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Each can help or hurt: Negative and positive word of mouth in social network brand communities

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ABSTRACT

Marketers aim to increase active participation in their brand communities on social networking sites to achieve favorable brand outcomes. This paper is the first to analyze the moderating influence of community type (i.e., whether members primarily strive for social versus functional goals) on the effect of (a) negative word of mouth (nWOM) and (b) positive word of mouth (pWOM) on brand community outcomes. Specifically, we analyzed the effects on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of social network brand communities (i.e., whether the community increases the likelihood that personal goals will be achieved) and active participation in these brand communities. The results of a field study and three laboratory experiments reveal that nWOM evokes more negative consumer reactions in social-goal communities than in functional-goal communities. However, pWOM evokes more positive consumer reactions in social-goal communities than in functional-goal communities. Overall, the results have important managerial implications for effectively managing the occurrence of nWOM and pWOM in social network brand communities.

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As of December 31, 2014, the social networking site Facebook had 1.39 billion monthly active users (Facebook.com, 2015a). Although Facebook and other social networking sites were initially launched to help users stay in touch with their friends, those users also seek to interact with brands. Increasingly, such users gather in groups centered on specific brands (Woisetschlager, Hartleb, & Blut, 2008; Zaglia, 2013)—so-called social network brand communities (SNBCs). In fact, many social network users currently connect with brands. For example, Coca Cola's SNBC on Facebook already has more than 93 million members (Facebook.com, 2015b).

Generally, online brand communities are groups of varying sizes that interact online to achieve their members' personal and shared goals and whose members are admirers of the brand that is the focus of the community (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Klein Pearo, 2004; Muñoz & O'Guinn, 2001). Specifically, in SNBCs, consumers can interact with a brand and other consumers online by posting user-generated content and "liking" or commenting on posts by both the brand's marketers and other community members. Because online brand communities, particularly SNBCs, provide a new opportunity to engage, collaborate, and advance relationships with potential and existing customers (Dholakia et al., 2004), the number of brand communities that brand managers have established on social networking sites has greatly increased during the last few years. Furthermore, prior research has shown that active participation in online brand communities and SNBCs, can lead to positive outcomes for a brand, such as by enhancing

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community members' affective brand commitment and their loyalty to and word of mouth communication about the brand (e.g., Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalíu, 2008; Dholakia & Durham, 2010; Thompson & Sinha, 2008). Thus, marketers need to ensure active participation in their SNBCs to derive positive outcomes for their brands.

SNBCs represent a channel for the exchange of user-generated content. Consequently, negative word of mouth (nWOM) and positive word of mouth (pWOM) are a regularly occurring phenomenon in such communities. nWOM (pWOM) are “any [...] negative [positive] statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions [...]” (see Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004, p. 39). Because a SNBC's content is visible to all its members, nWOM and pWOM in such communities (e.g., complaints about or recommendations for a brand and its products) determine these communities' character and may affect community members' perception of and active participation in the community.

At first sight it seems quite obvious how consumers react to nWOM and pWOM since prior empirical research has largely demonstrated the negative consequences of nWOM (see Chen & Lurie, 2013 for a review) and positive consequences of pWOM for product evaluations and sales (e.g., East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008).

However, literature on moderating effects under which these negative effects of nWOM and positive effects of pWOM might reverse—that is, conditions, under which nWOM might evoke positive effects and pWOM might evoke negative consumer reactions—is scarce for SNBCs and even beyond (first insights on understanding these reversed effects can be obtained by the work of Berger, Sorensen, and Rasmussen (2010) on how bad press helps unknown products as well as by the literature from persuasion research (e.g., Brehm, 1966; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). Unlike prior work, which focuses on how consumers' attitudes, evaluations, choice, or purchase are influenced by WOM (especially in the context of online product reviews (e.g., Moe & Schweidel, 2012) or regarding the question of how to manage brand posts successfully in SNBCs (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012)), this paper looks at how participation in SNBCs is influenced by WOM. Furthermore, this paper contributes to the literature by analyzing reversed effects of nWOM and pWOM, that is, conditions, under which nWOM might evoke positive effects and pWOM, might evoke negative consumer reactions.

In our approach, we assume that members of SNBCs act in a goal-directed fashion when they engage in these communities. Basically, we postulate that people participate in communities depending on whether their goals are satisfied within these communities. The relevance of goals as the key driver for actively participating in Web 2.0—in contrast, for example, to habitual behavior—has been shown in a number of empirical studies (e.g., Baldus, Voorhees, & Calantone, 2015; Dholakia et al., 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Leung, 2009; Ziegele et al., 2013). Specifically, based on the goal dependence of perception theory (e.g., Bruner & Goodman, 1947) and the uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974), we postulate that an increasing likelihood that members will be able to achieve their personal goals within the community increases the degree of active participation in SNBCs. Thus, this paper looks at the antecedents to goal instrumentality/participation in SNBCs, rather than outcomes, as other work focused on.

We further hypothesize that the type of community as well as the type of existing WOM in the community is crucial in this context. Specifically, we postulate that the effect of nWOM and pWOM in SNBCs on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of and actual participation in the community is dependent on the community type. The existing literature on the uses and gratifications of media and community participation research reveal that different types of community participation benefits motivate community members to participate (Dholakia et al., 2004; Katz et al., 1974; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Zaglia, 2013). We group these benefits into functional and social benefits and argue that when a SNBC predominantly provides the type of benefits that fulfill people's goals, people are likely to participate. Consequently, we distinguish two major types of SNBCs according to the predominant goals of their members: social-goal communities, which primarily provide social benefits and help their members to fulfill social goals (e.g., members primarily seek endorsement of their favorable attitudes toward a brand) and functional-goal communities, which primarily provide functional benefits and help their members to fulfill functional goals (e.g., members primarily seek objective and most credible information about a brand, which are not available outside the SNBC).

Against this background, this paper analyzes for the first time the moderating influence of community type (i.e., social versus functional-goal communities) on the effect of (a) nWOM and (b) pWOM on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of and actual participation in a community. The results of a field study and three laboratory experiments (using unconscious goal-priming techniques from the psychological literature, including the scrambled-sentence task and priming with pictures) reveal that community type moderates the effect of nWOM as well as pWOM on the perceived goal instrumentality of and actual participation in a community. Specifically, nWOM has a stronger negative effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of and participation in social-goal communities than in functional-goal communities. However, pWOM has a more positive effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of and participation in social-goal communities than in functional-goal communities. Thereby, this paper contributes to theory by providing (1) a new and tested proposition of how nWOM and pWOM can have different effects on participation in SNBCs, and (2) a tested argumentation for the mechanics of WOM in SNBCs, i.e. the relevance of goal instrumentality.

Overall, the results have important managerial implications for effectively managing the occurrence of nWOM and pWOM in SNBCs. For managers it is important to understand whether nWOM generally has indeed negative and pWOM positive effects or whether there are certain conditions under which nWOM (pWOM) might evoke even positive (negative) consumer reactions and what these conditions (i.e., moderators) are. This issue is of particular importance since nWOM and pWOM are becoming increasingly important through SNBCs where all WOM is visible to millions of other community members.

1. The moderating influence of community type on the effect of nWOM and pWOM on perceived goal instrumentality and participation

1.1. Theoretical background: The goal dependence of perception theory

Since the emergence of Web 2.0, scholars from several disciplines have investigated the reasons for consuming and producing user-generated content in online communities. Factors that were used to analyze these behaviors included, for example, personality traits, habits, social influence, values, or structural frameworks (e.g. Bishop, 2007; Leung, 2009; Preece, Nonnecke, & Andrews, 2004; Wise, Hamman, & Thorson, 2006; Ziegele et al., 2013). Particularly, in many studies, goals turned out to be a crucial variable in explaining active participation in online communities (Lampe, Wash, Velasquez, & Ozkaya, 2010; Leung, 2009; Smock, Ellison, Lampe, & Wohn, 2011; Ziegele et al., 2013). Similarly, in the field of marketing, the main reasons for engaging in brand communities and for the production of electronic word-of-mouth, such as gaining information or advice, self-expression, discussing with like-minded people, or helping other consumers, are goal-related (Baldus et al., 2015; Dholakia et al., 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Thereby, goals can serve as a tie or a common desire between active community members and act as “a drive that appears to be absent in the members who chose not to participate in online communities” (Bishop, 2007, p. 1882). Thus, striving for a specific objective is a key determinant that differentiates active from passive consumers. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to use goals and the instrumentality of communities as the theoretical framework for explaining active user participation.

