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Brand Guardian in a 'Fragile' Society

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ABSTRACT

Although the duties and responsibilities of brand guardianship are on a collective scale, their success depends on the hard work of each brand guardian according to their roles and capacities. In the era of disruption, the challenges are even more significant and more diverse

Keywords

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INTRODUCTION

About who protects brands is always a long debate among brand practitioners. Each party feels they have an essential contribution. Advertising practitioners' agency assume it was they who shaped the life of the brand. Then, the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) also feels a guardian in bringing up the brand. And a CEO also sees himself as a real brand guardian. In short, not wanting to be forgotten, each claim to have closeness with the brand.

According to Janoe Ariyanto, President Director/CEO of Dentsu Aegis Network Indonesia, the claims by the brand practitioners have a point. Because the brand is a living thing, which grows and develops. In its way to the

consumer/customer, said Janoe, there are determining points along the brand journey. That is when the presence of a brand guardian affects the interaction that occurs. It can go up and down, depending on what stimulus it receives from the brand guardian.

Thus, the success of the brand is the collective work of the brand guardian. For example, when the brand is still in a position of being brewed, of course, the brand guardian who works hard is an advertising practitioner. In another case, when the brand already on the market, then the determining journey points are among marketing practitioners. "*That applies to the extreme on the Omni Channel model, which requires the entire process run seamlessly, in a standard brand experience,*" concluded Janoe in his explanation.

Indeed, when viewed from the context of the organizational structure, of course, the CMO holds the position of the real brand

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guardian. In reality, they do not work alone because there are support teams that act according to their respective capacities. According to Janoe, the responsibility of brand guardianship is not only fall on one party. All team members who work for brands, whether Agency, CMO, or CEO, are the guardians who have the same responsibility for the brand. They are brand guardians, without the need to find who the real brand guardian is.

According to Adi Wijaya, Marketing Director of Klik Activation, easily the real brand guardian is a synergy between CEO - CMO – Agency. Because the direction of the brand will have to come from the CEO, then it must be implemented by the CMO, who will collaborate with the agency to translate the direction from the CEO into a marketing strategy for the brand communication.

Therefore, it needs an agency that can see the brand as a whole without leaving the brand book that the brand already has. *"I think the responsibility falls mostly on CMO, as the CMO act as the conductor of the brand's orchestra,"* states Adi.

Ricky Afrianto, Global Marketing Head Mayora Indah, said it does not matter who the best guardian for a brand. Because the brand guardian can not only refer to one person internally. *"Everything related to the brand, both from the agency, external, and even the media, can be placed as a brand guardian,"* explained Ricky.

However, when it comes to ownership, CMO and CEO are the parties who must establish brand value, brand vision, and manage the brand. Formally they are who determine the success of the brand among stakeholders. *"CMOs and CEOs can utilize all stakeholders to help guard the brand,"* he continued, so ingenuity is needed to take advantage of all of these components to bring the brand success.

Ricky stressed out that all of it goes back to the objective of the brand guardian. To his knowledge, the brand guardian has a role in managing a way to make a better brand value, more substantial brand equity, a more positives

brand image, increasing consumer confidence, and so on. Not stopping there, Adi believes the brand guardians must be able to deliver these values consistently to customers. *"So that the brand's existence is maintained well in the long run,"* pointed Adi.

As stated by Ricky, Adi also agreed, the task of the brand guardian is now increasingly hard. In this era, media fragmentation is extraordinary. There are ATL - BTL - social media/digital. Not to mention the millennial segment who have their characteristics. According to Adi, the brand guardian must be able to place the brand in the right place to achieve maximum results. *"If they were handling it wrong, the impact would be detrimental to the concerned brand,"* he warned.

Indeed, the presence of the brand guardian expected to minimize the risk. Because, no matter how trustworthy a brand is, it still needs to be managed to reduce the risk of failure. And no less important, having a brand guardian, the success of a brand becomes more controllable and measurable.

