

2018

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Recommended Citation

Soule, Catherine Armstrong and Sara Hanson. "Buying Unicorns: The Impact of Consumer-to-Consumer Branded Buy/Sell/Trade Communities on Traditional Retail Buying Behavior." *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* 3, no. 3 (July 2018): 260-276. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1086/698416>

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Buying Unicorns: The Impact of Consumer-to-Consumer Branded Buy/Sell/Trade Communities on Traditional Retail Buying Behavior

CATHERINE ARMSTRONG SOULE AND SARA HANSON

ABSTRACT Branded buy/sell/trade (BBST) is a consumer-to-consumer (C2C) selling phenomenon that is both massive in scale and meaningful in its impact on consumer behavior and the traditional retailing landscape. Consumers buy, sell, and trade one focal brand's products in these social media-hosted, consumer-initiated communities. This article introduces the phenomenon, differentiates it from other forms of C2C exchange, and explores relationships between members and the brand. Although brands may view these activities as a potential threat to retail sales, the effects are more complex and paradoxical. The authors present data collected from Facebook, in-depth interviews, and a survey. Findings suggest that buyer-sellers experience greater member closeness and spend more in traditional retail settings on the brand's products than strictly buyers, indicating that transactional engagement has positive member and brand outcomes. This research contributes to our understanding of C2C exchange and BBST engagement's effects on consumers and brands.

“My son saw someone's post about a unicorn on my phone and started asking me questions about BST [buy/sell/trade] and the crazy number of dresses I buy. As I explained it to him, he interrupts and says, ‘Mom, I think it's sort of like Pokémon trading cards for old ladies,’” reads a post shared by a member of a children's clothing re-selling community on Facebook. There are tens of millions of groups hosted on Facebook, and a large portion of these are focused on consumer-to-consumer (C2C) selling (Tam 2015). Facebook estimates that over 450 million people visit BST groups on its platform each month (Ku 2016). Branded BST members, from Nike sneakerheads to Louis Vuitton lovers, aggregate around a focal brand not just to express admiration for the brand but also for economic benefits. For the first time to our knowledge, this unique consumer-to-consumer (C2C) environment allows an exploration of the impact of a new type of retail behavior on consumers' traditional shopping experiences and relationships with the focal brand.

Branded buy/sell/trade (BBST) is defined as consumer-initiated communities hosted on social media platforms

that exist for the purpose of C2C buying, selling, and (to a much lesser extent) trading products from one focal brand. These communities are created, managed, regulated, and administered by independent consumers (i.e., nonaffiliated with the brand) and are organized around a single, specific brand. Such BBST communities appear within product categories as diverse as children's and adult apparel, accessories, outdoor gear, technology, video games, and more. Further, BBST communities exist across the image and price spectrum, from low prestige (e.g., Oshkosh) to high prestige (e.g., Gucci) brands. These communities are not only financially lucrative to consumers; it is also possible that community engagement may change the manner in which members bond with one another around the brand and engage in traditional retail activity. Brands may initially either dismiss these activities or view them as a threat to the bottom line. However, in our research, we propose a more complex picture of the value and risk of BBST from both consumer and brand perspectives.

Although C2C selling has existed in various forms throughout history, it is underresearched (Yoon and Occeña 2015).

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JACR, volume 3, number 3. Published online June 19, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/698416>
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More importantly, BBST as a specific iteration of C2C buying and selling is meaningfully different from more traditional forms of C2C exchange owing to the interplay between economic transactions and social bonds, as well as the focus on a single brand versus brand agnostic platforms. This article will introduce the phenomenon, provide insight into who participates in BBST and how they do so, and present findings regarding the effects of BBST engagement on consumers, brands, and retail purchases. Using field data scraped from Facebook to estimate the phenomenon, combined with in-depth interviews and survey data, we investigate the effects that BBST participation has on the traditional retail landscape and how the dual role of buyer-seller influences member-brand relationships and consumption behaviors in general. Additionally, our research contributes to the existing literature on C2C exchange and provides a framework for differentiating between related but distinct exchange phenomena. We also add to the literature on consumer relationship norms by researching how the interplay between economic motives and relationships with others are impacted when consumers become sellers of a brand's product.

Given the lack of attention paid to this new area of research, this article will first review the BBST phenomenon and compare it to similar but distinct marketing concepts. We then fully describe and detail BBST as a unique type of C2C exchange. Next, we develop theory around the impact of consumers' involvement in BBST, specifically how the dual role of buyer-seller affects traditional retail consumption and C2C relationship building. We then present a descriptive data collection from Facebook that provides an initial estimate of the size of the BBST phenomenon. Finally, we test our theory by conducting two studies in the domain of high-end children's clothing, a category we selected because of its popularity in the BST marketplace. We report themes from qualitative interviews and follow with hypothesis testing using a survey of almost 700 BBST members. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications of our research and overview that highlights several promising avenues for future research.

A ROADMAP: WHAT IS BBST AND HOW IS IT DIFFERENT?

Traditional C2C Reselling

Consumer-to-consumer reselling is perhaps as old as traditional business-to-consumer interactions, although historically, little research attention has been devoted to understanding these exchanges. Yet consumer participation in product resale has been present for many years in informal,

physical markets such as garage sales, flea markets, swap meets, classifieds, and thrift/consignment stores (Chu and Liao 2007). As an alternative retail format, these physical resale markets occur in what is called the "informal economy," and most are hidden from the government's measures of economic activity (McCrohan, Smith, and Adams 1991; Williams and Windebank 2000). Traditional C2C reselling (including more modern online iterations like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist) tends to be geographically limited and takes place in a strictly commercial or exchange-based setting, unlike BBST, which is hosted on social media and is universal in scope.

C2C e-Commerce

The digital environment has transformed consumer-to-consumer commerce by incorporating third-party mediation and increasing the scale and scope of C2C resale transactions. Emerging from auction-like behavior in chat rooms, email groups, and discussion forums (Leonard and Jones 2010), C2C e-commerce facilitates quicker and easier sales with customers who span the globe. These third-party mediated exchanges occur on platforms such as eBay, Alibaba, and app-based interfaces such as thredUP and Kidizen. Consumer resellers experience lower transaction costs due to third-party hosting, built-in audience/search functions, and payment infrastructure, and they command higher prices than they would in a physical product resale market (Halstead and Becherer 2003). Mediation by a third party also assists in building trust via consumer protection mechanisms (e.g., money-back guarantees), which is a key success factor in these markets (Lee and Turban 2001; Gefen and Straub 2004; Kim and Park 2013). By contrast, BBST communities are self-monitored and rely on direct interactions between buyers and resellers without "big brand" oversight and control (e.g., eBay's fraud protection processes). Thus, there is the potential for enhanced interpersonal relationship building, a possibility we empirically test herein. Importantly, all other C2C formats, to the best of our knowledge, are brand agnostic, meaning that numerous brands are involved. As such, the lack of brand specificity in traditional C2C e-commerce dilutes the impact of involvement on brand and consumer outcomes, making it difficult to explore on an individual brand level.

