

COLLABORATIVE BRAND ATTACKS IN SOCIAL MEDIA: EXPLORING THE ANTECEDENTS, CHARACTERISTICS, AND CONSEQUENCES OF A NEW FORM OF BRAND CRISES

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Recently, a new challenge has emerged for brand management. Large numbers of Internet users attack brands on social media collaboratively, a phenomenon that we refer to as “collaborative brand attacks” (CBAs). Yet despite the frequency and the relevance of CBAs, little is known about why and how they develop. In this research, we apply a Delphi study followed by a qualitative analysis of multiple CBA cases in order to develop a framework that explains the triggers, the amplifiers, as well as the reaction strategies to CBAs. These findings highlight the conceptual differences between CBAs and traditional brand crises.

In the “analog days,” dissatisfied consumers had only few options: They could remain loyal to the firm, exit the relationship (Singh 1990), or voice complaints to the firm (Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987). As individuals, they often had limited power. Firms rarely felt obliged to respond in a specific way. Only in exceptional cases consumers were able to force a company to change its behavior. For instance, when Shell’s management aimed to dump a disused oil storage platform in the Atlantic, consumers—coordinated by and in some cases also motivated by Greenpeace—were able to bundle their protest against Shell, ultimately forcing the company to invest heavily in the reinstallation of the platform. In most cases, however, consumers were considered rather

powerless and without the possibilities to effectively express their dissatisfaction. Consequently, crises, that is, sudden and unexpected significant threats for firm performance (Coombs 2007), only occurred in case of substantial (legal or ethical) managerial misconduct or in the case of external shocks, yet not in the more common case of consumer dissatisfaction.

Recent developments in social media provide consumers with additional tools for mass action. They can increasingly voice their opinions about brands and organizational behavior on social media platforms (Hendrix 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 2010; Labrecque et al. 2013). Social media encompasses any online application that allows users not only to consume content but also to create and share content that, in turn, can be consumed by other users either in real time or later. Irrespective of their physical location, consumers can spread, manipulate, and create content related to a particular brand (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010).

Scholars have argued that new media shift power from organizations to consumers (Bernoff and Li 2008; Bruce and Solomon 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Labrecque et al. 2013). The latter now have the opportunity to voice their own experiences with firms and brands publicly and reach out to and ultimately influence other consumers (Zhu and Zhang 2010). Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel (2006) describe cases of consumers who, for example, create anti-Starbucks communities, which quickly gain in intensity. We label such joint, event-induced, dynamic, and public offenses from a large number of Internet users via social media platforms on a brand that are aimed to harm it and/or to force it to change its behavior as

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Collaborative Brand Attacks (CBAs). A more detailed elaboration of this definition is provided in Table 1. The term “brand” thereby broadly refers to commercially marketed goods, services, and organizations including corporations, product (line) brands, celebrities, nonprofit organizations, and others.

Given the increased traffic on online and mobile platforms, the number of CBAs has substantially increased in the past years, regardless of a brand’s industry, value, or country-of-origin (Labrecque et al. 2013). As a consequence, many brands have been reporting as suffering from the consequences of CBAs, since CBAs can result in a large amount of negative user-generated content (UGC) that is ultimately spread not only in the online but also offline world.

While CBAs are among the most discussed issues related to social media among practitioners, there is still a profound lack of understanding when and how such online attacks occur and under which conditions they are amplified or mitigated (Faller and Schmit 2013). Scholars are still lacking a profound theoretical framework that explains the underlying mechanisms of CBA emergence. Consequently, also managers often lack profound research results that might indicate how to cope with social media crises (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Labrecque et al. 2013). Existing theories on brand crises, such as crisis communication theory (SCCT; Coombs 2004, 2007), exclusively refer to offline crises and are as such not applicable to fully explain CBAs, as we will outline in our study. Given the ubiquity of CBAs and the importance of the phenomenon for today’s brands, understanding the root causes, development, and implications of CBAs is of utmost relevance for both theory and practice. Since the burgeoning literature on such social media attacks is still in its beginnings, we aim to answer the following research questions: (1) Why and how do CBAs develop? (2) What are the implications of CBAs? (3) What strategies do organizations typically employ in reaction to CBAs and what are potential consequences thereof? To answer those research questions, we use a two-step approach including a Delphi pre-study and an exploratory, qualitative case study research design.

The expected contribution of this research is at least fourfold: First, we add to research in social media marketing (Gruner, Homburg, and Lukas 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Labrecque et al. 2013). This study develops a

Table 1
Characteristics of CBAs

Characteristic	Explanation
Event-induced and dynamic	Event-induced and dynamic describes the observation that CBAs do not develop slowly over time, but are induced by a particular event on a single social media platform. In many cases, CBAs develop and grow within several hours or days in an uncontrolled way. The intention of the trigger is not necessarily to attack/harm the organization. For example, the initial event can be a customer’s complaint. However, one characteristic of a CBA is that during the development of the CBA, the character of CBAs becomes (intentionally or unintentionally) attacking.
Large number of participants	CBAs generally involve a large number of participants (“netizens”). According to Muntinga et al. (2011), the participants can be divided into creators (those users who create UGC), contributors (those users who support the creators by spreading and acknowledging their content), and consumers (i.e., passive users who only read or watch UGC). Although it is difficult to estimate the number of participants in detail, CBAs often involve several hundred participants or more.
Joint	Social media are generally characterized by virtual interaction between users (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002). In CBAs, the term “joint” refers to the observation that users do not attack the organization in an isolated way. Participants of a CBA usually rally in a group of activists that collaboratively engage against a firm.
Public	CBAs develop and spread on public social media platforms. That is, even consumers who do not actively participate in a CBA—like posting negative WOM—may consume this content, even a long time after the CBA has taken place. Hence, although—as we have outlined before—CBAs are often very short in their actual duration, their consequences may exist for a long time span. In many cases, CBAs swamp over into traditional media and thus may even reach consumers that are not using social media.

Note: CBA = Collaborative Brand Attack, also known as Online Firestorm.

theoretical framework that explains triggers, characteristics, and consequences of CBAs and thus advances our understanding of the underlying mechanisms of this novel and relevant phenomenon. In particular, the findings of our qualitative multi-case study show that traditional, offline media-based frameworks such as SCCT are only moderately able to explain CBAs, making the need for our theoretical framework even more evident. Second, we advance knowledge on crisis communication management (e. g., Coombs 2004, 2007) by scrutinizing key assumptions and findings of this theory in a novel context. By doing so, we extend existing crisis communication theories, especially SCCT. More specifically, we identify and discuss several differences between traditional crises (as explained by SCCT) and CBAs (as explained by our inductively developed framework). Third, the findings of our article are of high practical relevance, because they reveal that traditional crises management practices tend to be less effective, in some cases even self-defeating when applied in order to prevent or manage CBAs. In order to close this existing knowledge gap, we also propose a set of novel response strategies that might be supportive in alleviating online brand crises. Fourth and finally, this study lays the groundwork for further research in crisis management and social media. By being among the first to systematically define and characterize CBAs, the categorization work completed within this study encourages researchers to build on it in order to explain further social media crises phenomena.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Crises and SCCT

Academics and managers have long attempted to understand communication crises, their root causes, and implications because such crises can substantially damage a brand and the firm owning the brand. For example, after the explosion of BP's oil platform Deepwater Horizon in 2010, newspapers and television shows extensively reported on the environmental catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico, leading to negative brand perceptions and a decrease in revenues. One of the most widespread conceptualizations that aims to explain such crises is crisis communication theory (SCCT). Drawing on attribution theory (Weiner 1985), SCCT provides a framework that describes the complex phenomenon of crises, how an organization reacts to

them, and how managers should match response strategies to specific types of crises (Coombs 2004, 2007; Coombs and Holladay 1996, 2002). More specifically, crises managers must first assess the degree of "guilt" attributable to the organization and then develop response strategies that match the specific type of crisis.

SCCT (Coombs 2004, 2007) distinguishes victim, accidental, and preventable crises, each of which consists of several subclusters of incidents. The first cluster of crises, so-called victim crises, occurs when organizational crises are caused by external events, such as natural disasters, rumor, or workplace violence, or when external agents cause damage to an organization. In general, victim crises are associated with lesser responsibility or "guilt" of the organization, and thus the reputational damages associated with such crises are rather mild. Second, "accidental crises" arise when organizational actions are responsible for the crisis; however, they are triggered unintentionally. Antecedents of such accidental crises include challenges (i.e., when stakeholders claim that a firm operates in an inappropriate manner), accidents (e.g., industrial accident caused by an equipment failure), or product failures (e.g., product recall caused by technology failures). In this type of crises, stakeholders usually attribute a minimal responsibility to the organization, and thus the reputational threat for the organization is stronger than that for victim crises. Third, preventable crises are crises caused by conscious misbehavior of the organization or its members by knowingly placing people at risk, taking inappropriate actions, or violating laws or regulations. These incidents include preventable accidents, such as stakeholder deception or violation of laws/regulations. In this type of crises, stakeholders attribute high levels of responsibility to the respective organization, and thus such crises often have serious, negative impacts on firm reputation.

SCCT further indicates that beyond the level of attributed guilt and responsibility, an organization's *crises history* influences how stakeholders perceive the crisis as well as what means are suitable to counteract the crisis (Coombs 2004). In particular, SCCT states that past crises intensify the attribution of crisis responsibility.

Drawing on prior research on corporate apology and image restoration theory (Benoit 1995), SCCT distinguishes between several primary and secondary response strategies (Coombs 2007). Primary response strategies occur immediately after the emergence of a crisis. Secondary response strategies are strategies later

introduced that aim to further bolster the response to a crisis. Primary response strategies can include “denying” (e.g., denying the existence of a crisis, attacking the accuser, blaming people outside the organization for the crisis), “diminishing” (e.g., denying the intention of the crisis, claiming an organization’s inability to control the triggers of a crisis, minimizing the perceived damage caused by a crisis), and “rebuilding” (e.g., taking full responsibility for the crisis, offering financial compensation to victims). Secondary response strategies can include reminding stakeholders about the good works of an organization, praising the stakeholders, and communicating to the stakeholders that the organization is also a victim of the crisis.

SCCT is applicable to various contexts (e.g., Coombs 2004, 2007; Coombs and Holladay 1996, 2002); however, extensions and adaptations to crises in social media are lacking. Thus, based on the findings of this study, we will propose a theoretical model applicable to social media crises that builds on and extends SCCT.

