Critical PR & Advertising Analysis Campaign - Airbnb's #WeAccept

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Executive Summary:

The mission of the Airbnb's #WeAccept campaign was to promote diversity and acceptance. Airbnb transformed their company's platform to embody a company that functions on community. They implemented internal changes to lead by example for hosts and customers to embrace all ethnicities and open their homes to people in times of need. Airbnb's #WeAccept super bowl commercial sparked conversation and caught people's attention. Airbnb displaying images of people who represent all different ethnicities shows that everyone has a place with their service. The campaign produced positive press for the company and overall benefited the community. Some aspects of the commercial and campaign had room for improvement, but those issues were overshadowed by the impact of their actions. It is evident when analyzing the #WeAccept campaign while being mindful of Airbnb's past that the company has equality and opportunity at the forefront of its priorities.

Key Terms:

Critical PR & Advertising Analysis- subjective writing that expresses the writer's opinion or evaluation of a PR campaign or advertisement.

PR Campaign- has a clear objective, such as raising awareness of a product, informing the public of company news, reaching a larger audience, or improving the brand's reputation.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)- the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations of organizations by society (Parnell Chapter 1).

Refuge- a condition of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger or trouble.

Discrimination- the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Crisis - something that is considered a significant threat to operations that can have long-term, negative consequences to the company or organization involved.

Crisis control- known as the process by which organizations respond to and manage the situation to minimize damage to products, people, the public, and their reputation.

Introduction:

Bed and Breakfasts were generally portrayed on TV shows to be convenient alternatives to a hotel. In advertisements, they are generally showcased as a small, historically based, chic place to stay. Today, Bed and Breakfasts are still seen as that; but, they have expanded into a marketplace called Airbnb. Airbnb's #WeAccept campaign is effective in attracting attention towards the issue of discrimination by tackling issues internally with their hosts and externally with the promotion of this campaign. Through this campaign, Airbnb is committed to making the stay of their guests comfortable and accommodating, despite the identities or ethnicities of their guests. The campaign has room for improvement such as representation issues and stereotype reinforcement, but those come second to the over impact of increased awareness to the general population and increased aid and support to those in need of it.

Within Airbnb, people rent out their homes within a certain area, often family vacation areas, and accommodate their home to the needs of guests and tourists. Discrimination does not have a home within the Airbnb marketplace. The #WeAccept Campaign was seen in commercials during the 2017 Superbowl in support of the Syrian Refugee Process. This campaign showcased the strong commitment of Airbnb towards people in need, not just their guests that pay to stay in their home. If victims of natural disasters or aid workers sought refuge, these Airbnb's would supply them with it. The #WeAccept campaign states, "We believe no matter who you are, where you're from, who you love or who you worship, we all belong." Although homeowners are not obligated to open their homes up at all, Airbnb has committed to the acceptance of people of any ethnic group and those in need.

Airbnb has a rich history of community involvement and charitable actions. In 2012 the company began their sharing of aid with a tool that allowed Airbnb hosts in New York to open their homes to those displaced by the effects of Hurricane Sandy. 1,400 hosts were involved in the opportunity to provide aid. The tool would later be named as "Airbnb Open Homes" and has is what the #WeAccept campaign works with. Also impacting their good reputation, Airbnb employees receive four hours of paid time off every month to volunteer in their local communities, and Airbnb estimated in 2016 that their employee service hours amounted to 17,000. Their past along with the recent #WeAccept campaign is very pleasant and is a sharp look for the company. #WeAccept was the final piece to the puzzle for a company whose only past blemish was on inclusiveness and equality.

Overview of PR Campaign or Advertising Campaign:

This section focuses on the events and news that lead up to the beginning of the #WeAccept campaign. Additionally, it discusses the creative process and strategic decisions that impacted the campaign as a whole, and the positive and negative results of those decisions.

