Trippin' for Hydration: The Truth About New-Age 'Psychedelic' Water The only thing that'll make you hallucinate is the price. BY ERIC TEGLER PUBLISHED: JAN 20, 2023

ave you ever sipped water with a psychedelic twist?

Based on recent data, a small but growing group of people are

hopping on the trend. By the end of 2022, Keith Stein, co-founder of

Psychedelic Water, reported sales of more than 700,000 cans of his beverage since it launched in early 2021. His firm claims the beverage is the first of its kind—a legal blend of water, kava root, damiana leaf, and green tea leaf extract that is "legitimately psychedelic." Scientists, for their part, aren't convinced. The Toronto-based company began selling Psychedelic Water online in

February 2022, with the hook that it has a "mild mood-boosting effect." Since

it emerged on the market, the drink has made \$4 million in revenue, with a

quarter of 2022 revenue coming from retail stores. It's still a far cry from the \$14 billion in U.S. sales registered by energy drink makers in 2021, but it's not a bad start.



joint and a glass of wine." And yet, consumer reviews on Amazon are at best

disclaimer.

Cannabis 2.0

Simmons of the rock band Kiss.

lack of legalization.

mixed, with an overall 3-star rating. Many reviews even suggest the drink does nothing at all, and tastes unpleasant to boot. On the contrary, Stein tells *Popular Mechanics* that "the overarching reaction is that it just relaxes people, but they maintain a certain mental clarity." That's a good thing for a beverage hyped as "hangover-free," though the claim

operate heavy equipment after drinking Psychedelic Water. Additionally, you shouldn't mix it with alcohol, consume it while pregnant or breast-feeding, drink more than two cans a day, or mix it with medications. Side effects can include—but are not limited to—bloating and upset stomach, according to a

"We're not interested in creating a product that will satisfy scientists. We're interested in creating a product that will satisfy customers."

That hasn't stopped noted Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) fighters from using it to

"take the edge off their intense workouts," Stein says. He's likely referring to

is at odds with the company's admonitions that you should never drive or

MMA fighters like Phumi Nkuta and Erin Blanchfield, whom Psychedelic Water just so happens to sponsor. If Psychedelic Water can take the edge off MMA workouts, it can probably also take the edge off the price. You can buy the drink directly from the company, or at an expanding list of retailers at \$42 for an eight-pack. As you pay, you can reflect on the fact that Psychedelic Water is 98 percent . . . water.

industry as a reason for starting the beverage company. "I started thinking about what could be cannabis 2.0? I started researching psychedelics, and I realized that they could represent a whole new frontier." It's a more complicated frontier than cannabis, he acknowledges, due to the

Among other law-related activities, Stein cites his involvement in the cannabis

Psychedelic Water's origin story is market-driven rather than psychedelic. Stein

is a lawyer by trade, practicing with the multi-national Dentons law firm in

Toronto. His background includes stints as corporate counsel for Toyota

Canada and as a founding partner of Simmons Records, along with Gene

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synthetics like LSD or MDMA), the Feds classify all psychedelic drugs as Schedule I substances as part of the 1970 Controlled Substances Act.

Stein observed startups pursuing costly, extended-development

Despite the fact that Denver, Colorado, and Oakland, California have

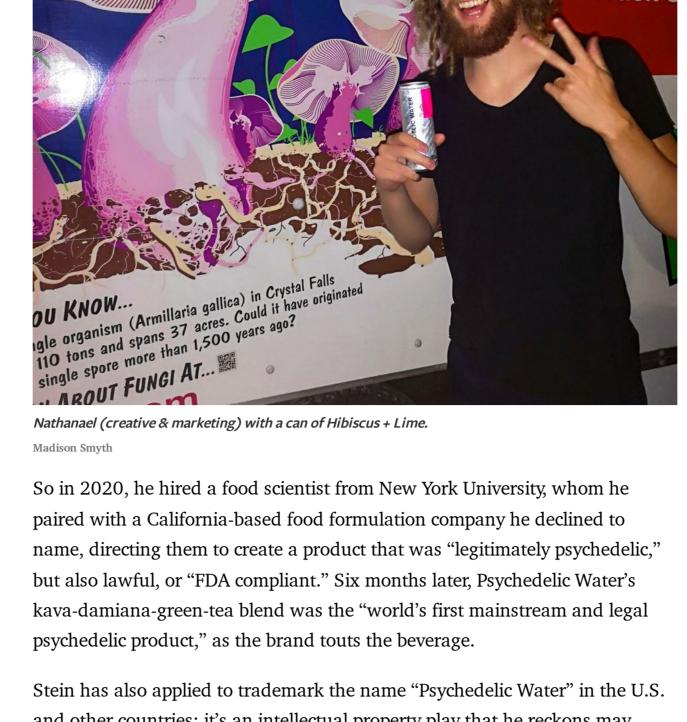
decriminalized psychedelics naturally derived from fungi or plants (not

recognized a quicker, legal, less capital-intensive way—developing a drink that essentially suggests psychedelic impacts. 37 - ACRE "HUMONGOUS FUNGUS"

pharmaceutical therapeutic psychedelic applications, or selling "magic

mushrooms" in the handful of countries where they're permitted. But he

Truck S



and other countries; it's an intellectual property play that he reckons may eclipse the drink, itself, in value if it's enforceable. Stein told entrepreneur-

including the sense of self."

