

DOVE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL BEAUTY

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Advertising and Public Relations
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2016

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ABSTRACT

The Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* launched in the United States 2004, challenging the norms of American beauty by featuring everyday women who were not skinny and flawless and who represented a range of ages, ethnicities, and races. Rooted in research and with the commitment to listen to women, Dove rolled out new sections of the campaign, each with a new target audience in mind, but all with the same message: all women are beautiful. However in the first ten years, the *Campaign for Real Beauty* did not change beauty standards overnight. What initially seemed to be a model CSR campaign proved to be a CSR campaign with many blemishes that has seemed to forget or departed from its original message about women's "real" beauty. Nevertheless, the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* points to the importance of finding and embracing new technologies. Lastly, this campaign seems to exemplify a model for an affective economy in the context of CSR or integrated marketing communications.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped me and guided me through the trials and tribulations of creating this manuscript. In particular, my family and close friends who stood by me throughout the time taken to complete this research project.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

CSR Corporate Social Responsibility

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am pleased to have this opportunity to thank the many faculty members and friends who have assisted me with this research project. I am most indebted to Meg Lamme, the chairman of this thesis, for sharing her expertise and wisdom throughout not only this entire research study, but also throughout my graduate and undergraduate academic careers at The University of Alabama. I would also like to thank all of my committee members, Regina Lewis and Jason Black for their invaluable input, inspiring questions, and support of both the thesis and my academic progress.

This research would not have been possible without the support of my friends and fellow students and of course of my family who never stopped encouraging me to persist.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Dove's *Campaign for Real Beauty* launched in 2004, challenging the norms of American beauty by featuring everyday women who were not skinny and flawless and who represented a range of ages, ethnicities, and races. Over the course of the past ten years, Dove has rolled out new sections of the campaign, each with a new target audience in mind, but all with the same message: all women are beautiful. Rooted in research and with the commitment to listen to women, Dove started a global conversation in which women were redefining the normative standards of beauty for themselves. Going on its eleventh year, the campaign has been widely successful, although, just like the women featured in the campaign, it was not without flaws.

Beauty and Body Image

Dove engaged in the conversation about body image after the talk of eating disorders had quieted, but almost corresponding with when talks of model-thinness and actress weight loss began. Coinciding with Dove's launch into the conversation about body image was its expansion from a singular soap to an entire brand. In the late 1990s, Dove introduced deodorants, body lotions, cleansers and shampoo. In the meantime, eating disorders had become the talk of the '90s. Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa were prevalent in Western countries (Makino et al., 2004). On television, eating disorders were dramatically portrayed but also joked about, as in the case with the character Monica on *Friends*. In flashbacks, she was shown in a fat suit — an overweight adolescent — whereas her present-day self was a very thin chef (Miller, 2014). Then,

in 2003, preceding the launch of the *Campaign for Real Beauty*, Dove introduced hand- and face-care products (Saddleton, 2007) just as the conversation took another turn, shining a light on the ways in which eating disorders actively affected the actors, actresses and models seen on television and in fashion shows. American supermodel Cindy Crawford spoke out about the change in the “average-sized” model from the late ‘80s to 2011, citing that a U.S. size 6 was the average then. Now, models on average are a U.S. size 2 (Littlejohn, 2011), which is 15 percent below the average female weight (Hawkins, et al., 2004). The average American woman today wears a U.S. size 14 (SFGate, 2012). Numerous studies have been conducted to show how damaging it can be for a young boy or girl to grow up thinking the “average model” is the “average person” (Nerini, 2015; Pritchard & Cramblitt, 2014; Spurr, et al., 2013). Today, it is even more common for actors and actresses to be asked to gain or lose weight for their roles in movies and television series (Acuna, 2015). Additionally, terms such as “thigh gap” (Murray, 2015), “thigh brow” (Muto, 2015), and “model thin” (Kozerski, 2015) have entered the conversations in today’s society and on social media. “Thigh gap” is a term used to describe the gap between the thighs when feet are together. “Thigh brow” combated the term thigh gap by drawing attention to the line where the top of the thighs meet the hips and create a crease, especially when sitting. “Model thin” is a term that has been used to describe thinness of models, beyond what is considered skinny. A recent study revealed that 40 percent of women want a “thigh gap” to boost their self-confidence (Murray, 2015). Diaper brand Huggies has even been accused of photo-editing a thigh gap on an infant model for their packaging (Hathaway, 2015). All of these terms are widespread on individual social media to indicate self-hate and self-love, but they also are prevalent in today’s media and used to praise or scorn celebrities, actors, and people in the spotlight.

Qualitative and quantitative studies have attempted to explore the effects of media on body image and gender identity. Many have found that participants feel pressure to exhibit flawless beauty similar to the bodies portrayed in the media (Bell et al., 2007; Strahan, et al., 2007). Even more so, many of these studies have determined that participants are aware of the counterfeit flawlessness of the bodies portrayed in media, yet, they still feel badly about their own bodies (Knauss et al., 2007; McNicholas, 2009; Van Den Berg, 2007). Bissell (2006) studied college women's visual literacy, comparing their knowledge of digital manipulation, such as Photoshop, to their desire to be thin, and found visual literacy did not reduce their desire to be thin. Studies have also documented that mass media influence norms, suggesting that increased exposure to these mass media messages enhances internalization of the body shape and facial attractiveness viewed in the media (Polivy & Herman, 2004).

Body image, then, was clearly a stir, but perhaps the most significant thing about the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* is the risk Dove took by engaging in a conversation about body image. Through the *Campaign for Real Beauty*, Dove tied its brand image to the conversation about body image. While these conversations are important, they are traditionally negative and especially delicate. This launch placed Dove in a vulnerable position that took very strategic decisions to keep it out of the negative conversations and in the positive conversations — strategic decisions that Dove did not always get right. The social context of the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* is important, especially given the time the campaign was introduced and how the conversations about body image have evolved since then.

Dove and The *Campaign for Real Beauty*

Dove operates under the Unilever umbrella, which began when Jergens and Van den Bergh founded Lever & Co. in 1887 in the Netherlands. Its first product was margarine. Later it

merged with Lever Bros — a company founded by William Lever that produced household soap. It then began acquiring other companies such as WB MacIver Ltd. In 1914, companies controlled by Lever Brothers added the production of soap, making up to 135,000 tons of it per year. Unilever was officially established January 1, 1930, continuing the production of both margarine and soaps. Since then, Unilever has launched additional brands and acquired more, including Sunsilk shampoo, Lipton International, National Starch, Axe body spray, Clearblue, Calvin Klein, Magnum Ice Cream, Breyers ice cream, Good Humor ice cream and Zwanenberg's at Oss — later to be known as the Unilever meat group UBG (Unilever, 2016). Dove debuted in 1953 (Media Bistro, 2005). Integrating into the United States in 1957, Dove announced a revolutionary cleansing bar — the Beauty Bar— with its patented blend of mild cleansers and “one-quarter” moisturizing cream, a term coined by AOR Ogilvy Advertising. The campaign slogan “Dove is Good for Your Skin” is still selling the brand today (Media Bistro, 2005).

Over the course of ten years, the *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty* evolved, targeting different audiences while adapting to new technologies and engaging women with the brand and with one another all while reinforcing the message that all women are beautiful. But the campaign itself had and has much larger implications than simply redefining beauty through self-esteem. Real Beauty represents an evolutionary initiative in global corporate social responsibility. Rather than engaging in social marketing or cause marketing, in which, for example, Dove could have tied the purchase of its soap to a corporate donation to a self-esteem fund, Dove took it upon itself to not only use “real” women (as opposed to professional models) in its advertisements, making it a brand for real women, but it also established an entire program where the focus was not on sales but on outreach, on building and maintaining relationships and conversations between and among Dove and the real women and girls it sought to help.

In the process, however, the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* also took on much criticism and critique, sometimes due to its own departure from the campaign's message of "real" by photo editing, for example. Nevertheless, as a consumer product and a subsidiary of a public company, Dove's profits contributed to Unilever's bottom line and, given the campaign's overall success and longevity, it seems clear that Unilever values Dove's contributions.

