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# **Disrupting Narratives of Beauty: Dove's Emotionally Authentic Path and The Transformation of the Industry**

*Nafisa Nawal, Daniela Mendoza, Loretta Labrín*

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** To highlight the fact that Dove was one of the first brands to change the narrative of beauty. Dove has emphasized the importance of displaying realness in their campaigns, and calling attention to the fact that beauty is *not* perfect. By repositioning their brand and connecting with consumer insight they have been leaders in revolutionizing the beauty industry. By taking on this big shift, other brands and even industries have followed in their footsteps.

**Methodology:** This paper will employ the use of various brand case studies and important literature reviews concerning emotional branding.

**Findings:** The findings of this paper will show examples of how Dove has initiated this brand shift of their brand image and how they have indirectly encouraged other brands to veer towards this emotional branding tactic as well.

**Original/Value:** Although we describe it as a disruptive narrative, we're really trying to emphasize how this real display of beauty should be the norm. It is important to highlight the brands that are positively changing this toxic industry that typically follows a set of beauty standards that are unrealistic for most. This research will particularly matter in the grand scheme of things, such as self-image, self-love, and ultimately provide us with a better outlook on beauty itself. We will provide a framework of our own that will be labeled as the 4E's.

**Keywords:** Emotional Branding, Repositioning Strategies, Consumer Insights, Beauty Industry/Makeup Industry, Authenticity

**Paper Type:** Research Paper

## Introduction

With the advancement of technology and numerous social media platforms, users are constantly presented with unrealistic images of beauty. In a survey held by Dove with Getty Images (2019), the brand wanted to identify how many women felt seen in media; the research revealed that 70% of women globally do not feel represented by everyday images. More importantly, the results proved that 67% of women are asking brands to step up. This research alone emphasizes that consumers *do* want change. Now more than ever, brands need to start taking on a realistic campaign approach to the beauty industry.

A common struggle that most individuals in the world face is that of low self-esteem. The trouble with low self-esteem is that it is much more than having no confidence. It is associated with negative feelings, anxiety, depression, and self-criticism, and in some cases, it can even be linked to a lower life expectancy (Victoria State Government, Department of Health, 2021). Although this is a feeling that can come and go at any time in a person's life, Dove has decided to tackle this personal value head-on. In their mission statement, it is specifically mentioned that the brand hopes to redefine beauty for young people.

By directly addressing this issue that affects billions of people on a daily basis, Dove is effectively building a strong network of consumers who feel seen. Since launching its first “*Real Beauty*” campaign in 2004, Dove has positively transformed the industry by encouraging consumers to embrace their insecurities and to loudly reject the fact that we must always present our best selves at all times (Unilever PLC, 2023).

Before Dove’s “*Real Beauty*” Campaign, their brand was mostly about the functional benefits of the product. By repositioning itself towards emotional branding, not only was Dove able to connect to a much larger consumer base, but it can be argued that it has much higher brand equity than before. Anselmsson (2023) explains that many of the decisions that people make are influenced by what their friends and family do or buy. He further emphasizes that if the general public knows what you stand for, there is an added value in the consumer mindset that can be extremely beneficial for the brand itself. In “*Measuring Brand Equity*” by Keller (2006), the author claims that whether we are discussing brand performance, brand feelings, brand imagery, or brand judgment, what matters the most is how positive and unique these thoughts are in the minds of consumers.

By considering the emphasis that Dove places on both internal and external factors of their company and brand image overall, Dove can be said to have a high brand orientation. With this brand orientation and the creation of value can come higher profitability. As discussed by Gromark and Melin (2011), the most brand-oriented companies may see higher profits than those that are less brand-oriented. By emotionally placing itself in the consumer's mind, Dove has been able to build a bond with its consumers. This paper will connect emotional branding to the various aspects of strategic brand management, with an emphasis on how emotionally authentic brands establish the strongest connection with consumers.

### *Problem Formulation*

In the chaotic business world we live in today, brands are constantly trying to find a way to differentiate themselves from the rest. The first consideration brand managers today must factor in is where their brand is

placed in the customer mindset, particularly in regard to what comes to mind when the consumer sees the brand. Leveraging both qualitative and quantitative research, May (2017) highlights that 78% of people do not feel emotionally connected with a brand. This research further proves that when there is no genuine connection present, it can heavily cost the brand when it comes to the purchasing decision of the consumer.

It is now clearer than ever how brand awareness, brand knowledge, and brand salience can be shaped by your brand image and what you represent.

There is a gap in research in regard to the comprehensive study of emotionally authentic branding within the beauty industry and how it has managed to shape specific brand narratives over the past two decades. Many brands do not consider it an important aspect to invest time into; however, emotionally authentic branding has proven to create a lasting bond with consumers. Kim & Sullivan (2019) explore the influence of the affective state to explain that the consumer does not forget how a particular brand has made them feel.

Our research focuses on brands that have provided excellent examples of emotionally authentic branding. Consequently, our research aims to bridge the existing research gap by looking at the initiatives these brands have taken to connect with consumers on a deeper level, consequently redefining the industry standards and perceptions of beauty.

