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Weapons of Brand Destruction: Exploring the different methods and strategies used by Online Anti-Brand Communities aimed to harm brands.

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Abstract

Aim: The aim of this paper was to shed light on the different methods/strategies that Anti-Brand Communities (ABCs) use in order to cause harm to particular brands.

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to offer assistance to brand managers through Anti-Brand Community-insights, as a means of combating the increasingly growing number of ABCs.

Research Question: What methods/strategies do anti-brand communities use in order to harm brands?

Methodology: This paper uses a qualitative research design through Ethnography. By applying thematic analysis the authors explore the contents of social media-based Anti-Brand Communities of three brands: **Nestlé** (1 large community on Reddit), **Apple** (1 medium-sized community on Facebook) and **Disney** (3 small-sized communities on Facebook and 1 medium-sized on Reddit).

Theory: Brand Community, Anti-Brand Community, Echo Chambers, Internet Memes, Consumer Boycott, Brand Awareness, Brand Dislike, Word-of-Mouth, Brand Involvement, Brand Identity, Culture Jamming, Positioning.

Findings: The findings of this paper suggest that Anti-Brand Communities use a variety of different methods/strategies aimed to harm brands. Them being: *Vocal Brand Dislike, Collective Brand Boycotting, Mockery, Echo Chamber and Negative Word-of-Mouth.*

Original/Value: This paper expands the current research area of Anti-Brand Communities with insights regarding how Anti-Brand Communities in practice (e.g. through which methods/strategies) intend to harm brands.

Keywords: Brand Community, Anti-Brand Community, Brand Dislike, Consumer-activism

Introduction

The famous American motorcycle manufacturer Harley Davidson was going

through several financially rough years in the early 1980's - even to the extent that in 1983, the company faced bankruptcy. However, 25 years later, the brand was valued at 7,8 billion dollars and reached a position as a top-50 global brand. One main reason that contributed to the company's massive change of direction was the management's efforts in building and managing a Harley Davidson brand community. This community, (Harley Owners Group) consisted of loyal customers who shared the same values, lifestyle and activities related to the brand. Managers saw the potential of utilizing the community to strategically reposition the brand and strengthen the relationships with their customers - which turned out very successful (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

There are several definitions of what a brand community is, Veloutsou & Moutinho (2009, p.316) define them as "enduring, self-selected groups of consumers, who accept and recognize bonds of membership with each other and the brand". Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) define them as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community that is based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand".

The research area has predominantly been focused on studying the positive aspects and beneficial outcomes of brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002; Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009) - not seldom through the classical examples of Harley Davidson, Apple and Jeep (Ouwersloot & Schröder, 2008).

However, through the general research focus on the 'good' brand communities can dothe flip side: 'Anti-Brand Communities' (ABCs) have historically been overlooked. Although in recent years ABCs have sparked increasing interest among researchers (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2012; Brandão & Popoli, 2022).

ABCs can be defined as "groupings of consumer activists gathered around the common aversion for a brand" (Dessart, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2012, p.6). Brandão, Popoli & Tomás (2022) argues that negative feelings towards brands are more noteworthy than positive ones, in the way that avoiding danger is more important than to reinforce one's sense of satisfaction. Having this in mind, Brandão et al (2022) further argues there have been a lot of negative emotions towards well-known brands in recent decades, which has majorly affected the brands in undesirable ways - for example, Coca Cola, Apple and Nike have suffered major brand damage due to scandals of poor working conditions in Asia. Hence it is vital for companies to be able to handle these negative brand emotions in the context of brand management (Brandão et al, 2022). Hollenbeck & Zinkham (2006); Dessart et al (2012) further stresses the importance for managers of being able to handle brand-negative groupings since there is an increasingly growing trend of ABCs. One main factor of the expanding number of ABCs is the use of internet and social media - facilitating the sharing of brand-related content and personal experiences (Popp, Germelmann & Jung, 2016; Brandão & Popp, 2022).

Problematization

The existing literature on anti-brand communities have drawn a lot of attention on the emergence of these groupings: Brandão & Popoli, 2022; Brandão et al, 2022; Dessart et al, 2016; Hollenbeck & Zinkham, 2006; Rodrigues, Brandão & Rodrigues, 2021 mainly focus on the drivers behind anti brand communities - why and how they form. What the previous research has overlooked, are what strategies and hands-on methods the ABCs use in practice

to harm brands - leaving a gap in the current knowledge.

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the different methods/strategies that ABCs use in order to achieve their goals. This knowledge is imperative for brand managers to have in order to be able to deal with the implications of the actions from the growing number of ABCs.

Research question

The research question for this paper is following:

What methods/strategies do anti-brand communities use in order to harm brands?

Literature Review

Brand Community

According to Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009, p.316), brand communities are identified as "enduring, self-selected [sic] groups of consumers, who accept and recognize bonds of membership with each other and the brand". They are not just consumers, but members of a group that partakes in a brand, not limited geographically, but bound by a set of social relationships (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) that unites them. bringing brands opportunities to interact with them.

And while identifying and defining segments is still an important part of the brand building process, communities are taking a stronger role in this process. In the end, segments are set in advance, they can be defined and measured; communities, on the other hand, are a living group. Segments agglomerate people with similar ideas, profiles or expectations; communities create

relationships, they communicate, exchange and between each other, becoming active participants of the brand (Kapferer, 2012).

Anti-Brand Community

The other side of the coin of brand communities are anti-brand communities (ABCs). While there is a scarcity of research on the topic, uncommon due to the general focus on the positive influences of brand communities, Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) describe them as groupings of consumer activists gathered around the common aversion for a brand.

Their emergence has been heavily influenced by the mass use of the internet, as online interaction aided in the growth of *anti-consumption* (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010), as well as helping them unite (Fournier & Avery, 2012), giving them a platform to communicate and exchange ideas between each other. This usually leads to brand avoidance, defined by Lee et al. (2009) as a situation in which consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand.

It is important to also understand the difference between typical consumers that act against brands, with the objective of boycotting them, and brand communities.

In contrast to consumer boycotts, where activists are generally willing to resume their relationship with a brand after their requests have been granted (Klein et al., 2004), anti-brand activists are permanently committed on principle to rejecting the opposed brand (Sandıkcı and Ekici, 2009) (Popp, Germelmann & Jung, 2016).

