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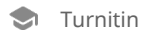
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"Crisis Communication in Advertising: Audience Reinterpretation, Social-Media Backlash, and Brand Response Strategies"

The significance of a study on crisis communication in advertising lies in its ability to illuminate how brands navigate public backlash in an era defined by real-time social media engagement. Advertising controversies today escalate within minutes as audiences reinterpret brand messages through cultural, political, and moral lenses. Understanding these dynamics is essential because they may reshape how organizations craft their communication strategies and respond to reputational threats. As Coombs (2015) explains, modern crisis situations require organizations to adapt quickly and ethically, making the study of crisis communication practices increasingly relevant.

A major source of significance stems from addressing a **clear gap in the literature**. Although existing research examines brand crises involving luxury fashion houses such as Balenciaga or Dolce & Gabbana, fewer studies have explored controversies rooted in *celebrity-led advertising campaigns* for mainstream brands. The American Eagle and Sydney Sweeney incident highlights how public figures can amplify brand controversies, yet scholarly attention to this intersection remains limited. By examining this case, the study may contribute to a deeper understanding of how influencer involvement interacts with public perceptions, brand responsibility, and digital backlash—an area requiring further exploration (Kintu & Ben-Slimane, 2020).

The study is also significant for **professional practice**, particularly for marketing managers, public relations specialists, and advertising teams. Insights derived from crisis communication frameworks such as the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Repair Theory may help practitioners anticipate audience reactions and design more responsive, empathetic, and transparent communication strategies. Research suggests that brands that respond too slowly, defensively, or without emotional acknowledgment often escalate the crisis rather than contain it (Huang & DiStaso, 2020). Therefore, examining how American Eagle managed the backlash might offer valuable lessons for professionals who wish to avoid similar pitfalls in future campaigns.

Furthermore, this research holds meaningful **social impact**. Advertising both shapes and reflects societal norms, and public reactions to controversial ads often reveal deeper social concerns around gender, representation, humor, and ethics. As Abbas et al. (2021) argue, digital publics play a crucial role in framing issues, especially when information spreads rapidly during moments of emotional intensity. Understanding how audiences co-construct meaning and mobilize collective outrage may help brands engage with consumers more respectfully and responsibly. By examining audience sentiments in the American Eagle case, the study might provide insights into how public discourse reflects broader cultural sensitivities.

Overall, this study is significant because it addresses a research gap, provides practical insights for communication professionals, and contributes to discussions about the societal influence of advertising. By analyzing digital crisis dynamics and response strategies, it may advance knowledge on how brands can navigate the delicate balance between creativity, cultural expectations, and public accountability in the fast-paced social-media environment.

References (APA 7)

Abbas, J., Wang, D., Su, Z., & Ziapour, A. (2021). The role of social media in the advent of COVID-19 pandemic: Crisis management, mental health challenges and implications. *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy, 14*, 1917–1932.

Coombs, W. T. (2015). *Ongoing crisis communication: Planning, managing, and responding* (4th ed.). Sage.

Huang, Y., & DiStaso, M. (2020). Responding to a health crisis on Facebook: The effects of response timing and message appeal. *Public Relations Review, 46*(3), 101909.

Kintu, B., & Ben-Slimane, K. (2020). Companies' responses to scandal backlash caused by social media influencers. *International Journal of Market Research, 62*(6), 666–672.

Here is your **DQ3 answer rewritten fully in 3rd-person form** (he/she/the researcher/the study).
It is more formal, more academic, still human-sounding, and keeps your topic intact.
A complete APA 7 reference list is included.

📘 DQ3 – Discussion Questions (Rewritten in 3rd Person)

Topic: Crisis Communication in Advertising and Social-Media Backlash

1. What was found?

After reviewing the literature, the researcher found that scholars consistently emphasized how crisis communication in advertising has been reshaped by the speed, emotional intensity, and public participation enabled by social media. It was observed that audiences no longer remained passive recipients of brand messages; instead, they reshaped advertisements by imposing cultural, moral, and political interpretations. The reviewed studies also showed that crisis escalation often occurred before organizations released any official response. Furthermore, it was identified that controversies involving celebrities attracted amplified attention, causing brands to face both reputational risks and increased expectations for timely engagement.

2. Five articles related to the research question

The first relevant study was conducted by **Abbas et al. (2021)**, who examined how information and emotional reactions spread rapidly online during high-intensity events. Their findings demonstrated why advertising controversies often escalate quickly, supporting the researcher's focus on social-media-driven backlash.

The researcher also reviewed **Cheng, Wang, and Kong (2022)**, who assessed the evolution of social-mediated crisis communication. They showed that contemporary crises required adaptations of established theories such as SCCT, reinforcing the need to analyze brand responses within digital settings.

Another useful article was developed by **Triantafillidou and Yannas (2020)**, who explored public reactions to sensitive advertisements. Their study revealed that audiences frequently expressed moral judgment online, mirroring the dynamics observed in the American Eagle–Sydney Sweeney case.

The researcher further examined **Kintu and Ben-Slimane (2020)**, who investigated influencer-related crises. Their work demonstrated that public figures heightened scrutiny, causing audiences to hold both the brand and the influencer responsible for controversial content.

Lastly, **Huang and DiStaso (2020)** analyzed how response timing and message tone influenced public trust during crises. Their findings showed that delayed or defensive responses often intensified backlash, offering practical insight into effective communication strategies for brands.

3. Effective strategies for organizing and writing a proposal

While studying proposal-writing techniques, the researcher identified several effective strategies. Establishing a clear problem statement was found to be essential for maintaining focus. Organizing the proposal into well-defined sections—introduction, literature review, methodology, and significance—was shown to improve clarity. The researcher also noted that constructing a conceptual framework early provided direction for the study. Guidance from Creswell and Creswell (2018) highlighted the importance of grounding the proposal in credible academic sources and using non-confirmatory language such as "may" or "might" to maintain neutrality.

4. Types of data and suitable methodologies

The researcher found that crisis communication studies often required **qualitative data**, including social-media comments, brand statements, and public reactions. For such data, methods such as thematic analysis, case study design, or content analysis were considered

appropriate. When measuring audience attitudes or engagement, **quantitative data**—including survey responses or platform metrics—were seen as useful. In cases where both forms of insight were needed, the researcher recognized that a **mixed-methods approach** could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the crisis.

📚 References (APA 7)

Abbas, J., Wang, D., Su, Z., & Ziapour, A. (2021). The role of social media in the advent of COVID-19 pandemic: Crisis management, mental health challenges and implications. *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy, 14*, 1917–1932.

Cheng, Y., Wang, Y., & Kong, Y. (2022). The state of social-mediated crisis communication research through the lens of global scholars: An updated assessment. *Public Relations Review, 48*, 102172.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

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