

Outcomes of Cyber-victimization and Bystander Reactions in Online Brand Communities

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Abstract

Online brand communities such as Facebook fanpages show an increasing level of cyber-victimization, which is where a community member is bullied by another member. Based on the cyber-victimization literature in psychology, we designed an experiment that explores how cyber-victimization affects three commercial outcomes, namely a victim's positive word-of-mouth intentions, community satisfaction and community following intentions. Using a survey of 387 community members with past cyber-victimization experiences, our results show that outcomes significantly differ in relation to the severity of cyber-victimization (severe vs mild) and the reactions (defending vs reinforcing vs pretending) from bystanders (i.e. uninvolved community members who witness the cyber-victimization incident). Our findings offer brand managers a better understanding of the undesirable effects of cyber-victimization in online brand communities, and on the type of reactions from bystanders that they may like to encourage.

Keywords: Consumer misbehavior; Consumer interactions; Online community; Social media; Brands

Introduction

Online brand communities (OBCs) have become an increasingly important marketing channel for companies to communicate with brand followers and deliver brand-related content [9]. In 2019, more than 50% of Internet users have followed brands on social media [89], and more than 70% of companies have reported that OBCs significantly improve brand exposure, awareness, engagement, commitment, and credibility [94]. Members of OBCs, likewise, can share their common interests about brands, support the brand by liking content, and interact with others [25]. In doing so, members gain utilitarian benefits such as updated brand information, vouchers and post-purchase guidance [60], as well as hedonic benefits in the form of receiving positive feedback on their comments, sharing entertaining content and building social capital [84].

However, despite the many positive benefits, there is a ‘dark side’ to OBCs. Marketing researchers report that members of OBCs increasingly experience being bullied by other members [5; 12; 30], an experience described as cyber-victimization in the psychology literature [1]. To illustrate, consider the screenshot below, taken from the official OBC of *Nike* on Facebook:



An increasing amount of netnographic observations in the marketing literature highlight that interactions such as the above are not isolated incidents but happen across a large number of brand categories and social media platforms [12; 28; 43]. Moreover, a recent survey shows that over 90% of American adults ($n = 10,093$) agree that cyber-victimization is a problem, while 41% have been bullied online [77]. A report by Statista [87] suggests that the number of victims on social media is likely to rise, indicating an increase in reported victimization from 32% in 2016 to over 50% in 2018.

It thus comes as a surprise that research in marketing on cyber-victimization in OBCs has remained scarce. The small amount of extant work relies on qualitative observations of consumer comments in OBCs [30], whilst studies that survey victims and directly measure how cyber-victimization affects their commercial attitudes and behavioral intentions are missing. As noted by Breitsohl et al. [12] and Bacile et al. [5], whilst knowledge on the types of comments and subsequent verbal behaviors within the community exist, there is a general lack of evidence on the impact of cybervictimization with regard to consequences that cannot be deduced from observing comments, such as victims' future commercial behaviors and attitudes. Moreover, following the cyber-victimization literature in psychology, victims' reactions to being bullied will likely depend upon contextual factors such as the perceived severity of a bullying comment, and whether bystanders (i.e., uninvolved community members who witness the cyber-victimization incident) intervene [53]. In line with this, several seminal review articles on the state of the digital marketing literature highlight that research on both the tone of consumer comments as well as the interactional dynamics between community members remains scarce, calling for more research [3; 37]. Yet, to what extent these factors influence victims' commercial attitudes and behavioral intentions has so far remained unexplored.

To address these gaps in research, the objective of this article is to see how cyber-victimization and its varying degrees of severity impact negatively on victims' commercial outcomes, and to test to what extent these outcomes are affected by other community members' reactions. We report on an experiment that tests how being bullied affects commercial outcomes, including positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) intentions (i.e., positive information about a brand or company that one consumer transfers to another), community satisfaction (i.e., an attitude that represents a consumer's evaluation of the overall performance of an OBC), and community

following intentions (i.e., a consumer's willingness to follow events in an OBC on social media in the future). We decided to focus on these outcome variables since they represent established constructs that have been used to measure the commercial outcomes of constructive interactions in OBCs in extant work. Specifically, research shows that positive, constructive C2C interactions in OBCs can increase consumers' willingness to spread PWOM about brands and their OBCs [50; 96], enhance consumer satisfaction towards the OBCs [45; 58], and ultimately influence consumers to keep following the OBCs on social media [49; 63]. Investigating these variables allows us to make a comparison for transgressive interactions (i.e., offensive or hostile comments that threaten others). Following meta-analytical evidence from the cyber-victimization literature [53], our experiment measures two moderating influences; that is, we account for whether a cyber-victimization incident is mild or severe, and whether bystanders defend the victim, reinforce the cyber-victimization or pretend that they did not notice the incident. Results show that both severity and bystander reactions can have a significant impact on victims' commercial attitudes and behaviors, and present novel insights. Together, our findings offer three main contributions to the literature.

First, we address the general lack of knowledge on victims in relation to commerce-driven outcomes. Whilst abundant studies in psychology indicate how cyber-victimization impacts on outcomes related to victims' psychological well-being and social behaviors (see [53] for a review), our study is novel in offering insights on outcomes related to victims' commercial attitudes and behaviors. In doing so, we complement the small body of qualitative work in marketing that has speculated about the consequences of cyber-victimization, and provide the first quantitative insights based on a unique sample of OBC members with cyber-victimization experiences. We thus respond to calls for research on hostile consumer-to-consumer (C2C) interactions on social

media, and we specifically expand the literature by directly capturing victims' commercial attitudes and behaviors.

Second, our experiment establishes that the consequences of cyber-victimization are negative, and that cyber-victimization severity represents an important moderating influence on victims' behaviors. We specifically contribute to the marketing literature by offering a quantitative substantiation of previous (qualitative) propositions that victimization negatively affects victims' commercial attitudes and behaviors [28]. Our findings also provide new knowledge on the moderating influence of victimization severity, responding to calls for research on quantitatively exploring variations in message characteristics of OBC interactions, and the degree of severity in particular [12].

Third, our experiment highlights the significant influence of bystander interventions and thereby offers novel insights on the impact of social feedback in OBCs. We complement extant research that highlights how social feedback from bystanders in OBCs can foster desirable commercial outcomes in constructive social interactions [48], and we enrich current knowledge by highlighting the importance of social feedback in moderating transgressive (victimizing) interactions. Furthermore, in exploring three types of bystander reactions (defending, reinforcing and pretending), we offer new insights to the divided debate in the cyber-victimization literature in psychology on whether a bystander reinforcing a bully leads to lower positive consequences than a bystander pretending that nothing happened [74; 80].

