

A Study on Brand Image Maintenance and Adjustment Strategies in Crisis Public Relations Situations

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Abstract: How to adjust brand image in the context of crisis public relations is a hot issue that every enterprise is concerned about. Some researchers have found that effective public sentiment monitoring and crisis contingency plans have a significant impact on brand image. However, the underlying crisis response strategies still lack analysis and summarization. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on the important roles of response speed, attitude, and methods when enterprises face public crises. In addition, enterprises should also take preventive measures against crises in advance, and do a good job in public sentiment monitoring and control to nip potential problems in the bud. This study analyzes the crisis cases of Pangdonglai and Yuanji Yunjiao, using brand image as the entry point to briefly explore the issues of brand image adjustment and maintenance for enterprises facing the dual pressures of crisis public relations and public sentiment attacks.

1 INTRODUCTION

Brand image is the impression and perception of an enterprise in the minds of the public, which mainly includes service image, staff image and market image. On the one hand, brand image as a digital business card of the enterprise, conveying the enterprise's unique value concept and core, which is the key to stand out in a large number of competitors. On the other hand, the success of the enterprise is inevitably inseparable from the brand image. Brand image as one of the important assets of the enterprise, shaping a good brand image is an important goal of every enterprise.

In the past, most enterprises have not yet recognised the impact of self-media on business development, making them immature in dealing with public opinion handling. However, with the popularisation of mobile internet and the wide application of smart devices, the way of obtaining and disseminating information has undergone a profound change. This change not only enables the public to obtain information about domestic and international emergencies more rapidly, but also prompts the traditional social opinion to shift from offline scenes to online space, and gradually evolve into the new manifestation form of online public opinion (Shi, Xue, & He, 2022).

In the all-media era, online public opinion presents such remarkable features as massive information, diversified carriers and rapid dissemination. The interaction of these features with the trend of pan-media and visualisation of new media has made the dissemination of public opinion more complex and changeable. This complexity not only increases the difficulty of guiding online public opinion, but also makes it a focus of attention in both academic and management practice.

In addition, the types of crises encountered by enterprises are becoming more and more diverse, and the complexity of crises continues to rise (Hou, Guan, Wang, Meng, & Zhang, 2023). And the effectiveness of crisis management can have a direct and critical impact on the survival as well as the long-term development of enterprises (Gu, 2024). Adjustment of brand image is not only an important part of public crisis management, but also an important strategy for enterprises to maintain competitiveness in market competition when facing complex and diverse crisis scenarios.

At the same time, how enterprises can quickly adjust their brand image in a crisis, restore public trust, and reduce the negative impact of business and revenue loss has become an urgent problem. There are also countless experts and scholars analysing and discussing this issue from different levels, such as the five principles of crisis PR put forward by the famous

crisis PR expert You Changqiao (2012): Speed First, Take Responsibility, Communicate Sincerely, Operate in a Systematic Way and Confirm Authoritatively (Liu,&You, 2012), Robert Heath's 4R Crisis Management Theory: Reduction, Readiness, Response, Recovery (Fink, 1986). However, the limitation of real-time data leads to a large amount of theoretical knowledge that is difficult to be analysed in conjunction with newly occurring hotspots. Moreover, countless crises are often good at lurking silently in all aspects of life, and once there is an oversight, it can take advantage of the situation and cause serious consequences.

In recent years, with the improvement of people's living standards and the gradual enhancement of their health awareness, people have attached unprecedented importance to food safety. Food quality has also become a hot topic of public concern, every move touches people's hearts. In the context of increasing market competition, product quality and brand image is directly linked, especially in the catering industry. However, the enterprise model Fat Donglai is at this juncture of the error, causing a high degree of concern of the netizens. Fat Donglai has always won the public's favour with its high standard of hygiene supervision and high-quality service attitude, and the outbreak of this crisis has caused the public to question Fat Donglai's long-established brand image. However, with its quick response, transparent communication and responsibility, the company successfully turned the crisis into an opportunity and used the heat to further enhance its popularity. Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling, as a typical example of counter-programming, more fully demonstrates that the long-term healthy development of enterprises must rely on the strong support of the crisis plan, and that enterprises should place the network supervision and public opinion handling as a top priority, which is a necessary course for every enterprise on the road to growth.

The article takes the crisis cases of Fat Donglai and Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling as the research object, adopts empirical and comparative research methods, analyses the communication characteristics of network public opinion, the five principles of crisis public relations, and the specific measures to deal with crisis public relations, reveals the multifaceted impacts of corporate crises that have been magnified in a short period of time, and puts forward the idea of optimizing the crisis response plan.

