Reframing online brand community management: consumer conflicts, their consequences, and moderation

Journal:	*European Journal of Marketing*
Manuscript ID	EJM-03-2022-0227.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	online incivility, consumer misbehaviours, social media networks, brand community management, Facebook moderation

Title

Reframing online brand community management: consumer conflicts, their consequences, and moderation

Purpose: Research into the dark side of online brand-managed communities (OBCs) and specifically, consumer-to-consumer (C2C) conflicts within this context are scarce. This paper explores the different forms of C2C conflicts in OBCs, measures their direct impact on observing consumers and brands and, investigates their appropriate moderation by exclusively focusing on two actors: brands versus consumers.

Methodology: Our research adopts a sequential exploratory approach. First, we capture different forms of C2C conflict via netnographic observations of five brand-managed communities. Second, the identified forms of C2C conflict are utilised in an online experiment to examine their impact on pertinent to OBCs social and commercial outcomes. Third, further two online experiments were employed to assess how brand versus consumer conflict moderators impact perceived credibility and conflict de-escalation.

Findings: We uncover three prominent forms of C2C conflict based on whether conflict occurs between supporters, non-supporters, or outsiders of the OBC. We further show that these affect consumers' engagement behaviours and emotional responses, while brands suffer from diminished credibility and could be targets of unfavourable electronic word-of-mouth. Finally, for managing C2C conflict our findings confirm, brands are perceived as more suitable, while under certain conditions consumers can also be viewed as appropriate moderators.

Practical implications: Our article offers guidance to marketing practitioners on the different nuances of undesirable consumer interactions in brand-managed communities on social media,

their impact on customer engagement and brand perceptions, and when/whether brands or consumers may be suited to moderating these.

Research limitations: This research used a range of participant self-selected brands and is limited to brand-managed (as opposed to consumer-managed) communities on Facebook. While beyond the scope of this paper, the dynamics for consumer-managed communities may differ.

Originality: This paper makes novel contributions to the literature on consumer (mis)behaviours and OBC management. Our findings are among the first to examine the direct social and commercial consequences of C2C conflicts and to provide comparative insights into the appropriateness of two different moderators in OBCs.

Keywords: *online incivility, consumer misbehaviours, social media networks, brand community management, Facebook moderation*

Introduction

Online brand communities (OBCs) situated on social media are described as a structured set of social relationships among customers who express mutual attitudes and feelings towards a particular brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Miliopoulou, 2021). With a rising number of companies using brand communities to better engage with their consumers (Statista, 2022a), the positive side of OBCs has been researched widely: consumers benefit from socialisation and information exchange, while companies gain important insights into consumer behaviours and market trends (e.g., Dolan *et al.*, 2019; Kumar, 2021). There is, however, a dark side to online communities managed by brands. OBCs bring together millions of consumers with diverse engagement motives and brand perceptions (Dessart *et al.*, 2019). These differences increasingly lead to uncivil consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions, henceforth referred to as C2C conflict.

Husemann and Luedicke (2013) define consumer conflicts as "an interaction relationship between two or more (groups of) market participants that have mutually exclusive or incompatible goals regarding certain consumption resources and ideologies" (p. 356). In OBCs, these conflicts typically entail one consumer posting an offensive or abusive comment to another consumer who reciprocates with further hostility (Dineva *et al.*, 2017). Indeed, such offensive interactions have increased by 38% in recent years (Brandwatch, 2021) with a large proportion of Internet users either experiencing or witnessing some form of hostility, often resulting in social media disengagement (Pew Research Centre, 2021). Preliminary findings show that C2C conflicts can disrupt consumer-to-brand (C2B) engagement behaviours, diminish consumer perceptions of brands' social responsibility credibility, and significantly reduce consumer satisfaction with service recovery (Bacile *et al.*, 2018; Dineva *et al.*, 2020).

Consequently, research has begun to acknowledge this less desirable side of OBC engagement (e.g., Naumann *et al.*, 2020). Several authors have called for research to better understand C2C conflicts as a prominent form of online incivility and to investigate how to best address it (e.g., Dineva *et al.*, 2020; Japutra *et al.*, 2018; Miliopoulou, 2021). In turn, research initiatives tentatively delineate between different nuances of C2C incivility based on their content, nature, or intent (e.g., Husemann and Luedicke, 2013; Husemann *et al.*, 2015). Nonetheless, these initiatives are largely fragmented and a more holistic understanding of the different forms of C2C conflict, which take place in OBCs, is lacking. We deem this gap important because different forms of C2C conflict are likely to influence the nature and effectiveness of the strategies or moderators employed to manage C2C conflict (Weiger *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, the direct social and commercial consequences of the different forms of this adverse C2C phenomenon have not been studied previously. Rather, research into the impact of adverse C2C interactions is scarce and is mostly limited to providing preliminary insights to brands regarding a single form of incivility (e.g., Hauser *et al.*, 2017). Finally, research into the moderation of C2C conflict almost exclusively focuses on the content of conflict moderation strategies brands adopt (e.g., Dineva *et al.*, 2020; Hauser *et al.*, 2017), with a small number of studies investigating the moderation of different actors via observational research (e.g., brand defenders; Colliander and Wien, 2013; Dineva *et al.*, 2017). A comparative approach to understanding the perceived appropriateness of these two prominent actors (brands versus consumers) in moderating C2C conflict in OBCs remains incomplete. Based on these research gaps, we are guided by the following three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What forms of C2C conflict occur in brand-managed communities?

RQ2: What impact do these forms of C2C conflict have on observing consumers and brands?

RQ3: Which actor (brand versus consumer) is perceived as more suited to moderating C2C conflicts?

To address these RQs, we utilise four mixed methods studies. First, to uncover and categorise distinct forms of C2C conflicts, we conduct a six-month non-participatory netnography of five brand-managed communities on Facebook (Study 1). Second, we investigate the impact of these forms of C2C conflict on several social and commercial outcomes pertinent to OBCs via an online experiment (Study 2). Third, we utilise two further experiments to understand the perceived credibility and conflict de-escalation success of prominent actors (the brand versus a consumer) (Study 3a) and whether these perceptions change in the presence of reactions from observing consumers (Study 3b).

This research makes three contributions to the marketing literature. First, we advance the consumer (mis)behaviour literature (e.g., Fombelle *et al.*, 2020) by providing a novel categorization of distinct C2C conflict forms that occur in OBCs. We extend previous research by showcasing that C2C conflicts can be understood based on the actors involved: supporters, non-supporters, outsiders. Our second and third contributions lie in the OBC management literature (Miliopoulou, 2021; Skålén *et al.*, 2015; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). Through focusing on the dark side of OBCs, we offer first insights into the direct impact of C2C conflicts on social and commercial outcomes. Focusing on the consequences on community engagement behaviours and brand perceptions, we advance existing research concerned with the causes of negative customer interactive behaviours in OBCs (Naumann *et al.*, 2020). Finally, we extend extant research on the moderation of consumer conflicts by exclusively focusing on the effectiveness of the actors who moderate the C2C conflict. Thus, by offering insights into the actors who adopt such strategies in OBCs, we advance research into the content of the conflict moderation strategies (Dineva *et al.*, 2020).

Consumer conflicts in online brand-managed communities

The nature of consumer conflicts

Husemann and Luedicke (2013) define consumer conflict as "an interaction relationship between two or more (groups of) market participants that have mutually exclusive or incompatible goals regarding certain consumption resources and ideologies" (p.356). While the C2C conflict phenomenon shares some features with other forms of brand- and consumption-related uncivil behaviours on social media, it diverges in three ways (as summarised in Table I). First, the target of C2C conflicts are exclusively other consumers on social media, while the majority of other uncivil behaviours entail transgression towards brands. Second, interactivity is at the core of consumer conflicts. This bi-directional nature signifies that anyone participating in an OBC and expressing their opinion(/s) is the target, unlike other uncivil behaviours whose target is predominantly the brand and in the case of trolling this is typically undirected. Third, C2C conflicts are motivated by the expression of other standalone forms of C2B incivility and as such C2C conflicts represent a broader OBC phenomenon that invariably encompasses these. For instance, C2C conflict can be the outcome (e.g., consumer shares nWOM about a brand, which escalates into a conflict) or the antecedent (e.g., conflict between multiple consumers accumulates and transforms into a firestorm) of other uncivil behaviours in OBCs.

[Insert Table I here]

Past research broadly delineates between types of consumer conflict based on their content, nature, or intent. Focusing on content, empirical work by Dineva *et al.* (2020) differentiated between two types of C2C conflict according to content orientation and in non-profit settings, self-oriented conflict and other-oriented conflict. While the former refers to conflict resulting from topics related to one's own benefit (e.g., implications of animal testing on advancing

human well-being), the latter denotes conflicts occurring from topics concerning the welfare of others (e.g., implications of consumption choices on animal welfare).

Focusing on the nature of C2C conflicts, Husemann and Luedicke (2013) synthesised studies on social conflict in consumption contexts and distinguished between three forms of conflict: emancipatory, authenticity-protecting and ideology-advocating. First, the authors conclude that emancipatory conflict is among the most frequently studied forms of conflict and refers to consumer resistance and anti-consumption practices (e.g., anti-brand communities; Dessart *et al.*, 2020). Authenticity-protecting conflict, in contrast, emerges because of oppositional claims to ownership of the same consumption object, activity, or simply using different criteria to evaluate the appropriateness of a consumption process (Arsel and Thompson, 2010). As such, it frequently occurs between consumers who support rival brands (e.g., between-community conflict; Ewing *et al.*, 2013). Third, ideology-advocating conflict relates to consumers defending a personal consumption ideology against those of other consumers who appear to support the same brand/consumption activity (e.g., within-community conflict; Dineva *et al.*, 2017).

Linked to Husemann and Luedicke's (2013) emancipatory conflict but focused on intent rather than the nature of the conflict, Husemann *et al.* (2015) differentiated between routinized (constructive) and transgressive (destructive) consumer conflicts. Routinized conflicts involve embracing heterogeneity, inviting conflict as part of the group culture, performing conflicts visibly and democratically, complying to pre-defined norms for enacting conflicts as well as positively contributing to the community's vitality and collective mission (Hemetsberger, 2006). In contrast, transgressive conflicts are counter-productive to the online community engagement because they are aimed at aggravating others and thus have a negative impact on the well-being of the participants in that community.

