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AN ANALYSIS OF CRISIS PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES FOR FOOD SAFETY IN THE NEW MEDIA ERA: THE HAITIAN SOY SAUCE CONTROVERSY AS AN EXAMPLE

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With the rapid development of new media, China's traditional media is facing new challenges, and enterprises are also facing greater crisis management pressure. 2022, China's Haitian Taste, a seasoning enterprise, was caught in a serious crisis because of the "food additives" issue, and its three public statements failed to solve the problem properly, which led to a huge loss for the enterprise.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the reason for the failure of digital anti-crisis public relations due to the problem with Haitian Taste food additives in 2022.

The authors adopt the case analysis method to conduct a horizontal analysis an example of the crisis PR practice of Haitian Taste.

Accordingly, the authors discussed the reasons for the failure of digital anti-crisis public relations. A proposal was made on how to implement effective digital crisis management and digital public relations response, as well as other related strategies, in order to learn lessons for future enterprises.

By analyzing the food additive crisis of Haitian Taste in 2022, we discuss the reasons for the failure of its crisis public relations, and at the same time propose how to carry out effective crisis management and public relations response and other related strategies, to provide lessons for future enterprises. This incident fully demonstrates that, in today's increasingly efficient information dissemination, enterprises must update their crisis response strategies, meet public needs promptly, and regain users' trust through openness and sincerity to minimize losses. In addition, food companies should improve crisis anticipation, pay attention to user ex-

В связи со стремительным развитием новых средств массовой информации традиционные СМИ Китая сталкиваются с новыми вызовами, а предприятия испытывают давление антикризисного управления. В 2022 году на китайском предприятии по производству приправ Haitian Taste возникла серьезная проблема, имеющая отношение к пищевым добавкам. Публичные заявления руководства предприятия о наличии кризиса не привели к его разрешению, что повлекло огромные финансовые потери.

Цель данного исследования – проанализировать причину провала цифровых антикризисных связей с общественностью из-за проблемы с пищевыми добавками Haitian Taste в 2022 году. В основу исследования положен метод кейс-технологий для проведения горизонтального анализа на примере антикризисной PR-практики Haitian Taste.

Авторы обсудили причины провала цифровых антикризисных связей с общественностью. Было выдвинуто предложение о том, как внедрить эффективное цифровое антикризисное управление и принимать меры реагирования на цифровые связи с общественностью, а также другие связанные с этим стратегии, чтобы извлечь уроки для будущего развития предприятия.

Анализируя кризис с пищевыми добавками компании Haitian Taste в 2022 году, авторы обсудили причины провала её антикризисных связей с общественностью и в то же время предложили меры, способствующие эффективному антикризисному управлению и реагированию на связи с общественностью, а также другие связанные стратегии. Этот инцидент в полной мере демонстрирует, что в условиях современного распространения информации предприятия должны обнов-

perience, and focus on food safety issues to cope with the increasing social norms.

The data obtained by the authors can be useful not only for food industry enterprises, but also for all those involved in digital crisis management, marketing communications, and in particular, public relations.

Keywords: Crisis; Digitalization; Web 3.0; Digital Crisis Management; Digital Crisis Communication; Additives; Food Additives; Food Safety; Internet Marketing Communications; PR Awareness; China; Haitian Taste; Chinese Food business; Chinese Food entrepreneurs.

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лять свои стратегии реагирования на кризисные ситуации, оперативно удовлетворять потребности общественности и возвращать доверие пользователей за счёт открытости и искренности, чтобы минимизировать потери. Кроме того, пищевым компаниям следует эффективнее работать над прогнозированием кризисных ситуаций, обращая внимание на опыт пользователей в вопросах безопасности пищевых продуктов, чтобы справиться с растущими социальными нормами.

Данные, полученные авторами, могут быть полезны не только предприятиям пищевой промышленности, но и всем тем, кто занимается цифровым антикризисным управлением, маркетинговыми коммуникациями, в том числе организациям по связям с общественностью.

Ключевые слова: кризис, цифровизация, Web 3.0, цифровое антикризисное управление, цифровая антикризисная коммуникация, добавки, пищевые добавки, безопасность пищевых продуктов, маркетинговые интернет-коммуникации, PR-информированность, Китай, Haitian Taste, китайский продовольственный бизнес, китайские предприниматели в сфере питания.

