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Dove: Evolution of a Brand

In 2007, Unilever's Dove was the world's number-one "cleansing" brand in the health and beauty sector, with sales of over \$2.5 billion a year in more than 80 countries. It competed in categories that included cleansing bars, body washes, hand washes, face care, hair care, deodorants, anti-perspirants, and body lotions. It competed with brands like Procter and Gamble's Ivory, Kao's Jergens, and Beiersdorf's Nivea.

Dove had recently launched what it termed a Masterbrand campaign under the title of The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. For some marketing observers the campaign was an unqualified success, giving a single identity to the wide range of health and beauty products. But the vivid identity owed much to the campaign's use of the unruly, unmapped world of Internet media.¹ Were there risks to putting the "Real Beauty" story out on media like YouTube, where consumers were free to weigh in with opinion and dissent? On blogs and in newsletters, marketing commentators argued that Dove's management was abdicating its responsibility to manage what was said about the brand, and was putting its multibillion-dollar asset at risk.²

Unilever

A leading global manufacturer of packaged consumer goods, Unilever operated in the food, home, and personal care sectors of the economy. Eleven of its brands had annual revenues globally of over \$1 billion: Knorr, Surf, Lipton, Omo, Sunsilk, Dove, Blue Band, Lux, Hellmann's, Becel, and the Heartbrand logo, a visual identifier on ice cream products. Other brands included Pond's, Suave, Vaseline, Axe, Snuggle, Bertolli, Ragu, Ben and Jerry's, and Slim-Fast. With annual revenues of \$50 billion, Unilever compared in size to Nestle (\$69 billion), Procter and Gamble (\$68 billion), and Kraft Foods (\$34 billion.)

Unilever was formed in 1930 when the U.K.-based Lever Brothers combined with the Dutch Margarine Unie, a logical merger given that both companies depended on palm oil, one for soaps and the other for edible oil products. By the 1980s Unilever's palm oil dependence had shrunk, but its British colonial and Dutch trading heritage continued to shape the highly multinational enterprise. It operated on every continent and had particular strengths in India, Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. It described itself as combining local roots with global scale.

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Global decentralization brought strengths through diversity, but also problems of control. In particular, the company's brand portfolio had grown in a relatively laissez-faire manner. In ice cream, for example, Unilever was the world's largest producer but lacked a unified global identity. It produced ice cream under the Wall's brand in the U.K. and most parts of Asia, the Algida brand in Italy, Langnese in Germany, Kibon in Brazil, Ola in the Netherlands, and Ben & Jerry's and Breyers in the United States. Other product categories had similarly checkered identities. In February 2000 Unilever embarked on a five-year strategic initiative called "Path to Growth." An important part of this initiative was a plan to winnow its more than 1,600 brands down to 400. Among the surviving brands, a small number would be selected as "Masterbrands," and mandated to serve as umbrella identities over a range of product forms. Previously Unilever had managed brands in a relatively decentralized fashion, allowing direction to be set by brand managers in each of the geographic regions in which the brand was marketed. Now, for the first time, there would be a global brand unit for each Masterbrand, entrusted with responsibility for creating its global vision and charged with inspiring cooperation from all geographic markets.

Dove: The Functional Benefits Era

Dove was a brand with its origins in the U.S. in the post-World War II era. The first Dove product, called a beauty bar, was launched in 1957 with the claim that it would not dry out your skin the way soap did, because it was not technically soap at all. Its formula came from military research conducted to find a non-irritating skin cleaner for use on burns and wounds, and it contained high levels of natural skin moisturizers. Dermatological studies found it milder than soap-based bars.

The 1957 launch advertising campaign for Dove was created by the Ogilvy and Mather advertising agency. The message was, "Dove soap doesn't dry your skin because it's one-quarter cleansing cream," and the claim was illustrated with photographs that showed cream being poured into a tablet. This simple proposition was expressed in television, print, and billboards; soon, Dove became one of America's most recognizable brand icons.

