

Crisis Communication Stages of Dove 2017 Racism Issue

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Abstrak

Iklan produk losion badan merk Dove yang ditayangkan di Facebook pada 2017 tersandung kasus rasisme. Iklan tersebut berupa GIF berdurasi tiga detik yang menampilkan tiga wanita melepaskan baju yang mereka kenakan. Amarah publik terpicu oleh adegan seorang wanita berkulit gelap melepaskan bajunya dan berganti menjadi wanita berkulit terang. Dove mengambil tindakan meminta maaf setelah isu yang tidak terduga tersebut menjadi viral. Pada 2018, Dove mempublikasikan sebuah iklan dengan semboyan *Let's Break the Rules of Beauty* sebagai upaya memperbaiki reputasi brand Dove. Iklan tersebut menekankan arti dari kecantikan: warna kulit, gaya rambut, dan penampilan fisik lainnya tidak menentukan definisi kecantikan. Jurnal ini membahas isu rasisme pada iklan Dove tahun 2017 dan iklan Dove 2018 *Let's Break the Rules of Beauty* sebagai upaya memperbaiki reputasi brand dan korelasinya dengan Langkah-langkah Komunikasi Krisis. Jurnal ini menemukan bahwa dalam menghadapi isu tersebut, Dove menerapkan lima langkah komunikasi krisis: pendeteksian, pencegahan atau persiapan, penahanan, penyembuhan, dan pembelajaran. Keunikan dari jurnal ini adalah tidak ditemukan penelitian lain yang berkaitan dengan bagaimana Dove memperbaiki reputasi brand dan menghadapi komunikasi krisis.

Abstract

Dove's body lotion advertisement on Facebook posted in 2017 was accused of racism issue. The advertisement was a three second GIF of three women removing their shirts. The public was triggered by the scene of a black woman removed her shirt and turned into a white woman. Dove then apologized directly after the unexpected issue went viral. In 2018, Dove then created an advertisement with Let's Break the Rules of Beauty as their tagline as an attempt to rebrand their brand. The advertisement emphasized the meaning of beauty: skin color, hair style, and any other physical appearances do not define beauty. This journal discusses the racism issue of Dove 2017 advertisement and Dove 2018 Let's Break the Rules of Beauty advertisement as an attempt to rebrand their brand also the correlation within the issue and Crisis Communication Stages framework. This journal found out that in facing their issue, Dove applied five stages of crisis communication: detection, prevention or preparation, containment, recovery, and learning. The gap of this journal is there is no study about how Dove rebrand their company's image and facing the crisis was found.

Keywords: Crisis communication, racism, advertisement, rebrand, public relations issue.

Introduction

Dove is one of the many well-known and popular brands created by Unilever. Dove focuses on selling hair and body products for women and men and are sold worldwide. Dove's campaigns are always about emphasizing real beauty, its mission is to create changes, educate and inspire women about the definition of beauty. Break public's stereotype about beauty, not wanting to generalize and create an ideal body image, and to help in building women's self-esteem are their aims.

However, in 2017, Dove was entangled with racism issue for an advertisement of one of their products which is body wash. This advertisement triggered public's reactions because it showed a black woman turned into a white woman as she took her shirt off. The public received Dove's advertisement differently than the main intention that Dove wanted to communicate that their body washes product is for every woman as a celebration of diversity.

The situation that Dove was facing was considered a crisis for the company, in terms of crisis communication. Crisis communication is a form of action that is done to maintain related institutions, organizations, or companies. There are five stages in handling crisis: detection, prevention or preparation, containment, recovery, and learning (Banks, 2011).

Dove was accused of being racist with no warning signs which does not imply in the stage of detection as prodromal where there should be a sign or symptoms of something that might occur. Since the problem came with no warning or sign, Dove could do prevention. However, they did preparation to limit crisis duration. As a way of limiting and overcome the crisis, Dove chose the apologia theory. To bring back the company's image and reputation through the black women in the advertisement by showing to the public and did an interview for a TV show where she defended Dove. The company took and consider the case as an experience and learning to avoid the same crisis to happen in the future.