Вклад авторов: все авторы внесли равный вклад в проведение исследования и написание статьи; выразили согласие нести публичную ответственность за все аспекты работы, связанные с точностью или достоверностью любой части рукописи; одобрили финальную версию статьи перед публикацией.

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Introduction

In the era of Web 3.0, the emergence of new media has subverted the traditional mode of information dissemination, and the social power structure has changed dramatically, with media power proliferating, while information technology has greatly empowered the public (Hu Yue, 2015).

As noted in studies by various authors (E.V. Purganova, 2019; N.N. Zolotukhina, 2013; etc.), the main attention in Internet communications should be paid to mandatory feedback and personalization, which unites all types of digital communications with the audience. Moreover, Internet communication with the target audience is the most effective and efficient method of interaction.

However, new media not only builds an information platform for business owners to communicate efficiently but also increases the difficulty for enterprises to deal with digital-crisis public relations when facing crisis.

It should be noted that anti-crisis PR management in the Internet environment is a fairly new and little-studied phenomenon. In this regard, the authors set out to analyze the reason for the failure of digital anti-crisis public relations due to the problem with Haitian Taste food additives in 2022.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts the case analysis method to conduct a horizontal analysis of Haitian Taste's crisis PR practice that occurred in October 2022, through the description of the crisis event synopsis, the extract of the characteristics of the crisis event, and by analyzing the Haitian Taste food additives fiasco in China in 2022, to explore the reasons for its crisis PR failure, and at the same time, to propose how to carry out effective crisis management and PR response and other related strategies, to provide the future enterprises with It also proposes how to carry out effective crisis management and PR response and other related strategies to provide lessons for future enterprises.

Results

In this paper, we analyze a failed crisis PR event - the Haitian Taste Industry in China was caught in the "food additives" controversy in 2022, which is a typical event of crisis PR failure in

2022, and the company involved, the Haitian Taste Industry, was not decent enough to face the crisis event. Haitian Taste, the company involved in the incident, attracted a lot of criticism for its lack of appropriate handling of the crisis, which had a wide range and far-reaching impact, causing serious economic losses and reputation losses to the company.

1 Haitian Taste's "food additives" incident based on the four stages of crisis communication theory

The crisis is like a time bomb, which has the process of installation, discovery, dismantling, or explosion. Crisis is a double-edged sword for the enterprise, if handled properly, it can let the audience see the responsibility and commitment of the enterprise and spread the corporate culture. If not handled properly, it will affect the reputation and revenue of the enterprise.

The introduction of the crisis event is carried out in five stages, namely, the stage of the starting event, the stage of the communication process, the stage of crisis formation, the stage of crisis expansion, and the stage of crisis weakening. Steven Finker proposed a four-stage life cycle model for crisis communication, in which he divided the life cycle of a crisis into: the first stage of sign/potential period, the second stage of onset/surge, the third stage of continuation/spreading period, and the fourth stage of healing/recovery period. This paper introduces the stages of the Haitian Taste "food additives" incident according to the characteristics of the four stages.

1.1 Stage 1: Signs/Potentials

A video of "thickened soy sauce" posted on September 10, 2022, by weblogger Xin Jifei was caught in the "food additives" controversy.

In the video, Xin Jifei used salt, monosodium glutamate (MSG), disodium monosodium nucleotide (disodium MSN), high-concentration soy sauce flavoring, caramel coloring, and other ingredients to make "soy sauce without soybeans at all," and this bottle of homemade "soy sauce" tastes thicker and fresher than soy sauce purchased on the market. Traditionally, soy sauce, as an indispensable condiment on the Chinese table, is a seasoning made from soybeans through different production processes.

1.2 Stage 2: Episode/Surge Phase

Haitian Taste, the seasoning brand with the highest frequency of appearance on Chinese people's dinner tables, the ingredients of its products were the first to be noticed by Chinese netizens. Haitian Taste made its first announcement on September 30, 2022: it said that its products complied with national standards and that it was some short-video accounts that were demonizing food additives and blackening food safety in China, and that the company had already taken measures to pursue responsibility for this part of the Internet bloggers.

