

Louvain School of Management

Iconic people's influence on brand image

Impact of iconic influencers on a misled product campaign of H&M

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Année académique 2021-2022
Travail de fin d'études (TFE) en vue d'obtenir le titre de
Master (60) en Sciences de Gestion
Horaire de jour

RESUME

The aim of this TFE is to study the impact iconic people had on a misled product campaign of the fashion company H&M. In early 2018, H&M released a product campaign under which an advertisement created controversy : a young black boy modelled a hoodie mentioning “Coolest monkey in the jungle”. Many people including some iconic people immediately reacted on the day of this advertisement release. The audience was offended, and H&M had to response rapidly in order to calm down the many backlashes against its brand. In this TFE, the main consequences on H&M's financials and brand image are examined as well as how the company regained trust from its stakeholders. The company's apologies and the undertaken actions concluded a short-term crisis with limited consequences on its financial performances. However, many iconic people reacted radically, and their influence on the brand might grow significantly in the future.

L’objectif de ce TFE est d’étudier l’impact de personnalités emblématiques sur une campagne de produits de la marque H&M. En 2018, H&M a publié une campagne de produits dont une publicité a fait polémique : un jeune garçon noir portait un sweatshirt à capuche mentionnant « Le singe le plus cool de la jungle ». De nombreuses personnes ont réagi le jour de la publication dont notamment des personnes emblématiques et de nombreux consommateurs. Le public s’est offusqué et H&M a dû réagir rapidement afin de calmer les nombreuses réactions négatives contre la marque. Dans ce TFE, les principales conséquences sur les implications financières et sur l’image de marque d’H&M sont examinées, ainsi que la manière dont la marque a regagné la confiance de ses parties prenantes. Les regrets exprimés par la marque et les actions prises par l’entreprise concluent une crise limitée dans le temps et dans ses impacts. Cependant, de nombreuses personnes emblématiques ont réagi radicalement et leur influence sur la marque pourrait à l’avenir s’accroître considérablement.

PREFACE

This thesis is part of the activities to achieve my Master's degree in Management at the LSM. This TFE analyses the potential influence of iconic people on the brand image of a company. It is based on a case study of the brand Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) which has faced a crisis in early 2018 when launching a misled product campaign. The aim of this TFE is to understand the impact of iconic influencers on this misled product campaign of H&M. The outcomes of this TFE are based on many internet-based sources, scientific articles, official documents published from H&M and some personal interpretations.

The motive of this subject is to evaluate the power of influence of iconic people on the company's brand image. As iconic people's power of influence is rising through social media, it is pertinent to analyze how far this power of influence can grow.

The main difficulty encountered for this TFE was the limited number of available scientific articles (either on the web or in libraries). Nevertheless, the needed data was found to reach a satisfying outcome for this TFE.

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2. INTRODUCTION

We live nowadays in a hyper connected world in which social media drives us to promote and share everything we like. Since a few years, individuals also changed their habits and are more tempted to consider social media news rather than traditional news. In addition, with the emergence of social media influencers, we have reached a point where a whole new digital and viral world has been created. Companies are now forced to take social media into account in their way of operating. Social media and their share of influencers can either become a strong asset or become harmful for organizations.

On the 8th January of 2018, the multinational fashion brand Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) released a controversial advertisement. This advertisement figured a young black boy wearing a green hoodie with the mention “Coolest monkey in the jungle”. It didn't take long before this advertisement drew the attention of many consumers as well as some iconic people, which led to a crisis.

The main objective of this TFE is to understand the impact of iconic people and social media influencers on this misled product campaign from H&M.

The TFE is composed of four different chapters. The first chapter explains several theoretical terms for a better understanding of the succeeding chapters. The second chapter discloses the context in which this crisis occurred. It will gather information about the brand, the marketing campaign in which the advertisement appeared, and a historical perspective of the word “monkey” by which people were offended. The third chapter will be composed of the several reactions of iconic people and consumers on this advertisement, followed by H&M’s responses on the numerous backlashes it received. I will further analyze the strategy that was used by the brand and what consequences this crisis implied for the company. Next, I will consider some of the actions H&M undertook to regain trust from iconic people and their stakeholders, ending this chapter with an illustration of a similar crisis that occurred at another company. In the last chapter, I will expose my personal critical view on this case along with some recommendations and managerial implications.

3. THEORETICAL CHAPTER

In this first chapter, I will explain some theoretical terms that will be useful to understand the following chapters and the overall content of this TFE.

3.1 Crisis management

During its lifetime, a company can potentially face catastrophic events. Those events can be driven by factors such as climate change, political upheaval, cyberthreats or many more (Posey, 2020). They need to be controlled. If not, they can disrupt operations, damage the reputation of the company and even destroy the shareholder's value.

Crisis Management can be defined as the application of different strategies to help a company overcome these sudden and significant negative events (Posey, 2020). The goal of crisis management consists of minimizing the damages caused by the crisis. It implies the ability to figure out the best way to respond to such events.

According to Cornelissen, stakeholders should be the main focus of any company when a crisis occur (Cornelissen, 2014). Stakeholders can be any individual or a group who is affected by the company's actions. If the company fails to communicate properly with its stakeholders or to meet their needs, it will probably aggravate the crisis.

3.2 Crisis communication

Crisis communication is defined as an action that intends to protect the company's reputation and brand image. When a brand image is damaged due to a crisis, specialists will strive hard to overcome this difficult situation by applying a crisis communication process. This process includes the need to guarantee an effective communication with external parties during critical situations. Avoiding media or lacking to talk about the problem will make the situation even worse. In addition, in many cases, information must be kept confidential. It is considered unprofessional for employees to share information and data with external parties as it could also harm the company's reputation. If all the above elements are well under control, the company will achieve a good control of its communication when a crisis will occur and will overcome that crisis even faster.

According to Dynes, crisis management and crisis communication are two inseparable aspects, as managing a crisis needs to have the right communication that goes along with it (Dynes, 1977).

3.3 Iconic people and Influencers

Iconic people are defined to be very successful and influential people. They are either idolized for their talents or actions, or they are either significantly representative of a cultural movement. Iconic people are usually considered to be singers, actors, models, politicians and many more. It includes everyone who is related to or having the character of an icon as the word says itself.

On the other side, influencers are people who have built up a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic (Geyser, 2021). They post on a regular basis on social media platforms and gather through this way a community of followers that stays engaged. Many brands and especially startups have the tendency to collaborate with social media influencers, as these influencers could convince their followers to buy the products they promote.

Iconic people and influencers can both be considered as influential people. Whereas iconic people were the original influencers according to Geysler. Iconic people still have an important role, however their importance as influencers is slowly decreasing and is replaced by the new digital influencers.

3.4 Stakeholders

Edward Freeman affirms that a stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or can be affected by an organization (Freeman, 1984). There are several stakeholders in an organization, and those can be internal or external. They can have a high or low influence and power of decision within the organization. Stakeholders of a company could for example be its shareholders, its employees, its customers, its suppliers, its business partners, the external media, the public authorities, or any other group that can be directly or indirectly affected by the company.

Figure 1 shows us that influencers are considered to be external stakeholders of an organization. Brand ambassadors are nowadays usually influencers or celebrities, which guarantees immediate recognition (Singh, 2018). They should certainly not be ignored by an organization as they can have a significant impact on their community and the population. For this reason, it is important for an organization to develop a good relationship and communication stream with this category of stakeholders.

3.5 Social media

The term “social media” was first used in 1994 on a Tokyo online media environment called ‘Matisse’ (Aichner, Grunfelder, Maurer & Jegeni, 2021). The very first social media platforms were developed and launched as of that year. Later on, more famous and successful social media platforms were launched such as MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005 or Twitter in 2006 (Gosh, Varschney & Venugopal, 2015). Nowadays, there are many different social media websites and applications that can be classified into different categories. Social media embraces a variety of online platforms, including blogs, applications, video sharing, social gaming, online platforms, forums and many more. Social media is defined by Kaplan and Haenlein as “*a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content*”¹. These platforms are useful to create, publish and share content between individuals.

Thomas Mayfield states that social media are changing the way information is transferred globally (Mayfield, 2011). The speed and transparency of information have seriously increased. Mayfield points out that some events that happened a few years ago could have remained secret, but now with the influx of social media, everything is reported around the world within a few minutes. Besides this, he mentions also the fact that people can today transmit unfiltered images to the world faster than it takes to make a phone call. People can use social media to mobilize groups without undergoing any consequential costs or risks. We can conclude that social media can do great things for our society, but it can also take a complete negative twist and create rapidly severe damages.

3.6 Trust repair

As Lewicki and Wiethoff mentioned, relationships do not happen overnight but rather over time based on interactions between the parties involved (Lewicki & Wiethoff, 2000). A trustful relationship is based on a person’s disposition to trust, his or her experience. What happens when trust is violated ? In some cases, distrust can occur when parties are unable to conform to meet expectations. One of the parties may feel disappointed, annoyed or even angry. The problem needs to be solved in a professional way by discussing the violation of trust and by working together between the parties. It usually takes time to repair trust since the parties need to rebuild what has broken down.

¹ Kaplan, A. & Haenlein, M. (2010). The challenges and opportunities of social media. *Business Horizons* 53(1) pages 59-68. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003>.

4. CONTEXTUAL CHAPTER

In this second chapter, the context and some background information will be provided to better understand the analysis of the thesis. I will first highlight the involved company, how it was created and what values it supports. Following this, I will consider different collaborations that the brand undertook with several iconic people. Thereafter, I will cover the campaign and the origin of the crisis, ending with an explanation of the misused term “Monkey”.

4.1 Hennes & Mauritz

Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) known as a Swedish fast-fashion clothing company for men, women and children was founded in 1946 in Stockholm. It opened its first store in 1947 in Sweden and called it Hennes which stands for “Hers” in Swedish. In 1968, Hennes got hold of the Swedish Mauritz Widforss hunting and fishing apparel retailer. From then on, the company’s name changed to Hennes & Mauritz. The company’s expansion boomed as it started offering apparel for the entire family through 42 stores in 1969. Soon, H&M started to grow internationally and opened stores in Norway, followed by Denmark, the UK and Switzerland. The brand had a big growth pace as it opened five to six new stores every year in the 1980’s. The first online shopping experience started in 1998 for H&M’s Swedish customers. By the end of the decade, H&M continued its expansion throughout Europe and enabled online sales in different countries. Soon after H&M’s first store opening in the US in 2000, Karl Lagerfeld and the brand teamed up and launched an exclusive collection. This marked the beginning of collaborations with fashion and iconic giants for H&M. In 2007, H&M continued its expansion and started opening its first stores in Asia (H&M Group, 2021).

