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M&M Rebranding Scandal

Most kids across the world would blissfully respond to the question, “What is your favorite candy?” Over the past few years, a fan favorite, M&M, has faced controversy, resulting in the decline of their popularity. This case sparked our interest because of the public’s reaction to such a minor change. This case shows how fast attitudes can change in Public Relations and is an excellent example of how to respond when a crisis occurs. The candy brand M&M has always used spokescandies to represent their company. These spokescandies were implemented in 2016 by the brand to help the candies stand out among other brands; the original spokescandies were red, yellow, blue, and green (O'Reilly, 2023). Around a year ago, M&M rebranded its spokescandies, causing a community crisis. Mars Wrigley, M&M’s founder, as well as all of the MARS industry, updated the look of some of these spokescandies and a few new ones (Diaz, 2023). These changes included changing the shoes of female spokescandies, changing the back stories of the characters, as well as adding a couple more spokescandies to the mix. He claimed he did this to “Make the mascots fit a “more dynamic, progressive world.” Though these changes were seemingly minor, they upset the public for many reasons. These new spokescandies were introduced with odd backstories that caught the eyes of many critics. The new spokescandies switch up is a prominent crisis that has escalated in the eyes of many. In response, M&M is taking several steps to mend its relationship with the candy advocates.

M&M has been one of the biggest chocolate brands in the U.S. for decades. M&M’s Plain Chocolate Candies were introduced in 1941 when Forrest E. Mars, Sr. returned to the United States, establishing M&M’s Limited in Newark, New Jersey (MMS, 2023). M&M’s is a business company that sells a variety of chocolate candies in stores worldwide. They are in good financial standing and have reached most parts of the world. They started building their

brand on the premise that M&M's are for all of the "Funkind". M&M's mission statement states: "M&M's is a chocolate brand on a mission. We believe in championing the power of fun to create a world where everyone feels they belong. We have been a fun brand for a long time, but now it's time to take that FUN to the next level. Make it meaningful. Make it powerful. Make it a movement. A movement that unites the masses by inviting everyone to be part of something bigger than just fun for fun's sake. After all, fun is meant to be inclusive, for all. Better yet, for all Funkind. This is our rallying cry to drive a global movement to remind people everywhere that, despite our differences, we all belong to a community of humans that share one simple and powerful thing in common: fun." To foster this world of belonging, M&M'S® has also launched The M&M'S FUN, a global initiative that tracks the brand's impact on its mission to increase the sense of belonging for 10MM by 2025. The M&M'S FUN provides resources, mentorship, opportunities, and financial support in the arts and entertainment space to help ensure people have access to experiences where everyone feels they belong. Because together, we can make this a reality for all Funkind" (MMS, 2023).

Their industry may have started in the 1940's, but M&M's soon became the biggest chocolate candy brand, gaining popularity in the 1950's during WWII (O'Reilly, 2023). Their brand became so popular that they had to start stamping the letter "M on each piece of chocolate (O'Reilly, 2023). M&M has always been a strong, worldwide company. Their brand took off during WWII and since then has been one of the most popular candy companies in the world. While conducting a SWOT analysis of M&M, we have found that they possess strong, unique marketing tactics, such as their spokescandies, which set them apart from other candy brands. In addition to their strengths, M&M also possesses weaknesses. In their creation of the spokescandies, they hit a nerve with their various publics. The changes of these spokescandies triggered some social issues that created a public relations crisis for

M&M. At the time of the crisis, M&M lacked the resources and tools to handle such a globally circulated crisis. Though they experienced some consequences from their weaknesses as a company, this crisis created various opportunities for M&M. These opportunities included learning, company growth, marketing, and branding opportunities through the management of this crisis. Many competing companies, such as Hershey and other candy companies, pose a threat in the face of a crisis. Countering this issue, M&M created opportunities for their company rather than allowing the treats to take down their brand. The M&M rebranding scandal is an issue that must be reconciled because of the decline in popularity with this company's large, various publics, and to assist and reimplement the reputation of this worldwide brand.

