Crisis Communication on Social Media

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Abstract

I takt med de sociale mediers fremherskende indflydelse, er flere og flere organisationer tilstede på et eller flere sociale netværk på internettet. Informationer og nyheder spredes med lynets hast på de sociale medier, og det gør, at organisationer har nye muligheder, men også udfordringer, når de skal kommunikere med deres interessenter – især i krisetider. Sociale medier er blevet en vigtig krisekommunikationskanal, og dette speciale,"Crisis Communication on Social Media", undersøger i hvilken grad konventionelle krisekommunikationsmodeller er relevante i forbindelse med kriser på sociale medier. I den forbindelse fokuseres der i specialet på to cases, hvor henholdsvis Starbucks og Applebee's var involveret. Ved at bruge de to cases, laves der en komparativ analyse for at kunne drage konklusioner ud fra hvad udfaldene af de to cases antyder om krisekommunikation på de sociale medier.

Ud fra specialets analyse af de to organisationers krisehåndtering, argumenteres der for, at Starbucks håndterede deres krise bedre end Applebee's håndterede deres. Starbucks kommunikerede, at de tog beskyldningerne imod dem seriøst samtidig med, at de brugte deres image og tidligere handlinger til proaktivt at kommunikere om deres holdning til homofobi og mangfoldighed. Applebee's derimod fejlfortolkede deres krise og forstod ikke interessenternes fortolkning af krisen samt deres muligheder på de sociale medier.

Resultaterne af specialet og analysen af de to cases indikerer, at det ikke er tilstrækkeligt for en organisation i krise at vælge en normativ krisekommunikationsstrategi ud fra, hvad der passer ind i en model med typiske krisetyper. Konventionelle krisekommunikationsmodeller er for statiske til at fungere optimalt på sociale medier, da dette medie indbyder til tovejskommunikation, som er mere dynamisk og komplekst end den mere afsenderorienterede kommunikation, som konventionel krisekommunikation er konstrueret til. Brugere af sociale medier forventer, at organisationer går i dialog, kommunikerer i øjenhøjde, viser engagement, ydmyghed, åbenhed og spontanitet på de sociale medier, og det virker vanskeligt at opfylde disse forventninger, hvis man følger nogle statiske modeller.

Specialet er baseret på den hermeneutiske og den fortolkende tilgang til forskning, hvor adfærd og verdensopfattelse forstås ved at tolke på ord og handlinger. Specialets metodiske ramme er med andre ord at forstå Starbucks' og Applebee's' handlinger i forbindelse med krisekommunikation på sociale medier, for dermed at kunne tolke på, hvordan man kommunikerer på sociale medier under kriser, og hvordan konventionelle modeller virker på et nyt medie. Undersøgelsen er case-baseret med fokus på de to nævnte cases, som er valgt ud fra kontekstuelle ligheder mellem de to organisationer og de omstændigheder, der førte til potentielle kriser. Undersøgelsens væsentligste data kommer fra diverse udtalelser på sociale

medier, erklæringer henvendt til offentligheden via traditionelle medier, informationer på hhv. Starbucks' og Applebee's' hjemmesider samt spørgeskemaer til nogle af de to cases hovedpersonerne.

Formålet ved dette speciale, udover at besvare problemstilling og forskningsspørgsmål, er altså at give organisationer en bedre forståelse for, hvordan kriser håndteres på et medie, der på mange måder adskiller sig fra traditionelle medier.

Den teoretiske ramme for specialet tager udgangspunkt i konventionelle krisekommunikationsteorier og nyere teori inden for sociale medier. Starbucks' og Applebee's' kommunikative handlinger er hver især analyseret ved hjælp af William Benoits Image restoration teori og Timothy Coombs' Situational crisis communication teori, som begge er anerkendte teorier inden for konventionel krisekommunikation. Winni Johansen og Finn Frandsens Retoriske arena er brugt som analysemodel til at strukturere analysen. Teorier inden for sociale medier supplerer krisekommunikationsteorierne i deres mangler og bidrager bl.a. til, at analysen kommer omkring væsentlige punkter, som måske ikke var i Starbucks' eller Applebee's' fokus.

Specialets resultater peger altså i retning af, at konventionelle krisekommunikationsmodeller kun kan bruges i begrænset omfang på sociale medier, da den normative og statiske tankegang har sine begrænsninger på de sociale medier. Begrænsede ressourcer og tid har ikke gjort det muligt at undersøge flere cases for på den måde at kunne få flere vinkler på og drage flere og måske nye konklusioner i forhold til konventionelle krisekommunikationsmodeller på sociale medier. Yderligere undersøgelse vil sandsynligvis kunne bidrage med mere generaliserende konklusioner om konventionelle krisekommunikationsmodellers anvendelighed på de sociale medier.

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1. Introduction

This introduction is a preliminary presentation of the subject. It also provides background information in order to provide an understanding of the problem area and research questions of the thesis. Additionally, the two cases, which will form the basis for a qualitative analysis where the theoretical framework will be applied, will be briefly presented.

In recent years, social media has had an increasing impact on people's lives. Most people in the developed part of the world are connected to social media through one or more social media networks such as Facebook or Twitter. Due to the increased importance of social media, most organizations have a social media presence on one or more of the social media platforms available on the Internet. When an organization is present on social media, it is obvious that an organization also must communicate and interact with its stakeholders on this new media. This gives organizations new challenges among other things because consumers expect a fast response as consumers today are constantly online, and because of emerging technologies, for instance on social media, which add the so-called "[…] many-to-many channel of communication to the traditional on-to-many channel" (Shklovski et. al, 2008 *in: Coombs, 2014: 35*). Giving reliable and relevant information to many is important on social media, and it is even more important when a crisis is emerging. Information spreads rapidly on social media, and even though this could be an advantage in crisis communication as stakeholders can be reached quickly, it might be more difficult to be heard due to "[…] the noise of the many-to-many communication model made possible by social media" (Ibid). Thus, social media gives organizations new opportunities and also challenges compared to traditional media when communicating to their stakeholders, especially in times of crises.

1.1 Presentation of the Cases

To give a preliminary idea of the two cases, which will be analyzed later in the thesis, the cases are briefly presented below.

1.1.1 Starbucks Case

On June 23, 2011, a Starbucks customer sent a letter to Starbucks in which she accused the company for homophobic behavior (Appendix 31). The customer witnessed Starbucks employees bullying a gay colleague. The gay employee quit his job after the incident, and the customer ran after him to console him. Afterwards, the customer wrote a letter to Starbucks in which she described what she had just witnessed and how she felt about the company. The letter was also posted on the customer's family blog, and it went viral on social media. Traditional media channels also published the story. Starbucks quickly responded to the accusations and mentioned that the company was against discrimination of any kind (Appendix 14). The case will be outlined in section 5.2.

1.1.2 Applebee's Case

On January 30, 2013, Applebee's fired a waitress because she took a picture of a customer's receipt and posted it on social media (Appendix 1). Applebee's quickly confirmed that the waitress had been dismissed and apologized to the customer (Appendix 2). Applebee's made several statements on social media regarding the case where it maintained its arguments regarding the dismissal, and people started posting comments with their opinions about the dismissal and Applebee's as a company. Applebee's also spoke to the mainstream media during the case where it again tried to justify the dismissal. The case will be outlined in section 5.4.

1.2 Background

The problem area for the thesis derives from an interest in how companies operate in crisis situations. It can be argued that crisis communication is more important than ever because of the amount of information available to people on the Internet (Gonzales & Smith: 2008), which is why it is interesting and relevant to study crisis communication on the internet or more precisely on social media. Traditional media channels such as newspapers and television have previously been a common channel for crisis communication. But in line with the increasing importance of the concept of social media, this medium has more recently become an important and widespread channel for crisis management (Coombs, 2012: 164). Hence, the aim of the thesis is to combine two fields, social media and crisis communication, which have been explored and researched a lot separately, but also to discover and uncover if and how crisis communication strategies, constructed for crisis communication through traditional media channels, can be applied when organizations use crisis communication on social media. By taking this angle on the fields, it will be possible to research and study crisis communication on social media in a different way while getting a better and deeper understanding of how the two fields of inquiry interact.

As news spreads quickly on the web and on social media (Coombs, 2012: 27), it may be argued that organizations are at potential risk of crises because it is hard for them to hide potential bad news. Consequently, any organization can face a crisis, and all organizations should be prepared to face such a challenge (Ibid: 5).

It is important for organizations to communicate their values and identities in order to stand out and differentiate themselves from competitors. Stakeholders must obviously appreciate and believe in these values and identities in order for organizations to create a strong reputation and image among the stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2008: 82). When organizations communicate about their values, identities, etc., it can be argued that a credible relationship can be built with stakeholders, which in particular is the case on social media. It is claimed that social media is more effective than conventional media when building relationships with stakeholders due to the accessible two-way communication between organizations and their stakeholders (Safko, 2010: 5). However, the accessible two-way communication also gives the public new opportunities for sharing experiences, ideas, etc., where they among other things can learn about products and services and share positive and negative experiences with people they trust. It can therefore be argued that organizations must cope with increased vulnerability as anyone can post a critical comment anytime and share it with a lot of likeminded people (Ibid). As a result, it can be argued that the users of social media, such as individuals, now represent a new voice; and communication about the organizations no longer can be controlled in the same way, as was the case with traditional media. "Today, angry stakeholders are more likely to generate crises. Consumers, shareholders, employees, community groups, and activist are becoming increasingly vocal when dealing with organizations and are using the Internet to voice these concerns […] the key feature of these Internet channels is the ability of users, rather than organizations, to create the content." (Coombs, 2012: 14). People may think that information from people they know or have a shared interest with is the more reliable than information from huge corporations (Ibid). It can therefore be argued that the communication between an organization and its stakeholders has changed due to the rise of the social media. Hence, it can be argued that social media has changed the way people and organizations communicate and interact, where organizations easily can engage in dialog with stakeholders. This might also have the implication that organizations have less control of their corporate messages.

Consequently, it can be argued that the modern consumer is more empowered. That in turn probably makes organizations' communication with consumers increasingly demanding and challenging: "Endless hours are wasted by people sitting around boardroom tables trying to second-guess the behavior of what appear to be increasingly irrational and unpredictable customers. In a poll of UK-based marketers, 64 per cent agreed that it is becoming more difficult to communicate with consumers than ever before" (Thomas & Brain, 2008, 13-14). When communication is more difficult than ever before, it seems likely that crisis communication faces new challenges as well, and especially for crises involving communication on social media.

When any organization can face a crisis, and when social media has changed organizational ways of communicating, the initial assumption is that conventional crisis communication strategies should also be changed to adapt to new approaches to crisis communication afforded by social media. The new opportunity of two-way communication may at the face of it give organizations facing a potential crisis a different tool to handle their stakeholders by means of dialog and improved mutual understanding. The notion that companies have new opportunities while they must also cope with increased vulnerability is interesting as it may challenge the traditional views of crisis communication and corporate communication in general. In this connection, two cases where the two American companies, Starbucks and Applebee's, each faced significant criticism from the public on social media, are relevant to examine in order to find out how the criticism was handled communicatively in the two cases and also to find out the extent to which conventional crisis communication was applicable in the two cases. Thus, it is interesting to examine if and how social media has changed the idea of how to communicate and interact when organizations are under pressure in undesirable situations and must react to protect, maintain or rebuild their image and reputation.

In both cases, the companies also communicated through traditional media channels where spokespersons from the companies addressed the public via more traditional media channels. Additionally, Applebee's made an official statement on its corporate website. Thus, both the communication via traditional media and social media will be taken into consideration in order to analyze the crisis cycles thoroughly. As the two cases mainly took place on social media, the study will focus on crisis communication handled on social media, but without entirely excluding communication via more traditional media channels.

The basis for conducting a comparative analysis of the two cases is that the two companies are quite similar when it comes to line of business, country of origin, crisis context, structure and employees. Likewise, the two cases were both triggered when an employee was dismissed from or quit his and her job in what the individuals, who started the criticism of the two companies on social media, regarded as unfair circumstances.

Before analyzing the two cases in terms of communication, crisis management, etc., it seems that the two cases had different outcomes according to people's reactions on different social media networks even though the contexts of the cases are quite similar, which forms the basis of analyzing the applicability of conventional crisis communication on social media as well as characterizing and throwing light on crises emerging on social media.

The above-mentioned considerations lead to the following problem statement and research questions:

2. Problem Statement and Research Questions

In the light of two illustrative cases focusing on similar events, the study will address the following questions:

To what extent are conventional crisis communication models relevant for crises on social media?

- ***How did Starbucks and Applebee's respectively use social media for crisis communication?***
- ***What lessons could be learned from the two cases about conventional crisis management versus crisis management via social media?***

3. Methodology

This section will outline the methodical approach to the thesis. The thoughts behind the scientific approach of the thesis will be explained as well as be put into the context of the scope. Additionally, the collection of data will be elucidated and elaborated.

3.2 Approaches to Theory of Science

Scientific method is a process where researchers elucidate the methodological procedures in their work with the aim of generating the optimal knowledge. There are two general ways of gaining knowledge in social science: the *positivist* and *interpretive* approach (Bryman, 2008: 14-15). It is claimed that positivism is a science-based way of thinking, for instance emphasizing tangible numbers and evidence, where interpretivism is related to the humanistic tradition, for example emphasizing spoken words (Askehave &

Norlyk, 2006: 33). The epistemological position in the thesis is in line with the interpretive approach to comparative research and seeks to take a position that is "[…] critical of the application of the scientific model of the study of the social world […]" (Bryman, 2008: 15). Thus, it is argued that via this position, we understand people's behavior and perception of the world by interpreting their actions and words. This is in contrast with the positivist approach where the focus is on the description and definition of human behavior (Ibid). Interpretivism aims at understanding socially relation patterns of actions, and likewise is the case in the thesis where the aim is to understand how conventional crisis communication models can be applied in a social media context. The aim is in other words to understand Starbucks' and Applebee's' actions in this context, and from this interpret how the mentioned models function, rather than just describing and defining them. The intention of the research is so to understand and explore the field of crisis communication in a social media context instead of describing crisis communication and social media as two separate fields of study.

3.2.1 The Hermeneutic Spiral

The thesis is based on the interpretive approach to research, and within this approach, the hermeneutic spiral is regarded as a way of obtaining knowledge, where understanding is reached through movements between parts of the text and the whole text. Interpretation is in other words reached through the knowledge one has beforehand, and gradually the reader's understanding changes while getting closer to the truth. One moves back an fourth between interpretations of smaller parts and the situation seen from a broader perspective (Pahuus as cited in Collin & Køppe, 2003: 145). In this context, the smaller parts can be seen as the selected comments on social media and selected communicative actions from Starbucks and Applebee's. It is argued that no single truth exists as people interpret things differently. This process of understanding a text or a situation is referred to as the hermeneutic spiral (Pahuus, et. al, 2006: 147). The approach is relevant to the thesis as it is not the aim to attempt to substantiate the truth as it can be argued that there is no single correct way to operate in a crisis situation on social media – perhaps guidelines to follow, but it seems rather impossible to claim that one way of communicating in a particular crisis is the only workable and dead-on method. Instead, it is sought to reach a holistic understanding of crisis communication in the context of social media in order to understand the small units that may affected Starbucks' and Applebee's' response strategies and more importantly how conventional crisis communication models can be applied on the new media.

The critical observer may argue that the hermeneutic spiral is a process that never comes to an end without reaching a result as new focus points and questions may evolve continuously. It is therefore a task for the researcher to keep the track and maintain focus on the subject and the problem statement, which also is the case in the thesis where the research questions are used as guidelines for exploring and analyzing data. New angles and thoughts may arise, which however must be subject and motivation for further research.

3.2.2 Case Study

The data in the thesis are based on the two cases in question. The case designs are based on the field of interest in crisis communication on social media. The two cases are selected due to the several contextual parallels when it comes to situational and social circumstances. Also, by researching the two cases in question, the preconceived hypothesis is that the results from the two cases are far from similar. It is thus interesting to make a comparative analysis to be able to draw conclusions in regards to the problem statement.

When using case studies as research method, a real-life situation is worked through as versatile as possible (Gyldendals Fremmedordbog as cited in Flyvbjerg, 1988: 1). Robert K. Yin also emphasizes that case study is relevant in connection with real-life situations, and he uses the following statement when referring to case study: “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially then the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009: 18). Thus, it may be argued that using case study research for an academic thesis makes the research process and final conclusions more tangible and perhaps more concrete in regards to the real life. As case studies are rooted in real-life, they can be linked to action and thereby contribute to change practice, for instance crisis communication in practice (Neergaard, 2007: 18).

In agreement with the hermeneutical approach, a case study does not meet the same demand for representativeness and generalizability as the positive research practice (Flyvbjerg, 1988: 3). So by applying case study as research method, it should be taken into consideration that even though cases seem very applicable when validating or rebutting theoretical claims, case studies do not say much about general development. Hence, awareness of the limitations of case studies should be taken as the case study and the hermeneutics are not always sufficient. Conclusions and results will thus not be determined from a precise number of repetitions, but from what the two cases indicate. In this way it possible to examine opinions, perceptions and expressions for instance by observing, which is one of the important research methods in case studies (Ibid: 5). This is done by observing activities at Starbucks’, Applebee’s’ and individuals’ interactions on social media platforms such as Facebook. By working with two cases instead of quantification, a holistic and thorough analysis prioritizing a particular area of the field of study will be possible.

3.3 Empirical Data Collection

This section describes the collection method of the empirical data applied in the thesis as well as presenting the empirical data in terms of source, period of time and medium.

Two possible methods are usually followed when collecting research data – the quantitative method and the qualitative method. One of the basic differences between the two is that quantitative data involve measurements and qualitative do not (Bryman, 2004: 19). Quantitative research is a method that uses quantification and numbers in the collection of data and in the analysis of data, while qualitative research can be understood as a method that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in order to find a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon (Ibid: 19-20). Interpretivism is often linked with qualitative research, but it is important to keep in mind that this view is not definitive (Daymon & Holloday, 2004: 3). The research strategy applied in this thesis is to some extent a mixture of both methods, also referred to as triangulation (Bryman, 2004: 19-20). Triangulation has been used in the thesis to validate the information and conclusions based on the collected empirical data. By using different sources and methods, it will be possible to reach a holistic understanding of the field of study (Ritchie, 2003: 43).

In the research process, data has been collected from various sources: statements on social media channels such as status updates and comments on Facebook, tweets on Twitter, a post on Reddit, and blog posts. Statements addressed to the public via traditional media channels, information and statements on Starbucks' and Applebee's' corporate websites, and questionnaires made for a few of the cases' key figures to highlight their views have been included as well. Thus, the empirical data for the thesis are based on both primary data, collected by the researcher, and secondary data, collected by others.

3.3.1 Netnography

In the professional and private spheres, computers and the Internet have become parts of our daily lives. It is possible to obtain knowledge etc. in a readily accessible way. In the thesis, a netnographic research method has been used in the empirical approach to study online communication and how people interact on the web.

The term netnography originates from ethnography, which is the study of people and culture and can implicate fieldwork and study of social groups via their practices and artifacts (Kozinets 2002). When the concept of netnography was introduced, it was primary customers in the context of marketing that were in focus. Later the focus has evolved to all stakeholders in the online scope. Thus, the research method embraces all interaction on social networking sites, blogs etc. (Kozinets, 2010: 3). Netnography is therefore useful as a research method in the thesis in order to study the interaction between the two organizations in question and their stakeholders, which especially took place online. Hence, it will be possible to obtain an immediate impression of stakeholders' views in the context of the two cases in question without necessarily observing the behavior in a more traditional way, which possibly could have affected the behavior if stakeholders felt watched differently than they do online. With that in mind, it seems reasonable to assume that one should be extra aware of the validity of the observed stakeholders, as it is possible to create a fake account on social media and thereby make up a fake identity in order to influence a conversation for one's own benefit.

3.3.2 Primary Data

In order to gather satisfactory data, some considerations have been made. It has been an on-going process with continuously added knowledge within the theoretical fields of crisis communication and social media. The focus area has thus been adjusted along the way. This process can be connected with the hermeneutic spiral moving back and forth between interpretations of smaller parts and the broader perspective, which was elaborated on in section 3.2.1.

The primary data for the thesis center around the selected comments from the public on social media and also the communicative actions from Starbucks and Applebee's respectively. These were selected according to the criteria: relevance, time period and content. Relevance is obviously important as the comments and communicative actions had to be data that could help examining the focus area of the thesis and thereby also answering the problem statement. The time period was important as it needed to correspond to the context and the scope of the thesis or in other words the time periods where the two crisis events occurred. Finally, the content of the comments and communicative actions are important as it had to complement relevance and time in the sense that it needed to emphasize relevance and time period. For instance, a communicative action from Starbucks in the same time period as the crisis event was on may not have anything to do with the crisis in question. Thus, the three criteria have all been considered in the collection of data.

Chelsea Welch, the dismissed waitress at Applebee's, and the moderator of an Applebee's boycott page on Facebook have separately answered some questions in a questionnaire. The two persons were found on Reddit and Facebook, and the questionnaires were also distributed through these two social media platforms. The questionnaires were made to strengthen and supplement the data available on the social media platforms and traditional news sources and also to get more aspects of the cases. In order to reach this goal, Starbucks, Applebee's and Missy Alison were also contacted in order to schedule a telephone interview or a questionnaire. However, this was not possible. The advantage of making such interviews or questionnaires would be to obtain firsthand knowledge from directly involved parties, which could have elucidated new areas of interest (Creswell, 2003: 186).

The two questionnaires that were carried through are not central when analyzing the problem area of the thesis. They are included to supplement and support the central data which is the communication on social media. The two questionnaires implied only open questions in an interview-inspired way, which agrees well with qualitative data collection as the open questions are less structured than probably would have been the case in a quantitative questionnaire. Also, the focus is more on the respondents' own experiences and views rather than on something measurable (Bryman, 2012: 470). When moving further trough the hermeneutic spiral, it has been possible to ask more relevant questions to the focus of the scope and the problem area.

When gathering data for the research, it has been a challenge not to instinctively select data suiting the problem statement of the thesis, which is why it has been an aim to gather data from various sides with different perspectives and interests.

3.3.3 Secondary Data

By using secondary data, it is possible to supplement the primary data in its limitations. For instance, some data have been impossible to find from the firsthand source, for example as Applebee's may have deleted some comments from the public on Facebook. So by using secondary data it is possible to gather a more thorough and complete analysis. The secondary data of the thesis are articles from online news sources such as Seattle Times.

The aim of converging data from various sources is to offer different perspectives of the two cases and thereby be able to reach conclusions as objectively as possible. Secondary data such as articles and journals may intentionally or unintentionally be influenced by the writer, which have been kept in mind during the work with the data.

It cannot be claimed that one research method is better than the other. But when quantitative and qualitative research methods are combined, they can supplement and complement each other to reach a more complete research (Humphries, 2008: 98). However, in the light of relevance to the hermeneutic approach to theory of science, the main data collection method is qualitative. The only quantitative data in the thesis are numbers such as revenues, numbers of employees, etc., which are not really central data when answering the problem statement. These data are included to give the reader a basic understanding of Starbucks and Applebee's. The qualitative data, which is the main method in the thesis, are the statements and information from articles, from Starbucks' and Applebee's' websites, from the social media channels Facebook, Twitter, blogs and Reddit, and from the questionnaires.

To be able to study and analyze the Starbucks case and the Applebee's case and to draw relevant conclusions in order to answer the research questions of the thesis, the following are included in the empirical data section:

3.3.3.1 The Starbucks Case

- **June 13, 2011**: The Starbucks case started when a customer sent a letter to Starbucks and posted it on her blog. Four public comments to the blog post from the period June 13, 2011 – June 17, 2011 are included as empirical data as well (Appendix 10-13).
- **June 14, 2011**: Starbucks made its first response to the blog post (Appendix 14). The same day, Starbucks made a status update on Facebook (Appendix 15). 16 public comments, from June 14, 2011 – June 15, 2011, to this status update are included (Appendix 17-18). The same day, Starbucks also made a statement on Twitter (Appendix 19). A tweet from Starbucks, also from June 14, 2011, directly addressed at the group OutSpokenNYC, is also included (Appendix 20).
- **June 17, 2011**: Statements from two articles, both published on June 17, 2011 by East Hampton Patch where Starbucks' CEO and the customer respectively were interviewed, are included as well (Appendix 32-33).

3.3.3.2 The Applebee's Case

- **January 12, 2013:** Applebee's posted a photo of another receipt (Appendix 5).
- **January 25, 2013:** The Applebee's case started when an Applebee's waitress posted a receipt from a customer on reddit.com on January 25, 2013 (Appendix 1).
- **January 30, 2013:** The waitress was dismissed (Rush, 2008).
- **February 1, 2013:** Applebee's made three different status updates on Facebook and a statement on its corporate website regarding the incident (Appendix 2-4 + 34).
- **February 2, 2013:** Applebee's made a tweet on Twitter addressed directly at an individual (Appendix 8). Comments from Applebee's to its own Facebook status update are also included in the empirical data (Appendix 29+30+37). These comments were made the night after Applebee's first status update according R.L. Stollar (Stollar, 2013). It has not been possible to find some of the original comments on Facebook as the huge total amount of comments makes it difficult to find few specific comments as the system comes to a stop when turning over the pages of thousands of comments in a thread. It is also possible that the comments have been deleted. However,

screenshots from rlstollar.wordpress.com are included to be able to use these comments from Applebee's as empirical data.

- **February 1 – February 16, 2013:** Applebee's made a tweet on Twitter addressed directly at an individual (Appendix 8). Eight examples of public comments from that period are included as well (Appendix 21).
- **Statements from key figures (January 31 and February 6, 2013):** Statements from interviews with the dismissed waitress and an Applebee's spokesperson respectively from two articles published by The Consumerist on 31 January 2013 (Morran, 2013) and The Toronto Star on February 6, 2013 (Rush, 2013) are also included.
- Finally, the moderator behind an Applebee's boycott page on Facebook and the dismissed waitress have both agreed to answer a questionnaire regarding the case (Appendix 27-28).

4. Theoretical Framework

This section will outline the theoretical basis for answering the problem statement of the thesis. In line with the research area of the thesis, theories within the fields of crisis communication and social media will be outlined in the section to provide the foundation for analyzing the two cases. The purpose of the section is to provide an overview and an understanding of the theories applied in the thesis.

4.1 Literature Review

In order to provide a pre-understanding of the field of crisis communication on social media and to put the research of the thesis into a broader perspective, a short introduction of some of the recent research within the field of study will be outlined in this section.

There has been an extensive study of crisis communication, which has grown since the mid-eighties (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 187). For instance, Timothy Coombs (his theory will be elaborated in section 4.3.4) argues that the choice of verbal response strategy must depend on how stakeholders perceive the crisis. This represents a shift in crisis communication research from the transmission of a message, which William Benoit (his theory will be elaborated in section 4.3.2) represents, to interaction between organization and stakeholders (Ibid: 271).

Gonzalez-Herrero and Smith study how the web has carried a major shift in organizational practice of handling a crisis. The shift is characterized by the fact that information and thus also crises spread online at a much quicker pace than usual (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2010: 97-98). Most crisis research has its focus on how entities should act when they are in a crisis, but in recent years digital communication technologies such as social media have changed the ecology of crisis communication (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013: 12). Social media provides the opportunity for the public to become creators of any kind of material (Ibid: 73). Thus, public may have the opportunity to influence a crisis in a new way, which may side-step a traditional sender/receiver-oriented process of crisis communication not emphasizing the dynamic that social media seems to cause. "[…] the public becomes a much more active and potentially empowered participant in the event, as opposed to a passive receiver of responder-produced messages" (Ibid: 132). The public is in other words more central in a crisis situation due to the public's increasing use of social media to share and modify information.

All things considered, the relevance of social media is here to stay, and organizations realize that they have to be present online to be competitive (Ibid: 251). Therefore, the future research of crisis communication on social media seems essential. Used wisely, social media may improve crisis management effort. Thus, it may be argued that a key objective when studying crisis communication and social media is to give organizations and crisis managers a better understanding of how to handle crises on a media that differentiates from traditional channels. For instance, Taylor and Perry ((2005) as cited in Sellnow and Seeger, 2013: 252) argue that there is a potential for utilizing two-way communication, but that must organizations do not engage stakeholders in dialog during crises (Ibid: 252). The theoretical understanding of the interaction on social media differentiates from strategies used on traditional media, and field is an area for further study (Ibid). It would seem that it is recognized that social media has changed communication during crises for organizations as well as their stakeholders. This would indicate that it is reasonable to assume that there is a potential for paying more attention to how to communicate on social media during crises.

A brief outline of the field of study has now been introduced, and the following sections within the theory section will present a more detailed elaboration of the theories applied in the analysis of the thesis.

