

Crisis Communication and Contingency Theory: What We Can Learn from Nestlé Maggi's Case

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Abstract

FSSAI discovered excessive levels of lead and monosodium glutamate in Nestlé India Limited's flagship brand Maggi. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were used by people across India to talk about a supposed #MaggiBan with anger, anxiety and anguish never seen before by the brand to which Maggi replied using auto response. The biggest revenue generator for Nestlé- Maggi accounted for roughly a quarter of the company's \$1.6 billion in revenue in the country (Fry, 2016) – stumbled into a Public Relations debacle.

The brand reputation earned with years of hard work and trust building was shattered in a matter of a few days, eroding consumer confidence. This study assesses crisis communication done by Nestlé using a case study approach with the lens of contingency theory. It was noted during analyses that responses by the brand before and after crisis were better as compared to during the crisis. Social media should have been better used by the brand during the crisis to placate the angry consumers and manage their expectations.

Customers felt a difference in the taste of Maggi post crisis, but very few respondents had stopped consuming Maggi. The former legacy of Maggi, trust of respondents on the brand and the advertisements released using nostalgia as an appeal post crisis are helping Maggi immensely to recapture the market.

Keywords: Nestlé Maggi; Maggi; crisis communication; contingency theory; social media; Facebook; Twitter; YouTube; case study

Background

"The only way to put out a social media fire is with social media water!"

- Ramon DeLeon, Marketing Mind at Domino's Pizza

When Maggi instant noodles arrived in India in 1983, they instantly caught everybody's imagination with their "2 minute noodles" strategy. Maggi has since been a popular snack that kids could cook, a "meal" and sometimes even a lifesaving instant dish. Each one undoubtedly has his/ her Maggi memories to share. Thus, people were aghast when the news of Maggi being unsafe for consumption spread across the country. The brand got into a mess for supposedly having high levels of lead and monosodium glutamate as an artificial taste maker in its contents.

One random incident and the biggest revenue generator

brand of Nestlé – Maggi accounted for roughly a quarter of the company's \$1.6 billion in revenue in the country (Fry, 2016) – stumbled into a Public Relations (PR) debacle. The hard earned brand reputation and image of years was shattered in a matter of a few days, eroding consumer confidence. Nestlé India would definitely understand this dynamic better now as the following excerpt from an article in Economic Times stands to concur, "Impacted by the Maggi controversy, foods maker Nestlé on Friday reported sales decline of 22.6 per cent for the October-December '15 quarter over the corresponding year-ago

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quarter,” (2016).

As Schiller (2007) explains, “In times of crisis, while corporate communication executives are preparing manicured statements, customers are [simultaneously] blogging, e-mailing, and posting photos out of rage and desperation because the very people who should be listening to them aren’t”. The PR team at Nestlé would understand this dynamic better, as when the crisis exploded, the team chose to stay in denial. This further dented the brand’s reputation. Full year net sales decreased 17.2 per cent mainly because of the Maggi crisis (ET Bureau, 2016).

this problem of drafting messages instantly and maintaining a control over its flow.

Traditionally, companies had nearly 48 hours to respond to a crisis. But, with the advent of Web 2.0, companies might now become aware of a crisis through news channels and/or social media! For instance, Mr. Sanjay Khajuria, head of corporate affairs at Nestlé was asleep in his Manhattan Hotel, when a call from one of his colleagues in India jarred him off his sleep. He was informed that a widely read Hindi language newspaper had reported the news about the health notice and state officials recommend FSSAI to soon ban Maggi. The speed with which news travels today has significantly increased, thus compelling companies to always remain alert and agile (Fry, 2016).

As Aula (2011) says, “instead of reputation belonging to the organization itself, it is to a large extent controlled and distributed by the organization’s stakeholders.” The important thing is that instead of seeing the crisis as a defeat, the company should recognize it as an opportunity and find the best possible way out of the crisis with minimum to no damage to its reputation and brand image.

A social scientific approach when applied to crisis communication on these lines can also be seen in Contingency Theory (CT). CT is a grand theory that attempts to explain how PR as a whole functions. Conflict drives CT. When conflict arises, the parties involved select a stance of how they will respond. The stances vary from accommodative (make concessions) to advocacy (advance your own position) (Coombs, et al., 2010).