The impact of uncivil interactive behaviours on social media

Research into the impact of C2C conflicts on consumers and brands is scarce. From a social perspective, when the expression of strong emotions including swearing, insults, and name-calling (Lee, 2005) occurs in OBCs, it often causes a significant disruption to community engagement behaviours. Thus, uncivil customer interactions typically receive more attention than non-offensive communications and as a result reach more consumers (Song *et al.*, 2020). Consequently, a "contagiousness effect" is created and more consumers are likely to participate in uncivil online interactions (Kwon and Gruzd, 2017), while discouraging observers from participating. Moreover, when trolling behaviours occur on OBCs these often disrupt and divert consumers from engaging in constructive interactions with like-minded supporters of the brand (Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Phillips, 2011). Bystanders and victims of this form of customer incivility report experiencing similar emotional and psychological outcomes as face-to-face forms of harassment including social anxiety and low levels of self-esteem (Pew Research Center, 2021). More specifically to conflicts in consumer-managed communities, Husemann *et al.* (2015) confirmed the negative consequences of transgressive (dysfunctional) conflict, which the authors suggested is detrimental to constructive community engagement and should therefore be terminated.

From brand and commercial perspectives, past research findings showed that if conflict between consumers remains unmanaged, this can accumulate generating "firestorms" (Hauser *et al.*, 2017). Such firestorms can be particularly harmful to the brand's reputation and typically result in financial losses (Herhausen *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, unmanaged customer incivility can decrease perceptions of source and message credibility, foster the formation of negative perceptions about the brand at hand (Dineva *et al.*, 2020) and undermine brands' service recovery efforts (Bacile *et al.*, 2018). Online conflicts can ultimately contribute to negative

attitudes towards the consumption and/or adoption of a brand's products and services (Hansen *et al.,* 2018).

To summarise, research into the different types of C2C conflict in OBCs is limited and fragmented. The majority of extant studies agree that the impact of consumers' online incivility is mostly adverse. This is because C2C conflict cause consumers to refrain from/terminate interacting with others (Pew Research Centre, 2021), while damaging the brand's reputation and its ability to effectively communicate with its consumers (Bacile *et al.*, 2018).

The moderation of C2C conflicts

The moderation of C2C conflicts falls under a broader phenomenon that has been well researched – the management of OBCs (e.g., Hakala *et al.*, 2017; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). This broader phenomenon includes brands managing both the positive and negative C2C and C2B interactional dynamics in their online communities. Specifically, according to Wirtz *et al.* (2013), OBC management structurally entails four key areas including, *brand orientation* (the brand is the core focus), *Internet use* (hosted on social media channels), in addition to *funding* and *governance* by the brands themselves. Brands, in turn, establish and manage communities on social media based on these four features for the ultimate purposes of encouraging customer engagement (Gensler *et al.*, 2013) and building brand legitimacy (Hakala *et al.*, 2017). In the present context, OBC management is especially concerned with the governance of consumers' interactive behaviours whereby the moderation of C2C conflicts represents an integral part.

The primary focus of conflict moderation research to date has been the content of the moderation strategies (*for a review see* Chandrasapth *et al.*, 2021), while little has been done to understand the perceived suitability of the actor managing C2C conflicts. One stream of research argues that the responsibility and/or appropriateness of moderating C2C conflicts lies with the brands that host online communities (Dholakia *et al.*, 2009; Dineva *et al.*, 2017;

Dineva *et al*., 2020). This stream has focused on outlining strategies adopted by brands that sit on a spectrum ranging from cooperative (e.g., reaffirming a brand supporter, informing), to authoritative (e.g., realignment of hostile communication, censoring comments), to passive (i.e., no involvement) strategies. Some strategies were found to be more effective than others in generating desirable OBC outcomes. For instance, Dineva *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that realignment (i.e., asking aggravated parties to adjust their communication style or behaviour) is an effective strategy in moderating consumer conflicts regardless of the content of the conflict, while censoring and lack of involvement are ineffective approaches.

Conversely, social media networks have enabled consumers to connect not only with brands, but also with other consumers. Thus, consumers have been empowered to engage in pro-brand activities including, defending brands they favour against attacks from other consumers (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño, 2016). In turn, scholars have advocated for OBCs to be self-managed through allowing active community members/key contributors to intervene in consumer incivility (Gillespie, 2017). Colliander and Wien (2013), for instance, put forward various consumer defence styles ranging from arguing in favour of the brand (i.e., advocating, justifying), to dismissing or challenging brand attacker comments (i.e., trivializing, vouching, and doubting). Hassan and Casaló Ariño (2016) uncover similar brand defending behaviours on Facebook brand communities and differentiate between defence practices adopted by consumers of high involvement (versus low involvement) brands as well as of utilitarian (versus hedonic) brands.

In sum, researchers thus far have examined consumers and brands as moderators of uncivil interactions in isolation of one another. Comparative research into the effectiveness of these two actors, however, remains deficient. Figure 1 illustrates our research framework and focus.

[Insert Figure 1 here]

Study 1

Method

The purpose of Study 1 is to address RQ1 and examine the different forms of C2C conflict in OBCs. We adopted a non-participatory netnography whereby relevant online textual data were systematically collected (Cocker *et al.*, 2021; Kozinets, 2002). Prior to the data collection, the lead researcher initially spent a month in 10 OBCs on Facebook from various industries, which were chosen following a non-probability sampling approach. This stage enabled the researchers to gain a preliminary understanding of the different types of interactions and behaviours that take place in OBCs and select suitable communities based on the presence of relevant to this research data (Kozinets, 2002). From these we selected five brands to be included in our final sample, as illustrated in Table II, and based on the following three criteria. First, we ensured that the brands adhered to Wirtz *et al.*'s (2013) criteria of brand-managed communities: brand orientation, Internet use, funding, and governance by the brands themselves. Second, we selected brands from retail and foods – two industries that have exhibited among the highest presence and active customer engagement on social media in recent years (Statista, 2022b). Third, the selected brands were information-rich and experienced frequent occurrence of consumer conflicts among other types of behaviours and interactions. Next, we collected data over six months.

[Insert Table II here]

We identified and recorded a total of 259 C2C conflicts, which ranged from a minimum of two individual comments to a maximum of 160 comments. To adequately capture C2C conflicts, we followed eight characteristics inherent to C2C conflict, as prescribed by past studies (Dineva *et al.*, 2020; Husemann and Luedicke, 2013), which are outlined in Table III with relevant examples provided from our dataset. For an excerpt to be included in our sample, we ensured, at a minimum, it contains an interaction (i.e., two-way exchange), which represents

a distinguishing feature of C2C conflicts, together with two other characteristics from Table III (e.g., profanity, rude diatribe).

[Insert Table III here]

Data analysis

We analysed data adopting a hybrid approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This process involved three main stages. First, we developed a coding template *a priori*, based on RQ1. The theory-driven template was developed from Husemann and Luedicke's (2013) systematic research outlining three broad categories of consumer conflict: emancipatory, ideology-advocating and authenticity-protecting. The theory-driven codes were applied to the raw data, leading to the exclusion of one code (emancipatory conflict) due to its inapplicability to the dataset. The second stage comprised generating additional codes derived from the data. In this stage, we uncovered an additional data-driven code, which we subsequently termed "outer-conflict". The final stage of data analysis involved combining the theory- and data-driven codes and collating into overarching themes, leading to three distinct forms of C2C conflicts. To ensure internal homogeneity and external validity of the themes, the data were triangulated, which involved the second researcher independently analysing a subset of the data using the research codebook. The two researchers then compared their interpretations and discussed any differences until a satisfactory level of agreement was reached. We used the method of proportional agreement (Rust and Cooil, 1994) and our inter-rater reliability index was acceptable (I_r = .96). We replaced all names used in this and the following studies with pseudonyms.

Findings

Three distinct forms of C2C conflict were identified: *intra-group*, *inter-group*, and *outer-group*. We show these in Table IV, which also outlines their definitions, frequencies and

provides examples. First, intra-group conflict involves apparent supporters of the same brand engaging in an uncivil interaction. The data revealed this form of conflict often occurred as a result of disagreements about the promotions a brand engages in, divergent personal values and/or opinions about how the brand should be consumed, or following an apparent brand supporter challenging, attacking, or boycotting certain brand practices, while others defend the brand.

The second distinct and most frequently occurring C2C conflict form, labelled inter-group conflict, refers to brand supporters engaging in uncivil interactions with brand non-supporters to defend the brand. In our data, the non-supporters of the brand act as brand adversaries and challenged or attacked the brand in a hostile manner, which resulted in brand supporters directly or indirectly defending the brand against these attacks. A secondary cause of this form of conflict revolved around consumers praising a rival brand and/or acclaiming its superiority over the brand in question, while the supporters of the attacked brand challenged these adversaries by defending the brand and/or its status.

Third, we identified outer-group conflict, which is characterised by apparent non-supporters of the brand engaging in uncivil discourse about topics indirectly related to the brand. In our observations, this form of conflict was produced by consumers who were uninvolved/uninterested in the brand itself. Rather, they attacked one another in relation to brand topics such as celebrity endorsers' practice or the brand's choice of content marketing and charitable activities. This form of conflict also occurred as a direct result of non-consumers teasing or trolling other consumers in the OBC aiming to aggravate them and provoke a response.

[Insert Table IV here]

Discussion

Our findings advance the limited knowledge on consumer conflicts. We offer a holistic and empirically informed typology consisting of three distinctive forms of C2C conflict that take place in OBCs. We are thus able to broadly contribute to the literature on consumer (mis)behaviours (Fombelle *et al.*, 2020) and more specifically to an existing research paradigm on within-community and between-community conflict (Ewing *et al.*, 2013; Ilhan *et al.*, 2018).

First, we show that the apparent supporters of the same brand can engage in uncivil discourse (intra-group conflict) in relation to contesting acceptable brand practices or how the brand should be consumed. Past research on close-knit consumer-hosed online communities has showed that similar within-community tensions mostly stem from decision-making processes (Hemetsberger, 2006) or community members exerting normative pressure on one another (Husemann *et al.*, 2015), which in turn produces conflict. Our results extend these findings and demonstrate that such tensions occur in large-scale brand-managed communities and are centred around the brand and/or its practices as a focal point of conflict.

