

# Consumer Engagement in Online Anti-Brand Communities

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## ABSTRACT

In a backlash against corporate branding and capitalism, a growing number of consumers are resisting current marketplace practices and big corporate brands. One particular form of this phenomenon is the emergence of anti-brand communities in social media. The current study, which surveyed a sample of 251 anti-brand community members on Facebook, provides a preliminary understanding of the characteristics and antecedents of anti-brand communities as a new platform for consumer empowerment and anti-brand activism. Findings suggest that consumers' engagement in online anti-brand communities, especially through social media, may be triggered by their negative experiences with employees, product quality, post-purchase service, and value/price. They are motivated, the results show, by seven primary factors: altruism, revenge, advice seeking, convenience, sympathy seeking, socialization, and the need to vent.

## INTRODUCTION

Today's consumers are shifting away from being passive receivers of brand information to being co-constructors of brand meaning and culture. Central to this shift are brand communities. A brand community is defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community," which is "based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, 423). A company may view a brand community as an effective marketing tool for the nurturing of its brand culture and consumer-brand relationships. In a brand community, like-minded consumers share interest in and passion for a brand. Its members facilitate the congealing of brand identification and the strengthening of brand attachment; they sustain brand loyalty and engage in pro-brand behaviors such as continuing community involvement, repurchasing, and paying premium prices (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Peters and

Hollenbeck 2005). Moreover, these devoted patrons serve as brand evangelists that advocate the brand by recommending the brand to others and spreading the word about positive experiences with the brand (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). Brand communities cultivate brand ethos and shape marketing practices and, interestingly, this not only reflects but fuels the current movement of “consumer empowerment” (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006).

The flip side of this type of brand community is the anti-brand community. Indeed, brands can often displease consumers, who can then band together for anti-brand purposes. Some disgruntled consumers may dislike or disapprove a brand’s advertising and marketing activities, its customer service, or its product’s actual quality. They can let their displeasure be known in many ways (Singh 1988). In addition, a growing number of people are now resisting society’s commercialization and its tendency to over-consume. These people have formed diverse consumer groups and now support each other in resisting marketplace practices and the activities of specific brands (Shepard and Hayduk 2002). These communal movements, which develop “around common aversions toward brands,” have gained traction through the Internet (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006, 479). In fact, a large number of them presently reside in cyberspace.

Despite the proliferation of anti-brand communities, particularly online, few

studies have examined this emerging form of consumer empowerment. The marketing and consumer behavior literature offer theoretical insights into communities of brand enthusiasts as well as brand antagonists—those who complain, boycott, and give negative reviews by word-of-mouth. Yet this literature overlooks a rising tide of collective and concerted anti-brand behavior. Therefore, a careful investigation of this unexplored area is timely and necessary. Such a study will help us understand two phenomena: how today’s consumers collectively resist commercial brands and their marketplace activities and how the Internet facilitates unhappy consumers in carrying out their anti-brand agenda.

The purpose of this study is to understand both the nature of online anti-brand communities in terms of collective consumer behavior and these communities’ adherents. More specifically, this study (1) sketches the common goals, communication channels, and action strategies of online anti-brand communities, (2) profiles the characteristics of anti-brand community members as well as their involvement in the communities, (3) investigates negative brand consumption experiences the community members have encountered, and (4) identifies motivations for joining and participating in the online anti-brand communities. From a theoretical perspective, as one of the first studies of anti-brand communities, this study sheds new light on the characteristics and antecedents of online anti-brand communities. These

communities are growing forms of consumer empowerment and of collective oppositional behavior to brands; companies and brands need to understand them better. Marketers, also, will be better able to serve customers by using these findings. The findings offer insight into the proactive role of consumers and their collective resistance to brands.

### CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

#### Brand Communities and Consumer Empowerment

Over the past several decades, scholars and practitioners have recognized the prominent role of brand loyalty in determining brand choices and equity. In today's marketplace, consumer-brand relationships and consumer empowerment are being framed by the important concept known as the "brand community" (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). A brand community consists simply of committed brand supporters. Brand communities, having been explored in an increasing number of studies, appear to thrive in diverse product and service categories. These include automobiles (Luedicke 2006; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schau and Muniz 2002), computers (Flavian and Guinaliu 2005), games (Cova, Pace, and Park 2007) and foods (Cova and Pace 2006).

Brand power holds these communities

together? For many consumers, brands embody symbolic properties such as quality, status, or reputation and are considered a means for expressing uniqueness or a sense of belonging. Consumers are attached to diverse brands – ranging from Harley Davidson to Apple, Nike, Starbucks, and M&M's – and support the marketing practices of the brands. Consumers, drawn together by their common interest in and passion for a brand, become a loose-knit community. As such they actively engage in the construction of meanings of the brand as a shared object and produce their own sub-culture around the brand. In addition to the relationship with the brand, brand community members can develop and enjoy social bonds amongst themselves by sharing information, opinions, experiences, sentiments, rituals, and traditions related to the brand. The social values are intertwined with brand values. Strong brand communities encourage pro-brand behaviors and lead to "socially embedded and entrenched loyalty, brand commitment, and even hyper-loyalty" (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, 427).

