USING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO DESIGN FOOD MARKETING STRATEGIES

The “Pork Fat” Rumor in Indonesia

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Isu (rumor) tidak hanya terjadi dalam peraturan bisnis, tetapi juga sering menerpa dunia bisnis. Dalam kasus bisnis, objek isu bisa terjadi ke produk yang dihatikan, persaingan, atau pengusaha. Sumber ini bisa berasal dari perusahaan-pengusaha sejenis, biasa pada benih dari masyarakat luas atau komunitas. Reaksi perusahaan yang terkena isu pun beragam. Ada yang tidak menanggapi sama sekali, ada yang melakukan kampanye, ada pula yang menahan gasa atau wabah pihak ketiga (pemerintah, pemeriksa masyarakat) untuk meredam isu.


Keywords: food products, habit, Islam, rumor, rumor.

Introduction

A rumor about food products that were alleged to contain pork fat received widespread attention and concern in Indonesia in 1988. Of the 200 million Indonesian people, 89 percent are Muslims who are prohibited by religious law from eating pork products. Therefore, it is understandable that rumors are received widespread emotions. Indonesian Muslims quickly expressed their disappointment and resentment to the Indonesian government for not better protecting the rights of Muslims (Wasih, 1988). The “pork fat rumor” originated from an article based on a study by Dr. Tri Susanto, a food scientist from Malang, East Java. Dr. Susanto conducted a survey that was intended to build Muslims
awareness and knowledge of named food labeling and to raise questions about the meaning of some of the terms used. The result of the survey appeared in Canopy (Susanto, 1988), a student journal with only about 100 copies in circulation. In the article, Dr. Susanto described the categories of food and beverages prohibited under Moslem law and explained his concerns about food labels. He was primarily worried about labels that included at least one of the following ingredients: gelatin, shortening, lard or alcohol. Dr. Susanto feared his belief that became thus word fact clarity, the food items that listed these as ingredients may contain pork fat; if so, they would be haram (prohibited for Moslems) products. Included in the article was a list of 34 food products he found in his sample that listed one or more of these ingredients on its label.

Only a week after the article appeared, Islamic community began to react. In Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia, the article was discussed and debated by an intellectual Islamic group. The topic was argued in sermons in most mosques across cities. However, most people had no access to the original article that appeared in Canopy (1988) magazine. The information they received therefore was hearsay.

The story then moved from news item to rumor after photocopies of list of food brands named in Dr. Susanto's research were made available. As more copies were made the articulated lists gradually underwent considerable revision. One of the copies found gave 50 different food names, all listed as being in the haram category. (Esip, 1988). Many of these were brands that had not been included in Susanto's survey. A large number of them were international names such as Danone, Colgate, and various Lever Brothers products that have been sold in Indonesia since World War II. In addition, local brands were named; examples were ABC Soy Sauce, Indonesia (instant noodle), and Sugar (candies).

The rumor successfully was brought under control after about a year when the government teamed up with Islamic leaders to reassure the citizens. The Indonesian government basically denied the rumor: Some of the producers that suffered from the rumor had done nothing to try to manage it. Others tried to resolve the problem by issuing a statement or distributing informative pamphlets about their products in which the rumor was refuted. On average, sales of the involved products decreased between 25 percent and 75 percent in the year after the rumor ("From Pork Fat .... ") (1990). About a year later, sales began to rise again.

This research explored strategies that might be effective in combating rumor in Indonesia. It is important that Indonesia has a different culture and type of government involvement than the Western societies where the social psychology theories have been developed. This study connected and extended two approaches previously used to test rumor-quelling strategies: information processing theory (Chesnutt, Calder & Socialsan, 1981) and persuasive theory (Gey & Debbra, 1991).

Cases and Studies

A rumor can be defined as a "specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure evidence of evidence being present" (Alport & Postman, 1947). Rumors have been studied by psychologists, social psychologists to determine their process and causes (see, for example, Stern, 1902; Jung, 1910; Hart
1916; Knapp, 1944; Allport & Postman, 1947; Festinger, 1957; Shibatan, 1966; Lienhard, 1975; Rosenow, 1976). Currently, in many advanced countries, marketers have begun to pay more close attention to ru-
ners. In the last two decades, several large producers were victims of vicious rumors. (Tybor, Calder & Steinhall, 1981; Koenig, 1985; Fiske & DeRovac, 1991; Kappeler, 1992; Koller, 1992; Miller, 1992). They are among those who would like to find an effective strategy to control rumors. 

