

Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association

Volume 2020

Article 8

November 2021

Pepsi-Cola's Number Fever Fiasco: How the Media Portrays the Actors of a Crisis

Rick Pulos

Regent University, rickpulos@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.rwu.edu/nyscaproceedings>



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), and the [Organizational Communication Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pulos, Rick (2021) "Pepsi-Cola's Number Fever Fiasco: How the Media Portrays the Actors of a Crisis," *Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association*: Vol. 2020 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://docs.rwu.edu/nyscaproceedings/vol2020/iss1/8>

This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association by an authorized editor of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

Pepsi-Cola's Number Fever Fiasco: How the Media Portrays the Actors of a Crisis

Cover Page Footnote

NYSCA 2020

Pepsi-Cola's Number Fever Fiasco: How the Media Portrays the Actors of a Crisis

Rick Pulos, Regent University

Conference Paper (Graduate)

Abstract

In 1992, Pepsi created a marketing ploy to increase interest in its products in the Philippines. The game was aptly called "Number Fever," and participants had to look at the number printed underneath the cap of their soft drink bottle and listen to the announcement of the winning numbers on the radio and evening news. Filipinos "went crazy for Number Fever. Everyone was trying their luck. Winners were announced daily and suddenly Pepsi seemed to be everyone's favorite drink" (Radeska, 2018, para. 3). The number "349" was announced for the jackpot and unfortunately thousands held the winning bottle cap. This created a serious problem for Pepsi and led to riots, deaths, conspiracy theories, lawsuits, legislation and consumer activism. Filipinos have since added the saying 349ed as a "generic term for being duped" (Lopez, 1994, Inside Story section). This paper will use rhetorical arena theory and cluster analysis of newspaper articles to see how the media characterized the voices that emerged during the Number Fever crisis.

Keywords: crisis communication, rhetorical criticism, marketing, Number Fever, Pepsi, Philippines, marketing

Introduction

In 1992, Pepsi created a marketing ploy to increase interest in its products in the Philippines. The game was known as "Number Fever," and participants had to look at the number printed underneath the crown of their soft drink bottle and then listen to the announcement of the winning numbers on the radio and evening news. Filipinos "went crazy for Number Fever. Everyone was trying their luck. Winners were announced daily and suddenly Pepsi seemed to be everyone's favorite drink" (Radeska, 2018, para. 3). A large jackpot was

guaranteed to be announced. The number "349" was announced for the jackpot and unfortunately thousands of players held the bottle cap with the winning number. This created a serious problem for the Pepsi-Cola Company and led to riots, deaths, conspiracy theories, lawsuits, legislation and consumer activism. Just a few of the headlines will give an idea of the magnitude of the error:

"Pepsi promo running a high fever" – *Philippine Daily Globe*

"Revolt of Philippines' Pepsi Generation" – *The San Francisco Examiner*

"Controversy, riots follow botched Pepsi Promotion" – *The Montgomery Advertiser*

"Pepsi Goons Bombed Own Trucks" – *People's Journal*

"Class suit readied vs Pepsi" – *Manila Standard*

Filipinos have since added the saying *349ed* as a "generic term for being duped" (Lopez, 1994, Inside Story section).

Crisis communication is a growing field. Heath (2010) declares that "part of that interest comes from the fact that crisis is dramatic; it is newsworthy" (Coombs & Holladay, p. 7). The Number Fever fiasco made headlines in the Philippines as well as internationally, partly because Pepsi is an international organization and partly because the stories that emerged from the crisis were compelling and newsworthy. Heath (2010) suggests that "crisis research [generally] focuses on a single organization, and rarely on the larger set of entities that suffer in varying ways and to varying degrees of magnitude" (Coombs & Holladay, p. 7). Although the Number Fever crisis is sparked by Pepsi, this is not its story alone. Frandsen and Johansen (2010) suggest that once a crisis erupts, a rhetorical arena materializes where all the stakeholders, or actors, create a complex and dynamic system of voices.

One of those voices is the media. Journalists and editors work as a part of a system of news production. Part of their responsibility is to inform the public. Their choices on how to characterize a story have profound impact on public perception of a particular event. The Number Fever fiasco touched every aspect of Filipino life at a particularly vulnerable time in the Philippines. Rhetorical arena theory will assist in identifying the actors and stakeholders in the crisis arena that unfolded after the announcement of number 349. A cluster analysis of multiple newspaper articles about the crisis will then illuminate how the media depicted the voices that emerged in the crisis arena. The primary research question is:

RQ1: How does the media portray the actors that emerge during a crisis?

The Number Fever fiasco is an excellent example of crisis communication with surprising twists and turns that sparked unthinkable reactions from all the players involved.

The Cola Wars and the History of Cola in the Philippines

"Wheel of Fortune", Sally Ride, heavy metal, suicide
Foreign debts, homeless vets, AIDS, crack, Bernie Goetz
Hypodermics on the shores, China's under martial law
Rock and roller **cola wars** [emphasis added], I can't take it anymore
-Billy Joel

The Cola Wars were as famous as the Cold War, so much so that it was included in Billy Joel's 1989 number one rock song, "We Didn't Start the Fire." The Coke versus Pepsi dynamic was so powerful that each organization attacked the other and tried incessantly to one-up the other. By the end of the 1980s, both soft drink companies had their own highly visible missteps. Coke tried to reinvent itself with New Coke, which nobody liked. Pepsi went down the path of celebrity endorsements. Michael Jackson's hair caught on fire during the filming of a Pepsi commercial. Madonna signed a multi-million-dollar endorsement contract but then released "Like A Prayer," a controversial video with a black Saint. Jackson's hair explosion stands in the lexicon of a celebrity endorsement gone bad and Madonna's moment in 1989 went down in history as the first time a company paid millions to a celebrity for not promoting the company at all.

