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Why Alex Jones, Mike Cernovich, and Joe Rogan Are All Selling Skin Care

By Angela Lashbrook | Jun 12, 2018



Why are hypermasculine conspiracy theorists hawkking all-natural sunscreens and anti-aging serums?

Alex Jones, the man who once said that the government is using “gay bombs” that “turn the frogs gay,” is getting into skin care.

The founder of Infowars, Jones is infamous for espousing conspiracy theories, like that the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting was faked by the government or that the government controls the weather. But on his online store, nestled among emergency survival gear and supplements like the “Real Red Pill” (which claims to “support optimal cognitive function”), there exists an unlikely little collection of skin care called Emric’s Essentials.

Since skin care is typically considered a vain enterprise for women, it might come as a surprise that the extremely macho Alex Jones sells his own. But interest in skin care is booming, with projections that it’ll grow to a \$135 billion industry by 2021; the most vigorously expanding category is natural and organic skin care, which is estimated to grow 10 percent from 2016 to 2025. So when you’re Alex Jones, a media personality who traffics in pseudoscience and fear, an industry like skin care prone to pseudoscience (and a little dose of fear) becomes an excellent market opportunity.

Jones isn’t the only hypermacho, conspiracy-loving internet personality to hawk skin care, either. So I decided to look into these new, surprising ventures — and, of course, try the products myself.



Mike Cernovich, the self-branded “American Nationalist” who’s best known for broadcasting the Pizzagate conspiracy, is also the founder of Gorilla Mind, a “cognitive enhancement” brand that promises to “unlock human potential.” In addition to selling three cognitive enhancement supplements (a.k.a. nootropics), Gorilla Rush, Gorilla Mind Smooth, and Gorilla Dream, the brand offers its latest product, a “youth serum,” much like the kind sold by the Ordinary.

UFC commentator and comedian Joe Rogan, whose hugely popular podcast covers diet and fitness alongside conspiracy theories, is a partner and promoter of Onnit Labs. The company specializes in nootropics but also sells workout equipment, branded apparel, and several personal care products such as toothpaste and deodorant.

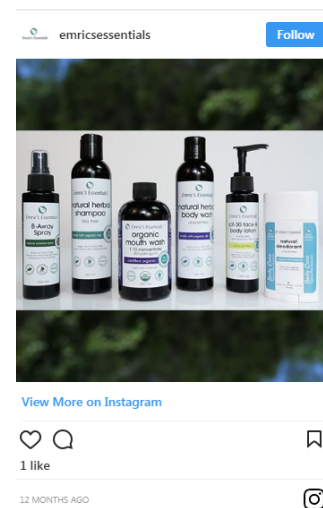
Common among these brands, and their founders, is a strong, almost pervasive misogyny and heightened male anxiety. “Modern feminism is anti-woman! Modern feminism is anti-goddess,” Jones growls in an interview with former Breitbart editor Milo Yiannopoulos. In another video, Jones opines about the dangers of “soy boys” or “beta males,” claiming that “it’s critical for people to understand the soy boys get together and mimic their bosses ... who wear camouflage uniforms of Patagonia vests and little skinny jeans and all the rest of it ... so that other alpha males that are left, despite the chemical warfare and the social warfare and the biological warfare, don’t know that they’re being taken control of and being enslaved.”

In an interview with controversial historian Thaddeus Russell, Rogan states that “women who support [alimony], they’re supporting it because they don’t like men. ... Sexism against men is very common.” For Cernovich, who has written blog posts about how to pressure sexually inexperienced women into sex (content warning for the link), it isn’t just feminists who are the problem — it’s also the men who support them. In a 2016 New Yorker profile, writer Andrew Marantz writes of Cernovich’s beliefs: “Men were oppressed by feminism. ... His opponents were beta males, losers, or ‘cucks.’”

The Infowars exclusive brand, Emeric’s Essentials, is the second listed category on the Infowars Shop, above such categories as Water Filtration, Emergency Preparedness, Personal Protective Gear, and branded Infowars merch such as T-shirts, hats, and “Trump gear.” The collection of skin care products is small, consisting of an unscented body wash, a tea tree oil shampoo, bug spray, SPF 30 lotion, and deodorant.

I ordered the body wash, bug spray, SPF lotion, and deodorant, and found them to range in quality. The SPF lotion is absolutely unusable: I had unlocked the pump before realizing I hadn’t shaken it well enough, and when I did, sunscreen went flying across my bathroom mirror. It’s pasty white, like thin paint on my already pale skin, so it wouldn’t work on anyone with deeper skin tones, and it’s sticky and greasy. I have a hard time imagining anyone actually using this product.

Unless, of course, they’re worried about nanoparticles.



”This natural spf lotion contains zinc oxide offering natural skin protection for the entire family,” states the product’s web description. “The zinc oxide is 21% (largest particle size used), and we do not use nanoparticles. The larger the particle, the safer it is for your body.”

Nanoparticles, according to dermatologist **Dr. William Kwan**, “are either titanium dioxide or zinc oxide particles that are very small and typically don’t look white when applied to the skin.” They aren’t a new concern for the Infowars crowd: A 2014 story on the Infowars website decries “The Dangers of Nanotechnology,” and an interview with a doctor from the “Global Healing Center” discusses the relevant hazards of nanoparticles compared to GMOs.

But according to chemist and beauty blogger Michelle Wong, while there’s some evidence that sunscreen nanoparticles cause photoreactivity in the skin, it’s not a concern for everyone.