In general, striving for goals is highly relevant to people's everyday actions, because goal fulfillment is a key prerequisite to personal well-being and life satisfaction (Emmons, 1986). As a result, people's personal goals and needs influence their perception of certain objects (Brendl, Markman, & Messner, 2003; Bruner & Goodman, 1947; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Lewin, 1935; Rosenberg, 1956). The existing literature has shown that consumers' perception of an object's goal instrumentality influences their attitudes toward that object, so attitudes toward goal-instrumental objects are more positive than attitudes toward goal-hindering objects (e.g., Ferguson & Bargh, 2004). Therefore, people will approach goal-instrumental objects more readily, whereas they will avoid objects that act as obstacles to goal fulfillment and search for alternative objects that are more likely to fulfill their goals (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008).

The uses and gratifications theory, as applied in the context of the perception and use of media, confirms the validity of the goal dependence of perception theory. According to the uses and gratifications theory, people choose media in a goal-directed fashion to fulfill particular needs; that is, the decision to choose a particular type of media is influenced not only by the specific attributes of different types of media, but also by the personal goals and needs that people seek to fulfill through the use of that media (Katz et al., 1974). Prior research has applied this theory to explain both the use of the Internet and consumer participation in online communities (e.g., Dholakia et al., 2004; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Nambisan & Baron, 2007).

Thus, we infer that the decision to participate actively in a SNBC is dependent on community members' perception of how the SNBC helps consumers to fulfill their goals. Community members perceive positive goal instrumentality of a SNBC when that SNBC can help them in satisfying their personal goals. Conversely, community members perceive negative goal instrumentality when the SNBC either cannot assist or actively hinders them in the achievement of their personal goals. Thus, community members choose SNBCs with perceived positive goal instrumentality for active participation, whereas they do not participate actively in SNBCs with negative perceived goal instrumentality.

In summary, based on existing research on both the goal dependence of perception theory and uses and gratifications theory as well as on research findings on online communities and eWOM, we suggest that community members' perception of a community's goal instrumentality is a key determinant of their active participation behavior in a SNBC.

1.2. Hypotheses development

A key characteristic of SNBCs is that communication does not take place face to face but is solely based on users' posts within the community. These posts are “the primary formative and shaping force for [SNBCs'] evolution, growth, and sustenance” (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002, p. 4). Thus, user-generated content characterizes SNBCs, and brand managers cannot control communication about a brand in a SNBC as intensively as they can in offline communications. As a result, both nWOM and pWOM about a brand are regularly occurring phenomena in a SNBC. Because a SNBC's content is visible to all its members, we postulate that nWOM and pWOM each affect community members' perceived goal instrumentality of and active participation in the community. Furthermore, based on the goal dependence of perception theory (Lewin, 1935), we postulate that the effect of nWOM as well as pWOM on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of and active participation in a SNBC is dependent on community type; that is, the effect of nWOM and pWOM depends on the specific goal sought by a SNBC's members.

Research on the uses and gratifications theory and on consumer community participation identifies a core set of benefits that motivate people to use media and, in particular, to participate in communities (Baldus et al., 2015; Dholakia et al., 2004; Katz et al., 1974; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Zaglia, 2013). We group these goals into functional and social goals and, based on these two primary types of goals, we distinguish two major types of SNBCs: social-goal communities, which primarily provide social benefits and help their members to fulfill social goals, and functional-goal communities, which primarily provide functional benefits and help their members to fulfill functional goals.

On the one hand, community members seek social benefits and the opportunity to share their passion for the object of the community (Dholakia et al., 2004; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Zaglia, 2013). Social benefits primarily include social enhancement and personal integrative benefits (e.g., social support and approval of other members), which community members achieve by

establishing and maintaining contact with other admirers of the brand (Dholakia et al., 2004). The key benefit provided by such a social-goal community should be an intensive interaction with like-minded people who are passionate about the brand and other members' social support and approval (Dholakia et al., 2004; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Zaglia, 2013). Thus, social-goal community members should be primarily interested in positive communication (i.e., pWOM) about the brand on which their community focuses since nWOM might evoke high levels of cognitive dissonance (i.e., members' passion for the brand conflicting with other members' nWOM about the brand). Thus, nWOM does not contribute to SNBC members' personal goal of meeting like-minded others passionate about the brand, but rather increases community members' doubts about being among true brand admirers and the infallibility of the brand. Thus, we postulate that in this type of community, nWOM reduces community members' perceived goal instrumentality of and active participation in their SNBC.

On the other hand, community members seek functional benefits within communities (Dholakia et al., 2004; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Zaglia, 2013). Functional benefits describe the informational value derived from obtaining other members' opinions and sharing information to accomplish specific tasks (e.g., making a purchase decision; Dholakia et al., 2004). Community members who strive for functional goals are primarily interested in functional benefits, such as sharing and receiving product- or brand-related information among community members, which might not be available or comparably credible outside the SNBC. Hence, a key benefit provided by a functional-goal community is to obtain more objective and valuable information about a brand generated through the exchange of knowledge (Dholakia et al., 2004; Nambisan & Baron, 2007; Zaglia, 2013). Available information about a brand outside the SNBC primarily consists of firms' marketing communication about a brand (e.g., television spots, print advertisements, homepage), which is mostly positive. Furthermore, negative information about a brand is considered as more credible inside the SNBC than outside of it, as the former comes at a higher percentage from trustworthy brand fans or experts (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009; Stuart, Teng, Wei Khong, Wei Goh, & Chong, 2014). Reversely, positive information provided by brand fans can be considered as less trustworthy in functional-goal SNBCs. Thus, functional-goal community members should be primarily interested in negative brand-related communication since such credible information is mostly not available outside the SNBC and hence provides them with more objective and valuable information about the brand on which their community centers. Since nWOM contributes to SNBC members' personal goal of receiving more objective information about the brand, consumer reactions to nWOM in functional-goal communities should be positive and hence less negative as in social-goal communities.

Overall, this leads to our first three hypotheses:

H1. *nWOM has a more negative effect on community members' active participation in terms of (a) the number of "likes" and (b) the number of comments posted in the community in social-goal than in functional-goal communities.*

H2. *nWOM has a more negative effect on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of a SNBC in social-goal than in functional-goal communities.*

H3. *The interaction between the occurrence of nWOM (i.e., no versus yes) and community type (i.e., social versus functional goal) on community members' active participation in a SNBC is mediated by their perceived goal instrumentality of the SNBC.*

As outlined, in social-goal SNBCs members primarily seek endorsement of their favorable attitudes toward a brand. Thus, they are interested in an intensive interaction with like-minded people who are passionate about the brand and hence a positive communication about the brand (i.e., pWOM) within the community.

However, in functional-goal SNBCs, community members primarily seek to obtain more objective information about a brand. Since available information about a brand outside the SNBC primarily consists of firms' marketing communication about a brand and is hence mostly positive, functional-goal community members should be more interested in negative brand-related communication to receive a more objective impression of the brand. Since pWOM mostly repeats the information which is already available outside the community in firms' advertising messages, etc., it sparsely contributes to SNBC members' personal goal of receiving more objective information about the brand. Thus, consumer reactions to pWOM in functional-goal communities should be less positive as in social-goal communities and might be even negative.

Overall, this leads to further three hypotheses.

H4. *pWOM has a more positive effect on community members' active participation in terms of (a) the number of "likes" and (b) the number of comments posted in the community in social-goal than in functional-goal communities.*

H5. *pWOM has a more positive effect on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of a SNBC in social-goal than in functional-goal communities.*

H6. *The interaction between the occurrence of pWOM (i.e., no versus yes) and community type (i.e., social versus functional goal) on community members' active participation in a SNBC is mediated by their perceived goal instrumentality of the SNBC.*

Fig. 1 summarizes our conceptual framework for the moderating influence of community type on the effect of (a) nWOM and (b) pWOM on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of and active participation in a SNBC. In Study 1, we undertook a field study to test H1 and H4, examining the effects of nWOM and pWOM on community members' active participation in a SNBC. In Study 2 and Study 3, we conducted two laboratory experiments to test H2, H3, H5, and H6, examining the effects of nWOM and pWOM on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of a SNBC. In Study 4, we provide a robustness check of our previous findings and of our priming method.

