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Brand-to-Brand Engagement on Social Media: Typology and Implications

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Abstract

Brand-to-brand (Br2Br) engagement on social media, where official brand accounts interact using various dialog strategies, is a growing trend in interactive marketing. This paper investigates the nature, nuances, and impact of Br2Br engagement on both participating brands and observing consumers, drawing from Language Expectancy Theory. To do this, we employ a mixed-methods approach, combining field data, qualitative and automated text analyses, and an experimental causal-chain mediation survey. In Study 1, we compare the effects of B2C versus Br2Br posts on consumer engagement, revealing that Br2Br posts generate higher engagement. Next, in Study 2, using typological theory building, we develop a framework of four overarching Br2Br engagement strategies—PR Hijacking, Praising, Teasing, and Spotlighting—differentiated by emotional tone and motivation. In Study 3, a causal-chain mediation analysis demonstrates that Teasing, as a violating strategy, leads to negative consumer responses, while Praising, PR Hijacking, and Spotlighting align with consumer expectations and result in favorable brand outcomes. These findings enhance the understanding of B2C and Br2Br communications on social media and provide actionable insights for digital marketers to optimize Br2Br engagement content.

Should brands converse with other brands on social media and, if so, how?

Figure 1 Br2Br engagement example

Research to date largely suggests that brands should refrain from mentioning competitor brands since this could lead to consumer schadenfreude, brand community conflict, or create perceptions of brand insincerity (Ewing, Wagstaff, and Powell 2013; Phillips-Melancon and Dalakas 2014; Thomas and Fowler 2021). Yet, nowadays, it is becoming increasingly common for brands to re-share, comment on, or endorse the content of other brands publicly in order to engage with new audiences on digital channels (Hootsuite 2022; Zhou, Du, and Cutright 2022). For example, Figure 1 showcases two supermarket retail brands engaging in an interaction on X (formerly known as Twitter). In the excerpt, responding to Sainsbury's featuring a black family in their Christmas advert, which received significant criticism from customers (The Guardian 2020), M&S concurs with their direct competitor and takes the opportunity to compliment their products.

We define this social media phenomenon whereby official brand accounts engage in explicit interactions with other official brand accounts as brand-to-brand (Br2Br) engagement.

Br2Br engagement represents an emerging social media marketing strategy that brands adopt to improve their online presence in a saturated digital marketplace (Alves, Fernandes, and Raposo 2016; Tyrväinen, Karjaluoto, and Ukpabi 2023; Voorveld 2019). We argue that two factors have significantly contributed to the proliferation of this phenomenon: hyper-connectivity and changing consumer preferences. The advancement of Web 2.0 and the rise of social media networks have created a hyper-connected environment, compelling brands to rethink their digital marketing strategies (Mangold and Faulds 2009; Swaminathan et al. 2020). In this landscape, where consumers and even competitor brands interact directly, brands are increasingly moving toward value co-creation (e.g., customer engagement, brand awareness) to achieve their goals (Swaminathan et al. 2022). Simultaneously, market research indicates that consumers are becoming more apathetic or skeptical toward conventional social media content marketing (Edelman 2021; The Drum 2019), driving the need for new communication strategies to effectively connect with these evolving audiences and reach new consumer segments.

Nonetheless, Br2Br engagement remains an obscure phenomenon, and its nature and consequences are poorly understood by scholars and practitioners alike. When brands employ Br2Br engagement strategies on social media, their underpinning motives are increasingly scrutinized and can either go viral or backfire, generating a range of consumer responses (Thomas and Fowler 2021). With three exceptions focusing on positively framed Br2Br engagement (Ross 2024; Zhang and Zhang 2023; Zhou et al. 2022), research to date has primarily focused on studying competitive interactive behaviors and aggressive communication tactics such as brand parodies (Singh and Sonnenburg 2012), brandjacking (Jean 2011; Thota 2021), rivalry (Berendt et al. 2024; Ewing et al. 2013), and teasing (Béal, Lécuyer, and Guitart 2024; Saavedra Torres et al. 2023). Still, knowledge about emerging Br2Br engagement

practices remains limited, as existing research is fragmented, while a holistic understanding of

this complex interactive marketing phenomenon remains urgently needed.

Consequently, this paper sets out to provide a comprehensive conceptualization of Br2Br

engagement strategies on social media, drawing from Language Expectancy Theory (LET)

(Burgoon 1993), which posits that people have expectations regarding the appropriateness of

communication behaviors in specific contexts that can be either violated or confirmed. LET

helps explain how unanticipated forms of Br2Br engagement on social media can significantly

influence audience reactions differently by challenging or confirming linguistic expectations

(Afifi and Metts 1998), especially compared with expected B2C communications (Deng et al.

2021). In turn, we base our work on the following three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What are the different forms of Br2Br engagement on social media, and how do
these compare with B2C communications?

RQ2: Can Br2Br engagement strategies be distinguished based on their emotional tone
and motivation, and how do these features conform to or challenge the expectations of
social media users?

RQ3: How do expectations of different Br2Br engagement strategies influence
participating brands and observing consumers?

To address these RQs, this paper employs a mixed-methods research approach,

combining insights from field data, qualitative and automated text analysis, and an experimental

causal-chain mediation study. By examining the nature, nuances, and implications of various

Br2Br engagement strategies, our research not only contributes to the broader B2C engagement

literature (e.g., Dhaoui and Webster 2021; Labrecque 2014; Liadeli, Sotgiu, and Verlegh 2023),

but also considerably advances the extant Br2Br engagement scholarly work (Thomas and

Fowler 2021; Zhou et al. 2022) by offering a new holistic and empirically informed perspective

on this phenomenon. Drawing from real-life brand practice, for social media marketing and

brand managers, we offer guidance on the different Br2Br engagement strategies they can

employ and their respective consequences when electing to converse with other (competitor or

non-competitor) brands on social media.

Literature review

Brand-to-consumer (B2C) communication strategies on social media

Since their inception, social media platforms have transformed interactive marketing

communications by enabling brands to actively engage audiences through enhanced connectivity

and person-to-person dissemination, leading to unprecedented levels of virality and challenging

traditional mass media norms (Eigenraam et al. 2018; Kaplan and Haenlein 2011). Therefore, it

is not surprising that a significant body of literature has emerged aimed at understanding the

most effective message strategies and executional factors for engaging online customer

audiences (Deng et al. 2021; Quesenberry and Coolsen 2020).

In academic discourse, B2C engagement strategies on social media exhibit a diverse array

of manifestations, largely categorized into *soft*, *hard*, and *contextual* engagement (De Vries,

Gensler, and Leeflang 2012; Sabate et al. 2014; Shahbaznezhad, Dolan, and Rashidirad 2021), as

summarized in the Web Appendix WA-Table 1, with scarce Br2Br engagement research partly

falling into the latter. Soft B2C communication strategies focus on the semantic and pragmatic

nature of brand messages, emphasizing content orientations, rhetoric, and stylistic elements

(Sabate et al. 2014). Effective engagement can target rational needs with factual information

(Liadeli et al. 2023; Tellis et al. 2019), emotional characteristics through entertaining content

(Ashley and Tuten 2015), and interactional needs via questions and calls-to-action (de Vries et al.

2012; Quesenberry and Coolsen 2019). Stylistically, simpler language and visual content, along

with expressions of certainty, enhance engagement and perceived brand power (Deng et al. 2021; Pezzuti, Leonhardt, and Warren 2021). Conversely, hard attributes like media richness and strategic post scheduling are embedded within social media platforms' technical affordances, influencing engagement through sensory stimulation, timing, and posting frequency (Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013; Moran, Muzellec, and Johnson 2020; Shahbaznezhad et al. 2021). Lastly, recent research highlights the importance of contextual factors in B2C engagement. At the platform level, brand communication's impact varies across social media types (Shahbaznezhad et al. 2021). At the brand level, its effectiveness depends on the follower base size and brand equity (Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair 2018). At the industry or product level, factors such as sector, B2C vs. business-to-business (B2B) dynamics, and the distinction between mass and luxury products significantly influence engagement (de Vries et al. 2012; Swani and Milne 2017).

Despite the well-established knowledge domain about brand communication on social media, brands continuously devise novel and unconventional engagement initiatives to overcome the decline in organic reach performance on social media platforms (Lee et al. 2018; Quesenberry and Coolsen 2019). In turn, current knowledge that is primarily concerned with studying B2C engagement (e.g., Deng et al. 2021) is not adept to fully capture the complexities of Br2Br interactions. For instance, hard attributes like media richness and post scheduling, essential for consumer engagement (Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles 2013), may be less relevant in Br2Br contexts, where strategic alliances or casual tactical interactions are a priority. Soft attributes, focusing on emotional and rhetorical elements (Sabate et al. 2014), may not suit or suffice in understanding more formal or competitive Br2Br communication contexts. Additionally, while contextual factors such as industry or product play an important role in distinguishing B2C from Br2Br communication, they are often considered only at a surface

level. The specific ways in which these factors influence Br2Br communication in particular are

not well understood.

Extant brand-to-brand communication literature

Referred to as explicit brand interactions and dialogs with other official brand accounts

(Thomas and Fowler 2021), we distinguish Br2Br engagement[1] on social media from more

conventional Br2Br behaviors based on three characteristics: *reciprocity, instantaneity*, and *low*

involvement. First, unlike traditional unidirectional Br2Br communications (e.g., a brand calls

out another brand on its misconduct; Thota 2021), Br2Br engagement involves a mutual

exchange where one or more brands consciously choose to reciprocate another brand's social

media posts, thereby fostering a real-time dialog, typically inherent to B2C communications.

Relatedly, the instant nature of social media further underpins the Br2Br exchange phenomenon

since engagement happens in real-time compared with conventional Br2Br communications

where, for example, an anti-brand advertisement created by another brand (e.g., Burger King and

McDonald's anti-adverts; Fleming 2018) takes longer to create and/or respond to. Third, whereas

traditional Br2Br advertising communications may be more expensive and time consuming

(Ramadan 2019), Br2Br engagement represents a cost-effective, low involvement strategy to

generate awareness and engagement organically by being exposed to rival brands' audiences

(Berendt et al. 2024).

To date, extant Br2Br engagement research fits on a continuum with more *competitive*

strategies on one extreme and more *cooperative* on the other. Web Appendix WA-Table 2

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[1]In this paper, the terms "Br2Br engagement" and "Br2Br dialog" are synonymous and are used interchangeably throughout.

summarizes key studies investigating the effectiveness of Br2Br engagement strategies on brand

and consumer related outcomes.

Competitive Br2Br engagement behaviors entail negatively framed communication

strategies between brands with brandjacking, use of aggression, and "roasting" being prominent

examples of these. Grounded in the brand parodying literature (Singh and Sonnenburg 2012),

Thota (2021) examined the phenomenon she coined "brandjacking", which involves a brand

creating an anti-commercial parody of another brand's ad that sabotages and reappropriates its

message. Unlike parodying, brandjacking is deliberately intended to damage the reputation of the

target brand, often adversely impacting brand attitudes.

Focusing on dark humor and sarcasm in Br2Br communications, a growing number of

scholars have examined the role of humor and aggression in Br2Br engagement. Thomas and

Fowler (2021) were the first to study the use of aggression and humor when brands interact with

each other on social media, which they termed "Br2Br dialog". The authors found that when

aggression (low or high) is contained in humorous Br2Br dialog, it generates perceptions of

manipulative intent and is thus discouraged. Ning et al. (2022) further confirmed that humor-

based Br2Br strategies that contain low aggression (compared with high aggression) are more

effective in generating consumer behavioral intentions. Studying "roasting" on social media,

Saavedra Torres et al. (2023) uncovered that the presence of dark humor in Br2Br

communications impacts consumers' perceptions of brand coolness and sincerity, and their

effectiveness is dependent upon the recipients' age and personality: young and extroverted

customers were more likely to rate "roasting" Br2Br messages as favorable. Most recently, Béal

et al. (2024) explored how brands' humorous responses on social media are perceived, finding

that affiliative humor is generally more effective and less suspicious than aggressive humor,

which can still work well against competitors and for top dog brands by generating more

engagement without harming purchase intentions.

