

Research on Brand Crisis Response Strategies in the Age of Self-Media-- Taking HUAWEI as an Example

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ABSTRACT

In the self media era, the way of information dissemination has changed, everyone can be the receiver and the disseminator of information. The uncertainty of the information environment leads to more complex brand crisis response, and multinational enterprises face more complex brand crises in different cultural backgrounds. HUAWEI, as a well-known multinational technology enterprise, has suffered many brand crises in recent years, such as technical security and unilateral sanctions by the United States. This study will take HUAWEI as a representative to analyze its crisis response strategies in recent years and organize the research. It will provide theoretical reference for enterprises responding to the policy of "going overseas".

KEYWORDS

Brand Crisis; HUAWEI; Differentiated Publicity

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

In order to further expand the market scope of domestic enterprises, "going overseas" has become an important strategy for many enterprises to broaden their business map. Under the environment of self-media, the external layout of the brand has changed dramatically compared with the past, and the brand information spreads more widely and faster with the help of the Internet.

At the same time, through the opening of the brand's official social media platform, you can always interact with consumers and increase the adhesion between consumers and the brand. Since the development of the media era, there are relatively fixed templates for brand publicity, product promotion, hotspot creation, etc., and it is easier for a brand or an enterprise to establish its own image than relying on traditional media publicity in the past. The Internet breaks the material barriers, but its characteristics also make the brand appear negative news, the influence spreads rapidly, crisis management is difficult, the direction of public opinion is not controlled.

1.2 Significance of the study

HUAWEI, as a leading domestic multinational technology enterprise, is well recognized at home and abroad for its high-quality products and relentless innovation. However, in recent years, HUAWEI has experienced large-scale crises such as the unprovoked detention of its chief financial officer, Ms. Meng Wanzhou, and the "251" incident. On the international front, tensions between China and the U.S., the U.S. tightening of chip supply, technology restrictions, HUAWEI's inability to install Google services on cell phones, and a series of other problems have caused HUAWEI to lose a large number of overseas consumers, and its reputation has been damaged.

As a well-known international brand, the current international tension between China and the United States is a specific manifestation. Analyzing HUAWEI's response strategy to the brand crisis can not only serve as a reference for other multinational enterprises, especially technology enterprises, to provide learning experience. And it can enrich the theoretical research in the field of crisis public relations.

2 Literature review

2.1 Definition of Self-Media

Self-media is a new type of media form. In 2003, the American Press Institute defined "self-media" as a way for the general public to provide and share their own facts and news after linking to the global knowledge system through digital technology. Timeliness, speed of dissemination and diversity of content are the main characteristics of selfmedia^[1]. The biggest difference between self-media and traditional media is that the boundaries of media subjects are blurred. The public can be both receivers and disseminators of information. In Jingwen Xue's view, various types of content producers make the self-media environment interactive and diverse^[2].

2.2 Crisis communication

Crisis public relations research in China started in the 1990s, and with the development of the Internet in the 21st century, the speed of information dissemination has been accelerated and the channels have been diversified, and the related research has also been deepened. Research on Corporate Crisis PR Strategies under the Network Environment Dominated by Generation Z mentions that the information dissemination environment has changed drastically, and the increase of communication channels has led to the explosive proliferation of information, which has gradually increased the risk factor of corporate crises, and crises may cause storms at any time, which has led to new pressures and challenges to the management of corporate brand reputations^[3].

At present, the steps of crisis management in China are dominated by the 5S theory of Changqiao You, collecting information (Survey), analyzing the situation (Sort), formulating countermeasures (Strategy), implementing programs (System) and summarizing and reflecting (Sum up)^[4]. In the face of online public opinion enterprises should recognize the regularity of online public opinion from five levels: easy-to-understand language, human-oriented pursuit of individuality, striving for intuitive expression, pursuing the storytelling of business information of enterprises, and pursuing the three-dimensionality of brands^[5].

Regardless of the general environment, scholars generally agree that avoiding responsibility, lacking effective communication with the public, and downplaying the harmful effects of public opinion on a company are very detrimental to crisis management.

