

# Marketing Communication

## Balenciaga Crisis

Child Pornography

Promoting

**BALENCIAGA**

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## *1. Introduction*

### *1.1 Title explanation*

Balenciaga is an avant-garde luxury fashion store, one of the most famous and well-known in the world. **Founded in 1927 by Cristobal Balenciaga in Spain** and later expanded to Italy. Today it generates sales of more than 130 million dollars a year in its Italian branch and has businesses on digital platforms, external companies, associations, and events. Every day the company expands through people's minds, either because of its striking clothing, its relationships with other companies, or, many times, due to its great controversies and crises.

The fashion company has already gone through several crises and cancellations on the internet, but **none affected the brand's image as strongly as the one that occurred at the end of 2022**. This happened due to 2 campaigns that Balenciaga carried out to **"promote children's clothing for Christmas "**. But that came in stark contrast with the story assimilated by the public, who **accused the promotional photos of pedophilia and child pornography**. Both issues are quite frowned upon and criticized by society. What it cost the brand to be accused of several complaints, low purchases, and "broken important relationships". In addition to the popularity of the criticism, they made past cancellations already made to the brand come back, causing people to accuse the brand of things like satanism, pedophilia, and homophobia, among others.

### *1.2 Personal Purpose*

We chose Balenciaga as our crisis brand primarily **because it's a company we all knew about and was both easy to describe** (a clothing house) and easy to research (due to its huge impact on the internet). In addition to the fact that **the issue that causes the**



**controversy is quite striking and harshly criticized by society**, this makes it different from other business crises that are usually caused by "bad company decisions", such as Netflix or Apple.

On the other hand, we were struck by the history of crises that the company endured, and **we wanted to see how it reacted to this new cancellation**. Because it is recent enough to be able to contextualize it with daily actions, but far enough to be able to analyze the changes that affected the company. Balenciaga had a striking, strong, studyable, and highly controversial crisis, perfect for this case study.

## *2. Development Division*

### *2.1 Form of the crisis, how it was Generated?*

Balenciaga, along with most stores around the world, shares its new products through its internet pages. Distributing information through its various platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and its official page. This means **of communication has become the main one for the brand**, **not only** because of its wide range of products to offer but also because of the events or campaigns that it carries out to offer groups of new products. Normally in globally festive times like "Christmas".

The company built a public that is quite interested in the development of the company, such as when they launch their products and especially with what new and original advertising they will do so. This is because Balenciaga has distinguished himself from



Figure 1: Balenciaga Promoting their products.

other brands for his way of communicating with campaigns that border on unethical or conventional themes of this time.

With these types of actions, the company managed to create its own brand identity, going beyond the functional aspect (clothing for people) with themes such as "revolutionary", rare, avant-garde, or even something out of society. Without a doubt, this is something very creative and popular among people, since people who feel associated with the brand feel directly associated with the identity of "something new and unconventional", which is precisely what Balenciaga tries to show in their products.

However, right on the path of going "against the conventional" is where the Balenciaga clothing brand finds its crisis, since due to an attempt to startle with an unusual theme, it crossed the limit of society, showing images that can be related to pedophilia or relationships with minors. Without a doubt, it is a subject that no other company had touched before, and with reason. Because by trying to maintain this identity of "something out of the ordinary" or "what goes with society", the company has achieved that, going against society. But at the end of the day, it is society that pays the bills.

**It can be said that the image of a brand is everything**, it is what is perceived, what sells, and what makes the company grow. Balenciaga knows this very well and has many connections with highly recognized public figures in the world of fashion or other areas of marketing. Even so, as soon as the company entered into crisis, many of these figures safeguarded their interests and began to publish that they were going to break business with the company because they had nothing to do with what Balenciaga is promoting at the moment. In this way, Balenciaga lost many of his connections, even momentarily. Even so, the company made an effort to cover up its mistakes and continued to announce



Figure 2: Balenciaga  
Child Abuse Scandal

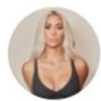
new campaigns and partnerships with famous people. The company vaguely criticized these "irrelevant to the topic" actions, but which later continued as normal.

## *2.2 Brand Image*

The **campaign carried out by Balenciaga has been controversial**, to say the least, but it has fulfilled the objective of any propaganda, which is that people talk about it. Both Balenciaga and other beauty houses such as Gucci carry out different advertisements or campaigns daily to attract people's attention and try not to be repetitive with the competition or with previous installments, in addition to *trying to be more striking and creative than the last time*. That is why **they often have repercussions to use unusual and often controversial propaganda (shockvertising)**, sometimes related to death or demonic sects. Normally achieving the desired goal, which is to get people's attention, and often people feel connected to the message. But there are limits, in today's society a campaign related to death is better viewed than "promoting pedophilia" since one can see it as a form of complaint or symbolism, but people are very careful when saying "No" to child pornography. That is *why the clientele, and the observers of the bells began to question Balencia's actions after the photos of her children in rooms* decorated with BDSM (Bondage, Discipline or Domination, Sadism or Submission, Masochism Messages) such as sadomasochism. This can also be seen as "Guerrilla Marketing" as **they touch on topics that no other company would dare to**. But if the fall in sales and relations with the Balenciaga brand is analyzed, it can be said that avant-garde advertising caused more damage than it was generated by controversy.