Exhibits 1, 2, and 3 show early and later examples of Dove advertising. In time there were minor changes in slogan—for example, the term "cleansing cream" was replaced with "moisturizing cream"—but Dove stayed with the claim not to dry skin, and the refusal to call itself a soap, for over 40 years. The advertising aspired to project honesty and authenticity, preferring to have natural-looking women testifying to Dove's benefits rather than stylized fashion models. In the 1980s, the Dove beauty bar was widely endorsed by physicians and dermatologists to treat dry skin. Until 2000, the brand depended on claims of functional superiority backed by the product's moisturizing benefit.

Dove was tapped to become a Masterbrand in February 2000. In that role, it was called on to lend its name to Unilever entries in personal care categories beyond the beauty bar category, such as deodorants, hair care products, facial cleansers, body lotions, and hair styling products. While much of the advertising for these entrants spoke of functional benefits, communication to build the Masterbrand needed to do something different—it had to establish a meaning for Dove that could apply to and extend over the entire stable of products. No longer could Dove communicate mere functional superiority, because functionality meant different things in different categories. Unilever decided, instead, that Dove should stand for a point of view. A search for that point of view began right away. A process of exploratory market research, consultation with experts, conversations with women, and message testing led to "The Campaign for Real Beauty."

A Brand With a Point of View

The origins of the idea began in 2002. Silvia Lagnado, the Greenwich, Connecticut-based global brand director for Dove, led a worldwide investigation into women's responses to the iconography of the beauty industry, and unearthed deep discontent. "Young, white, blonde and thin" were the almost universal characteristics of women portrayed in advertising and packaging, but for many

women these were unattainable standards, and far from feeling inspired they felt taunted. In the search for an alternative view of the goal of personal care, Unilever tapped two experts. Nancy Etcoff was a Harvard University psychiatrist working at the Massachusetts General Hospital, author of the book, *Survival of the Prettiest*. Suzy Orbach was a London-based psychotherapist best known for having treated Lady Diana Spencer and was the author of the book, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*. Philippe Harousseau, vice president for brand development at Dove, explained, "Working with psychologists was a real plus and the payoffs were enormous. By comparison, focus groups would have just scratched the surface." Unilever made some use of surveys. It went to 3,000 women in 10 countries and explored some of the hypotheses generated by the psychologists.



Source: Unilever.

Among the findings was the fact that only 2% of respondents worldwide chose to describe themselves as beautiful (**Exhibit 4**).

Informed by the research, Lagnado initiated the first exploratory advertising executions. She hired British photographer John Rankin Waddell, an avant garde fashion photographer well-known

for using ordinary people in supermodel contexts and for books of nudes featuring plain-looking models. The result was the so-called Tick-Box campaign. In this campaign, billboards were erected and viewers were asked to phone 1-888-342-DOVE to vote on whether a woman on the billboard was "outsized" or "outstanding." A counter on the billboard showed the votes in real time. The campaign attracted keen public interest, as "outsized" first raced ahead and then fell back.



Source: Unilever.

The next series of Dove ads, in June 2005, were known

internally as the Firming campaign because they promoted a cream that firmed the skin. They featured six “real” women cheerfully posing in plain white underwear. Dove marketing director for the U.S., Kathy O’Brien, told the press that the company wanted the ads to “change the way society views beauty,” and “provoke discussion and debate about real beauty.” Todd Tillemans, the general manager for Unilever’s North American Skin Business, commented, “This ad, in retrospect, was an easy transition away from functionality. We were selling a skin-firming cream, and here we were delivering a functional benefit.”

But as the campaign developed, concerns within the brand team began to grow. The argument that Tillemans heard was that work under the ‘Campaign for Real Beauty’ banner risked moving the brand to a positioning that was at odds with its heritage. “When you talk of real beauty, do you lose the aspirational element? Are consumers going to be inspired to buy a brand that doesn’t promise to take you to a new level of attractiveness? Debunking the beauty myth brings with it the danger that you are debunking the whole reason to spend a little more money for the product. You’re setting yourself up to be an ordinary brand.”

