



WOKE CULTURE REVOLUTION – A CASE STUDY OF LAYER'S SHOT CONTROVERSIAL ADVERTISEMENT

* Miss. Rashmi Mishra
** Dr. Gayatri Indrakanti

* Research Scholar, S.K. Somaiya College, Somaiya Vidyavihar University.

** Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, S.K. Somaiya College, Somaiya Vidyavihar University

Abstract

It is common for a word or phrase to enter the mainstream as language changes and develops, leaving many people perplexed about its true meaning. The term "woke" originally meant merely the "past simple of wake," as in to wake up or become awake. The definition of the word has significantly evolved in the current day, and in 2017, the dictionary was updated to reflect the new definition of "woke." The dictionary describes the term as being "chiefly US slang" and adding the following definition: "Aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)." The advertising industry is likewise not an exception. Marketing controversies are nothing new. Advertisers strive to draw viewers' attention to their product at all costs. They are constantly seeking approaches to do that. Others unintentionally or purposely become embroiled in contentious matters, which can be detrimental to their brand's reputation. Some advertisers have seen great success with controversial ad campaigns, while others have faced detrimental impacts on their businesses. Advertisers sometimes breach moral standards and challenge oversight organizations, whether openly or covertly. When faced with protests, marketers may pause airing specific ads temporarily or seek legal recourse. This research paper centers on the breach of advertising ethics in Indian advertising, spotlighting Layer's Shot advertisement as a case study due to its backlash. The paper aims to explore its effects on the audience and identify the loopholes present in controversial advertisements.

Keyword: Woke Culture, Controversial Advertisement, Advertising Ethics.

Copyright © 2024 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

Introduction:

Woke culture, a contemporary societal movement, emphasizes social justice, equality, and challenging systemic injustices. It involves critical analysis of ingrained prejudices and promotes empathy, understanding, and solidarity with marginalized communities. This movement focuses on addressing issues of race, gender, class, and their interconnectedness, known as intersectionality. While

it has been praised for addressing systemic inequalities, it has faced criticism for silencing dissenting views and emphasizing identity politics over individual merit.

Originating from the African American community and the civil rights movement, the term "woke" initially described awareness of racism, prejudice, and inequality. Its popularity surged after the Trayvon Martin murder and subsequent Black Lives Matter movement. Social media played a crucial role in

spreading and mobilizing support through hashtag movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, leading to societal changes. Woke culture has also permeated popular culture through films like "Get Out" and "Moonlight," highlighting social concerns. It has expanded to include various social justice issues like environmental action, LGBTQ+ rights, and gender inequality.

Defining Controversial Advertising:

Controversy advertising, a subset of advertising recognized in the 1970s, often gets mistaken for related forms like social marketing or advocacy advertising. While social marketing addresses health or social issues, controversy advertising tackles contentious, multi-dimensional problems without proposing a specific solution, unlike advocacy advertising.

Despite its relevance, controversy advertising hasn't received ample research attention. The International Advertising Association conducted a comprehensive study, "Controversy Advertising: How Advertisers Present Points of View in Public Affairs," recognizing the need to explore this emerging field. Initially, various terms like "public-interest advertising" or "opinion advertising" were considered, but "controversy" was chosen for its wide-ranging engagement, sparking discussion without limiting viewpoints.

The official definition by the International Advertising Association describes controversy advertising as any paid public communication in a conventional advertising medium presenting information or a viewpoint on a recognized controversial issue from an identified source.

Literature review:

Peter Phiri in **Wokeism: A Critical Analysis of its Impact on Society and the Emergence of Woke Capitalism** examines the complexity of wokeism, as well as its advantages and disadvantages, social effects, and the rise of Woke capitalism. Also covered are

suggestions for how policymakers, organisations, and companies should deal with the problems caused by wokeism. Understanding the complex nature of wokeism and its ramifications for society requires critical study and open discussion, which will ultimately result in a more just and equitable future. (Phiri P,2023)

Gilles Paché in Woke Culture Syndrome: Is Research in Management Under Threat?

demonstrates the threat's plausibility using research in logistics management as an example. A methodological perspective allows us to identify "sensitive" themes that have been covered in prior academic contributions but may be challenging to handle in the future under the pressure of wokism. These works use logistics to better comprehend societal problems. Two logistics-related findings are highlighted in the research: a framework for reading historical phenomena differently and a framework for comprehending the sex industry. The research note's primary weakness is that it only considers four examples; yet, from this vantage point, perspectives are opened for a comprehensive consideration of the problems that wokism poses for management research. (Paché, 2022)

Ann Kuan in Controversy Advertising: An Exploratory study on controversy advertising and its effects

researches how consumers are affected by contentious social themes in advertising. A literature review, an interview, and a survey in which participants were asked to respond to two controversial advertisements were used to collect secondary and primary data for this study. This study explores how controversial advertising affects how people regard the marketer and the social issue that is addressed in the advertisement through secondary and primary research. (Kuan, 2018)

The above-mentioned literature review studies about woke culture and controversial advertising differently

however this research paper intends to study the relationship between woke culture and controversial advertisement with the case study of layer's shot advertisement.