Brand Communities

BBST communities have commonalities with the more widely known and studied consumer groups known as brand communities. A brand community is not geographically bound

and is centered on consumption of a product or service (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001). BBSTs and brand communities are both collectives of like-minded consumers who interact based on their admiration and consumption of a focal brand. Related to the theory on consumer-brand relationships (Fournier 1998), brand communities allow consumers to congregate with one another, enhancing the meaningful relationships they have with the brand from what were once courtships to committed partnerships. Additionally, in recent years, brand communities and the social media space have come together (Laroche et al. 2012; Zaglia 2013), exhibiting similar features of traditional brand communities such as a shared consciousness and social identification. As brand communities and the social space provide new outlets for consumers to come together around a brand, new concepts like BBST communities also emerge.

However, brand communities and BBSTs differ in two primary ways: the nature of brand involvement (i.e., the party that initiates and/or facilitates the group, as well as the purpose of the community and why it is established) and motivation for membership. Brand communities may be brand-created or consumer-created (Lee, Kim, and Kim 2011), while BBSTs are created by consumers with no brand involvement. Additionally, brand communities are created to facilitate social interaction between members who have already purchased the brand's product(s). On the other hand, BBSTs are established to facilitate and support C2C market exchanges (i.e., product resale and redistribution). Given the transactional nature of BBSTs, one cannot assume that brand community theory will apply to this new phenomenon. It is possible that BBST members exhibit similar characteristics to brand community members, such as brand evangelism and connectedness between members, a contention that will be empirically tested herein.

Peer-to-Peer Exchange and Lateral Exchange Markets

Although a burgeoning area of consumer research and attention for almost 10 years, researchers focused peer-to-peer exchanges have demonstrated a lack of cohesion around a commonly accepted definition of these exchanges. Alternatively referred to as collaborative consumption (Botsman and Rogers 2010), access-based consumption (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2012), or the sharing economy (Belk 2010), these exchanges involve activities related to obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services through peer-to-peer connection. Consumers in these markets share intangible goods such as cell phone minutes, parking spaces, and mp3 music files, but we also see sharing of physical goods like automobiles (e.g.,

Zipcar), accessories, and clothing (e.g., Rent the Runway). Oftentimes ownership is not transferred in access-based or sharing economies. Even when the relatively rare "sharing" activities occur in BBST communities, members are trading items, so ownership is transferred. Another important aspect is that peer-to-peer exchange is often category-specific (e.g., Napster for music files, Airbnb for lodging), rather than brand-specific like BBST communities.

The term "lateral exchange markets" (LEMs) describes exchange activities between equivalent economic actors mediated by a technological platform (Perren and Kozinets 2018). This nomenclature and the related four-category typography deliver clarity to the diversity in types of peer-to-peer exchange. BBSTs can be categorized as "forum" LEMs, in which actors experience high levels of consociality, or the feeling of being present with one another virtually (Hannerz 2016), and low levels of platform intermediation. Forum LEMs' main value for members is in connecting consumers, which is true of BBSTs as well. However, BBSTs remain unique in impact on consumer behavior from other forum LEMs because of their potential downstream impact on the focal brand, which is not a direct participant in the exchanges taking place.

Social Media Hosted e-Commerce and Social Shopping

Social commerce involves commercial, business-to-consumer transactions occurring via social media sites (Liang et al. 2011; Wang and Zhang 2012). Social media sites (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010), such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram, are online applications that typically facilitate C2C interactions (Richter and Koch 2007), but social commerce allows the brand to play a role in this C2C space. Social commerce is a huge industry, with \$5 billion worth of goods sold in 2010 and a sixfold increase expected in the next 5 years (Anderson et al. 2011). Indeed, social commerce is growing as commercial features are added to social network sites and social networking functions are added to e-commerce sites (Liang et al. 2011). Related to our prior discussion of brand community, advances in social commerce have induced brands to convert their online brand community members to C2C buyers and sellers (Lu, Zhao, and Wang 2010). Researchers have explored the social elements inherent in exchange contexts (e.g., Price and Arnould 1999) in traditional retail formats, but as brands become integrated into the social network sites of their prospective and active customers, the lines between market exchange and social relationships blurs even further. In the social sphere, brands can communicate with consumers at a personal level as if they were a friend or family member in the social network feed (Gensler et al.

2013). Whereas previously consumers' social networks and brand communities were more separate, they now coexist. Social networking sites are used mainly for social activities; nevertheless, people experience transactional exchanges peppered in to those social interactions, rather than the experience of developing social relationships within a retail context.

As previously noted, thousands of BST communities, both branded and brand agnostic, exist on Facebook. Facebook groups add a sense of security that anonymous online C2C platforms, namely, Craigslist, do not because members must use their true identities when buying and selling items (Tam 2015). BBST communities are a subgroup of these social media hosted exchanges, but there are two critical differences that make BBST distinct from a marketing and consumer behavior perspective, namely, that standard BST groups tend to be geographically bound and brand agnostic (i.e., all brands and product categories). These distinctions are meaningful because the brand-specific and universal audience scope allows us to explore empirically the influence of BST activities, not just on the consumers' overall shopping and buying habits but, importantly, on brand perceptions, connectedness, and actual brand-specific retail purchase habits. See table 1 for a comparison between BBST and related phenomena discussed thus far.

BRANDED BST: ITS OWN BEAST

Beyond the unique nature identified above, there are further distinctive characteristics of the BBST communities worthy of study from a consumer behavior perspective.

Communication and Language

Specific language used across BST platforms acts as shorthand and helps to communicate a fairly standard rating system for item condition. Conditions can range from "NWT" (brand new with tags) to "good" or "play" (a heavily worn/used item). Beyond condition information, vocabulary in the BBST community can indicate an item's level of appeal (e.g., "unicorn"; see table 2 for a glossary of terms and acronyms commonly used in BBST communities).

Further, some communities feature monthly ISO (in search of) threads or "post of the day" topics. For example, a community may designate 1 day a month where other brands may be sold within the community, sometimes referred to as "boutique" or "garage sale" days. As previously mentioned, each community has set guidelines for social and transactional interactions, posting, claiming, negotiating, and so forth, which help to establish shared rituals and norms in BBST communities (Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001).

