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**Brand Activism as a Marketing Strategy:
A Bright Idea Turned Sour**

The Case of DOVE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
PART I: TODAY'S ACTIVISM AND ITS IMPACT ON MARKETING.....	5
CHAPTER 1: Definition and analysis of activism in the USA over the last decade .	5
CHAPTER 2: The impact of activism on consumerism from 2010	11
CHAPTER 3: The concept of activism tailored to brands	17
PART II: THE CASE STUDY OF DOVE'S MARKETING STRATEGY	25
CHAPTER 1: The comparison of Dove's business before and after choosing brand activism	25
CHAPTER 2: The advantages of brand activism for Dove's image.....	31
CHAPTER 3: The drawbacks of using activism as a brand strategy for Dove's image	39
CONCLUSION	45
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47
I. Books.....	47
II. Articles	47
III. Thesis and research papers	51
IV. Internet sources	51
V. Others / Miscellaneous.....	55
APPENDICES	I

INTRODUCTION

Did you know that Dove was the leading US deodorant brand in 2019¹? In a market crowded by competitors, even in its own corporate group, the brand accumulated 203.9 million dollars of sales that year. But, what made people buy Dove rather than another brand? Perhaps it was because of its research and development activities. But it is more likely that it was because of its ongoing conscientious work on its own reputation.

Brand's reputation has become an essential criterion of differentiation for a product in a market. Information flows fast, technology and cost-related strategies are easy to replicate for competitors. However, what is harder to change is what the consumer thinks about your brand. The image of the brand must be coherent and appealing, transforming a business into a character that the public will be able to relate to². To create a brand personality and make it a buying factor is the goal of the marketing strategy of a company. This strategy must connect the brand and the product to the target in a personal way.

In an ever-changing society, a way to connect to the public is to focus on societal issues consumers may be touched by. Since its beginnings, activism has had many definitions and sub-genres, but what seems to stick is the idea of taking actions and doing so to bring change³. Therefore, brands have become activists and have been taking a stand on environmental, social and political issues for a decade now. The fight they lead has become an added value to the products and services they sell. By raising awareness or taking actions, the brands become conscious and their consumers too.

Activism and marketing have taken a turn during the 21st century, and whether it is to build a reputation among consumers or trigger genuine progress in society, both are

¹ "Leading deodorant brands in the U.S. 2019 based on sales", *Statista*, October 9th 2019, available on <https://www.statista.com/statistics/194809/leading-us-deodorant-brands-in-2013-based-on-sales/> [ref. Jan. 2020].

² "How Do Brand Image and Marketing Affect Market Share?", *Investopedia*, available on <https://www.investopedia.com/ask/answers/032615/how-does-brand-image-and-marketing-affect-market-share.asp> [ref. Apr. 2020].

³ Mary C. JOYCE, *Activism Success: A Concept Explication*, Thesis in Master of Arts, University of Washington, 2014, p.15.

currently working hand in hand thanks to brand activism. In this report I will focus on how activism has become an essential part of companies' marketing strategies. Moreover, I will discuss whether it is always a riskless idea or not.

In order to address these issues, I will use the example of Dove, the well-known American brand for personal care. For over a decade, its marketing strategy has been based on activism towards youth and women. Dove's strategy is the origin of many campaigns which have led to success but also controversies. Overall, this case study will highlight the premises and consequences of brand activism on an established company.

First, I will give an overview of current activism and its impact on consumerism and marketing strategies in the corporate world. This first part will review the tools to understand the case of Dove. The second part of this dissertation will study Dove's case of brand activism, including all the consequences of its campaigns on its business and reputation.

In other words, the goal of this dissertation is to understand how companies draw from their social environment to build their brand and pursue their own corporate goals. At a personal level, my goal is to learn about communication and marketing mechanisms. I hope to learn from both practical situations of marketing success and difficulties, to start to have an insight of the complexity of corporate public relations.

PART I: TODAY'S ACTIVISM AND ITS IMPACT ON MARKETING

The goal of this first part is to focus on the premises and recent activism in the United States and to depict its relationship with consumerism and marketing. I will first develop a definition and analysis of activism in the USA over the last decade. Then I will study the impact of activism over consumerism from 2010 and the concept of activism tailored to brands and their marketing strategy.

CHAPTER 1: Definition and analysis of activism in the USA over the last decade

To understand how activism is currently impacting marketing strategies for companies in the United States and worldwide, it is important to understand what activism is, how it was initially defined and how it has evolved over the last ten years.

To begin defining the wide concept of activism, it is interesting to start with a dictionary definition. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, activism is "*the use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one*". Activism is a driver of change in society, and it is generally led by a group of people sharing the same needs and goals. To initiate that change, activists must catch the public eye and educate them on the issue they are fighting for or against. This is the core definition of activism. It is one that can always stick to old and new forms of actions taken by activists, no matter what characteristics these actions or activists have.

Today, the public knows that activism can have many different meanings, yet everyone will agree that it is mainly associated with impressive and sometimes violent actions occurring in the public space. In the United States, common examples of activism can be civil rights, anti-war or women's rights movements. The women's rights movement in the 20th century exemplifies the wide range of actions developed for one social battle. The activism created to push the ratification of the Equal Right Amendment included many street protests⁴. The most famous one was the march that took place

⁴ To ratify: "(especially of governments or organizations) to make an agreement official". *Cambridge Dictionary*, Available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/ratify> [ref. Feb. 2020].

in Washington DC on the 9th of July 1978. According to the New York Times⁵, 100,000 people protested peacefully that day, in favour of equal rights for all American citizens regardless of their sex. This peaceful example does not take away the violence that can be introduced in actions, such as the fight for women's right to vote, which led to throwing bricks and other violent actions in the beginning of the 20th century in the United Kingdom⁶. In the United States, activists involved in the fight for women's suffrage were sentenced with time in prison. Violence was and still is a part of significant changes in society, yet these changes can now be motivated by many other forms of action that gather people and put light on important issues. Peaceful and violent public protests are still a major method of activism but cannot entirely define it.

In addition, the goal of activism is to share information on social and political issues. As society evolves, communication tools evolve too, and to understand the current status of activism in the United States, it is essential to understand how the Digital Revolution has impacted the sharing of information. According to the websource Techopedia, "*the Digital Revolution refers to the advancement of technology from analog electronic and mechanical devices to the digital technology available today*". It refers to the fact that since the 1970s, the technology previously used in American society has evolved into devices such as computers, smartphones, tablets and more, all connected to the Internet. This has allowed people to discover and share an unlimited amount of information, and has therefore become a major tool in activism.

This Digital Revolution is still very much part of today, and changes in communication and information sharing are continually happening as a result. According to Internet World Stats, more than 360 million people were using the Internet in 2000, but in 2010 the number had grown to 6 billion people worldwide⁷. Consequently, as the Internet is

⁵ Karen DE WITT, "100,000 Join March for Extension Of Rights Amendment Deadline", *The New York Times*, July 10th 1978, digitized version of printed archive available on <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/07/10/archives/100000-join-march-for-extension-of-rights-amendment-deadline-100000.html> [ref. Feb.2020].

⁶ Andy DE LA TOUR et al., "The role of violence in winning votes for women (and men)", *The Guardian*, February 6th 2018, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/feb/06/the-role-of-violence-in-winning-votes-for-women-and-men> [ref. Feb.2020].

⁷ "The Internet Big Picture", *Miniwatts Marketing Group*, 2000-2011, available on <https://www.internetworldstats.com/> [ref. Feb.2020].

taking more and more space in the public's daily life, activism and activists do not have the same methods as they had ten years ago,

Being an activist in 2010 means sharing future protests on Facebook, building online organizations to fight for social equality, writing theories on personal blogs and creating strong hashtags for social media platforms like Twitter or Instagram. For example, looking back at the Equal Right Amendment is useful to understand how activism has been impacted by the Internet. In contrast to the first public protests that took place in the 1920s when the amendment was first introduced, the ERA now has its own website to continue the fight towards full national ratification. It shifts this race to the amendment's ratification from a very real street fight led by a group of enduring activists, to a project of sensitization and actions led by a nation-wide group of committed people recruited online. The ERA website is an attractive website developed by the Alice Paul Institute⁸. It was created to gather people around the cause and lead this project of amendment to an end.

On this website there are resources to understand the history behind the amendment and the actions led in the past. It also clearly demonstrates the advances of the ratification process and what is left to do to ratify it nationwide. Like traditional activism, the goal of these online resources is to share information and educate the public on the issue, except it is now in touch with society's new ways of communicating. The website features a list of online actions the public can take. There are toolkits including well-designed images that can be shared on social media platforms, but it also provides the opportunity to take part in an online campaign to contact state representatives and encourage ratification amongst all states. To collect donations, the Alice Paul Institute is selling t-shirts, pins and stickers amongst other merchandise, so the public feels like they are taking action easily by purchasing an object.

This type of website is useful for the growth of activism movements as it makes people feel like they are a part of the fight. Visiting the website, reading and sharing the resources transform an uneducated person on the issue into more than an advocate.

⁸ Alice Paul was an American suffragist who contributed to the obtention of women's suffrage. She wrote the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923 with the help of the lawyer Crystal Eastman.

The person will be taking small, yet true actions and it will, in a way, transform them into an activist. The Internet has become not only a tool to share information about real-life activism, but has also created a new method called cyberactivism.

The ERA project is only one of many examples of the changes going on in the world of activism. Today, every form of traditional activism is coupled with online activism, both working side by side to reach a social or political goal. It has truly changed the game for old and new activists, and it has truly developed over the last decade with the hike in the Internet attendance rates.

This new relationship between the Internet and activism has made activism more accessible. It is now easier to become aware of issues in society by browsing information about any subject possible. Anyone can become an activist, fighting with a large panel of actions in both real and online worlds. Still fighting for social and political outcomes, activism made its way not only into justice or environment-related sectors, but also into arts, science and even business. It is significantly easier for the public to find a cause to relate to, or which match its interests.

As previously demonstrated here, taking actions does not mainly revolve around civil disobedience anymore. Articles with titles like “*12 Ways You Can Be an Activist Without Going to a Protest*” are flourishing in North American media and worldwide, as if to demonstrate that taking actions upon issues is not reserved for social minorities and university students with time on their hands⁹. Analysing the status of activism in the United States over the last decade helps to understand this evolution between a time like the 1960s and today, from what the American Archive describes as “*the rise of the New Left and student radicalism*” and the new daily and easy relationship American citizens now have with social and political actions¹⁰. Activism is now a real opportunity for all profiles of people willing to dedicate any amount of time, energy or resources.

⁹ Felicia FITZPATRICK, “12 Ways You Can Be an Activist Without Going to a Protest”, *Shine*, August 17th 2017, available on <https://advice.shinetext.com/articles/12-ways-you-can-be-an-activist-without-going-to-a-protest/> [ref. Feb.2020].