Ryan (2010) provides a history of Coke in the Philippines starting with how it "was first bottled...[there] in 1912 and [how] the country has long been one of the top 10 markets" (para. 1). Pepsi did not arrive to the island nation until 1946 when "John Clarkin, a native of Minnesota, USA...came with the American forces at the close of World War II [and] brought Pepsi-Cola..." (Pepsi-Cola Products Philippines, n.d., History section). Even though Pepsi arrived later, at the start of the 1980s, "Pepsi dominated the market with a share of more than 60%" (Pepsi-Cola Products Philippines, n.d., History section). By the end of the 1980s, the tables had turned. Donovan (2013) provides a comprehensive look at the history of carbonated drinks in his novel *FIZZ: How Soda Shook up the World* and includes a fairly fascinating section regarding the cola wars in the Philippines:

The battle was fierce. In the Philippines, one of the world's biggest consumers of carbonated drinks, Pepsi and Coke fought a war of attrition across the archipelago's seven thousand islands. ...Dirty tactics followed too, with both companies hoarding each other's returnable bottles, filling fields with their enemy's glassware in the hope of forcing them to invest in new containers rather than more advertising. [Coke's] sales army had turned the tables, spreading Coca-Cola signs in every corner of the country and winning the business of thousands of tiny local stores until Coke was selling twice as much as Pepsi (p. 141).

At the start of the 1990s, Pepsi needed to come up with a plan to turn the tides and part of that plan brought Number Fever into play.

Cultural Context: A Changing Philippines

At the end of the 1980s one Filipina woman was all over the international news; mostly because of her shopping addiction and massive designer shoe collection. The legacy, the legitimate economic disaster, and polarizing feelings that the Marcos regime left in its wake was felt throughout every island of the Philippines. At the start of Number Fever, the country had a fever: economic woes, serious unemployment and disastrous prospects for a better life. The time period immediately following the end of the Marcos' reign saw a new leader, Corazon Aquino, who lead a "difficult transition to democracy from 20 years of autocratic rule" (Mydans, 2009, para. 3).

The Number Fever Contest

Considering the poor performance of Pepsi in the Philippines at the start of the 1990s, Pepsi sent over a marketing executive to strategize on ways to improve sales. He pitched Number Fever which "had worked successfully for PepsiCo in ten Latin American countries" (Lopez, 1994, p. 51). The game was fairly simple: buy Pepsi and its other sodas, save the bottle cap that had a three-digit number and alphanumeric code printed on it, listen to the media announcement of the winning number, and collect your winnings. Pepsi put out advertisements that talked up the game as a chance to become a millionaire. For Pepsi, the marketing gimmick worked because "six weeks after the start of the Number Fever promotion, Pepsi products had grabbed 24.9% market share, the highest single month since declining to 14% in 1989" (Lopez, 1994, p. 54). Pepsi decided to continue the promotion beyond its original end date. That winning streak for Pepsi came to a dramatic end on May 25, 1992, when number 349 was announced as the winner and Pepsi realized "that as many as 800,000 people could be holding 349, [and] backtracked and came out with a new winning number, but it was too late" (Lopez, 1994, p. 55). Lopez (1994) points out that "it was not the first time Pepsi encountered a problem with their Numbers Fever Promotions" (p. 55) since an eerily similar situation occurred in Chile in April 1992.

Figure 1

Number Fever rules and winning numbers (Coalition for Consumer Protection & Welfare, n.d.)

and P 1 MILLION
Millions And Millions In Cash Prizes!

HERE'S HOW:

1. Look under specially-marked crowns and/or resealable caps of Pepsi, 7 Up, Mirinda and Mountain Dew. These crowns are marked with:
 - A 3-digit number ranging from 001 to 999;
 - Cash prizes in denominations of P1,000, P10,000, P50,000, P100,000 and P1,000,000;
 - A security code.
2. Everyday, from Monday to Friday starting February 17 up to May 8, 1992, a winning 3-digit number will be announced on national and local TV, radio and newspapers.
3. All holders of crowns and/or caps bearing the winning 3-digit number will win the corresponding cash prize printed on the crowns/caps.
4. All winning numbers are valid throughout the promo period, not just on the days the numbers are announced. For example, if any day during the promo period you open a crown that bears a winning number already previously announced, you win. Likewise, if today you open a crown bearing a number that has not been announced yet, keep your crown! It could win any day during the promo period! All winning numbers are randomly selected by computer.
5. Watch out for the winning numbers to be announced everyday! Check with your nearest sari-sari store for a record of all the winning numbers.
6. This promo is valid in all areas covered by Pepsi-Cola plants and warehouses nationwide.
7. Cash prizes worth P1,000 can be redeemed from all Pepsi-Cola plants and warehouses nationwide. Cash prizes P10,000 and up can be redeemed from all Pepsi-Cola plants only. Prizes not claimed within sixty (60) days after the end of promo will be automatically forfeited. Promo period is from February 17 to May 8, 1992.
8. All cash prizes are tax-free. Pepsi-Cola will shoulder any withholding tax due on the prizes.
9. Employees of Pepsi-Cola Products Philippines, Inc. (PCPP), PepsiCo Inc., Pepsi-Cola Far East Trade Development Co., Inc., their advertising and public relations agencies, and relatives to the second degree of consanguinity and/or affinity are disqualified from joining the promotion.

The owner of this store will write in the winning numbers below.

