

Digital Marketing Strategy of a Celebrity Beauty Brand: A Case of Rare Beauty

¹Yoonju Han

¹Assistant Professor of Marketing, Ewha School of Business, Ewha Womans University, Korea
yoonyu.han@ewha.ac.kr

Abstract

We analyze the digital marketing strategies of Rare Beauty, a cosmetic brand founded by Selena Gomez in 2020, focusing on inclusivity and mental health advocacy as core pillars of its brand mission. Through an in-depth review of the brand's website design, SEO performance, social media engagement, and online review management—the key elements of a firm's digital marketing activities—we reveal Rare Beauty's success in authentically connecting with diverse audiences and fostering brand loyalty. Our analysis uncovers noteworthy findings: while Rare Beauty excels in creating a mission-driven aesthetic across digital platforms, there are areas for improvement, particularly in enhancing user experience by improving website readability, refining the review filtering system, and expanding social media engagement. Optimizing technical SEO could further increase discoverability. We propose these recommendations to strengthen Rare Beauty's online presence and demonstrate how the brand's unique approach offers valuable insights for industry professionals aiming to integrate social values into digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: Celebrity beauty brand, Social media marketing, Search engine optimization, Online review management

1. INTRODUCTION

Rare Beauty is an American cosmetics company founded and owned by Selena Gomez, a U.S. entertainer, and was launched on September 3, 2020. The company offers a diverse range of cosmetic products and beauty tools, targeting 16 to 35 aged consumers that align with the founder's fanbase. According to Rare Beauty's Social Impact Report, the brand expanded its fund globally, contributing over \$2 million to 16 grantees worldwide. Additionally, it launched the "Your Words Matter" campaign, engaging with over 85,000 individuals to emphasize the importance of word choice. The brand also co-hosted the first White House Mental Health Youth Action Forum, bringing young leaders nationwide together to address crucial mental health issues.

The brand has achieved a global valuation of \$250 million [1]. Notably, the brand will triple its net gain in 2030, following a robust net revenue of \$70 million in the preceding year [1]. Rare Beauty is ranked as the most popular celebrity beauty brand [2] and overpowers other celebrity brands such as Kylie Cosmetics, Fenty Beauty, and Florence by Mills, in terms of the search volume [3]. However, its high performance on search rankings does not lead to the same standing in terms of a financial measure [3]. Its annual revenue is the fifth,

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Corresponding Author: yoonyu.han@ewha.ac.kr

Tel: +82-2-3277-2787, Fax: +82-2-3277-2776

Assistant Professor of Marketing, Ewha School of Business, Ewha Womans University, Korea

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preceded by other brands like Fenty Beauty and Kylie Cosmetics.

The market is saturated with celebrity-backed cosmetic lines, as fans are drawn to products from public figures. Rihanna's Fenty Beauty stands out among them. Rihanna expanded its offerings in 2020 with Fenty Skin, positioning itself as a one-stop shopping destination for both cosmetics and skincare. The landscape of Selena's adversaries continues to expand, with celebrity beauty brands like Kylie Jenner's Kylie Cosmetics and Hailey Bieber's Rhode Skin becoming common choices. In addition, Rare Beauty could face competition from beauty brands that focus on similar values. For example, there are other brands dedicated to customers' mental health, such as Anxiety Cosmetics and Dr. Brandt Skincare.

The purpose of this paper is investigating Rare Beauty's success factor and areas for further improvement in digital marketing activities. As mentioned above, Rare Beauty is ranked as the most popular celebrity beauty brand, but to maintain its high performance in the highly competitive industry, their current digital marketing activities should be revisited and revised if needed. In the following sections, we discuss Rare Beauty's digital marketing activity, specifically website design, search engine marketing, and social media and online review management. Finally, we conclude with summarizing the discussions and suggesting implications.

2. WEBSITE DESIGN OF RARE BEAUTY

A key strength of Rare Beauty lies in its consistent design elements, including color schemes, typography, and imagery, which are cohesive on the website. Figure 1 comes from Rare Beauty's product page of the website. As one can see from the figure, the color scheme of Rare Beauty's website is a soft, neutral nude pink, which gives viewers a comfortable and warm feeling. The graphic design predominantly uses circular elements, creating a consistent visual identity with Rare Beauty's product images. All Rare Beauty's products have a rounded shape, as opposed to the sharp angles found in other cosmetic brands.



