

Examining Public Responses to Transgressions of CEOs on YouTube: Social and Semantic Network Analysis

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In what was labeled the “nut rage” incident, the vice president of Korean Air, Hyun-Ah Cho (Heather Cho), demonstrated behavior that exemplifies corporate transgression and deviation from societal moral standards toward a flight attendant aboard a flight. Such behavior instigated the public to express negative sentiment on various social media platforms. This study investigates word-of-mouth network on YouTube in response to the crisis, patterns of co-commenting activities across selected YouTube videos, as well as public responses to the incident by employing social and semantic network analysis. A total of 512 YouTube videos featuring the crisis from December 8, 2014 through November 11, 2018, and 52,772 public comments to the videos were collected. The central videos in the network successfully attracted the public’s attention and engagements. The results suggest that the video network was decentralized, with multiple videos acting as hubs in the network. The public commented on various videos instead of focusing on a few. The contents of influential videos uploaded by popular news organizations revealed not only Cho’s behaviors related to the nut rage crisis but also unrelated illegal behaviors and the moral violations committed by the family members of Korean Air. The public attached derogatory remarks to Cho and her family, and the comments also addressed ethical concerns, management issues of the company, and boycott intentions. The results imply that adverse public reaction was related to the long-standing problem caused by family ownership and governance in large Korean corporations. This Korean Air scandal illustrates backlash toward a leadership breakdown by the family business conglomerate prevalent in the Korean society. This study provides insights for effective handling of similar crises.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Network Analysis, Crisis Communication, Word of Mouth, Brand Reputation

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Introduction

The fundamental nature of public relations has drastically changed with the advancement of social media, and communication power has shifted from public relations practitioners to everyday social media users (Diers & Donohue, 2013; Donthu et al., 2021). PR practitioners are increasingly recognizing the value of utilizing social media as a way to reach broader audiences and engage in dialogue with stakeholders and as a tool for crisis response (Veil & Ojeda, 2010). Despite the growing demand to tap into the public's response in real time, limited research has examined publicly generated social media messages and user-generated content regarding crisis incidents (Park & Choi, 2022). Instead, more studies have focused on effectively utilizing social media as a tool to disseminate information to the public during crises (Derani & Naidu, 2016). Therefore, this study uses social and semantic network analysis to explore the public's social media responses to a crisis incident to provide practical and scholarly implications as well as insights to appropriately respond to and recover from similar crises at hand.

When an organization's executive displays inappropriate behavior, such as a violation of moral standards, it not only affects the individual, but it also most likely brings challenges and complications for the organization he or she represents. Therefore, executives' transgressions can have a substantial impact on how the public perceives not only the individual involved but also their organization's sponsorships, stakeholders, customer relations, and the community at large (Wilson et al., 2008).

This study examines the South Korean public's reaction to a Korean Air executive's insensitive social transgression against a flight attendant and its ultimate effects on the public's responses toward the company. Specifically, this study aims to understand public responses to a corporate crisis caused by a company's executive's transgressive behavior and how negative word of mouth (WOM) spreads on social media. Using social and semantic network analyses, this study explores the characteristics of negative WOM networks formed on YouTube in response to the crisis, influential content in the network, and public perception toward the crisis as well as the brand. Corporate transgression concerns corporations' violation of moral standards or behaviors in ethical and social contexts (Haidt, 2003). Specifically, we examine the damage resulting from corporate social moral transgression, which is the act of a corporation harming a community by violating norms or expectations of respect (Grappi et al., 2013). What happens when consumers learn about irresponsible corporate behavior?

The Case of Korean Air Vice President's Nut Rage Crisis

Personal transgressive misconduct by the vice president of Korean Air, Hyun-Ah Cho (Heather Cho), shocked the public on December 5, 2014. The incident, labeled the "nut return," "nut rage," or "nut gate" incident, occurred when a flight attendant served nuts to first-class passengers in their original plastic package instead of a plate. Cho aggressively yelled at and made physical motions at a flight attendant in a demeaning manner. Although disputes have arisen regarding whether Korean Air's manual guides flight attendants to serve macadamia nuts in a bowl or ask first-class

passengers about their preference (package or bowl; Kim, 2014), it is undeniable that Cho made the reckless decision to force the plane to turn around and return to its gate at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport so that the flight attendant could be removed from the aircraft (Jeong & Berlinger, 2018). Cho demonstrated behavior that exemplifies corporate transgression and deviation from societal moral standards (Kim et al., 2018).

