

SOCIAL MEDIA AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION: USING SOCIAL MEDIA AND
IMAGE REPAIR DISCOURSE TO MAINTAIN POSITIVE IMAGE

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ABSTRACT

In 2012, the COO of Chick-fil-A, and present day CEO, Dan Cathy, offered his personal opinion on gay marriage during two separate interviews with conservative media outlets. Those statements ended up making national headlines, drawing both positive and negative attention to the company. In response, Chick-fil-A issued a single statement on Facebook, and no official press release. Examining the statement by Chick-fil-A in regards to image repair offers public relations practitioners a glimpse into how similar situations can be handled, and it was found that social media can be used in image repair efforts during a crisis situation. For the study, the overriding question is this: following a crisis situation during the image repair efforts for a brand, what social media post types generate the most positive engagement for a brand? A crisis situation was presented as a scenario to participants in an online, information processing experiment to imitate the Chick-fil-A crisis, followed by a series of Facebook posts that meet the criteria for each of the five image repair strategies identified by Benoit (1997). Participants will answered questions based upon those posts in order to determine which image repair strategy is the most effective in building and maintaining a positive image during a similar crisis situation. The strategies were ranked based upon those responses.

Introduction

On June 16, 2012, Dan Cathy, the Chief Operating Officer and son of the founder of Chick-fil-A, went on the Ken Coleman show, a syndicated radio talk show. While on the show, Cathy stated, “I think we are inviting God’s judgment on our nation when we shake our fist at Him and say, ‘We know better than you as to what constitutes a marriage’” (Chick-fil-A, 2014). A few weeks later, during an interview with the Baptist Press, Cathy stated, “Guilty as charged” (Blume, 2012) when discussing his personal view of gay marriage versus the traditional family. Cathy also discussed his, and the company’s, support of the traditional family, “the biblical definition of the family unit” (Blume, 2012). Following this article, a flood of press coverage resulted in a lot of attention on Chick-fil-A, both positive and negative. It is important to note here that the company was not accused of doing anything concrete: not refusing service to gay customers, refusing to hire gay employees, nor firing gay employees, nor supporting violence against homosexuals (Wall, 2014). Gay marriage supporters were greatly angered by the statements and called for boycotts of the restaurants. Those who held the opposite opinion were quickly moved to act in support of Chick-fil-A, and in one day, Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day, supporters led to record-breaking sales, with 29.9% more in sales than usual, as well as an average of 367 more customers per store than a typical Wednesday.

In response to all of the attention, Chick-fil-A released only one single statement on Facebook. No official press release was issued. Chick-fil-A stated, “Going forward, our intent is to leave the policy debate over same-sex marriage to the government and

political arena” (Chick-fil-A, 2012). Examining the statement by Chick-fil-A in regards to image repair offers public relations practitioners a glimpse into how similar situations can be handled, although the primary supporters of Chick-fil-A, traditional families and Christians, influenced the situation in favor of Chick-fil-A with no effort put forth by the company into obtaining their loyalty during that time. The response is an example of a post that demonstrates a mixture of bolstering and corrective action, based upon the image restoration strategies described by Benoit (1997). Benoit’s image restoration theory is a look into the potential response strategies that can be used by brands in order to improve, maintain, or restore their image following a crisis.

Following the situation in 2012, Chick-fil-A appears to have fully rebounded, and even gained some positive advances in the company’s finances and public appearance. In 2012, the company saw \$4.6 billion in sales, which was up 14 percent from 2011, and opened 96 new stores, which is an increase of 4 more new stores than opened in 2011. In 2013, Chick-fil-A’s system-wide sales reached \$5 billion, and outperformed KFC in sales while operating in fewer locations than KFC. That year was also the 47th consecutive year of annual sales increases. Stafford (2013) quotes Ken Bernhardt, a Georgia State University marketing professor who consults for Chick-fil-A, saying, “I think the flap last summer will not have any effect at all long term. When they open stores, they hire 50 or 60 people and that is good for the community. That means jobs.” Chick-fil-A also were among an elite group of companies that were awarded the Temkin Experience Ratings, and were third among the top 12 companies for all three of the ratings: functional, accessible, and emotional. Also in 2013, Chick-fil-A was named fourth on the list of

Forbes “Inspiring Company,” ranking in the top five with Microsoft, Disney, Wal-Mart, and Target (Company Awards).

Looking back now at the situation faced by Chick-fil-A, combined with the fact that the majority of image repair research is done as case studies after a crisis situation, the question was raised: what would a study that systematically explores the dynamics of a potential crisis situation and the potential image repair strategies look like? To answer that question, the following study is being proposed. Using an information processing experiment, this study will examine how participants rank potential response posts via Facebook for a crisis scenario similar to the situation faced by Chick-fil-A in 2012. Participants will be asked to respond to a series of questions following an example Facebook post that represents each one of the five response strategies individually.

For the study, the overriding question is this: following a crisis situation during the image repair efforts for a brand, what social media post types generate the most positive engagement for a brand? Based upon the data obtained during the experiment, the response strategies will be ranked according to the potential ability to cause the desired results of positive engagement for a brand, resulting in a list that could be useful for public relations practitioners who find themselves in a similar situation. Additionally, the data will be evaluated based upon the potential relationship between certain demographic variables and the response strategy that appears to have the most potential for achieving the desired results for different target audiences in the population, such as different age groups and education levels.

The Internet and social networking sites have changed how public relations practitioners craft messages for their audiences. From the immediacy of information

availability to the public, to the interactivity of messages, and the potential for users and public to create content for brands, social networking sites have created possibilities for better public relations campaigns, but also a greater potential for negativity towards a brand to be showcased. This new field is not only a challenge for public relations practitioners, but also for researchers. Theories developed prior to the revolution of social networking as central parts of the lives of audiences are being reexamined, and many times changes will be necessary in order for the theories to still be applicable today, but other theories could be proven irrelevant based upon the information processing changes in society today. With that in mind, research examining social media and social network sites, crisis communication, and audience engagement was reviewed. Specifically, the research examined regarding crisis communication focused on image restoration theory.

Literature Review

The revolution of the Internet provided public relations a new tool for communication between companies and publics, leading to authentic, two-way communication (Kelleher, 2009; Byrd, 2012). Social media allows companies and organizations a way to improve understanding and rate consumer sentiment levels in a manner that has not been available in previous decades (Byrd, 2012). Social media has created a more personal platform for brands and consumers to create and build relationships, and for consumers to receive information in the case of a crisis (Byrd, 2012). Prior to the development of social media, practitioners worked quickly to write press releases, organize press conferences and make public statements (Byrd, 2012). It has also been shown that the publics' usage of social media increases during crisis situations (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2011), and the 24-hour news cycle has become more prominent as information can now reach publics instantaneously (Byrd, 2012). Knowing that, "it is surprising that only 29% of U.S. companies have formal social media policies" (Jin et al., 2011, p. 76), and generally public relations practitioners believe that social media is less reliable and accurate than traditional media. This study seeks to answer this question: Following a crisis situation during the image repair efforts for a brand, what social media post types generate the most positive engagement for a brand?

