EDITORIAL

Guest editorial overview: "dark side of online communities"

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Abstract

Online Communities have been growing with increasing intervention of social media. The digital natives have also gradually started to spend a fairly large time on the internet and their contributions have grown significantly in shaping discussions and future of online communities. With an increase in contribution, it is also witnessed that these communities have also been responsible for promoting cyberbullying; trolling; fake news; discriminant; harassment and many more such pressing issues. While studies have focused on each of these important issues, their lies a dearth of contributions from the academicians and practitioners that would extend the debate on the theoretical and practical side of these issues. Furthermore, with increasing complexity of data and forms of data, the problem becomes multifold. The current special issue aims to build discussions and debate on these critical issues.

Keywords Dark side · Online communities · Digital media · Brands · Theory

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1 Overview of the special issue

The aim of this special issue is to provide plethora of information in the online settings, for example, online communities, social media-based communities, forums, and comment boards, as the special issue aims to explore the dark side of the online communities. In spite of the fact that online communities provide a platform for constructive dialogue, the exchange of knowledge, and the provision of assistance, they are not without their negative aspects (Hilvert-Bruce and Neill 2020; Jordan 2019). In digital communities, cyberbullying and harassment may flourish. It is possible for users to engage in offensive behaviour against specific individuals or groups on the basis of their race, gender, religion, or other characteristics (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2009; Kucuk 2016; Gebauer et al. 2013).

As an additional form of harassment, trolling involves deliberately agitating or distressing others, and has the potential to disrupt a harmonious environment within a digital community. Several virtual communities cultivate echo chambers in which members are only exposed to information and viewpoints that are in agreement with their own (Kuo and Feng 2013; Ortiz 2019; Sharma et al. 2020). It has the potential to promote division and strengthen radical ideologies, thereby restricting users' ability to contemplate alternative viewpoints (Kuo and Feng 2013; Ortiz 2019). Nearly two decades ago, Muniz & O'guinn (2001) introduced the idea of online communities as specialized, non- geographically bound networks of individuals who have shared goals and purpose. Scholars' attention, thus far, has mainly been limited to exploring the bright side such as members' participation and their motivation to join an online community, user engagement, and collectivist cultures (Hilvert-Bruce and Neill 2020; Jordan 2019). In spite of calls, literature on the dark side is scarce. As the bright side has already been extensively researched, the aim of this special issue is to explore its less attended, darker side (Ferreira et al. 2023; Lutz & Hoffmann, 2017).

Moreover, the escalating reliance of society on information technologies, in conjunction with the expanding magnitude, regularity, and complexity of cyber assaults perpetrated by malevolent actors operating on the Darknet (Gatzweiler et al. 2017). Despite the increasing apprehension regarding the ethical implications and negative aspects of online communities, it is worth noting that to date, there has been no comprehensive review of the literature that would allow for the identification of questions pertaining to these topics, and a comprehension of their origins and potential future developments (Ferreira et al. 2023; Jayawardena and Behl 2023).

Hence this special issue fulfilled several areas in the literature including online community engagement; brand sabotage virality; adverse effects of gamification elements; ethics and dark side of online communities; privacy concerns in social media; consumer brand negativity; customer engagement in firm-initiated and consumer-initiated online brand communities; darknet traffic analysis and antecedents and consequences of addiction to mobile games. We organized this editorial review as per three major themes (Please refer Fig. 1) of influence of digital media platforms: privacy in online communities and consumer brand engagement.

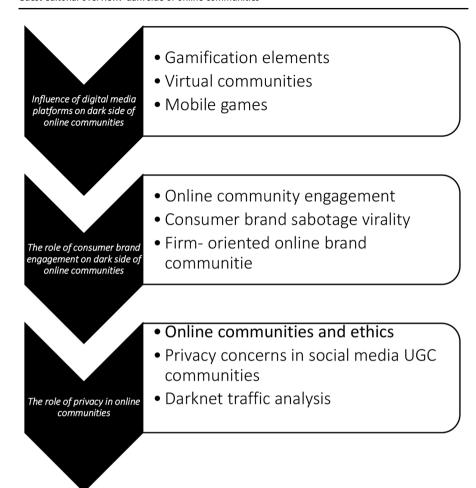The next section discusses the thematic mapping of this guest editorial.