Food can be extremely sensitive when it is the object of rumors. In the United States, McDonald's, General Foods, Spilby's Bubble Yum, and Coca-Cola (Koenig, 1985) all have experienced similar situations. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, in some European countries (e.g., Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy) there was also a rumor that well-
known brands of food products such as those made by Coca-Cola, Cadbury-
Scherples, Martini, BSN, and Gerovits-
Danone. These products were accused of being toxic and causing cancer (Kappeler, 1989).

In Indonesia, foods have not been the only foods involved in rumors. Another rumor accused a noodle restaur-

tant of "using baby's dead bodies," and yet another said biscuits were "poisonous." Nevertheless, those rumors were not pro-

longed and damaging as was linked to religious belief, aroused more emotion than did the contamination issues that were related to health. Many businesses entities that were hurt by the rumor issue in Indo-

nesia went to the government for help in dealing with the rumor. While some com-

panies conduct their own public relations campaigns even these separate campaigns referred to the government effort in mitigat-
ing the rumor. On one occasion, PT Food Specialities Indonesia, the producer of Dancow milk, spent about $200,000 for advertising and press events to which they invited not only government officials, but also Moody leaders. This company in-

vited Moody leaders and government of-

ficials to visit its plant facilities in East Java. The day after, all large newspapers and the television station (at that time there was only one TV station which be-

longed to the government) publicized an event where those leaders drank Dancow Milk in order to demonstrate that it was not harmful. Without the involvement of the government as well as Moody leaders, the campaigns undoubtedly would have had little credibility. The government as well as Moody leaders were needed. 

Involvement of the government in the rumor case is thought to be necessary. Rumors seem to threaten Indonesia's po-

titical stability, especially causing reli-
gious and racial tension and disruption employment. Still, it is unclear to what extent people believed the government refutation. What we usually know is that the negative comments in the mass media ceased. However, as discussed by Shibatan (1965), there is never a guaran-
etee that a rumor won't come back. Even today some people still appear to avoid the food products involved in the "fork fat" rumor; though they do not discuss their concern openly, it is likely that they con-

inue to have negative feeling about the food, feelings that were targeted by the rumor.

Marketing of foods and food prod-

ucts in Indonesia is rather complicated because it is not only related to issues of health, safety and region. It also is con-

nected to unethical or racial relationships like between the Indonesian Chinese and the Moodies, even between the people and the government. Societal, cultural (in-

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cluding religious) and government differences suggest that marketers consider adjusting marketing strategies that may have been adopted from western countries.

For Indonesian Muslims, there are strong religious restrictions related to consuming foods. Foods must not only promote good health, but also must avoid three things that make a food product haram (prohibited for Muslims) (Gus, 1996): first, any meat or fat, especially that made from pork and dog; second, food that contains alcoholic beverages and alcoholic beverages itself; and third, animals that are not "slaughtered in the name of Allah" (meaning that a religious person is present when the animal is slaughtered). Thus, Indonesian Muslims are not only concerned about food content, but also about how the producer slaughters animals (Burr, 1996).

In sum, there is a strong tendency for Indonesian Muslims to restrict their diets based on religious laws. Many people refuse to take any risk and prefer to keep away from food that is perceived as non-halal. Perceptions of the food industry are dilemmas because the Indonesian Chinese ethnic group (about 7 million of the total 200 million population) controls about 75 percent of all private economic activity in Indonesia ("The Overseas Chinese," 1992), including the food processing industry. Because Chinese food contains pork fat, people infer that any food made by the Chinese is likely to contain haram ingredients. Since rumors evolve as part of a social process that combines elements in various ways, the interaction between the Chinese, the Muslims, and the Indonesian government should be addressed. This interaction is another factor that affects the attitudes of Indonesian Muslims toward food products made by the Chinese. Resentment of the ethnic Chinese and their economic clout in Indonesia is nothing new; it dates back almost to their arrival in Indonesia centuries ago. Prior to Indonesian independence (1945), the Dutch relied primarily on the Chinese to keep the colonial enterprise moving, a role which served the interest of both sides. The merchant Chinese occupied a nebulous middle ground between the colonized and the colonizer; Chinese merchants were granted monopolies in a wide assortment of commodities and goods; in many areas they acted as de facto tax collectors for the Dutch; in addition Chinese trading syndicates took care of the colony's banking needs. Over time, their economic links with the Dutch powers enabled the Chinese to purchase peasant, Dutch officials and the przyjaciolenie—"the Javanese aristocracy"—in their debt (Schwarz, 1994).

