

Crisis Marketing: Hand Washing Brands Communication during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Natural catastrophes and crises have recently gained international significance, partly as a result of business globalization and increased international communication. In the pandemic situation, the importance of hygiene increased, and washing hands at regular intervals or frequently washing after touching some external surface was important to fight against the deadly virus called COVID-19. This paper tries to understand the message of the hand washing advertisements of Dettol, Lifebuoy, and Safeguard. It also tries to understand the emotional appeal in advertisements impacting the customers and whether its message content helps in increasing the awareness of the safety and hygiene appeals made by the hand washing brands in their advertising content. This study conducted a content analysis of Dettol, Lifebuoy, and Safeguard advertisements for one year from 1st February 2020 to 28th February 2021.

Keywords: Crisis Marketing, Covid-19 Pandemic, Hand Washing, Advertisement, Brand Communication.

Introduction

Crisis communication and crisis management are not the new terms for many brands, but the global impact and continued uncertainty around COVID-19 pandemic is a first for all. Moreover, whatever have written in the guidebooks of crisis response just weeks ago when COVID-19 hits the world now seem to be from another era. As a global disaster this COVID-19 pandemic crisis is profoundly affecting the development of the global economy and threatening the survival of all kind of business worldwide.

During the current Corona Virus pandemic deciding how and when to do communication become difficult for brands. In these extra ordinary times brands must think about how genuinely they can help society. The world has witnessed



that remote working tech companies offers free version of their software to help those who are working from home(ref). Similarly, Google have stepped up and announced that advanced Hangouts Meet features are available for free to anyone who use G-Suite around the world.

The ongoing pandemic have forced the brand advertisers to rethink the ways they sell and communicate with their customers. Think of KFC “it’s finger lickin good” slogan brand dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic because this message would seem very disgusting at a time when hygiene is the top priority. In addition to it, Lifebuoy’s 2013 popular advertisement feature a boy scout whose name was buntly. This boy uses his soap to wash his hand for at least a minute when a girl pops a question asking him” Babloo Tumhara Sabun Slow Hai Kya?” the message in the advertisement was Lifebuoy requires less time to wash the hands in comparison to ordinary soap bar. This situation after Corona virus pandemic is totally changed and according to World Health Organization (WHO) you need to wash your hand for at least proper duration of singing “Happy Birthday” twice.

Marketing during the time of crisis is the approach that depicts brands cares about more than making money. Crisis marketing is all about how the product solve problem for their customers during crisis. Corporate social responsibility is an integral part of crisis marketing. Brands use their resources to become part of the solutions or alleviate negative impact in some way.

In 2020 Sanika Kulkarni and Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth conducted a study on Crisis Communication & Social Activism: The means of social advertising in times of crisis. In this study the researchers discussed how the brands deals with crisis by keeping in mind the sentimental values of the human being. The result of the study indicates that with the means of social advertising From the Maggi meltdown to Cadbury winning the battle of worms, these brands have touched the lives of so many people and manage the crisis situation with ease (Kulkarni & Vidyapeeth, 2020).

Deng, Ekachai, & Pokrywczynski (2020), conducted a study on what advertisement message strategies were used during Covid-19. The study used Taylor’s Six segment message strategy wheel and narrative transportation theory to understand these strategies. Content analysis was done on 354 Covid-19 ads and PSAs in 49 countries from 1st March to 30th Sept 2020. The study concluded how advertisements during the Covid-19 time used narrative techniques which proved to be useful to elicit positive ad outcome such as favourable brand attitude. Consumers paid less attention to information provided in ads due to an influx of news and instead Covid-19 ads adopted a narrative approach to sell products and convey information.

Scope of Research

Although literature from different part of the world has been investigated and viewed but the scope of the research has been restricted to data collection from products available in Pakistan and data was collected for the period during COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions of this study:

1. How frequently are the three most popular hand washing brands namely Dettol, Life Buoy, and Safeguard give digital advertisements during COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How frequently are these themes (Ad message, call to action, storytelling, and humor) are discussed in the hand washing advertisements related to COVID-19 pandemic?
3. Did any hand washing brands give priority to sales call to action in the traditional sense during COVID-19 pandemic?