Thus, not only do these consumers not purchase the product or service of the brand they share a detestation of, but they actively participate in actions with the objective of negatively affecting the brand, tarnishing their reputation and attacking their identity. And the motivations behind are diverse, but commonly it is perceived that brands are driven by profits (which seems predatory) rather than by external interests that could be beneficial for consumers (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010).

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness translates to how acquainted consumers are with the existence of the brand (Melin, 2002). The objective for a brand is to then become the "top-of-mind" brand for customers in their given category, as an increase in awareness helps customers in their pre-purchase process (Melin, 2002). For that, brand proprietors work to raise awareness through advertising, TV or even mobile phones (Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). It is their responsibility to teach customers to make certain and unique brand associations that will then connect a normal thought to the brand (Melin, 2002).

Brand Dislike

Dalli, Romani & Gistri (2006) relates the concept of Brand dislike to a certain "dark side" of consumer preferences. Dalli et al (2006) created a model, dividing brand dislike in a vertical axis; Collectivistic and Individualistic. On the Collective side, Brand dislike functions more as a resistance practice, and on the Individualistic side as a refusal of inadequate partner brands. However, in between the two absolutes, Brand dislike works as a means of social communication (Figure 1):

A UNITARY MODEL OF BRAND DISLIKE

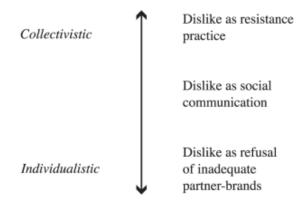


Figure 1: Unitary model of Brand Dislike Dalli et al (2006)

Dalli et al (2006) further divides Brand dislike in 3 categories; Product brand dislike (subject criticize brand on grounds of unfair performance/price ratio and poor customer services) User brand dislike (subject criticize brand on grounds of brand associations with unwanted user stereotypes) and Corporate brand dislike (users criticize brand on grounds of corporate activities and behaviors that they deem as immoral illegal or unethical).

Brand Involvement

Brand Involvement refers to the level of involvement of a consumer in a brand or product (Melin, 2002). When looking at low-level involvement, it is understood as weak, making it harder for a brand to produce strong and lasting brand loyalty, as they are passive recipients of information; when talking about high-involvement, in the other hand, it is the consumers who actively look for information, it is they who have a strong loyalty towards a brand, thus creating a reduced price sensitivity and an increased brand sensitivity (Melin, 2002).

Brand Identity

Brand identity is the vision that drives the brand, it is what defines their uniqueness and value (Kapferer, 2012, p.149). As brands are living systems, their identity "emphasizes the preeminence of substance over strictly formal features ... [and] defines what must stay and what is free to change" (Kapferer, 2012, p.151). When developing a brand identity, it is important to take into account the different elements that compose a brand - the name, origin, personality, use, distribution, and emotional added value, among others (Melin, 2002, p.120) - and unify them, fuelling recognition and amplifying differentiation (Wheeler, 2012). The objective is to make the brand stand by itself and, like Melin (2002, p.120) described, become the brand's "unique fingerprint which makes it one of a kind."

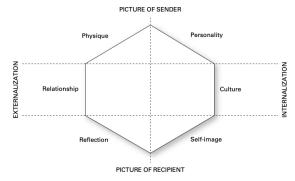


Figure 2: Brand identity prism (Kapferer, 2012)

A brand's identity can be represented by a hexagonal prism (see Figure 2) introduced by Kapferer (2012) as the Brand Identity Prism, which he divides the identity of a brand in six equal facets:

- **Physique:** The physical characteristics and qualities of the brand, its tangible added value.
- **Personality:** The human personality traits portrayed by the brand, with the objective of helping consumers

- identify with the brand, or project themselves into it.
- Culture: The internal aspect of a brand, and the most important facet. The culture reflects the internal shared values between both employees and the customers or communities.
- Relationship: The exchange or interaction between the brand and its consumers. It shows how both brands and customers act with each other.
- Customer Reflection: How a brand becomes the reflection or image of how customers see other members of a brand as (i.e. they are ...).
- **Self-Image:** How customers feel when interacting with a brand's product or service (i.e. I feel, I am ...).

Consumer Boycott

Consumer boycotts can be defined as "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases [from one or more target organizations] in the marketplace" (Sen, Gürhan-Canli & Morwitz, 2001, p.400). Sen et al (2001) differentiates consumer boycotts regular individual consumption from withholding of particular a brand/company/product - in the way that it is an organized and collective denial of purchasing a specific product or consuming a particular brand.

Culture Jamming

Culture Jamming is a concept about twisting messages that brands communicate, often through capitalizing on the commercial narratives or techniques that corporations use and filling them with new content or meanings in order to make your voice heard.

Culture jamming is related to subvertising (subverting advertising) - where ABCs or consumer/brand activists re-make logotypes or advertisements on the ideas of their agenda. One example is how brand activists made a mock-ad towards Absolut vodka, graphically portraying an arrangement of chairs seen from adobe in the shape of the Absolut bottle, combined with the text "Absolute AA". Another bottle-shape example was done with crime-scene crayons, with the text "Absolute end" (Östberg, Bengtsson & Hartmann, 2018).

Echo Chamber

Defined by Jamieson and Cappella (2008), echo chambers are spaces that amplify and magnify messages delivered within it. They are networks where the content shared is one-sided (Garimella et al., 2018), and where outside voices are discredited and actively excluded from the discussion (Nguyen, 2020). They are segregated communities with polarized opinions while being exposed to similar content (Luo et al., 2022).

Internet Memes

Internet memes usually derive from parodies, imitations or through commentary. They generally consist of Images, Videos or GIFs and spread rapidly via online peer-to-peer communication (Baukhage, 2011). Bokor (2014) discusses brand destruction in the online sphere with an emphasis on the use of social media. Bokor identifies 4 methods of online brand destruction, one of these methods is the generation and spread of brand-related memes that joke negatively about a brand's activities, products, community or values.

Positioning

Positioning is the place that a brand has in the mind of the customer, based on how the brand differentiates from the rest of its competitors (Melin, 2022). differentiation is achieved through a strong brand identity, which includes all of the tangible brand's and intangible characteristics. It is these characteristics that affect a consumer's purchasing decision, as they make a comparison between different products before choosing the one that has a perceived advantage over the rest (Kapferer, 2012). And that is because the brand and its characteristics act as a risk reducer and a catalyst, making it easier for the consumer in purchase process by reducing economical, social or psychological risk.

