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THE DARK SIDE REVEALED: INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FROM ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES

Structured abstract

Purpose: There is a growing recognition of the dark side of online brand communities (OBCs). Specifically, there is concern that consumers engage in negative or deviant behaviors that undermine the community and damage the reputation of the brand. These behaviors include trolling, snarking, spreading misinformation, and mocking. This study presents a comprehensive review of the literature of the dark side of online brand communities, identifying the dominant themes (determinants of the dark side in OBCs) in the literature and proposing ways to advance literature in this area.

Design/methodology/approach: This study reviews 72 scholarly articles published between 2009–2024 in peer-reviewed journals. A descriptive and thematic analysis of dark-side literature is presented.

Findings: The contribution of this scoping review lies in identifying the dominant themes in the literature on the determinants of the dark side of online brand communities, proposing management strategies, and identifying future research directions for advancing the literature. Six main themes of the dark side of online communities were extracted: (1) information dynamics, (2) group dynamics, (3) unethical practices and brand transgression, (4) provocation and schadenfreude, (5) brand activism and hate, and (6) disengagement.

Originality: The originality of this study lies in the comprehensive analysis of the literature on the dark side of online brand communities, an area that has received limited attention. The thematic analysis reveals overarching themes in the literature and following this a discussion of the themes

with strategic brand implications are proposed. This review offer new insights that would help brands effectively manage negative aspects of customer behaviors in online brand communities.

For managers, this review enable brands to improve their image, reputation, and customer value.

Practical implications: The scoping review on the dark side of online brand communities offers several important practical implications. First, it highlights the need for brands to engage in active moderation of OBCs to maintain information credibility and manage information overload. Second, to ensure an inclusive community environment for all members brands need to foster a balanced forum culture and moderation that discourages heterogeneity.

Keywords: Online brand communities, dark side, branding, deviant behavior, trolling

1. Introduction

Online brand communities (OBCs) are specialized, non-geographical user groups that form around brands through online platforms to achieve a collective or shared goal (Coelho *et al.*, 2018). These communities have become a cornerstone of contemporary brand management strategies (Martínez-López *et al.*, 2017). OBCs facilitate direct interaction and engagement between consumers and brands, facilitating social support, information sharing and strong emotional connection between consumers and brands (Hook *et al.*, 2018; Liao *et al.*, 2020a). They reflect a broader shift from passive receivers of brand information to being active co-constructors of brand meaning and image (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). The rapid advancements of information communication technologies has led to the development of both consumer-driven and brand-driven OBC platforms (Noble *et al.*, 2012). These platforms enable brands to enhance consumer engagement and experience and leverage the community empowerment and social capital (Jeong *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen *et al.*, 2020) to foster a sense of belonging and higher brand identification, loyalty, and love (Coelho *et al.*, 2019; López *et al.*, 2017).

Despite the positive or bright aspects of these communities, there is growing recognition of their dark or negative side. Researchers indicate that OBCs can become platforms for the dissemination of misinformation, cyberbullying, and other harmful behaviors (Behl and Jain, 2023; Dineva and Daunt, 2023). The ‘dark side’ of OBCs refers to the negative or deviant customer behaviors customers engage within OBCs (Behl *et al.*, 2024). Unlike the bright side where positive interactions foster community engagement and brand loyalty, the dark side involves customer deviant behaviors that adversely impact trust and cooperation among members (Liao *et al.*, 2020b). Traditionally OBCs have been viewed as homogenous groups where shared rituals, goals, and responsibilities foster a sense of belonging among the community members (Ouwensloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008; Dessart *et al.*, 2015; 2019). These studies suggest that group

similarity, receptivity and involvement, which are key characteristics of group homogeneity enhance community identification and contribute to positive brand-related outcomes (Liao *et al.*, 2020a). However, recent studies contradict this viewpoint by demonstrating significant heterogeneity in members within these communities, which lead to anti-brand or deviant actions (Behl and Jain, 2023; Özbölük and Dursun, 2017). Conversely, group heterogeneity or diversity results in deviant behaviors, that adversely impact the ability of OBCs to achieve the intended brand-related outcomes. For example, Dineva *et al.* (2023) showed that when consumers engage in deviant behaviors like conflicts in OBCs, brands suffer from reduced credibility and higher negative word of mouth. Similarly, Do *et al.* (2024) demonstrated that negative word-of-mouth behaviors in OBCs increases psychological discomfort, which in turn leads to anti-brand activism such as brand hate. Thus, an understanding of the dark side of OBCs becomes crucial for maintaining harmony among community members and shielding brands from their adverse effects.

Research on the dark side has identified various deviant or negative customer behaviors that are detrimental to both the community and the brand. Previous studies highlight that regardless of the specific context or dynamics of each community, deviant consumer behaviors such as trolling and harassment are pervasive issues (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2021; Tse *et al.*, 2023). Azer and Alexander (2020) identified six forms of direct and indirect negatively valenced influencing behaviors, such as discrediting, deriding, regretting, dissuading, endorsing competitors, and warning on OBCs. Raut *et al.* (2023) proposed that individual and out-group conflicts evolve into schadenfreude among online community members. Dineva and Breitsohl (2022) investigating trolling, i.e., posting inflammatory or provocative messages and its management strategies in online communities. Liao and Wang (2020) found that group heterogeneity negatively affects brand commitment and self-brand connection for high symbolic brands. These studies indicate that

deviant behaviors incite conflict, rivalry, and distress among the community members and reduce trust, ultimately damaging the brand reputation and loyalty.

The growing prevalence of deviant consumer behaviors in OBC has led to its increased attention from academicians and researchers in the recent past (Behl and Jain, 2023; Dineva and Daunt, 2023). Several authors have called for further research to better understand consumer deviant behaviors and how to detect, prevent and mitigate it (Dineva and Daunt, 2023; Herhausen *et al.*, 2019). While existing studies have begun to explore a range of negative consumer behaviors prevalent in OBCs, the literature remains fragmented (Behl *et al.*, 2024). This gap is important as negative consumer behaviors pose significant challenges for members within the community and for brands. Furthermore, an in-depth understanding of such behaviors will enable brands to develop more effective and tailored strategies to manage deviant behaviors and foster a more positive and sustainable community engagement. Thus, a scoping review of the dark side of OBCs, specifically focusing on the determinants of the deviant customer behaviors within OBCs is pivotal to synthesize existing research, identify gaps in current knowledge, and recognize potential ways to address them.

By integrating findings regarding the determinants of the dark side of OBCs, this scoping review will provide a more structured and nuanced understanding of how these behaviors manifest within OBCs and identify future research directions for advancing the literature. Based on the above discussion, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) current state of research on dark side of OBCs, (2) dominant themes relating to the determinants of deviant or negative customer behaviors within OBCs, and (3) discussion of strategic brand implications and future research gaps to advance literature on the dark side of OBCs.

This study focuses on OBCs given that these communities have changed the way consumers interact with brands. They not only provide information but also actively contribute to and shape brand content, without the direct involvement of the brand (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). These communities can significantly affect how brands are perceived, making it crucial for brand managers to focus on the interactions among the members (Gong, 2017). Furthermore, the low cost of setting up and maintaining OBCs offers a strategic opportunity for brands to enhance their identity and develop customer loyalty effectively (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). While previous research has predominantly focused on its bright side, this scoping review focuses specifically on the dark side of OBCs to understand the dominant themes in the literature and propose strategic implications and future directions of research in this area.

This study considers the dark side as those deviant or negative behaviors customers engage within OBCs. This focus on the determinants of the deviant behaviors within OBCs is crucial as they directly impact the brand's reputation and loyalty, unlike those exhibited externally that are not managed by the brand or its community. Synthesizing the literature on the dark side of OBC is crucial given that failure to identify and manage customer deviant behaviors in OBCs can lead to severe consequences. It may escalate into online firestorms, where negative interactions can spread rapidly within the communities, severely impacting brand perceptions and values. Thus, understanding and addressing the dark side of OBCs is significant from not only mitigating the dark side but also to maintain the brand value and integrity.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. The next section presents the details of the scoping review method used in this study. The third section presents a descriptive analysis of the literature on the dark side of OBC followed by the findings of the thematic analysis. The final

section explores the discussion and strategic brand implications, future research agenda, and limitations of the present study.

2. Methodology

The scoping review carried out in this study followed a five-stage process (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). The stages include, (1) defining the research questions, (2) identifying studies in the selected research domain, (3) selecting the most relevant studies for review, (4) organizing and verifying the data, and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. This approach has demonstrated its effectiveness in synthesizing and disseminating research findings, as well as in assessing the need for systematic reviews (Paul *et al.*, 2021; Pham *et al.*, 2014). To enhance the rigor of article section, PRISMA guidelines was employed (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003).

Scoping reviews is an appropriate tool for covering a body of literature on a given subject or topic, providing a detailed overview of the literature landscape (Munn *et al.*, 2018). They are especially valuable for exploring emerging evidence when it is not yet clear what existing research have covered, and for developing specific questions that lead to a more precise systematic review (Paul and Criado, 2020; Paré *et al.*, 2015). These reviews present the types of evidence that inform and guide practices within a given field and elucidate the research methodologies employed (Peters *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, we chose to perform a scoping review to synthesize literature that identifies the dark side of customer deviant behaviors in OBCs. As the literature on the dark side is fragmented, a scoping review helps systematically map this diverse literature to identify key themes, concepts, and trends.

2.1. Stage 1: Defining the research questions

In the first stage of the scoping review, the research question was carefully developed to explore the dark side or deviant consumer behaviors in OBCs. This process of defining the research

question involved reviewing the relevant literature to identify significant concepts or areas such as negative interactions among community members, online negative word of mouth, misinformation, and firestorms in communities, group heterogeneity and deviant behaviors, polarization of factions, inability to control brand narrative, and exploitation by online communities (Dessart and Bressolles, 2023). These concepts or topics guided the development of our research question, focusing on the dark side of OBCs.