The company is nowadays known as the second-largest global clothing retailer. It operates in 75 markets with over 5000 stores worldwide and 53 online markets (Statista Research Department, 2021). The company’s gross profit for the year 2020 amounted to 27.375 million SEK, which corresponds to 2.651 million euros (H&M Full-Year report, 2020).

H&M has built up a unique company culture with several values. “*We are one team*” is a first value they support. It stands for encouraging each other, being a team, sharing skills and much more. As they say, “*We win as a team, we lose as a team*” (H&M Group, 2021).

“We believe in people” is another interesting value of the brand to point out. H&M builds its workplace on trust, respect, inclusiveness and integrity. They value diversity in people and ideas, and encourage people to give and accept feedback and opinions.

H&M calls itself a value-driven company that wants to lead the way to a more inclusive world. H&M pretends to drive inclusion and diversity through their products and designs, promoting it through their communications. Through these inclusion and diversity initiatives, they reach communities around the world (Sustainability report of H&M, 2020).

Furthermore, H&M gives a lot of prominence to sustainability. In 2010, it launched its first collection made entirely out of sustainable materials. It became in 2019 the first global fast-fashion brand to bring forth detailed information on the product’s origins, materials and supply chain.

As mentioned before, H&M started establishing collaborations with iconic people in the early 2000's. Through time, H&M has dedicated a high level of interest to iconic people as we can notice through the high number of collaborations developed with multiple celebrities and influencers. Among some of the famous collaborators were Madonna, Beyoncé, Katy Perry, The Weeknd and many more.

H&M also started to combine sustainability and collaborations. This is how the company announced in April 2021 that the famous actress, Maisie Williams, will represent the brand as a global sustainability ambassador for H&M’s campaign using only recycled or sustainably sourced materials by 2030.

4.2 The campaign “Jungle”

On the 7th January of 2018, H&M has been criticized for a sweatshirt advertisement during its recently launched campaign “Jungle”. The ad featured Liam Mango, a 5-year-old black male who was dressed in a green hoodie printed with the words “Coolest monkey in the jungle” (see Figure 2). The hoodie for children was for sale at 8,99 euros. The hoodie was purchasable in three different colors. The first one was in dark green as mentioned before. The second one was in orange printed with the words “survival expert”, modelled by a white young male (see Figure 3). The third image was representing a black hoodie worn by a white little boy. (see Figure 4). At that moment, the hoodies were only available online.

4.3 The background of the expression “Monkey”

It is important to highlight the background and historical meaning of the word “Monkey” to better understand why some people have been offended and shocked by the hoodie’s citation associated with the young black male.

Social media users, iconic people and consumers considered the use of the word “Monkey” as a racial slur. According to Coleman, comparing black people to monkeys was used to sanction slavery, segregation and second-class status in the 16th to 17th century (Coleman, 2018). White people considered black males as subhuman beasts and brutes who lusted after white women. This interpretation has also been underlined in 1930 when the movie “King Kong” was released. Some people believe that physical differences among people and features such as a dark skin color are markers of a low status. This explains why, despite legal and constitutional measures that intent to protect racial minorities, racism still exists today in many communities. According to some experts, minds cannot be changed by laws but beliefs. This is the reason why racism may be difficult to be eradicated.

After the H&M’s advertisement was published picturing this young black male model wearing a hoodie “Coolest monkey in the jungle”, some people were feeling uncomfortable as this representation somehow referred to a past period when white people used to characterize black people as monkeys or savages. This aspect will be further developed in the next chapter.

In the next part, the empirical chapter will be presented. In this chapter, I will underline the H&M crisis, the implications of this advertisement and how H&M faced this situation.

5. EMPIRICAL CHAPTER

In this third chapter the empirical method is presented. I will first discuss broadly about the scandal that occurred. I will then consider the different communications of iconic people about the scandal following with the consumer's reactions. Afterwards, I will discuss H&M's responses. Subsequently, I will review what influence social media had on this crisis. Finally, I will study the different consequences the scandal has created on H&M and how the brand regained trust with iconic people and consumers, ending with a personal critical view.

The methodology used for this thesis is based on the information collected from the investigation of a case study and of several other articles that will be analyzed later on. The research approach of this thesis is based on a case study which studies H&M's crisis of January 2018 (Khasbani, 2018).

5.1 Reactions of iconic people and consumers on the scandal "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" of H&M

On Sunday 7th January 2018, H&M released its campaign "Jungle" with a few garments for a kid's collection (see Figure 2). The campaign was rapidly well-known but in a particularly wrong way. The controversy of a sweatshirt worn by a black-colored child and displaying the statement "*Coolest monkey in the jungle*" was highly exposed on social medias, starting with Twitter through a post from the famous actress and model Stephanie Yeboah. This Twitter post has been rapidly retweeted over 20 000 times in just a few hours (RTBF, 2018). The Swedish retailer was accused of being racist as it compared a black skinned boy to a monkey. The accident gained momentum as more and more people reacted on the post. A lot of other iconic people reacted, among others famous singers The Weeknd and G-Eazy, NBA star LeBron James, black UK Labor party member Kate Osmor and many more.

The Canadian artist of Ethiopian descent, The Weeknd also known as Abel Tesfaye, had developed two collaborations with H&M in the past. The first collaboration with the artist was launched in early 2017 and featured everything from basics to blazers with the "XO" branding on almost every piece of the collection (Hazlehurst, 2017). The second collaboration took place at the fall of 2017, composed by an 18-piece "Selected by the Weeknd" capsule collection with his favorite menswear staples (Saunders, 2017). Both collaborations were great successes and the relationship between the artist and the brand went well. But on January 8th 2018, Abel Tesfaye reacted offended on H&M's post and announced the end of his collaboration with the brand (Helie, 2018). As he mentioned it in a Twitter post, "*woke up*

this morning shocked and embarrassed by this photo. I'm deeply offended and will not be working with @hm anymore... ”² (see Figure 5). His post was retweeted nearly 120 000 times.

Another famous singer G-Eazy was upset by the post. The singer had an upcoming collaboration with the Swedish retailer due to launch in March of that year. After witnessing the disturbing promotional image with the young black child wearing the hoodie, he decided to end the partnership with the brand. His disappointment in the brand can be felt through his Twitter post, which goes as follow:

“Over the past months I was genuinely excited about launching my upcoming line and collaboration with H&M... Unfortunately, after seeing the disturbing image yesterday, my excitement over our global campaign quickly evaporated, and I've decided at this time our partnership needs to end. Whether an oblivious oversight or not, it's truly sad and disturbing that in 2018 something so racially and culturally insensitive could pass by the eyes of so many (stylist, photographer, creative and marketing teams) and be deemed acceptable. I can't allow for my name and brand to be associated with a company that could let this happen. I hope that this situation will serve as the wakeup call that H&M and other companies need to get on track and become racially and culturally aware, as well as more diverse at every level. ”³ (see Figure 6).

On top of that, the well-known NBA player LeBron James reacted with even more vigor than other artists and changed the advertisement by adding a crown on the young boy's head. With this visual representation, LeBron's intend was to let us perceive this little boy as a young king, as the ruler of the world with an untouchable force that can never be denied (see Figure 7) (Boren, 2018).

The big buzz escalated quickly. A couple of other iconic people created a hashtag #BoycottHM that was rapidly spread over social medias. And other major iconic people, such as Titus O'Neil, Kevin-Prince Boateng and Alex Medina also voiced their criticism and joined the opposition against H&M (Gobat, 2018).

² Source: Helie, M. (2018). *Offensé par H&M, TheWeeknd met fin à leur collaboration*. Online <https://www.parismatch.com/People/Offense-par-H-M-The-Weeknd-met-fin-a-leur-collaboration-1435127>.

³ Twitter, (2018). *In regards to H&M*. Online https://twitter.com/g_eazy/status/950869643803201537.

Many consumers were also very disappointed by the brand. This can be noticed through the numerous posts and comments on Twitter and other social media platforms. An interesting post on Twitter from an individual to highlight is: *“So the black kid gets to wear the H&M sweater with “Coolest monkey in the jungle” and the white kid with “Survival expert”. This is beyond disgusting. It’s a projection of your neo-colonial thinking. You won’t see me anywhere near your shops these days @hm”*⁴. The posts clearly show a feeling of disappointment and anger towards the brand. The contrast of the two advertisements and statements are shocking the consumers and are considered as being racist.

The outrage on social media was unfortunately not the only consequence H&M had to deal with. A couple of stores of the Swedish retailer were vandalized in South Africa. The protests went from scattering clothes to overturning racks and toppling mannequins. The local police had to stop the protesters and the company had to close temporarily its stores to protect its employees and customers (Fortin, 2018).

Yet not everybody reacted negatively to H&M’s advertisement. Starting with the mother of the little boy Terry Mango who was backlashed for defending the brand. She stated that this hoodie was one of the hundreds of outfits her son had modelled and saw no issue with it (Miller, 2018). Furthermore, she mentioned to people to “get over it” as she believed the advertisement wasn’t racially sensitive. Other consumers also replied to the protests by stating that people were overreacting. As seen on Figure 8, Morten Bjerre analyzed a sample of social media user’s reactions on this advertisement. The sample contained 150 participants. As a result, around 44% of the participants had a negative attitude towards the advertisement, 20,8% had a positive attitude, 22,1% were neutral and 6,5% remained mixed (Bjerre, 2018). This is obviously a random small sample, but it shows that not all people reacted negatively on the advertisement.

However, H&M was committed to reply to these oppositions. In the next part, I will describe how H&M responded and what measures they undertook to set the situation right.

⁴ Bigdeen (@big_deen75) (2018). *So the black kid gets to wear the H&M sweater « Coolest monkey in the jungle » and the white kid with...* (Tweet). Twitter. https://twitter.com/big_deen75/status/950326135631568896.

