Consumer response journey following a product-harm crisis: The role of online brand communities

Julia Casey | Yimin (Stephanie) Huang | Shijiao (Joseph) Chen

Abstract
Online brand communities can serve as a crucial information source about a product-harm crisis and allow consumers to seek information from others and share their opinions in a social dynamic environment. The role of an online brand community in shaping consumer responses following such a crisis nevertheless remains under-researched. Drawing from attribution theory, this research explores the dynamic and holistic consumer journey in online brand communities following a product-harm crisis, specifically examining consumer attribution as the key mechanism and consumers' decision to forgive the brand as the outcome response. This research includes two studies. First, a netnographic pilot study is conducted to provide real-world evidence for the research phenomenon and to explore consumer responses within the natural setting of an online brand community. Second, the main study uses an interpretivist epistemological approach to track the unfolding process and capture the evolution of consumer attribution and forgiveness. The results show the social nature of attribution as members engage with others in online brand communities, seeking and verifying information, sensemaking and forming opinions. The findings make theoretical contributions to the literature on attribution and product-harm crisis. The findings from the research also help brands make informed decisions on crisis management strategies.

1 | INTRODUCTION

A product-harm crisis, defined as a ‘discrete event in which products are found to be defective and therefore dangerous to at least part of the product’s customer base’, can represent a significant threat to a brand (Cleeren et al., 2017, p.593). Examples of recent product-harm crises include the Samsung battery scandal and Toyota’s vehicle defect with unintended acceleration (Cleeren et al., 2017; Robson & Farquhar, 2021). In recent years, the frequency of product-harm crises has risen due to the increased complexity of products, enhanced scrutiny of manufacturers and policymakers, and greater challenge of quality control during the globalisation of production (Aon, 2021; Chen et al., 2022; Cleeren et al., 2017; Haas-Kotzegger & Schlegelmilch, 2013). With the prevalence of digital platforms including online brand communities, consumers have easier access to various information about crises and have become more demanding, which poses increasing challenges for brands to decide how to respond once product-harm crises occur (Cleeren et al., 2017; Robson & Farquhar, 2021).

There is a surge of interest among scholars in understanding consumer responses when a product-harm crisis occurs to provide crisis management implications (Khamitov et al., 2020). Prior research shows that when a product-harm crisis breaks out, consumers gather information and form a view about the causal explanations for the crisis (Folkes, 1984; Weiner, 1980). This psychological process is called...
‘attribution’, which helps consumers figure out the cause and key characteristics of the crisis so they can navigate themselves in such uncertain circumstances (Carvalho et al., 2015; Klein & Dawar, 2004). Attribution has important impacts on consumers’ downstream responses, such as forgiveness and revenge that lead to various behavioural consequences including purchase, word-of-mouth, and complaints (Grégoire et al., 2010).

Past research has focused on how consumer responses, especially attribution as the key mechanism, are affected by information about product-harm crises from traditional sources, including media reports (Liu & Shankar, 2015), company announcements (Backhaus & Fischer, 2016), and government announcements (Cleeren et al., 2013). Recent studies suggest that online brand communities could serve as a critical information source for consumers (Mandl & Hogreve, 2020; Yuan et al., 2020). Online brand community members can seek information from others to form a perspective and navigate through the potential danger caused by a product-harm crisis (Yuan et al., 2020). Despite the key role online brand communities play in influencing consumer responses to a product-harm crisis, little attention has been paid to understanding how online brand communities, as an information source and social platform, influence the shaping process of consumer responses following a product-harm crisis (Kuchmaner et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2020).

Compared to traditional information sources (e.g., Backhaus & Fischer, 2016; Cleeren et al., 2013; Liu & Shankar, 2015), online brand communities have unique and underexplored characteristics that may affect consumers’ attribution and subsequent responses differently. First, the information in online brand communities is shared by alike people rather than formal entities such as companies or governments, therefore consumers may personally relate to the information (e.g., shared experiences) and apply it not only cognitively but also emotionally (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2020). Secondly, online brand communities have a social and interpersonal nature, which is characterised by their evolving and interactive opinion-sharing (Füller et al., 2008; Meng, 2022a; Meng, 2022b; Schau et al., 2009). When consumers apply opinions from online brand communities, they are inevitably subject to social influence and may need to constantly update their own views (Brodie et al., 2013; Meng, 2022a).

Based on these two underexplored characteristics, this research focuses on the context of online brand community to understand its role in shaping consumer attribution and subsequent responses during a product-harm crisis. This research makes the following theoretical contributions. First, the research extends the understanding of how information affects consumer attribution and responses during product-harm crises by incorporating both cognitive and emotional perspectives. Prior research on product-harm crisis shows that consumers apply information cognitively to make attribution so they can assign responsibility and decide whom to blame (e.g., Klein & Dawar, 2004). Our research shows that personally related information shared by online brand community members could affect the consumer attribution process both cognitively and emotionally. Consumers may resonate with positive emotions in the community and reduce their anxiety, that further sways them from forming negative blame attributions of the brand. Online brand communities also provide reassurance to consumers on their experienced emotions, increasing their confidence in applying these emotions to forming blame attribution.

Second, this research contributes to understanding consumer attribution during product-harm crises by showing its evolving and dynamic nature from a social influence perspective. Previous studies have mostly examined consumer responses at a moment in time without exploring how consumers interact with others and how they develop and revisit their judgements gradually under social influence (Cleeren et al., 2017). This research addresses the call for product-harm crisis studies to understand social dynamics that involve others and to capture a dynamic and holistic journey of consumer response process (Khamitov et al., 2020; Roschk et al., 2023). The present research captures this highly contextual and evolving nature of the response shaping process under social influence. The findings show that consumers are subject to social influence in attribution forming, which is evidenced in their sensemaking and evaluation through social learning and selective adoption of or distancing from others’ opinions. The insights from this research will help brands make informed strategic decisions to weather potential crises and more effectively leverage their online brand community to manage a product-harm crisis.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. First, we report the relevant literature to develop an overall conceptual understanding that guides our empirical studies. We then present our ethnographic pilot study, followed by the main study using an interpretivist epistemological approach to track the unfolding process of how consumers decide upon attribution and forgiveness. Finally, we discuss the theoretical contributions and practical implications of our findings and provide directions for future research.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

