“Thank you for reaching out:” Conversational Human Voice in Customer Care During Crisis Events

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Digital conversations and their effective management in online forums constitute what Michael Hulme once described as integral to an organization’s *Reputational Resource* when cultivating and controlling its brand and global image across social media platforms. These platforms have become the digital marketplace where the give-and-take of conversation, at its best, takes on a cooperative aspect, as companies collaborate with their customers and clients to sustain, mitigate, and, in some cases, repair their relationships with customers through these digital conversations Yet language and its effective use in these online encounters has gained remarkably little attention in studies dedicated to computer-mediated communication and interactive online marketing in retail and service settings. Even less attention, or so it seems, has been dedicated to examining how companies should respond to customers online during a crisis event. Drawing from the existing customer service literature on how best to respond to customers’ complaints and concerns in social media forums, this presentation will showcase the importance of sustaining a conversational, human voice in online exchanges by comparing the social media advice presented as best practices with the actual practices demonstrated by customer care representatives engaging with customers online during two crisis events: one in the service sector, the other in the retail sector.