While marketers can also take an active role in community building, brand communities are essentially consumer-centric. The collective minds and actions of these communities can effectively contribute to the evolution of brands and their marketing practices (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002). Mirroring the upward movement of "consumer empowerment," brand communities can further cultivate, to their mutual benefit, the

“exchange-based relationship” between the consumer and the brand (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). Here, where consumer input is instrumental in successful branding, marketers make their marketing decisions by capitalizing on consumers’ expertise and skills. The growth of consumer empowerment and brand communities has been fueled by the Internet, where consumer activities are no longer bounded by time or space.

#### Online Brand Communities

Like offline brand communities, the ramifications of online brand communities are varied; they enhance social interaction, information exchange, community commitment, as well as brand loyalty. Even passive participation in online brand communities can contribute to brand loyalty. Shang and colleagues (2006), exploring the perceived values of involvement in an Apple brand community, found that related positively to brand loyalty was “lurking.” Community members who never actively participated in community discussions or activities still learned a great deal about the brand from other members.

While little to no face-to-face communication is involved, online or virtual communities still embrace the social aspects of communities—human feeling and social affiliation (Rheingold 1993). On the other hand, online communities embody unique characteristics of social aggregations. First, online communities have no special or temporal restraints (Lin 2007).

With a multitude of communication means, members can, regardless of their physical locations, share information and opinions instantaneously. Second, the entry and exit costs of online communities are far lower than those of traditional offline communities (Barney 2004; Sproull and Faraj 1997). Third, online communities are generally founded upon volitional participation and their social structure tends to be horizontal without obvious hierarchical classes (Barney 2004; Bruckman 1998; Wellman and Gulia 1999). Altogether, online communities – marked by their low logistical and social costs of membership and their voluntary and egalitarian interaction – are well suited for brand-centered consumer groups. Yet not all brand communities are focused on the positive aspects of brands, nor are they all intended to drive favorable outcomes for the brands.

#### Anti-Brand Movement

Many consumers have become skeptical, distrustful, and wary of corporate domination and capitalism. Increasingly, they resist them. They defy marketers, see through marketplace practices, and attack brand names (Zavestoski 2002). Resistance has been defined as “the way individuals and groups practice a strategy of appropriation in response to structures of domination” (Poster 1992, 94). For some consumers, the contemporary marketplace can be seen as a structure of domination in favor of giant corporations. They tend to be highly

skeptical of business practices, especially various marketing efforts by transnational brands. As a result, from the Internet to the streets, today's consumers express growing impatience with such huge corporate brands as Wal-Mart, Starbucks, and Nike. These consumers view them as commercially exploiting local, national, or global agendas that aim to influence consumer interests, attitudes and identities (Held and McGrew 2002). Not all anti-brand behavior, however, is rooted in such a global view of things. It can also be personal. It may also arise from dissatisfaction with specific brand encounters. Despite the prevalent relational paradigms that seek to elevate consumer expectations, brands cannot realistically satisfy all consumers in every aspect of their business. Discontented consumers, trying to gain some control in the marketplace, may band together to voice their complaints or engage in other resistance efforts (Paulssen and Bagozzi 2009).

A growing number of researchers have looked into the reasons why consumers rebel in the marketplace. A notable piece by Fournier (1998) suggested several factors that might precipitate consumer resistance: consumer satisfaction rates at an all-time low, mounting consumer skepticism of marketing practices, increasing refusal rates in marketing research, consumers' sense of being overwhelmed by the marketplace and by the pace of new product development. Fournier (1998) further identified three different objects of resistance: (1) the marketplace as a whole,

(2) marketing practices, and (3) specific products and brands. This third type, which appears to be on a steady rise, is the particular focus of the present study. For example, as Palazzo and Basu (2007) stated, Wal-Mart can be viewed as having two conflicting societal characters: massive brand power and an inhuman personality. On the one hand, many praise the retail giant as being one of the world's most admired and powerful brand entities. On the other hand, many accuse Wal-Mart of unsavory and even unethical business practices such as expanding aggressively, making use of sweatshops in underdeveloped countries, providing its workers poor working conditions and low wages. Nike, Microsoft, Starbucks, McDonald's and other global brands also attract advocates and antagonists of their brand. For both groups, the rise of consumer empowerment and communication technology has facilitated their expression of views. Unfortunately for some brands, more and more consumers are engaging in the "anti-brand movement" and such collective efforts increasingly materialize in virtual space (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006; Holt 2002).

### Online Anti-Brand Communities

With the advent of the Internet, anti-brand movements are no longer restricted by space or time. In virtual space, social activists and consumers who are dissatisfied with commercial brands freely interact with one another (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006).

