

Black model in Dove video says ad 'misinterpreted'

LONDON - The black model who appeared in a Dove advert which triggered accusations of racism insisted Wednesday that she was not a victim and that the commercial had been misinterpreted.



Lola Ogunyemi

However, Lola Ogunyemi said viewers were "justified in their initial outrage" over the body wash advert she starred in, which she said had made her "the unwitting poster child for racist advertising".

The three-second video clip, which appeared on Facebook in the United States, showed Ogunyemi removing her top, revealing a white woman underneath. This woman then took off her t-shirt as well, revealing an Asian woman.

The Dove personal care brand, owned by Dutch food and consumer products giant Unilever, apologised after a deluge of social media users deemed the advert racist.

Ogunyemi said the full 30-second television commercial, featuring seven models answering the question "If your skin were a wash label, what would it say?", "does a much better job of making the campaign's message loud and clear".

"All of the women in the shoot understood the concept and overarching objective -- to use our differences to highlight the fact that all skin deserves gentleness," Ogunyemi wrote in the British newspaper The Guardian.

"I remember all of us being excited at the idea of wearing nude T-shirts and turning into one another."

A Nigerian born in London and raised in the southern US city of Atlanta, Ogunyemi said she jumped at the chance to take part.

"Having the opportunity to represent my dark-skinned sisters in a global beauty brand felt like the perfect way for me to remind the world that we are here, we are beautiful, and more importantly, we are valued," she wrote.

Then she found she had become "the unwitting poster child for racist advertising".

"If you Google 'racist ad' right now, a picture of my face is the first result."

She said advertisers needed to look beyond the surface and consider the impact their images might have on marginalised groups of women.

"I can see how the snapshots that are circulating the web have been misinterpreted," Ogunyemi wrote.

"I feel the public was justified in their initial outrage. Having said that, I can also see that a lot has been left out."

While she agreed with Dove's unequivocal apology, she said it could also have defended its creative vision and its choice to include her as the face of the campaign.

"I am not just some silent victim of a mistaken beauty campaign. I am strong, I am beautiful, and I will not be erased," she wrote.

Dove said the three-second clip "missed the mark in representing women of colour thoughtfully" and deeply regretted any offence caused.

Source: AFP

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