Social Media Platforms and CBAs

Social media platforms are websites and other digital tools focusing on communication or information that allows users to publish content and engage in dialogues with other users (Hendrix 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010). Many people use platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter for various reasons, including socializing, searching for specific information, entertainment, service requests, empowerment, or satisfying social needs (e.g., Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

With people increasingly using such platforms, the number of companies also using them is growing, for example, to win new or manage existing customers (e.g., Verhoef, Reinartz, and Krafft 2010), market products (e.g., Schulze, Schöler, and Skiera 2014), engage in public relations or corporate social responsibility communications, or attract talented employees. Companies can use social media marketing proactively by publishing their communication messages and by engaging in (public) dialogues with users (Dholakia and Durham 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). However, a firm’s engagement in social media activities can also entail substantial risk. For example, an organization’s stakeholders (e.g., customers, employees) might publish not only positive but also undesired content (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006), such as

confidential material or information that sheds negative light on the brand and its products. Moreover, any unprofessional behavior regarding customer interactions is, in contrast to comparable behavior carried out by call agents, publicly visible to a large number of social platform users. Such negative content can easily be shared with an even larger group of individuals who also have the opportunity to share their opinion on this incident. As a consequence of such “viral effects,” a large amount of negative UGC can be created, leading to substantial damage to the affected firm’s brand reputation (De Bruyn and Lilien 2008; Labrecque et al. 2013).

Summary of Prior Research

In conclusion, prior research in crisis communication provides theories to explain traditional crises. Previous research on social media enables a profound understanding of UGC and viral effects. Additionally, prior studies have often used examples of CBAs to explain the core mechanisms and risks of social media for companies. However, both the social media marketing and crises communication literature lack theory that explains the underlying mechanisms of CBAs. Thus, the expected contribution of this research is to address this research gap by developing a framework that explains the triggers, amplifiers, and reaction strategies to CBAs.

METHODOLOGY

Overall Research Design

Given the lack of knowledge on the emergence of CBAs and the “how” and “why” nature of our research questions, an exploratory, qualitative research design is most appropriate (Patton 1990; Yin 2004). Given the various contexts of CBAs and the numerous actors involved (companies, users, platforms), we apply a multi-case study analysis. Case study analyses thereby describes a “research strategy or design that is used to study one or more selected social phenomena and to understand or explain the phenomena by placing them in their wider context” (Kitay and Callus, 1998, p. 103). Harrison (2002, p. 158) argues that case studies are an appropriate research design when the “theory base is comparatively weak and the environment under study is messy.” Thus, compared to theory testing survey studies, case study research projects usually aim to

build theory and hence focus on fewer cases with detailed information from different sources on those cases (Woodside 2010; Yin 2004). Therefore, in contrast to theory-testing quantitative studies, each case of a qualitative case study design is investigated in detail using information from various sources. Building theory from multiple cases allows us to capitalize on rich qualitative empirical evidence to identify the precise mechanisms that lead to the breakout and spread of CBAs as well as the characteristics that can be used to describe and distinguish CBAs.

We followed a two-phase research approach based on (1) a Delphi pre-study and (2) a comparative multi-case study. Using multiple methods is in line with prior research that investigated new social media phenomena (e.g., Gruner, Homburg, and Lukas 2014). The multi-case study followed a replicatory approach (Eisenhardt 1989) that aimed to explain similarities as well as variance in root causes of and reactions to CBAs. The unit of analysis in our study is thus the individual firm challenged by a CBA. In the following subsections, we describe the purpose of each of the two stages and outline the data collection and analysis processes.

Delphi Pre-study

The main purposes of the Delphi pre-study were to (1) validate and refine the definition of CBAs; (2) create a list of important recent CBAs in Germany, which we subsequently used for sampling of the multi-case study; and (3) provide initial guidance for the development of a coding scheme, particularly in terms of relevant dimensions of CBAs. The underlying rationale for conducting the Delphi pre-study was the assumption that industry and social media experts can contribute “managerial wisdom” by providing their own tacit knowledge, based on experiences in their own companies or observations of other companies (Leeflang and Wittink 2000).

Participants of the Delphi pre-study were twelve experts with heterogeneous backgrounds and substantial experience in social media. We identified these experts based on three sources: (1) press releases, (2) published CBA-related interviews in business magazines, and (3) further recommendations from the already identified experts. To ensure that all participants of the Delphi pre-study possessed sufficient expertise regarding CBAs, we combined self-reported measures of knowledge (i.e., informants’ verbal self-assessment of their expertise) and a careful inspection of their profiles and CVs (e.g., professional expertise,

publications). Also, we asked each expert to name additional experts to be included in the Delphi study. The first round of data collection started in summer 2013. Each participant received a digital questionnaire document with open-ended questions. In this questionnaire, we used the term “Shitstorm” for CBAs, as this is a common term used by and thus well-known to practitioners in German-speaking countries. Those open-ended questions included the following: (1) “How would you define the term ‘Collaborative Brand Attack’? (if you do not have a perfect definition at hand, bullet points that cover the core aspects are sufficient)”; (2) “Which Collaborative Brand Attacks of the last two to three years do you remember? Which of them were particularly important and thus had influence or changed the understanding of social media substantially?”; (3) “Please mention as many reasons as possible why Collaborative Brand Attack develop”; and (4) “Generally speaking, which strategies/possible ways do exist to prevent, or stop, respectively, Collaborative Brand Attacks? Which of those strategies do you evaluate as most promising? Why?” We asked each respondent to reply within one week and to provide as detailed feedback as possible. After approximately four weeks, we stopped data collection as we felt that adding further respondents would not lead to new findings (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006).

We aggregated the collected statements and opinions of all participants from the first round and added comments when necessary. From a synthesis of the findings, we engaged in a second round of expert participation. In particular, we presented the refined definition of CBAs and an overview of potential characteristics and triggers to the twelve experts and asked for their feedback. Other than minor suggestions regarding the wording, all participants agreed with our findings, which led us to terminate the Delphi pre-study after the second round. The findings of the Delphi pre-study were subsequently used for the sample selection for the multi-case study as well as for the initial coding round of the case data. For instance, one outcome of the Delphi pre-study was a nuanced definition of CBAs as shown in Table 1.

Multi-case Studies

Sample

With input of the Delphi pre-study, we identified a series of twenty-nine recent events in which either German-

speaking customers joined CBAs to threaten the respective companies between 2004 and 2013 or German media reported on such CBAs. In this way, we aimed to follow a theoretical sampling logic (Yin 2004). In particular, we chose to investigate CBAs that exhibited heterogeneity in key aspects, such as company size, brand awareness, root causes of CBAs, organizational reactions, or implications. Such variance within the sample increases the generalizability of our findings. We stopped data collection and analysis as soon as the addition of further data no longer provided further insights (theoretical saturation; see Guest et al. 2006).

Data Collection

Over an eighteen-month period, we collected a rich body of data on the respective case studies. Our main source of data was UGC in the context of the respective CBAs. To retrieve this material, we searched the companies' Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, blogs, YouTube channels (content of user-generated videos and corresponding user comments), and press releases for information related to the CBAs. In addition, we used Google to systematically search for any other UGC, such as blogs and YouTube videos, unrelated to the brand.

Further material mainly refers to print and electronic articles about specific CBAs. To collect such data systematically, we used Google to search for the respective firms or brand names in combination with the words "scandal," "firestorm," "shitstorm" (a term frequently used in the German-speaking world when referring to CBAs; see Faller and Schmit 2013), "social media," "crisis," or "image." This search resulted in a large body of scientific- and practice-oriented articles, books, and expert blog articles, as well as firm-internal and firm-external analyses on the specific CBAs. Whenever possible, we amended our data collection through interviews with experts on the respective cases to collect so-far missing information and to validate our findings. An overview of the collected data appears in Appendix 1.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a two-step process (van Maanen 1979). In the first step of our data analysis, we created textual summaries of each of the twenty-nine cases (single-case studies). These summaries, which were

typically ten pages in length, renarrated the CBA from its beginning to its termination in a chronological way (Eisenhardt 1989). Two coders independently read through the summaries as well as other collected material and noted the emerging themes. From these themes, we created an initial coding guideline, which we iteratively refined throughout the analysis process.

In a second step, two coders (one of whom had not been involved in the data collection and initial analysis process, in order to maintain an independent perspective) hand-coded the case descriptions (Saldaña 2013). More specifically, the coders read the case descriptions and the collected material per case and categorized the case according to the guidelines presented in the coding scheme. In rare cases of disagreement between the coders, deviances were discussed until consensus was reached. Following Eisenhardt's (1989) replication approach, we switched between specific case data and extant theory on social media and crisis, to refine the coding guideline whenever required and to adapt our initial syntheses. After coding each case, we compared findings across the cases (cross-case study). This approach of data collection and analysis is in line with research designs used in prior marketing, communication, and management literature (e.g., Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Kammerlander and Ganter 2015).

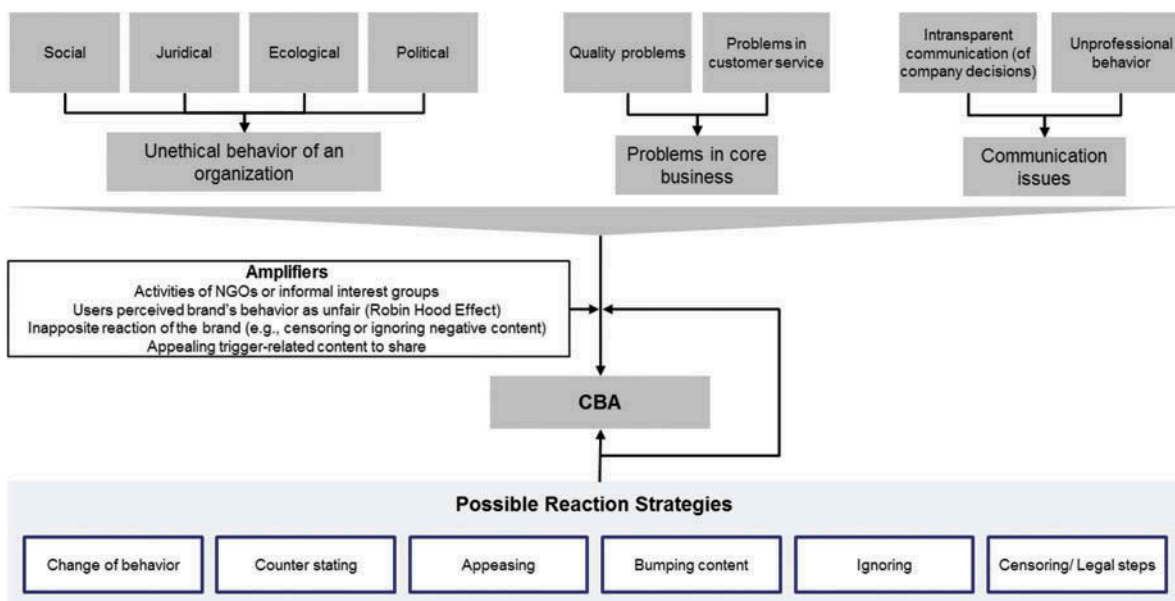
RESULTS

In the following paragraphs, we provide the synthesized findings of our cross-case analysis and outline the antecedents of the typical development of and observed measurements to abate CBAs. Figure 1 provides a summary of our findings, which we will discuss in the following sections. We begin with a discussion of the triggers, targets, and initiators of CBAs. Then, we outline the tonality, content, and spread of CBAs, before elaborating on the consequences of and reactions to CBAs. Appendix 2 provides a comprehensive overview and categorization of all twenty-nine cases.

