

# **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ONLINE CONSUMPTION COMMUNITIES**

BY

DENITSA PETROVA DINEVA

A thesis submitted to Aberystwyth University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree Doctor of Philosophy

MAY 2019

## ABSTRACT

The domain of conflict management in online consumption communities is under-theorised. Existing studies mainly focus on the nature and outcomes of aggressive consumer-to-consumer online communication (here referred to as ‘consumer-to-consumer (C2C) conflicts’), while neglecting whether and how such conflicts should be managed. Therefore, the first objective of this research project was to propose an empirically tested typology of conflict management strategies used by organisations in their online consumption communities on Facebook. The second objective of the project was to gain an understanding of the effectiveness of the identified conflict management strategies. This was done via a mixed-methods approach whereby the first two qualitative studies explored what strategies for-profit and non-profit hosts of online consumption communities utilise using the method of netnography. The findings from the qualitative stage showed that conflict management strategies in online consumption communities can be grouped into three broad categories: (i) universal – *non-engaging*, *censoring*, *bolstering* and *informing/educating*; (ii) for-profit-specific – *pacifying*; and (iii) non-profit-specific – *mobilising* and *asserting*. Subsequently, the effect of the identified strategies on consumer attitudes was tested via an online experiment. Results indicated that *pacifying* generates the most favourable consumer attitudes and perceptions towards the organisation’s social responsibility, while two other strategies (i.e. *mobilising* and *bolstering*) are also perceived favourably by consumers depending on the content of the C2C conflict. In light of these findings, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are discussed, together with proposing future research directions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	ii
List of Tables .....	v
List of Figures .....	vi
Declaration.....	vii
Acknowledgements.....	viii
<b>Chapter 1 - Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Rationale and Significance of the Study.....	1
1.2. Current Theoretical Perspectives .....	4
1.2.1. Organisational conflict management .....	4
1.2.2. E-complaint/Negative-WOM management .....	7
1.3. Summaries of the Papers and Research Questions .....	10
<i>Chapter references</i> .....	15
<b>Chapter 2 – Literature Review.....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1. Consumer-to-Consumer Conflicts .....	21
2.2. Online Consumption Communities Based in the Social Media .....	25
2.3. Conflict Management Theories .....	28
2.3.1. Theories from the management literature .....	28
2.3.2. Theories from the psychology literature .....	31
2.3.3. Theories from the marketing literature .....	33
2.3.4. Theories from other disciplines .....	35
2.3.5. Summary .....	37
<i>Chapter references</i> .....	39
<b>Chapter 3 – Methodology .....</b>	<b>52</b>
3.1. Mixed-methods Research.....	52
3.1.1. Researcher Philosophical Stance .....	52
3.1.2. Choice of methods .....	53
3.1.3. Qualitative data analysis .....	58
3.2. Ethical Considerations and Research Reflexivity.....	65
<i>Chapter references</i> .....	67
<b>Chapter 4 – Collection of Papers.....</b>	<b>73</b>
4.1. <b>Paper 1</b> - Corporate Conflict Management on Social Media Brand Fan Pages .....	73
4.1.1. Introduction.....	74
4.1.2. Literature Review .....	75

4.1.3. Method.....	80
4.1.4. Results.....	83
4.1.5. Discussion.....	92
4.1.6. Limitations and Future Research .....	98
<i>Paper references</i> .....	101
<b>4.2. Paper 2 - Managing Consumer-to-consumer Conflicts in a Non-profit Online Community</b> .....	112
4.2.1. Introduction.....	113
4.2.2. Literature review.....	114
4.2.3. Method.....	120
4.2.4. Results.....	121
4.2.5. Discussion.....	130
4.2.6. Limitations and Future Research .....	136
<i>Paper references</i> .....	138
<b>4.3. Paper 3 - Managing Consumer-to-consumer Conflict in Online Communities</b> .....	151
4.3.1. Introduction.....	152
4.3.2. Current knowledge from the marketing literature .....	154
4.3.3. Preliminary findings on current practice .....	154
4.3.4. Emerging topics and future research.....	156
<i>Paper references</i> .....	159
<b>4.4. Paper 4 – Consumer Reactions to Conflict Management in Online Communities</b> .....	161
4.4.1. Introduction.....	162
4.4.2. Literature review.....	164
4.4.3. Method.....	168
4.4.4. Findings .....	177
4.4.5. General discussion .....	179
4.4.6. Conclusions.....	184
Appendix A. Conflict content orientation.....	187
Appendix B. Conflict management strategies .....	189
<i>Paper references</i> .....	191
<b>Chapter 5 - Conclusion</b> .....	202
5.1. Theoretical Contribution .....	202
5.2. Managerial Implications .....	207
5.3. Limitations and Future Directions .....	211
<i>Chapter references</i> .....	214
<b>Appendices</b> .....	219

Appendix A. ‘Non-engaging’ theme and codes screenshots .....	219
Appendix B. ‘Censoring’ theme and codes screenshots .....	220
Appendix C. ‘Bolstering’ theme and codes screenshots.....	221
Appendix D. ‘Informing’ theme and codes screenshots .....	224
Appendix E. ‘Educating’ theme and codes screenshots .....	225
Appendix F. ‘Pacifying’ theme and codes screenshots .....	227
Appendix G. ‘Mobilising’ theme and codes screenshots.....	229
Appendix H. ‘Asserting’ theme and codes screenshots.....	231

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1</b> Key differences between C2C conflicts and complaints/negative-WOM .....	10
<b>Table 2</b> The six phases of thematic analysis .....	59
<b>Table 3</b> Data excerpts and codes .....	63
<b>Table 4</b> Sample brand fan pages and descriptions .....	82
<b>Table 5</b> Conflict management strategies .....	130
<b>Table 6</b> Conflict management strategies and sample comments.....	173

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1</b> Organisational conflict management typologies .....	5
<b>Figure 2</b> E-complaint/negative-WOM management strategies.....	8
<b>Figure 3</b> An overview of the collection of papers and methods used .....	11
<b>Figure 4</b> Conflict types and sources.....	22
<b>Figure 5</b> Conflict management theories .....	38
<b>Figure 6</b> Corporate conflict management strategies on social-media brand fan pages.....	92
<b>Figure 7</b> Future research avenues .....	156
<b>Figure 8</b> A typology of conflict management in online consumption communities.....	203

## DECLARATION

The bulk of this thesis is presented as a collection of four linked papers that have either been published or prepared for journal publication during my postgraduate research period, with the aim of informing the field of Marketing. The contribution of and collaboration with others did not extend beyond a normal supervisory role. I thus declare that this thesis is my own work, except where others have been acknowledged.

This thesis is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Aberystwyth University.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

**Name of Candidate:** Denitsa Petrova Dineva

**Signature:**

**Date:** 24 May 2019



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that this work would not have been possible without the full financial support provided by the Business School of Aberystwyth University, UK.

I am grateful to the many individuals who have offered their time and support during this process to ensure the success of the research project – my supervisory team, my friends and fellow doctorate students, my family and my partner. Most of all, I am forever grateful to Dr Jan Breitsohl for his continued commitment to me as well as his guidance and patience throughout the three years of my research degree. This project would not have been completed without his enthusiasm and an overall positive outlook, efficiency, and most importantly, his endless red comments and revision requests. I am truly inspired by his dedication to research. I am equally thankful to Prof Brian Garrod for being an unwavering source of support and wisdom for the past three years. His guidance and perspective on the research approach and topic have been invaluable. My sincere thanks goes to Dr Ian Harris and Prof Peter Midmore for stepping in halfway through the project and providing moral support in what was a challenging period during my research degree. My thanks also goes to Prof Phil Megicks for offering his time, knowledge and resources to facilitate the quantitative part of this project.

I am grateful to my family, friends and fellow doctorate students who have been continuously supportive and encouraging throughout this journey. I am especially thankful to my parents, Svetlana and Petar, for their enduring belief in my ability to persevere and complete this project, and continued love and support. Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my partner, Carl, who has been an endless source of moral support from the beginning and throughout.

# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Over the past couple of decades an object of study within the field of marketing has been the behaviour of consumers inspired by similar desires, thereby forming online brand communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Cova & Pace, 2006). Muñiz and Schau (2005) define online brand communities as groups of consumers who express mutual sentiments and commitment to a particular brand or consumption activity within a virtual setting. The positive aspects of consumer interactions in online brand communities are well-researched (Chu & Kim, 2011; Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeck, 2013; Wirtz et al., 2013). Consumers derive social as well as functional benefits from engaging with online brand communities, which in turn increases their engagement and stimulates the co-creation of value for both companies and consumers (Brodie et al., 2013). More recently, however, scholars have focused their attention on the negative interactions in these communities (Gebauer, Füller & Pezzeri, 2013). In particular, a small, but growing number of studies have focused on researching the essence (Hickman & Ward, 2007), the sources (Ewing, Wagstaff & Powell, 2013), and the types (Husemann & Luedicke, 2013) of consumer conflicts. Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) conflict refers to one consumer verbally attacking another consumer, who typically reciprocates in kind. As noted by others, such conflicts can range from mild (e.g. provocation) to heavy (e.g. harassment and threats) verbal attacks (Breitsohl, Roschk & Feyertag, 2018; Ewing et al., 2013). While some argued that conflicts can be beneficial to the brand community by contributing to its vitality and collective mission (Hemetsberger, 2006; Husemann, Ladstaetter, & Luedicke, 2015), this thesis focuses on the damaging side of consumer conflicts.

C2C conflicts can have a negative impact on both consumers and organisations hosting online communities. Reports by Pew Research Centre (2014, 2017) showed that the increasingly prevalent nature of aggressive online interactions causes users of online spaces mental and emotional distress, thus, forcing them to choose when and where to participate online. Indeed, 41% of the individuals surveyed (based on 4,248 respondents) reported to be personally subjected to aggressive online interactions, while 66% witnessed such behaviours directed at others (Pew, 2017). Thomas, Price and Schau (2013) further demonstrated that conflicts are often harmful to community members and can ultimately result in community exit. Moreover, others have shown that consumer conflict can negatively impact the organisation's reputation and credibility (Fisk et al., 2010), because social media sites have amplified the magnitude, range and speed of C2C discussions as well as their negative consequences for the firm when they become adverse (Qi, Qu, Tan & Mu, 2014).

The present research, therefore, proposes that managing consumer conflicts represents an essential part of an organisation's social responsibility, especially since consumers are found to blame (negative) events on the community moderator (Johnson & Lowe, 2015). In support of this rationale, Breitsohl, Kunz and Dowell (2015) showed that consumers expect the corporate community host to intervene in conflicts, which makes corporate conflict management an opportunity for companies to harness the value of the community. Similarly, Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom (2015) demonstrated that online community management has the potential to enhance both consumer engagement in the community and the company's reputation. Importantly, past research highlighted the necessity for companies to learn how to shape (negative) C2C discussions in a manner that is consistent with their performance goals and mission (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Surprisingly, little is known however of how companies can best manage such conflicts. Existing studies in the consumer research literature are largely limited to anecdotal evidence or conceptual recommendations (Husemann et al., 2015; Sibai, de Valck, Farrell & Rudd, 2015). Other disciplines (e.g. Psychology, Management, IT) provide recommendations on conflict management, but empirically informed strategies based on current company conflict management practice remain an important research gap, as noted by Matzat and Rooks (2014). This leads to the main research problem that this thesis aims to address.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. First, this chapter provides an overview of the current theoretical perspectives on managing adverse consumer behaviours online, including a critique of why these are not well-suited to managing C2C conflicts. These theoretical perspectives are organisational conflict management and e-complaint/negative-word-of-mouth (negative-WOM) management. This is followed by outlining the research questions and aim of the thesis and demonstrating how each paper that comprises the thesis meets these questions and aim. A brief summary of each paper, together with how the four papers link together, is provided alongside this discussion. Second, a review of the existing literature in the direct fields of investigation is drawn. These include C2C conflicts, online (consumption) communities, and conflict management. Particularly, conflict management theories from various disciplines, including scarce findings in the marketing literature, are discussed highlighting the need for future examination of the topic. The third chapter offers an overview of methodological considerations and is intended to complement the discussions of the methods employed in each independent paper. This chapter further provides a detailed account of the manner in which the qualitative data in Papers 1 and 2 were analysed. Ethical considerations and research reflexivity are also outlined in

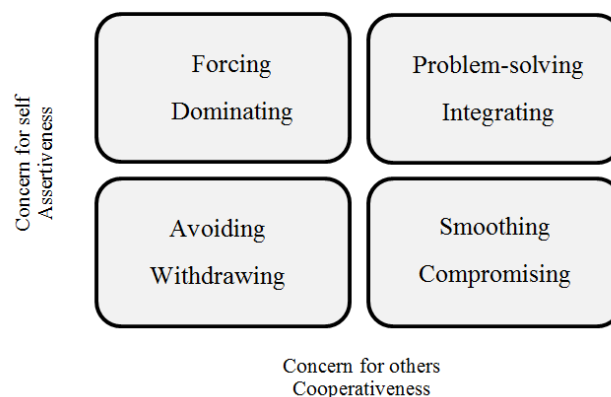
Chapter 3. Fourth, a collection of the four papers is presented in their peer-reviewed journal formats including information about their submission/publication status. The final chapter draws together the various outcomes of the work into a coherent synthesis, provides implications for management and policy, indicates directions for future research and outlines the limitations of the research presented here.

## 1.2. CURRENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

### 1.2.1. *Organisational conflict management*

To date, the majority of studies that investigate the management of negative customer behaviours in online environments (e.g. Hauser, Hautz, Hutter & Füller, 2017; Zhang, Chen & Sun, 2015) borrow theories from the management literature. In particular, these studies utilise organisational conflict management typologies developed by Blake and Mouton (1964) and Rahim (1983) which are based on the *dual concern theory*. The dual concern theory proposes that conflict management can be differentiated on the basis of one's motives to engage in conflict management behaviours – concern for self or concern for others (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; Pruitt, 1998; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). These can range from weak to strong and are largely independent of each other. While concern for self involves the conflict parties being concerned with their own beliefs, values and interests (i.e. assertiveness), concern for others refers to the conflict parties being interested in others' beliefs, values and interests (i.e. cooperativeness) (Thomas, 1976; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). Furthermore, as dual concern theory (De Dreu, 2010) views concern for self and concern for others as orthogonal, a conflict party can have one of: 1) high concern for self and low concern for others; or 2) high concern for self and others; or 3) low concern for self and others; or 4) low concern for self and high

concern for others. Self-concern and other-concern are rooted in various management and organisational behaviour frameworks. For instance, Blake and Mouton (1964) were among the first to identify five styles of conflict management - *forcing*, *withdrawing*, *smoothing*, *sharing* and *problem-solving* based on self- versus other-concern. Closely following Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid, Rahim (1983) developed a management model that explicitly focuses on interpersonal conflict in organisations and five corresponding conflict management behaviours: *integrating*, *obliging*, *compromising*, *dominating* and *avoiding* (Van de Vliert & Hordijk, 1989). Taken together, the strategies proposed by the two conflict management typologies fall into the cooperativeness versus assertiveness domain. As shown in Figure 1, accommodating strategies (high cooperativeness, low assertiveness) typically refer to making concessions and giving in to others' wishes, while avoiding ones (low cooperativeness, low assertiveness) involve denying or neglecting a conflict. Collaborating strategies (high assertiveness and cooperativeness) comprise behaviours that confirm the concern for others such as integration and problem-solving, whereas competitive (high assertiveness, low cooperativeness) refer to looking after one's own interests, and maintaining power and authority.



**Figure 1** Organisational conflict management typologies

Although these and other similar typologies (e.g. Pruitt, 1983; Thomas, 1976) have been adopted in online environments, there are two main reasons why these are not well-suited to managing C2C conflicts. First, the conflict management typologies have been developed in organisational settings for the purpose of resolving offline (face-to-face) conflicts. Such conflicts are typically different from online C2C conflicts and therefore their management is also likely to differ. The differences between offline and online conflicts can be largely attributed to the online disinhibition effect. The *online disinhibition theory* (Suler, 2005) posits that among others, dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, attenuated status and authority, and individual differences represent the key drivers of why individuals behave differently (e.g. more hostile) in their online interactions with others compared with face-to-face interactions.

Dissociative anonymity refers to the online self becoming a dissociated self whereby one can detach their online actions from their offline identity. Hence, one can evade responsibility in the case of hostile online behaviours. Invisibility refers to the absence of auditory and visual cues (e.g. signs of disapproval, hostility, indifference) in online communication which otherwise inhibit what individuals are willing to express in face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, online communication frequently involves individuals not interacting in the same moments of time, which Suler (2005) refers to as asynchronicity. Asynchronicity and not having to address one's immediate responses reinforces the online disinhibition effect. The absence of authority cues and presence of attenuated status in online environments encourages all participants to express their diverse opinions, regardless of their offline status and background. Individual differences and particularly personality types (e.g. susceptibility, compulsivity) tend to exaggerate the online disinhibition effect. Taken together, the absence of visual and

auditory cues when interacting with others online, such as in C2C conflicts, makes individuals bolder in what they say.

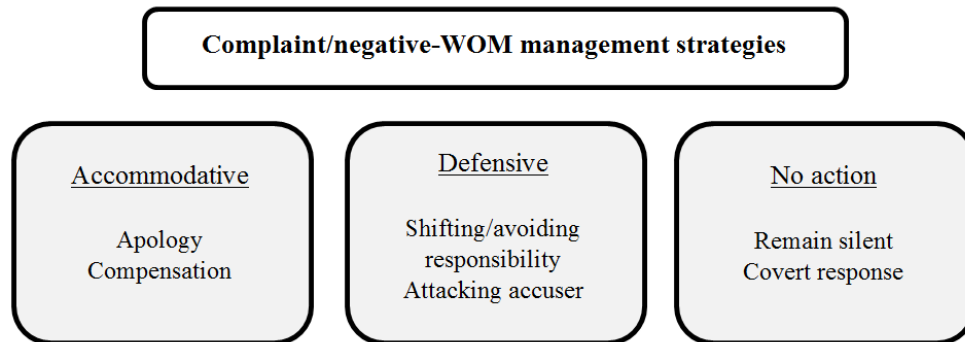
A second reason why organisational conflict management typologies are not appropriate for managing C2C conflicts lies in their dependency on the relationship between the conflicting parties (Lee, 1990; Phillips & Cheston, 1979). In other words, different conflict management strategies are appropriate in the offline context (compared with online environments) that largely depend on whether the conflict is between peers, or between a subordinate and a superior. For instance, Lee (1990) demonstrated that managers predominantly use an avoiding conflict management style with superiors, compromising with their peers, and competing with their subordinates. Such imbalances of power and various relationships between the conflicting parties in organisational conflict are absent in online consumption communities, which is likely to necessitate the use of different coping mechanisms.

### *1.2.2. E-complaint/Negative-WOM management*

A second stream of research that has investigated the management of negative online behaviours (i.e. complaints, negative-WOM) is the e-complaint management literature. The strategies used to address online complaints and negative-WOM can be broadly categorised into *accommodative*, *defensive* and *no action* (Lee & Song, 2010), as shown in Figure 2. Accommodative strategies comprise of corporate actions whereby the company publicly accepts responsibility for a negative event that is perceived by consumers as the company's fault (Coombs, 1999). Accommodative strategies therefore include any form of apology, compensation and similar corrective actions. In contrast, defensive strategies may involve shifting the blame to others, attacking the accuser and denying responsibility for the negative event (Coombs, 1999). No action



strategies refer to taking no overt action or offering no substantive response (Lee & Song, 2010). Hence, the company often remains silent during the occurrence of negative events.



**Figure 2** E-complaint/negative-WOM management strategies

While past research has shown that accommodative strategies generate favourable customer evaluations of the company, defensive and ‘no action’ strategies exacerbate the situation and damage consumers’ perceptions of the company (Conlon & Murray, 1996; Lee, 2005; Lee & Song, 2010), their applicability depends on the extent to which blame is attributed to the company. For instance, accommodative strategies are utilised when the company is perceived as accountable for the negative event, defensive strategies are used in instances where the source of the problem is difficult to identify, whereas no action strategies are adopted when no overt blame exists (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In contrast to complaints and similar negative-WOM behaviours, blame attribution and requesting some form of corporate remedy (e.g. compensation) is rarely the cause of C2C conflicts. While complaints and negative-WOM are usually described as unfavourable consumer comments, which originate in a negative consumption experience, corporate misconduct or product/service failure (Gelbrich &

Roschk, 2011), C2C conflicts involve one or more consumers directly addressing other consumers, without the intention of entering into a dialogue with a corporate representative. Importantly, the intent of online complaints and negative-WOM is to seek redress or help other consumers from being dissatisfied (Wetzer, Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007), while C2C conflicts revolve around addressing another consumer, with the intention to harm, provoke or personally criticise (Breitsohl et al., 2018). These and other fundamental differences between C2C conflicts and complaints/negative-WOM, outlined in Table 1, suggest that traditional strategies (e.g. apology, compensation, avoiding responsibility, attacking the complainer) are not suited to managing C2C conflicts. This further necessitates the development of consumer conflict management theory to accommodate the management of C2C conflict in online environments.

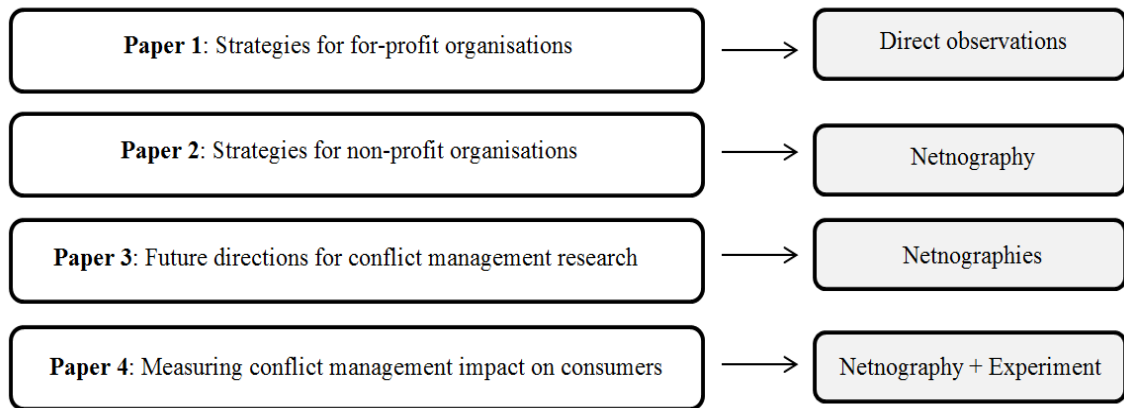
	<b>Complaints/ negative-WOM</b>	<b>C2C conflicts</b>
<b><i>Origin</i></b>	Originate in dissatisfactory consumption experience, corporate misconduct, or product/service failure.	Originate in oppositional (brand) loyalty, peer pressure, incompatible values and personal norms.
<b><i>Aim</i></b>	Aim to seek redress (e.g. compensation) and/or provide other consumers with product/ service information.	Aim to provoke/harm another consumer. No overt intent to provide product/service information.
<b><i>Outcome</i></b>	It can be beneficial to other consumers, if the aim is to help others via providing product/ service information.  Receive compensation from the company.	It is rarely beneficial for other consumers.  Compensation is usually not the intended outcome.
<b><i>Target</i></b>	If harm is intended, focus is on the company.	If harm is intended, focus is on other consumers.

<i>Corporate intervention</i>	Directly and indirectly seeks corporate response.	Usually does not seek corporate response.
<i>Communication process</i>	Rarely develops into a two-way communication episode, rather a one-way statement to an unspecified audience.	Typically, a two-way episode where the originator looks for social feedback, often from a specific audience.

**Table 1** Key differences between C2C conflicts and complaints/negative-WOM

### 1.3. SUMMARIES OF THE PAPERS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research aim of this thesis is to gain an empirically informed understanding of the different conflict management strategies companies utilise in their social-media-based online (consumption) communities and their impact on the consumers participating in these communities. This aim was addressed by considering a number of questions resulting in independent, but coherently linked papers completed during the course of the study. Each question investigated a particular aspect of the overarching research aim leading to four research-based papers, as shown in Figure 3. The decision to undertake an alternative format of this thesis was based on two prior considerations: personal and research-related. From a personal perspective, the alternative format allowed the author to divide the research project into manageable sections (i.e. papers), set achievable goals (i.e. paper publication dates and journals) and obtain tangible outcomes from each research phase. From a research perspective, this thesis format allowed the researcher to receive feedback and comments from experts in marketing and related fields outside the supervisory team. In addition, the researcher was able to develop an understanding of the research expectations within Higher Education Institutions in the UK and thus acquire the necessary skills and relative experience in order to meet the requirements of future Research Excellence Frameworks.



**Figure 3** An overview of the collection of papers and methods used

The first research question, which resulted in Paper 1, was: ‘*What strategies (if any) do companies use to manage C2C conflicts in their online communities?*’ The aim of this paper therefore was to propose a typology of conflict management strategies in company-hosted online communities. This paper adopted a qualitative research design that involved direct online observations of six online communities over the period of seven months. These Facebook communities were hosted by for-profit companies from five different industries: retailing, sports clothing, fast food, beverages and telecommunications. The data analysis, which involved thematic analysis and investigator triangulation, yielded five conflict management strategies that were divided into non-verbal i.e. *non-engaging*, *censoring*, and verbal i.e. *bolstering*, *informing*, and *pacifying*. This paper was published in the Journal of Marketing Management in 2017.

The second research question, which led to Paper 2, was: ‘*Do non-profit organizations utilise same/similar conflict management strategies in their online communities?*’ This was deemed an interesting question since non-profit organisations pursue more value-laden objectives in their online communities (compared with for-profit online communities) and as such the essence and management of C2C conflicts

was expected to differ. As a result, the research aim of this paper was to deepen the understanding of the investigated phenomenon through examining conflict management in a non-profit context. The paper utilised the method of netnography and obtained data from a single non-profit online community over the period of three months. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis and investigator triangulation. Six conflict management strategies were identified: *non-engaging*, *censoring*, *bolstering*, *educating*, *mobilising* and *asserting*. From these, two are specific to and previously uncovered in the non-profit context: *mobilising* and *asserting*. This paper is currently under review in the journal Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly.

The third research question, addressed in Paper 3, focused on drawing the findings from Papers 1 and 2 together and proposing research avenues in order to determine the future direction of the research topic investigated in this thesis as well as following the completion of the research degree. As such, this question asked the following: *‘Taking together the findings from Paper 1 and Paper 2, what directions (both theoretical and methodological) can future research undertake?’* Consequently, the third paper provides a short summary of the findings of the first two studies with the aim to delineate future research questions. Three future research avenues were proposed – *communication content*, *communication context* and *communication impact*. The target journal for this paper is the journal Marketing Letters that accepts short papers (i.e. ‘idea corners’), designed to put forward future research avenues based on a novel area of research.

The fourth research question, which led to Paper 4, was: *‘What is the impact of different conflict management strategies on consumers?’* Drawing on one of the three future research avenues proposed in Paper 3 (i.e. communication impact), this paper focused on the non-profit context due to its richness and uniqueness and utilised a

mixed-methods design. This included reporting the qualitative findings from Paper 2 (i.e. conflict management strategies), followed by testing their effect on two consumer variables via an online experiment – attitude towards conflict management and perceptions about the organisation’s social responsibility. Two alterations of the reported conflict management strategies included: 1) the asserting strategy identified in the non-profit study (Paper 2) was removed due to participants having difficulties correctly identifying it during the pre-test stage; and 2) a pacifying strategy (from Paper 1) was added, a justification for which is provided in the methodology section of Paper 4. The results demonstrated that pacifying leads to favourable customer attitudes and positive perceptions of the organisation’s social responsibility. In addition to pacifying, other strategies were found to generate favourable consumer attitudes depending on the content of the C2C conflict (i.e. whether it revolves around animal welfare issues or personal health issues). These were mobilising and bolstering. This paper is currently under review in the Journal of Interactive Marketing.

Lastly and importantly, as part of the reviewing process and adhering to different journal requirements, some of the terminology required revisiting and, as a result, some key terms in the papers vary, but are used interchangeably. Specifically, online consumption communities are referred to as “social media (brand) fan pages”, “social-media-based online communities” and “online communities” throughout the manuscript. In addition, while the intended method in Paper 1 was a netnography, during the review stage, it was requested that it is replaced by the method of “direct observation”. The methodological underpinning in the design stages of Paper 1 and 2 however remains that of a netnography. Furthermore, the spelling in the papers varies between UK and US English as a result of journal requirements. Finally, the tables and

figures in each paper have been re-numbered in order to follow a logical sequence within the overall thesis.

## Chapter references

- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16(2), 2-21. doi: [10.1002/dir.10006](https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10006)
- Blake, R., & Mouton, J. (1964). *The managerial grid: The key to leadership excellence*. Huston: Gulf Publishing Co.
- Breitsohl, J., Kunz, W. H., and Dowell, D. (2015). Does the host match the content? A taxonomical update on online consumption communities. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(9-10), 1-25. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2015.1036102](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1036102)
- Breitsohl, J., Roschk, H., & Feyertag, C. (2018). Consumer Brand Bullying Behaviour in Online Communities of Service Firms. In *Service Business Development* (pp. 289-312). Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden.
- Brodie, R. J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 105-114. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.029](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.029)
- Carnevale, P. J., & Pruitt, D. G. (1992). Negotiation and mediation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 43, 531 – 582. doi: [10.1146/annurev.ps.43.020192.002531](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.43.020192.002531)
- Chu, S. C., & Kim, Y. (2011). Determinants of consumer engagement in electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 47-75. doi: [10.2501/IJA-30-1-047-075](https://doi.org/10.2501/IJA-30-1-047-075)
- Coombs, W. T. (1999). Information and compassion in crisis responses: A test of their effects. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 11(2), 125-142. doi: [10.1207/s1532754xjpr1102\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1102_02)



- Coombs, W. T., & Holladay, S. J. (2002). Helping crisis managers protect reputational assets: Initial tests of the situational crisis communication theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *16*(2), 165-186. doi: [10.1177/089331802237233](https://doi.org/10.1177/089331802237233)
- Conlon, D. E., & Murray, N. M. (1996). Customer perceptions of corporate responses to product complaints: The role of explanations. *Academy of Management Journal*, *39*(4), 1040-1056. doi: [10.5465/256723](https://doi.org/10.5465/256723)
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment—the case “my Nutella The Community”. *European Journal of Marketing*, *40*(9/10), 1087-1105. doi: [10.1108/03090560610681023](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610681023)
- De Dreu, C. K. (2010). Social conflict: The emergence and consequences of struggle and negotiation. *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 983-1023, doi: [10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy002027](https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy002027)
- Dijkmans, C., Kerkhof, P., Buyukcan-Tetik, A., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2015). Online conversation and corporate reputation: A two-wave longitudinal study on the effects of exposure to the social media activities of a highly interactive company. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *20*(6), 632-648. doi: [10.1111/jcc4.12132](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcc4.12132)
- Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E., & Powell, I. H. (2013). Brand rivalry and community conflict. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(1), 4–12. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017)
- Fisk, R., Grove, S., Harris, L. C., Keeffe, D. A., Daunt, K. L., Russell-Bennett, R., & Wirtz, J. (2010). Customers behaving badly: a state of the art review, research agenda and implications for practitioners. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *24*(6), 417-429. doi: [10.1108/08876041011072537](https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041011072537)

- Gebauer, J., Füller, J., & Pezzei, R. (2013). The dark and the bright side of co-creation: Triggers of member behavior in online innovation communities. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1516-1527. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013)
- Gelbrich, K., & Roschk, H. (2011). A meta-analysis of organizational complaint handling and customer responses. *Journal of Service Research*, 14(1), 24-43. doi: [10.1177/1094670510387914](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670510387914)
- Hauser, F., Hautz, J., Hutter, K., & Füller, J. (2017). Firestorms: Modeling conflict diffusion and management strategies in online communities. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 26(4), 285-321. doi: [10.1016/j.jsis.2017.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2017.01.002)
- Hemetsberger, A. (2006). When David becomes goliath: Ideological discourse in new online consumer movements. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 33, 494–500. Retrieved from: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12334/volumes/v33/NA-33>
- Hickman, T., & Ward, J. (2007). The dark side of brand community: Inter-group stereotyping, trash talk, and schadenfreude. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research* Volume 34. Retrieved from: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12923/volumes/v34/NA-34>
- Husemann, K. C., & Luedicke, M. K. (2013). Social conflict and consumption: A meta-analytical perspective. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research*, 41, 355-360. Retrieved from: <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/17225>
- Husemann, K., Ladstaetter, F. & Luedicke, M., (2015). Conflict culture and conflict management in consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 265-284. doi: [10.1002/mar.20779](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20779)

- Johnson, D. & Lowe, B. (2015). Emotional Support, Perceived Corporate Ownership and Scepticism toward Out-groups in Virtual Communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 29(1), 1–10. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002)
- Lee, C. W. (1990). Relative status of employees and styles of handling interpersonal conflict: An experimental study with Korean managers. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 1(4), 327-340. doi: [10.1108/eb022687](https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022687)
- Lee, B. K. (2005). Hong Kong consumers' evaluation in an airline crash: A path model analysis. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(4), 363-391. doi: [10.1207/s1532754xjpr1704\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1704_3)
- Lee, Y. L., & Song, S. (2010). An empirical investigation of electronic word-of-mouth: Informational motive and corporate response strategy. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(5), 1073-1080. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2010.03.009)
- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), 357-365. doi: [10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002)
- Matzat, U. & Rooks, G. (2014), Styles of moderation in online health and support communities: An experimental comparison of their acceptance and effectiveness. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 36, 65-75. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043)
- Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Schau, H. J. (2005). Religiosity in the abandoned Apple Newton brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 737-747. doi: [10.1086/426607](https://doi.org/10.1086/426607)

- Pew Research Centre (2014). Online Harassment. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/>
- Pew Research Centre (2017). Online Harassment. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/07/11/online-harassment-2017/>
- Phillips, E., & Cheston, R. (1979). Conflict resolution: What works? *California Management Review*, 21(4), 76-83. doi: [10.2307/41164837](https://doi.org/10.2307/41164837)
- Pruitt, D. G. (1998). Social conflict. In D. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (4th ed., Vol. 2, pp. 89 – 150). New York: McGraw - Hill.
- Pruitt, D. G., & Rubin, J. Z. (1986). *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement*. New York: McGraw - Hill.
- Qi, J., Qu, Q., Tan, Y., & Mu, J. (2014). Modelling MGC strategies under extreme negative UGC. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*, 15(3), 150 – 161.  
Retrieved from: <https://www.scopus.com/record/display.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84908291299&origin=inward>
- Rahim, M. A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), 368-376. doi: [10.5465/255985](https://doi.org/10.5465/255985)
- Sibai, O., de Valck, K., Farrell, A. M., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social control in online communities of consumption: A framework for community management. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 250-264. doi: [10.1002/mar.20778](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20778)
- Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology & Behavior*, 7(3), 321-326. doi: [10.1089/1094931041291295](https://doi.org/10.1089/1094931041291295)

- Thomas, K.W., (1976). Conflict and conflict management. In: Dunnette, M.D. (Ed.), *Handbook in Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 889–935.
- Thomas, K. W., & Kilmann, R. H. (1978). Comparison of four instruments measuring conflict behavior. *Psychological Reports*, 42(3), 1139-1145. doi: [10.2466/pr0.1978.42.3c.1139](https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1978.42.3c.1139)
- Thomas, C.T., Price, L. L., & Schau, H. J. (2012). When differences unite: Resource dependence in heterogeneous consumption communities. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 1010-1033. doi: [10.1086/666616](https://doi.org/10.1086/666616)
- Van De Vliert, E., & Hordijk, J. W. (1989). A theoretical position of compromising among other styles of conflict management. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 129(5), 681-690. doi: [10.1080/00224545.1989.9713785](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1989.9713785)
- Wetzer, I. M., Zeelenberg, M., & Pieters, R. (2007). “Never eat in that restaurant, I did!”: Exploring why people engage in negative word-of-mouth communication. *Psychology & Marketing*, 24(8), 661-680. doi: [10.1002/mar.20178](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20178)
- Wirtz, J., Den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., Van De Klundert, J., & Kandampully, J. (2013). Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 223-244. doi: [10.1108/09564231311326978](https://doi.org/10.1108/09564231311326978)
- Zhang, S. J., Chen, Y. Q., & Sun, H. (2015). Emotional intelligence, conflict management styles, and innovation performance: An empirical study of Chinese employees. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 26(4), 450-478. doi: [10.1108/IJCMA-06-2014-0039](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-06-2014-0039)

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of a written review of three key sections summarising and synthesising previous research in the direct field of investigation including *consumer-to-consumer conflicts*, *online communities*, and *conflict management*.

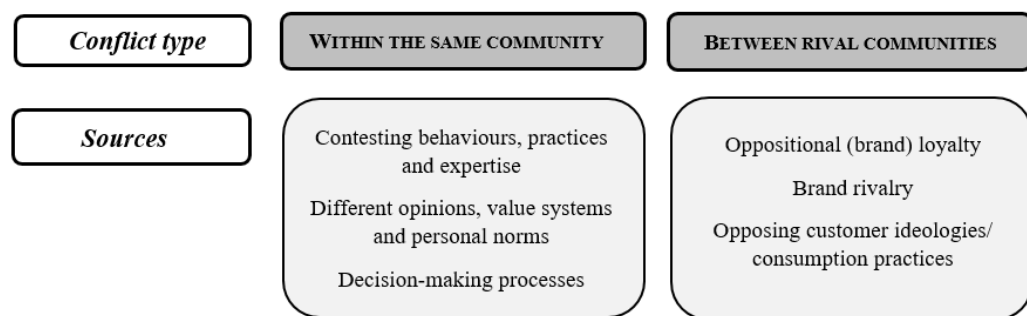
### 2.1. CONSUMER-TO-CONSUMER CONFLICTS

Sociological research broadly refers to social conflicts as interactions between individuals and groups with incompatible goals (Kriesberg, 2007) or as an encounter of dissimilarities (Levy & Zaltman, 1975). In the context of online communities, authors have introduced a range of terms to define the topic. Hickman and Ward (2007) for instance coined the term ‘trash talk’, while others used ‘flaming’ to describe the expression of negative feelings in online interactions (Castellá, Abad, Alonso & Silla, 2000). Lee (2005) suggested that the blurring of geographic and physical boundaries in online forums produces the foundations for new forms of flaming (e.g. cyber-bullying), which have an adverse impact on interpersonal relationships. Here, C2C conflict is defined as the intention of one consumer to harm another by the means of verbal provocation, harassment or threat using electronic media (Ewing, Wagstaff & Powell, 2013).

Past studies have investigated ways in which the types and sources of consumers’ online conflicts can be differentiated. Husemann and Luedicke (2013), for instance, conducted a conceptual synthesis of studies investigating social conflict in the consumption context and distinguished between three types of conflict: *emancipatory*, *authenticity-protecting* and *ideology-advocating*. First, emancipatory conflict is the

most frequently studied type of conflict that refers to consumer resistance and anti-consumption practices (Giesler, 2008; Thompson & Arsel, 2004; Varman & Belk, 2009). Second, authenticity-protecting conflict emerges as a result 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 & Thompson, 2010; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The third conflict type is what Husemann and Luedicke (2013) described as ideology-advocating conflict, which relates to defending personal consumption ideology against those of other consumers, and this type of conflict is investigated in the thesis.

With particular reference to online communities, C2C conflict can be divided up according to whether the conflicts occur between members of oppositional communities or between members of the same community, as demonstrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** Conflict types and sources

The former frequently occurs as a result of disagreements about a community's symbolic meaning and status (Husemann, Ladstaetter & Luedicke, 2015). For example, some authors propose that consumer conflicts originate in oppositional loyalty and brand rivalry where online brand community members adopt a negative perspective of

brand competitors (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Thompson & Sinha, 2008). Consequently, conflicts occur between community members based on cultural/social meanings of the brand, opposing customer ideologies and their righteous/ridiculed consumption practices (Kozinets, 2001; Luedicke, 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Hickman and Ward (2007) found that the strength of social identification with the brand in relation to rival brands leads to a sense of outrage, negative-WOM about oppositional brands and feelings of pleasure at the misfortune of rival brands and their users (Schadenfreude). Similarly, a number of studies demonstrate a strong correlation between a positively differentiated group identity and active engagement in trash-talking about rival brand community members (Beal, Ruscher & Schnake, 2001; Ruscher & Hammer, 1996). Colliander and Wien (2013) found that 'trash talk' causes identity-related conflicts between brand communities and represents a key driver of defensive behaviours that consumers adopt in order to counter negative information about the company. This, in turn, could reinforce existing conflicts and act as a source of new conflicts.