1.3 Stage 3: Continuation period/spreading period

In the second announcement on October 4, "The Responsibility, Commitment, and Call of Chinese Brand Enterprises", Haitian Taste indicated that food additives are widely used in food manufacturing in countries all over the world and that each country has its food safety production standards, and the company does not have the behavior of "double standard"; six minutes after the second announcement, China Flavoring & Seasoning Co. Six minutes after the second statement was issued, the China Seasoning Association's WeChat public number issued a "statement on the essence of the long environment, guiding the high-quality development of seasoning enterprises", expressing support for the affected enterprises to defend their rights against rumor mongers. However, this appeal and the association's statement caused public opinion to climb to new heights.

1.4 Phase 4: Healing/recovery period

On October 6, the China Food Industry Association issued a clarification statement, and the heat of the incident gradually decreased. In the third announcement, Haitian Taste said that the company has different grades of products in both domestic and overseas markets, selling products containing food additives as well as products without video additives. As China is the largest consumer market for the company, the domestic product line is more diversified while ensuring product quality and safety (You You, 2022).

Haitian Taste is almost always in a state of plummeting stock price in October 2022, as a potential stock that was once highly sought after by the market, the market value of Haitian Taste's stock peaked at 705 billion yuan on October 21, 2022, its market value was 326.3 billion yuan, evaporating nearly 380 billion yuan.

As of December 2, 2023, the microblogging platform topic # Haitian soy sauce # discussion volume of 47,000 times, 98,372,000 read; topic # Haitian Taste Industry response to soy sauce additives controversy # discussion volume of 15,000 times, 210 million read; topic # Haitian Taste Industry to participate in the drafting of the current standards of the soy sauce industry # reading volume of 5,243 times, 130 million read. I used octopus collector to capture the keywords "Haitian soy sauce additives", and "Haitian Taste Industry response to soy sauce additives controversy" data, after data cleaning and sorting, respectively, 155 data, 234 data, according to the frequency of microblogging content of The keywords are presented through data visualization, and Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 are obtained respectively:



Figure 1 – Frequency of Keyword Mentions



Figure 2 – Frequency of Keyword Mentions

We can see that the words "sauce", "soy", "Haitian", "additive", "food", "flavor" and other words are more prominent in the word cloud due to the high number of mentions, which also reflects several issues that audiences are more concerned about in the topic discussion.

3 Characteristics of the Incident

3.1 Haitian Taste "Unintentionally Shot"

The net red blogger exposed "soy sauce without soy" in the production video, and did not mention the name of any condiment enterprises, but the Haitian Taste Industry as China's leading brand of seasoning, has become the first consumer wants to go to the object of verification, although the subsequent occurrence of "food additives" and "double". Although there were subsequent incidents of "food additives" and "double standards", this is not a problem that exists in Haitian Taste alone.

3.2 Chinese consumers talk about "additives" color change

In recent years, the major media from time to time out of food additives scandals, such as using leather shoes to make jelly, Sudan red pickled salted duck eggs, the Sanlu milk powder melamine incident led to "big-headed dolls" and so on, so that the Chinese consumers from the heart of the food additives to produce a strong sense of resistance.

3.3 Is there a "double standard"?

While the wave of "food additives" has not subsided, the wave of "double standards" has arisen again. The ingredient lists of the products sold in China and those sold in Japan were not the same. Although Haitian Taste subsequently responded that each country has different food safety production standards, Chinese consumers will still carry the resistance to "food additives" and migrate to Haitian Taste's implementation of different standards within a reasonable range of production behavior.

3.4 Food safety incidents are highly publicized

With the improvement of living standards, the Chinese public has been paying more and more attention to food safety issues. Soy sauce, as an essential condiment on the Chinese table, is used in almost every meal of the day. As the old Chinese saying goes, "Food is the God of the people", but now Chinese people are anxious about food safety and the risk of potential diseases, so they are highly concerned about the Haitian Taste "food additives" incident.

4 Discussion

4 Problems of Crisis Public Relations

4.1 Tough public relations attitude

Haitian Taste Industry, as a seasoning enterprise with a long history of three hundred years in China, has become one of the first batches of "old Chinese brands" announced by the Ministry of Commerce of China and has the highest exposure to the dinner table of Chinese families of all sizes. However, after the storm of "food additives" and "double standard" appeared, the official released a "solemn statement" in which it said that the recent rumors on the Internet had caused damage to its brand reputation and clarified, emphasizing that the production of its products and the use of additives are in line with the relevant national laws and regulations and standards. It emphasized that the production of its products and the use of additives are in line with national laws and regulations. In addition, Haitian said it would also pursue legal responsibility for three short video bloggers who maliciously created rumors.

