***The Dove Code Campaign: Challenging Beauty Bias in AI***

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### **Abstract**

Dove’s 2024 campaign, *The Dove Code*, addresses the growing concern over AI-generated beauty filters and their impact on societal beauty standards. This campaign promotes inclusivity and diverse representations of beauty in digital spaces. The study evaluates the campaign’s effectiveness by applying public relations theories such as the Excellence Theory, the Situational Theory of Publics, and the PESO model. While Dove’s efforts have raised awareness, this study explores its strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations for future campaigns. This study also assesses the campaign's public perception and long-term impact by reviewing Dove’s strategic use of media and its engagement with public concerns.

### **Introduction**

Dove has long been a pioneer in the realm of body positivity, and its 2024 *The Dove Code* campaign marks a bold step into addressing the negative impacts of AI-generated beauty standards. In a world increasingly influenced by digital technologies, Dove sought to challenge the narrow beauty ideals perpetuated by AI filters and create an inclusive, diverse image of beauty. The *Real Beauty Prompt Guidelines* were introduced to encourage content creators to reflect a variety of body types, skin tones, and facial features in AI-generated content. However, this campaign also faced challenges, including limited audience reach and insufficient long-term evaluation metrics. This study evaluates Dove’s strategies and the campaign's public reception, applying key public relations theories to assess the effectiveness and areas for improvement.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study is to critically assess Dove’s 2024 *The Dove Code* campaign, focusing on its public relations strategies and their alignment with key communication theories. By analyzing the campaign's strengths, weaknesses, and overall impact, this study will offer insights into best practices for future campaigns that aim to tackle societal issues. The research will contribute to the broader field of public relations by demonstrating how an organization can use communication strategies to address ethical concerns in the digital age, particularly in the context of beauty standards and AI.

### **Organizational Background**

Dove, a brand under the Unilever umbrella, has been an advocate for body positivity since its inception. The brand’s *Real Beauty* campaign, launched in 2004, revolutionized the beauty industry by challenging conventional beauty standards. The campaign focused on promoting the idea that beauty comes in all shapes, sizes, and colors, and this core message continues to guide Dove’s marketing and advocacy efforts. Dove’s 2024 *The Dove Code* campaign extends this mission into the digital realm, where AI-generated beauty filters have raised concerns over unrealistic and exclusive representations of beauty. With its established reputation for promoting diversity, Dove is uniquely positioned to lead a conversation on digital ethics and inclusivity in the tech-driven beauty industry.

### **Campaign Overview**

The *Dove Code* campaign was launched to address the negative impact of AI-generated beauty filters on public perceptions of beauty. In response to the growing use of AI in apps like Instagram and TikTok, which often use filters to portray idealized and unrealistic beauty standards, Dove created the *Real Beauty Prompt Guidelines* to encourage more inclusive digital representations. The guidelines are aimed at content creators, influencers, and media professionals, urging them to produce AI-generated content that reflects diverse body types, skin tones, and facial features. Dove’s message was clear: Beauty should not be limited to what is digitally enhanced or altered but should embrace the natural diversity of human appearances (Dove, 2024; Forbes, 2024).

### **Methodology**

This study employed a content analysis of Dove’s public statements, social media posts, news coverage, and influencer endorsements related to the *Dove Code* campaign. The sources for this analysis were selected from reputable media outlets, Dove’s official communication channels, and academic articles, covering the campaign's duration from its launch in early 2024 to its impact assessment in mid-2024. Sources were chosen based on their relevance, credibility, and variety, encompassing both Dove’s owned media and earned media coverage from news outlets such as Forbes, Adweek, and The Drum (PRSA, 2024).