In contrast, conflicts in online communities may occur between the supporters of the same brand (within the same community) in the form of normative pressure and related resistance among community members (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005). This involves sources of conflict whereby members of the community contest particular behaviours, practices and expertise (de Valck, 2007) and/or challenge the approach (idealist or pragmatist) that should be adopted in the decision-making processes within the community (Hemetsberger, 2006). A related source of between-member community conflict is differences in opinions, value systems and personal norms regarding a consumption activity/a brand, as well as conflicts occurring between core and peripheral community members (Thomas, Schau & Price, 2010). The former may relate to the symbolic (i.e. what a brand stands for) as well as functional aspects of



a brand (e.g. what it enables a consumer to do). Sources of conflicts therefore can be both temporary events (e.g. a scandal related to a corporate brand owner or celebrity endorser) and constant conditions (e.g. a carefully nurtured, long-term brand image) (Ewing et al., 2013). The latter (i.e. conflicts between core and peripheral community members) refers to conflicts between loosely connected community members and those members who are highly involved with the consumption activity that the community promotes (Thomas et al., 2010). A third source of between-member community conflicts is a competitive mind-set. This source of conflict is particularly pronounced in co-creation communities where community members work together towards mutual goals (e.g. Spar bag design contest), but at the same time argue over the validity of certain information, or undermine each other's reputation in their pursuit for recognition (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2010; Gebauer, Füller & Pezzei, 2012).

It is important to note that not all C2C conflicts are adverse. Husemann et al. (2015) discuss productive (i.e. 'routinized') conflicts, which are characterised by embracing heterogeneity, inviting conflict as part of the group culture, performing conflicts visibly and democratically, and complying to pre-defined norms for enacting conflicts (Kriesberg, 2007). Such conflicts can positively contribute to the community vitality and collective mission (de Valck, 2007; Hemetsberger, 2006) and differ from the counter-productive C2C conflicts, which have negative impact on the community's well-being and represent the focus of this thesis.

To sum up, the examined studies have predominantly focused on understanding the essence of conflicts, the sources of consumer conflicts and their evolution over time, their impact on community members, their loyalty to the brand/consumption activity and/or the online community. However, the question that remains unanswered is in what ways companies should manage C2C conflicts in their online communities.

## 2.2. ONLINE CONSUMPTION COMMUNITIES BASED IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA

Muñiz and Schau (2001) define online brand communities as groups of consumers who express mutual sentiments and commitment to a particular brand or a consumption activity within virtual settings. These brand communities have received significant attention by marketing researchers due to the positive impact they have on their users as well as on their hosts (Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek, 2013; Kuo & Feng, 2013). From a managerial perspective, online brand communities are beneficial for companies in: (1) allowing them to share brand/consumption-related information and interact with devoted customers (Andersen, 2005); (2) enhancing consumer loyalty through integrating them into the brand identity (McAlexander Schouten & Koenig, 2002); (3) acquiring consumer and market insight for the purposes of new product development and innovation (Füller, Jawecki & Mühlbacher, 2007); and (4) value co-creation with consumers (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). From a consumer perspective, online brand communities enable consumers to share experiences, interact with like-minded others and thus strengthen their devotion to the brand/consumption activity (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

In researching the antecedents and consequences of online brand communities, many terms have been used to describe these online consumer groupings among which are consumer (brand) tribes, online consumption communities, virtual communities, online communities embedded in the social media/, social-media-based online communities, and social media (brand) fan pages (Brodie et al., 2013; Zaglia, 2013). Furthermore, researchers have distinguished between online brand communities created and hosted by consumers and online brand communities created and hosted by brands/companies (Lee, Kim & Kim, 2011). Despite the existence of disagreements

about the exact characteristics of such online consumer groupings, Preece (2000) used four distinctive features that prevail in most online communities: (1) individuals who interact socially in order to satisfy certain needs and requirements, (2) a shared purpose that serves as a foundation of the community e.g. information exchange, product/service, brand, or a consumption activity, (3) implicit and/or explicit norms that guide the interaction processes, and (4) computer systems that facilitate social interactions and provide a platform for communication. The last characteristic of online communities is a result of the less prevalent nature of geography and time limitations, which in turn promotes a diversity of consumers as well as engagement motives in online brand communities (Thomas et al. 2013).

More recently, marketing scholars have started investigating brand communities embedded within social media sites such as Facebook due to their increased usage and importance to both consumers and companies (e.g. Zaglia, 2013). This is because social media platforms enable like-minded consumers to form groups, share information, photos, videos and experiences in a more interactive way (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Similarly to traditional online brand communities, social media-based online communities allow consumers to join groups and fulfil self-esteem, self-presentation and self-expression needs (Back et al., 2010). Laroche, Habibi, Richard, and Sankaranarayanan (2012) and Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2014) are among the first to conceptualise social media-based online communities and refer to them as ‘the intersection of brands and social media groups or communities of brand admirers’ (p. 125). These are the online communities that represent the focus of the thesis.

Using netnographic research, Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2014) outline four distinct features of social media-based online communities that differentiate them from

traditional online brand communities: social context, structure, scale, and content/storytelling. First, the social context in social media-based online communities is richer compared with traditional online communities (e.g. forums, chat rooms), because their members use real identities, photos and personal information. The absence of structure or member rankings in social media-based online communities is a second area of differentiation from traditional online communities. Hence, while members of traditional communities are frequently divided into groups (e.g. hard core, soft core, pretenders, or outlaws) based on their commitment, membership duration, and community participation (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), social media communities are not. Third, compared with traditional online brand communities that consist of tens of thousands members at most, social media communities may have millions of followers. This is likely to contribute to there being a wide range of consumers from diverse socio-economic and geographic backgrounds (de Almeida, Dholakia, Hernandez & Mazzon 2014). Lastly, while text represents the main form of communication in traditional communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002), story-telling in social media communities relies on a combination of visual (e.g. videos, photos) and textual information. Importantly, Laroche et al. (2012) found that despite these unique characteristics, social media-based online communities exhibit the same building elements of traditional online brand communities – shared consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001).

## 2.3. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT THEORIES

Scholars suggest that conflict management involves three managerial considerations (Amason, 1996; Rahim, 2002): (1) dysfunctional conflicts that have negative impact on an individual and a group of individuals should be reduced; (2) conflicts that positively influence group and individual performance should be generated and maintained; and (3) effective management of conflicts requires different conflict handling behaviours, the scope of which is subject to the community owners' goals, the organisational structure and the budget for such activities. As a consequence, the literature on conflict management promotes two main perspectives on managing consumer conflicts. On the one hand, the *conflict cultivation* perspective views conflict as a productive element in consumer interactions, specifically insofar as it may lead to a constructive dialogue and improved decision making (Dubiel, 1998, Husemann et al., 2015). On the other hand, the *conflict resolution* perspective regards conflicts as negative interactions that should be terminated (De Dreu, 2008; Harris & Daunt, 2011; Rahim, 2002). This thesis focuses on conflict resolution strategies and, in view of its marketing context, follows Ensari, Camden-Anders and Schlaerth (2016) in using the term 'conflict management'. According to the authors, conflict management generally refers to practices that companies use to intervene in C2C conflicts. In this section, several distinct fields of research are reviewed to identify scholarly recommendations for managing consumer conflicts.

### *2.3.1. Theories from the management literature*

The extant management literature on dealing with conflicts is largely anecdotal. Most authors focus on giving practical accounts of conflict moderation, with the aim of identifying dos and don'ts (Fournier & Lee, 2009; Gallagher & Ransbotham, 2010;

Williams & Cothrel, 2000). Fournier and Lee (2009), for instance, use case studies from Dove, Apple and Porsche to illustrate that most companies choose to avoid engaging with conflict in their brand communities. Williams and Cothrel (2000) suggest that successfully managing conflicts in online communities requires explicit rules and formal moderation carried out by experienced moderators. Gallagher and Ransbotham (2010) use Starbucks as a case study to provide general guidelines on managing undesirable online behaviours on firms' social media fan pages. The authors recommend that companies should opt for active content moderation, i.e. responding to C2C discussions without reinforcing negative behaviours. In addition, they recommend that companies should refrain from using censoring to moderate C2C content, because this is likely to exacerbate the issue.

Two models of conflict management in an organisational context are widely discussed in the managerial literature. An early study by Blake and Mouton (1964) identified five styles of conflict management (forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, collaborating and problem-solving). Based on Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid, Rahim (1983) developed a management model that explicitly focuses on interpersonal conflict and five corresponding conflict management behaviours: integrating, obliging, sharing, dominating and avoiding. "Integrating" conflict management behaviour encourages the parties involved in the conflict to adopt mutually favourable solutions through a process of negotiated compromise. "Obliging" conflict management is a one-sided process in which one party accepts a resolution due to having made an incomplete assessment of alternatives (Kuhn & Poole, 2000). "Compromising" conflict management involves the conflicting parties accepting to give up something in order to make mutually satisfactory decisions. "Dominating" behaviour refers to one party enforcing their preferred resolution on the other.

“Avoiding” conflict management, meanwhile, is associated with withdrawal, i.e. avoiding a conflict by not participating further (Rahim, 2002).

As discussed previously, more recent studies use these typologies in various online contexts to assess their effectiveness. For instance, Zhang, Chen and Sun (2015) used Blake and Mouton (1964) and Rahim’s (1992) conflict management styles combined with emotional intelligence in understanding how organisational conflict is resolved and the impact on innovation. The results showed that emotional intelligence is significantly associated with integrating, compromising and dominating styles and all contribute to innovation performance. In virtual communities designed for teamwork, Liu, Magjuka and Lee (2008) assessed the impact of conflict management on performance and satisfaction. Based on Rahim, Garrett and Buntzman’s (1992) typology of conflict management in organisational settings, the authors found that cooperative conflict management style (i.e. the integration of diverse views) was associated with team satisfaction. Alper, Tjosvold and Law (2000) further added that this style leads to conflict efficacy, which is defined as the ability of individuals to effectively handle conflict among themselves.

Focusing on a collaborative (open source software) online community rather than an inter-organisational context, O’Mahony (2007) identified five characteristics defined as effective conflict management among peers: independence (issues are resolved between community members; a formal governance body is not required), pluralism (multiple points of view are considered), representation (conflict management is democratically assigned to some community members), decentralised decision making (formal governance body is present, but some problem-solving rights are distributed to community members) and autonomous participation (freedom is given to community members to contribute on their own terms). Furthermore, Ndubisi (2011)

investigated pre-emptive conflict management through the promotion of organisational and information reliability. This approach to conflict management is believed to have the capacity to transform potential sources of conflict, e.g. service errors, into grounds for improvement, e.g. error detection and containment (Butler & Gray, 2006; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 1999).

### *2.3.2. Theories from the psychology literature*

There are three main divisions of the psychology literature concerned with handling conflicts: organisational psychology, social psychology and cyber-psychology. From the organisational psychology literature, Tjosvold, Wong and Chen (2014) suggested that conflict management strategies should be based on facilitating “open-minded” discussions. Such discussions consist of the development and expression of one’s own ideas, questioning and understanding the views of others, and a general openness to integrate new ideas into existing ways of thinking. In destructive conflicts, respective managerial strategies involve finding and implementing mutually agreed solutions (Behfar, Peterson, Mannix & Trochim, 2008). Zornoza, Ripoll and Peiró (2002), meanwhile, suggested that conflict management should be adjusted in accordance with the nature of a task at hand. For intellectual tasks, the authors suggested a positive conflict management strategy, characterised by an emphasis on logical explanation. For idea-generation tasks, a negative conflict management strategy was proposed, involving the resolution of differences of opinions through voting or coin-tossing.

More recent work in social psychology, meanwhile, highlights the need to pay attention to emotional aspects of this particular conflict management strategy (Halperin, Cohen-Chen & Goldenberg, 2014). A distinction is typically made between direct and indirect emotion regulation. Direct regulation aims to increase positive emotions and



reduce negative ones. Indirect regulation, in contrast, is used in situations where discrete inter-group emotions occur. This type of intervention involves identifying a resolution associated with a desired conflict-related process (e.g. compromising) and defining a message that would regulate the associated emotions. Other studies have distinguished between two groups of supportive strategies when dealing with conflicts: emotional and instrumental. Emotional support involves empathy and understanding (Clark & Mills, 1993), while instrumental support strives to resolve the conflict directly (Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992). In preventing child misbehaviour Gardner, Sonuga-Barke and Sayal (1999) distinguished between pre-emptive and reactive approaches to handling conflict. While the pre-emptive approach refers to anticipation, planning and good timing, the reactive approach focuses on attempting to resolve the situation after misbehaviour has occurred.

A study in cyber-psychology by Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu and MacFadden (2011) conducted a review of studies on online intervention and prevention programmes to address child cyber-bullying. Their findings can be broadly divided into two conflict-handling approaches: (1) automated, which involves developing and using technological and software initiatives that block and filter inappropriate behaviour and misconducts; and (2) personal, which employs therapeutic interventions for the victims of cyber-bullying. Anderson, Bresnahan and Musatics (2014) added to the latter by introducing a model of dissenting behaviour to serve as a cyber-bullying prevention tool. Their study suggested that disagreeing with the bully will encourage more bystanders to provide social support to the victim. In contrast, Ishii (2010) investigated what strategies individuals use to manage conflict with others with whom they have formed close relationships online. The author used Blake and Mouton's (1964) organisational conflict management framework and found that online users select

cooperative management styles (i.e. integrating, compromising, and obliging styles) to handle conflict in their close relationships and avoid less cooperative styles (i.e. dominating and avoiding), if they want to maintain the relationship.

### *2.3.3. Theories from the marketing literature*

Godes et al. (2005) offered first insights into roles that companies may adopt when managing C2C interactions. The authors distinguished between four principal, non-mutually exclusive company roles ranging from passive observation to interactive participation. Depending on the type of C2C interaction (positive versus negative) and the context, the company can choose between the following roles: observer, mediator, moderator and participant. Similarly, Homburg, Ehm and Artz (2015) identified two generic company roles in managing C2C discussions in an online community setting: passive and active. On the one hand, in choosing passive engagement, the company offers consumers a platform to interact and does not engage in conversations among consumers. On the other hand, active participation involves interacting with consumers. The majority of marketing studies on conflict management in online and offline environments focus on examining active forms of conflict management.

In the field of consumer research, for example, a study by Sibai, de Valck, Farrell & Rudd (2015) argued that the heterogeneity of online consumption communities requires managers to exercise social control through governance structures and moderation practices. The authors put forward two strategies to manage conflicts. On the one hand, interaction maintenance follows a proactive, ongoing approach, which involves explicating roles, formalising rules, monitoring interactions, rewarding positive behaviours and sanctioning negative behaviours. For instance, explicating roles pre-defines positions or functions that have corresponding

responsibilities in managing the conflict. Similarly, formalising rules specifies rights to be used for future contingencies. In contrast to these, monitoring refers to keeping records of behaviour in order to understand the causes of the conflict. Rewarding or sanctioning behaviour represents a set of actions that incentivise positive behaviour or dismiss incentives for negative behaviour. On the other hand, interaction termination is more reactive in nature and seeks to end interactions that have become dysfunctional either by ignoring members or by permanently excluding them from the community.

Two previous studies on conflict management within consumer-hosted online communities have put forward the concept of community-governing mechanisms (Mathwick, Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007; Schau, Muñiz & Arnould, 2009). These constitute articulating expectations for acceptable behavior including maintaining criticism constructive, dismissing unjustified, negative comments, and sustaining a positive community environment. A netnography of consumer-hosted online communities by Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) proposed the concept of community governing mechanisms. The most common governing mechanism comprises articulating expectations for acceptable behaviour, followed by dismissing “flaming” comments and/or unjustified criticism in the community.

In the relationship-marketing field, Koza and Dant (2007) discussed installing “control mechanisms” in order to resolve disputes. Bureaucratic control mechanisms are characterised by formal control and a centralised authority (Bijlsma-Frankema & Koopman, 2004). Relational control mechanisms, in contrast, are trust-based governance structures that facilitate the participation of group members in the decision-making (Lui, Ngo & Hon, 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Koza and Dant (2007) further suggested that bureaucratic methods of regulation are more suitable in conflict situations that are characterised by hostility, frustration and overall antagonism. They

go on to propose that relational mechanisms are best used in cooperative situations (Deutsch, 1994).

Lastly, Mazaheri, Basil, Yanamandram and Daroczi (2011) investigated the effect of three conflict management styles: cooperative (i.e. an open-minded discussion with a focus on understanding the opposing arguments,), competitive (i.e. defending one's position and pursuing one's own interest at the expense of others) and avoiding (i.e. avoid expressing one's ideas) on customer perceived satisfaction in a service recovery situation. The authors found that cooperative conflict management style has a positive impact on customer satisfaction, particularly when customers have pre-existing positive attitudes.

#### *2.3.4. Theories from other disciplines*

Several more studies found in the politics, information technology (IT), information management and sociology literature are also relevant. In politics, Wright's (2006) work on online forums run by the government differentiates between content moderation and interactive moderation. Content moderation is characterised by content removal and the absence of justification for the deletion. Interactive moderation, in contrast, represents two-way communication between the moderator(s) and the community members and includes maintaining civility and encouraging thorough discussions.

In the IT literature, Matzat and Rooks (2014) drew a contrast between positive (reward) and negative (punishment) conflict management strategies. Positive conflict management involves rewarding desirable behaviour, while negative conflict management describes punishing undesirable behaviour. In contrast, Huang et al. (2016) examine the effectiveness of three strategies – rational explanation, constructive

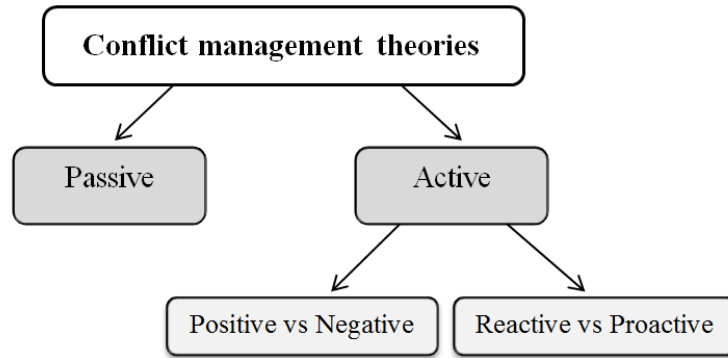
suggestion, and social encouragement – in managing conflicts in online collaboration projects. Rational explanation is reactive, focused on the issue and refers to providing more detailed information and clarifying misunderstandings among the conflicting parties, while social encouragement is more proactive and aims to create a friendly online environment to prevent conflicts from occurring. Constructive suggestion is most commonly used and refers to suggesting concrete alternative solutions to the conflict. The authors found that only constructive suggestions have a positive effect on retaining the contributors.

In sociology, Lee (2005) outlined behavioural strategies used in a feminist online forum to deal with conflicts among its members. Lee's (2005) strategies can be categorised into three groups: competitive-dominating, cooperative-integrating and avoiding. The competitive-dominating strategy involves threats, persuasion and requesting compliance. Cooperative-integrating suggests an overall consideration of others, including compromising, offering concessions, apologising and showing solidarity. Avoiding strategies comprise of activities that aim to ignore the conflict, including making jokes, being silent, bringing in third parties and withdrawal. In another early sociological study on a recreational virtual community, Smith (2002) offered three main mechanisms for social control when conflicts between the members of the community occur. Mediation refers to neutral negotiation that facilitates an agreement between the disputants. Fact-finding relies on resolving the conflict through determining the facts and rejecting the meritless argument, while arbitration is more authoritative whereby the provided resolution is final. The author further adds that arbitration is frequently the least preferred option, while mediation and fact-finding are more effective in preventing conflicts from escalating and sustaining relationships among community users.

In information management, borrowed from the organisational behaviour literature (Pruitt, 1983; Rahim, 1983), Hauser, Hautz, Hutter and Füller (2017) investigated the effect of assertive versus cooperative approaches to addressing public scandals that occur in online settings. Assertive conflict management is represented by competing, obliging, avoiding, which were found to further escalate the conflict. In contrast, cooperative conflict management involves accommodating, yielding, integrating strategies, which can be described as showing willingness to cooperate with the opposing party. The authors found that cooperativeness is generally more effective, though the success of assertive as opposed to cooperative conflict management depends predominantly on factors such as attitudes towards the community, the number and presence of moderators and their credibility.

#### 2.3.5. Summary

In sum, past literature on conflict management appears to fall into three main domains, which are not all strictly mutually exclusive - *passive* versus *active*, *positive* versus *negative*, and *reactive* versus *proactive* conflict management. Passive conflict management involves community moderator behaviours such as avoiding the conflict (Hauser et al., 2017), remaining silent (Godes et al., 2005), and observing without participating (Homburg et al., 2015). In contrast, active conflict management consists of a range of community hosts practices to manage C2C conflicts. As such, active conflict management can be further grouped into positive and negative, as well as reactive and proactive conflict management, as shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5** Conflict management theories

Positive conflict management broadly involves conflict management practices that reinforce desirable community behaviours e.g. rewarding (Sibai et al., 2015), cooperating (Zhang et al., 2015), and facilitating open-minded discussions (Tjosvold et al., 2014). In comparison, negative conflict management refers to punishing undesirable community behaviours such as community exclusion (Sibai et al., 2015), blocking and filtering inappropriate behaviours (Mishna et al., 2011), and forcing (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Reactive conflict management represents the community moderators' attempts to resolve the situation after misbehaviour has occurred (Gardner et al., 1999), while proactive conflict management relies on pre-defined community norms and formal rules enforced through community government mechanisms and expectations of community members to comply with these (Mathwick, et al., 2007; Schau, et al., 2009).

Despite the existence of these theories, consumer conflict management in online environments remains an area that requires a thorough investigation. This is because existing studies in the marketing literature are limited to providing conceptual recommendations, examine small-scale consumer-hosted communities, or offer preliminary, tentative findings.

## Chapter references

- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U. M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 19-34. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.69.3.19.66363](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.69.3.19.66363)
- Alper, S., Tjosvold, D., & Law, K. S. (2000). Conflict management, efficacy, and performance in organizational teams. *Personnel Psychology*, 53(3), 625-642. doi: [10.1111/j.1744-6570.2000.tb00216.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2000.tb00216.x)
- Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(1), 123-148. doi: [10.5465/256633](https://doi.org/10.5465/256633)
- Andersen, P. H. (2005). Relationship marketing and brand involvement of professionals through web-enhanced brand communities: The case of Coloplast. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 34(3), 285-297. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2004.07.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2004.07.007)
- Anderson, J., Bresnahan, M., & Musatics, C. (2014). Combating weight-based cyberbullying on Facebook with the dissenter effect. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 17(5), 281-286. doi: [10.1089/cyber.2013.0370](https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2013.0370)
- Arsel, Z., & Thompson, C. J. (2010). Demythologizing consumption practices: How consumers protect their field-dependent identity investments from devaluing marketplace myths. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(5), 791-806. doi: [10.1086/656389](https://doi.org/10.1086/656389)



- Back, M. D., Stopfer, J. M., Vazire, S., Gaddis, S., Schmukle, S. C., Egloff, B., & Gosling, S. D. (2010). Facebook profiles reflect actual personality, not self-idealization. *Psychological Science*, *21*(3), 372-374. doi: [10.1177/0956797609360756](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797609360756)
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *16*(2), 2-21. doi: [10.1002/dir.10006](https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10006)
- Beal, D. J., Ruscher, J. B., & Schnake, S. B. (2001). No benefit of the doubt: Intergroup bias in understanding causal explanation. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *40*(4), 531-543. doi: [10.1348/014466601164966](https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164966)
- Behfar, K., Peterson, R. and Mannix, E. & Trochim, W. (2008). The critical role of conflict resolution in teams: A close look at the links between conflict type, conflict management strategies, and team outcomes, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *93*(1), 170-188. doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.93.1.170](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.1.170)
- Bijlsma-Frankema, K. & Koopman, K. (2004). The oxymoron of control in an era of globalisation: Vulnerabilities of a mega myth. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *19*(3), 204–217. doi: [10.1108/02683940410527711](https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940410527711)
- Blake, R., & Mouton, J. (1964). *The managerial grid: The key to leadership excellence*. Huston: Gulf Publishing Co.
- Brodie, R. J., Ilic, A., Juric, B., & Hollebeek, L. (2013). Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(1), 105-114. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.029](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.029)

- Butler B. & Gray P. (2006). Reliability, mindfulness, and information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 30(2), 211–24. doi: [10.2307/25148728](https://doi.org/10.2307/25148728)
- Castellá, V. O., Abad, A. Z., Alonso, F. P., & Silla, J. P. (2000). The influence of familiarity among group members, group atmosphere and assertiveness on uninhibited behavior through three different communication media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 16(2), 141-159. doi: [10.1016/S0747-5632\(00\)00012-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0747-5632(00)00012-1)
- Clark, M., & Mills, J. (1993). The difference between communal and exchange relationships: What it is and is not. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19(6), 684 – 691. doi: [10.1177/0146167293196003](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167293196003)
- Colliander, J., & Wien, H. A. (2013). Trash talk rebuffed: consumers' defense of companies criticized in online communities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(10), 1733-1757. doi: [10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191)
- De Almeida, S. O., Dholakia, U. M., Hernandez, J. M. C., & Mazzon, J. A. (2014). The mixed effects of participant diversity and expressive freedom in online peer-to-peer problem solving communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(3), 196-209. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.003)
- De Dreu, C. K. (2008). The virtue and vice of workplace conflict: Food for (pessimistic) thought. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, 29(1), 5-18. doi: [10.1002/job.474](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.474)
- Deutsch, M. (1994). Constructive conflict resolution: Principles, training, and research. *Journal of Social Issues*, 50(1) 13–32. doi: [10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb02395.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb02395.x)

- De Valck, K. (2007). The war of the eTribes: Online conflicts and communal consumption. *Consumer tribes*, 260, 274.
- Dubiel, H. (1998). Cultivated conflicts. *Political Theory*, 26(2), 209-220. doi: [10.1177/0090591798026002004](https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591798026002004)
- Ensari, N., Camden-Anders, S., & Schlaerth, A. (2015). Constructive management and resolution of conflict. *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, 340.
- Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E., & Powell, I. H. (2013). Brand rivalry and community conflict. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 4–12. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017)
- Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 193-207. doi: [10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2011.01.001)
- Fournier, S., & Lee, L. (2009). Getting brand communities right. *Harvard Business Review*, 87(4), 105–111. Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/2009/04/getting-brand-communities-right>
- Füller, J., Jawecki, G., & Mühlbacher, H. (2007). Innovation creation by online basketball communities. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(1), 60-71. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.09.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.09.019)
- Gallaugh, J., & Ransbotham, S. (2010). Social media and customer dialog management at Starbucks. *MIS Quarterly Executive*, 9(4). Retrieved from: <http://misqe.org/ojs2/index.php/misqe/article/view/301>
- Gardner, F., Sonuga-Barke, E. & Sayal, K. (1999). Parents anticipating misbehaviour: An observational study of strategies parents use to prevent conflict with

- behaviour problem children, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 40(8), 1185-1196. doi: [10.1111/1469-7610.00535](https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-7610.00535)
- Gebauer, J., Füller, J., & Pezzeri, R. (2013). The dark and the bright side of co-creation: Triggers of member behavior in online innovation communities. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1516-1527. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013)
- Giesler, M. (2007). Conflict and compromise: drama in marketplace evolution. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(6), 739-753. doi: [10.1086/522098](https://doi.org/10.1086/522098)
- Godes, D., Mayzlin, D., Chen, Y., Das, S., Dellarocas, C., Pfeiffer, B., Libai, S., Sen, S., Shi, M., & Verlegh, P. (2005). The firm's management of social interactions. *Marketing Letters*, 16(3-4), 415-428. doi: [10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4)
- Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M. O. (2014). Brand communities based in social media: How unique are they? Evidence from two exemplary brand communities. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34(2), 123-132. doi: [10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.010)
- Halperin, E., Cohen-Chen, S. & Goldenberg, A. (2014). Indirect emotion regulation in intractable conflicts: A new approach to conflict resolution. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 25(1), 1-31. doi: [10.1080/10463283.2014.923155](https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2014.923155)
- Harris, L. C., & Daunt, K. L. (2011). Deviant customer behaviour: A study of techniques of neutralisation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7-8), 834-853. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2010.498149](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2010.498149)

- Hauser, F., Hautz, J., Hutter, K., & Füller, J. (2017). Firestorms: Modeling conflict diffusion and management strategies in online communities. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 26(4), 285-321. doi: [10.1016/j.jsis.2017.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2017.01.002)
- Hemetsberger, A. (2006). When David Becomes Goliath-Ideological Discourse in New Online Consumer Movements. *ACR North American Advances*, 494-500. Retrieved from: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12334/volumes/v33/NA-33>
- Hickman, T., & Ward, J. (2007). The dark side of brand community: Inter-group stereotyping, trash talk, and schadenfreude. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research* Volume 34. Retrieved from: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12923/volumes/v34/NA-34>
- Homburg, C., Ehm, L., & Artz, M. (2015). Measuring and managing consumer sentiment in an online community environment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 52(5), 629-641. doi: [10.1509/jmr.11.0448](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0448)
- Huang, W., Lu, T., Zhu, H., Li, G., & Gu, N. (2016). Effectiveness of conflict management strategies in peer review process of online collaboration projects. In *Proceedings of the 19th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing* (pp. 717-728). ACM. doi: [10.1145/2818048.2819950](https://doi.org/10.1145/2818048.2819950)
- Husemann, K. C., & Luedicke, M. K. (2013). Social conflict and consumption: A meta-analytical perspective. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research*, 41, 355-360. Retrieved from: <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/17225>
- Husemann, K., Ladstaetter, F. & Luedicke, M., (2015). Conflict culture and conflict management in consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 265-284. doi: [10.1002/mar.20779](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20779)

- Ishii, K. (2010). Conflict management in online relationships. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 13(4), 365-370. doi: [10.1089/cyber.2009.0272](https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0272)
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. doi: [10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003)
- Koza, K. & Dant, R. (2007). Effects of relationship climate, control mechanism, and communications on conflict resolution behaviour and performance outcomes. *Journal of Retailing*, 8(3), 279-296. doi: [10.1016/j.jretai.2007.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2007.03.002)
- Kriesberg, L. (2007). *Constructive conflicts: From escalation to resolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kuhn, T. & Poole, M.S. (2000). Do conflict management styles affect group decision making? Evidence from a longitudinal field study. *Human Communication Research*, 26(4), 558-90. doi: [10.1111/j.1468-2958.2000.tb00769.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2000.tb00769.x)
- Kuo, Y. F., & Feng, L. H. (2013). Relationships among community interaction characteristics, perceived benefits, community commitment, and oppositional brand loyalty in online brand communities. *International Journal of Information Management*, 33(6), 948-962. doi: [10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.08.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.08.005)
- Kozinets, R. V. (2001). Utopian enterprise: Articulating the meanings of Star Trek's culture of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(1), 67-88. doi: [10.1086/321948](https://doi.org/10.1086/321948)
- Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R., Richard, M. O., & Sankaranarayanan, R. (2012). The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers,

- value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1755-1767. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016)
- Lee, B. K. (2005). Hong Kong consumers' evaluation in an airline crash: A path model analysis. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(4), 363-391. doi: [10.1207/s1532754xjpr1704\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1704_3)
- Lee, H. (2005). Behavioural strategies for dealing with flaming in an online forum. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 46(2), 385-403. doi: [10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00017.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00017.x)
- Lee, D., Kim, H. S., & Kim, J. K. (2011). The impact of online brand community type on consumer's community engagement behaviors: Consumer-created vs. marketer-created online brand community in online social-networking web sites. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 14(1-2), 59-63. doi: [10.1089/cyber.2009.0397](https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2009.0397)
- Levy, S. J., & Zaltman, G. (1975). *Marketing, society, and conflict*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Liu, X., Magjuka, R. J., & Lee, S. H. (2008). An examination of the relationship among structure, trust, and conflict management styles in virtual teams. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 21(1), 77-93. doi: [10.1002/piq.20016](https://doi.org/10.1002/piq.20016)
- Luedicke, M. K. (2006). Brand community under fire: The role of social environments for the HUMMER brand community. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 33, 486-493. Retrieved from: <http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/4677/>
- Lui, S., Ngo, H. & Hon, A. (2006). Coercive strategy in interfirm cooperation: Mediating roles of interpersonal and inter-organisational trust. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(4), 466-474. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2005.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2005.09.001)

- Mangold, W. G., & Faulds, D. J. (2009). Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix. *Business Horizons*, 52(4), 357-365. doi: [10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002)
- Mathwick, C., Wiertz, C., & De Ruyter, K. (2007). Social capital production in a virtual P3 community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(6), 832-849. doi: [10.1086/523291](https://doi.org/10.1086/523291)
- Matzat, U. & Rooks, G. (2014). Styles of moderation in online health and support communities: An experimental comparison of their acceptance and effectiveness. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 36, 65-75. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043)
- Mazaheri, E., Basil, D. Z., Yanamandram, V., & Daroczi, Z. (2011). The impact of pre-existing attitude and conflict management style on customer satisfaction with service recovery. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 18(3), 235-245. doi: [10.1016/j.jretconser.2010.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2010.11.004)
- McAlexander, J. H., Schouten, J. W., & Koenig, H. F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(1), 38-54. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.66.1.38.18451](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.66.1.38.18451)
- Mishna, F., Cook, C., Saini, M., Wu, M. J., & MacFadden, R. (2011). Interventions to prevent and reduce cyber abuse of youth: A systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 21(1), 5-14. doi: [10.1177/1049731509351988](https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731509351988)
- Morgan, R. & Hunt, S. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing, *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20–38. doi: [10.2307/1252308](https://doi.org/10.2307/1252308)



- Muñiz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412-432. doi: [10.1086/319618](https://doi.org/10.1086/319618)
- Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Schau, H. J. (2005). Religiosity in the abandoned Apple Newton brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 737-747. doi: [10.1086/426607](https://doi.org/10.1086/426607)
- Ndubisi, N. (2011). Mindfulness, reliability, pre-emptive conflict handling, customer orientation and outcomes in Malaysia's healthcare sector. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(4), 537-546. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.02.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.02.019)
- O'Mahony, S. (2007). The governance of open source initiatives: What does it mean to be community managed? *Journal of Management and Governance*, 11(2), 139-150. doi: [10.1007/s10997-007-9024-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10997-007-9024-7)
- Preece, J. (2000). *Online communities: Designing usability and supporting socialbilty*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Pruitt, D. G. (1983). Strategic choice in negotiation. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 27(2), 167-194. doi: [10.1177/000276483027002005](https://doi.org/10.1177/000276483027002005)
- Rahim, M. A. (1983). A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict. *Academy of Management Journal*, 26(2), 368-376. doi: [10.5465/255985](https://doi.org/10.5465/255985)
- Rahim, M.A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organisational conflict. *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(3), 206-235. doi: [10.1108/eb022874](https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022874)
- Rahim, M. A., Garrett, J. E., & Buntzman, G. F. (1992). Ethics of managing interpersonal conflict in organizations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 11(5-6), 423-432. doi: [10.1007/BF00870554](https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00870554)

- Ruscher, J. B., & Hammer, E. Y. (1996). Choosing to sever or maintain association induces biased impression formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(4), 701. Retrieved from: <http://psycnet.apa.org/buy/1996-01736-004>
- Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30-51. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30)
- Schouten, J. W., & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 43-61. doi: [10.1086/209434](https://doi.org/10.1086/209434)
- Sibai, O., de Valck, K., Farrell, A. M., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social control in online communities of consumption: A framework for community management. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 250-264. doi: [10.1002/mar.20778](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20778)
- Simpson, J., Rholes, W., & Nelligan, J. (1992). Support seeking and support giving within couples in an anxiety-provoking situation: The role of attachment styles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62(3), 434-446. doi: [10.1037/0022-3514.62.3.434](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.62.3.434)
- Smith, A. D. (2002). Problems of conflict management in virtual communities. In *Communities in cyberspace* (pp. 145-174). Routledge.
- Thomas, C.T., Price, L., & Schau, J. (2013). When differences unite: Resource dependence in heterogeneous consumption communities, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 1010-1033. doi: [10.1086/666616](https://doi.org/10.1086/666616)

- Thompson, C. J., & Arsel, Z. (2004). The Starbucks brandscape and consumers'(anticorporate) experiences of glocalization. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(3), 631-642. doi: [10.1086/425098](https://doi.org/10.1086/425098)
- Thompson, S. A., & Sinha, R. K. (2008). Brand communities and new product adoption: The influence and limits of oppositional loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(6), 65-80. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.72.6.65](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.72.6.65)
- Tjosvold, D., Wong, A. & Feng Cheng, N. (2014). Constructively managing conflicts in organisations. *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational Behaviour*, 1(1), 545-568. doi: [10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091306](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091306)
- Varman, R., & Belk, R. W. (2009). Nationalism and ideology in an anticonsumption movement. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(4), 686-700. doi: [10.1086/600486](https://doi.org/10.1086/600486)
- Weick K., Sutcliffe K. & Obstfeld D. (2008). Organising for high reliability: processes of collective mindfulness. *Crisis Management*, 21(1), 81-123. Retrieved from: <http://www.archwoodside.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Weick-Organizing-for-High-Reliability.pdf>
- Williams, R. L., & Cothrel, J. (2000). Four smart ways to run online communities. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 41(4), 81–91. Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/product/four-smart-ways-to-run-online-communities/SMR051-PDF-ENG>
- Wright, S. (2006). Government-run online discussion fora: Moderation, censorship and the shadow of control. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 8(4), 550-568. doi: [10.1111/j.1467-856x.2006.00247.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856x.2006.00247.x)

- Zaglia, M. E. (2013). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(2), 216-223. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.015)
- Zhang, S. J., Chen, Y. Q., & Sun, H. (2015). Emotional intelligence, conflict management styles, and innovation performance: An empirical study of Chinese employees. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 26(4), 450-478. doi: [10.1108/IJCMA-06-2014-0039](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCMA-06-2014-0039)
- Zornoza, A., Ripoll, P. & Peiró, J. M. (2002). Conflict Management in Groups that Work in Two Different Communication Contexts: Face-to-Face and Computer-mediated Communication. *Small Group Research*, 33(5), 481-508. doi: [10.1177/104649602237167](https://doi.org/10.1177/104649602237167)

## CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the researcher's philosophical stance, an indication of the choice of methods employed as well as the associated considerations and implications for research. The aim of this chapter is to complement the methodologies employed in the papers that form the body of this thesis.

### 3.1. MIXED-METHODS RESEARCH

#### *3.1.1. Researcher Philosophical Stance*

Mixed-methods research, which is often referred to as “a third paradigm”, has emerged as a response to the long-standing debate on the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research (Feilzer, 2010). In a nutshell, positivism and social constructivism lie on the two opposite ends of a spectrum. While positivism advocates that reality is singular and can be discovered via objective quantitative research methods, social constructivism posits that qualitative research methods should be applied to what is a subjective reality constructed by varied and multiple meanings individuals attach to their experiences (Cresswell, 2009). Although there are many more paradigms and nuanced positions within these and other broad research frameworks (e.g. feminism, critical theory, contemporary hermeneutics), positivism and social constructivism represent the two most dominating paradigms in social sciences research (Blaikie, 2007).

