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Diagnosing member-customer ostracism in co-operatives and counterpoising its relationship-poisoning effects

Theo Benos
Maastricht University, Maastricht, The Netherlands and Wageningen University and Research, Wageningen, The Netherlands

Nikos Kalogeras
Wageningen University and Research, Wageningen, The Netherlands and Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Ko de Ruyter
Faculty of Management, Cass Business School, City University London, London, UK and School of Marketing, UNSW Business School, UNSW Sydney, Australia, and

Martin Wetzels
Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management, Maastricht University, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine a core member-customer threat in co-operatives (co-ops) by drawing from ostracism research, assessing co-op ostracism's impact on critical membership and relational exchange outcomes and discussing why relationship marketing research needs to pay more attention to the overlooked role of implicit mistreatment forms in customer harm-doing.

Design/methodology/approach – Three studies were conducted. In Study 1, ostracism in co-ops was explored, and a measurement scale for co-op ostracism was developed. In Study 2, the core conceptual model was empirically tested with data from members of three different co-ops. In Study 3, a coping strategy was integrated into an extended model and empirically tested with a new sample of co-op members.

Findings – Ostracism is present in co-ops and "poisons" crucial relational (and membership) outcomes, despite the presence of other relationship-building or relationship-destroying accounts. Coupling entitativity with cognitive capital attenuates ostracism's impact.

Research limitations/implications – Inspired by co-ops' membership model and inherent relational advantage, this research is the first to adopt a co-op member-customer perspective and shed light on an implicit relationship-destroying factor.

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Practical implications – Co-op decision makers might use the diagnostic tool developed in the paper to detect ostracism and fight it. Moreover, a novel coping strategy for how co-ops (or other firms) might fend off ostracism threats is offered in the article.

Originality/value – The present study illuminates a dark side of a relationally profuse customer context, painting a more complete picture of relationship marketing determinants. Little attention has been given to ostracism as a distinct and important social behaviour in marketing research and to co-ops as a research context.

Keywords Relationship marketing, Co-operatives, Membership, Coping strategy, Relationship poison, Ostracism

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Co-operatives (co-ops) occupy a strong position globally, providing both economic and social returns. Just the world's largest 300 co-ops yield combined revenues of US$2.36tn (ICA, 2015). Co-ops are common in many business sectors (e.g. banking, agriculture, retailing), have over a billion members and employ more than 100 million people (Ernst and Young, 2012). In the USA and retail banking alone, credit unions total 100 million members and regularly outperform rivals (e.g. traditional banks) on customer satisfaction (McKinsey, 2012). The co-op model is a distinct, principles-based, people-centred business form, grounded on a membership structure, organised to meet member needs (Birchall, 2013; Puusa *et al.*, 2013). Members are co-op's core customers, but also those who own, finance and control it (Birchall, 2011). As such, they maintain a close relationship with the co-op, enjoying both economic benefits (e.g. determining the services/products offered) and social welfare (e.g. networking, community support) (Foreman and Whetten, 2002; Freathy and Hare, 2004). Inevitably, co-op survival, let alone co-op success, rest on relational assets like member-customer loyalty (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2014).

Despite their pervasiveness and high prospects, co-ops are faced with a member-related threat eroding their distinctive character. That is, member involvement and commitment are increasingly challenged by growing member disconnection, and declining stocks of influence and interaction (Harris, 2014; Nilsson *et al.*, 2012). A recent US study suggests that members' dissociation is rising (Kenkel and Fitzwater, 2012). The UK's traditionally largest co-op, The Co-operative Group, has recently experienced "an annus horribilis for the mutual model of business ownership", partly owing to members' neglect (Gray, 2014) and a crisis in membership commitment (Davis, 2016). Clearly, co-ops need to beware of the widening "membership distance", else they jeopardise their core advantage and distinguishing feature from other business models, namely, their relational proximity to member-customers (Ernst and Young, 2012). Therefore, understanding how co-op members perceive being left out, disconnected or unattended is crucial in helping co-op leadership to prevent attrition of co-ops' relational competitive advantage.

To address this issue, we turn to research on ostracism. Ostracism means being overlooked, ignored or excluded by other individuals or groups (Williams, 2001). It is a ubiquitous phenomenon, occurring across a broad range of social contexts (e.g. playgrounds, hallways, workplaces; cf. Nezlek *et al.*, 2015). Being ostracised in social groups is particularly aversive, unleashing a variety of physiological, cognitive, affective and behavioural responses (Lustenberger and Jagacinski, 2010; Williams and Nida, 2011). Notably, even minimal forms of ostracism elicit significant perceptions of social disconnection (Gerber and Wheeler, 2014; Jones *et al.*, 2011). Connection and inclusion are central facets of co-op philosophy (Mellor, 2009; Novkovic, 2008); thus, ostracism can strike at the heart of co-op principles, poisoning intra-group relationships, and distancing members from their co-op.

While extant literature has repeatedly emphasised the importance of membership in co-ops (Byrne *et al.*, 2015; Fulton, 1999; Kalogeras *et al.*, 2009), and has long documented the co-op model advantages and shortcomings (Nilsson, 2001; Novkovic, 2008), it has paid limited attention to the social components of membership or the view of members on such issues (Bhuyan, 2007). As a result, little is known about core co-op threats from a member-customer standpoint. The principal objective of this paper, therefore, is to provide a conceptual analysis of a core co-op threat by drawing from research on ostracism and assess its impact on important membership and relational exchange outcomes. More specifically, we contribute to the literature in two important ways.

First, we conceptualise and explore co-op ostracism, develop a measurement instrument and assess its psychometric properties. We also develop a core conceptual model to empirically assess co-op ostracism's distinct influence on two relational exchange outcomes that condition co-ops' ability to maintain the symbiotic relationship with their cardinal customers (i.e. withdrawal intentions [WI]) and expand their customer reach (i.e. and word-of-mouth [WOM]). The strong effects on both outcomes across three different co-op samples and types (i.e. agribusiness, retail banking, consumer) support our premise that ostracism presents a core threat to the core co-op relational advantage, acting as a "relationship poison" for both member-customers and the co-op itself. Our in-depth study of this relatively unexplored and implicit relationship-destroying factor in a *de facto* relationally profuse context advances our relationship marketing (RM) knowledge. It offers a fresh perspective on key RM elements like customer membership and, at the same time, offers a fresh critique of RM's *implicit* harmful effects. All RM efforts necessitate action, which time and again leads directly or indirectly to perceptions of customer mistreatment (e.g. exclusion) (Nguyen, 2012). What remains relatively unexplored is the dark side behaviour of RM (Payne and Frow, 2017), particularly how customers perceive and react to mistreatment related to *inaction*. Implicit and often inadvertent harm-doing might be best explained by ostracism, which, albeit a relational phenomenon, involves the omission, rather than the commission of behaviour (Robinson *et al.*, 2013; Williams, 2009).

