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Consumers' online brand-related misinformation engagement: a weapons of influence perspective

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ABSTRACT

While misinformation has been around for centuries, the effects of online brand-related misinformation on consumers' engagement remain tenuous. Addressing this gap, we develop the concept of *online brand-related misinformation engagement*, a consumer's (e.g. cognitive/emotional) resource investment in their interactions with misinformation about brands. Recognizing the persuasive nature of misinformation, we draw on Cialdini's Weapons of Persuasive Influence to develop a typology comprising three positively valenced online brand-related misinformation engagement sub-types (i.e. reciprocal, social proof-, and consistency-based misinformation engagement), and three negatively valenced online brand-related misinformation engagement sub-types (i.e. repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional misinformation engagement). We then develop a Weapons of Influence-informed model that outlines the effect of online brand-related misinformation authority and scarcity on consumers' brand-related misinformation evaluation (liking), and its subsequent effect on their positive or negative online brand-related misinformation engagement, respectively. While consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement is predicted to yield online misinformation continuation or -intensification, its negative counterpart will generate online misinformation adjustment or -correction.

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1. Introduction

While *misinformation*, incorrect or misleading information that counters the mainstream narrative (Fong et al., 2023), is as old as mankind, online misinformation (e.g. on social media, including Facebook or Rumble), has surged in recent years, in particular (Xiao & Su, 2022). For example, online misinformation has addressed pertinent issues, including local,

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national, or global political issues or the pandemic (Lee et al., 2023; Pennycook et al., 2020), among others, exposing its significant and growing importance.

Though online misinformation contains inaccurate information, it may also contain true, or accurate, claims, challenging consumers in terms of assessing its veracity. While misinformation does not relate to brands *per se*, it can indeed centre on, involve, or affect brands (Berthon & Pitt, 2018). For example, an estimated $235 m of advertising budgets annually is spent on misinformation-peddling websites (Szabo, 2022), potentially impacting (e.g. tainting) the advertising brands. Specifically, 85% of consumers claim they would stop using a brand if they viewed its ads next to false or stirring content (Szabo, 2022). Therefore, while consumers' brand-related misinformation engagement, or their (e.g. cognitive/emotional) resource investment in their interactions with misinformation about brands (Kumar et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2023), can have serious consequences for brand performance (Bronnenberg et al., 2020), the dynamics or outcomes characterising this process remain tenuous (Fong et al., 2023), particularly for online misinformation, exposing a pertinent literature-based gap.

While the theoretical interface of (online) misinformation, brands, and engagement has been studied in related disciplines (e.g. political/media communications; Metzger et al., 2021), in the marketing literature, acumen of this three-way interface lags behind (e.g. Bronnenberg et al., 2020; Ladeira et al., 2022), as therefore addressed in this article. Consumers' online brand-related misinformation engagement may take a positive or negative valence (Hollebeek & Chen, 2014), as explored further from a Weapons of Influence perspective in this article (Cialdini, 1984). We take this perspective, given the persuasive nature or intent of misinformation (Peng et al., 2022), in line with Cialdini's (e.g. 2001) Weapons of Persuasive Influence. Specifically, Cialdini's (e.g. 1984) proposed Weapons comprise authority, scarcity, liking (evaluation), reciprocity, consistency (commitment), and social proof, which we apply to develop a conceptual model of online brand-related misinformation. Overall, the model suggests that online brand-related misinformation authority and scarcity drive the development of consumers' misinformation evaluation (liking), in turn triggering their positive or negative misinformation engagement.

Following Doty and Glick (1994), we also develop a typology of positive and negative online misinformation engagement sub-types. We propose consumers' *positive* online misinformation engagement, or their resource investment in accepting online brand-related misinformation (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2019), to comprise reciprocal, social proof-, and consistency-based engagement, as informed by Cialdini's Weapons of Influence. We also suggest *negative* online misinformation engagement, or consumers' resource investment in rejecting or resisting online brand-related misinformation (Do et al., 2023; Heinonen, 2018), to encompass their repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional engagement, which stand in direct contrast to their positive engagement counterparts. Our work thus extends the literature by assimilating Cialdini's Weapons of Influence with engagement in the context of brand-related online misinformation. Finally, we posit that while consumers' positive brand-related misinformation engagement will foster misinformation continuation or intensification, their negative misinformation engagement is predicted to nurture misinformation adjustment or correction, revealing important strategic insight.

This conceptual article makes the following contributions to the online misinformation, consumer engagement, and Weapons of Influence literature. First, we conceptualise consumers' online brand-related misinformation engagement (MacInnis, 2011), and develop a typology of three positive and three negative online brand-related misinformation engagement sub-types (Doty & Glick, 1994), as discussed further below. Our work thus extends that of prior misinformation engagement authors (e.g. Kumar et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2022; LoPresti & Maggiore, 2021). For example, while Ladeira et al. (2022) or Miller et al. (2023) address consumers' engagement with fake news, LoPresti and Maggiore (2021) discuss buyers' engagement with incorrect product reviews. By systematically analysing consumers' positive and negative online brand-related misinformation engagement from a Weapons of Influence perspective, our analyses unveil novel scholarly acumen on the interface of these theoretical entities, thus making an important theoretical contribution.

