
The impact of Ambient Guerrilla Marketing (AGM) on brand awareness in urban environments.

A comparative case study of Kit Kat and BBC campaigns.

SIFOUR Soumia *

Traditional industries laboratory, University of Algiers 3,
Algeria.

sifour.soumia@univ-alger3.dz

SOUKEUR Fatima Zohra

Globalization and Economic Policies Laboratory, University of
Algiers 3, Algeria.

soukeur.fatimazohra@univ-alger3.dz

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Abstract:

This study aims to explore the impact of ambient guerrilla marketing on brand awareness within the context of urban environments. While previous literature has extensively discussed the general principles of guerrilla marketing, there remains a gap in understanding how specific tactics and the urban environment itself influence brand perception and consumer engagement.

This study examines a couple of real-world campaigns that have either succeeded or failed in raising brand awareness in urban settings. By evaluating the role of ambient guerrilla marketing techniques, we have concluded that AGM has a positive and significant impact on brand awareness, it's important to tailor AGM campaigns to local norms and regulations to avoid sensitivity or misunderstanding and one of the most important points for brands to take into consideration when it comes to adapting the AGM aspect is manage risk properly and to avoid controversy.

Key words: ambient guerrilla marketing (AGM), brand awareness, urban environment, Kit Kat, BBC.

Jel Classification Codes : M31, M37, M39.

* Auteur correspondant

1. Introduction:

In today's fast-paced urban environments, brands face the challenge of breaking through the noise and capturing the attention of increasingly distracted consumers. Traditional advertising methods are becoming less effective as urban spaces grow more saturated with promotional messages. As a result, marketers have turned to ambient guerrilla marketing, an innovative and often unconventional approach that seeks to engage consumers in unexpected and memorable ways.

This strategy leverages the power of surprise, creativity, and location to create authentic connections between brands and their audiences, often transforming everyday urban spaces into platforms for brands storytelling.

Ambient guerrilla marketing campaigns typically involve using public spaces, such as streets, parks, and public transportation hubs, to deliver impactful messages through interactive and immersive experiences. Unlike traditional advertisements, which are often designed to inform or persuade, guerrilla marketing aims to build brand awareness by engaging consumers in a more participatory and memorable way.

❖ Problem Statement:

Considering the above, the features of the problem under consideration emerge through the following main question:

- How Ambient Guerrilla Marketing (AGM) campaigns influence brand awareness in urban environments?

With comparative case analysis of successful and unsuccessful campaigns.

❖ Research Hypothesis:

We built the following hypothesis for our study:

H1: Ambient guerrilla marketing campaigns in urban environments have a significant positive impact on consumer brand recall and recognition.

H2: Consumers exposed to ambient guerrilla marketing report higher emotional engagement and positive brand sentiment compared to those exposed to conventional outdoor ads.

H3: Successful ambient guerrilla campaigns are more likely to align with local urban culture and environmental context than unsuccessful campaigns.

❖ Research sub-questions:

To better understand and grasp the details of this study, we pose the following sub-questions:

- How does AGM affect brand awareness metrics, "Recall, recognition, and Top of mind" in urban spaces?
- How urban environments influence consumer behaviour, and how can AGM be adapted to this context?
- What differentiates successful AGM campaigns from unsuccessful ones? In terms of strategic design, message delivery, and audience engagement.

❖ Research objectives:

- To identify the main components and techniques used in ambient guerrilla marketing and assess their effectiveness in increasing brand awareness.
- To explore how urban settings shape consumers' interactions with ambient guerrilla marketing.
- To analyze case studies of successful and unsuccessful campaigns.

❖ Previous Studies:

These are some studies that addressed the topics of guerrilla marketing, AGM and their impact on brand awareness:

- The study, titled "**The Impact of Guerrilla advertising on Brand Image (A Study of three types of Guerrilla advertising)**" by Ghada Mahmoud Ouf, explores how unconventional advertising methods influence brand perception. The paper's primary aim is to contribute to a theoretical understanding of guerrilla advertising strategies by analyzing their origins, principles, and philosophy. (Ouf, 2023)

- The study titled "**Guerrilla marketing impact on brand awareness and purchase intentions**" investigated the impact of various guerrilla marketing strategies on consumer behavior, specifically focusing on how these strategies influence brand awareness and subsequently lead to purchase intentions. The research also aimed to provide insights for marketers developing campaigns, recommending low-cost and personal engagement methods. (BADRELDIN, NEGM, AMARA, & SHWKY, 2024)