focused publication Venteur, "It's like when Vitamin Water came out, owning certain names that can not only be compelling names, but can also really define a whole sector and create a moat around you." A "Trip" to Nowhere Stein acknowledges that with "Psychedelic Water," he wanted to "create a brand more than a product." It's a handy bit of logic to explain a venture in

which the actual product can't measure up to its name. "It's amusing that they're even using the term psychedelic. By no stretch of the imagination is this a psychedelic," Matthew Johnson, associate director at Johns Hopkins University's Center For Psychedelic & Consciousness Research, tells Popular Mechanics. Though there are some nuances, Johnson says the best definition of a psychedelic "is a drug that profoundly alters one's sense of reality, potentially

LSD, PCP, magic mushrooms, and mescaline elicit such a hallucinogenic

much higher doses of Kavalactones than are present in over-the-counter

group of chemicals that animal studies researchers have found to relax

supplements like Psychedelic Water, Johnson explains. Kavalactones are a

muscles, reduce convulsions, and aid sleep—at least, in animals. Kava has

reaction. Kava root does not. The Fijian natives who famously use kava take

psychoactive properties in higher concentrations, but it induces a sedative GABAergic effect similar to alcohol—but not psychedelics. Get To Know the GABA Effect: GABAergic refers to any chemical that affects the operation of Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), an important neurotransmitter in your

central nervous system. GABA inhibits a nerve cell's ability to receive, generate, or send chemical messages to other nerve cells. In essence, GABA allows you to calm down, relieving you from anxiety, stress, and fear. It also has a role in controlling high blood pressure, diabetes, and insomnia. People who have lowered GABA levels may have associated incidence of a neurological or mental health condition, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

"There's virtually nothing going on with the supplements of kava root being sold," Johnson says. The same holds true for the tiny amounts of damiana leaf and green tea extract found in Psychedelic Water. Even if Psychedelic Water's ingredients were present in higher quantities, Johnson adds, the blend still wouldn't produce hallucination. "An educated guess based on looking at hundreds of such products is that you're not getting any effect other than the placebo effect, which is what this

all appears geared toward," Johnson explains. The placebo effect is essentially

the person thinking that some treatment they take is causing an effect, when

experiments of drug treatments, for example, people report feeling the way the

their perception actually has nothing to do with the treatment. In medical

researchers tell them a pill will make them feel, even though it's a fake pill.

It's not a conclusion that phases Stein. "We're not interested in creating a

product that will satisfy scientists. We're interested in creating a product that

will satisfy customers." Stein maintains his company has tested the effects of Psychedelic Water on "hundreds of people," though he didn't specify whether such testing was done in a lab setting, or if the company produced any published results. Sales so far amount to well over half a million cans, and customers are buying the product online at Amazon, eBay, Etsy, Walmart, Urban Outfitters, and Erewhon, and in a number of convenience stores like Highs, as well as numerous vape shops. The sales map shows retail concentrations in Southern

California and the Northeast. "If you create a bullshit product, you're going to

be called out pretty soon," Stein says.

Psychedelic Water on shelf at Erewhon Market.

Alex Wilson & Brittany Butler

Psychedelic Water.

Down The Hatch: A Real Review of Psychedelic Water The experience that Psychedelic Water promises is one that a fair number of reviewers have tested, including wellness and fitness YouTuber, Cade Hansen. Hansen bought and tried Psychedelic Water for a week. He tells Popular Mechanics that he found its effect to be a slight calming sensation, which lasted for about two hours after consuming a The product name is "hyperbolic for its perceived effects," he says, adding that the beverage simply wasn't convincing enough for him to become a repeat buyer in view of its price. Hansen also says it compares unfavorably with other advertised psychoactive

Johnson remembers the splash that another provocatively-named beverage,

called Cocaine, created 15 years ago. "They packaged it in a red can, and the

name 'Cocaine' was even written in a powdery white font. I remember on the

David Letterman Show they tried drinking the stuff, and spit it out. Even

Administration] asserted that it was misleading customers."