“The studies so far have found that the nanoparticles don’t get very far into the skin,” she wrote on her blog, Lab Muffin. “It’s possible that nanoparticles will penetrate further if you apply them on broken skin, but they’re currently considered safe.”

“The concern with nanoparticles are that they are so small that they can penetrate into the skin and be absorbed into the bloodstream,” said Dr. Kwan. “This was disproven by studies done by the [Food and Drug Administration] that showed minimal penetration into the skin.”

The unscented body wash was decent. At \$14.95, it’s affordable and has a nice lather, though my already-dry skin found it slightly drying. If you have normal or oily skin, this would be a good choice, though it’s no more exceptional than your average unscented body wash from the drugstore.

Similarly, Joe Rogan’s Onnit-branded Castile Body Wash with Zen Spice scent was thoroughly acceptable. It smells delicious, if you’re a fan of potent, almost prickly clove, and it has a silky lather that nearly convinced me to continue using it — if it didn’t dry the hell out of my sensitive skin. The product description is positively flowery compared to the typical macho austerity of men’s products:

Imagine a zen garden, peacefully nestled in the shade of a Eucalyptus tree. Wild thyme is flowering nearby and a platter of bergamot and red grapefruit is sliced in mouth-watering wedges. Fresh cinnamon bark burns slowly in a charcoal brazier. Then as you lay there in the nude, a gentle raincloud moves in, showering you with warm, soft rain. That’s pretty much what it’s like taking a shower with Zen Spice Castile Body Wash!

Onnit saved a smidgen of macho energy to the product’s directions. “Get wet, lather up Onnit Body Wash, invigorate, rinse ... dilute with water for washing your dog, doing dishes or washing clothes at camp.” Lest Zen Spice Body Wash seem superfluous, its multipurpose properties make it a practical purchase — even if it does make you feel like you’re lying nude under a gentle rain cloud.

If you’re looking for high-quality alpha male skin care, Cernovich’s Gorilla Youth Serum fits the bill. The “absolutely loaded” product consists primarily of aloe juice, a common but effective hydrator; two safe, hydrating solvents; and the star of the show, the humectant hyaluronic acid,

coming in fourth. Compare that to the \$98 SkinCeuticals Hyaluronic Acid Intensifier, with the immensely drying denatured alcohol lingering near the top of the ingredients list. (Onnit, InfoWars, and Gorilla Mind did not respond to a request for comment.)

Cernovich is no stranger to the wonder that is hyaluronic acid. In a May post on his blog, he discusses how he’s included hyaluronic acid as an effective element of his skin care regimen for years; he also writes about why men shouldn’t be ashamed to care about their appearance. Linking to Janet Mock’s 2017 Allure essay, Cernovich writes, “Beauty privilege is real. People will judge you based on how you look. . . . You should therefore have no shame in trying to look younger.” He then goes on to detail the best methods men can utilize to look young, concentrating first and foremost on sunscreen before singing the praises of Vaseline, retinol, Botox, and finally — of course — hyaluronic acid in the form of Gorilla Youth Serum.

I hate to praise Cernovich, who’s an awful person famous for convincing his fans that Hillary Clinton ran a pedophile sex ring out of a pizza parlor (among other sinister statements).

Still, his only skin care product is scientifically sound. Retinol is, after sunscreen, widely accepted in the dermatological community as the best way to prevent wrinkles. Compare this to Jones’s fearmongering about nanoparticles, or Onnit’s claim that Zen Spice Body Wash is “more hydrating than normal soap,” a statement that does not expand on what “normal soap” is or what, exactly, makes the body wash more hydrating.

This isn’t to say Gorilla Youth Serum is perfect: Its directions claim that it can be used alone, despite the fact that humectants like hyaluronic acid can actually be dehydrating if not followed with an occlusive like Vaseline or another moisturizer. But its basic ingredients list is similar to that of the Ordinary, a brand highly regarded for being affordable, simple, and effective (if not without its own ethical quandaries).



Mike Cernovich's Gorilla Restorative Youth Serum. |
Photo: Gorilla Mind

What seems even more refreshing than Gorilla Youth Serum’s relative dermatologic strength is Cernovich’s honesty about the pressures both men and women face regarding their appearance. We don’t necessarily use skin care because it’s consistently fun or because we like to spend a bunch of money on Botox injections and expensive serums. Men do not have to be “soy boys” to be concerned about the wrinkles forming on their foreheads and the sunspots blossoming on their cheekbones. “Better looking people earn more money for doing the same job,” writes Cernovich in his blog post. “This is unfair. Welcome to life.”

Toxic masculinity and skin care, as it turns out, are not as at odds as one might think; it’s just that some men need a sales pitch that doesn’t threaten their fragile egos. It’s the same dynamic you see on the shelf of every drugstore. The products marketed to men and those to women are often the same, but whereas women are allowed to buy products for “beauty” or “self-care,” men have to be told that they’re buying a face serum because it is “optimizing performance.”

“This is a case of capitalism doing what capitalism does best: finding new markets by identifying new groups of people that can find themselves deficient in a way that promotes new spending habits,” Dr. Tristan Bridges, a professor of sociology at the University of California Santa Barbara, told me. “It’s tempting to suggest this is possibly a move toward equality, but these products are still marketed in ways that attempt to reinforce them as unequivocally masculine.”

What seems immediately refreshing on the surface — that a conservative, manly man like Cernovich would attempt to empower men by giving them tools to improve their lives — is, of course, nothing more than a money grab.

It’s a lucrative hustle, and hucksters like Cernovich and Jones, who traffic in pseudoscience on a daily basis, fit right into the skin care industry, where sometimes it’s hard to tell the difference between an effective product and snake oil.

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