Objective of Research

In the early days of the pandemic, so many brands communicated in very personal and empathetic way. The objective of this study is to find out how three most popular hand washing brand Dettol, Life Buoy, and Safeguard advertised during COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan. All three brands have launched an offensive against germs at some point during their history; Safeguard was the first with Commander Safeguard, Lifebuoy soon after with the "germ busters," and most recently (May 2012) Dettol has their own "warriors" to carry out the mission. Beyond bacteria, these three brands are actively competing with one another for higher market share and consumer awareness.

Theoretical Framework

Uma Sekaran and Roger Bougie suggested that theoretical framework is the conceptual model to proceed with the investigation (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). It is an explanation that why researcher belief that the relationship exists among the variables. *“The process of building theoretical framework consists of introducing definition of the concepts or variables in your model, developing conceptual model that provides a descriptive representation of your theory and coming up with the theory that provides an explanation for relationships between the variables in your*

model” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The theoretical framework of this study has been chosen under considered judgment of researcher. Following are the theory that has been examined:

1. Framing theory
2. Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Framing Theory

Framing is an individual’s set of expectations to make sense of social world and media contributes to those expectations (Baran & Davis, 2011): “Framing focuses not on which topics or issues are selected for coverage, but instead on the particular ways those issues are presented” (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997): Framing theory suggest that how something is presented to the audience influences the choice people make about how to process that information. In this study researchers investigates how framing effects hand wash brands marketing. The framing effects predicts that different behaviors can come out of the same information depending on how it is presented.

Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication theory (SCCT) is known as a prominent corporate communication theory. SCCT is defined by Coombs as a “theory-based system for matching crisis response strategies to the crisis situation in order to successfully preserve the organization’s reputation” (Coombs, 2004). SCCT has two stages for evaluating a crisis. First, a crisis classification, determining which type of crisis cluster is at hand: victim, accidental, or intentional. This is followed by another classification of what precisely is the nature of the threat posed by this crisis (Coombs, 2004). A pandemic, such as the coronavirus disease, is first and foremost an act of nature in which all parties involved are victims. The most prominent crisis type relevant to an analysis of the coronavirus crisis would thus fall primarily within the Victim crisis cluster, which includes natural disasters, or the Intentional crisis cluster, which includes human error accidents.

This theory helps us understand how these handwashing brands have communicated during the Covid-19 crisis and whether these brands have focused on traditional sales to action or highlighted educating the masses regarding

handwashing habit and hygiene without placing primary emphasis on their own profits and sales.

Types of Strategy	Strategic Response	Tactical Actions	Tactical Actions Description*	
Primary crisis response strategies	Deny crisis response	Attack accuser	Crisis Manager confronts the person/group claiming something is wrong	
		Denial	Crisis manager asserts that there is no crisis.	
		Excuse	Crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to do harm and/or claiming inability to control causes of crisis.	
	Diminish crisis response	Scapegoat	Crisis manager blames some person or group Outside the organization for the crisis.	
	Rebuild crisis response		Justification	Manager minimizes perceived damage caused by the crisis
			Compensation	Crisis manager Offers money or other gifts to victims.
			Apology	Crisis manager accepts full responsibility and asks stakeholders for forgiveness.
Secondary crisis response strategies	Bolstering crisis response	Reminder	Manager tells stakeholders about the past good works of the organization	
		Ingratiation	Crisis manager praises stakeholders and remind them of good works/relationships	
		Victimage	Manager reminds them that the organization is also victim of the crisis	

Significance of Research

The research is conducted Past here, generally keeping in view the social condition during COVID-19, but it is equally good and applicable in other days as well. It provides a significant direction to the researchers who want to conduct research on the marketing of commonly used products under a certain social condition like COVID-19.

