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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A counterinsurgent (COIN) framework to defend against consumer activists

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Abstract
With internet and social media technologies, activists can unleash swarming, guerilla style attacks that quickly devastate brands with little effort. Inspired by counterinsurgency (COIN) theory, this study proffers a multi-dimensional framework for brands to defend against consumer activists. The framework, which emerges from a comprehensive review of the military, consumer activism, and brand management studies, proposes *proactive strategies* that brands can implement to prevent an activist attack. They include (1) the mobilization and coordination of COIN, (2) intelligence operations, and (3) psychological operations. The proactive strategies extend and complement the *reactive strategies* (*e.g.,* accommodative, defensive, do nothing) previously emphasized by the literature. When brands do bad, consumer activists' attacks are warranted and accommodations are needed. But to avoid negative interactions with activists, brands could preemptively "strike," not necessarily with hostile measures, but by reaching out and engaging consumer activists to arrive at a solution before negative encounters occur.

Keywords Consumer activism · Counterinsurgency · Consumer brand attacks · Anti-consumption · Brand crisis

Introduction

Brands face an "inflection point" in consumer activism, with boycotts and other forms of consumer activism "gaining frequency, intensity, and visibility" (Weber Shandwick 2018, p. 2). Today's consumer activists are driven by social and political change, and target brands that have violated their ideologies with consumer brand sabotage, a deliberate form of hostile behavior meant to harm brands (Brandão and Popoli 2022; Kähr et al. 2016; Liaukonytė et al. 2022; Nyffenegger et al. 2018). Consumer activists often use the Internet and social media to spread their message in a real-time, public setting, and their attacks on business organizations can be fast, aggressive, and multi-directional (Abney et al. 2017; Saldanha et al. 2022). All it takes is for one negative social media post to go viral, and it can cause a media firestorm that can devastate the brand (Johnen and Schnittka 2019; Scholz and Smith 2019). Once the match is lit, it is challenging for brands to control the flames.

To illustrate the challenge of managing consumer activism, consider a case example. In 2020, Barnes and Noble, the world's largest retail bookseller, proudly announced the celebration of Black History Month by releasing "Diverse Editions" of 12 literary classics, like *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Wizard of Oz*, with cover variants where the character's skin color was rendered in various shades of brown. Of the 12 books chosen for the promotion, only one was written by a black author—*The Conte of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas. Upon the promotion's announcement, consumer activists immediately took to social media to castigate Barnes and Noble, accusing the bookseller of "fake diversity" (Wheeler 2020) and "literary blackface" (Cornish 2020). Barnes and Noble's transgression would have received negative publicity in any year, but in a historic 2020 where Black Lives Matter and social justice issues were top of mind, Barnes and Noble's promotion ignited a social media inferno that sullied the bookseller's reputation. A day after the announcement, Barnes and Noble acknowledged the gaffe on Twitter and disposed of the line, even though the books and promotional signage were already printed.

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Barnes and Noble's response to consumer activists is emblematic of the accommodative strategies established by the service recovery literature. Accommodation usually takes the form of a quick apology, sometimes followed by an atonement (Boschoff and Leong 1998; Mattila 2001; Stevens et al. 2018). Accommodation is just one option in a body of "reactive strategies," which are actions that brands can take after a transgression to mitigate negative publicity. Other reactive strategies include defensive strategies, where brands reject responsibility and push back on activists (Johnen and Schnittka 2019; Scholz and Smith 2019), or to do nothing and wait for the fire to simmer down (Hansen et al. 2018; McGriff 2012; Rauschnabel et al. 2016). Besides reacting, what else could Barnes and Noble have done? Could Barnes and Noble have *preemptively* avoided the activist controversy?

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a counterinsurgency (COIN) framework for brands to defend themselves against consumer activists. The framework is comprised of 1) the mobilization and coordination of COIN, 2) intelligence operations, and 3) psychological operations. These proactive strategies are inspired by COIN principles derived from military strategy. COIN re-emerged in the early 2000s as the US military increasingly encountered small insurgent forces in theaters of operation, especially in the Middle East, which confounded heavy artillery solutions (Hoffman 2006; Killcullen 2006a). COIN strategies map well onto the consumer activism domain, because modern activists are analogous to small insurgent forces in war. Especially, digital activists are loose networks of individuals who may not be organized under any leadership structure, but share a common grievance against a brand and engage in guerilla style attacks against it (Kähr et al. 2016). The reactive strategies prescribed by the literature, which includes accommodation, defensive strategies, or doing nothing, are ineffective when activists are multiple or cannot be identified. This paper's COIN-inspired, proactive strategies are preemptive measures that brands can implement to prevent negative encounters with activists from happening in the first place. Theoretically, this study's COIN framework extends the literature, which has focused on reactive strategies to consumer activism.

The COIN framework also proffers important practical implications. This study suggests that brands could activate a "COIN mindset" by engaging in brand activism, placing employees in activist response training, adopting tools that allow brands to monitor activists, and building relationships with consumer activists. Overall, the combination of both reactive strategies from the literature and the proactive COIN strategies in this study provides business organizations a "tactical repertoire" to effectively engage activists (McDonnell and King 2013).

The rest of the manuscript is organized as follows. First, the paper reviews the strategies from the service recovery, brand management, and consumer activism studies. Then, the paper reviews the origins of COIN in the military. Subsequently, a proactive COIN framework is developed by applying military principles to the consumer activism context. Then, the discussion section highlights the theoretical contributions and managerial implications of the COIN framework. Finally, the paper offers directions for future research.

Literature review

Consumer activism

Consumer activism refers to the process by which consumers seek to influence brands through activities that range from online complaints, boycotts, or litigation (Paeth 2018; also see Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Romani et al. 2015). Consumer activism overlaps with related concepts identified in the literature, including anti-consumption, consumer retaliation, brand avoidance, and brand sabotage. Broadly, anti-consumption means "against consumption" (Lee et al. 2009, p. 145), and it can be expressed as an attitude, sentiment, or activity (Cherrier 2009; Gopaldas 2014). On the other hand, consumer retaliation is action taken against a brand for an offense (Huefner and Hunt 2000), and it can be an emotion or behavior (Funches et al. 2009). Brand avoidance is instances when consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand (Lee et al. 2009). Finally, brand sabotage is a deliberate form of hostile, aggressive behavior on part of the consumer to harm the brand; sabotage can be mediated offline (*e.g.,* a protest) or online (*e.g.,* social media video that derides a brand) (Brandão and Popoli 2022; Kähr et al. 2016). Thus, consumer activism is anti-consumption attitudes manifested into behavior, and it can be manifested at individual and collective levels, and can be actuated online and in the real world.

This research primarily focuses on consumer activism at the digital, spectator level (George and Leidner 2019). Digital activism refers to collective action mediated through digital technologies. Digital activists skew younger than traditional activists, and they use the Internet and social media to mediate their activities. Spectator activism represents the lowest levels of involvement, including participating in political discussions, displaying support for a cause (*e.g.*, wearing a pin, bumper sticker), or trying to convince others of the cause (Milbrath 1965). In its digital form, spectator activities include clicktivism—liking or sharing a social media post (George and Leidner 2019).

Digital spectator activism characterizes modern consumer activism, comprised of multitudes of individuals who loosely share the same ideology, but may differ in their

interpretation of that ideology and what objective they seek to achieve (Rauschnabel et al. 2016). Some post anti-brand messages on social media hope for remediation for a perceived brand failure (Abney et al. 2017; Arbel and Shapira 2020). Others seek corporate or social change (Gopaldas 2014; van den Broek et al. 2017). Others, yet, seek to sabotage the brand (Kähr et al. 2016; Nyffenegger et al. 2018). This variance in objectives is reflected in Weber Shandwick's (2018) consumer activism report, which suggests that 15% of activists seek an apology, 18% want to harm the brand's sales, 35% want to harm the brand's reputation, and 36% would like to change the way the brand does business. The one commonality among spectator activists is their methodology—using digital media to disseminate messages to constituents and the public (Boyd et al. 2016; McGriff 2012). These digital tools "provide efficiencies that allow fewer participants to have greater impact" (George and Leidner 2019, p. 5). It is this unorganized, voluminous nature that distinguishes digital, spectator activists from traditional activists (George and Leidner 2019).

In sum, modern consumer activism is a veritable multi-headed hydra. In addition to organized groups that engage in traditional activism, brands also have to deal with digital activists that are an amorphous mass of individuals with no discernable leader, and multiple, sometimes conflicting objectives, for which there is no clear and present solution. Engagement with this latter type of activists is like trying to repel a swarm of wasps; it is beyond the scope of most businesses to address each individual in the swarm.

Reactive strategies

The service recovery and brand management studies convey much of what brands know about responding to consumer activists. Broadly, the literature prescribes reactive strategies, which are actions that brands can adopt *during* or *after* a transgressive event (*e.g.,* product or service failure, offensive advertising, or controversial social media post) to negate or mitigate its impact. They come in several variations including accommodative strategies, defensive strategies, and "do nothing" (Table 1).