Second, conflict in OBCs can occur between supporters and non-supporters of the brand whereby brand supporters defend the brand against adversaries. Studies have shown that similar between-community conflict can originate in oppositional loyalty or brand rivalry whereby community members adopt a negative perspective of competitor brands based on the cultural or social meanings of the brand or based on opposing customer ideologies (Colliander and Wien 2013; Ewing *et al.,* 2013; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). We extend these studies on conflict between rival communities by showing that such conflict can occur within the same brand-managed community in the form of inter-group conflict whereby supporters of the brand defend it against adversaries who challenge and attack the brand or praise a competitor brand.

Third, our results offer insight into outer-group conflict, which represents a novel contribution to the literature. Outer-group conflict takes place between consumers who appear

to be uninterested or uninvolved with the brand itself and who engage in uncivil interactions on the community. Past studies have proposed this to be an independent form of incivility in OBCs – brand trolling (Dineva and Breitsohl, 2022; Golf-Papez and Veer, 2017). Here, we demonstrate that this standalone misbehaviour, by generating further hostile interactions, also transforms into a distinct form of C2C conflict, which we termed outer-group conflict.

Study 2

Study 2 addresses RQ2 and investigates the impact of Study 1's C2C conflict forms on relevant to brand-managed communities social and commercial outcomes. Given the exploratory nature of this study and the lack of empirical data on the three forms of conflicts under investigation, a research question was favoured over hypotheses (Jann and Hinz, 2016).

Method

We conducted a randomised one-factor (*inter-group* vs *intra-group* vs *outer-group* conflict vs *control*) between-subjects experiment. We recruited subjects through an online panel (Prolific) who received a small monetary reward (£1.15 GBP) for their participation in the study. The final sample consisted of 200 UK residents (M_{age}=30.1, age range 18-67, *SD*=10.21, Female=69%). On average, the participants visited brand-managed communities several times a month and posted comments approximately once a month.

Procedure

Study 1 data informed our experimental scenarios. First, we asked participants to name a brand that they follow on social media. Respondents who failed to name a brand, had never visited a chosen brand's community, or failed the attention checks, were excluded from the final sample (n=49). Subsequently, following a post made by their chosen brand (Appendix 1), we randomly allocated subjects to one of four conditions, each portraying a different form of conflict (intra-group (n=52), inter-group (n=55), outer-group (n=41)) or a non-hostile

interaction (control (n=52)) (*see* Appendix 2 for manipulations). Next, respondents completed a control question regarding the perceived seriousness of the discussion and progressed to completing manipulation checks. Then, items related to social measures in response to the assigned scenario (see Table V for measures) were answered: interactive behaviours (Like, Hide, Report, Interact; Swani and Labrecque, 2020), emotional response (DeWitt *et al.*, 2008), and community engagement (Hanson *et al.*, 2019)). Items relating to commercial constructs were also completed: webcare credibility (Weitzl and Hutzinger, 2017), attitude (Johnen and Schnittka, 2019), trust (Sung and Kim, 2010), and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Richins, 1983). The study concluded with demographics questions.

[Insert Table V here]

Findings

We asked the participants to rate whether their assigned conflict scenario refers to one of the following: "*Followers of the brand page disagreeing with one another*", "*Followers of the brand defending the brand against non-followers of the brand*", "*Social media users attacking each other in relation to the brand*", or "*Followers of the brand conversing about the brand post"* to assess the validity of the manipulations. We employed a chi-squared test, which confirmed that the respondents correctly differentiated between the different forms of conflicts and the control condition ($\chi^2_{(9, 200)}$=208.68, p<.001).

Subsequently, we conducted a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with C2C conflict as an independent variable and social outcomes including "Like", "Hide", "Report" and "Interact" with the conflict, emotional response (positive and negative) and brand community engagement as dependent variables. The results showed a significant main effect of C2C conflict forms on all social outcomes (Wilk's λ=.46, $F_{(21, 546)}$=8.15, p<.001, partial-η2=.23) and table VI reports the summary of the associated univariate results. We further

conducted Tukey HSD post hoc multiple comparison tests to understand where the differences lie.

[Insert Table VI here]

In all three conflict conditions (intra-group (*M*=3.44, *SD*=2.02), inter-group (*M*=3.31, 2.01), and outer-group (*M*=3.20, *SD*=2.06)), the respondents disagreed that they would react favourably to the conflict through "liking" the comments, compared with the control condition (*M*=4.81, *SD*=1.51) (all *p*s<.01). Furthermore, the respondents were more likely to react unfavourably to the three C2C conflict scenarios through "hiding" the comments (intra-group (*M*=3.83, *SD*=1.94), inter-group (*M*=4.22, *SD*=1.84), and outer-group (*M*=4.51, *SD*=1.85)), compared with the non-hostile interaction (*M*=2.48, *SD*=1.31) (all *p*s<.001), though the tendency to do so was lower for the intra-group and inter-group conflicts, as evidenced in the descriptive statistics. The participants further agreed that they are more willing to "report" all three conflict scenarios (intra-group conflict (*M*=3.96, *SD*=1.87), inter-group (*M*=4.55, *SD*=1.74), outer-group (*M*=4.54, *SD*=1.85)) compared with the control scenario (*M*=2.04, *SD*=1.28) (all *p*s<.001), and this is particularly evident for the inter-group and outer-group conflicts, as shown by the descriptive results.

Focusing on interacting with the conflict, respondents across all three forms of C2C conflicts disagreed that they would interact with the conflict (intra-group (*M*=2.44, *SD*=1.59), inter-group (*M*=2.07, *SD*=1.40) and outer-group (*M*=2.07, *SD*=1.21)) in comparison with the non-hostile scenario (*M*=4.00, *SD*=1.57) (all *p*s<.001). Moreover, following exposure to all C2C conflict forms (intra-group (*M*=2.96, *SD*=1.38), inter-group (*M*=2.96, *SD*=1.37) and outer-group (*M*=2.79, *SD*=1.73)), the respondents did not report experiencing positive emotions, while the control group reported a positive emotional response (*M*=4.50, .99) (all *p*s<.001). While the respondents generally disagreed that they were likely to experience

negative emotions in all C2C conflicts (intra-group (M=3.71, 1.39), inter-group (M=3.64, SD=1.58) and outer-group (M=3.99, SD=1.40)), they were more likely to do so compared with the non-hostile scenario (M=1.63, SD=.87) (all ps<.001). Interestingly, across these five variables, no significant differences were found between the three C2C conflict groups (ps>.05). For community engagement, participants were less likely to engage in the OBC following observing outer-group (M=4.20, SD=1.58) and intra-group (M=4.35, SD=1.78) conflicts compared with the control group who reported high community engagement intentions (M=5.50, SD=1.50) (ps<.01). No other significant differences were found between the groups (ps>.05).

To assess the impact of C2C conflicts on commercial outcomes, we conducted a one-way MANOVA with brand webcare credibility, brand attitude, brand trust and eWOM (positive and negative) as dependent variables, and forms of C2C conflict as the independent variable. The results showed a significant effect of C2C conflict on all dependent variables (Wilk's λ=.46, $F_{(15, 530)}$=11.35, p<.001, partial-η2=.23). We then used Tukey HSD post hoc tests for multiple pairwise comparisons.

In terms of webcare credibility, the respondents disagreed that the brand cares about how participants in its Facebook community converse in all three C2C conflict scenarios (intra-(M=2.94, SD=1.43), inter-group (M=3.38, SD=1.52), and outer-group (M=2.68, SD=1.04)) compared with the control condition (M=5.44, SD=1.07) (all ps<.001). Moreover, there was a significant difference between the inter-group and outer-group conflicts with respondents perceiving the brand as less caring in the inter-group conflict (p<.05). No other significant differences were found (p>.05).

Respondents further indicated that their attitude towards the brand is significantly lower in all C2C conflict scenarios (intra-group (M=4.38, SD=1.31, inter-group (M=5.15, SD=1.21),

and outer-group (*M*=4.37, *SD*=1.04)) compared with the non-hostile scenario (*M*=5.74, *SD*=1.00) (all *p*s<.05), but not affected negatively as seen in the descriptive results. Moreover, a significant difference was found between the inter-group conflict and the intra-group as well as between the inter-group and outer-group conflicts scenarios (*p*s<.01). No significant differences were found between the remaining groups (*p*>.05). Similarly, the results revealed significant differences between all C2C conflict scenarios (intra-group (*M*=4.52, *SD*=1.14), inter-group (*M*=4.73, *SD*=1.27), and outer-group (*M*=4.37, *SD*=1.01)) and the control group (*M*=5.43, *SD*=.97) on brand trust (all *p*s<.01). While brand trust is significantly lower in all conflict scenarios compared with the control condition, the descriptive results show that only the outer-group conflict has the potential to negatively impact brand trust. No significant differences were found between the three conflict groups (*p*s>.05).

Finally, the respondents disagreed that they would share pWOM about the brand's Facebook community in all three conflicts (intra-group (*M*=2.90, 1.44), inter-group (*M*=3.44, *SD*=1.46), and outer-group (*M*=2.73, *SD*=1.45)) compared with the non-hostile condition (*M*=5.12, *SD*=1.11) (*p*s<.001). No significant differences were found between the three conflict groups (*p*s>.05). In contrast, for nWOM, the respondents displayed a significantly higher tendency to engage in nWOM about the brand community after being exposed to all the conflict scenarios (intra-group (*M*=3.42, *SD*=1.58), inter-group (*M*=3.47, *SD*=1.37), and outer-group (*M*=3.72, *SD*=1.32)) in comparison with the control group (*M*=1.73, *SD*=.82) (*p*s<.001), but are unlikely to do so, as evidenced in the descriptive results. No significant differences were found between the three conflict groups (*p*s>.05).

Discussion

The results from Study 2 consistently show across several social and commercial OBC outcomes that C2C conflicts have a negative impact on both observing consumers and brands. This has important implications for the management of OBCs.

First, our findings demonstrate that C2C conflicts negatively impact the engagement and interactive behaviours of consumers on brand-managed communities. Accordingly, past research has demonstrated that uncivil online behaviours can discourage engagement behaviours by observing consumers (Adjei *et al.*, 2010; Bacile *et al.*, 2018). We confirm and advance this knowledge with insights into specific engagement behaviours. Specifically, we show in the presence of C2C conflicts, consumers will not participate in otherwise valuable to brands interactive behaviours such as liking and commenting on brand posts. Consumers are also overall less likely to visit, post comments in and follow the OBC. Moreover, we reveal that consumers are willing to dismiss uncivil C2C comments through hiding and reporting such incidents, which has important implications for brands regarding the overall engagement on their communities (Kumar, 2020).

