

THE FENTY EFFECT: A CASE STUDY ON THE FUSION OF  
CELEBRITY, LUXURY, AND INCLUSIVITY

by

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A THESIS

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Historically in the beauty industry, market leaders offered a 10 to 20 shade range in facial cosmetic products, and thin, conventionally-attractive Caucasian women were the face of beauty campaigns. Enter Fenty Beauty. The retail cosmetics brand, founded by artist Rihanna, launched in 2017 and released 40 shades of foundation, filling a gap in the industry that yet to be properly addressed by a present-day brand.

Using Fenty Beauty as the subject of my analysis, I explore the phenomena labeled “The Fenty Effect” and how a cosmetics company was able to successfully break the mold as a luxury brand by introducing inclusivity within its products. My research was conducted through a comparative visual and textual analysis, as well as through secondary research on previous studies to establish concepts of luxury and their paradoxical associations with inclusivity.

What I found was that, while Rihanna’s celebrity name creates an advantage for the company’s relative perception, the brand’s luxury status is attributed also to its advertising, packaging, and distribution methods. Rather than following traditional luxury brands in all aspects, however, Fenty Beauty created its own category of luxury that is exempt from exclusion and hierarchy, redefining what it means to be a luxury good in the cosmetics market.

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# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

In the United States alone, Beauty, Cosmetics, and Fragrance stores made \$26.8 billion in revenue (Daly, 2021). Globally, that market is expected to reach \$493.2 billion in the next five years (Cosmetics). Fenty Beauty falls under the cosmetics segment, which makes up 53.8% of the U.S. market ahead of skincare, haircare, and other products. Market leaders include Ulta Beauty Inc., Sephora, Bath and Body Works, and Natura Cosmetics. Fenty Beauty, launched by celebrity artist and designer Rihanna, released its first product, the Pro Filt'r Soft Matte Longwear Foundation in an unprecedented 40 shades. After just a month since the initial launch, the brand was reported to earn \$72 million in earned media value, just below cosmetic giants MAC and Too Faced Cosmetics (Ilchi, 2018). The product additionally won Allure Reader's Choice Award in the year 2019. Despite being a private company, Fenty Beauty was launched under the luxury goods conglomerate, LVMH; the company self-labeled as the "world leader in high quality products" (LVMH). Operating as a luxury brand under LVMH, Fenty Beauty made it their mission to create an inclusive space where each individual could purchase a luxury option suitable for their skin. What interested me most about Fenty Beauty's success is their unique ability to diverge from incumbent cosmetics brands and find success as a luxury brand.

In this case study I present throughout this paper, I conduct secondary research to formulate a comprehensive understanding of how luxury operates within goods and specifically the beauty space. With that, I compare these precedents to Fenty Beauty's creative decision-making in order to understand where the brand aligns with luxury, and

where it deviates from the status quo. My research is aimed at establishing the definition of luxury and history of luxury cosmetics advertising. I then collected visuals and textuials for comparative analysis, drawing conclusions as to the public perception of Fenty Beauty, and how its marketing strategy achieves differentiation and, if my thesis is correct, simultaneously achieves inclusivity. I draw from various cosmetics brands, using both low-cost and differentiation strategies respectively, to identify Fenty Beauty's standout methods. I investigate Fenty Beauty's nontraditional marketing strategy, and how it effectively communicated a luxury positioning as well as an inclusive brand for all. This thesis is designed to apply business theory to a real-world company and measure the ripple effect a marketing strategy of a singular company can have on an industry's evolution and expectations.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Fenty Beauty operates under its parent organization, LVMH, whose division Kendo Holdings manufactures Fenty Beauty's products for sale through e-commerce and third-party retailers (Kerns et al., 2010). LVMH is the world's leading luxury goods vendor, with various divisions and brands including Givenchy, Dom Perignon, TAG Heuer, and more. In June of 1987, the two brands Louis Vuitton and Moet-Hennessy merged, combining and expanding their holdings to cosmetics brands and luxury retailers. Sephora was acquired by LVMH in 1998, and in the same year LVMH invested in beauty brands Hard Candy, Bliss Spa, BeneFit Cosmetics, and Make Up For Ever (Kerns et al., 2010).

Growing up in Barbados, mesmerized by her mom's lipstick, Robyn Rihanna Fenty went on to create her version of what a makeup brand should be, Rihanna herself claiming that "[makeup] should never feel like pressure, and it should never feel like a uniform" (About). Her goal was to fill the gap she observed in product shades available for skin tones as well as gaps in formulations made to accommodate various skin types. A brand based on inclusivity, Rihanna set out to create product lines that can accommodate all, a notion unseen by a celebrity brand or by Sephora-sold brands entirely.

Launched on September 8, 2017, Fenty Beauty initially was only available for purchase through its e-commerce website and LVMH subsidiary, beauty retailer Sephora. The launch strategically debuted alongside Rihanna's Puma collaboration shown at New York Fashion Week, which the New York Times defined as "a flood of pop culture powers led by Rihanna, returning after two seasons in Paris with three major fashion week moments: the introduction of her first makeup line (Fenty Beauty!); the Fenty Puma show; and, finally, what may be the most buzzed-about blowout party of the week. She is going to be such a dominant presence, one might be forgiven for thinking it's actually Rihanna New York Fashion Week" (Friedman, 2017).

Fenty Beauty was not Rihanna's first encounter with fashion. After spending years being styled in high fashion name brands, Rihanna became Puma's creative director and designed a line appropriately titled "Fenty X Puma" which made it to Paris and New York Fashion Week. From there she was named a contributing creative director of Stance Socks and won the Footwear News Shoe of the Year award from her previous Puma collaboration. Rihanna remained an ambassador for Dior, and

had other collaborations such as shoes with Manolo Blahnik, sunglasses with Dior, and jewelry with Chopard (Friedman, 2017).

As one of the best-selling musical artists of all time, Rihanna's voice has been an American favorite since her first release in 2005. She's made Time's list of "100 most influential people in the world" twice, landed roles in blockbusters including "Battleship" and "Ocean's 8," and recently was elected a National Hero of her native country, Barbados. She was Harvard University's "Humanitarian of the Year," and United States President Barack Obama called her "a powerful force in the fight to give people dignity." Rihanna has been transparent about her personal life, sitting down with Oprah to discuss her tumultuous childhood and her violent ex-partner Chris Brown. Today, she has relationship with rapper A\$AP Rocky and reveals they're expecting a child. She's a celebrity immune to embarrassment, somebody everyone adores and simultaneously feels they could befriend. She currently has 106.4 million Twitter followers and 128 million followers on Instagram. Rihanna's familiarity with the industry, trend-setting capability, and talent to reach far beyond solely her musical abilities made her an ideal candidate for a celebrity makeup brand. Observing how luxury brands solidify their positioning within their respective industries can explain Rihanna's ability to maintain her brand's image whilst paradoxically making Fenty Beauty a brand welcoming to all.



## Chapter 2

### EXPLORING LUXURY IN THE BEAUTY SPACE

Luxury goods can be defined as a non-essential purchase often sought after by higher-status people with wealth. Narrowing the scope, luxury products in the beauty space means the brand is operationally manufacturing using cleaner, more humane methods, and using superior ingredients. Luxury makeup is sold at a higher price than affordable, drugstore products in order to reflect its superior quality, and distributed more exclusively than drugstore makeup. TO be a luxury cosmetics brand is to be a combination of distribution, price, manufacturing, and brand messaging to convey a product better than the rest.

The concept of luxury within consumer goods and consumer behavior has been widely covered. Research done on the purchasing of luxury goods has concluded that consumers purchase as a means of signaling wealth, superiority, importance, and intrinsically support one's self-viewing and self-esteem (Wang and Griskevicius, 2014). Luxury goods interestingly enough also play a part in relationships. One study found that while men use luxury goods to attract a mate, women use luxury items for alternative motives. Using handbags and shoes for the experiment, results showed that women, when feeling their relationship was threatened, resorted to luxury goods as a deterrent. Another interesting way female subjects in the study used luxury goods was to indicate to society how devoted her significant other was to her. These results can somewhat be applied to luxury cosmetics in the sense that, as a female-centric consumer base, the ways women use luxury makeup products may play a part in how they manage their relationships with men (Wang and Griskevicius, 2014). This study's faults lie in its

sole evaluation of cisgender men and women, and the cosmetics industry in actuality appeals greatly to the LGBTQ+ community thus this study's principles cannot be applied to an entire consumer base.