Shortly afterward, Haitian Taste made a second response, called "The responsibility, bearing and calling of Chinese brand enterprises". The wording adopted in the statement is full of majesty as if it were the image of a feudal society that does not allow others to question its authority. However, in the Chinese cultural tradition, when there is a crisis, attitude is more important than facts. Therefore, companies should have the courage to take responsibility, be less defensive, and take the initiative to apologize, instead of being overly defensive about the incident and shirking their responsibilities (Wang Kaiyang, 2022).

4.2 Evasive public relations content

In the face of the netizens are most concerned about the "food additives", the Haitian Taste Industry has given three times in the life of the name of the additives, types, and dosage and do not make a clear explanation, but repeatedly emphasized that the production of its products and the use of additives are in line with relevant national laws and regulations and standards. At the same time the use of the name of the regulations and sensational adjectives with the set of words, but also playing the emotional card to avoid responding to the light. The statement appeared in the "Chinese brand enterprises", "made in China" products, "Chinese people" these nationalist plot words, this kind of hatchet behavior is bound to cause consumers to This kind of labeling behavior will inevitably cause consumers' strong dissatisfaction and questioning, which ultimately led to the plummeting of the company's stock price and brand reputation damage.

4.3 The public relations skill of saving the country from curves

Haitian Taste Industry, in the face of the "food additives" questioned by the majority of consumers, through the heavyweight third party - China Seasoning Association to make a statement, but the audience of the new media age quickly searched the Internet, Haitian Taste Industry Group executives in the China Seasoning Association as a key position. However, the audience in the new media era quickly searched online to find out that the senior management of Haitian Taste Group held important positions in the China Seasoning Association, "acting as a referee as well as a player".

4.4 Neglecting the central force of opinion leaders

In the new media era, opinion leaders play an important role in the dissemination of information. In the field of food safety, there are very powerful food nutrition opinion leaders, their credibility and expertise can also be involved in the Haitian Taste Industry's crisis public relations activities, at the same time, the third party's popularization of science speech for the soothing of public opinion, as well as the Haitian Taste Industry's trust in the endorsement of the formation of effective help, but in the whole crisis public relations event, their power is the same by Haitian Taste Industry. But in the whole crisis PR event, their power was also ignored by Haitian Taste.

5 Suggestions for the development of a crisis public relations solution strategy

5.1 Enterprises standardize their construction; strengthen the awareness of crisis public relations

The establishment of a crisis prevention mechanism is of great significance for enterprises to cope with crisis events (Lu Jichun, 2015). The business environment is unpredictable, enterprises should do a good job in their normative construction at the same time, should also be ready to face unexpected situations, complete the crisis public relations team or learn crisis public relations expertise, strengthen their crisis public relations awareness, comprehensive development of the crisis public relations plan, so that enterprises can make the fastest response in the first time of the crisis, which is not only the enterprise's self-help, but also a responsibility to the This is not only the enterprise's self-help but also a responsibility to the public.

5.2 Facing the public honestly and responding in time

The means of enterprise crisis public relations include: information monitoring and early warning before the crisis occurs; communication and control during the crisis; and recovery management after the crisis occurs; it also includes training and rehearsal to improve the ability of crisis public relations (Wu Yanmei, 2012). If a crisis event occurs in an enterprise, in line with the principle of not simply escaping and shirking responsibility, a relevant investigation team will be set up in the shortest possible time to investigate all aspects of the crisis event. Crisis events of enterprises often have a close connection with the public interest, so it is necessary to frankly face society and the public after the crisis occurs, and disclose the relevant information sincerely, objectively, and timely, and the means of information disclosure need to pay more attention to the enterprise in the reasonable use of rhetorical means to achieve a better rhetorical effect of public relations communication at the same time, but also should be aware of the limited nature of rhetoric (Jin Mingxin, 2014). Risk managers need to change the way they think about communication, especially on risk issues that have a

professional threshold, and adopt a new paradigm of "participatory communication", for example, by establishing the public's role in decision-making, accommodating the public's perception of risk and enhancing the openness and professionalism of their communication, and working on the development of cooperative and trusting relationships. Zeng Fanxuetc., 2015).

The public's concerns and suspicions should be addressed in a targeted manner and not avoided to avoid another escalation of the crisis. If the company itself is not responsible, it should also do what it can to correct the situation.

