

5-7-2021

How Publicity Affects How Customers View Brand Image: Results & Discussions

Joceyline Thesia

Results & Discussions

How publicity affects how customers view brand image

BY: JOCEYLINE THESIA

Table of Content

1. Sample Article	3
2. Results & Discussions	3
3. Theory Application	4
4. Application of Literature Review	6
5. Implications	7
6. References	8

1. Sample Article

Gendel-Guterman, H., & Levy, S. (2017). Consumer response to private label brands' negative publicity: A relational effect on retailer's store image. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(2), 204-222. doi:10.1108/jpbm-05-2015-0880

This article researched the effects of negative publicity of brands on customers and its relevance to the brand's image. The sample used in this study was a convenience sample. The demographics of the sample are chosen to be in within the range of the brand's target market and their familiarity with the brand. Participants were shown the news and publicity regarding the brand through a credible and objective source with little or no amount of bias. Then a survey was conducted to the participants on the subject of the brand's image.

2. Results & Discussions

The purpose of this research is to find out how publicity affects how customers perceived a business or a brand in terms of its image. This study will have Dolce & Gabbana as the subject of the research. The research question for this study is : "How did bad publicity affect consumer views about Dolce & Gabbana?". Censorship and gatekeeping are becoming less effective in controlling the spreading informations as most communications are now online. Information exchanged and communicated through online communication can create a feedback loop, which allows the public to share their own opinions and thoughts and therefore may initiate debates as well as comments about one's statements (Leung, 2017).

The sample used for this study was a convenience sample as the participants were sourced from the author's known associates. All participants confirmed to have purchased an item from Dolce & Gabbana and are familiar with the racism scandal that the brand was involved in. There are a total of four participants, two participants are female aged 19, one is a 21 years old male, and the other one is 47 years old female. Two of them identified themselves as middle class and another 2 as

upper middle class. The races and ethnicity of each participants are Korean- American, Malaysian-Chinese, British-Chinese, and Chinese-Indonesian.

There are several themes found in the study. The results of the interview indicates that all participants showed disappointment towards the brand and expressed negative responses. All of the participants agreed that the reputation of the brand after the racism scandal changed their views towards the brand. However, 2 of them suggested positive purchasing intentions after the scandal and 2 suggested negative purchasing intentions. One of the participants, Anty, "I'm greatly disappointed with the designers but I can't say that I wouldn't stop buying from Dolce & Gabbana. What I think of the brand doesn't matter and has no relevance to what (items) I like to buy." While another participant, Sarah, said "I would definitely not buy anything from Dolce & Gabbana again, not after what happened." All of the participants stated that the scandal was related to cultural appropriation. However, one of the participants, Alexa, said "It was definitely related to cultural appropriation but the responses (from the customers) may also fueled by the media's exaggerations." Two of the participants stated that they will not recommend the brand to others while the other two stated that they will remain neutral.

3. Theory Application

Social Comparison Theory

All of the participants identified with social comparison theory. All of the participants are from middle to upper middle class in the social economy hierarchy and they admitted that they bought luxury brands in order to show status, wealth, and self esteem. According to Worchel (1998), social comparison theory is an extension of social identity theory. Social identity theory is where a certain individual identifies with others in terms of their social behavior. Social comparison theory is where individuals distinguished themselves from others in the same group as a better one compared to others. They based their individuality to be distinctive while remain in the same group (Worchel, 1998). This resembles how the participants bought luxury fashion items to show their

uniqueness by comparison to others while identifying as a member of middle or middle upper class society. As one of the participants mentioned, “We buy stuffs to differentiate ourselves from other economical status.”

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

All of the participants expressed negative response towards the brand and showed that their role as an “Asian” plays a part in their arguments. One of the participants, Milo, said “I would definitely not buy any more products from Dolce & Gabbana because that means I’m supporting what they are doing. I’m as Chinese descendant should not tolerate or support that kind of behavior and I don’t want any Chinese or Asian people thinks that I support them by buying.” This resembles the symbolic interactionism theory which suggest that an individual’s reaction depends on the reaction of others they identify with. How people express themselves is directly dependent on how others respond through symbolic interaction. The response of an individual is in correspondence on other’s responses (Powell, 2013).

