

Audience Intelligence Portfolio: Rhode Beauty and the Power of Celebrity

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Rhode: Brand Overview

Rhode Skin was founded and creatively envisioned by the celebrity and influencer Hailey Bieber, the wife of world-famous popstar Justin Bieber. As a brand, Rhode is concerned with clean, transparent, and authentic skincare. I want to emphasize that though the term "skin" may be associated with the brand's formal name (it is most commonly referred to as Rhode, even the packaging solely has the words "Rhode" on it, skipping out on including the designator "skin") Rhode is NOT a cosmetic company, nor is it your prototypical solution-driven skincare company (i.e. it does not concern products that explicitly pertain to a traditional skincare line's narrowed or fixed goals like clearing hormonal acne, or solving dry skin, etc.). Rhode is simply a look, a feel, and a routine-based brand that was designed for people. As founder Hailey Bieber states, "I want[ed] to make a great brand that people gravitate towards, that they love, that they feel like they are a part of..." (Hailey Rhode Bieber, 2023, 6:10-6:17).

According to the brand's website, the overarching philosophy is; "Edited, Efficacious, and Intentional. At Rhode, we believe in Simplicity, Affordability, Authenticity, Quality, and Transparency." (Rhode, 2024). Indeed, the branding, marketing, and actual packaging/appearance embody minimalistic and "clean" aesthetics, making navigating the formal uses of each product simple and fostering eased and increased consumer digestibility of the brand. Systematically, the brand is not concerned with quantity but quality, taking over two years before launching the initial line of products to perfect the right look, feel, and results (Rearick, 2022). One aspect that lends to the phenomena of this brand is its prioritization of excellence; taking time to curate the perfect blend of ingredients for each new product launch and the subsequent steady small-batch processes not only allow for consumers who get the products to feel a part of something exclusive but also enables them to feel like a contributor to the sustainable and thoughtful efforts that go into making these goods. Correspondingly, a strong gratification correlated to participating in and consuming Rhode products would be its association with Mrs. Bieber, as individuals who purchase products associate the brand with characteristics surrounding Hailey: Those being clean, beautiful, and wealthy. Whether it is

One of Rhode Skin's unique aspects is its exclusivity. Their products are unavailable in brick-and-mortar retail stores, only through their e-commerce website can you purchase them. This limited availability adds to the brand's allure and demand, making every new launch and restock a special event for customers.

Implied or Addressee Audience

Rhode has proven to outlive many other celebrity beauty brands. Officially hitting the markets in 2022, the company has not only lasted longer than some of its peers (i.e., Vanessa Hudgens' brand KNOW Beauty, Addison Rae's Item Beauty, and JLo Beauty, to name a few) but as well has become a polarizing phenomenon in its space. One of the many strengths of the brand is its media presence; having 1.5 million followers on Instagram, social media constantly lends to the audience's perception and engagement with the brand.

Consequently, the social media campaigns and virality of Rhode's launches illustrate the intended demographic of the brand, being highly engaged online social media users who enjoy the participatory nature of the product launches. Though there is no specified distinction of whether or not the brand is a "universal" skincare line (i.e., promoted as a non-gendered product) or strictly associated with and promoted as a feminine brand, the audience is most certainly women. Moreover, the brand predominantly attracts female consumers in the broad age range of 18-44 (Similarweb, 2024). Indeed, 82.71% of Rhode's audience members are women, with the most occurring age category for those visiting the brand's website being between 25-34, making up 37.02% of the customer base (followed by ages 18-24, making up 24.78% of website traffic, and ages 35-44 representing 17.06% of website traffic) (Similarweb, 2024). Audience members are interested in beauty and skincare, as well as the enigmatic celebrity image of Hailey Bieber. Moreover, the strong aesthetic appeal of the brand's images, as well as the way in which the brand plays into trending aesthetics (i.e., their use of "Strawberry Girl Summer," "Clean Girl Aesthetic," "Quiet Luxury," etc.) reflects with its audience engagement; Individuals who derive value in a brand's "story-world" or promotion of specific aesthetic visual signifiers are indeed going to find notable worth in the way in which Rhode presents itself through its look and presence online.

