

# CORPORATE BRAND MANAGEMENT AND REPUTATION

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## MASTER CASES

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### Shaving off Toxic Masculinity - Gillette's 'The Best A Man Can Be' Campaign

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First Edition  
Student Case Papers

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## **Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's Cases**

The "Corporate Brand Management and Reputation: Master's cases" is a case series for applying the case method of teaching and learning in higher education. The cases are relevant to brand strategists in private and public sector organizations, as well as academics and students at universities, business schools, and executive education.

The cases are written by groups of master's students as a course project. The specially developed case format is defined as: *"A management decision case describes a real business situation leading up to a question(s) that requires assessment, analysis, and a decision reached by discussion in class. The alternative approaches and recommendations from the class discussion are followed by a description of the choices made by the case company. This description is then discussed by the class."*

The student groups select the topics of their case providing updated and relevant insights into the corporate brand management. The cases can be used as "written cases" (handed out and read in advance, later to be discussed in class) and/or as "live case" (presented by the teacher following a discussion in class). Each case includes teaching notes, visuals with speaker's notes, learning objectives, board plans, and references.

The mission of the series is *"to develop cases for discussion providing insights into the theory and practice of corporate brand management and reputation, with the intent of bridging the gap between academic teaching and managerial practice."*

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers at the elective course Corporate Brand Management (BUSN35 – five-credit course/eight-week half-time studies), part of the master's program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The cases represent the result of the intellectual work of students under the supervision of the head of course.

Although based on real events and despite references to actual companies, the cases are solely intended to be a basis for class discussion, not as an endorsement, a source of primary data, or an illustration of effective or ineffective management. The cases are free to be used and are to be cited following international conventions.

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# **Shaving off Toxic Masculinity - Gillette's 'The Best A Man Can Be' Campaign**

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## **WRITTEN CASE**

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**MANAGEMENT DECISION CASE**

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## Shaving off Toxic Masculinity

Boston, 2018 Gillette's North American brand director, Pankaj Bhalla is standing in his office and thinking back to the beginning of Gillette's biggest campaign that paved the way for who they are now some 30 years ago - Boston, 1989 with the Super Bowl just around the corner. What better way for Gillette to launch their new campaign "The best a man can get"? This campaign showed men who are successful in their business and family lives because they shave with Gillette and Gillette helps them to become the best version of themselves.

But times along with society are changing and he wonders if the message that Gillette conveyed all those years ago is still what they stand for today. The #metoo debate is all over the news and society is calling out for change through numerous movements for gender equality and acceptance. Bhalla wonders if the old slogan can still help Gillette meet those new societal expectations and stay relevant to its customers. Slowly, he knows, the brand is being seen as one for the older generation and millennials favour those new and funny companies like Dollar Shave Club with their exaggerating and yet basic commercials. Sales are dropping and their market share is decreasing. How can he fix that?

Looking out his office window over Boston he wonders what makes people buy Dollar Shave Club. What do young people want to see in a brand to feel connected to them? The men that were portrayed in Gillette's old advertisements were all an expression of traditional masculinity and success. But he wonders if that is really all that can and should be... Is this still reflective of today's world? Maybe it is time for us to step up and really help men to become the best version of themselves.

An idea for a new campaign is growing in his mind. It is time to get his team together, to call the advertisement agency and to create something that speaks of change and will represent the values that Gillette truly stands for. It's time to get to work.

## **Background**

### *Gillette brand history*

The years leading up to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were coined the 'Golden Era', an era in which men visited their barbershops to have their beards and moustaches meticulously trimmed with a straight edge razor. However, it was with King. C Gillette's vision to transform shaving that the revolutionary disposable razor was introduced as a prototype in 1900. Furthermore, it was his vision for precision that sparked the innovation that carried this brand into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to its latest product<sup>1</sup>.

However, in 2005 the love story between P&G and Gillette began with a 57 billion dollar acquisition, and from that Gillette entered P&G's brand portfolio. Gillette not only offered P&G an opportunity to increase the company's annual sales growth but also offered P&G the occasion to add a masculine element to its heavily female driven portfolio. P&G offered Gillette a major marketing platform, framing one of the greatest consumer brand success stories. However, when technology advanced in shaving and men's grooming, consumers purchasing habits changed. This accompanied with the laid-back social norms which prompted the beard craze in 2012 saw the US men's market for shaving products shrink by over 11% (Euromonitor)<sup>2</sup>.