Purpose of this study

The interest in and demands for organizational social responsibility has placed public relations in the forefront of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) conversation. The purpose of this study is to look at the first ten years of the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* in the United States to determine its implications for public relations and CSR today. Because of Dove's ability to continue to innovate and adapt to new technologies while expanding its conversation about real beauty from women to girls¹ all within the context of a growing interest in the bottom-line value of CSR, this study seeks to determine whether the campaign could serve as a model for 21st century consumer relations and organizational outreach.

¹ The Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* has since, in 2015, begun to encompass men as well.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is defined as a company, firm or brand's "commitment to improve societal well-being through discretionary business practices and contributions of corporate resources," to give back to the communities that have supported them (Kotler & Lee, 2005), including the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary responsibilities that are imposed on them by society and/or their various stakeholders (Carroll, 1979; David et al., 2005; Maignan & Perrell, 2001; Wang, 2007). Schwartz and Carroll (2003) proposed a three-domain approach to CSR, which included economic, legal and ethical domains, in opposition to Carroll's four-domain approach, which argued CSR encompassed economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations. Although organizations have always participated in CSR activities, "CSR as a marketing tool has increased over the past several decades" (Berg & Sheehan, 2014). Even mid-sized companies are engaging in CSR efforts, with as many as two-thirds implementing programs (Business4Better, 2013). Because of increased participation, or perhaps because of increased communication of that participation, CSR has become a given among organizations that assume responsibility "for righting social wrongs" (Berg & Sheehan, 2014), an expectation increasingly demanded by multiple stakeholders. This makes CSR different from cause marketing or traditional marketing campaigns because it integrates corporate expertise into larger societal needs and interests — which is "premised on exchange and can be defined as the ability of an organization to detect,

assess, and satisfy consumers' needs, wants, and desires by being the leader in a product or service category" (David et al., 2005, p. 293).

In 2004, CSR was still transforming into what it is today. In that year, BP Oil Company, Unilever, Veolia Water and Aviva were labeled the most ethical companies, scoring on average, 80 percent for performance in social responsibility as determined by a survey administered by the Business in the Community group for the *Sunday Times* in 2003 (BBC News, 2004). IKEA was dubbed a pioneer in social responsibility that year as well (Howard, 2004). At the 2003 World Economic Forum, Dove's 50th anniversary, corporate citizenship was a major topic, as well as "growing pressure on business leaders and their companies to deliver wider societal value" (Smith, 2003). Additionally, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development had also dubbed CSR as being "firmly on the global policy agenda," while the United Kingdom had appointed a minister for CSR, and the European Commission had adopted a strategy on CSR in 2002. Smith (2003) concluded that the question of CSR had switched from being a conversation of *should we* participate in CSR in the 1960s and 1970s to a conversation of *how to* in the early 2000s.

Scholars have examined CSR and its effects on corporate citizenship and consumer purchase intentions, but they have found mixed results on the consequences of CSR on consumer responses or the financial performance of an organization. Many of these studies were concerned with what CSR encompasses, how it affects consumer purchase intentions, and/or which of its aspects might affect consumers. Kotler and Lee (2005) determined CSR encompassed six sectors: corporate cause promotions, cause-related marketing, corporate social marketing, corporate philanthropy, community volunteering and socially responsibility practices. This would mean CSR encompassed actions ranging from employees contributing time or pro-bono

work to nonprofits and to organizations donating money to a charity when a particular product is purchased, such as Yoplait's "Save Lids Save Lives" campaign where Yoplait donates money for every pink lid that is returned to the company.. Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) included community support, diversity, employee support, the environment, non-U.S. operations, and product manufacturing as factors of CSR work, all of which goes beyond contributing money to actually making change. UPS, for example, changed the way their drivers deliver packages by devising delivery routes with only right-hand turns, which cut down on fuel and emissions to the environment. They concluded that when a brand's CSR initiatives line up with personal character, consumers provide more favorable company evaluations. Additionally, they found that under certain conditions — such as learning about CSR initiatives after learning about product information — CSR initiatives could decrease consumers' purchase intentions. David, Kline and Dai (2005) studied the impact of corporate expertise and CSR values on purchase intention and found that in two cases both had significant paths to purchase intention and in another case CSR values outweighed expertise in predicting purchase intention. Hess (2001) used reflexive law theory to look at the importance of social accounting, auditing, and reporting (SAAR) for corporations involved in CSR initiatives because traditional approaches to regulating corporate behavior did not produce socially responsible corporations. He concluded that SAAR provides a regulatory system that not only improves the social importance of a corporation but also allows stakeholders to hold corporations accountable to community norms and expectations. CSR was by no means a new topic of conversation in 2004, but it seems as though organizations and researchers were still determining what was and what was not CSR, as well as the standards of measurement and reporting.

In a 2008 article for *Forbes*, Vogel concluded that “CSR doesn’t pay,” and that there was very little evidence that firms with superior CSR performance performed any better than firms with poor CSR performance. “For most firms, most of the time, CSR is largely irrelevant to their financial performance...Part of the reason CSR does not necessarily pay is that only a handful of consumers know or care about the environmental or social records of more than a handful of firms” (Vogel, 2008). Citing Starbucks, Levi Strauss, Gap, Whole Foods and Timberland as a reference, he considered ethical products a “niche market” as “virtually all goods and services” are chosen based on “price, convenience and quality” rather than a brand’s commitment to CSR (Vogel, 2008). Studies, however, have found some positive relationships between CSR and consumer responses (Kim et al., 2009; Pava & Krausz, 1996; Wigley, 2008), such as the ways in which knowledge about CSR initiatives positively impacts attitudes and purchase intentions and that firms that were perceived to have met CSR criteria were on par with if not better off financially than other firms.

Studies have found that familiarity with a corporation’s CSR practices have effects on corporate identity and in turn, company/product evaluations (Kim, 2011). Others have also revealed that consumers’ perceived motivations of CSR initiatives affected the effectiveness of a CSR campaign (Barone et al. 2000; Ellen et al., 2000). CSR can enhance reputation (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Menon & Kahn, 2003) and convert stakeholders into brand ambassadors through word of mouth (Berg & Sheehan, 2014; Du, et al., 2007). Eisingerich et al. (2010) determined that organizations engaging in CSR activities may be better insulated when it comes to crisis issues, and Shim and Yang (2015) found that corporate hypocrisy was perceived most when a bad reputation and/or a company crisis led the public to infer ulterior motives in. Many studies found that prior corporate reputation shapes how CSR information is received (Bae & Cameron,

2006; Coombs, 2007; Lyon & Cameron, 2004). Yoon et al. (2006) found a correlation between how close a company's CSR initiatives are to its business success and public suspicions toward CSR; they found that if a company has a bad reputation, CSR initiatives closely related to its business success could cause neutral or even negative effects. Vanhamme and Grobbsen (2008) determined that the length of a company's investment in a CSR initiative matters when CSR activities are used to counter negative publicity in a crisis.

Kim and Ferguson (2014) studied not why CSR is important, but why communicating CSR to publics is important, and the best ways to communicate those activities most effectively. They found that consumer publics expect companies to share CSR information and that transparency and tone are the most important in communicating CSR initiatives. Kim and Ferguson's study also suggested that an organization's expertise might not be a factor when it comes to considering a CSR message so much as the specific outcomes from a CSR initiative. Kim (2014) studied strategic approaches to communicating CSR initiatives and found that "acknowledging a self-serving motive reduces skeptical attribution and enhances stakeholders' favorable intent to support, seek employment with, invest in, and purchase from the company" (Kim, 2014). So for example, if UPS acknowledges that right-hand turns not only reduce fuel emissions, but also reduce fuel purchases, then stakeholders are more favorable toward that company; not acknowledging that socially responsible behavior as mutually beneficial would increase skepticism.

