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## Beyond Strong Bonds: A Typology and Motivational Insights into Online Brand Defenders

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**Beyond Strong Bonds: A Typology and Motivational Insights into Online Brand Defenders**CLEMENS AMMANN<sup>1\*</sup>ANDREA GIUFFREDI-KÄHR<sup>2</sup>BETTINA NYFFENEGGER<sup>1</sup>HARLEY KROHMER<sup>1</sup>WAYNE D. HOYER<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Institute of Marketing and Management, University of Bern, Switzerland<sup>2</sup> Department of Business Administration, University of Zurich, Switzerland<sup>3</sup> McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin, United States of America**Author Note:** Clemens Ammann (\*corresponding author) is a Research Associate[Clemens.Ammann@unibe.ch](mailto:Clemens.Ammann@unibe.ch); +41 31 631 45 99), Bettina Nyffenegger is a Senior Researcherand Lecturer ([Bettina.Nyffenegger@unibe.ch](mailto:Bettina.Nyffenegger@unibe.ch); +41 31 631 45 47), and Harley Krohmer isProfessor of Marketing and Chairman of the Marketing Department ([Harley.Krohmer@unibe.ch](mailto:Harley.Krohmer@unibe.ch);

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## Beyond Strong Bonds: A Typology and Motivational Insights into Online Brand Defenders

### Abstract

In recent years, more and more consumers have defended brands online against criticism. Despite the high relevance of consumer brand defense (CBD) when recovering from adverse critique such as NWOM online, our understanding of the motives that drive CBD beyond emotionally intense consumer-brand connections remains limited. Building on a social media analysis of the phenomenon, qualitative in-depth interviews with consumers who defend brands, and a survey among brand defenders, we provide a better understanding of the motivational and relational drivers as well as the context factors of CBD. Specifically, our results show that brand defenders are driven by the motives of reciprocal altruism, equity restoration, and egoism as well as relational factors including brand satisfaction and attachment. Using a large-scale study with 570 actual brand defenders along with subsequent cluster analysis, we distinguish three distinct brand defender types: *Brand promoters*, *justice promoters*, and *self-promoters*. These defender types not only differ in their behavior but also in terms of contextual factors related to consumer characteristics, brand-related criticism, and company-related dynamics that influence their active engagement in CBD. Applying the distinct characteristics of the three defender types, we discuss how managers can more effectively motivate consumers to defend their brand online.

*Keywords:* Consumer Brand Defense, Prosocial Consumer Behavior, Brand Criticism, Consumer-Brand Relationships, Consumer Motives, Online Reputation Management

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3 Some years ago, Nike was heavily criticized after a Duke University star player, Zion  
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5 Williamson, injured his knee when his Nike shoe broke apart during a college basketball game.  
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7 While various media reported negatively on the quality of Nike shoes and some consumers made  
8  
9 fun of the incident (Boren and Bogage 2019), other consumers countered the criticism and  
10  
11 publicly defended Nike on online platforms. For example, one consumer pointed out that even  
12  
13 the smallest of production errors could cause a shoe to break, given the bodyweight of Zion and  
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15 the jerky movements so common in basketball (e.g., User Zachary Keller on YouTube; CNBC  
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17 Television 2019). Others defended Nike based on their own personal positive experience with  
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19 the brand (e.g., User yumyumnom on reddit; mpnitsua22 2019).  
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24 In our increasingly polarized world with ever-present social media firestorms and their  
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26 potentially severe consequences for a brand (e.g., Hansen, Kupfer, and Hennig-Thurau 2018), the  
27  
28 incident with Nike illustrates the important phenomenon of consumer brand defense (CBD).  
29  
30 Thereby, consumers deliberately act as a buffer against criticism by sharing brand-related  
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32 information and experiences online in support of a criticized brand (Colliander and Hauge Wien  
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34 2013; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). A pilot study where we conducted interviews with  
35  
36 marketing experts revealed that they are increasingly aware of the phenomenon of consumers  
37  
38 defending their brand and perceive it as a valuable resource for online reputation management, as  
39  
40 this quote of a head of community management from a transportation company illustrates:  
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42 “Since we are more present on social media, especially on Facebook, we can observe users who  
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44 defend us and who step into the breach for us - not just employees, as you would expect, but real  
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46 fans. That’s invaluable support for our brand” (see *Web Appendix A* for details of the pilot  
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48 study).  
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54 Research has shown that when consumers defend a brand in response to online criticisms,  
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3 it promotes positive perceptions and conversations about the brand (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017;  
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5 Dhaoui and Webster 2021). Consumer messages are often viewed as more credible than  
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7 company responses (Kozinets et al. 2010). Encouraging consumer defense can therefore be an  
8  
9 effective tool for marketing managers to protect a brand's reputation (e.g., Hong and Cameron  
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11 2018; Scholz and Smith 2019). To leverage this strategy, it is crucial for managers to understand  
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13 the motivations behind consumers' decisions to support their brand online.  
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17         Scholars have highlighted strong emotional connections, including brand passion  
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19 (Alnawas, Ghantous, and Hemsley-Brown 2023) and brand love (Dalman, Buche, and Min  
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21 2017), as key drivers of CBD. However, it remains unclear whether less intense and less  
22  
23 emotionally charged brand relationships can also motivate CBD. While studies have discussed  
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25 motives like perceived justice and self-enhancement (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Roy et  
26  
27 al. 2021) a notable research gap remains in systematically and empirically examining these  
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29 factors in online CBD and to explore the existence of other potential motives. Furthermore, while  
30  
31 CBD has been linked to contexts such as utilitarian brands (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016) and  
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33 CSR initiatives (Aljarah et al. 2022), no systematic approach has yet been taken to  
34  
35 comprehensively examine the context factors that may contribute to the existence of CBD. This  
36  
37 highlights the need for further research, echoing Wilk, Soutar, and Harrigan's (2019) call for  
38  
39 expanded exploration into the drivers of consumer advocacy, and more specifically, CBD in  
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41 online environments. Finally, despite the long tradition of studying consumer behavior and  
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43 clustering based on motivations (e.g., Novak and MacEvoy, 1990), there is still no typology  
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45 focused on consumers who defend brands online. Developing such a typology would help  
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47 managers better understand and identify the distinct motivations and behaviors of various  
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49 consumer segments actively defending their brand online.  
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3 Against this background, our study aims to answer the following questions: (1) What  
4 drives consumers to defend brands online in terms of their existing brand relationship, their  
5 motives, and relevant context factors? (2) To what extent can consumer brand defenders be  
6 segmented into different types? In addressing these research questions, we delve into the  
7 prevalence and drivers of online CBD, presenting findings from a social media analysis (Study  
8 1) and qualitative interviews with consumer brand defenders (Study 2). We discuss these insights  
9 in light of theoretical considerations from related research on positive eWOM, brand advocacy,  
10 and literature on prosocial behavior. Finally, we validate our identified drivers of online CBD  
11 through a large-scale survey among brand defenders and group them into homogenous segments  
12 based on their motivational and relational drivers to defend a brand under attack (Study 3).  
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26 This paper advances academic literature by identifying CBD's motivational and relational  
27 drivers beyond just strong emotional connections. Combining qualitative and quantitative  
28 studies, we identify three primary motive categories—reciprocal altruism, egoism, and equity  
29 restoration—thereby validating and extending the conceptual ideas proposed in previous research  
30 on CBD. We reveal that both consumers with strong brand attachment and less emotionally  
31 connected ones participate in online CBD. Extending prior research, we find that high levels of  
32 brand satisfaction alone can prompt CBD, highlighting the potential of satisfied consumers in  
33 supporting brand defense. This comprehensive understanding of CBD's drivers extends the  
34 current literature's focus on emotional brand relationships and conceptual discussions of isolated  
35 motives (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017; Roy et al. 2021).  
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37 Our typology of brand defenders enhances the understanding of consumers engaged in online  
38 CBD. The three identified types—brand promoters, justice promoters, and self-promoters—  
39 exhibit distinct behaviors and defense styles shaped by their motives and brand relationships.  
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3 This offers a more complete perspective on CBD. Moreover, our analysis of contextual factors—  
4 including consumer-related insights, company-related considerations, and aspects of the brand-  
5 related criticism—reveals differential influences on the motivation of defender types,  
6 contributing to prior research on CBD which has looked at specific CBD contexts in isolation  
7 (e.g., Aljarah et al. 2022; Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Such an improved understanding of  
8 the drivers and context factors of CBD is crucial for managers when developing strategies to  
9 leverage consumer brand defenders' potential in mitigating the impact of brand criticism.  
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## Definition of Consumer Brand Defense

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20 Hassan and Casaló Ariño (2016, p. 965) were among the first scholars who offered an explicit  
21 definition of CBD, which they refer to as “sharing of information and real-life experiences with  
22 the intention to protect a brand’s image and integrity against negative remarks which may  
23 adversely affect the brand.” The notion of consumers who protect a brand through their behavior  
24 is in line with the concept of prosocial behavior from social psychology, commonly referred to as  
25 the actions of one person to promote the welfare of another or to prevent declines in that person’s  
26 welfare (Clark et al. 2015). In CBD, the consumer can be considered the benefactor and the  
27 brand as a recipient of the prosocial act (Dovidio et al. 2006). This conceptualization aligns with  
28 the emerging literature on prosocial consumer behavior which categorizes brand advocacy as  
29 part of prosocial consumer behavior (Sweeney et al. 2020; White, Habib, and Dahl 2020),  
30 thereby acknowledging the positive impact of consumer actions aimed at promoting brands and  
31 preventing harm to their reputation. In essence, CBD represents a manifestation of prosocial  
32 behavior within the domain of consumer-brand interactions, where consumers engage in actions  
33 to support and protect brands from negative critique. Drawing from this conceptualization and  
34 previous descriptions, we define brand defenders as those *consumers who respond to criticism of*  
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3 *a brand with replies that are supportive of the criticized brand.*

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Several important aspects of this definition merit highlighting. First, CBD inherently entails a reaction to perceived *criticism of a brand* which may come from consumers, competitors, media, or other organizations (e.g., NGOs). For CBD to occur, this criticism must be publicly shared with an audience, underscoring the crucial role of online platforms such as social media. Second, *replies* of brand defenders must explicitly or implicitly refer to the criticism and the criticized brand and bear the potential to depreciate the criticism. These replies can take many forms—comments, memes, audio, or videos—and vary in content and style (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013). Examples include defending the brand by comparing competitors' actions or attributing blame to third parties or uncontrollable events (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016). Third, brand defenders' replies *are supportive of the criticized brand*, potentially mitigating the negative effects of the criticism and reputational damage among observers such as consumers, investors or (potential) employees (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017).

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In essence, CBD serves as mechanism through which consumers contribute to the protection of a brand's image and reputation in the face of criticism, highlighting its role as a form of prosocial behavior in the context of consumer-brand interactions. While Hassan and Casaló Ariño's (2016) definition of CBD emphasizes the intentional defense of brands by consumers, the concept of prosocial behavior extends beyond conscious intent of benefitting the recipient (Schroeder and Graziano 2015), including both deliberate, reflective actions and intuitive, emotional responses (Grehl and Tutić 2022; Rand et al. 2014; Zaki and Mitchell 2013). Thus, consumers may engage in brand defense even without clear intention to support the brand. Accordingly, consumers can defend a brand either through a thoughtful consideration of facts and structured arguments (i.e., *reflective narrative style*) or through instinctive reactions rooted

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3 in their emotions and experiences with the brand (i.e., *intuitive narrative style*).  
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6 Finally, while our definition of CBD encompasses various behaviors that may also  
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8 manifest in offline contexts such as in-person interactions, we focus on online CBD for several  
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10 reasons. First, online platforms enhance global brand visibility and leverage the viral potential of  
11  
12 online content, thereby amplifying the reach and impact of CBD. Second, they enable swift  
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14 reputation management by facilitating immediate responses to criticism and fostering real-time  
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16 dialogue among consumers and brands, strengthening engagement (Eigenraam et al. 2018).  
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18 Thus, focusing on online CBD offers unique advantages for brands to effectively manage their  
19  
20 reputation and engage with consumers in the digital age (see also Hollebeek and Macky 2019).  
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## 24 **Related but Distinct Concepts of Consumer Brand Defense**

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26 CBD has garnered increasing attention in branding literature as a distinctive form of positive  
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28 engagement with brands, particularly in the digital era. Branding scholars have discussed CBD  
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30 as an extreme form of positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM; Dalman, Buche, and Min  
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32 2017; Javed, Roy, and Mansoor 2015), whereby positive eWOM is referred to as positive and  
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34 consumption-related communication by consumers which is directed to other consumers or  
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36 institutions via digital tools (Babić Rosario, Valck, and Sotgiu 2020; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004).  
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38 Whereas this description generally also applies to CBD, brand defenders act within a specific  
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40 context where they respond positively, either implicitly or explicitly, to criticism against a brand.  
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42 Positive eWOM, on the other hand, encompasses a wider range of contexts beyond CBD,  
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44 including praises, suggestions, and recommendations (Brown et al. 2005).  
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50 While CBD shares similarities with other brand-related concepts such as brand advocacy,  
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52 brand evangelism, and brand ambassadorship, it also possesses distinct characteristics that set it  
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54 apart. Brand advocacy embraces a broader scope, covering positive communication about a  
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brand regardless of criticism, whereas CBD specifically responds to brand criticism (e.g., Sweeney et al. 2020; Wilk, Soutar, and Harrigan 2019). Similarly, while both CBD and brand ambassadorship involve positive engagement with a brand, they originate from different sources and serve different purposes. Brand ambassadors, strategically appointed by companies, promote and advocate for brands, aiming to influence consumer behavior and foster brand loyalty (Ambroise et al. 2014; McCracken 1989). In contrast, CBD emerges organically from consumer reactions to brand criticism, reflecting a form of prosocial behavior aimed at protecting a brand's image. Finally, while both CBD and brand evangelism involve positive brand communication, evangelists focus on actively recruiting consumers to experience the brand and encouraging them to switch from competitor brands (P. Becerra and Badrinarayanan 2013). In contrast, CBD centers on defending a brand from negative remarks. These distinctions underscore the importance of understanding the specific drivers behind CBD, which we explore in this paper by drawing on prior research in CBD and related marketing literature, as well as theories of prosocial behavior.

