Do Rich People Really Live Longer?: Hims & Hers Enters the GLP-1 Market

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Table of Contents

Overview…...……...…3

Company Background…...……...……4-5

Timeline of Key Events...…….……...……5

Rise in GLP-1 Popularity……...……..……...….5-6

Institute of Advertising Ethics…....……..……...…..7-8

Stakeholder Theory……...……8-9

Superbowl Ad…...……...…….……8-9

Compounded Pill Controversy..……..……...…….....9-12

Public Reaction/Business Impact…….……12-13

Discussion…….…14

AI Disclosure……..…...15

References……....16-18

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Weight loss is no longer a health goal—it's a market identity. As GLP-1 drugs become the face of a growing weight-loss culture, the line between treatment and trend is blurring, raising the question: When a pharmaceutical company advertises GLP-1 drugs to susceptible audiences in a rising weight-loss market, are they acting ethically, or should the company reevaluate its marketing strategies?

Hims & Hers is a well-known telehealth platform that connects customers with certified healthcare practitioners and provides access to a range of treatments. In 2026, the company faced backlash from consumers, health experts, and the FDA, who argued that its marketing for compounded GLP-1 weight-loss drugs is misleading and fails to disclose important risks.

This case examines how Hims & Hers' advertising and communication strategies contributed to ethical concerns, regulatory backlash, and public controversy. Using the Stakeholder Theory and the Institute for Advertising Ethics Principles and Practices, this paper analyzes how the company balanced accessibility-driven messaging with the responsibilities of operating in a highly regulated healthcare space. The research questions leading this case study are:

1. How has the popularity of GLP-1 drugs influenced Hims & Hers advertising strategy and consumer perceptions?
2. How has Hims & Hers responded to public backlash and legal challenges related to its marketing efforts of GLP-1 products?
3. What marketing strategies and messaging tactics did Hims & Hers use to attract consumers to its GLP-1 products?

Company Background

Founded in 2017 by Andrew Dudum, Hims & Hers Health, Inc. is a telehealth platform focused on making healthcare more accessible, convenient, and less stigmatized. Initially, the company positioned itself as a more convenient and approachable alternative to traditional healthcare systems.

From the beginning, Hims & Hers differentiated itself through a lifestyle-driven brand identity, using "conversational language, modern design, and direct-to-consumer marketing to make healthcare feel more integrated into every life" (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., n.d.). This strategy supports its expansion into areas like weight management and personalized, subscription-based care. In line with this strategy, Hims & Hers frequently leans into provocative, consumer-facing messaging in its advertising, most notably in its 2025 and 2026 Super Bowl advertisements, "Sick of the System" and "Rich People Live Longer," which continue to push the boundary of traditional healthcare narratives.

These advertisements reflect a broader strategy centered on accessibility, personalization, and disruption in healthcare systems. Hims & Hers mission— "to make the world feel great through the empowerment of better health"—reflects a customer-first, technology-driven approach focused on convenience, affordability, and user empowerment (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., 2026). A key strategic component of this strategy is removing barriers to care, as the company is "founded on the belief that high-quality healthcare should focus on you, not the industry," reinforcing a customer-first, data-driven model (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., 2026).

Additionally, Hims & Hers reframes healthcare as a way of life, making it relatable and interwoven into everyday life through conversational language and minimalist design (Matrix Global Advisors, n.d.). The "Rich People Live Longer" ad further reflects the brand's use of

idea-first, movement-based branding, prioritizing a broader social message over product features. By declaring that "the era of health as a luxury is over," the advertisement uses storytelling and visual contrast to highlight healthcare inequality and position the brand as an advocate for accessible care.

At the same time, this strategy increases memorability and emotional connection, but it also carries some risk. Such marketing might "oversimplify complex healthcare issues and raise concerns about clarity and transparency" (Northeastern University, 2025). This tension reflects a central challenge in healthcare communication: balancing bold, attention-grabbing storytelling with the need for accuracy, trust, and ethical responsibility.

Timeline of Key Events

- **March 20, 2024:** Hims & Hers enters the GLP-1 market.
- **March 2024:** GLP-1 Consumer Demand Surge
- **April 29, 2025:** Partnership with Novo Nordisk begins.
- **Late July 2025:** Novo Nordisk ends partnership after ~8 weeks.
- **January 29, 2026:** Super Bowl "Rich People Live Longer" advertisement launches and announcement of compounded pill.
- **February 5, 2026:** Novo Nordisk threatens legal action.
- **February 7, 2026:** Hims & Hers pulls compounded pill.

