The role of brands in the anti-racist movement

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The recent protests for racial justice across the United States and in other parts of the world, in response to the killing of George Floyd, among other causes, have strengthened the Black Lives Matter movement and rekindled the debate about the positioning of brands on issues such as racism.

Several recent surveys have shown that a considerable part of consumers, especially the younger ones, expect brands to take a position on issues of social importance, such as racial inequality and injustice.

Most of these consumers believe that silence about racial issues implies some kind of complicity with such issues. These consumers also consider that just posting messages and statements of support on social media is not enough, and understand that brands should take more effective actions to contribute to the fight against racism and discrimination.

In addition to demonstrations on social media, there are several other measures that brands and their owners can adopt, such as: (i) improvement of practices and policies regarding hiring, salaries and promotions of employees, in order to avoid inequity or injustice based on racial prejudice; (ii) launch of advertising campaigns with people of different races and ethnicities, in order to increase their representativeness and social inclusion; and (iii) development of educational campaigns to raise the awareness of employees and consumers about issues related to systemic or institutional racism.

As part of this awareness process, it is fundamental for companies to make a self-evaluation and review their portfolio of brands and products to identify and eliminate possible racist, prejudiced and discriminatory elements and references. Listening to and taking into consideration criticisms and suggestions from consumers and employees is also a great way of identifying what should be modified or improved.

In this context, some companies have already decided to make changes in their brands and products, as per the examples below:

- The L'Oréal Group announced that it will stop using words such as "whitening", "fairness" and "lightening" in connection with its skincare products;
- The BAND-AID brand committed to launch a range of bandages with new colors in order to match different skin tones, including light, medium and deep shades of brown and black skin tones;
- The owner of the brand AUNT JEMIMA, which identifies syrups for pancakes, announced that it will change the name and logo of said brand, which consists of the image of a smiling black woman, after

criticism about the racial stereotype of that representation;

- The owner of the rice brand UNCLE BEN'S, whose logo consists of the image of a black man with gray hair, informed that it is evaluating possible changes in the brand image;
- The manufacturer of cleaning products BOMBRIL announced the withdrawal of the steel sponges identified by the brand KRESPINHA from the market, after being accused of racism on social media.

Whenever a company realizes, through a reassessment of its own portfolio or after being alerted or criticized by third parties, that its brand name or image contains any reference or element that may be interpreted as racist, it is advisable to remove this reference or element and, depending on the case, to perform a rebranding. The idea behind the rebranding is to create a new and different identity for an already-established brand.

During the process of developing a new name, logo and visual identity for the brand, it is advisable to consult with a specialized Intellectual Property Lawyer in the country (or countries) where the products bearing the new brand will be launched. This professional will check whether the intended brand is available for registration in that country, by conducting searches at the local Trademark Office's database, and will also assist the company in the brand registration process.

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