A further novel contribution refers to the consumers' emotional response towards C2C conflicts in OBCs, which to date, has received little attention. Our findings confirm consumers do not experience positive emotions when exposed to C2C conflicts. Furthermore, there is an increased likelihood to experience negative emotions. In relation, researchers have shown that negative emotional experiences in brand communities can be particularly harmful for attracting and retaining novice community participants (Zhou *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, negative emotional responses can prevent brands from reaching a wide audience and promoting their agenda (Fombelle *et al.*, 2020). We advance this research by showing that the source of negative emotions in OBCs can be C2C conflicts.

Our second contribution lies in the consequences of C2C conflicts for brands. We find that exposure to C2C conflicts produces negative perceptions towards the brand's expertise in managing its community (webcare credibility). Weitzl and Hutzinger (2017) confirm this association in a service recovery context and found that webcare credibility is negatively impacted by the presence of uncivil customer behaviours and is dependent on effective incivility moderation. Building on these insights, we further observed that consumers' general attitudes towards the brand and trust perceptions decreased after witnessing a C2C conflict, but remained unaffected negatively, nevertheless. A possible explanation for these findings is consumers do not attribute blame to the brand for the occurrence of uncivil interactions in its online community since they recognise this is outside of the brand's control (Shin and Larson, 2020), but nevertheless expect the brand to moderate the incidents when they take place, which is illustrated by our webcare credibility results. Lastly, consumers are unlikely to recommend the OBC to others and displayed a higher tendency to dissuade others from engaging in the brand community after observing C2C conflicts. With these findings, we extend past research eWOM and community advocacy (e.g., Zhou *et al.*, 2019) by showing that when customers witness C2C conflicts, they will refrain from sharing pWOM and could engage in nWOM about the OBC.

Finally, the undesirable consequences we uncovered in Study 2 were largely present irrespective of the different C2C conflicts the participants were exposed to. This has an important implication for the management of OBCs and we owe it to consumers generally disapproving of uncivil online interactions in OBCs (Bacile *et al.*, 2018). Interestingly, conflicts between brand supporters and non-supporters (inter-group) as well as those caused by non-supporters of the brand (outer-group) generated more negative attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural intentions compared with conflicts between supporters of the brand (intra-group). We speculate this is because intra-group incivility is expected and normalised in online

community settings, as confirmed in research findings on routinized C2C conflicts (Husemann *et al.*, 2015), while conflicts stemming from rivalry and complete outsiders of the community are deemed as more intolerable.

Study 3a

Study 3a aims to address our RQ3. Study 3a uncovers who should be responsible for the moderation of C2C conflicts from the observing consumers' perspective, given the negative community consequences observed in Study 2. When managing OBCs, scholars have put forward multiple actors depending on the type of community (consumer- vs brand-managed), two of which are more prominent than others in relation to moderating uncivil behaviours: consumers and brands (Dineva *et al.*, 2017; Colliander and Wien, 2013; Närvänen *et al.*, 2019; Pedeliento *et al.*, 2020). In relation to the former, research has confirmed that consumers can act as successful moderators (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño, 2016), and that this is typical for consumer-managed online communities (e.g., Husemann *et al.*, 2015; Pedeliento *et al.*, 2020). In these communities, peer super users or key contributors engage in moderation in the absence of formal brand authority and/or brand appointed moderators (Noble *et al.*, 2012).

The majority of research, however, suggests brands are primarily responsible for the moderation of incivility in OBCs (e.g., Bacile *et al.*, 2018, Dholakia *et al.*, 2009; Dineva *et al.*, 2020; Närvänen *et al.*, 2019), particularly when these communities are brand-managed (Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). Since OBCs are created and funded by the brand, the responsibility for community management including establishing rules and expectations of appropriate customer engagement behaviours lies with the brand itself (Gensler *et al.*, 2013; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). Relatedly, when transgressive behaviours occur, consumers expect brands to get involved in the first instance by enforcing their established community engagement rules and moderate the

incivility incident (Bacile *et al.*, 2018; Pew Research Centre, 2021). Moreover, in OBCs, brands are perceived as the authority and intervening in transgressive interactions is most often and most effectively performed by formal brand moderators, according to Noble *et al.* (2012). Based on this research, we expect that in brand-managed communities, successful conflict moderation will be achieved by brands since consumers perceive governance to be the brand's (vs other consumers') first and foremost responsibility and predict the following:

H1: When C2C conflict occurs, the brand ("Author") will be perceived as a more credible actor in moderating the conflict compared to a consumer ("Top fan").

H2: When C2C conflict occurs, the brand ("Author") will be perceived as more successful in de-escalating the conflict compared with a consumer ("Top fan").

Method

In Study 3a, we employed a one-factor (moderation posted by: *Author* vs *Top fan*) between-subjects experimental design. We recruited respondents through an online panel (Prolific) who received a small monetary reward (£1 GBP) for their participation in the study. The sample consisted of 180 UK residents (M_{age}=30.26, age range 18-59, *SD*=9.67, Female=75.6%). The participants visited on average their chosen brand-managed community 2-3 times per month, while posted comments approximately once per month.

Procedure

Akin with Study 2, we asked the participants to name a brand that they follow on social media. The respondents who failed to name a brand, stated they never visited any of their chosen brand's social media communities, or failed the attention checks, were excluded from the study (n=41). Subsequently, the respondents were exposed to one C2C conflict scenario, following reading the same brand post we used in Study 2 (Appendix 1). One uniform conflict scenario was favoured in this and the following study, given the marginal differences found in

Study 2 between the different forms of C2C conflict. Next, we randomly allocated each subject to one of two experimental conditions, showcasing a different actor (brand (n=84); consumer (n=96)) moderating the conflict (see Appendix 3). We operationalised the conflict moderation in two ways. First, to account for different actors moderating the conflict, we adapted Facebook's interface features. The brand's moderation was labelled as posted by "Author", while a moderation posted by a consumer was labelled as "Top fan". Second, for the content of the moderation we utilised a "realignment" strategy (i.e., consumers are asked to adjust their language), which has been previously identified as most effective in moderating C2C conflict (Dineva *et al.*, 2020). Next, we asked respondents a control question regarding their expectations of conflict moderation. Thereafter, the respondents completed manipulation checks and answered questions about the credibility of moderator and perceptions about conflict de-escalation (see Table V for measures). The survey concluded with demographic items.

Findings

Using a chi-squared test, we confirmed that the respondents correctly differentiated between the different actors moderating the C2C conflict (brand vs consumer) ($\chi^2_{(1,\ 180)}$ = 135.16, p<.001). To test our first hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was performed with conflict moderator actor as the independent variable and moderator credibility as dependent. This showed statistically significant differences ($t_{(178)}$=3.78, p<.001). Although the descriptive results showed that both brands and consumers are seen credible conflict moderators, the respondents perceived the brand (M=5.53, SD=1.19) as the more credible actor in moderating the conflict compared with the consumer (M=4.86, SD=1.20), which confirms Hypothesis 1.

To test the second hypothesis, we performed an independent samples t-test with moderator actor as the independent variable and conflict de-escalation as a dependent variable, which

generated statistically significant results ($t_{(178)}$=2.19, p<.05). The results show that the brand is perceived as more successful in conflict de-escalation (M=3.87, SD=1.42) in comparison with a consumer (M=3.41, SD=1.39), thus allowing us to confirm Hypothesis 2. However, while there is a higher likelihood for the brand to de-escalate the C2C conflict, both actors are perceived as somewhat futile in doing so, as evidenced in the descriptive statistics. Taken together, these results show that when C2C conflicts occur on OBCs, it is the brand who is perceived as more suited to moderating these incidents.

Discussion

Our findings show that brands are perceived as more credible in moderating C2C conflicts in OBCs. The majority of past research suggests that brands should be responsible for the moderation of incivility in the OBCs they host (Bacile *et al.*, 2018; Dholakia *et al.*, 2009; Dineva *et al.*, 2017) and here we advance these findings by demonstrating that observing consumers favour brand (as opposed to consumer) moderators. In addition, brands are viewed as more suited to conflict de-escalation compared with other consumers, although this may not ultimately result in de-escalating C2C conflicts. A possible explanation for this finding is the range of contexts in which respondents' self-selected brands operate (e.g., commercial brands, non-profit brands) and the possible different conflict management expectations that may exist. Indeed, studies have shown that differences in communication strategies and content moderation on social media can produce diverse consumer perceptions (Dolan *et al.*, 2019; Hauser *et al.*, 2017).

Study 3b

Study 3b further addresses our RQ3 in order to understand whether credibility perceptions regarding the conflict moderator and conflict de-escalation success alter when the moderator receives support (versus not) from observing consumers in the community. Consequently, we

draw from established theories in social psychology, which confirm individuals can be susceptive to the opinions and behaviours of others in certain situations (i.e., interpersonal influences (Sweeney *et al.*, 2014)), as well as strive to behave like others by either categorising them into in-group and out-group members (i.e., social identity theory (Kuo and Hou, 2017)), or change/adapt their behaviours by learning from observing others (i.e., social learning theory (Zhou *et al.*, 2013)). In the context of C2C conflict moderation, we extend the findings from Study 3a and expect that observing other consumers within an OBC favouring (versus disapproving of) the moderator will impact the credibility perceptions of the moderator and the perceived success of conflict de-escalation. Thus:

H3a-b: When a C2C conflict occurs, (a) a moderator who received positive (vs negative) reactions from observing consumers in the community will be perceived as more credible and (b) this relationship will strengthen when the brand ("Author") moderates the conflict (vs a consumer; "Top fan").

H4a-b: When a C2C conflict occurs, (a) a moderator who received positive (vs negative) reactions from observing consumers in the community will be perceived as more successful in conflict de-escalation and (b) this relationship will strengthen when the brand ("Author") moderates the conflict (vs a consumer; "Top fan").

