizable. Future research must expand the scope of analysis to include more than one stylist in order to determine whether these findings are transferrable to virtual consultations in cosmetology and other industries more broadly.

Next, although there are similarities between the virtual consultation in cosmetology and the virtual consultation in medicine, the risks are quite different. The stakes in medicine are far greater than the stakes in cosmetology, where miscommunication might hurt the client-stylist relationship but does not pose the same level of risk or even danger that could result from miscommunication between patient



and practitioner. Further, issues such as privacy are far more critical in medicine and approaches to virtual consultations that involve social media platforms may never be appropriate for medical consultations. However, social media platforms *can* teach us about audience expectations and how the platform—whether it involves social media or a customized patient portal—must create conditions that welcome the patient, encourage their participation, and facilitate offering of perspectives regarding the patient’s condition and desired outcomes.

Also, as mentioned previously, invitational rhetoric is not a catch-all approach for all rhetorical situations. Invitational rhetoric has its own limitations, and these limitations should be considered when determining the types of rhetorical situations that invitational rhetoric might benefit. For example, situations that involve a collaborative approach, where the goal is to identify outcomes that benefits both parties and to promote audience participation in defining those outcomes, will benefit from an invitational rhetoric. However, in rhetorical situations wherein the necessary outcome leaves no room for negotiation due to risk or broader societal implications, invitational rhetoric is not an appropriate framework. That said, invitational rhetoric *can* offer a mechanism to uncover the audience concerns in relation to these broader issues; but invitational rhetoric is not equipped to solve them.

Finally, and most significantly, this study emphasizes the role of audience in creating rhetorical situations and yet it focused primarily on the *rhetor’s* strategies to enable co-creation. By focusing my analysis on West’s Instagram profile and her video interview with Cole, I centered her perspective and did not offer sufficient insight into her clients’ perspectives and, importantly, whether *they* believed that their perspectives

informed the situation and its outcomes. Here again, future research should move beyond a rhetorical analysis of the rhetor's approach to invitational rhetoric to better understand the audience's perspectives and how they respond to conditions of safety, value, and freedom. This second phase of research would require a more in-depth case study to examine the audience's response to virtual consultations, incorporating observation, think aloud protocols in which the audience comments on their own comments, and interviews regarding their experience. The current study, which can be considered Phase 1, provided a rich overview of one-side of the rhetorical situation—the rhetor's side—as viewed through invitational rhetoric. However, Phase 2 would devote as much attention to the audience. Together, by examining both rhetor *and* audience, future research would offer a better understanding of how the audience contributes to and co-creates the rhetorical situation.

Regardless of these limitations, this study offers a starting point to better understand virtual consultations in cosmetology, medicine, and countless other fields by presenting the importance of perspective and audience in this type of rhetorical situation. Virtual consultations may be a new phenomenon, but they are not going away any time soon. In fact, in the July 4, 2021, episode of NBC's Meet the Press, moderator Chuck Todd and panelists discussed the surge in need for online health services—particularly, mental health services—that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Todd mentioned the “many new apps and attempts...to deal with this [surge],” and panelist Audie Cornish described the need to teach “students web-side manner” due to the “long-term shifts that we are going to see...culturally [because] we have embraced some aspects of...remote interaction” (NBC News, 2021). I conclude with this example to

illustrate the type of virtual interactions that this line of study can inform. For many, remote interaction is the “new normal” or, at the very least, it has become a more accepted form of interaction between patient and practitioner, client and stylist, audience and rhetor. If we understand how to create virtual spaces that facilitate sharing of perspectives, if we center the audience and *their* needs as critical to the outcome, then we might co-create situations that result in better diagnoses, better adherence to treatment, and better access to services.

As I stated previously, cosmetology is not medicine, and cosmetologists are not medical practitioners. Nonetheless, this thesis demonstrated how approaches to virtual consultations in one industry can inform best practices in the other. This analysis also revealed the value in studying industries that may be unconventional in technical communication scholarship but which, nonetheless, offer both practical and theoretical implications. If we look for technical communication as it occurs in all aspects of our lives—no matter its industry of origin or the type of technical activity it supports—we can position ourselves to learn more about our field, the types of rhetorical situations that we face, and the best practices to inform those situations.

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