This section focuses on the context of product-harm crises and reports the review on online brand communities, attribution and consumer forgiveness which are the key theoretical components of this research. The process of attribution is the most common consumer response following a product-harm crisis (Folkes, 1984). Consumers gather information so that they can determine who is to blame for the crisis and to get a sense of whether it will reoccur (Robson et al., 2021; Whelan & Dawar, 2016). Such attributions help consumers manage potential risk and uncertainty after a crisis. Recent research suggests that online brand communities could serve as a critical information source for consumers (Mandl & Hogreve, 2020; Yuan et al., 2020). However, the role of these communities in influencing the formation of consumer attribution and consequently consumer responses to a product-harm crisis remains unclear (Kuchmaner et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2020). Particularly, it is unclear if consumers may apply personally related information from the communities to form responses both cognitively and emotionally (e.g., Brodie et al., 2013; Yuan et al., 2020) and if they are subject to the social
dynamics within the online brand communities (Füller et al., 2008; Meng, 2022a; Meng, 2022b; Schau et al., 2009). This research therefore aims to address the question of how online brand communities influence consumer responses to a product-harm crisis.

2.1 Online brand communities

A product-harm crisis refers to well-publicised negative events in which products (or services) are found to be defective or dangerous (Cleeren et al., 2017). When a product-harm crisis occurs, consumers face uncertainty associated with potential harm and risks (Cleeren et al., 2017). To better navigate themselves in uncertainty, consumers will seek information and explanations to clarify the cause of the crisis (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Kuchmaner et al., 2019). Online brand communities have provided consumers with a convenient and easy-to-use platform to express their views about products and services. As a result, the speed at which brand information can be accessed and transmitted has risen significantly (Yuan et al., 2020). Prior research has primarily focused on the positive role of online brand communities in building trust and helping to facilitate the co-creation of value (Lee & Hsieh, 2022; Schembri & Latimer, 2016; Skalen et al., 2015). However, online brand communities are increasingly being used as a vehicle to express views about brands’ scandals and failures (Javornik et al., 2020; Schaefers & Schamari, 2016) thus, potentially playing multi-faceted roles in influencing consumer-brand relationships.

In online brand communities, consumer-to-consumer interactions are increasingly taking place and members may collectively influence other members’ responses (Baz et al., 2020; Dessart et al., 2015; Ozuem et al., 2021). From a cognitive perspective, consumers can seek information from others in the community to help form an opinion and navigate the potential danger caused by a product-harm crisis (Kuchmaner et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2020). From an emotion perspective, consumers may spread negative feedback to discharge anger and express their concerns to resonate with others in the online brand community (Chahal & Rani, 2017; Cleeren et al., 2017; Hajli et al., 2014; Yuan et al., 2020). Further research is needed to gain a better understanding of the social dynamics of consumer-to-consumer influence within online brand communities to provide better insight into consumer responses to brand crises (Khamitov et al., 2020; Kuchmaner et al., 2019; Yuan et al., 2020).

2.2 Theoretical perspective: Attribution

A product-harm crisis triggers a flurry of sensemaking activity of attribution through which a consumer seeks a causal explanation to determine whether the brand or others are responsible and whether the crisis will reoccur (Robson & Farquhar, 2021; Whelan & Dawar, 2016). This research draws on attribution theory to explore the influence of online brand communities on consumer responses following a product-harm crisis.

Attribution theory explores the process by which consumers gather information and form a view about the causal explanations for an event (Folkes, 1984; Kelley & Michela, 1980; Weiner, 1980). Attribution is important in the process as it helps consumers figure out the cause and key characteristics of the product-harm crisis so they can navigate themselves in such uncertain circumstances. Weiner’s (1980) model is widely used to understand attribution and identifies three dimensions, namely, (1) locus: whether the cause of the crisis is inferred as internal or external to the brand; (2) stability: whether the problem is perceived as stable as opposed to temporary and (3) controllability: whether the problem occurred within or outside the control of the brand (Klein & Dawar, 2004). These three dimensions are not factually based on objective evidence, but rather subjective judgments that are formulated based on the information available to the consumer (Klein & Dawar, 2004), such as the information shared by online brand community members. As consumers work through the process of attribution, they may interact with others gaining new information, perspectives, and insights (Yuan et al., 2020), indicating the dynamic and evolving nature of attribution in social settings.

Product-harm crises studied through the theoretical lens of attribution have discussed factors influencing consumer attribution such as prior beliefs, experiences, and expectations of the brand (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Lei et al., 2012), perceived impact and the severity of the crisis (Haas-Kotzigger & Schlegelmilch, 2013; Vassilikopoulou et al., 2018). The extent of self-brand connection (Cheng et al., 2012) and consumers’ attachment (Whelan & Dawar, 2016) have also been found to influence consumer responses including attribution following a product-harm crisis.

Scholars have recently suggested a theoretical gap in the product-harm crisis literature, that the role of other stakeholders (e.g., consumers) could influence consumer responses (Khamitov et al., 2020; Kuchmaner et al., 2019). We support this view that consumers are socially embedded and during social interactions are likely to align their approaches with others (Dunn & Harness, 2018; Shaw et al., 2016; Zollo, 2020). Recent research has recognised that attribution may also be shaped by consumer-to-consumer interactions in social media (Dunn & Harness, 2018). Complex, multi-faceted social relationships and consumer interactions are important in helping consumers form opinions and decisions (Dahl, 2013). In addition, emotions such as empathy may interact with persuasion and social influence in shaping the consumer response (Zollo, 2020), particularly the way consumers make attributions (Lange & Washburn, 2012).

2.3 Consumer forgiveness

Following a product-harm crisis, consumers may eventually respond by forgiving or seeking revenge (Khamitov et al., 2020). Such responses are driven by consumers’ attribution judgements (Fincham et al., 2005; Valor et al., 2022). Some consumers develop judgements of whether the brand is responsible for the crisis, whether the brand has control of the situation, and whether the crisis is a one-off event that is unlikely to occur in the future (Klein & Dawar, 2004). These attribution judgements can influence how consumers eventually respond to the brand (Fincham et al., 2005).
Among consumer responses, our research focuses on consumer forgiveness as the response to a product-harm crisis and investigates how this response is shaped and affected by attribution judgement development. Consumer forgiveness is crucial for companies to sustain long-term relationships with consumers through effective crisis recovery strategies (Wei et al., 2020). Consumer forgiveness refers to ‘consumers’ willingness to give up retaliation, alienation and other destructive behaviours after an organisational violation of trust and the related recovery efforts’ (Xie & Peng, 2009, p. 578). Consumer forgiveness is conceptualised as a deliberative process that has two facets, namely, (1) replacing vengeful negative feelings within the individual with positive ones, and (2) intentions to continue purchasing (repurchasing) the brand (Fetscherin & Sampedro, 2019; Harrison-Walker, 2019; Valor et al., 2022). Behavioural indicators for consumer forgiveness include cooperation with the brand, repeat purchases (repurchasing) of the brand, and reduced negative word of mouth (Harrison-Walker, 2019; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015; Yuan et al., 2020). Cheng et al. (2012) further elaborate on the concept that consumers with strong relationships with the brand are more likely to forgive because they view the brand as an extension of self.