For managers, our findings raise awareness of a growing, commercially detrimental phenomenon in OBCs, that is community members who experience cyber-victimization. Based on our findings, practitioners can distinguish between those interaction scenarios in their communities that are likely to be detrimental to the commercial attitudes and behaviors of their brand supporters,

and thus may benefit from brand interventions, and those that may not need further managerial attention.

Theoretical Background

Cyber-victimization in the psychology literature

Cyber-victimization refers to being the target of threatening, offensive, or hostile comments through the Internet [1]. As such, cyber-victimization reflects the interaction experience of an individual (i.e. the victim) who is verbally attacked by another individual (i.e. the bully) in an electronic environment [73]. The literature in psychology suggests that cyber-victimization has a number of negative psychological consequences, including a greater likelihood for depression [85], suicide ideation [39], anxiety [70], emotional distress [72], a higher sense of loneliness and a lower sense of belonging [68]. In a workplace context, cyber-victimization causes higher absenteeism and staff turnover intentions, as well as lower job satisfaction and work performance [32; 54].

Meta-analytical findings in psychology suggest that the negative impact of cyber-victimization varies in relation to two contextual factors, which include the severity of a cyber-victimization incident and the reactions from bystanders [53]. In terms of severity, researchers usually distinguish between mild and severe forms of cyber-victimization; the more severe a victimization event is perceived to be, the higher its negative impact on the victim [19]. Severe incidents of cyber-victimization, compared to mild incidents, lead to lower psychological well-being and an increased likelihood of exhibiting problematic social behaviors [53].

Bystander reactions refer to the social feedback that victims receive from those who witness the cyber-victimization and thereafter decide whether and how to get involved [7]. The two most common types of bystander reactions include reinforcing the bully (e.g., assisting, laughing or cheering) and defending the victim (e.g., offering support to the victim and/or telling the bully to stop). Typically, when bystanders defend the victim, the psychological consequences for the victim are less negative than when bystanders reinforce the bully and join in [80]. More recently, studies have investigated a third bystander reaction, namely pretending that the cyber-victimization did not take place [40]. Although knowledge on ‘pretending’ has just started to develop, early results suggest bystanders ignoring a victimization incident can be equally damaging to bystanders supporting the bully [74], speculating that victims regard such behavior as silent approval [81]. In sum, the psychology literature offers extensive evidence that cyber-victimization has negative psychological consequences, and highlights the moderating influence of cyber-victimization severity and bystander reactions. Yet, the commercial consequences of cyber-victimization when it takes place in online brand communities have not been explored in this field of research.

Victimization in the marketing literature

Although conceptual links between the marketing and cyber-victimization literature are scarce, a number of studies have observed consumers who fall victim to behaviors that qualify as incidents of victimization. For instance, studies report that members of OBCs experience victimization from brand rivals; that is, brand supporters who bully those who support competing brands [8; 30; 38; 43]. Others suggest that members may also be victimized not because they support a different brand but because they have a different interpretation of what a brand stands

for [42; 61; 91]. Finally, recent studies suggest that victimization in OBCs may occur as a consequence of trolling; that is, Internet users who do not have any brand attachment but bully community members because they enjoy provoking others and causing distress [12; 34]. Extant work thus offers evidence that cyber-victimization is a re-occurring phenomenon in OBCs, and report incidents across several brand categories, including cars [30; 61], restaurants [28] and fashion [12].

However, these studies largely rely on netnographic evidence (i.e., observations of online comments) and do not directly survey victims to capture the impact of cyber-victimization. Whilst authors have called for such quantitative work [12; 31], studies on the commercial consequences of cyber-victimization are lacking. A notable exception comes from Bacile et al. [5], illustrating that community members who complain about a brand are regularly victimized by members who disagree with the complaint; it further shows that victims have more positive attitudes towards a brand when the brand moderator asks the bullies to stop, compared to when it ignores the cyber-victimization incident. However, no study to date considers the moderating influence of contextual factors related to victimization severity and bystander responses. Researchers offer some tentative insights from observations of online comments, suggesting that the severity of victimization is likely to vary and thus differently impact on victims [12; 30], yet a verification of such propositions by directly analyzing victim's responses is missing. Likewise, authors highlight the dynamics of social interactions in OBCs, and suggest that social feedback can be constructive and transgressive [42]; however, neither have these suppositions been substantiated by quantitative investigations, nor have they considered the possibility of pretending as alternative bystander reaction. Taken together, Table 1 summarizes our literature review of studies that report victimization incidents in OBCs.

Insert Table 1 about here

Hypotheses Development

We put forward that cyber-victimization in OBCs will have negative commercial impacts with regard to a victim's commercial attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, this article suggests that three outcomes which have been explored in non-hostile interactions in prior work on OBCs [14; 36], namely PWOM intentions, community satisfaction and community following intentions, will be detrimentally affected by hostile interactions (i.e., cyber-victimization), as we further elaborate below.

First, we look at how cyber-victimization affects PWOM intentions of victims. PWOM is an important consumer behavior outcome in relation to OBCs because of its comparably high credibility and perceived usefulness [51], and is generally seen as a positive, pro-social behavior. Past marketing studies show that positive C2C interactions in OBCs can increase consumers' willingness to spread PWOM about the brand, and to recommend the community to others [50; 96]. Arguably, negative events such as victimization may decrease consumers' intentions to share positive views about the brands. Research in psychology suggests that, compared to non-victims (i.e., individuals without victimization experiences), victims are less likely to engage in prosocial behaviors that remind them of victimization incidents [53]. It further seems reasonable to assume that this is more likely to happen when victimization is severe, compared to mild victimization [76]. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1a: Victims experiencing victimization show lower intentions to spread PWOM compared to non-victims.

H1b: Victims experiencing severe victimization show lower intentions to spread PWOM compared to those experiencing mild victimization.

Second, we examine the effect of cyber-victimization on victims' community satisfaction. Community satisfaction is a significant predictor of consumers' community revisiting intentions [10; 59], community engagement [46] and overall brand loyalty [64]. Since research shows that positive C2C interactions can lead to an increase in community satisfaction [45; 58], negative interactions such as being victimized are likely to have the opposite effect. Drawing on studies in psychology that explored influences on users' general social media satisfaction, it is plausible that cyber-victimization will have a negative impact on brand supporters' community satisfaction. Camacho et al. [17], for instance, found that victimization on Facebook could cause victims to feel anxious about future interactions, which in turn decreases the satisfaction with Facebook. There is ample support that victimization generally decreases satisfaction, including victims' life satisfaction [53], workplace satisfaction [22], and online browsing satisfaction [41]. Accordingly, we put forward that this may extend to the satisfaction of a victim in relation to the OBC in which the victimization occurred. Hence:

H2a: Victims experiencing victimization show lower community satisfaction compared to non-victims.

