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Land of woke and glory? The conceptualisation and framing of "wokeness" in UK media and public discourses.

SMITH, D., BUTLER-WARKE, A. and BOAG, L.

2022

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**Land of Woke and Glory?:
the conceptualisation and
framing of 'wokeness' in
UK media and public
discourses.**

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A brief history of wokeness?

Origins of wokeness

To be a socially conscious Black American
Marcus Garvey (1923), Leadbelly (1938): activism
William Melvin Kelley (1962): “if you’re woke you dig it”
2014: BLM, following murder of Michael Brown - “stay woke”
Google Trends: surge in USA searches since 2014, UK since 2019

Wokeness today

Prime ministerial race 2022: all candidates
War on wokeness: shows, books, films, news channels
Centre for Policy Studies (2021): third most concerning ideology, > homophobia
YouGov (2021) 12% of the UK identify as woke, but 60% do not know what it means

What is wokeness?

Current use

Positive

- Crucial for pedagogy (Babulski, 2020)
- Aspirational: not achieved (Whiteout, 2018)
- Essential part of holding others to account despite the online discourse (Atkins, 2020)

Negative

- Tenet of anti-racist religion (McWhorter, 2021)
- Basking in work being “complete” (Boyce, 2019)
- ‘Madness’ taking over educational institutions (Peterson, 2021)
- Weapon to silence/shame people into staying quiet on issues (Mwansa, 2022)
- Rhetorical style, upholds white power structures (Zavattaro & Bearfield, 2022)

The present study

Land of woke and glory?

- How is wokeness conceptualised by the press and public?

Research questions:

1. How is the concept produced? (press)
2. How is the concept reproduced? (social media)
3. How is the concept maintained? (general public survey)

Method

- Press analysis: items using the term in May 2022
- Social media analysis: subset from Twitter scrape in May 2022
- Survey: open/closed questions, distributed to the general public
What is wokeness, what are woke behaviours/institutions? Etc.

Sample

- Newspaper articles
- 1200 tweets (300 from 4 different weeks)
- 116 participants who did the survey

Press analysis

Method

- Lexis library 'news' articles
- May 2022, search term: woke
- Order from oldest to newest
- Every tenth article download
- Remove any duplicates
- Filter for relevance

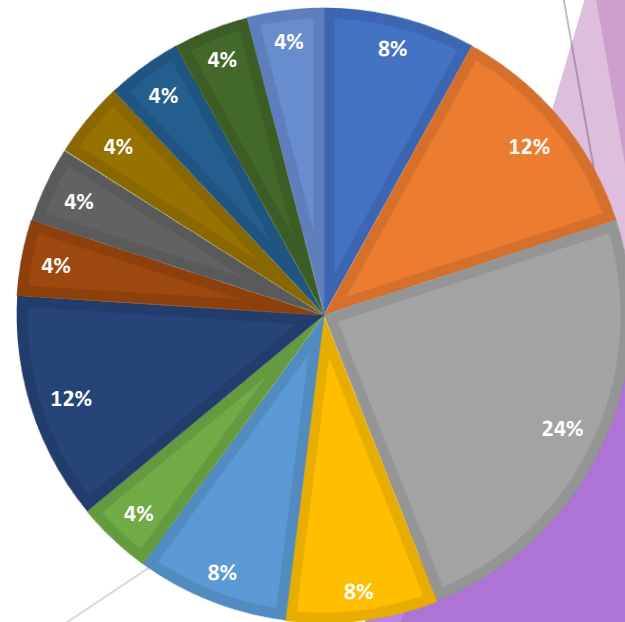
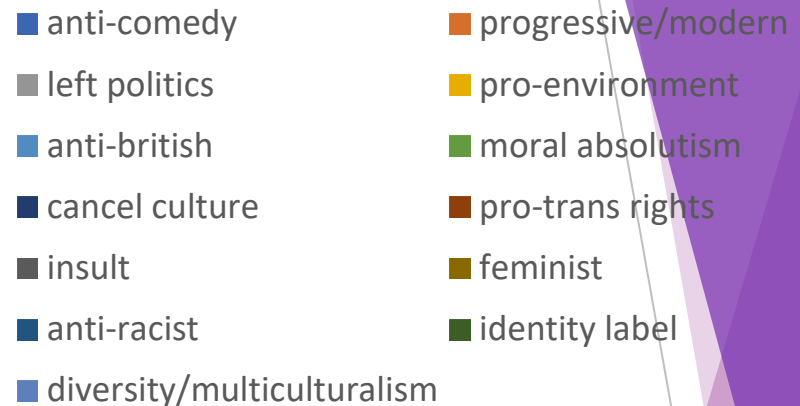
Sample