Triggers of CBA

Based on the case evidence, we identified the following triggers of CBAs, which will be detailed next: perceived unethical behavior, perceived problems in core business, and perceived unfair or unprofessional

Figure 1
Theoretical Model of CBAs



communication. It is important to note that those triggers often refer to relatively minor events and, as such, would not have held the potential to initiate a brand crisis in the presocial-media world. We will also discuss several amplifying factors that have the potential to compound the CBAs.

Perceived Unethical Behavior of an Organization

In seventeen out of twenty-nine cases (see Appendix 2 for details), perceived unethical behavior was the main trigger of the CBA. Unethical behavior refers to perceived false behavior of a brand with regard to social, legal, ecological, and/or political issues. It is important to note that the perception of this behavior is thereby highly subjective. Hence, a CBA might arise even if the brand's behavior might not be misaligned with legal and regulatory rules of the context in which the firm operates. In a CBA, the issue of "unethical behavior" is often identified and, at least from the viewpoint of the attackers, "validated" by groups such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), interest groups, or other social communities.

Example from the observed cases: Two employees in the Domino's Conover, NC franchise uploaded a video to

YouTube of themselves doing disgusting things to a sandwich and its ingredients before delivering it. Consumers, including customers of Domino's as well as other, initially non-involved, "netizens" detected that video and used the company's YouTube channel's commentary function to express their critiques, dissatisfaction, and even bewilderment about the behavior of the two employees. Blogs (and later traditional media) subsequently reported about, and spread, the video. Interestingly, the attack of Internet users was not only directed at the specific branch store in which the video was produced, but it almost instantly emerged into an attack of the Domino's brand in general.

Perceived Business Problems

CBAs can also be triggered by perceived quality problems in the core business of a brand, such as perceived problems in products (e.g., product features that might affect the safety or the effectiveness of a product) or problems related to customer service. This was the case in eight of the sampled CBAs. Similar phenomena appear in traditional crises literature (e.g., Coombs 2007; Van Heerde, Helsen, and Dekimpe 2007).

However, in contrast to traditional crises, CBAs can be caused by a mere *subjective* lack of quality, which does not necessarily exist from an objective perspective. In other words, CBAs—in contrast to traditional crises—do not require major quality problems to be triggered, yet it is sufficient that the products do not meet the (high) expectations of consumers. As a consequence, the brand might not be aware of such problems in their core business until Internet users give voice to their concerns in the emerging CBA.

Example from the observed cases: The bike lock brand Kryptonite, which has always emphasized the safety of its locks in advertising, was attacked by social media users after a YouTube video was posted showing how an individual cracks the lock. The fact that the lock could be cracked stood in stark contrast to the company's quality promises and thus induced Internet users to start an attack targeted at the Kryptonite brand.

Perceived Unfair or Unprofessional Communication Behavior

This type of CBA trigger, which is idiosyncratic to social media attacks and which was the main trigger of eleven of the sampled cases, is rooted in the brand's (online) communication. More precisely, CBAs can emerge if companies, from the perspective of Internet users, fail to clearly and transparently communicate organizational decisions to stakeholders. More specifically, perceived *unfair* or *unprofessional* communication can trigger such CBA. In those cases, Internet users have the perception that the brand managers do not communicate with them at eye's level or engage in communication that is not perceived as adequate for a brand of the respective reputation.

Example from the observed cases: The German TV broadcast *Galileo* by ProSiebenSat.1 Media had often been criticized for its content in the past ("quality problems"). However, the situation escalated and a CBA emerged when a Facebook post by an Internet user with harsh criticisms about the last broadcast received more than 100,000 "likes" but was suddenly deleted—an "unfair move" by the TV channel as perceived by online media users, which caused them to jointly attack the brand.

Synthesizing the results on triggers of CBAs and comparing them to traditional crises, we find the following: While traditional crises usually occur because of events that are external (e.g., natural diseases) or

incidents on a strategic level, such as product recalls or fraud (e.g., Coombs 2007), CBAs may be triggered by a variety of factors that are, at least from an organizational perspective, rather minor, that are caused by individuals and based on subjective perceptive actions of other individuals, and that are thus rather unpredictable. The unpredictability stems from the difficulty of managers to identify which communication behavior or action is perceived as "wrong" by Internet users with the responsibility being fully attributed to the brand.

Amplifying Factors: Lack of Fast and Appropriate Reaction

The first amplifier that we observed in four cases is the lack of a fast and appropriate reaction by the brand. When a brand's social media team does not react in response to CBAs in the early stages or if they react in a perceived "wrong way," CBAs become strengthened. When brands ignore negative content, deny mistakes, or communicate in a non-transparent manner, CBAs can also develop faster and more intensely because such actions motivate Internet users to continue their attack. For instance, when social media managers may attempt to delete critical content, users tend to spread this content on many places on the Internet to keep it accessible to other users, making the *corpus delicti* even more visible (a phenomenon often referred to as the "Streisand-effect").

Example from the observed cases: An unsatisfied customer of the cell phone provider Vodafone posted her negative experiences on Vodafone's Facebook page. Several thousand other users agreed with those experiences by "liking" the posting, stating their support for the initial posting, or sharing their own negative experiences. Because those initial postings occurred during the weekend, it took Vodafone several days to respond to those comments. Many users assumed that Vodafone's late reply was a consequence of the brand's ignorance and disregard of customers' criticism, which motivated them to post even more negative comments.

Perceived Unfair Use of Brand's Power (Robin Hood Effect)

When searching the data for amplifying effects, we noticed that in seven cases the CBA was intensified because so far unaffected Internet users (i.e., netizens that

were not active participants of the initial CBA) perceived that the brand exploited its power unfairly, once after the brand attack has started. Such behavior has an amplifying effect since it motivates “netizens” that have not been affected by the initial trigger of the company (e.g., because they are not customers of the company and, as such, do not care about quality problems of the respective products) to join the CBA as they find the power misuse as non-acceptable and thus want to support the initial attackers. We use the metaphorical similarity to Robin Hood, a heroic outlaw figure who, with his “merry men,” fought against institutional power—in our case the power of large brands—to term this mechanism as the “Robin Hood effect.” Our cases show that when social media users allege that an organization exploits its power unfairly, CBAs tend to develop more quickly and more intensely because users feel suppressed. Furthermore, user postings indicate that an unfair behavior by a brand toward one user of a group is often viewed as an attack on the whole group. This is because people who engage in common activities (e.g., engaging on a brand page) tend to perceive a sense of community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia 2002).

Example from the observed cases: Henkel, a large German family firm active in the detergent segment, launched a design contest on its Facebook page, asking users to submit ideas for a new package design of the Pril detergents. Some users submitted funny, provoking, and ludicrous ideas (e.g., “Tastes yummy like chicken”), which is often called “trolling” (Herring et al. 2002). These types of submissions received the most votes of social media users but were not in line with Henkel’s expectations. As a consequence, Henkel changed the rules and “cleaned” the votes of the contest in an intransparent way, which triggered the CBA. When Facebook fans complained, Henkel used its power to delete critical user comments. As a consequence, the CBA was amplified since the deletion by Henkel motivated other netizens who had not been involved in the contest to join the CBA.

Spreading of CBA Triggers by Influential Organizations

The third amplifying function, which occurred in twelve of the cases, is when influential organizations, such as NGOs, traditional media, or informal interest groups, identify or communicate CBA-related information. These organizations usually have a loyal community of (up to

several thousand) Internet users and a trustworthy image, which increases the likelihood of getting attention from potential CBA contributors (e.g., De Bruyn and Lilien 2008; Ferguson 2008; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Porter, Donthu, and Baker 2012). Therefore, when these organizations identify triggers of a CBA and communicate them to their audiences, CBAs can develop more quickly and become stronger. In line with this observation, prior research has highlighted the amplifying role of collective expression of needs and attitudes (e.g., Labrecque et al. 2013).

Example from the observed cases: The KitKat CBA was triggered by netizens criticizing Nestlé’s use of palm oil from suppliers that were allegedly destroying the rainforests. When Greenpeace identified this case of “misconduct,” it created a video and spread it via social media (see Figure 2). Greenpeace thus contributed to amplifying the spreading of information concerning Nestlé’s unethical behavior to consumers who would then use this information during the actual brand attack.

Appealing Trigger-related Content to Share

The fourth amplifying factor is appealing content, observed in five of our sampled cases. Prior research on word-of-mouth and viral marketing has widely investigated factors that increase the likelihood of sharing content, such as design elements or content characteristics (e.g., Berger and Milkman 2012; Ho and Dempsey 2010). In general, well-produced content increases the likelihood that consumers will perceive, watch/read, and share CBA-related content. This is a possible explanation for why, for example, many YouTube videos that debunk a brand’s misbehaviors receive high attention.

Example from observed cases: A CBA targeted at United Airlines emerged, when the musician Dave Carroll posted a video expressing his dissatisfaction with the airline company. The reason for his anger was that because of a lack of caution when handling luggage, Dave’s guitar broke. Dave Carroll’s video *United Breaks Guitars* gained worldwide attention, possibly because its content was also produced in an appealing way. Carroll focused on creating a simple and easy-to-remember song and used humorous visual elements and country music to do so (see Web Appendix).

Summarized, we observe that CBAs can be strengthened by a series of amplifiers that are of lesser importance for traditional offline brand crises, and whose strength is

Figure 2
Example for UGC in KitKat CBA



Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rb1HhmNtiw (left), www.greenpeace.org.uk (right). © Greenpeace. Reproduced by permission of Greenpeace. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

mostly determined by the brand's history of crises. With regard to the triggers and amplifiers of CBAs, we hence formally propose:

Proposition 1a: Compared to traditional offline brand crises, CBAs can be prompted by relatively minor, only subjectively valid and rather unpredictable triggers, such as organizational behavior or communication that is perceived as unethical or unprofessional or byproduct quality that is perceived as insufficient by individual consumers.

Proposition 1b: CBAs are amplified if the organization fails to react fast and in an appropriate way, if organizations misuse their power, if influential organizations join the CBA, and if the content of the CBA is appealing to a large number of netizens.

