

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION BY AN NGO: A CASE STUDY OF THE BACKATHON CAMPAIGN BY MAKE A DIFFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study is focused on the utilization of social media as well as traditional media by NGOs for their campaigns. I have studied the Backathon campaign of the NGO, Make A Difference as a case study. Backathon is a campaign by Make A Difference to push illiteracy backwards. It is an annual event carried out in the month of September when we celebrate World literacy day on the 8th. The campaign has utilized both traditional and social media to create awareness. The effectiveness of the two forms working in parallel has been studied using qualitative research. The broad purpose of this study is to understand the utilization of integrated marketing communication by an NGO to propagate its message. The facebook fan pages of the Backathon event along with newspaper articles is the data studied for 2 weeks. The audience response has been analysed in the form of likes and comments on the facebook fan page. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding theory is the theoretical framework used in the study, to analyse if the audience response is a negotiated, dominant or oppositional stand with respect to the campaign message. The analysis of audience response has revealed that the overall response has been a dominant reading of the campaign message.

Keywords: Social media, Traditional media, NGO, Backathon

INTRODUCTION

Media is a vital tool in bringing about social change. Numerous theories have attempted to understand the effect of the media on social change from a variety of perspectives and for different objectives.

The impact of traditional media and digital media on public opinion:

A decade ago, traditional media such as newspaper publications and television, were solely responsible for bringing various issues before the public "The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-

documented influence. Not only do people acquire factual information about public affairs from the news media, readers and viewers also learn how much importance to attach to a topic on the basis of the emphasis placed on it in the news.” (McCombs, 2003) In the past, traditional media and the government were the sole opinion leaders.

But today, with the bombardment of society by newer, alternate channels of communication, the news consumption and creation pattern is changing. It has given a voice to individuals. NGOs and activists, who are vital opinion leaders of society, have to no longer rely on traditional media alone to put forth their ideas and bring major issues to the forefront. They have the power of direct communication through social media.

This research involves studying the campaign Backathon, by the NGO Make a Difference. The research is focused on studying the campaign on the digital forum as well as the traditional forum.

Backathon is an annual campaign by Make A Difference, commemorating world literacy day which falls on the 8th of September. Though the main campaign was conducted on social media, the NGO has also used traditional media, newspaper, to reach the masses.

This study focuses on the Integrated marketing communication process used by the NGO to set the organizational agenda of garnering community attention towards the vulnerable condition of children in shelter homes. The paper comprises of a qualitative content analysis of the NGO messages in its Facebook page as well as the newspaper publications. A comparison between the messages on the social media as well as newspaper publication has been conducted during the course of this research. Stuart Hall’s encoding-decoding theory has been used to study the audience response in the form of Facebook likes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies have focused on the changing structure and the changing role of NGOs in the society owing to the rise of the internet revolution. Six Dutch NGOs have used the grounded theory and case studies approach to analyze the benefits and threats of social media to NGOs in the paper – “Social media in the context of development” (Sheombar, Urquhart, Ndhlovu, Ravesteijn). According to other studies, “More and more development organisations are discovering the power of social media to affect change” (Ørecomm, 2012). “Social media have been used for social good, such as organizing community activism, for empowering citizens, and for coordinating emergency or disaster relief efforts.” (Bresciani and Schmeil, 2012) Other studies have discussed the agenda setting role of NGOs online to put forth the human rights issue. “Drawing attention to human rights issues is a goal that leads to active online communication. NGOs aim at attracting attention to their issues online by initiating a dialogue

via online forums and motivating the public to participate in activities that may influence the media and the political agenda”(Meriläinen, Niina, Vos, Marita,2011) Studies conducted in India, have explored the role played by variety of social media in rural development. The paper – “Rural India: The Next Frontier for Social Media Networks” (Rai, Shahila, 2013) – has concluded that more social networks have to be established in rural India for it to flourish.

METHODOLOGY

This study involves a qualitative content analysis of the NGO message published in the newspapers and the Facebook fan page. “Qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (Mayring, 2000).The analysis involves an emergent coding scheme where categories have been created based on themes in the text. It is an inductive approach to answer the research question. The process involves identification of certain units and then categorizing them into codes for further analysis. This type of coding is known as open coding.