Some argue the future to luxury consumption is experiential marketing (Atwal and Williams, 2009) while other findings indicate serviceship as a form of affirming consumer's social hierarchy is what maintains a luxury company's brand image (Dion and Borraz, 2017). Published in 2017, close to Fenty Beauty's initial launch, Dion and Borraz explore maintaining luxury branding, and how by signaling to consumers their social statuses, brands can use consumer experiences to uphold luxury statuses. Dion and Borraz say

“Luxury brands are different from other types of brands because they follow logic rooted in their sociological characteristics that is fundamentally different from that of mass-market brands. It is not the objects or the brands themselves that define luxury but the social relationships that develop around them. Luxury draws on social stratification and is considered the exclusive privilege of the elite, who use it as a sign of distinction and an affirmation of their status.”

This study, however, poses a direct opposition to Fenty Beauty's approach. As a brand with solely an online presence and a narrow retail channel of Sephora only, Fenty Beauty has little to no opportunities to adopt Dion and Borraz's findings and use serviceship as a way to reinforce its luxury positioning. Additionally, Fenty Beauty's longtime tactic of inclusive messaging directly goes against Dion and Borraz's observational findings of cueing to customers' exclusion and social hierarchy. What I will illuminate within Dion and Borraz's definition is using luxury goods as a “sign of distinction.” In the world of cosmetics, many brands feed consumers with the promise that their red lipstick or black mascara, for example, will make these consumers stand

out in a way that other brands' products won't. What Fenty Beauty achieved from the beginning was its ability to convince consumers that its products would deliver on that promise. Rihanna's brand was willing to achieve this through their superb advertising, celebrity endorsement, and wide variety of foundation shades that were previously unfound anywhere else.

Luxury consumption also is dependent upon a consumer's desire for status maintenance versus status advancement, and motivations to consume luxury products can vary by political ideology (Kim et al., 2018). Kim et al's findings offered insight for companies on how to better cater to the conservative demographic. Experiments showed that when seeking status maintenance, conservatives showed an increased desire for luxury items. What I found to be important to conclude from this study wasn't conservative purchasing habits, but rather the finding that political alliance had no correlation to those seeking status advancement, which Kim defined as an attempt to increase one's status. Kim defines conservatives in his study as those who prefer to keep

“things as they are, and as such, conservatives often engage in the same daily routines. For example, conservatives tend to prefer familiar to unfamiliar music and favor established brands over nameless or new brands. Conservatism also triggers a greater sensitivity to the existing social structure. For example, conservatives tend to judge others on their position in the social strata rather than question the fairness of the social system. Accordingly, they tend to evaluate those with high status more favorably than those with low status, regardless of their own status.”

With Rihanna's brand seeking to convey a message of inclusivity, regardless of race or gender or sexual orientation, and using Kim's findings as a precedent, it seems Fenty Beauty was smart to target left-leaning consumer bases in order for those consumers to achieve status advancement. Conservatives both are less likely to turn to

Fenty Beauty as it is a newer brand and also prefer familiarity and comfort rather than a brand like Fenty Beauty seeking to break the mold.

Deliberate nonconforming behaviors can also indeed infer one's status to outsiders (Bellezza et al., 2014). The mission with this study was to address and answer the question of how nonconforming behavior would be received in a situation where conformity means professionalism and social acceptance. Results found that in situations when observers felt the nonconforming behavior was deliberate, those observers associated the deviant with a higher status. Through signaling theory, Bellezza et al concluded that this nonconforming signal must be effective by being illustrated in a costly situation. When observers know the social hierarchical risks this non-conformist is taking, they assume the person is of a higher status and competence. Fenty Beauty's approach to branding was intentionally meant to stand out. They released unique shade names and pigments, one-of-a-kind packaging, and new formulations which I delve into more detail later on. This differentiation approach using a storyline of breaking barriers and creating something unseen before allows Fenty Beauty to follow Bellezza et al's observations of how a deliberate act of nonconformity can indicate elevated status. While the study observed individuals' dress and styles rather than a brand's product offerings, I think the Bellezza et al labeled "Red Sneaker Effect" still applies, except in this case Fenty Beauty is the non-conformist and cosmetics purchasers are the observers.

With the uprising and takeover of social media platforms, studies like Liu et al's have been able to evaluate how social media can impact consumer engagement with

luxury brands, however, future research can be done on how consumer engagement itself can affect a luxury company's brand image (Liu et al., 2021). Intersecting social media platforms with luxury marketing is difficult due to a luxury brand's need to execute messages of exclusivity. Using quantitative studies, Liu et al was able to identify aspects of luxury brand marketing that are effective in social media. Of the five outlined, enhancing entertainment, interaction, and trendiness is successful in promoting and encouraging consumer engagement. Investing in these aspects is what will drive luxury social media activities forward while allowing brands to maintain their image. Examples of these tactics included entertainment strategies of collaborating with celebrities and influencers, interaction strategies of brands inviting consumers to join campaigns, and trendiness strategies such as live streaming runway shows. All these examples represent the three dimensions and their ability to increase consumer engagement, as well as the ability to

“‘strike a balance between exclusivity and inclusiveness’ and ‘spread brand and worth awareness far beyond the target group.’... By sharing up-to-date information on social media, luxury brands solidify their positioning as fashionable and aspirational and enhance customer engagement with social media content.”

This study provides a critical component in evaluating Fenty Beauty's success through their engagement with consumers through their various social media channels. As a young company with no brick-and-mortar stores, Fenty Beauty primarily depends on social media for promotions and as a medium for consumer engagement. Liu et al's study helps reinforce social media's importance to a company like Fenty Beauty and shows the ability a luxury company has to use social media platforms without sacrificing uniqueness. Social media allows for Fenty Beauty to engage in

entertainment, interaction, and trendiness. Entertainment can be found in Fenty Beauty's usage of YouTube and Instagram tutorials led by Rihanna herself, interaction through direct communication with consumers via Twitter and Instagram, and trendiness because the ability to formulate up-to-date information easily and using rising apps such as TikTok to follow viral trends. Fenty Beauty, as a luxury brand, can use social media to both solidify their luxury positioning and increase consumer engagement using these three dimensions.

The most widely used method of studying luxury goods involves working directly with the customer, whether in observational studies or by surveys and interviews with customers themselves, often resorting to specific target segments for their studies. Humphrey and Carpenter's ethnographic study highlights the importance of market-driving as opposed to market-driven, bringing to light the importance of brand recognition through status games, which can be applied to Fenty Beauty's early social influence and status as a luxury cosmetics brand (Humphreys and Carpenter, 2018). In contrast to the market-driven firms who adapt to consumer preferences and new competition, Fenty Beauty can be categorized as a market-driver. Through "disruptive innovation" Fenty Beauty was able to influence incumbents with their reimagined foundation line and change the way companies think about catering to consumers. As a high-status company, Fenty Beauty defined consumer preferences, set a benchmark, and defined the foundation product line through their initial foundation launch.

Each of these identified studies acts as a precedent, providing insight into luxury marketing and how it is best achieved. Some mention balancing exclusivity and

inclusivity, although none define luxury or present results of inclusivity as the focus of luxury brand marketing. The approach Fenty Beauty takes adopts some of these methods, but also reworks the definition of luxury and takes steps to reverse outdated marketing tactics.

## Chapter 3

### A HISTORY OF COSMETICS ADVERTISING 1950-2000's

December 15, 1959

**MAX FACTOR** has a gift for making lips beautiful—  
Hi-Society in dazzling new designs for Christmas

give Hi-Society...dainty case, mirror and lipstick all-in-one

Choose (if you can) from these beautiful new Hi-Society case designs...each complete with lipstick refill.