Janoe asserted that the brand guardian's task is not just to maintain the consistency of the look and feel of a brand that has been determined in a guideline when establishing and developing the brand. *"The task of maintaining consistency in things that visible is like a default system that always attached to the corporate structure,"* he asserted.

Another thing that is not easy, according to Janoe, is managing brand consistency when the brand meets all the dynamics of the market as it is now. *"That's some of the important tasks of the brand guardian now,"* he pointed out, for example, maintaining brand character amid market dynamics. According to Janoe, market dynamics are very complex. The brand meets with a variety of interactions in the form of service, customer experience, transactions, competition, market pressure, to the crisis market situation. *"Amid these various kinds of dynamics, the function of the brand guardian becomes very strategic,"* he stressed. Keeping

brand consistent is one of key tasks in guardianship (Remedy, n.d.; Wyk, 2017).

Well, brand guardians must ensure that the customer experience processes within brand standards. What Janoe meant, the customer experience design pattern as a series of various contact points that bring together the brands with various types of stakeholders. "There, a brand guardian must monitor and ensure everything runs seamlessly and consistently," Janoe said.

Hence, the brand guardian must be able to maintain brand value and brand character. "Maintaining the character of the brand is not an easy task. The brand does not stand alone. Brands interact, collaborate, build a shared vision, and respond to trends continuously," he said. Therefore, a brand guardian must be able to determine with whom the guarded brand goes with, who it can collaborate with, as well as which trends that can be adhered to or not.

"Consistency in brand guidelines often locks the brand in rigidity. Sometimes brands must dare to change themselves, so they remain relevant to the dynamics," Janoe stressed. Thus, a brand should remain relevant and visionary. "It is at this point that the brand must be able to respond to changes to continue to be relevant," he continued.

Ricky also added, one of the crucial points that must be processed by a brand guardian is crowd involvement in the branding process. Because the branding process runs more generic and even more authentic. Top-down patterns can no longer carry out when a lot of segments that require personal interaction and customization, as well as different and unique treatment of a brand.

Not to mention the brand guardians are now faced with an increasingly fragmented budget. The marketing landscape encounters fragments of channels and media in various forms, as well as in large numbers. This complexity can serve as an opportunity because the key is not about serving all of the growing media.

Brands in the Era of Disruption

From Janoe's observation, the crucial issue of a brand is a matter of brand delivery. Real brand practice, brand functions in daily life, and customer experience. At this point, the brand deal directly with product design or design service, which constantly demanded to be relevant.

Besides, Ricky added, marketing constraints are always about a limited budget. Therefore, marketers must also be careful. In the current situation, everyone is talking about digital technology. "But in my opinion, in some cases, we still have to be careful in choosing media and brand channels, depending on the target and strategy, and whether our brand categories are appropriate," said Ricky, always trying to keep spending balanced.

According to him, the roles and capacities of each party are different. The Agency, in general, is related to ideas and creativity. As a sparring partner, of course not just for creative ideas but also offering. The agency plays an important role because they help find options to dramatize the story of the brand and will test whether the brand proposition is appropriate for the target audience.

In the end, Ricky gave four tips to keep the brand in an era of disruption. *First*, everyone must realize that a brand is a living thing. Therefore, the brand can go up and down, depending on the stimulus it receives. *Second*, the brand should be a relevant and best-in-class solution. *Third*, brand guardians must be able to transmit the value of the brand through insightful communication. "Without communication, consumers will forget the brand," said Ricky. *Fourth*, innovation and adaptation. Brand guardians must continue to innovate and adapt the brand because it is not the only one that is dynamically evolving, the consumers are also evolving dynamically along with the changes in trends and developments in socioeconomic and technology.

For brand guardians, Adi added some important things. First, they must constantly up-

to-date with the communication trends in this digital age. Second, the use of digital communication channels and social media platforms plays a role in reaching the target audience. And third, take advantage of interactions on social media that can happen instantly and quickly become viral by up fronting things that are unique and related to the daily routines of the target audience. "In essence, creative - fast response - viral are the three things to maintain a brand in the era of disruption successfully," Adi said, closing the interview.

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