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PRCM 2500
Final Paper
Dove Canada Keep The Grey Case Study**

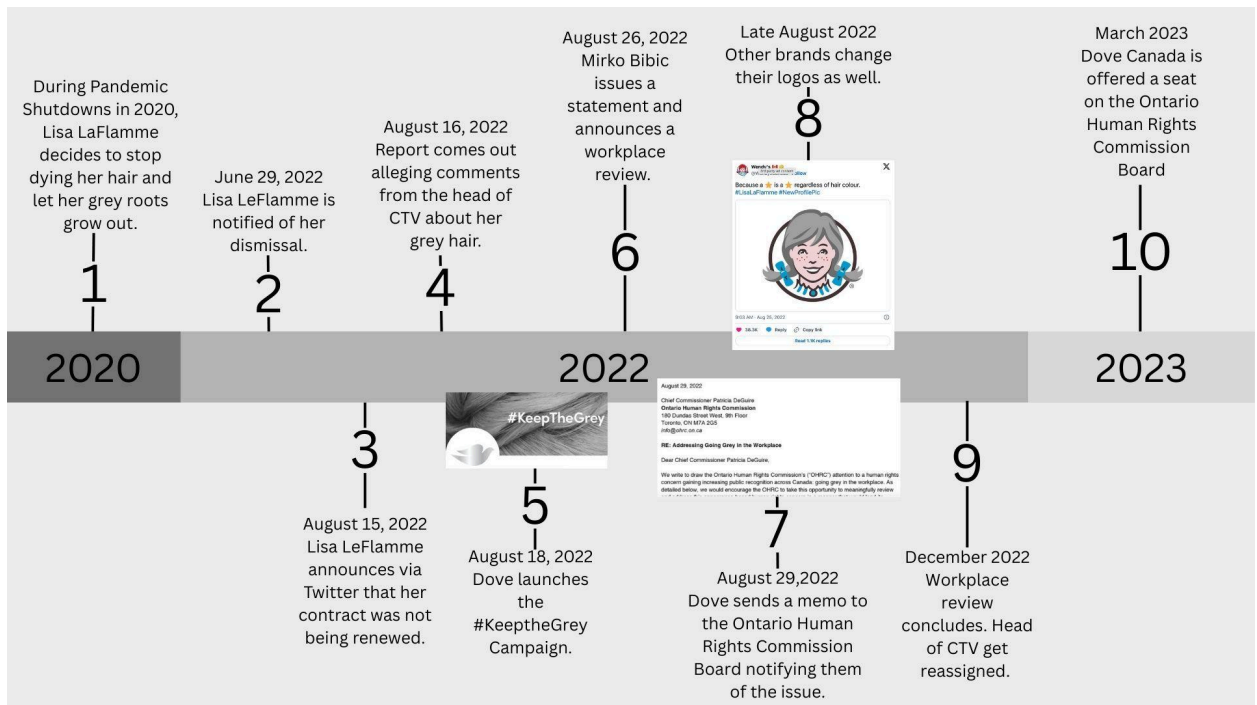
Case Overview

In June of 2022, long time Canadian journalist Lisa LaFlamme was dismissed from her contract with Bell Media, the parent company of CTV News, where she anchored for 35 years. Her dismissal was followed by news claiming that the grounds for Bell Media’s decision were based on ageist and sexist ideals citing both her dismissal being shortly after LaFlamme stopped dying her hair and comments made by the head of CTV about LaFlamme letting her grey hair grow. Enter Dove, a multifaceted subsidiary brand of the parent brand Unilever, which has rooted itself around the idea of “Let’s Change Beauty”. Dove is known for running campaigns that tackle modern, often stigmatized issues such as ageism, self-esteem, and body positivity. Through decades of running these campaigns, Dove has established a brand of authenticity, boldness, and inclusivity.

In the midst of this issue with CTV and Lisa LaFlamme, Dove saw both an opportunity to bring light to the issue of ageism and the unrealistic beauty standards placed on women, and an opportunity to bring awareness to their brand in a way that fits within the brand image of social activism they have created.

The external stakeholders in this campaign are the consumers of Dove products, the people facing this racial discrimination, and the people inflicting it. The internal stakeholders are those working on this campaign, and the professionals hired to help.

Case Narrative and Visual Timeline of Events



¹Google Gemini was used to draft the different points on the timeline.