Coombs, et al. (2010) review pertinent literature in their seminal document on crisis communication and CT. A crisis can be a conflict situation, hence, the applicability of CT to crisis communication. Managers will appraise the threat posed by a crisis by examining the threat type (internal or external) and threat duration (long term or short term). The threat level then serves to guide the manager’s stance in the crisis. The CT research has yielded insights into how stakeholders will react to crises based upon the threat posed by the crisis (Hwang & Cameron, 2008; Jin & Cameron, 2007).

Through the integrated appraisal model, CT has begun to address concerns about emotion and crises. The extant research suggests that anger and anxiety are two dominant



Figure 1: Timeline of Events

Source: Authors

Companies are now rapidly changing their crisis communication strategy by using the internet and its various social media platforms, more because word of mouth travels faster with Web 2.0 as compared to traditional media. Several corporate communication executives and PR practitioners across the globe are facing

emotions that emerge from crises and that the type of emotion generated in a function of crisis type (Jin, 2009; Jin&Pang, 2010). Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has explored the connection between emotion and crises too.

The SCCT research demonstrates a clear connection between anger and attributions of organizational crisis responsibility. Greater anger “motivates” people to engage in saying to others or posting online negative information about an organization in crisis – the negative communication dynamic (Coombs & Holladay, 2007).

Both theories are now exploring the relationship between crisis response strategies and emotions generated by a crisis. We can see there are similarities between CT and SCCT both in how they conceptualise and approach crisis communication. The research lines and results are compatible and their results can be integrated to a degree (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009).

Lee (2004, 2005), noted the corporate apology research can be viewed as sender oriented. The focus is on the sender selecting a message. There is no concern about how the stakeholders might react to the message or their interests in the crisis. Both SCCT and CT are more receiver oriented. Both try to understand how stakeholders will react to the crisis and to the crisis response strategies utilised by crisis managers. Drawing on the social scientific crisis communication research, crisis managers take action based upon the anticipated reactions of the stakeholders and not just their own concerns (Coombs, et al., 2010).

Literature Review

Crisis

Several authors have defined crisis over the years, but this study aims to quote the definitions only appropriate to the case on hand. Coombs (2007) states, “A crisis is the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes.” Coombs also mentions that “no organization is immune to crisis” and thus, all organizations should be prepared with their crisis management plan.

It is also true that ‘a crisis can be viewed as a threat to an organization’ (Allen & Caillouet, 1994; Barton, 1993). This

could be a threat to the organization’s reputation and image, which is one of the many important reasons as to why a brand needs to be prepared with a PR plan that can be activated during the crisis. “Reputation is described by The Penguin English Dictionary as 1: overall quality or character as seen or judged by others; 2: fame; 3: recognition by other people of some characteristic or ability”, (Griffin, 2008).

The organization does not only have to maintain its image amongst its stakeholders, it also has to prove its legitimacy in the society. According to DiMaggio & Powell (1983), “Legitimacy is critical to the successful operation of an organization.” Due to legitimacy issues, people’s trust started fading in Maggi. The brand should have responded immediately across various channels to justify themselves or inform consumers about the situation at hand.

Fearn-Banks (2007) defined crisis as a “major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome that affects an organization and its publics, products, services, or its good name and interrupts the organization’s normal flow of business”. The most significant characteristic of a crisis is that it causes immense damage to the reputation of the company if ignored, mismanaged or unplanned. The story would have been completely different for Nestlé, had they made decisions faster.

Crisis Communication

Crisis communication can be described as communication that companies use before, during and after a crisis, and it can be of great strategic importance to a company (Heradstveit& Hagen, 2011). It is really important for managers or executives in-charge of corporate affairs of an organization to listen to the public in order to maintain trust and reliability. The goal of the company is also to inform the public so that they can have a more rational view on the decisions made during the crisis (Brønn& Berg, 2005).

Every organization is aware that crisis cannot be averted. Such is the nature of business. So after the organization has accepted that it most likely will face a crisis at some point, the next step is to figure out how to cope with such a situation, and further how to prevent it (Smith, 1990). Most companies today hire a PR agency or have a corporate affairs department in place. These departments or agencies

are responsible for building and honing the reputation and image of the company.

But Nestlé's corporate affairs team somewhere failed to do so by not immediately responding to customers on Facebook and by tweeting a general template to brand loyalists and detractors alike. During such times, "not only is there nowhere to hide in this small world, there is also no time to even think about hiding," writes Griffin (2008). Sandman (2006) rightly explains, "One of three quite separate risk communication traditions: 'precaution advocacy', when people are insufficiently concerned about serious hazard and the mission is to warn them, 'outrage management', when people are exceptionally concerned about a small hazard and the task is to reassure them, and last is when people are appropriately concerned about a serious hazard and you need to help them bear it and guide them through it."

