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**Measuring the Woke Culture: An Ethnographic Study of Disney, Inc. and the Impact of Its  
Cultural Orientation on Organizational Outcomes**

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We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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**Abstract**

This study employed an ethnographic research design to investigate the impact of Disney Inc.'s cultural orientation since 2020 and its impact on organizational outcomes such as financial performance, image, and reputation. The impact of decision-making, contrary to the unchanging Biblical principles, on organizations who elected to pursue "woke" agendas is staggering. Rejection of the absolute Biblical truth in pursuit of humanistic, socialist, and atheist ideologies on the corporate level has become blatant on an unprecedented scale. Disney Inc., originally known as children's "Happiest Place on Earth," has transformed into one of the leading corporations to embrace the creeds of cancel culture, gender confusion, LGBTQ+, abortion, CRT, and other anti-biblical positions. Galatians 6:7-8 clearly instructs: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (King James Bible, 2017).

*Keywords:* woke, cancel culture, Bible, Disney

### Measuring the Woke Culture

While mainstream and social media platforms parrot the words ‘woke culture’, few truly understand the current meaning of the term. Warren (2022) defined ‘woke’ as a term originally meant to signal awareness, especially in relation to social injustices and discrimination [but] is now being used in a stigmatizing manner to label firms for inconsistencies between their corporate social initiatives (CSIs) and firm purpose, values, or practices. (p. 170)

From an unbiased perspective, the term ‘woke’ appears to be a well-meaning social rallying cry that gives a voice to unprivileged groups. However, this term has taken on numerous meanings seen throughout an array of cultures and beliefs. For example, according to D’Abrera (2019), the term ‘woke’ is defined as a “political term of African American origin that refers to a perceived awareness of issues concerning social justice and racial justice” (p. 21).

For those that do not align with the ‘woke culture’ and its associated agenda, they are quickly silenced or “cancelled.” The ever evolving ‘cancel culture’ that has swept across the world, has had its own devastating impacts. According to Lokhande and Natu (2022), ‘cancel culture’ is a term “Initially meant to call out the wrong doings of the people in powerful positions and hold them accountable for their actions, [but] is now also seen as a tool for further exploitation of the marginalized people” (p. 252).

Through his empirical data study, Pippa Norris, a Paul F. McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics at Harvard University, asked the question about whether ‘cancel culture’ was a myth or reality. Norris (2021) studied data derived from empirical evidence for the claims that ‘cancel culture’ existed. In his study, Norris examined the “World of Political Science, 2019 (WPS-19), a large-scale cross-national survey with a common questionnaire collecting

information from 2,446 scholars studying or working in 102 countries” (p. 156). Throughout the study, Norris (2021) concluded that “the WPS survey data confirmed the left-wing skew in the discipline of political science” (p. 170). Additionally, Norris (2021) explained that “the left-wing predominance observed in the discipline was stronger in the US than worldwide” (p. 170).

While ‘woke’ and ‘cancel culture’ have different meanings and perceptions, the impact it has invoked on many corporations has been unified. Beginning as far back as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, worldwide corporations began embracing a ‘woke culture’ into their respective workplaces. For example, Romano (2020) explained how in 1923, “a collection of aphorisms and ideas by the Jamaican philosopher and social activist Marcus Garvey included the summons ‘Wake up Ethiopia! Wake up Africa!’ as a call to global Black citizens to become more socially and politically conscious” (para. 8). This rallying cry had a far-reaching impact that has allowed the term to go into the mainstream with its original meaning staying largely intact entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Romano, 2020).

### **Background of the Problem**

As corporations navigate their way through the political correctness of dealing with both the ‘woke’ and “cancel culture,” many have made a conscious decision to affirm and agree with these social agendas. For example, Bond (2022) detailed one ‘woke’ issue that has recently included several high-profile companies such as J.P. Morgan, Levi Strauss, and Microsoft where they “announced plans to cover travel expenses for employees seeking an abortion in the wake of the Supreme Court's reversal of *Roe v. Wade*” (para. 1).