though there was no claim that cocaine was in it, the [U.S. Food and Drug

The caffeinated energy drink is still for sale (\$28.99/six-pack) and Cocaine

has not yet evaluated Psychedelic Water. The agency did not respond to

its regulatory categories, or whether it has any concerns about sales of

Energy claims that its name was always obvious marketing mischief. The FDA

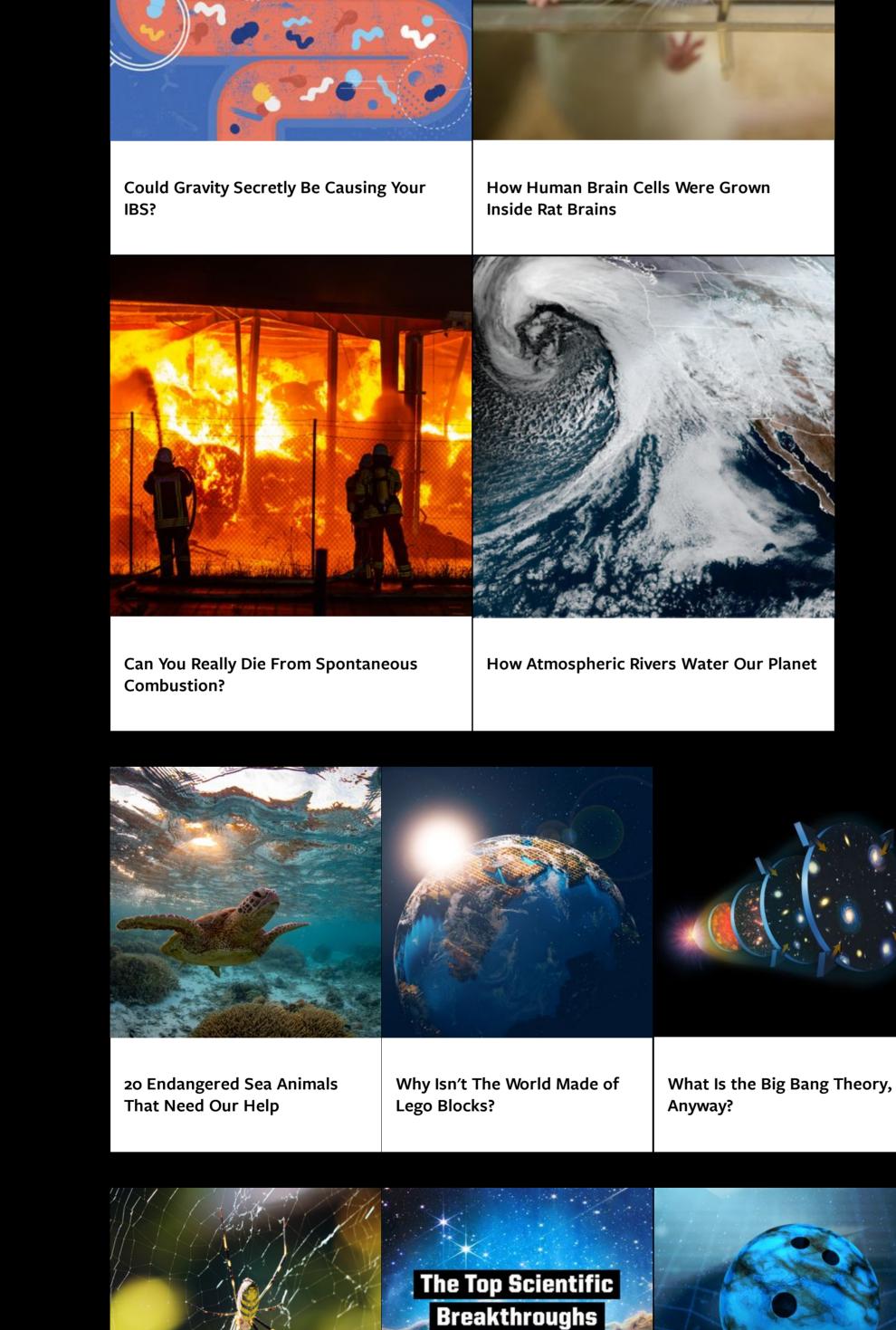
Popular Mechanics' queries about whether the product would fall under any of

Stein admits that Psychedelic Water is expensive, acknowledging that his team is working to get the price down. He says its sophisticated holographic packaging took nine months to develop—longer than formulating the blend itself.

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beverages."I have been to a local kava bar that sold a more traditional version of the beverage that Psychedelic Water marketed itself as containing, that being kava kava. I have also tried the brand Leilo that seemed to have a more potent effect than Psychedelic Water," Hansen says. You can find "blackberry yuzu" or "hibiscus lime" flavored Psychedelic Water on the shelves in limited spots around the country, though Southern California seems to have the most retail locations. Aside from 18 7-Eleven stores, it appears to be carried by a preponderance of vape shops, smoke shops and liquor stores. Such associations may be attractive or off-putting (a recent Johns Hopkins study found thousands of unknown chemicals in e-cigarettes), but the company is seeking to have Psychedelic Water carried at Trader Joe's and Whole Foods locations. While touting the benefits and pervasiveness of microdosing psychedelics (his daughters do so, he says), and asserting that Psychedelic Water will be actively promoting legalization initiatives, Stein says the product name "starts a conversation." "These are initial products. They're a starting point, not an end point. There will be a whole suite of products comprised of various ingredients. We believe strongly that this is a psychedelic product." 🥰 Before You Go: Learn What Your Brain Can Do



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