THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
BAHÇEŞEHİR UNIVERSITY

EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE DIGITAL FIRESTORMS RELATED TO SOCIAL ISSUES ON BRAND MARKETING

Master's Thesis

GİZEM ÖZKAYNAK

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THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
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DEDICATION

All the members of my family and my friends who have supported me during my thesis process.

Istanbul, 2021 Gizem Özkaynak

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTS OF NEGATIVE FIRESTORMS RELATED TO SOCIAL ISSUES ON BRAND MARKETING

Gizem Özkaynak

Marketing Master's Program

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Speed of digital platform usage is increasing with the advances in technology and more people have the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences online about the brands' attitudes towards certain situations that end up reaching many people. This occurrence might provide benefits to companies however, it might also increase the awareness of bad customer experiences, negative and controversial situations surrounding the companies very quickly that it can lead to disastrous events such as digital firestorms. Digital firestorm is the regenerated term of traditional crisis that occurs when there is a sudden discharge of negative messages about a brand, person or an event concerning the related parties. Negative digital firestorms can damage the brand's identity, reputation, image, position and it can in fact drop profits, dragging companies to close down. Companies are looking out for new ways to increase their strength against negative digital firestorms before experiencing them due to the lightning speed of spread levels of firestorms.

The objective of this research is to find out the company response strategies in accordance with Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) that Turkish companies used against firestorms and the changes in people's sentiments before and after the company responses using the digital platform Twitter as a data provider. Crisis is an occurrence that puts danger to brands' reputation and its future in public relations. Digital platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs encourage people to express sentiments online. In this research, five different firestorms and six different companies have been analyzed and changes in sentiment levels before and after company response have been observed. Using rebuilding response strategy for preventable and value-based firestorms assisted companies to increase positive sentiments and decrease negative sentiments of people. The results of the researched proved that, small and new companies can shut down after having a firestorm and, also reacting fast and being transparent in response statements helped companies to lessen the damage. Testing SCCT for negative digital firestorms indicated that it is applicable for the usage when facing online crisis. Overall, all firestorms had a negative impact on some groups of people and results showed the importance of using response strategies to reduce unfavorable effects as a brand.

Keywords: SCCT, Digital Firestorm, Crisis Response Strategies, Crisis Communication

ÖZET

SOSYAL DEĞERLERE İLİŞKİN NEGATİF FIRESTORM'LARIN MARKA PAZARLAMASINA ETKİSİ

Gizem Özkaynak

Pazarlama Yüksek Lisans Programı

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Teknolojideki ilerlemelerle birlikte dijital platform kullanım hızı artmakta ve daha fazla insan, markaların çevrimiçi olarak birçok kişiye ulaşan belirli durumlara yönelik tutumları hakkındaki fikirlerini ve deneyimlerini paylaşma fırsatına sahip olmaktadır. Dijital platform kullanım hızının artması, şirketlere fayda sağlayabilir ancak aynı zamanda kötü müşteri deneyimleri, şirketleri çevreleyen olumsuz ve tartışmalı durumların farkındalığının çok hızlı bir şekilde yayılmasına da sebebiyet verebilir ve dijital firestorms gibi yıkıcı olaylara yol açabilir. Dijital firestorms, bir marka, kişi veya olay hakkında, olumsuz mesajların aniden ortaya çıkması durumunda oluşan ve ilişkili tarafları ilgilendiren geleneksel krizin yenilenmiş terimidir. Negatif firestorm'lar, markanın kimliğine, itibarına, imajına, konumuna zarar verebilir ve şirket karını düşürerek markaları kapanmaya sürükleyebilir. Şirketler, firestorm'ların yayılma seviyelerinin hızından dolayı, olumsuz dijital firestorm'lara karşı güçlerini, onları deneyimlemeden önce artırmanın yeni yollarını aramaktadırlar.

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Türk şirketlerinin firestorm'lara karşı kullandıkları Durumsal Kriz İletişim Teorisi'ne (SCCT) göre şirket yanıt stratejilerini ve şirket yanıtlarından önce ve sonra insanların duyarlılıklarındaki değişiklikleri, dijital platform Twitter'ı veri sağlayıcı olarak kullanarak ortaya çıkarmaktır. Krizler, markaların itibarlarını ve geleceklerini tehlikeye atan bir olaydır. Dijital platformlar, insanların duygularını ifade etmesine teşvik vermektedir. Bu araştırmada, beş farklı firestorm ve altı farklı şirketin analizi yapılmış ve şirketlerin krizlere olan yanıtlarından önce ve sonra insanların duygu düzeylerinde değişiklikler gözlemlenmiştir. Önlenebilir ve değere dayalı firestorm'lar için rebuilding stratejisini kullanmak şirketlerin, olumlu duyguları artırmasına ve olumsuz duygularını azaltmasına yardımcı olmuştur. Araştırmanın sonuçları, küçük ve yeni kurulan şirketlerin, bir firestorm yaşadıktan sonra kapanabileceğini ve ayrıca hızlı tepki vermenin ve yanıtlarında şeffaf olmanın, şirketlerin zararı azaltmalarına yardımcı olduğunu kanıtlanmıştır. SCCT'nin negatif dijital firestorm'lar için kullanımına uygun olduğu yapılan testler sonucu tespit edilmiştir. Genel olarak, bütün firestorm'ların bazı insan grupları üzerinde olumsuz etkileri olduğu ve bir marka olarak olumsuz etkileri azaltmak için kriz müdahale stratejileri kullanılmasının önemli olduğu saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: SCCT, Digital Firestorm, Kriz Müdahale Stratejileri, Kriz İletişimi

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ABBREVIATIONS

B2B	:	Business-to-Business Digital Marketing
B2C	:	Business-to-Consumer Digital Marketing
E-WOM	:	Electronic Word of Mouth
HAKİM	:	Hayvan Hakları İzleme Komitesi
LGBT	:	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
OBCE	:	Online Brand Community Engagement
PPC	:	Pay-Per-Click Advertising
SCCT	:	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SEO	:	Search Engine Optimization
SMS	:	Short Message Service

1. INTRODUCTION

Improvements in the technology are causing the increase in the usage of the Internet and social media worldwide. Internet usage is making people gain knowledge about brands, specific products, features and customer experience quicker than ever. With the increase in social media networks in 2000s, sharing personal experiences about brands with other people in the social media platforms have been spreading wider each year. There are 4.54 billion Internet users and 3.80 billion active social media users around the world, 62.07 million Internet users and 54.00 million active social media users are the results of the Turkey's digital data as of 2020.[1]

With the increase in active social media and Internet users every year around the world, brands are searching ways to be able to track and avoid firestorms that spread faster than anything else. Firestorms are the sudden release of messages on social media platforms that include negative matters towards brands, people, or issues. Firestorms mostly take shape with digital Word of Mouth (WOM) which is a marketing method that means the spread of an information from one person to another and leading to a bigger mass of people and it happens on social media platforms with a faster speed than offline. Easy access to the Internet makes e-WOM to expand to more people and corporations around the world with a fast speed and it triggers firestorms to show up.

As a company operating in todays' world, social media networks are causing benefits but can also cause harm to the brands. It is beneficial to educate customers about product launches, create brand awareness and brand image, connecting with the customers and creating a loyal community, going viral and increasing sales by targeting more people using social media tools. On the other hand, it is easier to create negative brand perception and image when firestorms are not managed fast and strategically. Negative social media firestorms can lead to changes in the perceptions of the consumers mind against a brand. Short term and long-term effects of social media crises have been explored by and 78 real

[1] Hootsuite & We are social "Global Digital Year Book ", 2020

life firestorms are obtained. Using YouGov's brand Index scores and 997 customer surveys, brand perception decreased by 58 percent in a short-term period and 40 percent suffer from long-term effects. Negative social media firestorms can have a strong impact on the brand perceptions of the customers therefore gaining knowledge about the social media crises have a great importance as a brand (Hansen et al 2018).

As a company, it is a struggle to be able to avoid the spread of firestorms and brand crises to unexpectedly appear on social media causing the companies to make quick decisions on how to stop the damage on the brand in order to stop the effects of it on brand perceptions and image.

There are many examples of firestorms and the recovery journeys of brands around the world. In China, McDonald's got accused of selling expired food and KFC was accused of raising chicken to maturity in a short time period as of 2012. McDonalds responded after 2 hours of the crises and apologized on the microblog whereas it took weeks for KFC to apologize after they denied the events. McDonalds recovered their brand image faster than KFC. Crises response strategies should adapt with the culture, response strategies have cultural variations and social media users should be contextualized by culture (Zhu et al 2017). When comparing "denial" and "accommodative" responses to the crises, accommodative responses got higher impressions and less damage to the brand than denial responses (De Blasio & Veale 2009).

The main probable reasons of firestorms are a product or a service failure, communication failure, social, ethical and political opinions that a brand stands for. To be able to be successful and sustainable in today's world, companies should avoid product failures since it is directly linked to health issues and it can easily make people prefer alternative brands. Managers are searching for ways to detect or prevent social media firestorms quickly to avoid the devastating effects of them on the brand image and perceptions. Twitter is more effective than Facebook and Instagram while restoring the brand image after a crisis and the platform has more positive engagement. Other than the social media platform that a crisis occurs, corrective action creates the most engagement and triggering reactions such as likes and shares (Triantafillidou 2020). Additionally, answering online

complaints individually rather than a cluster creates a positive brand reputation when a firestorm is happening (Lappeman & Patel 2018).

Not all firestorms have a negative impact on the brand and the brands' targeted segments. Brand diagnostics of the user generated accident have a correlation with the brand identification and when people identify with the brand, user generated negative accident can increase positive signals towards the brand instead of a negative one (Gaustada et al 2020). After a product failure, online brand community engagement (OBCE) plays a big role on the consumers' forgiveness and repurchase decisions (Yuana et al 2020).

When it comes to the social firestorms such as socio-political issues, customers' attitudes towards the brands decrease when the brands preferred stands against the socio-political issue do not match with customers' preferred stand. On the other hand, there is no evidence show that customer attitude increases towards the brands that support the same idea and have the same stand. If the link between the perceived brand relationship and the stand is weak, brand activism also gets weaker due to customers dissociate the brand and the stand. When a company gets reactions from media negatively due to their stands, brand attitude of the supporters grow and if the company apologizes and takes back its stand, the attitude of the brand decreases among supporters and competitors (Mukherjee & Althuizen 2020).

The main objective of this study is to explore how brands recover, lead their brand management strategies and company response strategies when they face with negative e-WOM that causes a social issue related firestorm in Turkish media. Social issues surrounding the brand such as political, ethical or issues related to race, environment and discrimination creates strong digital firestorms that lead companies to find ways to manage the firestorm process. The aim is to provide supporting documents to brands on how social firestorms creates changes on consumers' judgements against brands and how they lead to changes in brand management to be able to find the best suited company crises response strategies quickly. The findings of the study underline the importance of understanding firestorms and the strategies developed to recover from them and it will be beneficial for the managers in order to lead a brand crisis with less damage.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 CONCEPTS OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Digital marketing is the operation of marketing activities on digital platforms as a company to be able to reach more customers, increase sales and brand awareness. Technological developments and the easy access of the Internet forced companies to change and adapt their business models to be able to perform steady on digital platforms. It was hard to evaluate and make analysis of the marketing activity investment results as a company and track the customers when operating in traditional marketing therefore, being able to easily target new customers and track the results of the marketing activities with digital marketing led companies to relocate all or most of their marketing activities into marketing activities run by digital marketing. Digital marketing platforms includes the use of the Internet, mobile marketing activities, blog management, social media management, search engine optimization marketing (SEO), and other digital based platforms. Digital marketing increases the interaction with the customers, getting quick feedbacks from them and building trust as well as getting a better understanding of the customer needs, values and wants.

2.1.1 Types of Digital Marketing

Website Marketing

A website is of the main digital marketing platforms for the brands to form and present their corporate identities. Websites are effective when introducing the brand and the history, products and services and any important information about the brands components. Additionally, websites can get enough traffic and for that reason investing in conducting digital marketing campaigns in websites is beneficial.

Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Advertising

PPC is a digital advertising model that enables companies to increase marketing income as a result of clicking to the advertisements posted on platforms such as Google, Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest. PPC advertising campaigns can target a specific segment of people based on people's demographics and interests. With the improvements of the Internet, digital advertising models play an important role in marketing therefore PPC advertising model became the most popular advertising modes among digital marketing types.[2]

Content Marketing

Content marketing is becoming a leading digital marketing model due to the long-term advantages that it provides to the brands, making it easier to create engagement with the customers through social media that influences their everyday life. One of the most important advantage of content marketing is building trust and brand loyalty among target customers without engaging in other marketing promotional advertisements (Plessis, 2017). Some of the content marketing tools are blogs, podcasts, webinars and e-books.

Email Marketing

Email marketing is widely used by many companies to engage with the customers and keep the connection with them while providing information. Website traffic can be increased by email marketing and that can lead to increase in sales or more brand awareness. To be able to manage effectively while doing email marketing is to determine the target audience carefully.

A recent study shows that tailoring and personalizing emails by stating personal information in the mail such as the name of the customer benefits the advertisers, and it

[2] Zhang, Li., & Guan, Y., 2008. Detecting Click Fraud in Pay-Per-Click Streams of Online Advertising Networks

increases the possibility for the customers to open the email by 20 percent (Navdeep et al 2018).

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is used to increase sales, traffic, brand awareness and product awareness leading to forming stronger customer relationships while sustaining trust between the customer and the brand. Nowadays, social media platforms can also be used as direct sales channels and an essential tool to reach people.

Affiliate Marketing

Affiliate marketing is a performance-based marketing technique operated by giving commissions to the affiliate when they reach the sales target. Based on a research, Instagram celebrity posts show more positive attitudes towards the brand and are found more trustworthy compared to a traditional celebrity's brand post on the social media platform Instagram (Jin et al 2019).

Video Marketing

Video marketing can be defined as the marketing of a brand or a product through videos and video channels. Using less words and more visuals in videos attracts customers' attentions towards the marketed subjects and additionally it is observed that with using influencers in videos, brands reach their marketing targets quicker. Some of the video making platforms are TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube.

SMS Messaging

SMS messaging provides customers to be able to directly pay through links as technology emerges. SMS and text messages can give information about the brand, products and promotions. It has been found that SMS marketing plays an important role in increasing brand awareness and perceived quality (Smutkupt et al 2012).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) Marketing

Ranking the websites, blogs and other platforms on top in search engine results is done by SEO marketing. By SEO marketing technique, view counts increase therefore there is a greater chance to get more customers in order to increase sales.

Inbound Marketing

Inbound marketing refers to a marketing strategy that creates customer experience by engaging customers to the buying process. It is essential to target the right customer audience and deliver high quality content. Attracting new target customers by creating experiences when using platforms such as blogs and social networking sites entertains and satisfies customers (Baltes 2016).

Business-to-Business (B2B) Digital Marketing

B2B digital marketing usually promotes more technical information rather than the price tables of the product or services due to the demand from businesses. People tend to purchase the products or services when they find the related information online clear. To be able to attract more customers, digital platforms that can provide any kinds of information's such as websites, blogs or LinkedIn are be used to create leads in the sector.

Business-to-Consumer (B2C) Digital Marketing

When a company is operating in B2C digital marketing, the aim is to make customers be able to reach and purchase the products fast without needing more guidelines from speaking to a salesperson. Customers search for the products or services online at first and they make decisions by themselves without asking to sales personnel (Desai 2019). Digital marketing tools and technologies should be used and also using platforms like Instagram and Pinterest can be more suitable than using platforms like LinkedIn when operating on B2C digital marketing.

2.1.2 Digital Marketing Challenges

Almost every company are using digital marketing techniques and they adapted their business models according to the changes in digital technologies and marketing tools to be able to increase sales and income as a final result. To be able to follow up the developing digital marketing techniques, companies should not be behind innovations for the reason that there is a high competition in the market. When a company is behind all the new digital marketing techniques, it can quickly lose its position and it results in dropping sales. Companies should keep up with the changing techniques and the ways that consumers use the platforms. Attention times of customers are dropping every year therefore it gets harder to make them stay on brands webpage or even watch the marketing campaign to result in sales. Additionally, there are many competitors' campaigns on the same platforms every day and to be able to catch attention among them is getting harder.

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media is defined as websites and their applications designed to enable people to share their content quickly, efficiently and in real time. People can access social media via smartphone apps and computers, and those who want to use social media can choose any internet communication tool that allows them to broadly share content and interact with people.

In social media thanks to the Internet; Our lifestyle has also changed with the instant sharing of photos, ideas, ways of doing business and real-time events. Consumer needs, which are greatly affected by the rapid proliferation of social media, have caused a new mode of communication and interaction between consumers and brands. Social media consists of a group of internet-based applications that encourage user connection, engagement and collaboration, and content sharing. Examples of interactive social media platforms that can be personalized include; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Wikipedia, games etc.

In addition to that, companies are increasingly trading on social media using internet-based sales channels. Relationships between companies and users on social media have transformed into a comprehensive, two-way dialogue that can include social issues and events as well as companies' products, brands and services. Consumers connected to the Internet are no longer only interested in the product, brand or company, but can also create their own personalized content and applications on the social media platform.

Networked consumers no longer merely act as passive recipients of product, brand or firm-related information, but are enabled to create, modify and exchange their own, personalized content and applications through social media. Social media poses both risks and opportunities for users. On the one hand, it carries the inevitable risk of open source of information about the products and brands of companies and organizations.

It may not only occur among current or past customers of a firm related to the product, brand or company on social media, but may also include future potential customers. Therefore, the prevalence of social media requires companies to seek new ways of interacting with consumers.

It is an important factor to improve consumer relations, increase trust among consumers, and monitor consumers' opinions about the product or brand including online conversations on consumer purchase decisions, and actively contribute to these. As a result, social media allows companies to communicate with customers and share information.

Social media thereby complement traditional ‘push’ communication with multi-directional communication, thus facilitating dialogue with consumers, including current and prospective customers. The ‘multi-directional’ facet of social media communications refers to social media interactions not being limited to dialogue between the company and a focal consumer exclusively but instead, this may extend to include other consumers. Thus, social media facilitates the dialogue with consumers, including existing and potential customers, with versatile communication. Since social media communication is "multidirectional", social media interactions may not only be limited to the dialogue

between the company and the target consumer, but may also involve other consumers (Baumöl et al 2016).

2.2.1 Managing of Social Media

Social media covers many different types of websites and applications that have different functions. However, most social media sites allow a user to create a profile, usually by providing the user a name and email address.

After the profile is created, users can create and share content. For example, a Facebook user with an account can take a photo and share it with a caption on their profile. In addition to creating content for their profile, social media users can find other users whose content they want to follow or comment on. Depending on the type of social media, a user can "follow" another user, add him as a "friend", or "subscribe" to another user's page. Social media often allows users to navigate content and uses algorithms based on the user's profile data to determine the content that appears and the order in which it appears.

2.2.2 Types of Social Media

There are many different types of social media platforms. They can be divided into different categories according to their purpose and functions. These are;

Social Networks

Social networks specialize in connecting and exchanging ideas with other users who often share their interests and priorities. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn are examples of social networks.

Media Networks

Unlike social networks that specialize in allowing users to share and exchange thoughts and ideas, media networks specialize in distributing content such as photos and videos. Instagram and YouTube are examples of this. For example, a YouTube user uploads a video he created and other users may "like", "dislike" or comment on the video. If they like the video enough, a user can choose to "subscribe" to the creator so that new videos from that creator appear in their streams.

Discussion Networks

Discussion networks like Reddit are ideal exit points for posts that can lead to in-depth discussions among users. Users can leave responses in the comment section, and other users can respond to those comments, allowing conversations to grow and develop.

Review Networks

Review networks such as TripAdvisor allow users to review their products and services and interact directly with the user.

2.3 BRAND MANAGEMENT

Brand management is a part of marketing which works on the analysis and planning of a brand's perception in the market. After the analysis of the brand perception in the market, the planning of the actions is done to change the brand perception to meet the brand targets and objectives. All actions are intended for a good relationship with the target markets.[3]

The most effective brand management can be done if there is a complete overview and a good understanding of the brand, its target market and the company's objectives. Building

[3] *Nielsen*, 2015. Understanding the Power of a Brand Name

loyal customers is the ultimate target to develop a strategic brand management system since the consumers are the ones who makes decisions on brands.

Most companies' success or fail positions are based on their brand management strategies because the sales, the growth and client retention are all dependent on successful branding. So brand management is an essential element of all companies.[4]

2.3.1 Brand Management Principles

There are some key principles for brand management which are common for all companies. Company specific strategies are also possible, but the following principles can be counted as relevant elements for all companies:[5]

a. Brand equity
b. Brand recognition
c. Brand loyalty

2.3.1.1 Brand equity

Brand equity is the value that a company gains from its name recognition when compared to a generic equivalent. It is created by making the products memorable, easily recognizable and superior in quality and reliability. Brand equity consists of three basic elements: consumer perception, negative or positive effects and resulting value. It has direct effect on the sales numbers hence profits of a company, so companies are differentiated by their brand equity if they are on the same sector or industry.[6]

The most important benefit of a positive brand equity is that it has direct impact on the companies' return of investment. As an example, consumers tend to pay higher prices if

[4] Roberts, M., 2019. What Does Brand Management Mean
[5] Schmidt, C., 2021. I absolutely couldn't succeed in 2021 without these 3 unique brand management strategies
[6] Hayes, A., 2021. What is brand equity?

they believe the quality and recognition of the brand is high. This makes companies to earn more with spending less on advertisement. Also, this makes new products market penetration faster if that brand is used as an umbrella brand.

The positive effects of brand equity can be listed as:

i. Order Value per Customer: Consumers are willing to pay more on a brand which has positive brand equity which results in higher profits.

ii. Reputation*:* If products have positive brand equity which leads to positive reputation, consumers first choice will be this brand. This results in less spending for advertisement with higher sales numbers.

Examples of companies with high brand equity are: Apple, Coca-Cola, Starbucks.

2.3.1.2 Brand recognition

Brand Recognition is the indication of easiness for consumers to recognize the brand without hearing or seeing the brand name. This recognition is created via a slogan, logo, packaging or jingle. Companies reserve a lot of resources for market research to determine the success of their brand recognition strategies. This research is conducted through experiments on focus or study groups.[7]

2.3.1.3 Brand loyalty

Consumers' positive associations with a product or brand are referred to as brand loyalty. Customers who display brand loyalty are committed to a product or service, as shown by their repeated purchases amid attempts by rivals to lure them away. Corporations spend a lot of money on customer support and promotions in order to build and retain brand loyalty with a well-known product.