Literature Review

Body Image

This part consists comprehensive review focusing on how crisis communication theory takes place in the Dove advertisement: racism issue. This literature review originated from searchers for articles and journals from various databases such as Google Scholar, Sage Journals and Emerald Insight. These databases provide resources in forms of articles and journals.

To begin with, the image of skin-color bias is spreading among people and has led to a bias (Ronald E. Hall, 1998). The differences in terms of skin-color honor the persevere effects on the color of women. Furthermore, the stratification of skin color requires both racism and colorism (Margaret L. Hunter, 2002). At the beginning of 1970, skin color measures have been used to study racial discrimination and stratification (Denia Garcia & Maria Abascal, 2016). The connection between racism and colorism can be seen for colorism would likely not exist without racism because colorism is about the honor of whiteness in terms of phenotype, aesthetics, and culture. However, the dissimilarity of these two processes is useful because people of color may experience racism differently depending on their skin color. Light skin is identic with Europeans and is ascribed differently with the dark skin, which identic with Africans and ascribed a lower status (Almaguer 1994; Barrera 1979; Fanon 1967; Jordan 1968). Little attention has been put to how skin colors run differently in the lives of women although the colors stratification literature considered light skin as a type of honor. Light skin is interpreted as beauty which contended as social capital for women (Margaret L. Hunter, 2002). For women, physical appearance is seen as a more important status characteristic rather than for men. However, appearance is becoming important for men (Banner 1983; Ferguson 1985; Luciano 2001).

The exposure of body image to the media is one major sociocultural on a female's body. There is a link between media exposure to portray the thin-ideal image in women, body image concerns and dissatisfaction in females (Grabe at al., 2008; Groesz et al., 2002; Want, 2009). A concept originated by Paul Schilder explains that body image is seen as a mental image of one's body as it appears to others. Moreover, Ferguson (1997a, 1997b) stated that the structure and nature of body image can change depends on the historical time and the variety of culture. Tiggerman and Slater (2004) reported that viewing images of ideal female bodies in a music video has increased the level of comparison while body satisfaction is decreasing with female undergraduate students as the sample. Furthermore, Cattarin and colleagues (2000) found that those whose tendency to internalize ideal society are more likely to feel appearance dissatisfaction in viewing attractive women in a video and feel better when viewing average women in a non-appearance video. Human's senses work together to produce perceptions of the world and human also sense other bodies through various media (Freund, 2009; Jung, 2009). Assuredly, Marks (2000, 2002) argued that we see movie or television, not in a purely

visual way but relating to visual media involving other senses. It has become common that the culture of the consumer is obsessed with the body. There is also fetish in the media with images of beautiful bodies, celebrities and people who exemplify the good life.

There are two main dimensions that identify the body image (Cash & Pruzinski: 1990, 2002): body image investment and body image evaluation. Body image investment reflects the stage of cognitive and behavioral importance that people assign to their appearance (Cash & Pruzinski, 2002, p.150) while body image evaluation refers to people's stage of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their appearance. The concern with body image among women and girls is greater than among men and boys which has led to the primary goal of body image research (Duane A. Hargreaves & Marika Tiggemann, 2006). The most conspicuous difference between male and female body image is in the body parts that raise the most discontent (Cafri & Thompson, 2004). Furthermore, the exposure of media images on body images is weaker for men and boys than for women and girls (Harrison, 2000; Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004; Vartanian, Giant, & Passino, 2001). Thin, tall and slender is believed to be the ideal body for women, thus many women feel overweight, whereas lean and muscular is the ideal body for men, thus many men feel small and weak (Stanford & McCabe, 2002). Based on this observation, Fallon (1990), Heinberg (1996), Robin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore (1985) suggested that the pursuit of unrealistic societal body ideals creates the negative body image perception.