As brands have identified the need to find better ways to connect with and attract

consumers (de Oliveira Santini et al. 2020), there has been a shift in how they engage with one

another on social media platforms, particularly in connection to specific societal issues (Zhang

and Zhang 2023). Rather than being solely preoccupied with self-motivated goals or competitive

interactive behaviors, some brands are embracing a more cooperative, others-driven approach to

yield positive brand and consumer outcomes (Brandenburger and Nalebuff 2021). Such

behaviors have been well captured in mature research fields including "complementary

competition" - a concept where brands collaborate on certain mutually beneficial issues such as

producing complementary products (Yalcin et al. 2023), and co-branding alliances whereby two

or more brands are presented together as one product that adds value to the consumer that is

greater than the individual brands (Paydas Turan 2021).

These conventional behaviors have more recently been extended to social media

platforms whereby brands can promote their product and/or service partnership collaborations

effectively and in real-time (Kupfer et al. 2018) with the intention of fostering engagement for all

of the involved brands. Examples of cooperative Br2Br behaviors that transcend the

conventional competitive paradigm include praising and helping (Ross 2024; Zhang and Zhang

2023; Zhou et al. 2022), providing positive competitor reviews (Perez, Stockheim, and Baratz

2022), and boosting the perceived distinctiveness of archrival brands (Berendt, Uhrich, and

Thompson 2018). For instance, Zhou et al. (2022) focused on a positive Br2Br communication

phenomenon that the authors coined "Br2Br praise". Br2Br praising is the act of one commercial

brand praising the products of another commercial brand on social media. Across several studies,

the authors found that Br2Br praise is received favorably by consumers because of perceptions of

brand warmth, which in turn results in enhanced brand evaluations and behavioral intentions

(i.e., social media and advertising engagement, brand choice, and purchase behavior). Likewise,

helping another brand on social media compared with conventional self-promoting

communications, Zhang and Zhang (2023) found to convey signals of high communion and

agency. Similarly, examining online reviews where brands or entities (e.g., influencers) provide

complimentary reviews for competitor brands, Perez et al. (2022) found that these increase

consumers' purchase intentions due to perceptions of credibility. Lastly, Ross (2024) found that

self-oriented Br2Br interactions positively influence brand-consumer evaluations for both brands

involved, with a particularly strong effect for well-known brands, and suggests further research

to clarify the dynamics of Br2Br relationships.

While these studies have provided a cumulative body of research on the nature of Br2Br

engagement strategies, our review identified two central limitations of this extant research. First,

existing research focused on isolated instances of Br2Br engagement that emphasize a single

framing aspect (e.g., positive; negative; aggression vs. humor). Due to the evolving nature of

social media networks and emerging brand engagement practices, a more holistic typification of

the Br2Br engagement phenomenon and appraisal of its consequences is needed (Eigenraam et

al. 2018). Second, most studies neglect the examination of the motivations for Br2Br

engagement, specifically the brands' orientation (self-interest vs. other-interest). Existing

research has predominantly focused on competitive motivations, particularly in rivalries and top

versus underdog brand dynamics (Berendt et al., 2024; Béal et al., 2024). However, this

emphasis overlooks other potential motivations within more collaborative brand relationships,

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such as those between non-competitors or indirect competitors. This leaves a gap in

understanding the full spectrum of Br2Br engagement motivations.

Language expectancy theory

LET is a message-centered theory of persuasion, which proposes that language operates

within socially constructed norms, known as "expectancies" and these guide interpersonal

interactions and information processing (Burgoon 1993; Burgoon et al. 2002). These

expectations are not arbitrary but serve as the normative framework by which individuals

interpret communication. During an interactional exchange, recipients assess messages based on

these *normative* expectations, categorizing them as either "confirming" or "violating." Recipients

engage in a two-step process when receiving a message: first, they focus on the message content,

such as a brand's engagement strategy. Then, if a violation occurs, they evaluate it and adjust

their behavior accordingly (Afifi and Metts 1998). Violations can be positive,

exceeding/confirming expectations and enhancing credibility and persuasion, or negative, falling

short of expectations and undermining credibility (Jensen et al. 2013; Kronrod, Grinstein, and

Wathieu 2012). Furthermore, LET posits that when an individual's expectations are violated, the

reaction depends on three key factors: violation *expectedness* (i.e., how predictable or surprising

the behavior is), *importance* (i.e., the significance of the expected behavior in the given context),

and *valence* (i.e., the positive or negative nature of the violation) (Afifi and Metts 1998).

Initially developed for interpersonal communication, LET's dimensions offer valuable

insights when applied to understand Br2Br engagement on social media. This is because social

media users develop distinct linguistic expectations regarding how brands should interact with

them through various communication efforts on these platforms (Mangiò et al. 2023) and

confirmations or violations of these expectations would produce divergent brand and consumer

outcomes. In particular, consumers expect brands to resort to social media to communicate

messages for commercial purposes via various content strategies (Kim, Spiller, and Hettche

2015; Mangiò et al. 2023) that entail different degrees of violation expectedness, importance and

valence.

First, in the context of social media, consumers generally expect brands to engage with

them directly, as such interactions are viewed as standard customer service and marketing

practices aimed at fostering relationships and addressing consumer needs (Deng et al. 2021;

Quesenberry and Coolsen 2019). This expectation makes B2C interactions less violating and

more predictable. Conversely, Br2Br interactions are less common and may appear as attempts at

competitive banter or strategic alliances (Béal et al. 2024), which can deviate from the normative

expectations consumers hold, thereby making these interactions seem more unusual or

unexpected. This disparity in expectations, we argue, explains why consumers may find B2C

interactions more acceptable and anticipated, whereas Br2Br engagements, by contrast, more

violating and thus elicit stronger reactions from social media users.

Moreover, the higher the unexpectedness of the communicative behavior, the more

significance the consumers may place on the violation. In terms of Br2Br engagement, this

means that consumers will not only perceive Br2Br engagement as more violating than B2C

engagement, but also evaluate the extent of violation/expectedness of different Br2Br

engagement strategies differently based on their motivation (Béal et al. 2024). For example, as

shown in past research some brands engage in competitive behaviors such as "brandjackijng"

(Thota 2021), which may violate social norms of cooperation and reciprocity (Swaminathan et

al. 2022), instead focusing on self-promotion and competitive advantage, and in turn be seen as

violating. Conversely, few scholars have demonstrated that Br2Br interactions can be non-

competitive and prosocial, and thus align better with societal expectations of mutual support and

positive engagement (Ross 2024; Zhou et al. 2022), thereby seen as expected and non-violating.

Finally, the valence of a violation in Br2Br engagement—whether it is perceived

positively or negatively—depends on the nature and severity of the deviation from consumers'

expectations of Br2Br communicative behaviors (Afifi and Metts 1998). Br2Br engagement

strategies, which focus on self-promotion and competitive behavior, may be seen as highly

negative and inappropriate, if they violate norms of collaboration and mutual respect (Béal et al.

2024). Conversely, Br2Br interactions, characterized by support and cooperation, are more likely

to meet or exceed consumer expectations (Ross 2024; Zhang and Zhang 2023), thus being

evaluated more positively.

An overview of the studies

Relying on field data, we were able to: (1) identify, explore, and delineate between the

characteristics and dynamics of an emergent and underexplored phenomenon to develop an

understanding of its differentiated and nuanced nature and, (2) drawing from LET, test its effect

on consumer and brand variables. Specifically, we conducted three studies to build and test our

Br2Br engagement typology. First, in a preliminary field data study, we compare the effects of

B2C vs. Br2Br communication strategies on customer engagement variables, thereby elucidating

the necessity for typology development. In our second study, via a hybrid content analysis,

which relies on an abductive approach (Shannon-Baker 2016) to qualitatively and quantitatively

content analyze an exploratory Br2Br engagement dataset, we build our Br2Br engagement

typology. To do this, we followed two criteria outlined by Doty and Glick (1994): (1) holistic

configurations of multiple unidimensional constructs, (2) and internal consistency among first-

order constructs. In other words, we focused on developing overarching multidimensional

constructs (i.e., Br2Br engagement strategies) with internally homogenous (within-strategy) and externally heterogenous (between-strategy) configurations of Br2Br engagement.

Finally, as per Doty and Glick's (1994) third criterion of typology-building, we tested the falsifiability of the constructs in our final Br2Br engagement typology via an experimental causal-chain mediation approach. In Study 3a, we tested the perceived expectedness (violating vs. non-violating) of the Br2Br engagement constructs generated in Study 2. Then, in Study 3b, we manipulated perceived expectedness of the Br2Br dialog strategies to show its effect on brand and consumer outcomes. A causal-chain design is more robust to experimental demands compared with purely statistical mediation analyses in certain contexts (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005), which we deemed necessary for our research. Specifically, LET posits a two-stage process where recipients first assess whether a message meets or violates their communicative expectations. If a normative violation occurs, recipients then evaluate the breach and react accordingly (Averbeck and Miller 2014). This rapid attentional deployment triggered by the violation renders traditional measurement-of-mediation approaches using self-report measures unsuitable, given that: 1) they prevent assurance that violations are accurately perceived prior to assessing their effects (Berg, Kitayama, and Kross 2021); and 2) they often rely on scales that assume the existence of baseline psychological states that may not actually be present (Spencer et al. 2005). In contrast, our approach of experimentally manipulating the mediator (LET), informed by the findings of a pre-existing experiment that pinpointed where violations occur, ensures the creation of the necessary psychological state of normative expectancy violation or confirmation, which might not naturally arise in the context of unknown to the respondents brands (Liao et al. 2023). Moreover, the experimental causal-chain design minimizes the influence of confounding variables through allowing the random assignment of manipulated

levels of the mediator. This method ensures that any differences in outcomes are not attributable

to pre-existing biases (Lee and Feeley 2017). By employing this sequential process, our causal-

mediation approach delineates cause-and-effect relationships more clearly, while reducing the

potential for confounding variables.

Study 1: B2C vs. Br2Br engagement field study

To assess the violations' expectedness (Afifi and Metts 1998) of B2C vs. Br2Br dialog in

response to RQ1, we compared the effects of Br2Br engagement with B2C engagement

strategies on consumer engagement indicators: "Likes", "Retweets", and "Engagement [2]" (i.e.,

the sum of "Likes" and "Retweets" for each brand message; Pezzuti & Leonhardt 2023).

To do this, we first conducted a content analysis in a manner similar to Labrecque et al.

(2022). This entailed the systematic collection of online textual data encompassing interactions

between official social media brand accounts on X, i.e., Br2Br engagement. A research assistant

(RA) was trained to identify, capture, and collect data regarding the novel phenomenon and

unique characteristics of Br2Br engagement (i.e., reciprocity, instantaneity, and low

involvement). Following non-probability sampling (Langer 2018) and prior to data collection,

our RA spent a month exploring the official X and Facebook accounts of 123 brands from a

range of industries and countries of origin. This stage enabled the researchers to gain an

understanding of: (1) the broader types of interactive behaviors occurring within these pages; and

(2) which brands regularly interact with other brands. Twelve official brand accounts on X were

selected for inclusion in our final sample because of the presence of Br2Br engagement. To

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[2] For a robustness check, an alternative aggregate measure of social media engagement (CESM) was computed using principal component analysis (PCA) (Web Appendix WA-Table 3), with results consistent with the additive approach reported here (Unnava and Aravindakshan 2021).

enhance the external validity of our study (Harwood and Garry 2003), we chose brands from a

range of key industries, which market research shows are among the top most active on social

media (Statista 2022), and from a diverse followers' base, ranging from micro to mega accounts

(see Table 1). Our content analysis suggests that the brands typically participating in Br2Br

dialogue come from consumer-facing industries that employ diverse content marketing strategies

to engage their target audiences (He et al. 2021). These brands typically produce shareable, low-

involvement content that resonates strongly with demographics characterized by active social

media engagement, such as Millennials and Gen Z.