¹⁰ “Speaking and Protesting in America”, *American Archive of Public Broadcasting*, available on <https://americanarchive.org/exhibits/first-amendment/protests-60s-70s> [ref. Feb.2020].

It is now clear that activism can be found in every aspect of society. It has made its way into the Americans' way of living and is thought of as a fulfilling activity. To finish this analysis of the concept of activism in the United States, it would be useful to observe its impact on the Americans' daily life.

First, it is a way to connect with other people sharing the same values and interests regarding important issues. Organizations involved in environmental activism in a country like the United States demonstrate the endless number of opportunities for people who are willing to connect on common issues. According to the United Nation Environment Programme, there are currently 99 accredited environmental organizations in the United States¹¹. This number does not include other smaller organizations taking actions around the country, but can give an approximative idea of the importance of environmental activism in the public eye.

Secondly, activism can be considered as a path to self-development. According to a study led by James Downton and Paul Wehr's in 1998, being involved in activism can result in positive psychological effects. Both researchers studied 30 committed peace activists and noticed that this commitment developed "*resilience, social bonds, skills building, and personal growth*" amongst the subjects¹². A study led in 2009 by two researchers in psychology Klar and Kasser, showed an improvement in well-being amongst subjects who were interviewed before and after doing an activist task¹³. Taking actions and making their local and global community a better place can make people feel good about themselves. In fact, 85% of American participated in a form of activism in 2017¹⁴.

Finally, activism is a philosophy of life that has an impact on activists' personal choices. Taking actions, educating themselves or the people around them, giving away

¹¹ List of accredited organizations by the UN environment programme, available on <https://www.unenvironment.org/civil-society-engagement/accreditation/list-accredited-organizations> [ref. Feb.2020].

¹² James DOWNTON et al., "Persistent Pacifism: How Activist Commitment is Developed and Sustained", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 35, issue 5, September 1st 1998.

¹³ M. KLAR et al., "Some benefits of being an activist: Measuring activism and its role in psychological well-being", *Political Psychology*, vol. 30, issue 5, October 2009.

¹⁴ "Pan-activism, a New Era of American Activism", *TBWA*, 2018, available on <https://activistamerica.tbwabackslash.com/5/> [ref. Feb.2020].

resources like money and time has consequences on the activists' life. For example, an animal rights activist will choose not to consume any product based on animal origins. It will have an impact on what products and brands they will choose when going grocery shopping. This demonstrates how tight the connection between social involvement and personal life is. Boundaries are blurred when political and social values are at stake.

In this chapter I demonstrated how activism evolved in sync with American society. I explored both the traditional definition and the new methods of this concept. Now that the importance of activism has been underlined, we can study the consequences of these personal and global actions on consumerism.

CHAPTER 2: The impact of activism on consumerism from 2010

While the first chapter of this research was focused on providing an insight into the status of activism in the United States today, the following chapter will focus on activism applied to consumerism. To understand the relationship between these two notions, this chapter will study the impact of activism on the consumers and on companies like H&M, Nestlé or Nutella since 2010.

It is important to grasp the definition of the concept of consumerism to understand what it includes. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, consumerism is "*the state of an advanced industrial society in which a lot of goods are bought and sold*"¹⁵. Thus, consumerism could be defined by a system in which different stakeholders exchange goods, like products, services and money. While this study will focus on consumers and companies, it seems clear that consumerism also involves other stakeholders like the government, suppliers and so on.

Activism was previously described as a concept that brings changes in society and therefore in the public's life. It was also demonstrated that nowadays, activism can take many forms and that activists often express their values by making conscious choices and habits. Consequently, the balance of the system of consumerism may be disturbed by the changes in consumers' habits. As consumerism is dependent on those who consume, changes in habits may even affect companies' results.

Firstly, activism has impacted the relationship the public has with the act of consumption. A person will no longer only buy a product for themselves, but also because it stands for their social values or political convictions. You may buy a product because of your social responsibility, because the values attached to it makes you feel like a better person, or even because of peer pressure. If peer pressure is known to be an important factor of choice for the consumer, this concept has evolved and spread since 2010 with the emergence of influencers in marketing¹⁶.

¹⁵ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/consumerism> [ref. Feb.2020].

¹⁶ EW Anderson et al., "The antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction for firms", *Marketing Science*, vol. 12, issue 2, pp.125-143, 1993.

An influencer is, according to the Cambridge Dictionary¹⁷, "*a person who is paid by a company to show and describe its products and services on social media, encouraging other people to buy them*". As the consumer may identify with the influencer's online content and personality, he or she will feel influenced or even pressured to buy the products. It is now common for influencers to share their social and political views with their audience, while working with companies sharing these same values. As the work of an influencer is based on their online community, they must adapt to their audience's changes in habits ; the situation is well summarized by the CEO of The Influencer Marketing Factory agency, in a recent article for Forbes: "*influencers adapt to consumers to stay on top because they recognize that there is a shift going on when talking about ethics and values. This shift is dictated by consumers, and brands should follow influencers in this strategy*"¹⁸.

Consequently, not only does the consumer look up to someone else's choices to buy, but he also trusts his political and social values as a guarantee of quality. Thus, activism has become a factor of choice for the consumer. The social and political values communicated by a brand allows for a better differentiation of the products amongst other similar products from other brands¹⁹. By choosing and buying this product, the consumer will feel like he is taking action on a societal issue and therefore, by definition, doing activism.

A common example of this kind of activism is often encountered with sustainability issues in the fashion industry. The public is concerned by the mass effect of production on the environment. Populations want to have a sustainable way of living. Therefore, they will choose a company that puts forward an ethical and respectful way of producing clothes. This is the case of the Swedish international group, H&M, who

¹⁷ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/influencer> [ref. Feb.2020].

¹⁸ Alessandro BOGLIARI, "Why Sustainability Is Becoming As Important As Influencers In Fashion", *Forbes*, October 9th 2019, available on <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2019/10/04/why-sustainability-is-becoming-as-important-as-influencers-in-fashion/#71711b914a82> [ref. Feb.2020].

¹⁹ Differentiation "involves uniqueness along some dimension that is sufficiently valued by customers to allow a price premium". ANGWIN Duncan et al, *Fundamentals of strategy*, Pearson, Harlow, 2018. p.129.

launched a conscious clothing line and created the H&M Foundation²⁰. The goal of this clothing line is to develop products that are made of at least 50% of sustainable materials²¹. The collection offers a wide range of items that remain affordable and attractive, while acting as H&M's baseline for environmentally friendly clothes. Moreover, the H&M Foundation supports the projects of many existing organizations all around the world. This focus on sustainability and social responsibilities has allowed H&M to draw the attention away from its sweatshops scandals, reporting workers abuse and the general unsafe work environment in its subcontractors' factories²². Consequently, it has allowed the company to attract new activist customers.

Additionally, the pace of the changes in consumerism habits is faster because of activism. Because of the flow of information the public have access to, it can educate itself easily on issues and the companies that fight these issues. It also allows the public to know which companies are not addressing or acting upon them. According to researchers Dietlind Stolle, Marc Hooghe and Michele Micheletti, "*a growing number of citizens are turning to the market to express their political and moral concerns*"²³. This means that consumers can shift easily towards another brand if they feel disappointed or attracted by a company's values. These concepts defining the shifting of consumer choices, motivated by activist reasons, are called boycotts or "*buycotts*".

As stated by a study led by the public relations agency Weber Shandwick, a boycott is "*an act of voluntarily refraining from using, buying or dealing with a product, brand or company as an expression of protest*"²⁴. Conversely, the act of buycott is "*an act of showing support for a company's actions by intentionally buying its brands, products or services*"²⁵. This means that, as quickly as a person can become an activist, the

²⁰ Official website available on <https://hmfoundation.com/> [ref. Feb.2020].

²¹ "Conscious products explained", available on https://www2.hm.com/en_gb/ladies/shop-by-feature/conscious-products-explained.html [ref. Feb.2020].

²² Kate HODAL, "Abuse is daily reality for female garment workers for Gap and H&M, says report", *The Guardian*, June 5th 2018, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/jun/05/female-garment-workers-gap-hm-south-asia> [ref. Feb.2020].

²³ Dietlind STOLLE et al., "Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation", *International Political Science Review*, vol 26, No. 3, 245–269, July 2005. p.248.

²⁴ Weber Shandwick, *Battle of the Wallets: The Changing Landscape of Consumer Activism*, 2018. p.3? available on https://www.webershandwick.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Battle_of_the_Wallets.pdf [ref. Feb.2020].

²⁵ Ibid., p.3.

person can also affect a company's result in a negative or a positive way depending on whether the corporate values resonate with theirs. However, the study shows that boycotts are less frequently used as a way to show disagreement, while buycotts are often used as a way for the public to support an accomplished brand.

In fact, there are not a lot of recent examples of activism motivating the consumers to boycott a particular company. Yet, going back in time, the example of the baby food scandal of 1977 involving Nestlé is worth mentioning²⁶. The action was initiated by the Infant Formula Action Coalition, who accused Nestlé and other companies of marketing their baby food formula in an aggressive way in developing countries. Accusing the company of "*misleading idealised and unsubstantiated claims*" used to sell their products and leading the mother to abandon breast feeding, the organizations involved decided to proclaim an international boycott²⁷. Up until the 1980s, the boycott reached all of the United States and even Europe. Justice and non-governmental organizations were involved before the situation finally settled. Here, the consumers did not only shift from Nestlé to another company, they asserted ethical values and acted to lead the company towards change.

To conclude on the impact of activism on consumers, we can introduce the notion of political consumerism²⁸. Activism changed consumerism by transforming the act of consumption into an act of a political and social fight. The choices of what to buy and from who to buy are now tools to assert personal opinions. There is a new external factor to take into account for both consumers and companies. It is now clearer how the public has been impacted by activism in the way it consumes, but how are companies impacted by activism? They must find a way to react in a judicious manner.

²⁶ "Le boycott contre Nestlé", available on <https://www.nestle.be/fr/lentreprise/faq/lentreprise/le-boycott-contre-nestle> [ref. Feb.2020].

²⁷ "Nestlé boycott", available on <http://www.babymilkaction.org/nestlefree> [ref. Feb.2020].

²⁸ Political consumerism is the "consumer choice of producers and products based on political or ethical considerations, or both". Dietlind STOLLE et al., "Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation", *International Political Science Review*, vol 26, No. 3, 245–269, July 2005. p.246.

First, and because of the growing importance of social and political values for companies and brands, they will be studied and observed more. In fact, as activism evolved from a concept synonymous with violent protests to a wider range of actions, it has become easier for the public to feel involved in activism. Therefore, the public may feel compelled by their social responsibility to call out companies on bad features and actions they notice. In the Weber Shandwick's study, 74% of the people interviewed agreed with the following statement: "*I think spreading information about the actions of a company is just as effective as a boycott*"²⁹.

