

Triggered, but engaged: Exploring cross-cultural variations of dark humor and controversial advertising among young adults in an era of woke culture

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Introdução

This study explores how young adults in Portugal, Germany, and the US perceive dark humor and controversial advertising, analyzing cultural differences and the impact of woke and cancel culture on how they interpret and relate to these ads. Through qualitative interviews, it reveals how historical experiences and social norms shape ethical boundaries and acceptability, offering insights for brands to create provocative yet culturally sensitive campaigns and avoid backlash in global markets.

Problema de Pesquisa e Objetivo

Understand how, in a saturated advertising environment, companies can stand out by using provocation, but in a way that is sensitive to cultural boundaries, especially in an era of woke and cancel culture. The objectives of the study are to understand how different countries accept this type of advertising differently, the cultural and historical factors that make them think this way, and how woke and cancel culture affect the way they accept and engage with this type of advertising.

Fundamentação Teórica

The rationale addresses controversial marketing, dark humor as an advertising strategy, cancel culture, and woke culture, as well as historical and cultural differences between the selected countries. It explores humor theories, cultural differences according to Hofstede, the impact of historical contexts on the perception of humor and advertising, and how woke and cancel culture shape ethical boundaries and consumer reactions, influencing brand communication strategies in global and socially conscious environments.

Metodologia

This study used a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews with 12 young adults (aged 18-30) from Portugal, Germany, and the US. The selection was made by purposive sampling. The interviews were conducted online, transcribed, and analyzed using content analysis, identifying cultural, historical, and social patterns in the perception of dark humor and controversial advertising.

Análise dos Resultados

The results showed that perceptions of dark humor and controversial advertising vary culturally. Portuguese people were more tolerant but sensitive to religious and colonial themes; Germans reject humor linked to Nazism and like context when controversy is used; Americans have little presence and little acceptance of this advertising due to major divisions and polarizations in society and due to woke and cancel culture. Everyone values authenticity in brands, but fears backlash due to wokeness. Historical context and social norms shape ethical boundaries and acceptability in each country.

Conclusão

The study concludes that perceptions of dark humor and controversial advertising are strongly influenced by historical and cultural contexts and by woke/cancel culture. Portuguese people show greater tolerance, Germans reject themes related to Nazism, and Americans are strongly polarized, which is why this type of advertising does not usually work in the country. Brands must balance creativity and cultural sensitivity to avoid negative reactions and connect with young adults in an authentic way in different markets.

Contribuição / Impacto

This study contributes to marketing by revealing how culture, history, and woke and cancel culture shape the acceptance of dark humor and controversy in advertising, filling gaps in cross-cultural perceptions. It impacts practice by offering insights for brands to create provocative yet culturally sensitive campaigns, minimizing backlash and strengthening authentic connections with young adults in diverse global markets heavily impacted by woke culture.

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