Moreover, today one of the *most important things for the brand is its loyalty system*. With the **unstoppable growth of connections in the world**, there is more and more competition at a much lower price, reaching a point where quality cannot exceed supply or quantity. That is why companies like *Balenciaga, which sell few clothes but at a high*

cost, have to create a special connection with the client, where they feel that they are not only buying the clothes but that there is also a kind of added value. In the case of Balenciaga, it can be a sign of **status but also of ideals, such as creativity, minimalism, or a "revolutionary spirit"**. Because on a certain level, people enjoy being different, and if the brand is represented with unusual images like "death" people try to say "I'm also unusual" or "I don't care about the opinion of society" when buying clothes from these brands. This leads to a big problem when the campaign tries to promote an ideal that is not visually appealing to anyone, as pedophilia was. Although this makes a person special and rare, no one wants to feel associated with this idea because it is also wrong and unethical. Adding to the fact that many people personify a brand (they have all kinds of products from it), if the brand makes a mistake, people also feel that it made a mistake. That is why after this crisis, many private and public figures declared that they had cut off connections with the brand.



**Kim Kardashian** ✓  
@KimKardashian

...

I have been quiet for the past few days, not because I haven't been disgusted and outraged by the recent Balenciaga campaigns, but because I wanted an opportunity to speak to their team to understand for myself how this could have happened.

6:58 PM · Nov 27, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

*Figure 3: Kim Kardashian Opinion about Balenciaga*

At the end of the day, companies like Balenciaga sell more of their image than their products. That is why maintaining a good public opinion is so important, but also so complicated. Balenciaga has done a lot right in the past, but the **brand must learn that there are limits to everything**. After this experience, Balenciaga is unlikely to comment on the issue again, spending more time clearing its name and moving on as a great brand.

## 2.3 Company Value, Brand

When creating a product, the creator must answer this simple question "Who is going to benefit from this?". Finding a potential client is one of the main parts of creating any brand. Knowing that someone needs a product and then satisfying that need makes your company come alive and make sense. Balenciaga has revolutionized his public and his status, in the complicated but beneficial relationship of young people.

Many companies complete a life cycle along with the life cycle of their customers, at first the customer is fascinated with the revolutionary product he sees, then he buys it until he gets used to it and then dies, dying with him the brand that served him for all life That's why constantly targeting a young, buying audience is so important, but exceedingly difficult. Youth is characterized by being unexpected and completely different from the past generation. The image of a brand that worked a year ago no longer works now. That is why always being connected with the society that can pay you is something so important.

Balenciaga achieves this, as mentioned above, by touching on topics that are rarely talked about in society, topics that can be considered taboo or prohibited by society. For example, being related to cults, blood, poverty, or everything contrary to what fashion shows. That is why he takes the risk, sometimes not very successfully, to mention topics that are very withdrawn by society.



Figure 4: Balenciaga Clothes



That is why having a good public relationship with society is always a good thing. But **you must know** how to keep the line between being connected to society and going against it to be creative and attract attention. Still, going to extremes is not a good thing, no one wants conservative clothing, but they also don't want to be associated with highly controversial clothing. **This small difference is what punished Balenciaga with his crisis.** That is why you have to learn the difference between a "taboo" subject and something that is strictly illegal, such as child pornography. Going to such a far end speaks badly of the company, greatly affecting its public relations and image. And since the company lives more from its relationships than from its products, it is vitally important to heal these wounds caused by the crisis.

### *3. Conclusion*

Balenciaga, a renowned luxury fashion brand, faced a significant crisis that heavily impacted its image and relationships. The controversy arose from campaigns promoting children's clothing for Christmas, which were accused of pedophilia and child pornography by the public. This controversy led to numerous complaints, decreased purchases, and damaged relationships with important partners. Balenciaga's history of pushing boundaries and unconventional advertising played a role in this crisis, as it strayed too far from societal norms. The brand lost connections with influential figures in the fashion industry, affecting its reputation. Maintaining a positive public opinion is crucial for companies like Balenciaga, as they rely on their image to drive sales. The crisis highlighted the importance of setting boundaries and understanding societal limits. Balenciaga must focus on repairing its reputation and moving forward as a strong brand, learning from this experience, and ensuring such controversies do not happen again. The company's value lies not only in its products but also in its image and public perception, making it crucial to maintain a good relationship with its target audience. The crisis serves as a reminder that staying connected to society while being creative and attention-grabbing is a delicate balance that must be maintained.

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