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CHECKERS “SIMPLE TRUTH” CAMPAIGN: GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS IN TRANSPARENCY
A Case Study in Celebrity Endorsement, Marketing, and Governance Dynamics

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The recent Checkers campaign, featuring British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver, South African rugby stars Pieter-Steph du Toit and Trevor Nyakane, and former Carte Blanche anchor Devi Sankaree Govender, has sparked discussion not just about marketing but also about governance. Titled the “**Simple Truth**”, the campaign uses a lie detector test to emphasize the transparency and reliability of Checkers' product range. While this is a clever marketing approach, it raises important governance implications for brands, endorsers, and competitors alike.

The campaign's strategic context

Checkers' "Simple Truth" campaign is a strategic move to position its products as trustworthy and ethically sourced. By enlisting Jamie Oliver, a global advocate for healthy eating, including local celebrities, Checkers taps into the growing consumer demand for authenticity. The lie detector theme conducted by Devi Sankaree Govender is a novel approach, designed to entertain while reinforcing the message of transparency and trust.

This campaign is not just about selling products; it's about selling a narrative of integrity. However, the involvement of Govender -- known for her relentless pursuit of truth on Carte Blanche and the Devi Show -- adds a significant layer to this narrative. Govender's reputation for uncovering the truth lends credibility to the campaign, suggesting that the "Simple Truth" promise is not just a marketing claim but a verified commitment. Her presence underscores the campaign's alignment with ethical journalism and governance principles, making it a noteworthy element in the broader context of consumer trust. Moreover, social media platforms -- where this campaign is prominently featured -- are becoming critical arenas for shaping consumer perceptions. Unlike annual integrated reports (AIRs), which few ordinary stakeholders read, social media adverts like this one have immediate and widespread influence.

The "believability" factor of such campaigns may soon become a key determinant of brand preference, placing greater demands on governance and regulatory oversight.

Governance implications for celebrities and brands

The involvement of high-profile endorsers like Jamie Oliver, the Springbok Rugby players, and Devi Sankaree Govender amplifies the stakes. Their reputations are on the line *if* the campaign's claims are not entirely accurate. This is a governance risk that both Checkers and the endorsers must manage carefully. Robust governance practices, including due diligence and contractual safeguards, are essential to mitigate these risks. Celebrities should ensure



that their endorsements are backed by verifiable claims, and brands must have mechanisms in place to continuously monitor any claims made against the product or the organisation.

The Checkers' campaign raises the bar for integrated reporting: the promises made on social media can be more readily and transparently challenged, making it easier to hold the endorsers and Checkers accountable. Unfortunately, the fact that the non-financial information contained in the AIR is not necessarily independently substantiated often undermines the credibility of these reports. The pressure to ensure that the content of the AIR aligns with the verifiable and lived actions of the organisation has just been intensified.

Governance codes

Governance codes like **King IV™** in South Africa and the **UK Corporate Governance Code** provide frameworks for ethical leadership and transparency. King IV™, with its principles of ethical leadership and sustainable value creation, emphasizes integrated reporting and stakeholder engagement. King V™ may further address emerging risks through Practice Notes akin to those found in King IV™ and include guidelines to mitigate risks arising from social media marketing campaigns and reinforce the importance of digital transformation and real-time governance insights.

Both King IV™ and King V™ follow an **"apply and explain" philosophy**, requiring boards to justify their governance approaches, including how marketing claims are verified. Similarly, the UK Corporate Governance Code, updated in 2024 and which adopts a "comply or explain" philosophy, highlights sustainability, risk management, and stakeholder engagement, with provisions that address monitoring internal controls within governance frameworks.

The Checkers' campaign **cleverly bypasses traditional reporting mechanisms** to influence consumer trust directly. If organisations emulate this trend without robust verification, the risk of misleading claims and reputational damage rises, placing pressure on regulatory frameworks to safeguard truthful and accurate reporting.

Early warning signs for competitors

A pertinent insight is: *"When an organisation fails to sustain continuous improvement in its product or service, that stagnation creates an opportunity for competitors -- even those with minor structural advantages -- to gain a strategic edge."*

Checkers' campaign highlights how high standards of governance can be a competitive advantage. Those who fail to take on the challenge risk losing market share. Digitised governance frameworks, which provide real-time, verified governance insights, are crucial for influencing market trends and consumer sentiments. The digital governance framework penetrates the whole organisation and equips leaders with the data needed to make astute decisions.

The Checkers' campaign is a wake-up call for competitors to reevaluate their governance practices. As Michael Judin (a member of King IV™ panel) wisely stated, *"In the digital marketplace, trust is currency - and it must be protected with the same rigour as any financial asset."*

Conclusion

The Checkers “Simple Truth” campaign delivers a **governance challenge**, highlighting the intersection of consumer trust and governance. While the requirement to ensure that claims about products, services and sustainability can be substantiated has always been there, social media is raising the stakes and making it increasingly easier to hold boards and organisations accountable. These new realities are reshaping governance. Business leaders, boards of directors and senior executives cannot afford to stand still if they want to remain credible and complete in this dynamic environment.

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