

Brand Crisis Communication and Consumer Brand Engagement on Social Media: The Case of Frontline Employee Generated Crisis

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Abstract

Social media enables brands to communicate instantly with consumers and drive user engagement. However, consumers' brand engagement on social media is not always positive, especially in the presence of a crisis. Consumer brand engagement becomes more complicated given consumers' empowerment through social media and the brands' multiple stakeholders that shape brands' value. The purpose of this research is to explore consumers' multi-valenced online comments on a brand crisis communication initiated by front-line employees' misbehavior towards a group of consumers in the retail environment. Data was collected from the brand crisis communication that was shared on the official Instagram account of the brand. Focusing on real time Instagram data from consumers that reside in a collectivistic culture, a typology was developed to classify the hybrid and multi-valenced forms of consumer brand engagement. The study contributes to the consumer brand engagement and brand crisis communication literature.

Keywords: Consumer brand engagement, social media, brand crisis communication, front-line employees

JEL Classification Codes: M31, M37

Sosyal Medyada Marka Krizi İletişimi ve Tüketici Marka Etkileşimi: Çalışanlarının Yarattığı Kriz Örneği

Öz

Sosyal medya, markaların tüketicilerle anında iletişim kurmasını ve kullanıcı katılımını artırmasını sağlar. Bununla birlikte, tüketicilerin sosyal medyadaki marka etkileşimi, özellikle bir krizin varlığında her zaman olumlu değildir. Tüketicilerin sosyal medya aracılığıyla güçlenmesi ve markaların marka değerini şekillendiren birden fazla paydaşı göz önüne alındığında, tüketici marka bağlılığı daha karmaşık hale gelir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, ön cephe çalışanlarının perakende ortamında bir grup tüketiciye karşı uygunsuz davranışlarıyla başlatılan bir marka krizi iletişimine tüketicilerin çok yönlü çevrimiçi yorumlarını keşfetmektir. Veriler, markanın resmi Instagram hesabında paylaşılan marka krizi iletişiminden elde edilmiştir. Toplulukçu bir kültürde yaşayan tüketicilerin gerçek zamanlı Instagram verilerine odaklanarak, hibrit ve çok değerli tüketici marka bağlılığı biçimlerini sınıflandırmak için bir tipoloji geliştirildi. Çalışma tüketici marka bağlılığı ve marka kriz iletişimi literatürüne katkı sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Tüketici marka etkileşimi, sosyal medya, marka kriz iletişimi, çalışanlar

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1. Introduction

Social media enables brands to communicate instantly with consumers and drive user engagement. As of April 2023, 64.6 percent of the world population are internet users and of this total 59.9 percent are social media users (Petrosyan, 2023). Using social media for connecting and engaging with friends, relatives, influencers and brands, consumers worldwide spend an average of 151 minutes per day on these platforms (Dixon, 2023). Given the vast potential of social media, brands across various industries are spending considerable financial resources for the development of specific digital strategies on these channels. Global social media advertising expenditures were around 116 billion U.S. dollars in 2021 and are projected to more than double by 2028 (ww.statista.com).

Apart from marketing practitioners, since 2010, the Marketing Science Institute has prioritized research that advances existing knowledge on the development of consumer engagement and the cultivation of this customer asset using technological platforms (MIS, 2022). This call exponentially increased the number of research in the marketing field (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold and Carlson, 2017). Nowadays, more than fifteen years after the development of the brand management metric, several review papers attempt to explore the structure of existing CE research (for recent reviews check Hollebeek, Sharma, Pandey, Sanyal, and Clark; Lim and Rasul, 2022; Lim, Rasul, Kumar and Ala, 2022; Santos, Cheung, Coelho and Rita, 2022). Recent studies acknowledge the multidimensional and multi-valenced nature of the construct. Manifested through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions consumers' engagement with brands can be positive or negative.

Increasingly, scholars also explore consumers' engagement with brands on social media platforms. Existing research focuses on either positive or negative engagement with brands on social media, while few studies explore the phenomenon by not defining these two mutually exclusive forms of engagement (e.g., Naumann, Lay-Hwa Bowden and Gabbott, 2017; Clark, Lages, and Hollebeek, 2020). Studies also predominantly collect primary data by using a retrospective sample generally represented by consumers in developed countries (Kumar and Kaushik, 2022; Viglia, Pera, Dyussebayeva, Mifsud, and Hollebeek, 2023).

