

Aligning Marketing Strategies: Addressing the Lack of Customer Centric Focus in Integrated Marketing Communication Campaigns.

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Introduction

In this paper, I aim to address the prevalent issue in many Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Campaigns, which is a lack of customer centric focus. This lack of customer-centric focus means that the brand either misunderstands or disregards their consumer's viewpoints. This leads to the advertising campaigns failing, and can also trigger a paracrisis, or even a crisis for the brand. Pepsi and DiGiorno both had campaigns fail this way with immense backlash, which highlights a need for brands to have a seamless and streamlined approach to their campaigns that align with their consumer's beliefs and core values.

Problem

IMC Campaigns can fail to correctly engage with its audience, whether that is through failing to understand the audience's needs, or by not aligning themselves with consumer's viewpoints, which leads to the campaign failing, or even facing a crisis. One example of a marketing campaign that failed to have a customer centric approach is Pepsi's "Live For Now" advertisement. In 2017, Pepsi's advertising insensitively used imagery from the Black Lives Matter movement, showing Kendall Jenner handing a can of Pepsi to police officers at a protest. Current activists and consumers were quick to point out that what Pepsi depicted in their advertisement was "precisely the opposite of their real-world experience of protesting police brutality", as protestors were shown chatting, hugging, and laughing (Victor, 2017). Pepsi faced an immense amount of backlash for the insensitivity of this commercial, as it highlighted a disconnect between Pepsi and their consumers.

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This example shows why a customer centric approach is so important when creating an IMC campaign. If an organization fails to consider their consumer's needs, they cannot properly connect with their intended audience. Another example that shows why a customer centric approach is important when designing a campaign was when Pizza brand DiGiorno used the hashtag "WhyIStayed" to promote their brand, stating "#WhyIStayed You Had Pizza" (Stampler, 2014). The hashtag DiGiorno used showed a disconnect from their consumers, as the hashtag was used to bring awareness to domestic violence.

DiGiorno faced immense backlash from consumers, demonstrating another reason as to why brands should have collective awareness on their consumers beliefs, opinions, and core values when designing an Integrated Marketing Communication campaign. DiGiorno mistakenly using a hashtag meant for abuse victims to share their stories came right before the start of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, emphasizing the disconnect between DiGiorno and their customers (Schwartz, 2014). Both Pepsi and DiGiorno attempted to use something that was prevalent on social media, failing to realize that it was prevalent to spread awareness about issues impacting consumers.

This lack of awareness highlights why a customer centric approach to IMC campaigns is so important. Consumers want companies to not only know who they are, but how they want to view their products (Northwestern University, 2023). Consumers expect companies to do proper research on what they are advertising too, as well as the methods they employ to advertise it. In other words, companies cannot just "hop into" a trend and expect it to be all they need to do for

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consumers to pay attention to them. Doing so may result in a paracrisis, or even a full crisis, as seen by Pepsi and DiGiorno's failed campaigns.

Solution

According to Finne & Gronroos (2017), A customer-integrated marketing communication (CIMC) approach could help design campaigns with consumer's beliefs and values in mind.

Having a customer centric IMC approach can determine how organizations, brands, and marketers communicate with customers, which can prevent brands from launching IMC campaigns with offensive materials in it. However, it is important to define what exactly a brand being "customer centric" means. Blake Morgan (2021), a customer experience futurist, states that "When a company is truly customer-centric, every decision and action is done with customers in mind." This definition of what customer-centric means gives the foundation for a solution to the problem being addressed.

Consumers desire convenience, they want IMC campaigns designed around a simple, and easy, way to obtain the product (Morgan, 2021). A proposed solution for the lack of customer-centric IMC campaigns would be for a constantly optimized, collaborative, omni-channel approach. In other words, for a brand to be the most customer-centric for their IMC campaigns, they should have a seamless, streamlined omni-channel approach that is constantly optimized for consumers (Awati et al., 2023).

The approach outlined above works with Exemplification Theory in mind. Exemplification theory states that crises evoke strong emotional responses, such as fear and anger, and how they are communicated and remembered over time (Ulmer et al., 2023). By

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creating an omni-channel platform for a brand, it would allow for the brand to collaboratively work together on streamlining IMC Campaigns that allow for consumers to feel strong emotions such as joy and excitement, instead of fear and disgust.

In other words, creating an omni-channel platform that allows for brands to constantly monitor consumer's reactions and attentiveness to certain advertisements will allow for a brand to be easily customer centric. This approach allows for consistent messaging to consumers, as the omni-channels allow for the brand to ensure that its messaging remains consistent across all channels. Moreover, this approach allows for the brand to gather and analyze data from the various channels to personalize their communication to consumers. Furthermore, an omni-channel approach allows for the brand to respond to customer inquiries and complaints in real-time, which demonstrates the brand values its customers. This will emphasize that the brand is committed to providing excellent customer service at any time.

Conclusion

The examples of Pepsi and DiGiorno's lack of customer centric approach emphasize how important it is to have a customer centric approach in IMC campaigns. To address this challenge, it is important for brands to have a customer-centric IMC strategy, but it is not always easy for brands to constantly monitor different social media channels or create a platform that makes it easy for consumers to have convenience when they need it. The approach of an omni-channel platform allows brands to engage across multiple channels with their consumers, meaning that they can provide convenience and a constant monitor on how consumers feel about the brand.

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Providing this approach to consumers not only fulfills their needs for a convenient, personalized brand, but also builds trust and loyalty amongst their consumer bases.

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