Accommodative strategies

Accommodative responses signal that the brand accepts responsibility and is willing to atone for its transgression (Johnen and Schnittka 2019). Accommodation is the de facto response to a product or service failure recommended by the literature. The service recovery scholarship, which outlines the actions a company takes to re-establish customer satisfaction after a service failure, is the wellspring of accommodative responses (Michel et al. 2009). It recommends that brands should quickly accept the blame, issue an apology

Table 1 Reactive strategies

Reactive strategies: actions that brands can adopt during or after a transgressive at brands can adopt during or after a transgressive	Definition	Keys to successful implementation	Select source literature (In order of appearance in manuscript)
Accommodative strategies	The brand accepts responsibility, apologizes and atones for the transgression	May be effective solution for lower-order transgressions (*e.g.*, product and service failure), and less effective for higher-order transgressions (*e.g.*, racial, ideological, moral)	Johnen and Schnittka (2019); Michel et al. (2009); Boschoff and Leong (1998); Hart et al. (1990); Harun et al. (2018); Mattila (2001); Stevens et al. (2018)
Defensive strategies	The brand rejects responsibility and pushes back on activists. Variations include escalation, DARVO, mobilize brand communities, and positive propaganda	Combining the various forms of defensive strategies into a multi-dimensional response. For some brands, using edgy humor to deflect accusations	Scholz and Smith (2019); Harsey et al. (2017); Ilhan et al. (2018); Yuksel and Myrteza (2009); Johnen and Schnittka (2019); Beal and Gregoire (2021)
Do nothing	"Lay low and wait for the fire to burn itself out."	Patience in the face of adversity. The 24-h news cycle will produce headlines that push brand transgressions to the bottom of the newsfeed. Consumers also have short-term memories	Hansen et al. (2018); McGriff (2012); Rauschnabel et al. (2016)

for the transgression, and offer a tangible compensation to the consumer or activist, such as a refund, atonement gift, or initiation of a policy change (Boschoff and Leong 1998; Hart et al. 1990; Harun et al. 2018; Mattila 2001; Stevens et al. 2018).

Business scholars have identified the keys to the successfully deploying an accommodative response. First, the speed of response and the level of atonement impacts customer satisfaction in a service recovery event (Boshoff 1997; Obeidat et al. 2017). Second, to enhance the speed of recovery, firms should empower employees to make decisions (Boshoff and Leong 1998; Hazée et al. 2017; Michel et al. 2009) and customize solutions for service recovery (Abney et al. 2017). Additionally, brands can develop outlets for customers to complain (Spreng et al. 1995; Harun et al. 2018). Accommodative responses may be effective in resolving product and service failures of a mundane nature, but are unlikely to quell ideologically driven activist behavior (Griffin et al. 1991; Kähr et al. 2016). For the latter type, an apology is not a viable solution.

Defensive strategies

A defensive strategy is where brands reject responsibility and push back on activists. The most common variation of the defensive strategy is escalation, where brands deny allegations, trivialize activists' causes, or escalate the conflict against brand attackers (Scholz and Smith 2019). Essentially, the accused brand goes on the offensive, sometimes threatening litigation against activists.

Defensive strategies can take several other variations. One variation, which complements escalation, is a Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender (DARVO) strategy. DARVO has its originations in criminal defense of sexual crimes, where the accused assumes the role of "falsely accused" and attacks the accuser's credibility, and blames the accuser of lying (Harsey et al. 2017). Essentially, DARVO is character assassination of the accuser. Another variant is the mobilization of brand communities to defend the brand during a transgressive event (Ilhan et al. 2018; Scholz and Smith 2019). When activists castigate a brand in the public arena, the brand's most ardent followers can do the morality work for the brand by proselytizing a counternarrative (Luedicke et al. 2010). Finally, brands can inundate (social) media with positive brand narratives to counter or dilute negative press (Yuksel and Myrteza 2009). These variants can be combined into a multi-dimensional defense. Protein World implemented several defensive strategies—escalation, mobilization of the brand community, and DARVO—in reaction to the activist firestorm that stemmed from the brand's controversial "Are You Beach Body Ready" campaign (Scholz and Smith 2019).

A defensive strategy can be perceived by the public as provocative, and its successful implementation may depend on three factors. Defensive responses may be more effective in a hedonic (vs. utilitarian) context, where some of that hostility can be passed off as humor (Béal and Grégoire 2021; Johnen and Schnittka 2019). Second, brands that have an aggressive brand personality (*e.g.,* UFC, Protein World, Harley Davidson) may fare better using a defensive strategy than brands with a wholesome image (*e.g.,* Trader Joe's, Disney), as a provocative response may be an expected, congruous response from an edgy brand personality, but may be an incongruous reaction from a "good guy" brand (Arora and Stoner 2009; Scholz and Smith 2019). Finally, defensive strategies may be more suitable for ideological transgressions than product and service failures, which can be resolved using accommodative strategies.

Do nothing

Another reactive strategy is "do nothing" (Hansen et al. 2018; McGriff 2012; Rauschnabel et al. 2016). The goal in doing nothing is to *not* draw any more attention by addressing the controversy, as any response is unlikely to placate activists anyway (Kähr et al. 2016). In doing nothing, the operational mantra is: "Lay low and wait for the fire to burn itself out." Instead of responding, brands could let the news cycle or consumers' short attention spans takeover. The news cycle is replete with sensational headline events (*e.g.,* a political scandal, celebrity death, or negative press from a competitor) that could push negative brand mentions to the bottom of the news feed.

The successful implementation of "doing nothing" requires patience and resilience in the face of adversity. Executives have been taught to respond quickly to controversy (Boshoff 1997; Harun et al. 2018). Yet, responding to activists will likely stimulate counter-responses and lengthen the life of controversies that would have otherwise died within days. On the other hand, scholars have also demonstrated that doing nothing is akin to complicity, and that brands should offer a response to negative publicity (Moorman 2020).

When confronted with a social media firestorm, the "standard operating procedure" is an accommodative approach, where the brand quickly acknowledges its transgression, apologizes, and atones (Boshoff and Leong 1998; Hart et al. 1990; Harun et al. 2018; Mattila 2001). But accommodation is not the only option. Another response is a defensive strategy, where the brand rejects responsibility, and in extreme cases, engages activists in a fight (Johnen and Schnittka 2019; Scholz and Smith 2019). The third alternative is to do nothing and wait for the controversy to die over time (Hansen et al. 2018; McGriff 2012; Rauschnabel et al. 2016). Yet, it may behoove brands if they were able

to *proactively* curtail consumer activists' wrath in the first place. While the literature offers different options that brands can take during or after a negative encounter with activists, it is limited in terms of strategies that brands can adopt *before* an activist firestorm ignites. This is the opportunity space that this manuscript examines through the lens of COIN.

COIN strategy in the military

> Charles Callwell (1990) on combatting insurgents: "The conditions of small wars are so diversified, the enemy's mode of fighting is often so peculiar, and the theatres of operations present such singular features, that irregular warfare must generally be carried out on a method totally different from the stereotyped system [for regular warfare]… The conduct of small wars is in certain respects an art by itself, diverging widely from what is adapted to the conditions of regular warfare…"

The idea of counterinsurgency is contingent on that of insurgency. In military lexicon, an insurgency refers to a "struggle for control over a contested space between a state (or group of states or occupying powers), and one or more popularly based, non-state challengers" (Killcullen 2006a, p. 2). The state is also known as "the incumbent" and the non-state challengers are "insurgents." Counterinsurgency, then, is "all measures adopted to suppress an insurgency" (Killcullen 2006b, p. 2). The goal of counterinsurgency is to "return the system to its 'normal' state of competitive interaction" (*e.g.,* status quo) and "to impose a measure of control on the overall environment," where control is not imposing an order, but rather "achieving collaboration toward a set of shared objectives" (Killcullen 2006a, p. 3).

Western military strategists created COIN strategies to adapt to changes in warfare in late twentieth century. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, wars were large-scale conflicts, involving mechanized forces between two or more actors. An exemplar of this style of war is World War II's famed Operation Overlord (*aka* D-Day), which involved the coordination of naval and airborne operations to lead an estimated 156,000 Allied troops, 6,900 naval vessels, 11,500 aircraft, 11,912 tons of bombs, and 20,000 vehicles in an invasion of German-occupied France (France24.com 2019). Operation Overlord embodied the classical idea that the force with the biggest army and the most bombs win.

Between the mid-twentieth and early twenty-first century, a different type of war became prevalent, involving a network of smaller, mobile opponents, who were not necessarily organized under a singular regime (Hoffman 2006). Western powers, especially the USA and the UK, grew frustrated with the ineffectiveness of heavy military operations in theaters of conflict such as Vietnam, El Salvador, and Iraq (Hoffman 2006; Sepp 2005). The USA and its Western allies realized that they were fighting wars, where the opponents were not large, organized, mechanized forces, but small, mobile, often times disaggregate forces, who engaged in both guerilla and information warfare, and deployed "urban bomb" tactics—mass casualty events that did not result in large casualties for the insurgent force (*e.g.,* suicide bomber) (Killcullen 2006b; Lyall and Wilson III 2009).

Classical warfare solutions, including large unit operations, or capturing and killing the enemy leader, were not effective in neutralizing guerilla insurgents because the military could not identify and locate dispersed insurgent groups, who often hid among the local populace (Sepp 2005). To use heavy infantry, tanks, and bombs to neutralize insurgents were akin to "a pile driver attempting to crush a fly, indefatigably persisting in repeating its effort" (Trinquier 1964, p. 4). In order to prevail against guerilla opposition, military strategists engineered tactical solutions to replace large unit combat operations (Galula 1964; Kilcullen 2006b; Kitson 1971; Trinquier 1964). The new solution was termed "counterinsurgency (COIN) warfare."

The goal of COIN is population control and persuasion, as opposed to conquering terrain through brute military force (Table 2). The key to winning a war against guerilla insurgents is to garner indigenous support so that the populace will help the military overcome the insurgents. The military literature suggests that an effective COIN strategy involve three operative dimensions: 1) mobilizing and coordinating the incumbent force(s) for COIN, 2) gathering intelligence on insurgents, and 3) psychological operations (Galula 1964; Kilcullen 2006a, b; Trinquer 1964).