A. Bunch and Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	B. Goddess Wreath, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	G. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
B. Goddess Wreath, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	C. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	H. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
C. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	D. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	I. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
D. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	E. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	J. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
E. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	F. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	K. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
F. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	G. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	L. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
G. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	H. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	M. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
H. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	I. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	N. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
I. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	J. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	O. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
J. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	K. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	P. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
K. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	L. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	Q. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
L. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	M. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	R. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
M. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	N. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	S. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
N. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	O. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	T. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
O. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	P. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	U. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
P. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	Q. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	V. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
Q. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	R. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	W. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
R. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	S. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	X. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
S. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	T. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	Y. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50
T. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$3.50	U. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$2.50	Z. Goddess Wreath design, enamel metal finish .....	\$1.50

Max Factor...maker of makeup since 1914

Max Factor Makeup Mirror Compact Cases Print Ad (1959)

Cosmetics marketing always intended to convey luxury and beauty. This advertisement from 1959 is no exception. The 1950's reinforced the nuclear family; parents were encouraged to have children post-war and women were expected to marry, bear children, and commit to the role of raising kids and tending to the house. Rock and



Roll dominated music and TV Shows emerged in pop culture. Families generally enjoyed more disposable income due to economic stability and government loans. Women in the 1950's generally adhered to traditional gender roles, and despite an increase in women occupying the labor force in the 1940's due to the war, suburbanization and motherhood was the norm.

Max Factor uses keywords such as “beautiful,” “Hi-Society,” “dazzling,” and “new” each to convey what has been true of luxury cosmetics marketing for a while - that the product is unique, high-value, and exclusive. The message reminds readers that lips aren't simply beautiful on their own, but the brand, Max Factor, has the unique ability to make lips beautiful. What is often seen in cosmetics marketing historically is the reminder to consumers that they need the products advertised to *become* beautiful. Wang and Griskevicius' research affirms this explaining how consumers purchase luxury goods as a means of signaling superiority and importance. It also may justify the campaign's focus on Hi-Society, incentivizing women that the new company's design can act as a signal to other women and men of your status and your relationship's status. A consumer's desire for beauty is only heightened in the cosmetics industry, as women's physical appearance in the 1950's holds great importance in American society. Beauty brands capitalized on a woman's need to both please society and feel beautiful herself (in order to feel somewhat valuable) by signaling to women through marketing the benefits a cosmetic product can bring.



Cover Girl Make-Up Print Ad (1962)

This Cover Girl advertisement dated from 1962 inches closer to my earlier theory about makeup pivoting from transforming your face to enhancing your natural features. Drawing attention to the word “natural,” Model Sara Thom displays a flawless complexion free of hyperpigmentation or scarring. Her eye makeup and lipstick bold, she is anything but natural. What Cover Girl wants to advertise here is purchasing and using Cover Girl products leads to what is called today the “no-makeup makeup look.” By purchasing the right products and using them correctly, a full makeup look, if done right, can fool the outside world that this is simply how you wake up in the morning.

Sometimes, advertising is not loud, but rather subtle. While some use large brand logos and obnoxious designs to signal their social hierarchy, others refer to minimal signaling or even nonconformity, like in Bellezza et al's study, to indicate social status. In the case of cosmetics, louder and more dramatic isn't always indicative of luxury. Cover Girl realized this and understood that consumers may desire a product that fools others into believing this is simply their natural skin.

Another trend seen thus far worth pointing out is the faces of these campaigns. In both images we see a white, cisgender female with blue twinkly eyes, narrow nose,

and red lips. What we see here and will continue to see for decades is the stereotypical face of cosmetics brands, without flaw or any diversity until around the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Revlon Touch and Glow Make-Up Print Ad (1960)

This Revlon 1960 advertisement follows the same trend in using a blonde, fair-skinned, thin woman for the campaign, but also made the creative decision to include a man. Revlon wants to appeal to the feminine desire to secure a mate and attract attention, hence their strategic verbiage “When it’s important to look your very best.” As a

cosmetics brand operating in the 1960's, Revlon understood gender roles in America, and the necessity of a woman's physical attractiveness. The text connects the bridge between their product, looking one's best, and the important occasion being in public around men. Besides a select few occupations, women in the 1960's had the universal intention of finding a life partner and acting as a housewife and a mother. An important part of having a successful marriage is attraction, and Revlon's advertisement uses the male gaze as a visual indicator to women that Revlon's product will successfully draw men's attentions and hopefully their affection.

This notion is outdated, yes, but many cosmetics brands up today still play at the female desire to look beautiful. Modern America inches further away from deciding a woman's value based on her looks, however, cosmetics brands understand the societal pressures a woman faces to be beautiful as well as the continuing desire for women to want to attract male attention and validation through their beauty. What I will argue is Fenty Beauty's divergence from this notion, and refusal to take the marketing approach of beauty for others and instead beauty for oneself.

Slowly pivoting towards a more natural look, this 1978 advertisement features a more simplistic look. Less eye makeup, a more honest complexion, and a natural glossy lip makes for a more honest demonstration of Maybelline's product. Promising to deliver a "healthy glow" with "fresh, healthy, natural looking color," Maybelline wants their products to make someone look in the mirror and think "That's you" despite wearing makeup. Earlier advertisements depict a look full of artificial products, while this one inches closer to the natural beauty promise. 1970's marketing seemed to echo

this magazine advertising, emphasizing natural beauty and pivoting away from heavy makeup designed to transform the face.



Turn on a healthy glow...instantly!

**brush/blush**

Soft color! Soft brush! Soft price! Fresh & Lovely Brush/Blush: Maybelline's lavish compact filled with fresh, healthy, natural looking color plus a brush so silky-soft, you'll purr. **\$1.95**

**More Fresh & Lovely ways to blush:**  
**Creme Blush** for a delicate, velvety finish and perfect control at your fingertips. **Fingertip Powder Blush** to touch a little sparkle here, there, anywhere.

**fresh & lovely®**

Hello Fresh Face! That's you with a little help from **Maybelline**  
Fine Make-up Sensibly Priced

Soft Honey Amber    Soft Misty Pink    Soft Gentle Rose    Soft Fresh Peach

Seventeen—December 1978 79

Maybelline Print Ad from the September 1978 issue of Seventeen

This reflects the cultural shift by American's in the 70's, seeking newfound individualism and rebellion from government. President Nixon and the Vietnam War generated distrust and anger, and people resorted to a release through appearances, sexuality, protest, and religion. The Equal Rights Amendment was passed, and feminism spread as many began to break away from traditional gender roles. Hippie fashion evolved fashion to prioritize comfort and style, emphasizing color and natural

beauty. These macroeconomics and cultural shift drove cosmetic companies like Maybelline to shift marketing strategy and appeal to the feminist desire to channel one's inner beauty. The text seen in this print advertisement reinforces the natural message and the avoidance of beauty through the male gaze.

However, 1970's beauty advertising did not stray from the typical face representing the brand. The ideal beauty standard in America still remained a young, fair-skinned, blue-eyed woman with perfect skin. Representation lacked, and where I found the most diversity was within haircare products. African-American women begin to be represented in the 1970's, however rather than being used to resemble the ideal beauty standard, marketers understood the discrimination against natural brown and black hair textures, and incentivized these groups to purchase hair straightening, firming, and shine products in order to closer resemble white women hairstyles.

We see a shift in the 1980's, one that embraces sharp features and bold looks. Reagan's presidency ignited the new right, one based on tax cuts and trickle-down economics (A&E). The revolutionary attitude in the 70's was replaced by conservatism and anti-communism. Culturally speaking, the 80's revolved around the baby boomer generation, now grown-up with steady jobs and an education. Depicted as more shallow and materialistic than their elders, these "yuppies" came with expensive taste. Entertainment burgeoned with iconic shows like "The Cosby Show," films including "The Breakfast Club" and "Return of the Jedi," and artists such as Madonna and



Michael Jackson. Despite this conservative American government, style in the 80's revolved around boldness and playfulness (A&E).