Correspondingly, as someone who has purchased every single product Rhode has launched, my perception of the brand correlates to its intended audience, as I am within their target demographic and actively participate in the consumption and circulation of these products. What initially attracted me to Rhode was not necessarily an admiration for Hailey Bieber, nor was it out of necessity for new skincare products. What I loved about this brand was the marketing and visuality of it. As someone who finds high value in what can be considered aesthetics, I gravitated to the way in which Rhode’s product campaigns looked and felt. Specifically, during the summer of 2023, I found myself constantly watching the Instagram page for Rhode to see what new marketing designs and graphics they were going to put out. When the brand collaborated with Krispy Kreme to launch the limited edition Strawberry Peptide Lip Treatment, I went to Krispy Kreme to try and buy the donuts. I became a highly engaged consumer by innocently forming a para-social relationship with the content they were putting out. I believe this is somewhat universal for their consumers and demographic. There is an undeniable elegance and innovation behind Rhode’s marketing, which has ultimately fostered a cult-like following amongst their target audience.

Social Media Campaigns & Audience Engagement



whoisbay rhode sunscreen??



Audiences interested and engaging in aesthetics



itsisaabelmarie either a cleansing balm/oil or maybe a mask jsjdjs either way i want it !



Audience membes rely on the accessibility of social media for new product releases



toriifabiano OMG we're getting a lemon cake flavor!!!!!! @rhode 🍋🍰



ribeiomarcella Vitamin C serum?



Pineapple Refresh Cleanser
Relying on online audiences and the anticipation and participation of social media followers, Rhode soft launches the aesthetics of their new products before releasing an official announcement or launch date. This fosters an urgency in audiences to keep up to date with the brand and their releases.



st4r.f0xx Lemon AHA/BHA mask...?... Just a guess 🍋 Ugh, so intriguing! 🍋



Scholarly Background and Analysis

The signifiers associated with and surrounding a brand or product can range from many aspects. Whether it be a spokesperson, character, celebrity, slogan, or campaign, consumers' associations with brands ultimately inform and influence their potential participation with said product or brand. For example, I can still remember how much I wanted to try Trix cereal as a child due to their constant rotation of commercials on the Disney channel, where the Trix bunny rabbit would play pranks on kids, and the children in the advertisement would always say, "Silly rabbit, Trix are for kids." Were there any other cognitive reasons I desired to try the Trix cereal? No, not really. I already enjoyed different cereal brands, but for some reason, the advertising for Trix resonated with me in some ways, and thus, it became a brand that stood out to me.

Subsequently, in my adult life, I am conscious of this continued pattern, where I find myself gravitating towards specific brands or products because of the spokespeople attached to them. Discussing the phenomenon around the utilization of celebrities and characters in brand imaging, Kim Sheehan conducted a study to find the cognitive associations in consumers when brands employ a highly visible and well-known spokescharacter. Employing the examples of advertisements using the likeness of iconic characters Miss Piggy and Hello Kitty, Sheehan asks whether or not participants find value in the nostalgia associated with these characters and thus find attractiveness, and trustworthiness within the product based on its advertisements with these characters. Sheehan also asks research participants about their assessment of the applicability between the character's likeness and the specific product, on whether or not consumers deem these collaborations to be the right fit. Ultimately, the study found that the subject's proneness to the nostalgic references of these characters positively influenced their perception of the product advertised and the perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness of the brand (Sheehan, 2020, p. 156). Conversely, it was found that there was little correlation or cognition around whether or not the spokescharacter was fit for the brand within the advertisement (Sheehan, 2020, p. 156).