### *Research Questions*

Some important questions we have considered that have helped guide our research are:

- How did Dove reshape the traditional beauty industry narratives with its emotionally authentic branding?

- How does emotionally authentic branding affect consumer engagement and loyalty?
- How can brands today adopt emotional branding to shape disruptive narratives within the beauty industry?

### *Aim*

The broader aim of our paper is to understand how Dove's path toward emotionally authentic branding has helped reshape traditional beauty narratives. Consequently, we aim to understand how other brands that followed suit have each had a unique approach to their initiatives. That said, each brand successfully leveraged emotional authenticity, proving the importance of making consumers feel seen and heard.

## **Literature Review**

### *Emotional branding*

Emotional brands, as discussed by Kapferer, are those brands mostly associated with "passion" or "love," and nowadays, these positive associations may be essential for the survival of brands (Kapferer, 2012). It is true that emotional brands are harder to copy than functionally-driven brands. However, emotional branding is much more than adding some extra love to your brand. Once brands realize that they can become a medium for consumers to connect and feel emotionally attached to, they have the power to influence the standards of whichever industry they may be in. As the times have changed, so has the definition of brand management. Kapferer highlights the importance of moving from transactions to relationships (Kapferer, 2012). It is now proven that traditional marketing is no longer enough for brands to receive a consumer's loyalty or to even reach high brand equity. This brand commitment is

something that is much harder to acquire than most.

### *Authenticity in Branding*

An authentic brand is consistent with its product, messaging, and morals. It is important that an authentic brand remains in line with its declared mission statement. It is not always an easy feat to accomplish. As described by Georgiou (2022), we now know that being coined as authentic comes with three additive incentives that can help a brand's consumer base today, including catering to younger generations, creating emotional connections, and rising above the noise (Georgiou 2019). It is clear that these three distinctions are ones that come from being true to themselves, as well as to their consumers. Even so, it is possible for brands to change over time to shift towards what their consumers need and want, all the while maintaining the company's values, which are equally as important.

In this age of mass-spread information, it is essential to place brand authenticity as a brand value. Consumers, at any given moment, can find out whatever they would like about your brand, and they are more aware than ever. Building and communicating authenticity can only come from being consistent and conveying your messages through marketing tactics or campaigns (Georgiou, 2019). Instilling authenticity into your brand requires a brand to do what it says it will.

### *Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism*

An important prism that will be referred to in our research is Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism. In order to help identify the brand's positioning and identity, one must consider where the brand "stems" from (Kapferer, 2012). This prism, in particular, helps brands determine their brands' physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image, guided by the core values

placed in the center. In order to create an effective brand prism, the brand must choose core values that connect to its consumers. According to Melin (2023), the core value criteria entail being valuable, communicable, unique, and difficult for others to imitate.

### *Realistic Branding and Challenging Beauty Stereotypes*

When Dove took an approach towards realistic branding in 2004 with their *Real Beauty* Campaign, the brand began to challenge the beauty stereotypes imposed among women all over the world. Unilever's purpose with this brand shift was to build a brand with purpose (Kramer, Sidibe Veda, 2021). Before deciding to take on this arguably new approach towards marketing, Dove decided to do all the research necessary before taking the leap; Dove found out that girls from the age of 6 years old started to develop insecurities about their appearance (Kramer, Sidibe Veda, 2021). Dove decided that by challenging the ideal definition of beauty, it would be able to change the way young girls saw themselves as well. Dove decided to initiate a conversation among consumers; the brand wanted to promote a community where people can embrace and inspire (Arendse, 2018). Right after the launch of their 2004 campaign, Dove hosted "Advertisements, school curricula, online resources, public events, policy advocacy, and training sessions that reached more than 35 million girls and women across 140 countries" (Kramer, Sidibe Veda, 2021), clearly proving to their consumers that this is something the brand strongly believed in and that it heard them.

This evolution of beauty narratives now focuses on diversified beauty, including all types of bodies, people of color, and representation of older people as well. With this realistic branding approach also comes

the fact that it is important for brands to address serious issues, such as mental health issues or struggles, including topics related to low self-esteem. As stated by Faris Yakob in his article, “*Emotional Realism and the Many Brands that Reject it*,” Yakob emphasizes how humans are full of all sorts of emotions and thoughts, most of which are not represented enough in the media.

### *The Transformation of the Beauty Industry*

The beauty industry is constantly changing and adapting itself to the times we live in. Nowadays, meaningful beauty has become a priority for consumers (March, 2022). Consumers are much more intentional with their spending habits, and they tend to do more research on the brands they want to support to make sure they are in alignment with the consumer’s beliefs. There is this new focus on the consumer’s “evolving ethical expectations” (March, 2022). Brands must have the ability to combine themselves with purposes in order to be able to sustain themselves long-term. At this current moment, the beauty industry is seeing an influx of nostalgic trends resurfacing, as well as the increasing display of self-expression (March, 2022). It is important for companies to embrace these current trends by also renovating them to cater to their consumers. As emphasized by McKinsey & Company in their article “*The beauty market in 2023: A special State of Fashion report*,” beauty industry leaders and competitors will have to be prepared to develop tailored marketing strategies specific to this “changing world of beauty.”