Second, we develop a strategy to buffer ostracism' adverse effect on exchange outcomes. We follow the lead of recent ostracism studies which explore coping strategies, such as how to soothe the distress caused by ostracism (Wu *et al.*, 2012; Zwolinski, 2014) or how to reduce its aversive impacts (Lelieveld *et al.*, 2012; Tang and Richardson, 2013). In a separate follow-up study, we develop and test an extended core conceptual framework that centres on the joint protective benefit of perceived "groupness" (i.e. entitativity) and social capital's shared aspect (i.e. cognitive capital). We posit that cognitive capital reinforces group entitativity and empirically verify that their coupling appeases co-op ostracism's influence on WI. Our approach extends the nomological network of RM with a cognitive-based intervention, which has important implications for relationship-building strategies, demonstrating that the (primarily cognitive) sense of community and mutuality serves as an effective "antidote" against the deleterious effects of customer disconnection.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. We first review the extant literature on ostracism and define co-op ostracism. Subsequently, we develop the core conceptual model and derive the hypotheses. Next, we present the three empirical studies included in the article. In Study 1, we describe how we explored co-op ostracism and developed a scale to measure it. In Study 2, we empirically test our core conceptual framework with data from three different co-ops. In Study 3, we examine the suggested coping strategy and the extended core conceptual model. Finally, we conclude this article with theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical background

Co-op membership, ostracism features and ostracism robustness

"Membership" is the central element of co-op enterprises that are jointly owned and democratically controlled by persons who choose to join them to meet their needs directly (ICA, 2013). Many enterprises attempt to emulate co-op membership by inviting customers to join loyalty schemes, club card packages, referral reward programmes and user communities. Moreover, several companies even adopt a membership structure (e.g. membership associations) with RM being vital for success (Vincent and Webster, 2013). Co-op membership differs, however, as its centrality renders co-ops value-to-members maximisers (Birchall, 2011; Puusa *et al.*, 2013). Also, unlike co-op membership, conventional RM arrangements or membership associations do not grant customers rights of ownership or much involvement in business decision-making. Unsurprisingly, co-ops are predominantly concerned with increasing, holding and benefiting from a loyal member-customer base (Kalogeras *et al.*, 2009). This fills both a central business aim – tapping member contribution and commitment – and the social purposes of providing members with a sense of inclusion, participation and community, as well as the opportunity to co-decide about several issues (e.g. what services are offered) (Foreman and Whetten, 2002; Freathy and Hare, 2004; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2014; Mellor, 2009).

Undermining or simply disregarding these co-op membership aspects is likely to form a "distance" between the members and the co-op, and poison their relationship. Drawing on ostracism research and adopting an individual member perspective seem best to shed light on such social exchange-based and exclusionary membership hazards. Social ostracism is defined as ignoring and excluding one or more individuals (Williams, 2001). Although some may think it is an extreme or infrequent event, people experience about one ostracism episode every day (Nezlek *et al.*, 2015). Individuals are ostracised in interpersonal friendships and relationships (Poulsen and Carmon, 2015), by close others or strangers (Nezlek *et al.*, 2012), by in-group or out-group members (Gómez *et al.*, 2011), online (Wolf *et al.*, 2015), in workplaces (Scott *et al.*, 2013; Wu *et al.*, 2011) and in marketplaces (Mattila *et al.*, 2013; Mead *et al.*, 2011).

Ostracism has distinct features which set it apart from physical or verbal altercations (e.g. bullying, harassment) and point to its unique nature and effects (Williams and Nida, 2011). First, ostracism is defined by acts of omission (Robinson *et al.*, 2013). That is, it is characterised by the absence of positive attention and wanted behaviour rather than the presence of negative attention or unwanted behaviour (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2014; Rajchert and Winiewski, 2016). This is why it reduces social interaction, in contrast to other social mistreatment behaviours (e.g. assault), which are interactional by nature (Cullen *et al.*, 2012). Second, ostracism's underlying motives vary, making it more ambiguous than other forms of social disdain (Lustenberger and Jagacinski, 2010; Zadro *et al.*, 2005). For example, individuals may ostracise a target to defend against being punished themselves (i.e. defensive ostracism) or because they might dislike something the target did (i.e. punitive ostracism; Poulsen and Carmon, 2015). Ostracism need not be intentional, however. People may simply overlook others (i.e. oblivious ostracism; Nezlek *et al.*, 2012). A precise cause cannot always be determined; thus, the motives ostracism targets infer might differ and trigger further ambiguity (Robinson *et al.*, 2013; Tang and Richardson, 2013). As ostracism perception is self-based and people have a tendency to over-detect it (Williams, 2009), it should not be surprising that its most aversive aspect is probably the enigma of whether one is purposefully ostracised and, if so, why.

Ostracism is not only general and unique but also remarkably impactful. Even seemingly innocuous forms of ostracism like information exclusion have psychological and behavioural consequences (Jones *et al.*, 2011). In the past 15 years, numerous studies

(Costantini and Ferri, 2013; Critcher and Zayas, 2014; Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Hitlan *et al.*, 2006; Wesselmann *et al.*, 2015; Williams, 2001; Zadro *et al.*, 2005) have consistently demonstrated that ostracism thwarts fundamental social needs (i.e. belonging, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence) and entails devastating personal, social and clinical effects (Poon *et al.*, 2013; Wolf *et al.*, 2015). The strength and robustness of ostracism have strikingly been manifested in organisational and consumer behaviour. In organisational settings, it has repeatedly been associated with negative psychological and behavioural outcomes, such as psychological distress (e.g. job tension; Wu *et al.*, 2012), lower work engagement (Leunga *et al.*, 2011), less in-role behaviour (e.g. lower job performance; Wu *et al.*, 2011), less extra-role behaviour (e.g. lowered organisational citizenship behaviours; Hitlan *et al.*, 2006), higher counterproductive work actions (e.g. hostility towards colleagues; Zhao *et al.*, 2013), higher employee turnover (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2014) and a negative spillover effect on family satisfaction (Liu *et al.*, 2013). Likewise, in consumer settings, ostracism spawns undesirable responses. It entices people to spend and consume strategically (e.g. buying symbolic products; Mead *et al.*, 2011), increases unhealthy food consumption (Salvy *et al.*, 2011) and exacerbates financial risk-taking (Duclos *et al.*, 2013). A mere "automatic reply e-mail" to customer complaints (i.e. a form of cyberostracism) has been found enough to inflict negative customer reactions (Mattila *et al.*, 2013). In summary, both workplace and marketplace ostracism undermine personal well-being, unleashing diverse adverse responses.

Ostracism in co-ops and the definition of co-op ostracism

Being left out or even merely unattended can be expected to be profoundly distressing to people who voluntarily join a co-op group and anticipate finding themselves cherished. Even in simple membership associations, members crave for recognition (Vincent and Webster, 2013). Co-op membership implies a special relationship between the co-op and the people whose needs it is established to serve. The inherent relational advantage creates high expectations (Byrne *et al.*, 2015; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2014). Ostracism probably disconfirms such expectations and sets the stage for negative reactions, tainting the underlying relationship and poisoning relational assets like membership maintenance.