2 INTRODUCTION TO CRISIS COMMUNICATION EVENTS

2.1 Fat Donglai

On 19 June 2024, a customer gave feedback to the Food and Beverage Department of Xinxiang Fat Donglai Life Plaza, saying that he found that the rolling dough processing point of the Xinxiang Fat Donglai Associated Catering Merchant was located in the middle section of the Yinhuang Road and that the processing point had a poor hygienic environment, and he provided the relevant video as evidence. FDL Catering then found that the processing point was inconsistent with the Baliying processing point reported by the merchant. On 20 June, FDL Catering arranged quality control personnel to investigate and confirmed that the processing point did exist, and the delivery vehicle departed from the processing point to deliver ingredients to the rolling out dough stalls of the catering department of the two shops of Xinxiang FDL Catering. After confirming that the situation was true, the Catering Department required the rolling out dough stall to suspend business for rectification and closed the processing point on Yinhuang Road, while imposing a fine of RMB 5,000 on the merchant. On 22 June 2024, the person in charge of the rolling dough merchant said that he had completed the rectification and relocated the processing point to Dajhuzhuang. Fat Donglai Catering arranged for quality control staff and supervisors to investigate and confirmed that the new processing site complied with hygiene standards. 23 June 2024, after the rectification was completed, the rolling dough stall resumed business.

On 25 June 2024, a customer posted a video on the Jittery platform, exposing the poor hygiene environment of Xinxiang Fat Donglai's rolling out dough processing site, which triggered social concern. 26 June 2024, after seeing the Jittery video, the Fat Donglai Group headquarters set up an investigation team to intervene and once again conduct a comprehensive investigation into the incident.

On 27 June 2024, Fat Donglai Trade Group released the 'Investigation Report on the Poor Hygiene Environment of the Rolling Noodle Processing Places of Xinxiang Fat Donglai Catering Merchants', and announced the relevant results of the investigation. The report pointed out that for the customer who found and fed back the major food safety hidden danger, Fat Donglai Trade Group gave high importance and positive reward, and decided to

give the customer 100,000 RMB cash reward to express the gratitude for his keen insight and high sense of responsibility, and also encourage more customers to actively participate in the supervision, and jointly guard the food safety.

In addition, for customers who purchased rolled noodles and spicy noodles from the catering department of two shops of Xinxiang Fat Donglai during the period from 9 June to 19 June 2024, Fat Donglai Trading Group has taken active remedial measures. The Group decided to refund these customers and give each person a compensation of 1000 yuan. According to statistics, the total number of customers involved was 8,833, and the total compensation amount was as high as 8,833,000 RMB. This initiative reflects Fat Donglai Trading Group's high regard for consumer rights and interests and its serious attitude towards food safety issues, aiming to make up for the losses of consumers to the greatest extent possible and restore their trust.

In terms of internal management, Fat Donglai Trading Group has also carried out severe accountability. The first supervisor and quality controller of Xinxiang Catering Department were dismissed for serious dereliction of duty and failure to perform their duties effectively, which led to the occurrence of food safety hazards. At the same time, all other management above the shift manager level were also removed from their positions for failing to effectively supervise and manage their duties. The manager of the Xinxiang shop was cancelled his year-end benefits for failing to supervise effectively, as a warning to all staff that they must perform their duties strictly to ensure food safety.

Fat Donglai Trading Group has also taken firm measures against the merchant involved. As the merchant violated the contract, deliberately concealed and privately changed the processing place, which led to the occurrence of hygienic environment problems, Fatty Donglai Trading Group decided to stop its business, cancelled the contract, terminated the cooperation, and asked it to withdraw the cabinet by a deadline. At the same time, the Group also reserves the right to pursue its legal responsibility in order to safeguard its own rights and interests and market order.

This series of handling measures demonstrates Fat Donglai Trading Group's zero-tolerance attitude towards food safety issues and its firm defence of consumers' rights and interests. The Group hopes that through these initiatives, it can effectively rectify the problems and improve its management level, so as to provide consumers with a safer and more assured consumption environment, and at the same time set a

good example for the healthy development of the whole industry.

2.2 Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling

On 19 November 2024, a consumer, Mr Jiao, purchased a fresh meat wonton noodle dish at Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling's Liudaokou shop in Beijing's Haidian District at a cost of RMB 14 yuan. During consumption, Mr Jiao found a black and purple unidentified object about 3cm long, which was later identified as an earthworm. Mr Jiao then picked out the foreign object and took photos to reflect to the shop, which returned the 14 yuan meal that day.

Mr Jiao left the shop and found that the foreign objects were earthworms, felt very disgusting, so he and his friends went back to the shop to negotiate with the person in charge of compensation, but was refused. Subsequently, Mr Jiao complained to the Consumer Protection Commission and the Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling Consumer Complaint Hotline.