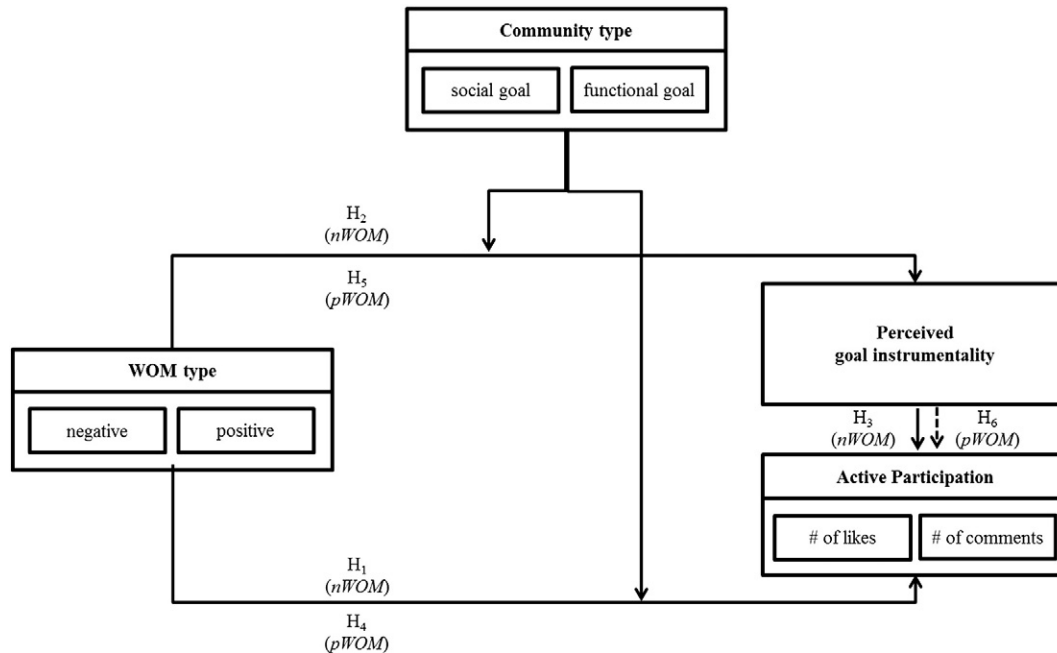


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

2. Study 1: The moderating influence of community type on the effect of nWOM and pWOM on active community participation

2.1. Procedure

We conducted Study 1 to analyze H_1 and H_4 , i.e., the effect of (a) nWOM and (b) pWOM on community members' active participation in SNBCs using field data. Specifically, we collected field data from various Facebook SNBCs to conduct a quantitative content analysis. We chose the selected Facebook SNBCs from a SNBC popularity ranking based on the number of fans (i.e., community members) from the online analytics platform Socialbakers.com, which gathers and provides information and statistics on key figures related to company-managed social media. From this ranking, we selected for our data collection and analysis the largest Facebook SNBCs (in terms of number of fans) that generally allowed their users to post both positive and negative word of mouth on their walls. Furthermore, the selected SNBCs should also have a substantial number of nWOM and pWOM and neutral posts on their walls for practicality reasons since we had to code all the data manually and hence strived for SNBCs which increased our coding efficiency (i.e., provided a high number of posts within one SNBC).

In total, our sample included 30 Facebook SNBCs from various industries (see Web Appendix-W1 for a list of all 30 Facebook fan pages).

2.2. Data collection

We collected data from January 15 to March 15, 2013, resulting in 60 days of data collection for each Facebook SNBC in our sample. In total, we collected 58,958 user posts, which were classified independently by two coders (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .96$) as either nWOM, pWOM, or neutral WOM. Additionally, two coders classified the 30 SNBCs independently as either social- or functional-goal communities (Krippendorff's $\alpha = .80$). We provided definitions for the coders of the social-goal community ("A community where passionate users of the brand and people passionate about the brand seek for endorsement of their positive attitudes toward the brand") and functional-goal community ("A community where users of the brand and people interested in the brand and its products who are eager for knowledge meet to exchange questions and answers and receive objective information about the brand which is not available outside the community") both corresponding with our theoretical framework. For both classification procedures, we integrated a third coder in case of discrepancies. For the final analysis, we chose the codification on which two coders agreed. For each of the user posts, we counted the corresponding number of "likes" and reply comments posted.

Based on this data collection, we calculated the daily number of nWOM, pWOM, and total word of mouth posts along with the daily number of corresponding "likes" and comments for each of the 30 Facebook SNBCs in our sample. The sum of "likes" and comments was used as a marker for community members' participation in each Facebook SNBC. Because we calculated the dependent measures on a daily basis for each of the 30 Facebook SNBCs, we had 1800 cases for our analysis (i.e., 30 SNBCs with 60 days of observation each).

Based on our theoretical framework, we assumed that the number of nWOM per day has a less negative effect on community members' active participation in a SNBC (i.e., the daily number of "likes" and comments) in functional-goal communities than in

Table 1

Results of static panel data regressions with random effects estimator, Study 1.

Dependent variable: Participation in SNBC (sum of “likes” and comments in response to WOM)								
Variables	Community type dummy: Functional = 0				Community type dummy: Social = 0			
	β	z-values	β	z-values	β	z-values	β	z-values
Constant	41.82	0.33	26.88	0.21	294.28	2.05*	294.03	2.01*
nWOM volume	8.64	7.54**	9.60	6.87**	1.15	0.56	1.65	0.79
pWOM volume	0.26	0.67	0.73	1.32	12.70	15.71**	12.70	15.72**
Community type (dummy)	252.46	1.33	267.16	1.38	−252.46	−1.33	−267.16	−1.38
nWOM volume × Community type	−7.48	−3.17**	−7.95	−3.32**	7.48	3.17**	7.98	3.32**
pWOM volume × Community type	12.44	13.83**	11.97	12.39**	−12.44	−13.83**	−11.97	−12.39**
nWOM volume × pWOM volume	–	–	−0.01	−1.21	–	–	−0.01	−1.21

First model: R^2 overall: .52 (within: .14); Wald χ^2 (5): 332.35 ($p > \chi^2 < .001$); second model: R^2 overall: .51 (within: .14); Wald χ^2 (6): 332.66 ($p > \chi^2 < .001$); number of observations: 1800, number of groups: 30; ** and * denote significance at the 1% and 5% levels, respectively.

social-goal communities. We further postulated that the number of pWOM per day has a less positive effect on community members' active participation in a SNBC (i.e., the daily number of “likes” and comments) in functional-goal communities than in social-goal communities.

2.3. Results

Due to the time series nature of our data, we conducted a panel data regression analysis to assess the effect of nWOM and pWOM on community members' active participation in Facebook SNBCs (see Table 1). Specifically, we ran a GLS random effects model with the SNBCs as the random effect to take account of the heterogeneity of the SNBCs and to be able to use time-invariant factor community type in the analysis. We tested the effect of number of pWOM, number of nWOM, community type and the interactions between the community type and pWOM respectively nWOM on participation. As our hypotheses target a comparison between social and functional communities, we conducted two GLS random effects models with reversed dummy variables for community type (Aiken & West, 1991). The following equation presents our random effects model for the participation volume $Participation_{it}$ of SNBC i on day t for all i ($= 1, \dots, 30$) and t ($= 1, \dots, 60$):

$$Participation_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 nWOM_{it} + \beta_2 pWOM_{it} + \beta_3 CommunityType_i + \beta_4 nWOM_{it} \times CommunityType_i + \beta_5 pWOM_{it} \times CommunityType_i + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

$nWOM_{it}$ and $pWOM_{it}$ are the number of nWOM and pWOM of SNBC i on day t , $CommunityType_i$ determines whether the SNBC i is a social-goal or functional-goal community, and β_1 through β_5 are regression estimates. u_{it} presents the error term which is assumed not to be correlated with the predictors. The results for Wald χ^2 (Wald χ^2 (5) = 332.35, $p < .001$) and the overall R^2 being 0.52 (within- R^2 is 0.14) indicate an acceptable model fit. Table 1 contains the results of our analysis.

The interaction between community type and nWOM as well as the interaction between community type and pWOM are significant, showing that the effect of pWOM and nWOM on active community participation is dependent on community type ($\beta_4 = |7.48|$, $p < .001$; $\beta_5 = |12.44|$, $p < .001$). In social-goal communities (when the community type dummy is functional = 1), the amount of pWOM had a significantly positive influence on active community participation ($\beta_2 = 12.70$, $p < .001$). In contrast, in functional-goal communities (when the community type dummy is social = 1), pWOM had no significant effect on community members' participation ($\beta_2 = 0.26$, $p = .50$). Reversely, the amount nWOM had no significant effect on community participation in social-goal communities ($\beta_1 = 1.15$, $p = .58$), while it had a significant positive impact on community members' participation in functional-goal communities ($\beta_1 = 8.64$, $p < .001$). Therefore, we confirmed H1 and H4: on the one hand, nWOM has a positive effect on community members' participation in functional-goal, while it does not increase participation in social-goal communities. On the other hand, pWOM has a positive effect on community members' participation in social-goal communities, but no effect in functional-goal communities.⁴

In the next step, we added an interaction term of nWOM and pWOM to our model to gain a deeper understanding about the mechanisms of both types of WOM (Wald χ^2 (6) = 332.66, $p < .001$ overall $R^2 = 0.51$, within- R^2 is 0.14). The interaction term of nWOM and pWOM had no significant effect on community members' participation ($\beta_6 = -.01$, $p = .22$), which again supports our main assumption and theoretical framework, that pWOM as well as nWOM are primarily moderated by the community type they are taken place and not by the opposing WOM type.