MARCH 2	MARCH 9	MARCH 16	MARCH 23	MARCH 30	APRIL 6	APRIL 13	APRIL 20
401	901	3A7	180	709	767	A25	355

Literature Review

Most scholars agree that the Chicago Tylenol murders of 1982 mark the beginning of the field of crisis communication "by what was generally touted to be an effective response by Johnson & Johnson" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 1). And of course, like all crisis situations, the story unfolded rapidly and dramatically:

Early on the morning of Sept. 29, 1982, a tragic, medical mystery began with a sore throat and a runny nose. It was then that Mary Kellerman, a 12-year-old girl from Elk Grove Village, a suburb of Chicago, told her mother and father about her symptoms. They gave her one extra-strength Tylenol capsule that, unbeknownst to them, was laced with the highly poisonous potassium cyanide. Mary was dead by 7 a.m. Within a week, her death would panic the entire nation. And only months later, it changed the way we purchase and consume over-the-counter medications. (Markel, 2014, para. 1)

Johnson & Johnson leadership took swift and immediate action in 1982 and some would say that their response was brilliant but risky with a potential to harm their reputation. There were five basic takeaways from the Johnson & Johnson reaction to the Tylenol scare that went down in the crisis management handbook and are still looked to today:

1. Be forthcoming and honest
2. Act quickly and decisively
3. Take responsibility, even if you don't have to
4. Treat people with respect
5. Good [corporate] behavior pays dividends (MissionMode, 2012)

The Tylenol case follows a classic model of crisis communication theory drawn from emergency management processes and serves as an exceptional and positive example of how a corporation can lead an organization during a crisis.

At the other end of the 1980s, another corporation in crisis further inspired the need for scholarly work within the field of crisis communication. In 1989, a little-known area of Alaska hit the prime-time news when the "Exxon Valdez ran aground on Bligh Reef in the eastern part of Prince William Sound" (Paine et al., 1996, p. 189).

The ensuing crisis pulled multiple actors into the arena and it shocked the American public, dominating the news media for weeks; individuals and organizations were galvanized into action, generating an economic boom for southeast Alaska; the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 was passed by Congress; the spill thwarted then-President Bush's intent to explore for and exploit known and suspected oil reserves in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge; and it generated the largest corporate response and subsequent fine in US financial history [up until the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010]. (Paine, et al., 1996, pp. 198-199) The ecological issues caused by the oil spill continued for years and the extent to which sea-life has or has not recovered is impossible to know. Exxon's response to the oil spill has been studied from practically every scholarly angle imaginable at all three phases of crisis that include "pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 22).

The overall literature from crisis communication focuses on "four basic allied fields: disaster communication, issues management, risk management and communication, and reputation management" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010 p. 54). Historically, theories from other areas, inside and outside of communication, have been applied to crisis situations. Recent trends have moved towards creating original theory specific to crisis communication. One of the preeminent theories of the field is Image Restoration Theory (IRT) which "uses communication to defend reputations" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 31). IRT suggests a strategic response that goes through three stages:

1. Denial
2. Evading Responsibility
3. Reducing Offensiveness (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 32)

The actions taken by Pepsi fall neatly within the parameters of this theory. Media content analysis continues to be leveraged by many scholars in crisis communication in an attempt to "analyze actual messages related to crisis communication" and to show "how crisis communication strategies have been used and, in some cases, the effects of those strategies on the crisis situation" (Coombs & Holladay, 2010, p. 33).

Rhetorical criticism, and specifically cluster analysis, has been used previously to analyze how the media portrays the actors of a crisis. Littlefield and Quennette (2007) conduct a cluster analysis of newspapers to see how those newspapers characterize federal and local leadership during the Hurricane Katrina crisis. They suggest that "the rhetorical study of crisis provides insight into how language is used to construct realities during chaotic situations"

(Littlefield & Quennette, 2007, p. 45). What they discovered is that clusters tended to be either positive or negative and that media took a privileged position to blame the leaders of the crisis response of Hurricane Katrina (Littlefield & Quennette, 2007). Maier et al. (2019) take a visual crisis communication approach moving away from language to images. Similar to this article, they use rhetorical arena theory to “focus exclusively on the voices of the news media – here, newspapers from Sweden, Norway and Denmark...[because they] are often seen as a strong and powerful external stakeholder that produces representations of an ‘outside world’” (Maier et al., 2019, p. 94).

Conceptual Framework: Rhetorical Arena Theory

Strauss (1978) suggests that arenas are worlds where “various issues are debated, negotiated, fought out, forced and manipulated by representatives of implicated subworlds” (p. 124). The applicability of arenas to crisis communication was suggested by Frandsen and Johansen (2010) as a response to the static nature of previous theories of crisis communication where the paradigm placed the organization at the center of the crisis as the dominant sender in a complex system. Rhetorical arena theory (RAT) allows for scholars and practitioners to study complex communicative patterns of crisis situations from a multivocal perspective, giving voice to all the stakeholders affected by the crisis (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010). A closely related and similar framework is issue arenas, first suggested by Luoma-aho and Vos (2010). They contend that issue arenas are “places of interaction where an issue is discussed by stakeholders and organizations” (Luoma-aho and Vos, 2010, p. 317) and issue arenas offer a way to look at “the dynamic nature and multiplicity of [organizational] environments” (Luoma-aho and Vos, 2010, p. 318). Either rhetorical arenas or issues arenas could be used for this analysis and the results would be the same.

Frandsen and Johansen (2010) analyze the actors that emerge during a crisis in the rhetorical arena on an overall, or macro, level. At the micro level, they look at the quality and character of communications in the rhetorical arena. This study will look at the macro level and use RAT to gain a complete “overview of actors or voices in the [Number Fever] rhetorical arena” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010, p. 433). The actors that emerge in the rhetorical arena all speak to each other, about each other or against each other and their “voices meet and compete, collaborate and negotiate” (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010, p. 433).