- Final yield: 64 articles
- From regional/national newspapers

Each analysed for:

1. Specific term used
2. Meaning ascribed to the term
3. General context of the article

Meaning of 'woke' in news articles



Press analysis

Summary of use

- Generally used more by right-leaning press
- Of all variants, ‘woke’ remains the most used
- Its use is generally derogatory—especially in right-leaning media
- Byword for left-wing politics and characteristics perceived to be related to left-wing politics including:
 - Feminism/gender identity
 - Environmental activism
 - Anti-racism
 - Cancel culture
- In some instances, left-wing political tenets grouped together as ‘woke’ are framed as anti-British thus raising further questions about perceived national identity, e.g., Brexit vs. wokeness.

Twitter analysis

Anger over companies pandering to woke agenda

Viewed as a marketing ploy and judged as insincere

Get woke, go broke

Refusal to comply or fund such attempts. Boycott woke.

Pleasure at seeing companies that appear to attempt this fail.

Brand/ Company no longer reflects my values and morals.

Used positively: compassion and embracing diversity

LGBTQIA+, CRT, women, teaching 'real' history.

Stay woke

Used ironically: auto-antonym

Self-regarded as enlightened

If 'X' means woke, then I must be woke

Having to make a stand to make a difference

Twitter analysis

The weak woke

Misguided and naive.
Brainwashed by 'agenda'.

Bleeding heart liberal
hippies

Idiot children who can't
even define 'woman':
diversity over logic.

Shallow/hollow attempts
for approval of others

Straw man arguments
that no one asked for.

Feminism, BLM:
divisive/contradictory

Non-defined liberal
legacy media

Active attempt
to subjugate vs weak
ignorance/stupidity

The woke agenda/ anti- woke agenda

Agenda of creating and
imposing culture

Cancel culture to
control what people say
and think

Survey

Findings

Wokeness:

- I am woke (M = 3.2, SD = 1.3)
- I would openly identify as woke (M = 2.6, SD = 1.3)
- I do not think my society is woke enough (M = 3.1, SD = 1.4)
- Total (M = 8.9, SD = 3.6)

Anti-wokeness:

- I am anti-woke (M = 2.1, SD = 1.2)
- I would openly identify as anti-woke (M = 2, SD = 1.2)
- I think my society has gotten too woke (M = 2.6, SD = 1.4)
- Total (M = 6.8, SD = 3.6)