The next step in the campaign was particularly controversial. At a Dove leadership team offsite meeting, an effort was made to engage executives in the idea behind The “Campaign for Real Beauty” by filming their own daughters discussing their self-esteem challenges. The impact was enormous, and the Ogilvy and Mather advertising agency quickly turned the idea behind the film into an ad. At one point, the ad focused on a young girl with freckles with the caption, “Hates her freckles.” At another, a shot of an Asian pre-teen was superimposed by the caption, “Wishes she were blonde.” The ad itself was widely admired, but controversy erupted over the fact that it mentioned no product. How would it earn a return on the investment in media? Tillemans commented, “Here was a brand in the health-and-beauty category, blatantly out to debunk the dream that supermodel beauty was within your grasp. We were saying that the beauty industry was portraying an unattainable and stereotypical image of beauty, and yet there we were in the beauty industry.” Nevertheless, supporters of the ad prevailed and it ran in the 2006 broadcast of the Superbowl football game between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Seattle Seahawks.



Source: Unilever.

Stage four of the Real Beauty campaign involved not an advertisement, but a film. In Canada, the Dove regional brand-building team was running self-esteem workshops for women, and the Toronto office of advertising agency Ogilvy and Mather developed a 112-second film to drive traffic to the workshops. The North American brand-building team saw the film and decided it deserved a wider audience. The resulting digital film was known as “Evolution.” It showed the face of a young woman as cosmetics, hair styling, and Photoshop editing transformed it from plainness to billboard glamour. Given its unusual length, television was not an option, and in October 2006 the film was posted to YouTube, a popular video-sharing website. Within three months, it had been viewed three million times.



Source: Unilever.

Unilever crafted a mission statement to serve as an anchor to the variety of creative initiatives that unified “The Campaign for Real Beauty.” The statement read:

Dove’s mission is to make more women feel beautiful every day by broadening the narrow definition of beauty and inspiring them to take great care of themselves.

The mission statement's purpose was summed up by Harousseau:

If you are not crystal clear what the brand's mission is, you cannot control what happens when people amplify it. Everyone working on Dove knows these words by heart. They know that the mission statement does not say Dove is about women feeling more beautiful, but . . . about more women feeling beautiful. Our notion of beauty is not elitist. It is celebratory, inclusive, and democratic.

From the Brand's to the Consumer's Point of View

In late 2006 the Dove brand builders in North America announced a contest, titled Real Ads by Real Women, to invite consumers to create their own ads for Dove Cream Oil Body Wash, a new product scheduled to be launched in early 2007. Winning commercials would air during a commercial break on the 79th annual Academy Awards broadcast on network television on February 25, 2007. The rules included a list of "thought-starters" for those thinking of entering the competition:

- Try the product. When you're using Dove Cream Oil Body Wash in the shower, take note of what you feel, smell, see and hear. Are you reminded of any pleasant experiences or interesting places?
- Look up "luxury" in the dictionary. What does it mean? What could it mean?
- Explore the world around you. What luxuries do you find in your world? Frozen yogurt after a hard workout, a moment of quiet after a long, hectic day, the sight of a brightly colored bird outside your window.

The contest website was hosted by AOL, and the ads of finalists for the top prize were posted to <http://dovecreamoil.com/>.

Media Planning

Harousseau described Unilever's media plan for "The Campaign for Real Beauty" as breaking every rule in the company. "We learned as we went forward," he said. The firming campaign used a blitz of paid media. "We bought every billboard in Grand Central Station. We were out to build a buzz. We knew we had succeeded when on July 14, 2005, Katie Couric spent 16 minutes on the *Today Show* with our firming girls. You just can't buy that kind of exposure. You can't buy pop culture."

