Leveraging AI
in Public Relations

Navigating "Cancel Culture" with Automated Narrative Analysis and Content Classification

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, "cancel culture" has emerged as a significant phenomenon in public discourse.

The term refers to the public's practice of calling out individuals or entities for transgressing societal norms and subsequently ostracizing them on social media and other platforms. We've taken a deep dive into the evolving landscape of cancel culture and its implications for brands and businesses, and outlined the pivotal role artificial intelligence (AI) can play in helping PR and communications professionals analyze and respond to this phenomenon.
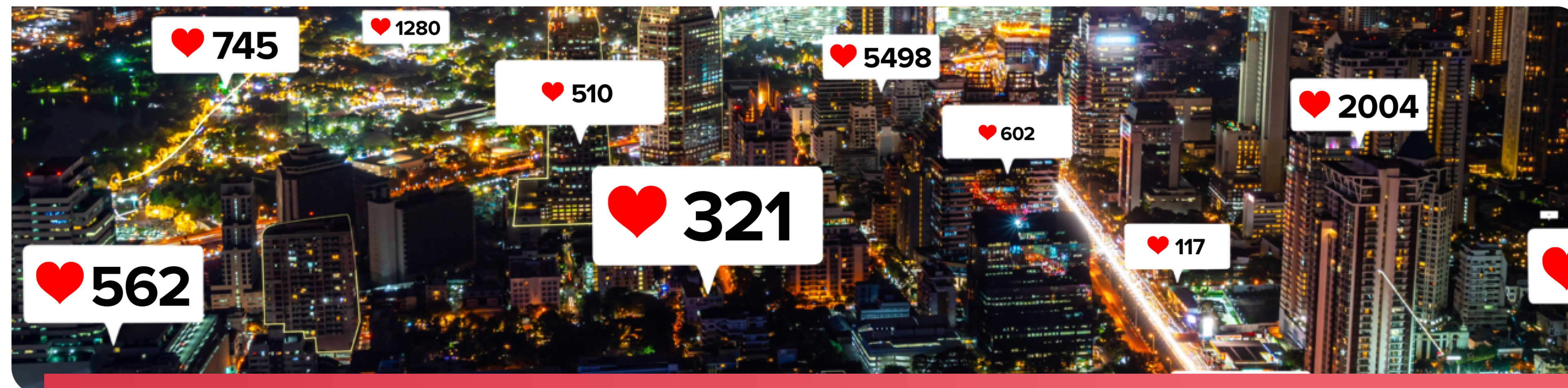
cancel culture

[**kan**-suhl **kuhl**-cher]   *noun*

the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure

THE IMPACT OF CANCEL CULTURE ON BRANDS

Cancel culture has profound implications for brands, making it increasingly challenging for organizations to remain apolitical in a polarized society. The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that in most surveyed countries, the majority of respondents expect businesses to take a stance on contentious societal issues. Gen Z, in particular, is driving this trend, with their purchasing decisions heavily influenced by personal, social, and environmental values. Notably, this generation's spending power has also seen significant growth.

While cancel culture is evident across a broad range of demographic groups, its financial impact on brands can be serious. For instance, the backlash against a transgender influencer's promotion of Bud Light on TikTok in 2023 led to a substantial drop in sales for Bud Light and Budweiser, ultimately resulting in layoffs at the parent company, Anheuser-Busch. This underscores the strong connection between consumer values and purchasing decisions, making it crucial for PR professionals to accurately and quickly measure and understand these beliefs.

CHALLENGES IN ANALYZING CANCEL CULTURE

A significant challenge faced by PR and communications professionals is the overwhelming volume of unstructured text data available. Approximately 80–90% of today's data is unstructured text, including consumer reviews, social media posts, news articles, blogs, and forum discussions. To meet the changing demands of new audiences and mitigate the risks posed by cancel culture, we need innovative methods to quantify and evaluate this unstructured information effectively.

Here we'll focus on two key areas where AI can support and empower PR professionals in navigating cancel culture effectively: Automated Narrative Analysis and Content Classification.