### *P&G brand architecture*

Procter and Gamble (P&G), one of the world's largest house of brands in the consumer goods sector, has a combined total of 65 brands that are divided into ten product categories. Their products range from skin and hair care such as Gillette and Head and Shoulders to daily household items such as Fairy and Bounty paper towels. In the relationship between P&G and Gillette, Gillette in fact possesses a high degree of freedom and an exclusive positioning within the shaving segment. In this brand architecture Gillette can be seen as a daughter brand with P&G as their shadow mother. The focus is thus exclusively on Gillette as a brand, while P&G stays in the back and only lends its good name when needed. So, even though Gillette is owned by P&G, it has its own values and identity and expresses its vision through their product advertisements and communication strategies.

Although P&G reported an increase of 3% in net sales in 2018 on the previous fiscal year with sales of \$16.5 billion, the grooming segment of P&G's portfolio is facing its own unique challenges. When comparing P&G's 2018 fiscal year to 2017, there have been some overall reductions in numbers: grooming net sales decreased 1% to \$6.6 billion in 2018, while the global market share of the grooming segment decreased 0.8 points. P&G's grooming segment which includes brands such as Gillette, Braun and Venus, made up only 10% of their total net sales and 14% of their total net earnings in 2018<sup>3</sup>.

### *P&G activist approach*

Today consumers expect brands to do more than just represent a product, they want them to stand for something important. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>4</sup>, 8 out of 10 consumers claim that they prefer brands that take a stand. Gillette's mother brand P&G is known for transforming brand purpose into brand activism by using their marketing campaigns to tackle ongoing political or social issues both big and small that resonate with their customers across the globe. P&G understands they have a responsibility towards every stakeholder and through the addition of a value, namely 'citizenship', P&G focuses on 'doing good everyday'. This highlights the requirement to show dedication through real actions and not just words. A prime example of this was the 'We See Equal' campaign that supported gender equality and depicted boys and girls defying typical gender stereotypes.

This was supported by the various promotional efforts linked to education opportunities for women and the fact that P&G took gender equality seriously in its own corporation, with 45% of managers being females<sup>5</sup>. P&G's choice to move away from typical product placement advertising and focus on creative content that tells a story is the brand's approach to prompt change by shedding light and sparking conversations on sensitive and controversial topics. Gillette, however, up until now has taken a different approach. Thirty years ago, during the Super Bowl, Gillette launched the tagline 'The Best a Man Can Get' and from the very beginning Gillette had a rich history with sport.

It had a vision to connect the brand with some of the world's most renowned athletes and sponsored and partnered with large scale events such as the PGA Tour, FIFA World Cup and Formula One Racing. Further partnerships with athletes such as David Beckham and the Gillette Champions program with Roger Federer, Thierry Henry and Tiger Woods fell in line with the brand's image as a performance brand, strengthening the connection to its male consumers<sup>6</sup>. As a man's product and a brand that has promoted the tagline 'The Best a Man Can Get' for thirty years, Gillette has a credible and relevant position when it comes to talking of masculine behavior.

## **Industry Trends**

The overall razor market is prognosed to steadily increase within the next 6 years with a compound annual growth rate of 3.5% from its current evaluation of 10.2 billion US dollars<sup>7</sup>. The prognosis for the shaving market predicts that revenues in this segment will amount to US\$ 4,108.8m in 2020 with China being the biggest growing market in global comparison with an predicted revenue stream of US\$ 5,688m in 2020. However, the overall revenue in the US is predicted to drop by 0.8% year-over-year which relates to the drop of the average revenue per capita of 1.3% year-over-year by 2020<sup>8</sup>.

The overall growth prediction of the shaving market can be explained through the increased focus of male grooming and an increasing awareness for hygiene. The trend right now rather goes towards growing a beard instead of shaving it clean everyday as having a beard became a new trend and way of representing one's identity. Especially for men under 45 the trend to grow a beard has highly increased.

