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GUEST EDITORS' PERSPECTIVE

Advancing toward the development of a discipline of negative events in marketing: A managerial perspective

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1. Why the need for a new discipline?

In the last decade, calls for research have urged scholars from different backgrounds to join forces to contribute to the development of a broad and unified discipline of negative events in marketing (Khamitov et al., 2020). These calls came from the realization that there are many fields in marketing—including brand transgression, service failure and recovery, product harm-crisis, and many others—studying similar issues but not sharing insights with one another. This situation is unfortunate because "this development in silos represents an unnecessary obstacle to the development of a knowledge base of higher quality" (Khamitov et al., 2020, p. 520). This special issue directly addresses this problem of siloing by publishing articles that both discuss negative events in marketing in broad terms and formulate clear recommendations to manage these situations.

Before discussing the focus of this special issue, let us first define the notion of a negative event in marketing. Historically, researchers have focused on specific events—service failure, brand transgression, and product-harm crisis. This narrow focus has limited the ability of this discipline to expand and consider new types of events. Accordingly, we define this notion in simpler and broader terms by stating that a *negative event in marketing* represents any conflict or friction that one or many consumer(s) or customer(s) can have with a brand, a firm, or any commercial offering. This conflict or friction has adversely impacted the relationship between the two parties. Keeping this broad definition in mind, the current special issue addresses three distinct gaps in the literature.

First, although the different subfields that form the discipline of negative events in marketing are made up of thousands of articles, they are rarely written specifically for a managerial audience. From our discussions with managers over time, we found that there are a relatively small number of articles that provide clear recommendations and incorporate terms that managers use in their day-to-day operations. For example, terms such as service failure, service recovery, and brand transgression are not typically part of a company's operating language. To address this gap, we have made sure that articles in this special issue were

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written with a practitioner focus: Each article incorporates detailed discussions of how managers can effectively handle specific negative events.

The second gap that we address refers to the identification of new negative events that go beyond the types previously studied (e.g., service failure, brand transgression) and should be integrated into this broader discipline. For instance, Morsi et al. (2024) examine the "fear of missing out" that occurs "when consumers are propelled by a compelling urge to imitate the behaviors of their peers." The benefit of using a broader definition of a negative event in marketing is that it allows us to consider new phenomena that were overlooked due to the previous silo approach.

Third, building on the work of Khamitov et al. (2020), we note that academic research usually focuses strictly on one of three different perspectives—micro, meso, or macro. Overreliance on only one perspective rather than the adoption of a systematic, multiperspective view has created the third gap that this special issue addresses. Before elaborating on such a systematic view, it becomes important to understand the domain of each level of abstraction.

At a micro level, the focus of research is on the internal reactions of a customer or consumer by examining his or her thoughts or feelings. The meso level usually assumes that a firm or a brand is responsible for the occurrence of a negative event in marketing. At this level, scholars typically examine what the firms did wrong and what they can do to recover from the situation. Finally, the macro level incorporates the involvement and influence of external stakeholders—such as observers, users of social media, competitors, investors, traditional media, and governments—in the unfolding of negative events in marketing.

Through the use of a "micro-meso-macro" framework (Khamitov et al., 2020), we believe that managers can make better decisions when handling negative events because it allows them to simultaneously take into consideration multiple perspectives. Consistent with this view, most of the articles in this special issue incorporate a multiperspective approach. The authors do so by taking the following approach:

1. At the micro level, they question the way consumers think and feel;

2. At the meso level, they explore the actions taken by firms and their level of responsibility, if any, in the occurrence of a negative event in marketing; and

3. At the macro level, they examine how external stakeholders (e.g., brand communities, activities on social media) can worsen or improve the situation.

In the remainder of this guest editors' perspective, we describe the five articles of this special issue using the suggested micro-meso-macro framework. Specifically, we highlight the specific negative event in marketing each article presents and describe its micro-meso-macro considerations. Please see Table 1 for an overview of this approach.

2. Different types of negative events in marketing

By breaking free of the previous silo perspective, the articles of this special issue examine the notion of negative events in marketing from a broader perspective with fewer conceptual constraints. Because they have greater latitude, we believe they address more effectively the concerns of managers in the current volatile environment.