❖ The study titled "**New technologies and ambient marketing communication**" explores new technologies and unconventional methods in marketing communication, specifically focusing on ambient and guerrilla marketing. It highlights how traditional advertising struggles in oversaturated markets, necessitating innovative approaches like virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and surprise-based campaigns. (Fichnová, 2022)

❖ Research Methodology:

In order to answer the research questions, the study employs a comparative case study approach to explore the impact of ambient guerrilla marketing on brand awareness in urban environments. Utilizing qualitative data from real-world examples, the study is descriptive and exploratory.

The real-world campaigns we analyzed were the KitKat Breaker Bench campaign and the BBC Dracula billboard. To collect data about the two campaigns, we used the brand's websites and a list of articles and blogs that wrote about and analyzed the two campaigns.

❖ Research limitations:

- The study relies on publicly available data and secondary sources, which may limit the depth of consumer insights or internal campaign metrics.

- The findings may not be fully generalizable to all urban environments, as each city or region may have unique cultural or market dynamics that influence campaigns.

2. Literature Review:

1. Guerrilla Marketing

1.1 What is Guerrilla marketing?

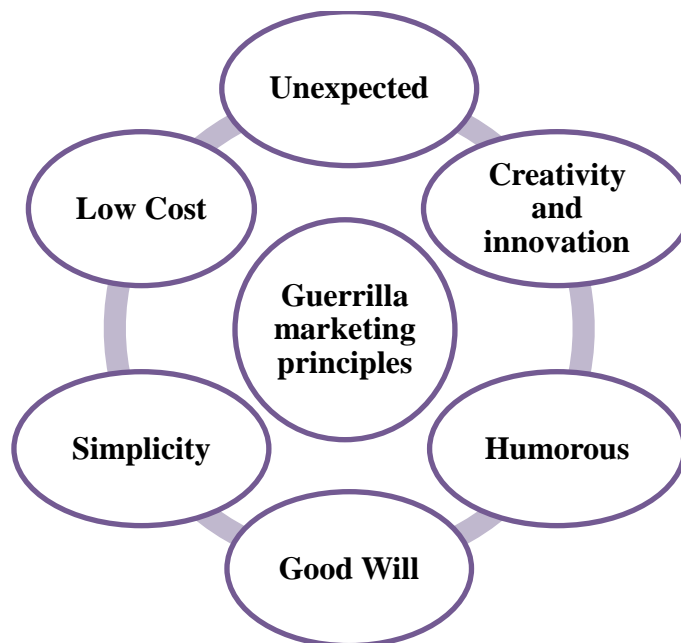
Although the term “Guerrilla marketing” was originally coined in 1984 by author Jay Conrad Levinson, it is rooted in military warfare history. As the term was inspired by guerrilla warfare, in which small and unconventional combat strategies are used by armed forces men in a region or a fierce battle.

Accordingly, we can say that Guerrilla Marketing is a type of marketing that reaches consumers engagingly and unexpectedly. It is about using your own creativity and tools at your disposal to make a genuine connection with your customers. (Jonathan Margolis & Garrigan, 2008), and it can be described as an innovative and outlandish method of advertising that uses low budget and high-impact tactics to advertise goods and services. (Raval & Reddy, 2023)

1.2 Core principles of guerrilla marketing:

The following diagram shows us the core principles of Guerrilla marketing:

Figure 1: Principles of guerrilla marketing



Source: Completed by the authors based on (YILDIZ, 2016)

Under the light of the previous figure, we can explain the core principles of Guerrilla marketing as follow:

- Unexpected:** Guerrilla marketing unconventionally relies on surprising the audience to grab immediate attention.

-**Creativity and Innovation:** It uses original and imaginative ideas to stand out from traditional marketing efforts.

-**Humorous:** Humor is often used to create a memorable and positive emotional response from the audience.

-**Goodwill:** Campaigns aim to generate goodwill by aligning with social values or offering something positive to the public.

-**Simplicity:** Messages are kept clear and straightforward to ensure they are quickly understood and easily shared.

-**Low Cost:** It emphasizes cost-effective strategies that produce high impact without a large marketing budget.