After Indonesia achieved independence in 1945, the only entrepreneurs really to be involved in the Indonesian economy were Chinese entrepreneurs. They had the necessary skills, experience, an international network, and capital. They also had connections with the indigenous aristocracy who became government officials. However, the connection between the Chinese and the aristocracy made the rank and file prabumi (indigenous people) unhappy. The Chinese linked with—and protection from—the Dutch (during colonialism) and the new aristocracy left feeling of antipathy among the prabumi toward all Chinese in Indonesia (Rush, 1991). The reason was simply that the Chinese were relatively more wealthy than the indigenous people. In addition, almost all the indigenous were Besakims and almost all the Chinese were tsoi-Moslems. This dichotomy worsened in the 1980s and the 1990s when the Indonesian government deregulated its economy. Schwarz (1994) noted:

What was new was that the relatively low-profile Chinese ryacons had been thrust
into the public spotlight like never before. By selling shares in the stock market, for example, businessmen had to disclose a degree of corporate information previously unthinkable. Their fast-growing banks became household names as they advertised lavishly for new customers. Their real estate investments spread their corporate existence throughout Java's cities and countryside. The press played its part, with business newspapers and general-interest magazines falling over other to dig up details of Indonesia's corporate elite. The biggest of the Chinese firms had been very wealthy for many years, but now their wealth was visible to everybody (p. 99).

Interactions between race, religion, class and politics in Indonesian social processes are important in analyzing a food contamination rumor such as the "fork fat" rumor. The contamination theme may have symbolized fears and unhappiness towards big business. According to Koenig (1985), the focus of contamination rumors is the target of rumors - that is, the products themselves and the producers who make them. But in the fork-fat rumor, the conspiracy theme is also important. In conspiracy rumors, the allegation which connects the rumor victims with "a political, religious, or other ideological movement that has a viable target..." (Koenig, 1985, p.59) is more important than the product and producers.

In the case of the "fork fat" rumor in Indonesia, the target was not an individual, but a group of business enterprises, those which belonged to Indonesian Chinese. Explicitly, this rumor did not attack "policies or practices promoted by a commercial enterprise that were deemed threatening" (Koenig, 1985); however, implicitly it targeted business practices in which Chinese were the dominant players in every sector, including food processing. For these reasons, it is important to examine those consumer attitudes that are related to rumors which are deeply influenced by beliefs and social processes that may be quite different from corresponding attitudes in Western societies (see for example, Iyer & Debevec, 1991; Calder & Steinhall, 1981; Kaperher, 1989). Because this study was conducted in Indonesia, its findings may be helpful to other interest groups such as business leaders from multinational companies doing business in Indonesia - Indonesian businesspeople in the non-food industries (including other rumor-sensitive areas such as financial services [see Koenig, 1985]), the Indonesian government, Modern leaders, and Indonesian Chinese business people.

Theoretical Framework

The focus of this study is consumers' attitudes toward food products in Indonesia that were rumored to contain "fork fat." In a laboratory setting, consumer attitudes in Indonesia that were measured through manipulation of communication variables such as source of the message, and its content and tone. Two major communication theories are important to this study: information processing theory and persuasive theory. The discussion of general concept of attitude, attitude change in information processing theory, and attitude change in persuasive theory will be briefly discussed here.