Crisis Communication

An image is essential to organizations and it is the central concept to the field of public relations. When a company is experiencing a crisis, its image and reputation are at risk. The crisis that arises which involves and related to public relations, organizational communication and management is considered crisis communication. A crisis is a major situation that has a potential negative outcome and affects the organization, company, or industry, its public, products, reputation, and services. A minor crisis is a crisis that only affects a small part of an organization. Thus, the major crisis threatens human lives, earnings, reputation, and the health of an organization (Coombs and Holladay, 2012). According to Millar and Heath (2004, p. 247), a crisis is a "time of ambiguity, uncertainty, and struggle to regain control". It is also considered "an event for which people seek causes and make attribution" (Coombs, Holladay, 2004, p. 97). Crisis can be threatening to the existence of the company (Mitroff & Anagnos, 2001: 34-35). A corporation's stakeholders can re-establish the social legitimacy of the company by using crisis communication (Hearit, 1995). Stakeholders will differ the attribute of a crisis either to the corporation involved in the crisis or situation within the crisis. The greater the threat of the crisis damage the corporate image and reputation, the greater the more stakeholders attribute the crisis (Coombs and Holladay, 1996, 2001).

When an organization or a corporation is being hit by a crisis, the organization or corporation will try to minimize the crisis response by responding to the crisis through response strategies while the public tries to seek information related to the crisis. Apologia is one of the strategies of how an organization or corporate minimize the crisis. Apologia is a genre taken from rhetoric and refers to self-defense and it is driven by a situation portrayed by the attack and defense of character (Ware and Linkguel, 1973). The effort was done by an organization or corporation is also known as the corporate apologia, a communicative way to defend the corporation from image and reputation attacks. It has become a tool for crisis communication in the study of crisis communication of Hearit (1995), Ice (1991), Hobbs (1995) and Ihlen (2002). The corporate apologia then extends to image repair theory (Benoit and Pang, 2008). Benoit argues that corporations have images that are valuable and should be protected when attacked.

There are five stages as the flow to handle crisis communication: detection, prevention or preparation, containment, recovery, and learning. Crisis usually begins with only a warning sign or several warning signs in the prodromal stage. This stage is the earliest stage of crisis when a company notices that a crisis is going to occur. After the signals are detected, company has two options on the next stage, to prevent or to prepare for the crisis. The prevention action is taken if there is possibility to stop the crisis from occurring. However, if it is not possible, then the company goes with the preparation stage where the company prepare itself for the crisis. Containment is the climax stage of crisis communication. In this stage, company's efforts and action to limit crisis duration are taken. After the crisis duration has been limited, the company enters the next phase, recovery. In this stage, company tries to return all situations back to normal or before crisis, internally and externally. Lastly, company learns and examines the crisis and determines what can be learned from the experience (Banks, 2011).

Result and Discussion

Dove and Their Mission

In 1957 Unilever created Dove as one of their personal care brands. Dove products are sold worldwide, more than 80 countries and men and women are targets of their products. A cleansing bar was their very first products followed by body washes, hair care, deodorants, lotions, moisturizers, and facial care products. Dove started their campaign which emphasizes on real beauty in 2004. In 2006, they created Dove Self-Esteem Fund. Their mission is to make changes, to educate and inspire women about the definition of beauty and to make women have more confidence in themselves.

On their official website, it is written that they believe beauty is not one dimensional; the definition of real beauty is not determined by age, body shape, body size, skin color, hair color, any physical appearance. Real beauty means being authentic, unique, and real. Dove encourages women to be aware of their potential and engage them through their products. Women have always been Dove's inspiration in producing and developing their brand. They are committed wholly to provide superior care to all women and to enhance real beauty in their advertisements. Their advertisements of real beauty will remain the same and they will continuously use their advertisements as a tool to campaign about real beauty, to break public's stereotype about beauty, and to celebrate the uniqueness in every woman.