⁴ These effects were also mostly found for separate dependent variables, i.e., for the amount of “likes” and comments in response to WOM discretely. Specifically, pWOM has a positive effect on user participation in terms of both “likes” and comments in social-goal communities, but no effect in functional-goal communities. Furthermore, nWOM has a more negative effect on community members' participation in terms of comments in social-goal than in functional-goal communities. However, merely the interaction between nWOM and community type for “likes” was not significant (see Web Appendix-W2 for detailed results). Hence, we still consider our hypotheses sustainable, especially since we consider comments rather than “likes” as a sounder, more universal and more relevant indicator for community members' participation.

Table 2

Results of additional static panel data regressions with random effects estimator, Study 1.

Dependent variable: Variables	Participation in SNBC in response to nWOM				Participation in SNBC in response to pWOM			
	Community type: Functional = 0		Community type: Social = 0		Community type: Functional = 0		Community type: Social = 0	
	β	z-values	β	z-values	β	z-values	β	z-values
Constant	1.90	0.23	−10.28	−1.04	26.48	0.22	295.69	2.10*
nWOM volume	8.15	24.56**	10.62	14.62**	1.52	1.42	−10.10	−5.24**
pWOM volume	−0.66	−5.63**	0.07	0.31	0.97	2.65**	13.13	17.41**
Community type (dummy)	−12.18	−0.94	12.18	0.94	269.21	1.44	−269.21	−1.44
nWOM volume \times Community type	2.46	3.08**	−2.46	−3.08**	−11.62	−5.27**	11.62	5.27**
pWOM volume \times Community type	0.73	2.86**	−0.73	−2.86**	12.16	14.49**	−12.16	−14.49**
R ² overall	.62				.52			
R ² within	.22				.14			
Wald chi ² (5)	877.34**				330.98**			

Number of observations: 1800, number of groups: 30; ** and * denote significance at the 1% and 5% levels, respectively.

In order to receive further diagnostic information about the interaction between pWOM and nWOM we complemented our model by using two other, more differentiated dependent variables: participation in response to pWOM respectively to nWOM. Thereby, we could analyze how pWOM can influence community members' participation to nWOM posts and how nWOM can have an effect on community participation to pWOM. Again, we used the same independent variables in the same equation as in the analysis before. The models again show an acceptable model performance (overall $R^2 = .62$ resp. $.52$, Wald $\chi^2(5) = 877.34$ resp. 330.98 , both $p < .001$, see Table 2).

First of all, the results show that a higher amount of nWOM evokes increasing reactions in both functional-goal and social-goal communities ($\beta_{1\text{functional}} = 8.15$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{1\text{social}} = 10.62$, $p < .001$). Similarly, a higher amount of pWOM also leads to more responses in functional-goal communities as well as in social-goal communities ($\beta_{2\text{functional}} = 0.97$, $p < .001$; $\beta_{2\text{social}} = 13.13$, $p < .001$). This occurs unsurprisingly, as the respective dependent variables require nWOM/pWOM and at least one form of reaction to a posting seems plausible. The interaction between pWOM and nWOM becomes clearer when we look at the crossed values of reactions to each WOM type. Specifically, in social-goal communities, a higher amount of nWOM significantly was able to decrease user reactions to pWOM ($\beta_1 = -10.10$, $p < .001$). However, a higher amount of pWOM did not affect community members' responses to nWOM significantly ($\beta_2 = 0.07$, $p = .76$). In functional-goal communities, a higher amount of pWOM decreases community members' responses to nWOM ($\beta_2 = -0.66$, $p < .001$). Though, a higher amount of nWOM did not affect reactions to pWOM significantly ($\beta_1 = 1.52$, $p = .16$). Therefore, contradicting the non-significant effect in our previous model, interactions between pWOM and nWOM do take place in both community types, however, only in the context of a certain WOM type respectively. These analyses indicate that, in both community types, not only single user postings but the total appearance of a community concerning content and valence of WOM determines community members' participation. Besides, these results again confirm our hypotheses as pWOM and nWOM act differently depending on community type.

3. Study 2: The moderating influence of community type on the effect of nWOM on perceived goal instrumentality

3.1. Procedure

To empirically assess H2 and H3 we recruited $N = 328$ respondents (average age: 35.65 years, 40.24% male) through a German online panel. We randomly assigned each respondent to one condition in a 2 (nWOM occurrence: no versus yes) $\times 2$ (community type: social versus functional goal) between-subject design (see below for a detailed description of the conditions).

3.2. Priming

Because the second factor of the experiment describes the community type (i.e., the predominant goals of SNBC members), we had to ensure that the respondents were predominantly striving for the proper goal with respect to the experimental group to which they were randomly assigned. This was necessary in order to ensure that the respondents were unconsciously striving for the same goal that community members would be predominantly striving for in the respective community type in a real life setting as we argue that people become community members only in SNBCs that fulfill their goals, i.e., that are goal-instrumental. To avoid potential experimenter demand effects, which may arise through conscious priming techniques (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977), we used two unconscious goal-priming techniques in our study to manipulate the respondents' SNBC-related goals: the scrambled-sentence task and the priming-with-pictures technique. The literature has frequently applied both techniques to achieve unconscious goal priming (e.g. Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996, Cesario, Plaks, & Higgins, 2006, Fitzsimons, Chartrand, & Fitzsimons, 2008, Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008, Pendry & Carrick, 2001, Shantz & Latham, 2009).

The scrambled-sentence task is an implicit method that helps to activate knowledge structures that are uniquely associated with a respondent's goals for a short period of time (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Srull & Wyer, 1979). The method requires each respondent to build a certain number of complete, grammatically correct sentences from sets of different words. These sets of words

each contain synonyms of the goals, motives, or values that should be primed. In general, the sets contain five words each, of which the respondents have to choose only four to build a complete, grammatically correct sentence. As a result, the built sentences contain one priming word that is associated with the goal that is being primed (e.g. Bargh et al., 1996, Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008).

To strengthen the effect of the scrambled-sentence task, we decided to combine it with the unconscious goal-priming technique of priming with pictures. Unconscious priming with pictures can be conducted either by directly presenting the priming picture to the respondent or by integrating the picture into the experiment in a way that causes the respondent to only notice the picture unconsciously (e.g. Cesario et al., 2006, Pendry & Carrick, 2001). Based on the existing goal-priming literature, we chose an unconscious presentation of the pictures (e.g. Cesario et al., 2006, Pendry & Carrick, 2001).

Additionally, we needed to ensure that we would be able to check the success of the goal-priming techniques implicitly. Therefore, we had to integrate manipulation checks into our study. In addition to unconscious goal-priming techniques, we integrated an implicit-test-of-memory technique to check whether the manipulation was successful. We decided to implement a word-stem completion task, which is an implicit-test-of-memory technique that is frequently applied in the literature, in which respondents are required to complete a series of word stems to the words that first enter their mind (e.g. DeWall & Bushman, 2009, Tiggemann, Hargreaves, Polivy, & McFarlane, 2004). The word stems that the respondents must complete can create either a priming or a non-priming word. For example, if we were to prime people for happiness, we would provide respondents with the word stem “Ha”. Respondents could then complete the word stem to the priming word “happy” or to a non-priming word such as “hand” or “hard”. If the previous priming was successful, respondents will complete more word stems to a priming word than a non-priming word.

3.3. Material

Because the second factor of the experiment describes the predominant goals of SNBC members, we began the questionnaire with the unconscious goal-priming and implicit-test-of-memory techniques described above. First, we introduced the respondents to the upcoming task, and then they had to complete the scrambled-sentence task. Specifically, we asked respondents to build 12 sentences from an equal amount of word sets. Relying on the scrambled-sentence task literature (e.g., Bargh et al., 1996; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008), each of our sets contained five words (including one priming word), of which only four were allowed to be chosen to build a complete, grammatically correct sentence. The priming word had to be included in the sentence to make it grammatically correct. Depending on the experimental group, respondents were either confronted with 12 word sets priming for social goals (e.g., we, so, excited, machine, are—“*we are so excited*”) or 12 word sets priming for functional goals (e.g., know, everything, should, we, machine—“*we should know everything*”; see Web Appendix-W3 for the word sets).⁵

Following the existing literature (e.g., Cesario et al., 2006; Pendry & Carrick, 2001), we supraliminally exposed respondents to priming pictures by integrating those pictures into both the background of the scrambled-sentence task instructions and the background of the task itself. We integrated one socially priming picture for the social-goal experimental group and one functionally priming picture for the functional-goal experimental group. The priming picture for each experimental group displayed a collage of miniature pictures representative of the goal that was supposed to be primed in that group (see Web Appendix-W3 for the priming pictures).

