

Julie Background Research Report: An in-depth analysis into the background of Julie, a morning-after contraceptive pill.

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Company Profile & Research Question

Julie Products Inc. is a privately owned company that sells a progestin-only emergency contraception (EC) pill that prevents pregnancy before it starts. The product is packaged in a bright blue and vibrant pink box which makes it easily identifiable for clientele. Founded in 2021, Julie's co-founders Amanada E/J Morrison, Julie Schott and Brian Bordainick initiated the business to normalize the usage and conversations around the morning-after pill (Deczynski, 2023). The company's LinkedIn page states that Julie is based in New York and composed of ten employees. During the last year, its LinkedIn posted different job opportunities listed for the following positions: Art Director, Operations Manager, Senior Producer, Brand Marketing Manager, Product Development Manager, Senior Manager of Retail Account Management, Head of Finance, Manager of Retail Execution, Demand Planning Manager, Retail Brand Representative, College Activations Coordinator. The growing amount of job positions indicate the company's growth and the potential it has to continue to expand in the modern market.

The company distributes its product nationwide, connecting with donation partners to simultaneously promote Julie and its partners' mission. Julie's mission is to continue the fight for reproductive healthcare for all (Impact Report, 2023). It values providing its emergency contraceptive pill to those who can not afford it throughout the United States and even across the world as Julie has partnered with the organization VOICE to create and send rape kits to Ukraine. Julie's main goal is to break the stigma around ECs. In an effort to reduce contraceptive deserts across the United States, the company prioritizes donating one box of Julie per each purchase of the pill. Working alongside over 300 community partners, Julie has donated over 1 million units of emergency contraceptives since its inception. Julie can be found in 4,500 Walmart locations, 6,900 CVS and 1,500 Target stores (Impact Report, 2023). Apart from these locations, the contraception that is donated can be found on college campuses, community pharmacies and multiple stores.

Julie's Chief Executive Order, Amanda E/J Morrison co-founded the company with previous experience from her Mented Cosmetics brand that launched in 2016. Morrison stated to Inc. magazine that she wanted her second company to be mission driven. Thus, Julie was created to produce tangible change in women's health. The company stands to advocate for reproductive rights during the country's restrictions on abortion and birth control in some places. Julie Products Inc. sells the morning-after pill that uses levonorgestrel, which has been FDA-approved since 2006. As previously mentioned, Julie's multitude of partners ensures that the product can be sold at a slightly cheaper price than competitors even despite its 1:1 donation program.

What sets Julie apart from other brands of contraception is its use of humorous marketing techniques via social media. The brand is constantly active on its Instagram and TikTok accounts, posting videos to promote its product. Heavily marketed towards the Gen-Z clientele, its videos play into the popular trends of these platforms, using witty captions and scenarios about when Julie should be used. For example, its Instagram bio dubs Julie as "your friend with benefits" (Julie, n.d.). There was also a campaign targeting college students to use the pill with the phrase "Don't turn your semester into a trimester" (Julie, 2023). Julie has also collaborated with fashion brands and social media influencers to reach bigger audiences in the media.

For our semester project, our team wants to focus on audience engagement for the company. With other forms of the morning-after pill like Plan B and ella® on the market, we are interested in seeing if its marketing strategies are actually driving consumers to choose Julie over other brands of the pill. We want to survey UNC students to see what brands of emergency contraceptive are purchased and if they are aware of Julie as a brand of the morning-after pill.

Profile Citations

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SWOT

As mentioned above, one of Julie's most prominent strengths is its marketing. Research shows that ages 18-34 are most likely to use EC, so Julie gears ad campaigns toward these younger generations (The Shorty Awards, 2023). With a uniquely designed website and memorable Instagram reels or TikTok videos, it leans into the use of humor and aesthetics popular among Gen-Z while still conveying reliable medical information. Additionally, the lightheartedness of its branding contributes to a more humanizing experience when purchasing EC, which resonates with the intended audiences. This is another strength: how it destigmatizes sex and promotes a healthy understanding of sexual health. Knowledgeable doctors write blog pages on the website and cover a wide range of topics that extend beyond FAQs about the pill (*Sex Education*, 2023). Furthermore, as mentioned in the first section of this assignment, Julie takes a philanthropic approach to its business plan, donating one pill to an underprivileged area with each purchase. This may entice those passionate about helping promote safe sex to choose Julie's brand over competitors. This also puts a positive spin on the brand, as the company aims to make reproductive care a standard for all and provide donations to people needing dignified access to EC (Impact Report, 2023).

