

Dark side of Social Media Communication: Online Firestorms –A Case Study of few Select Companies

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Abstract

Social networking sites emerged as prominent media for marketing communication. They spread company information at breathtaking speed to the large audience. However, this speed of communication may be negative and impact in reduction of brand image and adversely affecting the sale.

Researchers have identified 20 organizations who faced online firestorms. Further, these 20 organizations posts analyzed using text analytics and crowding. Added to this, a sentiment analysis was carried out to differentiate negative sentiment towards the company. Online firestorms raised when the sentiments of people were raised. This is by insulting traditions, customs, values and religion in total. People take it personally and negativity spreads faster than fire.

Online firestorms can be prevented by not affecting sentiments of people. Even if the online firestorm breaks, a quick and sincere apology pacifies the firestorms. Further, in a few instances, clarifications regarding the social media post were also published. Social media content writers have to carefully examine and should not mix people's sentiments with brand promotions of the company. The study is limited to twitter platforms and may have better understanding if explored with other social media platforms.

Keywords: online firestorm, cultural sentiments, Individualism, group based firestorms, organization control

Introduction

The unfolding of social media for marketing communication has brought a paradigm shift and also opened a Pandora's box. This is due to social media's inherent characteristics like sharing and commenting on posts by peers. These posts, reviews, comments and likes may be positive or sometimes turned into negatives. In case of negative comments, it may go viral within a fraction of seconds to the world. This sudden negative word of mouth outburst is called online firestorms (Scholz, J., 2019). According to Einwiller, S. (2017) online firestorms generated for several reasons. First, few want to bring bad repute to the organization, Second, create fun on the message of the company, and finally altruism in which the firestormer warns the people or organisations of those helping the target organization. Further, Intensity of emotions either high or low leads to the virality of the eWoM (Herrhausen, D, 2019). On the downside of the online firestorm, they result in social conflict (Hauser, F., 2017).

Competitors and Online Firestorms

BlackPR emerged in the recent past as a strategy by a few corporations. These corporations hire an external agency to generate negative word of mouth for their competitors.



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Individualism and online firestorms

Online firestorms are triggered by individuals, competitors and vested groups. Individuals create the online firestorms due to their unmet expectations (Hauser, F.,2017). These expectations may be due to delivery issues or quality issues. Further, online firestorms exploded based on social norms. Social media posts or company activities of a marketing organisation that hurts patriotism, religion, culture and hispanic groups sentiments result in sudden outburst. Added to this, individuals and organisational goal congruence problems outcomes in the online firestorms. Apart from this, researchers found that individuals acting as the source of online firestorms have complaint behaviour against the person, institute or groups (Pfeffer, J., 2014). Most of the online firestorms generated by individuals with emotionally unstable attitudes, depression and suffering from anxiety(Rost, K. ,2016) In addition to this, individuals believe rumours are the root cause of online firestorms.

Groups and online firestorms

The clutter in the offline news space created intense battles among the group members. To get noticed in flash, news aired to the customers.

Staunch supporters of such news channels make the news viral in a negative way(Pfeffer, J. ,2014). Further, vested groups create online firestorms to become the obstacle in the organisation's growth.

Detecting online firestorms

Online firestorms are detected using relative importance study. It was found that higher the arousal the post is having the higher the influence and less importance to the message content (Herrhausen, D., 2019). The study also highlighted linguistic style match with community and how communities structural ties are bonded is useful in identifying online firestorms.

Online firestorms are detected by identifying the geographical coverage. The sudden increase in the geographical spread forces the company to get attention. Interestingly, the customer age group also shows high deviation during the crisis(Koch, K., Dippel, A., & Schumann, M.,2021).

It was also observed in the online firestorms the fake social media accounts act as super spreaders. In another instance, it was found that the wording used in the online firestorms provide insight. The simpler the word to criticise managers is to use empathetic messages. However, if the messages are highly critical, managers have to provide a detailed explanation (Herrhausen, D., 2019).