Adbusters (<http://www.adbusters.org/>) and No Logo (<http://www.nologo.org/>), for example, originated on and organized through the Internet to attack corporate brands and resist what was seen as their destructive marketplace practices. More and more anti-brand communities live their lives in cyberspace. Shepard and Hayduk (2002, 7) note “activists with computer access usually log on and contribute to a virtual radical community of independent media sites and listservs; this new generation of do-it-yourself organizers has created everything from news reports, video feeds, and photo documentation to online discussions and diaries.” In this fashion, a growing number of anti-brand sites devote themselves to not just resisting but tarnishing brand meanings originally manufactured by marketers (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2009).

In sum, more and more online anti-brand communities are crystallizing around a corporation’s marketing practices and/or the meanings and values represented by a commercial brand. These same communities function as an impetus for members, providing a forum in which members can share common interests, experience a sense of place, engage in congenial dialogue, and rely on communal support for goal accomplishment (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006; McWilliam 2000). Grassroots efforts enhance consumer engagement and online brand communities can be understood as a clear manifestation of such efforts.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Empowered by the development of communication technology, anti-brand movements are experiencing an upsurge. They now represent a novel consumer group wielding more clout than ever before. Therefore, a research effort is both timely and necessary to update the existing paradigm of consumer activism and anti-brand movements. In answering this call for research, the present study seeks to understand how anti-brand community members, in the digital era, exchange their interests and information with one another and how they deploy collective action strategies to resist commercial brands. While a pioneering study by Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) offered preliminary insight into online anti-brand communities, its findings from 36 qualitative interviews with self-identified social activists should be expanded on and supplemented by a large-scale, quantitative study. Specifically, by surveying anti-brand community members in social media, the present study addresses the following research questions.

RQ1: What are the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the members of online anti-brand communities? What is the nature of consumer engagement in anti-brand communities? What are the perceived common goals of online anti-brand communities? What action strategies do online anti-brand communities take to fulfill those goals? What communication strategies do members of online anti-brand communities utilize?

RQ2: What are the precipitating factors of consumer participation in online anti-brand communities? That is, what negative brand experiences trigger consumers to join online anti-brand communities?

RQ3: What are the primary motivations or reasons for consumers to resist brands and companies and in so doing join online anti-brand communities?

### METHOD

To examine the proposed research questions, an online survey was administered to active members of several anti-brand communities on Facebook. Among the latest Internet developments, perhaps the most remarkable is the explosion, on a global scale, of social networking sites. With over 500 million registered users around the world, Facebook is the clear leader of such sites (Wortham 2010). As consumers have woven their activity on social networking sites into their daily lives, these sites are becoming major hubs of social exchanges. Consequently, they host more and more brand-related activities. Marketers, for instance, capitalize on the influx of social networking sites by building brand communities on them (e.g., fan pages or brand profile pages on Facebook) and engaging consumers in communal activities focused around their brand. Complete with personal profiles, manifested social networks, and posted messages among members,

companies are able, through social networking sites, to personalize and target their marketing communications. On the flip side of this, anti-brand communities on social networking sites offer marketers a vital opportunity to monitor consumer feedback on their brand and marketing practices. Furthermore, the ubiquity of social networking sites—combined with the ease with which anti-brand communities are viewed, accessed, joined, and participated in—results in a broad base of consumers with negative sentiment towards brands.

### Measures

For this study, a survey instrument was developed with measures that identify and measure key consumer resistance motivations as well as precipitating factors for involvement in anti-brand communities. The sources for these motivations and factors came from the literature as well as from in-depth interviews with 30 volunteer members of online anti-brand communities.

### Community Member Characteristics and Activities

The study also assessed anti-brand community members' demographic characteristics and perceived community goals, strategies, and activities. Additionally, members' attitudes toward complaining (ATC) and propensity to complain (PTC) were gauged via 7-point, Likert-type scales (Bodey and Grace 2007). Furthermore, community commitment, satisfaction, and future intention were gauged using 7-point, Likert-type

scales (Garbarino and Johnson 1999). The specific measures and their reliability coefficients appear in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

#### Negative Brand Experiences

By definition, anti-brand communities are formed around consumer resistance to brands. Members' brand antipathy may be attributed to unpleasant experiences with the brands. The measures of negative brand consumption experiences were borrowed from Sundaram, Mitra and Webster (1998) and modified, reflecting the general context of the study. That is, instead of asking respondents to recall a single dissatisfying episode, this investigation examined, on 7-point, Likert scales, respondents' global perceptions of dissatisfying experiences with the brand. Table 4 displays the measures.

#### Community Membership Motivation

The survey contained multiple items of motivations for community membership. Because established measures for anti-brand community participation motivation were unavailable, survey items were adopted from the literature on related topics such as negative word-of-mouth (Richins 1983; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998; Wetzler, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2007), complaining behavior (Day and Landon 1976; Kowalski 1996), customer dissatisfaction (Smith, Bolton, and Wagner 1999), Internet use (Ko, Cho, and Roberts 2005), and interpersonal relationship and

social enhancement (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo 2004).