Coordination and mobilization of COIN

In military operations, the mobilization and coordination of agents, infrastructure, and resources is needed so that incumbent forces can identify and assess the threat of insurgents. Specifically, COIN involves sociopolitical components and requires the tight coordination of multiple actors, including the military, the State Department (*e.g.,* political institutions), and the local populace (Department of the Army 2014; Hoffman and Taw 1992; United States Marine Corps 1940). For instance, Killcullen's (2006a) "Three Pillars" framework suggests that synchronization of security, political, and economic pillars is a necessary prelude to successful COIN operations.

Intelligence operations

The military stresses that a COIN force must be "a learning organization" that constantly exchanges information about insurgents and "develop an effective system to circulate lessons learned throughout the organization" (Cohen

Table 2 COIN literature: selection of military works

Authors	Summary	Operative dimensions	Categorization
Arquilla & Rondfeldt (2001)	To combat insurgents, the government, military, and law enforcement need to be networked themselves	Coordination and mobilization of COIN	Proactive
Cohen et al. (2006)	Legitimacy is the primary objective in war. It can be achieved through a "unity of effort," understanding the environment, and intelligence operations	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Department of the Army (2014)	The US Army's manual (FM 3–24, MCWP 3–33.5) on COIN detailing the strategic objectives, and characteristics of insurgencies. COIN is a battle for legitimacy over the local populace. Tactics to counter insurgents is through intelligence operations. The manual presents the "shape-clear-hold-build-transition" framework, which helps build support with the local populace	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Galula (1964)	One of the seminal texts in counterinsurgency. His COIN principles emphasize control of the local populace using selective and intentional efforts	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, psychological operations	Proactive
Hoffman (2006)	Insurgent suppression depends on non-combat solutions, including use of intelligence operations and psychological operations. Contemporary war is as much about persuasion as it is about bombs	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Hoffman (2011)	Modern insurgencies are increasingly transnational, urban, and religious. Emphasis on the use of intelligence and psychological operations to exert influence and legitimacy in theaters of operation	Intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Hoffman & Taw (1992)	A conceptual review of military case studies. Major COIN touchpoints include developing a command and coordination system, centralizing intelligence, and cultivating foreign collaboration	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations	Proactive
Kilcullen (2006a)	Recommends tight coordination between every security, political, and economic organization involved in war. Emphasis on intelligence sharing between organizations	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations	Proactive
Kilcullen (2006b)	Gaining local support and deploying psychological (vs. military) operations are needed to demotivate locals from supporting insurgent forces	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Kitson (1971)	Emphasis on intelligence collection and population control (vs. killing the insurgents)	Intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Nagl et al. (2008)	COIN is about constant adaptation and learning about local politics and customs, and winning support of the local population	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Sepp (2005)	A review of 24 theaters of insurgent conflict. Successful operations involve intelligence operations, population control, and pervasive psychological operations	Coordination and mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Trinquer (1964)	Insurgent warfare is not won by conquering terrain, but rather, through ideological influence. Trinquer offers a two-stage approach to counterinsurgent engagement that involves learning and adapting	Intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
United States Marine Corps (1940)	A guidebook to waging "small wars," which the Marine Corps differentiates from large unit conflicts. Recommends tight coordination between military and the government, small war tactics, and more	Coordination and mobilization of COIN	Proactive

et al. 2006, p. 51). In other words, the work of counterinsurgents is to gather intelligence on potential insurgent groups, their numbers, and their motivations (Sepp 2005; Tomes 2004). The learning aspect is explicitly highlighted in the US Army/Marine Corps Field Manual as an alternative to warfare (Nagl et al. 2008). These "low intensity operations," which help the military diagnose the problem, are more important, more efficient, and less costly than high intensity operations, such as combat engagement (Kitson 1971). Counterinsurgents must manage both information and expectations (Cohen et al. 2006), and military theorists have developed various processes by which intelligence is shared among actors (Hoffman and Taw 1992; Kilcullen 2006a; Nagl et al. 2008).

Psychological operations

Military strategists recognize that most wars are won on political and psychological dimensions. This is what is known in the military as "irregular warfare," where words and images win the hearts of people (and the war), as opposed to guns and bombs (Trinquier 1964). The modern theater of war is performed in mediated, "carefully choreographed images and stories designed to produce a desired effect" to "extend influence or delegitimize the insurgent" (Hoffman 2011, p. 11). Simultaneously, psychological warfare raises the credibility of the incumbent force by "winning [the local population's] hearts and minds" (Sepp 2005, p. 8) and to "deny energy and mobility to the insurgent's support base" (Kilcullen 2006b, p. 9). Given that insurgents are often hard to directly neutralize, psychological operations are especially important in cutting off insurgents from any local support (Cohen et al. 2006). Overall, psychological operations are a means by which the incumbent force can delegitimize and isolate insurgent forces.

COIN framework: application of COIN to consumer activism

Consumer activists are similar to insurgent combatants with respect to objectives, organizational structure, and methods of engagement. Insurgents do not have clearly defined political objectives or even seek to overthrow an existing regime. Rather, their main objective is to foment dissent and destabilization (Galula 1964; Hoffman 2011). Similarly, consumer activists—especially those of the digital, spectator variety—do not always have clearly defined objectives; some seek organizational change (Thompson et al. 2006; Weijo et al. 2018), others want to sabotage the brand (Kähr et al. 2016; Rauschnabel et al. 2016), and others, yet, are satisfied with merely expressing their displeasure on social media (Minocher 2019). With respect to organizational structure, insurgents are often organized in nebulous, leaderless structures with shared or competing agendas (Galula 1964; Hoffman 2006). Comparably, consumer activists are loose networks of individuals whose commonality is shared disdain for a brand. Finally, insurgents favor the use of irregular warfare to combat larger opponents (*e.g.,* hit-and-run tactics, suicide bomber, propaganda). Consumer activists deploy analogous methods to engage brands, including collaborative brand attacks (Rauschnabel et al. 2016) and "social media bombs"—damaging posts that include photographs or videos of transgressions (Hansen et al. 2018).

Brands have a pragmatic need to defend themselves from hostile consumer activists. If activists are similar to insurgent combatants, then it stands to reason that militaristic COIN principles may be utilized in consumer activism and brand management contexts. Thus, a "COIN theory" of consumer activism posits that preemptive action can reduce the chances of negative encounters with activists from happening in the first place.

Figure 1 presents a COIN framework that maps the three operative dimensions of militaristic COIN onto the consumer activism context. A framework is a structure that represents a situation, and proffers the processes and tools that can be implemented when the situation arises (Minsky 1979; Okumus 2003). Specifically, to reduce negative encounters with consumer activists and mitigate anti-brand discourses, brands could proactively coordinate and mobilize COIN, initiate intelligence operations, and implement psychological operations. The framework also identifies tools to implement the three operative dimensions. The framework is premised on the idea that once a consumer activist firestorm has been lit, it is too late, and brands can do little to control it (Sandicki and Ekici 2009). Consequently, it may be strategically advantageous if brands can proactively identify anti-brand activists, assess their threat, and engage them. Only then can brands modify their branding, products, or services before any controversy happens.

The framework emerged through an in-depth analysis of 60 articles from the service recovery, consumer activism online, consumer activism, and anti-consumption literary streams (Appendix). The researcher read the articles, identified their empirical contexts, summarized their strategic implications, and categorized the recommendations (*e.g.,* "accommodative," "intelligence operations"). Subsequently, the author coded the papers based on higher-order strategic categorizations (*e.g.,* "reactive," "proactive"). The proactive strategies in the framework (Fig. 1) represent the theoretical contribution of this article to the literature, which has largely focused on reactive strategies (Table 1). The idea of proactive crisis management has been acknowledged in the literature, but it has yet to be systematically formalized into an integrative framework.

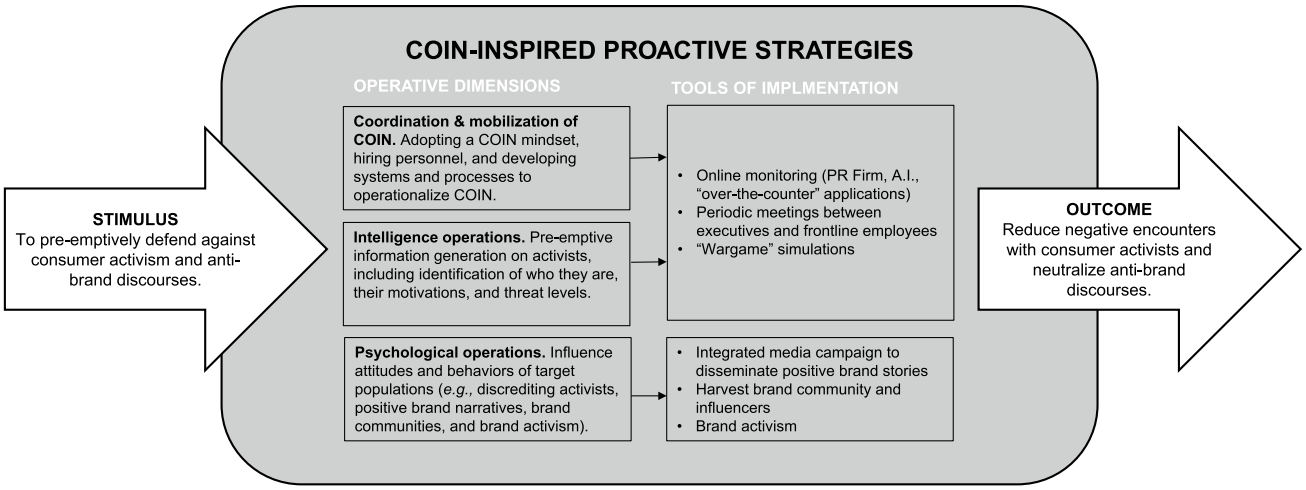

Fig. 1 Coin framework proactive strategies

Operative dimensions

Coordination and mobilization of COIN

The mobilization and coordination of COIN might begin with the organization adopting a COIN mindset, which is the recognition that targeted consumer activism can negatively impact the brand, and that proactive engagement with activists could be critical to crisis avoidance. The implementation of a COIN mindset does not necessarily require heavy financial investments—just buy-in by both top management and frontline employees. A COIN mindset should always be "in-play" to prepare organizations for traditional and digital activists (George and Leidner 2019).