The main weakness for Julie is the lack of publicized information on details involving financials and investors. While its 2023 impact report and website give much valuable information, there is little transparency about financial well-being (Impact Report, 2023). It is hard to determine exactly how successful its marketing campaigns are in terms of revenue or if its generosity in donating pills generates a loss. This information is also not freely available elsewhere in detail for the public. We can see that Julie has raised \$8.5 million in funding overall and generated \$5.3 million in debt in 2022 (Pitchbook, 2024). However, those are the only publicly available numbers, leaving the rest up to guesswork. This information would be beneficial for documenting the brand's success or making room for improvement.

Another substantial opportunity lies within its pricing. As mentioned above, it pledged to donate one pill per purchase, yet still have lower pricing than the generic Plan B brand. While only about a \$7 difference, this may entice consumers. Additionally, Julie offers a two-pack deal, unique to any other product in its line, which further reduces the cost (Quartz, 2023). Another opportunity came as a byproduct of the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. While Julie advocates against this ruling, it created a large market for EC, as other options have become unavailable. Demand for such pills went up 300% in the few weeks following the Supreme Court's decision (CNN, 2022), and since then, it has risen 59% overall (The Shorty Awards, 2023). Again, while Julie opposes this ruling, it left room for increased revenue.

Contrastingly, one of Julie's most significant threats is established companies. One interesting phenomenon is how people will refer to a general product by the most well-known brand. For instance, adhesive bandages are almost exclusively called Band-Aids, as they are the name of the most popular type. Morning-after pills experience the same phenomenon, with many calling any EC pill "Plan B". Thus, breaking into a field with an established front-runner is difficult. While researching, scientific surveys refer to EC as Plan B, further proving the point (Statista, 2020). Additionally, public opinion raises a threat. For instance, when Olivia Rodrigo distributed free Julie pills at her concerts, that received backlash from outraged parents. They felt it was an inappropriate example for an artist with a young demographic of fans to set (Media Matters, 2024). While Julie was not directly involved with this decision, instances such as this may affect Julie's ability to market since the topic can be offensive and will not always be well-received. Since morning-after pills are a stigmatized and polarizing topic, there will often be negative feedback when Julie markets its products.

SWOT Citations

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Literature Review

There appears to be much confusion among the general public on the difference between EC and the abortion pill, and many seem to not be properly educated on these matters at all. With this in mind, there is a strong argument to be made that garnering potent audience engagement is important for educating the consumer and fulfilling Julie's mission of "making reproductive healthcare the rule (not the exception)" (*Julie For All*, 2023).

The Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners completed a qualitative study in which 97 male and female university students were surveyed, and a rather shocking lack of exposure to EC was revealed. The study found that 87.8% of students could not differentiate between EC and the abortion pill, and 82.5% had not discussed EC with a healthcare professional. In addition, among women deemed by the study as less likely to use EC, 100% claim they would feel embarrassed requesting EC at the pharmacy, indicating that those with prescriptions are more likely to take the pill. Furthermore, many expressed that the perceived risk of this embarrassment and potential judgment from peers was higher than the risk of pregnancy (Corbett et al., 2006). Moreover, the American Journal of Health Education (AJHE) assessed 339 college-aged women and found that 64% of subjects believe you must be 18 years old or older to purchase EC, and 80.8% believe that it can harm a pregnant woman's fertilized eggs (Garrett Wagner et al., 2018). This information from these two studies is very alarming since it shows that people simply are not getting enough information on EC—what it is, how it functions, how it affects the body—and ignorance on the topic is evidently stigmatizing usage of the product, resulting in fewer people feeling comfortable buying it even if it is in the best interest of their health.

