

LOBBYING AND TIKTOK'S CAMPAIGN

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WG-OC-T/06 FRIDAY 11:30AM

TikTok's Campaign:

At the current moment, TikTok, owned by parent company ByteDance which is a company based in Beijing, is facing a ban in the United States (Politico 2024). This potential ban is due to significant national security and data privacy concerns. On March 13th 2024, the House of Representatives passed legislation requiring ByteDance to sell TikTok within the next six months or face a complete ban of the application. It is to be noted that this ban will be significantly detrimental to the company as United States users on the app are the largest by country audience size, being close to 150 million (Statista 2024). Prior to the legislation being passed, TikTok had implemented a major lobbying campaign in order to steer the influence of government senators and officials. As a part of this campaign, the company hired well-known Washington-based lobbying firms, former legal officials from President Obama's administration (New York Post 2023) as well as launching a \$2.1 million advertising campaign amongst other public relations efforts (MSN 2024). More specifically, the campaign aimed to display its transparency measures over data, engage directly with policy makers (Politico 2024), and leverage public support through its user base. Contrastingly to TikTok's lobbying efforts, the legislation to ban the application was passed.

This TikTok campaign effort is a strong example of the public relations concept of lobbying. Lobbying refers to an attempt to influence the decisions governing officials whether it be through policies or other actions (Britannica 2024). As mentioned previously, the company was facing unfavourable legislation to which they attempted to influence the United States government. TikTok launched large-scale television campaigns to target public opinion and perception, hired legal professionals to challenge the potential legislation as well as engaging directly with legislators through the lobbying firms they had hired. These are all key indicators of an attempted lobbying campaign, being a great example of the concept in real-world applications.

Lobbying Explained:

As previously highlighted, lobbying is a public relations concept that involves an attempt, usually through the form of a campaign, in order to influence government-made decisions (Britannica 2024). The process of lobbying is a widely utilised tool in various contexts around the world and is important in order to ensure decision-makers make the correct legislation according to the needs of the client or organisation represented. The concept can take various forms including; the engagement of media, political contributions, and direct advocacy. The strategies undertaken by lobbying endeavours aim to influence both the government and the general public (The Conversation 2016). It must also be stated that lobbying itself is a multi-billion dollar industry as there are firms that are well-versed in successful large-scale lobbying campaigns (Bloomberg Government 2024). The effectiveness of its implementation is also attributed to a number of factors. Furthermore, ethical concerns can also arise in various contexts to which lobbying is applied. Overall, this concept is multifaceted on its political impact through a number of ways.

The implementation of lobbying can be effective, but are influenced by various factors. These include the level of preparedness and strategic methods by lobby groups as well as the financial backing to perform such methods (SpringerLink 2021) (OECD iLibrary 2024). These factors also depend on the governing bodies in certain contexts, sometimes through varying political institutions as well as electoral voting rules in some instances (Cambridge University Press 2020). As an example, the federal lobbying system in Australia overall as it is not as strong as individual state and international standards (The Guardian 2020). It should also be highlighted as this can also raise ethical issues, specifically potential corruption, as such laws feature limited transparency, have limited punishment, and have no independent oversight. Furthermore, on the side of

lobbying, those who hold power politically and financially can monopolise influence and easily overpower other smaller lobbying campaigns (OECD iLibrary 2024). Contrastingly, lobbying is an important tool for allowing legislators to have more insight into significant decisions. Lobbyists can present attention to such legislators on information that can assist in the strenuous development of policies. Ultimately, there are both positive and negative attributes to the implementation of lobbying in society, influenced by various factors.