Figure 1. Rare Beauty's makeup products

Information provided by the website can boost visitor's interest and desire and lead to action, following AIDA (Attention-Interest-Desire-Action) model [4, 5]. Specifically, Rare Beauty helps customers understand the products clearly, enabling them to find the most suitable product for themselves. The website presents detailed product information such as ingredient lists, usage instructions, and the brand's assurances regarding product testing (e.g., Details, "What's in?", "How to use?"). Another unique feature is the inclusion of video tutorials on product web pages, often featuring Selena Gomez, offering practical usage tips. Using Selena's image to promote the products can increase the credibility of the products and, at the same time, create a sense of closeness and enhance engagement with customers [6]. On the web page of each product, there is a "Tips" section with video tutorials by Selena, providing tips on how to use the product effectively.

Being that said, weaknesses for further enhancement exist. Firstly, the readability of text on the website can be improved. Currently, the font size is relatively small compared to the website's layout, making the overall appearance harder to read. In addition, typically, for the best readability, larger text such as product names or major headings should use a sans-serif font, while smaller text like descriptions or detailed information should use a serif font [7]. Rare Beauty does the opposite entirely, using a serif font for large headings and a sans-serif font for descriptions. This could be a deliberate choice to build the company's unique website image. However, it diminishes readability, potentially affecting the shopping experience. Revising the font used in product headline sections is necessary.

Secondly, the navigation bar could go against consumers' smooth browsing. As Figure 2 shows, Rare Beauty's navigation bar on the upper left corner consists of three main sections: "Shop", "Shade Finder", and "Rare Impact". Under the "Shop" section, there are options such as Best Sellers, Face, Eye, etc. Instead of displaying a series of clickable text phrases like other websites, Rare Beauty incorporates images along with text to enhance the visual appeal of the products.



Figure 2. Rare Beauty's navigation menu

However, this approach has its limitations as all the options are not displayed on a single screen. Customers have to click on the right arrow on the screen to view other options. Having to continuously click like this to find the product they want can be inconvenient and may test the patience of customers. Adopting a conventional vertical dropdown list for the navigation bar is recommended. Benchmarking against other brands could provide valuable insights. Figure 3 shows that Kylie Cosmetics organize their categories and subcategories in a simple manner with a vertical dropdown list, yet manage to leave a distinct impression by using relevant imagery for each subcategory, such as face, lips, and eyes. Moreover, when one hovers over the Kylie Cosmetics category on the navigation bar, all the makeup-related subcategories appear within the same frame. Beneath each subcategory, there's a detailed list of products within that category, making it easy for customers to click and access the webpage without much effort.

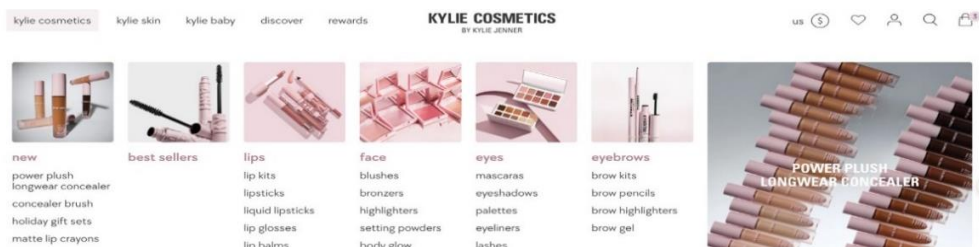


Figure 3. Kylie Cosmetic's navigation menu

3. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION OF RARE BEAUTY

The brand's strength in SEO (search engine optimization, hereafter) is summarized in its use of long-tail target keywords, which significantly boosts its organic search traffic [8] from users being more advanced in the search process [9, 10]. The main goal of SEO is to increase traffic from organic search results [11, 12]. Rare Beauty has been highly successful in this regard with organic search results that account for the largest share of Rare Beauty's search traffic [13]. The second highest source of traffic is direct traffic (24.75%), showing that most customers who visit the website are already aware and interested in the brand [8]. Moreover, Rare Beauty benefits from the use of long-tail keywords to attract interested customers and rank higher on the search results page. Rare Beauty's organic search keywords list show that their brand-specific, long-tail keywords all rank within the top 5 on the search results page [14].

Additionally, in terms of off-site SEO, Rare Beauty excels in creating linkable content, thereby facilitating the generation of backlinks. Selena Gomez creates various TikTok and YouTube videos to promote her brand and tutor product usages. Her celebrity influence expands the reach of the company's owned media content, increasing the possibility of reaching potential customers. These videos also generate backlinks on the platform where the video is posted via user sharing; thus, becoming a source of earned exposure for the brand.

