

Shay Mitchell's face masks for kids sparks debate on Gen Alpha beauty products

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Baby's first backlash

Rini seems to target two emerging avenues for growth: Gen Alpha and Korean beauty. Their Instagram bio simply reads, "Consciously Crafted in Korea, Just for Kids!"

- US shoppers spent \$2 billion on K-beauty products in the 12 months ended July, up 37% YoY, per Nielsen data shared with Business Insider.
- The hashtag "Sephora Kids," which describes the Gen Alphas that like to buy and review makeup, is filled with "Get ready with me" posts from tiny consumers.

However, the brand's launch sparked condemnation. Fractional CMO Lydia Lee [called out rini's business aims](#) and said some of their marketing "reads less like playtime and more like Patrick Bateman in 'American Psycho.'" Her critique garnered over 300 comments, most of which echoing that sentiment.

"The way [rini is] marketing it is explicitly connected to the way adult skincare is marketed, which I think really feels off," said Sara Wilson, founder of community strategy consultancy SW Projects.

Top comments on Mitchell's pre-launch Instagram post include "Girl did not one of your friends tell you not to do this???" and "I struggle to find the right words to articulate how disappointing and dystopian this is."

Studying audience outrage

While the brand is trying to connect parents and kids, it misjudged where boundaries fall, said Crystal Foote, founder and head of partnerships at Digital Culture Group. While 75% of US Gen Alpha parents have heard their children's opinions on beauty, only 31% actually changed their consumer behavior, according to a June DKC survey.

"If I go shopping with my daughter and she wants something, that doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to give it to her," she said.

"A lot of brands are testing the market when they go live with a launch," said Foote, who said launching a product without ample market research is especially dangerous when children are involved.

Digital Culture Group used ARI, its in-house predictive AI model, to simulate audience reaction to rini and found concern. Its synthetic audience of millennials and Gen Z moms came in with a low conversion potential, and ARI predicted that the audience "might question the necessity and safety of toddler skincare, preferring authentic, responsible products."

Beauty company Kiehl's was quick to take a side. The brand acknowledged the outrage with a [post dismissing the product line](#), writing "Let them have messy hair and wild hearts, not complicated skincare routines" alongside a kid wearing a crafty shark head.

When are consumers OK with it?

Concerns about Gen Alpha beauty aren't new, but rini stands out because "it's not marketed in a traditional kid-like manner with cutesy bows and bubbles," said Wilson.

Other beauty brands like Everden, which has a bestselling collab with Barbie, deliver child skincare in bright packaging that could read as more palatable. Wilson also mentioned the Pamper Truck, a whimsical beauty birthday party tour bus for kids in the UK.

"Whether it's Target or a bodega in Koreatown, you're going to see masks that are, if not for kids, marketed in very childlike ways with pandas and cute illustrations," said Wilson, adding that deep reactions to the marketing lead to "selective outrage."

The necessity of community backing

When 15-year-old influencer Salish Matter's skincare brand Sincerely Yours made its public debut at a Sephora in the American Dream mall, Wilson said 80,000 fans showed up.

"If you have that fan base that's excited about you, they're going to drown out that negative response," she said, referring to the Sincerely Yours launch.

Mitchell doesn't seem to have built that level of personal connection with a community. She shared a testimonial about bonding with her kids over masks, but rini doesn't appear in her Instagram bio while her other brands do.

Wilson said more world building is key.

"Entertainment is going to be a really key lever for driving all of this, and connecting with your kids is a huge value prop," she said. "There's an emotional [reaction to rini] here that has nothing to do with Gen Alpha wanting to remove micro toxins from their skincare routine."

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