As this study is aimed specifically at Disney’s ‘woke’ agenda items, it would be fair to further explore additional executive decisions that Disney Inc. has supported. For example, in March 2022, Disney advocated overturning Florida's Parental Rights in Education Bill which

prompted Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis to "threaten to take away tax and regulatory favors that have been hugely valuable to Disney's theme park business since 1967" (Bond, 2022, para. 3). As explained by Florida lawmakers, the bill "dictates that educators should not teach sexual orientation or gender identity until after the third grade" (Bond, 2022, para. 3). However, Disney does not stop this desire to indoctrinate children. Instead, Disney employees leaked a video of an internal meeting showing a Disney executive in charge of children's programming who boasted of a "not-so-secret gay agenda" (Bond, 2022, para. 5). Additionally, the video included a staffer who bragged that his team was "making sure there was no shortage of trans, asexual and bisexual characters in cartoons" (Bond, 2022, para. 5).

While Disney is a lead agent for propagating a 'woke' agenda, there are other Fortune 500 companies that are putting pressure on their respective industries if they do not fall in line with this ideology. As U.S. Senator (Arkansas) Tom Cotton (2019) decried in his speech, "giant media companies like Disney, Netflix, and Warner Media have threatened to cripple Georgia's film industry if its residents don't bend the knee and betray their pro-life convictions" (para. 5). This poignant statement raises a question whether this push toward wokeness is an intentionally planned-out marketing move or a purely ideological agenda to change the fabric of the society at any cost?

While not readily propagated on mainstream media, there appears to be many adverse examples of consumers' reactions to companies that cultivate this ominous belief system. For example, D'Abrera (2019) explained how Gillette alienated itself when it "shamelessly propagated the myth of toxic masculinity by portraying all men as being born fundamentally bad" (p. 21). The commercial associated men being engaged in bullying, sexual harassment and toxic masculinity and depicted their behaviors in a "variety of highly implausible and downright

insulting scenarios” (D’Abrera, 2019, p. 21). The backlash was evident as male customers promptly boycotted Gillette’s products, posted images of razors in the bin, and saw Gillette’s UK Brand Index score, which tracks public perceptions of brands, fall from 5.8 points to -3.4 in a matter of weeks (D’Abrera, 2019).

A more recent example of the negative impact of “wokeism” on corporations occurred in 2022, where shares of AMC, IMAX, and Cinemark “have fallen roughly 85%, 25%, and 50%, respectively, this year as media stocks shed a whopping \$500 billion-plus in value over the past year” (Canal, 2022, para. 3). Walt Disney Company has also experienced a negative impact on their profits and stock exchange earnings over the past 5 years. As seen in Figure 1, over the last 5 years, Walt Disney’s stock rode a volatile market that eventually saw an overall decrease in its value of over 5% with the price per share declining in the year 2022 from \$157.83 on January 1, down to \$87.18 on December 31 (see Figure 2).

### Figure 1

*5 years (2018–2022), Walt Disney Company (The), NYSE results*



**Figure 2**

*1 year (2022), Walt Disney Company (The), NYSE results*



It can be argued that Disney’s decline in performance metrics is a direct impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, however, the data and their analysis below paint a different picture.

### Data Analysis

Galatians 6:7-8 tell us, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (King James Bible, 2017). Disney has seen this verse of Scripture come to fruition as more families have turned their voices and wallets against Disney’s agenda because of their desire to protect their children from ‘woke’ indoctrination. The negative financial impact has been evident. Since engaging in the battle with Florida legislation and replacing Disney CEO Bob Chapek, Disney’s stock value lost more than 30% of its stock value, as it decreased from \$197.16 per share to \$86.88 per share, equating to an



approximately \$60 billion loss. Additionally, on February 8, 2023, the company announced its plan to slash their workforce by 7,000 jobs to save billions of dollars (Aten, 2023). Amid this myriad of failing indicators, in 2022, Disney also experienced skyrocketing park ticket prices and staggering losses from streaming and Disney+ services equating to almost \$8 billion (Whelan, 2022).