Crisis Communication

"A crisis is a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and poses both a financial and reputational threat. Crises can harm stakeholders physically, emotionally and/or financially" (Coombs, 2007, p. 164). In

a crisis situation, public relations practitioners must find the best ways to get their messages out so that the public can receive information (Jin, Liu, & Austin, 2011). Crisis communication is a combination of the messages that organizations send out during a crisis as well as the process of determining what those messages are and how they will be communicated to a variety of stakeholders (McKendree, 2011). Jin, Liu, and Austin (2011) examined crisis communication through the lens of social media and created a new model, the social-mediated crisis communication model (SMCC). The model seeks to portray the relationships between social media, traditional media and offline word-of-mouth communication as a way to help crisis managers decide how and if they should respond to social media consumers (Jin et al., 2011). Through their research, the authors found that internal crisis origins generate stronger crisis emotions and that publics are more likely to accept the organization's accommodative responses. The study also found that external crisis situations generate better acceptance of defensive responses (Jin et al., 2011).

Image Repair Discourse

One important aspect that public relations practitioners work to protect during a crisis situation is a company's image. According to Benoit and Pang (2007), "image is a subjective impression of that business held by other people" (p. 244). Individuals can perceive images of brands differently amongst themselves, but in the general context, image refers to the overall view held by the majority of the publics (Benoit & Pang, 2007). For this study, image is operationally defined as the preconceived idea that an individual user holds of a brand or organization based upon past experiences with and knowledge of the brand.

Along the same line, and an important reason for organizations to be concerned about their image, is reputation. “Reputations are valuable resources that are threatened during a crisis” (Coombs & Holladay, 2008, p. 252). An important consideration for consumers, when deciding what to purchase, is an organization or brand’s reputation, so much so that consumers become reluctant to do business with an organization that does not have a positive reputation (Benoit & Pang, 2007). Image restoration discourse seeks to identify message types based upon response styles that organizations can use during and after a crisis situation in order to protect and/or repair their image (Benoit & Pang, 2007).

Image repair/restoration discourse is a classic theory crafted by Benoit. Benoit (1997) sought to argue the theory of image restoration discourse as a viable approach for use by public relations practitioners in developing and understanding messages that are used to respond to corporate image crises. Image restoration discourse is based upon a crisis that was instigated by an attack or complaint, with two main components: the accused is held responsible for an action and the act is considered offensive (Benoit, 1997). One primary foundation underlying those components is that it is unreasonable to form an unfavorable impression of an organization “unless that company is believed to be responsible for that act” (Benoit, 1997, p. 178). Responsibility is defined as an act that a business can be blamed for based upon whether or not the business performed, ordered, encouraged, facilitated, or permitted the act to occur. Salient audiences, those who are directly affected by the event, must disapprove of the act for it to be considered a threat to image (Benoit, 1997).

Image repair discourse relies heavily on the perceptions of relevant audiences during an event (Benoit, 1997). Because of that, there are a number of points that must be addressed by businesses when determining the best route to direct their responses during such an event. An important point when examining the components underlying the importance of using image repair strategies is that in both conditions, “perceptions are more important than reality” (Benoit, 1997, p. 178). When determining response strategies, it is not important whether or not a business is responsible for the offensive act, but instead it is important whether or not the business is thought to be responsible for it by relevant audiences. According to Benoit, “as long as the audience thinks the firm is at fault, the image is at risk” (p. 178). Another important question for a business to ask is if the act was offensive, and if it wasn’t, do the relevant audiences believe it to be offensive. Finally, identifying and addressing the proper audiences is important for business crisis responses (Benoit, 1997).

Image restoration discourse focuses on message options during a crisis, rather than describing crisis types or stages. The theory addresses five broad categories of image repair strategies: denial of responsibility, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness of event, corrective action, and mortification. Denial of responsibility includes simple denial, stating that you did not perform the act, or shifting the blame, stating that another performed the act. Evasion of responsibility has four statement options: provocation, or responding to the act of another organization; defeasibility, or having a lack of information or ability to act; accident; and/or having good intentions, where the act was meant to do well but went sour. Reducing the offensiveness of an event can take a variety of message formats, from attacking the accuser to compensation. This

strategy can also be seen in bolstering, stressing good traits in an organization, minimization, stating that the act isn't serious, differentiation, stating that the act is less offensive than members of the public are making it out to be, and transcendence, stating that there are more important considerations than the crisis. Corrective action involves messages that include plans to solve the problem or prevent it from happening again. Mortification messages rely on apologizing for the act (Benoit, 1997).

Image repair is becoming an important evaluation tool for crisis communications (Moody, 2011, p. 406). Studies on image repair discourse have looked into applying the theory to case studies (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009; Liu, 2007). Holtzhausen and Roberts (2009) looked at specific strategies combined with stance type, news source, institutional spokesperson and crisis phase as potential factors impacting the positive, negative or balanced view point of news reports. The study analyzed a series of sexual assaults at the Air Force Academy in 2002 and found that it was difficult to correlate image repair strategies used in media releases and the strategies reported on in news reports, identifying this as a component that greatly affects the study of image repair discourse in a negative manner (Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009). Liu (2007) applied image repair discourse to the public sector by performing a content analysis of the nine major speeches given by President Bush focusing on Hurricane Katrina combined with a content analysis of 50 articles from three newspapers, two national and one local, regarding the effectiveness of the speeches. Liu (2007) found some image repair strategies partner naturally, whereas other strategies are contradictory and therefore ineffective in improving overall opinion.

Another important aspect of image repair discourse research has been the advent of social media and research attempting to determine if the two can be related or at least processed together. Liu and Fraustino (2014) examined existing research done using image repair theory in regards to the advent and development of social media and its potential uses in crisis communication. It was found that crisis situations can create new management issues for social media content creators and that social media use has the potential to be less effective in image repair campaigns when strategies are replicated from traditional media (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Additionally, it was noted that in prior research combining image repair theory and social media, no modifications were made to the theory, and that despite the usefulness of social media, image repair theory is too linear and static and that research in the future may need to focus on adaptations and expansions when studying the relationship of social media and image repair theory (Liu & Fraustino, 2014).

Social Media

Studies examining social media have looked at a variety of elements. These start with classifying characteristics and features to create a distinct class of technology (Kane, Alavi, Labianca & Borgatti 2014) and defining social media and the levels of self-presentation/self-disclosure based upon the relationship between the levels of social presence/media richness (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Others have looked at organizational usage of social media, such as how it works for an organization and the sales strategy (Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012). Others have looked at users and defined a good user of social media (Gharibpoor, Allameh & Abrishamkar (2012), addressed how users relate to the sites and brands on social media sites (Pentina,

Gammoh, Zhang & Mallin, 2013), and how users access social media sites (Heinrichs, Lim & Lim, 2011). The articles have addressed a variety of features of a variety of social media sites, and many of the articles include advice for brands and organizations to better their use of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Pentina, Gammoh, Zhang & Mallin, 2013; Kane, Alavi, Labianca & Borgatti, 2014; Andzulis, Panagopoulos & Rapp, 2012).