One of the learnings for Nestlé is "when a company is viewed as proactive and engages in two-way communication with its public, it can minimize the risk of being perceived as guilty" (Herrero & Pratt, 1996). The brand could have sustained the debacle better, if it would have engaged with its customers on social media sites. Nestlé has also implemented certain impactful strategies after the ban was lifted. They started with the #WeMissYouToo campaign on social media to target young consumers. Later, a campaign was run showcasing mothers declaring Maggi safe for consumption. Griffin (2008) found that consumers trust people who think like them and have the same outlook and concerns as them and that is what Nestlé smartly targeted on via roping in mothers for this campaign.

Crisis communication can play a pivotal role in protecting reputational assets during a crisis (Coombs, et al., 2010). Oliver (2007) borrowed from the strategic management literature to describe the four generic models of strategy formation as delineated by the four approaches: Classical, Evolutionary, Processual, and Systemic. These four approaches have shadowed the history of PR. Irrespective of the structure of the organization, the strategic process should be followed. A lack of strategic decisions has been observed in various organizations. Hence, the role of a PR expert is to ensure consistency in decision making (Oliver, 2007).

According to the Center for Crisis Management at the University of Southern California, only 5 to 25% of the Fortune 500 companies are prepared to face crises while the remaining 75% are unprepared. Managers, even in well managed organizations, work under the assumption that they can successfully manage a crisis without having a prior plan (Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2004).

Contingency Theory

CT is an approach to the study of organizational behavior in which explanations are given as to how contingent factors such as technology, culture and the external environment influence the design and function of organizations (Islam, 2012). CT suggests a wide range of possible stances along a continuum that an organization can take toward its public. The continuum ranges from pure advocacy to pure accommodation. Advocacy refers to the degree to which organizations maintain standpoints favorable to themselves, rather than to the public. Accommodation refers to the degree to which organizations accept the public's standpoint or argument (Jeong, 2015).

In Jeong's (2015) study, the 86 contingent variables that CT offered were divided into 11 categories on two dimensions of external and internal variables. While the external variables include threats, industry-specific environment, general political/social/cultural environment, external public, and the issue under question, the internal variables include an organization's characteristics, PR department characteristics, dominant coalition characteristics, internal threats, individual characteristics, and relationship characteristics. Similarly, Nestlé was affected by both, external as well internal factors. The major threat Nestlé faced as a brand was the external public that demanded answers and fast. Whereas the internal variables such as PR department were responsible for consistent communication from the organization in this scenario.

Crisis Communication Strategies

Communication during a crisis needs to be aligned across the organization. Every commercial, print advertisement, YouTube video, tweet, post on Facebook needs to convey the same message. This is only possible if an effective crisis communication strategy is thought of in advance because, crisis response strategies seek to protect an organization by

eliminating or reducing reputational damage (Allen & Caillouet, 1994). Every crisis situation would not have the same consequence. Hence, strategies would also vary during different crises. As rightly argued by Darling, et al. (2005) what a crisis communication should not be mixed with is a quick-fix or universal solution that is applied whenever an uneasy situation arises.

The medium chosen to convey a particular message is important. According to Lochridge (2011), "it is important to address the crisis initially in the same channel where it arose." Clearly if a customer tweets his complaint to an organization, the response should be tweeted back to him/her instantly. The brand may also take the conversation to Direct Message on Twitter in this case. Research shows that different degrees of advocacy and accommodation result in different crisis communication strategies. According to Jeong (2015) Coombs argues that advocative strategies are more appropriate in situations of low responsibility for the crisis, whereas accommodative strategies are more appropriate under conditions of high responsibility for the crisis. This emphasizes the fact that Nestlé could have been more advocative considering the magnitude of the crisis and their stand on the situation where they believed they were not at fault.

The most widely used crisis communication strategy approaches in conflict management have been Benoit's image repair theory and Coombs' situational crisis communication theory. Coombs asserts that crisis communication strategies should be arrayed along a continuum (with defensive and accommodative as the end points) and that different stages on the continuum require different crisis repair strategies. The term defensive that Coombs used is synonymous with the CT's stance of advocacy (Jeong, 2015). Similarly, different Facebook posts, Twitter tweets demand/ require a unique response tailored exclusively for the customer. In this case, Nestlé fell short. The responses drafted by Nestlé were repetitive and curt. This study worked - in part - with Benoit's theory and viewed the results from the lens of CT.

