

Strategic Communication in Promoting Environmental Sustainability: A Case Study of Alfamart's Campaign for Reusable Tote Bags

Arnold Surya Nugroho¹, Oey Hannes Widjaya², Gede Sukada³, I Made Satria Kurniawan⁴

¹³⁴Study Program of Communication Sciences, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Buddha Nalanda

²Universitas Tarumanegara

¹³⁴Pulo Gebang Street, East Jakarta City, Indonesia

²Tomang, Kec. Grogol Petamburan, West Jakarta City, DKI Jakarta

*Corresponding authors: Arnoldsuryanugroho@nalanda.ac.id

Abstract

This case study examines Alfamart's strategic communication efforts to promote the use of reusable tote bags as part of their environmental sustainability initiative. Using qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with managers and customers, as well as document analysis, the study explores the effectiveness of Alfamart's communication strategies in raising awareness, shaping attitudes, and changing consumer behavior. The findings indicate that a well-coordinated multi-channel communication approach, integrating both online and offline methods, significantly increased customer awareness and knowledge about the environmental impact of plastic waste. This heightened awareness facilitated positive attitudinal changes and led to the adoption of reusable tote bags. The study also highlights the importance of incorporating customer feedback to refine and improve communication strategies continuously. Despite the overall success, challenges such as customer resistance due to convenience factors and logistical issues were identified, underscoring the need for ongoing communication efforts and operational adjustments. The results demonstrate the potential of strategic communication to promote environmental sustainability and drive meaningful behavior change.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior; Environmental Sustainability; Reusable Tote Bags; Strategic Communication

INTRODUCTION

Plastic waste has emerged as a critical environmental challenge, necessitating innovative strategies and policies to mitigate its impact. One of the most prominent sources of plastic pollution is the widespread use of single-use plastic bags in supermarkets. Alfamart, a leading retail chain in Indonesia, has recognized this issue and implemented a policy to encourage the use of reusable tote bags. This initiative represents a critical case study for understanding the role of strategic communication in promoting environmental policies. Strategic communication involves the deliberate and purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission and achieve specific objectives. In the context of environmental sustainability, strategic communication is essential for raising awareness, changing behaviors, and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility. According to

Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2007), strategic communication integrates various communication functions to achieve organizational goals through a coherent strategy. By effectively communicating the benefits of reusable tote bags, Alfamart aims to reduce plastic waste and influence consumer behavior towards more sustainable practices.

The effectiveness of strategic communication in this context can be analyzed through several theoretical lenses. Strategic Communication Theory, which focuses on message design, audience analysis, and channel selection, provides a framework for understanding how Alfamart crafted and disseminated its messages about reusable tote bags. Additionally, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, as proposed by Rogers (2003), explains how new ideas, such as the adoption of reusable bags, spread within a community or organization. These theories, combined with insights from Social Marketing Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, offer a comprehensive understanding of the communication strategies employed by Alfamart. Alfamart's strategic communication efforts included both online and offline campaigns designed to reach a broad audience. Online platforms, particularly social media, played a crucial role in disseminating information and engaging with customers. Offline efforts, such as in-store signage and employee training, complemented these digital campaigns by providing consistent and reinforcing messages. The integration of these channels ensured that the communication strategy was multifaceted and pervasive, maximizing its reach and impact. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), the integration of social media and traditional communication methods enhances the effectiveness of strategic communication by leveraging the strengths of each channel.

Interviews with Alfamart managers and customers revealed that the strategic communication efforts were generally well-received and effective in changing consumer behavior. Customers reported increased awareness of the environmental impact of plastic waste and a greater willingness to use reusable tote bags. This shift in behavior can be attributed to the clarity, consistency, and appeal of the messages conveyed by Alfamart. As per the framing theory articulated by Entman (1993), the way information is presented significantly influences how it is perceived and acted upon by the audience. The strategic use of framing, highlighting the environmental and economic benefits of reusable bags, further enhanced the campaign's effectiveness. The success of Alfamart's reusable tote bag initiative underscores the importance of strategic communication in environmental policy

implementation. By carefully planning and executing its communication efforts, Alfamart was able to influence consumer behavior and contribute to reducing plastic waste. This case study highlights the potential for organizations to drive meaningful environmental change through strategic communication, provided they employ a well-designed and comprehensive approach. As Grunig and Grunig (2008) emphasize, effective strategic communication requires a symmetrical model where feedback from the audience is actively sought and integrated into the communication strategy.

