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

By Megan Hopkins

Dr. Glen T. Cameron, Thesis Supervisor

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 upon those responses.