



JACLYN COSMETICS: “Lumps & Mold & Hairs, Oh My!”

COM 4140: Public Relations Case Studies
Professor Robinson
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Mia Martinez-Escobar
Antionette Puyolt
Anahi Segovia
Marie Turiel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beauty influencer Jaclyn Hill began posting makeup tutorials on YouTube in 2010. After gaining popularity with the support of a loyal fanbase, the makeup mogul extended her success beyond YouTube by collaborating with well-known beauty companies to create co-branded products. At the demand of her fans, Hill launched her own beauty brand in 2019 with the release of a lipstick line priced at \$18 each; however, the highly anticipated products failed to meet fan expectations. Customers shared reviews exposing the poor quality of the products, contrary to the promises Hill had made to her audience. Although the failed launch was a shock to the beauty world, customers, and fans were more disappointed by Jaclyn Hill's disastrous responses across multiple social media platforms. Today, the lipstick scandal still dominates conversations in the beauty world.

BACKGROUND

Jaclyn Hill started her YouTube channel in 2010 to express her love of makeup. Hill primarily focuses on producing makeup tutorials to her channel, but occasionally branches out to skincare, favorite products, makeup hauls, and personality-driven content. Currently, her YouTube channel has over 5.84 million subscribers. Her popularity also reaches to Instagram with 6.3 million followers and to Twitter with 2.1 million followers.

On November 2, 2014, Hill teased the future launch of a personal makeup brand on her Twitter (Hill, 2014):

"Yes, the rumors are true! I am creating my own makeup line! It won't be released for a long time because I'm doing it all on my own!"

This announcement was incredibly well received and fans were thrilled to support Hill in her future endeavors. After five years, Hill officially announced the launch of her brand, Jaclyn Cosmetics, to her YouTube channel on May 22, 2019. The 35-minute video introduced Jaclyn Cosmetics to her fans and showcased the brand's mission statement, the PR box, and demonstrated swatches for each lipstick shade (Hill, 2019, May 23).

As of May 2020, the Jaclyn Cosmetics website on the About Jaclyn page states:

"Jaclyn Hill is obsessed with all things beauty—and she's been sharing that obsession with millions of subscribers since stepping in front of the camera in 2010 to film her first YouTube video. Over the years, she's perfected her signature look: an impeccably blended smokey eye, a statement nude lip, and a flawless complexion with blinding highlight. Jaclyn's beauty mantra is: it's more than just makeup. And she created Jaclyn Cosmetics for every boss babe out there who loves makeup just as much as she does." (About Jaclyn, 2020)

HISTORY OF LAUNCH ISSUES

As Hill's online popularity grew, she garnered attention from well-known brands. Her first collaboration was with Morphe, a popular makeup brand, on January 1, 2015. The collaboration consisted of an eyeshadow palette with 28 of Hill's favorite shades (Guglielmetti, 2016). The day prior to the product launch, Morphe changed the time of the launch which confused customers. Upon launch, the site crashed not allowing purchases to be completed. Morphe claims hackers swarmed the site to overwhelm their servers. The issue was quickly resolved and the palette became a success.

Hill's next collaboration was with Becca, a popular makeup brand found at Sephora, later that same year on July 2. Hill's product, Champagne Pop, sold out in 20 minutes after selling 25,000 units on the Sephora website (Cyk, 2015). Unfortunately for Hill, this was her only truly successful product launch as mishaps surrounded the rest of her product launches.

In June 2016, Hill collaborated with Becca once again to expand on the popular Champagne Pop. The collaboration was a collection of various products, including an eyeshadow palette. Influencers received product PR and reviewed the eyeshadow palette to be dry, patchy, and not the quality formula usually found in Becca products (Simmons, 2016). When reviews returned poorly, Jaclyn claimed Becca only allowed her to create a single color in the palette and that Becca used a different lab to rush the product. Ultimately, Becca pulled the eyeshadow palette from the collection (Gregor, 2016).

Hill collaborated with Morphe for a second time. The palette received positive reviews; however earlier that year, a baker accidentally leaked the palette colors to their Instagram (Dall'Asen, 2017). When fans noticed the similarities between the colors on the bakery's Instagram and teasers from Hill's social media, the bakery promptly deleted the photo, and Hill denied the claims.

In June 2018, Hill collaborated with Morphe to release new eyeshadow palettes consisting of favorite color shades Hill was unable to include in her first collaboration (Pellot, 2018). Upon receiving the product in PR, beauty bloggers gave palette negative reviews stating the quality isn't on par with the original. In response, Morphe delayed the release to re-formulate the palette. When finally launched, palettes seemed to be inconsistent in quality. The packaging was also similar in design to Becca's Champagne Pop Collection from June 2016, which caused Becca to send a cease and desist letter to Morphe (TFL, 2018).

