Design Crowdsourcing Social Media Campaigns

for a Flood-Impacted City

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Crowdsourcing has now been widely used as an innovative way to engage publics by public relations practitioners (Park & Kang, 2020; Sommerfeldt et al., 2019). Crowdsourcing refers to the phenomenon that organizations openly seek solutions, feedback, or voting for its challenges and problems from a wide range of audience members on digital platforms, such as social media and organizational websites (Brabham, 2008; Ghezzi et al., 2018; Hossain & Kauranen, 2015; Howe, 2006).

Overview of the assignment

This assignment (see Appendix) was assigned when city A, where our university is located, experienced an unprecedented flood in November 2021. Thousands of people had to evacuate, and a total financial loss was over four million dollars. I asked students to design crowdsourcing social media campaigns for local communities and organizations. The goal was to attract traffic to these organizations' websites, raise public awareness of important social issues caused by this emergency, help with the sales of the products from impacted farms, solicit solutions to evacuate the farm animals, seek crisis preparation strategies, or elicit solutions to manage floods in the future. Students needed to provide campaign goals, messages and images, justify its launch channels, major stakeholders, and public engagement for the campaigns.

Student learning goals

1.Understand how and why crowdsourcing campaigns are different from other social media campaigns.

2. Draft crowdsourcing social media campaigns to help local communities attract public attention and aid.

3. Apply your understanding of audience analysis and the media environment to communications planning and deployment.

4. Describe the flow and distribution of information and communications during a local community's real-life scenario.

Rational and Connection to PR Theory and Practice

Crowdsourcing campaigns may be an announcement of a challenge to call for public proposals, a current policy or solution to seek public feedback, an invitation for publics to vote for their favorite option, an interesting contest on social media to engage publics, and a small task to be fulfilled by publics for societal good.

Public relations educators call for more up-to-date experiential social media training to prepare students for the dynamic digital world and job markets (e.g., Fraustino et al., 2015; Stansberry, 2016). Both research and real-life practices show crowdsourcing has been used for public good, such as stopping drug abuse, promoting health behaviors, and advocating organizational CSR (Ahmad, 2022; Braham, 2015; Conrad et al., 2020; Park & Kang, 2020). Little literature has reported how public relations educators guide students to develop crowdsourcing social media campaigns for local communities in a real-life emergency.

Evidence of student learning outcomes

Students appreciated this experiential learning opportunity to contribute to the local city creatively. Some students created a Twitter contest to invite new proposals on how the local government could manage future floods. Some invited audiences to participate in a naming contest for animals in the local shelter and newborn calves in the flood-impacted farms. Some social media campaigns called for new recipe ideas to use apples and berries from local organic farms. This assignment helped students to identify and design crowdsourcing campaigns. After this course, some students reported developing engage crowdsourcing campaigns in their internships, which received unprecedented traffic to the organizational accounts.

Takeaways

I recommend instructors first help students distinguish crowdsourcing and non-crowdsourcing campaigns. Before students design crowdsourcing campaigns, instructors could show a few mixed campaign messages from both types to the students and lead a class discussion. I suggest the following major differences between crowdsourcing and non-crowdsourcing campaigns.

1. Crowdsourcing campaigns invite people to comment or submit their feedback or solutions in the comment section, whereas ordinary campaigns often present themselves in one-way communication, such as announcements. For example, "What are your recipes to create a healthy breakfast with our farm's organic blueberries? We cannot wait to hear from you." It is a crowdsourcing campaign because the campaign message encourages the audience to share their recipes publicly on the comment section with everyone. In contrast, "Come to join us for a blueberry tasting festival on November 30" is a non-crowdsourcing campaign because the audience is not expected to take communicative actions immediately.

2. Because crowdsourcing campaigns aim to pick the mind of the public, they often appear in the form of questions. Ordinary campaigns usually end with a period. For example, it is a crowdsourcing campaign that uses "What name would you give to this calf born during the flood emergency two weeks ago?" The following campaign is not crowdsourcing because it just states an event without inviting people to initiate communicative behaviors on social media: "We look forward to seeing you at the flood donation event this Friday."

3. Crowdsourcing campaigns usually give out incentives to the participants. Instructors should encourage students to describe the incentives clearly and concisely in the campaign message. Incentives may include social media acknowledgments of the best contributor(s), gift cards, product samples and swags, an on-site tour of the organization, trips for vacations, cash rewards, and so on. The class can discuss which incentives would best fit the campaigns.

References

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Appendix

Learning outcomes

1. Understand how and why crowdsourcing campaigns are different from other social media campaigns.
2. Draft a crowdsourcing social media campaign to help local communities attract public attention and aid.
3. Apply your understanding of audience analysis and media environment to communication planning and deployment.
4. Describe the flow and distribution of information and communication during a local community's real-life scenario.

Introduction to the assignment

Our city A has entered a state of emergency due to unprecedented floods. We want to apply our skills in public relations to help local businesses and organizations. Based on the lecture on crowdsourcing, please choose one of the following organizations and design a crowdsourcing campaign for them on their social media platforms.

Crowdsourcing social media campaigns may include the following formats : a. an announcement of a challenge to call for public proposals, b. a current policy or solution to seek public feedback, c. an invitation for publics to vote for their favorite option, d. a social media contest to engage publics, e. a small task to be

fulfilled by publics for societal good (e.g., every participant walks 10,000 on the same day to fight against climate change).

Goal of the crowdsourcing campaign

As public relations professionals, you want to use such a campaign to help with these flood-impacted communities in the City A. These organizations can be a blueberry, dairy, apple, or ham farm in the city A, an Indigenous community, the Red Cross Society in this city, the Emergency Info, or the City Government of the City A.

The goal is to attract traffic to these organizations' websites, raise public awareness of important social issues caused by this emergency, help with the sales of the products from the impacted farms, solicit solutions to evacuate the farm animals, seek crisis preparation strategies, or elicit solutions to manage floods in the future.

Requirements of the assignment

In your submission, please include the following information.

1. Introduction to your organization.
2. The goal of your campaign.
3. Campaign message, image(s), and captions.
4. Which social media platform(s) would you use, and why? For example, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and so on. Choose one or more and give your reasons.

5. Who will be the stakeholders of your campaign message? Please apply knowledge from the previous lecture on stakeholders to your analysis.

6. Why do you think your campaign is a crowdsourcing campaign? Why do you think your campaign will attract many people to participate? Please explain your campaign rationale.

Grading criteria

- You present a strong rationale for the crowdsourcing campaign and warrant public engagement to achieve the crowdsourcing goal.

- Your campaign generates persuasive and practical implications during the current flood emergency.

- Your campaign demonstrates a good fit with the organization.

- Each part in your submission is consistent with the other. For example, your campaign message reflects your rationale appropriately. Your analysis of stakeholders is consistent with your campaign message.