Rather than an ‘act’, or a moment in time, consumer forgiveness is being shaped along an evolving process (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015). For example, social psychology studies about interpersonal relationships reveal key stages that victims experience during the process of forgiveness: generating positive characters about the transgressor, reducing negative emotions with rising positive affect, and increasing the likelihood of positive behaviour towards the transgressor (Takaku, 2001). While forgiveness is tied to an individual’s thoughts and feelings (Fetscherin & Sampedro, 2019), other consumers may also influence how consumers decide on forgiveness following a product-harm crisis (Dunn & Harness, 2018; Yuan et al., 2020). This indicates that when a product-harm crisis occurs, consumer responses associated with forgiveness are not explicit and automatic. Instead, they are complex and evolve over time (Khamitov et al., 2020; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015; Xie & Peng, 2009). Consumer responses associated with forgiveness are socially constructed and created through community-based knowledge. The views of different ‘actors’ and their interactions need to be considered to develop a credible account of how the responses can be formed (Gehman, 2017; Halinen et al., 2013).

This research aims to investigate how online brand communities influence consumer responses following a product-harm crisis. We are interested in how an online brand community influences consumer attribution and the consumer’s decision to forgive the brand after a product-harm crisis. The research explores the shaping of responses as it unfolds, mapping the processes and examining how consumers decide on brand forgiveness.

3 | METHODS
Given the evolving nature of our research phenomenon, we adopted a qualitative approach using event-based narrative analysis in this research. Qualitative research is uniquely suited to ‘opening the black box’ to understand, within context, the ‘how’, ‘who’ and ‘why’ of individual and collective action as it unfolds over time (Doz, 2011). The application of event-based narrative analysis also responds to a call for studies into product-harm crises to adopt alternative methodologies to capture a whole customer journey throughout all consumer touchpoints (Khamitov et al., 2020). The event-based narrative analysis enables researchers to capture the holistic response instead of snapshots, which provides a richer, more in-depth understanding of the consumer response (Khamitov et al., 2020).

This research was conducted with a pilot study followed by a main study. The pilot study using the netnographic methods provided real-world evidence for the research phenomenon and helped develop the initial understanding of consumer responses within the natural setting of an online brand community. The insights from the pilot study informed the design of the main study, in particular, the development of the interview guide to more accurately capture the evolving process. The main study used an interpretivist epistemological approach, with in-depth interviews to better understand how consumers develop attribution and decide on forgiveness in a product-harm crisis. To track the unfolding nature of the consumer response, a process research design was adopted using event-based narrative analysis. This helps to explain why things happen over time and the patterns and sequences of ‘events’ taking place, in terms of causal mechanisms (Aaboen et al., 2012). The definition of process applied in this research is a ‘sequence of individual and collective events, actions and activities unfolding over time in context’ (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 338). To make sense of processes, the researchers have adopted narrative methodologies recognising that social reality occurs in sequences of actions within structures that either constrain or enable changes (Abbott, 1992). From an epistemological perspective, an event-based process research design enables insights into how processes evolve over time and within context. From an ontological perspective, events reveal a new understanding of the process. The process research design captures the inherently dynamic nature of the focal phenomenon, the ‘triggers’ along the process, and the temporal patterns that occur.

4 | PILOT STUDY
The pilot study was purposed to develop a better understanding of the focal phenomenon of interest and to identify initial patterns to inform the design of the main study. We used a netnographic methodology (Kozinets, 2002) for the pilot study, because it provides detailed and accurate descriptions of social behaviour (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Kozinets, 2023; Schembri & Latimer, 2015) and has the capacity to generate rich content that provides the contextual and lived experience of online life (Reid & Duffy, 2018). The pilot study involved the covert observation of the online brand community for Chevy Bolt (ChevyBolt.org) during the product-harm crisis between 16 August 2021 and 31 December 2021. In August 2021, General Motors, the parent company of Chevy Bolt announced that it planned...
to recall the Chevy Bolt battery following several fires with the electric vehicle. We chose the case of Chevy Bolt’s product-harm crisis because the brand is well-known globally and has an active online brand community (ChevyBolt.org), including 18,600 members who have posted 387,800 posts since 2015 when the community was established. The ChevyBolt.org online brand community provided a naturalistic setting where online social interactions since the product-harm crisis occurred could be observed unobtrusively.

The data were collected through observation of texts, images, and videos about the product-harm crisis sourced from the ChevyBolt.org brand community. The Chevy Bolt online community data set consisted of 229 threads dedicated to the recall of the vehicle and the product-harm crisis. In this research, we used the intention to repurchase as a behavioural indicator of consumer forgiveness (Yuan et al., 2020). We first reviewed responses to a question posted in the online brand community discussion forum about whether members would purchase another Chevy Bolt. These responses identified consumers who had favourable intentions for future purchases of the Chevy Bolt. This response analysis helped us to draw a sample of 20 members from the online brand community and 500 posts for analysis from these members about the product-harm crisis over the time period from August 2021 to December 2021. We tracked member interaction following the announcement from General Motors about the Chevy Bolt battery recall, through to the replacement of batteries following the product-harm crisis.

The narrative data were collected and compiled into a spreadsheet. Firstly, we familiarised ourselves with the data through sorting the data content by individual member to examine and identify meanings, patterns, and themes. We created initial codes that represented the meanings within the data and assigned the codes to the excerpts with the same meaning. The data was then categorised to identify themes of consumer behaviours on the online brand community following the Chevy Bolt product-harm crisis. We used the case-based cluster method (Uprichard, 2009) to merge similar themes into clusters. This helped to discover behavioural patterns of how consumers engage with online brand communities following a product-harm crisis.