Advocates of mixed-methods research strived for the amalgamation of quantitative and qualitative research methods (Morgan, 2007). As this approach to answering research questions fails to fall into either dominating paradigm, researchers

began to develop alternative philosophical positions that are capable of catering for the diverse nature of social research (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007). As a result, pragmatism among other paradigms (e.g. transformative emancipation (Mertens, 2003), dialectics (Greene & Hall, 2010), critical realism (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010)) was developed in order to offer an alternative worldview of those of positivism/post-positivism, social constructivism and others (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Miller, 2006; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Pragmatism is concerned with applications of research methods and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990) and as such places emphasis on the research problem and the use of (any) appropriate methods to understand the problem (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). In other words, the pragmatic worldview position is focused on solving problems by accepting the existence of singular and multiple realities and being open to multiple forms of empirical enquiry (Rorty, 1999). Thus, pragmatism has allowed the researcher to be free of practical and philosophical constraints imposed by the dichotomy of positivism and social constructivism (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

### *3.1.2. Choice of methods*

In planning the mixed-methods research design, the researcher placed emphasis on exploring the phenomenon of conflict management in online consumption communities due to lack of previous knowledge on the topic. As such, the researcher implemented a sequential exploratory strategy (Cresswell, 2009) that consisted of three phases of data collection reflected in Papers 1, 2 and 4. More specifically, the first and second phases involved qualitative data collection and analysis (i.e. Papers 1 and 2), followed by a third phase of quantitative data collection and analysis (i.e. Paper 4). The purpose of this strategy was to complement and expand the findings from the qualitative findings (i.e. the impact of the identified conflict management strategies) through the use of

quantitative data and results. Such sequential/three-phase design allowed for flexibility in adapting the third phase based on the findings from the first two phases (Feilzer, 2010).

The methods implemented in this thesis, which are outlined in the separate papers, were two netnographies and an online experiment. First, netnography involves conducting rigorous observations of computer-mediated communications in relation to topics of interest (Kozinets, 2002), making it an appropriate method for investigating conflict management practices in online communities. The coding and theme development process that took place during the data analysis stages of Paper 1 and Paper 2 are discussed in detail in the following section.

Second, since quantifying consumer reactions to conflict management during the first two phases of the research was not viable and did not represent the objective of the studies, an online experiment was used to capture the effect of different conflict management strategies on consumers' attitudes and perceptions in the third phase. Prior to selecting an online experiment for the purpose of answering the research question of whether the constructed conflict management strategies have a differential effect on two consumer outcomes, the method was considered with regards to its advantages as well as its limitations. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Online experiments are characterised by four key elements that distinguish them from other research methods: 1) the manipulation of one or more independent variables (i.e. six conflict management strategies and two conflict content orientations); 2) the use of control variables (i.e. participants' involvement with the conflict content orientation, conflict management expectations and perceived conflict severity); 3) randomization (i.e. respondents assigned to different scenarios with approximately

equal number of respondents per treatment group); and 4) careful measurement of one or more dependent variables (i.e. attitudes towards conflict management and perceptions of the organisation's social responsibility efforts) (Millsap & Maydeu-Olivares, 2009).

On the one hand, online experiments benefit from a number of advantages including automated processes and procedures, which in turn reduce costs and the time spent on managing the experiment (Reips, 2002). Thus, the consistency of the procedure across participant groups is improved. In addition, respondents in online experiments (compared with lab experiments, for instance) can complete the survey in a wide array of settings with 24-hour access and increased comfort (Salgado & Moscoso, 2003). Another advantage of online experiments is an increased ability to maintain ethical research standards, because respondents can discontinue their participation at any point and coercion is thus reduced (Reips, 2002). Online accessibility widens the pool of potential respondents, which in lab experiments, for example, is typically restricted to (undergraduate) students at a particular university that limits the generalisability of the findings (Reips, 2002).

On the other hand, online experiments have distinctive limitations among which are: multiple submissions, self-selection (i.e. only interested and motivated individuals may participate), the dropout rate, which is 20% higher compared with lab experiments (Birnbaum, 2004; O'Neil, Penrod & Bornstein, 2003; Reips, 2002), and possible bias in responses when providing incentives/rewards for participation (Dandurand, Shultz & Onishi, 2008). Since the experimental data were collected through Qualtrics panel services, the limitations of the online experimental design adopted in this thesis are discussed in light of that.



First, multiple submissions, though a rare issue with online experiments (e.g. when respondents have strong opinions about a topic (Konstan et al., 2005)), was mediated automatically by the Qualtrics survey platform that verifies respondents' IP addresses and does not allow for duplicates. Second, the respondents in the survey were selected by Qualtrics through careful screening that involved only revealing the survey to eligible individuals (i.e. supporters of non-profit organisations and social media users). In total, over 3,000 responses were collected, out of which 525 were complete and usable.

Third, the dropout rate typically associated with online surveys was managed through providing respondents with a financial incentive for a completed and usable survey. Specifically, each respondent received £3.65 for their usable response a week after the data were collected to allow the researcher to identify any quality or other issues with the responses and have these replaced. In relation to incentivising study participation, it is important to acknowledge that this may have introduced a certain level of bias in the responses as a result of respondents being rewarded for undergoing an online experiment. Particularly, a concern surrounding paid online surveys refers to 'professional survey takers' who are more likely to engage in inattentive responses in order to be incentivised (Golden & Brockett, 2009), which in turn impacts the sample integrity and the quality of the data (Hillygus, Jackson & Young, 2014). Others, however, have showed that intrinsic motivators for participating in online panels exist and these include enjoyment, obligation, curiosity, helping and giving opinion (Brüggen, Wetzels, De Ruyter & Schillewaert, 2011). Furthermore, it is common for social scientist researchers, driven by pragmatic needs, to accept convenience samples as long as these samples meet the research objectives and are reasonably representative of the target population (Murray, Rugeley, Mitchell & Mondak, 2013). Nonetheless, the

concerns regarding online panels raised by some scholars necessitated careful and detailed data screening, which included four aspects, some based on recommendations by Smith, Roster, Golden and Albaum (2016). These included: 1) setting a screen-out logic, 2) checking text entry responses, 3) validation and missing respondents, and 4) monitoring the speed of the survey completion.

The screen-out logic consisted of two questions: “Do you support any non-profit organisations?” and “Do you follow/visit/like the fan page of any non-profit organisation on social media?” The survey was terminated for those who selected the answer “No” to either question. Furthermore, prior to collecting the agreed sample of 500 respondents, a soft launch was conducted by Qualtrics, which represented 5% of the total sample. The data collected through the soft launch enabled the researcher to identify any inconsistencies or quality issues in the data including potential bias in responses prior to the full launch. One of these issues identified represented the median time to complete the survey, which was 5 minutes, and was deemed by the researcher too short. In contrast, the average time to complete the survey during the pilot test (n=20) carried out prior to the soft launch was approximately 10 minutes. To manage this, a speed check was added by Qualtrics and as a result responses taking under one-third of the median response time were automatically deleted. Indeed, a recent study has found that online panel respondents complete surveys at a faster pace compared with other ways used to generate survey responses (Smith et al., 2016). In addition, a quality check was added at the beginning of the survey requesting respondents to commit to overall quality responses (“Do you commit to providing your thoughtful and honest answers to the questions in this survey? - I will provide my best answers/I will not provide my best answers/I can’t promise either way”).

A second issue with the data gathered through the soft launch referred to some respondents incorrectly identifying the conflict content manipulations (“personal health” versus “animal welfare”), despite these manipulations being previously checked during the pilot test and pre-tests (n=16) and no issues were identified. The issue was addressed by revising the question and allowing only certain answers as acceptable before proceeding in order to improve the quality of responses.

The third and final issue was certain “straight-lining” (i.e. respondents selecting the same response throughout the survey) responses that upon careful examination were identified to produce overall inconsistent answers across the survey. This was partly managed through the survey design, which ensured a maximum of two questions per page, as well as having responses deemed untrustworthy replaced by Qualtrics. Similarly, responses containing “gibberish” text in the final question, which asked respondents to provide comments/feedback, if any, were replaced by Qualtrics, resulting in a total sample of 525 responses.

### 3.1.3. Qualitative data analysis

The data collected for Papers 1 and 2 were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six stages recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), as shown in table 2 below. Thematic analysis represents a method that systematically identifies, analyses and reports patterns of meaning (themes) across a set of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description of the process</i>
1. Familiarization with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire dataset.

3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, generating all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire dataset.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, relating back of the analysis to research question and literature, producing a scholarly report.

---

**Table 2** The six phases of thematic analysis (adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Prior to selecting thematic analysis as a suitable data analysis tool for the two qualitative studies (Paper 1 and 2), the researcher made a number of decisions, which are discussed here. The first consideration involved what a ‘theme’ will consist and what will count as a pattern. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data and captures something important about the data in relation to the research question. The overarching research question that the two qualitative studies aimed to address was what strategies, if any, companies use to manage C2C conflict in their Facebook communities. Therefore, the decision was made that a theme will be a distinctive conflict management strategy (e.g. non-engaging). A second consideration was whether the themes will be developed in an inductive, ‘bottom up’ (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) or in deductive, ‘top down’ (Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997) manner. Following Patton (1990), the author made the decision to identify themes (i.e. conflict management strategies) in an inductive manner, which is strongly linked with the data, instead of trying to fit the data into a pre-existing framework or the researcher’s preconceptions. The third consideration involved

choosing whether to analyse the data at a semantic (i.e. explicit) or latent (i.e. interpretative) level (Boyatzis, 1998). The author chose the former, which involved identifying themes at the surface meaning of the data, and not looking beyond what is presented in the textual data collected from Facebook via screenshots of conflict episodes.

To answer the research question that is what strategies, if any, companies use in their Facebook online communities to manage C2C conflict, data were collected in two separate stages reflected in Paper 1 and Paper 2. The data were collected from seven online communities, the suitability of which is discussed in the papers' methods sections, over a combined period of 10 months. During both stages the data were analysed in the same manner (i.e. via a six-stage thematic analysis approach), which is reported here.

The data consisted of 933 pages and 622 conflict episodes where a conflict episode represents one consumer verbally attacking another consumer who typically reciprocates in kind and the Facebook community host intervening or not. Familiarisation with the data (Phase 1) involved adding all screenshots of the conflict episodes into a Word document and assigning these numbers for differentiation purposes. This was followed by repeated reading of the data in order to search for patterns and re-occurring meanings. During Phase 2 of the thematic analysis, the generation of more formal codes from the data took place. The codes generated in both datasets identified a feature of the data that related to the research question (i.e. an element of conflict management). As such, the coding stage of the analysis represented organising the data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). Excerpts from both datasets and corresponding data-driven codes are presented in Table 3, while the supporting screenshots are provided in the thesis Appendices.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Data excerpts</i>	<i>Codes</i>
Non-engaging (Appendix A)		No intervention, despite swearwords are being used.  No intervention from the company, hate speech and freedom of speech mentioned, possibly indirectly requesting an intervention.
Censor (Appendix B)	[comments deleted]	Censorship.  Company removes all comments later on.  Company intervention requested by reporting one of the conflicting parties.  Company censors the comments made by one person.
Bolstering (Appendix C)	<i>“Haha thanks guys! They’ve pretty much said what I was going to say Sam ^Alex”</i>  <i>“***High five*** Susan!”</i>  <i>“Thank you for making a difference for animals by living a vegan lifestyle (heart emoji)”</i>	Thanks consumer (brand defender?) for their support.  Positive verbal reinforcement.  Positive verbal reinforcement.  Consumer defends the brand in a conflict and the company re-affirms it.  Thanks the person defending the organisation’s cause.
Informing (Appendix D)	<i>“We roast and blend our own coffee at our London roastery so this can’t be possible Liam... ^Alex”</i>  <i>“You’d get more than 2 toasties for £10 Keith... It was just a round number so 2 of you can enjoy with a bit extra (smiley face)”</i>	Provides information to clarify an issue.  Disagrees with consumer comment.  Providing product information despite brand defenders present.
Educating	<i>“Zoos all over the U.S. have closed</i>	Provides an explanation to an issue

(Appendix E)	<p><i>their elephant exhibits or announced that they intend to phase them out, citing an inability to provide the animals with proper care. There is absolutely no ethical way to keep these intelligent, social animals in captivity.”</i></p>	<p>causing the conflict. Explanation possibly aimed at educating conflicting parties. Aligned with the company mission.</p>
	<p><i>“We are recommending release into coastal sanctuaries, not directly into the wild.”</i></p>	<p>Further explains an issue that is causing the conflict. Aligned with company mission. Provides a hyperlink.</p>
Pacifying (Appendix F)	<p><i>“Happy to take the comments Liam but can we watch the language please. I can assure you that I am sitting in our head office...”</i></p>	<p>Dominating comment from company. Requests individuals to change the way they communicate. Afterwards provides information.</p>
	<p><i>“Now let’s try to be nice to each other (smiley emoji) I’ve passed your feedback onto our Ops Excellence team.. ^Liam.”</i></p>	<p>Dominating response by the company. Asks conflicting parties to change their communication behaviour.</p>
Mobilising (Appendix G)	<p><i>“Unfortunately, a majority of dairy farms use practices like the ones seen in this video. Please consider ditching dairy and going vegan: <a href="http://features.peta.org/how-to-go-vegan/">http://features.peta.org/how-to-go-vegan/</a>”</i></p>	<p>Information and appeal. Provides a hyperlink.</p>
	<p><i>“Animals exist for their own reasons – they don’t choose to be tortured and abused before being slaughtered. Please consider going vegan to help end this suffering.”</i></p>	<p>Appeal. Time 4, this is turning into a theme.</p>
Asserting (Appendix H)	<p><i>“All animals deserve a life free from abuse (heart emoji)”</i></p>	<p>Posts an opinion that aligns with the company mission. Value-driven.</p>

---

	Not directed at anyone in particular.
<i>“Cruelty is never entertainment! #NotOurs2Use”</i>	Heavy value statement – use of an exclamation mark. Adds hashtag.

---

**Table 3** Data excerpts and codes

Following the coding phase, data excerpts together with their respective codes were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet in order to re-focus the analysis at the broader level of themes. During this phase (Phase 3) the researcher began to analyse the codes and consider the ways in which these can be combined to construct an overarching theme (i.e. a candidate conflict management strategy). The codes were subsequently subsumed into distinctive conflict management strategies based on unifying features and similarity between codes. For instance, codes such as “thanks consumer (brand defender) for their support” and “positive verbal reinforcement” formed a candidate “positive reinforcement” theme that was subsequently labelled as “bolstering”.

In Phase 4, a review of the set of constructed themes was conducted in order to refine the themes. The refinement involved two main criteria – internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Putton, 1990). Hence, the researcher aimed to ensure that data within the constructed themes cohere together in a meaningful manner, while clear and identifiable distinctions between themes exist. Thus, this phase involved two levels of analyses – 1) reviewing at the level of the coded data extracts, and 2) reviewing the validity of individual themes in relation to the dataset. In this phase, the researcher read data excerpts for each theme (i.e. strategy), and considered whether they appear to form a coherent pattern as well as ensuring that the themes accurately reflect the meaning of the data. For example, during this phase, a candidate theme (i.e. “justifying”) in Paper 1



was not actually a theme since the data were too diverse and was therefore excluded from further analysis. Furthermore, in between this phase and Phase 5, investigator triangulation was implemented (Decrop, 1999) where another researcher (the PhD candidate's first supervisor) independently analysed the two datasets followed by the two researchers discussing their interpretations and excluding 43 conflict episodes due to irreconcilable disagreements. Following three rounds of analyses for each dataset, a total of 597 conflict episodes were derived (271 in Paper 1 and 351 in Paper 2).

In the next phase (Phase 5) the themes were refined by developing definitions and naming each theme. This was done by going back to collated data extracts for each theme in the Excel spreadsheet, and organising these into a consistent account with accompanying narratives. During this phase and as part of the triangulation process, another independent researcher (i.e. the PhD candidate's second supervisor) was presented with data excerpts, corresponding codes, themes, working definitions and titles in order to ensure external validity of the data interpretations of the two researchers.

The final phase involved producing the written report of the data analyses and results for the two separate manuscripts. In this phase, the researcher selected suitable and vivid data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of each strategy and to communicate the analytic narrative to any potential readers. These are discussed in Papers 1 and 2.

## 3.2. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RESEARCH REFLEXIVITY

### *3.2.1. Ethical considerations*

The research conducted in each phase has received ethical approvals (research ethics assessment numbers – 4541, 7962) in accordance with the departmental and university research ethics guidelines. The research carried out for the purpose of this thesis complied with the six key principles of ethical research, as outlined in the Economic and Social Research Council Framework for Research Ethics (ESRCUK, 2015). These included: 1) Research is designed and undertaken in a manner which ensures transparency, integrity and quality; with regards to collecting the qualitative data from Facebook communities, the researcher followed Langer and Beckman's (2005) perspective that social media fan pages are open, public spaces that do not require formal membership. Hence, data collection occurred based on the pragmatic position towards covert research, as it would have been difficult to obtain similar data in another way. This is in contrast to prescriptions by Kozinets (2002) that the researcher(s) should disclose their presence and/or request permission from the community host to use any specific postings. Nonetheless, the nature of data collected here was textual and disclosure would have weakened one of the biggest advantages of the undertaken research, that is, its unobtrusiveness; 2) Participants are informed about the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research, and what their participation in the research entails. This consisted of obtaining informed consent from the participants in the quantitative phase; 3) The information supplied by the participants in the quantitative stage together with the qualitative textual data is kept confidential and all responses and names have been anonymised; 4) Participants in the quantitative phase were informed that their participation is voluntary and withdrawal from the study at any point is

possible and free from any coercion; 5) No harm to the research participants took place; and 6) The research is independent and there is no conflict of interest to be reported.

### *3.2.2. Research reflexivity*

According to Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011), reflexivity represents a process whereby the researcher critically reflects on the self as a researcher and the research process. The authors further suggest that reflexivity encourages researchers to take into consideration the dualities faced during the research process as an inquirer and a respondent. In this sense, a pragmatic researcher is committed to uncertainty and acknowledges that deriving any knowledge from research is relative and hardly absolute (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This is not to be confused with scepticism which proposes that we cannot know anything, but instead pragmatism facilitates the researcher's flexibility to changes depending on the unpredictable nature of social phenomena and thus the emergence of sometimes unexpected data (Mounce, 1997). Ultimately, a pragmatic researcher concentrates on answering the research question(s) with the aid of the most appropriate methods (Hanson, 2008). Furthermore, a pragmatic approach to research needs to specify to whom the pragmatic solution is useful, as sometimes a satisfactory answer is lacking (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). In relation to this, this thesis aimed to provide practical solutions to social media marketing managers as well as contribute to theory development on conflict management in the Marketing literature. Lastly, designing and conducting mixed-methods research is resource, labour and time intense. It required the author to undertake a number of different roles e.g. non-participatory observer, statistician, graphic designer. These necessitated the researcher to develop ability and skills to work with number-crunching as well as soft data (Feilzer, 2010).

## Chapter references

- Blaikie, N. (2007). *Approaches to social enquiry: Advancing knowledge*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. London: Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi: [10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). *Thematic Analysis*, in Cooper, H. (ed.) *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, Vol. 2, pp. 57-71.
- Birnbaum, M. H. (2004). Human research and data collection via the Internet. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 803-832. Retrieved from: <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.psych.55.090902.141601>
- Brüggen, E., Wetzels, M., De Ruyter, K., & Schillewaert, N. (2011). Individual differences in motivation to participate in online panels: the effect on response rate and response quality perceptions. *International Journal of Market Research*, 53(3), 369-390. doi: [10.2501/IJMR-53-3-369-390](https://doi.org/10.2501/IJMR-53-3-369-390)
- Cresswell, J. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Dandurand, F., Shultz, T. R., & Onishi, K. H. (2008). Comparing online and lab methods in a problem-solving experiment. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40(2), 428-434. doi: [10.3758/BRM.40.2.428](https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.40.2.428)
- Decrop, A. (1999). Triangulation in qualitative tourism research. *Tourism Management*, 20(1), 157-161. doi: [10.1016/S0261-5177\(98\)00102-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(98)00102-2)
- ESRCUK, (2015). Economic and Social Research Council. *ESRC Framework for Research Ethics*. Retrieved from: <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/guidance-for-applicants/esrc-framework-for-research-ethics-2015/>
- Feilzer, Y.M. (2010). Doing mixed methods research pragmatically: Implications for the rediscovery of pragmatism as a research paradigm. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), 6-16. doi: [10.1177/1558689809349691](https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689809349691)
- Frith, H., & Gleeson, K. (2004). Clothing and embodiment: men managing body image and using thematic analysis in psychology. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 5, 40-48. doi: [10.1037/1524-9220.5.1.40](https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.5.1.40)
- Golden, L. L., & Brockett, P. L. (2009). Trials, tribulations, and trust: addressing issues in Internet surveys. In *Academy of Marketing Science World Marketing Congress, Oslo, Norway, July*.
- Greene, J. C., & Hall, J. N. (2010). Dialectics and pragmatism: Being of consequence. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (2nd ed., pp. 119-143). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14-26. doi: [10.3102/0013189X033007014](https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X033007014)
- Hanson, B. (2008). Wither qualitative/quantitative? Grounds for methodological convergence. *Quality & Quantity*, 42, 97-111. doi: [10.1007/s11135-006-9041-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-006-9041-7)
- Hayes, N. (1997). *Theory-led thematic analysis: social identification in small companies*. In Hayes, N., ed., *Doing qualitative analysis in psychology*. Hove: Taylor & Francis.
- Hillygus, D. S., Jackson, N., & Young, M. (2014). Professional respondents in non-probability online panels. In Callegaro (Eds.) *Online panel research: A data quality perspective, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.*, 219-237. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Konstan, J. A., Simon Rosser, B. R., Ross, M. W., Stanton, J., & Edwards, W. M. (2005). The story of subject naught: A cautionary but optimistic tale of Internet survey research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 10(2), 00-00. doi: [10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00248.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00248.x)
- Kozinets, R.V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72. doi: [10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935)
- Langer, R., & Beckman, S. C. (2005). Sensitive research topics: netnography revisited. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 8(2), 189-203. doi: [10.1108/13522750510592454](https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750510592454)

- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, 4*, 97-128.
- Maxwell, J. A., & Mittapalli, K. (2010). Realism as a stance for mixed methods research. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Sage handbook of mixed methods in social and behavioral research* (2nd ed., pp. 145-167). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mertens, D. M. (2003). Mixed methods and the politics of human research: The transformative emancipatory perspective. In A. Tashakkori & C. Teddlie (Eds.), *Handbook of mixed method social & behavioral research* (pp. 135-164). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Miller, S. (2006). Mixed methods as methodological innovations: Problems and prospects. *Methodological Innovations Online, 1*, 1-7. doi: [10.4256/mio.2006.0005](https://doi.org/10.4256/mio.2006.0005)
- Millsap, R. E., & Maydeu-Olivares, A. (2009). *The SAGE handbook of quantitative methods in psychology*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Morgan, D. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 48-76. doi: [10.1177/2345678906292462](https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292462)
- Mounce, H. O. (1997). *The two pragmatisms: From Peirce to Rorty*. London: Routledge.

- Murray, G. R., Rugeley, C. R., Mitchell, D. G., & Mondak, J. J. (2013). Convenient yet not a convenience sample: Jury pools as experimental subject pools. *Social Science Research*, 42(1), 246-253. doi: [10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.06.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2012.06.002)
- O'Neil, K. M., Penrod, S. D., & Bornstein, B. H. (2003). Web-based research: Methodological variables' effects on dropout and sample characteristics. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 35(2), 217-226. doi: [10.3758/BF03202544](https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03202544)
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Reips, U. D. (2002). Standards for Internet-based experimenting. *Experimental Psychology*, 49(4), 243. doi: [10.1026//1618-3169.49.4.243](https://doi.org/10.1026//1618-3169.49.4.243)
- Rorty, R. (1999). *Philosophy and social hope*. London: Penguin Books.
- Rossmann, G. B., & Wilson, B. L. (1985). Numbers and words: Combining quantitative and qualitative methods in a single large-scale evaluation study. *Evaluation Review*, 9(5), 627-643. doi: [10.1177/0193841X8500900505](https://doi.org/10.1177/0193841X8500900505)
- Salgado, J. F., & Moscoso, S. (2003). Internet-based personality testing: Equivalence of measures and assesses' perceptions and reactions. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 11(2-3), 194-205. doi: [10.1111/1468-2389.00243](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2389.00243)
- Smith, S. M., Roster, C. A., Golden, L. L., & Albaum, G. S. (2016). A multi-group analysis of online survey respondent data quality: Comparing a regular USA consumer panel to MTurk samples. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 3139-3148. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.12.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.12.002)



Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (1998). *Mixed methodology: Combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of mixed methods research: Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in the social and behavioral sciences*. London: SAGE Publications.

Tuckett, A. G. (2005). Applying thematic analysis theory to practice: a researcher's experience. *Contemporary Nurse*, 19(1-2), 75-87. doi: [10.5172/conu.19.1-2.75](https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.19.1-2.75)

## CHAPTER 4 – COLLECTION OF PAPERS

### 4.1. PAPER 1 - CORPORATE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT ON SOCIAL MEDIA BRAND FAN PAGES

*Published* - Dineva, D. P., Breitsohl, J. C., & Garrod, B. (2017). Corporate conflict management on social media brand fan pages. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(9-10), 679-698. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2017.1329225](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1329225)

*Abstract:* A recent development in the literature on social-media brand fan pages is the investigation of hostile consumer-to-consumer interactions. Existing research has thus far concentrated on the reasons why consumers engage in such online conflicts. In comparison, this study focuses on how online conflicts can be best managed. Based on direct observations of six brand fan pages on Facebook, we offer a first conceptualisation of corporate conflict management strategies. Our results reveal five main conflict-management strategies: non-engaging, censoring, bolstering, informing and pacifying. By drawing on existing suggestions from the marketing literature, we provide managerial implications and suggest avenues for future research.

**Keywords:** *conflict resolution, brand community, corporate governance, social media, consumer aggression*

#### **4.1.1. Introduction**

The positive aspects of social-media brand fan pages are well researched. Consumers derive social as well as functional benefits, which increases their engagement (Gummerus, Liljander, Weman & Pihlström, 2012; Wolny & Mueller, 2013) and stimulates the co-creation of value (Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Likewise, companies have the opportunity to gain insights on consumer behaviour and to release interactive promotional content (Kim, Choi, Qualls & Han, 2010; Quinton, 2013; Schembri & Latimer, 2016). The negative aspects of social-media brand fan pages are, however, considerably less well-known. Studies have so far focused mainly on conflicts between consumers and brands/businesses (C2B), including studies on consumers punishing brands for unethical conduct (Grappi, Romani & Bagozzi, 2013; Haberstroh, Orth, Hoffmann & Brunk, 2015), as well as consumer complaints about unsatisfactory service/product experiences (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). A more recent area of research interest in the social-media literature is the investigation of conflict between consumers, a phenomenon generally referred to as consumer-to-consumer (C2C) conflict (Gebauer, Füller & Pezzei, 2013; Hickman & Ward, 2007; Husemann, Ladstaetter & Luedicke, 2015). This type of online conflict describes a scenario in which one consumer verbally attacks another consumer in relation to a brand. This is the key focus of this article.

We argue that companies hosting social-media brand fan pages need to consider how to manage these C2C conflicts, given recent findings on their destructive impact. Fisk et al. (2010), for instance, show that conflicts between consumers negatively impact upon an organisation's reputation and credibility. Likewise, Wang, Yu and Wei (2012) demonstrate that C2C conflicts on social-media brand fan pages are likely to have a detrimental effect on consumers' purchase intentions.

Despite these findings, the marketing literature on the corporate management of C2C conflicts in online environments remains limited. The central focus of existing studies is not on corporate conflict management strategies and these were drawn upon in a conceptual manner or treated as an analytical sub-theme (Husemann et al., 2015; Sibai, de Valck, Farrell & Rudd, 2015). Indeed, Matzat and Rooks (2014) recently noted that empirically informed research is lacking. To help address this gap, we report the findings of direct observations of six companies' strategies for managing C2C conflicts on their social-media brand fan pages.

Our results serve to advance marketing theory by offering an empirically informed taxonomy comprising five corporate conflict management strategies. Through this paper, marketing managers can gain insight into current corporate practices in managing hostile consumer-to-consumer interactions on their social-media brand fan pages. This will enable them to adopt suitable conflict management strategies in their own organisations.

#### **4.1.2. Literature Review**

##### *Social Media Brand Fan Pages*

Companies create brand fan pages on social media in order to unite brand fans through enabling them to share their enthusiasm about the brand (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012). Moreover, social-media brand fan pages (SMBFs) focus on a single brand and are hosted by a company on a social media channel (Breitsohl, Kunz & Dowell, 2015; Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2014a). SMBFs are easily accessible, open to the public and aim to facilitate communication with and among consumers (Correa, Hinsley, & De Zúniga, 2010). While Laroche et al. (2012) suggest that social-media brand fan

pages are similar to other types of online consumption communities (OCCs) in that they facilitate a shared purpose, rituals and traditions, Habibi, Laroche and Richard (2014a, b) outline several differences. First, the structure of the traditional OCC is hierarchical, i.e. based on member status and ranking (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). SMBFs are, in contrast, more ‘flat’, because of the absence of such ranking or status systems. Second, because SMBFs are larger in size and easily accessible by anyone, social relations between consumers are likely to be weaker. Third, consumer content in brand fan pages tends to be more succinct as opposed to long textual narratives in other types of OCCs (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). In comparison to consumer-hosted OCCs, Zaglia (2013) emphasises that SMBFs embody a weaker form of social bonding due to a lack of ideological depth and homogeneous consumers. Breitsohl et al. (2015) further suggest that SMBFs are more commercially-oriented when compared to consumer-hosted OCCs, which are often driven by non-monetary, egalitarian values.

#### *Consumer-to-Consumer Conflicts in the Social Media*

Consumer-to-consumer conflicts in the social media can be defined as aggressive and deliberate act(s) of communication conducted by an individual or a group of individuals using electronic forms of contact (Menesini & Nocentini, 2009). Such conflicts may occur between supporters of rival brands due to oppositional loyalty (Ewing, Wigstaff & Powell, 2013; Popp, Germelmann & Jung, 2016), as well as between supporters of the same brand (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005) due to different consumer perceptions of a brand and its values. Ewing et al. (2013) emphasise that C2C conflicts are likely to cause emotional distress to those actively involved in the conflict as well as those who merely observe it. Negative emotional experiences in SMBFs are detrimental to consumers’ social bonding and may prevent them from returning to a brand fan page (Adjei, Nowlin & Ang, 2016).

Importantly, C2C conflicts differ from C2B (consumer-to-business) conflicts in several aspects. C2B conflicts usually relate to some form of corporate misconduct or product/service failure, due to which a consumer complains, spreads negative word-of-mouth or initiates an online protest (Grappi et al., 2013; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Here, the consumers' main goal is to harm the company, warn other consumers, receive reimbursement or bring irresponsible corporate practice to an end (Breitsohl et al., 2014, Romani, Grappi & Bagozzi, 2013). In contrast, C2C conflicts involve the intention of one consumer to harm another by means of verbal provocation, harassment or threat (Ewing et al., 2013). Moreover, the source of the C2C conflict is not necessarily corporate misconduct or product/service failure, so consumers have no intention to engage in a dialogue with the company.

#### *Corporate Conflict Management in the Marketing Literature*

Following Ensari, Camden-Anders and Schlaerth (2016), corporate conflict management can be defined as practices that companies use to intervene in C2C conflicts. In what follows, we review studies from the marketing literature on corporate conflict management strategies in online environments. Since the literature on SMBFs in this context is limited, we further include studies from other types of online consumption communities, because these may also be applied in social-media brand fan pages.

One of the first studies on corporate management in the social media was a study by Godes et al. (2005), which suggested that a company needs to manage C2C interactions along a continuum of passive observation to active participation. According to the authors, a company should carefully choose between different degrees of involvement depending on the context and content of an interaction episode. While the

authors did not explicitly refer to C2C conflicts, their call for more research encouraged later studies on C2C conflict management.

Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) were among the first to propose that those hosting online communities need to develop forms of governance to manage consumer conflicts. The authors conducted a netnography of nine consumer-hosted online brand communities and concluded that the most common governing approach comprised of articulating expectations for acceptable behaviour. An alternative conceptual suggestion was made in an earlier study by de Valck (2007). While this netnography focused on consumer conflicts in a company-hosted OCC, the author recommended splitting conflicting parties into sub-communities in order to manage the conflicts identified during her observations.

In one of the first empirical studies to specifically focus on the management aspects of C2C conflicts, Wiertz, Mathwick, de Ruyter and Dellaert (2010) investigated how consumers solve conflicts among themselves in a consumer-hosted online community. Conducting two surveys with community members, they identified two forms of conflict management, which they called normative and meritocratic governance. Normative governance refers to norms that emerge through social interactions and are enforced through peer pressure. These norms take the form of explicit and implicit guidelines of appropriate behaviour, similar to those suggested by Schau et al. (2009). Meritocratic governance, in contrast, involves rewarding community members who help solve conflicts by giving them special status within an OCC.

A later conceptual paper by Sibai et al. (2015), which focused on governance strategies for companies that host online consumption communities, further expands

these suggestions. The authors argue that the heterogeneity of OCCs requires managers to exercise control through governance structures and moderation practices, and proposing two strategies. First, interaction maintenance involves explicating roles, formalising rules, monitoring interactions, rewarding positive behaviours and sanctioning negative behaviours. For instance, explicating roles refers to a company providing consumers with positions that have the explicit responsibility to manage C2C conflicts. Similarly, formalising rules specifies rights consumers may exercise in future incidents. Monitoring refers to keeping records of behaviour in order to understand the causes of the conflict, while rewarding or sanctioning behaviour represents a set of actions that incentivise positive behaviour or disincentivise negative behaviour. The second main strategy, interaction termination, represents a last resort approach where companies seek to end interactions that have become dysfunctional either by ignoring members or by permanently excluding them from the OCC.

The most extensive study on C2C conflicts to date has been conducted by Husemann et al. (2015), consisting of a four-year netnography on a non-for-profit, consumer-hosted OCC. Mirroring propositions made in Wiertz et al. (2010) and Sibai et al. (2015), their findings empirically verify the managerial use of exclusion and social norms to address conflicts among consumers. According to Husemann et al. (2015), excluding consumers from the OCC was rarely used since it was incongruent with the democratic, open-minded character of the OCC in question. More commonly, the community moderator would highlight that a conflict violated the community's social norms, while giving those involved the opportunity to justify their conduct and potentially further elaborate the existing community rules.

To sum up, the scarce marketing literature on managing C2C conflicts in online environments suggests strategies that fall into a reactive-proactive conflict management



paradigm. Some scholars report reactive approaches to conflict management where managerial action involved changing status rankings or member exclusion after a conflict had occurred (Husemann et al., 2015; Wiertz et al., 2010). Others report a more proactive approach consisting of monitoring consumer interactions, splitting up communities into sub-groups, and explicating norms and community rules in order to manage C2C conflicts (de Valck, 2007; Schau et al., 2009). Importantly, these studies were mostly conceptual in nature or merely reflected upon corporate management strategies as a sub-theme rather than it being at the centre of their investigation. Moreover, most of the reported strategies are based on observations from consumer-hosted OCCs, which, as mentioned before, differ to company-hosted social-media brand fan pages. Therefore, the present study concentrates on an empirical investigation of SMBFs, as will be outlined in detail in the next section.

#### **4.1.3. Method**

To explore the strategies that companies use in managing C2C conflicts on their social-media brand fan pages, this paper followed Phillips and Broderick (2014) in employing direct observations. The method represents systematic recording of online data in natural settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). In comparison to interviews and focus groups, direct observations allow for more naturalistic and unobtrusive research (Patton, 2004), which was considered critical for the present conduct. Indeed, past studies have shown that participants tend to alter or constrain socially undesirable behaviour as a result of being observed (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014; Marquis & Filiatrault, 2002). Following others (Cova & White, 2010; Phillips & Broderick, 2014), the first author therefore assumed the role of a non-participating observer in order to

prevent influencing either C2C conflict behaviour or the strategies used by the companies involved to manage this behaviour when it took place.

The data were collected using a non-probability sampling approach, in which six SMBFs were selected according to the following criteria: (1) the brand fan page had a high frequency of consumer communication activity; (2) there was an ongoing content contribution from the brand fan page’s moderators; and (3) the author was personally familiar with the brands and their context (Kozinets, 2002). For the purposes of homogeneity (see Breitsohl et al., 2015), all brand fan pages were hosted on Facebook and consisted of company-owned and actively moderated official brand fan pages. To increase the relevance for marketing managers, brands from five different industries were chosen: retailing, sports clothing, fast food, beverages, and telecommunications. Brief descriptions of each brand fan page are provided in Table 4.

<b>Brand fan page</b>	<b>Description</b>
Tesco	Retail and consumer merchandise A brand fan page on which the consumers discuss cooking recipes, and Tesco’s products and promotions. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/tesco/">https://www.facebook.com/tesco/</a> <i>2,124,543 members</i>
Nike	Sports apparel A brand fan page on which consumer content focuses on Nike’s celebrity endorsers and sports apparel. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/nike/">https://www.facebook.com/nike/</a> <i>25,169,280 members</i>
Adidas	Sports apparel A brand fan page on which consumers discuss Adidas’ advertisements and sports apparel. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/adidasUK/">https://www.facebook.com/adidasUK/</a> <i>24,641,672 members</i>

Burger King	Fast food A brand fan page on which consumer content is based on discussing Burger King's meal deals and new products, and comparing these with its competitors. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/burgerkinguk/">https://www.facebook.com/burgerkinguk/</a> <i>240,211 members</i>
Costa Coffee	Beverages A brand fan page on which consumers discuss Costa's drinks and food variety and their preparation. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/CostaCoffee/">https://www.facebook.com/CostaCoffee/</a> <i>1,466,305 members</i>
Vodafone	Telecommunication A brand fan page on which consumer content focuses on discussing service issues and product failures. <a href="https://www.facebook.com/vodafoneUK/">https://www.facebook.com/vodafoneUK/</a> <i>387,584 members</i>

**Table 4** Sample brand fan pages and descriptions

Observations took place between January 2016 and July 2016, and C2C conflict episodes were recorded manually. A total of 271 such conflict episodes were identified. Names of all conflict parties were changed to ensure full anonymity. To analyse the data, we followed the hybrid approach in thematic analysis as suggested by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). The first author developed a coding manual to include broad code categories derived from the reviewed literature, and subsequently from the data set after several rounds of reading and re-reading the recorded conflict episodes. The codes were then compared in terms of applicability and reliability. The final step was connecting the codes to build themes, reflecting the identified conflict management strategies. In developing the themes, the authors undertook a semantic approach, whereby the themes were identified at a strictly explicit level (Braun & Clarke, 2006;

2014). As such, this approach to theme development focuses on surface meanings of the data, rather than engaging in an exploration of the underlying, implicit aspects of social phenomena. To ensure consistency in data interpretation and to enhance the study's validity (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008), we further used investigator triangulation. In doing so, the second author independently analysed the data in the same fashion as the first author. Afterwards, areas of disagreement were re-introduced to the analytical process and subsequently discussed. After the exclusion of 14 conflict episodes, the final dataset comprised 257 recorded episodes.

#### **4.1.4. Results**

The analysis yielded five corporate conflict management strategies: non-engaging, censoring, bolstering, informing and pacifying. For the majority of conflict episodes (n=233), companies chose the non-engagement strategy. Censoring was used for four conflict episodes by two companies. The remaining strategies were used in 20 episodes by one company. Bolstering was used during 12, informing during six and pacifying during two conflict episodes. Detailed findings for each conflict management strategy are outlined below.

##### *Non-engaging*

We define non-engaging as a conflict management strategy where the company does not take any action to moderate a conflict. In other words, the strategy involves disregarding C2C conflicts and remaining silent. In doing so, the company avoids resolving the conflict. A typical conflict episode where a company chose a non-engagement strategy is highlighted in the following example taken from Tesco's brand

fan page. In this example, two consumers engage in a tense interaction regarding their differing preferences of retailers:

**Rachel:** I hate Tesco's Sophie, try online Ocado, Morrisons, Asda! Brilliant! X

**Darren:** If you hate tesco what are you doing on their facebook page

**Rachel:** Giving my opinion! Your Problem?

In total, we identified 132 consumer-to-consumer conflict episodes on Tesco's brand fan page. The company chose the non-engaging strategy in all instances, irrespective of the level of aggressiveness, the length of the conflict episode and the number of consumers involved.