Brand	Industry	Followers
Aldi Stores UK	Retail/Supermarket	680.6 K
Beyond Meat	Food and drinks	136.9 K
Chicago Town	Food and drinks	19.6 K
Costa Coffee	Food and drinks	280.8 K
Dell	Technology	819.7 K
Dove	Health/Beauty	184 K
Greggs	Food and drinks	210.1 K
KFC UK	Food and drinks	151.9 K
MandS	Retail/Supermarket	647.1 K
Oreo Cookie	Food and drinks	1M
Quorn Foods, UK	Food and drinks	30.5 K
Tesco	Retail/Supermarket	662 K

Table 1 Study 1 Sample

The data were collected between February and July 2022 until saturation was reached and

no new insights emerged. Three hundred and seven excerpts (out of approximately 2,200 total

brand posts observed) were manually downloaded from X containing an element of Br2Br

engagement ranging from a passive retweet of another brand's post to active and often repeated

written posts and comments on other brand accounts. From these, 74% qualified as Br2Br

engagement, consistent with our conceptualization: official social media brand accounts that

engage in explicit interactions with other official brand accounts. The final dataset consisted of

226 X excerpts showcasing Br2Br interactions and corresponding engagement metrics ("Likes"

and "Retweets") for each Br2Br engagement excerpt. As a control group, we also collected 194

general B2C posts. To ensure consistency, the selection of B2C posts adhered to the following

criteria: (1) posts were exclusively chosen from the brands listed in Table 2; (2) an equal number

of posts per brand were randomly selected over a six-month period to ensure balanced

representation; and (3) each B2C post was thoroughly examined to verify the absence of any

Br2Br engagement, thereby maintaining a strict focus on brand interactions with consumers.

We then ran three negative binomial regressions to account for the overdispersion of the

dependent variables. The dummy variable "strategy", indicating whether a brand-generated post

includes a "Br2Br" or a "B2C" engagement strategy on X, served as the predictor variable in

each model. Several control variables suggested by the relevant literature (see Web Appendix

WA-Table 4 for the correlations and descriptive statistics of all variables, and Web Appendix

WA-Table 5 for definitions and source) were included, namely the number of textual

paralinguistic elements in a post ("TLP"; Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023), the post's length

(wordcount, "WC"; Lee et al. 2018), media richness (Shahbaznezhad et al. 2021), sentiment

(Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2023), whether it was posted during working hours (hour of the day,

"HoD") or during the weekend (Moran et al. 2020), and lastly the brand publishing the post

("brand"; Pezzuti and Leonhardt 2023).

As illustrated in Table 2, the models achieved good fit. Results of Model 1 show that that

posts using a B2C engagement strategy generate significantly fewer engagements ($IRR = .48$, $p <$

$.001$) compared to those employing a Br2Br strategy, which serves as the reference category.

Among the controls, brand-generated posts published during working hours generated more

engagement (IRR = 1.65; p = .00), whereas those characterized by a low extent of media richness

(text-only) generated less engagement than those containing pictures (IRR = .68; p = .02). In

addition, the brand posting the message was associated with different levels of engagement

(Wald χ2 (27) = 25.56; p < .001), whereas the relationships between TLP (p = .40), WC (p =

.71), sentiment (p = .94), weekend (p = .97) and engagement were not significant. Models 2 and

3 also show that posts containing a B2C engagement strategy are on average associated with a

lower number of likes (IRR = .47, p = .00) and retweets (IRR = .39, p = .02) compared with those

containing a Br2Br engagement strategy, providing further support for our expectations.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Dependent variable	Engagement		Likes		Retweets	
Predictors	IRR (SE)	IRR (SE)	IRR (SE)	IRR (SE)	IRR (SE)	IRR (SE)
Strategy [*Br2Br*]	-	-	-	-	-	-
Strategy [*B2C*]	.21*** (.04)	.48*** (.1)	.18*** (.3)	.47*** (.1)	.52* (.16)	.39* (.15)
TLP	-	1.08 (.1)	-	1.07 (.1)	-	1.29 (.24)
WC	-	1 (0)	-	1 (0)	-	1.01 (.01)
Media richness [*pictorial*]	-	-	-	-	-	-
Media richness [*textual*]	-	.68* (.11)	-	.73* (.12)	-	.46* (.14)
Media richness [*video*]	-	.87 (.21)	-	.88 (.22)	-	.94 (.42)
Sentiment	-	1 (.01)	-	1 (.01)	-	1.03 (.02)
HoD [*non-working*]	-	-	-	-	-	-
HoD [*working*]	-	1.65 ** (.29)	-	1.63 ** (.29)	-	1.96 * (.65)
Weekend [*no*]	-	-	-	-	-	-
Weekend [*yes*]	-	.99 (.28)	-	.92 (.26)	-	1.18 (.63)
Brand dummies	-	Yes	-	Yes	-	Yes
Intercept	72.26*** (9.17)	28.66 *** (10.25)	64.91*** (8.24)	26.92 *** (9.69)	7.25*** (1.55)	1.27 (.8)
Likelihood ratio	-	455.58***	-	438.24***	-	254.88***

Notes: The coefficients are exponentiated for ease of interpretation (impact rate ratio, IRR). Dependent variables are expressed on a per ten-thousand-follower basis, to ensure a reliable comparison between the heterogeneous follower bases of the sample brands. N = 419. * *p* < .05   ** *p* < .01   *** *p* < .001

Table 2 Effects of Br2Br vs. B2C posts on user engagement

In sum, we argued that B2C communications are more closely aligned with consumer expectations, making them more normative. In comparison, Br2Br communications often deviate from these norms, making them appear more unexpected. Our findings support this notion, showing that in terms of real-life behavioral response, B2C interactions tend to receive lower engagement from users compared Br2Br communications.

Study 2: Typology building

Method

Study 2 further addresses RQ1 as well as RQ2 and builds a typology of Br2Br engagement that specifies its: (1) "ideal types", that is, the theoretical multidimensional abstractions (i.e. the Br2Br engagement strategies) resulting in different levels of the dependent variable; (2) classificatory dimensions, that is, the unidimensional constructs (i.e. emotional tone and motivation) used to categorize a phenomenon; and (3) the relationship between the "ideal types" and classificatory dimensions (Doty and Glick 1994).
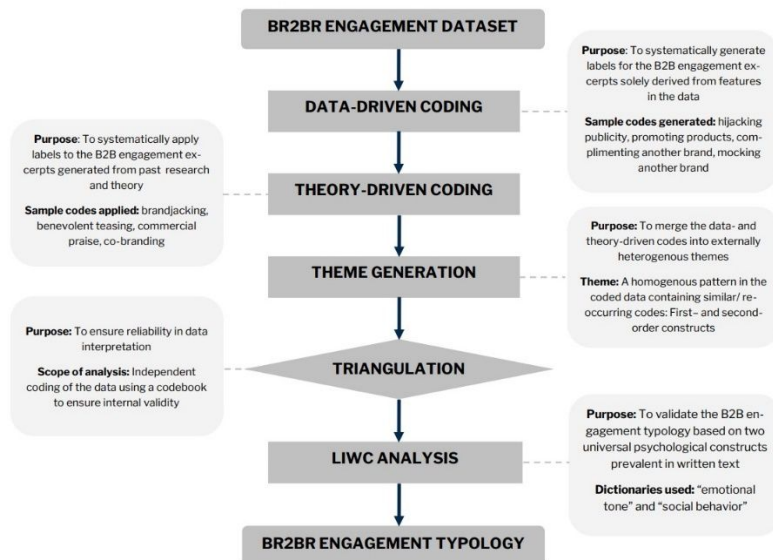
We followed a hybrid approach to thematic analysis where the Br2Br engagement dataset collected as part of our qualitative content analysis (Study 1) was inductively analyzed by generating codes based on unique features in the data at both the semantic (surface) and latent (underlying) levels of the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). We then deductively analyzed the dataset by applying theory-driven codes derived from the broader B2C and extant Br2Br engagement literature streams to further substantiate our analysis. Via the process of abduction,

the data- and theory-driven codes were then combined to derive our multidimensional

abstractions: Br2Br engagement strategies (see Web Appendix WA-Table 6 for the coding

sheet). As part of this process, two of the authors independently coded the data and, after

resolving any disagreements (first round: $Ir = .90$), reached a satisfactory inter-coder reliability

index (second round: $Ir = .98$). This was calculated using the method of proportional agreement:

the proportion of total pairwise agreements between the two coders (Rust and Cooil 1994). The

final dataset comprised four first-order Br2Br engagement strategies and eight corresponding

second-order dimensions.

Then, drawing from the Br2Br dialog literature (Web Appendix WA-Table 2) and LET

(Afifi and Metts 1998), to frame our typology we applied two relevant classificatory dimensions

derived from LIWC. LIWC's dictionaries contain comprehensive lists of words that have been

internally and externally validated in reliably assessing the prevalence of psychological

constructs in text communications (Pennebaker et al. 2015; Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010) and

are widely used to automatically analyze the content of social media textual data (e.g., Kim, Jun,

and Kim 2018; Pezzuti et al. 2021; Wakefield and Wakefield 2018). Figure 2 showcases the

research procedure for Study 2.

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BR2BR ENGAGEMENT DATASET

Purpose: To systematically generate labels for the B2B engagement excerpts solely derived from features in the data

Sample codes generated: hijacking publicity, promoting products, complimenting another brand, mocking another brand

DATA-DRIVEN CODING

Purpose: To systematically apply labels to the B2B engagement excerpts generated from past research and theory

Sample codes applied: brandjacking, benevolent teasing, commercial praise, co-branding

THEORY-DRIVEN CODING

Purpose: To merge the data- and theory-driven codes into externally heterogenous themes

Theme: A homogenous pattern in the coded data containing similar/re-occurring codes: First- and second-order constructs

THEME GENERATION

Purpose: To ensure reliability in data interpretation

Scope of analysis: Independent coding of the data using a codebook to ensure internal validity

TRIANGULATION

Purpose: To validate the B2B engagement typology based on two universal psychological constructs prevalent in written text

Dictionaries used: "emotional tone" and "social behavior"

LIWC ANALYSIS

BR2BR ENGAGEMENT TYPOLOGY

Figure 2 Study 2 Research procedure

As the first classificatory dimension, emotional tone was selected because: (1) Br2Br engagement initiatives have been found to employ language that ranges from very positive (e.g. the use of humor) to very negative (e.g. the use of aggressiveness; Ning et al. 2022; Saavedra Torres et al. 2023; Thomas and Fowler 2021); and (2) research posits that communication framed by affective and emotional intensity can breach recipients language expectancies (Afifi and Metts 1998; Jensen et al. 2013). To measure the emotional tone of Br2Br engagement strategies, the 2,999-word dictionary for "emotional tone", which represents a composite measure for both positive tone and negative tone dimensions in text, was applied to the data. By employing the "emotional tone" dictionary alongside our qualitative delineation of Br2Br engagement strategies, we further enhanced the granularity of our typology via quantifiable metrics, leveraging universally recognized language indicators of positive versus negative emotional tones (Boyd et al. 2022). Moreover, B2C engagement research has shown that emotional tone is a key driver for subsequent customer behaviors (Aleti et al. 2019; Deng et al. 2021; Kübler, Colicev, and Powels 2020). Examples of the most frequently used words in this

dictionary include: "good", "love", "happy", "hope", "bad", "wrong", "too much", "hate". The

higher the number calculated using LIWC, the more positive the tone of the Br2Br engagement

strategy (Cohn, Mehl, and Pennebaker 2004).