Targets of CBAs and Initiators

Targets of CBAs in general include a brand as a whole, including all its sub-brands (e.g., *Galileo*, which is part of ProSiebenSat.1 Media). Other possible targets that have not yet been identified in the sample are particular individuals (e.g., CEOs) associated with a brand, which reflect human brands (Bendisch, Larsen, and Trueman 2013). While the CBA was in all cases started by Internet users, we observed three different groups of initiators of CBAs: (1) customers who are dissatisfied with the brand (e.g., United Airlines customers; sixteen cases in our sample); (2) lobbying groups, journalists, or NGOs, which provoke CBAs as a useful means to attract high visibility and achieve high impact for their activities (e.g., animal rights activists that attacked Adidas for its engagement in the

European Soccer Cup 2012, vegetarians who attacked IngDiba bank for using a butchery in commercials; five cases); and (3) social media users who are not (necessarily) customers of the brand (eight cases). Encouraged by information shared on the Internet, this last group might decide to engage in an attack because of various motivations, such as the desire to change the brand's behavior, to punish "wrong" organizational behavior, or simply for fun or to alleviate boredom or tediousness. For example, when social media users attacked Pril for changing the rules of its label contest *ex-post*, many of the initial attackers were neither customers of Pril at that time nor involved in the contest at all; the attackers consisted mainly of individuals engaged in social media who perceived the organizational behavior as wrong. Finally, it is possible that in the future, CBAs will be started by other groups, such as unsatisfied employees or competitors that aim to damage their rivals' reputation. However, we have not yet observed cases with such initiators.

In several cases, we found that the focus of attack shifted during the CBA. For example, in the IngDiba case, social media users initially attacked the bank for having launched a commercial clip showing the basketball player Dirk Nowitzki eating sausages. In the course of discussion about the video, radical vegetarians joined the conversation, blaming any individuals and organizations that supported the consumption of meat products.

We can summarize that while both, offline and online brand crises are directed at attacking brands, their initiators differ: While offline brand crises are mostly initiated by journalist articles or formal or informal institutions, CBAs can be initiated by any netizen. Formally, we suggest:

Proposition 2: CBAs can be initiated by organizations (e.g., NGOs), by individuals that have a connection to the brand (e.g., being its customer), or by individuals entirely unaffiliated with the brand (i.e., netizens stumbling about a content they find interesting).

Content and Tonality of CBAs

The primary material used for verbal attacks in a CBA is UGC, which includes verbal or video postings on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or blogs. In the observed CBAs, the language used by attackers differed. In the majority of cases, the language was mostly emotional, aggressive, insulting, or threatening—and thus very different from the critical yet objective tone typically observed in discussions on traditional offline crises—while in another set it was objective and rational. The content centered on the perceived misbehavior of the respective firm, but also moved to (peripherally) related topics or the firm's behavior/brand in general. For example, in the case of IngDiba, the discussion shifted from eating vegetarian to a general discussion of eating meat. Furthermore, groups used not only texts to engage in CBAs; we also identified several other forms of content, such as pictures (memes) and videos, which seem to play a more central role for CBAs as compared to traditional, offline crises. For example, we found pictures showing users throwing away or destroying products of the brand and pictures of altered logos that CBA participants posted and spread via social media.

When assessing content and tonality, one major difference between traditional, offline-induced crises and CBAs becomes apparent: The content of verbal material in traditional crises is articles in newspapers and magazines, written mostly by professional journalists. While those articles are often critical by nature, they all use professional language. Furthermore, even if non-professionals contribute content to offline crises, such as in the form of readers' letters, this material is typically filtered or copyedited before publication, so that offensive language is removed before print. Such control mechanisms do not exist for CBAs. As a consequence, the share of harsh, insulting, and unprofessional content was much higher in our set of CBAs than might be expected from offline communication crises. Formally:

Proposition 3: Compared to traditional offline brand crises, CBAs are often more aggressive and emotional

in their tone, tend to shift their focus more frequently, and use non-textual material more often.

Spread of CBAs

The analysis of our cases shows that most CBAs start on a brand's social media platforms. Only a few cases (e.g., the attack of lobbyists on KitKat because of its use of palm oil) initially emerged on external platforms, such as a YouTube channel unrelated to the brand and later emerged to other social media platforms. In most cases, the CBA-related content was spread virally by other users (Ferguson 2008; Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels 2009) and even attracted attention of online and offline newspapers and magazines (see Appendix 2 for details). For example, first blogs and then traditional media reported on a video of unprofessional behavior of a Domino's Pizza employee.

As discussed previously, traditional crises usually develop in the offline world and spread via traditional media. However, increasingly traditional media reports transfer to social media. For example, after BP's offshore oil-drilling rig Deepwater Horizon had exploded in 2010, traditional media reported about the crisis. The reports motivated users to discuss the crisis in social media and to post negative UGC, such as altered BP logos (e.g., the BP logo with a seagull's oil-slicked feathers). CBAs, to the contrary, begin in social media and gain the attention of journalists of traditional media. Especially the latter aspect, the spillover of social media content to traditional print and television media, in combination with the fact that CBAs occur frequently and are often triggered by comparatively minor events and thus develop almost "randomly" is often neglected by managers that have to deal with CBAs. Formally:

Proposition 4: While CBAs mostly start on social media platforms, there is a high likelihood that their comments are also discussed in traditional online and offline media and thereby gain the attention of non-users of social media.

Organizational Reaction and Further Development of the CBA

Typical first reactions of the sampled firms occurred several hours to several days after the emergence of the CBA (see right column of table in Appendix 2). An initial non-reaction (e.g., Lufthansa and

ProSiebenSat1Media) often led to an increasing number of negative comments and postings (see also section on amplifiers). In one case (Vodafone), the brand initially reacted to the CBA but then stopped monitoring and interacting with social media users for more than two days (over a weekend). This relatively long time of non-reaction allowed attackers to post a large number of critical posts to the firm's Facebook page.

The reaction strategies of attacked firms that we observed in our sample include (1) ignoring, (2) censoring/legal steps, (3) counter-stating, (4) appeasing, (5) content bumping, and (6) changing behavior. The first two strategies, which include a non-reaction of the brand and deletion of unpleasant UGC, were adopted by Dell and Telfax, for example. As a consequence, the momentum of the CBA increased, and the tonality of user comments became harsher. Some companies, such as Vodafone, (initially) relied solely on counter-stating—that is, providing rational arguments for why the brand behaved correctly and why accusations of social media users are wrong. In most cases, attackers did not agree with such arguments and instead intensified their attacks. Importantly, in most cases several of the strategies were applied simultaneously and/or sequentially.

Other strategies appeared more effective in mitigating the CBAs. For example, an appeasement strategy, which includes an apology (e.g., Fressnapf, Lufthansa), and offering customers the possibility of discussing issues directly with the brand (ProSiebenSat.1 Media) sometimes combined with counter-statements (e.g., WWF), seemed to have prevented an increase of the CBA and reputation damage to the respective brand. Several companies announced, after having been attacked by social media users, that they would change their organizational behavior, a strategy that immediately stopped the CBAs of our sampled brands. For example, McDonald's announced that it would revoke its price increase for cheeseburgers, Adidas began advocating for stray dogs in the Ukraine, and a partner of Schufa announced that it would terminate its criticized cooperation.

Finally, bumping CBA-related content is another strategy organizations apply to deal with CBAs. When CBA-related content is easily accessible by consumers via search engines, organizations can either publish a lot of their own content, which bumps the CBA content from a search engine's top ranking, or absorb these platforms. For example, Kaffee Partner's CBA was triggered because of one critical blog posting which summarized the negative experiences with a leased coffee machine. This

posting was listed under the top search results for important search keywords (e.g., "Kaffee Partner," "Experience with Kaffee Partner," and so on). As a reaction, the managers created search-engine-optimized own platforms (e.g. www.kaffee-partner-erfahrung.de/i.e., "Kaffee partner experience") which "bumped" the negative content to positions that were harder to find by users.

In terms of reaction and strategy, some similarities but also important differences of traditional crises and CBAs exist. CBAs emerge quickly, are often unforeseeable, and require a fast response by the brand—much faster than required for offline crises. Consequently, a 24/7 monitoring and an emergency plan for reaction is required. (Most of the sampled companies did not have such measures in place before the CBA happened, but many invested in continuously monitoring social media and launching a professional PR team after the CBA.) Several strategies such as counter-statements and appeasement exist for both traditional crises and CBAs. However, the former strategy might be far less effective in the online world because discussions in social media are more emotionally laden, and each individual can contribute to the discussion/attack. Attackers often expect a quick apology as well as an observable change in the brand's behavior. Moreover, social media allow firms to get into direct contact with customers or users and listen to their issues—a reaction strategy that was very much appreciated by the users of our sample. Such strategy is only possible to work efficiently due to the technological advancement, and hence it appears much more applicable for CBAs as compared to traditional crises. To summarize those findings, we propose:

Proposition 5a: Compared to traditional offline brand crises, CBAs a) require faster reactions by the organization and b) are less likely mitigated by ignoring, censoring/legal activities, or counterstating response strategies.

Proposition 5b: Response strategies that appear most effective for CBAs include appeasing reactions, changes of behavior, and communication with consumers at eye's level.

Consequences of CBAs

Consequences of CBAs are difficult to measure because, for most affected organizations, no data on pre- and post-CBA brand reputation or sales numbers are publically available. However, user comments (e.g., "Amazon, you

just lost me as a customer”) indicate that short- and potentially even long-term damage might occur, such as damage to a firm’s reputation or loss of actual or potential customers. Vogt (2009) cites market research studies that identify negative short-term effects of the Domino’s Pizza CBA on brand reputation and website traffic. Similarly, United Airlines stock value was claimed to be negatively affected after being victim of a CBA (Ayrès 2009). While the actual duration of CBAs is typically shorter than crises discussions in traditional media, UGC and reports thereof, often formulated in harsh, offensive language, typically remain visible in blogs, YouTube videos, and other social media platforms, for a long time. That is, the crisis itself, its trigger, and the brand’s reaction are all archived on the Internet.

Do CBAs *necessarily* harm companies? The answer is probably no. The case of Domino’s Pizza shows that firms can even benefit from a CBA if they react quickly and in an appropriate way, that is, by approaching customers and starting a dialogue with them. Social media users often acknowledge such responses, and brand publicity and reputation might even increase when social media users perceive the brand’s reaction as fair, appropriate, and professional. To achieve such positive consequences, companies should react quickly and adequately. Adequate in this context means that they take customers and other social media users seriously and mirror their tonality (e.g., react seriously to serious concerns and “play the game” if funny comments appear). We formally propose:

Proposition 6: While CBAs can have negative short- and long-term implications for the affected brand, positive outcomes are also possible in case the organization reacts appropriately to the attack.

Exemplary Case: Pril

To illustrate the above explained pattern, we now provide a more detailed analysis of an exemplary case, Pril. This case is a prototypical example of CBAs as it shows how “trivial” decisions, combined with an inappropriate reaction, lead to a CBA. Furthermore, this CBA was one of the most frequently mentioned CBAs in the Delphi study, and no comprehensive case studies on this CBA have been published so far. The Pril case study is based on an intensive review of the literature, specifically fifteen scientific publications (peer-reviewed journal articles, working papers, peer-reviewed

conference papers, and book chapters), five published single-case studies, more than twenty-five practitioner-oriented publications, and more than 400 user postings on various social media platforms.

In April 2011, the German detergent brand Pril, which belongs to the family firm Henkel, launched a competition on its (German) Facebook page. Pril asked its Facebook fans to join an online competition and present their own ideas for a redesign of the historical Pril bottle. Users would vote for the best design on Pril’s Facebook page and website, which would then be used for a special edition of the detergent. Holiday trips were also promised to the winners of the contest. According to a Henkel posting, Pril received more than 44,000 submissions.

