

## The Rise and Fall of Balenciaga

**Purpose:** To inform the audience about Balenciaga and their unethical scandal.

**Thesis:** In order to understand the Balenciaga scandal, it is important to know how they rose to fame, what scandal they are facing, and how they are responding to the downfall of their company.

**Organizational Pattern:** Chronological

### I. Introduction:

- A. **Attention Getter:** Do you remember where you were on November 16? Probably not, but the Balenciaga team remembers this day as the downfall of their company.
- B. **Relevance:** In November of 2022, the high-end fashion brand, Balenciaga, posted an extremely controversial campaign ad. This ad featured children holding bondage bears and a supreme court document on child pornography laid out on a table. **(visual aid of teddy bear and court doc)** According to an updated article from the NY times in December of 2022, this is not the first controversy Balenciaga has gotten themselves into; selling destroyed sneakers for up to \$1,850 **(visual aid of shoes)** and sending models on stage looking like refugees holding garbage bags made with expensive leather **(visual aid of models)**. While these campaigns ended up boosting Balenciaga's reputation, they were not following ethical business standards. It is up to a business to maintain an ethical responsibility to the public, by promoting integrity and gaining trust from consumers.
- C. **Credibility:** I have thoroughly researched this topic, including all the statements made regarding the controversial ad and I have read the creative directors exclusive interview in detail.
- D. **Thesis:** In order to understand the Balenciaga scandal, it is important to know how they rose to fame, what scandal they are facing, and how they are responding to the downfall of their company.

- E. Preview:** So let's find out exactly how this high-end brand became what they are, how their controversial ads affected them ethically and what they are doing to rebuild their legacy.

**Transition:** First, let's take a look at how the brand came to be.

## **I. Body**

### **A. The beginning of Balenciaga.**

1. First, we have to know where the brand came from. It all started with Cristóbal Balenciaga (**visual aid of Cristóbal Balenciaga**), born in 1885 in a small town in Spain. According to Giada Graziano from glamobserver.com (2022), "the self-taught designer is known for never sketching a single garment with pencil and paper." He started his designs with the fabric rather than sketching and planning. He became so fascinated with his mother's seamstress work that he began his own journey into the fashion world at twelve-years-old, as an apprentice in the San Sebastian resort.
2. In 1917, Balenciaga opened his first fashion house in Barcelona and then another in Madrid before moving to Paris in 1937. (**visual aid of fashion house**) This store quickly became the city's most expensive and exclusive couturier. Balenciaga became a revolutionary in the fashion industry but he liked to keep his circle small and his face out of the press, which is ironic considering the brand today. He even stopped allowing the press at fashion shows. By the early 50's Balenciaga was a leader in Paris couture, revolutionizing women's fashion.
3. In 1968, Balenciaga decided to close his fashion house and passed away four years after. Almost two decades after the closure of Balenciaga, in 1986 it was revived. Taken over by many different creative directors which allowed Balenciaga to become famous again, in 2001 the fashion house was acquired by Kering, (**visual aid of Kering**) a global luxury group, which also owns Yves Saint Laurent and Alexander McQueen. In

2015 Demna Gvasalia was announced as the new creative director. **(visual aid of Demna)**

**Transition:** Now that we have discussed the background of Balenciaga, let's get into the controversy and why it is unethical for a brand.

## **I. Body**

### **A. The scandal (visual aid of the scandal)**

1. As I addressed earlier, this is not the first time Balenciaga has been caught up in a scandal, but it is the first time it actually made people rethink the brand as a whole. Here is what happened according to Danya Issawi from thecut.com (2023), "In November, Balenciaga dropped its holiday ad campaign featuring children holding teddy bears in bondage harnesses and costumes. The backlash against these images was swift, with the hashtag #cancelBalenciaga trending and many accusing the brand of condoning pedophilia and child exploitation. **(visual of #cancelbalenciaga tweet)** In a separate ad that dropped later that month, a bag from the fashion house was photographed atop copies of what appear to be documents from the Supreme Court case United States v. Williams, a ruling that upheld the PROTECT Act, which increased federal protections against child pornography. Both campaigns quickly became a conservative talking point and sparked conspiracy theories." **(visual of court doc)**
2. So now, knowing the scandal, we need to ask ourselves, why is this unethical? Well, the first campaign was accused of sexualizing children, dressing them in fishnets, glam makeup and provocative outfits. **(visual of CEO statement about children being sexualized)** Balenciaga's demographic is not aimed towards young children, so why use them in the first place? To the audience, this campaign can be seen as deceptive. At first glance, the ad shows a child holding a cute teddy bear, but with a closer look you can see the bondage, which is literally defined as being a slave. The second campaign contained the United States v. Williams court

case, which as I stated before, is an act which increased federal protections against child pornography. This is not something you accidentally leave in an ad, especially a high-end brand like Balenciaga. The entire campaign is considered unethical from the bondage gear to the Balenciaga team not realizing the court document was in the photograph. They ruined their reputation and the controversy continues today.

**Transition:** Now that we have fully dissected the scandal, let's take a look at how Balenciaga has responded.

## I. Body

### A. The response

1. November 16, 2022, the ads were released to the public. November 22, a statement was posted on Balenciaga's official Instagram. **(insert first statement visual)** Still nothing has been said directly from Demna at this point. November 28, another statement was posted on Instagram. **(insert second statement visual)** December 2, Demna posts on Instagram an official statement. **(insert final statement visual)** A summary of what Demna writes, "I want to personally apologize for the wrong artistic choice of concept for the gifting campaign... It was inappropriate to have kids promote objects that had nothing to do with them... I apologize to anyone offended by the visuals and Balenciaga has guaranteed that adequate measures will be taken."
2. Just recently, on February 9th, Demna did an exclusive interview with Vogue. Natalie Michie from fashionmagazine.com (2023) states, "In the interview, he says that while he approved the set dressing prior to the Spring 2023 campaign, he wasn't on site for the shoot itself. Images were presented to me to select the photos I liked, most out of the selection made by the photographer," said Demna. He also states, "We should not have featured kids in images that included objects that were not related and inappropriate to them. No one, myself included, raised a question of it

being inappropriate.” Balenciaga has and most likely will continue to receive backlash, even after all these statements. People who have invested in the brand are throwing out anything with the logo on it, so can Balenciaga really come back from this scandal?

3. Businesses have an ethical responsibility to their clients. They need to commit to their ethical standards and uphold a human rights policy. Especially now since everything is in the media, businesses need to be thorough when looking over their work before releasing it to the public. Even if a business deletes an unethical post, it will be out there forever and will tarnish their overall brand image. It is also important for businesses to keep in mind checks and balances and not allow just one person to make decisions for the entire brand. The way Demna just said, “I was not present for the shoot,” is a cowardly excuse for a huge problem. Overall, Demna is at fault and needs to take full responsibility.

**Transition:** In this speech I have discussed...

## **I. Conclusion**

- A. Thesis/summary:** In this speech I have discussed what Balenciaga is, the unethical scandal they got themselves into, and how they have responded to the controversy.
- B. Closing statement:** Now that you have this information, I hope you have a better understanding of why businesses should act ethically.

## References

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