Similar to Sheehan's study, Mehmet Özer produced research on the correlation between a celebrity's attachment to a brand and the effects of customer loyalty to said brand. The relationship between a celebrity's image, their associated brand, and the brand's demographic's interpretation of this collaboration is a positive one, as the findings of this research show that

"celebrity attachment positively influences actual self-congruence, ideal self-congruence, brand quality, and brand attachment...The more consumers are attached to celebrities and brands, the more loyal they become to the latter" (2022, para 1). Another notable study was performed by Jasmina Illicic and Cynthia M. Webster, who found that audiences are able to "identify and communicate the meaning of celebrity brand authenticity in terms of behavioural and relational components...celebrity brand authenticity center on the perception that celebrities are genuine..." (2016, para 24).

Consequently, with these findings around the effectiveness of a celebrity's or spokescharacter's image associated with a brand and its advertising, one can analyze the ways in which this applies to the company Rhode. Hailey Bieber's persona or public image connects and represents all the values of her brand, and if Hailey did not actively portray herself living into these values it would undermine the authenticity behind Rhode's messaging, and foster doubt in audience members. As Özer stated, "symbolic meanings are transferred from celebrities to brands and to consumers through celebrity endorsement" (2022, para 49). Rhode's target audience transfers their associations around Bieber, from her essence and physical appearance to the perceived or idealized aspect of her lifestyle, onto the brand Rhode due to Hailey's attachment to the products. The beneficial nature of Hailey Bieber's attachment to Rhode is one that the company clearly capitalizes on, as Bieber is included in every marketing campaign, instilling in audience members that both the brand's image and Hailey's image are so connected that they are almost inextricably tied to one another. Moreover, in the rare chances that Hailey is not in the brand's posts or advertisements, typically a beauty guru, influencer, or other celebrity is replacing her. This can be seen in her campaign images containing celebrities like Ariana Greenblatt (of the Barbie movie), who was in the marketing images for Hailey's skincare combo set (See Figure Below), and Candice Swanepoel (a top model in the industry), who was in the marketing images for the Pineapple Refresh Cleanser (See Figure Below). As stated above, Bieber also consistently utilizes influencers and beauty bloggers in order to promote the brand. When her Pineapple Refresh Cleanser campaign was launched, Hailey sent out samples to influencers who were allowed to post about and review the product (See Figure Below). The results of the inclusion of other celebrities and influencers in Rhode's campaigns translate to the analysis in Illicic and