Method and Procedure

We conducted a randomized 2 (moderation posted by: *Author* vs *Top fan*) x 2 (*positive reactions* received vs *negative reactions* received) between-subjects experiment. We recruited subjects through an online panel (Prolific) who received a small monetary reward (£0.90 GBP) for their participation in the study. The sample consisted of 245 UK residents (M_{age}=29.89, age range 18-60, *SD*=8.96, Female=70.6%). The participants visited the online community of their chosen brand several times a month, while posted comments approximately once per month.

Study 3b followed the same procedure as Study 3a. In total, we removed 75 respondents from the study. We employed the same C2C conflict manipulation adopted in Study 3a, while the support from observing consumers (brand (n=58); consumer (n=68)) we operationalised by including positive emojis (i.e., "Like", "Love") as reactions to the moderator's comment, while non-support with the moderation (brand (n=59); consumer (n=60)) we manipulated using negative emojis (i.e., "Angry", "Shock") taken from Facebook's reactions banner (see Appendix 4). We utilised the same measures used in Study 3a, which are outlined in Table V.

Findings

Using a chi-squared test, we confirmed that the respondents correctly differentiated between the different reactions (positive vs negative) to the moderators ($\chi^2_{(3, 245)} = 121.79$, $p<.001$). We conducted a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with moderator actor and observing consumers' reactions as independent variables and moderator credibility as a dependent variable, which yielded significant results ($F_{(3, 245)}=10.88$, $p<.001$, partial-$\eta 2=.12$).

Tukey HSD post-hoc multiple comparison tests revealed that the brand moderator that received positive reactions ($M=5.90$, $SD=1.13$) is more credible than a consumer moderator who received positive ($M=5.16$, $SD=1.21$) ($p<.01$) as well as a more credible than a consumer moderator who received negative reactions ($M=4.72$, $SD=1.35$) ($p<.001$). The results further showed that a brand with negative reactions ($M=5.64$, $SD=1.18$) is still perceived as more credible than a consumer moderator with negative reactions ($p<.001$). No other significant differences were found ($ps>.05$). While the descriptive results suggest that both brands and consumers are perceived as suitable moderators to C2C conflicts, brands that receive both positive and negative reactions to their moderation are rated by respondents as most credible based on which we reject H3a and confirm H3b.

We further conducted a two-way ANOVA with conflict de-escalation as a dependent variable, which was statistically significant ($F_{(3, 245)}$=5.05, p<.01, partial-η2=.06). Tukey HSD post-hoc tests showed that both the brand (M=3.78, SD=1.40) as well as a consumer (M=3.73, SD=1.36) who received positive reactions, are perceived as more successful in conflict de-escalation in comparison with a consumer moderator receiving negative reactions (M=2.92, SD=1.32) (ps<.01). No other significant results were found between the remaining groups (ps>.05). These findings allow us to confirm H4a and reject H4b.

Discussion

Our results are consistent with Study 3a's findings and with past research suggesting that brands are better suited to moderating online incivility in their OBCs (Bacile *et al.*, 2018; Dholakia *et al.*, 2009; Dineva *et al.*, 2017). We extend this research and show that brands are perceived as more credible in moderating C2C conflicts, regardless of whether the moderation receives support or not from observing consumers. Importantly, however, our results further demonstrate that consumers can also be perceived as credible C2C conflict moderators in instances where they receive support from observing consumers in OBCs. This complements findings by Colliander and Wien (2013) on consumer defensive behaviours in consumer-managed communities and we extend this knowledge to brand-managed online communities.

Focusing on conflict de-escalation, we show that support (versus not) from observing consumers in the form of positive reactions matters for both brands and consumers. Specifically, both actors are perceived as more successful in conflict de-escalation in their presence. Moreover, while our descriptive results showed that C2C conflict moderation irrespective of the actor may not de-escalate the conflict, when negative reactions to the consumer moderator are present, de-escalation is less likely to happen. Our findings extend past research on the actors moderating online incivility (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Dineva *et*

al., 2017; Gillespie, 2017) and we suggest that a combined approach to C2C conflict moderation may be a suitable approach going forward for the successful management of OBCs.

General Discussion

Theoretical Implications

In this paper, we examined an important and increasingly prevalent phenomenon inherent to the dark side of brand-managed communities: C2C conflict. In doing so, we contribute to the customer misbehaviour and OBC management literature streams. Past research on consumer incivility is fragmented (Husemann and Luedicke *et al.*, 2013), focusing on isolated forms of incivility and distinguishing between these based on the online versus offline contexts in which they occur (Fombelle *et al.*, 2020). We add to this consumer misbehaviour literature by providing a fuller understanding into C2C conflict behaviour in OBCs and its distinct forms. Specifically, we distinguish between three forms of C2C conflict: intra-group, inter-group, and outer-group. Intra-group and inter-group conflicts have been acknowledged in past research on brand rivalry and the related within- versus between-community conflict behaviours (e.g., Ewing *et al.*, 2013; Ilhan *et al.*, 2018). We advance these findings by showing that not only different forms of within-community (intra-group) and between-community (inter-group) C2C conflict can occur within a single brand-managed community, but that C2C conflict can also be generated by complete outsiders (outer-group) of the OBC. Outer-group conflict is thus a novel contribution to the literature on uncivil consumer behaviours, which can typically be the result of other forms of incivility (e.g., trolling).

Our second and third contributions are to the broader brand community management literature (Miliopoulou, 2021; Skålén *et al.*, 2015; Wirtz *et al.*, 2013). We provide first empirical findings on the direct consequences of C2C conflicts on social and commercial community engagement outcomes. Focusing on social outcomes and in line with past research on online incivility (Adjei *et al.*, 2010; Bacile *et al.*, 2018), we show that C2C conflicts have

an overall adverse impact on consumer engagement in the OBC. Our findings advance this research with specific insights into diminished interactive behaviours (reactions to and interacting with others), community enjoyment (emotional responses) and community engagement (visiting intentions) following observing C2C conflict. Additionally, we uncover an important link between observing C2C conflict and one's emotional response in that consumers are more likely to experience negative emotions when exposed to conflicts. Others have shown that emotions are a strong driver of positive cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioural consumer outcomes in online communities (DeWitt *et al.*, 2008). Our study is the first to highlight consumers' negative affective processes to the detriment of the OBC in response to C2C conflicts taking place.

From a brand perspective, C2C conflicts produce mixed commercial outcomes. Consistent with past research findings in service recovery contexts (Shin and Larson, 2020; Weitzl and Hutzinger, 2017), our results demonstrate that perceptions of the brand's webcare credibility is negatively impacted in the presence of C2C conflicts. Interestingly, however, C2C conflicts do not result in negative brand attitudes and brand distrust. We speculate that while consumers may expect brands to moderate uncivil interactions in their online communities, the occurrence of C2C conflict is ultimately perceived to be outside of the brand's control, therefore not affecting attitudes towards the brand and perceptions of trust. Nonetheless, we demonstrate that consumers are less willing to encourage and are more willing to discourage others from participating in the OBC when different forms of C2C conflicts occur, which research by Liao and Wang (2020) found to be negatively impacting brand commitment.

Finally, we specifically advance research into the moderation of online incivility in OBCs (Bacile *et al.*, 2018; Dineva *et al.*, 2017). We extend scarce findings on how different moderators impact adverse consumer behaviours within online communities when conflict takes place. While past research suggested that brands may be best suited (Dineva *et al.*, 2017),

we offer further insight into these dynamics and complement these findings in two ways. First, we evidence brands are consumers' preferred choice in C2C conflict moderation because brands are perceived as more credible and more successful at conflict de-escalation compared to consumers. Second, we demonstrate that the credibility of a moderator can be increased if the moderator is offered support by other community members. Thus, our findings show that moderation dynamics are not simple and that the interplay between the brand moderator and consumer support is most effective at tackling C2C conflict.

Managerial Implications

Our study raises important implications for marketing and brand managers practicing in the social media space. Our findings reveal consumers who view online conflict including profanities and aggressive exchanges in brands' online community spaces do not automatically distrust the brand. This finding is welcome news to managers who are concerned that the occurrence of online conflict might blight consumers' attitudes towards the brands which they manage. However, our data also evidences that practitioners cannot afford to be passive in the moderation of C2C conflicts, because C2C conflicts can negatively impact brand attitude dynamics. Consequently, brands should actively moderate such incidences and be seen to do so by members of the brand community. Specifically, our findings show that the brand is most credible and successful in de-escalating C2C conflicts compared to consumer moderation, and therefore managers might increase the functionality and positivity of their brand communities via active moderation of conflicts as opposed to assuming passive "let's see if this blows over" or "let them fight it out amongst themselves" approaches. Thus, allocating sufficient resources to this task could yield wide ranging benefits including the mitigation of C2C conflicts, fostering positive attitudinal and emotional responses from consumers and the ability to utilise some form of prompt over the tone of the narratives, which occur on brand community pages. Indeed, the results from our analysis reinforce the importance of assuming an active versus a

passive approach to the moderation of C2C conflicts because active moderation by the brand has positive effects on how consumers view the brand.

While our findings show that the brand is best positioned to moderate brand community C2C conflicts, our data also highlights the value of other user support. That is, we find that moderation efforts are deemed most effective when the moderator is supported by other users. Consequently, brands might consider how they could utilise brand ambassadors and key contributors in their community spaces to play a secondary supportive moderation role reinforcing the moderators' narratives and further tackling and de-escalating C2C conflicts. This approach maintains the brand's authority as primary moderator and thus regulator of the space but allows community members to aid and assist in such proceedings. This two-prong approach may yield greater levels of success in the moderation of C2C conflicts because all community actors (the brand and its users) are involved with the co-creation of policing the brand community space.

