

KIEA'INA



Special Report: Diversity & Inclusion

Why Beauty Can't Be Tone Deaf Anymore



Introduction

A quick look at the expansive group of beauty influencers who dominate social media makes it clear that the group is diverse: not just in personality or makeup style, but—even more fundamentally—in skin color. Immediately beyond these influencers lies an even more diverse group of people: their followers, who look to these beauty mavens for trustworthy expertise to inform their makeup purchases. The relationship between influencers and their diverse followers has created a responsibility for influencers to keep all of their followers in mind when they are reviewing products and brands, resulting in more influencers critiquing products that are not usable by a wide range of skin tones. With the increase in the power of diverse social media influencers in the beauty community comes a significant shift in expectations for brands and their products: conversations no longer just focus on the efficacy of products, but on whom the products are made for.



YouTuber Calls Out Brands

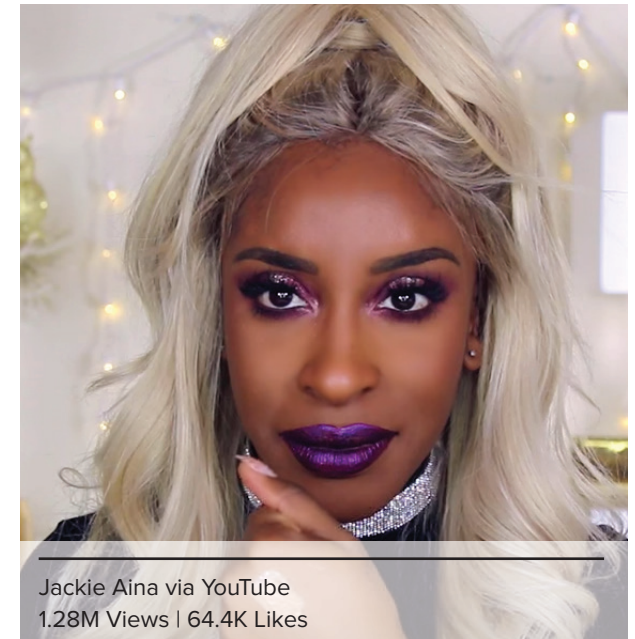
“I can support all of the black-girl friendly makeup lines that are out there and still side-eye the ones that are not diverse.”

—Jackie Aina

Some influencers take a more direct approach in their critique of how inclusive a brand’s products are. In a December 2016 video titled “The Worst Beauty Brands EVER For POC [People of Color]!,” YouTuber Jackie Aina presented her picks of the “worst” brands for people with dark skin tones, based on the brands’ shade offerings. The influencer didn’t hold back in describing how the four brands—Almay, It Cosmetics, Physicians Formula, and Laneige—did not offer sufficient face products for women of deep skin tones. Though Laneige is a Korean beauty brand primarily focused on creating shades to meet the needs of the Asian beauty market, Aina’s call-out remains especially important for any brand with a growing American presence. In addition to calling out these four brands, Aina also discussed how exclusionary the makeup industry can be, and explained her no-holds-barred criticism of brands. “I’m a blogger, it’s my job to review products,” she said. “I can support all of the black-girl friendly makeup lines that are out there and still side-eye the ones that are not diverse.”

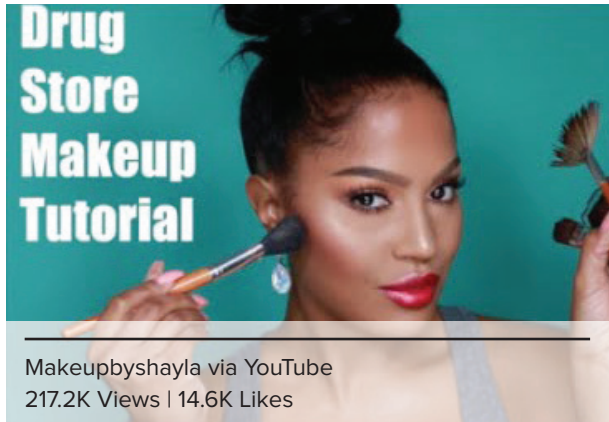
The influencer reassured her followers that she was simply using her channel to speak up for women of color: “I’m not doing this video to maliciously hurt these brands, it’s genuinely saying [to brands], ‘Guys, it’s 2016 and ‘Alabaster’ should not be the only shade on the market.’ ... It’s just a way to say, ‘We’re here too and we’re watching you.’” She ended her video with a playful challenge to makeup brands, explaining

that a failure to account for consumer diversity in creating products simply leaves the door open for brands that do care to come in and take the brand’s customers. (“One day when I have a makeup line,” she said, “... I’ll come in and slay the game and steal all [these brands’] customers and I have no problem doing that.”) Aina’s video should be viewed as a call-to-action for all makeup brands in the US to begin providing products for a wider spectrum of skin tones. It’s a critique that isn’t new to the industry, but is more easily amplified by influencers like Aina—who have dark skin, established relationships with brands, and the access necessary to effect change.