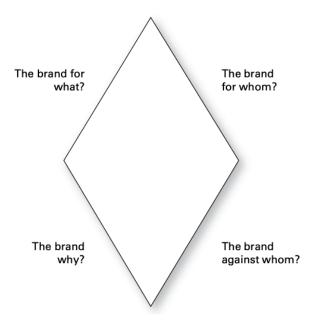


Figure 3: Brand diamond (Kapferer, 2012)

To better understand the position, Kapferer (2012) suggests a set of questions through the Brand Diamond (see Figure 3) that, when answered, will clarify the position a brand has:

- **For what:** What kind of problems are solved? The promise.
- **For whom:** Who is the target market?
- **Why:** Why is the brand in business? The purpose, the *raison d'être*.
- **Against whom:** Who are the competitors?

There are also different ways a brand can be positioned, as according to Melin (2022b). These are:

- **Rebranding:** An overall change in a brand's identity and image.
- **Re-naming:** A change in a brand's name, be it due to a M&A situation, or due to a rebranding.
- **Revitalization:** A change made when a brand wants to be more attractive to their market.
- **Rejuvenation:** A change made when a brand wants to be younger and evolve its values and attributes.
- **Depositioning:** A change in the perception of a competitor of a market in favour of your own brand.

Word-of-Mouth

Word of mouth is a key feature that brands can utilize to help customers learn information about the products and services a brand offers (Laczniak et al., 2001, cited in Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021), not from the brand itself, but from other customers. To talk about word of mouth for a brand is to talk about their success in converting involved customers into active promoters, and not just brand loyalists (Kapferer, 2012).

But just as we can have a positive word of mouth (pWOM), we can also have a negative word of mouth (nWOM), common in ABCs, and defined by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler (2004) as negative declarations done by either former,

actual or potential customers to a multitude of people and organizations about a product or a company. It is argued that nWOM has a bigger impact on new customers, as it usually appears transparent, and the discontent from former customers can cause brand avoidance on potential consumers (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021).

Methodology

This paper approaches the research question through using a qualitative research perspective. chosen The method Ethnography - a way of studying human relationships in the context societies/groups/communities with the aim of understanding it better (Allen, 2017). For this paper, this is done by conducting a thematic analysis of case examples. The thematic analysis process is based on creating codes from the research material and thereafter highlighting particular themes from these codes. Thematic analysis was chosen due to its ability to uncover patterns, systems and ideas within the natural habitat of the research subjects (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). This process consisted of approaching the raw data, identifying pieces of text, images, video and categorizing the pieces into different codes (Appendix I) representing certain behaviors, ideas, actions and reasoning of the community members. This paper has studied ABCs of three different ABCs from three different branches (see Table 1). The study is based on the community-content of two social media platforms; "I hate Apple" and "I hate Disney" on Facebook.com and "Fuck Nestlé" on Reddit.com. For this study, 19 codes were identified, then further analyzed and categorized into 5 different themes: Brand Dislike, Collective Brand Boycott, Mockery, Echo Chamber and Negative Word-of-Mouth.

Table 1: Overview o	f online ABCs studied	(April 2022-September 2022)

Name	Platform	Created on	Members	Publications
Boycott Disney	Facebook	30th of March, 2022	191	105
Boycott Disney Now	Facebook	31st of March, 2015	338	53
Boycott 'Woke' Disney	Facebook	31st of March, 2022	102	48
FuckMarvel	Reddit	1st of May, 2018	3,800	754
FuckNestlé	Reddit	29th of August, 2016	223,000	2641
I Hate Apple	Facebook	16th of October, 2007	6,421	57

Case Examples

Disney: Where Dreams Don't Come True

"Boycott Disney Now", "Boycott 'Woke' Disney", "Boycott Disney" and "Fuck Marvel" are four ABCs, the first three based on Facebook, (two of them public, the third one private), and the last one on Reddit. There, members (mainly, if not all, from the United States of America) unite their hatred towards Disney or it's sub-brand, Marvel, for their actions during the past decade, commenting on the different aspects of Disney or Marvel they dislike over a shared motto on all four groups: "Go/get woke, go/get broke".

"Boycott Disney Now" is a hub where members share news about "Disney's demise" coming from conservative, right-wing or even satirical news outlets, all based in the US (Boycott Disney Now, 2022). They also share their opinions on recent actions Disney has taken to "pander to the left". According to David W. Caulkett, an admin of the group, the reason behind the group's foundation was

[...] to protest when Disney forced US workers to train foreign works [sic] before being fired. This protest

shows that Disney has a history of being irresponsible toward others in a big way. Ole Walt is turning in his grave. The latest saying is Go Woke Go Broke so let's fight sucky Disney (Boycott Disney Now, 2022).

"Boycott 'Woke' Disney" is an online anti-brand community based on hatred towards Disney's brands and their recent actions, as well as a hub for right-wing conservatives from the USA (Boycott 'Woke' Disney, 2022). Their information paragraph stated the following:

We are here to send a message to Disney, and others, that 'wokeness' will not be tolerated. We want entertainment not lectures. We want food stories for our children, not for them to indoctrinated by sexual content (Boycott 'Woke' Disney, 2022).

Hence, members of the group share news about Disney's stock plummeting, or US laws against Disney, creating their own narrative without correlation as to link the stock collapse to "wokeness" due to the slogan previously mentioned. Members also share their stories on why they don't like Disney, and what they do about it,

encouraging others to not buy merchandising, to not go to the theme parks, to not watch their movies, or even to cancel their Disney+ subscriptions or sell their Disney stocks (Boycott 'Woke' Disney, 2022).

"Boycott Disney" differs from the previous two groups as this anti-brand community focuses more on the creation of images, memes, or jokes, against Disney, which is shared between members. Encouragement is also done to share this mentality outside the group, with the focus of gathering more members to the community (Boycott Disney, 2022).

"Fuck Marvel" is a community were both Marvel fans and haters unite to criticize Marvel projects (mainly from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or MCU), as well as other Disney projects or Marvel comics. The community has an established set of 11 rules (see Appendix II) and one of those rules is:

You are allowed to praise individual MCU entries while you are here, but any suggestion that the MCU on balance is not an embarrassment is prohibited (Fuck Marvel, 2022).

The community works as a hub for individual members to post negative content related to Marvel and the MCU (images, videos, memes, articles), with interaction between members to collectively criticize Marvel and its fans (Fuck Marvel, 2022).