## Previous Research on CBD

Previous research on CBD has primarily focused on its manifestations (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013), its consequences (e.g., Esmark Jones et al. 2018), and the relationship between defenders and brands (e.g., Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018), while research on the motives behind CBD remain scarce. Early ethnographic studies on its *manifestation* identified various defense styles such as 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

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3 (“challenging the credibility of the complainer”; Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013). Other  
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netnographic studies have found similar defense behaviors across various community contexts, such as justifying brand actions by sharing own experiences in Facebook communities (Hassan & Casaló Ariño, 2016) or, for example, mitigating criticism of a sports team by attacking the accuser, a behavior often observed in the context of rivalries between sports teams (Brown and Billings 2013). More recent research has added styles such as “provoking,” where defenders use aggressive or emotional messages that may escalate the conflict, and “pacifying,” where defenders acknowledge the complaint but offer suggestions for improvement or moderate the discussion (Hang Au, Ho, and Law 2021). Related to these various manifestations of CBD, researchers have examined its specific context factors, finding CBD comments more common for utilitarian (vs. hedonic) brands (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016), brands that engage in CSR initiatives (Aljarah et al. 2022), brands with active rival communities (e.g., Samsung vs. Apple; Ilhan, Kübler, and Pauwels 2018), and in communities where consumers have high domain knowledge (Hang Au, Ho, and Law 2021).

Later studies elucidated the positive *consequences* of CBD on observers and documented that CBD can increase consumers’ satisfaction and attitude toward the company (Esmark Jones et al. 2018), reduce intentions for negative eWOM (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017), and improve corporate reputation (Hong and Cameron 2018). Accordingly, there have been first attempts to examine strategies to activate consumer brand defenders (e.g., Scholz and Smith 2019), such as positively affirming defenders via “thank you” comments (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017).

Regarding drivers of CBD, prior research has mainly focused on *consumers’ relationship with the defended brand*. Scholars have examined strong emotional and self-relevant brand relationship constructs, such as those evident in rivalries between sports teams, identified

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3 through self-declarations in Twitter biographies or profile pictures (Brown and Billings 2013),  
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5 brand community members on Facebook, who defend their brand and attack rival brands (Ilhan,  
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7 Kübler, and Pauwels 2018), along with brand passion (Alnawas, Ghantous, and Hemsley-Brown  
8  
9 2023) and brand love (e.g., Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017) as predictors of CBD. Ali et al.  
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11 (2021) have contributed to this discussion by highlighting the role of brand anthropomorphism,  
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13 where human-like brand characteristics of a brand can intensify brand love and, consequently,  
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15 CBD. Also, highly self-relevant relationships such as brand attachment (Park et al. 2010) and  
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17 self-brand connection (Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Wilson, Giebelhausen, and Brady  
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19 2017) have been shown to trigger defensive consumer reactions, as protecting the brand becomes  
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21 linked to protecting their identity. Thus, emotional and self-relevant bonds seem to motivate  
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23 individuals to protect their brand (or themselves) from harm. Little is known, however, about the  
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25 role of less emotionally charged brand relationships, which raises the question of whether less  
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27 intense relations also play a role for CBD. Interestingly, initial evidence suggests that brand trust  
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29 may also drive CBD (Roy et al. 2021).  
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36 Finally, research on CBD's *motivational* drivers remains scarce. Initial studies  
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38 conceptually derived that brand defenders may be motivated by their sense of justice, need for  
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40 self-enhancement, or desire to raise social capital (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Roy et al.  
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42 2021). However, the motivational drivers of CBD have not been empirically studied and it  
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44 remains unclear how these drivers are connected to consumers' brand relationships. Related  
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46 literature on prosocial behavior, for example, suggests that individuals' motivation to help others  
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48 is more pronounced in close relationships (Maner and Gailliot 2007).  
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52 Recognizing gaps in the literature and the need for interdisciplinary approaches, as  
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54 highlighted by Roy et al. (2021), our study systematically examines the relational and  
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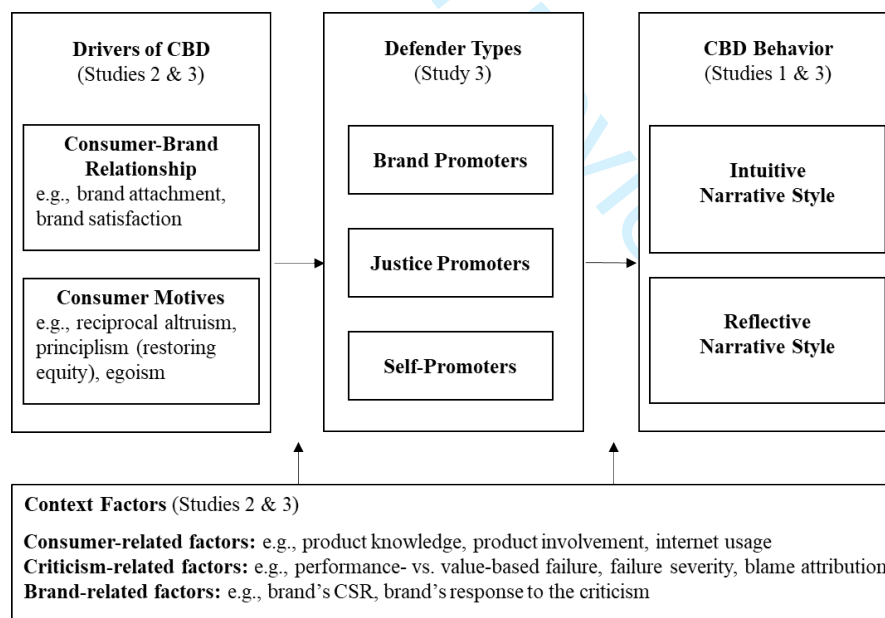
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motivational drivers of online CBD. By applying prosocial behavior theories and integrating both qualitative and quantitative insights, we provide a deeper understanding of this emerging phenomenon.

## Conceptual Framework and Overview of Empirical Studies

Figure 1 presents our conceptual framework for understanding the drivers and behaviors of CBD. We propose that CBD is shaped by pre-existing brand relationships, such as satisfaction or attachment, and specific motives like altruism or egoism. These drivers lead to the emergence of distinct defender types—brand promoters, justice promoters, and self-promoters—who engage in CBD through different narrative styles, such as intuitive and reflective. The framework also includes contextual factors, such as consumer knowledge, the nature of criticism, and the brand's response. This model is examined across multiple studies to explore the dynamics of CBD.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework and overview of empirical studies.



In a first step, we conducted a thorough content analysis of brand pages on Facebook to examine the prevalence of CBD and the nature of such comments in terms of reflective versus intuitive narrative styles (Study 1). To delve deeper into the underlying drivers, motives, and

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contextual factors behind consumers' defense behavior, we then conducted in-depth interviews with 10 actual consumer brand defenders (Study 2). In a last step, we conducted a large-scale survey with 570 brand defenders (Study 3) to validate our identified drivers of CBD and to group them into homogenous segments based on motivational and relational drivers.

## Study 1: An Observational Study of CBD's Prevalence in the Field

### *Method*

This study assessed the frequency and nature of CBD comments through a three-month social media content analysis (e.g., L.Lai and Wai Ming To 2015) of eight U.S.-based Facebook brand pages. Brands were selected to ensure diversity in hedonic versus utilitarian offerings and between manufacturer brands and service providers (see *Table 1*). We examined all posts and responses for instances of brand criticism and defense, categorizing CBD comments into intuitive, reflective, or mixed types based on their narrative qualities, using a well-described encoding key based on existing conceptualizations (Rand et al. 2014; Zaki and Mitchell 2013). Intuitive CBD comments involved emotions, heuristics, and personal experiences (e.g., insulting language, use of emojis, some typos, less clear structure), whereas reflective CBD comments contained logic and evidence-based content (e.g., rational argumentation, thoughtful structure, and references). Mixed comments exhibited both narrative styles. Two trained graduate students coded the comments using Atlas.ti software, achieving an intercoder reliability of 80.2%, with discrepancies resolved through author review (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002).

### *Results and Discussion*

*Table 1:* Prevalence of consumer brand defense comments.

Brands	# Comments	Facebook Page	Company Posts <sup>1)</sup>	Criticism <sup>2)</sup>	Defense Comments	Share of CBD/ Total Comments
Tesla	601	@electric-everywhere	14	34	62	10.3%
Pepsi	3,080	@PepsiUS	34	230	257	8.3%

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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%
EA - Electronics Arts	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 Tesla Facebook page was run by a user and was not an official page operated by Tesla. 2) Criticism is listed only if at least one CBD comment responded to it. 3) For AT&T, the number of analyzed criticisms exceeded the number of defense comments because some defense comments referred to more than one criticism.

We reviewed a total of 36,860 comments for the eight brands where 3.2% (1,173 comments) were identified as brand criticism and 4.7% (1,714 comments) as CBD (see *Table 1*). For some brands, the share of CBD differed by tenfold (min = 1.0%, max = 10.3%). With 969 comments (56.5%), the intuitive defense form was most prevalent for all the observed brands except for Tesla, followed by the mixed form with 409 comments (23.9%), and the reflective defense form was least common with 336 comments (19.6%, see *Table 2*).

*Table 2* : Prevalence of intuitive versus reflective CBD comments.

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%)

The findings reveal significant potential for CBD in company reputation management, with nearly one in every twenty comments defending brands against criticism. Understanding this statistic's relevance is crucial, considering consumers use Facebook brand pages for many reasons such as recommending products, sharing experiences, providing feedback, and discussing on product-related topics (Dhaoui and Webster 2021). As social media comments grow more negative (Whatman 2018), defense comments not only counteract negative

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sentiments but also play a critical role in protecting brand perception during crisis (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017).

While prior studies emphasized CBD's reflective nature, our content analysis revealed a surprising predominance of intuitive CBD comments, suggesting that solely focusing on reflective CBD underestimates the potential of defense comments in mitigating online brand criticism. Our study also identified diverse narrative defense styles across brands: Tesla attracted more reflective defenses, while Samsung elicited more intuitive defenses. This underscores the influence of various factors on defenders' choice of narrative styles, highlighting the need for further exploration of motivational and relational drivers and context factors in CBD.

## **Study 2: Insights from Actual Consumer Brand Defenders on the Motives and Relationship Constructs That Drive CBD**

In this study, we conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with consumers who defended brands online to understand the motivational and relational drivers of their behavior. Recognizing the impact of situational factors on prosocial behavior (e.g., Schroeder and Graziano 2015), we also aimed to explore the contextual factors shaping consumers' defense behaviors.

### ***Method***

We identified interview candidates by searching social networking sites for CBD comments based on our CBD definition and directly contacted them with interview requests. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached (Saunders et al. 2018), resulting in ten interviews (80% male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 32$  years, European citizens). Participants received a voucher from an online retailer (approx. 25\$) as an incentive. The sample was diverse in terms of education level, platforms, defended brands, industries, narrative defense style, and criticism. *Table W2 in Web Appendix B* provides an overview of the interviewed brand defenders.