Even though the beauty industry is ever-evolving, it is not the only industry that has seen significant changes since the use of emotional and meaningful branding. The makeup industry, which may be placed underneath the beauty market, has seen a few of these strategies being employed by a variety of makeup brands. One in particular

that will be discussed further later in this research is Fenty Beauty.

Since its launch in 2017, Fenty Beauty is now known worldwide as a brand that celebrates all different types of skin types and tones (Fenty Beauty, 2017). Before this launch, there had been a serious lack of foundation ranges, concealer shades, and inclusive products in the makeup industry in general. Women of color felt alienated from beauty products, and it is clear that makeup brands were not catering to them at all.

In an article by Candice Carty-Williams (2019), Candice gives the reader a first-hand account of what it is like to be a woman of color shopping in a makeup store and how much that has changed since the launch of Fenty Beauty. She further describes how this makeup brand alone has been able to transform industries.

The author emphasizes that even though Fenty Beauty was the first to begin this change, the brand does not sit still and conform to what it has done and that it is constantly seeking to evolve and cater to what its customers want while still maintaining their values.

### *Pioneering Brands in Shifting Beauty Narratives*

It is now essential for brands to be able to shift from the normative beauty standards that had been traditionally imposed upon women in the past. Shifting the beauty narrative can only be done once brands realize there are no more beauty standards to adhere to anymore; everyone can be perceived as beautiful in their own unique way (Givhan, Morales, 2020). A repositioning strategy or an evaluation of a beauty brand’s mission statement may be key in initiating this change, while Kapferers’ brand identity prism may be useful in determining the desired identity a brand chooses to pursue.

## **Methodology & Data Collection**

### *Case Study Selection*

Since the emphasis of our research is on the beauty industry, we will be employing case studies of brands that have had their fair share of experience in the industry, as well as one fairly new, upcoming brand that has decided to employ the aforementioned strategies right from the start. These cases were deemed appropriate because, in some ways, they have been pioneers in innovating the modes of communication with their consumers and seeing the relevance of emotional connection. In our research, Dove has been the focus of change, alongside three other brands that have leveraged the power of emotionally authentic branding, namely Nivea, Sephora, and Fenty Beauty.

### *Data Sources & Collection Process*

One of the main claims of our research paper is that emotional branding may be beneficial for your brand, consequently leading to brand growth. This can be proven to be true because, with higher brand engagement, brand loyalty, and brand authentication, consumers will feel drawn to a brand they know and trust. The data we have used to support these claims derive from secondary data sources, including research articles on various brand strategies, Kapferer's *New Strategic Brand Management*, journal articles specifically discussing the brands and what they stand for, news articles, as well as statistics on the feelings of consumers. Most of our claims are also tied to observational factors. Being a woman in this society can signify that each experience is unique, but it has also shown to be a universal experience in the grand scheme of things. We have only collectively gathered data from reliable sources.

### *Data Analysis Approach*

Our analysis of the data gathered aids this research paper in conveying a story. Although the use of facts and figures is essential in our research, it is also important that the message does not get lost within the research. Now more than ever, there is a growing desire for consumers to be seen and heard. There are various patterns, correlations, and trends among the chosen case studies that help us determine this exact idea. The statistics of our data help us to visualize the direction in which brands must veer now.

## **Empirical Results and Case Studies**

### *Dove's "Real Beauty" Campaign*

#### **Historical Background and Evolution**

In an era infiltrated by heavily edited images and posing in certain angles for a curvier waist, bigger chest, fairer skin, and aligned teeth - all to adhere to the stereotypical standards of beauty, Dove went with guns blazing to challenge every traditional definition of human beauty known to mankind. In 2004, with its launch of the 'Real Beauty Campaign', Dove dared to question the same narratives that have been embedded in us for long enough to be the 'ideal' standard of beauty itself.

What really happened? Why did the brand gain so much momentum and become a social media sensation - almost overnight?

Let us take a step back to look at women and their perception of self-worth in 2004. The media's rampant use of models who look a certain way proliferated body image issues for women of all colors and ages. It put them under constant pressure to look 'appealing', because if not, they were made to feel that they're not upholding their gender role right.

The media has historically exploited and, consequently, benefited from

commercializing a woman’s sexual appeal (Davis, 2018). Too often, thinness has been associated with beauty (Aparicio-Martinez, Perea-Moreno, Martinez-Jimenez, Redel-Macías, Pagliari, & Vaquero-Abellan, 2019), but for a woman, the challenge was a notch above. She needed to be thin, but not too thin as to appear ‘skinny’, because she needed to maintain her curves at all the right places. Her cheeks were praised when chubby, but her cheekbones needed to be sharp and defined. Each freckle needed to be covered with layers of foundation. A woman needed to be evergreen, so natural signs of aging, such as wrinkles and gray hair, meant she was no longer deemed beautiful.

With the media outright rejecting to portray women who did not conform to their ideal standards of beauty, women with sheer natural attributes had little to no representation (Santonico, Trombetta, Paradiso, & Rollè, 2023) - until Dove came through as a disruptor, a pioneer much ahead of its time.

