

## Beauty Concept In Sephora's "Black Beauty Is Beauty" Campaign Video

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**Abstract.** The dominance of Western beauty standards has often marginalized and rejected Black bodies and beauty in mainstream culture. However, Black communities have significantly contributed to the beauty industry. In response to this disparity, Sephora, a leading beauty retailer, launched a campaign to combat racial inequity by promoting Black-owned beauty brands. The campaign features a short video titled *Black Beauty is Beauty*, which highlights Black narratives, cultural practices, and the historical influence of Black beauty innovations on global beauty standards. This study examines how Sephora portrays beauty concepts in its campaign video. A qualitative method with purposive sampling is employed for data collection. Social semiotics and visual grammar serve as the theoretical frameworks, as they analyze both visual and spoken texts. The findings reveal several categories of beauty representation in the campaign video, including physical appearance, beauty traits, beauty routines, and gendered beauty—elements historically overlooked by mainstream culture. Through these representations, Sephora reintroduces Black beauty ideals, emphasizing their impact on shaping beauty trends. The campaign also challenges conventional beauty standards, such as fair skin, straight hair, and thin body types, which contrast with African physical characteristics.

**Keywords:** Beauty Concept; Black Representation; Social Semiotics; Text-Image Relationship; Visual Grammar

### INTRODUCTION

The discourse on equality of rights and opportunities remains a complex global issue, particularly in the American historical context, where Black individuals have long faced discrimination. A Pew Research Center survey (2016) revealed significant disparities in how Black and white adults perceive their treatment in workplaces, schools, restaurants, and interactions with law enforcement. Black Americans report higher incidences of racial prejudice (70% vs. 36%), lower-quality education (75% vs. 53%), and fewer job opportunities (66% vs. 45%) than their white counterparts, highlighting systemic inequities.

Beauty standards have played a crucial role in perpetuating these disparities. Western beauty ideals, favoring lighter skin, blue eyes, and straight blonde hair, have historically marginalized Black women's aesthetics. This devaluation dates back to the transatlantic slave trade when European theories equated Black physical features with inferiority (Moses, 2020). Consequently, Black women have often internalized these biases, affecting their self-perception and societal representation. Despite this, Black individuals have made significant contributions to the beauty industry. Social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), initiated in 2013 following Trayvon Martin's death, have fought against racism and anti-Black violence. The movement, which has expanded internationally, emphasizes racial justice, including representation in industries such as beauty and retail.

Another initiative, the 15 Percent Pledge, launched by Aurora James in 2020, urges retailers to allocate 15% of shelf space to Black-owned businesses. Sephora became the first major beauty retailer to support this pledge, dedicating a portion of its store inventory to Black-owned brands like Fenty Beauty, Topicals, and Pat McGrath Labs. This initiative aligns with Sephora's broader commitment to increasing Black representation in the beauty industry. As part of this effort, Sephora launched its "Black Beauty is Beauty"

campaign, acknowledging Black culture's influence on mainstream beauty trends. Google searches for "Black-owned businesses" surged by 600% in 2020 (thedrum.com), reflecting heightened consumer interest. However, while awareness increased, demand for Black-owned beauty brands stagnated. Sephora responded by investing in these brands and amplifying their visibility through marketing efforts. A Sephora survey (2020) found that 78% of customers believe retail lacks diversity in products tailored for people of color. Additionally, 40% of shoppers reported experiencing discrimination in stores, yet only 3% of major cosmetic brands are Black-owned. Further research by Sephora indicated that 74% of consumers feel beauty promotions fail to reflect diverse skin tones, body types, and hair textures, while 82% struggle to find relatable sales associates. In response, Sephora introduced policies addressing racial bias in advertising, hiring, retail operations, and customer experiences.

The "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign also serves an educational purpose, highlighting the Black community's historical and contemporary contributions to beauty culture. Many trends, including braided hairstyles, baby hair styling, acrylic nails, cut-crease eye makeup, shea butter skincare, and glossy lips, originate from Black traditions but are often uncredited. Historically, hairstyling was an intimate cultural practice within Black families before becoming a global trend. As part of the campaign, Sephora released a short film directed by Garrett Bradley, the first Black woman to win Sundance's Best Director award (2020). The one-minute video explores Black stories, traditions, and beauty practices, reinforcing their influence on mainstream beauty culture. Through this visual narrative, Sephora reclaims Black beauty's historical significance, advocating for inclusivity and representation.

This study examines how Sephora constructs Black beauty in its campaign video. Given the historical marginalization of Black aesthetics, the campaign represents a pivotal shift toward inclusivity. By reintroducing beauty trends rooted in Black culture, Sephora challenges traditional Western ideals and affirms Black identity in the beauty industry. The research question guiding this study is: How does Sephora represent the beauty concept of Black people in the "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign video? Using qualitative research and purposive sampling, the study applies social semiotics to analyze Sephora's representation of Black beauty.