4.2 Impression Management

Impression management is a goal-oriented method in sociology and social psychology, where people try to impact other peoples' perceptions and opinions about a person, object or event. People do it consciously or unconsciously by controlling and adjusting information in interaction with other people (Piwinger & Helmut, 2001: 1-2).

Erving Goffman, a sociology professor specialized in face-to-face interaction or what is also known as micro-sociology (Sociology, NY), began working with impression management in the 1950s. He regards the action of an individual as an attempt to build a particular kind of social identity and also to put oneself in the best possible position: ”Even actions that at first glance appear to be meaningless might actually be strategically performed to show the social actor in the best possible light. People are performers who play many different roles to construct their social identities.” (Rosenfeld et al., 2002: 5).

In his book ”The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”, Erving Goffman distinguishes between what he refers to as “front stage” and “backstage” in social interaction and communication. Goffman’s idea of front stage and backstage is inspired by a theater where front stage is visible to the audience. Front stage “[…] is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (Goffman, 1969: 32) and can be seen as the actions by individuals that allow them to show their personality in the presence of the public. On front stage, individuals can expressively emphasize some aspects and tone down others to appear in a certain manner, and the public may also expect that the individuals act in a certain way (Ibid: 114). In contrast, backstage is not visible to the audience, and it is suggested that communication and social behavior are more casual backstage: “Here the team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions when no audience is present to be affronted to them: here poor members of the team, who are expressively inept, can be schooled or dropped from the performance. Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character” (Ibid: 115). Following on from these thoughts, backstage can be seen as the actions by the individuals that allow them to be more relaxed and private, but also the zone where they can prepare the next front stage situation. Altogether, it may be argued that one is available to the public on front stage and not available to the public on backstage.

When impression management is used strategically to attribute a desired identity, it can also be relevant when individuals are members of a group or an organization (Rosenfeld et al., 2002: 7). This goal-oriented way of managing image, reputation and impression may thus also refer to professional communication in an organizational context, where impression management is a method to manage the organization’s image, reputation and impression in the eyes of its stakeholders. Thus, even though the theory of impression management originates from individuals, impression management has more recently become more widespread in connection with companies’ and organizations’ activities. The principles can therefore be used in both cases as the individuals’ and the organizations’ use of impression management is quite similar (Ibid: 195).

“IM is a broad phenomenon in which attempts are made to influence the perceptions and behaviors of others by controlling the information they receive.” (Ibid: 8). Thus, by controlling the information that others receive, organizations can leave out information that they do not want the stakeholders to know about, while they can highlight positive stories. This is interesting in connection with the new age of the

Internet as it is claimed in section 1.2 that news spread quickly on the internet, while organizations are more vulnerable on the social media due to the accessible two-way communication. When individuals and organizations communicate their thoughts, attitudes, etc. on social media, it would seem that they use self-presentation for image management to appear in a certain way. By using the behavior on social media for image management, it may also be argued that users of social media try to improve their relationship with others as they behave strategically to look good in the eyes of others. When social media users communicate informally and present new sides of their identities, perhaps a more private site, it may be argued that the users try to present what Goffman refers to as backstage. However, this private site of the users' identities may be a front stage identity after all, as the users pick out backstage thoughts - the ones they want others to know about - and use them strategically to control the impressions that others form of them. The clear distinction between Goffman's expressions of backstage and front stage can therefore be argued to be more complex in the social media era as people and organizations may on the one hand wish to make a positive impression of themselves, and on the other hand wish to create a more personal identity. Consequently, this would indicate that backstage and front stage are more closely connected nowadays due to social media as people and organizations constantly are open to the public on social media and because backstage is less private when private thoughts are shared with the public regularly. Thus, it is interesting to examine the validity of the above quote when it comes to how Starbucks and Applebee's may tried to control the information that the public received during the two cases, and also if it possible to control information, in the way that the above quote suggests, on the social media.

Also, it may be argued that communication on social media is more synchronous compared to conventional media due to individuals' new voices which may not be practicable in the same way on conventional media, where messages often are transmitted via news channels and journalists. Thus, individuals do possibly not have the same opening to communicate synchronously with organizations etc. via conventional media. Synchronous communication seems easier on social media as individuals can communicate directly with organizations in discussions and dialogs – this will be elaborated in section 4.6. Consequently, it seems as though organizations do not have the same time to works backstage on social media due to the more synchronous communication which seems to call for quick responses and two-way communication. When organizations communicate via traditional media, it seems likely that they will prepare a brilliant move for instance using a marketing ploy. It seems reasonable to assume that this preparation will be done behind closed doors as so-called backstage activity until the work is ready to go front stage. Thus, organizations have used time backstage to prepare the next front stage situation, and it seems questionable that organizations will have success on social media using a lot of time backstage as other rules of the game seem to apply, which also will be elaborated in section 4.6. These considerations are not meant as a criticism of Goffman as it has not been possible for him to make the distinction between the two media as his idea came into existence long before social media made its entry.

Introducing the field of impression management leads to theory within crisis communication, where crisis communication theory is applied as an extension to impression management as it can be argued that the two fields are rather related since crisis communication strategies' basics are about an organization's efforts "when an unexpected event occurs that could have a negative impact on the company's reputation" (BusinessDictionary, NY). Thus, both fields are about creating, upholding, maintaining and if necessary rebuilding ones image and reputation by generating a specific identity and putting oneself in the best possible position.

4.3 Crisis Communication Theory

The theoretical framework regarding crisis communication theory will be based on William Benoit's image restoration theory and W. Timothy Coombs' situational crisis communication theory. These two theorists within crisis communication are both well-known and recognized within the field (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 200-201). Crisis communication theory is regarded as a field that has developed in two different lines. These two lines are referred to as the text-oriented and the context-oriented tradition. In short, the text-oriented tradition has its focus on what the organization says or writes in a crisis situation. The context-oriented tradition focuses more on the context such as crisis type, decision-making processes, stakeholders' perceptions, etc. (Ibid: 184). As a result, it seems reasonable to include these two theorists and their work as they are well-known and recognized within the field, but also because each of them represents the text-oriented and the context-oriented tradition respectively. Benoit's Model on Image Restoration is one of the most mentioned theories within crisis communication and is recognized by many as the best and most comprehensive study of the rhetorical image restoration theories (Ibid: 201) Thus, Benoit represents the text-oriented tradition within crisis communication. Coombs' situational crisis communication theory is on the other hand regarded as one of the most strategic and context-oriented approaches to crisis communication (Ibid: 229). Additionally, Benoit and Coombs each represents what are referred to as the transmission paradigm and the interaction paradigm (Frandsen et al., 2002: 61). These two paradigms can also be referred to as the narrow definition and the broad definition of crisis communication. The narrow definition is about the specific actions during the crisis with focus on the crisis as an isolated incident where crisis communication is sender and information-oriented. The broad definition on the other hand regards crises as dynamic and complex processes and divides them into stages: before, during and after a crisis. This definition builds on the interaction paradigm, and crisis communication it considered to be receiver-oriented as well as sender-oriented. By implication, this definition and approach to communication is more holistic where context is taken into consideration (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 271-275). Thus, Benoit's theoretical approach is text-oriented and belongs to the narrow definition of crisis communication as he more or less only focuses on the rhetorical response strategy, while Coombs' approach is more context-oriented and belongs to the broad definition as he also attempts to embrace the whole background of a crisis such as stakeholders and crisis type.

In times of crises or potential crises it seems important to embrace more than just the communication from the organization in crisis. To be able to make an appropriate response, it may be argued that it is important for instance to know one's stakeholders as it is doubtful that an organization and all of its stakeholders always perceive the crisis in the same way. Obviously, the words that the organization chooses to use in its crisis response are essential, but it seems difficult to use strategically effective rhetoric if the organization is not aware of its environment and the context of the crisis. With that in mind, taking context into consideration may also be challenging as it seems hard to predict for instance how stakeholders will react to a crisis and thus what is the most appropriate communication strategy.

4.3.1 Crisis Definition

As Starbucks and Applebee's were under public pressure on social media and thereby had to communicate to their stakeholders regarding the specific accusations, a crisis definition seems appropriate. According to Coombs, a crisis is "the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders and has the power to seriously impact an organization's performance and generate negative outcomes" (Coombs, 2012: 2). Crises may therefore violate stakeholders' expectations of how the organization should act, which threatens the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders. When the organization does not meet its stakeholders' expectations, the stakeholders perceive the organization less positively, which may result in a harmed reputation (Ibid: 3). Consequently, a crisis is a crisis when stakeholders believe that a crisis exists (Ibid: 2). It seems reasonable that an organization is dealing with a crisis when stakeholders believe there is a crisis as it would seem that the organization's image and reputation depend on how its stakeholders regard the organization. Even though the organization may not think that a crisis exists, for example because it has not suffered from weaker sales or financial losses, a brand or an image crisis may be under way as stakeholders are changing their attitudes towards the organization due to a specific incident. On the other hand, it does not seem unlikely that an organization may think that a crisis exists, for example because of financial losses, even though stakeholders do not think that a crisis exists and have a positive attitude towards the organization. Thus, it might be two different kinds of general crises, one where stakeholders believe that a crisis exists resulting in a threatened image, and one where it is only the organization itself who believes that a crisis exists perhaps because of internal problems not at first resulting in a threatened image in the eyes of external stakeholders.

The span of a crisis and the interpretations of a crisis have great implication for the crisis communication effort. Organizations regularly find themselves in situations that could be defined as crises. That is why it is important for organizations to obtain knowledge and competencies within crisis management and know how and why crises occur. By doing so, organizations can be prepared as they must accept that “no organization is immune from a crisis anywhere in the world, not even if that organization is vigilant and actively seeks to prevent crises” (Coombs and Holladay: 2010: 17). A crisis can strike suddenly and be an element of surprise and unpredictability (Coombs, 2012: 2).

Benoit uses a similar crisis definition describing that a crisis is a threat to the organization’s reputation when the accused is held responsible for the event at the same time as the act is considered offensive. Whether or not the organization really is responsible does not tip the balance. The crucial element is the stakeholders’ perceptions as an organization only uses image restoration strategies if it believes that stakeholders hold the organization responsible: “[The] perceptions [of salient stakeholders] are more important than reality. The important point is not whether the business in fact is responsible for the offensive act (…) [or] if the act was in fact offensive, but whether [it] (…) is believed by the relevant audience(s) to be [so] (…)” (Benoit, 1997: 178).

The definition of a crisis differs from theorist to theorist, and Johansen and Frandsen use an alternative crisis definition and introduce the idea of a double crisis “A double crisis is a crisis where the original crisis is overlaid by a ‘communication crisis’ in a way that the organisation is not capable of running the communication process which is supposed to contribute to the handling of the original crisis (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 79)”. This definition is relevant as organizations may not be capable of running the communication processes which is supposed to contribute to recovering from the crisis or to re-establish a shattered image. When organizations for instance try to hide or blur the original crisis, it may work as a boomerang effect that will worsen the negative effects of the crisis and create a so-called double crisis as “Stakeholders are angrier when an organization lies about a crisis than when an organization has a crisis” (Coombs, 1999: 118). Consequently, an organization’s crisis management effort and how the crisis was handled is often what stakeholders remember rather than what the crisis originally was about (Johansen & Frandsen, 2006).

4.3.2 Benoit Image Restoration Theory

William Benoit's Image Restoration model is perhaps one of the most used and well-known models within the field of crisis communication. His model builds on rhetorical and sociological traditions (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 204). Aristotle defined rhetoric as "the art of discovering all the available means of persuasion" (Foss, 2009), and even though rhetoric now also addresses more than persuasion (Ibid), it is plausible that an organization tries to persuade its stakeholders when applying what Benoit's refers to as image restoration strategies, for instance when using rhetoric arguing for one's innocence. As a result, some critics will perhaps argue that Benoit's theory and the rhetorical tradition in general are quite cynical as the focus is on the spoken words, which can be regarded as empty words without substance compared to more concrete and tangible actions.

One of the primary aims of the theory is to rebuild and protect an image (Benoit, 1995: 69). If an organization's image is threatened, the organization can select an image restoration strategy. Benoit distinguishes between five strategies which can be applied to rebuild and protect an image in a crisis. The following table provides a basic overview of Benoit's image restoration strategies, which will be elaborated subsequently.

TABLE 1

Image Restoration Strategies

Strategy	*Key Characteristic*	*Illustration*
Denial		
Simple Denial	Did Not Perform Act	Coke Does Not Charge McDonald's Less
Shift the Blame	Act Performed by Another	Exxon: Alaska and Caused Delay
Evasion of Responsibility		
Provocation	Responded to Act of Another	Firm Moved Because of New State Laws
Defeasibility	Lack of Information or Ability	Executive Not Told Meeting Changed
Accident	Act Was a Mishap	Sears' Unneeded Repairs Inadvertent
Good Intentions	Meant Well in Act	Sears: No Willful Over-Charges
Reducing Offensiveness of Event		
Bolstering	Stress Good Traits	Exxon's Swift and Competent Action
Minimization	Act Not Serious	Exxon: Few Animals Killed
Differentiation	Act Less Offensive	Sears: Preventative Maintenance
Transcendence	More Important Considerations	Helping Humans Justifies Tests
Attack Accuser	Reduce Credibility of Accuser	Pepsi: Coke Charges McDonald's Less
Compensation	Reimburse Victim	Disabled Movie-Goers Given Free Passes
Corrective Action	Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem	AT&T Promised to Improve Service
Mortification	Apologize for Act	AT&T Apologized

(Appendix 39).

In his model, Benoit uses five overall rhetorical responses functioning as image restoration strategies when an organization's image is threatened. Benoit's first strategy is a denial strategy. The accused organization denies that the offensive act has occurred, or that the organization has any responsibility for the offensive act. Benoit argues that if the act was not offensive, the organization's image will not be threatened. Moreover, the image will not be threatened if the organization succeeds in denying to have performed the offensive act or to remove responsibility to a third party (Benoit, 1995: 75-76). Thus, the denial strategy has two sub strategies: simple denial and shifting blame. Using simple denial, the organization simply rejects to have performed the act, while shifting blame is a scapegoating approach. Benoit claims that shifting blame is the most effective strategy of the two denial strategies. However, his research indicates that stakeholders do not regard the two denial strategies as effective as other image restoration strategies, which is why organizations should accept responsibility promptly and apologize. With that in mind, it is possible that the organization is innocent and has not performed the offensive act. In such a case, well-argued and documented claims and proofs regarding the organization's innocence can help rebuild a damaged image depending on the sustainability of the claims (Ibid: 161-162).

The second overall strategy is evasion of responsibility focusing on reducing the responsibility by offering explanations. This overall strategy has four sub strategies. Provocation is when the organization explains that its actions were responses to the offensive act of another, and that the offensive actions were necessary. If stakeholders accept this explanation, the responsibility will perhaps be placed on the "provoking" third part. Using the sub strategy defeasibility, the organization tries to change responsibility. The organization argues that it lacked the information or ability to make the right choice and to control the crisis situation, which is why the organization is not fully responsible. If the organization succeeds with this strategy, the strategy will decrease the attribution of responsibility. Accident, the third sub strategy, is used when the crisis is a result of coincidences or an accident. The organization tries to convince its stakeholders that the crisis and its circumstances were an accident, which is why the attribution of responsibility should be decreased. The organization can also try to convince its stakeholders that its actions were meant well as the actions were of good intentions, which is the fourth sub strategy within evasion of responsibility (76-77). Generally, the aim of the evasion of responsibility strategies is not to deny the offensive act, but to explain it in a way that plays down the organization's responsibility.

The third overall strategy is the strategy of reducing offensiveness with the aim of downplaying the actions that affected the stakeholders negatively. This overall strategy has six sub strategies. The first sub strategy bolstering is about stressing the organization's good work and to show positivism to the stakeholders. The aim is to deflect the stakeholders from the negative consequences in order to protect the organization's image. The focus is to reinforce the positive emotions among the stakeholders in order to reduce the damages on the organization's image. This strategy works best when the highlighted positivism is relevant to the accusations against the organization. The second sub strategy is minimization where the organization tries to minimize the negative associations to the actions which caused the crisis by claiming that no serious harm was done. If the strategy succeeds, stakeholders' dislike of the act will be reduced, which will reduce the damage to the organization's image. However, if the actions are considered to be inappropriate, unethical and irresponsible, an attempt seeking to minimize the problem might damage the organization's image further (Ibid: 163). The organization may also try to compare the act to a more offensive act, which is the third sub strategy. The organization tries to downplay the current crisis by arguing that similar situations in the past were more serious. If the differentiation strategy works, it will downplay the organization’s actions which will reduce the dislike of the organization. Transcendence, the fourth sub strategy, tries to praise the organization’s actions by placing them in another more favorable context claiming that there was a higher purpose behind the actions. If the actions are placed in a more positive context, it may reduce stakeholders’ dislike of the organization and the offensive actions. By attacking the accuser, the fifth sub strategy, the organization tries to reduce the credibility of the accuser, which may reduce the damage on the organization’s image (Ibid: 77-79). Using the last subcategory, compensation, the organization offers reimbursement to the victims in order to reduce the consequences of its actions. If this is accepted by stakeholders, the organization’s image will perhaps be maintained and probably also improved (Benoit, 1997: 180-181).

The image restorations strategy, corrective actions, generally occurs when the organization shows that it has a plan for how it will correct its offensive actions. This can be done by trying to restore the conditions and/or by making clear that the offensive actions will never happen again for instance by offering a plan to solve the problem and/or prevent recurrence (Benoit, 1995: 79). Stakeholders will continually try to find a responsible part for the offensive act, and it will probably calm them down to know that the problems are being corrected. The organization’s dedication to correct current and future problems is an important element in the organization’s image restoration strategy. In some cases it is however impossible to correct problems such as deaths. When the organization has corrected current and future problems, it does not necessarily mean that the image restoration strategy is a success. The risk is that this strategy fails and/or is counterproductive if the corrective actions do not live up to stakeholders’ expectations (Ibid: 162-163). With that in mind, the organization can also correct the offensive actions without taking responsibility for them. Benoit makes clear that the corrective strategy differentiates from the compensation strategy as correction is directed at the source of the offensive actions, whereas compensation is directed at the victims of the offensive actions (Ibid: 79).

Benoit’s last image restoration strategy is mortification, which simply is an apology. The organization also asks for forgiveness among its stakeholders. If this strategy is successful, and the apology is accepted, stakeholders may forgive the organization resulting in a less damaged image. This strategy can advantageously be applied accompanied by corrective actions (Ibid). The apology strategy is an old strategy that can be traced back to the ancient Greek root word apologos (Partridge, 1977: 3147 as cited in Towner, 2009). In ancient Greece, a defense such as an apology was considered as an important genre of rhetoric. Plato, Isocrates and Aristotle all describe apologia as a particular genre where a speaker defends himself (Ryan, 1982 as cited in Towner, 2009).

4.3.3 Critique

Benoit mentions that his image restoration strategies are not completely adequate. As a result, not all responses to a crisis are included in his theory. Benoit mentions the strategy silence where accusations are ignored, but he has chosen not to include this strategy in his theory as it is nonverbal and cannot be used proactively by the organization. Benoit's theory is more about how organizations can use verbal initiatives to change stakeholders' perceptions of the crisis and the organization (Benoit, 1995: 79). Burns and Burner criticize Benoit's theory as they think its view on the organization's image is homogenous, which they argue is problematic as an image is a dynamic and heterogeneous phenomenon created by the receiver. Thus, Benoit's focus is primarily on the sender, which is why he neglects the receiver's perception of the sender's stimuli. It may also be argued that image restoration does not make it possible to return to the same image as it was before the crisis. It will never be possible to restore the exact same image, but rather to create a different and perhaps a better image (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 214-216). Moreover, one might argue that Benoit's theory takes its departure in a simple communication situation as the context, such as the media channel, and concrete actions, such as crying or laughing, are not taken into consideration. With that in mind, it does make sense that Benoit neglects the contextual background as his theory builds on the rhetorical tradition emphasizing the spoken or written words rather than the environment and the context (Ibid: 204).

4.3.4 Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Opposite Benoit's theory, Coombs' theory is primarily context-oriented and is based on public relations. The Public Relations Institute of Australia uses the following definition about public relations: "The deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization (or individual) and its (or their) publics" (Public Relations News, 2013), and this definition indicates that public relations is more than just communication and the spoken and written words. It can therefore be argued that PR is about handling the relationships with stakeholders by connecting words and concrete actions in order for the organization to appear credible. For instance, if an organization communicates about its high quality, it must live up to it via high quality products and/or services and thus connecting communication and actions in order to create a positive image. Hence, when Coombs theory is built on PR, the theory emphasizes more than just the spoken and written words as the context is embraced as well.

Coombs connects the selection of crisis communication strategy to the organization's crisis responsibility. He looks at a crisis as a cycle with three stages: before, during and after the crisis. The three stages seek to develop normative guidelines to maximize the effect of the crisis response (Coombs & Holladay, 2010: 95).

Coombs' situational crisis communication theory is based on the fundamental idea that the organization in a crisis situation selects crisis response strategy depending on the crisis type and stakeholders' attribution of responsibility to the organization (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 236). By implication, the theory takes the crisis situation and context into consideration in order to find the most appropriate crisis communication strategy when it comes to protecting the organization's image in the best way possible. By establishing a set of guidelines for the selection of crisis communication strategy, the organization can respond more effectively on a crisis being more prepared (Heath & Millar, 2004: 96). The crisis communication strategy is adjusted to the affected stakeholders more than it is adjusted to the organization. The reason for this is probably that the public expect such a reaction from the organization when it is attributed responsibility (Coombs & Holladay, 2002: 168).

4.3.4.1 Stage one – Crisis Type and Intensifying Factors

Before the crisis, also referred to as stage one, is about identifying the crisis type in order to assess the reputational threat that the crisis constitutes to the organization. The stage has two steps: Step one is about deciding the crisis type and thereby the threat that the crisis is to the image and reputation of the organization. Coombs distinguishes between three degrees of reputational threats: mild, moderate and severe, and step one divides the crisis type into three subcategories by level of responsibility. Stronger attribution of responsibility constitutes more reputational damage (Coombs, 2007: 142). The crisis types are outlined in the following table by Coombs (the table is copied from Coombs book: "Ongoing Crisis Communication" from 2014):

Table 8.3 Crisis Types, by Level of Responsibility

Victim Cluster: Very little attribution of crisis responsibility
Natural disasters
Rumors
Workplace violence
Malevolence
Accidental Cluster: Low attribution of crisis responsibility
Challenges
Technical-error accidents
Technical-error product harm
Preventable Cluster: Strong attributions of crisis responsibility
Human-error accidents
Human-error product harm
Organizational misdeeds

(Coombs, 2014: 150).

Research has shown that each crisis type creates attributions of responsibility among stakeholder which can be predicted (Coombs, 2012: 158).

The above crisis types suggest that the victim crises constitute very little responsibility as stakeholders regard the organization as a victim of the crisis. Accident cluster crises constitute low attribution of responsibility, and preventable cluster constitutes strong attribution of responsibility as the organization intentionally was engaged in the actions and behavior that led to the crisis. Even though most crises will fall into one of the mentioned crisis types, it is possible that the organization and its stakeholders disagree on the crisis type. If that is the case, the crisis management team should consider adopting the stakeholders' frame (Ibid).

Step two in stage one is about intensifying factors. These factors may influence the stakeholders as well and are based on the organization's crisis history and prior reputation. If the organization has been involved in a similar crisis in the past, stakeholders often attribute more responsibility to the organization than the crisis type suggests. The current crisis will therefore be a stronger reputational thread. As a result, a negative prior reputation intensifies the reputational threat (Ibid: 158). For example, when the British oil and gas company BP in 2010 struggled with a crisis due to an explosion on a drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico (The Guardian, 2010), the company was probably attributed more responsibility and experienced an intensified reputational threat due to a negative prior reputation from a similar crisis as BP has been involved in a number of incidents, among those an accident in Azerbaijan in September 2008 (Webb, 2010). Thus, when an organization makes a similar offensive act once again, stakeholders may think that the organization has not learned from its mistakes and thereby perceive the organization's previous crisis management as untrustworthy. As a consequence, it will be even harder for the organization to perform an appropriate crisis management strategy during the new crisis as stakeholders will be even more skeptical of the organization's future actions.

When the reputational threat has been evaluated and assessed via stage one, a response strategy can be selected which leads to stage two (Ibid).

4.3.4.2 Stage Two – Crisis Response Strategy

When the crisis type and thus also the reputational threat have been identified, the next step is to establish a response strategy.

The primary response strategies can be collected in three postures: The denial posture, the diminishment posture and the rebuilding posture. When using the denial posture, the organization can try to deny or remove any connection with the crisis. When using the diminishment posture, the organization can try to reduce attribution of organizational control of the crisis. When using the rebuilding posture, the organization can try to improve its reputation and regain confidence in order to recover its image by taking on responsibility. Each of the three postures represent different strategies with similar communicative goals reflecting the amount of responsibility that an organization seems to accept in a crisis and how much sympathy it seems to have for the victims in the crisis (Coombs, 2004: 468). The strategies under the three postures are summarized in the following table by Coombs (the table is copied from Coombs book: "Ongoing Crisis Communication" from 2014):

Table 8.1 Crisis Response Strategies, by Posture

	Denial Posture
Attacking the Accuser	The crisis manager confronts the person or group that claims that a crisis exists. The response may include a threat to use force (e.g., a lawsuit) against the accuser.
Denial	The crisis manager states that no crisis exists. The response may include explaining why there is no crisis.
Scapegoating	Some other person or group outside of the organization is blamed for the crisis.
	Diminishment Posture
Excusing	The crisis manager tries to minimize the organization's responsibility for the crisis. The response can include denying any intention to do harm or claiming that the organization had no control of the events that led to the crisis.
Justification	The crisis manager tries to minimize the perceived damage associated with the crisis. The response can include stating that there were no serious damages or injuries or claiming that the victims deserved what they received.
	Rebuilding Posture
Compensation	The organization provides money or other gifts to the victims.
Apology	The crisis manager publicly states that the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks forgiveness.
	Bolstering Posture
Reminding	The organization tells stakeholders about its past good works.
Ingratiation	The organization praises stakeholders.
Victimage	The organization explains how it too is a victim of the crisis.

(Coombs, 2014: 145).

The bolstering posture strategies, also referred to as secondary strategies, can be applied as a supplement to the primary strategies, and they are intended to build a positive connection between the stakeholders and the organization (Coombs, 2004: 157).

When a strategy is accommodative and shows concern for the victims, the stakeholders will often perceive the organization as taking more responsibility for the crisis, while the defensive strategies are intended to move responsibility away from the organization. This can either be perceived as more or less reliable or unreliable by the organization's stakeholders (Coombs, 2007: 170).

Coombs suggests that it is not unlikely that the organization will use more than one crisis communication strategy. With few exceptions, the strategies can be used in a variety of combinations. As the aim of the denial strategies is to deny that a crisis exists, while diminishment and rebuilding strategies accept the existence of a crisis, Coombs claims that denial strategies should neither be combined with diminishment strategies nor rebuilding strategies (Coombs, 2004: 157).

A clear difference between Benoit and Coombs' strategies is that Benoit suggests 14 different strategies and Coombs suggests seven strategies. Moreover, Coombs argues that counterattack on the accuser is a defensive strategy, whereas Benoit categorizes attacking the accuser as a sub strategy to the overall strategy reducing offensiveness of event.

4.3.4.3 Guidelines with Recommendations for Crisis Response Selection

The third stage is about matching stage one and two or in other words matching the actual crisis with an appropriate crisis response strategy. Via stage one and stage two, the organization can determine the crisis response strategy that will maximize reputational protection (Coombs, 2007: 166). Coombs suggests the following thirteen normative guidelines when it comes to finding a proper match in the crisis response selection.

1.	Provide instructing information to all victims or potential victims such as warnings and directions for protecting themselves from harm.
2.	Provide adjusting information to victims by expressing concern for them by providing corrective action when possible. Note: It is suggested that providing instructing and adjusting information is an appropriate response for victim crises in an organization with no crisis history or negative prior reputation.
3.	Use diminishment strategies for victim crises when there is no crisis history or negative prior reputation.
4.	Use diminishment strategies for victim crises when there is a crisis history or negative prior reputation.
5.	Use rebuilding strategies for accident crises when there is a crisis history or negative prior reputation.
6.	Use rebuilding strategies in preventable crises.
7.	Use denial strategies in rumor crises.
8.	Use denial strategies in challenges when the challenge is undesirable.
9.	Use corrective action (adjusting information) in challenges when stakeholders are expected to support the challenge.
10.	Use reinforcing strategies as supplement to the other response strategies.
11.	The victimage response strategy should only be used together with the victim cluster.

12.	Be consistent; do not combine denial strategies with either diminishment or rebuilding strategies.
13.	Diminishment and rebuilding strategies can be used in combination with one another.