Marketing strategies to prevent online firestorms

The best counter attacking strategy for the online firestorms is to keep messaging about products and brands irrespective of the online firestorm (Pfeffer, J. ,2014). Here it was advised to use the image repair messages to bring back the confidence of lost customers (Einwiller, S. ,2017). In another strategy , companies keep calm during the online firestorm and strongly believe that audiences have shorter memory and tend to look for new stories online(Falkinger, J. ,2007). Apart from this, companies are flagging such posts such that it reduces the negativity (Mandavia, M., & Gupta, D.,2018). In addition to this, organisations use third party handlers to write the positive posts for the negative comments that arose from the online firestorm(Mandavia, M., & Gupta, D. ,2018). Additionally, a few companies decided to move out of such social media channels or pages. On the other hand, if the company has not made a mistake it can provide a stronger explanation.

Organisation support to prevent online firestorms

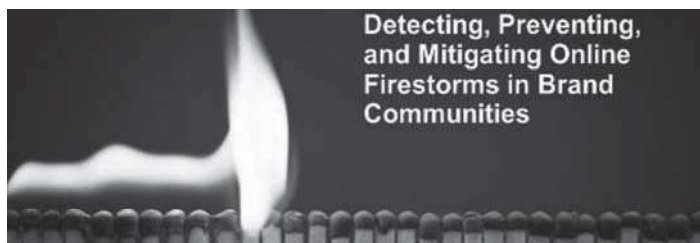
A dedicated team is required in the organisation for managing positive and negative social listening (Mandavia, M., & Gupta, D. ,2018). The team having reaction plans and knowledge of consumer attributes reduces firestorms effectively (Stitch, L.,2014). The team is also responsible for overcoming online firestorm by identifying the source of the message and the source attachment with membership groups(Herrhausen, D, 2019). However, it is very difficult to trace the online firestorm source as it may be an individual or group(Mandavia, M., & Gupta, D.,2018). Added to this woe, the major person who began the online firestorm may sneak out of the social media (Rost, K. ,2016)

Research Methodology

The research is having sample extent to the Indian subcontinent. Organisations that underwent online firestorms were considered as sampling units. These samples were selected based on the judgment of researchers. Further, qualitative analysis tools such as text analytics, text crowding and sentiment analysis applied to unearth the rich information.

Objectives

1. Study the dark side of social media communication
2. Factors causing Online Firestorms
3. Strategies to overcome Online Firestorms



Discussions

Online firestorms detections need continuous evaluation of social media. Organisations must monitor the e word of mouth communication and evaluate negative sentiments

Table 1. Companies in India undergone online firestorms

Sl. No.	Name of the company	Strategies to overcome from the online firestorms
1	ITC limited	Put a case on YouTube and Facebook to remove the fake content and have won the battle.
2	Pepsi India	The company arranged for influencer meet, plant visits, quality standards and awareness programs about its products to overcome Online firestorms.
3	Airtel	On 18th July 2018, the customer pooja asked for the service explanation form Airtel. The executive Mr. Shoib has promised her to get back with an explanation. The customer written no confidence in the executive as he is a Muslim. The company changed the executive and the answer was given by Mr. Gaganjot Singh. The earlier message was trolled by many in the online world and it has become a political issue. Rather than changing the executive Airtel would have flagged the post and avoided the criticism
4	Hindustan Unilever Ltd- Red label	Hindustan Unilver came out with a social media post about elders abandoned in the Kumbh Mela. The post got high criticism by twitter followers. This led to HUL changing the post and showing only the later part of the post(https://twitter.com/i/status/1103509143862816769)
5	Byju's-owned WhiteHat Jr	Byju's-owned WhiteHat Jr, which teaches coding to children, has come under criticism for its advertisements. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) asked the company in October to withdraw five advertisements due to misleading claims. In November 2020, WhiteHat Jr filed defamation lawsuits against two of its most vocal critics—software engineer Pradeep Poonia and angel investor Aniruddha Malpani—and sought \$2.6 million and \$1.9 million in damages, respectively. In May this year, WhiteHat Jr withdrew its defamation case against Poonia.
6	Kent	Kent, in its advertisement for a flour dough kneader denigrated the chores a maid does. This attracted widespread criticism and the brand had to withdraw advertising. After Twitter row over ad gone wrong, Kent apologises for 'hurting sentiments'. The advertisement is contrary to the beliefs and professional standards of Kent, he added. "We will investigate how our advertisement standards were compromised and we will further take corrective and preventive action so that such incidents are not repeated in future," Gupta said adding that "we support and respect all sections of the society and apologise for the mistake"
7	Tanishq	Tanishq, in its advertising, contextualised an inter-faith marriage and showed how a caring mother-in-law respected her daughter-in-law's faith. This portrayal also drew criticism from a virulent section of the society that threatened violence against the brand, forcing Tanishq to withdraw its advertising. Clearly the criticism itself was flawed. Hence, there were as many or more proponents for the brand than those against. So, even without Tanishq having to justify its choice, it had many fighting for it.

