

Benefit Cosmetics Media Relations Strategy

Group 4

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Benefit Cosmetics and Animal Cruelty

Who is the organisation?

Benefit Cosmetics is an American company founded in 1976 by twins Jean & Jane Ford. They produce beauty products & services which are known to be fun, creative and innovative (LVMH, n.d). Their most famous products include the “Hoola” bronzer and their award-winning brow products (Benefit, n.d). Benefit Cosmetics has a prestigious powerhouse status in the beauty industry as it operates in over 50 countries across the world with over 3200 locations and plans for expansion (LVMH, n.d). LVMH (Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton) owns Benefit (LVMH, n.d). LVMH is a French luxury goods conglomerate formed from the 1987 merger of Louis Vuitton and Moët Hennessy, creating one of the world’s premier sellers of luxury products (Johnston, 2024). Benefit Cosmetics primarily targets the consumer segment of young women as they present a quirky, more relatable brand identity with true-to—life personalised experiences in-store (Anand, 2021).

What is the background of the organisation?

Benefit Cosmetics has had highly successful marketing campaigns and is known to engage with its consumers in entertaining and quirky ways. However, it has received a significant amount of slander and backlash in the media for its ethical practices, particularly in regards to animal testing and cruelty-free certifications (Bishop, 2022). Whilst Benefit declares that they do not test their products on animals, they are highly scrutinised for partaking in greenwashing (Bishop, 2022). They are not certified by any organisation like PETA, they allow for third-party animal testing, and they are owned by a parent company, LVMH, which still tests on animals (Vlaming, 2024). It is also sold in China, where animal testing is a mandatory requirement to be done in order for products to be in the Chinese market (Vlaming, 2024).

What is the opportunity or issue that the media relations campaign is addressing?

The media relations campaign is addressing the major social issue of animal cruelty and animal testing in the beauty industry. Animal testing is practiced in several industries to test the safety of products, including the beauty industry (Animal Liberation, n.d). Whilst it may seem like an outdated method, many brands still use this approach and consumers are becoming increasingly opposed to this (Graham, 2023). Just in order for brands to test their product’s safety, animals are forced to undergo torturous acts such as having chemicals down their throats, poured into their eyes or on their skin (Graham, 2023). According to Humane Society International (2023), it causes the death of 500,000 animals every year, mainly including rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, rats and

mice. There is large media coverage addressing the issue of animal cruelty within the beauty industry, and also more specifically criticising Benefit Cosmetics, particularly on magazine articles and social media (Carrasco, 2023). There are now many brands that adopt alternative ways of testing their products and do not test on animals in order to save lives, and it is imperative that Benefit Cosmetics aligns with this for the better of society. Humane Society International created the hashtag #SaveRalph to highlight animal abuse and as a result of this Mexico discredited and prohibited animal testing, making it the first North American country to do so.

What has the previous news media coverage of this organisation / issue been? Using concepts and frameworks from this unit, analyse previous news media coverage and how the organisation / issue has been framed.

The previous news media coverage on Benefit Cosmetics and animal cruelty has been nuanced. Despite Benefit's claim that it does not test its products on animals and follows local regulations, the brand is not certified by any cruelty-free organization and is listed on PETA's "brands that test on animals" list. Additionally, its parent company is not cruelty-free, further complicating the brand's image. This contradiction between Benefit's statements and its practices, along with its presence in markets like China, has led to ongoing scrutiny and a complex public perception.

The media coverage has used framing theory to show contradictions in Benefit Cosmetics' claims, leading to confusion about the brand's identity. Even though Benefit says it doesn't test on animals, being on PETA's "brands that test on animals" list makes people doubt its honesty. This creates a contradiction frame, showing that what Benefit says might not match what it actually does. The media also highlights that Benefit isn't certified as cruelty-free and that its parent company isn't cruelty-free either. This ethical Responsibility Frame makes consumers question whether Benefit really cares about animal welfare. Finally, the coverage points out how Benefit's operations in China, where all brands that are not fully or partially manufactured there must undergo animal testing add more complexity to the brand's image, causing more confusion about what Benefit truly stands for.

Who are the public(s) that the media relations strategy will focus upon?

According to the context of public relation, publics are social groups with related communication styles, and they have an important impact on an organization. These communities, which are based on common interests or concerns, can be highly effective in influencing public opinion and choosing the effectiveness of a company's public relations campaigns.

