

Rihanna's Fenty Beauty "Shades Designed for All"

Cheyenne N. Darcy

New York City College of Technology

"Beauty history is incomplete. Much of what has been written about beauty culture and the beauty industry to date has been *exclusive*, prioritizing Eurocentric and American developments and perspectives". Inclusively, Rihanna's Fenty Beauty brand rattled the beauty industry in 2017, through the company's introduction of 40 different shades of foundation, today having 50 (Winker, 2019). Rihanna sought to fill the scarcity within the industry for beauty products which catered for all skin types and tones/undertones. Furthermore, her makeup brand was designed as, "Focusing on a wide range of traditionally hard-to-match skin tones, creating formulas that work for all skin types, and pinpointing universal shades" (Fenty Beauty by Rihanna: About, n.d.). The brand's inclusivity extends beyond the numerical symbol of shades, but it was the well-grounded refinement of each shade within its range that brought global prestige to the brand. Under this accord, a sense of connectivity is prevalent between women, the brand, and feelings understood by the beauty industry (Saputo, 2019). This case research analysis paper aims to discuss how Rihanna's Fenty Beauty brand redefines inclusivity, with respect to a product launch of 40 shades of foundation, now 50. Also with discussion, this paper will address how Rihanna uses "Beauty for All" as a marketing mission to expand the horizons of beauty, and cater to women who have been underrepresented by the beauty industry.

**What was the strategic need, problem, or opportunity the company was trying to address?**

Fenty Beauty by Rihanna was introduced to address and celebrate diversity by designing products "For women of all shades, personalities, attitudes, cultures, and races" (Owoseje, 2020). Rihanna told Refiner 29 that she "Wanted things that girls of all skin tones could fall in love with. In every product I was like, 'There needs to be something for a dark-skinned girl; there needs to be something for a really pale girl; there needs to be something in-between.' There's red undertones, green undertones, blue undertones, pink undertones, yellow undertones—you never

know, so you want people to appreciate the product and not feel like: 'Oh that's cute, but it only looks good on her'" (Muller, 2017). In light of Rihanna's ideals, the company aimed to offer inclusive shade ranges that catered all complexions, as visualized by the debut of the Pro Filt'r Soft Matte Longwear Foundation (Ilchi, 2019). With equality and representation, using makeup addresses this issue and correlates emotionally with women who are unrepresented by the beauty industry (Fetto, 2020). Historically, the beauty industry has fallen short with presenting beauty products and advertisements for all skin tones, but Rihanna and beauty tycoons have worked to address the gap (Muller, 2017).

### **What is the background of the company or entrepreneur?**

Robyn Rihanna Fenty was born on February 20, 1988 in Saint Michael Barbados. Prior to being "BadGalRiri," the beauty, fashion, and music icon; she was fascinated by her mothers lipstick at a young age (Fenty Beauty by Rihanna: About, n.d.). Upon her first encounter with makeup, it was utilized as a mode of self-expression in adventurous ways. Rihanna's enthusiasm to establish the Fenty Beauty brand was fueled by years of experimenting with makeup and trademarking the brand's name in 2014. Under such efforts, the entrepreneur noticed that gaps were still prevalent among women, leading to her own products under the Fenty Beauty brand. Offering more than 40 different foundation shades, she closed the gap in the market, while producing among the most significant inclusive beauty brands multinationally. Statistically proven, Fenty Beauty accumulated \$100 million within 40 days after the brand's launch date, totaling approximately \$560 million in 2018 (Novel, 2019). Notably, Rihanna executes her vision for beauty that is inclusive, expresses individuality, also while addressing prevailing issues within the industry.

**Why would the named entrepreneur have been positioned to address the gap?**

Rihanna was uniquely positioned to address the gaps in the realm of beauty because she faced them, then used her status to intentionally and meaningfully fill such gaps. She valued the inclusion of those who are underrepresented in the beauty industry by creating foundation shades for transgender, non-binary, "plus-sized," and dark-skinned individuals. During Fenty Beauty's initial brand launch, 12 women were visualized with varying ethnicities and skin types, not as a performative stunt, but to remain true to diversity and representation. Unlike other brands who view diversity and representation as an afterthought, Fenty makes that a focal point of the brand's positioning in the beauty industry. The brand's success is acclaimed by its entrepreneur and cultural icon Rihanna, who uses her voice to fill the gap of the underrepresented and account for women of all shades (Desmond, n.d.). With distinct recognition of working and networking with diverse individuals, she remains authentic to her brand in light of opposition, while being vocal about controversy (Casey et al, 2018).