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Each interview, lasting from 32 to 78 minutes with an average of 53 minutes (totaling 8.9 hours), followed a semi-standardized structure comprising three main sections (see Kähr et al. 2016 and Willis 2004 for similar approaches). The first section prompted participants to recount the initial brand criticism and their defense actions, delving into emotional responses to the criticism and the underlying thought processes to uncover their motivations driving their defense behavior. The second section allowed defenders to elaborate on their brand relationship. In the final section, participants were asked about factors encouraging them to defend a brand, covering personal aspects, perceptions of the company, and characteristics of the criticism. Following these sections, participants completed a brief one-page survey, providing demographic details such as gender, age, profession, and education level.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. We conducted inductive content analysis on the three interview sections to pinpoint key factors derived directly from participant responses (Krippendorff 2018; Spiggle 1994). Our analysis focused on categorizing various motives, relationships, and contextual factors. We then compared these findings with existing research on CBD, positive eWOM, brand advocacy, and prosocial behavior.

## ***Results and Discussion***

*Motivational Drivers.* In a first step, we sought to understand the motives behind brand defenders' actions. A first relevant finding that emerged from our interviews was the presence of motives that are *altruistic* in nature. Five brand defenders (1, 3, 7, 8, 10) expressed a desire to help the criticized company and protect the brand's reputation as this quote illustrates:

It's about putting the club in a better light or just defending the brand to make it look better. So, you don't come off as overly ambitious, but rather, you're doing it for rational reasons, so the club doesn't go bankrupt. We have some good examples here in [European country where interview was conducted]. Almost every club is struggling financially again because they're paying salaries and transfer fees that they don't really have available. (Defender 1)

This finding is related to prior research on positive eWOM which has identified several

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1  
2  
3 altruistic motives such as sharing information about a company or brand out of concern for other  
4  
5 consumers or to help the company (e.g., Eelen, Özturan, and Verlegh 2017; Hennig-Thurau et al.  
6  
7 2004). Such altruistic motivations are also present in prosocial behavior which has “the ultimate  
8  
9 goal of increasing another’s welfare” (Batson 2011, p. 20). As we found in our interviews, such  
10  
11 an intention to help the company was mostly connected to past positive experiences with the  
12  
13 brand and the desire to give something back to the brand:  
14  
15

16 Of course, it would be nice to get some appreciation or a thank you. Because that's what  
17 you associate with the brand and it might also lead to future actions. But above all, it's also about  
18 thanking for the experience, like I was able to thank the ground staff. (Defender 7)  
19

20 Such reciprocity plays a crucial role in consumer-brand interactions (Fournier 1998),  
21  
22 suggesting that CBD may stem from *reciprocal altruism* rather than pure altruism.  
23  
24

25 As a second category of motivational drivers, we found that some brand defenders were  
26  
27 motivated by the perception of unjust criticism, driving their *desire to restore equity*:  
28  
29

30 It depends on whether it [the criticism] is justified or not. If the media has valid criticism,  
31 I'm the last person to say anything. Then, it might even make a difference. Whether it's the  
32 government or whoever, it doesn't really matter to me. For me, it's about whether it's justified or  
33 not. That's what matters. (Defender 8)  
34

35 I think if someone talks very vehemently negatively about something, then I tend firmly,  
36 almost reflexively, to provide a counterpoint if I feel it's not justified. It's a bit because of justice  
37 - can you call it a sense of justice? Just a bit of balancing things out. (Defender 9)  
38

39 For four defenders (3, 4, 6, 7), the perceived inequity was not the main motivation but  
40  
41 represented a necessary condition to defend the brand as this quote illustrates:  
42

43 Depending on whether the criticism is justified. Then [if the criticism is justified], I think  
44 the company deserves the criticism, so to speak (laughter) [and he would not defend the brand].  
45 (Defender 7)  
46

47 The motive of restoring equity aligns with Colliander and Hauge Wien (2013) who  
48  
49 suggested that CBD may be motivated by justice considerations. Relatedly, research shows that  
50  
51 perceptions of justice (e.g., about how consumers are treated) predict positive WOM and online  
52  
53 brand advocacy (e.g., Cavdar Aksoy and Yazici 2023; Maxham III and Netemeyer 2002) and  
54  
55 drive prosocial behaviors like organizational citizenship in general (e.g., van Dijke et al. 2018).  
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3 Furthermore, observing perceived injustices, such as the unfair treatment of others, can evoke  
4 strong negative emotions that compel individuals to act, even when there is no personal gain  
5 involved (Mattila, Hanks, and Wang 2014; Turillo et al. 2002). This aligns with the *principlism*  
6 theory in prosocial behavior, which suggests that individuals are motivated to act out of moral  
7 principles—such as fairness and justice—rather than self-interest (Batson 2011; Turiel 2015).  
8 Our interviews suggest many brand defenders act out of a need to counter perceived unjust  
9 criticism, underscoring *restoring equity* as a pivotal motive for CBD.  
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19 Finally, seven defenders (2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9) indicated *egoistic motivation* such as boosting  
20 their ego, seeking appreciation from the company or other consumers, economic incentives, or  
21 finding pleasure in defending the brand. Specifically, several interviewees (2, 5, 6, 9) appeared to  
22 be driven by *self-enhancement* as they aimed at boosting their ego, as this quote illustrates:  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 There wasn't any specific driver other than being in the flow of writing and thinking,  
29 “Let's see how he reacts.” It's partly about curiosity, seeing what response comes back. It's a bit  
30 for the ego—if there's agreement in the response. (Defender 6)  
31

32 Others wanted to present themselves in the best light as expressed by this interviewee: “I  
33 wanted to appear in a good light; that's just how it is” (Defender 2). Yet others wished to be  
34 perceived as sophisticated individuals as this quote exemplifies:  
35  
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37  
38

39 I feel that I like to be perceived as nuanced, and I think that's also my objective [of  
40 commenting online]. If someone says something like “everything is crap,” I feel that's not  
41 nuanced enough for me. (Defender 9)  
42

43 An important egoistic motivation in CBD is the desire for self-enhancement or presenting  
44 oneself in a positive light (Sedikides 1993). Defending a brand can serve to boost one's  
45 reputation, elevate status, and impress others (see also Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013).  
46 Similarly, studies on positive eWOM have shown that individuals share positive brand  
47 information to fulfill ego needs (e.g., Berger 2014; Cheung and Lee 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al.  
48 2004). Helping and sharing information can inflate one's ego (Clary et al. 1998), enhance self-  
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3 image (Batson, Ahmad, and Stocks 2011), and impress observers (Brown and Smart 1991),  
4  
5 making self-enhancement a key motivational driver in CBD.  
6

7  
8 As an additional egoistic driver of CBD, three interviewees expressed the hope for *future*  
9  
10 *reciprocity* and rewards from the brand or other consumers, such as economic incentives or  
11  
12 feedback. Three defenders viewed it as a give-and-take situation (defender 5, 6, 7):  
13

14 It was probably self-serving, because maybe I would have gotten something [such as a  
15 product sample or voucher]. (Defender 7)

16 Let's put it this way. I'm happy when they [community] like it. Especially when I get  
17 feedback that they find it funny. (Defender 5)

18 If [I defend a brand], then really only when I know there will be a reaction [by  
19 observers], because otherwise you have wasted electricity, wasted time, thrown data into the  
20 world. (Defender 6)

21  
22 The motivation to defend a brand in the hope of getting a favor back has been suggested  
23  
24 in CBD literature (Roy et al. 2021) and has also been discussed in the literature on positive  
25  
26 WOM: Individuals are often motivated by the promise of future reciprocity, anticipating benefits  
27  
28 from sharing information (e.g., Berger 2014; Cheung and Lee 2012). Economic incentives and  
29  
30 rewards, such as web miles, have proven effective in encouraging individuals to write positive  
31  
32 comments (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). The belief in future reciprocity and the expectation  
33  
34 of returns from third parties are also important drivers of prosocial behavior (Leider et al. 2009;  
35  
36 Simpson and Willer 2008). Economic incentives, such as tax deductions for charitable giving,  
37  
38 have been shown to motivate prosocial behavior (Clotfelter 1980). For CBD, these rewards may  
39  
40 include monetary incentives like gift cards or product samples (White, Habib, and Dahl 2020).  
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45

46 Finally, four defenders (2, 4, 5, 8) expressed experiencing *hedonic benefits* from CBD.  
47  
48 Their motivation stemmed from the enjoyment of correcting critics as these quotes exemplify:  
49

50 (...), you just give the reward center in your brain a little boost by making someone look  
51 stupid. Or frankly, I just like to lecture people. (Defender 2)

52 There are definitely brands that I defend, to put it mildly, for fun. There are two typical  
53 camps, especially in computer gaming. One side is AMD and the other is Intel. And the two  
54 sides are like fire and water. They don't get along at all. Every time one side comes up with  
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1 something, the other has to fight it. You also know this from games consoles, whether it's X Box  
2 or Play Station, it's a miserable war. (Defender 5)

3 This aligns with existing literature indicating that gratification and enjoyment of online  
4 discussions serve as drivers of positive eWOM (e.g., Babić Rosario, Valck, and Sotgiu 2020).  
5  
6 Similarly, studies on prosocial behavior demonstrate that hedonic benefits, such as maintaining  
7 or enhancing positive feelings (e.g., Clary et al. 1998; Small and Cryder 2016) or gratification  
8 and enjoyment can motivate individuals to help others.  
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*Relational Drivers.* In exploring defenders' *relationship with the defended brand*, our  
interviews revealed that consumers' brand connection played an important role for their  
behavior. Nine out of ten defenders disclosed varying relationships with the brand, with four  
mentioning loyalty (1, 3, 4, 6), including two who reported strong attachment to the brand (1, 3):

27 There must be a certain relationship with the [to be defended] company. So, the fact that I  
28 would commit myself to the company at all, I think, is an extremely important point for me  
29 personally. So, I must have some connection. (Defender 3).

30  
31 These findings align with previous research demonstrating that consumers who have a  
32 strong connection to the brand (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012; Wilson, Giebelhausen,  
33 and Brady 2017) or love the brand (e.g., Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017) showed defensive  
34 behavior. Similarly, in the context of prosocial behavior, strong personal relations between  
35 potential helper and recipient (Clark et al. 2015) increase the likelihood of prosocial acts (e.g.,  
36 Barry and Wentzel 2006; Burnstein, Crandall, and Kitayama 1994; Clark et al. 1987). In support  
37 of these findings, our interviews revealed that *brand attachment* which refers to the strength of  
38 the bond connecting a brand with consumers' self, involving thoughts and feelings about the  
39 brand and its relationship to the self (Park et al. 2010) is an important relational driver of CBD.  
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51 On the other hand, six interviewees (2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10) only occasionally consumed the  
52 products or services without sharing an emotional bond with the defended brand. They have been  
53 very satisfied with the defended brand's performance. Respondent 8, for example, defended the  
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criticized tourism region predominantly because he had always been a satisfied guest. Similarly, reflecting on the intensity of his connection to the brand, respondent 2 remarked:

It's not about defending [brand] specifically. I like drinking it, but I don't have an emotional attachment to this brand. I'm completely indifferent if someone thinks poorly of it and criticizes it. It could have been Coca-Cola or Aperol Spritz, whatever. (Defender 2)

In line with these findings, studies in the context of prosocial behavior have found evidence of prosocial acts among individuals with weaker and less self-relevant relationships, such as mere exchange relationships (Clark et al. 1987). Drawing on these theoretical considerations and the statements made by our interviewees, we suggest that CBD is not limited to consumers who are strongly attached to a brand, but also extends to those who are merely satisfied. Consumers' overall positive evaluation of a brand, based on their experiences, can be a vital source for CBD (Cavdar Aksoy and Yazici 2023). Thus, *brand satisfaction*—considered a less self-relevant relationship based on meeting expectations (Nyffenegger et al., 2015; Oliver, 1993)—is an important relational factor driving CBD. *Table W3 in Web Appendix B* presents an overview of motivational and relational factors with further exemplary quotes.

*Context factors.* The third part of the interviews focused on contextual factors that encouraged interviewees to defend a brand. We organized these factors along three categories that refer to the consumer, the criticism, and the company / brand. *Table W4 in Web Appendix B* presents an overview of the context factors with exemplary quotes. A first situational driver is *consumers' knowledge* about the brand and its products and services as well as the confidence in their knowledge (i.e., *self-efficacy*). Our interviews highlight the critical role that pre-existing knowledge and prior experiences with the brand play. All ten defenders stated that some degree of knowledge and experience is necessary to be able to counter the critics:

I do not like to talk about things I do not know 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, research on prosocial behavior has shown that self-efficacy can

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drive prosocial actions (e.g., Grant and Gino 2010; Sharma and Morwitz 2016). For instance, Kerr and Kaufman-Gilliland (1997) found that individuals' perception of their ability to make a difference influenced their cooperative and prosocial behaviors. Similarly, in online knowledge-sharing contexts, Lee et al. (2006) revealed that reluctance to share knowledge often stems from low knowledge self-efficacy. Hang Au, Ho, and Law (2021) further demonstrated that domain knowledge empowers consumers to justify brand defending behaviors, particularly in online communities where expertise boosts confidence in countering negative claims.

