**THE DARK SIDE REVEALED:**

**INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS FROM ONLINE BRAND COMMUNITIES**

**Structured abstract**

*Purpose*: This study presents a comprehensive review of the literature on the dark side of online brand communities, identifying the dominant themes (determinants of the dark side in OBCs) in the literature and proposing ways to advance the literature in this area.

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

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

Originality: This study is unique in conducting an in-depth analysis of the literature on the dark side of online brand communities, an area that has received little attention. This review offers new insights that would help brands effectively manage negative aspects of customer behaviours in online brand communities. For managers, this review enables brands to improve their image, reputation, and customer value.

*Practical implications*:

First, this study highlights the need for brands to engage in the active moderation of OBCs to maintain information credibility and manage information overload. Second, to ensure an inclusive community environment for all members, brands need to foster a balanced forum culture and moderation that discourages heterogeneity.

***Keywords:*** *Online brand communities, dark side, branding, deviant behaviour, trolling*

# Introduction

Online brand communities (OBCs) are specialized, non-geographical user groups that form around brands through online platforms to achieve a collective or shared goal (Liao *et al.,* 2020b). Despite the positive or bright aspects of these communities, there is growing recognition of their dark or negative side. Researchers indicate that OBCs may become platforms for the dissemination of misinformation, cyberbullying, and other deviant behaviours (Behl and Jain, 2023). The ‘dark side’ of OBCs refers to the negative or deviant behaviours customers engage within OBCs. Unlike the bright side, where positive interactions foster community engagement and brand loyalty, the dark side adversely impacts trust and cooperation among members (Liao *et al*., 2020b). Recent studies have demonstrated that significant heterogeneity in members within these communities leads to anti-brand or deviant actions (Behl and Jain, 2023; Özbölük and Dursun, 2017). Thus, group heterogeneity or diversity results in deviant customer behaviours that adversely impact the ability of OBCs to achieve the intended brand-related outcomes. Furthermore, when consumers engage in deviant behaviours such as conflicts in OBCs, brands suffer from reduced credibility and higher negative word of mouth (Dineva *et al.,* 2017).

 **Research on the dark side has identified various customer deviant or negative behaviours that are detrimental to both the community and the brand.** Azer and Alexander (2020) identified six forms of direct and indirect negatively valanced influencing behaviours, such as discrediting, deriding, regretting, dissuading, endorsing competitors, and raising warnings on OBCs. This study is an attempt to fill the research gap on negative consumer behaviours prevalent in OBCs in the setting of the dark side of OBCs which is lacking and has been examined in organization research in the context of traditional organizations. For instance, organization research finds that the dark side of OBCs can play a destructive role in in-group favouritism and out-group hostilities as key social determinants of the dark side of OBCs (Behl and Jain, 2023; Liao *et al.,* 2020b). These group dynamics reveal significant challenges for brands, especially in maintaining group harmony and fostering positive interactions among members in the communities (Behl and Jain, 2023; Liao *et al.,* 2020b). To effectively manage group dynamics in OBCs and mitigate the dark-side effects of in-group favouritism and out-group hostilities, brands can implement several measures. They should establish clear guidelines and consistent moderation policies in brand-related communities, and therefore, it is of theoretical and managerial importance to test whether such findings are valid in brand-centred online communities (Herhausen *et al.,* 2019).

Identifying the root causes of negative behaviours in Online Brand Communities (OBC) is crucial to preventing them and mitigating their impact on brand loyalty and relationships. Thus, the primary aim of the present study is to identify the factors that lead to negative behaviours within OBCs. By proactively identifying these antecedents, brands can engage in proactive measures by preventing negative behaviours before they occur, rather than engaging in reactive strategies that may result in significant harm to brand reputation. Hence this scoping review will provide a more structured and nuanced understanding of how these behaviours manifest within OBCs and identify future research directions for advancing the literature. Based on the above discussion, this study is guided by the following research issues: (1) the current state of research on the dark side of OBCs, (2) dominant themes relating to the determinants of deviant or negative customer behaviours within OBCs, and (3) discussion of strategic brand implications and future research gaps to advance the literature on the dark side of OBCs.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section presents the details of the scoping review method used in this study. The third section presents a descriptive analysis of the literature on the dark side of OBCs followed by the findings of the thematic analysis. The final section presents the discussion and strategic brand implications, future research agenda, and limitations of the present study.

# Methodology

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

It is useful to conduct scoping reviews as it is valuable for exploring emerging evidence when it is not yet clear what existing research has covered, and for developing specific questions that lead to a more precise systematic review. These reviews present the types of evidence that inform and guide practice within a particular field as well as clarify the research methodologies used (Tranfield *et al*., 2003). Therefore, we chose to perform a scoping review to synthesize literature that identifies the dark side of deviant customer behaviours in OBCs. As the literature on the dark side is fragmented, a scoping review helps to systemati cally map this diverse literature to identify key themes, concepts, and trends.

## 2.1 Stage 1: Defining the research questions

In the first stage of the scoping review, the research question was carefully developed to explore the dark side of deviant consumer behaviours in OBCs. This process of defining the research question involved reviewing the relevant literature to identify significant concepts or areas such as negative interactions among community members, online negative word of mouth, misinformation, firestorms in communities, group heterogeneity and deviant behaviours, polarization of factions, inability to control brand narrative, and exploitation by online communities (Dessart *et al.,* 2020). We developed our research question based on these concepts or topics, focusing on the dark side of OBCs. For example, we have added aspects of *how community members interact, what drives their engagement, and how negative behaviours can emerge in OBCs.*

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

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

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

## 2.3 Stage 3: Selecting relevant studies

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

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

## 2.4 Stage 4: Organizing and data charting

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

[Insert Table 1 about here]

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

In this last stage, researchers developed and implemented a strategic approach for presenting the findings of the study. The results were communicated in a structured format through themes, frameworks, gaps, and future scope of research. The thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo and Word Cloud.