Similarly, we found that Adidas followed a non-engaging strategy for all identified conflict episodes (n=9). In the following example, a consumer (Rob) disagrees with Nike's football apparel promotional video and another consumer (Carl) replies with a provocative comment, leading to an intensification of the conflict:

**Rob:** Back to slavery? Smfh!!!! Dislike!!!! I would have never agreed to do this.

**Carl:** Lol dislike, what a joker.

**Rob:** Carl go suck your mum fucktard.

Adidas' non-engagement strategy seems somewhat surprising considering their publicly stated 'house rules', which request consumers not to post any content that may be threatening, harassing, abusive or otherwise inflammatory to others. Moreover, the company proclaims that such content will be deleted. Arguably, the example above violates these house rules.

Nike also exclusively managed C2C conflict episodes (n= 58) via a non-engaging strategy. In the excerpt below, two consumers engage in a conflict following Nike's dismissal of the celebrity endorser Manny Pacquiao:

**Melinda:** No manny no Nike for me! Freedom of speech has been forgotten! Shame on you, money over values smdh regardless personal business shouldn't mix, stupid move Nike

**Jamie:** And shut up about freedom of speech. No one arrested him. Uneducated moron.

**Melinda:** Jamie lol with that mouth even I want to apologize to your mother! (face with tears of joy emoji)

**Jamie:** Aww the psychopath made a funny. Careful now, your bible says not to talk back to men.

A final example of a non-engaging approach to conflict management is Burger King, choosing this strategy during all C2C conflict episodes on their brand fan page (n=24). In the following example, a consumer expresses his perceptions of Burger King's current company positioning, which is met by aggressive comments from two other consumers:

**Oliver:** Burger King used to be cool 10 years ago... Now it sucks worse than a lady Gaga's fashion sense.

**Alfie:** Then why are you here (face with tears of joy emoji)

**Oliver:** Because it popped up on my news feed from a friend of mine sharing the post (neutral face emoji)

**Amelia:** Yet you felt the need to waste everyone else's time. Who cares about being cool anyway it's about taste.

Despite the fact that the conflict evolved around Burger King's company image, the company remained silent and did not take any action to manage the C2C conflict.

### *Censoring*

Censoring is defined in this study as a conflict management strategy where the company permanently removes content. In the following example, a consumer (Mark) posts a comment containing bad language which was aimed at an employee from a specific Costa Coffee store. In reply, another consumer (Lydia) disagrees with Mark's comment, causing further aggressive remarks:

**Mark:** Costa coffee is now hiring at Aberdeen central! Are you an Eastern European bitch with no personality and no concern for the customer? Are you sultry and stupid? Are you slow in everything? Then we have plenty of jobs for you!!!

**Lydia:** What a sad life you must have (frowning face emoji)

**Mark:** You obviously have no idea about what good service is! Stupid cow!

The whole conflict episode was later removed by Costa. No consumers, including those involved in the conflict, appeared to notice or request the deletion of any of these comments.

In the following example, Costa removed a comment without making reference to their conduct. Here, a consumer (Paulina) uses strong language possibly to attract the attention of other consumers. Two other consumers remark on Paulina's first and hostile comment. A second comment by Paulina, however, was deleted by Costa:

**Paulina:** Fuck you Costa. CAFE NERO FTW. Costa staff are so rude

**Costa:** Sorry we have upset you Paulina. What happened? - Adrian

*[deleted comment from Paulina]*

**Costa:** Not good. Where and when did this happen? - Adrian

**Lois:** She's so rude

**Marta:** Wow.

In Vodafone's Facebook brand fan page, we found two episodes during which censoring was used. Slightly different to Costa Coffee, Vodafone provided an explanation to the consumers regarding the removal of their comments:

Hi Jonathan,

We removed your previous posts due to your language.

Continuing to break the House rules (Found here: <http://vdfn.co/ZCgO40>) will result in your posts being restricted.

If there is anything we can help with, email our team here: [vdfn.co/1MEeijn](mailto:vdfn.co/1MEeijn).

Thanks,

Lisa

Further to removing comments, Vodafone made reference to their house rules, gave a warning and made the offer to move the communication to a non-public company channel.

### *Bolstering*

Bolstering is a conflict management strategy where the company posts a comment that affirms a brand defender. Following Colliander and Wien (2013), a brand defender is a customer who defends a company/ brand against a brand aggressor who attacks the company/brand. Of the three verbal conflict management strategies, bolstering represented the most frequently implemented. The essence of the strategy is the positive reinforcement of comments made by the brand defenders. In the following examples, a brand aggressor (Lee) posts an aggressive comment concerning Costa Coffee, which is followed by three separate comments defending the brand:

**Lee:** Pay u tax u greedy basterds

**Martin:** That's Starbucks

**Vivien:** Costa are a British company and do pay their taxes.



**Luke:** Yep Starbucks are the tax dodgers not Costa

**Costa:** Haha thanks guys! They've pretty much said what I was going to say Lee (grimacing face emoji) ^Alex

In this example, Costa's employee affirms the brand defenders by thanking them for their comments. The brand aggressor is further addressed directly by name. This strategy was also found in a second conflict episode where a brand aggressor uses strong language to comment about a supposedly unfair company practice. Again, a brand defender responds, and Costa uses a bolstering strategy:

**Alison:** Its the principle of the matter you absolute idiots! It does not matter if its 30p or 1p its a rip off and we shouldnt stand for it, costa are a massive company that surly doesnt need to con honest punters out of a cup of coffee ffs! All these idiots claiming its only 30p are the sort of idiots that pay cowboy builders three times the rate, absolute roasters how can you ever accept being ripped off? Regardless of by how much? Mental cases! !

**Jordan:** 3 shots.. With less milk in the large. 2 shots with milk in the regular.. Get it? (smiling face with open mouth and cold sweat emoji)

**Costa:** \*\*\*High 5\*\*\* Jordan!

Here, Costa praises the brand defender's involvement and understanding of the company products. In contrast to the previous instance, here the company does not directly engage with the brand aggressor and limits the response to simply acknowledging the brand defender through a verbalised hand gesture. On other occasions, Costa's employees also used a heart emoji to further complement their support for the brand defender.

It must also be noted that Costa occasionally chose bolstering in episodes where brand defenders' comments used bad language and swearwords, as illustrated below:

**Edward:** Costa Coffee it is rubbish coffee

**Nick:** Fuck Costa

**Nick:** Scamming bastards

**Lily:** Idiots, when they made the latte, or Capp, or flat white it would have filled/nearly over filled the cup,..... Guess what, foam does not last forever! Get a grip

**Costa:** I didn't even want to throw the issue of aerated milk losing its volume, but yes this is exactly correct! People seem to struggle with the fact a drink now filled to the brim suddenly fits in a smaller cup right to the lip! Haha (smiley emoji) ^Alex

Here, Costa's employee not only agrees with the brand defender but makes an additional comment about 'people', which is arguably a critical opinion aimed at brand aggressors on their brand fan page.

### *Informing*

We define informing as a conflict management strategy where the company posts corporate/product information to rectify an allegedly incorrect consumer comment. The strategy was observed in instances where a consumer posts supposedly incorrect information which led to the development of a C2C conflict episode. The following excerpt shows a comment about the ingredients of a product from Costa Coffee, and an aggressive reply, leading the company to rectify the supposedly incorrect information about the ingredient:

**Gemma:** I bet it contains about 20 spoons of sugar!

**Gemma:** I won't be drinking them because it's far too much sugar for me, I'm sure they are very nice but people should just be aware of what they are drinking it's not fair to mislead people into thinking it's just fruit and ice really

**Tom:** Gemma people moan too much about being a diabetic with about being too much sugar in the items how can workers help it its just there job to do what they have to do if you don't like it tough.

**Costa:** There is no added sugar Gemma. It's just fruit blended with ice... The fruit pot is blended with ice and apple/banana puree. I can assure you we are not misleading anyone! ^Alex

The same strategy was also chosen in relation to a consumer's comment about Costa Coffee's product prices, which led another consumer to post a provocative remark:

**Sian:** I love how you're proud £10 can buy two toasties on your premises... £10 for a grilled bit of bread and a little bit of filling. Can get an entire loaf for 50p, with £10 you could feed a lot of people! Two toasties for £10 what an absolute joke...

**Joe:** What do you expect?? It's a cafe!!!!!!!!!!!!!!( not a supermarket

**Sian:** Other cafes do just fine not charging such extortionate amounts. What just coz it says Costa on the sign, ridiculous prices are ok??? Shame some people are so conditioned to branding when I guarantee there's at least 5 family run cafes in your town, with better tasting food, better sourced food, freshly made not pre-packaged, for a much better value for money...

**Costa:** You'd get more than 2 toasties for £10 Sian... It was just a round number so 2 of you can enjoy with a bit extra (smiley emoji)

Again, Costa aimed to provide information in order to resolve the conflict. As noted before, an emoji (in the form of a smiley) is added to complement the message and possibly to indicate the friendly intent of the comment.

### *Pacifying*

Pacifying refers to a company posting a comment that asks one or more consumers to adjust their communication behaviour or style. Pacifying thereby involves the company displaying an element of authority which may also contain the underlying possibility that the company takes further action if compliance is not achieved. In the present context, pacifying is demonstrated by asking consumers to adjust their communication style, as found on Costa's brand fan page. In the following extract, a consumer (Liam) responds to another (Jane) by using strong language and attacking the company as well as Jane, leading to an authoritative response from Costa's employee:

**Jane:** Very impressed with Costa's responses to all these messages. Anyone else would have given up after the first reply but Alex has answered every question. This has had the opposite effect for me....so impressed, I am changing to Costa. Well done Alex. If

these people that complain would rather have an overflowing cup of boiling coffee to burn themselves with, let them have it!

**Liam:** First of all Alex is not Alex, he is sitting in Pakistan call centre, answering Facebook post between being a totally useless cunt for some mobile phone companies customer services, secondly what the fuck would anyone want to buy shit tasting coffee from a rip of company that pays its staff minimum wage, avoids paying taxes, and quite frankly are the scourge of this country.

Easiest thing, vote with your feet and never entry their premises or purchase their shit.

If you really need to visit one of those establishments, please please use a Pret a Manger, who were the ONLY company of this sort that gave away food and drink in London during 7/7 bombings.

**Costa:** Happy to take the comments Liam but can we watch the language please. I can assure you I'm sitting in our head office in Dunstable, Bedfordshire. You also seem to be misinformed regarding tax, we're a British company (part of the Whitbread family) so we pay our tax like we should, you might be getting us confused with some other coffee shop brands. We've also been paying all of our staff (not just those 25+) the living wage since Oct last year. Hope this all helps (smiley emoji) ^Alex

The pacifying strategy is exemplified in the first sentence, where the company requests compliance from the brand aggressor. This is then followed by rectifying supposedly false information (i.e. informing strategy) and an emoji, possibly to move the interaction in a more rational direction and to appease the brand aggressor.

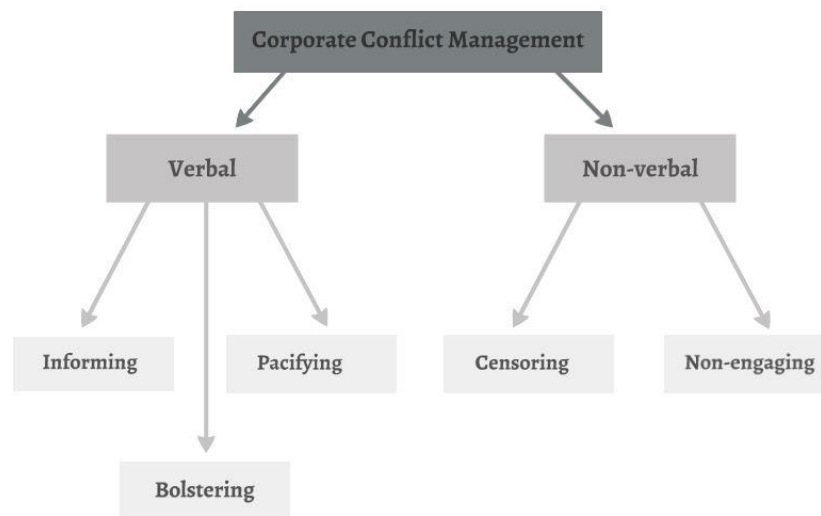
We further observed an incident where Costa asked several parties to comply with their request. The conflict episode started with a comment about a product and a rival brand, which led to an aggressive reply by another consumer:

**Collin:** The worst thing is when you ask for a large cappuccino and they fill it up with about 4-5 sips of coffee and the rest of the cup is froth. You cannot drink froth. You tight money grabbing company. If there was a Starbucks near by I would go there instead! Why are you this way

**Joanne:** I think you should get a life Collin instead of complaining about bloody froth!!!!!!!!!!!! He's just doing his job. Pathetic!!!!

**Costa:** Now let's try to be nice to each other (smiley emoji) I've passed your feedback onto our Ops Excellence team. If you ever have any further issues or specific feedback do let us know on talkcosta@whitbread.com ^Alex

Here, Costa's employee asks both parties to change their communication behaviour. Consistent with the previous example, an emoji was added to the message. Rather than rectifying information, the employee chose to refer the conflict parties to a different communication channel in case there was a need for further interaction. Figure 6 summarises the observed strategies, which are further categorised in verbal and non-verbal forms.



**Figure 6** Corporate conflict management strategies on social-media brand fan pages

#### **4.1.5. Discussion**

In this study, we aimed to explore corporate conflict management strategies on social-media brand fan pages. To date, this has been an under-researched topic in the marketing literature (Husemann et al., 2015; Sibai et al., 2015; Thomas, Price & Schau, 2013). The importance of investigating this topic is based on past work, which suggests that C2C conflicts on SMBFs can harm a company's reputation as well as consumers' purchase intentions (Fisk et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2012). Our findings offer a first

insight of current management practice. We reveal five conflict management strategies that help advance current theory and guide marketing managers.

#### *Theoretical contribution*

Our findings contribute to marketing research in a number of ways. We extend the emerging body of work on managing consumers' online conflicts (Husemann et al., 2015; Sibai et al., 2015) by observing corporate practice in six Facebook brand fan pages. In contrast with prior research suggesting that consumers manage conflicts between themselves, we demonstrate that firms are also engaging in conflict management behaviours. As a consequence, we offer the marketing literature a first empirically informed taxonomy of corporate conflict management strategies in the social media. Furthermore, our research contributes to the literature on consumer behaviour by providing a clearer understanding of an unfavourable type of consumer behaviour in the social media that requires the firm's involvement (Heinonen, 2011). In relation to this, we further outline several specific contributions.

First, we found that the most frequently used communication strategy in response to C2C conflicts was 'non-engaging'. This is surprising, as it contradicts suggestions in the marketing literature, which seem to predominantly suggest the necessity of active interference with C2C conflicts (Godes et al., 2005; Sibai et al., 2015; Wiertz et al., 2010). The non-engaging strategy does however find support in other research disciplines. Work in sociology by Lee (2005), for instance, discusses 'avoidance' as comprising of activities that aim to ignore the conflict, including making jokes, being silent, bringing in third parties or withdrawing. Likewise, management studies (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Rahim, 2002) suggest that avoiding conflict

management is a common strategy to respond to conflicts. However, the effectiveness of managing conflicts in this fashion is put in question in organisational behaviour studies. For instance, Gray and Williams (2012) demonstrate that non-engagement can have a detrimental impact on organisations in terms of inefficient decision-making and resistance to change.

Second, our findings revealed that the second most-often-implemented strategy to manage C2C conflicts was 'bolstering', a concept novel to the marketing literature. Bolstering aims to affirm brand defenders in a conflict situation, and can relate to concepts of consumer empowerment and advocacy (Pires, Stanton & Rita, 2006; Cova & Pace, 2006). This may further link to Sibai et al.'s (2015) concept of interaction maintenance, describing a strategy where consumers are assigned with roles and responsibilities to resolve a conflict. An interesting observation in this regard was that companies' utilised bolstering even when brand defenders used strong or inappropriate language. This may imply that the company strives for relationship development with key consumers who defend and advocate for the brand regardless of their communication tone and/or content (Ang, 2011).

A third contribution of our study was the observation of the so-far unexplored concept of 'informing'. This involves rectifying incorrect customer information and may relate to consumers' expectation of companies to provide credible information as part of their service provision in online environments (Dholakia, Blazevic, Wiertz, & Algesheimer, 2009). Our findings show that companies choose informing as a reactive strategy in SMBFs. Studies on computer-mediated conflicts from the organisational psychology literature may further corroborate our identified strategy. Zornoza, Ripoll and Peiró (2002), for instance, demonstrate that emphasis on logical arguments and providing accurate information is associated with constructively managing conflicts.

Likewise, Tjosvold, Wong and Cheng (2014) suggest that conflict management strategies should be based on information-sharing and the facilitation of ‘open-minded’ discussions, which consist of inviting different opinions.

Fourth, we found two further strategies that companies use to manage C2C conflicts on social-media brand fan pages: ‘censoring’ and ‘pacifying’. Censoring is a strategy that involves removing consumers’ content and has already been identified in marketing studies by Husemann et al. (2015) and Sibai et al. (2015). Both studies put forward the sanctioning of unacceptable behaviour through member exclusion as a conflict management strategy. Censorship has also been highlighted in political research on government-run online forums (Wright, 2006) and studies in the IT literature on online health communities (Matzat & Rooks, 2014). The infrequent use of this strategy during our observations may possibly be due to companies’ concern of repercussions when violating consumers’ perceived right for freedom of expression in online environments (Cohen-Almagor, 2012; Mosteller & Mathwick, 2014).

While censorship may be a strategy which goes unnoticed by consumers, pacifying is a more overt strategy, since it involves directly addressing the aggressor and often demands a change in behaviour. A similar strategy has been identified in sociology, where Lee’s (2005) competitive-dominating strategy describes requesting compliance as a means to manage conflicts between users of an online news forum. Other streams of literature have also identified pacifying as a conflict management strategy, referring to bureaucratic control mechanisms (Bijlsma-Frankema & Koopman, 2004), distributive (Munduate & Dorado, 1998) obliging (Rahim, 2002) and forcing (Blake & Mouton, 1964) conflict management. Some scholars, however, warn that this strategy may be damaging to the social interactions between consumers (Mele, 2011). Interesting in this regard is our observation that companies’ tend to use ‘smiley’



emoticons to accompany pacifying posts. It can be speculated that emoticons are used as a complementary linguistic tool to somewhat lessen the authoritative tone (Lo, 2008).

### *Managerial Implications*

Successful brand fan pages on social media depend on actively contributing consumers who deliberately create online content (Jahn & Kunz, 2012). However, certain consumer behaviours, e.g. consumer-to-consumer conflicts, may have negative implications for the company. In particular, when online conflicts occur, consumers tend to blame the corporate host (Johnson & Lowe, 2015). It is therefore vital for companies to decide upon which managerial approach is best to use in different circumstances. Our study highlights five strategies that are currently used on social-media brand fan pages. In contrast to consumer-hosted brand fan pages, where consumers manage conflicts between themselves, the strategies we put forward represent hierarchical interventions made by a corporate host. Hence, managers of SMBFs are expected to use their superior position in order to resolve C2C conflicts, which are seen as detrimental to the brand fan page.

The most common conflict management strategy implemented across the here investigated industries was non-engaging. Companies used this strategy independently of the length of the conflict or the members' requests for intervention. While this can be cost-effective in the short run, research has shown that conflicts lead to less consumer discussions (Rahim, 2002), consumer exit (Lee, 2005) and decrease in brand trust (Laroche et al., 2012). Not managing C2C conflicts in SMBFs may be perceived by consumers as lack of corporate social responsibility, which negatively impacts

consumer attitudes and behaviours towards the company (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006).

A more pro-active strategy companies may consider was bolstering. By verbally reinforcing their brand defenders, company-consumer relationships are manifested and increase the likelihood of future brand defending behaviour (Miller, Fabian & Lin, 2009). In fact, online community members prefer rewarding desirable behaviour over authoritative methods of conflict management (Matzat & Rooks, 2014). Moreover, encouraging brand defence is likely to help companies protect their brand during corporate scandals on social media. Bolstering brand defenders in SMBFs increases these consumers' attachment to the brand, which translates into consumers' defending behaviours to insulate the brand image from other consumers' negative opinions (Hassan & Ariño, 2016).

To maintain and enhance corporate credibility, online practitioners may further like to choose informing as conflict management strategy. Providing reliable information can help to avoid customer misunderstandings or misinterpretations of corporate or product information. Similar to bolstering, an informing strategy may be appropriate when managing consumer conflicts that result from negative corporate events. During corporate scandals, consumers appreciate corporate efforts to provide rectifying information (Chung, 2015). At the same time, informing as conflict management strategy provides managers with the positive side effect of being able to enhance customer knowledge and promote positive product/ service aspects. This is particularly important in the social media context, where consumers deliberately seek and join firm-hosted brand fan pages to gain product or service-related information (Carlson, Suter & Brown, 2008).

Our findings further propose that sometimes companies are best off by using their authority to censor or pacify C2C conflicts. Asserting authority through censoring content or pacifying the discussion may be most appropriate when conflicts escalate. However, in case of censoring, managers need to be careful not to violate consumers' sense of free expression, which can backfire and cause community exit if consumers notice it (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh & Kim, 2008). This is especially pronounced on Facebook brand fan pages, where community exit involves a simple action of un-clicking the 'Like' button. Similarly, pacifying can be perceived as violating the cooperative nature of co-creating communities (Gebauer et al., 2013). We recommend managers to consider complementing pacifying with smiley emoticons, as was sometimes found in our observations, to help minimise the authoritative tone of this particular strategy.

In sum, until research provides further empirical evidence for these strategies, managers should closely monitor their social-media brand fan pages before deciding on an appropriate strategy. This is important since the selected strategy not only affects the parties actively involved in the conflict, but also bystanders, i.e. those 'observing' the conflict as well as any corporate response.

#### **4.1.6. Limitations and Future Research**

This study set out to explore corporate conflict management on social-media brand fan pages, and several limitations need to be noted. First, the duration of our observations (seven months) does not match the online ethnographic depths of some studies conducted over the period of several years (e.g. Croft, 2013; Husemann et al., 2015). Second, our data was exclusively based on Facebook. Investigations of other social

media channels (e.g. Twitter, YouTube) and in different cultural contexts may reveal different managerial approaches to manage C2C conflicts. For instance, future research may investigate whether, considering the volume of Tweets, more automated and centralised approaches to conflict management may be used in such environments. Third, some censoring might have gone unnoticed during our observations. Although the authors engaged in back-tracking brand fan page content, recordings were not done on a permanent, 24-hour basis, and some content might have been removed without being noticed (Mishna, Cook, Saini, Wu & MacFadden, 2011).

We further recommend several avenues for future research. The literature would benefit from research to test the effectiveness of the conflict management strategies identified here. While the purpose of this study was to observe current corporate practice, there is a need for (quasi-) experimental studies that compare how each strategy affects consumer outcome variables such as community re-visiting intentions and attitudes towards a company.

Furthermore, investigating whether managerial strategies should be adapted to the varying levels of conflict severity seems a worthwhile research undertaking. For instance, Husemann et al. (2015) demonstrate that some forms of conflict can be beneficial to the development of social norms in an online community, a process the authors describe as 'routinized conflicts'. Their study suggests that a long-term investigation, perhaps using interpretative phenomenology, may offer cultural nuances of conflicts on social-media brand fan pages which our analytical approach was not able to capture.

Finally, this study calls for more research that focuses on the consumer perspective on C2C conflicts on social-media brand fan pages. So far, little is known

about the different types of aggressive communication consumers use, and whether some may be perceived as friendly teasing (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009), while others may be regarded as purposeful embarrassment (Wooten, 2006). Similarly, research is needed on the different roles that consumers may take on during a C2C conflict, since the marketing literature seems to be limited so far to those of brand aggressors and defenders (Colliander & Wien, 2013). Conclusions drawn from these investigations may allow companies to make a better judgement on whether a conflict occurs in good or ill humour, and whether consumers are likely to occupy roles (e.g. as impartial mediators) that help resolve a conflict.

## Paper references

- Adjei, M. T., Nowlin, E. L., & Ang, T. (2016). The Collateral Damage of C2C Communications on Social Networking Sites: The Moderating Role of Firm Responsiveness and Perceived Fairness. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 24(2), 166-185. doi: [10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057)
- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U. M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 19-34. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.69.3.19.66363](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.69.3.19.66363)
- Ang, L. (2011). Community relationship management and social media. *The Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, 18(1), 31-38. doi: [10.1057/dbm.2011.3](https://doi.org/10.1057/dbm.2011.3)
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 16(2), 2-21. doi: [10.1002/dir.10006](https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10006)
- Becker-Olsen, K. L., Cudmore, B. A., & Hill, R. P. (2006). The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(1), 46-53. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2005.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2005.01.001)
- Bijlsma-Frankema, K. & Koopman, K. (2004). The oxymoron of control in an era of globalisation: Vulnerabilities of a mega myth. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 19(3), 204–217. doi: [10.1108/02683940410527711](https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940410527711)
- Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S. (1964). *The managerial grid*. Houston, TX: Gulf.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi: [10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). *Thematic Analysis*, in Cooper, H. (ed.) *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, Vol. 2, pp. 57-71.
- Breitsohl, J., Kunz, W. H., & Dowell, D. (2015). Does the host match the content? A taxonomical update on online consumption communities. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(9-10), 1-25. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2015.1036102](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1036102)
- Carlson, B. D., Suter, T. A., & Brown, T. J. (2008). Social versus psychological brand community: The role of psychological sense of brand community. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(4), 284-291. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.06.022](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.06.022)
- Chung, S. (2015). Solving strategy for unintended criticism in online space: Consumer response to firm crisis in online discussion forum. *Internet Research*, 25(1), 52-66. doi: [10.1108/IntR-01-2014-0005](https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-01-2014-0005)
- Cohen-Almagor, R. (2012). Freedom of expression, internet responsibility, and business ethics: the Yahoo! saga and its implications. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 106(3), 353-365. doi: [10.1007/s10551-011-1001-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1001-z)
- Colliander, J., & Wien, A. (2013). Trash talk rebuffed: consumers' defense of companies criticized in online communities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(10), 1733-1757. doi: [10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191)
- Correa, T., Hinsley, A. W., & De Zuniga, H. G. (2010). Who interacts on the Web?: The intersection of users' personality and social media use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 26(2), 247-253. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2009.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2009.09.003)
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment-the case "My Nutella The Community". *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1087-1105. doi: [10.1108/03090560610681023](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610681023)

- Cova, B., & White, T. (2010). Counter-brand and alter-brand communities: The impact of Web 2.0 on tribal marketing approaches. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(3-4), 256-270. doi: [10.1080/02672570903566276](https://doi.org/10.1080/02672570903566276)
- Croft, R. (2013). Blessed are the geeks: An ethnographic study of consumer networks in social media, 2006–2012. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(5-6), 545-561. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2013.787113](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.787113)
- De Valck, K. (2007). The war of the etribes: Online conflicts and communal consumption. In B. Cova, R. V. Kozinets, & A. Shankar (Eds.), *Consumer tribes* (pp. 260–275). Oxford: Elsevier.
- De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & LeeFlang, P. S. (2012). Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: An investigation of the effects of social media marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 83-91. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003)
- Dholakia, U. M., Blazevic, V., Wiertz, C., & Algesheimer, R. (2009). Communal service delivery how customers benefit from participation in firm-hosted virtual P3 communities. *Journal of Service Research*, 12(2), 208-226. doi: [10.1177/10946705093338618](https://doi.org/10.1177/10946705093338618)
- Ensari, N., Camden-Anders, S., & Schlaerth, A. (2015). Constructive management and resolution of conflict. *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, 340.
- Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E., & Powell, I. H. (2013). Brand rivalry and community conflict. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 4–12. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017)
- Fereday, J., & 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*, 5(1), 80-92. doi:  
[10.1177/160940690600500107](https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500107)

Fisk, R., Grove, S., Harris, L. C., Keeffe, D. A., Daunt, K. L., Russell-Bennett, R., & Wirtz, J. (2010). Customers behaving badly: A state of the art review, research agenda and implications for practitioners. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 24(6), 417-429. doi: [10.1108/08876041011072537](https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041011072537)

Gebauer, J., Füller, J., & Pezzeri, R. (2013). The dark and the bright side of co-creation: Triggers of member behavior in online innovation communities. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1516-1527. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013)

Godes, D., Mayzlin, D., Chen, Y., Das, S., Dellarocas, C., Pfeiffer, B., Libai, S., Sen, S., Shi, M., & Verlegh, P. (2005). The firm's management of social interactions. *Marketing Letters*, 16(3-4), 415-428. doi: [10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4)

Grappi, S., Romani, S., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2013). Consumer response to corporate irresponsible behavior: Moral emotions and virtues. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(10), 1814-1821. [10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.02.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.02.002)

Gray, E. & Williams, J. (2012). Retail managers: Laissez-faire leadership Is synonymous with unsuccessful conflict management styles. *Open Journal of Leadership*, 1(3), 13-16. doi: [10.4236/ojl.2012.13003](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojl.2012.13003)

Gummerus, J., Liljander, V., Weman, E., & Pihlström, M. (2012). Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community. *Management Research Review*, 35(9), 857-877. doi: [10.1108/01409171211256578](https://doi.org/10.1108/01409171211256578)

- Haberstroh, K., Orth, U. R., Hoffmann, S., & Brunk, B. (2015). Consumer Response to Unethical Corporate Behavior: A Re-Examination and Extension of the Moral Decoupling Model. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1-13. doi: [10.1007/s10551-015-2661-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2661-x)
- Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M. O. (2014a). Brand communities based in social media: How unique are they? Evidence from two exemplary brand communities. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34(2), 123-132. doi: [10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.010)
- Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M. O. (2014b). The roles of brand community and community engagement in building brand trust on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 37, 152-161. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2014.04.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.04.016)
- Hassan, M., & Casaló Ariño, L. V. (2016). Consumer devotion to a different height: How consumers are defending the brand within Facebook brand communities. *Internet Research*, 26(4), 963-981. doi: [10.1108/IntR-03-2015-0090](https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-03-2015-0090)
- Heinonen, K. (2011). Consumer activity in social media: Managerial approaches to consumers' social media behavior. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10(6), 356-364. doi:[10.1002/cb.376](https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.376)
- Hickman, T., & Ward, J. (2007). The dark side of brand community: Inter-group stereotyping, trash talk, and schadenfreude. *NA-Advances in Consumer Research* Volume 34. Retrieved from: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12923/volumes/v34/NA-34>
- Husemann, K., Ladstaetter, F. & Luedicke, M., (2015). Conflict culture and conflict management in consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 265-284. doi: [10.1002/mar.20779](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20779)

- Jahn, B., & Kunz, W. (2012). How to transform consumers into fans of your brand. *Journal of Service Management*, 23(3), 344-361. doi: [10.1108/09564231211248444](https://doi.org/10.1108/09564231211248444)
- Jang, H., Olfman, L., Ko, I., Koh, J., & Kim, K. (2008). The influence of on-line brand community characteristics on community commitment and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 12(3), 57-80. doi:[10.2753/JEC1086-4415120304](https://doi.org/10.2753/JEC1086-4415120304)
- Jerolmack, C. & Khan, S. (2014). Talk is cheap ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 43(2), 1-32. doi: [10.1177/0049124114523396](https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124114523396)
- Johnson, D. & Lowe, B. (2015). Emotional support, perceived corporate ownership and scepticism toward out-groups in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 29(1), 1-10. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002)
- Kim, J. W., Choi, J., Qualls, W., & Han, K. (2008). It takes a marketplace community to raise brand commitment: The role of online communities. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 24(3-4), 409-431. doi: [10.1362/026725708X306167](https://doi.org/10.1362/026725708X306167)
- Kozinets, R. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72. doi: [10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935)
- Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R., Richard, M. O., & Sankaranarayanan, R. (2012). The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers, value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1755-1767. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016)

- Lee, H. (2005). Behavioural strategies for dealing with flaming in an online forum. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 46(2), 385-403. doi: [10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00017.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00017.x)
- Lo, S. K. (2008). The nonverbal communication functions of emoticons in computer-mediated communication. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 11(5), 595-597. Doi: [10.1089/cpb.2007.0132](https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2007.0132)
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage publications.
- Marquis, M., & Filiatrault, P. (2002), Understanding complaining responses through consumers' self-consciousness disposition, *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(3), 267–292. doi: [10.1002/mar.10012](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.10012)
- Matzat, U., & Rooks, G. (2014). Styles of moderation in online health and support communities: An experimental comparison of their acceptance and effectiveness. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 36, 65-75. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043)
- Mele, C. (2011). Conflicts and value co-creation in project networks. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(8), 1377-1385. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.033](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.033)
- Menesini, E., & Nocentini, A. (2009). Cyberbullying definition and measurement: Some critical considerations. *Journal of Psychology*, 217(4), 230-232. doi: [10.1027/0044-3409.217.4.230](https://doi.org/10.1027/0044-3409.217.4.230)
- Miller, K. D., Fabian, F., & Lin, S. J. (2009). Strategies for online communities. *Strategic Management Journal*, 30(3), 305-322. doi: [10.1002/smj.735](https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.735)

- Mishna, F., Cook, C., Saini, M., Wu, M. J., & MacFadden, R. (2011). Interventions to prevent and reduce cyber abuse of youth: A systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice, 21*(1), 1-10. doi: [10.1177/1049731509351988](https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731509351988)
- Mosteller, J., & Mathwick, C. (2014). Reviewer online engagement: the role of rank, well-being, and market helping behavior. *Journal of Consumer Marketing, 31*(6/7), 464-474. doi: [10.1108/JCM-05-2014-0974](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-05-2014-0974)
- Munduate, L., & Dorado, M. A. (1998). Supervisor power bases, cooperative behaviour and organisational commitment. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 7*(2), 163-179. doi: [10.1080/135943298398853](https://doi.org/10.1080/135943298398853)
- Patton, M. Q. (2005). *Qualitative research*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- Pires, G. D., Stanton, J., & Rita, P. (2006). The internet, consumer empowerment and marketing strategies. *European Journal of Marketing, 40*(9/10), 936-949. doi: [10.1108/03090560610680943](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610680943)
- Popp, B., Germelmann, C. C. & Jung, B. (2016). We love to hate them! Social media-based anti-brand communities in professional football. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 17*(4), 349-367. doi: [10.1108/IJSM-11-2016-018](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSM-11-2016-018)
- Phillips, N., & Broderick, A. (2014). Has Mumsnet changed me? SNS influence on identity adaptation and consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management, 30*(9-10), 1039-1057. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2014.927899](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.927899)
- Quinton, S. (2013). The community brand paradigm: A response to brand management's dilemma in the digital era. *Journal of Marketing Management, 29*, 912-932. doi:[10.1080/0267257X.2012.729072](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2012.729072)

- Rahim, M.A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organisational conflict. *The International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(3), 206-235. doi: [10.1108/eb022874](https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022874)
- Reeves, S., Kuper, A. & Hodges, B.D. (2008). Qualitative research methodologies: Ethnography. *British Medical Journal*, 337(7668), 512-514. doi: [10.1136/bmj.a1020](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a1020)
- Romani, S., Grappi, S., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2013). My anger is your gain, my contempt your loss: Explaining consumer responses to corporate wrongdoing. *Psychology & Marketing*, 30(12), 1029-1042. doi: [10.1002/mar.20664](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20664)
- Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30-51. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30)
- Schembri, S. & Latimer, L. (2016). Online brand communities: Constructing and co-constructing brand culture. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(7-8), 628-651. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2015.1117518](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2015.1117518)
- Schouten, J. W., & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 43-61. doi: [10.1086/209434](https://doi.org/10.1086/209434)
- Sibai, O., Valck, K., Farrell, A. M., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social control in online communities of consumption: A framework for community management. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 250-264. doi: [10.1002/mar.20778](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20778)

- Thomas, C.T., Price, L., & Schau, J. (2013). When differences unite: Resource dependence in heterogeneous consumption communities, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 1010-1033. doi: [10.1086/666616](https://doi.org/10.1086/666616)
- Tjosvold, D., Wong, A., & Cheng, N. (2014). Constructively managing conflicts in organisations. *Annual Review of Organisational Psychology and Organisational Behaviour*, 1(1), 545-568. doi: [10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091306](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091306)
- Vandebosch, H., & Van Cleemput, K. (2009). Cyberbullying among youngsters: Profiles of bullies and victims. *New Media & Society*, 11(8), 1349-1371. doi: [10.1177/1461444809341263](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809341263)
- Van Noort, G., & Willemsen, L. M. (2012). Online damage control: The effects of proactive versus reactive webcare interventions in consumer-generated and brand-generated platforms. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(3), 131-140. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2011.07.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2011.07.001)
- Wang, X., Yu, C., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social media peer communication and impacts on purchase intentions: A consumer socialization framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(4), 198-208. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2011.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2011.11.004)
- Ward, J. C., & Ostrom, A. L. (2006). Complaining to the masses: The role of protest framing in customer-created complaint web sites. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(2), 220-230. doi: [10.1086/506303](https://doi.org/10.1086/506303)
- Wiertz, C., Mathwick, C., de Ruyter, K., & Dellaert, B. (2010). A balancing act: Governance in a virtual P3 community. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 37, 672–673. Retrieved from: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15181/volumes/v37/NA-37>

- Wolny, J., & Mueller, C. (2013). Analysis of fashion consumers' motives to engage in electronic word-of-mouth communication through social media platforms. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(5-6), 562-583. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2013.778324](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2013.778324)
- Wooten, D. B. (2006). From labeling possessions to possessing labels: Ridicule and socialization among adolescents. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(2), 188-198. doi: [10.1086/506300](https://doi.org/10.1086/506300)
- Wright, S. (2006). Government-run online discussion fora: Moderation, censorship and the shadow of control. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 8(4), 550-568. doi: [10.1111/j.1467-856x.2006.00247.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856x.2006.00247.x)
- Zaglia, M. E. (2013). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(2), 216-223. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.015)
- Zornoza, A., Ripoll, P., & Peiró, J. M. (2002). Conflict Management in Groups that Work in Two Different Communication Contexts: Face-to-Face and Computer-mediated Communication. *Small Group Research*, 33(5), 481-508. doi: [10.1177/104649602237167](https://doi.org/10.1177/104649602237167)



## 4.2. PAPER 2 - MANAGING CONSUMER-TO-CONSUMER CONFLICTS IN A NON-PROFIT ONLINE COMMUNITY

*Paper under review in the journal Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (co-authors: Jan Breitsohl, Brian Garrod)*

*Abstract:* This study explores how a non-profit organization, PETA ('People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals'), manages consumer conflicts within its Facebook community. Consumer conflict represents a relatively new topic in marketing and refers to hostile consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions in online communities. While the small number of existing studies in this area focus on profit-driven commercial communities, conflicts in non-profit online communities remain an under-researched phenomenon. Findings from our observations highlight six main conflict management strategies: non-engaging, censoring, educating, bolstering, asserting and mobilizing. Two of these represent novel strategies which specifically address the ideological, value-driven conflicts in a non-profit online community. Theoretical and managerial implications with respect to each conflict management strategy are discussed.

**Keywords:** *consumer aggression; online community; community governance; non-profit*

#### **4.2.1. Introduction**

Non-profit organizations use social networks as a tool to engage the public and encourage social action (Nah & Saxton, 2012). Increasingly, these social networks operate on online communities in the social media, such as Facebook. These permit non-profit organizations to promote an ethical cause to a global audience in an interactive way (Waters et al., 2009). Recent studies have shown that non-profit online communities successfully attract and engage consumers who wish to contribute to the welfare of society by making ethically responsible consumption choices (Cano Murillo, Kang & Yoon, 2016). Those who participate in such online communities are likely to support the ethical cause of the non-profit organizations via word-of-mouth and social action (Mano, 2014). Despite their shared support for a given ethical cause, the views of members of non-profit communities often differ considerably with regard to what this cause constitutes and how it should be promoted (Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008). Indeed, research highlights that the global reach of online communities is likely to bring together consumers of very heterogeneous socio-cultural backgrounds, value systems and personal norms (de Almeida et al., 2014; Shaw & Newholm, 2002), which can cause C2C conflicts (Na & Jian, 2014; Schröder & McEachern, 2004). In the present paper, C2C conflict is defined as the intention of one consumer to harm another by means of verbal provocation, harassment or threat using electronic media (Ewing, Wagstaff & Powell, 2013).