While prior authors have addressed consumers' (online) misinformation engagement, the concept is yet to be classified into positive and negative sub-types, as undertaken in this article. As noted, we propose consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement to comprise their reciprocal, consistency-, and social proof-based engagement, as derived directly from Cialdini's Weapons of Influence. By contrast, negative online brand-related misinformation engagement is suggested to encompass consumers' repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional engagement (Saren, 2009; Cook et al., 2017), which emerge in direct contrast to their respective positive counterparts, thus extending the existing literature.

Second, drawing on Cialdini's Weapons of Influence, we also develop a model and an associated set of Propositions that suggest that online brand-related misinformation authority (authoritativeness) and scarcity (availability; Cialdini, 2001) drive consumers' misinformation evaluation or liking. We suggest that consumers' favourable (unfavourable) misinformation evaluation will foster their positive (negative) online brand-related misinformation engagement, in turn driving online misinformation continuation or intensification (for positive misinformation engagement) or online misinformation adjustment or correction (for negative misinformation engagement). Overall, the model brings temporal order to Cialdini's Weapons of Influence in the context of online brand-related misinformation engagement. This insight matters to brand managers, as it can be applied to reduce the proliferation and/or potentially adverse impact of online brand-related misinformation.

We next review key misinformation, Weapons of Influence, and consumer brand engagement literature in section 2, followed by the conceptual development of consumers' positive/negative online brand-related misinformation engagement from a Weapons of Influence perspective in section 3. Section 4 concludes by deriving key implications from our analyses.

2. Literature review

2.1. Misinformation

Misinformation, which has been predominantly studied in the fields of political, digital, and/or media-based communication (e.g. Metzger et al., 2021), is receiving

growing attention in the marketing literature (Fong et al., 2023). Misinformation has been defined as incorrect or misleading information, presented as fact, that counters the mainstream narrative, either intentionally or unintentionally (Ladeira et al., 2022). It thus differs from *disinformation*, or the *deliberate* informational deception of one's recipient (Bastick, 2021). Misinformation also differs from *fake news*, 'purposefully crafted, sensational, emotionally charged, misleading, or totally fabricated information that mimics the form of mainstream news' (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020).

Brand-related misinformation tends to spread at a particular velocity online (Lee et al., 2022), owing to factors, including the lack of (e.g. social media-based) standards or gatekeepers (e.g. editors), peer review, or regulation, allowing individuals to disseminate any information they desire (Choudrie et al., 2021). Even if misinformation is retracted, it can continue to influence its recipients' future engagement (e.g. with a brand; Ecker et al., 2015; Valenzuela et al., 2019). Misinformation counter-measures are therefore vital, including through consumer education (e.g. by enabling people to (better) assess the veracity of information), misinformation detection systems, or community-based moderators, who may flag or correct suspicious content (Vraga & Bode, 2020). Moreover, while a misinformation-tackling service sub-sector is emerging (e.g. through the growth of fact-checkers, like Snopes), online platforms may also limit the number of times incorrect content can be viewed or forwarded in encrypted chats (Walter et al., 2020), reducing misinformation's potentially adverse consequences.

2.2. Cialdini's weapons of persuasive influence

In 1984, Cialdini proposed a set of six Weapons of Persuasive Influence that can be used to sway another to one's viewpoint (Cialdini, 2007), as applied to online brand-related misinformation in this article. First, misinformation *authority* denotes the perceived authoritativeness of misinformation and/or its source (e.g. expert vs. lay-person). Second, misinformation *scarcity* denotes the (in)availability of misinformation (Muscanell et al., 2014). Specifically, the scarcer misinformation, the less available it is.

Third, misinformation *liking* (evaluation) reflects the extent to which a consumer positively assesses misinformation (Cialdini, 2001), which is driven by factors including perceived source credibility and attractiveness, and the source's perceived similarity to the self (DeBono & Harnish, 1988). Specifically, the higher one's perceived source attractiveness and similarity, the more positive one's expected source evaluation, even if it is misinforming the individual.

Fourth, misinformation-based *reciprocity* denotes the extent to which a consumer intends to *give back* to a misinformation source that is perceived as valuable (e.g. by recommending/sharing it; Jiang et al., 2021). Reciprocity is based on the notion that individuals feel obliged to repay a valued informational source by reciprocating to it (Blau, 1964). Thus, the greater one's perceived misinformation (source) value, the greater one's expected reciprocity to it.

Fifth, misinformation-based *social proof* is a psycho-social phenomenon that sees people copy the actions of others, which are legitimised through observation (Cialdini, 1984; Cialdini et al., 1999). In ambiguous or uncertain situations, in particular, people are likely to copy what they observe others doing (Amblee & Bui, 2011). For example,

consumers, whose friends have taken a COVID-19 booster, will be more likely to also take this additional jab.