Through social media research, many new conclusions have been reached regarding social media use for brands. Kane, Alavi, Labianca and Borgatti (2014) generated a road map for future research regarding relationships and networks on social media. This road map did not address social media as a potential tool for practitioners in crisis situations. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media and categorized aspects of social media sites that fall under the general terms based upon vague group applications. This study is an excellent reference for categories of social media, and addresses the specific characteristics that enable social networking sites to be usable as communication tools for organizations, both in daily information sharing as well as during crisis situations. Andzulis, Panagopoulos, and Rapp (2012) addressed how organizations can use social media in the sales process and for coordinating social media usage with sales techniques in order to build unique customer interactions and better relationships between the brand and their consumers. This study offers a broad overview of social media and the sales process, allowing it to potentially guide future research relating social media and sales. These three articles define social media, and those definitions were useful in creating a definition for this study, as well as identifying potential aspects of social media and social networking sites that would be the most beneficial for this study.

Gharibpoor, Allameh, and Abrishamkar (2012) found four main themes that define a good social media user: existence (referring to time spent online in social networks), civility (behaviors that represent respect of others and considering others' rights), humanity (behaviors that are morally and vigorously right), and sympathy (deep pity for others and the desire to understand and care about others' problems and feelings). These findings represent the fundamental shift in the way "humans communicate, interact, collaborate, create, inform themselves, priorities, organize, buy, sell, and play" (Gharibpoor et al., 2012, p. 160). The themes also affect how organizations decide to communicate with those users, therefore affecting their messages and message strategies.

Pentina, Gammoh, Zhang, and Mallin (2013) found that brand relationships play an important part in the context of social media and that relationship formation can influence consumer behaviors, including positive word of mouth. The findings of Pentina et al. (2013) represent the relationship between organizations and social media consumers as organizations are able to identify consumers that specifically match certain personality traits that make them better consumers, both of social media and of products. Heinrichs, Lim, and Lim (2011) found that higher-usage consumers show a higher positive perception of social networking sites based upon three access methods and three social networking sites. Perception differences between the three social networking sites was also noticed, and Facebook was important for usefulness, feeling, and usage intention no matter the usage level of the participant.

Tone in online writing is also an important aspect of the study of social media. Thayer, Evans, McBride, Queen, and Spyridakis (2010) combined elements of prior studies to lay groundwork for future research regarding tone effects on online audience

perceptions, based upon formality, verb contractions, punctuation, and the usage of the word “welcome.” The authors found that syntactic and semantic variables, either absence or presence, did statistically impact the participants’ ratings of online audience perceptions.

Defining social media was a portion of every article described previously. Initially, social media was intended for personal use but today many nonprofits, government, corporations and news media use social media to share information and promote their goals (Muralidharan, Rasmussen, Patterson, & Shin, 2011). Social networking sites are one form of social media, and are defined as Internet services that allow connection and interaction between groups by sharing content, which includes text, photos, videos, and are based on associations between consumers, both other individuals and brands. Social networking sites also allow for the distribution of materials, ideas, opinions, and use information and knowledge. For this study, social media is being defined as the collection of Internet sites that allow users to network and build relationships with other individuals, groups and brands by creating and sharing content, materials, ideas and opinions. For this study, Facebook will be the social media site used to examine relationships between users and brands following crisis situations. Facebook was chosen as the social networking site for this study due to the fact that is the number one network for connecting and sharing content (Which social media, 2014). Additionally, brands can share text, photo, and video content, and there is a larger limit on characters than on some other social networking sites, such as Twitter’s limit of 140 characters (Which social media, 2014). The character limit is extremely important in crisis communication, as it can be difficult to share a strong message with viewers in 140

characters. The audience on Facebook is also more diverse than sites such as Google Plus, which has a predominantly male user base and the professional segments are mostly students, tech-oriented professionals and creatives (Which social media, 2014).

Social media can be useful in crisis situations for a variety of reasons, from dispersing information quickly and directly, to engaging concerned publics in a dialog (Utz, Schultz & Glocka, 2013). Social media also serves as a fast and direct way to disperse information to global audiences (Ki & Nekmat, 2014). Utz, Schultz, and Glocka (2013) also addressed that using social media to inform the stakeholders about a crisis situation indicates that the organization is willing to quickly and directly send out information and to engage in a dialog with the stakeholders. Ki and Nakmet (2014) addressed a variety of studies where rapid responses on Facebook have curtailed potential crisis situations and where a lack of responses intensified situations. The study by Ki and Nakmet (2014) found that only a small percentage of Fortune 500 companies were using social media as a response tool during a crisis situation.

Audience Engagement

Audience engagement is important for public relations practitioners to learn about how consumers interact with, and in some ways, perceive the messages sent. Many studies examined how media content is consumed and engaged with (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2010; Marci, 2006; Cunningham, Hall, & Young, 2006; Michelle, Davis, & Vladica, 2009; Scott & Craig-Lees, 2010; Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012). Some studies have focused on engagement and readership based on factors of Uses and Gratifications (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2010). Others looked at a variety of factors

related to advertising (Marci, 2006; Cunningham, Hall, & Young, 2006; Michelle, Davis, & Vladica, 2009; Scott & Craig-Lees, 2010).

When looking at factors related to advertising, a variety of variables have been examined and results generated interesting advances in research. Marci (2006) looked specifically at emotional levels of engagement based upon the context, and found that levels were affected, but the pattern of engagement was not. Cunningham, Hall, and Young (2006) studied engagement with embedded advertising during the viewing of a TV awards show, and found that a strong emotional engagement can magnify engagement with the advertisements. One of the primary implications Cunningham et al. (2006) addressed based upon their findings was that the customer is the advertiser, and taking a “customer centric” viewpoint is key when attempting to generate engagement (p. 378). Michelle, Davis, and Vladica (2009) studied audience reception processes with screen media, such as television and film. The authors found four distinct orientations, separated by degrees of emotional and cognitive involvement, matched with four nodes theorized in the composite model. Scott and Craig-Lees (2010) studied the relationship between various factors affecting an audience’s ability to judge engagement based upon the memory of product placement, and found that engagement is a multidimensional measure describing a “person’s emotional and cognitive engagement with entertainment content” (p. 52-53). The study also found that engagement and its effects on product placement can be measured using self-reported measures and in a natural setting. These studies represent examining audience engagement in other media settings, and represent the definition of audience engagement.