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NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

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Narrative analysis is a multidisciplinary research methodology that interprets structured accounts of experiences, known as narratives. Although extensively studied in various fields, its application in PR measurement, evaluation, and generating insights remains relatively underexplored and lacks consistent definitions.

At Cision, we use proprietary automated narrative analysis algorithms to extract insights from media mentions related to specific topics. This process groups similar statements into a cluster of opinions, with each statement assigned a coherence score based on its alignment with others in the cluster. The resulting cluster is defined as a narrative. By aggregating likes, shares, and engagements of the opinions within a narrative, the narrative's size, popularity, and trends can be analyzed.

CONTENT CLASSIFICATION

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To understand the numerous narratives around a single issue, a combination of content classification and automated narrative analysis is used. Nineteen content classification models, including sentiment, emotion, hate speech, sarcasm, and fake news, are used to categorize text data. A targeted sentiment model, "stance," provides a nuanced and more accurate understanding of a narrative's point of view.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF AI IN PR

While empirical research on the effectiveness of automated narrative analysis is limited, Cision has successfully developed and leveraged this technology in real-world scenarios for many brands and agencies.

Several practical examples highlight how narrative analysis and content classification can provide insights that would be challenging to obtain through manual analysis. These examples show how PR and communications professionals can use content scoring as an early warning system to identify spikes in controversy and allocate resources accordingly.

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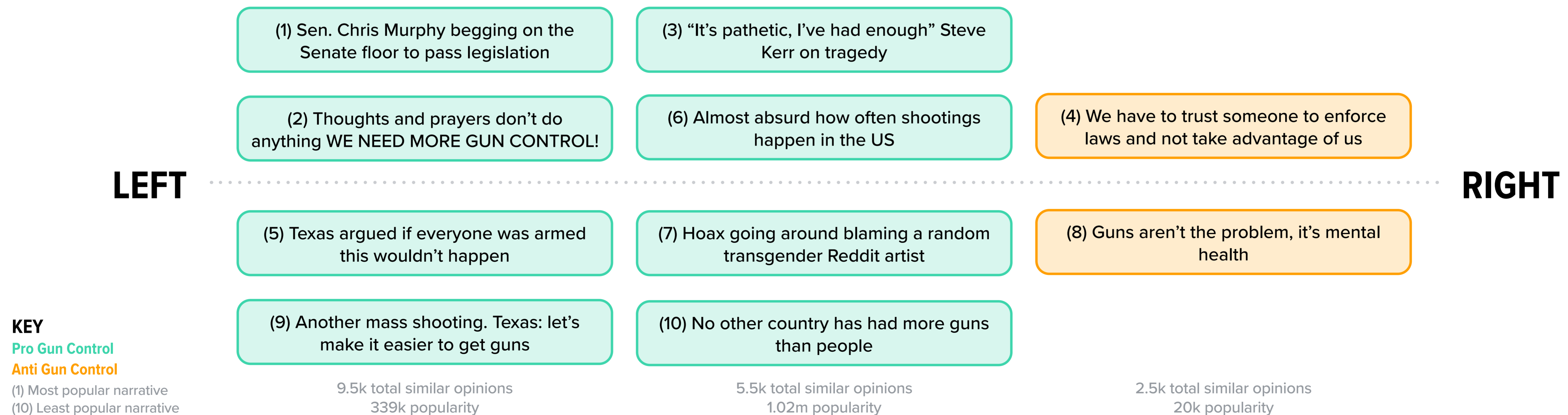
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GUN CONTROL

After a mass shooting incident in Uvalde, Texas, Cision analyzed 91,000 social media mentions related to "gun control." Using stance analysis, a number of narratives either supporting or opposing gun control were identified. The automated analysis also provides metrics for the "size" of the narrative in terms of the number of similar opinions being shared and the "popularity" of the narrative, determined by the sum of likes and shares of individual opinions. This analysis also provides other key elements of the narrative in terms of characters. For instance, the state of Texas appears to be a character in the broader plot of whether access to firearms should be expanded or reduced.