This study is significant for multiple stakeholders. Academics, particularly in Public Relations and Media Studies, can gain insights into how social semiotics interprets brand representation. For PR practitioners, the study offers a case study of how Sephora integrates diversity initiatives into its brand strategy, moving beyond performative activism to structural change. Furthermore, this study helps consumers recognize the evolving narrative around Black beauty in mainstream media. The study methodologically focuses on video frame analysis and spoken text interpretation. It follows a qualitative approach to examine the interplay of visual, textual, and symbolic elements within Sephora's campaign. This research is structured as follows: The first section introduces the global beauty concept and its evolution. The second section reviews relevant literature on racial representation in media and branding. The third section outlines the research methodology, including data collection, semiotic analysis, and validity measures. The fourth section presents key findings and their implications across various disciplines. Finally, the study proposes future research directions exploring diversity in beauty marketing.

By analyzing Sephora's campaign, this study contributes to broader discussions on race, representation, and branding. It underscores the importance of challenging

ingrained beauty biases while recognizing Black culture's profound impact on global beauty trends.

Beauty ideals are culturally determined, encompassing facial and bodily attributes that define physical attractiveness (Calogero et al., 2007). Historically, race was defined biologically, distinguishing individuals based on skin tone and hair texture. This concept perpetuated a racial hierarchy placing whites at the top and Blacks at the bottom (Koentjaraningrat, 2009). Colorism, closely linked to beauty standards, emphasizes lighter skin and European features as ideal (Hall, 2005; Ryabov, 2019). Black beauty has long been undervalued, with Eurocentric aesthetics dominating (Banks, 2000). During colonial times, Afrocentric features such as dark skin, full lips, and curly hair were deemed unattractive (Swain, 2012), reinforcing white beauty as the standard (Awad, 2015).

In the 19th century, straight hair symbolized middle-class status, prompting Black women to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards for social and economic mobility (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Peacock, 2019). However, a shift toward embracing natural hair reflects a rejection of imposed ideals and a celebration of Black beauty's diversity (Peacock, 2019). Beauty extends beyond the physical; it is also linked to personality, attitude, and self-presentation (Rosida & Saputri, 2019; West, 2010). Black women often associate beauty with strength, intelligence, and independence (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004), reinforcing beauty as a cultural and social construct.

Rejecting rigid beauty standards has been a significant movement in advertising. Campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty" challenge conventional ideals by promoting inclusivity (Millard, 2009). Historian Blain Roberts (2014) argues that racial differences have historically shaped beauty definitions, which intersect with social stratification and gender.

Cosmetics play a key role in enhancing appearance, influencing perceptions of beauty (Rahmawati, 2019; Nash et al., 2006). Industrialization in the 1920s expanded the beauty industry, benefiting African American women who developed beauty products tailored for Black consumers (Brown, 2016; Anauakan, 2002). By the 1960s, the "Black is Beautiful" movement politicized Black aesthetics, challenging white-dominated beauty norms (Baird, 2021). Though initially excluded, Black women leveraged beauty products to gain economic agency, establishing salons, schools, and professional organizations (Willet, 2010). Entrepreneurs such as Madame C.J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone pioneered hair care products, revolutionizing the industry (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014).

The 2017 launch of Rihanna's Fenty Beauty, featuring 40 foundation shades, compelled major retailers to diversify product lines, making Black beauty more visible in mainstream markets (Nittle, 2018; Frisby, 2019). Today, darker skin is increasingly valued, with many white individuals adopting tanning practices (Bernstein & Gillen, 2015; McIlhargey, 2021). Haidarali (2018) highlights how World War-era societal shifts elevated brown skin as a middle-class ideal within Black communities, further solidifying the changing perceptions of beauty.

Traditionally associated with women, beauty has expanded to include men due to globalization and market evolution (Sowad, 2017). Initially, beauty products emphasized femininity, but male grooming has gained acceptance (Eng et al., 2018). The "metrosexual" identity, defined by grooming habits, urban lifestyles, and fashion consciousness, emerged as a new masculinity model (Flocker, 2003; Kartajaya, 2004).

Masculine beauty standards emphasize fitness, clear skin, and overall aesthetics (Harrison, 2008; Cheng et al., 2010). Many men now use cosmetics as confidence boosters, prompting brands to develop male-targeted product lines (Brooker, 2016). Thus, beauty remains fluid, influenced by cultural and social dynamics.

