

THE RESILIENT AGILITY OF BRAND VOICE IN VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract

In an era marked by rapid change, the role of brand voice within brand communication has become increasingly vital to protecting brand identity, moving beyond traditional marketing approaches. This research introduces the concept of “resilient agility” of brand voice and examines it in a variety of uncertain contexts. Aiming to investigate the potential influence of volatile environments on brand voice within the context of brand communication, the author based her research on the examination of various case studies and as a result introduced two new models of projecting brand identity through brand communication, including one tailored for volatile environments. The author identifies the resilient agility of brand voice in projecting the essence of brand identity, consistency in core messaging, and transparency in addressing issues as key success factors for brand communication. This research enhances the understanding of the projection model of brand identity through brand communication, especially in volatile environments, offering valuable insights for marketers aiming to maintain brand integrity and develop lasting customer relationships amidst uncertainty.

Keywords: brand communication, brand identity, brand voice, resilient agility, volatile environments

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Introduction

The saying “change is the only constant” has never been more pertinent than in today’s world, characterized by rapid and unpredictable shifts. The recent global pandemic, economic upheavals, political instability, and societal transformations have placed change at the forefront of daily activities (Park, 2020). In this volatile environment, businesses, organizations, and individuals must continuously adapt to ensure long-term viability. The current landscape, often described using the acronym VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity), compels economic clusters, organizations, and people to modify their operational strategies (Taskan et al., 2020).

Brand communications are undergoing a profound transformation in response to these dynamic conditions (Wilhelm, 2019). This research is particularly timely as it addresses the increasing importance of resilient agility of brand voice within brand communication, especially in times marked by rapid changes in digital environments. Understanding how to maintain brand communication relevant to the demands of volatility becomes crucial for businesses as traditional marketing paradigms continue to face challenges. This research explores how brand voice contributes to brand communication, providing insights into how brands can effectively communicate and connect with their audience amid evolving consumer expectations and interaction methods in volatile environments.

The research examines various case studies, including Turkish Bank Z, McDonald’s, KFC, British Airways, and Balenciaga, coming to conclusions about how these renowned brands have navigated crises and public outrage and what role the brand voice played in brand communication. By analysing these real-world examples, the research not only provides theoretical insights but also practical applications relevant for brand strategists. The research builds upon David Aaker’s Brand Identity Model, introducing the Projection Model of Brand Identity into Brand Communication, developed by the research author. This

model adds a new dimension to brand strategy by emphasizing brand communication role in reflecting brand identity, particularly in volatile environments. The elaboration of these models is valuable both for academia and practitioners, offering a framework for maintaining brand integrity and navigating complex communication challenges. By drawing on qualitative analyses of case studies, the research contributes to both the academic understanding of the relationship between brand identity and brand communication and provides practical guidance for brand strategists to prepare for volatile times. The paper emphasizes the importance of flexibility in brand communication, suggesting that responsiveness to environmental changes is crucial for maintaining brand integrity and fostering audience engagement. These insights are essential for long-term brand success, making the research highly relevant in today's unpredictable global landscape.

Literature Review

Before exploring the examination of the resilient agility of brand voice in volatile environments, it is important to define the key terms central to this research: brand voice, resilient agility, and volatile environments.

Brand Voice

The contrast between the practical implementation of brand voice in marketing and its emerging status in academic research is surprising. Marketers have extensively discussed brand voice and its impact on brand communication strategies (Toomes, 2023; Newberry, 2023; Forsey, 2022). Recently, artificial intelligence (AI) and its growing significance in creating brand voice and its utilization in enhancing brand communication have become a new marketing trend (Mesaglio et al., 2023). This involves employing AI technology adept at developing and mimicking brand voices, a trend highlighted by Surikova et al. (2022). This aligns with the growing focus on integrating AI into brand communication, an area further explored by Mesaglio et al. (2023). In this evolving landscape, recent studies reveal a crucial interaction between brand voice and AI. Kirkby et al. (2023) suggest that AI-generated content, when transparently disclosed, retains the authenticity perceived by consumers, thus preserving the brand's integrity and attitude in the digital era.

However, academic inquiry exclusively into brand voice is still nascent (Surikova et al., 2022). The most recent research interest focuses on brand voice and AI, or AI generated content. Kirkby, Baumgarth, and Henseler (2023) conducted an extensive study on customer perceptions of brand voice, focusing on AI-generated versus human-crafted content. Their findings underscore the importance of authenticity in brand voice and its effect on consumer attitudes (Kirkby et al., 2023). They demonstrate that labelling a brand voice as AI-generated does not significantly affect its authenticity or brand perception, indicating AI's potential role in transforming brand communication strategies (Kirkby et al., 2023). Ju Jeong et al. (2022) stress the importance of adopting a human tone of voice in brand communications on social media. They argue that a humanized brand voice enhances consumer perceptions of a brand's social presence and engagement intentions. Their research suggests that a human tone can increase consumer engagement and purchase intentions through perceived social presence, highlighting the critical role of brand personification in influencing consumer endorsement (Ju Jeong et al., 2022).