Other studies looked at how consumers engage with a brand (Mersey, Malthouse, & Calder, 2010) and responses to user generated content compared to brand generated content (Christodoulides, Jevons, & Bonhomme, 2012). Mersey et al. (2010) sought to define engagement, demonstrate that consumers can have a variety of experiences with a brand and explore that range, propose ways to measure engagement and experiences, and to test those measures. They found two types of engagement, personal engagement and social-interactive engagement, and posited that the two types of engagement are associated with readership, the number of times a web site is visited and the amount of time spent on the site. Christodoulides et al. (2012) examined the responses of consumers to user generated content compared to brand generated content, and how audiences perceived that content, and found that involvement with user generated content is significantly related to brand perceptions and that consumers are more likely to relate to the brand positively when the brand is perceived as having co-creation, community and empowerment. These studies measured audience engagement with online platforms, both websites and social media.

Based upon those studies, audience engagement is defined conceptually as the experience of users with the brand, based upon their specific set of beliefs about how the brand fits into their lives. This experience can be enhanced by the surrounding context. It is also part of the degree of relevance to a person and the importance of the stimulus for the user. For the purposes of this study, the operational definition of audience engagement is the way that users of social media, interact with the brand based upon their reactions to posts by “liking,” sharing, or commenting either positively or negatively.

Research in audience engagement and crisis communication is just beginning. Byrd (2012) examined the forms of social media engagement of consumers of Toyota vehicles on the corporation's Facebook page based upon the elements of the stewardship model. The study focused on social media as a tool for two-way engagement during corporate crisis situations. Byrd (2012) found that early identification of the potential benefits of social media being included in the social media strategy is beneficial for companies with strong, positive reputations where not using social media could imply a negative effect of the company's image. The study also found that there can be opportunities for companies to extend their engagement tactics and initiate conversations.

Significance of this Study

In looking through literature relating to image repair, the studies were case studies examining how an individual or company handled their image repair efforts during a crisis situation (Benoit & Pang, 2007; Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009; Liu, 2007), but were done after the closure or after the press coverage had dramatically declined. This study is prescriptive, taking a different approach and examining potential responses and audience reactions to those responses of a potential crisis situation. There are also very few image repair studies using social media (e.g., Liu & Kim, 2011; Moody, 2011; Muralidhara, Dillistone, & Shin, 2011). Those studies are also case studies examining how social media efforts played a role in the image repair strategies used after the situation had been defused. This study seeks to understand how social media posts can be used to help further an image repair campaign by an organization.

Methodology

In order to complete this study, an experimental with-in and between subjects mixed information processing experiment was conducted, with participants accessing the survey via Qualtrics. The link was distributed via MTURK, the Amazon Mechanical Turk a crowdsourcing marketplace for obtaining survey information. An a priori G*Power analysis was conducted for the expected effect size of 0.25 with an alpha of 0.05. Analysis revealed a sample size of 230 was needed to sufficiently power the test of the design, repeated measures between factors ANOVA, and accounting for interactions, number of groups is 5 and the number of measurements equal to 2. A pretest was done of the survey in order to determine the average length of time it takes participants in complete. That information was used to determine how much to pay participants on MTURK, paying approximately \$0.50 for each four minutes based upon the average time the pretest participants spent taking the survey. For example, if it averaged out to approximately seven minutes for pretest participants to complete the survey, the rate of pay on MTURK for this survey would be \$1. In the end, it was determined based on the pretest results that the average length participants took to complete the survey was 5 minutes, so it was determined that MTURK participants would be paid \$0.75 each. Due to a Qualtrics error, meaning that not all participants received codes for MTURK, a total of 260 participants completed the survey. Participants that contacted the researcher regarding the lack of a code at the completion of the survey were compensated.

The survey was centered on a crisis situation and a series of Facebook posts that demonstrate image repair strategies that a company could use in the event of a similar

crisis. In order to come up with a crisis situation, a case study was done examining how Chick-fil-A handled the negative attention aimed at their company in 2012 after Dan Cathy, the son of the founder and current CEO, made statements against gay marriage. Following two interviews, one radio and one with the Baptist Press, Cathy's statements were made public and placed at the center of a debate about whether or not companies should be held responsible for the public beliefs of their top management. The full explanation of the scenario as seen by participants is included in Appendix A, as well as the full question list and format, including the images of the Facebook posts that were in the survey.

This scenario was chosen for this study as it was a relatively recent event that is representative of culture today (especially the influences of social media and contemporary public policy issues) and involved a large number of publics from government to individuals. Although there are some disadvantages to using a potentially recognizable scenario, there would be an equal or greater number of disadvantages to generating a fake scenario. For this study, the situation chosen was two years prior, so many participants will have had time to have forgotten some details of the event. For those that still remain aware of the issue, those participants in the study will be randomly distributed amongst all respondents. Additionally, participants who hold prior opinions or have strong attitudes towards Christianity and/or gay marriage will be randomly distributed throughout all respondents, negating potential negative effects on the data collected.

Following an initial explanation of the crisis scenario, participants were asked a series of questions regarding their opinion of the company and the situation. Those

questions included items from an attitude toward the company scales (Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004; Becker-Olson, 2003) and intention to recommend scales (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Two Likert scale items, “I have a favorable attitude toward doing business with ___ over the next few years” and “I believe this is a good company.” And three seven-point scales, “My overall impression of the ___ company is good/bad, favorable/unfavorable, and negative/positive” will be used. These questions were chosen based upon their relation to this studies operational definition of image as a preconceived idea that an individual user holds of a brand or organization based upon past experiences with and knowledge of the brand.

These scales offer both reliable and valid information. The attitude toward company scale by Mathwick & Rigdon (2004) reported an alpha of .88, and CFA was used to examine the measurement model and no changes were made to the scale as a result. The Becker-Olson (2003) attitude toward the company scale has had a range of alphas reported, from .92 through .96. The main study score used by Becker-Olson alpha was .94. Goldsmith, Lafferty and Newell (2001) examined the validity based upon a principle axis factor analysis with oblique rotation that described the variables as expected. The intention to recommend scales (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002) reported an alpha of .92. The study by Maxham and Netemeyer tested a measurement model, which fit very well, and it also met a stringent test of discriminant validity.

Following the questions examining how participants feel about the company after initially reading the scenario, a series of Facebook posts representing each of the five image repair strategies were used, with each participant viewing two posts. The posts varied in order to control for any order bias. Each Facebook post was followed by a series

of questions about the participant's response to that specific post, its content and, therefore, the strategy overall. The first three questions measured engagement based upon the measures described by Facebook for company pages: would you like this post, would you comment on this post, and would you share this post with your friends. These were yes/no questions. Following those three questions, there were questions using more traditional measures of engagement. Those questions included five semantic scale items from the personal involvement inventory by Zaichkowsky (1985), including irrelevant/relevant, worthless/valuable, not beneficial/beneficial, not needed/needed and useless/useful. Also included were semantic scales from the persuasiveness of the information scale (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). The scale includes directions for participants to describe their perceptions of the strength of the arguments, with scales representing not very convincing/very convincing, not very persuasive/very persuasive, and not compelling/compelling. Finally, the questions had participants rate the degree to which the statement handles the situation in a satisfactory measure, using a Likert-type statement from the satisfaction with problem resolution scale (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). This question read: "I am not satisfied with ___'s handling of this particular problem."