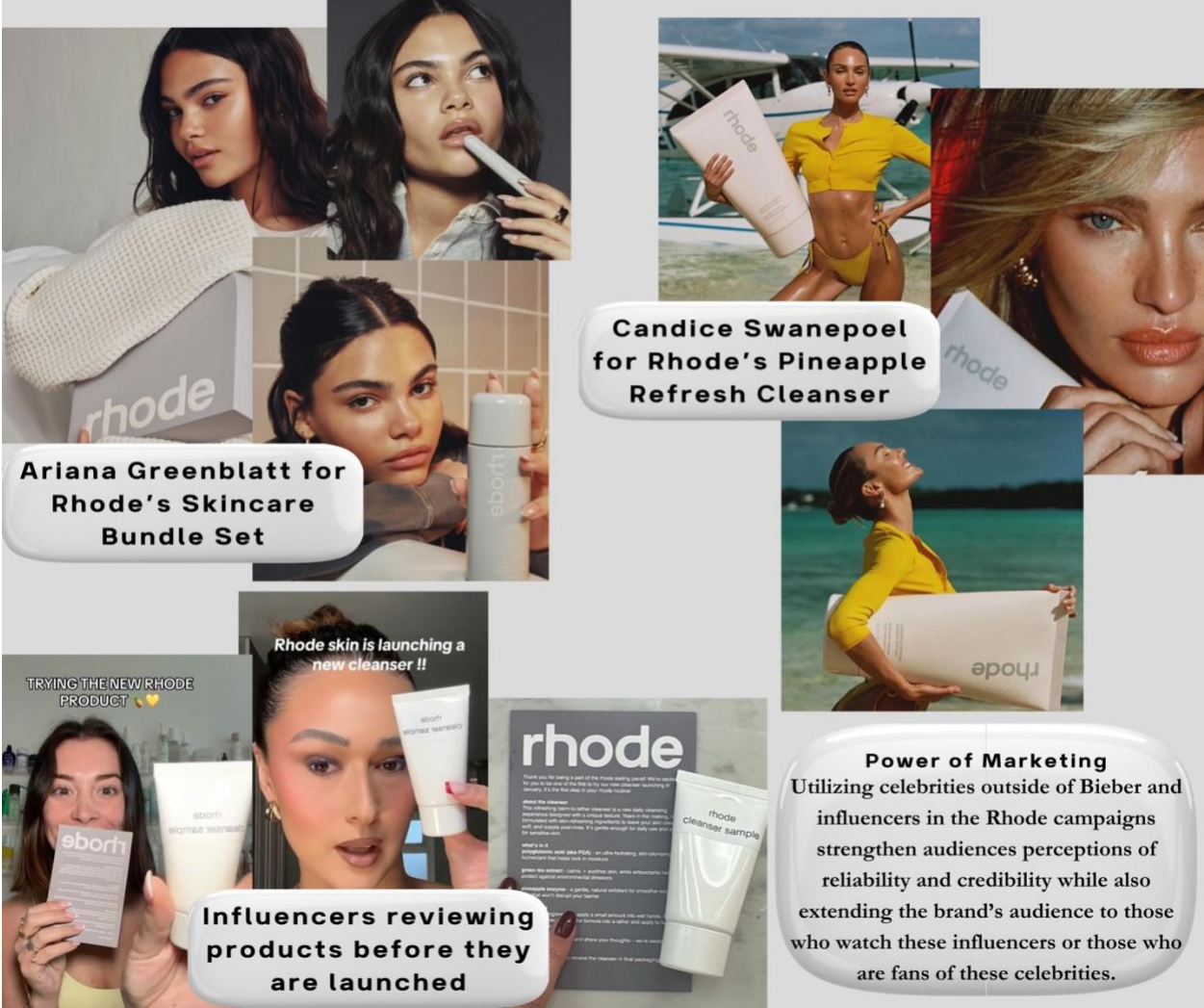
Webster's studies, being how audiences associate behavioural and relational concepts with specific figures of notoriety (i.e., well-known celebrities and influencers who have pre-existing "self" brands that are similarly translated onto their promotion of Rhode) (2016). This methodological process is constituted by audience members' parasocial relationships with the individuals included in these brand campaigns. Eugene Cheng-Xi Aw and Lauren Labrecque discuss the role of parasocial associations amongst audience members, finding that:

Partnering with the right celebrity [or influencer] endorser can achieve [minimized negative perceptions of a brand]. Notably, brands should select endorsers who are able to generate close and intimate connections with consumers, as a sense of attachment and congruence appear to be pivotal shielding elements. An intimate connection infuses the perception of credibility and likeability in endorsers and the endorsed brands. (2023, p. 399).

One of the predominant benefits of including the likeness and notoriety of celebrities and influencers alike is the ability to foster and engage with audience members directly. Indeed, Hassan et al. remind us of the power of influencer endorsements, stating that "an influencer's credibility, such as perceived trustworthiness, effectively enhances a brand message...An influencer's status will evoke positive responses from consumers [as]...they are easier to reach and connect [with]" (2021, para 15). Rhode's incorporation of Hailey Bieber's image and their implementation of reviews and support from other celebrities and influencers illustrates the power of catering and employing audience's cognitive associations with public figures. The celebrities included in the marketing campaigns for the brand foster the idea of an achievable idealized lifestyle within consumers (i.e., through purchasing products you achieve your desire for the same things these celebrities have), whilst the inclusion of influencers in the launching and reviewing of products facilitates the simulation of an "authenticity," allowing audience members to feel connected to the more personal content that influencers post. An undeniable marketing power is exercised within Rhode's framework for connecting and sharing with its audience members. The brand's demographic feels a sense of personal connection and reliability that the influencers who are promoting and reviewing the products foster, while the celebrities within the campaigns create a sense of longing and admiration in the audience. All in all, the

manner in which Rhode employs parasocial relationality, audience cognitive associations, and celebrity endorsements fundamentally constitutes the brand's signifying traits and cultivates an advanced audience connection to the products and branding; This is why the brand remains so successful in both maintaining their revenue and capturing their audiences' admiration.