1.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Guerrilla Marketing:

Guerrilla Marketing can be a very effective method for advertising goods and services, but at the same time, it also carries some risks.

In the following table, we will highlight some pros and cons of Guerrilla Marketing:

Table 01: Advantages and disadvantages of guerrilla marketing.

Advantages of Guerrilla Marketing	Disadvantages of Guerrilla Marketing
Cheap to execute	Mysterious Messages can be misunderstood
Allows for creative Thinking	Can create controversies
Grows with word of mouth	Measuring results is difficult
Memorable	It can be irrelevant sometimes
Appeals to customers' emotions	Legal and ethical concerns.

Source: Completed by the authors based on (Singhal, 2021) (Ali & Yazdanifard, 2014)

2. Ambient Guerrilla marketing

2.1 What is Ambient Guerrilla Marketing (AGM)?

Ambient Guerrilla marketing is a form of corporate communication that creatively uses elements of the physical environment in public high-traffic areas (streets, squares, shopping areas...) to deliver brand messages that engage consumers in an unexpected way. (Gambetti & Giovanardi, 2014) It also aims to create a memorable impression by integrating marketing into everyday surroundings, often requiring a low investment but high creativity and innovation. (Gegung, 2025)

2.2 Key Insights on Ambient Guerrilla Marketing

A) It is designed to surprise and engage consumers by placing unusual, eye-catching installations or messages in public spaces. often blending with or altering the environment to capture attention. (Gambetti & Giovanardi, 2014)

B) AGM relies on surprise and novelty to break through advertising clutter, leveraging unexpected locations and creative themes to maximize visibility and message diffusion. (Nufer, 2013)

C) It significantly positively impacts brand awareness and customer purchase intention compared to other guerrilla tactics. (BADRELDIN, NEGM, AMARA, & SHWKY, 2024)

Overall, we may say that AGM is an innovative, environment-based marketing strategy that uses public spaces creatively to engage consumers, enhance brand awareness, and drive purchase intentions by surprising and delighting audiences in their everyday environments.

2.3 The differences between ambient, ambush and stealth guerrilla marketing

To get a better understanding of AGM, it is better to differentiate it from similar marketing tactics, such as Ambush marketing and Stealth marketing. In the following table, we will highlight the main differences according to various aspects:

Table 03: The difference between ambient, ambush and stealth marketing.

Aspects	Ambient Guerrilla Marketing	Ambush Marketing	Stealth Marketing
Definition	Creative ads are placed in urban everyday places.	Associating with an event, without Official rights.	Hidden marketing where consumers are unaware.
Typical context	Public spaces, non-traditional ads locations.	Major sports and Entertainment event.	TV shows, movies, social media and influencer posts.
Visibility	Overt but unexpected Moreover, creative.	Overt but unofficial And sometimes Controversial.	Covert and disguised as Non-advertising content.
Goal	Capture attention through surprise and Engagement.	Gain visibility and brand Association with events.	Influence consumers subtly Without skepticism.
Ethical concerns	Generally accepted but Can be intrusive.	Often seen as deceptive Or unfair competition.	High ethical concerns due to Deception.
Impact on Brand Awareness	Positive and significant impact.	Strong impact Especially on younger Consumers.	Positive impact, but ethically Questionable.

Source: Completed by the authors based on (Łukasz P. Wojciechowski & Fichnová, 2022) (VIGAR-ELLIS & HALL, 2015) (Alkhafagi & Alsiede, 2022)

3. Brand Awareness

3.1 What is Brand Awareness?

Brand awareness is a fundamental concept in marketing that refers to the extent to which consumers are familiar with and can recognize or recall a particular brand. It plays a critical role in consumer decision-making, influencing purchase behaviour, brand loyalty, and overall brand equity. (Mante, Bin Abdul Kohar, & Markwei Martey, 2023)

3.2 Brand awareness stages (levels):

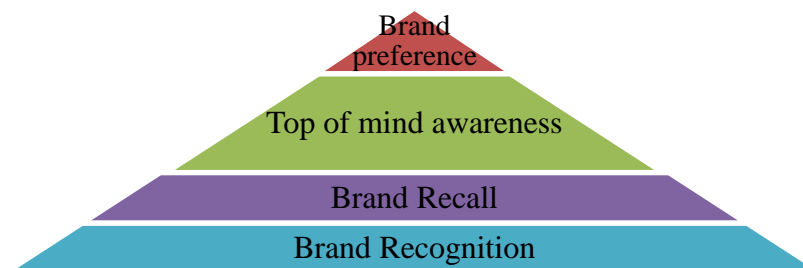
In the following table, we will be highlighting the four stages of brand awareness with examples: (staff, 2024)

Table 04: Levels of Brand Awareness.

