The Use of Real Time Marketing on Social Media in the Burger King Case During the "Vaccinagate" Scandal in Peru

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Abstract. This study explores Real Time Marketing (RTM) in Peru through the description of a paradigmatic case in the country. Due to its virality, this branding strategy -which consists of tackling viral dates, news, and events to create content and insert itself into the flow of a massive conversation in networks- requires determining the right conditions and timing. For such purpose, a qualitative documentary study was conducted to analyse Burger King's "Impossible to get tired of it" action on its Instagram and Facebook accounts associated with the "Vaccinagate" scandal in the context of the COVID-19 crisis in Peru. The case was studied with the objective of defining what are the best conditions to make use of this strategy and what criteria should be considered for the choice of the event when executed in social media. Thanks to the analysis, it was possible to conclude that for a brand to perform RTM properly, it needs to have an active and effective presence in its social networks, that the event chosen must be closely linked to the brand, and above all, the action must be quick and relevant.

Keywords: Real-time Marketing · Marketing · Social media · Newsjacking

1 Introduction

In recent years, the use of social networks has been a determining factor in everyday life. Social Media -software technologies manifested in channels, either applications or websites- allow users to exchange digital content or information among themselves, but also to create it. Today, communication between brands and consumers becomes mutual rather than a one-way relationship [2].

Nowadays, the use of social networks has been a determining factor in everyday life. To gain relevance, brands must stay in the consumer conversation, so they resort to what is called newsjacking, the action taking advantage of news or events for the creation of communication and marketing strategies [1]. The action of relating an external news or trend outside a brand to its advantage has recently been called Real Time Marketing (RTM), carried out through social networks to generate a topic of conversation among people [13]. An example of this phenomenon happened during the COVID-19 crisis in the context of the political scandal "Vaccinagate": Burger King (BK) became a topic of

conversation because one of the persons involved –Germán Málaga– used the persons implicated fed up with the frequent consumption of Burger King as an excuse to vaccinate one particular person –César Loo Cárdenas– without authorization: "We have 12 people from the Chinese delegation who are permanently with us. We vaccinate this person because he is often going to the research center [to bring us Chinese food] because the Chinese delegation gets tired of Burger King" [6]. The brand took this opportunity to publish a graphic on its Instagram and Facebook with the "Impossible to get tired of it" copy and turn the situation in its favor.

RTM is a recent technique, popularized in 2013 with the boom in the use of social networks as a marketing channel for brands [10]. This study seeks to identify the appropriate conditions for the execution of RTM under a Peruvian context to add new case documentation material. That is why the following research question was defined:

IQ: What are the conditions that brands should follow to use "real time" events in advertising messages in social networks?

2   RTM as a Content Marketing Formula

Social Media has become an important tool in people's daily lives, but it is also a space for brands and organizations to disseminate information and, above all, to try to establish a connection with users [2].

If we could give a definition of social media, it could be considered as a set of digital environments where there are web platforms (social networks) in which users can exchange information and consume content. It is also a space for brands, organizations, companies, and other organizations, where they can communicate information, interact and form a connection with users [2].

In the field of sales, social media has meant an opportunity for marketing and advertising. This is due to the massive number of users that each of the platforms that make it up and the possibility of reaching target audiences in difficult niches [11].

For brands, social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, have represented an opportunity for marketing and advertising. This is mainly the result of the massive number of users that each one of them holds, but above all for having opened the possibility of reaching hard-to-reach segments [11]. Content Marketing - which consists of creating stories based on the brand's values and intentions- is the preferred way to achieve these objectives [8].

According to Smith & Chaffey [12], to make it effective, the following elements should be considered: (i) The value generated: ask what kind of attribution this will give to the consumer. (ii) The communicative medium: consider whether it will be text, image, sound, or streaming transmissions. (iii) Distribution of the content: through e-mails, direct messages, social network feeds, among others, (iv) Participation in the content: this can be commented, rated, and shared, and once monitored it can be used to measure the reach. (v) Access to platforms and adaptability to electronic devices.

On the other hand, the participation granted by Content Marketing on these platforms is called engagement. Engagement meets the need for brands to connect with their consumers, which is increasingly necessary to keep them loyal and willing to consume their services. It includes actions such as reading, writing comments, reviews, liking and

sharing content on a digital platform. These actions are performed in order to reinforce consumers' loyalty and familiarity with the brand [20].

The engagement is a more effective mechanism for brands in the most competitive markets. Also, while it is a great alternative to bring the consumer closer to a brand with a friendlier language, it can mean a high risk, as the spread of a brand's good reputation through the consumer's word can be quickly reversed against the brand due to a mistake. The risk is much greater the greater the reputation and recognition of the Brand [17].