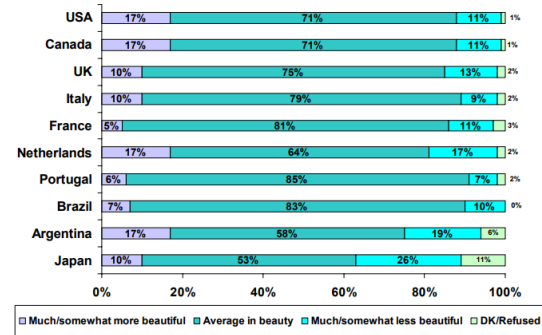
As we delve deeper, we will explore what exactly Dove did right to start a global conversation that, to this date, resonates with women across the globe.

### Strategies and Implementation

In 2004, Dove launched its campaign titled ‘Real Beauty Campaign’ based on its study, “*THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT BEAUTY: A GLOBAL REPORT*” (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, D’Agostino, 2004). This study was conducted to understand how women perceived themselves in regard to female beauty.

With a sample size of 3,200 women between the ages of 18-64, it revealed that a staggering 72% thought they were ‘average’, while 13% of the women considered themselves to be ‘somewhat less than average’ in comparison to others.

### Comparing beauty to other women



C4—Compared to other women, do you think you are...?

Figure 1: How women feel about themselves compared to others

Source: THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT BEAUTY: A GLOBAL REPORT

Furthermore, the study, as seen in the chart below, reflected how women associated beauty with their overall well-being and happiness and how it largely affected their self-esteem.

### Beauty, Well-Being and Self-Esteem

Total Respondents

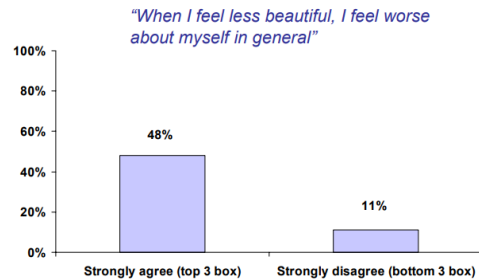


Figure 2: Relationship between beauty and well-being

Source: THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT BEAUTY: A GLOBAL REPORT

Did women think the media and pop culture exacerbate the situation by setting unattainable standards of beauty and only portraying women who were ‘physically attractive’? For almost half the women participating in the study, the answer was a resounding yes.



Popular Portrayals of Beauty/Physical Attractiveness  
Total Respondents

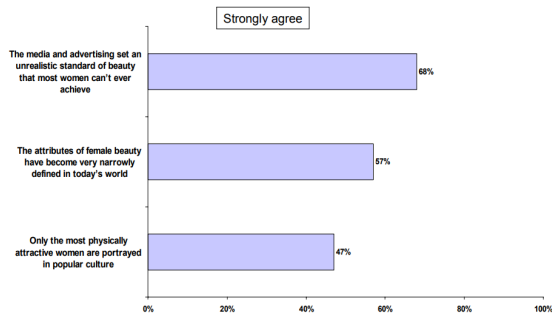


Figure 3: Women's thoughts on media portrayals of beauty

Source: THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT BEAUTY: A GLOBAL REPORT

Dove's study on women and beauty carried three major implications:

- Most women, irrespective of age, color, and nationality, considered themselves 'less than' in regard to beauty.
- This further affected their mental well-being, consequently resulting in a low sense of self-worth.
- The media and society at large associated beauty with physical attractiveness, setting up unrealistic expectations for women that couldn't be further from reality.

Based on the extensive research, Dove, in partnership with Ogilvy and Mather, launched its first groundbreaking campaign. In 2004, people started noticing Dove's billboard advertisements, particularly across the US, the UK, and Canada (Murray, 2012). These posters featured women, which wasn't so revolutionary in itself had it not been for the fact that they were all real women, and not models, of all colors, shapes, and sizes.

The brand then came up with rather thought-provoking questions beside every image, prompting bystanders to vote whether the woman in the accompanying

images looked 'fit' or 'fat', 'flawed' or 'flawless', 'wrinkled', or 'wonderful', and 'gray' or 'gorgeous'. This meant onlookers could vote on their opinions, and the results would then show up directly on the billboards (Griffin, 2023). The outcome stirred a global conversation questioning ideal standards of beauty.



Figure 4: Dove's first advertising campaign (2004)

Source: Copyright 2004 Ogilvy & Mather

With the launch of the Dove Self Esteem Project, the brand continued its mission to question the existing narratives and fueled the discourse with 'The Evolution', an advertisement showcasing a woman's transformation into a 'supermodel' through layers and layers of make-up, followed by profoundly drastic enhancements using Photoshop.

The result was an almost unrecognizable person, with Dove conveying a powerful message in the end, 'No wonder our perception of beauty is disoriented'.



Figure 5: A real photograph of a woman versus a full-face makeup and Photoshopped version for a shoot

Source: YouTube

The ad rapidly took social media by storm, combusting the myth of ‘perfection’ we see on screen.