In the celebration of their 60th anniversary on 2017, they launched Dove Real Beauty Pledge by promising 3 points. Firstly, they will always feature women in their advertisements and campaign, not models, to portray the real beauty and not wanting to generalize and create an ideal body image. Secondly, they portray women as they are in real life, thus they will never digitally edit their images. Lastly, the commit to helping 40 million young people in building self-esteem and positive body confidence.

Dove's mission is to redefine the definition of beauty, to build confidence and self-esteem in every woman's heart. They want to ensure the next generation will have more confidence in themselves. Dove spreads their campaign through Dove Self-Esteem Project, started in 2004, their programs are: school visits, workshops aiming youths, and online courses aiming parents. Although the idea of ideal body image is slowly changing, based on The Global Beauty Confidence Report in 2016, Dove found that women and girls are being more anxious and worried about ideal body image because of what media portrays. Since the launching of the Dove Self-Esteem Project, thousands of people have participated: parents, teachers, youth opinion leaders. Dove states they have reached over 20 million youths from 139 countries. They aim to reach 20 million more by 2020.

Body Image

Nowadays, people dealing with ideal body image problem. How people picture their physical appearances based on culturally and socially constructed images and used as a measurement to compare themselves to other's physical appearance is the definition of body image (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016). To worsen people's worries about their ideal body image, Ridgway & Clayton (2016) state displaying one's body image in social networking services has been popular. Based on research by Lup, et. al. (2015) Facebook has 1.28 billion users while Instagram is visited by approximately 100,000,000 active users per month. It means people are actively using social networking service. Ideal body image on social networking services are being seen by many people and many people are affected by what they see through their gadgets. Which means the idea of ideal body image is not ideal anymore. People especially women often perceive their ideal body image as someone who has bright skin, straight or nice wavy long hair, a small size of the body, and 170 centimetres tall. It makes the ideal body image seems impossible to be owned.

The Advertisement – Racism Issue

In 2017, Dove posted an advertisement of one of their products, body wash. The advertisement takes form in a three seconds GIF (Graphics Interchange Format). Three women are featured in the advertisement. All three women take off their shirts and turning from one woman to another woman. However, this advertisement triggered public's reaction because of its scene showing a black woman after taking her shirt off, she turns into a white woman. Despite the next scene which shows the white woman turns into a medium skin colored woman, the public was annoyed with the first scene and it went viral.

Dove directly took of their advertisement and apologized. However, criticisms from the public continuously appeared. Dove tweeted an apology and stated their deepest regret. They admitted that the advertisement does not represent their core beliefs, which is the diversity of real beauty. Dove stated they have removed the post and discontinue publishing any other related content. Dove ended the statement by apologizing once again for the offensive advertisement and conflict they have caused. Despite their regret, nearly 3000 comments were coming from Twitter users, the majority of the comments were negative. Their intention was to boycott Dove products.

Marissa Solan, Dove's spokeswoman, said that the intention of the advertisement was to communicate their body wash product is for every woman and as a celebration of diversity. However, they truly apologize because they have offended many people.

The Advertisement – Let's Break the Rules of Beauty

July 31, 2018, through Dove India YouTube channel, Dove posted a video entitled "Dove presents: The Perfect 10" and used #LetsBreakTheRulesOfBeauty as its hashtag. The scene shows Dove collaborating with Grazia were inviting young girls to choose photos of models as beauty feature of a magazine. The young girls kept giving comments such as "I don't find her pretty because of her smile", "she has a very big nose", "I like the structure of her face", "her underarms are big and she doesn't look good", "I think she should have straightened her hair and it would match her face, I don't think this gonna be perfect".

Then the video was shown to the young girls' mothers. Some comments from the mothers are: "You talk about Cinderella, you talk about Snow White, all these characters are pretty, the hair looks like that, and the eyes look like this. So, the child's mind automatically is wired like that from childhood" and "If the images are changed, I think a lot will be changed. Because we are exposed to those images a day in and day out".