Such behavior instigated the public to express negative sentiments on various social media platforms. Cho was sentenced to one year in prison for violating aviation laws and assaulting the flight attendant and paid almost \$18,000 to the afflicted flight attendant (Cain, 2015); nevertheless, the South Korean public was outraged. Negative WOM infiltrated social media for months and years after the incident, and the public fervently responded with WOM behaviors on social media by expressing anger, disapproval, and the need for justice.

Word of Mouth Communication on Social Media

Dissatisfaction often leads to greater WOM than satisfaction, where, in some cases, dissatisfied customers engage in WOM twice, or even 10 times, as much as satisfied customers (Anderson, 1998). Negative communication is likely to have a greater impact than positive communication, possibly putting corporate reputation and brand attitudes at risk when negative communication occurs (Lutz, 1975). This suggests that corporate social transgressions that violate moral standards/behaviors not only elicit negative emotional reactions from the public, such as anger, contempt, and disgust (Haidt, 2003), but they also prompt the public to engage in negative WOM, which may negatively impact the organization or brand.

Consumers are sensitive to corporate wrongdoings and respond negatively to such irresponsible behaviors (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). Upon seeing moral systems violated, consumers are induced to react, and they may perform destructive or punitive actions by creating a negative image of and avoiding the brand (Romani et al., 2013). Consumers choose brands based on their attitudes and values toward corporate business practices regarding issues of justice, fairness, or well-being (Micheletti, 2003). Conscious consumers may subsequently choose to avoid brands by boycotting (Micheletti, 2003) or engaging in anti-brand activities (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010) in the hope of social justice or to bring about changes in a corporation's controversial behavior.

Crisis Communication on Social Media

The literature on public reactions and corporate behavior has shed light on consumer responses to socially responsible corporate behavior (Grappi et al., 2013; Saxton et al., 2019; Chu et al., 2020) and the utilization of social media to disseminate messages during a crisis (Derani & Naidu, 2016; Saroj & Pal, 2020). With the virality of user-generated content, social media has revolutionized the way in which the public responds to crises (Liu et al., 2011). Today, organizations are increasingly focusing on the effective use of social media to interact with stakeholders and avoid

the pitfalls that can result from the free flow of user-generated content. Social media is a “breeding ground for crises or risks” (Cheng, 2018, p.1) and acts as a catalyst, which accelerates the spread of crises (Gonzalez-Herrero & Smith, 2010) by providing an outlet for unmonitored and free flow of discussion among stakeholders. Therefore, recent scholarship has shifted focus to social-mediated crisis management (SMCM), which refers to socially mediated conversations occurring between an organization and its publics throughout the lifespan of a crisis or negative events (Fearn-Banks, 2011). Therefore, this study contributes to the advancement of crisis communication strategies (CCS) by examining SMCM research findings in light of the traditional framework of CCS (Cheng, 2018). Additionally, brand-related crises (e.g., the United Airlines’ passenger dragging incident) (Park & Choi, 2022) that have garnered heated attention on social media have increased. Social media exposure to brand crisis intensifies negative reactions and brand attitudes while facilitating the spread of WOM behaviors (Pace et al., 2017). However, various CCS are also effective in containing WOM; for example, Seo and Jang (2021) demonstrated that the use of corporate branding strategies can reduce intentions to spread negative WOM after a crisis. More importantly, marketing literature has shown a link between customer WOM and sales, offering an explanation of the pattern of consumers’ adoption behaviors and the subsequent rise and fall in sales as a result of WOM (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Therefore, this study offers practical managerial insights for corporations, who may face negative attitudes and anti-brand activities in light of a corporate crisis.

Vice President Cho’s insensitive behavior prompted the public to express negative sentiments on various social media platforms. Numerous parody videos and news items were created and shared on YouTube. User-generated posts and comments of distaste and disapproval (in other words, negative WOM) continued to flood YouTube for months and years following the incident. Therefore, this study examines negative WOM behavior at the aggregate level from a social network perspective. Considering that social media discussions are dominated by a few elite users, this study focuses on active users who produced comments across multiple videos on YouTube and their responses to the Korean Air crisis (Shapiro & Park, 2018). The structural properties of the negative WOM network, the pattern of co-commenting activities among the users, and their responses to the crisis expressed in the comments are investigated.

