A Content Analysis of the Crisis Communication Strategies by Chipotle Mexican Grill

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Introduction

The Problem
- ❖ E. Coli outbreaks occurred in three waves from September 2015 to December 2015, causing illness to over 175 people
- ❖ CEO Steve Ells publically apologized on *The Today Show* on December 10, 2015

Research Questions
- ❖ RQ1: How do Chipotle's press releases frame the crisis situation?
- ❖ RQ2: How did Chipotle communicated its corporate social responsibility programs during the outbreaks?
- ❖ RQ3: How has Chipotle's brand loyalty been affected by the strategic communication strategies utilized by Chipotle's public relations strategy during the food safety crisis?

Literature

- ❖ Coombs (2007)
  - ❖ Crisis response strategy and technical translation strategy are two crisis communication strategies
- ❖ Gasper, Goriao, Seibt, Lima, Barnett, Moss and Wills (2014)
  - ❖ Social media is a space for people to learn information and to contribute to the conversation
- ❖ Bloom, Hoeffler, Keller and Meza (2006)
  - ❖ CSR programs help brands separate themselves from competing brands
- ❖ Klein and Dawar (2004)
  - ❖ CSR programs can provide increased loyalty, willingness to pay higher prices, increased market share, decreased attributions of blame in the face of crisis
- ❖ Hoeffler and Keller (2002)
  - ❖ Corporate societal marketing can unite brand users in community

Theory

- ❖ **Image Restoration Theory -** Fearn-Banks (2011)
  - ❖ Proposes 5 different strategies to restore an image

Denial	Evasion of Responsibility	Reduce the Offensiveness	Corrective Action	Mortification
• Shift the blame	• Provocation • Defeasibility • Accident • Good intention	• Bolster • Minimize • Differentiate • Transcend • Attach accuser • Compensate		

Methods

Sampling
- ❖ 56 press releases from August 24, 2015 and February 20, 2017
- ❖ 179 comments *from The Today's Show's* Twitter and YouTube page
- ❖ 84 comments from Twitter users using #IngredientsReign hashtag

Framing Analysis for Press Releases
- ❖ 4 pre-existing frames from Choi (2012)
  - ❖ Corporate social responsibility, official reports, informational, philanthropic
- ❖ 2 frames identified
  - ❖ Business development and marketing initiative

Coding for Social Media Posts (Chung & Lee, 2016)
- ❖ Cognitive responses
  - ❖ Rejection
  - ❖ Conditional acceptance
  - ❖ Acceptance
  - ❖ Other
  - ❖ No cognitive reaction
- ❖ Affective responses
  - ❖ Negative
  - ❖ Neutral
  - ❖ Positive
  - ❖ Mixed
  - ❖ No emotion

Results

RQ1 – Press Release Frames

Frames	Main Themes
Corporate social responsibility programs (16%)	• Giving back to the community by providing local jobs • Educating public about food • Recommitment to food safety
Business Development (25%)	• Technology • Employee hiring • Menu expansion • Presentation at business conferences
Official Reports (25%)	• Financial reports
Informational (7%)	• Educating public about specific actions during E. coli outbreak • Updates on investigation
Philanthropic (1%)	• Help local farmers meet new food safety standards
Marketing initiatives (25%)	• Promotions

RQ2 – CSR programs

Mediums	Examples
Local Presence	• Cultivate festival • Partnerships with local organizations
Online Presence	• Development of app games (Ex: Guac Hunter, A Love Story Game)
Promotions	• Chiptopia summer rewards program

RQ3 – Brand loyalty

	Twitter *The Today Show*	YouTube *The Today Show*	Advertising Campaign
Affective	38%	26%	55%
Cognitive	62%	73%	44%

Conclusions

Key Findings
- ❖ 75% of the press releases displayed a business development, marketing initiative or official report frame
- ❖ **Twitter responses to Steve Ells apology** – Of the 62% cognitive responses, 33% were coded as rejection
- ❖ **YouTube comments to Steve Ells apology** – Of the affective responses, 70% were positive and 30% negative
- ❖ **Tweets containing Chipotle's new advertisement campaign #IngredientsReign** – 55% of tweets were affective responses and 44% were cognitive responses

Implications
- ❖ Image Restoration Theory strategies is not a linear process, instead it is complicated and dynamic
- ❖ With organizations that use CSR programs, mortification strategy could potentially regain brand loyalty
- ❖ Individuals making public relations decisions should carefully analyze the audience and situation before acting