The first user criticisms arose early. For example, users complained about the low chances of “late submissions” because top-voted submissions were presented at the top of the paper and new submissions were presented at the bottom, hardly visible to visitors. Other social media users criticized the voting process and even stated that a jury would be a better alternative. The managers of Pril partly addressed these comments by presenting randomly selected pictures on the contest’s website, instead of the highest-voted ones. Pril also introduced a jury to select the two best submissions out of the users’ top ten votes.

After some time, “trolling” started to occur. That is, some users began submitting non-serious, fun contributions that had no relation to the Pril brand. One of the designs, for example, was named “PRIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIL” and consisted of a creepy monster. Another design draft presented a chicken and a claim that it “tastes like delicious chicken” (see Figure 3). These two submissions, as well as other similar submissions, received the highest number of user votes and thus topped the ranking.

On May 17, Pril posted the following information: “Now it’s getting exciting. The votes of the top designs have been cleared, the final top group is for sure: [Link]. The jury will decide next week!” A majority of the users who replied to the postings interpreted this as suspicious and manipulative. For example, the user “Ole” asked how a user could have more votes after a clearing (than before), and Pril vaguely replied that “perhaps not all changes in the database are live.” Furthermore, Pril stated that it used “technically sophisticated” methods to eliminate multiple votes by one user. About fifty minutes after this posting (before which some users that benefited from the vote-clearing process expressed their satisfaction and enjoyment), the first criticism of the user “René” occurred:

Figure 3
Example for Trolling Submissions (Pril)



Source: <https://lenssen.wordpress.com/category/shitstorm/>. © L. Lensen / sonncomsocialmediamarketing.wordpress.com. Reproduced by permission of Lucien Lensen. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

“What!!!? You must be kidding!” Similarly, user “Mark” wrote: “I would have bought PRIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIL, and many of my friends also.” User “Florian” declared Pril’s PR department “chicken-hearted.” In response to those emotional postings on Pril’s brand page, Pril’s social media team asked the social media users to calm down and discuss the issue on a factual base. Other users joined the conversation, claiming that Pril had deleted their postings. Similarly, user “Denise” stated, “Pril is deleting everything they do not want to hear! Never ever Pril again!” and user Alex claimed, “That contest claims as Apriiiiiil fools.” According to user postings, the PRIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIL design had lost up to 40,000 votes through the data-clearing process.

But was this only a short “tempest in a teapot” on Pril’s brand page? The postings clearly indicate that it was not. On June 2, 2011, about three months after the trigger of the CBA, Pril posted a question and asked users what they were planning to do on Father’s Day. A majority of users who replied to this posting expressed their anger with the contest. This CBA also spread to other social media platforms. For example, the YouTube user “Robert Werner” published a YouTube video about the design contest with a narrator imitating Adolf Hitler. Several blogs, as well as several online and offline newspapers, also reported critically

about the design contest. User postings with a negative or provoking tonality occurred until August 2011.

Applying our induced model to this case, we can conclude that this CBA was triggered by issues in communication, in particular a lack of fairness by the Henkel PR team as perceived by netizens. The CBA, which targeted the Pril brand, was started by the online community active in the contest. The CBA was subsequently amplified by the “Robin Hood” effect—other, so far unaffected users joined the CBA as they perceived Henkel would unfairly use its power in the design context. Henkel’s reaction started with ignoring and censoring. Later, Henkel changed its behavior in a way that the initial leading designs were launched as a limited edition. The tone of the UGC was very emotional, often angry and insulting and the CBA spread over to other social and traditional media.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first systematic investigation that defines and examines CBAs, a social media phenomenon that has gained increasing attention among scholars as well as managers. By investigating twenty-five recent CBAs, this study provides conceptual groundwork for theory and managerial practice.

Theoretical Contributions

Scholars from various disciplines have investigated the emergence of and reactions to different forms of crises (e.g., Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Huang 2006) or (negative) WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Relling et al. 2015). Additionally, marketing researchers have studied various forms of negative UGC and concluded that consumers’ power has increased over the last years. In many cases, these authors have used CBAs as examples to highlight the unique characteristics of social media, such as consumers’ shift of power. However, so far, no research has studied CBAs and their underlying mechanisms in detail. With this study, we thus extend the social media and crisis communication literature by introducing and explaining CBAs. Particularly, on the basis of a Delphi study, a review of extant literature, and a qualitative analysis of twenty-nine CBAs, we develop a comprehensive conceptualization of this new phenomenon and outline its characteristics in detail.

This study contributes to the crisis literature by extending SCCT (Coombs 2006, 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002). While this framework is applicable to a wide variety of crises—such as product recalls and natural disasters—we argue that CBAs differ fundamentally from classical organizational crises. From the Delphi study and analyses of case studies, we developed a theoretical framework that extends SCCT and identifies triggers, targets, developments, and reaction strategies. A comparison between traditional crises (as described by SCCT) and social media crises (as described by the framework developed in this article) is presented in Figure 4.

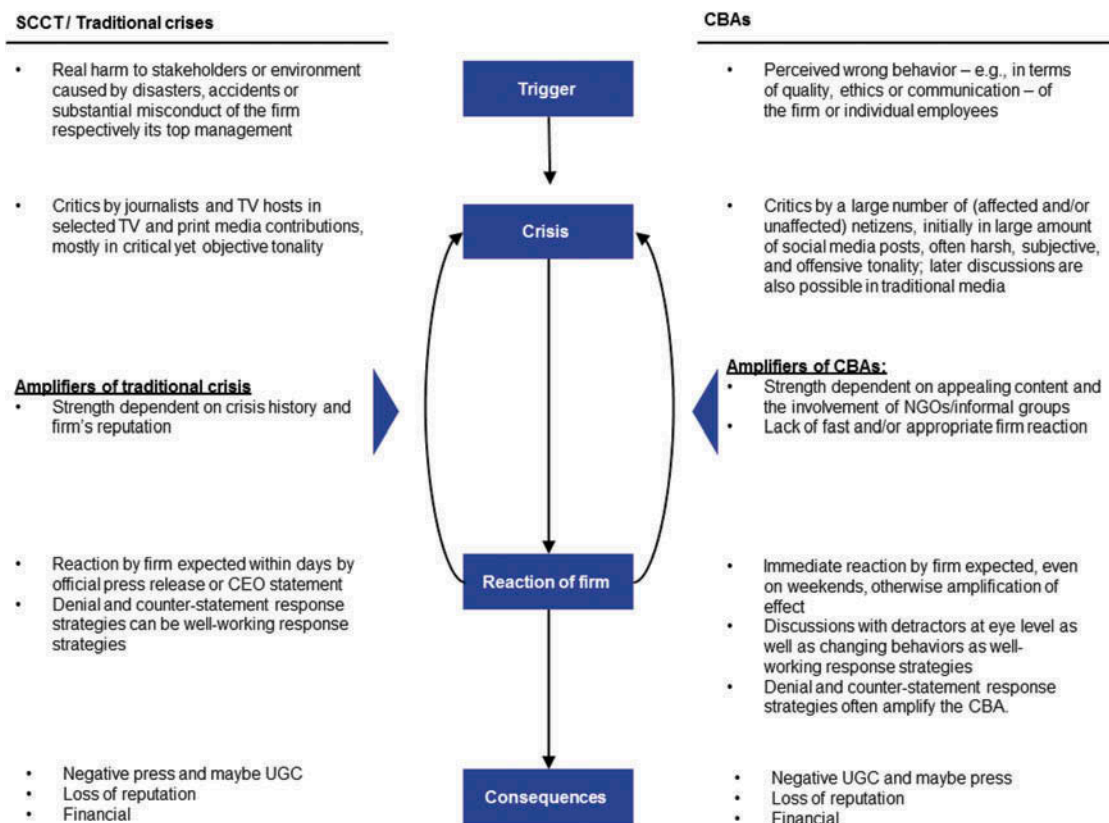
Traditional crises are typically triggered by events more substantial and also more “objective” than those leading to a CBA, such as natural disasters, industrial accidents, violated laws, product recalls, and so on. In general, such triggers have their origin at higher hierarchical levels in the organization (e.g., strategic mistakes). CBAs, on the contrary, can be induced by minor mistakes, even from few individual employees at lower hierarchical levels (e.g., Domino’s). Their development might hence even appear as “random,” which is a unique characteristic of CBAs and has not yet been identified in the crises

communication literature. In traditional situations, mass media mostly spread information about the crises while CBAs start on social media platforms. Later on during the crisis, CBAs may spill over to traditional media (e.g., “United Breaks Guitars”), thereby reaching audiences that typically do not use social media.

Whereas traditional media usually cover crises in a rather moderate, often neutral, and focused manner, this is often not the case for social media communication around CBAs. First, users’ tonality tends to be aggressive, insulting, and threatening. Second, the focus of a CBA-related discussion may shift toward unrelated topics (for example, in the IngDiba CBA, the discussion partly shifted toward a general discussion about vegetarian lifestyle).

At least three important characteristics of social media provide explanations for the idiosyncratic crisis process we observe in CBAs. First, the large number of participants in combination with their heterogeneous background, motives, and objectives leads to a high level of variance in writing style and content. Second, the high level of anonymity leads certain participants to adopt a communication style they would not show

Figure 4
Comparison of CBAs versus Traditional Crises (SCCT)



in a context in which their true identity can be traced or is revealed (c.f. Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin 2008 for a review). Third, the lack of coordination and transparent governance mechanisms does not determine a clear direction for the contributions individuals make to the overall communication that a given CBA involves.

Against this background, it is important to understand to what extent classical response strategies may be effective in a social media context during a CBA. SCCT distinguishes between primary and secondary strategies for how organizations can cope with crises. Our research suggests that these strategies cannot be simply transferred into the CBA context. Several issues require adaptations of extant response strategies. First, timing issues constitute a major barrier. Our empirical material implies that a fast first response, typically within only hours after a CBA is launched, is critical in order to avoid the spreading of the phenomenon. In classical crisis situations, managers may often have several days to develop a response strategy because traditional crises are less dynamic. Moreover, the constant monitoring of UGC related to the brand needs to be ensured 24/7, including weekends, to be able to continuously and quickly react to upcoming CBAs.

Second, censoring issues are of high importance. Censoring crisis-related content is often not possible in traditional crises whereas during CBAs managers can—at least technically—delete negative UGC. However, our study shows that this strategy might not contribute to mitigating CBAs, because online UGC cannot be exhaustively deleted and because removal of UGC typically triggers even harsher critics by social media users.

Third, several response strategies—such as “denial” and “ignorance”—which are rather effective in certain types of traditional crises are less recommended for CBAs. The reason is that dissatisfied customers can spread their opinion with limited effort to a broad audience. As a consequence, both pieces of evidence for the truth of the accusations made during the CBA or strong arguments for the likelihood that the accusations are justified may fire back at the brand.

