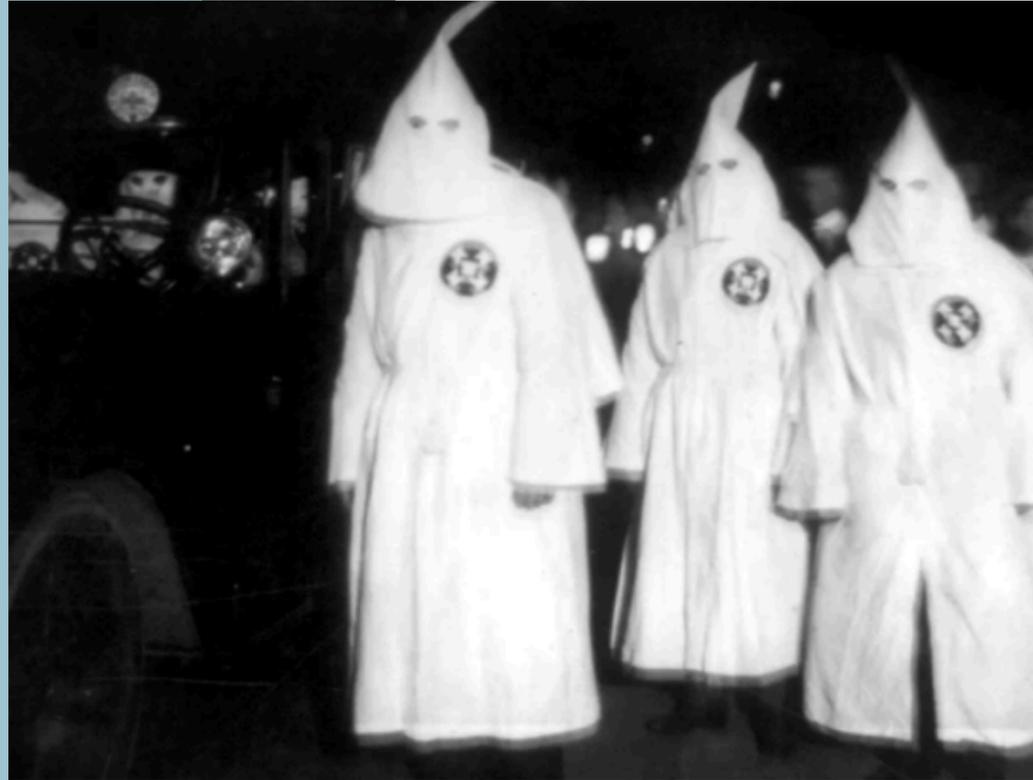




<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/10/14/bath-body-works-kkk-candle/>



<https://www.unionprogress.com/2023/08/25/when-the-klan-came-to-town-100-years-ago-carnegie-residents-fought-back-and-things-got-bloody/>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/10/14/bath-body-works-klan-candle/>



# THE BATH & BODY WORKS CANDLE SCANDAL

## CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS WHEN A CANDLE BECOMES A "KLANDLE"

Presented By : Elle Simonsen

# BATH AND BODY WORKS BRAND

"We make the world a brighter, happier place through the power of fragrance"