[7] Kenton, W., 2018. What is brand recognition?

Customers who are loyal to a brand will buy it regardless of convenience or price. These devoted customers have found a product that suits their requirements, and they have no desire to try another brand. The majority of well-known brand-name brands compete in a crowded market of new and outdated products, many of which are scarcely distinguishable. As a result, businesses use a variety of strategies to build and sustain brand loyalty. They invest their advertising budgets on ads that are aimed at a consumer group that includes both existing customers and people who may become loyal customers.[8]

2.4 ELEMENTS OF DIGITAL CRISIS AND MANAGEMENT

2.4.1 Digital Firestorms

Firestorms are releases of sudden messages that have negative word of mouth on social media networks about a brand, person or an event. Digital firestorms are faster, can be reached by many groups of people immediately compared to traditional firestorms which are slower, take time to share with friends and have limited number of receivers. Digital firestorms are types of crises that companies face online.

Digital firestorms can be categorized by product failure, service failure, and social failure (Hansen et al 2018). In order to exist as a brand in today's dynamic market, brands should be fulfilling the basic functions by producing quality products and services and that means there should not be any failures about products and services anymore. Social issues surrounding the brand such as political, ethical or issues related to race, environment and discrimination creates strong digital firestorms and can change the way of how consumers see and perceive the brand after being exposed to the sudden messages posted by people online.

[8] Kopp, C. M., 2021. What is brand loyalty?

2.4.1.1 Consumer boycotts

Consumer boycotts occurs in order to achieve a specific goal by not purchasing some products or services from a brand or informing society about some events that a brand is associated with. The main aim for consumer boycotts is to make some companies stop making profit, driving them to go bankruptcy, change their attitudes towards specific values or make people recognize attitudes of companies against some values to make them aware about things.

Consumers usually consider two things when they are decision making about purchasing a good or a service and they are the values of the products or services and the values of the company itself. Values of the product or a service are values such as quality, performance, durability, design and the price. Values of the company consists of all the social values that the company stand for and applies them to their business model. Both values of the company and the values of products and the services can cause boycotts. Due to the digitalization, boycotts now reach many people so quick on social media platforms and online platforms, putting companies in stressful crises management processes in order to lower the damage of the boycotts or survive through them. Companies should carefully consider about every customer segments and the different sensitivity levels of the society towards values before contributing to them.

2.4.1.2 Cancel culture

A modern explanation of cancel culture is taking a part of a mass cancelling to stop supporting a public person, brand or an idea due to the unsuitable social values and attitudes that they associate with. The renewed use of the word “cancel” is now used as stopping support and often includes boycotts when there are objectionable attitudes and behaviors towards some socially sensitive subjects. Sometimes this can occur when companies do not show any concerns about the remarkable events that are happening consisting of some social issues or other types of issues, cancel culture might occur. As an example. Mr. Peanut a mascot of the snacks company Planters, died in advertisement for Super Bowl LIV commercial. It was too close to Kobe Bryant’s death and that is why

it was criticized by a lot of people and the #BlockMrPeanut hashtag started to trend on Twitter. As a result of the firestorm and people trying to block and cancel the character and the brand by posting online, the company had to apologize and stop the campaign (Cover 2020).

2.4.1.3 Electronic word of mouth (E-Wom)

Word of mouth (WOM) is described as interpersonal communication between customers about products and services (Arndt 1967). E-WOM occurs when people share their opinions about a brand, product, experience or services on digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or blogs to inform other people about the subject. E-WOM can be positive or negative statements that is available for people to see through Internet. Comparing WOM and e-WOM, it can be observed that e-WOM spreads faster, and it consists of more real-time statements that can be posted every day. Customer's and target customer's attitudes and behaviors towards a brand or a product changes with the impact of e-WOM daily.

A research study based on whether different digital platforms effect customer's judgments about inspected products or not, discovered that contributors who are exposed to reviews on personal blogs are less prone to recommending the product to their friends compared to contributors who are exposed to reviews on independent websites. Customers recommend the products to their friends only when they influenced by a positive review on e-WOM platforms and when the review is negative, regardless of the e-WOM platforms, customers are not willing to recommend the products to their friends (Leea &Youna 2009). E-WOM also influences the customer decision making process and the purchase intentions due to the fact that people share their experiences with purchased products and services every day and that impacts others that are considering purchasing the same or similar product or a service. Results from a research model about the impacts of e-WOM on customer's purchase intentions shows that, e-WOM characteristics and the behaviors of the customers towards e-WOM information positively influence the customer purchase intentions (Erkan & Evans 2016).

2.4.2 Digital Crisis Management

2.4.2.1 Forming connection and being present on time

Failing to respond to customer complaints can cause some problems as a brand and makes the connection between the customers and the company weaker day by day. Not listening and being not present timely on social media to be able to respond will have poorly effects on the brand on modern age. Additionally, tracking the social chatter online and responding to them will have positive effects on the issues before it spreads more on the Internet. It is nowadays crucial to have a social media customer service to track the customer complaints or the statements from people online about the brand to be able to fix or respond to the problems on time.

2.4.2.2 Expectation setting

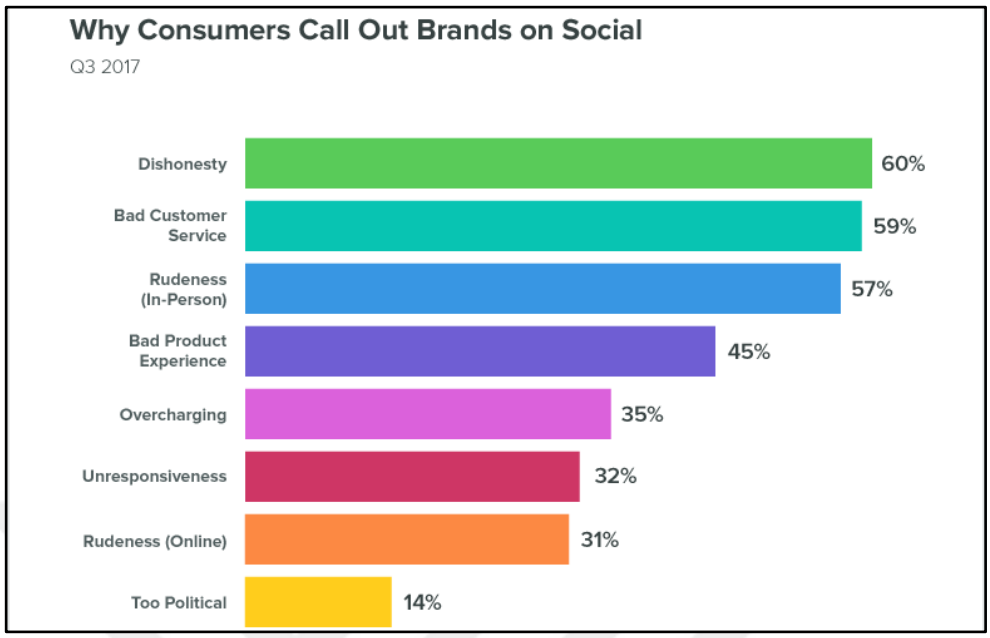
Giving information and being honest to customers about the response times of the company is beneficial especially as a small company that has limited resources to reply to complaints. Setting the expectations clearly and making sure that the message is understood by people is important to make customers feel more secure about the brand.

2.4.2.3 Transparency

Forming strong relationships with customers is one of the most primarily aspects of marketing strategy and the companies should lead crisis and customer complaints with sympathy, honestly and transparency to clear out all the misleading information. According to the Sprout Social Index Q3 2017[9], dishonesty, bad customer service and rudeness are the first three reasons why people call out brands on social.

[9] Cover, L., 2020. Navigating call-out culture

Figure 2.1: Reasons of consumers call out brands on social.



Source: Cover, L., 2020. Navigating call-out culture

Just like humans, companies can often make mistakes and trying to hide them, ignoring them or even removing the related post about them on social media platforms make companies look guilty and most importantly, it makes companies perceived as they do not care about the customers feedbacks and opinions which is harmful due to the fact that people now see companies as they place themselves as a part of companies.

2.4.2.4 Responding thoughtfully

Customers have the power to spread opinions and experiences online that can spread and affect the company's brand image, reputation, sales and even sometimes it can lead to more serious damages that cannot be fixed anymore. They also have the power to use e-WOM to spread positive messages about the companies and this can be very advantageous for the companies to be more visible in the market. Responding carefully and thoughtfully to customers online and offline can make customers change their negative feedbacks to positive ones and can lead the spread of positive statements about the company online fast enough for people to see. This allows companies to help building trust with the customers and get new customers due to the positive e-WOM.

2.4.2.5 Setting up a crisis management team

Setting up a crisis management is important when it comes to crises during the digital age. Almost every company will face a crisis therefore it is beneficial to have a professional team that knows how to respond to them fast without giving it a chance to spread more and damage the company reputation. Crisis management team should consist of professionals that knows every company response strategy and have plans for every possible crisis type in advance to lower the damage that the company is going to get during crisis.

2.4.2.6 Managing of social media

Social media management helps to connect with customers and be present in their daily life. Attracting new customers and having a deep understanding of the target customers can be performed by managing social media networks efficiently. A music retail chain called HMV unemployed many workers in 2013 but the company did not realize that they still had access to company's social media accounts. Therefore, they could use the official company accounts to inform people about the company that fired many people at once and used the hashtag #hmvXFactorFiring.[10]

2.5 EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL BRAND CRISIS

Case 1: GUCCI- online crises

Early in 2019, Gucci a well-known luxury fashion brand, experienced sudden discharge of negative messages towards a balaclava knit top that covers the nose and has a red lining around the lip area as seen in Figure 2.2. The negative backlash started to increase after some months of the official launch of the item and people claimed that it was racist.

[10] Walter, E., 2013. 10 tips for reputation and crisis management in the digital world

Figure 2.2: A balaclava knit top with a red lining around the lip area

Source: News Sky, 2019

The crisis was also shared by the press online and it became a digital firestorm by the fact that many people felt the need to backlash the brand and share their opinions online. One of the Twitter replying to Gucci is;

> "*But you made a blackface sweater?!*
> *Like how does that happen at this level of a fashion company?*
> *How many people did not understand what was happening here?*
> *Or did they just not care? Either way spells grossness for your company*."

Negative messages did not stop and even some celebrities shared their thoughts about the company with their audience. 50 Cent shared a photo burning a Gucci labeled t-shirt on his Instagram and some other celebrities started that they will boycott the company as seen in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: 50 Cent's Instagram post burning a Gucci T-shirt

Source: Independent, 2019

As a result of the online crises, Gucci made a quick response on the same day that the messages started to flood online and got rid of the item in their stores, removed it from the online website, additionally said that as an organization they value diversity. The brand apologized and stated that it was a "powerful learning moment", in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4: Gucci's apology

Source: twitter.com/Gucci, 2019

Gucci stated on Twitter and Instagram accounts that they plan to expand their diversity in the organization and increase cultural awareness around 10 days after the digital firestorm. On March 15, they stated announced a global program to support industry change called "Gucci Changemakers".[11] Furthermore, the brand made an advisory panel consists of academics, activist and the supermodel Naomi Campbell.

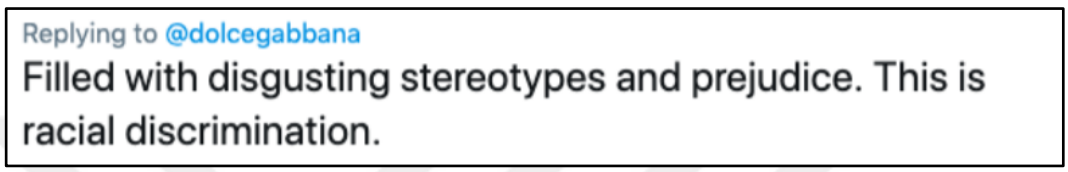
Case 2: DOLCE & GABBANA; advertising video on social media crises.

Dolce & Gabbana, an Italian high fashion brand, launched a social media marketing campaign for the Shanghai fashion show event that aimed to attract new Chinese consumers in November 2018. Brand realised a video for the campaign that has an Asian actress trying to eat Italian food with chopsticks and a male narrator voice was telling her

[11] Wekwerth, Z. M., (2019). Responding to online firestorms on social media: An analysis of the two company cases Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci. *Master thesis*, University of Twente

how to handle chopsticks, in Figure 2.5. The Asian actress was having trouble to take the food to her mouth and the narrator commented if the Cannoli was too big for her. After the advertisement was published, many people started to share negative feedbacks about it and after 24 hours, it was taken from Weibo but still circulated in other social media platforms. People stated that the advertising video was racist, sexist and insensitive against Asian people.

Figure 2.5: An example of a reply to Dolce & Gabbana on Twitter



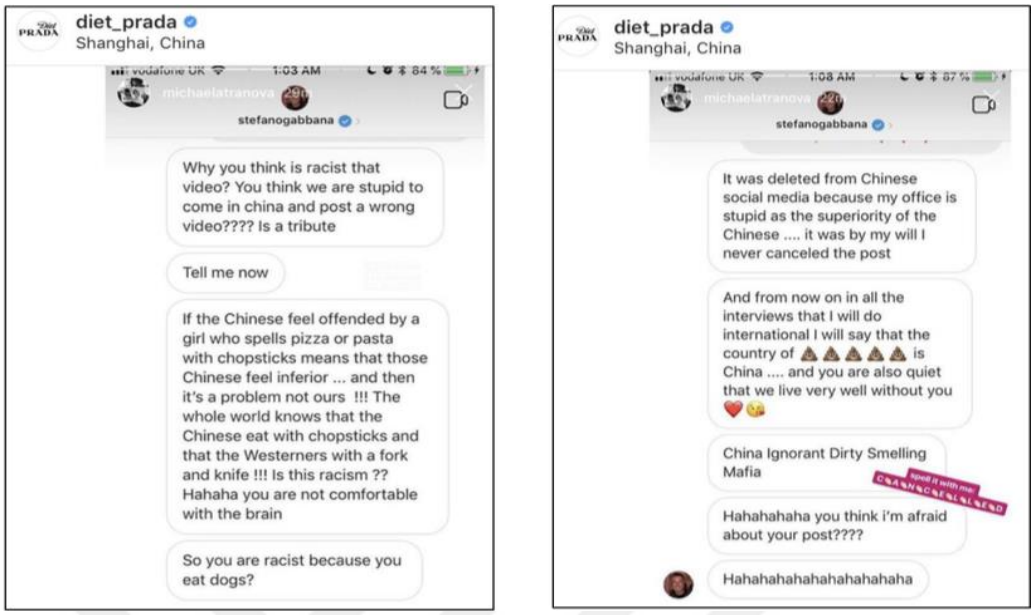
Source: twitter.com/teenvogue, 2018

Dolce & Gabbana was invited to erase the sexist marketing campaigns by the Italian government due to the fact that the brand tends to make them. The video is accessible and still can be shared therefore the brand might suffer from the campaign also in the future (Pantano 2021). An Instagram account called "Diet Prada" that has 2.3M followers as of December 2020, shared personal messages between Stefano Gabbana and Michaela Phuong Thanh Travona. The messages showed that Gabbana called China a country of shit and did not understand the campaign was racist and also called Chinese "Ignorant Dirty Smelling Mafia". After the conversation was leaked online, they became viral and shared by big Chinese social media accounts as seen in Figure 2.6.

Stefano Gabbana claimed that the messages that leaked on social media was fake and the statements did not belong to him.

Many celebrities and models stated that they would not attend the fashion show event and boycott the company. Some big brands such as Net-A- Porter, Alibaba, Yoox and Mr Porter dropped carrying the Dolce& Gabbana label.

Figure 2.6: Examples of Diet Prada's posts on Instagram



Source: Instagram/diet_prada, 2019

The Shanghai fashion show event go cancelled as of 21 November and the brand posted on Instagram and Twitter stating that "what happened were unfortunate and they thanked the people who worked for the show, their friends and family. "Furthermore, the brand shared a post on Instagram explaining that "Stefano Gabbana's account was hacked.". On November 23, the two designers of the brand published an apology video in Italian, and it additionally posted with Chinese and English subtitles, in Figure 2.7.

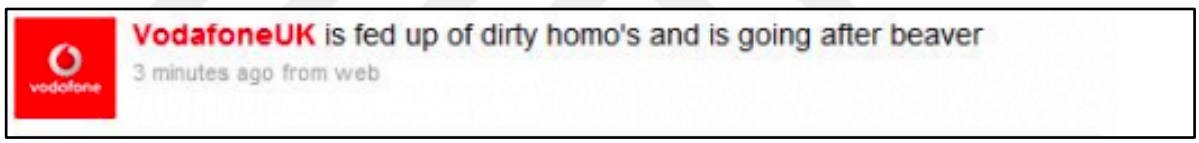
Figure 2.7: Dolce& Gabbana's Instagram statement after the firestorm

Source: Daily Mail, 2019

Case 3: Vodafone UK: Twitter crisis.

Vodafone UK- a British telecommunication service provider shared an offensive tweet that escalated quickly on social media in February 2010. The tweet was shared on Vodafone UK's official twitter account and said, "Vodafone UK is fed up of dirty homo's and is going after beaver". After the tweet, Figure 2.8, some assumed that the official twitter account was hacked, and others thought this was a very homophobic, discriminative and offensive message. The tweet was removed swiftly, and the brand answered people's tweet by saying that "they were not hacked and there is a severe breach of rules by staff in their organization". Later on, the company announced that they suspended the person who has a relation with this tweet and apologized. The company lead this online firestorm by being honest, transparent and having a strong communication with their customers.

Figure 2.8: VodafoneUK's tweet that caused a firestorm



Source: advocate.com

2.6 SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY (SCCT)

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) is based on Attribution Theory that recommends managers to form company response strategies in accordance with the responsibility levels that they have by determining the types of crises and additionally the reputational threat of the crisis (Coombs 2007). Attribution Theory states that people seek out for the causes of the events especially they are negative and unexpected. People attribute an emotion which results in behaviors intentions when they attribute responsibility to an event. The core people emotions are anger and sympathy. When a someone is responsible for an event and held accountable for it, anger feeling evokes while when someone is not responsible for an event and held accountable for it, sympathy feeling evokes (Weiner 2006; Weiner 1986; Weiner 1985). SCCT Theory states that, company responses created by crisis managers when having a crisis will create a negative

or a positive effect and in order to save the company from reputational damages or lower the reputational threats, managers should carefully decide the best company response strategy.

2.6.1 Crisis Types

There are three different types of crises and they are victim crisis, accident crisis and preventable crisis. All crises can be categorized under one of these crisis types in order determine the best reactions towards them as a company.

a. Victim Crisis

Victim crisis is a type of crisis that companies are the actual victim of the crisis itself. It can be natural disasters, crisis that companies are falsely accused of the reason of the crisis. Victim crises have minimum responsibility levels for the companies. Victim crisis do not make companies have reputational damage or the reputational damage is little due to the fact that these types of crises are unavoidable. An example for these types of crises is the crisis that Tylenol had back in 1982. The company was accused of being responsible for the death of 7 people in Chicago due to poisoning. But the actual reason for people who died from the drugs that were sold by the company was due to a killer who covered drugs with cyanide.

b. Accident Crisis

Accident crises occur when companies face a crisis that happens by an accident or the reason for the crisis is not intentional. These types of crises make companies take medium levels of responsibilities. An example for the accident crisis is the explosion of the battery of Samsung Galaxy Note 7 in 2016. Accident crisis can create a reputation threat and damage to the companies therefore the situation should be fixed immediately when facing an accident crisis.

c. Preventable Crisis

Preventable crises happen when companies do not stop a crisis from emerging even though with careful measures, they can avoid facing them. These types of crisis usually are related to social crises that have political, discrimination, or other ethical conflicts and not socially accepted in society or a party of the society. Preventable crises are avoidable therefore they create a big reputational damage for the companies facing them. High responsibilities should be taken if there is a preventable crisis.

2.6.2 Crisis Responsibility Level Factors

The Table 2.1 shows the three types of crisis that leads different responsibility levels and different reputational damage risks for the companies. Every responsibility level leads companies to respond to the crisis differently and work on different company response strategies. In order to find out the responsibility levels, as a first step crisis type should be determined. Victim crises have low responsibility levels, accident crises have medium responsibility levels and preventable crises have high responsibility levels. There are two critic responsibility intensifying factors. They are the history of the company and prior brand reputation. If the company has some prior crises in their history and if the company got some bad and negative reputational perceptions, responsibility levels of the companies when facing new crisis will increase.

Table 2.1: Responsibility level and reputational damage risks of crisis types

CRISIS TYPES	RESPONSIBILITY LEVEL	REPUTATION DAMAGE RISK
Victim Crisis	Low	Non-Existent/ Very low
Accident Crisis	Medium	Low/ Medium
Preventable Crisis	High	High

2.6.3 Company Response Strategies

According to the SCCT, companies should respond to crisis in accordance with the responsibility levels determined by the type of the crisis and the reputational issues of the company. Company response strategies are based on the responsibility levels but there are different ways to adapt the strategies in response techniques. Depending on the responsibility factors, companies can use base response strategy, denial response strategy, diminishment response strategy, bolstering response strategy and rebuilding response strategy. In Table 2.2 below shows the SCCT company response strategies with the responsibility levels, crisis types and the sub-categories of the crises.

Table 2.2: Company response strategies adapted from W. Timothy Coombs

RESPONSIBILITY LEVEL	CRISIS TYPE	SUGGESTED COMPANY RESPONSE STRATEGY	SUB-CATEGORIES
LOW	**VICTIM CRISES**	**DENIAL**	Ignoring/ No Action
			Attacking the Accuser
			Denial
			Scapegoating
LOW, MEDIUM	**ACCIDENT CRISES, VICTIM CRISES**	**DIMINISHMENT**	Excuse
			Justification
			Separation
LOW, MEDIUM, HIGH	**VICTIM CRISES, ACCIDENT CRISES, PREVENTABLE CRISES**	**BOLSTERING**	Reminder
			Ingratiation
			Victimage
			CSR-Based Response
			Endorsement
HIGH, MEDIUM	**PREVENTABLE CRISES, ACCIDENT CRISES**	**REBUILDING**	Apologizing
			Sympathy
			Corrective Actions
			Compensation
			Transcendence

Source: (Coombs 2007)

a. Base Response Strategy

Base response strategy consists of three strategies that companies should apply to their response strategies no matter what the crisis types or the responsibility level is. First one is to stop the factors and reasons immediately if something is hurting people physically or mentally. Second one is to make a statement that the situation that caused a crisis will not be repeated in the future. And lastly, third one is to show sympathy and place sympathy elements in the responses.

b. Company Response Strategy Categories

Denial response strategy is used to deny the crisis, act like there is no crisis by ignoring it and also blaming others in order to prove that the company is not guilty of what happened. It has 3 main subcategories, and they are ignoring/no action, attacking the accuser, denial and scapegoating. Denial company response is best to use when a company is having a victim crisis where the responsibility level is the lowest and the responsibility intensifying factors are not high.