The present study will explore consumers' online comments on brand crisis communication. The brand crisis communication was developed upon a viral video that shows front-line employees' misbehavior to a group of consumers in the retail environment. Focusing on real time data from consumers that reside in a collectivistic culture, the present study will explore positive and negative forms of consumer brand engagement in social media. Research findings contribute to the consumer brand engagement and brand crisis communication literature respectively.

The paper will start with the critical literature review on consumer brand engagement with a focus on the multi-dimensional and multi-valenced nature of the construct. Then information will be provided about the research methodology, followed by the analysis of the typology that was observed in the research context. The paper will end with a discussion of the research findings by providing theoretical contributions, limitations, and venues for future research.

2. Literature Review

The systematic literature reviews on consumer brand engagement (CE) using bibliometric and thematic or network analysis attempt to classify studies based on the conceptualization and operationalization of CE, the theoretical perspectives employed to frame of CE, the antecedents, moderators, mediators and consequences of CE, the methods of measurement, and new research contexts that offer new research opportunities (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2022; Lim and Rasul, 2022; Lim et al., 2022). Even though the dimensions of CE vary across studies, the multidimensional perspective dominates the field supporting the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of engagement (e.g., Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie, 2014; Vivek, Beatty, Dalela, and Morgan, 2014; Dessart, Veloutsou and Morgan-Thomas, 2016). According to Hollebeek (2018) cognitive CE refers to the consumers' mental processing of brand related information, emotional CE the short- or long-term affection towards brands and behavioral CE the actions that consumers take towards brands from a repurchase intention to creating and sharing brand related content on social media. Similarly, the context in which engagement is developed varies as brands use multiple offline and online channels to enable CE (Santos Corrada, Flecha, and Lopez, 2020; Lim et al., 2022). As Lim et al. (2022, p. 441) argue that the conceptualization of the construct is highly encompassing – *“the concept of CE can encompass cognitive, affective and behavioral engagement among current and potential internal and external customers in multi-channel and multi-touchpoint offline and online environments across industries and sectors”*. Following the multi-stakeholder approach on branding (Merz, He and Vargo, 2009), this conceptualization extends CE to all stakeholders that may shape the development of brand value.

2.1. Positive Online CE

The growth of digital technologies increased scholars' attention to the exploration of the phenomenon in the context of the digital environment. In contrast to the offline environment, social media platforms allow dynamic and timely communication between brands and consumers without the presence of any boundaries (Barari, Ross, Thaichon, and Surachartkumtonkun, 2021). Social media platforms allow firms to develop CE and use analytical tools for the evaluation of online social media outcomes (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014; Labrecque, 2014). Online consumer brand engagement enables several positive brand- and consumer-related outcomes such as brand loyalty, brand trust, purchase intention, word of

mouth communication and consumer satisfaction (Brodie, Ilic, Juric and Hollebeek, 2013; Harrigan, Evers, Miles and Daly, 2018; Simon and Tossan, 2018). Apart from brand-consumer interactions, engaged consumers will also be interacting with other devotees, strengthening CE (for a review check Santos et al., 2020).

Especially in the context of social media platforms, consumers engage in several behavioral practices. Muntinga, Moorman and Smit (2011) classify behavioral practices into consumption, contribution, and creation. Consumption refers to the minimum level of CE referring to consumers that follow brands without actively creating any content (such as watching videos and reading others' comments). Contribution refers to the middle level of CE that includes both consumer-brand and consumer-consumer interactions (such as following brands and/or brand related fan accounts and commenting on posts created by brands and/or other consumers). Cocreation refers to the highest CE as consumers are highly engaged in creating and sharing brand related content – content that can be consumed and contributed by other consumers (e.g., develop and share brand related posts that include different audio, verbal, and visual messages). Consequently, CE in social media is more complicated and dynamic as it enables not only consumer-brand interactions but also consumer-consumer interactions (Sawhney, Verona and Prandelli, 2005; Cova and Pace, 2006).