For instance, Hettiarachchige et al. (2024) focus on the consequences of negative events by exploring the important topic of *negative publicity*, which refers to the public exposure of an incident in the media that could tarnish the reputation of a firm. Hettiarachchige et al. argue that a negative event on its own is not the sole focus of managers, who are also concerned with the impact this event will have on the future reputation of their firm. The stories found in the media—whether they are true or false, the fault of the firm or not—affect a firm's reputation, and, as a result, these stories need to be properly managed.

The negative marketing events examined in this special issue—such as political wars (Hashmi et al., 2024) or scandals involving celebrities (Cui et al., 2024)—differ from those typically examined in the literature, which usually assumes that the firm is at fault and largely responsible for the occurrence of a crisis or a transgression. Yet, there are situations in which firms and brands have limited control over the situation and might instead be viewed as victims of circumstances. The narratives of the negative events are often hijacked by consumer activists (Cheng et al., 2024) or online communities with polarized views (Hashmi et al., 2024) to create unexpected crises for the firms (e.g., consumers' backlash against Budweiser after supporting a transgender influencer).

In one example of this new perspective, Hashmi et al. (2024) believe that brands cannot always avoid political issues and cultural wars even if they

Table 1. Summary of the articles examining negative events in marketing

Articles	Type of negative event	Consumers' or individuals' reactions (micro)	Analyses of firms' or brands' actions (meso)	Role of external stakeholders (macro)	Managerial implications
Hettiarachchige et al. (2024)	*Negative publicity* is "defined as the publication of a problematic incident through the media, which can have a detrimental effect on the reputation of the brand."	• Customers can view themselves as "righteous warriors" with the responsibility "to punish 'evil' companies …" • Employees can play a similar role as whistleblowers exposing the misconduct of a company.	• The nature of negative publicity is that it "can stem either from warranted criticism or unfounded accusations." • Given the context, there is no one-fits-all solution to counter all instances of negative publicity.	• The media of all sorts—traditional or social—are inseparable from the notion of negative publicity. Media are responsible for the framing of negative news about companies and the diffusion of such news.	• The effective management of negative publicity depends on three considerations: ○ A dual-focused strategy mixing proactive and reactive measures; ○ An assessment of the initial negative event (being value- or performance-based); and ○ Sources of the negative publicity (i.e., customers, employees, or the company).
Hashmi et al., 2024	Brands involved in *cultural and political wars* in which people with opposing values clash with one another.	• As political views become more polarized and an important component of one's identity, consumers tend to strongly engage with brands sharing their values and strongly oppose brands with different worldviews.	• Brands cannot always avoid political issues; social media will control the narrative if brands do not. • Typology of four brand responses—Herald, Divergent, Guardians, Inhibited—according to the authenticity of their actions.	• Strong brand communities take action on social media to protect the community over the brand. • A community can display love (or hate) when the actions of a brand are aligned with (or opposed to) its values.	• This article proposes a specific set of actions for each of the four types of brand response to culture wars (i.e., Herald, divergent, Guardians, Inhibited).
Cheng et al. (2024)	Service failures—that became public crises—involving foreign multinationals in China in	• This article examines how consumers' responses change over time as a	• It incorporates the contingency theory of accommodation which explores how	• It examines the reactions of both victims and observers to the crisis that takes place on social	• It discusses the importance of

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Table 1 (*continued*)