Levels	Description	Example
Brand Recognition	The ability of consumers to identify a Brand when they see its logo, name... Or other distinctive elements.	The most basic level of awareness, e.g. Recognizing the Ooredoo logo
Brand Recall	The ability of consumers to remember A brand from memory without any Visual or verbal cues when thinking of a category.	Higher level than recognition e.g. Naming Hamoud Boualem when Asked about soft drinks.
Top of Mind Awareness	The brand that comes to a consumer's Mind first in a product category.	Indicates strong mental Availability. e.g. Google for internet search.
Brand Preference	Consumers' tendency to choose one brand over competitors based on perceived advantages like quality or price.	Reflects consumer choice and competitive advantage. e.g. Choosing German cars over Chinese cars

Source: Completed by the authors using the previous sources.

The following figure shows the brand awareness pyramid:

Figure 02: Brand Awareness Pyramid.

Source: completed by the authors based on (staff, 2024)

3.3 Measuring Brand awareness:

Measuring Brand Awareness is multifaceted and depends on the marketing channels and goals.

Some common quantitative methods and metrics include:

- A) **Brand recognition and recall tests:** Surveys where consumers are asked aided "recognition" and unaided "recall" questions about a brand or product's category to assess familiarity and memory. (Mante, Bin Abdul Kohar, & Markwei Martey, 2023)
- B) **Brand impressions:** The number of times a brand is seen or heard through advertising, social media, or other channels. (Marta, 2024)
- C) **Branded search volume:** Tracking how often consumers search for a brand name online, indicating mental availability and interest. (Sheeraz, Sajid, Mehmood, Irfan, & Tahir, 2023)

D) Share of voice (SOV): The Brand's proportion of the total market mentions or conversations compared to competitors. (Kovalenko, 2024)

3.4 How Ambient Guerrilla Marketing Impacts Brand Awareness

Ambient Guerrilla marketing significantly affects brand awareness by employing unconventional and surprising advertising techniques in everyday environments.

Here is a breakdown of how it works:

A. UN conventional placement and surprise: Ambient marketing uses unusual advertising in UN expected places to capture people's attention.

This surprise element helps to cut through advertising clutter and make a lasting impression. (AHMED, QURESHI, ŠTREIMIKIENĖ, VVEINHARDT, & SOOMRO, 2020)

B. Attention capture: it is designed to surprise and engage consumer in places they least expected. Outdoor placement on unusual objects creates curiosity that motivates consumers to take notice (AHMED, QURESHI, ŠTREIMIKIENĖ, VVEINHARDT, & SOOMRO, 2020).

C. Emotional and experiential engagement: AGM often involves immersive or sensory experiences that emotionally engage consumers; this emotional connection fosters a deeper and more lasting brand impression, which is crucial for differentiation in competitive markets. (AKBIYIK, 2025)

D. Brand persona: IT allows brands to position themselves as innovative and close to the people, differentiating themselves from competitors. (Onobrakpeya, 2025)

E. Memorable brand association: By embedding promotional content within daily life, AGM transforms the ordinary into a memorable experience, emphasizing the brand's ability to think outside conventional constraints and connect with consumers. (SOOMRO, BAESHEN, ALFARSHOUTY, KAIMKHANI, & BHUTTO, 2021)

3.5 The influence of urban environments on consumer behaviour:

Urban environments significantly influence consumer behaviour by shaping how consumers interact with brands and advertising in public spaces.

