Examining the Case of Dick’s Sporting Goods:

Realignment of Stakeholders through Corporate Social Advocacy

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**Abstract**

This study examined corporate social advocacy and political activism through the case of Dick’s Sporting Goods and the company’s recent stance on gun control reform. Themes related to stakeholders, corporate values, and activism versus advocacy were explored through an interview with Dick’s President; documentation including an interview with Dick’s CEO and statements from the company; and a social media content analysis of 3000 public tweets to Dick’s in the wake of the announcement. Findings revealed that Dick’s actions extended beyond corporate social advocacy into corporate political activism, partly driven by secondary stakeholders. This action created an opportunity for Dick’s to redefine and realign stakeholders while making corporate values clearer to these stakeholder groups.

**Keywords:** corporate social advocacy, political activism, stakeholder theory, corporate values

**Bios**

Barbara Miller Gaither (Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) is a professor at Elon University, where she researches corporate issue advocacy, environmental communication, and public perceptions of CSR.  Gaither has authored a book on marketplace advocacy and published research in journals including the Journal of Applied Communications Research, Mass Communication and Society, Journal of Public Relations Research, Journal of Advertising, Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly, Risk Analysis and PR Review.  She has been named an Arthur W. Page Center Scholar and received a PRIDE Award for Outstanding Contribution to Public Relations Education from PR Review.

Lucinda Austin (Ph.D., University of Maryland College Park) is an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she researches social media, health and crisis communication, and publics’ perspectives in CSR and relationship building. Austin has published in journals including Communication Research, the Journal of Applied Communication Research, Health Communication, the Journal of Public Relations Research, and PR Review. She has been awarded AEJMC’s Promising Professors and PR Division SuPRstar Awards, the Arthur W. Page Center’s Legacy Educator and Scholar Awards, and NCA’s PRIDE Award.

Morgan Collins is an Honors student at Elon University studying strategic communications. Her research focuses on corporations’ efforts to undertake corporate social advocacy and corporate political activism, particularly in regards to environmental issues.