Method

A selection of 20 news articles from international and local Filipino newspapers were pulled from online archives. The articles were analyzed first through rhetorical arena theory and then by cluster analysis. RAT was used to

determine what voices emerged during the crisis. This resulted in general headings for the key terms of the cluster analysis. Those major headings are *Pepsi*, the *Government*, *Advocates*, and the *Filipinos*. The Number Fever rhetorical arena is represented in Figure 2.

A selection process was used to identify the actors of the rhetorical arena. Anyone who was directly quoted or paraphrased by the media clearly had voice within the arena and were noted in the list under the general heading where they belonged. If the media referenced a person or organization with related descriptions that built a symbolic image of the person or organization, they were also included as an actor in the rhetorical arena. The news media and journalists served as the lens that this analysis used to see how these actors are characterized in the public discourse during the Number Fever crisis.

The cluster analysis was then conducted using the actors from the rhetorical arena as the key terms. The newspapers were numbered 1-20. Cluster terms were then charted by hand using a color system where blue ink was used to identify terms associated with Pepsi, black with government, green with advocates, and red with Filipinos. This was done directly onto the printed image of the archival newspapers. A cluster list of the charting was then compiled into a word document (see appendix A). Key terms were organized under the general category of the actor from the rhetorical arena. For example, under Filipinos key terms like victims and consumers were placed. Each key term referred back to the specific number given to the original source article. Cluster terms were then listed underneath that and numbered according to what article they came from. Cluster terms were written out even if they repeated in the same article. The subsequent analysis looked for frequency, patterns, and intensity in order to build the results reported in the next section.

Figure 2

Number Fever Rhetorical Arena.



What emerged was a distinct picture of how the crisis was portrayed in the media to the local and international community. Noticeably, God and devil terms, *some terms more ideal and some more negative* (Foss, 2018), started to cluster around Pepsi and the Filipino people. This sent a dual message to the public about both the good and bad of each of these stakeholders of the Number Fever crisis. Since a rhetorical artifact “may provide [to its audience] a vocabulary of thoughts, actions, emotions, and attitudes for codifying and thus interpreting a situation” (Foss, 2018, p. 62), it proved very enlightening as it is applied here to the Number Fever fiasco.

Results

Pepsi

The cluster analysis revealed that the media portrayed Pepsi, its leadership and its subsidiaries in three main ways. The most prominent characterization was that Pepsi *simply made a mistake*. The terms that clustered around Pepsi making a mistake included *error, nightmare, fiasco, bad luck*, and, somewhat comically, a *boo-boo*. As the crisis unfolded the first day and night, Pepsi executives met to try to find a solution and their “first move was to withdraw 349...In its place, the company announced that the new winning number was 134...this only added to the confusion and rage of the mobs” (Lopez, 1994, p. 56). Pepsi used the error or *computer glitch narrative* in statements to the public and to the media. Many journalists opted to adopt the language the company offered with the boo-boo narrative.

The second way that Pepsi was portrayed in the media was as *showing goodwill*. The cluster terms, all positive, that pooled around this portrayal included *offering settlements, apologizing*, and announcing *consolation prizes*.

One of the early decisions by executives was what the media called “a ‘goodwill gesture,’ [because they] agreed to pay \$18 each to anyone holding one of the 800,000 caps” (Treves, 1993, para. 5). One option an organization has during a crisis situation is to apologize while taking responsibility. Pepsi, in this case, both apologized and then redirected blame towards the computer glitch narrative. The corporation’s messages across the media were undoubtedly muddied because the crisis caught them off guard. A front-page article in the *Los Angeles Times* discussed their management of the fiasco:

But unlike Pepsi’s cool crisis management in the United States after false reports spread that syringes were found in Pepsi cans, company officials here panicked. (Drogin, 1993, para. 17)

The cluster analysis also revealed that Pepsi was *demonized*, the third, and final, way the company was presented across newspapers. Words that tended to demonize Pepsi included *deceptive*, *misleading*, *scheming*, and *behaving with malicious intent*. Clearly these terms are devil terms in line with the most basic definition of devil terms that you might find in any rhetoric textbook.

Government

Although it is true that some holders of bottle cap 349 took the consolation prize money and walked away, others went on to file court cases and the largest “criminal case against Pepsi was filed in June 1993 by some 17,000 claimants” (Lopez, 1994, p. 58). Thousands of civil cases ran through the courts for years until 2006 when “the Supreme Court...cleared Pepsi-Cola of any liability in [the] promotional flap that sparked lawsuits and riots” (Clapano, 2006, para. 1). Civil lawsuits are definitely par for the course when an organization makes such an egregious error and when its customers dismiss their attempts at apologies and restitution. Something that was a bit unusual was the response and involvement of the Philippine government. Bergonia (1992) writes of the ails of Filipinos that took a backseat at a senate hearing:

Peasant leaders demanded higher payment for their palay [unhusked rice]. Students and parents complained of lack of teachers and books. Government health workers said they were short of facilities and medicine. But the burning issue of the day was the continuing fight of holders of 349 Pepsi crowns. (para. 6-9).