The pilot study confirmed that the phenomenon of interest exists. Consumers actively interact with online brand communities when they cope with a product-harm crisis. An online brand community was instrumental in helping consumers process information and form opinions to determine attribution and forgiveness. Further, the findings revealed that consumers engage with the online brand community in different ways as they move on to cope with a product-harm crisis, including seeking information, sense-making of the information gathered from the online brand community, as well as forming and sharing their own opinions and sentiments. These findings indicated that a nuanced approach, in contrast to a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, is needed to capture the dynamics of the consumer response development process following a product-harm crisis. Table 1 summarises the top-line findings from the pilot study.

## 5 | MAIN STUDY

### 5.1 | Methods and sampling

The main study was designed to explore consumers’ interactions with the online brand community over time to understand how the interactions affected consumers’ decisions on attribution and forgiveness. To achieve this, the main study used case studies with event-based narrative analysis. This method focuses on identifying critical events and their connections, understanding event sequences, and deciphering the temporal progression of events leading to attribution and the decision of forgiveness. A retrospective longitudinal case study was designed for the main study. Retrospective longitudinal approach has been used in other brand failure research for its advantage that consumers who have experienced the situation first-hand can report their actual feelings following the occurrence (Harrison-Walker, 2019). In making sense of events, consumers engage in retrospective and prospective thinking and can refer to their lived experiences and memories (Halinen et al., 2013), thus, providing rich accounts and helping researchers to reconstruct the past within the context or ‘natural setting’ (Pettigrew, 1997).

Four recent product-harm crises were selected for the research, with the purpose to seek contextual diversity. The crises were selected based on the criteria that (1) the product-harm crisis occurred within the last 12 months; (2) the brands selected are well-known brands; and (3) the brands have online brand communities with active members. A summary of the selected cases of crises is presented in Table 2, with further descriptions provided in Appendix A.

In-depth interviews were conducted for data collection with a theoretical sampling approach. Subjects were recruited following the selection criteria of: (1) being aware of the selected product-harm

### Table 1 | Summary of pilot study findings: patterns of consumer behaviour in the online brand community during a product-harm crisis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seeking information</th>
<th>Sense-making information</th>
<th>Forming and sharing opinions and sentiments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumers go to the online brand community to seek information about the product recall throughout the crisis.</td>
<td>As consumers evaluate and process the information provided by other consumers, they assess the relevance to their own situation and potential impact. They tap into the community for more information in relation to their circumstances and for advice from other consumers.</td>
<td>The influence of others emerges as consumers share their opinions about who is to blame and whether the brand is doing enough to support them. The interaction has evolved, and consumers start to share more about how they feel and their experience. Others react to the posts and provide new perspectives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
crisis for the selected brand, (2) being participants in an online brand community for the respective brand, and (3) having decided to forgive the brand as demonstrated by their behavioural intention to repurchase the brand.

Two steps were taken in recruiting subjects that satisfied the selection criteria. A pre-screening survey was designed and then distributed to the online panel Prolific. Potential subjects were asked to complete the survey, and those who were qualified and expressed interest were invited to participate in an in-depth video interview.

As a result, 13 qualified consumers were recruited and completed in-depth interviews with a minimum of 1 h (please see participant profile in Table 3). This sample size is considered appropriate as it permits deep case-oriented analysis (Boddy, 2016; Mason, 2010). A semi-structured interview guide was developed (see Appendix B), informed by the findings from the pilot study, with a key focus on capturing events along the progression of how consumers form attribution and decide on forgiveness during a product-harm crisis. Given the retrospective nature of the cases, participants were informed about what would be discussed in the interview so that they could adequately prepare. In the interview, participants were asked to share their stories about what happened when the product-harm crisis occurred and how they interacted with the online brand community. By sharing their stories, participants were able to contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being researched and brought new themes into the conversation as their interaction with the online brand community was probed and discussed. All the interviews were recorded, and verbatim transcripts were produced for analysis.

All participants were asked to describe their social tie strength with the brand, including motivation to join the online brand community and frequency of visits. The social tie strength evaluates the quality of a relationship in terms of closeness, intimacy, and support (Gao et al., 2018). Consumers with weak tie strength in consumer-brand relationship are referred to as ‘transactional consumers’, who visit online brand community occasionally and are largely driven by calculative purposes such as acquiring information on sales and discounts. Consumers who have a strong tie strength in consumer-brand relationship are referred to as ‘brand ambassadors’. These brand ambassadors feel bonded with brands and would visit the online brand community regularly to seek a sense of belonging. Table 4 presents the grouping of participants based on their relationship strength with the brand.

### 5.2 Data analysis

Event-based narrative analysis aims to capture the dynamics over time (Pettigrew, 1997). The evolution of changes along the process is captured through an analysis scheme comprising influencing factors and subsequent changes (Halinen et al., 2013). In this way, the analysis is focused on a holistic rather than a linear explanation of the process which is then linked to outcomes (Pettigrew, 1997). Narratives acknowledge ‘events’ as units of analysis (Halinen et al., 2013; Huang & Wilkinson, 2014). The focus of the data analysis is on identifying and examining critical events as triggers using event system theory (Morgeson et al., 2015). Critical events are characterised by novelty and disruption, resulting in changes such as new perspectives, behaviours or thinking (Morgeson et al., 2015). Events are mapped in a spatial–temporal structure to identify their connections and

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**Table 2** Product-harm crises summary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brands</th>
<th>Descriptions of product-harm crises (business cases)</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Online brand community (brand-managed vs. consumer-run)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samsung</td>
<td>Mobile phone fire on aircraft</td>
<td>August 2021</td>
<td>Brand-managed online community and consumer-run online community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyota</td>
<td>Recall of Toyota motor vehicle due to vehicle fault.</td>
<td>June 2022</td>
<td>Brand-managed online community only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kia</td>
<td>Recall of Kia motor vehicle due to vehicle fault</td>
<td>June 2022</td>
<td>Brand-managed online community and consumer-run online community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coles’ Private Brand</td>
<td>Recall of Coles’ private-branded packed spinach</td>
<td>April 2022</td>
<td>Brand-managed online community and consumer-run online community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3** Participant profile.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand/product</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kia automobile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung mobile phone</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyota automobile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coles-branded</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>packed vegetables</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
locations through which the process unfolds when consumers shape their attribution and decide on forgiveness to the brand involved in the crisis.

