

MDIA2006 ASSESMENT 2 – CLIENT SCENARIO

The Cologne Crew

Section 1 – Identification, key challenges and opportunities

The Cologne Crew is a small, independent enterprise consisting of 3 final year UNSW students, named Jeff, Mike and Anissa. They have come together to create a growingly popular cologne for young women, titled ‘Girls only’, where production is done at a basement owned by one of the students (Anissa) in Petersham, Sydney, which requires no rent. Thus far, the group has made around \$320,000 per annum – these sales have been accumulated through word-of-mouth, online sales, amongst family, friends and acquaintances. They produce 100x100ml bottles per week for around 75\$ / bottle.

Although they have had a good foundation to begin with, this group’s informal enterprise has its share of challenges and opportunities if they plan to formalize and grow their company further. Starting off with the enterprise’s challenges, the base title of the brand ‘Girls only’ raises a problem of inclusivity – specifically excluding male buyers from their target market, even though 25% of their consumers are males, it still risks a bad identity for the brand. This challenge ties to the readings of Harrison (2011), where he elaborates how important it is to be aware of the public relations of a company, one of which being “continuous societal change and uncertainty” -- Being solely female exclusive raises high risks of bad publicity. Plain packaging is another factor that should be addressed, it doesn’t align with the pricing of 75\$-100\$, statistics shown from verified market research (2025) found that the perfume packaging market is valued at 2.41 billion USD and is rising up to 3.48 Billion by 2031. This proves how competitors in this sector are greatly prioritizing their premium packaging, hence why the group should as well.

Though, there are more than many opportunities for the cologne crew to expand on, one of which is their brand’s background story, it has high potential to grow popularity, especially using a heartfelt narrative to communicate with stakeholders and mainly buyers. With some narrative branding, and a change of brand name, the cologne crew has potential for strong customer loyalty and a re-framing of identity (to not only female targeted perfumes). However, this group will not just implement a simple Narrative to attract attention to their brand, they will reconstruct a completely fresh and new perspective of perfumery through storytelling, with this use of narrative

strategy, consumers will feel more connected with the brand than ever. It's like Barry and Elms (2017) states "If storytelling is the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders, then surely strategy must rank as one of the most prominent, influential, and costly stories told in organizations"

Additionally, the group also has opportunities to expand their production space in the basement of Anissa's family home or even partner with a small-scale local manufacturer to increase output. Evidence and statistics will be proven in later sections.

Section 2 – Environmental scan / research

A triangulated secondary research plan will be used to examine trends in brand storytelling, consumer preferences as well as competitors that could be useful to provide insights to where the team should pivot their business to. This will be a mix of research from outside online sources, websites, and academic books. The research will search for useful quantitative statistics as well as qualitative advice from competing companies. As Jick (1979) states that the triangulation method "It heightens qualitative methods to their deserved prominence and, at the same time, demonstrates that quantitative methods can and should be utilized in complementary fashion", elaborating that when both methods are complimented together, it can produce valuable insights in turn.

Starting off with findings on age demographic, according to D'souza (2025) and Circana (2023), consumers aged 18-34 are more likely to buy perfumes frequently, compared to other age groups, and that this age demographic accounts for 60% of online fragrance purchases. This finds that Gen Z and millennials are actively spending on fragrance, and are also active on online shopping; this means that the team could target this age demographic as well as cater their brand to suit this group's values. This as well connects to my findings from Quintis (2025) -- a fragrance blog reveal how Gen Z has shaped the luxury perfume market to be changing into a more unisex, inclusive market. Because of the rise of awareness in LGBTQ+, non-binary, and the trans community, research from Klarna have found that 50% of Gen Z has bought outside their gender identity. This generation seems to highlight three main principles *Inclusivity*, *self-expression*, and *sustainability*. Even if the crew's target at the moment isn't to be a luxury perfumery brand, they could still take note of this and use these points to their advantage, taking these values can be a big motivator for the cologne crew to be quickly noticed upon Gen Z and young millennials.

