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**UNIVERSITÄT
BERN**

Consumer Brand Defense-Management

Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung der Würde eines
Doctor Rerum Oeconomicarum
der Wirtschaft- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät
der Universität Bern

vorgelegt von
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von Frauenfeld, TG

2021

Originaldokument gespeichert auf dem Webserver der Universitätsbibliothek Bern



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Die Fakultät hat diese Arbeit am 16.12.2021 auf Antrag der beiden Gutachter Prof. Dr. Harley Krohmer und Prof. Dr. Reto Hofstetter als Dissertation angenommen, ohne damit zu den darin ausgesprochenen Auffassungen Stellung nehmen zu wollen.

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Acknowledgments

Pursuing my dissertation project at the Marketing Department of the University of Bern has been an incredibly educational time that enhanced my personal development. Writing this dissertation would not have been possible without many people's support. Their company, encouragement, and know-how were invaluable factors that drove this dissertation's elaboration, and therefore, I would like to thank them at this point.

Above all, my deepest gratitude concerns my doctoral supervisor Prof. Dr. Harley Krohmer. His openness for my dissertation's topic spurred my intrinsic research motivation because it allowed me to examine the fascinating phenomenon of consumer brand defense. Further, his creative inputs inspired me to think outside of the box and thereby drove this dissertation's development in the right direction. Next to his remarkable expertise, my research also largely benefitted from his confidence in my abilities and optimism in my research projects. Additionally, I was really pleased by the department's excellent conditions to conduct my research. Specifically, I would like to highlight the possibilities of educating myself at several doctoral courses, visiting top-notch conferences, and frequent exchanges with managers and subject matter experts.

Moreover, I truly appreciated the possibility of working with Prof. Dr. Wayne D. Hoyer of the University of Texas at Austin, who is an outstanding scholar in his field. It was an honor getting feedback from such a world-renowned researcher. His profound knowledge greatly improved my dissertation's quality.

A big thank you also belongs to my dear colleagues and co-authors, Prof. Dr. Andrea Giuffredi-Kähr and Dr. Bettina Nyffenegger. Being able to discuss my ideas and concerns with them was a crucial part of this dissertation's complementation. I learned a lot in these thought-provoking talks, and consequently, they drove my personal development as a researcher to a large degree.

Moreover, I enjoyed sharing an office with my colleagues Dr. Andreas Hediger, Prof. Dr. Andrea Giuffredi-Kähr, and Alisa Petrova. On the one hand, they were always open to my questions and, on the other hand, always up for a good time. I cannot thank you enough for your invaluable encouragement. Also, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all other team members who indirectly assisted my research projects by providing an inspiring work environment: Dr. Lucia Malär, Sahar Rezaei, David Fankhauser, Franz Kölliker, Dr. Elena Ehrensperger, Dr. Daria Greenberg, Dr. Caroline Kähr-Serra, Robert Hasenböhler, Christoffer Treyz, Daniela Egger-Mikic, Thomas Plociennik, Michael Schertenleib, as well as the rest of the former and current team. Not to forget is my former junior research assistants' work who exceptionally helped form this dissertation. In that matter, I genuinely thank Alexandra Wälti, Eric Briner, and Curdin Robbi for their commitment and hard work.

Finally, I will never forget the endless support I received from my family and friends during this challenging journey. I am sincerely grateful for their unconditional help in easing this journey's path. My special thanks belong to my parents and three siblings, who always cheered me up and believed in me. Lastly, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my beloved Julia. Thank you for your patience and for always being by my side. Our wonderful moments together gave me the strength to overcome all hurdles.

Bern, August 2021

Clemens Ammann

Summary of the Dissertation

In today's digitized and connected world, brands are operating in an environment characterized by the ever-looming danger of online brand criticism. Such brand criticism is particularly delicate because of adverse effects such as a worse brand evaluation that can lead to a lower turnover in the long run (e.g., Luo 2009; Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley 2014; Relling et al. 2016). Thus, from a managerial perspective, it becomes increasingly vital to be prepared to handle such criticism (Herhausen et al. 2019). In that matter, a large portion of research focused on crisis and webcare communication (e.g., excusing or denying responsibility; e.g., Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Song 2010; Li, Cui, and Peng 2018; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020) to counter the brand criticism. One insightful example of brand criticism with a subsequent managerial response goes back to April 2017. After passengers had already boarded a plane of United Airlines, airport security violently removed a passenger who refused to give up his seat needed by crew members. Some passengers filmed the scene and uploaded it to YouTube. This video went viral on Social Media and was critically discussed in many media outlets (Zdanowicz and Grinberg 2017). Consequently, the stock price of United Airlines plunged (Reklaitis 2017), and the CEO felt compelled to apologize officially (Munoz 2017a, 2017b). However, the CEO's statements and an interview with ABC television made things even more precarious because people did not believe him to be honest and thought it was an act (ABC News 2017). Thus, an official management response may sometimes not be enough to condemn the brand criticism.

Yet, managers are often not alone in their quest to fight brand criticism. In fact, it can be observed that positive-minded consumers support brands against criticism. Accordingly, despite the international outrage about United Airlines, some consumers exposed themselves on Social Media and in comment sections of newspapers by holding against the criticism and defending United Airlines. For example, in the Washington Post, a consumer wrote: "Think about it. Do you think United really wanted things to play out this way on this airplane? They

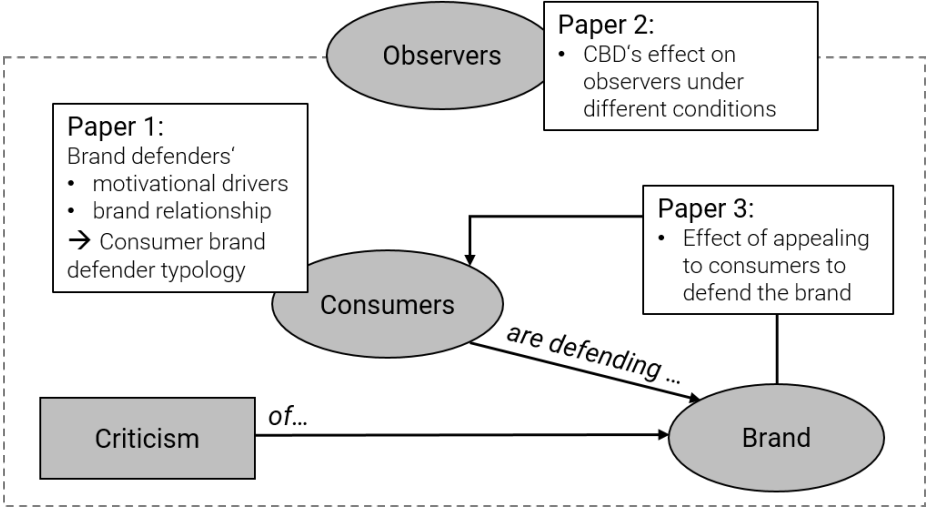
had to call in airport security to deal with the situation. It was the security people who roughed the guy up. United is paying the price for their actions (...)" (Aratani 2017).

This consumer comment exemplifies the phenomenon of "consumer brand defense (CBD)," which refers to consumers who are responding to brand criticism with supportive replies (Ammann et al. 2021). CBD hereby represents a valuable resource for brands in fighting brand criticism, especially because consumers' communication is often perceived as unbiased and more credible than official brand statements (Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins 2007; Bickart and Schindler 2001; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Senecal and Nantel 2004). However, even though stimulating CBD might constitute an effective strategy in mitigating the harmful effects of brand criticism, research about this phenomenon remains scarce. In more detail, first research endeavors examined the concrete manifestation of such consumer brand defense behavior and its prevalence (e.g., Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016), contingency factors that encourage brand defenders (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018), the driving role of a strong emotional relationship with the defended brand (e.g., Dalman, Buche, and Min 2019), CBD's consequences on observers (Esmark Jones et al. 2018; Hong and Cameron 2018; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017), and first suggested strategies to activate consumer brand defenders (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Scholz and Smith 2019). Taken together, the prevailing research about CBD still falls short of answering some of the most pertinent questions, such as consumer brand defenders' motivational drivers, and thus, leaves us with substantial research gaps.

This dissertation examines research questions from three distinct perspectives to provide actionable insights into CBD's management (see *Figure 1*). *Paper 1* focuses on the consumer brand defender's motivational drivers and their relationship with the defended brand. Based on these two factors, the consumers are segmented into different types of consumer brand defenders. The unit of investigation in *paper 2* is the neutral observer of online brand discussions. This research project is dedicated to studying CBD's effect under different

conditions (e.g., in conjunction with an official brand response) and scrutinizes the impact of an employee’s defense comment (e.g., written in his leisure time with his private social media account). Lastly, *paper 3* takes the brand’s perspective as a potential facilitator of CBD. More specifically, this research proposes a novel way of handling brand criticism by directly appealing to consumers to defend the brand. In that matter, the paper investigates the effectiveness of such CBD appeals.

FIGURE 1
Overall Framework of the Dissertation



Taken together, these three papers’ findings address essential research gaps in CBD’s examination and allow for more effective exploitation of CBD’s potential. Specifically, by inspecting brand defenders’ motives and the nature of their brand relationship, paper 1 identifies possible levers to stimulate CBD. Further, paper 2 tests CBD’s positive effects on observers under different conditions and thereby provides information under which circumstances an official brand response might be advantageous or, on the opposite, not even necessary. Finally, paper 3 extends a brand’s repertoire of reactions in the face of criticism by contriving a practical approach to activate the brand’s defenders.

Why Are Consumers Defending Brands After Criticism? A Typology of Consumer Brand Defenders.

The *first paper* conceptualizes the phenomenon of consumer brand defense (CBD) as prosocial behavior with the brand as the benefactor of the consumer's prosocial defense act (e.g., Clark et al. 2015; Dovidio et al. 2017). Based on this conceptualization, we derive consumer brand defenders' motives by using the three key motive categories of egoism, altruism, and principlism from prosocial behavior as a framework (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011). Further, this research also considers the consumers' relationship with the brand because the relationship between the helper and benefactor is crucial for explaining prosocial behavior (Clark et al. 2015). By means of a netnographic study (i.e., analyzing online communication, Kozinets 2002), we examine CBD's prevalence in the field and identify diverse forms of defense styles. Moreover, interviews and a large-scale survey among actual consumer brand defenders provide insights into CBD's complex motivational structure and the role of consumers' brand relationship. In more detail, we develop a typology of consumer brand defenders, characterized by distinct combinations of motives and the nature of their brand relationship. The first type, the self-promoter, is mainly driven by egoistic motives (e.g., self-enhancement, hedonic benefits) and has a relatively strong emotional relationship with the brand. The second type, the brand-promoter, is defending to give the brand something back in return for positive past brand experiences (i.e., reciprocal altruism) and at the same time has a strong emotional bond with the brand. The third type, the justice-promoter, is primarily motivated by justice considerations (i.e., perceives the brand criticism as unfair) and is merely satisfied with the brand without experiencing a strong emotional bond. To learn more about the exploitation of these three identified brand defender types via distinct approaches per defender type, we further conduct expert interviews and a focus group with managers. As suggested by these managers, one could, for example, foster self-promoters by affirming their brand defense (e.g., "thank-you" message), brand-promoters via conventional relationship

measures (e.g., samples of new products), and justice-promoters by emphasizing the criticism's unfair components.

By conceptualizing CBD as prosocial behavior, we advance prior research on prosocial behavior in consumer-brand interactions (e.g., Lang et al. 2021) and contribute to understanding the phenomenon as a whole (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). In contrast to previous research about CBD's antecedents (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2019), this paper takes a more comprehensive perspective because a wide array of motives and consumers without a strong emotional brand relationship are being considered. Our results suggest that it is not enough to take a one-dimensional view on CBD's antecedents but rather think in terms of different types of defenders for whom the importance of certain motives differs. In that way, we also build a better foundation for managerial implications because each defender type might be best handled with a distinct approach.

Brands under Criticism! The Power of Third-Party Brand Defense

Paper 2 is dedicated to studying the power of brand defense by third parties in mitigating the harmful effects of brand criticism in the eyes of neutral observers. As suggested by the rhetorical arena theory, brands are not alone in their quest to defend their brand against criticism (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). More specifically, brand criticism opens a rhetorical arena characterized by exchanges among diverse voices such as the brand, consumers, and employees (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). Drawing on the signaling theory (e.g., Connelly et al. 2011; Dawar 1998), I suggest that consumers' (CBD) and employees' brand defense (EBD) could alleviate the adverse effects of brand criticism. In fact, I identify multiple positive facets of CBD and EBD, such as a reduced negative impact of brand criticism on consumer's intention to forgive the brand in a first experimental study. A second experimental study considers CBD and EBD in conjunction with a simultaneous defense by the brand itself to gain even more realistic insights. This study demonstrates that brands particularly profit from

consumer brand defense when they take responsibility for the criticized incident (i.e., accommodative brand response) compared to denying responsibility (i.e., defensive brand response; Marcus and Goodman 1991). Further, an additional employee brand defense does not enhance the defense by the brand itself. Moreover, when studying rhetorical arenas, contingency factors should also be considered (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). In that sense, a third experimental study takes the brand's biography (i.e., underdog vs. topdog brand; Paharia et al. 2011) into account to derive implications for different types of brands. For instance, it turns out that both underdog and topdog brands profit from a defensive consumer brand defense (i.e., the consumer denies the brand's responsibility for the criticized incident). However, an accommodative defense by the brand is more potent in reducing the criticism's harmful effects for a topdog than an underdog brand.

This research provides evidence for CBD's and EBD's effectiveness in weakening brand criticism's adverse consequences in observers' brand perception. Compared to existing research about CBD's consequences (Hong and Cameron 2018; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017), this paper investigates multiple outcomes (e.g., consumers' forgiveness intention toward the brand; study 1), interaction effects with an official brand response (study 2), and brand biography's impact (study 3). As suggested by rhetorical arena theory (Frandsen and Johansen 2016), the simultaneous examination of two voices (e.g., brand and consumers; study 2) represents a more accurate depiction of reality. From a managerial perspective, it is essential to know about the positive effects of CBD under different conditions to develop a brand defense strategy for times of brand criticism. For example, it may not be needed to deny responsibility when consumer brand defenders are stepping into the breach. However, for topdog brands, an accommodative brand response can sometimes be advantageous.

Mobilizing your Consumer Brand Defense-Forces With(out) Appeals?

Paper 3 deals with a new management response to brand criticism by pursuing if consumer brand defenders can be stimulated with direct appeals (i.e., a brand's request to be defended).

Specifically, I theoretically derive three types of consumer brand defense (CBD) appeals based on research about appeals in the domain of prosocial behavior (Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Schwartz 1970; White and Peloza 2009) which are following consumer brand defenders' motivational structure (i.e., egoism, altruism, principlism; see paper 1). The wording of the first type of CBD appeals stresses the brand defender's potential self-benefits (e.g., enjoyment of arguing with the critics, improving one's reputation by winning arguments). In contrast, the wording of the second type of CBD appeals highlights the benefits for the defense act's benefactors (e.g., helps the brand and its employees to recover from criticism's adverse effects). Additionally, the third type's wording focuses on moral aspects such as the sense of justice (e.g., restoring justice by stopping false allegations). The first experimental study about CBD appeals' effectiveness demonstrates that these appeals can boost the willingness to defend a brand among consumers with a strong brand relationship. Further, the second experimental study reveals that the other-benefit and moral CBD appeal seem more promising than the self-benefit CBD appeal in eliciting a willingness to defend a brand. In more detail, the other-benefit and moral CBD appeal trigger a stronger empathy toward the brand and more strongly activate moral norms than self-benefit CBD appeals.

CBD appeals as a new approach in handling brand criticism advance research in the domain of crisis and webcare communication (Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Song 2010). Further, this paper contributes to CBD's examination because the literature about stimulating consumer brand defenders still falls short (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). Moreover, the two experimental studies demonstrate that appeals in prosocial behavior also apply to CBD (apart from donations and helping behavior; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008). Also, this research allows for actionable implications by taking the brand's perspective and asking how a brand can exploit its latent consumer defense forces. For managers, CBD appeals provide a new instrument in their fight against brand criticism.

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Paper I

Why are Consumers Defending Brands After Criticism?

A Typology of Consumer Brand Defenders¹

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¹ Earlier versions of this paper have been submitted and presented at European Marketing Conferences (EMAC 2019, EMAC 2020) and at the American Marketing Association Winter Academic Conference (Winter AMA 2020). It is intended to publish this manuscript in an international marketing journal in a modified version.

Why are Consumers Defending Brands After Criticism?

A Typology of Consumer Brand Defenders

Recently, it became evident that more and more consumers defend brands online against criticism. Although this phenomenon of consumer brand defense (CBD) is of high practical relevance to recover from adverse critique such as NWOM, so far, research about the motives that drive consumers to defend a brand is limited. Drawing from research on prosocial behavior in social psychology as well as literature on word-of-mouth, we develop a typology of consumer brand defenders based on the three key motives of egoism, reciprocal altruism, and sense of justice as well as the consumer's brand relationship. Using interviews with brand defenders and a large-scale study with 570 actual brand defenders along with subsequent cluster analysis, we identify three distinct brand defender types: *self-promoters*, *brand-promoters*, and *justice-promoters*. Thereby, we expand the literature on prosocial behavior from psychology to the domain of consumer-brand interactions and conclude with recommendations for the practice based on managerial interviews. For most companies, CBD resp. certain defender types (e.g., self-promoters and justice-promoters) represent an unused potential for their reputation management. Our findings provide possible levers to exploit this CBD-power against online criticism based on the distinct characteristics of the three defender types.

Consumer Brand Defense, Prosocial Behavior, Word-of-Mouth, Reputation Management

In February 2019, Nike was heavily criticized after Duke University star player Zion Williamson injured his knee when his Nike shoe broke apart during a college basketball match. While various media reported negatively about the quality of Nike shoes and some consumers made fun of the incident (Boren and Bogage 2019), other consumers countered the criticism and publicly defended Nike. For example, one consumer pointed out that even the most minor production errors could be sufficient for a shoe to break given the bodyweight of Zion and the jerky movements in basketball (e.g., user D'Kenya Mahmajaw or Zachary Keller; CNBC Television 2019) while others defended Nike based on their own sound experience with the brand (e.g., mpnitsua22 2019 on the online forum reddit).

This incident illustrates an ever-increasing and vital phenomenon in our digitized and connected world whereby some consumers actively defend a brand and thereby act as a buffer against criticism. To gain some initial insights into the prevalence of this novel phenomenon, we analyzed consumers' online communication on U.S.-Facebook brand pages (see study 1 for the details). Thereby, 4.7 % of the analyzed comments were identified as consumer brand defense comments. Thus, with almost every twentieth consumer who comments on the brand's post being a brand defender, this phenomenon bears the potential of becoming a central resource in protecting the brand against negative publicity.

Interviews provide further evidence with 20 marketing managers and consultants (see study 4a for details) and a focus group encompassing 31 managers (see study 4b for more information). In that matter, they indicated that they have already observed consumers who defend their brand on online channels (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, owned communities, comment sections of newspapers), and they appreciate the positive outcomes of this type of consumer behavior for their brand. For example, the head of community management from a transportation company stated: "Since we are more present on social media, especially on Facebook, we can observe users who defend us and who step into the breach for us - not just employees, as you would expect, but real fans. That's invaluable support for our brand."

In light of these very positive developments, there has been increasing interest in and attention to consumer brand defense (CBD). Initial attempts to conceptualize this phenomenon define CBD as an online behavior whereby consumers act as a buffer against criticism by providing supportive information and experiences in favor of a criticized brand (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Prior research mainly identified consumers with a strong emotional brand relationship to be the most likely brand defenders. These are consumers who are emotionally attached to the brand (e.g., Park et al. 2010), who have a strong self-brand-connection (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012), who deeply identify with a brand (Einwiller et al. 2006), or who love the brand (e.g., Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017). However, our knowledge about the role of consumers' brand relationships (particularly less strong or less emotional brand relationships) and the factors that motivate consumers to defend a brand are rather limited. Specifically, we propose that there can be various motives that can drive a consumer to defend a brand. However, to the best of our knowledge, only Colliander and Hauge Wien (2013) have discussed specific motives of justice and self-enhancement as possible motives of CBD, but this work is only conceptual. An empirical investigation is needed to explore this possibility.

This lack of insights on the drivers of CBD represents a notable research gap because, in our current environment of ever-present "shitstorms" and negative eWOM, stimulating consumers to defend a brand can be a highly effective strategy for brand and public relations managers to shield their brand from potential reputational and brand image damage (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Hong and Cameron 2018; Scholz and Smith 2019), mainly because engaged consumers today often have more influence on consumers' opinion formation than marketers due to more effective reach and higher credibility (Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins 2007; Bickart and Schindler 2001; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Hung and Li 2007; Kozinets et al. 2010; Senecal and Nantel 2004). To this end, the brand manager of a beverage company in our interviews stated: "Consumers who defend your brand are an invaluable asset. You do not have to pay for it. They defend the brand on their own initiative, and there's nothing more credible

[from the perspective of observers]. That's why I think it's extremely important to understand these consumers better.”

Against this background, the key goal of the current paper is to shed light on the under-researched phenomenon of CBD and take a more comprehensive perspective to explore the motives of brand defenders as well as their brand relationship as a key situational driver of such behavior. Further, we adopt a systematic approach to examine whether there are different CBD-types. That is, we investigate whether certain brand defenders can be grouped in a homogenous segment/type concerning why they defend the brand under attack and how they can be motivated to do so. Such insights can facilitate important implications for integrating brand defenders into a brand's reputation management. Thus, this paper addresses the following research questions: (1) What are consumers' motivational drivers to defend a brand against criticism? (2) What role do consumers' relationships with the brand play in driving CBD? (3) To what extent can consumer brand defenders be segmented in different types with regard to how they can be motivated to defend the criticized brand?

To address these research questions, we draw on theoretical considerations from research on prosocial behavior in the interpersonal domain as well as literature on consumer-brand relationships. In addition, we provide empirical evidence based on a qualitative study in which we interviewed actual brand defenders (study 2), a large-scale survey with 570 consumers who have already defended a brand (study 3), and a focus group with marketing experts (study 4b). Moreover, we conducted a netnographic study to provide insights into the prevalence of CBD in the field (study 1) and interviewed 20 marketing managers (study 4a) to learn more about possible approaches to managing CBD.

This paper thereby makes several essential contributions to the academic marketing literature as well as the marketing practice. First, by taking a more comprehensive perspective when exploring the motives of brand defenders as well as their brand relationship as a critical situational driver of such behavior, we provide an in-depth understanding of the drivers of such

behavior and contribute to the existing literature on CBD (e.g., Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016).

Second, we contribute to the literature on prosocial behavior which was only recently applied to the context of consumer-brand interactions such as consumer activism (e.g., Vredenburg et al. 2020) or prosumers (Lang et al. 2021). As we will elaborate in the next section, consumer brand defenders try to protect a brand against negative information, which qualifies as a form of prosocial behavior. We propose that the main motives for prosocial behavior (i.e., egoism and reciprocal altruism as well as a sense of justice) combined with the relationship between benefactor and recipient of the social act (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Schroeder and Graziano 2015) also apply to the defense behavior of consumers and define distinct brand defender types. By analyzing the role of different kinds of consumer-brand relationships, such as a rather satisfying bond to the brand versus an emotional attachment with the brand, we also extend prior research on CBD, which has primarily focused on strong emotional connections as a driver of CBD behavior (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017). As also consumers who are merely satisfied but do not show strong emotional ties with the brand may engage in defense behavior, we take a broader perspective on the relational drivers of CBD. Taken together, our work on the drivers of consumer brand defenders and the subsequent clustering into different defender types facilitates managerial implications for consumer-based defense strategies in times of online brand criticism (Hamilton and Price 2019).

Definition of CBD

A first explicit definition of CBD describes the phenomenon as follows: “sharing of information and real-life experiences with the intention to protect a brand’s image and integrity against negative remarks which may adversely affect the brand” (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016, p. 965). Since consumer brand defenders can protect a brand against negative information, CBD can be conceptualized as a form of prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior commonly refers to actions on the part of one person to promote the welfare of another or to prevent declines in that person’s welfare (Clark et al. 2015). In our context of CBD, the consumer would be considered the benefactor and the brand as the recipient of the prosocial act (Dovidio et al. 2017). Based on these preliminary definitions and our conceptualization of CBD as prosocial behavior, we broadly consider brand defenders to be *consumers who respond to particular criticism of a brand with replies, which can be perceived as supportive of the criticized brand by observers*.

There are several essential aspects of this definition that merit highlighting. First, the word *defense* already implies that CBD occurs in reaction to some event. Thus, in our context, consumers react to some sort of *criticism of a brand* which is “the expression of disapproval of someone or something on the basis of perceived faults or mistakes” (Lexico.com 2021). It is important to note that the communicators of the criticism can be consumers (e.g., through negative word-of-mouth) but also competitors, media outlets, governments, or other organizations (e.g., NGOs). Furthermore, to evoke CBD, the criticism needs to be shared with an audience. Most relevant in this regard are online platforms (e.g., social media networks, forums, comments sections of news sites, or messaging apps), where the criticism and the defending comments reach a large audience. Nevertheless, it is also conceivable that CBD occurs in offline contexts (e.g., talk with friends, letter to the editor in a newspaper, panel discussion in a TV show).

Second, *replies* of brand defenders must explicitly or implicitly refer to the criticism along with the criticized brand and bear the potential to depreciate the criticism. In that matter, the

replies can manifest in various forms, such as speeches, written comments, hashtags, pictures (e.g., memes), audio messages, or even videos. Moreover, prior research on CBD identified six specific defense styles of written comments: advocating (“arguing in favor of a company using reason”), justifying (“emphasizing the reciprocity of a customer-company relationship”), trivializing (“playing down the issue”), stalling (“urging the complainer to obtain additional information before passing judgment”), vouching (“favorable statements based on direct self-experience”), and doubting (“challenging the credibility of the complainer”; Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013). In addition, some brand defenders blame a third party or uncontrollable events, which may be categorized into the defense style advocating (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Still, other consumers compare competitors' actions or industry norms to defend the brand, which resembles the defense style of trivializing (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Further, our observations from study 1 suggest that some consumers also defend brands by using humor (e.g., memes or jokes that denigrate the criticism) or aggressive counterattacks (e.g., insulting the critic). Taken together, the defense replies manifest in highly specific forms. It is well-established in research on prosocial behavior on a meta-level that the according decision processes to act prosocially can stem from two systems. System one is characterized by being *intuitive*, fast, automatic, and emotional, and system two can be described as somewhat *reflective*, slow, controlled, and deliberate (e.g., Carlson, Aknin, and Liotti 2016; Rand et al. 2014; Rand 2016; Rand and Epstein 2014; Rand and Kraft-Todd 2014; Zaki and Mitchell 2013). An example of prosocial behavior mainly based on the intuitive system could be the spontaneous urge to give to others (Taute and McQuitty 2004) compared to a thoughtful process of giving to others, which would be characteristic of the reflective system (Grant and Dutton 2012). Applied to the context of CBD, we suggest that different brand defense behaviors result depending on how active these two systems (i.e., intuitive and reflective) were involved in the prosocial decision to defend a brand. The corresponding brand defense of consumers, who were primarily triggered by intuition, may be recognized by characteristics such as experiential-based as well as emotional content and less rigorous argumentation. By contrast, the reflective CBD could be

identified by including facts and a more straightforward structure of the arguments. However, if both systems were operating to some degree, the according brand defense may feature both emotional and rational components.

Thirdly, consumers' online replies to particular criticism against a brand *can be perceived as supportive of the criticized brand by observers*. Therefore, these replies should mitigate the potential adverse effects of the criticism against the brand in the eyes of observers (e.g., concerning observers' attitude toward the criticized brand).

Finally, conceptualizing CBD as prosocial behavior implies that not all brand defenders are aware of the fact that they are helping the brand with their defending comment. Prosocial behavior does not require the benefactors to have a primary or exclusive *intent* to benefit the recipients, nor does the recipients need to be aware that they profit from the benefactors (Schroeder and Graziano 2015). In this point, we are diverging from Hassan and Casaló Ariño's definition of CBD (2016). In our opinion, some brand defenders may defend a brand as a way to cope with the criticism without being aware that they are thereby helping the brand. In line with prior research on information processing in psychology, individuals use defensive mechanisms (often unconsciously) to cope with new information potentially damaging to the self-concept (Cramer 1998; Millon and Davis 1996). Similarly, in a marketing context, existing research has shown that consumers with a strong brand relationship perceive negative information about the brand as an assault on themselves (e.g., Ahluwalia 2002; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012). Thus, consumers may subconsciously discard such negative information and thereby support the brand by posting a defensive reply.

Branding scholars have treated CBD as an extreme form of positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017; Javed, Roy, and Mansoor 2015), whereby positive eWOM is referred to as positive and consumption-related communication by consumers which is directed to other consumers or institutions via digital tools (Babić Rosario, Valck, and Sotgiu 2020; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). However, CBD occurs in a specific context in which brand

defenders react with a positive reply implicitly or explicitly to criticism against a brand, whereas positive WOM also occurs in other contexts (e.g., praises, suggestions, recommendations; Brown et al. 2005).

Further, CBD can be seen as a specific and subordinate form of (online) brand advocacy whereby some brand advocates may defend brands in certain situations. Brand advocacy is a broader construct than CBD because it also includes recommendations and favorable communication about the brand without being triggered by criticism (e.g., Sweeney et al. 2020; Wilk, Soutar, and Harrigan 2019).

Research Framework and Theoretical Considerations

Figure 1 displays the research framework which guides the development of different brand defender types. As already mentioned in the section about CBD's definition, CBD occurs in response to some form of brand criticism. More specifically, this brand criticism is evaluated by potential consumer brand defenders. Based on their triggered egoistic, altruistic, and justice-related motives and their brand relationship characterized along satisfaction and attachment, they might decide to defend the brand. In that respect, our focus lies in examining different combinations of these five drivers, which manifest in diverse consumer brand defender types.

FIGURE 1
Research Framework of CBD-Drivers



Because most of the existing literature mainly focused on a strong emotional consumer-brand relationship as a possible driver of CBD (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017), a great portion of why consumers are willing to defend criticized brands still remains unclear. In light of this paucity of research on the vital phenomenon of CBD and because prosocial behavior plays a central role in the conceptualization of CBD, we turn to theories of prosocial behavior for guidance in analyzing the drivers of such behavior (e.g., Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011). Prior research on prosocial behavior in an interpersonal context has identified the three key motive categories which help us understand why people help: egoism,

altruism, and principlism (e.g., Batson 2011; Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Schroeder and Graziano 2015). According to Batson (2011, p. 20), *egoism* refers to behavior exerted to secure personal gains or avoid punishment, and the “ultimate goal is self-benefit.” In these cases, the prosocial act is an instrumental means to reach this ultimate goal (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011). In contrast, a prosocial act motivated by *altruism* has “the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare” (Batson 2011, p. 20). Thus, the focus is that somebody other than the benefactor primarily profits from the act. Finally, *principlism* guides some prosocial actions, which means that individuals strive to uphold moral principles like justice (e.g., Batson 1994). These three categories will serve as a framework to better understand the motives for CBD.

In light of our goal to develop a typology of brand defenders, the motives alone are a necessary but not sufficient factor as they will vary depending on a given situation (e.g., Romer, Gruder, and Lizzadro 1986; Schroeder and Graziano 2015). A key situational driver of prosocial behavior refers to the personal relationship between the recipient of the prosocial action (in our context: the brand) and the potential helper (in our context: the consumer brand defender; Clark et al. 2015). In general, prior research suggests that such personal relations should increase the likelihood of prosocial reactions (e.g., Barry and Wentzel 2006; Burnstein, Crandall, and Kitayama 1994; Clark et al. 1987; Costin and Jones 1992). However, Clark and colleagues (1987) also found that the relationship type (exchange or communal relationship) differently predicts prosocial behavior. We adapt this notion and apply it to a branding context to better understand the drivers of CBD and to develop a typology of brand defenders. We will examine how distinct types of consumer-brand relationships that differ in their level of emotional connection (e.g., pure satisfaction versus attachment) affect consumer defense behavior.

Motivational Drivers of CBD

Using the three key motive categories of *egoism*, *altruism*, and *principlism* from prosocial behavior as a framework to better understand the motives of CBD, we will subsequently discuss the motives found in the literature on CBD as well as from the related literature on positive WOM.

Egoism

The first type of prosocial motives are egoistic in nature (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011). One such egoistic motive is *self-enhancement* which refers to the striving to present oneself positively. In the context of prosocial behavior, helping can serve to enhance and grow one's ego (Clary et al. 1998), to improve one's self-image (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011), and to impress observers of the prosocial act (Brown and Smart 1991). In the context of CBD, a conceptual paper by Colliander and Hauge Wien (2013) suggested that a need for self-enhancement could drive defenders. Defending the brand can be seen as a way of gaining attention, boosting one's reputation, displaying status, and conveying certain impressions (e.g., expertise) to the observers of the discussions. Similarly, in the literature of positive eWOM, the motive of self-enhancement is an essential driver of such behavior as sharing of eWOM represents an opportunity to fulfill this human need (e.g., Berger 2014; Cheung and Lee 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998).

An additional egoistic motive for CBD would be *future reciprocity*. Sometimes people act prosocially to develop a positive reputation expecting future returns from third parties (e.g., future interaction on social networks; Leider et al. 2009; Simpson and Willer 2008). In the case of CBD, individuals may defend a brand to gain a reputation as protector with the hope for future rewards from the brand (e.g., feedback, economic incentives, acknowledgment) or future reciprocity from other consumers (e.g., feedback from observers). Accordingly, scholars in the area of knowledge-sharing and WOM suggest that future reciprocity could be a reason why

people share information (e.g., Berger 2014; Cheung and Lee 2012; McLure Wasko and Faraj 2000).

Furthermore, *hedonic benefits* such as the gratification and enjoyment of correcting statements of others on the internet can be a further egoistic motive for CBD. In other words, as examined in research about prosocial behavior, people can help others to maintain or enhance positive feelings (Clary et al. 1998; Isen and Levin 1972) or to experience emotional rewards by giving to others (e.g., Aknin et al. 2013; Aknin et al. 2015; Nelson et al. 2016). In the context of CBD, we suggest that some individuals defend brands because they enjoy the interaction with the critics; they feel good after helping or protecting the brand by defending it against the criticisms. Similarly, gratification and enjoyment of online discussions are also drivers of positive eWOM (e.g., Babić Rosario, Valck, and Sotgiu 2020).

A final egoistic motive for CBD refers to *economic incentives*. In prosocial behavior, research has shown that tax deductions can motivate individuals for charitable giving (Clotfelter 1980). In the context of positive eWOM, rewards such as web miles (which could be traded in for premiums in-kind) can serve as incentives to write positive comments (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). For brand defenders, such incentives could consist of monetary or other material components (e.g., gift cards, samples of new products; White, Habib, and Dahl 2020).

Altruism

A second motivational driver of prosocial behavior is altruism (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011). In the literature on prosocial behavior, it is widely accepted that egoistic motivations (such as internal rewards for the helper) may be simultaneously at work with altruistic motives (e.g., Batson 2011; Batson and Powell 2003; Dovidio et al. 2017). In other words, while the ultimate goal may be to increase another's welfare, egoistic motives may simultaneously be involved (Batson and Powell 2003). In the context of positive eWOM, prior research has identified several altruistic motives such as sharing information about a company or brand out of concern for

other consumers or to help the company (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Therefore, these motives can also be considered offering some self-serving benefits such as sharing information for self-enhancement rather than only to help others or help the company due to pure altruism (Berger 2014). In the branding and service context, the consumer-brand relationship is characterized by reciprocal exchanges – as the brand is an active member of the dyadic relationship with the consumer (Fournier 1998). Thus, in the context of CBD, we propose that consumers do not defend brands due to pure altruism but, rather, because of past reciprocity, which means that they want to give the brand something back for their positive past brand experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998). Thus, we suggest that altruistic behavior of brand defenders is motivated by *reciprocal altruism*.

Principlism

Finally, principlism can motivate prosocial behavior, which refers to behavior performed to uphold some widely held moral principles such as justice and welfare (Batson 1994, 2011; Turiel 2015). Thus, justice can motivate prosocial behavior beyond people's self-interests by taking the interests of others into account (Turiel 2015). Many studies report that (organizational) fairness or justice measures are strong predictors of prosocial behavior, organizational citizenship behaviors, and WOM intention (e.g., Bettencourt and Brown 1997; Lee 1995; Maxham III and Netemeyer 2002; Netemeyer et al. 1997). In the context of CBD, brand defenders perceive and evaluate the criticism against the brand. In this respect, prior research on CBD suggested that brand defenders can be motivated by justice and equity considerations (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013). In other words, consumers may perceive the criticism against the brand to be unjust and try to restore equity by taking the side of the brand. Thus, we suggest that *justice considerations* form another crucial motive to engage in CBD behavior.

The Role of the Consumer-Brand Relationship in Driving CBD

Due to the importance of interpersonal interactions in prosocial behavior, the relationship between the helper and the benefactor has been identified as a key situational driver of prosocial behavior (Clark et al. 2015). In general, prior research suggests that strong personal relations increase the likelihood of prosocial reactions (e.g., Barry and Wentzel 2006; Burnstein, Crandall, and Kitayama 1994; Clark et al. 1987; Costin and Jones 1992). In line with these findings, research on CBD provides some conceptual and preliminary empirical evidence that particularly consumers who exhibit a strong emotional relationship are more likely to defend a brand. More specifically, consumers who are emotionally attached to the brand (e.g., Park et al. 2010), who have a strong self-brand-connection (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner 2012; Wilson, Giebelhausen, and Brady 2017), who deeply identify with a brand (Einwiller et al. 2006), or who love the brand (Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017; Javed, Roy, and Mansoor 2015). In more detail, Cheng, White, and Chaplin (2012) revealed that consumers with a high self-brand connection experience negative information about a brand as a threat to their positive self-view. To uphold the positive self-view, they defend the brand similarly as they would defend themselves after failure. Further, consumers with a love-like relationship with a brand are willing to defend this brand even after unethical events (Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017).

While these studies all refer to a strong emotional connection to the brand as a driver of CBD, many studies in the context of interpersonal prosocial behavior focused on relationships between strangers (e.g., business partners). Such relationships are often relatively brief and sort of an exchange relationship rather than a communal type (e.g., parents) of relationship (e.g., Clark et al. 1987; Clark et al. 2015). Similarly, literature on employees' prosocial behavior in a service context showed that not only organizational commitment but also job satisfaction was an essential predictor of extra-role prosocial behavior (e.g., MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; McNeely and Meglino 1994).

Relationship marketing literature has discussed a continuum of customer relationships ranging from purely transactional to strong relational orientations (Garbarino and Johnson 1999). Whereas the future intentions (e.g., attendance, subscriptions) of the high relational group (e.g., subscribers, season ticket holders) are driven by their commitment, the future intentions of the group with the rather transactional bond (e.g., single ticket-buyers) to the brand are driven by their overall satisfaction. Similarly, prior research on brand relationship quality (BRQ) has distinguished between hot and cold components of consumer-brand relationships (Nyffenegger et al. 2015). The hot component of BRQ is conceptualized as the emotional properties associated with the brand, including consumers' feelings of closeness and attachment to the brand. In contrast, the cold component refers to object-relevant beliefs that result from an evaluative judgment of the brand and its performance. Thus, this cold component is more cognitive in nature, where satisfaction is an important dimension.

Interestingly, Nyffenegger et al. (2015) found that both hot and cold components of BRQ increased consumers' engagement in positive WOM but that this effect was even stronger for cold BRQ. In a similar vein, satisfaction has been identified as an important antecedent of positive eWOM (e.g., De Matos and Rossi 2008; Maxham III and Netemeyer 2002; Ranaweera and Prabhu 2003). Thus, transferred to the context of CBD, we suggest that consumers who exhibit a high brand satisfaction without being emotionally attached to the brand may engage in defensive behavior for such a brand.

Overview of the Studies

In total, we carried out five studies which are summarized in *Table 1*. To study the actual prevalence of CBD in the field, we first conducted a netnographic study and categorized comments from Facebook (study 1). Next, we interviewed ten actual brand defenders to gain a deeper understanding of the drivers of CBD (study 2). Based on these results and our findings from the literature review, we created a large-scale survey (study 3). Hereby, we surveyed 570 actual brand defenders, which allowed us to identify three distinct brand defender types via cluster analysis. In study 4a, we spoke to 20 marketing managers to gather insights into the management of CBD. Subsequently, study 4b aimed at generating insights about our three brand defender types from a managerial perspective. In more detail, we presented our CBD-typology to approx. 30 managers with a subsequent focus group to validate and collect actionable implications out of our cluster solution.

TABLE 1
Overview of the Studies

Study	Purpose	Method	Sample
1	Examining the prevalence of CBD in the field	Netnography	Approx. 37,000 Facebook comments of eight brands
2	Analyzing the drivers of CBD	Consumer interviews	Ten brand defenders
3	Developing brand defender typology	Survey with subsequent cluster analysis	570 brand defenders
4a	Gathering insights into CBD-Management	Expert interviews	20 managers
4b	Use and Validation of brand defender typology	Focus group	31 managers

Study 1: Prevalence of CBD in the Field

Method

As mentioned before, this first study aimed to examine the prevalence of CBD in a real-world setting. Therefore, we applied a netnographic approach (ethnography on the internet; Kozinets 2002). In more detail, we analyzed consumers' online communication on eight different U.S.-Facebook brand pages from April to June 2018. When selecting brands, we attempted to maximize diversity concerning the hedonic vs. utilitarian nature of the brand's offering and to a variety of manufacturer brands vs. service providers (see *Table 2*). We carefully studied consumers' comments for these brands to identify brand defense comments and the related company posts along with the criticism triggering the CBD comments. In that matter, we relied on the definitions outlined in this paper. Moreover, we were also interested in the concrete manifestation of the observed defense behavior regarding the two systems of prosocial behavior (i.e., reflective and intuitive). To do so, we developed a comprehensive, well-described encoding key based on the existing conceptualizations of intuitive and reflective prosocial behavior (e.g., Rand et al. 2014; Rand 2016; Zaki and Mitchell 2013). For example, intuitive CBD involves emotions, heuristics, and personal experiences (e.g., insulting language, use of emojis, gives the impression of having been written quickly). In contrast, reflective CBD contains more logic- and evidence-based content (e.g., rational argumentation, thoughtful structure, sometimes even references). As already discussed, we also assume that a mixed form of intuitive and reflective defense behavior is conceivable (from now on called "mixed CBD") for cases in which both systems (i.e., intuitive and reflective) were operating (e.g., emotional comment underlined with some facts). Using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti, each comment was coded by two independent graduate students extensively briefed and trained. The intercoder agreement was 80.2 %; minor differences were reviewed and discussed among the authors (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002).

Results

We reviewed a total of 36,860 comments for the eight brands whereof 4.7 % (1,714 comments) were identified as CBD and 3.2 % (1,173 comments) as corresponding criticism (see *Table 2*). For some brands, the share of CBD differed by the tenfold (min = 1.0 %, max = 10.3 %).

TABLE 2
Prevalence of Consumer Brand Defense Comments

Brands	# Comments	Facebook Page	Company Posts ¹⁾	Criticism ²⁾	Defense Comments	Share CBD/ Total Comments
Tesla	601	@electric-everywhere	14	34	62	10.3 %
Pepsi	3,080	@PepsiUS	34	230	257	8.3 %
Samsung	5,085	@SamsungUS	7	247	374	7.4 %
The Home Depot	3,849	@homedepot	42	118	229	5.9 %
Wendy's	8,538	@wendys	26	260	420	4.9 %
United Airlines	5,656	@United	26	137	253	4.5 %
Electronic Arts (EA)	1,527	@EA	7	35	38	2.5 %
AT&T	8,524	@ATT	38	112	81	1.0 %
Total	36,860		194	1,173	1,714	4.7 %

Note – 1) The Facebook brand page of Tesla was not officially operated by the company but rather by Tesla fans. **2)** The students only collected criticism for cases with at least one brand defense comment as a response to this criticism. **3)** For AT&T, the total number of analyzed brand criticism is higher than the number of analyzed defense comments because some defense comments refer to more than one criticizing comment.