(Own construction – Ibid: 159).

The matching process starts with locating the crisis type and thereby deciding the perceived attribution of responsibility for the crisis, followed by selecting crisis responses in order to modify perceptions of responsibility. When the crisis type is identified, it is, according to Coombs, possible to assess the attribution of responsibility that the crisis is to the organization. To sum up, Coombs argues that an organization can predict the level of reputational threat when the crisis type and prior reputation have been evaluated. Subsequently, an appropriate crisis communication strategy can be selected, and it is important to match the crisis response and the level of crisis responsibility and reputational threat. Coombs suggests the above thirteen guidelines with normative recommendations to respond to crises in specific situations.

4.3.5 Critique

It can be argued that Coombs situational crisis communication theory does not take into account that stakeholders may think differently and thereby also perceive a crisis differently. Stakeholders may also change their perceptions of the crisis and attribute more or less responsibility to the organization during the crisis. Additionally, the theory does not consider choice of medium, which is why it may be assumed that Coombs suggests an organization to communicate in the same way across different media channels. Even though Coombs takes the context into consideration, opposite Benoit, Coombs still has, like Benoit, a rather sender-oriented focus concentrating on the on the sender's choice of strategy. Moreover, the theory does not take into account that a crisis is dynamic and can escalate from one crisis type to another, and that more than one crisis type can occur simultaneously as Johansen and Frandsen's double crisis definition suggests (Ibid: 79).

The different theories from Benoit and Coombs are examples of popular and recognized theories within crisis communication. These two theories are also examples of what is meant when reference is made to conventional crisis communication theory in the thesis.

4.4 The Rhetorical Arena

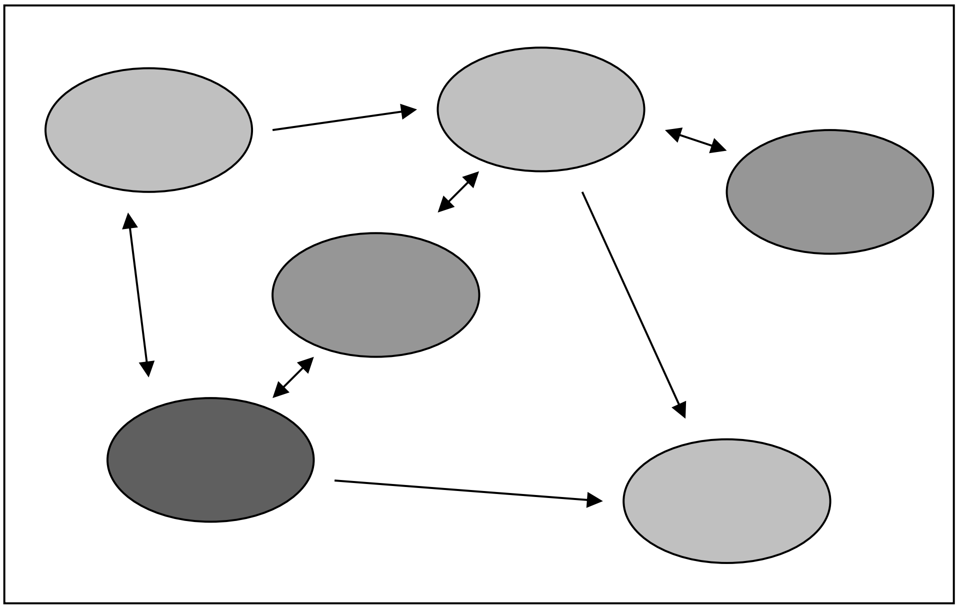
The Rhetorical Arena will be applied as an overall model of analysis for the introductory analysis section where the conventional crisis communication theories of Coombs and Benoit will be applied to the two cases in question.

The Rhetorical Arena, a crisis communication model by Johansen and Frandsen from Aarhus School of Business, will briefly be outlined in order to provide a basic understanding of its features and to give the reader an understanding of the structure of the analysis section. The Rhetorical Arena is inspired by simple views and paradigms within the research tradition of crisis communication, and it is based on the early work of Benoit and Coombs. Johansen and Frandsen describe their model as the third stage within crisis communication (Johansen & Frandsen, 2007: 251).The first stage represents the sender-oriented models of crisis communication, and the second stage represents the receiver-oriented models. The third stage seeks to give an additional understanding of crisis communication besides the more simple focus on one-to-one communication. The third stage is based on a multi-vocal approach taking various senders and receivers into account. Moreover, the approach takes into account that a crisis situation involves several dynamic and complex processes where stakeholders interact with one another (Ibid: 252), which is relevant as stakeholders easily can interact and communicate with each other on social media. Johansen and Frandsen argue that the multi-vocal approach of The Rhetorical Arena makes it possible to capture the complexity of a crisis caused by the various numbers of players who may be involved (Ibid: 274).

The Rhetorical Arena consists of two components: a context model and a text model. The context model is a communicational-sociological model, and it introduces the multi-vocal approach. On the other hand, the rhetorical text model considers crisis communication as that transmitted through the four parameters of context, media, genre, and text (Ibid: 252). The combination of these two models contribute to a more complete understanding of the context in which the crisis communication takes place in addition to providing a better understanding of the specific text that crisis communication consists of (Ibid).

4.4.1 The Context Model

A rhetorical arena opens the time a situation is perceived as a crisis by the organization, its stakeholders or both. Within the arena players act and communicate. These players may enter the arena from the beginning of the crisis or later on. It is argued that the arena may open before the crisis actually begins, and it does not necessarily close down immediately after the crisis is averted (Ibid: 275). It may therefore be important also to focus on the stages and the communicative actions before and after the crisis. When Frandsen and Johansen refer to the multi-vocal approach, they emphasize that crisis communication does not consists of only one sender (Ibid). It is thus suggested that crisis communication may consist of communicative actions between several senders and receivers, which may challenge the assumption that organizations can handle a crisis desirably when following a set of guidelines. Crisis communication can take place in many other forms as well. For instance, it may also be regarded as crisis communication when a customer complains for instance writing a comment on an organization’s social media fan page. The figure below illustrates how players communicate. The circles symbolize the players and their voices visualizing numerous senders and receivers communicating to, with, against, past, or about each other.



The context model (Ibid: 277).

The players operating in a rhetorical arena are, as mentioned earlier, both senders and receivers; and the players and their voices relate to each other.

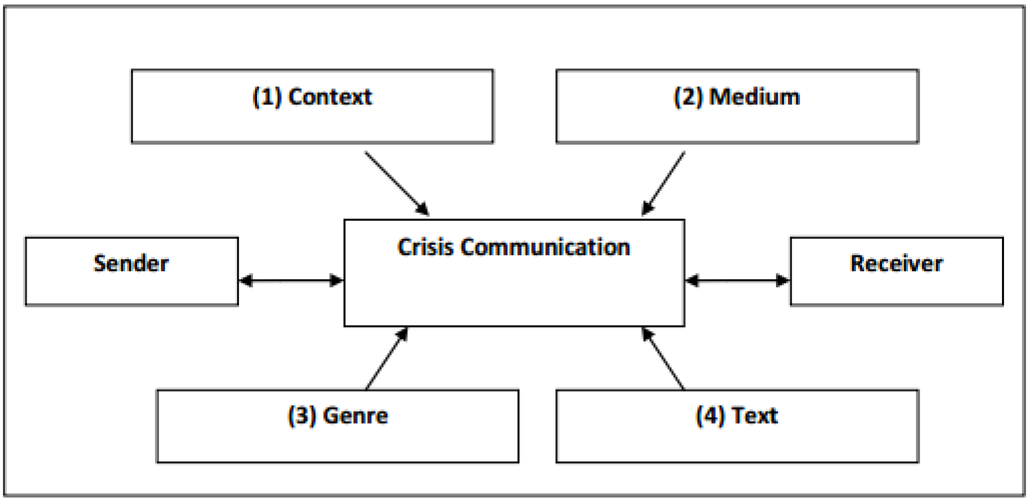
- Some of the players communicate *to* each other. This type of one-way-communication is one of the most common types of crisis communication.
- Other players communicate *with* each other. An example of this relation is when an organization begins a dialogue with their stakeholders trying to reach an agreement.
- Some of the players communicate *against* each other. An example of this relation is when an organization and a specific group of stakeholders are in conflict during a crisis.
- Players can also communicate *past* each other. This situation often becomes reality when an organization and their stakeholders interpret the crisis differently.
- Finally, players can communicate *about* each other. This type of communication is highly regarded among the media and costumers and citizens (Ibid).

Thus, it may be argued that the relations between the players in a rhetorical arena are far from equal because huge differences can occur in terms of power, financial positions, social capital, and media access and thereby also the ability to communicate at different levels.

The players and their relations to each other will not be discussed in a separate section in the analysis due to the scope of the thesis and the desire to keep the focus on crisis communication and crisis context in regards to Coombs, Benoit and social media.

4.4.2 The Text Model

The text model is a model that involves all relevant factors that may influence crisis communication. Whereas the context model explains how the arena functions and what happens on macro-level from an overall perspective in relation to the many players communicating, the text model focuses on the specific type of crisis communication applied by the players in the arena. Crisis communication is thus analyzed in relation to the context and medium from where crisis communication is transmitted (Ibid: 280). The text model consists of three bodies and four parameters. The three bodies are: crisis communication, sender, and receiver. Crisis communication is mediated through the four parameters: context, medium, genre, and text. The model is illustrated below:



The text model (Ibid: 284).

The text model suggests how crisis communication should be approached and how it can be regulated in order to fit a particular crisis. The model includes the four parameters, which all should be considered when an organization plans crisis communication as each parameter has an impact.

4.5 Summarizing

As mentioned previously, Benoit and Coombs are regarded as leading experts within the field of crisis communication. To sum up, a critical review of what perhaps should be taken into consideration when relying on the two theorists' work in times of crises is outlined in this section.

By applying Benoit's and Coombs' theories in the thesis, the combination of the two makes it possible to study the sender's communication in depth when applying Benoit's theory and also to involve aspects of the context by applying Coombs' theory.

With that in mind, it may be argued that both Benoit's and Coombs' research and theories are quite static and overgeneralized as it seems doubtful that two crises are exactly alike. When a crisis is unpredictable by nature and also a unique event that may evolve in many unexpected ways (Seeger, 2006), one may criticize Benoit and Coombs for being too static. When a crisis is a unique event, it seems reasonable to argue that no crises are exactly identical. Even though it will probably always be possible to put a crisis into a certain category of crisis type and a crisis response into a certain box of strategy, it may seem too normative and wishful thinking to presume a crisis will develop in a certain way according to crisis type and selection of crisis response strategy. For instance, it may be argued that Coombs' crisis division in before, during and after a crisis has some limitations as a crisis may develop so explosively that the stage before the crisis will be more or less nonexistent. As a consequence, an organization will not have the opportunity to prepare as Coombs suggests. Another situation could be that an organization goes directly from one crisis to another. It may also be quite paradoxically that Coombs define a crisis as an unpredictable event (Coombs, 2012: 2) when he is so normative in the way he suggests organizations to manage a crisis. Thus, it may be easier to follow a normative guideline during a predictable course of event.

It may also be argued that Benoit's and Coombs' theories respectively are quite sender-oriented. Benoit's focus is on the rhetorical response from the organization in a crisis, and he does not consider the receivers, and it can therefore be argued that he neglects to see communication as a two-way process where stakeholders also have a voice. Even though Coombs takes stakeholders into consideration in his context-oriented view, it could be suggested that his interpretation of them is quite general as his normative guidelines more or less seem to presume that all stakeholders behave the same during a crisis and have similar reactions to the crisis management effort. So even though Coombs involves stakeholders, he surprisingly does not seem to take into consideration that it might be a good idea for an organization to change or adjust its strategy in some situations according to the reactions from stakeholders even though he acknowledges that a crisis is erratic.

Benoit and Coombs both neglect silence as a strategy. Benoit mentions the absence of the strategy and explains that he wanted to make a model focusing on communicative crisis strategies and not the unsaid (Benoit, 1995: 79). However, this strategy seems to be usable and relevant as some organizations may do not want to answer specific accusations at first if they do not have necessary knowledge and information available to make a qualified response. It does not seem unlikely that an organization or a spokesperson will ignore accusations or say “no comment” when being forced into a corner in an unpleasant situation that could trigger a crisis. Moreover, some organizations may use this strategy hoping that the issue will be quietly forgotten. It is obviously open to discussion whether or not silence is a rhetorical strategy as it is not a verbal action. Nevertheless, silence could possibly be a verbal action as organizations may choose to say something and choose not to say something else. Following on from these thoughts, silence may in some situations be a strategic choice even though Benoit argues that it cannot be used proactively as mentioned in section 4.3.4. Other theorists have embraced silence as a strategy, e.g. Brummett, who works with silence from a strategic perspective. Brummett argues that “Silence becomes strategic only when talk is expected. Silence is strategic when someone has pressing reason to talk, but does not” (Brummett, 1980: 289). Thus, it would seem that a verbal answer must be expected before silence can be regarded as a strategy. So when an organization is in crisis and the public expects the organization to communicate, it seems plausible that silence can be used as a part of the crisis communications strategy. With that in mind, silence may give stakeholders the impression that the organization is passive and insecure or even guilty if they expect clear communicative actions from the organization. Moreover, silence may also give the public, the media and other stakeholders the opportunity to form perceptions of the organization and its role in the crisis. Consequently, an organization’s silence may give media, the public, etc. more control over the situation, which may have negative consequences as the media and other stakeholders may have another agenda than the organization.

Altogether, both theories could be criticized for being too simple, and a problem when dealing with crises in such models could be that some may rely too confidently on a normative guideline, which may be risky in cases where a crisis take an unexpected direction or stakeholders do not react as a specific model suggests. Moreover, following a guideline or a model may result in a response where the organization neglects to answer with real passion, concern and personality, as the communication may seem to be too strategic or even cynical when using a strategy from a guideline model which every organization has the opportunity to apply. This may especially be the case on social media where communication is more authentic, personal and less promotional (Artegic, NY), which will be elaborated in the next section.

4.6 Social Media

This section will outline social media as a concept, along with organizations’ and peoples’ usage of social media. Due to the scope and problem area of the thesis, the focus will thus not be on how political organizations, NGOs, governments etc. can use social media, but rather how enterprises and customers can use it.

The concept of social media has become increasingly popular and important on the internet during the last decade. Lon Safko refers to social as "the instinctual need humans have to connect with other likeminded humans" (Safko, 2010: 4). Humans have a need to be in a group where they can feel comfortable and share experiences, ideas, etc. Social media is referred to as a tool people can use to cover the need of gathering with other likeminded people (Ibid). Safko argues that organizations should use social media to build a credible relationship with stakeholders as social media is more effective than traditional media due to two-way communication between an organization and its stakeholders (Ibid: 5). As people can share information, experiences, ideas, etc., it is claimed that they are the ones controlling the social media for example by learning from each other and share negative or positive experiences. Consequently, organizations may have less control over their corporate messages as organization must cope with increased vulnerability when anyone can post a critical comment and share it with a lot of likeminded people (Ibid).

Kaplan and Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kapland & Haenlein, 2010: 61). Social media is in other words allowing people to interact and share information in a way that is not possible via traditional media. Moreover, there is no time and space limits on social media as user-generated information can spread across borders and time zones within seconds. The rise of social media seems to have democratized corporate communication as the people who create, share and consume blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc. on social media have taken power and control from those in marketing and PR (Kietzmann et al., 2011: 242). Thus, consumers can share information all the time, which can be a major challenge for organizations globally as consumers trust other consumers rather than organizations (Kotler et al., 2010: 30). Consumers may trust other consumers over organizations as they have more in common with them and similar interests. However, it may be possible that huge organizations for example can afford to hire very competent employees who may have the ability to take the power and manipulate with stakeholders on social media via advertisements and in a more indirect manners where stakeholders do not notice it. Moreover, organizations also have the ability to censor the content on their social media pages for example by deleting critical comments from stakeholders. Thus, even though stakeholders such as consumers have new opportunities on social media compared to traditional media, it may be argued that the power relationship between organizations and individuals still has not struck a balance.

Nevertheless, social media has become a convenient way for postmodern consumers to interact and share experiences (Kotler et al., 2010: 30). Social media is thus a tool that can "increase our ability to share, to co-operate, with one another, and to tale collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organizations" (Shirky, 2008: 20 as cited in Fuchs, 2014). Today, everyone with an Internet connection can post anything on social media networks, and many of the people using social media to share information etc. on everyday basis, would never have the same opportunities on broadcast media (Fuchs, 2014: 35). Due to the popularity of social media, it is claimed that it is important for organizations to be where their customers are. The customers are on social media which is why it is claimed that it is important that organizations are active on social media as well (Jensen, 2011). As a result, organizations can use social media to interact with customers and other stakeholders. For instance, a customer service tool can be offered (Safko, 2012: 8-9). Organizations can via social media share valuable information to anyone at any time, and in doing so, stakeholders' need for transparency of organizations' activities is easier met. However, this only seems to be the case when organizations are active and have an open style of communication engaging in dialog with their stakeholders. It is thus possible that organizations are present on various social media platforms without being more active and open than they are on their corporate website or through mainstream media channels. When organizations are open and transparent, they may uncover aspects of their activities to stakeholders, but if the increased level of transparency is successful, organizations may benefit from a closer and better relationship with their stakeholders (Postman, 2009: 9-10).

Social media is an umbrella term covering a lot of different social media platforms. As both Starbucks' and Applebee's' crises escalated on various social media networks, the relevant social media sites will be outlined briefly in the following:

4.6.1 Facebook

Facebook was founded in 2004 with a declared mission of allowing people to share and make the world more connected and open. People can use Facebook to stay connected with family and friends and to share experiences etc. (Facebook Newsroom, 2013). Facebook is the world's largest social media network site, and in December 2013, Facebook reached 1.23 billion monthly users (Socialbakers, 2014). Safko categorizes Facebook as a trusted network that includes a large number of likeminded people who come together to share ideas, thoughts and information about themselves (Safko, 2010: 21). Organizations can build a reliable relationship between themselves and potential and current costumers by establishing and using networks on their own Facebook page (Ibid). Facebook users can create profile pages and share information about themselves and anything else with their friends and networks (What is Facebook?, NY). When users become friends on Facebook, they are able to see each other's profiles and what they have shared in terms of news stories, personal notes, videos etc. (Ibid). When users share something on

Facebook, other users have the opportunity to “like” or comment the status updates. Users can also like pages they find interesting and thereby post comments and receive updates, for instance if they support a football club or prefer a specific product (Explained: What is Facebook?, NY). As a result, organizations can create a Facebook page that works like a fan page where people, who like the page, can follow organizations and the content they post.

Facebook is free and makes revenue from advertising such as banner ads (Barton, 2006). Organizations and others can benefit from Facebook Ads by target the ads via Facebook users’ age, education, location, relationship status, interests, preferences, etc. (Facebook, 2014).

4.6.2 Twitter

Twitter is another popular social network site. Twitter’s mission is “To give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers” (About Twitter, 2014). Twitter has 241 million monthly active users, and 500 million so-called “Tweets” are sent per day. Twitter states that organizations use the social media platform to share information about their services, build a relationship with stakeholders and gather market insight (Ibid). Twitter was founded in 2006 (Carlson, 2011) and is basically a social networking and microblogging service allowing everyone to answer the question: “what are you doing” by sending text messages of maximum 140 characters (Tweeternet, NY). These messages are called Tweets, and friends on Twitter are called “followers”. A Tweet allows people and organizations to write very brief and informal messages that can be shared with people, who Twitter users normally do not exchange email or the like with. Thus, Twitter may have the potential to open up people’s and organization’s circle of contacts (Ibid). A Tweet is shown on the user’s profile page, on the page of each of the user’s followers and on the Twitter public timeline (Ibid). Altogether, Twitter can be used to quickly broadcast information and to keep up with friends and others, while organizations can transmit latest news and blog posts, interact with stakeholders or communicate internally (Ibid). Organizations can also benefit from using advertisements on Twitter by buying space in someone’s timeline (Twitter, 2014). When choosing a timeline for an ad, it is possible to segment between geographic areas, interests, whom they follow, etc. Thereby it is possible to aim the ads directly at the preferred target group (Ibid).

So social media users can follow other users and keep others informed on their posts and updates on both Twitter and Facebook. It is also possible to follow celebrities on both platforms. Moreover, both Twitter and Facebook make it possible to upload various media such as adding a photo, a website or a video to a post (Laverty, NY).

Looking at some of the differences between Twitter and Facebook, it is argued that Facebook encourages users to enter real personal information and connect with friends and family, while Twitter allows more anonymity as users can be themselves as well as they can create an avatar (DeMers, 2013). Also, Facebook is commonly used to keep people informed via scrapbooking sites, where people record central moments of their lives and share information about themselves, while Twitter focuses on speeding things up becoming a source of its own, as people, journalists, etc. have access to all information for example during a certain event (Ibid), as Twitter enables users to segment the content based on topic using the hashtag ("People use the hashtag symbol **#** before a relevant keyword or phrase (no spaces) in their Tweet to categorize those Tweets and help them show more easily in Twitter Search"(Twitter, NY)).

Thus, interaction on Twitter seems less personal while users may have a stronger and more loyal bond on Facebook. A report shows that almost all activity and engagement happen within the first hour of posting on Twitter, while interactions on Facebook more commonly seem to go on for hours or days. Therefore, it seems that Facebook is more timeless where posts work as an ongoing discussion, while Twitter is more about communication here and now where out-of-date information possibly will be avoided (Aedy, 2013). It seems obvious that organizations and others should take these considerations into consideration when communicating on both platforms for example as Facebook allows longer messages and therefore another kind of information sharing and communication style than Twitter, which is more about short and fast sharing of information.

4.6.3 Blogging

A blog, which originates from the expression "web log" (Blood, 2000), is an information or discussion site published on a website. A lot of topics, problems, etc. can be covered in a blog, and organizations and individuals can write about anything such as a hobby, an interest, personal problems, diaries etc. (Newson, 2009: 3-4). Many blogs are interactive in the sense that they allow others to leave a comment to the blog and thus start a discussion. By implication, blogging is a kind of social media network where the bloggers produce content on their blogs, but also build social relations with their readers and other bloggers, for instance when linking to other blogs (Gaudeul & Peroni, 2010). Blogging is easy for most people as it does not require bloggers and other contributors to know a lot about electronic data processing or web page coding (Duermyer, NY). Compared to Twitter, which is a microblogging platform only allowing 140 characters in a flood of information, traditional blogging seems more ongoing as the information is not lost in a wealth of updates. As a result, blogs can also easier be found days, weeks or years after they have been posted. Moreover, blogs can be short or long depending on the topic and the writer, and the information may therefore also have more depth with more opinions and details. Tweets may be more useful for more quick and light dialog.

4.6.4 Reddit

Reddit was founded in 2005 and is a social network site that "[…] enables the individual, and gives literally anyone who has something interesting enough to say the ability to reach millions" (About Reddit, 2014). Reddit users vote about the stories and discussions they found the most important, and the most popular ones are voted up while the less popular ones are voted down (Ibid). Everyone is able to create a community called "subreddits", and everyone can post comments to all stories on Reddit (Ibid). Reddit is a social media site that encourages discussions where users vote for or against others stories and comments (Reddit, NY).

Four social media platforms relevant to the two cases have been briefly outlined above. The cases unfolded on these social media platforms, which is why they are outlined to provide an idea of what is meant when there is referred to a "status update", a "Tweet" or the like in the analysis. The following section seeks to elaborate on the field of social media as well as outlining how crisis communication and social media can be combined.

4.6.5 Crisis Communication on Social Media

Traditional media such as television has previously been a typical channel for crisis communication. The conventional crisis communication theories by Benoit and Coombs, outlined in section 4.3.2 and 4.3.4 are generally not created for social media, but for traditional media as they originate from a time where social media did not exist. However, both Benoit and Coombs neglect the medium which would indicate that both theorists assume that their strategies can be applied regardless of medium. Social media has more recently become a widespread channel for crisis communication as well (Coombs, 2012: 164). In this connection it is important for organizations to remember that social media is a mix of channels. Some channels are more appropriate than others when it comes to crisis communication, and which channel is the most appropriate depends on the crisis situation, the type of stakeholders and the crisis response strategy (Ibid). Obviously, the targeted stakeholders must be active on social media if that medium is going to be an option. Social media is audience driven and people have to visit sites or become followers to access particular information (Ibid: 24).

It should be recognized that news spread quickly on the social media, and Coombs suggests three basic rules that an organization should follow when communicating with stakeholders on the social media:

1. Be present (respond to posts and thereby show concern for what stakeholders think).

2. Be where the action is.

3. Be there before the crisis (Ibid: 27).

If the organization does not mention the crisis online, stakeholders will notice the lack of information (Ibid). If there is any doubt about what to answer, it is better to communicate that you are uncertain instead of answering incorrectly or not answering at all (Veil, et al., 2011: 119). Stakeholders expect their comments and posts to be answered on the social media (Gonzalez & Smith, 2010: 102). As for Coombs' situational crisis communication theory, it may also be argued that Coombs has a quite normative approach suggesting the above three basic rules. The three rules seem very basic and general, but as noted by Coombs, it is obviously a good idea to be where the action is and to be active where one's stakeholders are active in order to be able to communicate with them. When organizations use social media to inform about the crisis, the organizations signal that they are willing to inform their stakeholders (Utz et al., 2013: 41).

Kaplan and Haenlein advice organizations to use a set of guidelines on social media irrespective of what kind of social media platform is being used and what is being discussed due to the dynamic and fast-moving sphere of social media in general (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 64-65). The recommendations are divided into the two categories: "using social media" and "being social" (Ibid: 65-67).

The first overall recommendation "using social media" is about the importance of choosing the social media platforms carefully and to engage with them. It is argued that it is not possible to be present on all social media platforms, and an organization must therefore choose the platforms that are most relevant in relation to the target group. It is suggested that an organization must be active on the platforms where its customers operate, and also that it must consider whether or not customers should be allowed to post comments on the organization's social media pages (Ibid: 65). When the platforms are carefully selected, it is suggested that the organization's social media activities are aligned and integrated with each other both when it comes to social media, but also traditional media platforms. Stakeholders may regard all the organization's activities as a part of the organization's identity, and it is thus important to secure coherence across all media channels. The final recommendation when it comes to using social media is to make the pages available and accessible to all stakeholders and to make a guideline for social media usage for all relevant employees (Ibid: 66).

In their second overall recommendation "being social", Kaplan and Haenlein suggest that the organization must be active on its platforms and make sure that the content is always new (Ibid). Moreover, it is suggested that the organization engage in dialogs and discussions with its stakeholders in order for the organization to appear open and transparent. Stakeholders may also expect the organization to engage in a dialog with them, and it is suggested that the organization should not only respond to negative comments, but also engage in daily discussions with real interest in its stakeholders in order to find out what they will like to hear and talk about (Ibid). It can be argued that it may seem rather strategic or even cynical and manipulating to listen to and engage with one's stakeholders only to take advantage of it later on using the knowledge about what they like to hear and talk about for example to increase sales. Stakeholders may see through the organization's willingness and interest if these are too calculated and normative, and stakeholders will thus perhaps regard the organization as fake and unreliable. Following on from these thoughts, it could be suggested that organizations' presence on social media may initially be about communicating equally and humbly with stakeholders without any kind of hidden agenda. Subsequently, it may be possible to use the data and knowledge about stakeholders that are generated through two-way communication to improve the relationship with stakeholders. It does in other words seem important to identify the stakeholders and thus how to communicate with them during a crisis. Overall, it seems important that the organizations' communication is honest, compassionate and real and does not appear strategic or standardized when engaging in dialog with stakeholders.

Additionally, it is suggested that the organization takes time to study the history and basic rules on the social media platforms it uses (Ibid). Also, it is claimed to be a good idea that the organization acts unprofessionally in the sense that it must not be afraid of making mistakes as other social media users may "understand that things do not always go smoothly" (Ibid: 67). Finally, Kaplan and Heanlein argue that it is important to be honest and "respect the rules of the game" (Ibid). On social media being honest is not only about telling the truth, it is also about revealing the true identity of the organization (Ibid).