Cultivation Theory

One of the participant’s response suggested the application of cultivation theory. Alexa suggested that the medias are exaggerating the issue and that may affect some people’s judgements and perspective about the brand. She also questioned the credibility of media sources regarding the issue as most brand’s social medias has to go through the PR team to publish something. Cultivation theory suggest that constant exposure to a subject from the media may promote the acceptance of the subject in real world which in turn contribute back to the media. The time spent on medias in today’s world contribute to how we view the world and it shapes people’s perspective. (Shanahan, 1999). This theory supports Alexa’s claim that people may have been exposed to the exaggerated media claims about racism of the brand and therefore affects their overall perspective.

Stereotype Threat

This theory suggests the fear an individual has about confirming a negative stereotype about their social group. Stereotype threat affects how people perceived negative aspect of a certain stereotype may affect how one thinks, feels, and does (Schmader, 2010). The reactions of the public and the media regarding the issue of Dolce & Gabbana reflect this theory. The disagreement of the stereotype by Dolce & Gabbana about the Chinese race leads to public to respond negatively. The fear of confirming the negative stereotype by the brand of the Chinese race is what sparked the initial outrage. Stereotype threats can affect affect the behavior of how people communicate and also affects their performance in life (McGlone, 2015). This may be the reason of concern about the scandal of the brand. People affected by the stereotype the brand created may be offended and fear that this stereotype may impact their lives.

4. Application of Literature Review

An article by Janonis and Virvilaitė (2007) suggested that how customers view the brand directly relates to its reputation, how they communicate to their customers, and the message they are communicating to the customers. This article supports the result of this study which indicated that reputation of the brand affects how customers view the brand. The current reputation of Dolce & Gabbana showed correlation to how customers view the brand. According to the findings, participants showed negative responses towards the brand after the scandal. Participants associate the brand with values they perceived according to how the brand communicate to the customers, which in this case is the controversial advertisement.

An article by Reider (2013) suggested that media hype and sensational article may be caused by oversimplifying fact and therefore creates a media buzz that is often biased and was directed a few facts away from the original source. This article supports the result of this study which indicated that publicity affects how people think and their general tastes were influenced by their

own perspective. The scandal faced by Dolce & Gabbana created negative publicity for the brand and therefore received negative response in return. However, some media sources exaggerated the content and misinterpretations happened about the scandal itself and it altered how people perceived Dolce & Gabbana. Some participants who did not have or had little negative objections about the scandal have more negative approach towards the brand after reading the news. This showed that publicity, negative or positive, affects how people view the brand and it can be altered if used wisely.

5. Implications

This study aims to provide and add further knowledge about publicity in the fashion industry. These findings can be beneficial for those in the public relation field in regards of the fashion industry. PR specialists may learn from the scandal Dolce & Gabbana faced and how the brand responded to the issue. People in the PR sector can study about the decisions and solutions the brand had to come up with and analyze what went wrong. They can also learn what caused the scandal and how to best avoid it or come up with a better solution in case they face this kind of problem. This research may also further address the underlying issue of racism and stereotypes in the fashion industry. It may also help with further understanding of how negative response to negative publicity may affect how customers view the brand and also their buying intentions. However, limitations of this study includes the small sample used and the limitations of range of cultural background of the participants.

6. References

- Gendel-Guterman, H., & Levy, S. (2017). Consumer response to private label brands' negative publicity: A relational effect on retailer's store image. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 26(2), 204-222. doi:10.1108/jpbm-05-2015-0880
- Janonis, V., & Virvilaitė, R. (2007). Brand image Formation. Retrieved May 07, 2021, from <https://inzeko.ktu.lt/index.php/EE/article/view/11477>
- Leung, J. H. (2017). Publicity stunts, power play, and information warfare in mediatized public confessions. *Law and Humanities*, 11(1), 82-101. doi:10.1080/17521483.2017.1320039
- McGlone, M. S., & Pfister, R. A. (2014). Stereotype threat and the evaluative context of communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 34(2), 111-137. doi:10.1177/0261927x14562609
- Powell, J. L. (2013). Symbolic Interactionism. *Nova Science Publishers, Inc.*
- Reider, B. (2013). Publicity bias. *The American Journal of Sports Medicine*, 41(2), 261-262. doi:10.1177/0363546512475130
- Schmader, T. (2010). Stereotype threat deconstructed. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 19(1), 14-18. doi:10.1177/0963721409359292
- Shanahan, J., & Morgan, M. (1999). Television and Its Viewers : Cultivation Theory and Research. *Cambridge University Press*, 9.
- Worchel, S., Morales, J., Páez, D., & Deschamps, J. (1998). Social identity: International Perspectives. *SAGE Publications Ltd.* doi:10.4135/9781446279205