Social Media

Web 2.0 is the second generation of Internet. The second edition of the Web is a platform where content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all

users in a participatory and collaborative fashion (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). They define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." Unlike, traditional media, interaction on social media is two-way i.e. firm-generated as well as user-generated.

These new media platforms are low cost or free forums for the expression of ideas, information and opinion; they offer more opportunities to communicate and new avenues for global outreach in crisis communication (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Hence, people are now opinionated on most things that happen in the world which only makes the job of a PR practitioner difficult.

Communicators should never forget that 'word of mouth news is tremendously influential and even perceived as more trustworthy than mainstream media in some instances' (Colley & Collier, 2009). Thus, responding to every customer is important in today's era. Organizations that bring in new media tactics and engage the public in proactive discussions before, during and after a crisis exemplify an important movement from one-way communication to two-way interaction between the public and an organization (Perry, et al., 2003). Such organizations are valued immensely in this era. If used wisely, 'internet gives to every organization the potential to gain a control over its relations and reputation' (Phillips & Young, 2009).

Since, the content on these platforms is mostly user-generated, it takes only a few hours for the news to spread like wildfire and proves as an advantage for the company (if a proper response is communicated at the right time) to manage the situation as quickly as they can. Hence, unlike traditional crisis communication where the company had approximately 48 hours to think and respond to the stakeholders, the companies today have only an hour or two to formulate a crisis communication plan and implement it if they do not have a plan in place already.

Method

A qualitative approach with case study as a method was used to investigate the crisis communication of Nestlé Maggi.

Research Questions

1. How popular was Maggi before the ban?

2. How was Maggi affected because of the crisis?
3. What was the crisis communication done by Maggi during the scandal?
4. What was the crisis communication done by Maggi after the scandal?
5. What was the audience's reaction to the crisis communication done by Nestlé?

Research Design and Tools

This study sought to illuminate a particular experience and the learning from it rather than focus on generalisation. However, to come to a logical conclusion with certainty and to be in a position to comment and further recommend, data triangulation was employed to identify similarities and dissimilarities noted while analysing content, studying perception of participants via Group Discussions (GDs) and understanding opinion of experts through interviews as against the journey of Maggi's market capture pre and post ban.

Data Collection

Primary data from interviews with experts in the fields of PR, Corporate Communication, Marketing Communication and Social Media

GDs with mothers, who buy, make and consume Maggi within the age group of 35-55 years and teenagers who make and consume Maggi within the age group of 15-18 years

Secondary Data from websites, books, research papers, articles, market figures, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter

Data Analysis

Content analyses of Facebook posts, Twitter tweets and YouTube videos were done using data collected through secondary research. Expert interviews and GDs (mothers and teenagers who bought, made and consumed Maggi) were conducted and analysed using thematic analysis. Findings were collated to existing theories of crisis communication, reputation management and contingency theory to look for patterns in data collected and how they

sat within existing frameworks.

The following theories were referred to analyze the communication strategies of Nestlé:

Arthur W. Page society's principles are designed to guide PR practitioners' actions and behaviours and exemplify Page's philosophy of PR management: He has seven principles which are 'Tell the truth', 'Prove it with action', 'Listen to the customer', 'Manage for tomorrow', 'Conduct PR as if the whole company depends on it', 'Realize a company's true character is expressed by its people' and 'Remain calm, patient and good-humoured'. The principles would help understand and assess the strategies employed by Nestlé to communicate with its customers during the crisis.

Image repair discourse theory developed by W.L. Benoit helps practitioners design messages during crisis. Benoit has delineated a simple matrix highlighting 'Strategy', 'Key Characteristic' and 'Illustration' to give his readers a clear idea. For e.g. in the event of 'Denial' during a certain crisis, the entities involved could simply 'Deny' their involvement or 'Shift the Blame'. Similarly, when 'Reducing Offensiveness of Event' is the strategy, one could try 'Bolstering', 'Minimization', 'Differentiation', 'Transcendence' and/ or 'Attacking the Accuser'. Hence, assessing Nestlé on this parameter would provide detailed information on the topic in question.

Contingency Theory

Contingency theory stands to concur that the optimal course of action for every organization is dependent on internal as well as external variables. Hence, it further helps in analyzing and understanding the variables that Nestlé was dependent majorly during its crisis.