5.2 Response of H&M

H&M undertook different actions to recover from this unfortunate and delicate situation. The Swedish retailer responded very fast to the opposition. They created a new position of Global Leader for Diversity & Inclusiveness, and made several public apologies that were published on their official website and social networks after the campaign was released (see hereafter). The objective to create this new internal position was to strengthen H&M's commitment for diversity and inclusiveness. H&M informed through its 2017 sustainability performances report that this person would formulate and drive a roadmap to raise awareness and lead positive change across the whole company. H&M also introduced awareness-raising training courses for its CEO and executive teams. Through this way, they were aiming to set a clear strategy for the following years (H&M Group Sustainability Report, 2017). This first step was perceived as a good initiative. However, stakeholders were still concerned about the ethnic origin of this new Diversity & Inclusiveness Leader as no information about the gender or the origins of this person was available.

The brand also removed the advertisement of its website and stated : *“We have got this wrong and we agree that, even if unintentional, passive or casual racism needs to be eradicated wherever it exists”*⁵. In another statement, H&M apologized to those who were upset about the advertisement. *“We are deeply sorry that the picture was taken, and we also regret the actual print,”* the company said in a statement. *“Therefore, we have not only removed the image from our channels, but also the garment from our product offering globally.”*⁵.

Another apology was made on the H&M's Facebook page that reached over 27.000 reactions (see Figure 9). These reactions on Facebook contained “likes”, “laughing emojis”, “heart emojis”, “shocked emojis” and “sad emojis”. The distribution of these reactions can be analyzed on Figure 10. Following this apology message, the Facebook audience did react well. The majority approved the apology by liking the post, while only a minority reacted angry or disappointed.

A week after the incident, H&M released another apology post on Facebook (see Figure 11). H&M claimed that this incident was ‘entirely unintentional’. They placed themselves in a defensive position, in which they mentioned they had reached out for feedback from their

⁵ Stack, L. (2018). H&M Apologizes for ‘Monkey’ Image Featuring Black Child. Nytimes.com. Consulted on 14th November on <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/08/business/hm-monkey.html>.

community and stakeholders. As noted on Figure 12, the reactions were even more positive. Only a very limited proportion of people still reacted angry or disappointed on the post. H&M apologized as well on other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram.

After H&M apologized, the brand removed all images related to that hoodie from all of its platforms. The sweatshirt was removed from store shelves, and the materials were recycled to use them for future other garments, said the company (Talon, 2018). H&M also announced an internal investigation to understand how this misled campaign happened, to prevent it from happening again (H&M Twitter, 2018). They confessed that their internal processes had not been followed properly for this campaign and promised to re-evaluate all their internal processes and policies. This reveals that H&M was somehow willing to admit that the problem was initiated through the lack of proper follow-up and efficiency in their internal processes.

Furthermore, H&M stressed its zero-tolerance policy on discrimination and shared the following apologies on its website : *“Racism and bias in any shape of form, conscious or unconscious, deliberate or accidental, are simply unacceptable and need to be eradicated from society. In this instance we have not been sensitive enough to this agenda. Please accept our humble apologies.”*⁶ H&M tried to shift the audience's view by describing this phenomenon as an incident and by highlighting to its community that *“this incident is accidental in nature”*.⁶ To H&M's point of view, the audience's responses would be less negative and angry if they would perceive the situation as an accident and not as an intentional move from H&M. Through this way, the brand's reputation would potentially be less damaged.

In the following section, I will study if this advertisement was genuinely an accident as claimed by H&M, or if the advertisement was completely misunderstood by the consumers. I will further develop the strategy that has been used for this campaign and will define whether the company embraced a poor strategy or not.

⁶ Gobat, C. (2018). *H&M scandal. « Coolest monkey in the jungle » advertisement (bad strategy)*. German National Library. <https://www.grin.com/document/453229>.

5.3 *Where did it go wrong?*

It is important to understand what were H&M's intentions with this advertisement campaign. Did they follow a bad strategy ? Or were the original intentions of the brand completely misunderstood by the population ?

Many consumers were stunned by how it was possible that such an ad had been internally approved by H&M. Similarly, how was it possible that none of the company employees working on this advertisement of such a global prominent brand were aware of the potential implications of this displeasing advertisement (Gobat, 2018). On the other hand, others pretended this ad was due to a lack of cultural awareness and pure ignorance from H&M. They believed that the brand did not have any harmful intentions. A former employee's testimony on Twitter somehow confirmed this view by stating : *"I worked for them for years and they're clueless sometimes. The head office in Sweden is very disconnected to issues of racism, cultural and social challenges. They seriously probably think this is cute."*⁷

According to its statements, H&M values diversity, equality, transparency and responsible actions. They focus on sustainability performances and these values are implemented in their core business practices for many years. They are very transparent about it and they share every year a sustainability performances report. Through this report, they share their investments in creating a meaningful change towards a net positive impact throughout their value chain starting from the design and manufacturing of the raw materials to the sale and recycling of their products (H&M Group Sustainability Report, 2020). Furthermore, H&M aspires to being fair and equal. They focus on three main value pillars : human rights, fair jobs for all, and inclusion & diversity. For this last pillar, they pretend to promote diversity and equality through their products and communications. These are initiatives that were also supported before the misled advertisement of H&M. When looking at their 2017 sustainability performances report, right before the outburst, H&M positioned itself as stewards for diversity and inclusiveness. They believe they have a responsibility to drive inclusiveness and embrace diversity throughout their business (H&M Sustainability Report, 2017).

⁷ Zimmerman, A. (2018). *The Weeknd Blasts H&M for Racist 'Monkey' Ad: I'm 'Shocked and Embarrassed'*. The Daily Beast, 08th January 2018. Consulted on <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-weekend-blasts-handm-for-racist-monkey-ad-im-shocked-and-embarrassed>.

But H&M had to admit that they made an unintentional error of judgment with this image. Additionally, they communicated their belief that racism and bias in any shape or form, deliberate or accidental, is absolutely unacceptable. After this incident, the brand informed their stakeholders about the incidence on the company values. And all the company employees were able to share their thoughts through a feedback channel initiated by the company.

Carole Gobat states that the strategy used for this advertisement was a negative emerged strategy instead of an intended marketing and advertisement strategy. According to her analysis, the ad was the result of an individual decision-making mindset. The overall strategic guidelines and policies of H&M were apparently completely ignored by the different persons involved in this campaign. She also mentions that, during this product launch, a lack of judgment and maybe knowledge, as well as an inadequate communication appeared among the involved people. There was a complete negligence of the company's values, standards and objectives (Gobat, 2018).

After analyzing what went wrong for this campaign, it is interesting to understand H&M's intentions by modelling an Afro-American boy for this hoodie.

As the United States of America represents one of the biggest markets for H&M, this country was largely exposed to this advertisement through social media (Khasbani, 2018). The company's intention to expose people from different cultures or ethnicities to their campaign is to show their value in equality and integration. Brands are nowadays using more and more this approach. As an example, when looking at the brand Dove for instance, they have been including women from all continents and all different clothing sizes for their campaigns for years already.

Besides this, figuring models from different ethnicities enables companies to show that people won't be rejected by racial factors when joining their team. H&M has the following policy which they value a lot : *"When we do business the H&M way, we do so ethically, honestly and responsibly"*⁸. With more than 44 million of African Americans in the United States, this segment of the population represents a large potential market for brands like H&M (Statista,

⁸ H&MGroup. (2019). *Full year report 2019*. Consulted on 25th November on <https://hmgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2629510.pdf>.

2020). By using models representing this community, the company will somehow attract this community to their products. But the use of certain words, sentences or colors can also have an impact on attracting potential consumers. This phenomenon can also be understood as the 'homophily principle'. According to Khanam, homophily has demonstrated that people will search for similar profiles. Those are people who have equivalent locations, appearances, native languages and so on (Khanam, Srivastava & Mago, 2020). It helps people to identify themselves with the brand and respectively it will increase their brand identity and sales.

Let's now understand why the advertisement received so many controversial reactions. Khasbani made an interesting study on how this advertisement took the wrong turn.

H&M's decision to figure a black boy with the written phrase "Coolest monkey in the jungle" on a hoodie can be interpreted in many different ways. According to Khasbani, it can be interpreted as an effort from the company to attract sympathy from other communities. With this message, the brand would like to communicate to its customers that "being cool" can be possible for all people coming from different backgrounds (Khasbani, 2018). By using the word "coolest", H&M tries to persuade young buyers that its hoodie will value them more than others. This is a common marketing strategy that companies have been using to convince buyers that their product is better than others. The issue here with the slogan "Coolest monkey in the jungle" is that this strategy of advertisement was not perceived from customers as being cool. People were offended and thought the brand was comparing African Americans to monkeys. As mentioned before in the contextual part of this thesis, the allusion to monkeys has negative antecedents for a lot of people.

Some other examples of this common marketing strategy are for instance the cereal brand "Wheaties" who has associated themselves with sports brands and started using the slogan "*Wheaties – The Breakfast of Champions*" (Robinson, 2020). Another famous example is the cosmetic brand "L'Oréal" who attracts its customers for years with the slogan "*Because you're worth it*" (Dvornechcuck, 2021). Through this way, L'Oréal convinces women that it is acceptable to buy and apply makeup, even if wearing makeup has been criticized by many for being fake and not showing their natural beauty. Those advertisements were not criticized as they received only positive connotations.

The origin of this marketing strategy comes from the human nature who is convinced to present itself as the best among others with material assets. The choice of words and colors

for an advertisement is very important, but the meaning of it remains culture specific. The green color of H&M's hoodie has in some cultures plenty of positive meanings. Green represents in European and North American cultures 'life' and is associated with nature, growth and prosperity. In this respect, the H&M's hoodie represents youthfulness (colorsexplained, 2021). However, in a few cultures, this color interpretation can differ. In Israel, the color green is a sign of bad news. In China, green represents infidelity. And in Indonesia green has downright been traditionally banned. In this way, many things can be misunderstood by people due to their different cultures.

