

Introduction

The commercial that was launched by Pepsi in 2017, which showcased Kendall Jenner as the main face, led to various controversies due to the portrayal of images of protests related to sensitive movements such as Black Lives Matter. Most importantly, critics emphasize the portrayal of Jenner. A white, privileged woman with the power to democratize the protests and help calm law enforcement with consumer Pepsi- placate tension, divert the REAL complex issue of economically subordinated vs. police. This is a distraction and a Pepsi commercial, and the protests and social justice? Well, the critics say, the ad shows how any corporate entity can take a social justice movement and resell it, and social justice too, without any accountability. This is called appropriation. This essay on the Pepsi commercial highlights appropriation and social justice backlash. Beyond simply social justice to capitalism clash, it trivializes the real racism in our society in ads to economically empowered dominants. For the protests of racism, created from the collapse of economically subordinated and marginalized groups in our society, the ads transferred the protest to a commercial. For the economically empowered, the marginalized economically cannot be in the ads.

Background and Concept Analysis

Background Information

Pepsi commercial of 2017. It was released in April of that year and featured Jenner as the focal point of the manifestation of protest culture (Weidlich, 2017). The commercial, directed by Phillip Andelman, portrays Jenner stepping away from the photoshoot to join the protest. She then settles the tension of the protesters and police in a standoff by giving one of the officers a can of Pepsi. The beverage company was trying to promote the ideas of peace and unity as they used imagery from real-life protests in an attempt to advocate for social action. The commercial

was released to the protests and police and was met with real social action. The company was met with real social action, and the commercial was met with real social action. The company's stealing imagery from a protest was quickly met with real social action. The commercial and participation in this representation of protest culture were extremely controversial. The representation of protest culture is extremely controversial. Black Lives Matter protests, which center around police brutality and systemic racism, are part of these protests. The company was met with real social action and company was met with real social action. The company's stealing imagery from a protest was quickly met with real social action.

Concept 1 Analysis: Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation is the use of material from a particular culture, especially of the oppressed or marginalized groups, by members of the dominant or privileged groups. This often occurs without genuine knowledge of or respect for those elements in their original culture. It often leads to the trivialization or commodification of those elements, which is done in bad faith. It is context-erasing, stripping the elements from their culture and relegating them to sound, sight, and superficial visuals or commercial products (Lalonde, 2021). In the case of the 2017 Pepsi commercial, cultural appropriation directly occurs through the utilization of images from popular protests (united in the phrase) Black Lives Matter. It is done for profit, bypassing the struggles and injustices that the movement represents. This also exemplifies cultural appropriation by the mere use of protest imagery for profit.

Protest imagery used in Pepsi advertisements is a prime example of cultural appropriation as a result of the overused association of peaceful protests with the struggles of racially oppressed protesters. It is naive of the company to construct a false narrative of peace in the context of a protest. Pepsi is undermining the peace of the protest with police, social activists,

and violence. A white, privileged, and ignorant celebrity is cast as the peacekeeper and hero who ends the protesters' fight with a can of pop. Pepsi has undermined and neutralized the Black Lives Matter protests and other movements for social equity, and their fight for the protesters' peace that they constructed. The advertisement mocks social movements and strips the symbolism of social protest, showing how cultural appropriation relays the trivialization of complex social movements.

Concept 2 Analysis: Representation

The term representation is often used in connection with marketing, advertising, and film work in terms of certain social demographics, more specifically, underrepresented groups and their depiction in culture and media. Visibility should be multidimensional. Representation should capture the existence and the amount of control social groups possess. One can strengthen negative social stereotypes through unconstructive and unbalanced representations of social groups. On the other hand, stereotypes can be dismantled, and social groups can be empowered through balanced and authentic representation. In the case of advertisements such as Pepsi (2017), representation is greatly intertwined, as the ad in focus utilizes the images of protest, which, in appearance, carry and make visible the faces of marginalized and oppressed victims of systemic racism (Bencker, 2021). In the ad, however, the protest is televised and images of the white, privileged model, Kendall Jenner, are used as the face of the ad and the protest, streamlining, if not completely ignoring, the images, experiences, and voices of those who remain marginalized in the protest movements. This type of representation is a reflection of the protest movements and the issues of racial justice representation in mainstream media.

