Misery as Corporate Mission:
User Imagery at the Nightclub The Spy Bar

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Abstract

Despite extensive corporate responsibility research into both *what* and *how* firms produce, research is lacking in one product category in which the *what* and *how* linkage creates questionable corporate practice – luxury products. Luxury is in some cases created by companies controlling the so-called user imagery of their customers, i.e., encouraging 'desirable' individuals to consume their products and obstructing 'undesirable' individuals from consumption. This chapter critically analyses the implications of this corporate practice based on a study of Sweden's most luxurious nightclub. The study's results show that the nightclub has organised its activities to allow categorisations of individuals into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' customers. Furthermore, the study shows that a creation of 'misery' for the vast majority of individuals (the 'undesirable') is essential for creating 'enjoyment' for the selected few (the 'desirable'). The chapter concludes by discussing implications for practitioners interested in altering this situation.

Introduction

When discussing a firm's corporate responsibility, two main issues arise. *What* products does the firm produce, and *how* does it produce these products? Researchers, as well as practitioners, have given much attention to the idea that some products are 'irresponsible' – most notably cigarettes, weapons, alcohol, and gambling products (e.g., Newton, 1993; Kinder and Domini, 1997; Elm, 1998; Havemann, 1998; Maitland, 1998; Brenkert, 2000; Green, 2000). For example, firms producing these products are often excluded from 'ethical' funds (e.g., Kinder and Domini, 1997). Similarly, much attention has been given to *how* products are produced. Lately, this debate has mainly been focused on human and workers' rights in production in developing countries. Hot research topics include the corporate embracement of codes of conduct (e.g., Frenkel, 2001; van Tulder and Kolk, 2001; Graafland, 2002; Winstanley *et al.*, 2002; Egels-Zandén, 2007), the signing of global collective agreements (e.g., Wills, 2002; Carley, 2005; Fairbrother and Hammer, 2005; Riisgaard, 2005; Anner *et al.*, 2006; Egels-Zandén and Hyllman, 2006, 2007), and corporate operations in controversial markets (e.g., Donaldson 1989, 1996; De George 1990, 1993; Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994; Carroll and Gannon, 1997; Schermerhorn, 1999). Despite the ample research into both *what* products firm produce and *how* they produce them, research is lacking in one product category in which the *what* and *how* linkage creates questionable corporate practice – luxury products.

A review of international publications on corporate responsibility in recent years clearly shows that luxury products are a neglected area of research. The likely reasons are that luxury products generally are not of 'irresponsible' nature (compared to cigarettes, alcohol, weapons, etc.), and that the quality demands and high price range often limit the abuse of human and workers' rights in production (cf. McWilliam and Siegel, 2001). Hence, since previous research has treated the *what* and *how* questions separately, luxury products have escaped its radar. However, this chapter argues that when treated together the *what* in luxury products (i.e., their exclusiveness) leads to problematic aspects of *how* the products are produced and marketed.

The purpose of this chapter is to address this gap in previous research by analysing the intersection between *what* and *how*. More specifically, we focus on the corporate practice of customer base management aimed at influencing the user imagery of the product, and critically analyse the implications of the practice. This is much needed, since previous marketing research into user imagery and luxury products has neglected the corporate responsibility aspects of this practice. Thus, corporate responsibility researchers have neglected the area of luxury products and user imagery, while marketing researchers have studied both luxury products and user imagery but ignored their corporate responsibility aspects. We base our analysis of user imagery on a study of Sweden's most luxurious nightclub – The Spy Bar. Our results show that corporate responsibility as well as marketing researchers are well advised to recognise the corporate responsibility aspects of luxury products and user imagery in future research, since the corporate practice entails critical issues for further academic and practitioner discussions.