⁵: City News Everywhere Montreal. (2022). Image of the KeepTheGrey Logo. Retrieved December 9, 2025, from <https://montreal.citynews.ca/2022/08/23/grey-hair-workplace-dove/>. ⁷: Edelman. (2023). Image of the memo Dove sent to the Ontario Human Rights Commission Board. Retrieved December 9, 2025, from <https://www.edelman.com/work/dove-keepthegrey>. ⁸: CNN. (2022). Image of Wendy’s Twitter Post of Grey Logo. CNN. Retrieved December 9, 2025, from <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/27/business/laflamme-wendys-gray-hair-cv/>.

- **1:** Due to the shutdown mandates in 2020, hair salons closed their doors. During this time, Lisa LaFlamme stopped coloring her hair.
- **2:** On June 29, 2022, CTV notified LaFlamme of her dismissal from her position. LaFlamme and CTV did not release this information to the public immediately.
- **3:** On August 15, 2022, LaFlamme announces her departure from CTV via Twitter. The post kickstarted the backlash from fans, due to her show being amongst the most highly rated every year it was on air.
- **4:** On August 16, 2022, a report came out alleging inappropriate comments about LaFlamme's hair color made by the head of CTV, Michael Melling. Melling is accused of having asked, "Who let Lisa's hair go grey". Melling is also reported to have been the decision maker in letting LaFlamme go.
- **5:** On August 18, 2022, Dove launched its #KeepTheGrey campaign a mere 48 hours after it was released that LaFlamme was let go.
- **6:** On August 26, 2022, Bell Media CEO Mirko Bibic issues a statement on the firing of Lisa LaFlamme, and announces a workplace review to audit the processes that went into this decision.
- **7:** On August 29, 2022, Dove sent a memo about the situation and the discriminatory undergirdings to the Ontario Human Rights Commission Board. This kickstarted a relationship between Dove and the Ontario Human Rights Commission Board, and a collaborative commitment to fighting ageist discrimination in the workplace.
- **8:** In Late August of 2022, other brands started picking up on this grey scale trend. Pictured is Wendy's take on the trend, but others such as Sports Illustrated also participated. This stimulated sentiment online, and brought about a way for Dove to engage with other brands and with their stakeholders for greater reach.
- **9:** In December of 2022, the workplace review was completed and Bibic announced the reassignment of Melling to a different division. Melling was moved to a division where he does not make personnel decisions.
- **10:** In March of 2023, Dove Canada was extended an invitation to a seat on the Ontario Human Rights Commission Board, making them the first beauty brand to be offered this honor.

Case Analysis

- **Research**
 - Due to the rapid nature of Dove and Edelman's collaborative response, the time for research and planning was slim. Environmental scanning was a massive part of their ability to roll out a successful, well throughout, on brand campaign in such a short amount of time with such little capacity for research. Through this, they nailed the demographic on the head. They also used sentiment analysis to identify the hostile nature of their publics, and were able to produce a campaign

that did not add hostility but instead created a balance of awareness, positivity and empowerment.

- **Planning and the Stakeholder Theory of Publics**

- This research laid the groundwork for a fairly simple planning period. Dove and Edelman decided to change Dove's branding color palette to a greytone palette, symbolically tying in the name of the campaign, "Keep The Grey". They chose models that exemplified this more mature palette, and started making content that matched the raw, unfiltered aesthetic of this campaign. The only critique I would have is the fact that they did not have measurable objectives or goals for the outcome of this campaign, but I would argue that setting those would not be fitting for a campaign that is boarding on being a CSR campaign. The point of this campaign was not necessarily to fix a problem that Dove started, but to bring awareness to an issue that both pertains to the brand that Dove has created and the stakeholders that Dove exists to serve. This relates to the Stakeholder Theory of Publics. Dove identified the fact that their stakeholders were predominately the ones being affected by this discrimination, so they took a loud and proud stance on the issue. They did this not for solely monetary purposes, but because it was in the best interest of their stakeholders. The amount of planning and research that they were able to do all in the span of 48 hours speaks volumes of the effectiveness and efficiency with which Dove and Edelman ran this campaign.