		Tanishq's favour was that the commercial itself was themed on a celebration and the joy that comes with it. Added to it was the message of amity and mutual respect. Given the positive strokes of the commercial, the villain was the protest and the protestors, rather than the commercial itself.
8	Zomato	<p>The 'Har customer hai Star' advertisements, which were intended to promote the company's 'fast delivery and special customer service' ethos, led to outrage as viewers pointed out the not-so-healthy working conditions that are imposed upon the Zomato delivery partners/valets</p> <p>"Having said that, we have been intently listening to all the chatter about gig workers and all the problems associated with this part of the economy," Zomato said via Twitter.</p> <p>Zomato has been trying to do some damage control through a few ads which highlight the role of their delivery partners. The first one, starring comedian Danish Sait, was cancelled by the internet. In fact, the comedian took the ad down from his social media handles after rendering an apology.</p>
9	Jawed Habib	<p>Celebrity hair stylist Jawed Habib faced a huge social media backlash for a print ad in Kolkata that showed Durga and other Hindu gods and goddesses at leisure at one his salons.</p> <p>Habib himself posted a series of tweets explaining the situation and even posted a video on Twitter apologising for the ad. He said that he had only one religion, which is that of the scissors, and that the ad was printed by a Kolkata franchise without his permission, and it should not have. He ended the video with an apology, clarifying that he had no intention of hurting anyone.</p>
10	Ceat Tyres ad & CEO tweet on Kumb Mela	<p>In the ad, the Bollywood actor is advising people not to burst crackers on the streets. The MP has also asked the company to address the "problem of blocking roads in the name of namaz and noise from mosques during azaan".</p> <p>In a cryptic response to the said backlash, Harsh Goenka on Thursday tweeted, "The less you respond to negative people (including on Twitter), the more peaceful your life will be." Goenka did not apologise in any manner for his outrageous tweets till the time this report was filed. Goenka's tweet on Kumbh has also started circulating on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, and on messaging platform WhatsApp. It is yet to be seen if Harsh Goenka feels a sense of shame for defaming Hindus.</p>
11	FabIndia	<p>Clothing brand FabIndia has removed a promotional capsule about its new festive line after a backlash from right-wing groups. While the brand was accused of "defacing" the Hindu festival of Diwali by naming its festive collection as Jashn-e-Riwaaz (celebration of tradition), the company insisted that it is not a Diwali collection, which will be soon launched under 'Jhilmil si Diwali' promo.</p>
12	Sabyasachi	<p>A recent slate of ads Sabyasachi published to promote a new 'intimate fine jewellery' collection has become the subject of massive public ire on social media. Out of the many pieces, one has been marketed as the Royal Bengal Mangalsutra, which is facing the most criticism for its portrayal on the body of a woman clothed only in lingerie.</p> <p>"The campaign was intended as a celebration and we are deeply saddened that it has instead offended a section of our society. So, we at Sabyasachi have decided to withdraw the campaign," Sabyasachi in a post on Instagram.</p>
13	Manyavar	<p>Clothing brand Manyavar has found itself in controversial soup over its recently released bridal advertisement featuring Alia Bhatt. In the ad, Alia questions the archaic tradition of 'Kanyadaan' and netizens have mixed responses to it.</p> <p>Manyavar claimed that it was "Promoting a progressive way of thinking, one tradition at a time!" Apparently, 'Kanyamaan' "gives a new spin to wedding rituals, highlighting the idea of respecting brides instead of 'giving them away'."</p>