Concept of Attitude

There are many different formal definitions of attitude (see, for example, Allport, 1935; Nelson, 1939; Campbell, 1965; Greenwald, 1964; McGuire, 1966; Kiesler, Collins & Miller, 1969; Aaker, Kumar & Day, 1995). Extensive discussion of these definitions can be found in Fishbein (1975) and Ajzen (1993). Fishbein (1975)
Attitude Change in Information Processing Theory

Information processing theory is based on the premise that individuals make judgments not only from information that is directly provided but also from information about their environment and store those experiences in their memories. When individuals make a judgment, they retrieve relevant or associated information that is already in their minds (Bettman, 1979). He asserts that information is stored in both short-term and long-term memory. Because the capacity of short-term memory is limited, some of this information is forgotten and some—particularly relevant information for future judgments—will be stored in the long-term memory.

Information processing theory asserts that once information is stored in the long-term memory, it will stay there permanently (Bettman, 1979; Lynch & Sroll, 1982; Keller, 1987). Lewis (1979) observed that once information is fully comprehended and encoded in long-term memory, it will be available. However, for several reasons, this information is not always automatically accessible. It might be compete with other information or interfere with other information which is learned later in
an individual’s life (Lynch & Stull, 1982; Tulving & Parcak, 1971). Lynch & Stull (1982) suggest that individuals use "external retrieval cues" to retrieve that information. For example, adults might forget their first grade teacher’s name because they have had many different teachers in their life. A picture of the teacher might help them to retrieve that name (Lynch & Stull, 1982).

Atkinson & Shiffrin (1968) suggested the so-called memory control process, in which individuals organize the flow of information into and out of memory. The memory control process consists of rehearsal, coding, transfer, placement, retrieval, and response generation (Bettman, 1979). These factors are not independent of each other. The processes of coding and retrieval interact with each other in affect recall (Tulving & Thompson, 1973). Individuals retrieve information from their memory at the same time they transfer and code new information by associating it with already stored information (Keller, 1987; Lynch & Stull, 1982). Information stored in memory must be retrieved from long-term memory to short-term memory before making a particular judgment (Bettman, 1979).

In addition to the so-called memory control process, Anderson (1983) found what he calls the associative network model (see also Collins & Loftus, 1975). This model refers to the way individuals store the meaning of verbal materials in long-term memory. It indicates that information is stored in the network of long-term memory. The network consists of memory nodes that represent the stored information or concept; these lines connecting the nodes indicate the association between the nodes. According to this model, individuals retrieve information from the long-term memory through a process called "spreading activation" (Collins & Loftus, 1975). For example, new information (a stimulus) activates a node, and this activation will spread through the network and activate other related nodes. Each node that is activated represents a memory that is recalled. In the field of advertising, Hutchinson & Moore (1984) found that a least five pieces of information can be stored the memory nodes: brand name, brand characteristics, advertising about the brand, the product category, and evaluative reactions to the brand and the ad (see also Keller, 1987).

From the information processing perspective, Tybout, Calder & Sterman (1981) developed two marketing strategies (storage and retrieval strategies) to help business leaders whose firms were associated with a rumor. These researchers believe that consumers process rumor not because they believe it, but because they evaluate the object by associating the rumor with concepts stored in the memory nodes of the long-term memory. Both the storage and retrieval strategies developed by Tybout, Calder & Sterman (1981) were aimed at disconnecting the association between the object and the rumor. In order to do this, Tybout, Calder & Sterman (1981) suggested using a second object or concept to link with either the rumored object or the rumor. For example, in the storage strategy a second object is needed to link with the rumor. In the retrieval strategy, the rumored object was linked to a positive image which has been learned in the past by individuals and stored in their memories.

The usefulness of the information processing theory in changing individual attitudes is not recognized only in marketing and advertising (see, for example, Keller, 1987; Mowen, 1995) and in social psychology. Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) for
example, use this theory in the so-called “expectancy-value model” to demonstrate that individuals form beliefs about an object by associating it with certain attributes. They believe that cognitive or information-processing theory can be used to form individuals’ attitudes.

