

Starting up

- For many years, Unilever, one of the world's largest consumer goods companies, has sold a product in India called *Fair & Lovely*. What kind of product do you think it is?
- In what ways do you think the recent *Black Lives Matter* movement could have an impact on the cosmetics and beauty industry?
- What is the perception of fair skin for women in much of Asia and the Middle East? And what is the perception of tanned skin in much of Europe?

Reading

Unilever, one of the world's largest consumer goods companies, plans to change the name of one of its most successful skincare products in India. Read the article to find out why.

Reading comprehension

Read the article again and answer the following questions.

- 1 What kind of product is *Fair & Lovely*?
- 2 Why is Unilever planning to change the name of *Fair & Lovely*?
- 3 How long has the product *Fair & Lovely* been on the market in India?
- 4 How much money does *Fair & Lovely* generate in sales income per annum in India?
- 5 In what parts of the world are skin lightening products popular?
- 6 What message does Unilever want to project about *Fair & Lovely* in the future?
- 7 India has long been obsessed with fair skin. Why?
- 8 What other cosmetics company sells a similar product to *Fair & Lovely* in India?
- 9 Which group in India has been against products such as *Fair & Lovely* and why?
- 10 Why have some Bollywood actresses been accused of 'colourism'?
- 11 According to Bollywood actress and director, Nandita Das, what is the social message behind skin lightening products like *Fair & Lovely*?
- 12 What steps has Unilever already taken to change its marketing of *Fair & Lovely*?

Unilever to change name of *Fair & Lovely* skin lightening cream

¹Unilever is to change the name of its Fair & Lovely skin lightening cream, one of India's most popular skincare products, becoming the latest multinational to alter product ranges under pressure over racial stereotyping.

²The move to rebrand the 45-year-old product follows a decision by rival Johnson & Johnson last week to stop selling skin-lightening lotion.

³Such products are popular across Asia and the Middle East but have long faced criticism over their implicit message that light skin is preferable to darker tones. That pressure has intensified amid the global antiracism protests sparked by the police killing of US black man George Floyd.

⁴Unilever, one of the world's largest consumer goods companies, said on Thursday that it would unveil a new brand name for Fair & Lovely "in the next few months". Fair & Lovely makes more than \$500m a year for the company in India alone.

⁵Sunny Jain, president of the Anglo-Dutch company's beauty and personal care division, said: "We recognise that the use of the words 'fair', 'white' and 'light' suggest a singular ideal of beauty that we don't think is right, and we want to address this." He said the brand had been "progressively moving to a more inclusive vision of beauty that celebrates skin glow".

⁶India has long been obsessed with fair skin, traditionally viewed as an essential component of beauty. The whitening cream market has boomed in recent decades, when many other global brands launched products to compete with Fair & Lovely.

⁷But such products have faced a growing backlash from Indian women's activists, who said the constant emphasis on the importance of fair skin damages the confidence of women who do not have it.

⁸This year Bollywood actresses who spoke out in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement were accused of hypocrisy for promoting "colourism" in India with their own lucrative contracts to endorse skin whitening creams

⁹Bollywood actress and director Nandita Das, who served as the face of a social media campaign called "Dark is Beautiful" aimed at countering stereotypes, called Unilever's announcement "a step in the right direction".

¹⁰"Words do matter," she said. Fair & Lovely was "not just a brand — it's almost a euphemism for the kind of look people are seeking, and this obsession with fair skin. They tied it in with confidence, and with self-esteem, saying you'll not get a husband, you'll not get a job, and the world will collapse if you did not become lighter . . . It attacked a basic sense of self in young women."

¹¹She said she hoped Unilever was sincere in seeking to change the values of the brand, rather than merely repackage "old wine in a new bottle". The company's decision would "trigger conversations" around issues of colour and beauty in India, she said, adding that other companies might follow suit.

¹²Unilever said it had already changed the marketing of Fair & Lovely, removing before-and-after images and moving towards a message of "women empowerment".



Vocabulary

Find words or phrases in the article to match the definitions below.