2.3 Self-media and crisis linkages

The role of self-media in public relations should not be underestimated, scholars in this field of research and analysis will mostly mention the performance of crisis events on the Internet or the influence of public opinion on the brand. In her study, Xiaoyan Wu compares four cases of crisis public relations in social media environment, in which McDonald's and Starbucks brands make use of the openness and interactivity of social media platforms to clarify rumors at the first time, disclose relevant evidence, and interact with consumers at all times through microblogs, WeChat public numbers and other official accounts of self-media, so as to stabilize the emotions of consumers^[6]. The "McDonald's expired food incident" and "Starbucks cancer" not only did not affect brand reputation, but also won the public's support and affirmation for their proactive crisis management attitude.

As more and more Chinese brands "go out", in addition to public opinion and market supervision, we have to make targeted strategies according to the domestic environment of the host country. According to Du Hui, in the international public opinion arena, the subject of public opinion mainly refers to countries, news media, international organizations, multinational corporations, individual citizens and algorithmic systems.

In order to effectively guide international public opinion, it is necessary to target different subjects and strengthen cooperation between countries in economic and cultural aspects, so as to realize the dissemination of Chinese culture to the outside world and increase its influence.

HUAWEI accounts for the leading position in the global communications market, with a market share of 31.5% of the industry industry. However, the U.S. blatantly restricts HUAWEI's development by repeatedly publishing its negative information in the media and monopolizing the chip industry to restrict HUAWEI's development. For the crisis response strategy of technology enterprises overseas, Lina Miao and Wanxin Wu analyzed the development of TikTok, the software of another well-known technology enterprise, and summarized a total of three steps (1) localization strategy, in-depth understanding of the national conditions of other countries, and integration into the local society and audience; (2) strategic defense, the rational use of international rules, and the protection of their own rights and interests; (3) pioneering development, enhancement of the ability of overseas cooperation, and innovative ways of foreign expansion^[7].

3 Case studies

Founded in 1987 HUAWEI is a leading global provider of communications technology and smart devices based in China. Since its founding in 1987, HUAWEI has grown from a small, local business to one of the world's largest manufacturers of communications equipment, and has become a major player in a number of fields, including smartphones, cloud computing, and 5G technology.

HUAWEI has now become the most influential Chinese-made cell phone brand at home and abroad. In the process of internationalization, especially in its relationship with the United States and its allies, HUAWEI has faced challenges such as technical sanctions and security controversies. Analyzing the crises HUAWEI has encountered on its self-publishing platforms is informative for other brands that want to gain influence.

3.1 HUAWEI 5G Security Incident

3.1.1 The events leading up to the incident

Since 2018, the U.S. government has questioned the safety of HUAWEI's 5G equipment. The U.S. believes that HUAWEI, as China's largest telecommunications equipment vendor, may be required by the Chinese government to provide cyber espionage capabilities, steal private user data or conduct cyber attacks. In 2019, the U.S. formally placed HUAWEI on a "list" that prohibits U.S. companies from cooperating with HUAWEI, including, but not limited to, providing technical support such as chips, operating systems, and software. In addition, the U.S. also banned the use of HUAWEI's 5G equipment in other countries through "coercive diplomacy". On January 10, 2022, former British Business Secretary Tony Cable said that the British government's decision to ban HUAWEI's 5G equipment and services had nothing to do with national security and was due to pressure from the United States. Until today, the U.S. unilateral sanctions against HUAWEI are still ongoing, HUAWEI's 5G security controversy not only affects HUAWEI itself, but also unfavorable to the global 5G deployment, international trade, technological innovation and so on.

3.1.2 HUAWEI's Response on Self-Media Platforms

Enhanced brand PR.

HUAWEI has used its official social media accounts to take the initiative to make itself known to the public, releasing a statement to refute the allegations. Updated the technical explanation video on Weibo to show that its devices do not have the security vulnerabilities claimed by the US government. Publicizing detailed technical white papers and third-party institutional inspection reports on self-publishing media platforms to further provide data support for clarification. HUAWEI's founder has also come down many times to refute U.S. allegations and conspiracy theories in public, media interviews, and so on. In addition to the above external response, HUAWEI also actively interacted with the public in the process, and its team discussed product technical issues with users on Weibo, Zhihu, and other platforms to answer questions about device security.