Even though the behavioral dimension of social media CE is inevitable, Lim and Rasul (2022) argue that cognitive and affective engagement can be captured indirectly through the behavioral manifestations shared on posts and comments. Increasingly social media platforms create new tools that will multiply consumers' cognitive and affective engagement with brands on social media. Examples range from emotional reactions that are an extension of the like button on Facebook (like, love, care, happy, surprised, sad, and angry) and the newly developed alternative for Twitter Instagram Threads that allows consumers to post and text images and videos as well as enables interactions with other consumers' posts through replies, reposts and likes.

2.2. Positive and Negative Online CE

The CE research so far has more extensively focused on positive online consumer brand engagement. However not all engaged consumers will create favorable outcomes and scholars call for a more multi-valenced perspective on CE (Do, Rahman and Robinson, 2019; Azer and Alexander, 2020; Naumann, Bowden and Gabbott, 2020). Using social media platforms, consumers can actively contribute and cocreate by communicating their negative experiences with brands. Examples range from disliking a Facebook post to creating a new account on Instagram to express negative experiences towards a brand's shortcomings. An emerging stream of research focuses on the construct's negative valence and the resulting outcomes of negative consumer brand engagement (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014; Bowden, Conduit, Hollebeek, Luoma-aho and Solem, 2017; Clark et al., 2020). Hollebeek

and Chen (2014, p.69) define negative customer engagement (NCE) as “*consumers’ unfavorable brand-related thoughts, feelings and behaviors during focal brand interactions*”.

Similarly with the positive CE, negative CE’s conceptualization and dimensionality vary in the literature. For example, Hollebeek et al. (2014) conceptualize CE as either positive or negative and irrespective of its nature, it manifests with the three dimensions of immersion, passion and activation represented by a customers’ brand related thoughts, affection, and behaviors. On the other hand, Juric, Smith, and Wilks (2015) argue that NCE is not a reverse form of positive CE and define it as a multidimensional construct that is triggered by perceived threats to self that enables the adoption of coping strategies to reduce dissonance or perceived social risk. Despite the disagreements on how the dimensions and subdimensions of NCE operate, several scholars agree on the multidimensional nature of the concept and like positive CE incorporate negative cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations (Naumann et al., 2020).

Regarding negative CE with brands on social media, based on the intensity and activeness of negative experiences, scholars also distinguish between disengagement and negative engagement (Bowden et al. 2016; Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, and Goodman, 2016; Naumann et al., 2017). Dolan et al. (2016) categorize detachment (moderate and passive) and destruction (high and active) as negative engagement behaviors in social media. Naumann et al. (2017) classify the construct into disengagement and negative engagement and specify for each the sub-dimensions of cognitive (distrust versus cynicism), affective (frustration versus anger and complaining), and behavioral (neglect versus value co-destruction). Depending on the intensity level and activeness of negative expressions, negative brand CE can harm consumers’ perceived brand value (Van Doorn et al., 2010), lead to value co-destruction rather than co-creation (Naumann et al., 2017), reduce financial performance (Rahman, Faroque, Sakka, and Ahmed, 2022) and enable negative word-of-mouth communication (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014).

Despite the theoretical contributions, there is still scant research that combines positive and negative CE on social media. The bibliometric reviews on CE on social media offer pathways for future research: several categories of antecedents and consequences remain underexplored, CE can differ based on the country, culture and social media platform explored, and different research methodologies can provide insights for the thorough understanding of the phenomenon (Islam and Rahman, 2016; Hollebeek, Kumar, Srivastava and Clark, 2023; Lim and Rasul, 2023).