Table 1. Comparison of BBST to Similar Exchange Phenomena

Exchange type	Example	Hosted			Brand specificity		Ownership transfer			Geographically bound		Oversight/Mediation	
		Offline	Online/ App	SNS	Single	Agnostic	C2C	B2C	NA	Yes	No	Brand	Third party Self
Traditional retail	Nordstrom, The Gap, boutiques	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
Traditional C2C	Garage sales, consignment	✓				✓		✓		✓			✓ ✓
Traditional e-Commerce	TeaCollection.com, Amazon		✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	
Traditional C2C e-Commerce	eBay, Alibaba, Craigslist		✓			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
Sharing C2C commerce	Airbnb, Rent the Runway,		✓			✓			✓		✓		✓
App-based C2C LEMs	Kidizen, thredUP		✓			✓		✓			✓		✓
Social e-Commerce	Facebook marketplace			✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
BBST	Tea Collection: buy, sell, trade group			✓	✓			✓			✓		✓

Note.—BBST = branded buy/sell/trade; C2C = consumer-to-consumer; LEM = lateral exchange markets.

Table 2. Glossary of Common BBST Acronyms and Terms

Term	Definition/Meaning
Bump	Commenting/liking in order to move the post up to the top of the board
Closet account	A separate Facebook account maintained only for buy-sell-trade activities
Combined shipping	A discount when buying multiple items from the same seller at the same time
Cross-posted	The item is listed for sale in additional places
DISO	Desperately in search of
DOND	Deal or no deal: posts with no price where buyers make offers until the seller accepts
EUC	Excellent used condition
Flash sale	One seller posting many separate items for sale in one thread
Following	Commenting on a sale post in order to receive push notifications
FSBR	For sale before return (to the retailer)
GUC	Good used condition
Hoarding	Buying items that are for future use (e.g., a size [or more] up in children's clothes)
HSA	Highly sought after
HTF	Hard to find
IRL	In real life (often refers to pictures of the item in actual use)
ISO	In search of
Lot	A sale of several items combined together for one price
NFS	Not for sale (often a disclaimer used providing/seeking info or social sharing)
NIB	New in box/bag
NIL	Next in line (wait list once a sale has been initiated by a different buyer)
NWOT	New without tags
NWT	New with tags
OOTD	Outfit of the day
OT	Off topic
PIF	Pay it forward (giveaways to members of the BBST)
Play	Condition is poor (stained or worn)
Purge	Similar to a flash sale, but larger number of items posted for sale at once
PM	Private message (used for questions, providing payment info, and socializing)
SFPF	Smoke free / pet free (describing the home the item comes from)
Tagging	Mentioning another member in a comment to alert them through a notification
Stash	A collection of items held on to before or after the useful life
TDF	To die for
Unicorn	An item that is very hard to find and very desirable
VDISO	Very desperately in search of
VGUC	Very good used condition

Roles within BBST

These communities exist primarily to facilitate secondhand exchange, requiring both buying and selling activities. BBST members can buy or sell the brand's products, sometimes playing a dual by simultaneously buying and selling. Kozinets et al. (2010) describe a similar consumer-marketer dual role played by bloggers in word-of-mouth marketing campaigns, but in BBST, members are not only promoting the focal brand but also are marketers for themselves, as they retain all of the income from their sales. BBST communities are informally managed by an administrator who en-

forces regulations about claiming, paying, posting, limiting postings per day, and socializing/chatting.

Exchange Norms and Patterns

Although there are unique differences in the exchange formats and norms across BBST communities, the most common pattern of exchange is a buyer posting an image of an item with information about its condition and price. New posts appear on the top of the group page but also can appear in community members' social media timelines. There-

fore, buyers may encounter selling posts (1) directly by accessing and browsing the BBST group or (2) by chance, as selling posts are displayed along with traditional social network activity, such that the line between social and exchange is blurred and shopping activities are ever-present. This blur and constant presence makes BBST membership conducive to impulsive consumption (Rook 1987), spending when there was no preexisting motivation to shop or buy. It should be noted that, owing to Facebook algorithms, the more one interacts with the specific BBST community, the more often the selling posts will organically appear in the member's social media feed. Further, the unique nature of each sale post (e.g., one unique item is for sale to tens of thousands of potential buyers) keeps members checking back, wondering if that unicorn could be posted. When an item is posted, the potential buyer is more motivated to make a quick purchase decision for fear of losing the item to a faster member.

Normally, to acquire the item, the buyer must be the first person to indicate a commitment to buy with a reply to the post (such as "me!" or "SOLD"). Oftentimes, items are claimed within seconds or minutes, occasionally with a line of buyers indicating "next!" in case the original buyer falls through. Resellers' sale posts often implement lay marketing and persuasion knowledge such as scarcity, bundling, liking, and framing. In addition to traditional "selling" posts that feature one item, BBST often feature "lots" or similar/related items sold together for one price and "flash" sales or "purges" where one seller will list multiple items in one threaded discussion post, often discounting when one buyer claims more than one item. Other interesting BBST exchange actions are pay-it-forward (giveaways) and buyer's ISO ("in search of") posts for specific items they are seeking.

Further, social interaction and sharing of brand information exist alongside sale posts in BBST communities. Pictures of the brand's new or upcoming products, and information about the brand's customer service and sales promotions/coupon codes are often shared. Additionally, members who are shopping in physical retail locations might post "finds" and offer to buy and ship to others in the community at cost if other members indicate interest. Sometimes social bonds formed within the BBST community result in members "looking out" for others by tagging others in relevant sale postings. Members may also post images of the brand's goods in their lives (e.g., "outfit of the day" threads or media "sightings" of the brand). It is also commonplace in some BBSTs to see "off topic" posts, meaning nonbrand or category-related, with questions, advice, or even fund-raising topics.

So far, we have discussed how BBST communities are situated within the prior literature and also described the unique characteristics of BBST involvement. Using these characteristics, next we develop theory around the consequences of BBST involvement and how adopting the role of buyer-seller by incorporating selling activities has a positive impact on member relationships and brand outcomes in traditional retail.

THEORY DEVELOPMENT

We propose that BBST communities differ from similar concepts discussed in the marketing literature, particularly how BBST involvement facilitates transactional engagement (Gummerus et al. 2012). Following from Gummerus and colleagues' (2012) operationalization of transactional engagement within Facebook brand communities as involving spending money, we define "transactional engagement" as the process of community members becoming more engaged with the brand and/or community as a whole as a result of buying and/or selling behaviors. Transactional engagement differs from social or community engagement, which involves enhanced engagement due to social interaction such as sharing conversations or "liking" online posts (Gummerus et al. 2012; Dessart, Veloutsou, and Morgan-Thomas 2015).

The effects seen in BBST communities differ from those in traditional and online brand communities and adopt a paradoxical theoretical explanation in two ways. First, one can assume that, as consumers engage in nontraditional reselling behavior like that found in BBST communities, traditional retail sales could be cannibalized. Thus, brands could be negatively impacted by BBST involvement because buying behavior and spending shifts from the brand's own store to the BBST community. However, we hypothesize that members who engage in the BBST community in a dual role as buyer-seller (i.e., participate by making purchases and selling product) purchase more in traditional retail settings when compared to strictly buyers (i.e., participate by only buying product), a positive outcome for the brand.

