

Unilever adopts new inclusive beauty vision, bans the word 'normal'

Multinational consumer goods giant Unilever will adopt a clearer mission surrounding inclusive beauty standards across all its beauty and personal care brands' products, packaging and advertising globally.



Credit: Antonius Ferret from Pexels

This is part of the launch of the company's new Positive Beauty vision and strategy, and the company's recognition that making products that cater to all people is one of the most pressing challenges that the beauty and personal care industry faces.

The move will see Unilever eliminate the word 'normal' from all of its beauty and personal care brands' packaging and advertising. This is one of the steps that the company says it's taking "to challenge narrow beauty ideals, and work towards helping to end discrimination and advocate for a more inclusive vision of beauty".

The decision comes after global research into people's experiences of the beauty industry reveals that many groups are left feeling inadequate or marginalised by impossible standards which people experience on a daily basis.

Key research insights

The 10,000-person study, which was commissioned by Unilever, was conducted across nine countries[1], including in South Africa, where it found that:

- Despite the majority of people in South Africa describing the industry as “innovative” (70%) and “creative” (60%); four in ten people also describe it as “only for some” (39%).
- In South Africa, making products that cater to all people is recognised as one of the most pressing challenges that the beauty and personal care industry should address.
- More than two in three people in South Africa (67%) agree that the beauty and personal care industry makes certain people feel excluded.
- The beauty industry is seen as contributing to the spread of narrow beauty ideals and seven in ten (71%) think that the industry is pressurising people into thinking they need to look a certain way.
- Having clear skin, a nice smile, but also skin that is soft and having an overall fair complexion, and smelling nice, are some of the most pressing issues from a South African beauty and personal care standpoint.
- Other societal and cultural norms include the need to be both accomplished professionally and physically (66%), but also to be pure and feminine (60%).
- The majority of people in South Africa agree that the BPC industry still has some way to go in representing people of various body types (77%): people from different age groups (75%), people from different ethnicities (73%), and people from the LGBTQIA+ community (61%).
- One in two people in South Africa (49% for skin and 52% for hair) think that labels on beauty products contribute to narrow beauty ideals.
- Seven in ten people (71%) think that using non-inclusive beauty product packaging and in advertising has a negative impact on people. This is especially pronounced for the younger age groups, rising to eight in ten (80%) for those aged 18-35 compared to 52% for those older than 55.

A new era of beauty

Positive Beauty, which sets out several commitments and actions for Unilever’s beauty and personal care brands, including Dove and Lifebuoy, is aiming to champion a new era of beauty that does more good, not just less harm, for people and the planet.

The ambition will also help to drive a transformation in how products are designed and formulated so that they not only deliver a superior product experience, but also tap into consumer trends, says Unilever.

In addition to removing the word ‘normal’, Unilever will not digitally alter a person’s body shape, size, proportion of skin colour in its brand advertising, and will increase the number of advertisements portraying people from diverse groups who

are under-represented.



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14 Oct 2020



Three core commitments

The Positive Beauty ambition comprises three commitments by Unilever.

1. Taking action through its brands to improve health and wellbeing, and advance equity and inclusion, reaching 1 billion people per year by 2030. They will focus on:

- Helping to end discrimination in beauty and champion inclusion, by challenging narrow beauty ideals and building a more inclusive portfolio of products.
- Driving gender equity, including stepping up brand programmes, advocacy to challenge the status quo and #unstereotyping advertising.
- Improving health and wellbeing through existing educational initiatives in handwashing and oral hygiene and expanding focus into new areas, including physical health and mental wellbeing.

2. Helping to protect and regenerate 1.5 million hectares of land, forests and oceans by 2030, which is more land than is required to grow the renewable ingredients in Unilever's beauty and personal care products.

3. Supporting a global ban on animal testing for cosmetics by 2023, working alongside lawmakers, animal protection organisations and like-minded companies. Twenty-three Unilever beauty and personal care brands are now PETA Approved, with more working towards certification.



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At the heart of the delivery of these commitments will be Unilever's beauty and personal care brands. More of the company's beauty and personal care brands will join the likes of Dove, Lifebuoy, Vaseline and Sunsilk by taking action on social and environmental challenges and advocating for the evolution of norms, policies and laws.

Positive Beauty will also accelerate Unilever's science and technology programmes and innovation partnerships, driving the continued transformation of how its products are designed and formulated to become more people and planet positive.

"This includes developing tailored products to serve the diverse needs of people around the world, including South Africa, delivering real and meaningful consumer benefits, backed by cutting-edge science. Innovation will also advance the use of more natural, biodegradable, and regenerative ingredients – alongside continued packaging innovations that use less, better or no plastic," the company says.

Sunny Jain, president beauty and personal care, comments: "With one billion people using our beauty and personal care products every day, and even more seeing our advertising, our brands have the power to make a real difference to people's lives. As part of this, we are committed to tackling harmful norms and stereotypes and shaping a broader, far more inclusive definition of beauty.

"We know that removing 'normal' from our products and packaging will not fix the problem alone, but it is an important step

forward. It's just one of a number of actions we are taking as part of our Positive Beauty vision, which aims not only to do less harm, but more good for both people and the planet.

"With more consumers than ever rewarding brands which take action on the social and environmental issues they care about, we believe that Positive Beauty will make us a stronger, and more successful business."

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