Consistent with prior research highlighting the role of *consumers' product involvement* in driving WOM (e.g., Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998) and CBD (Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016), three interviewees mentioned product involvement as a predictor of CBD (1, 5, 10):

[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)

A second category of context factors is related to the *criticism that triggered CBD*. Five interviewees (1, 4, 6, 8, 10) mentioned that they incorporated *attributions of blame* in their evaluation of the criticism as this quote illustrates: "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).

In addition, the *severity of the criticized failure* can influence whether someone defends a brand (3, 6, 8, 9), with more severe failures inhibiting defense behavior as this quote exemplifies:

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)

Blame attribution and failure severity are critical factors in product-harm crises, brand crises, brand transgressions, and service failures (e.g., Coombs 2007; Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010; Kähr et al. 2016). They play crucial roles in determining the impact of negative events and companies' response strategies. Our findings indicate that lower levels of blame attribution and less severe failures are more likely to stimulate CBD. This aligns with prior

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research which found that higher levels of blame attribution to the brand and more severe failures are associated with increased levels of anger, desire for revenge, NWOM, and brand sabotage (e.g., Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010; Kähr et al. 2016).

Finally, participants indicated that their likelihood of engaging in CBD was influenced by their evaluation of the *critic's credibility* (3, 5, 9). They were less likely to counter critics seen as credible, such as government authorities. There was a notable reluctance to challenge highly authoritative or esteemed figures, like Nobel Prize winners, as highlighted by defender 5, due to a perceived discrepancy in expertise or standing, described as “not at eye level” by defender 3. This supports existing literature on the crucial role of source credibility in digital contexts and its impact on the evaluation of NWOM (Craciun and Moore 2019).

A last category of context factors is *related to the brand or company*. Interviewees mentioned the brand's philosophy as driver of CBD (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9). Transparency and social and sustainable engagement increased 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), drive brand advocacy behaviors like resistance to negative information (Xie, Bagozzi, and Grønhaug 2019), or positively influence customer participation behavior as well as customer citizenship behavior (Hur, Moon, and Kim 2020). Furthermore, Aljarah et al. (2022) emphasize that CSR initiatives, when perceived as authentic, can significantly enhance CBD by strengthening the bond between consumers and the brand.

An additional brand-related factor that emerged from the interviews concerns the impact of a *management response to the criticism* (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9). One interviewee mentioned not

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2  
3 feeling the need to defend a brand after an official statement, while five others felt more inclined  
4  
5 to support the brand after such responses. The relevance placed by our interviewees on  
6  
7 managerial responses to negative incidents echoes existing research highlighting its crucial role  
8  
9 in crisis communication and in bolstering a company's reputation (e.g., Coombs 2007).  
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11

12 In summary, our interviews provide initial evidence for the relevance of three motives—  
13 reciprocal altruism, equity restoration, and egoism— as well as defenders' relationship with the  
14 brand in driving CBD. Thereby, not only highly attached but also simply satisfied consumers  
15 defended brands. In developing our typology of brand defenders, we will focus on these three  
16 motive categories along with brand attachment and satisfaction. The study also identified  
17 relevant contextual factors influencing CBD, categorized into consumer-related (i.e., brand-  
18 related knowledge, knowledge self-efficacy, and product involvement), criticism-related (i.e.,  
19 blame attribution, severity of failure, source credibility), and company-related factors (i.e.,  
20 company philosophy and management response). These factors strongly shape CBD tendencies,  
21 underscoring their importance in determining which defender type emerges in specific contexts.  
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### Study 3: Typology of Consumer Brand Defenders

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37 The study aimed at validating our initial insights through a quantitative examination and at  
38 identifying types of brand defenders through a cluster analysis.  
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41

#### **Method**

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45 *Procedure and sample.* We recruited U.S. participants on Amazon MTurk, screening for CBD  
46 behavior by describing it and asking if they had engaged in it within the last six months.  
47  
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49 Participants then described the brand criticism and their defensive behavior in two open-ended  
50 questions and identified CBD comments from fictitious statements to test their CBD  
51 understanding (e.g., CBD: "Adidas is not to blame for this glitch! I think it's clearly the supplier's  
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mistake. So be careful with whom you blame!”). After these screening questions, we administered participants’ motives, brand relationship, defense behavior styles and frequency, and context factors identified in Study 2, before collecting demographic data.

To conduct our cluster analysis for the brand defender typology, we aimed for a sample of 600 defenders (e.g., Dolnicar, Grün, and Leisch 2016). To verify respondents’ qualification for the study, we manually analyzed their responses to the open-ended screening questions. Thus, we conducted the recruitment process in two waves with 1,596 consumers (1st wave [W1]: 661, 2nd wave [W2]: 935) of which 570 qualified for our study (W1: 224, W2: 346). Despite 844 indicating defense behavior (W1: 316, W2: 528), we excluded 182 individuals based on their open-ended responses (i.e., their CBD comment could not be perceived as supportive of the brand; W1: 79, W2: 103), and an additional 92 due to incorrect responses to the screening question on their understanding of CBD (W1: 13, W2: 79). Our final sample consisted of 570 brand defenders (66% male,  $M_{\text{age}} = 34$  years). A MANOVA revealed no significant differences between the two waves on the key constructs (i.e., egoism, reciprocal altruism, restoring equity, brand attachment, and satisfaction; Roy’s largest root,  $\lambda = .008$ ,  $F(5,564) = .946$ ,  $p = .451$ ), indicating that attrition likely did not bias our two-wave data (McCullough et al. 2001).

*Measures.* Unless indicated otherwise, we used 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = “I completely disagree” to 7 = “I completely agree” (see *Table 3* and *Table W5* in *Web Appendix C* for study items and Cronbach’s alphas). We employed a similar approach to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus (2013) in assessing consumers’ motives, querying participants about their motivations using established scales. Reciprocal altruism was measured using three items adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), while restoring equity was measured with two items from Wenzel and Okimoto (2009) and Schmitt et al. (2005). Self-

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enhancement and future reciprocity were each assessed with three items, and hedonic benefits with two items, all adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). Brand attachment was measured using Park et al.'s (2010) 7-item scale, and brand satisfaction was assessed with Nyffenegger et al.'s (2015) 3-item scale. CBD behavior was measured using six items for each of the six defense styles from Colliander and Hauge Wien (2013), although these styles were assessed only in the second wave due to a survey error. Lastly, we measured intuitive and reflective narrative styles with two items each from Rand et al. (2014) and general CBD frequency with a single item.

We measured context factors including defender characteristics, the criticism addressed, and brand attributes. These constructs, based on our qualitative interviews, were complemented by variables such as internet usage, Big Five personality traits, self-threat, and failure type.

Defender characteristics included product knowledge (2 items; Gürhan-Canli 2003), self-efficacy (4 items; Cheung and Lee 2012), and product involvement (5 items; Malär et al. 2011). Self-threat was measured using a 6-item scale (White et al. 2012), reflecting the impact of brand criticism on consumers strongly connected to the brand (Cheng et al. 2012). We also measured the Big Five personality traits using a 15-item scale (Schupp and Gerlitz 2014), as these traits significantly impact behavior and offer a relatively stable framework for differentiating our CBD types (Graham et al. 2020). Finally, we assessed internet usage through five metrics from the Digital 2024 Global Overview Report to identify channels for managers to connect with defenders.

Regarding brand criticism, we assessed blame attribution with the 3-item scale of Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp (2010) and failure severity with three 7-point bipolar items from Grégoire and Fisher (2008). We also measured the criticized type of failure with one item each for performance- and value-based incidents per Kähr et al. (2016) as prior research has shown

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1  
2  
3 that consumer react differently to these two types of failures (Nyffenegger et al. 2018).

4  
5 Performance-based failures include defective products and service mishaps, whereas value-based  
6  
7 incidents include ethical misconduct of the brand (e.g., Kähr et al. 2016). Finally, regarding  
8  
9 company-related factors, we measured perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) with the  
10  
11 6-item scale of Alvarado-Herrera et al. (2017). We assessed the managerial response—apology,  
12  
13 defense, or no response—using a single-item measure based on Coombs (2007).  
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## 16 17 ***Results and Discussion***

18  
19 This study presents findings in three key sections. First, we conducted a factor analysis of the  
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21 motivational and relational drivers. Second, we used multiple regression analyses to assess how  
22  
23 these factors influence forms and frequencies of CBD. Finally, through cluster analysis, we  
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25 grouped consumers by shared brand relationships and motivations and examined variations in  
26  
27 context factors across these groups.  
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31 *Analysis of the structure of the drivers of CBD.* We conducted a principal components  
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33 analysis (PCA) of our three key motives (reciprocal altruism, restoring equity, egoism) and two  
34  
35 relationship types (attachment, satisfaction), confirming a five-factor structure. *Table 3* presents  
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37 factor loadings of the varimax rotation and Cronbach's alpha values, indicating strong reliability  
38  
39 (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .71$ ). Confirmatory factor analyses in AMOS 28.0 demonstrated sufficient  
40  
41 reliability, convergent validity, and acceptable global fit (e.g., Hu and Bentler 1999: RMSEA  
42  
43 = .07, NFI = .91, NNFI = .92, CFI = .93). Discriminant validity based on Fornell and Larcker  
44  
45 (1981) was also confirmed, with average variance extracted exceeding squared correlations for  
46  
47 all construct pairs (see *Table W6* in *Web Appendix C*). The factor analysis thus confirmed the  
48  
49 five-factor structure of our qualitatively derived motives and brand relationship types that drive  
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51 CBD.  
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Table 3: Factor structure and item stability for the motivational and relational drivers of CBD.

Factor (Source), Cronbach's $\alpha$ , Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted	Items	Factors				
		1	2	3	4	5
Reciprocal Altruistic Motives (adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) $\alpha = .81$ , CR = .82, AVE = .62	...I am so satisfied with <i>brand</i> and its products that I want to help <i>brand</i> be successful.	.773				
	...I have mostly had good experiences with <i>brand</i> so far, and I wanted to give something back to <i>brand</i> .	.769				
	...in my own opinion, good companies should be supported.	.740				
Equity Restoration (adapted from Schmitt et al. 2005; Wenzel and Okimoto 2009) $\alpha = .71$ , CR = .72, AVE = .56	...the critics did not consider all the circumstances.		.834			
	...the criticism of <i>brand</i> was unfair.		.820			
Egoistic Motives (adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) $\alpha = .90$ , CR = .90, AVE = .53	...I wanted to raise my profile (i.e., positive self-representation).			.843		
	...through that I could show that I am clever.			.835		
	...I wanted to improve my reputation or boost my status with the comment/s respectively.			.828		
	...I hoped for a future reward (e.g., gift, voucher from <i>brand</i> ).			.739		
	...I hoped for feedback from the company.			.727		
	...I have pursued my own interest with the comment/s.			.686		
Brand Attachment (Park et al. 2010) $\alpha = .95$ , CR = .95, AVE = .72	...I hoped for feedback from other consumers.			.664		
	...I feel good when I can correct other people's statements.			.598		
	To what extent is <i>brand</i> part of you and who you are?				.887	
	To what extent is <i>brand</i> part of you?				.878	
	To what extent do you feel emotionally bonded to <i>brand</i> ?				.873	
	To what extent do you feel personally connected to <i>brand</i> ?				.851	
	To what extent does <i>brand</i> say something to other people about who you are?				.791	
To what extent do you have many thoughts about <i>brand</i> ?				.786		
Brand Satisfaction (Nyffenegger et al. 2015) $\alpha = .90$ , CR = .90, AVE = .75	<i>Brand</i> offers exactly what I expect.					.846
	I am consistently satisfied with my decision for <i>brand</i> .					.830
	I am completely satisfied with <i>brand</i> .					.812

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*Analysis of the relevance of the motivational and relational factors for CBD.* We conducted three multiple regression analyses using the enter method to examine the relevance of motivational and relational factors for CBD, with regression factor scores from our PCA analysis as independent variables (Thurstone 1935). No influential outliers were detected (Cook 1977; Stevens 1984), and multicollinearity was not a concern (Thompson et al. 2017). The first regression aimed to predict intuitive CBD, showing significant explanatory power of our five factors ( $F(5, 340) = 8.842, p < .001, R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .102$ ). Brand attachment ( $\beta = .225, t(340) = 4.393, p < .001$ ) and egoism ( $\beta = .242, t(340) = 4.736, p < .001$ ) positively influenced intuitive CBD, while other factors showed no significant impact (see *Table 4*). In the second regression, the five factors significantly explained reflective CBD ( $F(5, 340) = 6.450, p < .001, R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .073$ ), with restoring equity having the strongest positive impact ( $\beta = .215, t(340) = 4.140, p < .001$ ), followed by reciprocal altruism ( $\beta = .142, t(340) = 2.740, p = .006$ ), and brand satisfaction ( $\beta = .123, t(340) = 2.361, p = .019$ ). Brand attachment and egoism had no significant impact. Lastly, when regressed on CBD frequency, the five factors explained a small but significant portion of the variance ( $F(5, 564) = 15.402, p < .001, R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = .112$ ). Egoism ( $\beta = .282, t(564) = 7.151, p < .001$ ) and brand attachment ( $\beta = .199, t(564) = 5.051, p < .001$ ) positively influenced CBD frequency, while the other factors had no significant effect.