To further improve its SEO performance, Rare Beauty should decrease loading times and expand its paid keywords list. Firstly, Rare Beauty's website contains duplicated contents, meta descriptions, and title tags that adversely impact search engines' evaluation of its webpage quality [13, 14]. Additionally, Rare Beauty's desktop site (6.5 seconds) and mobile site (21.9 seconds) suffer from longer loading times due to excessive use of JavaScript and CSS files, alongside a low text-to-HTML ratio [15, 16]. These factors contribute to lowered search engine rankings, highlighting the need for optimization to improve both user experience and search visibility. Decreasing its web page load times to under 3 seconds for both desktop and mobile is equally essential as search engines penalize web pages with long load times [17]. This can be accomplished by compressing image files, minifying the JavaScript and CSS files, and removing unnecessary render-blocking resources [16].

Secondly, Rare Beauty's current paid search keywords list is highly limited with only 9 keywords, all of which directly feature the brand's name [18]. Although this list effectively captures interested customers already familiar with the brand to its website, it fails to capitalize on valuable advertising opportunities provided by customers unaware of the brand who may be casual searching and buying products on impulse [19]. A secondary channel to drive awareness is necessary as relying solely on social media to spread brand awareness overlooks potential customers who aren't active on social media. To supplement, Rare Beauty should consider including high search volume, fat head keywords, such as general terms for their most popular products like "liquid blush" and "tinted moisturizer", to build brand awareness. Although it is difficult for smaller brands to gain a high rank on search engine result pages with fat head keywords, Rare Beauty has the potential to improve its fat head keyword ranking. For instance, Rare Beauty's position for the fat head keyword "makeup" has moved up 7 positions, from rank 30, in their paid keywords list [20].

Benchmarking against industry leaders such as REI and Sephora can help Rare Beauty improve its search engine marketing regarding the issues raised above. First, REI, an outdoor retailer, stands out with its low web page load time for both its desktop and mobile site as well as its healthy core web vitals [21, 22]. REI balances its use of images and text to ensure high scannability with low load times. As with most beauty brand websites, Rare Beauty's web pages are slowed down by excessive use of images, JavaScript and CSS files. In this regard, Rare Beauty could reference REI's website in terms of image-to-text balance. Secondly, Sephora, a U.S.

cosmetic retailer, maximizes search engine marketing by employing an extensive paid keywords list encompassing long-tail, brand-specific terms, and broader fat head keywords. The brand can use Sephora's list as a guide to determine the proportion of fat head keywords it should invest in. Sephora predominantly targets long-tail keywords related to its products, yet also invests in select fat head keywords, such as "vitamin C serum," to attract less brand-conscious customers [23].

4. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE REVIEW MANAGEMENT OF RARE BEAUTY

Among various social media platform, Rare Beauty is effectively utilizing TikTok and Instagram to connect and engage with its main target, Generation Z consumers, to leverage the strong influence of Selena Gomez, consistent with the concept of influencer marketing in the beauty industry [24, 25]. Firstly, on its TikTok account, the brand features shorts with real voices and faces, aligning with its strategy to highlight human elements and relatability. Rare Beauty often creates video content in direct response to follower feedback or enquiry. When a customer asks a particular question, the brand publicly answers that question with an informative and instructive short video. The original comment is featured within the content and its owner is tagged in the caption. Initiating a two-way conversation with potential consumers, these response videos add value to Rare's audience by making them feel heard and seen. An interesting way to stop scroll and engage with its customers, custom graphics and text pose questions to its community and drive active participation.

Secondly, on Instagram, Rare Beauty curates a diverse collection of posts that address various contemporary social issues, demonstrating engagement with its audience on meaningful topics, which further can enhance target consumers' loyalty [26] and the brand's reputation [27]. Their posts include pictures, graphics, reels, and user-generated content. In their pictures, they show their products, honor and display employees, and customers wearing their products. They put captions in the reels to make sure their message is getting across as most users are scrolling without their sound on. Furthermore, as one can find in Figure 4, the Rare Beauty Instagram account has a collection of posts touching on various messages and essential subjects on social issues, such as #BlackHistoryMonth.



Figure 4. Screenshot of Rare Beauty's Instagram account

Rare Beauty has easily accessible reviews on the webpage, where the reviews of a certain product are shown on the landing page of the product. Additionally, it is visible on the overview of products as well, as to how many stars out of five the product has. Managing review on social media is inevitable these days, especially a celebrity-leading brand like Rare Beauty. In TikTok where its main target customers are widely using, Rare Beauty answers questions in public by shooting a video giving instructions/answers there and tagging the owner of the question in the caption. In addition, Rare Beauty seems to engage closely with their customers in

their TikTok account, as Figure 5 shows. They respond actively in the comment section. This makes the customer feel heard and understood, which highlights the brand's transparency and customer engagement.