Second, the pattern of transactional engagement of BBST members differs from traditional conceptions of membership socialization in brand communities. In typical brand communities, the theory of the developmental progression of members (Kozinets 1999) indicates that as community involvement increases, members begin with more transactional or functional engagements with others. Later, they develop communal relationships with their peers, growing more closely connected to the community (Kozinets 1999; Aggarwal 2004). In the context of BBST communities, we propose that member engagement follows a different pattern, such that

close connection is still a consequence but is a result of transactional engagement.

We hypothesize that increased transactional engagement via adopting a dual buyer-seller role will result in greater member closeness, despite the increased focus on economic motives (i.e., making money). Specific to our context, we expect that increased social engagement will occur alongside increased transactional behavior, as selling activities will layer on existing buying activities, an “interaction between market forces and consumer psychology” (Bar-Gill 2014, 486). While BBST communities are grounded in their fundamental purpose of facilitating economic exchange, we suggest that as selling behavior is incorporated, this will not shift members’ mind-sets to be more transactional or economic in focus. Rather, as buyers become buyer-sellers, there is a greater opportunity to share brand stories (Muñiz and O’Guinn 2001) by posting new product for sale, using the community-specific language and rituals, and connecting with and helping similar others.

We also consider the impact that increased transactional engagement, as exemplified through adopting a buyer-seller role, can have on the focal brand. We propose that as member closeness grows, buyer-sellers will also increase their spend in traditional retail settings (i.e., via the brand’s proprietary website, partner websites, and/or physical retail stores) because this spend behavior allows buyer-sellers to become more involved in the BBST community and enhance their interpersonal relationships. Thus, we suggest that increased engagement in BBST communities (i.e., as buyer-sellers vs. strictly buyers) has a positive outcome for the brand’s bottom line, rather than compromising traditional retail sales.

H1: The dual buyer-seller role increases traditional retail spend.

H2: The dual buyer-seller role enhances member closeness in BBST communities.

H3: Member closeness mediates the relationship between user type (i.e., buyer vs. buyer-seller) and traditional retail spend.

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Our first aim was to provide a descriptive overview of the BBST phenomenon. A phenomena size study (study 1) attempted to estimate the number of groups and consumers involved in branded buy/sell/trade behavior on Facebook.

Next, we conducted in-depth interviews with members of a children’s clothing BBST community (study 2). While exploratory in nature, our objective was to identify themes associated with BBST involvement. The themes also helped to inform our survey questionnaire. Study 3 involved surveying members of three BBST communities in the children’s clothing category and measuring both the bright-side and dark-side consequences of BBST involvement. Finally, we compared buyers to buyer-sellers to show the impact of transactional engagement in BBST communities.

STUDY 1: PHENOMENA SIZE DATA COLLECTION

Our first task was to understand the scale of the BBST phenomenon by estimating the number of users engaged in BBST communities on Facebook,¹ which, to our knowledge, no source—neither academic nor popular press—has attempted. Our estimation method began by identifying the top brands in several categories such as apparel, accessories, outdoor gear, and technology. We supplemented this list with popular reselling brands identified by visiting popular reselling sites for fashion and retail items (including clothing, handbags, shoes, and sporting goods), such as Tradesy, Kidizen, and thredUP. Of over 800 brands identified, we were able to locate at least one BBST group for 346 of the brands. Brands ranged from large multinational brands, such as Nike, Kate Spade, and Louis Vuitton, to smaller niche brands, such as Polarn O. Pyret and Alice + Ames.

A research assistant first compiled a list of buy/sell/trade communities with Facebook’s search function by entering each brand’s name and the term “BST,” “B/S/T,” “buy sell trade,” “resale,” and “resell.” Communities that had memberships of less than 20 or were geographically based (such as a city, region, or nation) were excluded from collection and further analysis. We were able to manually locate 1,757 buy/sell/trade communities for the brands identified, which totaled a combined membership of over 9.3 million. For many brands, there were multiple BST communities. Additionally, 577 of these buy/sell/trade communities were formed around multiple related brands, such as “Patagonia–The Northface–Columbia B/S/T” and “Nike/Under Armour Kids Resell,” and these multiple brand communities were subsequently eliminated from the collection. This process left 1,180 single-

1. We focused our efforts on Facebook, as it is, to our knowledge, the only online forum in which branded buy/sell/trade activity occurs. Other platforms, such as online bulletin boards or forums, feature BST activity but are brand agnostic to our knowledge.

brand groups, or BBSTs (i.e., focused on buying, selling, and trading a single focal brand). As we identified communities, we recorded the group name, the number of members, and the group’s description, which often included membership rules. In sum, we totaled 6,551,469 members across the 1,180 communities representing 346 unique brands at the time of data collection, with an average of 5,552 members (range = 20–209,036). We have included the 100 brands with the largest combined BBST memberships in table 3. A full list of brands with identified BBST communities and membership numbers is provided in the appendix (available online).

We believe these descriptives on the size of the BBST phenomenon to be as accurate as possible, although very conservative. It is not currently possible to quantify a more finite categorization owing to several limitations, namely, (1) the process of data collection could not be automated, (2) Facebook does not categorize BST groups in a searchable manner, (3) we did not search all existing brands but only a carefully selected subset, and (4) the private nature of the BST phenomenon, which in effect hides communities from nonmembers. Still, our data collection demonstrated that BBST involvement is well into the millions of users for the popular brands that we identified.