Regarding the forms of CBD, the intuitive defense form was the most prevalent one for all observed brands except Tesla, with 969 comments (56.5 %; see *Table 3*), followed by the mixed form with 409 comments (23.9 %). On the other hand, the reflective defense form occurred least often, with 336 comments (19.6 %).

TABLE 3
Consumer Brand Defense Behavior

Brands	Intuitive CBD	Reflective CBD	Mixed CBD	Totals
Tesla	14 (22.6 %)	24 (38.7 %)	24 (38.7 %)	62 (100 %)
Pepsi	176 (68.5 %)	36 (14.0 %)	45 (17.5 %)	257 (100 %)
Samsung	268 (71.7 %)	46 (12.3 %)	60 (16.0 %)	374 (100 %)
The Home Depot	90 (39.3 %)	68 (29.7 %)	71 (31.0 %)	229 (100 %)
Wendy's	234 (55.7 %)	101 (24.0 %)	85 (20.2 %)	420 (100 %)
United Airlines	118 (46.6 %)	43 (17.0 %)	92 (36.4 %)	253 (100 %)
Electronic Arts	18 (47.4 %)	7 (18.4 %)	13 (34.2 %)	38 (100 %)
AT&T	51 (63.0 %)	11 (13.6 %)	19 (23.5 %)	81 (100 %)
Total	969 (56.5 %)	336 (19.6 %)	409 (23.9 %)	1,714 (100 %)

Discussion

This study shows that CBD bears considerable potential for a company's reputation management because almost every twentieth comment defended the criticized brand. While the largest share of CBD comments was written in a relatively intuitive style, also reflective and mixed forms were common. Furthermore, it was interesting to observe that some brands were defended more often in a reflective way (e.g., Tesla), whereas others were clearly defended in an intuitive way (e.g., Samsung). Thus, there may be different factors that drive consumers' defense behavior. Therefore, it is crucial to understand better why consumers defend a particular brand, which we will address in the following studies.

Study 2: Preliminary Evidence for the Motives and Relationship Factors Driving CBD

Study 2 aims to deepen our understanding of the main motives of consumer brand defenders and the role of consumers' brand relationships in driving CBD. Due to the rather explorative character of these goals, we chose a qualitative approach (Maxwell 2009).

Method

In more detail, we carried out an interview study with actual brand defenders. We searched social networking sites for brand defense comments to identify the interview candidates based on our definition outlined in this paper and directly contacted them with an interview request. Of 28 possible interview candidates, six brand defenders agreed to an interview. Moreover, we created an online survey in which we asked respondents whether they had already defended a brand in the past and whether we were allowed to contact them. Of 23 survey-takers, we recruited four additional interview partners. In total, ten out of 51 possible interview candidates were willing to participate in the interviews (80 % male, $M_{\text{age}} = 32$ years). Participants were incentivized with a voucher from an online retailer in the value of approx. USD 25. The sample was diverse concerning education level (completed vocational training to people with a university grade), platforms on which the criticism and the corresponding defense comment occurred, defended brands respectively industries, critics and also with regard to the criticism that provoked the defense comments (see *Table 4*).

TABLE 4
Defense Cases of the Interviewees

Defender	Platform(s)	Industry	Source of the Critic(s)	Criticism	Defense
1	Fan forum and online media outlets	Soccer club	Private persons	(Transfer) policy of the club	Not so much money is available because they still have to pay for the stadium.
2	Facebook	Soft drink	Animal defense organization	The soft drink is a trash product of cheese production. Thus, it is not vegan.	"Chill out!"
3	Facebook	Sport and youth camps	Private person: a mother	Critical comment about increased camp prizes	Background information about the price increase.
4	Facebook and online media outlets	Railway company	Private person	Buying a ticket is complicated and not customer friendly.	"You can also take the stagecoach or go on foot."
5	Facebook	e-cars	Online article on a news site and private persons	e-cars offer new dangers (e.g., for firefighters), and the technology is ecological unacceptable.	That the batteries are 100 % renewable.
6	Facebook	Railway company	Private person	The company proposed a possible destination, and then someone wrote that there is primarily much car traffic.	That the critic has missed his aim. "First look on which page [railway company] you are writing."
7	Twitter	Airline	Private persons: air passengers	Unreliable airline with a bad customer support	That she already had some positive experiences with this airline.
8	Facebook and online media outlets	Touristic destinations	Media and private persons	Early in the winter, everybody is writing it does not have snow.	In the big ski resorts, you have enough snow to go skiing.
9	Jodel (social media app)	Railway company	Private persons	Construction work results in delay and the consumers complained that they need to use extra buses.	The company is doing as much as they can, and it's not their fault for the construction work.
10	Facebook	Drones	Private person	The motors would give up very fast, were defective, and smelled terrible. After the use of the warranty, the new drone still did not work 100 %.	Probably just bad luck with his product. And that this brand is the leader in the market (also in the aspect of "value for money").

Each interview lasted between 32 and 78 minutes ($M = 53$ minutes, total = 8.9 hours) and followed a semi-standardized structure. Specifically, this involved an interview guide with predetermined questions but also included ad-hoc follow-up questions. The guide was driven by our research questions and based on the findings of the literature review. It consisted of four

sections: (1) motivational factors, (2) the brand defenders' brand relationship, (3) the actual defense behavior, and (4) the context factors which accompanied the defense behavior.

Interviewees who had defended in more than one case were asked to focus on the most recent defense behavior to reduce the risk of memory bias (e.g., because of the better evaluation of past experiences than the present counterparts; Morewedge 2013). After receiving permission to record the conversation, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed afterward and anonymized, which yielded 130 single-spaced pages. At the end of each interview, the participants filled out a one page-survey with questions about their gender, age, profession, and education level.

Regarding the analysis of the transcripts, we applied a deductive content analysis for the first three sections of our interview guide (Mayring 2000). To give an example, our literature review on the motivational drivers of CBD showed that we can distinguish between three motive categories. Thereby, this finding guided the content analysis of responses about the motives of CBD. For the last section of the interview guideline on the context factors, we applied inductive content analysis to identify the most relevant factors based on the statements made by the interviewees (Mayring 2000). More specifically, we first had to get an overview of the responses about possible context factors and then step-by-step categorize them.

Results and Discussion

This section deals with the results of the interviews and is structured around our three research questions: First, we will present the findings about the motives for CBD, followed by the findings about what role consumers' relationship with the brand plays in driving CBD. Third, we are going to take together these results and discuss a possible typology of brand defenders. Moreover, the interviews also provided insights into their actual defense behavior and potential context factors that accompany CBD. Therefore, we are also going to present these findings.

Motivational Drivers of CBD

Concerning the motivational drivers of CBD, eight defenders (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) indicated some sort of *egoistic motivation*. A first motive in this egoistic category was self-enhancement. More specifically, interviewees stated that they wanted to counter the critic, that status was important to them (defender 5), that their defense was about boosting their ego (defender 6), that they wanted “to present themselves in the best light” (defender 2), or also that they wanted to be perceived as sophisticated individuals (defender 9). A second motive was future reciprocity. Three defenders hoped that other consumers or the company would appreciate their efforts: “I usually do not post anything at all, or if-then really only things where I know, there is also a reaction to it, because otherwise you have [...] wasted time” (defender 6). The motive of future reciprocity was also reported by defender 5 and defender 7, who explained that it is a “give and take” for her. Apart from this, she also anticipated an economic incentive: “because then maybe I would have gotten something.” In addition, four defenders (2, 4, 5, 8) indicated some sort of positive affect and pleasure resulting from their CBD behavior. They merely enjoyed the discussion with other people and wanted to correct the critics: “[...], but with such sentences, you briefly give the reward center in the brain a little boost by making someone look stupid. Or frankly, I just like to teach people” (defender 2). Taken together, we provide first evidence that the egoistic motives discussed in the literature about prosocial behavior and positive eWOM also apply to CBD (e.g., Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Berger 2014; Cheung and Lee 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

Another important category of motives was *reciprocal altruism* which surfaced from five brand defenders (1, 3, 7, 8, 10). These individuals wanted to help the criticized company and to (intentionally) protect the reputation of the brand: “Yes, to put the [soccer] club in a better light resp. simply to defend the brand and make it look better” (defender 1). Moreover, this urge to help the company mainly was connected to past positive experiences and the desire to give the brand something back: “Because that is what you associate with the brand [past experiences] and

maybe this has implications for your behavior in the future, but above all, to thank for the experience" (defender 7).

Concerning the last category of *principlism*, nine brand defenders stated that perceived justice is an influential factor for CBD. This means that the criticism was being perceived as unfair in the eyes of the brand defenders and thereby triggered their protective comment: "So, what I really respond to, is when I feel there is an imbalance or an injustice and then I want to share my knowledge" (defender 9). For two defenders, the sense of justice was decisive in their decision to defend the brand (defenders 8 and 9), whereas for defenders 3, 4, 6, and 7, the perceived inequity represented a necessary condition for their defense comment. For the other four interview partners (defenders 1, 2, 5, 10), it was an important motive which, in conjunction with other motives, made the difference in their resolution to defend the brand.

To conclude, preliminary evidence for the three different types of motives suggested by prior research on prosocial behavior (i.e., egoistic, reciprocally altruistic, and sense of justice as a principistic driver; e.g., Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011) was obtained. Thus, all three motive categories seem to play a role in explaining consumers' defense behavior. This conclusion is also in line with considerations that egoistic and altruistic motives are not mutually exclusive (Batson and Powell 2003).

The Role of the Consumer-Brand Relationship in Driving CBD

Nine of the ten interviewed brand defenders reported some sort of a relationship with the brand. However, the concrete manifestation and strength of this relationship differed between the defenders. Five defenders described their loyalty toward the brand (defenders 1, 3, 4, 6, 10), and out of these five individuals, three reported a very intense and strong *emotional attachment* to the brand (defenders 1, 3, 10). Exemplary, one of these three individuals stated that he defended the brand out of love: "It's more the fan love that makes me want to defend the soccer club" (defender 1). Thus, our results suggest that consumers with a strong emotional connection to

the brand engage in defense behaviors, which is in line with prior research on CBD (e.g., Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017).

On the other hand, four other interviewees (2, 7, 8, 9) reported a positive attitude toward the brand and were *merely satisfied*. They occasionally consumed the products respectively services of the defended brand without developing an emotional bond with this brand. The defender of the e-car brand (5) follows their business development, but neither owns a car of the defended brand nor is he a fan of them. Hence, these results provide preliminary evidence for our presumptions that consumers exhibiting just a high level of brand satisfaction (e.g., De Matos and Rossi 2008; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, and Ahearne 1998; Nyffenegger et al. 2015) are engaging in defense activities.

Different Types of Consumer Brand Defenders?

Interestingly, we can detect certain patterns among the ten interviewed brand defenders. Some motives respectively motive categories seem to be more or less important whether the defender showed a strong emotional consumer-brand relationship versus solely a strong satisfactoral relationship. Accordingly, this suggests that we can distinguish between different types of brand defenders based on their key motives and the type of brand relationship.

A *first type* reported that they were motivated by more egoistic motives such as positioning themselves in a better light (i.e., self-enhancement), the expectation of future reciprocity, or the mere pleasure of arguing online (defenders 2, 4 5, 6). Nevertheless, defenders 4 and 6 with rather egoistic motives exhibited a relatively strong bond to the brand. Hence, because they have a strong brand attachment, consumers of this type may consider the criticism against the brand a personal threat to their positive self-view (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012). This threat, in turn, should elicit rather egoistic motives such as pressure for self-enhancement (e.g., Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013).

On the other hand, a *second type* exhibited a strong emotional brand relationship and explained that they wanted to give the brand something back or to protect the reputation of the

brand and were, hence, driven by reasons referring to reciprocal altruism (defenders 1, 3, 10). These findings support our previous assumption that past positive brand experiences are connected with the rather altruistic motivation of helping the company as means to give them something back (e.g., Fournier 1998; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

A *third type* of defenders is characterized by a relatively weak attachment to the brand and a high level of brand satisfaction. These consumers apparently believed that the critique was unwarranted, and thus, they felt the urge to restore justice (defenders 7, 8, 9). Conclusively, we assume that applied to the context of CBD, brand defenders of the third type show a high level of brand satisfaction. Additionally, they have to perceive the criticism as unjust to become active defenders (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013).

Interviewees' Specific Defense Behavior

Regarding actual defense behaviors, the comments were quite diverse and could be subsumed under different defense styles (e.g., tweets about own positive brand experiences by defender 7 can be seen as vouching, according to Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013). On a more abstract level, some brand defenders argued rather reflectively (for example, defender 3, who provided facts about a price increase). In contrast, others defended rather intuitively (e.g., defender 2: "chill out"). In that matter, some coherences between the motives and an intuitive vs. reflective brand defense behavior became apparent. Interestingly, consumers who were defending rather intuitively, meaning that they reacted out of an impulse and rather emotionally on the brand criticism, pursued rather egoistic motives (consumers 2, 4, 6). Moreover, most consumers who were motivated by reciprocal altruism (consumers 1 and 3) or their sense of justice (consumers 8 and 9) defended reflectively. Thus, they rationally argued against the brand criticism by providing facts. Taken together, it seems that the above addressed first type of brand defenders could be more prone to defend intuitively than the other two identified types.

Context Factors of CBD

For predicting prosocial behavior, some scholars point out that it may be promising to investigate not only personal drivers but also examine situational factors (e.g., Romer, Gruder, and Lizzadro 1986; Schroeder and Graziano 2015). In addition to the consumer-brand relationship, the interviews with the brand defenders revealed some additional relevant context factors, which will subsequently be outlined.

A first situational driver is related to *consumers' knowledge about the product* and brand as well as their *knowledge self-efficacy* (i.e., confidence in one's knowledge). Ten interviewees discussed the importance of the existing knowledge about the brand, their products, respective services (e.g., own inquiries, discussion related to profession, brand fan), or existing brand experiences (e.g., frequent consumption). The defenders stated that some degree of knowledge respective experiences is necessary (10 mentions) to be able to counter the critics: "I do not like to talk about things I do not know about, or have only read about superficially. But if I know what it is about and what it is, then I also comment on it [...]" (defender 10). In line with this finding, studies on prosocial behavior have demonstrated that self-efficacy is a potential driver of prosocial behavior (e.g., Grant and Gino 2010; Sharma and Morwitz 2016). For example, Kerr and Kaufman-Gilliland (1997) discovered that individuals' inability to make a difference hindered them from behaving cooperatively and prosocial. Similarly, in the context of knowledge sharing in an online environment, Lee et al. (2006) found that one of the main reasons individuals do not want to share knowledge with others is a lack of knowledge self-efficacy. *Product involvement* was another factor that three interviewees mentioned as a possible predictor of CBD, as this quote illustrates: "[he wouldn't defend a low involvement product such as toothpaste] ...because it's not an affair of the heart at these prices. Unless you're a toothpaste fan" (defender 10). Prior research has shown the importance of product involvement in driving WOM (e.g., Dichter 1966; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998) and CBD (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Based on these findings, we assume that CBD is more likely to happen when the consumer has prior experiences

with the product and brand, is familiar with the topic of the criticism, and exhibits a minimum level of knowledge self-efficacy.

A second category of context factors is related to the criticism that triggered CBD. Five interviewees mentioned that they incorporated *attributions of blame* in their evaluation of the criticism: "It's a huge difference for me: is it self-inflicted, is it the fault of a third-party, is it force majeure?" (defender 6). Another factor to consider is the *criticized type of failure* (5 mentions). Three interviewees mentioned that they would rather defend in performance-related cases (e.g., product defect). No one preferably defends in response to value-based criticism (e.g., ethical topics). Two interviewees do not care about the type of failure. In addition, the *severity of the criticized failure* (4 mentions) can influence whether someone defends a brand or not: "If now somehow the accusation of a sexual abuse or something like that [would be taken up by the critics], then I would certainly not have commented" (defender 3). These three factors of attribution of blame, type of failure (i.e., brand failure vs. failure related to brand's values; Kähr et al. 2016), and failure severity are also crucial in the area of product-harm crises, brand crises, brand transgressions, and service failures (e.g., Coombs 2007; Grégoire and Fisher 2008; Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010; Kähr et al. 2016; Khamitov, Grégoire, and Suri 2020). Because a higher attribution of blame toward the brand and also a higher failure severity are associated with a higher level of anger, desire for revenge, NWOM, and brand sabotage (e.g., Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010; Kähr et al. 2016), by implication we would assume that a higher level in these two constructs would result in a lower level of CBD. Regarding the type of failure, research shows that value-based failures, in particular, can activate consumers, and therefore, we would predict that this also applies to CBD (Kähr et al. 2016). Concerning the sender of the criticism, the interviewees expressed that they assessed the *credibility of the critics*, which impacted their proneness for CBD (5 mentions). For example, they explained that some critics are unlikely to issue unfounded criticism (e.g., government) and that they would not defend against critics who are "not at eye level" (e.g., Nobel prize winner; defender 3). This finding makes sense considering that source credibility is a crucial factor in the online environment. For example, the source

credibility can impact the adoption of eWOM (Hussain et al. 2017) or how we evaluate NWOM (Craciun and Moore 2019).

A last category of context factors is related to the company. Regarding that category, the interviewees stated that the company's philosophy could be a driver of CBD (8 mentions). Specifically, transparency, as well as social and sustainable engagement, would increase their willingness to defend a brand: "But of course, if I now see that a brand is even socially committed and it is attacked anyway, then I would defend the brand even more confidently" (defender 2). Studies about *corporate social responsibility* support this finding as they demonstrate that the prosocial behavior of companies can minimize vindictive behaviors after product failures (Kim and Park 2020), have an impact on brand advocacy behaviors like resistance to negative information (Xie, Bagozzi, and Grønhaug 2019), or also positively influence customer participation behavior as well as customer citizenship behavior mediated by emotional brand attachment (Hur, Moon, and Kim 2020). Another factor that emerged from the interviews was the *management response to the criticism* (6 mentions). One person argued that she does not feel the need to defend a brand after it has already issued a statement, whereas five interviewees explained that a brand's reaction would encourage them to defend the brand. As the managerial response to a negative incident plays a major role in crisis communication and bolstering a company's reputation (e.g., Coombs 2007), further examining this factor in the context of CBD seems promising.

Study 3: Drivers of Defense Behavior and Typology of Consumer Brand Defenders

Based on the findings of study 2, we conclude that the nature of the consumer-brand relationship is a critical factor in identifying different brand defender types. Furthermore, these types are characterized by diverse motives for CBD and possibly inherit important implications for distinctively managing brand defenders. Thus, the main goal of study 3 is to develop this typology of brand defenders by conducting a large-scale survey among consumers who have already defended a brand. Moreover, this study aims to determine the role of these distinct factors in driving an intuitive and reflective defense behavior and the CBD frequency.

Method

Procedure and Sample

In a first wave, we recruited 662 consumers via the platform Amazon's Mechanical Turk. However, we underestimated the number of consumers who are actual brand defenders. Therefore, we additionally recruited 935 MTurkers in a second wave and combined this data set with the one from the first wave for our analysis (1,597 consumers in total). They were first presented with the following description of CBD behavior: "[...] consumers who publicly / online defend a brand that is under criticism (e.g., by making a positive comment about the brand in social media, in forums or comment columns of online newspapers)." Subsequently, we displayed a screening question in which they had to indicate whether they or someone from their circle of family and friends had defended a brand online within the last six months. 844 individuals indicated that they themselves were brand defenders and were therefore allowed to take the survey. In the data cleaning process, we excluded 274 individuals because their responses to open-ended questions (e.g., "What was the criticism of [brand]?", "What was/were your comment/s to the criticism?"), as well as a control question on their understanding of CBD, revealed that they were not actual brand defenders. In this control question, the survey-takers selected statements about Adidas, which demonstrated how a consumer defends a brand. Out

of four displayed statements, two represented defense comments (e.g., “Adidas is not to blame for this glitch! I think it's clearly the supplier's mistake. So be careful with whom you blame!”) and two criticisms (e.g., “Once again, Adidas is doing it all wrong! This was definitely the last time I bought Adidas shoes!”). This data cleaning procedure led to a final sample of 570 brand defenders (66 % male, $M_{age} = 34$ years).

After describing their CBD situation and the screening question, participants were asked to indicate their motives for defending the brand, their brand relationship, assess some context-related factors, and finally answer some questions about their concrete CBD behavior.

Measures

Unless indicated otherwise, measures were assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = “I completely disagree” to 7 = “I completely agree” (see *Table 6* and *Appendix A* for exemplary study items as well as Cronbach's alphas).

Motives. Based on our conceptual considerations and the results of study 2, we measured several motives categorized into the three focal groups derived from prosocial behavior literature of egoism, reciprocal altruism, and principlism (see *Table 6*). All items started with “I defended [BRAND] because...” and automatically inserting the respective name of the defended brand. As potentially *egoistic motives*, we measured the following variables (adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004): self-enhancement (e.g., “...I wanted to improve my reputation or boost my status with the comment/s respectively.”), future reciprocity (e.g., “...I hoped for a future reward (e.g., gift, a voucher from [BRAND]).”), and hedonic benefits derived from the discussion with the critic (“...I feel good when I can correct other people's statements.”). As discussed in study 2, we assume that brand defenders with egoistic motives experience a threat to their social self induced by brand criticism. Therefore, we also measured consumers' perceived self-threat to understand this possible brand defender type better. This factor seems important for examining disruptions in consumer-brand relationships (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Lam et al. 2010). For this purpose, we used an adapted six-item scale (e.g., “I defended [BRAND] because I

felt personally attacked by the criticism of [BRAND].”; White, Argo, and Sengupta 2012).

Reciprocal altruism was measured with adapted items from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004; e.g., “...I am so satisfied with [BRAND] and its products that I want to help [BRAND] to be successful.”).

For the aspect of *principiism*, we measured the sense of justice as a motive (e.g., “...the criticism of [BRAND] was unfair.”; adapted from Schmitt et al. 2005; Wenzel and Okimoto 2009).

Consumer-brand relationship. As outlined in study 2, we propose that we can distinguish between defenders with a high level of brand satisfaction and a strong attachment to the brand and those defenders with a high level of brand satisfaction but a relatively weak brand attachment. Therefore, we measured their emotional connection with the brand with seven items from the brand attachment scale of Park et al. (2010) and their brand satisfaction with a three-item scale of Nyffenegger et al. (2015).

Context factors. We included product involvement, product knowledge, knowledge self-efficacy, blame attribution, failure severity, type of failure, perceived credibility of the critic, management response, and perceived corporate social responsibility as context-related factors. We relied on established scales for measuring the product involvement (five items, e.g., “Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that the products / services of [BRAND] ought to be important to me.”; Malär et al. 2011), product knowledge (two items, e.g., “I know a lot about [BRAND]’s products / services.”; Gürhan-Canli 2003), and knowledge self-efficacy (four items, e.g., “I was confident that I could provide information that is valuable to other consumers.”; Cheung and Lee 2012). Moreover, we elicited the blame attribution with a three-item scale from Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp (2010; e.g., “Overall, [BRAND] was responsible for the criticized incident.”), the failure severity with three seven-point bipolar items from Grégoire and Fisher (2008; e.g., “The criticized incident caused... little problems. – big problems.”), and the type of failure with one item for performance-related incidents (“In my view, the criticism was due to poor product or service quality (e.g., the product was defective, a complaint was not satisfactorily resolved).”) and one item for value-based incidents (“I think [BRAND] was criticized because its behavior contradicted

the personal values of the critic (or violated the critic's personal values)."; Kähr et al. 2016).

Regarding the perceived credibility of the critic, the survey-takers had to assess the critic/s with a seven-point bipolar item ranging from "not credible" to "credible" (Ohanian 1990). Additionally, we asked participants whether the company had responded to the criticism (i.e., apology, defense, no reaction; Coombs 2007). Furthermore, we also measured the company-related factor of perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) with a six-item scale (e.g., "[BRAND] is committed to society."; Alvarado-Herrera et al. 2017).

CBD behavior. On the one hand, we measured consumers' specific defense styles based on previous research on CBD (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016) and our netnographic study (e.g., "My defense comment on [Brand] made fun of the criticism / critic."; see *Table 11*). On the other hand, as in studies 1 and 2, we also elicited the participant's defense behavior in terms of the intuitive system (Rand et al. 2014; two items, e.g., "My defense comment on [BRAND] was rather impulsive.") and the reflective system (Rand et al. 2014; two items; e.g., "My defense comment on [BRAND] was rather factual.").² We also assessed whether brand defenders were aware that they defended a brand with their comment and whether they were intentionally defending the brand (single-items; e.g., "Was it your intention to defend [BRAND] with your comment/s? Not at all – Absolutely"). Moreover, the participants were also asked how often they are defending brands (Rarer than once a year – More often than once a week).

Results and Discussion

First, we conducted a factor analysis with the three motive categories (i.e., egoism, reciprocal altruism, and sense of justice) and the two brand relationship types (i.e., brand attachment and satisfaction) to analyze the structure of these conceptually derived and qualitatively validated

² Unfortunately, we only added these questions regarding the defense style and form in the second wave of the recruitment process such that the sample size for these questions consisted of only 346 consumers.

constructs. Second, to examine their relevance for CBD, we regressed the three motivational factors and the two brand relationship types on the different forms of defense behavior (i.e., reflective and intuitive) as well as the CBD frequency. Finally, we conducted a cluster analysis to validate the three different types of brand defenders suggested in study 2.

Analysis of the Structure of the Drivers of CBD

To develop a typology of brand defenders, we relied on our proposed three key motives (i.e., egoism, reciprocal altruism, and sense of justice), brand satisfaction, and brand attachment. The results of a principal components analysis (PCA) correspond with our five proposed factors. *Table 6* shows the factor loadings of the varimax rotation and Cronbach's alpha values. In the next step, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using AMOS 26.0 to assess the reliability and validity of our five-factor structure. Meeting conventional standards (e.g., Hu and Bentler 1999), our global fit measures indicate that the empirical data acceptably fits our model: RMSEA = .07, NFI = .91, NNFI = .92, CFI = .93. Composite reliability and average variance extracted indicate our constructs' sufficient reliability and convergent validity (see *Table 6*). Furthermore, we assessed discriminant validity based on Fornell and Larcker (1981) and found that the average variance extracted exceeds the squared correlations between all pairs of constructs (*Table 5*).

TABLE 5
Discriminant Validity Assessment.

	AVE	Satisfaction	Attachment	Egoism	Reciprocal altruism
Brand Satisfaction	.754				
Brand Attachment	.722	.216			
Egoism	.534	.009	.162		
Reciprocal Altruism	.617	.449	.321	.006	
Sense of Justice	.561	.126	.001	.088	.032

TABLE 6
Factor Structure and Item Stability

Factor (Source) Cronbach's α , Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted	Items	Factors				
		1	2	3	4	5
Brand Satisfaction (Nyffenegger et al. 2015) $\alpha = .90$, CR = .90, AVE = .75	[BRAND] offers exactly what I expect.	0.846				
	I am consistently satisfied with my decision for [BRAND].	0.830				
	I am completely satisfied with [BRAND].	0.812				
Brand Attachment (Park et al. 2010) $\alpha = .95$, CR = .95, AVE = .72	To what extent is [BRAND] part of you and who you are?		0.887			
	To what extent is [BRAND] part of you?		0.878			
	To what extent do you feel emotionally bonded to [BRAND]?		0.873			
	To what extent do you feel personally connected to [BRAND]?		0.851			
	To what extent does [BRAND] say something to other people about who you are?		0.791			
	To what extent do you have many thoughts about [BRAND]?		0.786			
	To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward [BRAND] often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?		0.763			
Egoistic Motives (adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) $\alpha = .90$, CR = .90, AVE = .53	<i>I defended [BRAND] because...</i>					
	...I wanted to raise my profile (i.e., positive self-representation).			0.843		
	...through that, I could show that I am clever.			0.835		
	...I wanted to improve my reputation or boost my status with the comment/s respectively.			0.828		
	...I hoped for a future reward (e.g., gift, a voucher from [BRAND]).			0.739		
	...I hoped for feedback from the company.			0.727		
	...I have pursued my own interest with the comment/s.			0.686		
	...I hoped for feedback from other consumers.			0.664		
...I feel good when I can correct other people's statements.			0.598			
Reciprocal Altruistic Motives (adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) $\alpha = .81$, CR = .82, AVE = .62	...I am so satisfied with [BRAND] and its products that I want to help [BRAND] to be successful.				0.773	
	...I have mostly had good experiences with [BRAND] so far, and I wanted to give something back to [BRAND].				0.769	
	...in my own opinion, good companies should be supported.				0.740	
Sense of Justice (adapted from Schmitt et al. 2005; Wenzel and Okimoto 2009) $\alpha = .71$, CR = .72, AVE = .56	...the critics did not consider all the circumstances.					0.834
	...the criticism of [BRAND] was unfair.					0.820

Analysis of the Relevance of the Motivational and Relational Factors for CBD

Consequently, we examined to what degree our five identified factors (see *Table 6*) predict different CBD behaviors (i.e., intuitive and reflective) and the frequency of consumer brand defense (see *Appendix A* for study items as well as Cronbach's alphas). To do so, we conducted three multiple regression analyses using the enter method with the regression factor scores of our PCA analysis as independent variables (Thurstone 1935) and the three constructs mentioned above as dependent variables. We found no influential outliers according to the studentized residuals (Lund 1975; Stevens 1984) and Cook's measure of distance (Cook 1977; Stevens 1984). Further, multicollinearity was no concern with tolerance values of at least .99 for all independent variables in our three regression analyses (Thompson et al. 2017).

The first multiple regression analysis was carried out to predict the intuitive brand defense behavior. The results indicated that our five factors explain a significant amount of the variance of intuitive defense behavior, $F(5, 340) = 8.842, p < .001, R^2 = .115, R^2_{Adjusted} = .102$. In more detail, the two factors brand attachment ($\beta = .225, t(340) = 4.393, p < .001$) and egoism ($\beta = .242, t(340) = 4.736, p < .001$) both exerted significant positive influence on the intuitive defense behavior. The other three factors showed no significant impact (see *Table 7*). Intuitive prosocial behaviors are mostly shaped by past experiences, which turned out to be successful in the benefactor's daily life. More specifically, the past experiences' influence can be explained by the internalization of successful strategies as social heuristics (see social heuristics hypothesis (SHH) for more details; Rand et al. 2014). Brand defenders who are driven by egoistic considerations probably internalized that defending a brand benefits their egoistic motives (e.g., the social heuristic that defending a brand serves as a means for self-enhancement). Thus, SHH might explain why especially egoistic motives are eliciting an intuitive defense behavior. Moreover, it is also conceivable that consumers who are strongly

attached to a brand have adopted the heuristic strategy that a defense comment can help their brand. Consequently, they automatically apply this heuristic in times of brand criticism.

The second multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the reflective brand defense behavior as the dependent variable. The regression results demonstrated that our five factors explain a significant amount of the variance of reflective defense behavior, $F(5, 340) = 6.450, p < .001, R^2 = .087, R^2_{Adjusted} = .073$. To be more concrete, the sense of justice showed the strongest positive influence ($\beta = .215, t(340) = 4.140, p < .001$), followed by reciprocal altruism ($\beta = .142, t(340) = 2.740, p = .006$), and brand satisfaction ($\beta = .123, t(340) = 2.361, p = .019$). Moreover, brand attachment and egoism had no significant impact (see *Table 7*). In contrast to intuitive processes, the reflective processes can supersede the internalized heuristics. Consequently, individuals switch to the most advantageous behavior for a given context (e.g., Rand et al. 2014). Because the context can probably influence the two motives, sense of justice and reciprocal altruism (e.g., type of criticism, consideration of past reciprocities by the brand), the triggered defense behavior may require a stronger adoption to specific situations. For example, in the case of unfair criticism, the defender might reflectively point out why the criticism is unjustified. Further, in contrast to emotionally attached consumers, merely satisfied consumers might rather weigh up whether the benefits (i.e., helping the brand) outweigh the costs (e.g., time spent, cognitive effort) before they are effectively getting active.

Finally, we also conducted a multiple regression analysis to gain insights into the effect of our five factors on the frequency of brand defense behavior. The results revealed that the five factors explain a significant amount of the variance of the frequency of CBD, $F(5, 564) = 15.402, p < .001, R^2 = .120, R^2_{Adjusted} = .112$. Out of the five examined factors, egoism ($\beta = .282, t(564) = 7.151, p < .001$) and brand attachment ($\beta = .199, t(564) = 5.051, p < .001$) both showed a significant positive effect on the CBD frequency. The other three factors exerted no significant influence (see *Table 7*). It is interesting to see that out of the five factors driving

CBD; only two were significant predictors for a high defense frequency. Although brand satisfaction, reciprocal altruism, and a sense of justice can be drivers of CBD, especially egoistic motives and brand attachment impact whether a consumer brand defender frequently gets active. Moreover, it is striking that these two drivers were also the only significant predictors of intuitive defense behavior. Hence, it might be that especially the internalized social heuristics of CBD lead to a frequent defense behavior and that in situations that require more deliberation, CBD occurs less often. This finding also aligns with study 1, which showed that intuitive CBD is the most prevalent form.

TABLE 7
Factor Score Regression Results

	Intuitive CBD		Reflective CBD		Frequency of CBD	
	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	β
Brand satisfaction	.114 (.090)	.065	.154 (.065)	.123*	.028 (.054)	.020
Brand attachment	.386 (.088)	.225***	-.060 (.064)	-.048	.271 (.054)	.199***
Egoism	0.42 (.089)	.242***	-.050 (.065)	-.040	.383 (.054)	.282***
Reciprocal Altruism	-.038 (.086)	-.023	.173 (.063)	.142**	.014 (.054)	.011
Sense of justice	.018 (.089)	.010	.268 (.065)	.215***	-.008 (.054)	-.006
Constant	3.175 (.087)		5.699 (.063)		3.195 (.054)	
Observations	346		346		570	
<i>R</i> ²	.115		.087		.120	

Note — *B* = unstandardized regression coefficients; *SE* = standard errors; β = standardized regression coefficients; **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001

Taken together, the regressions' results demonstrated that all of our five proposed factors were significant predictors for some sort of defense behavior, with three factors being relevant for a reflective and the two others for an intuitive and high frequent defense behavior.

A Brand Defender Typology Based on Motivational and Relational Factors




Next, we conducted a hierarchical cluster analysis with the previously assessed factors brand satisfaction, brand attachment, egoistic motives, reciprocal altruistic motives, and sense of justice as input variables. Applying the Ward-method as a clustering algorithm using the squared Euclidean distance, the dendrogram and theoretical considerations implied an optimal cluster number of three (e.g., Ketchen Jr. and Shook 1996).

We compared the mean values between the three clusters with statistical significance tests (e.g., one-way ANOVA) for interpreting these clusters. In that matter, we not only tested the means of our input factors (e.g., egoism) but instead also along with non-clustering variables (e.g., product involvement, defense behavior). The results sections will demonstrate that the means of many non-clustering variables significantly differ between the three clusters. These findings provide evidence for the validity of our cluster solution by showing that the three clusters are even statistically different among external variables which are theoretically related to our cluster solution (e.g., Ketchen Jr. and Shook 1996; Nairn and Bottomley 2003). Moreover, a multiple discriminant analysis revealed that 89.5 % of the brand defenders were assigned to the correct cluster, providing evidence for the stability of the cluster solution (e.g., Carvalho et al. 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).

The results of the cluster analysis are summarized in *Figure 2*. These findings are going to be elaborated in more detail in the following sections, which are structured as follows: (1) motivational drivers of CBD and consumer-brand relationship, (2) context factors, (3) defense behavior, and (4) defense styles.

FIGURE 2

Main Characteristics of the Three Elicited Brand Defender Types

Defender Type	Main Motives	Consumer-Brand Relationship	Context Factors	Defense Behavior
 <p>Self-Promoters</p>	<p>Egoistic motives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-enhancement • Future reciprocity • Hedonic benefits <p>Reducing social identity threat</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High brand satisfaction • High brand attachment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest failure severity • Highest blame attribution • Highest perceived credibility of the critic • Defending performance-related incidents • 40% of the cases: defense or apology by brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest awareness & intention • Defend most often • Distinct defense styles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Joking – Insulting – Scapegoating
 <p>Brand-Promoters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciprocal altruism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest brand satisfaction • High brand attachment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest blame attribution • Highest CSR • Highest involvement • Highest knowledge • 60% of the cases: no reaction of brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highest awareness & intention • Non-use of harsh defense styles (e.g., insulting) • Highest values for vouching and justifying
 <p>Justice-Promoters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High brand satisfaction • Low brand attachment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowest failure severity • Lowest CSR • Lowest involvement • Lowest knowledge • 25% of the cases: don't know if reaction by brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High awareness & intention • Defend least often • Non-use of harsh defense styles (e.g., insulting) • Most important styles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Vouching – Justifying

Motivational Drivers of CBD and Consumer-Brand Relationship. The cluster analysis revealed that defenders in cluster 1 are represented by the highest mean for egoistic motives ($M = 4.75$) among the three identified clusters (Table 8). Moreover, their value for egoistic motives is almost twice as high as the mean of clusters 2 and 3. Thus, our results indicate that cluster 1 is the only cluster with rather egoistic motives. Hence, these defenders are driven by their need for self-enhancement, expectations for future reciprocity, and hedonic benefits from discussions with the critics. These motivational characteristics highlight the self-interest of these defenders and, therefore, we label them “*self-promoters*.” It is also important to emphasize that this group exhibited the lowest mean for the principlism-factor “sense of justice” ($M = 5.14$). Apparently, due to the high importance of egoistic motives, the sense of justice is less important compared to the two other clusters. Concerning the consumer-brand relationship, self-promoters are characterized by high levels of both brand attachment ($M = 5.08$) and brand satisfaction ($M = 5.52$). Moreover, they have the highest mean for the social identity threat ($M = 4.44$) among the three clusters. Taking all this together, these findings provide evidence that some consumers respond to criticism toward a strongly connected brand as a personal criticism. That is, they see this as a threat to their self-identity and therefore react with a defense comment (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012). In addition, self-promoters are the youngest defenders ($M = 30.64$ years) and have the highest share of males (71.4 %).

Defenders in cluster 2 overall exhibit the strongest brand relationship among all defenders. Their mean for brand satisfaction ($M = 6.15$) is significantly higher than the means of the other two clusters, and their mean for brand attachment ($M = 4.99$) is comparable with the mean of the self-promoters and higher than the mean of cluster 3. In addition, they reported the highest value for reciprocal altruism ($M = 6.05$). Taking all this together, these brand defenders can be labeled “*brand-promoters*” and are consistent with our premise that some defenders have such a strong bond to the brand that they want to give the brand something back as compensation for past positive brand experiences (e.g., Fournier 1998;

Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Hydock, Chen, and Carlson 2020). In addition, the brand-promoters have a high mean for age ($M = 34.65$ years) and scored high on sense of justice ($M = 6.24$).

Finally, defenders in cluster 3 are characterized by the lowest means for the three elicited motives egoism ($M = 2.06$), reciprocal altruism ($M = 5.01$), and social identity threat ($M = 2.78$) among the three clusters. The only exception relates to the motive "sense of justice" ($M = 6.11$), for which they show a comparable mean to brand-promoters and a higher value than the self-promoters. Within cluster 3, the mean for the sense of justice is the highest among all elicited motives. Paired samples t-test revealed that the mean of sense of justice ($M = 6.11$) is significantly higher than their second-highest mean for motives ($M_{\text{ReciprocalAltruism}} = 5.01$, $t(194) = 8.592$, $p < .001$). Thus, this type of brand defender is mainly driven by a need for justice restoration. Therefore, we name this cluster "*justice-promoters*." Furthermore, justice-promoters have a much smaller value for brand attachment ($M = 2.32$) and a lower value for social identity threat than self- and brand-promoters. However, their value for brand satisfaction is rather high ($M = 5.39$). This rather weak emotional bond with the brand is consistent with our assumptions and the results from study 2 that some brand defenders have merely a satisfying relationship rather than a strong connection with the defended brand. Moreover, the justice-promoters have the highest share of females (39 %) among the three defender types and are rather old compared to the self-promoters ($M = 35.23$ years).

TABLE 8
Motivational Drivers, Consumer-Brand Relationship, and
Demographics of the Brand Defender Types

Constructs		Self-Promoter (n = 140)	Brand-Promoter (n = 235)	Justice-Promoter (n = 195)	Entire sample (N = 570)
Cluster variables	Brand satisfaction ¹	5.52 (.10) ^b	6.15 (.05) ^a	5.39 (.09) ^b	5.74 (.05)
	Brand attachment ¹	5.08 (.10) ^a	4.99 (.06) ^a	2.32 (.07) ^b	4.10 (.07)
	Egoism ¹	4.75 (.09) ^a	2.41 (.05) ^b	2.06 (.06) ^c	2.86 (.06)
	Reciprocal altruism ²	5.80 (.09) ^b	6.05 (.05) ^a	5.01 (.12) ^c	5.63 (.05)
	Sense of justice ¹	5.14 (.12) ^b	6.24 (.05) ^a	6.11 (.07) ^a	5.93 (.05)
Descriptive variable	Social identity threat ³	4.44 (.12) ^a	3.92 (.10) ^b	2.78 (.10) ^c	3.66 (.07)
Demo-graphics	Gender	71.4 % male	67.7 % male	61.0 % male	66.3 % male
	Age ¹	30.64 (.60) ^b	34.65 (.64) ^a	35.23 (.72) ^a	33.86 (.40)

Note – The numbers displayed in this table are the respective means with the corresponding standard errors in brackets. ^{1/2}Welch test is significant ($p < .001$). ³One-way ANOVA is significant ($p < .001$). The same superscript letter within one line denotes that these means are not significantly different ($p > .05$) based on the Games-Howell¹ / Gabriel³ post hoc test resp. based on Games-Howell post hoc test ($p = .055$)². The mean(s) in the highest range are designated with the superscript a, the next highest with b, and the next highest with c.

Context Factors. Concerning context factors, *self-promoters* blamed the company most for the criticized incident ($M = 3.80$), and they perceived the incident to have the highest failure severity ($M = 4.20$) among the three clusters (see *Table 9*). Another noticeable difference is that these defenders rated the critic's credibility ($M = 4.10$) higher than the brand defenders of clusters 2 and 3. Thus, since self-promoters are mainly driven by egoistic motives, they seem to care less about how severe the criticized incident is and whether the critic might be right. Self-promoters had the highest mean for performance-related failures ($M = 3.91$) among the three clusters regarding the type of failure. Such performance-related cases might be more objective incidents compared to value-based failures (Pullig, Netemeyer, and Biswas 2006). Hence, we can see that self-promoters even take advantage of opportunities in which they may not have many rational arguments to counter the critics because of the objective criticism. Interestingly, they also have the highest knowledge self-efficacy ($M = 5.35$) without having the highest product knowledge ($M = 5.57$) among the three defender types. This

indicates that self-promoters probably have a high level of confidence. Furthermore, in over 40 % of the defense cases in this cluster, the company either defended itself or apologized (brand-promoters = 27.3 % and justice-promoters = 24.6 %). Hence, it appears that they are also writing defense comments when the company already responded to the criticism. They seem to seize all opportunities to gratify their needs even when their defense may sometimes not be urgent because the company already officially responded to the criticism.

As one might assume, *brand-promoters* do not blame their beloved brand ($M = 2.73$). Furthermore, they assess the CSR of the defended brand to be relatively high ($M = 5.51$). Moreover, they show the highest mean for product involvement ($M = 5.70$) and product knowledge ($M = 5.90$). This means that they possess a high level of knowledge about the company's offerings, which are highly relevant for them. Nevertheless, they have lower confidence in their knowledge ($M = 4.85$) than the self-promoters. Compared to the two other clusters, they defended brands more often when the company did not react to the criticism (58.3 % of the cases). Since the company often showed no reaction in the brand promoters' defense cases, the conclusion is that they are stepping into the breach for the company.