2.2. Stage 2: Identification of studies in the research domain

In the second stage, a key systematic keyword search was conducted across two major databases of Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) electronic databases. The search employed a combination of keywords/topics to capture the breadth of literature on the dark side of OBCs. The keywords used included “online brand communities” OR “e-commerce platforms” OR “drawbacks of virtual brand spaces” AND “negative consequences of online platforms” AND “spread of misinformation through online brand communities” AND “cyberbullying” AND “harmful behaviors such as peer pressure or groupthink”, AND “spread of misinformation.” These keywords are used to identify studies that explored the dark side of OBCs and strategies to mitigate it.

All articles indexed in in the business or management categories in both the databases were included. The search process was refined to include only articles from journals published in English, across various indices including Sci-expanded version, SSCI, AandHCI, CPCI-S, CPCI-SSH, and BKCI-S, specifically focusing on interdisciplinary studies, business management, and marketing (WoS categories). The search process concluded March 31, 2024, resulting in a corpus of articles that are further reviewed in the next stage. This approach ensures a comprehensive identification of articles in the research domain.

2.3. Stage 3: Selecting relevant studies

In this stage, the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the studies identified in the previous stages were manually screened to identify relevant articles for the scoping review. Studies that were found to be inappropriate and inconsistent with the research topic and questions were excluded. Following this, the remaining papers were meticulously analyzed to identify and assess the the dark side of OBCs. See Figure 1 for the selection process.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

2.4. Stage 4: Organizing and data charting

In this study, a total of 1,794 studies were initially identified. After removing duplicates of 21 papers, the abstracts of the remaining papers were reviewed, specifically assessing whether papers focused specifically on the dark or negative sides of OBCs. This screening led to the exclusion of 1,625 papers, leaving 148 papers in the review process. Further screening of full articles resulted in the exclusion of 79 papers. This resulted in a total of 69 relevant papers for the scoping review. Following this, we reviewed recent articles resulting in identifying three additional papers. As a result, 72 journal articles that align with the research objectives are included in the scoping review. Table 1 presents the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

2.5. Stage 5: Collating, summarizing, and reporting the results

In this last stage, researchers developed and implemented a strategic approach for presenting the findings of the study. The results are communicated in a structure format through themes, frameworks, gaps, and future scope of research. The thematic analysis was carried out using Nvivo and word cloud. Following this, approaches to address and research gaps were identified and presented. Two experts reviewed and validated the themes generated in this stage. In the following

section, the descriptive analysis of the literature is presented followed by the thematic analysis of the keywords.

3. Descriptive analysis: Trends, Theories, and Methodologies

A descriptive analysis was conducted on the 72 articles identified for the review. This analysis examined several key aspects of the studies, including (1) their aims, objectives, and key findings of the studies, (2) trends in publication by year, (3) the list of journals in which they were published, (4) the theoretical frameworks used, (5) the research approach employed, and (6) terminology used to refer to OBCs. The results of this analysis were systematically presented using comprehensive tables, trend lines, and graphs. A table summarizing the 72 papers included in the scoping review is presented in Web Appendix A.

3.1. Publication trends.

Journal articles published between 2009 and 2024 were reviewed. While studies on consumer-generated digital anti-branding and negative electronic word of mouth existed prior to 2009, there is no evidence of research specifically addressing these phenomena within the context of OBCs. Since 2009, there has been a steady stream of research, peaking remarkably with thirteen in 2020 and eleven in 2021. However, there was a noticeable decline in the number of publications on the dark side of OBCs post 2021 (while few studies addressed deviant consumer behaviors, they did not meet the selection criteria of such behaviors on OBCs). Figure 2 presents the year-wise publication trend of research on the dark side of OBCs.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

3.2. Journals

The articles selected for inclusion in the scoping review were published in 45 distinct journals that adhere to rigorous double-blind peer-review processes. These journals span a range

of disciplines, including marketing, information systems, sports management, communication, psychology, and ethics areas. The diverse range of journals highlight the multidisciplinary nature of research on the dark side of OBCs. Table 2 presents the list of journals that include the selected articles for the scoping review.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

3.3. *Theoretical frameworks*

To explore the dark side of OBCs, scholars have utilized various theoretical frameworks from diverse disciplines such as psychology, marketing, communication, persuasion, justice, sociology, philosophy, and criminology. For clarity, these theories were systematically categorized and coded in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Majority of articles employed theoretical frameworks to analyze the dark side of OBCs. This highlights a reliance on established theories to understand the research phenomenon. The articles that utilized theoretical frameworks utilized 37 different theories, suggesting a wide range of theoretical approaches. It also indicates that studies have investigated the dark side of OBCs from different perspectives. Social identity theory was the most frequently applied theory with seven articles (see code P15 in Table 3; Ewing *et al.*, 2013; Popp *et al.*, 2016; Kuo and Hou, 2017; Feng *et al.*, 2018; Popp *et al.*, 2018; Kim, 2018). Following this, social exchange theory was the next most cited theory (see code S2, P13 in Table 3; Rösner and Krämer, 2016; Kuo and Feng, 2013; Zhou *et al.*, 2019).

Additional theoretical perspectives employed include appraisal theory (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2021), balance theory (Popp *et al.*, 2018), brand culture theory (Popp *et al.*, 2018), cognitive dissonance theory (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013), community commitment theory (Zhang *et al.*, 2021),

customer compatibility management theory (Bacile, 2020), the elaboration-likelihood model, self-brand connection theory (Liao and Wang, 2020), self-categorization theory (Ewing *et al.*, 2013), self-perception theory (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013), situational crisis communication theory (Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2016), empiricist theory (Ilhan *et al.*, 2018), fairness theory (Bacile *et al.*, 2018, 2020), goal dependence theory (Relling *et al.*, 2016), justice theory (Bacile *et al.*, 2018, 2020), and other communication theories including the stereotype content model, usage and gratifications theory, and the social identity deindividuation effects model (Pantano, 2021; Rösner and Krämer, 2016). Each of these theories offer a unique lens for understanding the dark side of OBCs. Furthermore, it indicates a rich yet fragmented theoretical landscape.

3.4. Research approaches

The studies included in the review predominantly used qualitative methods, with 50 articles adopting this approach.

The qualitative studies employed a variety of methodologies. Netnography was frequently used, providing insights into interactions within OBCs (Ewing *et al.*, 2013; Husemann *et al.*, 2015; Dineva *et al.*, 2017; Burgess and Jones, 2021). Content and text analysis were also common, analyzing communication patterns in these communities (Relling *et al.*, 2016; Ilhan *et al.*, 2018; Paschen *et al.*, 2020; García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón, 2021). Other qualitative approaches included interviews, which offered nuanced understanding of the deviant behaviors (Gambetti and Graffigna, 2015; Bowden *et al.*, 2017; Demsar *et al.*, 2021), case studies that offers comprehensive and contextual insights of the negative behaviors (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010; Cova and White, 2010; Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2016), sentiment analysis to measure emotional responses (Pathak and Pathak-Shelat, 2017; Zhang *et al.*, 2021), semiotic analysis for understanding sign systems of anti-

brand communities (Kucuk, 2015), and the Delphi method for expert consensus on collaborative brand attacks (Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2016).

On the quantitative approaches, structural equation modeling was the most used technique, which helped to identify and quantify relationships between variables (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013; Jayasimha *et al.*, 2017; Bacile *et al.*, 2018; Kuchmaner *et al.*, 2019; Hayes and Carr, 2020). Regression analysis was used few researchers to understand the predictive factors of dark side of OBCs (Kuo and Feng, 2013; Relling *et al.*, 2016; Song *et al.*, 2021). Experimental surveys were also used to examine the causal relationships through controlled manipulation (Feng *et al.*, 2018; Kim, 2018; Bacile *et al.*, 2020; Sarkar *et al.*, 2021). One study also used simulated experiments which allowed for observation of deviant consumer behaviors in real-time (Zhu *et al.*, 2021). These diverse quantitative and qualitative approaches highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of research on the dark side of OBCs.

4. Thematic Analysis: Key Themes and Dynamics

The thematic analysis was carried out to identify prevalent themes in literature on the dark side of OBCs. Six key themes were extracted: (1) information dynamics, (2) group dynamics, (3) unethical practices and brand transgression, (4) provocation and schadenfreude, (5) brand activism and hate, and (6) disengagement (see Figure 3). These themes represent the determinants of the dark side of OBCs. These themes reflect underlying factors that contribute to the customer deviant behaviors and challenges faced by brands in managing OBCs.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

4.1. Information dynamics

Two key determinants or antecedents of consumer engagement in the dark side of OBCs were identified in the thematic analysis: information overload and information credibility (see

Figure 4). OBCs typically include a vast amount of information, including product reviews, discussions, comments, and promotional materials (Herhausen *et al.*, 2019). This overload of diverse information can overwhelm consumers and obscure critical brand information diluting the meaningful content on OBCs (Kucuk, 2015). Furthermore, the plurality of the information and voices on these communities result in information overload. In such situations, consumers do not elaborate their arguments and resort to heuristic processing. This can foster misunderstandings and misinformation, which results in conflicts and encouraging negative or deviant behaviors on OBCs (Herhausen *et al.*, 2019). In addition to information overload, information credibility significantly influences consumer deviant behaviors in OBCs (Liao and Wang, 2020).