TIMELINE

Nov 2, 2014 - Jaclyn announces via Twitter she's working on her own brand

May 22, 2019 - Hill releases a video launching Jaclyn Cosmetics

May 30, 2019 - Jaclyn Cosmetics Launches

Jun 4-11, 2019 - Customers receive lipsticks and complaints begin, pictures and reviews are shared online

Jun 5, 2019 - Hill responds to dissatisfied customers in what seems to be isolated incidents of poor product quality

Jun 11, 2019 - Addresses silence via Twitter and promises to address concerns

Jun 12, 2019 - Response Video is posted to YouTube
 Jun 22, 2019 - Jaclyn Hill candidly apologizes on Instagram Story
 Jun 26, 2019 - Hill responds to conspiracies on Twitter, but quickly deletes tweets later
 Jun 28, 2019 - Jaclyn Hill deactivates all social media
 Jul 23, 2019 - Hill reappears on social media and posts to YouTube
 Aug 16, 2019 - Jaclyn Cosmetics makes an official statement on Instagram and Twitter

INITIAL CUSTOMER RESPONSE

From the start of Hill's launch, Jaclyn Cosmetics was already experiencing backlash from customers. Many of the issues included inaccurate taxation, inflated international shipping costs, and troubleshooting problems within the brand's webpage. Many customers took to Twitter to voice their frustrations. Orders that had been placed and processed via Jaclyn Cosmetics, were subsequently canceled days later (Hollan, 2019). According to beauty influencer RawBeautyKristi, upon buying the collection out of her pocket to review for her YouTube channel, Jaclyn Cosmetics reached out to her to inform her that she was on the PR list, but that the product wasn't going to arrive after the launch (Hill, 2019, May 31). Many international customers were upset with the inflated shipping costs per lipstick. One Canadian customer reported spending \$52 USD on one lipstick with shipping and taxes. Through this, it becomes apparent that Jaclyn Cosmetics launch faced a rocky start.

Once lipsticks shipped, the controversy continued as many customers reported having received defective products. Many customers uploaded images to social media of their newly unpackaged lipsticks containing round particles, fiber-like hairs, lumps, and receiving it in a semi-melted state (Rearick, 2019). To make matters worse, many customers reported having health concerns after using the products. Many provided a detailed record on their social media platforms with sensitive photos of before and after using the product revealing swollen lips, bumps, and cold sores. Conspiracy rumors also roamed the media, about the lipsticks being old, expired, and tainted from not being handled within the proper regulations. Furthermore, several brand ambassadors noticed that all 20 shades of lipsticks had one batch code. This is unusual as each shade should have a distinct batch code. Batch codes are used to identify the exact date, time, and location of batch production. Through all the discrepancies and allegations surrounding the influencer's beauty line, customers, and brand ambassadors alike were eagerly seeking a response from Jaclyn Cosmetics and demanding a solution from their troublesome experience with the product.

ORGANIZATION'S RESPONSE

Within a day of initial customer responses, Jaclyn Hill began defending her product. Tweeting through her account, @JaclynHill, Hill responded to customers, citing their initial positive reviews in order to invalidate their critiques (see Appendix A):

"... you posted swatches 2 days ago loving the lipsticks? Now you're wondering why it's lumpy? It's obvious this lipstick is used & not fresh from factory. Like any other lipstick, if you use it over other products, have dry lips, etc, things like this can happen."

Her tone in the tweet is defensive and dismissive. Accusatory language such as "Now you're wondering" and "things like this can happen" convey that Hill was sure that defects and issues with the product were user error and not the product. Hill wrote later in the same Twitter thread, "... since her first review was great, it's hard to know the actual issue," once again shifting the blame off of her brand and onto the reviewer (see Appendix B).

In the following days, Hill (2019, June 6) begins listening to the number of customers with complaints and takes them seriously. Jaclyn Hill referring customers to the help email address and promises "to give you a full refund as well as send you a new product."

On June 11, 2019, Hill announces that she will be making a video response covering any issues with her lipsticks (see Appendix C).

"I plan on breaking my silence and addressing the issues regarding my lipsticks very soon. I have been working hard to gather all of the facts and details so I can give you accurate answers. I appreciate you allowing me time to wrap my head around all of this & investigate."