The study results demonstrate that not all C2C brand conflicts are the same and consequently, managers may need to moderate and tackle each form using different tactics and strategies. For example, our study reveals a form of previously unexplored brand conflict labelled outer-brand conflict. At first glance, practitioners may pay little attention to this content, because it does not directly relate to the brand, its products or services, or brand values. However, given that benefits can be gained in consumer brand attitudes, trust, and community engagement from moderating such exchanges, and the assumption that brands wish to foster positive and constructive online communities, practitioners should actively manage such exchanges. For example, while conflicts regarding misinformation surrounding the brand itself (i.e., a form of intra-group conflict) might be best tackled via direct debunking and presentation of the "facts", dealing with outer-brand conflicts will require a different approach wherein the

brand might focus on the appropriateness of the presentation of the narrative (i.e., use of profanities and insults), rather than the argument itself.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study's limitations provide opportunities for future research. First, our research settings are based within one social media platform – Facebook, due to its popularity and being deemed an appropriate site for investigating the phenomenon at hand (e.g., Bowden and Mirzaei, 2021). It is likely that consumers' interactive behaviours as well as moderation practices on other social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) vary, and we recommend future research investigates the format and content of conflict taking place on these platforms and brands' subsequent responses. Second, our studies utilised a wide range of self-selected brands from different product/service categories and backgrounds, which may have impacted the consumer involvement with the brand and the subsequent perceived effectiveness of the moderator. Future studies might investigate whether the perceived effectiveness of the moderator (brand versus consumer) vary depending on the brand at hand e.g., low versus high involvement brands, utilitarian versus hedonic brands, as well as in combination with different communication content.

Third, the literature differentiates between consumer- and brand-managed online communities and the focus of this work was on the latter. By exclusively adopting the lens of brand-managed communities, our research excluded consumer-led communities, which may produce additional insights into the nature of C2C conflicts and perceptions about their management. In response, we encourage future research to examine consumer-managed communities including anti-brand communities in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the overarching phenomenon of OBC management. Fourth, we examined the effectiveness of different moderators in the context of the received support (versus disproval) from observing

consumers and acknowledge that other factors may influence their perceived effectiveness such as the content of the strategy. A corresponding future research area thus lies in investigating additional conditions contributing to the perceived effectiveness of moderators handling C2C conflicts.

References

Adjei, M. T., Noble, S. M., and Noble, C. H. (2010). "The influence of C2C communications in OBCs on customer purchase behaviour", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 38, No. 5, pp. 634-653.

Arsel, Z., and Thompson, C. J. (2010). "Demythologizing consumption practices: How consumers protect their field-dependent identity investments from devaluing marketplace myths", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 37, No. 5, pp. 791-806.

Aziz, R., and Rahman, Z. (2022). "Brand hate: a literature review and future research agenda", *European Journal of Marketing*, (ahead-of-print).

Bacile, T. J., Wolter, J. S., Allen, A. M., and Xu, P. (2018). "The effects of online incivility and consumer-to-consumer interactional justice on complainants, observers, and service providers during social media service recovery", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 44, pp. 60-81.

Bergkvist, L., and Rossiter, J. R. (2007). "The predictive validity of multiple-item versus single-item measures of the same constructs", *Journal of marketing research*, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 175-184.

Bowden, J., and Mirzaei, A. (2021). "Consumer engagement within retail communication channels: an examination of OBCs and digital content marketing initiatives", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 55, No, 5, pp. 1411-1439.

Brandwatch (2021), "Uncovered: online hate speech in the Covid era", available at: https://www.brandwatch.com/reports/online-hate-speech/view/ (accessed 16 August 2022)

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006). "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. *3*, No. 2, pp. 77-101.

Chandrasapth, K., Yannopoulou, N., Schoefer, K., Licsandru, T. C., and Papadopoulos, T. (2021), "Conflict in online consumption communities: a systematic literature review and directions for future research", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 38, No. 5, pp. 900-926.

Cocker, H., Mardon, R., and Daunt, K. L. (2021). "Social media influencers and transgressive celebrity endorsement in consumption community contexts", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 55, No. 7, pp. 1841-1872.

Colliander, J., and Wien, H. A. (2013). "Trash talk rebuffed: consumers' defense of companies criticized in online communities", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 47, No. 10, pp. 1733-1757.

Dessart, L., Aldás-Manzano, J. and Veloutsou, C. (2019). "Unveiling heterogeneous engagement-based loyalty in brand communities", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 53 No. 9, pp. 1854-1881.

Dessart, L., Veloutsou, C. and Morgan-Thomas, A. (2020). "Brand negativity: a relational perspective on anti-brand community participation", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54 No. 7, pp. 1761-1785.

DeWitt, T., Nguyen, D. T., and Marshall, R. (2008). "Exploring customer loyalty following service recovery: The mediating effects of trust and emotions", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol.10. No. 3, pp. 269-281.

Dholakia, U. M., Blazevic, V., Wiertz, C., and Algesheimer, R. (2009). "Communal service delivery how customers benefit from participation in firm-hosted virtual P3 communities", *Journal of Service Research,* Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 208-226.

Dineva, D. and Breitsohl, J. (2022), "Managing trolling in online communities: an organizational perspective", *Internet Research*, Vol. 32 No. 1, pp. 292-311.

Dineva, D., Breitsohl, J., and Garrod, B. (2017). "Corporate conflict moderation on social media brand fan pages", *Journal of Marketing Moderation*, Vol. 33, No. 9-10, pp. 679-698.

Dineva, D., Breitsohl, J., Garrod, B., and Megicks, P. (2020). "Consumer responses to conflict-moderation strategies on non-profit social media fan pages", *Journal of Interactive Marketing* Vol. 52, pp. 118-136.

Dolan, R., Conduit, J., Frethey-Bentham, C., Fahy, J., and Goodman, S. (2019). "Social media engagement behaviour: A framework for engaging customers through social media content", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 53, No, 10, pp. 2213-2243.

Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E., and Powell, I. H. (2013). "Brand rivalry and community conflict", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66, No. 1, pp. 4-12.

Fereday, J., and Muir-Cochrane, E. (2006). "Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 80-92.

Fombelle, P. W., Voorhees, C. M., Jenkins, M. R., Sidaoui, K., Benoit, S., Gruber, T., and Abosag, I. (2020). "Customer deviance: A framework, prevention strategies, and opportunities for future research", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 116, pp. 387-400.

Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y., and Wiertz, C. (2013), "Managing brands in the social media environment", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 242-256.

Gillespie, T. (2017). "Governance of and by platforms", *SAGE Handbook of Social Media*, pp. 254-278.

Golf-Papez, M., and Veer, E. (2017). "Don't feed the trolling: rethinking how online trolling is being defined and combated", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 33, No. 15-16, pp. 1336-1354.

Hakala, H., Niemi, L., and Kohtamäki, M. (2017). "Online brand community practices and the construction of brand legitimacy", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 537-558.

Hansen, N., Kupfer, A. K., and Hennig-Thurau, T. (2018). "Brand crises in the digital age: The short- and long-term effects of social media firestorms on consumers and brands", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 557-574.

Hanson, S., Jiang, L., and Dahl, D. (2019). "Enhancing consumer engagement in an OBC via user reputation signals: a multi-method analysis", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 349-367.

Hassan, M., and Ariño, L. V. C. (2016), "Consumer devotion to a different height: How consumers are defending the brand within Facebook brand communities", *Internet Research*, Vol. 26, No, 4, pp. 963-981.

Hauser, F., Hautz, J., Hutter, K., and Füller, J. (2017). "Firestorms: Modeling conflict diffusion and moderation strategies in online communities", *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, Vol. 26, No. 4, pp. 285-321.

Hemetsberger, A. (2006). "When David becomes goliath: Ideological discourse in new online consumer movements", *Advances in Consumer Research,* Vol. 33, pp. 494–500.

Herhausen, D., Ludwig, S., Grewal, D., Wulf, J., and Schoegel, M. (2019). "Detecting, preventing, and mitigating online firestorms in brand communities", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 83, No. 3, pp. 1-21.

Husemann, K. C., and Luedicke, M. K. (2013). "Social conflict and consumption: A meta-analytical perspective", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 41, pp. 355-360.

Husemann, K., Ladstaetter, F. and Luedicke, M., (2015). "Conflict culture and conflict moderation in consumption communities", *Psychology & Marketing,* Vol. 32, No. 3, pp. 265-284.

Ilhan, B. E., Kübler, R. V., and Pauwels, K. H. (2018). "Battle of the brand fans: impact of brand attack and defense on social media", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 43, pp. 33-51.

Jann, B., and Hinz, T. (2016). "Research question and design for survey research", *The SAGE Handbook of Survey Methodology*, pp. 105-121.

Janssen, O., and Van de Vliert, E. (1996). "Concern for the other's goals: Key to (de-) escalation of conflict", *International Journal of Conflict Moderation*, Vol. 7, No, 2, pp. 99-120.

Japutra, A., Ekinci, Y., Simkin, L. and Nguyen, B. (2018), "The role of ideal self-congruence and brand attachment in consumers' negative behaviour: Compulsive buying and external trash-talking", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52 No. 3/4, pp. 683-701.

Johnen, M., and Schnittka, O. (2019). "When pushing back is good: The effectiveness of brand responses to social media complaints", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 47, No. 5, pp. 858-878.

Klein, J. G., Smith, N. C., and John, A. (2004). "Why we boycott: Consumer motivations for boycott participation", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 92-109.

Kozinets, R.V. (2002). "The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities", *Journal of Marketing Research,* Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 61-72.

Kumar, J. (2021). "Understanding customer brand engagement in brand communities: an application of psychological ownership theory and congruity theory", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 969-994.

Kuo, Y. F., and Hou, J. R. (2017). "Oppositional brand loyalty in OBCs: perspectives on social identity theory and consumer-brand relationship", *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 254.

Kwon, K. H., and Gruzd, A. (2017). "Is offensive commenting contagious online? Examining public vs interpersonal swearing in response to Donald Trump's YouTube campaign videos", *Internet Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 991-1010.

Liao, J., and Wang, D. (2020). "When does an OBC backfire? An empirical study", *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 413-430.

Lee, H. (2005). "Behavioural strategies for dealing with flaming in an online forum", *The Sociological Quarterly, Vol. 46*, No. 2, pp. 385-403.

Miliopoulou, G.-Z. (2021), "Brand communities, fans or publics? How social media interests and brand moderation practices define the rules of engagement", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 55 No. 12, pp. 3129-3161.

Muñiz, A. M., and O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). "Brand community", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 412-432.

Naumann, K., Bowden, J., and Gabbott, M. (2020). "Expanding customer engagement: the role of negative engagement, dual valences and contexts", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54, No. 7, pp. 1469-1499.

Närvänen, E., Koivisto, P., and Kuusela, H. (2019), "Managing consumption communities", *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 5, pp. 388-404.

Newell, S. J., and Goldsmith, R. E. (2001). "The development of a scale to measure perceived corporate credibility", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 52, No, 3, pp. 235-247.