**Attitude Change Persuasive Theory**

Though researchers have shown that information-processing theory might be effective in changing individual attitudes, traditionally marketers have used persuasive techniques to quell rumors (see several cases in Koenig, 1985). For example, when Procter & Gamble was rumored to be associated with the Unification Church of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon (the Unification Church), it used letters from church leaders such as Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell that were sent to American consumers to convince them that the rumor was just a rumor (Koenig, 1985). In Indonesia, business leaders used Muslim leaders, government officials, and food scientists to convince Muslim consumers to come back and purchase their products after the products had been accused of containing pork fat (“From Pork Fat,” 1996). It is believed that when a company is associated with a negative rumor, it may lose credibility; the company needs a third credible party to persuade consumers to come back (see Koenig, 1985; Iyer & Debevec, 1991).

According to Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), research about the effectiveness of persuasive theory in changing individuals’ attitudes come primarily from original work of the Yale Communication Research Program under the direction of Carl J. Hovland (see Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953). Hovland and his colleagues found that source credibility plays an important role in persuasive communication. Source credibility refers to the extent to which a source is perceived to have expertise and trustworthiness in topic of concern. Source expertise is defined as a source that is viewed as a result of the audience as having knowledge and unbiased information (see Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993; Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman, 1993). The greater the expertise and trustworthiness of an information source, the more likely the audience will be to perceive the source as credible. From their experiment, Hovland & Weiss (1951) found that messages attributed to a high credibility source were more effective in changing attitudes than those attributed to a low credibility source. They noted, “Subjects changed their opinion in the cases where the material was attributed to a ‘high credible’ source than when attributed to a ‘low credible source’.

In the study of rumor, Iyer and Debevec found that the source attributed to a rumor influences consumers’ reception of the rumor. They criticized Tybout, Calder & Sternthal’s information processing theory approach and argued that the effect of storage and retrieval strategies on consumers attitudes might be different if the subjects were told that the rumor came from a trustworthy source. The refutation strategy used by Tybout, Calder & Sternthal (1991) might have had different results if they had manipulated the source of the refuter in their experiment (Iyer & Debevec, 1991).

Iyer and Debevec (1991) linked a rumor about the negative effect of second-hand cigarette smoke to different sources expected to have different level of credibility.
In addition to manipulating the source, researchers in persuasive communication suggest that message content be manipulated. Hovland, Lumsdaine and Sheffield (1949) for example, compared two-sided messages (presenting both pro and cons) with one-sided (only pro or only con) messages. They found that, except when subjects already were convinced about the message, presenting two sides of an argument was more persuasive than simply presenting one side. Subjects perceived that two-sided messages were fairer than one-sided messages, and the two-sided messages tend to lower subjects' inclinations to agree (Jones & Brehm, 1970).

In summary, information processing theory suggests that a rumor can be quelled only by disconnecting the association between a rumor and a rumored object. Persuasive theory, on the other hand, suggests that to be effective strategy must be linked to a source that is credible. Empirical study using information processing theory found that information processing theory-based strategy (i.e., retrieval strategy and storage strategy) were more effective than other strategies and that persuasive theory-based strategies were even less effective than using no strategy at all. A second empirical study found, however, that persuasive refutation strategies linked to "credible sources" were more effective than using no strategy at all and was effective in suppressing rumors.

Methodology

This study used a 3 x 5 factorial design which involved two treatments: three levels of rumor commentator and five levels of rumor quelling strategy. A rumor commentator is defined as an authoritative entity (individual, group, agency, or institution) that comments on an existing rumor. This entity may be perceived by those who see/near the entity's name linked to the rumor either as a neutral commentator or as a commentator who is a stakeholder that is, has some kind of vested interest in the outcome of rumor. This vested interest may affect the commentator's perceived credibility. In this design, each of the three levels of rumor commentator represent different degrees in consumers' perceptions about the gain/loss neutrality of the entity as associated with a particular rumor. Rumor commentators are categorized as (i) negative, if consumers perceive that the commentator has something to lose if the rumor is believed; (ii) neutral, if consumers perceive that the commentator has nothing to gain or lose whether or not the rumor is believed; (iii) positive, if consumers perceive that the commentator has something to gain if the truth about the rumors is presented.