Finally, misinformation-based *consistency* (*commitment*) recognises that an individual, who commits to reading, following, and/or sharing misinformation, is more likely to continue exhibiting these behaviours over time (Cialdini, 2007). Commitment tends to be effective, because committed individuals are more likely to provide themselves and salient others with rationales or justifications to support their commitment through self-persuasion (Maio & Thomas, 2007), thus minimising dissonance (Powers & Jack, 2013). The greater the duration and/or intensity of an individual's commitment to a misinformation source, the higher their expected *escalation of commitment* (Brockner, 1992) and loyalty to it.

2.3. Consumer engagement

The *consumer engagement* (CE) literature has seen rapid development in recent years (Suseno & Nguyen, 2023; Hollebeek, 2011). However, despite the widespread attention afforded to CE, its definition is debated. For example, while Brodie et al. (2011, p. 260) conceptualise CE as 'a motivational state that occurs by virtue of interactive co-creative, customer experiences', Hollebeek et al. (2019, p. 166) define it as a customer's investment of operant and/or operand resources in their brand interactions. Notwithstanding these discrepancies, we observe the following similarities across proposed CE conceptualisations.

First, CE is an *interactive* concept reflecting consumers' interactions with a brand or brand-related object (e.g. brand-based misinformation; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Consumers may also interact with others (e.g. peers) to discuss, rate, or learn about brands (Clark et al., 2020), including on social media (Oliveira & Fernandes, 2022), enabling the spread of misinformation, fuelled by their engagement.

Second, CE is widely viewed as a consumer's resource investment in their brand-related interactions (Hollebeek et al., 2019). The more resources they invest, the greater their engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). As their resource investments rise, consumers will tend to display increasing commitment to the object, fitting with Cialdini's notion of *consistency*.

Third, though early CE literature focuses on positive, firm-benefiting CE (e.g. through customer purchases), Hollebeek and Chen (2014) first recognised CE's potentially *negative* valence. Negative CE reflects consumers' unfavourable or damaging (e.g. emotional/behavioural) resource investments in their brand-related interactions, including by spreading negative word-of-mouth, boycotting or sabotaging the brand, or by supporting brand-related misinformation (Heinonen, 2018; Naumann et al., 2020).

Fourth, CE is typically viewed as a multi-dimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioural facets (Vivek et al., 2014). Some authors also incorporate a social CE dimension (Brodie et al., 2013), reflecting the consumer's (e.g. altruistic) consideration of, or interactions with, others. However, while the literature has traditionally assumed social CE to manifest in a *pro*social manner (e.g. by helping others), *negative* CE can also be *anti*social (e.g. by hindering others; Hollebeek et al., 2019).

3. Conceptual development

3.1. Conceptualising and classifying online brand-related misinformation engagement

3.1.1. Conceptualising consumers' online brand-related misinformation engagement

Extending the work of engagement (e.g. Kumar et al., 2019) and misinformation authors (e.g. Fong et al., 2023), we define online brand-related misinformation engagement as *a consumer's resource investment in their interactions with online misinformation related to brands*, in line with our first stated contribution. Here, *misinformation* refers to incorrect or misleading information that counters the brand's main message (Vraga & Bode, 2020). For example, while medications (e.g. Gardasil), are designed to promote or maintain health, misinformation spreaders may suggest their detrimental effects (Marcelo, 2023).

3.1.2. Classifying consumers' brand-related misinformation engagement

We next integrate the misinformation, Cialdini's Weapons of Influence, and consumer engagement literature to develop a typology of consumers' positive/negative online brand-related misinformation engagement (Doty & Glick, 1994), in line with our first contribution. Specifically, we envisage the existence of three positive, and three negative, online brand-related misinformation sub-types, extending the work of prior engagement authors (e.g. Hollebeek & Chen, 2014; Clark et al., 2020), as detailed below.

3.1.1.1. Positive online brand-related misinformation engagement. We propose consumers' *positive engagement* with online brand-related misinformation, or their resource investment in accepting or approving of misinformation (Kumar et al., 2019; Valenzuela et al., 2019), to comprise the individual's Weapons of Influence-informed *reciprocal*, *social proof*-, and *consistency*-based engagement (Cialdini, 2001).

First, *reciprocal online brand-related misinformation engagement* reflects a consumer's investment of their (e.g. cognitive/emotional) resources in brand-related misinformation, based on the perceived value extracted from it (García-Sánchez, 2020). Here, *reciprocity* is 'a provision of favours, or the making of allowances for the other in return for similar favours [or] allowances to be received at a later date' (Sin et al., 2005, p. 185). Consumers may *give back* to the online misinformation source by adding to or recommending it, by referring it to others, or by sharing it in their networks (Blau, 1964), among others.