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### **Strengths of the Campaign**

One of the key strengths of the *Dove Code* campaign was its ability to address a timely and critical issue: AI’s role in shaping beauty standards. Dove’s commitment to inclusivity was evident in its use of diverse influencers, including people of different races, genders, and body types, to amplify the campaign’s message (Hootsuite, 2024). The campaign’s clear, actionable guidelines for content creators were a strategic move to involve the digital community in reshaping beauty standards rather than merely offering a one-sided corporate perspective. Dove also leveraged its established credibility from past campaigns to create a sense of trust and authenticity among its target audiences (The Drum, 2024).

### **Weaknesses of the Campaign**

Despite its strengths, the *Dove Code* campaign faced several challenges. One limitation was the narrow scope of its target audience, which primarily consisted of digital influencers and content creators. While these groups are influential, Dove could have expanded its outreach to include tech experts, digital rights activists, and AI critics to foster a broader dialogue about the ethical implications of AI in beauty (Lovethework, 2024). Additionally, the campaign did not provide sufficient longitudinal data to assess its lasting impact on the digital beauty industry, leaving questions about the true effectiveness of the initiative (Silvy Brand, 2024).

### **Public Perception**

The *Dove Code* campaign was largely well-received by audiences concerned with body positivity and the ethics of AI. Many praised Dove for taking a strong stance on digital inclusivity and ethical AI use. However, some critics questioned whether Dove, as a corporate entity, could truly influence AI developers or change the behavior of major tech companies that profit from AI-driven beauty filters (Edelman, 2024). These critiques highlighted the limitations of consumer campaigns in affecting systemic industry-wide change, especially when it comes to tech giants.

### **Application of Public Relations Theories**

* **Excellence Theory**: This theory emphasizes the importance of ethical communication and long-term relationships with stakeholders. Dove’s approach to the *Dove Code* campaign reflects the Excellence Theory by engaging stakeholders in a dialogue about AI ethics, creating transparency around the brand's mission, and encouraging mutual understanding (PRSA, 2024).
* **Situational Theory of Publics**: According to this theory, the level of involvement and awareness of an issue determines how the public will engage with it. Dove’s targeting of digital creators and influencers aligns with this theory, as these groups are highly involved in the issue of AI beauty filters (Hootsuite, 2024).
* **Two-Way Symmetrical Model**: Dove employed a two-way communication approach by actively listening to feedback from its audience and involving them in creating solutions. The brand engaged in dialogue with content creators and digital communities, helping to shape the campaign's direction (Adweek, 2024).
* **Framing Theory**: Framing theory suggests that media can shape public perception by emphasizing particular aspects of an issue. Dove framed the conversation around AI-generated beauty filters as a social responsibility issue, thus emphasizing ethical AI practices (The Drum, 2024).
* **PESO Model**: Dove successfully utilized the PESO model, leveraging **Paid Media** (advertisements on social platforms), **Earned Media** (positive press coverage), **Shared Media** (social media engagement), and **Owned Media** (official website and guidelines) to promote its message (Forbes, 2024).

### **Recommendations**

To improve future campaigns, Dove should consider:

1. **Expanding Outreach**: Collaborating with digital rights activists and AI ethics experts could broaden the conversation about beauty biases in AI and bring more credibility to the campaign.
2. **Tracking Long-Term Impact**: Dove should implement more robust tracking mechanisms to assess how AI beauty filters evolve post-campaign and whether their guidelines lead to lasting change in the industry.
3. **Expanding Partnerships**: Engaging with regulators and tech companies could ensure that ethical AI standards are implemented at an industry level, creating a more systemic impact.

### **Conclusion**

Dove’s *Dove Code* campaign represents a significant step forward in the fight against digital beauty biases perpetuated by AI. By leveraging its credibility and engaging with key stakeholders, Dove successfully raised awareness about the need for inclusivity in digital beauty standards. However, the campaign’s limited scope and lack of long-term evaluation highlight the need for broader outreach and more comprehensive impact tracking. As digital technologies continue to shape societal norms, campaigns like Dove's will be essential in promoting diversity and inclusivity in the beauty industry.

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