# Descriptive analysis: Trends, Theories, and Methodologies

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

## *****3.1 Publication trends.*****

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

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

## 3.2 Theoretical frameworks

To explore the dark side of OBCs, scholars have utilized various theoretical frameworks from diverse disciplines such as psychology, marketing, communication, persuasion, justice, sociology, philosophy, and criminology. For clarity, these theories were systematically categorized and coded in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

The majority of articles employed theoretical frameworks to analyse the dark side of OBCs. This highlights a reliance on established theories to understand the research phenomenon. The articles that utilized theoretical frameworks employed 37 different theories, suggesting a wide range of theoretical approaches. Social identity theory was the most frequently applied theory with seven articles (see code P15 in Table 2), (Ewing *et al.,* 2013; Popp *et al*., 2016; Kuo and Hou, 2017; Feng *et al*., 2018; Popp *et al.,* 2018; Kim, 2018). Following this, social exchange theory was the next most cited theory (see code S2, P13 in Table 2), (Rösner and Krämer, 2016; Kuo and Feng, 2013; Zhou *et al*., 2019).

There are additional theoretical perspectives employed, such as appraisal theory (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2021), balance theory (Popp et al., 2018), brand culture theory (Popp et al., 2018), cognitive dissonance theory (Verhagen et al., 2013), community commitment theory (Zhang et al., 2021), customer compatibility management theory (Bacile, 2020), the elaboration-likelihood model, self-brand connection theory (Liao and Wang, 2020), self-categorization theory (Ewing et al., 2013), self-perception theory (Verhagen et al., 2013), situational crisis communication theory (Rauschnabel et al., 2016), empiricist theory (Ilhan et al., 2018), fairness theory (Bacile et al., 2018, 2020), goal dependence theory (Relling et al., 2016), justice theory (Bacile et al., 2018, 2020), and other communication theories including the stereotype content model, usage and gratifications theory, and the social identity deindividuation effects model (Pantano, 2021; Rösner and Krämer, 2016). Each of these theories offers a unique lens for understanding the dark side of OBCs. Furthermore, it indicates a rich, yet fragmented theoretical landscape.

## 3.3 Research approaches

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

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

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

# Thematic Analysis: Key Themes and Dynamics

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

## *4.1 Information dynamics*

Two key determinants of consumer engagement in the dark side of OBCs were identified in the thematic analysis: information overload and information credibility (see Figure 3). OBCs typically include a vast amount of information, including product reviews, discussions, comments, and promotional materials (Herhausen *et al*., 2019). This overload of diverse information can overwhelm consumers and obscure critical brand information diluting the meaningful content of OBCs (Kucuk, 2015). This can foster misunderstandings and misinformation, which results in conflicts and encourages negative or deviant behaviours in OBCs (Herhausen *et al*., 2019). In addition to information overload, information credibility significantly influences consumer deviant behaviours in OBCs (Liao and Wang, 2020).

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

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

## 4.2 Group dynamics

The second key thematic finding involves two crucial group factors driving consumer engagement in the dark side of OBCs: intergroup favouritism and out-group hostility (see Figure 4). The advancement of technology and the proliferation of Web 2.0 applications have transformed consumers from passive receivers of brand communication to active co-creators of brand information (Peeroo *et al*., 2017). This has significantly increased the role of group dynamics as consumers engage on platforms such as social media, where they share and discuss brand-related information (Liao and Wang, 2020; Liao *et al*., 2019). These dynamics not only facilitate collaboration and community development but also increase the potential for conflicts between different brand communities (Dineva *et al*., 2017; Husemann *et al*., 2015). Thus, group dynamics play a key role in consumer engagement in the dark side of OBCs.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

In-group favouritism is the tendency to evaluate one’s group more favourably than those of other groups. While in-group favouritism increases consumers’ self-esteem, it can lead to bias and competitive behaviour (Ewing *et al*., 2013; Kim, 2018). Previous research using games such as dictator games has shown how in-group favouritism results in deviant consumer behaviours (Verhagen *et al*., 2013; Jayasimha *et al*., 2017). This is because consumers often prioritize the interests of their group over those of outsiders, leading to conflicts and anti-brand activities (Behl and Jain, 2023; Dessart *et al*., 2020). Few researchers have used games to explore consumer discrimination resulting from in-group favouritism (Zhu *et al*., 2021). Furthermore, in-group favouritism can evolve into collection actions, resulting in anti-brand activities (Kucuk, 2015). Out-group hostility emerges when the identity and interests of one community conflict with those of others (Hickman and Ward, 2013).

## 4.3 *Unethical practices and transgression*

The third key thematic finding explores unethical firm behaviour and brand transgression in OBCs (see Figure 5). Brand actions that are perceived as unethical and transgressions, such as corporate greed, misleading marketing practices or communication, failure to meet consumer expectations, or breach of trust, can adversely impact brand reputation and lead to negative consumer behaviours (Peeroo *et al*., 2017; Cova and D’Antone, 2016; Sharma *et al*., 2020b). Research has identified several areas where unethical practices are particularly detrimental to OBCs. For example, market concerns, such as unfair pricing and lack of fairness in competition, marketing actions, such as deceptive advertising and misleading product claims, and service issues such as delays in service delivery and failures in product quality (Ilhan *et al*., 2018; Noble *et al*., 2012; Peeroo *et al*., 2017) can increase consumer dissatisfaction, reduce trust, and lead to deviant behaviours. These unethical practices and transgression can evoke strong emotional reactions, and significantly impact consumer behaviour in OBCs (Husemann *et al*., 2015).