*Table 4: Factor score regression results.*

	Intuitive CBD		Reflective CBD		Frequency of CBD	
	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$	<i>B (SE)</i>	$\beta$
Brand satisfaction	.114 (.090)	.065	.154 (.065)	.123*	.028 (.054)	.020
Brand attachment	.386 (.088)	.225***	-.060 (.064)	-.048	.271 (.054)	.199***
Egoism	.420 (.089)	.242***	-.050 (.065)	-.040	.383 (.054)	.282***
Reciprocal altruism	-.038 (.086)	-.023	.173 (.063)	.142**	.014 (.054)	.011
Equity restoration	.018 (.089)	.010	.268 (.065)	.215***	-.008 (.054)	-.006
Constant	3.175 (.087)		5.699 (.063)		3.195 (.054)	
Observations	346		346		570	
R <sup>2</sup>	.115		.087		.120	

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficients; *SE* = standard errors;  $\beta$  = standardized regression coefficients  
\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

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3 These results confirm the significance of our proposed factors in predicting CBD  
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5 behavior. Egoism and brand attachment drive intuitive CBD and its frequency, while equity  
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7 restoration, reciprocal altruism, and brand satisfaction influence reflective CBD. This  
8  
9 demonstrates the relevance of these five factors as key drivers of CBD, validating their use in our  
10  
11 cluster analysis to develop distinct brand defender types.  
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14  
15 *A brand defender typology based on motivational and relational factors.* We conducted a  
16  
17 hierarchical cluster analysis using the three motives and two brand relationship constructs, based  
18  
19 on their mean values. Using the Ward method and squared Euclidean distance, both the  
20  
21 dendrogram and theoretical considerations suggested a three-cluster solution (e.g., Ketchen Jr.  
22  
23 and Shook 1996). We compared cluster mean values across our five input factors (e.g., egoism,  
24  
25 brand attachment), CBD behavior (e.g., defense frequency, styles), and context-related factors  
26  
27 (see *Tables 5 and 6*). The analysis revealed significant differences among clusters in both the  
28  
29 clustering variables and related external factors, supporting the validity of our solution (e.g.,  
30  
31 context factors; Ketchen Jr. and Shook 1996). The clusters were stable, with 89.5% correctly  
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33 assigned based on multiple discriminant analysis (Carvalho et al. 2015). We will now discuss the  
34  
35 detailed results for (1) motivational and relational drivers, (2) context factors, and (3) defense  
36  
37 behavior.  
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43 Regarding our cluster factors—the *motivational and relational drivers of CBD*—the  
44  
45 cluster analysis revealed three distinct types of brand defenders. Cluster 1, termed “brand  
46  
47 promoters,” is primarily driven by strong brand relationships and reciprocal altruism. They  
48  
49 exhibit the highest levels of brand satisfaction across the three segments ( $M = 6.15$ ) and the  
50  
51 second-highest brand attachment ( $M = 4.99$ ) after Cluster 3. With the highest value for reciprocal  
52  
53 altruism ( $M = 6.05$ ) and high scores on restoring equity ( $M = 6.24$ ), they aim to reciprocate  
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3 positive brand experiences. This segment represents the largest cluster, with about two-thirds  
4  
5 being male and slightly older on average ( $M = 34.65$  years) compared to the other clusters.  
6

7  
8 Defenders of Cluster 2, labeled “justice promoters,” are mainly motivated by a desire to  
9  
10 restore equity. Across all three motives, they scored highest on equity restoration ( $M = 6.11$ ),  
11  
12 significantly surpassing reciprocal altruism ( $M = 5.01$ ,  $t(194) = 8.592$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Compared to  
13  
14 the other two segments, they exhibit the lowest levels of egoism ( $M = 2.06$ ) and brand  
15  
16 attachment ( $M = 2.32$ ), while displaying high brand satisfaction similar to Cluster 3 ( $M = 5.39$ ).  
17  
18 This segment, with the highest proportion of female participants (39%) and the oldest average  
19  
20 age ( $M = 35.23$  years) among the clusters, represents the second largest cluster.  
21  
22

23  
24 Cluster 3, termed “self-promoters,” is primarily motivated by egoistical factors, namely  
25  
26 need for self-enhancement, expectations of future reciprocity, and hedonic benefits. They  
27  
28 displayed the highest mean for egoistic motives ( $M = 4.75$ ), double that of Clusters 1 and 2.  
29  
30 Additionally, they showed high brand attachment ( $M = 5.08$ ) and satisfaction ( $M = 5.52$ ) but the  
31  
32 lowest mean for restoring equity ( $M = 5.14$ ). This cluster represents the smallest and youngest  
33  
34 group ( $M = 30.64$  years), with the highest share of male participants (71.4%).  
35  
36

37  
38 In sum, while both brand promoters and self-promoters show a strong brand connection,  
39  
40 their motivations differ significantly. Brand promoters defend altruistically, whereas self-  
41  
42 promoters act for personal gain. Further, the relationship profile of justice promoters, with high  
43  
44 satisfaction but low attachment, extends prior research on CBD, which primarily emphasized  
45  
46 strong brand connections as driver of such behavior (e.g., Cheng, White, and Chaplin 2012).  
47  
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49  
50 In terms of *consumer-related context factors*, brand promoters reported the highest levels  
51  
52 of product involvement ( $M = 5.70$ ) and product knowledge ( $M = 5.90$ ), but lower knowledge  
53  
54 self-efficacy ( $M = 4.85$ ). In contrast, self-promoters exhibited the highest knowledge self-  
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3 efficacy ( $M = 5.35$ ) but lower product knowledge ( $M = 5.57$ ). This suggests that self-promoters  
4  
5 may overestimate their knowledge, driven by their desire to defend the brand for selfish reasons,  
6  
7 while brand promoters critically evaluate their brand-related knowledge, likely aiming to provide  
8  
9 meaningful defense as a form of reciprocal altruism. Additionally, self-promoters experienced  
10  
11 the highest levels of self-threat ( $M = 4.44$ ), likely due to their strong brand attachment and the  
12  
13 perception that criticism of the brand threatens their self-concept, reflecting their egoistic  
14  
15 tendencies and a defensive response to protect their self-image (Cheng, White, and Chaplin  
16  
17 2012).

18  
19  
20  
21 Concerning the *big five personality traits*, brand promoters exhibit the highest level of  
22  
23 conscientiousness ( $M = 5.69$ ), indicating a tendency towards diligence, organization, and  
24  
25 reliability in their activities. Self-promoters score highest on extraversion ( $M = 4.20$ ), reflecting a  
26  
27 greater likelihood of engaging in social interactions. Both brand promoters and justice promoters  
28  
29 score relatively high on agreeableness ( $M = 5.37$  and  $M = 5.24$ , respectively), suggesting a  
30  
31 propensity towards empathy and cooperation. Previous studies linked agreeableness with  
32  
33 reciprocal altruism, empathic concern (Ashton et al. 1998; Habashi, Graziano, and Hoover  
34  
35 2016), and equity sensitivity (Woodley et al. 2015). This aligns with the higher agreeableness  
36  
37 observed in brand and justice promoters compared to self-promoters, who defend for selfish  
38  
39 reasons. While openness levels were relatively high (mean values  $> 5$ ) and neuroticism relatively  
40  
41 low (mean values  $< 3.5$ ), there were no significant differences across groups, indicating shared  
42  
43 traits of curiosity and emotional stability among all clusters.  
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50 As a last consumer characteristic, we examined brand defenders' *internet usage*. Our  
51  
52 findings in *Table 5* indicate that both brand promoters and justice promoters are more active  
53  
54 online across various domains like information seeking, news consumption, and entertainment,  
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3 compared to self-promoters. Brand promoters, especially, are highly engaged on social media ( $M$   
4 = 5.85), suggesting a strong presence and influence in digital environments, leveraging their  
5 strong dedication to advocate for their preferred brands. Justice promoters, similarly engaged in  
6 online information search and news consumption, likely prioritize staying informed to actively  
7 contribute to discussions, including those on justice issues. Interestingly, self-promoters tend to  
8 express their opinions online more often ( $M = 4.67$ ) compared to both brand promoters ( $M =$   
9 4.49) and justice promoters ( $M = 4.21$ ), indicating a preference for actively voicing their views.

19 In terms of *criticism triggering CBD*, consumers were more likely to defend brands when  
20 they did not blame the brand ( $M = 3.03$ ) and when the incident was less severe ( $M = 3.74$ ). Self-  
21 promoters, however, blamed the brand more ( $M = 3.80$ ) and defended even with higher severity  
22 ( $M = 4.20$ ), indicating that they care less about the severity and focus more on personal benefit.  
23 Justice promoters defended when they perceived the criticism as unfair, with lower blame ( $M =$   
24 2.84) and severity ( $M = 3.41$ ). Value-based incidents triggered more CBD ( $M = 4.38$ ) than  
25 performance-based ones ( $M = 2.98$ ). Self-promoters had the highest mean for performance-  
26 related failures ( $M = 3.91$ ), while brand promoters defended most in value-based ones ( $M =$   
27 4.61).

40 Regarding *company-related contextual factors*, participants generally perceived the  
41 brands they defended to have high levels of CSR ( $M = 5.19$ ). However, justice promoters rated  
42 the company's CSR less favorably ( $M = 4.70$ ) compared to brand ( $M = 5.51$ ) and self-promoters  
43 ( $M = 5.33$ ). This suggests that justice promoters prioritize addressing perceived injustices over  
44 broader CSR concerns. Research shows that perceived corporate social irresponsibility can  
45 paradoxically trigger prosocial behaviors aimed at restoring justice (Kim, He, and Gustafsson  
46 2024). Reflecting on the brand's response to criticism, 52.3% of participants defended the brand

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even without a direct company response, underscoring the mixed relevance of this factor in our interviews. Brand promoters were more likely to defend when the company did not respond (58.3% of cases), while self-promoters defended more when the company did respond (40%). This indicates that self-promoters may prioritize personal benefit over brand support, while brand promoters defend when the company fails to respond. Justice promoters' uncertainty suggests a focus on equity restoration as their main motivation.

Table 5: Mean difference comparisons for the three brand defender types.

Constructs	Columns	Brand Promoter (n = 235)	Justice Promoter (n = 195)	Self-Promoter (n = 140)	Entire sample (N = 570)
		a	b	c	
Cluster variables	Brand satisfaction <sup>1, 8</sup>	6.15 (.05) <sup>b, c</sup>	5.39 (.09) <sup>a</sup>	5.52 (.10) <sup>a</sup>	5.74 (.05)
	Brand attachment <sup>1, 8</sup>	4.99 (.06) <sup>b</sup>	2.32 (.07) <sup>a, c</sup>	5.08 (.10) <sup>b</sup>	4.10 (.07)
	Reciprocal altruism <sup>1, 10</sup>	6.05 (.05) <sup>b, c</sup>	5.01 (.12) <sup>a, c</sup>	5.80 (.09) <sup>a, b</sup>	5.63 (.05)
	Equity restoration <sup>1, 8</sup>	6.24 (.05) <sup>c</sup>	6.11 (.07) <sup>c</sup>	5.14 (.12) <sup>a, b</sup>	5.93 (.05)
	Egoism <sup>1, 8</sup>	2.41 (.05) <sup>b, c</sup>	2.06 (.06) <sup>a, c</sup>	4.75 (.09) <sup>a, b</sup>	2.86 (.06)
Demo-graphics	Gender <sup>7</sup>	67.7% male	61.0% male	71.4% male	66.3% male
	Age <sup>1, 8</sup>	34.65 (.64) <sup>c</sup>	35.23 (.72) <sup>c</sup>	30.64 (.60) <sup>a, b</sup>	33.86 (.40)
Factors related to consumers' knowledge, involvement, self-threat	Product knowledge <sup>1, 8</sup>	5.90 (.06) <sup>b, c</sup>	5.16 (.10) <sup>a, c</sup>	5.57 (.10) <sup>a, b</sup>	5.57 (.05)
	Knowledge self-efficacy <sup>1, 8</sup>	4.85 (.09) <sup>b, c</sup>	4.07 (.11) <sup>a, c</sup>	5.35 (.09) <sup>a, b</sup>	4.71 (.06)
	Product involvement <sup>1, 8</sup>	5.70 (.06) <sup>b, c</sup>	4.03 (.11) <sup>a, c</sup>	5.37 (.09) <sup>a, b</sup>	5.05 (.06)
	Self-threat <sup>2, 9</sup>	3.92 (.10) <sup>b, c</sup>	2.78 (.10) <sup>a, c</sup>	4.44 (.12) <sup>a, b</sup>	3.66 (.07)
Factors related to the criticism	Performance-related failure <sup>2, 9</sup>	2.73 (.13) <sup>c</sup>	2.62 (.14) <sup>c</sup>	3.91 (.16) <sup>a, b</sup>	2.98 (.09)
	Value-based failure <sup>4</sup>	4.61 (.14)	4.27 (.17)	4.14 (.15)	4.38 (.09)
	Blame attribution <sup>2, 9</sup>	2.73 (.11) <sup>c</sup>	2.84 (.13) <sup>c</sup>	3.80 (.15) <sup>a, b</sup>	3.03 (.08)
	Failure severity <sup>1, 8</sup>	3.73 (.11) <sup>c</sup>	3.41 (.12) <sup>c</sup>	4.20 (.13) <sup>a, b</sup>	3.74 (.07)
Factors related to the company	Corporate social responsibility <sup>2, 9</sup>	5.51(.06) <sup>b</sup>	4.70 (.08) <sup>a, c</sup>	5.33 (.09) <sup>b</sup>	5.19 (.05)
	Company defended itself <sup>6</sup>	14.5%	15.4%	22.1%	16.7%
	Company apologized <sup>6</sup>	12.8%	9.2%	21.4%	13.7%
	Company did not react <sup>6</sup>	58.3%	49.2%	46.4%	52.3%
Defense behavior	Don't know <sup>6</sup>	14.4%	26.2%	10.1%	17.4%
	Frequency of defense behavior <sup>1, 8</sup>	3.13 (.08) <sup>b, c</sup>	2.80 (.08) <sup>a, c</sup>	3.86 (.13) <sup>a, b</sup>	3.19 (.06)