Limitation of Research

No work is beyond limitation. Therefore, this study has certain limitations like the researchers analyzed only three brands' content although there are many other available. This was due to time constraint. So, this result can be applicable to

these brands only and not be generalized on other handwashing brands. Furthermore, the timeframe selected for this study is for 1 year and the findings are only applicable to that and cannot be generalized.

Literature Review

Advertisers during the Covid-19 used digital marketing strategies to bring awareness and promote their products during the pandemic (Santoki & Parekh, 2020). Some studies have also highlighted how certain brands focused more on educating regarding Covid-19 precautions and kept sentiments of consumers in mind. Some brands are also focusing on becoming more corporate socially responsible and educated their consumers rather than simply thinking of positioning their products and focusing only on increasing profits (Santoki & Parekh, 2020).

Study by (Hussian, Choudhary, Budhwar, & Saini, 2021) states how some advertisements regarding Covid-19 have been misleading. Frequent use of social media and TV advertisements did provide information but at the same time were highly misleading and deceptive. The study highlights how Dettol India claimed that using soap is useless and not beneficial against Covid-19 led to its suspension of Covid 19 advertisements. This article concludes how the brands should stick follow guidelines and ethics to advertise products. The article also discusses how advertisements during covid 19 are essential tools to promote hygiene habits and spread useful information.

A study How Brands in India connected with the audience amid Covid-19 was conducted by Manjot Kaur Shah and Sachin Tomer in 2020. In their study the researcher analyzed the way the companies have responded in their promotion to fight with this unknown virus either by way of sending messages, creating awareness or the way their product would help people in fighting with this virus. The findings of the study show that the brands were very creative in modifying their advertisement to include the corona aspect in their promotion. Not only personal care brands but also brands dealing in products which do not provide any kind of protection against coronavirus also came up with the promotion during this period. The marketers need to understand that even if there may be a decrease in the sales, staying in the minds of consumers is of utmost importance (Shah & Tomer, 2020).

In 2021 P chitra worked on Changing Trends in Advertising, Anti-Covid Products and Brand Promotion. In this study the researcher emphasizes on over the top platforms for Pharmaceutical, Insurance and Health care Companies advertisements. The findings of the research concluded that during these challenging times of pandemic the e-commerce and e-content exposure accelerated. Consumers would place a higher value on brands that demonstrate credibility,

genuine experience, unprejudiced patriotism, and social responsibility (Chitra, 2021).

During the time of pandemic, consumers have also shifted towards more social media usage. Consumers spend less time in stores due to quarantine. This left brands with opportunity to promote their products online through social media and to build products and brand awareness Brands used social media and television as tools to promote their products since during quarantine these were prominent mediums beings used by consumers. Youtube was an important medium through which consumers gained much information on prevention guidelines (Andika, et al., 2021). A study by (Mason, Narcum, Mason, & Awan, 2021) investigated how social media marketing gained much importance during and after Covid-19. The research concludes how important it is for brands to keep consumer and their needs as priority above everything. The article concludes that brands need to build meaningful consumer experience by continuously producing and refreshing their advertising content and addressing concerns of consumers to engage them. While promoting their products, brands also need to consider that they should have a social purpose to help connect consumers and promote their products responsibly.

Crisis communication also holds much importance during the time of Covid-19. The time of crisis forces companies to think out of the box and adapt the content of brand communication to the current crisis. An article by (Hoekstra & Leeftang, 2020) highlights how personal approach to communication is important. Slogans such as “how can we help you” and “we are here for you” are fruitful if followed up by actions from these brands. The article also discusses how it is essential for brands to communicate WHO Guidelines and communicate consumers to follow SOP’s. Suggestion to carefully use humour in advertisements also proves to be helpful to retain advertisement messages.