The data analysis followed two steps, namely, within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. The within-case analysis used event-based sequence analysis (Abbott, 1992) to unpack the narratives and construct a replicable causal interpretation of the event (Griffin, 1993). The nature of events in each case taking place throughout the product-harm crisis was identified, described and mapped, with full consideration of contexts in which processes were embedded (Huang & Wilkinson, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The event sequence mapping (see an example in Appendix C) has helped to identify meaningful events, as well as their spatio-temporal positions in the overall process, their connection to other events and the impact on the two outcome events of attribution and forgiveness. Events that were disconnected to other events were identified as incidental events and extracted.

Meaningful events were retained and coded for further analysis. The coding was guided by the research questions and based on contexts, actors and the nature of activities involved by actors. All the researchers in this study did the coding and the coded events were compared, reviewed, and revised to ensure consistency and accuracy (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). The coded events were then transcribed onto another temporal map for each case for process tracing. Particular attention was given to changes emerging out of the interaction between consumers and the online brand community, leading to attribution and forgiveness events. The routes were traced to map out the unfolding process that reveals key mechanisms driving the shaping of attribution and consumer forgiveness.

The cross-case analysis involved identifying patterns and contextual themes across cases and comparing differences (Ragin, 1981). These differences were explored further by revisiting and probing the data, as well as reviewing the relevant literature (Huang & Wilkinson, 2013). It is important to note that the aim of the cross-case analysis was not to seek conformity in processes, but to identify patterns and underlying mechanisms that explained the differences. Differences are treated as significant parts of the research that provided complementary answers and encompassed a broader domain of potential mechanisms generating the same phenomenon. An important step in the cross-case analysis process was to fully reference the context so as to explain the process patterns observed, for example, the consumer’s relationship with the brand.

### 6 | FINDINGS

#### 6.1 | Motives to participate and engage in online brand communities during product-harm crises

The findings show that consumers are motivated to interact with online brand communities for a variety of reasons when a product-harm crisis occurs. These motives range from functional motives to social motives and identification with the brand. Consumers’ functional motives include seeking and verifying information. During a product-harm crisis, consumers refer to online brand community as an exclusive information source to develop a better understanding of the situation (‘There was a big thing about it on there... you don’t always hear about it elsewhere’). The findings reveal that seeking and accessing to additional information of product-harm crisis from others to develop a fuller understanding of the situation is a crucial functional motive for consumers to interact with online brand communities.

As for social motives, the findings reveal that consumers expect to share feelings and emotions to achieve a shared identity and sense of belonging. They also look for emotional support from other ‘like-minded’ consumers in online brand communities to ease their anxiety and concerns when they found themselves affected by the product-harm crisis. It is observed that consumers value the benefit of engaging with others who share a common identity, feelings, and purpose (‘I feel very close to that community because I feel that they are very relatable to me’). This finding evidences the strong social and emotional influence of other consumers in online brand community on how consumers cope with product-harm crisis. For example, when consumers observed that other community members were calm and not worried about the product-harm crisis, they became less anxious (‘If I had read more of people panicking and making it a big deal, I would also be panicked’).

The findings also reveal differences in consumers’ perceptions of consumer-run and brand-managed online brand communities, which affect their subsequent reliance on these online brand communities as they cope with the product-harm crisis. This study shows that consumers trust the information in consumer-run brand communities to be more authentic than those in brand-run communities, and believe that consumer-run brand communities provide more truthful and complete views of the situation (‘I prefer the Reddit community (consumer-run online brand community) over the group that is run by Kia because I think that Kia may have some kind of hidden agenda. Maybe sometimes they will try to suppress some news or some rumours about their brand, whereas on Reddit they have no incentive to say something’). This finding indicates the different approaches consumers take in engaging in consumer-run versus brand-managed online communities throughout the product-harm crisis, that they demonstrate higher levels of participation, trust and openness in consumer-run online brand communities. As a result, consumers are more likely to be influenced by consumer-run brand communities when shaping their own views and attribution decisions. In the following sections, we present more findings on the evolving process of how consumers interact with online brand communities to decide on...
attribution and forgiveness to the brand involved in a product-harm crisis.

### 6.2 Attribution process: Trigger point

A product-harm crisis initially triggers anger, worry and anxiety among consumers. Consumers are eager to know what happened, how they are impacted and what caused the crisis. When consumers are in such a stressful situation, they would look for opportunities to share their feelings and experiences with other consumers. Our finding shows that after the initial emotional response to the news of the product-harm crisis, the online brand community is one of the first places consumers visit. Consumers’ priority is to gather more information about the crisis, see what other consumers are experiencing and thinking, and/or verify information sourced elsewhere about the product-harm crisis. Being the primary source of information for consumers during a product-harm crisis, online brand communities play an important role in shaping consumers’ initial perceptions and interpretations of the situation. They initiated the decision-making process for attribution by being the ‘go-to’ place and a reliable source of information.

### 6.3 Attribution process: Sensemaking and evaluation through social learning

Sensemaking refers to the dynamic mechanisms through which consumers form an integrated view of the situation (Huang & Wilkinson, 2013). Sensemaking helps gauge the severity of the crisis and enables consumers to assess if the crisis has an impact on them. The findings discovered that consumers engage in sensemaking through gathering, evaluating, and processing the information in the online brand community to understand the nature and impact of the product-harm crisis. An online brand community presents a social sharing and learning context. It also acts as a ‘barometer’ for consumers to understand the nature and extent of the impact and to investigate how they will be affected.

‘I think it was just more like enquiring minds wanting to know, like ‘How did this happen?’, because it was a freak thing. It’s not like they sold hundreds of thousands of that model and it didn’t happen to any of those. I think it was just more of a scientific or just curiosity really’.

As they learned more, consumers in the online brand community felt more confident in assessing the situation. Consumers felt a level of comfort in connecting with others in the same situation to get advice about what to do, as well as to share sentiments or ‘let off steam’ if they were frustrated. It was observed that as consumers were exposed to richer conversations in the online brand community, they became more actively engaged in processing and interpreting information received. They also began to form opinions of the comments by other consumers on the crisis situation and felt comfortable to express in the community. For example, one consumer interviewed mentioned the discussion in the online brand community about the seriousness of the recall. Many consumers made critical comments there filled with frustration, anger, and concerns. While they understood these emotions, they also disagreed with the negative tones in the comment and brought different views to the conversation.