Given this call, the present study will contribute to the CE literature on social media by examining consumers reactions (positive and negative) to a brand crisis communication on Instagram in an emerging market. It is theoretically important to take a hybrid (positive and negative) rather than a single perspective (positive or

negative) for the exploration of CE as single perspectives narrow the understanding of the phenomenon. Specifically, during a crisis, managers try to restore or maintain brands' reputation by developing crisis-response communication strategies (Ertimur and Coskuner-Balli, 2021; Kleer and Kunz, 2023; Utz, Schultz and Glocka, 2013). For example, Kleer and Kunz (2023) explored Facebook brand pages and discussed how posts that implicitly communicate the pandemic increased online engagement behavior. Although several studies explore crisis communication, only a few do so in terms of interactive communication (Liu, Xu, and Tsai, 2020; Kleer and Kunz, 2023). Consequently, apart from the theoretical contributions in the CE literature, the present study will also identify the social media strategies that should be executed in a post-crisis stage.

3. Research Methodology

For the exploration of the research question, a netnography was carried out for a case that enabled the formation of positive and negative CE on a brand's official Instagram account. Netnography is a specialized form of ethnographic research in a computer-mediated environment (Kozinets, 2012). The online environment is a reflection of the social and cultural world that allows researchers to understand phenomena by observing online interactions using a cultural frame of reference (Kozinets, 1998). Next, the ethnographically explored case will be explained, followed by the methods of analysis used.

3.1. Case Study

On April 13th 2023, a video was shared on different platforms about an incident that occurred in the retail store of DeFacto in the province of Karaman in Turkey. The video shows two front-line employees walking in the corridor of the shopping mall carrying a bunch of coats to the store. Approaching to the entrance of the store a consumer crowd desperately expects the products on sale. To the surprise of many, the female sales representative throws the products on the consumers and runs away, while a group of consumers grasps the products held by the male sales representative. A huge fight between consumers starts in the retail store. Consumers pull not only the products but also the other consumers that hold these products. The fight gets so intense that some consumers fall on the floor still trying to protect their captured "prizes".

After the video went viral, DeFacto shared immediately a post on the brands' social media accounts about the crisis created by the front-line employees. On a black background the message reads "We are extremely sorry for the negative images that emerged during the campaign we presented in our Karaman store. As a brand that prioritizes customer satisfaction above all else, we have taken the necessary measures to ensure that the experienced negativity does not happen again. We present it to the information of all our customers and the public". The brand crisis communication increased consumers' negative CE. On Instagram, the post received

5.083 likes and 507 comments. Apart from the likes that may connote a positive affection, the comments vary.

3.2. Methods of Analysis

Consumers' comments shared on the brand crisis communication post were used for the exploration of the phenomenon. Collected data was analyzed using the premises of grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). First, each comment was read independently and coded. Then going back and forth the comments' similar codes were grouped together. This open coding phase led to the development of first-order codes that reflect closely the posted comments. The first-order codes used are consumers, brands, and front-line employees. Then axial coding – a more abstract level analysis – was performed by conceptualizing the cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations towards the three identified objects (consumers, brand, and front-line employees) that resulted in the development of second-order codes. Finally, a dialogue between data and literature was carried out throughout the analysis to check whether emergent research themes aligned with or diverged from previous research.

Based on the analysis, a typology was created to explain the different categories of consumer engagement. Consumers' social media comments inform the analysis. The content creators' account names were concealed due to privacy reasons. The contents were translated into English.

4. Research Findings

The identified typology explains how positive and negative CE co-exist due to the presence of several objects namely, the brand, the front-line employees, and the consumers. This hybrid CE is evident in the social media comments. While consumers engage positively with an object, they engage negatively with another. The typology classifies twelve different forms of engagement (see Figure 1). As shown in the figure, every form of engagement is observed in a reverse form. Each identified hybrid form will be discussed starting from a positive engagement towards consumers, then to front-line employees and finally the brand.

Consumers	+			+	+			+	+			+	+			+	+			+			
Front-Line Employees		+	+			+	+			+								+	+			+	+
Brand						+	+			+	+			+	+			+	+			+	+

Figure 1: Typology of Online CE

4.1. Positive CE – Consumers, Negative CE – Front-Line Employees

Consumers' social media comments focus on the affection towards the consumers that were present in the store and the anger towards the disrespectful behaviors of

front-line employees. Consumers point to the irresponsibility of front-line employees by communicating the selling process.