The rumor-quelling strategy is defined as a careful plan or method (Webster, 1989) for dealing with commercial rumor. This strategy has five levels in this study: "refutation strategy by a low credibility source in a conciliatory tone," "refutation strategy by a neutral source," "retrieval strategy, storage strategy, and the "do-nothing" strategy. Refutation strategy, for example, for purposes of this research, is defined as a careful plan or method that is intended to discredit a rumor by saying that the rumor is not true. A low credibility source is defined as a source who is not perceived as possessing either "expertise, objectivity, or trustworthiness" (Solomon, 1996). A neutral source is defined as a source that is perceived by consumers as being a stakeholder. The comments this source makes on the rumor are usually intended to provide neutral expertise based on existing knowledge or collected data. A conciliatory tone is defined as a mes-
Table 1. Factorial Design of the Present Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rumor</th>
<th>Rumor Quelling Strategies</th>
<th>Persuasive Refutation Strategies</th>
<th>Information Processing Strategies</th>
<th>Do-nothing Strategy</th>
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<td>Refutation by a low credibility source in conciliatory tone</td>
<td>Retrieval</td>
<td>Storage</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
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says tone that calls "... for a peaceful resolution of the difference between..." (Lyver & Dabrow, 1991) the victim of a rumor and its consumers.

In sum, the "refutation strategy by a low credibility source in conciliatory tone" is a plan or method developed by the victim of a rumor to discredit the rumor by saying in a peaceful manner that the rumor is not true. "Refutation strategy by a neutral source" is a plan or method intended to provide facts about the rumor by a source that has a neutral position. These two strategies are based on persuasive theory. Retrieval strategy is defined as a plan or method used to quell a rumor that is linked to an object by encouraging the public to retrieve positive thoughts about the object in order to dispel negative ones provided in the rumor (Tybald, Calder & Sterenthal, 1981). The storage strategy is defined as a plan or method to quell a rumor that is linked to an object by presenting the public with a second object that is "...intended to foster the association of the rumor attributes with a second object rather than with the object initially specified in the rumor" (Tybald, Calder & Sterenthal, 1981).

These two strategies are based on information processing theory. The "do-nothing" strategy is a plan or method to quell a rumor by not making any statement or taking any action against it (Koenig, 1985). Subject exposed to this strategy will form the control group in this design.

The dependent variable, attitudes, is defined as inferred "mental states used by individuals to structure the way they perceive their environment and guide the way they respond to it" (Asker, Kumar & Day, 1995). This study used the concept of "attitudes toward-the-object," that is, the inferred mental state used by individuals to structure the way they perceived a food product (I) before the food was subject to rumor, (ii) after the food was subject to rumor; (iii) and after they were exposed to a rumor quelling strategy.

In the complete version of this study that were eight basic proposition developers, each was followed by specific hypotheses. However, in this article...
the space is technically limited, only one of
the propositions is shown. The intended
proposition says: "The rumor and the ru-
nor-quelling strategies change subjects' attitudes toward the food product." This
proposition is aimed at providing data
regarding the first treatment (whether or
not planting the rumor) and the second
treatment (whether or not using rumor-
quelling strategies). Two hypotheses were
put forward in this instance. Hypotheses 1:
There will be a significant difference in
attitudes toward a food product before and
after the rumor is planted. Hypotheses 2:
There will be a significant difference in
attitudes toward a food product before and
after the rumor-quelling strategies are in-
corporated.

This study used three different sets of
questionnaires to measure its respondents' attitudes toward the food product. Each
was used to measure initial attitudes, atti-
tude after they were exposed to the rumor,
and attitude after they were exposed to a
rumor-quelling strategy. The data was
collected by using an experiment which
involved 305 Muslim students from the
University of Maledi (East Java) in August 1997. These 305 subjects were randomly assigned to 15
cells.

Findings

This study partially confirms find-
ings of previous study that found that the
effectiveness of the rumor-quelling stra-
tegies used varies with rumor com-
mentators. When a rumor commentator commends an existing rumor and (in
this situation) is perceived as either "ne-
gative" or "positive," storage strategy and
reputation by a neutral credibility source are
the most effective strategies. When rumor commentator is "neutral," storage
strategy appears to be as effective as per-
suasive refutation strategies (refutation by
a neutral credibility source and refutation
by a low credibility source), perhaps be-
cause both share similar message for-
at-that is a denial and justification.