Noble, C.H., Noble, S.M. and Adjei, M.T. (2012), "Let them talk! Managing primary and extended online brand communities for success", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 55 No. 5, pp. 475-483.

Pedeliento, G., Andreini, D., and Veloutsou, C. (2020), "Brand community integration, participation and commitment: A comparison between consumer-run and company-managed communities", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 119, pp. 481-494.

Pew Research Center, (2021). The State of Online Harassment, available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/01/13/the-state-of-online-harassment/ (accessed 16 August 2022)

Richins, M. L. (1983). Negative word-of-mouth by dissatisfied consumers: A pilot study. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 68-78.

Romani, S., Grappi, S., Zarantonello, L., and Bagozzi, R. P. (2015). "The revenge of the consumer! How brand moral violations lead to consumer anti-brand activism", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 22, No. 8, pp. 658-672.

Rust, R. T., and Cooil, B. (1994). "Reliability measures for qualitative data: Theory and implications", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 1-14.

Shin, H., and Larson, L. R. (2020), "The bright and dark sides of humorous response to online customer complaint", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 54, No. 8, pp. 2013-2047.

Skålén, P., Pace, S. and Cova, B. (2015), "Firm-brand community value co-creation as alignment of practices", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49 No. 3/4, pp. 596-620.

Song, Y., Kwon, K. H., Xu, J., Huang, X., and Li, S. (2020). "Curbing profanity online: A network-based diffusion analysis of profane speech on Chinese social media", *New Media & Society*, pp. 1-22.

Statista (2022a). Brands on social media - statistics & facts, available at: https://www.statista.com/topics/2057/brands-on-social-media/#topicHeader__wrapper (accessed 16 August 2022).

Statista (2022b). Share of businesses using social media in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2013 to 2018, by industry sector, available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/284286/social-media-use-by-businesses-in-the-united-kingdom-uk-by-industry-sector/ (accessed 16 August 2022).

Sung, Y., and Kim, J. (2010). "Effects of brand personality on brand trust and brand affect", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 27, No. 7, pp. 639-661.

Swani, K., and Labrecque, L. I. (2020). "Like, Comment, or Share? Self-presentation vs. brand relationships as drivers of social media engagement choices", *Marketing Letters*, Vol. 31, pp. 279-298.

Sweeney, J., Soutar, G. and Mazzarol, T. (2014), "Factors enhancing word-of-mouth influence: positive and negative service-related messages", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 48, No. 1/2, pp. 336-359.

Weiger, W.H., Wetzel, H.A. and Hammerschmidt, M. (2019), "Who's pulling the strings? The motivational paths from marketer actions to user engagement in social media", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 53 No. 9, pp. 1808-1832.

Weitzl, W., and Hutzinger, C. (2017). "The effects of marketer-and advocate-initiated online service recovery responses on silent bystanders", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 80, pp. 164-175.

Wirtz, J., den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., van de Klundert, J., Gurhan Canli, Z. and Kandampully, J. (2013), "Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities", *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 223-244.

Zarantonello, L., Romani, S., Grappi, S., and Bagozzi, R. P. (2016). "Brand hate" *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 11-25.

Zhou, Z., Wu, J. P., Zhang, Q., and Xu, S. (2013). "Transforming visitors into members in OBCs: Evidence from China", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66, No. 12, pp. 2438-2443.

Zhang, Y., Zhang, J. and Sakulsinlapakorn, K. (2020), "Love becomes hate? or love is blind? Moderating effects of brand love upon consumers' retaliation towards brand failure", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 415-432.

Zhou, Z., Zhan, G., and Zhou, N. (2019). "How does negative experience sharing influence happiness in OBC? A dual-path model", *Internet Research*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 575-590.

Tables

Table I Brand- and consumption-related forms of incivility in OBCs

Form of incivility	Purpose	Direction	Target	Author(s), year
C2C conflict	To express divergent opinions in a hostile manner.	Bi-directional	Other consumers	Dineva *et al.* (2017) Husemann and Luedicke (2013)
Brand hate	To express repulsion, disgust, anger, rage, or contempt towards a brand.	Unidirectional	Brands	Aziz and Rahman (2022) Zarantonello *et al.* (2016)
Trolling	To disrupt and aggravate brand and consumer communications with no instrumental purpose.	Undirected	Brands and other consumers	Dineva and Breitsohl (2022) Golf-Papez and Veer (2017)
nWOM	To share negative information about a brand, typically in response to a dissatisfactory experience.	Unidirectional	Brands	Richins (1983) Sweeney *et al.* (2014)
Firestorms	To cause a social media scandal through the accumulation of conflict/nWOM in response to a specific brand (mal)practice.	Unidirectional	Brands	Hauser *et al.* (2017) Herhausen *et al.* (2019)

Anti-brand activities	To participate in activities (boycott, revenge, retaliation) that sabotage and/or punish the brand.	Unidirectional	Brands	Klein *et al.* (2004) Romani *et al.* (2015) Zhang *et al.* (2020)

Table II Study 1 sample

Brand community	**Description**
Adidas	Sports apparel brand 39,641,538 followers https://www.facebook.com/adidasUK
Burger King	Food and drink brand 8,499,585 followers https://www.facebook.com/burgerking
Costa Coffee	Coffee and beverages brand 1,754,271 followers https://www.facebook.com/CostaCoffee
Nike	Sportswear brand 36,571,286 followers https://www.facebook.com/nike
Tesco	Retail and consumer merchandise 2,595,249 followers https://www.facebook.com/tesco

Table III C2C conflict characteristics (adapted from Dineva *et al*., 2020; Husemann and Luedicke, 2013)

Characteristic	**Description**	**Examples**
Two-way interactive exchange	A two-way episode where the originator (aggressor/victim) looks for/receives a verbal response from another person.	Consumer 1: "Back to slavery? Smfh!!!! Dislike!!!! I would have never agreed to this. " Consumer 2: "Lol dislike, what a joker" Consumer 1: "Go suck your mum fucktard"
Conflict actors	Two or more parties with mutual visibility and contact.	Minimum actors: 2, Maximum actors: 42
Consumption mediator (i.e., underlying conflict object)	Central to the conflict consumption activity or object that gives rise to the conflict.	product frustration, unpleasant retail experience, inadequate brand promotion, immoral celebrity endorser, unethical brand practices
Profanity	The use of obscene words and language.	"twat", "fuck", "fucking", "jack shit", "bastards", "fucktard", "suck it", "horseshit"
Rude or insulting diatribe	(Hostile) personal attacks towards a user who posts a comment.	"mind your own fucking business" "Find out what hypocrite means before you go spouting your gob off!" "How is it a scam the cup gets filled to the brim you would scold yourself idiots" "Uneducated moron."

Emoticons and acronyms	The use of emoticons and acronyms to reinforce the content intensity.	(middle finger emoji), (straight face emoji), (angry face emoji) "Smfh", "ffs", "stfu", "wtf"
Capitalized words and sentences	The deliberate use of capitalized words/sentences to emphasize a point/ express the emotion of anger.	"SCUMBAGS", "WE ARE NOW ORGANISING TO BOYCOT your products" "yes BUTT LOVER?" "WHAT AN APPALLING WAY TO TREAT CUSTOMERS!!!"
Multiple punctuation marks	The deliberate use of multiple punctuation marks to express an intense emotion.	"!!!", "???", "?!?!", "…."

Table IV C2C conflict forms

Codes	**Themes**	**Frequency**	**Definition**	**Data excerpt**
Different personal values or opinions regarding what are acceptable brand practices (e.g., products, brand promotions) or how the brand should be	**Intra-group**	11%	C2C conflict whereby consumers who appear to support the same brand engage in uncivil discourse.	"Victoria Jackson: *I was in a que with a friend who pointed out a dead one on a cake and then you could see tiny ones flying all over the place I think new cabinets that's close would be better couldn't believe they were still selling it all* [sic]

consumed Consumer of the brand expressing dissatisfaction/attacking/ boycotting the brand, while other consumers directly or indirectly defend the brand				Andy Styles*: @Victoria Christmas time a bit late for complaining now like ha* Victoria Jackson: *@Andy wasn't complaining merely stating a fact So mind your own fucking business"* "Helen Gough: *Can you only use it once does anyone know?* Iain Clark: *If only @Helen would have taken the time to read the description on the post, Helen would have gotten her answer, We wish Helen a speedy recovery from her eyesight (smiley emoji)* Helen Gough: *Guess I was too busy watching the video, no need to be mean! Crikey must be hard being perfect! Thank you Tesco for being kinder"*
Apparent supporter of the brand directly or indirectly defends the brand and/or brand practices against	**Inter-group**	61%	C2C conflict whereby consumers engage in uncivil discourse to defend the brand against brand adversaries.	"Evan Fraser: *Why is burger king so much more expensive than mcdonalds? 9 quid for a meal wtf you can go to five guys for that* James Millar*: Real food.....*

brand adversaries who disagree with/challenge/attack the brand Brand adversaries praise competitor brands, while other consumers support the brand and challenge brand adversaries				Connor Dow: *Obvious reasons , look at the quality of McDonald's* Georgie Synnott: *The food shits on Mcdonalds!* Paula Wilson: *Because McDonald's are crap*!" "Martin Ridley: *Pay up taxes ur a bunch of tax evaders and ur sarnies r rank!!* [sic] Joanne Fraser: *@Martin get your fact right and mind your own dam business* Brian Dark: *Lol! @Martin, you're a tool!* Sam Norton: *@Martin u twat its Starbucks*"
Apparently uninvolved/uninterested in the brand itself adversaries engage in uncivil discourse in relation to a brand topic (e.g., brand endorser/celebrity, brand charitable activities, brand	**Outer-group**	28%	C2C conflict whereby apparent non-supporters of the brand engage in uncivil discourse.	"Natalia Knowles: *If people are so concerned with following the bible they wouldn't be wearing Nike anyway as a lot of it is made from mixed fibres and that's forbidden in the bible….lol* Dina Taul: *@Natalia , that is an incorrect understanding of the Bible. The mixed fibre law is in the book of Leviticus, which were*

content marketing)	*laws specifically for Isrealites living in the land of canaan. If you want Biblical law on homosexuality, try Romans 1:26-27* [sic] Alex Brooks: *Religious idiots pick and choose from the bible to meet their needs. Lothar Rivera: Worst than animals indeed.*"
A brand troll post comment in relation to the brand to aggravate other consumers	*In relation to Tesco's content marketing promoting national vegetarian week:* "Jamie Jones: Is there a national carnivore week? *Allllll the bacon (smiley emoji)* Oliver McDermott: *Allllll the cancer and heart disease. Yum* Jamie Jones: *Did you know 100% of vegetarians die... No matter what they eat.* Oliver McDermott: *Yeah, but we don't die as quickly as you would. Vegans live even longer! (face screaming with fear emoji)*"

