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PR 2500

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PR Model Analytical Paper: 818 Tequila

Introduction

In February of 2021, Kendall Jenner made an announcement via Instagram that she would be launching her own tequila line named 818. The post began sharing, “For almost 4 years, I’ve been on a journey to create the best tasting tequila...” (Ramirez). Prior to this announcement, there had been much speculation regarding Jenner and the launch of the brand. To her nearly 300 million Instagram followers, she would post images of herself drinking tequila with nameless bottles nearby within ambient settings, causing social media users to speculate. Despite the widespread theorizations, there were no celebrities that had posted on the topic nor was there user-generated content created regarding the brand preceding Jenner’s statement.

Upon making the February announcement which included pictures of the product’s creation process, Jenner’s older sister, Kim Kardashian, endorsed the product, and earned-media recognition was obtained through outlets such as *Elle* and *Forbes*. At this time, the Instagram page for the company was launched. In May of 2021, the famous model, reality tv star, socialite, and social media influencer made another social media post announcing that 818 Tequila had officially hit the market, and was available to purchase within select U.S. locations. Following the craze of that launch, the company hosted launch parties in various locations, pop-ups, influencer campaigns, and social media strategies were utilized heavily.

The product itself is “Certified B-Corp...1% for the Planet partner in Jalisco, Mexico...100% Blue Weber Agave...sourced from family-owned farms...cooked in traditional brick ovens, and aged in oak barrels” (Mainwaring). According to the 818 Tequila website, the

Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

company so far has won “47 tasting awards across 14 spirits competitions including Gold Medal and Best Reposado at the World Tequila Awards” (drink818.com). Jenner’s launch received both positive and negative feedback, but overall, it appears to be an overwhelming success. This paper seeks to analyze how the company achieved such a victory through their PR strategies.

PR Concepts

818 Tequila employs what is known as the Two-Way Asymmetrical Model. Of the four PR models that exist (Press Agency/Publicity Model, Public Information Model, Two-Way Asymmetrical Model, and Two-Way Symmetrical Model), the Two-Way Asymmetrical Model aims to persuade an audience that they truly need a product by understanding psychologically what drives that audience. A key part of this model is receiving some sort of feedback from the audience and communicating back to them. However, the commentary provided by the target market is used to benefit the organization and not necessarily to maintain consistent communication. Edward Bernays (1891-1995), father of the Two-Way Asymmetrical Model and also Sigmund Freud’s nephew, believed that “...individuals were often irrational and driven by unconscious desires. He argued that public relations professionals could use psychological techniques to guide and influence these desires to achieve specific outcomes” (Ibrulj 57). That is essentially what this model is all about—being able to manipulate the consumer into purchasing the product. Bernays also argued “...public relations practitioners are obligated to provide the society with information on the organization by increasing the public interest in social, economical and political virtues...” (Ertürk and Berkman 65). This is where the particular tactics of the model come into play: scientific persuasion, public opinion and manipulation, the

Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

consulting role that the PR team possesses, bilateral communication, recipient feedback, etc. 818 Tequila implements a blend of these tactics in their own campaigns. First, scientific persuasion is always applied extensively. By making it known in these campaigns that they're Certified B-Corp, a 1% for the Planet partner, promotion of being carbon neutral, and letting the audience know in social media posts and website that their production "...runs on biomass and solar power, which means reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and our carbon footprint..." (drink818.com), they not only cater to a market of those who value sustainability and environmentally-backed initiatives, but they also provide the scientific information to the consumer as validation which in turn builds 818's credibility. A second use of the model's many strategies were the price adjustments made based on market research. In the beginning of 818's launch, Kendall Jenner appeared to have an objective of having this be a luxury product (this is reflected within the aesthetic posts being made), and the prices certainly reflected that: Blanco being \$45, Reposado standing at \$55, and Añejo at \$65. After receiving market feedback, analyzing their sales, consumer behavior, etc., the company realized that price point might have been a mistake and adjusted the prices accordingly (\$29.99 Blanco, \$39 Reposado, and \$49 Añejo). Following those amendments, in 2024, the Blanco tequila specifically saw a 94% increase in sales (Monteros). That alone is quite telling of how the company was able to succeed due to consumer dialogue. The final concept is a blend of two details: selling a lifestyle/aesthetic and incorporation of influencers/celebrity endorsements. Kendall Jenner alone is such a colossal public figure, so for her to launch any product in general will make particular demographics want to try it. Celebrity alcohol brands are not too new although they're not as popular as celebrity

Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

beauty brands. For instance, George Clooney's tequila company (sold in 2017 for \$1 billion), Casamigos, is one of the best-selling tequilas on the market. Aside from Jenner's large presence, other celebrities received PR packages and promoted the tequila, including Amy Schumer, many of the Kardashians, Cara Delevigne. This is an excellent way to increase the brand's viewing range. What perhaps was an immense driving-factor for the company was the incorporation of social media influencers. The brand selected individuals who fit the brand's aesthetic (fashion, luxury, lifestyle) and they catered the content to expand the brand's reach even further. The brand also hosted surprise events at locations like colleges, and were able to obtain much exposure both socially in person and via social media. When viewing the 818 Tequila Instagram feed, it is evident the company wants to make the consumer feel as if they are more luxurious when drinking their tequila. Selling an idea rather than discussing the product to no end tends to be more effective because it holds a strong connection to one's emotional state.