In conclusion, Alfamart's experience demonstrates that strategic communication is a powerful tool for promoting environmental sustainability. The deliberate and purposeful use of communication strategies can significantly impact consumer behavior and support the achievement of organizational goals. As environmental challenges continue to grow, the insights gained from this case study can inform the development of future communication strategies aimed at fostering sustainable practices and reducing environmental impact. The theoretical frameworks of Strategic Communication Theory, Diffusion of Innovations Theory, Social Marketing Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior collectively provide a robust foundation for analyzing and understanding the effectiveness of Alfamart's communication efforts. By integrating these theories, researchers and practitioners can gain deeper insights into the mechanisms of strategic communication and its role in achieving environmental policy objectives.

Theoretical Basis

To understand the strategic communication efforts employed by Alfamart in encouraging the use of reusable tote bags, we will focus on two key theories: Strategic Communication Theory and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Each of these theories provides a unique perspective on how communication strategies can influence behavior and promote environmental sustainability.

1. Strategic Communication Theory

Strategic Communication Theory involves the deliberate use of communication by an organization to achieve specific objectives and fulfill its mission. This theory emphasizes the importance of integrating various communication functions—such as public relations, marketing, and corporate communication—into a cohesive strategy that aligns with organizational goals. Hallahan et al. (2007) define strategic communication as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (p. 3). This theory provides a framework for understanding how Alfamart crafted and disseminated its messages about

reusable tote bags. It involves elements such as message design, audience analysis, and channel selection, which are crucial for effectively communicating the benefits of reusable tote bags and influencing consumer behavior towards more sustainable practices.

2. Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Diffusion of Innovations Theory, developed by Everett Rogers, describes how new ideas and practices spread within a community or organization over time. The theory identifies four main elements that influence the adoption of an innovation: the innovation itself, communication channels, time, and the social system (Rogers, 2003). According to Rogers (2003), the adoption process involves five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. This theory is particularly relevant to Alfamart's initiative as it provides a framework for understanding how the idea of using reusable tote bags was communicated to and adopted by customers. It highlights the importance of effective communication channels and the role of social systems in facilitating the adoption of environmentally friendly behaviors.

Integrating Theories for a Comprehensive Analysis

By combining Strategic Communication Theory and Diffusion of Innovations Theory, we can gain a robust understanding of Alfamart's strategic communication efforts. Strategic Communication Theory offers insights into the planning and execution of the communication strategy, while Diffusion of Innovations Theory explains the adoption process of reusable tote bags. These integrated theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing how Alfamart's strategic communication efforts effectively promoted the use of reusable tote bags and contributed to reducing plastic waste.

METHOD

The method used is descriptive qualitative. As explained by Sugiono (2011). This method is used to investigate about the strategic communication that has been used by alfamart and places the researcher as the key holder of the data collected. The research approaches used varied, with data collection from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was obtained through interviews and direct field observations, while secondary data was obtained through literature collected from various sources in the form of books and online journals. This method emphasizes revealing the meaning and generalization of the phenomena studied. (Hikmawan, 2017a).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research on Alfamart's strategic communication efforts to promote the use of reusable tote bags yielded several key findings. These results were derived from interviews with Alfamart managers and customers, as well as an analysis of the communication strategies and their impacts on consumer behavior.