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

## 4.4 *Provocation and schadenfreude*

The fourth key thematic finding explores the roles of provocation and schadenfreude in OBCs (see Figure 6). These social factors significantly impact interpersonal interactions, social dynamics, and community engagement. While OBCs foster increased consumer engagement and loyalty, they also lead to negative behaviours such as retaliation, trolling, and aggression (Demsar *et al*., 2021). Schadenfreude is the pleasure obtained from the misfortunes of others. This complex psychological phenomenon has attracted increased attention in the recent past because it is the antithesis of empathy (Demsar *et al*., 2021; Hayes and Carr, 2020; Behl and Jain, 2023). Previous studies suggest that consumers display varying degrees of schadenfreude in response to the misfortunes of ingroup and outgroup members (Hayes and Carr, 2020). Thus, schadenfreude leads to negative out-group messages or snark about a competitor brand (Lee *et al*., 2021).

[Insert Figure 6 about here]

Provocation in OBCs often emerges from consumers' heightened sense of identity and belonging. Members may display provocative behaviours using humour or parody to hide their antagonistic intent (Larson and Salvador, 2021). While such provocative behaviours may confirm their group identity it could also increase conflicts, leading to sustained campaigns against rival brands and their communities (Dineva *et al*., 2017).

## 4.5 Brand activism and hate

The fifth key thematic finding explores brand activism and brand hate in OBCs (see Figure 7)*.* Consumer activism refers to initiatives or efforts taken by brands to publicly support, advocate, or oppose social, political, environmental, or economic issues that resonate with their values (Dessart *et al*., 2020). If brands effectively leverage their activism it can serve as a powerful tool for customer engagement (Dessart *et al*.,.2020). OBCs enable brands to actively communicate their activism initiatives, share progress, and engage community members in supporting the causes (Behl and Jain, 2023; Liao *et al*., 2020b). This enables brands to attract like-minded consumers and those who appreciate the value and mission of the brand. However, the social dynamics of these communities can also give rise to brand hate, especially when consumer expectations are not met. According to Kuchmaner *et al*. (2019), consumers in dense networks are more likely to punish brands perceived as inauthentic or inconsistent in their activism efforts. The impact of brand activism and brand hate is further demonstrated by deviant consumer behaviours in response to perceived brand transgressions (Cocker *et al*., 2021). When brands do not perform as expected or betray trust, consumers can quickly mobilise and share their discontentment in their OBC. This collective behaviour highlights the critical need for brands to maintain consistency between their values and actions.

[Insert Figure 7 about here]

## 4.6 Customer Disengagement

Disengagement represents a crucial thematic finding of this scoping review on the dark side of OBCs (see Figure 8). OBCs provide significant opportunities for brands to engage with customers, but several factors can lead to disengagement (Ilhan *et al*., 2018). Several factors can stimulate disengagement, a process where consumers withdraw their participation due to dissatisfaction or disinterest (Sarkar *et al*., 2021). However, disengagement can occur when consumers feel their contributions are undervalued or ignored, when their ideas are not rewarded, or when their concerns remain unaddressed (Burgess and Jones, 2020). This lack of closure and feeling of unhappiness can lead to a reduced sense of belonging and commitment (Zhou *et al*., 2019). While disengagement may provide some relief for consumers to gather thoughts and feelings to change their future behaviour, it is a maladaptive behaviour that negatively affects consumers' relationship with brands (Zhou *et al*.,2019).

[Insert Figure 8 about here]

# Discussion and Strategic Brand Implications

This scoping review aims to explore the landscape of research on the dark side of OBCs. This review identified six pivotal themes that shape or determine deviant or negative consumer behaviours in OBCs. The thematic findings highlight the nuanced interplay between information dynamics, group dynamics, unethical practices, provocation and schadenfreude, brand activism, and consumer disengagement. Each theme emphasizes distinct challenges and potential risks brands face in managing OBCs. In the following sections, the discussion of each theme along with the strategic brand implications are presented.

## 5.1 Managing information dynamics in the dark side of OBCs

The thematic analysis identified information overload and credibility as key information dynamics influencing the dark side of OBCs. The vast amount of information available in OBCs often overwhelms consumers, dilutes the effectiveness of brand-generated content and may lead to information fatigue (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010). Similarly, when the information in these communities lacks credibility, it directly impacts consumer trust and brand perceptions (Liao and Wang, 2020). Such situations trigger a coping mechanism where consumers may create their narratives or create sub-communities where conversations are more manageable (Ilhan *et al*., 2018; Kuo and Feng, 2013; Verhagen *et al*., 2013).

## 5.2 Mitigating group dynamics in OBCs

This study identified the group dynamics of in-group favouritism and out-group hostilities as key social determinants of the dark side of OBCs. These group dynamics reveal significant challenges for brands, especially in maintaining group harmony and fostering positive interactions among members in the communities (Behl and Jain, 2023; Liao *et al*., 2020b). Furthermore, research reveals that these group dynamics could lead to rivalry and conflict between brand communities, which manifests in the form of humour, epithets, ridicule, malice, and hostility (Ewing *et al*., 2013). Social identity and social comparison theories provide a theoretical framework for understanding how group dynamics lead to potential feelings of envy and hostility toward out-group members (Kim, 2018). These theories suggest that consumers are likely to be prototypical in-group members while stereotyping out-group members as less trustworthy.