Earned Media Coverage

As discussed prior, 818 did not receive all positive feedback following the initial release. On a *Good Morning America* Report, Jenner received much harsh criticism related to cultural appropriation because she is not of Mexican descent (*Good Morning America*). There was much growing frustration regarding Jenner's venture into the tequila industry since many believe tequila is a dominant Mexican product. On a lighter note, *Forbes* covered the launch of 818 and in fact applauded the company for its blind taste-testing process. In the article, there was mention of the tequila winning "... the 2020 World's Best Reposado title from the World Tequila Awards" (Montero). A fine attention to detail on some flavors within the reposado are also introduced,

Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

including, "...pecan pie, sweet potato and caramel...oaky influence, vanilla, and more sweetness on the finish a cinnamon ice cream comes through" (Montero). Aside from these two sources, *Elle* magazine, notorious for covering fashion, reported on one of Jenner's 818 launch parties illuminating the immense celebrity guest list, highlighting the hardworking family of women she is from, stepping "...into the spirit industry, which has historically been male-dominated" (*Elle*), and overall emphasizing what an achievement the entire brand is for Kendall Jenner. The most negative backlash that Jenner received from any mainstream news media was strictly on the topic of cultural appropriation, so it is probably no shock that the same feedback came from social media users. A tweet from an upset user stated, "Kendall Jenner starting a tequila brand, with zero knowledge on Mexican culture and calling it "818 tequila" is GENTRIFICATION" (Appendix A). Another infuriated tweet reads, "Kendall Jenner starting a tequila company does not sit right w me at all... she's an unseasoned white privileged rich girl from Calabasas what the hell does she know about tequila?!" (Appendix B). A final tweet digs at the Kardashian clan stating, "Kendall Jenner coming out with her own tequila brand... what's next on the Kardashian/Jenner colonization list?" (Appendix C). Many thousands of social media comments were very similar to these. It's apparent that many individuals felt Jenner was not in the position, nor did she possess the knowledge to create a product with such a distinct heritage associated with it. The Kardashians in general are a controversial subject as it is, so she was certainly bound to get pushback either way. However, the hate could not keep up with this Kardashian. As reported by *The Spirits Business*, "818 Tequila, the brand created by *Keeping Up with the*

Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

Kardashians star Kendall Jenner, has reported sales of 136,000 cases in its first seven months of business” (Malczewski).

PR Effectiveness Analysis

The results 818 Tequila was able to produce is a testament to the brand’s well-executed PR strategies. Those 136,000 cases sold are “...equivalent to 1.5 million bottles... ‘best-selling new Tequila of 2021 in the United States’” (Malczewski). The first thing Jenner’s team did correctly was put a three month gap between the time of that first announcement and the official launch of the tequila. It created an enormous amount of anticipation which easily excited fans to buy the product when it was released. The aesthetic she used with all the images she posted and that 818 Instagram page continues to post, sets the stage for the luxuriousness she wants to offer her customers. 818 is the Calabasas area code, where Jenner is from, and the lighting of these pictures, the ‘cool LA girl’ vibes, and the graphics, sell that vision extraordinarily well. The photography makes it clear that it is not just tequila, it is an experience. This experience is not just for the upper class, it is a dream the brand wants to sell to a large array of people as demonstrated by the price adjusting based on consumer feedback and data analytics. By staying in touch with social media users, the brand effectively navigated its path to success and did so by psychologically manipulating consumers into purchasing the tequila. By implementing celebrity and influencer marketing, user-generated content, etc., the exposure obtained through that alone skyrocketed visibility. Earned media confirmed that the launch was official, solidified its existence, and promoted the brand for better or for worse. Recently, 818 has also been collaborating with other companies like Sacred Agave, “...a non-profit that supports the rural

Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

Mexican communities that produce agave spirits” (Malczewski). Despite some of the turmoil Jenner faced, it could not touch the company’s triumphs. Without a doubt, Kendall Jenner’s presence combined with 818’s PR team propelled this brand to stardom, as proven by the immense statistics and extensive recognition.

Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

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Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

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Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

Appendix A



Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

Appendix B



Dr. Chiaoning Su

PR 2500

27 February 2025

Appendix C