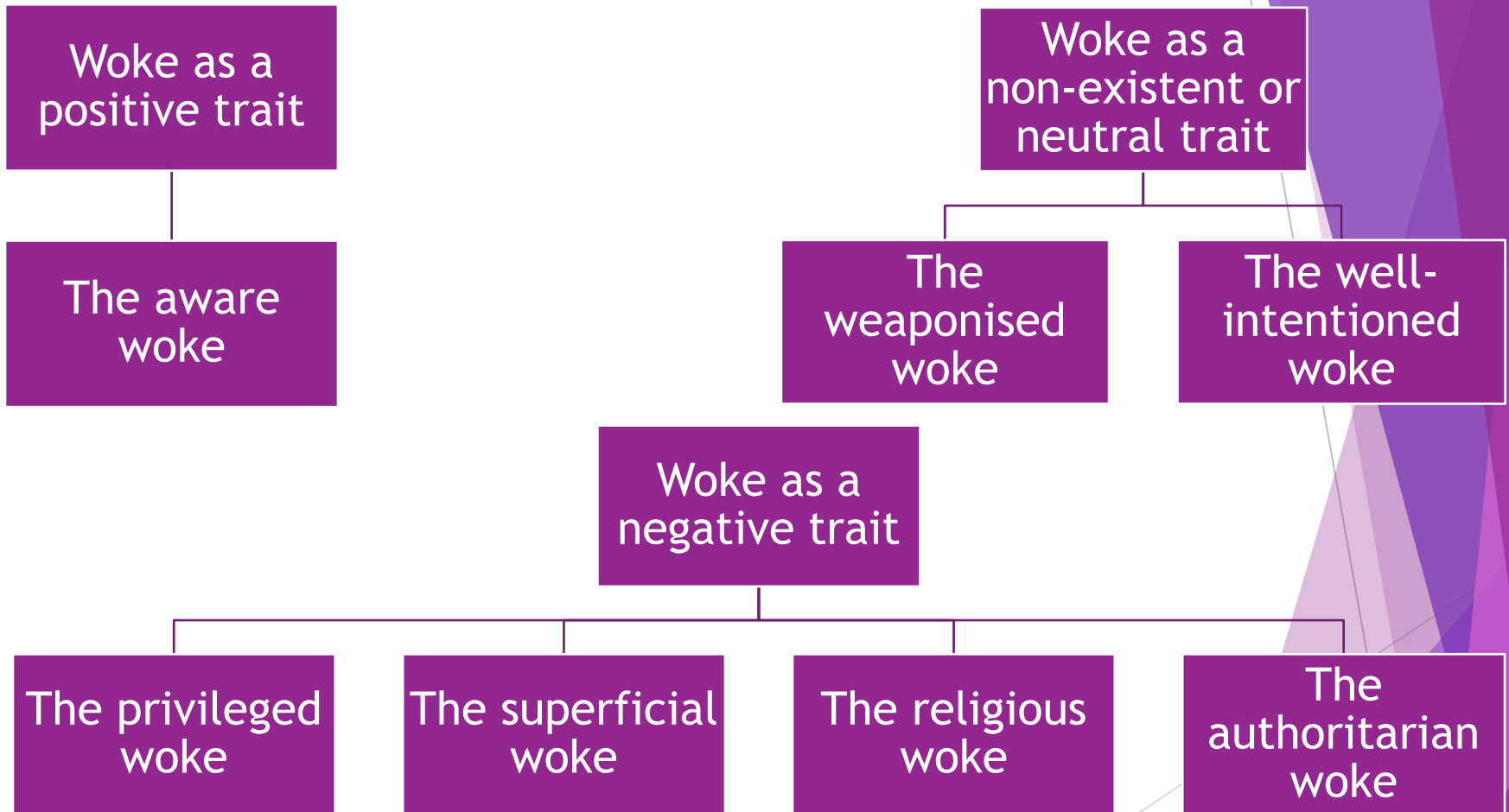
Patterns:

- No significant gender or age diffs $p > .05$
- More woke vs. anti-woke $t(115) = 3.43, p < .001$
- Less likely to openly identify by label: both sides
 - Wokeness diff: $t(115) = 6.40, p > .05$
 - Anti-woke diff: $t(115) = 3.02, P < .004$ - sig

Identification with anti-woke < strong disagreement with woke: apathy?

Survey

Themes



Woke institutions or groups

Activists, NGOs, LGBT+ communities, media, education (social sciences), social workers, young people, digital vs. real world, the establishment?

Discussion

Conclusions

- Multi-faceted: individual/group/corporate
- Awareness, compassion vs. weakness, puritanism
- Shift: minority to majority behaviours: being a good ally
- Promotes cultural vs. political agenda: insurgents, not legality
- Overwhelmingly negative portrayals in the press/Twitter samples
- Survey: Participants mostly identified as being woke - sampling bias?
- Further research: Can woke vs. neutral framing impact support for policies?
- E.g., 'Privilege' drops white support for renaming (Quarles & Bozarth, 2022)



Any questions?