Following these unconscious goal-priming techniques, we introduced respondents to the word-stem completion task and then asked them to complete the word stems for a word that first entered their minds. This task was included to verify a successful goal priming. We designed the word-stem completion task according to Tiggemann et al. (2004). First, we searched a thesaurus for synonyms for key priming words for each of the two experimental groups, which resulted in $N = 50$ words (i.e., 25 social and 25 functional words) that could be completed to either a priming or a non-priming word. To reduce the number of word stems to a reasonable number, we conducted a quantitative pretest in which we asked $N = 169$ respondents to complete the word-stem completion task on those 50 word stems. For inclusion in the main study, the word stems had to fulfill five criteria: 1) at least one respondent should have completed the word stem to a priming word; 2) fewer than 50% of all respondents should have completed the word stem to the priming word; 3) fewer than 50% of all respondents should have completed the word stem to the same non-priming word; 4) the number of incomplete word stems had to be lower than 18; and 5) two independent coders had to agree on whether the word stem was completed to a priming or a non-priming word (Tiggemann et al., 2004). After applying these criteria to the pre-test data, we were able to choose 10 social word stems out of 16 pre-tested and valid social word stems and 10 functional words stems out of 15 pre-tested and valid functional word stems for use in the main study (see Web Appendix-W3 for a list of the selected word stems).

Goal activation and its validation are often indistinctly differentiated from other priming principles such as semantic priming or process priming (Förster, Liberman, & Friedman, 2007). To ensure that our priming techniques aimed for goal priming rather than

⁵ Our SST included 100% prime words, whereas most SST in other studies only used up to almost 90% prime words (e.g., Chartrand & Bargh, 1996: 13 out of 15; Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & de Groot, 2001: 30 out of 37). We used the 100% version to assure effective priming in the sometimes-intricate environment of an online survey. In order to ensure that this priming operationalization did not bias our results, we replicated Study 2 with a SST that included 75% prime words (12 out of 16; Pre-study B). Therefore, we recruited $N = 304$ respondents (average age: 41.87 years, 57.6% male) through a German online panel. We again found a significant interaction between the occurrence of nWOM and community type on the magnitude of community members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($F(1, 287) = 2.91, p = .09$; see Web Appendix-W6). For social-goal communities, nWOM has a negative effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($t(149) = -1.50, p = .07$). Conversely, for functional-goal communities, nWOM has no significant effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($t(138) = .95, p = .35$). Consequently, we assume that a goal priming operationalization with 100% prime words did not bias the results.

for other priming principles and to make sure that WSCT is a proper unconscious manipulation check that did not further influence our respondents, we verified our methods by a pre-study A. Goal activation can be confirmed with a number of effects that distinguishes it from other methods. Specifically, the instrumental value of objects that can help achieving the primed goal is considered to be higher by goal-primed persons than by other persons (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004; Förster et al., 2007). For example, the value of the object “supermarket” should increase in the case of being primed with the goal “satisfy hunger”, because the former can help achieving the latter. This effect would not be expected due to semantic priming, as this is a between both concepts and the favorable evaluation has not necessarily been existent in the associative network before (Förster et al., 2007). In an empirical test, this evaluation can be assessed implicitly or explicitly (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004). We chose this effect and the explicit method as a potential test for our goal activation because of its efficient operationalization and its reasonable robustness. Consequently, we conducted a pre-study A with a convenience sample of $N = 312$, (average age: 42.42 years, 57.69% male) recruited through a German online panel. We randomly assigned each respondent to one condition in a 2 (priming: social versus functional goal) \times 2 (WSCT: yes or no) between-subject design. The respondents were asked to complete the respective priming task as outlined above and, depending on the experimental condition, the WSCT. After this, they received a list of 10 objects and were asked to indicate the subjective instrumentality of these items on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = not at all favorable, 7 = very favorable). The list included three objects that were a useful mean for each primed goal pursuit, and four neutral objects. As suggested by Förster et al. (2007, p. 216), we chose objects that were not ambiguous and not semantically associated with the goals and the words in the precedent tasks, e.g. sports club as a social-goal mean and encyclopedia as a functional-goal mean (see complete list in Web Appendix-W5. Although this explicit evaluation method is a proper check for goal priming and could be included in our main study, we preferred using the unconscious WSCT as we assume that this explicit evaluation method is more able to affect the degree of goal priming.

The results of pre-study A confirmed the functionality of both our priming techniques and the manipulation check. First, the respondents in the social-goal condition evaluated the social objects significantly as more favorable than those in the functional-goal condition did ($M_{\text{social}} = 4.39$, $SD = 1.39$; $M_{\text{functional}} = 4.09$; $SD = 1.45$; $t(310) = 1.88$, $p = .03$). Conversely, respondents in the functional-goal condition evaluated the functional objects as significantly more favorable than social-goal respondents did ($M_{\text{functional}} = 5.23$, $SD = 1.14$; $M_{\text{social}} = 4.84$; $SD = 1.28$; $t(310) = 3.60$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the evaluation results confirmed that WSCT was a significant indicator of successful priming. Specifically, the number of correctly identified words in the WSCT correlated significantly with the evaluation of the respective objects within each priming group ($r_{\text{social}} = .18$, $p = .07$; $r_{\text{functional}} = .24$, $p = .02$). Moreover, in both priming groups, the respondents in the WSCT-condition did not evaluate the respective objects differently than those in the no-WSCT-condition (social goal: $M_{\text{WSCT}} = 4.44$, $SD = 1.43$; $M_{\text{noWSCT}} = 4.36$; $SD = 1.36$; $t(157) = .35$, $p = .73$; functional goal: $M_{\text{WSCT}} = 5.30$, $SD = 1.10$; $M_{\text{noWSCT}} = 5.16$; $SD = 1.18$; $t(151) = .77$, $p = .45$), indicating that WSCT did not affect goal priming.

Following the unconscious goal-priming and implicit-test-of-memory techniques in our main study, we exposed respondents to the experimental stimulus. Because Facebook is the largest social networking site worldwide and we expected familiarity with Facebook and its brand communities to be reasonably high, we selected BMW's Facebook SNBC for our setting. Additionally, we chose BMW's Facebook SNBC due to BMW's high level of brand awareness and familiarity in Germany.

Initially, every respondent in both conditions received a picture showing the top layout of an artificial BMW Facebook SNBC. Each stimulus consisted of a picture showing the top layout of an artificial BMW Facebook SNBC, which we designed according to BMW's real-life, official Facebook SNBC as well as a corresponding social or functional welcome message (see both cover pages in Web Appendix-W4). Depending on whether respondents were assigned to the social-goal experimental group or to the functional-goal experimental group, respondents only saw either the stimulus with a “social” photo and a “social” welcoming message or the one with a “functional” photo and a “functional” welcoming message. On the pages that followed, all respondents received abridged postings on an artificial BMW Facebook SNBC. Depending on the experimental condition, respondents received either a screenshot of four positive and two neutral word of mouth postings (i.e., no nWOM condition) or a screenshot of the same positive and neutral word of mouth postings supplemented by six nWOM postings (i.e., nWOM condition).⁶ We chose the positive, neutral, and negative word of mouth postings from real Facebook SNBCs so that they were representative of typical SNBC communication. We represented positive word of mouth by postings such as “I love BMW”, neutral word of mouth by postings such as “Does anyone have any experience with the BMW 125i Coupé? What can you tell me about its configuration, extras, safety and value for money?”, and nWOM by postings such as “BMW?? No, thank you!!! Compared to your foreign competitors, your prices are way too high, although from an objective perspective you are not that much better than they are. I am not willing to pay this much for your products.” See Web Appendix-W4 for the stimuli for both experimental conditions.

Overall, we aimed to establish a research design that minimized potential demand artifacts, that is, the respondents were unaware of the purpose of the study, they received a set of information that was constant across all conditions, and it was not evident to them which piece of information was the most relevant when they read the experimental manipulations (Shimp, Hyatt, & Snyder, 1991).

⁶ A pre-test with regularly Facebook users revealed that a Facebook fanpage merely containing neutral WOM was not perceived as realistic since either some nWOM or pWOM comments normally occur on an average Facebook fanpage. Thus, we decided to implement some pWOM comments as well to achieve high levels of stimuli realism. However, this should have no bias on our results since we still isolate the effect of nWOM because the four pWOM and two neutral WOM comments appear in the no-nWOM as well as nWOM conditions.