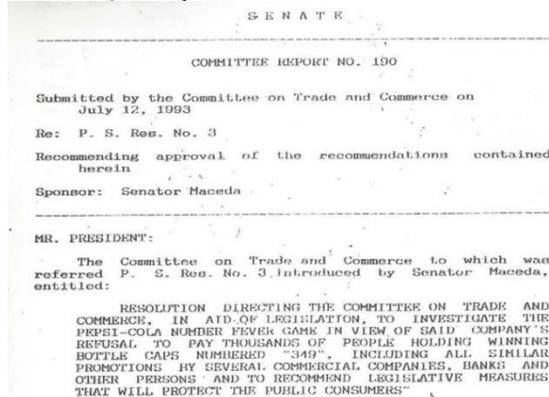
The cluster analysis revealed two major ways the media painted the picture of government involvement. The first was as an *authority*. The terms that clustered here varied. They included *ordering* of investigations and hearings, *dismissing* of claims and lawsuits, and the exploration of *punishment*. The other way that government involvement was colored by cluster terms was as *evaluator*. The terms that clustered around this included *listening*, *investigating*, and *explaining*. As an evaluator, the Senate Committee

circulated a report in the newspapers. In that report, the committee faulted Pepsi:

PCPPI-PCI may be faulted for gross negligence, by its failure to exercise that degree of due negligence in assuring that its Number-Fever promotions scheme which involved as it did hundreds of thousands of consumers nationwide, is conducted scrupulously and devoid of mistakes as will not delude and/or mislead the consuming public, following as it did, barely a month on the heels of the PEPSI Chilean fiasco which also created a consumer furor nationwide caused by its franchisee's "mistake" in the announcement of the winning number. PCPPI-PCI may be faulted for misleading and/or deceptive advertising "by changing rules of the game" contrary to that made known to the consuming public. (Senate Committee Report, 1993, p. 10)

Figure 3

Senate Committee Report No. 190. (Coalition for Consumer Protection & Welfare, n.d.)



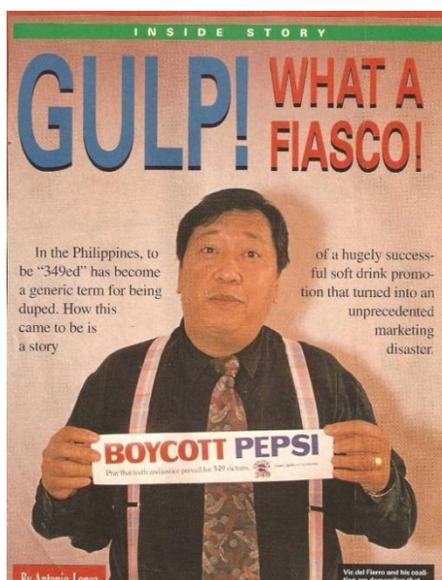
In response, Pepsi took out a full-page advertisement denouncing the report. Two days after the report was submitted, Senator Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (a future President of the Philippines) demanded an apology from Pepsi when she said, "if they have only controverted the findings of the committee, that would have been enough...But to say that it serves the cause of extortion, anarchy, and terrorism, I cannot take lightly" (Bedico, 1993, para. 3). Clearly, the ugliness of the crisis played out in the halls of the senate and on the pages of the newspapers.

Advocates

There is no question that people were angry. At the center of this anger was a lobbyist named Vic del Fierro. In the eyes of Pepsi, he was an agitator, possibly having "a link [to]...the protest groups and the well-orchestrated campaign of violence that has been employed to keep the issue alive" (Kenneth, 1993, para. 12). Mr. del Fierro created Coalition 349 to fight Pepsi and to advocate for consumer protection. In many ways he became the face of the fight. Eventually, Coalition 349 turned into the Coalition for Consumer Protection & Welfare. It is unclear if the organization is active today.

Figure 4

Gulp! (Lopez, 1994).



Note: Vic del Fierro leads the fight against Pepsi.

The cluster analysis revealed one dominant theme associated with del Fierro and all the other advocates for the Filipino citizens: *to pressure Pepsi and the government*. Advocates were characterized by words like *boycott*, *demands*, and *attacks*. Their cluster terms were associated with actions like attacking Pepsi through the media and through lawsuits. They also called for continued boycotts of not only Pepsi products but anything Pepsi sponsored including sports teams. Advocates were also characterized as being on a crusade and portrayed as defending the citizens of the Philippines.

Filipinos

The Filipinos were portrayed by the media in two very opposing ways that truly epitomize God and devil terms. Many terms clustered around the idea of the Filipinos being an *angry mob*. The associated terms included *fury*, *rioting*, *demonstrating*, *fighting*, and *bombing*. Filipinos holding caps with 349 became upset and angry. They united in the streets “in ways the government never could...[with] Communist rebels and army generals, well-dressed Manila matrons and barefoot rural peasants” (Baltimore Sun, 1993, para. 8) standing outside Pepsi’s bottling factories and distribution centers. What followed was “a cola war, Philippine-style” (Biltmore Sun, 1993, para. 8) during which “32 delivery trucks [were] stoned, burned or overturned...[and] Molotov cocktails and homemade bombs [were thrown] at Pepsi plants and offices” (Biltmore Sun, 1993, para. 9). In one incident, a woman and a child died, and others were injured.

Figure 5

Pop Goes the Cola. (Lopez, 1994).



Note: Crown holders demand justice from Pepsi.

The other way the people of the Philippines were portrayed in the media was as *heartbroken*. The frequency of these cluster terms was much less than any other terms in the analysis, but the intensity was by far the most powerful. Foss (2018) says that “a term may not appear very often in a rhetor’s work, but it may be critical because it is central to the argument being made, represents an ultimate commitment, or *conveys great depth of feeling* [emphasis added]” (p. 64). Terms that clustered around the notion of the Filipinos as heartbroken included *hopes*, *dreams*, *jubilant*, *innocent*, and *forgiving*.