H2b: Victims experiencing severe victimization show lower community satisfaction compared to those experiencing mild victimization.

Third, we investigate an impact of cyber-victimization on victims' community following intentions. Community following intentions is important because it allows companies to stay connected and communicate with brand followers [27]. Moreover, following an OBC positively influences brand loyalty [33] and purchasing intentions [13]. Past marketing research shows that

positive C2C interactions in an OBC are likely to increase community following intentions [49; 63], and it seems likely that the opposite holds true for negative interactions such as being victimized. A study by Thomas et al. [91] suggests that when consumers become involved in a conflict with other community members, they may be less likely to continue following the OBC. Likewise, recent research shows that past victimization experiences on Facebook can reduce the frequency and time victims spent on Facebook [17]. Thus, we propose the following:

H3a: Victims experiencing victimization show lower intentions to keep following the OBC compared to non-victims.

H3b: Victims experiencing severe victimization show lower intentions to keep following the OBC compared to those experiencing mild victimization.

Following our proposition that victimization has a negative effect on these outcomes, and that this varies by the degree of victimization severity, we further aim to explore whether there is an interaction effect between victimization severity and bystander reactions. In exploring interaction effects of victimization severity and bystander reactions on the three outcome variables, we use the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE) [78], which builds on social identity theory to describe social interaction processes between group members in online settings. With regard to online interactions, non-verbal cues common in face-to-face interactions are lacking, and group members interact without knowing preceding information about one another [79]. Consequently, SIDE proposes that group members are obliged to rely on two social cues in order to create an attitude regarding an interaction: their own personal norms and the group norms. While personal norms are more prominent because people have known what is appropriate to say since childhood, group norms are context-dependent and, in online contexts, are frequently acquired ad-hoc [83].

Following this notion, victims will use two interactional cues - victimization severity and bystander reactions - to make sense of cyber-victimization incidents [7]. Victimization severity reflects victims' personal norms, that is to what extent they perceive a victimization incident to go against what they consider appropriate in a social environment [16]. Bystander reactions, in turn, reflect the group norms that are formed by how other community members respond to a victimization incident [71]. Generally, SIDE suggests that attitudes and behaviors of victims are shaped by both personal norms and group norms. On the one hand, in situations during which personal norms are congruent with norms of the group that an individual identifies with, an individual's attitudes and behavioral intentions will be in line with the group [20]. On the other hand, when personal norms are incongruent with group norms, an individual is less likely to adopt an attitude and behave in accordance with the group [66].

Applied to victimization in OBCs, we suggest that victims' reactions will be influenced by whether or not the social feedback from the community (group norms) reflects their attitude towards victimization incidents (personal norms). We therefore suggest that the way bystanders in OBCs react to victimization will buffer or intensify the consequences of victimization at different degrees of severity. Following the cyber-victimization literature in psychology [80; 82], we expect that victims will be less inclined to be satisfied with the OBC, keep following it and spread PWOM when bystanders reinforce the bully, compared to when bystanders defend the victim. Moreover, as severe forms of victimization tend to violate victims' personal norms, compared to when it is mild [71], we propose that victim's preference of defending over reinforcing will be stronger when the victimization is severe. Thus, we hypothesize:

H4: When victimization is severe, reinforcing leads to lower victim outcomes (PWOM intentions, community satisfaction, and community following intention) than defending.

When it comes to pretending, the literature is divided as to whether victims may prefer pretending over reinforcing. Research suggests that victims may find bystanders trying to ignore the victimization incident as equally offensive as bystanders reinforcing the bully [74]. Salmivalli [81] further argues that victims may regard such behavior as silent approval which is likely to negatively affect victims. Whilst some suggest that pretending allows everyone in a community to move on [18], the temporal need-threat model of ostracism suggests that behaviors similar to ostracism generates a feeling of social exclusion that is even worse for victims than reinforcement of the bully [95]. Arguably, this will be more prevalent when victimization is severe, given that an incident of victimization is blatantly obvious and pretending becomes more insincere [62].

H5: When victimization is severe, pretending leads to lower victim outcomes (PWOM intentions, community satisfaction, and community following intention) than defending.

H6: When victimization is severe, pretending leads to lower victim outcomes (PWOM intentions, community satisfaction, and community following intention) than reinforcing.

In case of mild victimization, the effects of bystander reactions on victims seem to be less predictable. Unlike severe (i.e., apparent) victimization, mild victimization can be ambiguous, leaving it unclear as to whether or not a comment was meant to cause harm [6]. Likewise, mild forms of victimization can also affect how bystanders react to the incident as bystanders may possibly be unsure that an intervention is needed [7]. Furthermore, cyber-victimization studies show that bystanders are more likely to intervene when victimization incidents are severe, and such interventions decline significantly from severe to mild victimization [62; 67]. As such, we expect that bystander reactions will not influence victims when victimization is mild. We thus put forward the following hypothesis:

H7: When victimization is mild, bystander reactions will not affect victim outcomes (PWOM intentions, and community satisfaction and community following intentions).

Overall, Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model of the hypothesized relationships among victimization severity, bystander reactions, PWOM intentions, community satisfaction and community following intentions.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Methodology

Data collection and participants

To investigate the impact of victimization, we utilized a scenario-based experiment and a 2 (victimization severity: *severe vs mild*) x 3 (bystander reactions: *reinforcing vs defending vs pretending*) between-subjects factorial design with one control group. Given the reported reluctance of victims to participate in research studies in psychology [35], we followed a purposive sampling approach. We employed an online data panel provider to recruit participants based on the following three screening questions: (1) *Do you like or follow the fanpage of any brand on Facebook?*, (2) *How often do you post brand-related comments on Facebook fanpages?* and (3) *How often have others replied with negative comments to your brand-related posts?* Participants who answered ‘No’ for the first question and ‘Never’ for the second or third question were not included in the survey. We concentrated on Facebook fanpages as brand community context since Facebook is the most popular social media platform with over 2.4 billion daily users [86], and the largest number of OBCs [88].

Participants had to pass several attention checks to qualify, and were required to enter the name of a brand that they follow on Facebook into a textbox, which meaningfully acted as further criterion for inclusion. The final sample ($n = 387$) consisted of 66% female and 34% male participants, with the majority of participants (61.2%) aged between 25-54 years. Table 2 shows demographic information of the participants.

Insert Table 2 about here

Experimental conditions did not differ significantly in terms of age group ($\chi^2(36) = 33.60$, $p = .58$) and gender ($\chi^2(6) = 4.36$, $p = .63$). Moreover, ANCOVA results show that there was no significant difference between participants with different gender and age groups on all dependent variables. Table 3 shows observation number of each experimental group.