**What was the proposed objective and innovation or communication?**

Fenty Beauty's proposed objective and innovation was to bring a distinguished approach to inclusive makeup (Sandler, 2020). From impractical beauty standards to the underrepresentation seen in advertising campaigns and delivery of products, the beauty industry's affiliation with exclusivity has been problematic. Such ideals were associated with age-old Eurocentric messages of exclusivity that suppressed unique cultural appearances. Notably, Rihanna has sparked a conversation that ultimately changed the social constructs of beauty ideals seen throughout history. The Fenty Beauty brand was built around a "Beauty for All" ideology, advocating for inclusivity of consumers of all skin types. Throughout history, the beauty industry has witnessed a scarcity of inclusive representation, but Rihanna observed a gap

in the industry and generated an efficient solution. Ultimately communicated through the brand's merchandise and marketing efforts, Fenty has aimed to generate products and consumer relationships to comfort needs and issues (Sharma, 2019).

**What was the cultural context that supported this innovation or initiative in its success?**

Eurocentrism zones in on European culture to the rejection of the more extensive perspective on the world. With the exclusion of broader world views, it depicts beauty solely around European beauty norms and portrays excellence around European-like features and individuals (Hernandez, 2021). In a cultural and historical context, the beauty industry traditionally catered to white women, and eurocentric ideals of having pale skin, long flowing hair, and a thin body with delicate facial features. While such ideals of beauty are narrow, women of color have limited accessibility to beauty products that match their skin tones and complexions. Under ideas of eurocentrism, the racial exclusivity of diverse products of beauty is noted through the lack of diversity in beauty advertisements and product marketing (Hope, 2016). For a significant part of the 20th century, black women were only accounted for when showcasing skin lightening creams. However, in the 1960's and 1970's the Black is Beautiful movement paid homage to wider views on what is deemed beautiful. Consequent to this social movement, beauty brands such as Bobbi Brown and MAC began to take more accountability for black women and extensive scopes of skin tones (These Black Women are to thank for a more Inclusive Beauty Industry, n.d.). Upon Rihanna's debut of 40 shades of foundation with the Fenty Beauty brand, this was a remarkable turning point of diversity for all.

**What has been the impact for key consumer groups?**

Fenty Beauty's initial brand launch attained a demographic of women who were often excluded in marketing. The brand found powerful achievement since it situated itself from its

debut as a brand attaining to a different client base, and an underserved market. Fenty Beauty has fabricated foundation shades to match women whose skin tones haven't been accounted for. In an unfiltered and natural way, the brand gears towards consumers authentically with works to create emotional connections with consumers (Christiansen, 2021). Rihanna works with her brand to bring joy, and a sense of relief for the average Fenty consumer who is online, culturally fluent, and well spoken (Desmond, n.d.). Many consumers appreciated that Fenty was priced as a luxury brand, but has a lower price point than competing brands who sold many foundation shades. To illustrate, Estée Lauder's foundation range features 32 shades, priced at \$42, while Fenty's foundation is priced at \$32. By pricing competitively and offering an all-encompassing shade range for light and dark shades, Fenty has diversified themselves in the beauty industry (Christiansen, 2021).

### **What has been the impact for the company?**

Since Fenty Beauty's debut of their first product, the Pro Filt'r Soft Matte Longwear Foundation, the brand has been praised throughout the beauty industry (Rearick, 2018). The brand wasn't the first to offer over 40 foundation shades for all, but was one of the first popular beauty companies to display diversity in their products, marketing, and advertising efforts. With a strong social media presence, brand recognition, and desirable brand positioning which connected to consumers, this drove the brand to its success (Christiansen, 2021). Reportedly, Fenty Beauty was honored by *Time* Magazine for being the Best Invention of 2017, and one of the 25 Inventions of the Year (Fetto, 2020). With a goal to fill the gap in the industry made by beauty brands and eurocentric beauty ideals; Rihanna successfully proved that beauty offerings should be available for all, despite gender, culture, or race. According to Detroit News, "Darker shades of foundation went first, challenging the notion that the consumer market in those colors

isn't worth it to the bottom lines of beauty brands" (Casey et al, 2018). As proven by the brands positioning, the brand celebrates inclusivity and connects to consumers in a desirable way.