This information leads us to understand that people's perceptions are different in many ways. People will continue to debate whether this perception incident came from the brand itself or if the external audience completely misunderstood H&M's original good intentions. As mentioned by Friedman and Leclercq, creating and maintaining a strong brand image is nowadays an important feature to control by organizations. Companies invest a lot of resources when creating their branding identity, which related to slogans, colors, packaging, advertisements and much more. Many marketers focus on understanding consumer's feelings, visions, and attitudes towards brands. These marketing aspects are vital for a company in order to strengthen the consumer's perception of its brand (Friedman and Leclercq, 2015). As the authors mention, marketing communications and advertisements should help create or strengthen brand associations with its customers. In some cases, this will not work as expected as it was the case with the H&M's advertisement. Customers and iconic people changed their perception of the brand and couldn't trust it anymore even though it wasn't the initial intention of H&M.

H&M will clearly have to invest more resources in the future to prevent itself from similar undesired events. In the subsequent section, I will address how social media had an influence on this crisis and how fast the crisis propagated.

5.4 How did social media have an influence on the crisis?

Thanks to the internet and especially due to social networks, consumers are today much more aware of events than they used to a few years ago. Nowadays, with the high number of existing social media platforms, it only takes a few minutes for people to express their opinions and share them with the rest of the world.

As Glavinic mentions, a major point to understand is that a social media crisis hardly starts from ordinary people. The main drivers of crisis are iconic people, influencers, and new or traditional media. As she explains, when an influential person identifies an issue and tries to raise awareness, it becomes obvious for other users to share that issue (Glavinic, 2017).

The first post that went viral was published by Stephanie Yeboah on Twitter the day of the campaign's release. She posted: "*Whose idea was it @hm to have this little sweet black boy wear a jumper that says, 'coolest monkey in the jungle?'*"⁹ The posts reached over 20 000 retweets. The following day, other iconic people and influencers started reacting on this event as well, as mentioned before.

The thousands of posts, retweets and comments concerning this advertisement did spread the news even faster on social media. The crisis started rapidly after this blogger discovered the implied racist meaning of the ad. The crisis surprisingly did not start from traditional media but from an individual social media user. The numerous amounts of social media posts and comments related to H&M's advertisement confirms the way news are rapidly and widely dispersed today, compared to the way traditional medias were dispersing news a few years ago.

Morten Bjarre developed an analysis to study whether people were aware of the H&M crisis or not, and through which channel they have been aware of it. His analysis reached out the conclusion that 62,25% of the interviewees were aware of the crisis. The majority of people knew about the phenomenon through the social media platforms Facebook and Instagram and not through traditional newspapers (Bjarre, 2018).

⁹ Glavinic, I. (2017). *How Dove's reputation crisis unraveled on social media*. Mediatoolkit. Consulted on 28th November on <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/blog/dove-reputation-crisis/>.

With this rapid spread of the crisis, it is meaningful to examine what consequences this crisis has brought to H&M. I will explore different quantitative and qualitative features and will also investigate what impact they had on the brand.

5.5 Consequences on the H&M brand

It is interesting to analyze which quantitative and qualitative consequences this outrage has brought to the company. I will first discuss what influence this crisis had on the financial perspectives of the company, such as the impact on the sales and earnings. Later on, I will examine the effect of this crisis on the brand image and reputation of H&M.

When looking at the 2018 annual report of H&M, the group reached a total of net sales of 210.400 million SEK, which represents 20.292 million euros (see Figure 13). In 2017, the brand achieved a net sale of 200.004 million SEK, or 19.289 million euros. H&M achieved thus a net sales increase of 5% between 2017 and 2018. The online sales of H&M increased by 22% between 2017 and 2018 (H&M Group, 2018). As shown on Figure 14, the net sales of the H&M group then further grew in 2019 to 232.755 million of SEK, or 22.448 million euros. This is another 11% year-over-year net sales increase. And the online sales grew by 24% in 2019 compared with the previous year (H&M Group, 2019).

On the basis of those figures (13 and 14), it looks like this crisis didn't have any negative impact on the H&M net sales results over the period (2017-2019). Apart from the temporary closure of some stores in South Africa, it seems thus that this crisis did not have any negative long-term sales impact on H&M. Of course, we could speculate that the 2018 sales growth could potentially have been stronger without this crisis. Nevertheless, it is fair to notice that H&M didn't really suffer from this crisis at sales level.

Another financial aspect to assess is the potential impact on earnings of the company, and more particularly on the earnings per share (EPS). The EPS describes a company's profit per outstanding share of stock. If a company reaches a higher earning per share, this means that more profits can be distributed to its shareholders. Throughout the 2017-2019 period, the number of shares of the H&M group remained stable (i.e. 1.655.072.000 shares). Whereas the earnings per share (in SEK) slightly decreased from 2015 to 2018, the EPS grew by 0,48 SEK between 2018 and 2019. Once again, also for the company earnings, it seems thus that the crisis did not have a negative financial impact on H&M.

As it seems that the crisis didn't have much negative repercussion on its key financial indicators, let's now examine if the crisis had an influence on non-monetary components of the company.

A strong brand reputation and brand image is important for a company. On one side, it will provide more sales from consumers, and on the other side, it will attract more shareholders to invest in the company. When looking at this last aspect, we can notice a decrease in the number of shareholders between 2017 and 2019. H&M had 269.045 shareholders at the end of 2017, 245.427 shareholders in 2018, and 235.545 shareholders in 2019 (H&M corporate governance report of 2017, 2018, 2019). This significant decrease in the number of shareholders might be a result of a brand image that has been harmed in early 2018. Some shareholders may have sold their shares as they no longer wanted to be associated with a company that was not sharing their values.

An additional vital element that has already been mentioned previously is the influence of iconic people on a crisis. I have mentioned earlier a few well-known people who reacted unfavorably to this advertisement. For example, TheWeeknd, LeBron James, or G-Eazy reacted negatively to the advertisement. As these influencers gather large communities of followers and subscribers, they can potentially influence consumers and can somehow ruin a brand image. However, the reputation of a brand can also be measured through a brand index, such as the brand value.

Figure 15 indicates H&M's brand value throughout the years. In 2017, the brand value amounted to 20.488 million dollars (figure 16). In 2018, the brand value plunged to 16.826 million dollars (figure 17). In 2019, H&M faced a further decline of its brand value to 16.345 million dollars (figure 18). The depreciation between 2017 and 2018 therefore cannot be denied and may be caused by the ad crisis. Let us note on figure 19 that, after a strong decrease between 2018 and 2020, the brand value re-increases again as of 2021 and amounts to now 14,133 million dollars.

Nonetheless, ruining a brand image generally doesn't happen overnight and is the result of longer term trends. As mentioned previously, the crisis took place over a short period of time and was already "forgotten" after a few weeks. This brings us to the conclusion that the crisis had most probably only a very limited impact on the long-term evolution of H&M's brand value.

In the following section, I will review the different actions H&M undertook to regain trust with these iconic people and whether they succeeded in it.

5.6 What did H&M do to regain trust with iconic people and their stakeholders?

Stakeholders are key drivers for a company. Developing a strong trustful relationship with stakeholders is thus an important strategic activity for a company. As Cooms mentions, the crisis history and reputation are two considerations that will affect stakeholder's attitudes and intentions towards a company (Cooms, 2007).

H&M was aware that many stakeholders were affected by the incident. Their trust was impacted, and this is why H&M had to react rapidly and strongly to regain this trust. As seen previously, H&M took immediate actions by posting several repetitive apology messages on social media and on its website. They took care to communicate rapid information to their stakeholders to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation. H&M's apology approach, stating that the advertisement was unintentional, showed that they were open for feedback and that they wanted to regain the lost trust. Its last post on Facebook and Instagram "*we are listening*" (See Figure 11) highlighted how the brand was open for reactions and showed their legitimate interest to listen to its stakeholders.

Moreover, it became clear that H&M wanted to regain trust when they realized that words were not enough and when they started taking additional actions. As mentioned earlier, a significant action they undertook was to hire a Diversity & Inclusiveness Leader. Thanks to this, H&M would be able to have a better control on future actions to avoid a similar future crisis.

It is rather difficult to factually measure whether these actions succeeded in regaining trust from its stakeholders or not. But at least, H&M showed empathy, listened to its stakeholders, and undertook several actions to recover from this crisis.

Could H&M have taken more actions to regain trust ? I will discuss this topic in the last chapter after first comparing another brand that faced a similar crisis just before H&M's crisis in 2018.

5.7 Comparison with a similar crisis

Before expressing a personal critical view of this case followed by some managerial recommendations for H&M, it is interesting to compare this case to a similar situation that happened with another company. Through this way, it is intriguing to analyze how this other company reacted to the crisis, and compared to H&M what consequences it implied for the brand.

A few months before H&M's crisis, the beauty product company Dove faced a similar incident that went viral. On October 4th 2017, Dove published an advertisement for a new shower product. Two women were represented on the advertisement. A black woman and a white woman, both wearing shirts of their skin color. The images from the advertisement change from a black woman with the Dove soap next to her to a white woman with the same soap standing next to her (see Figure 20). This representation reminded people of the racist images used in old soap advertisements where black skin was considered as 'dirty' and would turn white when it was cleaned.

Dove apologized for the incident on their social platforms with four different posts. They apologized the day the advertisement was released, and their last post was published on the 9th of October. The incident went viral after a beauty blogger and make-up artist Naomi Blake reacted on the post on the social network platform Facebook (Glavinic, 2017). This situation is in a way similar to H&M's situation. However, Dove didn't get backlashed by iconic people as much as H&M.

Glavinic made an investigation on what the general feelings from individuals towards the issue were, and on what was discussed the most on social media about the Dove advertisement. From Figure 21, we can underline that the majority of people were having negative feelings about the advertisement. There were more than 6 000 negative mentions, and the brand was associated with "racism" or words such as "racist" more than 12 000 times (Glavinic, 2017).

As seen on Figure 22, the advertisement was mostly discussed on well-known social network platforms Facebook and Twitter, followed by the internet. This is quite understandable as the crisis originated on Facebook. Similarly to H&M, a hashtag "#boycottdove" circulated on Twitter which made the crisis even worse.

From Figure 23, we can notice that the crisis cooled down rapidly after just a week. This is mainly due to the fact that Dove reacted quite fast on this crisis. Nowadays, barely a few people talk about this crisis anymore.

From these two cases, we can see that even global well-managed companies can have internal process issues that can lead to a crisis. It shows that process improvements are still to be made in many companies. We live today in a very critical world in which everybody can share its opinions effortlessly through easy ways of communication. Companies need to stay alert of this risk and need to develop strong quality check processes to avoid these types of discrimination incidents. A misstep could quickly ruin the company's reputation and even potentially lead to bankruptcy for smaller companies.

