

Managing Reputational Storms: A Public Relations Examination of Crisis Management in Fast-Moving Consumer Brands over the Years

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Abstract:-

The field of Public Relations (PR) has experienced substantial alterations, redefining its functions and significance in the dynamic terrain of technology evolution. But despite all these adjustments, one thing has remained the same: crisis management's timeless place in PR. This study aims to decipher the complex development of public relations and illuminate the changes in its functions, with a specific emphasis on crisis management. The research dives into the field of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), investigating how PR tactics have evolved to meet the demands placed on these essential elements of daily life. Due to their widespread use, FMCG are vulnerable to significant and widespread catastrophes. With the use of a qualitative research methodology, the researcher conducts in-depth interviews with seasoned industry specialists to investigate the subtleties of PR evolution. Through interviewing these specialists, the study hopes to make inferences about the dynamic relationship between crisis management and PR, providing a thorough grasp of how PR tactics have changed over time in relation to FMCG crises. The study's qualitative data analysis enables a nuanced interpretation of the results, offering insightful information about the complex interplay between crisis management, technology advancement, and public relations in the context of rapidly evolving consumer brands.

Keywords: *Public Relations, Crisis, Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), Crisis Management, Managing Public Relations*

Introduction

The growth in companies and communication with consumers is the main reason of the importance of public relations. In the working of a company, it is possible that a company may face issues where their image may be at stake for a problem. For a better understanding of the subject, I have described the terms and background necessary for the understanding of the subject chosen. Public relations are the relationship between entities that may be seeking or receiving public attention and those interested in the same. It involves functions pertaining to management, policies and supervision so as to facilitate and foster to the organization's response to the public they want to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with. Although Public Relations is a term mostly recognized with corporate bodies and celebrity faces, that is not necessarily the case, the entity seeking the same maybe a religious body, a governmental organization, a charity body or any other person or organization. It not only helps in enhancing the status of its associated entity in the eyes of its spectators, depositors, shareholders, and entire population associated with it, but also plays an essential role in defending an organization.

An organization can face an unpredictable crisis due to certain events and must have plans sketched up to deal with them. The most recent example of the same can be the covid-19 pandemic which caused a crisis for many companies around the globe. It wasn't something that could have been predicted, nonetheless it was dealt with in the best ways by organizations to avoid massive losses. Any organization, big or small, must be aware to convert a crisis into an opportunity. Therefore, Crisis management is a crucial part of strategic management of an organization. Kash and Darling (1998) define crisis management as "a series of functions or processes to identify study and forecast crisis issues." (p. 179) Crisis management helps to deal with or prevent a crisis that may hamper the reputation of an organization.

Crisis management likewise empowers associations to adapt or forestall an emergency. Pollard and Hotho (2006) imply that an association will acquire huge benefits by arranging situations and through crisis management. The beneficial outcome from fostering an emergency plan, including further developed correspondence, more grounded corporate organizations and utilizing a wide scope of new prospects, likewise incorporates better administration of different parts of system (Coombs and Holladay, 1996). Correspondence might be a significant instrument for directors that are taking care of emergencies. Besides from the typical partners, news media likewise shares an interest in emergency circumstances influencing an association.

FMCG, short for Fast Moving Consumer Good, are those goods that mostly have durability of less than a year, have a quick turnover and are sold at a relatively low cost. These goods are bought at small and regular levels. Fast-moving consumer goods are items that sell rapidly for a somewhat minimal price. These merchandises are additionally called consumer packaged goods. FMCGs have a short period of usability because of high purchaser interest (e.g., sodas and chocolates) or because they are transitory (e.g., meat, dairy items, and prepared products).



These products are often bought, are used up quickly, are valued low, and are sold in larger amounts. Some prime functions of FMCG also involve selling, marketing, purchasing, and financing.

“FMCG markets are defined as relatively inexpensive, frequently purchased and rapidly consumed items on which buyers exert only minimal purchasing effort”. (Dibb et al., 2006, p. 298 through Leahy, 2011) FMCG is a highly competitive industry owing to the wide range of products. It is the fourth largest sector in the Indian economy and provide employment to five percent of the total industry employment. These products are consumed by all strata of society irrespective of income, age and social group although the type and price ranges may vary.

Rationale of the study

While it takes reams of research and years of persistent determination to build a brand, it could take just a few social media discussions and controversies by consumers, or an ad campaign gone wrong for it to turn into a massive corporate crisis. The work on the role of public relations can help to determine the expanse and importance of it behind the scenes in handling the events that may hamper the loyalty of customers especially in a swift moving department like FMCG, where most products are either convenience or Shopping products, and the technology develops every day. The study thus aims to study such cases to trace the impact of the crisis in short and long term and the effectiveness of crisis communication for FMCG goods. With the number of crises on a constant upswing, amends of substandard brand images becomes a crucial affair. It may just be a good idea to understand the customer’s view on the fiascos they face from brands they use and trust in their day-to-day endeavors. It also aims to study the development of Public Relations over the years and how the changes impacted the crisis and its management.