As someone who has been a storekeeper for years, do you consider it normal to throw a coat to the customer, who must grab it in the air? The staff goes and hangs it, then there is nothing to do about it. The job of the store personnel is not to be a buffoon, but to deliver the products to the customers properly.

Several metaphors were used for the consumers who had undergone this negative experience. Some of the metaphors used were statements that are offensive and only have a meaning in Turkish. An example of a more regular comment is provided below.

What is the logic of throwing coats on people like throwing a bagel at a seagull? Dear sales representative can you explain this?

With the content going viral, a second video was revealed that was shot by another consumer who was present in the retail environment. This video shows the brand's front-line employees watching the video and laughing about the consumers' fighting over the products. This intensified consumers' negative CE towards the employees. This misbehavior also acted as a reminder of previous negative experiences with the brand's front-line employees.

As if they are giving money for free as if they are giving products for free... People who have no knowledge about clothing, seriously come to your senses.

Some consumers also used this behavior as an example for the front-line employees of other brands.

These cashiers for some reason are very cool everywhere. I put in his/her place a cashier in Zara the other day. As if she was working at Gucci, he/she was arrogantly showing off.

4.2. Positive CE – Consumers, Negative CE – Brand

Engaging positively with the consumers that experienced the misbehavior, comments criticize the brand crisis communication and ask for direct evidence of the measures taken. Several comments point to the fact that the shared post does not include an apology.

Your statement without an apology doesn't mean anything. It's an inadequate statement.

As a behavioral manifestation of hate, consumers use hashtags of brand boycotts and even name alternative brands that could deliver a higher consumer value. Others criticize the poor quality and the high prices of products.

DeFacto out LCW in. Employee training and price policies are much better (in LCW).

You used to be a brand for middle-income people. Now you treat the middle-income people badly. Since the rich will not come and shop from you, you will miss the people of this group you humiliate. Your prices are no longer clear to whom you are targeting. Everyone has started to find alternatives. I hope you go bankrupt soon.

4.3. Positive CE – Consumers, Negative CE – Brand and Front-Line Employees

In this form of engagement, consumers develop a positive CE to consumers and a negative CE both to the brand and the front-line employees. The brand crisis communication was not considered a sufficient recovery strategy for the employees' misbehavior.

You treat consumers as animals, and when the reaction comes, apologize. Bravo.

Consumers asked the brand to dismiss the employees and even the store managers due to their inability to manage the crisis. Evidence for the measures taken are also demanded as the crisis communication was perceived as a general message stating that necessary precautions will be taken. Some consumers even expressed brand boycott.

I think that all employees from the manager to the cleaner should be fired. They made a video and made fun of it. I'm boycotting it on my own behalf.

4.4. Positive CE – Consumers and Front-Line Employees, Negative CE – Brand

Given the economic instability in Turkey, some consumers formed a negative CE only towards the brand. Accused of focusing on commercial interests, brands develop several strategies to increase the store traffic as it is the case with the sales promotions. Consumers not only identify the subjects responsible for this situation, but at the same time make recommendations for strategies that could have been executed.

The only guilty part in this situation is the company and the management. I think it should not be done like this. You are giving discounts on 10 coats and communicate it to 1000 people. The company is guilty. Why do you give the products to employees and then let them show them as models on a runway?

Place the products at night and let the products be sold in the morning. Shame on you.

Comments also focus on the working conditions of front-line employees by directly or indirectly giving references to working hours, job responsibilities and wages.

We don't know who works under what conditions. It's really a pity if they were fired.

4.5. Positive CE – Consumers and Brand, Negative CE – Front-Line Employees

In this form of engagement, consumers develop a positive CE with consumers and the brand and a negative CE with front line employees. Consumers who have experienced this misbehavior are considered as victims. The brand should not be held responsible for a single employee's behavior as the message shared on social media platforms depicts that precautions were taken.

True, the images in the video are not pretty. The brand would have preferred not to be shared. It would be a mistake to attribute the mistake of a young, perhaps inexperienced store employee to the entire brand. The brand expressed its regret and announced that it would take measures to prevent it from happening again, and I think it has done its part. I don't think it's right to look for bad intentions here and blame the brand.