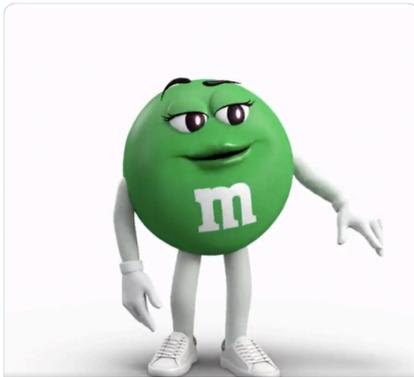
In this project, we will cover and discuss the M&M spokesperson rebranding scandal. The timeline of the events leading to M&Ms breaking the internet dates from 1960 all the way to 2023.

- 1940's M&M became the largest chocolate brand
- 1950 M&M gained popularity during WWII
- 1960's M&M introduces spokescandies (originally green, red, yellow, and blue)
- 2012 Brown spokescandy introduced
- January 2022 M&M changes the green M&M gogo boots to sneakers
- January 2022 M&M changes brown M&M stilettos to smaller pumps
- January 2022 M&M posts "X" post of the green M&M saying, "did my shoes break the internet?"
- January 2022 M&M got rid of spokescandies
- January 2022 M&M introduced its new spokesperson Maya Rudolph
- September 28, 2022 M&M added new "woke" purple spokescandy

- February 12, 2023 Superbowl Commercial
- February 12 Spokescandies are back

There are three significant scandal areas, including the Green, Purple, and Brown M&M. Originally, in 1960, M&M had four spokescandies; there was the single female M&M, Green, accompanied by three men, Blue, Yellow, and Red. These candies were simply introduced as playful characters to help them stand apart from other competitors. In 2012, M&M added, “Brown”, labeled as an intelligent woman who reportedly “worked behind the scenes for years” (Elsesser, 2023). However, she initially started out in stilettos, and M&M changed her shoes for lower-block heels. While this was supposed to be for female empowerment, M&M faced a multitude of nasty comments: Tucker Carlson found the M&M’s without heels “deeply unappealing”. The original Green had gogo boots in the 1990s, which changed to sneakers in January 2022. Brown simultaneously traded her stilettos for more comfortable pumps in January of 2022. This change was rumored to represent female empowerment and a statement suggesting to “Be who you are: At the time, Anton Vincent, president of Mars Wrigley North America, said the changes were made to make the characters more "representative of the customer." (Panella, 2023). This simple change in animated characters left the internet in shambles and M&M received feedback that Green was “no longer attractive.” Other comments about the change from the gogo boots to sneakers made M&M’s changes something they were not: Kat Timpf, also from Fox News, stated that Green was “an opportunistic, evil bitch” and suggests you should “run from women like the green M&M.” (Elsesser, 2023). M&M responded to the crisis by posting on X a photo of the

Did my shoes really break the internet?



“green” M&M saying “Did my shoes really break the

internet?” Exhausted with the public, M&M temporarily gave up on the spokescandies and had a human spokesperson, Maya Rudolph. They kept their responses lighthearted and true to their brand through playful tweets and well-explained messages. They also sent out a mass email on January 23, 2022, stating that their spokescandies are “embracing a new path to pursue other actions” and also stating the candies “Will share more on the spokescandies' new pursuits over the next few weeks” (Elsesser, 2023).

America, let's talk. In the last year, we've made some changes to our beloved spokescandies. We weren't sure if anyone would even notice. And we definitely didn't think it would break the internet. But now we get it -- even a candy's shoes can be polarizing. Which was the last thing M&M'S wanted since we're all about bringing people together.

Therefore, we have decided to take an indefinite pause from the spokescandies. In their place, we are proud to introduce a spokesperson America can agree on: the beloved Maya Rudolph. We are confident Ms. Rudolph will champion the power of fun to create a world where everyone feels they belong.