Airbnb held a private recruitment event where different panelists shared their experiences with discrimination to get a better idea of how these issues happen in order to be able to target them. One person even said that she didn't get accepted for a commercial because she was "too black" for what they were going for. After this, Airbnb started analyzing this and realizing how other companies are sometimes pushing/forcing to diversify their ranks causing a lot of stress on minorities trying to navigate this process. Just a few months later in February 2017, the US federal government announced a travel ban on seven muslim-majority nations. This made Airbnb realize they had to use their influence on much of the rented housing in America to help this issue. From Airbnb's wish to help dissipate discrimination and help the people affected by the travel ban the campaign WeAccept came to be in early 2017.

Now, Airbnb wanted to make the world better and ensure that all of its hosts and guests were held up to a standard of acceptance but Airbnb Co-founder and chief product officer Joe Gebbia said; "We do believe in an inside-out culture. If we hold our hosts and guests to an expectation of acceptance and belonging, it has to start within our company. Otherwise, how on earth do we have the credibility to hold them accountable, if we're not doing it to ourselves?" Airbnb produced a video titled "*Acceptance starts from within*" interviewing workers about their experience with the openness provided in the Airbnb workplace. Many workers elaborated on

how being able to express themselves in the way they want also enables them to do better work since they aren't constantly consumed by worrying about being judged.

After making sure that their values were being represented inside their work force, now it was time to tackle the issues of discrimination outside of the offices. Going along with the #WeAccept campaign, Airbnb rolled out an uncommon Super Bowl commercial. It wasn't uncommon because it was bad or unexpected but because it featured no celebrities, was very simple, and went against social issues instead of advertising a brand. The video was simply titled "We Accept" and it featured portraits of different people from different nationalities with the message; "We believe no matter who you are, where you're from, who you love, or who you worship, we all belong. The world is more beautiful, the more you accept. Although Airbnb tried to portray an image of embracing all races and ethnicities, they may have instead portrayed people who are not white as helpless. Airbnb presented itself as the savior for refugees and people who suffer from racism. In doing so, Airbnb is unintentionally enforcing the image of them being the white savior. This wasn't something notable on the surface, rather something more likely found on a second or third watch through, as the first was to learn about the campaign and its efforts.

This video generated 33 thousand retweets by the first half of the game alone with an 85% positive response. This ad made Airbnb the 3rd largest driver of Earned Impressions of all-time at over 87 million. Airbnb also revamped their website putting their campaign front and center and an overall increase of 13% was seen just on their website alone. The "WeAccept" video generated over 19 million views on facebook and 100 thousand shares. All of this is great

but the biggest feat was encouraging 15.4k Airbnb hosts to join the movement and offer up their homes voluntarily to displaced populations.

Airbnb had been making moves on these issues since November 2016 but the campaign kicked off strong in February after the US travel ban was put into place thanks to the ad during the superbowl on February 5th. Airbnb pledged to donate 4 million dollars over the next four years which means that 2020 was the last one. The campaign is officially over and there's not much need for the host volunteering their homes since the "Muslim Ban" has been reworked 3 times and lessened restrictions.

Analysis of Campaign through CSR:

This section will discuss the impact #WeAccept had on the overall image of Airbnb from the Corporate Social Responsibility standpoint. The campaign spread across multiple categories of CSR impact as well as multiple CSR concepts. In all, the campaign was positive press for Airbnb.

2016 marked the start of the current era of Airbnb's corporate social responsibility coming to the forefront, with the #WeAccept campaign. The campaign's impact on the company's CSR was on the people aspect (one of the three main categories of CSR impact). The #WeAccept campaign took on the issue of and raised further awareness on displacement changing the course of individual lives. Their objective was to provide short-term housing for 100,000 people over a five year period. In addition, they announced their plan to donate $4 million to the International Rescue Committee. People are taken from low situations and

provided temporary relief while they process their long term options and objectives. #WeAccept also impacts the "profit" category of CSR. This category is involved in the campaign when considering the economic hardship of those benefiting from the campaign. The beauty of #WeAccept is that Airbnb is working without a profit. The image of the campaign is their efforts to aid those in need. Further, it demonstrates their host's similar kind heartedness when they are involved. The efforts of #WeAccept have, as a whole, taken low quality situations such as displacement and raised them to higher and more potent realities. Airbnb used its main resource to make an impact on those in need.