Along with that comes a need for different grooming products than the traditional razor and shaving cream. This is where Gillette currently struggles to catch up as they are competing in the more 'traditional' segment of shave care and appliances.

In the year 2018 Gillette had a 52.8% market share in the segment of men's razors and blades in the U.S, according to Euromonitor<sup>9</sup>. Euromonitor points out that for the past six years Gillette continued to lose market share. They estimate the company's share at just 54% in 2016, down from 59% in 2015 and down from as much as 70% market share back in 2010<sup>10</sup>.

### *Gillette's main competitors*

One of Gillette's oldest competitors is razor brand Schick. Schick is part of Edgewell Personal Care and has existed since 1926. In 2017, Schick launched a new line of razor refills (Hydro Connect) that can fit on Gillette's Fusion or Mach 3 razor handles. This disruption forms a threat to Gillette's sales since Schick's refills are cheaper. The changing market is now being tackled by new fierce competitors such as Harry's (founded in 2012) and Dollar Shave Club (founded in 2011, acquired by Unilever in 2016) who challenge Gillette's traditional business model with their 'direct-to-consumer shaving subscriptions' approach<sup>11</sup>. Those competitors can offer their products at a lower price than the category average as both companies focus on low-costs, direct-to-consumer razors with an emphasis on convenience, simple design and spending less, which stands in high contrast with "the best a man can get."

As a direct result of the fierce competition, Gillette decided to decrease its prices about 12% since April 2017. On their website, it is stated that this was because they listened to their customers, who indicated that their products were too expensive. Gillette specifically emphasized when announcing this decrease in price, that this would not affect the quality of their products<sup>12</sup>. The new disruptors in the market do not just heavily impact the price level but also have a big impact on the traditional retail channels.

Online channels are on the rise while the sales through convenience stores and supermarkets are dropping. The overall trend towards shopping online and the 24/7 availability of products on platforms such as Amazon combined with the high availability of discounts and the ease of access, make up the major driving forces to sell through online channels. Because of their approach and online service, Harry's and Dollar Shave Club are mostly popular among millennials.

Gillette is now trying to match those trends with their own new online delivery system 'Gillette-on-Demand' that lets their customer schedule their razor deliveries on a subscription basis or one-time purchase. They are also trying to increase their product portfolio to catch onto the beard trend by providing trimmers and special beards oils and tips for the right trim.

### *The millennial consumer*



Among the millennials the trend towards various forms of beards and mustaches is increasing. A 2020 study from the Behavioral Ecology Journal has shown that the trend towards a beard relates back to old associations reaching back to Darwin where females are attracted to bearded men as they are regarded as more mature, dominant and convey a certain level of social status. Even though men with clean shaves are mostly regarded as more attractive, the level of social status however is perceived to be higher for men with facial hair<sup>13</sup>.

Nevertheless, clean shaved men are associated with more professionalism and several jobs especially in the health and safety sector demand clean shaves. The overall perception of younger people however is that the need to purchase replacement blades very frequently amounts to a great financial investment and it generally is a task they would rather avoid as it is time consuming. Especially the younger customer segment values convenience and low prices over the brand name which is one of the reasons companies like Dollar Shave Club are so high in demand. Millennials do not want to spend the amount of money on razors anymore and welcome cheaper options that still provide the needed level of quality and fit their modern on-the-go lifestyle.

## **Time for Change**

Gillette's slogan has been 'The Best a Man Can Get' since 1989. With this, Gillette has helped shape what masculinity means and what it means to be the best a man can get. However, Gillette is facing fierce competition and is losing millennials' attention to younger and cheaper brands. If Gillette wants to keep growing, keep their prices, high quality and constant innovations, they have to move along with the trend of being more than just a brand or product; they have to convey meaning. However, as Gillette's North American brand director Pankaj Bhalla was staring outside his window, he was wondering what kind of direction they should take. One thing he was sure of was that advertisements have the power to shape new meanings and spark discussion.