Articles	Type of negative event	Consumers' or individuals' reactions (micro)	Analyses of firms' or brands' actions (meso)	Role of external stakeholders (macro)	Managerial implications
	The automotive industry (e.g., Tesla, Mercedes).	Result of company statements. • By analyzing social media, the authors see how the responses of the customer and public evolve over time following a firm's response.	Organizations should adapt their communication stances according to the specific situational context and the stakeholders involved.	Media (e.g., Weibo), which is very influential in China.	• Social media listening tools; • Establishing a systematic approach to integrate the three categories of contingency factors: prescriptive factors, crisis situational, and proscriptive factors.
Cui et al. (2024)	Negative marketing events (scandals) involving celebrities can adversely impact their positive halo effect on brands.	• This article discusses the psychological, sociological, and cultural factors underpinning consumers' responses when celebrities are involved in negative marketing events. • These negative marketing events impacting celebrities can reduce their "halo effect" on brands.	• This article develops an attribution-based "2 by 2" framework to explain the reduction of celebrities' halo effect. • The two dimensions refer to the attributions (internal vs. external) made about the celebrity and the generalized consumers' responses (negative vs. positive).	• Celebrity's diminishing halo effect on a brand can be explained by multiple macro factors, such as the virality of content on social media, the shifts in cultural values and societal norms, and the rise of consumer activism.	• After a careful assessment of a celebrity's diminishing halo effect, the authors recommend a 7-step framework to help mitigate a crisis. These steps involve "responding swiftly," "articulating the firm position," "...reinventing the relationship," and "playing the long game."
Morsi et al. (2024)	Fear of missing out (FoMO) is defined as "a transient state of anxiety induced by persuasive marketing appeals, reflecting temporary unease over missed opportunities, triggering atypical consumption behaviors."	• Most FoMO-prone customers exhibit negative post-purchase responses in terms of emotions, cognitions, and behaviors. • This research identifies four types of consumers—Butterflies, Devotees, Endorsers, and Shopaholics—who are especially vulnerable to FoMO appeals.	• Brands regularly use multiple FoMO appeals which can "cause prolonged emotional, financial, and behavioral distress, which can harm consumers' well-being…" • These appeals (e.g., promotional offers, scarcity appeals, limited availability) are the main drivers leading to FoMO behaviors.	• Social media influences the fear of missing out by heavily promoting rewarding experiences. • Influencers or peers, family, and friends can play a role in triggering FoMO purchase.	• The authors highlight the actions that marketers and policymakers could take to reduce maladaptive consumption driven by FoMO. • The authors highlight the benefits of mindful consumption and discuss ethical considerations related to FoMO appeals. • They also discuss safeguards to put in place to protect vulnerable consumers.

would prefer to do so. Indeed, an absence of taking a position (e.g., not congratulating a politician from the Democratic Party elected to office) could be interpreted as taking a position by a group with strong political views (e.g., liberal groups could accuse the firm of supporting Republican causes). In an era of strong polarization, any brand actions that relate directly or indirectly to core values are likely to upset people who believe strongly in those values (Radanielina Hita & Grégoire, 2023). In this case, Hashmi et al. (2024) emphasize how important it is for brands to take authentic actions reflecting their core values, regardless of the potential backlash of some online communities.

In turn, Cheng et al. (2024) describe a more typical negative event, a private service failure that turned into a public crisis on social media in China. Interestingly, the authors analyzed the public crises from the perspectives of two different stakeholders: the complainer and the online community. Their analysis reveals that these two relationships evolve differently over time and that the relationship with an online audience is particularly difficult to manage. In this case, the brand has little control over the exchanges taking place on social media.

Taking a look at another type of negative event in marketing, Cui et al. (2024) discuss negative events involving celebrities and the resulting diminished halo effect on the image of a firm. This article is another example showing that firms and brands can be harmed by negative events over which they have limited control (e.g., Nike facing Tiger's sex scandal). Firms can suffer when their celebrity endorsers are involved in scandals. In these situations, managers need to carefully handle the aftermath of these unexpected events since they have no control over the initial scandal.

Finally, Morsi et al. (2024) suggest another perspective that has rarely been considered in the academic literature. Even if brands develop communication appeals based on good faith, such tactics may create unexpected negative consequences (i.e., an intense fear of missing out, or FoMO) for some vulnerable consumers. Indeed, Morsi et al. (2024) show that some marketing tactics that are reasonable for most consumers can trigger a series of negative postconsumption responses (e.g., compulsive behaviors, guilt, lower self-esteem, lower well-being) for FoMO-prone consumers. Again, this form of negative event is novel because it is created by the maladaptive responses of vulnerable consumers rather than a brand's intentional actions to exploit consumers.

In sum, this special issue discusses a series of novel negative events in marketing that tend to be more nuanced, compared to the events usually studied in academia, in terms of responsibility assigned to the firms versus consumers and other external stakeholders (e.g., online communities, individuals with strong political affiliations, online observers).

3. The micro-meso-macro framework to understand negative events in marketing

The micro-meso-macro perspectives of each article, presented in Figure 1, show the linkage between these three levels of analysis, with the different types of negative events in the background. We first look at the micro and macro perspectives of the special issue and conclude with the meso level because it relates to the managerial implications of the different articles and what firms can do to manage negative events in marketing. Importantly, decisions at the meso level are usually made by accounting for micro and macro considerations.

3.1. Micro perspective: consumers' reactions to negative events

All of the articles in the special issue discuss the importance of considering the characteristics and psychological processes of consumers (and other individuals) when assessing the impact of negative events. These discussions are consistent with the micro level suggested in Figure 1.