It is not unusual that co-op members experience the extreme or complete form of ostracism (i.e. forced exit), rooted in its ancient origins[1], especially when they systematically free ride on collective benefits (Nilsson, 2001). Nevertheless, as we have detailed above, the phenomenon of ostracism is typically represented by less dramatic behaviours (e.g. simply overlooking someone) or partial forms (e.g. being out-of-the-loop). We attest to this dominant approach of *partial* ostracism and, considering that the genetic code of co-ops is marked by the combination of market and social components, we also integrated elements which reflect the distinctive features of co-ops' value proposition (e.g. satisfying both individual and social needs, giving voice, information access). As the primary users and sole owners, but also as an integral part of the membership camaraderie, co-op member-customers anticipate individual attention and interest, response to their requests, access to information, and voice, among others. So, we view such social-market elements as the core reflective indicators of ostracism in co-ops and given their interrelatedness we expect them to form a unidimensional construct. Based on the defining characteristic of omission explained above (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2014), associated with the inherent ambiguity ostracism encompasses (Robinson *et al.*, 2013), we assume that their absence or low levels might infer perceptions of neglecting, ostracising conduct. In brief, we define co-op ostracism *as the perception of a member-customer that he or she is being subjected to neglecting behaviours* (e.g. *lack of attention, response, interaction, voice, concern for interests and treatment) by others within the co-op*.

We anticipate that ostracism might be perpetrated by a variety of sources within the co-op, such as by other members, board members, employees or managers. In line with past research (e.g. most workplace ostracism studies), we do not distinguish between sources, though. Besides, a one-person exclusion is adequate to elicit negative outcomes against all others (Gaertner *et al.*, 2008), even against inclusive ones (Chernyak and Zayas, 2010; Critcher and Zayas, 2014).

Core conceptual framework

In our central conceptual model, we focussed on two key relational exchange outcomes, namely, the expectation of continuity and WOM, for two reasons. First, as both are among the most common outcomes expected from RM efforts (Aurier and N'Goala, 2010; Choi and Choi, 2014; Verma *et al.*, 2016; Vincent and Webster, 2013), and second, as both can be critical in view of member centrality in the co-op context. If co-ops are not able to maintain their member-customer base or to renew it, their survival is at stake (Hernández-Espallardo *et al.*, 2013; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2014). Hence, the expectation of discontinuity through the (reverse) measure of WI may damage membership, while WOM may foster it. We supplement our framework with a relationship-building concept and a competing account to ostracism. That is, we also examine whether ostracism reduces the likelihood of continuing the relationship or referring the co-op, over and above "trust" and "social undermining", respectively. The former is considered a vital determinant of relationship success and is one of the most frequently studied constructs in RM research (Aurier and N'Goala, 2010; Verma *et al.*, 2016). The latter is also an insidious form of social mistreatment, though flagrant and interactional (Duffy *et al.*, 2002; Ferris *et al.*, 2008). We aim to test whether trust or social undermining can overshadow ostracism's toxic effects (Figure 1).

Perhaps the prime reason why ostracism will hurt membership outcomes is its conflict with top co-op priorities, like the sense of inclusion, attention and treatment (Nilsson, 2001; Novkovic, 2008). Though a subtle form of exclusion and mistreatment, ostracism presents a salient experience of being left out, violating individuals' expectancies of being included (Gerber and Wheeler, 2014; Poon *et al.*, 2013; Svetieva *et al.*, 2015). The purposeful or unintentional failure of co-op participants to act in ways that make members feel included or enjoy membership benefits (e.g. being attended to, having their voice heard) can be rather distressing. Reaction to ostracism often involves withdrawal (Ren *et al.*, 2016; Wesselmann *et al.*, 2015; Williams, 2001), such as employee turnover (O'Reilly *et al.*, 2014) or adversarial demeanour (Poon and Chen, 2014; Williams, 2001), such as displaced aggression (Rajchert and Winiewski, 2016). Ostracism can thus be expected to inflict member-customer ill-disposed responses (Poon *et al.*, 2013), like withdrawal thoughts or reluctance to praise the co-op group to other people. Formally, we hypothesise:

H1. Ostracism has (a) a positive effect on WI and (b) a negative effect on WOM.

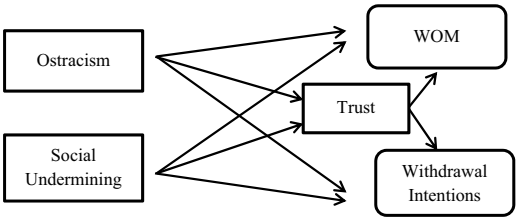

Figure 1.
Core conceptual framework

The role of trust has been the focus of many studies dealing with relationships in markets and has been shown to play an essential role in relationship building and maintenance (Aurier and N'Goala, 2010; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Nguyen, 2012). In the co-op context, trust between co-op participants (e.g. members, BoD members, managers) is crucial (Byrne *et al.*, 2015; Nilsson, 2001; Nilsson *et al.*, 2012). In this article, we treat trust as a cognitive expectation represented by a member-customer's confidence in others' reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In customer relationships, trust is regularly used to explain an individual's behaviour towards the actual value provider (Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002). Hence, we expect that if a co-op member thinks that others within the co-op can be relied on, he or she will also behave favourably towards what they jointly derive value from (i.e. the co-op itself). Central to the fundamental role of trust within exchange relationships is the tenet that it reduces behavioural uncertainty related to the actions of others (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Nguyen, 2012; Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002).

Ostracism, however, reflects the *in*action of others, described as a "non-behaviour" (Rajchert and Winiewski, 2016; Williams, 2009). As a result, neglecting to act in ways that engage co-op members might add a different kind of uncertainty that instead disengages them. This is why we expect ostracism to exert undue influence on relational exchange outcomes, no matter what the effects of trust might be. In other words, ostracism perceptions might partially destroy the relationship that trust helps to build and maintain. Of course, we cannot rule out that ostracism's influence is partly interceded by trust, which has repeatedly been shown to be a pivotal mediator of relationship maintenance and development (Aurier and N'Goala, 2010; Vincent and Webster, 2013). All in all, we anticipate that ostracism serves as a nonmatching extension to the explanation of relational-building factors (like trust), and should still significantly affect WI and WOM after accounting for the direct effects of trust. We, therefore, hypothesise:

H2. Ostracism has significant direct effects on (a) WI and (b) WOM, after accounting for the direct effects of trust.

Social rejection and ostracism are terms that are often used interchangeably (Wesselmann *et al.*, 2015). Even though each has specifically associated research paradigms, their fundamental theoretical premises are all compatible with research on social rejection, exclusion and especially mistreatment (Svetieva *et al.*, 2015; Zwolinski, 2014). Social undermining is not only a form of social rejection but also an insidious social mistreatment form like ostracism (Ferris *et al.*, 2008). Unlike ostracism behaviours, social undermining ones (e.g. insults) are overt and allow targets know why they are mistreated. Ostracised targets, in contrast, commonly report abhorring the ambiguity inherent in ostracism episodes (e.g. whether it is purposeful, the reason for its use; Nezlek *et al.*, 2015). We expect ostracism to have a profound effect on relational exchange outcomes, despite the likely presence of competing mistreatment behaviour like social undermining. Besides, co-op members' ingrained need for connection with their co-op can be principally thwarted by ostracism, which habitually provokes heightened social disconnection (Gerber and Wheeler, 2014; Mead *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, we do not expect ostracism or social undermining to outperform or offset one another, thus, we do not formulate a particular hypothesis. We just set to confirm that co-op ostracism maintains its influence on critical exchange outcomes (and essential elements for co-op membership) even when other mistreatment behaviours might be manifest.