Fig. 1 The three major themes of the guest editorial
Source: Developed by authors

2 Thematic mapping of the guest editorial

Numerous submissions for the special issue on the dark side of online communities focused primarily on the development of one or more proposed themes. In addition, the majority of accepted papers employed both a major and subordinate theme. We shall now provide a concise overview of the directional progression of these themes. A total of nine papers were approved for our special issue with the three main themes of influence of digital media platforms on dark side of online communities: the role of privacy in online communities and the role of consumer brand engagement on dark side of online communities.

2.1 Influence of digital media platforms on dark side of online communities

An inquiry inevitably emerges regarding the distinctions that exist between conventional media and social media when those platforms distribute information (Srivastava et al. 2022; Smaldone et al. 2020). It is well known that digital media platforms have a significant influence on the dark side of online communities, contributing both to the emergence and perpetuation of negative behaviours (Fox and Moreland 2015). The users of digital media platforms often have the option of creating accounts under pseudonyms or remaining completely anonymous (Fox and Moreland 2015). Although this can facilitate free expression, it can also serve as a shield for those engaging in malicious activities, such as cyberbullying, harassment, or spreading false information (Srivastava et al. 2022).

Social media platforms use algorithms to display content that aligns with the preferences and beliefs of their users (Srivastava et al. 2022). As a result, individuals may be exposed to only information that reinforces their existing views, thereby creating echo chambers (O'Hara & Stevens, 2015; Panke & Stephens, 2018). This can lead to the reinforcement of extreme ideologies in online communities, contributing to polarization and extremism (O'Hara & Stevens, 2015). Disinformation and fake news can spread rapidly through digital media platforms (Srivastava et al. 2022; Fox and Moreland 2015). The spread of false narratives can lead to the manipulation of public opinion, the spread of conspiracy theories, and the erosion of trust in reliable information sources as a result (O'Hara & Stevens, 2015; Panke & Stephens, 2018).

When considering the influence of digital media platforms on dark side of online communities, influence of gamification elements, virtual communities, and mobile games on the digital media platform landscape is substantial. When considering the gamification elements, digital media platforms frequently integrate gamification components in an effort to boost user retention and engagement. Badges, points, levels, and leaderboards are elements that incentivize greater user engagement with the platform. Incentives that recognise users for particular accomplishments or actions—such as submitting content, engaging in discussions, or finishing assigned tasks—have the potential to bolster user contentment and inspire sustained participation. A multitude of digital platforms enable users to acquire or generate virtual currency and products. Unlocking features, customising avatars, or improving the overall user experience are all possible with this.

Gamification has become a popular method of stimulating and promoting active engagement in online communities in recent years (Hamari 2017). In order to foster success and establish a sustainable operation, it is imperative that an online community is motivated to make frequent and constructive contributions (Hamari 2017). The demarcation between games is diminishing in accordance with their increasing popularity. This entails the integration of "game-like features" into services and applications that are not ludic in nature. Enhanced social connections result from heightened levels of engagement, thereby promoting social cooperation among community members (Behl et al. 2022; Jayawardena et al. 2021; Pereira et al. 2022). Nevertheless, augmenting participation in virtual communities presents a formidable task (Huotari and Hamari 2012). Gamification is contingent upon the specific context, and the mere incorporation of game-related components such as leaderboards,

points, and badges does not ensure favourable outcomes (Regalado et al. 2021; Hamari 2017). When recommending a suitable game, gamification specialists take into account various factors, including user profiling (Behl et al. 2022; Jayawardena et al. 2021). To date, shortage of research in investigating the potential adverse effects of gamification on students within an academic environment (Hollebeek and Chen 2014; Regalado et al. 2021; Hamari 2017).