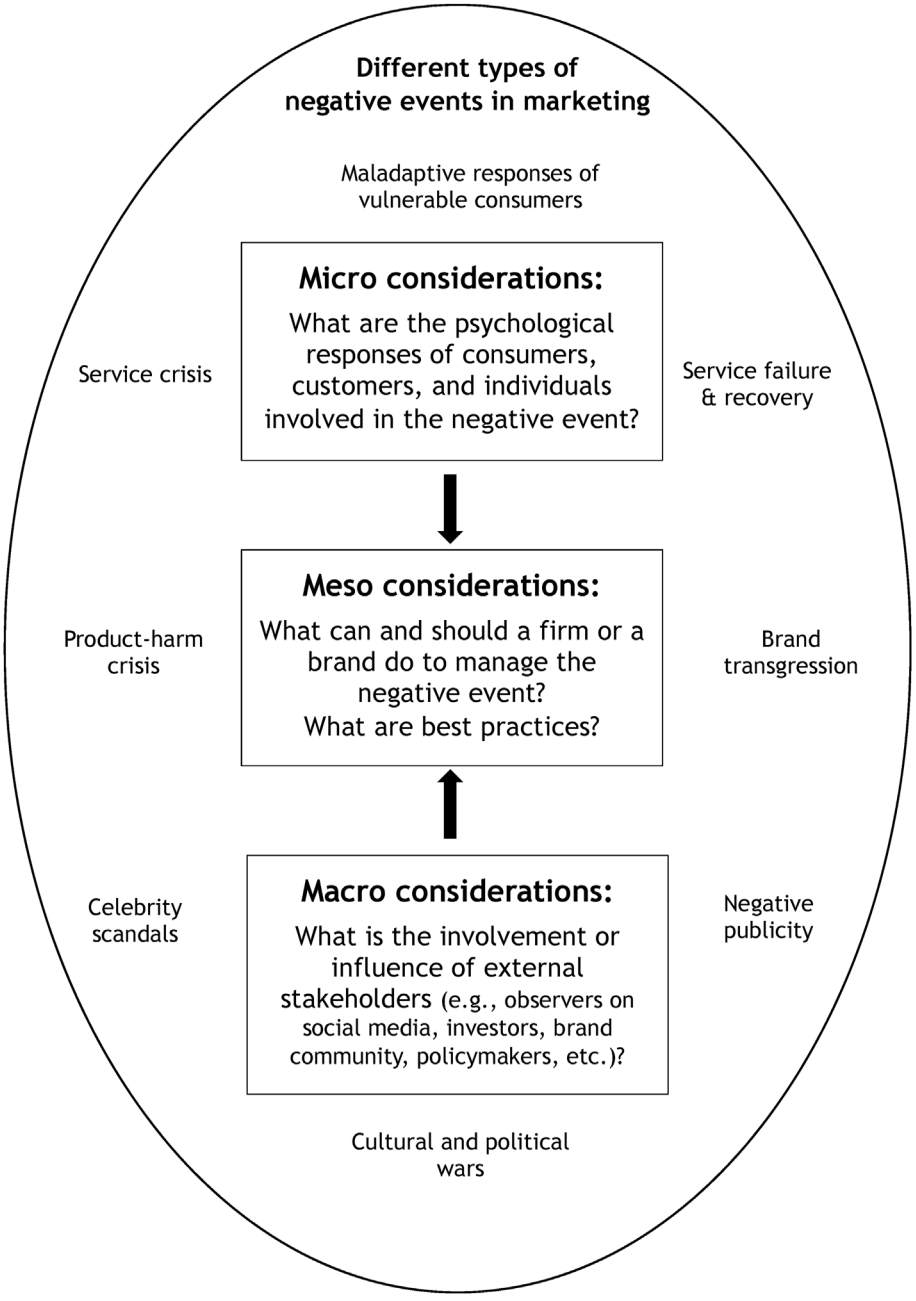
First, Hettiarachchige et al. (2024) underline the importance of considering the characteristics of consumers and employees when assessing the impact of negative publicity. For instance, consumers can view themselves as "righteous warriors" with the responsibility to punish "evil" companies. When customers feel this way, their motivation to spread negative publicity is difficult to eradicate. In turn, the authors explain that an employee's seniority can play an important role in influencing the diffusion of negative publicity. As they point out: "When an employee holds a senior position to the extent of being the face of the company, they wield a more substantial influence on public perception" (Hettiarachchige et al., 2024).