Dove inserted these two lines to emphasize problems found in India: “Even at age 10, girls have a set idea of beauty” and “6 out of 10 Indian girls feel the pressure to look beautiful”. At the end of the video, the conclusion is given by the mothers’ comments: “Each one is special, each one is beautiful”, “And be what you want, be you. That is it”, “It is just the way you look at it”. The video ended with “Let’s break the rules of beauty”.

Crisis Communication

Coombs and Holladay (2012) in their book state there is no universal definition of crisis. Many definitions of crisis are similar yet different. The authors covered a range of crisis definition related to public relations, organizational communication, and management. A crisis may have a positive or negative outcome. Friedman (2002:5) as cited in Coombs and Holladay (2012) defines crisis as a major situation that has a potential negative outcome and affects the organization, company, or industry, its public, products, reputation, and services. Crisis can be threatening the existence of the company. Mitroff & Anagnos (2001: 34-35) as cited in Coombs and Holladay (2012) explain a minor crisis is a crisis that only affects a small part of an organization. Thus, the major crisis threatens human lives, earnings, reputation, and the health of an organization.

According to Fredriksson (2014), Crisis communication is a form of action that is done to maintain the reputation of related institutions, organizations, or companies. There are five stages in handling crisis: detection, prevention or preparation, containment, recovery, and learning (Banks, 2011).

Detection

Banks (2011) in her book explains that the first stage is also called the Prodromal stage. Prodromes is a sign or symptoms of something that might occur. In this stage, a company identifies any warning signs, issues, or potential problems. The warning signs come from the issue itself or the issue that another company (which is in the same industry as our company) is facing. The author explains it would be beneficial for a company if they know immediately a crisis happen before its public finds out, especially the media. This leads to the second stage, which is prevention or preparation. A company can prepare themselves before the crisis spread.

Related to Dove and their advertisement that was accused of racism, there were no warning signs. Their advertisement on Facebook suddenly being the center of the public’s attention, accusing them of being racist. Facebook users commented that they were against the advertisement.

Prevention or Preparation

In the second stage, the company either prevent the crisis from happening or prepare themselves for dealing with the crisis. Prevention is an action taken to prevent the crisis from happening after identifying warning signs, lessen the negative impacts and limiting the duration of a crisis. Company usually set up programs to take actions. On the other hand, preparation is done when a company is dealing with a crisis that cannot be prevented from happening.

In Dove’s advertisement published in 2017 and was accused of racism case, Dove must be dealing with the preparation stage and took actions because they cannot prevent the crisis from occurring. It all happened even without any warning signs. When the advertisement was published, Facebook users directly accused them of being racist.

Containment

Containment is an action of limiting crisis duration when crisis worsens, which is the climax. At this stage, the company can apply many crisis communication strategies in order to overcome the crisis. One of crisis communication theory is apologia theory. Apologia theory is applied when a company tries to defend their reputation and protect their image in a crisis situation. In Apologia theory, it is possible for a company to take several actions: denial, apology, redefinition, dissociation, or conciliation.

The action taken by Dove is the apology action. October 8, 2017, at 01:27, on their official Twitter account @Dove, they tweeted:

"An image we recently posted on Facebook missed the mark in representing women of color thoughtfully. We deeply regret the offense it caused."

October 10, 2017, at 00:40, Dove tweeted another statement:

"As a part of the campaign for Dove body wash, a 3-second video clip was posted to the US Facebook page which featured three women of different ethnicities, each removing a t-shirt to reveal the next woman. The short video was intended to convey that Dove body wash is for every woman and be a celebration of diversity, but we got it wrong. It did not represent the diversity of real beauty which is something Dove is passionate about and is core to our beliefs, and it should not have happened. We have removed the post and have not published any other related content. This should not have happened and we are re-evaluating our internal processes for creating and approving content to prevent us from making this type of mistake in the future. We apologize deeply and sincerely for the offense that it has caused and do not condone any activity or imagery that insults any audience."