The response video, titled 'My Lipsticks' and posted to Jaclyn Hill's YouTube channel, addressed melting, white fuzz, black holes, and texture issues (Hill, 2019, June 12). Hill also displays three pieces of relevant documentation stating that the Jaclyn Cosmetics lipsticks were FDA approved throughout the video. Near the beginning of the video, Hill claims that mass production didn't begin until approximately a month before the brand launched. She previously had switched production labs in order to prevent any products from expiring after an unexplained setback. The ingredients of the lipsticks were approved by the FDA and had not expired before launch.

Black holes in the products were caused by oxygen bubbles that lifted to the surface and texture was caused by the production vats not completely breaking down ingredients, both of which were a result of the speed of production (Hill, 2019, June 12). White fuzz on the lipsticks was a result of the lab's decision to use white cotton gloves as opposed to black latex gloves in order to prevent any smudges or marks on the Jaclyn Cosmetics component, the silver packaging of the lipstick, as well as using white fiber towels to clean production vats. Jaclyn Hill explained that the production team was changing out equipment often in order to prevent any safety issues and as soon as the team realized that the products were being affected the lab switched to black latex gloves.

According to Hill (2019, June 12), up to 80 percent of complaints received were about melted lipsticks. She claimed that lipsticks can melt during the shipment process because of delivery trucks or the lipsticks sitting outside while the recipient is not home. She advised customers to allow the lipsticks to cool completely in order to prevent breakage or melting. Her team had previously done testing and concluded that the Jaclyn Cosmetics lipsticks were able to withstand up to 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

Jaclyn Cosmetics production will not use the lab again, meaning some future releases will be delayed (Hill, 2019, June 12). Hill encourages dissatisfied customers to reach out to her team

with photo or video proof in order to receive a full refund. If customers lose trust, Hill states that she hopes future launches will install more trust in her brand.

On June 22, 2019, 10 days after Hill's video response, she took to Instagram stories to publicly apologize for her reaction (Spill, 2019). Hill states she is embarrassed about her response and clarified her tone came from a need to defend her product. Hill specifically mentions consulting with many CEOs on how to remedy the public's concerns, but there is no mention of Hill reaching out to a crisis PR firm. Hill promises to spend \$100,000 to test her lipsticks through various labs to guarantee product safety to her public. Hill states that Jaclyn Cosmetics will not be working with the laboratory for future products, is developing a quality control team, and will push back future launches to learn from this mistake. Most notably, Hill guaranteed every customer to receive a full refund, including shipping and tax, regardless of the product issues.

Four days later, on June 26, 2019, Hill denied conspiracies on Twitter stating Jaclyn Cosmetics only offered refunds to avoid a lawsuit (Spill, 2019). She tweeted again to reassure her honesty but promptly deleted the tweets. When another Twitter user questioned her deleted tweets, Hill stated she did so to protect her sanity. Many conspiracies surrounded the lipsticks such as the white fuzz is animal hair, the lipsticks sat in a warehouse since 2015 while Hill dealt with her divorce and the lipsticks contained mold.

Two days after, Hill deactivated all social media (Prinzivalli, 2019). This caused speculation amongst customers who notice that these are the same social media channels where Hill announced the refund process (Robin, 2019).

It seemed to the public that all communication had been done through Hill's personal social media as the Jaclyn Cosmetics social media accounts were quiet on publicly addressing the issues. Jaclyn Cosmetics had only reached out through email or individually on Twitter. When the results of the lab tests came back, Jaclyn's Cosmetics posted the PDF publicly on Twitter for the public to review. Jaclyn Cosmetics also altered the site's FAQ to dispel rumors of old lipsticks and clarify why the lipsticks weren't being recalled. In August 2019, Jaclyn Cosmetics posted to Instagram thanking their customers for support and that they are working to make their next launch a success (Jaclyn Cosmetics, 2019).

MEDIA RESPONSE

Several major outlets including Teen Vogue, Allure, New York Post, Refinery 29 provided coverage on the Jaclyn Hill cosmetics crisis. While customers were waiting for a response from the company and observing social media activity, they turned to the media to decipher what was going on. The media provided detailed coverage and proposed several theories as to why her products turned out the way they did (Tullos, 2019). The media also deciphered Jaclyn's messaging after she put out her response video and when she deactivated her social media accounts (Robin, 2019). The extensive coverage left bad impressions on people and hurts her reputation for future collaborations and makeup launches.

According to Google Trends, web searches in the United States for the search term "Jaclyn hill lipstick mold" peaked in interest four times in the succeeding months. June 13, June 27, July 12,

and July 22 represent peak popularity search interest relative to the highest point on the chart for the given time in the U.S. (See Appendix D). According to the timeline provided above, this corresponds with activity on social media and demonstrates that this caused search curiosity in different parties.