Rise in GLP-1 Popularity

In November of 2025, the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), a leading health policy organization, released a news article about a report regarding how people are using GLP-1 drugs

and why they are taking them. The report revealed that "About one in eight adults (12%) say that they are currently taking a GLP-1 drug such as Ozempic or Wegovy either to lose weight or treat a chronic condition, an increase from 18 months ago, though the high costs of the medications remain a concern" (Kaiser Family Foundation, n.d.).

Additionally, it showcases a drastic increase in the use and interest of these GLP-1 drugs in less than 2 years—paving the way for new companies, like Hims & Hers, to emerge into this evolving landscape. The article also reported that 10% of women ages 18-24 have used GLP-1 drugs to lose weight or treat other conditions (Kaiser Family Foundation, n.d.). The rise in young GLP-1 consumers signals growing adoption among younger, more impressionable audiences.

Overall, the increasing demand for GLP-1 drugs reflects growth in the weight-loss drug industry and a shift in consumer perceptions of these treatments. This creates an opportunity for healthcare companies like Hims & Hers to expand access and scale their offerings.

Institute of Advertising Ethics (IAE) Principles & Practices

The 2026 Super Bowl ad can be evaluated using the Institute of Advertising Ethics (IAE) Principles and Practices, particularly through the principles of fairness, transparency, and disclosure. These values emphasize that ethical advertising must clearly communicate misleading framing and ensure audiences can make informed decisions. While this campaign is a standalone advertisement, it lies within the scope of the IAE framework because it extends beyond product promotion and actively shapes public understanding of medical treatments and access. Pharmaceutical advertising standards, including the FDA's requirement of "fair balance" between risks and benefits, further reinforce the expectation that healthcare messaging must be accurate.

The principle of transparency requires that advertising clearly presents information without obscuring or oversimplifying details that may affect consumer understanding. Hims & Hers emphasized affordability and access to GLP-1 medications, but the messaging didn't clearly communicate important distinctions between compounded GLP-1 drugs and FDA-approved medications. Disclosure builds on this by requiring that material information be clearly stated. The ad did not clearly disclose that compounded GLP-1 medications are not FDA-approved in the same way as brand alternatives like Wegovy, which limits consumer understanding of what is being offered. Through fairness, it avoids misleading comparisons by positioning compounded GLP-1 drugs alongside name-brand drugs without clear distinctions; the ad may have implied they are equivalent in safety.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, introduced by R. Edward Freeman, suggests that "organizations must consider the interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders… that businesses should create value for all stakeholders—employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and shareholders—rather than just maximizing shareholder profit" (University of Virginia Darden School of Business, n.d.).

The Hims & Hers' Super Bowl ad can be understood as a strategic imbalance in how different groups were prioritized and impacted by its messaging and decisions. Its promotion of GLP-1 offerings largely benefited shareholders and internal leadership by deriving rapid visibility, user growth, and short market expansion. However, this growth-focused strategy created tension with other key stakeholders. Consumers were positioned as beneficiaries through messaging centered on accessibility and affordability, yet the lack of a clear distinction between

compounded and FDA-approved medication limited informed decision-making. This suggests that empowerment through access was not fully supported by transparency.

At the same time, healthcare professionals and regulators raised concerns about the accuracy and safety implications of the messaging, highlighting a disconnect between marketing simplification and medical responsibility (Aguilar, 2025). The FDA's response further signaled that the company's strategy did not align with regulatory expectations. Additionally, the breakdown of the partnership with Novo Nordisk illustrates how prioritizing rapid expansion over compliance and clarity can strain important industry relationships.

While the advertisement showcased a lack of clear communication, the subsequent promotion of a new compounded pill triggered more stakeholder backlash, specifically from regulatory agencies and former partners like Novo Nordisk, who responded with legal pushback and safety concerns, which weakened the brand's credibility.

Super Bowl Ad

On January 29, 2026, Hims & Hers launched a Super Bowl advertisement called "Rich People Live Longer." The advertisement highlights the growing inequality in healthcare access. The advertisement conveys this through various healthcare treatment-related videos and narration that say phrases such as "All that money doesn't just buy more stuff, it buys more time" and "The wealth gap is a health gap" (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., 2026). Hims & Hers positions itself as a company that meets people where they are and fills a much-needed gap in the market.

Following Hims & Hers big stage advertisement, the company "delivered strong engagement results. Traffic to the Hims & Hers website reportedly surged 650% within hours of airing. Data from EDO Inc. ranked the spot fifth in overall engagement among Super Bowl ads,

and in the days following the game, the Hers app climbed to No. 2 and Hims to No. 4 in the Health & Wellness category on Apple's App Store" (Taylor, 2026).