The strategic benefit for Airbnb's CSR comes when their actions fall in line with the company's operations. For this reason, #WeAccept and the Airbnb Open Homes function logically make the most sense for the company from a social responsibility standpoint. The campaign most closely aligns with the concept of corporate philanthropy, one of the six types of CSR. This is achieved in most cases by promoting the welfare of others. Airbnb is doing this by the promotion of welfare as well as an action that is more than a donation, which is the usual step a company takes to fulfil their "obligation." Additionally, the company's operations align with the community volunteering type of CSR, with hosts offering up their homes so that Airbnb can deliver on their promise to fight against displacement and its negative effects.

A current assessment of Airbnb's CSR will provide positive and uplifting results. The company has been active as it is now for many years, and the most inviting aspect of their CSR's change over time is that it grows along with the company. As their assets and influence increase, their involvement with the community and their provision of aid increase alongside.

Analysis of Campaign Strategies and Tactics:

In this section, three key strategic components of the #WeAccept campaign are broken down and assessed. Internal communication, influence at the individual level, and further charitable action play major roles in the overall outcome of the campaign. In addition, the effectiveness of their commercials outreach are discussed in relation to timing and opportunity of broadcast viewership.

Analysis of Strategy 1: Internally communicating Airbnb's commitment to the values of inclusion and community

Airbnb launched the advertisement campaign #WeAccept to address discrimination amongst the company's platform. This campaign is an example of crisis control. A Crisis is something that is considered a significant threat to operations that can have long-term, negative consequences to the company or organization involved. Crisis control is known as the process by which organizations respond to and manage the situation to minimize damage to products, people, the public, and their reputation. Customers have experienced discrimination when trying to book a rental based on the color of their skin. Multiple customers being turned away after their race was known led to the development of the hashtag #AirbnbWhileBlack. Airbnb responded with speed, transparency, and thoughtfulness. Airbnb also released their own internal diversity numbers. As of 2016, 42.88% of employees were women, 56.6% were white, 30.41% were Asian, 6.47% Latino and 2.92% were Black.

To embody a sense of community meant to change the platform of the company. The hashtag #WeAccept campaign was first introduced to the public eye in 2017 during the Super Bowl. When President Trump announced a travel ban on several countries that have a predominantly Muslim population Airbnb seized this opportunity to display their efforts to

reshape the company's platform to represent the community. Most importantly a community that is diverse and welcomes everyone. As a result of taking full responsibility to change internally, Airbnb has created the "Community Commitment", a policy that requires users to agree they must treat everyone in the community with respect, regardless of race, disability, sex, and religion. Strategies to achieve the idea of a community that stands together meant doing more than announcing a commitment and changing company policies. One change that was made prevents hosts from telling people of color they are unavailable when in reality they do not want people of color staying in their home. This feature automatically blocks out the days on a host's reservation calendar they have told guests they are not available. Airbnb also stated they are open to the idea of limiting the number of guest photos in the booking process. Whether people mean to or not people judge based on photos and judgment can lead to discrimination. Another new policy implemented is referred to as the "Open Doors Policy'', this means a place to stay on any Airbnb will be found for any guest who is unable to find a place to stay due to discrimination. This policy incorporates a 24-hour service.