Insert Table 3 about here

Because the data collection involved human participants, ethical standards and practices were adhered to from the authors' institutional Research Ethics Committee, including confidentiality and anonymity of data. The research was granted ethical approval, and the data was collected over a period of three months.

Manipulation of independent variables

We developed the experiment based on the netnographic observations by Breitsohl et al. [12] and Dineva et al. [28] which offered a rich source of cyber-victimization that occurred in

OBCs. On entering the experiment, participants typed the name of the brand that they follow on Facebook into a textbox, and their own Facebook name into another textbox. The entered names were automatically forwarded into the subsequent scenarios and scales to increase the scenario realism and relevance of scale items. The first scenario showed participants the Facebook fanpage of their brand of choice, and a picture in reference to the brand's latest video advertisement. Participants then were asked to enter a positive comment to express their support for the chosen brand into a textbox (see Appendix 1). We asked participants for a positive comment for three reasons. First, since our sample consisted of brand supporters, a positive statement would more closely resemble their actual predisposition towards the brand, rather than asking them to imagine being complainants or brand rivals who make a negative statement. Moreover, research on consumer trolling highlights that unprovoked attacks on brand supporters are increasingly popular [21; 34], hence allowing us to capture a real-life trend in social media. Finally, operationalizing the victim as complainant or brand rival would have necessitated us to control for participants' justice perceptions regarding the complaint cause, or participants' attitude towards brand rivals; portraying the victim as a brand supporter allowed us to avoid having to control for such noise effects.

After posting a comment, participants received a notification that others had commented on the post, leading to our first manipulation (victimization severity). Participants were randomly allocated to one of three conditions: (1) severe victimization, (2) mild victimization, and (3) a control condition (see Appendix 2). Adapted from Obermaier et al. [67], the severe condition contained swearwords and no humor, whilst the mild condition contained elements of humor and no swearwords. For the control condition, comments were positive (i.e., no victimization took place). Next, participants received another notification that someone had added a comment to their

post, and participants were then randomly exposed to one of three conditions for our second manipulation (bystander reactions) on a subsequent page: (1) bystanders reinforcing the victimizing comments towards the participants, (2) bystanders defending the participants and (3) bystanders pretending that nothing happened (see Appendix 2). Participants in the control condition did not take part in any of the bystander reactions' conditions as victimization event did not take place in the first place. We then channeled participants towards our scale items (i.e., the outcome variables). Both victimization severity (0 = Control, 1 = Mild, and 2 = Severe) and bystander reactions (1 = Reinforcing, 2 = Defending, and 3 = Pretending) were coded as categorical variables.

Measures

Measures of the dependent variables were adopted from established instruments, as illustrated in Table 4, and anchored on seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). We measured PWOM intentions using a 3-item scale adapted from Yüksel and Yüksel [98], community satisfaction via Au et al.'s 4-item scale [4], and community following intentions with 3 items from Ku et al. [55]. These measurement items were introduced by the statement "Looking at these comments," in order to capture immediate reactions after participants seeing the stimuli.

We further measured participants' self-esteem (5 items from Jamieson, Harkins, and Williams [44]) and perceived social support (4 items from Zimet et al. [100]) since meta-analytic results suggest these significantly affect social media users' responses to being bullied [53]. Self-esteem and perceived social support were measured prior to the manipulations in order not to

confound the experimental variables. Correlation coefficients between variables are provided in the Appendix 3.

Insert Table 4 about here

Results

To assess the validity of the manipulations, 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) Likert scales were used. Victimization severity was measured with the item “*The comments from John Hope and Kylie Baroux were meant to be hostile*”, following Ordoñez and Nekmat [69]. Significant differences were found ($F(2, 253.18) = 1317.83, p < .001$) between the severe ($M = 6.39, SD = 1.00$), mild ($M = 4.44, SD = 1.77$), and control ($M = 1.32, SD = 0.52$) condition, including post hoc comparisons for the control versus mild condition (mean difference = 3.12, $p < .001$), the control versus severe condition (mean difference = 5.07, $p < .001$), and the mild versus severe condition (mean difference = 1.94, $p < .001$). Bystander reactions were measured with the item “*Tom Stanfield's comment was meant to support you*” [57]. Participants perceived significant differences ($F(2, 143.05) = 297.62, p < .001$) between reinforcing ($M = 2.12, SD = 1.62$), defending ($M = 6.30, SD = 1.09$), and pretending ($M = 3.81, SD = 1.52$), including post-hoc comparisons for reinforcing versus pretending (mean difference = 1.69, $p < .001$), reinforcing versus defending (mean difference = 4.19, $p < .001$), and pretending versus defending (mean difference = 2.49, $p < .001$). Participants also rated the realism of the manipulations (“*The described scenario is realistic*”), and results suggested them to be realistic ($M = 5.41, SD = 1.47$).

To test H1–H3, a one-way MANCOVA was conducted. Multivariate results showed significant differences between the three conditions on the combined dependent variables ($F(6,$

762) = 10.51, $p < .001$, Pillai's Trace = .153, partial $\eta^2 = .08$) after controlling for self-esteem and perceived social support. Univariate results also revealed significant differences between the three conditions on PWOM intentions ($F(2, 382) = 7.84$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$), community satisfaction ($F(2, 382) = 29.99$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$) and community following intentions ($F(2, 382) = 8.65$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$). Table 5 shows the cell means for our dependent variables.

Insert Table 5 about here

For PWOM intentions, pairwise comparisons further highlighted a lower mean in the severe than the control condition (mean difference = $-.64$, $t = -4.67$, $p < .001$) and a lower mean in the mild than the control condition (mean difference = $-.46$, $t = -3.55$, $p = .01$); the difference between the severe and mild condition was not significant (mean difference = $-.18$, $t = -1.55$, $p = .60$). Thus, H1a is supported, whereas H1b is not supported. For community satisfaction, the mean was lower in the severe than the mild condition (mean difference = $-.59$, $t = -3.80$, $p = .001$), and lower in the severe than the control condition (mean difference = -1.42 , $t = -8.76$, $p < .001$); the mean of the mild condition was lower than the control condition (mean difference = $-.83$, $t = -5.62$, $p < .001$). Hence, H2a and H2b are supported. For community following intentions, the mean in the severe condition was lower compared to the mean in the mild condition (mean difference = $-.37$, $t = -2.98$, $p = .01$) as well as the control condition (mean difference = $-.59$, $t = -4.58$, $p < .001$); the difference between the mild and the control condition was not significant (mean difference = $-.21$, $t = -2.11$, $p = .43$). Therefore, H3b is supported. However, H3a is partially supported as only the difference between the severe and the control condition was significant, but not between the

mild and the control condition. Overall, these results indicate that severe victimization leads to lower scores on the outcome variables compared to when no victimization occurs, and that, in most cases, severe victimization leads to lower scores than mild victimization, whilst mild victimization leads to lower scores than the control condition.