The initial set of the survey items was cross-checked with results from in-depth interviews with a volunteer group of 30 online anti-brand community members (20 male; mean age = 26). All participants were asked to answer the interview questions freely and in their own words. First, they were asked to list as many reasons as they could think of for joining and participating in online anti-brand communities. They were then directed to evaluate (and modify) the scale items generated from the literature. Finally, they were asked to list their community's goals, action strategies, communication tools, and their demographic and psychographic characteristics. Based on the results of this phase, necessary modifications and revisions were made for the final version of the survey.

#### Sampling Procedure

The selection of anti-brand communities on Facebook and recruitment of their members for the study followed a three-step process. First, the annual survey of "The World's 100 Most Valuable Brands" conducted by Interbrand with Businessweek (2008) was used to identify brands with a strong global presence. Brands (i.e., Coca-Cola, Microsoft, McDonald, Starbucks, Shell) enjoying such worldwide success are likely to exert a gravitational pull on anti-brand communities.

Second, for each of the 100 brands, the



study identified its anti-brand community with the largest number of members on Facebook. Among these, only active communities were selected. The specific selection criteria were that the communities, (1) had been in operation for more than one year, (2) had more than 100 members, and (3) had an identifiable community manager or administrator. This procedure led to a total of 24 online anti-brand communities.

Finally, managers (or administrators) of all 24 communities were contacted for survey participation. Among them, seven agreed to send out a survey invitation email to their community members or post the survey URL on the community discussion board. As a result, from the seven anti-brand communities on Facebook a total of 251 members participated in the study. The lifespans of the seven anti-brand communities, ranging from 13 to 37 months, averaged 18.8 months. Memberships ranged from 482 to 83,654, averaging 2,689. As an incentive to participate, all respondents who completed the survey were entered into a random drawing to win one of 10 iPod shuffles.

## RESULTS

### Characteristics and Community Goals, Activities, and Strategies

Among the total respondents who indicated their gender, 120 (62.2%) were male and 73 (37.8%) were female. Their ages ranged from

14 to 62 with a mean of 28.1. Approximately 28% of the respondents had some college education, 25.3% had graduated from college, 20.1% had graduated from high school, 12.4% had earned a master's degree, 6.2% had gone to vocation/technical school, and 2.6% had earned a doctoral degree. More than half of the respondents who completed the demographic questions were Caucasian (54.1%), single (53.4%), and had a full-time job (52.6%). Approximately 81% of the respondents had no children, 7.3% had two children, 6.7% had one child, 4.1% had three children, and 1.0% had more than three. More than 50% of the community members earned more than \$40,000 in annual income. In terms of political orientation, 20.9% of the respondents reported being Independent, followed by strong Democrat (17.3%), Democrat (8.4%), Republican (4.2%), and strong Republican (3.7%). Further demographic characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Age	Mean = 28.1 (14–62), SD = 9.26 (N=193)		
Gender	Male	120	62.2
	Female	73	37.8
	No Answer	58	
Education Level	High School or Equivalent	39	20.1
	Vocation/Technical School (2yr)	12	6.2
	Some College	54	27.8
	College Graduate (4yr)	49	25.3

Education Level	Master's Degree	24	12.4
	Doctoral Degree	5	2.6
	Professional Degree	4	2.1
	Others	7	3.6
	No Answer	57	
Ethnicity	Caucasian	105	54.1
	African American	1	0.5
	American Indian	1	0.5
	Asian American	3	1.5
	Hispanic American	7	3.6
	Multiracial	5	2.6
	International	37	19.1
	Others	35	18.0
No Answer	57		
Marital Status	Single	103	53.4
	Married	43	22.3
	Divorced	6	3.1
	Living with someone	36	18.7
	Separated	4	2.1
	Widowed	1	0.5
	No Answer	58	
Number of Children	None	156	80.8
	One	13	6.7
	Two	14	7.3
	Three	8	4.1
	More than three	2	1.0
	No Answer	58	
Employment	Full-time	102	52.6
	Part-time	44	22.7
	Not employed	48	24.7
	No Answer	57	
Household Income	Under \$10,000	30	16.3
	\$1,000–19,999	13	7.1
	\$20,000–29,999	23	12.5
	\$30,000–39,999	15	8.2
	\$40,000–49,999	21	11.4

Household Income	\$50,000–59,999	20	10.9
	\$60,000–69,999	10	5.4
	\$70,000–79,999	7	3.8
	\$80,000–89,999	5	2.7
	\$90,000–99,999	8	4.3
	> \$100,000	32	17.4
No Answer	67		
Political orientation	Strong Democrat	33	17.3
	Democrat	16	8.4
	Strong Republican	7	3.7
	Republican	8	4.2
	Independent	40	20.9
	Not applicable	53	27.7
	No Answer	94	

On average, the respondents reported having been associated with the communities for 14.6 months, ranging from 1 to 37 months. 94.8% of the respondents were regular members and 5.2% were either creators or administrators of the communities. More than 78% of the respondents shared their real names and personal information with other community members. As shown in Table 2, a majority of members first found out (or heard about) the communities through the Internet (e.g., Facebook, Google, email: 69.3%), followed by family or friends (20.3%), and others sources such as television, newspapers, etc. (4.0%). About 82.5% of the respondents indicated that they initiated or joined the community because of their own negative experiences with the brand, followed by moral issues related to the company (42.2%), their family member or friend's negative experience (24.0%), ecological concerns (23.5%), and political

reasons (16.7%). Members reported visiting their respective community website rarely (46.2%), followed by once a month (22.9%), once a week (12.9%), and once every two weeks (9.2%). About 10% of the respondents visited the community at least two times a week.