14	Surf Excel	<p>Surf Excel's Holi ad promoting Hindu-Muslim harmony faces backlash on Twitter. Surf Excel's minute-long Holi ad 'Rang Laaye Sang' (colours bring people together) shows two kids, a young Hindu girl and a Muslim boy.</p> <p>Surf has done well to capture the innocence and playfulness of kids. No wonder the film has been lapped up by those on social media,</p>
15	Dabur Fem	<p>Consumer goods maker Dabur India has apologised for its latest ad on Fem bleach which showed a same-sex couple fasting for each other on the festival of Karva Chauth. The ad, themed #GlowWithPride, got embroiled in a huge controversy and split mass opinions. ... Some also equated the ad to promoting fair skin</p> <p>FMCG giant took down its ad and even issued an apology via a tweet on 25 October.</p>
16	Amul macho	<p>Amul Macho has released a TVC for the launch of Macho Sporto, with a commitment to legitimise the female gaze.</p> <p>"Breaking patriarchal stereotypes, the campaign intends to highlight how today's women don't hesitate in making the first move." said JG Hosiery (parent company of Macho Sporto) MD Navinn Seksaria</p>
17	Manforce Condoms	<p>Mankind had posters with Sunny Leone advertising condoms which has Navratri in it. Apparently, it reads, "Iss Navratri, khelo magar pyaar se." Comparing dandiya with making out is what has stirred this controversy.</p> <p>Manforce Condoms has withdrawn near 500 hoardings encouraging Navaratri revellers to "play safe" from Gujarat after protests. Apart from pulling down the campaign that stirred controversy, the company clarified on social media platform Twitter on Wednesday evening stating: "Navratra Hoardings Campaign was not meant to hurt anyone's sentiments & was immediately withdrawn. We deeply regret any such incident."</p>
18	Ola	<p>The ad titled "Micro Stories: Too expensive to take GF out on a date?" was released earlier this week. Taxi aggregator Ola has pulled down an ad from its official YouTube channel after an outrage over it on social media.</p>
19	Eros Now	<p>Eros Now has been posting stills of Bollywood actresses from their production to wish people a happy Navratri. The film production company posted "vulgar" tweets and memes on Navratri.</p> <p>A section of the internet is upset with Eros Now for allegedly "violating" the religious festival of Navratri by "mocking" and "insulting" it.</p> <p>Eros Now later took down the creative and issued an apology saying "We at Eros love and respect our cultures equally. It is not, and it has never been, our intention to hurt anyone's emotions. We have deleted the concerned posts and we apologise for having offended anybody's sentiments."</p>
20	Paytm	<p>Paytm ad was slammed by the netizens lately because the ad showed a kid who supported his team, slapped by his coach. The coach said, "Do you want to play, or you just want to cheer?" Later, the kid became the great Sachin Tendulkar. The netizens created a blast by saying that slapping a kid on national television isn't appropriate.</p> <p>Paytm First Games Spokesperson said, "We have received an overwhelmingly positive response for our new campaign, with people across the country liking it and sharing on their social media handles. The theme of the campaign is about aiming for excellence and making the right choices. We truly believe in sportsman spirit and that is what we want to promote through this advertisement as well. We respect and embrace all the sentiments that this advertisement invokes."</p>

(Source: Primary data)

Text analytics

Table 2. Text analytics of 20 sample online firestorms (Source: Primary data)

Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage
1	Actor	6	0.064	40	Platform	7	0.075	79	Post	10	0.107
2	Actress	6	0.064	41	Posts	7	0.075	80	See	10	0.107
3	Coach	6	0.064	42	Promoting	7	0.075	81	Sentiments	10	0.107
4	Country	6	0.064	43	Released	7	0.075	82	Slammed	10	0.107
5	Culture	6	0.064	44	Religious	7	0.075	83	Tanishq	10	0.107
6	Festivals	6	0.064	45	Series	7	0.075	84	Eros	11	0.118
7	Leone	6	0.064	46	Severe	7	0.075	85	Indian	11	0.118
8	Light	6	0.064	47	Show	7	0.075	86	Women	11	0.118
9	Market	6	0.064	48	Statement	7	0.075	87	Colours	12	0.128
10	Posted	6	0.064	49	Stereotypes	7	0.075	88	Good	12	0.128
11	Puja	6	0.064	50	Tendulkar	7	0.075	89	Love	12	0.128
12	Rang	6	0.064	51	Traditions	7	0.075	90	Making	12	0.128
13	Religion	6	0.064	52	Wear	7	0.075	91	Sporto	12	0.128
14	Sachin	6	0.064	53	Wing	7	0.075	92	Users	12	0.128
15	Shared	6	0.064	54	Baby	8	0.086	93	Woman	12	0.128
16	Society	6	0.064	55	Bride	8	0.086	94	Bhatt	13	0.139
17	Sunny	6	0.064	56	Clothing	8	0.086	95	Diwali	13	0.139
18	Team	6	0.064	57	Content	8	0.086	96	Jashn	13	0.139
19	Trending	6	0.064	58	Creative	8	0.086	97	Brands	14	0.15
20	Tweet	6	0.064	59	Designer	8	0.086	98	Delivery	14	0.15
21	Unilever	6	0.064	60	Films	8	0.086	99	Habib	14	0.15
22	Withdraw	6	0.064	61	Gods	8	0.086	100	Riwaaz	14	0.15
23	Advertisements	7	0.075	62	Jewellery	8	0.086	101	Controversy	15	0.16
24	Apology	7	0.075	63	Kanyadaan	8	0.086	102	Products	15	0.16
25	Bring	7	0.075	64	Manyavar	8	0.086	103	Young	15	0.16
26	Came	7	0.075	65	Tech	8	0.086	104	Alia	16	0.171
27	Celebration	7	0.075	66	Views	8	0.086	105	Backlash	16	0.171
28	Couple	7	0.075	67	Bollywood	9	0.096	106	Navratri	16	0.171
29	Criticism	7	0.075	68	Customs	9	0.096	107	Netizens	16	0.171
30	Economic	7	0.075	69	Featuring	9	0.096	108	Macho	18	0.192
31	Face	7	0.075	70	Girl	9	0.096	109	Muslim	19	0.203
32	Fashion	7	0.075	71	Life	9	0.096	110	Festival	20	0.214
33	Gender	7	0.075	72	Tradition	9	0.096	111	Holi	21	0.225
34	Hurt	7	0.075	73	Across	10	0.107	112	India	24	0.257
35	Kaushal	7	0.075	74	Amul	10	0.107	113	Twitter	30	0.321
36	Kids	7	0.075	75	Daag	10	0.107	114	Advertisement	36	0.385
37	Launched	7	0.075	76	Durga	10	0.107	115	Social	37	0.396
38	Mandanna	7	0.075	77	Flak	10	0.107	116	Brand	51	0.545
39	Mangalsutra	7	0.075	78	Paytm	10	0.107	117	Hindu	51	0.545

Researchers have used a Text analyzer tool to identify the text important to research based on the objectives. The analysis extracted 117 words with celebrities and religious. Texts covering most of the words. Further, researchers conducted text validation using Python NLTK package to remove irrelevant words. The word count for the text analytics reduced to 97.