Coombs argues that the aim of using social media for crisis communication is the same as when using traditional media for crisis communication (Coombs, 2012: 19). Hence, even though Coombs does not completely neglect the choice of medium arguing that the aim is the same on both media, he does not seem to distinguish between them when it comes to his crisis communication strategies. Thus, the same kind of crisis communication tools and guidelines are still considered relevant (an argument that will be challenged in the analysis of the thesis) as long as organizations realize the differences in the way stakeholders can interact – both with the organizations and each other. Hence, organizations should be aware of the opportunities and possible risks that the social media carries. With that in mind, social media allows information to be spread globally within seconds reaching millions of people and potential customers. This would indicate that organizations' communication has become more instant and direct as a consequence of the speed of information sharing on social media. Organizations are able to express themselves promptly making the information more authentic and relevant for their audience (Postman, 2009: 9). When everything can be shared with everyone within seconds, and when organizations' communication has changed due to the rise of social media, it is likely that stakeholders expect to be constantly updated with new and relevant information. If stakeholders expect enlarged, newer and more relevant information on social media compared to traditional media, it may be argued that it is harder for organizations to be consistent in their crisis management strategy to the degree Coombs suggests. When organizations communicate through traditional media, it is probably easier to make consistent responses within the same normative strategy as organizations in some cases may settle for a few carefully prepared comments to a few mainstream news sources. On social media however, organizations are expected to be engaged in ongoing and open conversations with its stakeholders (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 66), so it may be assumed that it is harder for organizations to perform as normatively and consistently as Coombs and also Kaplan and Haenlein suggest both when it comes to crisis communication strategy and also guidelines and recommendations in social media usage. When communication on social media between organizations and their stakeholders is a two-way process (Safko, 2010: 5), it would seem that organizations must relate to more types of feedback and attitudes than when the communication is more sender-oriented in one-way processes. Also, the crisis communication process seems more complex as organizations can be active on a lot of different social media networks at the same time as they also must deal with the mainstream media.

If used appropriately, it may be argued that social media can be an effective tool for crisis communication due to the opportunities of two-way communication where organization easier can connect with their stakeholders (Safko, 2010: 5). But on the other hand, a crisis can also escalate as information spreads faster than through traditional media. Everyone can publish content which can harm the organization if the content of the comments is negative, but organizations also have the opportunity to communicate with their stakeholders in a new way which may have a positive impact on the stakeholders' perception of the crisis. But it seems reasonable to question the assumption that an organization will have success on the social media as long as it follows some normative guidelines and overall rules when social media is so dynamic and ever-changing due to the previously-mentioned features of social media.

4.6.6 Critique

As social media is new compared to traditional media, it may be argued that the field is not as thoroughly studied as for instance theory within traditional media. It is argued that the public is in control on the internet, but this view has been challenged since organizations as Starbucks, Applebee's, etc. can censor the content for instance on its Facebook site (Cammaerts, 2008: 361). Even though the concept of social media is rather new and thus the research on it may lack further development, it provides a dynamic to the traditional crisis communication theory and challenges Benoit and Coombs' conventional crisis communication theories which is relevant due to the problem area and field of study of the thesis. The normative views on how to use social media may also be questioned and criticized, which also have been touched on in this section.

5. Analytical Approach

After a more theoretical focus in the previous sections, the focus of the research process is now moving towards a more analytical scope. In order to answer the problem statement of the thesis, the theoretical framework will be put into practice to analyze the two cases of Starbucks and Applebee's.

Thus far, introductory considerations have been presented to outline the subject of the thesis. The problem statement and research questions have been defined working as guidelines and focus during the research process. Also, the structure and the applied research design, method of data collection and approaches to theory of science have been sketched out in the methodology section, and the theoretical framework has been compiled providing knowledge about the subject and making it possible to compose the analysis section.

The Rhetorical Arena by Johansen and Frandsen will be applied as an overall model of analysis for the introductory analysis section where the conventional crisis communication theories of Coombs and Benoit are applied to the two cases. The Rhetorical Arena will thus be applied to structure the introductory analysis section. When the two cases have been analyzed via Coombs' and Benoit's theories structured in The Rhetorical Arena, the second part of the analysis section will put conventional crisis communication theories into the context of crises on social media, where the first part more or less studies the cases from the perspective of traditional crisis communication theories. Hence, the first part of the analysis will provide the basis for the next part.

Before starting the analysis, the empirical finding in terms of company profiles of the two companies, Starbucks and Applebee's as well as the two cases in question will be outlined functioning as an introduction to the analysis section.

5.1 Starbucks Company Profile

This section will present a brief company profile of Starbucks in order to create an understanding of Starbucks as a company.

Starbucks is an American coffee house chain that opened its first store in Seattle in 1971 (Starbucks Company Profile, 2014). Today, Starbucks has about 20,000 stores in more than 60 countries, among these 12,279 in United States, 1,324 in Canada, 989 in Japan, 851 in China, and 806 in UK (Loxel, 2013) and is the largest coffee house chain in the world (Starbucks Company Profile, 2014). The range of products includes several coffee and tea drinks and also different foods (Starbucks, NY). Starbucks' mission is: "to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time". In order to live up to that, Starbucks operates with a set of principles for all employees that should be lived by every day (Starbucks Diversity and Inclusion, NY). Starbucks seeks to be a leader in diversity and inclusion and to be socially, environmentally and ethically responsible. To realize the goal of integrating diversity and inclusion, Starbucks expects the company's managers to behave according to the values and to demonstrate inclusion. The goals of diversity and inclusion apply when it comes to a diverse workforce and a diverse network of suppliers to increase cultural competencies. The company was mentioned on the list of the world's most ethical companies by Ethisphere Institute for the seventh year in a row in 2013 (Starbucks Our Company, NY). The same year, Starbucks employed 160,000 people worldwide. Starbucks' sales were of 13.66 B. USD, and the company was listed as number 76 on Forbes' "World's Most Valuable Brands List" (Forbes, 2013).

Starbucks has a corporate blog and is also present at different social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest and Google+ (Starbucks Our Company, NY).

During the case, which will be elaborated in the following section, Starbucks used these networks to communicate with the public: Facebook where Starbucks' fan page has over 35 million likes (Appendix 23) and is one of the most liked brands on Facebook (Moth, 2013), Twitter where Starbucks has about 5.5 million followers (Appendix 24) and the company's own corporate blog where Starbucks' CEO, employees, etc. write about coffee, the menu, responsibility, etc. (Starbucks, 2013).

5.2 Case Presentation - Starbucks Accused of Anti-Gay Behavior

On June 23, 2011, Starbucks was accused of homophobic behavior in a letter from a customer. The letter titled "I Know Starbucks is Not an Anti-Gay, Homophobic Company (by Policy)…. BUT…" was sent to Starbucks as well as it was posted on the blog Lil Family Blog (Appendix 31). The letter described what the customer, Missy Alison, experienced on June 12, 2011 when she, together with her daughter, was waiting for her wife Dana at a Starbucks in the Long Island, N.Y. town of Centereach (Ibid). In the letter, Alison mentioned that she had never seen such a horrible display of homophobia before. According to Alison, a male employee named Jeffrey, who turned out to be gay, was reprimanded by a female co-worker in front of customers. Apparently, the female co-worker kept on carping Jeffrey with two other employees when

Jeffrey excused himself to go to the bathroom. Alison was shocked that three colleagues conspired against Jeffrey. She knew Jeffrey's name because the woman, who Alison described as being the "leader" of the bullying, loudly yelled his name so everyone in the store could hear it. Alison stated that she was sad that her daughter witnessed the act of humiliation, homophobia and intolerance. Jeffrey was shaken and went to the bathroom to escape the harassment, and the three employees kept on talking condescendingly about Jeffrey for several minutes. Alison thought that the incident was unbelievably unprofessional and awful, especially because it happened so close to her and her daughter's table, and because it was done by a managing employee (Ibid).

The episode ended when Jeffrey handed over his keys and left the coffee house. Alison followed Jeffrey and confronted him with what she had just witnessed. Jeffrey seemed grateful for her sympathy. He explained that he thought Starbucks was a different kind of company and a tolerant place to work. He just could not take the other employees' harassment any longer. After Jeffrey left the store, Alison heard one employee say to the two others that Jeffrey should not get wounded about the things they were saying to him as he should be used to that as a homosexual (Ibid).

Alison was astonished about what she had just witnessed and wrote that she thought Jeffrey's sexuality had nothing to do with a routine rebuke at work. According to Alison, the focus of the three employees' discussion was not about a possible work-related incident, it was about prejudices against Jeffrey's lifestyle (Ibid).

In the letter, Alison made it clear that she had no politically motivated agenda, and she was not planning to boycott Starbucks. She wrote that she was not a political activist which she thought could be told by the tone of the letter. Her only agenda was that she still wanted to be able to visit Starbucks with her head held high and to reestablish her trust in the company (Ibid).

The letter went viral on Facebook and Twitter, and it had received more than 15,000 views the day after it was posted on the blog (Ibid). Other bloggers as well as the mainstream media retold the story. A blog post was for instance entitled "Patron: I Watched Starbucks Fire An Employee 2 Feet From Me For Being Gay" (Badash, 2011), and an article from The Seattle Post-Intelligencer was titled "Starbucks accused of anti-gay behavior" (Rolph, 2011) Additionally, the public commented on the blog letter (Appendix 10 - 13).

Less than 24 hours after the letter was sent, Starbucks responded via its company blog with the post "Our Dedication to Embrace Diversity" (Appendix 14). The post stated that Starbucks was unhappy with the accusations and was getting to the bottom of the incident, while it also told all the good things Starbucks had done for LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning (Mandar, 2005)) people.

Additionally, Starbucks mentioned that the reported incident did not agree with the organization's values (Appendix 14).

Starbucks has suffered from similar accusations in the past where two prior employees sued Starbucks claiming that they were dismissed for being gay (Kimberly, 2008).

The same day as Starbucks responded via its own company blog, the company made a status update on its Facebook fan page including a link to the blog post "Our Dedication to Embrace Diversity" which was attached to the status update (Appendix 15). The public commented on this status update as well, and the status update has received 670 comments (Appendix 16 - 18).

Starbucks also took action on Twitter, where it responded directly to those people who asked about the episode. One of Starbucks' tweets made it clear that the company dissociate itself from discrimination (Appendix 19). Another tweet from Starbucks (Appendix 20) was a response to OutSpokenNYC, which is "a collection of seven fearless voices, each based in New York City and at the pulse of the gay universe" (Outspoken, 2010), and the group praised Starbucks for its immediate response to the allegations and to its positioning on discrimination (outspokennyc.com).

Alan Hilowitz, a spokesperson from Starbucks, told The Seattle Post-Intelligencer on June 15th 2011 that not everything in Missy Alison's blog post was correct. Alan Hilowitz would not go into details saying that it was not easy to know what exactly was going on without being there (Appendix 32). He made it clear that the results of the investigations would not be made public (Vecsey, 2011). Alison said to the East Hampton Patch that Starbucks was taking the whole thing seriously (Appendix 33). She also told Kiro TV that Starbucks had contacted her, and in her mind, Starbucks was responding appropriately to the situation (Kirotv, 2011).

On January 24, 2012, Starbucks signed a letter together with the six prominent companies: Concur, Nike, Group Health Cooperative, RealNetworks, Vulcan and Microsoft (Allen, 2012) where support for gay marriage legislation in the state House and Senate was stated (Garber, 2012). Starbucks' statement included: "Starbucks strives to create a company culture that puts our partners first, and our company has a lengthy history of leading and supporting policies that promote equality and inclusion. This important legislation is aligned with Starbucks business practices and upholds our belief in the equal treatment of partners." (Advocate, 2012)

However, the NGO NOM did not support these viewpoints. (The National Organization for Marriage), who mentioned that companies supporting same-sex marriage would pay a "price" in Middle Eastern countries that are hostile to gay rights (Resnick, 2012). NOM's president, Brian Brown, among other things said that the organization had convinced 50,000 people to say no Starbucks product (Ibid). The organization started a campaign against Starbucks called "Dump Starbucks". The campaign has almost 20,000 likes on Facebook (Appendix 22).

5.3 Applebee's Company Profile

Just as a brief company profile of Starbucks was presented previously, this section will present a brief company profile of Applebee's in order to create an understanding of Applebee's as a company.

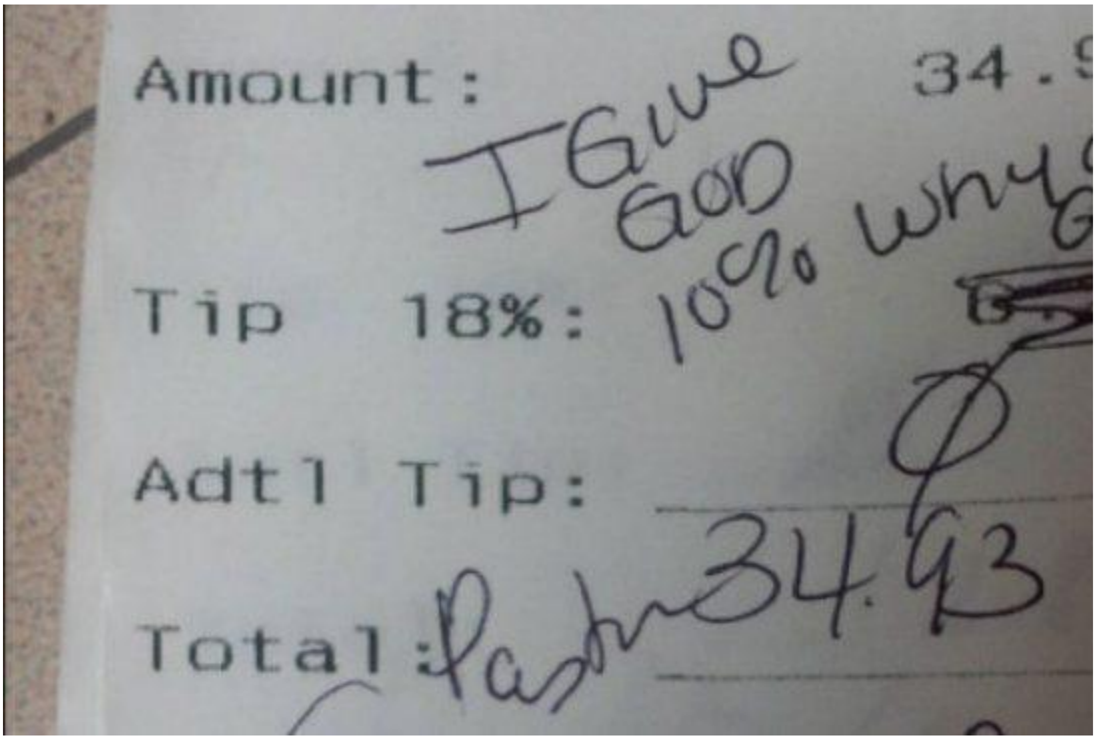
Applebee's is an American restaurant chain that opened its first restaurant in Atlanta in 1980. Today, Applebee's has about 2,000 restaurants in 15 countries (Applebee's Our History, NY). Applebee's' range of products includes beef, pork and chicken dishes, and also seafood and salads (Applebee's Our Menu, NY). Applebee's states that it strives at being a good neighbor that contributes to the local communities in which it operates. Additionally, Applebee's states that it takes concern for animals, energy consumption and embrace diversity (Applebee's Neighborhood Responsibility, NY). Applebee's total revenues in 2012 were 849.9 million USD (Applebee's Annual Report, 2006), and the company employs 28,000 employees worldwide (Applebee's FAQ, NY). Applebee's mentions itself as a great place to work, and People Report "the premier provider of human capital intelligence for the service industry" (TDn2K, NY), has granted Applebee's the Heart of the Workplace Award, and Forbes called Applebee's one of America's best-managed companies. Additionally, Applebee's states that a job at the company is a career in a pleasant social environment, and also that the company respects individual differences to continue long-term success (Applebee's Awards & Commendations, NY); moreover, Applebee's mentions that its corporate responsibility starts with its employees (Applebee's Linkedn, 2014).

Applebee's is present on the social media channels Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube (Applebee's, 2014). During the case, which will be elaborated in the following section, Applebee's used the social media channels Facebook and Twitter to communicate with the public. Applebee's nearly has 5.2 million likes on its Facebook fan page (Appendix 25) and has almost 265,000 followers on Twitter (Appendix 26).

5.4 Case Presentation - Applebee's Fires Waitress for Posting Pastor's Receipt

On January 30' 2013, the waitress Chelsea Welch was dismissed at an Applebee's restaurant in St. Louis in USA (Rush, 2013). Alois Bell, pastor of the World Deliverance Ministries Church in Granite City, was hosting a large party at the Applebee's restaurant in St. Louis on January 25, 2013 (Weisbaum, 2013). Chelsea's colleague served that party, and as usual, an 18 percent tip was routinely added to the bill. The pastor crossed out the 18 percent on the receipt and wrote “0” instead. Additionally, she added the following message to the receipt: “I give God 10% why do you get 18?” (Ibid). American restaurants normally add an automatic tip for large parties, and there were 20 persons at the table that night according to Chelsea who said that larger parties receive an automatic tip, which the computer automatically add to the bill at larger parties (Reddit, 2013). Chelsea took a picture of the pastor’s receipt and uploaded it on the social sharing site reddit.com (Weisbaum, 2013).

The original photo is no longer available on reddit.com, but can still be found on the internet:



(Appendix 1).

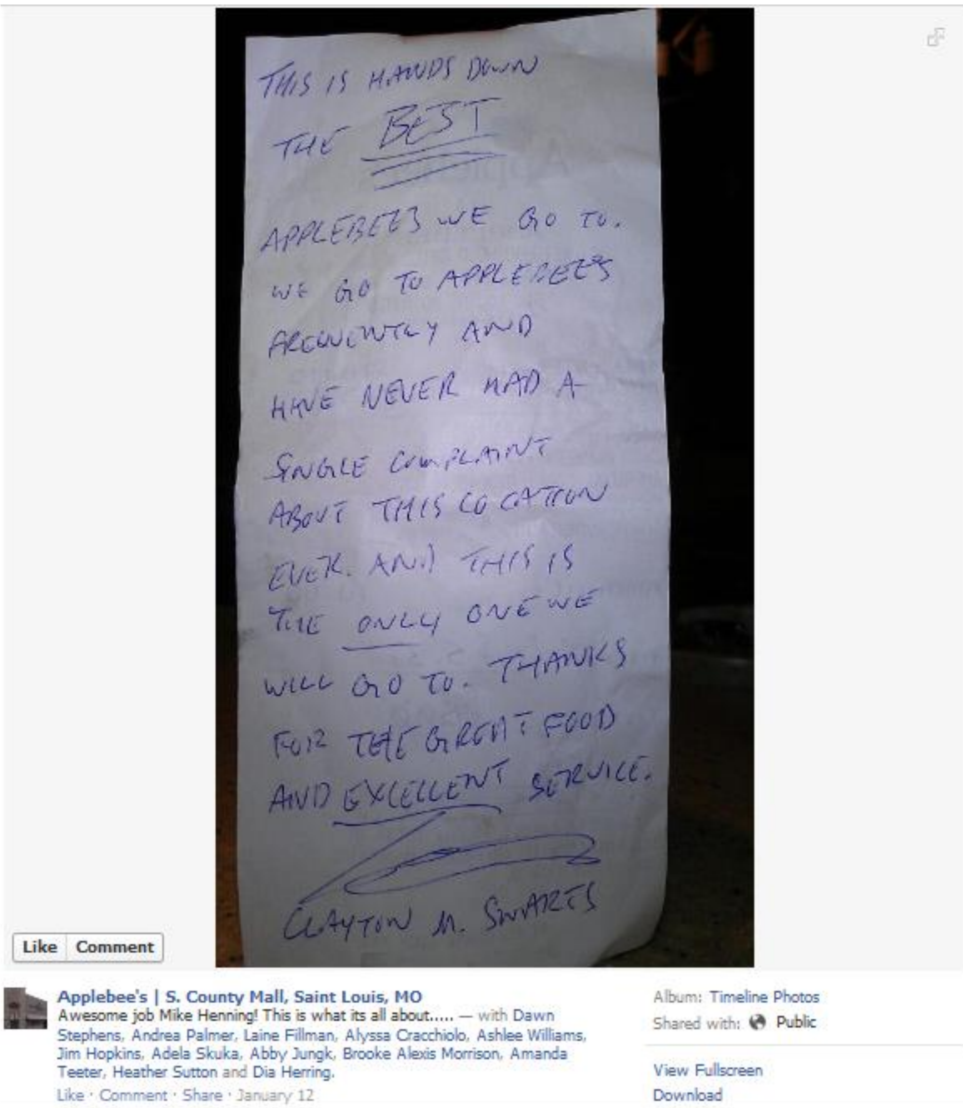
On January 30, 2013, the pastor contacted the manager of the Applebee’s restaurant and demanded that everyone was dismissed, servers as well as managers (Weisbaum, 2013). Subsequently, the pastor said she regretted her own behavior having brought embarrassment to her church and ministry (The Smoking Gun, 2013).

Chelsea told The Consumerist that she posted the receipt as a joke (Morran, 2013). However, the pastor did not think this was humorous and told The Smoking Gun that she did not expect to see her signature all over the internet (The Smoking Gun, 2013). Chelsea said that she had no intentions of hurting anyone, and that she had contacted the moderator of reddit.com to remove any personal information on the post note. All she wanted was to share the picture as she thought it was amusing (Ibid).

Applebee's confirmed the dismissal of Chelsea Welch with a statement on its website where it made clear that the guests' personal information is private, and that disciplinary actions had been taken (Appendix 34).

Chelsea was surprised that she got dismissed and claimed she had been an appreciated employee hoping to be promoted shortly. She argued that she did not represent Applebee's when she posted the note, and that she did everything she could to protect the identity of everyone involved. Even though Applebee's claimed that Chelsea violated the company's rules and guideline, Chelsea said that she did not violate any particular rules in the company handbook. Chelsea was surprised that Applebee's valued its customers more than its employees (Morran, 2013).

Despite Applebee's' reaction to Chelsea's actions, Applebee's posted the below photo a few weeks before the Chelsea incident went viral.



(Appendix 5).

The photo from an Applebee's restaurant in Missouri clearly shows the signature of the person. The person behind the Facebook page "If you can't afford to tip, you can't afford to go out and eat!" took a screenshot of the post before it was deleted from Applebee's Facebook fan page (Ibid).

People began to post angry messages on Applebee's' Facebook page, and Applebee's posted a status update on its Facebook page on February 1, 2013 stating that Applebee's wished that the situation had never happened as its guests' confidence is the most important thing for the company (Appendix 2).

Applebee's first status update reached 17,000 comments by 2 a.m. the night after it was posted (Stollar, 2013). In the middle of the night, Applebee's began to post comments in the thread to the status update, where it over and over again tagged people in comments that were repeated several times in the thread (Appendix 37).

Later that night, Applebee's was still tagging people while explaining to them how much the company cared, and that people did not know the real facts of the incident (Appendix 29). The same night, Applebee's made a new status update to answer people's comments. Applebee's stated that it was pleased to get the opportunity to explain what really happened as well as once again stating that the guests' privacy was vital, that disciplinary actions against Chelsea had been taken, and that the company wished the incident had never happened (Appendix 4).

Thousands of people commented on the threads and among other things claimed that Applebee's behavior was unforgiveable until responsibility was taken. It was also claimed that Applebee's had begun to delete posts in the thread with hundreds of new comments per minute (Appendix 21). Applebee's was also accused on Twitter for deleting Facebook comments, but Applebee's denied that (Appendix 8 + Appendix 30).

The next morning within the same 24 hours as the first status update, Applebee's posted a new status update on Facebook in which it once again explained the real facts of the incident (Appendix 3). In addition to the buzz on Applebee's social media sites, boycott movements such as "Boycott Applebee's" (Appendix 6), "Boycott Applebee's for Chelsea Welch" (Appendix 7) and "Protesting Applebee's until a formal apology is made" (Appendix 9) were established on Facebook.

Kevin Mortensen, an Applebee's spokesperson, said to The Toronto Star that the incident was undesirable, while he supported the Facebook status updates saying that Applebee's guests' privacy was essential in the company and in the hospitality sector (Appendix 35).

On February 7, 2013, Applebee's and its president Mike Archer released the statement "You are right, and we apologize" on Applebee's' corporate website. Mike Archer mentioned that the communication after the incident should have been better, and that the company will learn from its mistakes. Mike also mentioned that an independent social media expert had been hired to help Applebee's to improve when it comes to the community management process, and that all comments, positive as well as negative, were welcome (Appendix 36).

5.4.1 Outline of "Boycott Applebee's for Chelsea Welch" Questionnaire

The founder and moderator of the Facebook page "Boycott Applebee's for Chelsea Welch" has agreed to answer some questions regarding the case. The boycott community was established to spread the message that Applebee's actions were wrong according to the moderator. The community was established on Facebook because this medium reaches a lot of people - 1.19 billion active users in October 2013 (Appendix 27).

Before the incident, the moderator of the boycott community loved Applebee's food and the friendly atmosphere. However, he/she will never visit Applebee's again after the incident. He/she does not think that the incident was handled professionally, especially not on the social media (Ibid).

5.4.2 Outline of Chelsea Welch Questionnaire

Chelsea Welch has agreed to answer some questions regarding the case. She states that she posted the photo of the receipt on the internet because she thought it was funny (Appendix 28).

The photo was posted on reddit.com as Chelsea spends a lot of time on that medium, and she mentions that she did not have an intended strategy even though she was accused for starting a witch-hunt of a Christian on an atheist-specific forum (Ibid). She repeats that she is just an ordinary Reddit user, who posted the photo because she thought it was fun (Ibid).

Before the incident, Chelsea regarded Applebee's as a huge monotonous corporation, like many other businesses, where she could get her paycheck. After the incident she feels more or less the same about the company, and she understands why Applebee's handled the situation the way it did when she was dismissed (Ibid).

Even though Chelsea understands why Applebee's dismissed her, she thinks Applebee's' communication regarding the incident was a complete mess and very incompetent. Chelsea says that she was overwhelmed by the public's reaction and support on social media. However, she does not think that the incident and the subsequent buzz on social media have affected Applebee's.

6. Analysis Part 1

The analysis is divided in two sections: the first section will be presented as a Starbucks section and an Applebee's section respectively applying The Rhetorical Arena as a model of analysis. In part two of the analysis, a comparative analysis will be conducted where the social media theory also will be applied. The theoretical framework will be applied to the two cases separately to analyze the two crises and how the organizations' used crisis communication during the crises. Subsequently, a comparative analysis of the two cases will be made in order to discuss what the outcomes of the two cases may say about the applicability of conventional crisis communication models on social media and what lessons could be learned from the two cases about conventional crisis communication on social media.

6.1 Starbucks

6.1.1 Context Model

Above all, it seems relevant to determine when the arena opened in the Starbucks case, and when the different players entered in order to analyze their communicative actions. Based on the empirical data, what indirectly triggered the crisis incident was Missy Alison's experience of homophobia when she visited Starbucks in the Longs Island, N.Y. Town of Centereach on June 12,2011 (Appendix 31). As a result, it would seem that this incident opened the arena as Alison can be regarded as a key player in the case sending and posting the letter the following day (Ibid), which may more directly have started the crisis incident as the letter went viral on Facebook and Twitter. Alison was the first person entering the arena with her experience and letter. Starbucks already entered the arena less than 24 hours after the letter was sent to Starbucks and posted on the family blog. Starbucks responded to the letter via its company blog with the statement "Our Dedication to Embrace Diversity" (Appendix 14), and also on Facebook and Twitter where it linked to the response on the blog (Appendix 15 + 19). On Facebook, the first public comment to Starbucks' update was made one minute after the update was posted (Appendix 16), and the last was made on June 29, 2011 (Appendix 38). Thus, stakeholders in terms of individuals on Facebook entered the arena rapidly after Starbucks' response.

Having determined the starting point of the event and the opening of the arena, it may also be argued that the arena is not completely closed yet as the communication among other things took place on Facebook, which is argued to function as a timeless and continuing discussion as mentioned in section 4.6.2. Moreover, it is plausible that the original blog post on Missy Alison's Family Blog will not be lost in a wealth of information and news on social media platforms as it is mentioned in section 4.6.3 that blogging is more enduring than other social media platforms. As a result, stakeholders will easily be able to find the information again when it is online. With that in mind, it may be suggested that the climax of the event was in June 2011 as the last public comment on Facebook to Starbucks' post was on June 29 (Appendix 38). Even though the last comment on Facebook is more than three years old, it can be argued that the arena remains open because the incident may evolve later if Starbucks suffers from new similar incidents on diversity issues in the future. For Starbucks this may mean that it always must consider its communication about diversity extra carefully in order not to stir up any sleeping stakeholders such as Missy Alison.

6.1.2 Text Model

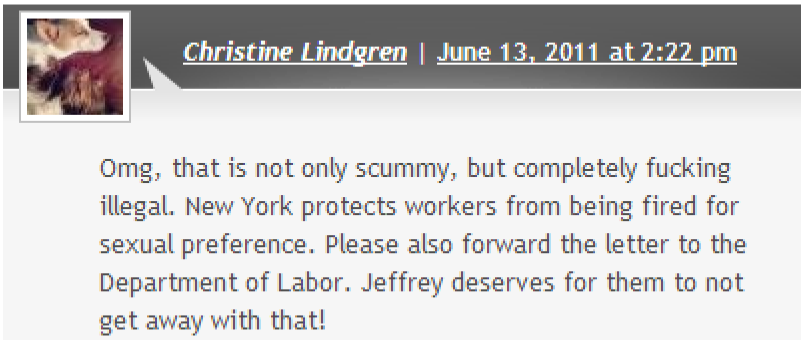
As mentioned in section 4.4.2, the Text Model is based on the sender, the receiver and the crisis communication. The crisis communication is transmitted via the parameters: context, medium, genre, and text. By implication, the focus is both on the communicated words and also the circumstances in which the crisis communication is mediated.

