

SNS Flaming Risk and Responses









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INSURANCE GROUP

Social Networking Services (SNS), enabling everyone easy posting and interaction with others, have become integral to both individuals' lives and businesses. On the other hand, with its characteristic of fast diffusion, it may spread the criticism of the company (company or employee) held by users, which may lead to a boycott.

In this article, we will introduce examples of companies in the Asian region that have encountered SNS flaming, and also guide on the response measures that companies in Asia should take.

1. Case Study of SNS Flaming in Asia

The following are examples of SNS flaming involving companies and government offices in Southeast Asia and South Asia. As we will see later, there are outstanding cases where people did not fully understand and consider politics, ethnic groups, cultures, religions, etc.

Country	Company	Details
 India	Car manufacturers, etc. (multiple companies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2022, South Korean and Japanese-affiliated Pakistan car manufacturing companies inflamed Indian public opinion when they expressed celebration for a Pakistan holiday related to the Kashmir territorial dispute. In India, a boycott campaign was developed, and each company apologized to the Indian people, said that "Posts in Pakistan were made by local partners and do not reflect our corporate stance."
 Singapore	Restaurant chain (Company A)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2018, in celebration of Independence Day, the restaurant announced a menu on Facebook named after the lyrics of Singapore's national anthem, and the name was interpreted as "curse yourself" in Malay language. Immediately after the announcement, criticism spread that "The company has no Malays and no diversity" and the restaurant apologized on Facebook.
 Vietnam	Vehicle dispatch application (Company B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2023, a user pointed out that the Spratly Islands, which China is claiming sovereignty over them, were mentioned as the "Nansha Islands" on a map showing in application. Criticism of the company spread as "Displaying Vietnamese territory as if it were China". The company apologized for using open source maps. Ho Chi Minh City authorities imposed a fine of VND 60 million (approximately USD 2,500) on the company.
 Thailand	Retail chain (Company C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2022, a video surfaced on Facebook showing a convenience store employee dancing to the music on the food preparation counter, triggering a flood of criticism for being "Unsanitary." The company operator issued an apology, took disciplinary action against the employee, and conducted a thorough cleaning and disinfection of the store.
	Food delivery (Company D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2021, after it was pointed out that a delivery man from Company D had participated in an anti-government demonstration in Bangkok, Company D posted on official X (formerly known as Twitter) account that "Company will terminate the contract in accordance with the regulations of the delivery person. We do not accept violence or terrorism". However, flaming on SNS occurred because the demonstration participants were treated as terrorists, and a boycott of company D was developed mainly by the demonstration supporters. Company D withdrew the contract termination and posted an apology.
 Malaysia	Government office (Ministry E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2020, when movement controls were issued due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as a tip to keep household happiness, the ministry posted on Facebook that "Wife should impersonate Doraemon's voice and giggle playfully and affectionately", "Wife should wear beautiful clothes", etc. There were a series of comments criticizing it as being female discrimination, and received a protest from women's rights activists. The ministry apologized and deleted the post.
 Indonesia	Confectionery manufacturer (Company F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2014, Company F's potato chips, containing pork extract not suitable for Muslims, were mistakenly placed on the halal product shelf of a convenience store, and a customer who found them criticized Company F on Facebook. Although the food labeling including the ingredients was accurate, the display error sparked negative feedback towards Company F. The situation was resolved after the convenience store operator apologized.

2. Popularity of SNS in Asia

According to the 2022 survey by GWI (British research firm), it can be seen that the major countries in Southeast Asia and South Asia are the countries with the most active use of SNS in the world. Asian countries have a high ranking of daily SNS usage time, while the global average usage time was 2 hours and 31 minutes. The survey results are as follows.

- No.4 Philippines (3 hours 43 minutes)
- No.10 Indonesia (3 hours 18 minutes)
- No.15 India (2 hours 50 minutes)
- No.17 Malaysia (2 hours 47 minutes)
- No.18 Thailand (2 hours 44 minutes)
- No.20 Vietnam (2 hours 32 minutes)
- No.26 Singapore (2 hours 13 minutes)
- No.51 Japan (51 minutes)

The factors behind this phenomenon are attributed to Asia's significant population of young people who have an affinity with web services, and nearly 100% mobile internet penetration rate. Interestingly, among the top five countries, excluding the Philippines, major countries in South America and Africa dominate the list.