Studies have also shown that media play an important role in informing and shaping the public opinion of corporations (Wang, 2007) and that exposure to that coverage can affect public opinion, with priming, framing and positioning in particular having negative effects on corporate images (Manheim & Albritton, 1984). That is, media's role in telling a corporation's socially

responsible story has just as much impact — positively or negatively, depending on framing — as the corporation being socially responsible in the first place.

Millennials, CSR, and Community

In 2015, Cone Communications released a study on Millennials and their interactions with CSR. In 1980, Carol Cone founded the firm to provide expertise in consumer marketing and to help corporations and organizations build cause branding and corporate responsibility initiatives. She left 30 years later to assume CSR initiatives at Edelman public relations and has since left Edelman to launch a new consultancy, Carol Cone On Purpose, but the firm retains her name.

The Cone CSR study revealed that Millennials are more universally engaged in CSR efforts in the United States and “nine-in-10 Millennials would switch brands to one associated with a cause and two-thirds use social media to engage around CSR” (Cone Communications, 2015). Millennials — consumers who were born between 1980 and the mid-2000s — are more likely to study social science, have invested in human capital more than previous generations, and are shaped by technology, and they now make up one-third of the U.S. population (Council of Economic Advisors, 2016). In response, organizations are turning from focusing on the Millennials’ parent generation, Generation X — consumers who were born in the early 1960s to the early 1980s — to the wants and needs of this new generation, one of which is CSR. Millennials “respond with increased trust (91 percent) and loyalty (89 percent) as well as a stronger likelihood to buy those companies’ products and services (89 percent)” (Cone Communications, 2015). In fact, most of Millennials have “never known a world without cause marketing and CSR reports” (Cone Communications, n.d.). With Millennials assuming buying power, organizations are responding worldwide: “55 percent of global online consumers across

60 countries say they are willing to pay more for products and services provided by companies that are committed to positive social and environmental impact” (Nielson, 2014). Even more than that, millennial respondents were, on average, three times more agreeable to sustainability actions than Generation X and 12 times more agreeable on average than Baby Boomers — consumers born between the mid-to-late 1940s to the early 1960s (Nielson, 2014).

Such efforts to engage consumers via CSR also serve to enhance public relations’ community-building function. Kruckeberg and Stark (1988) said public relations professionals “should not view public relations as a means of ‘us’ — communication specialists — simply doing something to ‘them’ — targeted publics. Instead, those responsible for public relations should approach communication as complex multi-flow processes having the potential to help create a sense of community.” Charging public relations professionals to develop and maintain those communities, Kruckeberg and Stark went on to expand their theory to include consumer communities, a group of enthusiasts who publicly identify with and believe in the superiority of a product or service. According to Popke (2006), community building is a relationally focused way of life that has “a normative concern for inclusion.” Similar to CSR, those relationships embody many aspects such as “a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world” (Tronto, 1993), “connectedness to others” (Lloyd, 2004), “warmth” (Jordan et al., 2012), “mutual obligations and relations of trust” (McDowell, 2004), “co-operation rather than competition” (Smith & Easterlow, 2004), and “interdependence over individualization” (Smith, 2005). Additionally, Sha and Ford (2007) argued that public relations professionals “must learn to consider multiple diversities as constituting integral and integrated aspects... rather than as ‘Others.’” With this, Logan and Tindall (2014) concluded that professionals “must cross cultural boundaries without bias and place the audiences’ standpoint

and perspective at the forefront in campaign development.” This approach pushes CSR beyond the scope of completing socially responsible actions to being integral to daily work, such as encompassing all types of people in advertisements and ensuring language is not offensive towards any audience.

Although many have long argued that communication technologies have demolished the community building that public relations previously embodied and has reinforced feelings of isolation and alienation (Scaff, et al., 1990), some argue that public relations should embody both care and community building, using new technologies “to restore that which they fractured — the sense of human, social community” (DiStaso & Bortree, 2014). CSR has a hand in piecing those fractions back together through community building, crossing cultural boundaries, and going beyond socially responsible giving to socially responsible actions.

The focus of this study, then, is *why this campaign, why at this time and to what success?* Dove stepped outside of its comfort zone and into what is, arguably, a very risky sector — a sector that is quite outside of soap and, despite criticism along the way, touched on issues and opportunities that have resonated with American women for more than ten years.

Throughout the first ten years of the campaign, Dove consistently launched a new conversation with new audience segments in innovative ways, mastering the technologies as they emerged. Dove took it upon itself to not only be a part of the conversation, to engage with its consumers, but also encouraged those consumers to engage with one another.

RQ1: How and why did the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* evolve in its first ten years in the United States?

RQ2: What are the implications of this campaign for CSR and the public relations industry?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Using historical method, this study will examine coverage of the campaign in the U.S. mainstream, business, and trade press between 2004 and 2014, the first ten years of the United States campaign, to determine the ways in which the *Campaign for Real Beauty* and, later, *Campaign for Self Esteem* were presented and explained—both in terms of how the company sought to position the campaign over time as well as how the campaign was received and understood in that same period by the industry. That is, in an era that just predated the dominance of peer influencers, how did the business and trade press—the peers of Dove’s campaign architects—perceive the success of the *Campaign for Real Beauty*?

Every issue of *PRWeek US* and *AdAge* published during the timeframe was examined to search for articles that featured the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty*; 12 and 56 such articles were found respectively. Exploratory research then identified more than 50 newspaper articles published on the campaign during the timeframe in the *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Huffington Post* and *Forbes*. Search terms were “Dove” or “Unilever” and “Campaign for Real Beauty” or “Campaign for Self Esteem” or “Real Beauty.” Closer analysis revealed that many of the articles contained in the sample were not relevant. For example, several articles mention the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty*, but only in reference to the advertising trend of real people rather than models being used for photographic and film advertisements or in comparison to another campaign. Although Dove and the campaign were

mentioned, because they were only mentioned as an example, these articles were excluded from the sample, leaving a total of 68 primary sources employed for this study.

To analyze these articles, this study employed a narrative analysis, as well as a layered reading and interpretation of the materials. Emergent themes were then interpreted with an understanding of professional promotional tactics and methods of the time as well as relevant social and cultural-historical context. This “content assessment” method compares media in relation to other media and to the conditions of their time (Kitch, 2005) in order to weigh, compare and analyze evidence in order to tell a story (Marzolf, 1978). It is a method that is tied to discourse and rhetorical theories, placing journalism, advertising and public relations in a broader cultural “conversation” (e.g., Foss, 1996; Van Dijk, 1997) and used in various other historical studies (e.g., Kitch, 2005; Parcell & Lamme, 2012; Russell & Bishop, 2009).

CHAPTER 4

EVOLUTION OF THE CAMPAIGN

In September 2002, Unilever announced it was seeking a new agency-of-record for its multi-million dollar Dove U.S. account. The New York-based M Booth & Associates had been the Dove U.S. agency-of-record for nine years (Arnold, 2002). Then, in September 2004, The *Campaign for Real Beauty* launched in the United States, with Edelman, New York and Ogilvy & Mather, Chicago behind it (Neff, 2004). The Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* was neither the first of its kind, nor the only of its kind at the time. Other brands, including Nike (MSNBC, 2005), held spots in the marketplace promoting positive self-images for women. However, Dove's campaign out-lasting the others, and did not bow down when "the allure of glamour again reared its beautiful head" (Elliot, 2005).

In 2004, the United States was recovering from the September 11, 2001 attacks and in an election year, in which President George W. Bush was re-elected for his second term, social media was in its early days (Balz, 2004). MySpace officially launched at the beginning of that year after being founded in 2003 (MySpace, n.d.), and Mark Zuckerberg and his friends at Harvard had just launched Facebook (Carlson, 2010). So, in its 51st year, Dove decided to expand from simply selling its beauty soap to engaging women in a conversation about beauty. The conversation began when Dove rolled out a "global integrated-marketing campaign," that aimed "to change the status quo and offer in its place a broader, healthier, more democratic view of beauty" (Neff, 2004). Silvia Lagnado, global brand director for Unilever's Dove brand, said in her 2004 *Advertising Age* piece, "We do think this is a precedent-setting campaign, and we hope it will inspire others to take new approaches to the way they represent women... I don't think it's

about telling girls that beauty doesn't matter, but about helping them understand where the images they see and the messages they get are coming from" (Lagnado, 2004).