Yet he was shocked when his team proposed a Superbowl media buy for the "Hates her freckles" ad. "Over my dead body," he said. "The Superbowl's where you sell beer. Do you want to show our message there? They came back at me: If you want to tell America that women suffer from low self-esteem, what better place to tell 90 million of them than the Superbowl?" The impact was extraordinary. News programs echoed the message of the ad, and Oprah Winfrey devoted a full show to self-esteem, with the advertisement as a centerpiece. Jay Leno ran a parody of the ad on his late-night talk show and Wal-Mart developed a version of the ad featuring its employees.

When the advertising agency brought the Evolution advertisement idea to Unilever, it was prepared to go forward without paid media at all. The ad was released to YouTube, and never ran on television except in the context of news and commentary programs such as *Good Morning America*. However it was among the most downloaded commercials ever to appear on YouTube, and its

popularity was the subject of considerable newspaper, radio and television coverage. It generated volumes of discussion on chat rooms, with contributions on topics like anorexia and heartfelt interchanges between fathers and daughters.

Public Relations

Unilever's public relations strategy was an element, together with advertising, media planning, consumer promotions, and customer marketing, in an integrated approach to marketing planning.

A public relations channel strategy was crafted by Stacie Bright, Unilever Senior Communications Marketing Manager, and Edelman, the Dove brand's public relations agency, in several countries including the U.S., to generate broad awareness for "The Campaign for Real Beauty" and establish an emotional connection with women. Embedded in a set of aggressive media relations benchmarks was an overarching goal: to spark a dialogue and debate about beauty that would ultimately penetrate popular culture. "The world of communications has changed dramatically since the first Dove marketing campaign in 1957," commented Bright. "The media landscape is increasingly fragmented and people are no longer passively consuming media. We had a great opportunity to build a framework to spark a debate and to meet the challenges we knew we'd meet when we tried to share control of the message with the media and the public."

The plan was grounded in research. The global survey (**Exhibit 4**) was the underpinning for all external communications. It lent scientific credibility to the team's hypothesis that the definition of beauty had become limiting and unattainable.

The plan needed to account for media dissent. Some media outlets took issue with the brand's "real women are beautiful" premise. For example, a *Chicago Sun Times* editorialist, Richard Roeper, wrote: "Chunky women in their underwear have surrounded my house. . . . I find these ads a little unsettling. If I want to see plump gals baring too much skin, I'll go to Taste of Chicago, OK?" Unilever and the public relations team had to decide whether to steer clear of this kind of controversy, or embrace and fuel the debate. They chose to do the latter. In this instance, the team took steps to ensure that local broadcasters in Chicago and other major markets saw Roeper's story. The team continued to build coverage and interest with more than 200 local news programs and more than 60 national broadcast and print outlets like *People* magazine, which ran a cover story on the campaign.

Influencers played a central role in building advocacy and generating discussion among the media elite. For example, before the launch of the Firming campaign, the team identified the Dove Two Dozen, a group of women in media and entertainment that the team thought would share its philosophy, and sent them tailored interactive packages that teased the campaign. The brand also developed a strategic partnership with an advocacy organization, American Women in Radio and Television, and created the "Dove Real Beauty Award" for the organization's annual gala.

The final pillar of the plan was to "walk the talk." Unilever established the global Dove Self-Esteem Fund to raise the self-esteem of girls and young women. In the U.S., the fund supported *uniquely ME!*, a partnership with the Girl Scouts of the USA that helped build self confidence in girls aged 8 to 17 with educational resources and hands-on activities. Communications for the campaign linked to campaignforrealbeauty.com, which invited visitors to learn more and share their views on a message forum, as well as to download tips and tools for developing self-esteem.

"We knew we were well on our way to achieving our goals when the media began covering the media covering the campaign," said Bright. On September 4, 2005, Rob Walker of the *New York Times*

magazine wrote an essay entitled, “Social Lubricant—How a marketing campaign became the catalyst for a societal debate.” In it, he remarked, “. . . the more intriguing fact is that it is a marketing campaign—not a political figure or a major news organization or even a film—that ‘opened a dialogue’ . . .”

