

Starting up

- Did you hear about Volkswagen's controversial advert in May 2020 on Instagram for the new Golf? Why was it criticised?
- With the big switch to advertising on social media channels – Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn – how easy is it for mistakes to slip out unnoticed till it's too late?

Vocabulary 1

To help with the vocabulary in the article, try to match the words and phrases from the article 1-11 with the definitions a-k.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 1 campaign | a very shocked |
| 2 outsized | b showed in a public way |
| 3 flicking | c bring a particular memory back into people's minds |
| 4 outrage | d a piece of something |
| 5 horrified | e pushing something with the quick motion of a finger |
| 6 interracial | f very shocked and surprised |
| 7 ethnicity | g a strong feeling of anger and shock |
| 8 portrayed | h involving different races |
| 9 segment | i much larger than usual |
| 10 stunned | j belonging to a national or racial group |
| 11 evoked | k a series of planned actions to persuade people to buy something |

Reading

Some weeks ago, Volkswagen had to remove an advert on Instagram for the new Golf.

To find out more, read the article and then answer the questions that follow it.

Volkswagen apologises for racist Instagram advert

Volkswagen has apologised for running a racist Instagram advert as part of a campaign to promote its new Golf model in Germany.

The short clip showed an outsized white hand pushing a dark-skinned man around, apparently preventing him from getting into the car, before flicking him into the doorway of a Buenos Aires restaurant.

“We understand the public outrage at this, because we’re horrified too,” VW brand board member Jürgen Stackmann and group head of diversity Elke Heitmüller said, in an apology posted on social media.

“It is an insult to every decent person. We’re ashamed of it and cannot explain how it came about,” they added. “We apologise in particular to those who feel personally hurt by the racist content.”

The now-deleted clip, made by a creative agency, was part of a series of promotional videos shown on the stories section of VW brand’s German language Instagram account, which told the story of an interracial couple falling in love.

The white hand belongs to the woman, who appears to be pushing her partner away from a yellow Golf 8 model. The letters of the German words for “the new Golf” fade in as the ad ends.

On its German language Instagram account, which has almost 150,000 followers, the VW brand said “the content shown was a creative use of the Instagram Story format”, and that the ethnicity of the people portrayed was not supposed to be relevant.

The world’s largest carmaker said it would launch an investigation into how the segment ended up being published.

VW workers’ representative and supervisory board member Bernd Osterloh said he was “stunned” and “ashamed” of the commercial, and that people were right to feel insulted by it.

“The incident must be fully investigated,” he wrote on LinkedIn. “The works council will not allow the responsibility for this incident to be permanently shifted down from top management.”

In their post, Mr Stackmann and Ms Heitmüller added: “We at Volkswagen are aware of the historical origins and the guilt of our company during the Nazi regime.

“That is precisely why we resolutely oppose all forms of hatred, slander, propaganda and discrimination.”

VW was founded in 1937 as part of Adolf Hitler’s ambitions to create a company that would manufacture cars that ordinary German families could afford, starting with the Beetle.

Last year, VW apologised after chief executive Herbert Diess used the phrase “Ebit (earnings before interest and taxes) macht frei”, or “Ebit makes you free”, in an internal meeting.

The phrase evoked the Nazi slogan mounted on the gates of the Auschwitz concentration camp, which read “Arbeit macht frei,” or “work will set you free”.



Reading comprehension

After reading the article, find answers to the following questions.

- 1 What country and city was the advert set in?
- 2 What does the video clip show?
- 3 Why was it criticised?
- 4 Who was responsible for making the advert and posting it on Instagram?
- 5 How did Volkswagen react to the criticism of the advert?
- 6 How did the company respond to the accusation that the advert was racist?
- 7 What action will Volkswagen take?
- 8 Why is the advert especially embarrassing for a company like Volkswagen?
- 9 When was Volkswagen founded?
- 10 What did the Volkswagen CEO, Herbert Diess, apologise for saying at an internal meeting in 2019?

Vocabulary 2

There are a number of words in the article that indicate a negative attitude towards other people or an intention to spread a negative opinion.

Can you match the definitions below to the relevant words in the article?

- 1 a person who thinks some races are better than others
- 2 unfair treatment of some people because of their religion, race or other personal features
- 3 saying something about someone that is not true and is likely to damage their reputation
- 4 feeling of disliking someone very much
- 5 information that a government or an organisation spreads in order to influence people's opinions

Grammar – phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences below using these phrasal verbs from the article. Change the tense of the verb where necessary.

push around

come about

fade in

end up

set free

- 1 Volkswagen is carrying out an investigation to try to find out how the Instagram video clip _____.
- 2 The company wants to know not only why it was made but also why it _____ being published online.
- 3 The advert shows a scene in which a dark-skinned man is _____ by the outsized finger of a white woman.
- 4 The infamous slogan — ‘Arbeit macht frei’ — on the gates of Auschwitz means ‘Work will _____ you _____’.
- 5 At the end of the video clip, after the man is flicked inside a restaurant, the words ‘New Golf’ _____ at the top of the screen.

Discussion

- 1 How do you think such an inappropriate advert was made and published on Volkswagen’s Instagram channel without, apparently, the knowledge or agreement of senior managers in Volkswagen? What measures should the company put in place to prevent something like this happening again?
- 2 Do you know of other advertising campaigns that have turned out to be very embarrassing for the company concerned, particularly in areas of race, gender and sexual orientation?

Here are some examples:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-39511906>

ANSWER KEY**Vocabulary 1**

- 1 k
- 2 i
- 3 e
- 4 g
- 5 a
- 6 h
- 7 j
- 8 b
- 9 d
- 10 f
- 11 c

Reading comprehension

- 1 Argentina – Buenos Aires
- 2 The short clip shows an outsized white hand of a woman pushing a dark-skinned man around, apparently preventing him from getting into the car, before flicking him into the doorway of a Buenos Aires restaurant.
- 3 Because it was considered to be racist.
- 4 It was made by a creative agency and was part of a series of promotional videos shown on Volkswagen's German language Instagram account.
- 5 The VW brand board member Jürgen Stackmann and group head of diversity Elke Heitmüller said they were shocked and horrified, and apologised to anyone who might have been offended.
- 6 They said it was an insult to every decent person and that they were ashamed of it and could not explain how it came about. They also said: "We apologise in particular to those who feel personally hurt by the racist content."
- 7 The company said they would launch an investigation into how the advert came to be published.
- 8 Because of the origins of the company during the Nazi period.
- 9 In 1937.
- 10 He used the phrase "Ebit (earnings before interest and taxes) macht frei", or "Ebit makes you free", in an internal meeting. The phrase evoked the Nazi slogan mounted on the gates of the Auschwitz concentration camp, which read "Arbeit macht frei," or "work will set you free".

Vocabulary 2

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| 1 racist | 4 hatred |
| 2 discrimination | 5 propaganda |
| 3 slander | |

Grammar

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1 came about | 4 set ... free |
| 2 ended up | 5 fade in |
| 3 pushed around | |

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