As the second classificatory dimension, motivation was selected because: (1) of the

fundamental principle of reciprocity inherent in Br2Br engagement. Central to this notion is

discerning whether the impetus behind initiating or reciprocating dialog with another brand is

predominantly other-oriented, aimed at fostering engagement for all involved brands, or

primarily self-oriented, intended to bolster engagement solely for oneself, holds significant

importance; and (2) research confirms that not only the polarity, but also the self-vs-other

orientation of communication exchanges can breach language expectancies (Barasch et al. 2014;

Mangiò et al. 2023). For instance, B2C advertising research has shown that comparable altruistic

versus egoistic brand advertising messages influence consumer intentions differently (Baek and

Yoon 2022). To measure the motivation underpinning the brand-generated posts, we used the

1,632-word "social behavior" dictionary provided by the LIWC software, which seeks to reflect

referents in text ranging from "prosocial" to "conflict" (Penner et al. 2005). Care", "say",

"fight", "attack", and "thank" are common examples in this dictionary. The higher the value

from the LIWC output, the more other-orientated interactive behavior is exhibited in the

analyzed text.

Results

From the content analysis, four Br2Br engagement strategies each containing two sub-

dimensions were constructed: Public Relations (PR) Hijacking (inviting, topical), Praising

(product-based, values-based), Teasing (dog-eat-dog, benevolent), and Spotlighting (unilateral,

symbiotic). As illustrated in Table 3 with examples provided alongside, each strategy consists of

two dimensions that reflect their nuanced nature and further emphasize their distinguishing

features.

Data excerpts	Second-order construct	First-order construct	Construct definition
"AldiUK: Ngl we're a bit jealous of @IcelandFoods staff today. We're all fighting over the freezer aisle. It's carnage (Loudly Crying Face emoji) #heatwave **Iceland Foods:** Ngl we're actually tweeting this from inside one of our freezers."	*Inviting*	**PR Hijacking**	A brand invites dialog by posting questions, making statements, or Tweeting about trending topics that intentionally generate engagement from other brands.
"AO: Which would you choose for your Jubilee party food? (Fork and Knife emoji **Greggs:** A party without a Sausage Roll is simply not a party **AO:** Well if you're offering ..."	*Topical*		
"ToyBook: Black-owned Purpose Toys is working with @JustPlayToys to introduce the Naturalistas Pixie Puff Collection at @Walmart in Sept. #pulseofplay **Dove**: We LOVE seeing natural hairstyles represented in the new Naturalistas Pixie Puff Collection (Sparkles empji) Thank you to Purpose Toys and @JustPlayToys for celebrating natural hair and amplifying #TheCROWNAct (Raising Hands emoji)"	*Values-based*	**Praising**	Two or more brands engage in a dialog to praise one another on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts or on the quality of their product- and non-product-related brand features.
"Greggs: Hang it in the @Tate (Man Tipping Hand emoji) **Tate:** Great art. Great vegan sausage rolls."	*Product-based*		
"McDonalds: which menu hack will you build yourself first? see u 1.31 (1) land, air & sea (2) crunchy double (3) hash brown mcmuffin (4) surf+turf **Wendy's:** You guys know these are cheeseburgers and not an entertainment center from IKEA, right?"	*Dog-eat-dog*	**Teasing**	A brand posts content that either mocks a competitor brand to stimulate competitive dialog or teases an indirect or non-competitor brand using humor.
"Quorn: Dibs on the vegan sausage roll two-piece [retweeting newspaper mentioning the brand] **Ginsters:** We're RIGHT HERE (Angry Face emoji)"	*Benevolent*		
"weetabix: Get up and go with this protein packed pairing. Grab your #MightyBix bundle here https://bit.ly/MightyBix @GetMIGHTY_	*Symbiotic*	**Spotlighting**	A brand posts promotional content that emphasizes a

GetMIGHTY: Fancy a breakfast that looks this good? Follow the link in our bio to grab your own #MIGHTYBIX bundle!"			mutual product collaboration with another brand or the brand's own products.
"**Oreo**: We're pumpkin spicing things up (pumpkin emoji)(leaves emoji) OREO Pumpkin Spice Cookies. On shelves 8/15. **Bigelow Tea:** Pumpkin Spice Tea with Pumpkin Spice Oreos? The dunk combo we all need (smiling face with he art-eyes emoji) **Bush's Beans:** skipping right over bean season"	*Unilateral*		

Table 3 Qualitative content analysis findings

PR Hijacking is a strategy whereby a brand posts content that encourages other brands to "hijack" its content and post replies. Other brands can be "invited" to participate by a brand posting explicit questions directed at its customers and/or specific brands, or more implicitly, whereby the brand posts a controversial statement that generates dialog. PR Hijacking can also be "topical" whereby the brand creates a Tweet about a trending topic in the media (e.g., via repurposing Love Island memes), which in turn stimulates Br2Br engagement. The goal of the PR Hijacking strategy is to generate buzz or virality by capitalizing on other brands hijacking one's content, often posted in relation to a trending theme or topic. This strategy leverages the collective attention and engagement generated by multiple brands, thereby amplifying the reach and impact of the original content.

Praising is a different Br2Br engagement strategy in which two or more brands interact to compliment a specific brand or each other. This Br2Br engagement strategy can be differentiated based on whether the act of praising is in relation a brand's CSR and citizenship values ("values-based") or in relation to its product-related (e.g., quality) and non-product-related (e.g., reputation) brand features ("product-based"). Praising represents a distinct Br2Br engagement strategy characterized by reciprocal compliments exchanged between two or more brands. This

approach fosters genuine interactions where brands appear to authentically acknowledge and

commend each other's products or values, without any underlying personal gain or contractual

obligations, thereby emphasizing the sincerity and goodwill behind the engagement.

Teasing involves the mocking of other brands in more aggressive ("dog-eat-dog") or non-

hostile and humorous ("benevolent") ways. The former entails a brand posting content that

makes fun of another brand to stimulate competitive dialog. In our findings, dog-eat-dog is

exclusive to archrival brands such as Aldi and Tesco. The latter is not limited to rival brands and

occurs when two or more (indirect or non-competitor) brands interact to make harmless fun of

each other. This strategy capitalizes on audience engagement by fostering further interactions

through defending or attacking behaviors, thereby shaping brand perceptions and enhancing

visibility in the competitive landscape.

Lastly, Spotlighting is a more conventional and promotion oriented Br2Br engagement

strategy that involves brands commenting on each other's products or CSR posts to increase

awareness of these. Spotlighting can be done more jointly where the brands interact with one

another to promote a mutual collaboration ("symbiotic") or unilaterally whereby the brand

promotes its own products and other brands engage in a dialog to acknowledge these. In the

context of social media engagement, the Spotlighting strategy involves a brand posting

promotional content that highlights either a collaborative product effort with another brand or

solely focuses on its own products. Unlike the Praising strategy, which primarily involves

positive compliments toward other brands, Spotlighting represents a contractual form of

engagement aimed at stimulating consumers' purchase intentions, particularly through the

promotion of a sole or mutual product offering.

To validate our Br2Br engagement typology, we created dummy variables based on the two LIWC dictionary outputs: emotional tone and social behavior. Two Welch's Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were then performed to compare how emotional tone and social behavior differ across the four Br2Br engagement strategies uncovered in the content analysis (see Figure 3 for illustration of the results).
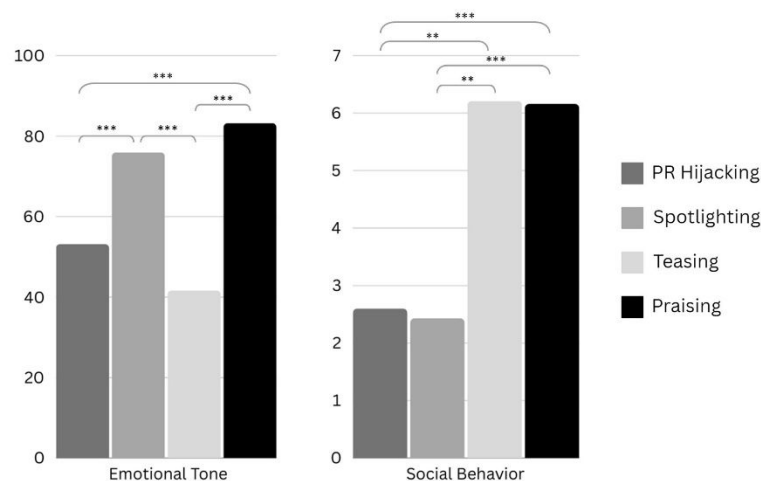

Figure 3 Visual representation of significant differences across the four Br2Br engagement groups for emotional tone and social behavior; Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

The first analysis revealed a significant difference in the emotional tone scores across the Br2Br engagement strategies, Welch's $F_{(3, 54.26)} = 13.67$, $p < .001$, $\omega^2 = .05$. Tukey's HSD pairwise comparisons indicated that both PR Hijacking ($M = 53.18$, $SD = 36.32$) and Teasing ($M = 41.65$, $SD = 34.01$) had significantly different emotional tones compared to Praising ($M = 83.22$, $SD = 32.02$) and Spotlighting ($M = 75.96$, $SD = 25.83$), ps $< .001$. However, no significant differences were found between PR Hijacking and Teasing, or between Praising and Spotlighting (ps $> .05$). These results, combined with the higher mean values of Praising and Spotlighting and

the lower means of Teasing and PR Hijacking, allow us to categorize Praising and Spotlighting

as positive in tone, while Teasing and PR Hijacking are categorized as negative.

The second analysis, with social behavior as the dependent variable, also showed

significant results, Welch's $F_{(3, 50.32)}$ = 9.92, p < .001, ω^2 = .06. Tukey's HSD post hoc tests

revealed that PR Hijacking (M = 2.60, SD = 3.24) and Spotlighting (M = 2.43, SD = 3.02) were

significantly different from Teasing (M = 6.21, SD = 4.50) and Praising (M = 6.16, SD = 4.64),

ps < .00. There were no significant differences between PR Hijacking and Spotlighting, nor

between Teasing and Praising (ps > .05). These results indicate that PR Hijacking are more self-

oriented in their motivation (i.e., intended to bolster engagement solely for oneself), while

Praising and Teasing are other-oriented (i.e., aimed at fostering engagement for all involved

brands, which can be negatively or positively valenced). Figure 4 illustrates our final Br2Br

engagement typology based on these results.
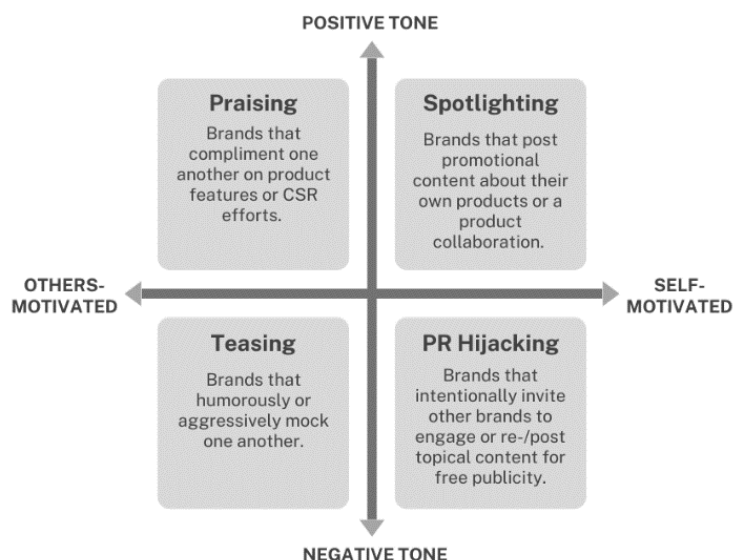
Figure 4 Br2Br engagement typology

Study 2 Discussion

Our research is the first to provide a holistic typology of nuanced Br2Br engagement strategies that goes beyond B2C engagement and fragmented Br2Br dialog behaviors on social media. As such, we contribute to the current knowledge on several fronts.

