



The public has the power

The past year's rise in global citizen action, influence and democratisation of information, fuelled by the growth of social networks, has had a profound impact on how marketers must treat their brand

What did we learn last year? We learned that there is one true 'superpower': public opinion.

Repressive authoritarian regimes, inequality, inequitable distribution of wealth – all these and more have been challenged and undermined by the power of public opinion.

There is a growing gap between the public and the institutions that serve them... detached, aloof and out of touch, be they politicians, bankers, bosses or the police.

Last year, we saw members of the public join together to take action against this sense of injustice, and the accelerants that have enabled this change – Twitter, BBM and Facebook.

To understand how that public opinion has been mobilised is to understand the democratisation of information enabled by social networks.

Today there is 'one public' with access to more information than ever before and the public no longer wants that information filtered; nor can institutions or corporations filter it themselves.

In the past year, we have witnessed the dramatic impact of both the democratisation and disintermediation of information in real-time.

There are lessons to be learned for marketers that enable you to harness the positive power of public opinion.

First, remember that you operate in broad daylight: you are operating in front of an audience of, potentially, many millions. This audience expects authenticity, openness and honesty across every part of your business. Be good, do



good. Equally, don't be afraid to push back when you have been treated unfairly.

Social media's influence over the corporate brand is more potent than ever because we do care who produces our food, manufactures our washing powder and heats and lights our homes. We want to know how they do it and at what social, economic and environmental cost.

We care that they do the right thing. Corporate social responsibility is not a departmental function, it must be embedded in the values and operating principles of

every organisation. It is a story to be told not only to key opinion-formers, but also to the consumer.

Create social campaigns that enable an easy engagement of your consumer base, or broader stakeholders. If consumers are engaging more with your brand, then give them the digital tools to connect better.

By building relationships, enabling conversations and sharing stories, you are not only engaging your public, but also mobilising it to advocate for you.

Don't underestimate the value of data. You might be telling the story you want to share, but does your audience care, and will it change what it does, says or believes?

Ditch the instinctive approach to campaign planning, and instead use data to understand your

audience and its behaviour, and test the resonance of your messaging. A number-count of friends, followers and fans pre- and post-campaign is not the answer.

Finally, deploy the skills of the political campaigner. Know your core narrative – be single-minded, ensure you're always listening to the world, enable rapid decision-making and a robust response mechanism, and intervene when necessary.

All this needs to be set alongside a clearly defined, proactive calendar of news content.

If the public has the power, then put the public back into your public relations. ■

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