

Cumulative Crisis: Dynamics, The Nature of Consensus, User Roles, and Social Media Management Efficiency Metrics in Explosive Online Discussions Around Brands

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Abstract:

Rapid brand crises online, when user commenting bursts out on social media in a reaction to what publics see as improper brand behavior, can hit any branded entity. Using the conceptual framework of cumulative deliberation and taking the Vkusvill brand crisis in Russia as a case, we explore and explain the nature of such crises in polarized societies, which, to our mind, remains virtually unexplored today. Cumulative deliberation implies that mass non-deliberative user communication matters due to systemic cumulative dynamics (accumulation/dissipation of opinion, often rapid and much less predictable), where user commenting goes through bifurcation points and may 'crystallize' in certain forms. Via automated data collection, sentiment analysis, manual qualitative-quantitative coding as advised by Krippendorff, and descriptive statistics, we provide conclusions on the nature of cumulative crises and recommendations on how to assess social media management efficiency in overcoming them. We show that, first, despite the rocketing commenting, the discussion is not completely negative. Second, both cumulative and micro-deliberative patterns of opinion formation and consensus may be traced inside a rapid brand crisis, to which brands need to pay special attention. Third, the underlying trigger of a rapid cumulative crisis is the antagonistic values-based social polarization, and such crises may mark social cleavages; brands should have pre-discussed strategies to address those. Fourth, as brands often have no clue on assessing the efficiency of social media management during and after cumulative crises, we suggest three types of metrics that brands may use to set the KPI for social media managers.

Keywords:

Brand crisis, cumulative crisis, cumulative deliberation, social polarization, social media management, efficiency assessment.