M&M'S



M&M taking away their spokescandies only temporarily

calmed the public. Also, in September 2022, M&M added a new spokescandy in over a decade: “Mars is thrilled to debut the newest member of the M&M’S cast of characters to the world. There is so much about our new spokescandy that people can relate to and appreciate, including her willingness to embrace her true self – our new character reminds us to celebrate what makes us unique,” said Jane Hwang, Global Vice President at Mars Wrigley. “Our purpose story is just getting started and the introduction of our newest M&M’S spokescandy

is the next chapter, as the brand continues to delight fans with fun in a way only M&M'S can.” (MMS, 2023). M&M's introduction of a purple, female spokescandy that was, according to a press statement, made to represent “acceptance and inclusivity” was not accepted how M&M imagined (Elsesser, 2023). The public immediately assumed Purple represented transgender individuals and labeled the company as “woke” M&M.

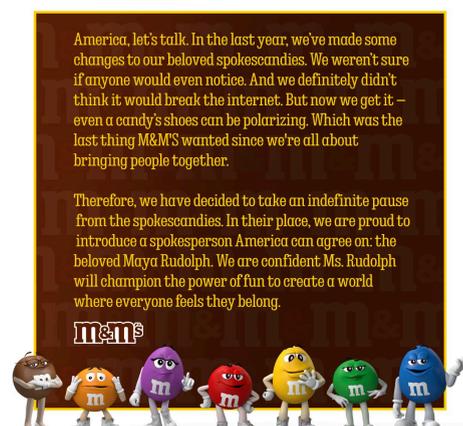
There are two sets of publics that M&M reached: internal and external publics. Their internal publics are the employees of M&M, the CEO and investors in the company, and those who represent the spokescandies. The external public that this specific case reached is much larger. The external public includes the general public, M&M consumers worldwide, viewers of their commercials, and social media presences that hopped onto this case. This specific case reached a more extensive public because of the coverage it received on the internet due to the impact and mass of social issues associated with this case, as well as already being a globally known product. Companies this large should have a crisis response team already in place with a plan for when a sudden crisis occurs. M&M learned so much and responded so well to this crisis, and is properly prepared for when something like this occurs in the future. Through crisis management, M&M re-established itself as a brand to their public.

M&M executed a very intentional, intricate strategy in the face of this crisis. To begin with, there are various objectives, purposes, and goals of a campaign that M&M pushed during their crisis management. There are typically three types of objectives that PR agents use: informational, attitudinal, and behavioral. M&M mainly used attitudinal. Through their campaigns, M&M targeted a change in consumer and public attitudes toward the situation. Starting off, they have an attitudinal objective because they have used Twitter as a platform to promote their image and address any skepticism. This was accomplished through the key messages delivered through the campaigns. There are a few different key messages that

M&M's has been promoting through their crisis management. To begin with, M&M said in a [statement](#) that “they were creating a World where everyone felt like they belonged (Elsesser, 2023). In addition, according to a [press statement](#), M&M desires to push its mission statement “For all Funkind.” (Mars, 2022). Throughout the whole crisis, M&M as a company admirably continued to refer to its mission statement for all responses to the public.

M&M faced a sudden crisis when their publics began to explode over changes to their spokescandies. As stated above, these changes involved seemingly minor changes to the original spokescandies, such as alteration of the appearance of the candies, adding new spokescandies, and creating new backgrounds and personalities for these candies. These changes sparked attention towards social issues such as female empowerment. The public was outraged as this crisis gained global attention, and M&M was banned in Sweden. M&M could never have prepared for the crisis at hand but responded quickly to this crisis and began their strategies for crisis management

To begin with, M&M communicated with the public through their website and Twitter. The Twitter post remained lightheaded and comical with an image of the “green M&M” in her new sneakers, stating, “Did my shoes really break the internet?” They released statements on their website that included their mission statement and the purpose behind the changes made to their spokescandies. They claimed in a [statement](#) that “they were creating a World where everyone felt like they belonged.” In these statements and Twitter posts, M&M



announced that they would temporarily do away with

their spokescandies and replace them temporarily with a human spokesperson, Maya Rudolph. Mrs. Rudolph was the spokesperson for M&M for a concise amount of time while the brand was deciding what to do with their beloved spokescandies. This decision temporarily calmed the public for the most part while also enraging others. In addition, another campaign that M&M decided to pursue was for International Women’s Day. This campaign was genius for M&M. On their next release, M&M included three female M&Ms on the packaging upside down to promote the message of women “flipping the status



quo” (Elsesser, 2023).