On 27 November, Yuanji Dumpling said it was willing to compensate Mr Jiao with RMB 500. On 1 December, Yuanji Dumpling confirmed that the foreign object was an earthworm and said that the shop had contacted the customer to apologise and settle the dispute, and that the shop would rectify the situation, fire the shop manager and discipline the staff involved.

On December 1, Yuanji Dumplings was investigated by the Beijing Haidian District Market Supervision Bureau for the presence of foreign objects in the food at the shop in question, and on December 20, Yuanji Dumplings issued an explanation and apology, stating that the shop in question had been ordered to shut down and rectify for one week (from December 2 to December 8), and that the shop manager of the shop in question had been dismissed, and that the other people responsible for the incident had been punished seriously. The manager of the store in question was dismissed, and other people responsible were seriously disciplined. At the same time, Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling said it will strengthen daily management and personnel training, and avoid the recurrence of such incidents through special verification counselling on food safety.

On 21 December, Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling again issued a statement saying that the shops involved in the incident had been rectified and had passed government inspections for compliance. The company also said it will conduct a comprehensive inspection of raw material procurement and shop hygiene in all shops nationwide, and gradually display the brand's after-sales customer service

hotline and online customer service in shops nationwide by 1 April 2025, so as to promptly respond to and resolve consumers' questions and feedback.

3 CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY ANALYSIS

3.1 Fat Donglai

From the “customer feedback problems, fat Donglai immediately take action” this detail can be seen, fat Donglai to customer groups of attention and attention is far from empty talk. Within 24 hours of the problem, fat Donglai quickly mobilise the relevant departments to investigate and verify the fastest possible response to the customer, to achieve the true meaning of the race against time. This shows that its specially set up feedback department is not just a formal arrangement, but really plays an important role in listening to customers “voices and solving customers” demands. In addition, Fat Donglai has always taken the integrity of its business as the core value of its corporate philosophy, and resolutely put an end to fraudulent behaviour. Yu Donglai, the owner of Fat Donglai, has publicly stated that although he and the person in charge of the merchant in this accident are like brothers and sisters, and are good partners working side by side in the business field. But this personal friendship must not be an excuse to cover up mistakes. Wrong is wrong, make a mistake to bear the consequences. Fat Donglai always adheres to the principle of the heart to heart, the interests of customers in the first place, and customers stand on the same front, and jointly guard the consumer experience and rights and interests protection.

Fat Donglai has always maintained a high degree of transparency in the investigation process, and promptly announced the progress of the investigation and the results of the investigation to the public through the official public number and other channels, and this transparent way of communication not only reflects the great importance that Fat Donglai attaches to the public's concerns, but also highlights its responsibility as a corporate responsibility. In the investigation process, Fat Donglai did not choose to conceal or delay the disclosure of information, but rather every key node of the investigation, every detail is unreservedly made public. This transparency is not only reflected in the recognition of the problem, but also in the deep excavation of the root cause of

the problem and the public commitment to corrective measures. Through this transparent communication, Fat Donglai not only successfully rebuilt consumers' trust in its brand, but also established a good social image for the company. This way of handling allows consumers to see Fat Donglai's sincerity and sense of responsibility in solving the problem.

Fat Donglai understands the importance of food safety. Therefore, in dealing with this incident, not only quickly shut down the merchants involved, but also actively assume the corresponding responsibility for the high compensation to consumers. Through this incident, Fat Donglai also reflected deeply on its own management loopholes, further improved its product quality control management system, and strengthened the supervision of its affiliated merchants. At the same time, Fat Donglai also established a food safety supervision and reporting incentive mechanism to encourage more consumers to participate in the supervision, and jointly maintain food safety.

3.2 Yuan Ji Cloud Dumplings

After the incident came to light, it quickly triggered widespread public attention and discussion, and rushed to the top of the Weibo hot search list. However, Yuan Ji Dumpling's handling of the incident was slow and lacked sincerity. Consumers were initially only offered a refund of 14 RMB for their meals, a treatment that clearly failed to calm consumers' anger and disappointment, or effectively alleviate the public's concerns about food safety.

As the incident festered, Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling's brand image suffered a serious blow. Consumers' trust in its brand has plummeted, with many once loyal customers saying they will suspend or stop patronising the brand. Social media was flooded with consumer criticism and questions, with some netizens even expressing doubts about the food safety management of the entire catering industry. The spread of such negative sentiments not only affected Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling's reputation in the market, but may also have a long-term negative impact on its future market performance and brand loyalty.

