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**PR Campaigns**

**Analysis of Salvation Army’s Domestic Abuse Campaign**

Many people remember the debate over “the dress” that occurred in the end of February this year. Couples, families, friends, and even celebrities were divided over one question: Is the dress blue and black, or is it white and gold? Unlike many social media crazes, “the dress” became something more than a fleeting interest, and instead, a symbol of an important cause. The highly disputed dress quickly became the center of the Salvation Army’s campaign to bring awareness to the problem of domestic abuse against women.

On March 6, 2015, about a week and a half after the dress phenomenon first hit the Internet, the South African branch of the Salvation Army released a public service announcement in the form of a photo. The picture was of a woman with bruises on her face and body, wearing the blue and black version of the famous dress that said, “Why is it so hard to see black and blue?” In smaller letters, the photo goes on to say, “The only illusion is if you think it was her choice. One in six women are victims of abuse. Stop abuse against women.”

Within a few hours, the original photo was viewed 16 million times. Originally released in The Times newspaper, the Salvation Army posted it to their Twitter account the same day. The photo was shared by many, and had quickly reached far beyond South Africa to become a global hit. Due to the high visibility of the dress, the ad was able to reach and interest millions. Many complimented the Salvation Army on its ability to turn a meaningless Internet sensation into the face of an important issue.

The geniuses behind the campaign were the group Ireland/Davenport, an advertising firm based in Johannesburg, Africa. Ireland/Davenport was doing a pro-bono advertisement for the South African Salvation Army and women’s shelter Carehaven. Wihan Meerhloz, creative director of Ireland/Davenport Group, was quoted saying, “We wanted to take advantage of the hype of the meme {the public service announcement} to spread awareness for something important.” Phil Ireland, chairman of Ireland/Davenport, said, “The issue of black and blue was a clear and obvious link to abuse.”

One unique aspect of this campaign was that the entire thing was put together in less than 24 hours, something incredibly rare for a successful campaign such as this one. Though the campaign had high success, I wouldn’t necessarily say they followed the PR process overly well, mainly because of the short amount of time the Ireland/Davenport group used to put together the campaign. However, in this case, the short preparation time was necessary for the campaign to thrive. While Ireland/Davenport did not put much research into this particular campaign, research proved unnecessary. They knew “the dress” had a high visibility at this time, and spending time researching further could have ruined the impact of their public service announcement – it was important to put this out while the dress was still relevant. They were also striving to meet the deadline of International Women’s Day, which is March 9th. While Ireland/Davenport didn’t do a ton of research about this particular campaign, they had high knowledge of the Internet and its’ ability to raise awareness - Ireland/Davenport has an entire division devoted to viral content called Virus.

While the Ireland/Davenport group did action plan, they didn’t do it by the book. Ireland/Davenport’s goal was to send a powerful message about abuse against women, one that was more to inform and educate rather than influence action. The message needed to be impacting and memorable. From there, they didn’t name key publics except for social media users as a whole, they didn’t set a calendar of when the tactics would be implemented except for a release date, and they didn’t set a budget. Instead, they took their goal and set it into action in a way that would reach as many people as possible. They presented the idea to the Salvation Army and Carehaven, and that was pretty much the extent of communication step.

Though Ireland/Davenport didn’t necessarily follow the other steps of action planning as they would be defined in the Strategic Communications Planning Matrix, they certainly have been able to evaluate the success of the campaign. Using their Virus division, Ireland/Davenport have been able to track the amount of people who saw the ad, as well as track the mentions of the public service announcement on blogs, social media, and news outlets.

The main publics of this campaign were the Salvation Army, Carehaven, victims of abuse, and social media users. Specifically, Ireland/Davenport wanted to reach the same audience who had seen the original white and gold/blue and black dress and understood the significance.

There were three aspects that made this campaign wildly successful – the timing in which the PSA was released, the use of a topic prominent in pop culture, and the use of social media to spread the message. Because Ireland/Davenport worked hard to release the PSA in a timely manner, they were able to catch their audience while their topic was still relevant. Using the white and gold dress, they were able to catch the attention of people who would have otherwise ignored the public service announcement. By using social media, the meme was easy to share, and to be shared by their audiences. Social media helps to disseminate messages quickly, as seen in this campaign. Very few other news sources could have such a high visibility in such a short amount of time.

This campaign taught me that being current with trends in the media and reacting to these trends in a timely manner can be an incredibly important tool when crafting a campaign. This campaign gained interest because it used a topic that had already been introduced to the public and tailored it to suit its’ clients needs. Another important thing that can be taught from this campaign is that in this day and age, social media is one of the most important tools to be used. Though this public service announcement was first introduced in The Times newspaper, it gained most of its success from its presence on Twitter. It has now been covered in news sources like television and radio, and was reprinted not only as print advertisements but also billboards. Ireland/Davenport did a terrific job in knowing how to catch their audiences’ attention in a captivating unique way.

Sources

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