Study 1: exploring ostracism in co-ops and developing a measurement instrument

In the absence of a validated self-report instrument and to better capture perceptions of ostracism experiences in the co-op context, we conducted Study 1. Before testing the core

conceptual model and the derived hypotheses, we performed a separate study to develop and validate a new scale as well as to explore whether co-op members' and experts' conceptions of ostracism were similar to our conceptualisation. As conventional practices for scale development efforts require extensive reporting, which is not feasible within the scope of this article, we present the detailed outcomes in the Web Appendix.

We followed a six-step process. We used the first three steps for item generation, screening and reduction, and also to confront our conceptualisation with members' (Step 2) and experts' (Step 3) notions, respectively. Next, we further selected items based on a suitability task (Step 4) and an item-sort task (Step 5). In Step 6, we collected data from three different industries (i.e. retail banking, agribusiness and consumer co-op) to provide evidence regarding the factor structure, scale reliability and the overall construct validity. We targeted the three most popular co-op sectors globally and relied on International Cooperative Alliance's (ICA) categorisation and reports (ICA, 2015). These three collectively accounted for 64 per cent of all sectors in 2013 global turnover terms (27, 21 and 16 per cent, respectively). In Step 7, we found discrete support for the scale's external reliability (i.e. test-retest). The resulting scale contained nine items (see Appendix). Study 1 findings not only supported its reliability and validity but also provided initial evidence that ostracism is fairly common in co-op life.

Study 2: testing the core conceptual framework

In Study 2, we set to test our overarching conceptual framework and empirically assess our hypotheses. That is, we empirically examined whether ostracism acts as a relationship-destroying aspect despite the presence of a relationship-building factor (i.e. trust) and that of a competing social mistreatment account (i.e. social undermining).

Method

We recruited respondents from Study 1 samples and offered them the chance to win vouchers redeemable at the co-op stores. Collection lasted three months and yielded a total of 573 responses (Table I). We generated fewer responses in more time than in Study 1 because we introduced a temporal separation between the focal construct (i.e. ostracism) and all the rest, following MacKenzie and Podsakoff's (2012) suggestion to diminish memory availability.

A three-item WOM scale (Choi and Choi, 2014) was adapted to measure the extent to which member-customers were willing to recommend the co-op to others. WI were examined by adapting three items from Jensen *et al.*'s (2013) turnover intentions measure, gauging members' propensity to withdraw from the co-op. We measured trust with four items capturing reliability and integrity of others in the co-op (i.e. other members, BoD members and employees) (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). To measure social undermining, we picked four items that had not only demonstrated the highest substantive validity in Study 1 but also reflected behaviours of explicit mistreatment (e.g. "others belittle you or your ideas"; Duffy *et al.*, 2002). All measures were reflective. Finally, we controlled for age, gender, length of membership, patronage and participation in committees, all of which were likely to be associated with the intention to (dis)continue co-op membership as well as to refer the co-op to others. Age and length of membership were self-reported in years. Patronage was also self-reported but varied across samples (see Table I notes). Gender and participation in committees were dummy-coded (i.e. male = "0", female = "1"; no participation = "0", participation = "1"). The means, standard deviations, and correlations appear in Table I. All constructs and measurement items can be found in Appendix.

Sample	Source	*N*	Gender	Average age	Average length of membership	Average patronage[a]	Committee participation
A	Agribusiness co-op	146	57% male	35	4.3 years	81%	31% yes
B	Financial services co-op	301	72% male	45	10 years	13 shares	22% yes
C	Consumer co-op	126	59% male	48	3.9 years	54%	23% yes

	M	SD	√AVE	SCR	1	2	3	4	5
Sample A									
1 Co-op ostracism	2.53	1.65	0.90	0.98	(0.97)				
2 Social undermining	2.31	0.97	0.81	0.89	0.36	(0.88)			
3 Trust	5.39	0.95	0.74	0.83	−0.36	−0.70	(0.83)		
4 WI	2.36	1.12	0.81	0.85	0.54	0.59	−0.58	(0.84)	
5 WOM	5.70	1.10	0.86	0.89	−0.52	−0.58	0.59	−0.65	(0.89)
Sample B									
1 Co-op ostracism	2.07	1.26	0.83	0.95	(0.95)				
2 Social undermining	2.80	1.18	0.91	0.95	0.51	(0.95)			
3 Trust	5.20	1.09	0.78	0.86	−0.51	−0.63	(0.85)		
4 WI	2.66	1.30	0.88	0.91	0.59	0.53	−0.57	(0.89)	
5 WOM	5.60	1.22	0.93	0.95	−0.52	−0.44	0.51	−0.63	(0.95)
Sample C									
1 Co-op ostracism	1.98	1.16	0.85	0.96	(0.95)				
2 Social undermining	2.21	0.78	0.70	0.78	0.46	(0.75)			
3 Trust	5.74	0.84	0.84	0.90	−0.45	−0.57	(0.90)		
4 WI	2.23	1.08	0.88	0.91	0.59	0.41	−0.52	(0.91)	
5 WOM	6.26	0.84	0.84	0.87	−0.50	−0.45	0.53	−0.60	(0.86)

Table I.
Study 2 descriptive statistics and correlations

Notes: WI = withdrawal intentions; WOM = word of mouth; AVE = average variance extracted; SCR = scale composite reliability; Scale alpha reliabilities are given on the diagonal (in parentheses); All correlations significant at $p < 0.001$ two-tailed; [a]For sample B, we were not given permission to measure the % of use members do with their co-op. We thus used a proxy, namely, the number of shares people retain in the co-op. For sample A, patronage refers to the share of wallet in services terms, while for sample C, to the share of wallet in product terms

Results

We performed structural equation modelling analyses, using AMOS 23. We first conducted a CFA to provide support for the construct validity of our scale measures. We tested the degree of fit of the five-factor measurement model with the same fit indices as in Study 1. All fit measures adhered to recommended benchmarks ($\chi^2[220] = 404.8, p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 1.84$ for sample A; $\chi^2[220] = 435.9, p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 1.98$ for sample B; $\chi^2[220] = 389.1, p < 0.01$; $\chi^2/df = 1.76$ for sample C; and ranges of CFI = 0.93 – 0.97, NNFI = 0.92 – 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06 – 0.08, SRMR = 0.04 – 0.06). All factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$; see Table AI) and AVEs for all constructs were greater than 0.50, in support of convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also established, as √AVE was greater than the

correlation between any constructs. Scale composite reliabilities ranged from 0.78 to 0.98 and scale alpha reliabilities from 0.75 to 0.97 (Table I).