Second, *social proof-based online brand-related misinformation engagement* denotes consumers' misinformation-related resource investment by following or copying others doing so (Cialdini, 1984; Naeem, 2021). Prior authors have, likewise, identified a social proof-based engagement-related effect in other (e.g. new platform registration) contexts (Roethke et al., 2020), as applied here to online brand-related misinformation. Overall, witnessing others perform specific misinformation-related behaviours (e.g. by reading/sharing misinformation), these are legitimised or validated in the consumer's mind (Shearman & Yoo, 2007), stimulating the individual to also engage with brand-related misinformation and triggering their social proof-based online brand-related misinformation engagement.

Third, *consistency-based online brand-related misinformation engagement* reflects a consumer's resource investment in reading, following, and keeping up with brand-related misinformation (Cialdini, 2007), exposing the individual's effort in this regard (e.g. by following misinformation channels on Rumble/Telegram). Consistency-based brand-related misinformation engagement will see the consumer's mental self-justification and/or self-persuasion for reading, following, or relying on brand-related misinformation (Maio & Thomas, 2007). Thus, to the extent that their misinformed view counters the brand's narrative, consumers will tend to develop *to them* powerful arguments to support their perspective (Hernandez & Preston, 2013).

Though these positive brand-related misinformation sub-types are theoretically distinct, they may co-occur. For example, consumers, who keeps up with misinformation (i.e. consistency-based online brand-related misinformation engagement), are likely to also share misinformation (i.e. reciprocal online brand-related misinformation engagement).

3.1.1.2. Negative online brand-related misinformation engagement. While three of Cialdini's (e.g. 2001) Weapons of Influence were directly applied to develop consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, individuals may also unfavourably evaluate online misinformation, yielding their predicted negative engagement with it (Do et al., 2023; see Figure 1). Consumers' *negative online brand-related misinformation engagement* denotes their disapproval or rejection of, or resistance to, online misinformation (Micallef et al., 2020; Saren, 2009), which we propose manifests as *repudiating*, *thwarting*, or *oppositional* online brand-related misinformation engagement. The proposed negative online brand-related misinformation sub-types extend the work of negative engagement authors (e.g. Heinonen, 2018), as discussed further below.

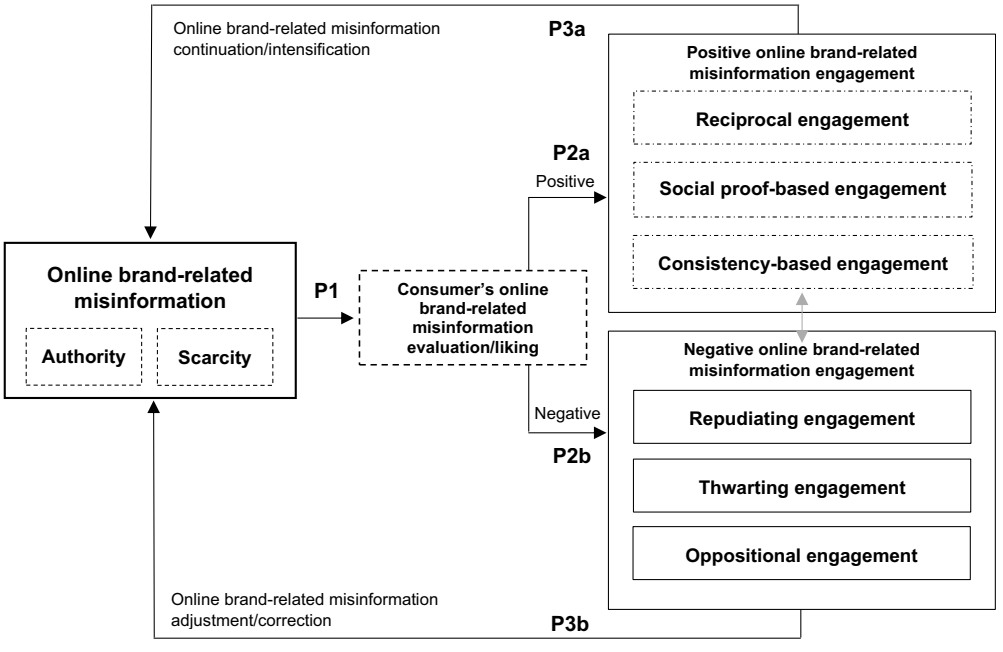

Figure 1. Framework. Dashed boxes: Cialdini's Weapons of Influence.

First, in contrast to reciprocal online brand-related misinformation engagement, *repudiating online brand-related misinformation engagement* reflects a consumer's resource investment in dismissing online brand-related misinformation (Paquin et al., 2022), implying their relatively low investment in its processing (Kumar et al., 2019). Repudiating engagement is thus characterised by the consumer ignoring brand-related misinformation, by paying little or no attention to it. Consumers may dismiss misinformation for different reasons (e.g. lacking interest/trust in it; Flynn & Krupnikov, 2015).