This method of call out can be about a particular product of the brand. Nutella is a good example, as the product's components were thoroughly studied by organizations and consumers. The use of palm oil as one of its ingredients was widely criticized by the public³⁰. It forced Ferrero, the company producing Nutella, to partner with the WWF organization to take sustainability into account when it comes to their use of palm oil³¹. Here the company reacted responsibly and made conscious changes. But, while global Nutella sales were not affected by this call out of behaviour, it put new light on many environmental and ethical issues regarding palm oil and allowed competitors to develop palm oil free products³². Therefore, this vocal action led by the public created a durable threat for Nutella on the market.

Consequently, activism and activists can have an impact on company development. It may have to reinvent its strategies of production, but also the way it markets its products. According to the study led by Weber Shandwick, the goal of 55% of the people surveyed who took consumerism-related action was to "*change the way the*

²⁹ Weber Shandwick, *Battle of the Wallets: The Changing Landscape of Consumer Activism*, 2018, p.5, available on https://www.webershandwick.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Battle_of_the_Wallets.pdf [ref. Feb.2020].

³⁰ Agence France-Presse, "Stop eating Nutella and save the forests, urges French ecology minister", *The Guardian*, June 17th 2015, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/17/stop-eating-nutella-and-save-the-forests-urges-french-ecology-minister> [ref. Feb.2020].

³¹ Palm Oil Score of Ferrero, available on <https://palmoilscorecard.panda.org/check-the-scores/manufacturers/ferrero> [ref. Feb.2020].

³² Francesca LANDINI et al., « Nutella maker fights back on palm oil after cancer risk study », *Reuter*, January 11th 2017, available on <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-ferrero-nutella-insight/nutella-maker-fights-back-on-palm-oil-after-cancer-risk-study-idUSKBN14V0MK> [ref. Feb.2020].

company or brand does business"³³. For example, part of Nutella's marketing strategy is now related to the use of palm oil from sustainable sources³⁴. This may be because of the activist call out previously addressed, and which revolutionized the way the brand was perceived. To correct its image and retain consumers it had to emphasize their new means of production.

To conclude, it is safe to say that activism has altered the life and the habits of consumers. It has given even more power to their choices and has transformed these choices into tools to harm or to benefit any company they feel is not acting in a beneficial way for society. This enhancement of the consumer's power has also led to the evolution of companies' strategies, because they have had to adapt their brands' personalities and actions to the new values the public is looking for. As Dietlind Stolle, Marc Hooghe and Michele Micheletti stated: "*political consumerism clearly has had an impact on industry standards, pushing awareness about the need for codes of conduct and labeling schemes*"³⁵. But how can a company relate to a public that is involved socially and politically, when it may be in contradiction with the core concept and goals of the company?

³³ Weber Shandwick, *Battle of the Wallets: The Changing Landscape of Consumer Activism*, 2018, p.7, available on https://www.webershandwick.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Battle_of_the_Wallets.pdf [ref. Feb.2020].

³⁴ "L'huile de palme durable de Nutella", available on <https://www.nutella.com/int/fr/lhuile-de-palme-durable-de-nutella> [ref. Feb.2020].

³⁵ Dietlind STOLLE et al., "Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation", *International Political Science Review*, vol 26, No. 3, pp.245–269, July 2005. p.248.

CHAPTER 3: The concept of activism tailored to brands

To further the understanding of the relationship between marketing strategies and activism, the following chapter of this research will focus on the form of activism adopted by companies and brands. The goal of this chapter is to understand the importance for companies to adapt and respond to this new kind of consumerism. To face the change of habits of their target, many companies have adapted by choosing to become activists as well. But, can a company be an activist in the same way as a person? In this part, Starbucks and Pepsi will be studied as examples.

Before listing a few activist marketing strategies a company can adopt, it is important to understand what motivates companies and brands to tailor activism to their strategies. The main goal of including activism in their marketing strategy is to connect with the public in the long run. In order to connect, a company has to target its products or services to a certain segment of the market³⁶. Targeting the products or services the right way allows the company to easily adapt its whole corporate strategy in case of changes in people's habits in their market segment, for example.

A company that has a distinct target market will know who it is selling to, how the public of that market is expected to react and how to market their products properly in order to retain and attract customers. That being said, companies are aware that some target markets are more likely to be activists. A few previously cited studies like the Weber Shandwick one³⁷, or the research led by D. Stolle, M. Hooghe and M. Micheletti³⁸ show that women are more likely to demonstrate their activism through consumerism, and more precisely by boycotting. Moreover, the Weber Shandwick study demonstrates that in the United States, people from the Gen Z and Millennial generations are more likely to support a company or brand as a way to do activism, in contrast to the Boomer

³⁶ A target market is « the group of people that a company wants to sell its products or services to ». *Cambridge Dictionary*, available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/target-market> [ref. Feb.2020].

³⁷ BUYcotters are more likely than boycotters to be women (56% vs. 47%, respectively). Weber Shandwick, *Battle of the Wallets: The Changing Landscape of Consumer Activism*, 2018 p.6, available on https://www.webershandwick.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Battle_of_the_Wallets.pdf [ref. Feb.2020].

³⁸ "Women have a stronger preference for this form of participation than men". Dietlind STOLLE et al., *Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation*, op.cit. p.252.

generation³⁹. Instead, people born before 1964 will commit to boycott actions to assert and fight for their political and social opinions.

Therefore, it seems wise for the companies whose target markets are young women, to adopt a conscious and activist way of operating. Studies regarding the political consumerism of racial minorities and LGBT+ people have not yet surfaced. Yet, according to a study led in 2012 about sexual identities and participation in social movements, lesbian, gay and bisexual people were said to be more likely than heterosexual people to be active in several social movements⁴⁰. Racial minorities do have a long going story of activism in the United States, as their sole existence is a political matter. That means that specific races and sexual orientations will be more likely to use consumerism as a tool to assert their views. These social categories may be key ones in the typical political consumer model. Consequently, companies that target youth, women, racial minorities and LGBT+ people may have to get socially and politically involved.

A way for the companies to include activism in their strategy is to include this involvement as a personality trait in their brand personality. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a brand personality is "*a set of characteristics that consumers connect with a particular brand*"⁴¹. Each brand is perceived differently by the public and it can control its perception by marketing its products and presenting itself differently. As social responsibility is becoming a key value in the eyes of their target market, brands may have to incorporate social responsibility into their strategy to be perceived as conscious and responsible. This has led to the development of corporate social responsibility, which is defined in the book "Fundamentals of strategy"⁴² by: "*the commitment by organisations to behave ethically and contribute to economic*

³⁹ "Four in 10 (41%) BUYcotters we surveyed belong to the Millennial or Gen Z generations (born 1981 to 1999), vs. 33% of boycotters, while Boomers+ (born 1964 and earlier) make up a larger share of the boycott segment".

⁴⁰ Eric SWANK, «Sexual identities and participation in liberal and conservative social movements », *Social Science Research*, vol. 74, pp.176-186, August 2018, available on https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0049089X1730265X?_docanchor=&_fmt=high&_origin=gateway&_rdoc=1&dgcid=raven_sd_via_email&md5=b8429449ccfc9c30159a5f9aeaa92ffb [ref. Feb.2020].

⁴¹ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/brand-personality> [ref. Feb.2020].

⁴² Duncan ANGWIN et al., "Fundamentals of strategy", Pearson, Harlow, 2018. p.125.

development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local community and society at large".

Here, this definition englobes social responsibility at its largest, including internal social responsibility of the company. In this research we will focus on external social responsibility, described in the definition as the "*local community*" and "*society at large*". A company being socially responsible will have a good image amongst activists and will have a larger chance of attracting this kind of target market. Nevertheless, the results of actions taken will be more important in the public eye than the sole image of social responsibility. In addition, using activism as a way to compliment its image has been criticized amongst radical activist communities by the use of the term "*slacktivism*". Committing slacktivism is committing an "*activity that uses the Internet to support political or social causes in a way that does not need much effort, for example creating or signing online petitions*"⁴³. It is a derogatory term, which may not resonate with the entirety of the activist community opinion, yet a necessary concept that the brands must be aware of. Employing material resources and involving itself in real-life actions will be an added value to a brand and its products.

Understanding that activism is important as a marketing strategy is a good baseline, but it is important to understand that brands cannot be activists like any other activists. It seems unlikely for a company to commit violent protests in the way suffragettes did to fight for women's suffrage⁴⁴. But, if this kind of action attracts new activist customers, why would it be an issue? Because a company has core goals of growth and sales, and while activism is an interesting opportunity, it is also a risky one. A company has to estimate the limits between its social responsibilities and putting its own business at risk.

While taking action on social and political issues requires taking a stand on political issues, some are easier to organize than others. For example, the actions led by companies tend to support causes that fight an issue rather than criticize the issue directly. It will allow the company to attract people concerned by the issue, while not

⁴³ Definition according to the Cambridge Dictionary, available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/slacktivism> [ref. Feb.2020].

⁴⁴ Cf. Chapter 1, pp.5-10.

immediately vex and come into opposition with the customers that do not have the same opinion. In the following part, the dissertation will focus on a few examples of actions a company can lead while limiting the risks of its marketing strategy backfiring on itself.

First, a common action taken by companies is to give resources to an existing activist organization. Resources may be financial, but they can also include products, the workforce or materials. An example of this kind of action could be sampled at Starbucks. As a complement to its international business, the company created the Starbucks Foundation in 1997⁴⁵. The main goal of this foundation is to finance opportunities for "*communities*". The term "*communities*" involves youth, but also communities of tea and coffee suppliers. Additionally, the Starbucks Foundation granted \$13.8 million to fight the issue of unclean water in developing countries, and more than \$14 million to fight against HIV. By supporting a wide range of organizations that promotes general well-being, Starbucks is taking action in a cautious way.

Secondly, a company could take action by adapting its products to reach activists' goals. McDonald's for example, has adapted its packaging to reach new sustainable goals. In France, and from November of 2019, the company stopped the distribution of straws and launched a new kind of cup, that is more respectful of the environment⁴⁶. According to a press release, this decision is part of a bigger environmental project begun in 1992. This project focuses on reducing plastic use in their restaurants. Again, this kind of strategy allows tangible results to be seen by the activist public, while not developing any risk for the core business of the company.

Finally, taking action can also mean sharing and creating content with information about a social or political cause. The next part will focus on the creation of informational content by the brand Dove, but this chapter will focus on the sharing of this information. By sharing activist content, a company can take a stand, while artfully not endorsing social or political views under its name. This is the case of Starbucks who is currently

⁴⁵ Definition according to the Cambridge Dictionary, available on <https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/community/starbucks-foundation> [ref. Feb.2020].