Luxury products and user imagery

The core idea of 'luxury' is often taken to be that the product is attainable only for a limited range of consumers (e.g., Berry, 1994; Twitchell, 2002). However, recently

there has been a shift in the clientele for luxury products with more affordable, although still expensive, alternatives for 'normal' people being launched (e.g., Twitchell, 2002; Allères, 2005). It is problematic to define 'luxury' precisely (e.g., Dubois *et al.*, 1995; Vigneron and Johnson, 1999), although most people in practice can categorise products into 'luxury' and 'non-luxury' products. In this chapter, luxury is defined as products that are widely desired and more expensive than what their utility motivates (cf. Berry, 1994; Twitchell, 2002). Hence, luxury products are primarily consumed because of their meaning to us rather than because of their utility. Consequently, brand-meaning creation is central to the creation of luxury.

Brand meaning is created partly through product design and market communication, but also through the communication between stakeholders in society (Balmer and Gray, 2000) in the form of, for example, public speech and print (Twitchell, 2002), word-of-mouth (Keller, 2003), and user imagery (Aaker, 1996). The idea of *user imagery* is that values are transferred to a brand through the people who are associated with it, i.e., that the brand meaning is dependent on those associated with the brand (cf. McCracken, 1989). This includes both companies' employees and the users of the product (Keller, 2000). Hence, consumers' perceptions of the brand users affect their perception of the meaning of the brand (Aaker, 1996; Schroeder, 2005; Brioschi, 2006). This relationship works in both ways. If 'desirable' individuals consume the brand it instils values of 'luxury' into the brand, and if 'undesirable' individuals consume the brand it has the opposite effect.

This idea of user imagery has led firms to invest in *ideal* users such as sponsored athletes, spokespersons, and people portrayed in advertising to promote the luxury of the brand (Aaker, 1996). The ideal users should not be confused with the target group for the brand, but should rather be seen as a reflection of the image that the firm wants to offer the target group (cf. Kapferer, 1994). In contrast to the ideal user who uses a brand because he or she is financially compensated for doing so, the *typical* users are those individuals actually using the brand (Aaker, 1996). In the same way as spokespersons, but arguably even more powerfully, these users instil the brand with values by conveying what can be seen as a visual word-of-mouth (cf. Twitchell, 2002; Keller, 2003). The focus in this chapter is on attempts to manage these typical users in order to improve the user imagery.

In essence, user imagery can be used as a tool to create a boundary between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' individuals. Framed in this way, it is clear that user imagery is based on the more general marketing ideal of identifying and targeting certain customer groups. Traditionally, this practice is referred to as positioning, which entails segmenting consumers into distinct but homogeneous target groups that require similar marketing mixes (e.g., Kapferer, 1994; Aaker, 1996; Keller, 2003). In these positioning strategies, any addition of customers not belonging to the target group is seen as a bonus – a *positive* side effect. However, when applying the user imagery logic, additional customers are seen as a *negative* side effect if they are from the 'undesirable' group. Since the consumers are perceived not only as income generators, but also as image creators, it is rational for purveyors of luxury to turn away potential consumers if their undesirable characteristics would taint the luxury brand's image. In other words, by employing customer base management to improve brand image, companies sacrifice short-term financial gain to create brand meaning. In creating brand meaning, user imagery plays a more central role for luxury products than for other product categories,

since conventional branding activities are ineffective for luxury products (cf. Baker, 2006). Hence, brand meaning has to be created in alternative ways for luxury products, and companies have to rely more on influencing social discourses through tools such as user imagery than on traditional activities (cf. Twitchell, 2002).

The boundary creation between 'desirable' and 'undesirable' customers can be expected to affect a person's perception of herself. Several authors have shown that consumption is closely linked to the construction of identities (e.g., Levy, 1959; McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988), and that this is especially so in consumption of luxury products (Berry, 1994; Vigneron and Johnson, 2004). Hence, by classifying an individual as a 'desirable'/'undesirable' consumer, companies influence individuals' identities. As will be shown in the study presented in this chapter, this influence can literally lead to matters of life or death. Despite these corporate responsibility implications, prior research into user imagery has neglected these aspects and solely focused on how firms strategically can employ user imagery to improve the brand personality (e.g., Aaker, 1996). Simultaneously, corporate responsibility research has neglected the topics of luxury and user imagery, leading to a lack of critical analysis of the implications of this type of corporate practice.