In order to fully address the research question central to this study, the following is the primary hypothesis:

H1: Different response strategies will produce different levels of engagement, either positive or negative, on Facebook.

Based upon those differences, a ranking was completed to order the response strategies from the most likely to succeed in a similar situation to the most likely to obtain the

opposite of the desired effect of positive engagement. For this study, audience engagement was defined as the way that users, specifically of social media, interact with the brand based upon their reactions to posts by “liking,” sharing, or commenting either positively or negatively.

The list of questions, those coming after the questions relating to engagement as described on Facebook, were tested and proved to be both reliable and valid in prior studies. The involvement scale by Zaichkowsky (1985) was tested by Houston and Walker (1996) and was found to have an alpha of .99. Houston and Walker also examined the discriminant validity of the full, larger version of the scale and found the items composing the scale were loaded on a single factor in principle components analysis. The semantic scales representing the persuasiveness of the information scale (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000) were reported to have an alpha of .85, and there have been no studies done reporting upon the validity of the scales. The satisfaction with problem resolution (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002) has a reported alpha of .92. The validity was measured at the same time as the intention to recommend scale described previously in this section.

After completing the main portion of the survey, participants were asked to answer a number of demographic questions. These questions included age, average number of hours spent on social media per day, highest level of education, and race.

Additionally, based on the demographic questions, a series of correlations was run to address the following hypotheses:

H2: Different age groups will respond with varying levels of engagement to each response strategy, such that those in the youngest age group will respond better to a different response strategy than those in the oldest age group.

H3: Different education levels will respond with varying levels of engagement to each response strategy, such that those with only a high school diploma or equivalent will respond better to a different response strategy than those with a PhD or equivalent degree.

H4: Those spending more time on average on social media will respond differently to strategies than those who spend very little time on average on social media.

Analyzing the Data

For evaluating the data, an N of 230 is the goal of the survey. The two posts were assigned to participants using true random selection. As each participant viewed two strategies, there will be approximately 92 participants viewing each post. Each of the following tests will be run using an alpha level of 0.05.

The primary research question for the study is this: following a crisis situation during the image repair efforts for a brand, what social media post types generate the most positive engagement for a brand? In order to answer this question, the individual results from each participant's answers on the semantic scale questions following each strategies Facebook post was weighted and the mean taken. Based upon those means, the strategies were ranked in order of likelihood to obtain the predicted response in this or similar situations, of repairing or maintaining a positive brand image using a five-way

ANOVA. Additional statistical tests may be run depending upon the data and the results to further examine the information collected.

In this study, the desired response is positive engagement with the Facebook post. In order to define positive engagement mathematically, a correlation was run between the yes/no questions following each post and the semantic scale items. The semantic scale items was recoded though, with the center bubble, generally considered a 4, being recoded to a 0 to indicate the neutrality of opinion. The three labels above were recoded to be equal to 1, 2, and 3, starting at one in the bubble nearest the center and 3 at the bubble indicated as the most positive according to the label given for the specific question. The opposite was done as well, recoding the bubbles lower than the central answer to be equal to -1, -2, and -3, with the -3 being the most negative option given for the specific question. Following the recoding, the correlation was run. If the result indicates a strong, positive correlation, that would represent a strong likelihood of positive engagement with the brand and brand content on Facebook. If the result indicates a strong, negative correlation, that would represent a strong likelihood of negative engagement with the brand and brand content on Facebook. Other correlation scores, of a more neutral tendency, would indicate either a lack of engagement in general or a lack of opinionated engagement. Although other situations may not deem positive engagement as the desired response, it is the predicted response to at least some of the response strategies used in this study.

The demographic variables were used to determine if there is a relationship between those variables and the preferred image repair strategy used, based upon correlations. Specifically tested were age, level of education, average time on social

media, and race. For each variable, the following question was asked: does this demographic variable make a difference in how each strategy is perceived, will be answered.

With the information collected from the Likert-scale items initially following the situation explanation and the Likert-scale item following each post, a Spearman correlation test was run to determine if a post adjusted the perceptions of the participants regarding the brand. The correlation coefficient can help determine if the initial opinions of the participants regarding the brand are affected by the image repair strategy used, based upon the potential of a correlation and, therefore, possible relationship of the post to the improvement or worsening of the participant's opinions regarding the brand.

Results

Dependent Variables

After reading each post, participants were asked a series of nine questions related to their perceptions of the post and its potential effectiveness, each a list of adjective antonym pairs with seven possible choices between the ends. Each of the questions was used to assess the perceptions held by the participants. The questions were entered into a principal component analysis with a rotation method of Varimax with Kaiser normalization. The adjectives used in the questions loaded, which led to testing the questions for Cronbach's α .

For each strategy, a test of reliability was run (Cronbach's α). For each strategy, the index was created using nine questions: relevance, worth, benefit, need, use, convincing, persuasion, and compelling. The results indicated that each test was reliable, with all results being over 0.96. For denial, the Cronbach's α was 0.974; evasion equaled 0.974; reducing offensiveness had an α of 0.978; corrective action's α was 0.970; and the α for mortification was 0.962.

Hypotheses

H1: Different response strategies will produce different levels of engagement, either positive or negative, on Facebook.

A five-way ANOVA was computed comparing the five Image Repair response strategies to the mean perception scores. A significant difference was found among

the strategies ($F(4, 428) = 6.306, p < 0.001$). Tukey's HSD was used to determine the nature of the differences between the strategies. This analysis revealed that the perceptions of reducing offensiveness ($m = 4.84, sd = 1.88$), corrective action ($m = 4.87, sd = 1.59$), and mortification ($m = 4.84, sd = 1.60$) differed significantly from the perceptions of the denial strategy ($m = 3.72, sd = 1.75$). There were no significant differences between denial and evasion, or any other significant differences between the response strategies.

Additionally, when examining the frequencies for each Image Repair strategy, mortification saw the most positive perceptions overall. Corrective action and reducing offensiveness were fairly similar, but corrective action slightly outranked reducing frequencies. Evasion ranked above denial, which noticeably had fewer positive reactions than the other response strategies.

Table 1					
<i>Pearson Correlations for Hypotheses Two, Three, and Four</i>					
		What is your age?	How many hours do you spend per week on average on social media sites?	Of the time that you spend on social media, how much of that is spent on Facebook?	What is the highest level of education you have completed?
DenialMean	Pearson Correlation	.343**	.135	.215*	.081
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.216	.046	.456
	N	86	86	86	86
EvasionMean	Pearson Correlation	.224*	.079	.197	-.052
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.037	.467	.067	.634
	N	87	87	87	87
ReducingMean	Pearson Correlation	.221*	-.003	.051	-.181
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	.980	.638	.096
	N	86	86	86	86
CorrectiveMean	Pearson Correlation	-.086	.019	-.026	-.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.430	.861	.814	.922
	N	87	87	86	87
MortificationMean	Pearson Correlation	.040	.104	.080	-.257*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.712	.337	.461	.016
	N	87	87	87	87

H2: Different age groups will respond with varying levels of engagement to each response strategy, such that those in the youngest age group will respond better to a different response strategy than those in the oldest age group.