Public relations (PR) campaigns enhance reputation and engagement (Vrontis, 2014). PR involves crafting positive public perceptions through strategic media messaging (Bussey, 2011). Campaigns address issues affecting organizations, reinforce branding, and foster audience trust (Wilcox et al., 2000; Morreale, 2007). Gregory (2018) identifies three PR campaign levels: cognitive (awareness), affective (opinions and attitudes), and conative (behavior change). Larson (in Venus, 2009) categorizes campaigns into product-oriented (branding), candidate-oriented (political), and ideological (social advocacy) types.

Campaign messages are conveyed through mass media, general media, advertisements, interpersonal communication, and internal corporate channels (Ruslan, 2008). Social media plays a significant role in PR, with video content being particularly effective (Gillin, 2008). Given this study's focus on Sephora's campaign, an understanding of PR's role in shaping brand messaging is essential.

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, is foundational in understanding meaning-making (Moerdisuroso, 2017). Pierce (1839-1914) and Saussure (1857-1913) introduced key semiotic frameworks, emphasizing signs' interpretative functions. Social semiotics extends this by incorporating cultural and social factors into sign interpretation (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 2009). Harrison (2003) defines three key principles: (1) signs shape societal perceptions, (2) meanings are collectively constructed, and (3) semiotic frameworks enable multiple interpretations. Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar provides a social semiotic framework for analyzing images, addressing Critical Discourse Analysis's verbal-text bias. Their metafunctional approach applies to visual analysis, recognizing images as representational, interactive, and compositional texts (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

Representational meaning depicts participants in actions and events (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). Narrative representation illustrates ongoing activities, while conceptual representation conveys classification systems. Visual analysis distinguishes between active and passive roles within images. Caple (2013) further categorizes images where human subjects act as signifiers, using posture, gestures, and gaze to establish meaning.

Interactive meaning is realized through gaze, framing, and camera angles. Contact is categorized as 'offer' (no eye contact) or 'demand' (direct gaze), shaping audience engagement (Halliday, 1994). Frame size affects viewer perception: close-ups foster intimacy, medium shots suggest social interaction, and long shots depict detachment (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Power dynamics are reflected in vertical angles—high angles diminish authority, while low angles elevate subject prominence (Caple, 2013).

Image composition integrates representational and interpersonal meanings into a cohesive visual structure. Key compositional aspects include information values, salience, and framing. The positioning of elements conveys implicit meanings—left-side elements signify known information, while right-side elements introduce new concepts (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). Salience is determined by size, color contrast, and focal positioning, guiding viewer attention (Perdana, 2020). Framing establishes relationships between visual elements through spacing, color, and vector lines (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

The literature underscores how beauty ideals, racialized aesthetics, and gendered representations shape societal perceptions. The evolution of the Black beauty industry reflects broader cultural and economic shifts. Public relations campaigns play a critical role in brand positioning and audience engagement. Social semiotics provides a robust framework for analyzing Sephora's campaign, illustrating how visual and textual elements construct meaning. By situating this study within these theoretical foundations, a comprehensive understanding of Black beauty representation in media emerges.

## METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research methodology, including the research approach, paradigm, data collection, analysis, and validation procedures, to investigate Sephora's representation of Black beauty in its campaign.

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore social phenomena through observation and data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research captures human perspectives through narratives, interviews, and visual data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Yin (2016) identifies key characteristics of qualitative research, including exploring real-world contexts and capturing participants' perspectives.

A case study method is used to gain a deeper understanding of Sephora's "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign. Case studies allow for an in-depth examination of contemporary phenomena within their real-life context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2013). This approach is particularly useful in answering "how" and "why" questions while considering contextual influences (Yin, 2002). By analyzing Sephora's campaign video, this study investigates how Black beauty is represented and its impact on challenging conventional beauty standards.

The study follows an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena through participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2007). Interpretivism allows researchers to construct meaning from data, engaging deeply with participants' experiences (Willis, 2007). This paradigm encourages a holistic examination of events rather than isolating variables, supporting qualitative methodologies such as ethnography and case studies (Moustakas, 1994). It enables researchers to explore Sephora's campaign within a specific cultural and social framework (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

The study employs a documentation technique to analyze Sephora's campaign video. Documents are considered "social facts" that reflect societal norms and are useful in qualitative research (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997, as cited in Bowen, 2009). Flick (2017) notes that documents include written texts and extra-textual features such as images and videos. This study examines eight key visual entries from Sephora's "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign video.

Purposive sampling was used to select relevant data (Weintraub, 2009). This technique ensures the selection of meaningful instances that directly address the research question. The data collection process involved the following steps:

1. Watching and gathering data from Sephora's campaign video.
2. Selecting eight significant visual entries depicting Black beauty.
3. Reviewing related literature for contextual understanding.
4. Preparing data for analysis through thematic categorization.