Although these metrics showcase the attention the advertisement received, not all reactions were positive, especially regarding a scene depicting a man receiving a "no signs of cancer" diagnosis via the Hims app. According to a Washington Post article, "that portrayal raises what some experts say is a risk of giving patients a false sense of security", due to the reliability of the specific test showcased (Gilbert, 2026). The article also mentions that important details are left out: "Those nuances are not included in the 60-second spot."

The contrast of success and the criticism the advertisement received highlights exactly what Hims & Hers was strategically planning. Chief Design Officer, Dan Kenger, described the advertisement by saying, "The ad shines a light on the uncomfortable truth that America's wealth gap has turned into a health gap" (Taylor, 2026), while also emphasizing that the ad was meant to be "a provocative conversation starter about health inequity" (Business Insider, 2026). This strategic approach extends beyond a Super Bowl advertisement; it reinforces the foundation Hims & Hers has established as the company continues to capitalize on the evolving GLP-1 market.

Compounded Pill Controversy

Hims & Hers has been building its name in this expanding GLP-1 market for quite some time. On March 20, 2024, the company announced that it would start offering GLP-1 injections (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., 2024). Although not the pills currently being pushed, this step symbolizes Hims & Hers' emergence into the GLP-1 market. Shortly after this entrance into the

market, there was a surge in popularity of use in March of 2024 (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2024).

To strengthen its position, Hims & Hers entered a partnership with Novo Nordisk on April 29th, 2025, gaining access to FDA-approved medications such as Wegovy through its platform. The company described the collaboration as a step toward “expanding affordable access to care” (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., 2025). In a press release documenting the partnership, Hims & Hers said that “As a first step, Americans can now access NovoCare® Pharmacy directly through the Hims & Hers platform, with a bundled offering of all dose strengths of Wegovy® and a Hims & Hers membership” (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., 2025). The partnership was designed to provide more accessible, affordable, and easier-to-obtain medications, but in reality, it also significantly established Hims & Hers' credibility in the medical space. By partnering with a company like Novo Nordisk, Hims & Hers gained access to sell the FDA-approved Wegovy weight-loss pill and now has much more legitimacy in the medical space.

However, the partnership quickly deteriorated. By July 2025, Novo Nordisk terminated the agreement after approximately eight weeks, citing concerns that Hims & Hers continued to market compounded versions of Wegovy despite regulatory changes regarding drug shortages (BioPharma Dive, 2025). Hims & Hers originally “had marketed compounded Wegovy under laws that permit it while a drug is in shortage, but the U.S. government said the shortage ended in February” (BioPharma Dive, 2025). Novo Nordisk originally partnered with Hims & Hers to give other telehealth companies access to branded Wegovy. These tensions, culminating in a quick end to a healthcare partnership, showcase how the rapid expansion of GLP-1 drugs and the controversy between name-brand and compounded versions can lead to complex challenges.

Just 7 days later, on February 5, 2026, Him & Hers announced in a press release that it would provide access to a new compounded semaglutide pill. Since its announcement in the press release, it had been taken down from the Hims & Hers website. The same day, Novo Nordisk immediately threatened legal action due to concerns about intellectual property infringement and unauthorized use of copycat versions of the Wegovy pill (CNBC, 2026). “Hims said it would sell a copy of the newly launched pill for $49, far less than the $149 Novo sells the branded pill for” (CNBC, 2026). The launch of a copycat compounded pill at a far more affordable price after the end of a partnership between Hims & Hers and Novo Nordisk signals a prioritization of accessibility over ethics.

Within days, on February 7, 2026, Hims & Hers halted distribution of the compounded semaglutide pill due to legal pressure from Novo Nordisk and the FDA. Hims & Hers released a statement saying “ its decision to cancel the pill offering was made after constructive conversations with stakeholders across the industry” (The New York Times, 2026). Although it does not admit wrongdoing, this statement attempts to signal cooperation with Novo Nordisk and the FDA. The FDA commissioner, Dr. Marty Makary, also “alluded to the uproar, saying that the agency would take swift action against companies mass-marketing illegal copycat drugs, claiming they are similar to FDA-approved products” (The New York Times, 2026).

This sequence of events illustrates a failed partnership, with Hims & Hers attempting to capitalize on a market gap but failing to do so ethically and transparently. While Hims & Hers attempted to capitalize on a high-demand market by emphasizing affordability and access, the rapid introduction and withdrawal of compounded GLP-1 products ultimately damaged stakeholder trust. The issue draws attention to the dangers of working in the highly regulated

pharmaceutical industry, where ambitious growth tactics may soon run short of industry, ethical, and legal norms.