Figure 5. Rare Beauty's interactions with customers on TikTok account

Being that said, Rare Beauty need to work on improving the system of how they portray their review. It is easy to access reviews, but there is no such system like Amazon where users can choose which reviews to read. For instance, it's not possible to choose to read a one or two-star product review. It is only possible to sort the reviews by "Top Rated", "Most Helpful" and "Newest", which could potentially be against the brand's transparency. Additionally, they do not directly answer customers on the reviews on their webpage. Moreover, except TikTok, the brand does not answer any comments on other social media platforms such as X, which can affect the image and the expandability of the brand, since they don't seem to make an effort to engage with other current and potential customers outside of TikTok or Instagram.

As a benchmark, Fenty Beauty, one of the main competitors of Rare Beauty, is worth to look at. Visitors of Fenty Beauty websites can filter reviews precisely by various criteria and can choose which reviews they want to read from a star rating from one to five, and if other customers think the review is helpful or not, which can enhance the user experience. Also, Fenty Beauty choose various social media platforms for managing reputation. For instance, they are engaging actively on Instagram with their followers and users by liking comments, pinning comments, and answering comments. Furthermore, Fenty Beauty gives behind-the-scenes glimpses on social media platforms to make the viewers feel closer and therefore foster a strong community.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we provide an in-depth examination of Rare Beauty, a celebrity-founded beauty brand, in terms of its digital marketing strategies. By analyzing Rare Beauty's approach, we identify valuable insights for practitioners in the cosmetics industry and other brands targeting similar demographics. While acknowledging the advantage of its founder's celebrity influence, we highlight adaptable strategies that other brands can implement to strengthen their digital presence and drive customer engagement.

In our analysis of Rare Beauty's digital strategy, we emphasize the importance of an integrated approach as a key takeaway. We find that the brand's success is rooted in a cohesive strategy that unifies the core elements of digital marketing. Through our examination of website design, we observe that consistent visual elements paired with detailed product information strengthen brand identity and customer trust. However, we

also identify the need to balance aesthetic appeal with readability and ease of navigation to optimize the user experience. Our analysis of Rare Beauty's search engine optimization (SEO) approach reveals the effectiveness of leveraging long-tail keywords and creating linkable content to drive organic traffic. This highlights the necessity of a well-rounded SEO strategy that combines technical optimization with robust content creation. Furthermore, we suggest that the brand's paid keyword strategy, which blends brand-specific and general industry terms, can serve as a model for capturing a broader audience. In social media strategy, we illustrate how Rare Beauty effectively uses platform-specific content, with short-form videos on TikTok and varied content on Instagram to engage different audience segments. The brand's practice of addressing customer inquiries through targeted content not only boosts engagement but also adds value for a wider audience. We find that aligning content with social issues relevant to the brand mission resonates strongly with socially conscious consumers. Finally, our assessment of online review management underscores the importance of comprehensive reputation management. While Rare Beauty makes product reviews readily accessible on its website, we suggest that implementing a more sophisticated review system with enhanced filtering could further support customer decision-making. This case demonstrates the value of managing brand reputation across multiple platforms, ensuring a consistent and positive customer experience.

Through our analysis of Rare Beauty, we reveal the dynamic and evolving nature of digital marketing in the beauty industry. We find that agility is essential for brands, as they must continuously adapt strategies to align with shifting consumer preferences and emerging platforms. This includes experimenting with new content formats, exploring alternative social media channels, and discovering innovative ways to showcase products in digital spaces. Our study emphasizes that Rare Beauty's case illustrates the powerful role of authenticity in digital marketing; by aligning digital efforts with the brand's core mission and values and featuring real people—employees and customers alike—brands can foster a more relatable and trustworthy image.

In summary, we conclude that while not all brands benefit from celebrity influence, the digital marketing principles exemplified by Rare Beauty are adaptable across diverse industries. Our findings suggest that brands focusing on user experience, content quality, platform-specific strategies, and authentic messaging can strengthen their digital presence and forge deeper connections with target audiences. Rare Beauty's success offers a valuable case study for brands navigating the complexities of digital marketing, demonstrating the effectiveness of a mission-aligned and audience-centered approach in today's rapidly changing marketplace.

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