Scholars have demonstrated that C2C conflicts negatively affect consumer well-being (Thomas, Price & Schau, 2013), perceived social and functional benefits (Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley, 2014), intentions to revisit the online community (Gebauer, Füller & Pezzeri, 2013), and the reputation of the community host (Fisk et al., 2010). Consequently, this paper argues that it is in the interest of non-profit organizations to

manage C2C conflicts. Conflict management in non-profit online communities is still, however, an under-researched area in the marketing literature, as evidenced by calls by de Valck (2007) and Husemann, Ladstaetter & Luedicke (2015) for more research to be conducted in this area.

Using the method of netnography of an online community hosted by the non-profit organization PETA, the present study offers an initial insight into the conflict management strategies that are used to address C2C conflicts. The results advance the marketing literature by revealing six management strategies that non-profit organizations may use when faced with a C2C conflict. In the next section, an overview of the literature on non-profit online communities is provided. C2C conflicts and research on conflict management in other environments are then discussed, followed by sections setting out the methodology and results. The paper concludes by discussing the theoretical and managerial implications of the findings, and offers avenues for future research that may complement this study.

#### **4.2.2. Literature review**

##### *Non-profit online communities*

Non-profit online communities are characterized by member identification, involvement and a perceived sense of community (Hassay & Peloza, 2009). Identification refers to the degree to which a community member sees his/her identity reflected in the community's values. Involvement consists of active engagement and commitment to the community. Perceived sense of community represents a sense of belonging to a community and a shared obligation towards common goals. A key purpose of online communities is to facilitate consumer-to-business (Chan, Li & Zhu,

2015; Labrecque, 2014) as well as C2C interactions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Laroche et al., 2012). In relation to this, previous studies have demonstrated that non-profit organizations use online communities in order to provide information on one or several ethical causes, encourage social action and facilitate community-building practices (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012; Saxton & Waters, 2014). Waters et al. (2009) note that information includes news, reports and activities related to the organization's cause. Social action refers to encouraging consumers to donate money, engage in advocacy campaigns and attend events. Community-building allows non-profit organizations to interact and converse with consumers for the purpose of strengthening the consumers' ties to the community and promoting the organization's mission and objectives.

In comparison to for-profit online communities, which typically include brand communities or commerce-based websites (de Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012; Gensler et al., 2013), non-profit online communities have experienced less attention in the marketing literature. However, there are several key differences between the characteristics of these two communities. First, non-profit online communities measure their success by improving social welfare (Hassay & Pelozo, 2009), while the end goal of for-profit communities focuses on profits (Cothrel, 2000). The host of a non-profit online community thus has ideological motives to increase the engagement and commitment of the community (Waters & Jamal, 2011), whereas hosts of for-profit online communities pursue monetary goals (e.g. increased profits through greater consumption of their products) (Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2014). Second, consumer support of a non-profit organization on social media sites is linked to brand warmth (Aaker, Vohs & Mogilner, 2010). In other words, a non-profit's brand ability to signal warmth results in increased support by consumers, because perceptions of warmth are

considered important in behavioral and affective responses (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2007). As a result, consumers engage in non-profit communities to support a wider ethical cause and generate altruistic value (Hou, Du & Tian, 2009). In contrast, consumers' support of for-profit firms in the social media is associated with perceptions of competence (Bernritter, Verlegh & Smit, 2016). Competence represents a secondary consideration in consumers' minds, following warmth, in their decision to support a brand (Ybarra, Chan & Park, 2001). Therefore, consumers who engage in for-profit online communities mostly seek to fulfil their consumption-based needs through the generation of hedonic value (Wang, Yu & Wei, 2012; Wirtz et al., 2013).

#### *C2C conflicts in non-profit online communities*

In non-profit online communities, C2C conflicts can occur between supporters of ethical consumption (Schröder & McEachern, 2004) as well as between supporters and non-supporters of ethical consumption (Minson & Monin, 2012; Zane, Irwin & Reczek, 2015) due to the global reach of online communities in the social media. The former seems to be based mainly on differences in opinions, value systems and personal norms regarding an ethical issue (Schröder & McEachern, 2004). For example, Shaw and Newholm (2002) suggest that ethical consumers consider a range of ethical issues in their consumer behavioral choices. Their opinions on these ethical issues, what the cause constitutes and how it should be pursued often differ. In contrast, conflicts between supporters and non-supporters have been suggested to stem either from a lack of information, scepticism and/or cynicism towards ethical consumption (Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011; Burke, Eckert & Davis, 2014), or simply from the joy of provoking others (i.e. trolling) (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhu, 2014). Bray et al.'s study (2011), for example, highlights that some consumers dismiss the suggested positive impact of ethical consumption on humans, animals and the environment on the grounds of it

being a mere marketing strategy to promote more expensive products. In addition, Zane et al. (2015) confirm that less ethical consumers denigrate the supporters of ethical consumption. The denigration, which can be an important source of C2C conflicts, is said to arise from the self-threat inherent in negative social comparison with others who consume ethically.

While such studies have explored the potential causes of conflicts, more recent research has started to focus on the negative outcomes of C2C conflict. Pfeffer et al. (2014) show that C2C conflict can prevent consumers from engaging in discussions with other like-minded consumers and the company host that foster involvement and commitment to the online community. In turn, decreased levels of involvement in the community make it more difficult for non-profit organizations to encourage consumers to contribute to social welfare through word-of-mouth, donations and activism (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Lastly, de Valck (2007) and Husemann et al. (2015) note that not all C2C conflicts are negative for the community members and the community host. Occasionally, C2C conflicts may be considered to be constructive, for example, when they help develop a collective view on controversial topics.

#### *Conflict management in non-profit online communities*

Conflict management generally refers to practices that companies use to intervene in C2C conflicts (Ensari, Camden-Anders & Schlaerth, 2015). While there is an evident lack of studies focusing on non-profit online communities, recent articles in the marketing literature have started to investigate conflict management in a for-profit context.

A study by Godes et al. (2005) identified four roles a company occupies in managing C2C interactions, which are spread along a continuum of passive observation

to active participation. Depending on the context and content of a C2C interaction, the company is able to select between different degrees of involvement: observer, mediator, moderator and participant. In a similar vein, Homburg, Ehm and Artz (2015) distinguish between two roles of the firm in managing C2C interactions in an online community: passive and active. A passive role involves offering consumers a platform to converse and choosing not to engage in these interactions, while an active role involves interaction with community members by replying to consumer posts or starting a new discussion.

A netnography of consumer-hosted online communities by Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) proposes the concept of community governing mechanisms. The most common governing mechanism comprises articulating expectations for acceptable behavior, followed by dismissing ‘flaming’ comments and/or unjustified criticism in the community. In a similar vein, Sibai et al. (2015) show that community hosts could utilize two governance structures in order to exercise control in online communities: interaction maintenance and interaction termination. The former involves explicating roles of consumers, formalizing rules, monitoring interactions, rewarding positive behaviors and sanctioning negative behaviors. The latter, in contrast, represents an approach where companies seek to terminate C2C interactions that have become dysfunctional either by disregarding members or by permanently excluding them from the online community. Findings from a recent study by Dineva, Breitsohl and Garrod (2017) further suggest that most firms choose not to engage in C2C conflicts in their online communities. The ones that do engage, however, tend to focus on affirming consumers who defend the brand, asking one or more consumers to adjust their communication style, censoring consumer comments and providing corporate or product information to rectify what is perceived to be incorrect consumer comments.

While some of these strategies may also apply in non-profit communities, the different characteristics of non-profit and for-profit communities suggest that the nature of conflict – and hence its management – is likely to differ (Thach & Thompson, 2007; Temkin & Cummings, 1986). For instance, Thach and Thompson (2007) found that, in an offline context, managers in non-profit organizations engage in more inspirational, value-laden conflict management. This is believed to be because the organization's mission is to fulfil social purposes. Furthermore, non-profit organizations are only likely to support the co-creation of meaning when it fits with their ethical standpoint. If such meanings are not compatible with their organizational goals, managers will tend to express disagreement with community members in order to educate them about the ethical issues at hand and/or encourage social action (Chen, Lune & Queen, 2013; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012).

Currently, only one study examines conflict management in non-profit online communities. Husemann et al. (2015) conducted a netnography of the Premium Cola community to gain an insight into the conflict culture and types of consumer conflicts that occur within the community. As an analytical sub-theme the authors suggested reactive conflict management, which consists of conflict resolution followed by the extension of the community's conflict management practices. In other words, in a C2C conflict situation where the community's social norms are violated, the community moderator would highlight this, while giving those involved the opportunity to justify their conduct and contribute to enhancing the existing community norms. In addition, on some occasions the authors observed censoring in the form of member exclusion. This was, however, considered inconsistent with the democratic character of the online community in question. Though Husemann et al.'s (2015) study offers initial insight



into non-profit conflict management, the community size is small, characterized by strong ties between consumers and managed by consumers.

#### **4.2.3. Method**

This study sets out to gain an improved understanding of how the hosts of a non-profit online community manage C2C conflicts. We employed the method of netnography for this purpose. Netnography consists of the researcher systematically recording online data in natural settings (Kozinets, 2002). Following Ertimur and Gilly (2012) and Phillips and Broderick (2014), the observation in the present paper was exclusively non-participatory, i.e. the researchers did not participate in the online community. Such approach to studying online communities allows for a more naturalistic and unobtrusive research (Wu & Pearce, 2013), because community members tend to alter socially undesirable behavior as a result of being observed (Jerolmack & Khan, 2014). Since hostile C2C interactions are deemed socially undesirable, we considered it essential not to participate in naturalistic conflict interactions.

Data were collected using the official Facebook community of PETA, an American non-profit organization with close to 5.5 million community members (<https://www.facebook.com/official.peta/>). Topics discussed in the community revolve around animal rights, including vegan lifestyles, animal testing and animal use for the purpose of entertainment. The choice of community was therefore made in accordance with the following criteria: 1) the first author's personal familiarity with the organization and its context, 2) the known presence of C2C conflicts, and 3) evidence of content moderation by the community hosts (Kozinets, 2002). This form of

purposive sampling is common in exploratory research when a new phenomenon is studied and generalization is not the primary purpose of research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

The observations were conducted on a daily basis and yielded 351 C2C conflicts over a three-month period. The length of observation is comparable to other studies (Ertimur & Gilly, 2012; Thompson & Sinha, 2008), and was deemed sufficient since further coding and theme development was no longer desirable, data saturation having been reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To analyze the data, we followed a thematic analysis approach, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2014). The first phase involved familiarization with the dataset for the purpose of identifying relevant data. Next, the data were systematically analyzed in order to generate initial codes. Coding was conducted at the semantic level of meaning, which focuses on surface meanings of the data rather than engaging in an exploration of the underlying concepts of social phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Subsequently, the codes were subsumed based on their unifying features, which generated the themes, i.e. conflict management strategies. The themes were then reviewed in relation to the coded data and the entire data set, while labels were assigned and definitions developed to describe the meanings underpinning each theme. To ensure full anonymity, the names of the participants were changed from the start of the analysis. Investigator triangulation was employed to enhance the study's validity (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008). This process involved the first and the second authors discussing their independent codes and interpretations of the data at several rounds of analysis. Areas of disagreement were then excluded. The final data set consisted of 340 C2C conflicts, a conflict being an occurrence of an aggressive consumer-to-consumer interaction.

#### **4.2.4. Results**

The analysis yielded six conflict management strategies: non-engaging, censoring, educating, bolstering, asserting and mobilizing. For the majority of conflicts (n=265), PETA adopted a non-engaging strategy. Censoring was used in two conflicts, educating in 21 occurrences, bolstering in 14 conflicts, asserting in eight occurrences and mobilizing in 30 conflicts. Detailed findings for each conflict management strategy are outlined below alongside excerpts that reflect the characteristics of each strategy.

### *Non-engaging conflict management*

Non-engaging represents a conflict management strategy whereby the company does not take any action to moderate a conflict. PETA used the non-engaging strategy in most conflicts, irrespective of their intensity and length. The following data excerpt shows a typical conflict during which PETA chose not to engage:

**Dan:** Human beings have eaten animals since they evolved and were able to hunt. Do you think lions cook their food? No! Quit acting like its so bad to eat meat. Respect other choice to eat meat when they respect vegans [sic]

**Tom:** it is sad to eat meat you nasty troll

**Dan:** No its not. I'm actually quite happy and healthy when I eat it so trolling me won't make me sad (face with stuck-out tongue and winking eye emoji)

**Marta:** Do you think lions don't kill rival lion's cubs? No! Quit acting like its so bad to murder children. Respect others choice to murder children when they respect non murderers. [sic]

**Dan:** Wow seriously people need to get their head out of their asses. That's nature...deal with it

**Jack:** Marta you should be in a padded room somewhere.

**Joanne:** Jack pretty sure she was taking the piss out of Dan (face with tears of joy emoji)

**Jack:** Whatever I have some cows to deliver at a feed lot you people are nuts

**Chris:** It's cruel to eat animals alive!! This is sick and u have to be sick in the head to eat while the poor animal is moving on your plate (astonished face emoji)

**Dora:** Quit eating vegetables and fruit! They are alive and have feelings! Quit drinking water! That's where fish live!

**Dan:** Thank you Dora!

**Eric:** Seriously curious why alot of you vegan&vegetarian haters even get on here. What is the point if you disagree? Just to troll and start arguments? Nothing better to do? Get a life or start your own page and leave us alone. [sic]

**Dora:** Same reason you all think people who eat meat are horrible people

**Joanne:** Dora ???? Vegans think meat eaters morals are horrible (not necessarily thinking the person is horrible) bc they literally pay somebody to brutally take away innocent beings life. Where in veganism is it deemed ok to kill an animal? You have no point [sic]

In this example, consumers engage in a conflict as a result of disagreements about values and personal beliefs in relation to meat consumption. The excerpt demonstrates that some meat eaters feel that their values and personal beliefs are perceived negatively and not respected by non-meat eaters. This represents a common source of C2C conflicts in PETA's online community on Facebook, and during most instances such as this the community host chose to remain silent.

#### *Censoring conflict management*

An example of an active conflict management strategy is censoring, here defined as the company permanently removing consumer comments. This is demonstrated in the following data excerpt:

**Michelle:** I hope everyone on here is a vegetarian. It is no different to other animals, such as cows. They are farmed for human food, leather goods (including the shoes you wear), and what humans don't eat is put back in the food chain. Even this film shows that the ostriches provide food as well as leather and other goods.

**Terry:** Are you suggesting that all of this is acceptable then?

[deleted comment]

**Liam:** It's not acceptable to treat any animal like it's life is worth nothing and to abuse and torture it.

**Chantelle:** Torturing and abusing = eating. Seriously go troll somewhere else

[deleted comment]

**Chantelle:** You need a life

[deleted comment]

**Chantelle:** Reported for spam. Seriously no one cares and it's getting old. We all know you're fake. Give it up

[deleted comment]

**Chantelle:** It's not gonna go through

**Rob:** Sorry to break this to you but you do abuse animals. Working in a slaughter house, eating their corpses and so on. Your dog is no different from those animals that you so kindly enjoy on your plate, actually pigs are even smarter than them.

The conflict occurs as a result of PETA posting a video about the practice of using ostrich leather in the fashion industry. As a consequence, a consumer (Michelle) posts a comment which appears to justify this practice. The comment is met by disapproval from other consumers. Further comments from Michelle are reported as spam and censored by PETA without further explanation. Based on daily observations of the online community, it was possible to record and compare when consumer content was removed or missing. The recordings substantiate that censoring is atypical for this online community. Such authoritative intervention is reactive in its nature, i.e. PETA censors content only when consumers demand it. However, censoring in this form allows PETA to demonstrate its commitment to devoted consumers and adherence to the community rules and norms.

### *Educating conflict management*

Educating can be defined as a conflict management strategy where the company provides educational information about an ethical issue. The essence of this strategy is explaining to consumers the rationale behind the organization's views on animal-rights-

related issues. Educating is primarily used in C2C conflicts when consumers seem to be only partly involved with the issue at hand. The data excerpt below exemplifies this:

**Rose:** I love zoos and think they are a great place to educate kids about animals. However, the well being of animals should come first. My suggestion, maybe use a zoo to house animals injured or disabled that could not survive on their own in the wild. [sic]

**Andy:** Zoos are awful. Children should be educated with books or in the nature about animals

**Jane:** How do kids learn about dinosaurs?

**Sian:** Build a cage, put some wheels and go where the animals are. Simple.

**Joel:** Most of the time the animals that are injured or endangered species are in zoos for a reason

**Tom:** If zoos were actually a sanctuary for animals and in the animals best interest they wouldn't need a business model.

**PETA:** Keeping animals in cages does nothing to foster respect for animals since all children learn is that animals will spend their lives behind bars for people's fleeting distraction and amusement. Study after study, including by the zoo industry itself, has shown that most zoo visitors simply wander around the grounds, pause briefly in front of some displays, and spend their time on snacks and bathroom breaks. One study of visitors to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., showed that visitors spend less than eight seconds per snake exhibit and only one minute with the lions. Researchers concluded that 'people ... treat[ed] the exhibits like wallpaper.' In fact, numerous studies have shown that exhibiting animals in unnatural settings may undermine conservation by leaving the public with the idea that a species must not be in jeopardy if the government is allowing it to be used for display and entertainment.

In this excerpt, a consumer (Rose) partly disagrees with PETA's stance that zoos exist essentially for the purpose of generating profits and offers her view on this ethical issue. Several other consumers express contrasting opinions to Rose's. As a result, PETA post an extensive comment referring to research findings in order to further elaborate on their stance. Hence, the sole purpose of this strategy is to educate

consumers through a simple one-way information exchange. There is no apparent secondary agenda in this strategy.

In fewer instances, PETA was observed utilizing the educating strategy when a consumer possesses incomplete information about an ethical issue. This provided an opportunity for the company to provide consumers with additional information to enable them to reconsider their consumer behavior with respect to animal rights.

### *Bolstering conflict management*

Bolstering as a conflict management strategy is defined as the company affirming a consumer comment. In the majority of C2C conflicts in this dataset, bolstering is used as an independent strategy to affirm a consumer who supports one or more of PETA's values and views on animal rights. For instance, the following scenario represents a direct verbal attack on PETA's opinion about pet stores:

**David:** So those dogs who are in the pet stores shouldn't be bought and have a home? You're an idiot PETA. [sic]

**David:** PETA says that those dogs that are in stores shouldn't have a home.

**Lisa:** No that's not what they're saying. It's called supply and demand. Stop buying and there will be less profit to puppy mills. It isn't rocket science! Just do the right thing so less animals have to suffer.

**PETA:** @Lisa thanks for explaining supply & demand. (winking face emoji)

In this example, a consumer (Lisa) defends PETA's view on boycotting pet stores by clarifying the meaning and rationale behind their original post, which is positively reinforced by PETA in their subsequent comment.

In fewer C2C conflicts, however, PETA added a forceful comment to complement the bolstering strategy, perhaps to enhance the message strength, as shown in the following example:

**Louise:** Look at his tail wagging hes so happy lol! Beautiful story! It's ridiculous we don't need to kill animals for food anymore! [sic]

**Mark:** you can be lovable and delicious all at the same time

**Michael:** Smh. You do realise that this is a pot bellied pig right? One does not simply eat a pot belly pig. They're meat is to greasy which makes the flavor really nasty. Boom you learned something today [sic]

**Louise:** lol cool!

**PETA:** No we do not! Animals have the right to not be exploited by humans for our passing pleasure. #NotOurs2Eat

In this data excerpt, PETA affirms the initial consumer comment by following it up with a comment that is directly linked to the organization's mission and objectives. Such intervention allows the community host not only to provide support for a like-minded consumer but also re-emphasize their opinion on meat consumption.

#### *Asserting conflict management*

In contrast to the bolstering conflict management strategy, when using asserting PETA does not support a like-minded consumer and takes a more one-sided approach to managing C2C conflicts. Asserting can be defined as the company making a value-laden statement about an ethical issue. The primary purpose of this strategy is to reiterate PETA's opinion about a specific ethical issue, as demonstrated in the example below.



**Lee:** It's fun to watch though

**Susan:** It would be funny to watch you get gorged instead!

**Lee:** Nah I'd kill the Bulls man

**Josh:** Lee why are you even on this site? You clearly don't support PETA's goal [sic]

**PETA:** Cruelty is never entertainment! #NotOurs2Use

This conflict revolves around three consumers disagreeing about the ethics involved in bull-fighting. In this example, PETA takes on a more authoritative position by explicitly dismissing Lee's comment. No explanation or justification is provided to support PETA's opinion. PETA complements the asserting strategy with a hashtag, to further raise awareness of their stance on bull-fighting.

#### *Mobilizing conflict management*

Mobilizing refers to a conflict management strategy where the company urges consumers to take action towards an ethical issue. This strategy is outcome-oriented, because it aims to mobilize consumers to help the organization achieve its objectives. Mobilizing is usually complemented by a factual statement about the issue at hand to possibly enhance the message credibility. In the following example a consumer directly attacks PETA, resulting in a conflict:

**Martin:** Come on PETA. Do more research on farms. You think ALL farms are like this and they are not. You guys are smoking meth if you think all farms are like this.

**Harry:** Did peta say all dairy farms or did they specifically call out Daisy???

**Martin:** Again. How do you know or PETA know where the milk comes from. Land O Lakes gets milk from different farms not just big farms. Plus the black white face in the video is a beef animal.

**Sarah:** So that wasn't a Holstein cow?

**Martin:** Sarah Nope. Not unless it was bred with Holstein but other than that the calf is a beef animal. Plus that cow is technically a heifer not a cow.

**Ronald:** 78% of cattle farming is done in factories. So no, it's not all of them. Just the vast majority.

**PETA:** Unfortunately, a majority of dairy farms use practices like the ones seen in this video. Please consider ditching dairy and going vegan: <http://features.peta.org/how-to-go-vegan/>

In this excerpt, multiple consumers disagree about PETA's post which exposes unethical practices in dairy farms. PETA's intervention here represents a strong appeal which urges consumers to stop consuming dairy products and change their behavior by becoming vegan.

In other instances, lighter appeals were observed in which PETA does not directly urge for a change, but instead advocates that consumers arrive at a decision of their own accord regarding more ethical consumption, as shown below:

**Mark:** Going Vegan wont save the planet though [sic]

**Natalie:** google it, you'll see!

**Rick:** so what can you do to save the plant?

**Josh:** in peta's POV only beef is non veg [sic]

**Amanda:** Yeah it's really not the number 1 concern right now

**Amanda:** And the animal industry is too big and too important that it won't stop, so it's a bit of a wasted effort

**Kim:** It's a personal choice. Just like a religion is a choice. It still makes no difference. People are born then breed then die. Our superiority will kill us all. Power to rule all others will never end.

**Kim:** Seeing nothing but power will only cause destruction, not peace

**Richard:** 'DO YOU VEGANS WANT A MEDAL?'

**Sion:** Richard yes

**Jason:** yeah a medal would be nice :)))

**PETA:** Eating animals is a leading cause of deforestation, greenhouse gas emission, pollution, climate change, and land, water, food and other resource waste. Watch

Cowspiracy (available on Netflix) to learn more about how your choices impact others:  
<http://www.cowspiracy/facts/>

In this data excerpt, consumers argue over the allegedly positive implications of a vegan diet on the environment. PETA’s subsequent involvement represents a more indirect approach to encouraging action through referring to a third-party source of information. The company’s intervention here is aimed at urging consumers to learn more about the consequences of meat consumption on the environment. Table 5 summarizes the identified strategies.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<i>Non-engaging</i>	The company does not take any action to moderate a conflict.
<i>Censoring</i>	The company permanently removes consumer comments.
<i>Educating</i>	The company provides educational information about an ethical issue.
<i>Bolstering</i>	The company affirms a consumer comment.
<i>Asserting</i>	The company makes a value-laden statement about an ethical issue.
<i>Mobilizing</i>	The company urges consumers to take action towards an ethical issue.

**Table 5** Conflict management strategies

#### **4.2.5. Discussion**

##### *Theoretical contributions*

Studies on managing C2C conflicts in online communities are in need for more research (Johnson & Lowe, 2015; Labrecque et al., 2013; Matzat & Rooks, 2014). Previous work focuses on how non-profit organizations use social media in order to

enhance the positive aspect of interactions among its consumers (e.g. Nah & Saxton, 2012). However, little is known about managing negative consumer-to-consumer communication, i.e. C2C conflicts. The present study, therefore, contributes to the marketing literature by identifying managerial strategies that a non-profit organization employs to manage C2C conflicts in their online community on Facebook. Our findings highlight six distinct conflict management strategies and advance the literature in several ways.

First, we uncover two strategies that have not previously been identified in studies on consumer conflict management – asserting and mobilizing. In relation to the former, past research shows that assertive messages create a perceived sense of urgency and mission (Baek, Yoon & Kim, 2015). An assertive tone in digital marketing communications has been discussed in both non-profit domains, e.g. recycling (Kronrod, Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012a), and for-profit domains, e.g. sportswear consumption (Kronrod, Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012b). This study contributes to this debate by linking assertiveness to conflict management strategies in online communities. While our observations illustrate how asserting is used to substantiate one's own (in this case PETA's) values, it is important to note that others have argued that ideological conflicts may likewise be resolved via affirming an opponent's values (Bendersky, 2014). However, the latter was not a strategy chosen by PETA during the period of our observations.

The second novel contribution of this study is the identification of mobilizing, which represents one of the key functions of non-profit organizations that utilize online communities in the social media (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) – requesting individuals to take action. In our observations, mobilizing is often used in combination with an informative statement, arguably to align the organization's

mission and objectives to the requested action (Vázquez, Álvarez & Santos, 2002). Occasionally, PETA used lighter appeals urging consumers to seek more information on certain ethical issues instead of urging them to immediately change their consumption and lifestyle behaviors. In line with previous studies (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002), we propose that such an approach is meant to empower consumers to be more self-directed in their decisions regarding ethical consumption and participation in advocacy programs. However, Yoon, Choi and Song (2011) put forward that consumers may resist company's attempts to mobilize action if they regard them as a breach of their freedom of choice.

Second, this paper identifies four conflict management strategies that previous authors uncovered in a for-profit context (Dineva et al., 2017; Sibai et al., 2015). The observed strategies – non-engaging, censoring, educating and bolstering - substantiate the scarce findings in the extant literature.

Non-engaging is the most passive of all strategies observed. The strategy is similar to what Godes et al. (2005) calls 'the observer' role, whereby the firm simply observes interactions and collects information about consumers (see also Homburg et al., 2015). Adjei, Nowlin and Ang's (2016) findings suggest that such a lack of responsiveness to negative C2C interactions is detrimental to an online community as it can result in negative word-of-mouth and community members leaving the site. However, similar to Waters and Jamal's (2011) findings on non-profit organizations, we observe that PETA frequently chose not to engage in such two-way interactions.

In contrast, censoring is an active and authoritative strategy. As noted in studies on both non-profit (Husemann et al., 2015) and for-profit contexts (Sibai et al., 2015), censoring is a means to sanction undesirable consumer behavior. It is not surprising that

this strategy was used infrequently exclusively in situations where consumers demand it. Past research has demonstrated that non-profit organizations often actively promote their commitment to the diversity of opinions (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012), and thus censoring may appear controversial in this context.

Educating is a less intrusive strategy in this regard, because it involves the company providing educational information about an ethical issue. Similar to Dineva et al.'s (2017) findings on for-profit communities, PETA uses educating to address those consumers who possess incomplete information on the organization or issues of animal rights or only partly agree with the organization's opinion about an ethical issue. This can be related to Lovejoy and Saxton's findings (2012) who demonstrate that information-sharing is a key function of non-profits' communication on Twitter, covering information about the organization's activities and news.

Lastly, bolstering represents a more relationship-oriented strategy. Our findings demonstrate that bolstering is often used as a strategy to invoke positive feelings among consumers and encourage them to continue doing what they are praised for (de Hooge, Verlegh & Tzioti, 2014; Schamari & Schaefer, 2015). This is crucial in the present context because continued support through taking action, donations and word-of-mouth is considered to be key to enhancing animal welfare (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Bolstering may further be linked to the concept of consumer empowerment, which others have already proposed as a way to reduce consumer aggression (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Labrecque et al., 2013).

### *Managerial Implications*

Conflict management in a Facebook online community takes place in the public sphere where an entire network of active and passive consumers can continuously observe the

way a company manages conflicts. Conflict management in non-profit online communities, therefore, has become a multi-user dialogue which is likely to necessitate corporate responses that need context-dependent tailoring (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013). Since consumers perceive conflict management to be the host's responsibility (Johnson & Lowe, 2015), non-profit organizations are advised to proactively select strategies which fit to a desired outcome.

Our study identified six conflict management strategies that PETA currently uses in its online community on Facebook. Although we can only speculate upon the respective effectiveness of each strategy at this stage, we relate our observations to findings from studies in other research fields in order to further develop their managerial applicability.

The most frequently used strategy by PETA is non-engaging. Although PETA appears to choose this strategy irrespective of the conflict severity or length, we recommend to be cautious in using a non-engaging approach. Past research indicates that non-engagement may negatively impact customer behaviors and attitudes towards the community host, intensify the conflict and discourage consumers from generating content (Gebauer et al., 2013; Nambisan & Baron, 2007). Therefore, we recommend community managers to carefully pilot-test non-engagement in comparison to the other strategies we have observed.

Asserting and mobilizing in this regard seem particularly useful for non-profits' conflict management practice. An asserting strategy allows the organization to re-iterate the organizational purpose and objectives. Mobilizing further encourages consumers to take action towards an ethical issue that the organization already promotes. In contrast to mobilizing, asserting does not provide a justification or explanation to support the

organization's opinion and instead appears to request consumer compliance. Since it is unclear whether consumers accept or reject active requests to take action (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), we again would recommend using careful pilot-testing. Likewise, censoring should be chosen with care. A censoring strategy can cause consumer resistance, if it is perceived to negatively affect their freedom of expression (Coleman, 2001). It is interesting to note in this context that PETA only utilized censorship in instances where consumers actively demanded the organization to do so.

Bolstering, in comparison, is unlikely to be met by resistance as it encourages like-minded consumers to voice their opinions. Bolstering may further stimulate the tie-strength between members in online communities and align them towards the overall ethical cause. However, praising good customer behavior should not be over-done. Kouchaki and Jami (2016) put forward the possibility that such praise encourages self-interest behaviors at the expense of consumer altruism, which could negatively affect knowledge sharing and other helping behaviors in online communities.

Finally, educating is another less risky management strategy. An educating strategy involves the community host providing reliable information to moderate C2C conflicts, which is what consumers expect in company-run communities (Dholakia et al., 2009). Consumers frequently join non-profit online communities to obtain information about the organization, its' charitable activities and work. Therefore, educating has the potential to attract the attention away from aggressive interactions and towards more constructive informational exchanges.



#### **4.2.6. Limitations and Future Research**

This study provides a preliminary insight into conflict management within a non-profit online community on Facebook. Owing to the novelty of this research area, there are limitations that raise the need for more academic work on the topic. First, the duration of observations does not match that of some previous studies (Husemann et al., 2015; Seraj, 2012). However, since we reached a stage of data saturation after the period of three months, the duration was deemed sufficient for the purpose of this study (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Second, the empirical findings are exclusively based on a single online community on Facebook. However, this is not uncommon for exploratory research which aims to uncover a new phenomenon (Beaven & Laws, 2007). A fruitful area of further research will be a calibration of the present findings using several online communities from different non-profit backgrounds and hosted on other social media channels than Facebook (e.g. Twitter, YouTube, Instagram) (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012).

The literature would further benefit from testing the effectiveness of conflict management strategies. While the purpose of this study was to provide an initial understanding of a current non-profit organization's practices, there is a need for quantifying the outcomes, ideally in an experimental fashion. Future work could, for instance, compare the effect of each strategy on consumer outcome variables such as community re-visiting intentions or consumer attitudes towards the non-profit organization and its overall ethical cause.

Furthermore, future research should take a more holistic look at the combined effect of both companies' and consumers' attempts to managing conflicts within an

online community. In terms of the roles consumers occupy, the marketing literature has already identified that consumers sometimes defend brands or ethical values during a C2C conflict (Colliander & Wien, 2013). Related research may explore how the involvement of such defenders influences the perceived need for a company to get involved.

## Paper references

- Aaker, J., Vohs, K. D., & Mogilner, C. (2010). Nonprofits are seen as warm and for-profits as competent: Firm stereotypes matter. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *37*(2), 224-237. doi: [10.1086/651566](https://doi.org/10.1086/651566)
- Adjei, M. T., Nowlin, E. L., & Ang, T. (2016). The Collateral Damage of C2C Communications on Social Networking Sites: The Moderating Role of Firm Responsiveness and Perceived Fairness. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *24*(2), 166-185. doi: [10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057)
- Ashcraft, K., & Kedrowicz, A. (2002). Self-direction or social support? Nonprofit empowerment and the tacit employment contract of organizational communication studies. *Communication Monographs*, *69*(1), 88-110. doi: [10.1080/03637750216538](https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750216538)
- Baek, T. H., Yoon, S., & Kim, S. (2015). When environmental messages should be assertive: Examining the moderating role of effort investment. *International Journal of Advertising*, *34*(1), 135-157. doi: [10.1080/02650487.2014.993513](https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2014.993513)
- Beaven, Z., & Laws, C. (2007). 'Never Let Me Down Again'1: Loyal customer attitudes towards ticket distribution channels for live music events: a netnographic exploration of the US leg of the Depeche Mode 2005–2006 World Tour. *Managing Leisure*, *12*(2-3), 120-142. doi: [10.1080/13606710701339322](https://doi.org/10.1080/13606710701339322)
- Bendersky, C. (2014). Resolving ideological conflicts by affirming opponents' status: The Tea Party, Obamacare and the 2013 government shutdown. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *53*, 163-168. doi: [10.1016/j.jesp.2014.03.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2014.03.011)

- Ben-Zur, H., & Yagil, D. (2005). The relationship between empowerment, aggressive behaviours of customers, coping, and burnout. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 14*(1), 81-99. doi: [10.1080/13594320444000281](https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320444000281)
- Bernritter, S. F., Verlegh, P. W., & Smit, E. G. (2016). Why nonprofits are easier to endorse on social media: The roles of warmth and brand symbolism. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 33*, 27-42. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2015.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2015.10.002)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. doi: [10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 57–71). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bray, J., Johns, N., & Kilburn, D. (2011). An exploratory study into the factors impeding ethical consumption. *Journal of Business Ethics, 98*(4), 597-608. doi: [10.1007/s10551-010-0640-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0640-9)
- Buckels, E. E., Trapnell, P. D., & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Trolls just want to have fun. *Personality and Individual Differences, 67*, 97-102. doi: [10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.016)
- Burke, P., Eckert, C., & Davis, S. (2014). Segmenting consumers' reasons for and against ethical consumption. *European Journal of Marketing, 48*(11/12), 2237-2261. doi: [10.1108/EJM-06-2013-0294](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-06-2013-0294)
- Cano Murillo, D.E., Kang, J. & Yoon, S., (2016). Factors influencing pro-social consumer behavior through non-profit organizations. *Internet Research, 26*(3), pp.626-643. doi: [10.1108/IntR-10-2014-0253](https://doi.org/10.1108/IntR-10-2014-0253)

- Chan, K. W., Li, S. Y., & Zhu, J. J. (2015). Fostering customer ideation in crowdsourcing community: the role of peer-to-peer and peer-to-firm interactions. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 31, 42-62. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2015.05.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2015.05.003)
- Coleman, S. (2001). *The transformation of citizenship*, in B. Axford and R. Huggins (eds), *New Media and Politics* (London: Sage), 109–126.
- Colliander, J., & Wien, A. (2013). Trash talk rebuffed: consumers' defense of companies criticized in online communities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(10), 1733-1757. doi: [10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191)
- Cothrel, J. P. (2000). Measuring the success of an online community. *Strategy & Leadership*, 28(2), 17-21. doi: [10.1108/10878570010341609](https://doi.org/10.1108/10878570010341609)
- Chen, K. K., Lune, H., & Queen, E. L. (2013). How values shape and are shaped by nonprofit and voluntary organizations: The current state of the field. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 42(5), 856-885. doi: [10.1177/0899764013480273](https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764013480273)
- De Almeida, S. O., Dholakia, U. M., Hernandez, J. M. C., & Mazzon, J. A. (2014). The mixed effects of participant diversity and expressive freedom in online peer-to-peer problem solving communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(3), 196-209. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.003)
- De Hooge, I. E., Verlegh, P. W., & Tzioti, S. C. (2014). Emotions in advice taking: The roles of agency and valence. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 27(3), 246-258. doi: [10.1002/bdm.1801](https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.1801)

- De Valck, K. (2007). The war of the etribes: Online conflicts and communal consumption. In B. Cova, R. V. Kozinets, & A. Shankar (Eds.), *Consumer tribes* (pp. 260–275). Oxford: Elsevier.
- De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. S. (2012). Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: An investigation of the effects of social media marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 83-91. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003)
- Dholakia, U. M., Blazevic, V., Wiertz, C., & Algesheimer, R. (2009). Communal service delivery: How customers benefit from participation in firm-hosted virtual P3 communities. *Journal of Service Research*, 12(2), 208-226. doi: [10.1177/1094670509338618](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670509338618)
- Dineva, D. P., Breitsohl, J. C., & Garrod, B. (2017). Corporate conflict management on social media brand fan pages. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 1-20. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2017.1329225](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1329225)
- Ensari, N., Camden-Anders, S., & Schlaerth, A. (2015). *Constructive management and resolution of conflict*. In H. S. Friedman (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mental Health* (Vol. 1, pp. 340-349). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Ertimur, B., & Gilly, M. C. (2012). So whaddy think? Consumers create ads and other consumers critique them. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(3), 115-130. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2011.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2011.10.002)
- Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E., & Powell, I. H. (2013). Brand rivalry and community conflict. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 4–12. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017)

- Fisk, R., Grove, S., Harris, L. C., Keefe, D. A., Daunt, K. L., Russell-Bennett, R., & Wirtz, J. (2010). Customers behaving badly: A state of the art review, research agenda and implications for practitioners. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 24(6), 417-429. doi: [10.1108/08876041011072537](https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041011072537)
- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: Warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11(2), 77-83. doi: [10.1016/j.tics.2006.11.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2006.11.005)
- Freestone, O. M., & McGoldrick, P. J. (2008). Motivations of the ethical consumer. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 79(4), 445-467. doi: [10.1007/s10551-007-9409-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9409-1)
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408-1416.
- Gebauer, J., Füller, J., & Pezzeri, R. (2013). The dark and the bright side of co-creation: Triggers of member behavior in online innovation communities. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1516-1527. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013)
- Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y., & Wiertz, C. (2013). Managing brands in the social media environment. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 242-256. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.004)
- Godes, D., Mayzlin, D., Chen, Y., Das, S., Dellarocas, C., Pfeiffer, B., Libai, S., Sen, S., Shi, M., & Verlegh, P. (2005). The firm's management of social interactions. *Marketing Letters*, 16(3-4), 415-428. doi: [10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4)

- Guo, C., & Saxton, G. D. (2014). Tweeting social change: How social media are changing nonprofit advocacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(1), 57-79. doi: [10.1177/0899764012471585](https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012471585)
- Habibi, M. R., Laroche, M., & Richard, M. O. (2014). Brand communities based in social media: How unique are they? Evidence from two exemplary brand communities. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34(2), 123-132. doi: [10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.010)
- Hassay, D.N. & Pelozo, J., (2009). Building the charity brand community. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 21(1), pp.24-55. doi: [10.1080/10495140802111927](https://doi.org/10.1080/10495140802111927)
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Hofacker, C. F., & Bloching, B. (2013). Marketing the pinball way: understanding how social media change the generation of value for consumers and companies. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 237-241. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.005)
- Homburg, C., Ehm, L., & Artz, M. (2015). Measuring and managing consumer sentiment in an online community environment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 52(5), 629-641. doi: [10.1509/jmr.11.0448](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0448)
- Hou, J., Du, L., & Tian, Z. (2009). The effects of nonprofit brand equity on individual giving intention: mediating by the self-concept of individual donor. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 14(3), 215-229. doi: [10.1002/nvsm.356](https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.356)
- Husemann, K., Ladstaetter, F. & Luedicke, M., (2015). Conflict culture and conflict management in consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 265-284. doi: [10.1002/mar.20779](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20779)