Airbnb also went on to create a skilled team of engineers, data scientists, researchers, and designers whose job is to get rid of bias on the platform. Airbnb is also working to incorporate more diversity by building relationships with predominantly black and Latino universities to expand the pool of talent in the advertising world. Major advertisement industries are not digging deep enough amongst their talent to allow people of color and women an opportunity to move up from the entry-level to middle and upper management positions. Diversity is a key point of evaluation. When middle and upper management has diverse members as a part of their team a company can grow and learn how to be more accepting and meet current social standards. Airbnb fostering new relationships to effectively produce an ethical and inclusive PR message

while embodying a sense of community internally proves Airbnb is not presenting a message as a PR exercise rather a commitment to change. To communicate their message Airbnb produced an advertisement that did not have flashy images moving across the screen rather close up images of people's faces with different ethnicities. To keep the focus on Airbnb reshaping how they operate internally to build on community Airbnb did not mention any deals or promotions. Airbnb made the statement, "We believe no matter who you are, where you're from, who you love or who you worship, we all belong. The world is more beautiful, the more you accept. #WeAccept".

Analysis of Strategy 2: Educating/Persuading Customers & Hosts to take action

Customers are one of the most important factors in a company's success. To get customers to donate to one of the charitable causes or rent a place to stay through Airbnb the language used to persuade customers needs to catch their attention. Customers in the past have indeed tried to rent a place to stay and were unsuccessful due to their race. According to a Harvard study, someone with an African sounding name was 16% less likely to receive housing than someone with a white sounding name. Airbnb has worked to reshape its company policy to represent a diverse and inclusive company internally. It is only beneficial to Airbnb if the customers can clearly understand that Airbnb is actively working to be better and educate themselves on the issues of racism and discrimination. Two areas where they have fallen short in the past. Airbnb presented their new identity to customers through images and bold language that stands out. The super bowl commercial presented close up images of people who represent different ethnicities. The commercial had background music and presented bold writing stating Airbnb's message that no matter who you worship, what color your skin is, you belong and you

are accepted. Customers seeing images of people who represent multiple ethnicities causes customers to know that they are welcomed and will be able to find a safe place to stay. If a customer feels they are valued they will want to come back again and share their experience with friends and family. Part of embracing diversity and inclusion also lies in the hands of the customers.

Airbnb's #WeAccept movement is focused on the premise of accepting and embracing diversity. Airbnb worked further to implement internal changes and build their company on the foundation of the community. Their efforts towards reframing history and emphasizing to customers the importance of renting and donating to causes that work for those in need had the potential to present controversy, which is discussed in Recommendation #2.

Analysis of Strategy 3: Donate money and resources to external organizations

It is not enough to spark a real change by saying that you rented from a company that is complying with societal norms. Airbnb showed support for immigrants and refugees by taking the initiative. Airbnb announced they will donate four million dollars to the International Rescue Committee in addition to providing housing relief to 100,000 people over five years. Airbnb took action and started the initiative by providing links in their posts to organizations and charities as a strategy to get people to take the same initiative and action. By providing links on the majority of their social media posts and their website gives customers the push to take action also. A community includes all stakeholders. Customers need to support diversity and inclusion. By seeing someone on the screen who represents the same race or culture that one identifies with can motivate people to donate also. Airbnb's campaign holds the company responsible internally but it also holds customers responsible. Airbnb presents the idea that if they can make a change regarding their values and the basis the company functions on so can you. If customers want to

see a change they need to take an initiative also and hold themselves accountable for doing their part regarding embracing diversity and helping the movement to end racism and discrimination. For a customer, this could be demonstrated by acknowledging that Airbnb has made a change and afforded them another chance by choosing to rent through them.

Another form of taking the initiative could be making a donation, retweeting, or posting the message that Airbnb has produced to show you stand with them. Another key stakeholder that is part of the community of Airbnb includes the hosts. As important as it is to make sure customers continue to return and there is customer growth this will only work if the hosts are on board. Airbnb has implemented training for hosts about diversity and inclusion. Hosts who chose to partake in this training will be seen as valued hosts by Airbnb and will be held to a higher standard than those who choose not to participate in the training. Hosts that complete this training are taking their initiative by changing the way they operate as hosts and gain a better understanding of the effects racism can have and how they can better themselves to be more ethical and embrace diversity. Hosts are also capable of donating. Hosts who not only open up their home but donate their money to people in times of crisis can influence customers to donate to those in need also. People of all different races and economic status stay at Airbnb's. Customers who enjoy their stay can potentially be influenced by the hospitality of their host to make a difference by donating and helping those who need a place to stay in a time of need. The #WeAccept movement was created to highlight that talking about it is not enough. Taking action will spark a change within Airbnb and can spark change amongst other industries.