6.1.2.1 Context

In the contextual parameter, stage one of Coombs' SCCT will be applied in order to identify the crisis type and intensifying factors or in other words the situational context. Thus, the crisis situation and context, and not only the spoken or written words, will be embraced in the analysis.

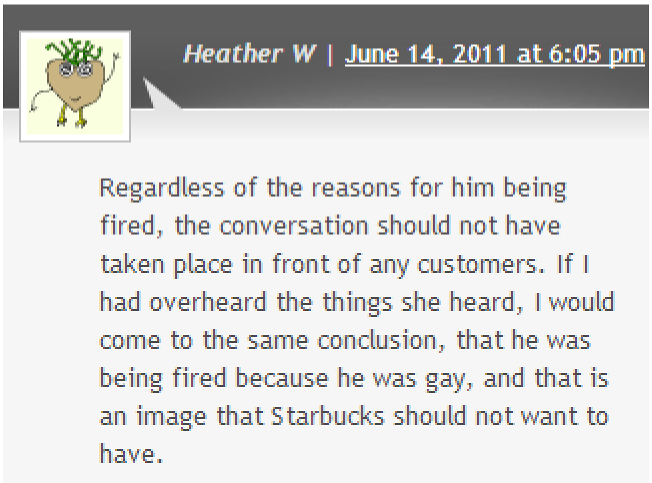
The organizational context was described in the company profiles, and in these sections it was clarified that the two organizations in question have American roots. Moreover, both incidents took place in America. Thus, the national-social context is American in both cases. Even though the contextual focus of the analysis is on the situational context, the social context cannot be neglected as the American culture and history naturally played a role due to the American context of the organizations and the place where the incidents took place. In regards to the topic of homophobia, it is for instance plausible to presume that if a similar episode had taken place in a culture where the public and also the legislation were more hostile to gay people, Starbucks' communication effort would have been different. Perhaps Starbucks would have stood by its positioning in order to appear convergent globally and in order not to stir up stakeholders in other cultures that normally are more accommodating to gay people. However, in the age of social media where information spread very fast, it may also be argued that national-culture plays a smaller role as people, regardless where they are, potentially can be affected by information and communication on social media. With that in mind, the American public is probably the most important for Starbucks due to the organization's origin and also because most of Starbucks' stores are located in America. Consequently, when Starbucks plans its overall communication strategy, it seems likely that the choice of phrases, words and views more or less intentionally takes departure in the organization's American roots.

When Missy Alison accused Starbucks of homophobia, a potential crisis began. Coombs argues that when stakeholders' expectations are violated, a crisis might be ahead as mentioned in section 4.3.1. In Alison's letter it is clear that her expectations of Starbucks were violated. The same was obviously the case with Jeffrey as he said: "I came to this company because I thought it was supposed to be better. I thought that it was a positive and tolerant work place to work" (Appendix 31). Thus, a customer's and an employee's expectations were violated, and it is likely that other customers' or potential customers' expectations were violated as well. The following public comments to Missy Alison's blog posts are examples of potential customers who may feel that Starbucks did not live up to their expectations:


Christine Lindgren | June 13, 2011 at 2:22 pm

Omg, that is not only scummy, but completely fucking illegal. New York protects workers from being fired for sexual preference. Please also forward the letter to the Department of Labor. Jeffrey deserves for them to not get away with that!

(Appendix 10).


Heather W | June 14, 2011 at 6:05 pm

Regardless of the reasons for him being fired, the conversation should not have taken place in front of any customers. If I had overheard the things she heard, I would come to the same conclusion, that he was being fired because he was gay, and that is an image that Starbucks should not want to have.

(Appendix 11).

Both comments above indicate a belief that this was wrong, and that more should be done in order to make things right and ensure justice. However, the statement: "Jeffrey deserves for them to not get away with that" (Appendix 10) may indicate a hostile tone towards the involved employees rather than Starbucks as an organization. Also, the statement: "[…] that is an image that Starbucks should not want to have" (Appendix 11) neither seems hostile towards Starbucks as it may seem to be a well-known fact that Starbucks does not want such an image (perhaps because of its promoted values concerning LGBT people). Even though both Christine Lindgren and Heather W are disgusted by the incident, the anger towards

Starbucks seems limited among other things because their comments do not imply statements such as "that is typical Starbucks", "I hate Starbucks for this" or the like.

With that in mind, as some stakeholders' expectations may have been violated, this would indicate that these stakeholders believe that Starbucks is responsible for the crisis event. If that is the case, taking these stakeholders' interpretations into consideration may indicate that the crisis type, according to Coombs' crisis clusters, can be regarded as *organizational misdeeds* under *preventable crises* where the reputational threat is severe and the attribution of responsibility is strong, as mentioned in section 4.3.4.1, among other things because Starbucks did not live up to the its promoted values described in section 5.1. When the crisis type is preventable, stakeholders will often believe that the organization is responsible as mentioned in section 4.3.4.1. However, a lot of individuals on social media were also positive towards Starbucks and its response to the allegations:


4,425 people like this.

Sabrina Guyton-Wright I can't wait to work for this company! So much love.
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like · 1

Jeremy Weddle Well I have been applying to work at Starbucks for about 2 years but with no luck
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like

Grétar Ágúst Agnarsson Lol
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like

Colin Heurlin As someone who works at a starbucks....if you only knew where you were.
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like · 1

Jozef Batora I want
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like

Michelle Bell Dang...clearly I've missed something.
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 3

Paige Post i'm so glad that a company out there supports the LGBT community
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 2

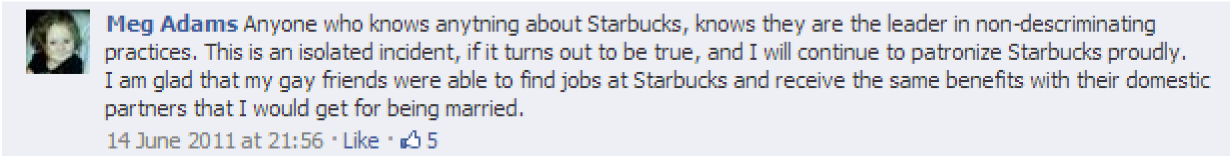
Quan Chandler I want to work for starbucks...i love the envoirment
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 1

Scott Michael Wilson The Prescott Valley, AZ employees rock and don't discriminate (daily customers opinion)
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like

Holly Cutroneo I just read the original blog regarding this and am as horrified as the poster.
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 8

Christopher Bear Ford Love. That's why I love working for Starbucks. I cam be myself. And be part of a great company.
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 2

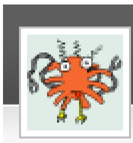
(Appendix 16).


Meg Adams Anyone who knows anytning about Starbucks, knows they are the leader in non-descriminating practices. This is an isolated incident, if it turns out to be true, and I will continue to patronize Starbucks proudly. I am glad that my gay friends were able to find jobs at Starbucks and receive the same benefits with their domestic partners that I would get for being married.
14 June 2011 at 21:56 · Like · 5

(Appendix 17).

These comments from the public are examples of stakeholders who mainly do not seem to attribute a lot of responsibility to Starbucks as an organization. Some of them actually praise Starbucks for its position on homosexuals. However, Holly Cutroneo's comment (Appendix 16) is not positive. But again, it is hard to determine whether the comment indicates horror towards the isolated incident of homophobia or Starbucks as an organization. Generally, in the research process for the thesis, it has been hard to find comments, where Starbucks is directly accused for being a homophobic organization, among comments which mainly are positive when it comes to this issue in connection with Starbucks or comments that first of all indicate horror towards the isolated incident and also homophobia. Meg Adams (Appendix 17), a random individual, believes it was an isolated incident, and this interpretation, together with other positive attitudes, may indicate that the reputational threat is mild, and the attribution of responsibility in general is little. The crisis type may in other words be regarded as *workplace violence* where employees attack another employee. Thus, if that is the case, Starbucks will, according to Coombs, be seen as a victim of the crisis, which may reflect some of the stakeholders' attitudes that Starbucks is being unfairly accused regarding a discrimination issue – an issue where Starbucks actually communicates in favor of diversity. As a result, Starbucks may benefit from its previous proactive communication regarding diversity as some stakeholders may have had a positive attitude towards Starbucks beforehand on the subject of diversity and LGBT people. For example, Starbucks claims that it "has supported the LGBT community for many years" and embracing diversity is a part of the organization's core values (Appendix 14). Thus, it would seem that Starbucks' proactive approach and image when it comes to their views on LGBT people have worked as what Coombs refers to as intensifying factors. Within this context it is plausible that some stakeholders think Starbucks has treated LGBT people well in the past, which indicates that Starbucks' prior reputation reduces the reputational threat that some stakeholders' attribution of responsibility may cause. Even though Starbucks has suffered from similar accusations in the past where two employees sued the company for similar reasons of homophobia (Kimberly, 2008), it may be argued that Starbucks does not suffer from its negative crisis history as its overall positive image and reputation on this issue is considered more important among the stakeholders, most of whom seem to be positive towards Starbucks despite Missy's accusations. So instead of having a situation where stakeholders feel further anger towards the organization because they think Starbucks has not learned from previous mistakes, it seems as most stakeholders on social media actually attribute lower levels of crisis responsibility to Starbucks and may even have evoked feelings of sympathy with Starbucks.

However, if it is assumed that Starbucks has a good reputation on this issue among most stakeholders, it seems reasonable to presume that some stakeholders were very disappointed when they heard about the incident. For instance, Jeffrey said that he applied for the job at Starbucks because it was a tolerant company. It would consequently seem that when Starbucks takes a very clear stand on diversity and tolerance, some stakeholders may also believe that the organization has further responsibility for avoiding such cases. With that in mind, it seems that Starbucks mainly benefited from its positioning as it received a lot of positive comments. Actually, it can be argued that Starbucks used the situation to strategically raise attention on its diversity work and its success as an employer. For example, the statement on the company blog contains the following sentence: “We’re also proud of the 100% score we received on the Corporate Equality Index from the Human Rights Campaign.” (Appendix 14), which is an example of Starbucks using a potential negative crisis proactively by communicating about its past good work, and from the stakeholders’ reactions, it would seem that Starbucks managed to do it in a trustworthy manner without provoking the public. Some stakeholders could possibly have been offended by a statement that some may think is rather self-praising in a situation where the organization, or at least some of its employees, did not seem to have complied with Starbucks’ promoted values. Nevertheless, even Missy Alison, who started the accusations, believes that Starbucks was responding appropriately to the situation (Kirotv, 2011). With that in mind, it is basically not a positive thing for Starbucks to be associated with homophobia, also because such an incident may question the organization’s credibility regarding its support for LGBT people and diversity in general. Holly (Appendix 16) is an example of an individual who first off all is disgusted by the incident. She does not directly mention her attitude towards Starbucks in this context, but it is plausible that Starbucks’ image when it comes to LGBT people and diversity have been weakened in the eyes of some people. Moreover, the following comment with the statement: “If any of the story is true then that entire Starbucks crew screwed up royally and should be terminated with extreme haste and a black mark placed on their permanent work record. Fired for criminal activity. To say the least this is another reason not to like Starbucks burnt bean coffee” (Appendix 12) indicates an individual who attributed responsibility to the employees as he mentioned that the employees should be punished, which also support the assumption that the crisis type can be regarded as workplace violence. However, the criticism also reached besides the incident as Starbucks’ coffee was criticized. Thus, Starbucks was also faced with negativity, and William is an example of an individual using the opportunity to criticize Starbucks’ coffee.



william | June 15, 2011 at 1:34 am

The minute the matter of sexuality in the work place was used in a negative public discussion in the workplace it became an illegal act and it should be dealt with by the authorities. In fact if Jeffery should wish to press criminal charges it may be possible to file sexual harassment charges in addition to those harassment in the workplace charges. If there are more customers witnessing this encounter they should make known to either the one who started this thread or to Starbucks so that they have the opportunity to make amends for the criminal behavior of their management and other employees. Yes, it is actually a criminal act to publicly humiliate an employee in front of customers or other employees. It is also illegal in most states to openly dismiss an employee in front of other employees.

If any of the story is true then that entire Starbucks crew screwed up royally and should be terminated with extreme haste and a black mark placed on their permanent work record. Fired for criminal activity.

To say the least this is another reason not to like Starbucks burnt bean coffees.

(Ibid).

Altogether, applying Coombs' crisis types, the two crisis types organizational misdeeds and workplace violence have been suggested depending on stakeholders' view on the incident and Starbucks as an organization and a workplace. However, what seems to have been the most essential when it comes to stakeholders' attribution of responsibility and views of Starbucks is the organization's prior reputation and general image on the issue of diversity. Thus, Starbucks seems to have been well prepared for such a crisis due to its image on the issue.

6.1.2.2 Text, Media and Genre

In the text parameter, Benoit's Image Restoration Theory as well as Coombs' Crisis Response Theories will be applied in order to analyze Starbucks' crisis communication according to these two conventional crisis communication theories or strategies. In accordance with the scope of the thesis, this section will not discuss genre even though it is a part of The Rhetorical Arena. Neither, will this section focus on media as media will be discussed in part 2 of the analysis where the social media theory will be embraced more thoroughly.

During the crisis, Starbucks both communicated to the public through traditional media and social media, and Starbucks' first move was to post a statement on its company blog. Subsequently, short updates including a link to the company blog statement were made on Twitter and Facebook. The two updates on Twitter and Facebook may more or less be regarded as informational updates regarding the incident at the same time as Starbucks dissociated itself from discrimination.

The statement on the company blog titled "Our Dedication to Embrace Diversity" may be argued to be the strategy that Benoit refers to as a bolstering strategy, as mentioned in section 4.3.2, where the organization tries to deflect stakeholders from the negative consequences by mentioning its past good work for example stating: "We have one of the largest Employer Resource Groups for LGBT employees in the United States […] (Appendix 14). As mentioned in section 4.3.2, Benoit argues that this strategy works best when the emphasized positivism is relevant to the accusations against the organization, and it can be argued that Starbucks' bolstering strategy, highlighting its values and prior work for diversity and LGBT people, is very relevant to accusations of homophobia. This strategy is, as mentioned in section 4.3.4.2, what Coombs refers to as a reminding strategy where the organization reminds it stakeholders about its past good work. Thus, from the positive reactions from stakeholders, it is plausible that Starbucks succeeded using this strategy to indirectly downplay the accusations at the same time as reinforcing positive emotions among stakeholders. Starbucks' combination of taking the incident seriously for instance by stating: "We are disheartened by the allegations […] and are taking immediate measures to investigate and take any steps necessary to make this right" (Appendix 14) and highlighting its past good work seems to have awakened positive reactions from some stakeholders and calmed others, such as Missy Alison, down. It is argued that Starbucks indirectly downplayed the accusations by focusing its communication on its past work and reputation. However, Starbucks did not openly belittle the incident, but communicated that it would be taken seriously.

One day after Starbucks' first move, Starbucks, represented by spokesperson Alan Hilowitz, communicated via the traditional media. Hilowitz admitted that the situation could have been handled differently, but the quote: “What she saw and what she heard was not exactly what was going on […]” (Appendix 32) can be suggested to be a strategy that both Coombs and Benoit refer to as attacking the accuser, as it may be argued that Starbucks with the above quote tried to reduce the credibility of Missy Alison as an accuser. As mentioned in section 4.3.4.2, Coombs argues that this strategy is an aggressive denial strategy. However, Hilowitz did not deny the claims saying: “[…] we could have handled this a bit better and not handled it in front of customers.” (Appendix 32). Benoit, on the other hand, argues that this strategy is a strategy that tries to reduce the offensiveness of the event, which more seems to be Starbucks’ aim rather than denying the accusations. Following on from these thoughts, this would indicate that Starbucks takes responsibility while softly attacking the accuser. Nevertheless, the focus seems to be on bolstering and reminding about Starbucks’ values and previous work. Coombs argues that bolstering strategies are intended to build a positive connection with stakeholders, which as mentioned seems to have been achieved.

Moreover, it seems as Starbucks with its positioning on homosexual people and its overall communication regarding the issue has taken a conscious and a strategic choice about aiming at a specific kind of customers and thus not aiming at another group. Taking such a clear political stance will obviously appeal to the stakeholders who have similar views and not appeal to the ones in opposition. The NGO NOM for instance started a boycott movement against Starbucks and its products (Resnick, 2012), and the shareholder Tom Strobhar also criticized Starbucks for supporting liberal causes resulting in negative reactions from the conservative customers (Medina, 2012). However, Starbucks seems to have benefited from its explicit views in this case by creating a clear profile and identity and thereby perhaps also gaining from more loyal customers in the sense that some may also choose Starbucks to signal liberal views or may even think they support a good cause when drinking their coffee at Starbucks.

6.2 Applebee’s

6.2.1 Context Model

Determining when the arena opened, it may be suggested that it did on January 30, 2013 when Chelsea Welch was dismissed. She was dismissed due to the actions that took place at the Applebee’s restaurant in St. Louis on January 25, 2013 where the pastor wrote the mentioned note (Appendix 1). However, it is suggested that the arena more explicitly opened January 30, when Chelsea was dismissed as it can be argued that Applebee’s troubles started that date. The pastor contacted Applebee’s and demanded everyone fired, and subsequently Chelsea was not working for Applebee’s anymore. As a consequence, the pastor can be regarded as a key player as she was the one who Applebee’s wanted to protect. Likewise, Chelsea can be regarded as a key player as she was the one who posted the receipt on social media and consequently received the dismissal notice that started the commotion. Hence, one may assume that

Applebee's wanted to set an example to show care for its customers and call on other employees not to behave like Chelsea as the company made a statement in which it made clear that it "[…] apologized to the Guest and has taken disciplinary action with the Team Member […]" (Appendix 34). Moreover, the statement "We value our Guests' trust above all" (Ibid) may indicate that Applebee's wanted to communicate that the customer is the most important interested party of the company.

Thus, Chelsea, the pastor and obviously Applebee's were the first players to enter the arena as they were the ones involved in Chelsea's dismissal. After Applebee's confirmed the circumstances on its website, people began to comment on the issue on Applebee's Facebook page on February 1, which is why this would indicate that stakeholders in terms of individuals on social media entered the arena two days after it opened.

As was argued in the Starbucks case, it would seem that even though the peak of Applebee's' crisis event was in January and February 2013 due to the dismissal in January and the buzz on social media in February, the arena is still not entirely closed as the communication on Applebee's social media sites is a continuous discussion which may rekindle if Applebee's suffers from similar incidents in the future. Consequently, it is plausible that Applebee's must consider its staff management extra carefully in the future in order not to stir up sleeping stakeholders such as individuals on Facebook.

6.2.2 Text Model

Following the structure of the text model of The Rhetorical Arena, Applebee's' crisis will be examined more thoroughly.

6.2.2.1 Context

In the contextual parameter, crisis type and intensifying factors will be examined via Coombs' SCCT in order to embrace the context of Applebee's' crisis event.

In regards to the national-cultural context, Chelsea Welch said: "Truly, the most interesting part of this entire incident was getting a look at how truly ignorant the American public was of the sorry state of the job known as waiting tables […] I'm incredibly grateful to all of the people who took my experience as inspiration to boycott Applebee's, tip their servers extra, or just get more educated about tipping etiquette." (Appendix 28). Thus, she embraces the American public and the topic of tipping servers, and it does not seem unlikely to presume that Applebee's' incident would not have taken place in a country with another culture when it comes to tipping – for instance, if tipping was not such an important part of a waiter's' salary, or if waiters had a higher minimum wage, the posted receipt would probably not have carried the same kind of interest as tipping in some cultures probably are regarded more as a bonus instead of an essential part of an income.

When Applebee's fired Chelsea Welch, a potential crisis began as a lot of individuals on social media thought that Applebee's handling of the incident was reprehensible. Random individuals for example posted the following on Applebee's Facebook page:

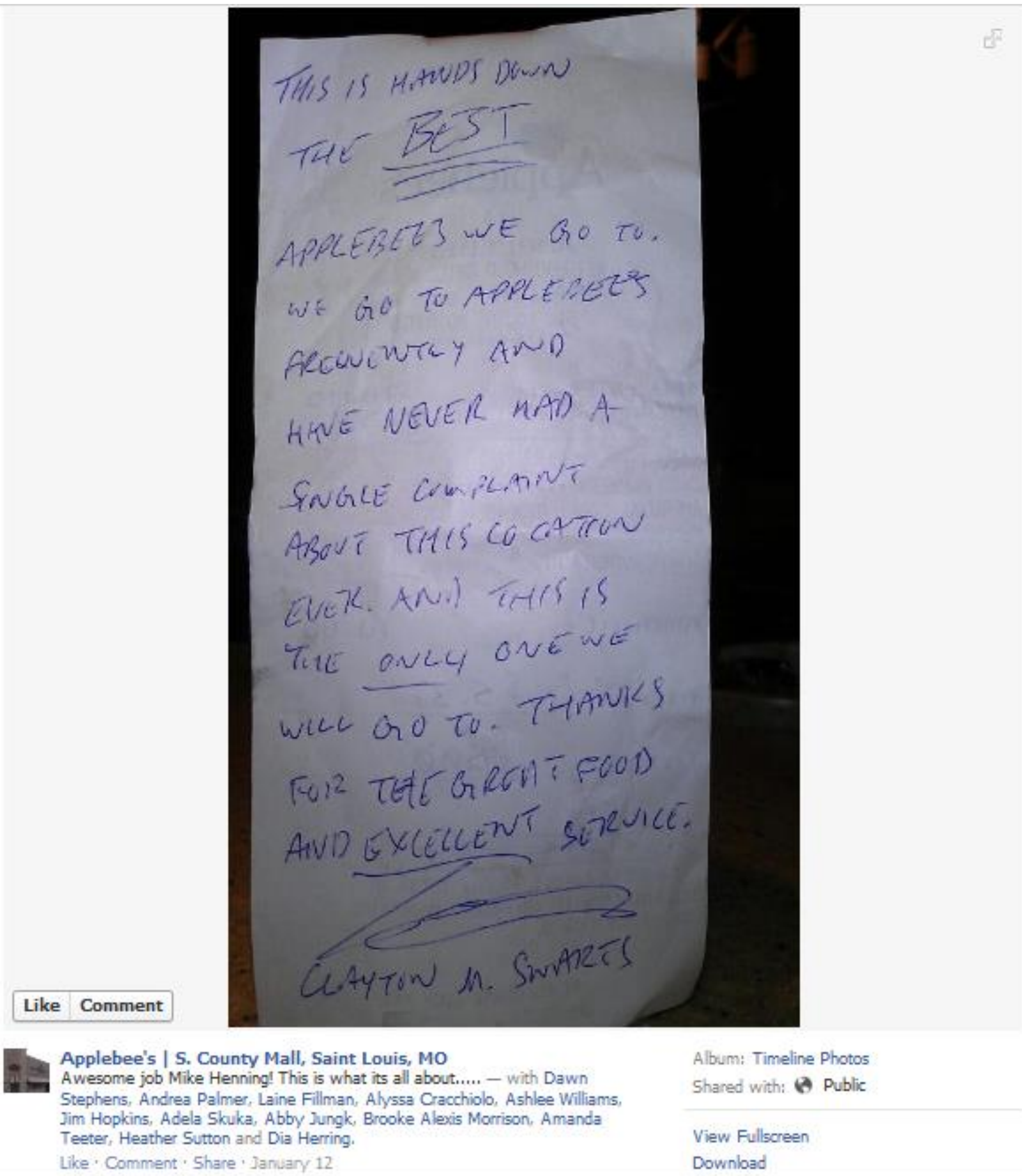
> **Nicole Freeman** Applebee's is easily the most disgusting restaurant to which I've ever been. The drinks are heavily watered-down and the food is inedible. Your PR nightmare is doing the country a favor. Maybe a good restaurant chain will take your place when you inevitably go bankrupt. Let's also not forget the fact that you violated your one privacy policy with a positive review from written by by a customer whose name was clearly visible.
> 16 February 2013 at 17:57 · Like · 6

> **Ray Grimmett** This isn't going away Applebee's until you take responsibility for the poor treatment of your employee's, I was aregular customer, as was my family, we are determined to boycott your restaurant until you make a formal apology and try to make things right again. Shame on you, and I hope your business suffers, you fat cat corporate vulchers. I hope you can see that this isn't going away, I thank you for making this into a movement for the rights of underpaid servers and waitstaff everywhere. See you tommorow, nope not EVER!
> 7 February 2013 at 00:48 · Like · 5

> **Lisa Malynn Kent** But you share positive receips and comments so HOW is that different? This was the last reason to eat at your joke of a restaurant. First you stand against giving your low paid employees the chance at real healthcare and now this. What a shitacular company!!!!
> 6 February 2013 at 04:31 · Like · 7

(Appendix 21).

These examples may indicate that some stakeholders' expectations of Applebee's were violated. For instance, Liss Malynn Kent's statement, "But you share positive receips (sic!) and comments so HOW is that different?" (Appendix 21) is an example of a reaction that points out discontent with Applebee's' double standard in this matter dismissing an employee for a similar act to what Applebee's did a few weeks earlier when it posted the following note:



(Appendix 5).

Ray Grimmett's statement: "This isn't going away Applebee's until you take responsibility for the poor treatment of your employee's (sic!) […] we are determined to boycott your restaurant until you make a formal apology and try to make things right (Appendix 21) indicates that some people were willing to boycott Applebee's because of Applebee's' handling of the incident.

Nicole Freeman's statement: "Applebee's is easily the most disgusting restaurant to which I've ever been. The drinks are heavily watered-down and the food is inedible" (Ibid) indicates that the anger among some people resulted in further grievances which did not directly have anything to do with the dismissal of Chelsea. Thus, this would indicate that the negative focus on Applebee's reached other topics such as the food, the working conditions and double standard of morality in addition to the isolated incidents.

Moreover, different boycott groups (Appendix 6+7+9) were established on Facebook because of the dismissal. From some of the public's comments on social media, it seems that they think Applebee's is responsible for the crisis being the part that dismissed Chelsea. From this approach, it could be suggested that the crisis type according to Coombs' crisis clusters can be regarded as what he refers to as organizational misdeeds as the dismissal was performed by Applebee's due to what the organization stated was against its company policy. Consequently, the reputational threat is severe, and the attribution of responsibility is strong in such a crisis according to Coombs. From Applebee's point of view it may be argued that the crisis can be seen as what is referred to as workplace violence as the isolated incident happened at a franchisee. However, as Applebee's subsequently kept supporting the dismissal on social media, it seems sensible to regard the crisis type as organizational misdeeds even though Applebee's seemed to think it had reacted appropriately at that time, although stakeholders on social media disagreed.

Nothing in the empirical data indicates that Applebee's suffers from a negative crisis history or any similar incidents in the past that could worsen the crisis.

By applying Coombs' crisis types, two crisis types have been suggested depending on whether it is from Applebee's or the stakeholders' point of view. Additionally, it should be taken into consideration that different stakeholders, also individuals on social media, may view the incident differently and some may even have supported Applebee's. Nevertheless, the typical reaction from the public on social media, such as: " […] we are determined to boycott your restaurant until you make a formal apology and try to make things right" (Appendix 21) indicates that the crisis could be regarded as a preventable organizational misdeed when the crisis is seen from the stakeholders' approach as a formal apology may be regarded as an apology from the top management as it seems to be top management's decision to insist on the dismissal due to Applebee's communication on social media which seemed to present the whole organization and not just the franchisee.

6.2.2.2 Text, Media and Genre

During the crisis, Applebee's both communicated through social media and traditional media. Applebee's first communicative action after Chelsea's dismissal was a statement on its website (Appendix 34). In the statement, Applebee's confirmed Chelsea's dismissal and made it clear that the franchisee had apologized to the guest (Ibid). This statement can be regarded as an informational declaration where Applebee's wanted to come out in the open confirming what happened.

In the context of conventional crisis communication, it would seem that the statement can be regarded as what Benoit refers to as a provocation strategy as the statement: "Our franchisee […] has taken disciplinary action with the Team Member for violating their Guest's right to privacy. The individual is no longer employed […]" (Appendix 34) may be argued to be communicated in order to claim that the act (the dismissal) was a response to the act of another (Chelsea). It may also be argued that by firing Chelsea, Applebee's could do what Benoit, as mentioned in section 4.3.2, refers to as shifting the blame, and what Coombs, as mentioned in section 4.3.4.2, refers to as scapegoating where a person outside the organization is blamed to remove attention from the organization. It thus seems reasonable to assume that Applebee's tried to clear itself of charge by blaming Chelsea, who was not a member of the organization after she was dismissed. She was the one who performed the act, and Applebee's may have felt that it had taken responsibility and acted properly by dismissing Chelsea and thereby protecting the customer.