When comparing the means of the context factors for *justice-promoters* with the other two clusters, it becomes evident that context factors that may be important for the other defender types do not play a role. These defenders rated the criticized company's corporate social responsibility ($M = 4.68$) the lowest of the three clusters. It seems that when confronted with criticism which they perceive to be unfair, a context factor like CSR is being dominated by their sense of justice. Moreover, they defend in low-severity cases ($M = 3.41$). This could constitute a boundary condition for this segment. Due to their weaker brand bond (mainly based on satisfaction), they are not eager to counter unfair criticism in high-severity incidents. In addition, they rate the critic's credibility the lowest ($M = 2.95$), which could mean that they do not believe the critic because of the high perceived injustice. In addition, they are characterized by the lowest product involvement ($M = 4.03$), the lowest product knowledge ($M = 5.16$) as well

as the lowest knowledge self-efficacy ($M = 4.07$). To conclude, justice-promoters also defend products / services which are not personally relevant to them, and additionally, they do not have much confidence in their ability to provide valuable information. Every fourth justice-promoter did not know whether the company made a statement in response to the criticism (self-promoters = 10.1 % and brand-promoters = 14.4 %). This circumstance that many justice-promoters did not know whether the company showed any reaction again highlights their principilistic motivation. It reflects that their sense of justice is the primary motivation, and context factors relevant to other clusters do not count as much.

TABLE 9
Context Factors per Brand Defender Type

Constructs		Self-Promoter (n = 140)	Brand-Promoter (n = 235)	Justice-Promoter (n = 195)	Entire sample (N = 570)
Context factors	Failure severity ¹	4.20 (.13) ^a	3.73 (.11) ^b	3.41 (.12) ^b	3.74 (.07)
	Blame attribution ²	3.80 (.15) ^a	2.73 (.11) ^b	2.84 (.13) ^b	3.03 (.08)
	Corporate social responsibility ²	5.33 (.09) ^a	5.51(.06) ^a	4.70 (.08) ^b	5.19 (.05)
	Credibility of the critic ¹	4.10 (.16) ^a	3.14 (.11) ^b	2.95 (.12) ^b	3.31 (.08)
	Performance-related failure ²	3.91 (.16) ^a	2.73 (.13) ^b	2.62 (.14) ^b	2.98 (.09)
	Value-based failure ³	4.14 (.15) ^a	4.61 (.14) ^a	4.27 (.17) ^a	4.38 (.09)
	Product involvement ¹	5.37 (.09) ^b	5.70 (.06) ^a	4.03 (.11) ^c	5.05 (.06)
	Knowledge self-efficacy ¹	5.35 (.09) ^a	4.85 (.09) ^b	4.07 (.11) ^c	4.71 (.06)
Management response	Product knowledge ¹	5.57 (.10) ^b	5.90 (.06) ^a	5.16 (.10) ^c	5.57 (.05)
	Company defended itself	22.1 %	14.5 %	15.4 %	16.7 %
	Company apologized	21.4 %	12.8 %	9.2 %	13.7 %
	Company did not react	46.4 %	58.3 %	49.2 %	52.3 %
	Do not know	10.1 %	14.4 %	26.2 %	17.4 %

Note – The numbers displayed in this table are the respective means with the corresponding standard errors in brackets. ¹Welch test is significant ($p < .001$). ²One-way ANOVA is significant ($p < .001$). ³Welch test is marginally significant ($p < .1$).

The same superscript letter within one line denotes that these means are not significantly different ($p > .05$) based on the Games-Howell¹ / Gabriel² post hoc test. The mean(s) in the highest range are designated with the superscript *a*, the next highest with *b*, and the next highest with *c*.

Defense Behavior. In the next step, we wondered whether the three defender types differed concerning their actual defense behavior. In that matter, self-promoters reported the lowest awareness ($M = 6.03$; *Table 10*) that they defended the brand with their comment and the lowest intentionality to defend the brand ($M = 5.88$). On the other hand, the brand-promoters stated the highest awareness ($M = 6.49$) and intentionality ($M = 6.40$) to defend the brand with their comment. This result makes sense since brand-promoters actively want to give something back to the brand while the self-promoters are driven more by selfish motives. Some self-promoters possibly consider the criticism to be an attack on themselves (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012). By writing a defense comment, these consumers may deal with this self-threat without noticing that they are helping the brand.

With respect to the frequency of the defense behavior, self-promoters ($M = 3.86$) are defending significantly more often than the brand-promoters ($M = 3.13$) and the justice-promoters ($M = 2.80$). This result could be explained by the fact that self-promoters are using the brand as a tool to gratify their own needs. Thus, they may be more proactive in looking for defense possibilities. Because brand-promoters want to give something back to their beloved brands and because most consumers develop an intense emotional attachment to only a small number of brands (Thomson, Macinnis, and Whan Park 2005), they are somewhat restricted in the number of possible defense cases. In the case of the justice-promoters, the low defense frequency suggests that most are not proactively looking for defense possibilities. Since they are triggered by criticism that they perceive to be unfair, the defense actions are probably more coincidental. These results are also in line with our regression analyses which revealed that egoism (important motive of self-promoters) and brand attachment (important driver of self- and brand-promoters) are significant predictors for a higher CBD frequency.

Further, following the results of our regression analyses and study 2, the self- ($M = 3.60$) and brand-promoters ($M = 3.30$) assessed their defense behavior to be more intuitive compared to the justice-promoters ($M = 2.68$). As already discussed, this might be explained

due to internalized heuristics that brand defense can satisfy egoistic motives (self-promoters) or might be linked to the internalized strategy of defending one's emotionally attached brand in cases of criticism (brand-promoters). Moreover, the more diverse drivers behind reflective CBD (i.e., brand satisfaction, reciprocal altruism, and sense of justice) could explain why in this regard, no significant differences between the three clusters were found. Brand-promoters who are highly satisfied and want to give the brand something back might sometimes invest more time in a highly factual defense comment. Justice-promoters who are also satisfied with the brand get mainly activated by unfair criticism. For them, it can be assumed that the composition of an aligning defense comment (e.g., highlighting the criticism's unfair aspects) is related to some reflection. The results are more complex for self-promoters because we have learned that they are the most intuitive brand defenders. However, it seems that they occasionally invest some time into a well-thought-out brand defense to maximize the reputational benefits.

TABLE 10
Defense Behavior per Brand Defender Type

Constructs	Self-Promoter (n = 140)	Brand-Promoter (n = 235)	Justice-Promoter (n = 195)	Entire sample (N = 570)
Awareness about defense behavior ¹	6.03 (.09) ^b	6.49 (.06) ^a	6.36 (.08) ^a	6.33 (.04)
Intentionality of defense behavior ¹	5.88 (.12) ^b	6.40 (.07) ^a	6.08 (.10) ^b	6.16 (.05)
Frequency of defense behavior ¹	3.86 (.13) ^a	3.13 (.08) ^b	2.80 (.08) ^c	3.19 (.06)

Note – The numbers displayed in this table are the respective means with the corresponding standard errors in brackets. ¹Welch test is significant ($p < .001$).

The same superscript letter within one line denotes that these means are not significantly different ($p > .05$) based on the Games-Howell¹ post hoc test. The mean(s) in the highest range are designated with the superscript *a*, the next highest with *b*, and the next highest with *c*.

Constructs	Self-Promoter (n = 81)	Brand-Promoter (n = 141)	Justice-Promoter (n = 124)	Entire sample (N = 346)
Intuitive defense behavior ¹	3.60 (.20) ^a	3.30 (.14) ^a	2.68 (.14) ^b	3.15 (.09)
Reflective defense behavior ²	5.55 (.13)	5.75 (.10)	5.73 (.12)	5.69 (.07)

Note – The numbers displayed in this table are the respective means with the corresponding standard errors in brackets. ¹One-way ANOVA is significant ($p < .001$). ²One-way ANOVA is not significant ($p = .474$)

The same superscript letter within one line denotes that these means are not significantly different ($p > .01$) based on the Gabriel¹ post hoc test. The mean(s) in the highest range are designated with the superscript *a*, the next highest with *b*, and the next highest with *c*.

Defense Styles. In terms of different defense styles (see Table 11) *self-promoters* had the highest means among the three clusters for advocating ($M = 4.15$), reasoning ($M = 4.33$), trivializing ($M = 4.09$), stalling ($M = 4.73$), joking ($M = 3.60$), scapegoating ($M = 3.47$), doubting ($M = 4.65$), and insulting ($M = 3.68$). Compared to the two other clusters, *brand-promoters* more often use justifying ($M = 4.99$) and vouching ($M = 4.99$) as defense styles. *Justice-promoters* scored lowest among the three clusters for each defense style.

For all three clusters, the results indicate that the three most essential defense styles are: writing about their own positive experiences with the brand (vouching; $M_{SP} = 4.88$, $M_{BP} = 4.99$, $M_{JP} = 4.00$), justifying the behavior of the criticized brand ($M_{SP} = 4.80$, $M_{BP} = 4.99$, $M_{JP} = 4.02$), and asking the critic to avoid jumping to conclusions (stalling; $M_{SP} = 4.73$, $M_{BP} = 4.52$, $M_{JP} = 3.84$). However, compared to the two other clusters, *self-promoters* use a more diverse range of defense styles, including doubting the critic's credibility, downplaying the critique

(trivializing), emphasizing imbalances in the consumer-brand relationship (reasoning), and advocating. Even defense styles such as joking, insulting, and scapegoating, which are not popular with the other two clusters, are an option for the self-promoters. It seems that any means is possible for the self-promoters because of the primarily selfish reasons for their defense actions.

As expected, brand-promoters motivated by their past positive experiences with the brand mostly use vouching as a defense style. Further, it appears that because of their high product involvement and product knowledge, they are often arguing rationally (justifying). Additionally, it is interesting that the justice-promoters with the weakest bond to the brand also use vouching as a defense style. Their motivational drive of principism is reflected by their non-use of rather harsh defense styles like insulting, scapegoating.

TABLE 11
Defense Styles per Brand Defender Type

Constructs	Self-Promoter (n = 81)	Brand-Promoter (n = 141)	Justice-Promoter (n = 124)	Entire sample (N = 346)
Advocating: My defense comment on [Brand] referred to applicable law or social norms. ²	4.15 (.21) ^a	3.70 (.18) ^{ab}	3.39 (.19) ^b	3.69 (.11)
Justifying: My defense comment on [Brand] justified the behavior of the company. ¹	4.80 (.18) ^a	4.99 (.15) ^a	4.02 (.20) ^b	4.60 (.11)
Reasoning: My defense comment on [Brand] pointed to an imbalance between provided input (e.g., purchase price) and expected outcome (e.g., service quality) in the criticized incident. ¹	4.33 (.19) ^a	3.58 (.16) ^b	3.06 (.19) ^b	3.57 (.11)
Trivializing: My defense comment on [Brand] trivialized the criticized incident (tried to downplay the issue mentioned by the critic). ¹	4.09 (.20) ^a	3.47 (.17) ^b	2.77 (.18) ^c	3.36 (.11)
Vouching: My defense comment on [Brand] was based on personal positive self-experiences with [Brand]. ¹	4.88 (.16) ^a	4.99 (.15) ^a	4.00 (.20) ^b	4.61 (.10)
Stalling: My defense comment on [Brand] asked the critic to avoid jumping to conclusions. ²	4.73 (.19) ^a	4.52 (.16) ^a	3.84 (.20) ^b	4.33 (.11)
Joking: My defense comment on [Brand] made fun of the criticism / critic. ¹	3.60 (.22) ^a	1.95 (.13) ^b	1.73 (.12) ^b	2.26 (.09)
Scapegoating: My defense comment on [Brand] blamed a third party (e.g., supplier) or an uncontrollable event (e.g., storm). ³	3.47 (.22) ^a	2.26 (.14) ^b	2.12 (.17) ^b	2.49 (.10)
Doubting: My defense comment on [Brand] questioned the credibility of the critic. ¹	4.65 (.19) ^a	3.87 (.18) ^b	3.37 (.20) ^b	3.88 (.11)
Insulting: My defense comment on [Brand] personally attacked the critic. ¹	3.68 (.21) ^a	2.13 (.14) ^b	2.01 (.14) ^b	2.45 (.10)

Note – The numbers displayed in this table are the respective means with the corresponding standard errors in brackets. ¹Welch test is significant ($p < .001$). ²Welch test is significant ($p < .05$). ³One-way ANOVA is significant ($p < .001$).

The same superscript letter within one line denotes that these means are not significantly different ($p > .05$) based on the Games-Howell¹ / Gabriel³ post hoc test. The mean(s) in the highest range are designated with the superscript *a*, the next highest with *b*, and the next highest with *c*.

Study 4a: Insights into CBD-Management

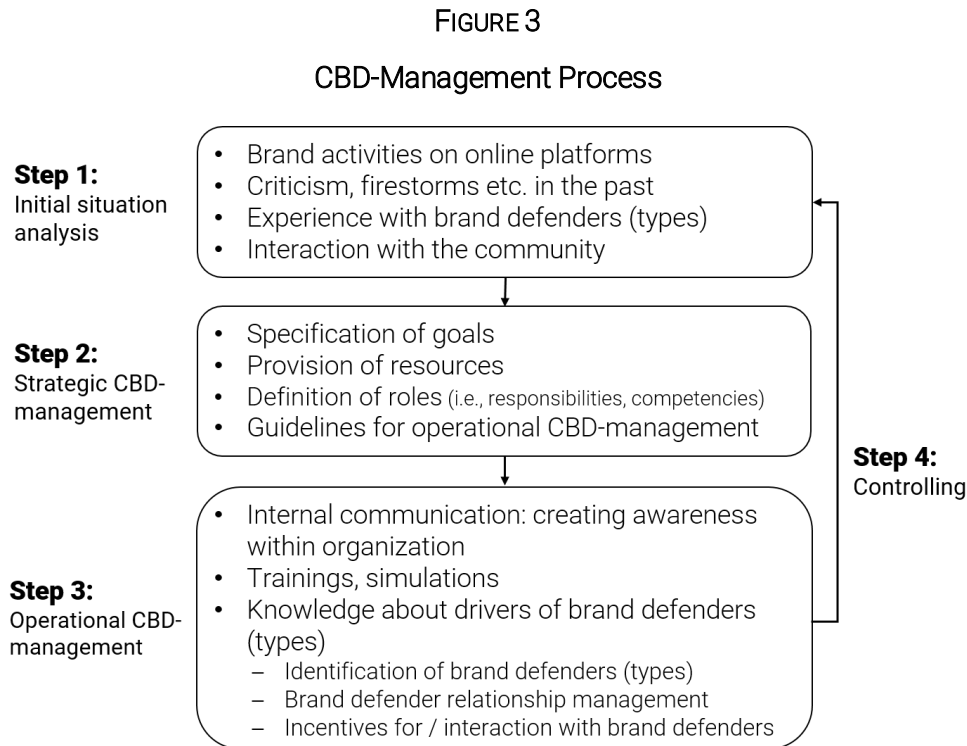
Method

The purpose of study 4a was to gain first insights into the managerial side of CBD. Therefore, we conducted an interview study with 20 managers in marketing, communication, branding, and social media. We attempted to maximize diversity regarding company size (SME to large), industries, and degree of internationalization to enhance external validity when selecting interviewees. The interviews were conducted over two months, and each interview lasted between 46 and 83 minutes ($M = 58$ minutes, total = 19.4 hours). We used a semi-standardized interview structure, ensuring a consistent order of questions to enable comparability among the different interviews while leaving the freedom to ask “off the script”-questions due to the explorative character of this study. The interviews were audiotaped and afterward transcribed, which resulted in 274 single-spaced pages. Regarding the content analysis of the first two sections about managers’ understanding and their observed consequences of CBD, we applied a deductive content analysis driven by our theoretical findings of CBD (Mayring 2000). For example, we collected manager’s statements about their understanding of CBD and compared them with our conceptual understanding. Because of the lack of scientific literature about CBD-management, we then applied an inductive content analysis for all statements from our interview partners about the process of managing CBD (Mayring 2000). In more detail, we first created abstract top categories (e.g., strategic vs. operational CBD-management) and collected the corresponding interview statements. In the next step, more specific sub-categories were formulated, and the statements were reassigned. This process was repeated until our result was sufficiently concrete and meaningful.

Results and Discussion

The interviews revealed that none of the brands of the interviewed managers has strategically nor operationally anchored CBD within the company so far. Hence, systematic CBD-

management could offer some unused potential. Therefore, we asked all managers how they would design such a CBD-management process. As displayed in *Figure 3*, we collected and synthesized all inputs in a step-by-step model.



In a *first step*, managers should initially analyze whether they can profit from a specific CBD-management. Hereby, the interview partners mentioned that the potential benefits depend on how active brands are online (e.g., number of brand posts, presence in earned and owned media) and the degree of criticism with which a brand is confronted. Hence, brands should analyze past criticism, the risk for future criticism, and whether they could already count on some brand defenders. Another aspect that may be considered is prior experiences in interacting with the community (e.g., liking comments, direct messages, crisis communication) and the success of such interactions (e.g., higher engagement rate, more positive sentiments).

Ideally, brands composite a CBD-strategy in a *second step*. According to the interviewed marketing experts, such a strategy should state aspired goals (e.g., number of activated brand-promoters after criticism), clarify who will be in charge of the specific operational tasks (e.g., external agency for web-monitoring, social media-employee for the interaction with brand defenders and for updating the social CRM-database), and provide information about the budget (e.g., for web-monitoring). Moreover, such a CBD-strategy should consist of guidelines for the operational CBD-management (e.g., whether defense comments get appreciated with a “like”, tone of voice when interacting with defenders). These guidelines can, for example, build upon an already existing social media strategy (Li, Larimo, and Leonidou 2021; Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Flemming 2020) or also be an addendum to a crisis communication plan.

In the *third step*, the involved persons must be informed and trained in accordance with the CBD-strategy and -guidelines. Such training can, for example, be implemented with workshops and simulative scenarios of criticism and brand defense cases. In the long run, organizational culture should be established that acknowledges CBD and promotes cooperation with the consumer brand defenders. Besides, the interviewed experts clarified that a profound understanding of the drivers of certain brand defender types is promising. To successfully identify brand defenders, stimulate CBD via relationship management, and directly interact with (potential) brand defenders, it is essential to know more about their motives and relationship with the brand. The operational phase should begin with observing online conversations via web monitoring to identify brand defenders. In a more technical-advanced approach, companies could also preselect potential brand defenders with text and sentiment analysis to ease the detection of brand defenders. According to our interview partners, collecting the identified brand defenders in the CRM-database for targeted relationship-measures (e.g., sending samples of new products, invitation for a tour of production sites) makes sense. An essential part of the operational CBD-management is about incentivizing brand defenders (e.g., with vouchers) as well as the interaction with brand

defenders. Hereby, the managers mentioned several possibilities: “liking” of or replying to defense comments, direct messages (e.g., personal “thank you”-message), and general brand communication (e.g., public apology after brand criticism).

As highlighted by our interview partners, the success of the CBD-management should periodically be evaluated regarding specified goals in the CBD-strategy (e.g., with predefined KPI's such as sentiments after criticism) in the *fourth step*. Subsequently, in combination with a repetition of the initial situation analysis, the controlling results should be reflected on opportunities for improvement and corresponding implications.

Study 4b: Managerial Validation of Applicability of the Brand Defender-Types

Method

As found out in study 4a, the operational CBD-management needs to know more about the drivers of CBD. In studies 2 and 3, we developed a typology of brand defenders characterized by specific drivers. One possible method to assess the validity of a cluster solution is to elicit expert opinions about the developed clusters (Ketchen Jr. and Shook 1996; Osei-Bryson 2010). In our case, we presented our results about the three defender types to practitioners at a conference in online marketing to get feedback about the applicability of our typology. Subsequent to our presentation, we had the opportunity to discuss our findings with 32 present managers ($M_{age} = 38.6$ years, male = 53.3 %) for approx. 30 minutes. Moreover, each present manager filled out a short survey with open questions. This discussion and survey allowed us to fetch their opinions about the typology and ideas about possible applications in practice. The survey comprised three sections: managerial implications for the three brand defender types regarding (1) CBD-web monitoring, (2) possibilities to foster CBD, (3) and potential brand reactions to CBD (e.g., liking a defense comment).

Results and Discussion

The managers confirmed our brand defender typology by recognizing the presented types from their daily business. More specifically, the discussions showed that mainly the brand-promoters are being observed. However, they assumed that this is because they so far did not think of other defender types. Moreover, the answers from the survey indicated that our typology could especially be relevant for web monitoring and, more specifically, the identification of brand defenders. As mentioned, the managers have primarily focused on brand-promoters so far, and they stated to keep an eye on the other two types in the future. Thus, the characteristics of the three defender types will help them classify observed defense comments (e.g., apparent compulsion to restore justice could be attributed to a justice-

promoter). In terms of fostering CBD, the managers disagreed whether it could be beneficial to incentivize certain brand defender types (e.g., vouchers or product samples for self-promoters driven by future reciprocity) and to what extent these brand defender types should actively be animated (e.g., a prompt targeted at the justice-promoters to help the brand against unjustified criticism). Moreover, the survey revealed that the typology could be interesting for content management. Depending on the targeted defender type, different brand messages may be promising (e.g., brand-history stories may be best-fitted for brand-promoters because of their interest in the brand). Interestingly, the managers mentioned that the typology offers not only actionable implications for the operative CBD-management but also for the strategy. In more detail, a reputation manager must think about their desired brand defender type and whether they want to cooperate with all of them (one manager asked the following question: “do you even want self-promoters to defend you?”) respectively if they are planning to build-up all three types. Such considerations should be reflected in the CBD-strategy and can even result in different plans per defender type.

General Discussion

The main goal of this paper was to develop a typology of brand defenders based on the main motives and the nature of the consumer-brand relationship. Study 1 demonstrated a high prevalence of CBD in the field. In more detail, almost every twentieth comment on eight Facebook-brand pages represented a defense comment. In a second study, we confirmed the existence and importance of the three motive categories (i.e., egoism, reciprocal altruism, and sense of justice) derived from the literature on prosocial behavior. We showed that some brand defenders are merely satisfied with the brand and do not exhibit a strong emotional attachment. Next, study 3 demonstrated that our five proposed drivers of CBD are significant predictors of CBD behavior (i.e., intuitive, reflective, frequency). Based on these preliminary findings, study 3 indicated that *self-promoters* are the only cluster with egoistic motives. Additionally, *brand-promoters* possess a strong brand relationship and are motivated mainly by reciprocal altruism. The third type of brand defenders, *justice-promoters*, is driven primarily by a need for justice restoration. Moreover, they have a relatively weak brand attachment, and their relationship is mainly characterized by satisfaction with the defended brand. In study 4a, we learned from marketing managers how to manage CBD in a step-by-step process. Thus, this study made clear that a profound understanding of their drivers is promising in operationally managing brand defenders. Next to the theoretically derived and empirically verified brand defender types, we also wanted to incorporate experts' insights into our brand defender types in study 4b. In that matter, they confirmed the existence of our brand defender types and gave additional ideas about managerial implications.

Theoretical Contributions

Our studies provide important insights into the drivers of CBD and thereby improve our understanding of this relatively unexplored phenomenon. More specifically, we advance our knowledge about CBD in four major areas: (1) the motivational structure of brand defenders, (2) the role of the consumer-brand relationship in driving CBD, (3) CBD as prosocial behavior, and (4) potential context factors which accompany the defense behavior.

First, by taking a more comprehensive view on the motives of brand defenders, we provide a better understanding of the phenomenon and contribute to the existing literature on CBD (e.g., Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Despite its high practical relevance, there has been little research thus far regarding this phenomenon and, in particular, the motives of brand defenders. To the best of our knowledge, the only study that examined specific motives of CBD is the conceptual paper by Colliander and Hauge Wien (2013). They suggested a sense of justice and self-enhancement as possible motives for CBD. Our study investigated a more comprehensive range of potential motives for CBD and validated these motives with both a qualitative and a quantitative study. The key implication is that brand defenders cannot be considered one type; rather, there are different motives for defending a brand, and defenders can be clustered in terms of these various motives. Further, these defender types engage in different defense behaviors. Taking all this together, our study provides an improved understanding of brand defense behavior.

Second, in addition to specific motives, we also investigate how the nature of the consumer-brand relationship can be an essential driver of CBD behavior. Thus far, the existing literature on the consumer-brand relationship of brand defenders has mainly focused on the role of strong emotional connections (e.g., Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017). The customer relationship literature has also mostly found that consumers with a strong connection to the brand engaged in defensive information processing when encountering negative information

about a brand (e.g., Ahluwalia 2002; Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2000; Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012). While we confirm that many defenders have a strong emotional bond with the defended brand, we find that this is not always the case. Our results show that also consumers who are merely satisfied with the brand can engage in CBD. Therefore, we make an essential contribution to the existing literature on CBD (Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017; Javed, Roy, and Mansoor 2015) by finding that consumers may be motivated to take a stand for the brand even when emotions and the relationship are less strong (e.g., when they perceive the criticism to be unfair).

Third, we also contribute to the literature on prosocial behavior in consumer research which has received more and more attention in recent years (White, Habib, and Dahl 2020), particularly in the area of donation behaviors (e.g., Passarelli and Buchanan 2020), ethical purchasing (e.g., Andersch et al. 2019; Zollo 2021), consumer activism (e.g., Vredenburg et al. 2020), and prosumers (Lang et al. 2021). Specifically, with our conceptualization of CBD as prosocial behavior, we advance research on prosocial behavior in consumer-brand interactions. Furthermore, our brand defender typology is based on the main motives for prosocial behavior (i.e., egoism, reciprocal altruism, and sense of justice as principled driver; e.g., Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Schroeder and Graziano 2015). Thus, we demonstrate that the main motives for prosocial behavior also apply to CBD, thereby discriminating between three different types of brand defenders. Moreover, we acknowledge and use the distinction of intuitive and reflective prosocial behavior (e.g., Carlson, Aknin, and Liotti 2016; Rand et al. 2014; Rand 2016; Rand and Epstein 2014; Rand and Kraft-Todd 2014; Zaki and Mitchell 2013) to the case of CBD and demonstrated that all of our five factors are significant predictors for either one of these two types of CBD.

Finally, our research also acknowledges that motives vary depending on situational factors (e.g., Romer, Gruder, and Lizzadro 1986; Schroeder and Graziano 2015). Therefore, we also provide initial insights into relevant context factors for CBD that have been largely

neglected so far. Specifically, we distinguish between factors that are related to the defended company and the situation. Concerning the defended company, we show that the crisis and communication management (e.g., Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Hong and Cameron 2018; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018; Scholz and Smith 2019), as well as CSR (e.g., Hur, Moon, and Kim 2020; Kim and Park 2020; Xie, Bagozzi, and Grønhaug 2019), have a potential impact on brand defenders. Hereby, our results, for example, demonstrate that a management response is not that important for all brand defenders (e.g., justice-promoters), which challenges first findings in this area (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Scholz and Smith 2019). Regarding other situational factors, we can further differentiate between factors related to the knowledge and involvement of the defenders and factors related to the criticism. From research, we know that CBD is especially apparent in high involvement contexts (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). However, our results suggest that some defenders (mostly justice-promoters) do not show high product involvement. Thus, low involvement contexts should not be neglected in the study of CBD. Because CBD gets triggered by criticism, the literature regarding negative events in marketing such as brand crisis or service failures (e.g., Khamitov, Grégoire, and Suri 2020) is strongly related. We demonstrate that context factors of this discipline, such as attribution of blame or failure severity, should also be considered when studying CBD (e.g., Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010). In this regard, we can, for example, observe that the attributed blame toward the criticized company is sometimes not as low as expected for someone who defends this brand (e.g., self-promoters).

Managerial Implications

First of all, our netnography (study 1) identified every twentieth to every tenth consumer who commented on the brand's post as a brand defender, which illustrates that CBD bears the potential of becoming a highly important resource in protecting the brand against negative publicity. Therefore, we examined the drivers of CBD (study 2) and created a typology of brand defenders (study 3). Moreover, the interviews with marketing experts (study 4a) revealed a step-by-step process of CBD-management and emphasized the importance of knowing the drivers of CBD. In addition, a focus group with marketing managers (study 4b) showed that the developed typology especially offers actionable insights for the CBD-strategy and operational CBD-management. Hence, we will first discuss the implications for the CBD-strategy aligned with the characteristics of the three defender types and, subsequently, regarding the operational implications.

CBD-Strategy

Our typology recognizes that brand defenders are a heterogeneous group and therefore require different approaches in the operational handling of these types (e.g., focusing on aspects of fairness in brand communication after criticism to evoke justice-promoters). Consequently, it seems promising to develop different strategic plans per defender type. This is in line with existing CBD-literature, which discusses the possibility of assigning consumers roles and responsibilities to resolve conflicts (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). In addition, our results indicated that intuitive and frequent brand defenders are rather driven by egoism and brand attachment. Brands should keep that in mind when elaborating their CBD-strategy. However, if a brand is interested primarily in reflective defense comments, the target levers are brand satisfaction, reciprocal altruism, and a sense of justice. Because we also studied the context factors which accompany the defense behavior of the three identified types, it is possible to get an idea under what circumstances which defender type might be more likely to stand up for the brand. On this foundation, the management can strategically specify their

efforts to build specific brand defender types for the future and in which situations they want to rely on these types.

In this respect, our results indicate that *self-promoters* are also defending in cases that are triggered by criticism with a higher perceived failure severity (e.g., functional product defect leads to injury vs. “only” bad user experience) and which is rather performance-related (vs. value-based). In some cases, they even defend brands, of which they think that they are somewhat responsible for the criticized incident. These findings highlight that the self-promoters are also helping the company in situations in which other consumers would not defend the company due to their assumed guilt. Besides that, the brand already apologized or defended itself in four of ten defense cases by self-promoters. Nevertheless, they are providing the brand with extra support and might deal as second-wave defenders for critics who are not entirely convinced about the official brand statement. In this regard, self-promoters could be integrated into crisis management as a hedging strategy when other crisis measures (i.e., brand statement) fail.

It is noteworthy that in almost 60 % of the *brand-promoters'* reported defense cases, the company did not respond to the criticism. On top of that, the defenders of this cluster are primarily defending the brand with an actual intention (i.e., giving something back and thereby helping the brand). Conclusively, brand-promoters are stepping into the breach when the company does not notice the criticism or does not want to react. Thus, these results suggest that brand-promoters may resolve conflicts that are not addressed in an official brand statement. In that manner, a pool of brand-promoters can be regarded as a sort of vaccine against criticism. That is, customer relationship management (CRM) resources can be dedicated to building them up with the expectation that they will protect the brand image in times of criticism.

Turning to *justice-promoters*, they are more likely to defend in cases where there is a lower failure severity than the two other defender types. On the other hand, the perceived CSR

of the attacked brand is not that important for these defenders. As a consequence, justice-promoters might also help companies that do not have the best reputation. Every fourth justice-promoter did not know whether the company made a statement in response to the criticism. Hence, these defenders are best suited for low-severity cases with unfair criticism regardless of many other context factors. Particular cases, which could be relevant for justice-promoters, are social movements that form to address inequality. Thus, in cases of criticism linked to such social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter), brands might be able to count on their justice-promoters (Nardini et al. 2021).

Operational CBD-Management

As we have found out in study 4a, the operational CBD-management can be divided into three actionable aspects: (1) identifying the brand defenders (types), (2) managing the brand relationship of brand defenders, and (3) incentivizing and interacting with them.

As a first step, our typology helps marketing managers to identify the different types of brand defenders. That is, it shows digital marketing managers what to look for in their *web monitoring* (e.g., not only brand-promoters) and how to classify and interpret defense comments. Regarding the self-promoters, it is essential to know that they defend most often compared to the other two clusters. Because many managers with whom we spoke about CBD only expected the brand-promoters to be defenders, the self-promoters could often be overlooked. As a consequence, this cluster may represent an unused potential for brands. Regarding their actual defense behavior, they are defending rather intuitively and are the only ones who use rather harsh defense styles like insulting, joking, and scapegoating. This means that sometimes the self-promoters are defending in a way an official brand representative would not dare because of possible negative backlashes. Concerning the brand-promoters, we know that they have utter high product involvement and knowledge. Thus, defense comments with a high level of facts are possibly related to this cluster and could even be more persuasive than sharing subjective experiences. It could also be beneficial for the brand to develop and

maintain a brand community where the company can identify possible brand defenders, increase the cooperation among the brand-promoters, and publish background stories to further improve their brand-related knowledge (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). As already discussed, the justice-promoters are often defending in low-severity and the self-promoters in higher severity cases. Hence, it may be promising for the web-monitoring efforts to classify the criticism according to severity levels to triage (i.e., determining the priorities for action) further operational measures per defender type (Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010). The actual defense behavior of the justice-promoters is characterized by efforts to justify the company's behavior, which is in line with their primary motivation of restoring justice. However, they appear to have a relatively low product involvement and knowledge self-efficacy. Therefore, the justice-promoters might have more trouble arguing with facts and rational arguments than the other two defender types. The second important defense style for them is vouching, which means that they are often providing their own positive experiences to counter the critic.

Coming to the second point of the operational CBD-management - *the relationship management of brand defenders* - we must consider three defender types' nature of brand relationship. Because the brand-promoters and the self-promoters exhibit a rather strong bond to the brand, relationship measures could be beneficial regarding future criticism (e.g., loyalty program, newsletter, birthday wishes, samples of new products, competitions). However, our results suggest that companies should also consider defenders who are merely satisfied (i.e., justice-promoters) and may even incorporate the value out of their defense activities in their calculations of the customer lifetime value. Therefore, it may be promising also selectively to invest in such equity-driven defenders via customer relationship measures.

Further, our findings of the motivational characteristics of the three brand defender types provide marketing managers key insights on potential levers to elicit CBD by *interactional measures* and *incentives*.

First, regarding the brand defender type of *self-promoters*, driven by self-enhancement and future reciprocity, it could be beneficial to enhance their sense of being valued by the company and other consumers to facilitate defense comments (Grant and Gino 2010). For example, the company could recognize their defense comments with a like or a short personalized “thank-you” comment. Support for this suggestion comes from the literature on corporate conflict management where the affirmation of defense comments is called “bolstering” (e.g., “High 5 [Name]”, using the heart emoji, praising the understanding of the defenders; Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). In a similar vein, it is also conceivable to positively influence the self-promoters by boosting their self-enhancement with direct messages that they have been identified as one of the top contributors on a social media channel (Ruvio et al. 2020). Further, self-promoters might also be activated by directly addressing opportunities to signal their status and engage in impression management within a community, such as through gamification (e.g., defense badges, level-ups resp. scores for defenders, “defender of the year”-award). However, our interviews, as well as the discussion with managers, also showed that such measures of publicly praising brand defenders should be treated with caution. Some of the managers fear that such a public encouragement to defend the brand might discredit the defense comments in the eyes of observers because such observers may think that the defenders are working for the company. One possibility to avoid such an outcome are direct personal messages (e.g., on Facebook, which are not publicly visible) to affirm the brand defender.

Because of self-promoters’ expectation of receiving a future reward, another promising avenue could be incentivizing these egoistic defenders through gifts, samples, or vouchers. In this regard, research confirms that prosocial actions can be reinforced with incentives and rewards (e.g., Clotfelter 1980). However, such economic incentives can also trigger side-effects such as eliminating other motivations (e.g., hedonic benefits, reciprocal altruism), which might be bad for the brand because consequently, the self-promoters are primed for incentives (e.g., Fehr and Rockenbach 2003; Gneezy and Rustichini 2000). Also, suppose it

becomes public that the brand is paying people to defend their brand. In that case, this might bear the risk of diminishing positive outcomes of these defense comments (e.g., no positive effect on brand attitude due to lower credibility of the comment) and for the defender him- or herself (e.g., no reputational benefit; e.g., Ariely, Bracha, and Meier 2009; Barasch, Berman, and Small 2016).

Another key motive for self-promoters was that they experience hedonic benefits from defending a brand. Thus, they might be stimulated by appealing to online discussions' entertainment value, such as by highlighting polarizing aspects of the criticism. A successful example of such a strategy can be found with McDonald's. In September 2010, a Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine criticized the company for their unhealthy food through a commercial that was later uploaded to YouTube (Physicians Committee 2010). The video showed a dead person in a mortuary with a tag on his foot with the inscription "I was lovin' it" and ended with the request 'I was lovin' it - high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart attacks, tonight make it vegetarian!' McDonald's published a link to the video on their Facebook brand page and asked their followers to share their thoughts on it. Interestingly, most of the triggered comments favored the brand and defended McDonald's (e.g., "Please - I would like to be buried with a Big Mac!").

The main characteristic of the second type of defenders, *brand-promoters*, is their central motive of reciprocal altruism. Hence, appeals to this motive could be beneficial for the brand. Specifically, brand-promoters might be activated by stressing the need for help from the perspective of the brand (e.g., "We've been there for you; could you be there for us? We could really use your help."). Such a call for assistance could induce an empathic bond with the brand, and the brand could even try to pronounce the empathic bond ("Please put yourself in our position and relate to our need for help."; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Goldman, Broll, and Carrill 1983; White and Pelozza 2009). Although the brand-promoters want to give something back to the brand with their defense comment, from their perspective, it remains

unclear to what extent their defense comment benefitted the brand. Thus, concerning future defense acts, it could be promising for brands to honor impactful defense comments. Such appreciation might enlighten the brand defender about the positive effects of defense comments by increasing the tangibility of such positive outcomes (e.g., direct message to the defender after the crisis has subsided with details about his comment such as the number of likes, responses with positive impressions; White, Habib, and Dahl 2020). In addition, providing information for possible defense comments could be promising since research states that making the prosocial behavior easy to perform can lead to better outcomes (e.g., background information in a newsletter about the fabrication process in light of criticism about alleged product quality issues; e.g., Kelting, Robinson, and Lutz 2019; White, Habib, and Dahl 2020). Another interesting approach to build up brand-promoters is to get a commitment from them to help out the brand (e.g., as part of a brand ambassador program; Kerr et al. 1997; Schroeder and Graziano 2015).

The third cluster contains the *justice-promoters* who have a satisfying relationship with the brand and defend brands they perceive to be unfairly criticized in order to restore justice. Hence, this cluster can potentially be motivated by appealing to their sense of justice (e.g., "In our opinion, this criticism is unjustified. What is your opinion on that matter?"; Allard, Dunn, and White 2020). Research on calls for prosocial behavior suggests that direct communication can call attention to the plight, increase the understanding of the situation (i.e., unfair criticism against the brand), and even favor the helpers' cooperation (Schroeder and Graziano 2015). Regarding the characteristics of the prompt for help, research states that signaling the importance and urgency for help could increase the number of people following this call for action (Christensen et al. 1998). Moreover, a request for assistance could be more effective when the requester is not the victim (here: brand) but rather a bystander (Boice and Goldman 1981). Therefore, it could be promising to engage brand defenders to spread the word that the brand is (unrightfully) criticized and needs help (e.g., "Please tag close friends in your comments to spread the word about the unfair criticism against our brand!"). However, brands

must act carefully when they approach brand defenders in such a way because of potentially harmful side-effects (e.g., tagged friends are writing negative comments because they do not want to be mentioned in this context). Another potential strategy to get defended could be to repost the brand criticism (e.g., a retweet of criticism which is formulated in a vulgar tone) to alert the justice-promoters and by framing the scenario in a way that strengthens the differences between both camps with the brand as the moral protagonist and the critics as moral antagonists (e.g., using a hashtag which is pointing the moral finger back toward the critics; Scholz and Smith 2019). Regarding a potential management response toward critics, research points out that the tone of voice can affect the justice perceptions of observers. Thus, it might be beneficial for the company to incorporate a conversational human voice (i.e., message personalization, informal speech, invitational rhetoric) compared to a corporate voice because such a conversational tone can have a positive effect on the justice perceptions and, as a consequence on the satisfaction of observers (Javornik, Filieri, and Gumann 2020). Because the justice-promoters exhibit a relatively low knowledge self-efficacy, it might be helpful to enhance their confidence in their knowledge. The brand could give feedback about their defense comment's effectiveness (e.g., a like or a response by the brand that they assess the situation same as the justice-promoter) or also address this issue in a prompt (e.g., "Every opinion matters."; Cryder, Loewenstein, and Scheines 2013; White, Habib, and Dahl 2020). Moreover, the justice-promoters are often defending by sharing positive brand experiences. Hence, a brand could stimulate the sharing of such experiences with competitions and prompts ("Please share your best experiences with our brand. We will select one who will win prize X").

Limitations and Future Research

This study makes an important contribution to the existing literature on CBD by shedding light on the motivational and brand relationship drivers of CBD as well as the situational circumstances in which it occurs. However, due to its relatively unexplored state, CBD still offers many research opportunities related to our study, which we will subsequently point out.

First, due to our cross-sectional survey design, our development of brand defender types adopts a static view on the topic of CBD. The survey-takers focused on their most apparent defense comment. Therefore, we neglected the rest of the discussion (e.g., a potential reaction on the defense comment by the company, a potential response of the critic). Therefore, a more dynamic perspective of CBD could provide additional insights (c.f., Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018). Accordingly, from research on prosocial behavior, we know that one fundamental reason why people are not helping others in need is due to the diffusion of responsibility (see also bystander effect, evaluation apprehension, pluralistic ignorance; e.g., Fischer et al. 2011). Thus, further research could examine whether less courageous brand defenders can be stimulated as soon as first consumers dare to expose themselves against the criticism or, quite the contrary if bystanders think that their help is not needed anymore after a brand defender has already defended the brand.

Second, while we investigated key drivers of CBD, it is possible that also additional factors may play a role in motivating CBD. For example, prior research examined the influence of social group memberships, a sense of belonging, and identification which can emerge in online communities (in the context of eWOM, e.g., Cheung and Lee 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; regarding customer citizenship behavior: Mandl and Högrevé 2020). As already mentioned, social movements could also play a role for CBD if the brand criticism addresses inequality in such regard (e.g., Black Lives Matter; Nardini et al. 2021). Applied to CBD, there may be contexts where the criticism against the brand is related to a social group (e.g., Beyond Meat and veganism) or is even political (e.g., New Balance and Donald Trump). Research on

prosocial behavior shows that individuals are more willing to help someone within one's social group (Levine et al. 2005; Levine and Crowther 2008). Thus, a future study could, for example, investigate whether the pool of possible brand defenders can be increased with clues about the social category (e.g., can Beyond Meat even recruit defenders who usually do not have a relationship with the brand by targeting vegans?).

Third, concerning consumer-brand relationships, it might be promising to investigate whether the bond with the brand changes after a defense comment. Depending on the perceived success of the defense act, the self-brand connection could be strengthened or weakened. By successfully helping the brand overcome criticism, some brand defenders may exhibit a stronger connection to the brand. A sense of psychological ownership (Jami, Kouchaki, and Gino 2021; Kuchmaner, Wiggins, and Grimm 2019) or also the "saying is believing effect" could drive this process (Kim et al. 2016).

Finally, it could be useful to develop a web monitoring tool to identify the three consumer brand defender types from a managerial perspective. Besides, it would be interesting to learn more about the consequences of the different defense styles outlined in this paper. For example, are brand defense comments of brand-promoters, in general, more effective than the comments of the other two brand defender types? Our results showed that brand-promoters often use the defense style of justifying. They provide fact-based arguments that convince highly involved consumers more strongly than superficial arguments (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo 1986). Or is it possible that self-promoters are a particularly valuable resource for brands because they also use rather harsh and humorous defense styles such as insults and jokes, which could persuade certain observers of the discussions (e.g., Lau-Gesk and Meyers-Levy 2009; Shin and Larson 2020). In a next step, it could be of high practical relevance to examine in which situations the brand should respond to the brand criticism and in which cases they may be more passive and let the consumers defend their brand. For example, research in crisis communication suggests that brands should respond in a highly

accommodative manner when the attributed responsibility toward the brand is high (Coombs and Holladay 2002). Thus, it would be interesting to study whether a brand can let the consumers defend it in criticized incidents with a low attribution of blame and only intervene when the brand criticism is valid.