Diminishment response strategy aims to lower the responsibility levels of the companies by defending the company, making the company seem like they are separated from the person who caused the crisis and not related with the crisis as a company and stating excuses. This response strategy is used when having a victim or accident crises therefore the responsibility levels of the companies that are using this company response strategy are low or medium.

Bolstering response strategy is a supportive strategy and can be used with other company response strategies to enhance the effects. All three types of crises and responsibility levels can use this strategy and add to their main response strategies. The aim for bolstering response strategy is to remind the stakeholders, people or institution that has been working with that the company has done many successful things in the past and now, reminding them the good work that they have done. In addition, stating praises for

the work partners and customers and reminding them that the company is a victim of the crises have been used in bolstering response strategy.

Last strategy method is Rebuilding company response strategy and it is used to rebuild the connections with the affected parts by the crises. Apologizing, accepting the mistakes and making corrective actions to fix them, showing sympathy, helping parts that were affected by the crisis by giving them presents or simply by helping them and also making people's attention to leave the main subject by stating about bigger situations are the sub-categories that are actively used in company response strategies. Rebuilding strategy is used when having preventable crisis which are they types of crisis that companies are mostly facing in today's world. Therefore, the responsibility levels are high. Also, for accident crises, this type of response strategy can be used to lower the damage from the crisis as a company and the responsibility levels for the companies from accident crises are in medium levels. Rebuilding strategy can lower the crisis damage and the reputational threats.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN CONCEPT

The research consists of two different types of analysis, which are qualitative and quantitative. A mixed method approach has been applied to be able to investigate the success criteria that will be beneficial for managers to be cautious about the possible firestorms against brands which can have a tremendous affect for a long or short time periods.

The qualitative part of the study consists of the social media analysis of the brands that faced firestorms in Turkish market. In order to acknowledge the response techniques and the people's perception changes towards the brands during the firestorms, the most used words and the main reasons that people feel a certain way towards the brand after a firestorm have been analysed by using a content analysis. For the quantitative research, twitter data have been collected to be able to find out the length and strength of the firestorms in the Turkish market.

Four distinct steps method approach is applied for research design concept. The first step is to research the firestorms occurrence reasons and related company responses, the second step is to collect the selected firestorm's data from Twitter by targeting specific hashtags, the third step is to run sentiment analysis to the collected data from Twitter by using a sentiment analysis software tool and the fourth step is the research design concept with applying the sentiment analysis results and the company responses in the light of SCCT.

In this study, the qualitative content analysis method is used to understand the phenomenon and enables the integration of different materials where communicative content is important. All analysis is based on the companies' responses and direct reactions of consumers only on digital social media. Additionally, as digital firestorms are a social media phenomenon and the response of the company and reaction of the users

are interrelated (action-reaction) so, companies' actions are interested in to determine the strength of the negative impact of firestorm on social media. To understand whether users react positively or negatively to companies' responses, sentiment analysis is applied to comments that directly refer to specific company post. The comments collected from social media sites are classified as positive, negative and neutral by applying a sentiment analysis approach. Public social media comments indicate whether a company's response is publicly accepted and whether that response has the desired effect in line with the objectives of this analysis.

3.1.1 Firestorm Research

The first step is to research the firestorms occurrence reasons and related company responses. Firestorms have been determined and explored by using Twitter hashtags and internet research between the years of 2017 and 2020 shown in Table 3.1. Five of them have been selected and research have been done in order to find out the occurrence reasons of the firestorms that companies faced and additionally the responses of the companies have been found via Internet research. The aim of this first step is to have a deep understanding of the firestorms cause reasons therefore they can be categorized by their crisis types.

3.1.2 Data Collection

The second step is to collect the selected firestorm's data from Twitter by targeting specific hashtags related to the firestorms and analyzing them. In order to analyze the data and run the tests to explore if using company response strategies according to the SCCT helps companies to effect customers sentiments, data from Twitter has been collected by using a data collecting software. Collected twitter data contains information such as text, username, date, time and URL. Specific hashtags are used for the selected firestorms, for that reason tweets are collected using those hashtags.

The main data was collected from the social media platform Twitter. Distinct words that associate with firestorms in Turkey such as "boykot", "almıyorum", "alışveriş yapmıyoruz" have been searched online. For deep investigation, firestorms that have the

largest number of participations from people online and have the largest scaled e-WOM have been selected.

Brand response strategies and the steps that they took in order to overcome the damage of the firestorm are explored by web search analysis. All the recovery processes have been investigated and categorised to point out the success criteria that have the fastest and the most stable recovery process.

Firestorm responses from the companies' social media accounts, are collected namely Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Using the application *exportcomments*[12], the relevant user comments were retrieved from Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. This program can export public comments from social media networks, including the commenter's identity, the comment's message, the date and time, likes, URLs, and retweet comments, among other things. Retweet comments are only included as quantitative data in the firestorm engagement number.

Consequently, comments which directly related to the company's firestorm hashtag are taken into account. Five different firestorms from six different companies were analyzed in this study and the total number of downloaded public comments belonging to these firestorm hashtags were below 50,000 comments limit. This limit is effective enough to run a sentiment analysis tool by *meaningcloud*[13] to evaluate the polarities of each obtained comments.

Firstly, comments belonging to the specific firestorm that has been observed were downloaded in an excel sheet from exportcommens. Secondly, the Turkish comments were translated into English with a computer translator in order to run a sentiment analysis. As a final step, MeaningCloud's sentiment analysis software tool was used to analyze all the data.

[12] *Exportcomments*, 2021
[13] *Meaningcloud,* 2021

In the Table 3.1, firestorms in different sectors were collected between the years of 2017 and 2020. The firestorm reasons and the accusations mostly differ from each other. Also, the steps and the company responses from social media and from the press were analyzed. It has been observed that many firestorms between the years of 2017 and 2020 were caused due to political events, discrimination issues, wrongful dismissal and unfair gain. The Table 3.1 shows the firestorms and the reasons of the firestorms that companies had in Turkish. After analyzing the reasons for the firestorms, companies set strategic brand and firestorm management techniques in order to recover from them and these strategic techniques determines the response from the companies.

The responses of the chosen firestorm company responses can be seen from the Table 3.2. The responses from the companies differs in terms of response strategy, response time, scope of the response and the level of taking accountability of the crises. Firestorms that have different reasons behind were selected for this study to be able to perform a more reliable analysis to see which response strategies work better against firestorms.

Table 3.1: Summary of selected firestorms between the years of 2017 and 2020

2017				
Brand	**Month**	**Hashtag**	**Reason**	**Accusation**
İPEKYOL, KOTON	JAN	#ipekyolboykot, #kotonboykot, #ipekyolkürkcalma,#kotonkürkcalma, #kürkünücıkarvicdanınıgiy, #kürkcinayettir, #kürkehayır, #kürkvahsettir	Animal fur sales.	**Animal Cruelty**
PINAR	APR	#pınarurunleriboykot, #yasarholdingboykot	Statements of the chairman of Yaşar Holding.	**Political**
MİGROS			Sales of the magazine called "Derin Tarih".	**Political**
BİTAKSİ	MAR	#bitaksi	BiTaksi user was physically harmed by BiTaksi driver.	**Employee assault**
ÜLKER	MAR	#şakamızyokülker, #ülker	A campaign about April Foools' Day.	**April Fools Ad Crises**
COCA COLA			Removing Turkey from the world map	**Ad Insensitivity**
A101			Fenerbahçe fans boycotted A101, due to a special campaign for Trabzonspor done by the company.	**Discrimination agaisnt a sports team**
REAL	SEP	#realtürkiyedendefol	A picture of a mosque appeared to be printed on a product on the companys' website.	**Religious Insensitivity**
KOÇ	OCT	#koçgibiahlaksızlık	Naked statues at the "kapı çalana açılır" exhibition.	**Immorality**
TAB GIDA	OCT		According to a statement on EkşiSözlük, a new graduate who applied for the position assistant specialist at TAB Gıda, an HR assistant general manager informed that an internship is a must and then stated "If you are going to cry, let's give you a tissue. Welcome to the corporate life".	**Statement Insenstivity**
NETFLIX	NOV		TV series "Designated survivor" targetted Turkey that is a port of refugees running from war and violence.	**Political**
ACIBADEM	NOV	#acıbademiboykotediyoruz	Acıbadem employee tweeted a racist statement because of the earthquake in Kirkuk.	**Racist Statemnt from an Employee**
D&R	NOV	#torpilyapmaDR, #Drkitabımızırafa çıkar, #picemiyeti		**Discrimination**

Table 3.1: Summary of selected firestorms between the years of 2017 and 2020 (Cont.)

2018				
Brand	**Month**	**Hashtag**	**Reason**	**Accusation**
EFES PİLSEN	JAN	#boykotefespilsen	Tuncay Özilhan, chairman of the board of Anadolu Group, said, "Beers made at home cause tax loss."	**Statement Insensitivity**
PEGASUS	JAN	#pegasus, #trabzonhavalimanı, #pegasusairlines	Crisis after the plane crash in Trabzon.	**Security Insensitivity**
KOTON	JAN	#kotondanalışverişyapmıyoruz	Taking dogs into the store from the streets.	**Hygiene Insensitivity**
KFC	MAY	#KFC	A marketing campaign banner says "free to look at".	**Ad Insensitivity**
QNB FİNANSBANK	MAY		After one of the names protesting Şenol Güneş was Murat Şakar, Deputy General Manager of QNB Finansbank, Beşiktaş fans canceled their cards, account numbers and pos devices in the bank.	**Sports Team Conflict**
FLORMAR	MAY	#flormardeğildirenişgüzelleştirir, #flormarveyvesrocherel	Woman workers were fired.	**Wrongful Dismissal**
UBER	AUG/SEP	#uberhırsızyetkililersessiz	The speculations of the company being an illegal organization where they gain unfair profits, reduce the earnings of domestic organizations.	**Unfair Gain**
ÖZDİLEK	OCT	#özdilekboykot, #myrleiayasahipçık, #özdilekegitmiyoru	The instruction of a shopping mall on the ancient city of Myrleia.	**Historical Artifact Insensitivity**
CGV MARS GROUP	DEC		Producers, including companies that produced high-grossing films such as BKM and Fikir Sanat, boycotted CGV Mars Group, which they claimed to make unfair profits through their promotions.	**Unfair Gain**

Table 3.1: Summary of selected firestorms between the years of 2017 and 2020 (Cont.)

2019				
Brand	**Month**	**Hashtag**	**Reason**	**Accusation**
NIKE	JAN	#nikeboykot	A writing under a shoe that was associated with Arabic-like "Allah" letters on the bottom of it.	**Religious Insensitivity**
TİMAŞ YAYIN GRUBU	APR	#timaşyayınlarınaboykot, #boğaziçiözürdile	Translation of Hamza A. Tzartis's book into turkish language.	**Political**
MEYDAN BEŞİKTAŞ	MAY	#meydanbeşiktaşboykot	The owner of the place called Meydan Beşiktaş did physically harmed the employees because they did not stand up when he entered the room, and the footage of this incident was recorded by the camera of the venue and went online.	**Employee Assault**
YEMEK SEPE	JUN	#yemeksepetiboykot	A tweet from the CEO of Yemek Sepeti about a politician.	**Political**
KOÇ	JUL	#boykotkoc	Due to the statements of Fenerbahçe Club President Ali Koç targeting Fatih Terim, ultrAslan announced that they had decided to boycott the Koç group by publishing a statement.	**Sports Team Conflict**
EFES	AUG	#efesboykot	Drinks named "Zilli Sally" and "Delikanlı Henry" were boycotted because of their sexist names.	**Sexist Rroduct Names**
CEM YILMAZ	SEP	#cemyılmazfilmlerinegitmiyorum, #cemyılmazaboykot	Due to Cem Yılmaz's political stance, Karakomik films 2 in one was boycotted.	**Political Stand**
KOTON	OCT	#kotonboykot, #haksızlıkkotonda	Mass dismissal occurance.	**Wrongful Dismissal**
CNN	OCT	#CNNhaddinibileceksin	Censoring Atatürk in of the publications.	**Political**

Table 3.1: Summary of selected firestorms between the years of 2017 and 2020 (Cont.)

2020				
Brand	**Month**	**Hashtag**	**Reason**	**Accusation**
P&G	JAN	#boykotfairy, #fairyboykot, #bernalacinyalnızdegildir	Berna Laçin asked about the earthquake taxes to the company and then she was removed from P&G group advertisements and canceled their contracts.	**Transparency Issues**
VODAFONE	MAR	#vodafoneboykot	A worker was fired because of a tweet that they shared.	**Wrongful Dismissal**
LGBT SUPPORTING COMPANIES	JUN	#LGBTfaaliyetleriyasaklansın, #LGBTfaaliyetleridurdurulsun, #onurhaftası2020, #alışverişyapmıyorum	Some LGBT friendly companies were boycotted.	**LGBTQ+ Discrimination**
LC WAIKIKI	JUL	#LCWAIKIKIboykot, #LCWAIKIKIdestek	The company was boycotted due to a corporate mail that was leaked online stating that LGBT associated symbols and colors should not be used in products.	**LGBTQ+ Discrimination**
KOÇ HOLDIN	JUL	#koçholdingboykot	Sharing a statement supporting the Istanbul convention.	**Political**
DARDANEL	AUG	#dardanelboykot	The claim that they did not remove the workers from the factory as a result of the corona virus among the workers.	**Wrongful Dismissal**
CARREFOURS	OCT	#carrefoursaboykot	The company replied a customer online and stated that they do not sell Turkish products in Saudi Arabia.	**Political**
TORKU	NOV	#sütbanyosu, #torku, #benefit, #akgıda	Torku, which has a factory in Konya, was protested after a TikTok video filmed by an employee in a milk collecting factory in Konya while bathing in the milk tank.	**Hygiene Insensitivity, Health Danger, poor production process**
TV8	NOV	#TV8boykot	Acun Ilıcalı and his channel were boycotted as a result of judging a person competing in masterchef for his pas	**Judgement of a contestants' past**
VESTEL	NOV	#vestelboykot	In August, workers at the Vestel factory in Manisa announced the effects of the covid-19 outbreak on workers. Workers stated that there were approximately 1000 positive cases at the factory and 7 workers died due to coronavirus. Then a boycott started against the company.	**Poor Working Conditions**
KOTON	NOV	#kotonboykot, #kotonhaddinibil, #etiketlericıkar	"Etiketleriçıkar" advertising campaign caused a firestrom due to the slogans that the company used.	**Religious Insensitivity**

Table 3.2: Summary of social media responses of companies

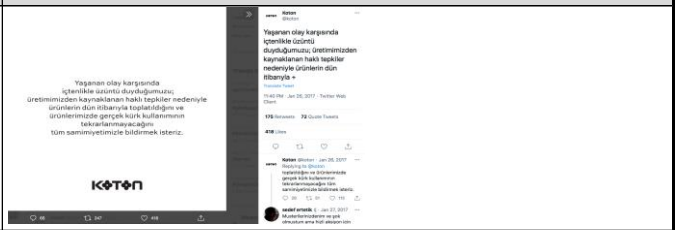
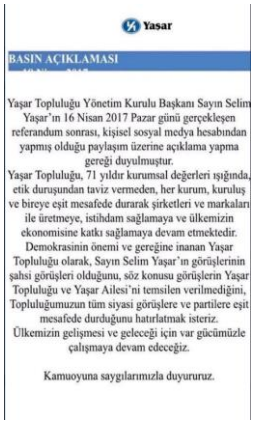
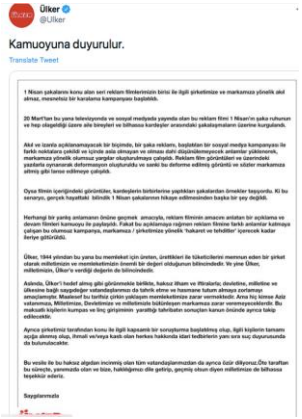
Brand	Fire Strom Start date	Company Response Date	Company Response Time	Channel	firestorm	Respons
Koton	25 Jan 2017	26 Jan 2017	11.40	Twitter	Usage of real animal fur in products.	
Pınar/ Yaşar Holding	16 Apr	18 Apr	23.00	Facebook	Firestorm started after Selim Yaşar shared a message on a social media platform. 	Selim Yaşar apologized and deleted the messages.  

Table 3.2: Summary of social media responses of companies (Cont.)

Brand	Fire Strom Start date	Company Response Date	Company Response Time	Channel	firestorm	Respons
Ülker/Murat Ülker	31 March	1 Apr	01.02	Twitter	Political meaning of the marketing ad.	Reklam filmi kaldırıldı. 
			1.59 am			
			12.39 pm			

3.1.3 Sentiment Analysis of User Responses

In the third step, sentiment analysis is applied to the user comments underneath the companies' firestorm hashtags. The objective of this step was to determine if consumers reacted positively or negatively to the firestorms associated with certain corporations in general.

In the sentiment analysis data is collected from Twitter by using a sentiment analysis software tool. This step is the most crucial step for the research due to the fact that the main goal of the research is to find out if the company crises response strategies according to the SCCT changes the people's emotions towards to the firestorms positively or not. The users' reactions to the six companies' comments were analyzed using sentiment analysis.

Only, Turkish comments are chosen for the study since communication language in the posts was Turkish, and consequently all of the comments were translated into English. Looking at Turkish comments also allowed us to capture users' reactions, as it is reasonable to believe that those who submitted comments from all over Turkey. Furthermore, it has been discovered that sentiment analysis work best with English content (Thelwall 2017).

Meaningcloud is utilized as a tool with an Add-in application for Excel and Google Sheets that can classify comments into strongly positive, positive, neutral, negative, and strongly negative categories, to identify the sentiment of the comments. *MeaningCloud* was chosen as a tool because it can identify global sentiment and sentiment at an attribute level, examining each sentence's sentiment in depth. Individual phrases are identified, and their relationships are assessed, resulting in a global polarity value for the text as a whole.

Furthermore, *MeaningCloud* is said to be capable of detecting irony. Another crucial reason for choosing *MeaningCloud* was that it can classify the majority of popular emojis. Because emojis are so popular in today's social media comments, this functionality is very useful in this case. Furthermore, because it has key customers of well-known companies

all over the word, and has been used and recommended in several studies, *MeaningCloud* seems trustworthy and competent (Herrera-Planells & Villena-Román 2018).

Running sentiment analysis to the collected Twitter data shows the sentiment polarities of each Twitter text that were post by people during firestorms. Sentiment analysis uncovers the positive, strong positive, negative, strong negative, neutral and other the sentiment polarities on the collected data. Positives and strong positives, negatives and strong negatives and neutrals and others are analyzed together as a group in order to find out the total positives, total negatives and others.

3.1.4 Qualitative Content Analysis of Companies' Responses

The fourth step, which is the final step of the research design concept is done by analyzing the sentiment analysis results and the company responses in the light of SCCT and crisis response strategies of the selected companies. In order to explore if company responses are suited to the SCCT theory or not, company responses have been analyzed and then with the results of the sentiment analysis, the research has been completed by discovering the changes in people's emotions before and the after of the company responses. Therefore, effects of using SCCT on company response strategies when facing a firestorm can be evaluated.

3.2 ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Qualitative content analysis is applied to the social media posts of the companies in order to understand the firestorm reactions of the companies in depth. Deductive and inductive coding can be used to categorize data. The main difference between inductive and deductive reasoning is that while inductive reasoning aims to develop a theory, deductive reasoning aims to test an existing theory. Table 3.3 lists the main and sub-categories of deductive analysis.

Table 3.3: Main and sub-categories of deductive content analysis

Main category	Denial				
Sub-categories	Attack the accuser	Denial	Scapegoating	Ignoring/no action	
Main category	Diminishment				
Sub-categories	Excuse	Justification		Separation	
Main category	Bolstering				
Sub-categories	Reminder	Ingratiation	Victimage	CSR-based response	Endorsement
Main category	Rebuilding				
Sub-categories	Apologizing	Sympathy	Corrective actions	Compen-sation	Transcendence
Main category	Sincere Apology				
Sub-categories	Acknowledging wrong	Explaining how wrong occurred	Commitment to avoid future mistakes	Expressing remorse and sincerity	Accepting responsibility
Main category	Pseudo-Apology				
Sub-categories	Evading responsibility	Apologizing for something else		Downplaying seriousness	

Inductive reasoning moves from specific observations to broad generalizations, and deductive reasoning the other way around. Both approaches are used in various types of research, and it's not uncommon to combine them in one large study. To do so, deductive and inductive coding are used to categorize the data.

Deductive content analysis is used in the first part of the analysis, because these categories are based on SCCT. The theoretical background of the deductive coding is SCCT. In this case the main categories are the crisis response clusters Denial, Diminishment, Bolstering, Rebuilding, Sincere Apology and Pseudo-Apology. In inductive coding the

categories are derived from the data (Schreier 2104) and (Mayring 2019) and used in the analysis in order to provide a complete understanding of the data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the response strategies with the user reactions of the firestorms examined in chapter 6 will be analyzed by combining the outcomes of the qualitative content analysis and the sentiment analysis of six company cases. The SCCT response strategies are used to categorize the responses that the selected companies announced, and qualitative content analysis have been performed to the collected data to determine whether the data is positive, negative or neutral by applying sentiment analysis before and after the company responses.

The software program *MeaningCloud*'s sentiment analysis tool has been used to analyze the tweets before the company response and after the company response to see how company response techniques affect the people's opinions and the changes in the firestorm length. Tweets were translated into English and then using the *MeaningCloud* software, sentiment analysis has been performed. Sentiment analysis by *MeaningCloud* was used as an Excel 365 add-in for the analysis of the data derived from Twitter. Obtaining the sentiment analysis data in an excel form makes it efficient to make comparisons and evaluations on the data in order to analyze before and after the company response sections. Sentiment analysis defines data by separating them into groups such as, objective, subjective, ironic, non-ironic, agreement and disagreement. If the agreement between the different elements in the text has the same polarity, they are categorized as agreement, if the elements have different polarities, they are categorized as disagreement.