Approximately 70% of the respondents indicated that the primary goal of their community was to provide a venue for venting one's frustrations. The other goals included: to connect people with similar needs and issues (61.8%), to perform collective actions (38.6%), to provide information to those who need help (34.7%), to provide information/resources to those who take legal actions (14.3%), and to increase awareness (11.6%). A total of 149 respondents (59.4%) indicated that the Facebook discussion board or wall was their primary communication tool, followed by e-mail (38, 15.1%), electronic newsletter (25, 10%), instant messaging (14, 5.6%), and other means such as telephone and face-to-face communication (4, 1.6%). For the community's major action strategies, 45.4% of the sample selected protest/boycott, followed by negative word-of-mouth (31.9%), email campaigns (24.7%), community newsletters (23.1%), and growth of community membership (4.0%). Additional characteristics of the anti-brand communities and the members' community activities are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Community Membership, Goals, and Activities

		N	%
Membership	Mean =14.62 months, SD =11.00	251	100
Role	Regular Member	238	94.8
	Creator	10	4.0
	Administrator	3	1.2
How did you find out about this community?	Internet (Facebook, Google)	174	69.3
	Family members or friends	51	20.3
	I initiated the community.	13	5.2
	Media sources	10	4.0
	Others1	3	1.2
*Reasons for initiate /join	My own negative experience	207	82.5
	Moral responsibility issues related to the company	106	42.2
	My family or friend's negative experience	60	24.0
	Ecological problems of the company	59	23.5
	Political reasons	42	16.7
	Others2	37	14.7
Share real name/ personal information	Yes	196	78.1
	No	53	21.1
	No Answer	2	0.8
Visit Frequency	Rarely	115	46.2
	Once a month	57	22.9
	Once every two weeks	23	9.2
	Once a week	32	12.9
	2-4 times a week	10	4.0
	5-6 times a week	5	2.0
	Everyday	4	1.6
	Several times a day	5	2.0
*Community Goals	Provide a venue for venting one's frustrations	175	69.7
	Connect people with similar needs and issues	155	61.8
	Educate the public about the issues related to the company	134	53.4

*Community Goals	Perform collective actions against the company (e.g., boycott)	97	38.6
	Provide information to those who need helps	87	34.7
	Provide information/resources to those who take legal actions	36	14.3
	Increase awareness	29	11.6
*Primary Communication	Facebook discussion board/wall	149	59.4
	E-mail	38	15.1
	Electronic newsletter	25	10.0
	Instant messaging	14	5.6
	Others3	4	1.6
* Primary Action Strategy	Protest/boycott	114	45.4
	Negative word-of-mouth	80	31.9
	Email campaigns	62	24.7
	Community newsletter	58	23.1
	Gathering people	10	4.0
	Others4	12	4.8

※ The items were not mutually exclusive (checklists) and the percentages collectively exceed 100%.

1. The 'others' includes books and protests.
2. The 'others' includes social issues, healthy issues, family issues, and just for fun.
3. The 'others' includes telephone and in-person communication.
4. The 'others' includes cash donation, magazine and Internet advertising, observation, and publicity.

Lastly, the members' personality characteristics and community commitment were examined. Overall, the anti-brand community members showed relatively positive attitude toward complaining ( $M = 5.97$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ) and strong propensity to complain ( $M = 5.52$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ). As for their relationship to the community, the respondents were fairly satisfied with the community ( $M = 5.02$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ), committed to the community ( $M = 4.77$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ), and willing to stay associated with the community

( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ). The specific measures, means and standard deviations are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** ATC, PTC, Community Satisfaction, Commitment, and Future Intention

	Mean	S.D.
Attitude toward Complaining (ATC) ( $\alpha = .73$ )		
I think people should complain when they are unhappy with the service they are getting.	6.19	1.27
*I don't think people should bother complaining when they are unhappy with the service they are getting.	6.16	1.33
*I don't like people who complain to service providers when they are unhappy.	6.05	1.41
I admire people who complain to service providers when they are unhappy.	5.47	1.51
Propensity to Complain (PTC) ( $\alpha = .89$ )		
If there is a service failure, I will complain to the company.	5.67	1.46
If I am dissatisfied with the things I buy, I will complain about them to the shop who sold them to me.	5.37	1.58
I do not hesitate to complain if I think it is warranted to do so.	5.68	1.49
Based on my past purchasing experiences, I am likely to complain in the event of dissatisfaction.	5.50	1.49
I am inclined to complain to the service provider if I am unhappy with the service.	5.60	1.30
*I am usually reluctant to complain about the service regardless of how bad it is.	5.54	1.74
*I am less likely than most people to complain about unsatisfactory service.	5.31	1.76
Community Satisfaction ( $\alpha = .85$ )		
I am satisfied with this brand community.	5.04	1.45
I am satisfied with this brand community compared with other communities.	4.69	1.43
I would recommend this brand community to my family or friends.	5.32	1.52
Community Commitment ( $\alpha = .84$ )		
I am proud to belong to this brand community.	5.11	1.57
I feel a sense of belonging to this brand community.	4.54	1.71

