

Galaxy Note 7 Crisis: Analysis of Compensation Strategy, Knowledge Management, and Innovation Transformation of Samsung

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the compensation and knowledge management strategies implemented by Samsung in dealing with the Galaxy Note 7 product crisis in 2016, as well as its impact on the transformation of the company's innovation strategy. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study, this research explores how high-tech product failure incidents affect consumer perceptions, brand loyalty, and the direction of the company's internal policies. Information was gathered from literature review and secondary documentation, highlighting compensation management and benefits offered to the affected consumers, the influence of organizational culture on internal communication failure, and the post-crisis shift from closed to open innovation. The research results revealed that Samsung's compensation strategy at the beginning was seen as inadequate by the public, which caused a decline in customer trust and company market value. Crisis management was exacerbated by internal knowledge management breakdowns and the centralization of decisions. But the accident was a wake-up call for Samsung to switch to an open and collaborative knowledge management system, and further improve its sustainable innovation practices through the recycling of products and the diversification of suppliers. This research provides useful insights for global technology companies in planning reputation recovery, management, and mitigation.

Keywords: Samsung Galaxy Note 7, compensation strategy, knowledge management, crisis management, innovation transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

The Samsung Galaxy Note 7 incident in 2016 was a significant product crisis in the history of the global technology industry (Lee & Lee, 2020). Samsung Electronics released a Galaxy Note 7 smartphone in August 2016 to a very enthusiastic market response at the time. However, there were reports of these devices overheating to the point of emitting smoke, exploding, or catching fire while in use or while being charged. As a result, the crisis rapidly grew into the international media spotlight and raised serious concerns for the safety of product users. It is suspected that the cause of the device incidents was a design and manufacturing process flaw in the Li-on or lithium-ion batteries from different suppliers, coupled with the extremely slim design of the phones that put more pressure on the batteries inside (Samsung Newsroom, 2017). This incident highlights the importance of strict product testing and quality control in the development of advanced technologies.

In this case, the role of knowledge management (KM) becomes very important. KM not only supports companies in solving technical problems but is also crucial in managing the impact of crises on reputation (Coombs, 2015). Managing information about consumer expectations, emotional impacts such as anger and disappointment, and other psychological dynamics is key to designing answers that are not only material but also touch the emotional aspects of customers (Lee & Lee, 2020).

In addition, the crisis illustrates the limitations of the closed innovation strategy used by Samsung. There was limited external knowledge flow, and the organizational culture was too focused on the speed of product launch (Yun et al., 2018). This type of strategy leads to "blind spots" in knowledge management. For example, important information is not conveyed or potential risks cannot be recognized early on, due to the hierarchical and rigid organizational structure, which can promote the phenomenon of "knowledge hiding" (Černe et al., 2014).

Thus, the Galaxy Note 7 incident is not only a technical lesson, but also shows how important it is to

build an open organizational culture, respond to risks, and support continuous learning. Effective knowledge management in crises depends not only on systems and procedures but also on the values and practices that make up the organizational ecosystem (Yun et al., 2018; Lee & Lee, 2020).

This research seeks to answer three core questions related to the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 crisis:

1. How does the compensation strategy implemented by Samsung in the Galaxy Note 7 incident affect consumer perception and brand loyalty?
2. What is the role of knowledge management in handling high-tech product crises such as the Galaxy Note 7 case?
3. How does product failure affect the transformation of innovation strategy and profit management of global technology companies?

Theoretically, this research will enrich the academic literature by providing an empirical case study on the relationship between Knowledge Management, organizational culture, and crisis response. Practically, this research is expected to offer valuable insights for corporate managers and company leaders on the importance of building an open knowledge culture to prevent similar crises and provide a framework for designing effective compensation and communication strategies when a critical crisis occurs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Knowledge Management

Knowledge management (KM) is a systematic approach to creating, storing, sharing, and applying knowledge within an organization to improve efficiency and innovation (Girard & Girard, 2015). In this context, knowledge can be divided into two main types: tacit and explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is knowledge inherent to individuals, such as experience and intuition, which is difficult to document. Meanwhile, explicit knowledge can be easily transferred through documents, manuals, or written procedures (Praharsi, 2016). The KM cycle includes the processes of knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge storage, and knowledge application. These four stages are very important in creating an organization's competitive advantage (Chang & Lin, 2015). In the digital era, knowledge management should include a strategic approach to both types of knowledge, as found in a study at Fab Labs that showed the importance of managing tacit and explicit knowledge in a balanced way (Maravilhas & Martins, 2019).