Organizing for Brand Management

Historically, Unilever had organized the work of marketing in a manner similar to its main competitor, Procter & Gamble, known as the brand management system. Within a product category the firm often offered multiple brands, each led by a brand manager. In effect, each brand operated as a separate business, competing with its siblings as well as the products of other firms. A staff of brand assistants executed the policies of the brand manager. Each brand manager was charged with the responsibilities of a general manager in relation to the brand, including design of strategy, delivery of profit targets, and power over many of the day-to-day marketing decisions such as advertising and trade promotions that were needed to achieve profitability.

In 2000, guided by the Path to Growth initiative, Unilever began to split responsibility for a brand between two groups, one charged with development of the brand and the other charged with building the brand in specific markets. Brand Development was centralized and global in scope. Brand Building was decentralized according to the major geographic regions in which Unilever operated.

Brand Development took responsibility for developing the idea behind a brand, for innovation, and for evolving the idea into the future. It was accountable for medium- to long-term market share, for brand health, for measures of innovativeness, and for creating value in the category. It had responsibility for television advertising strategy, and for deciding which non-traditional media the brand should explore. It developed the brand plan. It was usually located in the region of the world in which the brand was strongest.

Brand Building was replicated in each of Unilever’s major markets around the world. Managers in the brand-building chain of command were charged with bringing the brand to life in their marketplace. They were accountable for growth, profit, cash flow, and short-term market share. Working within the mission inherited from brand development, they had the freedom to use imagination to break through their particular market’s media clutter. They managed public relations and informal communications, and made decisions on what level of spending to put behind the media advertising campaigns that they received from brand development. Brand builders reported to a general manager for a collection of brands, who in turn reported to a country or region manager.

Conclusion

In September 2006, Landor Associates identified Dove as one of 10 brands with the greatest percentage gain in brand health and business value in the past three years.³ It computed that the brand had grown by \$1.2 billion. Much of the growth was attributable to its extension into new personal care categories, and exactly how much could be credited to “The Campaign for Real Beauty” was not a question anyone had evidence to answer. What was clear, however, was that the campaign had touched a nerve with the public. Thousands of blogs and Internet chat forums showed a rich diversity of public dialog. There were declarations by fathers to daughters on themes like self-esteem, and there were endorsements of Dove’s stand against stereotypes of beauty. Parody advertising abounded on websites that let people post and share videos, such as YouTube, Google

Video, and Grouper. Some of the parodies were respectful of the brand or gently humorous, but others were more edgy. Some parodies and Internet postings raised questions about Unilever's sincerity, its objectivity, and its motives. Then there were the professional marketers and consultants, trying to make sense of the strategy of a brand that was building meaning by courting controversy.

Alicia Clegg, blogging on Brandchannel.com, summed up her view of the Dove strategy as follows:

Taking up the cudgels for reality is a risky strategy for Dove. The underlying idea is appealing; the difficulty is in how to express it. When Dove ran its Masterbrand advertising, it was criticized by some for choosing unrepresentative "real" women—a 96-year-old, described by one marketer as: "the old lady equivalent of a super-model"; a heavily freckled, but enviably cute, 22- year-old, and so on. The latest campaign has a harder edge, tipping the balance away from aspiration toward realism. It may be more honest, but does its honesty leave women enough freedom to dream?" Seth Stevenson, a columnist for the popular online magazine *Slate*, went further: "Talk about real beauty all you want—once you're the brand for fat girls, you're toast."⁴

Exhibit 1 Dove Advertisement

Suddenly soap is old-fashioned!

It has been made old-fashioned by DOVE—a revolutionary new toilet bar.

Now for the first time you can wash as often as you like—without the dry feeling caused by soap.

DOVE is one-quarter cleansing cream. It leaves your skin feeling smooth and cool. It's milder than any soap. DOVE is good for your skin.