⁴⁶ Press release of September 2019, *McDonald's*, available on <https://www.mcdonalds.fr/espace-presse/communiqués-de-presse?articleId=601438> [ref. Feb.2020].

providing information about the refugee situation in the United States and worldwide⁴⁷. While sharing the name and actions of refugee resettlement agencies and NGOs involved in the issue, Starbucks also informs the public of its partnership with them, and the actions it led itself. Not only can this kind of content educate the public about the key players of activism related to the refugee situation, but it is a wise way to take a stand, especially in the United States' political context.

Nevertheless, when tailoring activism to its corporate strategy, a company must be aware of the potential risks, no matter how cautious it is. When choosing the right action to take, the company or brand must be able to manage the unstable and subjective world of activism that could ensue.

First, a brand must know that every activist can have its own opponents. When Starbucks took a stand on the refugee situation, it made a promise to employ 10,000 refugees around the world. However, this public promise was made in the context of the Trump administration's travel ban⁴⁸. While this ban was not directly related to the action led by Starbucks, it encouraged Republican supporters in the United States to violently criticize the choice of Starbucks to engage migrants over people from the unemployed American population. Starbucks managed the situation by maintaining its promise, while creating corporate programs dedicated to employing youth and veterans. Thus, the company reacted to the risk by maintaining its action and securing any potential reputation threat amongst the public which did not share the company's opinion on refugees.

Secondly, a company must know how to appear authentic with its actions. The targeted customer may sense a fault of authenticity from the actions of a brand if the use of activism appears too much like a marketing strategy, and not as an action to commit greater good for the community. Two concepts were introduced in the activist sphere to describe a strategy judged as inauthentic: greenwashing and pinkwashing.

⁴⁷ "Starbucks Makes Global Commitment to Hire 10,000 Refugees by 2022", Starbucks, available on <https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/community/refugee-hiring> [ref. Feb.2020].

⁴⁸ Adam VAUGHAN et al., "Starbucks vows to hire 10,000 refugees as US companies condemn Trump travel ban", *The Guardian*, January 30th 2017, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jan/30/trump-travel-ban-starbucks-hire-10000-refugees> [ref. Feb.2020].

According to The Guardian, greenwashing describes "*the corporate practice of making diverting sustainability claims to cover a questionable record*"⁴⁹. It means that a company's strategy could be described as greenwashing if it is not sustained over time, or if actions do not follow.

In the same way, the concept of pinkwashing was strongly criticized by women's rights and LGBT+ activists. Pinkwashing could be defined in the same way as greenwashing, except it concerns social issues related to gender and sexuality. As an example, many companies were accused of pinkwashing during the month of October, coinciding with breast cancer awareness⁵⁰. During this month, companies flaunted pink designs, while not supporting organizations and people concerned during the rest of the year. Here, the company tried to attract customers who felt concerned, while trying to share information on the disease. On paper, the strategy seemed wise and cautious, but in reality, activists thought of it as a marketing tool and did not consider the sharing of information as enough. Authenticity is an important factor of choice for the customer. In fact, a study from the Accenture agency, published in 2018, demonstrates that 74% of consumers "*crave greater transparency in how companies source their products, ensure safe working conditions and their stance on important issues*"⁵¹. The results are a good example of the definition of authenticity consumers have in mind. Activist actions must have a lasting motive and effect on the company's core, and the process must be communicated transparently.

Finally, it is decisive for a company to understand that activism is not only based on actions but also on theories whose baseline are social sciences and experiences of real people going through their reality. For a company, developing activism may lead to misunderstanding social and political issues and could lead an action to miss the

⁵⁰ Gina KOLATA, "A Growing Disenchantment With October 'Pinkification'", *The New York Times*, October 30th 2015, available on <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/31/health/breast-cancer-awareness-pink.html?auth=login-google> [ref. Feb.2020].

⁵¹ "Majority of Consumers Buying From Companies That Take A Stand on Issues They Care About and Ditching Those That Don't, Accenture Study Finds", *Accenture*, December 5th 2018, available on <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/majority-of-consumers-buying-from-companies-that-take-a-stand-on-issues-they-care-about-and-ditching-those-that-dont-accenture-study-finds.htm> [ref. Apr.2020].

essential point it was trying to aim at. Missing the point on a social or political issue will reduce to ashes the company's efforts to connect with its target.

This was the case when Pepsi launched a campaign featuring the social media star Kendall Jenner⁵². This campaign was criticized because the scene took place during a protest, featuring protesters and law enforcement officers. In order to settle the protest, Kendall Jenner distributed a can of Pepsi to a policeman. This campaign was launched during the Black Lives Matter movement, which was disapproving of police brutality. While not making any parallel to a real situation, the video was clearly launched at the wrong time and was "*accused of trivializing Black Lives Matters*", according to the New York Times. As a reaction, the company removed the campaign and apologized for its mistake: "*Pepsi was trying to project a global message of unity, peace and understanding. Clearly, we missed the mark and apologize*". As the company reacted in a responsible way, this mistake, which involved the highly publicized Kendall Jenner and the Black Lives Matter movement, is still very present in the public's mind. It may play a role in a customer's choice today and lead him or her to choose another brand.

To conclude this chapter, it is safe to state that activism as a strategy must be truly weighed and balanced. Activism has a direct impact and influence on individuals, but also on society as a whole. It is a powerful tool that brings many changes, and the business world does not escape this. Activism can be both beneficial and unsafe for any of its participants. When using activism to promote its activity, a company must be fully aware of the complexity and the context of the issue it is taking a part in.

For the last ten years, activism and its relationship with society have truly evolved. Much information is available and can be used as education or to analyse the actions and words of anyone. Understanding all risks and possibilities a company can dive into on paper is the first step towards an effective marketing strategy. Every social or political issue is different, therefore every marketing strategy must be tailored to the issue, to the targeted public and to the company's core. Some previously explained

⁵² Daniel VICTOR, "Pepsi Pulls Ad Accused of Trivializing Black Lives Matter", *The New York Times*, April 5th 2017, available on <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/05/business/kendall-jenner-pepsi-ad.html> [ref. Feb.2020].

situations may have never happened with a better global understanding. In the second part of this dissertation I will study the case of an established company in the international industry of personal health: Dove. The case study will measure if the risk for a company to be involved in activism really pays off as a marketing strategy.

PART II: THE CASE STUDY OF DOVE'S MARKETING STRATEGY

While the first part of this research dissertation was focused on providing a theoretical approach to activism in marketing, the second part of this research dissertation will study it in a practical way. To do so, I will present a case study of the marketing strategy of Dove.

The choice of this company as a practical example was made because of its weight and its longevity on the market. Dove's products are distributed internationally, and the company was founded in the 20th century, allowing us to have a clear vision of the changes and effects of their ongoing marketing strategy⁵³. This strategy involves activism as I defined it in the first part. Thus, the goal of this second part is to determine if brand activism is a good strategy to develop, but also to establish its limits. To reach this goal, the following parts will develop a comparison between Dove's business before and after brand activism, the advantages of this strategy on its image and the drawbacks.

CHAPTER 1: The comparison of Dove's business before and after choosing brand activism

Before specifying the case study of Dove on the effects of the symbiosis between activism and marketing on its image, this chapter will focus on its business evolution. It will introduce common knowledge about Dove, the development of its brand activism and the comparison of the state of its business both before and after this brand strategy.

To understand Dove's business, it is important to have some knowledge about its creation. Dove is part of the corporate group Unilever, created by William Hesketh Lever in the 19th century, in the United Kingdom⁵⁴. Far from the wide portfolio of international brands that Unilever currently manage, the first business of William H.

⁵³ "Dove", *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/brands/personal-care/dove.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁵⁴ "Our history", *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/about/who-we-are/our-history/#> [ref. Mar.2020].

Lever was mainly focused on hygiene products such as soap. Over the years, Unilever expanded its range of brands with the goal to be present in the consumer's daily life. In 2019, the corporate group had a portfolio of more than 400 brands ranging from personal hygiene and food and drinks, to home equipment⁵⁵. Unilever's vision is simple and defines the purpose of every single one of its brands, including Dove thus: "*our purpose is to make sustainable living commonplace*"⁵⁶.

Knowing the purpose of Unilever's actions as a group allow the understanding of the current marketing strategy, locally applied to each brand. As introduced before, Unilever's business started small and started with soap. Dove was introduced in 1957 with the launch of the Dove Beauty Bar in the United States⁵⁷. At the time, Dove's marketing targeted middle-aged women, advertising a "*patented blend of mild cleansers and ¼ moisturising cream*" in the media⁵⁸.

To attract consumers, the brand had to play with ideals and innuendos. Dove's early campaigns were adapted to a time when society was impacted by the ideal of working husbands and "*perfectly groomed housewives*"⁵⁹. This first campaign features a photo of a woman bathing in Dove's Beauty Bar and speaking on the phone, with the following beaming monologue printed: "*Darling, I'm having the most extraordinary experience... I'm head over heels in Dove !*"⁶⁰. This advertising campaign started the ongoing partnership of Dove with the Ogilvy agency, and first established the brand in the public's daily beauty routine⁶¹.

⁵⁵ "Unilever annual report and accounts of 2019", *Unilever*, p.5, available on https://www.unilever.com/Images/unilever-annual-report-and-accounts-2019_tcm244-547893_en.pdf [ref. Mar.2020].

⁵⁶ "Our vision", *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/about/who-we-are/our-vision/> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁵⁷ "Dove", *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/brands/personal-care/dove.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Lucy SADDLETON, "The evolution of Dove", *Strategy*, December 1st 2007, available on <https://strategyonline.ca/2007/12/01/tributedove-20071201/> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁶⁰ Alexander VIJAY SMITH, "The Art of Advertising - Exploring the Greats", *North Central Louisiana Arts Council*, September 12th 2012, figure n°2, available on <https://www.nclac.org/news-blog/the-art-of-advertising-exploring-the-greats> [ref. Mar. 2020].

⁶¹ Dove and Ogilvy have been working together internationally ever since. Ogilvy agency's website, available on <https://www.ogilvy.com/> [ref. Mar.2020].

Today, Dove's product range and targeting have evolved. The official website lists "skin cleansing", "skin care", "deodorants" and "hair care" products⁶². Additionally, Dove launched Dove Men+Care in 2010 and Dove Baby in 2017⁶³. Thus, while still mainly targeting women, the brand is expanding to reach for global purpose and for all type of consumers, not solely selling beauty for housewives. In 2001, Unilever's director of development stated his goal for Dove's business in a New York Times article: "*The aim is to be the biggest [...] We want to be on the top of the mind, like Coke. We are close. Globally, Dove is moving there*".⁶⁴

This statement is from 2001, but the vision for Dove's growth never left the headquarters of Unilever. It is likely that it inspired the launch of the global campaign of Dove in 2005, which asserted the new marketing strategy of the brand. This campaign asserted a strategy tinted by actions and purpose and initiated the brand activism of the company.

