

## **Crisis Communication & Social Activism: The means of social advertising in times of crisis**

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### **Abstract:**

Nowadays, modern consumers want their favourite brands to be humane in their treatment, have sustainable environmental policies or support a long time social cause. These consumers feel empowered to participate in this philanthropic process by simply buying the product. Corporates around the world and in India are responding well to this demand of being transparent with social responsibility by simply keeping their consumers in the loop by promoting their brand with social awareness advertisements or campaigns.

But what happens when a mishandled customer support call is recorded by the customer or there is a harsh review about a particular brand on the application? Anything a customer can record or comment on could potentially lead to a crisis for that particular brand.

The present study talks about how brands deal with crisis by using the means of political and social advertising; crisis management is done by keeping in mind the sentimental values of human beings. While it takes realms of research and years of unfaltering perseverance to build a brand, it could take just a few social media rants by consumers or an ad campaign gone wrong for it to turn into a massive corporate crisis. From the Maggi meltdown to Cadbury winning the battle of worms, these brands have touched the lives of so many people with the means of social advertising by means of mass media and managing the crisis situation with ease.

This research will essentially talk about corporate crisis communication and management. It will also present various case studies and articles in regards to corporate brands and the use of social advertising when dealing with crisis.

**Key Words:** Brands, Corporate Communication, Crisis Communication, Crisis Management, Social Advertising, Social Campaigns

### **Introduction:**

A sudden and unexpected event leading to major unrest amongst the individuals at the workplace is called as organization crisis. In other words, crisis is defined as any emergency situation which disturbs the employees as well as leads to instability in the organization. Crisis affects an individual, group, organization or society on the whole.

### **Need for Crisis Management**

- Crisis Management prepares the individuals to face unexpected developments and adverse conditions in the organization with courage and determination.
- Employees adjust well to the sudden changes in the organization.
- Employees can understand and analyze the causes of crisis and cope with it in the best possible way.
- Crisis Management helps the managers to devise strategies to come out of uncertain conditions and also decide on the future course of action.
- Crisis Management helps the managers to feel the early signs of crisis, warn the employees against the aftermaths and take necessary precautions for the same.

### **What is Crisis Communication?**

The effort taken by an organization to communicate with the public and stakeholders when an unexpected event occurs that could have a negative impact on the organization's reputation. This can also refer to the efforts to inform employees or the public of a potential hazard which could have a catastrophic impact. There are 3 essential steps that an organization can take to prepare for and withstand a communications crisis:

1. Define your philosophy;
2. Assess your vulnerabilities;
3. Develop a protocol

Nowadays, there is a significant trend of producing social content which will speak to the consumer on a very emotional and mental level. This might lead to a positive change in the society creating a social consciousness among the consumers. This in turn leads to activism.

### **Social Activism:**

Activism consists of efforts to promote or intervene in social, political or environmental reforms with the desire to make changes in the society. There are many varieties of activism, from the face-to-face conversations to massive protests, from principled behaviour to the immoral, from polite requests to objectionable interference, and from peaceful protests to violent attacks. Activism is not well defined, so different people often have somewhat different ideas of what constitutes activism.

Activism is supposed to be a conscious effort emerging from a person to a group in a society for the good will of the society itself. Nowadays people are getting aware and politically literate of the happenings in the society. Most of the awareness is possible because of the multi flow of content emerging from different media. Brands and corporate companies are making an effort to be a part of this movement to prove their social responsibility as well as by coming up with different types of social awareness campaigns and advertisements. This way they are not only getting the support of their already loyal customers but are also getting visible in the bigger picture of the socio-political consciousness movement in the society.

### **So what is Social Advertising?**

According to Bloom & Novelli (1981), succeeding in social marketing requires more intelligence and imagination, as well as originality in relation to the conventional commercial marketing. Marketing's contribution to the solution of social problems, such as the dealing with racism or the increased support of the education, constitutes a historical phenomenon and a policy of numerous social organizations (Takas, 1974). The increasing efforts of advertisers and marketers to be a part of social responsibility have led to the term "Social Advertising" or "Social Marketing".

### **Here is a list of some of the social advertisements which changed the face of branding for good:**

1. **Havells Fan – Ab Hawa Badlegi:** This advertisement tries to break the basic norms and common stereotypes in our day-to-day lives, right from a man who wishes to

adopt the last name of his wife or where a baby girl is delivered to a Hindu-Muslim couple and the father is okay with his daughter picking the religion of her choice when she grows up.