Brands could mobilize themselves by activating a "cross-functional task force to manage planning and execution of any potential [activist] response" (Weber Shandwick 2018). The frontline of this task force would be dedicated employees, whose primary function is to reconnoiter the brand's Internet and social media assets to identify dissatisfied consumers and activists, respond to them, and avoid negative encounters with them (McGriff 2012). The number of personnel may depend on the size of the organization. Large organizations (LO)—defined as those with more than 500 workers—can form a team dedicated to the work of COIN. Alternately, LOs can outsource this work to a public relation (PR) or legal agency (Bohme et al. 2005). Small and medium business enterprises (SMEs) with less than 500 employees are more prone to having employees perform multiple functions within the organization (Mitchell et al. 2013). On average, SMEs have three employees who create content for the organization's Internet and social media assets, directly engage customers, and provide remediation when needed (Lua 2021). For micro-SMEs—a firm with less than 10 employees—it may be the business owner who performs this kind of work (Chen and Schiele 2017). In today's world, brands' task forces often use online listening software to coordinate the work of COIN, and these tools will be discussed in the "Tools of Implementation" section.

The theoretical analogue to COIN coordination and mobilization is the "programmatic approach" toward market orientation, where a firm would implement organizational change to achieve a strategic objective (Narver et al. 1998). Market orientation involves the generation, dissemination, and response to customer intelligence (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). Similar to the interdepartmental coordination needed in COIN warfare, implementation of a market orientation would entail the management of "interdepartmental dynamics" and "systems" (p. 15) to generate and disseminate consumer intelligence within the organization. The coordination and mobilization of COIN requires hiring personnel and adopting systems and processes to organize and manage COIN work.

Intelligence operations

Intelligence operations involve preemptive information generation that assess activists, their motivations, and their level of threat. The emphasis of intelligence operations is on data gathering, as opposed to direct confrontation. While intelligence operations have bases in military operations, they can also be practiced in business.

Marketing practitioners have made it a regular practice of gathering consumer intelligence (especially online), and even going so far as posing as consumers on Internet forums (Milne et al. 2008). The literature houses these activities as a part of value creation—developing products and services based on consumer intelligence (Kohli and Jaworksi 1990). Scholars have recommended online monitoring (*aka* "social media listening") as a means by which brands can

proactively identify activists, assess their threat levels, and strategize solutions to deal with them (Crawford 2009; Hansen et al. 2018; Stevens et al. 2018; Yang 2022). The practice of online monitoring recognizes that social media is an important part of consumers "omni-presence" and that activism is mediated by social platforms (Appel et al. 2020; Yang 2022). Through online monitoring, brands can discover the consumer-generated, doppelganger brand stories that project anti-brand messages (Handelman 2006; Thompson et al. 2006). According to Gensler and associates (2013), "firms need to pay attention to such consumer-generated brand stories to ensure a brand's success in the marketplace" (p. 242). Moreover, brands can use online monitoring to identify problematic consumers and de-market them (Arbel and Shapira 2020).

Businesses should always be monitoring the digital environment for negative brand mentions and anti-brand activities. Consumer activism is on the rise, and many consumers are purchasing from brands that they support, while banning companies that violated their values (Liaukonytė et al. 2022; Weber Shandwick 2018). Because activists' discussions are often mediated by Internet and social media, organizations could, at minimum, sporadically probe what activists are saying about the brand online (van den Broek et al. 2017; Yang 2022). At the upper extreme, businesses can form a task force to systematically scrutinize social media channels and forums known to harbor anti-brand activists. Conducting intelligence operations enhances organizations' understanding of the political climate surrounding their brands, and can better prepare them for avoiding a brand attack.

Psychological operations

Once an activist threat has been identified and assessed, organizations can take preemptive action to influence its attackers, constituents, and the public. Psychological operations are tactics that take place on the information dimension; they involve the creation and spread of propaganda to influence attitudes and behaviors of target populations. In military applications, psychological operations are about persuasion—delegitimizing insurgents and gaining support from local populations. In business contexts, the same principle applies, and psychological operations can be used to proactively mitigate the impact of activist attacks. Marketing and consumer behavior scholars have previously identified a dynamic range of strategies that could be classified as "psychological operations," although the original ideas were not framed as such. These strategies include discrediting, disseminating positive brand narratives, mobilizing brand communities, and brand activism.

First, brands can collect intelligence on activists, and use the information to discredit them (Handelman 2013). If a consumer activist group is deemed hostile to a brand, and has a history of malfeasance, the brand can "flip the script" to reframe the group as criminal. For example, Ron Arnold, the leader of the Center for Defense of Free Enterprise (CDFE), coined the term "ecoterrorists" to vilify environmental activists, and provided authorities records of environmentalists who have arrest records and committed crimes (Smith 2008). The CDFE highlighted the fact that ecoterrorists have resorted to violent tactics, set dangerous booby traps, sabotaged deforestation equipment, and destroyed property. According to Mike German, an FBI special agent who conducted such work: "You are painting the political opposition as supporters of terrorism to discredit them and cripple their ability to remain politically viable" (Federman 2013).

A second form of psychological operations is the dissemination of positive brand narratives to control spin and deflect future negative publicity. Counternarratives could be deployed through corporate social media, and used as a form of reputation management to humanize the brand and make its corporate social responsibility efforts more relatable to consumers (Balasubramanian et al. 2020). Yuksel and Myrteza's (2009) study provides empirical support that releasing positive brand information is positively associated with a reduction in boycott behavior.

Another activity that could be classed as psychological operations is the mobilization of brand communities. Brand communities are comprised of rabid die-hards that will defend the brand from naysayers (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). They may also develop counternarratives to anti-brand discourses, evangelize the "good" of the brand, or engage in "buycotts" to support the brand in times of crisis (Ilhan et al. 2018; Liaukonytė et al. 2022; McGriff 2012). Members of brand communities may do this work for free, as the brand is an essential part of these consumers' identity work (Luedicke et al. 2010). Other times, brands can directly engage brand communities through large-scale sponsored events.

Finally, brands can preemptively defend itself from activists by participating in brand activism. Specifically, brands can assimilate activist discourses into their brand narratives, and in doing so, simultaneously neutralize negative activist encounters and create products, services, and brands that may appeal to them (Cherrier 2009; McDonnell and King 2013; Vrendenburg et al. 2020). Brand activism is practiced by brands such as Nike and Starbucks. Organizations see it as a way to align their brands with values that consumers find important—a way to "future proof" their brands (Ruby 2020). Gopaldas's (2014) study typologizes the various anti-corporate, anti-capitalism, and anti-pollution brand identities companies have adopted to appeal to consumers. However, brand activism needs to be directly related to companies' core business activities in order for the venture to be

perceived as authentic by consumers (Branicki et al. 2021; Koch 2020).

Another form of brand activism is reaching out and working with activists to find a "mutually agreeable solution" (van den Broek et al. 2017, p. 291). Kristal and co-authors (2018) suggest that brands can hire artists and activists as "co-creators of brand play" (p. 334), essentially subsuming countercultural brand representations into the official brand narrative. This style of engagement is a form of proactive avoidance, where brands could present products, services, and promotional campaigns to consumers behind-the-scenes, and address any potential controversies before their release into the public.

Brands can selectively use different psychological operations depending on the situation. Discrediting requires activists to be identifiable, and could be used when they represent an imminent threat to the brand. Positive brand narratives may be something that brands would want to implement even during good times, but may be especially expedient if future strategic endeavors need positive spinning. Cultivating brand communities may always be considered if brands have the resources to reap the benefits of such consumer brand relationships (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Finally, brand activism could be effectual for brands that have an authentic activist branding (Vrendenburg et al. 2020).

Tools of implementation

Implementing a COIN strategy involves a diverse set of tools, including online monitoring, periodic meetings between executives and frontline workers, wargame simulations, integrated media campaigns, litigation, harvesting brand communities and influencers, and brand activism. Understanding that businesses have different resources, this section proffers tools for both LOs and SMEs.

Online monitoring (aka social media listening)

Online monitoring (aka social media listening) can augment brands' mobilization efforts and intelligence operations. A Clutch (2018) Online Reputation Management Survey found that 49% of businesses used social listening software or external agencies to identify consumer activists and determine what they are saying about their products and services. Online monitoring solutions come in several variations that range in expense: the PR or legal firm, artificial intelligence (A.I.), or "over-the-counter" applications.

Brands can retain the services of a PR or legal firm to conduct intelligence operations on activists (Bohme et al. 2005). These agencies can identify the activists, understand their ideologies, assess the level of threat, and recommend courses of action for their corporate clients. While most intelligence work will likely be conducted online, a higher-order activity involves the insertion of an agent(s) into activist groups, and having them perform intelligence work on behalf of the organization. Based on intelligence reports, brands can assign threat-level scores to activist groups. High-level threat groups can be designated for preemptive responses, while low-level threats can be ignored. While conducting corporate intelligence carries ominous connotations, many brands have hired agencies to perform intelligence operations on activist groups (Demko 2008; Federman 2013; Mazzetti and Goldman 2021). For example, the Dev Group (formerly "Total Intelligence Solutions") is an agency that performs intelligence work for multinational corporations like Monsanto, the Walt Disney Company, and Deutsche Bank (Philpott 2010). Corporate intelligence is still a legal—albeit gray area—practice, but the risk is that the detection of the agents will lead to negative publicity and notoriety for the firm (Evans and Jones 2017).

