

## **Creating Strong Brand through Storytelling on an Application-Based Transportation Industry**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study looks at public relations in conducting brand storytelling. It discusses how to create a strong brand through storytelling. Public relations used employees' and customers' positive experiences to develop and communicate brand values through storytelling. The brand story must be consistent, compelling, and genuine. The use of social media in brand storytelling also improved public engagements, and it eventually made public feel that they are part of the brand. This research is a descriptive qualitative research.

*Keywords:* Brand storytelling, brand value, positive experience, public relations, social media

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, a brand is not only a logo or a symbol that differentiates one to another. It is about the message. The message must be compelling, unique, and original on the specifics of a brand. The performance of a brand is not only measured by its newness

and how it can fulfil new needs but more importantly, how it can tell the best stories (Mootee, 2013).

Based on the study conducted by Nielsen in 2012, 92% of consumers all over the world trust information recommended by their relatives, colleagues, and information delivered through online consumer review, and word of mouth. The number keeps growing 18% since 2007. In the Advertising Survey of the Nielsen's Global Trust towards more than 28,000 respondents of Internet user in 56 countries, customers' trust in the information conveyed through advertisements in the conventional media, such as television, radio and magazine

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decreased significantly from 2009-2011. Customers' level of trust towards advertisements in television decreased 24%; meanwhile in radio declined 20%. Compare to television and radio, level of customers' trust in the information in print media advertisements dropped 25% (Nielsen, 2012).

The data shows that advertisements in conventional media are no longer the sole source of information used by the public. Jim Yu, founder and CEO of BrightEdge, stated that customers preferred to gather information from their relatives, rather than information available on the marketing tools, such as advertisement (Yu, 2014).

The number of active Internet users in Indonesia according to We Are Social, there are 88.1 million active Internet users and 79 million of active social media users. The number has increased 15% over the past 12 months. Information about a brand can create what public see and think about the brand. What public sees and thinks of a brand is often called perception. According to Feldman (1999), as quoted by Sadaf (2011), perception was defined as a process of how someone uses senses and brain to work out, give meaning, and analyse various stimuli received (Sadaf, 2011). Thus, how the public sees and thinks of a brand depends on the information they receive and its interpretation.

Public relations is therefore responsible for delivering the right message through advertising. In addition, public relations must build and maintain trust (Prindle, 2011).

Conveying information about a brand through storytelling is performed by delivering a story that will create an emotional connection between the public and a brand. Public Relations must be able to create and deliver a story that is acceptable, both rationally and emotionally (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

The objective of this study is to find out how storytelling is used to create a strong brand in an application-based transportation industry.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Brand Storytelling

Building a strong brand in a highly competitive market is not easy. Like a human being, a brand has identity, personality, and character. The brand owner should not only expose the functions of a brand but also its value (Mootee, 2013).

Humans are exposed to millions of information from different brands every day. It is also not easy for humans to remember data, but humans are better at remembering stories. Humans love to tell story based on their experiences. Storytelling is found to be a good tool to humanize an organization. The public starts to see an organization as something that is reachable and interactive (Pulizzi, 2012a).

Brand storytelling is can be a part of branding; it uses narrative to shape an image among customers (Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010). In creating an interesting and attractive story, the narrative can combine visual and audio, and use various types of platform, such as printed, electronic

and social media. According to Chiu, Hsieh and Kuo (2012), as quoted by Du Plessis (2015), brand storytelling creates emotional associations to build a better understanding of a brand, and therefore, is considered as an effective way to communicate information about an organization to its target audience. More than that, the success of brand storytelling also depends on how the storytelling can focus on the brand persona. Brand storytelling must be able to focus on the personality of the brand that will eventually create an emotional connection between public and the brand (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010).

Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) also emphasized that it is essential to unveil the persona when it comes to storytelling. The stories can be varied, but the persona must remain consistent. The persona will make the story of a brand even more real, and it will eventually create experience and emotional bonding with its audiences.

Denning (2006), as quoted by Du Plessis (2015), mentioned that to make a brand story effective, public relations has an important role.