The campaign was conceived in 2004, when the beauty and care industry in the United States was using strict beauty standards to advertise its products. Dove had just commissioned a global study called "*The Real Truth About Beauty*"⁶⁵. Led by four different researchers, notably from the University of Harvard and the London School of Economics, the goal of the study was to take a step back and analyse the image of women in society. As stated in the preface of the study report:

*Dove's mission, in commissioning The Real Truth About Beauty study, was to explore empirically what beauty means to women today and why that is. Further, Dove wanted the study to assess whether it was possible to talk and think about female beauty in ways that were more authentic, satisfying and empowering*⁶⁶.

⁶² "Home", Dove, available on <https://www.dove.com/us/en/home.html#> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁶³ "Baby Dove Arrives to Provide Superior Care for Baby and Encourage Parents to 'Trust Their Way'", press release, Dove, April 5th 2017, available on <https://www.unileverusa.com/news/press-releases/2017/Baby-Dove-Arrives-To-Encourage-Parents.html> [ref. Mar. 2020].

⁶⁴ Julian E. BARNES, "The Making (Or Possible Breaking) Of a Megabrand", *The New York Times*, July 22th 2001, available on <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/22/business/the-making-or-possible-breaking-of-a-megabrand.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁶⁵ Dr. Nancy ETCOFF et al., "THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT BEAUTY: A GLOBAL REPORT", September 2004.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.2.

Not only Dove took a role in the creation of such scientific content, which asserted its image of an activist brand, but the results of the study provided some material to include in a potential brand strategy. Dove founded its “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” on the realization that “*only 2% of women around the world would describe themselves as beautiful*”⁶⁷. To become a more relatable brand to its target, it had to create a more visible outlet for the public to see its involvement. Therefore, the multi-media “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” was mainly created with the efforts of the Ogilvy advertising agency, but also with the Edelman Public Relations agency, two of its long-term partners in the industry.

Here, the “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” will be labelled as multi-media as it was shared on billboards and prints, but also developed with short films and online content. With the help of the Ogilvy agency, Dove re-used the advertising recipe that had always worked in the past: the image of a beautiful pampered woman and a wholesome catchy sentence. This recipe was recreated with a twist, and the women pictured on the billboards were far from the average beauty models of that time⁶⁸. It pictured older women, women with freckles or women with curves, standing next to one negative and one positive description of their physical appearance. The template of the billboard copied the model of a tick box form on which you could choose the negative or the positive description. This concept was only the first of many other billboard concepts, yet it opened the way and struck the critics and the public⁶⁹.

The reactions to the first steps of this campaign were mostly good, and the first short film of the campaign called “*Evolution*”⁷⁰ became the most viewed video on the YouTube platform in October 2006, proving that Dove’s target had been reached and captured⁷¹. As to ensure the credibility of its new marketing strategy, Dove not only

⁶⁷ “Dove”, *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/brands/personal-care/dove.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁶⁸ See appendices n°1, n°2 and n°3.

⁶⁹ Samantha COONEY, “Dove Wants Women to Redefine Beauty”, *Time*, January 10th 2017, available on <https://time.com/4629671/dove-raise-the-beauty-bar/>, [ref. Mar.2020].

⁷⁰ The video shows “a woman (the lovely Stephanie Betts) make-up free and ordinary, and a time-lapse video of her evolution into a ‘supermodel’”. “*Evolution*”, *Dove*, available on <https://www.dove.com/ca/en/stories/campaigns/evolution.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁷¹ Angela CELEBRE et al., “The good, the bad, and the ugly of the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty”, *The Inquisitive Mind*, 2014, issue n°2, available on <https://www.in-mind.org/article/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-of-the-dove-campaign-for-real-beauty> [ref. Mar.2020].

created an inclusive advertising campaign, but it also started providing educational content in 2004 and opened its “*Self-Esteem Fund*” in 2006⁷². This turning point of Dove’s marketing was, therefore, perceived as actions for the greater good, but it also led the company to its personal goal of growth.

Historically, Dove’s business has never struggled to make its way as one of the leaders of the personal care industry in the world. However, Unilever does not have the monopoly on this market and was in competition with the corporate group Procter & Gamble⁷³ and its brand Olay up until 1991⁷⁴. Dove played a role in securing the position of Unilever, and the group was stating the brand’s growth as one of its global progress in its 2000 annual report: “*progress was led by our Dove brand which grew by 18%*”⁷⁵. The early 2000s was also a time during which Dove overtook international markets in France, Italy or in the United Kingdom, by acquiring up to 21,5% of market share between 2000 and 2001⁷⁶.

Therefore, it seems that Dove did not need this turning point in marketing to uplift sales or gain ground in a new market, but rather to sustain them. The “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” was created as a way to differentiate the brand from its competitors and secure the trust of its target. Brand activism was incorporated in the brand’s strategy and gave Dove good financial results even in a short-time period.

In 2004, the first billboard concept of the “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” allowed the sales of Dove to rise by 700%⁷⁷. Such successful results were sudden but not that exceptional in Dove’s business history, as this growth continued over the years, hand-

⁷² “Dove”, *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/brands/personal-care/dove.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁷³ Procter & Gamble is a corporate founded in 1894 and specialized in daily life products. “P&G history”, *Procter & Gamble*, available on <https://us.pg.com/pg-history/> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁷⁴ Julian E. BARNES, “The Making (Or Possible Breaking) Of a Megabrand”, *The New York Times*, July 22th 2001, available on <https://www.nytimes.com/2001/07/22/business/the-making-or-possible-breaking-of-a-megabrand.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁷⁵ Unilever Annual Report & Accounts and Form 20-F 2000, *Unilever*, p.9, available on http://www.jaarverslag.com/assets/reports/JaarverslagCOM_Unilever_Jaarverslag_2000.pdf [ref. Mar.2020].

⁷⁶ In the UK. Luis SPITZ, *Soap Manufacturing Technology, 2nd edition*, AOCS Press, London 2016.

⁷⁷ During the first half of the year. Ben BOLD, “When Dove got Real : The history of a brand turnaround”, *PR Week*, June 17th 2015, available on <https://www.prweek.com/article/1351936/when-dove-real-history-brand-turnaround> [ref. Mar. 2020].

in-hand with the development of its brand activism. In 2007, the personal-care brand was selling its products in over 80 countries around the world, while accumulating sales of over 2.5 billion dollars a year⁷⁸. Ten years after the launch of the “*Campaign for Real Beauty*”, Dove’s sales had gone up to 4 billion dollars a year, allowing the brand to draw very positive conclusions from its new marketing choice tinted by social responsibility⁷⁹. Lastly, according to a national consumer survey published by Simmons in 2018, Dove and its bar soap were chosen by 117 million Americans, ahead of its historical competitor Olay, which was chosen by over 20 million Americans that year⁸⁰.

Comparing Dove’s business before and after the “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” allows us to understand that this campaign has not miraculously installed Dove as an international leader of personal care. Rather, this campaign asserted the global sustainability of an already strong company. Dove reinvented its image with brand activism, differentiated itself from its competitors, captured the interest of its target and performed profitably. This shift in marketing allowed for the rise in its business performance shortly after its launch but also in the long run, over more than 10 years.

To conclude, Dove’s business grew from its decision to shift its marketing towards brand activism. The financial growth of the company is established and its correlation with the launch of the “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” has been proved for over ten years. Rather than focusing its efforts on product development, the brand saw the opportunity to invest in its image and in its relationship with its clients⁸¹. Knowing the factual benefits of choosing this kind of marketing strategy is useful. However, to understand if brand activism is truly a good strategy for Dove or not, the next parts of this research will focus solely on the effects of such a choice on its image.

⁷⁸ Lucy SADDLETON, “The evolution of Dove”, *Strategy*, December 1st 2007, available on <https://strategyonline.ca/2007/12/01/tributedove-20071201/> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁷⁹ Sheila SHAYON, “After 10 Years of Dove’s ‘Real Beauty’, Others Are Starting to Catch On”, *brandchannel.*, January 23rd 2014, available on <https://www.brandchannel.com/2014/01/23/after-10-years-of-doves-real-beauty-others-are-starting-to-catch-on/> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁸⁰ See appendix n°4.

⁸¹ According to Mac Leod. Lucy SADDLETON, “The evolution of Dove”, *Strategy*, December 1st 2007, available on <https://strategyonline.ca/2007/12/01/tributedove-20071201/> [ref. Mar.2020].

CHAPTER 2: The advantages of brand activism for Dove's image

Now that the benefits of brand activism on Dove's growth have been attested, the following chapter of this research dissertation will focus on the image of the company. In this chapter I will focus on providing examples of good characteristics that have been associated with the image of Dove, after the brand chose to change its marketing strategy. It will introduce the last chapter of this research dissertation; whose goal is to qualify the advantages of such a marketing strategy by stating its drawbacks on Dove's image.

To understand the positive effects of the 2004 "*Campaign for Real Beauty*" on the image of Dove, I will first clarify the link between a marketing strategy and a brand's image. Then, I will develop four positive concepts such as value, responsibility, intimacy and creativity. These four positive concepts ensue from Dove's actions and reflect the way consumers could perceive the brand. The choice of these perceptions is based on research and monitoring of subjective public opinions about Dove actions since 2004.

First, it is important to understand the relation between the choice of a marketing strategy, such as brand activism, a brand personality and a brand's image. As a reminder, according to the digital agency named Instapage⁸², brand activism is:

*When a company seeks to have an impact on a social, economic, environmental, or political problem. Companies might actively engage on behalf of an issue because it aligns with their core values and founder's vision for the company, for good publicity, to help their businesses' bottom line, or for any number of other reasons.*⁸³

Therefore, brand activism can be used to attract consumers who are activists themselves, or who want their act of consumption to be responsible or political⁸⁴. To seduce these targeted consumers, the brand will develop a marketing strategy that

⁸² Instapage is an international agency specialized in digital advertising. It currently works with clients like Ebay, Vimeo or SAP.

⁸³ Ann HODGE, "The Advantages & Perils of Brand Activism", *Instapage*, January 3rd 2020, available on <https://instapage.com/blog/what-is-brand-activism> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁸⁴ Cf. Part 1 Chapter 2, pp. 10-15.

resonates with what the consumers want or need. These actions, like the launch of an advertising campaign or the founding of a charity fund, will have an impact on the “*set of characteristics that consumers connect with a particular brand*”⁸⁵. This is the definition of the brand personality.

Conventionally, there are five types of brand personalities: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness⁸⁶. Each type of brand personality is defined by how each consumers perceive a brand. Thus, a sincere brand will be perceived as down-to-earth, honest, wholesome or cheerful⁸⁷. In Dove’s case, the brand seems to have developed a personality that is sincere, but which also reflects activism. The following paragraphs will develop four positive characteristics of Dove’s personality and image. Each characteristic will be justified by actions led by the brand at some point.