## *5.3 Managing unethical practices and brand transgressions in OBCs*

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

## *5.4 Addressing provocation and schadenfreude in OBCs*

The thematic analysis revealed that provocation and schadenfreude are key factors influencing negative consumer behaviours in OBCs. Provocation, manifested through trolling and aggression, can cause emotional arousal disrupting harmony within OBC (Demsar *et al*., 2021). These provocations can cause flame wars, turning OBCs into battlegrounds where constructive brand discussions are sidelined. Similarly, schadenfreude can fuel a hostile community environment, encouraging members to engage in contentious and disruptive interactions. Such behaviours can adversely impact the brand image and community integrity. Furthermore, it is advised to educate community members about the negative outcomes of provocations and schadenfreude and help develop empathy among members (Bacile *et al*., 2018). Gamifications and rewards can also be used to encourage positive interactions and constructive contributions (Zhu *et al*., 2021).

## 5.5 Mitigating brand activism and hate in OBCs

Brand activism can serve as a double-edged sword by attracting customers who share similar values whilst also provoking hate among those who disagree (Behl and Jain, 2023; Liao *et al*., 2020b). Thus, brand activism may be viewed by some as brand advocacy while others may view the actions as polarizing with their personal beliefs. Thus, brand activism can foster loyalty and hate (Behl and Jain, 2023; Liao *et al*., 2020b). To manage the adverse effects of brand activism and resulting hate, brands should present activism as an inclusive strategy that benefits society rather than their cause. They could also foster a culture of open dialogue encouraging members to be respectable in their interactions and moderate discussions that reduce misconceptions about the brand’s activism efforts (Felix, 2012).

## 5.6 Managing Customer Disengagement on OBC

Addressing customer disengagement in OBCs is crucial for maintaining brand loyalty. Disengagement occurs when members become less active or completely inactive due to a perceived lack of value or relevance in the interactions in OBCs. Effective management strategies can mitigate this by emphasizing real-time engagement and demonstrating brand responsibility. Brands can share real-time updates and success stories within OBCs to showcase their commitment to community values (Verhagen *et al*., 2013). Moreover, highlighting tangible outcomes, such as product improvements or price reductions, can increase interest and participation from those who are disengaged. Pathak and Pathak-Shelat (2017) emphasized the importance of creating a community ethos where members feel a shared connection to the brand and each other.

# Future Research Agenda

A research agenda was developed to identify the management or regulation strategies to understand when customers may engage in deviant behaviours and avoid the dark side of deviance from spiralling out in OBCs. The research questions to guide future researchers are presented in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

## 6.1 Future directions: theory

Firstly, this study revealed a major deficit in the application of sociological, crime-focussed, and communication theories. Furthermore, many scholars used constructs from social identity theory (Ewing *et al*., 2013; Popp *et al*., 2016; Kuo and Hou, 2017; Feng *et al*., 2018; Popp *et al*., 2018; Kim, 2018). Social exchange theory was the most cited theory after the social identity theory (Kuo and Feng, 2013; Zhou *et al*., 2019). There is a possibility that OBC members develop a strong sense of identification with their group (the ingroup) and are negatively disposed toward members of other groups. As a result, future researchers are advised to use theoretical constructs from social identity theory, social exchange theory, and social information processing theory to identify the factors that influence incivility and trolling in dyadic situations (between a brand and a customer). According to social identity theory, individuals who support a brand develop a sense of belonging to its community through participation in it. Participants favour the in-group and view the out-group as inferior to boost their confidence and self-esteem (Schouten *et al*., 2007). In this study, it was observed that identifying with a brand community influences community members' commitment to the brand and self-brand connection. In the future, higher brand commitment and self-brand connection will result in higher oppositional loyalty.

## 6.2 Future directions: context

When considering the factor of the presence of unlimited information in OBCs, identifying effective strategies for managing the overload of information within OBCs is important as strong brands are more prone to anti-brand websites, thereby impacting brand value (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Using this stream of literature, the present study focused on subjective heterogeneity also referred to as perceived group heterogeneity, which can be defined as the degree to which a person perceives that community members are diverse according to the differences that seem most pronounced (Liao andWang, 2020). Content-recommendation algorithms, user interfaces, or community-driven approaches may be studied to assist members in finding and prioritizing information. Customers increasingly rely on online communities for advice regarding product purchases and service issues in the age of information (Husemann *et al*., 2015; Rauschnabel *et al*., 2016; Peeroo *et al*., 2017). An OBC should be constructed to satisfy consumers' informational needs. OBCs should also be considered by the smartphone industry as group heterogeneity may negatively influence consumers' brand commitment (Husemann *et al*., 2015; Rauschnabel *et al*., 2016; Peeroo *et al*., 2017). Smartphones, particularly luxury models, convey symbolic meanings about their owners as publicly consumed products (Peeroo *et al*., 2017). These symbolic brands may be greatly influenced by their users. The availability of unlimited information in OBCs creates ambiguity in consumer acceptance. Researchers should investigate how OBC users process information (Rauschnabel *et al*., 2016). To verify the effect of organizational feedback on the perceived credibility of user-generated content, further research is necessary.

## 6.3 Future directions: methodology

Future research could gather real data on users’ information-cognition processes. Qualitative interpretive methods such as in-depth interviews would be helpful. Participants need to have the opportunity to express themselves in their own words, thereby providing nuanced insights that cannot be captured by quantitative methods alone. To investigate how managerial feedback shapes consumers' perceptions of a source, an analytical/empirical design seems ideal. Using a web-based scenario vignette as a stimulus, followed by a survey questionnaire, could enhance research findings (Peeroo *et al*., 2017; Rauschnabel *et al*., 2016). Online communities are dynamic and multifaceted environments, and in-depth interviews offer researchers the opportunity to examine the complexities of user behaviour, interactions, and relationships within these communities. Researchers can probe deeper into participants' attitudes, beliefs, and decision-making processes to understand their underlying motivations and meanings. Table 3 (refer to Appendix) further elaborates the future research questions for this study as follows.