To explore the dynamics of negative WOM networks in response to the nut rage crisis and how the public responded to the Korean Airline’s VP Cho, this study conducts social and semantic network analyses. First, the structural properties of WOM networks are investigated to understand how negative WOM spreads on YouTube. Second, network centrality measures and YouTube engagement metrics are used to determine the most influential contents in the network. Finally, to examine active commenters’ reactions toward the brand, Korean Air, and VP Cho, a semantic network analysis is conducted.

Previous studies have investigated public responses to corporate crises, such as negative WOM, through quantitative empirical research, mostly with surveys or experiments. However, examinations of networking characteristics at the macro level and of actual public responses to a crisis have been limited. Rich managerial implications for consumer behavior can be gleaned by examining the dynamics of WOM behavior and the public comments about a crisis generated on

social media. Crisis managers could also yield crucial information that could help them understand, in real time, how consumers or other stakeholders behave toward brands and executives that act irresponsibly. Based on previous research, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: What are the characteristics of the negative WOM network on YouTube in response to Korean Air VP Cho's transgressive behavior, and which YouTube contents are influential?

RQ2: What does negative WOM on YouTube regarding Korean Air VP Cho's transgressive behavior indicate about South Koreans' response to the nut rage crisis?

RQ3: What does negative YouTube WOM regarding Korean Air VP Cho's transgressive behavior indicate about South Koreans' response to Korean Air as a brand and to Cho?

Method

Data collection

YouTube was selected for investigation among other social media platforms to explore the dynamics of the negative WOM network and how the public responded to a Korean Air executive's social transgression. A number of news videos provided by media companies and user-generated parody videos featuring the incident flooded YouTube when the crisis emerged (Chung, 2014). A wide range of videos regarded the flight being redirected back to the airport, VP Cho's police questioning, as well as videos mocking the airline. YouTube data can capture the vibrant nature of WOM networks. YouTube videos featuring the nut rage incident and public comments of active commenters who responded to more than one video regarding the incident were collected from December 8, 2014 through November 11, 2018. This resulted in a total of 512 YouTube videos in the Korean language and 52,772 public comments from active commenters on the collected videos. YouTube videos whose titles, tags, keywords, descriptions, or author's username included the word "nut return" in Korean ("땅콩회항"), which refers to the nut rage incident, were crawled; then, a video network was constructed using the API-based social media analysis tool NodeXL (Hansen et al., 2010).

Social and Semantic Network Analysis

To explore how negative WOM spread in response to the nut rage crisis caused by Korean Air VP Cho's transgressive behavior, this study conducted social and semantic network analysis. Drawing upon the co-inlink network approach, a co-comment network of videos in response to the nut rage crisis was constructed. In this video network, a node represents a YouTube video, and a link between videos was generated when videos were commented on by the same user, the "co-commenter." Co-inlinks refer to links to two nodes from a third node (Kim, 2012; Kim et al., 2010). Co-commenters are active users who contribute to social media discussions through

multiple videos (Shapiro & Park, 2018). In this study, active commenters were defined as co-commenters who left comments on multiple videos that addressed the nut rage incident on YouTube.

Network measures such as density, average geodesic distance, and degree centralities of the nodes were computed to determine the structural characteristics of the video network and the contents that were influential in the network. In addition, correlations between in-degree centralities of nodes and YouTube engagement metrics—including the number of views, comments, likes, and dislikes—were analyzed to identify the roles of central content in the network. Finally, to examine the co-commenters' reactions and concerns toward the brand and Cho, 52,772 comments generated by the users were examined. A semantic network analysis of the top keywords that occurred no less than 300 times in the comments was conducted using Krkwic. The semantic network dataset was a 136×136 keyword matrix that appeared at least 300 times in the comments. NodeXL and UCinet were used for network metrics computation.

Findings

The Characteristics of WOM Network in Response to the Nut Rage Crisis

As Figure 1 shows, 512 nodes and 12,647 links were identified in the negative WOM network in response to the nut rage crisis. Gephi with the Fruchterman–Reingold algorithm was used for network visualization. The nodes refer to YouTube videos featuring the nut rage crisis, and the links between nodes are the users' co-commenting activities. The link's thickness is proportional to edge (link) weights. The nodes' colors, which were randomly selected, refer to each cluster, which is useful to identify a community in a network. Nodes in the same cluster (same color) have dense connections to each other compared to their connections with nodes outside the cluster (Hussain et al., 2018).