Hill and her team did not properly handle the crisis because Google Trends also shows a related search term, “Jaclyn hill lipstick” peaked in interest in June but also has minor spikes near the launch of her new holiday collection in December 2019.

PUBLICS’ RESPONSE

There was a mixed response from consumers on social media. The most visible responses were reviews and opinions with pictures of the received product. There was an apparent divide between Hill’s loyal fan base and disappointed customers. Hill’s fans were quick to defend her and blamed the lack of quality control on the manufacturer Hill collaborated with. On the other hand, customers were disappointed the product failed to meet expectations and demanded a refund along with a recall. Beauty influencers also took sides in the controversy and uploaded review videos on their respective YouTube channels and shared their opinions on social media (McNeal, 2019).

When Jaclyn Hill responded with a Youtube video addressing concerns, the public continued with mixed responses. On YouTube, one person commented, “Anyone feel like she was getting a bit aggressive? Lol.” Another added, “Your whole attitude is upset and defensive and fast. idk what u paying ur PR agent for lmao.” A third person wrote, “You’re providing drama receipts instead of recalling a faulty project.” A fourth person said, “Apology video starter pack: Bare face, Sad face, Normal cheap clothes.”

Although Hill chose the appropriate medium to address concerns with her customers, the negative backlash showed the video was not adequate for customers and they were not impressed. Hill came across as insincere and her responses to concerns voiced on social media.

LOOKING AHEAD

After damaging her reputation, Hill uses the attention to her advantage and increases her brand recognition. In October 2019, Hill wore a “canceled” outfit for Halloween that had the words, “Jaclyn Hill is canceled” written all over a dress. Hill also publicly joked about being canceled with other controversial beauty influencers on social media (Tenbarger, 2019).

In November 2019, Hill was awarded Makeup Tutorialist of the Year at the American Influencer Awards. According to the American Influencer Awards’ Official website, “Final nominees are selected by an array of different variables, such as most public submissions, advisory board, creative content, engagement, growth rate, and most importantly, the ability to positively influence! Winners are selected through our public online voting process, which takes place on our website AiAwards.com, coupled with votes from the advisory board (weighted average), and announced at the yearly American Influencer Awards show.” Her award was seen as

controversial and fans had mixed reactions and the lipstick scandal was brought up again (Krause, 2019).

In December 2019, Hill launched another product extension for Jaclyn Cosmetics. According to her website, customers can, “light up the room with highlighters from the Jaclyn Cosmetics holiday collection in pressed or loose powders with perfectly-paired highlighter brushes.” The quality of the highlighters was closely inspected by customers and beauty influencers since this was the first product to launch since the lipstick crisis. While there were no issues with quality control, some customers experienced difficulties with their purchases unclearly being split and shipped separately. Some influencers also noted that they received different PR packages from influencers with larger followings (Tenbarga, 2019).

In February 2020, Hill collaborated with an established beauty brand, Morphe, to launch an eyeshadow palette. Hill has previously worked and encountered issues with Morphe in the past. Although there were no quality or shipping issues encountered with this launch, the palette did get leaked ahead of launch (Newby, 2020).

As of May 2020, the same lipsticks that were scrutinized by the public and media cannot be found for sale on the Jaclyn Cosmetics website.

ARTHUR PAGE PRINCIPLES

Tell the truth. The lack of transparency from Jaclyn Hill and Jaclyn Cosmetics upset the beauty community during the confusion and disappointment of the new lipsticks. Customers were demanding answers and the delayed response gave the impressions that Hill and her company were not forthcoming with the truth.

Prove it with action. In Jaclyn Hill’s apology video on her YouTube account, she apologized for the quality issue and urged customers to email help@jaclyncosmetics.com to receive a full refund and brand new product to replace the received product. This response proved to customers that Hill was trying to correct her actions and be accountable.

Listen to the customer. Hill failed to listen to her customers when the initial complaints were appearing on Twitter. When Hill eventually responded with a Youtube video, customers were not completely satisfied and felt like she still failed to see and address their concerns.

Manage for tomorrow. Because of her lack of management, Hill ruined the trust in her name and brand. In her YouTube response video, Hill states that she is grateful for the people reporting product issues as she can make future changes, and if customers lose trust, it’s okay but she will correct her errors and learn from her mistakes. If Hill had properly managed for these bumps in the road, then she would not have had to lose those valuable customers.

Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it. The response to the failures of this product line meant so much more to consumers. Her delayed response lost trust in consumers, and since this was the first product to launch, it affected her future launches. When

Hill announced her Holiday collection in November, many were eager to find flaws and were curious if another disaster was on the horizon.