Discussion

One important aspect to how the public perceives any given crisis is the way the media portrays the actors of the crisis. The media can have great influence on how the public reacts and even how the government responds, particularly as a crisis response unfolds (Littlefield & Quennette, 2007). The media portrayals of the actors of the Number Fever crisis provides a prime example of the power media holds in shaping the language of the discourse of a crisis. This language paints a picture of the stakeholders, sometimes good and sometimes bad, that enters into the symbolic universe of the public.

Across multiple newspaper articles written by a variety of journalists, the rhetoric used often pooled towards two competing images, one negative and one positive, or what rhetoric designates as God and devil terms (see Foss, 2018). Filipinos were painted as both angered and heartbroken. This portrayal of them in the media makes the story all that more fascinating for not just the local media market but also the international media market. It attracts interest broadly because everyday folks from across the globe can relate to feeling duped and feeling as though corporations do not care about them. The government, in cases of business, has a great interest in economic stability while maintain a role as protector of its people. This came through with language that demonstrated the government's position as authority and evaluator.

Pepsi's reaction to the crisis followed elements of a classic image restoration method by first denying that 349 was the winning number, then by evading responsibility with a computer glitch narrative, and finally by reducing offensiveness with offers of settlements for crown holders. The media portrayal tended towards the positive nature of goodwill gestures made by the company on one end and the demonizing of Pepsi as a Goliath destroying the David's of the Philippines on the other. The negative portrayal has a more powerful intensity to it. The narrative of Pepsi as a corporation of greed and power easily played into the imaginations of the Filipinos, particularly in relation to the terrible state of the economy and politics of the Philippines at the time.

Ultimately, the people are what matters the most in any crisis. Advocates like Vic del Fierro generally appear to have the best interest of the Filipino people at heart. But this is not exactly how he or other advocates were portrayed in the media. They were often characterized as bullying Pepsi and the government and making deals with crown holders that would line their pockets with riches should the barrage of lawsuits be settled towards a payout to the people. That payout never happened because ultimately the Philippine's Supreme Court sided with Pepsi (Maysh, 2020). The story lives on. As recently as August 4, 2020, Bloomberg reporter Maysh resurrected what he describes as "perhaps the deadliest marketing disaster in history... [and] one of the business world's great cautionary tales" (para. 10).

Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. It would be compelling to look exclusively at Filipino newspapers which might allow for a more in-depth analysis keyed into the cultural context. It may also allow for a reading of how the West influences media and crisis in other parts of the world. This study did not take into account the political leanings of the media outlets or journalists. That may be a factor to consider for further study.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic is rewriting the crisis communication field in ways that will not be understood for years. There was already a move in the field from the old paradigm of a corporation at the center of a crisis to a more multivocal approach. Lehmer and Hicks (2018) declares that there is a crisis in international crisis communication. They note that "despite 30 years of crisis communication research, international and/or multicultural crisis communication research remains limited" (Lehmer & Hicks, 2018, p. 357). Looking at the Number Fever fiasco through the lens of RAT and cluster analysis revealed how the media portrays all the stakeholders in a multivocal situation. Since the Number Fever fiasco occurred in a non-Western country, the study of the complexities of this particular crisis adds to the ongoing conversations about international crisis communication.

Combining rhetorical arena theory and cluster analysis revealed how the media portrayed the actors that emerged during the Number Fever crisis. It was not surprising the government was portrayed as an authority and evaluator since this is their role in society when things need to be mediated and people cannot work out their differences. Pepsi's image in the media was a bit more complex going from the extreme end of being demonized to the other end of showing goodwill. Reasonable people may have accepted the computer glitch narrative more easily but too many Filipinos simply felt duped. Advocates stepped in to fight for more consumer protections and this eventually led to new laws about marketing contests. The Filipinos were literally an angry mob and they protested, sometimes violently. But they also were heartbroken. The life altering money they thought they won had led some to imagine and plan for a better life. Some people thought about buying a home or sending their kids to college. Many had spent the money in their mind's eye and thought their life had instantly changed for the better. And then suddenly it was all taken back. That was the most heartwarming part of learning about their stories, and it is to the media's credit that they gave power to their voices.

References

Baltimore Sun. (1993, July 27). Blunder turns anti-Pepsi fever as Filipinos demand their contest prizes. <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1993-07-27-1993208127-story.html>

- Bedico, T. (1993, July 14). Pepsi should apologize. *People's Journal*.
- Bergonia, T. (1992, September 11). '349' issue tops Senate hearings. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*.
- Clapano, J. R. (2006, June 21). SC Clears Pepsi of liability on '349' flap. *Philstar*. <https://www.philstar.com/metro/2006/06/21/343014/sc-clears-pepsi-liability-145349146-flap>
- Coalition for Consumer Protection & Welfare. (n.d.). <http://www.ccpw.org/index.htm>
- Coombs, T.W. and Holladay, S.J. (Eds.). (2010). *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Donovan, T. (2013). *Fizz: How Soda Shook up the World*. Chicago University Press.
- Drogin, B. (1993, July 26). COLUMN ONE: Bottle Cap Flap Riles the Masses: After a Pepsi promotion went awry, thousands of Filipinos mistakenly thought they were in the money. Now the firm is trying to cool off protests that have united rebels, generals and matrons. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-07-26-mn-17084-story.html>
- Foss, S. (2018). *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice*. Waveland Press, Inc.
- Frandsen, F. & Johansen, W. (2010). Crisis Communication, Complexity, and the Cartoon Affair: A Case Study. In Coombs, T.W. & Holladay, S.J. (Eds.) *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* (pp. 425-448). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Kenneth, R. (1993, August 27). Pepsi Bottle Cap Flap. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-08-27-me-28364-story.html>
- Lehmberg, D., & Hicks, J. (2018). A 'glocalization' approach to the internationalizing of crisis communication. *Business Horizons*, 61(3), 357-366. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2018.01.002>
- Lopez, A. (1994, May 4). Pop Goes the Cola. *Asiaweek*.
- Louis, J.C. & Yazijan, H.Z. (1980). *The Cola Wars: The story of the global battle between the Coca-Cola Company and PepsiCo, Inc.* Everest Publishing.

