

Mini Method Paper: Crisis Communication with the film “It Ends with Us”

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Crisis Communication with the film “It Ends with Us”

The topic I am proposing is the crisis communication methods used to combat the controversies surrounding the 2024 film “It Ends with Us.” More specifically my research will answer the questions: (1) What elements of paracrisis are evident in the public's reaction to the movie adaptation of "It Ends with Us"? (2) Who are the stakeholders in the rhetorical arena (media arena) that support or oppose Blake Lively's position that "It Ends with US" is a romance movie? (3) How are these stakeholders different in terms of being active (voice) or passive (passive) stakeholders?

I will be using a qualitative approach to explore these questions using content analysis guided by situational crisis communication and rhetorical arena theory to convey the controversies before, during, and after the movie was released that tarnished the issue of domestic violence and how that was portrayed in/for this film. This issue caused substantial public outrage in how certain figures promoted the movie. This methodology “... is considered effective in identifying key themes and categorizing them into distinct clusters to effectively outline primary research areas and future directions in the field (Ko et al.,2024).”

Using content analysis, I will differentiate articles by date for pre-release or post-release to find the public’s positive or negative reaction to the film in both how it portrayed a sensitive topic like domestic violence and how it promoted the film itself. After the film was released and the public’s outrage was prominent it was clear that this was a paracrisis within the promotional aspects of the film.

Data Collection:

To research this controversy, I looked for multiple articles that were released before, during, and after the film was released. As this film was released a few months ago it is hard to say what impact that the promotional aspects of the movie had in relation to success post-release as it has made good profits. The controversies surrounding the film as well as the actors themselves helped keep this movie in multiple news media outlets. To answer my research questions, I needed to collect enough sentiment through various quotes for or against the portrayal of domestic violence in addition to the public's opinion for how they perceived the promotional aspects of this movie with these themes positively or negatively. I found seven articles containing quotes from viewers and the main actors - Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni. Each actor has promoted this movie with different intentions, Lively as a romance film and Baldoni with the hope to raise awareness on the issue of domestic violence and how that manifests in men. Within these articles I found quotes that convey these conflicting ideals.

Table 1: Sentiments found in each article and Crisis Phase

X = what sentiment was found in each article

Source & Link	Date & Pre,During,Post Crisis	Yes Romance Movie	No Its a DV movie	Yes Romance by Liv/Bal	No DV Movie by Liv/Bal	Support Lively	Support Baldoni	Not supporting Lively	Not supporting Baldoni
NPR The movie 'It Ends With Us' faces criticism for glamorizing domestic abuse	Aug 28 During		X		X		X	X	
The Atlantic It Should End Here	Aug 10 During		X						

<p>Glamour What is going on in the It Ends with us controversies y</p>	<p>Aug 9 During</p>		<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>				
<p>Page Six Truth behind 'It Ends With Us' feud rumors: Justin Baldoni made Blake Lively 'uncomfortable,' sources say</p>	<p>Aug 9 During</p>				<p>X</p>				
<p>Glamour Justin Baldoni Responds to Claims That It Ends With Us Glorifies Domestic Violence</p>	<p>Aug 12 During</p>						<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	
<p>NYTimes: It Ends With Us': The Press Tour Drama, Explained</p>	<p>Aug 16 During</p>				<p>X</p>		<p>X</p>	<p>X</p>	
<p>Slate The Backlash Against America's Most Popular Novelist Is Way Less Satisfying Than I'd Hoped</p>			<p>X</p>						

Data Analysis:

To investigate the varying statements on the disputed theme in the film “It Ends with Us” a quantitative analysis was performed where articles were chosen based on an Internet search for the film with sentiments like “criticism”, “controversy”, or “domestic violence.” During these searches multiple articles came up and were read through to find quotes from the actors and production, as well as any other sentiments from the media or experts that commented on this issue. Many articles were from beauty or entertainment sources that commented on celebrity or entertainment issues or controversies. After reading through multiple articles seven articles were selected to analyze this topic.

The codebook included deductive codes which followed the rhetorical arena theory framework for voice/visibility under rhetorical power and another section for rhetorical relations supporting or opposing the argument that “It Ends with Us” is a romance film or portraying domestic violence. I then took quotes or references from various actors and classified them under those categories. Under rhetorical power I separated my actors between active or passive voice within the article references or quotes. Raupp defines “the frequency in which actors are assigned the active speaker role is called ‘voice’, whereas the frequency with which an actor is mentioned in the role of an addressee is called ‘visibility’” (Raupp, p. 4).

In much of my research, specifically rhetorical relations, there are many actor-issue statements, which according to Raupp, is “a statement in which an actor speaks about an issue, without reference to another actor” (Raupp, p. 6). Under this category, each actor has statements highlighted that emphasize their stance on the controversy behind the film’s theme. Since there are many actors involved in this argument from media, social media users, the actors in the film

and some more, there are conflicting ideals represented in the promotion of the film and contributing to the media discourse and controversy.