5.3 Emphasize the power of the media and closely strengthen cooperation

In the new media era, everyone can be a communicator, but this also lowers the entry threshold of news dissemination. The public's participation in crisis events is increased in the performance, they are no longer bystanders to the event, but participants and discussants of the event (Li Yanyan, 2016). Therefore, enterprises should pay attention to the power of authoritative media and utilize their credibility to make timely and objective clarification of things that are unfavorable to their development and timely disclosure of crisis event information. This can not only quickly and effectively respond to the public's concerns in the shortest possible time, but also use the credibility of authoritative media to avoid unnecessary trouble.

5.4 Leveraging the power of opinion leaders to promote positive development

In the process of new media communication, whether it is positive news, or crisis triggering news, there are opinion leaders. In the whole process, opinion leaders with rich information sources, extensive appeal, and great appeal have a strong role in guiding public opinion. In the new media environment, with the help of personal microblogging and other media with high real-time attention, the influence of opinion leaders is further amplified (Cai Qiong, 2020). Therefore, when dealing with crisis events, enterprises must objectively recognize the value of opinion leaders, actively communicate and actively seek cooperation. By listening to the good advice of opinion leaders, and then relying on their great appeal, they can formulate targeted strategies for crisis public relations response, and ultimately effectively resolve the crisis event.

5.5 Tapping opportunities in crisis

Enterprises cannot completely avoid the possibility of crisis in the process of business but can find opportunities and challenges from the crisis. Through the crisis events to improve their own development, and even to avoid potential risks in advance. With a sincere attitude to the crisis event into a positive publicity for the enterprise itself, pay attention to the guidance of consumer emotions and appeasement (Zhu Zhou, 2014), with multi-party communication promptly to resolve conflicts, establish the enterprise's image, and cultivate customer loyalty.

6 The inspiration for this crisis public relations event

6.1 Enhance citizens' health literacy, correct and reasonable view of additives

To stop Chinese consumers from talking about "food additives", consumers themselves should take the initiative to learn relevant knowledge and have a scientific understanding of food additives. At the same time, the public media should take the responsibility of guiding the public and educating society, publicizing and popularizing health knowledge, inviting experts in related fields to explain and popularize scientific knowledge for the public, and advocating for the public to improve their health knowledge and protect their health.

6.2 The State Regulates the Entry Thresholds of Industry Associations and Introduces Association Operating Rules

As a key part of assisting government authorities in researching, formulating, and implementing industry development plans and related regulations, industry associations play an important role in the development of the industry. However, the phenomenon of "being a contestant and a referee" should be eliminated. At the same time, it is also necessary to introduce the relevant operating rules of the association to avoid the phenomenon of using official business for their gain. At the same time, the industry association should do self-correction, and take the initiative to combat and purify the industry chaos.

6.3 Authoritative media should assume its social responsibility

In the new media era, the media also bear the responsibility and mission of educating the society and scientific guidance. When conducting crisis public relations, authoritative media should release accurate news promptly, utilize their credibility to avoid speculation and confusion of right and wrong by some unscrupulous self-media, and avoid causing unnecessary social and public panic (Lin Fucheng, 2022). Doing a good job of crisis communication in the era of new media is an important issue faced by today's enterprises. The development of new media is a subversion of the previous communication mode, and the characteristics of diversification, autonomy, personalization, interactivity, and openness make the new media bring opportunities to enterprises while also presenting many challenges (Ding Mu, 2022). Enterprises operating in the complex and changing new media environment should not only have a strong sense of crisis and improve the crisis response mechanism. At the same time, when a crisis occurs, it is also necessary to comprehensively utilize the power of industry associations, opinion leaders, authoritative media, and other aspects to quickly deal with the crisis, sincerely face the audience, turn the crisis into an opportunity, and improve the enterprise's ability to cope with the risk and the credibility of the brand.

Conclusion

In this study, the authors examined the main issues related to the description of the cause of the crisis in the Haitian Flavor company and its unsuccessful anti-crisis communication in the Internet environment, which led to losses of hundreds of billions of Yuan.

Measures were proposed to implement effective digital crisis management, as well as retaliatory measures for digital public relations. A wide range of other Internet marketing strategies related to this issue is considered. The results obtained are useful for learning lessons for the future for small and medium-sized businesses working with Internet PR.

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