Academic literature on the definition of brand voice is scarce. Surikova et al. (2022) describe brand voice as a mix of marketing, linguistic, and stylistic elements that engage audiences across various channels, like social media and official websites, depending on the intended impact. Similarly, Kohli and Yen (2019) define brand voice as the projection and perception by the intended recipient, including attitude, tone, language choice, and typography. Surikova et al. (2022) argue that brands must ensure their language resonates with their target audience and aligns with their values and objectives. They emphasize the need for careful consideration of content, tone, and delivery style to avoid alienating or offending the audience

(Surikova et al., 2022). However, academia has not examined the impact and role of brand voice in brand communication, leaving this topic for further study.

Summarizing the provided literature review, some scholars perceive brand voice as a critical aspect of brand communication, combining elements of marketing, linguistics, and style. It requires a thoughtful assessment of the communication medium, target audience, and message impact (Surikova et al., 2023). Barcelos et al. (2019) highlight the significance of brand voice in social media communications. They reveal that a human tone of voice cultivates a more favourable brand attitude and a heuristic information search pattern in consumers, in contrast to a corporate tone that focuses attention on specific information. This distinction underscores the subtle yet profound impact of brand voice on customer engagement and perception on digital platforms (Barcelos et al., 2019).

Volatile Environments

In current rapidly changing business landscape, understanding and effectively navigating volatile environments is increasingly critical for organizations. Taskan et al. (2022) characterize these environments by rapid change, unpredictability, and complexity, encapsulated by the acronym VUCA, which stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Originally, a military term used to describe the post-Cold War environment, VUCA has become a prevalent concept in business, highlighting the need for strategies that can adapt and respond quickly to unforeseen challenges (Taskan et al., 2022). According to the literature sources reviewed by Saleh and Watson (2017), a common definition for VUCA can be determined as “a term used to describe the challenges that are surrounding the business environment in terms of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity” (Saleh, & Watson, 2017, p. 10).

Organizations operating in such VUCA environments encounter chaotic and unstable conditions, which necessitate strategic communication plans that are not only flexible and adaptive but also capable of responding swiftly to unexpected changes and uncertainties (Taskan et al., 2022). To navigate this growing complexity and unpredictability, new communication strategies and skills are essential (Taskan et al., 2022). The goal for organizations is not merely to survive in these volatile conditions but to thrive. Consistent engagement with the target audience through authentic, adaptable, and humanized communication can achieve this, maintaining the brand relevance and trust amidst market volatility, competitive pressures, and negative publicity, and ultimately enhancing organizational resilience (Taskan et al., 2022). Golgeci et al. (2019) describe volatile environments as characterized by instability, rapid policy changes, and institutional voids. Such environments are particularly common in economies undergoing significant political, economic, and social transformations. This perspective further underlines the complexities that organizations must navigate and the importance of developing robust, agile communication strategies to adapt and succeed in these challenging contexts (Golgeci et al., 2019).

Resilient Agility

In recent years, particularly over the past two decades, the concepts of “resilience” and “agility” have emerged as key areas of focus within the corporate world, a trend identified by the American Management Association as early as 2006. McKinsey & Company (2023) defines resilience as an organization’s ability to recover and prosper following setbacks, while agility is characterized as the ability to adapt quickly and effectively to change. Recent academic research has explored the relationship between resilience and agility, suggesting that these traits are interrelated and complementary in organizational contexts. Studies by Gölgeci et al. (2019) and Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) support this integrated perspective, emphasizing the need for a holistic understanding of these qualities in businesses. Further expounding on this, McKinsey & Company (2023) highlight the agile methodology as central to embracing change within organizational processes. This approach allows organizations to swiftly adapt to new circumstances, granting them the flexibility to effectively respond to various situations (McKinsey & Company, 2023).

Such adaptability is essential for crafting tailored strategies to meet unique challenges, moving away from rigid, one-size-fits-all solutions. Professor Lange (2020) introduces the term “resilient agility”, which encapsulates the combined capabilities of resilience and agility in rapidly changing business contexts. This concept is particularly relevant in volatile economies, where organizations must be nimble in sensing and responding to environmental changes (agility) while also being robust enough to withstand disruptions (resilience) (Lange, 2020).

