Singer Neil Young boycotts Starbucks over Vermont’s GMO Labeling Law

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Synopsis
Late in 2014, singer Neil Young issued a social media message calling for a boycott of Starbucks. Young alleged that Starbucks, as a member of the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA), supported a lawsuit that aimed to block a Vermont law that required genetically-modified food ingredients be labeled. A self-described loyal customer, Kyle Roberson, heard about the boycott from mainstream media sources including The Washington Post, Burlington (Vermont) Free Press, Rollingstone.com, and MTV.com. Could Kyle continue to patronize Starbucks if what Neil Young said was true? While waiting for the official Starbucks response, Kyle investigated the legislation, the parties in the lawsuit, and Young’s call for a boycott.

Learning Outcomes
In completing this assignment, students should be able to:

1. Examine how individuals and advocacy groups use social media when protesting organizations and corporations.
2. Analyze a public relations crisis from the perspective of multiple stakeholders.
3. Explain how firms effectively respond to and manage public relations issues.
4. Assess the virality of a social media message and its impact on business.

Application
This case is primarily intended for use in undergraduate business courses including marketing, public policy, business, government & society, or public relations

Key Words
public relations, crisis management, and social media

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