

Marketing Evil: Can Using Nightmares Lead to Nightmares?

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SYNOPSIS

The sleep wellness tech company, Hatch, had entered the market with splash. After receiving funding on the popular TV show Shark Tank, the brand originally marketed baby monitoring systems before later expanding into alarm clock/sound machines. Looking to continue its rapid sales growth, the company ran a promotional ad campaign in October 2025. The campaign starred popular actress Kiernan Shipka and was based on the horror film genre, with an eye-catching Halloween motif around the horrific nightmares of sleeplessness. The campaign was designed to capture attention for the brand, but there was an immediate online backlash among Christian consumers who thought the campaign was supporting evil, demonic activities. TikTok videos of consumers throwing Hatch electronic sleep devices started trending. And some consumers on social media were urging others to throw away all Hatch devices as well. Hatch now faced questions of whether and how to respond to consumers with concerns about the brand.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In analyzing this case, students should be able to:

1. Describe a target market for a business
2. Identify how a target market's needs and wants drive their interest in products
3. Apply the concept of the marketing mix to a business context
4. Examine the benefits and risks of using fear appeals in advertising
5. Evaluate the impact of attitudes toward an ad on brand avoidance
6. Assess the role of subcultures in impacting attitudes and consumption behaviors toward a brand
7. Evaluate various strategies to respond to a brand controversy and devise a plan for the best way for a company to respond

APPLICATION

This case is well suited for graduate and undergraduate courses in Principles of Marketing, Marketing Communication, Consumer Behavior, and Marketing Strategy.

KEY WORDS

Fear Appeals, Brand Avoidance, Subcultures

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