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

As information is abundant in OBCs, the authenticity and reliability of information becomes crucial. Misleading or inaccurate information can impact consumer trust and perceptions of brands (Liao and Wang, 2020). When consumers encounter information that appears deceptive or inconsistent with their expectations, it can foster negative behaviors such as public criticism, anti-brand activities, and brand rejection (Dessart *et al.*, 2020; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). As trust is the cornerstone of consumer engagement in OBCs, misinformation or lack of information credibility can lead to brand skepticism and negative behaviors (Noble *et al.*, 2012; Verhagen *et al.*, 2013). Thus, understanding and addressing the challenges posed by information overload and credibility in OBCs is essential for brands to leverage the positive outcomes of these communities.

4.2. Group dynamics

The second key thematic finding involves two crucial group factors driving consumer engagement in the dark side of OBCs: intergroup favoritism and out-group hostility (see Figure 5). The advancement of technology and the proliferation of web 2.0 applications has transformed

consumers from passive receivers of brand communication to active co-creators of brand information (Peeroo *et al.*, 2017). This has significantly increased the role of group dynamics as consumer engage on platforms like social media, where they share and discuss brand-related information (Liao and Wang, 2020; Liao *et al.*, 2019). These dynamics not only facilitates collaboration and community development but also increases the potential for conflicts between different brand communities (Dineva *et al.*, 2017; Husemann *et al.*, 2015). Thus, group dynamics plays a key role in consumer engagement in the dark side of OBCs.

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

In-group favoritism is the tendency to evaluate one's group more favorably than those in other groups. While in-group favoritism increases consumers' self-esteem it can lead to bias and competitive behavior (Ewing *et al.*, 2013; Kim, 2018). Previous research using games such as dictator games have showed how in-group favoritism results in deviant consumer behaviors (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013; Jayasimha *et al.*, 2017). This is because consumers often prioritize the interest of their own group over those of outsiders, leading to conflicts and anti-brand activities (Behl and Jain, 2023; Dessart *et al.*, 2020). Few researchers have used games to explore consumer discrimination resulting from in-group favoritism (Zhu *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, in-group favoritism can evolve into collection actions, resulting in anti-brand activities (Kucuk, 2015).

Out-group hostility emerges when the identity and interests of one community is in conflict with those of others (Hickman and Ward, 2013). Such hostilities can manifest in partisanship that results in defensive battles between groups (Beheshti *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, it could lead to negative behaviors, such as exchange of derogatory comments, snark, or sarcasm (Hayes and Carr, 2020). Previous research has highlighted that high levels of identification with a brand community can increase conflicts, leading members to engage in hostile actions against out-group members

and communities (; Kim, 2018). Additionally, the issue of involvement and moral identity of members significantly influence the extent of incivility and deviant behaviors displayed towards out-group members (Kim, 2018; Sharma *et al.*, 2020b). These dynamics demonstrate the complex interplay between group identity, consumer behavior, and brand strategy in OBCs. Understanding and managing these group dynamics is crucial for brands that foster positive community interactions and manage risks associated with the consumer engagement with the dark side of OBCs.

4.3. Unethical practices and transgression

The third key thematic finding explores the unethical firm behavior and brand transgression in OBCs (see Figure 6). Brand actions that are perceived as unethical and transgressions, such as corporate greed, misleading marketing practices or communication, failure to meet consumer expectations, or breach of trust, can adversely impact brand reputation and lead to negative consumer behaviors (Peeroo *et al.*, 2017; Cova and D'Antone, 2016; Sharma *et al.*, 2020b). Research has identified several areas where unethical practices are particularly detrimental to OBCs. For example, market concerns, such as unfair pricing and lack of fairness in competition, marketing actions, such as deceptive advertising and misleading product claims, and service issues like delay in service delivery and failures in product quality (Ilhan *et al.*, 2018; Noble *et al.*, 2012; Peeroo *et al.*, 2017) can increase consumer dissatisfaction, reduce trust, and lead to deviant behaviors. These unethical practices and transgression can evoke strong emotional reactions, significantly impact consumer behavior in OBCs (Husemann *et al.*, 2015). The perception of injustice or ethical failure by a brand not only increases conflicts but also leads to destructive consumer behaviors. Community members may show their displeasure through anti-brand activities and support competing brands (Ilhan *et al.*, 2018). Though emotional reactions are not

emphasized much in the literature, some scholars emphasize the importance of understanding how emotions play an important role in explaining consumer deviant behaviors.

[Insert Figure 6 about here]

4.4. *Provocation and schadenfreude*

The fourth key thematic finding explores the roles of provocation and schadenfreude in OBCs (see Figure 7). These social factors significantly impacts interpersonal interactions, social dynamics, and community engagement. While OBCs foster increased consumer engagement and loyalty, they also lead to negative behaviors such as retaliation, trolling, and aggression (Yoon Lee *et al.*, 2021). Schadenfreude is the pleasure obtained from the misfortunes of others. This complex psychological phenomenon has attracted increased attention in recent past because it is the antithesis of empathy (Behl and Jain, 2023). Schadenfreude manifests through mocking, snarky (sarcastic) comments, or making fun of out-group members (Demsar *et al.*, 2021; Hayes and Carr, 2020). Previous studies suggest that consumers display varying degree of schadenfreude in response to misfortunes of ingroup and outgroup members. This variance is closely related to social identity theory, which proposes that consumers derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups (Hayes and Carr, 2020). Thus, schadenfreude leads to negative out-group messages or snark about a competitor brand (Lee *et al.*, 2021).

[Insert Figure 7 about here]

Provocation in OBCs often emerge from consumers' heightened sense of identity and belonging. This leads to disparaging, offensive, or even aggressive comments aimed at the rival groups. Members could display provocative behaviors using humor or parody to hide their antagonistic intent (Larson and Salvador, 2021). While such provocative behaviors may confirm to their group identity it could also increase conflicts, leading to sustained campaign against rival

brands and their communities (Dineva *et al.*, 2017). The anonymity offered by online platforms can exacerbate these provocative behaviors, encouraging consumers to engage in more deviant behaviors with any repercussions (Liao and Wang, 2020). Moreover, the emotional support from in-group members often justifies these provocations, as members feel empowered to mock those from rival groups. This behavior is driven by positive differentiation, where consumers actively display their strength to enhance self-esteem and group status (Sun and Shen, 2021).

4.5. Brand activism and hate

The fifth key thematic finding explores brand activism and brand hate in OBCs (see Figure 8). Consumer activism refers to initiatives or efforts taken by brands to publicly support, advocate, or oppose social, political, environmental, or economic issues that resonate with their values (Romani *et al.*, 2015). If brands effectively leverage their activism it can serve as a powerful tool for customer engagement (Dessart *et al.*, 2020). OBCs enable brands to actively communicate about their activism initiatives, share progress, and engage community members in supporting the causes (Do *et al.*, 2024). This enables brands to attract like-minded consumers and those who appreciate the value and mission of the brand. However, the social dynamics of these communities can also give rise to brand hate, especially when consumer expectations are not met (Curina *et al.*, 2020). Brands with high OBC network density are vulnerable to consumer backlash and hate if they fail to maintain the values they support. According to Kuchmaner *et al.* (2019), consumers in dense networks are more likely to punish brands perceived as inauthentic or inconsistent in their activism efforts. The impact of brand activism and brand hate is further demonstrated by consumer deviant behaviors in response to perceived brand transgressions (Cocker *et al.*, 2021). When brands do not perform as expected or betray trust, consumers can quickly mobilize and share their discontentment in their OBC. This collective behavior highlights the critical need for brands to

maintain consistency between their values and actions, as any deviations can lead to significant brand hate and negative consumer-brand relationship.

[Insert Figure 8 about here]

4.6. *Customer Disengagement*

Disengagement represents a crucial thematic finding of this scoping review on the dark side of OBC (see Figure 9). OBCs provide significant opportunities for brands to engage with customers, several factors can lead to disengagement (Ilhan *et al.*, 2018). However, several factors can stimulate disengagement, a process where consumers withdraw their participation due to dissatisfaction or disinterest (Sarkar *et al.*, 2021). Consumers typically engage in these communities to exchange knowledge, share enthusiasm, and engage socially for various rewards and recognitions. However, disengagement can occur when consumers feel their contributions are undervalued or ignored, when their ideas are not rewarded, or when their concerns remain unaddressed (Burgess and Jones, 2020). This lack of closure and feeling of unhappiness can lead to a reduced sense of belonging and commitment (Zhou *et al.*, 2019). While disengagement may provide some relief for consumers to gather thought and feelings to change their future behavior, it is a maladaptive behavior that negatively affects consumers relationship with brands (Veloutsou and Ruiz-Mafé, 2020). It influences broader community dynamics, as dissatisfied members share their negative experience with others. This leads to further disengagement among community members (Sarkar *et al.*, 2021).

[Insert Figure 9 about here]

5. Discussion and Strategic Brand Implications

This scoping review aims to explore the landscape of research on the dark side of OBCs. This review identified six pivotal themes that shape or determine consumer deviant or negative

behaviors in OBCs. The thematic findings highlight the nuanced interplay between information dynamics, group dynamics, unethical practices, provocation and schadenfreude, brand activism, and consumer disengagement. Each theme emphasizes distinct challenges and potential risks brands face in managing OBCs. In the following sections, the discussion of each theme along with the strategic brand implications are presented.

5.1. Managing information dynamics in the dark side of OBCs

The thematic analysis identified information overload and credibility as key information dynamics influencing the dark side of OBCs. The vast amount of information available in OBCs overwhelms consumers that dilutes the effectiveness of brand-generated content and may lead to information fatigue (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010). Similarly, when the information in these communities lack credibility, it directly impacts consumer trust and brand perceptions (Liao and Wang, 2020). Such situations triggers a coping mechanism where consumers may create their own narratives or create sub-communities, where conversations are manageable (Ilhan *et al.*, 2018). While these sub-communities can become platforms for sharing grievances and voicing concerns, they also represent a double-edged sword. On one hand, they challenge the status quo of how brands are represented, which can foster negative behaviors (Kuo and Feng, 2013; Verhagen *et al.* 2013). On the other hand, they empower consumers by facilitating consumer-to-consumer support dynamics. Thus, empowerment enables community members to leverage the collective expertise and experience of fellow consumers to seek solutions to problem products, share tips, troubleshoot issues, and even co-create innovative solutions by utilizing the collective expertise and experience of fellow consumers (Kristal *et al.*, 2018).