Fuck Nestlé

"Fuck Nestlé" is a social-media based anti-brand community on the platform Reddit. The community is founded and driven upon the premise of disliking and being critical to the brand Nestlé. The community is public and is accessible to whomever and granted membership is not

needed. The community has an established set of 11 rules (Appendix III) and the information paragraph states following:

We are here to expose Nestlé for their horrible schemes extending from child labor to exploiting poor communities for water. Please read the rules!

You can post a variety of things here, but remember fuck Nestlé. Nestlé loving is forbidden (read rules) Enjoy! (Fuck Nestlé, 2022).

The community works in the way that individual community members post content (images, texts, video, articles, news stories, polls, studies, etc.) negatively related to Nestlé, not seldom with explicit invitation to other members to comment their opinions on the presented material. In the comment sections, community members exchange topic-related thoughts, personal experiences and recommended actions to be taken in order to further express their dislike to- and cause harm to the brand (Fuck Nestlé, 2022).

I Hate Apple

I Hate Apple is a Facebook-based Anti-Brand Community of individuals expressing hatred towards the tech brand Apple. The community is public and is accessible to whomever and granted membership is not needed. The community has an established set of 11 rules (Appendix IV) and the information paragraph states following:

We hate iPods, iPads, iPhones, iMacs, iLife, iTunes and everything else Apple makes. We also love technology - So we find apple's

repeated pushing to be the market leader with their over priced, slave-produced, sub standard crap highly offensive (I Hate Apple, 2022).

The community works as a hub of Apple-critical consumers who want to express their negative thoughts on the brand as well as share experiences and opinions with other like-minded individuals - this is done through posting content; images, videos, texts, news-stories, studies, rumors, jokes/sketches, Apple-quotes, etc. The community has a high textual interaction among members in the comment section where post-related themes/cases are further discussed and analyzed (I Hate Apple, 2022).

Analysis

Vocal Brand Dislike

Through the gathered empirical material, a theme of users vocally expressing brand despise is constantly recurring. Relating to Dalli et al (2006) concept of Brand Dislike as categories, users of the ABCs convey:

1) product brand dislike by criticizing the unfair or illegitimate prices of the brands products. This is mostly seen in the case of the "I Hate Apple" community. A common narrative amongst community members is that Apple changes their customers ridiculously high prices for iPhones and Macbooks, solely basing product cost on their brand equity; spiking prices and utilizing the social status the brand gives consumers. Product brand dislike is further expressed by community members negative comments and posts about the poor performance/quality of the product - for instance, community members of "Fuck Nestlé" post images highlighting the under-delivering quality of Nesltlé products, not seldom by analysing the nutritional chart.

2) Corporate brand dislike by community members vocally expressing the despite of the brand based activities or behaviors deemed unethical by the community. This is repeatedly seen in the "I Hate Disney" community, where members communicating explicit hatred towards the integration of political correctness and "wokeness" within Disney. It is also seen frequently in "Fuck Nestlé", where members are posting content about the global environmental harm caused by Nestlé. Observed in "I Hate Apple", community members are expressing sharp criticism initiatives in towards Apple's "messaging war" with Google. Further brand dislike content posted on the community platforms, involved members' pictures and videos of physically destroying brand products by purpose (see Figure 4).

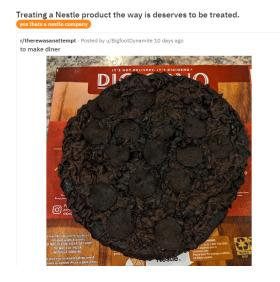


Figure 4: Example of community member purposely destroying Nestlé product (Fuck Nestlé, 2022)



Figure 5: Example of a community member who made a trash can out of a Macbook. (I Hate Apple, 2022)

Applying the Unitary Model of Brand Dislike (Dalli et al, 2006) the case ABCs may be placed on the upper half of the vertical axis (Figure 6) - viewing the communities as platforms for practice of brand-resistance. However also involving the social communication aspect which is fostering the member relationships that strengthens community and nourish resistance.

A UNITARY MODEL OF BRAND DISLIKE

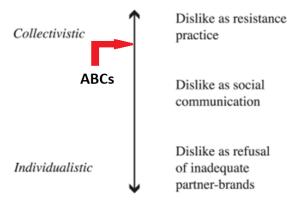


Figure 6: Brand dislike axis Dalli et al (2006). Edited by Kjellander & Garcia Raffo (2022).

Regarding brand dislike, there are different manners by which ABC members express their despise for the particular brand; In many cases members will post content as text or images that convey explicit hatred without arguing for their expression (see Figure 4 & 5). On the other hand, there are many cases where ABC members use intellectualized criticism as a way of communicating their dislike (see Figure 7).



These boys work 12 hours a day in the Swiss company Nestlé farms in the jungles of Ivory Coast, each carries an average of 3 tons of cocoa for about one dollar.

The company turns this cocoa into Kit Kat, Quality Street & Snickers chocolates & sells one kilogram for about \$84!!!.



Figure 7: Example of ABC member expressing Intellectualized critique towards Nestlé. (Fuck Nestlé, 2022)

Collective Brand Boycotting

Another frequently occurring theme identified in the empirical material, is a form of systematic refusal of brand products/services, which reminds of Sen et al's (2001) concept of consumer boycott. This is observed through both implicit and explicit actions/behaviours from the community members: Members of "Fuck Nestlé" and "Boycott Disney" explicitly

encourages other community members repeatetly not to use the brand in question (Figure 8) and in some instances further calls upon them to tell their family, friends and even strangers not to use the particular Community members do also brand. implicitly encourage brand boycotting by posting content that uplifts competitors and lists alternatives/substitutes for Apple or Nestlé products (see figure 9) This systematic behavior ofrefusing products/services from a particular actor is in line with the "collective denial" of brand-consumption that Sen et al (2001) writes about.



Figure 8: Disney-ABC admin encourages other members to boycott Disney (Boycott Disney Now, 2022)

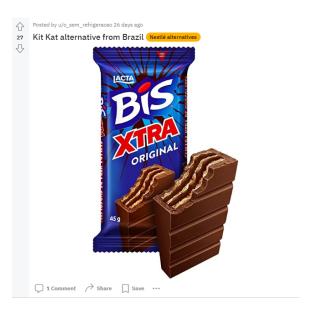


Figure 9: Nestlé-ABC member posts alternative of Nestlés famous product: Kit-Kat (Fuck Nestlé, 2022)

Echo Chamber

ABCs are, in itself, an echo chamber. As defined in the literature review, the content shared is one-sided, which is a common theme found across the ABCs analyzed. Becoming an echo chamber strengthens the ABCs as it creates a "safe space" for members to share their polarized opinions with reassurance that it will be met without criticism. As the Kapferer's brand identity prism (2012) suggests, when looking upon themselves, members of ABCs sometimes see themselves as being the defenders of the original and true brand, and that it is their job to change the brand to the values that they adhere to, and not to what the firm in itself values.