In 2020 a study on understanding the influence of advertisements on consumers during pandemic 2020 – a study on soap advertisements conducted by Parth Sanjay Salunke, Sahil Kedare, and Rishikesh Kamble. The result of the study indicates that changing opinion about the product and influencing consumer behavior can be done with advertisement. Furthermore, advertisements with emotional appeal along with vicarious learning in advertising does create a positive illusion of the products or services in the minds of customers (Salunke, Kedare, & Kamble, 2020).

A study on Effect of Two Complementary Mass-Scale Media Interventions on Handwashing with Soap among Mothers was conducted by James B. Tidwell, Anila Gopalakrishnan, Stephen Lovelady, Esha Sheth, Arathi Unni, Richard Wright, Shonali Ghosh, and Myriam Sidibe in 2019. Researchers evaluated two complementary mass-scale media interventions targeting mothers to increase the

frequency of handwashing with soap; one using TV advertising, and the other mobile phone messaging. The finding of the study indicates that Television commercials seen in the home and audio messages delivered via mobile phones produced significant increases in handwashing behavior among mothers (Tidwell, et al., 2019).

This corona virus may feel like it has damage everything but, in some ways, it has just accelerated marketing trends from before. Unfortunately, in Pakistan there has been very little work done on hand wash brands communication during the time of Corona Virus. The single most important piece of advice health experts gives to help us stay safe from Corona Virus is Wash Your Hands. That's why it is important to study hand wash brands advertisement role in creating awareness and disseminating information regarding COVID-19 precautions.

Research Methodology

This study relied upon the qualitative and quantitative content analysis of digital advertisements of three hand washing brands of Pakistan namely Dettol, Life Buoy, and Safeguard. The time of content analysis comprised of one year of advertisements that means from 1st February 2020 till 28th February 2021. The researchers qualitatively analyze the television advertisement campaigns of above mentioned three hand washing brands. The researcher extracted advertisement from the YouTube channel of the brands. The simple random sampling technique was opted and only COVID-19 themed advertisements were analyzed of the mentioned period.

Analyses and Interpretations

The unit of analysis is the “who” or the “what” of any study. It is defined as the entity that frames what is being investigated in a study. Following is the unit of analysis of this study:

Advertisement Themes:

Ad Message:

- Lockdown, stay home
- We are in this together
- Help each other
- Stay safe and healthy
- Social distancing
- Reopening
- Work from home

- Danger of the virus
- Wear mask
- Statistics
- Vaccine
- Second wave
- Hand washing steps
- Others

Call to action:

- Present
- Absent

Story telling:

- Yes
- No

Music:

- Yes
- No

Call to action:

- Present
- Absent

Story telling:

- Yes
- No

Music:

- Yes
- No

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Hand Washing Advertisements During Covid-9 Pandemic

Brands Name	Frequency of Advertisements (N)	Percentage (%)
Dettol	21	43.75%
Safeguard	8	16.66%
Lifebuoy	19	39.58%
Total	48	100%

The repeated advertisement broadcasting is used by brands to remind the audience not to forget the pervious advertisement message, reinforce the existing advertisement message, and with the intention of the changing the consumer's attitude to the information (Chih-Chung, Chang, Lee, Lin, & Nang, 2012). The above indicates that the highest frequency for COVID-19 handwashing advertisements belongs to Dettol with 21 advertisements out of 48 that the researcher analyzed. Furthermore, lifebuoy was 2nd with the frequency of 19 out of 48 advertisements. Whereas safeguard stood last with 8 advertisements out 48 throughout the time period from February 2020 till February 2021. The frequency of the advertisements plays an essential role for the awareness during the time of crisis.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of advertisement message themes of hand washing brands during covid-19 pandemic

The below table 2 consist of 13 themes of handwashing brands advertisement message. The researcher individually analyzed every theme in the advertisement of Dettol, Safeguard, and Lifebuoy. Dettol mostly discussed we are in this together theme in their advertisements. Additionally, Safeguard discussed most on handwashing steps and stay safe and health themes in their advertisements. Furthermore, Lifebuoy mostly discussed Stay safe and healthy theme in their advertisements. Surprisingly reopening, work from home, vaccine, and second wave themes were not discussed in any of the analyzed advertisements.