# Implications and Conclusion

The contribution of this scoping review lies in identifying the dominant themes in the literature on the determinants of the dark side of online brand communities, proposing management strategies, and identifying future research directions for advancing the literature. Six main themes of the dark side of online communities were extracted: (1) information dynamics, (2) group dynamics, (3) unethical practices and brand transgression, (4) provocation and schadenfreude, (5) brand activism and hate, and (6) disengagement.The thematic analysis identified information overload and credibility as key information dynamics influencing the dark side of OBCs. By adopting strategies that enhance clarity of communication and ensure information credibility, brands can mitigate the risk of consumers engaging in negative behaviours on OBCs (Kucuk, 2008). This study identified group dynamics of in-group favouritism and out-group hostilities as key social determinants of the dark side of OBCs. These group dynamics reveal significant challenges for brands, especially in maintaining group harmony and fostering positive interactions among members in the communities (Behl and Jain, 2023; Liao *et al*., 2020b).

Marketers should take note of the implications of this study as follows. Firstly, while value heterogeneity may damage a brand community, visible heterogeneity may serve as an asset for online brand communities. OBCs should be effectively managed when unethical practices and brand transgressions are committed by brands. To ensure a transparent communication strategy, they must establish rigorous guidelines for advertising and information dissemination. Brands need to ensure that all their communications are accurate and truthful to avoid misleading claims or unethical practices (Yang and Battocchio, 2021). Furthermore, brands should establish a strong moderation system to mitigate the risks associated with misleading claims or unethical practices. The integrity of community interactions can be further maintained by regularly training community managers in ethical practices and crisis management.

The scoping review on the dark side of online brand communities (OBCs) makes several key theoretical contributions. First, this review contributes to a nuanced understanding of the dark side of OBCs, considering that the majority of previous research focuses on the positive or bright side of OBCs. While recent research indicates that heterogeneity in these communities can lead to conflicting behaviours and anti-brand activities (Behl and Jain, 2023; Özbölük and Dursun, 2017), it is highly fragmented. This study contributes to this literature by developing a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research on OBCs. Second, the identification of specific themes such as information dynamics, group dynamics, *provocation and schadenfreude, brand activism and hate, and* disengagement in the dark side of the OBCs, provides an in-depth understanding of factors driving customer deviant behaviours in OBCs (Verhagen *et al*., 2013). Finally, this study proposes strategic implications for brands in managing OBCs (Herhausen *et al*., 2019; Husemann *et al*., 2015). This enables brands to mitigate consumer conflicts, build harmony, and develop community engagement and consumer loyalty.