The academic interest in these concepts parallels their practical application. Golgeci et al. (2019) define business resilience as a company’s ability to maintain integrity and withstand disturbances amid significant changes, incorporating elements such as resistance to disruptions, recovery from shocks, and adaptation to new environments. However, Bullough et al. (2014) caution that focusing solely on resilience or agility may not be sufficient in complex and uncertain environments (Bullough et al., 2014). While resilience supports survival, it may not ensure success, and agility, though it may offer immediate success, could risk long-term sustainability (Doz and Kosonen, 2008). In the context of branding, the closest concept to the resilience of brand voice explored in academia is brand resilience. Zarei et al. (2020) define it as a brand’s ability to withstand or quickly recover from difficult conditions like market volatility or negative publicity. Factors such as a strong brand identity, which resonates with consumers and is consistently communicated across various platforms, play a crucial role in enhancing brand resilience (Zarei et al., 2020).

Theoretical Background

Before examining the dynamics of a brand’s voice in volatile conditions, it is crucial to first position its role in brand identity. To lay a theoretical foundation for this exploration, this study draws upon David Aaker’s Theory of Brand Identity. While not the only framework exploring brand components, Aaker’s theory offers a comprehensive structure for identifying and examining the various elements of branding, including the potential position for a brand voice.

In the 1990s, David Aaker developed his Theory of Brand Identity, also known as Aaker's Brand Identity Model, which has significantly contributed to the brand management literature (Robichaud et al., 2012). Aaker, a distinguished marketing professor and brand consultant, introduced this model to provide an extensive framework for understanding and cultivating a brand’s identity (Aaker, 2023). The genesis of Aaker’s model coincided with an increasing awareness in marketing and business circles that a brand’s identity extends far beyond just its name and logo. This insight was particularly pertinent in an evolving competitive market landscape, where a distinct brand identity became a key differentiator and a critical factor for engaging customers (Silveira et al., 2013). Aaker’s model was groundbreaking, as it went beyond conventional marketing metrics, viewing a brand as a composite of assets and liabilities connected to its name and symbol (Joukanen et al., 2018). This comprehensive approach considers how these factors collectively influence the value a product or service delivers to its customers (Joukanen et al., 2018).

Aaker’s model emphasizes four key components of brand identity:

Table 1. David Aaker’s Brand Identity Model

Brand as a Product	Brand as an Organization	Brand as a Person	Brand as a Symbol
physical attributes, product scope, quality, value, uses, and users of the brand.	Organization behind the brand, including its values, culture, and philosophy.	Brand personality and customer-brand relationships.	The visual imagery and metaphors associated with the brand, including logos, mascots, and other symbolic elements.

The theory was a response to the need for a more holistic and strategic approach to branding, considering the growing complexity of consumer behaviour and market dynamics (Joukanen et al., 2018). Aaker's model has been influential in both academic and professional circles, shaping how companies approach building and managing their brand identities. A significant portion of scholarly work by Kapferer, Blomback, Kotler, and Pfoertsch views the brand as central to strategies in management and communication. Robichaud et al. (2012) express this concept through various elements such as brand names, logos, communication content, textual elements, and graphical aids.

Later, from the perspective of brand communication, Wijaya (2011) defined a brand as a mark that imprints on consumers' minds and emotions, thereby eliciting a particular sense of meaning and emotion. Consequently, the brand is not merely a logo, name, symbol, trademark, or the name of a product. A brand is defined as a promise (Morel, 2003). A brand is a relationship that is characterized by trust (McNally and Speak, 2004). According to Post (2005), a brand is the accumulation of an entity, a psychic connection that establishes a bond of loyalty with a buyer or potential buyer, and the perceived added value. Nilson (1998) delineated several criteria for characterizing a brand, which extend beyond its name. These criteria include a distinct value proposition, differentiation from other brands, attractiveness, and a prominent identity. Concurrently, branding is the process of establishing or perpetuating specific trail signs in the minds and souls of consumers through a variety of communication methods and strategies, thereby generating specific meaning and emotions that influence their lives (Wijaya, 2011). Therefore, branding activity is an integral part of the brand development process, serving as the vehicle for executing the brand communication strategy.

In this research, the author innovatively expands upon Aaker's Brand Identity Model by introducing an additional component: brand communication. This concept serves as an umbrella term, encompassing the more specific idea of a brand voice. By integrating brand communication into Aaker's framework, the research offers a fresh perspective, particularly focusing on the nuances and significance of a brand voice within its overall identity.

Table 2. Modified Aaker's Brand Identity Model including Brand Communication

Brand as a Product	Brand as an Organization	Brand as a Person	Brand as a Symbol	Brand Communication
physical attributes, product scope, quality, value, uses, and users of the brand.	organization behind the brand, including its values, culture, and philosophy.	brand personality and customer-brand relationships.	the visual imagery and metaphors associated with the brand, including logos, mascots, and other symbolic elements.	Brand voice at the core, messaging, tone of brand voice, syntax, style, etc.