We then examined if common method variance was inherent in the data set. Of course, the temporal separation we applied was already a first step in dealing with common method bias. Moreover, we implemented the procedural remedies of Study 1 (e.g. psychological separation, spatial separation, anonymity assurance). However, we still performed an empirical check using the bi-factor procedure (Chen *et al.*, 2006; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003; Williams *et al.*, 1989). According to the latter, an unmeasured general method factor is added to a t-traits factor (latent constructs) model and is compared to a model with just the t-traits factor specification. Our analyses showed that while the method factor did improve model fit in all three samples ($\Delta\chi^2[21] = 49.23$, $\Delta\chi^2[21] = 99.03$, $\Delta\chi^2[21] = 75.75$, $p < 0.05$), it accounted for only a small portion of variance (i.e. 4.39, 7.39 and 7.86 per cent, respectively), which was much lower than the 25 per cent suggested by Williams *et al.* (1989). Moreover, the trait factor loadings were significant and almost intact after the method effects were partialled out. These results were fully indicative that common method variance was not an inhibiting element in testing the hypotheses.

Next, we estimated the structural model (Table II). The control variables were included by adding direct paths from them to each of the two dependent variables. Only patronage exhibited a somewhat strong influence on WI for samples A and C ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < 0.001$, $\beta = -0.15$, $p < 0.05$) and on WOM for sample A ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$). This should not be

	Sample A		Sample B		Sample C	
	Std. β	p	Std. β	p	Std. β	p
Control variable paths						
Gender → WI	0.08	(ns)	0.06	(ns)	0.07	(ns)
Age → WI	−0.04	(ns)	0.08	(ns)	−0.09	(ns)
Length of membership → WI	−0.11	(ns)	−0.08	(ns)	−0.03	(ns)
Patronage → WI	−0.37	***	−0.03	(ns)	−0.15	*
Committee participation → WI	−0.01	(ns)	−0.01	(ns)	0.02	(ns)
Gender → WOM	−0.06	(ns)	−0.02	(ns)	0.04	(ns)
Age → WOM	−0.05	(ns)	0.01	(ns)	−0.11	(ns)
Length of membership → WOM	0.13	(ns)	0.05	(ns)	0.09	(ns)
Patronage → WOM	0.18	**	0.07	(ns)	0.01	(ns)
Committee participation → WOM	−0.01	(ns)	0.06	(ns)	0.13	(ns)
Hypothesized paths						
Co-op ostracism → WI	0.37	***	0.39	***	0.51	***
Co-op ostracism → WOM	−0.33	***	−0.29	***	−0.37	***
Trust → WI	−0.59	***	−0.42	***	−0.39	***
Trust → WOM	0.67	***	0.45	***	0.37	**
Other paths						
Co-op ostracism → Trust	−0.16	*	−0.30	***	−0.26	**
Social undermining → Trust	−0.72	***	−0.53	***	−0.61	***
Social undermining → WI	0.02	(ns)	0.06	(ns)	0.06	(ns)
Social undermining → WOM	0.07	(ns)	−0.01	(ns)	−0.07	(ns)
R^2 WI	0.73		0.60		0.53	
R^2 WOM	0.60		0.45		0.42	

Notes: WI = withdrawal intentions; WOM = word of mouth; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$, ns = nonsignificant

Table II. Parameter estimates and significance levels

surprising as member discontent is routinely associated with lower co-op patronage rates (Bhuyan, 2007). For sample B, we could only use a proxy (see Table I notes) to measure patronage, which might explain why it had no influence.

Based on the model estimates, ostracism had a strong effect on both outcomes across the three samples (WI: $\beta = 0.37$ [A], $\beta = 0.39$ [B], $\beta = 0.51$ [C], all $ps < 0.001$; WOM: $\beta = -0.33$ [A], $\beta = -0.29$ [B], $\beta = -0.37$ [C], all $ps < 0.001$), offering full support to *H1*. Furthermore, in support of *H2*, ostracism's influence remained strong, despite the robust effect of trust on both WI ($\beta = -0.59$ [A], $\beta = -0.42$ [B], $\beta = -0.39$ [C], all $ps < 0.001$) and WOM ($\beta = 0.67$ [A], $\beta = 0.45$ [B], $\beta = 0.37$ [C], all $ps < 0.001$). Ostracism had an effect on trust too, albeit weaker. Interestingly, social undermining had a strong negative relationship with trust, but its direct effects on both outcomes were all insignificant (Table II). Mediation paths were constructed using the bootstrapped confidence interval procedure, whereby the 95 per cent bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) of the indirect effects were obtained with 5,000 bootstrapped resamples (Cullen *et al.*, 2012; Hayes, 2009). The indirect effects of ostracism-trust-WI (or WOM), as well as these of social undermining-trust-WI (or WOM), were all significant across the three samples (i.e. the 95 per cent CI did not contain zero). Consequently, trust partially mediated the influence of ostracism and fully that of social undermining.

To substantiate that ostracism provides added value beyond trust, we considered the additional variance explained in WI and WOM when we added it to a structural model that included trust and the control variables. We found that the trust-only model explained 60.2 per cent (sample A), 44.6 per cent (sample B) and 37.8 per cent (sample C) of variance in WI, and 50.2, 34.3 and 35.2 per cent in WOM. Adding ostracism to this model increased the variance explained to 71.2, 56.3, 50.5 in WI, and 58.6, 40.6 and 40.7 per cent in WOM, respectively. Additionally, chi-square difference tests indicated that, in all cases, the fit for the enriched model was significantly better than the fit for the trust-only model ($\Delta\chi^2[133] = 202.19$ and $\Delta\chi^2[133] = 227.44$, $p < 0.05$ for sample A; $\Delta\chi^2[133] = 280.53$ and $\Delta\chi^2[133] = 307.07$, $p < 0.05$ for sample B; and $\Delta\chi^2[133] = 233.52$ and $\Delta\chi^2[133] = 212.1$, $p < 0.05$ for sample C). We, therefore, concluded that ostracism's influence on relational outcomes was genuine.

Overall, Study 2 findings indicate that ostracism consistently "poisons" crucial relational outcomes. It acts as a relationship-destroying element notwithstanding the rock-solid effects of the relationship-building factor of trust. Trust typically serves to reduce behavioural uncertainties in exchange relationships, but ostracism and its inherent ambiguity seem to add a different kind of uncertainty that is not easy to match. In other words, the relationship poison of ostracism does not seem to be really "absorbed" by trust, which instead appears to captivate unambiguous social mistreatment effects like these of social undermining.

Study 3: an "antidote" to the ostracism poison: the extended core model

After showcasing ostracism's distinct nature and added value on critical co-op elements, we attempted to develop a coping strategy. Understanding how to cope with ostracism is vital because effective coping strategies may trim or even exterminate the effects of ostracism on individuals (Williams and Nida, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2012). In the search for successful coping responses, scholars have explored several practices, such as financial compensation (Lelieveld *et al.*, 2012), turning to religion (Aydin *et al.*, 2010) and subsequent social inclusion efforts (Tang and Richardson, 2013). Also, personal characteristics have been examined, such as the moderating effect of just-world beliefs (Poon and Chen, 2014), political skill and proactive personality (Zhao *et al.*, 2013) and identity fusion (Gómez *et al.*, 2011). In contrast to extant research which has taken an individual-self perspective, we rather focussed on how

to neutralise the impact of ostracism on member WI from a group perspective. We followed a social perception approach and placed the emphasis on the joint protective benefits of perceived groupness and the shared perspective of social capital, represented by the concepts of "entitativity" and "cognitive capital", respectively.