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

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Authors* | *Journal Name* | *Aim and objectives* | *Key Finding(s)* |
| Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009) | Journal of Business Research | To investigate the relationship between an anti-brand website and its effect on a company's brand value | Strong brands are more prone to anti-brand websites, thereby impacting brand value |
| Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010) | Consumption, Markets, and Culture | To investigate what learnings, take place when anti-Walmart members negotiate the meanings of Walmart brand | Consumers negotiate the brand meanings by rejecting the marketer-generated marketing messages and creating their own through discursive storytelling |
| Kucuk (2010) | Journal of BrandManagement | To explore the negative double jeopardy phenomenon with newly developed anti-brand blogs, anti-brand websites, and social networking sites | The blogosphere has increased consumer-generated anti-branding on the web |
| Felix (2012) | Journal of Consumer Marketing | To understand consumer product use, practices, identity, and brand meanings in an online Japanese motorcycle community | Instead of single-brand loyalty, consumers of strong brands are more liable to multi-brand loyalty |
| Hickman and Ward (2013) | Journal of Brand Management | To understand the ramifications of online communities for rival brands | Social identification predictors like prototypicality define the attitude of the brand community toward rival brands |
| Noble et al. (2012) | Business horizons | To explore how negative information can be managed in primary and extended online brand communities | Basis the findings of negative behaviors, complaints related to product (product, promotions, market) and supplementary issues (service delay, employee behaviors are reported |
| Kuo and Feng (2013) | International Journal of Information Management | To identify the interaction characteristics of brand community members and the effect of member's perceived benefits on community commitment | Perceived learning benefits lead to strong community commitment, which in turn propagates oppositional brand loyalty |
| Ewing et al. (2013) | Journal of Business Research | To understand how new communication technologies provide a forum to express rivalry of online community members toward their rivals | In-group favoritism and social identity invoke hate towards the rival brand |
| Verhagen et al. (2013) | Computers in Human Behavior | To investigate the extent to which consumer emotions translate into negative online word-of-mouth and patronage and switching behaviors, thereof | Negative behaviors are an indication of consumer's patronage and switching intentions to other brands |
| Gambetti and Graffigna (2015) | Marketing Theory | To highlight the factors creating hindrances in value co-creation between consumers and the company, leading to online brand community failure | A plurality of marketing voices and social loafing was found in the online brand community |
| Rösner and Krämer, (2016) | Social Media and Society | To identify the factors and to disentangle the mechanisms that affect users to comment online in an uncivil way | Participants used a more aggressive tone when the group norms conformed with the aggressive behavior |
| Cova and D’Antone (2016) | Journal of Consumer Affairs | To analyze how an iconic brand like Nutella is threatened by the societal trend of anti-consumption motivated by well-being | Anti-consumption trends do not cause much harm to iconic brands but certainly, the brand loses a part of its strength |
| Rauschnabel et al. (2016) | Journal of Business Research | To investigate how collaborative brand attacks develop in an online brand community and its implications on the brand | Perceived unethical behavior, business problems, or unprofessional behavior are reasons for collaborative brand attacks |
| Golf-Papez and Veer (2017) | Journal of Marketing Management | To explore trolling in general and marketplace trolling | Trolls write more negatively and more frequently when they are being policed, perceiving their efforts to troll to be successful |
| Peeroo et al. (2017) | International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management | To explore the roles played by online brand community members in the creation as well as co-destruction of value | Consumers post messages on Facebook communities to remind brands about the previous transgression sarcastically and warn others to not buy any product, thereby impacting the company's image |
| Dineva et al. (2017) | Journal of Marketing Management | To investigate how conflicts can be managed in online social media brand fan pages | The study offers a conceptualization of six conflict management strategies |
| Özbölük and Dursun (2017) | Journal of Service Management | To explore the role of different types of members in an online brand community of Apple | Learners, pragmatists, opinion leaders, activists, and evangelists are some of the member types in OBCs |
| Bowden et al. (2017) | Journal of Service Theory and Practice | To explore whether positively and negatively valenced customer engagement co-exists in a brand community context | Consumer engagement is not discretely positive or negative; both types of engagement can co-exist in an online brand community |
| Pathak and Pathak-Shelat (2017) | Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing | To shine a light on the existence of negative emotions of consumers in a virtual tribe | Negative sentiments like anger, disgust, distress, and aggression can exist in an online brand community context |
| Jayasimha et al. (2017) | Marketing Intelligence & Planning | To examine the firm's strategy in responding to consumer advocacy in the virtual presence context | Consumer advocacy has a positive effect on brand avoidance  |
| Bacile et al. (2018) | Journal of Service Management | To investigate how the service recovery perceptions of complainants and observers are impacted when a consumer is bombarded with uncivil comments from other customers to their complaint on a corporate social media channel | Consumers attribute the brand accountability for addressing the incivility and expect fair treatment of complaints  |
| Kim (2018) | Computers in Human Behaviour | To explore the impact of online incivility on the observers, both, those who share the same group identity and those who do not | Participants were found to be more lenient towards uncivil comments from in-group members than out-groups |
| Popp et al. (2018) | International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship | To investigate the effect of social media-based anti-sponsor community on the brand and the sponsored club | Community members oppose the sponsor of the rival community while protecting their brand |
| Feng et al. (2018) | Information & Management | To review a model on how review spam affects the participation of members in a virtual brand community | The defaming review was found to have negative impacts on membership and influence.  |
| Ilhan et al. (2018) | Journal of Interactive Marketing | To investigate the effect of the brand' and competing brands' marketing play in attack, defense, and across commentary on brand fan pages | ADA has a positive impact on the social media performance of both the rival brands |
| Kristal et al. (2018) | Journal of Product & Brand Management | To investigate the effect of co-creation on brand equity as perceived by the observers of the co-created content in the online brand community | Non-collaborative co-creation can lead to a dilution of brand equity even for high-equity brands |
| Liang et al. (2020) | Internet Research | To investigate the determinants of oppositional brand loyalty and satisfaction in the context of social capital and e-quality | Perceived benefits, and social capital are determinants of oppositional brand loyalty |
| Zhou et al. (2019) | Internet Research | To investigate the impact of negative reviews sharing in online communities on community happiness | If negative brand sharing on online communities is through social exclusion, there will be unhappiness |
| Rossolatos (2019) | Psychology & Marketing | To examine threads analytically using NVivo and address its applicability in light of negative brand co-creation | All three cases were brand attacks and not brand play. |
| Kuchmaner et al. (2019) | Journal of Interactive Marketing | To examine the role of network embeddedness on psychological ownership in consumer responses to brand transgression | High network density has a greater effect on psychological ownership  |
| Herhausen et al. (2019) | Journal of Marketing | To examine how firms should detect, prevent, and mitigate an online firestorm as a result of NWOM in online communities | A closer linguistic style match between the sender of NWOM and the online brand community will evoke negative feelings |
| Sharma et al. (2020a) | Journal of Business Research | To investigate the impact of uncivil comment made by a political brand representative on the observer's attitude towards the party | The intensity of an individual's moral identity and personal issue stance impact the observer's attitude on incivility expressed by others |
| Bacile (2020) | Journal of Service Management | To investigate the effect of online consumer-to-consumer uncivil interaction on the experiential value of the focal consumer  | Dysfunctional consumer behavior or online incivility has a significant impact on customer-perceived service climate |
| Bacile et al. (2020) | Journal of Service Management | To explore customer and firm-level aspects as they relate to social media complaint handling. | Consumers with lower (or higher) attitudes towards online complaining experience higher (or lower) consumer-to-consumer interactional justice |
| Wang (2020) | Mass Communication & Society | To investigate the role of identity cues (anonymous vs identifiable) on user perception of information credibility | The absence of identity cues impaired the information credibility of the commenters |
| Hayes and Carr (2020) | Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising | To establish if snarking is encouraged by brand managers towards rival brands in an online community context | Snarking in social media brand communities results in oppositional brand loyalty and schadenfreude in focal brand members towards rival brands |
| Paschen et al. (2020) | European Journal of Marketing | To explore individual's motivations and values that lie at the core of the consumption restraint | Resistance to the American culture of Black Friday, consumption restraint is propagated to promote anti-capitalism and environmental sustainability. |