To test H4–H7 (i.e., the interaction between victimization severity and bystander reactions), a 2x3 MANCOVA was conducted. Results revealed a significant main effect for victimization severity on the combined dependent variables ($F(3, 290) = 6.69, p < .001$, Pillai's Trace = .07, partial $\eta^2 = .07$) after controlling for self-esteem and perceived social support, whereas the main effect of bystander reactions was not significant ($F(6, 582) = .58, p = .75$, Pillai's Trace = .01, partial $\eta^2 = .01$). Results also revealed a significant interaction effect between victimization severity and bystander reactions ($F(6, 582) = 3.01, p = .01$, Pillai's Trace = .06, partial $\eta^2 = .03$). As indicated in Table 6, the univariate results revealed significant main effects of victimization severity on the dependent variables, but none for the main effects of bystander reactions. Results also showed a significant interaction effect for PWOM intentions ($F(2, 292) = 5.82, p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$), community satisfaction ($F(2, 292) = 3.94, p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$) and community following intentions ($F(2, 292) = 3.89, p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$).

Insert Table 6 about here

To explore these differences further, we analyzed the simple effects of bystander reactions on the two victimization severity conditions. Table 7 lists the mean and standard deviation of the dependent variables for each experimental group.

Insert Table 7 about here

In general, results indicated significant differences between bystander reactions when victimization was severe, as can be seen for PWOM intentions ($F(2, 292) = 4.01, p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$) and community satisfaction ($F(2, 292) = 3.34, p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$), albeit this was not true for community following intentions. Looking at the pairwise comparisons, the difference between reinforcing and defending was not significant for all outcome variables: PWOM intentions (mean difference = $-.08, t = -.07, p = 1.00$), community satisfaction (mean difference = $-.49, t = -1.26, p = .20$) and community following intentions (mean difference = $-.07, t = -.17, p = 1.00$). Thus, H4 is not confirmed. Comparing pretending to defending, the difference was significant for PWOM intentions (mean difference = $-.80, t = -2.08, p = .03$) and community satisfaction (mean difference = $-.84, t = -1.68, p = .04$), albeit not for community following intentions (mean difference = $-.57, t = -1.34, p = .13$). Hence, H5 is confirmed for PWOM intentions and community satisfaction, but not for community following intentions. Comparing the pretending to reinforcing, we found a significant difference for PWOM intentions (mean difference = $-.73, t = -1.86, p = .04$), but not for community satisfaction (mean difference = $-.35, t = -.62, p = .86$) or community following intentions (mean difference = $-.50, t = -1.21, p = .18$). Thus, H6 is confirmed for PWOM intentions only. Furthermore, we did not find any significant differences between the conditions when victimization was mild, confirming H7. We will discuss these findings in relation to existing knowledge next.

Discussion

The purpose of this article was to examine how cyber-victimization in OBCs affects victims' PWOM intentions, community satisfaction and community following intentions. As there is a lack of research in the marketing literature, findings from research in psychology were used to hypothesize that victimization will negatively affect these outcomes, and that victims will further be influenced by the victimization severity and bystander reactions. The results suggest that, in most cases, consumers in OBCs show lower PWOM intentions, community satisfaction and community following intentions when they are victimized, compared to when they are not. Moreover, when victimization is severe, these outcomes tend to be at their lowest when bystanders ignore a victim, and at their highest when bystanders defend the victim, whilst no significant differences between bystander reactions are found when victimization is mild. We discuss these findings and their implications below.

Theoretical implications

First, we contribute to the scarce literature on consumers who fall victim to being bullied in OBCs. Research in this area has largely relied on netnographic observations, and inferences about the outcomes of victimization has so far relied on analyzing online commentary, whilst complementary survey data from victims has so far been missing [5]. This study thus offers evidence that cyber-victimization has a negative impact on consumers and brands. It is the first to provide experimental evidence that shows victims experience lower PWOM intentions, community satisfaction and community following intentions than non-victims. Specifically, the findings highlight that both forms of victimization (severe and mild) lead to lower PWOM intentions and community satisfaction compared to non-victimization; however, only severe

victimization leads to lower intentions to keep following the corresponding OBC. Interestingly, while victims experiencing mild victimization will be less inclined to be satisfied with the OBC and spread PWOM, they will not have lower intentions to keep following the OBC. This may indicate that the impact of mild victimization is not strong enough for victims to have lower intentions to keep following the corresponding OBC, and it may be that victims still have other reasons to stay connected with the community (e.g., information seeking) despite the mildly aggressive behaviors of other community members [99]. Surprisingly, the findings further show severe and mild victimization to have more or less the same impact on PWOM intentions compared to non-victimization. Although victims will have lower intentions to spread PWOM after being bullied in the OBCs, it is possible that victims still have positive opinions to share about the brand regardless of how severe the victimization incidents are [15; 24]. These results are consistent with and enrich the cyber-victimization literature in psychology [53], which emphasizes the negative psychological consequences for victims, yet has so far overlooked commercial consequences related to brands and brand communities. The results also contribute to the scholarly debate in marketing literature on whether inter-consumer hostility has favorable or unfavorable consequences for a brand [8; 43]. The contribution is further substantiated by using a hard-to-reach sample of OBC users with past victimization experiences, a previously unexplored consumer group.

Second, the results deepen extant knowledge on how victimization severity and bystander reactions impact on a victim's subsequent reactions. Following the social identity model of deindividuation effects, our findings offer new evidence on two moderating influences which significantly impact on victims' commercial attitudes and behaviors to the OBC literature. This is consistent with others on the importance of social feedback between consumers in constructive

OBC interactions [48], and current knowledge is enriched by applying it to a transgressive interaction context. Moreover, the research shows that victims prefer bystanders to support them when the victimization is severe, rather than pretending that nothing happened as victims will have higher PWOM intentions and community satisfaction when they are defended. The findings also highlight that being ignored by others in the community has the most negative influence on victims as it can lead to the lowest PWOM intentions when compared with other types of bystander reactions. However, while severe victimization leads to a decrease in victims' intentions to keep following the OBC, such intentions do not vary by the different types of bystander reactions. In other words, it seems that victims' community following intentions depend on personal (i.e., attitude towards severe victimization in OBCs) rather than group norms (i.e., attitude towards bystanders). As suggested in past research, it is possible that victims are more inclined to focus on individual determinants such as personal brand-related experiences when following an OBCs on social media [75; 97]. Surprisingly, our findings demonstrate that reinforcing and defending have more or less the same effects on all outcome variables when victimization is severe. Since both reinforcing and defending have in common that bystanders take sides, either with a bully or a victim [81], it might be that victims somehow prefer bystanders to at least acknowledge the victimization by taking sides, rather than ignoring it. This would explain why pretending appeared to be the least favorable bystander behavior. Together, these findings contribute to the marketing literature by highlighting the complexity of consumer-to-consumer interactions in OBCs, and responding to calls for more research on the quantitative influence of variations in message characteristics and bullying severity [12]. Our findings emphasize the buffering effects of defending behavior by bystanders, which is in line with the cyber-victimization literature in

psychology [53], and we further provide novel experimental evidence that pretending is the most unfavorable bystander reaction when compared to other types of reactions.

