

How Brands Are Embracing The 'Realness Movement'

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The beauty and fashion industry is going through an exciting transformation. There's been a huge shift from unattainable photoshopped beauty to a genuine appreciation of authenticity and diversity. In other words, brands are becoming more honest with their audience and addressing the problems that lead to mental health issues. This movement to embrace "realness" is more than a passing phenomenon. It represents a fundamental shift in how beauty is understood and accepted. And it's not limited to just beauty and fashion brands: Social media and dating apps are trying new features that break the norm of overpolished photos and heavily edited selfies.

The Problem With Perfection

The beauty and fashion industry often uses photo manipulation and airbrushing in advertising and social media. Seeing a constant stream of "flawless" faces and bodies online and in ads can fuel anxiety, low self-esteem and body image issues. These unrealistic standards of beauty perpetuated online and in real life have taken a toll, especially on young girls and women: According to a U.K. Parliament report, 31% of teenagers and 35% of adults feel ashamed or depressed because of how they perceive their bodies.

The financial cost of these harmful beauty standards is staggering. Dove research shows that toxic beauty standards causing appearance hate and discrimination have become a public health crisis, costing Americans over \$500 billion annually. It includes spending on beauty products and cosmetic procedures, but also indirect costs such as loss of productivity due to poor mental health.

The problem is not limited to beauty products. Social media in general has become more "fake," and online dating isn't far behind. Overly polished photos and distorted lifestyle representation pollute the feeds of many popular social media and dating apps. Apps also make it easy to edit your selfies, resulting in a quest for likes and validation.

This influence of social media has intensified feelings of insecurity, with nearly 67% of respondents to a Mintel survey acknowledging that it has established unattainable beauty norms.

A Movement Toward Realness

Some companies are working to fix this problem by embracing the "real beauty" movement.

Cult Beauty, one of the top U.K. online beauty retailers, recently launched their "Can't (Re)Touch

This" campaign. They are pushing for transparency by banning retouched images from their website and encouraging brands to showcase products on real people of all ages, sizes and skin

types. Cult Beauty's message resonated with consumers on social media, who praised the brand for promoting inclusivity and self-confidence.

Cult Beauty is also one of the brands—including Dove, Boots, Marks & Spencer and Boohoo Group—that have signed the "Body Image Pledge," a voluntary commitment by organizations to promote an authentic body image. This pledge is a stance against any form of media or advertising that digitally manipulates the size or shape of one's body. By signing the pledge, companies promise to emphasize health and wellness and to accurately represent the human body in all its transformations.

Social media are also hopping on the trend of realness, trying to change the landscape damaged by toxicity. The most popular example is BeReal, a minimalistic photo-centered app that took the world by storm in 2022. It encourages authenticity by prompting users to share a single, unedited snapshot of their day, sparking a more genuine representation of daily life. BeReal has gained popularity among Gen Z users since its launch, with over 20 million daily active users. [...]

The Power Of Authenticity

The real beauty movement hopefully won't be just a passing fad. These campaigns mark the beginning of a trend where more brands realize that realistic beauty standards resonate better with real women.

As consumers increasingly seek realness, companies that embrace this approach may experience a sales boost. In the U.S., 64% of women of all ages and ethnicities expect more diversity in beauty products. This is a big audience that could form a community of loyal, repeat customers.

For startups and social media apps, this could also mean a bigger slice of the pie. BeReal has raised a total funding of \$90 million over two rounds, which seems pretty impressive for an essentially simple photo-sharing app. In the end, it may be a win-win situation for everyone involved: Companies not only get more recognition and drive revenue but also empower their audience to love the skin they're in. [...]