The information available through secondary data was used to analyze the impact of Nestlé's crisis communication. Following the above method of analysis helped understand Maggi's communication holistically and provided a detailed report of the events occurred during the crisis.

Results

The analyses below helped derive differences between Nestlé’s communication before, during and after the ban.

Table 1: Analysis of Content

Themes Platforms	Facebook*	Twitter**	YouTube***
Pre-ban	Contests; In detail reply to comments; Interactive	Contests; Real-time tweets; Engaging; Interactive	Mom knows best and hence, Maggi is the best choice; Maggi is as special in a household as a child is for a mother
During ban	Informative; Repetitive; Less Interactive	Repetitive; Automated replies; Less personalized replies	Maggi is missed by bachelors, kids; Maggi is a trusted brand by mothers and grand mothers
Post-ban	Informative; Engaging; Interactive; Contests; Launching new variants	Informative; Engaging; Launching new variants; Message from CMD	People (kids, bachelors, dhaba owners, mothers, hostel students) celebrating Maggi’s comeback

*Facebook: Posts by brand and comments by fans analysed

**Twitter: Tweets and retweets by brand and replies by fans analysed

***YouTube: Videos uploaded and released by brand

It can be observed that before and after crises, their communication was much more interactive and engaging than during the crisis. The brand used to engage on Facebook by writing posts with replies like “Thanks a lot! Did you like the other ad as well?” Also, before crisis when people had apprehensions about the safety and quality of Maggi, the brand had replied in great detail mentioning all major details. Whereas, replies noted during crisis were short and too much was left for consumers to understand from the link provided leading to company’s website. The post crisis replies relating to concerns of people about safety and quality of Maggi are also addressed in a similar fashion, curt and impersonal.

A similar pattern can also be observed on Twitter. Before crisis, Maggi’s tweets were more engaging rather than the ones during crisis. Tweets generated during crisis by the

brand were automated responses and retweets. The post crisis tweets look much better, wherein an official message from the CMD has been shared. Hence, before and after crises Maggi tweets, responses and retweets seem to be livelier, engaging, interactive, real time and personalized.

The videos created just before the crisis targeted mothers mainly. Maggi tried to establish that it is a brand chosen and picked by mothers for their children, which means it is safe and special. The videos released just as the crisis was nearing to an end had an emotional appeal. The understanding that essentially lacked in their responses on Twitter and Facebook was present in those videos wherein kids, bachelors (young adults) express how they miss Maggi in different ways.

The second video was made targeting mothers to establish the fact that Maggi was and is safe to consume. The brand efficiently covered their primary (kids, college-going students, bachelors) and secondary targets (mothers) through these 2 videos. Post crisis videos have a happy and cheerful feel, people of different age groups celebrating the comeback of Maggi.

Table 2: Analysis of Expert Interviews

Themes	Content
Maggi Crisis	Bad time for the brand; Silent; No plan B; Epic crisis; Brand seemed confused; Faltered; Quiet; Sad state of affairs for the brand
During Crisis Communication	Negative: Impersonal messages; Too late to respond; Mechanic and technical responses; Lacked emotional appeal; Disappeared; No strategy Positive: Interactive; Top most executive called; Handled well
After Crisis Communication	Positive: Wonderful; Used nostalgia appeal; Smart; Involved mothers; 360 degree approach; The brand has a legacy; Established brand Negative: Not bang on; Slow to react
Effective Communication - Before Crisis	Too good; The brand had arrived; Instant noodles is known as Maggi; Effective
Effective Communication - After Crisis	Too great; Wonderful campaigns; Using mothers; Followed rules; Owned up; Top of the game
Themes	Content (contd.)
Better Communication Strategies	Use social media as there was no visibility of the brand; Out of sight is out of mind; Engagement; Proactive; Release official statements; More careful
Managerial And Specific Implications	Impacts public memory; Be fast; Decision making; Strengthen media relations; Strengthen Online Reputation Management; Strengthen Social Media monitoring; Design personal messages; Plan B important; Negative publicity
Social Media (SM)	Road of fire; Be there; Use in correct way; Right proportion; Social listening ¹ ; Interact; Engage; In line with company policy product and target ² ; Be consistent; Be positive
SM For Brands	Brand PR; Build identity; Use technology; Right level; Big data; Data analytics; Respond fast; No silence; Be fast and immediate; Not leave it open to interpretations; Engage; Media lists updating ³ ; Promote values

¹*Social Listening*: Understanding what the customers are saying about the brand and industry by monitoring conversations on Social media. During the time of crisis, it becomes important for a brand to monitor and understand these conversations to be able to respond effectively to customers.

