

The Reality of LGBTQ Marketing Campaigns

By Gilberto Esparragoza

Journalist. Master's Student in Business Administration, Marketing Emphasis

University of Carabobo – Venezuela

Date: 2024-Ongoing

Among the main trends in global marketing, campaigns targeting the LGBTQ+ community have experienced exponential growth. The LGBTQ+ movement is one of the most prominent lobbies today in terms of human rights, making it increasingly essential for brands to engage in the wave of support for this community. These marketing campaigns are usually intended to show the support that brands seek to provide to LGBTQ+ individuals.

However, it is important to distinguish genuine LGBTQ+ marketing campaigns from what is known as *rainbow-washing*. De La Torre et al. (2020; 5) state that “rainbow-washing refers to brands that use the rainbow flag merely as a seasonal sales strategy without any active year-round commitment to inclusion.” In this regard, rainbow-washing campaigns are not considered part of authentic LGBTQ+ marketing.

There are numerous international examples that could be cited: Coca-Cola, Adidas, Nike, and Skittles—major brands that take advantage of the month of June to voice their support for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community and boost their popularity. However, this creates a double standard, where the LGBTQ+ community does not receive real support but instead sees its values and struggles exploited for commercial gain.

These rainbow-washing campaigns end up placing the LGBTQ+ collective in the spotlight for just one season, rendering their ongoing fight invisible during the rest of the year. This, in turn, hampers the efforts of NGOs and advocacy groups working to advance LGBTQ+ rights.

In Venezuela, the landscape for LGBTQ+ rights remains a constant gray cloud, full of legal and moral uncertainty due to the lack of support from state institutions and legal systems. According to a report by the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2020; 408), entrenched sexist stereotypes in Venezuelan culture use homophobia and misogyny as tools to discredit members of the LGBTQ+ community. Furthermore, the civil association Unión Afirmativa, in its report *Being LGBT in Venezuela: Information and Data for the Humanitarian Action, Development, and Peace Nexus* (2022; 16), noted that 48.1% of respondents reported experiencing at least one act of abuse and/or violence related to their sexual orientation.

Given this context, rainbow-washing campaigns could directly and negatively affect the LGBTQ+ collective and the way the average Venezuelan perceives the community, as these campaigns often fail to promote genuine values of inclusion and acceptance, and instead reinforce harmful stereotypes to generate profits.

In 2021, the brand Cocosette, owned by Nestlé, became the first gay-friendly brand in Venezuela with its campaign “*More Kisses, Fewer Labels.*” The campaign involved modifying the brand's visual identity, changing the palm trees that represent the letter “t” in its logo to include the six

colors of the LGBTQ+ pride flag. Media outlets and public opinion quickly reacted: headlines such as “Cocosses Broke Down,” published by the website *Producto*, and numerous users on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), launched a smear campaign against the brand, reinforcing what was previously noted in the UN fact-finding mission report.

Such marketing actions, which go against the true spirit of LGBTQ+ marketing, contribute to consumer perceptions that not only create a negative image of the community but also stigmatize and alienate LGBTQ+ individuals from the equality and well-being they relentlessly pursue. In this sense, it becomes imperative to ask: *What are the elements present in rainbow-washing campaigns in Venezuela that prevent them from being effective in the national context?*

References

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