When comparing age and response strategies, two of the five strategies demonstrated a statistically significant correlation between age and perception of the statement. The strategies demonstrating a statistically significant correlation were denial ($r(84)=0.343, p<0.01$), evasion ($r(85)=0.224, p<0.05$), and reducing offensiveness ($r(83)=0.217, p<0.05$). All three were positive correlations, indicating for age that as the participants got older, they were more likely to hold positive perceptions of the strategy. The remaining two strategies were not statistically significant. Although it is noteworthy that the correlation for corrective action indicated that as participants got older, they perceived the strategy as worse.

H3: Different education levels will respond with varying levels of engagement to each response strategy, such that those with only a high school diploma or equivalent will respond better to a different response strategy than those with a PhD or equivalent degree.

In relation to the highest level of education completed, a statistically significant correlation was found with mortification, but the other correlations relating education levels and the remaining four response strategies were not significant. The correlation for mortification and level of education completed was significantly negative ($r(85)=-0.257, p<0.05$). Also notable though is that all correlations were negative, indicating that the higher the level of education completed, the less likely participants were to perceive the response as positive.

H4: Those spending more time on average on social media will respond differently to strategies than those who spend very little time on average on social media.

There were no significant correlations for any of the five response strategies regarding the time spent on social media per week. However, there was a statistically significant correlation between denial and the amount of time spent per week on Facebook ($r(84)=0.215, p<0.05$). The remaining response strategies did not have a significant correlation with the time spent on Facebook per week.

Although there were statistically significant correlations found amongst the entirety of the tests run for hypotheses two, three, four and five, they were too low to be considered strong, so are of little importance in the long run.

Table 2						
<i>Pearson Correlation-Yes/No Questions to Perception Mean</i>						
		DenialYNM ean	EvasionYNM ean	ReducingYNM ean	CorrectiveYNM ean	MortificationYN Mean
DenialMean	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	-.440** .000 86	-.185 .434 20	-.579* .024 15	-.488* .040 18	-.138 .552 21
EvasionMean	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	-.035 .882 20	-.558** .000 87	-.502* .040 17	-.144 .570 18	-.402 .123 16
ReducingMea n	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	-.418 .121 15	-.462 .062 17	-.514** .000 86	-.061 .809 18	-.188 .558 12
CorrectiveMe an	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	-.261 .296 18	-.175 .488 18	-.200 .426 18	-.440** .000 87	-.376 .124 18
MortificationM ean	Pearson Correlati on Sig. (2- tailed) N	-.071 .761 21	-.177 .513 16	-.060 .853 12	-.298 .230 18	-.534** .000 87

A correlation was run comparing the perception of the brand after the viewing of a Facebook post and the participant's likelihood to like, comment on, or share the post in order to determine if the engagement anticipated by the participants was positive or negative. The relationship of the likelihood to engage with the post and the perceptions of the post were all found to be statistically significant. The relationship for denial was negative, but not strong ($r(84) = -0.440$, $p < 0.001$). The relationship for the evasion Facebook post was also negative, but not strong ($r(85) = -0.558$, $p < 0.001$). The reducing offensiveness strategy was also found to be statistically significant, but again was not strong ($r(83) = -0.514$, $p < 0.001$). The post for corrective action was also statistically significant, but not strong ($r(79) = -0.440$, $p < 0.01$). The mortification strategy was also statistically significant, but was not strong ($r(85) = -0.534$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3			PreMean
<i>Spearman's Correlations Testing Pre- and Post- Perceptions</i>			
Spearman's rho	DenialMean	Correlation Coefficient	.325**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
		N	86
	EvasionMean	Correlation Coefficient	.582**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	87
	ReducingMean	Correlation Coefficient	.461**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	86
CorrectiveMean	Correlation Coefficient	.110	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.311	
	N	87	
MortificationMean	Correlation Coefficient	.181	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.093	
	N	87	

A Spearman's correlation was run to determine if perceptions changed from the initial responses in reaction to the company based upon the situation described to them. Three response strategies demonstrated statistically significant correlations from the pre-post reactions to the perceptions after reading a post of a certain response strategy. Denial ($r(84)=0.325, p<0.01$), evasion ($r(85)=0.582, p<0.001$), and reducing offensiveness ($r(82)=0.461, p<0.001$) are the three strategies that demonstrated statistically significant correlations. The strategies corrective action and mortification did not demonstrate statistical significance.

Discussion

H1: Different response strategies will produce different levels of engagement, either positive or negative, on Facebook.

A statistically significant difference between denial, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification was found. With that significance, the denial strategy was found to be perceived as worse than the other response strategies when dealing with this type of situation. The means and frequencies examined for the strategies indicated that the mortification response strategy was perceived the most positively, with corrective action and reducing offensiveness being the second and third most positive perceptions. Evasion, although not statistically significantly greater than denial, was higher. This means that denial was viewed with the most negative perceptions of the five response strategies. Denial is basically saying, “No, I didn’t do it.” None of the other response strategies take that sort of stance. The statistical difference signifying the lack of positive response towards denial also indicates the response strategy, while a valid option, may not be the most preferred option by the readers or viewers of the response, whether on social media or a more traditional news outlet.

H2: Different age groups will respond with varying levels of engagement to each response strategy, such that those in the youngest group will respond better to a different response strategy than those in the oldest age group.

Statistical significance was found between three of the response strategies and age, all indicating that as participants got older they were more likely to view denial, evasion, and reducing offensiveness as more positive than those in younger demographics. Also important to note, although not statistically significant, the correlation between corrective action and age was such that as participants got older they were more likely to view that strategy as more negative than those in younger demographics. Knowing your target audience is always important when crafting messages of any kind, especially during crisis situations. This study also goes to show that, and furthers that by demonstrating which response strategy may be most likely to generate the desired response based upon the age of the viewer of the message, during a similar crisis situation as the scenario seen by participants of this study. Based upon the history of social media, and its precursors of news sharing, specifically newspapers, this result is not altogether surprising. For those of older generations, accepting a quote denying the culpability during a crisis from a newspaper was acceptable, so they would be likely to hold the same belief that denial is an accepted response strategy. However, for younger generations who did not rely on the newspaper for newsgathering, social media is a form of accountability between an organization and its publics, so denial is not considered as an accepted response strategy due to the ease of information gathering from both social media and other online sources.

H3: Different education levels will respond with varying levels of engagement to each response strategy, such that those with only a high school diploma or

equivalent will respond better to a different response strategy than those with a PhD or equivalent degree.