Realize a company's true character is expressed by its people. This principle rings especially true for Jaclyn Cosmetics because consumers had a hard time putting their trust and money back into the company with Jaclyn Hill's confusing response and tweets. The varied responses between Jaclyn Hill's company, her YouTube apology video, and her personal social media accounts left a bad impression.

Remain calm, patient, and good-humored. When Hill came across tweets with initial complaints about quality issues, Hill hit back at these complaints by implying the customer was at fault for the defect because of improper use. This push of blame added to the lack of trust consumers had for Jaclyn Cosmetics.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways would a PR professional communicate to garner more sympathy from customers?
 - a. In this case, Jaclyn Hill was the main spokesperson for her brand, Jaclyn Cosmetics. Hill thought she could come off as relatable when she dressed down and wore minimal makeup in her response video. Instead, viewers were confused by the dramatic change in appearance because it strayed away from Hill's normal look. Hill also waited to release an official statement and claimed she wanted to collect as much information as possible. This delay in communication lessened sympathy from her following as it appeared that Hill was working to cover up and hide internal issues rather than deliver the immediate truth. In a crisis, a PR professional should always communicate immediately with a response even and address concerns even if they do not have the answers. Inform the public that you will keep them updated and deliver on your promises.
2. With Jaclyn Cosmetics's response, do you believe Jaclyn Hill acted with a PR team?
 - a. We do not believe Jaclyn Hill acted with a PR team. It is apparent that Hill acted with her best interests in mind and forgot to consider important stakeholders like other beauty influencers and customers. Also, a PR professional would not advise Hill to deactivate her social media. Because she cut off the main line of communication between her brand and her stakeholders, many were left to speculate and turn to the media for answers.
3. Did her past collaborations affect Jaclyn Hill's credibility?
 - a. Yes. Hill's struggles in the past to deliver on quality makeup did affect her personal credibility. However, this was a chance for Hill to start over with her own makeup company and products that came straight from the source. When Jaclyn Cosmetics failed to meet expectations, consumers pointed to the past for explanations when there was a lack of reason from Hill herself.
4. What could beauty influencers learn from Hill's crisis?
 - a. Beauty influencers must learn the importance of public relations and goodwill when it comes to a product launch or failure. There seemed to be transparency leading up to the product launch, but when things didn't go well for Hill, she

changed the narrative and demanded privacy during difficult times. All influencers should prepare and expect positive and negative scenarios with the help of PR professionals

5. How do you feel about Jaclyn Hill's initial responses on Twitter?
 - a. Jaclyn Hill's initial responses to customers on Twitter should have been a warning sign of the crisis to come. Instead, Hill assumed these early reviews were isolated incidents and she publicly dismissed the early concerns. These tweets were deleted and Hill eventually apologized. Originally, Hill should have reached out to the customer and investigated these claims to find a way to address the problem and find a solution.

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APPENDIX A



(Hill, 2019, June 5)

APPENDIX B



Jaclyn Hill ✓
@Jaclynhill

Follow

Replying to @HereForTheTea2 @itsv_82 @jaclyncosmetics

Honest to God, I have not seen one other person complain about this & I take my reviews very seriously. It's obvious the lipstick was used (you could see other product on top) and since her first review was great, it's hard to know the actual issue.

6:59 PM - 5 Jun 2019

6 Retweets 227 Likes



32



6



227



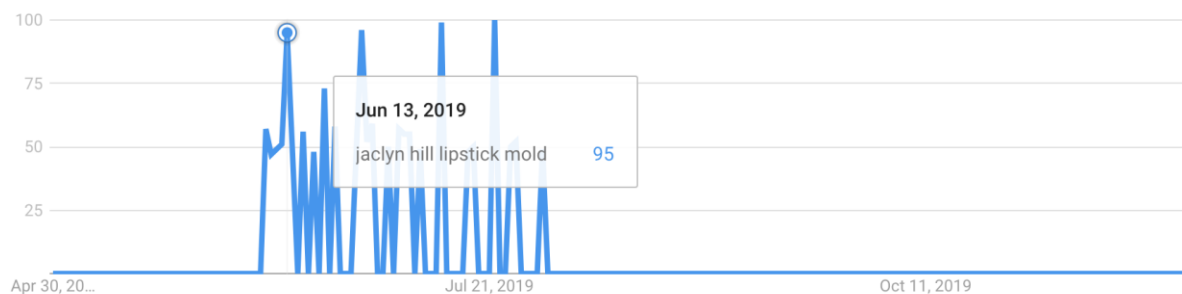
(Hill, 2019, June 6)

APPENDIX C

(Hill, 2019, June 11)

APPENDIX D

Interest over time ?



Interest over time ?