Method

To analyse how corporations strive to achieve user imagery through customer base management in luxury products, we make use of data from a study of Sweden's most luxurious nightclub – The Spy Bar. Data were collected via interviews, observations, and document analysis. The focus in the data collection was on studying the operations of the nightclub in relation to user imagery and customer base management. The Spy Bar is unusual in the sense that individuals from a security firm are the only individuals that the customers interacted with (except for bartenders and DJs). This is true also for the presentation of The Spy Bar on its webpage and in media articles in which the CEO of the security company – rather than the CEO of the nightclub – is the front figure for the nightclub. Thus, the nightclub has outsourced all significant interaction with customers to an independent security company. This has the effect that the head of security at The Spy Bar (also the CEO of the security company) is well known among the general public in Sweden. Given the importance of the security officers, they were the chosen focus in our data collection.

In total, 12 semi-structured interviews (lasting on average one hour) were made with the security officers (including the CEO) working at The Spy Bar. A handful of additional interviews were also made with representatives for The Spy Bar. These interviews were mainly used to provide a background understanding of the directives provided by The Spy Bar management to the security officers. Additionally, 15 semi-structured interviews (lasting on average 30 minutes) were made with customers inside The Spy Bar and potential customers queuing outside the nightclub.

In addition to interviews, observations were conducted during four evenings at the nightclub. During the observation study, the researcher closely followed the security officers' work and interaction with customers. In parts of the observation study, access was granted to the two-way radios used by the security officers. The observation study was focused on two central aspects of the security officers' work – the selection of customers outside the nightclub and the disciplining of customers inside the nightclub.

Finally, written documentation (in the form of web pages and media articles) was used as both input to interviews and as validation of the data received through observations and interviews. There were few inconsistencies between the data obtained in interviews and observations, but some between the data presented in the written documentation and the observations/interviews. In cases of inconsistencies, these were sometimes discussed with the security officers, and we based the descriptions presented below mainly on the data provided in the interviews and observations, since these seemed more reliable than the media articles and web pages.

The collected data were used to construct thick descriptions of the activities of the security officers. To validate the descriptions, they were sent to the CEO of the security company, who expressed no critique regarding the descriptions of their work. Based on these descriptions of the security officers' activities and the interviews with customers and The Spy Bar management, a 'typical' nightclub evening was constructed (as presented in the empirical section below). Evidently, there are problems in constructing a 'typical' nightclub evening, since nothing is 'typical' in corporate practice. However, this was perceived as the best way to present the empirical data in order to convey an understanding of a nightclub evening at The Spy Bar to the reader.

Night clubs belong to a specific category of luxury products. As shown by Allères (2005), luxury can be divided into different price levels. There is the inaccessible luxury level of yachts and mansions, the intermediate level of cars, watches, and hotels, and finally the accessible level where, although the products are more expensive than their substitutes, most people can afford to buy them should they wish to do so. This level covers, for example, champagne, perfume, and the empirical focus of this chapter: nightclub visits. In focusing on nightclub visits, i.e., on attainable luxury products, the purpose of this chapter is not to discuss the problems related to the first two types of offerings and, hence, to question the excluding nature of prices. Rather, the purpose of this chapter is to analyse those products that are attainable for most individuals. In these cases, the limitation has to be achieved in other ways than through prices, and as is shown in this chapter one way to achieve this is influencing user imagery via customer base management.

A 'typical' evening at the nightclub The Spy Bar

After midnight on a regular Friday evening, a large crowd stands outside a small entrance to a nightclub – The Spy Bar – in the city of Stockholm (the capital of Sweden). Separating the queuing individuals from the nightclub is a red rope, and inside the rope numerous security officers dressed in black suits control the queue, carefully selecting who should be allowed to enter the club. The queue is different from the traditional linear queue. It does not even look like a queue; rather, like an unstructured ocean of people. The head of the security officers (also the CEO of the security company) explains that this queue structure is generally referred to as a 'rainbow' queue, and that the purpose of the queue is to allow the security officers to freely select who is allowed to enter the nightclub without having to consider how long each individual has waited outside the club. The CEO mainly controls the selection of individuals himself, making him an influential and well-known figure in Swedish nightlife. He has, for example, been invited to go on tours around Sweden as a celebrity security officer.