*Data Analysis.* Data analysis in qualitative research involves identifying patterns and interpreting meanings from linguistic and visual material (Flick, 2017). Ary (2010) describes data analysis as one of the most complex aspects of qualitative research. This study follows a structured analytical process:

1. Preparing and organizing data from Sephora's campaign video and related studies.
2. Observing and reviewing the data for emerging themes.
3. Conducting a visual grammar analysis using Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) framework.
4. Examining text-image relationships to understand how visual and verbal elements interact.
5. Presenting findings in the discussion section.

*Visual Grammar Analysis.* Visual grammar provides a framework for analyzing visual data, incorporating elements such as people, objects, and spatial arrangements (Moerdisuroso, 2017). Kress and Leeuwen (2006) developed a systematic approach to multimodal discourse analysis, highlighting the integration of language and semiotic resources (Ping, 2018). Their model includes three metafunctions:

1. **Representational Metafunction** – Examines how images depict participants in actions and events (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). Visual analysis distinguishes between active and passive roles within an image.
2. **Interpersonal Metafunction** – Analyzes viewer-image interaction through gaze, framing, and camera angles (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). High angles diminish authority, while low angles enhance subject prominence (Caple, 2013).
3. **Compositional Metafunction** – Focuses on how visual elements are arranged to create meaning. Key factors include information values (placement of elements), salience (size and contrast), and framing (visual boundaries) (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

*Text-Image Relationship.* Images and text function interdependently to construct meaning (Caple, 2013). Wu (2014) highlights how multimodal texts rely on semiotic modes to convey layered interpretations. Martinec and Salway (2005) propose that image-text relationships can be complementary or independent, shaping audience perception. In the context of Sephora's campaign, this study examines how video frames and spoken text work together to reinforce messages about Black beauty.

*Data Validation.* Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research involves detailed descriptions and methodological rigor (Bertilsson & Gillberg, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2013) emphasize the role of validation in establishing credibility. This study applies triangulation to enhance validity (Denzin, 1973, in Moleong, 2004):

1. **Data Triangulation** – Incorporates multiple data sources to confirm findings.
2. **Investigator Triangulation** – Engages multiple researchers in the analytical process.
3. **Theory Triangulation** – Uses visual grammar and social semiotics to interpret findings.
4. **Methodological Triangulation** – Combines visual analysis with textual interpretation.

*Conceptual Framework.* A structured research framework ensures consistency and clarity. This study focuses on how Sephora's campaign represents Black beauty through visual and verbal elements. The conceptual framework guides data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the campaign's impact on beauty perceptions.

By employing a qualitative case study approach, an interpretivist paradigm, and a multimodal discourse analysis framework, this study provides an in-depth exploration of Black beauty representation in Sephora's campaign.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the visual, textual, and representational findings from Sephora's "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign video. Guided by Social Semiotics (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Caple, 2013), the chapter examines how Sephora represents the concept of beauty via eight selected visual entries from the campaign. The findings are divided into two sections: (1) An analysis of each visual entry using three metafunctions (representational, interactional, and compositional), along with related textual (spoken)

elements; (2) A discussion of the major findings on how Sephora conceptualizes Black beauty in this campaign.

### ***Visual and Text Analysis***

Entry 1



Figure 1. Video scene 0:07

#### **Representational Metafunction**

Two images appear side by side: on the left is a close-up of an eyeshadow palette and brush marked “Sephora”; on the right is a black-and-white photograph of a hair salon scene with Black women (both stylists and clients). There are two represented objects: Sephora’s eyeshadow and a group of Black women in a salon. The eyeshadow palette and brush connote the tools of beauty, suggesting Sephora’s products are essential. The salon scene shows hairstylists in action, highlighting a cultural practice rooted in African American beauty history (Willet, 2010). Historically, Black women established salons, beauty schools, and professional organizations, contributing significantly to the evolution of the beauty industry.

#### **Interactional Metafunction**

The left image employs a high angle, positioning viewers as decision-makers regarding Sephora’s product. Its close-up shot invites a sense of intimacy with the product. Meanwhile, the right image is at eye level, presenting a historical hair salon from an impersonal, observational distance. The gazes of the salon’s participants offer viewers a glimpse into their activity without direct engagement (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006).

#### **Compositional Metafunction**

The larger, colored product image on the left is more salient and labeled as “Given,” whereas the monochrome salon scene on the right is “New” (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006; Caple, 2013). The black-and-white color evokes an earlier era, reinforcing the historical aspect of Black women’s role in shaping beauty culture. Both images, though distinct, form a single narrative of past contributions and present products.

#### **Text-Image Relationship**

The accompanying narration, “Its influence is universal,” refers to Black people’s impact on the beauty industry. From salons to makeup innovations, African American grooming practices and entrepreneurship have influenced trends far beyond their communities (Sherrow, 2001; Terrell, 2020).