The first image ensuing from Dove choosing brand activism, is that Dove is a virtuous brand. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, being virtuous means “*having good moral qualities and behaviour*”⁸⁸. It also means that Dove is seen as a brand which is holding onto a set of values. Values are defined as “*the principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong, and how to act in various situations*”⁸⁹. But, how can Dove be perceived as virtuous?

Dove’s vision is focused on finding social purpose for its business. On the brand’s website, the brand’s vision statement appears to create a set of social standards rather than a vision for its business growth: “*We believe beauty should be a source of confidence, and not anxiety. That’s why we are here to help women everywhere develop a positive relationship with the way they look, helping them raise their self-*

⁸⁵ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/brand-personality> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁸⁶ According to English Terminology classes by Mrs. Fiona Rossette, M2i Master Degree, Université Paris-Nanterre, 2019-2020.

⁸⁷ Schiffman et al., *Consumer Behavior*, Pearson Global Edition, Harlow, 11th edition, 2014, p.139.

⁸⁸ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/virtuous> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁸⁹ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/values> [ref. Mar.2020].

*esteem and realise their full potential*⁹⁰. Integrating such principles and purpose in its business plan allows Dove to project an authentic image of virtue⁹¹.

In addition, the brand has created the “*Dove Real Beauty Pledge*”, available on the Unilever’s website. It includes three vows such as “*We portray women as they are in real life*”, “*We portray women with diversity, honesty & respect*” and “*We help girls build body confidence and self-esteem*”⁹². Not only the brand is trying to implement better values in its industry and society, but it is also standing by its own standards. According to Larry Fink, the CEO of BlackRock⁹³, one of the leading companies in financial planning and investment management: “*To prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society*”⁹⁴. This statement proves that integrating social purpose can be a powerful asset in the long run, perhaps because consumers can trust the strength and authenticity of the brand’s activism.

Dove could also be considered as virtuous because of its involvement in charity and social funds. Values are assets that “*help you to decide [...] how to act in various situations*”; therefore Dove needed to create its own values and act on it⁹⁵. As previously stated, the brand created the “*Self-Esteem Fund*” in 2006, soon after the launch of the “*Campaign for Real Beauty*”. This fund has helped the Self-Esteem Project to reach out to 35 million young people and has been financing common projects with the Women’s Dermatologic Society⁹⁶ or the World Association of Girl

⁹⁰ “Our vision”, *Dove*, available on <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/about-dove/our-vision.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁹¹ Olivia ZED et al., “DOVE: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRAND IN A CRISIS OF SINCERITY - The Struggle to Navigate Rising Expectations of Corporate Responsibility”, Boston University, 2019, p.8.

⁹² “Building body confidence and self-esteem”, *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/improving-health-and-well-being/health-and-hygiene/building-body-confidence-and-self-esteem/> [ref. mar.2020].

⁹³ BlackRock is an American company that helps other companies to manage global investment.

⁹⁴ Olivia ZED et al., “DOVE: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRAND IN A CRISIS OF SINCERITY - The Struggle to Navigate Rising Expectations of Corporate Responsibility”, Boston University, 2019, p.8.

⁹⁵ Cf. definition of “values” of the Cambridge Dictionary, p.30.

⁹⁶ The Women’s Dermatologic Society is an organisation of American women dermatologists working on issues “relevant to women and their families”. Available on <https://www.womensderm.org/about-wds/mission-and-vision> [ref. Mar.2020].

Guides and Girl Scouts⁹⁷. Associating Dove with virtue seems fair, as the brand called out a social issue, initiated change about it and acted upon it.

The second image of Dove ensuing from its brand activism is responsibility. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a responsibility is “*something that is your job or duty to deal with*”⁹⁸. By calling out the beauty and personal care industry about the use of unrealistic beauty standards in advertising, and the effect on the general self-esteem of the public, Dove took a stand on a social issue. But how can Dove be perceived as responsible?

Dove reflects an image of responsibility because it has been using its power, as an industry leader, to place on the spotlight deeply rooted issues in women’s representation in popular culture. The brand has engaged in corporate social responsibility. According to an article on the matter written by the Business Development Bank of Canada⁹⁹, corporate social responsibility is “*a company’s commitment to manage the social, environmental and economic effects of its operations responsibly and in line with public expectations*”. Motivated by its core values about “*Real Beauty*”¹⁰⁰, the brand has adapted its communication and advertising, in line with what the public expected from a brand who had just commissioned a study about the harm of unrealistic beauty standards¹⁰¹.

Dove all the more asserted its corporate social responsibility by working with existing organizations, already fighting for the condition of women. As developed in an article written by Tom Lin for the Boston University Law Review, the collaboration between social issues advocates and brands like Dove, allow the “*leverage*” of the brand’s resources to achieve aimed social change¹⁰². Therefore, Dove’s responsibility does

⁹⁷ “Our mission”, *Dove*, available on <https://www.dove.com/uk/dove-self-esteem-project/our-mission.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁹⁸ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/responsibility> [ref. Mar.2020].

⁹⁹ “Corporate social responsibility”, Business Development Bank of Canada, available on <https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/entrepreneur-toolkit/templates-business-guides/glossary/pages/corporate-social-responsibility.aspx> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹⁰⁰ Cf. “Dove Real Beauty Pledge”, p.31.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Part 2 Chapter 1, p.25.

¹⁰² Tom C.W. LIN, “Incorporating Social Activism”, *Boston University Law Review*, vol. 98, 2018, Temple University Legal Studies Research Paper N°2019-01, p.1562.

not only reside in its own actions, but also in the help it can provide to a cause at a bigger scale than its sole business. Hence, Tom Lin even introduces the concept of “*corporate social activism*” as an evolution of “*corporate social responsibility*”¹⁰³. Additionally to its collaboration with organizations in the United-States, Dove hosted a “*Young Women’s Advocacy Forum*” at the 2018 United Nation General Assembly¹⁰⁴. It allowed the brand to expand the reach of its own project, while advocating for women at an international scale. As stated by Tom Lin, in this case, responsibility is reflected thanks to actions that “*allow them to become better and more profitable corporate citizens, to the benefit of shareholders and society*”¹⁰⁵.

The third image of Dove ensuing from its brand activism is intimacy. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, intimacy is “*things that are said or done only by people who have a close relationship with each other*”¹⁰⁶. This image of intimacy the public can perceive is closely linked to the sincere brand personality that Dove has developed over the years. But how can Dove be perceived as intimate with its customers?

Dove has developed a relation of trust with its targeted segment of customers. The brand is sharing a fight for social changes with organizations, activists but also with the public, who may feel invested as well. For Olivia Zed and Sarah Dasher, who wrote a case study about Dove and the notion of sincerity, trust can be built by relying on two factors. The first one is “*the importance for companies to prove promises with action*” and the second one is an “*emphasis on listening*”¹⁰⁷. And as a matter of fact, Dove was chosen in 2018 as the most trustworthy brand amongst consumers aged from 13 to 36 years old¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.1567.

¹⁰⁴ “Building body confidence and self-esteem”, *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/improving-health-and-well-being/health-and-hygiene/building-body-confidence-and-self-esteem/> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹⁰⁵ Tom C.W. LIN, “Incorporating Social Activism”, *Boston University Law Review*, vol. 98, 2018, Temple University Legal Studies Research Paper N°2019-01, p. 1581.

¹⁰⁶ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/intimacy> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹⁰⁷ Olivia ZED et al., “DOVE: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRAND IN A CRISIS OF SINCERITY - The Struggle to Navigate Rising Expectations of Corporate Responsibility”, Boston University, 2019, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ According to a study led by Ybrands. Ibid., figure n°8, p. 10.

Dove's image of intimacy with its customers is based on trust, but also on the sharing of common values and dialogue. Aside from its daily communication with its online community, the brand has proved to be alert to its communication mistakes and to care about online feedback. As an example, we can quote the online apologies of the brand after an ambiguous online post from 2017 offended the community of women of colour¹⁰⁹. I will develop this incident in the last chapter of this research dissertation, as it was considered as an important stain on the brand's image, yet it gives an example of the rapid reaction and answer Dove gave to its public. In a tweet, the brand took note of the offence caused by its communication and attempted to continue the dialogue¹¹⁰. This attempt tried to stabilize the intimacy the brand had with its consumers, and to maintain a close relationship of trust, in which one can have the space to make mistakes and improve in the future.

The last positive image of Dove concerning its brand activism is creativity. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, creativity is "*the ability to produce or use original and unusual ideas*"¹¹¹. As Dove's activism began with the creation of a global advertising campaign picturing a wide range of beauty types, it is fair to state that its activism is closely linked with creativity. The initial commissioned study about beauty standards is an act of activism that gave Dove the tool to create a bigger project. But aside from implementing new beauty standards in the industry, what are some practical examples of Dove's creativity?

The data acquired by the "*Real Truth About Beauty*" study has allowed the brand to create educational content. In order for this content to be attractive and to reach a larger amount of people, it had to be carefully designed. Today, Dove offers three types of online resources about empowerment: one type for parenting, one which is adapted to teachers and a type of resource tailored for "*youth leaders*"¹¹². Dove's online resources include articles with advice and activities to spark conversation about issues

¹⁰⁹ Nicola SLAWSON, "Dove apologises for ad showing black woman turning into white one", *The Guardian*, October 8th 2017, available on <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/08/dove-apologises-for-ad-showing-black-woman-turning-into-white-one> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹¹⁰ See appendix n°5.

¹¹¹ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/creativity> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹¹² "Dove Self Esteem Project", *Dove*, available on <https://www.dove.com/us/en/dove-self-esteem-project.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

such as bullying, appearance or even family and celebrities¹¹³. Its public can also have access to a wide range of educational videos about an even wider range of issues related to self-esteem.

In addition, Dove has been challenging the creative limits of educational content by creating six cartoon episodes in collaboration with the Steven Universe franchise¹¹⁴. These six episodes were curated with the help of a body image expert to address issues like “*teasing and bullying, competing and comparing looks*”¹¹⁵.

Aside from educational content, Dove has been recognized by the critics for its work on its advertising campaigns. This is the case of the short film “*Evolution*”, previously introduced in this part¹¹⁶. This short film portrayed the transformation of a woman from her normal appearance to the photoshopped version of her appearance, used for a staged make-up campaign¹¹⁷. The video showed the backstage of advertising and finished with a key statement: “*no wonder our perception of beauty is distorted*”. As to applause for the brand’s creative efforts to unveil the unrealistic process of advertising, the campaign received two awards at the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival in 2007¹¹⁸. Since then, Dove has kept creating short films with the goal to advertise while drawing attention, proving its image of creativity.