It is critical for brands to understand and address the challenges posed by information overload and credibility to effectively leverage OBCs. By adopting strategies that enhance clarity

of communication and ensure information credibility, brands can mitigate the risk of consumers engaging in negative behaviors on OBCs (Kucuk, 2008). Such communication strategies empowers consumers and foster a collaborative environment that benefits both the brand and its community members. Furthermore, brands should not view these consumer-led brand communities as threats but rather consider them as valuable mechanisms (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). As these communities provide insights into consumer expectations and experiences, brands can engage community members to co-create content and transform negative interactions into opportunities for improving the brand, enhance community engagement, and developing long-term consumer-brand relationships (Lee and Hsieh, 2022).

5.2. Mitigating group dynamics in OBCs

This study identified group dynamics of in-group favoritism and out-group hostilities as key social determinants of the dark side of OBCs. These group dynamics reveals significant challenges for brands, especially for maintaining group harmony and fostering positive interactions among members in the communities (Do *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, research reveals that these group dynamics could lead to rivalry and conflict between brand communities, which manifests in the form of humor, epithets, ridicule, malice, and hostility (Ewing *et al.*, 2013). Social identity and social comparison theories provide a theoretical framework for understanding how group dynamics leads to potential feelings of envy and hostility toward out-group members (Kim, 2018). These theories suggest that consumers are likely to prototypical in-group members while stereotype out-group members as less trustworthy. This exacerbates conflicts and promotes a culture of exclusion and bullying (Ounvorawong *et al.*, 2022), undermining the integrity of the community and brand reputation.

To effectively manage group dynamics in OBCs and mitigate the dark side effects of in-group favoritism and out-group hostilities, brands can implement several measures. They should establish clear guidelines and consistent moderation policies in brand-related communities. They can also reward members for engaging in polite interactions in communities (Davvetas *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, brands can implement inclusivity and mixed group challenges that reduces out-group stereotyping. Emphasizing shared values strengthens community identity and offering conflict resolution mechanism can transform community members into brand ambassadors (Dineva and Daunt, 2023). Tailoring communication strategies that respect culture and individual differences increase trust and acceptance of out-group members. These comprehensive measures addresses the challenges posed by negative group dynamics by turning potential conflicts between rival brand communities into opportunities for fostering a collaborative environment.

5.3. Managing unethical practices and brand transgressions in OBCs

The review of literature on the dark side of OBCs revealed that unethical firm practices and brand transgressions, such as false advertising, misleading claims, exaggerated product claims, and failure to meet consumer expectations, create moral dilemmas among the members of OBC (Peeroo *et al.*, 2017). These unethical practices and transgressions mislead consumers, violate ethical standards, and undermine the credibility of the brand (Cova and D'Antone, 2016; Sharma *et al.*, 2020a). It may result in customer dissatisfaction and distrust. Furthermore, the discussion of these factors in OBCs can escalate to public outcry, brand hate, and brand boycotts (Kumar *et al.*, 2023; Ruppel and Einwiller, 2021). Thus, unethical behaviors and brand transgressions may extend beyond individual negative experiences to affect community-wide engagement and deviant behaviors.

Brands should effectively manage the negative outcomes of unethical practices and brand transgressions on OBCs. They must establish a transparent communication strategy by ensuring rigorous guidelines for advertising and information dissemination. Brands should ensure all their communications are accurate and truthful to avoid misleading claims or unethical practices (Yang and Battocchio, 2021). Moreover, brands should establish a strong moderation system to mitigate the risks associated with misleading claims or unethical practices. By regularly training community managers on ethical practices and crisis management, brands can further maintain the integrity of community interactions (Miliopoulou, 2021). Open channels for customer feedback and providing timely responses to grievances can help restore trust and prevent escalation of dissatisfaction and unethical practices into boycotts or public crisis (Kumar and Kaushal, 2023). By integrating ethical practices in community management, brands can protect their reputation and encourage positive and healthy interactions among the community members.

5.4. Addressing provocation and schadenfreude in OBCs

The thematic analysis revealed that provocation and schadenfreude are key factors influencing negative consumer behaviors in OBCs. Provocation, manifested through trolling and aggression, can cause emotional arousal disrupting harmony within OBC (Demsar *et al.*, 2021). These provocations can cause flame wars, turning OBCs into battlegrounds where constructive brand discussions are sidelined (Koiranen *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, schadenfreude can fuel a hostile community environment, encouraging members to engage in contentious and disruptive interactions (Au and Ho, 2022). Such behaviors can adversely impact the brand image and community integrity. To mitigate these negative consumer behaviors, brands can implement advanced monitoring tools to detect early signs of provocation and schadenfreude and address them before escalation. Furthermore, they can educate community members about the negative

outcomes of provocations and schadenfreude and help develop empathy among members (Bacile *et al.*, 2024). Gamifications and rewards can also be used to encourage positive interactions and constructive contributions (Zhu *et al.*, 2021). Finally, developing dedicated channels to report provocations and schadenfreude can help mitigate deviant consumer behaviors discreetly.

5.5. Mitigating brand activism and hate in OBCs

Brand activism can serve as a double-edged sword, which attracts customers who share similar values while provoking hate among those who disagree (Do *et al.*, 2024). Thus, brand activism may be viewed by some as brand advocacy while others may view the actions as polarizing with their personal beliefs. Thus, brand activism can foster loyalty and hate (Lima *et al.*, 2022; Warke *et al.*, 2022). To manage the adverse effects of brand activism and resulting hate, brands should present activism as an inclusive strategy that benefits society rather than their own cause (Costa and Azevedo, 2023). They could also foster a culture of open dialogue encouraging members to be respectable in their interactions and moderate discussions that reduce misconceptions about the brand's activism efforts (Felix, 2012). Additionally, providing clarity can help mitigate the perceptions of bias and manipulation, making brand efforts more understandable and acceptable to its diverse customers.

5.6. Managing Customer Disengagement on OBC

Addressing customer disengagement in OBCs is crucial for maintaining brand loyalty. Disengagement occurs when members become less active or completely inactive due to a perceived lack of value or relevance in the interactions in OBCs. Effective management strategies can mitigate this by emphasizing real-time engagement and demonstrating brand responsibility. Brands can share real-time updates and success stories within OBCs to showcase their commitment to community values (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013). They should keep the content fresh and engaging

and reinforces the presence and investment of the brand in the community. Moreover, highlighting tangible outcomes, such as product improvements or price reductions, can increase interest and participation from those who are disengaged (Kamboj and Rahman, 2017a). Additionally, Wirtz *et al.* (2013) suggest that the use of new and affordable platforms that facilitate community interactions at low cost. These platforms can be personalized to enhance customer experience and provide new ways for customers to interact with each other and the brand (Roy Bhattacharjee *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, fostering a sense of shared purpose and community can mitigate customer disengagement. Pathak and Pathak-Shelat (2017) emphasize the importance of creating a community ethos where members feel a shared connection to the brand and each other. This can be achieved through consistent engagement strategies that encourage user participation in discussions, feedback sharing, and community-driven projects.

6. Theoretical Contributions

The scoping review on the dark side of online brand communities (OBCs) makes several key theoretical contributions. First, the review contributes to a nuanced understanding of dark side of the OBCs, as the majority of previous research focuses on the positive or bright side of OBCs. Furthermore, we focus on the negative or deviant behaviors customer exhibit within OBCs. While recent research indicates that heterogeneity in these communities can lead to conflicting behaviors and anti-brand activities (Behl and Jain, 2023; Özbölük and Dursun, 2017), it is highly fragmented. This study contributes to this literature by developing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research on OBCs. Second, the identification of specific themes such as information dynamics, group dynamics, *provocation and schadenfreude*, *brand activism and hate*, and disengagement, in the dark side of the OBCs, provides an in-depth understanding of factors driving customer deviant behaviors in OBCs (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013; Cheung *et al.*, 2022). Finally,

this study proposes strategic implications for brands in managing OBCs (Herhausen *et al.*, 2019; Husemann *et al.*, 2015). This enable brands to mitigate consumer conflicts, build harmony, and develop community engagement and consumer loyalty. This contribution is particularly crucial for brands seeking to leverage OBCs for sustainable brand growth and positive consumer engagement.

7. Future Research Agenda

A research agenda was developed to identify management or regulation strategies to understand when customers may engage in deviant behaviors and avoid the dark side or deviance from spiraling out in OBC. Overall, a proactive approach to community management is necessary to achieve these objectives. In Table 4, the research questions to guide future researchers were presented.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

7.1. Future directions: theory

Firstly, this study revealed a major deficit with the application of sociological, crime, and communication theories. Furthermore, many scholars used constructs from social identity theory (Ewing *et al.*, 2013; Popp *et al.*, 2016; Kuo and Hou, 2017; Feng *et al.*, 2018; Popp *et al.*, 2018; Kim, 2018). Social exchange theory was the most cited after social identity theory (Kuo and Feng, 2013; Zhou *et al.*, 2019). According to Kuo and Feng (2013), the formation of oppositional brand loyalty in online brand communities is influenced by community commitment when applied to existing knowledge of relational marketing. It is important to note, however, that their study could only explain 10% variance in oppositional brand loyalty, and other factors may also play a role. Therefore, further research is needed into oppositional brand loyalty in online brand communities.