Engagement is also the psychological state of a consumer following the set of experiences and behaviours triggered by the actions of a brand. In other words, it is a concept that encompasses the emotional, cognitive and behavioural domains [19].

There are two possible outcomes of consumer engagement: (i) The interactional value: final link between the brand or firm and the consumer, the comments or reviews they leave on their platforms, or the final purchases they make. (ii) The multiplier value: it develops once the consumer appropriates the content and decides to spread it until it goes viral [18].

Having clarified this, it is necessary to highlight that content marketing has different techniques that are currently manifested, but this paper will focus on only one of them. Within this formula of content marketing, there is a marketing technique called Real Time Marketing (RTM). RTM is defined by Kerns [10] as a marketing strategy that consists of a brand seeking to capitalize and take advantage of a trending topic (whether it is an event, a special date, or an unexpected event) through its communication channels. Unlike traditional marketing, RTM cannot be planned weeks or timelines in advance (unless it is a holiday), but rather a constant conversation and vigilance to new eventualities on the web. Hanging on to a trend on a social network means making marketing part of a conversation with consumers.

RTM has two key benefits for brands: (i) It is cheaper -compared to traditional campaigns- and it (ii) allows to focus on a target audience and potential future customers [10].

Several experts agree that projecting an authentic image is a determining factor to properly apply RTM [14]. Kerns [10] outlines a classification of situations that can be targeted by RTM: (i) Planned events: represents a known topic and a planned, eye-catching event. (ii) Watchlist events: These are small and unexpected day-to-day events, including topics or known characters such as politicians or celebrities. And (iii) unexpected events: These are small, unexpected trends that may appear in larger events. (iv) Day-to-day RTM: These are trends or topics that come out of nowhere. This is the type of trend that marketers have the hardest time identifying.

3   Methodology and Procedures

A case analysis of the RTM rection of the BK brand in the context of the "Vaccinagate" scandal in Peru was carried out from a descriptive scope, qualitative approach, and documentary design. For this purpose, information was collected, including dates, characters, and events in the temporal space where the events took place before and during the event. This was done through the collection of data from first and second-hand sources with the purpose of identifying and describing the conditions that must be met for the use of

RTM in a chosen trend or news item. For this, a review of the publications of the brand in the chosen case will be made with the use of the theory collected in the theoretical review.

A case study methodology was applied, analysing the event and its particularities at the time it occurred. For them and made a review of the Facebook and Instagram profiles of the brand (BK), where reactions and comments were also studied to measure the reception of the public.

3.1   Study Design

An analysis was made of the BK case in the context of "Vaccinagate" occurred in Peru during February 2021. It is necessary to explain the context that triggered the action of the brand as a subject of study. Peru until then was one of the countries most affected by the global pandemic COVID-19, causing economic imbalance and exposing the shortcomings of the health system and ethical failures of the political class. The pandemic left the country with a total of 1.24 million infected and nearly 44,000 dead. The terrible consequences came as a surprise to other countries, given that Peru was an example of one of the few countries whose security protocol was implemented early and immediately, from the moment then President Martin Vizcarra decreed a State of Emergency on March 15, 2020 [3].

Something that began with fifteen days of quarantine at home, with strict confinement, ended up being prolonged for months. Peru, with a precarious health system and a high level of informality in terms of working conditions, did not have the expected results [3]. Despite the efforts of medical professionals, the failures of the precarious Peruvian healthcare system are beginning to be exposed: lack of infrastructure, technology and ICU beds [3]. From this point on, the race in search of vaccination of Peruvians begins, and with it also the direct cause of the event described in the case.

The Chinese laboratory Sinopharm arrived in the country with samples for the Phase III trial of the vaccine, received by the then Minister of Health Pilar Mazzetti. The arrival of the Chinese delegation took place at the end of August 2020. The Peruvian Cayetano Heredia University and the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos were entrusted with the task of implementing these trials in collaboration with the Chinese laboratory. Dr. Germán Málaga would be designated as the person in charge of supervising the project at Cayetano Heredia University, a fact that will be relevant later [7].

The scandal is unleashed after a journalistic note of the program "Beto a Saber", where it is revealed that the former president and his family would have been clandestinely vaccinated in the context of this clinical study during October 2020. Malaga, who was referred to as the person who agreed the vaccination with the president, refused to confirm or deny the possibility of having secretly vaccinated him in an evasive manner, which confirmed the facts.

