



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The dynamic interdependencies among the negativity and the positivity in news and user-generated content about safety in a firm's products and the firm's product recalls

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## Abstract

This article examines the dynamic interdependencies among the negativity and the positivity in news and user-generated content about safety in a

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highlighting the solution (recalls) [14]. Indeed, anecdotes support this coexistence of negativity and positivity in news and UGC about the safety of a firm's products [15, 16]. We thus consider the negativity and the positivity in news and UGC to empirically examine the interdependencies among the negativity/positivity in news and UGC about safety in a firm's products and the firm's number of recalls.

Our theoretical premise is as follows. We reason that managers may interpret the negativity

discouraged to buy from, work for, and invest<sup>o</sup> in the firm ([46]: 223). For example, Blevins and Rogazzino e\_\_ firm

firm's product recalls, mostly by analyzing secondary data. The dependent variable (DV) is usually a firm's number of recalls or the number



reputational costs nudge managers to lower the incidence of decisions that might further damage their reputations in the eyes of news organizations, and, by extension, the firm's stakeholders (i.e., business customers,



Now, consider the likely

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sales volume of passenger cars in the United States. These manufacturers are Acura, Audi, BMW, Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Dodge, FIAT, Ford, Honda, Hyundai, Infiniti, Jeep, KIA, Lexus, Mazda, Nissan, Porsche, Subaru, Toyota, and Volkswagen. Next, we gathered car recall data from June 2009 to June 2015 (a six-year period) from the NHTSA's recalls data file for each manufacturer. NHTSA is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Transportation dedicated to enhancing transportation safety nationwide. It develops and enforces vehicle safety standards, investigates vehicle safety defects, and researches driver behavior and traffic. The NHTSA recall data is a part of its effort to improve transportation safety. This dataset is one of the primary sources for vehicle recalls and has been leveraged and validated in prior research (e.g., [3, 6, 35]). Our exercise on recall data collection yielded 207,489,321 recalled units. Third, we used a Python program to collect the text of user-generated tweets each month about safety in each manufacturer's vehicles. Following prior research (e.g., [11, 42]), we used the combination of the manufacturer name and defect keywords (such as safety, recall, defect, and faulty) to obtain monthly user-generated tweets. This step yielded 164,944 tweets. In the fourth step, we applied identical search criteria on Factiva to compile the text of each distinct news articles on safety concerns in the products of each manufacturer. Factiva is a business information and research tool owned by Dow Jones & Company. It allows users to search, monitor, and analyze news and information to support research and decision-making processes. The reliability and validity of Factiva have been investigated extensively in prior studies (e.g., [3, 130, 131]). This step produced 19,812 news articles.

Fifth, we used the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) program [132] to measure the negativity and positivity in the news and UGC. LIWC was designed to evaluate text's psychological and structural components. The tool has been widely adopted in psychology and linguistics [133]. LIWC calculates the proportion of words that match predefined dictionaries using word counts for a given text. LIWC includes a psychometrically validated internal dictionary comprising approximately 6,549 labeled words and word stems, each classified into one or more categories [132]. Several management researchers have used LIWC to measure news sentiment [13, 79, 134]. The reliability and validity of LIWC variables have also been investigated extensively in settings such as news [e.g., 37], online review (e.g., [135]), and UGC (e.g., [136]).

We briefly discuss how LIWC processes the text in the following. Upon receipt of a text sample, the software processes each word in the sample, one at a time. While processing each word, LIWC scans its dictionary file to find a match, and if a match is found, the corresponding category is assigned to the word. For example, the word "the" is assigned to the category "the" with a count of 1.4684.

with the terms and conditions for the source of the data. [Table 1](#) presents variables' definition, data sources, and summary statistics. Table A1 in the online [S1 Appendix](#) reports the Pearson pairwise correlation coefficients.

### PVAR specification

A vector auto-regression (VAR) model can examine models that entail undefined or challenging-to-define constraints, such as causality [\[41\]](#). Leveraging the benefits of the VAR model and the structure of the panel data set, the PVAR offers several benefits to examine the dynamic interdependencies compared to traditional statistical analyses. It has been applied in prior research in multichannel communication (e.g., [\[36±38\]](#)) to examine interdependencies between multiple channels and



from concerns regarding serial correlation [145]. Following these prerequisites, we proceeded with the standard approaches to estimate our PVAR (see Table 2 for our procedure).

## Results

### Unit root tests and lag selection

Because our panel data are unbalanced, we conducted two unit root tests—Fisher-Type [90, 146] and Im-Pesaran-Shin [147]—to verify the absence of unit roots in our five main endogenous variables. The result suggests the absence of a unit root in our panel (see Table A2 in the online S1 Appendix for the results of the unit-root tests). Next, following Dewan and Ramaprasad [40], we calculated AIC for each cross-section and took the modal value of the optimal lag length among all cross-sections. The results indicate that first-order panel VAR (lag 1) is the preferred model. Subsequently, we followed Abrigo and Love [148] to apply the consistent moment and model selection criteria for GMM models to validate further lag 1 selected by AIC (see Table A3 in S1 Appendix for the result of the lag selection).