The campaign was founded on research. Edelman, New York — who headed the research with StrategyOne — noticed unrest among “normal” bodied women in regard to supermodel images being thrust upon them (Gordon, 2005). Twenty-minute phone interviews with 3,200 women ages 18 to 65 representing a range of income groups and different regions (Mitchell, 2005) revealed that more than four in 10 girls and young women saw only flaws when they look in the mirror, and that the average U.S. girl has the opportunity to see an estimated 77,546 commercials by the time she is 12 years old (Hareyan, 2007). In Mitchell's 2005 study, 76 percent of participants indicated they wished the media portrayed female beauty as more than just physical attractiveness and 85 percent strongly agreed that every woman has something about her that is beautiful.

In a 2005 *Advertising Age* piece, Stacie Bright, marketing and communications manager for Unilever in the U.S. mentioned that Dove ads had long eschewed supermodels for women who resemble the moms and girls next door who buy its products, and this campaign was not a “departure” from that norm, but rather “a step forward” (Neff, 2004). Two years later, Kathy O'Brien, marketing director for Dove was quoted as saying, “We have a responsibility as marketers, educators, mentors and role models, to change the way we communicate with girls. The entertainment industry can be a powerful partner in educating girls. We may not be able to decrease the number of messages girls receive, but we can educate girls about how they perceive them” (Hareyan, 2007).

The campaign started with billboard advertisements that featured images of real women, as opposed to models or celebrity spokespeople, that drove viewers to the Dove website to judge

women's looks on those billboards and vote online (Dove, n.d.). The advertisements would feature an image of such a "real" woman, without make-up or touch-ups, accompanied by two descriptors, such as grey or gorgeous, flawed or flawless, and ugly spots or beauty spots (Bahadur, 2014). The innovation of this launch was that it eschewed professional models or actors—people already acknowledged as beautiful by their industries—for women whose beauty did not necessarily mesh with those standards. "Victoria's Secret's models these are not" (PR Week, 2008). These women differed in age, race, weight, height, and hair color. What they had in common, however, was clear: beautiful skin.

Models were chosen in a variety of different ways, none of which matched the normal casting calls of skeletal women in sample sizes and 5-inch-heels walking down a runway with smiles nowhere to be found, often seen on *America's Next Top Model*. Instead these "real" women were found in "real" places and were chosen based on how much they liked their own bodies. *Advertising Age* revealed one of the "real women" featured was Tabatha Roman, an international account coordinator for Ogilvy & Mather in Greenwich, Connecticut, who worked on the Unilever business for Ogilvy (Wheaton, 2004). Gina Crisanti of Chicago was featured in the first rollout of the campaign and told CBS she was found by a casting agent while she was taking the trash out at work: "We're normal girls, we're happy and healthy and that's the standard of beauty. It's not about being flawless and perfect" (Smith, 2005). Another Dove model, Sigrid Sutter, was a mid-20s administrative assistant in San Francisco and answered a casting call ad on Craigslist for the campaign. She told *SFGate* that when interviewed for the position, she was asked questions like, "what are your favorite curves?" (Rubin, 2005) One model was found on a Dove website where women were encouraged to send in pictures with captions. Dove hoped to gather a gallery of 1 million faces with this site (Gordon, 2005), and

Shannon Melnyk revealed to the Canadian newspaper *Tyee* that she was chosen after she posted a photo of herself on the site with the caption “Feeling beautiful is a choice” (MeInyk, 2007).

Article headlines about the new campaign read “Wanted: Real People For Ads” and “For Everyday Products, Ad Using Everyday Women” (Elliot, 2005; Morales, 2005). Magazine advertising critic Barbara Lipper told CBS, “Anything that provokes this much controversy on both sides of the fence has to be working. Men are saying, on one side: ‘Women don’t want to see that. They want to see supermodels,’ because *they* (the men) want to see supermodels. On the other side [men are saying:], the women are too ugly, not fat enough, and too fat. Everyone has a different response. It’s great... You can say: There’s me; there’s my sister. There’s a wonderful feeling about that and it’s not hurting anybody” (Morales, 2005). *Washington Post* staff writer Robin Givhan criticized the campaign from the start: “They are commonly referred to as ‘real women,’ an infuriating term that suggests a model or an actress or any woman who does measure up to an unspecified standard of svelteness is somehow artificial. Real is equated with big, chubby – not sample size, which is as real as it gets in the fashion industry. It would be more accurate to say that the Dove women are amateur models while the women who regularly appear on the covers of magazines are handsomely paid professionals” (Givhan, 2005).

Since Dove already used women as “amateur models” in its advertisements, embracing that fact and enriching it by using women off-the-streets as models and encouraging positive body image — in a social scene where diet fads were just as varied as the foods they would not allow you to eat — only enhanced a brand that was *for* women. Although the campaign in 2004 did not integrate the social platforms MySpace and Facebook, the importance of social platforms — particularly Facebook — would be revealed throughout its ten year span.

In 2005, Americans were concerned with security online and on cell phones. The National Security Association (NSA) was accused of overstepping its boundaries and spying on U.S. citizens' emails and phone calls (Baker & Babington, 2005). A federal court case against the Child Online Protection Act (COPA) reminded parents of the potentially harmful content available online, and a growing number of families used Internet filters to limit access to that content (Lenhart, 2005). In that same year, Dove launched a new aspect of the *Campaign for Real Beauty* that year that featured six everyday women, driving people to its site, campaignforrealbeauty.com, where women could discuss body image and beauty issues (Dove, n.d.). Part of the print ads focused solely on driving people to its discussion forum, but the other half of the print ads featured Dove's firming cream product line. The advertisement reads, "New Dove Firming. As tested on real curves" (Traister, 2005). Philippe Harousseau, Dove marketing director, told *USA Today*, "We wanted to debunk the stereotypical beauty stereotype that exists. We are recognizing that beauty comes in different sizes, shapes and ages" (Neff, 2005). Driving consumers to a website to engage with a brand was a fairly new approach to advertising at that time, and this was especially important to the campaign, because this approach signaled a consistent embrace of new technologies over time (Dove, n.d.). Sarah Jensen, Dove regional brand development director, told *USA Today*, "The public relations buzz we've been getting has been outstanding. It's definitely provoking a debate and discussion, which is exactly what we intended it to do. We're really happy with the performance of the brand" (Howard, 2005). Although Jensen would not reveal sales performance, she said they "are definitely meeting expectations of what we thought the campaign would do" (Howard, 2005). The Dove campaign had picked up a great amount of press at this point, but it was not all positive. *Advertising Age's* Bob Garfield remarked, "Sizes 6 and 8 notwithstanding, they're all still head-turners, with

straight white teeth, no visible pores and not a cell of cellulite. Which is part of the problem. Hips or no hips, they represent a beauty standard still idealized and, for the overwhelming majority of consumers, still pretty damn unattainable... Is advertising that postures as refreshingly honest—only to engage in the business-as-usual of exploiting vanity, insecurity and self-delusion-better or worse than the standard supermodel Big Lie?” (Garfield, 2005).

