

# Be brand aware and beware of hypocrisy

By  [Bronwyn Williams](#)

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This week [Bronwyn Williams](#) draws parallels between an 18th century novella and the perils of brand woke washing!



I love Voltaire. Who doesn't? Well known for his scathing wit, *The Huron* (*L'Ingénu* for the Francophiles), his satirical novella published in 1767, which I read this past week, is no exception.

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The Huron deals with a young man whose family is trying to convert him to Christianity. The young man reads the Bible and is impressed enough with what he reads to agree to becoming a Christian, just as his family wishes.

However, he comes to realise that all is not quite what it seems. Every time he tries to follow the instructions as presented in the Bible, he is ‘corrected’ by his family and their priest as to their way of doing things.

For example, when he tries to get baptised in the river as the disciples are, he is told that that is not allowed and that he should get anointed by the priest instead. Then, after he is told to confess his sins to the priest, he asks the priest to confess his sins too - just like the examples he read in the Bible of the disciples “confessing their sins to each other” and is confused when he learns that confession is a one-way street these days.

The satirical story carries on in this manner, exposing the hypocrisy of the pre-reformation church, page by page and culminating in The Huron’s virginal fiancé being forced to trade the “use” of her body with a lecherous priest in exchange for saving The Huron’s life.

Its dry, dark humour is a treat to read; however what stuck with me is how many examples of this sort of hypocrisy - or at least a shocking lack of self-awareness there are, particularly in the world of branding and marketing right now.

### **How self-aware is your brand?**

In an effort to focus on “purpose over profit” or cause-based marketing (something that brands are told by consultants that customers “demand”, often on the basis of leading surveys, rather than empirical behavioural evidence to the contrary, since what people say they want and what they actually do are often two entirely different things, but that is another story, for another day), many brands seem to be clueless about how self-righteous and silly these kinds of communications campaign can appear when it comes across as “woke washing” rather than being authentic to the brand’s core business and lived values.



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As Mark Ritson says, brand purpose should not be applied as a “flimsy attempt to bolster a morally bankrupt concept that simply covers over corporate indiscretions.”

Take, for example, Coke’s recent campaign that included cans branded with a range of self-improvement messages in the style of new year’s resolutions.

The campaign was roasted on Twitter, for obvious reasons - a fizzy drink company encouraging people to live “healthier” is, of course, rather laughable.

“ I actually love this, because I’ll get to read [@AdContrarian](#)’s expletive-filled take on it. <https://t.co/Y0D9qNqXGj>—  
Ryan Wallman (@Dr\_Draper) [January 13, 2021](#) ”

Perhaps a lesson here is that, unlike the hypocritical priests in Voltaire’s *The Huron*, before using your brand platform to preach, make sure you are practising what you preach first.

## ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

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