In both cases, the negative consequences remained quite short term bounded. People were very angry and disappointed by both brands, but as seen previously, after a few weeks the hype disappeared. It didn't damage the brand's image on a long term basis. However, if H&M or Dove would face in the future other similar incidents, it would surely affect their reputation.

In the final chapter, I will express a critical view on this case with personal remarks followed by managerial recommendations for the company.

6. CRITICAL REVIEW CHAPTER

In this last chapter I will express my opinions and reflections on facts and findings from the preceding chapters. I will post and discuss several critical questions that could lead to debate. At the end of this chapter, I will consider a few managerial recommendations for H&M or other companies to avoid similar events in the future.

From the different findings of this case, we can notice that a minor mistake can lead to major consequences. Social media has become an accelerator for the spreading of information. A small misstep from one individual in a company is immediately amplified by the social networkers. This brings us to think that nowadays no mistake can be forgiven or ignored without any immediate accusation or judgment.

It seems also that some groups of people are more sensitive to specific topics than others. I think of minorities such as the black people community, the LGBT community or other discriminated minorities. The support for these minorities has never been as strong as today. Numerous actions are taken to integrate these minorities in the society and to avoid discrimination. Despite these initiatives, these minorities remain fragile and they seem much more sensitive for any discrimination or misled action against them. In the H&M's crisis, the black community seemed particularly offended by the word "monkey" written on the hoodie that was worn by a black little boy. But would there have been similar strong reactions if this hoodie had been worn by an Asian, a White or a Hispanic boy ? Is the black community particularly more sensible and touchier than other communities ?

Another interesting observation to highlight is that the vast majority of iconic people and influencers that reacted to this advertisement were from black origin. Why didn't white iconic people and influencers react on this event ? Why does the interpretation of the message differ so much from one community to another ? Shouldn't people from different origins still react in a similar way to the same global human values ?

Surprisingly, the influencers did not react positively to the comment of Terry Mango's mother who is also from black origin. Why did social networkers neglect the important comment of the little boy's mother ? Why did she get backlashed for her comment ? The reason may arise from the fact that Terry Mango and his mother are from black origin but were born and raised in Sweden. While most iconic consumers who reacted negatively to the ad were from North American origin, where topics related to slavery and black discrimination are more sensitive.

Does geography then potentially induce cultural differences for the interpretation of marketing messages ? This seems to be the case. As explained earlier and as an example, colors can be interpreted differently in distinct cultures and countries. Is it then still possible today for global brands to adopt a global marketing approach ? Is it still possible today to disperse the same communication and messages globally ? Most probably not. Companies might have to rethink their marketing approach and might need to 'localize' their campaigns by adapting their ads to the various local cultures to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Another question to raise would be to understand if it is still possible today for brands to publish controversial messages and campaigns, for example such as the fashion company Benetton did in the past ? In the 1990s, Benetton's marketing campaigns were very unusual. Instead of promoting their clothes, they addressed very controversial topics through shocking ad campaigns. As an example, Figure 24 represents the controversial combination of a white little girl pictured as an angel and a black little boy featured as a demon. Would such an ad still be acceptable today in a world dominated by social media ? Would it have been possible for H&M to intentionally publish a controversial ad to create a public debate such as Benetton did in 1990s ? Most probably not. Nowadays, controversial advertisements wouldn't be possible with the ubiquitous presence of social media. Companies have to be much more aware of their actions and potential mistakes as every single misled action is immediately backlashed by social networkers in just a few minutes.

If we assume that the H&M advertisement was truly unintentional, how could it then be possible that such a misstep has taken place in a large (and supposedly well-structured) multinational company like H&M ? As many wondered, how was it possible for H&M that such a mistake remained unnoticed even after the involvement of so many people in the development of this campaign ? Undoubtedly this raises concerns on the internal working processes of H&M, and particularly in its marketing department. Besides this, H&M may also have a lack of diversity within their marketing employees, even though this should not be an acceptable reason for approving this mistake. As a global company, the H&M employees should anyhow have sufficient awareness regarding Diversity & Inclusiveness topics. The resulting decision by H&M to hire a new Diversity & Inclusiveness Leader is in my opinion a good step forward, but it does not guarantee that such an event will not happen again in the future. Avoiding similar events should actually be possible only if all employees (starting from the CEO) would be truly attentive to this topic. I will later on further develop other

managerial actions and recommendations that H&M could consider implementing towards this topic.

A last consideration that is relevant to discuss is the actual intention of iconic people and their power of influence. Is the high level of influence of iconic people and influencers not becoming too predominant ? Before the emergence of social media, traditional media such as newspapers, TV-news, or radios were predominant. These traditional media employed professional media people, and events or crisis were analyzed and debated by professionals. Today, through the social medias, anybody can express his / her opinion in a viral way without a proper analysis of the situation. The numerous retweets and reactions on TheWeeknd and LeBron's posts demonstrated the lack of perspective on the crisis by most people. Is it acceptable (or at least advisable) that people share their opinions without discussing it first with the relevant brand ? For instance, when looking at TheWeeknd's reaction, isn't it too drastic to immediately end his collaboration with H&M without even trying first to understand what truly happened ? Are iconic people and influencers lacking critical reflection ? Or is there pressure from their community to react anyhow in order not to be perceived as disclaiming their own ethnic origins ? This leads me to think that there is no space anymore in this hyper connected world for companies to make mistakes without being immediately criticized and condemned by social networkers.

One may also potentially think that the actual intentions of many iconic people and influencers could be malicious. Did they react on this advertisement just to gain more personal visibility ? Or just to get an additional buy-in from their community ? When reacting, are iconic people or influencers truly sharing a personal opinion, or are they just feeding their social media account to serve their personal interest (i.e. gaining more views on their posts and thus generating more personal income revenues) ? It is unfortunately impossible to identify the border between good and evil. But making a step back on what the influencers post and how fast they post should raise a critical view to all readers and followers. Is the post actually serving a cause or a personal interest rather than expressing an honest opinion ?

After sharing some reflections on this case study, I will now suggest a few managerial solutions and recommendations that could be implemented to avoid duplicating these incidents in the future. These could be helpful to H&M but also to other global or local companies.

A first recommendation could be to integrate within the company more people from different ethnicities. As mentioned earlier, the issue at H&M might have been caused by the lack of sufficient diversity in its organization, although many global companies such as H&M are nowadays working on this subject by integrating people from different origins and minorities. H&M undertook several actions to prevent another crisis, with among others the hiring of a Diversity and Inclusiveness Leader. However, the origin of that person remains unknown. The fact that H&M didn't communicate neither responded to inquiries on this question might lead to speculations that this Diversity and Inclusiveness Leader is actually a white person. After this incident, it would most probably be more suitable to hire such a profile from a minority community.

A second recommendation for H&M could be to extend the internal controlling process for the development of marketing campaigns and advertisements. Through this, the advertisements would be reviewed by more internal people before being globally published. They could develop a controlling process through which at least one person from every key department of the company would have to approve the advertisements and the external communications before its release. And as highlighted earlier, it might also be interesting for H&M to 'localize' its market approach. As advertising campaigns seem to become more sensitive to local market context, H&M should adapt their communications and advertisements according to each local cultural context.

A third proposal could be to establish a chat box within the organization. As presented earlier, H&M integrated a chat box for their employees right after the incident. The main use of this tool was to gain feedback from their employees in order to discuss their feelings and impressions about the incident. But in my opinion, this chat box should remain a tool to structurally and openly discuss potential issues, incidents, or crisis. Global organizations tend to promote openness and transparency. It would be an opportunity for H&M to act accordingly and to try to gather a larger number of opinions and feedback from its employees.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This case has once again highlighted how fast and how violently people could react in a ubiquitous social media world. H&M faced a tremendous pressure from its consumers and from some iconic people when its advertisement was released in early 2018. However, the brand reacted rapidly and quite efficiently. H&M issued several apologies and undertook several actions to rectify the situation as fast as possible.

The main purpose of this TFE was to define what impact iconic people had on a misled product campaign of H&M. Before starting this TFE, we might have thought that this unfortunate event would bring significant impacts on H&M's brand image and financial performances. Through this incident, H&M had received a lot of negative comments and had lost the collaboration of several key iconic people. Yet, the actual consequences weren't too impactful. The sales results and the earnings of the company didn't seem to be much affected, while the brand value remained on same decreasing slope as the previous years. This leads us to believe that iconic people and influencers might not have the influence and the power that we might think of, at least to affect the economical performances of a global company. The real power and influence of iconic people seems thus actually more limited in time and in reach to the size of their community of followers.

Still, this incident raises many concerns and questions for our society and for a global company such as H&M. How can a large corporation employing so many professional experts still make (unintentional) mistakes like these ? How can H&M be so late in deploying an effective diversity culture across its whole organization ? How can this global brand still undervalue the need to respect local cultures and sensibilities ? And for ourselves, how can we accept that thousands of people react so vigorously just because a few iconic people have (too rapidly) expressed an opinion ? How can we keep a critical mind in a fast moving social media world where the speed of reaction seems unfortunately more valuable than the depth of the opinion ?

I learned from this TFE and from my findings that it is crucial to remain critical when reviewing such an advertisement. It is important to take time and to step back in order to understand the original intentions of the company as well as the reactions of iconic people. It also underlines that human mistakes should still be acceptable in our society and that people or companies should be first understood before being negatively backlashed.

'Errare humanum est'.