### **What has been the impact for the beauty industry as a whole?**

The introduction of Rihanna's Fenty Beauty brand coined a movement that shifted the beauty industry. The entrepreneurs revolutionary 40 shade of foundation debut, dispatched an industry wide discussion about inclusivity and variety, addressed through shades for all (Rao, 2018). She designed a humanized path to the beauty industry, making inclusivity a business model and an objective that all brands desire to fulfill (Desmond, n.d.). Known as the term "The Fenty Effect," this was a call-to-action across the beauty industry for brands to expand their makeup lines in an inclusive manner (Saputo, 2019). For both luxury and mass beauty brands, 40 shades has become a desirable standard for foundation. To illustrate, in 2018 Revlon launched a new prestige line called Flesh, created by the founding editor and creative director of Allure, which presented 40 shades of foundation. Following such events, in 2019 Dior launched a new liquid foundation line with 40 shades, titled Dior Backstage. Additionally, Tarte widened their shade range from 25 to 40, for the brands Amazonian Clay Full Coverage Foundation. Prominently, Fenty Beauty pushed the boundaries by catering to all shades which sparked a needed conversation and change within the industry (Rao, 2018).

### **How does this case analysis relate to discussions of modernity?**

Modernity refers to the characterization of analyzing modern societies to post modern or premodern ones, often associated with Western history and European ideals (Modernity Characteristics, n.d.). In such light, modernity relates to the discussion of Rihanna's Fenty Beauty debut of 40, now 50 foundation shades. Historically, shade ranges for beauty products have been characterized on ranges of lighter skin. A "flesh tone" creates pictures of smooth

whites and delicate beiges, instead of the more profound tans or dark shades that portray many skin tones. Foundation shades of today, like those prevalent in Fenty Beauty, address the issue of whitewashing in the beauty industry. Subsequently, when the notable entrepreneur Rihanna dispatched her exceptional beauty line, utilizing 40 foundation shades as her highlighting item, the magnificence world sat up and paid heed. The brands 40, now 50 foundation shades are successful at opposing the more restricted efforts displayed by competitors (Razavi, 2021). Modernly, the beauty industry is shedding away from eurocentric principles of being exclusive, to be more inclusive and acceptive of all.

### **How does this case analysis study relate to how beauty evolves with modernity?**

Rihanna's Fenty Beauty, debut of 40, now 50 foundation shades, evolves with modernity. Inspired by the Black is Beautiful movement, she expanded the horizons for women who have been ostracized by the beauty industry (Bawtonyapendleton, 2018). The 1960's and 1970's Black is Beautiful movement was dictated around Afrocentric beauty and showed the importance black features. By recognizing past socio-political development, Rihanna isn't solely paying homage to black individuals before her, but she is communicating a memo that continues to disrupt the beauty world (IIC, 2019). Rihanna delved into the files of modernized black social expressivity as a motivational force and sense of direction. Consequently, the brand is rooted by tastemakers, photographic artists, authors, models, designers and black artists from most recent years throughout the African diaspora (Admin, 2019). In relation to modernity, black beauty wasn't acknowledged or advanced through history as activists needed to battle for recognition of African American features; however, Rihanna through her brand, and inclusive foundation ranges, has ultimately empowered the beauty industry (Fredette, 2019). Her utilization of



historical signifiers of a cultural movement expressively paid light to the beauty of women, who were dismissed throughout history (Admin, 2019).

Conclusively, Rihanna has designed her Fenty Beauty line and debuted an exceptional amount of foundation shades to promise inclusivity for all women. With an unequaled contribution of shades and tones for all skin, the entrepreneur sought to cater to an underserved market. The brand's inclusivity stretches out past the mathematical image of shades, however it was the very much grounded refinement of each shade inside its reach that carried worldwide renown to the brand. Under this agreement, a feeling of availability is common between women, the brand, and feeling comprehended by the beauty industry. Upon Rihanna's debut of 40, currently 50 shades of foundation with the Fenty Beauty brand, this was a remarkable turning point of diversity for all. From impractical beauty standards to the underrepresentation seen in advertising campaigns and delivery of products, the beauty industry's affiliation with inclusivity has been problematic. Rihanna has sparked a conversation that ultimately changed the social constructs and eurocentric beauty ideals seen throughout history. As beauty ideals and culture constantly evolve, will beauty brands continue to look to Fenty Beauty as motivation to be inclusive?

## References

Admin. (2019, November 14). "That Rihanna Reign just won't LET Up": Fenty, Black beauty, and race in the fashion industry. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <http://abwh.org/2019/06/03/that-rihanna-reign-just-wont-let-up-fenty-black-beauty-and-race-in-the-fashion-industry/>

Bawtonyapendleton. (2018, August 16). How fenty beauty empowers black women. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://blackamericaweb.com/2018/08/16/how-fenty-beauty-empowers-black-women/>

Casey, M., Staff, U., Contributor, G., & Cameron, L. (2018, October 09). The rise OF FENTY Beauty: WHAT Rihanna can teach you about mastering your personal brand. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://careersblog.uts.edu.au/rise-fenty-beauty-rihanna-can-teach-mastering-personal-brand/>