I care about the long-term success of this brand community.	4.65	1.68
Future Intention ( $\alpha = .92$ )		
I plan to participate in future activities in this brand community.	4.34	1.73
I plan to be a regular visitor to this brand community in the future.	4.49	1.71
I would consider putting my time or effort to this brand community in the future.	4.20	1.81

※ Indicates reverse scored. (N=251)

### Negative Consumption Experiences

In examining the second research question, a principal component analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation was performed to examine different types of negative consumption experiences. The PCA analysis produced a four-component solution, which explained 66.76% of the variance.

The first component, “employee experience,” accounted for 38.37% of the variance and its three items, as assessed by Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = .94$ ), formed a reliable scale. The second component, “quality experience,” consisted of five items and accounted for 13.61% of the variance ( $\alpha = .74$ ). The third component, “post-purchase service experience,” explained 7.96% of the variance and the scale with four items was found to be reliable ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Finally, the fourth component, “value/price experience” with two items accounted for 6.82% of the variance ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The specific items and factor loadings are reported in Table 4.

	1	2	3	4	Mean	S.D.
Employee Experience ( $\alpha = .94$ )						
Employees were discourteous.	.93	.08	.20	.08	4.00	2.05
Employees were rude.	.91	.06	.23	.10	3.93	2.07
Employees were inattentive.	.88	.16	.21	.18	4.18	2.12
Quality Experience ( $\alpha = .74$ )						
The product failed too soon.	-.04	.82	.07	.05	4.82	1.91
The product caused inconvenience.	.13	.73	.06	.21	5.58	1.82
The product delivered quality far below.	.13	.62	.14	.28	5.84	1.71
The product was not like the ad claimed it would be.	.03	.54	.25	.34	5.46	1.81
The product damaged other products.	.05	.52	.28	-.06	4.59	2.07
Post-Purchase Service Experience ( $\alpha = .81$ )						
The company had unacceptable refund/exchange policies.	.31	.14	.84	.11	3.53	1.97
The company failed to honor the warranty.	.31	.17	.81	.13	3.42	1.92
The company blamed customers for problems.	.13	.27	.62	.24	4.53	2.12
The company failed to acknowledge product problems.	.06	.25	.51	.43	5.38	1.92
Value/Price Experience ( $\alpha = .85$ )						
The product provided poor value for the money paid.	.15	.19	.13	.88	5.25	1.97
The product was priced too high given the quality.	.15	.13	.20	.84	4.80	2.08
Eigenvalue	5.76	2.04	1.19	1.02		
% of Variance	38.37	13.61	7.96	6.82		
Cumulative %	38.37	51.98	59.94	66.76		

Table 4. Types of Negative Consumption Experience

Motives for Participating in Online Anti-Brand Communities

To identify what underlying motivational structure existed for participation in online anti-brand communities, this study carried out a principal component analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation. Since two items (i.e., I like to get anger off my chest; I want to understand what happened) had high loadings on more than one component and one item (i.e., I want to know whether I judged the situation right) loaded below .40, these three items were removed from the original set of 34 statements and the PCA was rerun with 31 items (Nunnally 1978). Consequently, the study obtained a meaningful and clear seven-component solution, which explains approximately 69.4% of the total variance. With the exception of one item (i.e., I believe the community representative knows the person in charge within the company and will convey my message), all of the traits showed high loadings ( $\geq .50$ ) on only one of the seven components and relatively low loadings ( $< .40$ ) on the other six components.

As shown in Table 5, the first component, labeled “altruism,” accounted for 31.28% of the variance after rotation and its seven items formed a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ). The second component, “revenge,” consisted of five items and accounted for 11.65% of the variance ( $\alpha = .89$ ). The third motive was “advice seeking” and explained 7.32% of the variance with five items ( $\alpha = .83$ ). The next motive, “convenience,” included five items ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and explained 6.4% of the variance. The fifth

component, “sympathy seeking” with three items accounted for 5.31% of the variance ( $\alpha = .80$ ). The sixth motive, “socialization,” consisted of three items and accounted for 3.77% ( $\alpha = .78$ ). Finally, the seventh motive, “ventilation,” with three items accounted for 3.64% of the variance ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Table 5 presents the full items and their loadings.

