COMMUNICATING A HUMANITARIAN MESSAGE IN A CONNECTED WORLD: THE CASE OF THE RED CROSS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the marketing approaches of a global non-profit organization (NPO) in various countries, as reflected by the communications posted on country-specific web sites. It has been a long time since Kotler’s seminal article in the Journal of Marketing, where the author recommended American NPOs should look at marketing beyond advertising and adopt successful marketing practices (Kotler, 1979). NPOs have realized that focusing on customers can be a winning solution and bring about greater recognition and success (Andreasen, 1982; Pope, Isely, & Asamoa-Tutu, 2009). In today’s world, non-profit organizations (NPOs) have to compete to achieve their missions. This is particularly true in developed nations where philanthropy—both from corporations and individuals—has increased and thrived since the first Industrial Revolution. As the amounts given have increased, so has the number of NPOs, and it has become more and more difficult for NPOs to gain support—in the form of both donations and volunteer hours. Consequently, just like businesses, NPOs have discovered that they can benefit from many marketing practices, such as market segmentation, branding and advertising.

The Red Cross was created at the end of the nineteenth century in Switzerland and has now 189 chapters worldwide. Out of these, 129 chapters have their own web sites to communicate their humanitarian messages to the public. Secondary data from French-language and English language web sites were collected. As expected, similarities in branding choices such as logo and colors were present across web sites. There were also commonalities in photograph selection and verbal message to appeal to visitors’ emotions. However, none of the web sites were alike and there were variations in design and technical advancement. This was especially true when comparing web sites between regions. Web sites from developed nations were also less static, and allowed access to social media. This research illustrates how the Red Cross has been adapting to changing global and technological environments.

References