While bystander reactions can influence victims' behavior when victimization is severe, the findings further show that the effects of bystander reactions on victims are not evident when the victimization is mild, as hypothesized. However, our findings suggest that mild forms of victimization can still cause a negative impact on victims as it leads to lower PWOM intentions and community satisfaction compared to non-victims. In the case of mild victimization, it seems that victims' attitudes and intentions towards mildly transgressive comments depend mostly on personal norms, in accordance with the SIDE model. As mild victimization can be ambiguous to both victims and bystanders [6; 7], it could be that victims may find bystander reactions to be unpredictable, thus they are less likely to be influenced by bystanders. Although the effects of bystander reactions are less predictable in the case of mild victimization, we argue that such the comments can indeed be hurtful for some victims and that bystander interventions are still in need. As cyber-victimization research shows that bystanders' willingness to help victims increases when the victimization severity increases [52], we further argue that mild victimization can still cause a negative impact on victims if bystanders fail to recognize the situation as a threat to the community and decide not to intervene. Moreover, helping victims is valuable for the community in general as research suggests that bystander interventions can also affect justice perceptions of other onlookers in the community [5]. While past studies examined the effects of bystander reactions during cyber-victimization incidents [81; 82], our findings thus add to the extant knowledge by comparing the effects of bystander reactions on different types of victimization severity and offer evidence that bystanders have stronger influence on victims when victimization is severe than when victimization is mild.

Finally, the finding on the impact of bystanders ‘pretending’, is worth elaborating on further. Our results suggest – although differences are not consistently significant for all outcome variables – that pretending is the least preferred bystander reaction when victimization is severe. These results seem somewhat counter-intuitive at first, and yet they may help to shed light on the inconclusive state of knowledge in the psychology literature as well as offering a phenomenon that so far has not been discussed in the digital marketing literature. Existing research on cyber-victimization, albeit scarce, suggests that being ignored is an undesirable bystander behavior for victims [74]. Researchers have speculated that ‘pretending’ communicates to the victim that others either approve of the incident or at least do not care enough to get involved [81]. Yet, others have argued that bystanders’ pretending signifies the intent not to further add to and potentially prolong an unpleasant interaction event [56], suggesting that a victim may best be protected by attempting to allow a conversation “to move on” [18, pp. 299]. These results give reason to speculate that a victim perceives bystanders’ attempts to move on as a positive event when victimization is mild, and perhaps not too hurtful; yet when victimization is severe, and the victim feels hurt, bystanders pretending it did not happen may further add to the negative impact on a victim. Whilst more research is needed to understand the exact role of pretending, the findings offer a first tentative explanation as to why scholars have so far been in disagreement on this issue. The research thus contributes to and advances the ongoing debate in the cyber-victimization literature in psychology, and introduces “pretending” as a new consumer interaction behavior to the marketing literature on social feedback in OBCs.

Managerial implications

OBCs allow companies to stay connected with brand followers [27], and the likelihood that consumers spread PWOM about brands increases when they have positive community experiences [51]. This research highlights that incidents of victimization can have negative commercial and attitudinal outcomes. We therefore recommend community content managers to get involved, and offer some insights on scenarios in which an intervention seems most needed. Specifically, when managers identify incidents of severe victimization, and bystanders either support the bully or pretend nothing happened, the results here would support intervening. Whilst our study does not offer direct insights on what such an intervention may look like, existing studies indicate that doing nothing is less preferred by consumers compared to asking a bully to stop [5], indicating a consumer preference for managerial content management.

The results further suggest that victimization in OBCs represents an opportunity to communicate a brand's corporate social responsibility (CSR). Given the increasing media attention paid to cyber-victimization on social media [90], and calls for corporations to take a stance [23], we propose brands can benefit from being more proactive in supporting victims. This can be implemented, for instance, by using online monitoring tools (e.g., Hootsuite, Brandwatch) to identify occurrences of cyber-victimization, and then taking action to moderate the situation [93]. The findings also suggest that content managers should publish community rules that highlight what is seen as bullying, and how victims can be supported. *American Express*, for instance, has a clear set of guidelines which has already received positive news coverage [2].

Companies can also address the victimization incident indirectly by having active communities of brand followers to help monitor OBCs. These brand followers are not directly

employed by the companies but typically take actions on behalf of the companies. They can help detect the victimization that occurs in OBCs and support the victims when needed.

Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, the scenarios used in the experiment could have been more complex and thus accounted for further moderating influences that likely occur during interactions in OBCs. Our scenarios depicted incidents where a victim is attacked after making a positive comment to a brand, hence depicting a victimization incident related to trolling; yet, alternative interaction scenarios are conceivable, for instance when a victim is a complainer or brand rival [5; 30]. Moreover, we only used one bystander to operationalize social feedback, whilst in reality more comments, and a greater mix of comments is likely to follow a victimization event [12]. Therefore, future research should explore alternative scenarios that vary the content of a victim's comment, as well as the volume and valence of bystander comments.

Second, future studies could explore the inconsistent results for some of the dependent variables in this research. Whilst our hypotheses were largely confirmed, and effects indicated the expected direction, some insignificant effects suggest that there are further conditions upon which victims' reactions depend and that were not covered in this study. For example, according to Bosnjak and Rudolph [11], consumer reactions vary depending on their degree of involvement with brands. Consequently, the results may differ when comparing victims who support brands that sell high-involvement products (e.g., clothing) with those who support brands that sell low-involvement products (e.g., fast food). Moreover, brands with a high level of self-relevance are more likely to cause brand-related aggression than those low in self-relevance [47], hence in some

OBCs victimization may be more common than in others, giving rise to the question of whether degrees of tolerance vary by the frequency with which victimization occurs.