In terms of packaging, according to Cara Federici, CEO and head of design of the *Madison Melle Agency* found that in a 2018 study, 72% of consumers stated that the look and design of their product packaging plays a big role when deciding a purchase, furthermore, 67% of consumers also showed that the materials used in packaging effects their purchase decision (Federici, 2023). This supports the plan to redesign the packaging of Girls only, she shares that “The goal is to create a package that doesn’t just house the product but enhances its brand story.” – which reflects on the direction of narrative strategy for the business. Looking at the competitors in the market, brands like *Maison Margiela* and *Toskovat* have a way of implementing narrative and storytelling as a strategical tool for their business. Analysis from Barnett (2025), makes apparent that Maison Margiela as a brand became successful due to their unique way of making fragrances that is instantly identifiable to their brand, with a voice that is “evocative, sensual and poetic”. Maison Margiela, with each fragrance tells a *story* that demonstrates real-life settings and scenarios, they take inspiration from certain locations for their fragrance and romanticizes its concept. Toskovat does a similar strategy for their company, but does it in an even more compelling way, having scents of gasoline, money etc.. – an article published by VOUGE written by Mukhtar (2023) speaks on Toskovat as a brand. The creator of this perfume integrates his mood and emotion, even personal memories into his perfumes, he sees his brand as more of an art piece – a statement rather than something that people would want to wear. He merges his personal experience and curates his strategy to become an entire story as a brand, just like Barry and Elms speaks of in their strategy of narrative. From these competitor brands, the cologne crew could use these as a model to reposition their brand to become more connected with it’s Gen Z, value-driven audience.

Section 3 – Aims and Objectives

With the analysis and research that has been found so far, we can produce the insight that the cologne crew should reposition their brand through strategic narratives like Barry and Elms speaks of to connect with the new Gen Z and young millennial consumer market. The ***central aim*** will be to successfully rebrand the crew into a storytelling, inclusive, sustainable and relatable unisex fragrance company by building a main brand identity which is centered around people’s personal, most memorable, life stories – put into a perfume bottle.

According to Harrison (2011), using a SMART technique is something that is used widely around the world to properly set objectives, this includes (Specific and concise, Measurable and Specific, Achievable and agreed, Realistic and relevant, and Time-bound). These are 4 SMART objectives that will be achieved in the reorienting of the company.

SMART 1 (*Rebrand the cologne crew to a new identity and launch a new brand name*)

S – Do a full rebranding of the cologne crew’s name through → creating a proper logo from “Girls only” to one that has a meaningful brand identity and main brand message, which is inclusive to all communities as well.

M – Launch new brand name identity across their websites, and create an Instagram and TikTok account to announce a rebrand of their company. this will be tracked by attempting to achieve at least 500 social media engagements (likes, shares, comments) in the first month after the launch.

A –using the main concept of strategic narrative from Barry and Elms & Viktor shklovsky, Hallahan’s framing techniques and advertising strategies, as well as using around 10% of their total annual revenue (can be around \$32,0000) to cover rebranding costs.

R – This makes sure that the crew will be able to address the current concerns about inclusivity and will reach a bigger demographic than what they have currently

T – Make a refreshed and renewed brand within 6-8 months before brand launch

SMART 2 (*Develop and Launch a new series for the brand*)

S – Create a new, first initial fragrance collection featuring 5 different scents, which are tied to a real, consumer-sourced story.

M – Collect around 100 memorable customer stories through social media and forums before the launch to decide on which 5 stories will be featured in the collection

A – Use social media (TikTok and Instagram) to spread news and get stories, with incentives like money prizes and giveaways (whoever’s story gets to be made into a perfume can get that scent for free)

R – This strengthens the brand’s emotional connection and makes use of narrative strategy

T – decide on 5 stories to showcase, and complete the development of new collection in 9 months

SMART 3 (*Redesign of Packaging*)

S – Redesign the product packaging to have a more timeless, gender neutral and meaningful look, and integrate the element of the consumer’s story into the packaging (a small note of the chosen consumer story will be inputted to the bottle)

M – Conduct a round of consumer testing (around 30 participants) to see which of 2 or 3 final designs they prefer

A – Collaborate with small and reachable sustainable packaging providers to create prototypes within the crew’s budget

R – As Federici advises in research, this is an important step in driving consumers to purchase the product

T – Launch the new packaging in around 9 months as well (aligning with the product series re-making)

SMART 4 (*Increase brand awareness in Gen Z*)

S – achieve a increase in social media following (through TikTok and Instagram within the first year of rebranding (around 20% of following)

M – use montly follower growth through tools already implemented in the app

A – create viral trends (surrounding the theme of ‘sharing your story’), behind-the-scene business story videos, creating #myscentstory hashtags

R – The 18-34 age demographic that the crew will aim is now surrounded by social media, so using these platforms are essential for the growth of the company

T – reach the target growth within a year after re-lauching.