Moving forward, there are significant ethical issues and concerns may arise in the use of lobbying. One major ethical concern that arises is transparency. There can be a manipulation of legislative processes if there is a lack of transparency in how much is spent monetarily and for what purpose lobbying is being completed for. To combat this, public policies of disclosure on lobbying activities must be implemented to prevent unethical influence on legislators which is proven to have lowered levels of corruption (Johnston 2016) (Chari et al 2012). Another ethical issue is a potential unequal democratic representation. Firms and campaigns with significantly more resources can have disproportionate influence on legislators. Essentially, organisations with large financial access can exert more influence than groups with less resources (McGrath 2007). A common concern that arises in contexts of lobbying are conflicts of interest. Lobbying firms tend to have close relationships with legislators which can lead to a conflict of interest. In order to prevent such an ethical issue, it is emphasised to maintain a strictly professional in lobbying efforts and to have a boundary in terms of personal relationships (Sallot & Johnson 2006). Concludingly, measures must be implemented in order to limit ethical concerns and issues that may arise.

How the TikTok Campaign is an Application of Lobbying:

TikTok's campaign is a great example of an application of lobbying in a real-world instance. Through the company's campaign, the basic principles of lobbying are used in an attempt to influence a legislative outcome. As previously mentioned, the campaign was aimed at countering and influencing a possible ban of their application in the United States, informing various legislators and general public opinion.

A major lobbying principle which was present in TikTok's application of the concept was their relevant strategies in influencing the potential policy change in communication. In their direct engagement with legislators, the company hired well-known lobbying firms and lobbyists within Washington (New York Post 2023). These firms directly communicated with the relevant government officials on behalf of the company. These highly-experienced professionals, already based in the Capitol, were hired as they could leverage their connections and relationships with legislators, a very strategic lobbying decision used by TikTok. The lobbying firms used by TikTok also provided these policymakers with important information to influence their decisions, yet another important lobbying principle. As an example, TikTok provided the United States government with reports and briefings that displayed their willingness to increase transparency over data collection. In another avenue, TikTok established a broader public opinion lobbying campaign, another important principle to lobbying. There were various media campaigns established, exclusive to both social media and television. These media campaigns reiterated the company's commitments to their transparency and the potentially large economic impact the ban of their application may cause. This endeavour was successful as it largely influenced public opinion in their favour (Pew Research Center 2023). As a multifaceted approach, lobbying campaigns should include both direct engagement politically as well as engagement to the public (Coen & Richardson 2009), this was utilised in TikTok's lobbying efforts. All in all, in the lobbying practices of TikTok, the company has utilised successful lobbying principles in their efforts.

There are ethical concerns and issues that are associated with lobbying, as priorly mentioned, that also affected TikTok's lobbying efforts in their campaign. While TikTok utilised the resources to ensure a democratic process was taken in their potential ban, these significant resources raised ethical concerns. Within this specific debate, the side against the ban taken by TikTok was the single sole lobbying effort that was represented publicly. There were no opposing lobbying actions publicly. When a single campaign dominates the lobbying landscape on a single issue, there is usually not a fair and equal representation on all sides (Drutman 2015).

Ultimately, the implementation of lobbying principles, utilised by TikTok, allowed for a slightly successful campaign. While their efforts delayed the proposed ban significantly, the United States government passed the bill for the ban of the application. This campaign highlights the potential effectiveness of lobbying, in the use of resources and strategy, which can shape and influence the decisions made by governing bodies.

The Value of Lobbying to Organisations:

There is significant value for organisations to be utilising lobbying as a public relations specialisation. A major benefit to utilising this concept is to favourably influence policy and regulation. Effective use of lobbying can successfully influence policy changes that relate to an organisation's goals and operations, therefore limiting risks associated with such a policy change (Baumgartner et al 2009). Accordingly, lobbying can allow organisations to anticipate changes that affect the company. By being involved in legislative processes, an organisation can advocate for a favourable outcome and avoid potential negative outcomes. By engaging in this process, organisations can identify issues in early stages and address them (Drutman 2015). Additionally, having access to key legislators and regulators allow an organisation to directly present their interests. Relationships, through lobbying, can create seamless communication with lawmakers (Coen & Richardson 2009). Furthermore, practising in lobbying efforts can establish a strong reputation for an organisation. By influencing policy changes, an organisation can position themselves as an influential segment within their respective industry.