Next, the article about brands involved in cultural and political wars (Hashmi et al., 2024) discusses individual differences conditioning consumers' responses to brands' actions. This article provides many examples that show variations in consumer responses—going from love to deep hate—depending on whether or not a brand community believes the brand shares its worldview.

In a polarized world, understanding how consumers perceive an issue is important so that managers can understand and predict their reactions to sensitive political issues. Here, the authors point out that consumer responses are conditioned by two main considerations: whether a brand shares consumers' worldviews and whether its actions can be considered authentic and sincere.

Cheng et al. (2024), in turn, discuss how consumers' responses change over time according to companies' public statements. These authors draw on the contingency theory of accommodation, which is a framework that explores how organizations should adapt their communication strategies and stances according to different types of stakeholders. The authors explain that people can respond differently whether they are the initial complainer experiencing a service failure or the audience observing the situation and sharing their perspective on social media.

Figure 1. A micro-meso-macro framework for negative events in marketing



Cui et al. (2024), in their article, discuss how consumers may differ in their reactions to negative events associated with celebrity endorsers. They discuss the role of confirmation bias and suggest that consumers with a positive view of a celebrity are more likely to minimize the significance of a negative event or attribute it to external factors. Understanding this form of processing is important for brands. For example, if a brand's target market has strong positive views of the celebrity before the negative event, keeping the celebrity as an endorser may be an option worth considering.

Finally, certain groups of consumers are more prone to FoMO than others. Morsi et al. (2024) highlight four types of consumers who are particularly susceptible to FoMO appeals (i.e., the Butterflies, Devotees, Endorsers, and Shopaholics). To the extent possible, firms should put in place some protective measures for these consumers when developing promotional appeals in retail contexts. For instance, Morsi et al. (2024) suggest that firms should be more transparent in their promotional efforts and implement strong return policies for customers experiencing guilt and regrets.

In sum, these articles highlight the importance of considering consumers' and individuals' psychological processes and characteristics when assessing negative events in marketing. The extent to which a negative event is viewed as negative is in the "eye of the beholder." Indeed, negative events may be considered more or less intense, depending on the way that consumers process and approach them. There is much heterogeneity in the responses of the stakeholders involved in a negative event.

3.2. Macro perspective: The effects of external stakeholders

Most research on negative events in marketing focuses on the relationship between consumers/customers and firms. Here, we note that there is less research that examines the macro level, or the role of external stakeholders in facilitating or preventing these negative events. In this special issue, all of the articles explore the role of external stakeholders by paying special attention to social media users.

Cheng et al. (2024) examine the key role that social media (e.g., Weibo) plays in service failures that become public crises in China. Their article highlights the speed at which a service failure can snowball into an almost uncontrollable crisis on social media in this unique country and market. These authors discuss the varying ability of companies (Tesla vs. Mercedes) to respond effectively to crises given the powerful influence of social media and the omnipresence of the Chinese government. The authors highlight the importance of monitoring social media before negative events become unmanageable.

Hashmi et al. (2024) discuss the impact of culture wars on brands. Culture wars are conflicts between groups with divergent beliefs on matters such as sports, art, education, and identity. The authors point out that culture wars are more likely to occur in polarized societies. In addition, social media is likely to amplify the intensity and power of the dialogue. Strong brand communities will not hesitate to take strong actions on social media to protect the community over the brand. This article is another example of how social media can play an important role in the impact of negative events on consumers.

Hettiarachchi et al. (2024), in their article about negative publicity, discuss the role of employees in creating negative events for companies. Employees can become dangerous whistleblowers when their negative comments are spread on social media or communicated to the news media. Whistleblowing amplified through social media can cause significant harm to a company's reputation and adversely impact its relationships with customers. Again, the power and influence of social media is highlighted in this article.

Similarly, in their article on the impact of FoMO appeals on consumers, Morsi et al. (2024) stress the importance of social media in exacerbating this phenomenon. As the authors point out: "The proliferation of social media has enabled effortless exploration of potential rewarding experiences, especially for individuals prone to FoMO." When FoMO-prone consumers observe their peers enjoying experiences or making purchases on these platforms, their desire for similar experiences and acquisitions increases.