Thus, examples of becoming an echo chamber can range from the use of baseless or unfounded negative comments towards the brand, as seen below on Figure 10, where one member of the group shared a list of things wrong with Disney, making up facts about Walt Disney and how he was into satanism, or how Beauty and the Beast promoted bestiality.

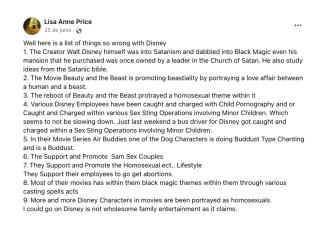


Figure 10: Example of baseless negative comments towards the brand (Boycott Disney Now, 2022)

In other instances, the anti-brand community can strengthen by the sharing of news or articles that are not real, sometimes made as satire for this type of communities to use, as it appears common for them to not fact-check. In the image below (see Figure 11), we can see a moderator of the Boycott Disney group sharing news against Disney from the page a page that "is a subsidiary of the "America's Last Line of Defense" network of parody, satire, and tomfoolery, or as Snopes called it before they lost their war on satire: Junk News" (Boycott Disney, 2022).



Figure 11: Example of satirical news shared in an anti-brand community (Boycott Disney, 2022)

Another case is the use of polls, where the options included will most likely have a clear right answer, thus the polls are just used as a way to re-confirm their biased ideas.



Figure 12: Example of post irrelevant to the hated brand, but similar in ideology (Boycott Disney Now, 2022)

Lastly, another way to strengthen the sense of community in ABCs is through sharing political content unrelated to the brand, but related to the member's ideology. Thus, while not actively attacking the brand, members keep sharing content where their point of view is shared, thus creating more common ideas to share between members. In the example above (see Figure 12), a member of the "Boycott Disney Now" group shares a post about illegal immigrants in the USA, which has no relation to Disney, but it connects with other members of the group as it fits the conservative and republican ideology that the members of the anti-brand community have.

Mockery

One of the most commonly recurring themes in the empirical material, is the community members' use of systematic mockery toward a brand and their fans. This mockery is identified through different actions by community members. One action is the generation of- and spread of satire/comedy memes relating to the brand. This action was identified 17 times towards Apple, 25 times towards Disney, 26 times towards Nestlé

and 32 times towards Marvel. The memes vary from shallow light-hearted jokes about product quality/price or marketing campaign satires (see Figure 13) - to dark jokes about the brand and political ideologies or unethical/illegal brand activities (see Figure 14).



Figure 13: Example of anti-Apple meme used on Facebook.com (I Hate Apple, 2022)



Figure 14: Example of anti-Nestlé meme used on Reddit.com (Fuck Nestlé, 2022)

Another action that is identified within the theme of mockery, is the use of Östberg et al's (2018) concept of Culture jamming. The use of culture jamming is seen in Apple and Disney cases, where the community members post images depicting the brands

logotype or graphical identity in a satirical manner based on community pre-existing narratives (see Figure 15).



Figure 15: Example of Nestlé and Disney culture jamming (Fuck Nestlé, 2022; Boycott Disney Now!, 2022)

Lastly, community members were identified to share negative comments or posts about the brands (positive) community, fan-base and loyal consumers. This was frequently occurring towards Apple and Marvel - here community members actively take part in conversations in comment sections on Facebook and Reddit. Members openly speculate about the poor mental state of the brand fans/customers/communities, not seldom using mass psychosis and sheep as comparisons (see Figure 16).



Figure 16: Apple-ABC member mocking reasoning of a typical Apple-fan (I Hate Apple, 2022)

Negative Word-of-Mouth

Negative word-of-mouth is the voice of ABCs. As described in the literature review, it refers to negative declarations made about brands or its products to a multitude of people. This strategy is how ABCs are built, and it is also how they grow; negative

word-of-mouth thus becomes a tool for social communication and interaction, where brand dislike is commonly shared between members of the ABCs.

Through the exploratory analysis on the selected ABCs, we found that negative word-of-mouth can be performed through at least four means:

By sharing news, articles or blogs with product, user or corporate brand dislike, members of ABCs are exposed to sources of information against the brand or their products, thus creating a base to be referred to when wanting to learn or be updated about the negative aspects of the brand. Seen in Figure 17 is an image of a piece of news from News Page Index, a coservative-funded news outlet that talks about Disney's stock plummeting, shared in the "Boycott Disney Now" group.



Figure 17: Example of news shared on an anti-brand community (Boycott Disney Now, 2022)

In the same vein, the action of sharing videos with a brand-negative narrative helps set a position in the mind of the members of the anti-brand community. These videos could either be the same as the news, sharing negative information about the brand, or it could be videos with negative opinions about the brand; opinions that

usually confirms their bias towards the brand.

In the "Boycott 'Woke' Disney" group (see Figure 18), a member of the community shares a video from Ben Shapiro & The Daily Wire, a common news source for conservative voices, that talks about Disney and they lack of response on the Parental Rights Bill in Florida, where one of their theme parks is located.



Figure 18: Example of video shared against Disney's lack of action (Boycott 'Woke' Disney, 2022)

To get their message across, members of ABCs also use personal experiences or stories that once again confirm the bias that other members have towards the brand. Here, these stories are subjective and from the point of view of the member, and their focus is to find more common ground or shared experiences between members.

In the "Fuck Nestlé" group (see Figure 19), a member shared their experience on what they did when they received a Nestlé's product as a prize at school, showing a plausible action that could be repeated by other members of the group.

Table 2: Strategy Orientation Framework

Internal	Echo Chamber
Internal-External	Mockery, Negative Word-of-Mouth & Vocal Brand Dislike
External	Collective Brand Boycotting

Figure 19: Example of a story told by a member (Fuck Nestlé, 2022)

Certain terminology is also commonly used in ABCs, as they create a language that members can use between each other. In the case of the ABCs analyse, there were a lot of mentions of a "woke, sexual, queer or hidden agenda" in the projects and actions of Disney, not only within the community through the publications, but also in the news, articles or even the videos.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to identify types what ofmethods anti-brand communities use in order to harm brands. This was achieved by exploring the content of online anti-brand communities of three major brands: Disney, Apple and Nestlé. Through the use of qualitative thematic analysis 19 different codes were identified. representing behavioral patterns and actions by community members. Through these codes, 5 major themes were identified: Vocal Brand Dislike, Consumer Boycotting, Echo chambers, Brand-related Mockery, Negative Word-of-Mouth.