Conclusion

This article examines the relatively unexplored context of cyber-victimization in OBCs. It aimed to provide evidence that cyber-victimization and its varying degrees of severity have negative outcomes for victims and brands, and to test to what extent these outcomes are affected by other community members' reactions. Our findings demonstrate that cyber-victimization has the potential to negatively affect commercial outcomes such as PWOM intentions, community satisfaction and community following intentions. The findings further show that these negative effects vary depending on victimization severity and reactions from bystanders. We offer a novel insight to both the marketing and cyber-victimization literature by showing that, for severe cases of victimization, pretending can lead to the least favorable victim reactions, compared to reinforcing and defending. Our findings, therefore, encourage firms to acknowledge the potential negative outcomes that cyber-victimization has on the brand- and brand community-related behaviors of victims, and to consider its CSR implications.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Initial Facebook scenario and personalized content

Now, please imagine that you are visiting **D&J**'s fanpage on Facebook.

You then see that **D&J** has just posted a picture link to their latest video advertisement.

You spontaneously decide to express your support for **D&J** and to make a positive comment below their original post. Please type a positive comment that you would be likely to make into the box below.

D&J
3 hr
Just released our latest promo video, check it out now!



👍❤️😮 15K 218 Comments 721 Shares

👍 Like 💬 Comment

Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out!
Like · Reply · 7m

Example of brand name entered by participant A

Example of Facebook name and positive statement about the brand entered by participant A

Appendix 2 - Experimental conditions

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Consumer comments</i>
<i>Victim comment</i> <i>Severe Victimization</i> <i>(Manipulation 1)</i> <i>Reinforcing</i> <i>(Manipulation 2)</i>	Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out! John Hope Shut up and talk to my fucking hand, Alex Brody! Kylie Baroux Alex Brody, are you serious!? You suck, moron! Next page: Tom Stanfield Yeah, fuck off Alex Brody!
<i>Victim comment</i> <i>Severe Victimization</i> <i>(Manipulation 1)</i> <i>Defending</i> <i>(Manipulation 2)</i>	Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out! John Hope Shut up and talk to my fucking hand, Alex Brody! Kylie Baroux Alex Brody, are you serious!? You suck, moron! Next page: Tom Stanfield You both are really hateful. Leave Alex Brody alone!
<i>Victim comment</i> <i>Severe Victimization</i> <i>(Manipulation 1)</i> <i>Pretending</i> <i>(Manipulation 2)</i>	Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out! John Hope Shut up and talk to my fucking hand, Alex Brody! Kylie Baroux Alex Brody, are you serious!? You suck, moron! Next page: Tom Stanfield Does anyone know the name of the song in the background?
<i>Victim comment</i> <i>Mild Victimization</i> <i>(Manipulation 1)</i>	Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out! John Hope You make me laugh so hard, Alex Brody. Such a joke! LMAO Kylie Baroux Haha, Alex Brody, you are not serious are you?? You joker :) Next page:

<i>Reinforcing (Manipulation 2)</i>	Tom Stanfield I've heard better jokes before Alex Brody LOL
<i>Victim comment</i>	Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out!
<i>Mild Victimization (Manipulation 1)</i>	John Hope You make me laugh so hard, Alex Brody . Such a joke! LMAO Kylie Baroux Haha, Alex Brody , you are not serious are you?? You joker :)
<i>Defending (Manipulation 2)</i>	Next page: Tom Stanfield Hey! no need to make fun of others. Leave Alex Brody alone guys!
<i>Victim comment</i>	Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out!
<i>Mild Victimization (Manipulation 1)</i>	John Hope You make me laugh so hard, Alex Brody . Such a joke! LMAO Kylie Baroux Haha, Alex Brody , you are not serious are you?? You joker :)
<i>Pretending (Manipulation 2)</i>	Next page: Tom Stanfield Does anyone know the name of the song in the background?
<i>Control group</i>	Alex Brody They have great customer service and quality items. If you have never tried them, check them out! John Hope Love it! Kylie Baroux Spot on Alex Brody ! You are totally right. Tom Stanfield Couldn't agree more!

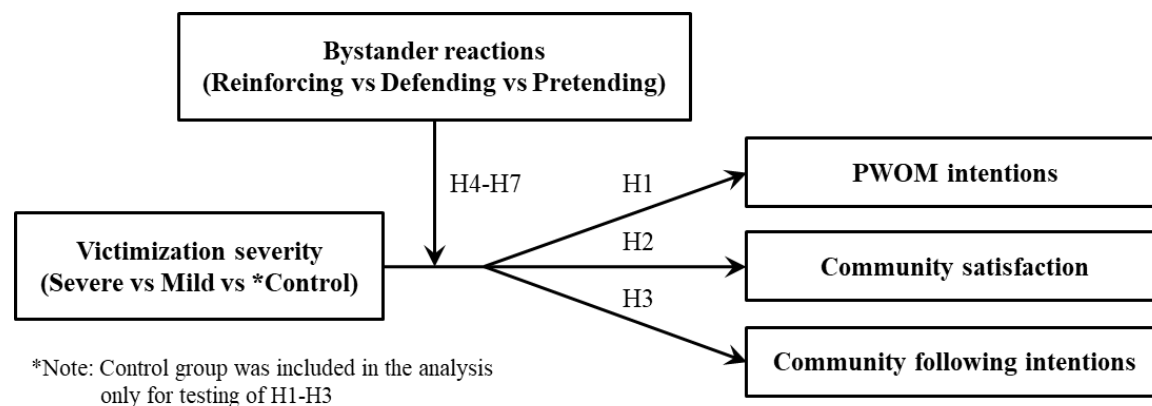
Appendix 3 – Correlation matrix

	PWOM intentions	Community satisfaction	Community following intentions	Self-esteem	Perceived social support
PWOM intentions	-				
Community satisfaction	.67**	-			
Community following intentions	.72**	.62**	-		
Self-esteem	.28**	.33**	.25**	-	
Perceived social support	.22**	.22**	.27**	.49**	-

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Figure

Figure 1 A conceptual model



Tables (start next page)

Table 1 Selected literature on cyber-victimization in OBCs.