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Appendix A

TABLE 1
Additional Measures

Constructs	Example of an Item resp. Choice	# Items / Choices	Cronbach's α	Adapted from... resp. inspired by...
Social identity threat	I defended [BRAND] because I felt personally attacked by the criticism of [BRAND].	6	.888	White, Argo, and Sengupta 2012
Product involvement	Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that the products / services of [BRAND] ought to be important to me.	5	.922	Malär et al. 2011
Product knowledge	I know a lot about [BRAND]'s products / services.	2	.911	Gürhan-Canli 2003
Knowledge self-efficacy	I was confident that I could provide information that is valuable to other consumers.	4	.811	Cheung and Lee 2012
Blame attribution	Overall, [BRAND] was responsible for the criticized incident.	3	.945	Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010
Failure severity	The criticized incident caused... little problems. – big problems.	3	.893	Grégoire and Fisher 2008
Type of failure: performance related	In my view, the criticism was due to poor product or service quality (e.g., the product was defective, a complaint was not satisfactorily resolved).	1	-	Kähr et al. 2016
Type of failure: value-based	I think [BRAND] was criticized because its behavior contradicted the personal values of the critic (or violated the critic's personal values).	1	-	
Credibility of the critic	How did you rate the credibility of the critic? (If there were several critics, please refer to the person who touched you most.) Not credible - Credible	1	-	Ohanian 1990
Management response	In what way did [BRAND] initially react to the criticism? • [BRAND] apologized.	4	-	Coombs 2007
Corporate social responsibility	[BRAND] is committed to society.	6	.866	Alvarado-Herrera et al. 2017
Awareness about defense behavior	Were you aware about the fact that you defended [BRAND] with your comment/s? Not aware at all – Well aware	1	-	Insights from the interviews with actual brand defenders
Intentionality of defense behavior	Was it your intention to defend [BRAND] with your comment/s? Not at all - Absolutely	1	-	
Frequency of CBD	How often do you generally defend brands online? Rarer than once a year – More often than once a week	1	-	Own item
Intuitive CBD	My defense comment on [BRAND] was rather emotional. My defense comment on [BRAND] was rather impulsive.	2	.838	e.g., Rand et al. 2014
Reflective CBD	My defense comment on [BRAND] was rather rational. My defense comment on [BRAND] was rather factual.	2	.736	

Paper II

Brands under Criticism!

The Power of Third-Party Brand Defense

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Brands under Criticism! The Power of Third-Party Brand Defense

Many scholars elicited the effects of brand signals (e.g., excuse) as a possible way to counter brand criticism. However, as suggested by rhetorical arena theory, one should also acknowledge third parties as potential signalers. The inclusion of such third parties allows for more realistic insights because it can be observed that, for example, also consumers are defending brands. In that regard, the question emerges to what extent such third-party signals can help a brand recover from criticism. Three experimental studies were conducted to scrutinize the effects of consumer and employee brand defense. These studies provide evidence that these two types of third-party signals manifest a valuable resource for brands in mitigating adverse effects of criticism on observers' brand perception. Besides, one study indicates that an accommodative brand signal could profit more from a simultaneous consumer brand defense signal than a defensive brand signal. Furthermore, this study implies that a brand's self-defense cannot benefit from an employee's additional defense signal. To conclude, this research takes an audience-oriented approach by examining observers' perception of signals after brand criticism and thereby provides a realistic examination by not only considering brands as signalers but rather also third parties.

Rhetorical Arena Theory, Signaling Theory, Consumer Brand Defense, Employee Brand Defense

Nowadays, brands must live with the fact that criticism is often expressed online and is thereby getting perceived by a large audience (e.g., Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley 2014). Moreover, because of the brand criticism' adverse outcomes (e.g., worse brand perception, lower turnover; e.g., Chen and Lurie 2013; Lee, Park, and Han 2008; Luo 2009; Moe and Trusov 2011; Relling et al. 2016), the proper handling of such situations can be essential. In that regard, an audience-oriented approach that considers how the observers evaluate the criticism can provide actionable insights because managers better understand how to react optimally (Schwarz 2012).

To follow this audience-oriented approach, I refer to the signaling theory, which studies bridging information asymmetries via signals (Connelly et al. 2011). Often the brand criticism's observers have less information about the criticized incident compared to the critic and the brand. Applied to this research, this means that the triggered information misbalance after brand criticism could be attenuated via signals which in this case are defense messages (Dawar 1998; Kharouf et al. 2020). Regarding such defense messages, most research endeavors about crisis and webcare communication focused on the brand as signaler and thus examined the best possible brand signal in certain situations (e.g., Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Song 2010; Li, Cui, and Peng 2018; Lyon and Cameron 2004; Marcus and Goodman 1991; Moio, Capelli, and Sabadie 2021; Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider 1998; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020). However, it is questionable if such a "one-voice" view (i.e., brand as signaler) is enough to study the effect of brand criticism on observers. When thinking about possible brand defenders apart from the brand itself, several other signalers may come to one's mind. In that regard, the rhetorical arena theory (RAT) comes into play which acknowledges the multiple voices which are getting activated in times of criticism and, consequently, introduce a rhetorical arena (Frandsen and Johansen 2016).

One such additional signaler to the brand itself can be consumers. In fact, it can be observed that companies are not alone in their quest to protect the brand against brand

criticism because some brands can count on their consumer brand defenders (CBD; e.g., Ammann et al. 2021; Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Moreover, employees as important stakeholders of the criticized brand are sometimes also getting active and defending their employer (EBD; e.g., Cravens and Oliver 2006; Frandsen and Johansen 2011; Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Flemming 2020; Miles and Mangold 2014).

Taken together, a “one-signaler” approach does not seem sufficient to study the complex rhetorical arena which emerges after brand criticism. It is more promising to acknowledge multiple signalers expressing their opinions about the brand criticism (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). Here I pick up by providing first evidence in the power of third-party defense like CBD and EBD. The according first research question is whether consumers and employees are potent signalers who can help the brand with their defense signals to mitigate brand criticism’s negative consequences in observers' eyes? This research question is getting addressed in study 1. Further, the examination of third-party defense could be more realistic by simultaneous consideration of the brand’s self-defense (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). Thus, the second research question is to what extent third-party signals (i.e., CBD and EBD) moderate the effect of the brand’s self-defense? In more detail, I consider the two most common types of brand self-defense: defensive and accommodative signals (Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Marcus and Goodman 1991). This research question is getting examined in study 2. Moreover, the RAT also acknowledges the advantages of studying context factors to gain additional insights into the best way of defending the brand (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). Therefore, this research also takes the brand’s biography into account. Especially underdog brands (i.e., competitive disadvantages but high passion for the business; Pahlia et al. 2011) with their underprivileged market position can have trouble fighting criticism (Kim, Park, and Stacey Lee 2019; Kim and Park 2020). Hence, study 3 pursues the research question which defense signal may be best suited to mitigate the brand criticism’s negative consequences for brands with an underdog or a topdog (i.e., competitive advantages but lower passion) positioning. In that matter, an accommodative brand signal and a defensive

consumer signal are being examined instead of a defensive brand signal. A defensive consumer signal might be a better option in some situations because employing defensive brand signals exhibits some risks (e.g., low trustworthiness; e.g., Kim et al. 2004; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013). To conclude, this research advances RAT by systematically exploring the power of third-party brand defense based on signaling theory.

Brand Criticism and Signaling Theory

Research shows that brand criticism (e.g., negative electronic word-of-mouth) can cause serious harm in the form of a lower turnover, unfavorable behavior of customers, or also a worse brand evaluation (e.g., Chen and Lurie 2013; Lacznia, DeCarlo, and Ramaswami 2001; Lee, Park, and Han 2008; Luo 2009; Moe and Trusov 2011; Petrescu et al. 2020; Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley 2014; Relling et al. 2016; Schlosser 2005; Sen and Lerman 2007). For the sake of this study, I refer to criticism as “the action of expressing disapproval of something or someone” (Collins English dictionary 2021). Observers who are perceiving and evaluating brand criticism are often inclined to search for explanations and causes. However, inferences about causes are not always straightforward. For example, it is sometimes hard to tell whether the criticized incident’s cause was within the brand’s control (e.g., Coombs 2007; Folkes 1988; Schwarz 2012). Actually, the neutral observers typically have less information about the criticized incident compared to, for example, the accused brand. In such situations where parties have access to different information, signaling theory can provide insights (e.g., Connelly et al. 2011; Dawar 1998; Kharouf et al. 2020). In more detail, signaling theory studies the reduction of information asymmetries via signals which refers to the “deliberate communication of positive information in an effort to convey positive organizational attributes” (Connelly et al. 2011, p. 44). Applied to the context of brand criticism, the signaler (e.g., brand) is signaling (e.g., the brand’s statement) towards receivers (observers of the brand criticism), and consequently, the signal might influence the receivers (e.g., altered attitude toward the brand; Kharouf et al. 2020). To conclude, studying different signals and signalers may help us gain insights into possibilities to overcome consumers’ information asymmetry with positive outcomes for the criticized brand.

Brand Self-Defense

After an accusation that a brand is responsible for an undesirable incident, its image is vulnerable. Consequently, the accused brand is often forced to react with image repair strategies to protect its image (Benoit 2015). Thus, the brand is defending itself to mitigate some of the brand criticism's negative consequences with their communication (e.g., reputational damage; e.g., Coombs and Holladay 2002). Indeed, brands often engage as signalers by defending themselves via communication efforts in criticism cases (Kharouf et al. 2020). For example, the brand can signal to its consumers that they are willing to take the necessary steps by detailing a potential remedial plan. Consequently, such brand responses may signal to observers the brand's degree of commitment and reduce uncertainty (Dawar 1998; Hsu and Lawrence 2016). Most of today's brand response strategies draw upon the continuum of defensive to accommodative signals. To be more concrete, *defensive signals* are characterized by a low acceptance of responsibility and putting the brand's interest first (e.g., denying that the problem exists). On the other hand, *accommodative signals* are distinguished by accepting responsibility and a high level of concern for the criticized incident (e.g., admitting that a problem exists; Bundy, Iqbal, and Pfarrer 2021; Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Marcus and Goodman 1991). Regarding the effectiveness of such signals, research on crisis and webcare communication demonstrated that under the right circumstances, strategies on both ends of the continuum can be beneficial for brands (e.g., Bundy, Iqbal, and Pfarrer 2021; Kim et al. 2004; Lee and Song 2010; Li, Cui, and Peng 2018; Lyon and Cameron 2004; Moisisio, Capelli, and Sabadie 2021; Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider 1998; Surachartkumtonkun, Grace, and Ross 2021; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020).

Rhetorical Arena Theory (RAT)

Most past research endeavors in crisis and webcare communication focused on signals by the brand itself, which can be summarized under the term "*brand self-defense*." However, with the rise of Social Media, more and more stakeholders publicly express their opinions concerning the criticism against "their" brand. For instance, competing companies can face the same criticism and with their way of handling the crisis, they may influence the competitor's response (Ham, Hong, and Cameron 2012). In other cases, companies may even work together in their crisis response strategies (Sellnow, Veil, and Streifel 2010). In this regard, the rhetorical arena theory (RAT) was developed, recognizing the multiple voices in crises. Oftentimes, brand criticism can start discussions among numerous stakeholders and, thus, open a new rhetorical arena (Frandsen and Johansen 2016, 2018). Some of the involved stakeholders in such rhetorical arenas comprise the media outlets reporting on the brand criticism (or in some cases even start it), consumers and employees expressing their opinions, and the management who is engaged in appropriately responding to this criticism. By acknowledging these multiple signalers and studying interactions among them, potential new insights can be elaborated for the practice (Frandsen and Johansen 2016).

Taken together, not only can the brand signal to the brand criticism's observers but rather also additional signalers. This research's focus lies on the power of other signalers apart from the brand as damage-controlling voices. This research concentrates on employees and consumers helping the brand with supportive behavior as a response to brand criticism which may be perceived as a positive signal. Previous research observed that sometimes a party not involved in the reputation-damaging act defends the criticized party, leading to third-party image repairs (Benoit 2015).

Consumer Brand Defense Effect

Concerning the consumers as an additional signaler in the rhetorical arena, the phenomenon of consumer brand defense (CBD) is of relevance. CBD refers to consumers who respond to particular criticism against a brand with replies that can be perceived as supportive of the criticized brand by observers (Ammann et al. 2021). Studies about CBD demonstrate the prevalence of such defense behavior by consumers in Facebook brand pages (Ammann et al. 2021; Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018; Johansen, Johansen, and Weckesser 2016), on Twitter (Brown and Billings 2013; Scholz and Smith 2019), and in online forums (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013).

Regarding the effect of consumers' defense acts, signaling theory demonstrates that consumers are often also signalers and that their signals, such as positive online reviews, can be powerful (Cheung, Xiao, and Liu 2014; Ho-Dac, Carson, and Moore 2013). Accordingly, I propose that in the eyes of observers, CBD manifests a powerful signal which can help the brand after criticism due to various positive effects on observers' brand perception. In that sense, first evidence indicates that CBD benefits brands, such as a lower attribution of responsibility, resulting in a better brand reputation (Hong and Cameron 2018; Jahn 2014). Moreover, consumer brand defense comments can sometimes also increase favorable brand-related outcomes (e.g., higher attitude toward the brand) or even mitigate unfavorable outcomes (e.g., intention to speak badly about the brand) among observers (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). In a similar vein, one study demonstrates that consumers' positive responses to negative online reviews can be more beneficial for the brand than the company's responses (Esmark Jones et al. 2018). Thus, I suggest that

H1: *CBD mitigates negative consequences of brand criticism on observers' brand relationship and behavioral intentions.*

Employee Brand Defense Effect

Although employees' role as brand defenders is almost unexplored, it is conceivable that employees can help their employer with defensive acts as a response to brand criticism. Often employees have to disclose themselves when posting something about their employer's brand (e.g., because of binding social media guidelines; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Thus, it is apparent for observers that an employee rather than a "regular" consumer is defending the brand. Furthermore, employees occupy a unique role in times of brand criticism because they have a legal relationship with the criticized company. In addition, they are getting paid in exchange for their workforce (Frandsen and Johansen 2011). Also, they usually exhibit a strong identification with their employer (Mael and Ashforth 1992), and consequently, they may experience a sense of obligation to defend the brand from attacks. Thus, employees are not only receivers of the brand's self-defense efforts, but besides they may even be receptive to help their employer by also engaging in some defense signaling (Cravens and Oliver 2006; Frandsen and Johansen 2011, 2016; Hansen, Kupfer, and Hennig-Thurau 2018; Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Flemming 2020; Mazzei, Kim, and Dell'Oro 2012; Miles and Mangold 2014). Taken together, it seems apparent that EBD is a promising resource for brands.

Following the definition of CBD (Ammann et al. 2021), I refer to employee brand defenders as consumers who respond to particular criticism against their employer's brand with replies, which can be perceived as supportive for the criticized brand by observers. By contrast to CBD, employee brand defenders must identify themselves as the criticized brand's employees because otherwise, they are consumer brand defenders in the public perception. Further, I do not discriminate between EBD, grounded on a formal initiative (e.g., brand ambassador program) and EBD, which occurs out of free will (cf. Frandsen and Johansen 2016; Schmidt and Baumgarth 2018) because, for neutral observers, this distinction is probably challenging to recognize.

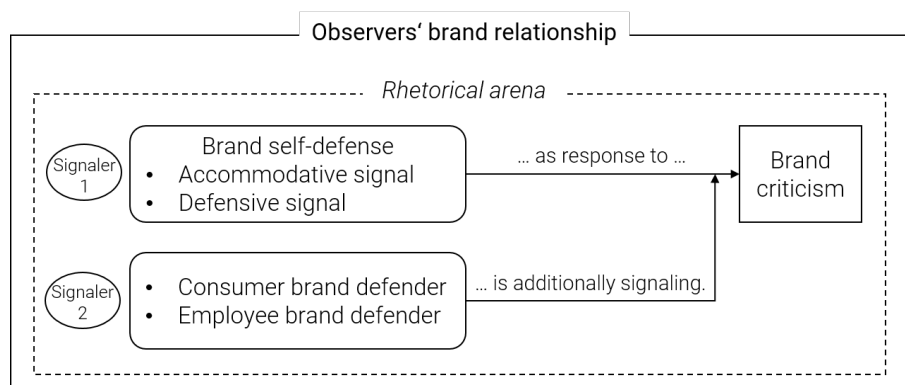
Regarding the effect of EBD, I propose that likewise to CBD, employees' defense acts can help the brand restore damaged observers-brand relationships after criticism. Drawing on the signaling theory, employees with insider knowledge can be valuable signalers (e.g., Karanges et al. 2018). Accordingly, an employee's vouching for his employer in the face of brand criticism can probably pose a strong signal to the observers. In that matter, research demonstrates that approval by a third-party represents a strong signal (Mavlanova, Benbunan-Fich, and Lang 2016) and that employees can positively impact the resolution of service failures (see van Vaerenbergh et al. 2019 for a meta-study) or also negative online reviews (Esmark Jones et al. 2018; Könsgen et al. 2018). In fact, first research also suggests that employees' defense may mitigate negative consequences of criticism (Opitz, Chaudhri, and Wang 2018; Lee 2019). To conclude, I hypothesize that

H2: *EBD mitigates negative consequences of brand criticism on observers' brand relationship and behavioral intentions.*

Brand's Self-Defense and the Moderating Role of Third-Party Defense

Next to the main effects of EBD and CBD, which are being addressed in study 1, the question arises of how the brand's self-defense interacts with these two third-party defense effects. As already discussed, brand responses to criticism can range on a continuum from defensive to accommodative signals (e.g., Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Marcus and Goodman 1991). Further, signals from both ends can be beneficial for brands in fighting criticism (e.g., Kim et al. 2004; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020). RAT suggests that studying interactions between multiple signalers could be more realistic and, therefore, provide actionable insights (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). *Figure 1* represents the rhetorical arena that is getting examined in study 2.

FIGURE 1
Rhetorical Arena with Two Signalers



Research on positive word-of-mouth and online reviews suggests that a higher number of positive messages (in my case: defense comments) results in a stronger positive effect on observers' brand attitude (Chen, Wu, and Yoon 2004; Park and Kim 2008; Tsao et al. 2015; Zhu and Zhang 2010). In a similar vein, a study found an attitude polarization effect in the domain of service recoveries. More specifically, participants who not only read a brand message about a successful recovery (i.e., delay in order resolved) but also a defense comment by a

consumer reported higher satisfaction and purchase intention compared to consumers who only saw the brand response (Schaefers and Schamari 2016). Applied to my rhetorical arena, one might assume that more than one defense comment accumulates a more substantial defense effect. However, the question arises if a simultaneous observation of brand self-defense and third-party defense leads to an even bigger positive effect than the sum of these two single effects? This could turn out to be true if these two types of defenses complement each other well.

One disadvantage of *defensive brand signals* is that they sometimes tend to be perceived as less trustworthy or even disrespectful. Thus, observers are not always persuaded by brand's claims that they supposedly had nothing to do with the criticized incident or that even another party is to blame (Chang et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2004; Lee and Song 2010; Marcus and Goodman 1991; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013). Actually, low message credibility may reduce the effectiveness of defensive brand signals because credibility is an essential indicator for observers' evaluation of messages (e.g., Metzger, Flanagin, and Medders 2010; Pornpitakpan 2004; Seeger 2006; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017) and signals (e.g., Boulding and Kirmani 1993; Dawar 1998; Erdem and Swait 1998; Kharouf et al. 2020; Rao, Qu, and Ruekert 1999). Because this defensive brand signal may be perceived as biased, it could profit from an additional third-party signal. In that matter, CBD and EBD can come into play and may enhance defensive brand signals' credibility. Research in (electronic) word-of-mouth suggests that statements that are dissociated from official marketer's communication (e.g., consumers' or employees' private communication) often appear to be more credible and unbiased in the eyes of observers (e.g., Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins 2007; Bickart and Schindler 2001; Cheong and Morrison 2008; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Hung and Li 2007; Kozinets et al. 2010; Senecal and Nantel 2004). From a signaling perspective, an additional defense signal from a consumer or employee could reduce uncertainty and, consequently, valorize the brand's signaling credibility (Dawar 1998; Ho-Dac, Carson, and Moore 2013). Taken together, I assume that

H3a: The effect of a defensive brand signal plus the effect of a third-party signal (i.e., CBD or EBD) are positively interacting with each other. Thus, the accumulated effect in mitigating negative consequences of brand criticism on observers' brand relationship is significantly higher than the sum of the two single effects.

Further, it is conceivable that the two signalers' joint-effect (i.e., brand and third-party) is lower than the sum of the two single defense effects due to some wear-out mechanism. First research suggests that *accommodative brand signals* convey higher credibility and sincerity among observers than defensive signals (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013). Hence, an additional third-party defense signal might not be as necessary to enhance the signal's credibility. Besides, accommodative brand signals, which are generally characterized by accepting responsibility and often also encompass an apology, compensation of losses, or a remedial plan, already convey a comprehensive picture about the criticized incident and the brand's next steps (e.g., Bundy, Iqbal, and Pfarrer 2021; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Song 2010; Marcus and Goodman 1991; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). As already described, signals are particularly useful in situations characterized by asymmetric information (e.g., Connelly et al. 2011; Dawar 1998; Erdem and Swait 1998). In the case of brand criticism, observers often do not have the same background information as the critic or the criticized brand. However, after an accommodative brand signal, this information asymmetry is already strongly alleviated. Therefore, I assume that the additional third-party signal (i.e., CBD or EBD) generates no amplifying effect. Due to the acceptance of responsibility and the subsequent higher perceived appropriateness and credibility of such accommodative signals compared to defensive ones, the consumers might also have less reason to scrutinize the brand's signal (Chang et al. 2015; Lee and Song 2010; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013). Compared to defensive signals, this type of signal is also stronger because accommodation is generally associated with higher occurring costs for the brand (Kharouf et al. 2020). Taken together, if someone has already read the official accommodative brand response, a subsequent third-party defense signal might not help the brand as much as a stand-alone third-party defense.

Hence, an accommodative brand signal may be enough to close the case in observers' perception and for them to move on. Therefore, I propose that

H3b: *The effect of an accommodative brand signal plus the effect of a third-party signal (i.e., CBD or EBD) are negatively interacting with each other. Thus, the accumulated effect in mitigating negative consequences of brand criticism on observers' brand relationship is significantly lower than the sum of the two single effects.*

Study 1 – Third-Party Brand Defense

Method

The purpose of study 1 was to test hypotheses 1 and 2, which state that consumers' and employees' defense comments should mitigate negative consequences of brand criticism in terms of observers' brand relationship and behavioral intentions. For this endeavor, I conducted an online three-factorial between-subjects experiment (brand criticism without defense vs. CBD after criticism vs. EBD after criticism). In total, 228 people were recruited via the crowdsourcing platform Clickworker, of whom five people were screened out during the survey because they failed to answer one of the attention checks correctly (e.g., "Please select 'I barely paid attention' from the list below."). To further ensure that the survey-takers were reading the scenarios, they were informed that the button to proceed would appear only after a certain time. Ultimately, the final sample consisted of 223 participants (37.7 % female, $M_{age} = 37.0$ years).

The survey-takers first read a short description of the German insurance company Allianz. Next, they were confronted with a consumer's criticism against this brand adapted from comments of the review website trustpilot.com. More specifically, the consumer criticized the insurance company because he must pay higher premiums after damaging another car while parking. Moreover, he is infuriated by how the customer support treated him and that the company is supposedly investing a vast amount in the oil business. Afterward, people who were randomly assigned to the CBD condition saw a consumer's defense comment. This defense comment was inspired by CBD's definition of being perceived as supportive for the criticized brand by observers (Ammann et al. 2021). Accordingly, the defender wrote that in many years with Allianz, he never had any problems, that the company has been CO₂-neutral since 2012, and he even referred to independent test results. Concerning the EBD condition, the arguments remained the same. However, in this condition, the defender wrote that he is a longtime employee (vs. longtime customer in the CBD condition; see *Table 1*

in *Appendix A* for all scenarios). Participants in the control condition who only saw the brand criticism were directly forwarded to the rest of the survey. After some filler questions, the survey-takers answered the dependent variables, manipulation checks, controls, demographics (i.e., age, gender) and were finally directed to a debriefing.

All scales were measured with 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 = “completely agree” if not stated otherwise (see *Table 2* in *Appendix A* for all items and Cronbach’s alpha). Regarding the dependent variables, the first one was about observers’ attitude toward the brand, representing a somewhat enduring internal state that results from a summary evaluation of the brand (four bipolar items, e.g., “bad - good”; Spears and Singh 2004). In situations of uncertainty like after brand criticism, observers’ brand trust can be an insightful variable. It encompasses consumers’ feelings that they can rely on the brand based on beliefs about the brand’s safety and honesty (e.g., Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Doney and Cannon 1997; Morgan and Hunt 1994). In the survey, brand trust was operationalized with five items, such as “Allianz is an honest brand” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Koschate-Fischer and Gartner 2015). For the context of brand criticism with a relating third-party defense, consumer brand forgiveness is another essential DV. It can be understood as the extent to which consumers are willing to give up destructive behaviors and instead respond more constructively after evaluating the whole incident (Christodoulides, Gerrath, and Siamagka 2021; Finkel et al. 2002; Xie and Peng 2009). In that regard, participants answered a three-item scale to assess to which extent they intended to forgive the brand (e.g., “Given what I have read, I would forgive Allianz.”; Kim, Park, and Stacey Lee 2019). Lastly, to elicit whether the third-party defense also affected consumers’ intention to buy the brand, participants completed a three-item scale about their purchase intention (e.g., “I could imagine to take out an insurance policy with Allianz.”; Grappi, Romani, and Bagozzi 2015; Kozup, Creyer, and Burton 2003). Also, I included five single items to verify that the manipulations worked as intended. Of the three first items, each was dedicated to one experimental condition. To be more concrete, these three items stated that a longtime Allianz customer (vs. item 2

“employee” vs. item 3 “neither an employee nor a customer”) wrote a defense comment as a response to the brand criticism. The fourth item stated that the company officially responded to the brand criticism and the fifth item that Allianz was not criticized. Regarding control variables, participants reported their product involvement (with insurances; five items; Malär et al. 2011) and their attitude toward insurance companies (one bipolar item: “I do not like them at all.” – “I like them very much.”) because of the influential role of issue involvement in persuasive communication (Petty and Cacioppo 1979). Moreover, to rule out that consumers’ experiences with the brand biased the results, two items examined the participant’s awareness with Allianz (Yoo and Donthu 2001), and one question was about whether they are customers of this company (dichotomous: “yes” or “no”).

Results

Manipulation Checks

To verify whether the three manipulations worked as intended, five items were tested for significant differences. A first one-way ANOVA showed that the groups significantly differed regarding the item whether a longtime customer wrote a defense comment ($F(2,220) = 184.95$, $p < .001$). In more detail, the CBD group achieved a significant higher mean ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 1.34$) compared to the other two groups ($M_{EBD} = 1.93$, $SD_{EBD} = 1.86$; $M_{control} = 1.89$, $SD_{control} = 1.60$) according to the Tukey post-hoc test. A second ANOVA revealed significant differences between the three groups for the item that a longtime employee wrote a defense comment as a response to the brand criticism ($F(2,220) = 303.84$, $p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey test further demonstrated that the EBD group ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 1.06$) scored significantly higher than the two other groups ($M_{CBD} = 1.77$, $SD_{CBD} = 1.59$; $M_{control} = 1.66$, $SD_{control} = 1.32$). Concerning the item that neither a customer nor an employee wrote a defense comment, a Welch test revealed significant differences ($F(2,143.54) = 139.50$, $p < .001$). More specifically, Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons highlighted that for this item the control group showed a significant higher mean ($M_{control} = 5.86$, $SD_{control} = 1.86$) than the other two groups ($M_{CBD} = 1.91$,

$SD_{CBD} = 1.80$; $M_{EBD} = 1.57$, $SD_{EBD} = 1.36$). For the last two items, no significant differences between the groups were found. All mean values were rather low for the item that the company responded to the brand criticism ($M_{control} = 1.69$; $M_{CBD} = 1.40$; $M_{EBD} = 1.73$) as well as for the item that the company was not criticized ($M_{control} = 1.61$; $M_{CBD} = 1.85$; $M_{EBD} = 1.72$). To conclude, the three manipulations worked as intended, and the EBD group did not confuse the employee's reaction with an official brand response. In addition, all three groups perceived the brand criticism.

Main Effect of Defense Comments

A one-way MANOVA was conducted to examine consumer and employee brand defense's effects on observers' brand attitude, brand trust, purchase intention, and forgiveness intention compared to the control group who only saw the brand criticism. Before the actual analysis, one observation had to be excluded because Mahalanobi's distance measure indicated that this data point was an outlier (Filzmoser and Gregorich 2020; Mahalanobis 1936). In fact, there was a statistical significant difference of defense comments after brand criticism on the dependent variables, Pillai's trace statistic $V = .11$, $F(8,434) = 3.09$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. *Table 1* displays the means and standard deviations for each dependent variable per condition.

Planned contrasts demonstrated that a consumer brand defense comment led to a significantly higher brand attitude ($p < .001$), brand trust ($p < .05$), purchase intention ($p < .01$), and consumer forgiveness ($p < .01$) compared to the control group (i.e., brand criticism only). Moreover, a defense comment by an employee also resulted in a significantly higher brand attitude ($p = .001$), brand trust ($p < .05$), purchase intention ($p < .05$), and consumer forgiveness ($p = .001$) compared to the control group. In addition, post-hoc comparisons between the CBD and the EBD condition revealed no significant differences in the four dependent variables.

Results did not change after including the control variables (see *Tables 3 and 4, Appendix A*).

Brand awareness and attitude toward insurance companies significantly influenced the dependent variables of the six considered covariates.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics per Condition for each DV

	Control (n = 74)	CBD (n = 75)	EBD (n = 73)
Brand attitude	<i>M</i> = 3.62, <i>SD</i> = 1.25	<i>M</i> = 4.43, <i>SD</i> = 1.40	<i>M</i> = 4.29, <i>SD</i> = 1.00
Brand trust	<i>M</i> = 3.67, <i>SD</i> = 1.38	<i>M</i> = 4.18, <i>SD</i> = 1.33	<i>M</i> = 4.16, <i>SD</i> = 1.12
Purchase intention	<i>M</i> = 3.06, <i>SD</i> = 1.49	<i>M</i> = 3.72, <i>SD</i> = 1.53	<i>M</i> = 3.58, <i>SD</i> = 1.27
Consumer forgiveness	<i>M</i> = 3.17, <i>SD</i> = 1.18	<i>M</i> = 3.79, <i>SD</i> = 1.48	<i>M</i> = 3.90, <i>SD</i> = 1.09

Discussion

Consistent with my hypothesis 1, this study provides evidence for the existence of a CBD effect. These results agree with previous research, suggesting that consumers' brand defense can help brands in times of brand criticism (e.g., Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). In line with hypothesis 2, this study implies that employee brand defense has a positive effect in lessening the negative consequences of brand criticism. Hence, these findings contribute to the existing literature that assumes that employees could be potential brand defenders by highlighting that their defense activities are valuable in fighting criticism (e.g., Frandsen and Johansen 2016). Interestingly, the study indicates that CBD and EBD can help in multiple ways. The defense comments can positively influence different beneficial brand-related outcomes (i.e., brand attitude, brand trust, consumers' brand forgiveness intention, purchase intention).

Study 2 – Brand Self-Defense and the Moderating Effect of Third-Party Brand Defense

The following study dealt with the moderating role of third-party defense (i.e., CBD and EBD) on brand self-defense (i.e., accommodative vs. defensive). As discussed, it is more realistic to examine more than one signaler in times of brand criticism. Hence, to answer my hypotheses 3a and 3b, this study also considers the brand's official signal.

Method

For this purpose, an online experiment was employed with a three (no brand self-defense vs. defensive brand signal vs. accommodative brand signal) x three (no third-party defense vs. consumer brand defense vs. employee brand defense) between-subjects design. The final sample of 338 people (43.5 % female, $M_{age} = 34.8$ years) consisted of 257 participants recruited via the crowdsourcing platform Clickworker and additional 81 participants recruited by a research assistant. Out of 414 people in total, 76 (18.4 %) were excluded because their answers to attention checks (e.g., "This survey deals with the brand...") were wrong or because the measured time they spent reading the experimental scenarios indicated that they were not attentive enough (Aguinis, Villamor, and Ramani 2021).

Participants first read a short description of the Swiss bank Credit Suisse. Subsequently to the brand's introduction, a consumer's brand criticism was displayed based on actual incidents (e.g., Ammann 2020; SRF DOK 2020). To be more concrete, the survey-takers were confronted with a comment which stated that since the Paris climate protection agreement, the bank financed the coal mining industry with about 2 billion Swiss Francs by credits and intermediations on the capital market. Moreover, the critic also mentioned that he was not informed that after the 12th transaction, each cash withdrawal from the savings account costs 10 Swiss Francs. Following the brand criticism, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the nine experimental conditions. The two brand signal scenarios were inspired by existing definitions (Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Marcus and

Goodman 1991). Accordingly, the defensive brand signal was characterized by a low acceptance of responsibility (e.g., “We have a completely different opinion [...]”, “[...] everyone should bear their own responsibility!”, “[...] and therefore we do not seem to be at fault in this case [transaction costs] either.”). In contrast, the accommodative signal admitted the existence of problems and additionally comprised an excuse (e.g., “[...] would like to apologize at this point.”, “It is absolutely true that we still have a lot of upside potential in these areas, [...]”). In the control group, the participants were informed that Credit Suisse did not respond to this criticism. The CBD and EBD conditions were similarly designed as in study 1. Hence, the longtime consumer (i.e., CBD) or employee (i.e., EBD) defended the brand in a comment with multiple arguments (e.g., changes need time, investments in the coal sector are declining, they assume social responsibility by making thousands of employees available for charitable projects every year; see *Table 1* in *Appendix B* for all scenarios). After questions about the dependent variable, manipulation checks, controls, and demographics (i.e., age, gender), the survey ended with a debriefing.

All scales were measured with 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 = “completely agree” if not stated otherwise (see *Table 2* in *Appendix B* for all items and Cronbach’s alpha). The dependent variable was consumers’ attitude toward the brand, widely used in studies of related fields (e.g., Esmark Jones et al. 2018; Surachartkumtonkun, Grace, and Ross 2021; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). In more detail, the participants were asked how they felt about Credit Suisse with four bipolar items (e.g., “bad” – “good”; Spears and Singh 2004). Besides, three items were used to gauge the perceived defensiveness (e.g., “Credit Suisse denies that they made a mistake.”) and four items regarding the perceived accommodation of the brand signals (e.g., “Credit Suisse admits that they made a mistake.”). Moreover, one single item elicited whether the participants noticed that the brand made a statement in response to the brand criticism. Concerning the manipulation checks of third-party defense, two single items from study 1 were used (i.e., defended by a longtime customer / employee). Further, the survey-takers answered the same control variables as in

study 1 (i.e., product involvement, attitude toward banks, brand awareness, customer of the bank).

Results

Manipulation Checks

First, an independent-samples t-test demonstrated that the group who saw the defensive brand response ($M = 5.47, SD = 1.29$) achieved a significant higher mean than the group with the accommodative brand response ($M = 2.47, SD = 1.25$) regarding the defensive brand response measurement, $t(220) = 17.59, SE = .17, p < .001$. Second, the accommodative group ($M = 5.40, SD = 1.08$) showed a significant higher mean for the accommodative manipulation check compared to the defensive group ($M = 2.00, SD = 1.04$), $t(220) = 23.85, SE = .14, p < .001$. Third, a one-way ANOVA detected significant differences regarding the single-item that the brand responded to the brand criticism with a statement, *Welch's* $F(2,209.13) = 347.83, p < .001$. In more detail, Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons showed that the control group ($M = 1.45, SD = 1.14$) had a significant lower mean than the defensive group ($M = 5.62, SD = 1.77$) and the accommodative group ($M = 5.76, SD = 1.61$). Taken together, the manipulations of brand's self-defense appeared to have worked.

Coming to the third-party brand defense, a one-way ANOVA found significant differences for the item measuring whether a consumer wrote a defensive comment as a response to the brand criticism, $F(2,319) = 219.79, p < .001$. Post-hoc comparisons using Tukey test further demonstrated that the CBD group ($M = 5.80, SD = 1.67$) scored significantly higher than the two other groups ($M_{control} = 1.73, SD_{control} = 1.39; M_{EBD} = 1.98, SD_{EBD} = 1.69$). An additional ANOVA revealed significant differences between the three groups pertaining to whether an employee defended the brand, *Welch's* $F(2,206.89) = 222.65, p < .001$. Subsequent Games-Howell comparisons showed that the EBD group achieved a higher mean for this item ($M = 6.11, SD = 1.23$) than the CBD ($M = 2.37, SD = 1.81$) and control group ($M = 2.43, SD = 1.93$). Finally, no significant mean differences were found concerning the already used item

that the brand responded to the brand criticism, $F(2,319) = .28, p = .76$. To conclude, the third-party defense manipulations also seemed to be successful.

My two independent variables' manipulations are quite similar because both deal with some sort of defense signal, and the main distinction is the issuer (i.e., brand, consumer, employee). Due to that reason, the manipulations were additionally verified by accounting for the effect of both independent variables simultaneously (i.e., brand self-defense and third-party defense; Perdue and Summers 1986). To be more concrete, moderation analysis using ordinary least squares path analysis with PROCESS model 1 was conducted to probe the interactions and test for significant mean differences (Hayes 2018). These results also suggest that the manipulations worked as intended and can be found in *Table 3 of Appendix B*.

Moderating Effect of Third-Party Defense

To test hypotheses 3a and 3b, I conducted a moderation analysis with PROCESS model 1 (Hayes 2018). In more detail, a two-way interaction between the multicategorical variable brand self-defense (0 = no brand self-defense, 1 = defensive brand signal, 2 = accommodative brand signal) and the multicategorical variable third-party defense (0 = no third-party defense, 1 = CBD, 2 = EBD) was being calculated. To examine differences between the different types of defenses against the control groups, dummy-coding was applied (i.e., x_1 = no brand self-defense vs. defensive brand signal, x_2 = no brand self-defense vs. accommodative brand signal; w_1 = no third-party defense vs. CBD, w_2 = no third-party defense vs. EBD).

First, a test of significance for the change in R^2 in the regression model was examined which revealed that the effect of brand self-defense on brand attitude is dependent on the effect of third-party brand defense ($\Delta R^2 = .03, F(4, 329) = 2.95, p < .05$). Next, an analysis of the four simple effects revealed that the defensive brand signal ($B = .59, SE = .29, t(329) = 2.06, p < .05$), accommodative brand signal ($B = 1.02, SE = .30, t(329) = 3.36, p < .001$), CBD ($B = .82, SE = .29, t(329) = 2.80, p < .01$), as well as EBD ($B = .65, SE = .30, t(329) = 2.16, p < .05$) all showed significant positive effects on consumers' brand attitude. Further, when taking interaction

effects into account the results suggest that a defensive brand signal paired with CBD significantly decreases the effect of the totaled two respective simple effects ($B = -1.12$, $SE = .42$, $t(329) = -2.69$, $p < .01$). The same holds true for the interaction between the accommodative brand signal and EBD ($B = -1.14$, $SE = .43$, $t(329) = -2.67$, $p < .01$). Moreover, the two other interactions reveal marginally significant negative effects (defensive and EBD: $B = -.83$, $SE = .42$, $t(329) = -1.95$, $p = .05$; accommodative and CBD: $B = -.76$, $SE = .42$, $t(329) = -1.79$, $p = .07$). Taken together, it seems that the brand self-defense effects in conjunction with the third-party brand defense effects exhibit negative interaction effects.

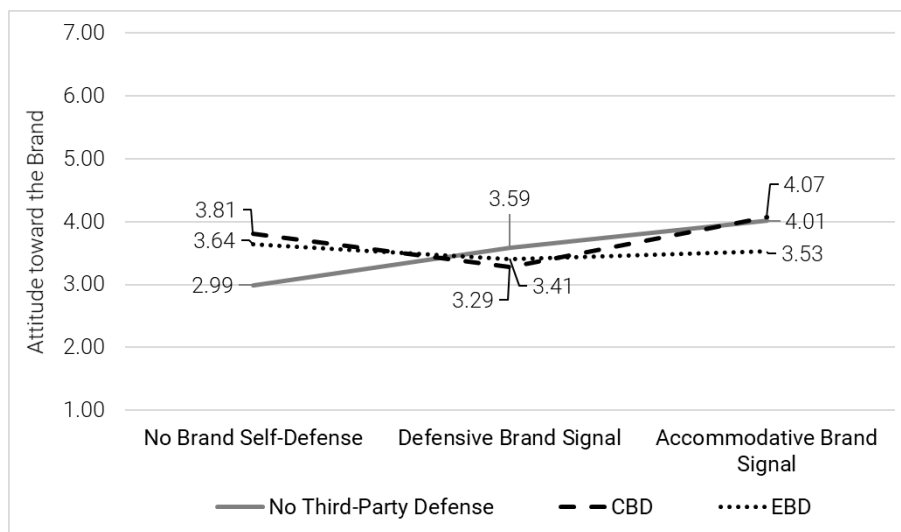
To better understand these interactions *Figure 2* displays all the mean values which were in a next step further probed. As already described in the section about the simple effects, in cases without third party defense (i.e., no CBD or EBD) a defensive brand signal and also an accommodative brand signal had a significant positive effect. If a consumer was additionally defending the brand (i.e., in the cases with an additional CBD) the defensive brand signal showed a marginally significant negative effect on observers' brand attitude (*conditional effect* = $-.52$, $SE = .30$, $t(329) = -1.76$, $p = .08$). In contrast, the effect of an accommodative brand response together with CBD was not significant (*conditional effect* = $.26$, $SE = .29$, $t(329) = .90$, $p = .37$). Regarding the effectiveness of brand signals with a simultaneous EBD, the defensive signal (*conditional effect* = $-.23$, $SE = .31$, $t(329) = -.75$, $p = .45$) as well as the accommodative signal (*conditional effect* = $-.12$, $SE = .30$, $t(329) = -.39$, $p = .70$) both showed no significant effects.

Further, a supplementary moderation analysis with Helmert coding for the IV brand self-defense was conducted. This served the purpose to compare the effects of the defensive and accommodative brand signal. Without an additional third-party defense the effects of the two brand signals did not significantly differ (*conditional effect* = $.43$, $SE = .30$, $t(329) = 1.45$, $p = .15$). Moreover, this analysis revealed that observers' brand attitude was significantly higher for the accommodative group ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.31$) compared to the mean of the defensive group

($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.30$) for cases with CBD (*conditional effect* = .79, $SE = .31$, $t(329) = 2.58$, $p < .05$). In regard to the groups who also saw EBD, no statistical difference between the defensive and accommodative condition was found (*conditional effect* = .12, $SE = .31$, $t(329) = .38$, $p = .70$).

FIGURE 2

The Effect of Brand's Self-Defense considering Third-Party Brand Defense



Furthermore, these presented results were slightly impacted by the inclusion of the control variables (see *Table 4* and *Table 5* in *Appendix B*; i.e., product involvement, attitude toward banks, brand awareness, customer of Credit Suisse, gender, age). Out of the controls, the involvement with banking services, the attitude toward banks, and the gender exerted significant influence on observer's brand attitude. One noteworthy difference in this model is that for the group who saw the additional consumer brand defense comment the interaction with the accommodative brand signal was no longer significant ($B = -.31$, $SE = .33$, $t(323) = -.94$, $p = .349$). In addition, a marginally significant positive conditional effect of an accommodative brand signal (compared to a negative effect of a defensive brand signal in the

model without controls) was detected for the CBD condition (*conditional effect* = .41, *SE* = .23, $t(323) = 1.77, p = .08$).