One point that is most relevant to consider as a future public relations practitioner is to create and maintain relationships with the relevant legislators as well as the general public through lobbying. In order to effectively practice lobbying, a strong form of a relationship with such individuals, and the public, allows for ease in future communication. This involves regular positive interactions and being attentive to their needs accordingly. With this, by establishing a network through lobbying, I can receive important insight and additional support long-term (McGrath 2007). By maintaining such relationships, it is ensured that this exemplifies a transparent and ethical practice.

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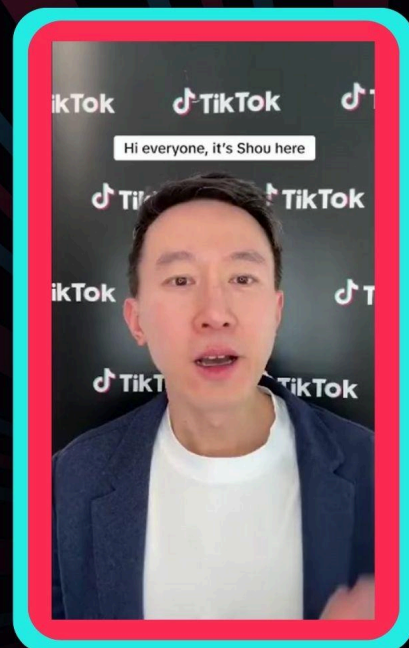
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TIKTOK'S CAMPAIGN

- **POTENTIAL UNITED STATES BAN**
- **150 MILLION U.S. USERS**
- **OWNED BY BYTEDANCE**
- **HIRED WELL-KNOWN LOBBYISTS**
- **CAMPAIGN TO ADDRESS TRANSPARENCY**
- **\$2.1 MILLION TV CAMPAIGN**



HOW IS THE TIKTOK CAMPAIGN AN APPLICATION OF LOBBYING

- **UTILISED IMPORTANT LOBBYING PRINCIPLES**
- **TARGETED BOTH LEGISLATORS AND THE PUBLIC**
- **HIRED FIRMS HAD DIRECT ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT**
- **SOCIAL MEDIA AND TELEVISION CAMPAIGNS**
- **FACED ETHICAL ISSUES THAT ARISE WITH LOBBYING PRACTICES**
- **THE ONLY PUBLIC LOBBYING CAMPAIGN WAS FROM TIKTOK DUE TO MONOPOLISATION**
- **DELAYED THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

LOBBYING EXPLAINED

- **WHAT IS LOBBYING?**
- **VARIOUS FORMS OF LOBBYING PRACTICES**
- **MULTI-BILLION DOLLAR INDUSTRY**
- **PRESENT INFORMATION AND INFLUENCE DECISIONS**
- **VARIOUS FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVENESS:**
 - **LARGE FINANCIAL RESOURCES**
 - **VARYING STRENGTH IN REGULATION**
 - **MONOPOLISATION OF LOBBYING IN CERTAIN INDUSTRIES**
- **ETHICAL ISSUES:**
 - **TRANSPARENCY**
 - **UNEQUAL DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION**
 - **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

THE VALUE OF LOBBYING TO ORGANISATIONS

- **FAVOURABLY INFLUENCE POLICY AND REGULATION**
- **CAN PROVIDE A FAVOURABLE OUTCOME FOR OPERATIONS**
- **HAVING A RELATIONSHIP WITH LEGISLATORS ALLOWS FOR SEAMLESS COMMUNICATION**
- **FOSTER THIS BY BEING ATTENTIVE TO GOVERNMENT NEEDS**
- **ANTICIPATE FUTURE CHALLENGES AND RISKS**
- **EXEMPLIFIES A TRANSPARENT AND ETHICAL PRACTICE**