The text is subjective when there are subjective marks and when there are no subjective marks, they are categorized as objective. Also, the text is grouped as ironic when there are ironic elements in it and when there is not, it is categorized as non-ironic. The polarity of texts in sentences is determined separately by language processing techniques and the relations between the texts are evaluated. Polarity values have been listed as P, P+, N, N+, NEU and NONE. Positives are titled as P, strong positives are titled as P+, negatives are titled as N, strong negatives are titled as N+, neutral data is titled as NEU and lastly

if the text does not have any sentiment it is titled as NONE. According to a research *MeaningCloud*'s sentiment analysis has 82.13 percent accuracy, Python NLTK text classification has 74.50 percent accuracy and Miopia-an academic system has 73.00 percent accuracy after applying them to 2.400 data obtained from Amazon, Kaggle, IMDb and Yelp (Zulkifli & Lee 2019).

4.1 KOTON FIRESTORM

Koton is a retail chain operating in ready-made clothing sector founded in 1988 in İstanbul and the company has around 8.500 employees and 434 stores in 28 different countries.

4.1.1 Step 1: Firestorm Occurrence Reasons

Hayvan Hakları İzleme Komitesi (Animal Rights Monitoring Committee) posted a photo of one of Koton's coats in a store and announced that the coat was made of real fox fur, the committee aims to compile, achieve, monitor and report the news about animals and animal rights in media. They invited everyone who was conscious about animal rights to boycott the brand from social media. The post said "we are inviting right-conscious people to boycott Koton who earns money from animal fur. Animal fur does not belong to humans". A post which apparently initiated the firestorm from twitter posts is shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: A screenshot of the post that started the firestorm of Koton.

Source: twitter.com/hakim_komite, 2017

After the post was seen on social media, it caused a digital firestorm especially among people who were conscious and sensitive about animal rights and animal cruelty in clothing items. The post that triggered E-WOM on social media and created crisis was posted on 25 January 2017 around 7:01 PM. Quickly after the post, people noticed the issue of using real fur for clothing items and created hashtags on Twitter related to brands using real fur and animal rights such as "#kürkvahşettir", "#kürkünüçıkarvicdadınıgiy", "#kürkcinayettir", "#kürkehayır". Among all the hashtags that were related to the animal fur in clothing, two specific hashtags were formed directly to boycott the brand Koton. People created a negative firestorm against the specific brand using two hashtags and they were "#kotonboykot" and "#kotonkürkçalma". Therefore, a firestorm was created on social media against a famous and well-known company that got accused of using real animal fur in their products. The firestorm is formed under an accusation of animal cruelty. People started to share pictures of clothing items from the brand that had tags saying "real fur" on them from the stores of the company online in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: A response screenshot sample for Koton.

Source: twitter.com/search?q=kotonkürkçalma, 2017

Company Response

Due to the quick spread of the firestorm on social media, Koton posted a response the day after the start of the firestorm on Twitter at 11:40 PM. The company stated on the response that they would like to inform that they sincerely regret the incident and the products were

collected from the stores due to the justified reasons to the production. Additionally, as it can be seen from Figure 4.3**,** the brand stated that using real animal fur would not be repeated on their response.

Figure 4.3: KOTON's response post

*Source:*Instagram/koton, 2017

4.1.2 Step 2: Twitter Data Analysis

In order to analyze the firestorm, two specific hashtags were chosen to be evaluated due to the fact that only two of the hashtags were directly linked to the company- using a real animal fur in their clothing items. Using *ExportComments* as a tool to download all the Turkish tweets that uses #kotonkürkçalma and #kotonboykot, 951 tweets were downloaded. Analysis of the complete data and detailed distribution of data are given in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.4 respectively.

Table 4.1: Analysis of the complete data & before and after company response for KOTON's firestorm

ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLETE DATA	
Total Tweet Count	951
Total Retweets	5,261
Total Comments	372
Total Favorites	10,145
Total Engagement	**16,729**

BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE	
Total Tweet Count	245
Total Retweets	1,663
Total Comments	84
Total Favorites	3,080
Total Engagement	**5,072**

AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
Total Tweet Count	706
Total Retweets	3,598
Total Comments	288
Total Favorites	7,065
Total Engagement	**11,657**

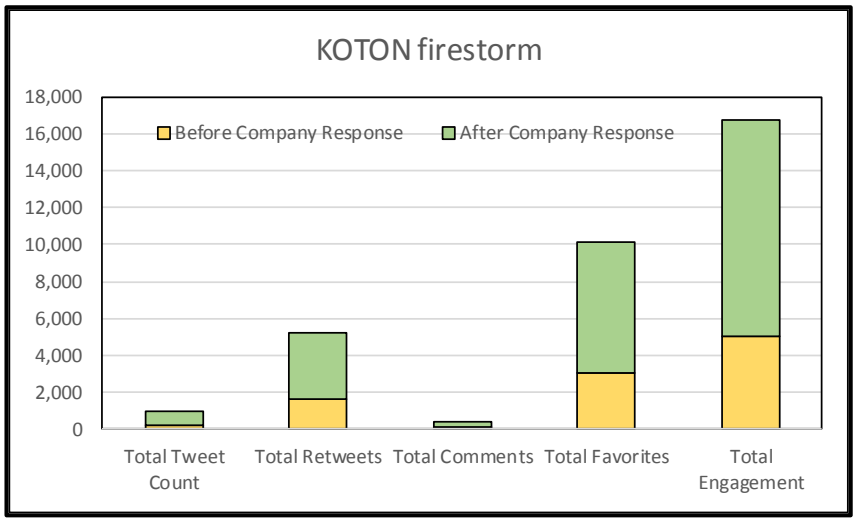
As seen in the Table 4.1 and Figure 4.4, total 951 tweets, 5.261 total retweets, 372 total comments and 10.145 total favorites have been founded. The specific firestorm against Koton got 16,729 engagements online between the dates of 25 January 2017 and 30 January 2017.

Data has been separated into two parts as before and after company response. The firestorm started on 25 January 2017 and at 11:40 PM on 26th of January, the company posted a response against the firestorm. After 11:40 PM on 26th of January, the data have been addressed as after the company response.

245 total tweets, 1.663 total retweets, 84 comments, 3.080 favorites have been found before the company response and the total engagement number before the company response is 5.072.

706 total tweets, 3.598 total retweets, 288 comments and 7.065 favorites have been found after the company response and the total engagement number after the company response is 11.657.

Figure 4.4: Analysis of before and after company response for KOTON case.



Additionally, according to the Figure 4.4, it is highly noticeable that the number of engagements after company response is higher than before company response. The number of total tweet count, total retweets, total comments, total favorites have been

observed to increase after the company released a response to the firestorm. Getting informed about the response of the company online increased the engagement numbers on the other hand, it has been observed that the negative sentiment polarity lowered, and positive sentiment polarity increased as it is shown in Table 4.2.

4.1.3 Step 3: Sentiment Analysis of the Company

Sentiment Analysis of the complete data is shown in the Table 4.2. Out of 951 tweets, 233 of them are categorized as positives, 23 of them are categorized as strong positives, 327 of them are categorized as negatives, 75 of them are categorized as strong negatives, 58 of them are categorized as neutrals and 235 of them are categorized as none by sentiment analysis. When all positives, negatives and other polarities are gathered, it has been observed that there are 402 negatives, 256 positives and 293 negatives when we analyze the compete Koton firestorm data. There are 832 tweets under agreement category and 119 under disagreement category. There are total 16 ironic, 935 non-ironic, 694 objective and 257 subjective tweets.

Table 4.2: Sentiment analysis of the complete data & before and after company response for Koton's firestorm

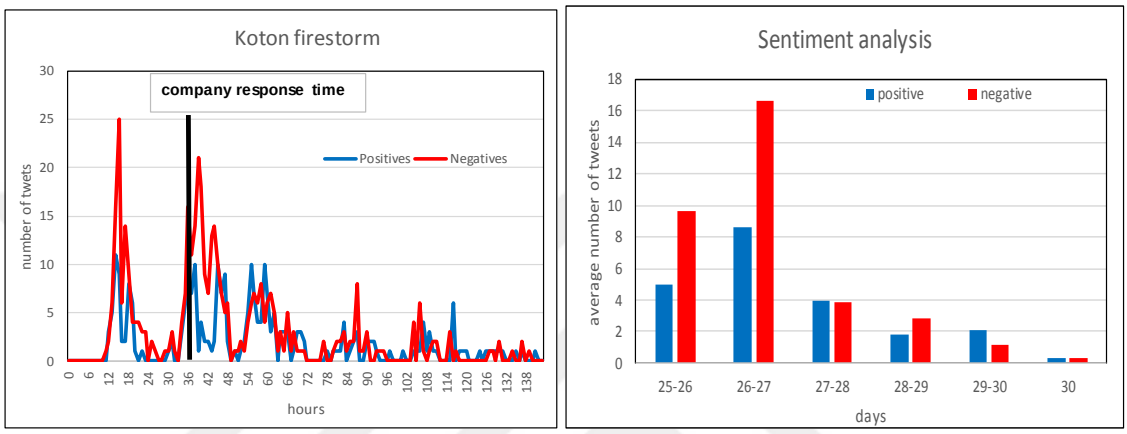
SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA	
P	233
P+	23
N	327
N+	75
NEU	58
NONE	235
Total Positives	**256**
Total Negatives	**402**
Other	**293**
AGREEMENT	832
DISAGREEMENT	119
IRONIC	16
NONIRONIC	935
OBJECTIVE	694
SUBJECTIVE	257

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	53
P+	5
N	87
N+	24
NEU	11
NONE	65
Total Positives	**58**
Total Negatives	**111**
Other	**76**
AGREEMENT	219
DISAGREEMENT	26
IRONIC	5
NONIRONIC	240
OBJECTIVE	181
SUBJECTIVE	64

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	180
P+	18
N	240
N+	51
NEU	47
NONE	170
Total Positives	**198**
Total Negatives	**291**
Other	**217**
AGREEMENT	613
DISAGREEMENT	93
IRONIC	11
NONIRONIC	695
OBJECTIVE	513
SUBJECTIVE	193

Figure 4.5 shows the frequency and intensity of the tweets and sentiment results before and after company response. As expected, the number of tweets increased at the beginning of the fire storm and decreased after a short time. However, right after the company's response, the social media platform attracted more attention and a second peak occurred. Later, it progressed by decreasing over time.

Figure 4.5: Number of tweets by hours and number of tweets by days.



a. Sentiment Analysis Before Company Response

Before company posted a response on 26th of January at 11:40 PM, the data has been grouped as before company response data. As a result of the sentiment analysis, the data has been evaluated and there are 53 positives, 5 strong positives, 87 negatives, 24 strong negatives, 11 neutral and 65 none polarity rates. It has been observed that, here are 58 total positives, 111 total negatives and 76 of them are grouped as other. Responses splatted into three sections, 24 percent of them are positive responses, 31 percent of them are other responses and 45 percent of them are negative responses. There are 219 tweets under agreement category and 26 under disagreement category. Additionally, there are total 5 ironic, 240 non-ironic, 181 objective and 64 subjective tweets before company response.

b. Sentiment Analysis After Company Response

Tweets after the company response on 26th of January at 11:40 PM have been categorized as after company response data and then sentiment analysis was performed. There are

180 positive tweets, 18 strong positive tweets, 240 negative tweets, 51 strong negative tweets, 47 neutral tweets and 170 of them are categorized as none. Total positives are 198, total negatives are 291 and 217 of them are grouped as none There are 613 tweets under agreement category and 93 tweets under disagreement category. 11 of the tweets are categorized as ironic, 695 of them non-ironic, 513 objective and 193 subjective. 28 percent positive responses, 31 percent other responses and 41 percent negative response polarities have been explored after the company response.

c. Compared Analysis of Before and After Company Response

When before and after the company response sections are compared as given in Table 4.3, 18 percent increase in positive responses, 9 percent decrease in negative responses and 1 percent decrease in other responses have been discovered. The firestorm lost its strength after the company response and even though engagement rate increased, negative tweets were decreased, and positive tweets were increased in percentage. Comparison of data before and after company response is given in Table 4.3.

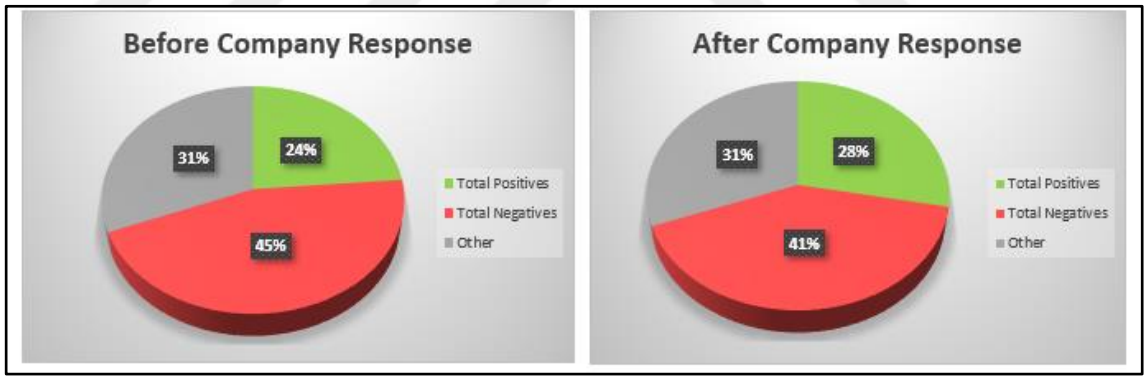
Table 4.3: Comparison of before & after sentiment data for Koton's firestorm

COMPARISON BETWEEN BEFORE & AFTER COMPANY RESPONSES		SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA			
Total Tweet Count	461	P	18%	Total Positives	18%
Total Retweets	1,935	P+	25%	Total Negatives	-9%
Total Comments	204	N	-4%	Other	-1%
Total Favorites	3,985	N+	-26%	AGREEMENT	-3%
Total Engagement	6,585	NEU	48%	DISAGREEMENT	24%
		NONE	-9%	IRONIC	-24%
				NONIRONIC	0%
				OBJECTIVE	-2%
				SUBJECTIVE	5%

There is an 18 percent increase in positives, 25 percent increase in strong positives, 48 percent increase in neutrals and there is a decrease in negatives, strong negatives and none polarities. Negatives dropped 4 percent, strong negatives 26 percent and none 9 percent. Overall, 461 more tweets were sent, 1.935 more retweets 204 more comments and 3.985 more favorites were made after the company response.

Figure 4.6 pie charts show the polarities of the before and after company response data in percentages. Total positives were 24 percent before the company response and it increased to 28 percent after the company response. That shows that the company response made a positive impact on the peoples' opinions on the brand and how the brand responses and takes responsibility against the specific firestorm. Negatives were 45 percent before the company response, and it decreased to 41 percent after the company response. On the other hand, it had been observed that there is no change in other polarity marks which stays at 31 percent before and after the company response.

Figure 4.6: Sentiment analysis before and after company Koton's response.



4.1.4 Step 4: Company Response Analysis According to SCCT

One day after the firestorm, on 26th of January at 11:40 PM, the company shared a response. In the response the company stated "We sincerely would like to inform you that we sincerely regret the incident, that the products were removed yesterday due to the justified reactions arising due to our production, and that the use of real fur in our products will not be repeated."

According to the SCCT response theory, the company used rebuild crises response strategy. Rebuild strategies aims to create positive activities to influence and change perceptions. Symbolic or real help varieties are offered when there is a crisis to be able to apologize and seek for forgiveness from people.

First part of the response clearly stated that the company sincerely regrets the incident. And then it explained that the company recalled the products that caused a crisis from their stores due to the justified reactions arising from people and then the company said real fur usage would not be reaped in the future. Apologizing, accepting the issue, taking actions against the issue and promising that it won't be reaped used in the company response. Therefore, it has been observed that the company used some sub-categories of rebuilding response strategies from SCCT response strategies.

One of the rebuilding response strategies is an apology. Company used direct and distinct apology elements in their response. There are some apology techniques such as genuine apology and pseudo apology. Pseudo apology used when the responsibility is avoided, and the apology is for something else instead of the real cause of the issue and that shows that the apology is not sincere and genuine. The response of the company shows sincere apology and avoidance for the future mistakes therefore the elements used in the apology statement belong to genuine apology subcategory.

Corrective actions are other elements of the SCCT response strategies that are used to positively influence people. In Koton's response, it has been clearly stated that, the products that used real fur, which caused the firestorm, were collected from the stores. This is a fast corrective action that the company made in order to gain sympathy and positively influence the people.

In the last part of the response, it has been stated that the usage of fur will not be repeated again. In order to avoid uncertainty for the future production of the products, stating that the issue will not be repeated creates a more stable recovery for the company and creates trust from the customers for the future purchases.

As a result, rebuild response strategies have been observed in the response of Kotons' firestorm apology statement. When we categorize the rebuild strategy, genuine apology, corrective actions and committing to avoid similar issues for the future elements have been found in order to recover from the firestorm.

4.2 ÜLKER FIRESTORM

Ülker was founded in 1944 by two brothers called Sabri and Asim Ülker in İstanbul, Turkey. The company produces well- known food and beverages and such and biscuits, chocolates, coffee, ice cream and dairy products. They started to produce chocolates and wafer as of 1970, after that, milk, cake and vegetable oils were produced as of 1990. After the year of 2000, the company started to produce beverages and other food products. Ülker exports their products internationally to around 110 countries. The company has revenue of 7.803 billion Turkish liras as of 2019. Yıldız Holding is the parent company of Ülker and in 2016, 51 percent of Ülker's shares were transferred to Pladis.

According to the company's official website, their vision is to maintain, strengthen and sustain the company's position as the most preferred brand in Turkey and be in the top 5 companies in the world market in 10 years. Their mission states that every person has the right to have a good childhood no matter which country they live in.

4.2.1 Step 1: Firestorm Occurrence Reasons

Ülker branded advertisement video broadcast on social media on 31 March 2017 and the main subject of the video, Figure 4.6, was based on April fools' jokes in 2017. The advertising video caused controversy among people quickly after it was released online.

Figure 4.6: Screenshots from the Ülker's advertising video in 2017

Source: Pr Outlet Plus, 2018

The main reason why the video became a digital firestorm cause for the company is that people believed and claimed that the video had many subliminal messages hidden inside to provoke and communicate political innuendos. The advertising video was 50 seconds long and it starts with the writing on the screen with a brand name and logo on top saying, "April 1st is approaching, strange things are happening". The video was ending with the quote "April 1st is approaching, reckoning time is approaching, I will have surprises for you". The video was all animated with characters and visuals with a song saying, "happiness is planned, happiness is pranked".

Some of the statements from the advertising video were, "on your way back home, a glow will dazzle you and you will find your house wrapped in foil", "suddenly you will find yourself as goal post, shots by dirty shoes will find you", "you will sweetly order deserts in a place but sufferings will find you", you will think you are sleeping with peace but you will find glasses around you when you wake up", you will go on holiday and suddenly you will get a phone call about a thief in your house and you will feel sad". In the advertisement, #KüçükKardeşOlmak meaning becoming a little sibling was promoted.

The video quickly became viral after people started to talk about it and create subliminal theories about it. The video had been slowed down and reversed in addition, tone of the video changed by people and shared online, and people claimed the results of the interpreted video indicate some political meanings. Aside from the political issues people claimed that the video indicated, suicide, fear, violence, revenge and negative behavioral acts were the other reasons that made the advertisement a digital firestorm. Taking into consideration that the nation had political sensitivity around the times that the video was published, creating fear about a political threat and danger feelings among some segments of the society led the company to face a big firestorm all of a sudden. The subliminal message theories were shared fast on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media platforms such as forums. Ekşi Sözlük- one of the most used collaborative hypertext dictionary in Turkey, has around 70 pages and 691 texts written about the Ülker's firestorm by people as of 2021.

Figure 4.7: A screenshot of a response post

Source: twitter.com/search?q=%C3%BClker&src=typed_query, 2017

Company Response

The chairman of Yıldız Holding-Murat Ülker published the first response, Figure 4.8, against the firestorm a day after the advertising video was released online. He mentioned on his twitter response post that he was abroad, and he just heard about the issue, thanking the people who made him get knowledge about the firestorm. And he stated that "those

who set up the conspiracy will be responsible for what they deserve, we are on our nation side".

Figure 4.8: A twitter response from Murat Ülker

Source: Gazate Duvar, 2021

Ülker shared on 1st April shared another advertising on social media and stated that" here is the original campaign, surprised that they distorted it, necessary measures will be taken".

Figure 4.9: Ülker's twitter response post

Source: twitter.com/Ulker/status/847946403242536960, 2017

Ülker shared a statement online at 12:39 PM on twitter a day after the firestorm was started. The statement is consisting of 9 total paragraphs as seen in Figure 4.10.

The English explanation of the statement is below.

"An incomprehensible and unsupported campaign has been launched against our company and our brand directed towards our first commercial out of April Fool's day commercial series.

This commercial which has been on television and social media since 20th of March is fictionalized by the joke spirit of April Fools and the jokes between family members, especially siblings.

The joke advertisement was diverted into different points in a way that cannot be explained with logical reasons by a social media campaign and negative judgments were tried to be created against our brand by attribute meanings that never existed and never to be considered and thought of. Deformations were created by playing with the commercial images and writings and it was tried to be presented as if the deformed images and worlds belong to our brand

.

Whereas the footage in the film contained examples of the jokes siblings make to each other. This scenario was nothing more than a story about the familiar April Fools jokes in real life.

In order to avoid any misunderstandings, a statement explaining the purpose of the commercial and its' sequels were shared with the public. However, despite this statement, the negative campaign which tries to add different meanings to the campaign was carried to a point where "insults and threats" against our brand and company was formed.

Ülker is aware of the importance of our nation and country as a company that has been producing for since 1944 and satisfying customers with what it produces. And again, Ülker is aware of the value our nation attaches to it".