B. Compensation and Benefit Management

Compensation and benefits management is a crucial component of human resource management, which involves providing both direct and indirect rewards to employees as a form of appreciation for their contributions. Direct compensation includes basic salary and incentives, while indirect compensation includes health benefits, pension programs, and other work facilities (Lestari et al., 2020). The main objective of compensation management is to attract, retain, and motivate employees to remain high-performing (Kurbani et al., 2022). In crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations need to adopt a strategic approach to compensation systems. This includes benefit adjustments and pay flexibility to maintain organizational stability and employee well-being (Safuan & Kurnia, 2021; Shtembari et al., 2022).

C. Product Crisis and Corporate Responsibility

A product crisis is a situation where a product experiences failure or harm to consumers, potentially damaging the company's reputation. In facing this crisis, the role of communication is crucial. Open and strategic communication can mitigate negative impacts and restore public trust (Coombs, 2015). Product recalls are a form of corporate responsibility. The company's response to such incidents affects consumer trust and loyalty (Liu et al., 2023). Taking the stock market into account, an appropriate crisis management strategy can minimize investors' negative reactions (Zheng et al., 2023). Moreover, corporate social responsibility (CSR) reputation also plays an important role in shaping public perception. Companies known to have a strong CSR reputation tend to gain higher tolerance from the public during a crisis (Kim & Woo, 2019).

D. Related Research

Various studies have examined the link between knowledge management, compensation management, and organizational crisis management. For example, Abuzyead and Sherif (2017) showed that effective KM implementation improves organizational readiness and response to crisis. Similar research by Elhendawi (2020) also confirmed that KM stages support the overall crisis management process. However, Safuan and Kurnia (2022) discovered that a combination of effective crisis communication and a fair compensation system can sustain public trust. A study by Sunardi (2017) emphasizes that strong KM capabilities combined with strengthening human resources can increase an organization's resistance to external shocks. Inkinen (2016) also confirms that KM practices contribute positively to organizational performance and sustainability in the long term. Therefore, this literature review provides a strong theoretical and empirical foundation to analyze how knowledge management can support strategic decision-making in the context of compensation and benefits when facing a product crisis such as the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 case.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative research with a case study approach. Through descriptive qualitative research to provide an in-depth and holistic picture of an event in its natural context, this descriptive research aims to describe, interpret, and understand in depth an event, process, or condition. In this case, this research will focus on describing the details of how Samsung designed and managed compensation and benefits strategies during the Galaxy Note 7 crisis. The object of this research is the case of the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 product recall in 2016. The main focus or limitation of this research is on the compensation and benefits management aspects applied by Samsung Electronics to deal with affected consumers. This case was chosen because it is unprecedented in the technology industry. The crisis occurred not once, but twice, thus offering valuable lessons on crisis management, organizational learning, and customer relationship recovery strategies. The analysis will not focus on the technical causes of the battery failure, but rather on the series of actions and policies the company took to compensate its customers as part of its reputation recovery strategy. The study relied solely on secondary data. This was done because of the historical nature of the events under research, where primary data collection (e.g., interviews, surveys) was impossible. The secondary data used is rich in content and provides the various perspectives necessary for adequate analysis. The data was obtained through two fundamental methods: study of the literature and study of documentation. A literature review was conducted to frame the theoretical foundation of the study. Here, literature searching, collecting, and reviewing on the study areas such as crisis management, customer compensation theory, reputation management, and Knowledge Management (KM) in a business context were done. Documentation study is a systematic collection of documents related to the study topic. The researcher conducted a focused search on digital archives using keywords such as "Samsung Note 7 recall", "Samsung compensation program Note 7", "Samsung crisis communication", and "financial impact of Note 7". The documents retrieved were then filtered for their relevance and source credibility before analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of the Galaxy Note 7 Incident

The Samsung Galaxy Note 7 has been withdrawn from the market after several devices exploded following its launch in 2016 (Yun et al., 2018). This was caused by normal batteries that should have met two conditions, which were met by batteries from ATL. First, the negative pole should be short so that it does not reach the rounded end. Second, the edge should be almost at a right angle. However, the battery from Samsung SDI did not meet both conditions and short-circuited, eventually causing an explosion. After that, if Samsung spent time testing the ATL battery after the first recall (Lan, 2023), it could cause the product's marketability to drop because it coincided with the launch of its main competitor, the iPhone 7, so Samsung neglected further testing on the ATL battery in favor of marketing earlier than its competitors.