Comparison of pro- and anti-gun control narratives emerging on social and traditional media after the Robb Elementary School in Uvalde mass-shooting

(1) Sen. Chris Murphy begging on the Senate floor to pass legislation	(3) "It's pathetic, I've had enough" Steve Kerr on tragedy	
(2) Thoughts and prayers don't do anything WE NEED MORE GUN CONTROL!	(6) Almost absurd how often shootings happen in the US	(4) We have to trust someone to enforce laws and not take advantage of us

LEFT ·· **RIGHT**

(5) Texas argued if everyone was armed this wouldn't happen	(7) Hoax going around blaming a random transgender Reddit artist	(8) Guns aren't the problem, it's mental health
(9) Another mass shooting. Texas: let's make it easier to get guns	(10) No other country has had more guns than people	

KEY
Pro Gun Control
Anti Gun Control
(1) Most popular narrative
(10) Least popular narrative

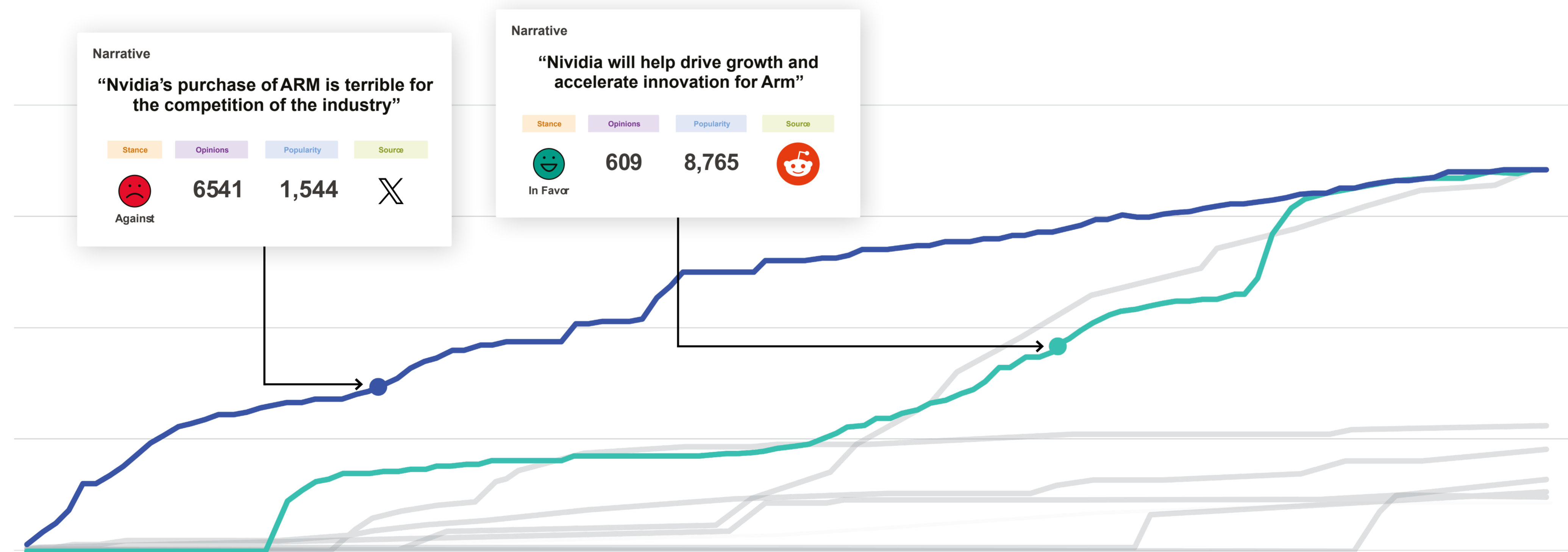| 9.5k total similar opinions 339k popularity | 5.5k total similar opinions 1.02m popularity | 2.5k total similar opinions 20k popularity |

NVIDIA'S ACQUISITION OF ARM

Too much information is one of the main challenges of automated narrative analysis and has potential to hinder and delay human interpretation. The figure below shows the complexity of a such a narrative display across time. In 2021, Nvidia was seeking to acquire UK-based chip designer Arm. As the company was facing regulatory and anti-competition interests in the acquisition, two conflicting narratives emerged: one in which Nvidia was the antagonist, stifling competition, and in the other, the company could be hero of the story, driving innovation. This type of analysis shows where there are opportunities to build on certain narratives and change others. By tracking narratives' development over time, PR professionals can identify pivotal moments and measure the impact of their actions on narrative size and popularity.