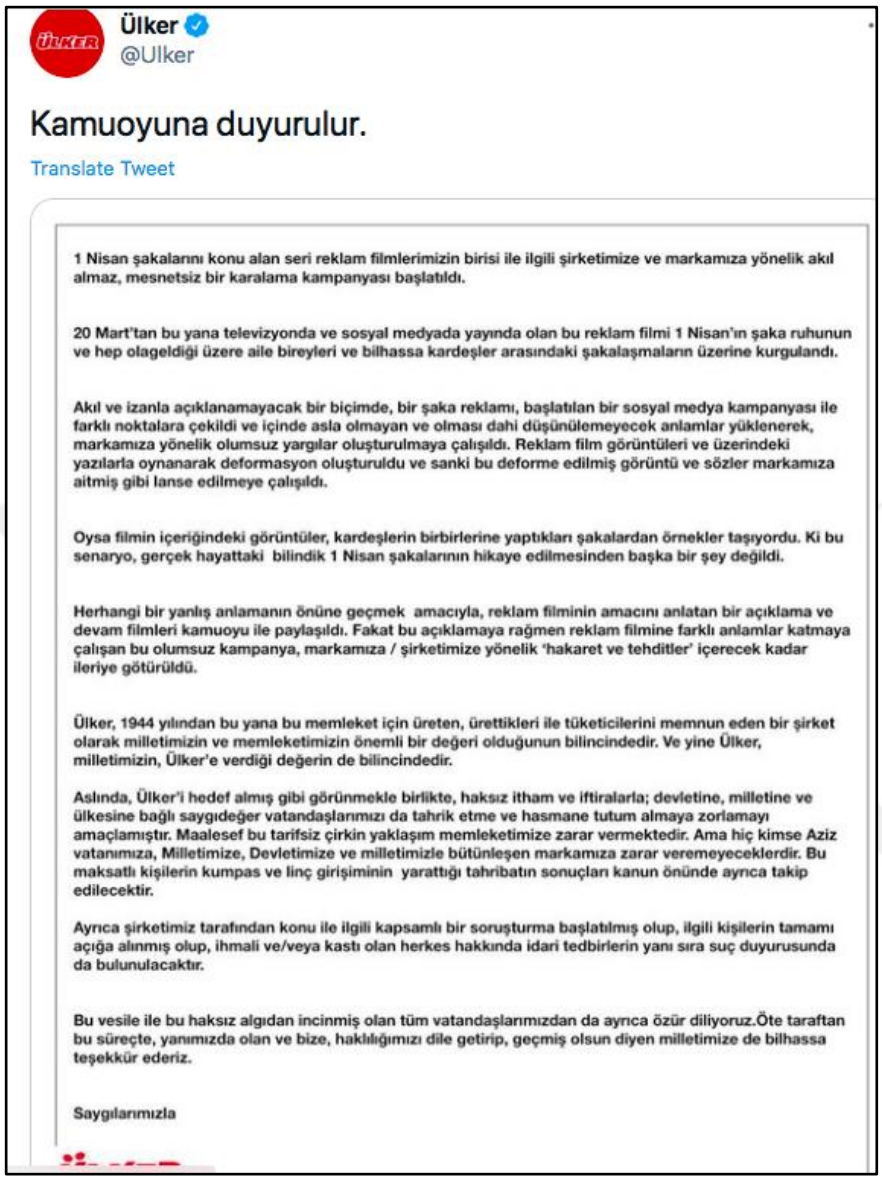
In fact, although it seems to target Ülker, with unfair accusations and slanders, it aimed to provoke and force our honorable citizens who are loyal to their nation, property and country to show hostile attitudes. Unfortunately, this indescribable and ugly approach harms our country. But no one will be able to harm our beloved homeland, nation, state and our brand, which is integrated with our nation. The consequences of the damage caused by the conspiracy and the law will follow lynching attempts of these purposeful people.

In addition, a comprehensive investigation has been initiated by our company on the subject, all the relevant people have been suspended, and anyone with a possibility or intent will be filed a criminal complaint as well as administrative measures.

On this occasion, we also apologize to all of our citizens who were hurt by this unfair perception. On the other hand, we especially thank our nation, who stood by us in this process and who expressed our righteousness and told us to get well soon.

Regards".

Figure 4.10: Ülker's response post on twitter



Ülker
@Ulker

Kamuoyuna duyurulur.

Translate Tweet

1 Nisan şakalarını konu alan seri reklam filmlerimizin birisi ile ilgili şirketimize ve markamıza yönelik akıl almaz, mesnetsiz bir karalama kampanyası başlatıldı.

20 Mart'tan bu yana televizyonda ve sosyal medyada yayında olan bu reklam filmi 1 Nisan'ın şaka ruhunun ve hep olageldiği üzere aile bireyleri ve bilhassa kardeşler arasındaki şakalaşmaların üzerine kurgulandı.

Akıl ve izanla açıklanamayacak bir biçimde, bir şaka reklamı, başlatılan bir sosyal medya kampanyası ile farklı noktalara çekildi ve içinde asla olmayan ve olması dahi düşünülemeyecek anlamlar yüklenerek, markamıza yönelik olumsuz yargılar oluşturulmaya çalışıldı. Reklam film görüntüleri ve üzerindeki yazılarla oynanarak deformasyon oluşturuldu ve sanki bu deforme edilmiş görüntü ve sözler markamıza aitmiş gibi lanse edilmeye çalışıldı.

Oysa filmin içeriğindeki görüntüler, kardeşlerin birbirlerine yaptıkları şakalardan örnekler taşıyordu. Ki bu senaryo, gerçek hayattaki bilindik 1 Nisan şakalarının hikaye edilmesinden başka bir şey değildi.

Herhangi bir yanlış anlamanın önüne geçmek amacıyla, reklam filminin amacını anlatan bir açıklama ve devam filmleri kamuoyu ile paylaşıldı. Fakat bu açıklamaya rağmen reklam filmine farklı anlamlar katmaya çalışan bu olumsuz kampanya, markamıza / şirketimize yönelik 'hakaret ve tehditler' içerecek kadar ileriye götürüldü.

Ülker, 1944 yılından bu yana bu memleket için üreten, ürettikleri ile tüketicilerini memnun eden bir şirket olarak milletimizin ve memleketimizin önemli bir değeri olduğunun bilincindedir. Ve yine Ülker, milletimizin, Ülker'e verdiği değerin de bilincindedir.

Aslında, Ülker'i hedef almış gibi görünmekle birlikte, haksız itham ve iftiralarla; devletine, milletine ve ülkesine bağlı saygıdeğer vatandaşlarımızı da tahrik etme ve hasmane tutum almaya zorlamayı amaçlamıştır. Maalesef bu tarifsiz çirkin yaklaşım memleketimize zarar vermektedir. Ama hiç kimse Aziz vatanımıza, Milletimize, Devletimize ve milletimizle bütünleşen markamıza zarar veremeyeceklerdir. Bu maksatlı kişilerin kumpas ve linç girişiminin yarattığı tahribatın sonuçları kanun önünde ayrıca takip edilecektir.

Ayrıca şirketimiz tarafından konu ile ilgili kapsamlı bir soruşturma başlatılmış olup, ilgili kişilerin tamamı açığa alınmış olup, ihmali ve/veya kastı olan herkes hakkında idari tedbirlerin yanı sıra suç duyurusunda da bulunulacaktır.

Bu vesile ile bu haksız algıdan incinmiş olan tüm vatandaşlarımızdan da ayrıca özür diliyoruz.Öte taraftan bu süreçte, yanımızda olan ve bize, haklılığımızı dile getirip, geçmiş olsun diyen milletimize de bilhassa teşekkür ederiz.

Saygılarımızla

Source: twitter.com/Ulker/status/ 848107604933054464, 2017

4.2.2 Step 2: Twitter Data Analysis

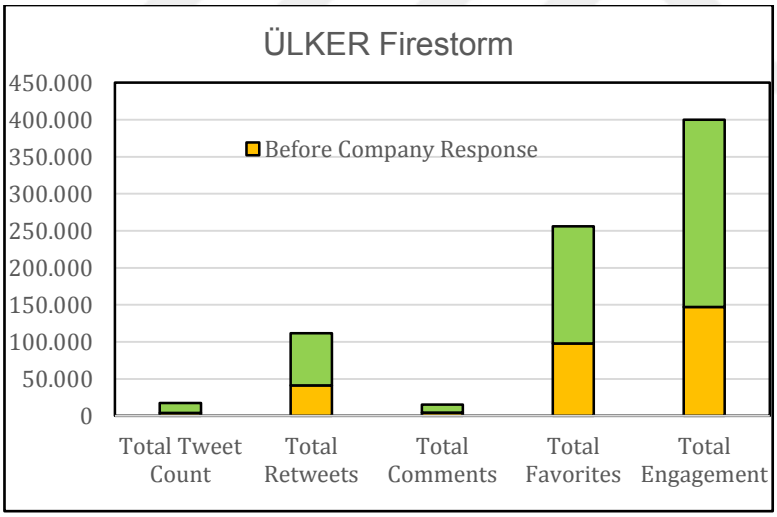
Twitter data analysis in Table 4.4 includes total tweets of 17,456. Two main hashtags were directed at the company due to the firestorm and they are #şakamızyokülker and #ülker. Therefore, data including the two mentioned hashtags were collected by using *ExportComments* a data providing service.

Table 4.4: Analysis of the complete data & before and after company response for ÜLKER's firestorm

ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLETE DATA		BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE		AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
Total Tweet Count	17,456	Total Tweet Count	4,157	Total Tweet Count	13,299
Total Retweets	111,617	Total Retweets	41,112	Total Retweets	70,505
Total Comments	15,170	Total Comments	4,308	Total Comments	10,862
Total Favorites	256,055	Total Favorites	97,684	Total Favorites	158,371
Total Engagement	**400,298**	**Total Engagement**	**147,261**	**Total Engagement**	**253,037**

Total engagement to the firestorm is 400.298, total tweet counts are 17.456, total retweets are 111.617, total comments are 15.170 and total favorites are 256.055 between the dates of 31 March 2017 and 1 April 2017.

Figure 4.11: Analysis of the Ülker's firestorm

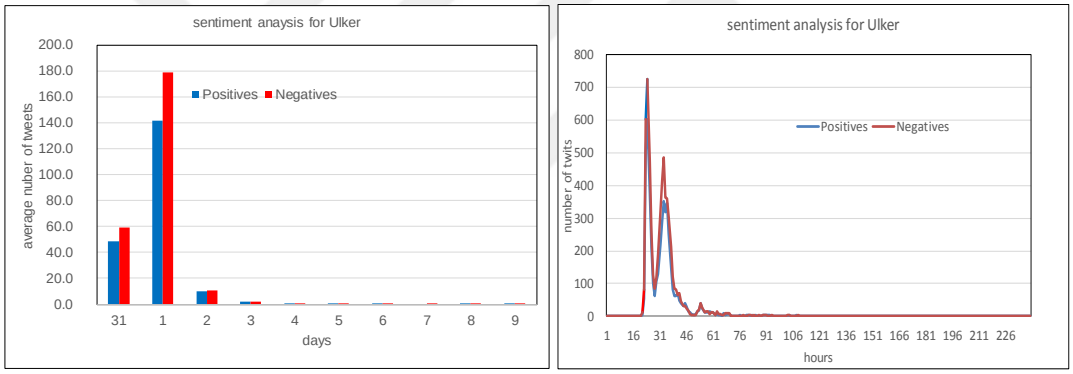


To be able to evaluate before and after the company response responses, data has been separated into two sections before April 1st at 01:02 and after since the first response was published in that moment and date. Before there were any responses published, the firestorm has 147.261 engagements, 4.157 total tweets, 41.112 total retweets, 4.308 total comments and 97.684 total favorites.

After the response was shared with public, total engagement became 253.037, total tweet count was 13.299, total retweets have been 70.505, total comments were 10.862 and total favorites were 158.371.

In addition, according to the Figure 7.12 and Figure 7.13, the engagements increased after the company started to publish responses. Total tweets, retweets, comments, and favorites also increased after the company response due to the fact that people could share more thought on the company response strategy and more people got to know the firestorm. More people attending the firestorm responses are directly linked to the more engagements the firestorm gets. It can be seen from the Table 4.5 that the polarities of the tweets before and after the firestorm have not been changed a lot.

Figure 4.12: Number of tweets by hours and by days



4.2.3 Step 3: Sentiment Analysis of the Company

Sentiment Analysis of the complete data is shown in the Table 4.5 and according to the *MeaningCloud*'s sentiment analysis tool, out of 17.456 tweets, 4.903 of them were positive, 6.103 of them are negative and 6.450 of them are others. To be able to reach that total numbers, the firestorm got 4.200 Positives, 703 strong positives, 5.189 negatives, 914 strong negatives, 1.284 neutrals and 5.166 none sentiment polarities. There are 14.966 agreement and 2.490 disagreement, 146 ironic and 17.310 non-ironic, 12.352 objective and 5.104 subjective data categorized under this analysis.

Table 4.5: Sentiment analysis of the complete data& before and after company response for Ülker's firestorm

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA	
P	4,200
P+	703
N	5,189
N+	914
NEU	1,284
NONE	5,166
Total Positives	**4,903**
Total Negatives	**6,103**
Other	**6,450**
AGREEMENT	14,966
DISAGREEMENT	2,490
IRONIC	146
NONIRONIC	17,310
OBJECTIVE	12,352
SUBJECTIVE	5,104

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	1,013
P+	157
N	1,226
N+	215
NEU	276
NONE	1,270
Total Positives	**1,170**
Total Negatives	**1,441**
Other	**1,546**
AGREEMENT	3,599
DISAGREEMENT	558
IRONIC	25
NONIRONIC	4,132
OBJECTIVE	2,976
SUBJECTIVE	1,181

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	3,187
P+	546
N	3,963
N+	699
NEU	1,008
NONE	3,896
Total Positives	**3,733**
Total Negatives	**4,662**
Other	**4,904**
AGREEMENT	11,367
DISAGREEMENT	1,932
IRONIC	121
NONIRONIC	13,178
OBJECTIVE	9,376
SUBJECTIVE	3,923

a. Sentiment Analysis Before Company Response

Before the company released a response on April 1st 01:02, the data has been categorized as before company response. There are 1.170 total positives, 1.441 total negatives and 1.546 others out of 4.157 tweets. 28 percent of the before company response data are positive, 35 percent of them are negative and 37 percent of them are others. Detailed sentiment analysis resulted as 1.013 positives, 157 strong positives, 1.226 negatives, 215 strong negatives, 276 neutrals and 1.270 none sentiment polarities. There are 3.599 agreement, 558 disagreement, 25 ironic, 4.132 non-ironic, 2.976 objective and 1.181 subjective tweets under the categorized sentiment analysis.

b. Sentiment Analysis After Company Response

Data collected for the firestorm after 01:01 on April 1st were grouped as after company response data. There are 13.299 total tweets under the after-company response category. Out of these tweets, 3.733 of them are positives, 4.662 of them are negatives and 4.904 of them are others. That leads to 28 percent positives, 35 percent negatives and 37 percent others out of the after-company response data. 3.187 positives, 546 strong positives, 3.963

negatives, 699 strong negatives, 1.008 neutrals and 3.896 none sentiment polarities have been found in detailed. In addition, 11.367 agreement, 1.932 disagreement, 121 ironic, 13.178 non-ironic, 9.376 objective and 3.923 subjective data have been observed under categorized sentiment analysis.

c. Compared Analysis of Before and After Company Response

Compared data before and after the firestorm responses from companies in Table 4.6 shows that there have been 9.142 more tweets, 29.393 more retweets, 6.554 more comments, 60.687 more favorites and 105.776 more engagements were made after the company response against the firestorm. When we compare the total polarities, increases in sentiment analysis data have been; 9 percent in strong positives, 1 percent in negatives, 2 percent in strong negatives and 14 percent in neutrals. There is a 2 percent decrease in positives and 4 percent decrease in none sentiment polarity. As a result, total positives stay the same as a percentage, total negatives have been 1 percent increased and other sentiment polarity decreased in percentage of 1 percent.

Table 4.6: Comparison of before & after sentiment data for Ülker's firestorm

COMPARISON BETWEEN BEFORE & AFTER COMPANY RESPONSES		SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA			
Total Tweet Count	9,142	P	-2%	Total Positives	0%
Total Retweets	29,393	P+	9%	Total Negatives	1%
Total Comments	6,554	N	1%	Other	-1%
Total Favorites	60,687	N+	2%	AGREEMENT	-1%
Total Engagement	105,776	NEU	14%	DISAGREEMENT	8%
		NONE	-4%	IRONIC	51%
				NONIRONIC	0%
				OBJECTIVE	-2%
				SUBJECTIVE	4%

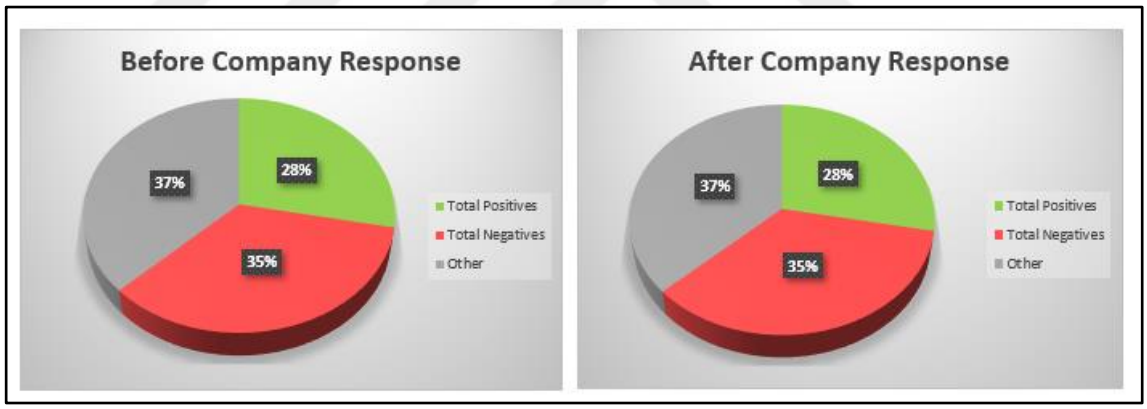
Total positives stay the same in percentage before and after the company as it has been showed in the pie charts. Total negatives increased in small amount, which is a percentage of 1 and other sentiment polarity decreased in percentage of 1. It can be seen that, before

and after the company responses, even though there are more tweets after the company response, there is not significant change in the people's perceptions and emotions towards the firestorm.

4.2.4 Step 4: Company Response Analysis According to SCCT

According to the SCCT, Ülker's crises can be categorized as preventable crises due to the fact that the company could prevent the firestorm before happening by avoiding campaigns that might get disrupted and changed by people and turn into a negative event, strengthening the relationships between the advertising agencies and monitoring the societal perceptions. Taking full responsibility and using rebuilding and bolstering response strategies against these types of crises is more appropriate considering SCCT recommendations.

Figure 4.13: Sentiment analysis before and after Ülker's response



The first response to the company crisis posted by the Murat Ülker on twitter stating that he was informed by people about this issue because he was abroad and that stating people who made up the conspiracy will get what they deserve. This short response did not provide any information and clarity against the firestorm. It can be considered as a denial response strategy using scapegoating in a way that some people and groups outside the company started and caused the firestorm in Figure 4.13.

The long statement that the company posted and shared with public on April 1st uses mainly denying and diminishment response strategies and, also bolstering response strategy. Company did not take full responsibility and responded as it is a victim crisis. The company stated that their campaign was deformed and changed by people and negative messages were shared, people who caused the firestorm by creating conspiracies will be punished and the social media firestorm was caused by people who blames them about the issues that the company did not performed. These meanings from the statement show that the company was blaming a group or some other people outside of the company causing the firestorm. Scapegoating occurs when the company blames others for the crises therefore it can be seen that this response strategy was used while preparing the response statement. In addition, denying the fact that company has a role in the crisis were implied by the statement saying that the company is getting threat and insults messages and the people who performed these behaviors will be punished.

Overall, company was stating that someone else caused the firestorm and those people who caused it were all from outside of their company, and the company shared that original campaign was something different and did not mean any harm. Stating that the original campaign was different, and it did not mean any harm to the receivers is a diminishment response strategy using excuse elements.

Bolstering strategy was used when the statement reminded of the company's history, the fact that they are satisfying peoples' needs and also stating that the company is aware of the value that the people give to them. At the end of the statement, there is an apology for the people who got hurt by the unfair perceptions. This cannot be categorized as sincere apology since the company did not take responsibility for the crises.

As a result, the company used mostly denial, diminishment, and bolstering strategies. According to the SCCT, crisis that leads companies to take responsibilities benefits from using rebuilding response strategy in order to recover better and faster. Since Ülker did not take any responsibility for the firestorm and mostly blamed others creating wrong and negative messages online, it can be said that this might not be the best response strategy for the crises that they were facing. In order to understand if the response strategy created

any emotion changes in tweets, before and after company response data from twitter using the specific hashtags related to Ülker's crises, the analysis showed that there is no significant changes in sentiment analysis results. Positive, negative and other emotions calculated by the sentiment analysis tool did not find any positive emotion changes after the company responses. Every firestorm is a negative event and always will stay as a negative event in the histories of companies but with the right response techniques, damages from the firestorms can be decreased and the emotional changes can be observed and turned into more positive ones by managing perceptions with the right response strategies. History of company crisis and reputational damages might lead companies to face bigger problems in the future possible crises therefore, it is crucial to manage sudden firestorms with cautious responses.

4.3 TIMAŞ YAYINLARI FIRESTROM

Timaş Yayınları was found in 1982 by Hekimoğlu İsmail and Ahmed Günbay Yıldız in İstanbul. Some of the company's publishing fields are fields of family, politics, faith, culture, history, children and youth. The company brought more than 5.000 books to millions of people in more than 25 countries. Timaş Publishing has always put forward a publishing vision one step ahead by using the new possibilities and applications offered by technology (such as e-book, audiobook, digital platforms) in the context of new generation publishing channels and forms of information delivery.

4.3.1 Step 1: Firestorm Occurrence Reasons

Timaş Yayınları was going to publish a book titled as "The Divine Reality" by Hamza Andreas Tzortzis who is a British public speaker and researcher on Islam. He shared a post on his twitter account stating that he is so happy to share that his book is translated into Turkish language and soon it would be published on 25th of April 2109. The Turkish name of the book is "Hakikatin İzinde: Din, Bilim ve Ateizm and it was going to be published by Timaş Yayınları in Figure 4.14.