Even though people began to post angry comments on Applebee's Facebook page in continuation of the dismissal, Applebee's remained firm with the update:

(Appendix 2).

"Our franchisee has apologized to the Guest and has taken disciplinary action with the Team Member for violating their Guest's right to privacy" (Ibid) clearly indicates Applebee's' perception of the incident in the sense that the organization took the guest's side – perhaps for the reason that Applebee's thought that it would be a good idea to take up a "the customer is always right attitude" in order to please the customers who at the end of the day are the ones who ensure Applebee's' revenues.

In dialog with Facebook users, Applebee's kept repeating the message and so did Keven Mortensen, an Applebee's spokesperson, via the mainstream media source Toronto Star (Appendix 35). Thus, it can be argued that Applebee's' communication at this time of the crisis event was very coherent. However, the message and the attitude that Applebee's insisted on were not what people on social media wanted to hear. They did not like Applebee's behavior when Chelsea was dismissed, and neither did they like Applebee's behavior on social media, which will be elaborated in the second part of the analysis section.

About a week later, Applebee's suddenly turned around when the president of the organization stated: "You are right, and we apologize" (Appendix 36) in a statement on Applebee's website. Thus, Applebee's did what Benoit refers to as mortification, and what Coombs refers to as apology where the organization admits its mistakes in order to come out of the crisis without too many scratches.

Even though Applebee's apologized, it could be suggested that this strategy should have been used earlier. As mentioned in section 4.3.2, Benoit argues that organizations should accept responsibility promptly and apologize. With thousands of comments, many of which were angry and negative towards Applebee's, it would seem that the apology was not timely and came too late as Applebee's image and reputation had suffered from its stubborn attitude before it changed its strategy. By implication, the coherent communication effort in the beginning seems to have failed as Applebee's was coherent with an attitude that stakeholders disagreed with. Moreover, one may question the credibility of the apology as one may get the assumption that Applebee's only apologized to put a stop to the negative buzz on social media. Moreover, Applebee's apology and choice of words: "Whatever anyone thinks about the personnel decision made by our franchisee in St. Louis, everyone agrees our communication afterwards made the decision worse" (Appendix 36) seem to only explicitly accept full responsibility for the behavior on social media after the dismissal, and not for the dismissal and the behavior before the dismissal when Applebee's posted a personal receipt itself. Nevertheless, the official apology, even though it may was not timely and did not acknowledge Applebee's wrongdoings regarding the dismissal, but only the behavior on social media, seems to have calmed down the negative stakeholders on social media as the climax of the fuss on social media was a week earlier with more than 17,000 public comments to Applebee's first Facebook update (Stollar, 2013). Thus, in Applebee's case a late apology seems better than no apology at all even though a lot of trouble and reputational damage could possibly have been avoided.

6.3 Summarizing

Having examined the two cases in the context of Benoit's and Coombs' conventional crisis communication theories, crisis types and applied communication strategies have been examined. From this, it seems as though Starbucks was more successful than Applebee's' in its crisis management effort.

As mentioned, it is suggested that the organization and the stakeholders may interpret the crises differently in both cases. If and when that is the case, it seems difficult for an organization to choose a proper crisis communication strategy according to normative recommendations - a criticism that was mentioned in the theoretical section as well. This may have been the case for Applebee's, which seems to have misinterpreted the core of the incident trying to protect the customer and making a scapegoat of Chelsea when who the stakeholders really had sympathy with was Chelsea. The first apology from Applebee's, the apology to the customer, was in other words not performed in an appropriate context and not addressed to relevant stakeholders. So when tackling a critical situation communicatively, stakeholders' perceptions seem more important than the organization's. Thus, when applying conventional crisis communication models, it would seem that that the organization needs to make a thorough survey of its stakeholders in order to know their perspective.

However, it is plausible that organizations do not always have the time to make such a carefully prepared communication plan on social media where stakeholders expect to be constantly updated.

This leads to the second part of the analyses where the social media theory will be applied to more thoroughly analyze and discuss the applicability of conventional crisis communication strategies and normative models on social media in the context of the two cases.

7. Analysis Part 2

The second part of the analysis will function as a discussion section where the normative models of conventional crisis communication theories together with social media theory will be applied and discussed in order to analyze the crux of the applicability of conventional crisis communications strategies on social media.

7.1 Coombs' Thirteen Normative Guidelines

As outlined in section 4.3.4.3, the third stage of Coombs' SCCT is thirteen recommendations that he suggests in order to find a proper crisis communication strategy.

As mention in section 4.3.4.3, Coombs suggests that basically the organization should provide adjusting information and express concern for victims. It may be argued that Starbucks succeeded in showing concern for the victim (Jeffrey) in its first response on its company blog which contains the statement: "We are disheartened by the allegations reported in an East Coast Starbucks store and are taking immediate measures to investigate and take any steps necessary to make this right" (Appendix 14), as exasperated stakeholders such as Alison were stressed down as mentioned in section 6.1.2.2. As a result, it seems as though Starbucks succeeded in implicitly communicating that everything was under control by showing that it took the incident seriously.

In contrast, Applebee's did not seem to have the same success when confirming the dismissal of Chelsea. Applebee's also showed concern. However, the concern was addressed at the customers and not at Chelsea. Consequently, even though Applebee's also showed that it took the situation seriously and expressed a degree of concern, the organization did not have success with this recommendation due to the misinterpretation of the incident as mention in section 6.3.

Throughout the first part of the analysis, it was revealed that Starbucks' crisis was either a result of organizational misdeeds or workplace violence depending on the individual stakeholder's interpretation. According to Coombs' recommendations for mixing crisis type and response strategies, reinforcing strategies should be used to supplement other strategies. Starbucks' main focus in its crisis communication was to remind and bolster its previous good work and reputation when it comes to diversity. However, this strategy did not seem to have been used as a supplement to another strategy even though it also was suggested that Starbucks to some extent used a denial strategy. The reminding strategy seems to have been Starbucks' primary strategy even though Coombs argues that it is a secondary strategy. With that in mind, the two strategies seem to have supplemented each other well in Starbucks' case despite of the inversion between primary and secondary strategy.

In Applebee's case, the crisis type was revealed as organizational misdeeds or workplace violence as well. Nonetheless, from the stakeholders' reaction, the crisis is mainly regarded as an organizational misdeed. Applebee's first response was a defensive scapegoating approach where Chelsea was blamed, and later Applebee's made an official apology. Scapegoating is a denial strategy aiming at moving responsibility away from the organization and should therefore, according to Coombs, not be combined with apology which is a rebuilding strategy. Thus, a wrong combination of strategies was used according to Coombs.

From the above considerations based on Coombs' normative guidelines, it seems as though Starbucks' incident was handled well and did not result in a worsened communication crisis - a so-called double crisis where the actual crisis is more or less replaced by the communication crisis when the organization is not able to handle the crisis communicatively. The opposite may be concluded in Applebee's case, and it also seems as though Starbucks' crisis management matches Coombs' normative recommendation better than Applebee's crisis management did. With that in mind, other factors, which not directly can be placed in the context of Coombs thirteen guidelines, may have played important roles as well when it comes to the outcomes of the two crises. This will be outlined in the following sections in order to go more thoroughly into a discussion of whether conventional crisis communication theories and thus normative guidelines can be applied for crises on social media.

7.2 Crisis Management in a Social Media Context

As mentioned in Part 1 of the analysis, both crises escalated on social media. Both organizations were present on the social media platforms where their customers or potential customers, the ones who participated with comments in the two cases respectively, were active. Being present seems to be the first step to be able to communicate appropriately and effectively with key stakeholders, who in these cases may be regarded as individuals on social media in addition to the directly involved employees, providing them with relevant information on the media where they are. Thus, the strategy of focusing the communication on social media platforms seems suitable as the targeted stakeholders were active on particularly Facebook and Twitter. This would indicate that social media was an appropriate channel for crisis communication in both cases due to the context of the crisis situations where the accusers used social media to spread their words. Moreover, it is suggested that organizations prove that they are eager to inform stakeholders about what is going on when they use social media to inform about the crisis as mentioned in section 4.6.5.

However, taking what seems to be a proper first step does not necessarily result in stakeholders that praise the organization for its willingness to inform. It has been suggested that consumers trust other consumers before organizations on social media as mentioned in section 4.6. This may indicate that if consumers have another understanding of what happened in a crisis incident than what the organization communicates, then the organization possibly risks being in a situation where it appears untrustworthy as consumers are likely to buy other likeminded consumers' interpretations of the incident. It is plausible that this was the case for Applebee's which despite of its willingness to inform, did not understand how the public on social media interpreted the incident. So if the proper first step of communication through a suitable channel, which by the way also seems to be a quite normative advice from Coombs characterized by plain common sense, is not in agreement with the general perception among stakeholders, this first step may be the root of disagreement and controversies between the organization and its stakeholders. This disagreement can be extensive for instance resulting in boycott movements and negative press both on social and traditional media, which was the case for Applebee's. However, due to the argument that social media users often will accept that things do not always go smoothly and that blunders can happen on social media as mentioned in section 4.6.5, it seems likely that Applebee's could have handled the crisis better by entering an engaged dialog with the public admitting its mistakes promptly.

Starbucks, on the other hand, showed that it took the incident seriously at the same time as using the incident proactively in its communication by raising awareness of its general reputation regarding LGBT people. The general perception among the public on social media was positive, and Starbucks was therefore not forced into a lot of explanations and discussions, as individuals such as Meg Adams (Appendix 17) served as ambassadors for Starbucks which created a synergy where Starbucks did not have to oversell and repeat its message as Meg Adams' and others' positive comments were credible and strengthened Starbucks' message due to the argument that social media users trust other users rather than organizations.

So instead of using social media to get closer to the consumers via dialog and understanding, it is plausible that Applebee's repelled them by underestimating the possibilities they have in terms of being informed, sharing, interacting, etc. Applebee's may have regarded the incident as though social media should not be handled differently than traditional media. It is, however, argued that people have opportunities on social media which they would never have on traditional media as mentioned in section 4.6. Thus, it would seem that Applebee's most essential mistake in the whole crisis was its attempt trying to superciliously manipulate the public by claiming that they misunderstood the situation in addition to the deleted posts on Facebook and the deleted receipt the organization shared online a week before Chelsea was dismissed for a similar act. It can be argued that by attempting to influence the history of the incident in such a manner, Applebee's may have hoped that it could bail out of the troubles by adapting the history to its own advantage. However, it is probably harder to manipulate with consumers in the age of social media due to access to information and the interaction between likeminded people. Following on from these thoughts, Applebee's did not seem to understand or accept that individuals may have dissenting voices and can play diverging roles on social media, and therefore thought that it could control its corporate communication instead of using social media to appear transparent, obliging and trustworthy.

Using Facebook, which is claimed to be a platform for personal communication as mentioned in section 4.6.2, it is plausible that Applebee's could have benefitted from a more personal and engaged communication instead of repeating the same message over and over again in the dialog with the public (Appendix 37). Actually, Chelsea understands why she was dismissed and why Applebee's reacted the way it did even though the pastor did not seem to show ethical behavior: “Their decision to terminate my employment was perfectly understandable from my end of things” (Appendix 28). However, Applebee's communication seems to have failed due to the above-mentioned considerations. The dismissal could probably have been legally defended, but Applebee's did not show empathy or sympathy with Chelsea or the public holding a different opinion. Hence, the dismissal and the subsequent communication on social media seem to have offended public morality even though the dismissal remained within the law. Furthermore, Applebee's did not appear open-minded and humble with willingness to learn from the consumers and thereby to adjust to the environment and the context of the crisis.

Thus, by taking a rather self-justifying attitude in terms of its crisis communication combined with not utilizing the features of the social media platforms proactively, but on the other hand blogging consumers and tagging them in a post that was repeated several times in the same thread, created the so-called double crisis where Applebee's image was not only suffering from the dismissal of Chelsea, but also from its poor communication effort on social media which seems to have resulted in a double crisis where Applebee's communication and handling of the original crisis worsened the negative effects of the original crisis and on the organization's image.

Starbucks, on the other hand, seems to have succeeded with its quick and more humble response showing dedication, which according to Benoit is important when correcting a problem, in combination with its prior good image on the issue and its ability to use the incident and social media proactively to raise awareness about its views and responsibilities.

As mentioned, it would seem that Starbucks has placed itself in a position wanting to appear as a tolerant organization. Thus, Starbucks' communication, for example its statement in connection with Alison's accusations, and its company values, may be argued to be what Goffman refers to as front stage, where some aspects are expressly emphasized as mentioned in section 4.2 in order for Starbucks to appear in a certain manner. However, the clear distinction between backstage and front stage as presented by Goffman may not be present on social media where information is spread and shared with lightning speed, and where consumers easily can communicate with each other and talk positively or negatively about the organization. It thus seems very difficult to draw a clear line between what is front stage and what is backstage activity more so than is the case with conventional media. Moreover, it is expected that when an organization is present on social media, it will engage in dialog with the public as mentioned in section 4.6. When people demand personal response to their comments, it seems natural that the communication become less formal and strategic as the organization may not have the time to work backstage and prepare its communication for the next front stage situation. Moreover, when stakeholders expect to be continually informed on social media during a crisis as mentioned in section 4.6.5, it may be a good idea to lose control deliberately and communicate informally with stakeholders revealing more of the organization's identity and thereby meeting stakeholders' call for transparency. It practice, an organization can obviously try to control the information stakeholders receive for example by deleting posts on its Facebook pages.

However, stakeholders will probably, due to the easy access to information on the web, find out and notice the lack of transparency if an organization is too willing to control and holds back information.

It thus seems to be a good idea for an organization to more or less melt front stage and backstage together when it is present on social media in order to invite consumers inside and reveal backstage thoughts. Instead of trying to control everything, which may have been Applebee's aim when deleting comments on social media and trying to tell people that they have gotten the facts wrong, Applebee's could perhaps have benefited from revealing backstage thoughts in order to appear transparent and personal and thus less knowingly and strictly.

Thus, by examining the two cases, it would seem that a normative approach to crisis communication on social media is not sufficient. It may be a good idea to have some clearly defined responsibilities in certain situations in order to be prepared to a certain extent. Moreover, it also seems to be a good idea to make up some guidelines for rules of the games on the different media platforms in order to communicate appropriately – for instance, formal and complicated information may not be suitable for Twitter as it is only possible to send text messages of maximum 140 characters. It does not seem as though Applebee's had defined these roles as the organization's social media moderator did not seem to have the competencies necessary to communicate on social media. As mentioned previously, however, a lot of other factors, such as humility, readiness for change, presence, dialog, etc., play a role when communicating in a crisis on social media. Hence, a normative approach which Coombs suggests with his 13 guidelines for selecting crisis communication strategy do not seem to be enough if an organization does not understand the rules of the game on social media and does not understand its stakeholders on social media. Moreover, it seems difficult to rely on such guidelines when it is possible that a crisis is perceived differently by the organization and its stakeholders, which especially seems to have been the case for Applebee's. With that in mind, the analysis suggested that Starbucks' communication actually matched the normative approach of conventional crisis communication better than Applebee's' communication did, and Starbucks did also seem to be more successful in its handling of the crisis. So a part of Starbucks' successful crisis management was possibly also that it did not combine contradictory strategies. Conventional crisis communication strategies can thus be applied when an organization is aware of the fact that they are not constructed for social media. It seems to be a good idea to be aware of the strategy that one is using in a particular situation in order to appear coherent and not mixing a lot of strategies which may confuse and frustrate stakeholders. Conventional crisis communication models can be used in this connection as they provide an overview of the different purposes of the specific strategies. However, at the end of the day, the dynamic on social media compared to traditional media reduces the possibility for normative calculation as the features of social media seem to demand more space for spontaneity. Following on from these thoughts, it will also be natural to reveal parts of one's true identity in order to appear transparent and get closer to the consumers.

If an organization does not have time and/or competencies to handle crisis communication on social media, one might argue that it would be an idea to close down social media platforms for a period of time and rely on conventional crisis communication strategies via traditional media channels in order to simplify the crisis communication effort and to ease the burden of communicating on several media with different features. But in these two cases where the crisis more or less directly started and peaked on social media, it seems reasonable to assume that Applebee's and Starbucks would have appeared as closed and old-fashioned organizations with something to hide and also denying individuals' voices if they closed down social media. Doing this could therefore probably have worsened the negative effects on their image and reputation. It does in other words not seem to be a proper solution to close down social media to avoid criticism. Instead, the medium should be taken seriously and be integrated into the organization in order to make social media a natural part of the organization's communication strategy and thereby avoiding to appear as incompetent as Applebee's. Social media can instead be used as an asset in crisis communication by engaging with individuals via two-way communication for example by calling attention to one's past good work in connection with the topic of the crisis like Starbucks did.

8. Conclusion

In this final section, the analysis of the thesis will be concluded upon. Also, the limitations of the research will be explained. The conclusion is thus an answer to the research questions formulated in section 2.

The focus of the main research question is on the applicability of conventional crisis communication strategies for crises on social media.

By examining the two cases of Starbucks and Applebee's, it seems difficult to pick out a suitable normative crisis communication strategy when the organization's and the stakeholders' interpretations of a crisis may differ. In order to avoid misinterpretations and thus miscommunication, it seems to be a good idea to scrutinize one's stakeholders. Yet, social media is so dynamic that organizations may not have time to make carefully planned communication before a situation on social media is out of control. It has thus been revealed that conventional crisis communication models seem too static, normative and simple for the complex and dynamic two-way communication on social media. With that in mind, social media theory suggests normative guidelines as well, and it also seems to be a good idea to be aware of the basics when it comes to one's spokesperson, the rules of the game on different social media platforms etc. Conventional models may be applied in the sense that they can provide a survey of what one is doing in a hectic situation and which strategies may suit a specific situation. However, the features of social media are more essential when it comes to crisis communication on social media, and it therefore seems too simple to rely on normative conventional crisis communication models when communicating on social media during crises.

Starbucks and Applebee's both used social media in their crisis communication efforts. Starbucks used Facebook and Twitter to link to its overall response on its blog, where it among other things stated that the incident was taken seriously. Starbucks used its positioning on LGBT people to proactively remind stakeholders of its previous good work and its general reputation relating to the topic of homophobia and diversity. Hence, a very strong image seems to make an organization more resistant to crises as positive consumers may tend to work as ambassadors resulting in word-of-mouth marketing, especially on social media where consumers easily can interact with each other. Applebee's also communicated with the public on social media during the organization's crisis. Applebee's repeated the same message over and over again confirming its attitude and elucidation of the incident. A week later, Applebee's apologized on its website for its behavior on social media, and this calmed things down. Consequently, Applebee's communicative actions, and also the possible deleted comments, on social media seem to have worsened the original crisis. Altogether, the research found that Starbucks was more successful using social media for crisis communication than Applebee's.

From the two cases in question in can be learned that it seems to be a good idea to communicate humbly and at eye level on social media in order to get closer to one's stakeholders. By doing so, the chance of successful crisis communication seems to be better as the communication can be adjusted to stakeholders' views. By losing control for instance by admitting a mistake and appear open and transparent, the organization will probably seem more human and can thereby improve the relationship with its stakeholders and thus gain insight into what they want and how they see the crisis. Thus, organizations using social media for crisis communication must have another kind of mindset when interacting with stakeholders compared to more traditional communication via conventional media channels. Conventional crisis communication models are therefore deficient when communicating on new media where stakeholders have other opportunities and expectations due to the features of the internet and different social media platforms.

Due to limited time and resources, there have only been focused on two organizations, and the results of the research are thus concluded from what the two cases in question indicate and not on more generalizing conclusions. Further research applying more case studies can thus contribute new perspectives and verifications of the results or perhaps new results. The indications of the research in the thesis can however be an inspiration to other organizations that may experience hard times on social media.

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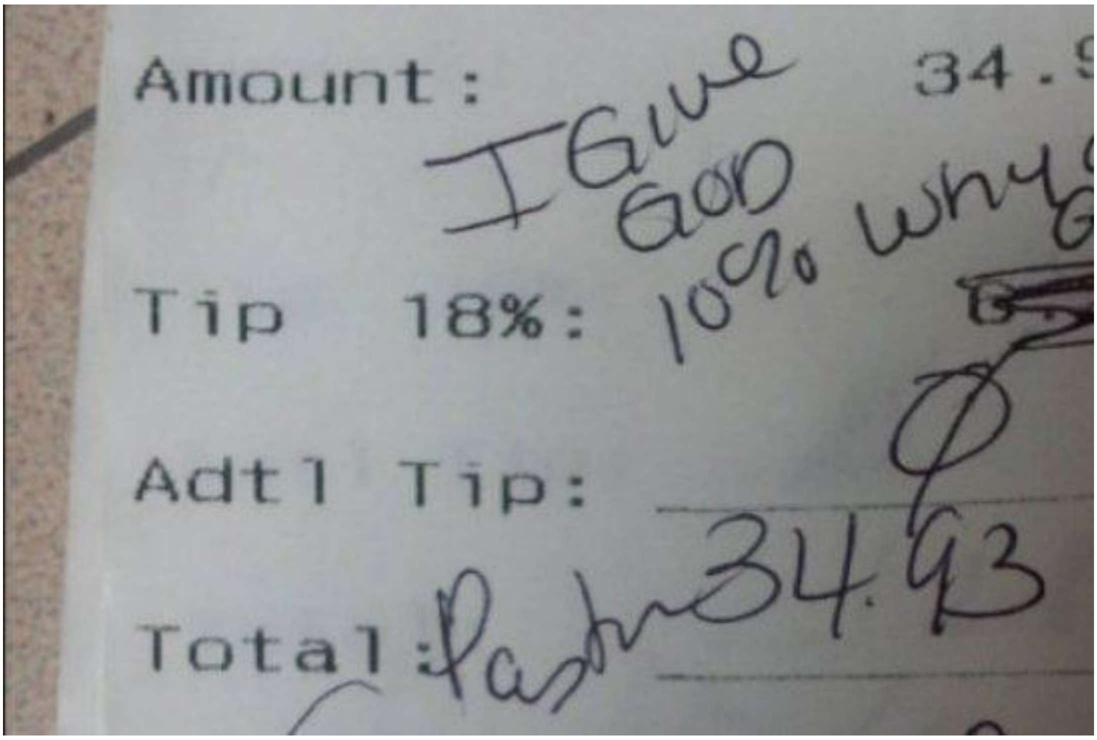
Appendixes

Appendix 1

Salter, Jim: Applebee's waitress fired after posting online customer's snarky comment questioning tip. The Star, 2013.



/ REDDIT

The customer who described herself on the receipt as a pastor shared appetizers with eight or nine friends on Jan. 25. The group was large enough that an automatic 18 per cent tip was added to the bill.

By: Jim Salter The Associated Press, Published on Fri Feb 01 2013

Accessed January 22, 2014 through http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/02/01/applebees_waitress_fired_after_posting_online_customers_snarky_comment_questioning_tip.html

Appendix 2

Applebee's Facebook page

Applebee's
1 February 2013

We wish this situation hadn't happened. Our Guests' personal information – including their meal check – is private, and neither Applebee's nor its franchisees have a right to share this information publicly. We value our Guests' trust above all else. Our franchisee has apologized to the Guest and has taken disciplinary action with the Team Member for violating their Guest's right to privacy.

Like · Comment · Share 5,930 21,382 1,065

Accessed January 22, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/applebees?fref=ts

Appendix 3

Applebee's Facebook page

Applebee's
1 February 2013

As a company that relies on literally hundreds of thousands of incredibly hard working Team Members, we can assure you that we and our franchisees value and support them and their efforts. However this unfortunate situation has nothing to do with work. The Team Member involved did not wait on the guest or party. Regrettably, and without the restaurant's knowledge, she took it upon herself to take a Guest's receipt, with the name clearly visible, and posted it online with her own commentary. That is a clear violation of our Guest's privacy and against the franchisee's company policy that the Team Member was provided when hired. We simply cannot accept behavior that compromises the safety and privacy our Guests have every right to expect and deserve. Please note that we are also not excusing the Guest's behavior in this matter and the unacceptable comment she wrote on the receipt, which is offensive to us and all our hard working team members. To be clear, the 18% gratuity added to large party tickets was paid by the Guest's party. This is a regrettable situation, and we wish it had never happened. we hope this provides you with some additional insight. Thanks again for the chance to explain.

Like · Comment · Share 5,161 28,022 634

Accessed January 22, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/applebees?fref=ts

Appendix 4

Applebee's Facebook page

Applebee's
1 February 2013

We appreciate the chance to explain our franchisee's action in this unfortunate situation.

Please let us assure you that Applebee's and every one of our franchisees values our hard working team members and the amazing job they do serving our guests. We recognize the extraordinary effort required and the tremendous contribution they make, and appreciate your recognition and support of our colleagues.

At the same time, as we know you will agree, the guests who visit Applebee's -- people like you -- expect and deserve to be treated with professionalism and care in everything we do. That is a universal standard in the hospitality business. That includes respecting and protecting the privacy of every guest, which is why our franchisees who own and operate Applebee's have strict policies to protect personal information -- even guest's names.

With that in mind, here is what happened in St. Louis:
- A guest questioned the tip automatically attached to her large party's bill by writing: "I give God 10%. Why do you get 18?" on the check.
- A different server, who did not even wait on the group, photographed the receipt, posted the photo online and commented about the incident.
- The guest subsequently heard from friends who identified her from the posting, where her name is clearly visible, and the restaurant was notified. There was no further communication with the guest.
- The team member was asked about posting the receipt and admitted she was responsible.
- When she was hired, the team member was provided the franchisee's employee hand book which includes their social media policy and states:
"Employees must honor the privacy rights of APPLEBEE's and its employees by seeking permission before writing about or displaying internal APPLEBEE'S happenings that might be considered to be a breach of privacy and confidentiality. This shall include, but not be limited to, posting of photographs, video, or audio of APPLEBEE'S employees or its customers, suppliers, agents or competitors, without first obtaining written approval from the Vice President of Operations. The policy goes on to specify: Employees who violate this policy will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.
- As a result of her admission to violating a clear company policy intended to safeguard guests, the team member is no longer employed by the franchisee.

Our franchisees are committed to acting in the best interests of guests and team members. This is a regrettable situation and we wish it had never happened. However, the disregard for an important policy left the franchisee no choice but to take the action they did.

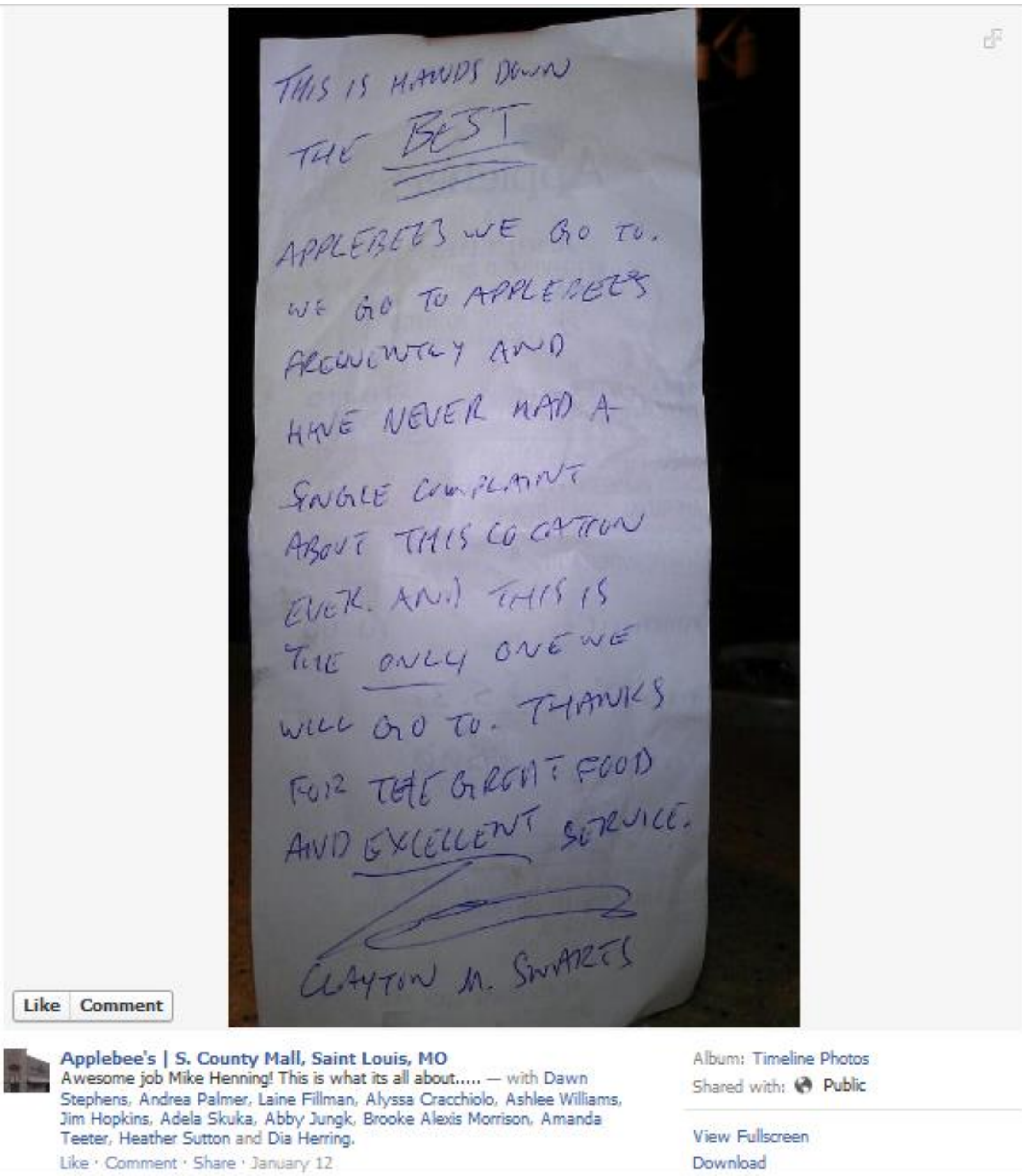
We hope this provides you with some additional insight. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to explain the facts involved.