Brand Collaborations = Brand Visibility = Audience Extensions



Ariana Greenblatt for Rhode's Skincare Bundle Set

Candice Swanepoel for Rhode's Pineapple Refresh Cleanser

Power of Marketing
Utilizing celebrities outside of Bieber and influencers in the Rhode campaigns strengthen audiences perceptions of reliability and credibility while also extending the brand's audience to those who watch these influencers or those who are fans of these celebrities.

Influencers reviewing products before they are launched

Rhode skin is launching a new cleanser !!

TRYING THE NEW RHODE PRODUCT

Insights from Journalistic Interpretation and Reception

In order to understand the allure of Rhode amongst audiences one must come to understand the allure of Hailey Bieber. In an article from Vox, Cunningham analyzes the contemporary shift from the once popular high-glam “full-beat” (i.e., full-faced) makeup looks (typically associated with the Kardashians) to the natural, glowy, and muted makeup looks (typically associated with Hailey Bieber) (2024). Furthermore, this Vox article inquiries into Gen-Z’s fixation on Bieber, stating, “[Bieber] remains primarily a mood board, ready to project the consumerist desires of young, beauty-obsessed women. Not a persona, but an idea to aspire to. It’s the perfect setup for Rhode Skin” (2024). Undoubtedly, audience members of Rhode find

an aspiration aspect within the brand's imagery. Thus, it transforms their underlying interests in skincare, makeup, and elegance into a desire, ultimately achieved through their participation and purchasing of the products. When it comes to Rhode's marketing and social media presence, there is a vital nature in how it connects and creates its audience, as Brand Vision Insights reports that the brand's online and perceived identity resonates so much with its target audience (2024), and this is due to the fact that it is highly visible and easily accessible (through social media platforms). Furthermore, Giovanna Gherzi interrogates the brand identity and the sensory marketing of Rhode, discussing how the brand had identified the desires and preferences of its audience and "achieved effective marketing by leveraging the symbols and semiotics, such as words, colours, images and feelings, to send compelling messages" (2024). Exemplifying this collective imagining and association between audience members and the attributes marketed alongside Rhode's products is the Peptide Lip Treatments, which are typically described or named after specific food products (i.e., Espresso Lip Treatment, Toast Lip Treatment, Passionfruit Jelly Lip Treatment, Raspberry Jelly Lip Treatment, Strawberry Glazed Donut Lip Treatment, etc.). The sensory associations audience members form with these products can ultimately encourage both the product's appeal and the user's desire to purchase them.

Rhode's audience has grown notably in the two years it has been on the market, with the brand globally expanding due to its demand and popularity amongst followers. Kati Chitrakorn from Vogue considers the power of resonance within Rhode's image, discussing how Bieber already had a following with Gen-Z audiences, which was then supplemented into her brand's following (2023). Admittedly, Rhode has successfully expanded globally, making products available in the United Kingdom, Europe, and Canada. Correspondingly, this has broadened the audience of Rhode Skin and enabled world-wide visibility, which is all ultimately due in part to the strong connection Rhode has with their audience. Sarah-Jane Corfield-Smith encapsulates the dynamics between Rhode and its target demographic, stating, "For its key Gen-Z audience, it has been a huge success, and I predict it will continually sell out...Could you get the same result for less money? Of course, but would it come with the status symbol of owning something that Hailey Bieber has been involved with? No, it wouldn't" (Corfield-Smith, 2024). Assuredly, the brand's audience is one that has been established far before the creation of Rhode. Individuals

who have followed Hailey Bieber’s journey as a celebrity (from being a model to getting married to one of the world’s most famous popstars) are now able to witness and participate in the next stage of her career: Being a skincare and brand mogul.