Entry 2



Figure 2. Video scene 0:15

### Representational Metafunction

Three dark-skinned figures are in a dressing room, with mirrors, wigs, and cosmetics in the background. They appear to be drag performers, applying makeup. Action processes are evident: the figures hold or apply cosmetics. This setting suggests a drag performance context (Muldrow, 2021). Drag culture historically embraces bold makeup and exaggerations of womanhood, with looks such as cut creases serving as hallmark techniques (Moncrieff & Lienard, 2017). Sephora's alignment here indicates its acceptance and facilitation of drag beauty needs (Compass, 2018).

### Interactional Metafunction

All three figures look into the mirror rather than at the camera, creating an "offer" of information (Caple, 2013). The medium shot fosters a friendly social distance, while the eye-level angle conveys equality between subject and viewer, subtly inviting viewers to appreciate their process of self-transformation.

### Compositional Metafunction

No single participant overwhelms the scene, and the environment (mirror, makeup) is similarly emphasized. This equality in salience underscores the notion that drag artistry and its setting are equally important.

### Text-Image Relationship

The narration, "there'd be no cut creases and beat faces, without these legendary icons," directly credits drag culture—especially within Black communities—with popularizing techniques such as "cut creases" and "beat faces."

Entry 3



Figure 3. Video scene 0:24

### Representational Metafunction

A Black mother styles her daughter's hair with a toothbrush in what appears to be a family living room. Family photos are visible in the background. The mother's action



depicts hair care passed from one generation to another. African American hair care traditions often include creative styling practices, such as using toothbrushes for baby hairs (Uhaihair.com). This focus on a mother's care spotlights a nurturing dimension of Black beauty: motherhood as integral to personal grooming (Sparks, 2019).

#### Interactional Metafunction

A low angle positions viewers as observers looking "up" to the mother and child. The long shot and oblique angle create a slightly detached, observational role. The mother's gaze toward her daughter signifies warmth and responsibility, showing Black beauty as a loving, generational practice.

#### Compositional Metafunction

The mother and daughter are foregrounded but not in isolation; the setting (family photos) is visible, conveying an intimate, homely environment. Low-key lighting emphasizes tenderness and closeness (Roe, 2016).

#### Text-Image Relationship

The narration says, "No baby hair and laid edges without tight coils and a mother's love." The phrase "mother's love" underscores how family-based grooming rituals have shaped Black beauty standards.

Entry 4



Figure 4. Video scene 0:28

#### Representational Metafunction

Three figures (a Black man, a Black woman, and a white woman) wearing bright, samba-style costumes apply lotion backstage. Samba attire traces back to African influences in Brazil (Alma De Cuba, 2021). The presence of individuals from different races suggests diversity and inclusivity—hallmarks of Sephora's brand identity. Action processes involve applying lotion to exposed skin. The Black man, positioned with an athletic build, signals a metrosexual trend where men also partake in beauty regimens (Kartini, 2015).

#### Interactional Metafunction

At eye level, the participants maintain an indirect "offer" gaze, focusing on each other or their own bodies. The medium shot conveys social connection. Two different racial women physically interact, reflecting a theme of unity and cheerful camaraderie.

### Compositional Metafunction

Bright lighting and vibrant attire create an atmosphere of fun (Poland, 2015). The central Black female figure assists the white woman with lotion, reinforcing the notion of Black-led trends. There is no dominant figure in terms of salience, highlighting communal participation.

### Text-Image Relationship

The narration, “none of the glow, none of the shine...” references the luminous effect of using lotions for healthy skin, implying how Black beauty practices have also set global trends in skincare (Misra & Shrivastava, 2020).

Entry 5



Figure 5. Video scene 0:33

### Representational Metafunction

A Black woman in a kitchen setting mixes natural ingredients like butter and oil to create a skincare product. The activity of combining raw ingredients (e.g., butter, oils) points to a “DIY” approach derived from Black cultural traditions. Shea butter-based skincare is historically used by Black communities and later commercialized (Gant, 2017). This entry emphasizes how home-based beauty practices became mainstream.

### Interactional Metafunction

A medium shot, eye-level angle, and the woman’s gaze downward at her hands convey an “offer” of information: viewers observe her demonstration. The scene fosters involvement by making her activity transparent, hinting that anyone can replicate it.

### Compositional Metafunction

The participant is centered, suggesting she is the primary focus. The unobscured kitchen background, however, remains significant, reinforcing the link between domestic culture and beauty creation (Caple, 2013).

### Text-Image Relationship

The narration says, “...if they didn’t turn doing it yourself into doing it for the culture.” The “they” points to Black innovators whose personal experiments became cultural staples, eventually permeating the broader beauty industry (Sephora, 2021).

