

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Coty takes aim at outdated definitions of beauty in new campaign

January 31, 2023



Launched by way of an open letter published today, Jan. 30, Coty is requesting the review and removal of outdated, ageist and sexist definitions of "beauty" in a new campaign. Image courtesy of Coty

By AMIRAH KEATON

U.S. beauty group Coty is calling attention to an issue of representation that has covertly permeated culture for some time.

At the core, beauty has always been community-obsessed. Using inclusive messaging and additional philanthropic touches, the global conglomerate's #UndefineBeauty campaign taps into that strength, starting with the launch of an open letter in which Coty executives are requesting the review and removal of the outdated, ageist and sexist definitions of "beauty" that exist today.

"Seen through the lens of today's society and values, the definition of beauty hasn't aged well," said Sue Y. Nabi, CEO of Coty Inc., in a statement.

"Of course, not all people are impacted by, or feel excluded by these definitions," Ms. Nabi said. "But the implicit ageism and sexism in the examples were born in a different time.

"We believe it's time to bridge the gap - time to bring the definition to where society is today."

Coty's call-to-action

Coty's #UndefineBeauty effort, in many ways, marks an evolution of beauty's communal concepts, delivering an important call to action that is based in a reality that often goes overlooked.

On the morning of Jan. 30, an open letter titled "Undefine Beauty: An open letter to major English dictionary houses from Coty" arrived on Ms. Nabi's personal LinkedIn page, signed with support from Coty's executive committee and senior leadership teams.

An accompanying petition is available for signature at worldwide nonprofit platform Change.org, for those members of the public who seek to do the same.

No one can control or dictate what is, or is not, beautiful not even the dictionary. Discover the #UndefineBeauty campaign and show your support by signing the petition <https://t.co/9NIFTjbXcf>

Coty Inc. (@COTYInc) January 30, 2023

“An open letter to major English dictionary houses from Coty,” reads Ms. Nab’s LinkedIn caption.

“Together, in a spirit of collaboration & co-creation, let’s move beauty forward.”

Both the letter and larger campaign center on a direct call to action, urging publishers to change dictionary definitions of beauty using updated descriptions with more modern and inclusive language.

Coty emphasizes examples currently used, citing one specific excerpt “she was a great beauty in her youth.” According to the conglomerate, this problematic phrase is currently being used across the pages of major dictionaries.

Lest the public forgets the faces of those susceptible to impact, input from those affected by harmful definitions of beauty is captured on camera.

Of the same name as Coty’s campaign, qualitative social experiment results executed on behalf of the brand takes the form of a film.

Coty’s #UndefineBeauty campaign video

The four-minute selection features 100 faces from across the globe who answer a series of questions, the first being “How do you define beauty?”

Individuals across the age, race, nationality and gender expression spectrum provide their perspectives.

“I feel like beauty is a synthesis of love,” answers one participant.

“Beauty to me is having the freedom to be yourself,” says another.

One subject details acts of service and self-love, highlighting Coty’s core commercial focus in the process “a little blush on the face, [it is] about my skin looking healthy and soft and nice.”

The video goes on to share an outline of the term as currently defined, pointing out that one exclusionary aspect involves heavily gendered and youth-centric takes.

“You just witness the excluding and isolating effect of the current definitions of beauty in the dictionary,” a text screen reads.

Participants express disdain for the premise.

“We all made the dictionary together,” notes a final speaker.

“So maybe it is time that we update it together?”

Luxury lends a hand

Time and time again, luxury entities have taken a stance against various injustices. As of late, some entities have chosen to hone in on issues that unequivocally impact women and girls.

Luxury hair care company Krastase celebrated International Mentoring Day with “Power Talks,” a campaign aimed at closing the gender confidence gap through mentorship, education, and inspiring discussions.

The initiative features shocking stats, celebrity cameos and digital content, a standout nonprofit partnership and a promise to reach more than 15,000 young women worldwide by 2025, revealing that more than 1 in 2 women also confess they have been held back because of limiting beliefs ([see story](#)).

Coty’s campaign strikes a bit differently, though. In a sea of parallel philanthropic pursuits ([see story](#)), the beauty group’s stands out.

Perhaps this is due to the subject matter, in terms of the unique nature and level of specificity associated with the issue at hand. Unmasking a “hidden” problem, so to speak, could work to catch audiences off guard, piquing interest.

The other component at play has more to do with existing executive settings than new forms of communication.

In many ways, the campaign’s compelling nature appears partially due to an alignment between the target demographic impacted by outdated definitions of beauty, and the identity of Coty’s CEO herself.

One could argue that Ms. Nabi's long-standing leadership lends credibility to Coty's empowered platform.

Either way, between the penned piece, public petition, campaign video and call-to-action, #UndefineBeauty gets at the essence of beauty's strongest, most enduring message, proving there is, indeed, power in numbers.

"At Coty, we believe that no one can control or dictate what is, or is not, beautiful," Ms. Nabi said.

"That is why the campaign to #UndefineBeauty aims to 'undefine' rather than simply 'redefine' beauty, so that no one feels excluded by the definition or examples that accompany it," she said. "By changing the definition, if more people feel included feel beautiful there will be a ripple effect which touches us all."

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