In Asia, it is crucial to recognize the environment where dissatisfaction with a company's activities can be posted on SNS and spread quickly.

3. Mechanism of "SNS Flaming"

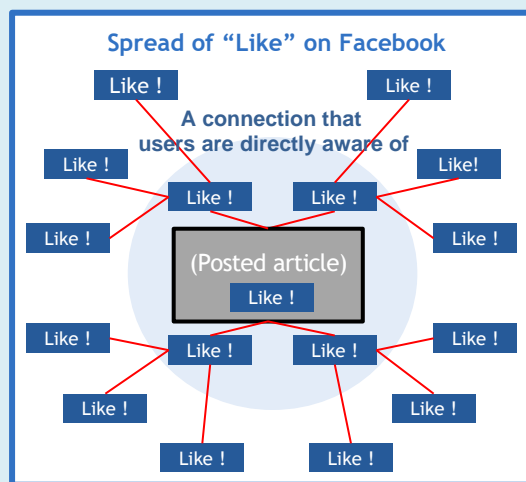
SNS is a web-based membership platform that allows interaction among registered users. It enables close communication between users, such as gathering of friends, people with the same hobby, and residents of neighboring areas. In Asia, it is common to use the term of "Social Media" for these services, but in this article, we will use the term of "SNS" to focus on reactions among users.

Various SNS platforms are being used, such as text-based X and photo-focused Instagram, but all major SNS platforms share a common feature of promoting interaction among users

- 1) **Follow:** Registering other users with the "Follow" button makes it easier to check the posts and actions of the said users. People who follow you are called followers.
- 2) **Like:** Users can evaluate and show sympathy to other users' posts with the "Like" button.
- 3) **Share:** User can introduce other users' posts, news, etc. to the followers with the "Share" or "Repost (retweet)" buttons.

The combination of these features provides explosive diffusion power. If one user finds the content interesting and shares it with the followers, again the followers also share their own followers, and it will quickly spread throughout the SNS. Although "flaming" lacks a precise definition, it generally refers to an event that negative reactions spread unexpectedly fast and on a large scale.

Figure : Image of content diffusion on SNS



(Source : Tokio Marine dR Co.,Ltd.)

When using SNS, people will have the illusion that they are making a personal post among their friends, but in fact there is a structure that reaches an unspecified large number of people like shouting loudly in a busy street. Even if users set it to private, there is a risk that someone in their friend will make it public.

And once the content is shared, it can be immediately viewed by many users through push notifications on smartphones. In most cases, even if the original post is deleted, the content that has been viewed by many users will be saved somewhere and reposted.



4. Trigger of SNS Flaming

Flaming can be triggered not only by internal posts within company but also posts from external sources such as customers, etc. Posts that trigger flaming can be categorized as follows.

Posts Originating within Company

1) Official company announcement:

In situations where a company disseminates inappropriate information through its official SNS accounts, advertisements, or campaigns. In some cases, criticism towards posting by joint venture partners, business partners, or outsourced companies may be directed to that company.

2) Posts created by employees:

When an employee leaks personal or confidential information held by the company, or posts personal crimes or pranks, etc.

Posts Originating from Third Parties

3) Customers, business partners, local residents:

When customers, business partners, etc. are dissatisfied with products/services, defects in quality, fraud, etc., and post criticisms, complaints, etc.

4) Non-profit organizations, media, etc.:

When a non-profit organization (NPO), journalist, etc. make a post criticizing the company due to inappropriate aspects of the company's business.

5) Posts created by third parties:

Company's competitors or third parties having a grudge against the company post negative campaigns or spoofing.

5. Sensitive (Trigger) Topics

There are several topics that are likely to lead to SNS flaming around the world. Sensitive issues, such as which principles or doctrines should be aware of, etc. are different in each country and region, but they all share a common pattern, and case studies of flaming mentioned earlier also fall under this pattern.

1) Discrimination and Hate speech

Attacking or insulting people in a particular position to get backlash from them. (politics, religion, culture, ethnicity, etc.)



2) Bias

Posting something that is close to a specific doctrine or principle and provoke a backlash from a different point of view. (politics, religion, culture, ethnicity, etc.) In addition, there are countries where posts such as disadvantage to the country or criticizing the royal family are prohibited.



3) Sexual harassment

Posting based on biases, such as role imposition regarding to gender and sexual orientation and receiving feedback that lacking of diversity.