Table 3. Text Validation by removing irrelevant words (Source: Primary data)

Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage
1	Actor	6	0.064	34	mangalsutra	7	0.075	67	tanishq	10	0.107
2	Actress	6	0.064	35	platform	7	0.075	68	eros	11	0.118
3	Coach	6	0.064	36	posts	7	0.075	69	indian	11	0.118
4	Country	6	0.064	37	promoting	7	0.075	70	women	11	0.118
5	Culture	6	0.064	38	released	7	0.075	71	colours	12	0.128
6	Festivals	6	0.064	39	religious	7	0.075	72	users	12	0.128
7	Leone	6	0.064	40	statement	7	0.075	73	woman	12	0.128
8	Light	6	0.064	41	stereotypes	7	0.075	74	bhatt	13	0.139
9	Market	6	0.064	42	tendulkar	7	0.075	75	diwali	13	0.139
10	Posted	6	0.064	43	traditions	7	0.075	76	jashn	13	0.139
11	Puja	6	0.064	44	baby	8	0.086	77	brands	14	0.15
12	Rang	6	0.064	45	bride	8	0.086	78	delivery	14	0.15
13	Religion	6	0.064	46	clothing	8	0.086	79	habib	14	0.15
14	Sachin	6	0.064	47	content	8	0.086	80	riwaaz	14	0.15
15	Shared	6	0.064	48	creative	8	0.086	81	controversy	15	0.16
16	Society	6	0.064	49	designer	8	0.086	82	products	15	0.16
17	Sunny	6	0.064	50	films	8	0.086	83	young	15	0.16
18	Team	6	0.064	51	gods	8	0.086	84	alia	16	0.171
19	Trending	6	0.064	52	kanyadaan	8	0.086	85	backlash	16	0.171
20	Tweet	6	0.064	53	manyavar	8	0.086	86	navratri	16	0.171
21	Withdraw	6	0.064	54	tech	8	0.086	87	netizens	16	0.171
22	Advertisements	7	0.075	55	views	8	0.086	88	macho	18	0.192
23	Apology	7	0.075	56	bollywood	9	0.096	89	muslim	19	0.203
24	celebration	7	0.075	57	customs	9	0.096	90	festival	20	0.214
25	Couple	7	0.075	58	girl	9	0.096	91	holi	21	0.225
26	Criticism	7	0.075	59	life	9	0.096	92	india	24	0.257
27	Fashion	7	0.075	60	tradition	9	0.096	93	twitter	30	0.321
28	Gender	7	0.075	61	amul	10	0.107	94	advertisement	36	0.385
29	Hurt	7	0.075	62	durga	10	0.107	95	social	37	0.396
30	Kaushal	7	0.075	63	paytm	10	0.107	96	brand	51	0.545
31	Kids	7	0.075	64	post	10	0.107	97	hindu	51	0.545
32	launched	7	0.075	65	sentiments	10	0.107				
33	mandanna	7	0.075	66	slammed	10	0.107				

The text validation output brought out new insights into the research. The celebrity controversies extracted 12 words and showed the importance of corporate keep tabs on the content and celebrity to avoid the online firestorms.

Table 4. Text analytics on Celebrity controversies (Source: Primary data)

Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage
1	actor	6	0.064	7	mandanna	7	0.075
2	actress	6	0.064	8	designer	8	0.086
3	leone	6	0.064	9	bollywood	9	0.096
4	sachin	6	0.064	10	habib	14	0.15
5	fashion	7	0.075	11	riwaaz	14	0.15
6	kaushal	7	0.075	12	alia	16	0.171

Another major factor extracted from text analytics was religion. Indians have a high level of bonds of emotions to their religion, culture, festivals and celebrations. Any corporation that makes witty messages has to earn the online firestorm. Thus, content developers, and social media managers have to scrutinize the post before posting on social media platforms.

Table 5. Clustering of text analytics results on Religion (Source: Primary data)

Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage
1	culture	6	0.064	10	religious	7	0.075	19	colours	12	0.128
2	festivals	6	0.064	11	traditions	7	0.075	20	diwali	13	0.139
3	puja	6	0.064	12	bride	8	0.086	21	jashn	13	0.139
4	rang	6	0.064	13	clothing	8	0.086	22	navratri	16	0.171
5	religion	6	0.064	14	gods	8	0.086	23	muslim	19	0.203
6	celebration	7	0.075	15	kanyadaan	8	0.086	24	festival	20	0.214
7	couple	7	0.075	16	customs	9	0.096	25	holi	21	0.225
8	gender	7	0.075	17	tradition	9	0.096	26	hindu	51	0.545
9	mangalsutra	7	0.075	18	durga	10	0.107				

In action to this, researchers identify most of the online firestorms are the result of social media. Twitter in particular triggers most of the online firestorms. Text analytics resulted in 23 words.