Social perception varies from the individual level, in which persons serve as the perceptual unit and are treated as distinct agents, to the group level, in which social groups serve as the perceptual unit and individual members are considered undifferentiated and interchangeable (Gaertner *et al.*, 2008). Campbell (1958) coined the term "entitativity" to convey that aggregates of persons vary in the extent to which they are perceived as a cohesive whole or entity. Family members, for instance, might be perceived more entity- or group-like than a project team. When an aggregate of persons is seen as an entity, its members are expected to behave more consistently and may be considered more similar to one another (Vock *et al.*, 2013). Perceived entitativity promotes the integration of group representations (Gaertner *et al.*, 2008), enhances judgments of collective responsibility (Lickel *et al.*, 2003) and, notably, promotes favourable attitudes and actions towards a group when that is in-group (Gaertner *et al.*, 2006). Co-op members voluntarily join their co-op association. Hence, the latter can be perceived as an entity-like in-group. In turn, members can be expected to hold favourable associations towards the co-op when perceived entitativity is salient. Therefore, if the "groupness" of a co-op group is solid when members are glued in a coherent unit, ostracism's influence on relational outcomes might wane.

The cognitive dimension of social capital is symbolic of shared goals, values and vision between exchange actors in a social system (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). It facilitates the development of common understandings and collective ideologies, outlining norms for parties to coordinate their exchange, and comprehend the synergistic potential of the relationship. This, in turn, enables the alignment of interests and the attainment of collective outcomes (Villenaa *et al.*, 2011). In a related vein, cognitive capital in co-ops probably serves to increase the level of understanding among co-op actors (e.g. members, employees, managers) and stimulate a "self-interest collectively expressed" (Birchall, 2011). Besides, successful co-ops unite their membership into a common purpose (Birchall, 2011; Fulton, 1999; Nilsson, 2001).

Several characteristics influence individuals' perceptions of entitativity, such as interpersonal similarity, interpersonal bonds, sharing a common fate (e.g. collective goals) and collective movement (Campbell, 1958; Gaertner *et al.*, 2006). In a co-op, members cannot develop strong interpersonal bonds with many others. They share a common fate with each other to a great extent, however, as they pursue common goals on top of individual interests while they often have a similar philosophy or a shared vision (i.e. this implying high cognitive capital). In fact, co-ops are a form of collective movement. Hence, we expect cognitive capital to fuel entitativity and their joint effect to reinforce the "groupness" of a co-op group. In that respect, cognitive capital might provide the *mutual lens* (e.g. shared goals, philosophy, vision) through which a co-op group is viewed as an entity-like one by its member-customers, eventually deflecting threats from neglecting acts that distance them from their co-op. Moreover, entitativity typically shifts the attention from the self to the group, from the single to the common. Coupling cognitive capital with entitativity could probably divert members' attention even further from the self to the group, from individual to mutual interest. This could serve as a mindful-based intervention that buffers the influence of ostracism on WI, "condensing" the distance between co-op participants while actively promoting the common sense of purpose. We hypothesised:

H3. Cognitive capital moderates the moderating effect of entitativity on the relationship between co-op ostracism and WI. High entitativity coupled with high cognitive capital leads to the weakest relationship, while low entitativity combined with low cognitive capital results in the strongest relationship (Figure 2).

Method

We sampled member-customers from a South-eastern European agribusiness supply co-op. Data were collected using procedures identical to the previous studies. A total of 225 responses were generated, yet 205 were usable. Of the participating members, 65 per cent were male, the mean age was 39.5 years (SD = 11.5), the mean membership tenure was 6.9 years (SD = 5.05), 19.5 per cent participated in at least one committee, and the mean patronage was 82.6 per cent (SD = 17.12). As a result, the sample was consistent with the demographic characteristics of Studies 1 and 2.

We once again adapted existing reflective measures (see Appendix). We also controlled for customer-company identification (CCI). It represents a connection between a customer's sense of self and an organisation (Homburg *et al.*, 2009) and can be a rival account of entitativity. However, it primarily focuses on the self, providing little information about the relationships among other group members, and is thus conceptually different from entitativity. To measure it, we used four items from Homburg *et al.*'s (2009) CCI scale.

Results

To check the convergent and discriminant validity among all constructs (including CCI), we conducted a CFA with maximum likelihood estimation. The five-factor model provided an acceptable fit (χ^2[199] = 489.5, χ^2/df = 2.46, CFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.91, SRMR = 0.045, RMSEA = 0.08). In support of convergent validity, all factor loadings were significant ($p <$ 0.001). We also conducted Fornell and Larcker's (1981) test for discriminant validity. According to Table III – which also provides the means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities and correlations for the study variables – the square root of the AVE for each construct was larger than the correlation between the respective constructs. This means that the distinction of the constructs was evident. Moreover, all of the constructs were associated in the direction expected.

Following Cohen *et al.* (2003), we conducted a five-step hierarchical multiple regression analysis to test our hypothesis. We first entered the control variables, followed by co-op ostracism in the second step. In the third step, we entered entitativity and cognitive capital. We next introduced the three two-way interaction terms. Finally, we entered the three-way interaction term in the fifth step for predicting WI. Before the analysis, all continuous measures were mean-centred to reduce any multicollinearity. Table IV presents the regression results.

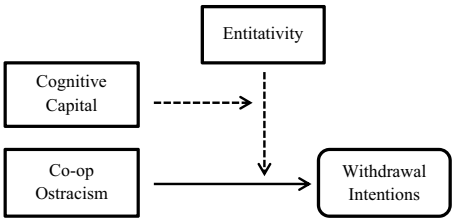

Figure 2.
Conceptual framework of a co-op ostracism coping strategy

Constructs	M	SD	AVE	SCR	SAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Age	39.47	11.49	–	–	–	–							
2 LoM	6.90	5.05	–	–	–	0.56**	–						
3 Patronage	82.59	17.12	–	–	–	−0.09	−0.05	–					
4 CCI	5.04	1.20	0.60	0.85	0.85	−0.13	−0.09	0.11	*0.77*				
5 Co-Os	3.07	1.46	0.67	0.95	0.94	0.06	0.09	−0.02	−0.54**	*0.82*			
6 Ent	4.83	1.53	0.73	0.89	0.89	−0.08	0.03	0.04	0.60**	−0.52**	*0.85*		
7 CogCa	5.03	1.30	0.65	0.85	0.84	−0.10	−0.08	0.11	0.46**	−0.47**	0.58**	*0.81*	
8 WI	2.84	1.24	0.64	0.84	0.83	0.05	0.11	−0.20**	−0.58**	0.58**	−0.56**	−0.64**	*0.80*

Notes: LoM = length of membership; CCI = customer-company identification; Co-Os = co-op ostracism; Ent = entitativity; CogCa = cognitive capital; WI = withdrawal intentions; AVE = average variance extracted; SCR = scale composite reliability; SAR = scale alpha reliability; Square root of the AVE along the diagonal –; *$p < 0.01$; **$p < 0.001$