Fourth, managers can adapt or combine response strategies within a short period. For example, companies that initially deleted UGC but realized the deletion would not stop the CBA engaged in other strategies—such as justifying or excusing the trigger of the CBA. In traditional crises management, the level of response flexibility is typically far lower while the possibility to plan response patterns is more developed.

Finally, bumping CBA-related content can help companies cope with CBAs, or they can try to buy the platform from the initiator or launch their own platforms that are accessible through search engines. Many search engines, such as Google, use the quality and quantity of other websites that link on a particular website (besides many other variables, such as the content, social signals, and technical features) as factors that influence the search engine positions of a website. Thus, when many people and even online news websites (which are usually evaluated by search engines as being highly qualitative) link CBA content, CBA content receives better search engine positions. In these cases, it becomes more difficult for companies to bump it. In contrast, when a CBA does not receive much attention by websites that are ranked by search engines as “good,” bumping CBAs with search engine optimized websites is less difficult. Although, to the best of our knowledge, the crises literature has not yet discussed this strategy, this strategy could also be applicable in traditional offline crises.

The consequences of CBAs and traditional crises can be quite similar. Both can result in negative implications for organizations, such as a loss of reputation, negative effects on financial performance, and so forth. However, substantial differences exist with respect to the crisis process and the effectiveness of response strategies. Our extended framework allows for the integration of hypotheses about new crisis phenomena in the established SCCT perspective.

Managerial Implications

This study also provides valuable insights for managers. First, the analysis of the case studies highlights the importance of the shift of power from companies to social media users (Bernoff and Li 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010; Labrecque et al. 2013). Any Internet user can potentially set off a CBA and a large majority of Internet users can collaboratively attack a company through its social media platforms. Thus, in addition to leaving a relationship or accepting an organization’s misbehavior, customers can now use their power in social media (Bruce and Solomon 2013). This voice allows them to communicate their dissatisfaction and anger to a broad audience and thereby harm the respective organization. For organizations, this means that each customer interaction is essential because it might be the source of friction leading to crisis.

Second, the findings clearly emphasize the importance of monitoring social media. As our findings show, social media users expect instant replies to queries, comments, or criticism they formulate. We believe that, as a consequence, all organizations should educate all of their employees with respect to the potential consequences of misbehavior in social media or in the offline world—and not just the marketing staff. In contrast to traditional crises, CBAs can be triggered by the actions of any employee, as the Domino's Pizza case demonstrates. Because users can use a multitude of social media platforms to voice their opinions, social media should be integrated into organizations' strategies, independent of whether they use social media as a communication channel or not. This recommendation is in line with the concept of reactive social media marketing (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch 2016). Furthermore, the results show that companies need to engage in dialogues transparently. That is, denying mistakes, behaving incorrectly in interactions, or deleting criticism all constitute the least promising strategies.

Which strategies are the most promising ones to prevent organizations from experiencing CBAs? This question is difficult to answer. By identifying the amplifiers and root causes, we show that fairness and transparency are important aspects in social media marketing. Social media managers should therefore consider the possibility of acknowledging the users, rather than trying to enforce their ideas. That means, for example, responding to any comments, managing trolling, and integrating users into their strategies. Furthermore, some CBAs developed because their starting points were easily accessible to a large number of Internet users (e.g., Kaffee Partner). Thus, company-owned activities, in particular social media presences, should work to bump the CBA trigger (critical blog posting) in search engines.

Note, however, that CBAs might, at least in some cases, also result in positive consequences for the brand. This is because companies can receive fast feedback on their actions, often faster than via traditional market research. Firms that show an interest in the attackers and are responsive to the provided opinions and statements can even gain credence and sympathy of the social media users; in turn, former attackers might ultimately become supporters or "fans" of the brand.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with any scholarly work, this study has several limitations that could result in research opportunities. First, the

main focus of this study is the single country source of German CBAs. Culture may influence consumer behavior in brand attacks. On the other hand, many instruments that allow consumers to criticize, control, and in some instances attack companies exist across different national markets and cultures, such as consumer associations or consumer rights systems. Moreover, consumers in most countries of the world support non-governmental organizations in their fight against unethical corporate practices and the use of information about corporate misconduct is a quite global phenomenon. Hence, in order to evaluate the relative importance of national or cultural factors for CBAs, future research should address this issue in detail, for example by comparing consumers and firms from typical cultural groups. Prior research on customer complaint behavior has shown that unsatisfied customers in collectivistic cultures (as compared to individualistic cultures, such as Germany) are less likely to complain (Liu and McClure 2001). Thus, culture might serve as an amplifying factor in the model. As such, it might be interesting to study, to what degree and in what way netizens from different larger cultural groups or areas engage in CBAs and what types of organizational strategies they are responsive to.

Second, our data might have a survivorship bias. In other words, we cannot identify strategies that prevent CBAs in the first place, because we could only observe and analyze CBAs that actually occurred. However, our analyses and the expert interviews indicate that several factors, such as fast, transparent, and honest reactions tend to help avert such crises a priori. Future studies could link CBAs and reaction strategies to financial outcomes on a company level. Doing so could shed light on the financial consequences of CBAs and promising strategies that help combat them.

Third, our study also provides findings from a strategic perspective. Future studies could focus on the individual consumer level and examine psychological mechanisms of CBA participation. For example, how can influential initiators (Trusov, Bodapati, and Bucklin 2010) of CBAs be identified, and are there similarities between the spread of CBAs and the spread of positive WOM from viral campaigns (De Bruyn and Lilien 2008)? Further validation of the CBA model could also come from methodological replications, such as experimental designs.

Fourth, we found that consumers' negative feedback, in most cases, was against the organization (or brand) rather than against particular employees or the social media team. In other words, consumer actions against the brands

had similar patterns to what is typically observed in interpersonal (conflict) relationships. Further research could investigate this question by applying consumer-brand relationship theories (Fournier 1998), parasocial theories, or anthropomorphism (Epley et al. 2007), to social media in general and CBAs in particular.

Finally, the role of specific interest groups—such as rivals, employees, or special interest groups—in CBAs should be studied. For example, could unsatisfied employees trigger a CBA against their employer and what measures could be taken to avoid such CBA?

The aim of this study was to explore a new form of social media crises. We have shown that SCCT in its initial form is not fully applicable to CBAs. Thus, we extended SCCT and provide a novel theoretical model that highlights important triggers, amplifiers, and reaction strategies for CBA. A comparison of this new model with traditional SCCT uncovers various differences between traditional crises and CBAs that have important implications for marketing theory and practice. We hope that both researchers and managers build on these findings to shed greater light on CBAs.

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APPENDIX 1
Overview of Sample and Data Sources

Firm Characteristics		CBA				Collected Data				
Company	Industry	Size (in thousand FTEs)	Geography	Year	Peer-reviewed Articles	Books /Book chapters	Practitioner-oriented press ****	Expert interviews, firm-internal documents	Analysis of postings generated by users	Analysis of postings generated by brand
1. Amazon	E-Commerce	117	Germany	2013	N/A	7	11	N/A	About 200	1
2. Abercrombie&Fitch	Fashion	85	U.S.	2013	N/A	1	15	N/A	About 200	0
3. Zalando	E-Commerce	5	Germany	2012	N/A	N/A	11	N/A	About 100	N/A
4. Vodafone	Telecommunication	91	Germany	2012	N/A	6	8	N/A	About 250	50
5. IngDiba	Bank	85	Germany	2012	1	9	11	1	About 200	1
6. Adidas	Sport	51	Germany	2012	N/A	N/A	12	N/A	About 150	N/A
7. E.ON	Energy	79	Germany	2012	N/A	N/A	5	1	About 100	1
8. Fressnapf	Retailing	8	Germany	2012	N/A	N/A	9	N/A	About 300	2
9. Lufthansa	Airline	118	Germany	2012	N/A	2	16	N/A	About 50	N/A
10. McDonald's	Restaurant	1800	Germany	2012	1	2	14	N/A	About 100	N/A
11. ProSiebenSat.1 - Galileo	TV Show	3	Germany	2012	N/A	2	12	N/A	About 100	1
12. Schufa	Credit bureau	0.8	Germany	2012	N/A	N/A	1	N/A	About 100	N/A
13. Henkel—Pril	Detergent	48	Germany	2011	1	14	26	N/A	About 400	12
14. Schlecker**	Retailing	36	Germany	2011	N/A	6	18	N/A	About 50	N/A
15. O2	Telecommunication	6	Germany	2011	N/A	1	17	1	About 100	1
16. Adidas—EM 2012	Sport Event	51	Europe	2011	N/A	4	18	N/A	About 100	1
17. Nikon	Photography	24	U.S.	2011	N/A	N/A	12	N/A	About 150	1
18. Der WWF & der Panda	NGO	4	Germany	2011	N/A	8	11	N/A	About 100	10
19. Sparda Bank	Bank	0.7	Germany	2011	N/A	2	19	N/A	About 150	4
20. Mammut	Sport	0.5	Germany	2011	N/A	1	6	N/A	About 50	1
21. Teldafax**	Telecommunication	0.7	Germany	2011	N/A	12	14	N/A	About 100	1
22. NestlÖ—KitKat	Food	333	U.S./Intl.	2010	1	2	16	N/A	About 250	5

23. Deutsche Bahn	Railway	290	Germany	2010	N/A	1	9	N/A	About 100	N/A
24. Domino's Pizza	Restaurant	220	U.S.	2009	4	14	16	N/A	About 100	2
25. Jako	Sport	0.2	Germany	2009	N/A	2	18	N/A	About 50	N/A
26. United Airlines	Airline	88	U.S.	2009	3f	14	36	1	About 400	N/A
27. Dell	IT	109	U.S./Intl.	2005	1	N/A	6	N/A	About 50	N/A
28. Kryptonite	Bike	0.1	U.S.	2004	2	12	18	N/A	About 50	N/A
29. Kaffee Partner	B2B Coffee Leasing	.5	Germany	2012	0	1	5	1	About 200	0
General information										
/Experts										12***+5

Notes: * Otto was mentioned as one particularly prominent example of CBAs during an expert interview and several practice-oriented publications. However, the detailed analysis showed that, albeit Otto's case showed some characteristics of CBAs, no actual CBA emerged. This might be attributed to the early and thorough reaction of Otto responsables to first signs of a CBA. We discuss this case in more detail in the manuscript. ** Those companies are not operating any more at the time of writing this study (2014); both firms went bankrupt within the previous years. *** Experts who participated in Delphi pre-study. **** Magazines, newspapers, practice-oriented journals, expert blogs. We did not analyze all user comments; for example, we found more than 15,000 user postings for INGDiBa, but analyzed about 150 of them. Some brands, such as Schlecker or Schufa, do/did not have Facebook (or other social media) profiles. Some brands, such as Lufthansa, deleted most user postings on their Facebook. In these cases, we searched for screenshots via Google picture search (e.g., brand name + "shitstorm," and so on), cited user postings in blogs and publications, and so on. Henceforth, we analyzed significantly less postings for some brands.