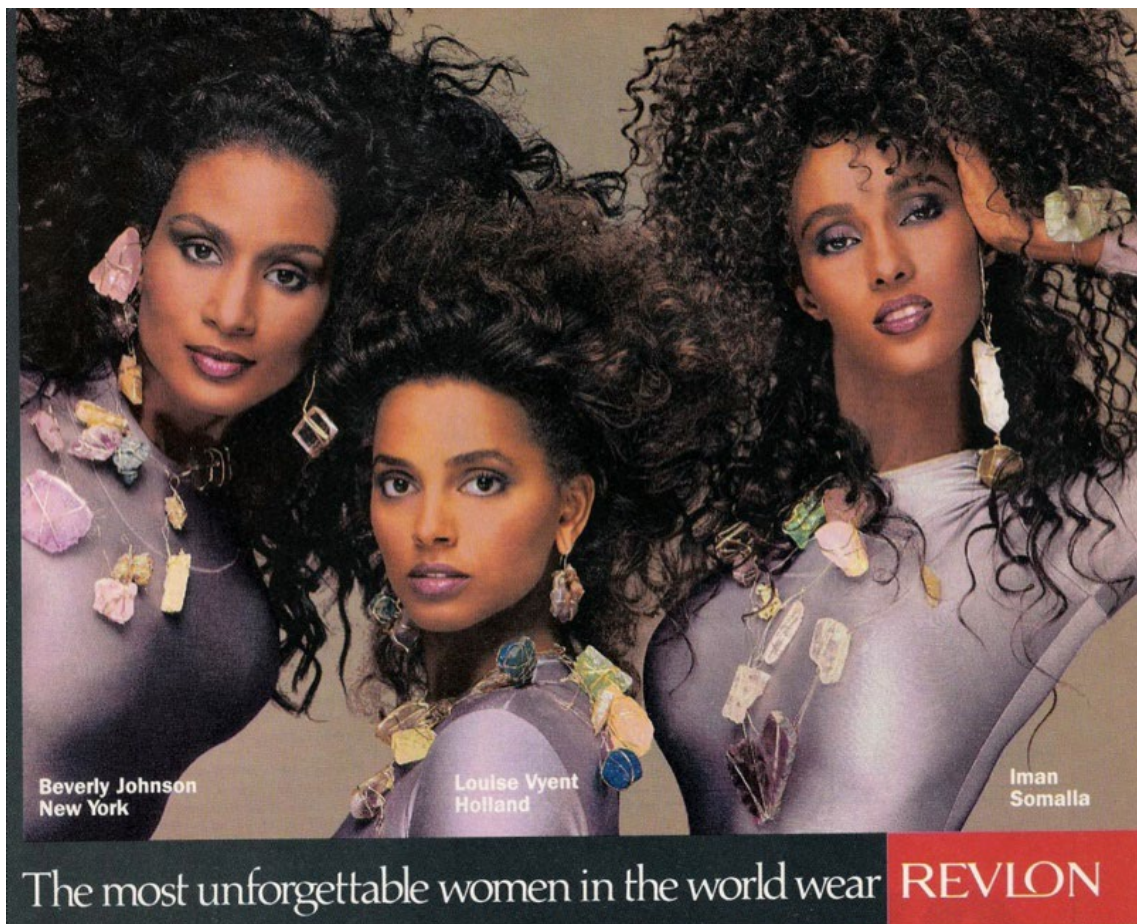


Revlon 1980's Print Ad

Revlon launched a marketing campaign in the 80's focused on the idea of being unforgettable. Bellezza et al's and Liu et al's findings are demonstrated here even before the age of social media. Nonconformity leads to uniqueness, and a sense of originality. To be "unforgettable" as Revlon says is to be one-of-one, reinforcing Bellezza et al's findings on nonconformity. Using the buzzword unforgettable also coincides with the stylistic choice of the 80's to be bold and unique, with the models themselves being photographed with voluminous hair and brightly-colored dresses.



Liu et al's suggestions for social media marketing correlate here in Revlon's usage of both trendiness and entertainment for more consumer engagement. Hiring celebrity ambassadors, including their names and place of birth, and dressing them according to current trends will hopefully increase consumer engagement beyond simply turning the page. With this strategy, women viewing the ad will be incentivized to purchase Revlon because of the possibility their products offer to look unforgettable as they say.



Revlon 1980's Print Ad

Revlon, along with others, began to hire models in the 1980's that represent demographics besides white women. However, it is important to note that these brands, while taking strides to become more inclusive, still are selecting well-known supermodels who also share flawless skin and thin frames. The exclusivity of these bodily features neglects a major portion of cosmetic brands' consumer bases, and while the strategy of using beautiful women to sell product has worked in the past, there is still untapped potential in what an inclusive campaign can do for a brand's success. This advertisement in particular resembles the diversity seen in the 80's as well as the untamed hairstyles and brightly-colored lips and cheeks. It captures the essence of style

in the 80's, and neglects to show unconventional beauty and sidelined demographics, similar to the conservatism seen in the 1980's.



CoverGirl Westicks Print Ad (2006)

This 2006 CoverGirl campaign led by ambassador Rihanna both continues old marketing strategies as well as embraces newer ones. While no longer considered an expensive luxury makeup option, CoverGirl still remains a prominent beauty brand and uses celebrity ambassadors to sell their products. The “wetsticks” shown here are advertised to be “without all that sticky,” intending to differentiate between other lip

products as more wearable and comfortable for consumers. Visually, Rihanna is pictured in a subtle, youthful look, with silky smooth brown hair and a rosy tint to her cheeks. Starkly different from her style today, Covergirl wanted Rihanna to be conveyed as warm, friendly, familiar, and above all, beautiful. Textually the advertisement focuses on the product rather than generalizing about how the makeup makes one appear to the outside gaze. This correlates to the 1990's advertisement and the general shift to promoting the product's features in order to differentiate from competition.

By the 2010's, platforms such as Facebook and Instagram were active and social media marketing became a primary method of consumer engagement. Cosmetics giants such as Maybelline, Revlon, and CoverGirl faced competition from smaller brands able to sustain business through ecommerce channels and inexpensive marketing methods including email marketing and social media advertising. Luxury brands, however, had a new platform to navigate and achieve both status maintenance and status advancement.

## **LUXURY COSMETICS ADVERTISING IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

This 1990 Vogue advertisement takes a more mysterious approach, similar to the decade. The 1990's was a decade of indulgence. American homes were larger and cars became flashier. The gradual acceptance of the gay community grew as more questions about masculinity were raised and debated in society. Rock and hip-hop dominated the radio, and style was heavily influenced by grunge and casual wear. Icons Kurt Cobain and Drew Barrymore exemplify the evolution of style in the 90's, a style



rooted in individuality and mystery rather than adhering to the girl-next-door aesthetic from previous decades.



Christian Dior Mascara Parfait Print Ad, July 1990 issue of Vogue

Dior captures the 90's in this ad, signaling mystery and using dark colors to reflect the grunge style at the time. Highlighting the product's abilities, Dior uses the buzzword “perfection” as a way to signal the brand’s status and superior quality. The visual focus is not on the model's beauty, but instead on her voluminous lashes, further showing the product’s effectiveness. Her identity is a mystery, and the dark shadow hiding half of her face alludes ambiguity that supports the idea that luxury brands need

to maintain status through exclusivity. This visual feels secretive and seductive, much like the 90's, gaining consumers' attention as well as promoting the exclusivity of Dior itself.

Advertisements from the 1950's through to the 1980's hire women to look beautiful in front of the camera, while Dior takes an approach solely focused on selling the perfection of the product. Dior understood that in the 1990's, the approachable, conventionally attractive face on an advertisement wasn't going to appeal to women as much as before in previous decades. With this said, the model in the advertisement still resembles the familiar trope of a fair-skinned, blue-eyed female free of imperfections. This mascara advertisement introduces the shift from selling the product through a pretty face to selling a product with claims of superior product quality and a focus on the product's effects, which in this case are the eyelashes. Moving into the 21st century, it's important for brands to differentiate their product using these strategies. The growing feminist movement and cultural shift away from traditional gender roles means less women will feel appealed to products centered around a beautiful face. Beauty remains an important theme for cosmetics to sell their products and convince consumers that their products achieve something, but the concept of beauty is what significantly evolves overtime.

Continuing themes from previous advertisements, Yves Saint Laurent advocates for the product textually, boasting "8 hours of beauty sleep in a click" and detailing added benefits. Compared to earlier non-luxury advertisements boasting general appearances using buzzwords "perfect," "glow" and "unforgettable," this more modern, luxury advertisement linguistically draws attention to the products abilities.

Headlining the product's features prioritizes the message of why the consumer is paying for an expensive product. YSL is communicating that the product's formulation is worth the purchase, and the product delivers on achieving a well-rested appearance.