First, our typology shows a general shift away from competitive Br2Br behaviors on social media. With few exceptions (Zhang and Zhang 2023; Zhou et al. 2022), this is contradictory to mainstream research, which has predominantly studied negatively framed Br2Br interactive behaviors online (e.g., brandjacking, Thota 2021; brand rivalry, Ewing et al. 2013). Thus, our findings add to the scarce research on positive Br2Br engagement, showcasing less aggressive strategies including PR Hijacking, Praising, and Spotlighting, some of which are particularly positively framed and/or collaborative. Specifically, we demonstrate a bright side to brandjacking (Thota 2021), which we termed "PR Hijacking": a self-oriented and opportunistic strategy whereby brands engage in dialog with other brands in response to trending topics in the media. PR hijacking can be further linked to the well-established concept of viral marketing since both reside in a motivation to spread popular content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2011). Where PR Hijacking diverges from viral marketing and extends the literature is in: its reactivity (brands jump on the bandwagon of sharing/responding to "trending" content), while viral marketing relies on proactive (push) techniques; and its timeliness: PR Hijacking spreads instantaneously due to the real-time interactive nature of social media networks, while viral marketing often requires time to become widespread (Allagui and Breslow 2016).

Second, with our Praising strategy, which entails brands interacting with other brands online more casually to compliment one another, we advance the extant Br2Br praising literature (Zhou et al. 2022). Our findings demonstrate that this phenomenon can occur beyond

commercial settings (i.e., praising other brand's products/services). In our findings, we confirmed that Br2Br praise can also be non-commercial as well whereby brands engage in a dialog relating to common social issues to showcase mutual support for these.

Next, we uncovered Spotlighting, which is a strategy that showcases brand collaborations on products and can also be linked to past research on traditional co-branding alliances and promotional strategies (e.g., Pinello, Picone, and Li Destri 2022). Our findings on Spotlighting extend this stream of research in the context of online communications where brands use their social media accounts to promote collaborative initiatives to generate awareness and engage with each other's audiences in real-time, instead of relying on more conventional marketing channels such as TV adverts.

Fourth, with our Teasing strategy, we advance two scholarly fronts. On the one hand, we extend the brand hijacking literature (Thota 2021), which has predominantly examined the negative Br2Br hijacking behavior that aims to damage the reputation of a target brand. In this study, we show that teasing behaviors can be differentiated on the basis of their intensity: dog-eat-dog vs. benevolent, where the former is used to undermine a competitor brand, while the latter is benign, and humor based and complement existing research into benevolent and malevolent teasing (Béal et al. 2024). On the other hand, we contribute to the brand rivalry literature and an ongoing debate regarding the competitive behaviors between brands perceived to be arch-rivals to each other's products (Berendt et al. 2018; Ewing et al. 2013). Our results show that such teasing Br2Br interactive behaviors are not limited to arch-rival brands (except for "dog-eat-dog") and can occur between indirect and non-competitors disguised in humor.

Study 3: Typology testing

Typologies should exhibit internal consistency within organizations associated with a given phenomenon, and they should also generate distinct outcomes for the target dependent variable(s) that are not predictable during the typology development process (Doty and Glick 1994). Thus, in the final step of our typology development, we investigate how the four overarching Br2Br engagement strategies may differently impact various measures of communication effectiveness. Due to the novelty of our typology, the development of specific hypotheses was not feasible. Therefore, we rely on our supporting theory, LET, whose principles, while not fully explaining the performance of our typology constructs, provide a foundation for developing theoretical expectations (Bajde et al. 2021; Doty and Glick 1994). Our predictions regarding the effectiveness of Br2Br engagement strategies, which we test in the following studies, are as follows.

Br2Br engagement strategies, which are framed by self-interest - "Spotlighting" and "PR Hijacking" – we expect to align with consumers' expectations because they transparently focus on brand visibility and promotion, which consumers often anticipate from businesses (Kim, Spiller, and Hettche 2015; Mangiò et al. 2023). As a result, these strategies would lead to positive consumer responses since they meet rather than challenge or disrupt what consumers expect from Br2Br interactions. Conversely, Br2Br engagement strategies framed by other-oriented motivations - "Teasing" and "Praising" - would be more violating to observing consumers' expectancies and generate stronger responses compared with non-violating strategies. More specifically, Teasing would be a norm-violating behavior due to its competitive goal-fulfilling nature compared with other other-oriented brand communications on social media that are typically more cooperative (Guha and Korschun 2023; Mangiò et al. 2023), and thus

negatively violate consumers' expectancies. Consequently, consumers would inhibit desired

behaviors while triggering undesired ones. In contrast, Praising would be a positive violation

since Br2Br communication unmotivated by commercial, self-interest goals and designed to

fulfill non-contractual collaboration is evaluated more positively compared to more conventional

B2C communication (Mangiò et al. 2023). This would then generate desired consumer and brand

goals while inhibiting undesired ones.

Study 3a

Participants

A UK sample (n = 145)[3] was purchased from Prolific (M_{age} = 38, age range 18-78,

Gender: Female = 51%, Male = 46.9%, Non-binary = 2.1%; Race: White = 75.2%, Asian =

10.3%, Black = 9.7%, Mixed/Other = 4.8%). The participants had to meet the following

eligibility criteria to take part: general use of social media sites, regular posting activity on X,

"Follow"/"Like" brand accounts on social media and naming three, and the visiting frequency of

these brands accounts (i.e., ranging from minimum once a month to daily).

Design and Procedure

In this study, we used a one-factor between-subjects design where the respondents were

then assigned to one of four scenarios: PR Hijacking (n = 37), Praising (n = 36), Teasing (n =

36), or Spotlighting (n = 36) where fictitious brands (Big Fresh, RiseUP Nosh, and Nourish

Nook) tweeted replies to each other's posts (see Web Appendix WA-Figure 1 for stimuli). The

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[3] G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al. 2009) was used to estimate the sample size required for Studies 3a and 3b to achieve a statistical power of $(1 - b)$ = .90. On the basis of the lowest effect size measures (partial eta-squared) reported by previous research analyzing Br2Br dialog (e.g., Saavedra Torres et al. 2023; Thomas and Fowler 2021), the effect size was set to f = .20 with the significance level set to alpha = .05.

stimuli were based on our findings from Study 2 and pre-tested across three industries with 150

social media users to verify that the stimuli were understood as intended. In the PR Hijacking

condition, respondents viewed a brand posting about a trending topic "World Food Day" and

other brands replying to this post using a trending hashtag. In the Praising condition, a brand

tweeted about its charitable cause, while two other brands complimented the cause and the

brand's products. In the Teasing condition a brand posted a Tweet which was met by comments

from other brands making fun of the brand's customer service and products. The Spotlighting

condition contained the three brands promoting a mutual product collaboration.

Fictious brands created using an AI-powered brand name generator (Looka;

https://looka.com/) were chosen for the stimuli to avoid respondent existing preconceptions or

experiences when brand familiarity is concerned (e.g., Ghosh, Sreejesh, and Dwivedi 2021).

Following the stimuli, the participants answered a manipulation check to assess the realism of

the scenario ($M = 4.79$, $SD = .92$) and as an attention check we asked participants whether the

scenario was about brand or user accounts interacting with one another, following which twenty-

one respondents were removed. LET was then assessed using an adapted scale from Burgoon

and Walther (1990) (see Table 4), and the survey ended with demographic questions.

Results

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the perceived expectedness of the four

Br2Br engagement strategies (see Figure 5). The results were significant: $F_{(3, 141)} = 28.45$, $p <$

.001. Teasing ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.12$) was rated as significantly more violating/less expected than

the remaining Br2Br engagement strategies: PR Hijacking ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.17$), Praising ($M =$

5.48, $SD = .96$), and Spotlighting ($M = 5.67$, $SD = .70$). There were no further significant

differences between the remaining strategies (ps > .05).

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Study 3b

Participants

A UK sample (n = 160) was purchased from Prolific (M_{age} = 40, age range: 22-72,

Gender: Female = 50.6%, Male = 49.4%; Race: White = 83.1%, Asian = 6.3%, Black = 6.3%,

Mixed/Other = 5%; Prefer not to say = 2%). The same eligibility criteria in Study 3a were used

to recruit participants.

Design and Procedure

Akin with Study 3a, the study adopted a one factor between-subjects experimental

design. The participants were given the instruction to imagine that they logged into their X

account and on their news feed they saw a very typical/a very unusual scenario where the typical

scenarios were PR Hijacking (n = 39), Praising (n = 40), and Spotlighting (n = 41), while

Teasing (n = 40) was the unusual scenario, as per the findings from Study 3a. The participants

then answered a manipulation check to assess the manipulation of perceived expectedness on a

7-point semantic differential scale (1= unexpected, 7 = expected). A one-way ANOVA ($F_{(3,156)}$ =

5.47, p = .001) indicated that the respondents correctly categorized Teasing as mostly

unexpected (M = 3.55, SD = 1.89) compared with Praising (M = 4.45, SD = 1.58), PR Hijacking

(M = 4.79, SD = 1.72), and Spotlighting (M = 4.95, SD = 1.58), which were classed as mostly

expected.

Next, measures assessing brand evaluations (Akpinar and Berger 2017), purchase

intentions (Sundar and Kalyanaraman 2004), and user engagement ("Follow", Like", "Retweet",

"Reply") (Swani and Labrecque 2020) were administered (see Table 4). We were interested in

user engagement intentions, given that the primary premise of Br2Br engagement suggests that

brands engaging with one another on social media platforms do so to expose themselves to each

other's audiences (Zhou et al. 2022). This exposure can elicit diverse reactions from consumers,

ranging from a desire to follow the new brands to engage in commenting behaviors (e.g.,

Saavedra Torres et al. 2023). Beyond generating awareness and engagement among one others'

audiences, brands engaging in Br2Br dialog seek to create favorable brand perceptions and

ultimately purchase intentions (Swaminathan et al. 2022), which are two further variables we

assess in this study to test our novel Br2Br engagement typology. The survey ended with

demographic questions.

Construct	Items	Inter-item correlations		Cronbach's alpha
		Minimum	Maximum	
Language Expectancy (Burgoon and Walther 1990)	The brand communications in the scenario are...appropriate/normal/expected/unusual for official brand accounts.	.36	.65	.85
		.56	.84	
		.54	.84	
		.36	.56	
		Scale: $M = 20.19$, $SD = 5.05$ Variance = 25.49		
Customer purchase intentions (Sundar and Kalyanaraman 2004)	Imagine that Big Fresh, RiseUP Nosh, and Nourish Nook are brands similar to ones that you have purchased food from before. If you were to try new food or get lunch in the future, how likely would you be to…try/buy/go to any of the three brands?	.90	.92	.97
		.89	.92	
		.89	.90	
		Scale: $M = 12.29$, $SD = 4.46$, Variance = 19.88		
Brand evaluations (Akpinar and Berger 2017)	Based on the X scenario you were shown, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the brands Big Fresh, RiseUP Nosh, and Nourish Nook are...	.69	.88	.95
		.61	.88	
		.71	.88	
		.61	.77	

		.77	.86	
	Bad-Good, Negative-Positive, Unfavorable-Favorable, Not interesting-Interesting, Undesirable-Desirable	**Scale:** $M = 22.63$, $SD = 7.11$, Variance = 50.62		
User engagement (Swani and Labrecque 2020)	If you came across a similar X scenario on your feed where brands you are typically interested in Tweet replies to each other, would you: Follow one or more of these brands. Like one or more of the comments. Retweet one or more of the comments. Post a reply to this conversation.	.51 .54 .59 .51	.71 .71 .75 .75	.87
		Scale: $M = 12.21$, $SD = 5.69$, Variance = 32.42		

Note. All items were assessed using a 7-point ascending Likert scale.