We argue that these themes represent the different methods applied by the communities to cause harm to the brands in question. Some of these themes partly

overlap, for example Brand Dislike and Mockery, as well as **Negative** Word-of-Mouth and Echo Chamber. However, though the themes may appear to convey similar meaning - they may have different implications in terms of brand and internal organization: harm example, Brand dislike as an observed anti-branding method generally involves community members being vocal about their negative opinion about a brand, not seldom through intellectual reasoning. Mockery as a method typically involves community actors integrating humor and satire through an anti-branding narrative. Negative Word-of-Mouth on the other hand, is more focused on sharing clickbait-oriented content with the aim of spreading it peer-to-peer. Echo Chamber is more focused on the internal organization of community; interacting actors and reaffirming their own opinions and strengthening the community as a whole.

When deliberating on what strategies to use in an anti-brand community, members sometimes forget that the consequences of these strategies can vary depending on the group of people that listen to them. Usually, the consequences of using certain strategies are negative, as is the objective of ABCs. Attacking a brand, voicing your dislike of their product features, or even their quality, teaches those that are not part of the community of what is wrong about the brand. The same goes with brand boycotting, as the objective is to negatively

impact the brand by refusing to make purchases.

But what happens when an anti-brand community uses negative word-of-mouth? While their objective is to make others aware of their community, to grow the community, there is also an indirect consequence: it creates awareness of the brand they intend to harm. This awareness happens as the main topic in the mouth of ABCs is the brand, just like with brand communities that favor these brands.

And when working with culture jamming, it becomes harder. Just like brands want their customers to recognize them, their logotype or their slogan, among others (Melin, 2022), ABCs need their targets to associate certain logos or slogans for culture-jamming to be effective. If not, how would the images in Figure 20 above work? How can a person understand the second image if they don't know about their bird as the logo for Nestlé? How can a person understand the image without knowing what the Mickey ears are, or who those princes are?

Evidence then suggests that some of the targets of ABCs can be actual customers of the brand. Some of them find their way into ABCs after negative experiences with the brand. But what about the passive consumers, those with a low involvement. with fickle loyalty towards the brand? (Melin, 2002) They need to be convinced that the side of the ABCs is the right one. And while in cases such as Nestlé, we can find intellectualized comments with a base when critiquing the brand and their negative actions towards the environment, it is not the case of Disney, where it appears to be common for members to share baseless accusations as we have seen through this paper, or where they share sources that are actually satire, as there was no fact-checking done beforehand

Then, ABCs can actually trigger a change in behavior and actually increase the involvement some customers have towards the brand. Only, in this case, the involvement could be positive. They could possibly become vocal in favor of the brand, thus going against what their objectives were.

The purpose of this paper was also to give brand managers an insight of ABCs in order to be able to deal with the implication of their actions. Thus, it is important for them to be able to identify the different strategies used by ABCs. This can aid in their process of analyzing the potential actions that the brand can take to lessen the negative impact that comes from ABCs, or to take advantage of those strategies that can positively impact the brand. In that sense, brand managers must also understand that different types of They are part of the ABCs exist. environment that surrounds the brand, thus becoming stakeholders too.

It is also important for brand managers to differentiate the different things that ABCs voice and identify what is a baseless comment from an actual critique. And while the first is just an invention caused by an echo chamber, both voices should be dealt with the same level of importance.

Hence, we would highly recommend for brand managers to use a similar, if not the same, thematic analysis when trying to understand their "haters" and how to deal with these types of crises, categorizing the actions of the ABCs just like it was done on this paper before acting on them.

For that, we also believe that the themes (or strategies) found through the analysis could also be divided in three categories as shown in the table above (see Table 2). The categories are:

- Internal: Strategies with the objective of strengthening the identity of the anti-brand community and the values and ideas commonly shared by them.
- Internal-External: Strategies with the objective of not only strengthening the anti-brand community through interactions between members, but also with the objective of attracting more members.
- External: Strategies with the objective of attracting more members to the anti-brand community, building it and making it grow.

Conclusions

This paper analyzed different anti-brand communities from different industries to better understand the story within and how they act in order to harm brands. With the focus on analyzing these strategies, we give brand managers a tool to use when dealing with ABCs. But why is it important?

After the analysis, we can conclude that brand managers have to consider that ABCs are a growing force in the environment of the brand. Although their methods may seem to convey similar meanings, they have different implications towards the brand and the internal anti-brand community that brand managers just can't ignore. Thus, it becomes imperative for them to be constantly updated, scanning the environment of ABCs in order to stay ahead.

That is why we believe managers should do some type of analysis of what is being said by ABCs to learn about the common themes or strategies used by them. They should then divide the themes or strategies using the strategy orientation framework to understand the different implications those

strategies have. And they should constantly be up-to-date and tackle each strategy differently, finding common patterns within the ABCs. Because no one anti-brand community is the same.

Limitations & Avenues for Further Research

This research paper is subject to a diversity of limitations:

Limitations - Research method

Firstly, the qualitative research perspective has many advantages, simultaneously it also carries several limitations. Some of these limitations are: a) researcher bias, b) heavy dependency on researcher's interpretation, and c) difficulty to replicate results. These factors carry the potential to negatively affect the overall reliability and validity of the research process (Mohajan, 2018). Regarding this paper's chosen method of thematic analysis, it also holds some limitations. One of these is that, since thematic analysis is flexible, it may lead to "...inconsistency and lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data" (Nowell, Norris, White, Nancy & Moules, 2017, p.2).

Limitations - Case examples

Secondly, the case examples of this study are relatively few: three brands analyzed on two social media platforms may cause findings not to be generalized to larger scales. The limited number of case examples and utilized platforms is due to two factors that are interconnected: The first being the word- and timeframe of this paper. The second being the potential loss of analytical depth if 5-10 more case examples would have been applied.

Further research

What would enrich the existing field of anti-brand communities is a large-scale multi-platform, multi-language, multi-method research paper on social media-based ABCs. Building upon this ABC-method/strategy-identifying paper's aim, such research carries the potential of uncovering previously overlooked methods/strategies used by anti-brand communities. This knowledge could further assist brand managers "hand-on" combat the implications from the increasingly growing online anti-brand communities.