The campaign's primary publics must be identified and included in our media relations plan. For Benefit cosmetics, our key public can be the ethical customers who always want the cruelty-free and vegan products, influencers, brand promoters in the beauty industry who impact consumer opinions and trends, government or non-government organization such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA, Cruelty Free International (CFI), The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) which fight for the banning of animal testing, plays an important role in the context of the public relation. Again, there are a lot of general customers who are really not aware of the animal testing practices in the makeup industry. However, according to Kim and Krishna (2014), we can determine that all of them have the ability to affect the brand's reputation and success in the beauty industry through interaction and sharing their thoughts. So, this group of people can play an essential role in our campaign's success by being the primary audience.

According to Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), celebrities and influencers are impacting cosmetics products by sharing their personal experiences, makeup tutorials, and featuring the products that gain the trust of the public in our campaigns. By targeting professionals, brands, and influencers in the beauty industry, our PR strategy can highlight the public awareness of the negative impacts of animal testing in the cosmetic industry, particularly with regard to animals, the environment, and the cosmetic industry itself. Moreover, our activist who are already aware of these, engaging with them we can also raise the fact of Benefit Cosmetics. Depending on various age group, the awareness of animal testing depends. However, Özoran and Üzümlü (2024) states that Some of them specifically the generation Z is aware of the cruelty of animal and looking for vegan products, where the women age of 43 to 62 know about animal testing. Again, the study also shows that, women age of 23 to 42 they knew it before but unsure of the cosmetics brand. According to Gagliano (2024) we can determined that Generation Z is becoming more and more aware of the value of sustainability in regards to cruelty-free lifestyle. Additionally, Petro (2024), claims that Millennials and Gen Z rely on their purchasing decisions on social, environmental, and personal ideals as well. Our campaign focuses on storytelling in activity public relations within cosmetics industry, tool in social change and awareness rising efforts. Our target is to create short- and long-term effects of storytelling on awareness level, behavioral change, across different age group.

Using concepts and frameworks from this unit, what stage are the publics in?

In order to determine the stage of the public in a public relation context, James E. Grunig's Situational theory of Publics, categorizes public based on awareness and involvement of an issue. This mechanism identifies different groups of publics and their behaviors. Those individuals who are not aware of benefit cosmetics or their animal testing practices are known as non-public, as they are not affected by the issue and have no awareness of it. Nonpublic can raise awareness about the issue through educational campaigns (Grunig 2005).

The next one will be those people who use Benefit Cosmetics but are unaware that the brand is engaged with this animal test, though they are affected by the issue and have no recognition for it. They are known as the latent public. Through campaigns, they can be alerted and learn about the animal testing practices of benefit cosmetics.

The aware public are the customers who are aware that the brand is engaging in animal testing but have not taken any action (Grunig 2005). Again, based on this research, we can say that although they are aware of the problem, they haven't taken any specific action to fix it. An aware public encourages others to take action to choose cruelty-free products or become involved in campaign initiatives.

Individuals or organizations that strongly disagree with Benefit Cosmetics' use of animals in testing are known as "Active people." This could include supporters of cruelty-free products, ethical shoppers, and advocates for animal rights. The active public ought to plan and promote them in their quests by giving them platforms and resources. According to Jo-Yun, Overton and Bhalla (2020), PR professionals need to engage active audiences to convey a strong message to others.

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Fact Sheet

- According to Humane Society International (2023), it causes the death of 500,000 animals every year, mainly including rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, rats and mice.
- An incredible 85% of Australians oppose cosmetics testing on animals and 81% support a national ban on the sale of animal-tested cosmetics according to the 2013 Nexus Research Poll.
- #BeCrueltyFree is the leading global campaign to end animal testing for cosmetics backed by 11 million members. HSI launched the global #BeCrueltyFree campaign in 2012 to create the political will and consumer pressure to ban cosmetics animal testing wherever it takes place in the world (Humane Society International Australia, 2023)
- Responding to public pressure, the Australian Government enacted a ban on animal tested cosmetics in Australia from July 2020 (Humane Society International Australia, 2023)
- According to Animal Liberation (n.d.) Some skin allergy tests on guinea pigs only predict human reactions 72% of the time, and the Draize skin irritation test in rabbits only predicts human skin reactions 60% of the time.
- According to PETA, it is estimated that at least 300,000 animals are used every year in tests for cosmetics products or ingredients in China alone, and the global total is likely to be much higher.
- According to PETA, a single test for a cosmetics ingredient can use over 1,000 rats or rabbits.
- According to PETA, Some companies – such as Benefit, Bobbi Brown, and Maybelline – say they don't conduct animal tests *unless required to by law*. This usually means that they are opting to sell in places where such requirements exist, thereby putting profit before ethics by *choosing* to pay for tests on animals or use animal-tested ingredients so they can expand their market.

Media Relations

Benefit

Monday 4-6 PM Group