Advertising Age and others reported that *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Richard Roeper wrote if he wanted to see “‘plump gals baring too much skin,’ he would attend the city’s annual summer food festival” (Thomaselli, 2005). *Advertising Age*’s Jonah Bloom wrote, “You think Dove hatched Campaign for Real Beauty because it cares about women’s self esteem? No, it simply wanted to play to the pack-following newsrooms all over the country that it knew would give the campaign more media coverage than it could have bought with a decade’s worth of marketing dollars” (Bloom, 2005). These comments, however, were challenged by the strength of the campaign’s ROI: the 10-month-old campaign generated double-digit growth for the brand in the second quarter of 2005, with sales up 11.4 percent in the first quarter, three times the category average (Neff, 2005). During the summer of 2005 alone, the campaign earned more than 650 million impressions, more than 200 local news programs across the United States covered the campaign, and more than 1 million visitors logged on to its website (Neff, 2005). Dove started receiving the first of many awards for its campaign with two silver and two bronze Clio awards and a Bronze Lion at Cannes in the outdoor category (Neff, 2005). Maureen Shirreff, Ogilvy & Mather creative director, told *PR Week* that it was difficult to take a veteran brand and promote it in a new light, but by changing the Dove voice from the more “passive voice” that frequents the marketplace to a new proactive (or engaging) voice that stayed true to who they are made the

campaign successful. “The reason it works is because it’s so right for the brand. That’s really who Dove is” (Casalino, 2005).

Because Dove did not reveal sales numbers in the same conversation as the campaign and Jensen would only reveal that it had met their expectations, it begs the question: what were Dove’s measurements of success? Kim’s 2009 study found a few years later that women gained psychosocial benefits such as increased self-esteem, decreased psychological distress, and greater optimism about their body image from the social support found when participating in the *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty* discussion forum. If Dove were relying solely on sales figures to determine its success, this campaign would be less about CSR than advertising or marketing campaign, even if a nontraditional one.

Dove’s 2005 integration used Dove’s online social platform to start the conversation about body image, but later, Dove would integrate new platforms to join conversations and encourage women to have positive body images.

In 2006, Jack Dorsey founded Twitter, a social media site that only allowed 140 characters in each post (Twitter, n.d.). That same year, Dove established a Self Esteem fund to inspire and educate women about what all beauty encompasses. It also created more buzz with a new ad, “Little Girls,” which addressed young girls and their insecurities (Dove, n.d.). This ad was not intended to sell soap but to announce Dove’s foray into promoting self-esteem among girls, calling for all of us to teach little girls “to be real” (Dove, n.d.). Most striking was its placement: the 2006 Super Bowl — a CSR message that ran at a cost of \$2.4 million (La Monica, 2006). That message generated 400 million consumer impressions in its single appearance (Neff, 2007). While skeptical, *Advertising Age*’s Bob Garfield wrote a year after his critical appraisal of the *Campaign for Real Beauty*, “Body-image obsession is a corrosive force,

and the sentiment behind this beautifully photographed spot is unassailable. Though these children aren't models, they're absolutely lovely" (Garfield, 2006). Kathy Jenkins, brand catalyst at Sudler & Hennessey, told *Advertising Age*, "I know it's a chick-flick in a sea of beer, but this spot goes beyond 'brand advertising' to 'issue enlightenment'" (Taylor, 2006). *PR Week*'s Erica Iacono wrote, "The fact that a company like Dove was advertising at all during the Super Bowl garnered a fair amount of media attention prior to the game. More importantly, though, it reinforced the company's message of self-acceptance and provided a centerpiece to an integrated campaign that used the commercial in online video efforts" (Iacono, 2009).

That same year, Dove released a short film that came to be known as "Evolution" that used videography to document the transformation of a woman's face into a portrait for a professional advertisement. Launched just one year after the video-streaming site, YouTube, it was, as *Advertising Age* described it, "a simple idea executed to technical perfection, it use[d] time lapse to show an ordinary-looking woman tricked by makeup artists, hairdressers, lighting and digital retouching to become a billboard vixen-this to pose the question: How have we so distorted the notions of beauty?" (Garfield, 2007). Although it is billed as a "Dove film," neither the beauty bar nor any of Dove's brand extensions are mentioned in the film. It generated 12 million views (Neff, 2007) and more than 3 million downloads on YouTube (Wentz, 2007) and spots on "Ellen," "The View" "CNN" and "Entertainment Tonight" (Neff, 2006). In fact, the 75-second video brought three times more traffic to CampaignForRealBeauty.com than Dove's Super Bowl ad (Neff, 2006). Unilever credited this success to its public relations firm Edelman, New York (Neff, 2006). Todd Tillemans, Unilever VP-North American skin care, told *Advertising Age* that the campaign had strengthened brand loyalty as two-third of brand sales in 2006 were coming from consumers purchasing more than one product, which was up from one-

third in 2003 (Neff, 2006). Dove also started racking up awards in 2006 with gold and bronze Effies for campaign effectiveness (Neff, 2006) and the Grand Effie at the 2006 Effie Awards for the campaign (Advertising Age, 2006). Dove continued to reap the benefits as sales rose 2 percent in 2004, 12.5 percent in 2005, and 10.1 percent in 2006 to \$589.2 million (Neff, 2007). *Advertising Age*'s Garfield came back to write about the "Evolution" video, the "Dove Campaign for Wishful Thinking began evolving into something truly special" which "transcend[ed] the petty venality of commerce" (Garfield, 2006).

Dove's shift in audience from women — the purchase-decision makers of the household — to "little girls" who have little purchasing power was a revolutionary one. Dove's "Little Girls" and "Evolution" marked a climax for the campaign. It was authentic in its issue enlightenment and its placements were focused solely on promoting positive self-esteem and body image. Soaps and product talks would have to wait, because this conversation was important to Dove, to its audiences and to the future of the beauty industry. Dove won top honors in global ethical reputation rankings from PR-monitoring firm Covalence and Columbia University's Botwinick Prize in business ethics (Neff, 2008). The 2006 integrations took advantage of new media technologies such as YouTube, and Dove's success — particularly with "Evolution" — can be accredited to its viral status on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. The vast difference between the success of the expensive Super Bowl placement and the inexpensive YouTube integration not only proves the significance of social platforms at this time, but also Dove's ability to successfully adapt to them.

Meanwhile, in 2007, Tumblr, a social blogging site was launched (Bennett, 2014), and Twitter introduced the hashtag (#), which linked tweets from different users together (Twitter, n.d.). Tesla Motors, a Silicon Valley start-up with 250 employees, debuted the Tesla Roadster, a

fully electric car (Naughton, 2007). But then the “housing bubble” burst, and year-on-year home prices dropped by up to 2-15 percent in areas (Baker, 2007). This year marked the start of an economic meltdown, as well as a campaign meltdown for Dove.

Dove started tuning its message and altering its audience. Dove senior VP, Fernando Acosta, told *Advertising Age* about Dove’s mission, adding “and inspire women to take care of themselves,” an addition that had previously not been in any of Dove’s messaging across any channel (Wentz, 2007). Dove started targeting an older generation of women when it released a study of women over 50 called *Beauty Comes of Age*. Coinciding with the release of Dove’s Pro-Age body wash, deodorant and hair care (Neff, 2007), Dove teamed up with photographer Annie Leibovitz to create a celebration of these women.² It released the photographs on a new site DoveProAge.com and in advertisements over the next two years. The print ads read: “too many age spots to be in an anti-aging ad, but this isn’t an anti-aging ad. this is pro-age. a new line of skin care from dove. beauty has no age limit.” Aisha Tyler — a Hollywood actress — signed on as a spokesperson for the campaign. Tyler told the *Huffington Post* that she “love[d] what Dove is doing to celebrate real women and their unique beauty in an honest, exuberant way. What’s great is how beautiful and radiant and real the women look in the Dove ads – it’s very exciting!” (Jolie, 2007). *More* magazine featured a triple foldout of the Dove ladies, and editor-in-chief Peggy Northrop told NPR within hours of its release, the magazine’s e-mailbox was clogged with praise for the ads (Bates, 2007). However, the backlash started immediately as the photographs were published. Longtime beauty-industry consultant Suzanne Grayson told *Advertising Age* that the Pro-Age brand is “for people who are giving up” (Neff, 2007).