In addition, one of the main causes of the Galaxy Note 7 incident was the failure of the lithium-ion battery, which resulted in some devices catching fire or exploding. Despite Samsung's pre-launch quality tests, this issue tells us that the batteries used still have a risk of failure. As discussed by the study (Fantham & Gladwin, 2021), which highlights that battery failures can occur even in well-designed and tested systems, and shows the importance of more complete testing of possible failure modes. One example of the most dangerous form of failure mode is thermal runaway (Allen, 2020), where the battery temperature increases dramatically due to internal pressure, triggering a chain chemical reaction that leads to an explosion or fire. Moreover, based on the technical investigation results of a forensic study (Loveridge et al., 2018), it was found that one battery cell from the manufacturer Samsung SDI was detected to have a deformation of the top corner of the battery and overpressure against compression, which caused damage to the separator layer damage. In fact, through forensic analysis also using CT scans (Wu et al., 2018), it was found that one manufacturer's pouch-type battery design did not provide enough space between the electrode side and the case, especially in the corner area. The CT scan results also included burrs on the positive tap of the battery, which caused a short circuit between the positive tab and the copper current collector. Both results make it clear that the poor battery design was the cause of the Galaxy Note 7 explosion.

Moreover, a contributing factor to the lengthy problem identification of the Galaxy Note 7 was Samsung's highly centralized organizational culture (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2018). Decisions were made by senior employees without involving suggestions from lower technical level employees, where many employees were required to carry out all orders without asking questions. This communication limitation led to irregular information received by the engineering team based on the results of other employees, resulting in engineers failing to replicate the problem at the lab site, which was one of the causes of the Galaxy Note 7 incident. After the widespread product defects became public knowledge, Samsung announced the suspension of all sales and production of Galaxy Note 7 on October 11, 2016 to prioritize "customer interests" (Firoz Shamsi et al., 2017), which became an important moment to retain customers, then Samsung compensated Galaxy Note 7 users with refunds. Samsung published its classification on the official website, directing Galaxy Note 7 users to turn off their devices and contact the store of purchase or carrier for a refund (Thomas et al., 2019).

B. Compensation Strategy and Benefits Provided

Samsung implemented one of the compensation strategies to customers by remodeling part of the recalled Galaxy Note 7 for resale into a limited edition Galaxy Note Fan Edition, where the fan edition

product is a cheaper edition in a step to fix the product failure (Park & Lim, 2020). After Samsung said that it would phase out sales and production of the Galaxy Note 7 (Lim & Kim, 2018), the company offered a new compensation strategy to customers. However, the strategy was not effective with customers, who responded negatively because they felt cheated and played by the company, based on the analysis of comments from the public. This is because Samsung initially carried out an ineffective monetary compensation strategy for customers regarding the Galaxy Note 7 product, where customers who bought a phone worth approximately \$800 felt disadvantaged. After all, they received a lower quality replacement (Firoz Shamsi et al., 2017). It was also criticized regarding Samsung's actions that should have immediately stopped sales when it heard reports of the Galaxy Note 7 exploding, instead of just conducting a recall for repairs. Due to the failure of Samsung's compensation strategy, as a result, on October 11, 2016, Samsung officially stopped all production and sales of the Galaxy Note 7, and launched a complete fund control program (Thomas et al., 2019). In addition, after the Galaxy Note 7 explosion incident, it actually made the market in China rise in local products such as Xiaomi and Huawei, which is the impact of Samsung's compensation strategy failure which resulting in consumer dissatisfaction (Lan, 2023). If Samsung could have maintained its market before the recall incident, it could have gained more customers.

Moreover, the Samsung case study explains that compensation and benefits management has a strategic function in supporting the company's innovation change (Yun et al., 2018). Initially, the closed innovation strategy focused on R&D through internal investment, successfully competed in the market through innovative products that were also supported by compensation and benefits management systems. However, the incident also showed its weaknesses with the defects of the Galaxy Note 7, such as the lack of supplier diversification and limited product quality verification, which became a driving step towards the open innovation strategy. As a result, Samsung implemented an effective strategy by launching a new product in the form of the Galaxy Note 8 after the crisis, which has a performance and design that is a solution to the problem of the Galaxy Note 7 failure, and is responded positively by consumers.