Second, unlike social proof-based online brand-related misinformation engagement, *thwarting online brand-related misinformation engagement* reflects a consumer's resource investment in impeding or blocking the contents or the further dissemination of online brand-related misinformation (Pham et al., 2020). Thus, while reciprocal engagement entails a consumer's sharing of online brand-related misinformation, thwarting engagement sees the consumer obstruct or bar its exposure or continued diffusion. Moreover, while repudiating online brand-related misinformation engagement reflects the consumer's dismissal of misinformation, thwarting engagement denotes their active effort in obstructing online brand-related misinformation and/or its dissemination. For example, consumers may block misinformation channels on relevant (e.g. social media) platforms, unfollow misinformation disseminators, or report these (Hawa et al., 2021).

Third, unlike consistency-based online brand-related misinformation engagement, *oppositional online brand-related misinformation engagement* denotes a consumer's resource investment in refuting or countering misinformation (Micallef et al., 2020). Thus, while consistency-based online band-related misinformation engagement exposes a consumer's commitment to (e.g. by keeping up with) online brand-related misinformation, oppositional engagement reflects the individual's contesting of misinformation (Saren, 2009; MacFarlane et al., 2021). For example, consumers may publicly attack online brand-related misinformation or persuade their friends of its incorrectness, revealing their oppositional engagement. Moreover, thwarting (oppositional) misinformation engagement denotes the consumer's effort to block (refute) online brand-related misinformation, respectively.

3.2. Conceptual framework

In line with our second contribution, we next develop a Weapons of Influence-informed model and a set of Propositions that outline online brand-related misinformation's predicted effects on consumers' misinformation engagement and its consequences. By linking these to-date disparate issues, the model proposes temporal order to Cialdini's (e.g. Cialdini, 2007) Weapons of Influence (see Figure 1), which have remained more unstructured to date. We define the model's constituents in Table 1, and discuss its proposed associations below.

3.3. Online brand-related misinformation authority & scarcity/misinformation evaluation

We posit that online brand-related misinformation, which sees a specific authority (authoritativeness) and scarcity (availability) level (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2002), will affect the consumer's misinformation evaluation (liking), or the degree to which the individual

Table 1. Review and conceptual development synthesis. Literature review and conceptual development synthesis.

Cialdini's Weapons of (Persuasive) Influence	Cialdini's Weapons of Influence, as applied to online brand-related misinformation	
	Proposed conceptual development	**Proposed theoretical association(s) (see Figure 1)**
Authority: The authoritativeness level of a persuasive source (e.g. Cialdini, 2007).	*Online brand-related misinformation authority*: The authoritativeness level of specific online brand-related misinformation (Cialdini, 1984, 2007).	Antecedent of consumers' positive/negative online brand-related misinformation liking/evaluation.
Scarcity: The availability level of a specific persuasive source (e.g. Cialdini, 1984).	*Online brand-related misinformation scarcity*: The availability level of specific online brand-related misinformation (Cialdini, 1984, 2007).	Antecedent of consumers' positive/negative online brand-related misinformation liking/evaluation.
Liking (evaluation): The degree to which a consumer positively evaluates a persuasive source (e.g. Cialdini, 2001).	*Online brand-related misinformation liking/evaluation*: The degree to which a consumer positively evaluates online brand-related misinformation (Cialdini, 1984, 2007).	Antecedent of consumers' positive/negative online brand-related misinformation engagement (Kabadayi & Price, 2014).
	Proposed taxonomy of positive online brand-related misinformation engagement	
Reciprocity: The extent to which a consumer perceives receiving *valuable* brand-related misinformation will see him/her feel obliged to repay the informational source by reciprocating to it (e.g. by recommending the source; Blau, 1964; Jiang et al., 2021).	*Reciprocal online brand-related misinformation engagement*: A consumer's investment of their (e.g. cognitive, emotional) resources in online brand-related misinformation, based on their perceived value extracted from it (e.g. Hollebeek et al., 2019).	Drive the development of online misinformation continuation or -intensification
Social proof: A psycho-social phenomenon that sees consumers copy the actions of others through brand-related misinformation, which are legitimised through situationally contingent observation (Cialdini, 1984).	*Social proof-based online brand-related misinformation engagement*: A consumer's engagement with online brand-related misinformation that arises from their observation of others (e.g. family, friends, or co-workers) doing so (i.e. by copying their behaviours; Naeem, 2021).	
Consistency: The notion that a consumer, who commits to reading, following, or sharing brand-related misinformation is more likely to continue exhibiting this behaviour (Cialdini, 2007).	*Consistency-based online brand-related misinformation engagement*: A consumer's commitment to reading, following, and keeping up with online brand-related misinformation (Cialdini, 2007; Mollen & Wilson, 2010).	
	Proposed taxonomy of negative online brand-related misinformation engagement	
	Repudiating online brand-related misinformation engagement: A consumer's instant ignoring or rejection of online brand-related misinformation (Paquin et al., 2022).	Drive the development of online misinformation adjustment or -correction
	Thwarting online brand-related misinformation engagement:	

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (Continued).