To conclude, Dove’s image has been positively impacted by its choice to integrate corporate social activism into its core business. The brand has led local and international actions that impacted the way it is perceived by its customers. Dove is perceived as virtuous for the standards it sets. It is perceived as responsible for the execution of these standards on its own activity and in society. It is perceived as intimate because it considers the experience of its customers and bases the purpose

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ The Steven Universe franchise has been created by Rebecca Sugar for the Cartoon Network channel. It first aired in 2013 and follows the adventures of Steven, a character with superpowers.

¹¹⁵ “Building body confidence and self-esteem”, *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/improving-health-and-well-being/health-and-hygiene/building-body-confidence-and-self-esteem/> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹¹⁶ Cf. Part 2 Chapter 1, p.26.

¹¹⁷ “Evolution” video, available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹¹⁸ “Dove”, *Unilever*, available on <https://www.unileverusa.com/brands/personal-care/dove.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

of its business on shared values. Finally, Dove is perceived as creative, because all this activism is communicated by thoughtfully designed content that has been recognized globally.

Brand activism has been shown as a true advantage for Dove's business. It has allowed the brand to grow financially in the long term, to get established in the personal care and beauty market, and to secure its image in the eyes of its targeted segment. However, such a marketing strategy involves drawbacks and while it is important to notice the good effects of choosing activism as a brand, one should also notice the potential dangers of such a choice on its image.

CHAPTER 3: The drawbacks of using activism as a brand strategy for Dove's image

In this last part, I will focus on tempering the good effects ensuing from Dove's choice to integrate social activism into its core business. As previously developed, brand activism used as a marketing strategy can generally improve business growth by enhancing the image of the brand and its financial performance. Nevertheless, getting involved in social activism means getting involved in a historically and socially charged phenomenon¹¹⁹. Unlike a common social activist, a company must stay true the course of its corporate goals, and at times, compromise its dedication to the cause.

To study the limits of brand activism as a marketing strategy, the following chapter of this part will provide four examples of how Dove's image could be negatively impacted. As a reminder, these perceptions are based on research and monitoring of subjective public opinions about Dove's actions since 2004. The following paragraphs will justify the image of a risky, unreliable and insensitive brand, which is dowsing in complexity. Rather than denigrating the corporate choices of Dove, the goal of this chapter is to give an example of the public opinion a brand could face after such a strategic choice.

By engaging in brand activism, a brand could be perceived as risky. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, it means that a company could get involved with "*the possibility of something bad happening*"¹²⁰. Trying to differentiate itself by getting involved in the fight against social issues involves the risk of diving into social and corporate instability. But, in practice, how can Dove be perceived as a risky brand?

Getting involved in corporate social activism politicizes the marketplace¹²¹. As it is a way to bring social change, corporate social activism is also a way to polarize the public's opinion, meaning the brand could damage its own image because of its fight. In his article about the matter, Tom Lin describes the risk of such activity: "as

¹¹⁹ Cf. Part 1 Chapter 1, pp.5-10.

¹²⁰ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/risk> [ref.Mar.2020].

¹²¹ Tom C.W. LIN, "Incorporating Social Activism", *Boston University Law Review*, vol. 98, 2018, Temple University Legal Studies Research Paper N°2019-01, p.1540.

*businesses become more prominent in social activism, they could also become more prominent targets for regulation, investigation, and counteractivism*¹²². Merging corporate and social goals, therefore creating risk, could also prevent investors and other stakeholders to work with, or to associate their own image with the brand¹²³.

In Dove's case, its corporate group got involved in the issue of women's representation and empowerment in the personal-care industry and society-wide. While bringing light to such issue, it also brought light on its own corporate activity. For example, conducting the brand activism of Dove, Unilever and its compromising actions were more likely to be called out and sanctioned.

Between 2002 and 2003, the corporate group was heavily criticized for creating and airing a whitening cream advertisement on the Asian market for its Fair & Lovely brand¹²⁴. Associating professional and personal success with the use of the whitening product, the ad was brought to the attention of the Indian government by All India Democratic Women's Congress¹²⁵. The Indian government chose to ban two advertisements and India's Information and Broadcasting Minister at that time even declared: "*Fair & Lovely cannot be supported because the advertising is demeaning to women and the women's movement*"¹²⁶.

By sharing the same corporate group, and therefore corporate management, Dove has been harmed by the negative feedback of such advertising on the Asian market. As a matter of fact, the information about the Fair & Lovely incident developed here was partially found in an academic article studying the activism of Unilever at a corporate

¹²² Ibid., p.1582.

¹²³ Ibid., p.1586.

¹²⁴ Fair & Lovely is a Unilever owned Pakistanis brand launched in 1975. It sells skin care products for women and men but focus its activity on the selling of whitening face products.

¹²⁵ Julie E. DOWSETT, "Commodity Feminism and the Unilever Corporation: Or, How the Corporate Imagination Appropriates Feminism", *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Volume 4, Number 2, 9-16, 2010, p.4.

¹²⁶ Aneel KARNANI, "Doing Well by Doing Good Case Study: 'Fair & Lovely' Whitening Cream", Michigan Ross School of Business, 2007, p. 9.

level¹²⁷. This demonstrates that the risk taken by a brand can stain the image of any other associated brand of the same corporate group.

Secondly, by engaging in brand activism, there is a risk for Dove to be perceived as unreliable. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, someone that is unreliable is someone that is “*not able to be trusted or believed*”¹²⁸. For Dove, and because of its involvement, the risk is for its past and current actions to be investigated by the public. Any incident, like the Fair & Lovely incident, could harm the credibility of the social purpose of its business. Moreover, the fragility of the brand’s credibility could affect the choice of the consumer to buy or not the product of the brand¹²⁹. But, how can Dove be perceived as an unreliable brand?

Dove could be perceived as unreliable in its activism, because of its sole existence as a business. Unlike social activists, Dove is using corporate social activism as a way to enhance the image of its brand¹³⁰. Therefore, its activism is based on the goal for its business to reach as many people as it can. This interpretation was developed by feminist theorists and the process of Dove using women’s empowerment as a marketing strategy was labelled as “*commodity feminism*”¹³¹. This concept, explained by Julie E. Dowsett, targets the lack of sincerity of corporate activism by stating that “*commodity feminism has little or nothing to do with the actual politics of feminism or the material circumstances of women’s lives*”¹³². In this article, Dove and its “*Campaign for Real Beauty*” are quoted as prime examples of such practices¹³³. In other words, the brand is perceived as unreliable by activists sharing the same values, because it is using feminism to sell its products.

¹²⁷ Julie E. DOWSETT, “Commodity Feminism and the Unilever Corporation: Or, How the Corporate Imagination Appropriates Feminism”, *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture and Action*, Volume 4, Number 2, pp.9-16, 2010.

¹²⁸ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/unreliable?q=UNRELIABLE> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹²⁹ Mike SAUNDERS, “What is brand credibility”, Marketing Huddle, May 1st 2011, available on <http://marketinghuddle.com/what-is-brand-credibility/> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹³⁰ Tom C.W. LIN, “Incorporating Social Activism”, *Boston University Law Review*, vol. 98, 2018, Temple University Legal Studies Research Paper N°2019-01, p.1574.

¹³¹ Julie E. DOWSETT, “Commodity Feminism and the Unilever Corporation: Or, How the Corporate Imagination Appropriates Feminism”, op.cit., p.2.

¹³² Ibid., pp.1-2.

¹³³ Ibid., pp.2-5.

Dove is also questioned in its reliability because the products that Unilever sells at a global scale are considered not to be following the standards that Dove is trying to set. Aside from commercializing whitening face products on the Asian market with its Fair & Lovely brand, Unilever is managing Axe, a male grooming brand with a radically different marketing strategy than Dove¹³⁴. Axe's products target young men aged from 18 to 24 years old¹³⁵. Its advertising was originally based on demonstrating the power of attraction a young man could gain by using Axe's products. While trying to picture the benefits of its product on its target, Axe was accused of objectifying women and setting harmful standards in the young public's mind¹³⁶.

Thereafter, Unilever was criticized for engaging in two opposite advertising messages, creating confusion between Dove and its fight for women empowerment, and Axe picturing "*conventionally beautiful*" women in sexualized contexts¹³⁷. Social activists' perception of Axe's image hurt their perception of Dove's image. In the public's mind, the brand became untrustworthy in its corporate activism.

Finally, by engaging in brand activism, there is a risk for Dove to be perceived as insensitive. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, someone who is insensitive is someone who is "*not feeling or showing sympathy for other people's feelings or refusing to give importance to something*"¹³⁸. Because its social activism is part of a marketing strategy, Dove activism has already been perceived as harmful for the cause by other social activists. But in practice, how can Dove be perceived as an insensitive brand?

Dove could be perceived as an insensitive brand because of its public responses in times of publicity incidents. As previously developed in this part, dialogue with

¹³⁴ Axe may be known as Lynx in the UK, Australia, New Zealand.

¹³⁵ Julie ZEILINGER, « Axe Commercial Suggests That Women's Increasing Hotness Is A Danger To Men », *The Huffington Post*, August 1st 2013, available on https://www.huffpost.com/entry/axe-commercial-suggests-that-women-ruin-everything_n_3689409 [ref. Mar. 2020].

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Danielle KURTZLEBEN, "Do Dove and Axe Sell the Same Message?", *US News & World Report*, April 18th 2013, available on <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/04/18/unilever-faces-criticism-for-real-beauty-ad-campaign> [ref. mar.2020].

¹³⁸ Definition of the Cambridge Dictionary available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/insensitive?q=INSENSITIVE> [ref.Mar.2020].

customers plays a role in the building of an intimate relationship with the public¹³⁹. However, every attempt to communicate and apologize to a community of customers must be thoughtfully executed to avoid miscommunications and aggravation. Dove's lack of sensitivity was demonstrated during the handling of an incident regarding an ambiguous ad posted on Facebook in 2017¹⁴⁰. In their case study about Dove's image of sincerity, Sarah Dasher and Olivia Zed summarize the situation:

Dove released a three-second body wash ad to Facebook as part of its much-acclaimed Campaign for Real Beauty. The video GIF featured a diverse trio of women individually lifting their shirts and swiftly transitioning from one person to the next: a dark-skinned woman pulled up her brown shirt to reveal a white woman in a cream shirt [...]. By depicting a woman's transformation from black to white through implied use of its product, Dove unwittingly nodded to an ugly theme of personal care advertising original to the 19th century, when blatantly racist messages suggested that "dirty" people of color could be purified to white with soap¹⁴¹.

The online community was quick to call out the brand on the racial and historical charge of its ad, and the video GIF was pulled. Dove published a statement on its mistake and responded to the online community directly on its Twitter account. But Dove's response was considered as dismissive towards its community feelings and concerns. Thousands of answers to Dove's tweet showed that the brand's statement was not enough to convince the public of the brand's understanding of the situation. The African-American celebrity Ava DuVernay even tweeted to call out the brand on its poor-worded statement¹⁴²: *"You can do better than 'missed the mark'. Flip + diminishing. Deepens your offence. You do good work. Have been for years. Do better here"*¹⁴³.