Publicizing information on autonomous R&D science and technology systems.

Before the United States banned Google from providing Android to HUAWEI, HUAWEI had already carried out internal research on the chip and the Harmony system. In the second year of the device security controversy, on August 9, 2019, HUAWEI's developer conference officially disclosed the Harmony system HarmonyOS, which will be used for the first time in IoT devices, and will gradually be extended to smartphones and other devices. In 2020, Harmony 2.0 was released, and in 2021 the commercialization of the Harmony system was accelerated. HUAWEI's own technical capabilities and independence to HUAWEI users and suppliers a shot in the arm.

Enhanced external communication.

The main battlefield of public opinion in the 5G controversy lies in the international market, especially in Europe and the United States, where foreign media have repeatedly published negative news about HUAWEI's 5G equipment. In addition to domestic media platforms, HUAWEI has official brand accounts on overseas platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube. On these accounts, HUAWEI synchronously updates explanatory videos on technical issues and rebuttals of unfounded accusations from the outside world. HUAWEI has partnered with a number of well-known tech bloggers, analysts, and social media influencers to use their influence and voice to spread positive messages and refute allegations about 5G security. Through these platforms, HUAWEI delivers technology highlights and innovations to users around the world, and strengthens consumer trust in the HUAWEI brand.

3.2 Alleged Intellectual Property Rights Infringement by HUAWEI

3.2.1 The events leading up to the incident

HUAWEI's technology development covers a wide range of areas, including smartphones, 5G base stations, and network equipment, and involves a variety of intellectual property rights. In 2021, HUAWEI has had disputes and lawsuits of varying degrees of severity over intellectual property rights with a number of international companies.

The world's leading cell phone chip supplier accused HUAWEI of infringing on its patents and demanded payment of patent licensing fees. HUAWEI considered Qualcomm's asking price to be too high and countersued Qualcomm for violating antitrust laws. In 2020, HUAWEI settled with Qualcomm for \$1.8 billion in royalties and started cooperation. Nokia owns most of the world's patents related to 5G technology, accusing HUAWEI of using these patented technologies in its cell phones and base station equipment without Nokia's technology license. Subsequent legal disputes between the two sides, in 2022 HUAWEI released information on its official website has renewed the patent license agreement between the two sides in Nokia.

Under the environment of global 5G technology competition, HUAWEI, as the leader of 5G technology, is inevitably

involved in the "patent war".

3.2.2 Self-media response approach

The HUAWEI infringement dispute occurs against the backdrop of the 5G security controversy, which complicates the attitude of overseas public opinion towards HUAWEI. HUAWEI released an official statement through its official website, Weibo, twitter, and other self-media platforms, emphasizing the denial of any infringement, the company's adherence to internationally recognized licensing guidelines, and its emphasis on the transparency of patent licensing as well as the innovative achievements of its self-developed technologies. Monitoring the direction of public opinion on the Internet and clarifying false information in the first instance.

HUAWEI founder Ren Zhengfei has told the HUAWEI story on several occasions through self-media platforms, publicized HUAWEI's strategy for dealing with patent wars, and re-emphasized that HUAWEI will not infringe on other people's patents for short-term benefits.

To further promote the development of the industry, HUAWEI has used the Internet to hold online technical forums on several occasions, inviting industry partners and experts to talk openly about technical issues and patent licensing issues to show its attitude.

During this period HUAWEI carried out content marketing on self-media platforms. For example, it released a technical white paper on its official WeChat public number and official website, within which it elaborated on HUAWEI's contribution to global 5G, to a certain extent, to dispel external doubts. Regarding HUAWEI's Hongmeng system update, the related topic #HarmonyOS NEXT# reached 920 million readers on Weibo.