- 1 make changes to (Para 1)
- 2 business competitor (Para 2)
- 3 when something is not stated directly (Para 3)
- 4 increased, become stronger (Para 3)
- 5 caused to happen (Para 3)
- 6 announce officially (Para 4)
- 7 aiming to involve everyone (Para 5)
- 8 always thinking about something (Para 6)
- 9 a strong negative reaction to something (Para 7)
- 10 bringing a lot of money (Para 8)
- 11 to say publicly that you support something (Para 8)
- 12 fighting against (Para 9)
- 13 a word people use when they want to talk about something embarrassing without mentioning the thing itself (Para 10)
- 14 confidence in yourself (Para 10)
- 15 start, set off (Para 11)

Grammar – reported speech

Change the following extracts from the article into either direct or reported speech.

- 1 Unilever said that it would unveil a new brand name for *Fair & Lovely* in the next few months. (*into direct speech*)
- 2 “We recognise that the use of the words ‘fair’, ‘white’ and ‘light’ suggest a singular ideal of beauty that we don’t think is right, and we want to address this.” (Sunny Jain, president of the Unilever’s beauty and personal care division) (*into reported speech*)
- 3 Sunny Jain said the brand had been progressively moving to a more inclusive vision of beauty that celebrates skin glow. (*into direct speech*)
- 4 “Fair & Lovely is not just a brand — it’s almost a euphemism for the kind of look people are seeking”. (Nandita Das) (*into reported speech*)
- 5 Nandita Das said she hoped Unilever was sincere in seeking to change the values of the brand, rather than merely repackage “old wine in a new bottle”. (*into direct speech*)
- 6 Nandita Das said that the company’s decision would trigger conversations around issues of colour and beauty in India, adding that other companies might follow suit. (*into direct speech*)
- 7 Unilever said it had already changed the marketing of *Fair & Lovely*. (*into direct speech*)

Discussion

1 Unilever is intending to change the name of *Fair & Lovely* and to change the marketing message of the product. But it will still be a skin lightening product. So if the company is serious about not being accused of racial stereotyping, shouldn't it simply withdraw the product from the market? Otherwise they will merely be repackaging "old wine in a new bottle", to quote Nandita Das. What is your opinion?

2 Why is it that many women who have fair skin want to be more tanned, whereas many women with dark skin want to be more fair-skinned?

3 Discuss these comments made by some readers of the article in *The Financial Times*.

How ironic. India still has an effective caste system which institutionalises prejudice and discrimination on a grand scale but a skin lightening product causes offence and fuss. Strange priorities.

Culturally, many westerners like to holiday in the sun and get a nice tan. Are they to be accused of 'blackening up'? Similarly, in parts of Asia, there is a preference for fairer skin. Should these skin lightening products be banned?

ANSWER KEY**Reading comprehension**

- 1 A skin lightening cream.
- 2 Because of pressure over possible racial stereotyping.
- 3 45 years.
- 4 \$500m.
- 5 In Asia and the Middle East.
- 6 The company's new message is "a more inclusive vision of beauty that celebrates skin glow".
- 7 Because fair skin is traditionally viewed as an essential component of beauty.
- 8 Johnson & Johnson.
- 9 Indian Women's activists. They claim that the constant emphasis on the importance of fair skin damages the confidence of women who do not have it.
- 10 Because they have their own lucrative contracts to endorse skin whitening creams.
- 11 According to Nandita Das, the implicit message is that fair skin is linked to confidence and self-esteem. "If you don't have fair skin, you'll not get a husband, you'll not get a job, and the world will collapse if you did not become lighter. It attacks a basic sense of self in young women."
- 12 It has removed before-and-after images and is moving towards a message of "women empowerment".

Vocabulary

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1 alter | 6 unveil | 11 endorse |
| 2 rival | 7 inclusive | 12 countering |
| 3 implicit | 8 obsessed | 13 euphemism |
| 4 intensified | 9 backlash | 14 self-esteem |
| 5 sparked | 10 lucrative | 15 trigger |

Grammar

- 1 The company will unveil a new brand name for *Fair & Lovely* in the next few months.
- 2 Sunny Jain said that Unilever recognised that the use of the words 'fair', 'white' and 'light' suggested a singular ideal of beauty that the company didn't think was right, and they wanted to address this.
- 3 The brand has been progressively moving to a more inclusive vision of beauty that celebrates skin glow.
- 4 Nandita Das said that *Fair & Lovely* was not just a brand — it was almost a euphemism for the kind of look people were seeking.
- 5 I hope Unilever is sincere in seeking to change the values of the brand, rather than merely repackage "old wine in a new bottle".
- 6 The company's decision will trigger conversations around issues of colour and beauty in India, and other companies may follow suit.
- 7 We have already changed the marketing of *Fair & Lovely*.

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