While the selection procedure is extremely strict at this hour, it was easier to enter the nightclub earlier in the evening. Then, individuals were allowed to enter who now would not even come close to the 'desirability' status of the selected few that are allowed entrance. The security officers explain this by referring to the need for the nightclub to receive revenues throughout the evening, and that they have fewer individuals to select from early on in the evening. At this hour, the possibility to select individuals is seemingly endless. The management of The Spy Bar has defined the characteristics of those that are to be allowed to enter the nightclub, and the security officers do their best to implement these directives in practice. When asked what they are searching for in a customer, the security officers have difficulties providing a precise answer. Rather, they provide a list of characteristics to exemplify what they are after. Guests are to be celebrities, over 25 years of age, from the city centre, dressed in Gucci, trendy, financially wealthy, journalists, stockbrokers, real estate agents and/or CEOs. While those few with just the 'right' characteristics enter the nightclub quickly, the vast majority of guests wait outside for often over an hour, uncertain whether they will be allowed entrance. The length of the wait is also difficult to predict, since the 'rainbow' queue system provides no signals regarding whether, and if so when, a person will be allowed to enter.

The selection of individuals is a complex and sometimes ruthless process. The security officers establish contact with the visitors through body language and eye contact. Rarely, if ever, is there any verbal communication between the security officers and the visitors other than to inform someone to enter the nightclub or to impolitely answer visitors' attempts to persuade the officers to allow them entrance. Occasionally, the security officers signal (in a hardly noticeable way) to groups of individuals that they are to walk around the block and return without certain members of the group. Hence, the officers force groups to be split into the 'desirable' who will be allowed to enter and the 'undesirable' who will not.

Sporadically, celebrities arrive at the nightclub, walking past the crowd and straight into the club. This does not seem to surprise anyone. However, sporadically some individuals are allowed to enter the nightclub without fitting the expected characteristics of a Spy Bar customer. The queuing visitors quickly recognise this (they are often highly skilled themselves in judging the likeliness of others entering), and discussions start in the crowd. Some of these unexpected guests wear visible signs indicating that they are part of well-known criminal groups, while other unexpected guests seem to have a close relationship with some of the security officers (most often the CEO). Another surprising event to those in the queue is that some celebrities arrive highly confident of their chances to enter the club, but are denied entrance. This includes famous Swedish actors and Olympic winning sportsmen. Seemingly humiliated, these celebrities are forced to leave the queue and continue to another nightclub. Loud discussions start among the other queuing individuals, focused on understanding why these celebrities were not allowed to enter. Did the security officers not recognise them? Are the officers incompetent? Are they incapable of making a 'fair' selection?

The answer to why the celebrities were denied access to the nightclub is found inside the club. Here, the security officers are responsible for inducing the 'right' atmosphere to the nightclub. This mainly involves assisting guests and ensuring that no acts of violence occur throughout the evening, but it also involves disciplining individuals to

behave in a 'correct' way. For instance, visitors standing in certain areas of the nightclub or attempting to climb onto the window-ledges are quickly and harshly reprimanded. If an individual, despite these reprimands, does not comply with the 'correct' behaviour, the security officers either make him/her leave the nightclub or restrict the individual's future entrance to the club. Such previous acts of 'incorrectness' (although of more severe nature) were the reasons for denying the above-discussed celebrities entrance to the nightclub.

In addition to disciplining customers inside the nightclub, the security officers are responsible for ensuring that only 'highly desirable' individuals are allowed entrance to the VIP areas within the club. The Spy Bar is thus really two, or even more, nightclubs, sharing little more than the same portal. In this way, the security officers' sorting of individuals into categories continues inside the nightclub as well.

About forty-five minutes before closing time, the security officers stop allowing individuals to enter the nightclub. However, this is not signalled to those in the queue, leading many to queue until the club closes. The evening ends with the security officers lining up outside the club, making sure that everything runs smoothly when the customers leave.

