Strategies to refrain reputation crisis during Online Firestorms in social media

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Abstract

Purpose – Online firestorm, a relatively new phenomenon, has drawn the attention of academia due to its harmful effects. The present paper aims to provide a comparative overview with respect to the employment of two different crisis communication strategies (CCS), namely corrective action vs. apology, in the wake of the phenomenon and to avoid its further escalation. Design/methodology/approach - The present research used a 2 x 3 factorial experimental design, that comprised two levels of image repair strategies (corrective action; apology), and three levels of online firestorm triggers (unethical behaviour; core business problem; communication issue). An online questionnaire was distributed, and 564 valid responses were collected. Findings - Results show that corrective action, as image repair strategy, is more effective than an apology following core business- and communication-related incidents, whilst neither strategy shows to be more effective than the other one following unethical behaviour-related incidents. Furthermore, the effect of image repair strategy on perceptions, attitudes and behavioural intentions is moderated and mediated by users' attribution related to companies´responsibility and brand attitude, respectively. Last, the absence of an organizational response following an incident has a negative effect on Facebook users' brand attitude. Research limitations/implications - Fictitious scenarios depicted (no crisis history and prior reputation taken into account). Crisis response timing, crisis origin and media coverage not considered. Facebook as a SNS over Twitter. Practical implications – Contribution towards the body of knowledge of crisis communication and crisis management fields in online settings. Originality/value – This is the first paper that integrates a comparative overview of CCS' effectiveness into the management of online firestorms.

Keywords: *online firestoms; crisis management; social media*

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