According to social identity theory, individuals who support a brand develop a sense of belonging to its community through participation in it. Participants favor the in-group and view

the out-group as inferior to boost their confidence and self-esteem (Schouten *et al.*, 2007; Manchanda *et al.*, 2015). In this study, it was observed that identifying with a brand community influences community members' commitment to the brand and self-brand connection. In the future, higher brand commitment and self-brand connection will result in higher oppositional loyalty. It is possible that members of OBCs develop a strong sense of identification with their own group (the ingroup) and are negatively disposed toward members of other groups (outgroups). Creating an "us vs. them" mentality is a result of ingroup bias, which can cause hostility, prejudice, and discrimination toward members of outgroups. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers adopt theoretical constructs from social identity theory, social exchange theory, and social information processing theories to identify the factors that influence incivility and trolling in dyadic situations (between a brand and a customer; Lima *et al.*, 2022).

7.2. Future directions: context

The contextual factors can be described in three main themes: the presence of unlimited information in OBC, brand switching intentions in OBC, and disengagement in OBC.

When considering the factor on the presence of unlimited information in OBC, identifying effective strategies for managing the overload of information within OBCs is important as strong brands are more prone to anti-brand websites, thereby impacting brand value (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Using this stream of literature, the present study focused on subjective heterogeneity, also referred to as perceived group heterogeneity, which can be defined as the degree to which a person perceives that community members are diverse according to the differences that seem most pronounced (Liao and Wang, 2020). Content-recommendation algorithms, user interfaces, or community-driven approaches may be studied to assist members in finding and prioritizing information. Customers increasingly rely on online communities for

advice regarding product purchases and service issues in the age of information (Husemann *et al.*, 2015; Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2016; Peeroo *et al.*, 2017).

It is recommended that an OBC be constructed in order to accommodate consumers' informational needs. The smartphone industry should be aware of the negative impact of OBCs, as group heterogeneity may have a negative effect on consumers' brand commitment. In their capacity as publicly consumed products, smartphones, particularly those of the luxury variety, convey symbolic meanings about their owners. The meaning of such symbolic brands may be greatly influenced by the users of those brands. The availability of unlimited information in OBCs creates ambiguity in consumer acceptance. Researchers should investigate how OBC users process information (Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2016; Peeroo *et al.*, 2017). Research is needed to verify the effect of organizational feedback on perceived credibility of user-generated content (Bacile *et al.*, 2018, 2020).

Managing brand-switching intentions, explains the motives of consumers who openly state their brand-switching intentions in OBCs may be deciphered using real customer insights from interviews and focus groups (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013; Brandão and Popoli, 2022). Taking a practitioner's perspective on the phenomenon would also provide valuable insights, pointing the way to future directions of research (e.g., managerial interviews on how to attenuate the effect of overt behavior in OBCs through managerial interviews). As Verhagen *et al.* (2013) as well as Huang *et al.* (2022) have shown, oppositional loyalty is beneficial for the focal brand as it involves negative stereotypes of the competing brand and the fans of the competing brand (Huang *et al.*, 2022; Peeroo *et al.*, 2017). Out-group hate is a function of brand choice, and it entails trash-talking about not only brands, but also their admirers within a community (e.g., gender, religion, caste, race; Aziz and Rahman, 2022; Huang *et al.*, 2022). Future research can address whether negative

out-group ratings promote competition or social harm (Peeroo *et al.*, 2017; Huang *et al.*, 2022). To do so, future research could adopt theoretical lenses of group rivalry theory, fan psychology, and motivational theory constructs.

Disengagement in OBC, when considering the role of cultural dimensions in consumer participation, studies have captured conflict cultures and management in OBCs and generalized their findings across contexts (e.g., country, cultures; Husemann *et al.*, 2015; Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2016; Peeroo *et al.*, 2017). Several studies have examined disengagement in OBCs when considering how cultural dimensions affect consumer participation (e.g., country, cultures; Husemann *et al.*, 2015; Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2016; Peeroo *et al.*, 2017) and generalized their findings across contexts. Further this scoping review has identified the incivility and trolling in OBCs (Wang, 2020). Researchers have only examined incivility and trolling discourses in OBCs in dyadic and triadic contexts (Bacile *et al.*, 2018; Warke *et al.*, 2022). As a result of real-life incivility and trolling incidents, the online space features numerous uncivil customers, comments, trolling actors, and organizational responses (Golf-Papez and Veer, 2022; Warke *et al.*, 2022). A significant amount of research is needed to produce novel insights that capture the essence of real incivility and trolling discourses (Warke *et al.*, 2022). Thus, future scholars may extend the research beyond dyadic and triadic perspectives.

7.3. Future directions: methodology

Future research could gather real data on users' information-cognition processes. The qualitative interpretivist methods such as in-depth interviews would be helpful. For example, researchers are able to capture detailed and contextually rich data by conducting in-depth interviews with participants. This allows researchers to delve deeply into the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is important for participants to have the opportunity to express

themselves in their own words, thereby providing nuanced insights that cannot be captured by quantitative methods alone (Aziz and Rahman, 2022). Using an analytical/empirical design to investigate how managerial feedback shapes consumers' perceptions of a source seems ideal (Aziz and Rahman, 2022). An experimental survey design could enhance research findings by using a web-based scenario vignette as a stimulus, followed by a survey questionnaire (Huang *et al.*, 2022). It is evident that online communities are dynamic and multifaceted environments, and in-depth interviews enable researchers to explore the complexities of user behavior, interactions, and relationships within these communities in an in-depth manner. In order to understand underlying motivations and meanings of participants' attitudes, beliefs, and decision-making processes, researchers can probe deeper into their attitudes, beliefs, and decision-making processes.

8. Limitations

This scoping review, while provides a comprehensive analysis of the literature on the dark side of OBCs, presents several limitations. First, this review focuses on deviant behaviors within OBCs. Considering that consumers may also engage in similar behaviors outside of these communities, future studies could carry out a more comprehensive investigation of the dark side both within and outside of OBCs. Second, the present review primarily identifies the determinants of customer deviant or negative behaviors in OBCs. Future research could employ frameworks such as the ADO-TCM to more comprehensively review the antecedents, mechanisms, outcomes, moderators of the dark side of OBCs. Finally, although this study presents strategic brand implications, subsequent research should carry out an in-depth analysis of how these implications can be effectively implemented to mitigate deviant behaviors within OBCs, ensuring healthy interactions within community members and enhancing community engagement and brand loyalty.

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Tables

Table 1: The inclusion and exclusion criteria	
<i>Inclusion criteria</i>	<i>Exclusion criteria</i>
Studies conducted during the period of 2009 to 2024	Studies which did not conducted during the period of 2009 to 2024
Journals ranked B or above in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) ranking, or Q3 or above in the SCImago Journal ranking	Journals ranked in C in the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) ranking, or Q4 in the SCImago Journal ranking
Journal articles published in English language	journal articles published in non-English language
Articles published in business management and marketing journals	Articles published in computer science, education, and psychology journals

Table 2: List of Journals

<i>Journal Name</i>	<i>No of articles</i>	<i>Journal name</i>	<i>No of articles</i>
Business horizons	1	Journal of Global Marketing	1
Computers in Human Behavior	1	Journal of Interactive Marketing	2
Computers in Human Behaviour	1	Journal of Marketing	1
Consumption, Markets and Culture	1	Journal of Marketing Management	4
Corporate Communications: An International Journal	1	Journal of Product & Brand Management	2
Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	1	Journal of Product and Brand Management	1
European Journal of Marketing	5	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	4
Information & Management	1	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	2
Information Processing & Management	1	Journal of Service Management	4
International Journal of Electronic Commerce	1	Journal of Service Theory and Practice	1
International Journal of Hospitality Management	1	Journal of Strategic Marketing	1
International Journal of Information Management	1	Journal of Brand Management	2
International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	1	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	1
International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	1	Marketing Theory	2
Internet Research	2	Mass Communication & Society	1
Journal of Business Ethics	2	Online Information Review	1
Journal of Business Ethics	1	Psychology & Marketing	2
Journal of Business Research	6	Social Behavior and Personality	1
Journal of Consumer Affairs	1	Social Media and Society	1
Journal of Consumer Marketing	1	Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC	1
Journal of Consumer Research	1	Sport Management Review	1
Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising	2	Telematics and Informatics	1
Journal of Electronic Commerce Research	1		

Table 3: List of Theories

<i>Theories and models</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Publication</i>	<i>Theories and models</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Publication</i>
Appraisal Theory	P1	Delgado-Ballester et al. (2021)	Schadenfreude	Ph2	Hayes and Carr (2020)
Balance Theory	P2	Popp et al. (2018)	Self-Brand Connection Theory	P9	Liao and Wang (2020)
Big 5 Personality Traits Model	P3	Yoon Lee et al. (2021)	Self-Categorization Theory	P10	Ewing et al. (2013)
Brand Culture Theory	M1	Ewing et al. (2013)	Self-Perception Theory	P11	Verhagen et al. (2013)
Cognitive Dissonance Theory	P4	Verhagen et al. (2013)	Service-Dominant Logic	M5	Cova and White (2010)
Community Commitment Theory	P5	Zhang et al. (2021)	Situational Crisis Communication Theory	C1	Rauschnabel et al. (2016)
Consumer-Brand Relationships Model	M2	Dessart et al. (2020)	Social Comparison Theory	P12	Ewing et al. (2013)
Customer Compatibility Management Theory	M3	Bacile (2020)	Social Exchange Theory	S2, P13	Kuo and Feng (2013); Zhou et al. (2019); Hou and Zhang (2021)
Elaboration-Likelihood Model	Pr1	Larson and Salvador (2020)	Social Identity Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) Model	P14, C2	Rosner and Kramer (2016)
Empiricis Theory	Ph1	Ilhan et al. (2018)	Social Identity Theory	P15	Hickman and Ward (2013); Ewing et al. (2013); Popp et al. (2016); Kuo and Hou (2017); Feng et al. (2018); Popp et al. (2018); Kim (2018)
Expectation-Confirmation Model	M4	Liang et al. (2019)	Social Information Processing Theory	C3	Wang (2020)
Fairness Theory	J1	Bacile (2018); Bacile et al. (2020)	Social Movement Theory	S3	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010)

