

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Moschino's politically tinged campaign creates controversy

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Moschino's fall/winter 2018 campaign has drawn controversy. Image credit: Moschino

By SARAH JONES

Italian fashion label Moschino's latest advertising campaign is attracting criticism on social media for its approach to a heated political debate.

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For fall/winter 2018, the brand's American creative director Jeremy Scott took aim at the U.S. administration's handling of "illegal aliens" by turning models into otherworldly figures. While the campaign was intended to humanize the topic, the effort has drawn dissent.

"My take is that this campaign was created for shock value that neither shocks nor adds value to the national discourse," said Fred Reffsin, president of [Brandgrowth](#), a New York based luxury branding firm.

"Instead, the campaign comes across as narcissistic borrowed interest, trivializing one of the most important social issues of our time," he said. "If, however the goal was to bring attention to Jeremy Scott then I guess you could call it a success."

[Moschino](#) was reached for comment.

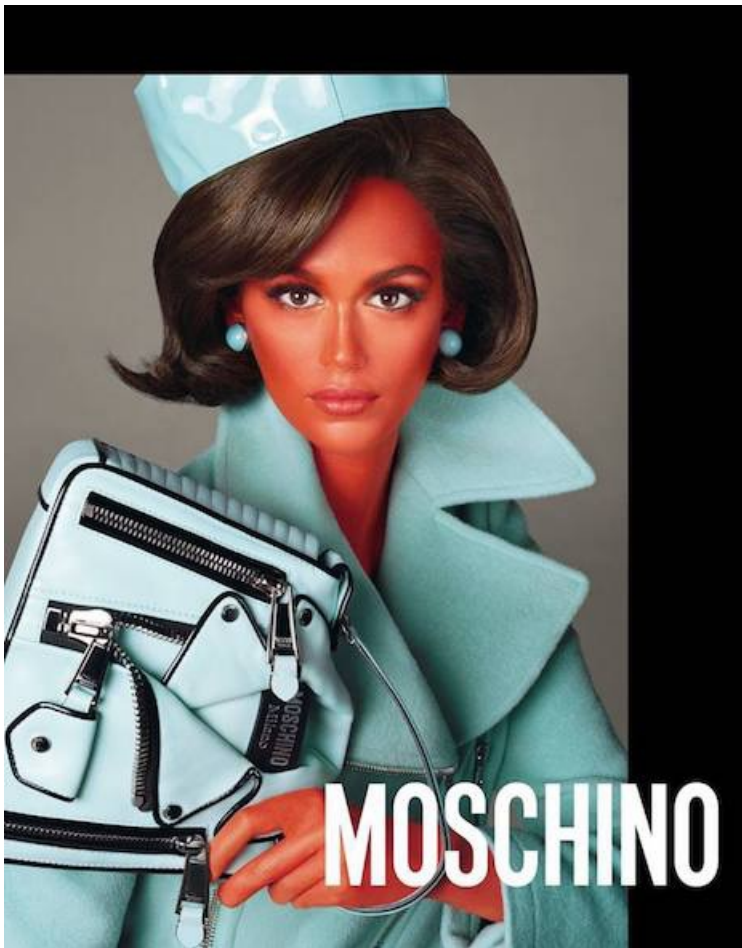
Alien approach

Moschino's ad campaign follows in the footsteps of its runway show in February. During the presentation, models strutted in colorful suits and pillbox hats, creating a retro look reminiscent of Jackie Kennedy.

However, Mr. Scott gave the runway show an alien look by painting a number of models in hues such as blue and green.

The campaign's faces also sport body paint, Rianne Van Rompaey is decked out in a verdant color, while Soo-Joo Park was given a head-to-toe turquoise makeover. Similarly, Vittoria Ceretti is seen in a fuchsia ensemble with a yellowish orange skin tone.

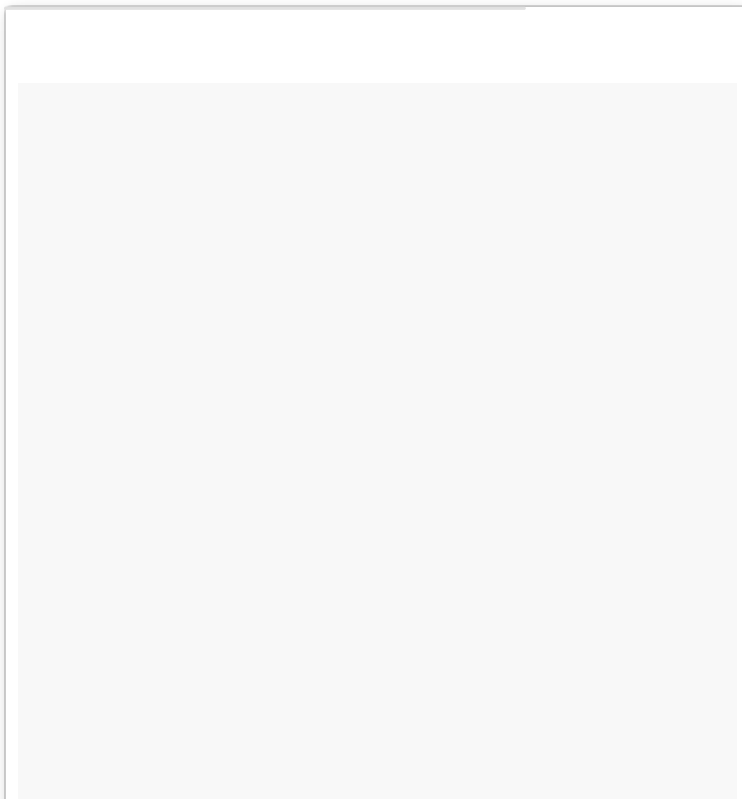
Moschino first shared a photo of model Kaia Gerber. The model's skin was painted an orange-red color for the shoot, leading some to think her skin appeared darkened.