APPENDIX 2
Overview of CBA Case Studies

Company	Brief description of CBA	Type of trigger	Amplifier	Initiator and Target	Tonality	Spread	Time and Type of Company Reaction
Amazon	Amazon pays very low salaries to temporary workers.	Unethical behavior of an organization	Informal interest group	Identified by journalists	Aggressive	Started on Amazon's Facebook page, spread via other media	First reaction: Ignorance of postings, users complained that Amazon deleted some comments. Four days later, Amazon commented on their Facebook page that they admit their mistakes and will change their behavior, particularly with temporary workers. Individual employees acted as customers posting positive comments, which was identified and discussed in many blogs.
Abercrombie&Fitch	A&F's CEO, Mike Jeffries, commented that "a lot of people don't belong [in our clothes], and they can't belong. Are we exclusionary? Absolutely," and "in every school there are the cool and popular kids, and then there are the not-so-cool kids... we go after the cool kids."	Unethical behavior of an organization	Informal interest group	Internet users in general, and one particular Internet user with an eating disorder who started an online petition	Aggressive, emotional	Facebook, blogs, other social media platforms	Distraction from the CBA by focusing on their discrimination statements; about two weeks later, A&F's CEO apologized
Zalando	Bad working conditions of Zalando's employees. Directly after the documentary revealed this situation, a CBA started online.	Unethical behavior of an organization	Informal interest group	Started by customers; targeted at company	Emotional and offensive/aggressive posts; including threat of violence	Started on Zalando's Facebook page; spread to Twitter and Google+; was reported in online news	One day after start of CBA, Zalando comments in its company blog; reaction: counter-statement; appeasement; promises to change behavior
Vodafone	An unsatisfied customer criticizes Vodafone for its bad customer service on the company's Facebook page. Vodafone did not react immediately.	Problems in core business	Robin Hood effect Inappropriate reaction of the brand	Started by customer, targeted at company	Mostly emotional complaints, but also offensive/insulting	Started on Vodafone's Facebook page (more than 100,000 likes of initial posting); no spread to other media; reports on CBA in online and offline media	First reaction after several hours (counter-argument); then no further reaction for 2.5 days (weekend), in which the CBA grew in size; after one week statement by PR responsables on Facebook

IngDiba	Launch of new commercial with German basketball player Dirk Nowitzki. Commercial could be interpreted as “You need to eat meat to become as strong as Dirk.” As a consequence, vegetarians started to complain on IngDiba’s Facebook page. A heated discussion between vegetarians and meat-lovers emerged. IngDiba tried to join the discussion, yet lost any control.	Unethical behavior of an organization; communication issues	Informal interest group	Started by lobbying group (vegetarians), targeted at company and several groups (“meat eaters,” “vegetarians”)	Diverse, but mostly aggressive, insulting, and/or emotional	Started on Facebook; no spread, no reporting	After one day, IngDiba joined the discussion. The company welcomed comments but asked for fair language and transparency. After two weeks it was announced that further comments would be deleted in order to get control over the Facebook page again
Adidas	Adidas posted a Facebook photo of the JS Roundhouse Mids, a shoe with a plastic shackle attached to it. It reminded consumers of the degradation of black people.	Unethical behavior of an organization	Informal interest group	Started by consumers and forced by NGOs	Aggressive, insulting	Mostly via Facebook, Twitter, and blogs	Within a few hours, Adidas tried to justify the shoe. As this strategy was not effective, Adidas withdrew the shoe, apologized and clearly stated their rejection of any racist views
E.ON	The electric utility service providers E.ON added “easiness” as an additional core value of their brand. In a TV spot, a couple was lying in bed. The women told her husband that she could not sleep. Then, the man headbutted his wife so that she fell “asleep.” Users perceived this ad as violence-glorifying and misogynistic.	Unethical behavior of an organization	N/A	Started by customers; targeted at company	Mixture of emotional and offensive/aggressive posts; including threat of violence	Started on their Facebook page, blogs	A few days later, E.ON apologized for the spot, mentioning that they have estimated the consequences wrongly and promised to retract the spot immediately
Fressnapf	Fressnapf posted advertisement for a lottery on its Facebook post; the content of this advertisement was assessed as inadequate by customers.	Communication issues	N/A	Started by customers who felt they could not identify with the company anymore; targeted at company	Mostly angry posts	Started on Fressnapf’s Facebook page (500 comments; 250 shares within first four hours); reporting in blogs and online press	Reaction after few hours; Fressnapf apologized for inadequate post; thanked customers for comments
Lufthansa	Lufthansa launches commercial targeted at male customers only. Content of commercial was criticized as sexist by social media users.	Communication issues	Informal interest group	Social media users started the attack which was targeted at the company itself	Mostly objective/rational	CBA started on three platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and an expert blog; reports in other expert blogs as well as in online media	It took Lufthansa more than one day to react. The firm apologized (appeasement strategy) and stopped parts of the campaign

(Continued)

**APPENDIX 2
(Continued)**

Company	Brief description of CBA	Type of trigger	Amplifier	Initiator and Target	Tonality	Spread	Time and Type of Company Reaction
McDonald's	Price increase of Cheeseburger by 39 percent (from 1 EUR to 1.39 EUR). An unsatisfied customer complained on McDonald's Facebook page, resulting in more than 80,000 likes.	Unethical behavior of an organization	N/A	Started by customers, targeted at organization	Mixture of objective/rational and emotional posts	Started on firm's Facebook page (81,000 likes and 6800 comments within two days); online news reported on CBA	Two days after start of CBA, McDonald's announced to revoke the price increase in most restaurants. The CBA stopped.
ProSiebenSat.1Media - Galileo	"Galileo" is an educational TV broadcast that had often been criticized for its content in the past. In 2012, a student posted a critical post on the company's website. The comment was liked more than 100,000 times. When the posting (which was offensive in language) had suddenly disappeared, a CBA started.	Problems in core business; communication issues	N/A	Started by customer (viewer), targeted at company	Mixture of objective/rational and aggressive/insulting (in particular initial posting)	Spread from firm's Facebook page to Twitter; reported in online news	It took the firm more than one day to react with censorship (deletion of posting), appeasement, and counter-statement
Schufa	Schufa announced the idea of using data of Facebook to use sensitive Facebook data to evaluate clients' credit score.	Unethical behavior of an organization	Informal interest group	Initiated by online community; supported by politicians and privacy groups	Mixture of objective/rational and satiric posts	Started on Twitter, spread to Facebook and other social media platforms; blogs /online news reported	One day after the CBA started, a partner of Schufa cancelled the partnership; all respective plans were stopped
Henkel—Pril	The detergent brand "Pril" launched a competition on their Facebook page. Pril was asking their fans to respond with their redesign of the historical Pril bottle, and their Facebook fans should vote for their favorite design to be used for a special edition. Some users submitted hilarious ideas. These postings received the highest number of votes within a few days. Pril changed the roles of the competition and deleted votes that Pril defined as "fakes." Users perceived this as unfair and alleged Pril manipulation.	Communication issues	Robin Hood effect	Initiated by online community	Angry, insulting	Started on Facebook, spread via other social media platforms, including international blogs, also reported in offline media	First reaction: deleting of postings, then trying to harm the CBA, then launching of a special edition of the former top votes via eBay

Schlecker	Linguists criticized the claim "For you. Vor Ort" (a mixture between German and English, suggesting "for you, locally") of the German drug store chain "Schlecker." A company spokesman justified the choice of the slogan with a moderate- to low-educational level of their target group. This statement was perceived as unethical by Internet users.	Unethical behavior of an organization; communication issues	N/A	Started by consumers, targeted at organization	Angry, insulting	Several social media platforms (Schlecker was not actively using social media)	A few days later, Schlecker justified their statement on their corporate blog.
O2	Matthias Bauer, a frustrated customer of the Internet provider O2, was unsatisfied with O2's core services. On various complaints about problems, we received the answer "that's an individual case." He then created a blog called "we are individual cases," and about 8,000 other users contributed to the blog with own postings and stories.	Problems in core business	Robin Hood effect; appealing content	Single customer	Aggressive	Started on Matthias Bauer's blog, spread via other social media platforms	O2 admitted their mistakes in a guest posting on the initial blog and promised to change their behavior.
Adidas—EM 2012	Animal rights activists started posting of angry comments on the Facebook page of Adidas. Reason: Adidas sponsored the European Soccer Cup in Ukraine, where stray dogs were killed; accusation: Adidas as sponsor would not engage enough in solving this problem.	Perceived unethical behavior	Informal interest group	Initiated by lobbying group; targeted at company	Mostly emotional and offensive/insulting	Twitter, newly founded Facebook page as well as several other social media platforms; reports in online news	After a few days Adidas deleted angry comments (censorship); additional appeasement: company acknowledged complaints; Adidas started to exert pressure (together with UEFA) on Ukraine to stop the killing of stray dogs.
Nikon	Nikon posted on the website that a photographer is just as good as the equipment he/she uses. Users felt insulted and degraded in their knowledge and creativity.	Communication issues	No immediate reaction	Facebook community, targeted at the company	Emotional	Started on the Nikon Facebook page, spread to other social media.	Nikon apologized for the comment sixteen hours later.
Der WWF & der Panda	A TV documentary criticizes WWF because of its close cooperation with industrial companies. They are accused of "greenwashing" firms that donate money to them. As a consequence, social media users start attacking WWF.	Unethical behavior of an organization; communication issues	N/A	TV audience in social media	Objective and emotional; expression of anger, critiques and asking questions	WWF's Facebook page to Twitter; reporting on CBA in expert blogs and interaction via WWF chat).	After one day: first counter-statement, then appeasement (invitation for communication and interaction via WWF chat).

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**APPENDIX 2
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Company	Brief description of CBA	Type of trigger	Amplifier	Initiator and Target	Tonality	Spread	Time and Type of Company Reaction
Sparda Bank	SpardaBank used published an ad for the 'black-yellow bank card' in a magazine. The ad showed Borussia Dortmund fans (their colors are black and yellow). However, on the megaphone of a fan was a sticker of the "Ultras Gelsenkirchen," a group of fans of the rival team. Hence, users identified that this ad was photoshopped.	Communication issues	Informal interest group	Identified by a Twitter user, boosted by a large online blog.	Emotional, aggressive	Various social media platforms	Within few days, Sparda Bank posted several postings to apologize to their fans.
Mammut	Mammut signed a petition against Swiss CO2-laws and communicated their engagement in climate. A Facebook user questioned this contradictory behavior in public.	Unethical behavior of an organization; communication issues	N/A	Identified by a Facebook user	Aggressive, also some constructive postings indicating that the users' criticism should be handled by the executive board	Mostly on Mammut's Facebook page	Mammut withdrew their sign for the petition against Swiss CO2-laws.
Teldafax	Customers used the company's Facebook page to complain about the service. One employee replied on Facebook: "Guys, this page is not the right location for complaints and customer requests." Subsequently, the CBA started.	Problems in core business; communication issues	Inappropriate reaction of the brand	Unsatisfied customers, against the company	Mostly emotional	Spread from Teldafax' Facebook page to other social media platforms; online news reported on the CBA	First reaction of firm after few hours: censorship; company posted new contact address on their Facebook page.
Nestlé—KitKat	Greenpeace has asked Nestlé to stop buying palm oil from a supplier that was consciously destroying rainforests and thus threatening the environment of orangutans. Nestlé has never replied to that. Greenpeace has uploaded a shocking video on YouTube showing that Nestlé supports suppliers of their chocolate bars "KitKat" who deforest the rainforest. Altered KitKat logos were created. Nestlé reacted by demanding the video be deleted (copyright violations) and deleted postings with altered logos which stimulated more users to post videos online.	Unethical behavior of an organization	Robin Hood effect; NGO	Initiated by an NGO	Emotional, aggressive	Started on YouTube, spread via Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms, as well as other online and offline news	First: (trying to) delete postings; then: apologize for deletion; then, Nestlé reacted with a new policy that commits to identifying and excluding companies from their supply chain that own and/or manage "high risk plantations or farms linked to deforestation."