Cialdini's Weapons of (Persuasive) Influence	Cialdini's Weapons of Influence, as applied to online brand-related misinformation
	A consumer's investment of their (e.g. emotional) resources in impeding or blocking the contents or further dissemination of online brand-related misinformation (Pham et al., 2020). *Oppositional online brand-related misinformation engagement*: A consumer's resource investment in refuting, opposing, or countering online brand-related misinformation (Micallef et al., 2020).

positively evaluates misinformation (Cialdini, 2007; Xiao & Su, 2022). For example, consumers, who believe the misrepresentation that specific medical (e.g. liposuction) treatments are risk-free, which is however contested by experts, may positively engage with such misinformation (e.g. by taking it on board or sharing it with others). Generally, the higher online brand-related misinformation's perceived authority, the more positive the consumer's evaluation of it, in line with expert endorsement research (e.g. Wang, 2005). Moreover, the lower brand-related misinformation scarcity, the more it will abound, raising the consumer's exposure to, familiarity with, and, likely, their evaluation of it (Fan et al., 2019). We theorise:

P1: Rising online brand-related misinformation authority (scarcity) will raise (lower) consumers' online brand-related misinformation evaluation/liking.

3.4. Positive online brand-related misinformation evaluation/positive misinformation engagement

We next propose that consumers' favourable online brand-related misinformation evaluation will cultivate their positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, or their acceptance of it (Bowden et al., 2017; see Figure 1). While positive online brand-related misinformation engagement reveals consumers' misinformation-supporting resource investments, these are likely to be – at least partially – driven by their negative emotions (e.g. fear, anger, or feeling manipulated; Douglas, 2021). For example, individuals, who believe misinformation suggesting that genetically modified foods compromise their health are more likely to positively engage with online brand-related misinformation (e.g. by declining to purchase or consume these foods).

Consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement is predicted to manifest as reciprocal, social proof-, or consistency-based engagement, as detailed in section 3.1.2, depending on consumers' specific positive engagement manifestation. The proposed positive online brand-related misinformation sub-types may also co-occur. For example, consumers may follow their friends in subscribing to or following non-GM misinformation sources, illustrating their social proof-, consistency-based, brand-related misinformation engagement. We posit:

P2a: A consumer's favourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation is expected to yield their positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, which may manifest as reciprocal, social proof-, and/or consistency-based engagement.

3.5. Negative online brand-related misinformation evaluation/negative misinformation engagement

We further suggest that consumers' unfavourable misinformation evaluation will yield their negative online brand-related misinformation engagement (Heinonen, 2018; see Figure 1), or their rejection of or resistance to online brand-related misinformation, as discussed. Negative misinformation engagement may be driven by factors, including lacking interest or trust in, or respect for, online misinformation, which may be facilitated by consumer education and/or consumers' exposure to correct, fact-checked information (Lelo, 2022). Negative online brand-related misinformation engagement is predicted to manifest as repudiating, thwarting, or oppositional engagement, as contingent on the specific negative manifestation of consumers' engagement (e.g. Saren, 2009), as discussed in section 3.1.2. These negative engagement sub-types may also co-occur. For example, consumers, who block online brand-related misinformation (thwarting engagement) are also likely to resist it (oppositional engagement; Saren, 2009). We theorise:

P2b: A consumer's unfavourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation is expected to yield their negative online brand-related misinformation engagement, which may manifest as repudiating, thwarting, and/or oppositional engagement.

3.6. Consequences of positive/negative online brand-related misinformation engagement

We next outline key expected consequences of consumers' positive or negative online brand-related misinformation engagement, shown by the backward-looping arrows in Figure 1. First, we anticipate consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, which sees individuals approve of or endorse online brand-related misinformation (e.g. by subscribing to misinformation channels; Razmus & Pawel, 2022), to yield online misinformation continuation or -intensification (Levkoff & Kempner, 2021). In other words, if consumers engage positively with online brand-related misinformation, they will *buy into* and support it (e.g. by following or disseminating it; Xiao & Su, 2022), contributing to online misinformation continuation or -intensification, which represents a potential threat to brand performance (Di Domenico et al., 2022). We postulate:

P3a: A consumer's positive (i.e. reciprocal, social proof-, or consistency-based) online brand-related misinformation engagement will tend to yield online brand-related misinformation continuation or -intensification.

Conversely, negative online brand-related misinformation engagement sees consumers dismiss, block, or refute online misinformation about brands, respectively (e.g. Langdon et al., 2021; Saren, 2009), as outlined. For example, consumers, who engage negatively with online brand-related misinformation may publicly debunk specific incorrect brand-related facts on the misinformation conveying, their own, and/or the brand's or firm's social media pages (Walter et al., 2020). In such instances, these individuals typically

defend the brand by rectifying false (e.g. negative) brand-related claims (Clark et al., 2020). Consumers may thus contribute to the process of online brand-related misinformation adjustment or -correction, as shown in Figure 1 (e.g. by instigating the revision or removal of brand-related misinformation as a result of their complaints to the platform/content owner), as shown in Figure 1. By contributing to online brand-related misinformation adjustment or -correction, consumers are thus able to help reduce the prevalence or influence of online brand-related misinformation (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). We theorise:

> **P3b**: A consumer's negative (i.e. repudiating, thwarting, or oppositional) online brand-related misinformation engagement will tend to yield online misinformation adjustment or -correction.