Tactic: Showcasing and Emphasizing Diversity

In the advertisement Airbnb released, a variety of people are shown. Around the time the advertisement was being published, the company was under a global agency review in order to

find a new advertising partner. Diversity was a key component of this review. This led to the thought that showing this commercial during a time like the Superbowl would boost their chances of finding a decent partner. The advertisement also included footage from a previous advertisement that Airbnb aired after receiving backlash in 2015 for specific people being denied housing. The commercial was also used as leverage so that Airbnb could express its commitment to provide to over 100,000 refugees. They also announced that they would donate $4 million to the International Rescue Committee. This response is reminiscent of their response to accusations of discrimination in 2016. They stated their community commitment, stating that they don't discriminate based on gender, race, etc. In this response, however, they took it a step further by expressing their commitment to take action.

Tactic: Timing

The advertisment aired 9 days after President Donald Trump ramped up border control (known as ‘extreme vetting’) for people coming from seven pre-dominantly Muslim countries. Considering the timing, this campaign comes across as Airbnb taking a stand against cultural and political suppression towards minorities. The fact that the commercial also aired after Airbnb received backlash for discrimination demonstrated that they saught to redeem and refocus their image. Airing it during the Superbowl was a good strategy because the Superbowl draws the highest TV ratings annually and specifically is known for its commercials. In all, the video generated 1.9 million views on YouTube, 109,000 on Instagram and 14 million on Facebook. The timing also helped spark a conversation with people who felt strongly about the travel ban. Airbnb received over 33,000 tweets after the commercial aired, achieving their goal of starting a conversation.

Recommendations for Campaign, Strategies/Tactics:

#1

People are motivated by incentives. One way Airbnb can improve their campaign is by informing customers and hosts of the progress the company is making by donating to refugee centers and providing links for others to contribute. When people are able to see the progress that is being made people are more motivated to want to be part of the movement that is sparking change. Airbnb can consider providing a database of hosts that have chosen to complete the diversity training and customers who have generously donated. Airbnb can state that they have transformed their company and are helping those in need; but, people listen and respond to data they can view. Providing the progress of the campaign can lead to a more positive outcome.

#2:

As mentioned earlier in the document, Airbnb's imagery and direction in their #WeAccept commercial is suspect in one major aspect. Airbnb presented itself as the savior for refugees and people who suffer from racism. In doing so, Airbnb is unintentionally enforcing the image of them being the white savior. People of color and people who have immigrated to the United States could take offense to see people that represent their race looking completely helpless. This advertisement can produce the single-story that all refugees and immigrants need financial assistance and a place to stay, and black people need special services to help them find suitable housing. The idea of a white savior can also be associated with white supremacy. White supremacy is the belief that white people are superior to those of all other races. A term that is associated with white supremacy and is evident in this advertisement is white privilege. White privilege is a legacy and a cause of racism. White centering spins from white privilege and is the belief that white culture, values, and norms are the center of the world. Many immigrants come

to the United States to establish housing and a living for themselves and their families. The single-story belief that all immigrants are refugees who need saving robs hard-working immigrants who have obtained success of their dignity and pride they have achieved while living in the United States legally. A greater sense of ethnic representation in the commercials would completely remove this issue from the campaign.