Themes	Dettol (N)	Safeguard (N)	Lifebuoy (N)
Lockdown, stay at home	0	2	1
We are in this together	3	2	0
Help each other	1	1	1
Stay safe and Healthy	2	4	7
Social distancing	0	2	1
Reopening	1	0	0
Work from home	0	0	0
Danger of the virus	1	0	0
Wear mask	0	0	2
Statistics	2	1	0
Vaccine	0	0	0
Second wave	0	0	0
Hand washing steps	1	4	4
Others	6	0	7

Table: 3 Frequency Distribution of Storytelling in Hand Washing Advertisements during COVID-19 Pandemic

Brands Name	Story Telling (N)
Dettol	4
Safeguard	2
Lifebuoy	5

According to Schank human memory is story based (Schank, 1999) . Story telling is an important theme in advertisements because the consumer associates

his/her own experiences with the story shown in the advertisements. The narrative technique used in story telling helps consumers retain the message shown in the advertisements. Furthermore, storytelling can help to persuade consumers to adopt protective behaviors.

The above table shows that in comparison to other two brands, Lifebuoy highly emphasizes on storytelling in their Covid-19 advertisements. This will help consumers to retain the message and persuade them to adopt handwashing habit.

Table: 4 Frequency Distribution of Music in Hand Washing Advertisements during COVID-19 Pandemic

Brands Name	Music (N)
Dettol	7
Safeguard	6
Lifebuoy	16

Music is an important aspect when it comes to advertisements. According to Huron, music can help brands achieve promotional goals in many capacities (Huron, 1989). Brands use music to build an emotional connection. Brands need to win the war for attention and develop authentic connection with the consumers. Music also is stated to create loyalty and advocacy. The table above indicates that Lifebuoy among other two handwashing brands frequently used music in its advertisement throughout the analyzed content.

Table: 5 Frequency Distribution of Sales call in Traditional Vs Social Responsibility Sense in Hand Washing Advertisements during COVID-19 Pandemic

Brands Name	Sales Call in Traditional Sense (N)	Sales Call in Social Responsibility Sense (N)
Dettol	1	0
Safeguard	2	0
Lifebuoy	0	2

Verma stated that during COVID-19 pandemic Lifebuoy explicitly mentioned in their online and print advertisements that these advertisements are not for promotion or increasing sales of brand rather for the public awareness, also lifebuoy did mention its rival brands (Verma, 2020).

The above-mentioned table show that twice Lifebuoy discussed that the advertisement purpose is solely for public awareness and people can use their rival brands like Lux, Dettol, and safeguard for handwashing because hand washing habit is one of the most effective preventive measures to curb COVID-19 spread. Whereas, during COVID-19 times Dettol once and Safeguard twice give sales call in traditional sense which means they have mentioned in their advertisements content that their brand is better than the competition

Conclusion

Advertisement world is totally changed after COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This uncertain time have made a massive change in advertising world as well as content marketing. This research paper provided insight that how Pakistan's advertising industry specially related to hand washing brands have evolved to create and shift persuasive message to encounter COVID-19 crisis related to hygiene.

In conclusion, the research depicts that all three popular handwashing brands of Pakistan have played their part to aware the general public regarding the importance of handwashing and to encourage the habit of handwashing. Additionally, Lifebuoy stands out amongst other with its crisis marketing approach of prioritizing public safety on promotion and sales by taking their rival brands' name. Whereas Dettol and Safeguard during the time of crisis did adopt traditional sales to call by calling their brands the best amongst the competitors.

Furthermore, the themes like ad message, music and storytelling were used by all the three brands. However, Lifebuoy managed to adopt most of the themes to create awareness of handwashing.

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