Research Question

This research began with a comprehensive literature review on the concept of brand voice, particularly its behaviour in volatile environments. However, this review revealed a notable gap in existing studies, with limited data available for in-depth analysis. To address this gap, the author set out to investigate the potential influence of volatile environments on brand voice within the context of brand communication. Thus, the research question goes as follows:

How does a volatile environment impact brand voice within the realm of brand communication?

This research aims to investigate the impact of volatile environments on brand voice, a crucial component of brand communication. Early findings underscored a scarcity of research specifically focused on the

relationship between volatile environments and their effect on brand voice in brand communication, highlighting the need for this research.

Methods

This research implies an exploratory approach, which involves investigating a subject where little is known in order to gain insights and develop hypotheses for future research. Grounded in inductive reasoning, the research moves from specific observations to broader generalizations. Inductive reasoning involves collecting detailed data and identifying patterns within it to form conclusions. The author chose this method to analyse the nuances of brand voice within brand communication in diverse, volatile environments.

The research employs qualitative data analysis methods to explore these patterns. The author examines various case studies, each representing unique instances of how brands navigate and communicate within challenging and unstable contexts. By focusing on these case studies, the research aims to uncover patterns in how brand voice adapts and evolves in response to volatility. This detailed examination helps to understand the dynamics of brand communication in environments characterized by uncertainty and change.

The case studies for this research were selected from scientific databases (Scopus and Web of Science), based on their relevance and availability. Although the selection may not adhere strictly to a scientific methodology, it is firmly based on practical considerations. The chosen case studies represent a diverse range of volatile environments, providing a broad spectrum of contexts in which brand communication occurs. This diversity ensures a comprehensive exploration of brand voice adaptation and evolution. By including a variety of cases, the research aims to capture a wide array of patterns and insights, enhancing the robustness of the findings.

Case Study 1

Bank Z's Communication Dilemma During Turkey's 2001 Crisis, Nukhet Vardar, 2016 (Vardar, 2016)

Bank Z operated in a volatile business environment, where trust issues were prevalent. The bank organized its products according to financial expertise areas (such as private, consumer, and commercial banking, as well as credit cards) and concentrated on delivering 80% of its transactions via online and telephone banking. This required substantial technological investments and communication with customers about the ongoing changes at the bank, especially under volatile economic conditions. During the economic crisis, however, the bank continued its advertising, a decision that was critical and sensitive. The bank carefully crafted its communication to avoid directly mentioning the crisis, instead conveying positive messages to boost consumer morale. The communication style was calm and sensitive, giving the impression of a partnership between Bank Z and its customers. The brand consistently communicated themes like "credence", "trustworthiness", and being a reliable financial institution. Brand communication during the economic crisis was cautious yet bold. The bank chose messages that were realistic and offered solutions to potential problems faced by consumers. Consistency in its brand communication, emphasizing trust and reliability, played a significant role in maintaining its image and reputation.

During this period, Bank Z's brand communication strategies produced a positive outcome. The bank saw a continuous improvement in attracting new customers during the 2001 crisis. There was also a significant increase in unaided brand recall in 2009 compared to 2008. Financially, there was a notable improvement in consumer loans and credit card shares in the total loans, while commercial loans' share dropped. This positive outcome, including becoming the first bank to obtain a higher assessment than the country grade in emerging markets, indicated a promising future and attracted international investors.

Findings

Maintaining consistency with the brand's core values in communication is crucial.

The bank remained loyal to its core values throughout the volatile environment. The brand consistently communicated themes of trustworthiness and reliability, reflecting its long-standing commitment to these values. The bank's messaging focused on being "the bank that the world and Turkey have confidence in" and "the product of your trust" (Vardar, 2016). This consistency in brand communication was a crucial element in its overall continuity and coherence, indicating a strong adherence to its foundational values.

Communication adaptation to volatile environments

While Bank Z adapted its communication strategy to the challenging economic environment, it did not fundamentally change its brand voice. The adaptation was more about the style and tone of communication than a shift in core messaging. During the crisis, the bank chose a communication style that was calm and sensitive, aiming to reassure customers and project a sense of stability and partnership. This approach was in line with its established values of trust and reliability but tailored to address the specific needs and concerns of customers during a difficult time.

Positive messaging

In response to the crisis, the bank's brand voice included a focus on positive messaging. By carefully avoiding direct mention of the crisis and instead delivering uplifting messages, the bank maintained a positive and hopeful tone. This approach reinforced its core values by demonstrating a commitment to supporting its customers through challenging times, further strengthening the perception of the brand as reliable and trustworthy.

Adherence to brand values

Bank Z's brand voice during these volatile times was characterized by a steadfast adherence to its core values of trust and reliability while skilfully adapting its communication style and tone to meet the challenges of the economic environment. The bank managed to uphold its core brand identity while effectively navigating the crisis, demonstrating flexibility without compromising on its foundational principles.