²*In line with company policy, product and target*: Brands presence on Social media entirely depends on its company policy, product and target. Similarly, its communication also hinges on these three factors.

³*Media lists updating*: With the current trend of Digital and

Social media, PR managers are constantly updating their media lists with websites like Huffington Post, Firstpost, ScoopWhoop, and BuzzFeed. It is considered to be a victorious moment if a certain press release is covered on the website of a publication.

Respondents who were buyers, makers and consumers of Maggi were chosen for the GDs to understand their consumption and impact of Maggi’s pre and post crisis communication. It was observed during screening the respondents that only 1 out of the 15 mothers chosen was not a buyer and consumer of Maggi post the crisis.

Table 3: Analysis of GDs with Mothers

Themes	Content
Preference for Maggi	Easy to cook; 2 minutes; Instant hot snack; Tasty; Increased vegetable intake of children
Feelings for Maggi - Pre Ban	Happy because it's hassle free; Satisfied with quality; Kids love it
News about Ban	High content of lead; Not safe to consume; Harmful for health
Awareness of Ban	Newspaper; WhatsApp; T.V.
Maggi Ban - A justified decision?	Justified; Not safe to consume; Harmful; Needed to retest the content of lead
Feelings about the ban	Positive: Sad Negative: Confused; Worried
Kids reaction to the Ban	Don't throw Maggi; Unbelievable; Sad; Looked for Maggi at home
Feelings about Maggi's comeback	Positive: Happy; Relieved; Satisfied; Safe and secure Negative: Confused and worried
Trust for the brand	Positive: Trustworthy; Proved right; Stood strong Negative: Felt something wrong because of the sudden ban
Entry of Maggi in their life - post crisis	Positive: Easy; Forever love; Nestlé; Goodwill of the brand; Kids wanted it; Advertisements Negative: No entry
Difference in Maggi	Positive: Less tasty as compared to before ban, hence quality might have improved Negative: Unhealthy because could be a scam
Words for Maggi post ban	MeriMaggi (My Maggi) ; Healthy; Safe; A mystery because still not clear on how things changed so fast

Feelings about ban: A few mothers were sad on hearing and reading about the ban because they loved and trusted the brand. While, others were confused and worried as to what is happening. It was difficult for them to understand that the product they had trusted for so long was said to contain harmful ingredients in an alarming quantity. This created confusion about what to believe and worry as to what would happen next.

Feelings about Maggi's comeback: Most of the mothers were happy and relieved to know the ban had been lifted and their family's favorite snack was back. But, a few mothers were still confused and apprehensive if they should continue with the brand or shift to some other brand of instant noodles. They were worried if changes had actually been made in the product or were some facts still hidden from them and hence, they could not trust the brand as

much as they did before.

Difference in Maggi: One school of thought says that because Maggi is less tasty now as compared to before the ban, quality might have improved and content of lead must have decreased. Whereas, according to the other school of thought it could just be a scam and no changes have been made, it was perhaps just a psychological ploy.

During GDs it was noted that the approximately 3 packets of Maggi bought home by the gatekeeper of the house more or less remained the same pre-ban and post-ban. The rounds of consumption of Maggi also remained the same, except for a few houses where it declined to once a month.

An interesting fact noted was that Maggi was brought into the house not only for kids but also because the family loved it. During the ban, a few mothers did stock up on

Maggi under the influence of their children and others already had packets of Maggi at home. But, none of the mothers threw away the packets after news of the ban spread. Maggi was welcomed almost instantly back into their lives after the ban was lifted. Only 1 out of 15 mothers did not trust Maggi enough to bring it back.

All mothers agreed that their kids complained of the change in taste due to which they believe the quality of the brand has now improved as the content of lead and MSG has now been tweaked. It is possible mothers found taste better when MSG content was higher.

The second school of thought that was noted during GDs was that a sudden change in taste pre-ban and post-ban led a mother to believe that Maggi wasn't safe to consume.

Respondents (teenagers) who were makers and consumers of Maggi were chosen for GDs to understand their consumption and impact of Maggi's pre and post crisis communication. It was observed during screening of respondents that only 2 out of 16 teens chosen were not consumers of Maggi post the crisis.