Table 3. Top 100 Brands with Largest Combined BBST Membership on Facebook

Brand	No. of BBSTs	Total	Brand	No. of BBSTs	Total	Brand	No. of BBSTs	Total
Louis Vuitton	37	535,069	Balenciaga	4	46,509	Connecta	1	21,060
Nike	34	495,929	Freshly Picked	4	46,206	Lego	20	20,895
Tula Carriers	9	277,883	Forever 21	2	44,115	Hoyt	1	20,855
Matilda Jane	24	263,136	Tory Burch	5	43,597	Adorable Essentials	1	20,112
Lilly Pulitzer	50	202,909	American Girl	10	41,723	Target	5	20,036
Victoria’s Secret	29	187,695	Giggle Moon	5	39,533	Converse	2	19,725
Lululemon	12	172,762	Tea Collection	5	38,885	ModCloth	2	19,585
Gymboree	36	170,216	Kickee Pants	10	38,438	Aden + Anais	4	18,978
Torrid	20	136,710	Lolly Wolly Doodle	2	37,220	Southern Tots	2	18,081
Livie & Luca	13	109,352	Vera Bradley	12	34,148	Little Bird Clothing	2	17,987
Well Dressed Wolf	15	105,900	Bape	2	33,384	Agnes & Dora	1	17,911
SweetHoney	8	86,780	Christian Louboutin	4	33,363	Sakura Bloom	3	17,701
Joules	5	80,958	Salt Water Sandals	5	32,822	TokiDoki	8	17,675
Gucci	5	80,934	Cath Kidston	3	30,929	Hunter	2	17,407
Eleanor Rose	7	79,710	Next	8	30,879	Ralph Lauren	8	17,286
BumGenius	15	77,744	GroVia	5	30,601	LOL Surprise Dolls	10	17,002
Jeep	4	70,223	Under Armour	5	30,365	Black Milk Clothing	2	16,961
Anthropologie	9	64,696	Pandora	16	30,193	Coach	3	16,757
Ju-Ju-Be	6	62,927	Cheeky Plum	2	29,652	Givenchy	3	16,616
Pokemon	37	61,246	Coca-Cola	13	28,102	Goyard	3	16,478
Miss Me	8	59,097	Tiffany	8	27,347	Osh Kosh	1	16,198
Kate Spade	6	58,524	Rolex	9	26,341	Frugi	3	16,072
James Avery	11	57,711	Hanna Andersson	4	26,082	Rick Owens	1	15,983
Chanel	4	55,628	Boden	8	23,764	Carter’s	2	15,894
Smocked Polkadots	2	54,115	ACNE	1	23,654	Moncler	4	15,299
Rags to Riches	9	54,007	Mustard Pie	6	23,600	Olive Mae	1	15,295
RicRac & Ruffle	2	53,288	Patagonia	3	22,679	Hermes	1	14,741
Kelly’s Kids	5	51,111	Tdazzle Too	1	22,671	gDiapers	7	14,234
Janie and Jack	22	50,198	Naartjie	17	22,445	Burberry	1	14,084
Tieks	7	50,102	Pottery Barn	6	22,260	Bape	2	14,073
Gap	9	48,384	J. Crew	5	22,251	Caroline Kate	1	13,695
Fossil	3	47,721	Vetements	1	22,033	Mini Cooper	2	13,310
Yves Saint Laurent	6	47,265	cabi	1	21,684			
Xbox	10	46,678	Ted Baker	1	21,532			

STUDY 2: INTERVIEWS OF BST BUYERS AND BUYER-SELLERS

Next, we wanted to more closely explore the BBST phenomenon by interviewing involved members of a BBST community for the brand “Tea Collection.” We conducted hour-long interviews with 10 members involved with one of the several BBST communities associated with Tea Collection. Tea Collection is a children’s clothing brand, and the community, “Little Citizens: Tea Collection Retail,” is a popular BBST community with 8,843 members.

Method

We identified interview participants by posting an administrator-approved request to the BST community and offering a \$25 Tea Collection gift certificate for participation in an hour-long interview. Those interested were asked to complete a prescreening questionnaire that had prospective participants categorize their role (primarily buyer, buyer-seller, primarily seller), their membership length, dollars spent and earned per month, and transactions completed per month (see table 4). We made an effort to sample participants who were most representative of the phenomenon (Corbin, Strauss, and Strauss 2014), those who adopted different roles within the BST community, as well as both long-standing and newer members. All interview participants were women in the 27- to 43-year age range. Pseudonyms are used in the findings discussed below.

Using a grounded theory approach (Corbin et al. 2014), the authors conducted semistructured interviews via phone, which were recorded after permission was granted by the interview participant. Prior to the first interview, we drafted an interview protocol featuring 20 questions that covered

topics such as the length and nature of the participant’s involvement in the BBST community, interactions with other members of the BBST community, the participant’s relationship with the brand itself, and the participant’s purchasing habits before and during involvement in the community (see the appendix for the full interview protocol). This interview guide helped us maintain consistency of topics discussed, but the authors asked additional clarifying questions as needed and probed into topics that were of interest to the interviewee. The first author conducted the interviews and gathered field notes, while the second author proposed follow-up questions as needed and also gathered field notes, which summed to approximately 79 single-spaced pages. Following the interviews, the recordings were transcribed.

After each interview, the authors met to analyze the interview data. Concepts were identified from the transcriptions if they were repeatedly present in the interview data. Initial concepts included topics such as communal shopping via tagging others, nonbrand conversations, sharing deals, brand ambivalence, trusting others, gambling, hoarding, Teagret (i.e., feelings of regret from not buying Tea Collection clothing), adrenaline/panic/insanity, negative impact on family, sharing memories, feelings of consumerism and materialism, the importance of reuse and extending the life of the products, and the opportunity to purchase high end, which we recorded in theoretical memos. We returned to these lower level concepts regularly, applied continued scrutiny to certify their appropriateness in representing the participants’ reality, and made comparisons across interviewees. We discarded concepts if they were specific to a single interviewee (e.g., negative impact on family) or if they represented viewpoints that were not the interviewee’s own (i.e., brand am-

Table 4. Pseudonyms, Demographics, and BBST Engagement Detail for Interview Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Role	Membership length	Dollars spent/earned per month	Transactions per month
Claire	31	Primarily buyer	6 months	\$100 spent	4–5 buying
Alice	35	Primarily buyer	3 months	\$20 spent	1 buying
Candance	27	Primarily buyer	3 months	\$50 spent/\$15 earned	4 buying/1 selling
Lisa	43	Buyer-seller	1 year, 2 months	\$100 spent/\$50 earned	5 buying/3 selling
Jamie	32	Buyer-seller	1 year	\$200 spent/\$50 earned	5 buying/2 selling
Sophie	38	Buyer-seller	1 year, 6 months	\$20 spent/\$15 earned	1 buying/1 selling
Samantha	36	Buyer-seller	9 months	\$100 spent/\$90 earned	5 buying/5 selling
Lucy	39	Buyer-seller (currently only selling)	2 months	\$50 earned	6 selling
Janna	40	Primarily seller, BST group administrator	6 years, 5 months	\$200 earned	20 selling
Mary	31	Primarily seller	2 years	\$25 spent/\$100 earned	2 buying/5 selling

bivalence). Broader, high-level categories were then formed from related concepts, which were challenged and re-formed in an iterative approach between the data and our analysis. Three primary themes emerged that speak to the experience of our interviewees' BBST involvement: perception of brand value, member connections, and dark-side behaviors.

Perception of Brand Value

All interview participants said that their BBST involvement was fostered by the brand's reputation for high quality, durability, and desirability in the marketplace, and their participation only served to enhance positive perceptions of brand value. One study participant, Claire (age 31, membership of 6 months), reported:

I became more of a believer [in Tea Collection] . . . [BBST involvement] has increased my purchasing from Tea itself, and I'm more knowledgeable about the deals on the website. I'm buying more than I was. I would buy 1–2 purchases per year. Now, I'm definitely watching [the Tea website] more. I've made more purchases on the actual website, as well as on BST.

Jamie (32, 1 year) discussed the BBST community as a place to share sale information for the traditional retail website, indicating that BST members engaged in marketing tactics on behalf of the brand:

It's definitely a medium to drive sales; it creates brand loyalty. It does premarketing for you. . . . In some ways, it's like they're doing a retailer's job.