Like · Comment · Share 5,728 14,593 811

Accessed January 22, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/applebees?fref=ts

Appendix 5

“If you can't afford to tip, you can't afford to go out and eat!” Facebook page



Accessed January 22, 2014 through
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10151241669918091&set=a.10150923877183091.414593.310708858090&type=1&theater

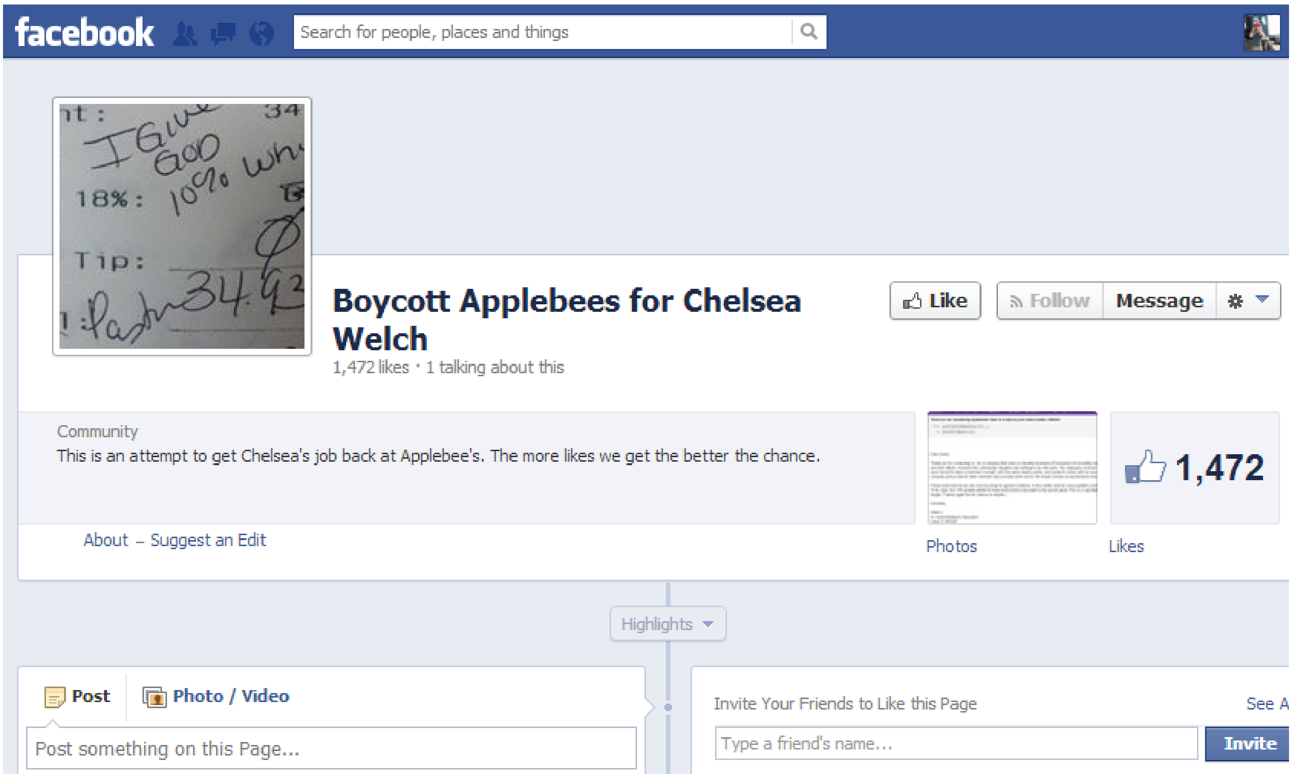
Appendix 6

Boycott Applebee's Facebook page

Accessed January 22, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/BoycottApplebees?fref=ts

Appendix 7

"Boycott Applebee's Until Chelsea Welch Is Rehired" Facebook page



Accessed January 22, 2014 through
https://www.facebook.com/BoycottApplebeesUntilChelseaWelchIsRehired?fref=ts

Appendix 8

Applebee's status on Twitter

Accessed March 5, 2014 through https://twitter.com/Applebees/status/297801442138394624

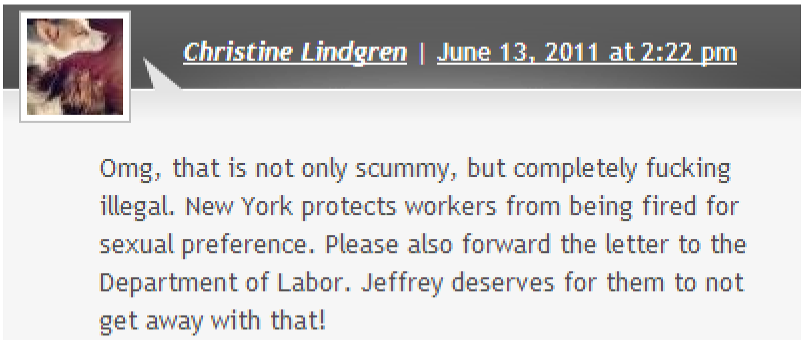
Appendix 9

"Protesting Applebees until a formal apology is made" Facebook page

Accessed January 24, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/ProtestingApplebees?fref=ts

Appendix 10

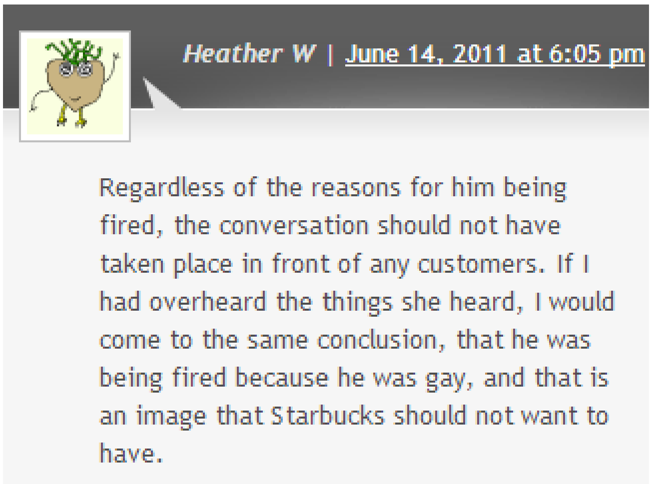
Comment to Missy Alison's blogpost "I Know Starbucks is Not an Anti-Gay, Homophobic Company (by Policy)…. BUT…"



Accessed January 27, 2014 through http://lilfamilyblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/13/i-know-starbucks-is-not-an-anti-gay-homophobic-company-by-policy-but/

Appendix 11

Comment to Missy Alison’s blogpost “I Know Starbucks is Not an Anti-Gay, Homophobic Company (by Policy)…. BUT…”

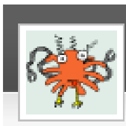

Heather W | June 14, 2011 at 6:05 pm

Regardless of the reasons for him being fired, the conversation should not have taken place in front of any customers. If I had overheard the things she heard, I would come to the same conclusion, that he was being fired because he was gay, and that is an image that Starbucks should not want to have.

Accessed January 27, 2014 through http://lilfamilyblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/13/i-know-starbucks-is-not-an-anti-gay-homophobic-company-by-policy-but/

Appendix 12

Comment to Missy Alison's blogpost "I Know Starbucks is Not an Anti-Gay, Homophobic Company (by Policy)…. BUT…"



william | June 15, 2011 at 1:34 am

The minute the matter of sexuality in the work place was used in a negative public discussion in the workplace it became an illegal act and it should be dealt with by the authorities. In fact if Jeffery should wish to press criminal charges it may be possible to file sexual harassment charges in addition to those harassment in the workplace charges. If there are more customers witnessing this encounter they should make known to either the one who started this thread or to Starbucks so that they have the opportunity to make amends for the criminal behavior of their management and other employees. Yes, it is actually a criminal act to publicly humiliate an employee in front of customers or other employees. It is also illegal in most states to openly dismiss an employee in front of other employees.

If any of the story is true then that entire Starbucks crew screwed up royally and should be terminated with extreme haste and a black mark placed on their permanent work record. Fired for criminal activity.

To say the least this is another reason not to like Starbucks burnt bean coffees.

Accessed January 27, 2014 through Accessed 27/1 2014 through http://lilfamilyblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/13/i-know-starbucks-is-not-an-anti-gay-homophobic-company-by-policy-but/

Appendix 13

Comment to Missy Alison's blogpost "I Know Starbucks is Not an Anti-Gay, Homophobic Company (by Policy)…. BUT…"

David | June 17, 2011 at 12:30 pm

Missy ~

Kudos and brava! Your story is making the internet rounds nationally *and* internationally-I read about this incident on an international site. Your letter was clear, cogent, beautifully-written, thoughtful and honest. We all need to speak up when we run across employee discrimination, and I applaud your courage and your example is one that should be followed. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, " Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Thank you.

Accessed January 27, 2014 through http://lilfamilyblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/13/i-know-starbucks-is-not-an-anti-gay-homophobic-company-by-policy-but/

Appendix 14

Holmes, Kalen: Our Dedication to Embrace Diversity. Starbucks, 2011.

Our Dedication to Embrace Diversity

Tuesday, June 14, 2011
Posted by Kalen Holmes., evp, Partner Resources

At Starbucks, we pride ourselves on being a great place to work. We are deeply dedicated to our core values – to embrace diversity and treat each other with respect and dignity. We're committed to providing an inclusive, supportive and safe work environment for everyone. Moreover, we look for ways in which we can honor and celebrate the diversity of our partners as they, too, represent the communities that are home to our stores.

We are disheartened by the **allegations reported in an East Coast Starbucks store** and are taking immediate measures to investigate and take any steps necessary to make this right. The actions reported do not correspond with our values, who we are as a company or the beliefs we try to instill in our partners.

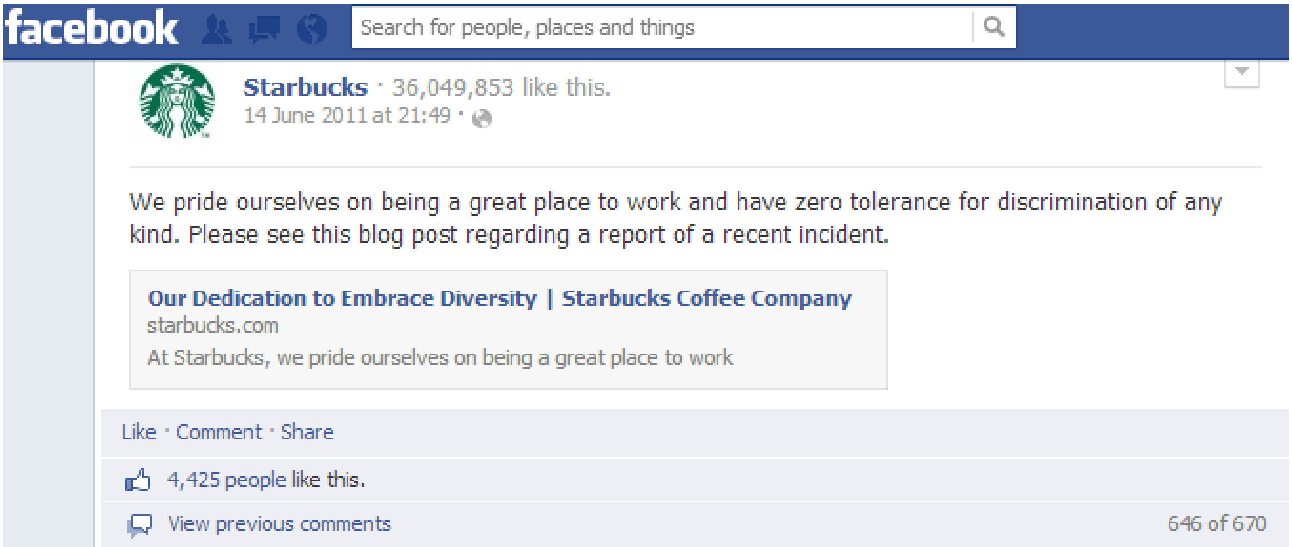
Starbucks has supported the LGBT community for many years, and we have zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind. We have one of the largest Employer Resource Groups for LGBT employees in the United States helping to raise awareness about issues in the communities in which we live and work. Our **benefits program** has always offered domestic partner benefits in the United States and Canada, and Starbucks partners actively participate and organize local LGBT events in their communities. We're also very proud of the **100% score we received on the Corporate Equality Index from the Human Rights Campaign**. We will continue to work very closely with this organization and others on topics relevant to the community.

UPDATE: Many of you have asked to hear specifically what, if any, disciplinary actions are taken as a result of our investigations into this incident. As this is a personnel matter, it is our policy not to provide such details regarding those steps.

Accessed January 27, 2014 through http://www.starbucks.com/blog/our-dedication-to-embrace-diversity/1035?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=rep

Appendix 15

Starbucks Facebook page



Accessed January 27, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/Starbucks/posts/10150231198643057

Appendix 16

Starbucks Facebook page

4,425 people like this.

Sabrina Guyton-Wright I can't wait to work for this company! 🙂 So much love. ❤
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like · 1

Jeremy Weddle Well I have been applying to work at Starbucks for about 2 years but with no luck
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like

Grétar Ágúst Agnarsson Lol
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like

Colin Heurlin As someone who works at a starbucks....if you only knew where you were.
14 June 2011 at 21:50 · Like · 1

Jozef Batora I want
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like

Michelle Bell Dang...clearly I've missed something.
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 3

Paige Post i'm so glad that a company out there supports the LGBT community 🙂
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 2

Quan Chandler I want to work for starbucks...i love the envoirment
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 1

Scott Michael Wilson The Prescott Valley, AZ employees rock and don't discriminate (daily customers opinion)
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like

Holly Cutroneo I just read the original blog regarding this and am as horrified as the poster.
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 8

Christopher Bear Ford Love. That's why I love working for Starbucks. I cam be myself. And be part of a great company.
14 June 2011 at 21:51 · Like · 2

Accessed January 28, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/Starbucks/posts/10150231198643057

Appendix 17

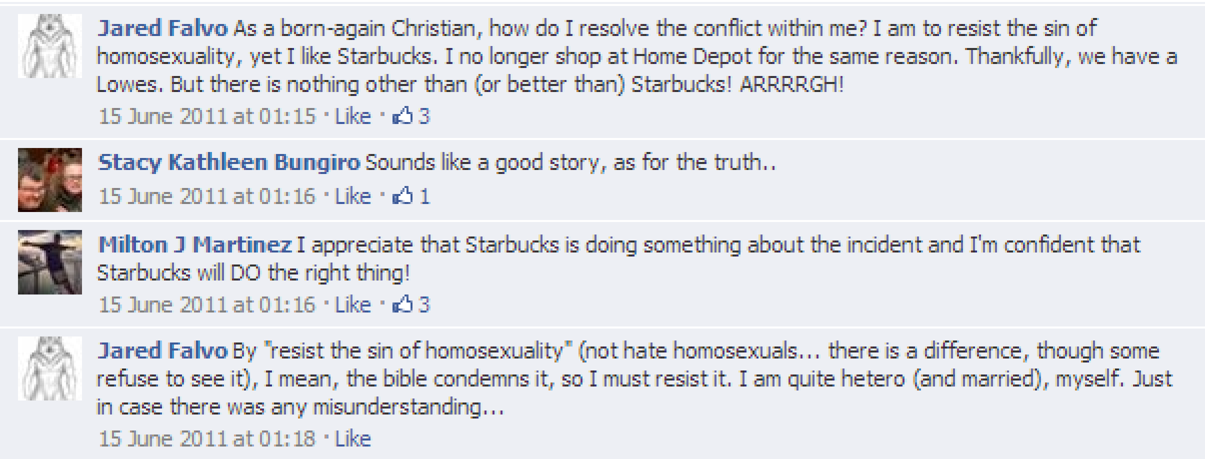
Starbucks Facebook page

Meg Adams Anyone who knows anytning about Starbucks, knows they are the leader in non-descriminating practices. This is an isolated incident, if it turns out to be true, and I will continue to patronize Starbucks proudly. I am glad that my gay friends were able to find jobs at Starbucks and receive the same benefits with their domestic partners that I would get for being married.
14 June 2011 at 21:56 · Like · 5

Accessed January 28, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/Starbucks/posts/10150231198643057

Appendix 18

Starbucks Facebook page



Jared Falvo As a born-again Christian, how do I resolve the conflict within me? I am to resist the sin of homosexuality, yet I like Starbucks. I no longer shop at Home Depot for the same reason. Thankfully, we have a Lowes. But there is nothing other than (or better than) Starbucks! ARRRRGH!
15 June 2011 at 01:15 · Like · 3

Stacy Kathleen Bungiro Sounds like a good story, as for the truth..
15 June 2011 at 01:16 · Like · 1

Milton J Martinez I appreciate that Starbucks is doing something about the incident and I'm confident that Starbucks will DO the right thing!
15 June 2011 at 01:16 · Like · 3

Jared Falvo By "resist the sin of homosexuality" (not hate homosexuals… there is a difference, though some refuse to see it), I mean, the bible condemns it, so I must resist it. I am quite hetero (and married), myself. Just in case there was any misunderstanding…
15 June 2011 at 01:18 · Like

Accessed January 28, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/Starbucks/posts/10150231198643057

Appendix 19

Starbucks status on Twitter

Starbucks Coffee
@Starbucks

Following

We have have zero tolerance for discrimination of any kind. Pls see this post regarding a report of a recent incident: http://sbux.co/lI3POS

Reply Retweet Favourite More

384 RETWEETS 56 FAVOURITES

9:51 pm - 14 Jun 2011

Accessed January 28, 2014 through https://twitter.com/Starbucks/status/80724171507765249

Appendix 20

Starbucks status on Twitter


Starbucks Coffee
@Starbucks
Following

@OutSpokenNYC Hi, we are currently addressing this issue and please know we will stand by our zero tolerance policy on discrimination.

Reply Retweet Favourite More

15 RETWEETS

Accessed January 28, 2014 through https://twitter.com/Starbucks/status/80692344462118914

Appendix 21

Applebee's Facebook page


Nicole Freeman Applebee's is easily the most disgusting restaurant to which I've ever been. The drinks are heavily watered-down and the food is inedible. Your PR nightmare is doing the country a favor. Maybe a good restaurant chain will take your place when you inevitably go bankrupt. Let's also not forget the fact that you violated your one privacy policy with a positive review from written by by a customer whose name was clearly visible.
16 February 2013 at 17:57 · Like · 6

Ray Grimmett This isn't going away Applebee's until you take responsibility for the poor treatment of your employee's, I was aregular customer, as was my family, we are determined to boycott your restaurant until you make a formal apology and try to make things right again. Shame on you, and I hope your business suffers, you fat cat corporate vulchers. I hope you can see that this isn't going away, I thank you for making this into a movement for the rights of underpaid servers and waitstaff everywhere. See you tommorow, nope not EVER!
7 February 2013 at 00:48 · Like · 5

Lisa Malynn Kent But you share positive receips and comments so HOW is that different? This was the last reason to eat at your joke of a restaurant. First you stand against giving your low paid employees the chance at real healthcare and now this. What a shitacular company!!!!
6 February 2013 at 04:31 · Like · 7

Jermell Beane No Applebees the facts aren't twisted, who cares if the girl who was fired wasn't the one who waited the table. That doesn't change the fact that you decide to side with someone who is already an unsavory person over an employee who doesn't get paid enough to deal with BS like that. End of facts.
1 February 2013 at 11:53 · Like · 9

Michael Denison Applebees, stop insulting us by claiming we got our facts wrong. One thing the vast internet community is good at is getting to the bottom of things. Sure, individually, we are all in error. But, as Wikipedia will so you, when we all get together, we tend to get it right. So if there is some specific information we do not have that will correct the record, then either share it or continue to hide behind your lawyers.
1 February 2013 at 11:53 · Like · 8

Helen Jean Over 12K comments, not including all of the ones you deleted. Mmmm Great PR move. Yeah, the brain trust was on the ball with this one. Why do I think Pastor Bell is not having a great week either. Do unto others ring a bell, Pastor?
1 February 2013 at 04:10 · Like · 6

Brandon Tanner What's hilarious is that Applebees corporate thought that "damage control" meant coming on facebook to apologize to the Pastor...as if the majority of people would side with her.

What planet do you live on, exactly?
1 February 2013 at 03:47 · Like · 9

Delena Price btw this is also going on my page and you can't delete it from there
1 February 2013 at 03:11 · Like · 3

Accessed January 28, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/applebees?fref=ts

Appendix 22

Dump Starbucks Facebook page

Accessed January 28, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/dumpstarbucks

Appendix 23

Starbucks Facebook page

Accessed January 29, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/Starbucks?fref=ts

Appendix 24

Starbucks Twitter account

Accessed January 29, 2014 through https://twitter.com/Starbucks

Appendix 25

Applebee's Facebook page

Accessed January 29, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/applebees?fref=ts

Appendix 26

Applebee's Twitter account

Accessed January 29, 2014 through https://twitter.com/Applebees

Appendix 27

Questionnaire Boycott Applebee's for Chelsea Welch

1. Why did you establish this "boycott community" on Facebook?

We established this community to get the word out that what Applebee's has done was wrong.

We have found MANY instances (you will find photo's on our site) of Applebee's doing the exact same thing either by the office themselves or other employees of other Applebee's locations.

2. Why did you use Facebook as a medium?

It is a huge medium to get the word out and also directly interact with Miss. Welch as well as Applebee's themselves . Facebook as of October had 1.19 billion Active users that is quite a reach for information to go.

3. Can you describe how you felt about Applebee's as a company before the incident?

I love applebee's food they have a great friendly environment (for the most part).

4. Can you describe how you feel about Applebee's as a company after the incident?

I will never step foot in Applebee's again.

5. How did you think that Applebee's handled the situation?

We do not think it was at all handled in a professional manner.

6. How do you think that Applebee's handled the situation on the social media?

When this was all going on they were deleting comments. Arguing with commenters (pictures as proof) they sent out generic emails over and over (picture proof) .

7. What do you think about people's reaction on the social media?

People responded very well actually. Most were asking to give her her job back.. But Applebees being the faceless corporation that they are would never send a personal response.

8. How do you think the incident and the subsequent buzz on the social media have affected Applebee's?

They are huge so as with any incident it blows over. It might have impacted them at the time but I dont think they will see a long term damage.

9. How do you think the publics' reaction, incl. your "boycott community", on the social media have affected Applebee's as a company?

We dont think they will see a long term damage. They probably seen a drop in sales at the time but as time moves on people tend to forget.

Appendix 28

Questionnaire Chelsea Welch

1. Why did you post the photo of the receipt on the internet?

As a laugh! I'm a big fan of the internet, especially as a form of entertainment. I find the purest humor in the surreal happenings in the lives of strangers, so I love to share weird moments from my life, too.

I remember standing in the manager's office with the server who received the receipt. She and I were both counting out our money at the end of our shift. She pushed it over to me with one finger and said 'check this out.' I laughed, asked if I could take a photo, and I did. The note was just so strange, and so funny- I wanted more people to have a laugh at this ridiculous thing. There was never a thought of vengeance, or even anger. Servers are very used to this particular form of abuse, this one just stood out as odd. I really just thought it'd be a good laugh.

2. Why did you use reddit.com as the medium to spread the photo?

I spend entirely too much time on Reddit in the first place. It's my go-to for sharing (and viewing) silly photos. I've been submitting content to Reddit for ages. Some has done well, some hasn't. I use every major form of social media for different purposes. I use Facebook to stay in touch with friends, Twitter to get celebrity news, etc. Reddit is where 'odd photos and interesting links' typically end up.

In retrospect it would seem as if all of this was very calculated. I posted a photo to an atheist-specific forum, one that especially likes ridiculing the image of the Terrible Christian- and this so perfectly fit the bill. I've been accused of summoning a witch-hunt, but in all honesty, I'm just another Reddit user who posted a little slice of life for a laugh. There were no plans- I was far too poor at the time to make plans like that. Wage slaves don't like to make trouble nearly as much as they like to make rent.

3. Can you describe how you felt about Applebee's as a company before the incident?

Companies like Applebee's put a great deal of work into being monolithic, unchanging, and impersonal. No one face represents the company. Most 'corporate' joints are like this. Some servers like the consistency, others hate the lack of flexibility. The philosophy has its own ups and downs when compared to any other style. Applebee's is no longer building a business, they're just maintaining a brand. They want to be just as ubiquitous as a street light, and just as consistent. A great deal of their training material focused on standardization and consistency. It was repeatedly stressed that a person should have an identical experience walking into any Applebee's, anywhere.

We knew who our manager was because he was there every day, but we didn't know who owned the store or the franchise until he came through on an inspection and we were all hollered at. We didn't know who he answered to. I still haven't the slightest of who the CEO might be. Applebee's never meant anything to me, it was just where I went to receive a deluge of the worst humans the world had to offer in exchange for paying rent. I was a great server, but a few months at that place saw me gaining weight and losing sanity, yet also *convincing myself that I should stay, because the money was all right. We were all just cogs in the machine, tired fat racehorses with blinders on. It was a place to get a paycheck.*

4. Can you describe how you feel about Applebee's as a company after the incident?

Actually, very much the same. I understand both why and how they handled the situation, and I can't say I'd have done much different were I in their shoes. The people who call the shots in a corporation like that aren't innovators or men of action. All they do is gloss things over. They've got their winning ticket, and it's consistently half-decent Americana cuisine at every interstate exit in the country. They don't need to change anything, so they won't. Their company has recovered from my little 'incident,' and I doubt if a single one of their corporate suits even remembers my name.

For all those still working there, it's still just a team of blind horses waiting tables. They slog through yet another shift, making far more than they could at a regular job, and it's tax free. They're smoking out back with an elbow on the dumpster, and they're getting drunk on a Tuesday. Not a single person I knew there was happy, and that's not ever going to change. There was a line cook with a master's degree and a waitress who had been working there for eleven years. We never gave a thought to upper management, we never met middle management, we just greeted the next table and burned our fingers on plates that sat under the lamp for too long. All of us servers were too busy and too poor to really care, and I still don't care. Applebee's will never change. Applebee's will always be just 'good enough.' The food wasn't great, but it was good enough. The pay wasn't good, but it was good enough. Nothing about the place, from top to bottom, was remarkable, but it was good enough. And it will remain that way until the end of time.

5. How did you think that Applebee's handled the situation?

Once they had their feet back under them, they handled the situation as any large corporation ought - stony-faced and patient. However, they did take nearly a week to get there, and until they did, it was utter chaos. Their little breakdown in communication and sanity was posted to Facebook for the world to see- and personally, I found it far more entertaining than the actual note. (see question 6)

Many people don't realize who actually made the decision to fire me. Corporate never heard of me until headlines started breaking. The pastor called the restaurant, my boss (the restaurant manager) did as much damage control as he could, and then called his boss (the franchise owner). That man, whose name I still don't know, told my manager that I ought to have been fired the moment he got the call. My manager liked me a lot, and I was one of the best servers in the restaurant. He would have kept me if he could- and even *joked about rehiring me if I promised to wear a wig.*

The bottom line of the situation was this: I violated a customer's privacy, and Applebee's doesn't stand for that. Now, of course, the real bottom line was that Missouri is an at-will employment state which means that an employee can be fired for anything, which is to say for no reason at all. I've had fellow servers get fired instantly for far lesser offenses- anything from taking a cigarette break without asking to a response to an anonymous email to the owner with no basis in fact. You can be fired if a manager 'just doesn't like you,' and as long as your termination papers say something like 'it wasn't working out,' you can't complain.