Entry 6



Figure 6. Video scene 0:46

### Representational Metafunction

Three dark-skinned figures in colorful, party-style outfits appear close to each other, gazing directly at the camera. These images are from New York City's drag scene of the 1980s and '90s (Murphy, 2020). They are performing or posing as drag queens, highlighting flamboyant fashion and makeup artistry. The cut-crease eye makeup and "hippie" fashion sense underscore drag's role in popularizing dramatic styles (thezoereport.com). This entry illustrates how Black and Latino "Ball" culture influenced mainstream beauty.

### Interactional Metafunction

Direct gazes at the camera communicate a "demand," inviting viewers to engage with their confidence (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006). The close-up shot fosters intimacy, as though forming a friendly bond.

### Compositional Metafunction

The bright costumes dominate the frame, and the background is blurred, ensuring full attention on the trio. Their unified poses, along with color, highlight their bold aesthetic.

### Text-Image Relationship

The narration, "the trends we love, the tools we need, the style that we can't wait to post, are all black beauty," establishes that mainstream beauty trends (like cut-crease eyeshadow) have roots in Black drag culture.

Entry 7



Figure 7. Video scene 0:52

### Representational Metafunction

Four close-up frames show a Black woman sequentially applying makeup—foundation, gloss, and so forth. She uses foundation matching her natural dark skin tone, a departure from the old notion that lighter skin is always more desirable (Thompson,

2009, as cited in Rahmawati, 2019). Her neat baby hairs also reflect a hairstyling technique originating in Black culture (Uhaihair.com). Plump, glossy lips—another modern beauty trend—further illustrate Black influence on mainstream cosmetics (Mazzarello, 2016).

#### Interactional Metafunction

The close-up shot and eye-level angle create an intimate relationship with the viewer. Her gaze off-camera “offers” an insight into her routine. Viewers are positioned as fellow participants in the beauty process.

#### Compositional Metafunction

All four frames center on the same woman, emphasizing each step in a cohesive tutorial. Consistent framing underscores unity in the process and highlights her transformation (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001).

#### Text-Image Relationship

The narrator states, “so it’s time we all give black beauty the credit it deserves.” Coupled with the visuals, Sephora highlights that foundation shades, lip gloss styles, and hairstyling methods are deeply rooted in Black culture.

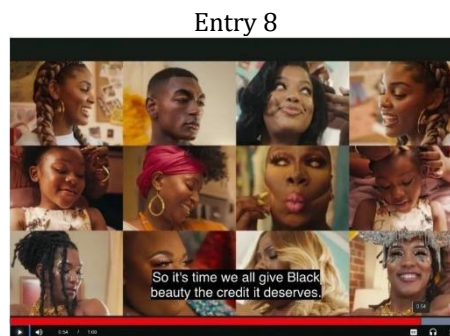


Figure 8. Video scene 0:54

#### Representational Metafunction

Twelve frames show close-ups of different Black individuals—varying in age, gender, and style—engaging in self-styling, such as hair grooming or makeup application. The collage depicts Black men, women, and a child, emphasizing generational continuity.

Many are seen applying or wearing makeup, reflecting how men’s grooming (including drag culture or metrosexual practices) has also entered mainstream beauty (Greaf, 2016; Hess, 2016). This montage underscores the collective influence of Black communities on contemporary beauty.

#### Interactional Metafunction

Positive facial expressions—raised eyebrows, smiles—convey an inviting vibe. The close-up shots enhance intimacy with the audience, while the eye-level angle signals equality (Caple, 2013). Indirect gazes still “offer” a look into their personal routines.

#### Compositional Metafunction

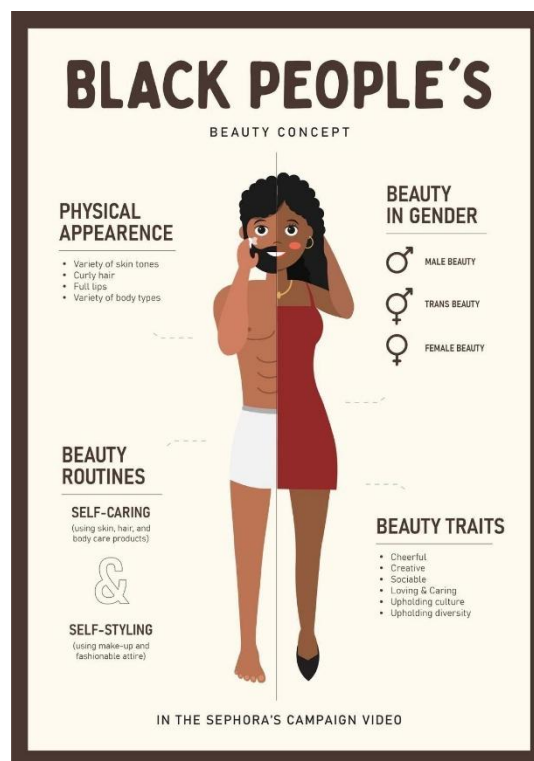
Each figure is centered in their frame with no blurred backgrounds. All are equally salient. Despite being separate images, they form a unified composition celebrating varied expressions of Black beauty.