2. **Google – Reunion:** The most shared ad of 2013, this ad captures the reunion of two friends expressively when they meet for the first time after the India-Pakistan partition of 1947. Their reunion takes place with the help of Google search. The futility and negative consequences of partition are being questioned through this ad.
3. **Vogue India - #Start with the boys:** The purpose of this ad is to display a simple social message of teaching boys to be gentle and treat girls with respect. It is an effort to convey effectively the need for taking action to reduce crimes against women by changing the way boys are brought up by their parents.
4. **Tata Tea - #JaagoRe Campaign:** In the year 2007, 'Jaago Re' launched its very first campaign with an aim to 'awaken' the entire nation to the fact that they tend to hold the government accountable to various mishaps and encouraged them to participate in the functioning of the country's politics by voting. To further establish this, 'Jaago Re' highlighted the ignorance of Indian citizens about facts like the credentials of the candidates that represent them in a hard hitting yet witty series of films. By launching a website, 'Jaago Re' facilitated voter registrations which enabled an extensive call out to the youth of the nation and encouraged them to vote.

These kind of social advertisements and campaigns have changed the face of branding and corporate social responsibility sphere. Nowadays, "Activism sells more than glamour". "We define advertising creativity as original and imaginative thought designed to produce goal-directed and problem-solving advertisements and commercials." (Reid, Whitehill King, & DeLorme, 1998) There are three terms which are significant in this definition for a profit-oriented advertisement:

1. **Original & Imaginative –** Obviously for the consumer appeal, the more the original content, the more a consumer is directed towards it; the more the content is imaginative, more are the chances of appeal.
2. **Goal-Directed –** The advertisement in making should have a specific goal other than the target audience, the marketer in question should uphold the brand image and be aware of all the outcomes possible out of the advertisement.

3. **Problem-Solving:** This should be the direct nature of the advertisement. Along with it having a goal, it should also keep in mind that it is solving all the doubts that are associated with the brand in the minds of the consumer.

### **Methodology:**

The content of social advertising has a significant impact on the world of consumers, the way they feel, think and see, it show their willingness to do something themselves to improve their lives or just the opposite. This also affects the way the producers of the content or the marketers build more advertisements and present the format. So considering that social advertisements do have an impact on the buying habits of consumers, these types or forms of advertisements and campaigns might also help in the times of crisis and to build a particular brand image.

So this is studied with various types of case studies regarding the brands, their corporate social responsibility, their corporate management and their publicists and marketers.

### **Building Brand Equity:**

Brand equity refers to the perceived value of a company, product, or service. It's based on a brand's reputation among consumers and involves factors that go beyond features, benefits and price. Consumers often make purchasing decisions based on their perception of a brand, i.e., its brand equity. They buy from brands they feel confident in, are familiar with and consistently get value from.

So what makes a brand unique and instantly recognizable in the competition? Apart from customer experience and retention, it is also important to have a unique selling proposition. The brand needs to communicate with the consumers as to how they are different from their competitors. They need to focus on building an emotional connection with the customers; it sells more than selling a feature or benefit of the product.

### **Dove #RealBeauty Case Study:**

Let's consider a well-known brand "Dove", an eminent name in the FMCG industry, owned by the marketing team Unilever. The Dove difference hasn't just come from using more diverse "real" women in its ads. Unilever was one of the earliest to adopt corporate sustainability into its business model, and the often tearjerker Real Beauty ads were backed

by lots of action to improve the self-esteem of women everywhere. The campaign's impact extended beyond promoting a vision for beauty equality. Sales for Dove jumped from \$2.5 to \$4 billion in the campaign's first ten years. Dove bars became the number one preferred soap brand in the U.S. and Unilever's best selling product company-wide.

That's why so many people scratched their heads over the subsequent missteps that caused consumers to call foul on what they said was racism in some of the Real Beauty messages. Specifically, in October 2017, Dove released a three-second body wash ad on Facebook. The ad featured a diverse trio of women individually lifting their shirts to transition into one another: a black woman pulled up her shirt to reveal a white woman, who then unveiled an Asian woman. This got a lot of backlash owing to it being a "racist" advertisement. The twitter and facebook feeds were filled with a lot of flak and criticism and the Unilever team personally apologised for the campaign.

For purpose-driven brands like Dove, success is largely based on the strength of their consumer's relationships. Key to those bonds is moving beyond a transactional approach and investing in efforts to listen. Actively listening and engaging with audiences shows that you care. And Dove's repeated, absent responses indicated it did not. At least, that's how things looked for the last 18 months until Dove's recent unveiling of a new Real Beauty effort grounded entirely in listening. Project #ShowUs asks women to do just that in partnership with Getty Images and Girlgaze "to create the world's largest photo library created by women and non-binary individuals to shatter beauty stereotypes." Not only did Dove hear and admit it sometimes gets things wrong, the company asked for input. It the kind of sound action required of brands that take positions on emotional, and often on a social level, especially critical topics like race and gender.