The idea that there is a negative air surrounding the purchase and use of EC is supported by Madison Borsella in her University of Ottawa thesis on emergency contraceptives in New Brunswick, Canada. Through visits to 30 different pharmacies and in-depth interviews with 21 survey participants, Borsella found that many women have the idea that it is shameful and irresponsible to need EC; specifically, taking the pill after sex feels incredibly irresponsible since women feel like they should have done more to prevent pregnancy beforehand. Shame regarding the need for the product has manifested in women of the area generally mistaking important information regarding EC, such as when to use it, how effective it is, whether or not it is different from abortion, and if it will have an effect on fertility (Borsella, 2021).

In the aforementioned study by AJHE, 90.3% of participants answered that they had heard of EC through media sources at least once, and 45.8% have learned information on it through media 'Many times' (Garret Wagner et al., 2018). This is a significant portion of people receiving information on reproductive healthcare through the internet, which means that those tasked with sharing such information must do so in an appealing way. Researchers with Perspectives on Medical Education have found that entertaining resident-led conferences increased both satisfaction and engagement in viewers. People who learn with these stipulations are more likely to make meaningful and lasting connections to what they have learned (Jerardi et al., 2013). The well-rated conferences being resident-led implies that relatability is crucial to viewers absorbing presented information.

Since using entertainment to captivate an audience is associated with higher-quality learning, it makes sense that Julie approaches advertising in the way that it does, with things such as vlogs and on-the-street interviews and games. We would like to confirm whether or not these methods prove effective in bringing awareness to women's reproductive healthcare and if they spur consumers to purchase Julie over market alternatives who rarely, if ever, advertise the product.

Literature Review Citations

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Summary of Findings and Ideas for Primary Research

Julie's light-hearted and Gen-Z-targeted approach to marketing strategies with a focus on educating and destigmatizing, as well as its philanthropy, has set it apart from its competitors. It has created a name for itself in a market dominated by Plan B, a brand so popular that morning-after pills are commonly referred to as 'Plan B,' even though it was founded much later, 2021. Julie has a vast network of partners with whom it advertises and works with in donation efforts. Julie also has competitive pricing, approximately seven dollars cheaper than its main competitor, Plan B, and an even better deal when buying a two-pack, a unique offer which sets it apart from similar brands. Another nuance to Julie is that it is a growing contraceptive brand in the era after the overturning of Roe vs. Wade, which significantly increased the demand for emergency contraception, as well as put into question the possibility of it being taken off the market.

Some of the weaknesses and challenges Julie faces are the brand establishment of Plan B, as well as the polarizing response to its philanthropy efforts and marketing, such as the media response to it being passed out at an Olivia Rodrigo concert. Additionally, for a brand whose target audience is young and caters to campuses, it is possible that the non-name brand contraceptive offered at campus pharmacies undercuts Julie's price, as it does at UNC. Furthermore, although it has a notably active presence on TikTok and Instagram, it has around 20k followers and 30k followers on these platforms, respectively, which are large within its market but small compared to the total amount of followers brands have been able to amass.

In regards to data, there is a lot of confusion over the difference between the morning-after pill and the abortion pill, as well as general unfamiliarity with the way contraceptive pills work. On its packaging, Julie links to its website faqs, which answers common misconceptions about the morning-after pill. It also hosts blog posts on its website from medical professionals, answering questions about sex and contraception. Regarding this, we are wondering about the effects of Julie's educational aspects on its clientele and whether individuals who purchase Julie are more likely to know more about contraception than customers of other brands. We are also interested in the gender gap in this knowledge and potential other gaps among race and sexual orientation.

We are interested in how Julie's approach to marketing strategies comes off to and influences the opinion of its clientele. Do its marketing strategies bring in buyers, or at least make them aware of its brand? Where are customers going to buy Julie's morning-after pill? Is its clientele aware of its philanthropy efforts? Are customers concerned about the overturning of Roe vs. Wade, and are they thinking about that during their purchase? What are the effects of Julie's destigmatizing efforts through its marketing strategies on its customers and potential customers? Overall, our interest is based on assessing the success and influence of Julie and its marketing strategies in a modern technological, social, and political landscape. We plan to explore these questions and similar inquiries as we continue the research process through focus groups, surveys, and experiments. Something to keep in mind during this is the potential sensibilities of asking about morning-after pill usage and general contraceptive topics; people might feel uncomfortable disclosing information about these purchases or their opinions and knowledge of it. However, we are also interested in continuing Julie's destigmatization initiative. Balancing this will be a key aspect of our research process.