Their decision to terminate my employment was perfectly understandable from my end of things. Truly, the most interesting part of this entire incident was getting a look at how truly ignorant the American public was of the sorry state of the job known as waiting tables. Finding out that people thought that there was even the slightest chance that Applebee's was going to keep me on, or that I had even the smallest right to keep my job was absolutely hilarious to me. The idea that an employer could be unhappy with me, for any reason, and I'd still have a job was a totally foreign concept- and the fact that it was a foreign concept to me was a foreign concept to so many others!

All in all, their reaction to the situation was exactly as should have been expected of them- and it wasn't until a month or so afterwards that I realized how odd that was.

6. How do you think that Applebee's handled the situation on the social media (Facebook and

Twitter)?

'Comically incompetent' comes to mind. Social media is the new way to reach 'the people,' and it doesn't matter if you release a flawless press release on the subject if you can't handle a few thousand inquiring tweets with grace. It was clear that their social media team wasn't trained to do any more than give vapid positive responses and post photos hot off the press from the ad department. A team of any sort would have been put under immense pressure in a situation like this- being rapidly moved into a raging spotlight- but it became clear almost immediately that this team had no idea how to respond. Some of my favorite moments included members of their team getting into arguments with random Facebook commenters, using the company's account.

Established companies, for the most part, know that the best policy with bad publicity is to wait for it to blow over, as the internet's collective attention span is about three days. Applebee's social media spent the crucial first few days raging right back at the public. Now, they were reigned in shortly after the event, but *the damage was done. Their policy is now far more measured and professional- but after that debacle, I imagine more than just my own employment was terminated.*

7. What do you think about the public's reaction (comments on Facebook and Twitter, boycott

movements etc.) on the internet?

I was wholly overwhelmed. The outpouring of love and support was astounding, but I'd be lying if I said I deserved it. To me, it was very bittersweet, because all I could think of was that there are a few million people waiting tables right this very second who aren't getting thanked, or interviewed, or even supported when someone is harassing them. There's no national movement to stick up for any of them and as I'm very familiar with the very short cyclical nature of internet fame I was sure I'd be back among them before long.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm incredibly grateful to all of the people who took my experience as inspiration to boycott Applebee's, tip their servers extra, or just get more educated about tipping etiquette. I believe that the effect of the informational discussions about tipping and server wages will be far longer lasting than any of the he-said she-said catty religious drama.

At the end of the day, Applebee's is just too big to fail. It's everywhere, and they know that they can wait out some bad publicity far longer than the American public can wait out their impulsivity.

8. How do you think the incident and the subsequent buzz on the social media have affected

Applebee's?

Aside from a few changes in their marketing policy and a tighter leash on their social media team, not at all, I'm sure. In the days following the event, they required each of their employees to sign an addendum to their employment agreement- in short forbidding them from posting anything relevant to their work on any form of social media. A few blanket policies to prevent this from happening again, and then they're back on track with their consistency and stagnancy, as if nothing ever happened.

9. How would you feel about working for Applebee's again?

Working at Applebee's wasn't anything special. It was tough, and the clientele was harsh, but there was nothing especially horrible about it. All corporate restaurants are essentially the same, and in a period of desperation I'd certainly never think myself above it. However, I'm sure they'd be less than thrilled to have me back. Surely my name pops up on some kind of blacklist.

10. How would you feel about visiting an Applebee's restaurant today?

I have actually returned to the Applebee's where I was fired several times. The staff and management there were my friends and colleagues for months, and my little spurt of publicity didn't spark any ill will between us. There was a little bitterness about the sheer volume of hateful phone calls they had to deal with, but all in all, I was welcomed back.

Now that being said, I just don't care much for anything that they serve. The food that I was actually likely to order was the sort of thing I could have had for half the cost from the grocery store- tortilla chips and salsa, raspberry lemonade, simple alfredo noodles. Their food was fatty, filling, and salty, and after seeing the preparation process I lost my interest in most of it. A popular satirical slogan for Applebee's is 'For when you're too lazy to microwave your own food,' and it's very true. Microwaves were used constantly- there was a row of five or six above the line in the kitchen. Noodles were pre-cooked days in advance, everything from the salsa to the wing sauces arrived frozen, and the only thing the back of house employees were told to put any effort into was cleaning.

I'm certainly not opposed to the franchise as a whole. The whole situation was exactly what happens when old business meets new school. Applebee's will carry on, and I'll get a job elsewhere. Their response, once formally formulated, was perfectly reasonable. As 'old school' ages and dies, more and more companies are social media savvy. I think that the best policy for a company to avoid a situation like this in the future is an understanding of the social media world and a realistic communication with their employees about what is and isn't okay to post. Not only would tricky situations like this one be avoided, an entire workforce posting positively and within certain boundaries can breathe life into even the most boring establishments.

~~~

Thanks very much for your interest in my opinion. Feel free to cut down, paraphrase, selectively quote, etc.
~~~

I am absolutely flattered by your request and I hope you got what you were looking for. If not, I'd be willing to tackle a round two of questions.

All the best,

Chelsea

Appendix 29

Stollar, R.l.: APPLEBEE'S OVERNIGHT SOCIAL MEDIA MELTDOWN: A PHOTO ESSAY. Rlstollar.wordpress.com, 2013.


Applebee's We can understand why you are upset. But the details circulating about this story do not represent all the facts. For example the team member who posted the receipt WAS NOT the team member that waited on the group. The 18% gratuity was added to the bill. We'll be posting a statement later that explains the facts. We want and value you as guest. This is an unfortunate situation but please let us assure you that Applebee's and every one of our franchisees values the hard working team members and the amazing job they do serving the guest. We appreciate your support of them too.
33 minutes ago · Like


Applebee's Martinez We can understand why you are upset. But the details circulating about this story do not represent all the facts. For example the team member who posted the receipt WAS NOT the team member that waited on the group. The 18% gratuity was added to the bill. We'll be posting a statement later that explains the facts. This is an unfortunate situation but please let us assure you that Applebee's and every one of our franchisees values the hard working team members and the amazing job they do serving the guest. We appreciate your support of them too.
35 minutes ago · Like

Accessed February 13, 2014 through http://rlstollar.wordpress.com/2013/02/02/applebees-overnight-social-media-meltdown-a-photo-essay/

Appendix 30

Stollar, R.l.: APPLEBEE'S OVERNIGHT SOCIAL MEDIA MELTDOWN: A PHOTO ESSAY. Rlstollar.wordpress.com, 2013.


Applebee's Robert No posts have been deleted... People get upset and we have not removed posts because they are negative. ~ARL
about an hour ago · Like · 1

Accessed February 13, 2014 through http://rlstollar.wordpress.com/2013/02/02/applebees-overnight-social-media-meltdown-a-photo-essay/

Appendix 31

Alison, Missy: I Know Starbucks is Not an Anti-Gay, Homophobic Company (by Policy)…. BUT… Lil Family Blog, 2011.

I Know Starbucks is Not an Anti-Gay, Homophobic Company (by Policy) …. BUT…

JUN 13 Posted by lilfamilyblog

Yesterday while I got my hair cut, my wife witnessed something in Starbucks (while she hung out with Lily, waiting for me) that she felt couldn't go unnoticed or unmentioned. Her letter says it all, but I wanted to share this open letter to Starbucks corporate office as a plea for awareness and solidarity. Please forward this link on… and please leave comments to show your support. Let's all let Starbucks know that this is not OK. Missy keeps saying that a stranger to us, Jeffrey, had a HORRIBLE day yesterday, let's see if we can make his (and others') todays and tomorrows better.

Please add us on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Lil-Family-Blog/139186336101600

Dear Starbucks,

I am writing this letter to you as a loyal customer with concerns. I know probably 90% of the letters you receive trying to solicit something from you probably start the same way, but this is different. When I say, I am a loyal customer I mean you have had me for the better part of my adult life, hook, line and sinker. I will spend the extra $2.50 for a cup of your coffee. When I worked in Hoboken I would walk an extra three blocks for your coffee, walking past a Dunkin Donuts, Panera, Macdonalds and two bodegas to purchase from you. Every morning I drink my coffee out of one of your ceramic mugs and I have for years. A dozen of them line my shelves, (even the poorly conceived “Father’s Day” argyle mugs from 2005 that have metal bottoms which means I can’t pop it in the microwave to reheat) I only buy Starbucks for my home consuption. When you roll out a new product, I flock to your nearest location like a moth to a flame. I mourned the loss of the Chantico and I even rushed out to try that banana mocha abomination (a match made in hell) blindly following your suggestions like a lemming. I know, and speak your “lingo” that grates on me like nails on a chalk board and is sometimes so complicated I feel like I speak a second language. I even, as much as I am ashamed to admit it, buy most of the adult contemporary CDs you peddle in the front of the store. By the time I reach the front of the line somehow the newest James Taylor CD or whatever swing jazz collection you put together seems like something I can no longer live without. I am your disciple. I am part of the Starbucks machine. I am your dream customer because whatever your company puts into the market, I have and I would have continued to buy. I never felt bad about my commitment to your chain either because I felt like you were a company that was ethically sound. Your commitment to free trade, The Starbucks Charitable Foundation, your appearance as a diverse work environment. These are all things that I as a customer felt good about. I felt like I was supporting a company that although huge, I felt you were doing your best to "do good" and leave a positive mark on the world.

That was the case, until yesterday.
Which is why I am writing to you today.
The sentiments above, about me being a loyal customer were not written to solicit anything from you. I do not want free coffee or a refund. I ask, as a loyal customer for the past 15 years that I have your attention. Your time and consideration.

Yesterday when I walked into your Centereach, Long Island location I saw one of the most brazen and unapologetic displays of homophobia I have ever witnessed in my entire life. What was most concerning about it was it was perpetuated by not one, not two but THREE of your employees and it was directed towards a fourth employee. I don't know this man, but I know his name is Jeffrey because the woman (who seemed to be in charge of this circus) loudly scolded, spoke to in a condescending manner, humiliated, and then let go. In the middle of your store. Two feet away from my table. Then when Jeffrey, who was visibly shaken went to the bathroom to collect him self, the women at the table went on a long, ranting homophobic rant that lasted about five minutes. This rant transpired two feet away from my table where I sat with my daughter. A three year old child, with two mothers. I have never, in my entire life seem such a gross and unapologetic display of ignorance and intolerance. The most horrific aspect of it was that it was by someone that your corporation put into a was that it was by someone that your corporation put into a position of power. I have never, ever in ANY context seen ANYTHING so unprofessional in my entire life. I was horrified that my daughter was exposed to that.

The whole incident spanned about 15-20 minuets. It looked like it was a sit down discussion about something that had happened in the store, an earlier problem. What that was, I couldn't be certain. I do know however, the fact that Jeffery's sexuality was brought into the conversation (and it obviously was for me to know about it) is inappropriate. The woman (Who I will refer to going forward as the "Manager" although she may have been someone from Human Resources) spoke to him in a sharp condescending manner. She told him that they were not interested in his politics or beliefs and his thoughts were down right offensive to his co-workers. They did not want to hear about his personal life. When Jeffrey pointed out that they ALL talked about their personal lives (during the course of the conversation I learned that the manager had a daughter that went to tennis camp and another one of the women had a birthday coming up so the irony and the hypocrisy of that statement was mind blowing.) That his beliefs were not welcome at Starbucks. She went on, an on and on talking about leadership building workshops where she learned to "Keep it to herself" (again I will remind you of tennis camp). She was even so condescending to tell him,

"It might not be today, it might not be tomorrow, but ten years from now you will thank me for this..."

For what? For for letting him go for speaking about his personal life? For learning to put up with bigotry in the work place?

She kept reminding him, "You are not fired but…." as if to say, you are not fired but you are really not welcome here anymore. I assume this was a clever HR move so he would not be able to collect unemployment. He told her that he felt like he was being FORCED to leave because he felt like the "problems" at that location were not being addressed and the workplace had turned into a hostile environment. She in turn told him that if he was not, "Part of the solution, he was the problem."and his two weeks notice would not be needed. He asked if he would be marked by the corporation as "un-hireable"

She smugly looked at him and said,

"Well I don't know. It's not looking good for you."

Basically threatening his professional future.

Know, I am not going to swear by what the original confrontation was. I only heard bits and pieces, but I know that worker was attacked and humiliated on the middle of your shop floor. I don't care what his offense was, that sort of business should be conducted in a back room. I also know, the "manager" was not willing to listen to him and personally attacked him several times with snide, condescending comments. Telling him, in the subtext of her words that he was "Less than" and his personal belief system was no longer welcome at the shop.

The event got more horrific, when he, who had kept his composure through the entire incident, not once raising his voice despite being attacked, got up from the table to go to the bathroom to cry in private.

Then the three women turned on him like Vultures.

"I'm done. I'm done. Nobody wants to hear it anymore. I don't care who he is dating. I don't want to hear about it."

"He should not get upset at the things people say to him. He should be used to it. It's not like he turned gay yesterday."

"I used to listen to it, now I'm just sick of hearing about it."

"Nobody does, but it's over now. You won't have to hear about it anymore."

It went on, and on and on.

The focus of their discussion then when he left the table, was not about an incident that occurred in the previous days. It was about how they were intolerant to his lifestyle, nobody wanted to hear about the fact that he was gay, they didn't want to be exposed to that. The focus was not about his poor performance as an employee but their intolerance towards him as a person. I sat at there at my table with the impression that,

This man, this Starbucks employee was losing his job, because he was gay.

Whether that was the case or not. Whatever Jeffrey's offense might have been… that is how one of your loyal customers perceived the events as they transpired based on the actions and the statements of your "manager". She was bigoted, intolerant, insensitive and no matter how upset she was at Jeffrey, her comments and sentiments should not have been overheard by one of your customers, gay or not.

So I guess the biggest irony is, that nobody in the Starbucks that afternoon wanted to hear her politics, the very thing she was scolding Jeffrey for.

When Jeffrey returned from the bathroom she asked him for his keys. She was pretending to be sensitive and offered him her card if he needed to talk. Which disgusted me because, she was anything but concerned for his well being.

I followed Jeffery out of the store horrified by what I had just witnessed.
I said to him, “That was unreal. That was “bullshit” and I was so sorry.
He walked away at first, then he approached me and said, “Thank you.”
I hugged him and he said,

“I came to this company because I thought it was supposed to be better. I thought that it was a positive and tolerant work place to work. I was passed over for promotions, they hired from the outside, I fought against their vendetta. I couldn’t take it anymore. I didn’t have a chance here.”

I hugged him again.
Disgusted that something so ugly, so cruel could happen in this day in age in America and that the perpetrator was basically patting herself on the back. Not caring that she had not only destroyed this man’s life, but that she also humiliated him and threatened his future. She was going to sleep soundly that night. She was going to get away with her gross display of how disgusting one human can be to another if they have a position of power and slap a fake smile across their face.

I walked away from Jeffrey and I started to cry. At how cruel we can still be to each other. How awful I felt for him. I strapped my daughter into her car seat and I thought about how in this society we are so self congratulating as we scream to the rafters promising our children,

“It gets better!”

I found myself wondering, “Better than what?”
What I saw on that Starbucks floor was pretty awful.

I have had friends tell me, to boycott. I have had other friends tell me that Starbucks is a positive and tolerant corporation. The latter has always been my impression. I don’t think this is how Starbucks wants themselves represented. However, I think you should be aware of the people who you currently have representing you and the way they are doing it. I am hoping by bringing this to your attention, you will do the right thing. As you can tell by the tone of my letter I am not a political activist. I am not militant and I do not have an axe to grind nor am I looking for a soap box. I’m pretty boring to be quite honest with you. I do not even march in pride parades and I swear I own not a single thing that has a rainbow on it. I don’t celebrate my diversity, That’s simply not the type of person that I am. In fact, I’m more the type to wallow in how mediocre I am. I am an average American who just so happens to be gay. I live my life, I raise my family and I hope to also leave a mark on this world that is positive. I do not like seeing anyone hurt, abused and degraded. I know that should go without saying, a sentiment akin to “All babies should be fed.” but after yesterday, and what I witnessed, I feel like it has to be said.

I want to still be able to walk into a Starbucks with my head held high. I want to drink your drinks, speak your code and even buy your newest record releases, even though they make me feel middle aged and unhip... and feel good about it.

I want you to restore my faith that you are the company I always thought you were.
Please don't let this incident go unnoticed. Do something, anything you can to make this right. Please protect your (former) employee. Take a step, and take action to protect basic human dignity. To protect equal rights and equality. Please do something. I don't want you to lose my business forever.

A loyal customer,
Missy Alison
631- xxx-xxxx

****

Edited to add: we have been contacted by Starbucks. Please see updates here: https://lilfamilyblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/14/starbucks-update-part-1/

I can't reply to every comment here, but if you're a media outlet, Missy is available for interview. If you have questions, Please contact me directly at LilFamilyBlog @ gmail dot com.

Thank you so much, everyone!

Love,
Dana

Accessed March 4, 2014 through http://lilfamilyblog.wordpress.com/2011/06/13/i-know-starbucks-is-not-an-anti-gay-homophobic-company-by-policy-but/

Appendix 32

Vecsey, K. Taylor: Starbucks: We're 'Gay Friendly,' LI Employee Quit. East Hampton Patch, 2011.

Starbucks: We're 'Gay Friendly,' LI Employee Quit

Spokesman says 'performance discussion' should not have happened in front of customers in Centereach store.

Posted by Taylor K. Vecsey (Editor) , June 17, 2011 at 08:12 PM

"He was not terminated. Jeffrey actually resigned his position without coercion of any kind," he said.

Starbucks, however, has not spoken to Warren.

Hiliowitz said Warren's resignation "was corroborated with a few different people," who are part of store operations team in that region.

Reached by phone on Thursday, Warren declined to comment other than to say he has not yet spoken to Starbucks and is getting legal advice.

Starbucks is investigating what took place, however. "The allegations are so against who we are as a company and we take this super seriously." He called the company "gay friendly" and supportive and one that employs a diverse workforce.

Hilowitz said Alison was only overhearing part of a conversation on performance discussion and she had her daughter with her at the Centereach store on Sunday afternoon. "She may have misunderstood," he said.

"What she heard or thinks she may have heard may not have actually happened."

Hilowitz said he wouldn't dispute the details of the conversation or what led up to it. "Her account is her perception."

The meeting that Alison witnessed in the late afternoon was a performance discussion about an incident that happened earlier in the day at the store.

"Regrettably, we could have handled this a bit better and not handled it in front of our customers," Hilowitz said. "It's not appropriate in front of the customer -- absolutely."

The store, the smaller of two Starbucks on Middle Country Road, has a back-room that "is almost non-existent," he said. "It's no excuse," he said, adding that the company is looking on how to change that in the future.

Results of the investigation will likely not be public. Hilowitz said it is the company's policy to handle personnel issues privately. "We won't share what, if any, disciplinary actions are taken."

Accessed March 4, 2014 through http://easthampton.patch.com/groups/editors-picks/p/starbucks-were-gay-friendly-li-employee-quit

Appendix 33

Gay Couple's Account of 'Homophobic Rant' Witnessed at LI Starbucks Sparks Investigation

A blog post detailing a confrontation in Starbucks on Long Island has gone viral on social media sites.

Posted by Taylor K. Vecsey (Editor) , June 17, 2011 at 08:15 PM

"They are taking this seriously," Missy said.

In the end, all Missy said she wanted was for Starbucks to be aware there was a problem.

"I just want this made right. If nothing else, I want to know that there's not a black mark on Jeffrey's work record."

She said she was a bit overwhelmed by the attention her letter has received. "We're really average," she said with a laugh about her and her wife. "We're not on a soap box, we don't really attend rallies, we don't have a rainbow-anything," she said.

She's not confrontational about their lifestyle, she said. "Maybe it's a lesson. You don't have to be aggressive to be in their face: to change their minds about things."

Dana said she's proud of her wife's actions. "We just did what anybody should have done, and what I hope someone else woul do if it were my wife or my daughter in Jeffrey's seat that day. People need to look out for each other," she said.

"I am just amazed at the reactions and attention this has gotten," Dana said. "The power of the internet is amazing; it holds everyone accountable for their actions."

As for Jeffrey, according to a post on Dana's blog Wednesday morning, he's planning to take legal action against the company.

Accessed March 4, 2014 through http://easthampton.patch.com/groups/editors-picks/p/gay-couples-account-homophobic-rant-witnessed-at-li-s4bc33295f7

Appendix 34

Applbees.com – "Applebee's Statement"

Applebee's Statement

Our Guests' personal information – including their meal check – is private, and neither Applebee's nor its franchisees have a right to share this information publicly. We value our Guests' trust above all else. Our franchisee has apologized to the Guest and has taken disciplinary action with the Team Member for violating their Guest's right to privacy. This individual is no longer employed by the franchisee.

###

Accessed March 4, 2014 through http://applebees.mwnewsroom.com/manual-releases/Applebee-s-Statement

Appendix 35

Rush, Curtis: Applebee's refuses to rehire waitress despite online petition for Chelsea Welch. The Star, 2013.

Spokesperson Kevin Mortesen said the decision to fire Welch would not be reversed.

"It's an unfortunate situation, but our guests' privacy is paramount," Mortesen told the Toronto Star.

He said the restaurant values its servers, calling them "the backbone" of the business.

However, employees are warned not to breach privacy rules.

"It's one of the things in the hospitality industry that you don't violate," Mortesen said.

"It's pretty well universal in the hospitality world. What if that guest was not supposed to be at that restaurant at that time? In today's world, our identities are compromised on a daily basis. It's a slippery slope."

Accessed March 4, 2014 through
http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/02/06/applebees_refuses_to_rehire_waitress_despite_online_petition_for_chelsea_welch.html

Appendix 36

Applebees.com – “Statement from Applebee's President Mike Archer”

Statement from Applebee's President Mike Archer

You are right, and we apologize.

Whatever anyone thinks about the personnel decision made by our franchisee in St. Louis, everyone agrees our communications afterwards made the situation worse. We agree. It doesn't excuse us, but we were simply overwhelmed by the outpouring and made decisions that failed the strong online community we've built with you for years.

We have every intention of learning from our mistakes. To help us determine what happened and how we can get better, we will enlist an independent, objective advisor to review the entire situation with us -- a respected and recognized social media expert who will give us impartial insights to strengthen our community management process. We will let you know who that is just as soon as we make final arrangements. We commit to taking whatever steps are needed to ensure we are as responsive and open with our community during difficult times as we've always been during good times.

Even before starting that important work, we are re-dedicating ourselves to the community’s right to air its opinions as our guiding light. All comments – positive, negative, and in between – that are shared according to acceptable community standards can help us improve. We’ve taken the first step by posting clear Content Guidelines to guide our moderating.

We believe we can do better, and hope you will give us the chance to prove it by our actions. Thank you.

Mike Archer

Accessed March 4, 2014 through http://applebees.mwnewsroom.com/manual-releases/Statement-from-Applebee-s-President-Mike-Archer

Appendix 37

Stollar, R.l.: APPLEBEE'S OVERNIGHT SOCIAL MEDIA MELTDOWN: A PHOTO ESSAY. Rlstollar.wordpress.com, 2013.

Applebee's Hi James I'm really sorry your upset. will you please read the comment we posted above yours. Most people have misunderstood what's happened here. The server that posted the photo was not the server that waited on the group. There are some other key details in the comment we posted before yours. We value you and appreciate your concern.
48 minutes ago · Like · 2

Applebee's I can understand that TL. You should know though that the server was not stiffed. There was 18% gratuity added in with the bill. The guest just did not leave an additional tip. Thanks for sharing your concerns.
16 minutes ago · Like

Applebee's We can understand why you are upset. The details circulating about this story do not represent all the facts. For example the team member who posted the receipt was NOT the team member that waited on the group. The 18% gratuity was added to the bill. We'll be posting a statement later that explains the facts. This is an unfortunate situation but please let us assure you that Applebee's and every one of our franchisees values the hard working team members and the amazing job they do serving the guest. Thank you for showing support of them.
39 minutes ago · Like

Applebee's People can say a lot but it doesn't mean it's true. I really do understand why you're upset Manuel, I'm upset over the situation too. Sometimes it hard to let people know just how much you really care behind a computer screen, in a facebook comment. Thanks again for caring so much about Applebee's workers.
17 minutes ago · Like · 1

Applebee's Sorry you feel that way. If you knew me or we were face to face you'd know how much I care. No one's asking me to comment at 5 am in the morning. I am because I care, we care. I totally understand why you're upset and hate that I can't fix it.
14 minutes ago · Like

Applebee's Thanks James. Unfortunately the internet has several of the facts wrong about the situation. I understand why their upset but again they don't have the full story. We should be posting something soon to help clear up some of this. Appreciate your concern and words of encouragement friend.
24 minutes ago · Like · 1

Applebee's We can understand why you are upset. But the details circulating about this story do not represent all the facts. For example the team member who posted the receipt WAS NOT the team member that waited on the group. The 18% gratuity was added to the bill. We'll be posting a statement later that explains the facts. We want and value you as guest. This is an unfortunate situation but please let us assure you that Applebee's and every one of our franchisees values the hard working team members and the amazing job they do serving the guest. We appreciate your support of them too.
34 minutes ago · Like

Applebee's We can understand why you are upset. But the details circulating about this story do not represent all the facts. For example the team member who posted the receipt WAS NOT the team member that waited on the group. The 18% gratuity was added to the bill. We'll be posting a statement later that explains the facts. We want and value you as guest. This is an unfortunate situation but please let us assure you that Applebee's and every one of our franchisees values the hard working team members and the amazing job they do serving the guest. We appreciate your support of them too.
41 minutes ago · Edited · Like · 1

Applebee's The disregard for an important policy left the franchisee no choice but to take the action they did.
31 minutes ago · Like

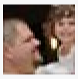
Applebee's I understand it probably won't change how upset you are but the team member that actually did wait on the group didn't get stiffed. The 18% is automatically added to the check. There was just nothing additional left. Again, a lot of the facts have been twisted. Really do understand why you're upset and hate that you are. A lot of what's spreading unfortunately is inaccurate.
20 minutes ago · Like

Applebee's Hate that you feel that way Ami. Wish folks had all the facts though. This story has really got the facts twisted.
23 minutes ago · Like

Accessed February 13, 2014 through http://rlstollar.wordpress.com/2013/02/02/applebees-overnight-social-media-meltdown-a-photo-essay/

Appendix 38

Starbucks Facebook page



Jay Bremner This post wast the first that I had heard of the issue. Since then, I (and many others) have been following it. I understand the need for a company to not discuss the details of human resources decisions, but can you at least mention in broad terms what was found from your investigation? Have you talked to the employee? If he has retained an attorney, have you spoken with the attorney?

29 June 2011 at 16:06 · Like

Accessed May 6, 2014 through https://www.facebook.com/Starbucks/posts/10150231198643057

Appendix 39

Benoit, William: Image repair discourse and crisis communication. Public Relations Review, 1997, 177-186.

TABLE 1

Image Restoration Strategies

Strategy	*Key Characteristic*	*Illustration*
Denial		
Simple Denial	Did Not Perform Act	Coke Does Not Charge McDonald's Less
Shift the Blame	Act Performed by Another	Exxon: Alaska and Caused Delay
Evasion of Responsibility		
Provocation	Responded to Act of Another	Firm Moved Because of New State Laws
Defeasibility	Lack of Information or Ability	Executive Not Told Meeting Changed
Accident	Act Was a Mishap	Sears' Unneeded Repairs Inadvertent
Good Intentions	Meant Well in Act	Sears: No Willful Over-Charges
Reducing Offensiveness of Event		
Bolstering	Stress Good Traits	Exxon's Swift and Competent Action
Minimization	Act Not Serious	Exxon: Few Animals Killed
Differentiation	Act Less Offensive	Sears: Preventative Maintenance
Transcendence	More Important Considerations	Helping Humans Justifies Tests
Attack Accuser	Reduce Credibility of Accuser	Pepsi: Coke Charges McDonald's Less
Compensation	Reimburse Victim	Disabled Movie-Goers Given Free Passes
Corrective Action	Plan to Solve or Prevent Problem	AT&T Promised to Improve Service
Mortification	Apologize for Act	AT&T Apologized

Accessed September 30, 2014 through http://ac.els-cdn.com/S0363811197900230/1-s2.0-S0363811197900230-main.pdf?_tid=d9939786-487d-11e4-bbd2-00000aacb35e&acdnat=1412066788_f76b7a174a226e74b0d336813a23e171