- **Implementation, the PESO Model, and the Relationship Management Theory**

- In my opinion, the implementation of this campaign could not have been better. First, the cohesiveness of the branding they created and the tie that it has to the Dove brand that everyone recognizes was genius. The original Dove logo has organic brand recognition, but changing the color signifies that there is something different that Dove is trying to communicate. This drives engagement with the campaign and the platform that they are trying to push, and utilizes the owned media that Dove already has under their belt. Second, their use of outside entities, like the Ontario Humans Rights Commission board, to lobby for this social justice shows their genuine care and willingness to walk the walk. Thirdly, their use of paid and shared media, getting outside brands and companies in on this greyscale theme, caused this campaign to spread like wildfire. This use of paid, owned and shared media illustrated the PESO Model, which was essential to the success of this campaign. They stayed active with engagement on social media platforms, and contributed to the conversation beyond the content they were producing. The way that they used their relationships with other businesses and brands to spread awareness about a common interest and communicate that interest effectively exemplifies the Relationship Management Theory of Public Relations.

- **Evaluation**

- While the evaluation does not come from objectives being met, the metrics that came from this campaign were record breaking. First, Dove Canada became the first beauty brand to be extended a seat in the Ontario Human Rights Commission Board. Second, according to Edelman, 675+ stories were earned, 18,000 pieces of user-generated content were shared, and over 1 billion impressions were made. Thirdly, while this campaign was not directly intended to increase sales, 61% of viewers reported that they were more likely to purchase Dove after seeing this campaign. Finally, the brand awareness that they were going for was definitely achieved. 89% of viewers reported that this campaign gave them a good impression of Dove, 83% of viewers reported to want Dove to run more campaigns like this one, and 90% of viewers felt that #KeepTheGrey brought awareness to an issue that needs to be discussed. These numbers speak for themselves on the effectiveness of this campaign, and the thoroughness of the evaluation.

Ethics

This case is a textbook example of what ethical Public Relations, specifically ethical use of Corporate Social Responsibility, looks like. According to the PRSA Code of Ethics Member Statement of Professional Values, the values of Advocacy, Honesty, Expertise, Independence, Loyalty, and Fairness are essential to the practice of Public Relations. While each of these values is exhibited through this campaign, the value of Advocacy is what I want to focus on. The code of ethics states that advocacy means that, “We serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent”. Dove advocated for its stakeholders, and all those that face ageist discrimination in the workplace. They showed their commitment to advocacy through their collaboration with the Ontario Human Rights Commission Board, and through the donations that they contributed to different organizations fighting discrimination.

The strengths of this case are the connection that was created between Dove and its stakeholders and Dove and other brands. Another strength is the way in which Dove mended a hostile sentiment by bringing in a campaign filled with empowerment and positivity while not neglecting the issue at hand.

The only weakness that I can think of is the lack of connection the campaign had to Dove products. While I do not think the goal of this campaign was to drive purchasing behavior, it would not hurt to have aspects of your campaign that inadvertently point to profit.

While I have learned a lot about the ethical practice of Public Relation through this case, I have narrowed the lessons down to 3. First, the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility could not be understated. Second, sometimes profit does not drive a campaign but it can follow it. Finally, relationships are essential to pulling off campaigns that are not profit driven.

Process Memo and Course Reflection

To start out this assignment, I went to Edelman's website and read as much as was provided on this case. Next, I went to Google and surveyed the sentiment behind the campaign through reading editorial articles written around the time period of the campaign. Next, I used Gemini to map out the sequence of events that went into this campaign, from 2020 to 2023. I followed this up with my own research of each event, ensuring the information given by Gemini could be corroborated. For this, I used many different websites including CNN, Montreal City News, The Guardian, the Marketing Awards website, and the Today Show. Then, I used Canva to make a graphic of the timeline and included pictures from sources cited in the footnote on page 1. In terms of writing this paper, I started with evaluating the RPIE of the campaign and built the paper out from there.

Since doing my in class case study, I feel as though I have gained a greater nuance for analyzing cases. My ability to critically think about cases has led to a more advanced understanding of what to look for when analyzing a case. This class has also given me a greater vocabulary, which has allowed me to put words to the different things I notice and draw similarities from previous cases or examples.

AI Disclosures

- **Disclosure 1:** I used generative AI tools as part of my work on this project. I used Gemini for the following purposes: I used Gemini to map out the sequence of events that went into this campaign, from 2020 to 2023. All final content, analysis, and conclusions are my own. The AI-assisted parts were reviewed and revised to ensure originality and relevance. When I referenced content generated by AI, we included in-text parenthetical citations to indicate the source. However, I did not directly use anything directly from Gemini, I just used the dates that it gave me as an outline for research.
- **Disclosure 2:** I/we did not use AI tools or technologies for writing assistance in this assignment. All writing, editing, and proofreading were done manually.

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