Discussion

First, the results regarding the simple effects of CBD and EBD replicate the findings from study 1 by demonstrating that both types of third-party defense can positively impact the observer's brand attitude after brand criticism. Moreover, this study shows that the simple effects of the defensive and accommodative brand signals are positive. Thus, brand self-defense can also be beneficial for the brand in fighting criticism. This finding is in line with the previous literature about webcare communication, which demonstrates that both types of brand signals can reduce the negative impact of negative eWOM (e.g., online complaints, negative online reviews; e.g., Chang et al. 2015; Lee and Song 2010; Li, Cui, and Peng 2018; Moisisio, Capelli, and Sabadie 2021; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020).

Secondly, the detected interaction effects suggest that the positive impact of the brand's self-defense and third-party defense is not accumulating and amplifying each other. Detached from the brand signal's type two signals together do not seem to be more effective compared to the totaled two signals' single effects. This finding is quite surprising because, in hypothesis 3a, I assumed that a defensive brand signal could benefit from consumers' and employees' higher signaler credibility. However, it could be that the presence of an additional signaler activated some suspicion among the observers. A defensive brand signal is sometimes perceived as less trustworthy (Chang et al. 2015; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013). When a second signaler is defending the brand, some consumers might be alerted because they notice the brand's persuasion attempt in a more obvious way. Similarly, one study shows that social media influencers' inclusion in crisis communication can backfire because observers may realize that the brand is pursuing a manipulative intent (Singh et al. 2020). Applied to my context, I guess that the defensive brand signal does not benefit from the third-party signal due to increased suspicion and, consequently, an increased elicited

psychological reactance (Miller, Massey, and Ma 2020). Regarding the accommodative brand signal, the results confirm my hypothesis 3b and emphasize that a third-party defense does not appear to accumulate and boost the positive effect of accommodative brand self-defense. As outlined, one possible explanation could be that after the brand already admitted and accepted its responsibility, the “case is closed” for most observers (e.g., Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Song 2010; Marcus and Goodman 1991; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). Furthermore, such an accommodative brand signal already represents a costly and strong signal (Connelly et al. 2011; Kharouf et al. 2020).

Thirdly, a more in-depth examination of the results indicates that accommodative brand signals seem to be more effective than defensive signals in cases with CBD. This is also illustrated by the fact that the interaction between the accommodative signal and CBD was no longer significantly negative in the model, including the control variables. Hence, this combination of signals could even be similarly potent as the two single effects combined. Because consumers usually cannot accept the responsibility on the brand’s behalf officially, they are defending with other arguments compared to the accommodative brand signal. Thus, it might be the case that the accommodative (vs. defensive) brand signal and the consumer signal complement each other better, resulting in an even stronger signal (Kharouf et al. 2020). Interestingly, it makes no noticeable difference whether an employee is additionally defending the brand or not. This circumstance could relate to the attributed closeness of employees to their employer. Therefore, observers might not discriminate between the official brand signal and the employee signal and rather consider it as one single signal (Esmark Jones et al. 2018).

Defensive Consumer Brand Defense and Accommodative Brand Self-Defense

As seen in study 2, accommodative brand signals seem to be a good option in mitigating brand criticism's negative consequences. In a similar vein, research in crisis and webcare communication suggests that often it is the best strategy for brands to use an accommodative (i.e., recognizing and accepting responsibility) rather than a defensive signal (e.g., Chang et al. 2015; Dens, Pelsmacker, and Purnawirawan 2015; Lee and Song 2010; Schaefers and Schamari 2016; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013). However, despite the positive consequences of an accommodative signal, this strategy also comes with downsides. The acceptance of responsibility for the criticized problem can be understood as an admittance of weaknesses (Xia 2013), convey the perception that the brand is guilty (Ferrin et al. 2007; Kim et al. 2004) and consequently also trigger observers' concerns about the brand's offerings (e.g., advertised quality; Siomkos and Kurzbard 1994). Moreover, the accommodation bears the risk of making the brand legally vulnerable (e.g., claims for damages; Coombs and Holladay 2002).

By contrast, a defensive signal can be efficient because the brand denies that a problem exists in the first place (e.g., Coombs and Holladay 2002; Marcus and Goodman 1991). For instance, the accused brand can blame another party by claiming that the cause of the problem can be attributed externally (Moisio, Capelli, and Sabadie 2021; Raju, Rajagopal, and Murdock 2021). However, as already discussed, defensive signals might appear disrespectful as well as untrustworthy, and consequently, some observers might not believe the brand (e.g., Chang et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2004; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013). On the other hand, consumers' and employees' expressions could be perceived as more credible than marketer-initiated communication (e.g., Bickart and Schindler 2001; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Kozinets et al. 2010; Senecal and Nantel 2004). Thus, the question emerges whether it might be a promising strategy for certain brands to delay an official accommodative brand signal and observe whether their employees or consumers are defending the brand with a somewhat

defensive signal? This could be advantageous because, in such cases, the brand has not admitted any responsibility and profits from the potential higher credibility of third-party defense regarding the defensive signal.

Moreover, I assume that consumers could even be better-suited for defensive signals (i.e., denying the brand's responsibility or even shifting blame to others) than employees. One disadvantage of EBD compared to CBD is that employees are often constrained in their social media communication about their employer's brand. One study shows that out of 238 Twitter users, over 70 % must stick to social media guidelines from their employer (Schaarschmidt and Könsgen 2020). Such guidelines, for example, comprise the topics they are allowed to communicate about, punishments for non-compliant behavior, or that they are obliged to use a positive tone of voice (Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch 2017). In fact, employees' fear of negative personal or professional consequences for non-compliant behavior with corporate guidelines can restrict them from speaking up (e.g., Jung, Bozeman, and Gaughan 2020; Kish-Gephart et al. 2009; Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin 2003). By contrast, consumer brand defenders can speak out more freely and express their honest opinion. This means that they can formulate issues in a way that might appear offensive or inappropriate if the same is voiced by an employee or an official brand representative (Ammann et al. 2021). Indeed, it can be observed that consumers often use somewhat defensive signaling. For instance, research on consumer brand defense identified common defense styles to be trivializing (i.e., playing down the criticism), doubting (i.e., challenging the credibility of the critic), or also blaming the critic's actions, uncontrollable features, and third parties (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Further, first research about defensive consumer brand defense indicates its potential in derogating adverse brand-related outcomes such as failure attribution (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017).

The following example of Sony launching its new game console, Playstation 5 (PS5) in 2020, provides anecdotal evidence of consumers helping the brand with defensive signals in

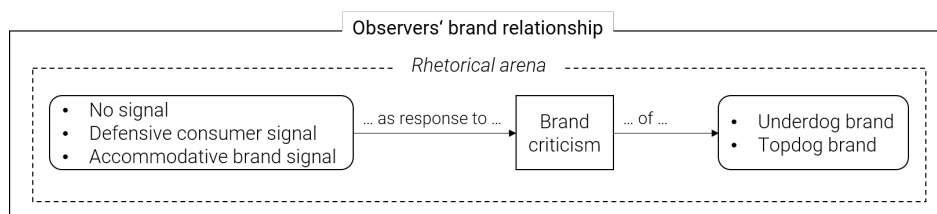
times of brand criticism. Many consumers were totally frustrated because it was so hard to get a PS5. There were just not enough consoles available to meet the demand (Thier 2020). This circumstance was exacerbated by the fact that a massive share of the sold PS5's was bought by shopping bots (i.e., computer programs with the task to buy the PS5 automatically; Fowler and Kelly 2020). Consequently, the release of the PS5 escalated in an outrage by some consumers: "Shame on Sony for not giving a s*** about its community. The company just wants to sell every console as fast as possible, even if it means the community is being scammed \$1500 on eBay" (yeetdakseet 2020 on the online forum reddit). This shortage of PS5's was so critical that Sony felt compelled to officially apologize: "Let's be honest: PS5 preorders could have been a lot smoother. We truly apologize for that. Over the next few days, we will release more PS5 consoles for preorder" (PlayStation 2020 on Twitter). However, what Sony did not dare mention was that it was not solely their fault. And at this point, some consumers stepped into the breach and defended Sony with their honest and influential comments: "It's not your fault Sony. Walmart thought they were cute and dropped preorders before the date you had decided on" (308 likes; Rulx 2020 on Twitter), "Not your fault it's retailers fault and most gamers are dumb and couldn't see that" (628 likes; Chin Chekah 2020 on Twitter). Taken together, I propose that defensive consumer signaling represents a valuable resource for brands. Thus, the following study examines this type of defense signal opposite to an accommodative brand signal.

Brand Defense–Brand Biography Fit

Theories in crisis communication such as the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT; e.g., Coombs 2007) as well as the rhetorical arena theory (RAT; Frandsen and Johansen 2016) acknowledge that crisis communication should be adapted to context factors. In that regard, I take the brand’s biography (i.e., under- vs. topdog) into account because of the assumption that the impact of defense signaling on observers can depend on such brand characteristics. Especially for underdog brands with their external disadvantage (e.g., less financial and human capital; Paharia et al. 2011), it might be hard to fight criticism (Kim and Park 2020; Kim, Park, and Stacey Lee 2019). Thus, the following study examines to what extent brands with an underdog (vs. topdog) positioning could benefit from different defense signals. *Figure 3* displays the according rhetorical arena of interest.

FIGURE 3

Rhetorical Arena with Context Factor



An underdog brand is defined as a brand that exhibits a disadvantage in terms of resources but has the passion and determination to overcome these hurdles. On the other hand, topdogs operate out of a privileged market position but seemingly lack passion for their business (Paharia et al. 2011). Research in marketing, sport sciences, psychology, and political sciences demonstrates that people support and have a positive attitude toward underdogs. This phenomenon is called the “underdog-effect” (e.g., Kim et al. 2008; McGinnis and Gentry 2009; Paharia et al. 2011; Vandello, Goldschmied, and Richards 2007). In more detail, we often

have a more positive attitude toward underdogs because they elicit a stronger empathy (Jun et al. 2015; McGinnis and Gentry 2009) and a stronger feeling of identification than topdogs (Kim et al. 2008; Paharia et al. 2011). Thus, underdogs profit from a favorable prior reputation, and consequently, observers may give underdogs the benefit of the doubt in times of brand criticism (Coombs and Holladay 2006). In that matter, research demonstrates that highly moral underdog brands can even overcome deficits in competence (Kirmani et al. 2017).

Regarding the question which defense signals are particularly effective for which type of brand biography, I refer to the expectation-disconfirmation theory, which has been applied to study consumers' perceptions of brand defense signals in times of brand criticism (Xia 2013). In our case, this theory would suggest that the defense signal should meet or surpass consumers' expectations to be perceived as appropriate (i.e., confirmation or positive disconfirmation). Not meeting the expectations (i.e., negative disconfirmation) would mean that the signal could be evaluated negatively (Oliver 1980). An essential characteristic of underdogs is that others do not expect them to succeed (Nurmohamed 2020). Therefore, observers may not necessarily anticipate an accommodative signal for underdog brands because, as previously discussed, accommodative signals are usually more cost-intensive (e.g., Kharouf et al. 2020). A brand with a high passion and which needs to overcome many hurdles deserves the right to signal defensively. Besides, research demonstrates that consumers who exhibit a positive brand relationship assess a brand's defensive reactions as less inappropriate than consumers with a worse brand relationship (Raju, Rajagopal, and Murdock 2021; Xia 2013). Due to the underdog-effect (i.e., positive basic attitude), a defensive signal by underdog brands could be tolerated by observers (Santos and Boote 2003; Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman 1993). This could mainly hold for consumers as brand defenders because their comments can be perceived as more trustworthy than possibly biased brand statements (e.g., Bickart and Schindler 2001; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Kozinets et al. 2010; Senecal and Nantel 2004). To conclude, I propose that

H4a: *a defensive consumer signal is more effective in mitigating negative consequences of brand criticism on observers' brand relationship for underdog (vs. topdog) brands.*

By contrast, due to their advantageous and privileged position in the market, brand criticism observers may attribute a higher responsibility toward topdogs. These brands typically possess all the required resources to behave better than in the criticized situations. In that regard, research suggests that a failing topdog can even elicit schadenfreude because observers perceive the defeat to be deserved (Kim et al. 2008; Vandello, Goldschmied, and Richards 2007). Hence, topdogs are probably obliged to take responsibility. They need to invest more to elicit empathy and, consequently, restore their damaged reputation (e.g., Chang et al. 2015; Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Cranage 2014; Lee and Song 2010). Moreover, research on negative online reviews indicates that brands with a high ability to change or, in this case, the topdog brand with their advantageous market position should rather signal in an accommodative way (Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020). Taken together, consumers possibly anticipate a stronger signal due to higher expectations (Nurmohamed 2020). Thus, topdogs need to invest more which could manifest in an accommodative brand signal (Kharouf et al. 2020). In that sense, I hypothesize that

H4b: *an accommodative brand signal is more effective in mitigating negative consequences of brand criticism on observers' brand relationship for topdog (vs. underdog) brands.*

Study 3 – Consumer Brand Defense vs. Brand Self-Defense and the Moderating Effect of Brand’s Biography

Method

To examine hypotheses 4a and 4b, an online experiment was carried out with a three (only brand criticism vs. defensive consumer signal vs. accommodative brand signal) by two (topdog vs. underdog brand biography) between-subjects design. 368 individuals who a research assistant recruited finished the survey. Thereof 20 individuals (5.43 %) were excluded because the recorded time for reading the experimental scenarios designated that they were almost skipping these passages (Aguinis, Villamor, and Ramani 2021). Eventually, the final sample consisted of 348 people (50.3 % female, $M_{age} = 33.01$ years).

The survey started with a description of a fictitious coffee house manipulated as an underdog or topdog brand. As already outlined, underdogs (topdogs) are characterized by a high (low) external disadvantage and passion (Paharia et al. 2011). Accordingly, the underdog (topdog) brand was introduced as “a small (big) coffee house outside (in the center) of the city” with “(no) trouble raising enough capital” as well as a “small (extensive) network” which is “pressured by big coffee house chains (putting pressure on small, traditional coffee houses).” Concerning the dimension of passion, the brand biography stated that they “suffered many (almost no) setbacks,” “never gave up (don’t have to struggle),” “pursue their dream (no bigger dream),” and that “giving up is not an option (showing no enthusiasm).” This manipulation was adapted from other studies (Goldschmied, McDaniel, and Ramirez 2017; He, You, and Chen 2020; Jin and Huang 2019; Kao 2015; Kim and Park 2020; Kim, Park, and Stacey Lee 2019; Paharia et al. 2011; Tang and Tsang 2020) and can be looked up in *Table 1 of Appendix C*. Next, all participants saw the same brand criticism about the presented brand which detailed that the critic found a hair in her coffee which disgusted her. Also, she mentioned that a recent report uncovered that this coffee house brand sources their coffee beans from fields in Brazil where the poor harvesters are shamelessly exploited. Her criticism ended with the words that

she would boycott the brand and recommended all observers doing the same. Subsequently, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions of the independent variable. First off, the defensive and accommodative conditions differed by the issuer. Whereas the defensive signal was written by a consumer, the brand itself issued the accommodative signal ("Another consumer (The company) responded to the comment from earlier as follows:"). Next off, the manipulation of the defensive and accommodative signal differed in its content formulated based on existing definitions (Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Marcus and Goodman 1991). Accordingly, the defensive signal comprised arguments that downplayed the criticized incidents (e.g., "unfortunate isolated incident," "wouldn't make a drama," "could happen at other coffee chains," contesting the credibility of her source). On the other hand, the accommodative signal acknowledged responsibility (e.g., "sincerely apologize for the inconvenience," "take the incident seriously," "we will learn from your criticism," "could you send us the report," "contact the authors for more details"). Participants assigned to the control group saw no defense signal to the brand criticism. They were directly forwarded to the rest of the survey (see *Table 1* in *Appendix C* for all scenarios). After some filler questions, the survey-takers completed measures for the dependent variable, manipulation checks, control, and demographics (i.e., age, gender). To the end, a debriefing was displayed.

All scales were measured with 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = "completely disagree" to 7 = "completely agree" if not stated otherwise (see *Table 2* in *Appendix C* for all items and Cronbach's alpha). As in study 2, the dependent variable was consumers' attitude toward the brand, which was elicited by asking the participants how they feel about the presented brand (four bipolar items, e.g., "bad" – "good"; Spears and Singh 2004). Regarding the manipulation checks, the same three items as in study 2 were used to measure the signal's perceived defensiveness and the same four items to assess the signal's accommodation. Additionally, the survey-takers had to answer three single items about (1) whether the brand has been criticized, (2) whether a consumer defended the brand, and (3) whether the company

defended itself. Concerning the brand's biography, the two dimensions (i.e., external disadvantage, passion and determination) were each measured with five items from established scales (Paharia et al. 2011). Moreover, the survey-takers completed the same five-item scale as in studies 1 and 2 about their product involvement with coffee to control for differences in the participants' relevance of this product category (Malär et al. 2011).

Results

Manipulation Checks

Three single items were checked in the first step between the three groups of the independent variable (brand criticism without defense signal vs. defensive consumer signal vs. accommodative brand signal). The goal hereby was to examine whether the survey-takers correctly understood that the brand was criticized and, additionally, if they noticed whether the brand was defended by a consumer, the brand, or no signaler. A one-way ANOVA showed no significant differences between the three groups ($M_{control} = 6.35$, $SD_{control} = 1.35$; $M_{consumer} = 6.68$, $SD_{consumer} = .90$; $M_{brand} = 6.63$, $SD_{brand} = 1.03$) for an item which stated that the brand was getting criticized, $Welch's F(2, 208.32) = 2.09$, $p = .13$. For the second item regarding the consumer's defense, there were significant differences between the three experimental conditions, $Welch's F(2, 217.48) = 330.06$, $p < .001$. In more detail, a Games-Howell post hoc comparison demonstrated that the group who saw the consumer defense signal scored significantly higher ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 1.35$) compared to the two other groups ($M_{control} = 2.22$, $SD_{control} = 1.64$; $M_{brand} = 2.02$, $SD_{brand} = 1.70$). For the third item significant differences were found, too ($Welch's F(2, 187.48) = 434.84$, $p < .001$). Subsequent Games-Howell post hoc testing found that participants who saw a brand signal achieved a significantly higher mean ($M = 6.51$, $SD = .92$) than the two other groups ($M_{control} = 2.38$, $SD_{control} = 1.68$; $M_{consumer} = 2.18$, $SD_{consumer} = 1.82$) regarding the item that the brand responded to the criticism.

In a second step, two independent-samples t-tests were conducted to validate whether the consumer's (brand's) signal was being perceived as more defensive (accommodative)

compared to the group with the brand (consumer) signal. In fact, the consumer's signal achieved a higher mean ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.64$) for its defensiveness than the brand signal ($M = 2.21, SD = 1.49, t(250) = 7.08, p < .001$). Furthermore, the brand signal was more accommodative ($M = 5.83, SD = .99$) compared to the consumer signal ($M = 4.16, SD = 1.61, t(196.43) = -9.84, p < .001$).

The last step comprised the moderator variable's verification. In more detail, two independent-samples t-tests were calculated to examine whether the participants who saw the underdog brand biography assessed the brand to have a higher external disadvantage and a higher passion compared to the topdog brand. Indeed, the underdog group evaluated the external disadvantage to be significantly higher ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.40$) compared to the topdog group ($M = 2.16, SD = 1.19, t(340.40) = -18.23, p < .001$). Further, the passion was being rated significantly higher for the underdog brand ($M = 5.32, SD = 1.14$) than for the topdog brand ($M = 3.05, SD = 1.12, t(346) = -18.70, p < .001$).

Taken together, the brand criticism was being perceived by all groups, and the participants correctly noticed whether a consumer or the brand responded to this criticism. Besides, the consumer's signal was perceived as more defensive and less accommodative than the brand's signal. Further, also the brand biography manipulation with its two dimensions worked well.

Main Effect of a Defense Comment

There was a significant effect of a defense signal to the criticism on consumers' brand attitude, $F(2, 345) = 9.20, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test revealed that both the defensive consumer signal ($M = 4.56, SD = 1.38$) as well as the accommodative brand signal ($M = 4.78, SD = 1.25$) elicited a higher brand attitude compared to the control group ($M = 4.02, SD = 1.42$). The difference between the consumer brand defense and the control group (.54, 95 % CI [.11, .97]) was statistically significant, $p = .01$. Also, the difference between the brand self-defense and the control group (.77, 95 % CI [.34, 1.19])

was statistically significant, $p < .001$. Moreover, no significant difference between the two types of brand defenses was found (.23, 95 % CI [-.17, .63], $p = .377$).

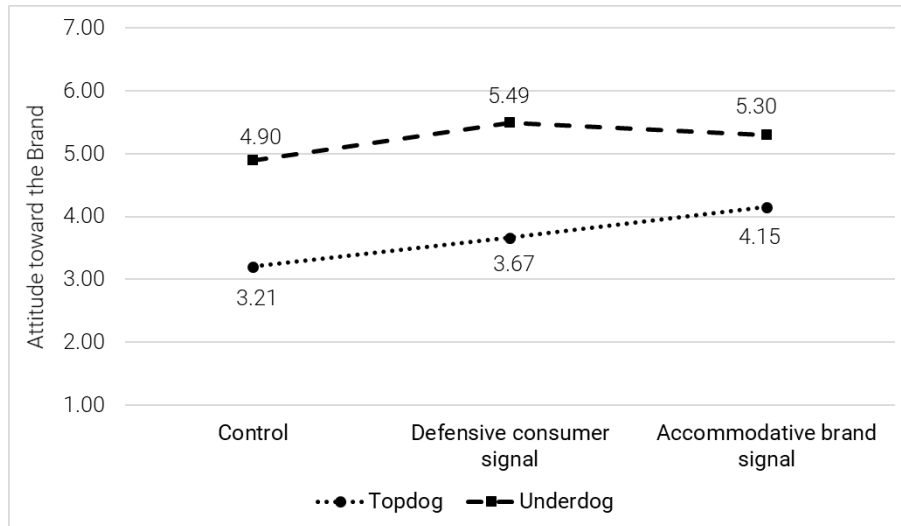
The Moderating Effect of Brand's Biography

Hypotheses 4a and 4b were examined with a moderation analysis using PROCESS model 1 (Hayes 2018). A test of significance for the change in R^2 in the regression model revealed that brand defense's effect depends on the brand's biography, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(2, 342) = 3.26$, $p < .05$.

In a first step, two dummy variables were created for the multicategorical independent variable (x_1 = no brand defense vs. defensive consumer signal; x_2 = no brand defense vs. accommodative brand signal) and one for the moderator variable (w = topdog vs. underdog). Next, an analysis of the simple effect of brand's biography demonstrated that in the control condition (i.e., brand criticism without defense) the underdog achieved a higher mean than the topdog brand regarding consumers' brand attitude ($B = 1.69$, $SE = .22$, $t(342) = 7.54$, $p < .001$). Thus, in this experiment the underdog-effect could be detected. Furthermore, the interaction effect of defensive CBD and the brand biography was not significant ($B = .13$, $SE = .30$, $t(342) = .45$, $p = .65$). However, I found a marginally significant interaction between the accommodative brand signal and the brand biography ($B = -.54$, $SE = .30$, $t(342) = -1.82$, $p = .07$). To conclude, these findings suggest that the effect of a defensive consumer signal is not depending on the brand's biography but that on the other hand, the effect of the accommodative brand signal could be weaker for underdog brands. To gain deeper insights, the results were further probed and graphically illustrated (see *Figure 4* with the mean values per condition). Regarding topdog brands, both defensive CBD (*conditional effect* = .46, $SE = .21$, $t(342) = 2.20$, $p < .05$) as well as accommodative brand self-defense (*conditional effect* = .94, $SE = .21$, $t(342) = 4.47$, $p < .001$) exerted significant positive influence on observer's brand attitude after the criticism. Concerning the underdog brands, also both types of defense showed (marginally) significant positive effects (*conditional effect*_{consumer} = .59, $SE = .22$, $t(342) = 2.75$, $p < .01$; *conditional effect*_{brand} = .41, $SE = .21$, $t(342) = 1.96$, $p = .05$).

FIGURE 4

The Moderating Effect of Brand's Biography on Brand Defense



In a second step, Helmert coding was implemented to examine whether the effects of the defensive consumer signal and the accommodative brand signal significantly differed depending on the brand's biography. In that matter, a significant interaction was found ($B = -.67$, $SE = .28$, $t(342) = -2.42$, $p < .05$), indicating that the difference in effects between a topdog and an underdog brand is significantly smaller for the accommodative brand signal compared to the defensive consumer signal. Further, the probing of the interaction brought to light that topdogs defended by the brand achieved a significant higher mean ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.08$) compared to the topdogs who were defended by the consumer ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.18$; *conditional effect* = .48, $SE = .20$, $t(342) = 2.42$, $p < .05$). However, no significant difference was found between a consumer defending the underdog brand ($M = 5.49$, $SD = .87$) or the brand defending itself ($M = 5.30$; $SD = 1.15$). The inclusion of the control variables (i.e., product involvement, gender, and age) led to no essential changes (see *Tables 3 and 4 in Appendix C*).

Discussion

This study once again demonstrates that CBD can have a positive impact on observer's brand attitude. Compared to the previous studies, this experiment shows that the CBD effect also pertains when the consumer is signaling defensively. This effect is even comparably effective as the accommodative brand signal. Further, this positive influence is not limited to either only underdog or topdog brands. In that matter, no interaction effect of the brand biography on the effect of consumer's defensive signal was found. Hence, this type of defense seems to be equally beneficial for both types of brands. This result contradicts my hypothesis 4a that the defensive consumer response should be particularly effective for underdog brands. This might be explained because consumers are further away from the brand and are therefore seen as independent signalers (e.g., Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins 2007; Cheong and Morrison 2008; Kozinets et al. 2010; Senecal and Nantel 2004). Thus, the dangers of a defensive brand signal (e.g., disrespectful and low trustworthiness; e.g., Kim et al. 2004; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013) are probably less pronounced; therefore, the topdog brand profited from the consumer's brand defense. Future research could follow from this and examine differences in a defensive signal by consumers or the brand.

Regarding the accommodative brand signal, the results indicate that this type of answer can be especially beneficial for topdog brands. Hence, the results partly confirm hypothesis 4b, with the corresponding interaction effect being marginally significant. Furthermore, when contrasting the two defense effects, the topdog brand achieved a significantly higher mean for the accommodative brand signal (vs. defensive consumer signal). Therefore, because observers' may attribute more blame toward the topdog with their advantageous market position and high ability to change, it could be valuable to signal in an accommodative way (e.g., Chang et al. 2015; Coombs 2007; Nurmohamed 2020; Paharia et al. 2011; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020).

General Discussion

According to the rhetorical arena theory, it is also essential to study the consequences of third-party signals on observers' brand perception for actionable insights regarding how brands should signal in times of brand criticism (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). In that sense, this research acknowledges and examines consumers' and employees' power in defending brands as third-party signalers. Due to the elicited information asymmetry after brand criticism, this research relates to signaling theory in analyzing third-party defense's power (Connelly et al. 2011; Dawar 1998; Kharouf et al. 2020). Three studies hereby provide evidence for the positive effects of third-party defense on observer's brand relationship and in study 1 also on behavioral intentions. Moreover, study 2 suggests that the effect of the brand signal and the third-party signal's effect do not accumulate and enhance each other. Further, an accommodative brand signal could profit more from a simultaneous consumer brand defense signal than a defensive brand signal. Besides, this study implies that a brand's self-defense cannot benefit from an employee's additional defense signal. Because defensive brand signals are often a risky communication tactic due to possible downsides (e.g., disrespectful and low trustworthiness; e.g., Kim et al. 2004; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Xia 2013), study 3 compared the effect of a defensive consumer signal and an accommodative brand signal. It turned out that both these signals were similarly potent to reduce the adverse outcomes of brand criticism. Also, this research acknowledged a brand's biography and demonstrated that underdogs and topdogs could likewise profit from such defensive consumer signals. However, accommodative brand signals appear to be more effective for topdog (vs. underdog) brands. Building upon these summarized findings, theoretical and managerial implications are subsequently derived, and eventually, the three studies' limitations and future research endeavors are discussed.

Theoretical Implications

The three studies were dedicated to studying the power of third-party signals after brand criticism. In that matter, this research contributes to the study of signaling theory (e.g., Connelly et al. 2011). In more detail, several studies about handling brand criticism based their research on signaling theory (Cheung, Xiao, and Liu 2014; Dawar 1998; Ho-Dac, Carson, and Moore 2013; Hsu and Lawrence 2016; Javornik, Filieri, and Gumann 2020; Kharouf et al. 2020; Marcus and Goodman 1991). However, none of them considered consumers and employees as potential signalers in times of brand criticism. Thus, my research advances the understanding of signals from third-party signalers in mitigating the negative consequences of brand criticism.

Further, I focused on two different types of third-party signals: consumer and employee brand defense. Whereas first studies about the consequences of CBD exist (Esmark Jones et al. 2018; Hong and Cameron 2018; Jahn 2014; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017), the research about EBD generally remains scarce. Apart from scholars who acknowledged EBD's potential (Cravens and Oliver 2006; Frandsen and Johansen 2011, 2016; Hansen, Kupfer, and Hennig-Thurau 2018; Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Flemming 2020; Mazzei, Kim, and Dell'Oro 2012; Miles and Mangold 2014), to the best of my knowledge, only two also examined EBD's consequences for observers (Lee 2019; Opitz, Chaudhri, and Wang 2018). Study 1 picked up these first preliminary findings of CBD's and EBD's effects on observers and systematically analyzed multiple positive consequences. More specifically, this study revealed that CBD offers positive outcomes for the brand regarding consumers' higher forgiveness intention toward the brand, representing a new insight. Besides, EBD also seems to constitute an effective signal with multiple positive outcomes after brand criticism (e.g., higher brand trust, purchase intention).

Another related domain of research is about webcare and crisis communication, which often dealt with accommodative and defensive brand signals (e.g., Bundy, Iqbal, and Pfarrer

2021; Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Song 2010; Li, Cui, and Peng 2018; Lyon and Cameron 2004; Marcus and Goodman 1991; Moisiso, Capelli, and Sabadie 2021; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020). In that matter, the rhetorical arena theory emphasizes that examining interactions between different signalers would provide even more actionable insights (Frandsen and Johansen 2016). Accordingly, as probably first in the field, I explored the effect of a brand signal in conjunction with a third-party defense signal in study 2. Therefore, this research also provides insights for RAT by demonstrating that, in fact, multiple signalers should be considered when studying brand criticism. The effectiveness of brand signals differs whether a consumer or an employee is also defending the brand.

Furthermore, first research examined differences in observers' attitudes and forgiveness toward underdog and topdog brands after criticism (Kim and Park 2020; Kim, Park, and Stacey Lee 2019). But still, there is no research about how the brand's biography can impact the effectiveness of defense signals. Hence, study 3 also advances the study of CBD and EBD by acknowledging the brand's biography as an influential factor that should be considered. To be more concrete, one reason CBD can be a valuable resource for brands lies in consumers' ability to speak out more freely than the brand (Ammann et al. 2021). In that matter, I provide evidence that consumers who are signaling defensively could manifest a valuable resource for brands with an underdog-positioning.

Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, this research's audience-oriented approach provides insights into the consequences of third-party defense. These insights help to develop the brand's defense strategy. In cases of brand criticism, managers should decide whether they aim to actively manage third-party defense to exploit its potential or instead follow a passive approach. However, both tactics first require acknowledging third parties' power in fighting brand criticism within the organization (Ammann et al. 2021). Besides, the organization should have set up sophisticated web monitoring to detect arising criticism and third-party brand defense (Ammann 2021; Ammann et al. 2021; Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018).

One strategy to counter brand criticism could comprise *active third-party defense management*. This research demonstrated the positive consequences of consumers and employees as defenders, and therefore, a brand could profit from the active stimulation of CBD and EBD. In that sense, research on CBD already proposed or examined some possible ways to activate consumer brand defenders. Some scholars suggest gamification as a viable way to stimulate consumer brand defenders (e.g., defender badge in the owned community; Ammann 2021; Ammann et al. 2021). Moreover, it is also conceivable to renounce responding with an accommodative or defensive signal and instead use a CBD appeal. Such an appeal can be understood as a request to help the brand with defense comments and has been shown to initiate brand-connected consumers (Ammann 2021). Further, if the brand can already count on brand defenders, they can affirm these consumers by positively reinforce their comments via "thank-you" replies or "likes" (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). For underdog-brands, it could turn out beneficial when they engage in "framing-the-game." By highlighting the competitive threat elicited by topdog-brands, some observers may be more prone to support the underdog in their battle against critics (Paharia, Avery, and Keinan 2014).

Overall, the risk exists that in times of brand criticism, companies primarily focus on external communication efforts (Lee 2019). However, as my results demonstrate, involving employees in the brand's defense strategies could be advantageous. Thus, EBD should be anchored within the organization and exemplified by superiors. The employees should be aware that they can influence their employer's brand perception (Schaarschmidt and Walsh 2020). I recommend focusing on internal communication during a phase of brand criticism to provide firsthand information for employees' potential defense signals. It could also be beneficial to launch a brand ambassador program within the organization to boost employees' willingness to be active on social media (Schmidt and Baumgarth 2018). Besides, the employees should be enabled in the brand's defense by providing social media guidelines, workshops, trainings, simulations, or even incentives (Huang, Singh, and Ghose 2015; Marchand, Hennig-Thurau, and Flemming 2020; Schaarschmidt and Könsgen 2020; Walsh, Schaarschmidt, and Kortzfleisch 2016; Walsh, Schaarschmidt, and Teng 2020). In the long term, conventional HR practices could be aligned with the active EBD management by, for example, examining job candidates' social media affinity and engagement (Albrecht et al. 2015).

On the other hand, a brand can also engage in *passive third-party defense management*. Such a strategy would mean that the brand closely monitors the discussions regarding the brand criticism and does not intervene for the moment. Thus, the brand foregoes costly signals for the time being. Regarding this passive approach, this research offers some heuristics. If no third-party defense is observable and the criticism gets out of hand, the brand should consider some sort of self-defense signaling. In cases where an employee already defended the brand, study 2 suggests that an additional brand signal would probably not improve the observers' attitude toward the brand. Furthermore, if the brand ascertains defense comments written by consumers, they should thoroughly analyze the observers' reactions. Is the criticism contained, or are there still ongoing negative voices against the brand? If the critics are still active, the brand could consider using an accommodative signal to calm them.

Moreover, study 3 implies that a topdog brand does not profit to the same degree from consumers' defensive signals as opposed to underdog brands. Hence, managers of topdog brands cannot entirely rely on defensive consumer signals and should consider using an accommodative signal in severe cases of brand criticism.

Limitations and Future Research

In addition to the examined third-party signals (i.e., CBD and EBD), other types of defense signals could be part of a future study. The government could, for example, defend a state-owned company, and an NPO like Greenpeace might protect an ecologically exemplary brand. Furthermore, a brand signal could possibly be valorized with third-party signals, which are indicators for high-quality standards (e.g., International Organization for Standardization (ISO 9001) certification; Basso and Pizzutti 2016). On social media, it can also be observed that brands affirm their brand defenders with a “thank-you message” or a “like” (c.f., affirmation / bolstering strategy; Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). In that regard, the question arises whether brands could boost consumers’ defense signals with such an affirmation tactic? In observers’ perception, such brand defense messages got approved by the brand and thus, might exert a more substantial positive impact. Moreover, future research could deal with signals in response to a second wave of criticism triggered by an inappropriate brand signal (Basso and Pizzutti 2016; Frandsen and Johansen 2018). In such cases, it is conceivable that third-party signals could be helpful to stop the criticism because the brand already signaled inadequately. Taken together, such a study would take a more dynamic perspective by examining the power of third-party signals at various points in time.

Further, to better understand the power of third-party signals, future research could be dedicated to examining the signals’ mechanics on observers. In that matter, I propose three insightful avenues: signal strength, signal credibility, and signal complement. First, signals can be assessed regarding their strength which relates to the costs for implementing the signal’s message (Kharouf et al. 2020). As seen in studies 2 and 3, the accommodative brand signal successfully mitigated the negative consequences of brand criticism. Hence, because such signals can be regarded as quite strong (e.g., implementing a costly remedial plan), the question arises whether an additional third-party signal is still required? On the other hand, a CBD signal also seems to be quite strong because, for outsiders, such defense comments by

consumers may represent a costly signal (i.e., a brand must heavily invest in their consumers for them to become brand defenders). Taken together, this approach of assessing signal strength may explain the results of studies 2 and 3 and could guide the study of other signals (e.g., paid influencers as defenders; Singh et al. 2020).

Second, CBD's potential could be better gauged by probing the signal's credibility, which refers to observers' confidence that the signal is truthful, dependable, reliable, and honest (Connelly et al. 2011; Karanges et al. 2018). Existing research indicates that consumers' expressions are less biased and, therefore, more credible in the public perception (e.g., Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins 2007; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Senecal and Nantel 2004). Hence, the question emerges whether CBD exhibits higher credibility than brand self-defense (e.g., Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017)? If so, to what extent do brands profit from this higher signaler credibility? However, against my prediction, the defensive brand signal was not valorized by the third-party defense in study 2. This finding could be explained by triggered suspicion and raised psychological reactance among the observers (e.g., Miller, Massey, and Ma 2020; Singh et al. 2020). Thus, future research could investigate the "dark side" of third-party signals, which means consumers could question and doubt some defense signals.

The third avenue of future research regarding the signal's mechanism would comprise how well the third-party signal complements the brand signal. According to the congruity theory (Osgood and Tannenbaum 1955), contradicting information among the brand and the third-party defender elicits pressure for observers to revise their judgment to either side. If a consumer brand defender is, for example, downplaying the brand's responsibility and, conversely, the brand is officially accepting responsibility; these contradicting statements might confuse observers. On the other hand, if both parties, the brand and the consumer, are denying the brand's responsibility in the criticized incident, the signals are congruent. In such cases, the observers perceive two matching defense signals from two different signalers, possibly enhancing these signals' effect.

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Appendix A - Study 1

TABLE 1

Experimental Scenarios

<p><u>Brand Criticism</u></p> <p>Timo Meier: Ich habe meine Autoversicherung bei der Allianz und warne euch davor es mir gleichzutun! Nichts als Ärger. Neulich habe ich beim Parkieren einen Schaden an einem anderen Auto verursacht. Weil die andere Partei auch bei der Allianz versichert ist, wurde der Vorfall gar nicht richtig geprüft. Letztens musste ich feststellen, dass ich hochgestuft wurde und höhere Prämien zahlen muss... sie haben auch Schäden am anderen Auto beglichen, welche bestimmt nicht durch mich verursacht wurden! So ein Verhalten geht gar nicht. Als ich nach 20 Minuten in der Warteschlange des Kundensupports endlich eine Mitarbeiterin ans Telefon gekriegt habe, wurde mir bloß klargemacht, dass sie da ohne Beweise nichts machen können. Wie soll ich bitte schön Beweise vorlegen? Das andere Auto gehört ja nicht mir. Dieser Vorfall hat mir verdeutlicht, dass ich bei der Allianz sofort kündigen muss. Ich kann euch nur dasselbe empfehlen! Zudem präsentiert sich die Allianz immer als Vorreiterin in Sachen Umweltschutz...nichts als bloßes Geschwätz. Die investieren immer noch Unmengen in das Ölgeschäft. #MIESEBILANZ #ALLIANZ</p>	
<p><u>Consumer Brand Defense</u></p> <p>Lieber Timo,</p> <p>ich bin bereits seit 12 Jahren bei der Allianz versichert und habe per Zufall deinen Kommentar gelesen. Ich kann deinen Ärger vollkommen verstehen, möchte aber an dieser Stelle meine Versicherung in Schutz nehmen. In meinen etlichen Jahren bei der Allianz hatte ich (auch bei einem vergleichbaren Fall) nie Probleme... es handelt sich wohl um einen sehr unglücklichen Einzelfall. In meinem Fall, bei welchem beide Parteien Kunden der Allianz waren, wurden die Vorgänge ganz genau untersucht und es wurde versucht die bestmögliche Lösung zu finden. Das dies nicht nur inhaltsloses Geschwafel ist, beweisen auch die vielen unabhängigen Tests (z.B. FOCUS Money, Stiftung Warentest), welche die Allianz regelmäßig mit Bestnoten auszeichnen! Zudem habe ich mich bei deiner Kritik gefragt, von wo du wissen willst, dass die anderen Schäden schon vorhanden waren? Dies würde ich an deiner Stelle auch behaupten☺ So wie ich das sehe, wurde die Partei mit dem Schaden sofort entschädigt, was schließlich das Wichtigste bei einer Versicherung ist.</p> <p>Zu deinem anderen Kritikpunkt bezüglich der Nachhaltigkeitspolitik bei der Allianz. Als langjähriger Kunde habe ich da einige Einblicke und ich kann Dir versichern, dass in diesem Bereich sehr viel Positives passiert. Beispielsweise werden ab 2023 keine Versicherungen mehr für Unternehmen angeboten, die ihr Geld mit dem klima-schädlichen Kohlegeschäft machen. Zudem möchte ich noch erwähnen, dass die Allianz seit 2012 ein CO2-neutrales Unternehmen ist. Dies kannst du gerne auch bei unabhängigen Quellen nachlesen.</p> <p>Ich bin stolz bei der Allianz versichert zu sein und kann euch «versichern», dass ihr da gut aufgehoben seid!</p> <p>Viele Grüße, Marko Schumann</p>	<p><u>Employee Brand Defense</u></p> <p>Lieber Timo,</p> <p>ich arbeite bereits seit 12 Jahren im Schadensmanagement der Allianz und habe per Zufall deinen Kommentar gelesen. Ich kann deinen Ärger vollkommen verstehen, möchte aber an dieser Stelle meine Arbeitgeberin in Schutz nehmen. In meinen etlichen Jahren bei der Allianz habe ich nie von einem vergleichbaren Fall gehört... es handelt sich wohl um einen sehr unglücklichen Einzelfall. Wenn ich jeweils Fälle behandle, bei welchen beide Parteien Kunden der Allianz sind, untersuche ich die Vorgänge ganz genau und versuche die bestmögliche Lösung zu finden. Das dies nicht nur inhaltsloses Geschwafel ist, beweisen auch die vielen unabhängigen Tests (z.B. FOCUS Money, Stiftung Warentest), die uns regelmäßig mit Bestnoten auszeichnen! Zudem habe ich mich bei deiner Kritik gefragt, von wo du wissen willst, dass die anderen Schäden schon vorhanden waren? Dies würde ich an deiner Stelle auch behaupten☺ So wie ich das sehe, wurde die Partei mit dem Schaden sofort entschädigt, was schließlich das Wichtigste bei einer Versicherung ist.</p> <p>Zu deinem anderen Kritikpunkt bezüglich der Nachhaltigkeitspolitik bei meiner Arbeitgeberin. Als Mitarbeiter habe ich da einige Einblicke und ich kann Dir versichern, dass in diesem Bereich sehr viel Positives passiert. Beispielsweise werden ab 2023 keine Versicherungen mehr für Unternehmen angeboten, die ihr Geld mit dem klima-schädlichen Kohlegeschäft machen. Zudem möchte ich noch erwähnen, dass die Allianz seit 2012 ein CO2-neutrales Unternehmen ist. Dies kannst du gerne auch bei unabhängigen Quellen nachlesen.</p> <p>Ich bin stolz bei der Allianz angestellt zu sein und kann euch «versichern», dass ihr bei uns gut aufgehoben seid!</p> <p>Viele Grüße, Marko Schumann</p>

TABLE 2

Construct Indicators, Measurement Items, and Scale Reliabilities

Measure (α , AVE, CR)	Items
<i>DV</i> : Attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = .942$, AVE = 85 %, CR = .958)	Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Allianz. Unappealing - appealing Bad - good Unfavorable - favorable Unlikable - likable
<i>DV</i> : Brand trust ($\alpha = .940$, AVE = 81 %, CR = .954)	I am confident in Allianz's ability to perform well. I trust Allianz. I rely on Allianz. Allianz is safe. Allianz is an honest brand.
<i>DV</i> : Consumer's brand forgiveness intention ($\alpha = .890$, AVE = 82 %, CR = .932)	I think favorably of Allianz. Given what I have read, I would forgive Allianz. I feel sympathetic toward Allianz.
<i>DV</i> : Purchase intention ($\alpha = .941$, AVE = 89 %, CR = .962)	I would like to take out an insurance policy with Allianz. I could imagine to take out an insurance policy with Allianz. I think it is a good idea to take out an insurance policy with Allianz.
<i>Control</i> : Product involvement ($\alpha = .934$, AVE = 79 %, CR = .950)	Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that insurances ought to be important to me. Because of my personal values, I feel that insurances ought to be important to me. Insurances are very important to me personally. Compared with other services, insurances are important to me. I am interested in insurances.
<i>Control</i> : Attitude toward insurance companies	Please indicate how you feel about insurance companies in general. I do not like them at all. (1) - I like them very much (7)
<i>Control</i> : Brand awareness ($\alpha = .895$, AVE = 91 %, CR = .950)	How well do you know the company Allianz? Very bad (1) – very good (7) How well do you know Allianz's insurance policies? Very bad (1) – very good (7)
<i>Control</i> : Customer of Allianz	Yes (1) - No (2)
<i>Control</i> : Gender	Male (1) - Female (2)
<i>Control</i> : Age	Age in years
<i>MC1</i> : A long-time Allianz customer wrote a personal defending comment to the criticism of Timo Meier.	
<i>MC2</i> : A long-time Allianz employee wrote a personal defending comment to the criticism of Timo Meier.	
<i>MC3</i> : Neither an Allianz employee nor a customer wrote a defending comment on Timo Meier's criticism.	
<i>MC4</i> : Allianz responded to Timo Meier's criticism in an official statement.	
<i>MC5</i> : Allianz was not criticized.	