Findings

RQ1: What elements of paracrisis are evident in the public's reaction to the movie adaptation of "It Ends with Us"?

This film falls under the two paracrisis categories in Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) operational faux pas and challenge. Under organizational faux pas it is evident through social media comments and various comments throughout articles that fans along with some professional experts and activists do not agree with the claims that this is a romance film. Many have a similar sentiment conveying that the film is not promoted appropriately, and it could be harmful to those who may not know what the film is about prior to watching it. This idea also ties into the second category this paracrisis has which is challenge.

As fans watch the promotional aspects for this film it is very clear that there are different approaches by various actors starring in the film and the divide is stark. Lively has been promoting the film as a romance and seemingly glossing over the details of domestic violence prominent in the film. Baldoni on the other hand is vocal in his portrayal of a domestic violence abuser and his approach to playing that character. Due to this divide critics begin to question the themes of this film even more and how it is presented to the public.

RQ2: Who are the stakeholders in the rhetorical arena (media arena) that support or oppose Blake Lively's position that "It Ends with Us" is a romance movie?

Blake Lively in her promotion for the film shows that she believes this is a romance film. Throughout the coding process used to analyze this film there were only four sentiments found

that support the ideal that this is a romance film. Two were by Lively and the other two by Baldoni. While almost contradictory since Baldoni is heavily supporting the idea of domestic violence portrayed in the film, he was quoted speaking about his experience reading the book saying, “It was sexy, it was romantic, it was mysterious.” He admits to the romance elements within the book thus supporting that ideal. He is not explicitly supporting Lively in this context but subsequently supporting the same ideal that she is.

Lively on the other hand took to promoting this film as a romance and also had two sentiments supporting this category. A quote that was said during the promotion of this film supports the fact that she is promoting this movie as a romance. She was quoted saying “Grab your friends, wear your florals” in reference to her character Lily’s flower shop. This comment could be interpreted culturally as fans have been seen on social media dressing up in themed outfits to go watch a movie. In this same way Lively wanted to promote that lighthearted aspect of the film with the florals theme and make people go out to watch the film.

Other actors involved with opposing the romance theme within the rhetorical arena were professionals and activists as they were coded with seven (7) sentiments and the news media with five (5). Professionals and activists focused a lot on the framing of this film as it had no trigger warning or emphasis on the darker themes that would be presented in the film. This sentiment clearly shows that they were opposed to the film being portrayed as a romantic movie. The news media display sentiment that this film and novel do not do a good job of conveying the abuse and instead romanticize it throughout the piece. This in turn is extremely harmful to young girls and those learning about love. Activists have been pushing this idea since this film was released.

Many sentiments found throughout the analysis found that a total of twenty-seven (27) sentiments were found that support that this piece portrays domestic violence. The most prominent actors of this are social media commentators with eight (8) and Baldoni with seven (7). Social media commentators were very upset with how Lively was handling the promotion of the film and thus disagreed with her supporting the idea of romance. A comment wrote “Grab your friends, wear your florals.... but forget the sole purpose of this film is to raise awareness to domestic violence?” (Glamour) This response to Lively’s statement shows the obvious difference in perspective on this themes within the film. Other similar comments were made on the movie’s theme as many felt that the depiction of domestic violence was glossed over and not important to the storyline of the film even though that is a large emphasis in Lively’s character’s past as well as the presented current storyline.

Baldoni was seen promoting the film and having an emphasis on the abuse that Lively’s character Lily endured from Baldoni's character Ryle. Baldoni acknowledges the character’s flaws and has good insight into how the character acts and his reasons. His stance was perceived positively by the media as many were happy that he acknowledged the themes of domestic violence within this piece. He additionally was passionate about raising awareness for domestic violence and was keen on expressing resources for people to seek help if needed. He also was emphasizing how this film would change perceptions of domestic violence for men and in turn be aware of habits and harmful mindsets that lead to abuse.

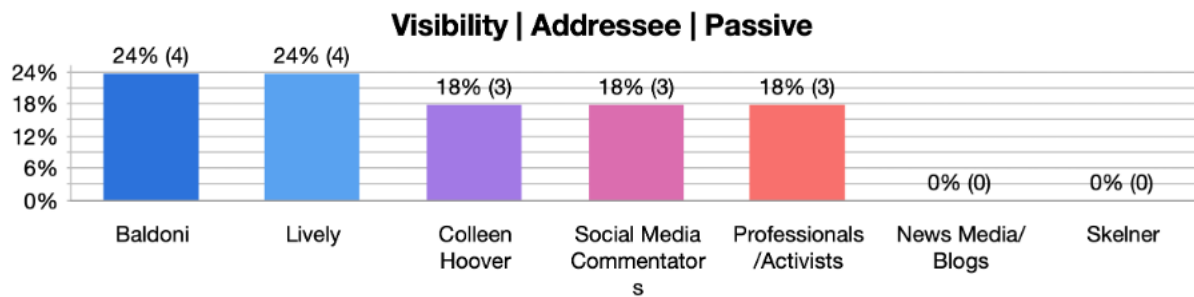
Prior to this movie’s release there was controversy surrounding the author of the book, Colleen Hoover, as similar sentiments were being said about her book when she decided to publish a coloring book based on the novel. It was interpreted as tone deaf and not accepted well as she was forced to cancel the release. This event shows that this controversy surrounding the themes

of this book are delicate and need to be handled carefully. It also shows that this pushback for the romance genre that this movie may fall under is not well accepted by fans and thus fueling the controversy despite this happening prior to the movie release during the pre-crisis phase.