This is a very remarkable new development. It looks like soap, and you use it like soap. But DOVE is a completely new formula.

It's milder than soap. Even milder than "baby" soaps.

Doctors recommend DOVE. Read what one well-known skin doctor says after studying the effects of DOVE on his patients:

"It appears to be free of certain important skin-irritating effects of regular toilet soaps. For example, DOVE lacks the strong alkaline reaction and the irritating properties found in toilet soaps. DOVE comes close to what I have been seeking for years."

One-quarter of every cake is cleansing cream. That's why you can wash your face as often as you like—when you change to DOVE. And your skin won't get the dry feeling that soap gives you. DOVE leaves your skin soft and smooth.

Quick, rich lather in all waters

DOVE bursts instantly into waves of the richest, creamiest lather you've ever seen. Even in the *hardest* water. How come? Because it contains a new lathering ingredient found in no other toilet bar.

This gives DOVE an utterly new kind of lather. Thick, soft and snowy white.

Take a bath with DOVE. Then step out of the tub and pull the plug. DOVE leaves no ugly bathtub ring!

And, what's even more wonderful, DOVE leaves no dulling soap film on your complexion—which is something ordinary soap always does, whether you see it or not.

The makers of DOVE are none other than Lever Brothers—pioneers in the science of soap-making. You can trust Lever Brothers.

And Lever unconditionally guarantees that DOVE is better for your complexion than regular toilet soap. If you don't agree—you'll get your money back.



DOVE IS ONE-QUARTER CLEANSING CREAM

You can smell the rich beauty-cream fragrance in every bar of DOVE. It's at least three times more creamy than any soap. DOVE is actually good for your skin.



RICH LATHER IN HARDEST WATER

The test-tube on the left contains lather from ordinary soap. The one on the right contains lather from DOVE—rich, soft and abundant. Test made in hardest water.



DOVE

makes soap old-fashioned

THE BAR FOR A BETTER SKIN

Copyright 1955—Lever Brothers Company

Source: Unilever.

Exhibit 2 Dove Advertisement

Amazing New Beauty Discovery!

DOVE creams your skin
while you bathe



New bath and toilet bar is one-quarter cleansing cream

ORDINARY toilet soap *dries* your skin. But dove, the *sensational* new bath and toilet bar, is different. It actually *creams* your skin while you bathe.

You use dove just like soap—in your shower, bathtub and wash basin. But dove is a completely *new formula*. It makes soap old-fashioned.

Rich cleansing cream

One-quarter of every bar of dove is rich *cleansing cream*. That's why dove makes your skin feel so soft and smooth—with none of that dry, tight feeling you get from using soap. *dove* is good for your skin.

You can *feel* the rich cleansing cream in *DOVE*. You can actually

smell its creamy, luxurious fragrance. *dove* lathers *instantly*—even in hardest water. And it leaves no bathtub ring.

dove looks different, too. It has a fascinating new *shape*—sculptured to fit the hand.

Lever Brothers unconditionally guarantees that *DOVE* is better for your face, your hands, your whole body, than any toilet soap. If you don't agree—we'll give you back every penny you paid.



DOVE

Source: Unilever.

Exhibit 3 Dove Advertisement

Prove Dove doesn't dry your skin
the way soap can.