Table 4 Study 3 measures: reliability and descriptive statistics

Results

We conducted three univariate ANOVAs to assess the effect of the four Br2Br engagement strategies on our three dependent variables: brand evaluations, purchase intentions, and user engagement (see Figure 5). The results of the first analysis assessing the impact of Br2Br engagement on brand evaluations indicated that the model was significant, $F_{(3,156)} = 11.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta p2 = .18$. Follow-up Tukey's HSD tests revealed that Teasing ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.54$) generated less favorable brand evaluations compared with Praising ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.31$), $p < .001$, PR Hijacking ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.10$), $p = .00$, and Spotlighting ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.21$), $p = .00$. Our second analysis with purchase intentions as a dependent variable was also significant, $F_{(3,156)} = 6.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta p2 = .11$. Tukey's HSD tests indicated that Teasing ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.60$) does not produce purchase intentions in comparison to Praising ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.40$), $p < .001$, PR Hijacking ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.11$), $p = .02$, and Spotlighting ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.50$), $p = .05$, where users are more likely to purchase from the brands involved in the Br2Br engagement

scenario. The last ANOVA results with user engagement as a dependent variable were also

significant, $F_{(3,156)}$ = 5.61, p = .001, ηp2 = .10. Tukey's HSD post hoc tests showed that Praising

(M = 3.77, SD = 1.37) generated the highest engagement intentions (Follow, Like, Retweet,

Reply) compared with Teasing (M = 2.56, SD = 1.38), p < .001 and Spotlighting (M = 2.85, SD =

1.42), p = .02 where respondents disagreed that they would engage with the brands involved.
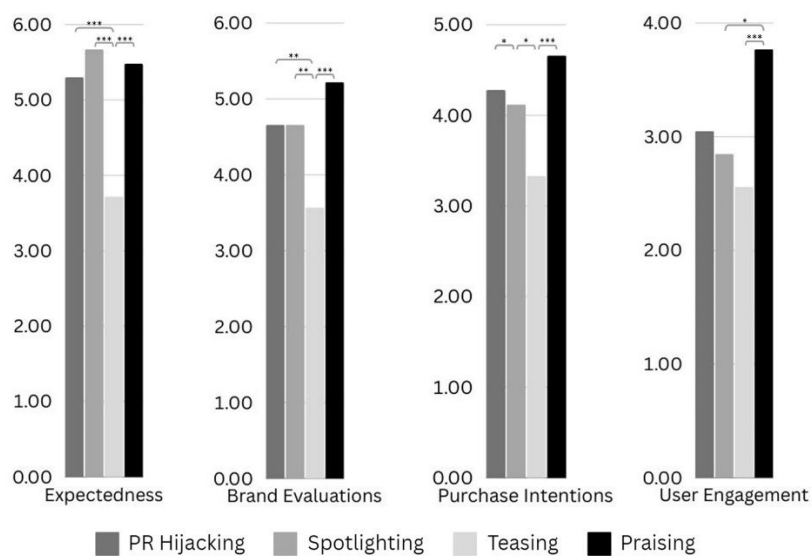
Figure 5 Visual representation of significant differences across the four Br2Br engagement

groups for perceived expectedness, brand evaluations, purchase intentions and user engagement;

Note: *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.

Study 3 Discussion

Combined, the findings from Studies 3a and 3b demonstrate that Teasing is a Br2Br

engagement strategy that is perceived as most unexpected/violating by social media users and

generates the least favorable outcomes for the involved brands. Grounded in more competitive

and aggressive brand tactics, which have been shown to produce diminished effectiveness (Ning

et al. 2022; Thomas and Fowler 2021), we offer novel insights via our Teasing Br2Br

engagement strategy that produces negative brand evaluations and fails to generate purchase or

engagement intentions among observing consumers. We argue that this is because consumers

expect brands to work together toward common goals (Vredenburg et al. 2020), which, in the

context of Br2Br engagement, requires more collaborative and positively framed communication

strategies. Moreover, while recent research offers preliminary insight into the favorable use of

humor in teasing Br2Br behaviors among competing vs. non-competing brands (Béal et al.

2024), we show that such behavior remains a violation of consumers' expectancies regarding

how brands should communicate and is undesirable.

In contrast, the Br2Br dialog strategies of Praising, Hijacking, and Spotlighting are

effective in generating purchase intentions and fostering positive brand evaluations. These

findings align with LET, which posits that positive violations (i.e., exceeding consumer

expectations), as well as the fulfillment of consumer expectations (i.e., non-violations), lead to

favorable outcomes (Burgoon et al. 2002). Additionally, when considering user engagement,

Praising emerges as particularly effective, especially when compared to Spotlighting. This is

consistent with LET's prediction that strategies involving expectancy violations produce more

pronounced effects than those that merely meet expectations (Averbeck and Miller 2014).

General Discussion

Theoretical Implications

This study develops and tests a novel typology of Br2Br engagement strategies on social

media. As such, we extend prior research on B2C engagement on social media (Dhaoui and

Webster 2021; Labrecque 2014; Tyrväinen et al. 2023) by providing a first inquiry into the

diverse Br2Br interactive behaviors occurring on social media and presenting empirical evidence

on how these strategies influence participating brands and observing consumers. Specifically, we

highlight the shift of brands' social media communication strategies for consumer engagement

from mainstream B2C communications to more focused Br2Br communications. Interestingly,

we find that Br2Br engagement strategies tend to elicit higher levels of consumer engagement

than B2C posts. These findings highlight the importance of studying multi-actor echo-systems

(i.e., "echoverse"; Hewett et al. 2016) to better grasp the interactional dynamics between

different social media actors that shape consumer perceptions and attitudes, which we provide

preliminary insights into. More granularly, we contribute to the extant Br2Br engagement

literature in three ways.

First, by examining the nature and nuances of various forms of Br2Br engagement, our

research advances the theory of Br2Br engagement strategies on social media by providing a

holistic typology that considers the interplay between emotional tone and motivation that

collectively have been overlooked in research to date. Prior studies have broadly focused on

binary Br2Br communications (e.g., humor vs. aggression; Thomas and Fowler 2021; benign vs.

malign humor; Béal et al. 2024), brand relationships (e.g., competition vs. cooperation; Ramadan

2019; rivalry effect; Berendt et al. 2024), and consumers' attributes in evaluating the

effectiveness of Br2Br dialog (Saavedra Torres et al. 2023). Here, we advance this research and

show that not only the four overarching Br2Br engagement strategies can be multidimensional

but can also be distinguished based on their positive versus negative tone and self- versus others-

orientation when reciprocating Br2Br engagement.

Second, we demonstrate that Praising, PR Hijacking and Spotlighting are strategies that

consumers expect/are non-violating, while Teasing violates consumers' expectations negatively.

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On the one hand, our findings show that Praising, PR Hijacking and Spotlighting are beneficial

for brands and speculate that this is because it signals to consumers that brands are not always

competitively driven (Zhang and Zhang 2023). In particular, we complement conventional and

emerging research into Br2Br interactive behaviors (e.g., Allagui and Breslow 2016; Pinello et

al. 2022; Zhou et al 2022) and show these strategies generate purchase intentions and positive

favorable brand evaluations. Surprisingly, however, when it comes to user engagement

intentions, only Praising influences these, while Spotlighting is ineffective. We argue that

Spotlighting fails to generate user engagement, because consumers today are increasingly

indifferent to traditional ways of brand communication and content marketing (Edelman 2021).

Third, teasing is a negative violation to how consumers expect brands to be engaging

with other brands on social media and, in turn, leads to unfavorable brand valuations and

behavioral intentions. We argue that this is because consumers can discern when such Br2Br

interactions lack authenticity and fail to convey meaningful interactions (Guèvremont and

Grohmann 2016). This is a significant finding as it extends the work of Ning et al. (2022),

Saavedra Torres et al. (2023), and Thomas and Fowler (2021) by showing how brands engaging

in teasing interactive behaviors can cause harm.

Finally, we contribute to the broader and evolving academic debate on inter-firm brand

engagement: rivalry and co-coopetition (Berendt et al. 2018; Brandenburger and Nalebuff 2021).

These studies consider how brands and their rivals could involuntarily or not achieve desirable

goals such as brand distinctiveness, and we propose to advance this field via the studied here

Br2Br engagement strategies, the majority of which we show lead to a win-win situation for all

brands involved. We further add to a growing discussion in the non-market strategy domain,

specifically where brands post public statements on a sociopolitical issue (e.g., "Black Lives

Matter", LGBTIQA+) on social media platforms (Guha and Korschun 2023; Vredenburg et al. 2020). We advance this debate by demonstrating that brands can engage in more subtle forms of activism by supporting other brands on social issues via the use of value-based Praising, which fosters engagement among consumers and favorable brand evaluations. In essence, our findings signify a shift away from traditional competitive Br2Br engagement, offering brands novel ways to connect with their consumers and build relationships in a multi-stakeholder and interactive digital age.

Managerial Implications

Our research findings highlight important implications for brand managers, marketers, and practitioners in the social media space, which are summarized in Table 5. In the domain of Br2Br engagement, we demonstrate that one size does not fit all and that the mechanisms for effective engagement with other brands on social media are more casual and nuanced than conventional knowledge. Thus, our typology enables marketers to examine the state of Br2Br engagement on social media platforms and advance their practice in accordance. At the core of our typology is the idea that Br2Br interactions are just as important in amplifying a company's online presence as more conventional and expected by consumers brand promotional messages and communications on social media. This is because our results confirm that casual dialog between brands in real-time can produce beneficial outcomes, such as engagement with the brand's content, purchase intentions, and positive brand evaluations.

Br2Br engagement strategy	Description	Impact on brand evaluations	Impact on consumer behaviors
Praising	Complimenting other brands positively based	Generates favorable consumer evaluations.	Increases user engagement and

	on product quality or societal stance.		consumer purchase intent.
Spotlighting	Showcasing product promotion or mutual collaboration with another brand.	Generates favorable consumer evaluations.	Increases purchase intent but does not lead to user engagement.
Teasing	Benevolently or aggressively mocking other brands.	Results in negative consumer perceptions.	Decreases user engagement and purchase intentions.
PR Hijacking	Reactively or proactively leveraging trending content or responding to "inviting" PR Hijacking.	Generates favorable brand evaluations.	Increases purchase intentions.

Table 5 Br2Br engagement implications for marketers

Based on our findings, brands can tailor their Br2Br engagement strategies to meet their communication goals by choosing between positive (Praising, Spotlighting) and negative (Teasing, PR Hijacking) tones. The choice depends on whether the focus is on the brand itself or its competitors. In relation we offer several approaches that brands can use to further refine their social media engagement strategies with a particular focus on conversing with other brands. PR Hijacking can be reactive, responding to existing trends, or proactive, by initiating content related to trending topics. Praising can be product-based, highlighting another brand's product quality, or values-based, acknowledging its stance on societal issues. Spotlighting can be unilateral, promoting a brand's own product, or symbiotic, showcasing a collaborative effort. Teasing involves either benign or more confrontational mockery, with the latter often used by competing brands.

Importantly, any of these Br2Br engagement strategies should be adopted with caution because not all generate favorable consumer evaluations of brands or behavioral intentions.

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Overall, Praising, PR Hijacking, and Spotlighting align with consumer expectations and foster

positive brand perceptions and purchase intentions. Spotlighting can reduce customer

engagement with Br2Br communications, so it should be used judiciously. Teasing, on the other

hand, is generally inadvisable as it clashes with consumer expectations and can adversely affect

brand perception, purchase intent, and user engagement.

Finally, we recommend that marketers embrace the strategy of engaging in constructive

dialogue with other brands on social media, rather than focusing solely on consumer interactions.

Currently, Br2Br posts account for 14% of all brand posts on social media, indicating their

growing significance and potential for enhancing consumer engagement compared to traditional

B2C posts. Although engaging with competitors may seem risky due to the possibility of

unintended publicity, our research suggests that it can lead to positive outcomes.

In an era where misinformation is prevalent (Visentin, Pizzi, and Pichierri 2019), our

findings support the value of interacting with other brands on social media to increase brand

exposure and foster meaningful discussions on both commercial and non-commercial topics.

However, brand managers should exercise caution, particularly with playful teasing of

competitors, to avoid potential risks to brand reputation and consumer perceptions. A balanced

and strategic approach to Br2Br engagement is essential for maximizing benefits while

minimizing potential drawbacks.