We also found that involvement in the BBST community increased perceptions of the brand's quality (i.e., its durability and desirability). Claire (31, 6 months) said:

I saw [Tea Collection] as [producing] quality items. I really liked them. I would tell people that. The quality is there It's a catch-22 making a quality item. It can travel to 10 kids. They have value, and they seem to live up to the value. Rarely do I get an item that's not worth it.

Other members discussed the BBST community as a gateway to what is perceived as a higher-end children's clothing brand. Because of the reselling market, it created oppor-

tunity for Mary (31, 2 years) to both own the brand and later resell the brand:

That opened the door to a lot of insanity. BST allowed me the opportunity to pick up things that I thought I never had the opportunity I would ever own. And also to buy more than I ever thought because I could make a profit.

Sophie (38, 1.5 years) also valued the ability to resell the brand, as well as collect items from prior seasons that sold out previously but were desirable to her. Additionally, because of the quality and durability of the clothing items, Sophie spoke of reselling as allowing the item to live on after her child's use:

In general, finding things that you can't buy anymore, that's number 1 for me. I also feel good about recycling, if you will. Keeping a high-quality garment alive. I take excellent care in how I launder my clothes so that they can go on to live again.

In sum, BBST involvement enhanced participants' value of the brand, resulting in many members purchasing more within the community and in traditional retail outlets than before their involvement.

Member Connections

Consumers' involvement in BBST communities facilitates relationships between like-minded peers. Interactions extend beyond transactions and become an important part of membership. Similar to brand communities, the love for the brand brings consumers together, and their similar interests build connections and relationships that are about more than just clothing. Janna (40, 6 years+) speaks of the ways that BBST members support one another in difficult times:

On one board [BBST community], a woman sold her son's clothing who died. We raised \$5,000 for mitochondrial research in honor of her son. We've raised money for funeral expenses. It creates a social situation for people that [sic] are lonely: a husband deployed [in the military], they moved, they have an abusive relationship. In some cases, it probably saves lives.

Lisa (43, 1 year+) echoed Janna's sentiment toward the sense of community that is built among BBST members,

expressing the importance of friendships that she made or strengthened due to her involvement:

I find community. I have friends that I meet in person that I met on the board. I love that sense of community. I have a friend that now when she comes to Boston she stays with me for a few days. Some people I knew, and it deepened due to our shared interest. We would get dinner with each other. Frequently, we're having conversations that are much deeper than clothing.

Mary (31, 2 years) also spoke of the BBST community as a place where she made "lifelong friends":

My best friends I met on the boards of all places. They ended up being real life friends, not just virtual. With those friends, we definitely do pass deals on to each other. . . . It's kind of like family in that way. . . . The best stuff [about the community] would have to be my friends that I made. They are not just casual friends, but they are lifelong friends. I'm grateful for that.

Interestingly, we found that Lisa (43, 1 year+) and Janna (40, 6 years+), both buyer-sellers, appeared to experience stronger member connections. Claire's experience as primarily a buyer focused more on transactions. While she acknowledged that niceties were exchanged between members, Claire's (31, 6 months) description was much softer than those of Lisa (43, 1 year+) and Janna (40, 6 years+), who occupied the dual role of buyer-seller:

I went to an all-girls school. I think girls can be kind of catty. Online text can be tricky—it can seem bitchy. I'm into buy and walk away. People seem friendly and sociable. That aspect exists. It's nice when someone is looking for something, and they tag people. There's camaraderie.

Samantha (36, 9 months, a buyer-seller of about 9 months, said that the BBST community provided the opportunity to connect with other moms by sending off clothing items with "good memories," something that only a platform like the BST community could facilitate:

I like the idea of a community of moms sharing resources. Handing off your baby stuff can be hard. Send-

ing off things that have good memories to a mom that's going to love it, it's better than eBay. That's a good feeling.

Dark-Side Behaviors

We found that BBST involvement may involve participants engaging in dark-side consumer behavior in two ways. First, as mentioned earlier, BBST involvement provides members with a "licensing effect" when purchasing the brand's products, new or used. Licensing refers to the behavior pattern wherein a consumer who has made a choice or behavior that is perceived by the self in a positive manner (in this case, selling old clothing) can, in turn, allow the consumer relief from the guilt that would normally be associated with a more negative behavior (such as splurging on an expensive new item); therefore, she is more likely to subsequently indulge (Khan and Dhar 2006). Second, the nature of the Facebook platform makes for, at best, an easy (sometimes mindless) purchase process that occurs alongside social interaction. At worst, this process can become impulsive or even addicting.

Claire (31, 6 months) spoke of, at times, turning off push notifications for new posts, using the functionality of the Facebook platform to assist her in monitoring her consumption behavior:

[When] I have notifications set up . . . oh, I have to check! On the other hand, I shut notifications off before. After I bought a bunch of stuff, then I turned them off. . . . Sometimes I don't need the temptation. Why am I still buying? I kind of have to police myself.

BBST involvement gave our participants the license to buy more, as the brand now had more value, as discussed earlier, than when the postconsumption journey ended at disposal. Lisa (43, 1 year+) hints at the increase in her consumption as a consequence of her BST involvement:

For me, BST has like a gambling element. If I check it right now for something cheap, there's so much pleasure—like huge score! . . . It changed the way I thought about the value of my children's clothing, which opens the door to something irrational like I need to buy thousands of dollars' worth of clothes. I use the idea that I will resell to buy more, because I could resell it, even if I don't resell it.

While Alice (35, 3 months) stated that the BBST community may have saved her money as it allowed her to buy used clothing items versus new for her family, she acknowledged that she purchased items she didn't need and had to monitor her shopping behavior:

Sometimes I'm sure that I buy things that I'm sure I don't really need. . . . This summer, I had to take an intentional break. I unfollowed them for a while. I was spending more time doing it than I wanted to.

Jamie (32, 1 year) seemed to struggle with balancing the excitement of purchasing sought-after items with the ease and speed of purchasing that the BBST community facilitates. She first spoke of "panic moments":

Unfortunately, the shopping epidemic has just taken off. . . . Being on these boards almost creates these like adrenaline, panic moments. There's only one [item].

Later, Jamie recounted an "embarrassing" story of her BBST involvement taking over a family vacation:

This is embarrassing, but we were in Montana, and we were staying at an Indian teepee reservation, and a sale came up and Wi-Fi is not great, but, "oh, that's the item I wanted for such a long time!" And I was on the phone for like 45 minutes. And I got it!

As BBSTs are situated within a social platform, buying, selling, and socializing coexist. While BBST involvement may cause members to stray into dark-side consumption behaviors, our findings simultaneously indicate an important bright-side connection between members that builds as involvement increases via engaging in selling behaviors. In summary, our interviews revealed three primary themes that represent both positive and negative consumer outcomes of BBST community involvement.