4) Lack of understanding of taboos

Being criticized for not understanding and having no consideration to things that are forbidden or should be avoided such as religion, culture, ethnicity, etc.



5) Prank

A scene of employees playing practical jokes in the workplace can make customers feel uncomfortable.

* In Japan, it is called "part-time job terrorism".



6) Dishonesty in business

Being criticized when a business is made known to public that it makes unfair profit or harm the interests of others through setup, shell acts, exaggerated advertisements, rumors, etc.



7) Low quality business

The actual business situation where there is a problem in terms of quality control is revealed such as unsanitary or rough handling.



8) Compliance violation

Being criticized when a business is made known to public that having harsh working conditions such as modern slavery, falsification of raw materials, illegal use of personal information, etc.



All of the above can lead to criticism depending on how the user receives it, regardless of whether the poster intended it that way or not, so it is necessary to pay close attention. Within a company, it is important to provide education so that the information/PR, products/services, CSR activities, etc. as a company and personal use by employees do not fall under the above patterns.

5. Measures should be taken

To respond to the risk of flaming on SNS, we divide the measure into Pre-incident measures and emergency responses as following ;

Pre-incident measures

Develop guidelines for using SNS and promote education so that employees do not post official company information or posts that may trigger flaming. If necessary, seek cooperation from joint venture partners and subcontractors.

- ❑ Prepare a list of sensitive issues in your business area and target audience
- ❑ Develop the operation guidelines for official accounts, etc. based on the above and ensure compliance (giving examples of inappropriate posts, specifying of check-process before posting)
- ❑ Develop the guidelines for private use of SNS by employees and request to comply with them (giving examples of inappropriate posts, awareness of responsibility for posts)
- ❑ Implement SNS risk education (seminars, etc.) related to the mentioned issues
- ❑ Operate the official accounts to post the information on major SNS when flaming occurs
- ❑ Monitor posts on major SNS
- ❑ Conduct regular drills in order to appropriately respond to the following emergencies

Emergency responses

In the event that signs of inappropriate posts or flaming are caught through the above monitoring, etc., a system will be put in place to quickly respond to crisis, and repeat the training so that appropriate responses can be made.

- ❑ Collect the following information and determine whether the company should apologize or resolve misunderstanding
 - Are posted details true ? Is the company at fault ?
 - Who is posting ? Can the company contact directly ?
 - Is the spread continuing ? Is the spread settling down ?
 - What are the impacts of this flaming ?
- ❑ If necessary, make an apology or resolve misunderstanding on the official account (if possible, prepare an example sentence in advance).

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graph TD
    A[Wait and See] --> B[Apology]
    A --> C[Resolve misunderstandings]
                    
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In addition, it is important to send information to the SNS where the flaming takes place. It is desirable to operate an official account on a frequently used SNS. It is also necessary to keep in mind that among them, there are SNS such as Zalo in Vietnam and Moj in India, etc. which are unfamiliar in other countries, and on the contrary, X and LINE are not used frequently in many countries.

(Reference) Top 10 SNS usage rate rankings in major Asian countries

No	Singapore	Malaysia	Indonesia	Philippines	Thailand	Vietnam	India	No.	Myanmar *
1	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	WhatsApp	Facebook	Facebook	Facebook	WhatsApp	1	Facebook
2	Facebook	Facebook	Instagram	FB Messenger	LINE	Zalo	Instagram	2	X
3	Instagram	Instagram	Facebook	TikTok	FB Messenger	TikTok	Facebook	3	YouTube
4	Telegram	Telegram	TikTok	Instagram	TikTok	FB Messenger	Telegram	4	Pinterest
5	TikTok	TikTok	Telegram	X	Instagram	Instagram	FB Messenger	5	VKontakute
6	FB Messenger	FB Messenger	X	Telegram	X	X	Snapchat	6	Reddit
7	LinkedIn	X	FB Messenger	Pinterest	Pinterest	Telegram	X	7	Instagram
8	X	WeChat	SnackVideo	WhatsApp	Telegram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	8	Tumblr
9	WeChat	Pinterest	Pinterest	Viber	iMessage	iMessage	Moj	9	LinkedIn
10	Pinterest	LinkedIn	LINE	Spanchat	WhatsApp	Skype	Pinterest	10	(others)

(Data source: DATAREPORTAL for each country <https://datareportal.com/> *Myanmar only, Statcounter is the source of analysis)

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