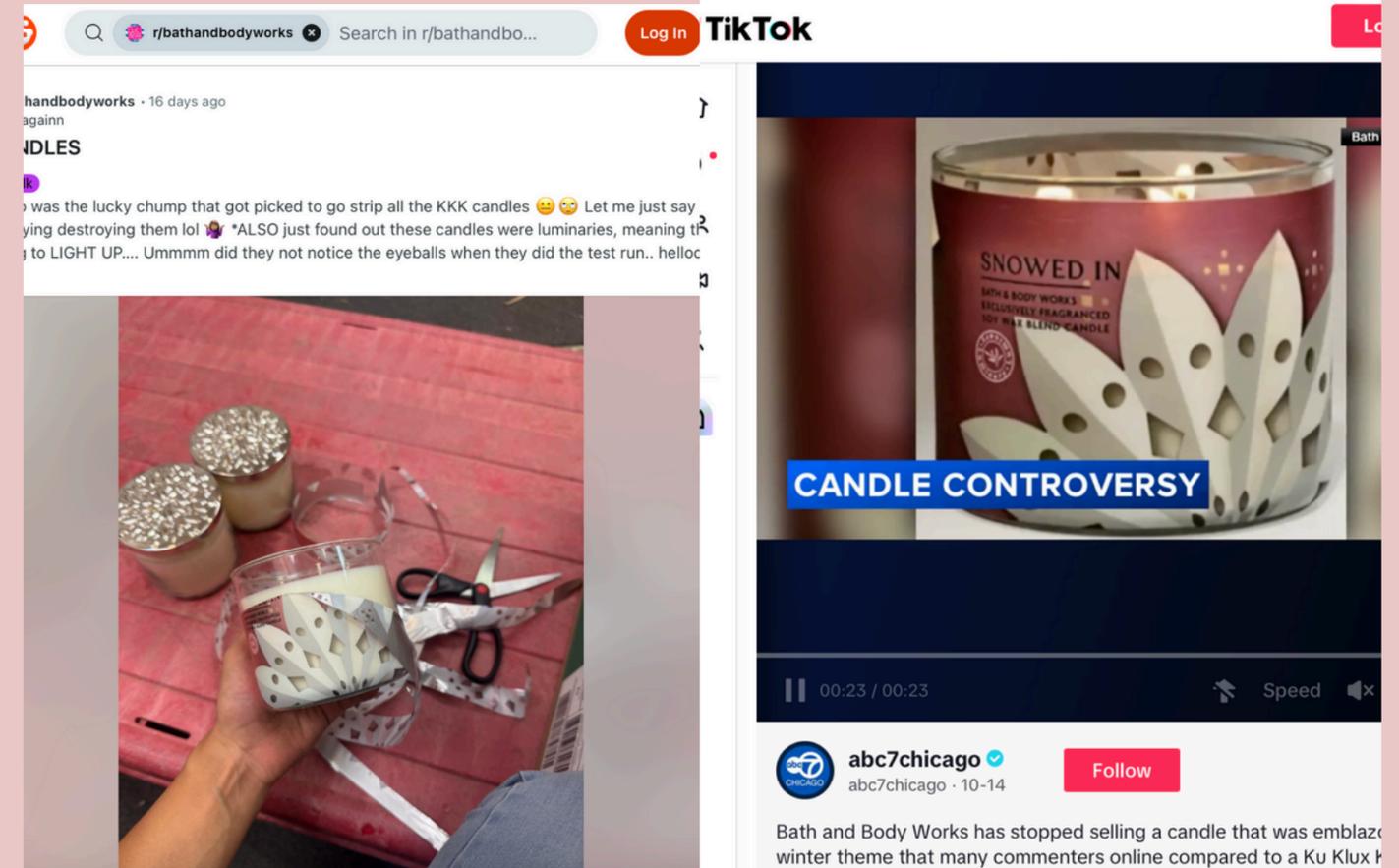
- Publicly traded on NY Stock Exchange "BBWI"
- Body lotion, shower gel, fragrances, hand soap, hand sanitizer
- Global beauty and home fragrance brand
- 2023 net sales amount to 7.43 billion US dollars



- 1990 in New Albany, Ohio
- 2003 Q4 sales were almost 2.91 billion
- Became the largest bath shop chain in the US in 1977
- More than 1,850 company-operated locations in the US and Canada

# SITUATION: FROM PRODUCT LAUNCH TO PR CRISIS

- Heading into the 4th quarter of the holiday sales period (40% of sales), the Snowed In candle was launched October 14, 2024
- Social media users noticed that the paper snowflake images on the candle label resembled robes of Klansmembers of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK), one of the oldest white supremacists hate group
- Online sentiment was a range of "offended" to "fake outrage" to "laughter"



<https://www.reddit.com/r/bathandbodyworks/comments/1g1kbur/kkkkandles/>  
<https://www.tiktok.com/@abc7chicago/video/7425681238897249566>

# BACKLASH

- Reddit user first posted: "I know it's one of those paper snowflakes, but I can't be the only one who sees 'it,' right?" Post quickly gained attention
- Some people saw it as an honest mistake, others saw racism

How did that design even make it to shelves? This isn't just a branding mistake; it's a reminder of how sensitive cultural symbols can be."