Here are some key influences of urban environments on consumer behaviour:

A. High foot traffic and diverse demographics: Urban areas have dense populations with diverse backgrounds, affecting preferences and purchasing habits. (KOTLER & KELLER, 2021)

B. Sensory overload: the hustle, noise, and visual stimuli can either attract attention or overwhelm consumers, influencing their responsiveness. (KOTLER & KELLER, 2021)

- C. **Convenience and accessibility:** proximity to transport, shops, and amenities increases impulse buying and spontaneous decisions. (Cialdini, 2009)
- D. **Social influence:** Urban settings foster social interactions and phenomena, like peer influence, impacting consumer choices. (Cialdini, 2009)
- E. **Cultural and lifestyle trends:** Cities often lead in trends, affecting consumer value, aspirations, and behaviour. (Cialdini, 2009)

3.6 Adapting AGM for urban contexts:

- A. **Leveraging public spaces:** Use streets, parks, and transit for unexpected brand interactions. (Badran, 2021)
- B. **Align with daily routines:** Engage audiences at transit stops, malls, and workplaces. (Badran, 2021)
- C. **Visual and sensory appeal:** Use bold sensory, Rich visuals to stand out in noisy environments. (SENSORY BRANDING, 2017)
- D. **Legal and cultural sensitivity:** Tailor campaigns to local norms and regulations. (KOTLER & KELLER, 2021)

4. CASE STUDY “Kit Kat Vs BBC”

This case study undertakes a comparative analysis of two notable ambient guerrilla marketing campaigns, the KitKat breaker bench campaign and the BBC Dracula billboard campaign.

1. Kit Kat breaker Bench campaign

“A successful AGM campaign example.”

The KitKat campaign exemplifies a successful approach, where public benches were creatively redesigned to mimic the iconic KitKat chocolate bar.

1.1 Campaign details:

1.1.1 Location and scale:

The campaign was launched in multiple cities, starting with Bagato Colombia in 2013, after that Amsterdam and Utrecht in the Netherlands in 2014, and later in the Philippines in 2016, where 500 specially designed benches were placed across busy districts. (Staff, 2020)

1.1.2 Design and interactivity:

Benches were designed to look like a giant kit Kat bars, visually reinforcing the brand’s iconic wafer bar. Some benches included interactive elements such as piano keys, guitars, inflatable designs, and even placement on rock climbing walls to increase engagement and surprise. (Dixit, 2024)

1.1.3 Promotional Tie-ins:

In the Netherlands, the campaign was linked with a challenge where sitting on the bench for a certain time could win a Google nescus 7 tablet, cleverly tying the product to attach promotion “**the nescus70s was named after kit Kat**”.

(Dixit, 2024)

1.1.4 Digital integration:

People could locate benches via the Kit Kat website or navigation app “**waze**” encouraging exploration. (Staff, 2020)

1.1.5 Social media and viral impact:

The campaign generated 6.9 million views on Facebook and YouTube, and 262million impressions across social media platforms, driven by user-generated content (UGC) such as photos and videos shared online. (Staff, KitKat Breaker Benches gain marketing buzz across Manila, 2022)

1.1.6 Award and Recognition:

It received multiple prestigious awards including bronze at the “**2016 Warc Prize for Asian strategy**”, bronze spike at **Spikes Asia**, and several medals at the Asian Marketing effectiveness and Strategy Awards. (Staff, KitKat Breaker Benches gain marketing buzz across Manila, 2022)



Source : (Dixit, 2024) <https://shorturl.at/QyfNA>

1.2 Analysis:

We choose to analyze the campaign according to different factors, “creativity, audience engagement...” as follows:

1.2.1 Brand USP integration:

The campaign leveraged Kit Kat’s unique selling proposition of “**having a break**” by literally providing a place to take a break, making the brand message tangible. (Kit Kat Benches and Street Art, 2013)

1.2.2 Creative use of public spaces:

Transforming ordinary benches into branded interactive installations created a memorable and playful experience that disrupted the everyday urban environment positively. (Team, 2024)

1.2.3 Audience engagement:

The campaign encouraged physical interaction and social sharing, key drivers in guerrilla marketing success, enhancing both engagement and organic reach. (Team, 2024)

1.2.4 Strategic placement:

Placing benches in high-traffic areas maximized visibility and participation, ensuring the campaign reaches a broad and diverse audience. (Staff, Dynamic Marketing Communiqué, 2020)

2. BBC Dracula Billboard campaign

“Unsuccessful AGM campaign example.”

The BBC campaign serves as a case of mixed or negative outcomes, as its provocative nighttime billboard design elicited fear and discomfort, overshadowing the intended promotional impact.

2.1 Campaign details: (Stanley, 2020)

The BBC ran a billboard campaign, launched in December 2019- January 2020 in the UK, to Promote the new BBC/Netflix mini-series “Dracula” by using AGM techniques that placed the Imagery in public spaces.