Advertising Age reported their reaction was “mixed-with the menfolk trying to figure out the

² Leibovitz worked for *Rolling Stone* and *Vanity Fair*, to name a few, building an international reputation for photographing stars and celebrities over the course of her career.

right thing to say and, surprisingly, a number of women saying this particular campaign crossed the line” (Wheaton, 2007). Television networks including Fox and NBC rejected the ads, which showed artful nude profiles of several older women. In fact, even YouTube rejected the ads (Neff, 2007). Instead, Dove aired a “heavily edited version steering people to the brand website at DoveProAge.com to see ‘what we couldn’t show you on TV’” (Neff, 2007). “Oprah” and the “Today Show” featured segments about the ads or the Pro-Age models (Neff, 2007). However, Dove saw sales slow abruptly. Sales were up only 1.2 percent to \$604 million in 2007, compared to the previous year’s increase of 10.1 percent to \$589.2 million (Neff, 2007).

At the Academy Awards in 2007, Dove released a new ad that was a crowd-sourced video of a girl using Dove Cream Oil in the shower. Slate and other media heavily criticized the ad, saying it “failed on a myriad of levels” and even calling Dove consumers “unpalatably boring” (Stevenson, 2007). Then, in late 2007, Dove released “Onslaught,” the sequel to “Evolution,” which “raise[d] the consciousness of girls and women and expose[d] the inner ugliness of the so-called beauty industry” (Garfield, 2007). However, with this release came more controversy. *Advertising Age*’s Bob Garfield revealed in October that Unilever, who owns Dove, also owns Axe and Slim-Fast, which are not as enlightened as the Dove brand. Garfield went on to reveal that Ogilvy — Dove’s advertising agency — was also the U.S. agency for the Barbie doll (Garfield, 2007). That is, through two other brands and, by association, its agency of record, Unilever was perpetuating some of the very body and esteem issues it sought to remedy with *Campaign for Real Beauty*. As media started heavily criticizing the brand, Unilever and even its agency for hypocrisy, the campaign hit yet another roadblock. Articles in the *Huffington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *Gawker* revealed the hypocrisy, calling it a “public relations detriment” accusing Unilever — and Dove — of leveraging women’s health to “help make their

brand stand out in a sea of very similar competitors” (Learned, 2007). *Boston Globe* contributor Michelle Gillett titled an op-ed “A Company’s Ugly Contradiction” writing, “Viewers are struggling to make sense of how Dove can promise to educate girls on a wider definition of beauty while other Unilever ads [for Axe] exhort boys to make ‘nice girls naughty.’ ... Unilever is in the business of selling products, not values, and that means we, the consumers, are being manipulated, no matter how socially responsible an ad seems” (Neff, 2007). Blogger Lucinda Marshal headlined an entry “Unilever ditches self-esteem as a marketing concept, embraces misogyny” (Neff, 2007). *Advertising Age* wrote “Perhaps a company shouldn’t be crowing about virtues in the communications for one brand if it’s preaching vices for another... And no amount of spin is going to erase the fact that Unilever is being hypocritical with its Dove work” (Advertising Age, 2007).

Unilever responded saying the Axe campaign was a joke and “not meant to be taken literally... Each brand’s efforts are tailored to reflect the unique interests and needs of its audience” (Neff, 2007). Later, Simon Clift, Unilever’s then chief marketing officer (CMO) told *Advertising Age* that Axe and Dove “tend to be about building people’s confidence up” (Neff, 2008). A *Harvard Business* article, however, revealed that in reference to late night parodies a Dove executive said, “You can’t buy this kind of publicity” (Hanna, 2007). Dove was clearly not in a positive position. But it should be noted that Dove’s sister brands were and are public knowledge and that Dove never distanced itself from or denied its relationship to those brands. Nevertheless, they are distinct brands with their own marketing, advertising and communications strategies. The problem here was not Dove, per se, and its intentions regarding the *Campaign for Real Beauty*, so much as Unilever’s apparent gamble or miscalculation regarding the consequences of successfully managing two such extreme sets of messages under one umbrella.

“Onslaught” begged for public criticism. After revealing the nastiness of the beauty industry, it reads: “talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does” (YouTube, n.d.). This was a ploy to separate Dove from the rest of the beauty industry, as if it did not have multiple product lines that *firm* or *reduce* skin impurities. It begged media to look into Dove’s background, drag the skeletons out of the metaphorical closet, and skeletons did media find. Dove was ill prepared for this controversy, and its CMO provided the press with nothing of substance and failed to ask his teams to not praise this publicity. No, you cannot buy this kind of publicity, but it is also very difficult to save an already controversial campaign after ill-advised comments from leadership.

At first, Dove seemed to be stepping away from social platforms to appeal to its Pro-Age target audience’s familiarity with Annie Leibovitz and print advertisements featuring her photographs. However, Dove then attempted to leverage the video platform when traditional television advertisements were rejected, but YouTube also denied the posting of the Pro-Age commercial. Meanwhile, Dove also attempted to recreate their viral “Evolution” video with its sequel “Onslaught,” which was not as successful. This was the first time that Dove’s social media integrations were not incredibly successful, which points to the importance of not only integrating new social platforms, but also being strategic with those integrations so they fit with the campaign’s mission, rather than straying from it.

In 2008, Facebook jumped ahead of MySpace in its number of users (Bennett, 2014). President Barack Obama was elected President of the United States, and Beijing hosted the 2008 Olympic Games where the United States won 110 medals (BBC, 2008). That same year, Bill Gates retired from Microsoft (Lyons, 2008), but not until after he mentioned Unilever as an example of a company involved in sustainability efforts in an interview at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland (Neff, 2008). Then, in May, Dove hit another major roadblock

when Lauren Collins, a *New Yorker* reporter, published a profile of prominent photographic editor Pascal Dangin, who mentioned that the Annie Leibovitz photos featured in the Pro-Age campaign had been retouched (PR Week, 2008). “It turned out that it was a Dangin job. ‘Do you know how much retouching was on that?’ he asked. ‘But it was great to do, a challenge, to keep everyone’s skin and faces showing the mileage but not looking unattractive’” (Neff, 2008).

Leibovitz and Dangin denied the accusations four days after the article was published, saying that the retouches were “only to remove dust and do color correction. Both the integrity of the photographs and the women’s natural beauty were maintained” (Neff, 2008). The Pro-Age models were upset over the potential controversy, as they had been told that none of the photos would be retouched (Neff, 2008). The controversy continued. In letters to *Advertising Age*, Robert Sawyer of New York wrote, “‘Real’ women is as artificial (read: false) a concept as a supermodel. These models were not chosen at random on the subway. They were selected, which is to say, edited. The photography was styled and shot to approximate some notion we’ve agreed to call real. Hey, wake up: There’s nothing real here, it’s advertising” (Sawyer, 2008). Dr. Gordon Patzer, author of “Looks: Why They Matter More Than You Ever Imagined” wrote that the campaign “embodies much hypocrisy along with seldom-revealed distasteful dimensions and associations. Nevertheless, its professed goals and efforts are admirable... I would hope that the *Dove Campaign for Real Beauty* will continue to credibly present the notion that beauty comes in different shapes, sizes and appearances” (Patzer, 2008). *PR Week* suggested Dove should have released the original images from the outset: “Consumers would likely understand that minor changes were necessary to keep the ads professional looking. Companies shouldn’t fear presenting the public with the preparations behind a task” (PR Week, 2008).

At the same time, Dove also backed a new movie, *The Women*. Dove, then, released a Dove film titled *The Women Behind the Women* on their own site with exclusive previews, behind-the-scenes clips, and exclusive interviews on its website (Davi-Khorasanee, 2008), as well as product placements within the film (Debruge, 2008). After some harsh criticism of the film, Dove's *The Women Behind the Women* or its affiliation with the film *The Women* can no longer be found on Dove's website (Dove, n.d.).

It was bad enough that Unilever supported two contradictory campaigns for two of its product lines, but now the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty*, founded on the notion that the beauty industry is reproducing a fake beauty, had been found to have falsified its own images. The photographer and editor both came back days later and said the photos were not edited and that his interview was taken "out of context," but what really occurred behind the scenes during those four days remains unknown, another skeleton in another closet, possibly never to be revealed. Dove's response was to remain quiet, keeping the media at bay and then letting the photographer and editor come back and deny. Perhaps the photos were truly unedited and published in all their *real* glory. But since professionals hired and paid by Dove released the only statement, the untouched authenticity of these photographs is doubtful.