Research Methodology: The methodology used is Descriptive case study of layers shot controversial advertisement.

Data Collection: The data collection has been done based on secondary sources like books, articles, reports, and online materials related to the case.

Data Analysis: Content Analysis has been used to analyse textual or visual content for specific patterns, messages, or sentiments.

Findings (Layer's Shot Advertisement): The deodorant brand, Layer's Shot, received criticism on social media for its ads that were deemed disrespectful towards women's modesty and accused of perpetuating rape culture. In response to public outrage, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting quickly instructed platforms such as Twitter and YouTube to take down these controversial commercials.

Referring to breaches of the IT Rules, 2021, and the ASCI Code of Self-Regulation in TV Advertising, the Ministry invoked Section 67 of the IT Act, 2000. This resulted in an FIR being filed against Layer's Shot following a complaint from the Delhi Commission for Women, accusing the brand of promoting a "rapist mindset."

The legal debate here, applicable to creative content like TV ads, revolves around balancing free expression with the responsibility not to offend religious or other sentiments. Previous instances like Surf Excel's 2019 Holi ad, which depicted Hindu-Muslim harmony, and a Tanishq ad portraying interfaith marriage sparked similar controversies.

The Layer's Shot ads stood out for being offensive and accused of normalizing rape in Indian society, although interpretations varied. The ASCI contacted the advertiser using the "Suspension Pending

Investigation" method, directing immediate removal of the ad across media platforms. The advertiser responded, claiming the ad was inoffensive and smartly used the brand name without insult. The CCC believed that the advertisement's plot and the question, "Hum chaar aur ye sirf ek.... toh shot kaun legaa?" were offensive to and demeaning of women. In the interests of morality and decency, the advertisement is harmful to how women are portrayed. The CCC concluded that this is a careless piece of communication that encourages socially improper behaviour. Given the generally accepted standards of decency and appropriateness, such unpleasant advertising is likely to offend people deeply and widely, particularly women. This YouTube/TVC commercial violated Chapter II of the ASCI Code. The grievance was upheld. (ASCI - ADVERTISING STANDARDS COUNCIL OF INDIA, n.d.)

In this regard, Layer's Shot has released a statement that says

 **Layer'r Shot**
@layerr_shot

...

STATEMENT OF CLARIFICATION

This is with reference to our recent two TV advertisements of Layer'r SHOT on various broadcasting platforms.

We, the brand Layer'r SHOT would like to inform one and all that only after due & mandatory approvals, we have aired the advertisements, wherein, we never intended to hurt anyone's sentiments or feelings or outrage any women's modesty or promote any sort of culture, as wrongly perceived by some.

However, we sincerely apologise for the advertisements that consequentially caused rage amongst individuals & several communities and beg their pardon.

Most importantly, we have voluntarily informed all our media partners to stop the telecast/broadcasting of both the TV advertisements from 4th June with immediate effect.

Impact of Woke Culture on Society:

Woke culture's influence on society is undeniable. It serves as a catalyst for crucial conversations, shedding light on entrenched biases within structures. Notably, it has driven a surge in diverse representation in media and compelled businesses and institutions to reevaluate their internal workings and guiding principles. However, this awakening has also stirred division as conflicting perspectives clash. Consequently, the need to bridge these divides and foster unity through respectful dialogue becomes increasingly vital in navigating this cultural landscape.

1. Uncovering New Perspectives:

Fostering an atmosphere that promotes open discussion and the study of other viewpoints is necessary for successfully managing the effects of woke culture. By encouraging inclusivity and a better grasp of the movement's intricacies, accepting fresh viewpoints enhances it. Greater solutions may result from actively seeking out and paying attention to the movement's marginalised voices. We can make sure that woke culture develops in a way that is advantageous to society by empathising with others, actively listening to them, and engaging in respectful dialogue. In this time of increased social awareness, it is our collective responsibility to critically evaluate our views, confront our own prejudices, and participate in positive conversations that advance inclusivity and understanding.

2. Navigating Challenges in Woke Culture

As woke culture evolves, it faces hurdles that hinder progress. One such challenge is performative activism, where people engage superficially rather than seeking real change. Cancel culture, the trend of ostracizing unpopular ideas or individuals, also impedes constructive dialogue. Overcoming these barriers involves promoting education, critical thinking, and empathy. Encouraging sincere introspection and

genuine efforts for improvement can bolster a more effective and inclusive movement.