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Constructs	Brand Promoter (n = 235)	Justice Promoter (n = 195)	Self-Promoter (n = 140)	Entire sample (N = 570)
Intuitive defense behavior <sup>1,8</sup>	3.30 (.14) <sup>b</sup>	2.68 (.14) <sup>a,c</sup>	3.60 (.20) <sup>b</sup>	3.15 (.09)
Reflective defense behavior <sup>7</sup>	5.75 (.10)	5.73 (.12)	5.55 (.13)	5.69 (.07)
Conscientiousness <sup>2,9</sup>	5.69 (.07) <sup>b,c</sup>	5.34 (.09) <sup>a</sup>	5.05 (.10) <sup>a</sup>	5.41 (.05)
Extraversion <sup>3,8</sup>	3.90 (.11)	3.68 (.13) <sup>c</sup>	4.20 (.12) <sup>b</sup>	3.90 (.07)
Big Five Agreeableness <sup>1,8</sup>	5.37 (.07) <sup>c</sup>	5.24 (.09) <sup>c</sup>	4.92 (.09) <sup>a,b</sup>	5.21 (.05)
Openness <sup>7</sup>	5.38 (.08)	5.22 (.10)	5.13 (.10)	5.27 (.05)
Neuroticism <sup>7</sup>	3.22 (.11)	3.42 (.13)	3.41 (.12)	3.33 (.07)
Information search <sup>1,8</sup>	5.74 (.07) <sup>c</sup>	5.65 (.08) <sup>c</sup>	5.08 (.12) <sup>a,b</sup>	5.55 (.05)
News consumption <sup>2,9</sup>	5.50 (.09) <sup>c</sup>	5.57 (.09) <sup>c</sup>	5.05 (.12) <sup>a,b</sup>	5.41 (.06)
Internet usage Expression of opinion <sup>5,9</sup>	4.49 (.11)	4.21 (.12) <sup>c</sup>	4.67 (.12) <sup>b</sup>	4.44 (.07)
Entertainment <sup>1,8</sup>	5.88 (.06) <sup>c</sup>	5.85 (.08) <sup>c</sup>	5.35 (.10) <sup>a,b</sup>	5.74 (.05)
Surfing on social platforms <sup>1,8</sup>	5.85 (.07) <sup>c</sup>	5.61 (.10)	5.27 (.12) <sup>a</sup>	5.63 (.05)

Notes: The numbers displayed in this table are the respective means as well as the corresponding standard errors in parentheses and also for some constructs, the relative frequencies. <sup>1</sup>Welch test was significant ( $p < .001$ ). <sup>2</sup>One-way ANOVA was significant ( $p < .001$ ). <sup>3</sup>Welch test was significant ( $p < .05$ ). <sup>4</sup>Welch test was marginally significant ( $p < .1$ ). <sup>5</sup>One-way ANOVA was significant ( $p < .05$ ). <sup>6</sup>Chi-squared test was significant ( $p < .001$ ). <sup>7</sup>No significant differences ( $p > .1$ ). Within each row, superscripts (a, b, c) indicate the significant differences for the respective column based on the Games-Howell<sup>8</sup> / Gabriel<sup>9</sup> ( $p < .05$ ) / Games-Howell post hoc test ( $p = .055$ )<sup>10</sup>.

For *CBD behavior*, self-promoters defend brands more often ( $M = 3.86$ ) than brand promoters ( $M = 3.13$ ) and justice promoters ( $M = 2.80$ ). Brand promoters often justify ( $M = 4.99$ ) and vouch ( $M = 4.99$ ), reflecting their past positive brand experiences. Justice promoters typically justify brand's behavior to restore equity. In contrast, self-promoters employ a variety of styles including trivializing ( $M = 4.09$ ) and doubting critic's credibility ( $M = 4.65$ ), indicating that due to their selfish reasons any means is possible.

Table 6: Defense styles per brand defender type.

Constructs	Brand Promoter (n = 141)	Justice Promoter (n = 124)	Self-Promoter (n = 81)	Entire sample (N = 346)
	<i>Columns</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>
<b>Advocating:</b> My defense comment on [Brand] referred to applicable law or social norms. <sup>2</sup>	3.70 (.18)	3.39 (.19) <sup>c</sup>	4.15 (.21) <sup>b</sup>	3.69 (.11)
<b>Justifying:</b> My defense comment on [Brand]	4.99 (.15) <sup>b</sup>	4.02 (.20) <sup>a,c</sup>	4.80 (.18) <sup>b</sup>	4.60 (.11)

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justified the behavior of the company.<sup>1</sup>

**Trivializing:** My defense comment on [Brand] trivialized the criticized incident (tried to downplay the issue mentioned by the critic).<sup>1</sup>

	3.47 (.17) <sup>b, c</sup>	2.77 (.18) <sup>a, c</sup>	4.09 (.20) <sup>a, b</sup>	3.36 (.11)
--	----------------------------	----------------------------	----------------------------	------------

**Vouching:** My defense comment on [Brand] was based on personal positive self-experiences with [Brand].<sup>1</sup>

	4.99 (.15) <sup>b</sup>	4.00 (.20) <sup>a, c</sup>	4.88 (.16) <sup>b</sup>	4.61 (.10)
--	-------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	------------

**Stalling:** My defense comment on [Brand] asked the critic to avoid jumping to conclusions.<sup>2</sup>

	4.52 (.16) <sup>b</sup>	3.84 (.20) <sup>a, c</sup>	4.73 (.19) <sup>b</sup>	4.33 (.11)
--	-------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------	------------

**Doubting:** My defense comment on [Brand] questioned the credibility of the critic.<sup>1</sup>

	3.87 (.18) <sup>c</sup>	3.37 (.20) <sup>c</sup>	4.65 (.19) <sup>a, b</sup>	3.88 (.11)
--	-------------------------	-------------------------	----------------------------	------------

Notes. The numbers displayed in this table are the respective means with the corresponding standard errors in brackets. <sup>1</sup>Welch test is significant ( $p < .001$ ). <sup>2</sup>Welch test is significant ( $p < .05$ ). Within each row, superscripts (a, b, c) indicate the significant differences for the respective column based on the Games-Howell post hoc test.

In sum, we have developed a typology of three distinct defenders based on their motivational and relational drivers. Each type varies in terms of context factors stimulating CBD and the specific defense behavior. *Figure 2* provides a summary of the cluster analysis results.

*Figure 2:* Main characteristics of the three brand defender types: Brand promoters, justice promoters, and self-promoters.

Defender Type	Main Motive	Consumer-Brand Relationship	Big Five and Internet Usage	Context Factors	Defense Behavior
<b>Brand Promoters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reciprocal altruism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highest brand satisfaction</li> <li>High brand attachment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highest conscientiousness and high agreeableness</li> <li>High internet usage for entertainment, and social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highest knowledge</li> <li>Highest involvement</li> <li>Moderate perceived self-threat</li> <li>Lowest blame attribution</li> <li>Highest perceived CSR</li> <li>60% of the cases: no brand reaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employing especially defense styles "justifying, vouching, stalling"</li> <li>Moderate frequency</li> <li>Defend reflectively with moderate intuition</li> </ul>
<b>Justice Promoters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equity restoration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High brand satisfaction</li> <li>Low brand attachment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low extraversion and high agreeableness</li> <li>High internet usage for entertainment and lower for expression of opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lowest knowledge</li> <li>Lowest involvement</li> <li>Lowest perceived self-threat</li> <li>Lowest failure severity</li> <li>Lowest perceived CSR</li> <li>25% of the cases: do not know if brand reacted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mostly defend by justifying brand's behavior and vouching</li> <li>Defend least often</li> <li>Defend reflectively and the least intuitively</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Promoters</b>	Egoistic motives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-enhancement</li> <li>Future reciprocity</li> <li>Hedonic benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High brand satisfaction</li> <li>High brand attachment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High extraversion, low agreeableness</li> <li>Higher internet usage for expression of opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strongest perceived self-threat</li> <li>Defending performance-related incidents</li> <li>Highest failure severity</li> <li>Highest blame attribution</li> <li>40% of the cases: defense or apology by brand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wide array of defense styles, e.g.: vouching, stalling, justifying, doubting</li> <li>Defend most often</li> <li>Defend reflectively and more intuitively</li> </ul>

## General Discussion

In an increasingly polarized digital landscape marked by frequent social media controversies with significant brand implications (Hansen, Kupfer, and Hennig-Thurau 2018), consumers

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emerge as credible actors capable of defending brands online to protect their reputation and image (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017). To encourage such defense behavior, it is essential to understand the drivers behind it. This study explores the underexamined motivations of CBD and develops a typology of brand defenders. Drawing on literature related to positive WOM, brand advocacy, and prosocial behavior, as well as qualitative and quantitative research, we identified three key motives (reciprocal altruism, restoring equity, and egoism) and two brand relationship factors (brand attachment and satisfaction) that drive CBD. These elements differentiate unique defender types: brand promoters, justice promoters, and self-promoters, who vary not only in behavior but also in contextual factors related to consumer traits, criticism, and company characteristics. Enriching the literature, our findings provide valuable insights into the drivers of CBD.

## ***Theoretical Contributions***

Our study offers a significant advancement in understanding CBD motives through a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative approach. Despite CBD's practical relevance, there has been little research on brand defenders' motives of (e.g., Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Dalman, Buche, and Min 2017; Roy et al. 2021). While prior research has conceptually discussed potential motives of CBD including consumers' sense of justice, need for self-enhancement, and a desire to raise social capital (Colliander and Hauge Wien 2013; Roy et al. 2021), these were not empirically studied. Through our comprehensive approach, we identified three primary motive categories: reciprocal altruism, egoism, and justice restoration. Our research sheds light on these crucial motives, particularly highlighting the previously overlooked motive of reciprocal altruism, thus contributing significantly to the CBD literature.