Jackie Aina via YouTube
1.28M Views | 64.4K Likes

Shade Range Is Part of the Rubric



“Pretty much everything I use [in my videos] is women-of-color friendly.”

—Jackie Aina

While Aina’s video dealt with the issue of inclusivity in makeup offerings head-on, many other prominent influencers also address it consistently in their content, often including a product’s shade range or general usability for all skin tones in the rubric for their review. Regardless of their own skin tone, influencers know how ethnically diverse their audiences are, so they strive to make product recommendations as applicable to all of their viewers as possible. For many bloggers, that means making sure that beauty brands are held accountable to their consumers’ diverse range of skin tones as well.

Beauty powerhouse Kathleen Fuentes, better known as KathleenLights, has 2.9M subscribers on YouTube. The influencer, who is fair-skinned, often comments on a product’s usability for both light and dark skin tones—never restraining her critique of a product’s range of shades, even when it is one of her favorites. In her “February Favorites” video, the beauty maven touted Physicians Formula’s Butter Bronzer as one of her all-time favorite drugstore bronzers. But in regards to the two shade offerings—the darker of which worked for her relatively light skin—Fuentes implored the brand to expand the shade range. “If you have a medium to deep skin tone, this probably won’t show up on you,” Fuentes warned. “So, Physicians Formula, if you are watching this, you need to make this in a darker shade so we can all wear it, because it’s really amazing!” As a highly influential and well-trusted content creator, Fuente’s endorsement, or criticism, of

a brand’s products can have a lasting effect on how the brand is viewed by followers.

Influencers don’t always “throw shade” on shade ranges. In contrast, a darker-skinned influencer’s consistent use of a brand that offers shade options for their skin tone speaks volumes. Shayla Mitchell of Makeupshayla (who boasts 366.5K YouTube followers and 2.2M Instagram followers) posted a video titled “Drugstore Makeup Slay-Torial,” in which she praised Maybelline as a consistent drugstore option for her dark skin—and a brand that she was “excited about.” And in her video calling out brands that are not suitable for people of color, Aina reminded viewers that “pretty much everything I use [in my videos] is women-of-color friendly.” With thousands, even millions, of users looking to these darker-skinned beauty experts for makeup recommendations, a single influencer’s consistent use of a brand can quickly attach an “inclusive seal of approval” to the brand and its product offerings.

Aina, Fuentes, and Mitchell are definitely not alone in their comments, both positive and negative, on makeup brands’ shade offerings. Other influencers, such as Tati Westbrook of Glam Life Guru (2.4M YouTube subscribers) consistently consider the shade range of a product during their reviews—in July, Tati notably commended Kat Von D for launching its Lock-It Concealer Creme in an impressive 20 shades. By criticizing or complimenting a brand’s usability across skin tones, these influencers are creating a new standard of inclusiveness that benefits all of their followers.

Tackling Inclusivity Through Product Collaborations

“I’m so glad that [women of color] are getting recognition in the makeup community and that you made a product specifically designed for WoC. It means a lot to girls out there who feel like there is nothing meant for them.”

—Eleana Carter
via YouTube Comment

The pervasiveness of the conversation of inclusivity within the beauty community becomes even clearer when looking at product collaborations between influencers and brands. Often, influencer collaborations represent distinct forays into making more inclusive products: in some cases, it’s because the partnering influencer has darker skin; in other cases, it’s thanks to targeted efforts made by the influencer themselves. Additionally, these product collaborations are often supremely popular among consumers and drive some of the highest EMV figures for brands.

Aina, arguably one of the most outspoken influencers on shade inclusivity, collaborated with brand Artist Couture to develop a deep-skin friendly holiday collection in 2016. Aina announced her collaboration with the brand, launched by influencer Angel Merino (Instagram’s @mac_daddy) at the end of the year. The Jackie Aina x Artist Couture Holiday Set included the brand’s Diamond Glow Powder, an all-purpose shimmer powder, in “LaBronze,” a brand new shade that Aina had worked with the brand to create. Aina described the rose gold shade as “definitely not only for my dark girls. It’s for my medium girls, it’s for my light girls. ‘LaBronze’ ... is a shade that pretty much everyone can rock. ... I am so proud of this product because I had the chance to actually make something that would flatter me, flatter you guys.”