3. Effectively Navigating the Impact of Woke Culture:

The evolution of woke culture has shaken societal norms, advocating for justice and equality. To navigate this effectively, it's vital to honor its origins while welcoming new perspectives. Engaging in open, respectful discussions, amplifying marginalized voices, and fostering empathy are crucial. This approach shapes an inclusive future, addressing social issues and fostering authentic, positive change.

Intersection of Woke culture and Controversial Advertising:

"Woke culture" signifies increased awareness of social and political issues, promoting discussions and actions for justice. Controversial advertising intentionally or unintentionally provokes strong public reactions. When these concepts intersect, it often involves companies aligning with progressive values but can lead to backlash if not executed thoughtfully.

Controversy factors include:

Authenticity: Consumers spot insincerity, labeling it "woke-washing."

Cultural Sensitivity: Careful research is crucial to avoid perpetuating stereotypes.

Misinterpretation: Well-intentioned campaigns may be misunderstood due to cultural nuances.

Representation: Genuine representation is vital to reflect diverse experiences.

Polarization: Taking a stance on polarizing topics can alienate parts of the consumer base.

Social Media Impact: Controversies go viral quickly, impacting brand reputation.

Language Evolution: Rapid changes in social justice language require updated and appropriate ad terminology.

Discussions: For brands delving into social and political issues in their advertising:

Educate and Research: Thoroughly understand the issues and seek expert guidance if necessary.

Authenticity is Key: Genuine and consistent support for causes is more impactful than short-term strategies.

Embrace Feedback: Openness to criticism allows for learning and improvement.

Diversity Matters: Include a diverse team for varied insights and perspectives.

Test and Consult: Prior to launch, test campaigns and consult affected communities for feedback.

Balance Values and Promotion: Maintain a balance between product promotion and cultural sensitivity.

Finding this balance is crucial for brands navigating social and cultural contexts in their ads.

Conclusion:

Woke culture significantly affects controversial advertising by prioritizing social awareness and inclusivity. Here's how it influences such ads:

Accountability: Pushes for advertiser accountability when controversial ads spark social media discussions or activism.

Public Pressure: Activists and woke-aligned consumers may start boycotts or petitions against offensive ads, impacting a company's reputation and finances

Promotes Dialogue: Encourages discussions on social issues and ad impact on diverse communities, sparking broader cultural conversations.

Prompts Reflection: Encourages companies to reflect on values and the potential harm of their ads, leading to reconsideration of advertising strategies.

Changes in Approach: Advertisers may modify or withdraw controversial ads, collaborating with diverse groups for respectful messaging

Reputation Impact: Ignoring woke principles can harm a company's reputation, motivating them to avoid controversies for a positive brand image.

Industry Influence: Woke culture collectively drives

industry norms towards more inclusive and responsible practices.

However, responses vary among advertisers, and the impact depends on specific contexts and the broader socio-cultural landscape.

References

- Agarwal, D. (2022, 06 14). Feminism In India. Retrieved from Layer'r Shot's Sexist Perfume Ad: Analysing Laws Governing The Content Of Advertisements In India: <https://feminisminindia.com/2022/06/14/layer-shots-ad-promoting-rape-jokes-legal-framework-advertisements-india/>
- ASCI - ADVERTISING STANDARDS COUNCIL OF INDIA. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.ascionline.in/complaint-outcomes-details/?case_id=2022-6-4-1-C.257
- Kuan, A. (2018). Controversy Advertising: An Exploratory Study on Controversy Advertising and Its Effects . Portland State University.
- Koktail Media. (2023, June 27). Koktail Media. Retrieved August 7, 2023, from <https://www.koktailmagazine.com/content-detail/The+Evolution+and+Impact+of+Woke+Culture+in+Society>
- Phiri, P. (2023, 06 05). Wokeism: A Critical Analysis of its Impact on Society and the Emergence of Woke Capitalism. Diversity and Equality in Health and Care, Volume 20. (Issue 03). 10.21767/2049-5471.20.03.20
- Tinic, SA. "United Colors and Untied Meanings: Benetton and the Commodification of Social Issues." Journal of Communication, vol 47, no. 3, 1997, pp.3-25. Oxford University Press (OUP)

International Advertising Association. (1977).
Controversy Advertising. Hastings House,
New York.

Paché, P. G. (2022). Woke Culture Syndrome: Is
Research in Management Under Threat? .
Journal of Management Research, 1 - 12.

Cite This Article:

Miss. Mishra R. & Dr. Indrakanti G. (2024). *Woke Culture Revolution – A Case Study of Layer's Shot Controversial Advertisement. In Aarhat Multidisciplinary International Education Research Journal: Vol. XIII (Number I, pp. 1–6). AMIERJ. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10564401>*