Deutsche Bahn	The Deutsche Bahn launched a Facebook page to sell an exclusive, a so-called "Chef-Ticket," a discount ticket offering tickets for a journey in Germany for 25 EUR. To buy such a ticket, users had to become a fan of the page. Instead of buying tickets, users used the page to complain about bad customer service experiences, strikes (one strike took place during the same time), delayed trains, and soon. Users started playing games such as "find the train with the highest delay time," and so on.	Problems in core business	Inappropriate reaction of the brand	Unsatisfied customer, against the company	Aggressive	Started on YouTube, spread via other social media platforms	The Deutsche Bahn ignored critical comments but only replied to Chefticket.
Domino's Pizza	Two employees in the Domino's Conover N.C. franchise uploaded a video to Youtube of themselves doing disgusting things to a sandwich and its ingredients before delivering it. At that time, Domino's did not have a social media presence.	Unethical behavior of an organization	'Appealing' (provoking) content. Fast reaction of the firm calmed down CBA	Employees were the initiator, unsatisfied/angry customers and other netizens started the CBA, against the company	Emotional	Started on Youtube, spread via blogs, finally reached online/offline media/	Domino's collaborated with the consumer watchdog GoodAsYou.org, identified and fired the employees, and reacted on each user comment honestly. Then, Domino's president Patrick Doyle recorded an apology that was uploaded on YouTube.
Jako	A hobby soccer trainer criticized Jako's new logo in an insulting way. Jako's lawyers forced him to delete the content, to sign a declaration to cease and desist. Baade agreed and paid. News aggregators had already saved parts of the content so that parts of his prior blog post were still available. Jako's lawyers imputed him to breach of the declaration of cease and desist and sent him a fine of more than 5,000 EUR. Other bloggers reported about the case and made the case available for a larger audience.	Unethical behavior of an organization	Robin Hood effect; Informal interest group	Bloggers	Emotional	Started in blogs, spread into offline media	Trying to censor negative UGC; later, Jako admitted their wrong reaction in a press release.

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**APPENDIX 2
(Continued)**

Company	Brief description of CBA	Type of trigger	Amplifier	Initiator and Target	Tonality	Spread	Time and Type of Company Reaction
United Airlines	A musician flew with United Airlines and saw how the airline's baggage packers threw his guitar on the runway. The flight attendants did not help him. He realized then that his guitar was broken. Later, neither the staff at the final destination, nor the service staff from the headquarters was willing to help him. He wrote a song called "United Breaks Guitars" and uploaded it on YouTube. The video reached increased attention and support.	Unethical behavior of an organization	Robin Hood effect; appealing content; informal interest group	Unsatisfied customer, against the company	Rational	Started on YouTube, spread via Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and also reached traditional media	United reacted by offering the payment of a new guitar.
Dell	Dell customer complains online about the customer service and product quality of Dell, which he perceived as inferior. Dell did not take his complaints seriously. Other users joined the complaints.	Problems in core business	Inappropriate reaction of the brand	Unsatisfied customer, against the company	Mixture of objective/ rational and (negative) emotions	Started on a firm-external blog, spread to other expert blogs; various online and offline media reported	Dell first did not notice/ignored CBA.
Kryptonite	Kryptonite's most lauded bike locks that claimed to be resistant to hammers, saws, and bolt cutters were found to be susceptible to the plastic pen key product fault. A video was posted online.	Problem in core business	Informal interest group	Unsatisfied customer, against the company	Mixture of objective/ rational and (negative) emotions	Started in a forum, spread via blogs, finally reached traditional media, such as the <i>New York Times</i>	Replacements, a few weeks later.
Kaffee Partner	Employees of a B2B customer, vibrio, complaint in their own company blog about problems in the core business of Kaffee Partner. Vibrio conducted some search engine optimization and posted links on related social media platforms.	Problem in core business	Appealing content	Unsatisfied customer, against the company	Objective, disappointed	On the vibrio blog and in few different blogs	Offered help/goodwill, bumping content.

APPENDIX

Exemplary Case 2: United Breaks Guitars

The second exemplary CBA is based on an intensive review of the literature, specifically seven scientific publications (peer-reviewed journal article, working papers, peer-reviewed conference papers, and book chapters), five published single-case studies, more than ten practitioner-oriented publications, and more than 400 user postings on various social media platforms, as well as an interview with David Carroll, the initiator of the CBA (thirty minutes by telephone). This CBA was targeted at United Airlines because of a service failure that led to the perceived feeling that a large and powerful corporation used its power to ignore the rights and feelings of the “small” user. The initiator of the CBA was Dave Carroll, a musician in the band “The Sons of Maxwell.” He told the following story about what had happened:

In the spring of 2008, Sons of Maxwell were traveling to Nebraska for a one-week tour and my Taylor guitar was witnessed being thrown by United Airlines baggage handlers in Chicago. I discovered later that the \$3,500 guitar was severely damaged. They didn’t deny the experience occurred but for nine months the various people I communicated with put the responsibility for dealing with the damage on everyone other than themselves and finally said they would do nothing to compensate me for my loss. So I promised the last person to finally say no to compensation (Ms. Irlweg) that I would write and produce three songs about my experience with United Airlines and make videos for each to be viewed online by anyone in the world. United: Song 1 is the first of those songs. (*Source*: YouTube)

Carroll’s main motivation was not to threaten but to persuade United Airlines to change its behavior. In the video, the Sons of Maxwell performed their song “United Breaks Guitars” and their actions in this video reflected how they perceived United employees dealing with their customers’ baggage. Carroll later added:

At that moment it occurred to me that I had been fighting a losing battle all this time and that fighting over this at all was a waste of time. The system is designed to frustrate affected customers into giving up their claims and United is very good at it. However I realized then that as a songwriter

and traveling musician I wasn’t without options. In my final reply to Ms. Irlweg I told her that I would be writing three songs about United Airlines and my experience in the whole matter. I would then make videos for these songs and offer them for free download online, inviting viewers to vote on their favorite United song. My goal: to get one million hits in one year.

The video was watched more than 14 million times and received more than 25,000 comments, more than 72,000 positive evaluations, and less than 1,500 negative ones. Most of the user reactions were positive toward Carroll and negative toward United Airlines. The video also motivated other users to share their negative experiences with United Airlines on YouTube and other social media platforms or to share positive experiences with other airlines. The following YouTube comments on the original video demonstrate people’s negative experiences with United:

[U]nited not only breaks guitars, but leaves passengers stranded for days, and makes no effort to get them the rest of the way home. Has happened to me, to friends, to my daughter. (Youtube user Janet Hanson, March 26, 2014)

This is funny because an employee stole my mother’s External [hard disc] ... She was told there wasn’t enough room on the plane and it had to go with the rest of the cargo. Guess that is the best time for them to steal from you because when she got to Texas all she has in her bag was the USB cord but nothing to hook it up to. This family plans to not fly UA anymore. (Youtube user Viet Trinh, August 24, 2013)

There is an ever-growing number of large companies whose individual customers represent an insignificant value and so they just don’t care about them. Let’s hope they start waking up to the impact social media can have on a company’s reputation and— more importantly (to them)— their profits. (Youtube user Bruce Hazelton, August 30, 2013)

No Fast and Appropriate Reaction of the Brand

United’s reaction to Carroll’s complaints was contrary to his expectations and thus marks the first mistake in the interaction. After the video was posted, United’s behavior seemed somewhat rash and passive. A few days after the video posting, United contacted Carroll to solve the problem and to reimburse him. Carroll

denied the reimbursement and suggested that United donate the money to a charity organization. He also claimed that Song 2 was already written, but not Song 3. Carroll prevented any attempts of United to make him delete the video by starting the conversation by stating that the second song was already written. He invited United to provide him with information about how it would improve its customer service and stated that he would include that in the video to have a “happy ending,” which underscores his motivation to force United’s behavior, rather than threatening the firm. However, United did not take Carroll seriously. Carroll described United as “a company that wasn’t really prepared to handle [such negative electronic WOM]... and that [it] didn’t really embrace social media.” He assumed that United was hoping that the popularity of the videos would go away. Carroll stated that he wished United had apologized for the misbehavior early.

Robin Hood Effect

United’s use of power (“the final word is no”) was not perceived well by Carroll or other users. Carroll described his video as “a conversation starter” that motivated other users to share their experiences as helpless consumers in conflict with powerful organizations.

Appealing Content

Carroll’s appealing video was a core reason why United’s misbehavior received a great amount of attention. In particular, the video was well-made and entertaining. In contrast with other videos, this video was not only objective or only funny but also “opened up

roots for other people ... and they thought for hours and shared stories about bad customer service.”

Support of an Influential NGO

With Carroll’s band background, the video received support (e.g., watching and spreading the video) from many of the band’s fans. In addition, an informal group of musicians, who tend to have strong attachments to their instruments and thus could empathize with Carroll about his broken guitar, helped amplify this case. Prior research (e.g., Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Tajfel and Turner 1986) suggests that musicians treat other musicians as their in-group, and thus a threat by a company can motivate them to act.

The consequences of the video were enormous. Dave Carroll’s song spread via social media and even hit the top of the iTunes Charts. The failure of United Airlines also spread via other social media, as reflected by the large number of blog postings on that case and Wikipedia articles in five languages (English, German, Portuguese, Russian, and Chinese). According to an analysis of Grok.Se, the English version of the Wikipedia article still receives more than 150 visitors each day on average. Several newspapers, such as the U. K. *Daily Mail*, reported about Carroll’s experience. David Carroll also documented his experiences and reactions in a book titled *United Breaks Guitars*; the majority of the reviews this book has received on Amazon.com, bookreads.com, and other opinion platforms have been positive. Several online shops also began selling accessories that referred to the title of the book. Note that the original YouTube video still receives comments on users’ negative experiences with United or their support for Dave Carroll.