Our study advances the literature on positive brand engagement, including eWOM, brand

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3 ambassadors, evangelists, and advocates. While some motivations overlap with positive eWOM  
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5 (e.g., economic incentives), we uncover motives unique to CBD and less relevant ones (e.g.,  
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7 aiding purchase decisions; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Unlike brand evangelists and  
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9 ambassadors, driven by reciprocal altruism (Ambroise et al. 2014; Becerra and Badrinarayanan  
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11 2013), we identify egoism and equity restoration as key drivers of CBD in the context of online  
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13 brand criticism. Additionally, while fairness perceptions influence advocacy (Cavdar Aksoy and  
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15 Yazici 2023), we highlight the role of egoistic motives, distinguishing CBD from advocacy and  
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17 other forms of positive brand engagement.  
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22 Second, we shed light on the drivers of CBD derived from the consumer-brand  
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24 relationship. Whereas prior research on eWOM and brand advocacy has already identified brand  
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26 satisfaction as a driver of such behavior (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004), CBD studies have  
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28 predominantly focused on strong and emotional brand relationships. These include exploring  
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30 brand passion (Alnawas, Ghantous, and Hemsley-Brown 2023), the actions of brand community  
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32 members on Facebook, who defend their brand and attack rival brands (Ilhan, Kübler, and  
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34 Pauwels 2018), and consumers in love-like relationships with the brand (e.g., Dalman, Buche,  
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36 and Min 2017). However, our research shows that high levels of brand satisfaction alone can  
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38 prompt CBD, even in the absence of strong brand attachment. This extends prior CBD studies  
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40 and emphasizes the overlooked potential of satisfied consumers in driving CBD. Thus, our  
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42 theoretical understanding of CBD should be broadened to include these individuals as brand  
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44 defenders.  
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50 Third, our typology of brand defenders further contributes to our understanding of CBD  
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52 by categorizing them based on their motives and brand relationships. Brand promoters, justice  
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54 promoters, and self-promoters exhibit unique behaviors and defense styles reflective of their  
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3 underlying motives and relationships. For instance, brand promoters, characterized by their  
4 vouching defense style, focus on amplifying positive brand attributes, reciprocating their past  
5 positive experiences. Justice promoters, employing a justification defense style, seek to rectify  
6 wrongs and advocate for fairness. Meanwhile, self-promoters utilize a variety of defense styles  
7 and employ more confrontational tactics such as challenging critics' credibility, indicating their  
8 willingness to employ any means due to their selfish reasons. These distinctions enrich our  
9 theoretical framework of CBD by highlighting the distinct behaviors of each defender type,  
10 providing a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in CBD.  
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22 Furthermore, we add to recent empirical research that provides strong evidence that  
23 intuitive processes often underlie prosocial behavior (Grehl and Tutić 2022; Rand et al. 2014;  
24 Zaki and Mitchell 2013). These studies consistently show that prosocial actions are typically  
25 quick, automatic, and less cognitively demanding, indicating that they stem from intuitive rather  
26 than reflective processes. Whereas prior research on CBD often regarded such behavior as  
27 deliberate and intentional (Hassan and Casaló Ariño's 2016), our study provides evidence of a  
28 more intuitive narrative style that seems to be even more prevalent based on our Study 1.  
29 Focusing on reflective processes may have led to an incomplete understanding of CBD and our  
30 insights contribute to reevaluate existing frameworks to include the role of intuitive processes.  
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42 Finally, we adopt a systematic and comprehensive approach to understand the context  
43 influencing various defender types (e.g., Romer, Gruder, and Lizzadro 1986). Specifically, we  
44 explore how context factors that refer to the consumer, the brand criticism, and the company  
45 affect different brand defender types. For instance, our results show that communication  
46 management can influence brand defender types differently (e.g., Crijns et al. 2017; Ilhan,  
47 Kübler, and Pauwels 2018). While a management response motivates brand and self-promoters  
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3 to defend the brand, it appears less critical for justice promoters, challenging previous findings  
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5 (Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017; Scholz and Smith 2019). This contributes to prior CBD  
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7 research that often examined specific CBD contexts in isolation (e.g., Hassan and Casaló Ariño  
8  
9 2016). Understanding the importance of different context factors is crucial for incentivizing  
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11 specific defender types, such as justice-promoters, for desired CBD behavior (e.g., justifying).  
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## 14 ***Managerial Implications***

15  
16 Our research offers valuable insights into CBD, examining its motivational and relational  
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18 drivers, which are essential for marketing and brand managers aiming to address brand criticism  
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20 effectively (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). This is especially relevant given the increasing number  
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22 of social media platforms where brands are active and where criticism can arise, making  
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24 management more resource-intensive (e.g., TikTok, Twitch). According to a reputational risk  
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26 readiness survey conducted by WTW (2022), 55% of companies consider reputational incidents  
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28 among their top five risks. Despite this, there is a disparity, with 87% of companies seeing social  
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30 media as crucial for marketing, yet many executives avoid addressing reputational issues on  
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32 these platforms. Our Study 1 found that up to 10% of user comments can be CBD, suggesting  
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34 CBD could be a valuable resource for countering negative criticism at a lower cost and with  
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36 greater credibility compared to brands' social media engagement (Kozinets et al. 2010).  
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42 Our study identifies three distinct types of brand defenders, each with unique motives,  
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44 relationships, behaviors, and triggers. While managers often assume brand promoters are the  
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46 primary defenders (see pilot study in *Web Appendix A*), our research highlights other types, such  
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48 as justice promoters and self-promoters. This understanding enables managers to develop  
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50 tailored strategies for engaging these different defender types and addressing brand criticism  
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52 more effectively. Ultimately, our research deepens the understanding of defender motives,  
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1 helping managers motivate them through targeted interventions and incentives.  
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5 Companies should empower consumers to express their opinions in ways that align with  
6 their values and interests, fostering authentic and voluntary engagement. To motivate brand  
7 promoters' reciprocal altruism, marketers can strengthen their emotional connection to the brand  
8 and appeal to empathy by framing requests from a victim's perspective (White and Peloza 2009).  
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10 Justice promoters can be motivated by appealing to their sense of fairness, asking for their input  
11 on unjust criticism (Allard, Dunn, and White 2020). For self-promoters, who seek self-  
12 enhancement and future reciprocity, acknowledging or liking their defense comments can  
13 effectively make them feel valued (e.g., "bolstering"; Dineva, Breitsohl, and Garrod 2017).  
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24 However, it is crucial that companies maintain authentic communication online. Research  
25 by Karaman (2021) demonstrated that online review solicitations can reduce extremity bias and  
26 increase representativeness. Our results showed that different types of brand defenders, such as  
27 justice promoters and self-promoters, engage for reasons beyond brand attachment. This  
28 diversity of perspectives can mitigate extreme opinions and enhance the representativeness of  
29 online discourse, fostering a more accurate understanding of consumer sentiments.  
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38 Brands should establish ethical guidelines for consumer engagement and regularly  
39 monitor the impact of their strategies on online discourse. This includes assessing the  
40 authenticity and quality of consumer interactions to ensure CBD efforts do not distort genuine  
41 opinions. Publicly praising brand defenders should be approached with caution, as it may give  
42 the impression they are company representatives, potentially harming credibility (Crijns et al.  
43 2017). Alternatively, brands can recognize and incentivize defenders through direct messages or  
44 community-based status signals, such as gamification with defense badges or level-ups (Berman  
45 et al. 2015).  
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Understanding the distinct internet usage patterns of different brand defender types can help brand managers create targeted strategies. For brand promoters, who engage in various online activities, personalized digital experiences, influencer collaborations, and community-building initiatives can effectively leverage their engagement. Justice promoters, active in information search and news consumption, may respond better to platforms that foster dialogue and activism on social justice issues. Self-promoters, who frequently share opinions online, can be engaged through participative forums or feedback platforms. By aligning digital strategies with each defender type's characteristics, managers can effectively mobilize them.

Our findings on relevant context factors for brand defender types offer insights for marketing and brand managers to determine when each type is likely to defend the brand. Marketers can strategically identify situations to rely on specific defender types and coordinate efforts to motivate CBD. For example, when the company faces blame for a failure, brand- and justice promoters may be less inclined to engage, while self-promoters might be willing to help. Conversely, brand promoters may defend the brand when a company opts not to react.

Finally, our insight that the reflective style was least prevalent helps practitioners recognize the contexts in which intuitive or reflective styles are more prevalent and to tailor their approaches accordingly. For example, intuitive styles may be more typical in high-pressure, fast-paced environments, while reflective styles may be more common for complex problem-solving scenarios, such as when restoring equity upon unfair critic. This may also be company-specific, as Tesla attracted more reflective defenses, while Samsung elicited more intuitive defenses.

## ***Limitations and Future Research***

In line with previous research (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Kähr et al. 2016), we used qualitative interviews in Study 2 to explore consumer motivations for CBD. While this method

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3 uncovered new motivational factors, it has limitations, as self-reported data may not fully capture  
4 the complexity of motivations. Future research could adopt more immersive methods, such as  
5 ethnography or behavioral experiments, to gain deeper insights into the underlying "why" of  
6 these motivations. Although we identified reciprocal altruism, egoism, and restoring equity as  
7 key drivers of CBD, additional factors may exist. For example, collectivism, a prosocial motive,  
8 was less relevant for brand defenders but could be more significant in brand communities where  
9 members support each other (Dineva, Breitsohl, Roschk, and Hosseinpour 2023).

19 Future research could also explore the dynamics of defender types across brands and over  
20 time. While our study identified distinct consumer segments within specific CBD cases, it  
21 remains unclear whether individuals maintain consistent defense strategies or shift between types  
22 depending on the brand. A longitudinal approach could shed light on the stability of these  
23 clusters, as consumer-brand relationships may evolve. Examining these shifts could assist  
24 practitioners in adapting strategies to evolving consumer engagement.

33 In addition, future research could also examine the link between influencer activities and  
34 CBD. Like self-promoters, influencers seek to build a positive image and distinct personal brand  
35 (Lee and Eastin 2020). When there is strong alignment with a brand, defending it during  
36 criticism may benefit both parties, enhancing the influencer's visibility and audience  
37 engagement. Investigating whether influencer involvement in CBD should be explicitly  
38 addressed in contracts, particularly in long-term collaborations, could offer valuable insights for  
39 future studies.

49 Finally, from a managerial viewpoint, future research could explore the effectiveness of  
50 the three defender types. Our findings indicate that brand and justice promoters often use defense  
51 styles like justifying and vouching, with vouching previously shown to have positive brand  
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outcomes (Weitzl and Hutzinger 2017). Conversely, self-promoters, using varied defense styles like doubting and trivializing, might benefit brands as a complementary addition to official company responses (e.g., Frandsen and Johansen 2016).

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**WEB APPENDIX:****“Beyond Strong Bonds: A Typology and Motivational Insights  
into Online Brand Defenders”**Clemens Ammann (Clemens.Ammann@unibe.ch)<sup>1</sup>Andrea Giuffredi-Kähr (Andrea.Giuffredi-Kaehr@business.uzh.ch)<sup>2</sup>Bettina Nyffenegger (Bettina.Nyffenegger@unibe.ch)<sup>1</sup>Harley Krohmer (Harley.Krohmer@unibe.ch)<sup>1</sup>Wayne D. Hoyer (Wayne.Hoyer@mcombs.utexas.edu)<sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Institute of Marketing and Management, University of Bern, Switzerland<sup>2</sup> Department of Business Administration, University of Zurich, Switzerland<sup>3</sup> McCombs School of Business, University of Texas at Austin, United States of America

Web Appendix A: Pilot Study.....	2
Web Appendix B: Study 2.....	5
Web Appendix C: Study 3.....	8

*These materials have been supplied by the authors to aid in the understanding of their paper.*

*The AMA is sharing these materials at the request of the authors.*

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## Web Appendix A: Pilot Study

The purpose of this Pilot Study was to examine marketing managers' perceived relevance of CBD.

### Method

We conducted 20 expert interviews among managers in the areas of marketing, communication, branding, and social media. When selecting interviewees, we attempted to maximize diversity with regard to company size (SME to large) and industries to enhance external validity (see *Table W1*).

Table W1: Overview of the Interviewed Managers.

Inter- view	Manager	Manager's employer	
	Job title	Number of employees <sup>1)</sup>	Industry / products
1	Brand Manager	50 – 249	Soft drinks
2	Head of Marketing and Communication	250 – 999	Snacks (chips)
3	Senior Specialist Social Media Marketing & Consultant Social Media Marketing <sup>2)</sup>	50 – 249	Online marketing agency
4	Social Media Manager	10,000 – 49,999	Telecommunication
5	PR and Social Media Relations Specialist	10,000 – 49,999	Technology
6	Managing Partner	10 – 49	Social media agency
7	Head of Social Media & Dialog Marketing	10,000 – 49,999	Airline
8	Brand Manager	50,000 – 99,999	Sports articles
9	Head of Online Marketing	10 – 49	Design and advertising agency
10	Online Marketing Manager	250 – 999	E-bike
11	Community and Social Media Manager	50 – 249	Communication agency
12	Senior Manager Marketing Insights	1,000 – 9,999	Insurance
13	Head of Social Media	50,000 – 99,999	Insurance
14	Head of PR & Social Media Manager <sup>2)</sup>	1,000 – 9,999	eCommerce
15	Head of Marketing Communications	1,000 – 9,999	Transportation
16	Head of Community Management	10,000 – 49,999	Transportation
17	Consultant Social Media Strategy	1 – 9	Social media agency
18	Head of Marketing	10 – 49	Tourism

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19	Specialist Community Management	10,000 – 49,999	Postal services
20	Head of Social Media & Head of Branding <sup>2)</sup>	1,000 – 9,999	Insurance

Notes: 1) To ensure the interviewees' anonymity the number of employees of their employer is displayed in categories. 2) In three interviews, we were able to speak with two managers simultaneously.

The interviews were conducted over a two-month period 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. If necessary, we also asked “off the script” questions due to the explorative character of the study. The interviews were audiotaped and afterward transcribed which resulted in 274 single-spaced pages. We applied an inductive content analysis for all statements from our interview partners about possible drivers. Specifically, we first created abstract overarching categories and collected the corresponding interview statements. In the next step, we formulated more specific sub-categories and reassigned the statements. This process was repeated until all interview statements could be assigned to a sub-category (Krippendorff 2018; Spiggle 1994).