- Luoma-aho, V., & Vos, M. (2010). Towards a more dynamic stakeholder model: Acknowledging multiple issue arenas. *Corporate Communications, 15*(3), 315-331.
- Littlefield, R.S. & Quennette, A.M. (2007). Crisis Leadership and Hurricane Katrina: The Portrayal of Authority by the Media in Natural Disasters. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 35*(1), 26-47. DOI: 10.1080/00909880601065664
- Maceda. O. (1993, July 12). Senate Committee Report No. 190. *Senate of the Philippines*.
- Maier, C. D., Frandsen, F. & Johansen, W. (2019). Visual crisis communication in the Scandinavian press: Images of the MS Estonia disaster. *Nordicom Review, 40*(2): 91-109. doi:10.2478/nor-2019-0035.
- Maysh, J. (2020, August 4). Number Fever: The Pepsi Contest That Became a Deadly Fiasco. *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-08-04/the-inside-story-of-pepsi-s-philippines-bottle-contest-fiasco>
- Mydans, S. (2009, July 31). Corazon Aquino, Ex-Leader of Philippines, Is Dead. *New YorkTimes*.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/01/world/asia/01aquino.html>
- Paine, R. T., Ruesink, J.L., Sun, A., Soulanille, E.L., Wonham, M.J., Harley, C.D.G., Brumbaugh, D.R., & Secord, D.L. (1996). TROUBLE ON OILED WATERS: Lessons from the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics, 27*(1), 197-235.
- Pepsi-Cola Products Philippines. (n.d.) History section.
<http://pcppi.weebly.com/history.html>
- Radeska, T. (2018, January 10). Pepsi's 'Number Fever in the Philippines caused street riots, deaths and 14 years of lawsuits. *Vintage News*. Retrieved from <https://www.thevintagenews.com/2018/01/10/pepsi-number-fever/>
- Ryan, T. (2010). A Date with History in Manila, Philippines. Coca-Cola Company. <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/2010/11/a-date-with-history-in-manila-philippines>
- Strauss, A. (1978). Social World Perspective. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction, 1*, 119-128.
- Treves, O. (1993, July 29). A Pepsi Giveaway, Gone Wrong. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1993/07/29/a-pepsi-giveaway-gone-wrong/1a6af4b1-2b6f-4e5a-9b1d-5dc6799ac2af/>

Appendix A

Note: Nothing denotes that no cluster terms were found.

RAT Heading: Government

Key Terms (article number)

The Senate (1)
State prosecutors (2)
Provincial court (6)
Department of Trade and Industry (7)
DTI Acting Secretary Lilian Bautista (7)
DTI Chief Counsel (7)
Chief Inspector – police (7)
Regional Director NBI (8)
Santiago Chan, Jr. (8)
Local court (8)
NBI Agents (9)
Senators (10)
Police Officials (10)
Senior Official NBI (11)
Anti-organized crime unit (11)
Anti-Fraud Division (11)
Senators (mainly Arroyo) (12)
Department of Trade and Industry (12)
Department of Trade and Industry (13)
Department of Trade and Industry (15)
Philippine Court of Appeals (18)
International Chambers of Commerce (18)
US Eastern Court (18)
Senate (19)
National Police (20)

Cluster Terms for Each Article Number

1. Accuse
2. Dismissed
3. Dismissed
Pending
4. Nothing
5. Nothing
6. Dismissed
Ordered
7. Investigating
Explain

- Cancellation
- Suspension
- Evaluation
- Ordered
- Ordered
- 8. Grave threats
- Abuse
- Misconduct
- Defense
- Ordering
- Denied his right
- Dismissing
- Unidentified
- Interrogated
- Intimidated
- Coerced
- 9. Nothing
- 10. Listen
- Punishment
- Laughed it off
- 11. Ordered
- Corrected
- Clearing
- Accused
- 12. Faults
- 13. Nothing
- 14. Blame
- 15. Look into it
- solution
- 16. Nothing
- 17. Nothing
- 18. Ordering
- Pointed out
- Decision
- Decision
- Arbitration
- Order
- 19. Criticize
- Accused
- 20. Investigate

RAT General Heading: Pepsi

Key Terms (article number)

Pepsi Philippines (PCPPI)
Rosemarie Vera (2) – marketing director
Pepsi Executives (3)
Rosemarie Vera [twice] (3)
Chairman of the board (4)
Rod Salazar (President) (7)
Roy Lago Salcedo (8)
Lawyer (11)
Anti-Fraud Division
Pepsi (13)
Pepsi International (14)
Pepsi Philippines (14)
Pedro Vergara, design of the game (14)
Pepsi (15)
Pepsi (16)
Pepsi (17)
Pepsi (18)
Pepsi (19)
Pepsi (20)
Rod Salazar (President) (20)