Note – α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted; DV = dependent variables, control = control variables, MC = manipulation checks

TABLE 3

Pillai's Trace Statistic V, F- and P-Values, Partial Etas Squared for the MANCOVA Model

Measure	V	df	F	Sign.	η_p^2
IV (control vs. CBD vs. EBD)	.11	8, 422	3.11	.002	.06
Product involvement	.01	4, 210	0.49	.742	.01
Attitude toward insurance companies	.17	4, 210	10.37	.000	.17
Brand awareness	.06	4, 210	3.52	.008	.06
Customer of Allianz (yes, no)	.04	4, 210	2.36	.055	.04
Gender (male, female)	.02	4, 210	1.00	.408	.02
Age	.03	4, 210	1.53	.196	.03

Note — V = Pillai's trace statistic, df = degrees of freedom, F-value, significance level, η_p^2 = partial eta squared

TABLE 4

Estimated Marginal Means, Standard Errors, and Planned Contrasts for the MANCOVA Model

Measure	Control	CBD	EBD
Brand attitude	<i>M</i> = 3.68, <i>SE</i> = .12	<i>M</i> = 4.40, <i>SE</i> = .12***	<i>M</i> = 4.26, <i>SE</i> = .12**
Brand trust	<i>M</i> = 3.73, <i>SE</i> = .13	<i>M</i> = 3.15, <i>SE</i> = .13*	<i>M</i> = 4.13, <i>SE</i> = .13*
Consumer's forgiveness	<i>M</i> = 3.24, <i>SE</i> = .13	<i>M</i> = 3.76, <i>SE</i> = .12**	<i>M</i> = 3.87, <i>SE</i> = .13**
Purchase intention	<i>M</i> = 3.14, <i>SE</i> = .14	<i>M</i> = 3.70, <i>SE</i> = .14**	<i>M</i> = 3.53, <i>SE</i> = .14*

Note — Planned contrasts revealed a significant difference between the control group and the CBD or EBD group with a significance level of: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The covariates in the model were calculated using the following values: brand awareness = 3.90; product involvement = 4.24; attitude toward insurance companies = 4.18; customer of Allianz = 1.78; gender = 1.38; age = 37.08.

Appendix B - Study 2

TABLE 1

Experimental Scenarios

<p><u>Brand Criticism</u></p> <p>Tobias Müller: Weshalb soll ich bei meiner Hausbank Credit Suisse noch Kunde bleiben? Zu Hause schauen wir immer, dass wir brav unseren Müll trennen, lieber den Zug statt das Auto benutzen und maximal noch einmal pro Jahr fliegen. Die CS hält anscheinend aber nichts von Klimaschutz und Nachhaltigkeit. Laut einem aktuellen und gut recherchierten Fernsehbeitrag von «SRF DOK», haben sie seit dem Pariser Klimaschutzabkommen mit rund 2 Milliarden CHF den Kohleabbau durch Kredite und Vermittlungen am Kapitalmarkt finanziert – das kann ich mit meinen Werten nicht mehr verantworten! Das Tüpfchen auf dem «i» ist ja, dass nach der 12. Transaktion jeder weitere Bargeldbezug vom Sparkonto von nun an 10.- CHF kostet... Eine absolute Schweinerei, denn erfahren habe ich das erst mit der Bankspesenabrechnung!! Für mich ist somit klar – ich werde die Bank wechseln und ich lege es euch allen sehr stark ans Herz mir gleichzutun 😊.</p>	
<p><u>Accommodative Brand Response</u></p> <p>Lieber Herr Müller, vielen Dank für das Teilen Ihrer persönlichen Meinung.</p> <p>Es tut uns leid, dass Sie von unserer Investitionsstrategie und unseren Nachhaltigkeitsbestreben enttäuscht sind und möchten uns an dieser Stelle entschuldigen. Es stimmt vollkommen, dass wir in diesen Belangen noch viel Potenzial nach oben haben, da sind wir genau der gleichen Meinung.</p> <p>Die kohlebedingten finanziellen Investitionen sind seit ein paar Jahren rückläufig. Zudem haben wir im Juli, 2020 eine Strategieänderung bekannt gegeben. Wir finanzieren keine Unternehmungen mehr, welche mehr als 25 % ihres Umsatzes durch den Abbau von Kohle oder die Herstellung von Strom aus Kohle generieren. Zudem bemühen wir uns, die Ziele des Pariser Klimaabkommens in den nächsten Jahren zu erreichen. Weiter engagieren wir uns auch intern für Nachhaltigkeit und sensibilisieren unsere Mitarbeitende über unseren Code of Conduct für Umweltthemen z.B. mit der «bike-to-work»-Kampagne.</p> <p>Überdies bedauern wir es sehr, dass die Information zu den Gebühren nach zwölf Bargeldbezügen nicht bei Ihnen angekommen sind. Als Zeichen der Wiedergutmachung werden wir Ihnen die zusätzlich entstandenen Transaktionsspesen Ende nächsten Monat auf Ihr Konto gutschreiben.</p> <p>Wir hoffen, dass wir Sie weiterhin als unseren Kunden zählen dürfen und bedanken uns für das entgegengebrachte Vertrauen.</p>	<p><u>Defensive Brand Response</u></p> <p>Lieber Herr Müller,</p> <p>Wir sind da ganz anderer Meinung und finden, dass es den Banken selbst überlassen ist zu entscheiden in welche Sektoren sie investieren. Jeder Kunde kann selber entscheiden, bei welcher Bank und wie er sein Geld anlegen möchte, da sollte jeder die eigene Verantwortung tragen!</p> <p>Auch ist diese Zahl seit ein paar Jahren rückläufig. Zudem haben wir im Juli, 2020 eine Strategieänderung bekannt gegeben. Wir finanzieren keine Unternehmungen mehr, welche mehr als 25 % ihres Umsatzes durch den Abbau von Kohle oder die Herstellung von Strom aus Kohle generieren. Unserer Ansicht nach trifft uns durch diese Strategieänderung somit keine unmittelbare Schuld mehr. Bitte beachten Sie zudem, dass solche Veränderungsprozesse viel Zeit brauchen, genau gleich wie bei unseren Mitbewerbern.</p> <p>Überdies können wir nicht verstehen, wie die Information zu den Gebühren nach zwölf Bargeldbezügen nicht bei Ihnen angekommen sein soll. Wir haben alle unsere Kunden/Innen bestmöglich auf allen Kanälen darüber informiert und deshalb scheint uns auch in diesem Fall keine Schuld zu treffen.</p> <p>Die Vorwürfe von Ihnen sind also in keiner Weise gerechtfertigt und wir bitten Sie in Zukunft solche Kommentare zu unterlassen.</p>

Consumer Brand Defense

Hallo Tobias, ich bin seit vielen Jahren Kunde der Credit Suisse.

Ich kann deinen Unmut vollkommen verstehen und dein Anliegen nachvollziehen. Auch mir liegt die Umwelt am Herzen. Jedoch sollten die genauen Umstände genauer betrachtet werden. Als langjähriger Kunde versuche ich solche Dinge immer differenziert zu betrachten.

Veränderungen (vor allem in Grosskonzernen) brauchen stets Zeit und die Investitionen im Kohlesektor sind zudem stark rückläufig. Hier steht die CS im Vergleich zu ihren Mitbewerbern ähnlich, wenn nicht sogar besser da. Wie du auf ihrer Homepage zudem nachlesen kannst, übernimmt die CS auch soziale Verantwortung indem sie jährlich tausende Mitarbeitende für gemeinnützige Projekte zur Verfügung stellt.

Die Gebühren für die Bankomatbezüge ab dem Sparkonto sind zudem branchenüblich. Am Schalter kannst du zudem immer kostenlos Geld beziehen und Bargeld wird generell immer irrelevanter im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung – take it easy!

Andreas Huber

Employee Brand Defense

Hallo Tobias, ich bin seit vielen Jahren Mitarbeiter der Credit Suisse.

Ich kann deinen Unmut vollkommen verstehen und dein Anliegen nachvollziehen. Auch mir liegt die Umwelt am Herzen. Jedoch sollten die genauen Umstände genauer betrachtet werden. Veränderungen (vor allem in Grosskonzernen) brauchen stets Zeit und die Investitionen im Kohlesektor sind zudem stark rückläufig. Hier steht die CS im Vergleich zu ihren Mitbewerbern ähnlich – wenn nicht sogar besser – da. Dies kann ich als langjähriger Kundenberater bei der Credit Suisse gut beurteilen. Wie du auf unserer Homepage zudem nachlesen kannst, übernimmt die CS auch soziale Verantwortung indem sie jährlich tausende Mitarbeitende für gemeinnützige Projekte zur Verfügung stellt.

Die Gebühren für die Bankomatbezüge ab dem Sparkonto sind zudem branchenüblich. Am Schalter kannst du zudem immer kostenlos Geld beziehen und Bargeld wird generell immer irrelevanter im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung – take it easy!

Andreas Huber

TABLE 2

Construct Indicators, Measurement Items, and Scale Reliabilities

Measure (α , AVE, CR)	Items
<i>DV</i> : Attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = .931$, AVE = 83 %, CR = .951)	Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Credit Suisse. Unappealing - appealing Bad - good Unfavorable - favorable Unlikable - likable
<i>Control</i> : Product involvement ($\alpha = .954$, AVE = 85 %, CR = .965)	Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that banking services ought to be important to me. Because of my personal values, I feel that banking services ought to be important to me. Banking services are very important to me personally. Compared with other services, banking services are important to me. I am interested in banking services.
<i>Control</i> : Attitude toward banks	Please indicate how you feel about banks in general. I do not like them at all. (1) - I like them very much (7)
<i>Control</i> : Brand awareness ($\alpha = .887$, AVE = 90 %, CR = .946)	How well do you know the company Credit Suisse? Very bad (1) – very good (7) How well do you know Credit Suisse’s banking services? Very bad (1) – very good (7)
<i>Control</i> : Customer of Credit Suisse	Yes (1) - No (2)
<i>Control</i> : Gender	Male (1) - Female (2)
<i>Control</i> : Age	Age in years
<i>MC</i> : Defensive brand signal ($\alpha = .860$, AVE = 78 %, CR = .914)	Credit Suisse rejects responsibility of climate unfavorable behavior. Credit Suisse accuses Tobias Müller of being responsible for his own choice of bank. Credit Suisse denies that they made a mistake.
<i>MC</i> : Accommodative brand signal ($\alpha = .904$, AVE = 78 %, CR = .933)	Credit Suisse takes responsibility for its misguided investment strategy. Credit Suisse offers compensation for the additional transaction costs incurred. Credit Suisse apologizes to the critic Tobias Müller. Credit Suisse admits that they have made a mistake.
<i>MC1</i> : A long-time Credit Suisse customer wrote a personal defending comment on Tobias Müller's criticism.	
<i>MC2</i> : A long-time Credit Suisse employee wrote a personal defending comment on Tobias Müller's criticism.	
<i>MC3</i> : Credit Suisse responded to Tobias Müller's criticism in an official statement.	

Note – α = Cronbach’s alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted; DV = dependent variable, control = control variables, MC = manipulation checks

TABLE 3
Mean Differences for Manipulation Checks

Measure	Group	Means	ΔM , standard error, t-statistic, p-value
Defensive brand signal	Control	$M_{def} = 5.52; M_{acco} = 2.57$	$\Delta M = -2.95, SE = .29, t(216) = -10.22, p < .001$
	CBD	$M_{def} = 5.59; M_{acco} = 2.10$	$\Delta M = -3.49, SE = .30, t(216) = -11.68, p < .001$
	EBD	$M_{def} = 5.28; M_{acco} = 2.72$	$\Delta M = -2.56, SE = .30, t(216) = -8.56, p < .001$
	<i>Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .009, F(2,216) = 2.42, p = .09$</i>		
Accommodative brand signal	Control	$M_{acco} = 5.55; M_{def} = 2.33$	$\Delta M = -3.22, SE = .24, t(216) = -13.52, p < .001$
	CBD	$M_{acco} = 5.45; M_{def} = 1.65$	$\Delta M = -3.80, SE = .25, t(216) = -15.39, p < .001$
	EBD	$M_{acco} = 5.21; M_{def} = 1.94$	$\Delta M = -3.27, SE = .25, t(216) = -13.23, p < .001$
	<i>Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .004, F(2,216) = 1.70, p = .19$</i>		
Credit Suisse responded to the criticism in an official statement.	Control	$M_{con} = 1.63; M_{def} = 5.70$	$\Delta M = 4.07, SE = .35, t(313) = 11.76, p < .001$
		$M_{con} = 1.63; M_{acco} = 5.74$	$\Delta M = 4.11, SE = .36, t(313) = 11.30, p < .001$
	CBD	$M_{con} = 1.41; M_{def} = 5.40$	$\Delta M = 3.99, SE = .38, t(313) = 10.52, p < .001$
		$M_{con} = 1.41; M_{acco} = 5.59$	$\Delta M = 4.19, SE = .37, t(313) = 11.18, p < .001$
	EBD	$M_{con} = 1.27; M_{def} = 5.76$	$\Delta M = 4.49, SE = .39, t(313) = 11.47, p < .001$
		$M_{con} = 1.27; M_{acco} = 5.92$	$\Delta M = 4.66, SE = .38, t(313) = 12.35, p < .001$
<i>Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .002, F(4,313) = .38, p = .82$</i>			
A longtime customer defended Credit Suisse.	Control	$M_{CBD} = 6.00; M_{con} = 1.58$	$\Delta M = -4.42, SE = .38, t(313) = -11.63, p < .001$
		$M_{CBD} = 6.00; M_{EBD} = 1.53$	$\Delta M = -4.47, SE = .40, t(313) = -11.09, p < .001$
	Defensive	$M_{CBD} = 5.80; M_{con} = 1.93$	$\Delta M = -3.87, SE = .36, t(313) = -10.73, p < .001$
		$M_{CBD} = 5.80; M_{EBD} = 2.18$	$\Delta M = -3.62, SE = .38, t(313) = -9.41, p < .001$
	Accommodative	$M_{CBD} = 5.62; M_{con} = 1.66$	$\Delta M = -3.96, SE = .37, t(313) = -10.61, p < .001$
		$M_{CBD} = 5.62; M_{EBD} = 2.15$	$\Delta M = -3.47, SE = .36, t(313) = -9.54, p < .001$
<i>Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .005, F(4,313) = .99, p = .41$</i>			
A longtime employee defended Credit Suisse.	Control	$M_{EBD} = 6.23; M_{con} = 1.58$	$\Delta M = -4.65, SE = .40, t(313) = -11.50, p < .001$
		$M_{EBD} = 6.23; M_{CBD} = 1.75$	$\Delta M = -4.47, SE = .40, t(313) = -11.09, p < .001$
	Defensive	$M_{EBD} = 6.09; M_{con} = 2.81$	$\Delta M = -3.28, SE = .38, t(313) = -8.55, p < .001$
		$M_{EBD} = 6.09; M_{CBD} = 2.63$	$\Delta M = -3.62, SE = .38, t(313) = -9.41, p < .001$
	Accommodative	$M_{EBD} = 6.03; M_{con} = 2.89$	$\Delta M = -3.14, SE = .39, t(313) = -8.14, p < .001$
		$M_{EBD} = 6.03; M_{CBD} = 2.65$	$\Delta M = -3.47, SE = .36, t(313) = -9.54, p < .001$
<i>Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .014, F(4,313) = 2.32, p = .06$</i>			

Note — M_{con} = mean of control group, M_{def} = mean of group with defensive brand signal, M_{acco} = mean of group with accommodative brand signal, M_{CBD} = mean of CBD group, M_{EBD} = mean of EBD group, ΔM = difference in means, ΔR^2 = change in R squared

TABLE 4
Moderation Analysis Including Covariates with Dummy Coding

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	.87	.75	1.16	.249
Defensive brand signal (X1)	.47	.23	2.06	.040
Accommodative brand signal (X2)	.72	.24	3.00	.003
Consumer brand defense (W1)	.48	.23	2.07	.040
Employee brand defense (W2)	.52	.24	2.16	.032
X1 * W1	-.73	.33	-2.22	.027
X1 * W2	-.73	.33	-2.20	.029
X2 * W1	-.31	.33	-0.94	.349
X2 * W2	-.79	.34	-2.35	.019
Product involvement	.39	.05	8.20	< .001
Attitude toward banks	.27	.04	5.94	< .001
Brand awareness	-.01	.05	-0.29	.772
Customer (yes, no)	.25	.34	0.74	.458
Gender (male, female)	-.24	.12	-2.07	.040
Age (in years)	< .01	< .01	-0.46	.649
Model summary: $R^2 = .43$, $F(14,323) = 17.65$, $p < .001$				
Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .017$, $F(4,323) = 2.45$, $p < .05$				
Control group	Conditional effect defensive brand signal = .47, SE = .23, $t(323) = 2.06$, $p < .05$			
	Conditional effect accommodative brand signal = .72, SE = .24, $t(323) = 3.00$, $p < .01$			
	Test of equality of conditional means: $F(2, 323) = 4.72$, $p < .01$			
CBD	Conditional effect defensive brand signal = -.26, SE = .24, $t(323) = -1.10$, $p = .27$			
	Conditional effect accommodative brand signal = .41, SE = .23, $t(323) = 1.77$, $p = .08$			
	Test of equality of conditional means: $F(2, 323) = 3.93$, $p < .05$			
EBD	Conditional effect defensive brand signal = -.26, SE = .24, $t(323) = -1.08$, $p = .28$			
	Conditional effect accommodative brand signal = -.07, SE = .23, $t(323) = -.28$, $p = .78$			
	Test of equality of conditional means: $F(2, 323) = .63$, $p = .54$			

Note — dummy coding: X1 = no brand self-defense vs. defensive brand signal, X2 = no brand self-defense vs. accommodative brand signal; W1 = no third-party defense vs. CBD, W2 = no third-party defense vs. EBD; dependent variable: observers' brand attitude

TABLE 4
Moderation Analysis Including Covariates with Helmert Coding

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	1.26	.74	1.72	.087
Brand signal (X1)	.60	.20	2.94	.004
Type of brand signal (X2)	.26	.23	1.09	.277
Consumer brand defense (W1)	.13	.14	0.97	.333
Employee brand defense (W2)	.01	.14	0.06	.952
X1 * W1	-.52	.29	-1.82	.070
X1 * W2	-.76	.29	-2.63	.009
X2 * W1	.41	.34	1.24	.218
X2 * W2	-.06	.34	-0.17	.864
Product involvement	.39	.05	8.20	< .001
Attitude toward banks	.27	.04	5.94	< .001
Brand awareness	-.01	.05	-0.29	.772
Customer (yes, no)	.25	.34	0.74	.458
Gender (male, female)	-.24	.12	-2.07	.040
Age (in years)	< .01	< .01	-0.46	.649
Control group	Conditional effect of brand signal = .60, SE = .20, $t(323) = 2.94, p < .01$			
	Conditional effect of brand signal type = .26, SE = .23, $t(323) = 1.09, p = .28$			
CBD	Conditional effect of brand signal = .07, SE = .20, $t(323) = .37, p = .71$			
	Conditional effect of brand signal type = .67, SE = .24, $t(323) = 2.77, p < .01$			
EBD	Conditional effect of brand signal = -.16, SE = .21, $t(323) = -.80, p = .42$			
	Conditional effect of brand signal type = .20, SE = .24, $t(323) = .82, p = .41$			

Note – Helmert coding: X1 = brand criticism without defense vs. the two groups with brand signals, X2 = defensive brand signal vs. accommodative brand signal; W1 = no third-party defense vs. CBD, W2 = no third-party defense vs. EBD; dependent variable: observers' brand attitude

Appendix C - Study 3

TABLE 1

Experimental Scenarios

<p><u>Topdog</u></p> <p>Die Gründer des Home of Coffee starteten mit ihrem riesigen Kaffeehaus im Zentrum der Stadt und hatten somit eine äusserst gute Ausgangsposition, um in den Markt einzusteigen. Darüber hinaus hatten sie keine Mühe grosse Mengen an Kapital für das teure Inventar aufzubringen (bspw. für professionelle Kaffeemaschinen, Möblierung). In der Zwischenzeit verfügen sie über ein weitreichendes Netzwerk (z.B. zu Lieferanten, zur lokalen Regierung) und etliche Filialen. Dadurch setzen sie die kleinen, traditionellen Kaffeehäuser zunehmend unter Druck (z.B. durch weitreichende Marketingkampagnen und einen intensiven Preiskampf). Das Home of Coffee ist bekannt dafür, Kaffee in einer äusserst hohen Qualität anzubieten. Die Gründer haben auf ihrem Weg zur Marktführerschaft in der Stadt nahezu keine Rückschläge erlitten und sie müssen sich auch nicht anstrengen, um in dieser Branche wettbewerbsfähig zu bleiben. Sie wollen primär ihren meistverkauften Kaffee verkaufen und streben nicht danach neue Kaffeekreationen zu entwickeln. Die Gründer scheinen somit keinen grösseren Traum mehr zu verfolgen und zeigen auch keine grosse Leidenschaft für ihr Geschäft. Nichtsdestotrotz, werden ihre Kaffeekreationen von den Kritikern weiterhin mit Bestnoten ausgezeichnet.</p>	<p><u>Underdog</u></p> <p>Die Gründer des Home of Coffee starteten mit ihrem kleinen Kaffeehaus am Rande der Stadt und hatten somit eine schlechte Ausgangsposition, um in den Markt einzusteigen. Darüber hinaus hatten sie viel Mühe genügend Kapital für das teure Inventar aufzubringen (bspw. für eine professionelle Kaffeemaschine, Möblierung). Zudem verfügen sie nur über ein kleines Netzwerk (z.B. zu Lieferanten, zur lokalen Regierung) und werden von den grossen Kaffeehaus-Ketten zunehmend unter Druck gesetzt (z.B. durch weitreichende Marketingkampagnen und einen intensiven Preiskampf). Das Home of Coffee ist bekannt dafür, Kaffee in einer äusserst hohen Qualität anzubieten. Die Gründer haben bereits viele Rückschläge erlitten und deshalb stand das Home of Coffee mehrmals vor der Schliessung. Jedoch gaben die Gründer nie auf und kämpften sich immer wieder mit viel Herzblut aus den Krisen. Die Gründer verfolgen unentwegt ihren Traum, einmal eine Filiale an einem zentraleren Standort zu eröffnen und arbeiten leidenschaftlich, um diesen Traum zu verwirklichen. Aufgeben kommt für sie nicht in Frage! Obwohl sie im Vergleich zu mächtigen Konkurrenten immer noch relativ unbekannt sind, werden ihre Kaffeekreationen von den Kritikern mit Bestnoten ausgezeichnet.</p>
<p><u>Criticism</u></p> <p>Lisa Fink: Ich habe mir gestern einen Kaffee im Home of Coffee gekauft. Beim Trinken habe ich plötzlich ein Haar auf meiner Zunge gespürt, welches in diesem Kaffee war. Dies hat mich so angewidert... richtig eklig!! Zudem habe ich erst kürzlich einen Bericht gelesen, dass das Home of Coffee ihre Kaffeebohnen von Feldern in Brasilien bezieht, bei welchen die armen Erntehelfer schamlos ausgebeutet werden 🙄 Dies war definitiv mein letzter Kaffee vom Home of Coffee! Ich werde dieses Unternehmen von nun an meiden und empfehle euch es mir gleichzutun.</p>	
<p><u>Defensive Consumer Response</u></p> <p><i>Ein anderer Kunde hat auf den Kommentar von vorhin wie folgt geantwortet:</i></p> <p>Chris Teutscher: Liebe Lisa. Ich verstehe deinen Ärger vollkommen. Jedoch trinke ich regelmässig Kaffee von Home of Coffee und es war nie ein Haar in meinem Kaffee. Sehr wahrscheinlich handelte es sich bei deinem Kaffee um einen unglücklichen Einzelfall. Ich würde an deiner Stelle kein Drama daraus machen. Ein solcher</p>	<p><u>Accommodative Brand Response</u></p> <p><i>Das Unternehmen hat auf den Kommentar von vorhin wie folgt geantwortet:</i></p> <p>Home of Coffee: Liebe Lisa. Wir verstehen deinen Ärger vollkommen und möchten uns für die Unannehmlichkeiten betreffend dem Haar in deinem Kaffee ganz herzlich entschuldigen. Wir nehmen deinen Vorfall ernst und versuchen unser Bestes, dass sich ein solcher Vorfall nicht mehr wiederholen wird. Wir werden aus deiner</p>

Vorfall könnte doch auch bei anderen Kaffee Ketten vorkommen? Vielleicht bekommst du sogar den Verkaufspreis zurückerstattet, wenn du ihnen den Vorfall erläuterst.

Darüber hinaus musst du auch noch andere Quellen studieren bevor du solche Anschuldigungen ins Internet stellst. Bist du Dir sicher, dass deine Quelle verlässlich ist? Ich habe kürzlich einen Artikel über eine unabhängige Untersuchung einer NPO gelesen. Darin stand, dass sich der Produzent in Brasilien durchaus für faire Bedingungen einsetzt. Sie zahlen die gesetzlichen Mindestlöhne, gewähren den Erntehelfern lange Pausen mit Wasser und der Produzent wurde kürzlich als einer der Top-Arbeitsgeber in der Region São Paulo ausgezeichnet. Home of Coffee will zudem auch in der Zukunft eng mit den lokalen Produzenten zusammenarbeiten.

Ich werde auf jeden Fall weiterhin Kaffee von Home of Coffee trinken!

Kritik lernen und die entsprechenden Schlüsse ziehen (z.B. zusätzliche Qualitätsprüfungen). Selbstverständlich werden wir Dir den Verkaufspreis für diesen Kaffee erstatten, wenn du das nächste Mal bei uns vorbeikommt.

Darüber hinaus nehmen wir auch deine Anmerkungen zum Bericht über die Herkunft unserer Kaffeebohnen sehr ernst. Könntest du uns bitte den von Dir genannten Bericht senden, damit wir mit den Verfassern in Kontakt treten können, um nähere Details zu erfahren? Unser Produzent wurde kürzlich als einer der Top-Arbeitsgeber in der Region São Paulo ausgezeichnet, zahlt die gesetzlichen Mindestlöhne und gewährt den Erntehelfern lange Pausen mit Wasser. Wir planen in der Zukunft mit den lokalen Produzenten noch enger zusammenzuarbeiten, um die Arbeitsbedingungen der Erntehelfer weiter zu verbessern.

Wir hoffen sehr, dich auch in Zukunft bei uns als Kundin begrüßen zu dürfen.

TABLE 2

Construct Indicators, Measurement Items, and Scale Reliabilities

Measure (α , AVE, CR)	Items
<i>DV</i> : Attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = .920$, AVE = 81 %, CR = .944)	Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Home of Coffee. Unappealing - appealing Bad - good Unfavorable - favorable Unlikable - likable
<i>Control</i> : Product involvement ($\alpha = .957$, AVE = 85 %, CR = .967)	Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that coffee ought to be important to me. Because of my personal values, I feel that coffee ought to be important to me. Coffee is very important to me personally. Compared with other products, coffee is important to me. I am interested in coffee.
<i>Control</i> : Gender	Male (1) - Female (2)
<i>Control</i> : Age	Age in years
<i>MC1</i> : Home of Coffee has been criticized in a comment (e.g., hair in coffee, exploitation of harvesters). <i>MC2</i> : Home of Coffee was defended in a comment by a customer (e.g., unfortunate isolated incident, unreliable source). <i>MC3</i> : The company has defended itself in a comment and taken a position on the allegations (e.g., quality checks, cooperation with local producers).	
<i>MC</i> : Defensive signal ($\alpha = .516$, AVE = 51 %, CR = .756)	[A consumer (Chris Teutscher) / Home of Coffee] ¹ rejects [Home of Coffee's] responsibility for the incidents (hair and poor working conditions). [A consumer (Chris Teutscher) / Home of Coffee] ¹ accuses critic Lisa Fink of being responsible herself. [A consumer (Chris Teutscher) / Home of Coffee] ¹ denies that [Home of Coffee / they] made a mistake.
<i>MC</i> : Accommodative signal ($\alpha = .871$, AVE = 72 %, CR = .912)	Home of Coffee accepts full responsibility for the incidents criticized. Home of Coffee offers compensation. Home of Coffee apologizes to the critic Lisa Fink. Home of Coffee admits that they have made a mistake.
<i>MC</i> : External disadvantage ($\alpha = .944$, AVE = 82 %, CR = .958)	The founders had more obstacles in the way to success compared to others. It was harder for the founders to be where they are now compared to others. The founders had to struggle more than others to be where they are now. Compared to the competition, the founders started from a less advantageous position to achieve their goals. The founders have to prove themselves against competition with more resources (money, energy, etc.).
<i>MC</i> : Passion and determination ($\alpha = .911$, AVE = 74 %, CR = .934)	Compared to others, the founders pursue their goals more passionately. The founders fight harder compared to others to succeed when obstacles are in the way. The founders always remain determined even when they lose. Even when the founders fail, they do not lose hope. The founders show more resilience than others in the face of adversity.

Note — α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted; DV = dependent variable, control = control variables, MC = manipulation checks

¹ For participants in the defensive CBD condition, «A consumer (Chris Teutscher)» was displayed, and for individuals in the accommodative brand signal group, «Home of Coffee» was inserted.

TABLE 3
Moderation Analysis Including Covariates with Dummy Coding

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	3.64	.30	12.34	< .001
Defensive CBD (X1)	.49	.21	2.34	.020
Accommodative brand signal (X2)	.92	.21	4.37	< .001
Brand's biography (W1)	1.69	.22	7.52	< .001
X1 * W1	.15	.30	0.51	.609
X2 * W1	-.51	.30	-1.73	.085
Product involvement	.02	.03	0.82	.411
Gender (male, female)	-.20	.12	-1.67	.097
Age (in years)	-.01	< .00	-1.60	.111
Model summary: $R^2 = .38$, $F(8,339) = 26.38$, $p < .001$				
Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .011$, $F(2,339) = 3.13$, $p < .05$				
Topdog	Conditional effect defensive consumer response = .49, $SE = .21$, $t(339) = 2.34$, $p < .05$			
	Conditional effect accommodative brand response = .92, $SE = .21$, $t(339) = 4.37$, $p < .001$			
	Test of equality of conditional means: $F(2, 339) = 9.66$, $p = .001$			
Underdog	Conditional effect defensive consumer response = .64, $SE = .22$, $t(339) = 2.96$, $p < .01$			
	Conditional effect accommodative brand response = .41, $SE = .21$, $t(339) = 1.99$, $p < .05$			
	Test of equality of conditional means: $F(2, 339) = 4.43$, $p < .05$			

Note — dummy coding: X1 = brand criticism vs. defensive CBD, X2 = brand criticism vs. accommodative brand signal, W1 = topdog vs. underdog; dependent variable: observers' brand attitude

TABLE 4
Moderation Analysis Including Covariates with Helmert Coding

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	4.11	.26	15.58	< .001
Brand defense (X1)	0.71	.18	3.83	< .001
Type of brand defense (X2)	0.43	.20	2.16	.031
Brand's biography (W1)	1.57	.12	13.19	< .001
X1 * W1	-0.18	.26	-0.68	.499
X2 * W1	-0.66	.28	-2.40	.017
Product involvement	0.02	.03	0.82	.411
Gender (male, female)	-0.20	.12	-1.67	.097
Age (in years)	-0.01	< .00	-1.60	.111
Topdog	Conditional effect of brand defense = .71, $SE = .18$, $t(339) = 3.83$, $p < .001$			
	Conditional effect of brand defense type = .43, $SE = .20$, $t(339) = 2.16$, $p < .05$			
Underdog	Conditional effect of brand defense = .53, $SE = .19$, $t(339) = 2.79$, $p < .01$			
	Conditional effect of brand defense type = -.23, $SE = .19$, $t(339) = -1.19$, $p = .23$			

Note — Helmert coding: X1 = brand criticism without defense vs. the two groups with defense, X2 = defensive CBD vs. accommodative brand signal, W1 = topdog vs. underdog; dependent variable: observers' brand attitude

Paper III

Mobilizing your Consumer Brand Defense-Forces

With(out) Appeals?

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Mobilizing your Consumer Brand Defense-Forces With(out) Appeals?

A large portion of research on webcare and crisis communication focuses on enhancing the public brand perception via management responses (e.g., denial of responsibility). Conversely, this research proposes a novel way to handle brand criticism by exploiting the power of consumers who are defending the brand (e.g., supportive comments). More specifically, a first experimental study pursues whether a direct appeal can improve observers' willingness to defend the brand. This study demonstrates that individuals who are highly connected with the brand can indeed be activated with such requests for consumer brand defense (CBD). Moreover, I distinguish between three types of CBD appeals derived from the literature about prosocial behavior. In more detail, managers can emphasize the benefits for the brand (i.e., other-benefit appeals), for the brand defender (i.e., self-benefit appeals), or stress the observers' sense of justice (i.e., moral appeals). The second experimental study reveals that other-benefit and moral appeals are more potent in evoking a willingness to defend the brand because these types of appeals elicit a higher degree of brand empathy and moral norms compared to self-benefit appeals. Taken together, these results uncover a new way to handle brand criticism and thereby advance the field of reputation management.

Consumer Brand Defense, Prosocial Behavior, Appeals, Reputation Management

In the age of negative electronic word-of-mouth (e.g., Esmark Jones et al. 2018; Luo 2009; Relling et al. 2016) or in large quantities even firestorms (Hansen, Kupfer, and Hennig-Thurau 2018; Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley 2014), public calls for brand boycotts (e.g., Yuksel, Thai, and Lee 2020), and brand sabotage acts (Kähr et al. 2016) it is essential to learn how to cope with such threats. One educational incident in which a brand reacted simply and nevertheless successfully goes back to 2010. In those days, a Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine criticized McDonald's for their unhealthy food through a commercial later uploaded to YouTube (Physicians Committee 2010). The video showed a dead person in a mortuary with a tag on his foot with the inscription "I was lovin' it" and ended with the request "I was lovin' it - high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart attacks, tonight make it vegetarian!" McDonald's Germany published a link to the video on their Facebook brand page and appealed to their followers to share their thoughts on it. Interestingly, most triggered comments favored the brand and defended McDonald's (e.g., "Please - I would like to be buried with a Big Mac!").

The scientific literature about crisis communication and webcare responses after negative electronic word-of-mouth (NWOM) primarily focuses on directly improving the observers' opinions about the criticized incident and brand (e.g., via an excuse or denial of responsibility; e.g., Chang et al. 2015; Coombs 2007; Lee and Song 2010; Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider 1998; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020). However, the correct management response after brand criticism is complex because it can be hard to tell how the observers perceive and evaluate such responses. In that matter, research shows that a wrong brand statement can sometimes even cause more harm. The acceptance of responsibility (i.e., accommodative brand response) can, for example, lead to the impression of weakness and guilt (Ferrin et al. 2007; Kim et al. 2004; Xia 2013). Nevertheless, there might be a subtler way to turn around the public's opinion after brand criticism. For example, McDonald's demonstrates that brands can also indirectly tackle emerging criticism by stimulating well-meaning consumers to comment. In that sense, I am interested in a completely new form of management responses with which the brand can activate consumers to defend their brand.

With the ever-looming danger of brand criticism, stimulating consumers to defend a brand can be highly useful to protect the brand from potential reputational and brand image damage (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018; Esmark Jones et al. 2018; Hong and Cameron 2018; Scholz and Smith 2019; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). Notably, because engaged consumers' communication often has more influence on observers' opinion formation than marketers due to more effective reach and higher credibility (Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins 2007; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Kozinets et al. 2010; Senecal and Nantel 2004). Moreover, such a strategy could be promising because brand defenders show a wide array of defense styles. For example, consumers sometimes defend brands by denying that the criticism is even worth mentioning (cf. "trivializing"), by doubting the credibility of the critic (cf. "doubting"), by advocating for the brand with rational arguments (cf. "advocating"), or also by vouching for the brand (cf. "vouching"; Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Thus, the question emerges whether it is possible to stimulate the intention to defend a brand among observing consumers with a specific type of management response?

To the best of my knowledge, only two netnographic studies examined how to exploit CBD with managerial responses until now. In a moral-based firestorm, a company can engage in an escalation strategy to gain support from observers. This strategy stipulates that the brand is deepening the ditch between the brand critics and advocates by, for example, using a moral tone and retweeting the criticism (Scholz and Smith 2019). Another approach suggests affirming consumers who wrote defense comments with a like or message (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). However, the first strategy may be limited to moral-based firestorms, whereas the second one prerequisite at least one consumer brand defender. Inspired by the example of Mc Donald's, my proposed strategy differs from these two existing management responses because I examine whether a brand that is getting criticized can ask their community for help? In more detail, CBD can be conceptualized as prosocial behavior because consumer brand defenders protect a brand against negative information (Ammann et al. 2021). Prosocial behavior commonly refers to actions on the part of one person to promote

another's welfare or prevent declines in that person's welfare (Clark et al. 2015). Studies about prosocial behavior hereby demonstrated that the wording of an appeal for help exerts a potent influence on the probability that someone would follow this request (e.g., Boice and Goldman 1981). Such appeals can be understood as "making a serious, urgent, or heartfelt request" (Lexico.com 2021). Applied to the prosocial behavior of CBD, an appeal for help by the brand directed at potential brand defenders could manifest a new sort of management response strategy in tackling criticism.

First, I go more into detail about consumer brand defense and its positive effects. Further, I discriminate between three distinct types of appeals with which a brand could activate their consumers brand defenders based on research about appeals in the domain of prosocial behavior. Secondly, with an experimental study, I pursue whether these appeals effectively stimulate consumers' brand defense behavior. In that matter, I also consider the role of consumers' relationship with the brand. Finally, in a second experimental study, the effectiveness of the three different types of CBD appeals is getting examined, along with the mechanism responsible for the success of these appeals. To conclude, this research about CBD appeals contributes to the literature about webcare and crisis communication (e.g., Benoit 2015; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Coombs 2007; Lee and Song 2010; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017) by demonstrating an alternative path in defending the brand. Upon now, research on CBD remains scarce about effective ways to exploit the CBD's potential. Thus, the examination of CBD appeals also advances the study of practical tools for CBD-management (Ammann et al. 2021). Further, the proposed CBD appeals are based on the literature about prosocial behavior and, therefore, also provide insights into the application of appeals in another context than donations (e.g., Brunel and Nelson 2000; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Goenka and van Osselaer 2019; Small and Verrochi 2009; White and Peloza 2009).

The Consumer Brand Defense Effect

With the rise of social media platforms, it became clear that the brand is not the only actor communicating in times of criticism (Timothy Coombs and Jean Holladay 2014). In this regard, the rhetorical arena theory (RAT) was developed, recognizing multiple voices that influence public opinion. Apart from the brand, one such crisis communicator can be consumers (Frandsen and Johansen 2016; Frandsen and Johansen 2018). For this study, consumers who are defending the brand are of interest. More specifically, the phenomenon of consumer brand defense (CBD) can be defined as “consumers who respond to particular criticism of a brand with replies, which can be perceived as supportive of the criticized brand by observers” (Ammann et al. 2021, p. 17). Despite the early research stage on the effect of consumers' brand defense behavior, first studies reveal that this behavior can be beneficial for brands. Consumers' defense comment that contradicts criticism can lessen the attribution of blame responsibility and improve the brand's reputation (Hong and Cameron 2018; Jahn 2014). Furthermore, CBD exerts a positive impact on brand-related outcomes (e.g., better brand attitude, brand trust) and could even mitigate unfavorable outcomes such as the intention for NWOM (Ammann 2021; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). Moreover, one study demonstrated that consumers' responses to negative online reviews could be more beneficial for the brand than the brand's or employees' responses (Esmark Jones et al. 2018). To conclude, first evidence demonstrates the existence of the “*consumer brand defense effect*,” which encompasses the beneficial outcome of consumers' brand defense acts in mitigating negative consequences of brand criticism (Ammann 2021).

Types of CBD Appeals

As already described, the brand defense act is prosocial in nature because the consumers are getting active to enhance or prevent a reduction in the brand's welfare (Ammann et al. 2021). Research on prosocial behavior has identified three key motive categories that clarify why people help: egoism, altruism, and principism (e.g., Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Batson 2011; Schroeder and Graziano 2015). In more detail, someone might help another person with the primary goal of self-benefit (i.e., egoism), to increase the welfare of this person (i.e., altruism), or to uphold a moral principle such as justice (i.e., principism; Batson 1994; 2011; Turiel 2015). First research indicates that these three motive categories are also relevant drivers for the prosocial behavior of CBD (Ammann et al. 2021).

Building upon these categories, I discriminate between three unique types of appeals, each addressing a different motive through its specific wording. The first two types of appeals can be distinguished whether they emphasize the benefits for the addressees themselves (i.e., self-benefit appeals) or the benefits for the recipients of donations (i.e., other-benefit appeals; e.g., Brunel and Nelson 2000; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Green and Peloza 2014; White and Peloza 2009). This distinction exhibits a high relevance in the literature about prosocial behavior (Baek et al. 2019; Brunel and Nelson 2000; Feiler, Tost, and Grant 2012; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Green and Peloza 2014; Jin et al. 2021; Kareklas, Carlson, and Muehling 2014; Kulow and Kramer 2016; Nelson et al. 2006; Robitaille et al. 2021; Ryoo, Sung, and Chechelnytska 2020; White and Peloza 2009). To be more specific, self-benefit appeals plea to egoistic motives like self-enhancement and hedonic benefits (e.g., "build your resume by developing and practicing job skills" or "enjoy networking opportunities"; White and Peloza 2009, p. 113). Besides, these appeals can stress ego-focused emotions such as pride or happiness emerging from the prosocial act (Aaker and Williams 1998; Faseur and Geuens 2012). On the other hand, other-benefit appeals emphasize emotions such as empathy (e.g., Aaker and Williams 1998) and, more specifically, perspective-taking (Robitaille et al.

2021) to pronounce altruism as a motive for helping (e.g., "As a caring person, you understand the importance of helping others in need."; Nelson et al. 2006, p. 50). Furthermore, I also discriminate between a third type of appeals based on principlism as a motive for prosocial behavior (Batson 1994; 2011; Turiel 2015). Appeals based on principlism promote the activation of moral norms by, for example, highlighting the personal responsibility of the addressee (e.g., "When your relative signs an organ donation card, you are no longer burdened with the possibility of having to decide for someone."; Hansen et al. 2018, p. 1026). Further, the consequences for others ("Jennifer is waiting since four years... for new lungs... let's help!"; Hansen et al. 2018, p. 1025; Schwartz 1970) and principlistic motives such as a sense of justice are getting accentuated (Batson 1994; 2011; Turiel 2015).

