



HOW PRADA NAVIGATED THE KOLHAPURI CONTROVERSY

Brand monitoring identified media spike driven by Prada's "Kolhapuri" sandal controversy. A fashion launch quickly escalated into a global debate on cultural appropriation, then subsided after Prada acknowledged Indian artisans and proposed collaboration - showing how fast media can amplify and reshape reputational risk.

19.02.2026

Image source: The Times of India

Executive Summary

An initial review of online coverage around major luxury fashion houses (such as Prada, Gucci, Dior, Chanel, Fendi, Burberry, and more) revealed a significant media spike between June and July 2025. This surge, identified through Sensika’s brand monitoring, prompted a deeper investigation into the stories driving the conversation. Further analysis showed that a large portion of this increase was linked to Prada’s “Kolhapuri” sandal controversy, which quickly evolved from a design launch into a global discussion on cultural appropriation, heritage craftsmanship, and brand responsibility.

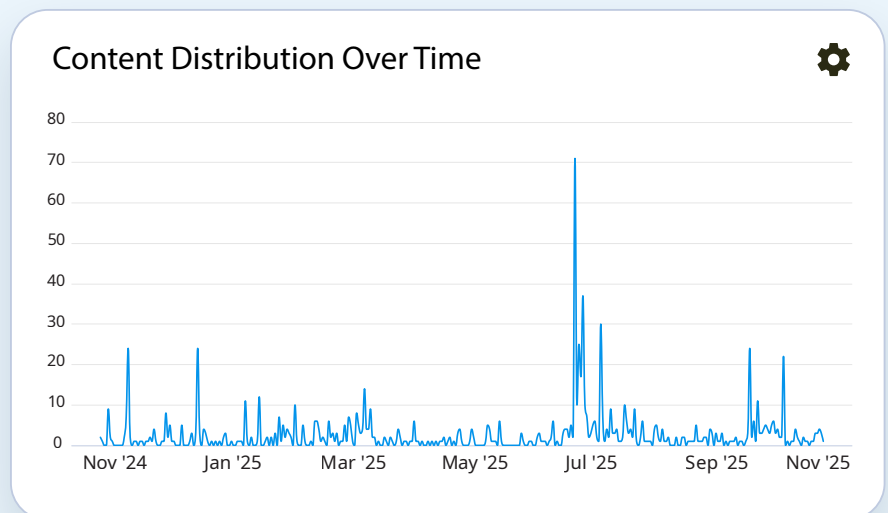


Figure 1: Major luxury fashion houses mentions over time

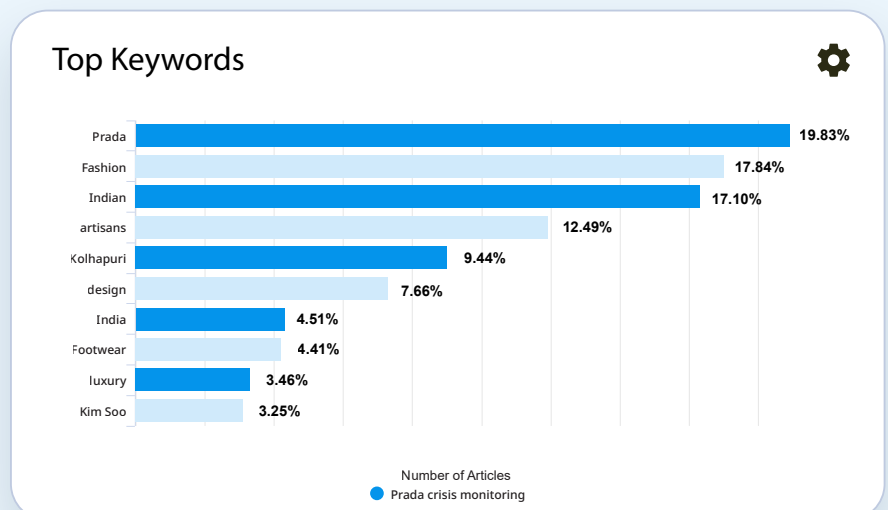


Figure 2: Top keywords in the fashion houses' coverage

Between **22 June and 30 July 2025**, online media coverage of the **controversy surrounding Prada's sandals**, inspired by the traditional Kolhapuri chappal, reached a **noticeable peak** in articles published globally in English-language sources. The most intense surge of attention occurred immediately after the pieces were showcased at Milan Fashion Week (Spring/Summer 2026 menswear) on **22 June**, followed by a second and much bigger wave of commentary triggered by the brand's formal response and outreach to Indian artisan communities around July. It is also worth noting that the controversy generated **disproportionately higher media attention** compared to other brand-related discussions during this period, underscoring its significance from

a crisis-monitoring and **reputational-risk perspective**.