### **The Role of Public Relations**

In managing a brand, public relations is responsible for communicating anything related to the brand. According to Prindle (2011), public relations has two important roles in relation to managing brand, i.e. as the creator of the narrative – in this case, public relations will create and develop narrative that deliver information to the public; and the other role is to make sure

that the appropriate media is used to deliver the narrative. Public relations creates brand awareness, promotes the brand, and at the same time, maintains a company's reputation thereby influencing public opinion and review of its ethics and values (Hynes, 2009).

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. Descriptive research focuses on the question of "how" and "who." This study focused more on describing how an event occurs, rather than on exploring new issues (Neuman, 2003).

Descriptive study uses various data collection techniques, such as surveys, field research, content analysis, historical comparison, or in some cases, it uses experimental research. Descriptive research also presents an overview of the details of an event, social setting, or relationship between the parties studied. In this study, the data collection technique was field research.

Descriptive research is similar to explorative research. In practice, these two approaches are often mixed. In descriptive research, the researcher begins with perfectly defined subjects and conducts research to describe accurately the subject. The result of descriptive research is a detailed description of the research subjects. Descriptive research offers an idea of various types of people or social activities. This study describes how to create a strong brand using storytelling and how public relations are involved in this activity.

In this research, data consists of (1) Primary data: primary research that required data or information from the main source, usually referred to as the respondent. Data or information obtained through written questions by using questionnaires or orally using interview method (Sarwono, 2006). There are also two types of primer data collection technique, as follows: (a) In-depth interview, according to Bungin (in Hamidi, 2007), it is a process of obtaining information for the purpose of research by conducting question-answer method between the interviewer and the informant or interviewee, with or without using the interview guideline, whereas interviewers and informants are engaged in a relatively long social life. In this study the interview method used is a direct interview; the authors communicated verbally with the person who becomes the source of data, without intermediaries, both about self and everything that relate to himself; (b) Observation, is a method of collecting data by researchers to observe or record an event with direct testimony and usually the researcher can be a participant or observer in watching or observing an object of the event being examined (Ruslan, 2008). (2) Secondary data: secondary research used materials that are not from the first source as a means to obtain data or information to answer the problems (Sarwono, 2006). In addition to using interviews and observations, the secondary data is assisted with documentation. Documentation is a method of collecting data by taking data derived from the original document. The

original document may be a graphic, table, or checklist and documentary (Hamidi, 2007).

This qualitative study uses in-depth interviews with the informants who are closely related to the topic of the study. According to Moleong (2007), informants are individuals who could provide information regarding the situation and condition of the research background. In this study, the informant used is public relations of an application-based transportation industry.

Data analysis is a process of organizing and sorting data into patterns, categories, and units of basic descriptions so that the theme can be found, and hypotheses can be formulated as suggested by the data. In this study, researchers used a narrative analysis method, focusing on the stories in everyday human life. In stories or narratives, people's cultural complexities can be captured and spoken in the language. In this context, the story is not just a story, but rather a means to understand people and their world (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 2007), defined data analysis as a detailed process of formal effort to find themes and formulate work hypotheses (ideas) as suggested by data. It is an attempt to provide assistance to the theme and work hypothesis. The data analysis process begun by examining all available data from various sources, such as interviews, observations written in field notes, personal documents, official documents, pictures, photographs, and so on (Moleong, 2007).

According to Schofield, Covey-Crump, Stretton, Daymond, Knight and Holloway (2003), there are four ways to determine the validity and reliability in qualitative research: (1) Credibility refers to the acceptance of the research process and results by readers. Researchers continuously observed to see directly and explain the social phenomenon of the study. In this study, researchers conducted interviews, and verbatim coding to analyse accurately; (2) Transferability refers to whether the result of this study can be applied to similar contexts within the same population based on the findings acquired from the field; (3) Dependability refers to the consistency and accuracy of the findings. Started with the research design, data collection, data analysis, which are documented in the form of transcripts and field notes. The use of concepts to analyse data can conclude the study. Researchers must conclude the study based on the data which includes observations and in-depth interviews; (4) Confirmability refers to whether the research result can be verified, and accordance with the data collected. Confirmability is done by establishing the connection between data and its sources in order to draw conclusions. The researcher also includes the coding process of the transcript in the table format based on axial coding and selective coding.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, traditional transportation is defined as the non-application-based transportation industry. In the application-based transportation industry customers

download the application on their smartphone.