‘It did happen, and it is what it is. You have to move on and go from there. It’s what they do after that that matters also.’

This narrative revealed that as consumers engage with the online brand community more deeply, they would adapt their knowledge and experiences to form a view of the product-harm crisis situation. The interactions among consumers gradually change the sentiment in the online brand community (‘Initially a lot of people were panicking but over time it definitely became more of making fun of Coles or making fun of the whole situation’). This indicates that consumers are influenced by others when they process information and consider others’ opinions to assess the situation and form their attribution. Attribution is being shaped within a social learning and sharing context with consumers actively or passively engaging in observing, perspective taking and sensemaking with other consumers in the online brand community as they work through the process of attribution (‘I was agreeing with them because being such a huge brand all over Australia and they have so many consumers they should have ensured that they checked their spinach’).

### 6.4 Attribution process: Selective perception in forming views

Our finding reveals that as the crisis continues, consumers engage with the online brand community more deeply and share their sentiments more freely within the community. Consumers respond to the sentiment expressed by other consumers in the online brand community in various ways. For example, posts with sentiments could comfort other consumers as they provide reassurance that feelings and emotions, such as anger, frustration, or a sense of betrayal, are normal when consumers cope with a product-harm crisis (‘A lot of people were commenting that people don’t need to be worried about that recall as it just happened to specific models in a specific period of time, so people just need to calm down and check whether their car was on the list or not’).

At the same time, it is noted that consumers put in more deliberate cognitive efforts in screening and processing information from online conversations as they develop views on comments left by other consumers (“I would see the occasional person complaining that they thought something had made them sick and I wondered if that was like a bit of paranoia. I did find myself thinking ‘well how do you know that’s what made you sick?’). It is noteworthy that
consumers tend to distance themselves from other consumers in the online brand community whose posts blame brands unfairly or are loaded with strong unpleasant emotions. At the same time, comments that are aligned with the consumer’s viewpoints are more likely to be accepted and influence their views when forming attribution.

‘There were some very angry people who were just blaming Coles and saying bad things. They were not getting much reaction or replies to their post. There were a few who were saying that Coles has done the right thing by informing everyone straight away and they believed that Coles was more than capable to handle this situation and to avoid it from happening in the future. I was siding with the ones who had confidence in Coles. I trust them to be vigilant in catching such things in the future.’

These observations reveal the occurrence of selective perception among consumers at this stage as they continue to be engaged in the online brand community while coping with the product-harm crisis. Consumers tend to selectively absorb what they agree in the information sources while ignoring or distancing themselves from opposing viewpoints (Klein & Dawar, 2004). Selective perception is an important part of sense-making through which consumers choose to perceive, process and interpret information in making sense of their world and in forming attributions (Huang & Wilkinson, 2013). Our findings discover that selective perception occurs when consumers have developed a good understanding of the situation and their own perspectives in reading the situation. Selective perception is more likely to be triggered by strong emotionally charged posts, in particular, negative emotions expressed by other consumers in the online brand community.

6.5 | Attribution process: Assignment of responsibility

Attribution occurs as a continuing interaction between consumers and the online brand community, leading to consumers finalising their attribution of who should be responsible for the crisis. Findings in this research provide further empirical evidence to this view, that consumers shape their attributions of responsibility as they engage in conversations in online brand communities, making sense of what they hear from other consumers, and responding to it. Consumers blend the information, feelings, sentiments, and opinions shared in the online brand community to form a perspective about who is responsible for the product-harm crisis. This indicates that an online brand community has facilitated consumer attributions of responsibility through both cognitive and affective ways.

Further, it is observed that as consumers learn about others’ attributions in the online brand community, they attempt to form their own attributions of responsibility, as evidenced in the following quotes. This implies the role of an online brand community as a propeller for forming attributions of responsibility via the mechanism of social influence.

‘I agree with the opinion that Kia had to take responsibility. I think Kia was responsible because maybe they didn’t do the quality control of their suppliers well and that caused the domino effect of the defective product. I think people agree that maybe they need to put more effort, time, and resources into quality control for their production.’

‘What the community was curious about was whether it (the battery problem) was a design flaw with the phone or was it the phone and the circumstances, potentially how this user was using it. Maybe they were using it to play movies for six hours. Did they get this thing super-hot already? And then, you know, maybe an altitude shift. I think it was more inquisitive.’

6.6 | Outcome: Consumer forgiveness

Our findings reveal that consumers tend to forgive brands when they attribute the crisis as a one-off accident that rarely occurs (low stability) (‘it hasn’t changed my perspective on Coles at all. It’s just a thing that happened, like a road bump really. But if it became a more regular occurrence about different products, for example, or seeing a lot more recalls, then I might start thinking twice’). A more noteworthy finding is that consumers’ decision of forgiveness is not only affected by their attribution of the product-harm crisis, but also by the additional knowledge obtained from the online brand community when information shared extends from a particular crisis to a general brand-related conversation. As the product-harm crisis unfolds over time, the scope of conversations among consumers in online brand communities is broadened, which directs consumers to go beyond a particular product-harm crisis to reflect upon the brand in general, such as the track record of the product recalls in the past and the company’s investment in product quality and consumer relationships. The new content brought to the online conversations in the brand community dilutes the negativity of crisis, thus, enhancing the likelihood of consumer rationalising, defending and excusing the brand involved. The online brand community helps foster consumer forgiveness if a brand is seen to be doing the right thing on a day-to-day basis (Yuan et al., 2020), for example, demonstrating commitment and responsibility after the product-harm crisis. Such learning from the online brand community would encourage consumers to rationalise the brand’s responses in a positive way and begin to defend the brand (‘Mistakes happen, but I think Kia voluntarily recalled their cars, so I’m sure that they are very committed and take responsibility for their mistakes’).