Case Study 2

The Effectiveness of Airline Crisis Management on Brand Protection: A Case Study of British Airways, Michael Grundy, Richard Moxon (2013), (Grundy et al., 2013)

This study analysed how British Airways managed four different crises and their impact on brand identity protection. To manage these crises, British Airways used several key methods:

- For the Heathrow crash, they released timely and consistent statements, utilized a minimization strategy to frame the incident positively, and praised the crew for their handling of the situation.
- During the cabin crew dispute, British Airways employed various communication channels, including social media, to control the information flow. They used bolstering strategies and evaded responsibility through media narratives.
- During the airspace closure crisis caused by the volcanic eruption, the airline prioritized providing instructive information while evading responsibility by challenging the decisions of regulators and governments. The CEO's involvement was notable for leading the industry's response. The case study highlighted the importance of crisis management in protecting brand identity. Successful management, as seen in the Heathrow crash and volcanic eruption crises, involved effective, efficient, and accurate communication that reflected the airline's core brand values. Conversely, less successful management, like the Terminal 5 crisis, resulted in a decline in brand identity due to ineffective communication and a lack of leadership voice.

Findings

British Airways handled various crises, demonstrating the critical role of consistent and effective brand communication in crisis management. The airline's ability to maintain its brand values and adapt its communication strategy to different crises played a significant role in protecting and even enhancing its brand identity.

Maintaining consistency with the brand's core values in communication is crucial.

British Airways generally remained loyal to its core brand values, particularly during the Heathrow crash and the volcanic ash crisis. The airline's response to these crises was characterized by effective, efficient, and accurate communication, reflecting its commitment to safety, experience, and quality of service. This was evident in how they managed the media narrative, praised their crew, and showed care for victims, aligning with their values of safety and reliability.

Adaptation of brand voice

British Airways adapted its brand voice to various crisis situations. For instance, during the cabin crew dispute, they utilized social media to control information flow and address the needs of different stakeholders. This shows an adaptation in their communication approach, catering to the changing media landscape and customer interaction platforms. British Airways faced challenges in maintaining the brand voice consistently across all crises. A lack of effective communication and leadership marked the Terminal 5 crisis, leading to a perceived decline in some of the airline's core values, such as experience and quality of service. This inconsistency negatively impacted the brand's perception during this particular crisis.

Leadership plays a crucial role in brand communication

The role of leadership, especially the CEO, was pivotal in reinforcing brand communication during crises. For example, the CEO's presence on the test flight during the volcanic ash crisis and his statements during various crises played a significant role in shaping the narrative and reinforcing the brand's values of leadership and responsibility.

Throughout crises, British Airways's brand voice largely remained loyal to its core values of safety, experience, and quality service. However, there were instances where the brand voice struggled to maintain consistency, underscoring the challenges of crisis management in preserving brand integrity. The airline's adaptation of its communication strategies to different situations and the crucial role of effective leadership in reinforcing the brand voice were key takeaways.

Case Study 3

Social Media and Culture in Crisis Communication: McDonald's and KFC Crises Management in China, Lin Zhu, Deepa Anagondahalli, Ai Zhang (2017), (Zhu et al., 2017)

McDonald's and KFC, as multinational fast-food chains, faced crises in China due to unethical practices exposed by mainstream media in 2012. Their different approaches to handling these crises led to varying outcomes. McDonald's quick and effective use of social media, especially its rapid response to the crisis, played a crucial role in its successful crisis management. Conversely, KFC's delayed response harmed its reputation, given that the extent of reputational damage in social media-mediated crises often correlates with promptness.

The role of culture in crisis communication was a significant factor in the differing outcomes for McDonald's and KFC. McDonald's quick apology was seen positively in the collectivist Chinese culture, where apologies are viewed as recognition of a burden suffered by others, rather than an admission of fault. This approach exceeded stakeholders' expectations and helped alleviate the crisis's severity. Conversely, KFC's delayed apology and perceived evasion of responsibility led to negative ramifications. The study highlights that understanding local cultural practices is crucial for effective crisis management, especially for multinational corporations. McDonald's emerged stronger from the crisis, while KFC took over a year to recover. The cultural perception of each company's response strategy accounts for this

difference. McDonald's strategy of promptly acknowledging the issue and apologizing resonated well with the Chinese public, improving its trust and reputation. Conversely, the Chinese public perceived KFC's approach as less sincere and responsive, which resulted in a prolonged negative public perception and a slower recovery.

This case study illustrates the critical importance of understanding and integrating cultural nuances in crisis communication strategies, particularly in the context of social media. The contrasting outcomes for McDonald's and KFC underscore the significance of prompt and culturally sensitive responses in managing crises effectively.

Findings

Adapting the brand voice to cultural environments is crucial

The study highlights the importance of adapting brand communication strategies to local cultural contexts. McDonald's quick apology, which was well-received in the collectivist Chinese culture, indicates an understanding and adaptation of its brand voice to align with cultural expectations and norms. This approach helped alleviate the severity of the crisis and improved public perception.