Yves Saint Laurent Print Ad (2015)

Visually, the product looks sleek, simple, elegant, and expensive with its gold coloring. The models have simple, nude looks emphasizing skin, and their eyes look straight into the camera. The advertisement is visually daunting, conveying the opposite of inviting. In tune with previous knowledge about luxury brands this advertisement is intentionally not designed to feel welcoming or identifiable, but rather isolating. The photograph relays the social hierarchy, and the desire for all those lower on that

hierarchy to purchase these luxury products in hopes of achieving a higher status. Rather than regular cosmetic ads wanting women to look as beautiful as the model, this luxury YSL ad wants women to be incentivized to look as high class, cool, and beautiful as the models. Interestingly, the models' appearances drastically differ from earlier advertisement in the 50's and 60's depicted from the male gaze and advertised to please outside society. This refreshing difference reflects a changing time, where women are entering the workforce, gaining higher education levels, and depending less on physical appearance for self-worth and success.

A 2009 Chanel commercial advertising the brand's Rouge Coco lipstick exhibits similarities to the 2015 YSL advertisement (Chanel, 2012). The commercial opens with a shot of Vanessa Paradis, French singer and model, tantalizingly brushing her lips with her thumb. Her tooth gap visible, the commercial reinforces European beauty as well as Chanel's establishment as a French luxury house. A playful, sexy guitar strums as Paradis looks herself in the mirror and sings Daydream by The Lovin' Spoonful. Close-ups of the lipstick being opened and twisted are shown, and the camera follows Paradis effortlessly apply the lipstick as she continues to sing. The images are clean. Paradis wears a minimal makeup look, with a bow in her hair and a dainty, sheer, white top with small flowers sewn on. The commercial concludes with Paradis tucking her hair behind her ear as she smirks into the camera, and a cut to the product with an echo of music (Chanel, 2012).

The commercial feels similar to the YSL print ad due in its simplistic images and intentional stare into the camera. But, since the commercial offers more room for messaging, this Chanel commercial signals seduction and secrecy. The lyrics "What a



day for a daydream” alongside the guitar indicate a wandering mind. The viewer sees Paradis applying the lipstick, and yet feels as though she is daydreaming herself. The clean, sharp environment contrasted with the simple, black lipstick packaging signals luxury. What Chanel did here was invite viewers to daydream about the product and Paradis. Viewers watch her effortlessly apply the product and feel they want to see how the product will look on their lips. Paradis’ stare into the camera feels like a moment of intimacy, a moment where she feels more confident to stare after applying her Rouge Coco lipstick. The commercial displays classic luxury messages using the model, sound, and imagery, and revolves around seduction, playfulness, and exclusivity.

There is a traditional mold by which celebrity-packaged product or brand launches are generally approached (Friedman, 2017). Friedman details three effective strategies:

First, the "license your name and make a profit from your fame" approach, one that has had varying levels of success: Jennifer Lopez's Sweetface line failed and Jessica Simpson's namesake empire was a wild success. Second, the "humble yourself before the industry and disappear into the atelier to pay your dues" tack. This has been the favored mode if you want to be seen as a serious fashion person, as exemplified by Victoria Beckham, the Olsen sisters and (at least at the moment, a somewhat chastened) Kanye West. And third, the newest iteration: the pop-up rock collection gambit, as adopted by Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga and the Weeknd, and essentially an expanded, upstyled version of what used to be called "tour merch."

Within the past few decades, the idea of celebrity in America has skyrocketed, and modern technology has made celebrities more available and more exposed to the public. Paparazzi are able to locate and photograph A-listers everywhere, online blogs allowed for inside scoops on the famous, and social media platforms allow fans to see into celebrity’s everyday lives. This evolving American culture is what led to Shawn

Mendes' fame after going viral on social media app Vine, and how teenager Addison Rae gained celebrity status after a series of dancing videos on the popular TikTok app. Paparazzi have uncovered secret relationships, such as Tom Holland and Zendaya, and captured iconic moments, like Ben Affleck struggling to carry his Dunkin Donuts coffee. America shifted from celebrities gaining fame through family wealth and talent, to individuals achieving and maintaining stardom via modern technology and social platforms. It feels like, today more than ever, anyone can achieve fame, with the right combination of likeability, viral content, and eye-catching livelihood.

Many celebrities since the 21st century have launched their brands using one of Friedman's methods, and while some garnered success, most no longer exist today. Taking advantage of technological and cultural advancements, celebrities attempted to expand their empires using entrepreneurial pursuits like cosmetics, clothing, fragrances, and more. Beyoncé launched a ready-to-wear clothing brand in 2004 titled House of Dereon, but ultimately shuttered in 2012. Gwen Stefani in 2003 started L.A.M.B., but what was once a clothing line now mostly includes eye makeup. In 2009 Katie Holmes attempted her own luxury clothing brand, Holmes and Yang, but the brand discontinued in 2014. Sarah Jessica Parker, Nelly, Mandy Moore, Lindsay Lohan, and more opted to start their own brands, and yet all fizzled out. More recently, Selena Gomez launched her cosmetics brand Rare Beauty, and Kylie Jenner used her famous lips to start her cosmetics brand, which has now expanded to a skincare line, swim line, and even a baby care line. What Rihanna attempted with Fenty Beauty in many ways is the same as these celebrity brands, but in others, differs in its strategy to fuse inclusivity, luxury, and uniqueness which delivers with its innovative products.

## Chapter 4

### MACROECONOMIC LANDSCAPE IN THE 2010's

The past decade in America has been one focused on economic recovery, technological advances, and changing social views. The recession in 2008 led to interest rates declining in the 2010's, however income inequality only grew in size (Wessel and Campbell, 2019). The free-market capitalism America adopted so long ago led to politicians passing poorly designed tax cut budgets and the gradual disappearance of the middle class. The Affordable Care Act insured millions of U.S. citizens, inching America closer to universal healthcare other first world countries already offer their citizens. Life expectancy in the United States fell for the first time in 2014, due to the opioid crises, alcohol abuse, and suicide rates, which all disproportionately affect lower class citizens. The labor force participation rate amongst younger Americans declined due to the higher interest in human capital investment, which hopefully will lead to a higher labor force participation rate in the future. More women are choosing to invest in themselves with more years in school and statistics showing less than 1.8 births per woman in 2017 compared to 1.9 in 2010 (Wessel and Campbell, 2019).

Technology, which burgeoned in the 2000's, has now become the norm for Americans by the end of the 2010's (See Appendix A). Within the decade, social media overtook print newspapers as the number one news source, led by social media apps Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (Schaeffer, 2020). Demographic changed braced the U.S., when in 2013 over half of newborn babies were nonwhite minorities, and in 2018, about 52.9% of public K-12 students were minorities. Americans are attending church less and those identifying as atheist or agnostic increased from 17% to 26% over the

decade. As more and more Americans stray from Christian idealism, studies show an increase in support for marijuana legalization, roughly across two-thirds of America. By 2019, eleven states passed laws legalizing the drug. A Supreme Court landmark case, *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, legalized same-sex marriage in 2015. The 2010's was undoubtedly a decade full of social change, one aimed at inclusivity and individual freedoms whether that be recreational drug use or the constitutional right to marry whomever one chooses. The face representing America sees a shift in its citizens with minorities paradoxically making up a majority of newborns and taboos like sexuality and marijuana becoming a national conversation embraced by a majority of citizens (Schaeffer, 2020).

In pop culture, the 2010's reflected the desire for Americans to be free in their individuality and separate from traditional Christian views. Women unapologetically read E.L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey* and hit cable TV Show *Girls* depicted honest livelihoods of women in their twenties battling issues of abortion and drug use (McNally and Rodriguez, 2019). The #MeToo movement allowed survivors of sexual violence to be heard and held accountable men such as Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein for their crimes. Caitlyn Jenner announced to the world her identity as a transgender woman, and Misty Copeland became the first black principal dancer at the American Ballet Theater. The rap-infused Broadway musical *Hamilton* broke records and broke away from stereotypical associations with the rap genre. What was possibly the most notable instance of activism in the decade was Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the National Anthem in protest of systematic racism and police brutality against African Americans. Donald Trump, a conservative TV personality and

billionaire elected U.S. President, divided the nation over his controversial comments on immigrants, disabled people, women, democrats, and more. *Moonlight* (2016), a film about a young gay black man battling hardship and exploring his sexuality, won the Oscar for Best Film. Beyoncé became the first black female solo artist to headline Coachella, and Meghan Markle became the first biracial American to marry into Britain's Royal Family. The highest-grossing romantic comedy in the decade was *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) an all-Asian cast and a story set in Singapore. The college admissions scandal led to larger conversations about privilege in America and the disadvantages lower-class citizens face, and Leonardo DiCaprio used his historic Oscar win moment to draw attention to the pressing issue of climate change (McNally and Rodriguez, 2019).