The YouTube video network's density was 0.096, with the average geodesic distance of 1.993. These results indicate that the co-commenters created a sparse network, and the distance between the pairs of videos was small. The video network was also decentralized (centralization: 1.74%), which suggests that multiple videos acted as hubs in the network. In other words, in this context, users commented on various videos instead of focusing on a few. In total, 130 clusters were identified. Except for 123 isolated nodes (gray), seven colored clusters (75.97%) were found. Degree centralities were calculated to identify the most influential contents in the network. The degree centralities of nodes measure the extent to which they are connected to other nodes in a network, indicating the popularity of the nodes in the network (Powell & Hopkins, 2015). Table 1 summarizes the topics and YouTube engagement metrics of the top 10 videos in terms of in-degree centrality.

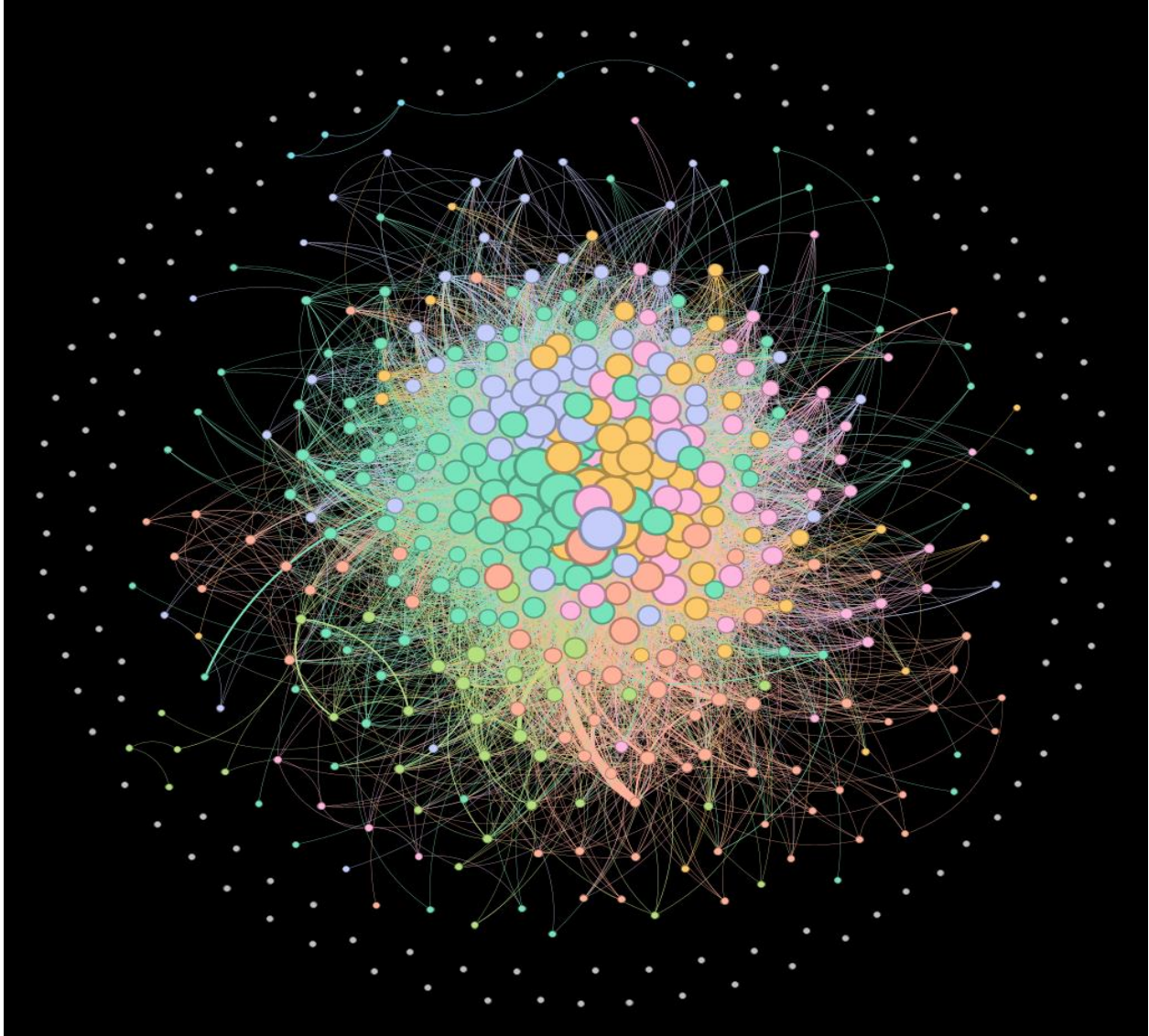


Figure 1. A video network of WOM in response to the nut rage crisis

Influential videos with high degree centralities mostly concerned the moral transgressions of Cho and her family members, including her mother Myung-hee Lee, sister Hyun-min Cho (then Senior Vice President), and brother Won-tae Cho (Chairman of Korean Air). The video content revealed that, like Hyun-ah Cho, her mother and sister had also committed serious moral transgressions, exposing Cho's mother's habitual beating and verbal abuse of the company's employees and houseworkers, although she did not hold any official position in the company.

In relation to Hyun-ah Cho's nut rage incident, influential YouTube videos exposed the corruption of the entire Korean Air conglomerate's family members, particularly her mother, sister, and brother.

Table 1

Top 10 Videos in Terms of Degree Centralities

Rank	Topic	Type of Creators	No. of Views	No. of Comments	No. of Likes	No. of Dislikes
1	Recording of Myung-hee Lee's verbal abuse against house workers	News Organization	902,343	1,921	2,824	160
2	Questioning of Hyun-ah Cho as a suspect for illegally hiring a foreign worker	News Organization	850,777	1,257	3,548	175
3	Myung-hee Lee's verbal abuse against workers and her daughters	News Organization	200,392	737	1,044	57
4	Investigation of Hyun-ah Cho on a charge of smuggling and tax-dodging	News Organization	229,583	883	994	75
5	Recording of Hyun-ah Cho's verbal abuse against house workers	News Organization	185,652	528	649	74
6	Revealing Korean Air Owner family's anger expression problems	News Organization	355,133	522	858	116
7	Myung-hee Lee's beating and insulting hotel staff	News Organization	43,205	298	391	15