Consistency with core brand values

The research suggests that McDonald's was able to maintain a brand voice consistent with its values, such as responsibility and customer care, by quickly responding and apologizing. Chinese consumers perceived KFC's approach as evasive and slow, suggesting a potential misalignment with these values.

The impact of brand communication on public perception is significant.

The study implies that the manner in which both companies communicated during the crisis significantly impacted public perception. McDonald's approach, which was more aligned with the expectations of the Chinese public, helped in restoring and even strengthening its brand image post-crisis. In contrast, KFC's approach led to prolonged negative public perception and a slower recovery.

Case Study 4

The Power of Consumers on Social Media: A Case Study of Balenciaga's Crisis Communication, Paula Gárgoles, Gabriela Ambás, 2023 (Gargoles et al., 2023)

This case study centers on the significant crisis that luxury brand Balenciaga encountered following the launch of a contentious holiday campaign in November 2022. The campaign featured children with sadomasochism-inspired teddy bears/handbags, which was widely perceived as sexualizing children and promoting paedophilia. This resulted in an immediate and significant public backlash, particularly on social media platforms like TikTok, where the incident went viral. In response to the crisis, Balenciaga's initial communication strategy involved releasing a statement of apology and announcing legal action against the parties responsible for creating the campaign set. However, the perception of these actions as shifting blame instead of accepting full responsibility did not sit well with the public. Later, they adopted a more accountable stance, acknowledging errors and accepting responsibility. The brand's communication evolved from a slow and unclear response to a more direct acknowledgment of the mistakes made, along with a commitment to learn and implement changes.

The crisis had a significant impact on Balenciaga's reputation, leading to the vandalization of its stores, a decline in social media engagement, and public statements of disassociation from celebrities associated with the brand. Balenciaga's creative director and president issued separate apologies, taking responsibility and outlining actions to prevent similar incidents in the future. The scandal led to Balenciaga maintaining a low profile in subsequent public appearances and social media activities.

Findings

Radical adaptation to volatile environments

Balenciaga's brand voice had to adapt significantly to the dynamics of social media during the crisis. The brand, known for its high-end fashion status, had to navigate a digital environment where consumers' power is amplified, and public perception can rapidly change. This required a more responsive, transparent, and empathetic communication style compared to traditional brand messaging.

Maintaining core brand values

Balenciaga's response initially struggled to maintain its core brand values of exclusivity and luxury amidst the crisis. People perceived the brand's initial silence and later defensive stance as inconsistent with the high-end fashion brand's expectations of accountability and responsibility. However, the brand eventually shifted towards a more responsible and empathetic approach, realigning with its values of quality and customer care.

The mismatch between the brand voice and the expectations of the audience

The way Balenciaga handled the crisis initially led to negative public perception, indicating a disconnect between the brand voice and the expectations of its audience. The brand's later efforts to rectify this by taking accountability and being more transparent showed an attempt to restore its voice in line with its luxury and responsible image.

Responsiveness and transparency

A crisis highlighted the importance of responsiveness and transparency in a brand voice. Balenciaga's delayed response initially exacerbated the situation. However, its subsequent actions to address the issues head-on and communicate openly about the steps taken to rectify the situation helped to some extent in regaining consumer trust.

Necessity to adapt the brand voice

The Balenciaga case study demonstrates the importance of quickly adapting the brand voice to suit the platform (in this case, social media) and maintaining core brand values even in a crisis. It also highlights the critical role of responsiveness and transparency in shaping public perception and trust in a brand during volatile times.

Findings

To summarize the findings drawn from the case studies, the author created a summary table.

Table 3. Summary table of the case studies's findings

	Case Study 1	Case Study 2	Case Study 3	Case Study 4
Consistency with brand core values in brand communication	X	X	X	X
Adaptation of communication without changing brand voice	X			
Positive messaging	X			
Adaptation of brand voice		X	X	X
Challenges in maintaining brand voice		X		
Importance of leadership voice in crisis communication		X		X
Impact of brand voice on public perception	X	X	X	X
Adaptation to social media dynamics				X
Mismatch between brand voice and audiences' expectations				X
Necessity to adapt brand voice to volatile environment	X	X	X	X

The synthesis of findings from the case studies examining brand communication in volatile environments reveals a nuanced interplay of various factors. These findings highlight the importance of brands staying consistent with their fundamental brand values in their communication strategies. A prominent theme was

adaptability, with some brands retaining their traditional brand voice while others evolving it to align with new circumstances. Experts deemed positive messaging and effective leadership crucial in defining and maintaining the brand voice. Additionally, the case studies highlighted the substantial influence of brand voice on public perception, along with the complexities encountered in aligning it with audience expectations, particularly during transitions to social media platforms. Ultimately, the studies suggest that the capacity to agilely modify the brand voice in response to fluctuating environmental conditions is critical for maintaining relevance and resonance with audiences.