Section 4 – Conceptual Framework

The main strategy I offer for the cologne crew to implement into their rebranding is to work with a Narrative conceptual framework, inspired by Barry and Elms (1997). Circling this main strategy will be concepts of Defamiliarization and Credibility from Viktor Shklovsky, as well as concepts of Framing from Hallahan (2011), lastly will touch lightly on ideas of advertising mythologies. Barry and Elms speaks of strategy as a way of telling a story rather than a logical, operational duty; creating a literal *narrative* as an identity designed to engage consumers, they quote “it explores ways in which organizational stakeholders create a discourse of direction; to understand and influence one another's actions” Barry and Elms (1997). For the cologne crew’s case, the brand will take consumers personal inspired stories, so the brand will focus on using these narratives to center an entirely new brand identity, and create a groundbreaking consumer experience. Barry and Elms says how effective strategy works similarly to writing fiction, it’s made to influence perspectives and guide action – this requires a balance between *credibility* and originality. In order for the team to achieve this, theories of perspective and setting will be included to this strategy, the brand’s identity will have an emotionally intimate voice, designed to be inclusive of all diversities and experiences, creating a story of *life (perspective)*. The brand will use *setting* to structure around everyone’s familiar milestones (first heartbreak, first loss, first love) – this creates a narrative in relatable life experiences.

Defamiliarization, as Shklovsky argues is said to “bring out a different way of viewing things”, the crew will do this by presenting their perfumes not just as everyday products, but as a carrier of personal and meaningful stories, each scent will have a gender neutral, emotional label and put together with a person’s short story, turning that scent into something that’s close to heart. This concept of defamiliarization connects the crew with its new Gen Z audience, who value authenticity, inclusivity and emotional experience. Additionally, Hallahan (2011)’s theories of *framing* will be exemplified for each product to be made around people’s emotional journeys, hence, consumers will be able to see themselves in the narrative – and feel like they have a personal contribution into the brand, curating strong brand loyalty. This will match with how Hallahan speaks of *product positioning* of “designing a company’s image so they occupy a meaningful position in the customer’s mind”. Furthermore, advertising *mythologies (as spoken in the lecture*

on Barthes), can be used to advertise by reinforcing mythologies of personal journeys and emotional renewal.

Section 5 – outline of tactics

Now, moving on to the 6 tactics the cologne crew will implement. Starting off with **Tactic one**, rather than ‘Girls only’, the crew will formally relaunch under the name of “*Everwhisper*” – every person’s story counts as a whisper of scent lingering around, an iconic, fresh and timeless concept. Alongside this, a new logo, refreshed website, and a new social media presence will immediately embody a new narrative scene and credibility by showing a thoughtful and purposed change. **Tactic two**, the newly announced *Everwhisper* will launch and introduce its first storytelling perfume series called “*The Whispered Collection*”, with each bottle paired with a heartfelt- relatable micro-story, shown through packaging and website descriptions, each scent will be titled e.g. “*Whisper No. 1 – the whisper of first love*”. There will be 5 initial scent launches in the collection. This approach implements defamiliarization by turning everyday perfumes into vessels of memory and meaning. **Tactic three**, creating a packaging which includes a print of the chosen person’s mini-story into the box, along with using sustainable packaging, timeless colors, and minimal design to appeal for Gen Z. **Tactic four**, the crew will start a digital campaign called #whisperyourstory, which will drive people to share their meaningful story that they wish to become a scent. Consumers whose stories are collected will be given a free bottle of their story, strengthening community engagement with the brand. **Tactic five**, consistent advertising content surrounding emotional life journey’s will be needed to keep framing *Everwhisper* as a brand with this identity, this reflects the concept of mythologies of personal renewal and journey’s. **Tactic six**, near the UNSW community and around busy streets in Sydney, *Everwhisper* will host “whisper room” pop-up stands where people will be able to experience the different scents through small rooms (boxed sections) and experience the different stories that were chosen. This will allow consumers to smell scents and be motivated to submit their own story, as well as spread awareness of *Everwhisper*. All these tactics align with the chosen framework and concepts, furthermore also connects with an important note from Rumelt (2011)’s words on good and bad strategy of identifying a clear goal and implementing coherent actions, taking of the heart of strategic thinking (*taking the most important point of change; turning the brand into a narrative but to the point that it’s still doable*).

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