In the meantime, a study had revealed that although advertisements featuring thin models make women feel bad, they have higher evaluations of the brand. Advertisements featuring regular sized models do not change consumers' sense of body image, but consumers' evaluation of the brands actually lower (Neff, 2008). Unilever responded to the study with a statement. "Unilever is confident in the effectiveness of its advertising. We believe women have the right to feel comfortable with their bodies and not suffer from lack of self-esteem brought on by images of excessive slimness. ... We are excited to see now (and have seen in the past couple of years) a

growing trend towards more realistic and healthy-looking women in advertising and in the media” (Neff, 2008). Despite the results of this study and the economic crisis in 2008, Dove continued with the *Campaign for Real Beauty*, even when other consumers felt cause and environmental efforts were not top priority at the time (Neff, 2008).³

In an interview with *Advertising Age*, Unilever CMO Simon Clift mentioned the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* started as a public relations campaign but was later expanded to encompass a larger marketing program with social benefits. He also said, “Advertising that just kind of celebrated being overweight was just clearly wrong and wasn’t effective for consumers, either. We want to encourage you to take care of yourself. ... But you should nevertheless make yourself feel good about making the best of yourself. ... And of course there’s a fine line, but there’s a line that sometimes we got wrong” (Neff, 2009). It is also important to note that *PR Week* nearly stopped covering the campaign after 2008, with the exception of one article in 2012 and an anniversary article in 2014, an indication, perhaps of how far Dove had strayed from its CSR roots. While Dove’s integrations in this year did not take advantage of new social platforms, it was nevertheless affected by the power of social media when articles about the photoshopping scandal spread through social media like wildfire.

In 2009, Facebook created the “like” button, and “unfriend” was the New Oxford American Dictionary word of the year — a sentiment stating the power of social media at the time (Bennett, 2014). YouTube also reached 1 billion views per day in 2009 (Bennett, 2014). In keeping with its embrace of new technologies in 2009 — an embrace that was necessary for any

³ It is possible that Dove chose to distance itself from the movie after criticism. The film is a remake of the 1939 film and was meant to empower women. Yet, the 2008 film did not receive great reviews; See, Scott, A. (2008) *Catfights and Class Struggles, but Not at Katz’s Deli*. *NYTimes.com*. Retrieved 1 February 2016 from, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/12/movies/12wome.html?_r=0

brand to succeed at the time—Dove went digital in 2009, creating an app in conjunction with Facebook that allowed users to literally erase advertisements they found offensive. Dove won a Silver Lion recipient at Cannes for empowering women to take an ad they disliked on Facebook and replace it with a different ad (Barrett, 2012). *PR Week* wrote, “Imagine the talkability and the shareability of that” (Barrett, 2012). In 2010, Dove held a Self-Esteem Weekend, and changed the name of the campaign from *Campaign for Real Beauty* to *Dove’s Movement for Self Esteem* (Dove, n.d.). Many started to question why Dove was not following in other brands’ footsteps by collecting celebrity spokespeople for the brand and campaign. Unilever Senior Communications Marketing Manager Stacie Bright wrote, “The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty...is built on the insight that real women are just as compelling and beautiful as their celebrity counterparts” (Bright, 2010).

Following Unilever CMO’s earlier acknowledgement of crossing ethical lines with the campaign, Dove’s launch of the app in conjunction with Facebook, Self-Esteem weekend and stance against celebrity spokespeople seemed to be the right move in getting the campaign back on track to its mission: celebrating real beauty and promoting a positive body image among women.

Dove took a few years to recalibrate the campaign, and in the meantime, digital was clearly the new channel, and communications professionals did not miss the memo. Twitter launched sponsored tweets (Bennett, 2014), Snapchat entered the conversation (Bennett, 2014), and Facebook reached 1 billion users and announced its Initial Public Offering (Wood, 2012). Pinterest was launched and became the fastest site in history to break through the 10 million unique-visitors mark (Bennett, 2014). Google Plus launched and introduced its communities and events features (Bennett, 2014). Vine and Instagram video launched while YouTube launched

paid channels, Instagram introduced sponsored posts in the United States, and Twitter reached 500 million registered users, with more than 200 million of those active (Bennett, 2014). The Bitcoin, a decentralized digital currency that has no issuing country, began going mainstream (Leger, 2013), and Apple founder and CEO Steve Jobs passed away (Griggs, 2011).

In 2013, Dove released a short film online in which a sketch artist would first draw a woman's self-description and then draw a stranger's description of the same woman. The two sketches were displayed side by side, as both women shared their reactions—a sometimes-emotional interchange. This short film was both praised and critiqued. Many thought the film positioned beauty as a “yardstick by which women measure themselves,” showed women “as their own enemies rather than victims of a sexist society,” and found the film hypocritical in light of Unilever's other brands such as Axe and Slim-Fast that reinforce the very norms that Dove had challenged (Griner, 2013). Dove also launched a “beautify” app that claimed to help “enhance skin tone and give skin a beautiful glow while hiding all the imperfections.” However, when applied on an image, it posted a message that read, “don't manipulate our perceptions of real beauty” (Edwards, 2013). Dove had once again returned to its roots, leaving sales and product placements behind and focusing on real beauty.

In 2014, Facebook acquired the WhatsApp (Popkin, 2014). The mobile app game, Flappy Bird, went viral, became the number-one app downloaded, and then just a month later was discontinued (Warren, 2014). Instagram reached 200 million active users, and more than 60 million photos were posted per day (Bennett, 2014). The Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* and Facebook both reached their tenth years. In that same year, Dove released its *Selfie* part of the campaign where Dove encouraged teens and their moms to post selfies on their own social media to boost their confidence (Dove, n.d.). It also released a new ad called “Patches” where women

were tricked into believing they're wearing pharmaceutical patches that would make them feel more beautiful. *New York Magazine* called it "garbage" and Jezebel coined it "Most Bullshit Ad Yet," even though 91 percent of Twitter and Facebook posts were favorable (Neff, 2014). Steve Miles, Unilever's senior VP-Dove, told *Advertising Age* the ad was created to "intentionally provoke a debate about women's relationship with beauty" since Dove's findings revealed that 80 percent of women feel anxious about how they look and only 4 percent consider themselves beautiful (Neff, 2014). The *Selfie* campaign meshed well with the campaign's original message in encouraging self-esteem; however, the "Patches" series was a clear departure from early advocacy because the brand seemed to be exploiting its own message of authenticity and sincerity. This ploy seemed to be sales-driven rather than an advocacy-based CSR message. At this point, then, it seems the Campaign for Real Beauty has diverged into two streams: one that reflects its roots even as the other seems to mock them.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Over the course of the first ten years of the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty*, sales rose from \$2.5 billion to more than \$4 billion (Advertising Age, 2015) even as it struck many emotional chords with women of all ages. Every time Dove launched a new section of the campaign, it was unexpected and oftentimes unprecedented. While it sometimes crossed a line, Dove used emotional advertisements and social posts to generate an emotional response. That emotional response not only garnered attention for the brand and connected like-minded stakeholders, but it also impacted the bottom line. While the campaign started with an audience that were the purchase-decision makers of the household, it oftentimes omitted the traditional call-to-action to purchase its products. Unfortunately, after the decline in sales following the Pro-Age photo-editing revelations, the campaign seemed to devolve from CSR into a cynical version of itself. Even *PR Week* stopped covering the campaign at that point, only revisiting it twice after 2008.