Figure 4.14: Hamza A. Tzortzis's twitter post

Source: twitter.com/vaziyetcomtr, 2019

The reason why Timaş Yayınları had a firestorm about a book release is a video that was re-shared online. In the video, the author was giving a speech at Boğaziçi University in İstanbul organized by Boğaziçi Islamic Research Club in 2014. His speech was on the news back in 2014 due the subject of the speech and his word choices that imply insults towards Former President of Turkey- Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. It caused big reactions when the speech was given from the society and people were sharing their opinions using the hashtag #özürdileboğaziçi. With reminding people this occurrence after author's post on twitter, people started to invite everyone to boycott the company with using the hashtag #timaşyayınlarınaboykot in 2019.

After the firestorm was started and people called everyone to boycott the publishing company, the company posted a response and shared that they are stopping the publishing

process of the book. Some people were happy about the decision, but some people stated that stopping a publishing process were not necessary.

Company Response

The firestorm started on 27th of April and two days later on 29th of April Timaş Yayın Grubu shared a response on their social media accounts. Company responded as in Figure 4.15.

Figure 4.15: Timaş Yayın Grubu's response on Instagram

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bw1wjoWDY-q/, 2019

The English explanation of the company response is below.

> "*After the announcement that Hamza A. Tzortzis's book which was translated into Turkish will soon be published by our publishing house, a speech video of the author from 2014 started to circulate. We, like everyone else, became aware of the speech when it started to circulate. Although the book we are preparing for publication is not even remotely related to this speech and the text does not contain any political discourse, we decided to stop the publishing by having its sensitivity in the public opinion. Timaş Publishing Group is an institution that has been operating in line of loyalty to the national and moral values of our country, human rights and universal legal rules for 37 years. It is respectfully announced to the public."*

4.3.2 Step 2: Twitter Data Analysis

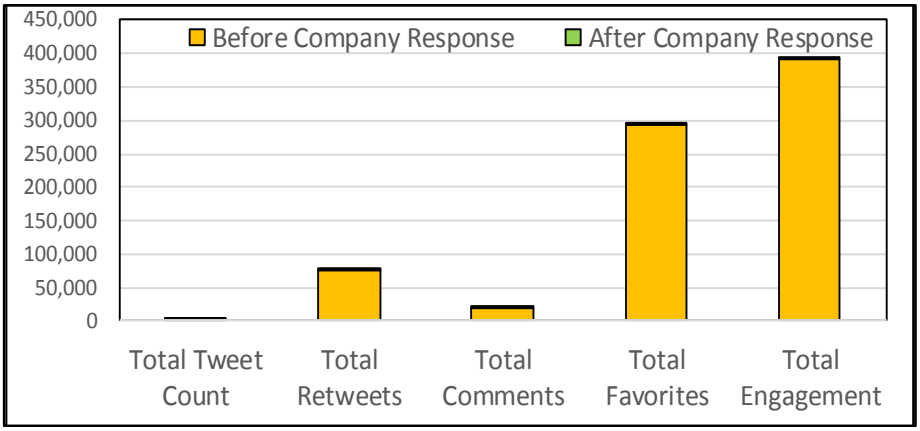
The firestorm that Timaş Yayın Grubu had was analyzed with Twitter hashtag #timaşyayınlarınaboykot. There are 1.444 total tweet data for the evaluation of the case between the dates of 27 April 2019 and 30 April 2019. Total tweets and the data set were downloaded from *ExportComments*.

Table 4.7: Analysis of the complete data & before and after company response for Timaş Yayın Grubu's firestorm

ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLETE DATA		BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE		AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
Total Tweet Count	1,444	Total Tweet Count	1,225	Total Tweet Count	219
Total Retweets	75,067	Total Retweets	74,399	Total Retweets	668
Total Comments	20,764	Total Comments	20,484	Total Comments	280
Total Favorites	296,499	Total Favorites	294,116	Total Favorites	2,383
Total Engagement	**393,774**	**Total Engagement**	**390,224**	**Total Engagement**	**3,550**

In Table 4.7 above, shows the Timaş Yayın Grubu's firestorm that occurred in 2019. Total engagement to the firestorm has been calculated as 393.774. There are 75.067 total retweets, 20.764 total comments, 269.499 total favorites and the total twitter data set consists of 1.444 tweets in Figure 4.16.

Figure 4.16: Timaş Yayın Grubu's firestorm analysis of the complete data



Firestorm started on April 27th and the company response was shared with public on April 29th of 2019. The company response was shared at 3:42 PM. Therefore, data before 29th of April at 3:42 PM was categorized as before company response and the remaining data was categorized as after company response to be able to evaluate the differences between before and after company response data and additionally, to be able to determine if the company response causes any changes in human emotions and perceptions towards the firestorm.

Total engagement is 390.224 and total tweet counts have been 1.225 before the company response. Additionally, there are 74.399 total retweets, 20.484 total comments and 294.116 total favorites. After the company response, engagement dropped to 3.550. Total tweet counts are 219, total retweets are 668, total comments are 280 and lastly total favorites are 2.383.

Analyzing the complete data and categorizing it as before company response and after company response, it can be observed that the engagements dropped right after the company shared a respond towards the firestorm. (Analysis of before and after company response for Timaş Yayın Grubu case), Engagement before the company response was 390.224 and after the company response, engagement dropped to 3.550. This might show that after the company response, the firestorm weakened its strength to reach more people. The comparison data before and after the firestorm shows the polarity changes in both categories and it can be seen that total positives increased in percentage when negatives stay the same.

4.3.3 Step 3: Sentiment Analysis of the Company

Sentiment analysis of the company can be seen in the Table 4.8. Using *MeaningCloud*'s sentiment analysis add in tool for excel 365, out of 1.444 tweets, 294 of them were positives and 43 of them were strong positives. When it comes to negatives, there have been 441 negatives and 163 strong negatives. Additionally, 125 of the tweets are categorized as neutrals and 378 have none sentiment polarity.

Table 4.8 Sentiment analysis of the complete data& before and after company response for Timaş Yayın Grubu's firestorm

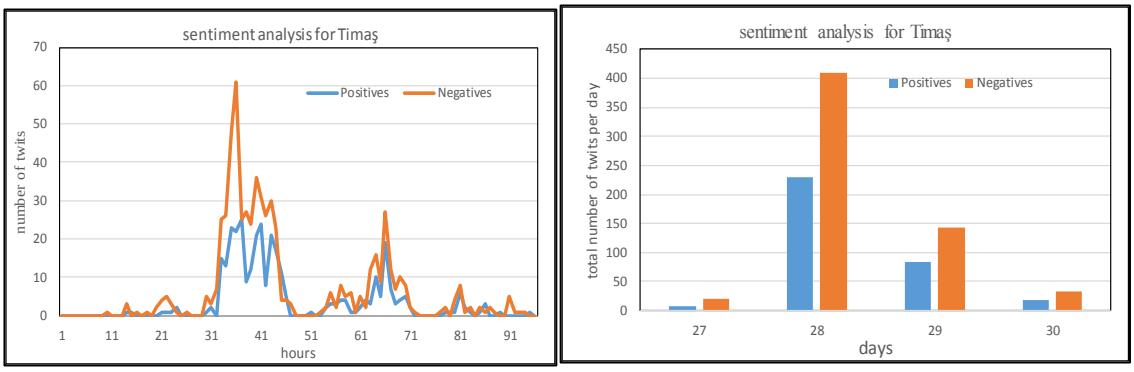
SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA	
P	294
P+	43
N	441
N+	163
NEU	125
NONE	378
Total Positives	**337**
Total Negatives	**604**
Other	**503**
AGREEMENT	1,120
DISAGREEMENT	324
IRONIC	20
NONIRONIC	1,424
OBJECTIVE	1,036
SUBJECTIVE	408

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	246
P+	37
N	376
N+	136
NEU	110
NONE	320
Total Positives	**283**
Total Negatives	**512**
Other	**430**
AGREEMENT	951
DISAGREEMENT	274
IRONIC	17
NONIRONIC	1,208
OBJECTIVE	885
SUBJECTIVE	340

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	48
P+	6
N	65
N+	27
NEU	15
NONE	58
Total Positives	**54**
Total Negatives	**92**
Other	**73**
AGREEMENT	169
DISAGREEMENT	50
IRONIC	3
NONIRONIC	216
OBJECTIVE	151
SUBJECTIVE	68

Total number of positives are 337, total number of negatives are 604 and 503 tweets are categorized as other in terms of polarities. According to the detailed evaluations, 1.120 of the tweets have been categorized as agreement, 324 of them disagreement. There are 20 ironic, 1.424 non-ironic, 1.036 objective and 408 subjective tweets when they are categorized in sentiment analysis.

Figure 4.17: Number of tweets by hours and days



a. Sentiment Analysis Before Company Response

Company responded to the firestorm on April 29th at 3:42 PM therefore before that specific day and time, all data have been grouped as before company response. There are 1.225 total tweets under the category when analyzing the before company response data. Out of 1.225 tweets, 283 of them are positives, 512 of them are negatives and 430 of them do not have polarities and they are categorized as other. In detail, there are 246 positives, 37 strong positives, 376 negatives, 136 strong negatives, 110 neutrals and 320 none sentiment polarities. Results of the detailed sentiment analysis for before company response data show that there are 951 agreement, 274 disagreement, 17 ironic, 1.208 non-ironic, 885 objective and 340 subjective data. As a result, there are 23 percent total positives, 42 percent total negatives and 35 percent other polarity groups before company response.

b. Sentiment Analysis After Company Response

After the company response on 29th April at 3:42 PM, there were only 219 tweets. 54 of them are total positives, 92 of them are total negatives and 73 of them have the other polarity level. In detail, there are 48 positives, 6 strong positives, 65 negatives, 27 strong negatives, 15 neutrals and 58 none sentiment polarity groups. Additionally, there are 169 agreements, 50 disagreements, 3 ironic, 216 non-ironic, 151 objective and 68 subjective data when evaluating the after company response data set. In percentage, there are 25 percent total positives, 42 percent total negatives and 33 percent others.

c. Compared Analysis of Before and After Company Response

When before company response and after company response data are compared, in Table 4.9, before company response, there are 1.006 less tweets, 73.731 less retweets, 20.204 less comments, 291.733 less favorites and in total 386.674 less engagements are found. Total positives increased, total negatives stayed the same and others decreased comparing the two categories. There is a 7 percent increase in positives, 1 percent increase in negatives and 5 percent decrease in others.

Table 4.9: Comparison of before & after sentiment data for Timaş Yayın Grubu's firestorm

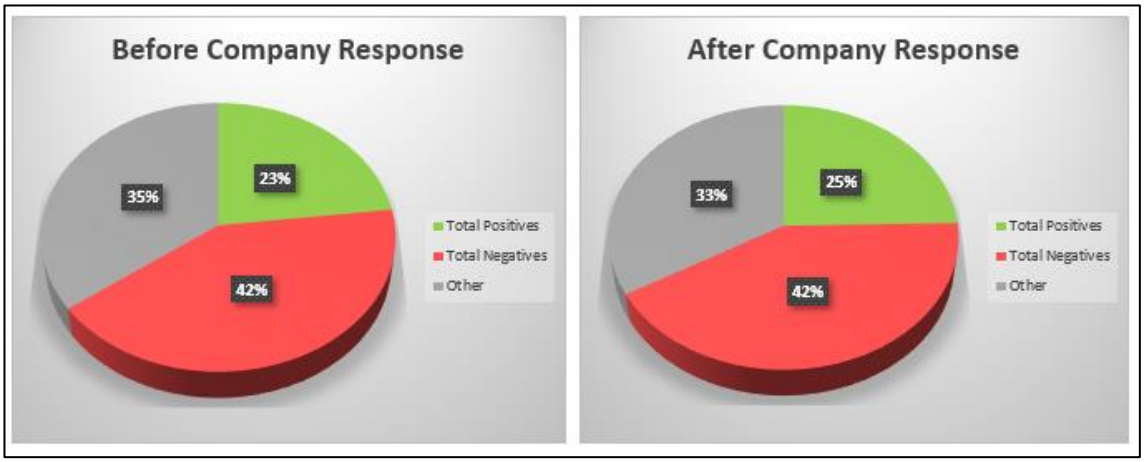
COMPARISON BETWEEN BEFORE & AFTER COMPANY RESPONSES		SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA			
Total Tweet Count	-1,006	P	9%	Total Positives	7%
Total Retweets	-73,731	P+	-9%	Total Negatives	1%
Total Comments	-20,204	N	-3%	Other	-5%
Total Favorites	-291,733	N+	11%	AGREEMENT	-1%
Total Engagement	-386,674	NEU	-24%	DISAGREEMENT	2%
		NONE	1%	IRONIC	-1%
				NONIRONIC	0%
				OBJECTIVE	-5%
				SUBJECTIVE	12%

It can be seen from the Figure 4.18, pie charts that before and after company response changes have been very subtle. Engagement drops significantly after the company released a response and the firestorm quickly came to an end but as in percentages it can be seen that people's perceptions and emotions towards the crises and the brand changed very little.

4.3.4 Step 4: Company Response Analysis According to SCCT

The company response stated that they did not know about the authors previous crises cause and they just got informed with everyone else. When we evaluate that response, the company takes the crisis, as it is an accidental crisis because they did not intentionally cause the crises but it happened by an accident. According to the SCCT, accidental and victim crisis are at low responsibility level whereas in preventable crisis, companies should the full responsibility. With the technological improvement and the speed of research, it might be possible to learn as a company about the previous complications and sensitivity about the subject before deciding to publish a book that could potentially get criticism from the society. In this perspective, this crisis can be categorized under the preventable crisis, which that case suggested to take full responsibility while giving a response.

Figure 4.18: Sentiment analysis before and after Timaş Yayın Grubu's response



In the first paragraphs of the company response, excuse sub strategy was used by stating that they have not been informed about the speech of the author in 2014. By saying that, the company is minimizing the effects of the firestorm. Minimizing the effects of the firestorm makes the company less responsible for the situation and it shows that the company did not do anything wrong intentionally.

Company response states that the book did not have any political meanings and it was not related to the speech created crisis. Justification technique can be used to minimize the effects of the crises and it allows companies to lower the perceived damage of the firestorms. Additionally, canceling the publishing process because the company wanted to end the pressure and sensitivity against the subject and reminding their motives in the last paragraphs of the response also can be categorized as justification. The overall aim is to lower the affects and the speed of the firestorm by trying to lower the perceived harm against the company.

As a result, the company response uses diminishment company response strategy. If we analyze the crises under accidental crises, diminishment strategy can be used due to the low responsibility level against the firestorm. But, it might be expected that, as a big and old publishing company, research team would be in aware of the events happened in 2014 that caused many different opinions from people and sensitivity among them, considering these, the crisis could be predictable. In that case, company should have taken full

responsibility and must have used rebuilding or bolstering response strategies to recover better from the crisis and prevent more harm for the future possible crisis. The sentiment analysis results show that after the company response there is a small increase in positives and small decrease in others whereas negatives stay the same. The changes are very subtle therefore, it would have caused the engagement rates go higher if the company took full responsibility for the crises, sentiment analysis results might have changed more in a way that positives increase more, and negatives decreases. This would be a result of taking full responsibility, apologizing of the lack of knowledge, ensuring that this situation would not happen again and making corrective actions sincerely.

4.4 LC WAIKIKI FIRESTORM

LC Waikiki was found in 1988 by three partners in France. The brand was operating in wholesale and their t-shirt and sweatshirts designs were popular. After the separation of two partners, the company handed over to George Amouyal who was the sole shareholder. Tema Tekstil bought worldwide rights of the brand as of 1997 and the company grew in İstanbul.

After the year of 2000, production and retail operations separated. Retail sector has been operated under the roof of Tema Holding connected to Tema Mağazacılık and Taha Holding has run production operations. The vision of the company is to become Europe's one of three most successful clothing brans until 2023. The company has more than 1000 stores and it continue to grow with the mission statement of "everyone deserves to dress well".

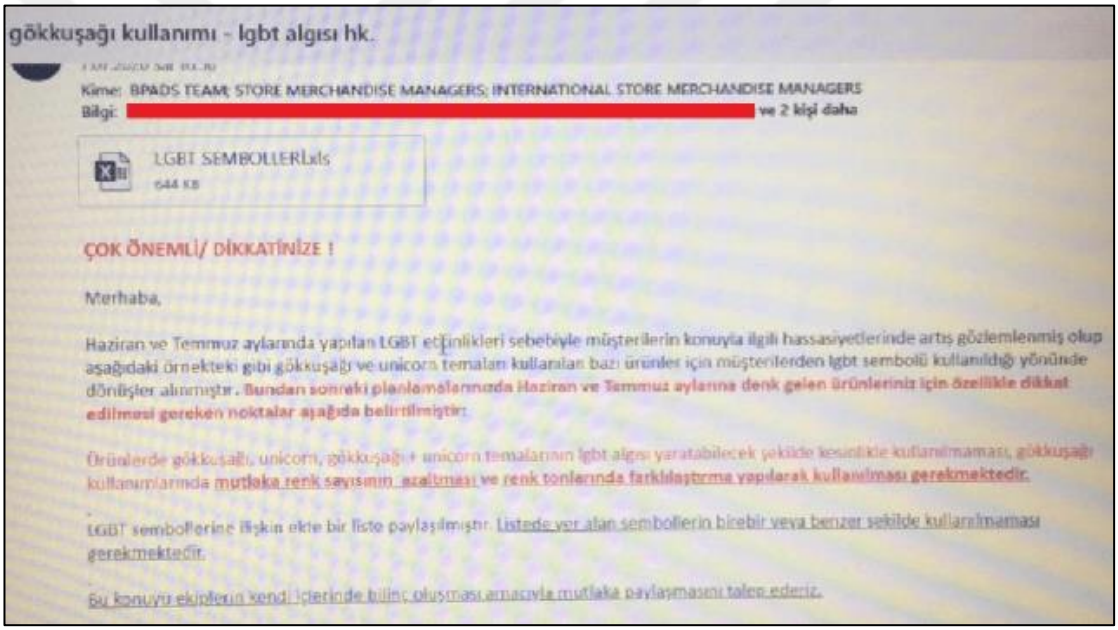
4.4.1 Step 1: Firestorm Occurrence Reasons

A firestorm started in 2020 July after the leak of a corporate mail, which was sent to some company workers. According to the mail, due to some of the sensitivity of the company's customers about LGBT, products that have rainbow, unicorn or symbols that associate with LGBT should not be used and products that will be launched in July and June should be carefully planned considering the instructions. The instructions state that rainbows, unicorn or themes that associate with LGBT should not be used, colors should be limited

while using a rainbow and also colors should be changed. Additionally, the mail had an attachment about the LGBT symbols, and it was stated that the symbols in the attachment should not be used. At the end of the mail, it was advised to share the information with team members to be able to have a perception about the matter in Figure 4.19.

Quickly after the mail was leaked on the Internet, a firestorm started. Some people blamed the company by making discrimination and used boycott words and some people supported the company by limiting the usage LGBT associated products in their clothing lines.

Figure 4.19: LC Waikiki's mail



Source: Tele1.com.tr, 2020

Company Response

Quickly after people stared to share their opinions and thoughts about the company's decision to not to use LGBT associated symbols and limiting color usage, two different hashtags were form on twitter. People disagreeing what the company decided to do started to share the firestorm and against those ideas, some people started to support the company on their decision and stated that they will continue to shop or even more from now on.

Both sides shared their opinions and the firestorm became a trending topic on Twitter. However, company chose not to response to the firestorm therefore there is no company response about this matter.

4.4.2 Step 2: Twitter Data Analysis

Two hashtags were analyzed separately at first due to the fact that some people supported the company decision by using #LCWaikikidestek and some people boycotted the company by using #LCWaikikiboykot. After analyzing two different hashtags, these two data belonging to two different hashtags were combined and evaluated.

Table 4.10: Analysis of the complete data for LCWaikiki's firestorm

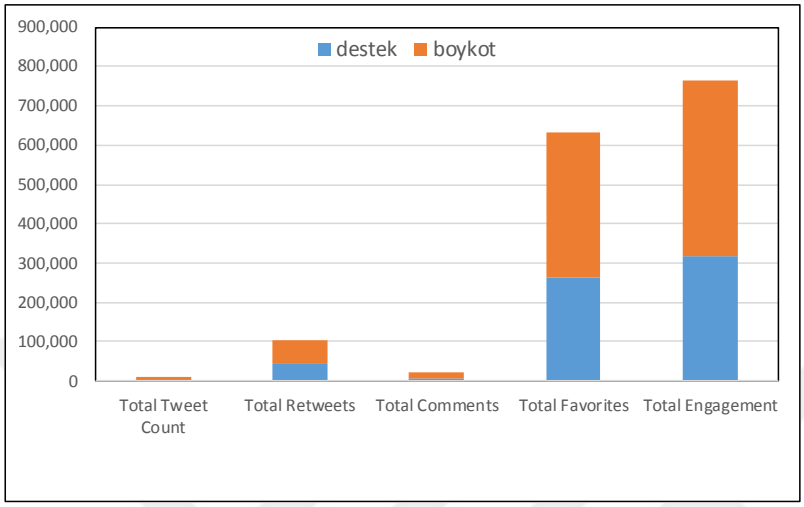
ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLETE DATA		SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA			
Total Tweet Count	10,030	P	3,606	**Total Positives**	**4,153**
Total Retweets	102,181	P+	547	**Total Negatives**	**2,688**
Total Comments	20,205	N	2,262	**Other**	**3,189**
Total Favorites	631,214	N+	426	AGREEMENT	7,746
Total Engagement	**763,630**	NEU	932	DISAGREEMENT	2,284
		NONE	2,257	IRONIC	181
				NONIRONIC	9,849
				OBJECTIVE	6,666
				SUBJECTIVE	3,364

The firestorm started on 8th of July in 2020. Data consists of the tweets between the dates of 8th July 2020 and 30th of July 2020. Firstly, analyzing the people who supported the company's decision with #LCWaikikidestek, 316.633 engagements have been found. There are total 2.089 tweets, 43.755 total retweets, 6.313 total comments and 264.476 total favorites belonging to the hashtag. Secondly, analyzing the hashtag that boycotts the company using #LCWaikikiboykot, there are 446.997 total engagements. Total tweet counts are 7.941, total retweets are 58.426, total comments are 13.892 and total favorites are 366.738 belonging to the hashtag.

As a result, given in Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21, combining the two hashtags that were being used during the firestorm, there are 763.630 total engagements. 10.030 total tweets,

102.181 total retweets, 20.205 total comments and 631.214 total favorites were found using the *ExportComments* data source.