Consumers value the brand crisis communication of the firm despite the employees' misbehavior. Some consumers even suggest strategies so that the brand does not experience again a similar situation.

The brand's apology is really nice and humane. But despising and humiliating people is far from empathy. Employees' personalities should be questioned about their personality.

If you really need to, don't sell the products, please, these images are a scandal for a big chain store... store employees and managers need to be trained immediately. Not all individuals are at the same level of education.

4.6. Positive CE – Brand, Negative CE – Consumers

Protesting consumers who were present in the retail environment, consumers' comments express positive CE towards the brand. The brand and indirect employees' misbehavior is normalized as similar incidences are regularly experienced in times of promotion.

There is no need to make the company a scapegoat. Wherever we see news about discounts, similar situations happen. If people choose not to be courteous, we will continue to observe similar situations elsewhere.

Communicating love towards the brand, consumers pay attention to the importance of the target market. This is a call for classifying consumers and identifying the brand's real consumers – consumers who protect and support the image of the brand.

I think it's not about you. The customer is very important. Show a little understanding, we love you Defacto ♥

In this engagement form, consumers also offer recommendations to the brand's retailing strategies.

These folks don't deserve any discounts. Then you are declared as guilty. As if consumers who drag each other are normal.

4.7. Positive CE – Brand and Front-Line Employees, Negative CE – Consumers

In this engagement form, comments focus on negative manifestations towards the consumers whose behaviors enabled the creation of negative social media CE. These consumers are accused of embracing materialistic values not only due to the fight over the products on promotion but also due to the number of products purchased.

Sorry, why should they quit their job? They brutally attack each other; they are greedy, and they do want others to take advantage of the sales. Don't you see how they attack? They (front-line employees) did very well for treating them like this. Kudos to you, DeFacto.

Consumers particularly specify that front-line employees should not be held responsible for their actions and thus, advise and sometimes even warn the brand to not impose any sanctions.

@defacto it's not the fault of any of the employees. If you fire them, then you must apologize. No matter what the employees do. Stupid people are attacking like they are hungry, the employees could have been harmed. It's their (consumers') own fault. @defacto stand behind your employees, they are clearly not guilty.

You don't need to apologize. A group of consumers ripped coats in the air. I hope your employee has not been sanctioned for this situation.

4.8. Positive CE – Front-Line Employees, Negative CE – Consumers

Similar to the above CE, consumers form a negative CE towards the consumers that were present in the retail environment, but only positive CE towards the front-line employees. Consumers are perceived as embracing materialistic values, acting

selfishly by stockpiling products and putting in danger the well-being of front-line employees.

I am writing as someone who was present at the time of the event. It is not as you think. An employee got punched. They jumped on one consumer and fell. Consumers were waiting at the door to grab the products. If the girl hadn't thrown the coats, they would have dragged her to the ground. They are not people who lack financial resources. A person without resources would not be able to buy 30-40 pieces or go every day to see what they could get today. They are out of humanity because they are cheap.

As observed by the following comment, consumers also criticize other consumers' online social media comments that create a negative NE towards the front-line employees.

No one says why the consumers jump on the sales representative. If that girl hadn't thrown those coats away, they would have smashed her. I'm sorry, but the consumers are guilty. I would personally feel ashamed to jump like that, even if it's for free. First, we must learn to be human.

4.9. Positive CE – Front-Line Employees, Negative CE –Brand

In this form of engagement consumers express positive CE to front-line employees and negative CE to the brand. Given the brand crisis communication, consumers felt sorry for the front-line employees who may have been dismissed.

I would be upset if that employee was fired. There is absolutely no fault of the employee.

You cleared the case by removing the company's cheekiness from a group of employees. What's wrong with the employee? If the girl had not thrown the products, they would have jumped on her. Bravo (to the brand) 👏 the event has been cleared.

Brands are held responsible for not providing regular training and for the weak execution of retailing strategies. As the brand determines the prices of products, it was also held accountable for the mistreatment of employees and consumers.

In short, the employees lost their jobs. As if they are regularly trained, it's the young people who are to blame for everything.

The coat is obviously affordable. So, isn't it the fault of those who make people race each other to buy coats?