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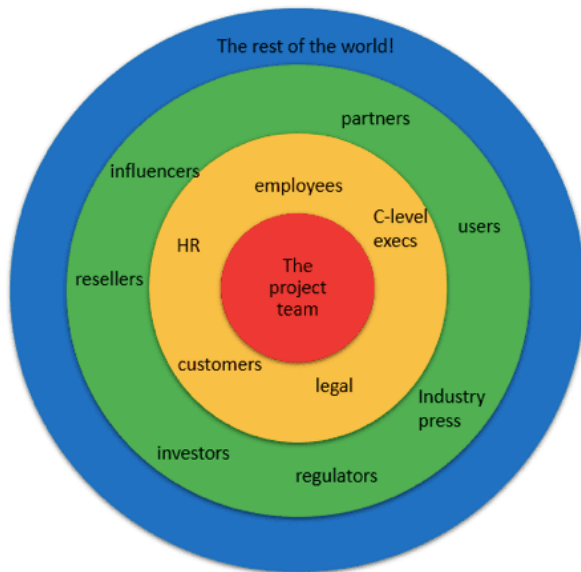
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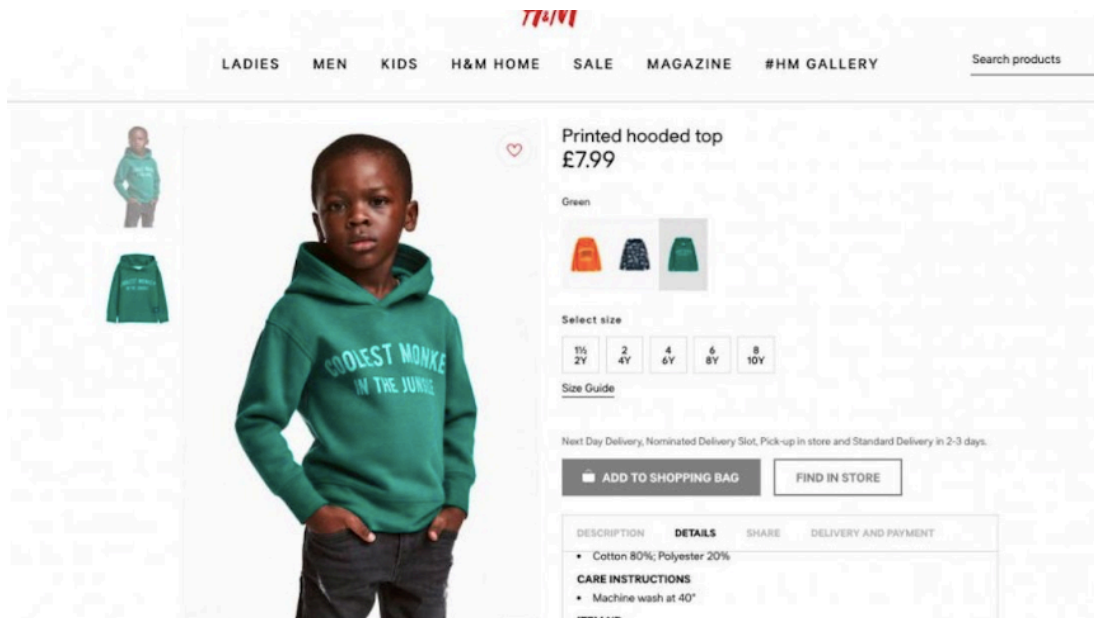
9. ANNEXES

Figure 1: Representation of different stakeholders



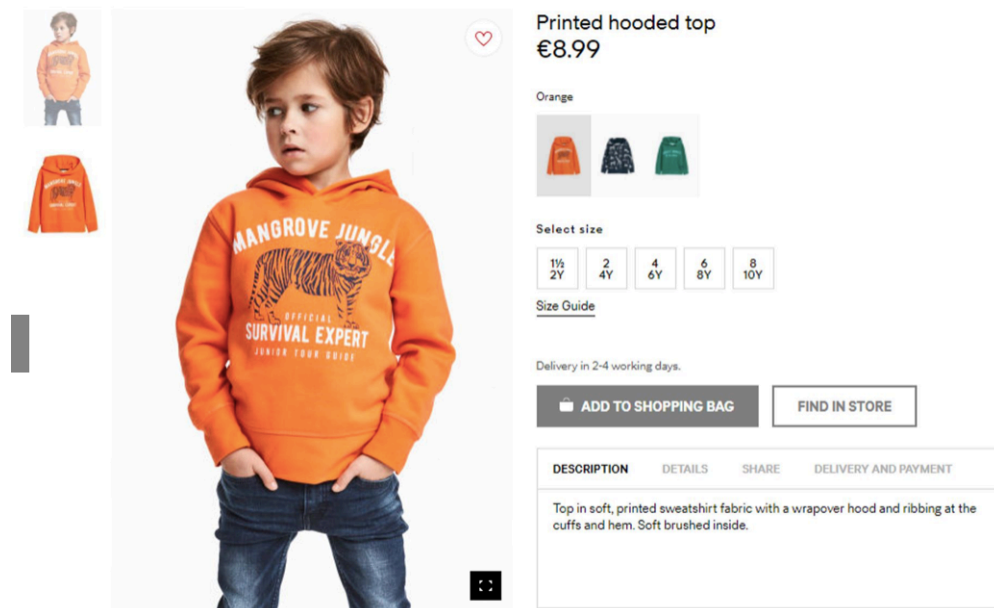
Source: Morphy, T. (2008). *What is a stakeholder?* Online <https://www.stakeholdermap.com/stakeholder-definition.html>.

Figure 2: Representation of the H&M advertisement and of the black boy wearing the green hoodie “Coolest monkey in the jungle” written on



Source: Hardy, A. (2008). *The internet fixed that H&M monkey sweatshirt photo.* Online <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/hm-monkey-hoodie-racism-artists-edit-redesign>.

Figure 3: Image of the white boy wearing the orange hoodie with “survival expert” written on



Source: RTBF (2008). “Coolest monkey in the jungle”: H&M présente ses excuses pour une photo polémique. Online https://www.rtb.be/info/societe/detail_coolest-monkey-in-the-jungle-h-m-presente-ses-excuses-pour-une-photo-polemique?id=9805553.

Figure 4: Image of the white boy wearing the black hoodie



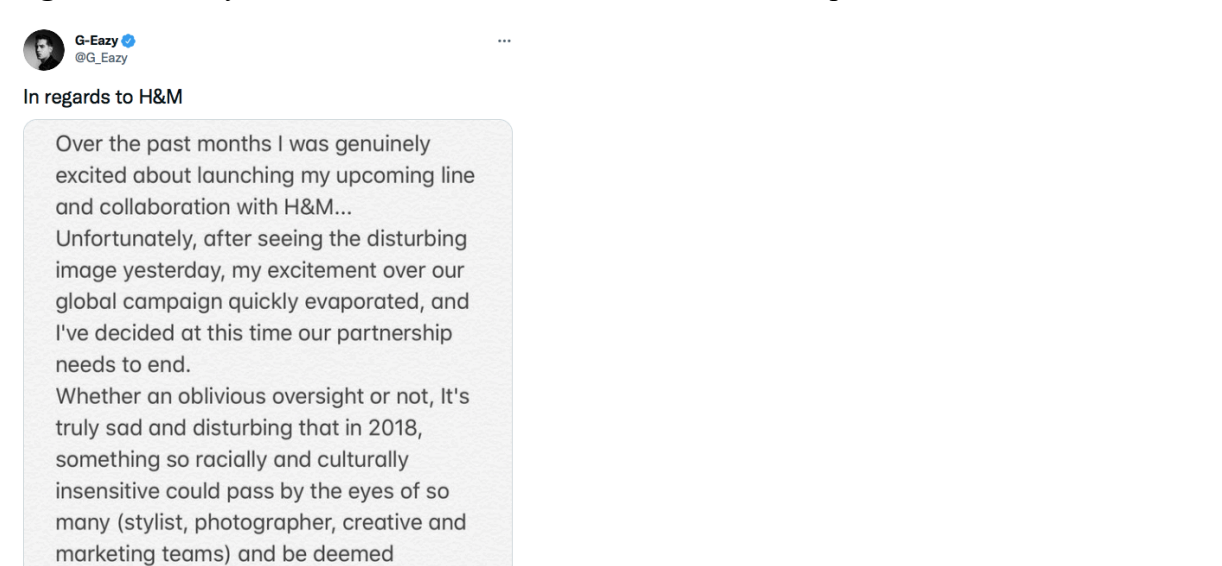
Source: Ishola, S. (2018). HM deletes pictures after backlash from using a black child model to promote hoodie with racial insult. Online <https://allure.vanguardngr.com/2018/01/hm-deletes-pictures-after-harsh-reactions-trail-its-using-a-black-child-model-to-promote-hoodie-with-racial-insult/>.

Figure 5: The Weeknd's reaction on the advertisement of H&M, his post on Twitter



Source: Helic, M. (2018). *Offensé par H&M, TheWeeknd met fin à leur collaboration*. Online <https://www.parismatch.com/People/Offense-par-H-M-The-Weeknd-met-fin-a-leur-collaboration-1435127>.

Figure 6: G-Eazy's reaction on the advertisement of H&M, his post on Twitter





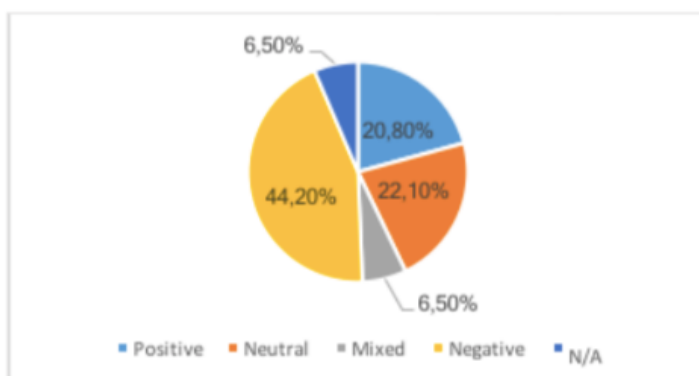
Source: Twitter, (2018). *In regards to H&M*. Online https://twitter.com/g_eazy/status/950869643803201537.

Figure 7: LeBron's reaction on the H&M's advertisement, post on Instagram



Source: Guadeloupe La 1^{ère}. (2018). *H&M présente ses excuses, trop tard pour les internautes*. Online <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/guadeloupe/hm-presente-ses-excuses-trop-tard-internautes-547895.html>.

Figure 8: Distribution of the different attitudes from participants towards the advertisement (out of 150 participants).



Source: Bjerre, M. (2018). *H&M & « Coolest monkey in the jungle » A study on correlations between crisis communication and intentional consumer behavior*. Online

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326271422_Coolest_Monkey_in_the_Jungle_-_A_study_on_correlations_between_crisis_communication_and_intentional_consumer_behavior.