Aina drove \$1.4M EMV for Artist Couture in 2016. The Holiday Set, which featured the “LaBronze” collaboration and quickly sold out

on the brand’s website, drove \$339.3K EMV for the brand. In creating a popular, versatile product for a wide range of skin tones for Artist Couture, Aina also enriched the brand’s image with her general passion for inclusivity and diversity, a crucial mindset for brands to adopt as conversations of inclusivity among influencers gain steam.

In June, Tarte released the limited-edition Tarteist x @Makeupshayla Contour Palette in collaboration with Shayla Mitchell. The influencer announced the partnership in a tutorial video for the palette, noting that while its shades were intended for all skin tones, one in particular was especially “bomb” for deeper skin. Though some users griped that Tarte still needed to create a “permanent” contour kit for deeper tones, most followers received the palette positively. One user commented, “I’m so glad that [women of color] are getting recognition in the makeup community and that you made a product specifically designed for WoC. It means a lot to girls out there who feel like there is nothing meant for them.” The palette, which sold out and was subsequently restocked, generated \$7.2M EMV for Tarte in 2016. Meanwhile, Mitchell drove \$8.5M EMV for Tarte over the year.

With their collaborations, Aina and Mitchell, influencers with dark skin tones, created products that they, by their own admission, would have no problem using on a daily basis. Artist Couture and Tarte gave them the creative freedom to conceptualize their dream products, and in doing so, successfully

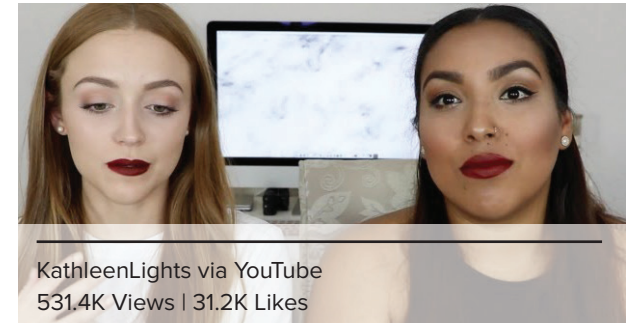
“I always hear my subscribers with deeper skin tones say they can never find highlights that work for them. So, I knew I wanted to create a color for them because light skin is not the only skin color in the world.”

—KathleenLights



developed products that had women with darker skin tones not only in mind, but at the forefront. By granting Aina and Mitchell decision-making power in the collaboration, the brand effectively utilized these influencers’ knowledge of what is usable and desired by people with deeper skin tones, successfully expanding their product offerings to become more inclusive.

Even when influencers have light- or medium-tone skin, they continue to acknowledge and consider their deeper-skinned followers. Kathleen Fuentes of KathleenLights has partnered with numerous brands, including Makeup Geek, Ofra, and ColourPop, on a myriad of collaborations. For each project, the influencer works hard to reassure her followers that when she conceptualizes products and shades, she has all her followers—and all of their skin tones—in mind. In her video announcing the KathleenLights Highlighter Palette collaboration



with Makeup Geek, Fuentes explained how pivotal her followers were in her decisions throughout the palette’s development, and oriented the conversation around Makeup Geek to one about inclusiveness. She chose to include a deeper highlight color in the trio because, “I always hear my subscribers with deeper skin tones say they can never find highlights that work for them. So, I knew I wanted to create a color for them because light skin is not the only skin color in the world.” In July, Fuentes uploaded a video in which she and her deeper-skinned best friend, Emilia, swatched all of her ColourPop and Ofra lip product collaborations, demonstrating what each shade looked like on her own light skin, and on Emilia’s darker skin. In producing the 11-minute video, Fuentes not only heavily showcased the two brands and their products, but subtly heralded ColourPop and Ofra as versatile options for individuals of all skin tones. Fuentes drove \$23.7M EMV for ColourPop and \$12.1M EMV for Ofra in 2016.

What Does This Mean for Brands?

Whether influencers are deep-skinned themselves or speak on behalf of followers with deep skin tones, the influencer community is using its clout and access to brands to change expectations of whom brands should be making products for. Influencers, with their legitimate power to affect the purchasing habits of consumers, are using their social media channels to amplify criticism in instances where the beauty industry is lacking inclusiveness. Furthermore, because what influencers create is primarily guided by the interests and concerns of their thousands, or millions, of followers, influencer collaborations with brands have become leading examples of products conceptualized, produced, and marketed with diversity in mind. As influencer conversations around inclusivity and diversity grow, it will become integral for brands that want to be fully embraced by the influencer community, and their diverse followings, to make distinct efforts to make their brand offerings more inclusive.