3.4. Measures

Following the experimental manipulation, we measured the perceived goal instrumentality construct on a 7-point Likert scale so that a higher score indicated a more favorable rating (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). Respondents indicated their perceived goal instrumentality of the community on two items which we derived from the “perceived instrumentality” measure from Rosenberg (1956) and adapted to our research context: “Overall, a Facebook fan page such as this one for BMW would meet the expectations that I have formed based on content exchanged on this type of page” and “I think that I would find what I am looking for in Facebook fan pages on this particular BMW Facebook fan page.” Furthermore, respondents indicated their intention to participate in the community on a two-item Likert scale adapted from Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002): “I intend to read and/or write postings on this particular BMW Facebook fan page” and “I intend to write postings on this particular BMW Facebook fan page together with other group members.” Finally, we measured respondents’ brand attachment to BMW on a four-item Likert scale based on Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010): “I feel personally connected to the brand BMW”, “I feel emotionally bonded to the brand BMW”, “The brand BMW means a lot to me” and “BMW is an important part of me”.

The multi-item measures achieved satisfying levels of reliability and convergent validity (Cronbach’s $\alpha > .86$ with $>87.94\%$ average variance extracted). We further used a one-item Likert scale adapted from Mittal (1995) to measure respondents’ involvement with automobiles: “I am highly interested in automobiles” (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). We also used a one-item Likert scale adapted from Kent and Allen (1994) to measure consumers’ familiarity with BMW: “I am very familiar with BMW” (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). To check the success of our intended manipulation, we measured the perception of nWOM within the community using two items: “On BMW’s Facebook fan page, BMW’s products were criticized” and “On BMW’s Facebook fan page, negative comments were made about the BMW brand and its products” (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). Finally, we measured consumers’ weekly Facebook usage behavior with one item: “I usually use Facebook X days a week.” All the items included a no-choice answer option.

3.5. Results

The data confirmed our intended manipulation with respect to community type. The respondents correctly identified more functional words in the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought functional benefits from a SNBC ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.66$) compared to the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought social benefits from a SNBC ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.31$; $t(309.41) = -8.99$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the respondents correctly identified more social words in the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought social benefits from a SNBC ($M = 2.41$, $SD = 1.78$) compared to the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought functional benefits from a SNBC ($M = 1.19$, $SD = 1.08$; $t(268.91) = 7.53$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, the data confirmed our intended manipulation regarding the occurrence of nWOM. In the no-nWOM condition, the respondents indicated lower values regarding the perception of nWOM within the SNBC ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.60$ for the first item and $M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.48$ for the second item) than in the nWOM condition ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.83$ for the first item and $M = 6.06$, $SD = 1.32$ for the second item; $t(295) = 15.50$, $p < .001$ for the first item and $t(278.56) = 24.68$, $p < .001$ for the second item).

Fig. 2 shows the mean values for perceived goal instrumentality for each experimental group.

We used an ANOVA procedure to test hypotheses H2 and H3. We found a significant interaction between the occurrence of nWOM (i.e., no versus yes) and community type (i.e., social versus functional goal) on the magnitude of community members’

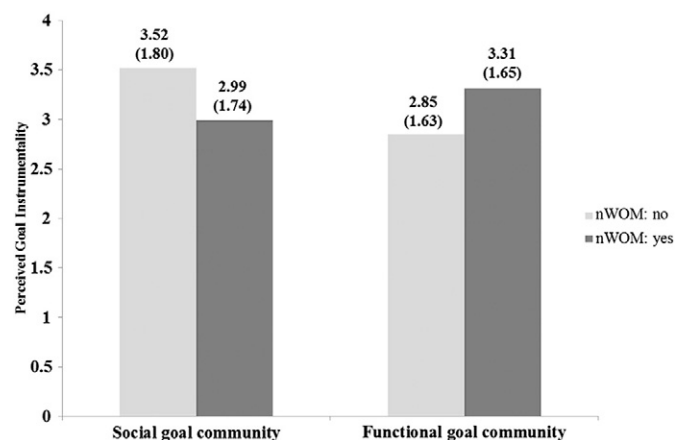


Fig. 2. Mean values and standard deviations for perceived goal instrumentality from Study 2.

perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($F(1, 308) = 6.71, p = .01$). Hence, community type moderates the effect of nWOM in a SNBC on the perception of the community's goal instrumentality. For social-goal communities, nWOM has a negative effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($t(157) = -1.91, p = .03$). Conversely, for functional-goal communities, nWOM has even a positive effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($t(151) = 1.76, p = .04$). Thus, in support of H2, nWOM has a more negative effect on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of a SNBC in social-goal than in functional-goal communities.

In addition, the direct effect of the interaction between the occurrence of nWOM (i.e., no versus yes) and community type (i.e., social versus functional goal) on members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC is not significant ($\beta_c = -.20; p = .48$). Furthermore, an ANOVA with the occurrence of nWOM, community type and the interaction as independent variable and members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC as dependent variable confirmed the non-significance of the direct effect of the interaction on members' participation intention ($F(1, 317) = .50, p = .48$).

Thus, we analyzed whether the magnitude of community members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community actually mediates the effect of the interaction on members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC. According to the classification of mediation effects by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010), we consider a full mediation as well as indirect-only mediation of community members' perceived goal instrumentality of the SNBC on the effect of nWOM on community members' active participation in a SNBC. To assess this mediating effect, we applied the moderated-mediation model (i.e., process model 8) by Hayes (2013). We found support for the proposed mediation and hence H3. The confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect of the interaction on members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC does not contain zero (lower 95% CI = $-.66$, upper 95% CI = $-.10$). Furthermore, the direct effect of the interaction on members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC is not significant ($\beta_a = -1.01, p = .01$; $\beta_b = .36, p < .001$; $\beta_c = -.20, p = .48$; $\beta_{c'} = .13, p = .63$), indicating an indirect-only mediation of community members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community (Zhao et al., 2010).

Finally, the direct effect of members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members' brand attachment with BMW is significant ($\beta_c = .25; p < .001$). Furthermore, we analyzed whether the magnitude of community members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC actually mediated the effect of members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members' brand attachment with BMW. As expected, we found support for the proposed mediation. The confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect of members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members' brand attachment with BMW does not contain zero (lower 95% CI = $.19$, upper 95% CI = $.36$). Since the c-prime path of members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members' brand attachment with BMW is not significant ($\beta_a = .35, p < .001$; $\beta_b = .76, p < .001$; $\beta_c = .25, p < .001$; $\beta_{c'} = -.01, p = .74$), we could confirm a full mediation of community members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

4. Study 3: The moderating influence of community type on the effect of pWOM on perceived goal instrumentality

4.1. Procedure

To empirically assess H5 and H6, we recruited $N = 165$ respondents (average age: 36.00 years, 46.10% male) through a German online panel. We randomly assigned each respondent to one condition in a 2 (pWOM occurrence: no versus yes) \times 2 (community type: social versus functional goal) between-subject design.

4.2. Priming

We conducted the priming analogously to the unconscious goal priming described in Study 2 and again chose the priming techniques of the scrambled-sentence task and priming with pictures. Additionally, we used the implicit-test-of-memory technique of the word-stem completion task to check whether our goal manipulation was successful in each experimental group.

4.3. Material

The material and order of the manipulations and tests were the same as in Study 2. Again, after the priming tasks, each respondent in all four conditions received a picture of the top layout of the artificial BMW Facebook SNBC that displayed the page's cover photo along with information about the number of fans and "likes" and a social-goal/functional-goal welcoming message. On the pages that followed, all the respondents received abridgements of postings on the artificial BMW Facebook SNBC. Depending on the experimental condition, the respondents received either screenshots of four nWOM and two neutral WOM postings (i.e., no-pWOM condition) or the same negative and neutral word of mouth postings supplemented by six pWOM postings (i.e., pWOM-condition). The neutral WOM comments were the same as in Study 2. Furthermore, an additional pre-test with regularly Facebook users as well as a test with objective linguistic measures revealed that (a) the six nWOM comments in the nWOM-condition in Study 2 and the six pWOM comments in the pWOM-condition in Study 3 as well as (b) the four pWOM comments in the no-nWOM-condition in Study 2 and the four nWOM comments in the no-pWOM-condition in Study 3 were reasonably comparable with each other in terms of length and content

(see Web Appendix-W4 for all stimuli).⁷ Again, we aimed to establish a research design that minimized potential demand artifacts (Shimp et al., 1991).

4.4. Measures

Following the experimental manipulation, we measured the same constructs as in Study 2. To check the success of our intended manipulation, we additionally measured the perception of pWOM within the community using two items: “On BMW’s Facebook fan page, BMW’s products were lauded” and “On BMW’s Facebook fan page, positive comments were made about the BMW brand and its products” (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). All items again included a no-choice answer option. The multi-item measure of respondents’ perceived goal instrumentality of the SNBC, respondents’ intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC, as well as their brand attachment to BMW achieved satisfactory levels of reliability and convergent validity (Cronbach’s $\alpha > .71$ and $>77.43\%$ average variance extracted).