### Text-Image Relationship

The narrator repeats, “so it’s time we all give black beauty the credit it deserves.” The inclusive pronoun “we” implies collective participation: both the campaign creators and viewers are urged to acknowledge Black influence on beauty. The imperative tone of “it’s time...” is an invitation to join this recognition.

### **Discussion on Beauty Concept by Sephora**

Analyzing these eight entries through three metafunctions reveals how Sephora’s campaign frames Black beauty as integral to mainstream trends. Below is a condensed overview of the core concepts uncovered (Figure 9 offers a summary diagram):



1. Black Roots in Beauty History
    - Vintage salon imagery and references to early Black beauty pioneers underscore how African Americans shaped modern beauty from the 19th century onward.
    - Baby hair styling, shea butter concoctions, and bold cosmetics (such as those used by drag performers) originated within Black communities.
  2. Inclusivity and Diversity
    - Multiple entries display a diverse cast—drag queens, women, men, and children.
    - Different angles, lighting, and distances depict communal experiences of beauty, aligning with Sephora’s emphasis on inclusivity.
  3. Generational and Cultural Transmission
    - Scenes of mothers caring for daughters’ hair, or older and younger individuals both applying makeup, highlight knowledge passed down through families.
    - This intergenerational link underscores how Black communities have preserved beauty practices as a collective cultural heritage.
  4. Empowerment and Self-Expression
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- Bold makeup, bright fashion, and drag performances are shown positively.
- Engaging camera angles and lighting present these practices as creative, joyful expressions of identity.

#### 5. Acknowledgment of Black Innovation

- Narration repeatedly emphasizes that mainstream beauty's "glow," "shine," and trends (like cut creases and baby hair edges) owe credit to Black culture.
- By showing the utility of Shea butter, body lotions, and specialized makeup for darker skin tones, Sephora foregrounds longstanding Black ingenuity.

Through these visuals and text, Sephora positions Black culture as central to popular beauty trends. The brand invites viewers to reflect on (and appreciate) how many contemporary makeup, hair, and skincare practices originated in, or were popularized by, the Black community.

Overall, the "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign not only advertises Sephora's products but functions as a social statement. By employing distinct semiotic strategies—such as angle, distance, color, and compositional framing—the video underscores how Black innovation in hairstyling, makeup, and self-care is ingrained within global beauty standards. The campaign consistently emphasizes the role of Black mothers, drag performers, and everyday individuals in shaping popular trends, highlighting that these innovations are not marginal but deeply embedded in the industry's core. Furthermore, it embraces diversity by showcasing various ages, genders, and body types, maintaining a unifying theme: celebrating Black culture's contributions to beauty history.

Sephora's narrative extends beyond mere representation, urging audiences to recognize and honor Black influence. The repeated imperative—"it's time we give black beauty the credit it deserves"—exemplifies an ethos of both acknowledgment and solidarity. By positioning Black people as innovators and key drivers of style, the campaign shifts typical beauty narratives, moving from a narrow, Eurocentric focus to a more inclusive, culturally rich depiction of what "beautiful" can mean.

Ultimately, this research clarifies how corporate campaigns can employ visual and textual strategies to reshape social perceptions. The findings indicate Sephora's alignment with broader cultural calls for inclusivity and representation, reinforcing that major beauty brands carry influence not just over consumer purchases, but also over cultural discourse. The "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign thus stands as a significant example of how commercial advertising can function as a site for affirming and celebrating historically underrepresented groups, granting them overdue recognition for their expansive contributions to the beauty industry.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how Sephora represents the concept of beauty in its "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign video, emphasizing both the visual and verbal (spoken) aspects of the material. By collecting scenes from Sephora's official YouTube video and organizing them into eight visual entries, the researcher was able to delve into the three metafunctions of Visual Grammar by Kress and Leeuwen (2006)—representational, interactional, and compositional—and subsequently analyze the *Text-Image Relationship* based on language and grammatical features. This process revealed not only the individual components of each visual entry but also how they collectively communicate a broader narrative of Black beauty as central and transformative within the beauty industry.



One of the most notable findings is that Sephora foregrounds Black individuals in a manner that highlights the diversity of physical appearances, stylistic expressions, and cultural practices. Black beauty, as shown in the campaign, comprises several defining characteristics. First, there is an emphasis on physical traits such as full lips, curly or textured hair, a range of skin tones, and different body types. Rather than treating these features as secondary or niche, the campaign makes them the focus of each scene, illustrating how valuable and influential Black aesthetics have been in setting trends. Second, the campaign underscores the passion for self-care and self-styling—Black women and men alike are shown actively engaging in beauty routines, such as hairstyling, makeup application, and creative grooming techniques. These routines reveal how the Black community has historically shaped mainstream beauty with innovative methods, from haircare rituals to makeup artistry.