The benefits offered by the application-based transportation industry are convenience, reliable, and simple. It is convenient because customers can place an order through the application with their smartphone. It is reliable because customers are informed of the identity of the driver (includes the driver's name, photograph, and contact number). It is simple because it offers several means of payment (cash, credit card, and customers can create an account to save some deposit that will be deducted when they use the service). Like a human being, this brand has a pleasant personality.

The company consistently communicates its values. As explained by Herskovitz and Crystal (2010), in telling a story about a brand, consistency is a must, especially when it comes to conveying the brand persona – the values held by a brand. The stability to convey the persona of the brand, i.e., convenience, reliable, and simplicity, can be recognized by public in many stories. For example, the experience told by the driver or the customers.

This research focused on the positive experience of employees and customers. It believes that brand values reflected through positive experiences will create a positive brand story. However, it is not adequate to create a compelling brand story that conveys the brand persona and an emotional connection between brand and public needs to be established. The meaning of the story has to be authentic and sincere. If the brand

persona is an excellent form to create symbol, genuineness generates trust of the audience.

Apart from a compelling yet genuine story public relations add elements, such as photos, a bit of data or numbers, and audio to the brand story. These elements give more emphasis on the story and improve brand awareness. (Gunawan, Diana, Muchardie, & Sitinjak, 2016). It was found that even though the brand image is good, customers are likely to conduct brand switching because they are interested in trying alternative products after being exposed to good testimonials about competitor products on the Internet. The truthful story of a brand creates an emotional connection, and lead to the construction of a strong brand. A single story of customer's positive experience about the brand may not be able to convey the whole benefits of the brand (i.e. convenience, reliable, and simple), but at least, it could create an association for the brand, and can be recognized by other customers.

Regarding the role of public relations in creating strong brand using storytelling media can strengthen a brand. As stated by Prindle (2011), Public Relations' role in storytelling is to create and develop the narratives of the story and to provide the proper media to deliver the story. The implication of integrating new media in storytelling for public relations also is not only providing the narratives, but public relations are required to create materials faster and immediately. This new challenge

includes obtaining approval from the top management. According to James (2007), the pressure to produce materials immediately with the required level of accuracy has created pressure within the relationship among public relations' team and the upper management, including the team from other division, such as the Information Technology (IT).

Public relations must form strong alliances with parties involved in the storytelling process. In this application-based transportation industry, to create a strong brand using storytelling, public relations must collaborate with different parties. As front-liners, drivers must be able to communicate the brand's values to customers that are convenient, reliable, and simple.

In addition to the fact that this business model is new the company wants the public to associate the brand with advanced technology and use social media to share the brand story. Social media can be a powerful method to deliver brand story and create strong emotional connection with the public. Posting and re-posting stories about a brand makes the public happy to associate with a brand.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study finds employees' and customers' positive experience are used to communicate brand values through storytelling. It is believed that by communicating brand value and sharing them with employees' and customers' will create an emotional



connection between brand and the public and improve brand knowledge. A strong brand is built on the strength of its persona.

The brand story must be consistent, compelling, and genuine. It is essential that the public feels the authenticity and sincerity of the story. Therefore, an honest and sincere story will create a strong and positive brand.

The role of public relations is to develop a narrative of the brand story using the positive experiences of the employees and customers and aligning them with. Adding visuals, graphics, and audio to the story strengthens the emotional connection between a brand and the public.

The use of social media in brand storytelling also improves public engagements, and it eventually makes them feel that they are part of the brand. Public relations can shape and lead the idea and narrative and through it ensure the alignment of the story with values of the brand.

It is recommended that the future studies should look at brand storytelling and the obstacles encountered by public relations in storytelling through social media.

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