C. The Role of Knowledge Management in Managing Crisis

The case study shows that the weak knowledge management system at Samsung during the Galaxy Note 7 crisis was also due to the centralized organizational culture (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2018). In addition, Samsung's corporate culture is also influenced by Confucian values that emphasize hierarchy, which is one of the causes of the Galaxy Note 7 explosion incident (Saadah, 2018). This culture creates many obstacles in the crisis handling process of the Galaxy Note 7 explosion issue. Limited communication between engineers and managers, as well as fear of lawsuits, led to test results not being documented due to shareholder demands and tight production deadlines. This made Samsung make a gradual mindset change due to the Galaxy Note 7 Incident, where this product failure became a turning point that changed the mindset of most Samsung employees and executives.

Samsung's move to only display a public statement without the presence of a CEO figure as the face of its response to the Galaxy Note 7 product crisis is considered an irresponsible strategy, which has the potential to exacerbate public response, for example as in the case of Wells Fargo who even resigned over a regretful apology (Brandford, 2019). The brand image repair strategy implemented by Samsung is a corrective action that leads to knowledge as practice, which has conducted the first and second recalls of millions of products worldwide and also full refunds. In addition, information on social media, especially on Twitter regarding company issues such as the Galaxy Note 7 incident, can disseminate information quickly about product failures (Kang et al., 2019). This has an impact on how companies manage external knowledge management environments, such as public opinion about a product on social media. The role of Samsung and influencers who support the company's products in using Twitter is needed to actively push back Samsung's reputation.

The results of the forensic study of the Galaxy Note 7 battery prioritized the importance of managing technical insights in the design phase as well as product testing (Loveridge et al., 2018). In addition, Samsung also identified battery design defects using CT scans to identify corner areas with tight spaces and welding burrs on the positive tab (Wu et al., 2018). Moreover, the handling of the Galaxy Note 7 incident revealed weaknesses in Samsung's knowledge management, especially in managing explicit insights in the form of technical data and product trial results, where one of the causes is Samsung's centralized culture which causes miss communication between managers and technicians, as well as tacit knowledge in the form of knowledge from previous experiences from professionals in dealing with crises (Firoz Shamsi et al., 2017). Applying knowledge management can encourage companies by identifying more quickly about potential hazards of the product, so that it mitigates the risk of failure and that the same incident from occurring. By integrating techniques such as forensic dissection, X-ray tomography, microscopy, and CT scans to determine the path of product failure as a driver for testing and developing product safety and quality. This makes Samsung implement new practices in conducting product testing, so that by applying knowledge management, it can prevent re-incidents such as the explosion of the Galaxy Note 7 product.

Samsung makes large investments or provides large compensation to the internal R&D division to produce innovative products, and conducts open innovation gradually starting in 2015 by adopting Android products from Google, where the Galaxy Note 7 incident encourages open innovation more quickly in improving product competitiveness (Lan, 2023). In addition, Samsung was also criticized for not coordinating with the US safety authority (CPSP), and instead taking unilateral action in announcing the recall (Thomas et al., 2019). Samsung's strategy of ignoring further testing of the Galaxy Note to compete

with the iPhone 7 led to a crisis management failure that caused a decline in the number of consumers. It is important to implement knowledge management by Samsung, especially in terms of production, where supervising the appropriate number of suppliers and testing raw materials is important to be improved to avoid more serious problems.

On the corporate side of knowledge management, the Galaxy Note 7 explosion is also an opportunity for Samsung to gradually eliminate the Not-Invented-Here syndrome, which is the tendency of companies to focus too much on internal innovation from the managerial side due to high production demands by shareholders, as well as reluctant to adopt outside technology and limit internal communication between company managers and engineers (Yun et al., 2018). This incident shows that current Samsung Electronics employees realize the importance and possibility of implementing knowledge management in the form of an open innovation strategy and changing the mindset of corporate culture to be more open between divisions. Moreover, through the remaining Galaxy Note 7 devices recalled due to product explosion incidents, Samsung is working with recycling companies to recycle components such as semiconductors and camera modules, which can be reused for the production of test samples for future smartphone models (Park & Lim, 2020). This made Samsung start implementing open innovation towards recycling failed products, thus learning from the failure in implementing knowledge management.