When correlating level of education and response strategies, only the mortification strategy was found to have a statistically significant relationship. This relationship was negative, indicating that those with higher levels of education perceived the mortification strategy more negatively than those with lower levels of education. The importance of this data is also related to the importance of knowing your target audience and key demographic characteristics of that audience. Again, as with H2, knowing the demographic characteristics related to the level of education of your target audience, messages could be crafted to more effectively generate the desired response during a crisis situation.

H4: Those spending more time on average on social media will respond differently to strategies than those who spend very little time on average on social media.

Regarding the relationship between the amount of time spent on social media per week and the image repair response strategies, there was nothing of statistical significance discovered. However, upon further review of the follow-up question, regarding the amount of time per week spent on Facebook on average, there was statistical significance in the relationship between corrective action and the time spent on Facebook. This relationship was negative, indicating that participants who spent more time on Facebook per week viewed the corrective action strategy more negatively than those who spent less time on Facebook per

week. In the literature, Heinrichs, Lim, and Lim (2011) noted that increased social media consumption lead to increased positive perceptions of social networking sites. This relationship did not seem to be transferable to the relationship between higher consumption rates and perceptions of various social media post types relating the different response strategies.

Further Literature Examination and Theoretical Implications

Image repair theory has primarily focused on defining, spotting, and examining the various response strategies. The second, third, and fourth hypotheses are a different look at image repair, instead looking at how various demographic variables effect perceptions of viewers. As seen in prior studies attempting to examine the relationship of media releases (or speeches) and news coverage, image repair was reinforced of being five primary response strategies. While this study does not dispute that, and in some ways also reinforces the theory, this study adds another aspect onto the theory examining viewer demographic characteristics as a potential influence on the selection and success of the response strategy.

When examining the results in relation to the literature reviewed, a few important descriptors were noted. First, Thayer, Evans, McBride, Queen, and Spyridakis (2010) found that tone impacted the ratings given by participants regarding their online perceptions. Similarly, this study notes that response type, much like tone, impacts the perceptions of audiences, both positively and negatively. Secondly, Ki and Nakmet (2014) examined studies where Facebook responses, or lack of Facebook responses, have either curtailed or intensified situations. Similarly,

it could be seen in this study that not only does having a Facebook response matter in a crisis situation, but that putting forth the proper response strategy for the specific crisis situation could potentially curtail or intensify a situation as well. And finally, Liu and Fraustino (2014) examined prior research in the area of crisis communication and social media, and addressed the research that had been done in the area of image repair theory and social media. They found the research to be somewhat lacking, and that future research using image repair theory as it currently is defined to be difficult and potentially useless. This study, however, found that there was statistical significance regarding the relationship of social media and image repair response strategies. More research could be done to expand upon these findings and to address a wider range of crisis situations, indicating that research in the area of image repair theory and social media could be performed and generate a multitude of practical implications, both for image repair researchers and public relations/communications practitioners.

Practical Implications

This study offers a wide range of practical implications for public relations/communications practitioners. Practically speaking when examining the first hypothesis, the statistical significance indicates the social media participants are likely to prefer different response strategies over others. This means that practitioners should carefully examine each response strategy, based upon the specifics of their situation, to determine which response strategy would be most likely to generate the desired response. For example, if an organization were to face

a similar situation to the scenario seen by the participants of this study, the organization would most likely want to use a response that would classify as mortification. Additionally, they would want to avoid creating a statement that uses denial as their primary response, unless there is significant proof to back that statement making it more than a general statement which was all that was seen by the participants of this study. Important to note for practitioners regarding hypothesis four is that those who spend more time on social media sites will not be prone to responding differently than those who spend very little time on social media. Additionally, when crafting messages for Facebook, it could be important to note that corrective action did not seem to be as consistent with obtaining the desired effect of positive engagement across all social media viewers as those who spent more time on social media were more likely to reactive negatively to a corrective action statement.

Limitations and Future Research

There are many directions in which research in the area of social media and image repair theory could go from this point. The next step in research would be to continue examining scenarios in experimental studies to determine if certain post types are more consistently perceived as better or worse. Additionally, continuing research in the area of experimental scenarios instead of continuing to focus on past situations allows for more connections to be made between response strategy and perceptions than just the overall reactions of viewers that may or may not be directly related the response strategy used by the organization or individual.

Another direction would be to examine this scenario using other social media sites, such as Twitter. This would look into which social media platform seems to generate the better responses, and if different response types are perceived differently on other social media sites. Further in the research process, studies could be done to examine the varying degrees of each response strategy, such as varying degrees of denial or corrective action. Potentially, studies could center around planned comparisons, such as denial versus mortification to determine if one response strategy seems to prevail as the more positively responded to strategy across a variety of scenarios.

From this study, there are many modifications that could be made in the future if the study were to be repeated. The initial decision to show participants only two strategies was made due to concern for the length of the survey if participants were to see all five strategies. However, the participants ended up needing only a few minutes to complete the survey, so it is possible that all five response strategies could be shown to each participant without the error caused by survey fatigue setting in. This would allow for different statistical analyses to be done on the data, leading to either more support for the results of this study or create opposition to this study. Further, to extend this study, more demographic variables could be examined to determine if other characteristics influence perceptions of the response strategies. For example, physical location, religion, and gender could be examined as well. During a different scenario, say one involving children or families, the question of whether or not a participant is a parent could be

asked and then determine if that influences which response strategy is perceived as the most positive.

During all of the initial evaluation of literature, no studies were found that created a scenario and then manipulated responses to extract viewers perceptions of specific response strategies. Most studies found examined past crisis situations, and analyzed the responses of the organization or individual, and deemed certain response strategies as better than others based upon the overall feelings toward the organization or individual as they understood them to be during that time period. Future studies should also involve more situations being created with the manipulation of the response strategies and direct examination of perceptions by viewers instead of relying on past crisis situations to provide answers for how an organization or individual should handle themselves during a crisis. I believe that this is where Liu and Fraustino (2014) did not see the research going, which is why the statement was made that further research relating social media and image repair theory was potentially futile. Utz, Schultz, and Glocka (2013) noted that use of social media by organizations during a crisis situation as a communication tool for sharing information to stakeholders and maintaining a dialogue with those stakeholders as a positive measure for showing willingness to quickly and directly send information to the public. For further research, it could be looked into more as part of image repair theory as well, to discover if certain response strategies are perceived as more open and direct than other strategies, or if any response from an organization is perceived a positive step for the organization.

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- Chick-fil-A (2012, July). The Chick-fil-A culture and service tradition in our restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity and respect – regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 Restaurants run by independent Owner/Operators. Going forward, our intent is to leave the policy debate over same-sex marriage to the government and political arena. Chick-fil-A is a family-owned and family-led company serving the communities in which it operates. From the day Truett Cathy started the company, he began applying biblically-based principles to managing his business. For example, we believe that closing on Sundays, operating debt-free and devoting a percentage of our profits back to our communities are what make us a stronger company and Chick-fil-A family. Our mission is simple: to serve great food, provide genuine hospitality and have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A [Facebook status update].
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Appendix: Survey Questions

Recently, the COO of Chicken Right did two interviews with conservative media outlets. Since Chicken Right is well known for their conservative values, from being closed on Sundays to the level of politeness of the employees, these interviews went as expected, with the COO chatting about his personal, conservative views on a variety of public issues.