¹³⁹ Cf. Part 2 Chapter 2, pp.33-34.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Part 2 Chapter 2, pp.33.

¹⁴¹ Olivia ZED et al., "DOVE: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRAND IN A CRISIS OF SINCERITY - The Struggle to Navigate Rising Expectations of Corporate Responsibility", Boston University, 2019, p.2.

¹⁴² "Ava DuVernay is a writer, producer, director and distributor of independent film". Available on <http://www.avaduvernay.com/about> [ref. Apr.2020].

¹⁴³ Casey QUACKENBUSH, "Dove Apologizes After Body Wash Ad Is Slammed For Being Racist", *Time*, October 9th 2017, available on <https://time.com/4974075/dove-apology-racist-ad/> [ref. Mar. 2020].

This incident happened on a social media platform and was publicly handled. It showed the continuity of the lack of judgement of Dove on a sensitive racial matter, in front of an extended community of followers and beyond¹⁴⁴. Therefore, it reinforced the image of untrustworthiness of the brand and created an image of insensitivity towards marginalized racial minorities¹⁴⁵.

To conclude, Dove's image has been negatively impacted by actions ensuing from brand activism. A monitoring of press and essays about the corporate social activism of the brand has justified negative images as risky, unreliable and insensitive. Getting involved in social activism means fighting for social changes. As a corporation, it means putting itself in the lime light as an example of good conduct. Dove's image was harmed because of its difficulty to appear consistent in its own social standards. At a corporate group level, it was associated with brands that were publicly criticized for their poorly thought marketing strategy. In addition, it had to deal with the release of an inept ad that created a situation of backlash. Thus, Dove's efforts to enhance their image and attract conscious customers were tinted by reputation incidents.

The aim of this part was to provide a qualified insight of the reality of choosing activism as a brand strategy. Studying Dove has shown that this kind of strategy can be a true opportunity of success, but also an opportunity of risk. At the end of this part, it is fair to state that Dove's image is complex because of the brand's choice to get involved in social activism. In reality, fighting for women empowerment involves more than including realistic beauty standards in its product's advertisement. Dove must navigate through the complexity of the theory of activism and manage incidents that could take a toll on its reputation and image. This case study proves that there is no such thing as a riskless idea when it comes to marketing, even as an international leader of the personal-care industry.

¹⁴⁴ Olivia ZED et al., "DOVE: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN BRAND IN A CRISIS OF SINCERITY - The Struggle to Navigate Rising Expectations of Corporate Responsibility", op.cit., p.13.

¹⁴⁵ A racial minority is "a group of a certain race that are in the minority compared to a larger group, the rest of the population, etc". *Collins Dictionary*, available on <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/racial-minority> [ref. Apr.2020].

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, bringing activism to the core of a marketing strategy is as complex as it is rewarding. Marketing is the art of selling a product by tuning it to the needs and wants of the consumer. Activism is the art of bringing changes to society by leveraging resources and taking action. This research dissertation has shown that the latter concept has become significantly more widespread since the early 2000s. Thanks to the development of the Internet, the definition of activism has widened, and it has become more accessible. Speaking up and bringing awareness on societal issues has never been so easy. As a matter of fact, 78% of the youth expressing opinions on social media platforms consider themselves as activists¹⁴⁶. At first sight, marketing and activism do not have a lot in common, yet, it is important to think of these 78% of activists as potential powerful consumers, creating the need for brands to adapt.

How has activism become an essential part of the marketing strategy of companies? This partnership has become essential because both concepts are able to serve each other. To remain relevant, a marketing strategy must draw from the social environment of the product it sells and the consumer it targets. For activism to achieve change, it has to reach an audience and have resources to lead powerful actions. Therefore, when Dove is engaging in a campaign that defends more realistic beauty standards, it does not only advertise its deodorants in a meaningful way for the women it targets. This campaign also puts light on an ongoing fight that organizations and activists have been leading for years. Devoting financial and human resources from the company to women empowerment benefits both sides. Marketing and activism have become powerful assets for one another.

But, is this kind of marketing strategy always a riskless idea? In the best-case scenario, the implementation of activism in the actions of a brand will sustain its results. The creation of a purposeful reputation will establish the brand in the long term. In case of difficulties, brand activism could polarize the public's opinion about the brand and harm its reputation. As a motor of societal change, activism is relevant for a brand which has the time and resources to stay up-to-date with its evolutions. In March of 2020, Dove

¹⁴⁶ Carrie JAMES et al., "Speaking up online: civic identity and expression in the digital age", *Social Movements and Media, Studies in Media and Communication*, vol. 14, pp.119-149, 2018. P.130.

joined the ongoing legal fight against discrimination of “*Black hair*” in the United States¹⁴⁷. Perhaps as a way to balance its last incident with the community of women of colour, it has co-founded the CROWN Coalition which sponsored the CROWN Act¹⁴⁸. In the word of Dove, bills are being passed to “*ensure that traits historically associated with race, such as hair texture and hairstyle, are protected from discrimination in the workplace and in K-12 public and charter schools*”¹⁴⁹. This project is an example of Dove demonstrating its concern about a current racial issue, while consolidating its recently fragilized reputation in the eyes of its customers.

In other words, to be a safe and rewarding strategy, brand activism must be about balance. It must be a balance between enough involvement to be perceived as sincere, and too much involvement meaning harming the market environment. At a personal level, this research dissertation has allowed me to learn that a good communication strategy depends on a good understanding of the environment and constant evolution. Studying brands’ reactions to communication success and failures has deepened my interest in public and press relations. I know that these skills are necessary assets to the successful completion of any strategy and the protection of the brand’s reputation and influence.

Finally, I have learned that activism is not enough to differentiate a brand anymore. It truly has become an essential part of numerous companies’ marketing strategy and cannot be used on its own. What currently makes the difference for customers is using activism as part of a bigger brand story¹⁵⁰. Brand activism works because there is concern, sincerity and authenticity involved. If Dove was the US leading deodorant brand in the US in 2019, it is perhaps because of its research and development skills. But it is more likely because of its 15 years’ worth of work on an activist brand storyline and its empathic relationship with its loyal customers.

¹⁴⁷ “The CROWN Act”, Dove, available on <https://www.dove.com/us/en/stories/campaigns/the-crown-act.html> [ref. Mar.2020].

¹⁴⁸ Founding of the “CROWN Coalition (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair) in partnership with the National Urban League, Color Of Change, and Western Center on Law and Poverty”. Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Celinne DA COSTA, “3 Reasons Why Brand Storytelling Is The Future Of Marketing”, *Forbes*, January 31st 2019, available on <https://www.forbes.com/sites/celinnedacosta/2019/01/31/3-reasons-why-brand-storytelling-is-the-future-of-marketing/#3a660d2555ff> [ref. Mar.2020].

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APPENDICES

Appendix n°1



- wrinkled?
- wonderful?

Will society ever accept 'old' can be beautiful? Join the beauty debate.

campaignforrealbeauty.co.uk  | Dove

Dove, "Tick Box Campaign", 2006, available on https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/wrinkled_wonderful [ref. Apr.2020].

Appendix n°2



- flawed?
- flawless?

Is beautiful skin only ever spotless? Join the beauty debate.

campaignforrealbeauty.co.uk  | Dove

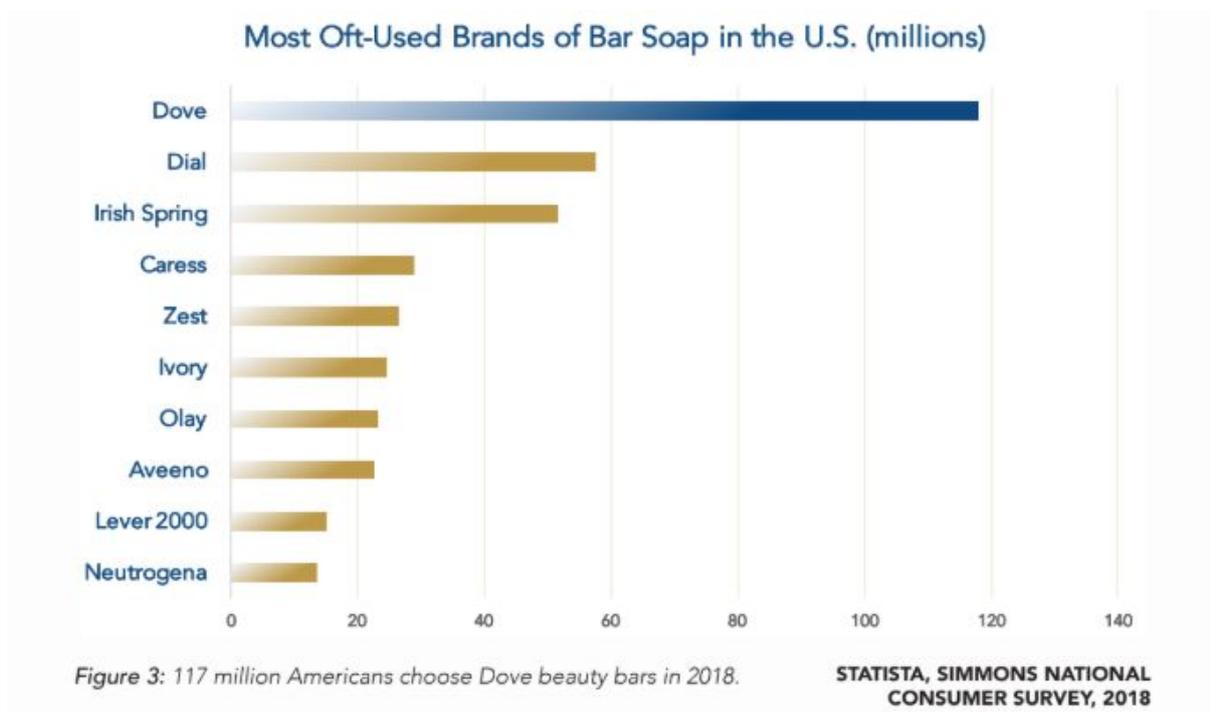
Dove, "Tick Box Campaign", 2006, available on https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/flawed_flawless [ref. Apr.2020].

Appendix n°3



Dove, "Tick Box Campaign", 2006, available on <https://jessicasharp.weebly.com/dove-campaign.html> [ref. Apr.2020].

Appendix n°4



DASHER Sarah, ZED Olivia, *Dove: a purpose-driven brand in a crisis of sincerity*, Boston University, Grand Prize Winner of the Arthur W. Page Society and Institute for Public Relations 2019 Case Study Competition, 2019. p.4, screenshot.

Appendix n°5



Dove and Ava DuVernay, tweet exchange, 2017, screenshot, available on <https://twitter.com/Dove/status/916731793927278592> [ref. Apr.2020].