A.I. represents another form of online monitoring, where brands can automate the task of identifying consumer activists, segment them into groups based on their level of threat, and engage them in real time (Davenport et al. 2020). For example, IBM Unica Interact's powerful A.I. classifies customers into segments, tracks consumer insights over time, defines strategies for dealing with each segment, and provides the capacity for the business to contact consumers to offer real-time solutions (IBM 2021). Another A.I. alternative is to employ a visual analysis (*aka* "visual listening in") approach (Liu et al. 2020). Since most social media platforms are image-driven (*e.g.,* Instagram, Facebook), activists could be posting both anti-brand text *and* pejorative images. Support vector machines (SVM) and deep convolutional neural networks (DCNN) provide brands the ability to analyze visual images on consumers' social media and link them to brand attributes (*ibid*). SVMs are machine learning algorithms that analyze data for patterns utilizing regression analysis. Computer engineers can "train" SVM (*e.g.,* a computer) to analyze and categorize features (*e.g.,* color, shape, texture) from a social media image. Then, they can use DCCNs, which are algorithms that A.I. use to identify images, and classify images into brand perceptual attributes (*e.g.,* "rugged," "glamorous," "healthy"). In doing so analysts can derive insights into the relationship between image features and perceptual attributes.

A lower-cost solution that can be accessed by SMEs is online monitoring software like Hootsuite, Reputology, and Social Mention that offer text mining, sentiment analysis, and customer intelligence (Chaney et al. 2016). These app-based services allow businesses to tune into consumer online chatter, monitor the business's online reputation, and respond to customers in a timely (if not real-time) fashion. Hootsuite monthly service plans cost between $49 and $739 (Hootsuite 2022), while Reputology's services range from $110 to $2,500 a month (Reputology 2022). Brands can

have employees use these applications to periodically check social media and identify red flags. If a business is extremely tight-budgeted and cannot afford these applications, it could designate an employee to manually monitor the company's social media accounts to identify any issues.

Periodic meetings

Another tool for coordinating COIN is internal processes and workflow systems that quickly disseminate activist intelligence across the organization (van Cranenburgh et al. 2013). For most companies, periodic meetings between executives and frontline personnel can mediate the dissemination of activist intelligence. As simple as it may sound, a McKinsey report found that only 11% of executives polled spent time coaching and directing their subordinates (McKinsey and Company 2010). Having periodic meetings would substantially enhance an organization's ability to coordinate an agile response to a consumer activist event.

"Wargame" simulations

Wargames could be a training tool for preparing organizations with a COIN mindset and operationalizing intelligence operations. Wargames are multi-player role plays, where organizations test differential strategic approaches under varying conditions (Bartels 2020). The US military uses them to test situational responses in hypothetical theaters of conflict with other superpowers such as China and Russia (Davis et al. 2021). Wargames can also have business applications. Executives can use them to run hypothetical conflict scenarios with activists, assess the firms' organizational readiness, and test the various engagement strategies. When a crisis occurs, brands can deploy a "tried-and-tested" solutions package.

Integrated media campaigns

Brands can have their PR departments develop integrated media campaigns, which highlight positive brand stories. As opposed to conventional advertisements meant to push sales, these preemptive campaigns are meant to be influential—to sway activist and public sentiment before a negative event occurs (*e.g.,* a psychological operation). Ironically, brands can use social media—the very platform activists use to protest—to test if corporate messages are perceived by consumers as authentic and fresh (Balasubramanian et al. 2020). An example is British Petroleum's (BP) "Skills Accelerator" campaign—a series of commercials and YouTube videos on BP's official account—that curbed off critiques of the company's heavy investments into A.I. BP was cognizant that its A.I. investments could be interpreted by its workforce (and the public) as a means of redundancy, where the company could replace human labor with robots. The BP campaign repositioned A.I. as a tool that humans can learn and use to become more capable. It is a message to assuage BP's workforce that A.I. is a "partner" and not something that will obviate them (BP 2020).

Brand communities and influencers

Brands can recruit hardcore customers and influencers to attend festivals and cultivate brand community online and offline (Campbell and Farrell 2020). Brand communities are comprised of a brand's most ardent fans, who hold the brand at the heart of their identities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Luedicke et al. 2010). They will come to the defense and rouse positive sentiment on behalf of the brand when it is attacked (Scholz and Smith 2019). Two popular applications that help brands network with influencers are Crowdtap and Bzz Agent, which encourage influencers to create a profile and share their interests. Brands could invite the appropriate influencers to try their products, and influencers can share their experiences on social media (Ye et al. 2021). Subsequently, brands could invite these influencers to brand-sponsored events, and create internet forums that serve as hubs for content sharing between influencers and consumers (Keller and Fay 2016). Yet, brands may need to be intentional in their influencer selection, and also create online posts that influencers can easily repost (Thomas and Fowler 2023). In this way, brands can better control the overall brand messaging.

SMEs with less resources can recruit micro-influencers—those with less than 10,000 followers—from social media. These micro-influencers may not have as many followers as mega-influencers with over a million followers, but may they could be more effective with respect to local reach. SMEs may be able to recruit nano-influencers by simply offering free products, services, and VIP-style invitations to business events (Ye et al. 2021).

Brand activism

Brands can adopt activist causes that align with their brand values and get on the same side as consumer activists (Branicki et al. 2021; Gopaldas 2014; Koch 2020). Brand activism is perceived positively when consumers feel that the company's activism is a reflection of its core business activities (Branicki et al. 2021; Vrendenburg et al. 2020). Brands can fully commit to a cause, and change the company from the inside-out by hiring employees who embody corporate activism and training them to engage activists with empathy—an endeavor known as "social intrapreneurship" (van Cranenburgh et al. 2013, p. 991; also see Carrington et al. 2019). The ice cream brand Ben & Jerry's is an example of brand activism. Ben & Jerry's has a long history of supporting

activist causes including social justice, LGBTQ+rights, and criminal justice reform. For instance, a year before the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, Ben & Jerry's released a flavor in support of the movement called Justice Remix'd, with a portion of proceeds going to the Advancement Project National Office's "Free and Safe" campaign (Suri 2020). During 2020's BLM protests, Ben & Jerry brand zealots took to social media to point out that the brand's history of social activism stood in contrast to other companies' who simply posted blacked out images on social media—a disingenuous form of virtue signaling—and castigated rival brands, like Häagen-Dazs, who remained silent during the ordeal. In support of BLM and voters' rights, Ben & Jerry's relaunched Justice Remix'd in late 2020. These actions helped Ben & Jerry's garner a devoted brand following, and helped solidify the company's position as the #1 ice cream brand in the USA with $900 million in sales (Morris 2021).

On the other hand, SMEs with limited budgets could run influence campaigns using a scaled-down approach. In grass roots efforts, SMEs can adopt local causes that consumers find important (*e.g.,* supporting a school or church project). A Better Business Bureau poll suggests that 90% of SMEs donate to local causes, and it may behoove businesses to get word of their charitable endeavors out to the public (BBB 2019).

In summary, the moral of this study's framework (Fig. 1) is "be prepared and proactive." Brands should not wait until consumer activists to attack before taking action. Instead, brands could preemptively identify anti-brand activists, pinpoint contentious social and political discourses, and work with activists to address issues. The COIN-inspired strategies outline the operative processes for brands to avoid negative encounters with activists, including coordinating and mobilizing COIN in the organization, intelligence operations, and psychological operations. The framework also identifies the tools by which to implement these processes. Last, but importantly, this framework is not intended as a field manual to help brands conduct malfeasance or hide evidence of wrongdoing. If brands do bad, then they deserve the ire of consumer activists. But sometimes brands are targeted by activists, not necessarily because of wrongdoing, but because big brands are platforms that can bring media publicity to their cause. Proactive measures could be deployed in these cases.

Contributions and implications

Consumer activists' attacks, which include public protests, boycotts, and social media posts, could do irreparable harm to targeted brands (Ilhan et al. 2018; Kristal et al. 2018; Rauschnabel et al. 2016; van den Broek et al. 2017). The principle behind proactive strategies is to not wait until activists ignite a firestorm before taking action, but rather, to preemptively identify adversaries, anticipate anti-brand activities, and engage in work that mitigates the damage of impending brand attacks. This is a theoretical departure and rethinking of the service recovery concept, which is comparatively reactive in nature (Table 1).

Theoretical contributions

The paper contributes to theoretical knowledge in several ways. First, this study extends the service recovery and brand management studies, which have focused on reactive strategies—actions taken *during* or *after* a transgression to reduce the damage of activist attacks (Hansen et al. 2018; Grégoire et al. 2015). The default reactionary approach is accommodation, where brands accept responsibility and provide restitution, either in the form of an apology or renumeration (Boschoff and Leong 1998; Johnen and Schnittka 2019; Mattila 2001). But accommodative strategies are de facto admissions of guilt, regardless of whether the brand is really at fault (Grewal et al. 2008), and have become commonplace and expected, thereby reducing their effectiveness in overcoming consumers' negative emotions (McDougall and Levesque 1999). Another reactive strategy is defensive push back, where brands reject liability for alleged transgressions, and discredit their attackers (Johnen and Schnittka 2019; Scholz and Smith 2019). Both accommodative and defensive approaches are reactive—implemented *after* a public rebuke which can damage the brand. This paper's proactive strategies (Fig. 1) present an alternative to the reactive ones prescribed by the literature.