Goal Dependence Theory	P6	Relling et al. (2016)	Social Sharing Theory	P16	Verhagen et al. (2013); Abro et al. (2020)
Grounded Theory	G1	Ozbuluk and Dursun (2017)	Sociological Theory	S4	Husemann et al. (2015)
Justice Theory	J2	Bacile (2018); Bacile et al. (2020)	Stereotype Content Model	P17	Hickman and Ward (2013)
Moral Identity Theory	P7	Sharma et al. (2020a); Sharma et al. (2020b)	Usage and Gratifications Theory	C4	Relling et al. (2016)
Moral Judgement Theory	J3	Sharma et al. (2020a)	Value Co-creation Theory	M6	Gambetti and Graffigna (2015)
Practice Theory	S1	Cruz et al., (2018)	Routine Activity Theory	Cr1	Golf-Papez and Veer (2017)
Regulatory Focus Theory	P8	Wang et al. (2021)			

Note: Psychology theories (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17); Marketing theories (M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6); Persuasion theory (Pr1); Philosophical theories (Ph1, Ph2); Justice theories (J1, J2, J3); Grounded theory (G1); Sociological theories (S1, S2, S3, S4); Crime theory (Cr1); Communication theories (C1, C2, C3, C4)

Table 4: Potential research areas and questions to advance the field of dark side of OBC

<i>Topics</i>	<i>Major Themes</i>	<i>Future research questions</i>
<i>Future directions based on the Theory</i>		
Theoretical foundation	Interlink with communication theories to evaluate persuasion, memory, recognition skills in order to assess the factors and effects of electronic word-of-mouth when a firm suffers threats regarding the brand activism The consumers' information cognition processes in online product forums based on social cognition theories	- How can communication theories be extended to explain consumer social cognition stages such as (persuasion, memory, recognition skills) to evaluate the effects of harmful electronic word-of-mouth when a firm suffers threats regarding the brand activism ? - How can social psychology theories be extended to explain consumers' information cognition processes in online product forums?
<i>Future directions based on the Context</i>		
False news circulation through social media	There is a need for more research on a proactive approach to community management within the OBC	- Can OBC via e-commerce platforms be affected by factors such as gossip-sharing behavior, fear of missing out, and social media fatigue?
<i>Future directions based on the Method</i>		
Nature of method applied	Need for more research based on quantitative techniques	- Can empirical researchers expand the current knowledge of OBC into brand messaging and dimensions?