4.5. Results

The data further confirmed our intended manipulation with respect to community type. The respondents correctly identified more functional words in the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought functional benefits from a SNBC (Mean (M) = 4.07, SD = 1.55) compared to the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought social benefits from a SNBC (M = 2.52, SD = 1.44; $t(163) = -6.66, p < .001$). Similarly, the respondents correctly identified more social words in the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought social benefits from a SNBC (M = 2.61, SD = 1.41) compared to the experimental condition in which community members predominantly sought functional benefits from a SNBC (M = .95, SD = .93; $t(144,41) = 8.91, p < .001$). Furthermore, the data confirmed our intended manipulation regarding the occurrence of pWOM. In the no-pWOM condition, the respondents indicated lower values regarding the perception of pWOM within the SNBC (M = 3.10, SD = 1.87 for the first item and M = 3.09, SD = 1.65 for the second item) than in the pWOM condition (M = 4.58, SD = 1.41 for the first item and M = 5.12, SD = 1.32 for the second item; $t(145,27) = 5.70, p < .001$ for the first item and $t(149,50) = 8.66, p < .001$ for the second item). Fig. 3 shows the mean values for perceived goal instrumentality for each experimental group.

We used an ANOVA procedure to test hypotheses H5 and H6. We found a significant interaction between the occurrence of pWOM (i.e., no versus yes) and community type (i.e., social versus functional goal) on the magnitude of community members’ perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($F(1, 161) = 5.24, p = .02$). Hence, community type moderates the effect of pWOM in a SNBC on the perception of the community’s goal instrumentality. For social-goal communities, pWOM has a positive effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($t(82) = 3.11, p < .001$). Conversely, for functional-goal communities, pWOM has no significant effect on the perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($t(79) = -.17, p = .87$). Thus, in support of H5, pWOM has a more positive effect on community members’ perceived goal instrumentality of a SNBC in social-goal than in functional-goal communities.

In addition, the direct effect of the interaction between the occurrence of pWOM (i.e., no versus yes) and community type (i.e., social versus functional goal) on members’ intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC is not significant ($\beta_c = .15; p = .65$). Furthermore, an ANOVA with occurrence of pWOM, community type and the interaction as independent variable and members’ intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC as dependent variable confirmed the non-significance of the direct effect of the interaction on members’ participation intention ($F(1, 161) = .21, p = .65$). Thus, we analyzed whether the magnitude of community members’ perceived goal instrumentality of the community actually mediates the effect of the interaction on members’ intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC. Again, according to the classification of mediation effects by Baron and Kenny (1986) and Zhao et al. (2010), we consider a full mediation as well as indirect-only mediation of community members’ perceived goal instrumentality of the SNBC on the effect of pWOM on community members’ active participation in a SNBC. To assess this mediating effect, we again applied the moderated-mediation model (i.e., process model 8) by Hayes (2013). We found support for the proposed mediation and hence H6. The confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect of the interaction on members’ intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC does not contain zero (lower 95% CI = .03, upper 95% CI = .54). As mentioned, the direct effect (β_c) of the interaction on members’ intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC is not significant ($\beta_a = 1.03, p = .02; \beta_b = .19, p < .01; \beta_c = .15, p = .65; \beta_c' = -.04, p = .90$), indicating an indirect-only mediation of community members’ perceived goal instrumentality of the community (Zhao et al., 2010).

Finally and similar to Study 2, the direct effect of members’ perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members’ brand attachment with BMW is not significant ($\beta_c = .11; p = .21$). Furthermore, we analyzed whether the magnitude of community members’ intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC actually mediated the effect of members’ perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members’ brand attachment with BMW. We found support for the proposed mediation. Again,

⁷ The objective linguistic measures used to make sure that the content of the experimental conditions in Study 2 and 3 (nWOM vs. pWOM condition and no-nWOM vs. no-pWOM condition) are comparable regarding average word count of posts including corresponding comments (nWOM-condition: 27.0 vs. pWOM-condition: 27.7; no-nWOM-condition: 19.0 vs. no-pWOM-condition: 22.0), average proportion of long words with more than 6 characters per post including corresponding comments (nWOM-condition: 22.3% vs. pWOM-condition: 21.0%; no-nWOM-condition: 21.1% vs. no-pWOM-condition: 19.3%) and average proportion of self-referential pronouns per post (nWOM-condition: 4.2% vs. pWOM-condition: 3.1%; no-nWOM-condition: 6.6% vs. no-pWOM-condition: 4.5%). Note that these measures were applied to the German versions of the posts as these were the ones used in the experiments.

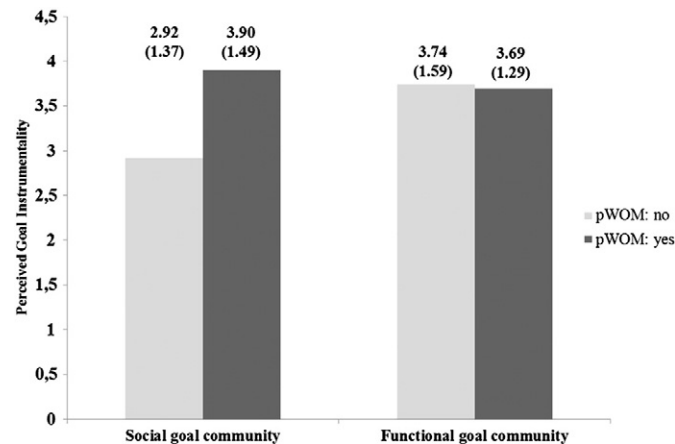


Fig. 3. Mean values and standard deviations for perceived goal instrumentality from Study 3.

the confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect of members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members' brand attachment with BMW does not contain zero (lower 95% CI = .04, upper 95% CI = .28). Since the direct effects (i.e., c-path as well as c-prime path) of members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community on members' brand attachment with BMW are not significant ($\beta_a = .18, p < .01$; $\beta_b = .82, p < .001$; $\beta_c = .11, p = .21$; $\beta_{c'} = -.02, p = .73$), we could confirm an indirect-only mediation of community members' intention to actively participate in the particular SNBC (Zhao et al., 2010).

5. Study 4: Comparing the moderating influence of community type on the effects of nWOM and pWOM on perceived goal instrumentality

5.1. Procedure

We conducted another experiment to provide a robustness check on our previous findings and to test pWOM and nWOM in one experimental setting. We recruited $N = 136$ respondents (average age: 42.34 years, 66.91% male) through a German online panel. Each respondent was randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (WOM occurrence: nWOM versus pWOM) \times 2 (community type: social versus functional goal) between-subject design.

5.2. Priming

Again, we conducted the priming almost analogously to the unconscious goal priming described in Study 2 and Study 3. However, we only used the priming technique of the scrambled-sentence task which included 75% prime words (12 out of 16; same as in Pre-study B) and forwent priming with pictures. Thereby, we wanted to check whether our results uphold even with weaker priming. Besides, we again used the implicit-test-of-memory technique of the word-stem completion task to check whether our goal manipulation was successful in each experimental group.

5.3. Material

The material and order of the manipulations and tests were the same as in Study 2 and in Study 3. This time, depending on the experimental condition, the respondents received either screenshots of six nWOM, four pWOM and two neutral WOM postings (i.e., nWOM condition) or six pWOM, four nWOM and two neutral WOM postings (i.e., pWOM-condition). The stimuli for nWOM and pWOM were the same that were used in Study 2 respectively Study 3.

5.4. Measures

To measure respondents' perceived goal instrumentality of the SNBC we used the same construct as in Study 2 and Study 3 (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$).

5.5. Results

The data confirmed our reduced manipulation with respect to community type.

Respondents correctly identified more functional words in the functional-goal condition ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.55$) compared to the social-goal condition ($M = 2.84, SD = 1.44$; $t(108.10) = 4.73, p < .001$). Similarly, the respondents correctly identified more

social words in the social-goal condition ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 1.67$) compared to the functional-goal condition ($M = 1.09$, $SD = .94$; $t(134) = 5.69$, $p < .001$).

Again, we used an ANOVA procedure to test the moderating effect of community type on the effect of WOM type on goal instrumentality. We found a significant interaction between the occurrence of WOM type (i.e., nWOM vs. pWOM) and community type (i.e., social versus functional goal) on the magnitude of community members' perceived goal instrumentality of the community ($F(1, 124) = 2.73$, $p = .05$). Hence, community type moderates the effect of WOM type in a SNBC on the perception of the community's goal instrumentality. Specifically, in social-goal communities, pWOM has a more positive effect on goal instrumentality than nWOM does ($t(63) = 1.61$, $p = .06$). Conversely, for functional-goal communities, nWOM has a higher effect on perceived goal instrumentality than pWOM does ($t(58) = 1.32$, $p = .09$). Thus, again, we showed that, even with a weaker priming method, nWOM and pWOM evoke different levels of goal instrumentality depending on community type.