Since Disney committed itself to the ‘woke’ agenda, it is hardly coincidental that all these woes “happened” simultaneously. As aforementioned, the Bible explains in Galatians 6:7 that “God is not mocked” (King James Bible, 2017). With this truth and declaration, an unbiased observer should be able to conclude that “wokeism” does not and will not work. For example, if one compared “wokeism” to the law of gravity, it would be quite simple for a person to ignore, deny, or even defy gravity; however, gravity will invariably take effect and bring one down. Regarding “wokeism,” this same individual can pretend, believe, or even declare that “wokeism” is an effective, meaningful, and productive social platform; however, the reality is that it only leads to decline and destruction.

Walt Disney once said, “All I ask of myself is to live a good Christian life and toward that objective I bend every effort in shaping my personal, domestic and professional activities and growth” (Movieguide Staff, n.d.). An unbiased reader can see how far Walt Disney’s company has sunk and wonder if Walt Disney would recognize it today? Alas, without allowing Jesus Christ to do a heart-transforming work in our lives, any change becomes just a band-aid to the course doomed by sin.

### **Findings**

It is puzzling to observe the paradox between Disney’s mission of serving children and their families while the company creates an affront to the personal values of their own patrons.

While one could argue that the ‘woke’ agenda has been covertly, systematically, and slowly evolving throughout Disney’s leadership for many years, its manifestation announced itself since the passing of Florida’s HB 1557 law. According to HB 1557, the bill “prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students” (The Florida Senate, Education Committee, 2022, para. 3). However, this seemingly common-sense legislation sparked a storm of ‘woke’ indignation from Disney on Twitter.

Florida's HB 1557, also known as the 'Don't Say Gay' bill, should never have passed and should never have been signed into law. Our goal as a company is for this law to be repealed by the legislature or struck down in the courts, and we remain committed to supporting the national and state organizations working to achieve that. We are dedicated to standing up for the rights and safety of LGBTQ+ members of the Disney family, as well as the LGBTQ+ community in Florida and across the country. (The Walt Disney Company, 2022)

This process became the catalyst for a true display of gender ideology that has been espoused by Disney as expressed by journalist Christopher Rufo:

SCOOP: I've obtained video from inside Disney's all-hands meeting about the Florida parental rights bill, in which an executive producer says her team is regularly ‘adding queerness’ to children's programming. (Rufob, 2022)

The information and video posted on Twitter, by Rufo, was further corroborated by Disney corporate president Karey Burke who said in another video that she “would like to see at least 50% of Disney’s characters in the future identify as LGBTQ or a racial minority” (Miller, 2022, para. 2).

Disney does not stop there, as they further attacked the very first identifier that a person acquires at birth, which is their gender. Even the commonplace and friendly greeting of “hello boys and girls,” practiced by Disney since 1971, became Disney Inc.’s next target. According to Rufo’s tweet:

SCOOP: Disney diversity and inclusion manager Vivian Ware says the company has eliminated all mentions of "ladies," "gentlemen," "boys," and "girls" in its theme parks in order to create "that magical moment" for children who do not identify with traditional gender roles. (Rufo, 2022a)

One executive producer at Disney, did not attempt to disguise the company’s agenda. In the video posted on Twitter by Christopher Rufo, Ms. Raveneau openly boasted about the “change” in the culture of Disney that welcomes openness in promoting a radical agenda of LGBTQ (Rufo, 2022b). In other words, Disney and ‘wokeness’ became synonymous.