STUDY 3: SURVEY OF BBST MEMBERS WITHIN THE CHILDREN'S CLOTHING CATEGORY

To empirically demonstrate the impact of BBST involvement on retail purchase behavior within the children's apparel category, we conducted a survey by collecting responses from BBST community members. The sample consisted of 698 responses from members of the BBST communities for three brands: Livie & Luca ($N = 34$), Boden ($N = 359$), and Tea

Collection ($N = 305$).² The children's clothing category was selected due to its BBST popularity, and each of these three brands are in the list of the top 100 BBST brands generated in study 1. This category does, by nature, have a population that is highly female and within a certain age range, due to the nature of the products mainly being bought and sold by mothers with growing children.

Method

The survey was conducted over a period of 1–3 days for each brand. To recruit respondents, we posted a message to each BBST community inviting members to participate in exchange for an entry into a drawing to win a \$50 gift card for the focal brand. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, the first half of the survey posed descriptive questions to better characterize BBST membership, and the second half focused on the research hypotheses.

The survey began with questions about the member's role (buyer, seller, or buyer-seller), the duration of membership, frequency of participation, and activity types within the BBST group (e.g., buying, selling, brand-related information sharing, socializing, ISO [in search of] specific sold out or sought after items, etc.). We then transitioned to questions regarding motivations for participation (e.g., I can't afford to buy the clothes at full retail, I make money from selling old clothes, I like the social aspect, etc.) and the relative importance of each motivation, followed by questions about the frequency of purchases and spend by month and year within the BST community. While not central to our hypotheses, at the end of the survey we also measured brand relationship quality using five items from Fournier (1994, 1998), loyalty intentions using three items from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996), as well as two individual difference scales including deal proneness (Lichtenstein, Netemeyer, and Burton 1995) and impulsiveness (Rook and Fisher 1995) to begin to explore the impact of BBST involvement on the brand relationship and whether individual character-

2. At the time of manuscript preparation, the total number of members for each of the branded BST communities sourced for interview participants was 9,245 (Livie & Luca), 22,337 (Mini Boden), and 10,621 (Tea Collection), corresponding to a response rate of 0.4%, 1.6%, and 2.9%, respectively. However, because of the nature of Facebook's algorithm (which selects the posts to display or not in the user's personal feed based on the members' level of involvement, i.e., members who are inactive or less likely to participate may not have been exposed to our call for participants) and the fact that, anecdotally, a small percentage of the total members of the community are active, we believe that the total number of members is a skewed way to view the population size. Still, the response rate is a limitation of this study.

istics drove our hypothesized differences between buyers and buyer-sellers.

The second half of the survey, which directly tested our hypotheses, involved measuring “traditional retail spend” (i.e., “Now I spend ____ money on items from the brand in traditional retail settings [e.g., the brand’s website, local retail stores, etc.] than I did before,” 1 = a lot less, 7 = a lot more), as well as “member connection,” which was measured using two items which were averaged ($r = .73$) including the “inclusion of other in the self” scale (Aron, Aron, and Smollan 1992). To explore evidence of the “dark-side behaviors” we found in our interview data, we asked if increased buying was due to the possibility of resell later or a licensing effect (i.e., “I buy more new [brand] in traditional settings—brand website, online retailer, or physical store—because I know I can resell it later”) as well as feelings of regret (i.e., “I sometimes regret the things that I’ve bought in buy/sell/trade groups”). The end of the survey asked demographic questions including age, gender, and household income. Prior to the full study launch, we pretested the survey with a similar group of respondents ($n = 98$) to validate the items used. The full survey instrument is included in the appendix.

Descriptives

The vast majority of respondents were women (99.8%) with an average age of 36.65 (range: 23–69). This sample is representative of BBST membership in the children’s clothing category. Over 50% of respondents reported a household income of \$75,000 or more, indicating that motivations for BBST involvement extended beyond financial necessity or deal-seeking. The majority of survey respondents were also heavy users, with more than half reporting that they visit the BBST community at least once per day and 51.6% reporting a purchase from the BBST community 2–3 times per month or more. The majority of members (67.8%) reported spending \$50 or less per month, and 47.7% said that they planned to spend \$200 or more this year. While buying was the primary activity reported, over half of the respondents reported also engaging in selling, sharing brand-related information, and ISO items. While making money was reported as a strong motivator for the majority of respondents, loving to shop, seeing items go to good use, and the ability to purchase hard-to-find items were other common motivators. See the appendix for detailed descriptives tables. Respondents also appeared to be shoppers, as they reported high membership in other BSTs, with an average group membership of 14 BST communities and active participation in six of those

groups on average. We divided respondents into two categories based on our hypotheses: buyers (33%) and buyer-sellers (67%). None identified as sellers exclusively. The following analysis compares buyers and buyer-sellers.

Results

Traditional Retail Spend. When comparing buyers and buyer-sellers, respondents who adopted the dual role of buyer-seller reported spending more on traditional retail purchases since becoming involved with BBST ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 3.62$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 3.96$, $t(610) = -2.34$, $p = .019$), thus supporting hypothesis 1.

Member Connection. We also found that buyer-sellers reported stronger connections to their fellow members than buyers ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 2.48$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 3.17$, $t(598) = -6.75$, $p < .001$), suggesting that increased involvement (i.e., adopting the dual role as buyer-seller) in the BBST community facilitated closer relationships, supporting hypothesis 2. We tested the mediation model, specifically whether member connection underlies the relationship between user type (buyer vs. buyer-seller) and traditional retail spend. Using the Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro (model 4 with 10,000 bootstrapped samples), results indicated that the indirect effect of user type on traditional retail spend was significant through member connection ($a \times b = .067$, 95% confidence interval: .027, .12).

Dark-Side Behaviors. When comparing buyers and buyer-sellers, results provided initial evidence for a licensing effect of BST involvement. First, buyer-sellers were more likely to purchase more because they could resell it later, providing additional evidence of BST involvement giving members a “license” to buy more ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 4.34$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 5.09$, $t(606) = -5.30$, $p < .001$). Additionally, buyer-sellers were more likely to feel regret over items purchased in the BST group ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 3.58$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 3.86$, $t(600) = -2.11$, $p = .034$). This could be due to the nature of the Facebook platform, such that new items are posted regularly, and there is a sense of immediacy in “getting the deal” that leads to impulsive purchases. We speculate that buyer-sellers may be more involved in general and therefore even more likely than buyers to be exposed to sales that they impulsively claim. With the safety net of a hypothetical future sale, buyer-sellers may have lower barriers on pulling the trigger to buy, resulting in more unnecessary purchases. Future research should further explore why increased involvement via buying and selling increases regret likelihood.