The proactive strategies extend the idea that conflict avoidance may be the best defense against consumer activists (van den Broek et al. 2017). Brands can proactively avoid negative encounters through intelligence operations—identifying potential activists and social discourses that potentially spark controversies. Subsequently, brands can engage in psychological operations—disseminating positive brand narratives, building a base of loyalist consumers, and participating in brand activism—to reduce entanglements with consumer activists. Scholarship has recognized that anticipatory action—usually in the form of online monitoring or the creation of forums for customer complaints—is the best practice for detecting small "fires" become they become catastrophic (Hansen et al. 2018; Harun et al. 2018; Rauschnabel et al. 2016; Stevens et al. 2018). Intelligence and psychological operations support this call for proactivity.

This study also contributes to consumer activism scholarship. Digital spectator activists—the center point of this study—are theoretically distinct from organized activist groups with respect to their structure and method of engagement (George and Leidner 2019). Digital spectator activists are networks of disaggregated individuals linked together

by digital technologies. In many cases, there is no organized group, but rather an amorphous nebula of disparate individuals who share the same collective opposition toward a brand. These activists may periodically engage in traditional forms of collective activism (*e.g.,* protest, boycott), but they are more known for their uncoordinated, swarming attacks, especially on social media. They have a diverse identity, with members that have different objectives, where some seek a simple apology, while others demand fundamental change within business institutions. The *modus operandi* embodied by digital spectator activists seems to be "death by a thousand cuts" (*e.g.,* a thousand social media posts). In contrast, traditional activists are organized, hierarchical groups that are geographically bound, and engage in collective, organized action, including protests and boycotts (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Milbrath 1965). The *modus operandi* with NSMs and consumer movements seems to be: "to fell the beast with one fell swoop" (*e.g.,* a large, public protest).

Finally, the study follows a line of research that applies military principles to marketing contexts. Much of this work have utilized military strategy toward market positioning or product/ service development contexts. Scholars implemented Karl von Clausewitz's attack strategies to illustrate how businesses can establish marketing positioning, and capture market share from competitors (Kotler and Singh 1981; Parks et al. 1994; Ries and Trout 1986). For instance, in *Marketing Warfare*, Ries and Trout (1986) recommend market leaders use von Clausewitz's principles of defensive warfare, and market followers use principles of offensive, flanking, and guerilla warfare. Other scholars applied Sun Tzu's "terrain and ground" approach as a means by which businesses can comprehend the environmental context, so that they can better develop products and services for customers (Macdonald and Neupert 2005). This study differs from this literature because the military-inspired COIN framework is not necessarily deployed to establish positioning or develop products for consumers, but rather, as a form of proactive defense against consumer activists.

Managerial implications

The framework proffers insights for brand practitioners to avoid conflicts with consumer activists. First, to mobilize themselves for consumer activism, brands could form cross-functional team to "manage planning and execution of any potential response" (Weber Shandwick 2018, p.14; also see van Cranenburgh et al. 2013). These teams could engage in work to fully understand activists' motivations, if not engage activism themselves (Carrington et al. 2019). Second, brands could adopt digital solutions such as A.I. or social media listening software to monitor activist conversations online. Organizations with larger budgets could outsource intelligence work to a PR or legal agency. The objective of intelligence work is to identify the activists who are lighting "small fires" and address them before they ignite a social media firestorm. Third, brands can preemptively identify countercultural, social, or political narratives that could be integrated into their brand narratives. In doing so, brands can potentially align themselves with activist groups (Branicki et al. 2021). If an activist discourse cannot be identified, then another strategy is to affect an innocuous brand narrative—one that is unlikely to be embroiled in activist action (Kähr et al. 2016). Finally, brands could harvest close-knit relationships with brand communities by sponsoring tradeshows attended by brand fanatics, vertically integrating festivals and conferences, or hosting VIP-style experiences for loyalists (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

Several cases illustrate the practical implications of this paper's COIN-based framework. This paper opened with the Barnes and Noble's Diversity Editions case, where the bookseller acknowledged activists' critiques, and quickly pulled the line—a move consistent with the reactive strategies prescribed by the literature. Hypothetically, Barnes and Noble could have instead adopted a proactive orientation by forming a team comprised of diverse executives and employees to vet the idea at its inception (*e.g.,* mobilization and coordination of COIN). The team could have invited diversity activists into ideation sessions, and fielded their thoughts on the promotion (*e.g.,* intelligence operations). Activists may have rejected the Diversity Editions, but it would have occurred behind closed doors. Additionally, they may have suggested alternate ways to promote Black History Month, for instance, promoting novels that were written by Black authors and recruiting diversity influencers to produce promotional content on social media content for Barnes and Noble (*e.g.,* psychological operations). In being proactive, Barnes and Noble could have included the constituents that the retailer was targeting in the first place and avoided the firestorm altogether.

A real case involves Monster Energy, a market share leader in the energy drink category. In 2021, Monster formalized its first site engine optimization (SEO) team to manage the brands' Internet assets (*e.g.*, mobilization and coordination of COIN). In addition to driving traffic to website, the team identified uncomplimentary Internet brand searches (*e.g.*, intelligence operations), and redirected searches to the corporate website or other credible resources, which provide a countervailing, favorable perspective (*e.g.*, psychological operations). Specifically, the team discovered that consumers often used Internet search engines to query "Will Monster energy drinks kill you?" and "Is taurine (a feature ingredient in Monster energy drinks) bad for you?". These queries lead users to consumer-generated forums and conspiracy websites that offered inaccurate information, which cast Monster in a bad light. The SEO team inserted metadata into Monster's webpages that redirected queries to the company website

or external health websites like healthline.com and webmd.com, which offered accurate information and responsible practices for consuming energy drinks (*e.g.,* psychological operations). In this way, Monster preemptively controlled the narratives surrounding their energy drink products.

Fashion retailer Lane Bryant provides another real case that illustrates the deft execution of psychological operations—the most faceted dimension in the COIN framework (Fig. 1). In 2016, Lane Bryant teamed up with Refinery29—a leading digital media company for women—on their "The 67% Project" campaign. The name of the collaboration references the 67% of plus-size women in America who are absent from media representations (Refinery29 2016). The 67% Project anticipated and proactively engaged feminist, body diversity discourses when many fashion retailers were still promoting conventional beauty. To create positive word of mouth for the 67% Project, Refinery 29 hired five notable social media influencers to generate social content, produce synergies with Lane Bryant's "This Body" campaign, curate content for the Refinery29 website, and participate in brand-sponsored events. In short, the Lane Bryant campaign intermixed brand activism, brand communities, and positive brand narratives, and involved the use of an integrated media campaign, social media, and influencers. The 67% Project resulted in over 295 million social impressions and was nominated for the "Digiday Content Marketing Award for Best Brand + Influencer Collaboration" (IAB 2018).

Engaging modern activists is incredibly complex and unlikely to have a universal solution, and not all types of consumer activism may be resolved through strategies in the paper's COIN-inspired framework (Fig. 1). But what this paper *does* present are proactive strategies, which encourages mobilizing the organization to engage activists, identifying who activists are, and developing persuasive campaigns to win over activists, brand communities, and public support. In other words, the most effective means of activist defense is to launch a preemptive strike—to manage the environment such that an activist attack never occurs in the first place.

Agenda for future research

This paper's framework (Fig. 1) offers several directions for future research. Four research domains are elaborated in the following passages: 1) testing the framework, 2) testing the tools of implementation, 3) expanding the framework, and 4) studies that examine the broader topic of consumer activism.

Testing the framework

Future research could empirically test the framework's proposition that the implementation of proactive strategies will mitigate the likelihood of a negative activist event from happening (Fig. 1). Scholarship could take several permutations. The first is experimental studies that test the implementation of the proactive strategies on consumers' likelihood to boycott or protest. Specifically, the independent variables in these studies could be bifurcated into two conditions: 1) a brand that engaged in proactive strategies, and 2) a brand that did not. The dependent measures in the study could be "likelihood to boycott/protest" (Yuksel and Myrteza 2009), or other measures including consumer perception, purchase intentions, share price, brand image, and sales (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020; van den Broek et al. 2017).

The second variation is survey studies that asks brand executives about their beliefs that proactive strategies will reduce negative encounters with activist. Researchers would need to ensure that the key informants are qualified to report on their brand's activities. Researchers can survey informants about how the mobilization of COIN, intelligence operations, and psychological operations may impact some of the dependent variables listed in the above paragraph. Qualitative depth interviews may substitute for surveys if the goal is to capture richness and complexity with respect to the research questions, as opposed to measuring correlations.

The third variation is structural equation modeling (SEM) studies, which examine the relationship between one or more independent variables (IVs) with one or more dependent variables (DVs) (Ullman and Bentler 2012). Using SEM, researchers could model the relationship between the operative dimensions of the framework (Fig. 1) with dependent variables such as intention to boycott, consumer perception, or brand image. Subsequently, they can collect data (either continuously or discrete) to analyze causality between the IVs and DVs.

Future work can also examine the differential impact of proactive strategies versus reactive strategies. Which is more effective in quelling consumer activists' rage? This study suggests a proactive approach may be more effective, but the literature recommends reactive strategies, such as accommodation, defensive, or doing nothing. Future studies could take the form of experiments where the independent variables are "implementation of proactive (vs. reactive) strategies" and the dependent variables could be those identified in the previous paragraphs.

Testing the tools of implementation

Future research can examine the tools that operationalize the framework's operative dimensions (Fig. 1). For instance, to test the efficacy of mobilizing and coordinating COIN, scholars can test the impact of running wargames (vs. not running wargames) on organizational readiness to engage consumer activists. Researchers can also scrutinize the moderating effect of the high versus low use of meetings between

executives and employees on organizational readiness. Ideally, these studies are experimental studies that establish causality, but scholars could modify the inquiry into survey or qualitative variants.

