

Social Media Humour and Image Management: The Itel Shitstorm

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Abstract

The chapter engages the nexus between social media humour and image management in Zimbabwe. It focuses on how user-generated humour shared on various social networking (SNSs) sites, such as WhatsApp, is implicated in the discursive construction of shitstorms that threaten the reputation of specific brands. Shitstorms are online crises resulting from a sudden online attack on a brand. They are, thus, a product of collaboration and co-creation. In image management, social media humour can be implicated in negative dialogue, shitstorms and trash talking of an organisation's brands and/or reputation. Shitstorms are rarely arbitrary and random collections of complaints from customers. They are made up of related vitriol that coalesce into a system. Social media humour is implicated in the formation of negative discourse against the Itel smartphone from which five salient narratives. Image management is fast becoming an integral and inescapable part of organisations' strategic communication practices. The proliferation of SNSs demands that organisations have to recognise the potential of online humour as a massive reputational threat. However, social media humour is not always played out on conventional or traditional online spaces monitored by the organisations. Negative social media humour, therefore, presents a different dynamic to our conceptualisations of shitstorms and the kind of interventions organisations need to make to manage them. The chapter departs from studies that have focused on how organisations use both firm-generated and user-generated humour in ORM.