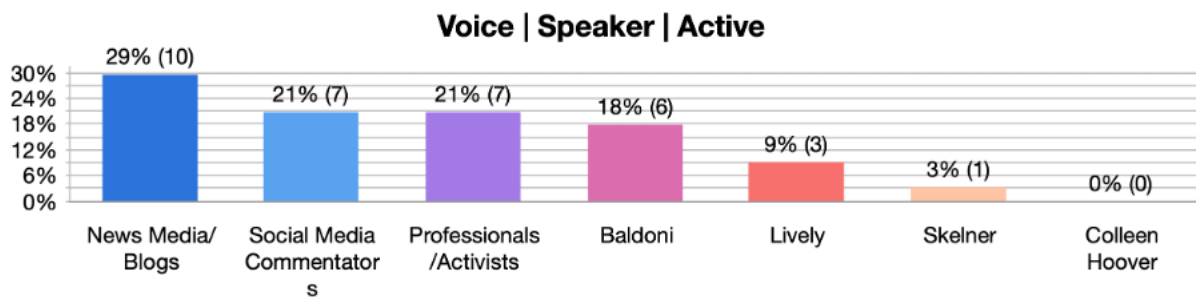
RQ3: How are these stakeholders different in terms of being active (voice) or passive (visibility) stakeholders?

Within fifty-one (51) statements from various actors there were seventeen (17) passive statements and thirty-four (34) active statements between actors.

Graph 1: Visibility/Passive sentiments from various actors



Graph 2: Voice/Active sentiments from various actors



In terms of rhetorical standing the news media had a 29% active voice but 0 passive statements so their percentage difference was an increase in 29% more voice. The news media had the largest percentage difference. The news media had the most active voice with 10

sentiments. The top active voice actors included social media commentators and professionals/activists which had equal sentiment counts with 7 and Baldoni with 6.

These findings emphasize how news media and blogs can push the narrative of the controversy and can promote more views into the story. It can also influence if a blogger has a specific opinion as others can share in that opinion of the film’s themes and also then get commentor feedback. Social media commentators can each individually express their opinions on the film as well as the film actors promoting the film and the fashion they do it in. Furthermore, the professionals and activists voicing their opinions can make their opinion credible because of their background. For example, if advocating for domestic violence themes within the film they can emphasize the lack of trigger warnings and how that is harmful to viewers who may not know what they are about to watch.

Visual 1: Voice vs Visibility sentiments visual comparison



For visibility or passive addressee, Lively was found to have 4 sentiments with a percentage difference of -15% as she had less voice but more visibility. Baldoni had equal visibility as Lively with 4 sentiments. The news media and Brandon Skelner, who plays Atlas in the film, both had 0 visibility sentiments within the specific articles analyzed.

Since Lively had less voice and more visibility it can convey that her theme and promotion did not resonate with the public and how she was more referenced to the film than being able to promote her specific ideals. Moreover, Skelner who was also a leading actor in the movie had 0 visibility despite putting out statements on social media about his stance on the film. He was quoted in one article but not many articles referenced his opinion making his rhetorical standing quite low overall.

Table 2: Rhetorical Standing: voice and visibility, based on actors and subgroups

Speaker quotes (n = 34) and addressed actors (n = 17)

Actor	Voice (actor as speaker)	Visibility (actor as addressee)	Percentage difference between voice and visibility
Baldoni	6 (18%)	4 (24%)	-6% less voice
Lively	3 (9%)	4 (24%)	-15% less voice
News Media	10 (29%)	0 (0%)	+29% more voice
Social Media Com.	7 (21%)	3 (18%)	+3% more voice
Professionals/Activists	7 (21%)	3 (18%)	+3% more voice
Hoover	0 (0%)	3 (18%)	-18% less voice
Skelner	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	+3% more voice

Overall, this film deals with many actors trying to push their opinions and the chatter among the channels causes this paracrisis surrounding the film's promotional events. As the main actors in the film, Lively and Baldoni push different narratives despite promoting the same piece. It is shown that the news media and blogs as well as social media have given this paracrisis a platform to grow as social media commentors and professionals and activists have chimed in to convey their opinions and experiences as well as expertise for the promotional narratives displayed. This controversy clearly shows how a difference in ideals on such a sensitive subject like domestic violence can lead to public backlash and scrutiny because of how voices interact on platforms like social media which can fuel a paracrisis.

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