4. Discussion, implications, and limitations

4.1. Theoretical implications

Using Cialdini's Weapons of Influence, we explored the effects of online brand-related misinformation authority and scarcity on consumers' positive or negative online brand-related misinformation engagement, thus extending the work of prior misinformation (e.g. Lee et al., 2022), Weapons of Influence (Cialdini, 2007), and engagement (e.g. Kumar et al., 2019) authors. In line with our first stated contribution, we conceptualised consumers' online brand-related misinformation engagement as their resource investment in their interactions with online misinformation about brands (Kumar et al., 2019; Xiao & Su, 2022), as outlined. The concept's development is important, given its focus on the consumer's resource investments in their interactions with online brand-related misinformation (Ladeira et al., 2022), which remains nebulous to-date. The more consumers invest in these interactions, the more likely online brand-related misinformation is to intensify or spread further, raising key strategic implications.

We also suggested that consumers' online brand-related misinformation engagement may transpire with a positive or negative valence (Do et al., 2023), as summarised in the proposed typology of positive/negative online brand-related misinformation engagement sub-types (Doty & Glick, 1994). While we classified consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement as reciprocal, social proof-, and consistency-based engagement, we categorised their negative engagement in this regard as repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional engagement (see Figure 1/Table 1). The typology has value, given the different positive and negative manifestations of online brand-related misinformation engagement. While the proposed positive misinformation engagement sub-types were derived directly from Cialdini's (e.g. Cialdini, 2007) Weapons of Influence, their negative counterparts were established in direct contrast to their respective positive sub-types (Micallef et al., 2020; Saren, 2009), thus extending literature-based insight. Key implications arise from these analyses, including:

(a) What engagement-based cognitions, emotions, and behaviours do misinformed consumers display and how do these differ across the proposed positive and negative online brand-related misinformation engagement sub-types?

(b) Under what conditions will consumers' negative online brand-related misinformation engagement lead to the adjustment or correction of online misinformation about brands?
(c) When or why might firms disseminate online (e.g. greenwashed) misinformation about their own brands and what are its consequences?

In line with our second contribution, we developed a model outlining the expected effect of online brand-related misinformation authority and scarcity on consumers' online misinformation evaluation (liking) (Cialdini, 2001). Here, consumers' favourable (unfavourable) evaluation of online misinformation is predicted to yield their positive (negative) online brand-related misinformation engagement, respectively, yielding unique misinformation consequences (Figure 1). By deploying Cialdini's Weapons of Influence to enhance scholarly acumen of the drivers, characteristics, and outcomes of consumers' positive and negative online brand-related misinformation engagement, our analyses raise pertinent implications, including:

(a) How do firms best manage consumers' positive and negative online brand-related misinformation engagement?
(b) To what extent or under what conditions may consumers exhibit ambivalent (i.e. positive *and* negative) online brand-related misinformation engagement?
(c) What actions may firms take to reduce or combat consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, while fostering their negative engagement in this regard?

We also provide further research questions, organised by the Propositions, in Table 2.

4.2. Practical implications

Our analyses also raise managerial implications. First, P1 reads: '*Rising online brand-related misinformation authority (scarcity) will raise (lower) consumers' online brand-related misinformation evaluation/liking*'. Firms are advised to foster consumers' negative (vs. positive) online brand-related misinformation evaluation, given the latter's elevated probability of nurturing individuals' misinformation rejection (vs. adoption). To this end, managers may discredit, debunk, or quell specific online misinformation in perceived truthful, authentic, credible, and benevolent ways (Fong et al., 2023). We recommend practitioners to transparently communicate their agendas and actions as being in the consumer's best interest (e.g. by using fact-checkers, influencers, or personalised Q&A) to reduce consumers' positive, and boost their negative, online brand-related misinformation evaluation (Walter et al., 2020).

P2a reads: '*A consumer's favourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation is expected to yield their positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, which may manifest as reciprocal, social proof-, and/or consistency-based engagement*'. This Proposition, likewise, highlights managers' need to minimise (nurture) consumers' positive (negative) online brand-related misinformation engagement, respectively. To do so, they may approach key (social) media platforms to censor misinformation related to their

Table 2. Theoretical implications.