The billboard was minimalistic by day and dramatic by night.



Source: (Bloom, 2021) <https://rb.gy/2tkhac>

2.2 Analysis:

We choose to analyze the campaign according to different factors, “ emotional impact, audience expectations...” as follows:

2.2.1 Negative emotional impact:

Unlike the Kit Kat campaign, which evoked curiosity and delight, the Dracula billboard triggered fear and unease, alienating the audience rather than engaging them positively.

This emotional dissonance harmed the brand's image. (TEAM, 2021)

2.2.2 Misalignment with audience expectations:

AGM thrives on surprise, but most balanced it with appeal; the fear-inducing imagery was a poor fit for public spaces, where people expect safety and comfort, leading to backlash. (Hossain, 2020)

2.2.3 Lack of a clear message:

The campaign's scary visuals overshadowed the creativity and the promotional intent, causing Confusion rather than interest or excitement about the show. (Hossain, 2020)

2.2.4 Poor contextual fit:

The placement and design did not consider the environment's influence on audience perception, and that caused a critical failure in the ambient marketing strategy. (Stewart, 2020)

2.2.5 Reputation Risk:

Negative public reaction can damage brand equity and reduce future marketing effectiveness, a significant risk in guerrilla campaigns that rely on public spaces and direct consumer interaction.

(Staff, An Inventive Billboard with A Twist Waiting Sunset, 2020)

The following table summarizes what differentiates the two campaigns:

Table 05: The difference between KitKat and BBC campaigns.

Aspects	Kit Kat Breaker Bench	BBC Dracula Billboard
Emotional impact	Positive: fun, playful, and engaging.	Negative: fear and discomfort.
Brand message clarity	Clear, aligned with the brand's USP "Have a break."	Unclear, overshadowed by scary imagery.
Audience engagement	High: interactive benches and social media sharing	Low: avoidance and negative reactions.
Use of Public Spaces	Creative and contextually appropriate.	Poorly matched to the environment.
Risk nmanagement	Well managed, it avoided controversy.	Poorly managed, it caused backlash.
Campaign outcome	Viral success, the campaign won Multiple awards and it achieved a Strong brand lift.	Negative public response, the campaign damaged the brand perception.

Source: Prepared by the authors using the previous content and sources.

5. Conclusion:

This study addressed the impact of ambient guerrilla marketing (AGM) on brand awareness, more specifically in urban environments. As we tried to identify all the factors of AGM that have an impact on brand awareness and consumers' interactions.

We reached a set of conclusions summarized as follows:

- AGM is an innovative, environment-based marketing strategy that uses public spaces creatively to engage consumers and enhance brand awareness.

- The main goal of Ambient guerrilla marketing is to capture attention through surprise and

Unconsent methods.

- AGM has a positive and significant impact on brand awareness and consumers' purchase intention.

- AGM often involves immersive or sensory experiences that emotionally engage consumers and create a long-lasting connection.

- Urban environments significantly influence consumer behaviour by shaping how consumers interact with brands and advertising in public spaces.

- It is important to tailor AGM campaigns to local norms and regulations, to avoid sensitivity or misunderstanding.

- Brand message clarity can be affected by unclear or misunderstood Ads like the BBC Dracula campaign.

- When the message is clear and aligned with the brand's USP, it will improve audience engagement.

- One of the most important points for brands to take into consideration when it comes to adapting the AGM aspect is managing risk properly and avoiding controversy, as when risks are poorly managed, they will cause backlashes towards the brand.

5.1 Recommendations:

In light of the analyses we conducted and the theoretical framework we explored, we were able to arrive at the following recommendations for both brands, which are as follows:

- * **Kitkat campaign:**

- It's better to integrate digital elements (e.g., AR, QR codes) to enhance engagement.

- They must localize designs to fit cultural nuances in different markets.
- It's important to measure long-term brand impact with quantitative tools.
- They should think about using sustainable, eco-friendly materials and consult communities.
- It's crucial to prepare crisis communication plans for rapid response to feedback.
- * **BBC campaign:**
 - They should pre-test the emotional impact to avoid negative fear responses.
 - It's important to adapt design and placement to fit the audience context and environment.
 - It's critical to provide clear messaging to reduce confusion about campaign intent.
 - They must engage local stakeholders early to address ethical or approval concerns.
 - They had better conduct thorough post-campaign sentiment analysis and documentation.

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