But there was no stopping for Dove. Its effort to reconstruct the norms of societal beauty had, in fact, just begun. In 2013, Dove launched “Real Beauty Sketches”, its most successful film to date (Dove, 2023). The brand invited women to describe themselves to a trained forensic artist sitting behind a curtain. The idea was to create their sketches simply based on their description of them. The artist then sketched the same woman based on the description of a complete stranger.

The results came out dramatically different - the portraits based on the description of the strangers looked more confident, happier, and more beautiful, leaving the women feeling awestruck.

Dove made a bold statement with this film. The brand went on to explain that women, despite being inherently worthy, were extremely critical of themselves, and it only took looking at themselves from a stranger’s perspective to understand how beautiful they truly are.

Translated in 25 different languages (Google, 2012) and with over 70 million views to date (YouTube, 2013), the film pledged to make beauty a woman’s core strength, not anxiety.

Since then, Dove has continued its movement to promote body positivity and build self-esteem in women with remarkable campaigns and short films, including but not limited to #MyBeautyMySay, #Speak Beautiful, #ShowUs, and #DetoxYourFeed (YouTube, 2023).

As recently as 2023, Dove launched its latest campaign, titled ‘Cost of Beauty’, a short film addressing the effects of toxic social media content on teenage mental health (Dove, 2023).

## Consumer Responses and Impact

Dove took the risk of starting a difficult conversation, but backed up by extensive research, the risk paid off in spades. The movement caused something to shift deeply among women across the world: they wanted to engage in this difficult conversation.

The brand’s use of the hashtag #SpeakBeautiful, in partnership with Twitter, resulted in a whopping 36.8% decrease in negative comments in regards to how women talked about themselves and their beauty on social media, along with a 17% increase in brand sentiment (The Shorty Awards, 2015).

Colourtext (2021) conducted a study to understand the hype associated with Dove’s Real Beauty Sketches. Analyzing audience reaction on Twitter, the study revealed that women across the social media platform ‘hyper-recommended’ and, in some instances, pleaded to other women to watch the video.

The results showed how the video went beyond a conventional ad campaign to rallying for a social cause - a cause that struck an emotional chord for women across different cultures and nationalities.

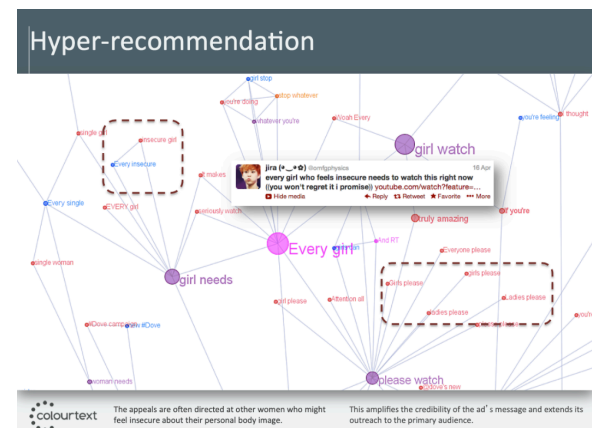


Figure 6: Women across Twitter hyper-recommending watching Dove’s Real Beauty Sketches

Source: Colourtext (2021)

With comments across YouTube such as “I can’t wait to show this to my best friends so we can start to believe this more.”, “This video made me shed a tear or two as I can definitely relate.” (YouTube, 2013), Fernando Machado, the then Global VP of Dove Skin, believed that the campaign truly paved Dove’s way for brand love (Google, 2012).

Furthermore, the brand enjoyed 30 times higher media exposure than it actually paid for, with a 25% increase in global sales in 2005 and securing numerous accolades under its belt, including but not limited to being titled ‘International Advertiser of the Year’ by *Campaign* and the Grand Prix at the European Effie Awards in 2005 (Riggs, 2007).

Dove marked a revolution in international advertising, one embedded in authenticity and emotional bonding.

As we dive deeper, we will be exploring brands that have successfully tapped into the consumer mindset by forming lasting emotional bonds and leveraging authentic branding.

*Forces in Emotional Branding: Case Studies in Authenticity*

### **Case Study #1: Nivea**

With a brand value of \$6.6 billion (Petruzzi, 2023), Nivea continues to nurture its long-held emotional bond with consumers. While the brand hasn’t had a ground-breaking impact in changing the narratives, what it did do extremely well is build a brand of authenticity, one that resonates with consumers through and through.

Kapferer (2012) argues that Nivea, in essence, sells ‘pure love and care’. He further states the brand’s philosophy, which is rooted in strong moral values such as

‘softness’, ‘confidence’, and ‘honesty’, has essentially been embodied at its core.

The brand has stood the test of time, holding our hands for generations and creating a core childhood memory symbolizing care. In that respect, Kapferer (2012) characterizes it as ‘timeless’. At some point in our lives, we all reached for the little blue box, the loyal companion in our skincare routine.

Nivea has carefully understood and nurtured these emotions over the years and engaged with its consumers accordingly, identifying itself as a ‘caretaker’ (Alberti, Asgian, Caldwell, & DeFanti 2019).