Another hot-button issue that revealed Disney’s stance regarding “wokeism” was abortion. Ironically, Disney sees children, the very customers that the company relies on to make billions of dollars in profit, as inanimate objects. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe vs. Wade, Disney Inc. clearly articulated that they supported the murder of unborn babies. Disney supported the pro-choice prerogatives by publicly stating that they would pay for travel expenses to a different state for “pregnancy-related” care which included abortions (Sherman, 2022). In her tweet, U.S. Representative (Georgia) Marjorie Taylor Greene stated, “If corporations are paying \$4,000+ to their female employees to kill their baby, they should pay them the same to celebrate life when their employees become mothers” (Greene, 2022). Reporting for CNBC, Alex Sherman (2022) provided readers with the following memo

written by Vice President of Enterprise Benefits and Well-Being, Pascale Thomas, and Chief Human Resources Officer, Paul Richardson:

Teams,

We recognize the impact that today's Supreme Court ruling could have on many Americans and understand that some of you may have concerns about what that might mean for you and your families, as medical and family planning decisions are deeply personal. Please know that our company remains committed to removing barriers and providing comprehensive access to quality and affordable care for all of our employees, cast members and their families, including family planning and reproductive care, no matter where they live. In fact, we have processes in place so that an employee who may be unable to access care in one location has affordable coverage for receiving similar levels of care in another location. This travel benefit covers medical situations related to cancer treatments, transplants, rare disease treatment and family planning (including pregnancy-related decisions). Lastly, we would like to remind you of the range of medical coverage options you have as an eligible employee of The Walt Disney Company, as well as the options for your covered dependents. As medical coverage needs are unique to each of us, we encourage you to contact your medical carrier should you have specific questions about your coverage. You can also learn more about the company's benefit offerings at [Benefits.Disney.com](https://Benefits.Disney.com), consult the [Contacts | Disney Benefits Portal \(fidelity.com\)](#) or reach out to your HR representative. Disney will continue to prioritize the health, safety and well-being of our team members and their families. (para. 6)

The memo clearly espouses Disney’s rejection of all “barriers” that deal with God-given standards of human life and morality.

Furthermore, during one educational tour of Walt Disney World attended by one of the authors, leading cast members proudly announced Disney’s ever-changing evolution of their standards for employees themselves. The clean-cut professional attire, once required for “male look” and “female look,” gave way to a variety of hair styles, clothing, and tattoo options for “look one” and “look two.” When asked about the new standards and criteria, and what would be considered “unacceptable,” one Disney manager of operations explained that Disney is evolving with the “new norm” culture.

Rachel Alexander (2022), a visiting fellow in The Heritage Foundation’s B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies, accurately states:

There’s nothing inherently vicious about Disney’s desires to bring people pleasure, a break from the mundane, and glimpses of industrial progress. But we shouldn’t be surprised that the philosophy he embraced—one that favored stimulation over subtlety, fantasy over nature, novelty over immutability, and expert planning over political life—might today yield a company that keeps up with the times, promoting evolving categories of identity and sexuality through training programs administered by ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ experts. (para. 15)

### **Conclusion**

Leadership turmoil, rapid financial decline, and image deterioration are among a few outcomes of Disney’s strategic choices to embrace ‘woke’ culture in pursuit of a humanist and relativist agenda. By denying the absolute truth of the Bible, Disney Inc. has made a conscious

decision to mock God's precepts and principles while promoting creeds of 'wokeism,' 'cancel culture,' gender confusion, LGBTQ+, abortion, and other anti-biblical positions.

Ironically, regardless of Disney's energetic efforts to "package" the destructive nature of their stance as "tolerant" and "family-friendly," the "Happiest Place on Earth" disenfranchised scores of customers who understand the true meaning of the family as a God-designed fundamental unit of any society. The results are not surprising, and Disney's decline is obvious. Sadly, the company's leadership attempts to reverse the downward spiral by basing their decisions on their financial concerns rather than following biblical truth. Alas, as seen in Psalms 127:1, "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (King James Bible, 2017). In Disney's case, they are clearly reaping what they are sowing.

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