Considering Fenty Beauty's strategy and impact in the following chapter, it's important to realize the message's relevancy respective to the corresponding macroeconomic and cultural trends. Thinking back to past cosmetic advertisements, the marketing strategies were largely influenced by the cultural state of America at the time. For Rihanna to attempt her brand's marketing approach in the 1950's may not have seen the success that it had in 2017. In a decade with wild pop culture moments and unprecedented economic changes, Fenty Beauty recognized the desire from Americans to see a brand sincere in its acceptance of all people, and more specifically, Fenty Beauty saw the gap in the cosmetics industry where brands were ignoring certain skin colors and excluding racial and ethnic minorities within their marketing efforts.

## FENTY BEAUTY'S STRATEGY

Sandy Saputo, Chief Marketing Officer of Fenty Beauty's parent company attributed the brand's success to its three strategies: exclude no one, let values inform the process, and show, don't tell (Fenty). From the beginning, Fenty Beauty attributed its success to Rihanna's vision, claiming she wanted her brand to exclude nobody. Back in 2017,

“At the time, there wasn't a brand that truly reached everyone from the lightest skin to the darkest. Many undertones, such as olive ones like mine, were also underserved in beauty. Inclusion was more than the number of shades; it was the well-crafted nuance of each shade in the range that also served as a proof point. This allowed so many women to find themselves in the brand and feel included.”

What Friedman finds about historical celebrity brands and what we have seen since 2017 to be true is Rihanna's inability to fall under one of the outlined strategies. She displays in each product she's attached to her involvement and dedication and holds a long track record working with brands on shoes, makeup, sunglasses, and more. Rihanna became Puma's creative director and designed a line appropriately titled “Fenty X Puma” which made it to Paris and New York Fashion Week (Friedman, 2017). She was named a creative director of Stance Socks, an ambassador for Dior, and had collaborations with Manolo Blahnik, sunglasses with Dior, and jewelry with Chopard. Her transition from brand collaborator to business owner felt natural, and she was able to successfully launch her first brand using a multitude of strategies.

In terms of distribution, the decision Fenty Beauty made to remain available through ecommerce and third-party retailer Sephora was appropriate to pursue due to the required capital needed for brick-and-mortar stores and staffing. Establishing luxury

through exclusive-natured servicership, as found in the earlier study, doesn't coincide with Fenty Beauty's call for inclusivity. Acting similar to luxury houses contradicts what Fenty Beauty's promise is and would send mixed messaging to consumers. Additionally, Rihanna's strength lies within her image and social media presence and hiring employees to represent her brings added risk and a loss of the exclusive, luxurious image Rihanna possesses. This perfect balance allows Fenty Beauty to deliver on its promise for inclusivity through its products, while maintaining image using Rihanna's socials and online platforms to convey luxury. This decision to maintain a strong online presence pays off, as beauty brands such as MAC Cosmetics and Origins are struggling to keep doors open and attract enough consumers to turn a profit. Consumers today have widespread availability to shop online and the opportunity to walk inside a Sephora or Ulta and shop across various brands and product offerings.

With the prevalence of the "one-stop-shop" experience in America, brick-and-mortar stores struggle to attract enough business (Daly, 2021). E-commerce stores have gained traction within this industry, especially in recent times. The COVID-19 pandemic only enhanced this shift in shopping habits, making Fenty Beauty's decision even more advantageous. Ecommerce channels can compete with lower prices due to lessened overhead costs, direct shipping, purchasing incentives, and wider inventories. Despite the loss of instant gratification, the ease of online shopping offers quicker shopping times and technological enhancements make it easier for consumers to shop and find the right product shade for them. Before, products could only be tested in stores or via physical products or samples by a magazine ad or mail marketing (Daly, 2021).

Despite the advantages that come with ecommerce, Fenty Beauty recognized the need for an in-person presence and decided to sell products exclusively at Sephora. Owned by LVMH, same as Fenty Beauty, Sephora began outside the United States in Paris. In the U.S. the brand operates under Sephora USA Inc. and is reported to account for 35% of Sephora's total sales (Daly, 2021). Sephora offers what they call a "Beauty Insiders" program, an incentive designed to reward the retailer's top-paying customers with special promotions and products. Sephora's product offerings are slightly more focused than their largest competitor, Ulta. They offer cosmetics, fragrances, skincare, and hair products and tools. Sephora achieves differentiation from other beauty retailers by placing a strong focus on customer service and carrying higher-end brands. Fenty Beauty's choice to sell products through Sephora rather than Ulta was smart in maintaining status. Instead of being carried alongside brands such as e.l.f. Cosmetics or Wet N Wild, Fenty will be seen next to the likes of Armani, Charlotte Tillbury, and Natasha Denona. Choosing Sephora was the right choice for establishing Fenty Beauty's luxury branding and avoiding potential associations with lower-end brands. This balance provides Fenty Beauty exactly what they want: their products surrounded by other high-end brands whilst also being able to receive assistance from employees who don't represent Fenty Beauty, but rather Sephora. Fenty Beauty, through Sephora, and continue to walk the line between luxury and inclusivity and allow consumers to more easily test products in-person rather than solely purchasing online without the option of feeling and using the product beforehand.

This choice of third-party retailer was perfect for Fenty Beauty's mission to establish itself as a luxury brand. The brand also had intentions to be available



everywhere, coinciding with their desire for inclusivity, and Fenty Beauty fulfilled that promise by shipping to 137 countries. Again, Rihanna was able to walk the line with her brand in both making the product available enough for consumers worldwide to test and purchase, whilst also strategically making the product appear luxurious in its selective availability online and at Sephora only.

An important aspect of signaling luxury within cosmetics is the packaging. Instead of using overzealous, in-your-face themes, Fenty Beauty used simple, elegant, distinctive product themes centered around the brand name (See Appendix B). The nude tones signify uniformity, but shapes and product silhouettes add a daring edginess to the products. It feels new and modern with various matte and shiny textures, but the nude tones and uniformity feels welcoming and signals an invitation for all to try. Paying close attention to the brand logo, the “N” in Fenty Beauty is flipped, drawing attention. A deliberate mistake, this demonstration of nonconformity puts Bellezza et al’s theory in practice and adds a layer of originality, showing Fenty Beauty is unafraid to break the rules. The minimalistic approach and subtle brand labeling on the packaging establishes luxury, as demonstrated by Han et al and their experiments regarding luxury signaling. Their study found that luxury brands charged more for the handbags displaying the brand less obviously, and luxury cars selling for cheaper had larger brand logos (Han et al., 2010). Han et al found that those with lower financial means sought out louder products. Fenty Beauty understood the connotations that come with louder, more obnoxious packaging, and what kind of consumers they would attract. In choosing a more subtle, quieter brand labeling, Fenty Beauty successfully conveys a high-end product for the consumer without needing loud branding to convey their status. The

focus around the brand name mimics similar packaging used by incumbent luxury brands. Chanel, for example, limited their primary packaging of their high-selling bronzer to include a simple colorway, black and white glass, with their logo on top of the lid (See Appendix C). La Mer does the same, limiting the primary packaging to just their brand name and sleek, frosted glass with shiny cap (See Appendix D). Brand identity is clear here, and the logo instantly isolates the product from any other. Fenty Beauty adopts this approach, and thus the products isolate themselves from others, making it easy for consumers to identify the product using both the brand name and the FB logo imprinted on the pressed powder (See Appendix E). Comparing these high-end primary packaging choices to a lower-end option, an example can be made out of NYX Professional Makeup's primer (See Appendix F). The product grabs attention with a neon yellow color, and what looks like plastic material. While there is the namesake logo, NYX, in large font, more text accompanies the primary packaging, and in various fonts and sizes. The takeaway here is that luxury brands need only their names to signal the product's value, while lower-end brands resort to bold coloring and text to incentivize consumers.