In 2015, with the launch of ‘Second Skin Project’ (YouTube, 2015), the brand reminded consumers that it still very much cared. The advertisement depicted a mother and a son unable to celebrate Christmas together. Using advanced technology, Nivea developed a simulation mirroring human touch to give them a sense of togetherness (YouTube, 2015).



Figure 7: Nivea ‘Second Skin Project’

Source: YouTube

The campaign had no sales prompt, but it served as a powerful reminder that Nivea genuinely cared.

While Dove may have been at the forefront of challenging stereotypical narratives to form an emotional bond with its audience, Nivea distinctly, albeit silently, paved its own path with emotional branding, nurturing lasting bonds with its consumers on the very foundation of brand authenticity.

## Case Study #2: Sephora

Sometime in 2017, Sephora started its journey of building a community around its brand by leveraging its loyalty program, Beauty Insider (Danziger, 2020). This community was a platform for beauty enthusiasts from around the world to share their posts, images, and experiences and even ask for product recommendations.

In 2019, the brand launched “We Belong to Something Beautiful” with a pledge to include and celebrate diversity, particularly in concern to marginalized communities (R., 2020).

To drive its cause home, Sephora started sharing stories of women of different ages, races, and ethnicities on its YouTube channel, Sephora Life (YouTube, 2023).

The campaign was a massive success, as more and more people from minorities felt represented and took to social media to express their appreciation (R., 2020).

According to a Nielsen study, 38% of African Americans would like their purchased brands to support social causes (Nielsen, 2022).

Sephora did just that, and then some, by partnering with several minority organizations and equity activities, including the likes of April Reign (R., 2020).

Sarah and I had the biggest opportunity ever, we got **to** be a part of the **@Sephora** “**We Belong to Something Beautiful**” campaign. I am a proud child of Haitian immigrant parents and I will make them proud 🇸🇪 🇧🇪

Figure 8: Consumer response to Sephora’s campaign

Source: LinkedIn

Shortly after, Sephora Canada launched its first National Indigenous History Month Campaign in order to honor the “knowledge, wisdom, diverse strengths” the indigenous community embodies (Sephora, 2021).



Figure 9: Minority representation by Sephora

Source: CBC

Sephora made it a point to partner with people from indigenous communities for this campaign, both on-screen and off-screen (Sephora, 2021).

Michelle Chubb, the Winnipeg Cree social media influencer who was featured in this campaign, said to CBC News, “I thought I couldn’t do much in life... Having this representation is very important because [now other kids] can dream also and say, like, ‘I can do that, too.’” (CBC News, 2021).

Similar to Dove, Sephora fought for a cause that truly resonated with its audience. In its own unique way, one might even argue that Sephora, perhaps unwittingly, followed Dove’s footsteps in its mission to drive change in the beauty industry.

## Case Study #3: Fenty Beauty

Led by the Barbadian musician Rihanna, Fenty Beauty was launched in 2017 with the vision to make everyone ‘feel included’ (Bailey, 2020). Everything about the brand, starting from its intriguing packaging to what it stands for, was a bold statement from Rihanna welcoming inclusivity (Matusow, 2022).

With an astounding range of 50 different foundation shades, a feat no other brand had accomplished before, the brand amassed \$72 million within a month (Elizabeth, 2017).



Figure 10: 50 different shades of foundation by Fenty Beauty

Source: Think With Google

The frenzy Fenty created among its target audience was unprecedented. Embodying its philosophy ‘Beauty for All’, the brand sought to include models, makeup artists, and women from all ethnicities and backgrounds (Brand Vision, 2023).

The numbers started speaking for themselves. While the industry standard in terms of online brand engagement stood at an average of 1%, Fenty’s Instagram saw an engagement rate of a whopping 10.41% (Sharma, 2019).

Pasquarelli (2017) called the brand a ‘wake-up call for the retail industry’, and rightly so. Fenty essentially challenged the norms of exclusivity and, in doing so, connected with its consumers on a deeper level. The brand rightly identified the struggles of both fairer and darker-skinned women to find the right shade and set on its mission to ‘show’ its consumers that it had something for everyone.

## Analysis

### *Dove’s Emotional Branding and Brand Identity Prism*

In the arena of strategic brand management, Dove stands out as the epitome of emotional branding, celebrated for its authenticity and profound emotional resonance with its consumers.

Using the brand identity prism (Kapferer, 2012), we have analyzed how Dove weaves a narrative within each of its facets that tap into consumer emotions, successfully crafting its core values of beauty, self-love, and empowerment.

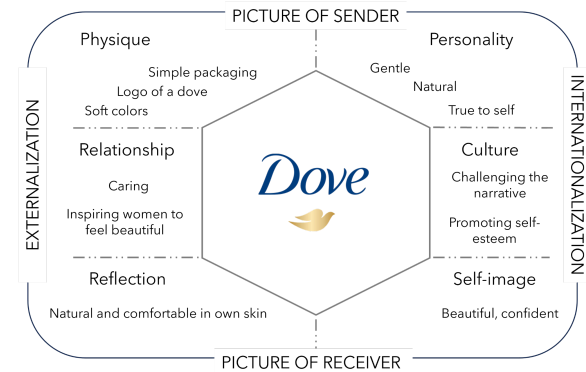


Figure 11: Dove Brand Identity Prism

**Physique:** In the tangible dimension, the brand’s serene logotype, use of soft colors (white and blue), and simple packaging serve as a visual representation of its simplicity and purity.