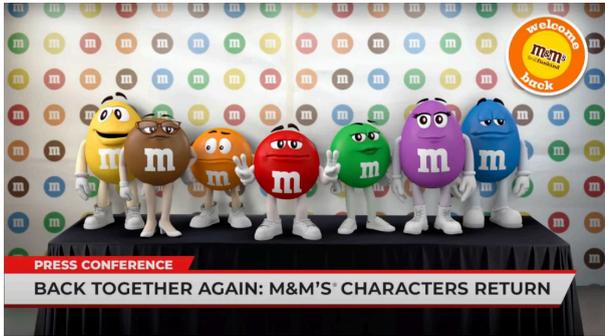
This further implemented the key message of “Creating a World where Everyone Feels Like They Belong” (Elsesser, 2023). This strategy helped M&M reaffirm to their public that they support women. Their final main strategy is taking advantage of their Super Bowl commercial slot to reimplement the spokescandies for good. M&M took full advantage of their time and the situation at hand to deal with the crisis they faced. In the background of the commercial, “red” and “yellow” M&M were holding up a “HELP” sign in response to the



fake rebranding promoted in the commercial.

This made light of a negative situation and used a funny commercial to calm the public.

M&M responded positively to the commercials and began transitioning to implementing their spokescandies for good after all (Wiener-Bronner, 2023). They used Maya to intricately introduce that the spokescandies are back through a comical commercial. Though it seems



intricate, it aided in the success of all of the campaigns M&M attempted. The company released a final commercial where the spokescandies stated, “We are back together again: M&M’s characters return (Wiener-Bronner, 2023).

M&M adopted the contingency theory during this crisis. They had to decide whether to advocate for their company and spokescandies or accommodate their public. They had a mixed approach, meaning they both advocated for their company and accommodated their publics. It began by accommodating their publics through the removal of the spokescandies. It transitioned to advocacy through the strategies stated above that resulted in the reinstatement of the spokescandies. M&M follows the two-way symmetrical model. The dialogue created mutually beneficial communication between the company and the publics. This communication was done through Twitter posts and on the MARS website. M&M continued to point back to its mission statement and key messages time and time again. In all aspects of communication, M&M stayed consistent and true to the brand, the mission statement, and its key messages. I admire the way that M&M stayed very true to their playful brand, as well as consistently referring to their mission statement. It is a wonderful example of properly executed ethical PR. Their responses during this crisis were apologetic, corrective

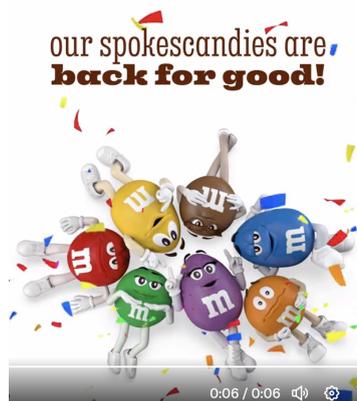
action, and strategic silence. Their response timing was admirable. They were quick to hop on the issue and responded in a timely manner. In addition, all of their responses were strategic to the end goal of rebranding their spokescandies. Their response is admirable, but some may believe that they should have kept the iconic candies and written apologies to create a new image for themselves by keeping the colors and outfits original instead of giving the spokescandies human-like attributes. They did their best to achieve their overall goal in a situation that no one could have foreseen. Overall, the strategies implemented by M&M were, in the end, creative and effective in the rebranding of the spokescandies