Kaia Gerber for Moschino's fall/winter 2018 campaign. Image credit: Moschino

A number of brands and media outlets have been accused of using blackface in shoots. *Vogue Italia* and Gigi Hadid faced criticism earlier this year for a cover spread in which the model was given a severe tan.

When Mr. Scott shared a Moschino campaign photo of Ms. Hadid in blue, his caption also drew dissent. The designer paired the image with the sentence, "The only thing illegal about this alien is how good she looks."



ALIEN NATION ! @gigihadid STARS IN MY NEW @moschino
CAMPAIGN SHOT BY STEVEN MEISEL & STYLED BY

@carlynecerfdedudzeele HAIR & MAKE UP BY @guidopalau & @patmcgrathreal. WHAT IS AN "ALIEN?" THE CONCEPT OF MY AD CAMPAIGN IS TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE US ADMINISTRATION'S HARSH STANCE TOWARDS 'ILLEGAL ALIENS.' I PAINTED THE MODELS IN MY SHOW AND THIS CAMPAIGN AS A WAY TO OPEN A DISCUSSION ON WHAT EXACTLY AN 'ALIEN' IS - ARE THEY ORANGE BLUE YELLOW GREEN? DOES THIS MATTER? THEY ARE OUR FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, CO WORKERS, RELATIVES AND PEOPLE WE LOVE.

A post shared by Jeremy Scott (@itsjeremyscott) on Jun 25, 20...

In response to this, one comment asked the designer to reconsider the caption, while others called it "tone deaf" or "ignorant."

Mr. Scott then updated his caption to explain the campaign's concept. "What is an "alien?" The concept of my ad campaign is to bring attention to the U.S. administration's harsh stance towards 'illegal aliens.' I painted the models in my show and this campaign as a way to open a discussion on what exactly an 'alien' is - are they orange blue yellow green? Does this matter? They are our friends, neighbors, co workers, relatives and people we love."

Some consumers did support the message and the brand's activism, while others said that the label was profiting off the issue.

Those who have a negative view of immigrants who enter the country illegally also voiced their opposition to the campaign's message.

"Without a doubt this hurts the brand," Mr. Reffsin said. "The best outcome for the brand is that the campaign disappears quickly, and that social media will move on to the next new thing.

"I'm sure the intention was to raise awareness and get people to do something, but because it asks nothing of us, we will do what it asks: nothing," he said.

"The good news is that the brand will survive. Brand loyalists will continue to buy, stores will continue to stock. Pushback will likely be minimal, and life will go on. Fortunately, it is doubtful that people look to Moschino for its political views or social commentary."

Risk and reward

In a time when social media allows customers to voice their criticisms of brands' decisions at any time, navigating through those crises becomes easier while bringing on new challenges.

Speaking at Forrester's Consumer Marketing event on April 6, an analyst from the research firm explained how Forrester views brand crises, how they can be predicted and how to handle them once they arise. When brands get things wrong, and they inevitably do, loyal customers can turn into fierce critics in a flash ([see story](#)).

Taking political positions can be a risky move, but it may be the way to win the luxury consumers of the future.

While many question whether brands should comment on social or political issues, research shows that for Generation Z, social justice is the way to their hearts.

In an era where social norms seem to be shifting and important social conversations are at a high, a new study by DoSomething.org has found that 76 percent of Gen Z consumers have purchased or are open to buying from a brand based on the issues it supports. Many are now even seeking out brands, rather than finding them by happenstance, based on social causes ([see story](#)).

"The risks are huge. We have seen what has happened to brands and people who have waded haphazardly into social waters only to find themselves way over their heads," Mr. Reffsin said. "Consumers are smarter than we give them credit for and many will see the campaign for what it is.

"People buy not out of alignment of positions but because they believe in and support brands that share their values," he said. "It is one thing to support brands that work for the greater good. It is another to participate in exploiting a crisis.

"I can't comment as to whether this is a smart strategy or not. That is up to the customer to decide. What I do know is that the laws of unintended consequences are not limited to luxury. Mass brands are just as capable of poor judgement and making the same mistakes."

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