- Jerolmack, C. & Khan, S. (2014). Talk is cheap ethnography and the attitudinal fallacy. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 43(2), 1-32. doi: [10.1177/0049124114523396](https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124114523396)
- Johnson, D. S., & Lowe, B. (2015). Emotional support, perceived corporate ownership and skepticism toward out-groups in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 29, 1-10. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002)
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68. doi: [10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003)
- Kouchaki, M., & Jami, A. (2016). Everything We Do, You Do: The Licensing Effect of Prosocial Marketing Messages on Consumer Behavior. *Management Science*, 1-10. doi: [10.1287/mnsc.2016.2571](https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2571)
- Kozinets, R.V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72. doi: [10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935)
- Kronrod, A., Grinstein, A., & Wathieu, L. (2012a). Go green! Should environmental messages be so assertive? *Journal of Marketing*, 76(1), 95-102. doi: [10.1509/jm.10.0416](https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.10.0416)
- Kronrod, A., Grinstein, A., & Wathieu, L. (2012b). Enjoy! Hedonic consumption and compliance with assertive messages. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(1), 51-61. doi: [10.1086/661933](https://doi.org/10.1086/661933)

- Labrecque, L. I. (2014). Fostering consumer–brand relationships in social media environments: The role of parasocial interaction. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 28*(2), 134-148. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.003)
- Labrecque, L. I., vor dem Esche, J., Mathwick, C., Novak, T. P., & Hofacker, C. F. (2013). Consumer power: Evolution in the digital age. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 27*(4), 257-269. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002)
- Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R., Richard, M. O., & Sankaranarayanan, R. (2012). The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers, value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty. *Computers in Human Behavior, 28*(5), 1755-1767. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016)
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 17*(3), 337-353. doi: [10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x)
- Mano, R. S. (2014). Social media, social causes, giving behavior and money contributions. *Computers in Human Behavior, 31*, 287-293. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.044](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.044)
- Matzat, U., & Rooks, G. (2014). Styles of moderation in online health and support communities: An experimental comparison of their acceptance and effectiveness. *Computers in Human Behavior, 36*, 65-75. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043)
- Minson, J. A., & Monin, B. (2012). Do-gooder derogation: Disparaging morally motivated minorities to defuse anticipated reproach. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 3*(2), 200-207. doi: [10.1177/1948550611415695](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611415695)

- Na, Z., & Jian, Z. (2014). The Individual Differences of Ethical Decision Makers. *Advances in Management*, 7(5), 34-37.
- Nah, S., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Modeling the adoption and use of social media by nonprofit organizations. *New Media & Society*, 15(2), 294-313. doi: [10.1177/1461444812452411](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812452411)
- Nambisan, S., & Baron, R. A. (2007). Interactions in virtual customer environments: Implications for product support and customer relationship management. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 21(2), 42-62. doi: [10.1002/dir.20077](https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.20077)
- Pfeffer, J., Zorbach, T., & Carley, K. M. (2014). Understanding online firestorms: Negative word-of-mouth dynamics in social media networks. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(1-2), 117-128. doi: [10.1080/13527266.2013.797778](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.797778)
- Phillips, N., & Broderick, A. (2014). Has Mumsnet changed me? SNS influence on identity adaptation and consumption. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 30(9-10), 1039-1057. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2014.927899](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.927899)
- Reeves, S., Kuper, A. & Hodges, B.D. (2008). Qualitative research methodologies: Ethnography. *British Medical Journal*, 337(7668), 512-514. doi: [10.1136/bmj.a1020](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a1020)
- Saxton, G. D., & Waters, R. D. (2014). What do stakeholders like on Facebook? Examining public reactions to nonprofit organizations' informational, promotional, and community-building messages. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(3), 280-299. doi: [10.1080/1062726X.2014.908721](https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2014.908721)

- Schamari, J., & Schaefer, T. (2015). Leaving the home turf: how brands can use webcare on consumer-generated platforms to increase positive consumer engagement. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 30, 20-33. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.12.001)
- Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30-51. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30)
- Schröder, M.J. & McEachern, M.G., (2004). Consumer value conflicts surrounding ethical food purchase decisions: a focus on animal welfare. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 28(2), pp.168-177. doi: [10.1111/j.1470-6431.2003.00357.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2003.00357.x)
- Seraj, M. (2012). We create, we connect, we respect, therefore we are: intellectual, social, and cultural value in online communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(4), 209-222. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.03.002)
- Shaw, D., & Newholm, T. (2002). Voluntary simplicity and the ethics of consumption. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(2), 167-185. doi: [10.1002/mar.10008](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.10008)
- Sibai, O., de Valck, K., Farrell, A. M., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social control in online communities of consumption: A framework for community management. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 250-264. doi: [10.1002/mar.20778](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20778)
- Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2012). How does brand-related user-generated content differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 102-113. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.002)

- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77-100. doi: [10.1177/2345678906292430](https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292430)
- Temkin, T. and Cummings, H.W., (1986). The use of conflict management behaviors in voluntary organizations: An exploratory study. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 15(1), 5-18. doi: [10.1177/089976408601500101](https://doi.org/10.1177/089976408601500101)
- Thach, E., & Thompson, K. J. (2007). Trading places: Examining leadership competencies between for-profit vs. public and non-profit leaders. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 28(4), 356-375. doi: [10.1108/01437730710752229](https://doi.org/10.1108/01437730710752229)
- Thomas, C.T., Price, L., & Schau, J. (2013). When differences unite: Resource dependence in heterogeneous consumption communities, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 1010-1033. doi: [10.1086/666616](https://doi.org/10.1086/666616)
- Thompson, S. A., & Sinha, R. K. (2008). Brand communities and new product adoption: The influence and limits of oppositional loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 72(6), 65-80. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.72.6.65](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.72.6.65)
- Van Noort, G., & Willemsen, L. M. (2012). Online damage control: The effects of proactive versus reactive webcare interventions in consumer-generated and brand-generated platforms. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(3), 131-140. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003)
- Vázquez, R., Álvarez, L. I., & Santos, M. (2002). Market orientation and social services in private non-profit organizations. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(9/10), 1022-1046. doi: [10.1108/03090560210437316](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560210437316)

- Yoon, S., Choi, Y. K., & Song, S. (2011). When intrusive can be likable. *Journal of Advertising*, 40(2), 63-76. doi: [10.2753/JOA0091-3367400205](https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367400205)
- Wang, X., Yu, C., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social media peer communication and impacts on purchase intentions: A consumer socialization framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(4), 198-208. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2011.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2011.11.004)
- Waters, R. D., Burnett, E., Lamm, A., & Lucas, J. (2009). Engaging stakeholders through social networking: How nonprofit organizations are using Facebook. *Public Relations Review*, 35(2), 102-106. doi: [10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.01.006)
- Waters, R. D., & Jamal, J. Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review*, 37(3), 321-324. doi: [10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002)
- Wirtz, J., den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., van de Klundert, J., Canli, Z. & Kandampully, J. (2013). Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities. *Journal of Service Management*, 24(3), 223-244. doi: [10.1108/09564231311326978](https://doi.org/10.1108/09564231311326978)
- Wu, M., & Pearce, P. (2013). Appraising netnography: Towards insights about new markets in the digital tourist era. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 17(5), 463-474. doi: [10.1080/13683500.2013.833179](https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2013.833179)
- Ybarra, O., Chan, E., & Park, D. (2001). Young and old adults' concerns about morality and competence. *Motivation and Emotion*, 25(2), 85-100. doi: [10.1023/A:1010633908298](https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010633908298)

Zane, D. M., Irwin, J. R., & Reczek, R. W. (2015). Do less ethical consumers denigrate more ethical consumers? The effect of willful ignorance on judgments of others. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 26*(3), 337-349. doi: [10.2139/ssrn.2678534](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2678534)

#### 4.3. PAPER 3 - MANAGING CONSUMER-TO-CONSUMER CONFLICT IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES

*Submitted to the journal Marketing Letters (co-authors: Jan Breitsohl, Brian Garrod)*

**Abstract:** Consumer conflict is a relatively new topic in digital marketing and refers to aggressive consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions in online communities. Research has thus far demonstrated that C2C conflicts can negatively impact upon consumers' well-being, brand identification, and re-purchase intentions. It is therefore in the interest of organizations to manage C2C conflicts in their online communities. However, at present, the Marketing literature offers little to guide organizations on how they should manage these conflicts. This paper offers a short overview on the current knowledge and managerial practice of organizational conflict management in online communities. Combining suggestions by others and preliminary findings from our own observations, we highlight the importance of this emerging Marketing phenomenon and propose several avenues for future research.

**Keywords:** *consumer aggression; online community; community governance; social media; netnography*



### 4.3.1. Introduction

Brand communities on social media sites are described as groups of consumers who express mutual sentiments about a particular brand, organization or consumption activity (Laroche, Habibi, Richard and Sankaranarayanan 2012). The benefits of consumer interactions in these communities are well researched: consumers obtain social as well as functional value, while companies learn about consumer behaviors and market trends (e.g. Kim, Naylor, Sivadas and Sugumaran 2016). However, there is a dark side to these communities. Online communities bring together millions of consumers with heterogeneous socio-cultural backgrounds, belief systems and brand perceptions, and these differences increasingly lead to consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions becoming hostile (i.e. C2C conflict) (Ewing, Wagstaff and Powell 2013). Unlike hostile consumer-to-business (C2B) interactions, these conflicts neither originate in a product/service failure, nor do they demand a corporate remedy. Rather, C2C conflicts represent interpersonal interactions between brand followers who disagree on a brand-related subject. Consequently, traditional forms of managing hostile consumer comments (e.g. offering an apology or monetary compensation) are unfit for this purpose and organizations need to develop new strategies to address this emerging phenomenon.

To illustrate this, the excerpt below shows a C2C conflict about Nike's dismissal of celebrity endorser Manny Pacquiao following his derogatory comments about same-sex couples.

**Gary Ruyter:** Repost: So Tiger Woods cheats on his wife and Nike keeps him. PacMan shares his beliefs and Nike drops him. Yeah, good one Nike, the company that outsourced their jobs to Asian countries where they only pay their workers \$10 a week and charge \$100 for shows. well done Nike.

**Lee Freeman:** #Boycottnike

**Helen Roberts:** what an irrelevant comparison! Even Burberry sacked Kate Moss for cocaine pictures. cheating on someone as horrible as it is, is NOT hate speech or does not reflect upon any particular race or sexual orientation.

**Sean Leonard:** Glad someone else on here sees their hypocrisy. Child slavery (action) is 1000000x worse than a bit of bigotry from the ignorant (words).

**Rose Hernandez:** so we really needs to BOYCOTT NIKE

**Jamie Edwards:** Nike did very well , THESE intolerant patients , false moralists , homophobic have to pay a rotten tongue Having,.. ;-]

**Angela Torres:** I am A Filipino I will not buy any Nike From Now on..... Boycott Nike.

**Michael Jones:** F\*ck your self!

This particular conflict continued for four days on Nike's official Facebook brand community (31 million followers), generating 160 comments and 12,258 reactions. Importantly, Nike did not intervene in what became an increasingly hostile interaction. This paper argues that such conflicts have a negative impact on both consumers and brands, and consequently we suggest that they present a new managerial problem in need of research.

Indeed, recent research indicates that C2C conflicts decrease the well-being, brand identification, and re-purchase intentions of consumers (e.g. Adjei, Nowlin and Ang 2016), and several authors have recently called for future research on how to manage such conflicts (Breitsohl, Roschk and Feyertag 2018; Husemann, Ladstaetter and Luedicke 2015; Sibai, de Valck, Farrell and Rudd 2015). This paper offers preliminary insights on current research knowledge and organizational practice related to C2C conflict management in online communities, and presents three central research avenues to inspire future studies.

### **4.3.2. Current knowledge from the marketing literature**

The literature on organizational conflict management in online communities is limited. Studies are largely conceptual in nature (e.g. Sibai et al. 2015) and focus on small-scale, consumer-hosted communities (Husemann et al. 2015). Sibai et al. (2015) suggest that community hosts could utilize various forms of social control including formalizing rules, monitoring interactions, rewarding positive behaviors and sanctioning negative behaviors. Husemann et al. (2015) observe that conflicts in a small email-listing community were usually resolved by a moderator who provides feedback or, in exceptional circumstances, chooses to exclude a member. However, both studies emphasize that when a conflict culture develops within a close-knit group of consumers, conflicts may sometimes lead to constructive discourse which does not require managing. Yet, future research needs to establish whether these propositions apply to larger, company-hosted online communities on social media sites.

### **4.3.3. Preliminary findings on current practice**

In order to gain an initial insight into how organizations manage C2C conflicts, we conducted a non-participatory netnographic study (Kozinets 2002) of seven online brand communities hosted on Facebook by both for-profit and non-profit companies. We engaged in daily observations over a 10-month period, and recorded 597 C2C conflicts containing thousands of individual comments. Using thematic analysis and investigator triangulation, we engaged in several rounds of coding and theme development, ultimately leading to seven distinct organizational conflict management strategies. As shown in the table below, for the vast majority of C2C conflicts, the respective organization chose not take any action. If action was taken, one of the

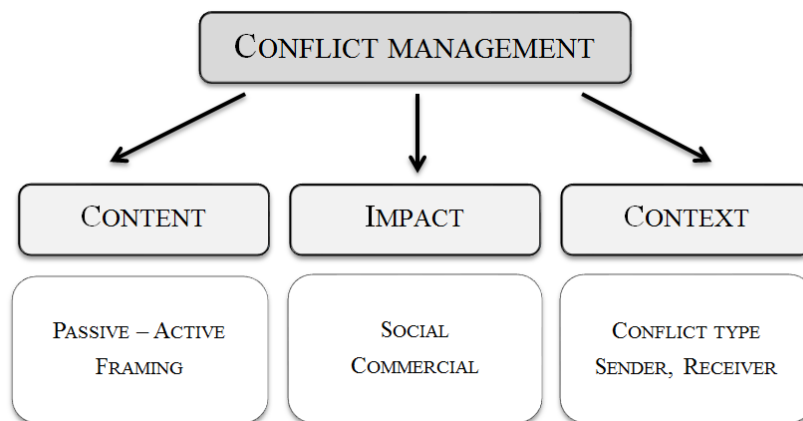
following six strategies was employed: censoring, bolstering, informing, mobilizing, asserting and pacifying.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Observed</b>	<b>Excerpt</b>
<i>Non-engaging</i>	The organization does not take any action to moderate a conflict.	498	
<i>Censoring</i>	The organization permanently removes consumer comments.	6	<i>[comment was removed]</i>
<i>Bolstering</i>	The organization affirms a consumer comment.	26	<i>"@Lisa thanks for explaining supply &amp; demand. (winking face emoji)"</i>
<i>Informing</i>	The organization provides information about a product, the organization or a consumption-related issue.	27	<i>"There is no added sugar @Gemma. It's just fruit blended with ice... The fruit pot is blended with ice and apple/banana pureé."</i>
<i>Mobilizing</i>	The organization urges consumers to take action towards a consumption-related issue.	30	<i>"Please tell everyone you know to go vegan to help stop this!"</i>
<i>Asserting</i>	The organization makes a value-laden statement about a consumption-related issue.	8	<i>"Cruelty is never entertainment! #NotOurs2Use"</i>
<i>Pacifying</i>	The organization asks one or more consumers to adjust their communication behavior or style.	2	<i>"Happy to take the comments @Liam but can we watch the language please."</i>

**Table 5** Conflict-management strategies

#### 4.3.4. Emerging topics and future research

This paper offers a preliminary overview of current research knowledge and organizational practice related to managing C2C conflicts in online communities. The scarce existing literature suggests that companies should employ a set of strategies to exercise social control, while some conflicts which prove constructive should perhaps not be interfered with. In practice, we find that in the majority of incidents, organizations do not get involved. If however companies choose to act, they follow six distinct strategies. Based on these initial insights, we propose three main avenues for future research (Figure 7).



**Figure 7** Future research avenues

##### **Research Avenue 1: Communication Content**

Future studies should focus on the content of organizational communication strategies. While our observations indicate that organizations currently tend to remain inactive, we suggest systematic observations of a broader range of online communities to expand upon the examples of current practice illustrated in this article. Once a more

generalizable overview of current practice across industries and perhaps cultures can be drawn, subsequent experimental research should verify their effectiveness. Studies should test whether passive approaches (censoring, non-engagement) are preferable to more active (bolstering, informing, asserting, mobilizing, pacifying) interventions, and whether additional message framing manipulations might have a positive effect. For instance, research on message congruity in the e-complaint management literature shows that interventions which match the tone of one or several parties tend to yield more positive outcomes (Breitsohl, Khammash & Griffiths, 2010). Likewise, theories of persuasion such as the elaboration likelihood model may be used to frame an intervention message based on the ability and motivation of the conflicting consumers.

### **Research Avenue 2: Communication Impact**

To understand the effectiveness of manipulating the content of conflict management strategies, future research further needs to investigate commercial and social impact factors. Commercially, an organization will benefit from research that verifies which strategy has the most positive effect on consumers brand relationship, organizational image perceptions and loyalty-related behaviors. For instance, Adjei et al. (2016) show that not intervening in negative consumer comments results in negative word-of-mouth and members leaving an online community. Of similar interest for future research is the effect of different conflict management strategies on consumers' social well-being. To this regard, intervening in hostile interactions may enhance consumers' trust in social discourse online and prevent the negative emotional contagion of online community conflicts (Breitsohl et al. 2018).

### **Research Avenue 3: Communication Context**

Closely linked to content and impact, considerable research opportunities may lay ahead in exploring boundary conditions which reflect differences in the communication context. First, based on our observations, we propose to investigate whether the effectiveness of conflict management strategies depends upon the type of conflict. Since C2C conflicts are likely to vary in their degree of aggression (Breistohl et al. 2018), and may at times actually prove constructive (Husemann et al. 2015), the type of conflict may be an important moderator of the impact of management interventions. Second, we suggest that the effectiveness of a strategy will vary in relation to the sender and the receiver of an online intervention. Based on social agency theories (Hartmann et al., 2008), it is likely that consumers react differently depending on whether an intervention is posted by a brand, employee or consumer advocate. Similarly, the effectiveness of an intervention may be different for an uninvolved witness and an active conflict participant.

## Paper references

- Adjei, M. T., Nowlin, E. L., & Ang, T. (2016). The collateral damage of C2C communications on social networking sites: the moderating role of firm responsiveness and perceived fairness. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 24(2), 166-185. doi: [10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057)
- Breitsohl, J., Roschk, H., & Feyertag, C. (2018). Consumer Brand Bullying Behaviour in Online Communities of Service Firms. In *Service Business Development* (pp. 289-312). Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden. doi: [10.1007/978-3-658-22424-0\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22424-0_13)
- Breitsohl, J., Khammash, M., & Griffiths, G. (2010). E-business complaint management: perceptions and perspectives of online credibility. *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 23(5), 653-660. doi: [10.1108/17410391011083083](https://doi.org/10.1108/17410391011083083)
- Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E., & Powell, I. H. (2013). Brand rivalry and community conflict. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 4-12. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017)
- Hartmann, W. R., Manchanda, P., Nair, H., Bothner, M., Dodds, P., Godes, D., Hosanagar, K., & Tucker, C. (2008). Modeling social interactions: Identification, empirical methods and policy implications. *Marketing Letters*, 19(3-4), 287-304. doi: [10.1007/s11002-008-9048-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-008-9048-z)
- Husemann, K. C., Ladstaetter, F., & Luedicke, M. K. (2015). Conflict culture and conflict management in consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 265-284. doi: [10.1002/mar.20779](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20779)



- Kim, J., Naylor, G., Sivadas, E., & Sugumaran, V. (2016). The unrealized value of incentivized eWOM recommendations. *Marketing Letters*, 27(3), 411-421. doi: [10.1007/s11002-015-9360-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-015-9360-3)
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72. doi: [10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935)
- Laroche, M., Habibi, M. R., Richard, M. O., & Sankaranarayanan, R. (2012). The effects of social media based brand communities on brand community markers, value creation practices, brand trust and brand loyalty. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(5), 1755-1767. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.04.016)
- Sibai, O., De Valck, K., Farrell, A. M., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social control in online communities of consumption: A framework for community management. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 250-264. doi: [10.1002/mar.20778](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20778)

#### 4.4. PAPER 4 – CONSUMER REACTIONS TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN ONLINE COMMUNITIES

*Paper under review in the Journal of Interactive Marketing* (co-authors: Jan Breitsohl, Brian Garrod, Phil Megicks)

**Abstract:**

Social media fan pages hosted by non-profit organizations (NPOs) are a fertile ground for hostile consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions or C2C conflicts. Past research has demonstrated that such conflicts can have a negative impact upon consumers' engagement in the fan page and the organization's reputation. However, little is known about how NPOs should manage C2C conflicts. This research uses a mixed-methods approach to understand how a NPO manages C2C conflicts and how consumers are influenced by the selected strategy. Results from a netnography identify two conflict content orientation types, and a range of passive and active conflict management strategies. A subsequent online experiment builds upon these findings to establish consumers' attitudes towards the selected strategy and the effects on perceived social responsibility. Insights are offered into the applicability of different strategies from a consumer viewpoint, particularly in regard to how selected strategies influence non-profit organizational effectiveness.

**Keywords:** *conflict management; consumer aggression; social media fan pages; non-profit organizations; self and other benefits; mixed methods*

#### **4.4.1. Introduction**

Non-profit organizations (NPOs) have fan pages on social media sites such as Facebook for several reasons. One purpose is to inform consumers about events, activities and issues relating to the organization's cause (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). A second is to facilitate consumer-to-consumer (C2C) discussions and gather feedback (Alden, Kelley, Youn & Chen, 2016; Saxton & Waters, 2014). Thirdly, they may be used to encourage consumers to engage in behaviors which support the organization's cause (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Saxton & Wang, 2014) such as giving behaviors (i.e. donations and volunteering) (Liu & Aaker, 2008); activism (i.e. signing petitions, lobbying and spreading word-of-mouth) (Lee, Kim, Kim & Choi, 2014); and ethical purchase behaviors (i.e. buying ethical products or refraining from buying unethical ones) (Sudbury-Riley & Kohlbacher, 2016). Although consumers appear to support the same cause, they frequently disagree with each other. Such disagreements can result in one consumer verbally attacking another consumer, who typically reciprocates in kind. We term this phenomenon 'C2C conflicts'. As noted by others, such conflicts can range from mild (e.g. verbal provocation) to heavy (e.g. harassment and threats) verbal attacks (Breitsohl, Roschk & Feyertag, 2018; Ewing, Wagstaff & Powell, 2013). C2C conflicts might occur because consumers have dissimilar socio-economic backgrounds and incompatible personal values (de Almeida, Dholakia, Hernandez & Mazzon, 2014; Shaw & Newholm, 2002). Alternatively, they might arise as a consequence of consumers' different opinions about what the nature of the NPO's mission involves, or how it should be pursued (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2014; Freestone & McGoldrick, 2008).

Previous research suggests that such conflicts can have a negative impact on both consumers (Gebauer, Füller & Pezzei, 2013; Thomas, Price & Schau, 2013) and

organizations (Fisk et al., 2010). C2C conflicts can cause consumers psychological and emotional distress (Pew, 2017), making them less likely to interact with each other and consequently no longer able to obtain the same level of functional benefits from the social media fan page as before (Gebauer et al., 2013). The NPOs concerned could meanwhile experience a loss of credibility especially should they be deemed to fail to effectively manage such C2C conflicts (Pfeffer, Zorbach & Carley, 2014). Indeed, conflict management is typically perceived to be part of the organization's social responsibility efforts (Illia et al., 2017; Pew, 2017).

Despite these potential negative outcomes for both consumers and organizations, the marketing literature presently lacks research on how NPOs should manage C2C conflicts when they arise. To date, only a few studies have examined what strategies organizations use to address C2C conflicts (Dineva, Breitsohl & Garrod, 2017; Husemann, Ladstaetter & Luedicke, 2015). Their findings suggest that community moderators mainly use a non-engaging strategy (i.e. not intervening in the conflict at all), followed by other less frequently used strategies that reward or sanction (un)desirable behavior. These studies, however, are observational in nature, and have not investigated the effects of such strategies on consumers. Without an understanding of what kind of conflict management consumers prefer, the effectiveness of these strategies cannot be understood, and the benefits of using social media fan pages for consumers and NPOs cannot be fully achieved. The present study therefore investigates what conflict management strategies are used by NPOs, and which have the most favorable outcomes for consumers and for the organization. To achieve this, we examine the nature of non-profit fan page conflict management strategies and the attitude of consumers towards the use of different strategies, and how the choice of strategy affects perceptions of the organization's social responsibility. Developing a

further understanding of C2C conflict management strategies is of particular significance to NPOs as they can influence the organization's reputation as well as consumers' purchasing behavior (Wang, Yu & Wei, 2012). Moreover, within the non-profit context the implications for how organizations are perceived from a social responsibility perspective are important as this may influence consumers' actual market place activities (Lichtenstein, Drumwright & Braig, 2004).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. We first consider the existing literature on C2C conflicts and conflict management in online settings. The methods employed in the research, involving a netnographic study of a non-profit social media fan page, and an online experiment of consumers' attitudes and beliefs about different conflict management strategies used by NPOs, are then presented. Following this the findings of the two studies are discussed highlighting implications for research and practice. Finally, we offer a general conclusion, the limitations of the research and some areas for further investigation.

#### **4.4.2. Literature review**

##### *C2C conflicts in non-profit social media fan pages*

C2C conflicts in NPOs' social media fan pages can occur between supporters of ethical consumption (Schröder & McEachern, 2004) as well as between supporters and non-supporters of ethical consumption (Minson & Monin, 2012; Zane, Irwin & Reczek, 2015) due to the global reach of fan pages in the social media. The former seems to be based mainly on differences in opinions, value systems and personal norms regarding a specific ethical issue (Schröder & McEachern, 2004). For example, Shaw and Newholm (2002) suggest that ethical consumers consider a range of ethical issues in

their consumer behavioral choices. Their opinions about these ethical issues, what the cause constitutes and how it should be pursued often differ. In contrast, conflicts between supporters and non-supporters of particular causes have been suggested to stem from a lack of information, skepticism or cynicism towards ethical consumption (Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011; Burke, Eckert & Davis, 2014), or simply from the joy of provoking others (i.e. trolling) (Buckels, Trapnell & Paulhu, 2014). Bray et al.'s study (2011), for example, highlights that some consumers dismiss the suggested positive impact of ethical consumption on humans, animals and the environment on the grounds of it being a mere marketing strategy to promote more expensive products. In addition, Zane et al. (2015) confirm that less ethical consumers denigrate the supporters of ethical consumption. Such denigration, which can be an important source of C2C conflict, is said to arise from the self-threat inherent in negative social comparison with others who consume ethically.

While some studies have explored the potential types and causes of conflicts, more recent research has started to focus on the negative outcomes of C2C conflict. Pfeffer et al. (2014) show that C2C conflict can prevent consumers from engaging in discussions with other like-minded consumers and the company host that foster involvement and commitment to the fan page. In turn, decreased levels of involvement in the fan page make it more difficult for NPOs to encourage consumers to contribute to social welfare through word-of-mouth, donations and activism (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Lastly, de Valck (2007) and Husemann et al. (2015) note that not all C2C conflicts are negative for the community members and the community host. Occasionally, C2C conflicts may be considered to be constructive, for example, when they help develop a collective view on controversial topics (Kornum, Gyrd-Jones, Al Zagir & Brandis, 2017).

### *Conflict management*

Ensari, Camden-Anders and Schlaerth (2015) define conflict management as a collection of practices used by organizations to intervene in C2C conflicts. Few marketing studies have begun to examine C2C conflict management in social media-based online communities, while only one study has investigated conflict management in a non-profit online community.

Godes et al. (2005) offer first insights into the roles that companies may adopt when managing C2C interactions. The authors distinguished between four principal, non-mutually exclusive company roles, ranging from passive observation to interactive participation. Depending on the type of C2C interaction (positive versus negative) and the context, the company can choose between the following roles: observer, mediator, moderator and participant. Likewise, Homburg, Ehm and Artz (2015) identified two company roles in managing C2C discussions in an online community setting: passive and active. In choosing passive engagement, the company offers consumers a platform to interact and does not engage in conversations among consumers, whereas active participation involves direct interactions with consumers.

Two previous studies on conflict management within consumer-hosted online communities have put forward the concept of community-governing mechanisms (Mathwick, Wiertz & De Ruyter, 2007; Schau, Muñiz & Arnould, 2009). These mechanisms involve articulating expectations of acceptable behavior, including keeping criticism constructive, dismissing negative comments, and maintaining a positive community environment. Similarly, based on an in-depth review of the literature, Sibai, de Valck, Farrell and Rudd (2015) differentiate between two C2C conflict-moderation roles of online community moderators: interaction maintenance and interaction

termination. Interaction maintenance is intended to ensure C2C interactions remain functional and involves monitoring interactions, rewarding positive behaviors and sanctioning negative behaviors. Interaction termination, in contrast, occurs when C2C interactions become dysfunctional and entails ignoring members or excluding them from the online community. A recent study on conflict management in for-profit social media fan pages demonstrates that across six product and service categories most firms adopt a passive role during C2C conflicts (Dineva et al., 2017). The remainder of the strategies comprise of informing (i.e. providing corporate or product information to rectify what is perceived to be incorrect consumer comments), bolstering (i.e. affirming consumers who defend the brand), pacifying (i.e. asking one or more consumers to adjust their communication style) and censoring (i.e. permanently removing consumer comments). Furthermore, a netnographic study based in a consumer-hosted non-profit online community offers findings into conflict management practices as a sub-analytical theme (Husemann et al., 2015). The authors divide C2C conflicts into routinized (i.e. positive for the community, constructive) and transgressive (i.e. negative for the community, aggressive) and recommend different practices depending on the type of conflict. While routinized C2C conflicts may require nurturing, because they are seen as beneficial for the community, transgressive C2C may involve excluding members from the online community due to their negative impact on the welfare of the community and its members.

In summary, past literature on conflict management in online environments appears to fall into two main domains - passive and active. Passive conflict management involves similar community moderator behaviors such as avoiding the conflict (Hauser, Hautz, Hutter & Füller, 2017), remaining silent (Dineva et al., 2017), and observing without participating (Godes et al., 2005). In contrast, active conflict



management is reported by scholars as establishing explicit community-governing mechanisms (Schau et al., 2009) and sanctioning or rewarding (un)desirable consumer behavior (Sibai et al., 2015). Nonetheless, with one notable exception, these studies are focused on for-profit, or consumer-hosted online communities. They are also limited to delineating conflict management practices without taking into account the consumer perspective. Importantly, some of these studies are conceptual in nature, while others offer only anecdotal evidence.

The research presented here addresses the shortcomings of existing literature and contributes to further understanding of online conflict management strategies in a non-profit context. Specifically, it provides insights into the nature of management strategies in such a setting, and identifies differences in consumers' attitudes with regard to their use.

#### **4.4.3. Method**

In this paper we implemented a two-step, mixed methods approach in order to provide a robust assessment of the present research topic. In Study 1, we conducted a netnography of the Facebook fan page of a non-profit organization in order to deepen our understanding of the conflict management strategies it uses. Building on the strategies identified in Study 1, we subsequently designed an experiment to capture how different conflict management strategies affect consumers' attitudes.

##### *4.4.3.1. Study 1: Netnography*

Following Ruvio & Belk (2018), we conducted a non-participatory netnography of a Facebook fan page hosted by the non-profit organization PETA ('People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals'). After three months, the researchers agreed that data saturation

was reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The choice of a fan page was made in accordance with the following criteria: 1) the researchers' familiarity with the organization and its context, 2) the presence of between-member interactions of the type required for the present study (i.e. C2C conflicts), and 3) evidence of content moderation by the organization (Kozinets, 2002). In this context, we define a C2C conflict as one consumer verbally attacking another consumer, who usually reciprocates in kind (Chan & Li, 2010; Ewing et al., 2013). Following Ensari and colleagues (2015), organizational content moderation is defined as the community host moderating interactions between the fan page users.

#### *Data analysis*

To analyze the data, we followed a six-stage thematic analysis approach, as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2014). The first phase involved familiarization with the dataset for the purpose of identifying relevant data. Next, the data were analyzed in order to generate initial codes. Subsequently, the codes were subsumed based on their unifying features, which generated our themes, i.e. types of conflict and conflict management strategies. The themes were then reviewed in relation to the coded data and the entire data set, while labels were assigned and definitions developed to describe the underpinning meaning of each theme. Investigator triangulation was employed in order to enhance the study's validity (Reeves, Kuper & Hodges, 2008). This process involved two researchers discussing their independent codes and interpretations of the data at several rounds of analysis, reaching a final set of 332 C2C conflicts.

## Results

Initial analysis of the C2C types of conflict on the fan page revealed that most conflicts could be meaningfully categorized into two content conflict orientations: whether they related to issues relevant to the self (e.g. personal health), or others (e.g. animal welfare). The excerpts bellow illustrate C2C conflicts resulting from issues relating to the self i.e. the implications of consuming meat for one's health (Excerpt 1) and issues relating to others i.e. the implications of dairy farms for animal welfare (Excerpt 2).





The screenshot shows a vertical list of seven comments on a social media platform. Each comment includes a profile picture icon, the user's name, the text of the comment, and the time it was posted along with a 'Like' button. The comments are as follows:


- Jordan Casey** (51 minutes ago): "I don't get why people who eat meat find worms and insects disgusting." (Like)
- Samantha Jones** (45 minutes ago): "That's speciesism...society has brainwashed them into thinking animal corpses like chicken are healthy, and safe to eat. But animals, like worms, are viewed as unhealthy, and infectious to eat. When in reality they are both unhealthy and both their corpses can become infectious, when they are a dead being, and raw and therefore decaying at a fast rate." (Like)
- Mike Harrison** (33 minutes ago): "Haha it is funny that some people believe that when salmonella often comes from chicken." (Like)
- Isaiah Trujillo** (31 minutes ago): "Lol Samantha how is chicken unhealthy? I eat chicken every day and I am healthier than 90% of the population" (Like)
- Mike Harrison** (19 minutes ago): "Isaiah Trujillo how can you eat and chew on a dead body and think it id ok?" (Like)
- Gabriel Wolf** (15 minutes ago): "Jordan Casey, what about all the people that get salmonella from veggies. I still remember salads being recalled..." (Like)
- Jacques Novak** (10 minutes ago): "Isaiah Trujillo how do you know you are healthier than 90% of the population? Your body is filled with dead body parts." (Like)


At the bottom of the screenshot is a text input field with the placeholder text "Write a comment ...".


### Excerpt 1 C2C conflict relating to the self


 **Rachel Thurlow** 1 – Wearing rings are used because baby cows are greedy and will continue to nurse as long as they are able to  
 2 – They have to be spikey because nose rings that aren't spikey don't provide any real deterrent to the calves or their mothers to stop the calf from trying to nurse  
 3 – Happy and healthy cows provide more milk. The idea that farmers are going to hurt their own bottom line just so they can arbitrarily be cruel to animals is ridiculous.  
 3 hours ago · Like


 **Lily Saunders** Really? Seriously you think this is okay?  
 2 hours ago · Like


 **Rachel Thurlow** Yes, I support animal welfare.  
 2 hours ago · Like


 **Nick Stanford** But you believe it's ok to kill and exploit animals for humans' greed? This is where most people on this page disagree with you.  
 1 hour ago · Like

 **Joshua Lockwood** Facts: The amount of grain we feed cattle could end world hunger. There isn't enough water or grass to economically let cows on all factory farms be "free range". Most cattle end up in a slaughterhouse at just 5 years of age. All very good reasons to go vegan!!! Any little bit helps! One person = 2-3 less killed cows a year!  
 50 minutes ago · Like

 **Amanda Smith** You don't think that asshole wasn't being cruel? I would love to return the favor. Humans are the worst. You rationalizing that kind of treatment tells us everything we need to know about you. Monster.  
 35 minutes ago · Like

 **Amanda Smith** I get so upset, I can't even type. No animal deserves that.  
 34 minutes ago · Like

 **Rachel Thurlow** It is very unclear from your post what you mean by "that asshole". Also the idea that "humans are the worst" is nonsense. Humans are literally the only omnivores/carnivores on earth that feel any sort of compassion or empathy towards their prey.  
 20 minutes ago · Like



**Excerpt 2** C2C conflict relating to others

Further analysis yielded five conflict management strategies, as illustrated in Table 6. Non-engaging is a conflict management strategy wherein the organization does not intervene in a conflict. This was the most commonly used strategy, irrespective of the intensity and length of the C2C conflict. In contrast, a more active and authoritative strategy is censoring where the organization removes comments. Censoring was observed in two C2C conflicts, both of which involved the consumers specifically requesting for the content to be removed. Unlike censoring, bolstering involves the organization actively posting comments to affirm views expressed by like-minded consumers. This strategy broadly involves the organization thanking supporters of the

organization’s mission (e.g. consumers who follow a vegan lifestyle) or agreeing with their comments in support of issues relating to the organization’s cause. Educating, in comparison, refers to providing consumers with additional educational information about an ethical issue. During our observations, the organization used educating in C2C conflicts where one or more consumers partly or wholly disagreed with the organization’s views on a given ethical issue. Lastly, mobilizing involves the organization encouraging consumers to take action with regard to the ethical issue that caused the C2C conflict to happen. This strategy enables the organization to further promote its views on certain ethical issues and thus arguably drive the organizational objectives. In our observation, mobilizing was frequently complemented by the provision of additional information (i.e. an external link), possibly to strengthen the impact of the message.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Observed</b>	<b>Excerpt</b>
<i>Non-engaging</i>	The organization does not take any action to moderate a conflict.	265	
			<i>[comment was removed]</i>
<i>Censoring</i>	The organization permanently removes consumer comments.	2	
<i>Bolstering</i>	The organization affirms a consumer comment.	14	<p><i>“Thank you for choosing compassion! (heart emoji) #FriendsNotFood #TheYearOfVegan”</i></p> <p><i>“@Lisa thanks for explaining supply &amp; demand. (winking face emoji)”</i></p>

---

<i>Educating</i>	The organization provides educational information about an ethical issue.	21	<p><i>“Zoos claim to provide educational opportunities, but most visitors spend only a few minutes at each display, seeking entertainment rather than enlightenment [sic].”</i></p> <p><i>“Keeping animals in cages does nothing to foster respect for animals since all children learn is that animals will spend their lives behind bars for people's fleeting distraction and amusement.”</i></p>
<hr/>			
<i>Mobilizing</i>	The organization urges consumers to take action towards an ethical issue.	30	<p><i>“Please tell everyone you know to go vegan to help stop this!</i></p> <p><a href="http://www.peta.org/living/food/free-vegan-starter-kit/">http://www.peta.org/living/food/free-vegan-starter-kit/</a>”</p> <p><i>“Unfortunately, a majority of dairy farms use practices like the ones seen in this video. Please consider ditching dairy and going vegan:</i></p> <p><a href="http://features.peta.org/how-to-go-vegan/">http://features.peta.org/how-to-go-vegan/</a>”</p>

---

**Table 6** Conflict management strategies and sample comments

#### 4.4.3.2. Study 2: Experiment

##### *Research design and sample*

Based within an online survey, we conducted a randomized 2 (conflict content orientation) x 6 (conflict management strategies) between-subjects scenario experiment. Participants were recruited via a Qualtrics online panel and consisted of 512 US consumers (68% female,  $M_{Age} = 44$  years) with an average income of \$2,000 per month, and aged 18 to 65. All participants visited social media fan pages at least once a week and, on average, posted comments in social media fan pages ‘2–3 times per month’.