The role of user imagery

The conducted study clearly illustrates that the security officers at The Spy Bar use customer base management to influence the user imagery and the nightclub brand in the desired direction. Hence, this study confirms the arguments and results of previous studies that corporations in practice use customer base management to influence user imagery (e.g., Aaker, 1996; Twitchell, 2002). In the case of The Spy Bar, this practice was explicitly demanded by The Spy Bar management and consciously implemented by the security officers. The security officers even regarded customer base management as one of the most – if not the most – important of their work tasks. As the CEO of the security company noted: "Popular nightclubs have strategically organised their activities in order to sort people into an A class and a B class. The entire organisation from the interior to the queue system is designed for this purpose." Furthermore, most security officers did not regard this as problematic or disturbing. Rather, it was seen as the common practice among luxurious nightclubs, a necessary strategy for creating the luxury status of the club.

The Spy Bar's focus on user imagery via customer base management should be seen in the light of the fact that the club had ample opportunities to select customers. Since a nightclub visit is an attainable luxury product (cf. Allères, 2005), most individuals can afford an evening at The Spy Bar and, given the perception of the club as the most luxurious club in Sweden, numerous individuals attempt to spend an evening at the club. However, the club is limited in size by the building it is occupying, so even if the security officers desired to allow all interested individuals to enter the club, this would be impossible. Hence, the club is in the rare situation that demand for its product vastly exceeds the supply and that the supply capability cannot easily be increased.

The security officers used customer base management to influence user imagery in two main ways. First, and most importantly, when selecting who should be allowed to enter the nightclub. The 'rainbow' queue system at The Spy Bar was an important tool for

selecting who was allowed to enter. By creating a crowd of individuals outside the red rope that marks the division between inside and outside the nightclub, the security officers were able to continuously choose individuals who were perceived as 'desirable'. These 'desirable' individuals included royalties, 'celebrities', wealthy individuals, and 'cool' individuals. Importantly, an individual's spending capability was not the main criterion for the security officers' selections; rather, the officers attempted to identify an "appearance of luxuriousness". The 'undesirable' individuals, on the other hand, included overweight, poorly dressed, and 'ugly' individuals (especially if these were also immigrants and/or not from the city centre). These individuals were consciously restricted from entering the nightclub, regardless of their spending capability. In addition to the categories 'desirable' and 'undesirable', the security officers sorted individuals into a 'potentially desirable'/'not undesirable' category. This category filled a central role for the nightclub, to create a queue as large as possible outside the nightclub. Hence, the security officers consciously attempted to maximise the queue outside the club both to create an appearance of popularity, and to communicate that even the seemingly – to an outside observer – 'cool' and 'desirable' individuals in the queue were not 'desirable' *enough* to enter the nightclub. This practice can be understood as a negative user imagery message: these seemingly desirable individuals are not even qualified to be 'typical' users of The Spy Bar.

Second, in addition to the queue system, the security officers used customer base management inside the club. First, in a similar fashion as outside, there were restricted 'VIP' areas within the club, open only to especially 'desirable' individuals. Second, the security officers disciplined individuals inside the nightclub who did not act as a 'desirable' individual ought to act. This included evident behaviour such as acts of violence and sexual harassment, but also standing in certain parts of the nightclub and addressing the security officers in the 'wrong' way. Thus, besides being sorted into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' on the basis of mainly external attributes via different queue systems, individuals were sorted into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' through their behaviour inside the nightclub. 'Undesirable' behaviour occasionally led to individuals being forced to leave the club, but more frequently to being restricted in future attempts to enter the club. The sorting of individuals into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' continued throughout the customers' nightclub visit and affected their future classification. However, since there is not a perfect relation between 'desirable' external attributes and 'desirable' behaviour, some individuals who had 'desirable' external attributes were denied access to the nightclub due to behavioural aspects. For others who were unaware of the behavioural 'problems' of these individuals, this practice sent the message that the security officers were poorly skilled at recognising 'desirability', in turn potentially threatening the nightclub's user image.