On the other hand, virtual communities play a crucial role in enhancing the reputation of a brand (Regalado et al. 2021). Positive consumer brand engagement has garnered significant scholarly interest in the field of marketing, while negative consumer engagement has been given relatively little consideration (Regalado et al. 2021). Existing literature indicates that consumers often experience adverse experiences when interacting with brands (Parihar and Dawra 2020; Hara & Stevens, 2015; Panke & Stephens, 2018). Negative brand engagement is more pervasive and potentially more detrimental to brands and consumers than positive brand engagement (Parihar and Dawra 2020; Hara & Stevens, 2015). Smartphone addiction has garnered the interest of researchers as a distinct form of addictive behaviour, separate from conventional desktop internet game addiction, owing to its potential adverse impacts on mental health (van Noort and Willemsen 2012; Wang et al. 2019). The scarcity of specialised tools to assess this form of behavioural addiction has limited the number of studies that have investigated the correlation between addiction to mobile games and adverse effects on mental health (Wang et al. 2019; Balakrishnan and Griffiths 2018).

2.2 The role of consumer brand engagement on dark side of online communities

The negative aspects of online community engagement are equally as significant as their positive counterparts (Wang et al. 2019; Tsai and Hung 2019). Consumer brand engagement plays an important role in the dynamics of online communities, including both positive and negative aspects (Safadi et al. 2021; Tsai and Hung 2019). Brand engagement can enhance positive interactions and loyalty, nonetheless it can also contribute to the dark side of online communities. It is possible for brand engagement to lead to the formation of online tribes or communities centred around specific brands (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021).

It is possible that these communities may become echo chambers where members reinforce their beliefs and values, resulting in polarization and animosity towards other groups (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021). In some cases, strong brand engagement can lead to aggressive behavior towards individuals who criticize the brand or have a different perspective. It may result in online harassment and trolling, contributing to a toxic online environment (Ma and Agarwal 2007). In conclusion, it suggested that understanding consumer brand sabotage virality, understanding customer engagement in firm-initiated and consumer-initiated online brand communities are important factors when contributing both to positive and negative aspects of online brand communities.

2.3 The role of privacy in online communities

Digital ecosystems generate large quantities of information related to users' actions every day, leading to important concerns about their collection, management, and analysis, as well as their privacy. In contemporary times, individuals have developed an expectation to participate in and obtain assistance from digital communities (Porter and Donthu 2008; Wang et al. 2021). This special issue examines the primary privacy concerns prevalent in social media communities and their impact on online conduct. Over the past decade, digital strategies have become more prevalent in the business environment (Matt et al. 2015).

To enhance social network engagement and facilitate information management in digital settings, users are identified as vital elements of this interdependent ecosystem (Montalvo 2011). Digital communities are virtual spaces where people share ideas, preferences, and other relevant topics (Hilvert-Bruce and Neill 2020; Martín and Fernández 2022). Consequently, users generate a growing amount of data about their online activities, organization, and concerns every day (Martín and Fernández 2022). Artificial intelligence (AI) tools have not been used previously to identify online communities or their correlation with privacy concerns (Gupta et al. 2018; Montalvo 2011). This special issue provides a scholarly contribution by investigating the negative aspects of virtual communities, privacy issues in user-generated content communities, and darknet traffic analysis.

The next section discusses the selected papers with the aligned contribution in detailed manner.

3 The contribution for the guest editorial based on the accepted papers

The first paper selected was about analysing the obstacles to consumer engagement in online communities with title of "Understanding the dark side of online community engagement: an innovation resistance theory perspective". This study investigated this particular aspect with postulated hypotheses grounded in the Innovation Resistance Theory, with a total of 301 responses gathered from members of an online community. The study revealed that barriers related to social recognition, performance, and information saturation positively influence users' intention to disengage from an online community.