8	Chang-jin Park's press interview about the nut rage crisis	News Organization	207,417	837	2,037	94
9	Hyun-ah Cho's resignation and her father(president)'s apology	News Organization	83,662	580	292	52
10	Resignation of Hyun-ah Cho's and her sister Hyun-min Cho	News Organization	76,149	396	246	34

This finding implies that the nut rage crisis evolved into the nut rage *family* violations over time as negative WOM on YouTube facilitated the disclosure of other closely related corporate moral transgressions.

As shown in Table 2, the results of Pearson’s correlation analysis indicate that the in-degree centralities of videos and YouTube engagement metrics—including the number of views, comments, likes, and dislikes—were positively related, $p < .01$. These findings indicate that the central videos connected to several other videos in the network were also popular, successfully attracting the public’s attention and engagement.

Table 2

Correlations between Network Metrics and YouTube Engagement Metrics

	No. of views	No. of comments	No. of likes	No. of dislikes
Centralities	.288	.514	.251**	.252
No. of views	-	.741**	.802**	.858**
No. of comments		-	.809**	.677**
No. of likes			-	.769**

Notes. ** $p < 0.01$

Public Perception About the Nut Rage Crisis

As displayed in Figure 2, a semantic network of negative WOM in response to the nut rage crisis was constructed. Gephi with the Yifan Hu proportional algorithm was used for network visualization. A node refers to a word used in the comments; the nodes’ size is proportional to their in-degree centralities; the link between nodes denotes the co-occurrence of words, and the link’s thickness is proportional to edge (link) weights. The nodes’ colors refer to each cluster in which words within the same cluster were strongly connected. Only the words that co-occurred with other words were visible in the network. A total of 136 nodes and 3,190 links were detected. The semantic network of negative WOM formed a sparse and decentralized network (density: 0.173, centralization: 6.56%), and the distance between the nodes was fairly small (average geodesic distance: 1.880).

Three clusters were identified in the semantic network. The largest group (76.61%, purple) in the semantic network includes central terms that indicate Korean Air’s family (“daughter,” “Cho’s,” “family,” “a whole family,” “birth”) and its corruption (“power trip,” “money”). These core keywords were also connected to terms suggesting the South Korean public’s intentions to protest against the name of the airline and brand’s logo, which resembles that of the Korean national flag (“Taeguek mark,” “national flight”).