| Sharma et al. (2020b) | Online Information Review | To investigate the effect of service transgression on distant third-party customers in an online setting while exploring the role of moral identity and moral judgment | EWOM messages posted by distant third-party customers on social media discussed incidences of ethical service failure. |
| Liao and Wang (2020) | Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing | To examine the moderating role of brand symbolism in revealing heterogeneous communities are more damaging for high symbolic brands than for low symbolic brands | Member heterogeneity threatens community continuity and may present a destructive effect on brands |
| Larson and Salvador (2021) | Corporate Communications: An International Journal | To examine whether student's engagement with online university parody accounts diminishes their concern for the university's image and their image as future alumni | Those who engage heavily with university parody accounts come to identify more with the humorous university experience portrayed within these accounts |
| Zhu et al. (2021) | Journal of Product & Brand Management | To investigate whether interactions triggered by gamified elements in online communities impact the brand attitude of the members | Exchange red packet interactions induced higher normative community pressure than communal red packet interactions, thereby reducing brand attitude |
| Dessart et al. (2020) | European Journal of Marketing | To examine negativity toward brands by framing the concept as a collective phenomenon that underpins the existence of anti-brand communities | Inviting or recommending other people to the community may invoke brand hate among non-users also |
| Carina et al. (2020) | Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services | To investigate the brand hate phenomenon for service products in a cross-channel setting (offline/online environment) | Brand hate in the service context leads to online complaining, thereby leading to non-repurchase intention |
| Burgess and Jones (2020) | European Journal of Marketing | To investigate the impact of brand community members on the forced closure of the community | BioWare’s dislike for the criticism was the highly hypnotized reason for its forced closure as mentioned by fans in the thread |
| Liao et al., (2020) | Journal of Product and Brand Management | To investigate the effect of two types of heterogeneity on community and brand-level outcomes | Perceived value heterogeneity was negatively associated with brand community commitment |
| Lee et al. (2021) | Telematics and Informatics | To differentiate members based on personality traits who deliberately seek to create division in an online community by trolling | Online trolls scored the highest on psychopathy and sadism among all the behavior types |
| Hou and Zhang (2021) | Social Behavior and Personality | To investigate how different types of social support affect social loafing in online brand communities | All the four types of social support (e.g., informational, emotional, esteem, network) have different effect on social loafing |
| Behl and Jain (2023) | Journal of Global Marketing | To examine the role of culture in the dark side of the OBCs. | Culture plays a key role in determining negative customer behaviors such as conflicts, rivalries, and Schadenfreude. |
| Bilro and Loureiro (2023) | Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing | A conceptual model based on self-determination theory (SDT) depicts the effect of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on hedonic and utilitarian rewards | Hedonic and utilitarian rewards are significantly affected by intrinsic motivations  |
| Paruthi et al. (2023) | Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC | Consumer engagement was examined as a mediator between brand relationship quality and consumer identification with brand love. | A positive association was found between consumer engagement and brand love, thereby fostering positive word of mouth.  |
| Kumar et al. (2023) | Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services | Consumer perceptions of brand ethicality are influenced by perceived brand marketing communications | Brand communications tend to generate favorable perceptions of brand ethicality.  |
| Sarkar et al. (2021) | International Journal of Hospitality Management | To examine how service failure severity in an interactive multi-actor service setting may lead to customer retaliation and revisit the intention | Service failure causes retribution through the sequential mediation of dissatisfaction and brand hate.  |
| Pantano (2021) | Journal of Business Research | To model the viral effects of a luxury marketing campaign when adopting negative stereotypes to increase the market share in a growing market. | Results revealed an unanticipated social outburst caused by unfavorable consumer feedback, which was magnified and became substantially harmful to the brand (brand hate). |
| Delgado-Ballester et al. (2021) | International Journal of Electronic Commerce | To analyze the role of anger, sadness, and dislike in triggering an online firestorm | In reaction to outrage assessments linked with the occurrence, openly voiced feelings of anger, hatred, and grief emerge. |
| Demsar et al. (2021) | Journal of Marketing Management | To examine the historical and discursive conditions that have produced trolling and its social practices | The combination of trolling, censorship, and anti-corporate discourses enhanced the trolling of firms |
| Gong and Wang (2022) | Journal of Marketing Management | To investigate the impact of a contract breach on the quality of a brand's connection with its customers, as well as brand apology and restitution. | Brand relationship quality, brand apology, and brand restitution moderate the relationship between a psychological brand contract breach  |
| Cocker et al. (2021) | European Journal of Marketing | To investigate instances in which celebrity endorsements by social media influencers embedded inside online consumption communities  | Uncovered five reoccurring celebrity endorsement transgressions, each of which violates a community-wide recognized moral responsibility. |
| García-de-Frutos and Estrella-Ramón, (2021) | European Journal of Marketing | To analyze whether anti-consumption framed content garners more engagement than pro-consumption content in social communities | In terms of total views, likes, dislikes, and comments, there are discrepancies between anti-consumption and pro-consumption content. |
| Goyal and Verma (2024) | Journal of Strategic Marketing | Empirically investigates a multi-dimensional relationship between brand engagement, overall brand equity, and purchase intentions | Brand engagement is a strong predictor of brand loyalty, which in turn leads to OBE, which leads to purchase intent. |
| Vargo et al., (2024) | Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising | A study of the dynamics of content monetization in social media, focusing on Reddit's brand safety system  | Advertisers' concerns over brand safety are outweighed by Reddit's economic motivations for monetizing content |
| Sibai et al., (2024) | Journal of Consumer Research | The article identifies brutalization constellations in consumption communities and wider social media sphere | Three constellations of interacting, mutually reinforcing forms of direct, structural, and cultural violence fuel community brutalization in distinct ways |
| Wang et al., (2023)  | Information Processing & Management | Formulated seven research hypotheses using service-dominant logic | The social media affordances and OBC identification contribute to both value experiences through the facilitation of technology-mediated and communal interactions between OBC members |
| Dong et al., (2024) | Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing | Based on the concept of engagement, this paper presents the results of nine studies that contributed to the development and validation of the proposed scale as a means of assessing engagement. | This validated instrument encompasses four dimensions (cognition, affection, online constructive behavior, and online destructive behavior), which are captured by 17 items. |
| Popp et al. (2016) | Sport Management Review | To investigate social media-based anti-brand communities and their effect on sports team brand | Co-destructive behaviors directed at a professional football brand community and its members intended to cause harm |
| Husemann et al. (2015) | Psychology & Marketing | To explore how community members initiate, perform, manage, and resolve intracommunity conflicts | Conflict cultures can significantly affect practical identity among consumption community members |
| Kucuk (2015) | Marketing Theory | To investigate how the semiotic characteristics of digital consumer artifacts affect market and consumption | The learning process of the digital anti-branders and the ways they generate corporate meanings |
| Kuo and Hou (2017) | Journal of Electronic Commerce Research | To explore the role of social identity theory and consumer-brand relationships in the formation of oppositional brand loyalty | Brand commitment and self-brand connection are predictors of oppositional brand loyalty |
| Kucuk (2016) | Journal of Business Ethics | To reconceptualize brand dilution as a matter of counter-posed brand meanings and associations in digital markets | Consumer anti-branding has less potential for brand dilution  |
| Zhang et al. (2021) | Electronic Commerce Research and Applications | Investigated the effect of community support and commitment to reduce social loafing in online brand communities | Community support positively impacts the reduction of social loafing  |
| Koch-Bayram and Biemann (2024) | Journal of Business Ethics  | Investigated business-centered focus overlooks the potential of organizations to change employees' private social and environmental behaviors  | Employers' environmental CSR activities increase employee donations and willingness to volunteer outside of the workplace |
| Sansome et al. (2024) | Journal of Business Research | The present research uses signaling theory to refine the conceptual framework in critical dimensions of perceived brand transparency  | Availability of information as a necessary but insufficient antecedent to brand transparency |
| Butler and Spoelstra (2024) | Journal of Business Ethics | Focused specifically on the phenomenon of workplace gamification for an examination of the ethics of play in a business context | Aristotelian eudaimonia cannot be achieved in the context of work without introducing ethical ambiguity |