The second paper titled "Factors affecting Consumer Brand Sabotage virality: a study of an Indian brand boycott" discussed the negative brand relationships. In recent years, there has been an increase in the amount of research conducted on negative brand relationships. This type of research has mostly focused on product failures and service failures, leaving the conflict that arises as a result of the values and ethics espoused by a company relatively unexplored. In this study, the authors investigated the factors that influence the virality of social media content within the context of Consumer Brand Sabotage (CBS), a phenomena that has become increasingly popular in recent years. The objective of this study was to examine how tweet attributes

influence the likelihood that tweets about a brand's sabotage will be amplified by the data gathered from a week's worth of Twitter data.

The third paper, titled "Adverse effects of using gamification elements in online communities: A scoping review," discusses the adverse effects of using gamification elements in online communities. This paper examined the adverse effects of gamification elements in online communities based on the five-stage framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). In two different ways, the purpose of this paper is to improve our understanding of the adverse effects that can result from the use of gamification elements in online communities. It focuses on (1) a wide range of areas that have been examined for adverse effects of the use of gamification elements, emphasizing the fact that this topic is becoming increasingly popular, and (2) is a theme that summarizes organizational strategies for responding to adverse effects of the use of gamification elements in online communities.

The fourth paper examines the dark side of online communities from an ethical perspective, titled "Ethics and the dark side of online communities: mapping the field and a research agenda". The Internet has grown rapidly in acceptance and use, and it is relatively simple to create online communities, but there are ethical concerns regarding the dark side of their operation. A wide range of academic journals have published research on the dark side of online communities, resulting in a fragmented academic contribution. This study fills this gap in the literature by conducting a systematic review of ethics and the dark side of online communities.

The fifth study, "Privacy concerns in social media UGC communities: Understanding user behaviour sentiments in complex networks," discusses social media privacy Data collection, administration, and analysis are challenges in a digital ecosystem where user activity data is generated daily. This study investigates how privacy concerns affect online behavior among social media users. Machine learning was used to study social network online communities, privacy issues, and user behavior. The paper concludes with some user data methodologies and problems and how they affect digital user behaviour.

Brand engagement is the topic of the sixth study, "Why consumers turn negative about the brand: antecedents and consequences of negative consumer engagement in virtual communities". Marketing literature emphasises brand involvement but ignores negative consumer engagement. Brand switching and retribution result from unfavourable customer brand engagement. Researchers rarely examine virtual communities' dark side, yet this study does. Using the theories of expectancy-disconfirmation, social exchange, and equity, this conceptual model proposes an explanation for negative consumer participation in virtual communities.

In seventh paper, titled "Customer engagement in firm-initiated and consumer-initiated online brand communities: an exploratory study," a qualitative study is conducted on consumer engagement within online brand communities. Facebook-based brand communities initiated by firms (FIOBCs) and those initiated by consumers (CIOBCs) are analyzed. With the help of Netnography, a total of 2512 Facebook posts were analyzed across twelve online brand communities (OBC) of six brands. It is estimated that ten in-depth interviews were conducted with members of these online brand communities in total. Online brand communities that are driven by con-

sumers tend to provide information and to emphasize self-improvement and brand identification as well as promoting self-improvement.

It is the eighth paper in the series, entitled "Darknet traffic analysis, and classification system based on modified stacking ensemble learning algorithms", that discusses the darknet traffic analysis. Basically, the darknet is the unused address space of the internet, where people don't expect to interact with their computers in a way that they expect. It is important to analyze the threats that are characteristic of the network in order to establish security within the network. The purpose of this paper is to propose a new machine learning classifier called stacking ensemble learning in order to analyze and classify darknet traffic by using machine learning algorithms.