Figures

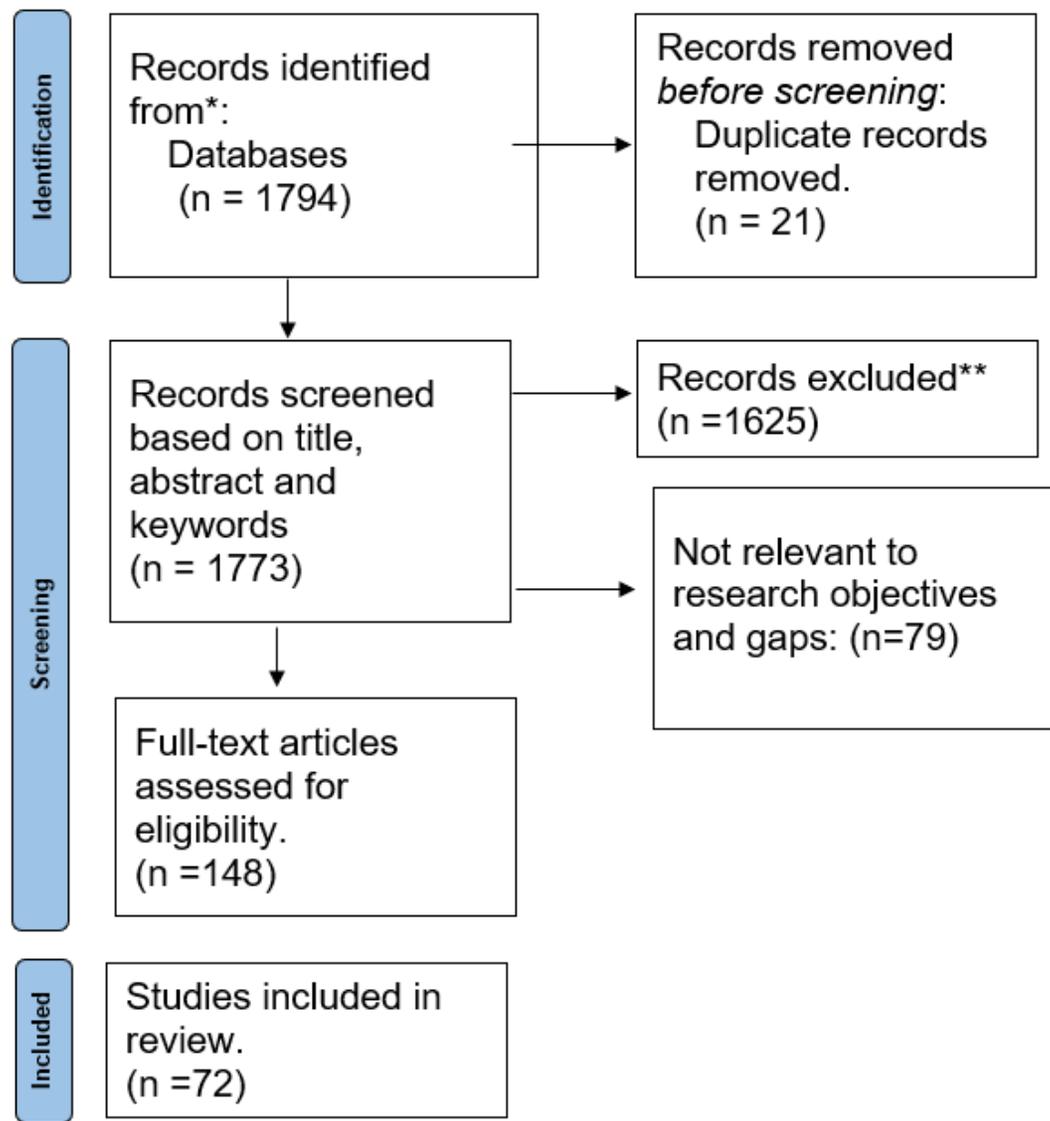


Figure 1: Data Selection Process

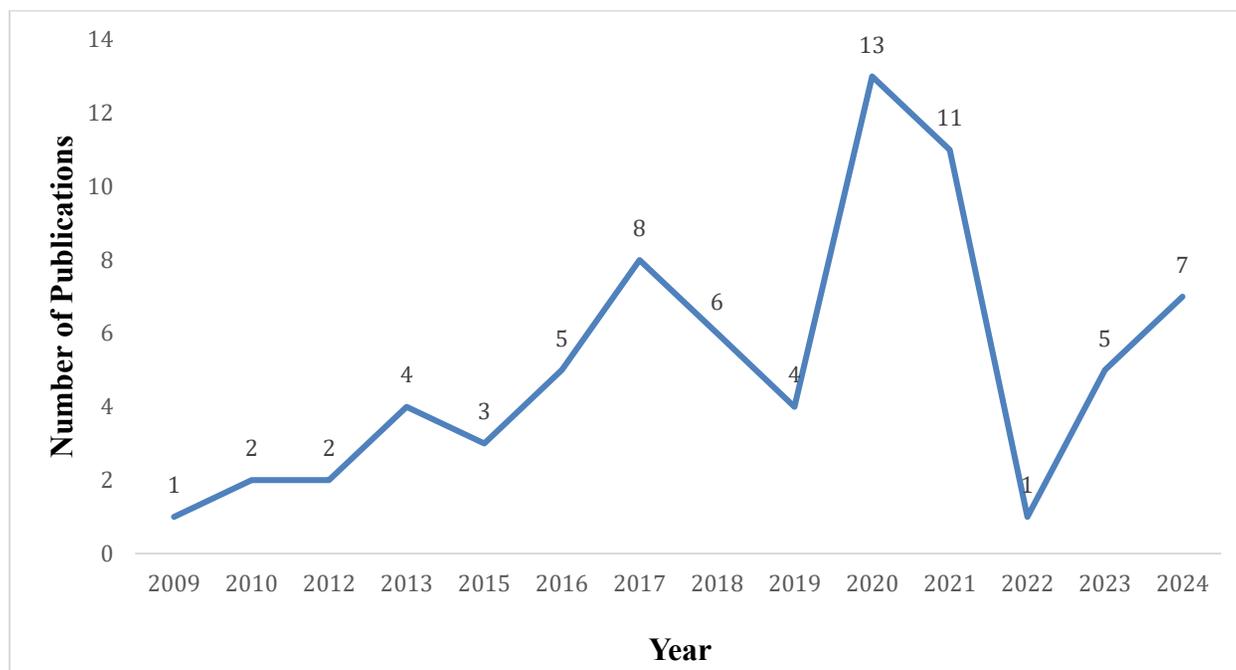


Figure 2: Year-wise publication trend analysis

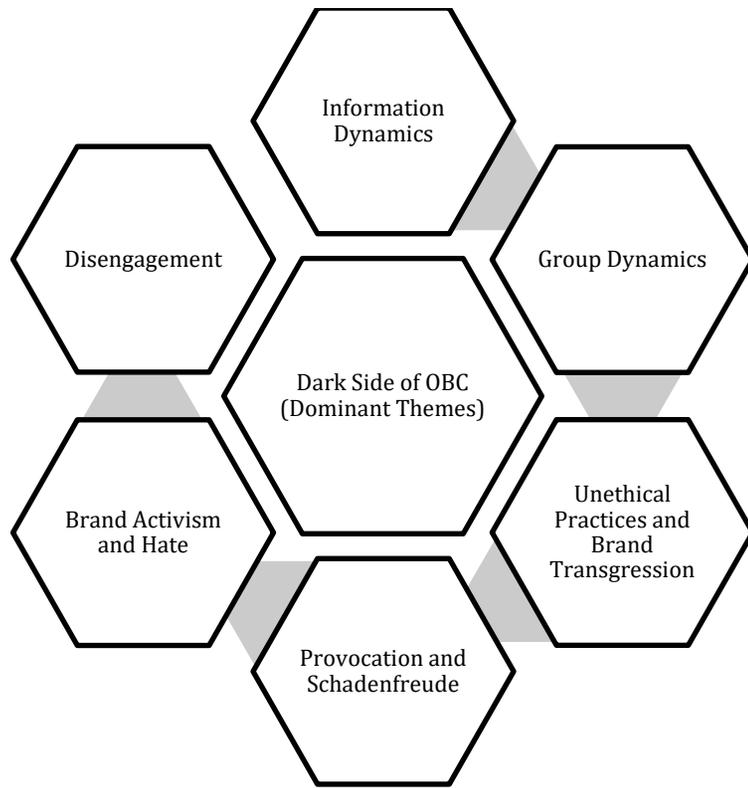


Figure 3. Dominant Themes of the Dark Side of OBCs



Figure 4: NVivo software-based word cloud map for information overload and information credibility



Figure 5: NVivo software-based word cloud map for in-group favoritism and out-group hate



Figure 6: NVivo software-based word cloud map for unethical firm behavior and brand transgression



Figure 7: NVivo software-based word cloud map for consumer retaliation and aggression



Figure 8: NVivo software-based word cloud map for brand activism and brand hate



Figure 9: NVivo software-based word cloud map for disengagement

Web Appendix A: Summary of the studies included in the review

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Journal Name</i>	<i>Aim and objectives</i>	<i>Key Finding(s)</i>
Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009)	Journal of Business Research	To investigate the relationship between an anti-brand website and its effect on company's brand value	Strong brands are more prone to anti-brand websites, thereby impacting brand value
Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010)	Consumption, Markets and Culture	To investigate what learnings, take place when anti-Walmart members negotiate the meanings of Walmart brand	Consumers negotiate the brand meanings by rejecting the marketer-generated marketing messages and creating their own by discursive storytelling
Kucuk (2010)	Journal of Brand Management	To explore the negative double jeopardy phenomenon with newly developed anti-brand blogs, anti-brand websites and social networking sites	Blogosphere has increased the consumer-generated anti-branding on the web

Felix (2012)	Journal of Consumer Marketing	To understand consumer's product use, practices, identity and brand meanings in an online Japanese motorcycle community	Instead of single brand loyalty, consumers of strong brands are more liable to multi-brand loyalty
Hickman and Ward (2013)	Journal of Brand Management	To understand the ramifications of online communities for rival brands	Social identification predictors like prototypicality, competence and warmth towards out-group members define the attitude of brand community towards rival brands
Noble et al. (2012)	Business horizons	To explore how negative information can be managed in primary and extended online brand communities	Basis the findings of negative behaviours, complaints related to product (product, promotions, market) and supplementary issues (service delay, employee behaviours are reported
Kuo and Feng (2013)	International Journal of Information Management	To identify the interaction characteristics of brand community members and the effect of member's perceived benefits on community commitment	Perceived learning benefits leads to strong community commitment, which in turn propagates oppositional brand loyalty
Ewing et al. (2013)	Journal of Business Research	To understand the extent to which new communication technologies provide forum to express rivalry of online community members towards their rivals	In-group favouritism and social identity invokes hate towards rival brand
Verhagen et al. (2013)	Computers in Human Behavior	To investigate the extent to which consumer's emotions translate into negative online word-of-mouth and repatronage and switching behaviours, thereof	Negative behaviours are an indication of consumer's repatronage and switching intentions to other brands
Gambetti and Graffigna (2015)	Marketing Theory	To highlight the factors creating hindrances in value co-creation between consumers and company, leading to online brand community failure	Plurality of marketing voices, social loafing was found in online brand community
Rösner and Krämer, (2016)	Social Media and Society	To identify the factors and to disentangle the mechanisms that affect users to comment online in an uncivil way	Participants used more aggressive tone when the group norms conform with the aggressive behaviour
Cova and D'Antone (2016)	Journal of Consumer Affairs	To analyze how an iconic brand like Nutella is threatened by societal trend of anti-consumption motivated by well-being	Anti-consumption trends do not cause much harm to iconic brands but certainly the brand lose a part of its strength

Rauschnabel et al. (2016)	Journal of Business Research	To investigate how do collaborative brand attacks develop in an online brand community and its implications on the brand	Perceived unethical behaviour, business problem or unprofessional behaviour are reasons of collaborative brand attacks
Golf-Papez and Veer (2017)	Journal of Marketing Management	To explore trolling in general and marketplace trolling	Trolls write more negatively and more frequently when they are being policed, perceiving their efforts to troll to be successful
Peeroo et al. (2017)	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management	To explore the roles played by online brand community members in creation as well as co-destruction of value	Consumers post messages on Facebook communities to remind brands about the previous transgression sarcastically and warn others to not buy any product, thereby impacting company's image
Dineva et al. (2017)	Journal of Marketing Management	To investigate how conflicts can be managed in online social media brand fan pages	The study offers a conceptualization of six conflict management strategies
Özbölük and Dursun (2017)	Journal of Service Management	To explore the role of different types of members in an online brand community of Apple	Learner, pragmatist, opinion leader, activist and evangelist are some of the member types in an online brand community
Bowden et al. (2017)	Journal of Service Theory and Practice	To explore whether positively and negatively valenced customer engagement co-exists in a brand community context	Consumer engagement is not discretely positive or negative; both types of engagement can co-exist in an online brand community
Pathak and Pathak-Shelat (2017)	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	To shine a light on the existence of negative emotions of consumers in an virtual tribe	Negative sentiments like anger, disgust, distress, aggression can exist in an online brand community context
Jayasimha et al. (2017)	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	To examine the firm's strategy in responding to consumer advocacy in the virtual presence context	Consumer advocacy has a positive effect on brand avoidance with organizational response as the moderator.
Bacile et al. (2018)	Journal of Service Management	To investigate how the service recovery perceptions of complainants and observers are impacted when a consumer is bombarded with uncivil comments of other customers to their complaint on corporate social media channel	Consumers attribute the brand accountable for addressing the incivility and expects fair treatment of complaint and uncivil consumer's response
Kim (2018)	Computers in Human Behaviour	To explore the impact of online incivility on the observers, both, who share the same group identity and those who do not	Participants were found to be more lenient towards uncivil comments from in-group members than out-group; conversely, when

Popp et al. (2018)	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship	To investigate the effect of social media based anti-sponsor community on the brand and the sponsored club	their personal stance is challenged, they become hostile for in-group members also. Community members oppose the sponsor of the rival community, while protecting their own brand
Feng et al. (2018)	Information & Management	To review a model on how review spam affects the participation of members in a virtual brand community	Defaming review was found to have negative impacts on membership and influence. One defaming review may reduce the confidence of a VBC member in the community
Ilhan et al. (2018)	Journal of Interactive Marketing	To investigate the effect of brand' and competing brand's marketing play in attack, defence and across commentary in brand fan pages	ADA has a positive impact on the social media performance of both the rival brands
Kristal et al. (2018)	Journal of Product & Brand Management	To investigate the effect of co-creation on brand equity as perceived by the observers of the co-created content in online brand community	Non-collaborative co-creation can lead to a dilution of brand equity even for high-equity brands, demonstrated by a before-and-after negative change in observer-based brand equity
Liang et al. (2020)	Internet Research	To investigate the determinants of oppositional brand loyalty and satisfaction in the context of social capital and e-quality	Perceived benefits, social capital, strong relations with other community members and service quality are determinants of oppositional brand loyalty
Zhou et al. (2019)	Internet Research	To investigate the impact of negative reviews sharing in online communities on community happiness	If negative brand sharing on online communities is through social exclusion, there will be unhappiness
Rossolatos (2019)	Psychology & Marketing	To examine threads analytically using NVivo and address its applicability in light of negative brand co-creation	All three cases were brand attacks and not brand play.
Kuchmaner et al. (2019)	Journal of Interactive Marketing	To examine the role of network embeddedness on psychological ownership in consumer responses to brand transgression	High network density has a greater effect on psychological ownership and likelihood to punish the brand due to reputational issues in the network
Herhausen et al. (2019)	Journal of Marketing	To examine how firms should detect, prevent and mitigate an online firestorm as a result of NWOM in online communities	Closer linguistic style match between sender of NWOM and online brand community will evoke negative feelings