4.10. Positive CE – Front-Line Employees, Negative CE – Consumers and Brand

Several comments supported the front-line employees as the consumers' misbehavior and the brand's retailing strategies had posed a threat to employees' well-being. The brand is specifically criticized directly or indirectly for the execution of occupational health and safety standards and the working conditions.

Where is I.S.G. (abbreviation for occupational health and safety in Turkish)? Every workplace should have safety. Well done, they documented the video. Will they be acquitted by sacrificing those employees? They handled it well, again.

I think the only thing in the video is what the consumers are doing. If I were in that woman's place, I would have given the same reaction. Why should I hurt my life? If people listened, she wouldn't have had to throw them. Folks pinching, biting, hair pulling for a piece of rag? She did her best by throwing it away. No one knows how hard they are working. Don't bother yourself with words without putting them in your place. Write about what you would do if you were in the same conditions and situation.

While consumers are criticized for the loss of control over material possessions, consumers' Instagram comments focus on the brand's concerns over the precautions taken for the front-line employees.

Why are you apologizing? That girl did the right thing. Did she become unemployed because of our greedy people? Now I support that girl.

This discount could have been online instead of in-store. I hope the personnel do not get blamed because it was your brand that was not able to manage a correct process. If it were me, I'd throw those coats on the ground, not in the air, and run 😂.

4.11. Positive CE – Brand, Negative CE – Front-Line Employees

Consumers also expressed their positive CE towards the brand, while front-line employees were held responsible for the creation of negative brand CE. Comments focus on the quality of products and the pricing policies. Given the high inflation rate in the country, consumers are thankful for the offered promotions.

DeFacto is a well-intentioned brand, and its prices are always better than other stores.

I agree with you, there is almost no clothing brand that offers discounts currently. It is a move that suits our nation to put the inexperience of the employee over the brand.

The comments focus on the fact that one front-line employee's misbehavior should not be extended to the brand, especially as the brand through the brand crisis communication had expressed their sorrow towards the internal and external public.

They are constantly making meetings. They do not hire immediately. One employee was like this. We cannot do anything about it. We cannot blame the brand.

The incident is due to staff attitude. She officially put the company under suspicion.

4.12. Positive CE – Brand, Negative CE – Front-Line Employees and Consumers

Apart from a positive CE to the brand and a negative CE to front-line employees, in this form of engagement, consumers develop a negative CE to the consumers that were present in the retail environment. Front-line employees are often required to prioritize customer service despite the challenges. Comments criticize consumers' and employees' mistreatment.

If I were you, I wouldn't give a discount or anything. Our people do not deserve it. Consumers attacking each other and attacking the store employee? It is wrong to upload the wrong move of the employee to the entire DeFacto. This is the only place where we shop properly and conveniently. It is a brand with really good intentions.

After all, it's the rudeness of those who work there. The important thing is that you understand your mistake and make up for it. Our society (consumers) has (have) gotten crazy.

5. Conclusion

More than fifteen years after the introduction of CE in the marketing field, scholars' and practitioners' attention on the construct is still persistent given the outcomes on firms' and brands' performance (Hollebeek et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2022). Despite the disagreements in the literature, several scholars acknowledge the multidimensional and multi-valenced nature of CE (e.g., Naumann, et al. 2020; Lim and Rasul. 2022). Over the years, researchers have also recognized that social media allows consumers to better engage with brands (de Oliveira Santini, Ladeira, Pinto, Herter, Sampaio, and Babin, 2020; Wang and Lee, 2020; Lim and Rasul, 2022) – an engagement that can be positive or negative.

This research develops a typology and explores CE in the presence of several objects – brand, front-line employees, and consumers. The findings identify twelve forms of engagement and show that positive and negative CE co-exist due to the presence of different objects. This hybrid engagement that forms on the official

Instagram account of the brand eventually shapes CE with the brand despite the object of engagement.