Public Perception toward the Brand and Hyun-Ah Cho

To examine the public perception toward the brand, Korean Air’s ego network was constructed. An ego network refers to a network around a focal node (ego: “Korean Air”), which displays keywords connected to the focal nodes. Table 3 summarizes the top keyword pairs used in Korean Air’s ego network.

Table 3

Top Keyword Pairs in Korean Air’s Ego Network

Word 1	Word 2	Tie Weight	Word 1	Word 2	Tie Weight
Korean Air	Cho’s	329	Korean Air	pity	118
Korean Air	national flight	258	Korean Air	Hyun-min Cho	109
Korean Air	The whole family	256	Korean Air	wrongdoing	105
Korean Air	Yang-ho Cho	230	Korean Air	South Korea	103
Korean Air	flight	226	Korean Air	problem	102
Korean Air	owner	226	Korean Air	president	99
Korean Air	a power trip	210	Korean Air	Hyun-ah Cho	95
Korean Air	USA	195	Korean Air	nation	94
Korean Air	family	193	Korean Air	Chang-jin Park	94
Korean Air	company	190	Korean Air	Hanjin	89
Korean Air	Asiana	182	Korean Air	name	87
Korean Air	stop	161	Korean Air	face	87
Korean Air	people	132	Korean Air	employee	85
Korean Air	self-reflection	129	Korean Air	appearance	82
Korean Air	trash	124	Korean Air	South Korea	74

The word “Korean Air” had strong ties with words referring to Cho and her family, including “Yang-ho Cho” (her father; then Chairman) and “Hyun-min Cho” (her sister), the “Chaebol” (conglomerate) ownership structure of the family-owned company, Cho’s physical appearance, competitor companies, and the brand’s rival competitor, Asiana Airlines.

Next, to examine the public perception around Cho as the company’s head, the ego network of “Hyun-ah Cho” was constructed. Table 4 presents the top keyword pairs in the ego network of Hyun-ah Cho.

Table 4

Top Keyword Pairs in Hyun-Ah Cho’s Ego Network

Word 1	Word 2	Tie Weight	Word 1	Word 2	Tie Weight
Hyun-ah Cho	Hyun-min Cho	512	Hyun-ah Cho	USA	44
Hyun-ah Cho	Myung-hee Lee	256	Hyun-ah Cho	bitch	41
Hyun-ah Cho	dirty	174	Hyun-ah Cho	crazy bitch	21
Hyun-ah Cho	Yang-ho Cho	116	Hyun-ah Cho	nation	21
Hyun-ah Cho	Korean air	95	Hyun-ah Cho	tsk tsk	20
Hyun-ah Cho	judiciary	93	Hyun-ah Cho	support	20
Hyun-ah Cho	permanent	85	Hyun-ah Cho	money	20
Hyun-ah Cho	crazy	84	Hyun-ah Cho	Cho’s	20
Hyun-ah Cho	Hanjn	76	Hyun-ah Cho	ignorant	15
Hyun-ah Cho	power trip	72	Hyun-ah Cho	mental	15
Hyun-ah Cho	birth	68	Hyun-ah Cho	trash	15
Hyun-ah Cho	problem	66	Hyun-ah Cho	conglomerate	13
Hyun-ah Cho	company	53	Hyun-ah Cho	face	12
Hyun-ah Cho	house	52	Hyun-ah Cho	law	12
Hyun-ah Cho	nut	48	Hyun-ah Cho	go for it	11

Cho was associated with terms mentioning her family, her transgression (“a power trip,” “crazy”), her qualification as a CEO (“ignorant,” “mental,” “trash,” “problem,” “bitch,” “crazy bitch,”), and her physical appearance in the media (“face”). Only a few positive words (“support,” “go for it”) were used toward the victim, flight attendant Chang-Jin Park.

Discussion and Conclusion

Previous studies have investigated public responses to corporate crises through quantitative empirical research mostly through surveys (Donthu et al., 2021). However, this study examines actual public responses generated in response to a crisis incident as well as networking characteristics at the macro level (Park & Choi, 2022). Therefore, using social network analysis and semantic network analysis, this study explores the dynamics of negative WOM networks and how the public responded to a crisis caused by a Korean Airline executive's social transgression.

