ABSTRACT

SHANNON HENESY. Roasting the Competition: A Rhetorical Case Study of the Wendy’s Twitter Feed. (Under the direction of Dr. Zachary Beare.)

This capstone project analyzes the Wendy’s Twitter account as a contemporary case study of how large corporations build brand identity and manage social impression using social media. The project questions why Wendy’s has been so successful in employing Twitter as a platform and works to theorize possible explanations for its success. This analysis reveals the rhetorical work being done by the Wendy’s Twitter: by acting under the umbrella concepts of brand personification and impression management, Wendy’s has created a Twitter persona that mimics millennials and the members of Generation Z, thus enticing audiences composed of those people to follow, like, retweet, and ultimately purchase Wendy’s products. Contrary to previous research done on Twitter, this report seeks to examine viral tweets from a singular Twitter account and explain how and why they worked as well as they did in the context of Twitter. Tweets produced by the Wendy’s Twitter account over the course of 2018 were collected and coded for content and rhetorical work; these codes were later used to theorize how rhetorical work contributes to virality. Viral tweets from 2018 (those receiving at least 100,000 likes, n=6) were then analyzed through the lens of Cara Finnegan’s (2010) Production, Composition, Reproduction, Circulation, and Reception framework. The results of this study demonstrate that the Wendy’s account possesses mastery in successfully mirroring its primary audience and capitalizing on current trends to capture the interest of the wider Twitter community by making intentional rhetorical moves with its tweets. This study would be of interest to scholars wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the nuances of social media advertising.