<i>Study</i>	<i>Study Context</i>	<i>Method</i>	<i>Survey data?</i>	<i>Sample of victims?</i>	<i>Impact on victims measured?</i>	<i>Severity?</i>	<i>Bystander interventions?</i>	<i>Study findings related to victims</i>
Bacile et al. [5]	Service failure and recovery	Qualitative (netnography) & quantitative (experiment)	Yes	No	Yes; attitudes	No	No	Complainers who are victimized have more favorable attitudes of brands that ask bullies to stop rather than brands that do nothing
Berendt et al. [8]	Inter-firm and inter-consumer brand rivalry	Quantitative; experiment	Yes	No	No	No	No	When third parties witness victimization between brand rivals, it can have positive outcomes related to group distinctiveness and brand (dis)identification
Breitsohl et al. [12]	Categorizing types of bullying behavior	Qualitative; netnography	No	No	No	Yes; Implied ^a	Yes; Implied	Victims experience types forms of cyberbullying, and are likely to receive different forms of bystander support
Dessart and Pitardi [26]	Online consumer engagement	Qualitative; netnography	No	No	No	No	Yes; Implied	Consumers may become victimized by other consumers because they narrate positive stories about brands
Dineva et al. [29]	Conflict management strategies	Qualitative (netnography) & quantitative (experiment)	Yes	No	No	No	Yes; Implied	When victims do not receive corporate support, bystanders are likely to have less favorable attitudes towards a company compared to when victims do receive corporate support
Ewing et al. [30]	Inter-consumer brand rivalry	Qualitative; netnography	No	No	No	Yes; Implied	Yes; Implied	Consumers may become victimized by the fans of rival brand due to oppositional loyalty
Husemann et al. [42]	Conflict culture within an OBC	Qualitative; netnography	No	No	No	No	Yes; Implied	Consumer are victimized because of different social and cultural brand values, the symbolic meaning of the community or consumer ideologies
Ilhan et al. [43]	Inter-consumer brand rivalry	Qualitative; content analysis	No	No	No	No	No	Consumers are victimized because they make comments to support their favorite brands and get attacked by the fans of rival brands
Luedicke et al. [61]	Consumer conflicts in OBCs	Qualitative; netnography and interview	No	No	No	No	No	Consumers are victimized because of morally and culturally framed conflicts in OBCs
Muniz and Hamer [65]	Inter-consumer brand rivalry	Qualitative; netnography	No	No	No	No	No	First study to suggest that brand rivals may become victimized within and across OBCs
Thomas et al. [91]	Heterogeneity in online communities	Qualitative; netnography and interview	No	No	No	No	No	Heterogeneity within the online community can lead consumers to attack one another, and is likely to lead to community exits
Thompson and Sinha [92]	Brand community and oppositional loyalty	Quantitative; hazard modeling approach	No	No	No	No	No	Consumers may become victimized by the fans of rival brands in the context of new product adoptions
<i>Current study</i>	<i>Cyber-victimization in OBCs</i>	<i>Quantitative; experiment</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes; attitudes and behaviors</i>	<i>Yes; Measured</i>	<i>Yes; measured</i>	Victimization severity can impact on a victim's commercial attitudes and behavioral intentions, moderated by the type of bystander intervention

Note: ^a 'measured' refers to quantitative assessment of a concept (severity; bystander interventions), whilst 'implied' refers to anecdotal suggestions

Table 2 Demographic information of the participants.

	n	%
Gender		
Male	132	34
Female	255	66
Age		
18 - 24	22	5.7
25 - 34	83	21.4
35 - 44	74	19.1
45 - 54	80	20.7
55 - 64	73	18.9
65 - 74	44	11.4
75 or older	11	2.8
Country of origin		
United States of America	340	88
United Kingdom	47	12

Table 3 Observation numbers.

		Victimization severity		Control
		Severe	Mild	
Bystander reactions	Reinforcing	67	63	-
	Defending	49	64	-
	Pretending	26	31	-
Total		142	158	87

Table 4 Measurement items.

Variable	Item	Loadings	α
	<i>Looking at these comments, ...</i>		
PWOM intentions	I would say positive things about [brand] to other people.	.94	.89
	I would encourage others to visit [brand]'s fanpage on Facebook.	.86	
	I would recommend [brand] to other people.	.94	
Community satisfaction	I would be very contented with [brand]'s fanpage.	.95	.97
	I would be very pleased with [brand]'s fanpage.	.97	
	I would feel delighted with [brand]'s fanpage.	.96	
	Overall, I would be very satisfied with [brand]'s fanpage.	.96	
Community following intentions	I would plan to keep following [brand] on Facebook in the future.	.94	.95
	I would intend to continue to follow [brand] on Facebook in the future.	.97	
	I would expect my following of [brand] on Facebook to continue in the future.	.96	
	<i>In general, ...</i>		
Self-esteem	I feel good about myself.	.90	.90
	I feel high in self-esteem.	.91	
	I feel liked.	.84	
	I feel satisfied.	.88	
	I feel insecure. (R)	.75	
Perceived social support	My friends really try to help me.	.87	.93
	I can count on my friends when things go wrong.	.91	
	I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	.93	
	I can talk about my problems with my friends.	.91	

Table 5 Cell means for dependent variables across the victimization severity conditions.

Victimization severity	Dependent variable					
	PWOM intentions		Community satisfaction		Community following intentions	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Severe	5.40	1.41	4.40	1.65	5.54	1.38
Mild	5.58	1.20	4.99	1.38	5.91	1.00
Control	6.04	0.91	5.81	0.96	6.12	0.85

Note: 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; n=387;

Coding for victimization severity: 0 = Control, 1 = Mild, and 2 = Severe

Table 6 Results for two-way ANCOVAs.

Independent variables	Dependent variables					
	PWOM intentions ^a		Community satisfaction ^b		Community following intentions ^c	
	F	η^2	F	η^2	F	η^2
Victimization severity	4.94*	.02	15.46***	.05	12.32**	.04
Bystander reactions	.83	.01	.79	.01	.07	.00
Victimization severity x bystander reactions	5.82**	.04	3.94*	.03	3.89*	.03

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; $n=300$ (excluding the control group)

a: $R^2 = .13$, b: $R^2 = .19$, c: $R^2 = .13$

Coding for victimization severity: 1 = Mild, 2 = Severe

Coding for bystander reactions: 1 = Reinforcing, 2 = Defending, 3 = Pretending

Table 7 Cell means for dependent variables by experimental condition.

Victimization severity	Bystander reactions	PWOM intentions		Community satisfaction		Community following intentions	
		M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
Severe	Reinforcing	5.50	(1.50)	4.29	(1.73)	5.59	(1.39)
	Defending	5.58	(1.22)	4.78	(1.60)	5.66	(1.24)
	Pretending	4.78	(1.44)	3.94	(1.50)	5.09	(1.58)
Mild	Reinforcing	5.34	(1.33)	4.91	(1.48)	5.85	(1.09)
	Defending	5.60	(1.11)	4.86	(1.31)	5.77	(1.00)
	Pretending	5.94	(1.05)	5.31	(1.34)	6.22	(.78)

Note: 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; $n=300$ (excluding the control group)

Coding for victimization severity: 1 = Mild, 2 = Severe

Coding for bystander reactions: 1 = Reinforcing, 2 = Defending, and 3 = Pretending