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Appendix I: Code Structure

Complaining about the product's quality (QUALITY)

Complaints about the brand's product quality.

- **Apply to** all messages that talk about the negative features of the brand's product, and the poor quality they have.
- **Do not apply to** messages where members critique the price (see PRICE) or their actions (see ACTIVITIES).

Negative comments about product price (PRICE)

Complaints about the brand's product price.

- **Apply to** all messages of members complaining about the product's price.
- **Do not apply to** messages where members critique the quality (see QUALITY) or the brand's doings (see ACTIVITIES).

Complaining about activities (ACTIVITIES)

Complaints about activities done by the brand they want to harm.

- **Apply to** all messages where the critiques of the members are about something the brand has done which they believe has a negative aspect.
- **Do not apply to** messages where the members are critiquing the quality (see QUALITY) or price (see PRICE) of the brand

Cheering for stock decline (STOCK)

Positive commentary about the brand's stock decline.

- **Apply to** all messages or shared content that speaks about the decline in stock for the brand.
- **Do not apply to** shared content that is unrelated to the stock (see NEWS).

Posting photos destroying brand products (DESTROY)

Upload of images that show members destroying the brand's products or related assets.

- **Apply to** all images that show products or assets from the brand being destroyed, or already destroyed.
- **Do not apply to** images that poke fun on the brand's products (see MEMES).

Intellectualized negative brand comments (INTELLECT)

Comments made by members of the ABCs that are based on actual critiques and are not unfounded.

- **Apply to** all messages where members critique the brand with an actual explanation behind it.
- **Do not apply to** all messages where the critiques are unfounded (see BASELESS) or where the critique focuses on other aspects.

Uplifting competitors/substitutes of a particular brand (COMPETITOR)

Content shared uplifting the brand's competitor's products or substitutes.

- Apply to content shared that shows substitutes for the brand's products or uplifts the competitor's products, via comments or images.
- **Do not apply to** content shared that includes critique of the competitors or their substitutes, or images of other products without context.

Encouragement to not buy or consume the brand (N-CONSUME)

Content that encourages other members of the group to not buy or consume the brand as to negatively impact them.

- Apply to all messages where encouragement towards not consuming the brand is included.
- **Do not apply to** all messages where the brand is criticized for its features (see QUALITY), activities (see ACTIVITIES) or price (see PRICE).

Baseless negative comments towards the brand (BASELESS)

Critiques against the brand with no base to work upon.

- **Apply to** all messages that are just attacks against the brand without real information to back it up.
- **Do not apply to** messages where the critique focuses on the fans (see FANS) or where there is real evidence behind it (see INTELLECTUAL).

Sharing of content unrelated to the brand but related to the ideology (IDEOLOGY)

Unrelated content that caters to the members' ideology and forgets about the brand.

- Apply to all messages where members share content that has no relevance towards the hatred of the brand, focusing on those that appeals to their ideology.
- **Do not apply to** messages that are just content about the brand.

Creating Polls

Internal surveys done in the ABCs with questions related to the brand through a negative POV.

- **Apply to** polls that have some relation to the brand.
- **Do not apply to** polls that are completely unrelated to the brand (see IDEOLOGY).

Sharing of satirical pieces without fact-checking (SATIRE)

Content shared originating from satirical sources.

- **Apply to** all news or articles shared coming from satirical sources that have not been fact-checked.
- **Do not apply to** all news or articles shared that have been fact-checked (see NEWS).

Negative comments on the brand community or the brand's fans (FANS)

Critiques that target the brand community, those loyals to the brand, or its fans.

• Apply to all messages that have the brand community or the fans as its target.

• **Do not apply to** all messages that critiques the brand's actions (see ACTIVITIES), its features (see QUALITY), price (see PRICE), or others.

Sharing of culture jamming imagery (JAMMING)

Twisting messages that anti-brand communities communicate.

- Apply to all messages where culture jamming has been applied through images or slogans.
- **Do not apply to** messages where jokes or memes (see MEMES) have been created against the brand, even if they have used some sort of the brand image on it.

Sharing of anti-brand comedic images or memes (MEMES)

Imagery shared that includes mockery towards the brand through images or memes.

- Apply to all images that poke fun of the brand through common or known memes, or images.
- **Do not apply to** images that poke fun of the brand through using the brand's imagery or assets (see JAMMING).

"Sexual/Queer/Woke/Hidden" Agenda

Use of buzzwords to talk about a "secret" agenda brands have to indoctrinate the society.

- **Apply to** all messages that include words like "sexual/queer/woke/hidden agenda" as the main topic.
- **Do not apply to** messages that use the buzzwords as part of another main idea.

Sharing of negative articles about the brand (NEWS)

Content shared about the brand through media outlets.

- Apply to all content shared coming from media channels such as newspapers, blogs, magazines, that talk negatively about the brand.
- **Do not apply to** shared content that does not talk about the brand (see

IDEOLOGY) or content that has not been fact-checked (see BASELESS).

Personal experience or stories by users (STORIES)

Telling of personal experiences or stories users have gone through.

- Apply to all messages where a member of an ABC tells their own personal experience or a story about something they have gone through.
- **Do not apply to** messages where the member tells a story that is not theirs.

Sharing of videos with brand-negative narratives (VIDEOS)

Shared videos where the content of the videos include a negative narrative towards the brand.

- **Apply to** all videos shared on the groups that include negative commentary against the brand.
- **Do not apply to** videos that do not talk negatively about the brand, or those that have not been fact-checked (see BASELESS).

Appendix II: Rules of Fuck Marvel

Rule 1: No Defense of MCU Allowed

You are allowed to praise individual MCU entries while you are here, but any suggestion that the MCU on balance is not an embarrassment is prohibited. If you have a problem with this, go jerk off with everyone else at /r/movies. In general, any comment that casts the MCU in too positive a light will be removed at the mods' discretion. If we see too much praise for Marvel capeshit in the comments here, we will institute a wider ban.

Rule 2: Site-wide Guidelines Will Be Enforced Here

Don't threaten or harass anyone.

Rule 3: No DC Fanboyism

A sub titled "Fuck Marvel" is sure to bring the DC sadbois to the yard. Unfortunately this is the easiest way to make everyone in the sub look pants-on-head retarded. Saying that you like Man of Steel is okay, but saying that BvS is an Arthurian masterpiece is not. What exactly consitutes "fanboyism" will be left up to the mods. Basically, if you're a DC fan, have some self-awareness and dignity. If the sub begins to stray from its main topic, there will be a ban on all DC discussion.

