



THE MYTH OF CSR ON THE EXAMPLE OF DOVE CAMPAIGN

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Introduction

Cause related marketing practices, being a part of corporate social responsibility (CSR), are becoming one of the fastest developing forms of marketing. Companies boast less frequently about their expansion and profits than even a decade ago. Both communication and management strategies are headed in the direction of "soft elements", the organisation's culture and exposing its involvement. CSR is defined as a direct link between the sale of products or services of an enterprise and commitment to a specific social purpose¹. In this way, companies are distinguishing their offer from the competition, which is important in mature, homogenous markets.

There are, however, many doubts as to the ethics of these actions and, paradoxically, the social consequences, which, as it turns out, are not necessarily linked to social good or responsibility.

First of all, referring to deontological ethics (e.g. Kantianism), it should be stressed that CSR actions are motivated first of all by the enterprise's own benefit, and, as it were, afterwards some good is produced (help for the needy). Such an action is different from an action that was undertaken out of a sense of duty and concern for others, and at the same time the perpetrator of the action achieved some benefit (e.g. increased sales of its products). Only the latter act deserves moral praise, while the former one at most does not deserve a moral reprimand.

Moreover, aid provided through a market mechanism, i.e. within processes over which the beneficiary may not exercise any control, or even participate in the forms of support imposed on him, only deepens the feeling of dependence on others and leads to undermining individual autonomy.

CSRs are a complete failure in addressing real problems associated with sustainable business practices. CSR has not managed, even to a small extent, to curb the negative impact of economic growth and economic activity on social problems.

The case of CSR in the Dove brand campaign

In 2003, over 70 years since the launch of the Dove soap, the brand communication is still based on the same declaration of willingness to help women *discover the power of true beauty*, to support them in building self-confidence, self-awareness and acceptance. Messages about democratizing female images, breaking stereotypes, caring for clients are combined with commercial recommendations that *every skin is beautiful, you just need to moisturize it properly*.

Over a period of about 10 years, the Dove Self-Esteem Project has seen over 20 million young people take part in assertiveness empowerment classes, making it one of the most extensive CRM programs in the world. This raises the question of what factors, besides its large reach, *have contributed to its effectiveness*. A few of the most important ones can be pointed out:

- Consistency in implementation of the communication strategy and diversity and creativity of its forms and tools
- The social engineering of social engagement and authenticity
- In-depth analysis of target groups

Until now, Dove was seen as a brand offering products for older people. Without this reorientation of the target group, it was in danger of slowly disappearing from the market along with their aging female consumers. This does not mean, however, that Dove has abandoned its targeting of this group, as it has included it in the message of the "Pro-Age" campaign with its "diversity of beauty".

Deconstructing the promotional discourse of the Dove brand

Real beauty? Woman's identity was reduced to contextualized physicality, meaning that judging herself takes place only from the perspective of an outside observer. The campaign billboards, which encouraged viewers to vote online about the appearance of the women featured on them, in a way gave recipients permission to act as judges of their appearance. Women can only be beautiful when others perceive them as such (here, when they vote), which destroys the psychological principle of self-acceptance of one's own body. They are subject to Bourdieu's "principle of display", being a body for someone else, or existing just for the gaze. Beauty is diverse, but it must manifest itself in female body. In this way, the campaign *deepens the stereotypical perception of women*, narrowed down to their physical appearance and its exaggerated role in human life.

Varied beauty? The need to change stereotypes was declared, and so "non-models" were employed in the campaign. Unlike in other commercial discourses, beauty was to be diverse. The "non-models", however, have certain features in common: each of them has a pretty face, white even teeth, smooth skin (even though with moles), shiny, thick, well-groomed hair. It turned out that the casting criteria were narrowed down as the search proceeded. The women were supposed to have shapely figures, nice legs, arms and faces; their bodies could not have any tattoos or scars. Thus, those who did not meet certain requirements were crossed off the list of "real women".

The notion of beauty in this discourse turns out to be restrictive. It clearly marks the border between better and worse images of women. Advertisements clearly itemised the features that beauty should not be associated with: old age (grey hair, wrinkles), obesity. A socially acceptable and unacceptable image was created, the world was presented in two dimensions only, and woman had to be placed there.

Social action? The campaign was not so much about "broadening the definition of beauty", but more about the target group. Communication about the brand's social involvement was addressed to young girls, often worried about their physicality, as well as those whose age and figure somehow excluded them from the group of women who have a chance to meet the contemporary requirements. The proper message of this campaign was thus: "If you are neither slim nor young or you don't feel as beautiful as you'd like to – buy a Dove product." The beauty pattern presented by the creators of this discourse gave women more options than size S. Models were chosen whose bodies were perceived as within reach in order to make it easier for women to identify with them.

Conclusion

The campaign fitted well into the postmodern chaos with its mixing goals, values and meanings in order to make social perception more credible in terms of the pro-social character and "authentic" involvement of the corporation in advancing women's interests. By multiplying messages about the importance of women's appearance in their lives, they exploited girlish immaturity and female insecurity. Appealing to theses that sound like life truths, weakened consumers' alertness to the contradictory, often paradoxical meanings of this campaign. Under the slogans of a necessity to create a community opposing the sexist imagery of naked and skinny women, skin-"renewing" cosmetics were sold successfully, thanks to which a woman would gain the acceptance of others, even if she is slightly overweight. By positioning the brand as a "tool" of resistance to contemporary "beauty standards" beyond your reach, no real support was offered in Dove's promotional communication. The help that focussed on 'beauty' (again) could not alleviate women's anxieties; on the contrary, by making the body the main tool for building self-esteem, it could only intensify them.

Declarations of responsibility, formulated in well-sounding documents, prepared by management, will be difficult to enforce at lower levels of the organisation, if they are not based on new competences, skills and do not provide for the development of principles to enforce this responsibility. The most important challenge for CSR, therefore, is to bring it into the mainstream of management, at all levels, i.e. to include it in the development of strategy, in the instruments of implementation, in the measurement of results and in the selection of key directions of development. Effective CSR must be integrated with organisational systems, processes and structures (*hardware*), as well as corporate culture (*software*).

On the other hand, the majority of corporate charity initiatives seem like socially responsible marketing campaigns – easy to refer to and not related to other aspects of the company's activity. Relations between companies and the community, based on a paternalistic philanthropy, PR or marketing approach, should be replaced by partnership strategies based on the involvement of all stakeholders and investing in progressive markets. It is also a "soft steering" of the state, minimal interventionism, but with a strong involvement of business and consumers in sustainable development.