M&M possesses and uses reliable communication tactics. Their primary forms of communication are through their website, Twitter “X”, company emails, and commercials. Most of the messages they deliver as a brand are through these outlets. Their main form of communication as controlled media is Twitter and their website. The “X” posts on their account are playful and consistent with M&M as a brand. Because of the consistency in their marketing and communications, no matter how much it upsets people, there will always slightly be a lighthearted association with any crisis that occurs. Though there was an eruption over the change of the spokescandies, their publics responded well to their corrective actions since then. However, their marketing strategies for the future are still unknown since they strive to achieve the idea of “Fun for all”. I admire the communication tactics in place by M&M. A company as large as M&M needs to stay consistent with what it is promoting, and it has continued to return to the playful brand and mission statement in every response it puts out to the public. The consistency of their company has helped M&M accomplish rebranding amidst a crisis. I do not know what more they could have done as a company. They communicated well, listened to their publics, accommodated their publics while advocating for their brand. While it was a global crisis initially, they succeeded in their goals and objectives.

At first glance, this case does not make sense, but when looking at this crisis, all events that follow apply to learning about PR. One might ask how it got so blown out of proportion and gained such large coverage by the media; M&M themselves said that their spokescandies “broke the internet”. When dealing with social issues such as the ones seen in this case, it is hard to prepare for how the public will react. I think M&M handled this case well. They were trying to empower women and make social adjustments to an outdated design, and changing something as small as the design of a cartoon candy caused a greater response from the public. M&M strategically stayed true to their brand and kept their responses lighthearted through their Twitter posts while making severe changes necessary, such as temporarily removing their spokescandies. Their “X” post alone received over 57 million views which helps understand how large of an audience this brand reached. The way they communicated with the public was clear and done well.

What was a sudden crisis, M&M turned into a strategic PR campaign. The use of the superbowl commercial to make light of the crisis, and reintroduce the spokescandies was a great move for M&M. Ultimately, this was a very smart publicity tactic for M&M. The company surely did not realize that something as small as changing a candy’s shoes would stir up such a controversy, but they used a potentially negative situation as a great opportunity to gain some fresh attention on their brand and spin the situation in their favor. They used applications from the PRSA code of ethics for this crisis. Ethics are foundational to all Public Relations matters. M&M ethically responded to all hate, and misinformation spread during the crisis through an accommodative approach. Their transparency in all cases of the events at hand about how unexpected their responses were are a great example of ethical public relations. They accommodate their public through the removal of the spokescandies temporarily, but advocate for their company through their statements, campaigns, and the reinstatement of the spokescandies.

I personally do not think it was necessary to get rid of the M&M spokescandies but I understand why they felt it was best for their brand to relieve some of the feedback they were receiving from their public. Circumstances considered, creating a new branding tactic of having a physical person, Maya Rudolph, be the face of the brand temporarily was a positive, strategic idea for M&M. This relieved a lot of the pushback and attention from the public as well as helped set up the company for the rebranding. In addition, the use of the female characters on an M&M package for international women's day was a clever tactic to gain the respect of one of the external publics of M&M. This strategy also helped M&M show their support for women while they were under a close watch. The reintroduction of the spokescandies was intricately planned and executed through strategic planning. Now, the



NOO THEY UN YASSIFIED THE GREEN M&M

Mark's Yesterworld @Yester_World
I can't wait for the internet to inevitably obsess over the incredibly subtle new design changes to the M&M characters.



spokescandies are back and

better. They have been redesigned and are staying for good: "From new product innovations to brand campaigns, our evolved characters and our experiential retail stores, we'll incorporate colorful visuals, inclusive messaging and our purpose into all we do to prove that all together, we're more fun," said Jane Hwang, global marketing vice president for Mars Wrigley, in a statement. They used an unforeseen sudden crisis to spark a campaign that advocated for their company and gained the respect of their publics again. In addition, what has been most prominent is the importance of sticking to the mission statement. M&M continually referred to their mission statement in every response, and it aided in the success of rebuilding their brand for the better. Finally, what could have been a disaster for M&M

turned into a clever PR strategy that ended up reframing the reputation of M&M company for the better. Though M&M was faced with a sudden crisis, they successfully accomplished their objectives through strategic planning and successful implementation of their goals.

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