Discussion

Theoretical Contribution

The Projection Model of Brand Identity into Brand Communication

The author's analysis of the case studies, which focused on how organizations adapted their brand communications in volatile environments across diverse platforms and audiences, led the author to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of brand communication strategies. This research posits that brand communication transcends being merely a component of a brand's identity. Instead, it serves as a holistic representation of the brand's values, foundational characteristics, and the array of attributes delineated in David Aaker's model. In essence, brand communication is a mirror that reflects these aspects of the brand both internally and externally. At its core is the brand voice, which not only is rooted in but also encapsulates the fundamental essence and ethos of the brand itself (Figure 1). This perspective underscores the brand voice as a critical element in broadcasting the brand's identity and values to the world.

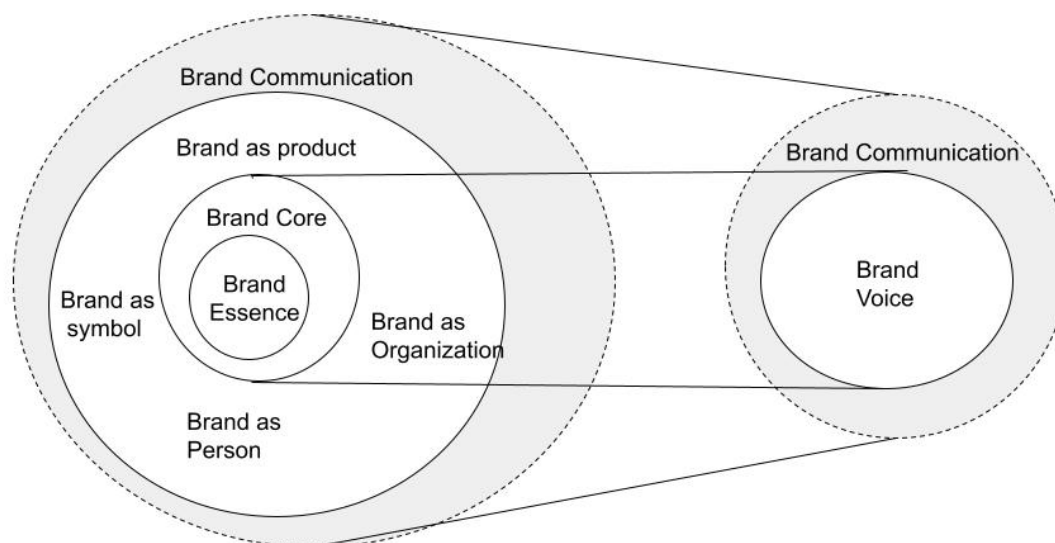


Figure 1. The Projection Model of Brand Identity into Brand Communication

The Projection Model of Brand Identity into Brand Communication in Volatile Environments

This study investigates whether volatile environments influence brand voice. Through an analysis of case studies, it becomes evident that adaptability is a crucial requirement for brand communication in all instances within such environments. However, despite this adaptability, the core brand values remain steadfast and unaffected by the surrounding volatility. To elucidate these findings, the author integrates the concept of volatile environments into The Projection Model of Brand Identity (Figure 1). This

integration leads to the introduction of the notion of “resilient agility” in the context of brand voice. “Resilient agility” refers to the brand voice capacity to remain consistent with its core brand values while simultaneously adapting to the shifting dynamics of volatile environments (Figure 2). This dual capability ensures that the brand voice not only survives volatile environments but also thrives, maintaining its integrity and resonance with the audience.