### Granger causality tests

Given that the PVAR assumes all DV to be endogenous, researchers could conduct Granger causality test to ascertain whether the lagged DVs could predict future values of the same set of DVs within the PVAR system of equations [149]. The outcomes of our Granger causality test (Table 30) (Love) Tj 2.1430939 | \*eTj 2.75559 -Td (the) TTj 1.7802 0 Td (set) Tj 1.3833 0 Td (each) Tj 2.0

firm's product defects negatively correlates with its product recalls in the following period, supporting our theoretical argument ( $H_1$ ). Stated differently, the result does not support our competing  $H_{1alt}$ , where we reasoned that the negativity in the news makes managers socially more responsible.

The negativity in UGC has an asymmetric association with recalls. Specifically, the negativity in UGC in a month about a firm's product defects positively correlates with the firm's number of units recalled in the following month, supporting our  $H_{2alt}$ . The data thus support our theoretical argument that the public criticism of safety of a firm's products helps the firm identify defects. We also reason that because regulators and product liability lawyers are known to use UGC in monitoring how proactive/reactive a firm has been in recalling its defective products, the firm has reason to use UGC as a signal of the defect recalling

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firm's recalls in the following month. This finding, thus, supports our H<sub>6</sub>. Our results on interaction associations

zero from month 1 to month 6. On the other hand, the change in recalls in response to a shock in the positivity in the news ([Fig 1B](#)) reaches a peak around month 1 and remains positive over time. We observe similarly asymmetric patterns in the associations of the negativity in UGC and the positivity in UGC. For example, the negativity in UGC positively correlates with recalls in month 1 ([Fig 1C](#)). However, this association is not significantly different from zero from month 2 to month 6, suggesting a transitory association of the negativity in UGC on recalls. This finding is also consistent with characterizing user-generated tweets as a fast-paced way to discover new content and see what trending is [42]. Finally, we find no evidence supporting short- and long-term associations of the positivity in UGC on recalls. Overall, IRFs show a graphical representation of how the system evolves and can provide important implications for managers who monitor the earned media. For example, because the negativity and the positivity in the news take



Table 6. PVAR estimation results for high-severity recalls.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable				
	<i>High severity recalls<sub>i,t</sub></i>	<i>Neg news<sub>i,t</sub></i>	<i>Pos news<sub>i,t</sub></i>	<i>Neg UGC<sub>i,t</sub></i>	<i>Pos UGC<sub>i,t</sub></i>
<i>High severity recalls<sub>i,t-1</sub></i>	-0.029	0.015			

because managers need to involve high managerial discretion with more subjective judgment [49]. Thus, we expect to see different patterns for low-severity recalls. Following Astvansh and Eshghi [4] and Liu and Shankar [151], we classify a recall as a high-severity recall if keywords such as *injury*, *crash*, *death*, or *fire* appear in the consequence summary of the NHTSA recall data. A recall characterized by these conditions involves an immediate safety concern [151]. Otherwise, we treat the recall as low severity. Based on this classification, we differentiate two recall variables: high-severity recalls and low-severity recalls.

Tables 6 and 7 show the short-term dynamics for high-severity recalls and low-severity recalls, respectively. The results of high-severity recalls (Table 6) are consistent with the main results (Table 4). For example, the negativity in the news negatively correlates with the number of units recalled as part of high-severity recalls. In contrast, the positivity in news and the negativity in UGC positively correlate with the number of units recalled as part of high-severity recalls. In contrast, we observe very different patterns for low-severity recalls (see Table 7). For example, the positivity in the news is positively correlated with low-severity recalls, which has the opposite direction as the corresponding one for high-severity recalls.

Finally, we conduct interaction and IRF analyses for high and low-severity recalls. The result for high-severity recalls shows consistent patterns like the main results, while that for low-severity recalls demonstrates different patterns. Tables A4 and A5 in the online S1 Appendix present these results, and Figures A1 and A2 in S1 Appendix depict the IRF results for high- and low-severity recalls, respectively.

## Discussion

This study examines the dynamic interdependencies of the negativity and the positivity in news and user-generated content on a firm's product recalls. We believe our findings have important theoretical implications for researchers and practical implications for managers.



find that the relationship among news, UGC, and recalls is not universal but is contingent

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could examine, for example, whether a firm's apology advertising and responses to tweets moderate the main associations of news and UGC.

Third, because we exclusively studied automobile failures and used data from Twitter only, researchers may want to extend the scope of this inquiry. Future studies may test the generalizability of our findings by studying failures in services and other product categories (e.g., medical devices), and sourcing UGC from Facebook, Instagram, and review websites and apps. Fifth, we incorporated organizational perception (media reputation and public reputation) as a theoretical mechanism. Further research could collect data on these mechanism variables and estimate mediation models. More broadly, researchers could develop a theory and test when, how, and why earned media affects recalls.

Moreover, although we have followed several prior recall research (e.g., [44, 49, 124]) to control several firm- and recall-related characteristics in our models, our control sets may exclude some other possible control variables due to data limitations. Further research could consider these possible control variables when the data becomes available. Finally, our data covers the period from 2009 to 2015. Twitter (now X) has changed its data collection policy

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