As for the secondary packaging, there is a stark difference between the two (See Appendix G). While the products themselves feel clean and sleek, the secondary packaging containing the products feels messy and chaotic. As if sprayed with a can of paint, this graffiti-like design feels like deliberate rule-breaking and adds a danger enticing consumers to see what's inside. Rihanna's brand walks the line between sophistication, edginess, and ferociousness, effectively setting its brand apart from incumbents. Luxury beauty brands such as Chanel, La Mer, Bobbi Brown, and Dior

resort to simplistic primary and secondary packaging, usually simplified to product name, information, and a solid or monochromatic colorway. Fenty Beauty, rather, opts for a bolder choice seen in Appendix G which makes for unique, eye-catching secondary packaging that reinforces the brand's refreshing take on what a luxury brand can do.

Kim et al's understanding of conservative and progressive spending habits is in-tune with Fenty Beauty's positioning. As a newer brand conveying inclusivity, but also nonconformity and boldness, this brand would not appeal to the conservative demographic. Luckily, Rihanna has a track record of progressive thinking. Rihanna openly supports the Black Lives Matter Movement and has advocated for LGBTQ rights. This paired with a left-leaning marketing tactic of inclusivity and edginess invites progressives rather than conservatives, and thus accurately targets the demographic interested in advancing status.

Looking at Fenty Beauty's pricing strategy, it becomes clear the brand is aiming to be on the lower end of luxury goods, becoming a more affordable luxury brand compared to others. Fenty Beauty offers their Pro Filt'r Soft Matte Longwear foundation for \$38, while Charlotte Tilbury offers their Airbrush Flawless Foundation for \$44, Dior's Dior Forever Foundation retails for \$52, and Armani Beauty's Luminous Silk Foundation retails for \$65 as of June 2022. Looking at bullet lipsticks, Fenty Beauty sells for \$32, while Charlotte Tilbury, Dior, and Armani Beauty sell their versions for \$34, \$39, and \$39, respectively. For mascaras, Fenty Beauty sells for \$24, while Charlotte Tilbury, Dior, and Armani Beauty sell their versions for \$29, \$29.50, and \$29, respectively. Comparing Fenty Beauty's prices to prominent drugstore names

such as e.l.f. Cosmetics and Wet n Wild, I found that the two offer foundations for \$6 and \$6.89, lipsticks for \$3 and \$1.29, and mascara for \$6 and \$3.79 as of June 2022. The pattern here makes clear of Fenty Beauty's approach to create a luxury brand that fills the accessible luxury category, rather than the high luxury category occupied by brands such as Dior and Armani Beauty. In pricing their products significantly above low-end brands but below high fashion brands, Fenty Beauty accomplishes their goal of forming a luxury brand that adheres to everyone.

The final step in differentiating from existing luxury cosmetic brands lies within Fenty Beauty's adoption of inclusivity. The products themselves are inherently inclusive, due to their unprecedented shade range and ability to accurately match various skin undertones. Fenty Beauty is available internationally online and chooses to promote their products using models of all races, sizes, and unique features. Where they deviate from inclusivity is within their price, which sells at significantly higher than lower-end, affordable brands like NYX and Wet N Wild. The price simultaneously stimulates Fenty Beauty's luxury image whilst excluding a significant portion of its consumer base that has less disposable income. Inclusivity, established as an antonym to luxury, seems a conflicting move to take when trying to establish a brand image. But, Rihanna took the risk, and with the help of her celebrity status, she was able to create a ripple effect in the beauty world. Humphrey's findings highlighted the differences between market-driven firms and market drivers, and the decision to, from the start, adopt an inclusive mantra and back it up with product and model representation exhibits a market-driving firm. Other brands followed suit, and today's standard for cosmetics brands includes enough shades for all skin colors, and more representation within brand

advertising and promotion. Fenty's ability to transform an entire industry's standards rightfully label's the brand as a market driver and solidifies the brand's place amongst its competitors for years to come.

As a pillar of the business, Rihanna's cosmetic company set out to integrate inclusivity throughout its brand. Dauntingly choosing to make their first product launch foundation, a relatively unexciting product compared to lipstick or eyeshadow, Fenty Beauty stretched the imagination further by offering a matte finish foundation formula available in 40 shade options. Looking back at previous advertisements, a pattern within textual analyses was the buzzwords "shine," "natural," and "glow." Fenty Beauty instead created a product suitable for oily skin types and offered medium to full coverage for those looking to cover imperfections. Many beauty influencers applauded Fenty Beauty for their inclusivity efforts, especially noting the formula's accommodation for oily skin types, and its various undertones available.

A major component of marketing the initial foundation launch was via social media and online campaigning. Using the slogan "Beauty for All," Fenty Beauty communicated amazing product quality and well as available for all skin tones. Before the launch, a YouTube video offered a sneak peek at what potential products could be expected from the brand (Think). The 55-second clip featured Rihanna alongside women representing a plethora of races, ethnicities, religions, cultures, and backgrounds. Shattering traditional cosmetics marketing methods, the advertisement, with the aid of EDM background music, feels daring, secretive, and thrilling. The diversity within the one-minute and fifteen-second clip achieves what no other brand had in the past 70-plus years of beauty marketing.

With 50 shades, the Pro Filt'r Soft Matte Longwear Foundation offers not just shade ranges, but different tones (See Appendix H). This message of inclusivity was well received and celebrated, and more than that, pivoted towards criticism of incumbents who never took the effort to make available options for all skin colors. Fenty Beauty not only made a name for itself but gained selling power over existing brands unable to meet consumers' needs. Lastly, by showing rather than telling, there was a sense of authenticity and a gimmick-free brand. The tactic to exclude the buzzword "inclusivity" from any marketing text was a choice Fenty Beauty made in order to emphasize people and their stories, rather than tactical messaging void of any real action. The refusal to take the traditional approach and to instead take such a big risk won over consumers and forever changed the landscape of cosmetics.

Fenty Beauty's adoption of Liu et al's strategies to enhance entertainment, interaction, and trendiness through social media has also attributed to Fenty Beauty's success. Their promotional tools combined with Rihanna's celebrity are what make the brand successful from the start. Fenty Beauty had a highly publicized Global Launch Party and creates a series of YouTube Tutorials led by Rihanna herself. These videos attracted attention and garnered lots of consumer interactions through likes, comments, shares, and even a few viral clips. Rihanna's personality shines through in each tutorial and watching her use her own products and garner results incentivizes consumers to try the product themselves.

After the initial launch, Fenty Beauty continues to incentivize purchasing via themed launches. Strategically released during the holiday season, Fenty Beauty announced their Galaxy collection, a series of flashy, sparkly products including an

eyeshadow palette aimed to excite. Her Mattemoiselle line dropped on boxing day, where consumers could shop a product line of colorful, plush, matte lipsticks. Consumers are interacted with constantly on Fenty Beauty's social media, where try-ons are shared, stories are posted, questions are answered in comment sections, and online sweepstakes are frequent. The brand promotes itself online with a pinned story detailing all the various awards their products have won and expands their brand faces beyond Rihanna to include male and female influencers both big and small. Fenty Beauty appointed a Global Makeup Artist, Hector Espinal, who uses Fenty Beauty products to create campaign looks as well as red carpet looks for celebrities such as Joan Smalls and Emily Ratajkowski. Trendiness is not so easily achieved; however, Fenty Beauty continues to set trends with their new product releases and tips and tricks. Fenty Beauty's strong online presence is what allows itself to continue upholding their luxury branding and act as an aspirational brand for others to hopefully emulate.

A final note about Fenty Beauty's strategy was its creative product launches. The brand from the beginning emphasized fun and creativity, launching anything from a jet-black lipstick to a green-undertone golden highlighter named "Trophy Wife." The belief that makeup can and should be fun, and more so, defy traditional beauty standards, invites those who might be construed as different to continue to be themselves. Again, Fenty Beauty continues to live up to its promise as beauty for all. The product and the brand name the consumer pay for makes each individual feel special and set apart from others. Part of this is attributed to Fenty Beauty's unique product offerings mentioned, as well as the idea that with inclusivity comes many different appearances. Fenty Beauty intentionally sought out distinctive-looking models

of all demographics and was sincere in its promise for inclusivity when it launched 40 foundation shades, which have now been extended to 50 to accommodate even more people. A distinction isn't achieved when everyone looks the same. So, while some of Dion and Borraz's definition of luxury directly contradicts Fenty Beauty's mantra, it does reinforce the brand's ability to make consumers feel distinct and above others when they use Fenty Beauty products.