Sharma et al. (2020a)	Journal of Business Research	To investigate the impact of uncivil comment made by a political brand representative on the observer's attitude towards the party	Intensity of an individual's moral identity and personal issue stance impact the observer's attitude on incivility expressed by others
Bacile (2020)	Journal of Service Management	To investigate the effect of online consumer-to-consumer uncivil interaction on the experiential value of the focal consumer in an online service recovery context	Dysfunctional consumer behaviour or online incivility have a significant impact on customer perceived service climate
Bacile et al. (2020)	Journal of Service Management	To explore customer and firm level aspects as they relate to social media complaint handling.	Consumers with lower (or higher) attitude towards online complaining experience higher (or lower) consumer-to-consumer interactional justice
Wang (2020)	Mass Communication & Society	To investigate the role of identity cues (anonymous vs and identifiable) on user perception of information credibility	The absence of identity cues impaired the information credibility of the commenters
Hayes and Carr (2020)	Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising	To establish if snarking is encouraged by brand managers towards rival brands in an online community context	Snarking in social media brand communities result in oppositional brand loyalty and schadenfreude in focal brand members towards rival brands
Paschen et al. (2020)	European Journal of Marketing	To explore individual's motivations and values that lie at the core of the consumption restraint	Resistance to American culture of Black Friday, consumption restraint is propagated to promote anti-capitalism and environmental sustainability.
Sharma et al. (2020b)	Online Information Review	To investigate the effect of service transgression on distant third-party customers in an online setting with exploring the role of moral identity and moral judgement	The findings from netnography revealed that the EWOM messages posted by distant third-party customers on social media discussed incidences of ethical service failure.
Liao and Wang (2020)	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	To examine the moderating role of brand symbolism in revealing heterogenous communities are more damaging for high symbolic brands than for low symbolic brands	Member heterogeneity threatens community continuity and may present a destructive effect on brands
Larson and Salvador (2021)	Corporate Communications: An International Journal	To examine whether student's engagement with online university parody account diminishes their concern for university's image and their own image as future alumni	Those who engage heavily with university parody accounts come to identify more with the humorous university experience portrayed within these accounts

Zhu et al. (2021)	Journal of Product & Brand Management	To investigate whether interactions triggered by gamified elements in online communities impact brand attitude of the members	Exchange red packet interactions induced higher normative community pressure than communal red packet interactions, thereby reducing brand attitude
Dessart et al. (2020)	European Journal of Marketing	To examines negativity toward brands by framing the concept as a collective phenomenon that underpins the existence of anti-brand communities	Inviting or recommending other people to the community may invoke brand hate among non-users also
Curina et al. (2020)	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	To investigate the brand hate phenomenon for service products in a cross-channel setting (offline/online environment)	Brand hate in the service context leads to online complaining, thereby leading to non-repurchase intention
Burgess and Jones (2020)	European Journal of Marketing	To investigate the impact on brand community members on the forced closure of the community	BioWare's dislike for the criticism was the highly hypnotized reason for its forced closure as mentioned by fans in the thread
Liao et al., (2020)	Journal of Product and Brand Management	To investigate the effect of two types of heterogeneity on community and brand level outcomes	Perceived value heterogeneity was negatively associated with brand community commitment
Lee et al. (2021)	Telematics and Informatics	To differentiate members on the basis of personality traits who deliberately seek to create division in an online community by trolling	Online trolls scored the highest on psychopathy and sadism among all the behavior types
Hou and Zhang (2021)	Social Behavior and Personality	To investigate how different types of social support affect social loafing in online brand communities	All the four types of social support (e.g., informational, emotional, esteem, network) have different effect on social loafing
Behl and Jain (2023)	Journal of Global Marketing	To examine the role of culture in the dark side of the OBCs.	Culture plays a key role in determining negative customer behaviors such as conflicts, rivalries, and Schadenfreude.
Bilro and Loureiro (2023)	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	A conceptual model based on self-determination theory (SDT) depicts the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on hedonic and utilitarian rewards, which the authors believe affect subjective well-being (SWB) and brand advocacy	Hedonic and utilitarian rewards are significantly and positively affected by intrinsic motivations, but not by extrinsic motivations. Despite different strengths, hedonic and utilitarian rewards are significantly related to brand advocacy and SWB.
Paruthi et al. (2023)	Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC	Consumer engagement was examined as a mediator between brand relationship quality and consumer identification with brand love.	A positive association was found between consumer engagement and brand love, thereby fostering positive word of mouth.

Kumar et al. (2023)	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Consumer perceptions of brand ethicality are influenced by perceived brand marketing communications	Consumer engagement also plays a partial or full mediating role in different proposed associations. Brand communications tend to generate favorable perceptions of brand ethicality. As a result of such perceptions of brand ethics, consumers are more inclined to engage with their online communities
Sarkar et al. (2021)	International Journal of Hospitality Management	To examine how service failure severity in an interactive multi-actor service setting may lead to customer retaliation and revisit intention	Service failure causes retribution through the sequential mediation of dissatisfaction and brand hate. Furthermore, it was discovered that other customer participation had a greater influence in reducing the negative impact of service failure severity on dissatisfaction.
Pantano (2021)	Journal of Business Research	To model the viral effects of a luxury marketing campaign when adopting negative stereotypes to increase the market share in a growing market.	Results revealed an unanticipated social outburst caused by unfavourable consumer feedback, which was magnified and became substantially harmful to the brand (brand hate).
Delgado-Ballester et al. (2021)	International Journal of Electronic Commerce	To analyze the role of anger, sadness and dislike in triggering an online firestorm	In reaction to outrage assessments linked with the occurrence, openly voiced feelings of anger, hatred, and grief emerge.
Demsar et al. (2021)	Journal of Marketing Management	To examine the historical and discursive conditions that have produced trolling and its social practices	The combination of trolling, censorship, and anti-corporate discourses enhanced trolling of firms
Gong and Wang (2022)	Journal of Marketing Management	To investigate the impact of a contract breach on the quality of a brand's connection with its customers, as well as brand apology and restitution.	Brand relationship quality, brand apology and brand restitution moderate the relationship between a psychological brand contract breach and dysfunctional customer behavior toward a brand
Cocker et al. (2021)	European Journal of Marketing	To investigate instances in which celebrity endorsements by social media influencers embedded inside online consumption communities are viewed as transgressive by community members.	Uncovered five reoccurring celebrity endorsement transgressions, each of which violates a community-wide recognised moral responsibility.

García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón, (2021)	European Journal of Marketing	To analyse whether anti-consumption framed content garners more engagement than pro-consumption content in social communities	In terms of total views, likes, dislikes, and comments, there are discrepancies between anti-consumption and pro-consumption content.
Goyal and Verma (2024)	Journal of Strategic Marketing	This study conceptualizes and empirically investigates a multi-dimensional relationship between brand engagement, brand loyalty, overall brand equity, and purchase intention	Brand engagement is a strong predictor of brand loyalty, which in turn leads to OBE, which leads to purchase intent.
Vargo et al., (2024)	Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising	A study of the dynamics of content monetization in social media, focusing on Reddit's brand safety system and its effectiveness in securing advertisers from unsafe user-generated content.	Advertisers' concerns over brand safety are outweighed by Reddit's economic motivations for monetizing content A detailed interpretation of their study reveals that three constellations of interacting, mutually reinforcing forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence fuel community brutalization in distinct ways: sadistic entertainment, clan warfare, and popular justice.
Sibai et al., (2024)	Journal of Consumer Research	The article identifies and discusses these brutalization constellations in consumption communities as well as the wider social media sphere	
Wang et al., (2023)	Information Processing & Management	Formulated seven research hypotheses using service-dominant logic	The social media affordances and OBC identification contribute to both value experiences through the facilitation of technology-mediated and communal interactions between OBC members and the brand.
Dong et al., (2024)	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	Based on the concept of engagement, this paper presents the results of nine studies that contributed to the development and validation of the proposed scale as a means of assessing engagement.	This validated instrument encompasses four dimensions (cognition, affection, online constructive behavior, and online destructive behavior), which are captured by 17 items.
Popp et al. (2016)	Sport Management Review	To investigate social media based anti-brand communities and their effect on sports team brand	Co-destructive behaviours directed at a professional football brand community and its members, intended to cause harm

Husemann et al. (2015)	Psychology & Marketing	To explore how community members initiate, perform, manage and resolve intracommunity conflicts	Conflict cultures can significantly affect practical, identity and relationship level conflicts amongst consumption community members
Kucuk (2015)	Marketing Theory	To investigate how the semiotic characteristics of digital consumer artifacts affect market and consumption	Learning process of the digital anti-branders and the ways they generate corporate meanings
Kuo and Hou (2017)	Journal of Electronic Commerce Research	To explore the role of social identity theory and consumer-brand relationships in the formation of oppositional brand loyalty	Brand commitment and self-brand connection are predictors of oppositional brand loyalty
Kucuk (2016)	Journal of Business Ethics	To reconceptualize brand dilution as a matter of counter-posed brand meanings and associations in digital markets	Consumer anti-branding has less potential for brand dilution and more potential for consumer confusion due to identity collusion
Zhang et al. (2021)	Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	Investigated the effect of community support and commitment to reduce social loafing in online brand communities	Community support positively impact the reduction of social loafing, where community commitment mediates the relationship between both variables.
Koch-Bayram and Biemann (2024)	Journal of Business Ethics	Investigated business-centered focus overlooks the potential of organizations to change employees' private social and environmental behaviors	Employers' environmental CSR activities increase employee donations and willingness to volunteer outside of the workplace
Sansome et al. (2024)	Journal of Business Research	The present research uses signaling theory to refine the conceptual framework in the extant literature and pinpoint the critical dimensions of perceived brand transparency (perceived objectivity, clarity, and proactivity)	Availability of information as a necessary but insufficient antecedent to brand transparency
Butler and Spoelstra (2024)	Journal of Business Ethics	Focused specifically on the phenomenon of workplace gamification for an examination of the ethics of play in a business context	According to this paper, Aristotelian eudaimonia cannot be achieved in the context of work without introducing new kinds of ethical ambiguity

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