

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Balenciaga issues long apology and explanation for controversial holiday campaign

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In the Balenciaga spring/summer 2023 campaign images, children are holding teddy bears that are outfitted with accessories reminiscent of adult bondage fetish wear. Image credit: Balenciaga

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Spanish fashion brand Balenciaga apologized for its holiday campaign that included young children posing with sexually dressed toys.

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After a huge backlash from celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and parents around the world, the brand pulled the images, and issued a statement on social media. It addressed the backlash, taking responsibility for the pulled campaign.

"We would like to address the controversies surrounding our recent ad campaigns," the brand's post on Instagram stated.

"We strongly condemn child abuse; it was never our intent to include it in our narrative. The two separate ad campaigns in question reflect a series of grievous errors for which **Balenciaga** takes responsibility."

Due to resounding criticism, Balenciaga Nov. 23 announced the cancellation of its latest ad campaign that featured images of children posing with sexually suggestive merchandise and props.

In the images, children are holding teddy bears that are outfitted with accessories reminiscent of adult bondage fetish wear. The campaign was met with swift backlash, particularly from online parent communities, and the imagery promptly removed ([see story](#)).

French luxury conglomerate Kering has owned **Balenciaga** since 2001.

WE WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS THE CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING OUR RECENT AD CAMPAIGNS. WE STRONGLY CONDEMN CHILD ABUSE; IT WAS NEVER OUR INTENT TO INCLUDE IT IN OUR NARRATIVE. THE TWO SEPARATE AD CAMPAIGNS IN QUESTION REFLECT A SERIES OF GRIEVOUS ERRORS FOR WHICH BALENCIAGA TAKES RESPONSIBILITY.

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN, THE GIFT COLLECTION CAMPAIGN, FEATURED CHILDREN WITH PLUSH BEAR BAGS DRESSED IN WHAT SOME HAVE LABELLED BDSM-INSPIRED OUTFITS. OUR PLUSH BEAR BAGS AND THE GIFT COLLECTION SHOULD NOT HAVE BEEN FEATURED WITH CHILDREN. THIS WAS A WRONG CHOICE BY BALENCIAGA, COMBINED WITH OUR FAILURE IN ASSESSING AND VALIDATING IMAGES. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS LIES WITH BALENCIAGA ALONE.

THE SECOND, SEPARATE CAMPAIGN FOR SPRING 2023, WHICH WAS MEANT TO REPLICATE A BUSINESS OFFICE ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDED A PHOTO WITH A PAGE IN THE BACKGROUND FROM A SUPREME COURT RULING UNITED STATES V. WILLIAMS 2008 WHICH CONFIRMS AS ILLEGAL AND NOT PROTECTED BY FREEDOM OF SPEECH THE PROMOTION OF CHILD PORNOGRAPHY. ALL THE ITEMS INCLUDED IN THIS SHOOTING WERE PROVIDED BY THIRD PARTIES THAT CONFIRMED IN WRITING THAT THESE PROPS WERE FAKE OFFICE DOCUMENTS. THEY TURNED OUT TO BE REAL LEGAL PAPERS MOST LIKELY COMING FROM THE FILMING OF A TELEVISION DRAMA. THE INCLUSION OF THESE UNAPPROVED DOCUMENTS WAS THE RESULT OF RECKLESS NEGLIGENCE FOR WHICH BALENCIAGA HAS FILED A COMPLAINT. WE TAKE FULL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR OUR LACK OF OVERSIGHT AND CONTROL OF THE DOCUMENTS IN THE BACKGROUND AND WE COULD HAVE DONE THINGS DIFFERENTLY.

WHILE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL INVESTIGATIONS ARE ONGOING, WE ARE TAKING THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

- WE ARE CLOSELY REVISING OUR ORGANIZATION AND COLLECTIVE WAYS OF WORKING.
- WE ARE REINFORCING THE STRUCTURES AROUND OUR CREATIVE PROCESSES AND VALIDATION STEPS. WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT NEW CONTROLS MARK A PIVOT AND WILL PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING AGAIN.
- WE ARE LAYING THE GROUNDWORK WITH ORGANIZATIONS WHO SPECIALIZE IN CHILD PROTECTION AND AIMS AT ENDING CHILD ABUSE AND EXPLOITATION.

WE WANT TO LEARN FROM OUR MISTAKES AND IDENTIFY WAYS WE CAN CONTRIBUTE. BALENCIAGA REITERATES ITS SINCERE APOLOGIES FOR THE OFFENSE WE HAVE CAUSED AND EXTENDS ITS APOLOGIES TO TALENTS AND PARTNERS.



Balenciaga issued a long apology for its much-criticized holiday campaign featuring teddy bears in suggestive gear. Image credit: Balenciaga

Bearing down

The post outlined the intentions behind the campaigns, offering both apologies and explanations for the resulting images.

"The first campaign, the Gift Collection Campaign, featured children with plush bear bags dressed in what some have labeled BDSM-inspired outfits," Balenciaga stated.

"Our plush bear bags and the gift collection should not have been featured with children," the post continued. "This was a wrong choice by Balenciaga, combined with our failure in assessing and validating images.

"The responsibility for this lies with Balenciaga alone."

The second campaign had apparently further issues, as outlined by the brand in the post.

Balenciaga claimed negligence on the count of third parties that used document props concerning the legality of child pornography. The third parties assured the company that they were fake, but it was found that they were legal documents.

The brand filed complaints against the third parties as a result of the oversight, and is beginning investigations both within the company and externally.

"The inclusion of these unapproved documents was the result of reckless negligence for which Balenciaga has filed a complaint," the post continued.

"We take full responsibility for our lack of oversight and control of the documents in the background and we could have done things differently."

This was followed by the brand outlining actions it plans to take moving forward, to avoid further controversy and harm ([see story](#)).

The steps include a general revision of work practices, strengthening the leadership structure within creative endeavors, adding checkpoints before publication and contributing to organizations that protect children from abuse.