However, this study does not confirm
findings of previous studies (Tybout, Cal-
der & Stenhal [1981] and Iyer & Debevec
[1991]) regarding the potential usefulness of a do-nothing strategy. In
deed, this study found that in all conditions
of rumor commentator, the do-nothing
strategy was least effective in its ability
to change subjects' attitudes. In particular,
this study suggests that a "do-something"
strategy (whether storage strategy, retrieval
strategy, refutation by a low credibility
source, or refutation by a neutral credibil-
ity source) is always better than "do-noth-
ing" in quelling the rumor. The differ-
ence between findings of this study and
findings of the previous studies is believed
due to one or more of at least three causes:
(1) difference in design of the studies, (2)
difference in rumor topics used in the
studies, and (3) difference in culture from
which subjects were drawn.

As previously said, the effectiveness
of the rumor-quelling strategy varies with
rumor commentators. That is why, before
adapting a strategy, users profitability may
spend some time investigating rumor com-
mentators whose names are linked to a
rumor. Failure to identify a rumor com-
mentator may cause users to choose a less
effective strategy and fail to quell the
rumor. Investigating rumor commentators
does not mean simply trying to find an
authoritative entity to comment on a par-
cular rumor. Investigators need to think
further about society's perceptions regard-
ing the gain/loss/neutrality of the entity as
associated with a particular rumor.
Different Strategies, Different Results

Theoretically, information processing theory suggests that storage strategy and retrieval strategy will provide similar results because both are based on a similar theory—that is, information processing, which assumes that individuals make judgments not only from information that is directly provided but also be qualified by disconnecting the association between the object (in this study: a food product) and the rumor (here: "pork fat"). Thus, both the storage strategy and the retrieval strategy are assembled in a similar way. The storage strategy links the rumor ("pork fat") to another object (Chinese restaurant), while the retrieval strategy links the object (the rumored food company) with other attributes (here: positive images of the food company).

This study, however, does not confirm such above theoretical logic. The storage strategy and the retrieval strategy produced different results, instead. This may be due to subjects' focus of attention: the rumor itself or the rumored object. In the storage strategy, the focus was the rumor ("pork fat"). Here, experimenters first denied the rumor and then linked it with another object. In the retrieval strategy, the focus was the object, that is, the rumored food company. Here, experimenters did not "do" anything to the rumor. By attempting to retrieve subjects' positive image about the food company from their memories, the association between the rumor and the object in subjects' minds was expected to weaken.

It is possible that subjects in study paid more attention to the rumor rather than the object, and because retrieval
strategy focused on the object, it was less effective. Perhaps subjects focused on the rumor because the topic was considered highly important. If this is true, then retrieval strategy might only be effective if subjects' focus of attention is the object. Another possibility is that the rumored food company did not have a good reputation, (strong positive image) and thus it was impossible to retrieve anything positive from subjects' minds. Theoretically, retrieval strategy will only work if subjects have strong positive image of the rumored object and these can be stimulated and retrieved from their minds. This suggests the need for food companies to be extremely sensitive to their reputations (such as maintaining good relations with communities, being good citizens, providing clean and healthy food, and in general, promoting the corporate interest as well as ways within they want to take to achieve it).

Universality of the Best Strategy

Results of this study indicated that no universal opposing strategy can be expected to be effective in all kinds of rumor topics in food industries in all places. The effectiveness of rumor quelling strategy appears to be related to, in addition to the variables under investigation, perceived importance of the rumor topic by subjects, the culture ("high-context" or "low-context") from which subjects were drawn, subjects' received similarity to the experiments who denied the rumor, and the different content of two messages used in the refutation strategies. Further investigation of all of them would be useful. The more important the rumor topic to a society, the stronger the psychological effect produced by the rumor, and the more difficult it will be to quell the rumor. Because similar rumor topics may produce differ-
end psychological effects in different societ
ies (and even within the same society), different strategies may be
needed to quell rumors.

Culture or shared social processes to
which subjects are exposed can influence
attitudes toward rumors. In particular, the
more the culture is considered "low-context" (emphasizes on legal regulation and
institutions), the more possible it is that a
"do-nothing" strategy will be effective,
and the more the culture is considered
"high-context" (personal relationships,
extended family and informal group), the
more possible it is that a "do-nothing"
strategy will be ineffective.