4 Innovations and insights

4.1 Innovative means of crisis communication

4.1.1 Internet Account Matrix

HUAWEI, as a large multinational technology enterprise, has a mature PR model. HUAWEI has its own official accounts and websites on major media platforms at home and abroad. HUAWEI's microblog "HUAWEI China" has 4.05 million followers, with a cumulative video playback of 321 million, and updates 15-20 microblogs per month. YouTube account "HUAWEI Mobile" has 861,000 subscribers, and has posted 391 videos with a cumulative total of 169 videos as of December 18, 2024, with a cumulative total of 1,690 videos. The YouTube account "HUAWEI Mobile" has 861,000 subscribers, and as of December 18, 2024, it has posted 391 videos with a total of 169,421,146 views. Each account is kept up-to-date, and the brand is the first to publicize brand information and interact with users, responding immediately to public opinion disputes as they arise. Less than 24 hours after the U.S. placed HUAWEI on the "Entity List", HUAWEI synchronized its official website with a statement from HUAWEI's Chief Legal Officer, calling on the U.S. to stop the crackdown.

The core of the business speaks out.

As can be seen from the above case study, HUAWEI founder Ren Zhengfei personally came down to respond to negative information about the brand. In addition to public opinion counterattacks, Ren Zhengfei actively participates in HUAWEI's brand publicity, helping to build up the company's image by telling the story of entrepreneurship. While showing his stance, he is not afraid to mention the sanctions of Europe and the United States, expresses his confidence in his own products, and calls on the whole industry to make progress together to develop innovation.

4.1.2 Differentiated campaigns

In the face of different public opinion environments at home and abroad, HUAWEI's official account updates are differentiated according to the network environment. For example, HUAWEI's official accounts on Weibo and Instagram were updated in December, when the snow and ice season began on the Chinese mainland, and Weibo, in addition to updates on professional cooperation and equipment knowledge, linked up with China Unicom to introduce to the public the important role played by 5G technology in snow and ice sports venues, and to provide communications support for the 2025 Harbin Asian Winter Games. On the winter solstice, we released information on environmental protection and demonstrated our corporate social responsibility, and on Instagram, we released a promotional video on how HUAWEI technology helps Santa Claus deliver gifts before Christmas, in keeping with the festive atmosphere.

On domestic social media, HUAWEI often links up with domestic tech companies to link up and organize tech forums. Long-form reports are published to update the public on HUAWEI's recent technologies, special events in cities, and so on. On its extranet accounts, HUAWEI favors visualization tools such as cartoons and short films with short English text for

explanation, and production is closer to Western aesthetics. The new videos are subtitled in English, but the content is available in other languages, such as French and Japanese, in order to create an emotional connection with more overseas users.

4.2 What the brand can learn

4.2.1 Strengthening of self-media platforms

Perfect and active self-media system ensures monitoring of brand public opinion and timely communication with users. The first time to update the status of the enterprise, activity information, solve the public questions, and improve the participation and trust of consumers and users.

Increase linkages with relevant stakeholders

In the case of HUAWEI, in addition to the response of HUAWEI enterprises themselves, the central government has repeatedly responded to the groundless accusations of HUAWEI by the West, and the use of HUAWEI's 5G, artificial intelligence, and big data technologies during the Beijing Winter Olympics as technical services during the Olympics supports HUAWEI in action. The government's support reduces public opinion pressure to a certain extent. Maintain cooperation and communication with related enterprises and suppliers.

4.2.2 Flexibility to respond to market changes

The volatility of the market is potentially risky for multinational enterprises. HUAWEI relied on independent innovation to stand firm after technology sanctions were imposed by the United States. It responded flexibly to market changes, made timely adjustments, and avoided single-market or technology dependence to ensure that it could continue to survive and develop in the crisis.

4.2.3 Corporate image building

In addition to short-term crises, multinational enterprises should pay attention to long-term social image building in the course of business, such as taking the initiative to assume social responsibility, excellent technical strength, friendly business attitude, and so on. Consumer brand loyalty can help enterprises to quickly restore their brand image after a crisis.

5 Summary

HUAWEI, as a leading brand of Chinese technology enterprises, is worthy of learning from all multinational enterprises in handling brand crises by being timely, calm, and providing a large number of technical reports to support its position. The self media era brings massive information, fragmented information, highly interactive comments, and extremely fast communication speed, which makes crisis management more complicated. It is important to understand the current market situation of the brand, and to publicize the brand to meet the market demand. In addition, it is important to have a clear stance on your own and pinpoint the direction of public opinion in brand PR.

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