6.7 | Contingency in attribution process and forgiveness

The cross-case analysis in this study identified the pattern that the decision-making processes of attribution and consumer forgiveness
during a product-harm crisis vary between transactional consumers (a weak tie strength between the consumer and the brand) and brand ambassadors (a strong tie strength between the consumer and the brand) (Gao et al., 2018). In the process analysis, much fewer events occurred before transactional consumers reached the decision of attribution and forgiveness, indicating that transactional consumers are less engaged in information searching, deliberation and sensemaking out of their interaction with the online brand community. Transactional consumers mainly use the communities to assess how the crisis would impact themselves. They would immediately dive into searching for relevant information without engaging in conversations with other consumers. They tend to pay more attention to the matters that affect them, not others. In addition, their stay in the online brand community during the crisis is short and brief, as they just ‘skim through’ the comments to quickly get an idea of what is going on. If they perceive that the product-harm crisis has a low impact on them, there is little deliberation of attribution and they move quickly to decide on attribution and on forgiveness (or not) (‘In my mind, I was just thinking these things happen. I’m at least aware of it. It’ll somehow get fixed up over time’).

Brand ambassadors, in contrast, are drawn to the online brand community to feel connected to the brand and show their support. They regularly visit the online brand community as it gives them a strong sense of belonging, shared identity and comradeship with other consumers. The findings discover longer processes with more events identified that lead to attribution and forgiveness among brand ambassadors. This evidences that the decision-making process for attribution is deeper and more complex for brand ambassadors, and there is a deliberate process of deciding who is to blame. Brand ambassadors seek information from both within the community and external sources. They embark on a strong and thorough verification process by accessing multiple information sources multiple times. Brand ambassadors are reluctant to attribute blame without all the relevant information and depend on the online brand community in forming a perspective by actively evaluating the information and observing comments from other members (‘I was doing searches with Google news and would go into Facebook to see if there was any word... There’s a view which shows everything they’ve (Coles) ever posted and other people have posted’). While the attribution process is more complex, the findings show that once a conclusion of attribution is reached, the decision to forgive the brand is a relatively straightforward process for brand ambassadors where the online brand community plays less of a role.

Figure 1 summarizes the findings presented above.

7 | DISCUSSION

The literature on product-harm crisis notes that consumer responses to a crisis are complex (Cleeren et al., 2017), and there are different processes at work requiring the use of alternative methodologies (Khamitov et al., 2020). Our study uses an event-based narrative analysis to understand how consumer responses evolve over time as an outcome of the interactions between consumers and online brand communities. It is one of the first empirical efforts to understand the influence of the online brand community on how consumers develop attribution and decide on forgiveness following a product-harm crisis.

The process of attribution enables consumers to determine the cause and characteristics of the crisis so that they can navigate their way through the uncertainty after a product-harm crisis. The findings from this research reveal that attribution is being shaped as an evolving process with social learning patterns, that consumers interact with other consumers in the community to formulate their responses. As consumers grasp a better understanding of the crisis situation, they are more comfortable and confident in engaging in conversations with other consumers in the online community, where they felt safe to express their own views or disagree with others. Consumers became selective with information shared in the community to process and respond to. They are more likely to be affected by information and opinions from online brand communities that align with their views but would distance themselves from heavy emotion-loaded opinions, especially strong negative and unpleasant ones. This indicates that consumers engage in online brand communities in different ways at different stages when coping with the product-harm crisis. There is a blend of intuition and reason in how consumers want to interact with and be influenced by online brand communities during the coping experience, the precise mix depending on the situation (Huang & Wilkinson, 2013). It is however not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. The results reveal that the pathways leading to attribution and forgiveness vary within different contexts, in particular, how consumers are related to the brand in crisis and perceive the value of online brand community. Transactional consumers tend to stay in online brand communities briefly as they only use the communities to collect information on the product-harm crisis to understand the crisis and its impact. They are less engaged in actively processing information received from the online brand community, indicating that the influence of online brand communities on transactional consumers is the strongest at the early stage of crisis but this influence will diminish once they think they have understood the situation. Brand ambassadors tend to stay in online brand communities much longer and be engaged in conversations with other consumers beyond a product-harm crisis, hence, being exposed to more sustained influence from online brand communities as they form their views on attribution and decide upon forgiveness.

7.1 | Theoretical implications

This research has the following theoretical implications. First, our study is among the first to treat online brand community as a crucial information source of product-harm crisis, and it expands the current understanding of the role of crisis information on consumer attribution and subsequent responses. Specifically, previous studies mainly focus on consumers’ cognitions when evaluating how information from traditional sources affects the way they make attributions to assign responsibility and blame (e.g., Backhaus & Fischer, 2016;
Cleeren et al., 2013; Liu & Shankar, 2015; however, our research assesses both consumers’ cognitions and emotions when exploring how personally related information from the online brand community shape their attribution and responses. We show that positive emotions experienced by consumers when interacting with online brand communities will affect how they justify the brand's responsibility, which further influences their readiness and willingness for brand forgiveness.

Second, there is limited understanding of social dynamics that involve others within the context of product-harm crisis (Khamitov et al., 2020; Roschk et al., 2023). Our research captures the social dynamic nature of the consumer journey by adopting a processual approach from a social influence perspective. The findings discover the evolving and interactive processes of how consumers form their decisions of attribution and brand forgiveness through engaging with other online brand community members, such as sensemaking and evaluation through social learning, and selective adoption of or distancing from others’ opinions. Our processual perspective has enabled a richer and deeper understanding of the consumer response journey as it explores the evolution of change based on social time and the dynamic changes over time. This addresses the call for product-harm crisis studies to capture a dynamic and holistic journey of consumer response process (Khamitov et al., 2020).

7.2 | Practical implications

The findings of this research have important implications for marketers. Online brand communities have changed the way consumers interact with brands and the speed at which information is shared among consumers following a product-harm crisis. This is especially so for negative information which spreads rapidly (Yuan et al., 2020). This research has revealed that online brand communities are often the first touchpoint for consumers when they hear about the crisis and remain to be a vital source of information throughout the product-harm crisis. They are also a place where consumers can connect and obtain comfort and reassurance during the crisis. The emotions gathered and experienced in online brand communities will affect consumers’ attribution as well as readiness and willingness to brand forgiveness. Our findings indicate that brands should seek effective ways to incorporate online brand communities in their crisis management efforts to influence consumers towards a more favourable attribution judgement. For example, brands should consider how to utilise online brand communities as a platform to gather opinions and sentiments shared by community members to forecast consumer responses, which could guide brands’ offline communication strategies to be more targeted and relevant in influencing consumers.