Christiansen, L. (2021, March 19). How fenty's brand positioning GENERATED \$100 million in 40 days. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://jilt.com/blog/fenty-brand-positioning/>

Desmond, H. (n.d.). How Rihanna's crusade for INCLUSIVITY changed the game forever. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://shots.net/news/view/how-rihannas-crusade-for-inclusivity-changed-the-game-forever#:~:text=of%20our%20generation.,Rihanna%20understood%20firsthand%20the%20gaps>

%20in%20the%20beauty%20space%20because,to%20meaningfully%20fill%20those%20gaps

Fenty beauty By Rihanna: About. (n.d.). Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.fentybeauty.com/about-fenty>

Fetto, F. (2020, April 06). How Fenty Beauty changed the state of play in the industry. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.vogue.co.uk/beauty/article/rihanna-fenty-beauty-diversity>

Fredette, M. (2019, May 29). Rihanna's debut Fenty collection was inspired by the 'black is Beautiful' movement. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/rihannas-debut-fenty-collection-was-inspired-by-the-black-is-beautiful-movement>

Hernandez, N. (2021, January 12). Column: Eurocentric beauty standards uphold white supremacy. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://depauliaonline.com/51920/opinions/column-eurocentric-beauty-standards-uphold-white-supremacy/>

Hope, C. (2016, August 23). The makeup Industry's frustrating cycle of struggle and progress for women of color. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://jezebel.com/the-makeup-industrys-frustrating-cycle-of-struggle-and-1782880385>

IIC, P. (2019, December 12). Under the Fenty UMBRELLA: A case study on diversity in the beauty and the fashion industries. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://paris7masterculture.wordpress.com/2019/12/12/under-the-fenty-umbrella-a-case-study-on-diversity-in-the-beauty-and-the-fashion-industries/>

Ilchi, L. (2019, March 19). 9 makeup brands that offer 50-Plus FOUNDATION shades for every skin tone. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/makeup-brands-foundation-shades-for-every-skin-tone-1203087469/>

ModernityCharacteristics. (n.d.). Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/modernit.htm>

Muller, M. (2017, September 19). How Rihanna's Fenty beauty is ushering in a new era of inclusivity in the beauty industry. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://www.wmagazine.com/story/how-rihanna-fenty-beauty-changing-beauty-industry>

Novel, M. (2019, July 02). How Rihanna went from pop sensation to entrepreneur.

Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://www.finance101.com/rihanna-pop-sensation-fashion-entrepreneur-fenty/>

Owoseje, T. (2020, July 20). Rihanna says her new Fenty Skin collection is for men as well as women. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/rihanna-fenty-skin-for-men-intl-scli/index.html#:~:text=beauty-,Rihanna%20says%20her%20new%20Fenty%20Skin%20collection,men%20as%20well%20as%20women&text=Rihanna's%20new%20skincare%20range,Skin%2C%20is%20gender%2Dinclusive.&text=No%20matter%20who%20you%20are%2C%20you%20deserve%20to%20have%20great%20skin>

Rao, P. (2018, July 20). The Fenty effect: How beauty brands are responding to the New 40-shade foundation standard. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.glossy.co/new-face-of-beauty/the-fenty-effect-how-beauty-brands-are-responding-to-the-new-40-shade-foundation-standard>

Razavi, O. (2021, March 22). Highlighting Fenty Beauty's DIVERSITY-BASED business model. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.gendereconomy.org/fenty-beauty-diversity-based-business-model/>

Rearick, L. (2018, October 08). Fenty beauty was just named one Of 2018'S most Genius companies. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/time-magazine-named-fenty-beauty-one-of-2018s-most-genius-companies>

Sandler, E. (2020, July 28). Fenty skin aims to elevate the inclusivity conversation. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.glossy.co/beauty/fenty-skin-inclusive-beauty-launch/>

Saputo, S. (2019, June). Fenty Beauty's inclusive advertising campaign - think with Google. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/future-of-marketing/management-and-culture/diversity-and-inclusion/-fenty-beauty-inclusive-advertising/>

Sharma, T. (2019, November 03). THE FENTY IMPACT: What Beauty marketing can learn From rihanna. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://medium.com/@tanvi00sharma/the-fenty-impact-what-beauty-marketing-can-learn-from-rihanna-9f12dea11c40>

These black women are to thank for a more inclusive beauty industry. (n.d.). Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://www.theskimm.com/well/systemic-racism-beauty-industry-5qeJWWN269RVK1EntnA862>

Winker, K., & Read more by Katelyn Winker. (2019, September 11). The rise of inclusivity in BEAUTY: Digital Beauty HQ. Retrieved May 23, 2021, from

<https://digitalbeauty.com/inclusivity-in-beauty/>