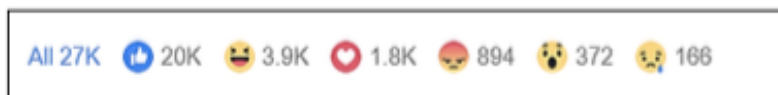
Figure 9: H&M's response to the backlash on Facebook



Source: H&M. (2018). Facebook post. Retrieved from:

https://www.facebook.com/hmtheus/posts/2029989230572653?__tn__=-R.

Figure 10: Repartition of reaction from the audience on H&M's apology on Facebook



Source: H&M. (2018). Facebook post. Retrieved from:

https://www.facebook.com/hmtheus/posts/2029989230572653?__tn__=-R.

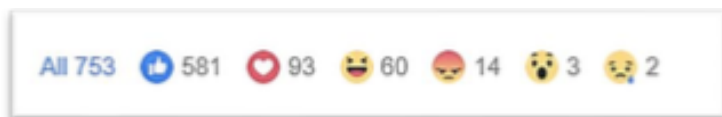
Figure 11: H&M's apology post on Facebook on the 16th of January 2018



Source: H&M. (2018). Facebook post we are listening. Retrieved from:

<https://www.facebook.com/hmtheus/photos/a.1514853132086268/2033607470210829/?type=3>.

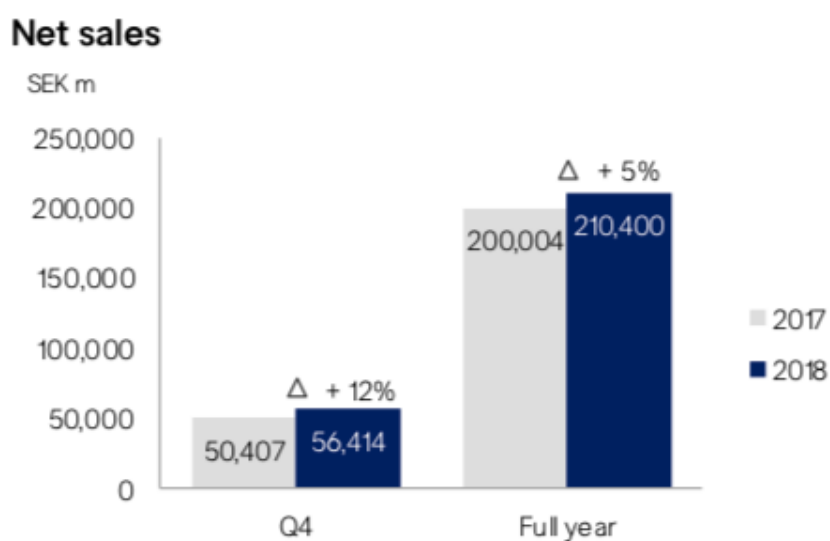
Figure 12: The audience's reactions on H&M's apology post (of figure 7)



Source: H&M. (2018). Facebook post we are listening. Retrieved from:

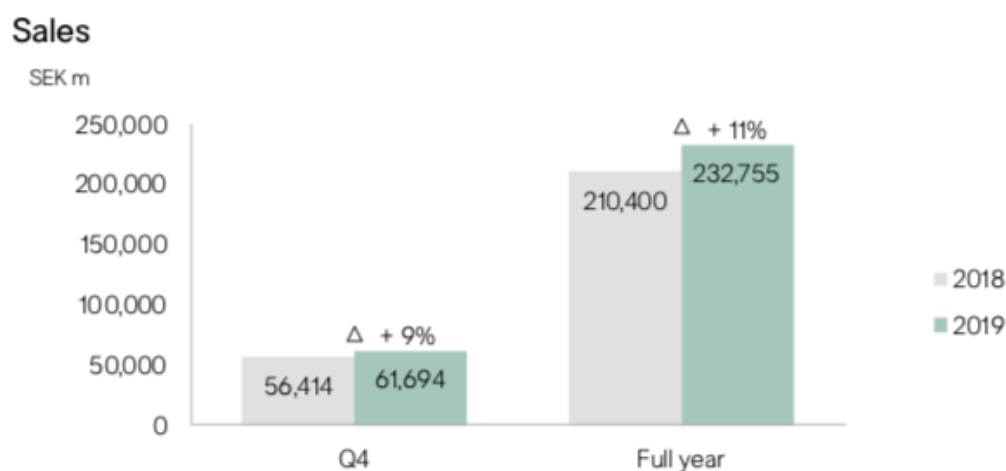
<https://www.facebook.com/hmtheus/photos/a.1514853132086268/2033607470210829/?type=3>.

Figure 13: Net sales of H&M group from year 2017 and 2018 (in millions of SEK)



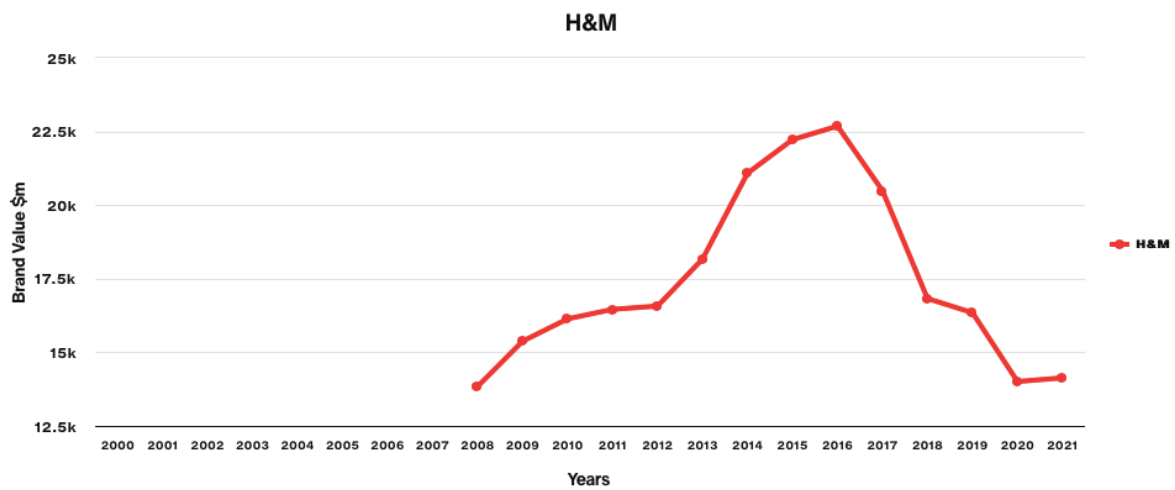
Source: H&M Hennes&Mauritz AB. (2018). *Full year report 2018*. Online <https://hmgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2371044.pdf>.

Figure 14: Net sales from H&M group from year 2018 to 2019 (in millions of SEK)



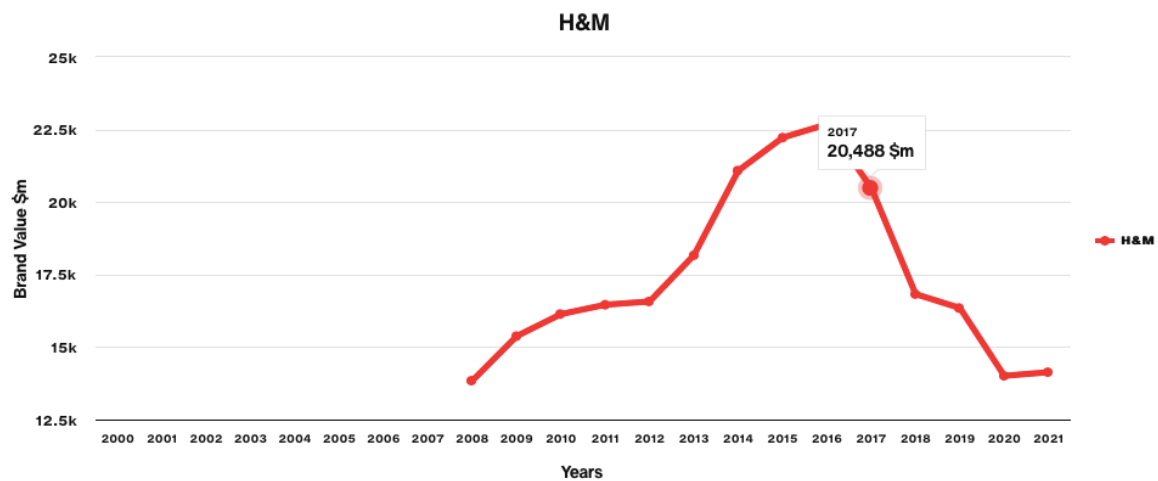
Source: H&M Group. (2019). *Full year report 2019*. Online <https://hmgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2629510.pdf>.

Figure 15: Interbrand distribution of Brand Value of H&M (from 2000-202)



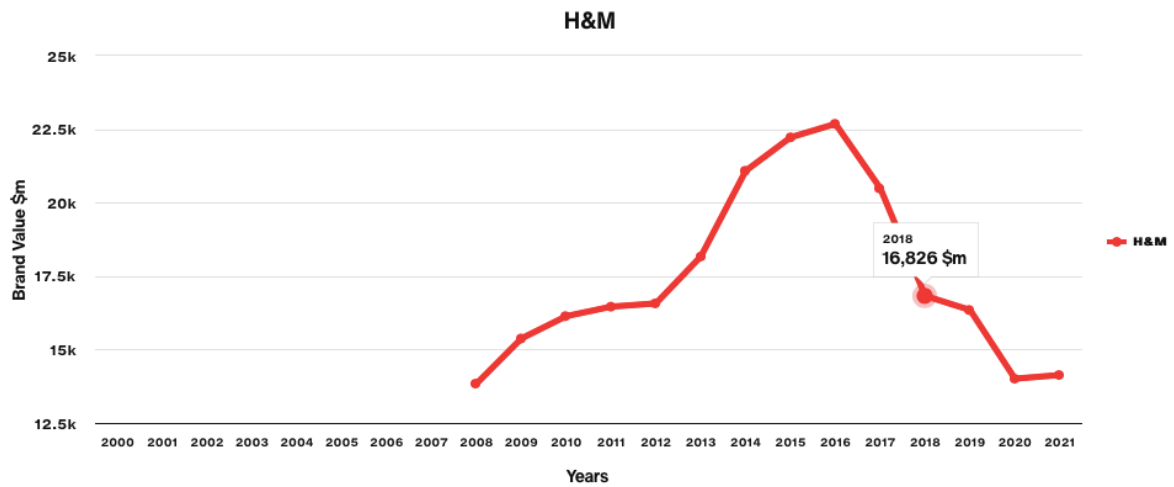
Source: Interbrand. (2021). *Best global brands H&M*. Online <https://interbrand.com/best-global-brands/hm/>.