This research contributes to marketing theory in several ways. First, the identified typology shows the existence of a hybrid form of consumer brand engagement. Existing research in the field focuses either on the positive or negative consumer brand engagement (for a review check Lim and Rasul, 2022). Studies that take a multi-valenced perspective classify the engagement as positive, and negative, while hybrid engagement takes little notice. Naumann et al. (2017) define engagement as fluid due to the co-existence of positive, and negative engagement and the presence of dual objects in the context explored. However, the fluid engagement defined is still classified as mutually exclusive (positive, disengaged, and negative) forms of engagement, while the firm is taken as the main engagement object. Clark et al. (2020) create a typology that classifies positive and negative CE's value effects on fellow customers and the firm. The theoretical paper supports the multi-actor perspective and calls for empirical research on CE's multi-actor effects. The present study answers this call and shows that the presence of multiple valences (positive and negative) and objects (brand, front-line employees, and consumers) create a more complicated engagement with the focal brand. The presence of front-line employees in the research context supports the stakeholder perspective in marketing where multiple interactions (except the customer-provider dyad) can enable brand value creation and destruction (Sim, Conduit, Plewa and Hentzen, 2022; Hollebeek et al., 2023; Viglia et al., 2023).

Second, the present study provides insights for the call in CE for the investigation of antecedents and consequences that remain unexplored (Lim and Rasul, 2022; Lim et al., 2022). Marketer related antecedents namely, front-line employees' misbehavior and the social media brand crisis communication create different forms of engagement enabling hybrid positive and negative manifestations. Consumers' social media comments reflect directly or indirectly the positive and negative brand CE and customer-based consequences that will eventually affect the brand's performance.

Third, methodologically the study uses secondary data using web crawling by collecting data from the official Instagram account of the brand. Existing research collects either primary or secondary data for the measurement of consumer engagement (e.g., Kumar and Kaushik, 2022; Kleer and Kunz, 2023; Viglia et al., 2023). Primary data is collected retrospectively by asking consumers to recall positive or negative experiences with an engagement object. However, using web crawling allows the collection of data in real time and eliminates measurement errors.

Fourth, existing research on CE on social media has been carried out in a single country without taking into account how the country and culture may shape consumers' engagement practices (for a review of research context check Lim and

Rasul, 2022). The present study is conducted in an emerging market that is culturally collectivistic, predominantly Muslim and embraces non-western moral and religious values. In the identified engagement forms, engagement with front-line employees and consumers that were present in the retail environment is rationalized with cultural values. The motivation to care and protect others, and act in accordance with justice norms are evident in consumers' comments on social media.

The findings of this study also carry several managerial implications. Given the different engagement forms due to the different objects of engagement, brands need to create different types of communication especially in the presence of a crisis. For the brand explored, at least explicitly stating the measures taken would have eliminated some of the brand engagement classifications. Brands often try to create a message that will fit to the target market. However, consumers' empowerment in social media necessitates the development of messages that will respond to the needs not only of the target market, but the wider audience. Employing a stakeholder approach in communication is challenging, but it can prevent at least the chaos that can be generated by prioritizing only the target market.

The brand did not respond to any of the comments posted on the brand crisis communication, except a standard message that was shared about consumers' dissatisfactions due to earlier purchases. Based on the algorithms used on social media, brands define keywords and thus, try to manage the communication by posting the relevant message content. For example, in the case of product or service failure, brands communicate that the customer support services will get in contact through a direct message. This standard message in between the comments also enabled a negative brand engagement. In times of crisis, if firms do not develop a more effective communication strategy to respond to consumers' opposing comments, it seems reasonable to leave the execution of standard procedures.

Apart from consumer engagement, brands need to consider how consumers' social media comments can affect employees' engagement. Employee engagement refers to employees' motivation to accomplish work tasks and their dedication, and pleasure in executing work responsibilities (Michel, Lindsey-Hall, Kepes, Qi, Leon, Weinzimmer, and Wheeler, 2022). In the research context explored, as the brand crisis communication was developed due to the front-line employees' misbehavior, the comments either positive or negative, directly, or indirectly targeted the employees and thus, threatened employees' engagement.

The study also provides venues for future research. The proposed hybrid engagement can be explored across brands, product categories and countries. Given the proliferation of social media platforms and the distinctive tools that allow different forms of consumer engagement, research can be conducted on the exploration of the phenomenon across different social media platforms.

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