Mock Mediation Case: Going Viral

General Facts

Sage, a high school junior, never expected the short "get ready with me" videos and vlogs they posted for fun to attract much attention. That changed when one of their recent social media videos received more than 10.5 million views. Almost overnight, Sage found themselves becoming a social media influencer. As their audience has grown, they have continued creating content while trying to find the balance between over-sharing and making relatable content.

One Thursday evening, Sage and several friends went to Robertson's Eatery, a highly acclaimed local restaurant owned by the Robertson family. During their meal, Sage believed they saw a rat running across the restaurant floor. Startled, they immediately began recording a video for social media. In the video, Sage told their followers what they believed they had seen and described their fear of rodents. They then turned the camera toward their friends, who also appeared upset by the incident. No rat was visible in the video.

A server noticed the group's reaction and asked what was wrong. Sage and their friends explained that they had seen a rat. Restaurant employees searched the area but found no evidence of a rodent. The server apologized for the situation and offered the group a 25% discount on their meal.

After Sage posted the video, their followers quickly identified the restaurant as Robertson's Eatery. The comment section filled with criticism of the restaurant, and the hashtag *#RodentsonsEatery* began circulating online. Some commenters announced that they would no longer eat at the restaurant and encouraged others to do the same.

The video soon became Sage's most popular post. Other social media users began using clips from the video, including audio of Sage reacting to the alleged rat sighting, in their own posts. The attention significantly increased Sage's online following and led to new opportunities, including brand partnerships and funding to develop an online cooking show.

Robertson's Eatery experienced a very different outcome. In the weeks following the video, business declined significantly. The restaurant also became the target of jokes and vandalism, including graffiti on its front door reading, "Home of Ratatouille."

Jamie Robertson, the restaurant's owner and founder, hired three different exterminators to inspect the property. None found evidence of an existing or previous rat infestation inside the restaurant. However, rats are known to live outdoors in the surrounding neighborhood. As an additional precaution, exterminators placed traps and rodent control treatments around the exterior of the building. Despite these efforts, business at Robertson's Eatery did not return to its previous levels in the months following Sage's post.

Hoping to repair the restaurant's reputation, Jamie contacted Sage and asked them to remove the video. Sage declined and maintains that they genuinely believe they saw a rat and did not intentionally provide false information. They are also concerned that removing the video could hurt the online following and professional opportunities they have gained since it went viral.

Jamie believes Sage's video unfairly damaged the reputation of a business their family worked hard to build and that they should be held responsible for the financial harm that followed. Sage believes they truthfully shared what they experienced and should not be responsible for how other social media users reacted.

Jamie Robertson has filed a defamation lawsuit against Sage. Before continuing with litigation, the parties have agreed to attempt to resolve their dispute through mediation.