The framework intimates that intelligence operations enhance an organization's understanding of consumer activists, and that online monitoring tools are a common form of intelligence gathering used by brands today (Clutch 2018). Scholars can conduct studies to examine the differential impact of low versus high use of online monitoring on a brand's understanding of activists.

This study suggests that psychological operations reduce an organization's likelihood of experiencing a hostile consumer activist event. Future work can estimate the magnitude to which psychological operations (*e.g.,* discrediting, counternarratives, brand communities, brand activism) impact activist cognition and behavior (*e.g.,* intent to purchase, brand perception, boycott). This style of research has been previously utilized in scholarship (Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020; Kim et al. 2022; van den Broek et al. 2017; Yuksel and Myrteza 2009). Furthermore, scholars can examine how different levels of brand activism (*e.g.,* high vs. low) can moderate the relationship between psychological operation type on activist cognition and behavior.

Expanding the framework

The operative dimensions and tools in the framework (Fig. 1), which were drawn from literature, could be verified, expanded, or contracted through qualitative field studies. Case studies of single or multiple organizations utilizing numerous levels of data sources (*e.g.,* observations, interviews, corporate literature, historical analysis) may be fruitful (Eisenhardt 1991; Yin 1994). Specifically, Eisenhardt and Graebner's (2007) case methodology involves two levels of analysis: within-case analyses and across-case analyses. The case studies can be directed to uncover the additional psychological operations and tools brands adopt to mitigate negative encounters with consumer activists.

Future research can also expand the framework by investigating the role of retailers in consumer activism. The current framework (Fig. 1) is a "two-player game" that recognizes brands and consumer activists. Yet, consumer activism impacts retailers also, as they are the distribution points of branded products, and have a role in moderating consumer attitudes during a scandal (Friedman 1996; Kapoor et al. 2021; Neilson 2010).

Broader studies on consumer activism

Finally, subsequent work can examine consumer activism issues related, but exterior to the framework. Longitudinal studies can test if consumer activism truly impacts short- and long-term business performance. Research in this area limited, and offers mixed results. For instance, scholars have found that boycotts damage brands, diminish sales, and negatively impact consumer perceptions (Kim et al. 2022; Mukherjee and Althuizen 2020; van den Broek et al. 2017). On the other hand, studies also show that consumer activism has little to no negative effects (Koku 2012), and in some cases, activism can *enhance* sales (Liaukonytė et al. 2022; Neureiter and Battacharya 2021).

The literature can also use more case studies of consumer activist events, which provide an in-depth review of brand controversies, and the actions and tools organizations used to overcome the scandal. Some notable examples include Pantano's (2021) overview of Dolce&Gabbana's 2018 China campaign, Scholz and Smith's (2019) overview of ProteinWorld's "Are You Beach Body Ready?" campaign, and Humphreys and Thompson's (2014) review of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster. As a body of work, these case studies document reactive strategies, which goes against the spirit of this study's proactive framework. But they offer deep, historic prescriptions of how and when brands responded, what worked, and what did not work.

Conclusion

In closing, the suppression of consumer activists who are dispersed, multiple, and hard to identify, represent a special brand challenge. For traditional activist groups, brands could negotiate with their leadership to arrive at an amiable outcome that satisfies both parties. However, this kind of negotiation is difficult with activist swarms with no leaders. It is beyond the scope of any organization to address every individual in the swarm. That is why proactive action is needed to prevent activist firestorms from occurring in the first place. This paper introduces a COIN framework as a strategic measure for brands to defend against consumer activists. But it does not suggest brands should attack consumer activists with hostility. Instead, this paper suggests that brands work preemptively with the mission objective: "Identify. Engage. Prevent."