##### *Scenario development*

The experimental scenarios were developed in close relation to our observations in Study 1. In the beginning, participants read a Facebook post by a fictitious non-profit organization called World Society for Ethical Food Consumption (WSEFC) about the implications of consuming dairy products. In the comments section below the organization’s post, respondents were shown a C2C conflict which revolved either around personal health or animal welfare concerns (Manipulation 1 – Conflict content orientation) (see Appendix A). Subsequently, participants were randomly allocated to one of six organizational posts reflecting the different strategies in response to the C2C conflicts (Manipulation 2 – Conflict management strategy) (see Appendix B). Participants exposed to the non-engaging strategy were told that the organization ignored the comments and made a new unrelated post instead. In the censoring condition participants were told that the organization deleted all comments and made a new, unrelated post.

The self versus others manipulation was based on the content orientation of the C2C conflict, i.e. whether it related to consumers’ self-benefits (personal health) or the

benefits of others (animal welfare). Content orientation was developed using the following rationale. First, in Study 1 we observed two main types of C2C conflicts: those revolving around issues relevant to the self and those concerning issues relevant to others. Second, self-benefit versus other-benefit content orientation has received attention by researchers in non-profit marketing, particularly with respect to their differential effect on consumers' charitable attitudes and behaviors (Fisher, Vandenbosch & Antia, 2008; Green & Peloza, 2014; Yang, Lu, Zhu & Su, 2015; Ye, Teng, Yu & Wang, 2015). Third, past research has demonstrated that social exchange is a useful model for explaining self-benefit versus other-benefit content orientation (Mathur, 1996) and therefore could be an important moderator in the present study. In accord with this, social exchange theory puts forward the idea that self-benefit content orientation is more influential since individuals invest in relationships on the basis of comparative levels of costs and rewards (Emerson, 1976). In the non-profit context consumers are therefore expected to display attitudes and engage in behaviors that support a non-profit's cause when the benefits outweigh the costs (i.e. self-benefit) (White & Peloza, 2009).

The manipulations of organizational conflict management posts were derived from the five strategies identified in Study 1 (i.e. non-engaging, censoring, educating, bolstering and mobilizing), and an additional strategy, pacifying, which was added based on recent research (Dineva et al., 2017; Hauser et al., 2017). Following Dineva et al. (2017), pacifying refers to an authority-driven organizational conflict management strategy which involves asking one or more consumers in a social media fan page to adjust their communication style or behavior. We included pacifying for two reasons. First, past studies on governance structures of social media fan pages offers vast empirical evidence on the frequent use and, in part, effectiveness of an authoritative



communication style by community moderators in managing conflict (Kronrod, Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012a; Matzat & Rooks, 2014). Second, a recent observational study indicates that pacifying is used by for-profit organizations (Dineva et al., 2017), thus allowing our study to offer complementary insights beyond the non-profit context.

For the conflict content orientation and conflict management strategy, two dependent variables were assessed: one relating to attitudes toward the given strategy, and the other evaluating how that strategy was perceived in relation to the organization's social responsibility.

#### *Pre-tests and pilot study*

We conducted a pre-test (n=16), where participants were given the different scenarios and asked to identify: a) the conflict content orientation ('The comments are mostly about: Animal welfare/Personal health') and b) the type of conflict management strategy ('Please read each comment carefully and match the statement that best describes it'), with 81% doing so correctly. Furthermore, 75% agreed that the scenarios were realistic (i.e. 'they could have happened on Facebook'). A subsequent pilot study (n=20) of the complete survey further confirmed the manipulations, while minor wording alternations were made in relation to participant feedback.

#### *Measures*

Attitudinal measures were based on five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). We assessed consumers' attitude towards the conflict management strategy using a scale by Nan and Heo (2007): 'The organization's reaction is: fair, justified, appropriate, acceptable' ( $\alpha=0.94$ ). Consumers' attitudes towards the extent of the organization's social responsibility efforts was assessed using Wagner, Lutz & Weitz's (2009) scale: 'WSEFC is a socially responsible organization', 'WSEFC is

concerned to improve the well-being of others’ and ‘WSEFC follows high ethical standards’ ( $\alpha=0.9$ ).

As manipulation checks, participants rated the conflict content orientation on an eight-point semantic differential scale (1 = ‘about animal welfare’, 8 = ‘about personal health’). Realism of the conflict management strategy (‘The way WSEFC reacted is realistic (it could have happened on Facebook)’ was also rated on an eight-point semantic differential scale (1 = strongly agree, 8 = strongly disagree).

We further included several control variables (Likert scales, 1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree). We assessed participants’ involvement with the conflict content orientation (‘Animal cruelty is important to me’; ‘My personal health is important to me’; see Kronrod, Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012b), conflict management expectations (‘I expect that WSEFC will take some action to moderate similar discussions’; see McCollough, Berry & Yadav, 2000) and perceived conflict severity (‘I think that comments like these are upsetting’; see Coyne, Archer & Eslea, 2006).

#### **4.4.4. Findings**

##### *Manipulation checks and control variables*

We used cross-tabulation employing a  $\chi^2$  test to assess whether respondents correctly identified that the simulated C2C conflict revolves around either personal health or animal welfare. The results show that all respondents correctly identified the C2C conflict content orientation  $\chi^2(7, 512) = 512.00, p<0.01$  and confirmed that the respondents mostly agreed to the scenarios’ realism  $\chi^2(35, 512) = 46.15, p<0.05$ . Studies indicate that the perceived importance of an ethical issue (Kronrod et al., 2012b), the perceived severity of the discussion (De Vries, Gensler & Leeflang, 2012)

and expectations of discussion moderation (McCullough et al., 2000) have an influence on the tested variables. However, when including these in our analyses, the effects remained the same.

#### *Attitude towards conflict management*

A 2 x 6 two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the type of conflict management strategy had a significant main effect ( $F_{(5, 512)} = 8.43, p < 0.01, \eta^2 = 0.08$ ), while the content orientation of C2C conflicts did not ( $F_{(1, 512)} = 0.8, p > 0.05$ ). Results of Tukey HSD post hoc multiple comparison tests identified that participants exposed to the *pacifying* ( $M = 1.73, SD = 0.73$ ) and *mobilizing* ( $M = 2.02, SD = 0.9$ ) strategies were significantly more favorable in their attitudes towards conflict management compared to *bolstering* ( $M = 2.14, SD = 0.97$ ), *educating* ( $M = 2.31, SD = 1.02$ ), *censoring* ( $M = 2.51, SD = 1.08$ ), and *non-engaging* ( $M = 2.51, SD = 0.98$ ). However, the tests did not identify significant differences between *pacifying* and *mobilizing* or between, *bolstering*, *educating*, *censoring*, and *non-engaging*.

The ANOVA also revealed an interaction effect ( $F_{(5, 512)} = 2.42, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.02$ ). One-way ANOVAs indicated that in the personal-health-oriented C2C conflict ( $F_{(5, 216)} = 5.49, p < 0.01$ ), respondents favored *mobilizing* ( $M = 1.7, SD = 0.7$ ) and *pacifying* ( $M = 1.73, SD = 0.76$ ) over *non-engaging* ( $M = 2.61, SD = 1.1, p < 0.01$ ) and *censoring* ( $M = 2.41, SD = 1.11, p < 0.05$ ). The remaining strategies (*bolstering* and *educating*) did not yield significant results. In contrast, in the animal-cruelty-oriented C2C conflict ( $F_{(5, 296)} = 5.45, p < 0.01$ ), *pacifying* ( $M = 1.73, SD = 0.72$ ) and *bolstering* ( $M = 2.01, SD = 0.94$ ) were rated more favorably compared with *censoring* ( $M = 2.57, SD = 1.07, p < 0.05$ ). In addition, compared with *educating* ( $M = 2.44, SD = 1.08, p < 0.01$ ) and *non-engaging* ( $M = 2.43, SD = 0.88, p < 0.01$ ), *pacifying* alone was rated more favorably by the

respondents. No significant differences were found between *pacifying* and *bolstering*, and between *bolstering*, *educating*, *mobilizing*, and *non-engaging*.

#### *Attitude towards the organization's social responsibility*

A 2 x 6 two-way ANOVA to assess respondents' attitudes toward the extent of organization's social responsibility revealed that the type of conflict management strategy had a significant main effect on consumers' perceptions of the organization's social responsibility ( $F_{(5, 512)} = 2.45, p < .05, \eta^2 = 0.02$ ). Follow-up post hoc tests using Tukey HSD revealed that participants exposed to *pacifying* ( $M = 2.08, SD = 0.83$ ) perceived the organization to be more socially responsible than those exposed to *censoring* ( $M = 2.47, SD = 0.91, p < 0.05$ ). No significant differences were found between these and the other conflict management strategies (i.e. *non-engaging*, *bolstering*, *educating*, and *mobilizing*), or between any of the remaining conflict management strategies.

We did not find a significant main effect for the content orientation of the C2C conflict ( $F_{(1, 512)} = 0.00, p > 0.05$ ), nor a significant interaction effect between the C2C conflict and the conflict management strategies ( $F_{(5, 512)} = 1.58, p > 0.05$ ). Hence, content orientation (i.e. revolving around self or others' benefits) does not appear to influence consumers' attitudes toward the organization's level of social responsibility.

#### **4.4.5. General discussion**

Studies on managing C2C conflicts in social media fan pages are in need for more research (Johnson & Lowe, 2015; Labrecque et al., 2013; Matzat & Rooks, 2014). Previous work focuses on how NPOs use social media in order to enhance the positive aspect of interactions among its consumers (e.g. Nah & Saxton, 2012). Little is known,

however, about managing negative interactions between consumers i.e. C2C conflicts. The present study, therefore, offers two contributions. First, it identifies managerial strategies that a non-profit organization employs to manage C2C conflicts on their Facebook fan page. Second, it assesses how different conflict management strategies affect consumers' attitudes about the organizations' approach towards conflict management as well as the extent of the organization's social responsibility.

### *Implications for research*

Our findings offer several theoretical contributions. First, we show that pacifying is the most favored conflict management strategy, irrespective of whether the conflict content orientation revolves around issues related to self-benefits or issues related to others' benefits. Past studies suggest that requesting compliance may negatively affect social interactions between consumers (Mele, 2011) and potentially intensify a conflict (Friedman, Tidd, Currall & Tsai, 2000). In contrast, we demonstrate that users of Facebook fan pages actually favor such a strategy over others. Moreover, our findings provide empirical support that pacifying generates favorable social responsibility perceptions among consumers, complementing past studies on the general positive effects of organizations' verbalizing their perceived responsibility (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore & Hill, 2006; Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Considering that we did not observe this preferable strategy in our netnography, one may speculate that organizations are keen to encourage a wide range of opinions and views (Guo & Saxton, 2014), rather than to appear restrictive. However, this may vary in relation to the behavioral standards set out by the community host (Matzat, 2009), and we recommend future research to investigate such variations.

Second, our findings indicate that when self-benefit versus other-benefit content orientations are activated, other conflict management strategies in addition to pacifying are favored by consumers. Contrary to Yoon, Choi and Song (2011) who put forward that consumers may perceive it as a breach of their freedom of choice, we found that mobilizing is an appropriate strategy for managing self-benefit C2C conflicts. Our findings support past studies which highlight mobilizing as one of the key functions of NPOs' fan pages (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), and we are first to show that it is in fact an effective means to manage C2C conflicts. Mobilizing is the only strategy which supports social exchange theorists' view that promoting self-benefits is more effective in influencing consumer attitudes than other-benefits (White & Peloza, 2009).

When managing other-benefit conflicts between consumers, bolstering and pacifying elicit favorable consumer attitudes. Bolstering is a conflict management strategy whereby the organization encourages consumers to continue to support the organization's mission and related activities through affirming their opinions (de Hooge, Verlegh & Tzioti, 2014; Schamari & Schaefer, 2015). Bolstering may further be linked to the concept of consumer empowerment, which others have already proposed as a way of reducing consumer aggression (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Labrecque et al., 2013). In contrast, mobilizing and bolstering do not have an effect on the consumers' attitudes toward the organization's social responsibility efforts. In support of this, Du et al. (2010) and Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013) argue that when the organization's social responsibility-related communication has an evident self-interest (i.e. mobilizing action relating to the organization's mission; encouraging behaviors that support the organization's objectives), consumers' attitudes and behaviors may

remain unaffected. This is due their suspicion about the organizations' social responsibility motives.

Third, the findings from Study 1 show that non-engaging is the most passive and frequently occurring strategy. Past research shows that lack of responsiveness to negative C2C interactions can be detrimental to company-hosted social media fan pages (Adjei, Nowlin & Ang, 2016; Waters & Jamal, 2011). Our results are consistent with these findings, as we found that non-engaging is perceived unfavorably by consumers in both the self-benefit and other-benefit oriented C2C conflicts.

Fourth, censoring is another conflict management strategy that generates unfavorable consumer attitudes across both conflict content orientations. In Study 1, we showed that this strategy was used infrequently and exclusively in situations where consumers demand it. In relation to this, past research has demonstrated that NPOs often actively promote their commitment to diverse comments and opinions (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012), and thus censoring may appear controversial in this context. Furthermore, we found that consumer perceptions of the organization's level of social responsibility are less favorable when censoring is used, compared with the pacifying approach. This is consistent with past research which found that deleting customer comments may be seen as impeding freedom of expression, which in turn results in damaging the organization's credibility (Cohen-Almagor, 2012). Alternatively, pacifying is regarded more positively through proactively engaging with consumers (Ndubisi, 2012) and proposes modified behaviors.

### *Implications for practice*

Conflict management in Facebook fan pages takes place in the public sphere where an entire network of active and passive fan page users can be continuously observed in order to identify the ways in which the organization manages conflicts. Since consumers' attitudes and perceptions vary depending on which conflict management strategy is used, NPOs are advised to carefully select strategies which fit their desired outcomes. In this section, we provide some initial recommendations in relation to this.

We offer a number of active strategies that are applicable to different types of C2C conflicts which occur in social media fan pages. Our study identifies that asking consumers involved in a C2C conflict to adjust their communication behavior or style (i.e. pacifying) leads to favorable customer attitudes irrespective of the conflict content. Moreover, using pacifying to manage C2C conflicts has a positive impact on the consumers' perceptions of the organization's social responsibility. Therefore, pacifying is an appropriate choice for NPOs that want to optimize their conflict management practices on social media fan pages. In addition, based on our findings we recommend that mobilizing is well-suited to managing C2C conflicts that revolve around ethical issues relevant to the self (e.g. the consequences of dairy consumption on personal health). Moreover, mobilizing not only generates favorable consumer attitudes toward an organization's conflict management practices, but also further encourages consumers to take action towards an ethical issue that the organization already promotes. Contrary to this, bolstering is appropriate for managing C2C conflicts resulting from ethical issues relevant to others (e.g. the consequences of dairy consumption on animal cruelty). Nonetheless, non-profit community moderators should be aware that bolstering is favored by consumers who are likely already involved with the organization's cause. As a consequence, the strategy could further encourage like-



minded consumers to voice their opinions. Despite the fact that non-engaging is the most common conflict management strategy we observed, we encourage NPOs to move away from passive, non-engagement to more active conflict management. This is because consumers do not hold favorable attitudes towards non-engaging strategies to manage C2C conflicts. We also found that although censoring is irregularly used, it does not yield favorable customer attitudes or beliefs about the extent of the organization's social responsibility. Therefore, we recommend that community managers refrain from using censoring unless consumers specifically demand it, as revealed in our observations of a NPO's social media fan page.

#### **4.4.6. Conclusions**

This research set out to identify the nature of conflicts between consumers on NPOs' online fan pages, the strategies adopted by these organizations in managing such conflicts, and differences in consumers' attitudes and perceptions in regard to those strategies. The findings across both studies undertaken reveal that the types of conflict apparent can be classified as those oriented towards the self and those associated with others. Strategies vary across a range of active and passive approaches, but it is generally apparent that those most-often-adopted do not involve the organization intervening in the conflict. Evidence also suggests that these strategies are selected in line with specific organizational objectives, which is consistent with previous research in the for-profit sector (Dineva et al., 2017). However, findings generally in regard to consumers' attitudes and perceptions about the different strategies identify that a more proactive approach involving a pacifying and mobilizing strategies in particular, promotes a more favorable attitudinal response from consumers and enhances

perceptions about the organization's social responsibility efforts. In addition, there is evidence of some variation of attitudes across the two conflict orientation types which emphasizes the desirability of different strategies and their effect on perceptions of the extent of the organization's social responsibility. Yet it is clear that although censoring involves active engagement in managing conflict, it is deemed as undesirable in comparison with adopting a pacifying strategy, especially in terms of perceived social responsibility. This is particularly important in a non-profit context as perceptions about social responsibility efforts has been highlighted in the public relations literature as being critical in influencing stakeholders' attitudes which in turn can affect the organization's reputation, legitimacy, purchase intention and loyalty (see Waters & Ott, 2014).

The limitations of our research provide guidance for avenues of further investigation. Although the findings from Study 1 are the first to examine conflict management in non-profit social media fan pages, the strategies were obtained from a single social media fan page. This form of purposive sampling is common in exploratory research when a new phenomenon is studied and generalization is not the primary purpose of research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Future research should therefore calibrate the present findings using several social media fan pages from different non-profit backgrounds, and hosted on additional social media channels to Facebook (e.g. Twitter, Instagram) to increase the generalizability of the findings (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012). Another opportunity for further research concerns the examination of the current topic in more realistic settings. Despite the fact that the manipulations were based on real world examples, Study 2 was conducted in a controlled experimental setting. Future research may study the phenomenon in a realistic environment (e.g. field experiment using actual social media content) in order to enhance external validity. The


data were collected through a Qualtrics panel, which has its limitations among which are participant self-selection, multiple submissions and inattentive responses as a result of incentivizing participation. While these were addressed during the data collection period through careful responses screening, future research may replicate the study by collecting data from real online communities based on Facebook. Lastly, some of the participants' demographic characteristics may have influenced their preference over certain conflict management strategies. We exclusively studied an American sample which necessitates the replication of the current study across different (more collectivistic) cultures.

## Appendix A. Conflict content orientation

### A.1 Self-benefit (personal health) conflict content orientation

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption)** ✓  
3 hrs

Dairy consumption is bad for your personal health!





👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share


👍❤️👎 222


33 shares

 **James Nickols** The idea that consuming dairy products is bad for your health is ridiculous!  
17 minutes ago · Like

 **Rose Johns** Really? seriously you think that dairy consumption is not bad for your health?? go educate yourself!!  
15 minutes ago · Like

 **James Nickols** Yes dairy consumption is not bad for your health you idiot! Besides personal health is over-rated.  
10 minutes ago · Like

 **Sam Sanford** James Nickols you are the idiot! Dairy products are bad for humans. Think about your well-being!  
9 minutes ago · Like

 **Miranda Evans** James Nickols you're an asshole! Your rationalization of dairy consumption tells us everything we need to know about you. Monster!  
6 minutes ago · Like

 **James Nickols** Miranda Evans you and your tree hugging friends can mind your own damn business!  
4 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

## A.2 Other-benefit (animal welfare) conflict content orientation

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption)**   
3 hrs

Dairy consumption leads to animal cruelty!



 Like  Comment  Share

   222

33 shares

 **James Nickols** The idea that consuming dairy products is linked to animal cruelty is ridiculous!  
17 minutes ago · Like

 **Rose Johns** Really? seriously you think that dairy consumption is not related to animal cruelty?? go educate yourself!!  
15 minutes ago · Like

 **James Nickols** Yes dairy consumption is not cruel you idiot! Besides animal cruelty is over-rated.  
10 minutes ago · Like

 **Sam Sanford** James Nickols you are the idiot! Dairy products are bad for animals. Think about their well-being!  
9 minutes ago · Like

 **Miranda Evans** James Nickols you're an asshole! Your rationalization of dairy consumption tells us everything we need to know about you. Monster!  
6 minutes ago · Like

 **James Nickols** Miranda Evans you and your tree hugging friends can mind your own damn business!  
4 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

## Appendix B. Conflict management strategies

### B.1 Non-engaging and censoring

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption)** ✓  
2 hrs

200,000 likes!!! Thank you all for your support!



 Like  Comment  Share

  206 Top comments ▾

### B.2 Pacifying

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption):** Swearing will not be tolerated, so can we please watch the language.  
11 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

### B.3 Bolstering

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption):** Thank you all who support our cause!  
11 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

#### B.4 Educating – self-benefit content orientation

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption):** Experts agree that as much as 90% of health problems can be related to dairy consumption.  
11 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

#### B.5 Educating – other-benefit content orientation

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption):** Experts agree that as much as 90% of the dairy industry involves some form of animal cruelty.  
11 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

#### B.6 Mobilizing – self-benefit content orientation

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption):** Please consider dairy-free alternatives and do your health a favor!  
11 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

#### B.7 Mobilizing – other-benefit content orientation

 **WSEFC (World Society for Ethical Food Consumption):** Please consider dairy-free alternatives and do the animals a favor!  
11 minutes ago · Like

 Write a comment ...

## Paper references

- Adjei, M. T., Nowlin, E. L., & Ang, T. (2016). The Collateral Damage of C2C Communications on Social Networking Sites: The Moderating Role of Firm Responsiveness and Perceived Fairness. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 24(2), 166-185. doi: [10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057)
- Alden, D. L., Kelley, J. B., Youn, J. B., & Chen, Q. (2016). Understanding consumer motivations to interact on brand websites in the international marketplace: Evidence from the US, China, and South Korea. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), 5909-5916. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.108](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.108)
- Becker-Olsen, K. L., Cudmore, B. A., & Hill, R. P. (2006). The impact of perceived corporate social responsibility on consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(1), 46-53. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2005.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2005.01.001)
- Ben-Zur, H., & Yagil, D. (2005). The relationship between empowerment, aggressive behaviours of customers, coping, and burnout. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 14(1), 81-99. doi: [10.1080/13594320444000281](https://doi.org/10.1080/13594320444000281)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi: [10.1191/1478088706qp063oa](https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2014). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 57–71). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Bray, J., Johns, N., & Kilburn, D. (2011). An exploratory study into the factors impeding ethical consumption. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 98(4), 597-608. doi: [10.1007/s10551-010-0640-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-010-0640-9)



- Breitsohl, J., Roschk, H., & Feyertag, C. (2018). Consumer Brand Bullying Behaviour in Online Communities of Service Firms. In *Service Business Development* (pp. 289-312). Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden.
- Buckels, E. E., Trapnell, P. D., & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Trolls just want to have fun. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 67, 97-102. doi: [10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.016)
- Burke, P., Eckert, C., & Davis, S. (2014). Segmenting consumers' reasons for and against ethical consumption. *European Journal of Marketing*, 48(11/12), 2237-2261. doi: [10.1108/EJM-06-2013-0294](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-06-2013-0294)
- Carrington, M. J., Neville, B. A., & Whitwell, G. J. (2014). Lost in translation: Exploring the ethical consumer intention–behavior gap. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(1), 2759-2767. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.022](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.022)
- Chan, K. W., & Li, S. Y. (2010). Understanding consumer-to-consumer interactions in virtual communities: The salience of reciprocity. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(9-10), 1033-1040. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.08.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.08.009)
- Cohen-Almagor, R. (2012). Freedom of expression, internet responsibility, and business ethics: The Yahoo! saga and its implications. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 106(3), 353-365. doi: [10.1007/s10551-011-1001-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1001-z)
- Coyne, S. M., Archer, J., & Eslea, M. (2006). “We're not friends anymore! Unless...”: The frequency and harmfulness of indirect, relational, and social aggression. *Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression*, 32(4), 294-307. doi: [10.1002/ab.20126](https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20126)

- De Almeida, S. O., Dholakia, U. M., Hernandez, J. M. C., & Mazzon, J. A. (2014). The mixed effects of participant diversity and expressive freedom in online peer-to-peer problem solving communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(3), 196-209. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.02.003)
- De Hooge, I. E., Verlegh, P. W., & Tzioti, S. C. (2014). Emotions in advice taking: The roles of agency and valence. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 27(3), 246-258. doi: [10.1002/bdm.1801](https://doi.org/10.1002/bdm.1801)
- De Valck, K. (2007). The war of the etribes: Online conflicts and communal consumption. In B. Cova, R. V. Kozinets, & A. Shankar (Eds.), *Consumer tribes* (pp. 260–275). Oxford: Elsevier.
- De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. S. (2012). Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: An investigation of the effects of social media marketing. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 83-91. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003)
- Dineva, D. P., Breitsohl, J. C., & Garrod, B. (2017). Corporate conflict management on social media brand fan pages. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 1-20. doi: [10.1080/0267257X.2017.1329225](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1329225)
- Du, S., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Sen, S. (2010). Maximizing business returns to corporate social responsibility (CSR): The role of CSR communication. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12(1), 8-19. doi: [10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00276.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00276.x)
- Emerson, R. M. (1976). Social exchange theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2(1), 335-362. doi: [10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003)

- Ensari, N., Camden-Anders, S., & Schlaerth, A. (2015). *Constructive management and resolution of conflict*. In H. S. Friedman (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Mental Health* (Vol. 1, pp. 340-349). Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Ewing, M. T., Wagstaff, P. E., & Powell, I. H. (2013). Brand rivalry and community conflict. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(1), 4–12. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.017)
- Fisher, R. J., Vandenbosch, M., & Antia, K. D. (2008). An empathy-helping perspective on consumers' responses to fund-raising appeals. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *35*(3), 519-531. doi: [10.1086/586909](https://doi.org/10.1086/586909)
- Fisk, R., Grove, S., Harris, L. C., Keeffe, D. A., Daunt, K. L., Russell-Bennett, R., & Wirtz, J. (2010). Customers behaving badly: A state of the art review, research agenda and implications for practitioners. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *24*(6), 417-429. doi: [10.1108/08876041011072537](https://doi.org/10.1108/08876041011072537)
- Freestone, O. M., & McGoldrick, P. J. (2008). Motivations of the ethical consumer. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *79*(4), 445-467. doi: [10.1007/s10551-007-9409-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9409-1)
- Friedman, R. A., Tidd, S. T., Currall, S. C., & Tsai, J. C. (2000). What goes around comes around: The impact of personal conflict style on work conflict and stress. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, *11*(1), 32-55. doi: [10.1108/eb022834](https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022834)
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, *20*(9), 1408-1416. Retrieved from: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol20/iss9/3>
- Gebauer, J., Füller, J., & Pezzeri, R. (2013). The dark and the bright side of co-creation: Triggers of member behavior in online innovation communities. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(9), 1516-1527. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.013)

- Godes, D., Mayzlin, D., Chen, Y., Das, S., Dellarocas, C., Pfeiffer, B., Libai, S., Sen, S., Shi, M., & Verlegh, P. (2005). The firm's management of social interactions. *Marketing Letters*, 16(3-4), 415-428. doi: [10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4)
- Green, T., & Peloza, J. (2014). Finding the right shade of green: The effect of advertising appeal type on environmentally friendly consumption. *Journal of Advertising*, 43(2), 128-141. doi: [10.1080/00913367.2013.834805](https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2013.834805)
- Guo, C., & Saxton, G. D. (2014). Tweeting social change: How social media are changing nonprofit advocacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(1), 57-79. doi: [10.1177/0899764012471585](https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012471585)
- Hauser, F., Hautz, J., Hutter, K., & Füller, J. (2017). Firestorms: Modeling conflict diffusion and management strategies in online communities. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 26(4), 285-321. doi: [10.1016/j.jsis.2017.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsis.2017.01.002)
- Homburg, C., Ehm, L., & Artz, M. (2015). Measuring and managing consumer sentiment in an online community environment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 52(5), 629-641. doi: [10.1509/jmr.11.0448](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0448)
- Husemann, K., Ladstaetter, F. & Luedicke, M., (2015). Conflict culture and conflict management in consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 265-284. doi: [10.1002/mar.20779](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20779)
- Illia, L., Romenti, S., Rodríguez-Cánovas, B., Murtarelli, G., & Carroll, C. E. (2017). Exploring corporations' dialogue about CSR in the digital era. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 146(1), 39-58. doi: [10.1007/s10551-015-2924-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2924-6)

- Johnson, D. S., & Lowe, B. (2015). Emotional support, perceived corporate ownership and skepticism toward out-groups in virtual communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 29, 1-10. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002)
- Kornum, N., Gyrð-Jones, R., Al Zagir, N., & Brandis, K. A. (2017). Interplay between intended brand identity and identities in a Nike related brand community: Co-existing synergies and tensions in a nested system. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 432-440. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.06.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.06.019)
- Kozinets, R.V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72. doi: [10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935)
- Kronrod, A., Grinstein, A., & Wathieu, L. (2012a). Enjoy! Hedonic consumption and compliance with assertive messages. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(1), 51-61. doi: [10.1086/661933](https://doi.org/10.1086/661933)
- Kronrod, A., Grinstein, A., & Wathieu, L. (2012b). Go green! Should environmental messages be so assertive? *Journal of Marketing*, 76(1), 95-102. doi: [10.1509/jm.10.0416](https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.10.0416)
- Labrecque, L. I., vor dem Esche, J., Mathwick, C., Novak, T. P., & Hofacker, C. F. (2013). Consumer power: Evolution in the digital age. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 257-269. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002)
- Lee, Y. K., Kim, S., Kim, M. S., & Choi, J. G. (2014). Antecedents and interrelationships of three types of pro-environmental behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(10), 2097-2105. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.04.018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.04.018)

- Lichtenstein, D. R., Drumwright, M. E., & Braig, B. M. (2004). The effect of corporate social responsibility on customer donations to corporate-supported nonprofits. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(4), 16-32. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.68.4.16.42726](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.4.16.42726)
- Liu, W., & Aaker, J. (2008). The happiness of giving: The time-ask effect. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(3), 543-557. doi: [10.1086/588699](https://doi.org/10.1086/588699)
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 337-353. doi: [10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x)
- Matzat, U. (2009). A theory of relational signals in online groups. *New Media & Society*, 11(3), 375-394. doi: [10.1177/1461444808101617](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444808101617)
- Matzat, U., & Rooks, G. (2014). Styles of moderation in online health and support communities: An experimental comparison of their acceptance and effectiveness. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 36, 65-75. doi: [10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.03.043)
- Mathur, A. (1996). Older adults' motivations for gift giving to charitable organizations: An exchange theory perspective. *Psychology & Marketing*, 13(1), 107-123. doi: [10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6793\(199601\)13:1<107::AID-MAR6>3.0.CO;2-K](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199601)13:1<107::AID-MAR6>3.0.CO;2-K)
- Mathwick, C., Wiertz, C., & De Ruyter, K. (2007). Social capital production in a virtual P3 community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(6), 832-849. doi: [10.1086/523291](https://doi.org/10.1086/523291)
- McCollough, M. A., Berry, L. L., & Yadav, M. S. (2000). An empirical investigation of customer satisfaction after service failure and recovery. *Journal of Service Research*, 3(2), 121-137. doi: [10.1177/109467050032002](https://doi.org/10.1177/109467050032002)

- Mele, C. (2011). Conflicts and value co-creation in project networks. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(8), 1377-1385. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.033](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.033)
- Minson, J. A., & Monin, B. (2012). Do-gooder derogation: Disparaging morally motivated minorities to defuse anticipated reproach. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 3(2), 200-207. doi: [10.1177/1948550611415695](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611415695)
- Nah, S., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Modeling the adoption and use of social media by nonprofit organizations. *New Media & Society*, 15(2), 294-313. doi: [10.1177/1461444812452411](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812452411)
- Nan, X., & Heo, K. (2007). Consumer responses to corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives: Examining the role of brand-cause fit in cause-related marketing. *Journal of Advertising*, 36(2), 63-74. doi: [10.2753/JOA0091-3367360204](https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367360204)
- Ndubisi, N. O. (2012). Mindfulness, reliability, pre-emptive conflict handling, customer orientation and outcomes in Malaysia's healthcare sector. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(4), 537-546. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.02.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.02.019)
- Pew Research Center, (2017). Online harassment. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2017/07/11/online-harassment-2017/>
- Pfeffer, J., Zorbach, T., & Carley, K. M. (2014). Understanding online firestorms: Negative word-of-mouth dynamics in social media networks. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 20(1-2), 117-128. doi: [10.1080/13527266.2013.797778](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.797778)
- Reeves, S., Kuper, A. & Hodges, B.D. (2008). Qualitative research methodologies: Ethnography. *British Medical Journal*, 337(7668), 512-514. doi: [10.1136/bmj.a1020](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a1020)

- Ruvio, A., & Belk, R. (2018). Strategies of the extended self: The role of possessions in transpeople's conflicted selves. *Journal of Business Research*, 88, 102-110. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.03.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.03.014)
- Saxton, G. D., & Wang, L. (2014). The social network effect: The determinants of giving through social media. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 43(5), 850-868. doi: [10.1177/0899764013485159](https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764013485159)
- Saxton, G. D., & Waters, R. D. (2014). What do stakeholders like on Facebook? Examining public reactions to nonprofit organizations' informational, promotional, and community-building messages. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(3), 280-299. doi: [10.1080/1062726X.2014.908721](https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2014.908721)
- Schamari, J., & Schaefer, T. (2015). Leaving the home turf: how brands can use webcare on consumer-generated platforms to increase positive consumer engagement. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 30, 20-33. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.12.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.12.001)
- Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30-51. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.5.30)
- Schröder, M.J. & McEachern, M.G., (2004). Consumer value conflicts surrounding ethical food purchase decisions: a focus on animal welfare. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 28(2), pp.168-177. doi: [10.1111/j.1470-6431.2003.00357.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2003.00357.x)
- Shaw, D., & Newholm, T. (2002). Voluntary simplicity and the ethics of consumption. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(2), 167-185. doi: [10.1002/mar.10008](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.10008)
- Sibai, O., de Valck, K., Farrell, A. M., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social control in online communities of consumption: A framework for community management. *Psychology & Marketing*, 32(3), 250-264. doi: [10.1002/mar.20778](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20778)



- Skarmeas, D., & Leonidou, C. N. (2013). When consumers doubt, watch out! The role of CSR skepticism. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(10), 1831-1838. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.02.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.02.004)
- Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2012). How does brand-related user-generated content differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(2), 102-113. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.002)
- Sudbury-Riley, L., & Kohlbacher, F. (2016). Ethically minded consumer behavior: Scale review, development, and validation. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 2697-2710. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.11.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.11.005)
- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 77-100. doi: [10.1177/2345678906292430](https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292430)
- Thomas, C.T., Price, L., & Schau, J. (2013). When differences unite: Resource dependence in heterogeneous consumption communities, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 1010-1033. doi: [10.1086/666616](https://doi.org/10.1086/666616)
- Van Noort, G., & Willemsen, L. M. (2012). Online damage control: The effects of proactive versus reactive webcare interventions in consumer-generated and brand-generated platforms. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 26(3), 131-140. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.003)
- Yoon, S., Choi, Y. K., & Song, S. (2011). When intrusive can be likable. *Journal of Advertising*, 40(2), 63-76. doi: [10.2753/JOA0091-3367400205](https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367400205)
- Wagner, T., Lutz, R. J., & Weitz, B. A. (2009). Corporate hypocrisy: Overcoming the threat of inconsistent corporate social responsibility perceptions. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(6), 77-91. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.73.6.77](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.6.77)

- Wang, X., Yu, C., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social media peer communication and impacts on purchase intentions: A consumer socialization framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26*(4), 198-208. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2011.11.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2011.11.004)
- Waters, R. D., & Jamal, J. Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review, 37*(3), 321-324. doi: [10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002)
- Waters, R. D., & Ott, H. K. (2014). Corporate social responsibility and the nonprofit sector: Assessing the thoughts and practices across three nonprofit subsectors., *Public and Non-profit Administration, 8*(3), 1-18. Retrieved from: <http://www.prsa.org/intelligence/prjournal/vol8/no3/#.VXC2Lkbis8A>
- White, K., & Peloza, J. (2009). Self-benefit versus other-benefit marketing appeals: Their effectiveness in generating charitable support. *Journal of Marketing, 73*(4), 109-124. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.73.4.109](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.4.109)
- Yang, D., Lu, Y., Zhu, W., & Su, C. (2015). Going green: How different advertising appeals impact green consumption behavior. *Journal of Business Research, 68*(12), 2663-2675. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.04.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.04.004)
- Ye, N., Teng, L., Yu, Y., & Wang, Y. (2015). "What's in it for me?": The effect of donation outcomes on donation behavior. *Journal of Business Research, 68*(3), 480-486. doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.09.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.09.015)
- Zane, D. M., Irwin, J. R., & Reczek, R. W. (2015). Do less ethical consumers denigrate more ethical consumers? The effect of willful ignorance on judgments of others. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 26*(3), 337-349. doi: [10.2139/ssrn.2678534](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2678534)

## CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to develop a typology of conflict management strategies based on existing company practice. In particular, emphasis was placed on the following two broad research aims:

- Gaining an insight on the conflict management strategies companies use to address C2C conflict in their online communities on Facebook.
- Assessing the effect of different conflict management strategies on consumer outcomes.

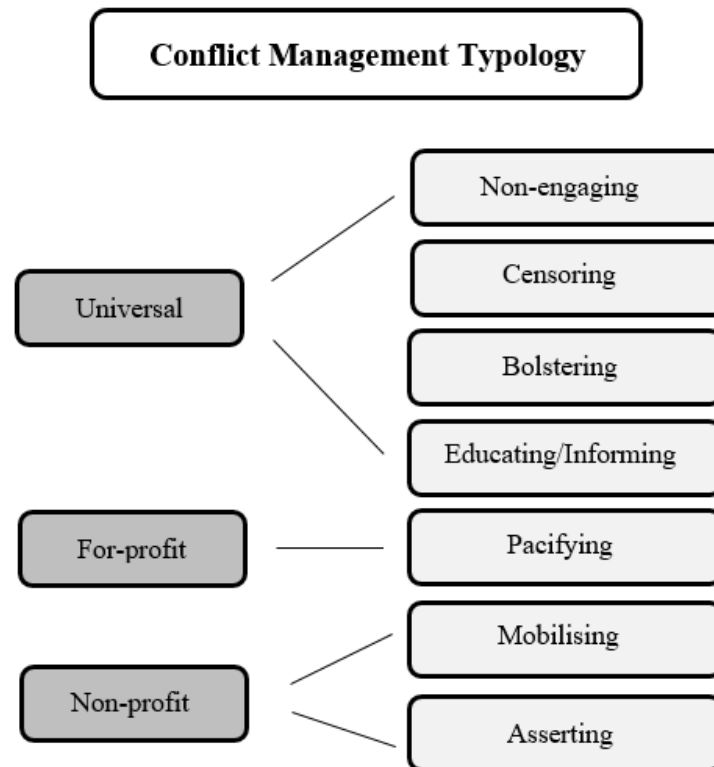
Based on the findings from the three-phase research, this chapter discusses the theoretical contributions to the marketing literature the thesis makes together with the implications for marketing managers. Future research directions and limitations are also provided here.

### 5.1. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

This section gathers together the results from the papers that form the core of this thesis and offers some broad theoretical contributions to complement the discussions provided in the separate papers.

First, the results contribute to the marketing literature by offering a typology of strategies for-profit and non-profit organisations use to manage consumer conflicts in their online communities on Facebook. These strategies can be grouped into universal, for-profit-specific and non-profit-specific and include – non-engaging, censoring, bolstering, educating/informing, pacifying, mobilising and asserting, as shown in

Figure 8. From the qualitative observations conducted in Paper 1 and Paper 2, it became apparent that non-engaging, censoring, bolstering and educating/informing are strategies applicable to both for-profit and non-profit contexts. Pacifying was exclusively uncovered in the for-profit context, while mobilising and asserting are non-profit-specific.



