

Rhode — Focus Group Research

How can Rhode increase their diversity and reach a more inclusive consumer base?

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Background:

Consumers have placed a higher value on authenticity within the media, even with company interactions. This has led companies to utilize micro-influencers to market products as their audience more closely relates to them. Unlike other brands, Rhode's representation consists of models and A-list celebrities, including the CEO Hailey Bieber. This has led us to our research question: “How can Rhode increase their diversity and reach a more inclusive consumer base?” In this focus group, we evaluated the roles various factors, such as representation, play in individuals’ buying behaviors, focusing mostly on skincare and cosmetics.

Method:

The focus group consisted of four participants, three female-presenting and one male-presenting undergraduate students at UNC-Chapel Hill. Our research team consisted of two moderators and two coordinators who both took notes, while one also served as the timekeeper. During school hours, we conducted the study in an empty classroom and began the session by setting ground rules. The two facilitators then asked a series of questions, beginning with an icebreaker about self-care practices, followed by follow-up questions after the participants’ responses. The questions focused on participants' current buying behavior toward cosmetics and the impact of various factors, such as influencer and celebrity endorsements, on their purchasing decisions.

Result:

The opening question asked about self-care practices, introducing the topic of skincare. There were mixed answers such as baking, eating, exercising, skincare, and playing with pets. The majority mentioned skincare as one of their self-care practices. In addition to the opening question, three main questions guided the discussion. The first question asked what factors influence what cosmetic products they buy. The two main answers were price and reviews of the brand as a whole. One participant stated, “I like to look at reviews from other people with the same skin type.” Other responses included evaluating any potential controversies of the brand and if a high-end product has dupes or cheaper alternatives. The second question was about whom they tend to watch and take advice from on social media about cosmetic products. The top three answers were people on TikTok, trusted professionals like dermatologists, and friends and family. Participants agreed that they need evidence and positive reviews to fully trust skincare products, especially since they’re putting these products on their skin.

The final key question we asked them was about how packaging and branding influence their decision to buy a product. Branding wasn’t discussed much, but a brand’s packaging was important to them. A participant notes that applicators with pumps seem more “professional” and can get more product out. Brands that look clean or have pops of color, like CeraVe, Tarte, and Bioma, tend to draw their attention the most. Follow-up questions were proposed to the focus

group throughout the discussion. The group was asked if they were open to the concept of celebrity skincare and their general thoughts on the subject. A consensus within the group was that “If you’re going to put something on your skin, you want someone who is a professional recommending it.” The group expressed distrust in celebrity skincare and overall believes it is done for a “quick buck.” An example a participant provided was brands such as Proactiv Skincare, which used celebrity endorsements, but when she used the product, it irritated her skin. Instead, the group trusts dermatologist-approved brands such as Cerave, Neutrogena, The Ordinary, and First Aid. However, the group was not fully against the idea of influencers endorsing products. When asked about micro-influencers, the group agreed that to an extent, they could be influenced depending on the influencer and if the influencer has credibility within the beauty space.

The group was also asked about their thoughts on sustainability within the beauty space. The group agreed that sustainability is a factor they consider when purchasing a product, specifically recyclability and cruelty-free products, but not as much as they wished. Before closing remarks, the group was specifically asked, “Does diversity influence your decision to purchase a product from a beauty brand?” One participant noted that they look for diversity in a brand but agreed that most do not.

Other takeaways were that participants search for diversity more within makeup (variety of foundation shades and undertones) but not as much with skincare. Based on participants' responses, it was concluded that while diversity and sustainability may play a slight role when purchasing a product, price range and positive reviews are factors they actively search for. In their closing remarks, participants re-emphasized the importance of turning to friends and micro-influencers when evaluating products as “the closer in proximity they are to me, the more trust I have in their review.”

Discussion:

Our focus group gave us insightful information on what drives skincare purchases, especially around branding, influencer credibility, and product efficacy. One significant takeaway was that social media is instrumental in product discovery, yet study participants were mostly suspicious of celebrity-endorsed brands. Instead, they relied on micro-influencer endorsements, dermatologists, or word of mouth from friends. Packaging also mattered; applicators, the product’s texture, and a professional and clean appearance were all factors in purchasing decisions. Sustainability was considered a bonus but not necessarily an issue unless it significantly impacted animals or the environment. Diversity was acknowledged as being important. Participants did not feel it was promoted as much in the skincare industry as in the makeup industry.

Some limitations came up in the discussion, including occasional awkward pauses after a question was asked and repetition of the responses from participants when asked different questions. Sometimes, it seemed like participants were not sure how to keep expanding on their ideas, which may suggest that we can improve our questions in the future by making them more specific. If we were to do it again, we would like to explore what motivates an individual to

switch brands and how Rhode can build and sustain trust with consumers beyond early-stage product hype. Overall, the session gave us great insights that will benefit us moving into future research.

Moderator Guide

Group Roles:

Moderators - Kayla, Audrey

Coordinator - Fernanda, Young

Analyst: All

Writer: All

Opening Question

1. What are your favorite self-care practices, if any?

Questions:

2. What are some factors you consider when purchasing from a cosmetic brand?
3. Who do you tend to watch or take advice from on social media about cosmetic products?
4. Does packaging and branding influence your decision to buy a product?

Questions that will help gain greater insight into a solution for our problem statement:

1. How much do you spend on skincare a month?
2. How often do you try other skincare brands?
3. What are the factors you consider when spending more money on a product?
4. What skincare companies do you currently buy from, and what are the reasons why you chose that particular brand?
5. How important is the sustainability element to you when choosing a skincare product?
6. Does packaging and branding influence your decision to buy a skincare product?