Table 6. Text validated results of Social Media (Source: Primary data)

Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage	Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage
1	culture	6	0.064	8	launched	7	0.075	16	views	8	0.086
1	posted	6	0.064	9	platform	7	0.075	17	sentiments	10	0.107
2	shared	6	0.064	10	posts	7	0.075	18	users	12	0.128
3	society	6	0.064	11	promoting	7	0.075	19	delivery	14	0.15
4	trending	6	0.064	12	released	7	0.075	20	netizens	16	0.171
5	tweet	6	0.064	13	statement	7	0.075	21	twitter	30	0.321
6	advertisements	7	0.075	14	stereotypes	7	0.075	22	advertisement	36	0.385
7	criticism	7	0.075	15	content	8	0.086	23	social	37	0.396

Similarly, researchers identified corporate responses to the online firestorms. The words included withdrawal, apology, accepting the hurting sentiments, and understanding the backlash.

Table 7. Response to online firestorm (Source: Primary data)

Sl. No.	Unfiltered Word Count	Occurrences	Percentage
1	withdraw	6	0.064
2	apology	7	0.075
3	hurt	7	0.075
4	slammed	10	0.107
5	controversy	15	0.16
6	backlash	16	0.171

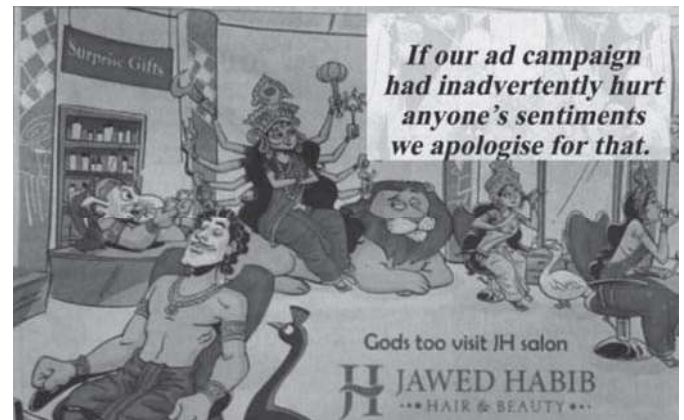
One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Sentiment Analysis of Online Firestorms	5.907	811	.000	.10025	.0669	.1336

(Source: Primary data)

The above table and figure shows that sentiment analysis of online firestorms form negative responses for companies under the controversies. The t test analysis showed that the (N=812, t=5.907 p<0.05) is significant. That means the controversies have affected the sentiments of the customers toward that company and their brand equity.

Conclusions

Online firestorms erode brand image built by corporations over the period in a second. Due to the proliferation of smartphones and enhanced telecom bandwidth, viral news is faster than earlier. Thus, social media marketers always stand on their toes to anticipate the firestorm. These firestorms were generated by individuals and corporations. In certain instances corporates used it to malign the image of competitors. The concept of Black PR is spreading rapidly. Online firestorms generated due to hurting of sentiments by social media posts. These sentiments include, personal, religious, morals, values, costumes and beliefs. There are various measures taken by the corporations. A few released public apology to stop the widespread negativity. In another instance, companies gave the reason behind the post and in the last few companies ignored the messages. However, researchers observed one of the companies that deleted messages has further infuriated netizens to go berserk. Hence, a cautious approach needed to pacify the firestorms. Researchers selected samples across industries. There is a further scope for the research pertaining to single industry and single media vehicle based firestorms.



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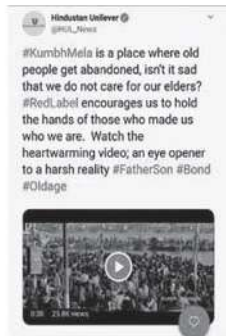
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