The structural properties of the network in response to the nut rage crisis suggest that the video network was decentralized, and multiple videos play roles as hubs in the network. This means that the public commented on various videos featuring the crisis instead of focusing on only a few. The contents of influential videos uploaded by popular news organizations revealed not only Cho's behaviors related to the nut rage crisis but also her other illegal behaviors and the moral issues of the family owning Korean Air.

The findings of the semantic network analysis indicate that the South Korean public was outraged: they were not merely disgusted by Hyun-ah Cho's transgressive behavior on her flight at JFK International Airport, but they actively condemned and continued to expose the transgressions of all members of the family owning Korean Air for months and years after the nut rage incident. As Korean Air is part of the invincible "chaebol" group, which describes a large family-owned conglomerate (e.g., Samsung or LG), the South Koreans took the opportunity to attack a usually untouchable and unbelievably wealthy group of individuals ("owners," "family," "Hyun-min Cho," "Yang-ho Cho," "Myung-hee Lee," "conglomerate"). VP Cho's nut rage incident opened the doors for an active national hunt to expose all wrongdoings committed by the family owning Korean Air and to bring down and diminish their reputation and power in Korea. At the same time, while Korean Air, as a brand, seemed to have held a positive image as the best airline in South Korea ("national flight"), commenters mentioned Asiana Airlines, Korean Air's rival company, as their alternative or new preference ("Asiana," "stop," "support").

Moreover, the findings of the semantic network analysis indicated a feeling of disgrace among the South Korean public. They considered this incident a national disgrace and felt ashamed, as a country, on Cho's behalf. They described her behavior as a "power trip" against her employee and did not hesitate to express extreme disapproval and shock ("disapproval," "mental patient," "crazy girl," "bitch"). The adverse public reaction may be attributed to the long-standing problem caused by family ownership and governance in large Korean corporations (Kim, 2006). Excessive family involvement in management has contributed to governance corruption and abuse of power historically in Korea. The Korean Air scandal illustrates backlash toward a family business conglomerate, prevalent in the Korean society, due to an organizational mishap.

Implications

This study's examination of WOM characteristics as well as user-generated content and comments

on social media has rich managerial implications on crisis communication and brand reputation. Brand managers can learn how to gather information from actual audiences in real time, which could help them understand how the public or other stakeholders may behave toward their brand if and when executives act morally or ethically irresponsible. Although more crises-related studies have examined content on X, this study examined YouTube videos to provide rich contextual implications for managers—especially for brands and executives who are not only facing criticism but also shame and ridicule as a result of morally insensitive actions. Additionally, as only 7% of SMCM research has examined YouTube data according to Cheng (2018), this study provides especially valuable insight into public responses on socially mediated platforms during a crisis. Previous research has also examined public responses through social media contents and comments, such as tweets from X, to gather insights in real time during and after an incident where United Airlines forcibly dragged a passenger off of an overbooked flight (Park & Choi, 2022) as well as to understand the determinants of accepting prevention recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Choi & Park, 2021).

Furthermore, receptivity to communication often varies by culture and moral standards (Choi & Lewis, 2017); therefore, the current study provides practical insights for corporate managers in the Korean market. Accordingly, the responses of the South Korean public gathered through social media revealed that Cho's transgressions negatively impacted not only the individual but also her entire family, company, and the country's reputation. The anger and disgust expressed by the public was not only due to the disappointment felt toward VP Cho, but it also included complex cultural emotions, such as the shame and embarrassment that resulted in being associated with her in terms of nationality. Additionally, the current study provides theoretical contributions to the existing SMCM literature. This study's findings are timely as Cheng (2018)'s review of SMCM research shows that stakeholders are increasingly interested in identifying and generating online content in times of crises.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations. First, it used the case of Korean Air to understand how an executive's transgression affected WOM networks on social media and consumer behavior. Although this case exemplifies corporate transgression and deviation from societal moral standards, the results may not be generalizable in the same regard to other social or regional contexts. In addition, this study examined YouTube as a major social media discussion platform. Considering that YouTube serves as a primary political discussion forum in Korea, where memes and satire news stories are actively created when a controversial social issue emerges, this study underscores the role of YouTube in forming a WOM network (Park et al., 2021). However, the public's responses to this incident have also gone viral on other social media platforms such as X and Facebook. Brand-related sentiments from user-generated content differ across YouTube, X, and Facebook (Smith et al., 2012). Thus, public responses to the Korean Air crisis may have been different on other platforms. Future studies should consider conducting cross-media analysis for a more comprehensive crisis response.

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