Public Reaction/Business Impact

The “Rich People Live Longer” advertisement generated mixed reactions, reflecting a clear divide between consumer enthusiasm and professional concern. Most consumers responded positively to the advertisement's message around affordability and access, viewing Hims & Hers as a challenger to traditional healthcare and pharmaceutical pricing. The ad reinforced this framing through its opening claim that “rich people live longer,” drawing attention to systematic disparity between health and wealth in the United States.

However, the advertisement also provoked strong opposition from legislators, health experts, and medical professionals. Critics questioned how compounded GLP-1 medications were being marketed to consumers, calling the advertising “deceptive” and omitting important safety information that is normally necessary in pharmaceutical marketing. Others cautioned that the advertisement would “confuse and mislead patients,” especially since it advertises substitutes that aren't FDA-approved in the same manner as name-brand medications (STAT News, 2025).

This split was reflected in media attention. While some media portrayed Hims & Hers as a disruptive force against “Big Pharma” and tackling healthcare disparities, others denounced the business for minimizing dangers and oversimplifying intricate medical procedures. This conflict was reflected in social media responses, as people expressed concerns about safety, authenticity, and transparency in addition to excitement over a more cost-effective option.

From a business perspective, the advertisement drove strong short-term results. Following the Super Bowl ad, Hims & Hers experienced a reported 650% spike in website

traffic, significantly increasing awareness and consumer interest (Fierce Healthcare, 2025). The advertisement effectively reinforced the brand's positioning as an accessible, consumer-first healthcare alternative. These improvements came with a degree of uncertainty. The FDA took "decisive steps" against compounded GLP-1 medications due to increased regulatory scrutiny, noting issues with safety, quality, and legality (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2026). After regulatory pressure and legal threats, the company finally stopped selling the compounded semaglutide pill, saying it "decided to stop offering access" to the medicine.

A drop in stock performance and an increase in doubts about the brand's legitimacy were also caused by Novo Nordisk's legal action and more general regulatory issues. Although a brief collaboration with Novo Nordisk at first suggested more legitimacy and market access, its quick dissolution further clouded public opinion and prompted concerns about strategic coherence (Campaign, 2026).

As of March 9, 2026, Hims & Hers announced that it will no longer advertise compounded GLP-1 offerings in its marketing or on its website (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., n.d.). In the same announcement, Hims & Hers announced a new partnership with Novo Nordisk, allowing customers to access a variety of FDA-approved medications, positioning the company as "the largest global consumer health platform" (Hims & Hers Health, Inc., n.d.).

Overall, the advertisement effectively raised awareness and established Hims & Hers as a revolutionary force in the healthcare industry. However, the difficulties of striking a balance between daring marketing and credibility and trust in a highly regulated industry are highlighted by the mix of public backlash, regulatory intervention, and strategic uncertainty.

Discussion

Although Hims & Hers advertises itself as a unified, consumer-first healthcare brand, this case reveals a growing disconnect between its messaging and actions, especially as it expands into more complex healthcare offerings like GLP-1 weight-loss treatments. As the company expanded into GLP-1 weight-loss treatments, its communications increasingly prioritized engagement and accessibility, often at the expense of clarity and regulatory alignment.

Through the lens of Stakeholder Theory, this imbalance becomes more visible. While shareholders and internal leadership benefited from increased visibility, market growth, and brand attention, other stakeholder groups experienced conflicting outcomes. Consumers were targeted with messaging centered on affordability and access, but the lack of clear distinctions between compounded and FDA-approved medications limited informed decision-making. Thai suggests that the value created for one stakeholder group came at the expense of transparency for another.

This tension is reinforced by the Institute of Advertising Ethics framework. The ad's simplified framing of GLP-1 treatments reflects a broader ethical gap between persuasive marketing and medically responsible disclosure, particularly in a context where consumer understanding directly impacts health outcomes.

This case demonstrates that entering an evolving healthcare market requires alignment between messaging, stakeholder expectations, and regulatory responsibility. Hims & Hers' short-term success in audience-buzz was offset by regulatory scrutiny, partnership instability, and questions of credibility. Strong marketing alone is not enough—companies must ensure transparency, ethical communication, and consistent strategy across partnerships and products to maintain long-term credibility and growth.

AI Disclosure

For this project, artificial intelligence was not used to generate any content or provide writing assistance. We used ChatGPT to help with formatting and flow, but never copied and pasted any content into our outline or drafts. We also utilized Grammarly to help with grammar and editing. Everything else was created from our own research, insights, and discussions.

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