The findings also urge brands to be more strategic with the timing of their communication as part of crisis management strategies to influence consumers during a product-harm crisis. For example, if there is a quality issue with a product, the earlier the brand interacts with consumers with transparency and openness, the more positive influence on consumers’ dealing with the product-harm crisis, such as better processing and more appropriately responding to the emotion-loaded posts from other consumers in online brand communities, thus facilitating more reasonable formation of attribution and later, brand forgiveness.
7.3 Limitations and directions for future research

This research provides important insights into the way consumers tap into the online brand community and form attribution following a product-harm crisis. Despite its contributions, this study also has limitations that will help guide future research.

The process of attribution would ideally require longitudinal data collection so that we could follow the process of attribution in real-time as it unfolds. Future research should seek opportunities to conduct longitudinal studies in real-time to more fully capture the richness and dynamics of consumer experiences.

This study focused on the outcome response of consumer forgiveness. Future research may wish to look at unforgiveness as the outcome response, exploring other outcome responses such as revenge. Understanding the decision not to forgive a brand is important, as there may be negative downstream consequences for brands such as boycotts, refusal to purchase, and negative word of mouth (Cleeren et al., 2017).

Future research could consider context diversification to enhance the understanding of the focal phenomenon. For example, all the cases in this study were well-known, globally established brands. Brand equity could influence the process patterns of attribution and forgiveness (Yu et al., 2018). It may be beneficial to explore lesser-known brands to see if there were different response patterns. Our research has identified preliminary findings of contingency factors to the influence of online brand communities, such as consumer-brand relationships. Future research should more thoroughly explore different consumer cohorts and scenarios, such as the role of crisis severity (Vassilikopoulou et al., 2018), to enrich our knowledge of how online brand communities influence consumers’ responses to product-harm crises.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT
All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the research.

ORCID
Shijiao (Joseph) Chen https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1851-2528

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Julia Casey is a research student at Macquarie Business School, Macquarie University. Her main research areas include consumer behaviour and product-harm crisis.

Yimin (Stephanie) Huang is Associate Professor in Marketing at Macquarie Business School, Macquarie University. Her main research interest is in investigating dynamics and evolution of business relationships and networks, consumer vulnerability and well-being, and brand trust in digital economy.

Shijiao (Joseph) Chen is Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Macquarie Business School, Macquarie University. His research focuses on business ethics issues in marketing, particularly how consumers respond to ethically questionable business practices.

A.1 | Case descriptions

A.1.1. | Case: Samsung

The Samsung product-harm crisis involved a Samsung smart phone which caught on fire on an Alaska Airlines flight which had landed at the Seattle-Tacoma airport in the United States (Glover, 2022).
In June 2022, the Federal Court found that Toyota diesel vehicles sold from October 2015 to April 2023 had a defect with faulty diesel particulate filters and the brand had engaged in deceptive and misleading conduct while marketing and selling the motor vehicle. A class action was announced against Toyota with allegations that the faulty filters reduced fuel efficiency, caused foul smelling emissions and caused wear and tear on the engine resulting in financial loss for owners (Sciberras, 2022).
A.1.3. | Case Summary: Kia

The Kia product-harm crisis which was announced in June 2022 involved the recall of Sportage mid-size SUV and Sorento SUV vehicle models over fears that a software issue could result in the vehicle catching on fire due to overheating (Lewin, 2022).
A.1.4. | Case summary: Coles’ Private Brand Spinach

In April 2022, Coles announced a recall of Coles’ private brand spinach after quality testing identified the presence of Salmonella (Coles, 2022).
APPENDIX B

B.1 | Interview guide

B.1.1 | Screening questions

What do you know about the Samsung product failure on the Alaska airlines flight in August last year?
  Did you have to refer to the Samsung online brand community at that time?
  Have you had a chance to review and remind yourself about the interactions with the community at that time?
  Have you purchased anything from Samsung since that time? What have you bought?
  Or do you intend to buy anything from Samsung?

B.1.2 | Introduction

Welcome: brief discussion and introduction to the session establish open/honest environment
  Introduction of the purpose of the study
  Revisit Participant Information and Consent form
  No right or wrong answers and different opinions welcomed
  Emphasise privacy and confidentiality as well as our impartiality
  Cover recording and how it will be used
  Cover data storage, security as well as secure destruction of interview material
  Duration – Maximum 60 min

B.1.3 | Context

Tell me about how your relationship with Samsung. Would you say you are a strong advocate or less of an advocate of the Samsung brand? Do you purchase a lot of Samsung products? Do you feel that you know a lot about Samsung products?
  Why did you join the Samsung online brand community? What do you usually do there? How often do you go there? Probe further about why they go there. Is it to get updates, to see what others are talking about, sharing your views?

B.1.4 | Process

Walk me through what happened when you first learnt of the Samsung Galaxy A21 battery fire on the Alaska airlines flight. How did you first come to hear about it?
  How did you find out more? Did you go to the online brand community to get more information? Probe Who did they talk to? What are some of the posts they remember? What kinds of messages were there? Probe which posts changed how they felt or influenced them? What was the information you were looking for? How did the information help you? Was there some information that helped you more? In what way? Tell me about that. Were the conversations with other members helpful? Why?
  Did you share any information your views with other members in the community? What did you share? Probe to understand the sharing behaviour of the subject and how that triggered engagement in and interaction with the brand community
  How did you feel when you heard about the product failure by Samsung? Why was this? Did you share your feelings with others and other brand community members? Did you see others in the brand community sharing their feelings? Did that affect you? Tell me about this.
  Who do you think should be blamed for the product failure and battery fire? Was there much discussion in the brand community about this? (Probe whether they went to the brand community for information on this, how they processed it, did it influence them. Can they recall some of the posts and how that affected the evaluation of the situation and feelings; Can they recall someone posting with strong anger? Did that affect them?)
  How would you rate the seriousness of this product failure and battery fire (1 least serious and 10 most serious)? Were you concerned about the quality of this product and Samsung products in general? Has there been much discussion in the brand community about this? Did you share the same sentiment or concerns other members have expressed there? Did you share yours with others? How did that help? Probe Did that make you less concerned, or more, feeling something else, developing a new way of seeing the situation?

B.1.5 | Outcome response

You have chosen to continue buying Samsung products. Why is this? Did consumers talk about this in the brand community? What did they say? Probe Is it because of what other members were saying in the brand community? Tell me about this.

Thank participant and close
APPENDIX C

Process Map Example