Shortly afterwards, the complete list of those vaccinated in an irregular manner was revealed, vaccinated without the knowledge of a Peruvian population that had just begun to be vaccinated. The list showed a total of 487 people involved, including high-ranking politicians, their relatives and other influential people in the country. The revelations of this list and the actions of those involved provoked the indignation of the country and the subsequent resignation of the officials involved [3].

At the climax of the scandal, the statements of the implicated start to emerge, among them Dr. Germán Málaga. The person in charge of the clinical testing of the vaccines made a statement about his reasons after the vaccination of César Loo Cárdenas, owner of a Chinese restaurant, in a press interview [5]. His bizarre statement affirmed that the businessman had been vaccinated, since he had been a food supplier for the 12 members of the Chinese delegation with whom they were working, since they already had enough of Burger King. His words were that "the Chinese delegation got tired of BK". He brings the food, he interacts with them permanently" [6].

4   Results

The doctor's response and his name became a trend in social networks through the hashtag #BurgerKing [15]. The brand, seeing its name compromised in the statements in the middle of a huge political crisis made the following publications.

As can be noticed in Fig. 1, the brand had a quick response to the sudden spotlight on it. Just a few hours after Malaga's statement, BK unveils the piece "Impossible to Get Tired" with the image of a big burger, right at the caption "Impossible to get tired of a 100% beef burger #ALaParrilla" on both Facebook and Instagram [4, 16].

This action can be interpreted as a clear RTM action capitalizing on a highly discussed trend and news, but also as damage control. It is known that brands should be cautious in how they interact with the news, especially avoiding controversial topics. In this case precisely, the mention of the brand is introduced directly into the controversy.

In the Facebook social network, the publication reached more than 3000 Reactions and 810 comments, a visible increase in interaction compared to other publications of the brand in this social network, ranging from 50 Reactions to more than 200 Reactions, the latter figures being rare.

Fig. 1. Graphic pieces used in Instagram and Facebook of the Burger King Peru Brand after the statements of the head of research Germán Málaga.

Almost all the comments section on Facebook is positive, where users congratulate the Community Manager (CM) and the advertisers behind the decision. Others, praised the brand's occurrence, adding that they will continue to buy its products. Another section of users congratulated the brand for bringing humor to such a serious situation.

The reception on Instagram far surpassed the Facebook post. The Instagram post had a total of 13010 Likes with 619 comments. The action provoked a comical reaction among users, almost always accompanied by congratulations to the brand and the CMs for handling a situation seen as a blunder, a possible stain on the brand name, and turning it into an opportunity.

It is worth mentioning that although the brand intentionally carried out the advertising action because it was mentioned in the middle of a political scandal, at no time does it mention Germán Málaga or the clandestine vaccinations. The brand was careful about getting involved in controversial situations and they have very strict guidelines where they are clear about what to do and what not to do in certain situations.

However, having been included in the conversation of a political crisis, the brand did not hesitate to make a clever action without referring directly to the problem. This is a special case in which the brand has been indirectly forced to take a position, as it can mean a point against its reputation. In this case, the position is an ironic counter-response to Malaga's controversial statement, an action that gives the brand the sympathy of the audience in a scenario where its presence was already discussed.

While the call to action –that people buy a hamburger– in the publication is one of the clearest objectives in this campaign, there are those that can be seen implicit in the conception of this execution. The brand addressed its users colloquially, and did not hesitate to answer comments with doubts. This lends an air of familiarity and trust with its consumers.

According to the words of Alejandra Ibarcena [9], a specialist in the areas of Planning and Networking, RTM has several brand objectives such as achieving greater exposure or developing a greater affinity with the target audience, and even increasing sales.

When we talk about affinity and connection with the public, we are also talking about public interaction with the brand. Positive reception was observed in the comments of both publications, expressing agreement with the brand's message or laughing at its occurrence.

5   Discussion and Conclusions

The increasing development of the latest media technologies has changed the way a person interacts with their social circles, their environment and their perception. As a result, these advances have revolutionized advertising in ways that were unimaginable a decade ago. Social networks, as a means of mass communication, represent a break with the unilateral relationship in which the medium is the sender and the user is the receiver. Brands can take advantage of this new landscape, so they can communicate messages and content to their users and vice versa.

The speed at which information and news travels within this channel signifies an opportunity. Instead of creating content that is of interest to attract the attention of your customers, what happens when that spotlight already exists, and the brand does nothing

more than chase it? This is how RTM is known as the advertising technique in which a brand seeks to capitalize on a news story, trend, event, conversation, or occurrence of interest in everyday life for as long as it is a relevant topic of conversation [10], the focus under which this research has been directed.