Table III.
Means, standard deviations, correlations, and assessment of discriminant validity

Variables	Withdrawal intentions as dependent variable (standardised β) Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Control variables					
Gender	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01
Age	−0.10	−0.08	−0.10	−0.10	−0.11*
LoM	0.11	0.08	0.10	0.08	0.08
ComPar	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.03
Patronage	−0.14*	−0.16**	−0.14**	−0.12**	−0.10*
CCI	−0.56**	−0.35**	−0.20**	−0.10	−0.09
Independent variables					
Co-os		0.38**	0.24**	0.22**	0.29**
Ent			−0.12	−0.14*	−0.18*
CogCa			−0.35**	−0.46**	−0.49**
Two-way interactions					
Co-Os × Ent				−0.17**	−0.14*
Co-Os × CogCa				0.05	−0.01
Ent × CogCa				−0.20**	−0.14*
Three-way interaction					
Co-Os × Ent × CogCa					−0.19**
R^2	0.36	0.46	0.58	0.61	0.63
ΔR^2	0.36	0.10	0.12	0.04	0.02
F	18.48**	24.03**	29.49**	25.49**	25.05**
ΔF	18.48**	37.09**	26.68**	6.29**	8.23**

Table IV. Results of hierarchical regression analysis predicting withdrawal intentions

Notes: LoM = length of membership; ComPar = committee participation; CCI = customer-company identification; Co-Os = co-op ostracism; Ent = entitativity; CogCa = cognitive capital; β values are standardised coefficients –; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

As Step 5 of Table IV shows, co-op ostracism was significantly and positively associated with WI ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), while both entitativity ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$) and cognitive capital ($\beta = -0.49$, $p < 0.01$) were negatively related. Their interaction effect was also negatively associated with WI ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$), implying that their coupling led to a lower propensity to leave the co-op. As far as ostracism's interaction effects were concerned, only the interaction with entitativity was significant ($\beta = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that the latter toppled the effect of ostracism on the intention to terminate the relationship. Finally, of the control variables, similar to our previous studies, patronage had a negative significant effect ($\beta = -0.10$, $p < 0.05$), followed by age who had a similar effect ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < 0.05$).

Our hypothesis predicted that entitativity and cognitive capital would jointly moderate the ostracism–WI relationship. The three-way interaction term proved to be significantly and negatively related to WI ($\beta = -0.19$, $p < 0.01$), offering initial support to our hypothesis. As a cross-check, and as a means to explore the interaction, we used a bootstrapping method (Hayes, 2013; 10,000 bootstrapped resamples; SPSS Macro PROCESS model 3), which also accommodates the investigation of three-way interactions. The results indicated that the three-way interaction effect was significant at 99 per cent level (CI = [−0.28, −0.015]). This provided further support for our hypothesis. Moreover, when inspecting the conditional effects (CE) of ostracism on WI at values plus and minus one standard deviation from the means of entitativity and cognitive capital, we could detect the nature of the three-way interaction. The only insignificant conditional effect ($\beta_{CE} = -0.04$,

p = 0.69) was found for the highest levels of entitativity and cognitive capital. In other words, the weakest effect of ostracism was found at the peak of the entitavity-cognitive capital combination.

To further examine the nature of the significant three-way interaction, we performed a spotlight analysis by plotting values plus and minus one standard deviation from the means of ostracism, entitativity and cognitive capital (Cohen *et al.*, 2003). Figures 3(a) and (b) clearly illustrated that only when both entitativity and cognitive capital were high, was co-op ostracism unrelated to WI (β = 0.04, p = 0.64). However, when both were low, co-op ostracism did not exhibit the strongest positive relation to WI (i.e. β = 0.37, $p < 0.01$ vs β = 0.66, $p < 0.01$ for the low entitativity–high cognitive capital combination). Taken together, these findings suggested that our hypothesis was partially supported, but our effort to discover an effective "antidote" to co-op ostracism's virulent effect was rather fruitful.

General discussion and implications

Member-customer proximity enables co-ops to thrive, even when other business forms might fail, as in times of crisis (Birchall, 2013; Byrne *et al.*, 2015). This inherent relational proximity, however, is challenged by the core threat of membership "distance", which acts as a relationship poison. This co-op peril prompted us to turn to ostracism, a hallmark concept of social exclusion and mistreatment research. To date, marketing scholars' understanding of the unique co-op model or the phenomenon of ostracism has been limited. Our first contribution was to fill these gaps. We diagnosed ostracism's poisonous presence in co-ops and developed a reliable and valid tool that can support initiatives focussed on confronting its deleterious effects while shielding relational assets.

We built our co-op ostracism framework within a nomological network by specifying and testing consequent effects, and examining its influence next to a dominant relationship-building factor (i.e. trust) and a rival account (i.e. social undermining) on exchange outcomes. We obtained strong support, across three studies, for our prediction that co-op ostracism has a discrete impact, largely on what maintains and extends co-ops' member-customer base. The empirical evidence we present contributes to the relational perspective on marketing through a more multifaceted view of relational exchanges because it concentrates on understanding and measuring an *implicit* relationship-destroying factor in a business type which possesses an *a priori* relational advantage. Our research helps capture a more complete picture of the factors influencing marketing relationships, providing scholars with a reason to further investigate and explain the firm's social environment. Marketing researchers and managers should not disregard

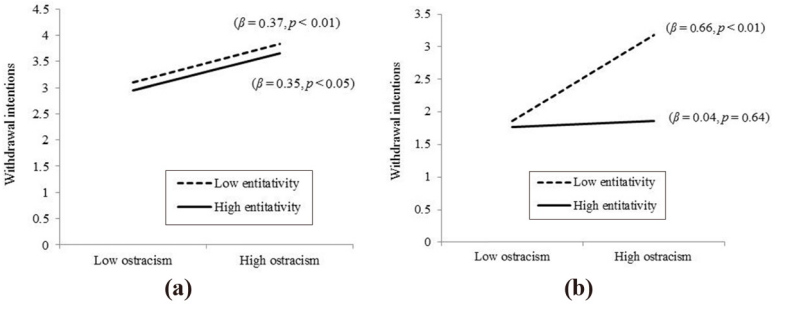

Figure 3.
The joint effects of co-op ostracism, entitativity and cognitive capital on WI

Notes: (a) Low cognitive capital; (b) high cognitive capital

that businesses, particularly the co-op ones, are a social construction, which humans have created to get specific problems solved and address both individual and social needs (Freathy and Hare, 2004). Hence, inclusive membership should top the co-op leadership agenda (Davis, 2016).