Social Media Analytics

Rhode is consistently incorporating brand collaborations through its social media marketing. Last summer, Hailey Bieber teamed up with Krispy Kreme to launch a limited-edition strawberry glazed donut flavour to go along with her latest limited-edition strawberry lip peptide treatment. This collaboration and launch ultimately resulted from the virality of Bieber’s post in the early summer months of 2023, where she claimed it was a “strawberry girl summer” sporting a makeup look that was full of red tones. The seamless nature of Rhode’s collaborations is undeniable, and consumers of the brand find it enjoyable to participate in guessing what the next Rhode launch or product will be based on the aesthetics of the Instagram. Another example of this was when Bieber was hinting at the launch of her Pineapple Refresh Face Cleanser; for weeks prior to announcing what the actual product would be, the Rhode Instagram was posting tropical scenery, images with yellow hues, and even photos of pineapples. All over the page, fans were commenting (see Figure in Section 2 Implied or Addressed Audience), guessing what the new pictures in the Rhode feed could mean for the next product release. Most recently, Bieber teased and subsequently launched a Rhode phone case with a compartment for carrying the Rhode Peptide Lip Treatment (See Figure Below). Following this launch, the case sold out within the hour it went live on the website (Chapman 2024). These collaborations not only enhance the effectual responses to the brand within audience members but also heighten the brand’s visibility, producing a circular nature; Audience members find value in these collaborations, engaging and responding to social media posts, while the individuals or brands Rhode collaborates with generates and attracts new audience members.

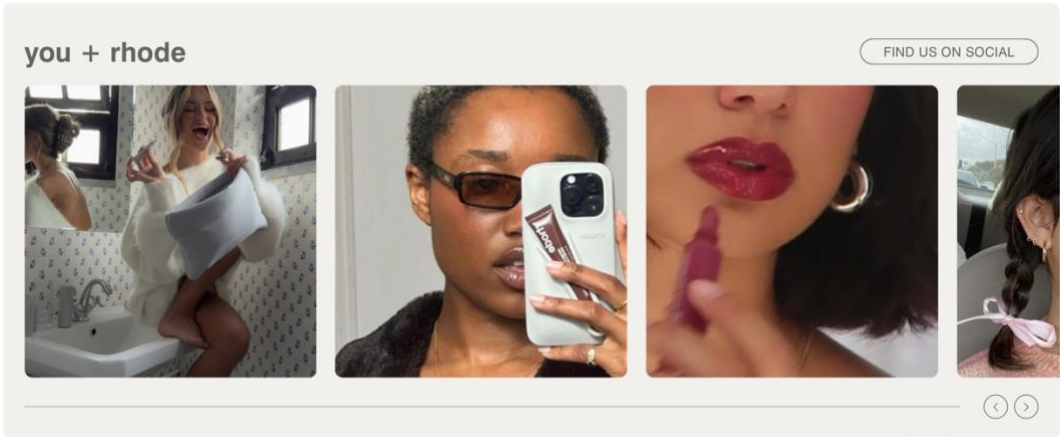


Image taken via Rhode’s Website. <https://www.rhodeskin.com>

Concluding Remarks

It is clear that Rhode's audience is a group of highly engaged women, predominantly being millennial and Gen-Z women, who find immense pleasure in both participating in the aesthetic appeal of the brand as well as finding aspirational value or personal desires in the brand's attachment to celebrity Hailey Bieber. Correspondingly, the marketing and social media presence that the brand relies on in order to garner and constitute their audience also illustrates the brand's demographic, being women who actively use and participate on social media platforms. The strength of Rhode's branding and marketing is notable; however, without its cult following, it would not have been able to expand globally, consistently sell out the day of launching or restocking items, or grow over one million followers on social media. Conclusively, Rhode's greatest asset as a brand is its audience, which it not only acknowledges but continues to rely on for both the consumption of its products and the bolstering of its brand image.

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