Since 2014, Dove has continued its *Movement for Self Esteem* with a #SpeakBeautiful implementation, another shift in the campaign that seems to be returning to its CSR roots while, as always, employing the technology of the times. For example, at the Grammy's in 2015, Dove placed an advertisement that turned self-negative tweets into positive tweets. Dove found that women sent 5.3 million negative beauty or body image tweets in 2014, so it made them into a positive message. For instance, it would turn "I hate my body. I give up" into "I'm beautiful." Then, Dove implemented a "Choose Beautiful" implementation, where Dove placed the words "beautiful" and "average" above double-entryways at malls, department stores and more, where women had to choose which door to walk in. While some praised this part of the campaign, it

also received backlash, as some women questioned why they couldn't label themselves as both beautiful and average (Chumsky, 2015).

RQ1: How and why did the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* evolve in its first ten years in the United States?

Throughout its first ten years, the Dove campaign was grounded in affect, regardless of technology, target stakeholder groups, or brand extensions. It was grounded in “real” women’s reactions to the women they saw portrayed in advertising as compared to their own self image and self esteem. The campaign was launched in a culture concerned about eating disorders and the portrayal of thin-ness in advertising and popular culture, and studies have shown that over time, stakeholder reactions included insecurity, aspirational, resentment, and, in the case of the Pro-Age campaign, even disgust. Dove essentially tapped into what scholars term “the affective economy.”

In a study published the same year that Dove launched the *Campaign for Real Beauty*, Ahmed (2004) described an affective economy as the circulation of affects of an interpersonal community that then results in individuals within that community producing a circulation of effects. That is, words, phrases and social cues become distributed like goods and they gain value the more they are circulated and exchanged (Ahmed, 2004). An affective economy also acts as “a system in which emotions act as a driving force for marketing goods and services and consumer viewing and purchasing decisions” (Jenkins, 2007). Adrejevic (2013) explained that this becomes a participatory culture “accompanied by revamped strategies for managing and manipulating audiences.” Sanlin and Maudlin (2015) noted that “as part of this shift, socialization and discipline are displaced by affect, which becomes central to social control, including the perpetuation of social inequalities.” In this sense, an affective economy thrives on

the perpetuation of inequalities — such as advertising consistently featuring skinny models — which then in turn has a larger social context — creating conversations about body image in which women negatively compare themselves to those women in the ads — which only reinforces those inequalities, driving consumers to seek to *fix* those inequalities, creating a financial effect.

The Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* used social inequalities in regard to commercial standards of beauty within the context of web discussions and community building online as a way to launch the circulation of affects within an interpersonal community of “real” women who had felt excluded by those standards. By using models that did not “measure up” to the professional models used regularly, Dove at once declared the differences in those beauty standards while encompassing all those versions of beauty. Because of its use of digital and then social media, Dove was able to cultivate conversations and then reveal the affects generated within those interpersonal communities, publicize them, and use them as drivers for the next iteration of the campaign. Dove continued this cycle as it continued to spotlight different beauty ideals (e.g., wrinkles, curves, dimples). In turn, these affects continued to build and gain interest with each circulation and with each new rollout within the campaign.

In this sense, Dove’s *Campaign for Real Beauty* produced different effects. Perhaps, it attempted to reverse the affective economies of previous media portrayals by showing “real” women outside the beauty standard of, for example, Victoria’s Secret models. In doing so, it also demonstrated that the affective economy had direct, financial benefits, despite some research to the contrary. To a point, Dove generated a positive affective economy that produced a financial effect: by making women feel good about themselves as proven by the Kim (2009) study, Dove benefited the bottom line. The success of the campaign was hurt when it betrayed its own ideals

concerning what was “real” via the Pro-Age photo-editing revelations, when it seemed to overextend the portrayal of “real” beauty in its shots of nude Pro-Age stakeholders, and when it seemed to abandon its roots of sincerity by tricking stakeholders with its “Patches” campaign. It should be noted, though, that even in these instances, when affect was negative, it also was directly correlated to declining figures—the affective economy even on the downslide was evident in the Dove campaign.

RQ2: What are the implications of this campaign for CSR and the public relations industry?

For all its awards during its first ten years, the *Campaign for Real Beauty* did not change beauty standards overnight or even in that decade. But Dove started a conversation. And, although slow to come, the effects are coming. Modcloth (Gibson, 2014) and Aerie (Krupnick, 2014), two major retailers, have promised to not retouch its models. Aerie also promised to feature models of all shapes, sizes and ethnicities in its advertisements and on its website (Krupnick, 2014). Other brands, such as Desigual (Fleming, 2014), Calvin Klein (Lee, 2014) and H&M (Murray, 2015), have also incorporated models of different races, ethnicities, sizes and hair colors. The fashion and beauty industry has not been completely ignoring the impact of Dove’s campaign and its subsequent financial success, but they are not there yet. For example, these changes in advertising raise some ethical questions about exactly how much photo-editing is acceptable, if and when advertisements should identify edited images, and when advertisers should take responsibility for the social effects of advertising.

After the initial rollout of the Dove campaign in the United States as a CSR event, it quickly started unraveling. Dove began by hosting these conversations on its website, where users could engage with one another even while remaining mostly anonymous, but when Dove

shifted the campaign to Twitter, users lost anonymity because they had to use their own social media handles and, perhaps more to the point, they experienced a more one-sided experience rather than community engagement. This took the discussion from a safe place on Dove's site (e.g., Kim, 2009) to a very public place where stakeholders more or less were asked to make personal declarations. After the decline in sales in 2008 with the Pro-Age implementation, Dove started shifting the focus of the campaign from "real beauty" to "self-esteem."

Starting with a "pure" advocacy stance that garnered a number of industry awards and steadily increasing sales, the campaign experienced decline in reputation and in financial success as the industry delved further into the skeletal closet. From "it's great" (Morales, 2005) to "issue enlightenment" (Taylor, 2006), to "ugly contradiction" (Neff, 2007), the campaign, while traditionally understood to be exemplary CSR, might actually have a more complicated legacy among communication professionals.

At first glance, the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* seemed to exemplify a model CSR campaign, and its longevity pointed to success despite its numerous blemishes. However, after further research, the campaign actually modeled a squishy CSR campaign with many blemishes that seemed to forget or departed from its original message about women's "real" beauty.

This study of the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* also calls into question the difference between CSR and issue enlightenment (Taylor, 2006): At what point can organizations consider themselves to be taking a social role in an issue (via CSR), rather than just putting money towards an issue (shining a light on issue without taking action)?

This study also points to the importance of finding and integrating new technologies in a long-term campaign, but only with an understanding of new technologies and how they are useful or beneficial to a campaign's purpose. For example, Dove's integration of anonymous

conversations with women held on their website allowed honest, open conversations. When Dove attempted to move those conversations from its site to the social media platform Twitter, it seemed Dove was taking advantage of new technologies to further the conversation. However, integrating Twitter was actually counter-intuitive, as Twitter lacked anonymity and consisted of one-sided conversations, where women are less likely to participate.

Lastly, this study revealed that the Dove *Campaign for Real Beauty* seems to exemplify a model for an affective economy in the context of CSR or integrated marketing communications. Even when unsuccessful, there seemed to be a correlation between action and financial performance.

Future Research

This study examined the first ten years of Dove's *Campaign For Real Beauty* in the United States, yet the campaign rolled out in several other regions including Canada, England, Australia and Brazil. Future scholars could look at the roll-out of the campaign internationally across many different cultures as Dove adopted to new technologies over time and sought out more groups of stakeholders along the way. Whereas this study examined industry responses to the campaign via trade and business coverage in the United States, future scholars could, with the increasing sophistication in content analysis software, conduct data mining to build on this study with a census of media, industry, and public response to the campaign. Additionally, future studies could employ in-depth interviews with Dove's agencies of record — Edelman and Ogilvy & Mather—and explore Unilever's hand in the campaign, especially as Dove's financial success seemed to be increasingly impacted by a departure from the campaign's CSR roots. Because the success of the campaign depended heavily on Dove's sophistication with emerging social media technologies, future scholars could look into the best practices of these social media

outlets at the time and compare those to Dove's strategies in leveraging them. Finally, there is still much to learn regarding the ethics behind campaigns like Dove's that touch so many emotional chords, particularly in regard to the affective economy.

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