

Things fall apart (when you focus on the loudest voices)

By [Bronwyn Williams](#)

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I finally got around to reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, that most well renowned and highly regarded work of African literature which brought the last days of pre-colonial Africa into light for the world at large. (No, I don't have a good reason for why it took me so long, it's a wonderful book.)



What stood out for me, along with the general keen-eyed observation of human nature (all my favourite books and writers, both fact and fiction, have a keen eye for *observing* the world and its citizens, not as we want to be presented, *but as we really are*), was the following passage, in which a wise character uses an African fable to explain the folly of his kinsmen after they attacked and killed a foreign emissary to their village who had been sent by the newly arrived European colonists.

“Never kill a man who says nothing”

“ Mother Kite once sent her daughter to bring food. She went and brought back a duckling. ‘You have done very well,’ said Mother Kite to her daughter, ‘but tell me, what did the mother of the duckling say when you swooped and carried away its child away?’
 ‘It said nothing,’ replied the young kite. ‘It just walked away.’
 ‘You must return the duckling,’ said the Mother Kite, ‘There is something ominous about the science.’
 And so Daughter Kite returned the duckling and took a chick instead.
 ‘What did the mother of this chick do?’ asked the old kite.
 ‘It cried and raved and cursed me,’ said the young kite.
 ‘Then we can eat the chick,’ said her mother. ‘There is nothing to fear from someone who shouts.’ ”

The squeaky wheel may get the attention, but it’s the quiet ones you ought to watch

The moral of this little story clearly applies to more than issues of personal defence.

As marketers, entrepreneurs and business leaders, we should take heed of mother kite's wisdom when it comes to dealing with customer complaints and public relations crises.

The people who complain the loudest and make the most noise denouncing your brand on social media are the least of your problems (even if they are very distracting). We should be far more concerned about those who *do not* file complaints or join online mobs to drag your name through the proverbial mud after you have made a mistake. The silent majority of dissatisfied or disgusted customers will simply, quietly walk away, taking their business to your competitors without even giving you the right of reply.

Beware the silence.

ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

Futurist, economist and trend analyst. Partner at Flux Trends.

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