### **Results and Discussion**

Marketing managers confirmed CBD's relevance by reporting that they increasingly observe consumers who help their brand in times of criticism. From the 20 interviewees, all were aware of the phenomenon of CBD and 18 personally experienced consumers who defended their brand on online channels (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, owned communities, comment sections of newspapers, forums).

The managers emphasized the significance in corporate practice, highlighting its critical role in reinforcing brand authenticity and bolstering consumers' brand trust. For instance, interviewee 11 underscored the importance of CBD in adding authenticity to the brand's perception among consumers, stating: "I find it very important. It is a factor of

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3 authenticity. It shows a consumer that they are not the first person who is satisfied. There are  
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5 already others and [with positive] experiences". Additionally, it was discussed that CBD  
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7 could transform negative perceptions and moderate heated emotions, which is pivotal in  
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9 maintaining a positive brand image and mitigating potential crises. Furthermore, interviewee  
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11 2 noted the personal affirmation that brand defenders receive and the communal impact of  
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13 their actions, suggesting that CBD provides a sense of belonging and positive reinforcement  
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15 for those who engage in it.  
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19 These insights collectively indicate that CBD is not merely a reactive strategy but a  
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21 vital aspect of proactive brand management, nurturing a supportive community around the  
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23 brand and fostering a resilient brand image. In sum, marketing managers recognized the  
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25 relevance of CBD for reputation management.  
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**Web Appendix B: Study 2: Insights from Actual Consumer Brand Defenders on the Motives and Relationship Constructs That Drive CBD**

Table W2: Overview of the Interviewed Brand Defenders' Reported Cases.

De-fender	Platform(s)	Industry	Source of Critic(s)	Criticism	Defense (narrative style <sup>1</sup> )
1	Fan forum, online media outlets	Soccer club	Private persons	(Transfer) policy of the club	The club has not that much money available as it still must pay for the stadium. (reflective)
2	Facebook	Soft drink	Animal defense organization	The soft drink is a waste product of the cheese production. Thus, it is not vegan.	"Chill out!" (intuitive)
3	Facebook	Sport and youth camps	Private person: mother	Critical comment about increased camp prizes	Background information about the price increase (reflective)
4	Facebook, 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." (intuitive)
5	Facebook	e-cars	News article, private persons	E-cars offer new dangers, and the technology is ecologically unacceptable.	The batteries are renewable to 100%. (reflective)
6	Facebook	Railway company	Private person	In response to the company proposing a new destination for a day trip, a person wrote that there is always heavy car traffic.	The critic missed the point. "First check on which page [railway company] you are commenting." (mixed)
7	Twitter	Airline	Private person: air passengers	Unreliable airline with a bad customer support	She already had positive experiences with this airline. (intuitive)
8	Facebook and online media outlets	Touristic destinations	Media, private persons	Beginning of winter some were writing that there is no snow in the destination.	In the big ski resorts you have enough snow to go skiing. (reflective)
9	Jodel (social media app)	Railway company	Private persons	Delay due to construction work and consumers complaining that they must take replacement buses.	The company is doing as much as it can, and the construction work isn't its fault. (mixed)
10	Facebook	Drones	Private person	Motor performance drops very quickly, product is defective and smells bad. Despite warranty replacement, the new drone didn't fully work.	Probably just bad luck with product. Brand is the leader in the market (also in the aspect of "value for money"). (mixed)

Notes: 1) Coding of the narrative style was based on the coding key of Study 1.

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Table W3: Motivational Drivers and Nature of the Brand Relationship of the Interviewees.

Category	Construct (Description)	Illustrative Quotes	Mentioned by Defenders ...
	Reciprocal Altruistic Motives (consumers' striving to give something back in return for positive past experiences)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[I defended the brand] "to put the [soccer] club in a better light or simply to defend the brand and make it look better". (defender 1)</li> <li>"[...] 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)</li> </ul>	1, 3, 7, 8, 10
	Equity restoration <sup>1</sup> (consumers' striving to restore an unjust situation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"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)</li> </ul>	3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9
	Self-enhancement (consumers' striving to present the self in a positive way)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[I defended the brand] "because I would like to present myself in the best light". (defender 2)</li> <li>[The defense was about] "boosting my ego". (defender 6)</li> <li>[I defended the brand because] "I feel that I like to be perceived as nuanced". (defender 9)</li> </ul>	2, 5, 6, 9
Egoistic Motives	Future reciprocity (consumers' expectations of future returns from third parties)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Let's put it this way. I am happy if they [observers] like it [defense comment]. Especially when I get feedback that they find it [defense comment] funny". (defender 5)</li> <li>"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)</li> </ul>	5, 6, 7
	Hedonic benefits (consumers' gratification and enjoyment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"[...] with such sentences you give the reward center in the brain a little boost by making someone look stupid. Or frankly, I just like to educate people". (defender 2)</li> </ul>	2, 4, 5, 8
Consumer-Brand Relationship	Brand attachment (consumers' connection with brand involving thoughts and feelings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"There must be a certain relationship with the [to be defended] company. So, the fact that I would commit myself to the company at all, I think, is an extremely important point for me personally. So I have to have some kind of connection." (defender 3)</li> </ul>	1, 3
	Brand satisfaction (consumers' evaluation of the brand's performance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[I defended the brand] "because I myself am a satisfied customer". (defender 8)</li> </ul>	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Notes: 1) Nine interviewees mentioned equity restoration as an influential factor for their defense behavior. However, it only represented an essential motive for the six listed interviewees' defense behavior.

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Table W4: Relevant Context Factors for CBD.

Context Factors	Explanation	Sources
Factors related to consumers' knowledge	Consumers' knowledge of the product / brand and consumers' knowledge self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in their knowledge)	<u>Prosocial behavior</u> e.g., Grant and Gino 2010; Kerr and Kaufman-Gilliland 1997; Martin-Raugh, Kell, and Motowidlo 2016; Sharma and Morwitz 2016
	Product involvement	<u>CBD</u> Hassan and Casaló Ariño 2016
Factors related to the criticism that triggered CBD	Blame attribution	Five interviewees reported that they incorporated attributions of blame in their evaluation of the criticism. One brand defender elaborated that it makes a large difference to him who is responsible for an incident: "is it self-inflicted, is it the fault of a third-party, is it force majeure?" (defender 6).
	Critic's credibility	Three participants conveyed that their engagement with CBD critiques was influenced by their evaluation of the critic's credibility. One participant reflected, "I have the feeling that it wouldn't have been on an equal footing and perhaps the consequences would have been too great if I had somehow tried to defend the company," (defender 3) highlighting the perceived risks of challenging esteemed critics.
	Severity of the criticized incident	Four brand defenders stated that the severity of the criticized failure influenced their defense behavior. One brand defender explained that he would certainly not have commented in the case of: "[...] accusation of a sexual abuse or something like that" (defender 3).
Factors related to the company	Brand's response to the criticism	Six brand defenders mentioned that the brand's response to the criticism was important to them. Five interviewees explained that a reaction of the brand would encourage them to defend the brand, whereas one defender did not feel the need to defend a brand after it issued a statement.
	Corporate social responsibility	Eight interviewees explained that the company's philosophy, such as transparency, as well as social and sustainable engagement influenced their CBD behavior: "[...] if I see that a brand is socially committed and it is still attacked, then I would defend the brand even more confidently" (defender 2).
		<u>Discipline of negative events in marketing</u> e.g., Coombs 2007; Grégoire and Fisher 2008; Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010; Kähr et al. 2016; Khamitov, Grégoire, and Suri 2020
		<u>CBD</u> Aljarah et al. 2022; Alnawas, Ghantous, and Hemsley-Brown 2023

Notes: The "Sources" column indicates sources from related research that demonstrate an influence of these contextual factors.

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**Web Appendix C: Study 3: Typology of Consumer Brand Defenders**

Table W5: Measures of the Defense Behavior and Context Factors for Descriptive Purposes of the Defender Types.

Constructs	Items resp. Choices	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Source
<b>Intuitive CBD</b>	My defense comment on <i>brand</i> was rather emotional. My defense comment on <i>brand</i> was rather impulsive.	.838	e.g., Rand et al. 2014
<b>Reflective CBD</b>	My defense comment on <i>brand</i> was rather rational. My defense comment on <i>brand</i> was rather factual.	.736	
<b>Frequency of CBD</b>	How often do you generally defend brands online? Rarer than once a year – More often than once a week	-	Own item
<b>Product knowledge</b>	I know a lot about <i>brand's</i> products / services. Strongly disagree – Strongly agree My knowledge of the <i>brand's</i> products / services of is... very small. – very large.	.911	Gürhan-Canli 2003
<b>Knowledge self-efficacy</b>	...I was confident that I could provide information that is valuable to other consumers. ...I was confident that I could provide information that is valuable to <i>brand</i> . ...I had the necessary expertise or experience respectively to provide valuable information to other consumers. ...I had the necessary expertise or experience respectively to provide valuable information for <i>brand</i> .	.811	Adapted from Cheung and Lee 2012
<b>Product involvement</b>	Because of my personal attitudes, I feel that the products / services of <i>brand</i> ought to be important to me. Because of my personal values, I feel that the products / services of <i>brand</i> ought to be important to me. The products / services of <i>brand</i> are very important to me personally. Compared with other products / services, the products / services of <i>brand</i> are important to me. I'm interested in the products / services of <i>brand</i> .	.922	Malär et al. 2011
<b>Self-threat</b>	...I felt personally attacked by the criticism of <i>brand</i> . ...I felt threatened by the criticism. ...the criticism made me unhappy. ...I felt challenged by the criticism. ...I felt uncomfortable due to the criticism. ...the criticism disturbed me.	.888	Adapted from White, Argo, and Sengupta 2012
<b>Type of failure: performance related</b>	In my view, the criticism was due to poor product or service quality (e.g., the product was defect, a complaint was not satisfactorily resolved).	-	Kähr et al. 2016
<b>Type of failure: value-based</b>	I think <i>brand</i> was criticized because its behavior contradicted the personal values of the critic (or violated the critic's personal values).		
<b>Blame attribution</b>	Overall, <i>brand</i> was responsible for the criticized incident. The criticized incident was the fault of <i>brand</i> . To what extent do you blame <i>brand</i> for what happened? Not at all - Absolutely	.945	Grégoire, Laufer, and Tripp 2010
<b>Failure severity</b>	The criticized incident caused... little problems. – big problems. little inconvenience. - big inconvenience. a slight aggravation. - a strong aggravation.	.893	Grégoire and Fisher 2008

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Constructs	Items resp. Choices	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Source
<b>Corporate social responsibility</b>	<i>Brand</i> is committed to society.	.866	Alvarado-Herrera et al. 2017
	<i>Brand</i> campaigns for the environment / environmental protection.		
	<i>Brand</i> is committed to social and cultural projects.		
	<i>Brand</i> behaves ethically correct.		
	<i>Brand</i> abides by the law.		
<b>Brand's response</b>	<i>Brand</i> operates transparently.	-	Adapted from Coombs 2007
	In what way did <i>brand</i> initially react to the criticism?		
	<i>Brand</i> apologized.		
	<i>Brand</i> defended itself.		
<b>Internet usage</b>	<i>Brand</i> did not react.	-	Own items
	I don't know.		
	How often do you use the Internet for the following activities?		
	Information search (e.g., about products or services)		
	News consumption (e.g., reading online newspapers)		
<b>Big Five</b>	Expression of opinion (e.g., writing comments)	.730	Schupp and Gerlitz 2014
	Entertainment (e.g., videos or music)		
	Surfing on social platforms (e.g., Facebook or Twitter)		
	I see myself as someone who...		
	...does a thorough job. (+, Conscientiousness)		
	...is talkative. (+, Extraversion)		
	...is sometimes rude to others. (-, Agreeableness)		
	...is original, comes up with new ideas. (+, Openness)		
	...worries a lot. (+, Neuroticism)		
	...is reserved, quiet. (-, Extraversion)		
	...has a forgiving nature. (+, Agreeableness)		
...tends to be lazy. (-, Conscientiousness)			
...is outgoing, sociable. (+, Extraversion)			
...values artistic, aesthetic experiences. (+, Openness)			
...gets nervous easily. (+, Neuroticism)			
...does everything efficiently. (+, Conscientiousness)			
...is considerate and kind to almost everyone. (+, Agreeableness)			
...has an active imagination. (+, Openness)			
...is relaxed, handles stress well. (-, Neuroticism)			

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Table W6: Discriminant Validity Assessment.

	AVE	Squared correlations for the pairs of constructs			
		Satisfaction	Attachment	Reciprocal Altruism	Equity Restoration
Brand Satisfaction	.754				
Brand Attachment	.722	.216			
Reciprocal Altruism	.617	.449	.321		
Equity Restoration	.561	.126	.001	.032	
Egoism	.534	.009	.162	.006	.088

Notes: AVE = average variance extracted.

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