

Detecting, Preventing, and Mitigating Online Firestorms in Brand Communities

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Abstract

Online firestorms pose severe threats to online brand communities. Any negative electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has the potential to become an online firestorm, yet not every post does, so finding ways to detect and respond to negative eWOM constitutes a critical managerial priority. The authors develop a comprehensive framework that integrates different drivers of negative eWOM and the response approaches that firms use to engage in and disengage from online conversations with complaining customers. A text-mining study of negative eWOM demonstrates distinct impacts of high and low arousal emotions, structural tie strength, and linguistic style match (between sender and brand community) on firestorm potential. The firm's response must be tailored to the arousal in the negative eWOM to limit the virality of potential online firestorms. The impact of firestorms can be mitigated by distinct firm responses over time, and the effectiveness of different approaches also varies with their timing.

Keywords: *online firestorms; online brand community; text mining*

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