### **FENTY BEAUTY'S IMPACT ON THE COSMETICS INDUSTRY**

Multiple companies followed suit and expanded their foundation shade collection, and any brand releasing complexion products post-Fenty Beauty was held to the high standard Fenty Beauty outlined. Beauty influencers often reviewed foundation releases on their YouTube channels, shaming those who refused to make enough shades for everyone. One review in January of 2018, titled "Black Girls React to Tarte Shape Tape Foundation," went viral with 5.4 million reviews to date detailing the shortcomings of Tarte's new Foundation release (Aina, 2018). Only offering 15 shades, the foundation grossly underrepresented darker skin tones, and with Fenty Beauty changing the landscape of cosmetics expectations, Tarte's lackluster foundation release led to scandal and an eventual withdrawal of the product.

This ripple effect, labeled The Fenty Effect, shifted the trajectory of cosmetics brands. From their magnetic contour stick packaging being duplicated by MakeupByMario, or their shade ranges being duplicated by Hourglass, Cover FX, L'Oreal, and more, Fenty Beauty did more than simply up the standards. The Fenty Effect created a more inclusive space for all, so when a girl walks in Sephora and needs



a foundation, she doesn't have trouble finding one. The importance of showing different races, of showing women in hijabs, of showing women with unique facial features, allows young girls and boys growing up that they don't need to fit a beauty standard, they are the beauty standard. For decades in America, women saw beauty advertisements filled with the same images. Now, women can see somebody resembling them when they shop.

The question that lingers is this: Could Fenty Beauty have succeeded in its luxury positioning without the celebrity component? Doing everything to evolve to the modern America, Fenty Beauty still created a brand based on luxury. From the distribution channels to the packaging, to the product quality, the brand on its own is one worthy of a luxury label. What seems to be the derivative is Rihanna's insistence on inclusion. I think the more appropriate question might be whether or not the Fenty Effect would have been possible without Rihanna behind it. Her celebrity and special reputation for trendsetting, edginess, boldness, and originality made for the perfect combination. The paradox here seems to be that nonconformity, in Bellezza et al's terms, was in fact inclusivity. It was Rihanna and Fenty Beauty's deliberate intention to go against the grain and create something untraditional and unseen that solidified Fenty Beauty's luxury status. The brand did not care what the rules were or how things were done before, they took their own approach and deliberately threw precedent out the window.

Another question that lingers looking into the future is the risk leaning into affordable luxury poses for the brand. Fenty Beauty currently offers lower prices than certain luxury brands, and recently made news for deciding to sell product at retailer

Ulta Beauty. As mentioned earlier, Ulta beauty offers a wide range of brand types, however many are low-end, drugstore brands such as e.l.f Cosmetics and Wet n Wild. Fenty Beauty's paradoxical approach to luxury was innovative and groundbreaking, however this change in distribution and continuance of lower price points may lead to a change in brand perception. How long before Fenty Beauty begins to be grouped alongside middle-tier brands? Elements of the brand will always signal luxury, such as the brands owner LVMH and the brands celebrity founder, but if prices remain stagnant or begin to fall, Fenty Beauty may be at risk for losing their luxury status. What will be interesting to see in the next five to ten years is where the brand will be both literally and metaphorically, and if the brand will continue on with the same brand messaging it has now, or if Fenty Beauty will have pivoted.

Following Rihanna's massive success, there was a massive spike in celebrity brands and products. Rihanna herself continued her empire by creating LVMH-owned Fenty, a fashion house featuring designer clothing, Fenty Skin, a skincare-focused brand, and Savage X Fenty, a lingerie company also rooted in inclusivity. The most comparable is Kim Kardashian West's business ventures, first with KKW Beauty, then KKW Fragrance, and her most successful venture, Skims. Skims continues to follow Rihanna's inclusive business model, offering shapewear for all sizes and using models of all backgrounds and sizes. Singer Jennifer Lopez created JLo Beauty, also carried in Sephora, and Model Hailey Bieber plans to launch Rhode, a skincare brand. Artist Ariana Grande recently started her cosmetics brand R.E.M. Beauty, and artist Harry Styles launched his company titled Pleasing, which thus far sells nail polish. Actress

Priyanka Chopra launched a sustainable haircare company titled Anomaly, and actress Scarlett Johansson announced plans for her own beauty brand.

This spike in celebrity-backed brands, specifically in regards to the beauty space, begs the question of other trends soon to be followed. Envisioning the future of the beauty space and becoming a market driver is difficult to do, but a groundbreaking feat. Looking at trends, something untapped in the beauty market is makeup targeting towards men. While men are frequently utilized in marketing for Fenty Beauty today and for other brands as well, no cosmetics brand has launched with the sole intention of creating makeup for men to use, not to mention the men used in marketing are often within the LGBTQ+ community. The real untapped market applies to straight men. We've seen an uptick in cisgender men experimenting with skincare, haircare, jewelry, and recently nail polish. Things that were typically only used by women are now beginning to be seen on cisgender men. Beyond that, a secret within Hollywood is the truth that male celebrities have been using makeup in films and red carpets for decades. Makeup for men feels like taboo, like something that would emasculate them similar to how they felt about face masks and nail polish decades ago. What would be innovative to see is a beauty brand advertising makeup for cisgender men. An unprecedented idea, yes, but an idea that could cause a ripple effect in the industry similar to Fenty Beauty. Whether it be an entire brand dedicated to men, or an existing brand releasing a product line for men, makeup for men is the next step towards inclusivity in the beauty space.

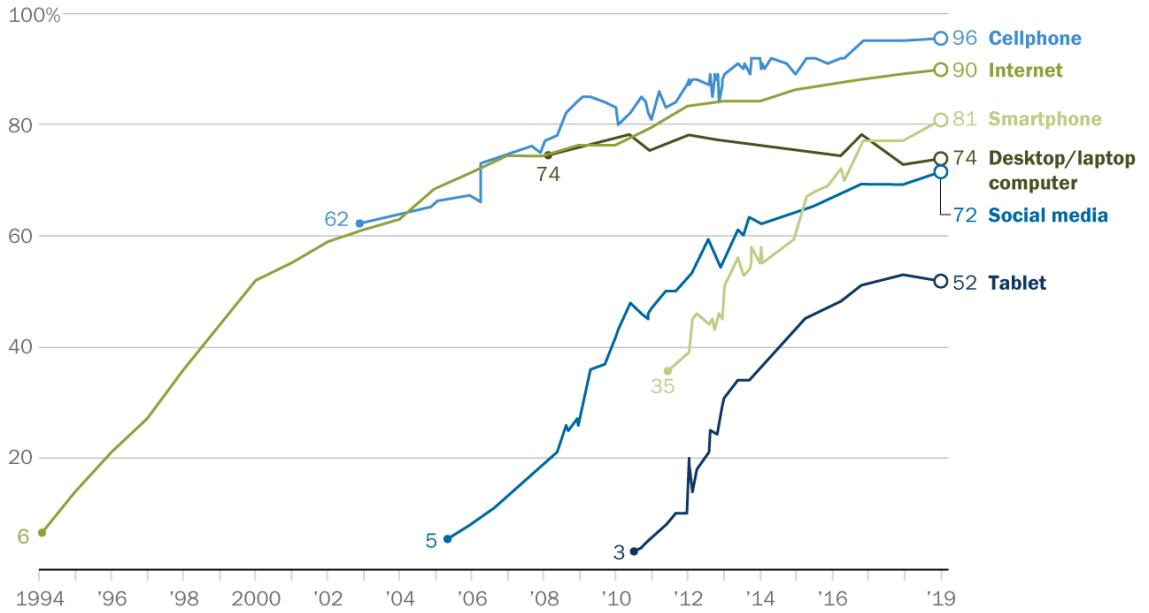
Today, beauty brands are expected to have options for consumers, and they are expected to have models in advertisements that represent more than one demographic. Fenty Beauty redefined what qualifies as a luxury cosmetics company, and

paradoxically used inclusivity as a form of nonconformity. This unused branding approach led to a market-driving strategy capable of changing the landscape of complexion products, and of representation within the beauty industry.

## Appendix A

### Use of mobile devices, social media in U.S. rose sharply in 2010s

*% of U.S. adults who say they own or use each technology*



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019. Trend data are from Pew Research Center Surveys. Data on internet use from 2000-2016 are based on pooled analysis of all surveys conducted each year.

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Appendix C



Appendix D





Appendix E



Appendix F



Appendix G



Appendix H



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