In the context of CBD, *self-benefit appeals* of criticized brands should stress the positive effects for the defenders themselves, like hedonic benefits (e.g., enjoyment of countering the critics' arguments). Or in other words, such an appeal for CBD should highlight the egoistic advantages accompanying a potential brand defense act (e.g., possibilities for self-enhancement by boosting one's online reputation with impressive comments; Ammann et al. 2021). Besides, self-benefit appeals should emphasize ego-focused emotions such as pride after successfully defending the brand.

On the other hand, *other-benefit appeals* for CBD should draw attention to the benefits for the brand (e.g., mitigating potential damage to the brand image) and their stakeholders like employees (e.g., no salary cuts due to the prevention of a "firestorm") and suppliers (e.g., no negative reputational spill-over effect). Further, such appeals should evoke empathy toward the brand among observers by mentioning the brand's challenging situation due to the criticism. Recent research demonstrated that a sense of empathy could also be experienced toward brands (Allard, Dunn, and White 2020; Kirmani et al. 2017; Wei, Liu, and Keh 2020). Consumer's empathy toward the brand (CETB) hereby refers to concern, warmth, and compassion toward the brand and, more generally, the consideration of the brand's

perspective in the respective situation (Allard, Dunn, and White 2020; Kirmani et al. 2017; Wei, Liu, and Keh 2020).

Finally, *moral appeals* for CBD focus on moral principles. More specifically, a moral appeal in the context of CBD could highlight an imbalance in equity (i.e., unjustified brand criticism) and, consequently, plea to observers' sense of justice. Besides, such moral appeals emphasize one's duty to help the brand against the critics. Thus, these appeals pronounce the personal responsibility of the reader. This personal responsibility may also be evoked with an appeal that conveys an implicit accusation by triggering thoughts among the appeal's readers, such as "why am I not defending the brand?" (Hansen et al. 2018).

The Effect of CBD Appeals on the Intention to Defend the Brand

The purpose of appeals for help is that observers of these appeals comply and consequently support the requester. For this purpose, appeals for help should provide information that the requester is at serious risk (e.g., Lindsey 2005). Hence, appeals can evoke awareness of the urgency and importance for the assistance of someone in need (Christensen et al. 1998). In fact, the literature about prosocial behavior highlights that charitable appeals can increase the degree of helping (Boice and Goldman 1981; Goldman, Broll, and Carrill 1983) and donations (e.g., Goenka and van Osselaer 2019; Kim, Gupta, and Lee 2021; Lindsey 2005; Sallis, Harper, and Sanders 2018; Small and Verrochi 2009).

Regarding self-benefit appeals, the arousal:cost–reward model states that the brand criticism’s observers are confronted with arousal they might be motivated to eliminate. The subsequent cost–reward comparison determines whether someone helps the person (in this case, the brand) in need (Piliavin et al. 1981; Dovidio et al. 1991). The costs consist of personal costs (e.g., the effort for CBD) and costs for not helping the brand (e.g., guilt and shame; Dovidio et al. 2017). On the other hand, the reward for helping or, in my case, for defending the brand can be attributed to the fulfillment of egoistic motives, such as self-enhancement, hedonic benefits, or the expectation of future reciprocity (Ammann et al. 2021). In this matter, a self-benefit appeal for CBD could stimulate defense comments by drawing attention to a positive benefit-cost ratio (e.g., Boice and Goldman 1981; White and Peloza 2009).

Further, the empathy–altruism hypothesis posits that observers of people in need experience an empathic response, which in turn could lead to an altruistic motivation to free them from their suffering (e.g., Batson 2011; Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Batson and Powell 2003; Batson and Shaw 1991). Hence, other-benefit appeals that emphasize the need for others’ help could elicit an empathic response and lead to helping behavior (Fisher, Vandebosch, and Antia 2008). Thus, when highlighting that the brand requires support after criticism, this type of CBD appeal might result in defense comments by observing consumers.

Moreover, some people are motivated to help because of their urge to uphold moral principles such as justice (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011). Moral norms can be activated when people experience some degree of personal responsibility and realize that their behavior has an impact. Consequently, a sense of moral obligation can arise, which leads to an understanding that one should act in a particular way (Nelson et al. 2006; Schwartz 1970). In the present case, moral appeals should evoke personal responsibility and an urge to restore justice after brand criticism, resulting in defense comments.

The Role of Consumers' Relationship with the Brand in Complying with CBD Appeals

The notion that we rather comply with an appeal of a friend than with an appeal coming from a stranger seems obvious and is also scientifically elaborated (e.g., Burger et al. 2001; Clark et al. 1987; Frenzen and Davis 1990; Williamson and Clark 1992). In more detail, we are positively reacting to appeals that stem from close ones because such a request can elevate positive affect because we feel chosen and being required (Williamson and Clark 1992). On the other hand, refusing a request leads to negative affect if the request's addressee is in a communal relationship with the help seeker (e.g., friends, romantic partners; Williamson et al. 1996). Taken together, appeals can be particularly persuasive among people with a strong positive relationship with the requester. Thus, it seems reasonable that appeals from brands (e.g., a statement on Social Media) increase the degree of helping in the form of defense comments after brand criticism, particularly among consumers with a strong positive brand relationship.

H1: *The stronger the reader's brand relationship, the higher the appeal's effectiveness (vs. no appeal) in evoking a willingness to defend the brand against criticism.*

More specifically, I argue that appeals in which the brand draws attention to the brand's predicament (other-benefit) or the principle of restoring justice (moral appeal) should elicit more complying reactions among observers the stronger their relationship with the brand.

Concerning other-benefit appeals, empathy's positive effect on showing some helping behavior is stronger among close ones than among strangers (Maner and Gailliot 2007). Other-benefit appeals emphasize the benefit for others and stress empathic responses (e.g., Aaker and Williams 1998; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; White and Peloza 2009); therefore, other-benefit appeals should be more effective among consumers with a strong bond to the brand.

H2: *With increasing levels of reader's brand relationship, the other-benefit appeal for CBD by a criticized brand results in a higher willingness to defend the brand among observers of the discussions compared to no appeal.*

Moral appeals address the injustice of criticism to induce a personal responsibility to act (e.g., Schwartz 1970). In this matter, research about relationship types states that people feel a higher personal obligation to help those with whom they have a close relationship (e.g., Clark et al. 1987; Janoff-Bulman and Leggatt 2002). Hence, I assume that in the case of CBD, the moral appeal's effectiveness should be increased for consumers with a strong positive relationship with the brand.

H3: *With increasing levels of reader's brand relationship, the moral appeal for CBD by a criticized brand results in a higher willingness to defend the brand among observers of the discussions compared to no appeal.*

However, I do not expect higher effectiveness for the self-benefit appeal for individuals with a stronger bond to the brand. For this type of appeal, the focus lies on triggering egoistic motives (e.g., hedonic benefits because of the entertaining discussions with the critics) and ego-focused emotions (e.g., pride), which should be independent of the relationship with the brand. In more detail, such emotions are rather associated with one's internal state under the exclusion of others or, in our case, the brand (Aaker and Williams 1998). Moreover, egoistic motives are characterized by the goal of self-benefit, and thereby, the benefit for the victim is only of secondary importance (e.g., Batson 2011; Schroeder and Graziano 2015). These considerations let me conclude that

H4: *the self-benefit appeal does not work better than no appeal in stimulating the willingness for CBD, the stronger the reader's brand relationship.*

Study 1 – The Effect of CBD Appeals and the Moderating Role of Consumers' Brand Relationship

An experimental study was carried out to examine the moderating role of consumer's brand relationship in driving the effect of CBD appeals (vs. no appeal). In more detail, the focus lay on the examination of the first four hypotheses.

Method

This study was designed as an online experiment with a four (no appeal vs. self-benefit vs. moral vs. other-benefit appeal) x continuous (self-brand connection: measured) between-subjects design. Consumers' brand relationship was operationalized with the self-brand connection construct (SBC) because SBC is a well-established variable in the literature about consumer-brand relationships (e.g., Escalas and Bettman 2005). SBC measures the extent to which consumers internalize a brand as part of their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Moreover, it has been shown that SBC is also pertinent in the context of CBD because strongly self-connected consumers may experience brand criticism as a threat to their positive self-view (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner 2012; Wilson, Giebelhausen, and Brady 2017).

347 participants were recruited on MTurk, of whom 44 people were screened-out during the survey because they were not familiar with the introduced brand (Malär et al. 2011), or because their answers to attention checks (e.g., "This survey deals with the brand...") or to an instructional manipulation check (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko 2009) were wrong. This resulted in an exclusion rate of 12.7 % and a final sample of 303 participants (44.6 % female, $M_{age} = 43.42$ years).

Participants first read a short description of the brand Nike. This brand was selected because, on the one hand, Nike got criticized in the past and, on the other hand, also defended by consumers (Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018). Moreover, it is possible to elicit the

interacting factor, the consumers' brand relationship with Nike and, therefore, improving external validity due to a higher degree of realism (Lynch 1982). After measuring the participants' self-brand connection, they were presented a brand criticism by a consumer. In more detail, this criticism mentioned that the Nike shoe of a famous basketball player drew apart and led to an injury. This scenario was based on an actual incident (Tracy and Draper 2019). Furthermore, the critic was complaining about the quality of Nike's shoes. In addition, the comments of some other consumers were displayed that defended Nike (e.g., "The injury of Zion was just a mild knee sprain ... nothing serious.") to model a realistic discussion with brand criticism as well as brand defense (Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018). Subsequently to this discussion, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. In the control group, the participants were informed that Nike did not respond to this discussion. The people in the "appeal"-conditions saw one of three different appeals (i.e., self-benefit, moral, other-benefit) as outlined in this paper (see *Table 1* in *Appendix A* for all scenarios). After questions about the dependent variable, manipulation checks, controls, and demographics (i.e., age, gender), the survey ended with a debriefing.

All scales were measured with 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = "completely disagree" to 7 = "completely agree" if not stated otherwise (see *Table 2* in *Appendix A* for all items and Cronbach's alpha). The dependent variable CBD intention was measured with a self-developed scale (see *Table 1*), which was inspired by the definition of CBD (Ammann et al. 2021). Further, the dependent variable was also measured by asking the participants how likely they would defend Nike online in the described situation (0-100 % slider; see *Table 1*; Lin, Zlatev, and Miller 2017). These different scale properties (0-100 % scale vs. 7-point Likert scale) can be a way to reduce the common-method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 2012). Another dependent variable measured how the participants felt about Nike to examine whether CBD appeals also affect consumers' brand attitude (e.g., "unfavorable – favorable"; five bipolar items; Spears and Singh 2004).

TABLE 1

Measurement Items and Scale Reliability of CBD Intention and CBD Likelihood

Dependent variable: CBD intention ($\alpha = .986$, $M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.93$)
In this case of criticism against Nike, I would...
... stand up for Nike in social media.
... defend Nike in social media (e.g., on Facebook, Twitter).
... support Nike in social media.
... write a positive comment about Nike in social media.
... protect Nike in social media.
Dependent variable: CBD likelihood ($M = 29.61$, $SD = 33.29$)
How likely would you be to defend "Nike" online in the described situation (e.g., writing a positive comment on Facebook)? 0-100 % slider

Note — α = Cronbach's alpha, M = mean, SD = standard deviation

The moderator self-brand connection was measured with a seven-item scale from Escalas and Bettman (2003); e.g., "Nike reflects who I am.", "I can identify with Nike."). In addition, response-efficacy (i.e., believing that CBD helps criticized brands to recover) was queried to elicit the participants' opinion about the positive effects of defense comments because these efficacy-beliefs can be influential whether someone complies with an appeal (five items; Lindsey 2005; Septianto and Paramita 2021; Sharma and Morwitz 2016). Another covariate which was included in the survey measured the participants' perceived self-efficacy (i.e., believing that one can defend the brand; four items; Cheung and Lee 2012; Lindsey 2005), which impacts whether individuals are showing prosocial acts (Grant and Gino 2010; Kerr and Kaufman-Gilliland 1997; Sharma and Morwitz 2016). Further, the participants assessed the perceived brand despair, which was operationalized with five items (e.g., "Nike seems to have lost all their hope"; Westerhof, Bohlmeijer, and McAdams 2017). This control variable was administered because I assumed that appeals as a brand response to criticism could be perceived as somewhat "last desperate act." Besides, participants reported their product involvement (with shoes; five items; Malär et al. 2011) because a high involvement is associated with a more thorough message processing (i.e., with the CBD appeals) which in turn can influence the message's persuasive effect (Petty and Cacioppo 1979).

To test whether the participants have perceived the appeal by Nike compared to the group without appeal, they further answered a self-developed four-item manipulation check (e.g., "In a statement, Nike appealed to me to defend their brand with a comment."). Furthermore, three four-item manipulation checks were included to verify that the participants of the three appeal conditions correctly perceived the characteristics of their randomly assigned type of appeal (e.g., self-benefit appeal: "The statement by "Nike" focused on the potential benefits of defense comments for myself, like having fun in arguing against critics."; Aaker and Williams 1998; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; White and Peloza 2009). All manipulation checks with the corresponding items and scale reliabilities are shown in *Table 3* of *Appendix A*.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Four one-way between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted to confirm the effectiveness of the manipulation of the independent variable. The first ANOVA tested whether the three appeal conditions significantly differed from the control group (i.e., without an appeal) in terms of the perceived existence of Nike's statement. In that regard, a significant difference between the four groups was found, $F(3, 299) = 310.99, p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons using Gabriel's test provided support for the effectiveness of the manipulation concerning the self-benefit ($M = 6.15, SD = 1.11$), moral ($M = 6.12, SD = .96$), and other-benefit ($M = 5.95, SD = 1.16$) groups because they all significantly differed from the control group ($M = 1.64, SD = 1.27$). Concerning the three other ANOVAs, the goal was to demonstrate that the participants of the three appeal groups all correctly perceived the assigned type of appeal. The results showed that the groups differed in terms of the self-benefit ($F(2, 217) = 34.62, p < .001$), moral ($F(2, 217) = 9.20, p < .001$), as well as the other-benefit manipulation check ($F(2, 217) = 10.68, p < .001$). More specifically, Gabriel's post hoc test made evident that the self-benefit group ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.41$) achieved a significantly higher mean than the other two groups ($M_{\text{moral}} = 3.40, SD_{\text{moral}} =$

1.49; $M_{\text{other}} = 3.67$, $SD_{\text{other}} = 1.64$) for the self-benefit check. Regarding the moral appeal's manipulation check the corresponding experimental group had a significantly higher mean ($M_{\text{moral}} = 5.41$, $SD_{\text{moral}} = 1.51$) compared to the two other groups ($M_{\text{self}} = 4.57$, $SD_{\text{self}} = 1.51$; $M_{\text{other}} = 4.32$, $SD_{\text{other}} = 1.57$). Similarly, also the last manipulation check was successful because the group with the other-benefit appeal ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.58$) achieved a significantly higher mean for the other-benefit manipulation check than the other two groups ($M_{\text{self}} = 4.28$, $SD_{\text{self}} = 1.43$; $M_{\text{moral}} = 4.13$, $SD_{\text{moral}} = 1.51$).

Main Effect of CBD Appeals

Three Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to examine the main effect of appeals among the four experimental conditions (i.e., no appeal, self-benefit, moral, other-benefit; Conover 1999). In that matter, the Kruskal-Wallis tests did not detect any significant differences between the groups for CBD intention ($H(3) = 2.86$, $p = .414$), CBD likelihood ($H(3) = 2.80$, $p = .423$), and brand attitude ($H(3) = 5.11$, $p = .164$).

CBD Appeal vs. No Appeal: The Moderating Effect of SBC

Hypothesis 1 was tested by employing a moderation analysis using ordinary least squares path analysis with PROCESS model 1 (10,000 bootstraps; Hayes 2018). In more detail, a two-way interaction between the multicategorical independent variable with four conditions (no appeal = 0, self-benefit appeal = 1, moral appeal = 2, other-benefit appeal = 3) and the continuous moderator SBC was calculated. For this analysis, heteroscedasticity consistent standard errors (hc3 estimator) were used to compute the confidence intervals and inferential statistics (Hayes and Cai 2007; Long and Ervin 2000). Further, Helmert coding was implemented to test whether the three types of appeals collapsed are eliciting a higher intention and likelihood to defend the brand with increasing levels of SBC compared to the control group. Following the procedure of Hayes and Montoya (2017) for multicategorical variables, first, a test of significance for the change in R^2 in the regression model was examined, which revealed that the effect of the appeals on CBD intention ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(\text{HC3})(3,$

295) = 3.15, $p = .026$) as well as on CBD likelihood ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $F(\text{HC3})(3, 295) = 3.32$, $p = .020$) linearly depends on SBC. Moreover, the bootstraps of the interaction regression coefficients underlined this finding because zero was not included in the 95 % confidence intervals (CI) for CBD intention (Boot $M = .35$, Boot $SE = .13$, Boot CI = [.10, .59]) and CBD likelihood (Boot $M = 6.73$, Boot $SE = 2.36$, Boot CI = [2.15, 11.36]; Kelley 2005; Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007).

Next, I conducted a floodlight analysis to probe the interaction (Johnson and Neyman 1936; Bauer and Curran 2005; Spiller et al. 2013). The results revealed a significant positive effect of CBD appeals (vs. no appeal) for individuals with an SBC higher than 3.19 regarding their intention to defend the brand (38th percentile, $B_{\text{JN}} = .35$, $p = .05$). Concerning the likelihood to defend the brand, the floodlight analysis showed a significantly lower effect of CBD appeals (vs. no appeal) for individuals with an SBC lower than 1.67 (14th percentile, $B_{\text{JN}} = -11.06$, $p = .05$) and a higher effect for individuals with an SBC higher than 4.60 (68th percentile, $B_{\text{JN}} = 8.98$, $p = .05$).

Three Types of CBD Appeals vs. No Appeal: The Moderating Effect of SBC

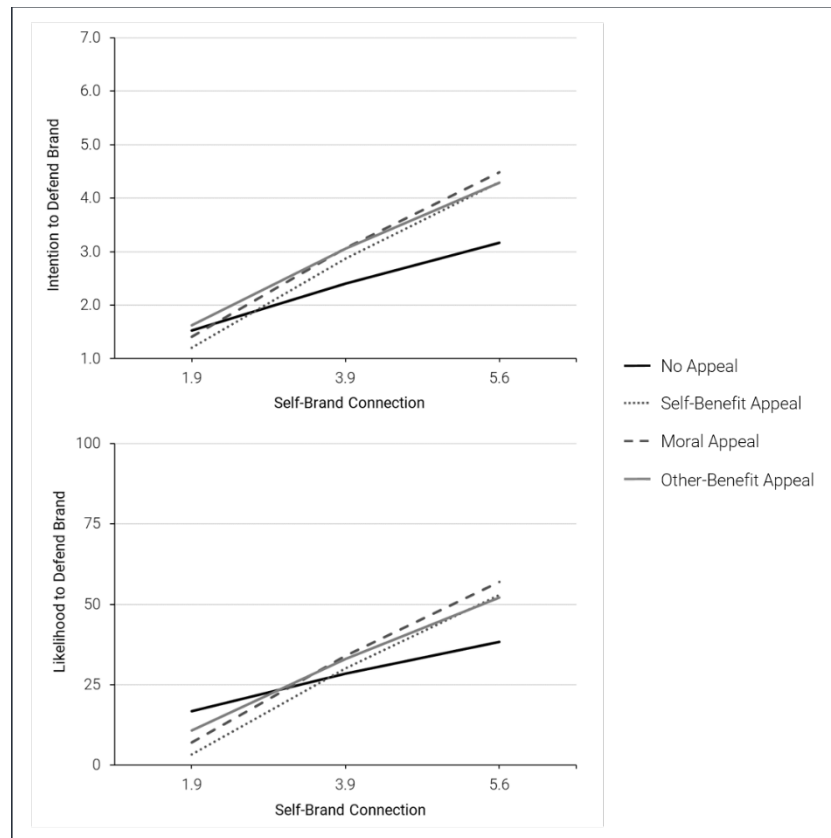
In a next step, dummy coding (d1 = no appeal vs. self-benefit appeal; d2 = no appeal vs. moral appeal, d3 = no appeal vs. other-benefit appeal) was applied to test hypotheses 2-4. Again, PROCESS model 1 with heteroscedasticity consistent standard errors (hc3 estimator; Hayes and Cai 2007; Long and Ervin 2000) was used to compute the interaction effects with SBC as the moderator (10,000 bootstraps; Hayes 2018). Further, I followed the procedure of Hayes and Montoya (2017) for multicategorical variables. As already demonstrated the test of significance for the change in R^2 in the regression model revealed that the effect of the three types of appeals linearly depends on SBC for both dependent variables. In more detail, the bootstraps of the interaction regression coefficients (Kelley 2005; Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007) revealed a significant interaction for the self-benefit (CBD intention: Boot $M = .38$, Boot $SE = .14$, Boot CI = [.10, .65]; CBD likelihood: Boot $M = 7.44$, Boot $SE = 2.60$, Boot CI = [2.25, 12.50]) and moral appeal (CBD intention: Boot $M = .38$, Boot $SE = .14$, Boot CI = [.11, .65]; CBD

likelihood: Boot $M = 7.55$, Boot $SE = 2.66$, Boot $CI = [2.28, 12.60]$). However, no significant interaction between the other-benefit appeal and SBC was found (CBD intention: Boot $M = .27$, Boot $SE = .17$, Boot $CI = [-.08, .59]$; CBD likelihood: Boot $M = 5.21$, Boot $SE = 3.05$, Boot $CI = [-.84, 11.03]$; see *Figure 1*).

Next, a floodlight analysis was elaborated to probe interactions (Johnson and Neyman 1936; Bauer and Curran 2005; Spiller et al. 2013). The results revealed that the self-benefit appeal (vs. no appeal) exhibits a significant positive effect regarding the consumers' intention to defend the brand for individuals with at least a moderate SBC (53th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=3.91} = .49$, $p = .05$). Concerning the second dependent variable (i.e., CBD likelihood) the floodlight analysis showed a significant negative effect of the self-benefit appeal (vs. no appeal) for low-SBC individuals (26th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=2.34} = -9.81$, $p = .05$) and a significant positive effect for high-SBC individuals (82th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=5.51} = 14.05$, $p = .05$). A similar pattern was detected for the moral appeal with moderate-SBC individuals showing a higher CBD intention (38th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=3.21} = .41$, $p = .05$) and likelihood (65th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=4.49} = 10.34$, $p = .05$). Moreover, a significant negative effect of the moral appeal (vs. no appeal) was found among consumers with a low SBC regarding the CBD likelihood (8th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=1.40} = -13.31$, $p = .05$). Despite the non-significant interaction for the other-benefit appeal, I still examined at what values of SBC the CBD intention and likelihood are significantly higher compared to the "no appeal"-condition. In that regard, the other-benefit appeal triggered a significant higher CBD intention among moderate- to high-SBC individuals (41th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=3.33} = .51$, $p = .05$) and a marginally significant higher CBD likelihood for individuals with a high SBC (81th percentile, $\theta_{X \rightarrow Y|M=5.32} = 12.42$, $p = .100$).

FIGURE 1

Effect of CBD Appeals on Consumers' Intention and Likelihood to the Brand



Moreover, the inclusion of covariates (i.e., response- and self-efficacy, brand despair, product involvement) and demographics (i.e., age, gender) led to one difference compared to the presented models. The other-benefit appeal (vs. no appeal) exerted a significant positive interaction effect with SBC (see *Table 4* and *Table 5* in *Appendix A*). Further, the covariates response- and self-efficacy both positively impacted CBD intention and likelihood. Concerning the dependent variable CBD likelihood, the perceived brand despair additionally had a significant negative influence.

Discussion

In alignment with hypothesis 1, this study provided evidence that the stronger the observers' brand relationship (operationalized with SBC), the higher their intention and likelihood to defend the brand after a CBD appeal (vs. no appeal). In more detail, consumers with a

moderate to high self-brand connection showed a significantly higher intention and likelihood to defend the brand in cases with a CBD appeal than the condition without an appeal. On the other hand, the results with CBD likelihood as the dependent variable showed that low-SBC individuals might even be less inclined to defend the brand after seeing a CBD appeal (vs. no appeal). Further, these results were not impacted by the inclusion of control variables, one of which measuring consumers' perceived brand despair. Even though some might argue that an appeal to defend the brand represents a desperate act, they yet seem to work among highly brand-connected consumers. Overall, the results might also help to understand why the appeal by Mc Donald's worked so well (see introduction). They published the appeal on their Facebook brand page, and therefore, they perhaps mostly reached out to their brand fans. A large portion of brand page followers can be seen as brand fans who exhibit a somewhat positive brand relationship (Maree and van Heerden 2021). This study's results suggest that consumers with a solid bond to the brand are also following CBD appeals. Thus, these results could probably explain why Mc Donald's could recruit some brand defenders among their Facebook brand page followers.

Next, a more pronounced examination led to ambiguous results for an interaction effect of SBC on the other-benefit appeal's effect (i.e., (non-) significant for the model with(out) the control variables). Hypothesis 2 stated that the other-benefit appeal should be more effective the stronger the consumer's SBC. Thus, the results contradict this hypothesis to some degree. Nevertheless, this type of CBD appeal significantly impacts consumers' willingness to defend the brand for highly connected consumers. Further, it is interesting that the other-benefit appeal is not considerably worse compared to no appeal for low-SBC individuals. Taken together, it seems that this type of appeal only marginally depends on consumers' SBC. The lower impact of SBC on the appeal's effectiveness might be explained by the other-benefit appeal's ability to mutually fulfilling altruistic and egoistic motives (Fisher, Vandebosch, and Antia 2008). In more detail, someone reacting to other-benefit appeals can be driven by the selfless desire to help the brand. However, publicly complying with an other-

benefit appeal could simultaneously convey the image of being an altruist and satisfy egoistic motives such as an improved reputation. Because of this possibility of gratifying self-centered motives, this type of appeal might be less influenced by consumers' brand relationship.

Moreover, the results revealed a significant interaction of SBC for the moral appeal. As hypothesized (*H3*), the moral appeal (vs. no appeal) is more effective, the stronger the consumers' bond with the brand. As described, moral appeals aim at inducing a personal responsibility among the observers (e.g., Schwartz 1970). In line with my results, research about relationship types states that people feel a higher personal obligation to help close ones (e.g., Clark et al. 1987; Janoff-Bulman and Leggatt 2002). Thus, it makes sense that the moral appeal works better among self-connected consumers.

Against my assumption in hypothesis 4, the self-benefit appeal is getting more effective than no appeal with increasing levels of SBC. One possible explanation for this unexpected result could be that complying with a self-benefit appeal to defend a brand only satisfies egoistic motives if the observer has a strong bond with this brand (e.g., appealing to the entertainment value as a reason to defend the brand might only be tempting for observers with a high SBC). Besides, it is also conceivable that, opposite to the other-benefit appeal, it is not beneficial for one's reputation to publicly comply with a self-benefit appeal because one might appear as an opportunistic individual. Thus, only consumers who really care for the brand follow the self-benefit appeal and take the risk of conveying the image of an egoistic-driven individual.

Furthermore, I also measured consumers' attitude toward the brand as a dependent variable for supplemental analysis. This analysis served the purpose of evaluating whether CBD appeals could also backfire by decreasing consumers' brand perception. The literature about crisis communication and webcare responses has often shown that the wrong choice of management response can lead to adverse outcomes. For example, there are better options for brands than defending their reputation (e.g., denial or shifting of blame to others; Chang et

al. 2015; Lee and Song 2010) in cases of high attributed crisis responsibility (e.g., Coombs 2007), product failure reviews (Li, Cui, and Peng 2018), or when the criticized problems are rather a onetime thing (Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020). In severe cases, an inappropriate management response can even trigger a "double crisis" (i.e., inadequate management response leads to a second crisis; Basso and Pizzutti 2016; Frandsen and Johansen 2018). Interestingly, the appeals did not affect how the observers felt about the brand. No significant difference could be detected when comparing the attitude toward the brand between the control group and the three types of appeals. Thus, CBD appeals may constitute a beneficial addition to the repertoire of management responses. It is conceivable that the danger of triggering a "double crisis" is lower than with conventional response types (e.g., denial of responsibility). Simultaneously, CBD appeals also bear the potential to activate self-connected consumer brand defenders.

The Effectiveness of Different Types of CBD Appeals

When comparing the effectiveness of the three CBD appeals among each other, many would probably propose that appealing to egoistic motives (i.e., self-benefit appeals) should be particularly useful in stimulating consumer brand defenders. For the reason that it is widely accepted that egoism is a powerful motivation for prosocial acts. In more detail, people help others to receive some reward (e.g., esteem, praise), to avoid punishment (e.g., guilt, shame), or to reduce arousal (e.g., stress; e.g., Batson 1994; Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Dovidio et al. 2017). However, as already touched in the discussion of study 1, even altruistic acts can sometimes benefit the self (e.g., Batson 2011; Batson and Shaw 1991; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008). For example, when defending a brand for altruistic reasons (i.e., primary motivation = helping the brand), this act may also reduce distress and be accompanied by rewards such as a reputation as a selfless brand advocate. On the other hand, when it is evident that someone is reacting on a self-benefit appeal, this may negatively affect the cost-reward ratio because this person then appears to be an egoist. Or in other words, if someone is reacting to self-benefit appeals, it might be harder to persuade observers that the brand's defense was out of purely altruistic reasons. In fact, research on donation appeals demonstrates that other-benefit appeals are more effective than self-benefit appeals in generating donations, which might be explained by the social desirability to help for noble reasons (Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008).

To conclude, I argue that other-benefit appeals are more effective in the context of CBD than self-benefit appeals because following such appeals can also satisfy egoistic motives such as self-enhancement. In contrast, when complying with self-benefit appeals, this act may even convey a bad image of the brand defender. This argumentation leads to the following hypothesis:

H5: *An other-benefit appeal is more effective than a self-benefit appeal to elicit a willingness to defend the brand.*

Further, I assume that also moral appeals should be more effective than self-benefit appeals. Likewise to other-benefit appeals, complying with a moral appeal probably conveys a better image of the brand defender (selfish vs. moral brand defender). Thus, obeying an appeal to restore equity in a discussion might also benefit egoistic motives such as making a positive impression (e.g., as a moralist) on observers. Furthermore, moral appeals could also be more effective than self-benefit appeals because of the salience of personal responsibility (Nelson et al. 2006; Schwartz 1970). A sense of moral obligation is a demanding force in which breaches trigger justifications and guilt toward observers and the brand (Basil, Ridgway, and Basil 2006; Tomasello 2020). On the other hand, not obeying a self-benefit appeal is rather directed against oneself and probably holds less need to justify the actions to outsiders. To conclude, I hypothesize that

H6: *a moral appeal is more effective than a self-benefit appeal to elicit a willingness to defend the brand.*

Further, other-benefit appeals are characterized by other-focused emotions, especially empathy (Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008). Conversely, self-benefit appeals focus on ego-focused emotions such as pride which nurtures independent feelings (Aaker and Williams 1998). Thus, other-benefit appeals should elicit a higher degree of brand empathy compared to self-benefit appeals. In this regard, research on the empathy-altruism relationship demonstrates that deep empathic concern results in helping (e.g., Batson 2011; Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011; Batson and Powell 2003; Batson and Shaw 1991). To conclude, the stronger initiated brand empathy of the other-benefit appeal (vs. self-benefit) should result in a higher willingness to defend the brand because observers can take the brand's perspective and experience compassion as well as sympathy. Thus, I assume that ...

H5a: *an other-benefit appeal leads to a stronger brand empathy than a self-benefit appeal, eliciting a higher willingness to defend the brand.*

Furthermore, I suppose that an appeal that addresses injustice (i.e., moral appeal) can induce empathy with the brand. In fact, research shows that unfair treatment can evoke

empathic concerns (Batson et al. 2007; Haidt 2003). Similarly, unfair negative reviews about brands can provoke empathic feelings and, in turn, even brand support behaviors such as a higher willingness to pay and a higher purchase intention (Allard, Dunn, and White 2020). Because moral appeals emphasize a sense of justice, they should evoke brand empathy to some degree. Contrary, self-benefit appeals elicit self-concern rather than concern for the brand. Moreover, as argued above, a higher brand empathy should result in a higher willingness to defend the brand due to the empathy–altruism hypothesis. Taken together, I suggest that ...

H6a: *a moral appeal leads to a stronger brand empathy than a self-benefit appeal, eliciting a higher willingness to defend the brand.*

Next to the mechanism of brand empathy, another possible explanation why moral and other-benefit are more effective than self-benefit appeals could lie in the internalization of moral norms. In that matter, moral norms refer to personal beliefs about what is right or wrong and can thereby act as personal guidelines on whether to show a particular behavior (Sabucedo et al. 2018). In more detail, when moral norms are internalized, these norms are essential for the individual's self-evaluation and, thus, influence the behavior through self-expectations (Schwartz 1973; Schwartz 1977). Because moral appeals for CBD (in contrast to self-benefit appeals) are characterized by evoking a personal responsibility and framing the criticism as unfair, I assume that they are better suited to evoke moral norms among observers. Consequently, the stronger moral norms that defending the brand is the right thing to do should result in a stronger CBD willingness.

H6b: *A moral appeal leads to stronger moral norms than a self-benefit appeal, eliciting a higher willingness to defend the brand.*

Research on prosocial behavior states that acting altruistically may simultaneously pursue the internalized moral norm of doing something good for others (Schwartz and Howard 1984). Because the other-benefit appeal highlights altruistic motives for defending the brand, it is conceivable that moral norms are also getting activated. In the context of CBD, the moral

norm would encompass a personal belief that defending the brand is morally correct behavior. Thus, appealing to others' benefits (i.e., helping the brand and its employees) rather than the benefits for oneself should result in the activation of moral norms. Consequently, these activated moral norms should result in a higher willingness to defend the brand due to observers' self-expectations (Schwartz 1973; Schwartz 1977). Hence, I suggest that

H5b: *an other-benefit appeal leads to stronger activation of moral norms (i.e., defending a brand is morally correct) than a self-benefit appeal, eliciting a higher willingness to defend the brand.*

I expect no significant differences between other-benefit and moral appeals because both types of appeals can help increase prosocial acts (e.g., Fisher, Vandebosch, and Antia 2008; Schwartz 1970) and convey a positive image of the complying brand defenders.

Study 2 – Moral and Other-Benefit Appeals vs. Self-Benefit Appeal

Method

The purpose of study 2 was to compare the moral and other-benefit with the self-benefit appeal under consideration of the two mediators moral norms and consumer's empathy toward the brand. This study was elaborated as an online experiment on MTurk with a one-way between-subjects design. The independent variable hereby consisted of three levels (self-benefit vs. moral vs. other-benefit appeal). Out of 363 MTurkers, 63 (=17.4 %) were still excluded during the survey because they incorrectly answered an attention check (e.g., "This survey deals with the brand...") or did not follow the instructional manipulation check (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko 2009). Further, 11 individuals (=3.0 %) were excluded because time recordings indicated that these participants did not pay enough attention to the scenarios (Aguinis, Villamor, and Ramani 2021). Ultimately, the final sample consisted of 289 participants (45.7 % female, $M_{age} = 39.39$ years).

The survey started with introducing the fictitious coffee house "Finest Taste," which was described as serving different sorts of coffee, tea, and pastry. I opted for a fictional (vs. actual) brand because study 1 demonstrated the crucial role of the consumer-brand relationship on the effect of CBD appeals. Therefore, study 2 established a more controlled setting to reduce the strong extraneous effect of the consumer-brand relationship (Winer 1999). Next, the participants were confronted with brand criticism stating that the coffee house should be renamed "Worst Taste" because the coffee was watery and had way too much sugar. Besides, the cake was dry and probably not freshly baked. Moreover, the critic mentioned in his comment that the employees were rude. After the brand criticism, the participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions. Again, the three different types of appeals were elaborated based on the characteristics outlined in this paper (see *Table 1* in *Appendix B* for all scenarios). Subsequently, the survey-takers completed measures about the mediators, filler questions, dependent variables, manipulation checks, and

control variables. Finally, the survey ended with questions about the demographics (i.e., age, gender) and a debriefing.

All scales were measured with 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = “completely disagree” to 7 = “completely agree” if not stated otherwise (see *Table 3 in Appendix B* for all items and Cronbach’s alpha). The dependent variables were the same as in study 1 (i.e., CBD intention, CBD likelihood, and attitude toward the brand). The first mediator, “moral norms,” was operationalized with a two-item scale (e.g., “I consider it morally correct to defend Finest Taste.”; Sabucedo et al. 2018) and the second one “consumer’s empathy toward brand” (CETB) with five items (e.g., “I can put myself in the shoes of Finest Taste.”; Romani et al. 2015; Wei, Liu, and Keh 2020; Wieseke, Geigenmüller, and Kraus 2012). Further, the same control variables (i.e., response- and self-efficacy, brand despair, product involvement) and demographics (i.e., gender and age) as in study 1 were elicited. Additionally, participants also assessed their processing fluency with three bipolar items (e.g., “difficult to understand - easy to understand”) to control for differences in the difficulty to process the different types of appeals (White and Peloza 2009).

Five single-items were used to test the manipulations’ success. One item stated that the brand was criticized and another one that the brand responded to this criticism. These two items were elaborated to prove that the participants noticed the brand criticism and brand response. Furthermore, one item was included for each type of CBD appeal to verify that the participants correctly perceived their randomly assigned appeal’s characteristics (Aaker and Williams 1998; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; White and Peloza 2009). The respective manipulation checks stated that the brand response made them think about egoistic motives (self-benefit), altruistic reasons (other-benefit), or their sense of justice (moral; all items are shown in *Table 2 of Appendix B*).

Results

Manipulation Checks

First, two one-way between-subjects ANOVAs confirmed that the participants perceived the brand criticism and the subsequent brand response. In all three experimental conditions, the means were higher than 6.50 regarding whether a consumer criticized the brand. Further, the corresponding ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 286) = .19, p = .826$. Concerning the item that Finest Taste did respond to the criticism, all three experimental groups achieved means higher than 5.90, and no significant differences were found, $F(2, 286) = .02, p = .978$. Next, three additional ANOVAs were conducted to examine whether the three experimental groups correctly perceived the type of appeal which was shown to them. The results demonstrated that the groups differed in terms of the self-benefit ($F(2, 286) = 5.60, p = .004$), moral (*Welch's* $F(2, 181.968) = 41.33, p < .001$), as well as the other-benefit manipulation check (*Welch's* $F(2, 189.16) = 10.64, p < .001$). A following Gabriel post hoc test made evident that the self-benefit group ($M = 4.70, SD = 1.90$) achieved a significantly higher mean than the other two groups ($M_{\text{moral}} = 3.99, SD_{\text{moral}} = 1.97; M_{\text{other}} = 3.82, SD_{\text{other}} = 1.85$) for the self-benefit check. Concerning the moral appeal's manipulation check, a Games-Howell post hoc test revealed that the moral group had a significantly higher mean ($M_{\text{moral}} = 6.00, SD_{\text{moral}} = 1.30$) compared to the two other groups ($M_{\text{self}} = 4.08, SD_{\text{self}} = 1.96; M_{\text{other}} = 4.51, SD_{\text{other}} = 1.75$). Also, the last manipulation check was successful because the group with the other-benefit appeal ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.92$) achieved a significantly higher mean for the other-benefit manipulation check than the other two groups ($M_{\text{self}} = 3.19, SD_{\text{self}} = 2.01; M_{\text{moral}} = 3.82, SD_{\text{moral}} = 1.80$) according to a Games-Howell post hoc test. No significant differences between the groups other than the above reported were detected.

Main Effect of CBD Appeals

Hypotheses 5 and 6 were tested by comparing the effects of the three different CBD appeals on consumer's intention and likelihood to defend the brand. A first Kruskal-Wallis test made

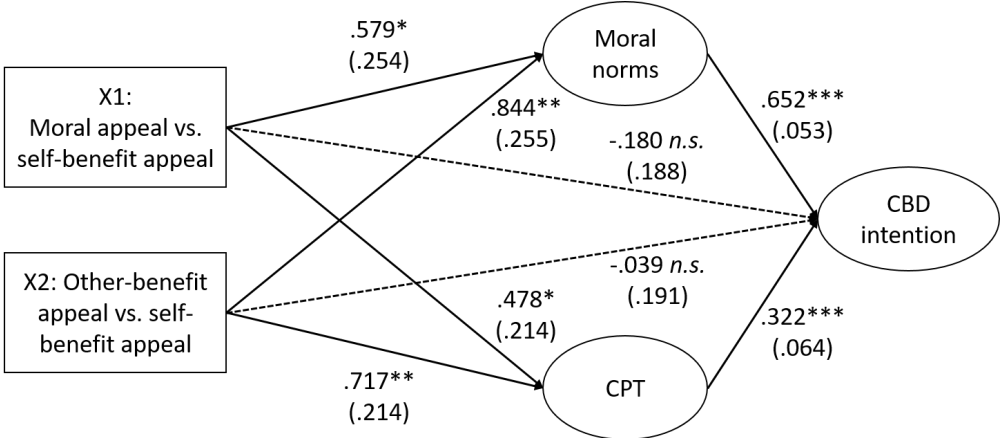
evident that the three appeals differed in their effect on consumers' intention to defend the brand, $H(2) = 6.98, p = .030$. Other-benefit appeals ($Mdn = 4.0$), as well as moral appeals ($Mdn = 2.4$), elicited a higher intention to defend the brand than self-benefit appeals ($Mdn = 2.0$). Next, post hoc Mann-Whitney tests using a Bonferroni-adjusted level of $.017 (.05/3)$ were used to compare all pairs of groups. The difference in CBD intention between the moral and self-benefit appeal was insignificant ($p = .529$). On the other hand, the difference between the other-benefit and self-benefit appeal was significant, $U(N_{\text{other}} = 98, N_{\text{self}} = 92) = -31.62, z = -2.64, p = .025$. Moreover, there was no difference between the moral and the other-benefit appeal ($p = .563$). A second Kruskal-Wallis test for the dependent variable CBD likelihood only detected a marginally significant effect, $H(2) = 5.91, p = .052$. Thus, no post hoc tests were conducted. Nevertheless, the other-benefit ($Mdn = 50.0$) and moral appeal ($Mdn = 26.0$) both showed higher medians compared to the self-benefit appeal ($Mdn = 14.0$). Besides, a supplemental analysis was conducted to examine differences in consumers' attitudes toward the brand between the three groups. In that regard, significant differences between the three types of appeals were found, $H(2) = 8.30, p = .016$. Subsequent post hoc tests found no significant difference between the moral ($Mdn = 4.4$) and the self-benefit appeals ($Mdn = 3.8; p = .190$). However, there was a significant difference between the other-benefit ($Mdn = 4.8$) and the self-benefit appeal, $U(N_{\text{other}} = 98, N_{\text{self}} = 92) = -34.45, z = -2.85, p = .013$. Further, no significant difference was detected for the moral and other-benefit appeal ($p = .935$).

The Mediating Role of Moral Norms and Consumer's Brand Empathy

Hypotheses 5a, 5b, 6a, and 6b stated that the moral as well as the other-benefit appeal elicit higher moral norms and also a higher degree of consumer's empathy toward the brand which in turn results in a higher CBD intention and likelihood compared to self-benefit appeals. In that regard, I employed a parallel mediation analysis using ordinary least squares path analysis with PROCESS model 4 (10,000 bootstraps; Hayes 2018). For my purpose, the independent variable was dummy-coded ($x1 = \text{self-benefit vs. moral appeal}$; $x2 = \text{self-benefit vs. other-benefit appeal}$). The respective mediation model with CBD intention as dependent variable

revealed significant indirect effects. The specific indirect effects of the moral appeal (vs. self-benefit) over moral norms ($B = .38, SE = .17, 95\% CI = [.06, .72]$) and CETB in parallel ($B = .15, SE = .08, 95\% CI = [.01, .31]$) were both significant because the 95% confidence interval (CI) did not include zero (Hayes 2009; Kelley 2005; Mackinnon, Lockwood, and Williams 2004; Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes 2007). To be more concrete, the moral appeal (vs. self-benefit) led to higher moral norms and also to higher CETB which in turn strengthened consumers' CBD intention (see Figure 2). Besides, no significant total ($B = .35, SE = .28, 95\% CI = [-.21, .91]$) or direct effects ($B = -.18, SE = .19, 95\% CI = [-.55, .19]$) were detected. When comparing the other-benefit with the self-benefit appeal also both specific indirect effects over moral norms ($B = .55, SE = .17, 95\% CI = [.22, .90]$) and CETB ($B = .23, SE = .08, 95\% CI = [.09, .40]$) turned out to be significant. In particular, the other-benefit appeal resulted in a stronger activation of moral norms and CETB which consequently enhanced the CBD intention (see Figure 2). Further, the other-benefit appeal (vs. self-benefit) exerted a significant total effect on CBD intention ($B = .74, SE = .28, 95\% CI = [.18, 1.30]$) without showing a significant direct effect in this mediation model ($B = -.04, SE = .19, 95\% CI = [-.42, .34]$).