1. Awareness and Knowledge

The strategic communication efforts significantly increased awareness and knowledge about the environmental impact of plastic waste among Alfamart's customers. Interviews revealed that many customers became aware of the detrimental effects of single-use plastic bags through Alfamart's campaigns. This heightened awareness was a critical first step in changing consumer behavior, aligning with the knowledge stage of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003). Customers reported that the information provided by Alfamart was clear and informative, which helped them understand the importance of switching to reusable tote bags.

2. Attitudinal Change

There was a notable shift in customers' attitudes towards the use of reusable tote bags. Strategic communication theory emphasizes the importance of shaping positive attitudes to influence behavior (Hallahan et al., 2007). The messages disseminated by Alfamart, which highlighted both the environmental and economic benefits of reusable bags, were effective in fostering a positive attitude among customers. Many customers expressed a newfound appreciation for the environmental benefits of using reusable bags and showed a willingness to change their shopping habits as a result.

3. Behavior Change

The strategic communication efforts led to a measurable change in consumer behavior. According to the interviews, a significant number of customers adopted the use of reusable tote bags for their shopping needs. This behavior change can be attributed to the comprehensive communication strategy that included both online and offline channels, ensuring consistent and pervasive messaging. The adoption process described by the Diffusion of Innovations Theory was evident, as customers progressed from awareness and persuasion to decision and implementation stages.

4. Influence of Communication Channels

The integration of online and offline communication channels played a crucial role in the campaign's success. Social media platforms were particularly effective in reaching a broad audience and engaging with customers. Offline efforts, such as in-store signage and employee

training, reinforced the messages delivered online. This multi-channel approach ensured that customers encountered consistent messages across different touchpoints, enhancing the overall impact of the campaign (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

5. Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Feedback from customers was actively sought and integrated into the communication strategy, reflecting the principles of the Excellence Theory in public relations (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). Alfamart used customer feedback to refine their messages and address any misconceptions or concerns. This iterative process helped maintain the campaign's relevance and effectiveness, ensuring that it continued to resonate with customers over time.

6. Barriers and Challenges

Despite the overall success, some barriers and challenges were identified. A segment of customers was resistant to changing their habits due to convenience factors associated with single-use plastic bags. Additionally, there were logistical challenges in ensuring a sufficient supply of reusable tote bags at all store locations. Addressing these barriers required ongoing communication efforts and operational adjustments to make the transition to reusable bags as seamless as possible for customers.

CONCLUSION

This case study of Alfamart's strategic communication efforts to promote reusable tote bags highlights the significant role of well-planned communication in driving environmental sustainability initiatives. By increasing awareness and knowledge about the environmental impact of plastic waste, Alfamart successfully laid the groundwork for changing customer attitudes and behaviors. The strategic use of multi-channel communication, including social media and in-store messaging, ensured consistent and pervasive outreach, effectively engaging customers and encouraging the adoption of reusable tote bags. The findings underscore the importance of shaping positive attitudes to influence behavior change, as emphasized by strategic communication theory. Alfamart's messages, which combined environmental and economic benefits, resonated with customers and fostered a willingness to change shopping habits. The iterative process of incorporating customer feedback into the communication strategy further enhanced the campaign's relevance and effectiveness, demonstrating the value of continuous improvement in strategic communication efforts. Despite the overall success, challenges such as resistance due to convenience factors and logistical issues in ensuring a sufficient supply of reusable bags were identified. Addressing

these barriers through ongoing communication and operational adjustments was crucial. This case study underscores the potential for strategic communication to promote environmental sustainability and highlights the need for comprehensive, multi-faceted approaches to drive meaningful behavior change among consumers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to thank the friends who have helped in this research. Any omissions or errors remain those of the authors.

REFERENCE

- Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1), 3-35.
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.
- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), 357-365.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Grunig, J. E., & Grunig, L. A. (2008). Excellence theory in public relations: Past, present, and future. *Public Relations Research*, 327-347.
- Hallahan, K., Holtzhausen, D., van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., & Sriramesh, K. (2007). Defining strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 1(1), 3-35.
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press.