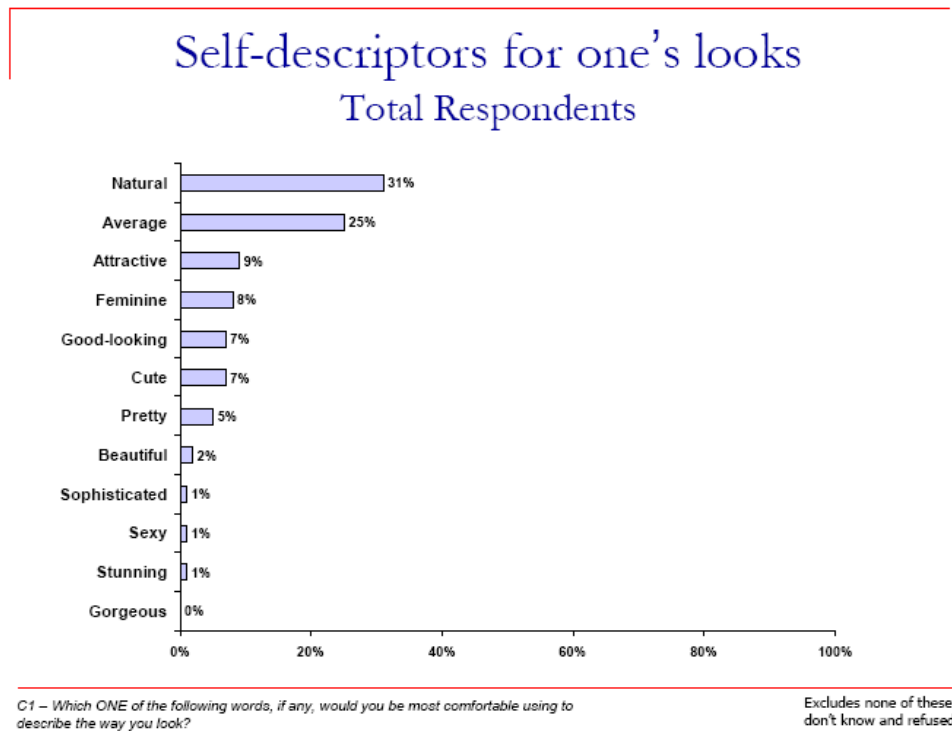
1 Imagine a delicate film forms the surface of your face - as you put in the product. This helps seal skin of your face with soap.

2 Unlike the other side of your face with Dove. Notice how much richer the skin looks. It's more creamy and white than soap.

3 Now close and get dry. Notice the wonderful skin. Notice how soft and dry your skin looks. It's a fact - soap can dry your skin.

Source: Unilever.

Exhibit 4 Extracts from “The Real Truth About Real Beauty: A Global Report,” prepared by Dr. Nancy Etcoff, Dr. Susie Orbach, Dr. Jennifer Scott, and Heidi D’Agostino, September 2004.



Study Highlights

	BRA	ARG	USA	CAN	GBR	ITA	FRA	NLD	PRT	JPN
Women who are beautiful have greater opportunities in life	68%	52%	44%	28%	37%	50%	49%	40%	50%	39%
Physically attractive women are more valued by men	69%	60%	59%	51%	50%	63%	71%	40%	73%	57%
The media and advertising set an unrealistic standard of beauty that most women cannot ever achieve	66%	77%	81%	69%	74%	80%	72%	72%	62%	20%
I wish the media did a better job of portraying women of diverse physical attractiveness - age, shape and size	91%	86%	80%	75%	75%	81%	77%	69%	66%	41%
Beauty can be achieved through attitude, spirit, and other attributes that have nothing to do with physical appearance	88%	82%	87%	82%	64%	76%	74%	72%	81%	57%
I do not feel comfortable describing myself as beautiful	40%	49%	44%	35%	54%	45%	41%	34%	36%	41%

Source: Unilever PLC.

Endnotes

¹ Grant McCracken, "Is marketing now cheap, fast and out of control?" This Blog Sits at the Intersection of Anthropology and Economics, www.cultureby.com, October 27, 2005.

² Gerry Lantz, "This brand has started a genuine conversation that they don't have control of," <http://www.stevedenning.com/Conferences/SmithsonianMay07.htm>, accessed July 9, 2007, and "The interesting thing here is the risky bet Dove is making," in Seth Stevenson, "When Tush Comes to Dove," *Slate*, August 1, 2005.

³ *Fortune* magazine, September 18, 2006.

⁴ Seth Stevenson, "When Tush Comes to Dove."