Misery as corporate mission

There are several implications of the security officers' classification of individuals into 'desirable' and 'undesirable'. First, the 'undesirable' individuals risk spending their weekend queuing outside the nightclub. It is common that individuals spend hours in the queue outside the nightclub, and still are not allowed entrance. Despite this, they return the next weekend to repeat the procedure. Since the 'rainbow' queue system restricts contact with the security officers, individuals receive no signals of whether they are to be allowed to enter the club or not. Hence, they may – and many in fact do – spend much of their weekend queuing outside The Spy Bar. Such behaviour can be considered

desperate, suggesting a self-fulfilling process that might render them ever less desirable to the security officers who remember them.

Second, and even more important, the classification of individuals into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' not only influences individuals' weekend activities, but also their perception of themselves. Numerous authors have shown that consumption is closely linked to individuals' construction of their identities (e.g., Levy, 1959; McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988), and that this is especially so in consumption of luxury products (Berry, 1994). Hence, to be classified as 'desirable' or 'undesirable' potentially affects individuals' perception of themselves. The vast majority of visitors to The Spy Bar are uncertain of their status when arriving at the nightclub, with only a handful confident of being allowed to enter the club. That most individuals are uncertain of their 'desirability' makes them susceptible to security officers' classifications. Our study's results also indicate that the security officers influence the visitors' perception of themselves –in both positive and negative ways. The few who are allowed to enter seem to experience improved self-confidence (at least temporarily) in perceiving themselves as successful individuals. On the other hand, the majority who are restricted from entering seem to experience diminished self-confidence (at least temporarily) in perceiving themselves as less successful than they had thought. In an age when individuals are increasingly uncertain of their identity and value (e.g., Gabriel and Lang, 2006), these 'desirability' signals plausibly have important implications for individuals' identities.

Moving from an individual to an organisational level, the links between the security officers' actions and individuals' identities provide an overall understanding of luxurious nightclubs' operations. As much as nightclubs are providing a service in the form of entertainment, they are also providing a service in ranking of individuals. The results of our study indicate that individuals do not mainly visit the nightclub for the music, drinks etc., but rather for the potential to feel 'desirable', 'successful' and 'exclusive'. However, in order for a selected few to feel this, the majority has to be categorised oppositely – as 'undesirable', 'unsuccessful' and 'ordinary'. This is achieved through creating a widespread queue of 'undesirable' individuals outside the club – individuals to whom the few 'desirable' can feel superior. Hence, while the mission of nightclubs is to create a feeling of 'successfulness' among the selected few, it is also to create a feeling of 'unsuccessfulness' or 'misery' among the vast majority of individuals interested in visiting the club. The nightclubs (and in the Spy Bar case the security officers) have become judges of our times, classifying individuals into an A and a B group while simultaneously promoting everyone's wish to be in the A group.

This categorisation of individuals as 'undesirable' is not always accepted by the undesirable, making them strike back. In the studied case, this resistance mainly took the form of verbal abuse of the security officers, but sometimes it also led to threats and acts of violence. When reflecting on these forms of resistance, the CEO of the security company said: "In practice, the 'rainbow' queue system leads to increased frustration and disorder among the guests – the opposite of the task of a security officer." Hence, the CEO of the security company was aware of the connections between their practices aimed at creating an exclusive user imagery and the resistance of the 'undesirable'. In extreme cases, the resistance has led to devastating consequences with frustrated 'undesirables', returning after being denied entrance to the nightclub, firing weapons into the queues and at the security officers. This has occurred several times in The Spy

Bar area, although not directly at the nightclub itself. Hence, the practice of categorising individuals into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' customers to improve the user imagery can have severe implications, not only for the security officers but also for the individuals queuing outside the nightclub.

Cracks in the façade

So far, the analysis of the role of user imagery at The Spy Bar has focused on the instances where security officers manage the customer base according to the nightclub's mission. However, there are also instances when this is not the case – when there are cracks in the façade. The most obvious such crack is that the 'desirability' of an individual seems related to when the individual attempts to enter the nightclub. A 'desirable' individual at 10-11 p.m. is often an 'undesirable' individual at 1-3 a.m. (not to mention at 4 a.m.). This is both because 'desirable' individuals only enter the nightclub scene after midnight, and because it is important for the profitability of the nightclub to receive revenues throughout the evening. This practice can be referred to as a 'geek tax' in the sense that, by entering the club early and spending money throughout the evening, otherwise 'undesirable' individuals buy themselves an entrance ticket to the club. However, the consequence of this practice is that 'undesirable' individuals are at the club later in the evening when the 'desirable' individuals arrive. Hence, the 'desirable' individuals are faced with 'undesirable' ones inside the club, potentially making them doubt the exclusiveness of the club and the 'success factor' of the clientele. Partly, the nightclub solves this by having VIP rooms, protecting highly 'desirable' individuals from mingling with 'undesirable' ones – but partly the 'problem' remains.