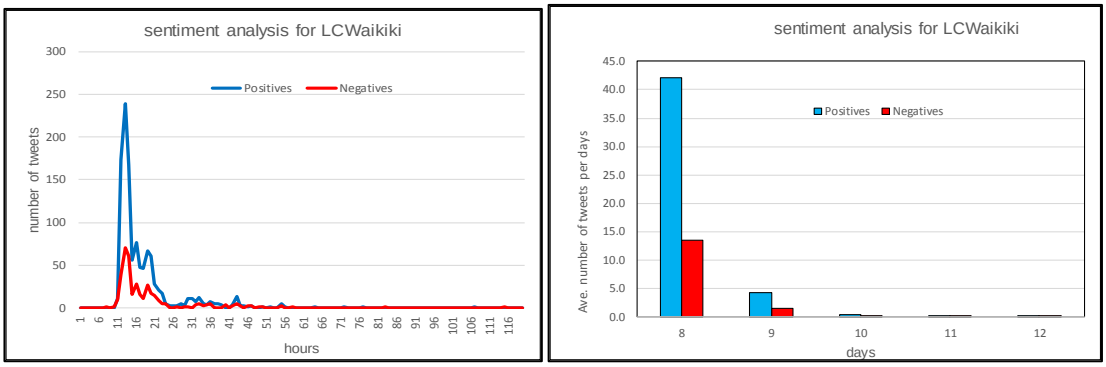
Figure 4.20: Results of combined two hashtags used during the firestorm



4.4.3 Step 3: Sentiment Analysis of the Company

MeaningCloud's sentiment analysis tools have been used to identify the data as positives and negatives to be able to evaluate the suitability of the company response against the firestorm. In LC Waikiki's case, there is no company response therefore the analysis was not categorized as before company response data and after company response data. Instead, two different hashtags belonging to the firestorm were analyzed separately and then it was combined to evaluate the full data including different opinions in Figure 4.22.

Figure 4.21: Sentiment results of combined hashtags by hours and days



a. Sentiment Analysis of #LCWaikikidestek

Analyzing the hashtag that people showed their supports, it has been found that there are 1.138 total positives, 368 total negatives and 583 other polarity groups. There are 999 positives, 139 strong positives, 318 negatives, 50 strong negatives, 167 neutrals and 416 none polarity groups between the dates of 8 July 2020 and 29 July 2020. In detailed sentiment analysis, there are 1.706 agreements, 383 disagreements, 18 ironic, 2.071 non-ironic, 1.487 objective and 602 subjective data have been found. Therefore, as a result, 54 percent of the hashtag are positive, 18 percent of the hashtag are negatives and the rest, which is 28 percent are categorized as others.

b. Sentiment Analysis of #LCWaikikiboykot

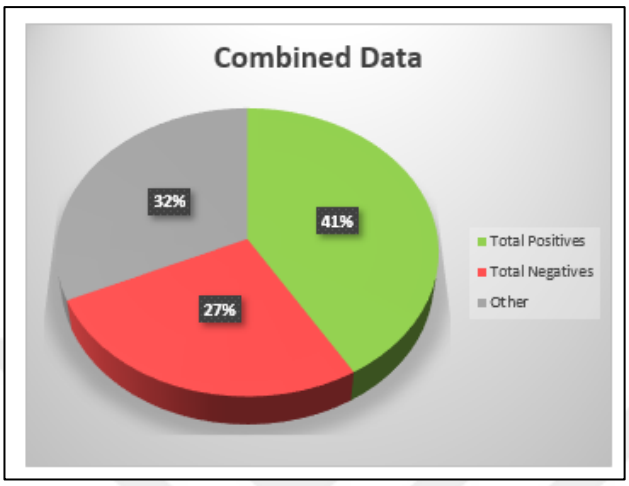
#LCWaikikiboykot hashtag was formed to boycott the company's decision and it quickly attracted attention on Twitter. Out of 7.941 total tweets, 3.015 of them are total positives, 2.320 of them are total negatives and 2.606 of them are grouped as others. In detail, there are 2.607 positives, 408 strong positives, 1.944 negatives, 376 strong negatives, 765 neutrals and 1.841 none sentiment groups. Additionally, using *MeaningCloud*'s sentiment analysis tool, it has been found that there are 6.040 agreements, 1.901 disagreements, 163 ironic, 7.778 non-ironic, 5.179 objective and 2.762 subjective data. As a result, total positives are 38 percent, total negatives are 29 percent and others are 33 percent as percentages between the dates of 8 July 2020 and 30 July 2020.

c. Sentiment Analysis of Combined Data

Analyzing two hashtags supported by different opinions, out of 10.030 tweets, there are 4.153 total positives, 2.688 total negatives and 3.189 others. In detailed sentiment analysis, in Figure 4.22, there are 3.606 positives, 547 strong positives, 2.262 negatives, 426 strong negatives, 932 neutrals and 2.257 none sentiment polarity groups. Furthermore, 7.746 of the combined data are agreement, 2.284 are disagreement, 181 of them are ironic, 9.849 of them are non-ironic, 6.666 objective and 3.364 of them are subjective data. As a result, in combine data, there are 41 percent total positives, 27

percent total negatives and 32 percent others between the dates of 8 July 2020 and 30 July 2020.

Figure 4.22: Sentiment Analysis of LC Waikiki's Combined Data



4.4.4 Step 4: Company Response Analysis According to SCCT

In order to analyze if the company response affected the firestorm management or changed people's perceptions about the brand after the crisis, company response strategies are evaluated according to the SCCT. To be able to analyze what types of a crisis LC Waikiki had, crisis types have to be found accordingly to SCCT to find out the responsibility level of the company for the crisis. After determining the responsibility level, SCCT advice to apply some types of strategic company response techniques in order to receive less harm, shorten the crisis period and prevent taking more damage in the future.

Accidental crises happen when the organizations actions are leading to an unintentional crisis. In LC Waikiki's firestorm, the company did not intend to make a firestorm but additionally, the mail that led to a firestorm was leaked by an employee outside of the company causing people to get informed by the situation happening in the organizational environment. It can be categorized as accidental crisis however, in todays' world which is becoming more transparent everyday by the speed of the internet improvements in the technology and also the changes in people's values over years, it can be predicted

beforehand that something like a leakage of an important mail which was accused to have discrimination issues can easily go viral and attract a lot of people to share an opinion about the brand and the brand's take on of the LGBT community. Therefore, the firestorm can be categorized as a preventable one as of today.

It has been suggested that in preventable crises, re-building company response strategy should be used due to the high levels of company responsibility for the firestorms, but it has been observed that LC Waikiki did not response to the crisis. Therefore, it can be categorized as deny company response strategy. In deny responses, company can choose not to response to the crises to be able to separate from it as a company. This strategy was suggested to be applied by SCCT when the crisis requires less responsibility taken from the companies.

When the data was combined, it can be seen that there have been more positives than negatives in sentiment analysis. But it has been observed that the firestorm was present online longer and giving no response caused more hashtags opening by people who have different opinions about the subject. Even though, more positive opinions about the company decision might satisfy some customer segments, other segments who are against the company decision might be out of the reach for the company. Generational changes and values of people develop and evolve everyday therefore it might be effective not to make bold decisions that can lead a sudden firestorm and many disagreements among people, customers or potential customers. Additionally, crisis that is not taken care of strategically might cause bigger problems in the future possible crisis and can easily increase the company responsibility levels that leads to different company response strategies.

4.5 TORKU AND BENEFIT HAYVANCILIK FIRESTORM

Torku founded in 2007 by the producer brand Konya Şeker has a product portfolio of sweets, chocolates, bakery products, frozen products, modern greenhouse products, milk and dairy products, meat and meat products and vegetable oils. The brand's production is carried out in Meram that is one of the central districts of Konya.

Benefit Hayvancılık was founded in 2019 and was milk merchant collecting milk daily in Konya.

4.5.1 Step 1: Firestorm Occurrence Reasons

A thirty-thirty-five seconds long video started to circulate on social media, which was filmed in TikTok social media platform became a firestorm and caught people's attention very quickly. The video created a firestorm in 5th of November 2020 and lasted for a few days. The reason why the video was shared so much on social media is because of health concerns and ethics concerns that people had after seeing the video. In the video, there is a man who is sitting in a milk boiler and taking a milk bath in a milk collecting plant topless. Screenshots of the TikTok video are shown in Figure 4.24.

Figure 4.23: Screenshots of the TikTok video

Source: Ekonomist, 2021

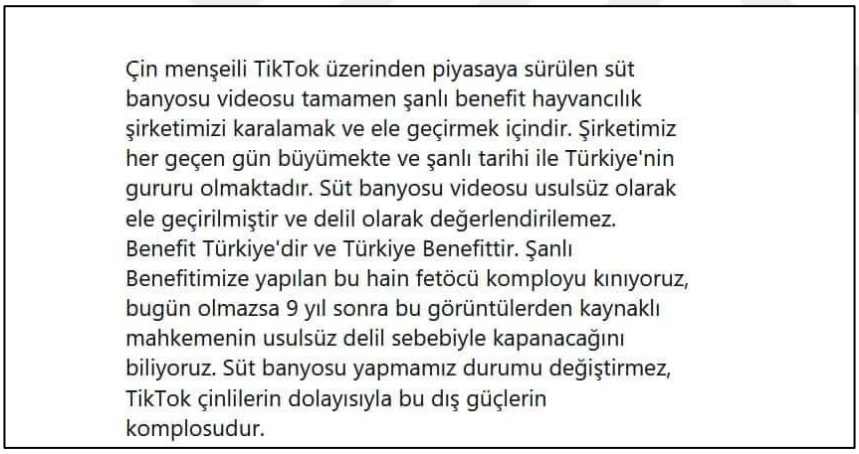
On twitter, people shared their opinions and worries about the video using many different hashtags such as #sütbanyosu, #Torku, #Benefit, #süt, #Konya. Since the video was filmed in a milk collecting plant in Konya, people assumed that the plant belonged to Torku but in reality, it belonged to a new milk merchant called Benefit Hayvancılık, which had a plant in Konya. After the investigations and finding the person in the video, ministry of agriculture and forestry made a decision to close the company due to the health concerns of the plant. Some other companies who had milk plants in Konya

doubted by people and shared on social media. Torku was one of the biggest ones that started to be in the trending page of Twitter and accused of the video that was shared on TikTok and the company got more tweets than the actual company caused the crisis.

Company Response

After the TikTok video that was shared on many digital platforms, the responsible company for the issue was closed and they did not share a public official response. The company only tweeted some statements about the firestorm and shared a picture that had explanations in Figure 4.24. Considering the account had not been verified by Twitter and not stating that it is official, it had few followers, and the response did not reach many people.

Figure 4.24: Benefit Hayvancılık Company response



Source: twitter/benefitsut, 2020

In the response post the company explained that the milk bath video was shared on TikTok, which is owned by China, and it has been released to taking over Benefit and blacken the company. The response states that the company is growing day by day with their glorious history and Benefit is the pride of Turkey. The milk bath video was illegally posted and cannot be used as evidence. We condemn this conspiracy to the glorious Benefit. If not today, we know that the court due to the images will close our company nine years later. Our milk bath does not change the situation; it is a conspiracy of Chinese TikTok therefore its due to the external forces. On the other hand, Torku made an official

company response statement shown in Figure 4.25 and shared it on their social media accounts to clarify the situation on the same day that the TikTok video started to circulate on 5th November 2020 at 3:38 PM. The company response is as follows;

Figure 4.25: Torku's company response shared on Twitter

Source: twitter/torku, 2020

The English description of the company response is provided below.

> *"**Announced to the public**,*
>
> *As a result of the video that is circulated on the Internet today, which is not only related to the food hygiene regulations but also to morality and conscience that took place in a milk collecting plant in Konya, the necessity to giving an explanation about this event has emerged due to the mentions of our brand Torku. Konya Şeker affiliates have never had a business ties or commercial exchanges in the past with the responsible company and will never have. The allegations that Torku bought milk from this company are completely unfounded and do not reflect the truth, and a legal attempt was made before the relevant judicial authorities. The two foundations of the "Torku Reliable Food Chain", with 900 thousand farmer partners behind it: our raw material supply model consisting of certified farmers and our smart production facilities where the highest level of hygiene is used, we offer our valued consumers products that are meticulously inspected at every stage. We would like to specify these. With "Torku Reliable Food Chain", you and your loved ones can consume our products with peace of mind.*
> *We present to the public.*
> *Regards"*

4.5.2 Step 2: Twitter Data Analysis

Using *ExportComments* to be able to download and analyze the twitter data, #Torku was picked in order to find out the emotions that people had towards the company about the firestorm. The data has been collected between the dates of 5 November 2020 and 9 November 2020.

The Table 4.11 below shows the Torku's firestorm that occurred in 2020 (analysis of the complete data & before and after company response evaluations). Data consists of 3.586 tweets in total. There are 20.418 total retweets, 10.771 total comments, 119.588 total favorites and as a result of these data, total engagement is 154.363.

Table 4.11: Analysis of the complete data & before and after company response for Torku's firestorm

ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLETE DATA	
Total Tweet Count	3,586
Total Retweets	20,418
Total Comments	10,771
Total Favorites	119,588
Total Engagement	**154,363**

BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE	
Total Tweet Count	1,656
Total Retweets	14,884
Total Comments	7,916
Total Favorites	72,622
Total Engagement	**97,078**

AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
Total Tweet Count	1,930
Total Retweets	5,534
Total Comments	2,855
Total Favorites	46,966
Total Engagement	**57,285**

Table 4.12: Analysis of the complete data for Benefit Hayvancılık's firestorm

ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLETE DATA	
Total Tweet Count	934
Total Retweets	17,332
Total Comments	7,655
Total Favorites	83,118
Total Engagement	**109,039**

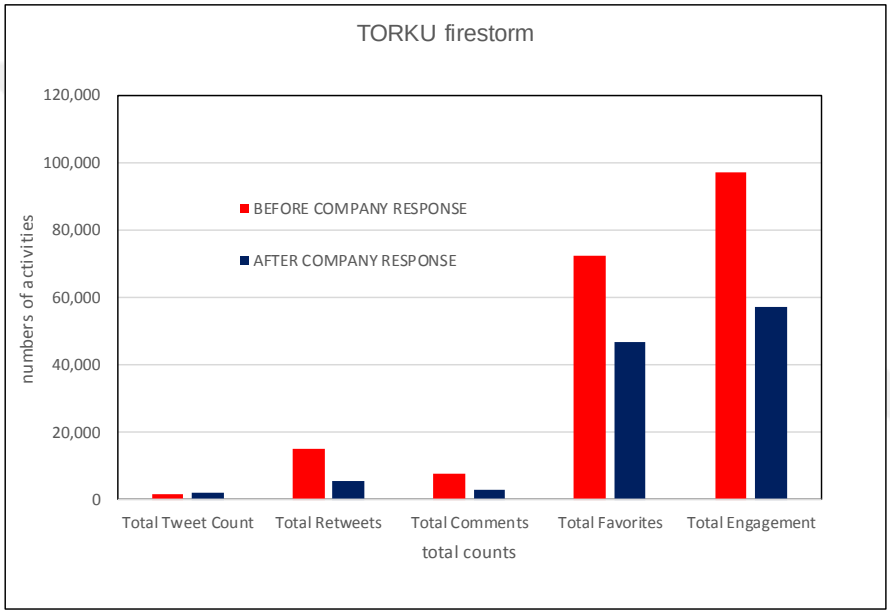
SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA	
P	11
P+	14
N	297
N+	39
NEU	96
NONE	477

Total Positives	**25**
Total Negatives	**336**
Other	**573**
AGREEMENT	719
DISAGREEMENT	215
IRONIC	10
NONIRONIC	924
OBJECTIVE	165
SUBJECTIVE	769

Before company responded to the firestorm, there are 1.656 tweets, 14.884 retweets, 7.916 comments and 72.622 favorites. Total engagement before the company response is 97.078.

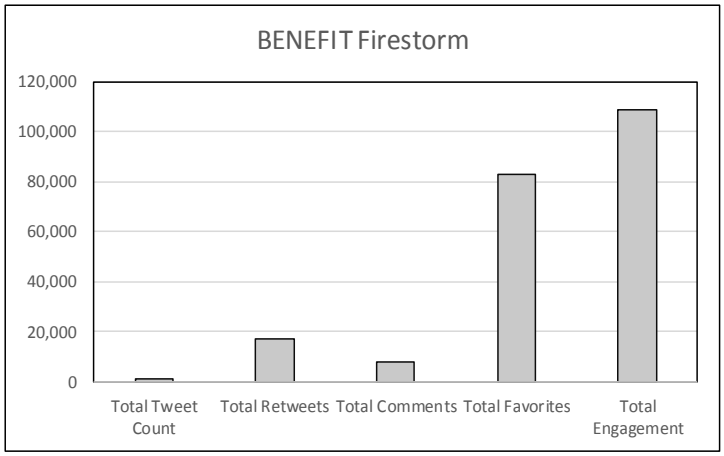
After the company responded to the firestorm the same day that the TikTok video started to circulate on the internet, 1.930 tweets were found. There are 5.534 retweets, 2.855 comments, 46.966 favorites and 57.285 engagements shown in Figure 4.26.

Figure 4.26: Total engagement of Torku's firestorm.



To be able to analyze Benefit Hayvancılık's data, #Benefit hashtag has been collected from Twitter. There are total 934 tweets, 17.332 total retweets, 7.655 total comments, 83.118 total favorites and 109.039 engagements seen in Table 4.12 and Figure 4.27. Since the company shared a response on Twitter after the firestorm ended, before and after company response could not be analyzed.

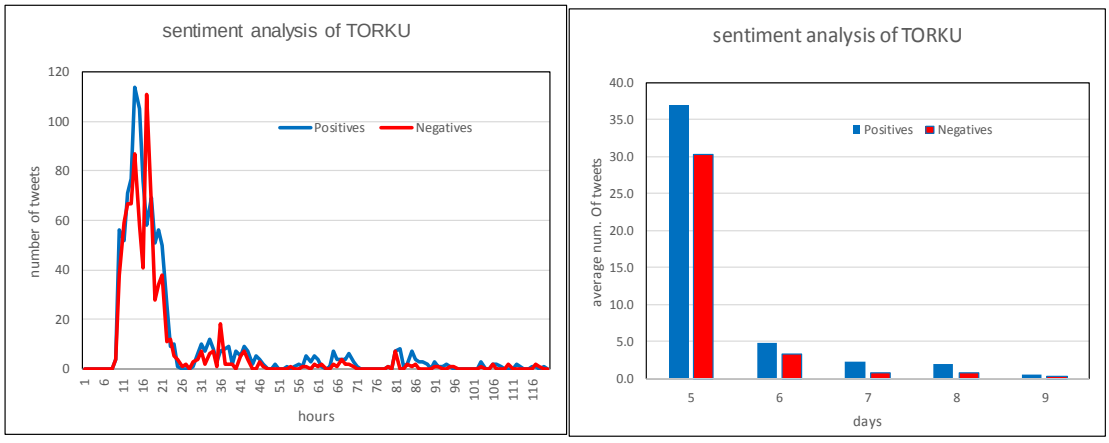
Figure 4.27: Total engagement of Benefit's firestorm.



4.5.3 Step 3: Sentiment Analysis of the Company

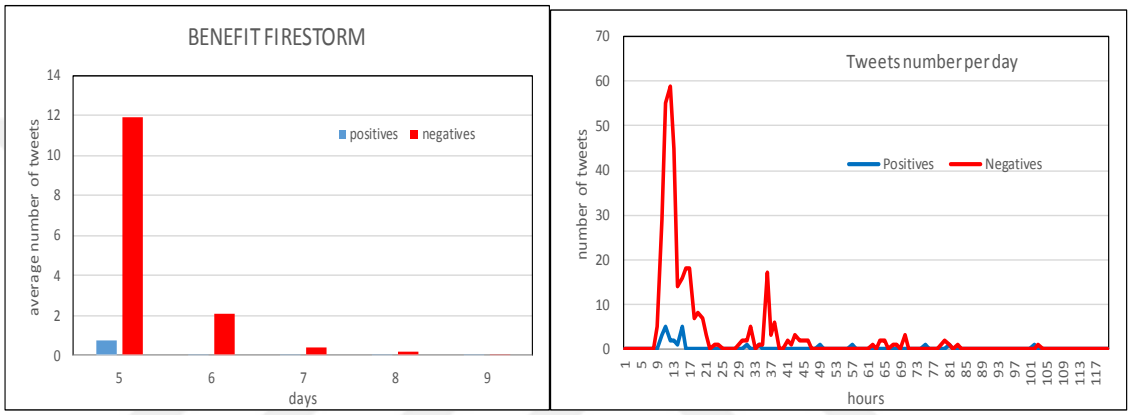
Torku has 1.114 total positives, 852 total negatives and 1.620 other sentiment polarities due to the *MeaningCloud*'s sentiment analysis tool. Sentiment analysis of the company can be seen in the Table 7.13. There are total 888 positives, 226 strong positives, 750 negatives, 102 strong negatives, 508 neutrals and 1.112 none polarities out of 3.586 total tweets. Detailed sentiment analysis showed that there are 2.976 agreements, 610 disagreements, 34 ironic, 3.552 non-ironic, 2.424 objective and 1.162 subjective data. Sentiment analysis of Torku's firestorm given by day and hours can be seen in Figure 4.28.

Figure 4.28: Sentiment analysis of Torku's firestorm by day and hours



Benefit Hayvancılık has 25 positives, 352 negatives and 557 other sentiment polarities. There are 11 positives, 14 strong positives, 313 negatives, 39 strong negatives, 86 neutrals and 471 none sentiment polarities due to *MeaningCloud*. Additionally, there are 719 agreements, 215 disagreements, 10 ironic, 924 non-ironic, 165 objective and 769 subjective data. In percentage, company has 3 percent positive tweets, 38 percent negative tweets and 59 percent other tweets, seen in Figure 4.29.

Figure 4.29: Number of tweets of Benefit's firestorm by day and hours



a. Sentiment Analysis Before Company Response

Torku responded to the firestorm on 5th of November when the firestorm began on social media. Tweets before 3.38 PM have been considered as before company response on 5 November 2020. There are 1.656 total tweets before the company response and 520 of them are positives, 415 of them are negatives and 721 of them belong to other sentiment polarity. There are 403 positives, 117 strong positives, 354 negatives, 61 strong negatives, 128 neutrals and 593 none sentiment polarities. In detail, there are 1.415 agreements, 241 disagreements, 22 ironic, 1.634 non-ironic, 1.077 objective and 579 subjective data. Before company response, Torku had 31 percent positives, 44 percent negatives and 44 percent other sentiment polarities as percentages.