Table 4: Analysis of GDs with Teenagers

Themes	Content
Preference for Maggi	Instant; Could cook; Brand name; Tasty; Preferable for night munching
Feelings for Maggi - Pre Ban	Fast; Tasty; Fun; Awesome; Love; Refreshing; MeriMaggi (My Maggi);Meri plate (My plate)
Words for Maggi - Pre Ban	Night Food; Time pass; Anytime; Anywhere; Instant meal
News about Ban	Had chemicals; Harmful for health; High amount of lead
Awareness about ban	Social Media; WhatsApp; Friends; Newspapers
Maggi Ban - A justified decision?	Unjustified; Controversy created by competitors; Justified
Feelings about Maggi Ban	Shocked; Confused; Heart-breaking
Words for Maggi during the ban	Not trustworthy; Confused; Mystery; Lost; Gone
Feelings about Maggi's comeback	Brave; Strong; Surprising; Happy; Heart-mended
Trust for the brand	Trustworthy; Trustworthy because of the goodwill; Visible in stores; Parents lost trust
Entry of Maggi into their lives	Advertisements; Ban lifted; Tests confirmed Maggi is safe
Difference in Maggi	Taste has changed
Words for Maggi post ban	Brave; Competitive; Surprising; Trustworthy; Much awaited; Less satisfied because feels unsafe to consume post controversy

Maggi Ban, a justified decision?: Most of the teens thought that banning Maggi was an unjustified decision because they believed that Maggi was always safe to consume. Also, some believed that it was unjustified because it could be a controversy created by the competitors.

It was observed that most teenagers that participated in the GDs ate 2-3 packets of Maggi at home but consumed it from outside (hawkers) as well. Moreover, 40% of the teenagers

that participated in the discussions also influenced their mothers to buy Maggi after the crisis.

As soon as news about the ban spread, teens agreed to have tried to stop mothers from throwing the packets of Maggi in the house. While 2 of the teenagers could not consume Maggi because their parents lost trust for the brand and shifted to alternate options available like Patanjali (post crisis) and Sunfeast Yippee (during crisis). The

consumption of Maggi among children has remained the same pre and post crisis.

Findings and Implications

Nestlé Maggi's brand positioning was so strong that consumers identified instant noodles with Maggi. Such was its popularity that Snyder (2016) wrote, "Maggi had become the third staple of Indian food after wheat and rice". Maggi commanded 80.2% of the market for instant noodles in the quarter to March 2015 (Mitra, 2016) and all that was needed was to keep consumers satisfied with its product and happy with new variants, offers and contests to increase its market share further.

With the advent of technology, it is becoming increasingly important for brands to not only be present, but also to interact and engage its target audience on Social media. Hence, posts on Facebook, tweets on Twitter and engaging videos on YouTube are some of the most crucial elements of social media engagement with audiences. As noted earlier, Maggi ignored detailed responses during its crisis on Facebook. Replies and comments with a personal touch would have made people feel safe and secure about choosing Maggi above any other instant noodles' brand.

During the crisis, Maggi mainly re-tweeted and used auto-tweets which created detachment between the brand and its consumers. Personalized tweets and being more interactive would have helped connect with consumers. It seemed as if the brand had forgotten that Maggi was a loved brand and a lot of emotions were attached to it. YouTube videos during all three phases –pre-crisis, during the crisis and post-crisis – have been effective in their communication compared to that on Facebook and Twitter. The message has been communicated clearly and effectively using YouTube.

While conducting interviews with experts in fields of PR, Corporate Communication, Marketing Communication and Social Media, it was observed that most of them believed Maggi's communication during the crisis was weaker than before and after crisis. It was noted that during crisis, communication from the brand's end seemed impersonal, too technical and mechanical and as if it lacked a strategy.

In contrast, before and after crisis communication where Maggi was doing wonderful, had communication which

was so powerful that Maggi had become synonymous with instant noodles in India and consumers were willing to welcome it back into their lives with open arms. On the other hand, a few experts thought that Maggi did not falter at any point. They were of the opinion that the brand faced the crisis head on. It called in the top most executives to handle the situation and always followed government policies and norms.

All the experts believed that Maggi needed to be more careful while communicating, more proactive and engaging. Social media is a powerful, interactive and instant tool of communication and care has to be taken while using it. Experts likened it with a double edged sword which might help cut out barriers in communication or slice through your efforts in one stroke.

