Mini-Case: Procter & Gamble and the Satanism Rumor

Procter & Gamble’s original logo dates back to 1850; it depicted the man in the moon and 13 stars (representing the 13 original colonies) around the moon. The logo identified Crest toothpaste, Tide detergent, Pampers diapers—all the P&G products. Then, in 1979, there was a rumor that the company had been purchased by the Unification Church headed by the Rev. Sun Moon (followers of the church are called “Moonies”). At first, calls came in to the Consumer Services Department’s toll-free number. The company denied the rumor to consumers on the phone and also called news organizations in certain areas. Soon, the rumor changed to claim that P&G was involved in devil-worshipping, that the design of the man in the moon and 13 stars representing the original American colonies was a symbol of Satanism.

The Moonie rumor faded away, and the Satanism rumor grew. A P&G executive, according to the rumor, went on a TV show and admitted a pact with the devil to gain success for the company. (The same rumor circulated about McDonald’s and other companies.) Also, fliers were circulated, usually misspelling the company’s name, claiming that 10 percent of the company’s earnings go to the Church of Satan and advocating a boycott of P&G. Some church heads believed the rumors and advised their congregations to stop buying products from P&G.

The rumor went further and suggested that there was a 666 sign, the sign of the beast from the Book of Revelation in the Bible. Some saw 6s in the curls of the man in the moon when held up to a mirror. P&G was afraid to fight the rumor publicly because it would tell more people about it than already had heard about it. P&G sought the cooperation of religious leaders Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham, who spoke up for the company and sent out letters to 48,000 churches.

Rumors subsided but sometimes recur. Some people were prosecuted, and that helped the public realize the rumors were false. Usually, charges were dropped after apologies.

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The company started to phase out the logo in the mid-1980s, except on company letterheads and publications. It wasn’t worth the trouble, and it had already cost $100,000 to fight the rumors associated with it.