**Personality:** Dove’s personality is a testament to everything the brand stands for. Words such as ‘natural’, ‘gentle’, and ‘true to self’ are intrinsically associated with the brand. Dove’s advertising campaigns are not merely publicity stunts; they personify qualities the brand embodies, inviting women to embrace their true selves and find beauty therein.

**Culture:** Dove has made its statement - it is not there to adopt the narrative and go with the flow, but to challenge the traditional

concepts. With its ground-breaking campaigns, the brand dared to address deeply-rooted societal issues to promote body positivity and self-esteem in women.

**Relationship:** The relationship Dove shares with its consumers transcends monetary gains - it is a bond forged with care. The brand leverages emotional storytelling and conveys thought-provoking messages to inspire women across the world to ‘feel’ beautiful.

**Self-image:** At the heart of Dove’s identity lies its vision to empower its customers with beauty and confidence. The brand embodies a self-image that inspires individuals to celebrate their most authentic selves as truly beautiful.

**Reflection:** Dove’s brand identity skillfully mirrors the self-image it aspires for its customers. With a strict commitment to portraying real people instead of airbrushed models, the brand encourages people to be comfortable in their own skin, equating natural with real beauty.

*A Brand Worth Emulating*

Dove broke the glass ceiling for traditional beauty standards. The beauty industry came to the stark realization that in all its efforts to portray perfection, it is, indeed, failing to connect with the majority of its audience.

Today, authenticity is regarded as a brand’s ‘core asset’ (Södergren, 2021). This means that in order to resonate with customers, brands need to portray the real picture - and not an airbrushed version of it.

Dove nailed that aspect, and soon after, several brands, both within and outside the beauty industry, jumped on the bandwagon. In 2005, Revlon featured Susan Sarandon, the then 58-year-old American actress, as its spokesperson, advocating for the notion that the beauty of a woman does not fade with time (Riggs, 2007). In the same year, Nike

launched a series of advertisements featuring large women truthfully discussing different parts of their body, such as thighs, arms, shoulders, etc., to promote inclusivity across women of all sizes and not just size-zero models (Riggs, 2007).



Figure 12: Nike’s campaign featuring ‘Thunder Thighs’

Source: NBC News

Dove’s campaign led to a paradigm shift, with brands discretely as well as overtly following suit.

*Developing A Framework for Emotional Branding - The 4Es*

Based on the impact we have witnessed from brands nurturing a strong emotional connection with their consumers, we have developed a comprehensive framework to come up with the four key elements of emotional branding.



Figure 13: The 4Es of Emotional Branding

Brands can harness the power of emotional branding by weaving these four elements into their core values. This framework acts as a practical roadmap for brands aspiring to build a lasting emotional bond with their consumers.

## **Empathy**

- Understanding the needs and pain points of your target audience is not enough. Put yourself in their shoes to really understand how they ‘feel’.
- Humanize the brand so it can, in essence, speak to the consumers.
- Show you care. Prioritize your customers’ well-being.
- Ensure that the messaging and the experiences you create around your brand resonate with your audience.

## **Engagement**

- Aligned with your brand’s core values, start a conversation that matters to your consumers.
- Make way for two-way communication.
- Create a community welcoming active participation from your consumers.
- Tell a good story. Focus on authentic storytelling your customers can relate to.

## **Empowerment**

- Establish shared values to make your customers feel they are a part of something much bigger than themselves.
- Facilitate ways for consumers to ‘live’ the brand experience.
- Leverage the community you have built for your customers to celebrate their personal growth, milestones, and achievements.

## **Expression**

- As you share a good story, remember it is equally important for your customer to be able to share their stories. Ensure that you always have that door open.

- Inspire your customers to express their most authentic selves through your brand.
- Encourage your customers to celebrate your brand’s core values with you.

In a world where consumers look for a real connection with brands, the 4E framework serves as a north star to guide brands toward the path of emotional authenticity. While navigating the evolving landscape of emotional branding, it is crucial for brand managers to understand that being emotionally attuned is not just about knowing what your customers feel and calling it a day - but about nurturing a sense of trust, care, and belongingness.

The brands that have embraced the 4Es do not merely sell a bar of soap, a box of face cream, or a tube of foundation - they spark emotions and empower stories.

### *Implications for Strategic Brand Management*

Based on our analysis of brands leveraging emotionally authentic branding, there are now some key implications in the realm of strategic brand management:

#### **Consistency is key**

Brands need to be consistent in their emotionally authentic approach. This extends to a brand’s core values, expression, and messaging. Dove has consistently advocated for the portrayal of real women across all its campaigns. Its commitment to the cause has been integral to the brand’s success. That is what paved the brand’s way toward strong customer trust and credibility.