This opportunistic strategy of connecting brand values to social movements is also known as "movement marketing", a term coined in 1999 by the ad agency StrawberryFrog. Indeed, today we find movement marketing at play in nearly every major consumer industry, from cosmetics brands advocating for "natural" standards of beauty to fashion labels embracing feminism. "When a company aligns itself with what the young generation perceives to be good causes, it boosts sales and strengthens brand loyalty," ,” observes Brayden King, Professor of Management & Organizations at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management.

Just like Dove, many brands are jumping on the bandwagon of activism and social advertising. Lifebuoy through its “Help a Child to Reach 5” campaign intends to fight child mortality due to diarrhoea by teaching healthy hand washing habits in villages. Lifebuoy has managed to partner with UNICEF, PSI and Millennium Villages Partnership to target school children, new mothers and various other community groups to spread awareness about maintaining overall health and wellbeing. The campaign has led to a change in the hand washing behaviour of over 130 million people, worldwide.

More brands like Pantene and L’Oreal have started activating their activism by standing up for a cause and engaging people in their endeavour. Turning their stories into fights that concern people has managed to get these brands easy traction. It has also helped in making their brands famous as these fights support their brand stories.

The growing spread of social media has transformed the way businesses operate in India. There is a demand for forceful campaigns that fight for a cause which consumers actually believe in. The youth want to be a part of every social decision that impacts them, even if it is about politics. They associate brands with human truths and when they feel these truths are being attacked, they start engaging themselves in conversations on social media.

Ajay Menon, EVP, Brand David, explaining the rise in this numbers, said, “Increasingly, people don’t just buy products; they equally buy what the brand stands for. Purpose works the best when consumers are able to see how the product ties back to the brand image. There is no denying that the kind of brand you are says a lot about the kind of product you will make.”

The campaigns nowadays are without a mascot, with less focus on the product, and more about the consumer or in other words, purpose-driven. In this ever-increasing competition, it is difficult to position your brand and convince the god-consumer. In order to make a little home in consumers’ mind, touching their heart is the way to begin.

### **Maggi Case Study:**

On 13 August, the Bombay high court set aside a ban imposed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on sale of Maggi noodles and asked for retesting at three laboratories certified by the National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories in Pune, Hyderabad and Punjab. Nestle had moved the high court following the

FSSAI order on 5 June asking the firm to immediately withdraw all nine variants of Maggi noodles, calling them "unsafe and hazardous" for human consumption.

After the announcement, Nestle released three short videos on its official YouTube channel Meri Maggi. The videos were shared on Twitter with the hashtag #WeMissYouToo, and thus Nestle India tried to keep the brand alive in consumers' minds, while it was still out of the shelves. This campaign was in response to the outpour of emotions that the public expressed towards the ban of maggi.

After the release of the videos of Maggi's lovers expressing how much they miss it, they have released a set of videos expressing how Maggi fanatics feel relaxed, now that it has cleared all the tests. The videos show mothers saying how they were tensed when the news about Maggi bad for health. But, now they are happy that they were right about Maggi all this while. The campaign was called #LetYourMomKnow that Maggi is now safe and it is time to celebrate the comeback of the most popular noodles.

After making their ultimate social comeback, Maggi churned out another relatable series of videos that every kid could connect with. Nothing Like Maggi brought back the memories and took their audience through a reminiscing route while playing a significant role in creating a nostalgic campaign.

### **Conclusion:**

When bad things happen, the companies need a right strategy for taking their way out of the mess and avoiding a calamities pummeling of their corporate message. Choosing the best response can spell the difference between a brand's survival – even enhancement – and its irreversible tarnishing (Johar, Birk, 2010) Building the brand is just the first step, but maintaining its reputation is a continuous process. After looking at the Dove and Maggi case studies, it is evident that brand messages play a very important role in maintaining this reputation, especially if these messages have an emotional appeal.

The object of this paper was to study how social and emotional advertising play an important role at times of brand crisis. Greta and Malala get the headlines, but for every young leader pictured on a magazine cover, thousands more are working tirelessly for causes like climate justice, racial and gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and economic change. "Around the world, we are seeing children and youth engage as social, political, and economic actors,



demonstrating their capacity to help make social change," said Taft, an associate professor of Latin American and Latino Studies at UC Santa Cruz.

Thus, majorly the youth might feel inclined towards the brands that are working for a social cause or at least portraying their marketing and advertising with social messages. This phenomenon might be helpful in times of crisis and can be included in the study of crisis management.

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