Table 4.13: Sentiment analysis of the complete data& before and after company response for Torku's firestorm

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA	
P	888
P+	226
N	750
N+	102
NEU	508
NONE	1,112
Total Positives	1,114
Total Negatives	852
Other	1,620
AGREEMENT	2,976
DISAGREEMENT	610
IRONIC	34
NONIRONIC	3,552
OBJECTIVE	2,424
SUBJECTIVE	1,162

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	403
P+	117
N	354
N+	61
NEU	128
NONE	593
Total Positives	520
Total Negatives	415
Other	721
AGREEMENT	1,415
DISAGREEMENT	241
IRONIC	22
NONIRONIC	1,634
OBJECTIVE	1,077
SUBJECTIVE	579

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
P	485
P+	109
N	396
N+	41
NEU	380
NONE	519
Total Positives	594
Total Negatives	437
Other	899
AGREEMENT	1,561
DISAGREEMENT	369
IRONIC	12
NONIRONIC	1,918
OBJECTIVE	1,347
SUBJECTIVE	583

a. Sentiment Analysis After Company Response

After the Torku responded at 3.38 PM on 5th of November 2020, there have been 1.930 total tweets. Using sentiment analysis tool, it can be evaluated that there are 594 total positives, 437 total negatives and 899 others after company response. In detailed sentiment analysis, there are 485 positives, 109 strong positives, 396 negatives, 41 strong negatives, 380 neutrals and 519 none sentiment polarities. Additionally, there are 1.561 agreements, 369 disagreements, 12 ironic, 1.918 non-ironic, 1.347 objective and 538 subjective data. After the company response positives stayed the same as 31 percent and negatives dropped to 23 percent. Others increased to 46 percent according to the sentiment analysis results.

b. Compared Analysis of Before and After Company Response

When Torku's before company response data and after company response is compared to each other, it has been found that after company data, there are 274 more tweets 9.350 less retweets, 5.061 less comments and 25.656 less favorites. Overall, engagement number drops to 57.285 after company response from 97.078, which is 39.793 less than

before company response. There is no different in positives before and after company data, it stays 31 percent in percentage, but negatives dropped from 25 percent to 23 percent and others increased from 44 percent to 46 percent after the company response.

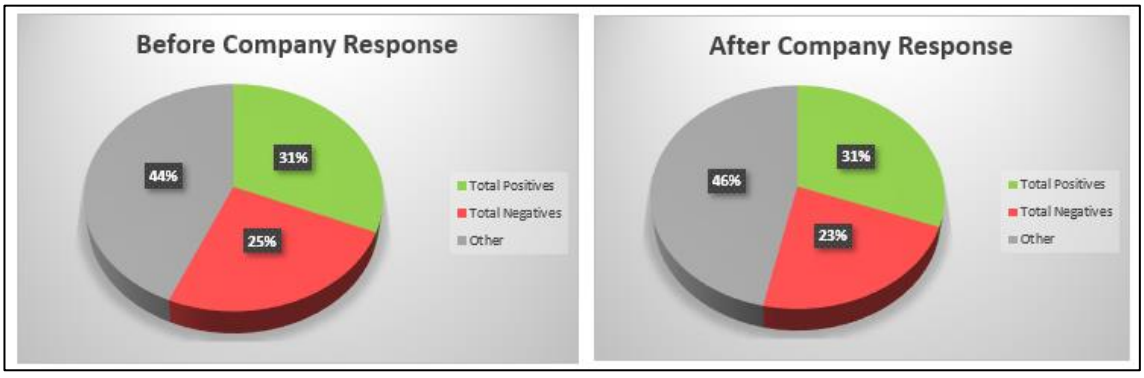
Table 4.14: Comparison of before & after sentiment data for Torku's firestorm

COMPARISON BETWEEN BEFORE & AFTER COMPANY RESPONSES	
Total Tweet Count	274
Total Retweets	-9,350
Total Comments	-5,061
Total Favorites	-25,656
Total Engagement	-39,793

SENTIMENT ANALYSIS OF COMPLETE DATA	
P	3%
P+	-20%
N	-4%
N+	-42%
NEU	155%
NONE	-25%

Total Positives	-2%
Total Negatives	-10%
Other	7%
AGREEMENT	-5%
DISAGREEMENT	31%
IRONIC	-53%
NONIRONIC	1%
OBJECTIVE	7%
SUBJECTIVE	-14%

Figure 4.30: Sentiment analysis of before and after Torku's response

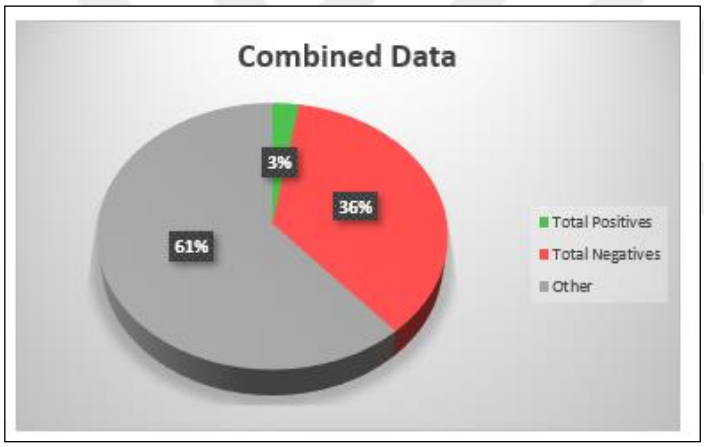


After the response, total tweet counts increased but, engagement dropped, and the overall sentiment analysis shows that there is a slight decrease in negatives while positives stays the same. Results of both Torku and Benefit are given as charts in Figure 4.30 and Figure 4.31 respectively.

4.5.4 Step 4: Company Response Analysis According to SCCT

Torku was accused to be the brand that started a firestorm and made people have concerns about food safety, hygiene at plants and overall, all work ethics and morals. Since it got cleared that the actual brand caused the firestorm was Benefit Hayvancılık instead of Torku, people still shared their opinions on Twitter mentioning the brand name Torku and this could lead bigger misunderstandings if not responded as a company. These types of crises occur when people wrongly accuse a brand and it is under the victim type of crises. The responsibility level that the companies should take for the victim crisis according to the SCCT is minimal and it has a mild reputational danger.

Figure 4.31: Total users' response of Benefit's firestorm



Torku shared a public response to be able to clear the concerns of people and strengthen the trust between the brand and the customer. Choosing to publish a company response when the responsibility levels are minimal, and the reputational danger is low is not mandatory when it comes to strategic company responses but it can clarify the situation and ease people's minds when purchasing the brands products. Additionally, history of the company crisis can damage the reputational perceptions of people therefore; sharing a response can lead the firestorm to spread to different segments and out of control.

When facing a victim crisis, deny strategic company response type is the best one to use. It can be seen that Torku also used this strategic company response in their post. It can be seen that the company denied and clarified that they have not been doing business with

the responsible company that created the firestorm and will never do it in the future. They reminded customers about their good work and the reliable production facilities.

On the other hand, Benefit Hayvancılık was responsible for the firestorm and it was a preventable crisis, which would harm the company severely. They responded late and they used denial strategic company response by attacking external forces and denying that the crisis due to the people who tried to blacken their company. This response strategy should not be used when the responsibility level is high according to the SCCT.

As a result, it can be observed that smaller companies can be closed when facing a preventable crisis especially about healthy, hygiene and ethic factors. Firestorms tend to get bigger everyday by the use of social media platforms and it's easier nowadays to be unsuccessful when making a mistake that requires high responsibilities.

Additionally, it is not possible to prevent crisis because crisis can happen about a company that is not responsible for the crisis itself and every company should be prepared beforehand to be able to give the best company response quickly in order to control the crisis and lighten the effects of it. Torku's response is suitable for SCCT and it can be seen that, after the company response there is a slight decrease in negative tweets and the firestorm lost its strength in a few days. It is important to avoid performance-based crisis such as product or service failure if not, since there are many alternatives, the company can be replaced by another one and the one that had a problem will be forgotten. Also, when there are health and hygiene concerns, the crisis becomes even more strong and hard to overcome. At the end of this section, a small company got closed due to a firestorm and another company got accused by people but overcame the crisis by being transparent and clear to the customers.

4.6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS OF THE FIRESTORMS

Table 4.15 below shows the analyzed six Turkish company firestorms occurrence reasons and the accusations against the companies. The first step of this research is to investigate the firestorm occurrence reasons and search the Internet to find out the related documents

about the firestorms as well as the company responses to the firestorms. Koton had a firestorm in 2017 and the firestorm occurrence reason was the clothing items that had tags stating that they were made of real fur.

The company was accused of animal cruelty. Ülker's firestorm occurred in 2017 and it was about a marketing campaign that were post from their official accounts. People associated the marketing campaign with hidden political meanings and started to create conspiracy theories on digital platforms.

Table 4.15: Analysis of firestorm occurrence reasons and the accusations of selected Turkish companies

COMPANY NAME	FIRESTORM OCCURRENCE REASON	ACCUSATION
KOTON	Using real fur in clothing items	Animal Cruelty
ÜLKER	Marketing campaign that associated with political meanings	Political
TİMAŞ YAYIN GRUBU	Publishing a book from an author who criticized by political opinions	Political
LCWAIKIKI	Mailing employees not to use LGBTQ+ associated logos and limiting colors in products	Discrimination
TORKU/BENEFIT HAYVANCILIK	A viral TikTok video that was filmed in a milk plant	Hygiene Insensitivity, Health Danger, Poor Production Process, Poor ethical values among employees

Timaş Yayın Grubu had a firestorm in 2019 about a book from an author that was going to be published and translated into Turkish language. A speech that the author held in İstanbul started to circulate on the Internet that quickly turned into a firestorm related to political statements that the author implied during the speech. LC Waikiki had a firestorm that divided people into two different groups that had different opinions about the crisis.

A mail leaked that was sent to company's employees about limiting the colors and stopping Lgbtq+ associated logos on product designs in 2020.

The company received support and boycott from people at the same time after the leakage of the mail and the company were accused of discrimination. Torku had a firestorm in 2020 due to a TikTok video that went viral after it was post online. In the video a man was sitting in a milk boiler and taking a shower in a milk plant. Since the Torku's milk plant was in the same city with the milk plant that was shown in the video, people started to talk about the worries about hygiene, health, production processes and ethical values about the company on online platforms. Quickly after, even though the video was not belonging to Torku, the company had to deal with the critics and respond to them. The video was filmed in a milk collecting plant belonged to Benefit Hayvancılık and the company was new on the market as it was launched in 2019. Not many people knew about the company therefore people assumed Torku was the responsible company for the firestorm. Benefit Hayvancılık was closed due to the firestorm that they had due to the health and hygiene risks of the milk collecting place.

After researching about the firestorms, crisis types and the responsibility levels of the companies towards the firestorms are explored. In the Table 4.16, shows that Koton, Ülker, Timaş Yayın Grubu and LC Waikiki had preventable crises and the responsibility levels are high when experiencing preventable crisis according to the SCCT.

Torku on the other hand had a victim crisis therefore the company's responsibility level is low for the firestorm that they had. Benefit Hayvancılık's firestorm is high risked preventable crisis.

Second step of analysis is to collect data with the correspondent hashtags for the firestorms from Twitter in order to evaluate the changes in people's emotions before and after the company responses.

Table 4.16: Crisis types and responsibility levels of the selected Turkish companies based on SCCT

COMPANY NAME	CRISIS TYPE	RESPONSIBILITY LEVEL
KOTON	Preventable	High
ÜLKER	Preventable	High
TİMAŞ YAYIN GRUBU	Preventable	High
LCWAIKIKI	Preventable	High
TORKU	Victim	Low
BENEFIT HAYVANCILIK	Preventable	High

It can be seen from the Table 4.17 that the most engaged firestorm is LC Waikiki's firestorm and Ülker, Timaş Yayın Grubu, Torku, Benefit Hayvancılık and Koton comes in order after it.

Table 4.17: Total tweet counts before & after company responses and total engagements for selected Turkish companies

COMPANY NAME	TOTAL TWEET COUNTS BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE	TOTAL TWEET COUNTS AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	TOTAL ENGAGEMENT TO THE FIRESTORM
KOTON	245	706	16,729
ÜLKER	4,157	13,299	400,298
TİMAŞ YAYIN GRUBU	1,225	219	393,774
LCWAIKIKI	10,030	N/A	763,630
TORKU	1,656	1,930	154,363
BENEFIT HAYVANCILIK	934	N/A	109,039

Koton has 16,729 engagements, Ülker has 400,298 engagements, Timaş Yayın Grubu has 393,774 engagements, LC Waikiki has 763,630 engagements Torku has 154,363 engagements and lastly,Benefit Hayvancılık has 109,039 engagements for the firestorms that they experienced. Total tweet counts before company response is 245 for Koton, 4,157 for Ülker, 1,225 for Timaş Yayın Grubu, 10,030 for LC Waikiki, 1,656 for Torku

and 934 for Benefit Hayvancılık. Total tweet counts after company response is 706 for Koton, 13,299 for Ülker, 219 for Timaş Yayın Grubu and 1,930 for Torku. Total tweets increased for Koton, Ülker and Torku after the companies responded publicly to the firestorms.

In the third step, sentiment analysis has been performed to the collected twitter data. Results of the sentiment analysis changes in percentages are shown in the Table 4.18 below. Sentiment analysis results before company response for Koton; 24 percent positive and 45 percent negative, for Ülker; 28 percent positive and 35 percent negative, for Timaş Yayın Grubu; 23 percent positive and 43 percent negative, For LC Waikiki; 38 percent positive and 29 percent negative and lastly for Torku; 31 percent positive and 25 percent negative.

Table 4.18: Before & after company response sentiment analysis of selected Turkish companies

	SENTIMENT ANALYSIS BEFORE COMPANY RESPONSE		SENTIMENT ANALYSIS AFTER COMPANY RESPONSE	
Company Name	**Positives**	**Negatives**	**Positives**	**Negatives**
KOTON	24%	45%	28%	41%
ÜLKER	28%	35%	28%	35%
TİMAŞ YAYIN GRUBU	23%	42%	25%	42%
LCWAIKIKI	38%	29%	N/A	N/A
TORKU	31%	25%	31%	23%
BENEFIT HAYVANCILIK	3%	36%	N/A	N/A

Sentiment analysis results after the company response for Koton; 28 percent positive and 42 percent negative, for Ülker; 28 percent positive and 35 percent negative, for Timaş Yayın Grubu; 25 percent positive and 42 percent negative and for Torku; 31 percent positive and 23 percent negative.

Sentiment analysis of Koton after the company response shows increase in positive emotions and degrease in negative emotions. Ülker on the other hand have no changes in sentiment analysis before and after the company response. Timaş Yayın Grubu has no difference in negatives but has an increase in positives after they shared a company response. LC Waikiki did not respond to the crisis therefore it cannot be evaluated as before and after company response. But overall, the company had 38 percent positive emotions and 29 percent negative emotions from people on Twitter towards the firestorm. Torku does not have a change in positive emotions before and after the company response but negatives decreased after they shared a company response when experiencing a firestorm. Benefit Hayvancılık had 3 percent positive emotions and 38 percent negative emotions. Before and after company response cannot be performed in this case because the company responded late after the firestorm and since the company is small and newly launched, the social media accounts of the company did not have many followers to be able to reach people online.

The final and the fourth step of the research is analyzing the company response strategies of companies and measuring them with the results of before and after company response sentiment analysis results. All company response strategies are used in selected firestorm cases. As an outcome after analyzing the company response statements, Koton used rebuilding response strategy, Ülker used denial, diminishment and bolstering response strategies, Timaş Yayın Grubu used diminishment response strategy, LC Waikiki used Denial response strategy and Torku used denial and bolstering response strategies. Koton had corrective actions, sincere apology, commitment to prevent future mistakes as sub response categories in response statement.

Ülker used denial, scapegoating, excuse, separation, reminder, victamage, pseudo apology and evading responsibility factors as sub-categories in the response. Timaş Yayın Grubu response strategy has excuse and justification elements. LC Waikiki decided not to respond to the firestorm therefore, they used ignoring and no action sub category of denial response strategy. Torku used denial and reminder elements in response statement using both denial and bolstering company response strategies. Benefit Hayvancılık used denial response strategy by using denial and scapegoating strategies as sub-categories.

Table 4.19 below shows all company response strategies according to the SCCT and, also the sub-response categories.

Table 4.19: Company response strategies and company response sub-categories of selected Turkish brands

COMPANY NAME	COMPANY RESPONSE STRATEGY	COMPANY RESPONSE SUB-CATEGORY
KOTON	Rebuilding	Corrective Action, Sincere Apology, Commitment to Prevent Future Mistakes
ÜLKER	Denial-Diminishment-Bolstering	Denial, Scapegoating, Excuse, Separation, Reminder, Victimage, Pseudo Apology, Evading Responsibility
TİMAŞ YAYIN GRUBU	Diminishment	Excuse, Justification
LCWAIKIKI	Denial	Ignoring/No Action
TORKU	Denial, Bolstering	Denial, Reminder
BENEFIT HAYVANCILIK	Denial	Denial, Scapegoating

After gathering all the results from sentiment analysis and the SCCT company response analysis, three success criteria elements have been considered. They are the increase in positive sentiment analysis results after the company response in percentage, degrease in negative sentiment analysis results after the company response and the suitability of the used company response strategy with the company responsibility levels from the firestorms. The summary of the success criteria Table 4.20 can be seen below. Koton used rebuilding strategy which was the best option for high responsibility leveled crisis which is preventable crisis. It was observed that, after the company made a response statement, positive sentiments increased, and negatives decreased even though tweets from people increased after the company response. Ülker had a preventable crisis which led to high responsibilities as a company and the company did not used rebuilding response strategy therefore the response strategies of the company were not as effective. Ülker did not

received increased positive sentiments and decreased negative sentiments after they released company responses. Timaş Yayın Grubu had a preventable crisis, and the responsibility is high as a company against the firestorm. The company used diminishment response strategy and as a result, positive sentiments increased after the company response, but the company failed to decrease negative responses with diminishment response strategy. LC Waikiki on the other hand, used denial response strategy against a preventable crisis therefore the response strategy is weaker than the other company response strategies. The overall sentiment analysis result is 38 percent positives and 29 percent negatives.

Table 4.20: Success criteria of selected Turkish company crises

	SUCCESS CRITERIA		
Company Name	**Positives increased after company response**	**Negatives Degreased after company response**	**Used Applicable Crisis Response Strategies**
KOTON	YES	YES	YES
ÜLKER	NO	NO	NO
TİMAŞ YAYIN GRUBU	YES	NO	NO
LCWAIKIKI	N/A	N/A	NO
TORKU	NO	YES	YES
BENEFIT HAYVANCILIK	N/A	N/A	NO

Some people supported the company and some people boycotted the company after the spread of the firestorm. It seems that company was successful due to the fact that positive sentiments were higher than the negatives shown in the Table 4.18, but every unsolved firestorm can intensify the effects of the future firestorms and can leave reputational damages in the company's history according to the SCCT. Torku had a victim crisis which led to low responsibility levels and the company response strategy that they used was applicable for that. After the company response, it was observed that positive

sentiments did not change in percentage, but the company managed to decrease the negative sentiments in percentage. Benefit Hayvancılık did not use an appropriate response strategy and the response from the company did not seem formal and clear enough. Since the firestorm was related mainly to health and hygiene danger, the company was closed shortly after investigations.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Firestorms are releases of sudden messages that have negative word of mouth on social media networks about a brand, person or an event. Firestorm is the new and modern version of traditional crises that companies have been dealing with for many years. The objective of the research is to explore how customers emotions changes after company responses to firestorms and the negative and positive emotion changes towards the crises online. Another important objective is to test the SCCT and company response strategies by diving the data as before and after company responses to be able to run sentiment analysis separately on collected data and evaluate the sentiment changes after the applications company response strategies.

It has been found that different company response strategies lead to different sentiment analysis results. Finding increases in positive sentiment levels and decrease in negative sentiment levels shows that the company was effective enough to turn the firestorm around and changed people's emotions to the firestorm. Using rebuilding response strategy was successful because it provided a result of positive changes in people's emotions after being used. Companies are facing value-based firestorm which consists of social issues and most of them can be prevented before they occur. For that reason, responsibility levels of companies are higher nowadays for the firestorms and developing a rebuilding response strategy helps companies form better emotional links with customers. Denial response strategies should be avoided if the responsibility levels are high according to the results of the research, showing companies could not be able to effect people's emotions positively after the usage of denial responses. Additionally, it has been found that being transparent and showing sympathy without blaming other parties when the responsibility levels are low or medium benefits companies. It is important to acknowledge that there is a competition on markets and making product and service-based mistakes involving the possible danger to health might not be forgiven and the findings of this research showed that it can lead companies to close down especially if the company is new and small.

Overall, all digital firestorm cases in this study indicates that, even if there are positive emotions from people towards the firestorm, there are always some people who are getting effected negatively and that means a digital firestorm always has a negative impact on some people who can be customers or potential customers. For that reason, crisis management should be ready to react quick to be able to understand the crisis type and the best response strategy to lower the reputational damage as much as possible and as quick as possible.

SCCT is applicable and can be utilized for online crisis that is called digital firestorms. It was observed that using different SCCT based company responses effected sentiment changes of people differently on Twitter.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the fact that this thesis research makes significant contributions to the theory and practice, there are limitation factors that can be supported by future research. First significant limitation is sentiment analysis accuracy. Sentiment analysis has been performed by a software that has high accuracy levels however sarcasm and ironic texts cannot always be detected by a sentiment analysis software correctly. Second limitation of the study is the fact that not all firestorm related texts from internet users have been collected. Only Twitter was used to obtain user texts in order to perform the study considering twitter is a platform where people can freely tweet about everything and interact with each other but there are other social media platforms that can be used additionally to obtained data from. Third limitation of this research is that firestorm length can vary due to other major seasonal occurrences. They can reduce online reactions to firestorms that brands have. The last limitation is that not all company responses that were shared in the past years can be found online currently.

Even though this study includes Turkish firestorms, future studies can be performed to investigate if company responses and user responses to firestorms are related to the culture and how SCCT works in every culture.

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