Dove directly apologized to the public to limit the duration of crisis and to prevent the crisis from worsening. The news of their apology was spread on the media, covered by several media. Telling people that they were sorry and would not repeat the same mistake again.

Recovery

The fourth stage is the stage when the company restore their image, reputation, and win back public's trust, the recovery stage. After apologized to the public as an action to limit crisis duration, Dove tried to recover their image and reputation through the black woman model in the video, Lola Ogunyemi. She showed to the public and done an interview for a TV show. In her interview on Newsbeat program, she defended Dove and the advertisement. She argues that the advertisement was perceived in a wrong way and taken out of context. She explained, the advertisement showed her turning into a white woman. When the white woman pulled her shirt, she turned into a middle skin tone woman. That was the whole picture of the advertisement. Lola said what had been spread was not the whole idea. People took it wrong, they screenshot only the two first scenes and spread it.

The second attempt to rebrand their company was through Let's Break the Rules of Beauty video published by Dove India on July 31, 2018, entitled "Dove presents: The Perfect 10". On the video, Dove emphasized how since young age people especially girls have set a mindset about what beauty is, what beauty looks like in appearance, how all physical looks define the ideal beauty. Dove conveyed messages how physical appearances do not define beauty, all girls and women must be able to open their mind and break the rules of beauty they have been portraying all these times. Skin colors, hairstyles, body shapes, and any other physical appearances do not determine the ideal beauty.

Through this video, Dove rebranded their brand by conveying messages that they are still the company who stands in women's side. That their mission and vision remain the same (although they have done mistakes through their advertisement), they support women and encourage women to look themselves as beautiful creatures no matter what their physical appearances are. Dove wants every woman in this world knows that they are beautiful and they are worthy.

Learning

At the last stage, the company learns from the crisis they have overcome. What was lost, what was gained, what triggered the issue, how to prevent the issue's effect from expanding, how to limit the crisis duration, and any other lessons to avoid the same crisis happen in the future.

In the author's opinion, Dove has used the best strategy to use apologia theory to minimize and overcome the crisis that attacked the company. Dove also tried to rebrand their reputation and image in a good way through new advertisement which conveys their visions and missions, also that they are still the company that who stands in women's side.

Although they were accused of racism issue, Dove sticks to their motto which is being beautiful is dimensional and owned by every woman. In every apology, they keep emphasizing that they uphold this motto as the foundation of their brand.

Conclusion

Five Stages of Crisis Communications can be applied to overcome public relations issues. In overcoming their racism issue, Dove applied Crisis Communication Stages. In the first stage, the Dove team was not able to detect any warning signs because there were no symptoms. Moving to the second stage, Dove prepared themselves rather than preventing the crisis from occurring because the crisis happened without warning signs and cannot be prevented. In the containment stage, Dove apologized, applying Apologia theory. In the attempt to recover their brand image, Lola Ogunyemi, the advertisement model, spoke to the public in a TV show and stated that she was not offended at all. She denied that Dove's advertisement was racist. The second attempt to rebuild their brand image was through Let's Break the Rules of Beauty tagline. Once again Dove emphasized that they have never generalized the idea of beauty. At the last crisis stage, Dove learned that sticking to their motto and emphasizing it on every statement they made are the keys.

Apologia theory worked in this case because this case involves specific parties and cause a sensitive issue which divert from their vision and mission that has been believed by many women for many years. There are no better solutions other than applying the apologia theory to this case for Dove to recover their brand image even though Dove have explained that what they are trying to say through the advertisement is unlike people's perception. However, Dove knew that to gain the market's attention back, they have to gain their market's trust first by apologizing through the affiliated party in the advertisement who have made people thought that Dove is actually generalizing the idea of beauty, especially in skin colour and races.

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