Back in the days they truly believed that Gillette can help men to achieve the best a man can get but is that really still attainable now in 2018 going towards 2019?, he wondered. With this in mind, he thought maybe it is time to shift the conversation to modern masculinity and its meaning in the 21st century; maybe it is time to say goodbye to the best a man can get, and welcome 'The best a man can be'. He discussed this idea with his team and consequently worked together with a creative agency to create the first video advertisement of this potential campaign. But would tackling the stereotypical idea of masculinity be the right choice or should we follow a different path? What will help us get ahead of our new competitors, like Dollar Shave Club?

The team came up with a broad idea for the centerpiece video of their new "We believe" campaign and would challenge the concept of masculinity. It would be about 1.45 minutes long and start with snapshots of men, while you hear news reports and the narrator talking about sexual harassment, bullying and 'toxic masculinity'. A boy is running from bullies, a male executive patronizes his female colleague, you see boys fighting and dads saying "boys will be boys.". But then it takes a twist and the narrator

says “But then.. something finally changed.” Men decide to stand up and fight for what is right. The video shows being masculine means calling out other men when they are crossing the line. When a guy checks a girl out, another guy stops him. A dad helps the boy on the street who is being bullied; while his son looks at him like he is a superhero. The men of today should set examples for young boys, since “the boys watching today will be the men of tomorrow.”

At the end, the [thebestmancanbe.com](http://thebestmancanbe.com) website is shown, where people can see what kind of actions Gillette is taking. The Gillette logo appears at the end, but our products are not shown since we want the emphasis to be on the message; we want to be more than our products. This could be the centerpiece for our new campaign and maybe other videos about the social issues in the LGBTQ community where equality is still a big issue could follow. All under our vision of “We Believe”. We believe that we as an organization have to stand up and help society get better - help men to become the best version of themselves.

## **Managerial Questions**

1. Would this campaign be the right choice to solve Gillette’s issues in the market?
2. Do you think by focusing on CSR and social issues Gillette can tackle the competitors and adjust to the consumer’s behavioral trends?
3. Which other direction(s) could Gillette take in order to increase sales and become one of the chosen brands for millennials?

## Appendix

### Exhibit 1 – Average Revenue per Capita in the Shaving Market

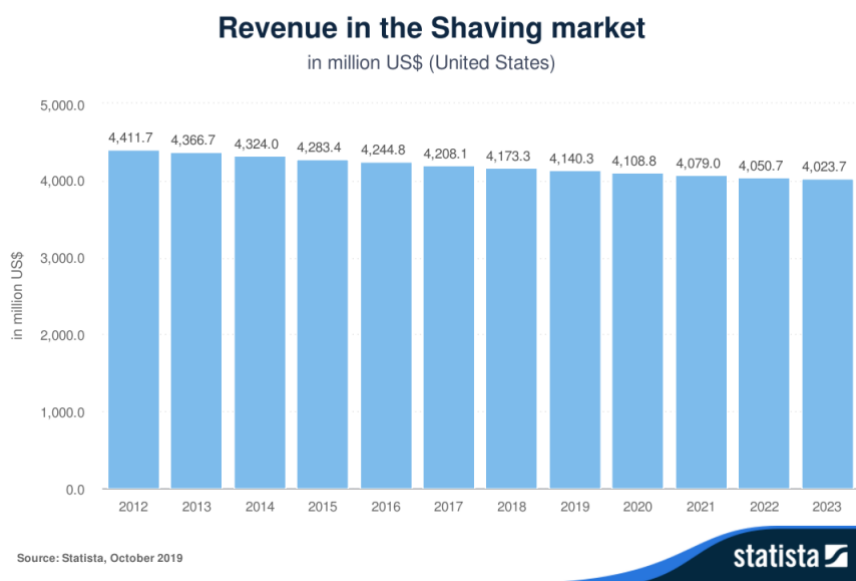


Figure 1 Source: Shaving - United States. Accessed: February 12, 2020.  
<https://www.statista.com/outlook/70070200/109/shaving/united-states>

