How Persuasion and Moral Reactions Affect Negative Word-of-Mouth and Hatred Towards Firms in Social Media Firestorms

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Research-in-Progress Paper

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Abstract

Although social media provides firms with unprecedented opportunities to grow their business, firefighting social media firestorms have become one of the biggest challenges facing firms. Messages criticizing firms' wrongdoings are highly persuasive and usually emotionally charged. As a result, they easily sway other social media users into supporting the firestorms. The impacts of social media firestorms are far-reaching and deteriorating, which have drawn increasing academic and managerial attention. To derive insights into tackling such issues, we draw on the literature on persuasion and moral psychology to develop a research model that explains how persuasion takes place in social media firestorms and their influences on social media users' moral cognitions and emotions, and negative behaviors toward firms. In particular, we examine the effects of rhetorical appeals (i.e., ethos, pathos, and logos appeals) on negative moral cognitions and negative moral emotions and their subsequent influences on negative word-of-mouth and hatred toward firms in firestorms. The research model will be tested with social media users in an online experiment using modified real-life social media firestorm incidents. This study is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge of social media firestorms and provide managerial implications for tackling such issues.

Keywords: Social media firestorm, customer backlash, persuasion, rhetorical appeals, moral cognitions, moral emotions, negative word-of-mouth, hatred