Further, the research involves usage of Stuart Hall’s Encoding Decoding theory to analyze the audience response in the form of Facebook likes. This theory is a cultural theory that says that, “senders encode meaning in their messages according to their ideals and views and the messages are decoded by the receivers according to their own ideals and views.” (Julie Martin, 2007)

Hall has given three positions for decoding the message. They are the dominant, negotiated and the oppositional position. Under the dominant position, the sender and receiver are in agreement with each other and are said to possess the same values, attitudes and beliefs. This is the decoding position under which the message is clearly understood by the receiver as conveyed by the sender. Under the negotiated position, the receiver is in partial agreement with the sender. His/her understanding is influenced by slightly different values and beliefs than the sender. Whereas, the oppositional view involves the audience perceiving other unintended meaning different from the dominant view and is in disagreement with the dominant view. In this paper, the Facebook likes have been used as the parameter to classify the audience response into the above three categories

Sample

The paper involves the study of three newspaper articles in prominent periodicals to perform a content analysis. This has been followed by the study of the Facebook campaign of Backathon for a duration of two weeks which includes 8 posts. Here, the sender message ie the NGO’s message has been studied using emergent coding scheme of content analysis. The audience response has been studied using Hall’s theory.

Analysis

The Analysis has been carried out at two levels.

The first level involves a content analysis of newspaper articles describing the NGO messages to identify the tone in each message and thereby identify the organizational agenda .

The second level involves the content analysis of the NGO message on the Facebook fanpage followed by the study of the audience response for the Facebook posts in the form of Facebook likes using Stuart Hall’s encoding-decoding theory.

The study is focused on identifying the type of audience response – dominant, negotiated or oppositional for a positive tone message and for a negative tone message.

Level 1:

The analysis involves identification of the tone used by the newspaper publications to convey the organizational message. The tone of each message has been categorized as positive or negative based on the presence of certain coded positive and negative terms. In the analysis, terms that are repeated have been taken into consideration each time.

Newspaper Articles:

In the research the total coverage comprising of three articles have been studied

Newstory #1 :

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
Awareness	illiteracy
Positive	illiteracy
Empower	deteriorating
Broaden	illiteracy
role models	risk
	Poor homes
Total words = 5	Total words = 6

Tone: Positive parallels negative

Here, the number of terms with positive connotation nearly equals the number of terms with a negative connotation. Hence, it can be inferred that the organization is using a negative tone in parallel with the positive tone to convey the message.

Newstory #2 :

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
	illiteracy
	backward
	Total words = 2

Here, the organization has used only negative terms to put forth the organizational message

Newstory #3:

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
Awareness	backwards
Care	backwards
	risk
Total words = 2	Total words = 3

The third article again reveals a parallel between negative and positive terms

The overall analysis of the three articles indicate a combination of words with negative connotation and a positive one used to put forth the message.

Level 2

In the second level also, the NGO messages have been studied using theme based content analysis by dividing text into categories to understand the tone of the message as done for the

newspaper messages.

But, in addition, here the audience response for each message has also been studied. The audience response studied is the Facebook likes on the fanpage. A criteria has been used to classify the messages as dominant, negotiated and oppositional. If the number of likes received for a message is more than 10, then the response has been categorized as dominant, if it lies between 5 and 10, it has been categorized as negotiated and lesser than 5 likes has been categorized as oppositional.

Later, it has been determined whether organizational messages with positive connotation have received dominant response or messages with negative connotation have received dominant response.

Facebook Posts:

Post #1

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
CareMore	suicidal
care	Gruesome
	dark
Total words = 2	Total words = 3

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated audience response (5<Likes<10)	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Positive parallels negative	5	no	Yes	no

Here the words with positive connotation supplement the words with negative connotation. The word care and caremore brings a supportive tone to the message which has described the condition of children through words like gruesome and dark. The audience response is a negotiated one. This indicates that people are partially receptive to the ngo message.

Post #2

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
Aid	destitute children
Support	Orphans
Positive	abandoned children
Warm	physical/sexual abuse
Safe	Malnutrition
Safe	Discrimination
CareMore	not caring
	Apathetic
Total words = 7	Total words = 8

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated audience response (5<Likes<10)	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Positive parallels negative	18	yes	No	no

Here, though the same tone has been imparted through the message with positive connotation supporting the negative connotation, the audience response has shown that they are more receptive to the message. It is because, the audiences are more conditioned to the message than they were when they received the first post.

Post #3

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
Caring	Illiteracy
Right	Discrimination
love	Abuse
Care	Discrimination
Caremore	
Total words = 5	Total words = 4

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated audience response (5<Likes<10)	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Negative parallels positive message	15	yes	No	no

Here too, the audiences have given a dominant response to the message in which negative and positive tone parallel each other. This is indicative, that the formatting of the negative tone describing child condition with positive words like love and care is necessary and is appreciated by the audience. This has enabled the NGO to garner audience support.