Of no less interest is our finding on buffering WI associated with ostracism perceptions. The goal of our research was not only to show the potential usefulness of identifying co-op ostracism but also to provide a means to offset the phenomenon's effects. Co-ops are essentially business groups whose member-customers share properties (e.g. interdependence, common goals) characterising high entitativity groups (Vock *et al.*, 2013). As our results show, coupling entitativity with high cognitive capital reinforces the sense of community and mutuality among co-op member-customers and neutralises the particular ostracism effect on intentions to discontinue the relationship. This finding has important implications for how co-ops (or other firms) might fend off ostracism threats, offering a novel avenue for intervention strategies. For example, companies can not only channel communication efforts on sharing their vision, goals and philosophy with their customers but also further invest in organising active customer communities, injecting them with shared purposes and understanding. The financial services co-op which participated in our studies launched a communication campaign in which it even used a "lens" metaphor. It stressed that when its member-customers "look through the lens of shared goals and vision, they can clearly see their mutual fate of success as well as their difference from the isolated customers of conventional banks". Admittedly, this campaign boosted a vital capital stock increase undertaken shortly after.

Our findings might also prove valuable to enrich the understanding of membership, not only in co-ops but in general. Companies increasingly attempt to infuse elements of membership in their RM arrangements (e.g. loyalty programme membership) or their core business (e.g. membership associations) (Vincent and Webster, 2013). Membership needs to involve social benefits beyond the offer of monetary or in-kind rewards, so as to create the sense that customers are in a pleasurable long-lasting relationship rather than a recurring, yet passing, transaction.

Like any research project, our conceptualisation and research design choices involve limitations. We took several precautionary steps and implemented plenty of the procedural and statistical remedies suggested by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) and MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012) to free our measure of methodological artefacts, but we cannot rule out that the latter may have exerted some influence. Furthermore, our scale was not designed to differentiate between different ostracism sources. In Study 1, we did test for differences in ostracism perceptions based on the source (i.e. other members, employees, BoD members), but none was found. Although it may be beneficial in future work to differentiate the foci of co-op ostracism and examine if differential responses are prompted, our conceptualisation of the construct was driven by prevailing theoretical and empirical considerations. In this regard, the vast majority of available literature – particularly the empirical one, such as workplace ostracism studies (Cullen *et al.*, 2012; Leunga *et al.*, 2011; O'Reilly *et al.*, 2014; Scott *et al.*, 2013; Wu *et al.*, 2012) – suggests that ostracism or its responses are not dependent on the source. Besides, a mere one-person exclusion is sufficient to elicit negative outcomes, even against inclusive individuals who may be seen as part of the excluding alliance (Chernyak and Zayas, 2010; Critcher and Zayas, 2014).

Finally, the concept of co-op ostracism needs more dedicated research. We do not know all the consequences, especially the long-term ones, and further research could examine whether it can predict specific behavioural outcomes (e.g. actual member exit). Longitudinal

studies could be designed that would allow exploring these, and other issues (e.g. coping mechanisms). Similarly, RM literature needs to pay more attention to the "dark side" of RM (Payne and Frow, 2017), particularly to the overlooked, yet indispensable role of implicit mistreatment forms in customer harm-doing. We have shown how core customers in a genuinely customer-focussed business form are driven away by simply not directing desired social behaviour towards them.

Note

1. Ostracism occurred long before it was named (*ostrakismos*), when ancient Athenians cast their votes on shards of clay, *ostraca*, to determine whether a citizen would have to be expelled from the city for 10 years (Costantini and Ferri, 2013).

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Appendix

Measure	Items	FL_A[2]	FL_B[2]	FL_C[2]	FL[3]	Scale
Co-op ostracism[1, 2, 3]	*To what extent others at the co-op…*					7-point scale
	show no interest for you	0.94	0.80	0.82	0.77	(1 = "not at all", 7 = "to
	do not respond to you or your messages	0.91	0.80	0.93	0.80	a large extent")
	avoid you	0.90	0.83	0.78	0.76	
	show little interest in your opinion	0.89	0.86	0.86	0.85	
	disregard your interests	0.94	0.88	0.79	0.85	
	ignore you	0.89	0.85	0.87	0.84	
	your voice is not heard	0.93	0.78	0.90	0.86	
	keep information from you	0.79	0.80	0.80	0.75	
	do not pay attention to you	0.94	0.84	0.87	0.80	
Social undermining[2] (Duffy *et al.*, 2002)	*"Others at the co-op…"*					7-point scale
	belittle you or your ideas	0.79	0.92	0.73	–	(1 = "not at all", 7 = "to
	compete with you for status and recognition	0.88	0.91	0.85	–	a large extent")
	criticise the way you handle things in a way that is not helpful	0.80	0.95	0.90	–	
	insult you	0.76	0.87	0.81	–	
Trust[2] (Morgan and Hunt, 1994)	*"Others at the co-op…"*					7-point scale
	can generally be trusted	0.79	0.86	0.75	–	(1 = "strongly disagree",
	can be counted on to do what is right	0.58	0.67	0.51	–	7 = "strongly agree")
	have high integrity	0.69	0.78	0.62	–	
	can be relied on	0.78	0.76	0.76	–	
WOM[2] (Choi and Choi, 2014)	I usually say positive things about my co-op to other people	0.84	0.91	0.75	–	7-point scale
	I tell other people to consider my co-op for membership	0.78	0.91	0.82	–	(1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")
	I recommend my co-op and its products/services to others	0.90	0.96	0.89	–	
Withdrawal intentions[2, 3] (Jensen *et al.*, 2013)	I often think of quitting my membership at the co-op	0.72	0.74	0.80	0.68	7-point scale
	If that were possible, I would look for a better co-op	0.81	0.95	0.91	0.85	(1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")
	There isn't much to be gained by staying in the co-op	0.79	0.92	0.88	0.86	
Entitativity[3] (Vock *et al.*, 2013)	*"At my co-op, we…"*					7-point scale
	form an entity	–	–	–	0.86	(1 = "strongly disagree",
	have a bond	–	–	–	0.85	7 = "strongly agree")
	are a unity	–	–	–	0.85	

Table AI. Measurement scales and items

(*continued*)

Measure	Items	FL_A[2]	FL_B[2]	FL_C[2]	FL[3]	Scale
Cognitive capital[3] (Villenaa *et al.*, 2011)	share similar corporate culture/values	–	–	–	0.69	7-point scale
	share similar philosophies/ approaches to business dealings	–	–	–	0.87	(1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")
	have compatible goals and objectives	–	–	–	0.85	
Customer-company identification[3] (Homburg *et al.*, 2009)	I strongly identify with this co-op	–	–	–	0.74	7-point scale
	I feel good to be a member-customer of this co-op	–	–	–	0.79	(1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree")
	I like to tell that I am a member-customer of this co-op	–	–	–	0.77	
	This co-op fits well to me	–	–	–	0.78	

Notes: Subscripts indicate the corresponding sample in Study 2 (A = sample A, B = sample B, and C = sample C); superscripts indicate the study in which each measure was used (1 = Study 1, 2 = Study 2, and 3 = Study 3); FL = factor loading; all factor loadings were highly significant ($p < 0.001$); the three potential sources of ostracism (i.e. employees, other members, members of the BoD) were given as examples for "others"

Table AI.

A link to the appendix can be found below:

https://coopostracismscale.wordpress.com/2018/08/10/web-appendix-co-op-ostracism-scale/

Corresponding author
Theo Benos can be contacted at: theo.benos@hotmail.com