Rule 4: Posts Must Be About The MCU

DC and 20th Century Fox focused comments are allowed at the mods' discretion, but every post must be about the MCU.

Rule 5: No Politics

Don't come here if you're looking to bitch and moan about le sjws. There are plenty of reasons to criticize the MCU. No need to complain about "forced diversity" or "Cultural Marxism" or whatever. Comments that start waxing political will be removed at the mods' discretion.

Rule 6: Fuck the MCU

Anyone who thinks these movies are funny or creative in any important way deserves to be laughed out of here.

Rule 7: Go watch a Real '70s Political Thriller

Seriously, if you think there's anything worthwhile in this fucking disgustingly bland cinematic universe, you need to broaden your horizons. Try watching a movie that's actually good before you spend the rest of your life LOLing at jokes that

wouldn't make the cut on a third rate Cracked.com writer's twitter feed.

Appendix III: Rules of Fuck Nestlé

Rule 1: No Spamming

No spam and also no posts with the content as "Fuck Nestle" for example tell us why you hate it etc... Posts violating this rule will be closed and hidden

Rule 2: No NSFW content

We get it, sometimes there is a post that has some 18+ content in it but relates with our community, in this case mod must approve, DM us! All posts that are NSFW or not Fuck Nestle related will be closed and removed.

Rule 3: No harassment

Please don't be mean. Middle finger posts are also no longer allowed.

Rule 4: Posts should be flaired

You must flair your posts, mods may also flair posts for you.

Rule 5: No Reposts

Please do not repost. Reposts will be locked

Rule 6: No Nestlé loving

Rule 7: No politics

No low effort political posts

Rule 8: No self promotion.

Rule 9: No off topic

Rule 10: No /r/HailCorporate

Specifically no mentions of chocolate brands whose name rhymes with "Crony" and "I am so lonely".

Rule 11: No brigading

Related to no harassment.... don't link to other subreddits or Reddit accounts. Screenshots must have usernames censored.

Appendix IV: Rules of I Hate Apple

Rule 1: No Spam/Sales/advertising

We don't have a problem with users who have been members for a year or longer making the occasional sales post as long as it's related to tech, and not too frequent.

Rule 2: No Pro-Apple Posting

We all have different core ideas about how we hate Apple but outright loving them... well that's just icky.

Rule 3: No Annoying People on purpose, i.e. trolling

Look it's funny to leave flaming poop on a door step but after the 100th time it gets old. Until you do it to someone else. Then it's funny again!

Rule 4: English language posts only

It just makes it easier to police the group.

Rule 5: No back to back duplicate topics or posts

Please do not post multiple times about the same topics in a short space of time. Also

Check that what you're about to post hasn't been posted before. It probably has.

Rule 6: Please don't repeatedly ask other members for help

This is the internet, we are not your own personal technical support line. You need to try and find out on your own. This doesn't mean you can't, just don't expect a class in "How to use a computer".

Rule 7: No repeated signatures

This isn't 2008 so we don't need to know you posted from your Samsung Smack my Galaxy 10.

Rule 8: No threats or overwrought aggression

For instance "I want to kill Tim Cook", "I want to kill you", "I'm going to kill/stab/torture/maim/cause harm to your person". However, we don't have an issue with swearing.

Rule 9: Have a sense of humour

Don't be a grumpasaurus if you don't get the joke.

Rule 10: You may not block moderators

This will get you removed from the group. Sorry if you don't like what we're saying, but we have to have an open line of communication to resolve problems.

Appendix V: List of codes grouped by themes

Once the codes were set, the Facebook groups were analyzed in a time frame of 6 months (April to September 2022) and the Reddit groups in a time frame of 1 month (September 2022). The codes found were

counted and grouped together in their themes.

A stands for Apple. D stands for Disney. M stands for Marvel. N stands for Nestlé.

Vocal Brand Dislike (132)

Complaining about company activities (ACTIVITIES) [52] = A8 D12 M16 N16

Posting user photos of destroying brand products (DESTROY) [5] = A1 D1 N3

Negative comments about product price (PRICE)[4] = A4

Complaining about product quality (QUALITY) [23] = A6 N7 M10

Cheering for stock decline (STOCK) [26] = D21 A2 N2 M1

Intellectualized negative brand comments (INTELLECT) [22] A2 N6 M14

Collective Brand Boycott (73)

Uplifting of competitors / substitutes for particular brand (COMPETITOR) = A14 D5 N16 M4 = 39

Encouragement to not buy or consume the brand (N-CONSUME) [34] = D16 N17 M1

Echo Chamber (51)

Baseless/unfounded negative comments/posts towards brand (BASELESS) [6] = D1 M5

Sharing of political content unrelated to the brand but related to the ideology (IDEOLOGY) [31] = D31

Creating Polls (POLLS) [8] = A2 N5 M1

Sharing of satirical pieces without fact-checking (SATIRE) [6] = D5 A1

Mockery (127)

Negative comments on positive brand community/fans (FANS) [30] = A14 M16

Sharing of culture jamming imagery (JAMMING) [14] = A8 D6

Sharing of anti-brand comedic images or memes (MEMES) [83] = A17 D25 N26 M32

Negative Word-of-Mouth (150)

"Sexual/Queer/Woke/Hidden" Agenda (AGENDA) [13] = D11 M2 Sharing negative news/articles/blogs about brand (NEWS) [79] = A18 D54 N5 M2

Personal experience stories by users (STORIES) [17] = A5 D2 N10

Sharing of video with Brand-negative narrative (VIDEOS) [41] = A13 D16 N8 M4

Table 1: Overview of online ABCs studied (April 2022-September 2022)

Name	Platform	Created on	Members	Publications
Boycott Disney	Facebook	30th of March, 2022	191	105
Boycott Disney Now	Facebook	31st of March, 2015	338	53
Boycott 'Woke' Disney	Facebook	31st of March, 2022	102	48
FuckMarvel	Reddit	1st of May, 2018	3,800	754
FuckNestlé	Reddit	29th of August, 2016	223,000	2641
I Hate Apple	Facebook	16th of October, 2007	6,421	57

Table 2: Strategy Orientation Framework

Internal	Echo Chamber
Internal-External	Mockery, Negative Word-of-Mouth & Vocal Brand Dislike
External	Collective Brand Boycotting