6. Discussion

Marketers aim to increase active participation in their SNBCs to achieve favorable brand outcomes. However, user-generated content characterizes SNBCs, where nWOM and pWOM about the underlying brand is a frequently occurring phenomenon. Marketers need to know how and under what circumstances such nWOM and pWOM negatively or positively affects community members' perception of and active participation in their SNBCs so that they are able to effectively manage the occurrence of nWOM and pWOM in SNBCs and react adequately. This paper is the first to analyze the moderating influence of community type (i.e., whether members primarily strive for social versus functional goals) on the effect of (a) nWOM and (b) pWOM on community members' perceived goal instrumentality of and active participation in SNBCs. What can researchers and managers learn from our findings?

(1) Consumer reactions to nWOM in SNBCs depend on community type. The results of our field study reveal that nWOM evokes more negative consumer reactions in social-goal communities (i.e., communities in which members predominantly strive for social goals) in terms of less active participation behavior compared to functional-goal communities (i.e., communities in which members predominantly strive for functional goals). In social-goal communities, community members are enthusiastic about a brand and seek like-minded others with whom they can share their common passion for a brand. Thus, in social-goal communities, community members do not seek diverse information about a brand; instead, they seek positive communication. In functional-goal communities, however, community members are primarily interested in exchanging and receiving diverse, objective information about a brand and its products which are not available with an equivalent credibility outside the community. Thus, the members of a functional-goal community are not solely interested in merely positive communication about the brand which might be already known through firms' marketing efforts; instead, they also seek for nWOM communication.

Moreover, our results extend prior research which has consistently shown that nWOM has negative consequences for product evaluations and sales (see [Chen & Lurie, 2013](#), for a review). In the context of SNBCs our results suggest that this only holds for the occurrence of nWOM in social-goal communities. nWOM seems to provide a substantial benefit for consumers in functional-goal communities, which prompts consumers to participate more actively.

Most importantly, our findings imply that marketers should differentiate their reactions to nWOM in their SNBCs according to community type. Our results suggest that nWOM in functional-goal communities can evoke favorable consumer reactions. Accordingly, marketers may not comment on negative user posts because possible commentary might reduce the positive effect of nWOM. Moreover, marketers should avoid deleting negative user posts in functional communities because it is likely that doing so will diminish positive consumer reactions. Deleting negative user posts may deteriorate the credibility of both a brand and its corresponding community and may even evoke negative consumer reactions.

We further observed stronger effects of nWOM as well as pWOM on members' participation for social-goal than functional-goal SNBCs in our field study. We propose that this might result from generally higher levels of brand involvement (e.g., higher levels of brand passion and emotion) in social-goal communities. This additionally highlights the managerial relevance of implementing adequate management reactions especially in case of the occurrence of nWOM in social-goal communities.

(2) Consumer reactions to pWOM in SNBCs also depend on community type. The results of our field study further reveal that pWOM evokes more positive consumer reactions in social-goal communities in terms of more active participation behavior compared to functional-goal communities. In social-goal SNBCs, members primarily seek endorsement of their favorable attitudes toward a brand. Thus, they are interested in an intensive interaction with like-minded people who are passionate about the brand and hence a positive communication about the brand (i.e., pWOM) within the community. However, in functional-goal SNBCs, community members primarily seek to obtain more objective information about a brand, which is not available outside the SNBC and hence creates a demand for nWOM. Since pWOM mostly repeats the information, which is already available outside the community in firms' brand communication activities, it sparsely contributes to SNBC members' personal goal of receiving more objective information about the brand. Thus, consumer reactions to pWOM in functional-goal communities should be less positive as in social-goal communities and might be even negative.

Our findings also extend prior research which has almost uniformly shown positive effects of pWOM on product evaluations and sales (e.g., [East et al., 2008](#)). In the context of SNBCs, our results suggest that this evidence only holds for the occurrence of pWOM in social-goal communities (due to consumers' high levels of brand passion).

Our results further suggest that pWOM in functional-goal communities might evoke neutral or even negative consumer reactions. Accordingly, marketers should carefully observe pWOM comments in these SNBCs, especially if these comments only reflect unreasoned statements without valuable information. Thus, marketers might establish communication guidelines where members

are actively prompted to reason their arguments since the reasoning of a statement is more likely to provide the valuable objective information for members compared to the statement itself. This should also hold for nWOM in functional-goal communities since bunches of unreasoned nWOM (i.e., trash talk) might not be helpful for members to seek objective and valuable information. Hence, if marketers aim to realize positive effects of nWOM on members' perception of the community's goal instrumentality in functional-goal communities, they might implement communication guidelines, which require a valuable reasoning of members' statements.

(3) *Community members' perception of the community's goal instrumentality is the underlying factor that causes their reaction.* The results of our two laboratory experiments reveal that nWOM and pWOM in SNBCs evoke similar consumer reactions involving community members' perception of the community's goal instrumentality and their active participation behavior in the community. Specifically, in social-goal communities, nWOM has a negative effect on community members' perception of the community's goal instrumentality because it does not contribute to SNBC members' personal goals of meeting like-minded others and striving for positive communication about a brand. However, nWOM can have an even positive effect in functional-goal communities because it contributes to SNBC members' personal goal of receiving diverse (and hence especially negative) information about a brand. Accordingly, opposite effects are observed for pWOM: It has a positive effect on community members' perception of the community's goal instrumentality in social-goal communities because it contributes to SNBC members' personal goals of striving for positive communication about a brand. However, pWOM can have a neutral or even negative effect in functional-goal communities because it does not contribute to SNBC members' personal goal of receiving primarily negative information about a brand. Thus, we conclude that community members' perception of the community's goal instrumentality is the underlying factor that causes their active participation behavior.

The significance of community members' perception of the community's goal instrumentality in explaining consumer reactions to nWOM and pWOM in SNBCs provides valuable evidence for marketers. First, because consumers generally strive for different goals (i.e., social versus functional) when joining a community, marketers should implement both social- and functional-goal communities on social networking sites. The simultaneous implementation of two different community types (i.e., social versus functional goal) may help marketers to target each individual consumer's goals. Second, marketers should communicate clearly the purpose of their community. This approach allows marketers to increase the probability that like-minded consumers will join a community. Specifically, consumers who are passionate about a brand might join social-goal communities, whereas consumers interested in the exchange of knowledge and objective information about a brand might join functional-goal communities. This strategy should generally increase both the perception of the community's goal instrumentality for all its members and the probability that members of social- or functional-goal communities will react similarly to nWOM and pWOM, which eases the implementation of effective reaction strategies from a marketing perspective.

Our studies have certain limitations, and we recommend further research to address these limitations in more detail. First, our research does not focus on the dynamic effects of nWOM and pWOM in SNBCs. Thus, further research should analyze whether the occurrence of nWOM in social-goal communities or pWOM in functional-goal communities might evoke favorable consumer reactions in the long run.

Second, our manipulation of nWOM in Study 2 and pWOM in Study 3 primarily includes reasoned statements. As outlined above, the positive effects of nWOM in functional-goal communities might not hold if these comments only reflect unreasoned statements without any valuable information (i.e., trash talk). Such trash talk probably does not provide the same uniqueness and value of information as reasoned WOM. Similarly, pWOM might cause worse consumer reactions in functional-goal communities if these comments only reflect unreasoned statements. The variance in uniqueness and value of WOM, i.e., its goal instrumentality, across different SNBCs should be deeper investigated in further research. Besides, based on our assumption that in social-goal communities people strive for positive brand communication with other brand fans, the positive statements in our manipulations all included a reference to the brand. Future research might test the consequences of positive interactions without any brand reference, examining whether our assumption can be confirmed.

Third, we merely analyzed the isolated effects of nWOM and pWOM in both community types. We cannot rule out that nWOM and pWOM might interact to a certain degree, i.e., that the ratio between both might have an impact on our results, as shown for participation behavior in Study 1. Since we kept constant the ratio of nWOM to pWOM and pWOM to nWOM (i.e., the ratio was each 1.5) in both laboratory studies, future research might analyze for both community types whether different nWOM/pWOM and pWOM/nWOM ratios might evoke different results on goal instrumentality. Furthermore, resulting from our intention to improve internal validity, the nWOM and pWOM stimuli had twice as many posts as the no-nWOM and no-pWOM stimuli. As the perception of more people taking part in the community might affect the willingness to join them, we cannot rule out that this fact had an impact on the intention to participate. Thus, further studies could also address this issue.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.11.001>.

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