The ninth paper, titled "Examining the antecedents and consequences of addiction to mobile games: an empirical study," examined the antecedents and consequences of addiction to mobile games. Mobile games are typically played on portable devices such as mobile phones, feature phones, smartphones, tablets, personal digital assistants with game console capabilities, and portable media players with Internet access. A growing number of people are becoming addicted to mobile gaming. The factors responsible for such addictions, especially social influence and motivation, have been the subject of a few studies. This study examined the antecedents and consequences of mobile game addiction using social exchange theory, social networking theory, motivational theory, and technology acceptance theory.

4 Conclusion and future research directions

Although online communities offer a medium for constructive dialogues, the exchange of knowledge, and assistance, they are not without their negative aspects (Martín and Fernández 2022). Malevolent actors may target online communities with the intention of exploiting or manipulating their members (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021). This may include attempts at phishing, schemes, or the dissemination of propaganda for financial or political gain. Individuals may inadvertently expose sensitive personal data in virtual communities, thereby increasing their susceptibility to privacy breaches (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021). This data is susceptible to unauthorised access and other pernicious uses. Substance abuse through online communities may result in detrimental effects on the mental well-being of its members. The pressure to adhere to societal norms, constant comparison, cyberbullying, and other similar factors have the potential to induce stress, anxiety, and depression (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021).

Active involvement with brands has the potential to foster favourable exchanges and allegiance, yet it may also exacerbate negative aspects of virtual communities. The establishment of online communities or tribes that revolve around particular brands may result from brand engagement (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021). Extreme partisanship and hostility towards other social groups may ensue as members of these communities reinforce their own beliefs and values within echo chambers (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021). A strong brand engagement may occasionally lead to aggressive conduct towards individuals who express criticism or hold an opposing viewpoint. Contributing to the development of a hostile online environment, the

outcome could involve cyberbullying and harassment (Ma and Agarwal 2007). Thus, it is essential to understand the negative aspects of online community engagement, consumer brand subversion virality, and customer engagement in online brand communities initiated by both companies and consumers. It is possible for individuals to establish and engage in digital communities at the same time. Among these are virtual communities where members converse and discuss shared interests, preferences, and viewpoints (Hilvert-Bruce and Neill 2020; Martn and Fernández 2022).

Consequently, an ever-increasing volume of data pertaining to users' online activities, organisation, and concerns is produced on a daily basis (Martín and Fernández 2022). An examination of the correlation between online communities and privacy concerns utilising artificial intelligence (AI) tools has not been undertaken in the literature thus far (Gupta et al. 2018; Montalvo 2011). Limited research has been dedicated to investigating the adverse effects of the subject matter under specific conditions (Grewal et al., 2020; Naumann et al. 2020). The notion of negative online brand engagement is a recent development in the field of marketing research; there is still a significant lack of understanding regarding its causes, consequences, and dimensions (Hollebeek and Chen 2014; Heinonen et al. 2019). Researchers are interested in mobile game addiction as a distinct form of addictive behaviour from traditional desktop computer internet game addiction, owing to the potential adverse impacts it may have on mental health. The scarcity of research investigating the correlation between mobile game addiction and mental health outcomes can be attributed to the absence of specialised measurement instruments for this form of behavioural addiction (Wang et al. 2019; Balakrishnan and Griffiths 2018).

The utilisation of anonymity and pseudonymity within virtual communities has the potential to foster a dearth of responsibility regarding the conduct of its constituents (Martín and Fernández 2022). This could potentially enable individuals to engage in harmful behaviour without facing any consequences (Wang et al. 2021; Safadi et al. 2021). Consequently, this special issue made numerous contributions to the extant body of literature, encompassing the following: customer engagement in firm-initiated and consumer-initiated online brand communities; online community engagement; adverse effects of gamification elements; ethics and the dark side of online communities; privacy concerns in social media; consumer brand negativity; darknet traffic analysis; and antecedents and consequences of addiction to mobile games.

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