Subjects' responses also may be in
fluenced by their familiarity with persons
involved in administering the experiment.
For example, in this study the identity of
the experimenters may have been known
to subjects; experimenters may not have
been strangers to all subjects. Lack of
control here may suggest that if they rec
ognized the experimenters who denied the
rumor as faculty members and perceived
similarity with them, they may have per
ceived the denial as more credible, thus
possibly making the strategies used more
effective (refutation strategies and storage
strategy).

Message content formulated in a strat
egy also may influence attitude toward
rumors. For example, this study did not
consider the message content in the advi
cement and the advertisement. It may be
that the reasons given in the advertisement
shown to subjects, though they came from
a low credibility source, made the strategy
more effective.

Finally, as Bailey (1994) notes, the
main disadvantage of using an experiment
in conducting social science research is the
fact that it is carried out in an "artificial
environment." When rumors are articu
lated in a classroom, for example, the
ultimate results might well be different
from results that might occur if a real
rumor were circulated in public. In an
experimental design, interactions among
subjects are likely to be more restricted
than in a natural setting; in this case, sub
jects were given no opportunity to talk
with each other or to discuss the rumor.
Thus, the shaping and reshaping process, a
process in which a rumor may become
distorted and/or changed by many differ
ent players (Shibutani, 1966), cannot oc
cur. What we learn from the effects of the
rumor and of the rumor-quelling strategies
on subjects' attitudes, here attitudes to
ward a rumored food product. In addition, this
study examined commercial rumor that
involved rather trivial attitudes, atti
dudes that had relatively little substance
because they were developed quickly with
subjects provided little time to think about
them. More substantial attitudes are those
that are developed over time and nurture
and affirmed by networks of family, friends,
and acquaintance, rather than strategies in a quickly-executed experi
ment. "Substantive" attitudes can be ex
pected to be more difficult to change than
"trivial" attitudes. These caveats should
be kept in mind by those who wish to
examine quelling strategies in the "real
world."

The search for the best rumor strate
gies will be enhanced by the following
avenues for future exploration, all of which
are suggested in the preceding paragraphs.
First, in the present study, faculty
members were used as experimenters.
However, subjects may have recognized
the experimenters as campus instructors,
and this may have affected results. To
avoid such "contamination," care needs to
be taken in future designs to assure that
experimenters are strangers to subjects.
Next, this study suggests that different tumor topics may produce differing results in terms of the effectiveness of the strategy. In particular, this study indicates that the more important the tumor topic is to the subjects, the stronger the psychological effect, perhaps causing a "do-nothing" strategy to be less effective than a refutation strategy. Subsequent investigators may wish to compare the effectiveness of the strategy by different levels of relevance of the tumor topic to the subjects, or by using a totally random process for selecting subjects (assuming that they aren't all Methodist or health addicts or whatever).

Third, a more ambitious study may be conducted using several tumor topics in two different cultures. For example four (or more) levels of topics’ relevance to subjects could be compared with results of the effectiveness of strategies in a "high-context" culture amid a "low-context" culture.

Fourth, results of this study indicate that the effectiveness of retrieval strategy and storage strategy may vary with the attention focused upon by subjects either on the tumor or object. The tumor used in this study is one that may have caused subjects to focus their attention more on the tumor itself rather than the object. Subsequent investigators may want to test these strategies by using tumor topics that clearly focus subjects' attention either on the object of the tumor or the tumor itself.

Finally, this study indicates that subject response might not only have been influenced by the credibility of the source, but also by the messages used by each source when they denied the tumor appeared to have an unintended effect. This variable could have been controlled.

In conclusion, this study provides some new suggestion regarding possible ways to quell a commercial tumor. By using subjects from a different society and a different tumor topic, this study yielded different results than had been found in previous studies that were conducted in the United States. The explanation of why retrieval strategy was not as effective as storage strategy, as well as why a "do-nothing" strategy was found not effective in this study will enhance our understanding of the usefulness of persuasive theory and information processing theory. I believe these findings to be important step in the marketing literature, particularly in literature dealing with commercial tumor.

References


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