Conclusion

Our research explores the under-researched phenomenon of Br2Br engagement and, as

such, has some limitations that provide opportunities for future research. We provide a novel

typology of Br2Br engagement based on field data and measure its impact on consumer

evaluations. In doing so, we assessed the effect of the overall typology represented by its four

distinct Br2Br engagement strategies, while omitting their underpinning sub-dimensions. We

recommend that future studies investigate each of our Br2Br engagement strategies (PR

Hijacking, Praising, Teasing, and Spotlighting) independently and their sub-dimensions to

further establish their influence on consumer choice when considering their distinguishing

nuances. Moreover, our research assessed customer evaluations for all brands involved in Br2Br

interactions. Past research has studied the differential effect of Br2Br dialog on the initiating vs.

the receiving brand (Thomas and Fowler 2021; Zhou et al. 2022), and we suggest that future

studies further explore how communication dynamics and corresponding outcomes shift when

the spotlight is on the initiator vs. recipient in adopting the identified here Br2Br engagement

strategies.

The role of the brand in Br2Br engagement is a further promising area of future research.

In our research, we deliberately employed fictitious brands to avoid existing consumer

preconceptions (Ghosh et al. 2021). However, we posit that investigating Br2Br engagement

employed by real brands is a viable research direction because mediating factors such as the

brand's personality and consumers' self-brand connection may further impact the effectiveness

of the identified here strategies. Using real brands in future research to test our typology is

especially important in clarifying how the boundary conditions - such as direct, indirect, and

non-competitor contexts—impact consumer outcomes in brand interactions. Relatedly, across

our two studies, we focused on brands that are representative of the food and drinks category,

and we recommend future studies to explore other higher involvement industries (e.g., fashion,

technology) to further validate and generalize the findings from our research.

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Additionally, with the exception of one Br2Br engagement strategy (dog-eat-dog), our data came from interactions between indirect competitors and non-competitor brands. Future studies should establish the effects of the identified Br2Br engagement strategies when archrival brands are concerned. For example, Berendt et al. (2018) found that Br2Br behaviors that entail rivalry may, in fact, generate brand distinctiveness. However, in our findings we find such an approach to be negatively evaluated by observing consumers. Relatedly, future research should explore the antecedents as well as other mechanisms that drive Br2Br engagement from the brand's perspective by conducting interviews with social media content managers. This approach will help to validate our typology and provide deeper insights into the motivations behind the use of various Br2Br engagement tactics.

Finally, in our study, we employed a Western (UK) sample to assess the effectiveness of Br2Br engagement on participating brands and observing consumers. We recommend that future studies carry out a cross-cultural comparison or focus on an Eastern sample because brand communications expectations will likely diverge in how different cultures assess Br2Br engagement content (e.g., Pezzuti et al. 2021).

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Author Accepted Manuscript

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Web Appendix – "Brand-to-Brand Engagement on Social Media: Typology and Implications"

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Contents

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Author Accepted Manuscript

WA-Table 1 A synthesis of the B2C communication on social media literature

Attribute			Description	Sample studies
Soft	Content orientation	*Rational*	Messages that appeal to consumers' rationality, intellectual processing, and informational needs through the provision of factual and resourceful information.	de Vries et al. (2012); Lee et al. (2018); Liadeli et al. (2022); Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021)
		Transformational	Messages that appeal to consumers' psychological and emotive characteristics by providing entertaining, humorous, and socially engaging content that addresses their need for group belonging, social integration, and interaction.	
		Interactional	Messages that foster two-way communication with consumers through cues such as questions, surveys, quizzes, and calls-to-action.	
	Linguistic style	*Informality*	Communication styles that are familiar, non-official and casual.	Deng et al. (2021); Munaro et al. (2021)
		Complexity	Efforts required by the audience to process and understand a brand-generated post.	Deng et al. (2021); Pancer et al. (2018)
		Certainty	Communication styles that convey a sense of conviction or general confidence.	Pezzuti et al. (2021)
	Pragmatics	*Speech acts*	Performative functions (assertive, expressive, directive) of brand-generated communication.	Villaroel Ordenes et al. (2018)
	Paralinguistic style	*Emojis*	Pictographs representing facial expressions, people, places, or things, which increase a brand's perceived playfulness.	McShane et al. (2022)
		Textual paralanguage	Textual instantiations of nonverbal audible, tactile, and visual elements in support or replacement of written language.	Luangrath, Peck, and Barger (2017); Luangrath et al. (2023)

Author Accepted Manuscript

Hard	-		Media-richness	Extent of vividness conveyed by a brand-generated post, based on the type of media incorporated (textual, pictorial, audio/visual, or a combination of them).	Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles (2014); Munaro et al. (2021)
	-		Post scheduling	When the social media post is published (e.g., time of the day, day of the week, month of the year).	Pletikosa Cvijikj and Michahelles (2014); Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021)
	-		Frequency	Duration of a brand-generated post, determined by the number of posts published during a given observation period.	Swani and Milne (2017); Shahabaznezahd et al. (2021)
	-		Positioning	Whether the brand-generated post is fixed on top of the brand-owned social media page.	de Vries et al. (2012); Schultz (2017)
Contextual	Platform-level		SMP type	Type of social media platform where the brand-generated messages are shared.	Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021); Unnava and Aravindakshan (2021)
	Brand-level		Follower base	Number of followers of a given brand's social media page.	Pezzuti et al. (2021); Swani et al. (2013)
			Brand type	Specific features of the source of the message (e.g., brand stereotypes).	Mangiò et al. (2023)
	Industry-level		Category	Specific features of the industry the brand operates in (e.g., B2C vs. B2B; mass vs. luxury)	de Vries et al. (2012); Swani and Milne (2017)
			Sector	The specific industry in which a brand operates and how this defines the choice and style of B2C communications.	Deng et al. (2021a); Mangiò et al. (2023)

WA-Table 2 A summary of the Br2Br engagement literature on social media and the current research gap

Study	Context	Focal construct(/s)	Framing of communications		Self- vs. Others- framing examined		Key findings
			Positive	Negative	Self	Others	
Berendt et al. (2018)	Online survey	Inter-firm rivalries	No	No	No	No	Inter-firm brand rivalry enhances perceived brand distinctiveness.
Ramadan (2019)	X posts	Br2Br relational moments	No	No	Yes	No	Rival confrontation and bullying have the highest impact (i.e., likes, retweets, and intensity of comments)
Thomas and Fowler (2021)	X posts	Humor type	Yes	Yes	No	No	Initiating brands using light-hearted (low aggression) humor are viewed more favorably.
Thota (2021)	YouTube videos	Brandjacking and parodies	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Perceived dimensions of offensiveness and truth about the hijacked brand can reduce its brand attitudes
Ning et al. (2022)	X/Sina Weibo	Br2Br low aggression humor (e.g., teasing)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Low-aggression humor could promote consumer engagement behavioral intention more than high-aggression humor. Brand personality is a key moderator.
Perez et al. (2022)	Online reviews	Competitor review	No	No	No	Yes	Competitor reviews positively affect consumers' purchase intentions and actual choices due to higher perceived credibility and expertise.
Zhou et al. (2022)	X posts	Br2Br praise	Yes	No	No	Yes	Praising one's competitor increases the preference for the praiser via warmth perceptions.
Saavedra Torres et al. (2023)	X posts	Dark humor-like roasting of Br2Br communications	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Not all customers find roasting messages funny. Customers who are young and extroverted tend to believe roasting messages to be funny that subsequently lead to brand to be perceived as cooler and sincere.

Zhang and Zhang (2023)	Instagram posts	Brand-to-brand help on social media	No	No	No	Yes	A brand's helping behavior on social media increases consumers' perceptions of both communion and agency.
Guha and Korschun (2023)	X posts	Peers' brand activism posts	No	No	Yes	No	Brands are more likely to engage in activism in which their peers engage as a way to gain market-driven intelligence about potential risks and benefits.
Berendt et al. (2024)	X posts	The rivalry vs. non-rivalry competition	Yes	Yes	No	No	Referencing a rival brand increases engagement through story embeddedness.
Béal et al. (2024)	X posts	Humor type, competitive context, brand positioning	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Affiliative humor is more effective than aggressive humor, but this effect varies based on competitive and brand positioning.
Ross (2024)	SM posts	Attitude towards Br2Br interaction	Yes	No	Yes	No	Br2Br interactions positively affect consumer-brand evaluations, especially for familiar brands.
This study	**X posts**	**Br2Br engagement**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Yes**	**Conceptualizes Br2Br engagement strategies and identifies a typology of its forms and outcomes.**

WA–Table 3 PCA Robustness check: Effects of Br2Br vs. B2C posts on one-factor representation of user engagement (CESM)

Dependent variable	CESM		CESM	
Predictors	Estimates	std. Error	Estimates	std. Error
Strategy [Br2Br]				
Strategy [Br2C]	-.53 ***	.15	-.42 **	.15
TLP			.03	.07
WC			.00	.00
Media richness [pictorial]				
Media richness [textual]			-.47 ***	.14
Media richness [video]			-.20	.21
Sentiment			-.01	.01
HoD [non-working]				
HoD [working]			0.28	0.14
Weekend [no]				
Weekend [yes]			.07	.23
Brand dummies			Yes	
Intercept	-4.04 ***	.10	-3.66 ***	.32

R² / R² adjusted			.461 / .415

Note: To address the high correlation among the two metrics of engagement used as dependent variables, in addition to the additive approach presented in the main manuscript, we employed PCA as a dimensionality reduction technique to operationalize CESM as a linear combination of likes and retweets (Unnava et al. 2021). Specifically, we log-transformed likes and retweets, normalized them per 10,000 followers, and then applied PCA to the engagement data. The analysis revealed that the first principal component (PC1) accounted for 84.09% of the variance in engagement behaviors, making it the most informative summary. In contrast, PC2 explained only 15.91% of the variance, contributing minimal additional information and offering limited relevance in representing the data. By retaining only PC1, we captured the majority of the variance in engagement metrics while simplifying the analysis. This approach allowed us to reduce dimensionality without significant loss of information, thereby enhancing the interpretability and robustness of our models.

WA–Table 4 Descriptive statistics and correlations among field study's variables

	Mean (SD)	Median [Min, Max]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1) Engagement	46.0 (348)	3.89 [0, 6010]										
2) Likes	40.3 (318)	3.60 [0, 5640]	.99									
3) Retweets	5.70 (42.7)	0.322 [0, 555]	.74	.68								
4) Strategy	-	-	-.08	-.09	-.04							
5) TLP	0.547 (0.90)	0 [0, 6.00]	-.06	-.06	-.03	.1						
6) WC	13.6 (16.8)	11.0 [1.00, 293]	0	0	.01	.16	.08					
7) Media richness	-	-	.02	.02	.02	.12	.02	.1				
8) Sentiment	3.23 (6.25)	0 [-25.0, 33.3]	0	-.01	.03	.07	.01	.05	.04			
9) HoD	-	-	.02	.02	-.03	.07	.03	.11	-.02	.06		
10) Weekend	-	-	-.03	-.03	-.03	.13	.03	.01	-.03	.06	-.1	
11) Brand	-	-	.05	.04	.12*	-.26	0	.1	.03	-.03	.09	-.04

Notes: Share of the dataset: Strategy: Br2Br 225 (54.0%); B2C 192 (46.0%); Media richness: pictorial 171 (41.0%); textual 190 (45.6%); video 56 (13.4%); HoD: non-working 109 (26.1%); working 308 (73.9%); Weekend: 385 (92.3%); 1 32 (7.7%); Brand: AldiUK 20 (4.8%); BeyondMeat 17 (4.1%); BrewDog 1 (0.2%); chicagotown 18 (4.3%); comicrelief 1 (.2%); CostaCoffee 32 (7.7%); Dell 27 (6.5%); Dove 29 (7.0%); GetMIGHTY_ 1 (.2%); GreggsOfficial 32 (7.7%); HeinzUK 2 (.5%); InStyle 1 (.2%); KFC_UKI 32 (7.7%); LidlGB 2 (.5%); marksandspencer 20 (4.8%); newchapterltd 1 (.2%); Oreo 123 (29.5%); PFLAG 1 (.2%); QuornFoods 30 (7.2%); sainsburys 1 (0.2%); Silverbullet_HQ 1 (.2%); sonicdrivein 1 (.2%); StarbucksUK 1 (.2%); Tesco 17 (4.1%); waitrose 3 (.7%); Wendys 3 (.7%); figures in italics are significant at 95% ci. $N = 420$