Proposition	Sample Research Questions
P1: *Rising online brand-related misinformation authority (scarcity) will raise (lower) consumers' online brand-related misinformation evaluation/liking*.	• What misinformation characteristics are key in shaping consumers' online brand-related misinformation liking (evaluation)? • Which (if any) consumer or situational factors impact consumers' online brand-related misinformation liking (evaluation)? • What factors may moderate the association of online brand-related misinformation authority, and scarcity, and consumers' misinformation evaluation?
P2a: *A consumer's favourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation is expected to yield their positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, which may manifest as reciprocal, social proof-, and/or consistency-based engagement*.	• What is the strength of the association of consumers' favourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation and their ensuing positive online brand-related misinformation engagement? • Might their positive online brand-related misinformation evaluation trigger their negative engagement in some cases? • To what extent may consumers' reciprocal, social proof-based, and consistency-based engagement co-occur, and how may they interact with one another? • Under what circumstances may consumers' reciprocal, social proof-based, and consistency-based online brand-related misinformation engagement transfer or spill over to one another (Bowden et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2023)?
P2b: *A consumer's unfavourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation is expected to yield their negative online brand-related misinformation engagement, which may manifest as repudiating, thwarting, and/or oppositional engagement*.	• What is the strength of the association of consumers' unfavourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation and their ensuing negative misinformation engagement? Might their online brand-related misinformation engagement be positive in some cases? • To what extent may consumers' online brand-related repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional engagement co-occur, and how may they interact with one another? • Under what circumstances may consumers' repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional online brand-related misinformation engagement transfer or spill over to one another?
P3a: *A consumer's positive (i.e. reciprocal, social proof-, or consistency-based) online brand-related misinformation engagement will tend to yield online brand-related misinformation continuation or -intensification.*	• What can organisations (e.g. authorities) do to influence or minimise consumers' positive online brand-related misinformation engagement, while stimulating their negative brand-related misinformation engagement? • Which (if any) positive (i.e. reciprocal, social proof-based, or consistency-based) misinformation engagement sub-type is most damaging in terms of fostering online brand-related misinformation continuation or -intensification? • (How) may consumers' reciprocal, social proof-based, and consistency-based online brand-related misinformation engagement interact to foster misinformation continuation or -intensification?
P3b: *A consumer's negative (i.e. repudiating, thwarting, or oppositional) online brand-related misinformation engagement will tend to yield online misinformation adjustment or -correction.*	• What can organisations do to optimise consumers' negative online brand-related misinformation engagement? • Which negative (i.e. repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional) online brand-related misinformation engagement sub-type is most conducive in yielding online misinformation correction or -retraction? • How do consumers' repudiating, thwarting, and oppositional online brand-related misinformation engagement interact to foster online misinformation correction or -retraction?

brand(s) (Myers West, 2018), limiting its dissemination and reducing consumers' positive misinformation engagement.

P2b states: '*A consumer's unfavourable evaluation of online brand-related misinformation is expected to yield their negative online brand-related misinformation engagement, which may manifest as repudiating, thwarting, and/or oppositional engagement*', which should be cultivated. First, *repudiating online brand-related misinformation engagement* denotes consumers' dismissal of brand-related misinformation (Paquin et al., 2022). To stimulate repudiating engagement, firms are advised to publicly question online misinformation veracity (e.g. by presenting factual evidence against it; Porter & Wood, 2022), encouraging their audiences to dismiss it. Second, *thwarting online brand-related misinformation engagement* sees consumers block online brand-related misinformation (Pham et al., 2020). To nurture thwarting engagement, we recommend educating consumers with high-quality information, enabling them to distil fact from fiction and stimulating them to block any incoming misinformation (Sánchez & Martínez, 2020). Third, *oppositional online brand-related misinformation engagement* reflects a consumer's refutation of online brand-related misinformation (Micallef et al., 2020). To nurture oppositional engagement, relevant rewards (e.g. discounts) may be offered for acting as ambassadors of verified information (vs. misinformation).

Finally, P3a-b further reinforce the need for firms to develop negative (vs. positive) online brand-related misinformation engagement, given the former's strategic role in curbing or minimising online brand-related misinformation continuation or intensification. When online brand-related misinformation has been curbed, managers are also advised to minimise any new or related online brand-related misinformation.

4.3. Limitations and further research

This study also incurs limitations that offer additional research avenues. First, the conceptual nature of our analyses yields a need for their future empirical testing and validation. For example, the Propositions may be tested in quantitative (e.g. survey-based) studies. Here, scholars will measure positive/negative brand-related misinformation engagement sub-types (e.g. by adapting existing/developing new scales).

Second, while we deployed Cialdini's Weapons of Persuasive Influence, alternate perspectives may be used to further explore the effects of social influence and persuasion-based dynamics on brand-related misinformation engagement. For example, researchers may adopt cognitive dissonance theory to examine the role and effects of consumers' misinformation engagement, or assess the effect of motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, or pre-bunking, on brand-related (misinformation) engagement (Harjani et al., 2022). Moreover, while misinformation may involve individuals' unintentional dissemination of incorrect or misleading information to others, disinformation refers to the deliberate spreading of false or deceptive information, as noted. Therefore, while the proposed model may to an extent also apply to disinformation, further study of (online) disinformation may be better served by theory that explicitly accounts for such intentionality (e.g. interpersonal deception theory). Finally, it is important to better understand the role of new technology in impacting (e.g. raising, reducing, or neutralizing) misinformation and/or its dissemination. For example, (generative) artificial intelligence tools, like ChatGPT, may generate and spread misinformation, warranting further investigation.

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