GDs with mothers revealed that although they believed the ban was a justified decision, when the product was back on shelves most were sure of its quality and safety. Thus, they did not hesitate from buying it as soon as it was back. Sentiment associated with Maggi's comeback was more positive than negative as most mothers seemed happy and satisfied with its return. A few, however, who disagreed with this sentiment, had certain doubts about Maggi's safety and quality. Therefore, it was difficult for them to trust the brand and welcome it back into their lives. According to most mothers, the change in taste of Maggi proved that it was healthy now and high content of lead was reduced. On the other hand, a few thought that the change in taste was only an inducement for fooling consumers and there was no actual change in the product.

GDs with teenagers also revealed similar results. According to them, the communication done by Maggi during and after crisis through advertisements convinced them to buy the product as soon as it was back. It was difficult for the kids to accept the ban of one of their favorite brands. Hence, bringing it back into their lives after the ban was easy for them. Nonetheless, there were a few families that did not support Maggi after the ban and preferred other brands of instant noodles.

GDs with both mothers and kids revealed that though Maggi may have failed to communicate and connect efficiently with their consumers during the crisis, the legacy of the brand continues. Most families still trust Maggi and love it as much as before the crisis. However,

most experts believed theirs was a crisis communication/PR failure on part of the brand during the crisis.

Experts said Maggi's market share would certainly go back to where it was before, but brands need to be careful while communicating over social media. Online brand presence has become a necessity today. Content is king and if it is meaningful and relevant, it can build brand love and loyalty over time. Brands/personalities get trolled for a single mistake made on social media given its ruthless nature as highlighted by Comcowich (2016) who reported that Maggi has suffered substantial reputation damage as the crisis brewed. The question to ask is would the brand have survived if it did not have the legacy and credibility that it did?

One of the principles that Arthur W. Page Society (2016) follows and preaches all communication enthusiasts to follow, is to "Tell the truth". As soon as the crisis struck the first thing Nestlé should have done was to release an official statement establishing the truth. In this case, what Nestlé actually did was as per Image Restoration Strategies (Benoit, 1997) "Simple Denial." It can also be observed on Maggi's Facebook post where they deny news of any recall of Maggi Instant Noodles. Some experts also believe that "Denial" cannot and should not be the first statement released by a brand (Prabhu, 2016).

It also couldn't implement the second principle by Arthur W. Page Society i.e. "Prove it with Action." It started with a laboratory report in Uttar Pradesh that claimed Maggi contained high amount of lead. If a statement would have been issued by the brand with a tangible proof, situations would have turned out quite different than they did. But, considering the tough situations faced by the brand, there would have certainly been a policy or protocol they followed such as a lock down.

The third principle of Arthur W. Page Society states "Listen to the customer." Maggi should have listened to each and every customer before sending out a general template as a response to all agitated and concerned customers. Because every customer/fan/follower had a different tweet/post/comment which demanded different replies. Thus, Maggi could have used social media in a better manner for its advantage.

PR is to manage a company's reputation and create a lasting bond with its target audience. So, when Arthur W. Page Society's fifth principle states "Conduct PR as if the whole company depends on it" the importance of it can be understood. Unfortunately Maggi did not communicate efficiently to its public or manage its reputation effectively. As mentioned by Paul Bulcke, Nestlé CEO (in Comcowich, 2016), "We were right on factual arguments and yet so wrong on arguing. It's not a matter of being right. It's a matter of engaging the right way and finding a solution."

What Maggi did perfectly later was "Minimization" of the act as per W.L. Benoit's Image Restoration (1997) strategies. The videos released by Maggi towards the end of crisis very cleverly ignited a feeling of nostalgia within its customers and connected with them emotionally. This worked for the brand as we also observed from the GDs conducted. It made people forget all that had happened and concentrate only on the years they had spent enjoying Maggi.

The brand did face various challenges such as tough media, strict regulation and agitated customer tweets and Facebook posts. If you don't have a contingency plan when crisis hits, especially for communication in today's world of social media, things will certainly get complicated like they did for Nestlé. Fortunately for them, their branding is so strong that they have bounced back despite the serious blow. This case surely serves as a lesson for various PR and corporate communication practitioners especially in the area of crisis communication and contingency theory.

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[†]The matrix can be accessed on <https://sites.google.com/view/figuresfromthepaper/home>

[‡]Maggi's social media engagement on Facebook and Twitter can be accessed on <https://sites.google.com/view/figuresfromthepaper/home>

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