Appendix

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Abney et al. (2017)	Service recovery	Twitter/Pizza	Highly adaptive recoveries (e.g., where the firm employees adjust their behavior to meet the needs of consumers) positively impact service recovery satisfaction	Accommodative	Reactive
Boshoff (1997)	Service recovery	Tourism	Time/speed and level of atonement impact consumer satisfaction in a service recovery event	Accommodative	Reactive
Boshoff and Leong (1998)	Service recovery	Banking	Attribution (accepting blame) is the most important component of the service recovery process. Once blame is accepted, consumers prefer to speak to staff who are empowered with service solutions	Accommodative	Reactive
Chaney et al. (2016)	Service recovery	Social media monitoring tools	Overview of popular Internet and social media monitoring tools that businesses can use to listen into consumer "chatter." Also provides a framework to respond to customers' negative feedback	Accommodative	Reactive
Hart et al (1990)	Service recovery	Conceptual review of service recovery	Articulates a framework for fast service recovery, with an emphasis on training employees and empowering them with the ability to make decisions relevant to service recovery	Accommodative	Reactive
Harun et al. (2018)	Service recovery	Not applicable	Service recovery strategies such as speed, apology, courtesy, and more play a role in consumers' perception of justice. Also recommend developing outlets for consumers to complain	Accommodative	Reactive/proactive
Hazee et al. (2017)	Service recovery	Airline	Co-created service recovery, where customers have the ability to personalize the content of the recovery is the most favorable solution for service failure. Empowerment of frontline employees to be able to customize a solution is important aspect of service recovery	Accommodative	Reactive
Mattila (2001)	Service recovery	Various service-oriented businesses	An apology combined with a tangible compensation positively influences recovery satisfaction	Accommodative	Reactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Michel et al (2009)	Service recovery	Conceptual review of service recovery	Service recovery fails because of misalignment between customer, employee, and process perspectives. Thus, successful recovery would entail aligning these three perspectives. The authors also call for the creation of a database to aid in service recovery decisions	Accommodative	Reactive
Spreng et al. (1995)	Service recovery	Moving company	A successful recovery process includes the development of a recovery program, and actively encouraging complaining behavior	Accommodative	Reactive
Stevens et al. (2018)	Service recovery	Online complaints	Introduces the 3 T framework (timeliness, transparency, and trust). For timeliness, firms could build teams for online complaints, monitor online sentiment, and respond to negative feedback. For transparency, firms could encourage customer interactions, empower brand advocates, and issue terms of online engagement. For trust, firms could personalize responses, encourage polite responses, and form a code of ethics	Accommodative, intelligence operations	Proactive
Arbel and Shapira (2020)	Consumer activism online	Nudniks	Nudniks are consumers who "call to complain, speak with managers, post online reviews, and file lawsuits." With big data, firms can proactively identify nudniks and disarm or avoid selling to them Alternately, firms can reactively, offer selective remedies to appease nudniks or drown out nudnik online reactions by flooding social media with positive brand stories. Finally, firms can pursue litigation to delimit nudnik's ability to complain	Intelligence operations, accommodative, defensive	Reactive/proactive
Balasubramanian et al. (2020)	Consumer activism online	Twitter	Firms with Twitter accounts tend to perform better than peers without Twitter with respect to corporate social responsibility. Outlines why social media is important with respect to corporate social responsibility	Psychological operations	Proactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Boyd et al. (2016)	Consumer activism online	Consumer activists	Social media is linked with increased individual empowerment. Empowerment can be high and low. The authors recommend that firms use social media as a means to communicate with consumers (vs. advancing the firm's interest)	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Gensler et al. (2013)	Consumer activism online	Consumer-generated brand stories	Articulates a network approach to branding that takes into consideration consumer-generated brand stories. The implication is that brands are no longer firm-generated stories, but rather what consumers tell each other it is	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Grégoire et al. (2015)	Consumer activism online	Conceptual review of social media firestorms	Typology of six styles of consumer social media complaints and how to manage them (solutions presented in parentheses): 1) complaint to the company (atonement and service recovery), 2) positive publicity about service recovery (share service recovery story online), 3) negative word of mouth (identify unhappy consumer and attempt service recovery), 4) complaining to a third party (work with the third party to resolve issue), 5) spreading negative publicity (identify unhappy consumer and attempt service recovery), and 6) when competitors respond to negative publicity to steal customers (use opportunity to have consumers identify problems)	Accommodative, pro-brand narratives	Reactive
Hansen et al. (2018)	Consumer activism online	YouGov panel	The most impactful social media firestorms are the ones that are triggered by a vivid image (e.g., video). Proactive monitoring of social media is needed to prevent or mitigate the effects of major firestorms. Smaller firestorms may require no action	Do nothing, intelligence operations	Reactive/proactive
Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006)	Consumer activism online	Anti-brand websites	Monitoring online anti-brand communities could be a free means to rejuvenate business functions and preemptive defense against opposition	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Ilhan et al. (2018)	Consumer activism online	Social media posts	Brand fans display their brand love on social media, but they also post negative comments on rival brands, and defend their brands against attacks	Psychological operations	Proactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Johnen and Schnittka (2019)	Consumer activism online	Social media	For observers of social media posts, a defensive brand response (e.g., pushing back) may be more effective than an accommodative strategy. Specifically, it is more effective in hedonic (vs. utilitarian) contexts	Accommodative, defensive	Reactive
Kahr et al. (2016)	Consumer activism online	Brand saboteurs	Consumer brand sabotage (CBS) is a form of hostile aggression where harming the brand is the dominant motive. The detection of CBS is important to mitigating the damage done by saboteurs. Some of these strategies include creating "balanced" branding strategies that are inoffensive. Once CBS has occurred, the firm could apologize, respond objectively to its failure, or discredit the saboteur	Accommodative, defensive, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Reactive/proactive
Koku (2012)	Consumer activism online	Boycotts against publicly traded companies	Online boycotts do not negatively impact brands economically. Even still, managers should monitor consumer sentiment online	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Kristal et al. (2018)	Consumer activism online	Brand co-creation	Brand co-creation carries risks (brand play and brand attacks). Brands need to closely monitor non-collaborative co-creations. Alternately brands could recruit artists as co-creators of brand play	Intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Minocher (2019)	Consumer activism online	Change.org	Recognizes that consumer activism could be bifurcated into "slacktivists," consumers who take to social media to voice their negative brand opinions, but take no further action, and "activists" (e.g., nudniks), who will take action beyond social media	Not applicable	Not applicable
Nyffenegger et al. (2018)	Consumer activism online	Spillover effects of a sabotaged brand	Consumer brand sabotage (CBS) of a brand manufacturer can negatively impact retailers who carries that brand. Retail managers should monitor brands and delist problematic ones from inventory	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Obeidat et al. (2017)	Consumer activism online	Facebook anti-consumption groups	The article points to the need for firms to be proactive in monitoring online spaces. Additionally, when a negative event is recorded, the firm would need to rapid and effectively address the complaint	Accommodative, intelligence operations	Reactive/ Proactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Pantano (2021)	Consumer activism online	Luxury brands (Dolce and Gabanna)	A "burst" of online negative comments amplify into aggregate-level brand hate, which can damage brands. Brands should do their best to contain the burst, and proactively monitor social media for threats	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Rauschnabel et al. (2016)	Consumer activism online	29 cases of consumer brand attacks (CBAs)	Firms should be proactive and monitor digital channels for eminent CBAs. Authors propose several reaction strategies including 1) change of behavior, 2) counter-stating, 3) appeasing, 4) bumping content, 5) ignoring, or 6) censoring/legal steps	Intelligence operations, accommodative, defensive	Reactive/proactive
Scholz and Smith (2019)	Consumer activism online	Protein world	Offers a counter-offensive response strategy called "Flyting," comprised of Deny, Diminish, and Escalate phases. The emphasis is in escalation, where a firm may 1) retweet hostile activist tweets, 2) reframe itself as the victim, 3) adopt moralistic tone, and 4) employ "cultural jujitsu," a form of reverse stigma	Defensive, psychological operations	Reactive
van den Broek et al. (2017)	Consumer activism online	Online protests	The paper indicates that online protests hurt the brand in terms of consumers' perceptions and purchase intentions. Authors recommend working with activists to find a mutual solution, proactive management of social media, and to have executives undergo training in response strategies	Psychological operations, work with activists	Proactive
Yang (2022)	Consumer activism online	Weibo	Emphasis on proactive online monitoring of brand activists to avoid crises	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Branicki et al. (2021)	Consumer activism	CEO activism	A critical evaluation of CEO activism during two "moral episodes"—DACA and FHAs. The authors typologize CEO activism into a 2×2 matrix	Psychological operations	Proactive
Carrington et al. (2019)	Consumer activism	Manager activism	Business organizations should fully train managers to understand activist motivations, if not embody activism themselves	Intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Griffin et al (1991)	Consumer activism	Negative brand publicity	The study suggests firms could proactively redress negative publicity to restore brand image. Denying the rumor or doing nothing seems to have a negative impact on consumer attitudes	Psychological operations	Reactive/proactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Gopaldas (2014)	Consumer activism	Activist groups and websites	Identifies three sentiment categories of ethical consumption: contempt for villains, concern for victims, and celebration of heroes. Brands can co-opt these sentiments in their branding to appeal to different ideological consumers	Psychological operations	Proactive
Handelman (2006)	Consumer activism	Societal constituents	Activists are a type of social constituent that co-produce brand identities in both positive and negative lights. It is vital for brands to understand how social constituents alter brand meanings, and use marketing communications to shape desirable brand stories	Intelligence operations, psychological operations	Proactive
Handelman (2013)	Consumer activism	Consumer activists	Consumers have multiple identities that may or may not conflict with their activist identities (e.g., "obfuscation"). The implication is that firms can investigate activists' backgrounds in their intelligence operations to dig up information that they can use to discredit brand saboteurs	Defensive, intelligence operations	Reactive
Kapoor and Banerjee (2021)	Consumer activism	Conceptual review of brand activism literature	To mitigate brand scandals, brands should issue a timely response, and amplify positive press in media	Accommodative, psychological operations	Reactive
Kim et al. (2022)	Consumer activism	Boycott campaigns in East Asia	The study demonstrates that animosity toward countries (e.g., Korea, Japan) can negatively impact purchase behaviors on brands from those countries. Brands could enhance its affinity by strategically leveraging its countries' unique culture to delimit this negative effect	Psychological operations	Proactive
Kozinets and Handelman (2004)	Consumer activism	Anti-consumer groups	Establishes the adversarial relationship between mainstream consumers and activists. While there are anti-brand activists, there are also pro-brand consumers who will defend the brand against anti-brand rhetoric and activists	Mobilize brand communities	Reactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Liaukonytė et al. (2022)	Consumer activism	Goya boycott/buycott	In 2020, Goya supported Donald Trump leading liberals to boycott the brand. In media, the boycott was prominent, but in terms of sales data, Goya sales increased 22% as supporters boosted supported brand during the brand crisis (e.g., buycott). Brands do not need to react during crises, because many consumers may not boycott due to switching costs or brand loyalty	Mobilize brand communities, do nothing	Not applicable
Luedicke et al. (2010)	Consumer activism	Anti-hummer websites	Pro-brand consumers will defend the brand against anti-brand rhetoric and activists. And they can be as just as savvy as activists in using moral discourses to defend their ideologies and practices	Mobilize brand communities	Reactive
McDonnell and King (2013)	Consumer activism	Boycotts	Firms tend to use prosocial claims as a form of impression management in reaction to activist boycotts. Authors recommend firms develop a "tactical repertoire" in preparation for activist attacks	Defensive, Mobilize and coordinate COIN	Reactive/proactive
Mukherjee and Althuizen (2020)	Consumer activism	Brands that adopt socio-political issues	Identified an "asymmetric effect of brand activism," where brand scandals bore no negative impact for pro-brand consumers, but decreased attitudes, intention and choice for anti-brand consumers. Recommend avoidance of brand activism, and leaning on brand communities for support during crises	Accommodative, mobilize brand communities	Reactive
Neureiter and Battacharya (2021)	Consumer activism	Politically oriented companies (e.g., Starbucks, Chick-fil-A)	In certain cases, consumer activism can positively enhance sales, especially when boycotts lead brand supporters to rally around the company (*e.g.,* buycotts). Suggests that brands not take a political position in the first place	Mobilize brand communities	Reactive/proactive
Nyffenger et al. (2018)	Consumer activism	Retail branding	Consumer brand sabotage not only affects brands, but also the retailers that carry them. How should a retailer respond to a sabotaged brand? The findings suggest rapidly delisting the sabotaged brand	Accommodative	Reactive
Smith (2008)	Consumer activism	Environmental activists	Some agencies have sought to discredit environmentalists by illuminating their criminal pasts, or reframing activist activity as criminal activity	Psychological operations	Proactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Thomas and Fowler (2023)	Consumer activism	Social influencers	Brands need to be intentional in their influencer selection. Brands may also create their own social posts that influencers can repost, thereby controlling the overall brand messaging	Psychological operations	Proactive
Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007)	Consumer activism	Community supported agriculture	Outlines a countervailing theory to co-optation that allows for countercultures to reclaim and politicize their co-opted symbols and practices	Co-optation	Reactive
van Cranenburgh et al. (2013)	Consumer activism	Heineken beer	Case study of activism targeted against Heineken. Authors recommend firms adopt policies and mechanisms to coordinate activist control, and ways to influence managers in their responses	Mobilize and coordinate COIN	Proactive
Weijo et al. (2018)	Consumer activism	Restaurant day	Collective creativity can change the mobilization, organization, participation and recruitment for consumer movements	Not applicable	Not applicable
Antonetti and Maklan (2016)	Anti-consumption	Conceptual review of consumer anger	Consumers exhibit vengeful anger and problem-focused anger. Problem-focused anger can be resolved via service recovery and can reap positive consequences, but vengeful anger is hard to change	Accommodative	Reactive
Cherrier (2009)	Anti-consumption	Culture jammers and texts	Marketers can co-opt project identity anti-consumption discourses in their branding to appeal to consumers who have a "project identity," where anti-consumption is a part of their self-discovery, and does not negate negation	Psychological operations	Proactive
McGriff (2012)	Anti-consumption	Conceptual review of consumer boycotts	Recommends several strategies to prevent or mitigate the effects of consumer boycotts including monitoring, mobilizing brand communities and influencers to support the brand, creation of a dedicated social media team to address boycotters, or "do nothing."	Accommodative, intelligence operations, psychological operations	Reactive/proactive
Nguyen et al (2014)	Anti-consumption	Freegans	Brands should monitor anti-consumption websites for negative mentions, and manage their practices to mitigate negative encounters with anti-consumption groups	Intelligence operations	Proactive
Sandicki and Ekici (2009)	Anti-consumption	Ulker	Firms can create localized, culturally specific marketing communications to mitigate chances of politically motivated brand rejection	Psychological operations	Proactive

Authors	Domain	Empirical context	Takeaway	Recommended strategies	Higher-order categorization
Yuksel and Mryteza (2009)	Anti-consumption	Consumer boycotts	Unrelated positive information about the brand and negative information about the competition can reduce the likelihood of boycott behavior	Psychological operations	Reactive
Zarantonello et al. (2018)	Anti-consumption	Consumer interviews	Typologizes five forms of brand hate, and identifies antecedents of brand hate (negative experiences, corporate wrongdoing, image congruence)	Accommodative	Reactive

Declaration

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