WA–Table 5 Study 1 variables definitions and operationalizations

Construct	Definition	Operationalization	Source
Dependent variable			
Customer Engagement on Social Media	Brand-related online activities on the part of the customer that vary in the degree to which the consumer interacts with, and engages in, the consumption, contribution, and creation of SM content (de Oliveira Santini et al., 2020; Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski, 2016).	*Likes* count; *retweets* counts; sum of *likes* and *retweet* counts, per ten-thousands followers (engagement ratio)	SMP (X)
Independent variable			
Strategy	Communication strategy deployed by a given brand-generated post to engage its audience online (de Vries et al. 2012)	B2C Br2Br	MCA
Controls			
Textual paralinguistic nonverbal elements (TLP)	Textual instantiations of nonverbal audible, tactile, and visual elements (e.g., emojis, stress, tempo) in support or replacement of written language expressed in online communication (Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023)	Summation of all TPL nonverbal parts of speech	ATA (PARA; Luangrath, Xu, and Wang 2023)
Post's length (WC)	Length of the post (Lee et al. 2018)	Word count	ATA

Media richness	Extent of vividness conveyed by a brand-generated post, based on the type of media incorporated (textual, pictorial, audio/visual, or a combination of them) (Shahabaznezahd et al., 2021)	The post contains textual (text-only), pictorial (photo or image), video elements	MCA
Sentiment	Sentiment expressed by a brand-generated post (Pezzuti & Leonhardt, 2023)	Prevalence of words expressing positive net of negative emotions	ATA (LIWC; Pennebaker et al., 2015)
Hour of the Day (HoD)	Hour of the day when a given post is published (Moran et al. 2019)	Working hours; non-working hours	MCA
Weekend	Day of the week when a given post is published (Moran et al. 2019)	Weekend day vs working day	MCA
Brand	Brand which published a given post (Pezzuti & Leonhardt, 2023)	Categorical variable enlisting the XX brands included in the study	SMP (X)

Note: Automated Textual Analysis (ATA); Manual Content Analysis (MCA)

WA-Table 6 Study 2 content analysis code sheet

Data excerpts	Data-driven codes	Theoretical codes	Second-order construct	First-order construct	Construct definition
"**AldiUK:** Ngl we're a bit jealous of @IcelandFoods staff today. We're all fighting over the freezer aisle. It's carnage (Loudly Crying Face emoji) #heatwave **Iceland Foods:** Ngl we're actually tweeting this from inside one of our freezers." "**Dell**: What's your Friday mood? Reply with a gif to share how your day is going (finger pointing down emoji) **World Wide Technology:** [meme about 'It's Friday']" "**KFC**: Me waiting to order while 20 school kids in front take the last of the boneless banquets. **Chicago Town:** Me waiting for the microwave to ding so I can eat my deep dish (smiling face with sunglasses emoji)"	Mentioning of another brand @ Posing a question directly or indirectly to other brands Use of humor or controversy as a means incentivize other brands to engage	Brandjacking: hijacking and reappropriating another brand's commercial (Thota 2021) Social media for public relations campaigns (Allagui and Breslow 2016)	*Inviting*	**PR Hijacking**	A brand invites dialog by posting questions, making statements, or Tweeting about trending topics that intentionally generate engagement from other brands.
"**AO:** Which would you choose for your Jubilee party food? (Fork and Knife emoji) **Greggs:** A party without a Sausage Roll is simply not a party **AO:** Well if you're offering ..." "**AldiUK**: Here's our list: snog: @OfficialPLT	Mentioning of another brand "@" in relation to a trending topic on X Posting a Tweet in relation to a	Brandjacking (Thota 2021) Viral marketing: a message about company, brand, or product is transmitted in an exponentially growing way on social media	*Topical*		

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marry: @Specsavers pie: @tesco (soz, it's not you it's the clubcard) x #LoveIsland **Specsavers:** Does the middle aisle stock rings?" "**Oreo**: Petition to make the next Wordle OREOS. **Wordle:** Good luck. We've been trying for weeks **Microsoft Edge:** Day 1 of guessing OREOS until we see"	popular topic, activity, theme Use of trending hashtags	(Kaplan and Haenlein 2011)			
"**ToyBook:** Black-owned Purpose Toys is working with @JustPlayToys to introduce the Naturalistas Pixie Puff Collection at @Walmart in Sept. #pulseofplay **Dove**: We LOVE seeing natural hairstyles represented in the new Naturalistas Pixie Puff Collection (Sparkles empji) Thank you to Purpose Toys and @JustPlayToys for celebrating natural hair and amplifying #TheCROWNAct (Raising Hands emoji)" "**BeyondMeat**: "Where do you get your protein?" Same place @CP3 gets his (flexed biceps emoji) **SnackDropApp**: It goes to show there's many ways to get your protein. (flexed biceps emoji)"	Commending another brand on its non-commercial initiatives Brands commending each other on a mutual purpose-driven initiative	Br2Br Praise: complimenting a competitor (Zhou, Du, and Cutright 2022)	*Values-based*	**Praising**	Two or more brands engage in a dialog to praise one another on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts or on the quality of their product- and non-product-related brand features.
"**Greggs:** Hang it in the @Tate (Man Tipping Hand emoji)	Brand commending another brand on	Commercial Br2Br Praise	*Product-based*		

Author Accepted Manuscript

Tate: Great art. Great vegan sausage rolls." "**Which?Money?**: (first place medal emoji) (party popper emoji) Congratulations to @LidlGB for being named the cheapest supermarket - for the SIXTH month in a row! **LidlGB**: Surely this is worth another bank holiday?"	commercial attributes Thanking another brand	(Zhou, Du, and Cutright 2022) Complimentary competition (Brandenburger and Nalebuff 2021)			
"**Premier League:** It's good to be back. **AldiUK:** When you come back to Aldi after trying out Tesco's 'Price Match'" "**McDonalds**: which menu hack will you build yourself first? see u 1.31 (1) land, air & sea (2) crunchy double (3) hash brown mcmuffin (4) surf+turf **Wendy's:** You guys know these are cheeseburgers and not an entertainment center from IKEA, right?"	Brand directly mocks a competitor Brand responds to third party brand content to antagonize a competitor	Brand rivalry: competitive behaviors between brands (Berendt, Uhrich, and Thompson 2018; Ewing, Wagstaff, and Powell 2013) High aggression Br2Br dialog on social media (Ning et al. 2022; Thomas and Fowler 2021) Dark humor/roasting a rival brand (Saavedra Torres et al. 2023)	*Dog-eat-dog*	**Teasing**	A brand posts content that either mocks a competitor brand to stimulate competitive dialog or teases an indirect or non-competitor brand using humor.

Author Accepted Manuscript

Quorn: Dibs on the vegan sausage roll two-piece [retweeting newspaper mentioning the brand] **Ginsters:** We're RIGHT HERE (Angry Face emoji)" "**KFC:** You can. The Margravyta exists. **Tango:** We'll stick with a Tango, thanks (winking face emoji)(orange emoji) **KFC**: Your loss, Tango."	Two or more brands mutually joke about one another Heavy use of emojis to convey light-heartedness in teasing	Low aggression Br2Br dialog on social media (Ning et al. 2022; Thomas and Fowler 2021)	*Benevolent*		
"**weetabix:** Get up and go with this protein packed pairing. Grab your #MightyBix bundle here https://bit.ly/MightyBix @GetMIGHTY_ **GetMIGHTY:** Fancy a breakfast that looks this good? Follow the link in our bio to grab your own #MIGHTYBIX bundle!" "**Greggs:** (loudspeaker emoji) It's time for the encore! The Greggs and @Primark festival collection is out now! **Primark**: We can't wait to show you all the delicious new arrivals! (face with tongue emoji)"	Brand promotes a collaboration with another brand that generates symbiotic dialog Brands highlight a mutually beneficial partnership	Co-branding alliances: brands associating in a single product or service (Pinello, Picone and Mocciaro Li Destri 2022)	*Symbiotic*	**Spotlighting**	A brand posts promotional content that either emphasizes a mutual product collaboration with another brand or the brand's own products.
"**Oreo**: We're pumpkin spicing things up (pumpkin emoji)(leaves emoji) OREO Pumpkin Spice Cookies. On shelves 8/15. **Bigelow Tea:** Pumpkin Spice Tea with Pumpkin Spice Oreos? The dunk combo we all need (smiling face with heart-eyes emoji) **Bush's Beans:** skipping right over bean season"	Two or more brands interact with one another for the sole purpose of each diverting attention to its own brand and/or products.	Sales promotions (Ashley and Tuten 2015) Conventional advertising techniques (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis 2014)	*Unilateral*		

"**Which?:** Trying to cut your carbon footprint? Lidl and Waitrose are the greenest supermarkets, according to our latest ground-breaking research. **Waitrose:** We're proud to recognised for our efforts to make the Partnership a more sustainable business. The job isn't done but we are working hard to better understand our emissions and setting science-based targets to help us reach net-zero across our farming supplier network by 2035."	A brand responds to a third-party Tweet by putting an emphasis on its own products/CSR initiatives				

WA-Figure 1 Br2Br engagement strategies stimuli

PR Hijacking condition

Big Fresh ✔
@BigFresh_UK

PSA: It's World Food Day! PARTY ON OUR STREET 🥳

@nourishnookUK @riseUPnoshGB - You're all invited! 💜

Tell us which other brands we should invite to the party 👇

#WorldFoodParty🎉

12:03 PM · Oct 16, 2023

54 Retweets   **3** Quote Tweets   **176** Likes

RiseUP Nosh ✔ @riseUPnoshGB · Oct 16, 2023
Yay see you soon! 💜#WorldFoodParty

3   5

Nourish Nook ✔ @nourishnookUK · Oct 16, 2023
Promise we won't indulge in our nourishing snacks before🥳#WorldFoodDay

1   12

Praising condition

Big Fresh ✔
@BigFreshUK

As it's World Food Day today we are fundraising with all of the donations going to our local food banks💰🍲 Check our website for more information.

12:03 PM · Oct 16, 2023

53 Retweets   **3** Quote Tweets   **176** Likes

RiseUP Nosh ✔ @riseUPnoshGB · Oct 16, 2023
What a great cause @BigFreshUK🙏

3   5

Nourish Nook ✔ @nourishnookUK · Oct 16, 2023
Great cause, great food @BigFreshUK ❤️👍

1   12

Teasing condition

Big Fresh ✔
@BigFreshUK

World Food Day **** Need copy and link****

12:03 PM · Oct 16, 2023

54 Retweets   **3** Quote Tweets   **176** Likes

RiseUP Nosh ✔ @riseUPnoshGB · Oct 16, 2023
When your Tweets are just as tasteless as your food.

3   5

Nourish Nook ✔ @nourishnookUK · Oct 16, 2023
@BigFreshUK you okay, hun?•• How about you copy our exceptional customer service for a change?

1   12

Spotlighting condition

Big Fresh ✔
@BigFreshUK

📢NEW PRODUCT ALERT📢We are biased but our new healthy snack bars range collaboration with @riseUPnoshGB and @nourishnookUK is definitely one to be excited about 😉

12:03 PM · Oct 16, 2023

54 Retweets   **3** Quote Tweets   **176** Likes

RiseUP Nosh ✔ @riseUPnoshGB · Oct 16, 2023
It's an unmissable collaboration! Check online or in our store @BigFreshUK @nourishnookUK 🤩

3   5

Nourish Nook ✔ @nourishnookUK · Oct 16, 2023
Our shelves are stocked up🙌 @riseUPnoshGB @BigFreshUK

1   12