Research Objectives

- To explore the Role of Public Relations in Crisis Management according to experts in the industry
- To find the role of Crisis Management in FMCG Brands and how they are changing with changing times.

Research Methodology

This study's research methodology incorporates a thorough examination of the function of public relations (PR) in crisis management for fast-moving consumer companies, with a particular emphasis on a retrospective analysis of crises these businesses have faced in the past. Ten seasoned public relations professionals were interviewed in-depth as the main research approach. These professionals were chosen with great care due to their wealth of knowledge and proficiency in handling emergencies in the consumer brands sector. The semi-structured interviews will cover a wide range of topics related to crisis communication, such as tactics used, obstacles encountered, and the changing PR environment in crisis circumstances. The objective is to gather complex information and first-hand accounts that clarify the relationships between crisis management and public relations within the context of fast-moving consumer brands.

The sample of PR specialists will comprise people from both agency and in-house backgrounds, covering several businesses within the fast-moving consumer goods sector, to ensure a diversified and well-rounded perspective.

Thematic interviewing will be used to conduct the interviews, enabling the examination of important topics such as media relations, stakeholder communication, crisis preparedness, and the use of digital platforms in crisis management. Thematic content analysis will be used to thoroughly examine the qualitative data obtained from these interviews. This will enable the identification of trends, similarities, and distinctive tactics used by PR professionals to manage crises. The goal of this research technique is to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the vital role that public relations plays in helping fast-moving consumer brands navigate crises.

Review of Literature

This study delves into the critical function of Public Relations (PR) in the context of crisis management, with a particular focus on the ever-changing Fast-Moving Consumer Brands (FMCG) industry. Since crises in the FMCG industry are unavoidable and have the power to significantly damage a brand's reputation, this study aims to thoroughly analyze the many crises that FMCG firms have faced over the years. It attempts to analyze the complex tactics used by PR specialists to lessen harm and rebuild public confidence in the wake of such incidents. By means of a comprehensive analysis of case studies and empirical instances, the study sheds light on the complex relationship between crisis management and public relations within the diverse FMCG sector. The research highlights the critical roles that strategic messaging, effective communication, and stakeholder engagement play in crisis navigation and examines how these factors influence the course of brand recovery. It also explores how social media is changing the way the public perceives crises, acknowledging the difficulties brought on by the speed at which information spreads in the digital era. The research findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the mutually beneficial interaction between crisis management and public relations within the context of FMCG brands, which is significant information for both academics and industry. The report also offers helpful advice for PR professionals and brand managers on how to handle crises in a proactive manner while considering how quickly and constantly the consumer landscape is evolving.

Data Analysis

The researcher as a part of the research design interviewed 10 experts from the Public Relations industry. Interviews with experts were conducive to fulfill the objectives of the research which was to find out what are the expert opinions on the influence of developing Media on Public relations over the years and the Crisis management relating to Fast Moving Consumer Goods. The sampling technique used was non-probability purposive sampling method as the researcher wanted to gain perspectives of people from different walks of the industry and across the country for which probability sampling would be difficult to gather a particular set of samples.

Results and Conclusions

The study's findings underscore the complexity of crises in the consumer goods industry and the necessity of a customized PR strategy that considers the unique difficulties these companies encounter. A thorough grasp of the

relationships that exist between brands, consumers, and the media is necessary for crisis management to be successful. The study pinpoints the crucial tactics that prosperous businesses utilize during times of crisis, including prompt action, well-crafted communication, and an emphasis on restoring confidence.

This study paper concludes by exploring the vital role that public relation (PR) plays in handling crises in the industry of rapidly evolving consumer brands. After a thorough examination of numerous crises over the years, PR tactics that are successful are essential for preventing reputational harm and guiding brands through difficult times. The importance of stakeholder engagement, transparency, and proactive communication in crisis management is emphasized by the study. Important insights into the changing landscape of PR in the context of crisis communication are obtained by looking at the trends and reactions seen in crises faced by fast-moving consumer firms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge for both practitioners and academics in the field of public relations.

- For their PR teams to be capable of handling the intricacies of today's crises, brands must make preparations and investments in crisis communication training.
- To assess public opinion and modify public relations tactics instantly, the report also recommends integrating data analytics and monitoring systems.
- Scholarly investigation of the newest developments in crisis communication and the changing function of social media in influencing brand perception in times of crisis is highly recommended.

This study adds to the continuing conversation about the critical crisis management function that public relations play in preserving the endurance and good name of rapidly expanding consumer brands.

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