ENG3004 Assignment 1 Ho Cheuk Yin 19060108D

Topic: Volkswagen (VW) emission scandal

In this Volkswagen emission scandal, it was a devastating act of damaging the company’s brand image to the public, as well as a greedy act of circumventing the regulations in order to enter the US market to gain sales. VW, as one of the largest leading company in the field of automotive, has made a terrible decision to receive a major negative impact in company reputation and also damages to the environment in the US by committing to this fraud in their vehicles.

In terms of the professional dimensions of VW, the fundamentals of being in a professionalism is that they will follow and comply with the highest standards of ethic while maintaining integrity, courtesy and honesty. VW as one of the leading company in the automotive field should be defined as the professional in vehicle engineering as it is one of their duties to provide high quality products (vehicles) to customers in this world. According to their company’s vision statement, it is stated that “to make this world a mobile, sustainable place with access to all the citizens.” [1] However, in order to achieve the global reach they stated, like in the US market, they cheated through implementing AI software that controls the amount of pollution released when it detects the vehicle is under testing in lab to bypass the environmental regulations in the US. By this decision, the company was already making unethical decisions by lying to the public and government parties about their vehicle’s pollution level. In addition, this act of fraud is an irresponsible action to the corporate social responsibility such that it violates rules to increase their profits. This is in no way of achieving professional with their actions. As a consequence, VW is not contributing to the society in a positive way by using their profession in automotive field, let alone of achieving sustainability with their vehicles.

In terms of social dimensions, with reference to the above VW’s vision statement, in respect with sustainability, there are three factors that contribute to a sustainable engineering development. This includes Environment, Economic and Society. When all three areas of sustainability is achieved and balanced, human well-being is also achieved and the development is defined as sustainable. However, in the VW’s emission scandal, there is no doubt that VW has chosen to increase their economic growth instead of contributing to the progress of conserving the environment. As a result, VW’s act of emission fraud is a negative impact on both the environment and to the general public by being misleading on their claims of “clean diesel” engine vehicles in their marketing ads and social media platforms. When a company is committing to provide misleading information on their products to fool the general public into buying their products, they are using the public as their tools of earning more profits such that in this case, VW used their brand image with media advertisements and advancements in their automotive technologies to fool the public to think that their diesel engine vehicles are clean and environmentally friendly. This shows that VW is using their profession for their own needs of increasing profits while using the public’s trust in their brand and is irresponsible to the social and caused a negative public perception of engineers.

Another point in the social dimension side of this event is the attitude of VW when being proved there are issues in their vehicles. According to the interview video of a group of engineering students in the TV program 60 Minutes [3], the company was showing their ignorance and arrogance to the group of students when they had been doing multiple experiments where all the data also showed the difference of pollution level in normal driving and lab testing while VW challenged back the group of students with claims of the use of improper testing methodologies and equipment. There have been over 10 meetings between VW officials and emission regulators over a year such that every time the regulators pointed out the disparity in the data. VW’s attitude is still being dismissive and arrogant with every meeting until there’s an undeniable evidence that caused VW finally admits that they have been cheating in their vehicles to bypass the emission regulations. This shows the company’s sole objective of profiting from the public without admitting self’s mistakes in their inability of achieving the emission regulations. With this ruthless policy of VW, there will only have negative impact on the company’s social perception such that the public will think that VW is not a professional company and will commit to unethical strategies to increase profit. As a result, VW’s strategy is only doing more harm than good with their sales, as well as suffering loss of brand image, profits and being irresponsible to the society and the environment.

In response to the engineers in VW, it is no doubt that they did not follow and uphold their code of conducts as an engineer. As an engineer who owns a profession and is professional in certain field of study, it is important that an engineer should use their acquired knowledge and qualifications to contribute to the society and be responsible to different stakeholders in the society. According to the HKIE Code of Conducts [2], there are a couple important parties that an engineer needs to be responsible to. In the scope of VW’s engineers, they did not uphold the responsibility of contributing to the reputation, standing and dignity of the engineering profession as VW is trying to use their technologies to fight against the authorities to circumvent regulations, which is not moral and unethical as an engineer. Another reason why the VW engineer did not uphold their code of conduct is because of the irresponsibility to the public, which is also one of the important stakeholders in the code of conducts. It is clear that VW’s emission scandal is not for the interest of the general public. The dirty diesel engines are harming the environment, health, safety and also the wealth of the citizens who use VW’s vehicle for travel. While VW’s engineers were not being professional at their profession, they were also being unethical and dishonest at business level as well. They knew before launching the cars to the US market that their new engine technologies will not pass the emission regulations in the US. However, they chose to hide the truth and thought of a dishonest method of bypassing the issues without withdrawing the launch of the vehicles because of their greed in profit. In another words, they did not discharge their duties to their employers with integrity and it is unethical of them to abandon the corporate social responsibility for the sake of company’s economic growth. Therefore, VW’s engineers did not uphold their code of conduct but to bring harm to public through the use of their profession, as well as failing to use ethical methods to achieve profit growth.

To sum up, VW’s emission scandal is a clear example of how a company fails to uphold its corporate social responsibility by using the public’s trust, their profession in automotive technologies in the objective of increase profit. It creates negative impacts of the image of engineering profession and the VW brand. In addition, the VW engineers, one of the major stakeholders of this event, are also responsible for the inability to uphold their code of conducts and fulfill their duties to their employers to be ethical in a business standard.

# References

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[3] *German auto giant Volkswagen caught lying on a spectacular scale | 60 Minutes Australia*. YouTube, 2019.