Table V Research measures

Constructs and items	**Study 2**
Social measures	
Conflict interactive behaviours* (Swani and Labrecque, 2020)	
I would be willing to 'Like' one or more of these comments.	
I would be willing to 'Hide' one or more of these comments.	
I would be willing to 'Report' one or more of these comments.	
I would be willing to interact with one or more of these social media users.	
Positive emotions (DeWitt *et al.*, 2008)	α=.96
Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each of the following states.	
Enjoyment, Pleasure, Happiness, Excitement	
Negative emotions (DeWitt *et al.*, 2008)	α=.94
Please indicate the extent to which you experienced each of the following states.	
Distressed, Hostile, Irritable, Incensed	
Brand community engagement (Hanson *et al.*, 2019)	α= .71
I would be willing to visit the [chosen brand]'s Facebook community.	
I would be willing to post comments on the [chosen brand]'s Facebook community.	
I would be willing to unfollow the [chosen brand]'s Facebook community (*item reversed*).	
Commercial measures	
Webcare credibility (Weitzl and Hutzinger, 2017)	
I think that the brand cares about how people converse on its page.	
Brand attitude (Johnen and Schnittka, 2019)	α=.97
My attitude towards the brand is positive/favourable/good.	

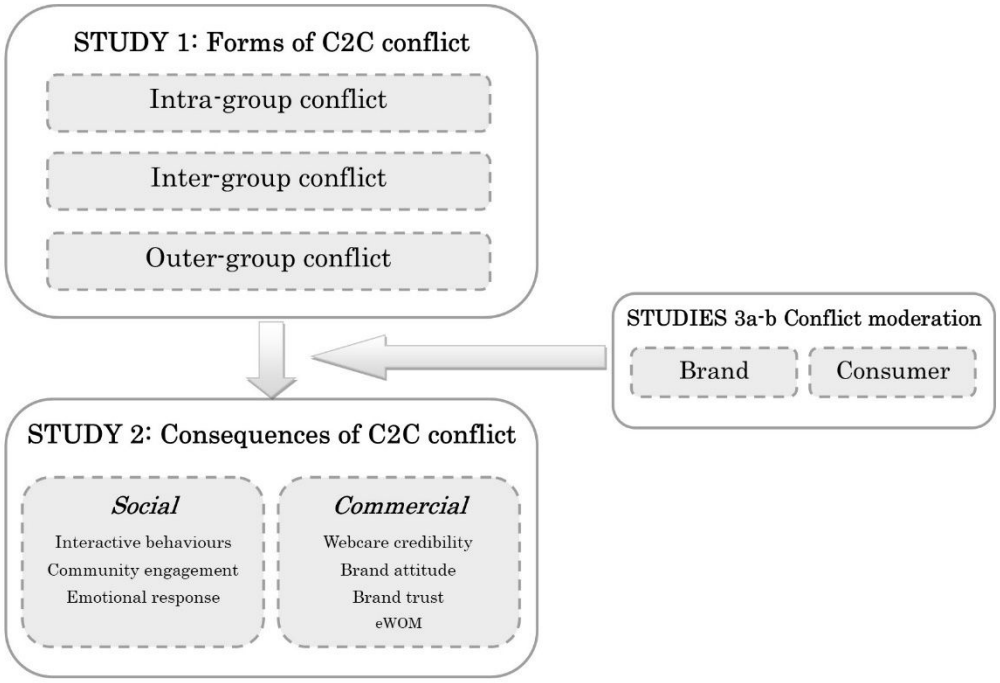
	Study 3a	Study 3b
Brand trust (Sung and Kim, 2010) I think the brand is trustworthy/credible/authentic.	α=.88	
Positive eWOM (Richins, 1983) I would say positive things about this community. I would encourage others to visit this Facebook community. I would recommend the Facebook community to others.	α=.92	
Negative eWOM (Richins, 1983) I would warn others not to visit this Facebook community. I would tell others not to use this Facebook community. I would say negative things about this Facebook community.	α=.91	
Perceived seriousness of the conflict (Dineva *et al.*, 2020) I think that comments like these are intolerable.		
Moderator credibility (Newell and Goldsmith, 2001) In my opinion, the Facebook account that posted the final comment in the comments thread is... Credible/Reliable/Trustworthy	α=.93	α=.96
Conflict de-escalation (Janssen and Van de Vliert, 1996) Having seen who posted the final comment on the comments thread, how likely do you think it is that… The seriousness of the discussion will subside. The issue causing the discussion will be resolved. The discussion will become less antagonistic.	α=.80	α=.83
Expectation of conflict moderation (Dineva *et al.*, 2020) I think comments like these should be moderated.		

Notes. All items were assessed on an ascending 7-point Likert scale. Single-item measures used due to the concrete nature of the construct (i.e., easily and uniformly imagined) (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007). *Items assessed individually.

Table VI Study 2 univariate results

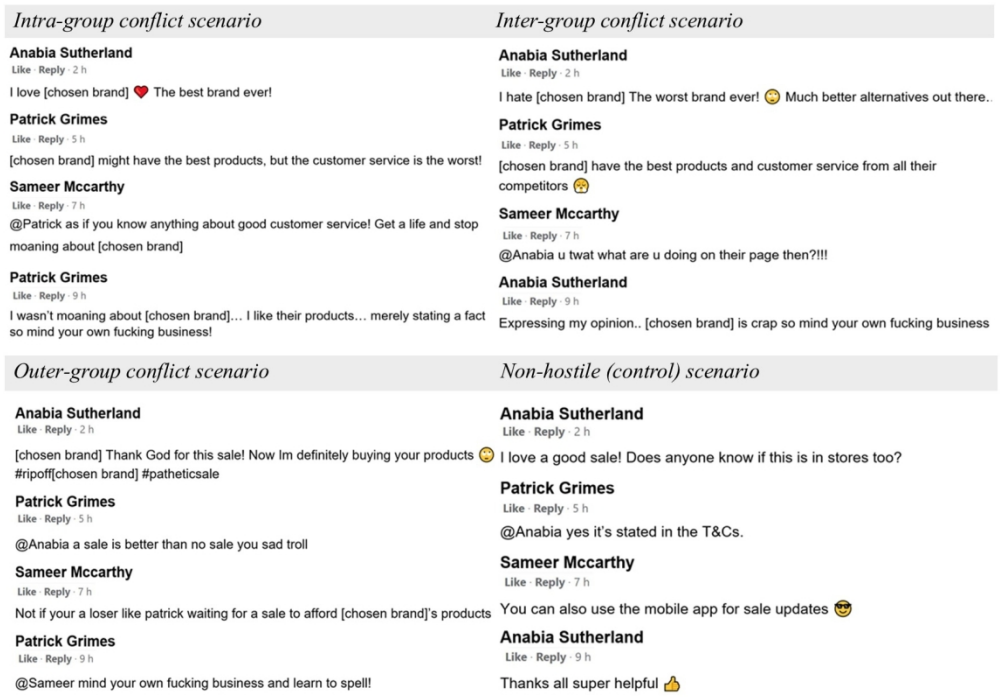
Dependent variable (outcomes)	**Df**	**Error**	**Mean square**	***F***	**Partial-η2**	**Sig.**
Social						
Like the conflict	3	3.64	28.70	7.89	.11	<.001
Hide the conflict	3	3.05	39.94	13.09	.17	<.001
Report the conflict	3	2.87	71.60	24.99	.28	<.001
Interact with the conflict	3	2.14	42.97	20.08	.24	<.001
Positive emotions	3	1.87	32.55	17.37	.21	<.001
Negative emotions	3	1.79	59.42	33.28	.34	<.001
Community engagement	3	2.74	16.98	6.21	.09	<.001
Total	200					
Commercial						
Webcare credibility	3	1.69	78.46	46.39	.42	<.001
Brand attitude	3	1.33	21.69	16.27	.20	<.001
Brand trust	3	1.24	10.87	8.81	.12	<.001
Positive eWOM	3	1.88	59.33	31.65	.33	<.001
Negative eWOM	3	1.70	41.73	24.57	.27	<.001
Total	200					

Figure 1 Research overview



Appendix 1. Brand post stimulus

144x137mm (144 x 144 DPI)



Appendix 2. Study 2 stimuli

297x209mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Brand ('Author') moderation

Lawson Orr

Like · Reply · 9 h

I hate [chosen brand] The worst brand ever! 🙄

Erin Waters

Like · Reply · 7 h

@Lawson u twat what are u doing on their page then?!!!

Lawson Orr

Like · Reply · 5 h

Expressing my opinion.. so mind your own fucking business 🖕

[chosen brand]

Author Like · Reply · 2 h

Swearing will not be tolerated, so can we watch our language please.

Consumer ('Top fan') moderation

Lawson Orr

Like · Reply · 9 h

I hate [chosen brand] The worst brand ever! 🙄

Erin Waters

Like · Reply · 7 h

@Lawson u twat what are u doing on their page then?!!!

Lawson Orr

Like · Reply · 5 h

Expressing my opinion.. so mind your own fucking business 🖕

Finnley Reynolds

Top fan Like · Reply · 2 h

All this swearing is intolerable, so can we watch our language please.

Appendix 3. Study 3a stimuli

209x297mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Reactions to brand ('Author') moderation

[chosen brand]

Author **Like** · **Reply** · 2 h

Swearing will not be tolerated, so can we watch our language please.

77

[chosen brand]

Author **Like** · **Reply** · 2 h

Swearing will not be tolerated, so can we watch our language please.

77

Reactions to consumer ('Top fan') moderation

Finnley Reynolds

Top fan **Like** · **Reply** · 2 h

All this swearing is intolerable, so can we watch our language please.

77

Finnley Reynolds

Top fan **Like** · **Reply** · 2 h

All this swearing is intolerable, so can we watch our language please.

77

Appendix 4. Study 3b stimuli

137x147mm (144 x 144 DPI)