FIGURE 2
 Mediation Model over Moral Norms and Consumers' Empathy Toward Brand on CBD Intention

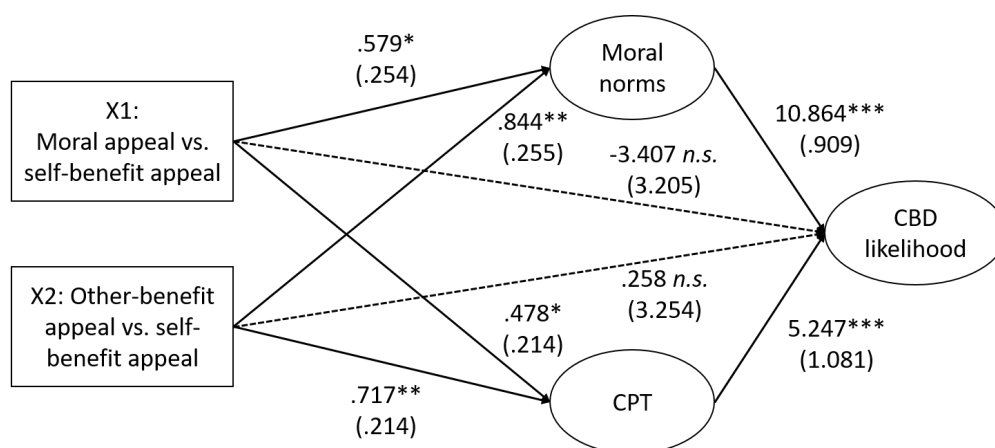


Notes – unstandardized regression coefficients and in brackets the corresponding standard errors
 $***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05$

The second mediation model was the same as the first one except for the dependent variable CBD likelihood. Matching the results from the first model, the same significant specific indirect effects were also found for this DV. The specific indirect effects for moral appeals (vs. self-benefit) over moral norms ($B = 6.29, SE = 2.78, 95\% CI = [.91, 11.83]$) and CETB ($B = 2.51, SE = 1.23, 95\% CI = [.16, 5.02]$) were both significant. More specifically, the moral appeal elicited higher moral norms and in parallel also higher CETB which consequently resulted in a higher CBD likelihood (see *Figure 3*). Besides, the total ($B = 5.39, SE = 4.74, 95\% CI = [-3.95, 14.73]$) and direct effect ($B = -3.41, SE = 3.21, 95\% CI = [-9.72, 2.90]$) were both not significant. Regarding the other-benefit appeal (vs. self-benefit) I found evidence for significant specific indirect effect over the mediator moral norms ($B = 9.17, SE = 2.87, 95\% CI = [3.65, 14.81]$) and over the mediator CETB ($B = 3.76, SE = 1.26, 95\% CI = [1.43, 6.39]$). In more detail, the other-benefit appeal increased moral norms and in parallel CETB which in turn enhanced CBD likelihood (see *Figure 3*). In addition, the total effect turned out to be significant ($B = 13.19, SE = 4.76, 95\% CI = [3.83, 22.55]$). However, no significant direct effect was detected ($B = .26, SE = 3.25, 95\% CI = [-6.15, 6.66]$).

FIGURE 3

Mediation Model over Moral Norms and Consumers' Empathy Toward Brand on CBD Likelihood



Notes – unstandardized regression coefficients and in brackets the corresponding standard errors
 *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Both models (i.e., with the two different DV's) were also calculated with the control variables (i.e., response- and self-efficacy, brand despair, product involvement, processing fluency) and demographics (i.e., age and gender) included. In that matter, no noteworthy differences were identified (see *Tables 4 and 5 in Appendix B*). Apart from the two mediators, a higher response-efficacy, product involvement, and also the gender (i.e., females instead of males) exerted a significantly higher CBD intention and likelihood.

Discussion

In accordance with hypothesis 5, other-benefit appeals seem to be more effective than self-benefit appeals in evoking a willingness to defend the brand among observers, which is in line with the results in the domain of charity and donation appeals (Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008). Moreover, study 2 demonstrates that two possible explanations for this finding lie in the higher elicited brand empathy (H5a) and the stronger internalization of moral norms (H5b). The stronger brand empathy comes with only little surprise because other-benefit appeals are characterized by eliciting emotions such as empathy and, consequently, should evoke an altruistic reaction (Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008). However, the stronger activation of moral norms is probably less obvious and underlines that observers' beliefs about CBD as a morally correct behavior can also be boosted via other-benefit appeals (vs. self-benefit). Further, an other-benefit appeal could also be superior to a self-benefit appeal in other aspects besides enhancing observers' willingness for CBD. In that matter, a supplemental analysis revealed that this type of appeal led to a better brand attitude among the observers. Perhaps self-benefit appeals appear improper because the brand focuses on brand defender's benefits without mentioning that CBD especially helps the brand itself. Observers who see through the self-benefit appeal and the brand's primary intention might, as a result, be disappointed or angry.

Although moral appeals lead to a higher CBD willingness than self-benefit appeals, the respective mean differences were not significant, contradicting hypothesis 6. Nevertheless, the

computed mediation models demonstrated that in line with hypotheses 6a and 6b, moral appeals trigger higher levels of moral norms and brand empathy, leading to a higher willingness to defend the brand than self-benefit appeals. As the name implies, moral appeals pursue the goal of inducing a moral obligation among the observers, and therefore the first result is as expected (Hansen et al. 2018; Schwartz 1970). Besides, research shows that unfair negative online reviews can induce an empathic response (Allard, Dunn, and White 2020). In that matter, I suggested that moral appeals, which emphasize unjustified brand criticism, evoke more brand empathy among observers than self-benefit appeals, which also turned out to be true.

General Discussion - Appeals for CBD as a New Sort of Management Response Strategy

First, I conceptually derived three distinct types of CBD appeals, which are based on research about appeals in the domain of prosocial behavior (e.g., Aaker and Williams 1998; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Schwartz 1970; White and Peloza 2009) and acknowledge the consumer brand defenders' motive structure (Ammann et al. 2021). To be more concrete, a first type of CBD appeal emphasizes self-benefits (e.g., self-enhancement, enjoyment of online discussions), whereas a second CBD appeal focuses on other-benefits (e.g., mitigating adverse effects of brand criticism). Further, a third CBD appeal (i.e., moral appeal) highlights principles such as a sense of justice. A first experimental study demonstrated that the self-benefit and the moral appeal both work under the boundary condition that the appeal's receivers exhibit a moderate to strong self-brand connection. Concerning the other-benefit appeal, the case is less clear because I only found a significant interaction when controlling for several factors such as brand despair, self-, and response efficacy. Thus, other-benefit appeals seem to be less dependent on observers' SBC. Study 2 continued there by comparing the moral and other-benefit appeal with the self-benefit appeal in a more controlled experiment with a fictitious brand. Overall, study 2 showed that other-benefit appeals are superior to self-benefit appeals in enhancing observers' CBD willingness. Further, this study also revealed that this higher effectiveness could be explained by the stronger triggering of empathy toward the brand and stronger moral norms. To conclude, it seems that all three types can benefit consumers with a strong brand relationship. However, out of these three appeals, the other-benefit appeal and moral appeal appear to be more promising than the self-benefit appeal.

Theoretical Implications

This research examines the phenomenon of CBD and hereby takes the perspective of managers by pursuing how consumer brand defenders can be activated. In that matter, it is proposed that managers could use CBD appeals as a new approach to handle brand criticism. More specifically, three types of CBD appeals are developed based on CBD's conceptualization as prosocial behavior (Ammann et al. 2021). Furthermore, study 1 revealed the moderating effect of consumers' SBC and study 2 the mediating effects of consumer's empathy toward the brand and moral norms. To conclude, this research contributes to the study on webcare and crisis communication (1), CBD (2), prosocial behavior (3), and on a more specific level on moderators and mediators of CBD appeals (4).

First, conventional research on webcare and crisis communication primarily focuses on different types of management responses to mitigate negative consequences of brand criticism (e.g., apology, bolstering company image, denial, scapegoating; e.g., Benoit 2015; Chang et al. 2015; Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Lee and Song 2010; Li, Cui, and Peng 2018; Lyon and Cameron 2004; Moisisio, Capelli, and Sabadie 2021; Sellnow, Ulmer, and Snider 1998; Zhao, Jiang, and Su 2020). However, such management responses overlook the potential of positively tuned observers. In that matter, the rhetorical arena theory acknowledges the multiple voices communicating when brands are getting criticized (Frandsen and Johansen 2018). Building upon this multiple-voice model, this research considers consumers and investigates whether the brand can ask them for help. Thus, the proposed strategy of appealing and exploiting consumers as a buffer against brand criticism represents a new approach in this research domain.

Second, I advance the examination of CBD from a managerial perspective. Upon now, research on consumer brand defense examined its prevalence (e.g., Ammann et al. 2021; Brown and Billings 2013; Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016), motives (Ammann et al. 2021), contingency factors (Ammann et al. 2021; Hassan and Casaló

Ariño 2016; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018), the role of consumers' brand relationship (e.g., Ammann et al. 2021; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2019), consumers' defense behavior (e.g., Ammann et al. 2021; Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013), and CBD's consequences (e.g., Ammann 2021; Hong and Cameron 2018; Esmark Jones et al. 2018; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). However, only two netnographic studies focused on strategies to exploit CBD. One of which suggests an escalation strategy that encompasses framing the brand criticism as ideologically wrong and enraging the brand critics to stimulate brand supporters (Scholz and Smith 2019). The other study defines a management response characterized by affirming brand defenders via positive reinforcement of defense comments (e.g., thank you-message; Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). In contrast to my research, these two management strategies were observed in Social Media and not tested for their effectiveness with experiments. Besides, the escalation strategy was particularly detected in a moral-based firestorm and might be limited to such circumstances (Scholz and Smith 2019). On the other hand, the affirmation strategy is only applicable when brand defenders already supported the brand (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). Taken together, my research on CBD appeals presents a third strategy to exploit the potential of CBD. Compared to existing research, direct CBD appeals can be incorporated under diverse circumstances (e.g., after a product failure) and do not require existing CBD.

Third, the phenomenon of CBD is defined as prosocial behavior (Ammann et al. 2021). I follow this conceptualization by linking research on CBD's motives (Ammann et al. 2021) with research on appeals in the areas of helping and prosocial behavior (e.g., Boice and Goldman 1981; Goldman, Broll, and Carrill 1983; Goenka and van Osselaer 2019; Lindsey 2005; Small and Verrochi 2009). More specifically, I distinguish between three different types of CBD appeals based on the literature about prosocial behavior and aligned with the three motive categories of consumer brand defenders. A first type of CBD appeal emphasizes self-benefits (Brunel and Nelson 2000; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Nelson et al. 2006; White and Pelozza 2009) and is therefore connected to brand defenders' egoistic motives (Ammann et al.

2021). The second type of CBD appeals highlights other-benefits (Brunel and Nelson 2000; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008; Nelson et al. 2006; White and Peloza 2009) and consequently appeals to brand defenders' somewhat altruistic motives (Ammann et al. 2021). Further, moral appeals as the third type stress moral norms and personal responsibility (Hansen et al. 2018; Schwartz 1970) and are thus based on brand defenders' motive of principlism (e.g., sense of justice; Ammann et al. 2021). Ultimately, this research demonstrates that appeals can not only elicit complying behavior among donors (e.g., Goenka and van Osselaer 2019; Small and Verrochi 2009) but also among highly-connected consumer brand defenders.

Forth, study 1 advances the knowledge about the complex role of consumers' brand relationship in driving CBD (e.g., Ammann et al. 2021; Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2019; Park et al. 2010) by showing that CBD appeals only work for moderate to strongly connected consumers. Moreover, study 2 provides first insights into the potential mechanism behind CBD appeals. In more detail, two mediators derived from literature on prosocial behavior were investigated: moral norms (Schwartz 1973, 1977) and empathy (Batson 2011; Batson and Shaw 1991; Fisher, Vandenbosch, and Antia 2008). Applied to research on brand management, consumers' empathy toward brands just recently gained first interest (Allard, Dunn, and White 2020; Kirmani et al. 2017; Wei, Liu, and Keh 2020). In that sense, I also contribute to the advancement of this area by underlining the driving role of CETB behind the other-benefit and moral appeal for CBD.

Managerial Implications

We know that consumer brand defenders can be a highly valuable brand resource because of consumers' high credibility (e.g., Allsop, Bassett, and Hoskins 2007; Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Kozinets et al. 2010; Senecal and Nantel 2004) and their diverse positive effects in mitigating negative consequences of brand criticism (e.g., lower attribution of responsibility, higher brand trust, and purchase intention; e.g., Ammann 2021; Hong and Cameron 2018; Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). However, to the best of my knowledge, only two research endeavors investigated how to activate such brand defenders to help the brand (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Scholz and Smith 2019). Building upon this starting point, the most obvious possibility to influence consumer brand defenders is by just asking them. With my first study, I demonstrate that brands struggling with the choice of an adequate management response in a critical discussion could profit from the use of CBD appeals. These appeals for CBD hereby establish a new type of management response in times of brand criticism.

Conventional webcare practices can sometimes result in a complaint publicization which describes the amplified public exposure of these complaints if the company is entangled in discussions with the complainer. As a result, the brand's social media page is dominated by brand criticism with adverse outcomes such as a decreased firm value (Golmohammadi et al. 2021). In other cases, a brand response can even result in a so-called "double crisis" because the observers perceived the brand's crisis response (Frandsen and Johansen 2018) or service recovery (Basso and Pizzutti 2016) as inappropriate. In that regard, a preliminary result of study 1 showed no significant differences between an appeal for CBD and the control group (i.e., no appeal) in terms of observers' attitude toward the brand. Therefore, from a *strategic perspective* in webcare and crisis communication, it could be that such appeals are less risky compared to conventional management responses. In the worst case, CBD appeals do not work and the same amount of brand defenders is getting activated

without an appeal. However, more research about the possible downsides of CBD appeals is needed.

From an operational perspective, I first recommend managers to conduct an *initial situation analysis*. As study 1 demonstrated, such CBD appeals can only boost observers' willingness for CBD if they exhibit a somewhat moderate to strong self-brand connection. Hence, brands should first monitor the consumers on their social media platforms (e.g., owned community, Facebook fan page) and only appeal to the users if they seem connected with the brand. In that regard, text analysis or specific sentiment analysis may help gain insights (e.g., Berger et al. 2020; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018). Besides, employees with direct customer contact (e.g., social media manager, client advisor, account manager, customer insight specialist) could be questioned whether they think some consumers would comply with such an appeal. Moreover, it is conceivable that CBD appeals cannot be used too often due to some sort of wear-out effect (Calder and Sternthal 1980). For example, consumers on the internet often get used to and annoyed about a brand's social media advertising (Chae, Bruno, and Feinberg 2019; Goldstein et al. 2014). Therefore, CBD appeals are probably only an option if the brand did not use this instrument in the recent past and should not be adapted as a standard tactical marketing measure.

Second, the *operative design* of such appeals should be well-thought-out. I discriminated between three different types of CBD appeals in my studies: self-benefit, other-benefit, and moral appeals. These types of appeals all tie in with the results about consumer brand defenders' motives. Consumer brand defenders can be clustered according to their primary motive for defending the brand, which can be rather egoistic (e.g., self-enhancement, future reciprocity), reciprocal altruistic, or principistic (e.g., sense of justice; Ammann et al. 2021). Overall, my results suggest that the other-benefit and, to some degree, the moral appeal might be more potent in evoking a willingness for CBD among the observers than the self-benefit appeal. Hence, the choice for managers lies in whether to emphasize the benefits for

the brand itself, its employees and suppliers (i.e., other-benefit appeal) or rather to focus on the unjustified criticism (moral appeal). In that sense, the decision should probably also be dependent on the concrete criticized incident and whether it can be framed as unfair criticism or whether the brand is somewhat to blame. Therefore, in most cases, the other-benefit appeal is probably the safest choice, and in cases of unfair criticism, the moral appeal could represent a practical option. Moreover, study 2 also revealed that these two types of appeals work better than self-benefit appeals because these appeals evoke a higher degree of brand empathy and activate moral norms more strongly. With this knowledge, managers could particularly use the other-benefit and moral appeals if the brand criticism is prone to empathic feelings toward the brand or is covering a moral topic with the brand in an advantageous position. In cases of empathic issues (e.g., understaffing because of an employee's illness or accident), the appeal's concrete wording should indicate that the reader ought to put himself in the brand's shoes and highlight aspects such as sympathy and compassion. Further, in cases of moral topics (e.g., environmental subjects: criticism that fast food-chain no longer uses plastic tableware), the appeal could cannibalize the brand's higher moral standards (e.g., "doing our best to save the environment") to stimulate consumer brand defenders (Scholz and Smith 2019).

Avenues for Future Research

Consumer brand defense can strongly depend on situational factors such as the attribution of blame toward the company or the type of criticism (e.g., performance- or value-related).

Besides, company-related factors such as corporate social responsibility or brand personality can influence whether consumers engage in defensive activities (Ammann et al. 2021).

Accordingly, future research endeavors should also consider such contingency factors when examining the CBD appeals' effectiveness. One insightful aspect might be whether the brand is appealing publicly or privately (Lin, Schaumberg, and Reich 2016). Applied to CBD, a brand might ask privately (e.g., direct brand message on Facebook) or publicly (e.g., post on the Facebook brand page) for help. Research on appeals in advertising and prosocial behavior demonstrated that other-benefit (self-benefit) appeals are more effective than self-benefit (other-benefit) appeals under circumstances that heighten (versus lessen) public self-image concerns (Green and Peloza 2014; White and Peloza 2009). Hence, it is conceivable that the self-benefit appeal for CBD could perform better if the brand is asking potential consumers in a private setup in which they have less to worry about the public's opinion. Such an appeal could also address consumers' arrogance because recent research suggests that framing the discussion as an opportunity to brag and to flatter consumers by highlighting their superiority can lead to more eWOM communication ("You have been identified as one of our superior customers. Would you be willing to brag about your brand experiences in the following discussion: [link]"; Ruvio et al. 2020).

Further, scholars could examine to what degree self-benefit appeals can be enhanced when offering an incentive or reward (e.g., discounts, coupons) to address egoistic motives such as future reciprocity. Similarly, research in prosocial behavior (Clotfelter 1980; White, Habib, and Dahl 2020), electronic word-of-mouth (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004), online reviews (Woolley and Sharif 2021), and appeals on social media (Ashley and Tuten 2015) emphasized the positive outcomes of incentives (e.g., more charitable giving, more written

positive messages, more enjoyable experience of review writing, higher engagement rate). However, such an approach could trigger some backlash if the observers are getting suspicious and publicly enraging about the brand's shady behavior (e.g., "they are paying consumers to defend the brand"; Singh et al. 2020). Also, when adding incentives to other-benefit appeals, the effectiveness probably decreases because the appeals then appear to be more self-centered (Pessemier, Bemmaor, and Hanssens 1977). Moreover, future research could turn towards gamification. More specifically, whether the self-benefit appeal's effectiveness could be boosted with gamification elements because these elements could increase the propagandized hedonic benefits (i.e., enjoyment) for defending a brand or also help the defender in his status-signaling (e.g., defender badge in a brand-owned community; Ammann et al. 2021; Hollebeek, Das, and Shukla 2021).

Another important context-related factor to consider are traditional management responses to brand criticism (e.g., accommodative or defensive response; Coombs 2007; Coombs and Holladay 2002; Marcus and Goodman 1991). First research on the effect of consumer brand defense in conjunction with a brand response on observers' brand attitude suggests CBD could be particularly valuable if the brand responded in an accommodative (vs. defensive) way (Ammann 2021). Therefore, the question arises whether the brand should combine an accommodative brand response with an appeal for CBD? And if so, which type of appeal would be adequate? For example, when a brand accepts that a problem exists and takes responsibility (i.e., accommodative response), an other-benefit appeal could be beneficial. To be more specific, the brand might generate goodwill with their accommodation, and consequently, observers would be willing to give the brand something back. On the other hand, if the brand continues to be criticized, a delayed moral appeal might be advantageous because it could argue that they already admitted the problems and are doing their best for redemption.

Moreover, it could be promising to study other types of appeals. I discriminated between three kinds of appeals based on the addressed motives, which align with consumer brand defenders' motives (Ammann et al. 2021). However, next to the content of an appeal, the appeal's stylistic elements, such as the tone of voice or the language's degree of formality, could be impact factors (e.g., Kamatham et al. 2021). Accordingly, a study in complaint handling revealed that a conversational human voice (i.e., message personalization, informal speech, invitational rhetoric) compared to a corporate voice can be advantageous because of observers' positive justice perceptions (Javornik, Filieri, and Gumann 2020). Similarly, such a distinction could be applied to CBD appeals to study whether a moral appeal could profit from such a conversational human voice.

As already shortly addressed in the section about managerial implications in a long-term perspective, it would be beneficial for managers to know whether CBD appeals are prone to wear-in- / wearout-effects (Calder and Sternthal 1980). How often does a brand need to appeal to their consumer till they are actually defending the brand? How often can a brand appeal to its audience to defend them until these consumers are getting used to it and can no longer get activated? Additionally, a future study could also examine whether consumers would comply with more minor requests such as liking or sharing the brand's response to the criticism. Further, this small initial request might even be the starting point to future more costly requests such as responding to the brand's response or as the ultimate step the brand's defense. In that regard, the foot-in-the-door technique suggests that once individuals comply with a small request, they are more likely to comply with consecutive larger requests because, in their self-perception, they are becoming brand advocates (Seligman, Bush, and Kirsch 1976).

In addition, the two employed studies relied on participants' reported intention to defend the brand, which provides first insights about the effectiveness of CBD appeals. However, future studies about this new type of management response could certainly profit from behavioral measurements (Hulland and Houston 2021). In that sense, researchers could

either run a simulation study in which participants can write actual defense comments after a CBD appeal or even work with a real company to examine the power of CBD appeals.

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Appendix A – Study 1

TABLE 1
Experimental Scenarios

Discussion

Steven Clark: I recently read about the incident in which basketball star Zion Williamson was injured because his Nike sneakers were damaged and drew apart during an important game. This should truly not happen!! Especially, considering that the shoes of Nike are quite expensive compared to competitors. How can I trust Nike if they don't even deliver good quality shoes for their sponsored athletes?!

Me personally, I bought another pair of Nike shoes some months ago and I must say "JUST DO IT NEVER AGAIN!" My last two pair of shoes always had the same issues. After some months they nearly broke apart (e.g., bad processed stitches, discolorations, degumming). The quality is just shitty! And I am certainly not the only one with such complaints. Nike must realize that functionality, comfort, and quality should go over design, horrendous marketing campaigns, and expensive sponsoring contracts.

For me the case is clear I will renounce Nike products in the future and would recommend you all to do it like me.

Robert Jones: Let me explain something to you. Nike always endeavors to use real leather for their shoes. Moreover, I really don't get your argument regarding comfort and functionality. Name me one brand which offers a higher level of comfort than the shoes of Nike... The best example for the superior quality of their shoes is the Nike ZoomX Vaporfly NEXT%. Why do you think are even athletes - who are sponsored by rival brands - using this shoe for their marathons?

Barbara Wilson: I can't hear it anymore. Always these critics who claim something which is just their own personal opinion. My experiences are completely the opposite. I love my Nike sneakers and wouldn't switch to another brand for all money in the world.

James Anderson: Shut up Stevy boy! Absolutely no one asked for your opinion.

Susan Moore: First, get your facts right! The injury of Zion was just a mild knee sprain ... nothing serious. Moreover, he weighs in at roughly 280 pounds. This incident could have happened in shoes of any other brand.

CBD Appeals

Nike responded to these accusations with the following statement:

Dear community, maybe you have already heard about the controversial discussion around the quality of our shoes which were triggered by the unfortunate incident with the basketball star Zion Williamson.

We were obviously concerned about this incident with Zion in 2019 and are happy for his speedy recovery. The quality and performance of our products are of utmost importance. While this was an isolated occurrence, we are always working on improving the quality of our products.

Self-benefit appeal: In this sense, we appeal to your pride. You surely understand the urgency of stopping such brand critics like Steven Clark. Please engage in this discussion and prove yourself that you can counter these false allegations by writing defensive comments. In doing so, you can improve your reputation by successfully defeating the arguments of Steven. Thus, your defense is important for your standing within the community, and it may also be fun to argue against such criticism and convince them of our products. We would be very proud of you! #proud

Moral appeal: In this sense, we appeal to your sense of justice. You surely understand your personal responsibility to counter such brand critics like Steven Clark. Please write a defensive comment in this discussion to restore justice by stopping these false allegations. In doing so, you would pursue the only right thing - fighting back against this unjustified criticism of Steven. Thus, your defense is important to restore equity in this discussion so that the correct image of "Nike" is conveyed to observers. We depend on your help! #justice

Other-benefit appeal: In this sense, we appeal to your empathy. You surely understand our need for help to counter such brand critics like Steven Clark. Please support us – the "Nike"-family - by writing a defensive comment in this discussion to stop these false allegations. In doing so, you would improve our brand reputation by countering the arguments of Steven. Thus, your defense is important for us, our employees, and their families, so that we can continue being successful for all our customers and suppliers. We would be very thankful! #solidarity

TABLE 2
Measurement Items and Scale Reliabilities

Measure (α , M , SD)	Items
Dependent variable: attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = .985$, $M = 5.079$, $SD = 1.707$)	Please describe your overall feelings about "Nike." Bad - Good Unfavorable - Favorable Unpleasant - Pleasant Unlikable - Likable Unappealing - Appealing
Moderator: self-brand connection (SBC) ($\alpha = .965$, $M = 3.759$, $SD = 1.665$)	Nike reflects who I am. I consider Nike to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others). I feel a personal connection to Nike. I (can) use Nike to communicate who I am to other people. I can identify with Nike. I think Nike (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be. Nike suits me well.
Control: response-efficacy ($\alpha = .959$, $M = 4.619$, $SD = 1.495$)	Defense comments by consumers after brand criticism ... can help the brand to recover from the criticism. are often successful in improving how the brand is getting perceived by observers. are capable of mitigating a potential negative effect of the brand criticism. can protect the brand from negative image effects. are often effective in improving the reputation of the brand in the eyes of observers.
Control: self-efficacy ($\alpha = .930$, $M = 4.710$, $SD = 1.558$)	I am confident that I could write a valuable brand defense comment. I am able to defend a brand with comments against criticism. Writing defensive brand comments after criticism is easy for me. I have the necessary expertise or experience to write a brand defense comment.
Control: consumers' perceived brand despair ($\alpha = .810$, $M = 3.383$, $SD = 1.390$)	It pains Nike to think about the criticism by Steven Clark. Nike would wish to have taken a different path. Nike appears to be desperate. Nike seems to have lost all their hope. Nike is bothered by their mistakes.
Control: product involvement ($\alpha = .952$, $M = 4.562$, $SD = 1.551$)	Shoes are very important to me personally. Because of my personal values, I feel that shoes ought to be important to me. Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that shoes ought to be important to me. Compared with other products, shoes are important to me. I'm interested in shoes.
Demographic: gender	Male (1) - Female (2)
Demographic: age	Age in years

Note — α = Cronbach's alpha, M = mean, SD = standard deviation.

TABLE 3

Manipulation Checks - Measurement Items and Scale Reliabilities

Measure (α)	Items
MC: appeal vs. control group ($\alpha = .928$)	<p>Nike responded to the criticism of Steven Clark.</p> <p>In a statement, Nike appealed to me to defend their brand with a comment.</p> <p>Nike did not respond to the criticism of Steven Clark. (-)</p> <p>In a statement, Nike recommended me to defend their brand with a comment.</p>
MC: self-benefit appeal ($\alpha = .847$)	<p>The statement by "Nike" focused on the potential benefits of defense comments for myself, like having fun in arguing against critics.</p> <p>The statement by "Nike" stated that a defense comment from me could improve my reputation within the community.</p> <p>According to Nike's statement, they would be proud of me if I would write a defense comment.</p> <p>The statement by "Nike" appealed to emotions like enjoyment and pride.</p>
MC: other-benefit appeal ($\alpha = .796$)	<p>The statement by "Nike" stated that a defense comment from me would help them, their employees, and their families.</p> <p>The statement by "Nike" focused on the potential benefits of defense comments for themselves, their employees, as well as their families.</p> <p>The statement by "Nike" appealed to emotions like solidarity and empathy.</p> <p>According to Nike's statement, they would be thankful if I would write a defense comment.</p>
MC: moral appeal ($\alpha = .862$)	<p>The statement by "Nike" stated that a defense comment from me would support them by restoring equity in this discussion.</p> <p>The statement by "Nike" focused on defense comments' potential benefits for restoring equity in this discussion.</p> <p>According to Nike's statement, they depend on my help in the form of a defense comment.</p> <p>The statement by "Nike" appealed to principles like my sense of justice.</p>

Note — α = Cronbach's alpha.

TABLE 4

Bootstrap Results for Regression Model Parameters Including Covariates

Variable	Boot Mean	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Intercept	-1.025	.597	-2.184	.150
Self-benefit appeal vs. no appeal (X1)	-.786	.484	-1.737	.159
Moral appeal vs. no appeal (X2)	-.629	.496	-1.609	.348
Other-benefit appeal vs. no appeal (X3)	-.519	.616	-1.696	.721
Self-brand connection (W)	.275	.117	.045	.504
X1 * W	.375	.133	.108	.633
X2 * W	.373	.129	.118	.627
X3 * W	.337	.162	.010	.646
Response-efficacy	.267	.063	.142	.391
Self-efficacy	.150	.056	.041	.259
Brand despair	-.137	.071	-.275	.003
Product involvement	.107	.072	-.035	.247
Gender (male, female)	.134	.170	-.192	.474
Age (in years)	.002	.007	-.012	.015
Model summary: $R^2 = .484$, $F(\text{HC3})(13,289) = 27.224$, $p < .001$				
Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .019$, $F(\text{HC3})(3,289) = 3.252$, $p = .022$				

Note — dependent variable = CBD intention; independent variables were dummy coded; 10,000 bootstraps; SE = standard errors which were based on the hc3 estimator; LLCI = lower limit 95 % confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit 95 % confidence interval

TABLE 5

Bootstrap Results for Regression Model Parameters Including Covariates

Variable	Boot Mean	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Intercept	-19.335	11.177	-41.086	2.804
Self-benefit appeal vs. no appeal (X1)	-22.916	9.144	-41.367	-5.233
Moral appeal vs. no appeal (X2)	-20.001	9.815	-39.392	-.455
Other-benefit appeal vs. no appeal (X3)	-17.942	11.113	-39.701	4.053
Self-brand connection (W)	2.740	2.232	-1.660	7.189
X1 * W	7.421	2.439	2.509	12.164
X2 * W	7.301	2.416	2.457	11.991
X3 * W	6.563	2.869	.737	12.157
Response-efficacy	4.821	1.157	2.521	7.051
Self-efficacy	3.489	.987	1.567	5.458
Brand despair	-2.823	1.229	-5.194	-.448
Product involvement	1.401	1.386	-1.334	4.142
Gender (male, female)	1.203	2.969	-4.631	6.959
Age (in years)	-.064	.132	-.321	.198
Model summary: $R^2 = .428$, $F(\text{HC3})(13,289) = 21.992$, $p < .001$				
Test of highest order unconditional interaction: $\Delta R^2 = .025$, $F(\text{HC3})(3,289) = 3.516$, $p = .016$				

Note — dependent variable = CBD likelihood; independent variables were dummy coded; 10,000 bootstraps; SE = standard errors which were based on the hc3 estimator; LLCI = lower limit 95 % confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit 95 % confidence interval

Appendix B – Study 2

TABLE 1
Experimental Scenarios

Brand

Finest Taste is a nationally active coffee house, which was founded in 1985. They serve different sorts of coffee, teas, and also pastry like cakes. The company employs about 500 people and is known for being customer-oriented, employee-friendly, and economically stable.

Brand Criticism

John Smith: I just visited the flagship coffee house in Philadelphia of “Finest Taste,”... or should I better say “Worst Taste”?! I didn’t know that one can do so many things wrong with a simple coffee and a piece of cake. They not only added way too much sugar but in addition, it was also very watery. The cake was hard and dry... probably some days old and surely not freshly-made. Altogether, a horrible experience for such a high price! I wouldn’t recommend this coffee chain to anyone. Not to mention that the employees looked like they would hate their job and didn’t consider it to be necessary to say goodbye.

To sum up, nobody should visit the coffee houses of “Worst Taste” – please also tell your friends!

CBD Appeals

Self-benefit appeal: Dear community, given this criticism, we are interested in your opinions. What are your experiences with our coffee houses? In this sense, we appeal to your pride. You surely understand the urgency of stopping such brand critics like John Smith. Please engage in this discussion and prove yourself that you can counter these false allegations. In doing so, you can improve your reputation by successfully defeating the arguments of John. Thus, your defense is important for your standing within the community, and it may also be fun to argue against such criticism and convince them of our coffee houses. We would be very proud of you! #proud

Moral appeal: Dear community, given this criticism, we are interested in your opinions. What are your experiences with our coffee houses? In this sense, we appeal to your sense of justice. You surely understand your personal responsibility to counter such brand critics like John Smith. Please write defensive comments to restore justice by stopping these false allegations. In doing so, you would pursue the only right thing - fighting back against this unjustified criticism of John. Thus, your defense is important to restore equity in this discussion so that the correct image of “Finest Taste” is conveyed to observers. We depend on your help! #justice

Other-benefit appeal: Dear community, given this criticism, we are interested in your opinions. What are your experiences with our coffee houses? In this sense, we appeal to your empathy. You surely understand our need for help to counter such brand critics like John Smith. Please support us – the “Finest Taste”-family - by writing a defensive comment to stop these false allegations. In doing so, you would improve our brand reputation by countering the arguments of John. Thus, your defense is important for us, our employees, and their families, so that we can continue being successful for all our customers and suppliers. We would be very thankful!
#solidarity

TABLE 2
Manipulation Checks

Measure	Items
<i>MC: brand criticism</i>	A consumer criticized Finest Taste.
<i>MC: brand response</i>	Finest Taste did respond to the criticism.
<i>MC: self-benefit appeal</i>	The statement by "Finest Taste" made me think about egoistic motives (e.g., enjoyment, pride).
<i>MC: other-benefit appeal</i>	The statement by "Finest Taste" made me think about altruistic motives (e.g., solidarity, empathy).
<i>MC: moral appeal</i>	The statement by "Finest Taste" stressed the sense of justice.

TABLE 3
Measurement Items and Scale Reliabilities

Measure (α , M , SD)	Items
DV: CBD intention ($\alpha = .982$, $M = 3.118$, $SD = 1.970$)	In this case of criticism against "Finest Taste," I would... ... defend Finest Taste in social media (e.g., on their corporate website, Facebook). ... stand up for Finest Taste in social media. ... support Finest Taste in social media. ... write a positive comment about Finest Taste in social media. ... protect Finest Taste in social media.
DV: CBD likelihood ($M = 37.201$, $SD = 33.087$)	How likely would you be to defend "Finest Taste" online in the described situation (e.g., writing a positive comment on Finest Taste's website)? 0 – 100 %
DV: attitude toward the brand ($\alpha = .981$, $M = 4.156$, $SD = 1.726$)	Please describe your overall feelings about "Finest Taste." Unlikable - Likable Unpleasant - Pleasant Unfavorable - Favorable Unappealing - Appealing Bad - Good
Mediator: CETB ($\alpha = .933$, $M = 4.592$, $SD = 1.501$)	I can take the perspective of Finest Taste. I can put myself in the shoes of Finest Taste. I can feel with Finest Taste. I can understand what is going on with Finest Taste.
Mediator: moral norms ($\alpha = .971$, $M = 3.865$, $SD = 1.785$)	I consider it morally correct to defend Finest Taste. To defend Finest Taste is something morally correct.
Control: response-efficacy ($\alpha = .958$, $M = 4.820$, $SD = 1.425$)	Defense comments by consumers after brand criticism ... can protect the brand from negative image effects. are often effective in improving the reputation of the brand in the eyes of observers. can help the brand to recover from the criticism. are often successful in improving how the brand is getting perceived by observers. are capable of mitigating a potential negative effect of the brand criticism.

<p>Control: self-efficacy ($\alpha = .931$, $M = 4.779$, $SD = 1.565$)</p>	<p>I am able to defend a brand with comments against criticism. I am confident that I could write a valuable brand defense comment. I have the necessary expertise or experience to write a brand defense comment. Writing defensive brand comments after criticism is easy for me.</p>
<p>Control: brand despair ($\alpha = .782$, $M = 4.090$, $SD = 1.452$)</p>	<p>Finest Taste seems to have lost all their hope. Finest Taste would wish to have taken a different path. Finest Taste is bothered by their mistakes. Finest Taste appears to be desperate.</p>
<p>Control: product involvement ($\alpha = .958$, $M = 4.663$, $SD = 1.863$)</p>	<p>Compared with other products, coffee is important to me. Coffee is very important to me personally. Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that coffee ought to be important to me. I'm interested in coffee. Because of my personal values, I feel that coffee ought to be important to me.</p>
<p>Control: processing fluency ($\alpha = .947$, $M = 5.995$, $SD = 1.265$)</p>	<p>I perceived the statement by the coffee house Finest Taste to be... ... difficult to process. - ... easy to process. ... difficult to understand. - ... easy to understand. ... difficult to comprehend. - ... easy to comprehend.</p>
<p>Demographic: gender</p>	<p>Male (1) - Female (2)</p>
<p>Demographic: age</p>	<p>Age in years</p>

Note — α = Cronbach's alpha, M = mean, SD = standard deviation, DV = dependent variable.

TABLE 4

Regression Models and Indirect Effects for Parallel Mediator Model (Moral Norms and CETB) with DV CBD Intention

Antecedents	Consequences												
	Moral norms (mediator 1)				Consumer's empathy toward brand (CETB; mediator 2)				CBD intention (dependent variable)				
	Coeff.	SE	t	p	Coeff.	SE	t	p	Coeff.	SE	t	p	
Constant	-.600	.764	-.785	.433	1.603	.571	2.809	.005	-2.096	.610	-3.433	.001	
(X1) Moral vs. self-benefit appeal	.591	.228	2.594	.010	.573	.170	3.368	.001	-.111	.182	-.610	.542	
(X2) Other- vs. self-benefit appeal	.738	.227	3.249	.001	.582	.170	3.433	.001	.067	.182	.367	.714	
(M1) Moral norms									.570	.053	10.816	< .001	
(M2) CETB									.185	.071	2.627	.009	
(C1) Response-efficacy	.448	.077	5.794	< .001	.320	.058	5.545	< .001	.239	.065	3.678	< .001	
(C2) Self-efficacy	.090	.071	1.272	.205	.255	.053	4.831	< .001	.064	.057	1.123	.263	
(C3) Brand despair	.010	.066	.155	.877	-.254	.049	-5.173	< .001	.011	.054	.199	.843	
(C4) Product involvement	.146	.053	2.772	.006	.079	.039	2.013	.045	.142	.042	3.412	.001	
(C5) Processing fluency	.037	.075	.496	.621	.050	.056	.902	.368	.007	.058	.125	.901	
(C6) Gender (male, female)	.218	.186	1.169	.244	.226	.139	1.624	.106	.335	.146	2.290	.023	
(C7) Age (in years)	.004	.009	.483	.630	-.003	.007	-.492	.623	-.013	.007	-1.940	.053	
Model Summary	$R^2 = .273, F(9, 279) = 11.619, p < .001$				$R^2 = .426, F(9, 279) = 22.992, p < .001$				$R^2 = .639, F(11, 277) = 44.588, p < .001$				
Specific total effects		X1	B = .332, SE = .230, 95 % CI = [-.121, .786]					X2	B = .596, SE = .230, 95 % CI = [.144, 1.048]				
Specific indirect effects	IV → Moral norms → CBD intention	X1	B = .337, SE = .129, 95 % CI = [.087, .591]					X2	B = .421, SE = .135, 95 % CI = [.156, .681]				
	IV → CETB → CBD intention	X1	B = .106, SE = .050, 95 % CI = [.021, .219]					X2	B = .108, SE = .048, 95 % CI = [.025, .210]				

Note – Regression coefficients are unstandardized; 10,000 bootstraps; X1 and X2 = independent variables; M1 and M2 = mediators; C1 – C7 = control variables

TABLE 5

Regression Models and Indirect Effects for Parallel Mediator Model (Moral Norms and CETB) with DV CBD Likelihood

Antecedents	Consequences											
	Moral norms (mediator 1)				Consumer's empathy toward brand (CETB; mediator 2)				CBD likelihood (dependent variable)			
	Coeff.	SE	t	p	Coeff.	SE	t	p	Coeff.	SE	t	p
Constant	-.600	.764	-.785	.433	1.603	.571	2.809	.005	-38.823	10.627	-3.653	< .001
(X1) Moral vs. self-benefit appeal	.591	.228	2.594	.010	.573	.170	3.368	.001	-2.240	3.163	-.708	.480
(X2) Other- vs. self-benefit appeal	.738	.227	3.249	.001	.582	.170	3.433	.001	1.764	3.168	.557	.578
(M1) Moral norms									9.763	.918	10.635	< .001
(M2) CETB									3.395	1.229	2.763	.006
(C1) Response-efficacy	.448	.077	5.794	< .001	.320	.058	5.545	< .001	3.568	1.130	3.158	.002
(C2) Self-efficacy	.090	.071	1.272	.205	.255	.053	4.831	< .001	.037	.999	.037	.970
(C3) Brand despair	.010	.066	.155	.877	-.254	.049	-5.173	< .001	-.519	.945	-.550	.583
(C4) Product involvement	.146	.053	2.772	.006	.079	.039	2.013	.045	2.276	.724	3.145	.002
(C5) Processing fluency	.037	.075	.496	.621	.050	.056	.902	.368	-.445	1.015	-.438	.662
(C6) Gender (male, female)	.218	.186	1.169	.244	.226	.139	1.624	.106	4.929	2.543	1.938	.054
(C7) Age (in years)	.004	.009	.483	.630	-.003	.007	-.492	.623	-.191	.119	-1.604	.110
Model Summary	$R^2 = .273, F(9, 279) = 11.619, p < .001$				$R^2 = .426, F(9, 279) = 22.992, p < .001$				$R^2 = .612, F(11, 277) = 39.735, p < .001$			
Specific total effects		X1	$B = 5.473, SE = 3.997, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-2.394, 13.340]$				X2	$B = 10.944, SE = 3.985, 95\% \text{ CI} = [3.100, 18.788]$				
Specific indirect effects	IV → Moral norms → CBD likelihood	X1	$B = 5.767, SE = 2.219, 95\% \text{ CI} = [1.491, 10.229]$				X2	$B = 7.203, SE = 2.332, 95\% \text{ CI} = [2.655, 11.759]$				
	IV → CETB → CBD likelihood	X1	$B = 1.946, SE = .869, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.490, 3.863]$				X2	$B = 1.977, SE = .793, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.560, 3.670]$				

Note — Regression coefficients are unstandardized; 10,000 bootstraps; X1 and X2 = independent variables; M1 and M2 = mediators; C1 – C7 = control variables