The ad centers around Kendall Jenner, a white, privileged celebrity, and casts her as the hero of the 'protests'. Jenner, who in the ads is assumed to be fully devoid of the pains of the

‘protesters’, negotiates the peace deal and resolves the conflict of interest between the ‘protesters’ and police, victims of the ‘peace offering’. Not only does this erasure distort the work and contribution of people racialized as ‘marginalized’ in social justice movements, and social justice work, but also paints a romanticized version of Jenner as the peace maker who single handedly resolves the ‘corporate social justice’, without any real deep structural remedies that address the capitalist inequalities that make the ‘protests’ a necessity. That the ad places Jenner at the center of the peace offering construct illustrates the cultural erasure of the people who have suffered racial capitalist injustices and further assumes that the white privileged are the only people who can save the day, supporting harmful social justice race activism stereotypes.

Concept 3 Analysis: Systemic Racism

The term systemic racism means the policies, practices, and societal norms that create racial inequities across several systems, like policing, schooling, health care, and jobs etc. While racism at the individual level may be different, the impact here is at the level of social structures. Systemic racism affects marginalized racial groups and is, therefore, an inter-generational process that perpetuates the inequalities in the distribution of wealth, social and political power, and opportunities across different races (Banaji et al, 2021). In protest movements like Black Lives Matter, systemic racism is the target of the police violence, mass incarceration, unjust socio-economic structures, etc., that the protesters have been organizing against. Eliminating systemic racism is an extensive social, political, and legal work that has to be done in order to achieve the desired results. The 2017 Pepsi commercial, however, worked against the reality of the depth of systemic racism and the consequences on society by offering quick and easy fixes rather than the complex solutions needed.

Corporations will do almost anything to sell products. Pepsi's attempts to market products are analyzed very carefully. But Pepsi's ad is an example of the corporation downplaying the very real systemic racism prevalent in North America. Pepsi assumes that systemic racism can be solved as people can simply offer a Pepsi to a police officer. We see the ad as a desire to evoke feelings of peace and wholeness. But in reality, the ad ends up grossly simplifying the problem of systemic racism in North America and the complexities surrounding the issue. People don't just become racist and prejudiced - systemic racism is ingrained in the very policies and structures of a country. Most people don't recognize the fact that people in the country (above and beyond the US) don't just face systemic racism - they also face other corporate policies that are equally racist and prejudiced. Pepsi fails to recognize the complexities that surround the issue of racism and other corporate policies. We also don't just face systemic racism - We also have to deal with corporate policies that are equally racist. The reductive nature of this ad and the serious issues that surround it also highlight just how constructive it can be to use this ad.

Synthesis

In the 2017 Pepsi commercial, the examples of cultural appropriation and systemic racism can be examined together. The advertisement shows, in a reductive and predatory manner, the protests of the racial justice movement, particularly the Black Lives Matter movement. The advertisement reproduces cultural appropriation in the most blatant and mainstream form. The ad features a white supermodel, Kendall Jenner, and this construction misrepresents the role of the white, privileged, and tranquil in activism, as she becomes the centerpiece/pivot in the resolution of all race-related conflicts by simply drinking a Pepsi. Ironically, she is positioned as the activist. The ad features the most blatant form of the ad, ignoring the purpose of protest, which is to dismantle systemic racism. The ad illuminates the irony, as for Ethnic Studies, it shows how

social media communicates the commodification of social justice movements. This “social justice” advertisement highlights the exclusion of marginalized communities, and the ad seeks to highlight racial inequality as a form of ‘justice’ for the non-marginalized. Ethnic Studies seeks to show the absence of racialized communities in the media and cultural representation.

The ad's implications for Ethnic Studies are considerable in showing that the media commodifies essential social justice movements for profit. This ad exemplifies the erasure of the silenced and the oversimplification of systemic racism. Ethnic Studies seek the more genuine portrayals of marginalized populations in media and within the culture (Fischer et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The Pepsi advert from 2017 is an example of how appropriation in culture, misrepresentation, and the trivialization of systemic racism all come together in advertising. The exploitation of real depictions of protest and putting in the center of the ad an impoverished white woman who is portrayed as the savior and solution to all the problems, detracts from the real challenges and obstacles marginalized communities endure as part of the protest. The ad attempts to tackle social justice issues and completely ignores those most impacted by the injustice of the social justice issues. In the context of Ethnic Studies, this commercial illustrates the media's tendency to exploit the struggles of the marginalized to profit while simultaneously creating and reinforcing negative stereotypes and ignoring the real roots of racism. This example shows that the media and the arts inadequately present and portray racial justice.

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