**Figure 8** A typology of conflict management in online consumption communities

From all strategies identified, non-engaging is the most-frequently-used strategy by both for-profit and non-profit organisations. The strategy refers to the company not taking any action to moderate the consumer conflict(s). Studies from marketing and other disciplines have uncovered this strategy in the past e.g. avoiding/ignoring (Rahim, 2002), observing/remaining silent (Godes et al., 2005; Homburg, Ehm & Artz, 2015). This passive organisational role in the management of conflicts has been suggested by

others to be either intentional (i.e. the organisation simply collects information about customers without engaging) (Homburg et al., 2015) or non-intentional (i.e. the organisation ignores/fails to address C2C conflicts) (Adjei, Nowlin & Ang, 2016). Censoring, in contrast, is an active strategy whereby the company permanently removes consumer comments. In both contexts (for-profit and non-profit) censoring was used most infrequently and, in some instances, exclusively when consumers demand it. Censoring in the form of member exclusion from a community has been observed and recorded in past studies on conflict management (Husemann, Ladstaetter, & Luedicke 2015; Sibai, de Valck, Farrell & Rudd, 2015). Arguably, in the for-profit context companies refrain from using censoring due to negative consumer perceptions resulting from having their freedom of expression online restricted (Mosteller & Mathwick, 2014). Likewise, in the non-profit context, censoring will restrict the organisation from encouraging diverse and sometimes conflicting opinions on an ethical consumption issue which they may aim to promote (Guo & Saxton, 2014; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

In contrast to sanctioning undesirable consumer comment(s), bolstering positively affirms a consumer comment, which is perceived to support the brand or an ethical (consumption) issue. In relation to this, past studies have demonstrated that companies use various communication strategies online among which are the ones that empower the consumer and generate advocacy (Cova & Pace, 2006; Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Nonetheless, bolstering represents a novel contribution since a bolstering strategy has not been previously identified in the marketing literature on conflict management. A fourth strategy identified during the qualitative phases of this research project was “informing” in the for-profit context and “educating” in the non-profit context. The similarities between the two strategies lie in providing information about

an (ethical) consumption issue or the product/ the company. In relation to this, Dholakia, Blazevic, Wiertz and Algesheimer (2009) found that customers have expectations of companies to provide reliable information online. Lovejoy and Saxton (2012) further demonstrated that a key function of non-profit organisations' communication on social media sites is to provide information about the organisation's activities and mission. Thus, informing and educating not only represent contributions to the marketing literature on conflict management, but also complement past findings on corporate/organisational communication strategies online.

Pacifying, on the contrary, is an authoritative strategy and specific to the for-profit context. Other studies have previously proposed similar strategies to manage negative customer behaviours e.g. bureaucratic control mechanisms (Bijlsma-Frankema & Koopman, 2004), competitive-dominating (Lee, 2005). The strategy was infrequently used by for-profit companies which could be due to company fears that it may negatively impact the interactions with consumers, as pointed out by Mele (2011).

The last two strategies identified during the qualitative phases are mobilising and asserting. These were used to manage consumer conflicts specifically in the non-profit context. The two strategies are novel contributions to the marketing literature on conflict management. On the one hand, mobilising has previously been discussed as a general communication strategy adopted by non-profit organisations in their social media fan pages (Guo & Saxton, 2014). While it may be useful in generating consumer advocacy and support, scholars warn that consumers may resist a company's attempts to mobilize action, if they regard them as a breach of their freedom of choice (Yoon, Choi & Song, 2011). On the other hand, an assertive tone in digital marketing communications has been discussed in both non-profit domains, e.g. recycling (Kronrod, Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012a), and for-profit domains, e.g. sportswear

consumption (Kronrod, Grinstein & Wathieu, 2012b). The findings here thus contribute to this debate by linking assertiveness to conflict management strategies in online communities.

Second, the thesis demonstrates that the identified strategies have differential impact on consumer attitudes towards conflict management and towards their perceptions about the organisation's social responsibility. This is particularly pronounced when the consumer conflicts revolve around different ethical consumption issues i.e. the implications of dairy consumption on animal welfare (issues related to others) or personal health (issues related to the self). Contrary to previous suggestions that pacifying may damage the organisation's social interactions with consumers (Mele, 2011), the results from the quantitative phase show that pacifying is perceived favourably by consumers and generates positive perceptions regarding the organisation's social responsibility efforts. Moreover, such positive attitudes and perceptions are generated in both types of consumer conflicts: the ones revolving around animal welfare and the ones revolving around personal health.

In addition to pacifying, the results showed that other strategies are perceived favourably depending on the type of conflict. For personal-health-related conflicts, findings indicated that mobilising is an appropriate strategy. Thus, in the context of mobilising, the notion that consumers' attitudes and behaviours can be influenced when the benefits to the self outweigh the benefits to others (White & Peloza, 2009) is supported. In contrast, when managing animal-welfare-related conflicts, bolstering was found to generate positive customer attitudes. In a similar vein, findings from past studies show that empowering consumers is useful in reducing aggression in online settings (Labrecque et al., 2013).

Finally, non-engaging and censoring were found to generate unfavourable consumer attitudes in both types of consumer conflicts. Moreover, the results further demonstrated that censoring negatively impacts consumers' perceptions of the organisation's social responsibility efforts. As predicted by others, lack of responsiveness to negative consumer interactions and sanctioning (undesirable) consumer behaviour can both be damaging to the organisation's online community (Adjei et al., 2016; Cohen-Almagor, 2012; Waters & Jamal, 2011). The results from the quantitative phase of this project confirm this.

## 5.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Conflict management in social media-based online consumption communities has become a multi-user dialogue, because it takes place in the public space where active and passive consumers can continuously observe the way(s) in which a company manages conflicts. According to recent data provided by the PEW Research Centre (2017), 62% of the individuals surveyed (based on 4,248 respondents), acknowledge adverse online behaviours occurring in the social media as a major problem, causing real life consequences to those encountering them ranging from mental to emotional distress and compromising their online privacy. Furthermore, social media users who observe negative online behaviours are also influenced by them leading to a third of respondents refraining from posting online after witnessing others being subjected to hostile behaviours, while 13% admit having stopped using an online service as a result of that. Importantly, the majority of individuals surveyed assign responsibility for addressing these behaviours to online companies and platforms. Therefore, since conflict management is perceived to be the community host's responsibility (Johnson &



Lowe, 2015), organisations are advised to pro-actively seek and utilise strategies which fit to a desired outcome. In other words, online companies are required to tailor their conflict management practice depending on the context and content of the conflict (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013). This section provides managerial and policy recommendations in relation to this based on the findings presented in this thesis.

Non-engaging represents the most commonly observed conflict management strategy, but online companies are encouraged to move away from non-engagement to more active conflict management. This is because results show that consumers do not favour non-engaging as a strategy to manage C2C conflicts. In line with this, a recent joint proposal by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Home Office outlined three major consequences for firms that do not address 'online harms' (e.g. hate crimes, harassment, cyber-bullying, trolling, conflicts). These are: 1) the establishment of an independent regulator who will provide a "code of practice" for social networks and internet companies; 2) regulator enforcement powers that include the ability to fine online companies that break the rules; and 3) the consideration of additional enforcement powers that include forcing internet service providers to block rule-breaking sites (Fox, 2019). Despite opposition from freedom of speech supporters, the findings from the research conducted as part of this thesis together with recent public and government concern over companies not handling adverse online behaviours show that a non-engaging strategy is not a viable option for online companies. Instead, this thesis offers a number of active strategies, some of which are applicable to different types of consumer conflicts.

First, the results indicate that asking consumers to adjust their communication behaviour or style (i.e. pacifying) during C2C conflicts generates favourable attitudes.

This is valid for conflicts related to both self-benefit and other-benefit consumption issues. Moreover, using pacifying to manage C2C conflicts has a positive impact on the consumers' perceptions of the organization's social responsibility efforts. Therefore, online companies are advised to frequently use this somewhat authoritative strategy to moderate consumer conflicts, despite possible concerns over infringing with social media users' freedom of speech. This is because the strategy allows the online company to adhere to their community rules of maintaining civil discussions by addressing what are perceived to be undesirable consumer behaviours online, while at the same time allowing consumers to express their opinions and views on a given issue. Hence, this strategy enables "moderated" freedom of expression, which freedom of speech lobbying groups such as the Adam Smith Institute advocate for.

Second, based on the findings here, it is evident that in a non-profit context, mobilising is well-suited to managing C2C conflicts resulting from issues relating to the self, while bolstering is appropriate for C2C conflicts resulting from issues relating to others. Importantly, the two strategies arguably have additional purposes to moderating a consumer conflict. Mobilising not only generates favourable consumer attitudes towards an organization's conflict management practices, but also further encourages consumers to take action towards an ethical (consumption) issue that the organization already promotes. As such, this strategy addresses undesirable consumer behaviours such as consumer conflicts and simultaneously aligns the (hostile) discussion with the organisation's mission and objectives. In contrast, bolstering is favoured by consumers who are involved in other-benefit-related conflicts. The strategy can be used to moderate consumer conflicts where consumers who support/defend the organisation are present and this could subsequently encourage like-minded consumers to further voice their opinions that support the organisation's mission and objectives.

As the two strategies were exclusively identified in a non-profit context, we recommend that for-profit online companies carefully pilot-test these before deciding on their appropriateness for their communities. This is because mobilising and asserting are both directly stemming from the organisation's mission and cause, which may be perceived as restrictive of one's freedom of choice.

Lastly, despite evidence that censorship is widely practised by online companies and platforms (Tett, 2019) and some even developing policies based on self-governing censorship (e.g. YouTube had 7.8 million videos removed between July and September 2018) (BBC news, 2019), the findings presented here reveal that censoring is irregularly used. The observations of the online companies further demonstrated that in most instances deleting a single or multiple consumer comments was done only after other consumers demanded/reported it. Arguably, this approach to censorship does not undermine freedom of expression to the extent that YouTube's content moderation policy does, and it does not require online companies to take an overall restrictive approach to content removal since they receive notifications of reported content and make a judgement accordingly. Nonetheless, the results here show that censoring does not yield favourable customer attitudes. With regards to policy development on social media content moderation, the thesis adopts the view of advocates of freedom of speech in social networks by demonstrating that censoring generates unfavourable perceptions towards an online company's social responsibility efforts. As a result, it is proposed that community managers and policy makers refrain from using censoring unless it is specifically demanded, as seen during the observations reported here.

With the increased usage of social media sites by both companies and consumers, the prevalence of adverse online behaviours including consumer conflicts will continue to rise. Findings from the observational studies reported here together

with recent media reports confirm this. This is also evident in the emergence of third party companies providing content moderation services for online companies that host communities in their social media networks (e.g. The Social Element). Online companies and platforms are thus made accountable for managing such behaviours, while policy makers are beginning to consider introducing a standardised approach for addressing ‘online harms’ across platforms and private companies. The research findings presented here provide six empirically-tested verbal and active conflict management strategies (i.e. bolstering, pacifying, informing, educating, asserting and mobilising) that online companies may use to moderate consumer conflicts in their social media communities and fit to the community moderation standards and desired outcomes. Importantly, the results demonstrate that non-engagement and censorship are unfavourable options forward.

### 5.3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings from the mixed-methods research conducted as part of this thesis are subject to some limitations which raise the need for future academic work on the topic of conflict management in online consumption communities. This section addresses these limitations and proposes future areas of research.

First, the data was exclusively obtained from Facebook. Investigations of other social media channels (e.g. Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) and in different cultural contexts may reveal different managerial approaches to manage C2C conflicts. For instance, future research may investigate whether, considering the volume of Tweets, more automated and centralised approaches to conflict management may be used in such environments.

Second, the second and fourth papers focused on examining the implications of conflict management based on strategies derived from a single non-profit online community. This form of purposive sampling is common in exploratory research when a new phenomenon is studied and generalisation is not the primary purpose of research (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). However, future research should calibrate the present findings using several online communities from different non-profit backgrounds and hosted on other social media channels than Facebook (e.g. Twitter, Instagram) to increase the generalisability of the findings (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012).

Third, the research presented here adopted an experimental design based within an online survey, which has certain limitations. Although the scenarios presented to the respondents during the experiment were based on real-life examples taken from the qualitative observations (Wason & Cox, 1996), the experiment was conducted in a controlled setting including having to incrementally modify the real-life examples for consistency purposes in order to avoid respondents' bias. In future, research could conduct a field experiment using exact real-life examples from social media sites, which will increase the external validity of the studied phenomenon. A related limitation of the quantitative research presented in this thesis is the sampling approach (i.e. data were collected through Qualtrics panel services). Generating responses from online panels, similarly to other data collection methods, has its drawbacks among which are multiple submissions, self-selection, high(er) dropout rate and quality issues due to respondents being incentivised to participate. This limitation was however address through careful screening of the data in two stages – following the soft launch and again following the full launch.

Fourth, future research can focus on investigating the content of corporate communication strategies to manage consumer conflicts. While the results from the two

qualitative studies indicate that organisations currently appear to mostly avoid getting involved, there are instances where different forms of communication are used to intervene, and it is therefore systematic observations of a broader range of online communities are suggested to expand upon current practice.

Lastly, since non-engaging represents a significant proportion of the organisations' conflict management, future research should take a more holistic look at the combined effect of both organisations' and consumers' attempts to managing conflicts within an online community. In terms of the roles consumers occupy, the marketing literature has already identified that consumers sometimes defend brands or ethical values during a C2C conflict (Colliander & Wien, 2013). Related research may explore how the involvement of such defenders and other roles consumers occupy during consumer conflicts influence the perceived need for an organisation to get involved.

## Chapter references

- Adjei, M. T., Nowlin, E. L., & Ang, T. (2016). The Collateral Damage of C2C Communications on Social Networking Sites: The Moderating Role of Firm Responsiveness and Perceived Fairness. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 24(2), 166-185. doi: [10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057](https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.2016.1131057)
- BBC News, (2019). Social media: How can governments regulate it?, Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47135058>
- Bijlsma-Frankema, K. & Koopman, K. (2004). The oxymoron of control in an era of globalisation: Vulnerabilities of a mega myth. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 19(3), 204–217. doi: [10.1108/02683940410527711](https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940410527711)
- Cohen-Almagor, R. (2012). Freedom of expression, internet responsibility, and business ethics: the Yahoo! saga and its implications. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 106(3), 353-365. doi: [10.1007/s10551-011-1001-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1001-z)
- Colliander, J., & Wien, H. A. (2013). Trash talk rebuffed: consumers' defense of companies criticized in online communities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 47(10), 1733-1757. doi: [10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-04-2011-0191)
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment—the case “my Nutella The Community”. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1087-1105. doi: [10.1108/03090560610681023](https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560610681023)
- Dholakia, U. M., Blazevic, V., Wiertz, C., & Algesheimer, R. (2009). Communal service delivery how customers benefit from participation in firm-hosted virtual P3 communities. *Journal of Service Research*, 12(2), 208-226. doi: [10.1177/1094670509338618](https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670509338618)

- Fox, C., (2019). Websites to be fined over 'online harms' under new proposals, *BBC News*, Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-47826946>
- Godes, D., Mayzlin, D., Chen, Y., Das, S., Dellarocas, C., Pfeiffer, B., Libai, S., Sen, S., Shi, M., & Verlegh, P. (2005). The firm's management of social interactions. *Marketing Letters*, *16*(3-4), 415-428. doi: [10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-005-5902-4)
- Guo, C., & Saxton, G. D. (2014). Tweeting social change: How social media are changing nonprofit advocacy. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *43*(1), 57-79. doi: [10.1177/0899764012471585](https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764012471585)
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Hofacker, C. F., & Bloching, B. (2013). Marketing the pinball way: understanding how social media change the generation of value for consumers and companies. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *27*(4), 237-241. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.005)
- Homburg, C., Ehm, L., & Artz, M. (2015). Measuring and managing consumer sentiment in an online community environment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *52*(5), 629-641. doi: [10.1509/jmr.11.0448](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.11.0448)
- Husemann, K., Ladstaetter, F. & Luedicke, M., (2015). Conflict culture and conflict management in consumption communities. *Psychology & Marketing*, *32*(3), 265-284. doi: [10.1002/mar.20779](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20779)
- Johnson, D. & Lowe, B. (2015). Emotional Support, Perceived Corporate Ownership and Scepticism toward Out-groups in Virtual Communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *29*(1), 1–10. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2014.07.002)



- Kronrod, A., Grinstein, A., & Wathieu, L. (2012a). Go green! Should environmental messages be so assertive? *Journal of Marketing*, 76(1), 95-102. doi: [10.1509/jm.10.0416](https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.10.0416)
- Kronrod, A., Grinstein, A., & Wathieu, L. (2012b). Enjoy! Hedonic consumption and compliance with assertive messages. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(1), 51-61. doi: [10.1086/661933](https://doi.org/10.1086/661933)
- Labrecque, L. I., vor dem Esche, J., Mathwick, C., Novak, T. P., & Hofacker, C. F. (2013). Consumer power: Evolution in the digital age. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 257-269. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002)
- Lee, H. (2005). Behavioural strategies for dealing with flaming in an online forum. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 46(2), 385-403. doi: [10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00017.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2005.00017.x)
- Lovejoy, K., & Saxton, G. D. (2012). Information, community, and action: How nonprofit organizations use social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(3), 337-353. doi: [10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2012.01576.x)
- Mele, C. (2011). Conflicts and value co-creation in project networks. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(8), 1377-1385. doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.033](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.06.033)
- Mosteller, J., & Mathwick, C. (2014). Reviewer online engagement: the role of rank, well-being, and market helping behavior. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 31(6/7), 464-474. doi: [10.1108/JCM-05-2014-0974](https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-05-2014-0974)
- Rahim, M. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 13(3), 206-235. doi: [10.1108/eb022874](https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022874)

- Sibai, O., Valck, K., Farrell, A. M., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social control in online communities of consumption: A framework for community management. *Psychology & Marketing, 32*(3), 250-264. doi: [10.1002/mar.20778](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20778)
- Smith, A. N., Fischer, E., & Yongjian, C. (2012). How does brand-related user-generated content differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26*(2), 102-113. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2012.01.002)
- Teddlie, C., & Yu, F. (2007). Mixed methods sampling: A typology with examples. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(1), 77-100. doi: [10.1177/2345678906292430](https://doi.org/10.1177/2345678906292430)
- Tett, G., (2019). Is there a smarter way to tackle online hate?, *Financial Times*, Retrieved from: <https://www.ft.com/content/7b10a5f2-60fe-11e9-b285-3acd5d43599e>
- Van Noort, G., & Willemsen, L. M. (2012). Online damage control: The effects of proactive versus reactive webcare interventions in consumer-generated and brand-generated platforms. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26*(3), 131-140. doi: [10.1016/j.intmar.2011.07.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2011.07.001)
- Wason, K. D., & Cox, K. C. (1996). Scenario utilization in marketing research. *Advances in Marketing. Texas: Southwestern Marketing Association*, 155-162.
- Waters, R. D., & Jamal, J. Y. (2011). Tweet, tweet, tweet: A content analysis of nonprofit organizations' Twitter updates. *Public Relations Review, 37*(3), 321-324. doi: [10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.03.002)

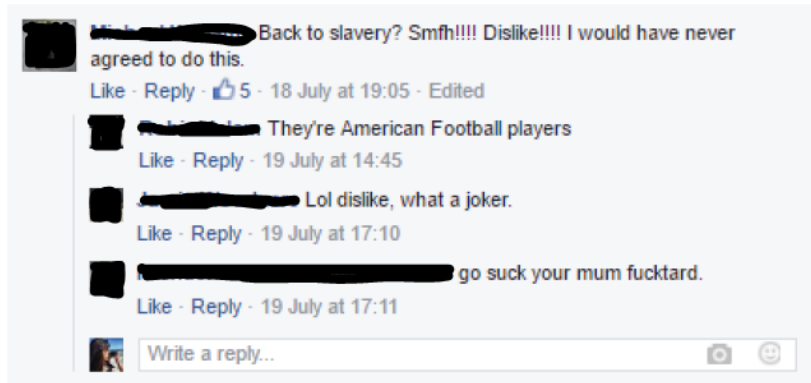
White, K., & Peloza, J. (2009). Self-benefit versus other-benefit marketing appeals: Their effectiveness in generating charitable support. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(4), 109-124. doi: [10.1509/jmkg.73.4.109](https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.4.109)

Yoon, S., Choi, Y. K., & Song, S. (2011). When intrusive can be likable. *Journal of Advertising*, 40(2), 63-76. doi: [10.2753/JOA0091-3367400205](https://doi.org/10.2753/JOA0091-3367400205)

## Appendices

### Appendix A. 'Non-engaging' theme and codes screenshots

#### Conflict episode 7: **NON-ENGAGING**



No intervention despite swearwords are used

#### Conflict episode 15: **NON-ENGAGING**



No intervention from the company  
Hate speech and freedom of speech mentioned  
Possibly indirectly requesting an intervention

## Appendix B. 'Censoring' theme and codes screenshots

### Episode 41: CENSORSHIP

The screenshot shows a Facebook post from a user whose name and profile picture are redacted with black boxes. The post is from 3 hours ago in London. The text of the post is: "Costa coffee is now hiring at [redacted]! Are you an Eastern European bitch with no personality and no concern for the customer? Are you sultry and stupid? Are you slow in everything? Then we have plenty of jobs for you!!!". Below the post are three comments, all from redacted users. The first comment says "What a sad life you must have 😞" and was posted 1 hour ago. The second comment says "You obviously have no idea about what good service is! Stupid cow!" and was posted 1 hour ago, with one like. The third comment says "Your nice [redacted]" and was posted 21 minutes ago. The post has 3 comments in total. At the bottom of the post area, there are buttons for "Like", "Comment", and "Share", and a "Chronological" dropdown menu.

Later on all completely removed

censorship. good example.

**Conflict episode 162:** CENSORING



Company intervention requested by reporting one of the conflicting parties  
Company censors the comments made by one person

Appendix C. 'Bolstering' theme and codes screenshots

**Episode 21:** BOLSTERING



thanks consumer (brand defender?)  
for their support  
positive verbal reinforcement

## Episode 30: BOLSTERING

Its the principle of the matter you absolute idiots! It does not matter if its 30p or 1p its a rip off and we shouldnt stand for it, costa are a massive company that surly doesnt need to con honest punters out of a cup of coffee ffs! All these idiots claiming its only 30p are the sort of idiots that pay cowboy builders three times the rate, absolute roasters how can you ever except being ripped off? Regardless of by how much? Mental cases! | Like Reply 3 · 1 April at 01:05

Everyone just buy my coffee yeah? Ok | Like Reply 1 · 1 April at 01:21

So true .. They can't fill the cup that high.. So its no way cheating of any sorts .. Ppl post just anything.. | Like Reply 1 · 1 April at 04:02

3 shots. With less milk in the large. 2 shots with milk in the regular.. Get it? 😏 | Like Reply 2 · 1 April at 06:13

Rip off Costa | Like Reply 1 April at 06:20

Irony: being told you're getting ripped off by a builder. | Like Reply 10 · 1 April at 07:42

Your coffee aint hot enough to burn shit | Like Reply 4 · 1 April at 07:51

Orink piss..... Problem solved | Js #! | Like Reply 1 April at 08:18

Costa you are a cheat! | Like Reply 1 April at 08:44

Costa Coffee \*\*\*High 5\*\*\* | Like Reply 3 · 1 April at 08:51

positive verbal reinforcement

consumer defends the brand in a conflict - the brand re-affirms that

### Conflict Episode 3: BOLSTERING

██████████ Humans are simply disgustingly cruel animals, the only truly thoughtless 'cruel' animal. Vegan 4 Life 🤔🤔  
Like · Reply · 816 · 30 September at 21:05

██████████ Well since your human and I'm sure you were fed meat as a child and your parents . You should hate yourself  
Like · Reply · 10 · 30 September at 21:14

██████████ Bit of a jump there. ██████████  
Like · Reply · 10 · 30 September at 21:15

██████████ I do...and I wish my parents knew how traumatic eating animals was for me as a child. I always loved all animals. And I was very sensitive to suffering...Wish I could go back as a kid, knowing what I know. I've been vegan for 25 years, but wish it was my whole existence 📉  
Like · Reply · 32 · 30 September at 21:17

██████████ ██████████ has made the choice to be vegan now as an adult when she understands what is happening. She should be proud of herself. She is obviously a caring human being and is completely correct in what she wrote. She most defiantly should not hate herself! But I'm sure she is thankful for that 'lovely' comment 🤔🤔  
Like · Reply · 24 · 30 September at 21:20

██████████ Thanks ██████████ 🙏  
Like · Reply · 3 · 30 September at 21:22

██████████ ██████████ your an idiot  
Like · Reply · 12 · 30 September at 21:24

PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) Thank you for making a difference for animals by living a vegan lifestyle. ❤️  
Like · Reply · 106 · 30 September at 21:27

Thanks the person defending the organisation's cause  
Adds emoji



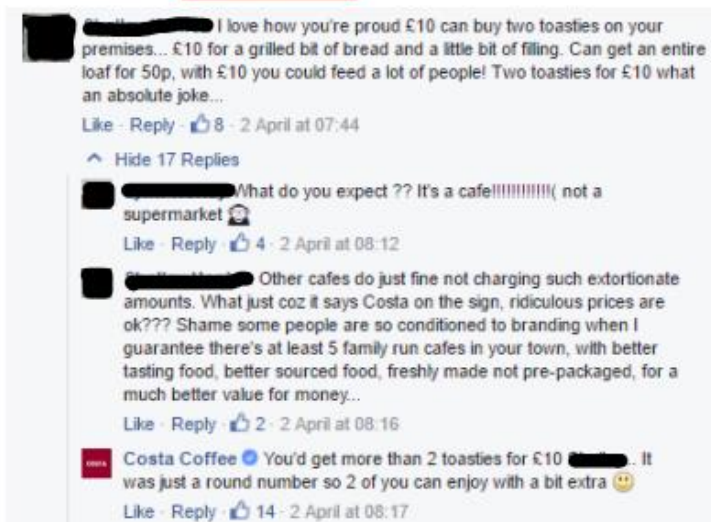
## Appendix D. 'Informing' theme and codes screenshots

### Episode 31: INFORMING



provides information to  
clarify an issue  
disagrees with  
consumer

### Episode 18: INFORMING



providing product information  
despite brand defenders present

## Appendix E. 'Educating' theme and codes screenshots

### Conflict episode 217: EDUCATING

Levi Chubb! Nothing wrong with elephants in zoos! Not all zoos are bad PETA! Believe or not...some even feed their elephants! 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔

Like · Reply · 22 · 12 August at 13:29

Really?

Like · Reply · 5 · 12 August at 13:35

Ask yourself two questions, are humans making money from zoos, and would the animals choose to live there? There's your answer for zoos.

Like · Reply · 15 · 12 August at 13:40 · Edited

What does making money have to do with anything? And would your dog or cat choose to live with you?

Like · Reply · 8 · 12 August at 14:05

Levi Chubb! you are totally right!!

Like · Reply · 2 · 12 August at 14:08

Thank you

Like · Reply · 1 · 12 August at 14:12

There are definitely better zoos than others- for sure. Australia Zoo is one of them for instance. BUT the larger question is- should zoos exist at all and the answer to that is a resounding NO. Unless a 'zoo' exists solely to rehab and release and yes, people could conceivably see the animals during the period that they are recuperating, then there should be no such thing as zoos.

Like · Reply · 3 · 12 August at 14:22

making money has everything to do with it. When people are financially motivated the interest of others is never a priority. Additionally, comparing an animal that has been systematically bred to rely on another species to live, to that of an animal that has evolved to thrive in their social pack, is a weak misguided comparison.

Like · Reply · 3 · 12 August at 14:45 · Edited

Zoo's have been established originally by taking wild animals from their habitat, away from their families, and putting them in cages in another climate to exhibit and profit from it. Humans idea, it's wrong!!

Like · Reply · 4 · 12 August at 14:43

**PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)** Zoos all over the U.S. have closed their elephant exhibits or announced that they intend to phase them out, citing an inability to provide the animals with proper care. There is absolutely no ethical way to keep these intelligent, social animals in captivity.

Like · Reply · 6 · 12 August at 14:43

provides an explanation to an issue causing the conflict  
explanation possibly aimed at educating conflicting parties aligned with company mission

**Conflict episode 272: EDUCATING**

**[Redacted]** I thought seaworld already said they were going to stop breeding orcas and weren't going to get new orcas. What more do you want? Releasing them into the wild is a death sentence.  
Like · Reply · 19 · 5 August at 02:14

**[Redacted]** PETA is a group for millennials. They want it now. Never mind thinking of the finical and statistical issues. Just do it!  
Like · Reply · 2 · 5 August at 03:06

**[Redacted]** Man, no one listened to the video. Lol.  
Like · Reply · 3 · 5 August at 03:28

**[Redacted]** They aren't going to send them into the wild...please listen to the video...  
Like · Reply · 2 · 5 August at 03:29

**[Redacted]** This whole ad is pointless . If PETA cared they would take the 42 million dollars they make a year and build an ocean sanctuary . Since they haven't maybe they should focus on something else  
Like · Reply · 4 · 5 August at 04:17

**[Redacted]** ...but they're spreading world wide awareness, otherwise many people wouldn't have known about SeaWorld and what these orcas are going through...I have to stop reading comments... 🤦  
Like · Reply · 2 · 5 August at 05:22

**[Redacted]** I thought that blackfish movie is what spread awareness about SeaWorld...  
Like · Reply · 1 · 5 August at 05:29

**[Redacted]** Someone obviously didn't read.  
Like · Reply · 6 August at 02:19

**PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)** We are recommending release into coastal sanctuaries, not directly into the wild. <http://www.seaworldofhurt.com/sea-sanctuaries-sure-thing.../>



**Sea Sanctuaries Are a Sure Thing— Get With the Program, SeaWorld -...**

SEAWORLDOFHURT.COM

Like · Reply · 6 August at 18:05

Further explains an issue that is causing the conflict  
Aligned with company mission  
Provides hyperlink

## Appendix F. 'Pacifying' theme and codes screenshots

### Episode 35: PACIFYING

The screenshot shows a Facebook comment thread. At the top, a user with a blacked-out profile picture comments: "Very impressed with Costa's responses to all these messages. Anyone else would have given up after the first reply but [redacted] has answered every question. This has had the opposite effect for me...so impressed, I am changing to Costa. Well done [redacted] If these people that complain would rather have an overflowing cup of boiling coffee to burn themself with, let them have it!" This comment has 25 likes and is dated 30 March at 08:17. Below it, the official Costa Coffee account replies: "Really appreciate the lovely comments [redacted] but we're just trying to make sure everyone understands there really isn't anything to worry about 😊" This reply has 4 likes and is dated 30 March at 08:33. A third user with a blacked-out profile picture replies: "Agreed with [redacted] and hats off to [redacted]" dated 31 March at 09:18. A fourth user with a blacked-out profile picture posts a long, multi-paragraph comment: "First off [redacted] is not [redacted] he is sitting in a Pakistan call centre, answering Facebook post between being a totally useless cunt for some mobile phone companies customer services, secondly what the fuck would anyone want to buy shit tasting coffee from a rip of company that pays its staff minimum wage, avoids paying taxes, and quite frankly are the scourge of this country. Easiest thing, vote with your feet and never entry their premises or purchase their shit. If you really need to visit one of these establishments, please please use Pret a Manger, who where the ONLY company of this sort that gave away food and drink in London during the 7/7 bombings." This comment has 6 likes and is dated 31 March at 10:57. Finally, the Costa Coffee account replies: "Happy to take the comments [redacted] but can we watch the language please. I can assure you I'm sitting in our head office in [redacted]. You also seem to be misinformed regarding tax, we're a British company (part of the Whitbread family) so we pay our tax like we should, you might be getting us confused with some other coffee shop brands. We've also been paying all of our staff (not just those 25+) the living wage since Oct last year. Hope this all helps 😊" This reply has 6 likes and is dated 31 March at 11:03.

positive reinforcement  
affirms brand defenders

dominating comment  
requests individuals to change  
the way they communicate  
afterwards provides information



Episode 38: PACIFYING

██████████ The worst thing is when you ask for a large cappuccino and they fill it up with about 4-5 sips of coffee and the rest of the cup is froth. You cannot drink froth. You tight money grabbing company. If there was a Starbucks near by I would go there instead! Why are you this way  
 Like · Reply · 4 · 30 March at 14:28

^ Hide 13 Replies

Costa Coffee · Yeah I hate bad cappuccinos as well ● The thing is there should always be foam on a cappuccino, normally about 1/3 foam ratio to 1/3 coffee and 1/3 milk. If you don't like foam I suggest you try another drink? ^ ██████████  
 Like · Reply · 16 · 30 March at 14:43

██████████: Wow! ██████████ Ok let's keep this as light hearted as possible. As a company owner I would never respond to a customer of mine like that. You say 1/3 ratio foam to milk. Try 1/3 milk to foam. It's an absolute joke. I've gone in the everyday for the past 2 years and you just never know what your going to get. I just cannot bring myself to complain everyday especially with a que full of people behind me. I think maybe after all this instead of just throwing the ball back in our court, why don't you look at the 1000's of complaints you are receiving and do something positive to rectify the situation, like increase the size of your cups to rival Starbucks and give your franchise owned shop staff more training.  
 Like · Reply · 4 · 30 March at 14:56

Costa Coffee · Sorry ● what was wrong with the response? Was just talking about how we like our capps weren't we? Thanks for the feedback anyway, it's very useful! ^ ██████████  
 Like · Reply · 8 · 30 March at 15:04

██████████ No we were exposing the way you have been cheating customers and you don't like it do you. So what will you do with this useful feedback?  
 Like · Reply · 2 · 30 March at 15:07

██████████ I think you should get a life ██████████ instead of complaining about bloody froth!!!!!! He's just doing his job. Pathetic!!!!!!  
 Like · Reply · 14 · 30 March at 15:15

Making fun of the customer  
 different strategy altogether.  
 → suggesting

Defensive  
 Again, not taking customer serious

██████████: 🤔oooooooooooooool, so wait I cannot complain about a poor service no? Who are you his mother ██████████  
 Like · Reply · 2 · 30 March at 15:18

Costa Coffee · Now now let's try and be nice to each other 😊 I've passed your feedback onto our Ops Excellence team. If you ever have any further issues or specific feedback do let us know on talktocosta@whitbread.com ██████████  
 Like · Reply · 5 · 30 March at 15:30

██████████ ██████████  
 Like · Reply · 30 March at 15:34

██████████ Gaddo  
 Like · Reply · 1 · 30 March at 15:34

██████████ Costa Coffee I've always been advised to ask for a wet cappuccino. All the coffee with none of the froth.  
 Like · Reply · 3 · 31 March at 10:16

██████████ That's down to the individual barista ██████████ you always get the perfect drink from costa because you can have it remade if you are not happy!  
 Like · Reply · 1 · 31 March at 10:19

██████████ ██████████ order a latte pal, as someone who works in the industry, and not for Costa, I can confirm ██████████ knows what he's talking about. Unless you were given a shit cappuccino, then I'd agree with you!  
 Like · Reply · 2 · 31 March at 11:13

██████████ just order a wet cappuccino = less froth - more coff  
 Like · Reply · 1 · 1 April at 20:39

Write a reply...

→ Dominating response by company  
 Asks conflicting parties to change their communication behaviour

## Appendix G. 'Mobilising' theme and codes screenshots

### Conflict episode 123: MOBILISING

██████████ - Weaning rings are used because baby cows are greedy and will continue to nurse as long as they are able to. This has health risks for the mother and also for any other heifers in the herd because the calves will attempt to suck on anything in lieu of their mothers teet, including other heifers in the herd and each other's ears. It's not because they are "starved of motherly attention", it's because they are greedy, like all children are.

2 - They have to be spikey because nose rings that aren't spikey don't provide any real deterrent to the calves or their mothers to stop the calf from trying to nurse, and the calves are smart enough to push them out of the way and keep on sucking if the weaning rings aren't spikey.

3 - Happy and healthy cows provide more milk. The idea that farmers are going to hurt their own bottom line just so they can arbitrarily be cruel to animals is ridiculous.

Like · Reply · 🗳️ 15 · 9 September at 02:52

██████████ Really? Seriously you think this is okay?  
Like · Reply · 9 September at 04:39

██████████ Yes, I support animal welfare.  
Like · Reply · 9 September at 04:41

██████████ But you believe it's ok to kill and exploit animals for humans' greed? This is where most people on this page disagree with you.  
Like · Reply · 🗳️ 2 · 9 September at 07:17

██████████ Facts:  
The amount of grain we feed cattle could end world hunger.  
There isn't enough water or grass to economically let cows on all factory farms be "free range"  
Most cattle end up at the slaughterhouse at just 5 years of age.  
The industry itself is depleting our water supply and destroying the planet. We are facing the 6th mass extinction in the earths history.  
All very good reasons to go vegan!!! Any little bit helps! One person= 2-3 less killed cows a year!  
Like · Reply · 🗳️ 1 · 9 September at 07:21

██████████ You don't think that asshole wasn't being cruel? I would love to return the favor. Humans are the worst. You rationalizing that kind of treatment tells us everything we need to know about you. Monster.  
Like · Reply · 9 September at 13:34

██████████ I get so upset, I can't even type. No animal deserves that.  
Like · Reply · 9 September at 13:37

██████████ It's very unclear from your post what you mean by "that asshole". Also, the idea that "humans are the worst" is nonsense. Humans are literally the only omnivores/carnivores on earth that feel any sort of compassion or empathy towards their prey.  
Like · Reply · 🗳️ 3 · 9 September at 13:54

 **PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)**   
 Unfortunately, a majority of dairy farms use practices like the ones seen in this video. Please consider ditching dairy and going vegan: <http://features.peta.org/how-to-go-vegan/>



**HOW TO GO VEGAN**  
 1 2 3  
 Vegan Life

**How to Go Vegan**  
 Going vegan is easier than ever before, but we are here to make it even easier—as easy as 1,...

FEATURES.PETA.ORG

Like · Reply · 9 September at 16:37

 Write a reply... 

information + appeal provides hyperlink

**Conflict episode 125: MOBILISING**

 [redacted] These animals choose to be tortured and killed for their meat, why does everybody have a problem with that???

They came into this life knowing they'd be used to feed humans.

Like · Reply · 9 September at 02:13 · Edited

 [redacted] How do you figure they choose that life? Sounds to me like you need to get educated this is the most ignorant statement I've ever heard in a long time.

Like · Reply ·  7 · 9 September at 02:27

 [redacted] So... you actually think that there's like a waiting list in heaven where souls get to choose what they want to be on Earth and you think "tortured and slaughtered for human consumption" is the #1 top pick?

Like · Reply · 9 September at 08:54

 **PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals)**  Animals exist for their own reasons—they don't choose to be tortured and abused before being slaughtered. Please consider going vegan to help end this suffering.

Like · Reply · 9 September at 16:56

appeal

time 4, this is turning into a theme.

## Appendix H. 'Asserting' theme and codes screenshots

### Conflict episode 122: ASSERTING

The screenshot shows a Facebook comment thread. The main comment is from a user with a blacked-out profile picture, stating: "They deserve better we are human beings not monster!! Stand Up and protect!!! We should treat all animals better!!! You do not have make their last hours or days so terrible they deserve better they giving their life so we can eat!!!!". It has 1 like and was posted on 9 September at 05:35. Below it are three replies: "Go vegan! You can eat all the food you want cruelty free! It's easier than you think and delicious as anything!" (1 like, 07:22), "No thanks I love beef pork, and chicken, and fish to must I grow up on a farm and we never treated the animals badly !!!! They can be treated better!!!!" (07:25), and "You tried [redacted]" (1 like, 08:50). At the bottom is a PETA post: "PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) All animals deserve a life free from abuse" (1 like, 16:52).

posts an opinion that aligns with the company mission value-driven not directed at anyone in particular

### Conflict episode 351: ASSERTING

The screenshot shows a Facebook comment thread. The main comment is from a user with a blacked-out profile picture, stating: "It's fun to watch though". It has 1 like and was posted on 8 July at 01:28. Below it are three replies: "It would be funny to watch you get gored instead!" (02:40), "Nah I'd kill the Bulls man" (1 like, 03:18), and "why are you even on this site? You clearly don't support PETAs goal" (1 like, 17:41). At the bottom is a PETA post: "PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) Cruelty is never entertainment! #NotOurs2Use" (1 like, 20:50).

heavy value statement - use of exclamation mark  
adds hashtag