Despite little documentation in research, RTM is constantly used by agencies to find their niche of relevance in the busy minds of their audiences. However, this documentation has not collected cases from Peru, so the case of the BK campaign in the development of Vaccinagate is one worthy of analysis to understand its scope in a Peruvian situational context. Likewise, it would mean adding one more research to the limited amount of existing literature on this topic.

This case follows what Kerns [10] stipulates when he refers to finding an opportunity in an unplanned event and taking advantage of it for advertising purposes. This event was a trend in social networks and was mentioned by different news platforms, both national and international. It also fulfills the aspect of immediacy.

This incident was a trend in social networks and was mentioned by different news platforms, both national and international, due to the size of the scandal and the political crisis it caused. It also fulfills the aspect of immediacy. Although the news came out in the early hours of a morning, the executions took place at lunchtime.

However, the case exposes a particularity not mentioned in previous research. Although the news was already trending, the brand did not need to look for a link between the event and its brand values and attributes, as it is usually considered before executing an RTM action: the scandal is linked by itself to BK unexpectedly when one of the implicated, Edgar Malaga, mentions the brand. The brand is not forced to make a statement at any time, but nevertheless finds an opportunity to change the negative connotation of the mention of its name. BK executes this action by cleverly phrasing a graphic piece on Facebook and Instagram, using Malaga's verbatim words in response without mentioning his name. This RTM execution was received with congratulations and humor from the public, who had a moment of laughter during the crisis.

It is critical to know that the success of this event and action is measured in the effect it had on the public within both platforms. Already published this graphic piece in both social networks, two objectives of content marketing were met in it after this execution and the reaction of the public. In the case of engagement, there can be two outcomes: the interactional value and the multiplier value [18]. This multiplier value was observed in the times the user shared the post on both Facebook and Instagram, even though Facebook is the only social network that has this measure visible to the viewer. Given the virality of this action, also commented on the social network Twitter, it can be considered that this value was successful. On the other hand, if the question is whether Burger's RTM action fulfilled the interactional value, the hundreds of comments and thousands of reactions on each social network is tangible proof of the campaign.

Thanks to the analysis of the development of BK's campaign, it can be concluded that for a brand to perform RTM properly, it needs firstly (i) to have an active and effective presence in its social networks. Secondly, (ii) the event chosen to apply it must be closely linked to the brand, its values and tone. Thirdly, (iii) the time of action must be quick and relevant. On Facebook and Instagram posts, users are constantly interacting on every occasion. Secondly, the event is closely linked to the brand, its values and tone.

If Malaga had not mentioned the brand in his statement, it would not have been possible for BK to get involved in such a critical situation. Given that the response of the person involved was surreal and funny in contrast to the seriousness of the political scandal, the brand was able to fit this situation in a relevant way with its communication tone. The timing in the planning and posting of the message on each social network should be quick and relevant. If the statement and the corresponding mention was given in the morning of that day, BK already had both publications ready at noon, a break and lunch time for many people. Had he delayed for 24 h, the effect would not have been the same, as conversations and trends in social networks are fleeting. Therefore, this leads us to discuss the organization that makes this possible below.

It is important to point out that a good CM and research team behind the social networks is decisive. It is this team that must monitor and choose the news and events and know what conversations are taking place among users and where their focus is. This team must be characterized by being perceptive, astute, know the brand it represents and the target audience perfectly and, above all, understand what risks are at stake when pursuing the opportunity.

It should be noted that the present research presented limitations. While RTM has been conducted for years, the official designation and its exact classification as such has not been in existence for more than a decade. This implies that the number of documented investigations and cases are very limited. Studies in relation to RTM focus primarily on cases from the USA and some European countries, but there are no developed investigations of the growing number of cases from Latin America and Peru.

Also, being a case study, the two social networks where the event directly took place were chosen. The social network Twitter still hosts the reactions of the day in which the case occurred, but the totality of these comments from users in this social network cannot be located, just as the comment sections in Facebook and Instagram could be consulted. On the other hand, being a case study, the above findings are limited to self-observation and prior consultation of a certain number of specialists, but exhaustive analysis of the reaction of the target audience to know their perception has not yet been done.

Future research should consult a more in-depth angle by specialists. Likewise, it is hoped that this case study will serve as a point of comparison for the documentation of future cases and enrich the literature on RTM. Under this premise, which especially initiates a greater impulse to document cases from Latin America and Peru.

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