In addition, although Yuan Ji Yun Dumpling has taken some measures in the subsequent handling of the case, such as dismissing the shop manager involved, disciplining the staff concerned, and promising to strengthen management, these measures have not been able to fully restore consumers' trust. Some consumers believe that Yuan Ji Dumpling, as a well-known chain brand with more than 3,500 shops, has obvious loopholes in its internal management and food safety control, and that this incident is not a

coincidence but a direct reflection of the company's lax management system.

4 SUGGESTIONS FOR BRAND IMAGE MAINTENANCE AND ADJUSTMENT STRATEGIES IN CRISIS PR SITUATIONS

Crisis is everywhere and needs to be prevented in advance. In the process of daily development of enterprises, managers should pay attention to the formulation of crisis management plans. Constructing an early warning mechanism for emergencies network public opinion crisis can effectively improve the speed of early warning response, gain valuable time for emergency disposal, quickly start the emergency process, and even effectively weaken or even eliminate the negative effects caused by public opinion crisis (Tian, Wang, & Yang, 2023). At the same time, it is also necessary to keep up with the continuous updating of crisis management theories so as to improve the crisis plan. In addition, the enterprise should also have a keen crisis early warning ability, to nip potential crisis in the bud, to ensure the stability of enterprise operations.

In the context of the digital era, enterprises should take network monitoring and public opinion handling as their priority work. Social media can be used as a tool for policy makers to monitor different public opinion dynamics in real time (Latif, & Samad, 2024). Social media platforms facilitate the rapid diffusion of information and real-time interaction, which becomes a key factor for efficient crisis response. At the same time, advanced data analytics enable proactive monitoring and crisis prediction, which in turn improves the effectiveness of organisations in responding to and mitigating crises (Abduraimov, 2024). Managers must pay great attention to the impact of self media on the development of enterprises, learn to control and guide the direction of public opinion, and reduce unnecessary losses in the development of enterprises.

In the age of the Internet, there are numerous hot topics and explosive content, and their forms are diverse and complex. These materials are often prone to controversy if they are accompanied by different textual descriptions in certain specific contexts. When the relevant discussions and retweets reach a certain scale, hotspots will be formed rapidly, leading to the complication of the incident, which in turn will give rise to public opinion. If the truth is not disclosed to the public in a timely manner, all kinds of

speculations and analyses will flood the court of public opinion, exacerbating the public's dissatisfaction or panic, and further expanding the scope of influence of the incident (Ma, 2022). When a crisis arises, companies must respond quickly, take effective action in the first instance, and make full use of official channels to inform the public of the full picture, progress and results of the incident in a timely and comprehensive manner. By providing transparent and accurate data to alleviate the public's doubts and concerns, enhance the public's trust in the brand, and win back consumer recognition through practical action, thus curbing the negative impact from expanding and spreading. In daily crisis management, managers should clarify the division of responsibilities of all relevant departments in a crisis to ensure that the responsibility is assigned to the post. Once the crisis occurs, each department should quickly play a good co-ordination and take effective action.

When companies respond to the controversy, they should focus on the emotional resonance with the public, incorporating humanistic care and emotional elements, and not just focus on factual explanations (Ai, & Shao, 2025). In today's complex and changing business environment, companies must learn to view crisis events from the public's perspective. It is through a deeper understanding of the public's emotions and demands that they can better respond to the public. At the same time, this public-centred perspective can also help companies to prevent new negative issues from arising at the root of the problem and avoid further expansion of the crisis. In addition, companies should also strengthen their brand culture and focus on delivering core values such as integrity and responsibility. This approach not only helps to maintain the good image of the enterprise, but also enhances the public's sense of identification with the enterprise, laying a solid foundation for the enterprise to win the turnaround in the crisis.

5 CONCLUSION

Fat Donglai has demonstrated a high sense of corporate responsibility and social commitment in the incident of "poor hygiene in the processing place of rolling dough". From quick response, transparent communication to actively taking responsibility, Fat Donglai's every move has won wide public praise. This incident also reminds all enterprises that food safety is no small matter, and that only by strictly controlling every step of the process can consumer trust and support be won.

The “earthworms in Yuanji dumplings” incident highlights once again the importance of a timely and effective response and handling of food safety issues. If a company fails to take proactive measures to properly address consumer claims in the first instance, it will not only lose consumer trust, but may also lead to wider negative public opinion, causing long-term damage to the brand image.

Through the analysis of this paper, it can be found that when enterprises face a PR crisis, they should act quickly to inform the public of the progress of the incident and the results of the treatment in a timely manner, but also to ensure transparency and enhance public trust in the brand. On this basis, enterprises should formulate detailed crisis response plans. Improve the enterprise's crisis management ability and promote the healthy development of the enterprise.

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