"Your lack of diversity in the workplace shows exactly why the candle got approval."

"This was an honest mistake it looks like a snowflake. But they still took accountability."



Reddit. (2021). [Reddit commentary on candle]. Retrieved October 27, 2024, from <https://preview.redd.it/ord7pn18n1ud1.jpeg?auto=webp&s=d107bc27617196dd7cfa528979590c6062290c06>

# A CHOICE TO MAKE IN CRISIS PR

- PR Team had to evaluate the risk and determine if a response would create more news stories
- "Klandle" "Klu Klux Kandle" - would it stop or get worse?
- How much money would they lose if they pulled all candles from shelves? Would it affect stock? Affect company reputation?

**DECISION: 1) Put out a statement highlighting "unintentional mistake" and steps to remedy 2) pull the candles from shelves**



At Bath and Body Works we are committed to listening to our teams and customers, and committed to fixing any mistakes we make- even unintentional ones like this one. We apologize to anyone we've offended and are swiftly working to have this item removed and are evaluating our process going forward.

<https://afro.com/bath-body-works-holiday-candle/>

# HOW THEY HANDLED IT: QUICK STATEMENT = SMART CHOICE

- Bath and Body Works PR's quick statement DID cause many news stories
- CNN, Washington Post, Fox, Today.com and many others
- Even though the statement made more people aware of the issue and caused news stories, it was the smart thing to do:
  - It showed they cared about customers and did not want to offend anyone
  - They care about racism and cultural issues
  - They pulled candles quickly before it could blow up into something more



Logo Design Love. (n.d.). CNN logo. Retrieved October 27, 2024, from <https://www.logodesignlove.com/cnn-logo>

The Washington Post. (n.d.). Washington Post logo [Image]. Retrieved October 27, 2024, from [https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/2143/6539/files/WP-logo.png?height=628&pad\\_color=fff&v=1614292069&width=1200](https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/2143/6539/files/WP-logo.png?height=628&pad_color=fff&v=1614292069&width=1200)

The Washington Post. (n.d.). Washington Post logo [Image]. Retrieved October 27, 2024, from [https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/2143/6539/files/WP-logo.png?height=628&pad\\_color=fff&v=1614292069&width=1200](https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/2143/6539/files/WP-logo.png?height=628&pad_color=fff&v=1614292069&width=1200)

# HOW THEY HANDLED IT:

## QUICK STATEMENT = SMART CHOICE (CONT'D)

- Bath and Body Works stock was not dramatically affected
- It actually went up in the days following the 10/14 response

launch date →

Date	Open	High	Low	Close ⓘ
Oct 24, 2024	29.74	30.14	29.41	29.95
Oct 23, 2024	29.96	30.22	29.20	29.47
Oct 22, 2024	30.52	30.52	29.40	29.82
Oct 21, 2024	31.80	31.92	30.26	30.57
Oct 18, 2024	32.31	32.35	31.65	31.94
Oct 17, 2024	32.32	32.68	31.65	32.02
Oct 16, 2024	31.39	32.76	31.20	32.47
Oct 15, 2024	30.87	32.20	30.77	31.11
Oct 14, 2024	31.90	31.97	30.75	31.03

# WHY WAS HANDLED THIS WAY?

- **Public companies have to think about how a crisis/reputation could affect stock price and sales**
- **You have to “do the right thing” for customers, stock shareholders and as a big company that employs a lot of people**
- **Having a perceived KKK candle would NOT make the world a “brighter, happier place” as their website describes them**
- **Crisis Communications means PR departments need to evaluate the problem and react quickly before the coverage online or in the news gets out of control. They were successful with this.**

# RELATION TO CLASS CONTENT

## ● Crisis Communication

Lecture Definition - the approach organizations use to manage and mitigate the impact of an event or situation that poses a threat to their reputation, stakeholders, or operations



The crisis communication department had to weigh in all the factors that would negatively or positively effect their brand if or after they reacted to the issue.

