

(0:00) Hi, my name is Kalia Xiong, and for my capstone project, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of (0:07) Rare Beauty's social media content. So get ready with me to trust a brand. Across social media, (0:14) we see brands constantly trying to present themselves as authentic and relatable.

But (0:19) what does authenticity actually look like when it's part of a marketing strategy? (0:23) Today, I'm exploring how authenticity is not just expressed by brands, but constructed. The brand I (0:32) focused on is Rare Beauty, founded by Selena Gomez in 2020. It's known for its natural, (0:38) real skin makeup aesthetic and positioning itself as accessible and easy to use.

(0:44) Rare Beauty's mission statement emphasizes self-acceptance, inclusivity, mental health, (0:49) and creating a supportive, safe space. So rhetorically, it's not just promoting products, (0:54) it's also promoting a set of values. And that raises an important question.

How does Rare (1:02) Beauty use rhetorical strategies in its social media content to construct and communicate its (1:07) mission of authenticity and self-acceptance? In other words, how is authenticity being created (1:13) across platforms, not just expressed? To explore this, I analyzed 27 social media artifacts across (1:20) TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Each platform was chosen intentionally because they function (1:25) differently. And by comparing all three, I could examine how authenticity shifts across platforms.

(1:34) I used a one-to-five scale to measure how strongly different rhetorical strategies (1:39) appeared in each post. I coded for ethos, pathos, logos, inclusivity, authenticity cues, (1:45) and community building. This allowed me to move beyond simply identifying what was present (1:50) and instead analyze how central each strategy was in constructing the brand's message.

(1:58) Across platforms, a few clear patterns emerged. On Instagram, Rare Beauty relies heavily on (2:03) emotional appeal, especially around self-worth. On TikTok, the content feels the most authentic (2:09) and inclusive, but it's also the most inconsistent.

And on YouTube, the content is (2:14) more controlled and less community-driven. So overall, the content aligns strongly with (2:18) the brand's mission of authenticity and self-acceptance. But when looking more closely, (2:23) this is where the analysis becomes more complex.

Because while the messaging appears consistent, (2:29) a more layered dynamic emerges. I began to notice moments where two things were happening at the same (2:35) time. For example, Rare Beauty promotes messages like, you are enough.

But at the same time, it (2:42) promotes products designed to enhance appearance. This reflects a relationship between self-acceptance, (2:48) messaging, and product promotion. And this is what I describe as promotional tension.

(2:53) And this isn't just one example. This tension shows up across the content in different ways. (2:58) Authenticity is consistently presented in ways that feel natural, relatable, and unfiltered.

(3:04) At the same time, those moments are still shaped by deliberate choices, like how content is framed, (3:10) who is featured, and how products are introduced. So rather than authenticity simply existing in (3:15) the content, it's being carefully constructed alongside the brand's promotional goals. (3:21) And this pattern becomes even more apparent when we move beyond individual posts and look at the (3:25) brand as a whole, like the Rare Impact Fund.

The Rare Impact Fund is Rare Beauty's initiative (3:32) focused on expanding access to mental health resources and support. On one hand, the brand (3:38) supports mental health initiatives, has raised over \$20 million, and contributes to communities (3:43) around the world. On the other hand, when we look at how the fund operates, only 1% of annual sales (3:49) is directly contributed by the brand, and much of the impact is tied to consumer participation (3:54) and external support.

So this highlights a relationship between messaging and structure, (4:01) where advocacy is strongly emphasized, while impact remains connected to consumption. (4:06) And this is exactly what I mean by promotional tension, where authentic messaging and commercial (4:11) structures are working together at the same time. So across platforms, Rare Beauty consistently (4:21) presents itself as authentic through emotional appeal, inclusivity, and community.

But when we (4:27) look more closely, that authenticity isn't just naturally occurring, it's being shaped through (4:32) content choices, platform strategies, and brand decisions. And through that, we see how authenticity (4:39) and marketing aren't separate, yet working together. But I'll leave you with this.

When a brand feels (4:45) authentic, is that authenticity something we're witnessing, or something we're persuaded to believe? (4:51) Thank you everyone!