#### **Inclusivity fuels brand loyalty**

Brands today need to embrace diversity and inclusivity. This is what drove Fenty Beauty to its success. The brand recognized the need for a diverse product range where most other beauty brands failed to, consequently

catering to a broader demographic of consumers who previously felt excluded.

### **The right storytelling can start groundbreaking shifts**

Powerful storytelling lies at the heart of emotional branding. Nivea's 'Second Skin Project' had a unique way of conveying how it is there to care. Dove's 'Real Beauty Sketches' ignited the path for one of the biggest shifts in the industry.

### **Empowering your consumers increases customer resonance**

Brand managers need to explore how they can celebrate their customers - their milestones and achievements. Sephora created a platform focusing on just that, which has now become a community and safe space for customers to share their experiences.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### *Key Findings*

It is important to recognize the new direction brands must take, which entails personalizing consumer insights into their products. As more and more consumers yearn for an authentically emotional connection to their brands, brands should align their core values to strive to be real in front of their customers.

For a brand to be emotionally authentic, as in the case of Dove, it has to build upon what the consumers want to see, such as realistic representations of a woman's real beauty (Dove), caring about wellness and personal care (Nivea), building an inclusive community (Sephora) and highlighting the discrepancies found in the industry for women of color (Fenty Beauty); all the while, constantly repositioning themselves over time in order to be continuously authentic.

For a brand to align itself with what its consumers truly want to see and feel, it must integrate its core values in all areas of the organization and work together to communicate it effectively. Another important aspect to consider is the constant innovative development of a brand's products and the message they wish to convey.

The consumer inclusivity our research paper touches upon includes the personalization of Dove, Nivea, Fenty Beauty, and Sephora products. By appealing to the consumer's emotions of love, care, honesty, desires, aspirations, happiness, and trust, brands can have a positive impact on their own brand image while contributing to the well-being of their consumers.

### *Significance of Dove's Contribution*

Dove was able to recognize the lack of representation for women in the beauty industry. By being one of the first beauty brands to go against the stereotypical standards of beauty and including women of all shapes, sizes, and colors, Dove encouraged women to embrace their insecurities and bask in their own unique features.

Putting a spotlight on this relatively new outlook of beauty allowed other brands to be as inclusive and as representative as Dove was, especially considering how successful Dove was in connecting to their consumer base and in driving brand loyalty.

### *Call for further research*

Considering that inclusivity and representation are more important than ever, brands should be more mindful of what they decide their brand image and brand identity to be. Especially in this technologically driven world, strong brands have the power of influence and must handle that power with caution.



By employing a realistic and emotionally authentic branding strategy, brands are able to further change stereotypes present in the beauty and makeup industry. However, this brings into question whether other industries have also been inspired by this concept of emotionally authentic branding. For instance, the fashion and modeling industry still has a long way to go in portraying real individuals instead of picture-perfect models. These inconsistencies have the potential to negatively impact a generation of young people and give them the idea that they have to look a certain way to be considered beautiful. There is a need for brands to be a physical representation of the extremely diverse and cultured society we live in today.

However, an important consideration for future brand strategists is the possible negative effects of emotional branding. Is it plausible that certain consumers do not appreciate the overly intrusive nature of emotional branding? As brands explore the path toward emotionally authentic branding, they should be aware of not hurting consumer sentiments alongside the fact that it may not work for all industries.

One research gap present in our findings is that although we gathered sufficient research to support our statement, our research scope was limited, and it is possible that we have not completely captured the full spectrum of strategies that brands incorporate in different marketing and cultural contexts. Our findings are derived from selected case studies and may not apply universally to all industries. Therefore, there is a need for further research to understand whether or not brands in other industries have embraced authenticity in their branding and how, if so.

## **Contribution to Strategic Brand Management**

### *Key Takeaways for Brand Managers*

Brand managers must now consider the position of their brand's identity within the minds of consumers. As stated at the beginning of our paper, the over-saturated world of brands has now made it incredibly difficult for brands to differentiate themselves from this noisy world.

Important key takeaways for brand managers seeking to elevate their brand include:

- Managers must now realize it takes more than product attributes to build a lasting bond with consumers.
- Leveraging the 4Es we have developed: empathy, engagement, empowerment and expression, can direct brand managers on how to tell their brand's story. Any initiative they take to build authentically emotional branding must be representative of what their consumers resonate with as well as their own core values.
- Being an authentic brand is the foundation for an emotional branding strategy to flourish.
- By offering more than what the product offers, brands are able to cultivate a community of consumers, which can lead to organic brand promotion and brand loyalty.
- It is important to further build upon self-expression, and encourage users to express their authentic self.

Employing these main takeaways can help brand managers to further disrupt the narrative present in many industries.

## *Insights for Shaping Future Branding Strategies*

Brands aspiring to change the narrative should prioritize emotional resonance as the key component of customer engagement. Consequently, as we have seen throughout our research, brands building emotional resonance focus on authenticity and inclusion.

Future branding strategies, therefore, should revolve around nurturing credibility and customer trust. Furthermore, we encourage future brands to consider all the possible implications of employing an emotionally authentic brand strategy.

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