Third, the study uncovers that Sephora's representation speaks to deeper traits within the Black community, such as creativity, caring, love, and sociability, which emerge as "tools" for building new beauty trends. By highlighting interpersonal connections (e.g., a mother teaching her daughter to style her hair, or drag performers collectively preparing for a show), the campaign shows that beauty is not just an isolated act; rather, it is a communal, cultural, and intergenerational experience. Fourth, the campaign expands the notion of beauty beyond conventional gender norms, presenting beauty as accessible to all—cisgender women, transgender women, men who embrace makeup and grooming, and a wide range of body types and identities. This aligns with the opening narration's rhetorical question, "What is beauty without Black beauty?"—a prompt that effectively asserts the centrality of Black culture to global beauty standards.

In showcasing these representations, Sephora subtly yet powerfully challenges mainstream beauty standards that have traditionally centered fair skin, straight hair, or slender bodies—physical attributes that diverge from many African-based phenotypes. By providing a counterpoint to these dominant ideals, the campaign not only celebrates the diversity of Black appearances but also repositions them as part of the core narrative of beauty rather than a peripheral exception. This message has the potential to shift consumer perspectives, encouraging broader acceptance and appreciation for various forms of beauty.

Moreover, the methodological approaches applied in this study—particularly the Social Semiotics framework (Kress & Leeuwen, 2006) and the analysis of *Text-Image Relationships*—allowed for an in-depth exploration of how Sephora's visuals and spoken narration interact. The language in the video consistently underscores how integral Black creativity is to popular trends, from innovative haircare routines (like laid edges and baby hairs) to culturally rooted skincare practices (using shea butter and natural oils). This synergy between visuals and voiceover ultimately strengthens the campaign's message, ensuring that audiences recognize the historical and ongoing contributions of Black communities in shaping the beauty industry.

Overall, by synthesizing the findings of the eight visual entries, the conclusion is clear: Sephora's "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign calls for a more inclusive understanding of beauty, positioning Black identity and aesthetics as driving forces rather than mere offshoots of a Eurocentric norm. The call to "give Black beauty the credit it deserves" is not just an advertising slogan but a statement that resonates with contemporary discourses on racial equity and representation. The analysis presented here has offered a lens to see how corporate campaigns can simultaneously promote products and engage in broader cultural conversations. Future campaigns in the beauty industry might well take cues from Sephora's approach, adopting more diverse, authentic,

and ethically aware messaging to address representation gaps and reshape consumer attitudes.

Building on the insights generated by this research, several recommendations can guide future studies and practical applications. Firstly, scholars interested in the intersection of media, marketing, and cultural studies should familiarize themselves thoroughly with Social Semiotics and Visual Grammar. The researcher recommends consulting core texts such as *Reading Images* by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) and *A Critical Social Semiotics Approach on Text-Image Relationship: Revisiting Bali Nine Ringleaders* by Perdana (2020). This theoretical grounding will help researchers decode nuanced visual and textual elements in campaign materials.

Secondly, as beauty campaigns increasingly intersect with social justice and identity politics, future researchers could benefit from collaborating with experts in sociology, anthropology, and communications. Such cross-disciplinary projects can reveal deeper layers of meaning behind representational choices in campaigns, examining not only their aesthetic impact but also their sociocultural significance.

Thirdly, marketing professionals and public relations practitioners can adapt these findings to develop more compelling campaigns. While crafting visuals and narratives, teams should maintain cultural sensitivity, ensure inclusivity, and highlight the authentic voices of underrepresented communities. A campaign's success often hinges on how well it resonates with audiences on social and cultural levels, not just on its product messages.

Fourthly, beyond qualitative semiotic analyses, future research could adopt quantitative methods to measure a campaign's effect on product sales and brand perception. Surveys, focus groups, or sales data analysis can clarify how these inclusive representations influence consumer behavior and brand loyalty. Additionally, measuring engagement on social media platforms can provide insights into how audiences discuss and share campaign messages, indicating broader cultural resonance.

Finally, given the growing relevance of social media marketing and representation studies, this project can serve as a model for Public Relations or Communications curricula. By examining real-world campaigns like Sephora's, students can develop analytical skills and better understand the intricate link between semiotics, cultural narratives, and effective messaging strategies.

By offering a comprehensive look at the visual and verbal rhetoric in Sephora's "Black Beauty is Beauty" campaign, this research underscores the transformative power of inclusive representation. It is the hope of the researcher that future scholars, practitioners, and students alike will build on these observations to advance richer, more equitable conversations in the beauty industry and beyond.

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