**Table 5.** *Motives for Anti-Brand Community Participation*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Altruism (<math>\alpha = .90</math>)</b>							
I want to warn other consumers of bad product/service.	.82	.29	-.10	.11	-.05	.02	.07
I want to prevent other consumers from making the same mistake I did.	.81	.09	.08	.14	.12	.06	.06
I want to save other consumers from having the same negative experiences as me.	.78	.06	.14	.07	.12	.01	.14
I want to warn other consumers not to use this product/service.	.77	.31	-.14	.09	.01	-.03	.09
I want to help other consumers with my own negative experiences.	.73	.22	.23	.03	.03	.15	.21
I want to give other consumers the opportunity to buy the right product/service.	.65	.15	.11	.22	.06	.30	.02
I want to help other consumers with making a decision.	.64	.07	.20	.17	.15	.13	-.00
<b>Revenge (<math>\alpha = .89</math>)</b>							

I want to take vengeance upon the company.	.17	.81	.09	.10	.03	.05	.13
I want to take revenge on the responsible person for this product/service.	.10	.81	.08	.12	.12	.18	.18
The company harmed me, and now I will harm the company.	.16	.78	.24	.09	.13	.12	.00
I want to give this company a bad reputation.	.30	.76	-.21	.18	.08	-.08	.09
I want the company to lose customers.	.36	.69	-.19	.21	.08	-.05	.01
Advice Seeking ( $\alpha = .83$ )							
I hope to receive advice from others to solve my problems.	.15	-.08	.84	.04	.14	-.03	.12
I expect to receive tips or support from other consumers.	.21	-.05	.81	.03	.10	-.01	.19
I want advice on how to handle my feelings.	-.05	.10	.76	.19	.18	.19	-.02
I want to pour my heart out.	-.04	.15	.53	.07	.31	.30	.26
I believe the community representative knows the person in charge within the company and will convey my message.	.12	.23	.49	.31	.22	.17	-.30
Convenience ( $\alpha = .79$ )							
I believe companies are more accommodating when I publicize the matter.	.15	.06	.22	.72	.25	.12	.04
It is not that costly.	.19	.16	.00	.71	.07	.09	.22
It is more convenient than writing to or calling the company.	.09	.25	.04	.70	-.05	.22	.19
I believe the community representative will stand up for me when speaking to the company.	.22	.13	.38	.57	.21	.08	-.29

One has more power together with others than writing a single letter of complaint.	.28	.19	-.01	.51	.03	-.04	.21
Sympathy Seeking ( $\alpha = .80$ )							
I search for comfort.	.18	.07	.18	.11	.84	.05	.04
I want a feeling of sympathy.	-.03	.24	.29	.11	.76	.04	.08
I want to feel that someone understood me.	.16	.06	.15	.09	.70	.21	.30
Socialization ( $\alpha = .78$ )							
It is fun to communicate this way with other people in the community.	.24	.05	-.05	.13	.09	.81	.24
I meet nice people this way.	-.08	.09	.22	.10	.14	.76	-.04
I believe a chat among like-minded people is a nice thing.	.38	.02	-.03	.23	.04	.68	.30
Ventilation ( $\alpha = .81$ )							
I want to vent my feelings.	.21	.16	.18	.13	.09	.20	.77
I have to blow off steam.	.21	.18	.10	.16	.26	.16	.76
My contribution helps me to shake off frustration about bad buys.	.22	.36	.18	.26	.21	.09	.53
Eigenvalue	9.69	3.61	2.23	1.99	1.65	1.17	1.13
% of Variance	31.28	11.65	7.32	6.40	5.31	3.77	3.64
Cumulative %	31.28	42.93	50.25	56.65	61.96	65.73	69.37

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study makes contributions on several fronts. First, it adds to the consumer behavior literature by shedding light on a new form of social movement and consumer empowerment, one that revolves around the Internet. Exploiting the ubiquity of the Internet, online

anti-brand communities serve as an effective platform for consumers to communicate common goals, interests, and emotions and coordinate efforts to resist corporate brands. The findings from this study suggest that online anti-brand communities, especially in the social networking landscape, function increasingly as a forum for consumers to share negative brand experiences and frustrations and to help each other in handling brand-related problems. This function of online anti-brand communities may stand in contrast to their other potentialities—serving as councils to address more sweeping agendas such as philosophical, moral, ethical, or environmental issues.

A second contribution of this study is the revelation that anti-brand communities in social media can serve as a unique platform where consumers complain of unsatisfactory brand experiences. Such experiences were identified as an important trigger for anti-branding on the Internet (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2009). Complaint behavior, according to Singh's (1988) taxonomy, consists of three types: voice, private, and third-party responses. There are two dimensions to these types, (1) social network—whether consumers direct their complaints to individuals or organizations that are internal or external to their social circle and (2) involvement—whether the recipients of the complaints are directly involved in the unsatisfactory exchange. In the context of consumer-brand exchanges, “voice” represents consumer

complaints directed at the unsatisfactory brand and to an audience external to the consumer's social network. When a consumer complains “privately,” the consumer addresses the issue not with the brand but solely within his or her social circle. Finally, a “third-party” complaint takes place when the consumer reports the problem to an individual or organization that is not directly involved with the brand or the consumer.

Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009) suggest that anti-brand sites are akin to third-party responses. Anti-brand communities in social media, however, may represent an interesting confluence of those complaint types. When a consumer is dissatisfied with a brand, that consumer can turn to an anti-brand community to make a private complaint (community members can be considered to be within the consumer's social network) and/or an “indirect” voice complaint (the anti-community can address the issue as a group on the consumer's behalf). Due to the pervasiveness of social media in general and social networking sites in particular, today's consumers can effortlessly resort to anti-brand communities for social exchanges and support pertaining to brand dissatisfactions. The convenience factor makes such communities even more attractive to consumers. In addition, marketers are more likely to be aware of the collective consumer feedback and requests of redress via anti-brand communities in social media. Hence the communities can be more effective in bringing about remedies to



consumer problems (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Anti-brand communities, from a public policy perspective, may also have good effects on consumer empowerment. Consumers are oftentimes in a weak position in the marketplace but the communities can support such vulnerable consumers in finding useful information, ventilating their complaint, and seeking remedies from companies (Garrett and Toumanoff 2010).

Third, this study extends the literature on consumer-brand relationships by investigating important precipitating factors for and consequences of anti-brand communities and their associations with consumer-brand relationships. Although there is a growing interest among researchers and practitioners in consumer-brand relationships, no previous study has investigated the implications of anti-brand communities for long-term relationships between consumers and brands. The social media environment is conducive to the fostering of brand ethos and social engagement among consumers. As consumers' social circles and communications are explicitly manifested in social networking sites, collective brand relationships beyond the paradigm of consumer-brand dyads can be closely examined (O'Guinn and Muniz 2009). Furthermore, anti-brand communities represent the antithesis of brand enthusiasts; marketing and consumer researchers can acquire critical knowledge about the dynamic nature of brand meaning and loyalty and relationships by delving into the incidental and

informal brand resistance processes that come to light with today's technological advances (Ward and Ostrom 2006).

From a managerial perspective, the findings of this study provide valuable insight into how marketers can successfully satisfy today's proactive consumers and better serve both society and consumer welfare. Consumers tend to vent their frustration with brands and seek advice and remedy through anti-brand communities. According to Singh and Wilkes (1996), this semi-public act of consumer complaint can, for a company, be more desirable in the long term than private complaints. The semi-public complaint is similar to the voice action—largely driven by goals of redress and loyalty, whereas private complaints are chiefly motivated by retaliatory impulses. Hence, for a company, anti-brand communities in social media can serve as an effective mechanism for encouraging (indirect) vocalization of complaints and thereby mollifying the impulses inclined toward the more detrimental private complaint behaviors. In addition, the findings of this study underscore the growing importance of these communities as a channel of consumer feedback. While marketers have little control over the dynamics of interactions within the communities, they should be able to obtain a wealth of consumer criticism and advice by closely monitoring the conversations among the committee members (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Mangold and Folds 2009).

While this study sheds light on the

understudied topic of anti-brand communities, especially in the emerging social media environment, it is not without limitations. These should be discussed in terms of directions for future research. First, the sampling frame of the study was limited to anti-brand communities on social networking sites. Social networking sites are among the most prevalent channels of communication and one of the most frequent online destinations these days. In spite of this fact, anti-brand communities within this context might not be representative of anti-brand communities on other online media platforms. Another sampling issue is a potential self-selection bias. With increased privacy and security concerns, most of the anti-brand communities contacted by the authors were reluctant to participate in the study. The only feasible approach to sampling the members appeared to be to distribute or post the survey link for volunteers to access. Yet those who completed the survey may be more enthusiastic about the community and hold strong opinions about the brand. Future research should gather a more representative sample to enhance generalizability.

In building on this study, a next step would be to gain more details about community activities. The present study was intended to sketch the phenomenon of anti-brand communities in social media and to obtain preliminary insights into the motivations behind consumer membership of the communities. This study's findings provide an

outline of the characteristics of communities and their members. It would be useful to have more illustrative and in-depth knowledge of communal actions and social exchanges among the community members and the impact of such actions and exchanges on consumer relationships with the brands. Along this line, as anti-brand communities can serve as an effective conduit for negative WOM, the relationship structure of the community members in the dissemination of brand knowledge and experience warrants close scrutiny (Brown, Broderick, and Lee 2007; Dwyer 2007).

Another area of further research would be an investigation of the relationships among the variables of interest. For example, what aspect of anti-brand community involvement best predicts continued community membership? If a consumer joins an anti-brand community in social media to seek remedies for a problem versus to engage in social exchanges, would the level of their commitment to the community differ? How do consumers' personality characteristics, such as propensity to complain, relate to their affiliation with an anti-brand community? How does consumer involvement in an anti-brand community influence brand perception and relationship in the long term? Does anti-brand community membership increase members' sense of empowerment? Understanding these issues would be a challenging but rewarding research endeavor.

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