The strong presence of "Prada" reflects the brand's dual role as both a trendsetter and a case study for the **evolving ethics of luxury fashion**. Its rapid acknowledgment of **Indian craftsmanship** and subsequent commitment to collaborate with local artisans following **public backlash** positioned the company at the center of debates about authenticity, transparency, and respect for cultural heritage. This moment also demonstrated how sustainability discourse in high fashion increasingly intersects with social and cultural responsibility, expanding beyond traditional environmental concerns.

The Narrative

The narrative begins with what seemed like a typical luxury-fashion launch: Prada showcased a new open-toe leather sandal during its Spring/Summer 2026 menswear show in Milan, described as a high-fashion take on a "flat" sandal. What raised eyebrows (and then sparked full-blown media attention) was how strikingly the design resembled the traditional Kolhapuri chappal from Kolhapur, Maharashtra - handcrafted, centuries old, GI-tagged, and sold in India at a fraction of the price of the luxury version. The story thereby shifted from a "new luxury sandal release" into a [broader cultural narrative](#): a clash between global luxury branding and local artisanal heritage.



As the coverage spread, the narrative layered on multiple dimensions: cultural appropriation, economic fairness, craftsmanship recognition, and supply-chain ethics. Indian artisans and trade bodies called out Prada for “monetising cultural heritage while excluding the originators” of the craft. Meanwhile Prada’s response after the big scandal online acknowledged the inspiration, opening a “dialogue” with artisan groups, and exploring a “Made in India” collaboration. Later this entered the frame as a reputational moment and potential mitigation [strategy](#). The narrative thus tracks a trajectory: from an unnoticed design launch -> to national-social and online media outrage -> to institutional calls for recognition -> to brand response, all underscored by questions about who deserves credit and benefit in the global fashion system.

Media Attention

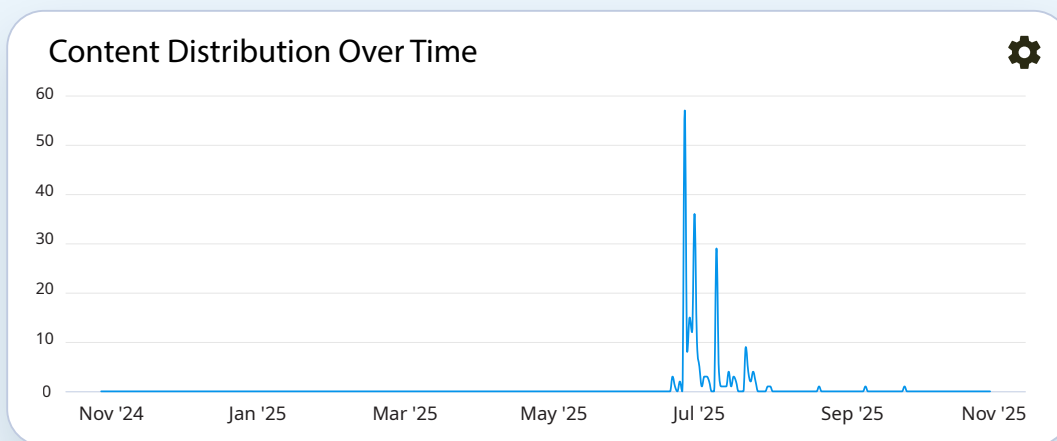


Figure 3: How media attention evolved around Prada’s Kolhapuri Controversy

The data clearly illustrates how the media attention toward Prada in the context of scandals **spiked exclusively during the Kolhapuri controversy**.

The sharp peak in late June and early July corresponds to the **public backlash** that followed the debut of the Kolhapuri-inspired sandals at Milan Fashion Week. This phase saw extensive reporting from both **international and Indian outlets**, amplifying artisan voices, political reactions, and cultural commentary. The intensity of the spike highlights the **media’s catalytic role** - transforming what began as a design criticism into a broader debate on **cultural**

appropriation, heritage recognition, and luxury ethics.

After Prada’s acknowledgment and outreach to Indian craftsmen in early July, coverage **dropped rapidly**, signaling the resolution phase typical of short-cycle reputational crises. The absence of sustained coverage after August 2025 further confirms that the controversy, while sharp, was short-lived, and that the media’s involvement was instrumental in both escalating and subsequently concluding the narrative once corporate accountability measures were communicated.



Figure 4: What conversation is about

The keyword cloud highlights the **central themes** and actors shaping the Prada–Kolhapuri conversation. The dominance of terms such as “Prada,” “Kolhapuri,” “Indian,” and “artisans” reflects how the discussion was framed around the intersection of **luxury branding and cultural heritage**. Mentions of “design,” “footwear,” and “fashion” indicate that while the controversy emerged within the fashion context, it quickly extended beyond aesthetics to questions of **authenticity and credit**.