D. Implications of Compensation Strategy and Benefits Management

Samsung's compensation strategy during the Galaxy Note 7 incident showed that poorly designed crisis management can reduce company profits and customer loyalty to product failures. Although Samsung tried to end the crisis by offering refunds or replacement options for other smartphones, the scheme elicited negative user feedback, as the value of the replacement product was not equivalent to the original purchase price of around \$800 (Firoz Shamsi et al., 2017), and some customers complained that the refund process was complicated and time-consuming (Thomas et al., 2019). The implications of this ineffective compensation led to the increasing dominance of local brands such as Huawei and Xiaomi in the Chinese market, which accelerated the transition of users from products using Samsung. Samsung even attempted the release of the Galaxy Note 7 Fan Edition (FE) (Park & Lim, 2020), a series based on the defective Galaxy Note 7 devices, which replaced the batteries with safer ones. Samsung's strategy in implementing the Galaxy Note 7 FE is in line with studies by (Loveridge et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2018), which encourage the importance of implementing engineering verification processes after a crisis and the Note 7 FE is used as an intermediary to demonstrate implementation to improve the product. From Samsung's internal side, large compensation is given to the internal R&D division to produce innovative products (Lan, 2023; Yun et al., 2018), the strategy is indeed effective in producing highly competitive products, but the centralized culture and the tendency of closed innovation are the causes of the Galaxy Note 7 explosion due to communication limitations.

In terms of profit management, the incident prompted Samsung to reorganize its strategic approach towards open innovation and reduce Not-invented-here syndrome, both from outside the company and between internal divisions. The study by (Yun et al., 2018), identified that Samsung's compensation or investment in its internal R&D division functioned effectively to produce innovative products, but eventually exposed its weaknesses. Over-reliance on internal suppliers and limited internal testing led to insufficient risk mitigation. Therefore, after the crisis, Samsung started using an open innovation approach, improved battery design, enhanced safety testing procedures, and released the Galaxy Note 8 as a representation of rebirth and reputation rebuilding initiatives (Lim & Kim, 2018). This shows that the Galaxy Note 7 failure was also a turning point for Samsung in balancing profit planning through innovation and crisis management that is more acceptable to the public. Samsung's strategy, despite several issues and challenges faced, finally managed to improve its public reputation by launching the Galaxy Note 8 products that have high product value, although the impact on customer reduction was also felt, especially in China. In addition, Samsung also implemented knowledge management in the form of forensic product testing to review product safety. In response to the Galaxy Note 7 incident, Samsung also implemented open innovation by working with third-party recycling companies to recycle components such as semiconductors and camera modules, and produce Galaxy Note 7 FE products as a solution to efforts to repair product failures. This strategy not only improves public reputation but also promotes long-term benefits through better organizational responses based on knowledge management, especially learning.

V. CONCLUSION

This research affirms that the Samsung Galaxy Note 7 crisis was not only the result of technological fault lines in battery design and production, but also vulnerabilities in crisis management, compensation policy, and internal knowledge management. Samsung was unable to effectively anticipate and address the incident due to its centralized organizational culture, inadequate internal communication, and delayed product recall and testing. The lack of early compensation programs kindled customer trust and induced market transformation, particularly in China. The failure also catalyzed the implementation of an open innovation paradigm, the improvement of safety testing processes, and the institutionalization of knowledge management to prevent future failures. By releasing the Galaxy Note 8 and Galaxy Note FE, and entering into recycling partnerships, Samsung demonstrated strategic managerial flexibility in reputation and long-term profit recovery. The findings provide insight into the need for a balance between

innovation, risk management, and organizational transparency in handling technology product crises.

This research has several limitations. First, secondary data from existing literature studies, rather than primary data from Samsung's internal stakeholders, was used to examine and analyze, so the understanding of internal decision-making dynamics is still hypothetical, obtained from open sources. Secondly, this study highlights one case study, the Galaxy Note 7 scandal, which limits the applicability of the findings to other technology company crisis cases. Thirdly, time constraints and access to official investigation reports prevented tracking the company's technical timeline and communication plans directly. Therefore, future research is recommended to use more efficient techniques, for example, in-depth interviews with industry players and interpretation of companies' internal media to provide richness to the point of view.

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