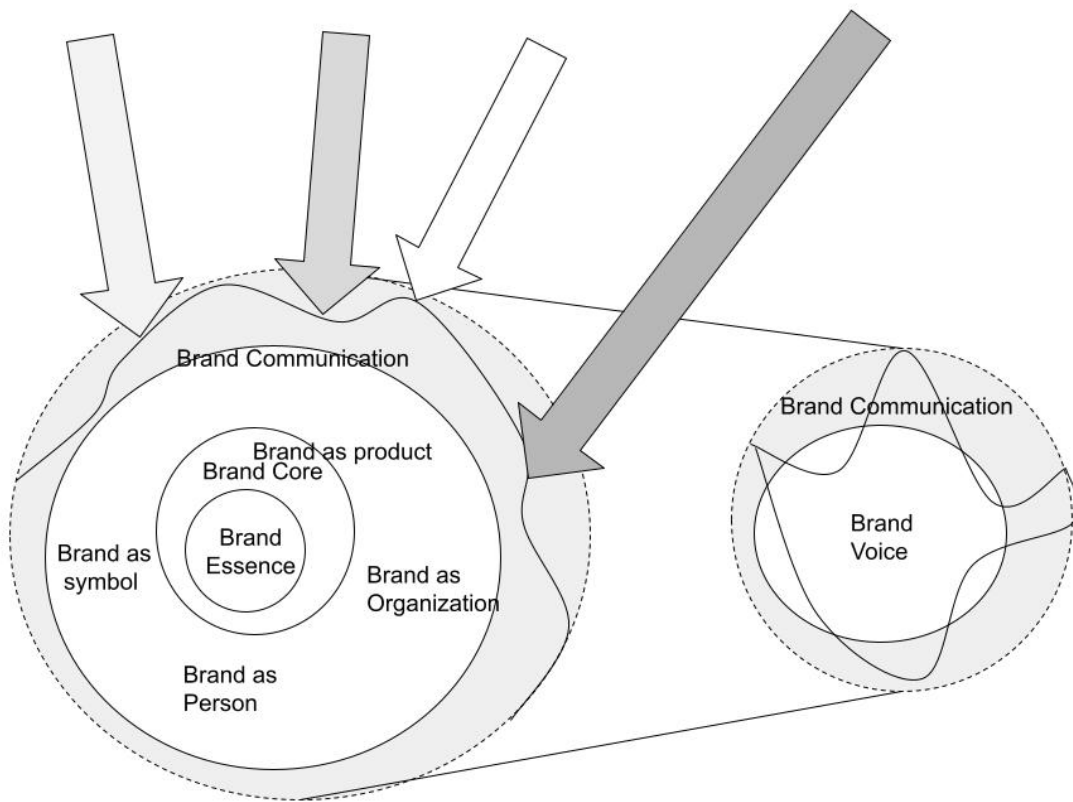


Figure 2. The Projection Model of Brand Identity into Brand Communication in Volatile Environments

Figure 2 depicts volatile environments as imposing arrows aimed at the periphery of brand communication. These arrows symbolize the influence or pressure that external changes or crises exert on various facets of the brand. Despite this external pressure, it is crucial that the brand identity and its core values remain intact. Therefore, brand communication, which is positioned at the forefront of the brand and serves as the initial contact point with customers, must adapt to these volatile environmental changes. This adaptation acts as a buffer, protecting and preserving the brand’s core identity (Figure 2).

The model emphasizes the need for a dynamic and agile approach in these external facets of the brand to effectively navigate stakeholder perceptions while upholding the brand's integrity in unpredictable circumstances. Although the brand’s foundational values and essence are constant, its communication strategies and brand voice need to be responsive to external volatility. This flexibility in brand communication, and by extension, in brand voice, is vital. It is through these channels that stakeholders engage with the brand and develop their perceptions, particularly during volatile times. Thus, the adaptation of brand communication and brand voice is a strategic imperative to ensure the brand remains relevant and resonates with its audience in the midst of uncertainty.

Conclusions

Addressing the research gap in existing studies related to the concept of brand voice and its behaviour in volatile environments, the author aimed to investigate the potential influence of dynamic and volatile surroundings on brand voice within the context of brand communication. To achieve this goal, the author examined various case studies and introduced two new models for projecting brand identity into brand communication, including one tailored for volatile environments.

In volatile environments, only the core values of a brand may and must remain intact; however, the brand voice within brand communication must adapt in accordance with the ever-changing circumstances. Therefore, we deem the concept of "resilient agility" in brand voice crucial. This concept encapsulates the brand voice's ability to adapt to shifting conditions while remaining faithful to its core values. The research process has introduced an extension of Aaker's Brand Identity Model, offering a valuable contribution to both academia and practitioners. The author expands upon Aaker's Brand Identity Model by positioning brand communication as a reflection of the brand identity, emphasizing the significance of preserving core values in communication strategies.

The analysis of the case studies underscores the strategic necessity of adjusting the brand voice in response to external factors. Doing so ensures the brand's continued relevance and connection with its audience during volatile times. Consequently, the research findings make significant contributions to the understanding of brand identity and communication, both in academic and practical contexts, particularly within the fields of marketing and brand management. This research highlights the importance of flexibility in brand communication and suggests that responsiveness to environmental changes is important in maintaining brand integrity and fostering audience engagement.

Limitations and Further Research

The scope of the conducted qualitative research, which primarily relies on a selected number of case studies, limits its insights. This suggests that a more comprehensive approach, perhaps integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods, could provide a deeper understanding of brand communication strategies in volatile environments. In particular, content analysis might yield further insights into the resilient agility of brand voice, areas not extensively explored in the current research. The findings are meaningful for academic research, which has seen limited exploration of brand voice within brand communication. Industry professionals could also gain from these insights, particularly in formulating adaptable communication strategies for turbulent times, which they could continuously refine through post-event analysis. Future research could examine the complex relationships between brand voice, communication, and identity, examining how each facet of brand identity influences the overall brand strategy.

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