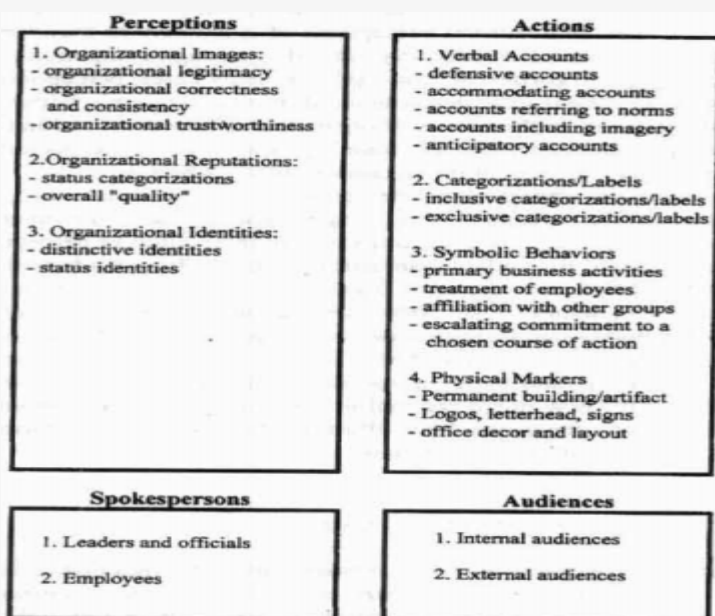


PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT 101

Perceptions are real. They color what we see, how we interpret, what we believe, and how we behave. They create or diminish value. They generate or solve problems. So powerful are our perceptions that many psychologists believe that perception is reality (Cialdini, 1984; Strauch, 1989). Perceptions come in two forms: experiential and intellectual. Experiential perception is kinesthetic in origin we develop these perceptions through our senses of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Our proverbial sixth sense knowing about something defines the realm of intellectual perception. Intellectual perception is more elusive. (Beydogan, 2008)

I would have thought that perception management is a recent phenomenon, especially with the constant changes in how we as a sociality interacts with each other. With the current trend for people, companies, government, etc. to publicize everything that they do on social media I would have assumed that this generation was the mecca of perception management. My assumptions are wrong, in fact, the efforts of organizational managements need to protect and manage positive images, identities, or reputations of their organizations can be found in historical accounts of the Roman Catholic Church, and universities of ancient Greece (Elsbach, 2003). Schlenker (1980) defines perception management as the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are projected in real or imagined social interactions. Elsbach (2003) further defines perception management as the actions that are designed and carried out by people to influence audiences' perceptions. Elsbach definition of organizational perception management contain four key components, which is additionally expounded upon on figure 1:

1. Perceptions of the organization
2. Actions or tactics
3. Organizational spokespersons, and
4. Organizational audiences



Some would naturally think that perception management was a tool used for crises management, e.g., Volkswagen's s facing its worst crisis in its 78-year history after admitting to cheating diesel emissions tests in the United States, with eleven million vehicles affected worldwide. One of the first major moves that Volkswagen did

in confronting this crisis was relieving their CEO, suspension of several engineers, including Heinz-Jakob Neusser, head of Research and Development for Volkswagen brand passenger cars. Volkswagen's perception to their customers was that they were making major changes to fix the culture issue within their company. Perception management is used for many reasons, not just crisis management for businesses. Perception management is designed to influence perceptions as an entity. Such perceptions include: 1. Images (e.g. current perceptions of legitimacy or trustworthiness); 2. Reputations (e.g. being consistently viewed as a tough competitor); and 3. Identities (e.g. being categorized as "green" or "natural") (Elsbach, 2003). When you are in business, you are always in the process of managing your professional brand. Moreover, your brand is the perception that others have of you (your company, services, or products). The caveat, however, is that brand perception resides with consumers, not business owners. Thus, your goal is to intentionally develop consumer perception by getting clear on how brands are created, evaluated, and selected, which is a combination of both functional and emotional experiences (Mariama-Arthur, 2014). Think about your favorite products or services, your perception of these will stay with you no matter if the quality diminishes significantly. For entrepreneurs, perception management can make or break you.

"The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger – but recognize the opportunity."

-John F. Kennedy

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