How the Media Reacted: Sentiment Towards Prada’s Kolhapuri Sandals

Negative sentiment - This phase captured the **initial backlash**. Media and public commentators criticised Prada for introducing a high-end sandal that closely resembled the traditional Indian “Kolhapuri chappal” without giving proper credit or collaborating with the original makers. For example, one article noted: “By not calling their new line of sandals ‘Kolhapuris,’ Prada is guilty of monetising cultural appropriation.”, “The price disparity: the original craft sold locally for modest amounts whereas Prada’s version came with a luxury tag.” ([The Guardian](#))

The sentiment reflects the early wave of criticism and media scrutiny - accounting for roughly **12%** of the coverage.

Neutral sentiment - The largest slice of media coverage falls under has neutral tone towards the story. This phase reflects reporting that combined description of the facts, acknowledgment of the issue, and coverage of the unfolding response - **without strong normative judgement** (either fully condemnatory or entirely celebratory). A representative example: “The sandals, with their open-toe, braided design, looked eerily similar to Kolhapuri chappals—traditional, handmade footwear from Maharashtra ... The backlash was swift ... Prada finally admitted ... the brand is now in talks with the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce and says it’s open to collaborating with local artisans.” ([Gulf News](#)) In other words, the neutral coverage chronicled:

- ▶ The unveiling of the sandals and their resemblance to the traditional design, which received very little to no media coverage at first.

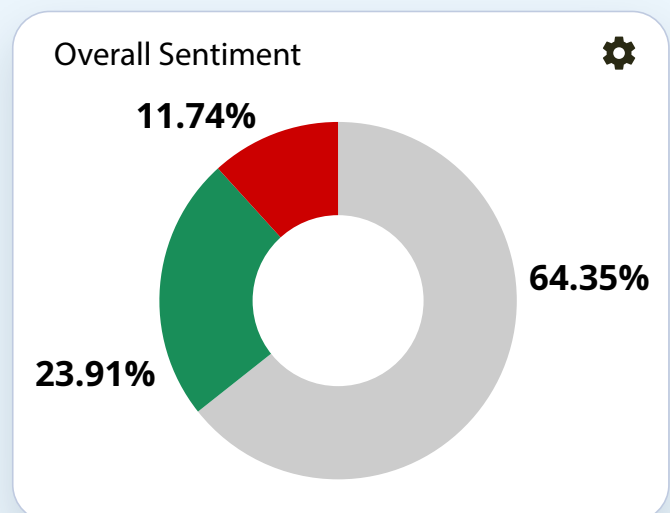


Figure 5: Overall sentiment

- ▶ The reaction - backlash, social media, artisan community concerns.
- ▶ Prada's acknowledgement and initial dialogue, after the big online response, with stakeholders, such as the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce.

In conclusion, the **64% neutral portion** captures the bulk of the media journey: from awareness to acknowledgement, but before deeper resolution or definitive positive spin.

Positive sentiment - Finally, a significant portion of the coverage shifted into a more positive light - when the narrative moved from pure controversy towards collaboration, acknowledgment of heritage, and potential responsible action. For instance, the [Business of Fashion](#) article states: "The chamber of commerce said that during the talks Prada said it aimed to launch a limited-edition "Made in India" Kolhapuri-inspired collection of sandals in partnership with Indian artisans." Key elements of the positive-tilted coverage include:

- ▶ Recognition by Prada of its inspiration and connection to Indian craft.
- ▶ Commitment to engage with local artisans and potentially co-create or license the heritage design.
- ▶ A reframing of the story from appropriation alone to heritage appreciation, possibilities of fairer partnerships and uplift for artisan communities.

Thus the **~24% positive sentiment** reflects the segment of media coverage that casts the development as a constructive turn: from controversy to engagement, dialogue and potential social value.

Conclusion

The Prada-Kolhapuri case highlights how vital crisis monitoring is in today's fast-moving digital landscape. What began as a simple product launch quickly escalated once online media amplified concerns around cultural appropriation and craftsmanship. Tracking these shifts in real time allowed the escalation - and later the resolution - to be clearly understood.

The role of online media was central: it intensified the backlash, shaped the public debate, and later helped spotlight Prada's corrective actions and engagement with Indian artisans. This shows that brand perceptions today are built and transformed through the dynamics of digital coverage.

Ultimately, the controversy demonstrates that effective brand monitoring is essential for identifying risks early, responding strategically, and managing reputation in a media environment where narratives can change within hours.

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