## ● Copy Testing

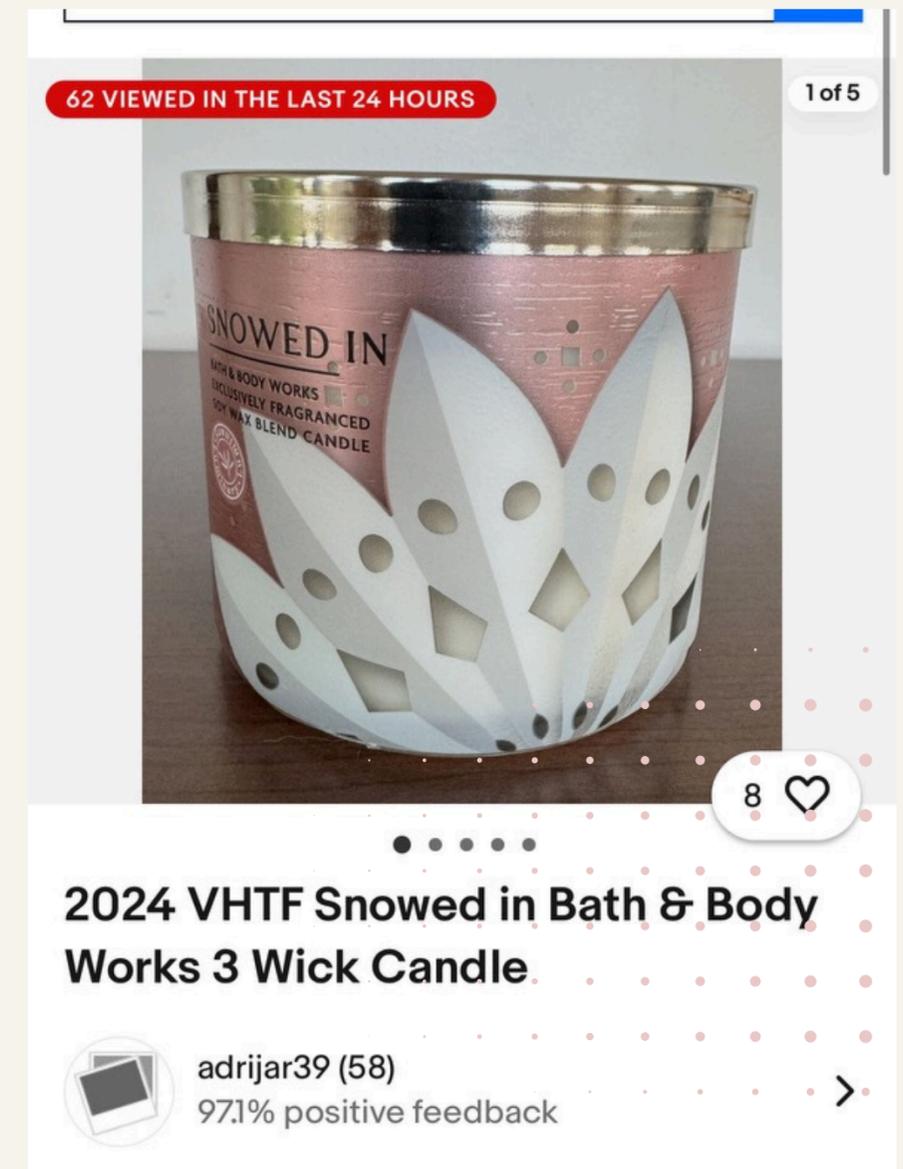
Lecture Definition - to test campaign materials on a sample of target audiences before distributing on a larger scale



Could be likely that the design team became blind to their product and instead of asking a target audience or others in the company they released the product on the largest scale and had to deal with the consequences.

# WHAT WE THINK BATH & BODY WORKS COULD HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

- The candle is now selling on Ebay for around \$300... they should work with eBay to have that removed
- Future focus group tests with new product labels should be reviewed by many different departments that aren't "too close" to the design



# AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

**How can companies incorporate cultural awareness training into their practices to prevent similar issues in the future?**

**How might this incident impact Bath & Body Works' brand identity and consumer perception in the long run?**

**In what ways can consumers effectively hold brands accountable for their actions, and what role does social media play in this?**



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The background features three vertical bars on the left: a wide light pink bar, a narrower teal bar, and a narrow light beige bar. The right side of the image is white with two rectangular areas of a light pink dot grid pattern, one in the top right and one in the bottom right.

**THANK YOU**