Finally, apart from the omnipresence of social media in all the articles of the special issue, Cui et al. (2024) discuss another external, macro phenomenon needing attention: the potential that an external crisis can spill over to a company. Cui et al. (2024) article about celebrities and negative events in marketing provides many examples of spillover effects when they discuss the reduction of celebrities' halo effects on brands. Spillover crises are an emerging area of research in the literature on public relations (Wang & Laufer, 2024); companies need to be aware of crises occurring outside of their organizations that can adversely impact them as well.

3.3. Meso perspective: Generating managerial implications

The meso level of analysis refers to the actions of the firms. It incorporates 1) what firms did in the past that led to negative events, and 2) what firms should do better in handling a negative event in marketing (i.e., best practices). The meso level is related to the managerial implications included in these articles.

One of the important takeaways is that there is no silver-bullet solution when handling negative events. As stated by Hettiarachchige et al. (2024), there is no one-fits-all solution that can resolve all the different types of negative events in marketing. The popular "It depends!" answer is very appropriate when discussing the best practices for handling negative events in marketing. In line with this view, we note that the current articles excel at identifying the micro and macro factors that influence the use of a given practice over another. As alluded to by Cheng et al. (2024), the "contingency theory of accommodations" is probably the most appropriate paradigm to use in developing company responses to specific negative events. In that respect, we note that most managerial implications are designed by accounting for micro considerations (i.e., consumers' thoughts and feelings), macro prerogatives (i.e., the responses of external actors), or both.

Most of the articles in this special issue find that the effective management of negative events in marketing is contingent on a mix of both micro and macro considerations. It should be noted that the mix being considered varies depending on the type of negative event under scrutiny. For instance, when handling a surge in negative publicity, Hettiarachchige et al. (2024) recommend using a well-balanced mix of proactive and reactive measures, which accounts for the type of negative event (value- or performance-based) and the sources of the negative event (e.g., customers, employees, or companies).

In the same line of thought, three other articles suggest that firms should take action after an assessment of both micro and macro factors. First, Hashmi et al. (2024) propose a specific set of measures for each of the four types of brand situations related to political conflicts (i.e., The Herald, The Divergent, The Guardians, and The Inhibited). This typology was established by assessing whether or not consumers viewed a brand's action to be authentic (a micro factor) and whether brand communities were supporting or opposing the stance of a brand (a macro factor). Second, Cheng et al. (2024) recommend that organizations should adapt their recovery strategies according to the power of Chinese social media (macro), the legal constraints of regulatory bodies (macro), and the type of stakeholders (complainers or observers on social media; micro). Third, Cui et al. (2024) suggest analyzing the reduction of the halo effect of a celebrity after a negative event by exploring a series of factors. At a micro level, these authors highlight the importance of understanding the psychology of consumers—especially their attribution process—and their growing sense of empowerment. At a macro level, Cui et al. pay special attention to the amplifying role of social media and the shifts in cultural values; accounting for these multiple factors, the authors propose a 7-step framework to help managers handle a crisis involving celebrities.

Morsi et al.'s (2024) article on FoMO takes a somewhat different perspective by focusing mainly on micro considerations when it formulates recommendations for managers. This approach is understandable given its focus on protecting vulnerable consumers prone to FoMO-generating appeals. Accordingly, they formulate their recommendations for both policymakers and companies. These recommendations are organized in line with the different stages of the consumer journey in terms of prepurchase (e.g., promoting transparency), purchase (e.g., highlighting the genuine benefits of an offering), and postpurchase (e.g., implementing a strong returns policy).

In sum, the articles in this special issue highlight that firms' responses need to be carefully designed by taking into consideration multiple factors that pertain to both the micro and the macro environments of a given negative event. In such a context, the "name of the game" refers to the development of well-adapted recoveries that fit the key attributes of complex negative events.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, we are proud of this special issue, which we believe propels the development of this fledgling discipline (i.e., negative events in marketing) by emphasizing its managerial dimension. We believe this special issue represents a good starting point to address the gaps previously identified. First, by proposing a broader definition for negative events in marketing, the current articles uncover new phenomena that have received little attention in the academic literature (e.g., fear of missing out, negative publicity, service failures

turning into public crises). Second, by using a comprehensive micro-meso-macro framework, the current articles present rich managerial insights, which can help the development of well-adapted recoveries to cover a wide range of negative events in marketing.

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