Figure 16: Interbrand, brand value of H&M in 2017



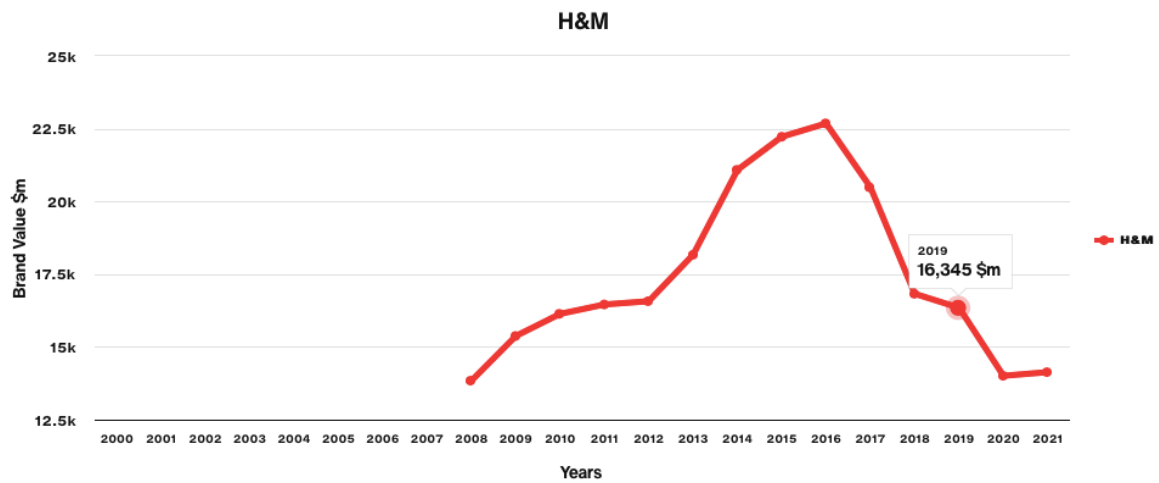
Source: Interbrand. (2021). *Best global brands H&M*. Online <https://interbrand.com/best-global-brands/hm/>.

Figure 17: Interbrand, brand value of H&M in 2018



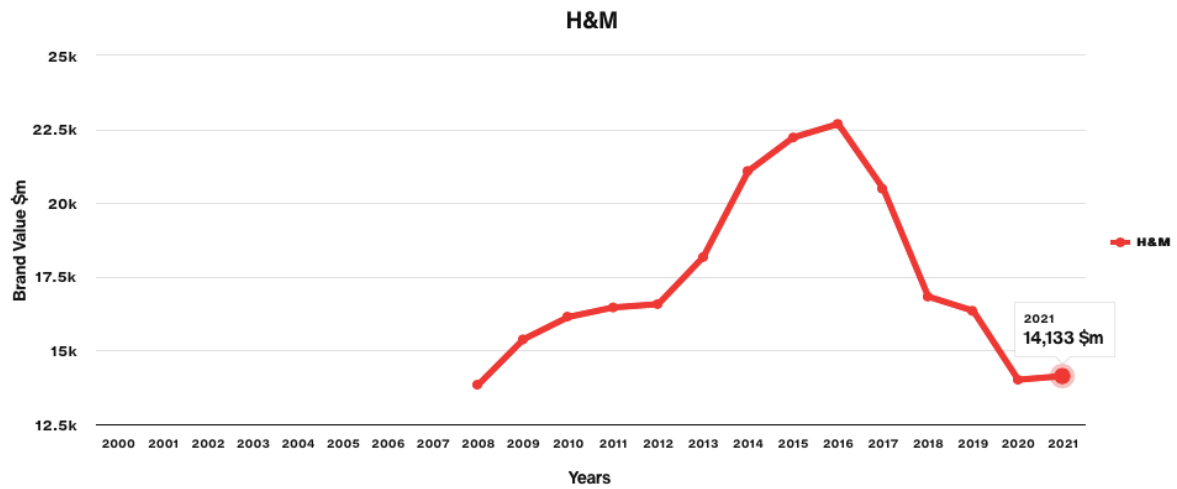
Source: Interbrand. (2021). *Best global brands H&M*. Online <https://interbrand.com/best-global-brands/hm/>.

Figure 18: Interbrand, brand value of H&M in 2019



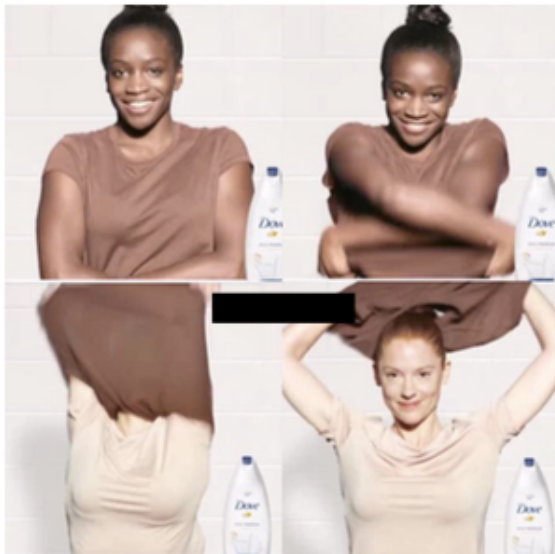
Source: Interbrand. (2021). *Best global brands H&M*. Online <https://interbrand.com/best-global-brands/hm/>.

Figure 19: Interbrand, brand value increase of H&M in 2021



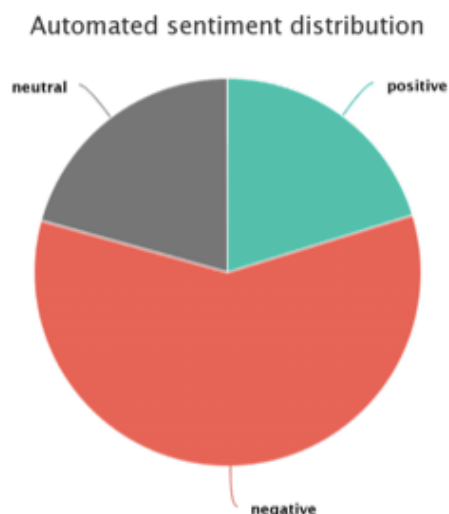
Source: Interbrand. (2021). *Best global brands H&M*. Online <https://interbrand.com/best-global-brands/hm/>.

Figure 20: Screenshot of Dove's advertisement that went viral



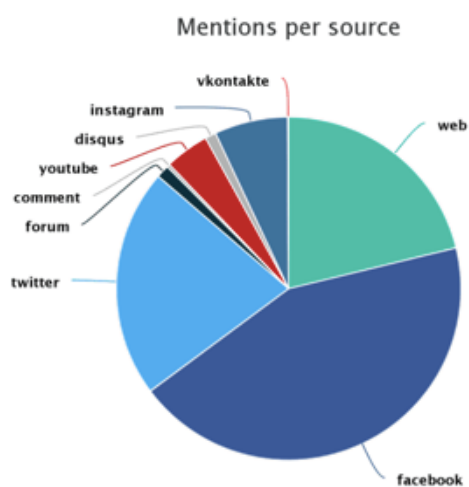
Source: Glavinic, I. (2017). *How Dove's reputation crisis unraveled on social media*. Online <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/blog/dove-reputation-crisis/>.

Figure 21: General feelings from the audience towards the Dove issue



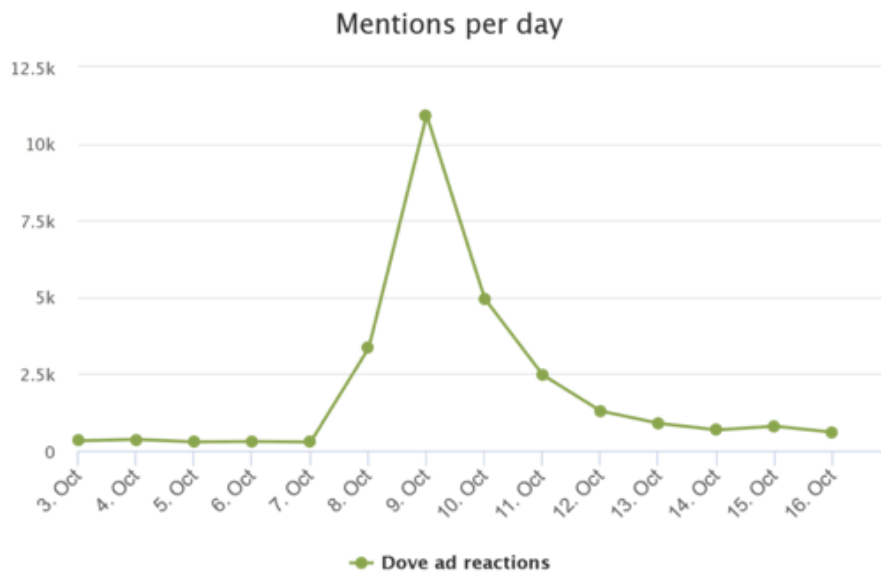
Source: Glavinic, I. (2017). *How Dove's reputation crisis unraveled on social media*. Online <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/blog/dove-reputation-crisis/>.

Figure 22: Distribution of where the Dove's advertisement was discussed the most



Source: Glavinic, I. (2017). *How Dove's reputation crisis unraveled on social media*. Online <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/blog/dove-reputation-crisis/>.

Figure 23: How long Dove's crisis lasted



Source: Glavinic, I. (2017). *How Dove's reputation crisis unraveled on social media*. Online <https://www.mediatoolkit.com/blog/dove-reputation-crisis/>.

Figure 24: controversial advertisement of Benetton



Source: Floros, G. (2016). *10 most controversial United Colors of Benetton ads*. Online <https://friendlystock.com/top-ten-controversial-united-colors-of-benetton-ads/>.