Brand Relationship Quality, Loyalty Intentions, and Individual Differences. While not central to our theory, we wanted to determine whether greater BBST involvement (i.e., buyer-seller dual role) had a positive impact on the brand beyond traditional retail spend. We found no difference between buyers and buyer-sellers on brand relationship quality ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 4.17$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 4.18$, $t(590) = -.14$, $p > .05$) nor loyalty intentions ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 6.15$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 6.18$, $t(583) = -.43$, $p > .05$), suggesting that BBST involvement affects retail spend but not the brand relationship itself. Additionally, results indicated no difference between the two groups on whether they were most likely to pursue deals ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 5.60$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 5.71$, $t(576) = -1.58$, $p > .05$) or their tendency toward impulsive behavior ($M_{\text{buyer}} = 3.77$ vs. $M_{\text{buyer-seller}} = 3.77$, $t(573) = -.032$, $p > .05$). In ruling out these related concepts, we find additional support for BBST involvement affecting greater traditional retail spend within the children's apparel category.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

One may be tempted to consider BBST as good for consumers (i.e., saving/making money) and bad for brands (i.e., undercutting traditional retail sales). Using field data from Facebook, qualitative interviews, and a survey of consumers, our research on BBST alternately suggests a rich phenomenon that is both unique from other related exchange contexts and meaningful in its impact on inter-member relationships and traditional retail behavior. We find that, like social shopping and brand communities, social bonds form between members. Surprisingly, results also reveal that members who play the dual role of buyer-seller, thus incorporating more transaction-based activities into their involvement (i.e., transactional engagement), actually feel stronger connections to their fellow members. Counter to initial assumptions, increased involvement as a buyer-seller also increases traditional retail purchases, suggesting the benefit of BBST in this changing retail environment.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

This article introduces and differentiates a new type of C2C exchange platform—BBST communities—as well as outlines both the straightforward and counterintuitive effects of involvement on brands and consumers. Our research also provides theoretical contributions to the literature on C2C exchange, brand communities, and consumer-brand relationships. We add to the limited research on consumers as resellers and how buying and selling roles affect relation-

ships between peers and with brands. Further, our work supports prior brand community research (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009; Lee et al. 2011; Laroche et al. 2012), demonstrating the close bonds that form between members and brands, even in the face of a transactional motivation for engagement with the community. We also add to the consumer engagement literature by defining and describing the process of transactional engagement, a unique feature of BBST communities in which communal relationships are built via transactional behavior (i.e., selling).

We also provide the first steps in answering the call for an increased understanding of how consumers' dual role as a buyer-seller in C2C exchange affects brand satisfaction and retention (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2010). We go beyond the oft-researched context of third-party mediators such as Amazon and eBay to provide insight into how C2C exchange can change consumers' relationship with a focal brand and its community. Further, this research also adds to the burgeoning area of marketing research on the blur between social and exchange norms (Scaraboto 2015). Whereas relationships used to be construed as either social or market-based, current research in social shopping has explored the blending of these two relationship types. Our research suggests that in BBST, a community grounded in transactions may follow an alternative path of membership development, simultaneously based in market and social interactions.

The existence of BBST has major implications for the traditional retail landscape. Although a brand's initial reaction to these activities can understandably be wary or even negative, the current research suggests that brands would benefit from approaching BBST from a more nuanced perspective, in that these activities do much more than represent lost sales for the brand. First, it is possible that BBST activities act as a sort of "gateway" into the brand, similar to consumers who are introduced to a brand via pirated or "knock off" luxury products (e.g., a fake Louis Vuitton purse; Ahuvia et al. 2013). For example, a consumer finds the original retail price too expensive but tries out the brand through a BBST exchange. Once the brand is accessible, it is possible that the individual will transition to traditional retail purchases, perhaps intending to resell the product(s) later. Further, BBSTs provide social proof (Cialdini 1987) that the brand must be liked/desired in the marketplace to be able to support this sort of downstream disposal activity. From a marketing research perspective, monitoring sales and comments/chatter in these groups can also provide valuable, candid, and reliable feedback on what consumers like about the brand and its products. Finally, brands might be able to find

creative ways to directly engage with these BBSTs. Possibilities could involve utilizing the BST community as a final selling ground for seconds or as a test market for new products.

Directions for Future Research

Perhaps most exciting about this new area of research are the various directions of future study that can be explored more deeply to understand the nature of BBST and its impacts on consumption, brands, and retailing. It will be important for researchers to understand the potential negative side of BBST interactions for consumers. Although the current research did not discover explicit evidence for compulsive consumption, the nature of the interactions clearly suggests this possibility as evidenced by our interviews and survey results, which indicated the occurrence of a licensing effect. Perhaps BBST can be a gateway into brand loyalty and love but also a dangerous purchase habit that can be difficult to suppress and lead to hoarding and overconsumption. Further, there are very interesting mental accounting avenues to explore. For example, BBST members might justify additional purchases in traditional retail settings or within the BBST community by having an intention to sell the products later (i.e., “spend now, save later” point of view). In light of these paradoxical dark-side behaviors, future research should also explore consumer protection and legal implications of such involvement.

Another important direction is to explore other product categories in an effort to discover what findings are universal to BBST involvement and to identify category-related differences as well. Children’s clothing is a popular category for BBST as the nature of the product ensures that a user is often ready to dispose of the product before its useful life has ended. Our descriptive research suggests that BBST in other categories is very healthy as well. In particular, the shoe category (featuring brands such as Nike) might reveal interesting differences as the exchanges tend to be of a more “collectible” nature. It is likely that some categories lend themselves even more to the uniqueness and the investing elements of BBST based on the type of product. While our exploratory research is, by nature, limited to one product category, we do see elements of collectability even in this domain, as certain items are designated as “unicorns” that are no longer available through traditional retail channels and therefore are sold out, very sought after, and able to garner resale prices well above original retail price. Still, we expect our findings—the increase in social bonds and closeness—to hold across different product categories, given the unique

nature of BBST as evoking both social and transactional engagement but that the intensity of these social outcomes will vary. As such, exploring additional categories is a rich area for future research. Further, we acknowledge that the three BBST groups from which the survey data were drawn may not be representative of all BBST groups, as the sample skewed highly female, middle-to-high income, and middle-aged. Future research should unpack whether the demographics of these communities are typical or idiosyncratic, relative to the greater BBST ecosystem.

Additionally, exploring differences between brand loyal customers who only buy through traditional avenues and BBST members will further illuminate our understanding of the outcomes of BST involvement. Comparing these two groups is a worthy challenge that future research should undertake in an effort to determine how the brand relationship is impacted and how critical the social element of BBST is to generating positive brand outcomes.

In the ecosystem of BBST, an individual IVDSO (in very desperate search of) a unicorn, someone hoping to save money on a high-quality brand, and another looking to recoup thousands from traditional retail spending all coexist in order to make this marketplace work. Understanding this unique phenomenon will provide insight into blended social/market-based exchanges. More importantly, BBST is not a subgenre of C2C e-commerce; rather, it truly is its own beast, which brands would do well to understand more thoroughly in order to gain value from these consumer-organized communities. Because these communities are not anonymous or geographically bound but are organized around brand admiration and market transactions, their study provides a fertile ground to determine how the interplay between social interactions and economic exchange has an impact on the traditional retail landscape.

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