Comparison of Nvidia content and emergence of different narratives

Narrative

"Nvidia's purchase of ARM is terrible for the competition of the industry"

Stance	Opinions	Popularity	Source
Against	6541	1,544	X

Narrative

"Nividia will help drive growth and accelerate innovation for Arm"

| Stance	Opinions	Popularity	Source
In Favor	609	8,765	Reddit

ADIDAS ON TWITTER

Content classification can identify points in time where more in-depth narrative analysis is warranted. Cision analyzed 50,000 tweets related to Adidas from September of 2022 to February of 2023 – prior to Elon Musk acquiring Twitter (now called X). The analysis highlighted how a controversial social media post from a major public figure (the rapper Ye, formerly known as Kanye West) negatively affected Adidas's brand risk score and underscored the importance of social media engagement during crises. Such analyses can help other brands identify controversy and act quickly to mitigate negative brand impact.

Risk Score Profile for Adidas
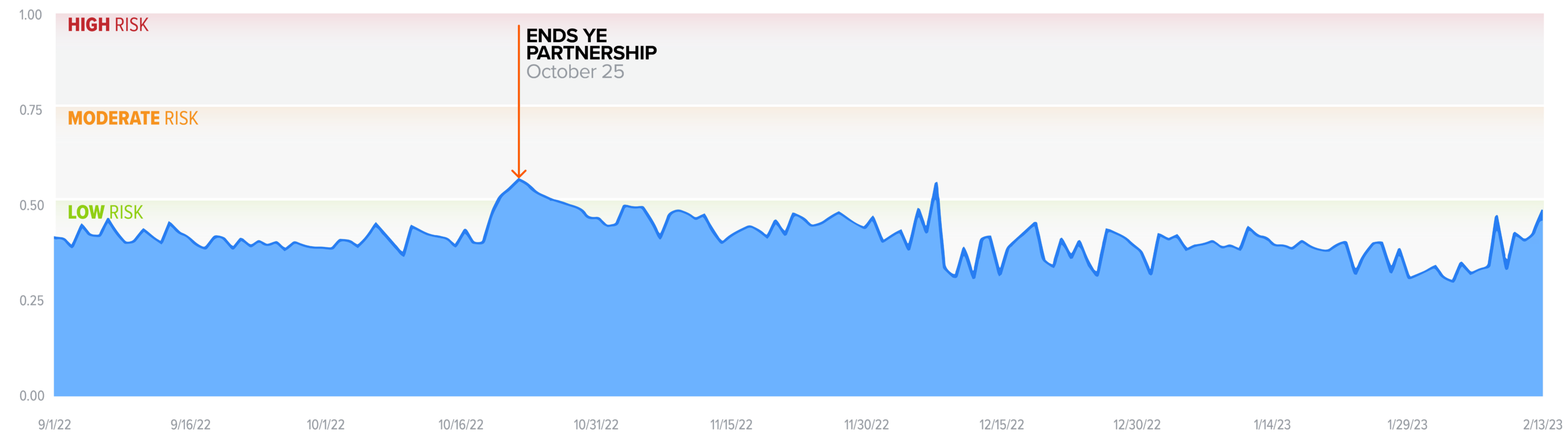
SILICON VALLEY BANK COLLAPSE

The timeline of events leading up to the collapse of SVB demonstrates how an early spike in controversy could have alerted SVB to the need for more external stakeholder engagement much sooner than their press release and statement from the CEO were released. Our analysis also showed that even as traditional news coverage of the failure waned, Twitter continued to talk about it. The U.S. government was attempting to calm the markets and prevent contagion, largely by speaking to the media; yet our analysis indicates that using social media may have been a more effective channel for engaging audiences and dispel rumors and fears.

