

TO: Dr. Parrish, Instructor for Crisis Communication and Integrated Marketing Communication

FROM: Cameron Hughes, Graduate Student

DATE: April 8th, 2024

SUBJECT: Paracrisis Identification

Situation Analysis

On or around April 2nd, 2017, Nivea posted an advertisement to their Facebook. This advertisement depicted the backside of a clothed woman with long brunette hair. The woman appears to be facing the window, as we can only see her hair. At the bottom of the image, there is a photo of Nivea's dry deodorant line, with the caption "WHITE IS PURITY" (Adams, 2017).

Upon the advertisement's release, there was an online uproar about the racial insensitivity displayed within the advertisement, namely, the statement of "WHITE IS PURITY". This is because many saw the statement to be referring to the "white power" movement, which according to assistant professor Kathleen Belew from the University of Chicago, utilize horrifically racist phrases such as "White is Right" to encourage their movement (Belew, 2021). Moreover, the visual aspect of the advertisement, where the woman was dressed in white, her walls were painted white, and everything in the room is lighter colors further emphasized the racial insensitivity of the Facebook advertisement, as it highlighted how there were no people of color, or rather, any color but white in the advertisement (Kottasova, 2017).

Identifying a Paracrisis

According to Coombs & Holladay (2012), a paracrisis is defined as a "publicly visible crisis threat that charges an organization with irresponsible or unethical behavior." A paracrisis must be public and it must not be an illegal action, as that would make it a full-blown crisis for the company. A paracrisis is unique in that it can potentially turn into a crisis, as the organization has done an irresponsible action or has acted unethically, but they have not done something illegal that is sure to launch them into a crisis. A paracrisis can be seen as a potential crisis, or a warning that a crisis may occur, but they must always be public and have the potential to make shareholders aware of the company's behavior.

Viewing Nivea's situation through the lens of what Coombs & Holladay define a paracrisis as, it can be said that Nivea had gone through a paracrisis. There was a public eye on the unethical action that Nivea had taken, which was a racially insensitive advertisement. While it was not illegal for Nivea to post that advertisement, it was certainly unethical and irresponsible to not conduct proper research to avoid a racially insensitive advertisement. Nivea's situation was also

a prelude to a crisis, as if the company did not address their actions, it was certain to lead into a full-blown crisis.

Organization Steps

Following the backlash from consumers, Nivea pulled the advertisement from their Facebook page and issued an apology. The advertisement was on their Facebook page for two days before it was removed (Tsang, 2017). The apology stated that Nivea was sorry for “anyone who may take offense” from their advertisement, and immediately deleted the advertisement from their Facebook page once they realized it was offensive (Kottasova, 2017). Many people online felt as if Nivea was being disingenuous and did not actually mean it when they apologized, as there has been a history of Nivea publishing racially insensitive advertisements (Kottasova, 2017). Nivea has stated that since this incident, their current development and approval processes will now be immediately reviewed by another team so that they may avoid any kind of future “misleading interpretations” of their advertisements (Tsang, 2017).

Evaluation of Organization Steps

Coombs & Holladay (2012) give three primary response strategies for a paracrisis; refute, reform, and refuse. Refuting the paracrisis means that the organization will “fight back” against the claims and escalates the conflict against stakeholders and consumers. Reforming means that the organization will change their policies and practices to reflect the demands that are being made by their shareholders and consumers. Refusing means that the organization will ignore the paracrisis in hopes that a lack of attention will take attention away from it.

Looking at Nivea’s situation through the lens of Coombs & Holladay recommendations, it can be said that the company attempted to address the paracrisis by reforming, but it fell flat. Nivea took two full days before removing the advertisement (Tsang, 2017), which was well after it began to spark outrage. Moreover, the policy they claimed they were going to enact was not very specific and gave no plan or details on how the company was going to reform, other than a nondescript team reviewing potential media before publication. Furthermore, Nivea used language to alleviate blame from themselves, such as saying consumers “may have” been upset at their advertisement, which makes it seem as if those who have taken offense are overreacting.

It can be said that while Nivea attempted to reform to respond to the paracrisis, their response did not convince their consumers. Consumers were still angry at the brand for their history of racially insensitive advertisements, believing that Nivea had not learned from their previous mistakes and were not going to learn from this paracrisis (Adams, 2017). Despite Nivea’s efforts, consumers still distrusted the brand and believed they did not truly learn from this racially insensitive advertisement and merely apologized just to attempt to save face.

Response to the Paracrisis



Nivea
Today at 12:00PM · 🌐

Earlier today, we posted an advertisement that insinuated that we believe that one color is more preferable than another. Once we realized the racial insensitivity of our advertisement, we immediately deleted it from our Facebook page. At Nivea, we believe every color is beautiful, and that beauty knows no bounds. We are deeply committed to learning from our mistakes, so starting from today, we have established a new team that is focused on reviewing everything before we post it. This is to ensure that anything we post aligns with our values that at Nivea, we believe that everyone is beautiful.

✨ **Beauty knows no bounds.** ✨

We deeply apologize for our previously published advertisement.

We are committed to learning from our mistakes and continuously improving.

Starting from today, we have created a team to review all promotional materials before they are distributed.

This team is equipped with a unique skillset that will ensure we release materials that are aligned with our values as a company.

✨ At Nivea, we believe that everyone is beautiful. ✨



👍👎👤 100k

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👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

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This is the best response to the paracrisis, as Nivea was slammed for using language that tried to alleviate any blame from themselves. By taking accountability, it shows that Nivea is listening to shareholders and consumers' opinions. Moreover, by acknowledging their desire to continuously improve, it also addresses the previous mistakes that Nivea made as a company, which many consumers felt Nivea chooses to ignore and refuse to address (Adams, 2017). I wanted to add more detail to what exactly the team's objective is in both the graphic and my caption for the graphic, as many people felt as if Nivea was being purposefully vague in describing their actions they will take from this paracrisis in an attempt to redirect attention from the fact they may not follow through with their actions.

By having direct, clear language that takes accountability, Nivea tackles the main complaint with their apology, which was the lack of accountability and desire to improve from the company. Moreover, giving a clear plan on what the company wanted to do moving forward gave credibility that Nivea will follow through on their actions. This response not only humanizes Nivea to consumers with its comforting colors and font choice, but it addresses what the consumers wanted to hear from Nivea, accountability, a commitment to improve, and action taken.

In terms of design choices, I chose to use a warm, comforting color for the graphic. I also used geometric shapes joined together as an accent, to symbolize unity. The I chose to use was reflective of handwriting, further adding to the comfort of the graphic. The underlying accents were specifically chosen to emphasize the most important parts of the graphic and add to the feeling that this graphic was made by hand, so that consumers can feel more "connected" to the brand. The star accents were used to bring attention to the main points that Nivea believes as a company within the graphic.

References

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