### Exhibit 2 – Average Revenue per Capita in the Shaving Market

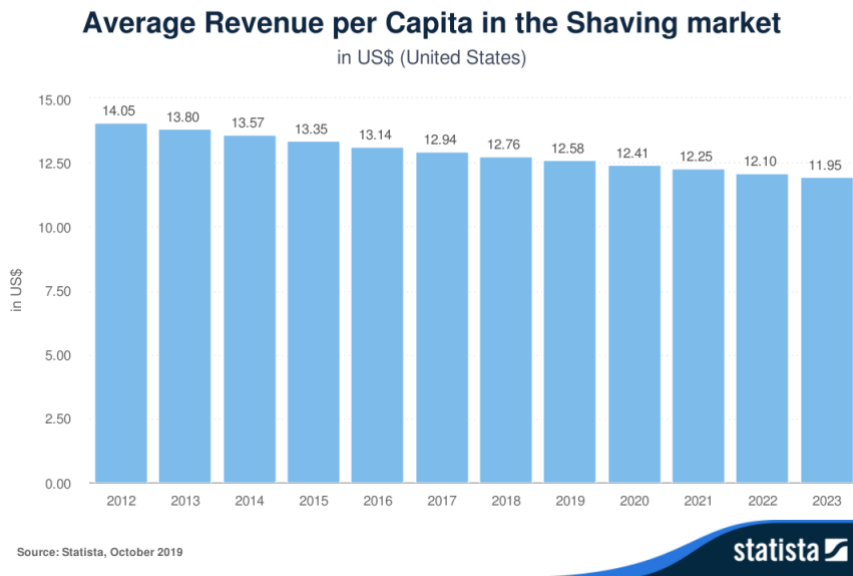
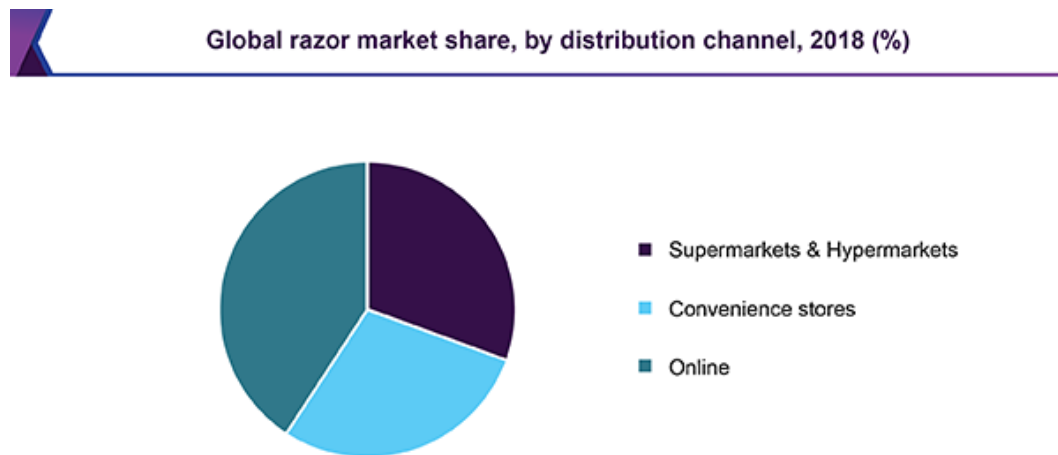


Figure 2 Source: Shaving - United States. Accessed: February 12, 2020.  
<https://www.statista.com/outlook/70070200/109/shaving/united-states>

### Exhibit 3 – Global razor market share by distribution channel 2018



Source: [www.grandviewresearch.com](http://www.grandviewresearch.com)

Source: <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/razor-market> Accessed: February 12, 2020

### Exhibit 4 – Snippets from the proposed advertisement



Source: <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2019/01/15/what-creatives-make-gillette-s-dividing-ad-toxic-masculinity>

**Exhibit 5 - Old Gillette advertisement**



Source: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/critics-call-for-boycott-of-gillette-razors-over-ad-for-me-too-era-kr0w9j5p3>

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<sup>13</sup> Dixon, B. J. & Vasey, P. L. (2012). Beards augment perceptions of men's age, social status, and aggressiveness, but not attractiveness, *Behavioral Ecology*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 481-490, Available online: <https://academic.oup.com/beheco/article/23/3/481/221987> [Accessed February 18, 2020]