After the second interview, these comments were suddenly thrust into national news headlines as some of the statements voiced his strong disapproval of same-sex marriage. The COO and Chicken Right are very supportive of the traditional family, namely the biblical definition of the family unit.

Many same-sex marriage groups were already against Chicken Right as their charitable arm gives money to many organizations that pro-same-sex marriage support groups state are very against gay marriage. The giving made Chicken Right a target for groups that support gay marriage.

The recent statements, combined with the giving history, were made public and enraged gay activists and supporters. Protests and boycotts are being called for, and many major city governments are working to prevent Chicken Right from coming to their cities. Same-sex marriage supporters are even planning a Kiss-Off day as a protest against Chicken Right.

Some of the companies that Chicken Right works with right now, especially for Kids Meal promotions, are also receiving negative treatment from gay marriage

supporters. Chicken Right and those companies are trying to decide what they should say to the public right now.

I have a favorable attitude toward doing business with Chicken Right over the next few years.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I believe this is a good company.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My overall impression of Chicken Right is...

- Bad 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Good
- Unfavorable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Favorable
- Negative 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Positive

Chicken Right has posted a status update to Facebook in response to this situation. Please review each post, and respond as you would if you read the post on your personal Facebook page.

Denial Strategy




Chicken Right

The Chicken Right culture and service tradition in our restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity, and respect—regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 restaurants run by independent owner/operators. In this recent situation regarding the statements of our COO, the Christianity Times misused a quote as an inexperienced reporter wrote the story. To date, this is the largest story the reporter has ever been asked to write, and in his excitement, he misused the quote.

Like · Comment · 25 minutes ago · 🌐

👍 250 like this.

 Write a comment ...

Would you like this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you comment on this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you share this post with your friends?

- Yes
- No

Is this post...

- Irrelevant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Relevant
- Worthless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Valuable

- Not beneficial 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Beneficial
- Not needed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Needed
- Useless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Useful

Is this argument...

- Not very convincing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Convincing
- Not very persuasive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Persuasive
- Not compelling 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Compelling

I am not satisfied with Chicken Right’s handling of this particular problem.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Evasion of Responsibility Strategy




Chicken Right

The Chicken Right culture and service tradition in our restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity, and respect—regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 restaurants run by independent owner/operators. Our COO is allowed to hold his own opinion, just as each of you is entitled to your own opinion. The statements used in the Christianity Today story were made off the record in a personal conversation with the reporter after the completion of the interview, and were not intended to be part of a story about Chicken Right as a restaurant.

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · 25 minutes ago · 🌐

👍 250 like this.

 Write a comment ...

Would you like this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you comment on this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you share this post with your friends?

- Yes
- No

Is this post...

- Irrelevant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Relevant
- Worthless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Valuable
- Not beneficial 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Beneficial
- Not needed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Needed
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Is this argument...

- Not very convincing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Convincing
- Not very persuasive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Persuasive
- Not compelling 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Compelling

I am not satisfied with Chicken Right's handling of this particular problem.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree

- Strongly Agree

Reducing Offensiveness of Event Strategy



Chicken Right

The Chicken Right culture and service tradition in our restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity, and respect—regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 restaurants run by independent owner/operators. Although our COO may hold the views expressed in these interviews, these views do not affect how we treat and serve each of our customers. And to this date, our customer service has never been affected by the personal opinions of some of the top management of Chicken Right, and our service will never be affected by those opinions.

Like · Comment · 25 minutes ago · 🌐

👍 250 like this.



Write a comment ...

Would you like this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you comment on this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you share this post with your friends?

- Yes
- No

Is this post...

- Irrelevant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Relevant
- Worthless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Valuable
- Not beneficial 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Beneficial
- Not needed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Needed
- Useless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Useful

Is this argument...

- Not very convincing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Convincing
- Not very persuasive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Persuasive
- Not compelling 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Compelling

I am not satisfied with Chicken Right’s handling of this particular problem.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Corrective Action Strategy



Chicken Right

The Chicken Right culture and service tradition in our restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity, and respect—regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 restaurants run by independent owner/operators. We also understand that offending customers is not the way to run a business, and to make it up to those we offended, this coming Monday we will offer half-price Chicken Sandwiches at all of our restaurants. In addition, we are evaluating the individual values of every organization our charitable arm donates to, and making changes as deemed necessary so that Chicken Right is only giving money to organizations who value every individual, regardless of their personal opinions.

Like · Comment · 25 minutes ago · 🌐

👍 250 people like this.



Write a comment ...

Would you like this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you comment on this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you share this post with your friends?

- Yes
- No

Is this post...

- Irrelevant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Relevant
- Worthless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Valuable
- Not beneficial 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Beneficial
- Not needed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Needed
- Useless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Useful

Is this argument...

- Not very convincing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Convincing
- Not very persuasive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Persuasive
- Not compelling 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Compelling

I am not satisfied with Chicken Right's handling of this particular problem.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree

- Strongly Agree

Mortification Strategy



Chicken Right

The Chicken Right culture and service tradition in our restaurants is to treat every person with honor, dignity, and respect—regardless of their belief, race, creed, sexual orientation or gender. We will continue this tradition in the over 1,600 restaurants run by independent owner/operators. We at Chicken Right are very sorry for making the statements against gay marriage. We are proud to live in a country that guarantees the freedom of speech and opinion, and we respect those who wish to voice their opinions, even if they may contradict our personal opinions. We apologize for disappointing our customers by making statements that are unprofessional and inappropriate for the business dialogue.

Like · Comment · 25 minutes ago · 🌐

👍 250 people like this.



Write a comment ...

Would you like this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you comment on this post?

- Yes
- No

Would you share this post with your friends?

- Yes
- No

Is this post...

- Irrelevant 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Relevant
- Worthless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Valuable
- Not beneficial 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Beneficial
- Not needed 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Needed
- Useless 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Useful

Is this argument...

- Not very convincing 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Convincing
- Not very persuasive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very Persuasive
- Not compelling 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Compelling

I am not satisfied with Chicken Right's handling of this particular problem.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Demographic Information

What is your age? ____

How many hours do you spend, on average, on social media per day?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9
- 10 or more

Of the time that you spend on social media, how much of that is spent on Facebook?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-6
- 7-9

- 10 or more

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Grammar school
- High school or equivalent
- Vocational/technical school (2 year)
- Some college
- College-Bachelor's degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral degree
- Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)

How would you classify yourself?

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black
- Caucasian/White
- Hispanic
- Multiracial
- Would rather not say
- Other