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**Figures**



Source: Authors’ own work

**Figure 1: Data Selection Process**

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**Figure 2: Year-wise publication trend analysis**

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**Figure 3: NVivo software-based word cloud map for information overload and information credibility**

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**Figure 4: NVivo software-based word cloud map for in-group favoritism and out-group hate**

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Source: Authors’ own work

**Figure 5: NVivo software-based word cloud map for unethical firm behavior and brand transgression**



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**Figure 6: NVivo software-based word cloud map for consumer retaliation and aggression**

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Source: Authors’ own work

**Figure 7: NVivo software-based word cloud map for brand activism and brand hate**

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Source: Authors’ own work

**Figure 8: NVivo software-based word cloud map for disengagement**

**Tables**

**Table 1: The inclusion and exclusion criteria**

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

Source: Authors’ own work

|  |
| --- |
| **Table 2: List of Theories** |
| *Theories and models* | *Code* | *Publication* | *Theories and models* | *Code* | *Publication* |
| Appraisal Theory | P1 | Delgado-Ballester et al. (2021) | Schadenfreude | Ph2 | Hayes and Carr (2020) |
| Balance Theory | P2 | Popp et al. (2018) | Self-Brand Connection Theory | P9 | Liao and Wang (2020) |
| Big 5 Personality Traits Model | P3 | Yoon Lee et al. (2021) | Self-Categorization Theory | P10 | Ewing et al. (2013) |
| Brand Culture Theory | M1 | Ewing et al. (2013) | Self-Perception Theory | P11 | Verhagen et al. (2013) |
| Cognitive Dissonance Theory | P4 | Verhagen et al. (2013) | Service-Dominant Logic | M5 | Cova and White (2010) |
| Community Commitment Theory | P5 | Zhang et al. (2021) | Situational Crisis Communication Theory | C1 | Rauschnabel et al. (2016) |
| Consumer-Brand Relationships Model | M2 | Dessart et al. (2020) | Social Comparison Theory | P12 | Ewing et al. (2013) |
| Customer Compatibility Management Theory | M3 | Bacile (2020) | Social Exchange Theory | S2, P13 | Kuo and Feng (2013); Zhou et al. (2019); Hou and Zhang (2021) |
| Elaboration-Likelihood Model | Pr1 | Larson and Salvador (2021) | Social Identity Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) Model | P14, C2 | Rosner and Kramer (2016) |
| Empirical Theory | Ph1 | Ilhan et al. (2018) | Social Identity Theory | P15 | Hickman and Ward (2013); Ewing et al. (2013); Popp et al. (2016); Kuo and Hou (2017); Feng et al. (2018); Popp et al. (2018); Kim (2018) |
| Expectation-Confirmation Model | M4 | Liang et al. (2020) | Social Information Processing Theory | C3 | Wang (2020) |
| Fairness Theory | J1 | Bacile (2018); Bacile et al. (2020) | Social Movement Theory | S3 | Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010) |
| Goal Dependence Theory | P6 | Relling et al. (2016) | Social Sharing Theory | P16 | Verhagen et al. (2013); Abro et al. (2020) |
| Grounded Theory | G1 | Ozboluk and Dursun (2017) | Sociological Theory | S4 | Husemann et al. (2015) |
| Justice Theory | J2 | Bacile (2018); Bacile et al. (2020) | Stereotype Content Model | P17 | Hickman and Ward (2013) |
| Moral Identity Theory | P7 | Sharma et al. (2020a); Sharma et al. (2020b) | Usage and Gratifications Theory | C4 | Relling et al. (2016) |
| Moral Judgement Theory | J3 | Sharma et al. (2020a) | Value Co-creation Theory | M6 | Gambetti and Graffigna (2015) |
| Practice Theory | S1 | Cruz et al., (2018) | Routine Activity Theory | Cr1 | Golf-Papez and Veer (2017) |
| Regulatory Focus Theory | P8 | Wang et al. (2021) |  |  |  |

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

Source: Authors’ own work

**Table 3: Potential research areas and questions to advance the field of the dark side of OBC**

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

Source: Authors’ own work