Analysis of narrative by platform
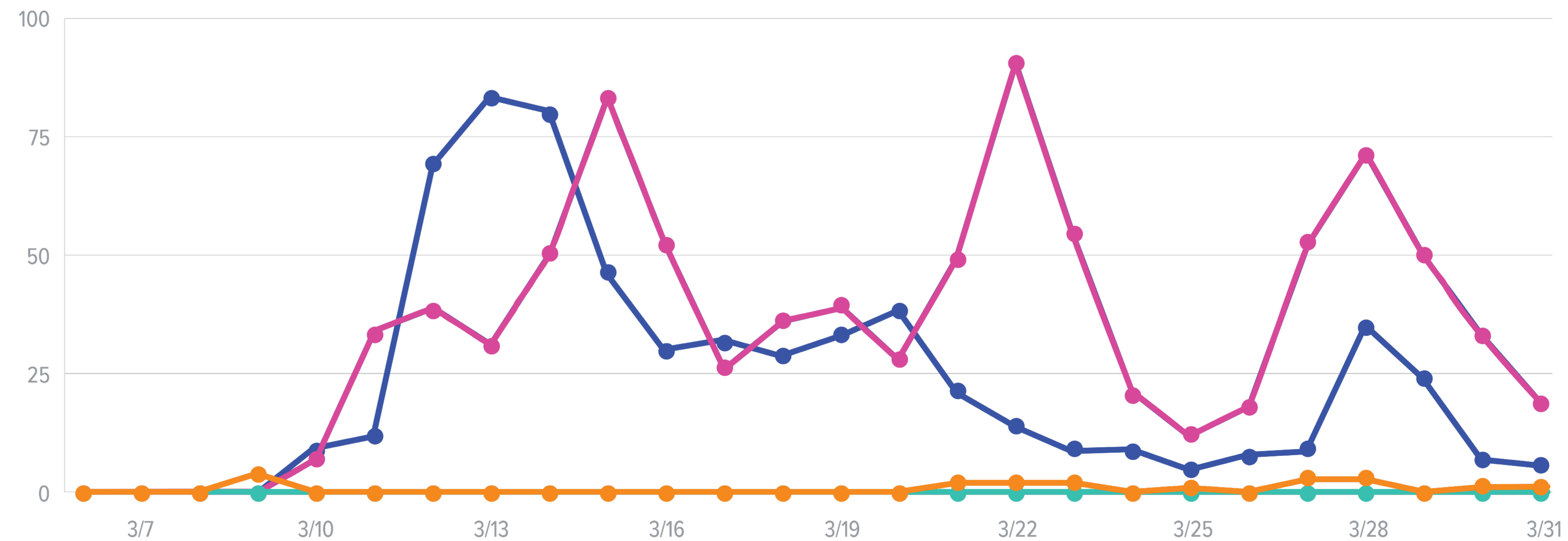
CONCLUSION

In an era dominated by cancel culture and increasing polarization, PR and communications professionals must adapt to ever-evolving consumer demands and mitigate the risks to their brands. Automated narrative analysis, coupled with content classification and targeted sentiment modeling, offers a new approach to PR measurement and evaluation. These AI-driven solutions empower PR professionals to navigate the complex landscape of cancel culture, detect contentious content early, and respond effectively.

It is important to note that while AI plays a crucial role in this process, human oversight and interpretation are essential to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data sources and analysis.

As the media landscape and cancel culture continue their evolution, PR and comms professionals can take advantage of AI to safeguard their brands' reputations.

ABOUT CISION

Cision is the leading provider of consumer and media intelligence and communications solutions, enabling public relations, marketing, social media, and communications professionals around the world to understand their consumers, influence outcomes and amplify their stories. As the market leader, Cision's award-winning brands and technology enable Marketing and Communications leaders to manage and shape their brands in today's rapidly evolving world. Cision has offices in 24 countries through the Americas, EMEA and APAC, and offers a suite of best-in-class solutions, including PR Newswire, Brandwatch Consumer Research, and CisionOne. To learn more, visit **www.cision.com**, **www.brandwatch.com** and **www.prnewswire.com**.