Cluster Terms for Each Article Number

out

1. Gross negligence
Chaos
Withdrew winning number/Forced to withdraw/pulling out

Refuse
Scheme
Failed

2. Nightmare
Giant
Trouble
Mistake
Refused/refusal
Error
Torched
Fraud
Plummeted/Fell
To calm the storm

- Gesture of goodwill
- Redeemed caps
- Recovered market share
- 3.** Nightmare
- Settle
- Repair
- Shattered image
- Refused/Refusal
- Armed Guards
- Death threats (good quote here)
- Fraud
- Plummeted
- Fell
- Gesture of goodwill
- Recovered
- Woo customers
- Still here
- 4.** Breach of contract
- Breach of contract
- Refusal
- Served
- Thwart
- Admitted
- Goodwill payment
- 5.** Mistake
- Hastily
- Mistake
- Investigated
- Threatened
- Compelled in fairness
- Controversy
- Guilty
- Mistake
- False advertising
- Guilty
- Blaming *aswangs* and *mangkukulam*
- Bad luck
- 6.** Feeling ill
- Wishes
- Unfortunately for
- Vandalized
- Goodwill Gesture
- Deception
- Malice

- Luting customers
- Recovering
- Controversy
- 7.** Deal (as in make)
- Restore confidence
- Compromise
- Goodwill
- Consolation prize
- Mistakenly
- Mistake
- Sanctioned
- Appealed for understanding
- Goodwill money
- Apology
- deal
- Controversy
- Refused
- Sabotaged (ruled out)
- Hurled empty bottles
- 8.** Controversial
- Complained
- 9.** Boo-boo
- 10.** Issue
- Controversial issue
- Refuses
- Problem
- Burning issue
- Controversy
- Refused
- Mistake
- Fraudulent
- Refused
- Controversial
- Problem
- 11.** Staged attacks
- Botched
- Refusal
- Goons
- Foul-up
- Haunted
- Diffuse
- Gross negligence
- Misleading
- Deceptive

- 12.** Apologize
A slur
- 13.** Explaining
Way out
Questionable
- 14.** Blame
Dilemma
Blame
Don't Blame
Mistake
Goofed
Goofed
- 15.** Manipulate
Controversy
- 16.** Goliath
Erred
Goofed
Botched
Refused to pay
Error
Non-committal
At fault
Morally responsible
- 17.** Controversial
Scam
Computer glitch
Explanation
Goodwill
Violence against
Rejected talks
- 18.** Fiasco
Refused
Fiasco
Rejected
Appeal
Tarnished image
Goliath
- 19.** Negligence
Chaos
Refused to pay
Scheme
Failed
- 20.** Trouble
Refused to honor

Apologized
Mix-up
Clarifies

RAT General Heading: Advocates

Key Terms (article number)

Coalition 349
Lawyers
Filipino Lawyers (4)
American Lawyers (4)
Vic del Fierro (4)
Coalition 349 (4)
Antonio Flores - lawyer (4)
Robert Swift – lawyer (6)
Vic del Fierro (6)
Coalition 349 (6)
Jefferey Glen
Berwim Leighton
Coalition 349 (8)
Del Fierro (8)
Del Fierro (9)
Norrie del Fierro (9)
349 Club (10)
Victor del Fierro (10)
349 Alliance (11)
Del Fierro (16)
Del Fierro (17)
Del Fierro (18)

Cluster Terms for Each Article Number

1. Nothing
2. Nothing
3. Nothing
4. Filed
To Pressure
Biggest consumer group
Boycott
Crusade

- Boycott
- Settlement
- Settlement
- Complaint
- Boycott
- Censorship
- 5. Advise
- Crusade for justice
- 6. Nothing
- 7. Nothing
- 8. Accused
- Solicit
- Right[s] as a citizen
- 9. Against (NBI)
- 10. Warning
- Demand
- 11. Firebombed
- Protests
- Attacks
- Settlement
- 12. Nothing
- 13. Nothing
- 14. Nothing
- 15. Nothing
- 16. Shut the door in faces
- 17. Filed complaint
- Complaint
- Complaint
- Negotiate
- Settle
- 18. Sued
- Appealed
- Settle
- Settlement
- Crusade of justice
- Class action
- Class action

Filipinos

Key terms (article number)

Victims (1)

General Public (1)

Filipinos (3)

Country (3)

Consumers (4)
Complainants (4)
Albert Yeban (6)
Consumers (15)
Male Claimant (15)
The people (16)
People (19)
Pepsi Drinkers (20)

Cluster Terms for Each Article Number

1. Rioted
2. Millionaires
Jubilant
Won
Rioting
3. Millionaires
Claimed their prize
Fury
Rioting
Bombing
Torching
Grendade tossed
Killed
Against
4. Accused
Boycott
Damages
Uprising
Alleging
5. Demanding
All hell broke loose
Lynch Mob
Shock
Uncomfortable feeling
Feel
Fair and equal (chance)
Legitimate
Refuse
Winners
6. Hope
Hoping
Win
Against pepsis
Angry
Demonstrations
Refused

- Pressure groups
- Exploited
- Litigiousness
- Forgiving
- Understand (as understanding)
- 7. Celebrations (after winning)
- Sold belongings and valuables
- Held vigil
- Disappointed
- Stubborn
- Bad joke
- Protest
- Hapless
- Innocent
- 8. Nothing
- 9. Disgruntled
- 10. Fight
- Boycott
- Fighting
- Anger
- Dreams
- 11. Unfairly accused
- 12. Nothing
- 13. Nothing
- 14. Nothing
- 15. Outrage
- Heart attack
- Victim
- Victimized
- 16. Hardship
- Gamble
- Compromise
- Protested
- Angered
- Frustrated
- Rallies
- Violence
- Violence
- 17. Nothing
- 18. Won
- Stabbed to death
- David as in Goliath
- 19. Rioted

20. Injured
Temperatures rose