Post #4

The post comprises of a testimonial and an image

Words having a positive connotation in relation to child care	Words having a negative connotation in relation to child care
Experience	
smile	
good	
Total words = 3	

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated audience response (5<Likes<10)	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Positive	21	yes	No	No

Here, the audience response has increased in the dominant category and the tone is only positive with motivational phrases.

Post #5:

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
bright	
brighter	
caremore	
Total words: 3	

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated audience response (5<Likes<10)	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Positive	42	yes	no	no

Here, words like bright, brighter and caremore have enhanced the positive tone being propagated through the message. The audience response shows an increasing trend in the dominant category.

Post #6:

Words having a positive connotation in relation to child care (Motivational phrases)	Words having a negative connotation in relation to child care
Get up	
Stand up	
Walk backwards	
3 days to go	
Total words = 4	

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated response (5<Likes<10)	audience	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Positive	33	yes	no		no

This post supports the observation that motivational phrases capture audience attention and response.

Post #7

Words having a positive connotation in relation to child care	Words having a negative connotation in relation to child care
Come together	
Solidarity	
Total words = 2	

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated audience response (5<Likes<10)	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Positive	19	yes	no	No

Here, the number of positive phrases has decreased and hence the response also has slightly dipped in comparison. This is indicative that the audience response is directly influenced by the no of motivational phrases.

Post #8:

Words having a positive connotation in relation to childcare (motivational phrases)	Words having a negative connotation in relation to childcare
This time for our children	
Walk the change	
Total words = 2	

Tone of the message	No of likes	dominant audience response (Likes>10)	negotiated audience response (5<Likes<10)	oppositional audience response (Likes<5)
Positive	26	yes	no	no

Here, the usage of the phrase – “this time for our children” has captured the audience attention. This has once again led to an increase in the dominant response category in the form of likes.

Consolidated Table

Analyzed Posts	Tone of the message	Audience Response
Post #1	Positive negative parallels	Negotiated
Post #2	Positive negative parallels	Dominant
Post #3	Negative positive parallels	Dominant
Post #4	Positive	Dominant
Post #5	Positive	Dominant
Post #6	Positive	Dominant
Post #7	Positive	Dominant
Post #8	Positive	Dominant

DISCUSSION

An analysis of the consolidated table shows that five out of the eight analyzed posts have a tone with a positive connotation. The usage of this tone includes motivational words like care, support, come together, walk the change and others. The first three posts have words with negative connotation accompanying the motivational words. The words with negative connotation are used to describe the vulnerable condition of children in shelter homes.

Using Stuart Hall’s encoding and decoding theory, it has been determined that the audience response in the form of likes is more dominant in case of messages with positive connotation. One of the messages with negative connotation has received a negotiated audience response. This indicates that the audience is more receptive to messages with a positive tone comprising of motivational words. Such words inspire the will to take action from the audience.

Comparison between newspaper articles and Facebook posts:

A brief comparison of the newspaper articles and the Facebook posts has yielded the following results:

- 1) The content in the newspaper articles are descriptive in nature while the Facebook messages are more engaging.
- 2) The newspaper articles have devoted a certain percentage of article space in describing the organizational message and the rest of the article space is devoted to describing the event. Whereas Facebook, being an informal platform has given more space to describe the organizational message in different forms including images and testimonials.
- 3) But the newspaper articles have greater reach and have added credibility to the message. The two used in parallel have enabled effective delivery of the organizational message. This form of integrated communication used by the organization enabled the organization to reach 14,000 people in India.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, of newspaper articles and Facebook posts, it is found that the organizational message delivered through the two platforms successfully mobilized 14,000 Indians and created awareness. The audience response to the messages belonged to the dominant category. This is indicative of the fact that the campaign messages were clearly understood and supported by the target audience. Since messages with positive connotation received more dominant response, the study has inferred that NGOs should use motivational messages on the digital forum more than presenting the gory truth. Though the vulnerable condition of children has to be brought forth before the audience, it should be formatted and always supplemented with positive motivational phrases as done by the NGO.

From the comparison of the two platforms the study has inferred that owing to factors like engagement, reach and credibility that is provided in unison by the two platforms, NGOs should effectively use digital as well as traditional media to reach their goals.

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