Conclusion:

The #WeAccept campaign's overall efforts to do good for their customers are extremely impactful because of Airbnb's commitment to their beliefs. In times of crisis, Airbnb has provided resources, through the willingness of their hosts, to make a difference. Airbnb's deep rooted connection to crisis is far from unnoted; yet, the #WeAccept campaign truly brought their ability to make a change into the limelight. This ongoing campaign was not their first time helping others and certainly will not be their last. Airbnb's status as a globally recognized brand, with direct outreach and services in over 220 countries, takes their aid and willingness to take a stance on issues that affect the majority to a new level of impactful. Optimistically, one would hope that Airbnb can inspire others who are in a position to provide aid to actually go forth and provide it. This goal is continuously worked towards through the company's daily activity and ongoing improvements provided to local communities and the greater good. Through understanding this, individuals can do their part by continuing to be aware and spread awareness of situations such as those that Airbnb involves themselves with. By continuing to support companies like Airbnb and their initiative, individuals are working towards bettering the quality of life. While good acts should be done without the purpose of self-image in mind, Airbnb avoids

this rule of thumb because their selflessness can shed light on those in need and lead to a better tomorrow.

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Appendix:

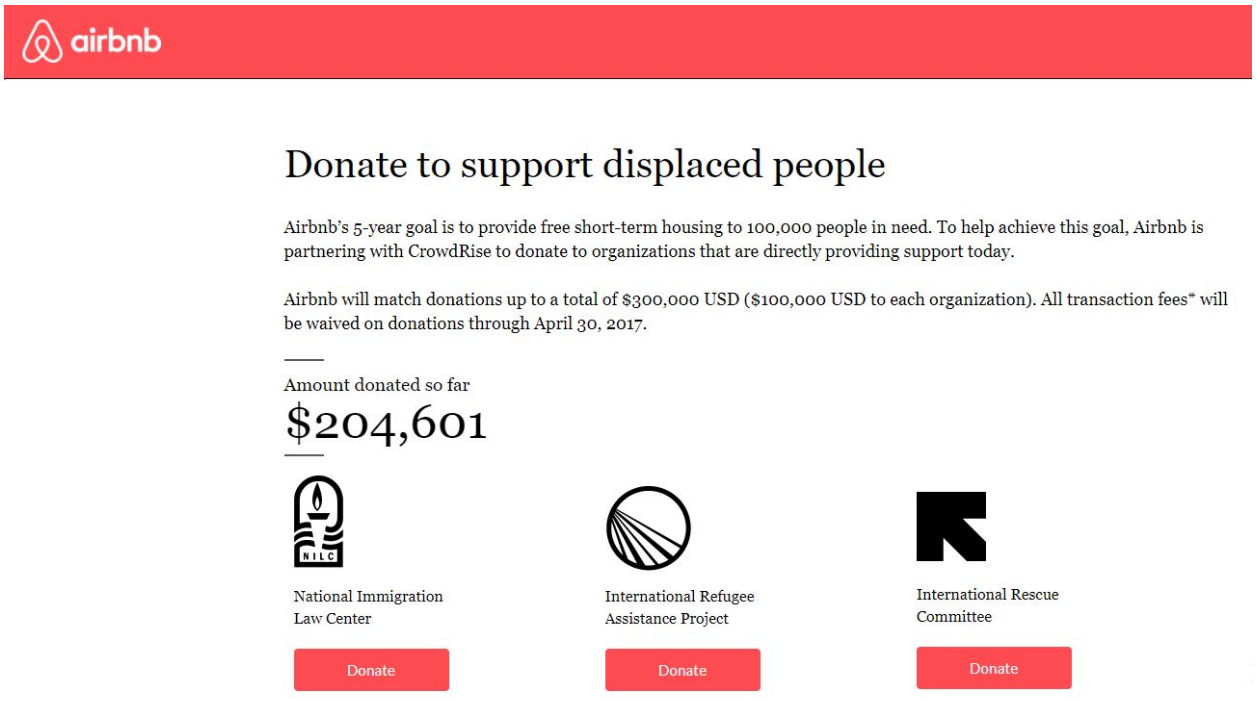
Information and statistics on Airbnb's Open Homes function

https://www.airbnb.com/openhomes

Airbnb Founders Statement on #WeAccept

https://www.airbnb.com/weaccept

The commercial that aired during the 2017 Super Bowl

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yetFk7QoSck

Airbnb's GoFundMe page from the campaign, and the resulting financial total. Also note the relevant charities associated with the page.