An additional crack in the exclusive user image façade is that the security officers allow some 'undesirable' individuals to enter despite an ample supply of 'desirable' candidates in the queue. This initially puzzling observation is partly explained by some of these 'undesirable' individuals having personal relations with the security officers. The security officers themselves would probably not have been classified as 'desirable' according to their own standards, and neither would their friends. However, since decision-makers are complex individuals (e.g., Sjöstrand, 1997), as well as boundedly rational (e.g., Simon, 1957; Cyert and March, 1963), they make decisions that are not necessarily in line with the corporate mission. The security officers sometimes prioritised assisting their friends over following the corporate mission, leading to 'undesirable' individuals being allowed to enter the nightclub. In addition to friends, other 'undesirable' individuals who still were allowed entrance belonged to criminal groups, and were given access to the nightclub in order for the security officers and the nightclub to avoid repercussions.

In sum, to enter the nightclub an individual has to be either 'desirable', or 'undesirable' but willing to pay a 'geek tax', or have a personal relationship with the security officers, or belong to a criminal group. Hence, there were several groups of individuals who, for different reasons, were allowed to enter the nightclub and who did not fit the characteristics of a 'desirable' individual. The practice of customer base management to improve user imagery seems, then, to be somewhat difficult to implement in practice, despite conscious attempts by The Spy Bar management. These cracks in the façade appeared to affect the user imagery negatively, with some individuals noting that the nightclub was not as 'exclusive' and 'successful' as they expected. Consequently, the

instances of security officers' selection 'failures' negatively affected the nightclub's user imagery.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that corporate responsibility researchers need to broaden their perspective and analyse the intersection between *what* products are produced and *how* they are produced, in order to capture central corporate responsibility issues. It has also shown that marketing researchers are well advised to include aspects of corporate responsibility in their analyses of user imagery. By addressing these gaps in previous research, the chapter has provided an initial study of the corporate responsibility implications of firms' customer base management strategies aimed at creating an exclusive user imagery. The study's results are distressing, indicating that some companies consciously organise their entire operations in order to sort individuals into 'desirable' and 'undesirable' categories. Furthermore, the employees sorting individuals often do not perceive this as problematic or unethical, despite being aware of the negative effects of their actions on the 'undesirable' individuals. They are just "doing their job".

Based on these results, the chapter has argued that exclusive nightclubs have two sides – one focused on entertaining the selected few and one focused on depreciating the vast majority. This 'enjoyment' and 'misery' of nightclubs are two sides of the same coin, with some people's 'enjoyment' being dependent on the 'misery' of others and vice versa. Indeed, the same duality may well be implied by the name of the nightclub The Spy Bar, since 'spy' is not only an English word meaning to see exclusive things, but also a Swedish word meaning 'to vomit'. More fundamentally, of course, it is a duality inherent in any society affluent and competitive enough to divide people into extreme winners and abject losers.

The conducted study has important implications for practitioners interested in altering the situation at exclusive nightclubs. First, the so-called 'rainbow' queue structure could be replaced by a regular queue system. This would shorten the time individuals spend in queues, force the security officers to inform and justify to each customer why he/she is not welcome, and decrease the frustration induced by the queue system. This fairly simple alteration in the operations of the nightclubs would significantly reduce the problems caused by the striving for an exclusive user image. Second, and more radically, the private security firms could be replaced by police officers, weakening the control of nightclub management on the selection and categorisation of individuals. Such a change would challenge the entire corporate organising for creation of an exclusive user imagery, compelling nightclub management to find alternative (and hopefully less problematic) ways of creating 'exclusiveness'.

Acknowledgment

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