**BRITISH ACADEMY
OF MANAGEMENT**

**BAM
CONFERENCE**

3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER
ASTON UNIVERSITY BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

Exploring negative customer brand engagement in social media: A framework of antecedent and consequence

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Social media has established new opportunities for businesses to engage with their customers. Central discussion around the engagement concept is customer brand engagement (CBE), which has been conceptualised as a positive relationship between a brand and a customer. However, along with a positive relationship, social media has also facilitated a negative relationship, which is conceptualised as negative customer brand engagement (NCBE), and which can destroy the brand value of the businesses. This research aims to develop a comprehensive framework of antecedent (brand betrayal) and consequence (brand hate) of NCBE in social media, grounded in the conservation of resources (COR) theory. The study proposes using data from 250 participants to test the proposed hypothesises in the conceptual framework. Using COR theory, this study provides new insights about the NCBE process and offers valuable suggestions to brand managers to transform NCBE to positive CBE in social media.

(word count- 2,032)

Introduction

Global development, especially since the advent of social media, has changed business practices and strategies to enable them to face the emerging opportunities and challenges (Bharadwaj *et al*. 2013). Social media has provided new opportunities to strengthen the relationships between businesses and customers by moving away from physical person-to-person communication to an electronic word of mouth (Gambetti *et al*. 2015). Thus, social media has redefined the conceptualisation of customer engagement to be viewed as "beyond purchase" (Marketing Science Institute. 2010). Van Doorn *et al*. (2010) defined customer engagement as "the customers' behavioural manifestations that have a brand/ firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers" (p. 254), allowing businesses to focus on customer experiences through behavioural activities (liking, commenting and sharing) (Calder *et al*. 2016). Within the context of customer engagement behaviour, academics and practitioners have a growing interest in CBE, which is a tautology for "customer engagement", but studies have associated this term with engagement with brand-related content in a social media context (Solem 2016; Tuškej and Podnar 2018; Vale and Fernandes 2018). CBE is the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organisation's offerings and/or organisational activities or customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase (Van Doorn *et al*. 2010; Hollebeek 2011a; Vivek *et al*. 2012). Furthermore, studies have shown effective CBE can increase sales (Neff 2007), profits (Voyles 2007), customer satisfaction (Challagalla *et al*. 2009), and overall firm competitiveness (Kumar *et al*. 2010).

In recent years, significant interest has been placed on CBE, since it is portrayed as a mechanism to strengthen the customer-brand relationships but challenging for businesses to implement (Brodie *et al*. 2013; Van Doorn *et al*. 2010). However, this is not the only challenge faced by businesses, as there is another possible challenge or threat from CBE, which is NCBE (Juric *et al*. 2015). Only a few academics to date have conducted research into NCBE (Van Doorn at al. 2010; Juric *et al*. 2015), and this study aims to contribute to this area of research by developing a conceptual model identifying an antecedent and consequence of NCBE. Although researchers have started to take an interest in negative customer engagement, their focus so far has been on the negative valence of customer engagement rather than specifically on NCBE (Hollebeek and Chen 2014; Heinonen 2018; Naumann *et al*. 2017).

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine NCBE with brand-related content in social media. Using COR theory, brand betrayal is considered as an important antecedent for NCBE and brand hate as a key consequence of NCBE. In particular, the main aim of this research is to develop and empirically test a conceptual framework of how various aspects of CBE activities within a social media environment are driven by brand betrayal and eventually lead to brand hate. This study developed the theoretical framework based on the COR. It will be tested using survey data from anti-APPLE online communities in social media.

Negative Customer brand engagement

CBE is viewed as a mechanism that serves to strengthen customers' relationship with brands, organisations, and other individuals (positive engagement) (Algesheimer *et al*. 2010). However, not all CBE manifestations are positive. Higgins (2006, p. 442) asserted that to be "engaged is to be involved, occupied and interested in something", which may not only focal positively, but also potentially focal negatively, valenced forms. Researchers such as Hollebeek and Chen (2014), considered the positive and negative valence of engagement using the regulatory engagement theory and developed a broader conceptualisation of "engagement".

Positive/negative valenced brand engagement triggers are based on a particular favourable/unfavourable or affirmative cognitive, emotional and behavioural brand-related customer dynamics during focal brand interactions, resulting in positive/negative consequences.

But NCBE occurs when customers engage with the intention to damage the brand value, resulting in value destruction (Van Doorn *et al.* 2010; Juric *et al*, 2015). As such NCBE is triggered by perceptions that customer values have been destroyed in a customer's view, which is preceded by events, such as negative direct and indirect experiences with the provider, concerns with service quality and/or perceived value, dissatisfaction (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Wangenheim 2005). In this view, NCBE is conceptualised as a sense of anxious, stressful, and negative involvement or non-involvement, as criticisms and blame are used in conjunction with resistance, avoidance or fear of doing something (George 1998; Harrison 2009; Dishion *et al.* 2004).

With limited existing literature on NCBE, a specific scale to measure NCBE has not been identified in the literature, so to overcome this gap, the COBRA (consumers online brand-related activities) scale is adopted. The COBRA scale is a behavioural scale and measures three types of behavioural activities (consumption, contribution and creation) in regards to brand-related content in social media (Schivinski *et al.* 2016). The COBRA scale is an activity scale, thus the motivations lead to positive/negative CBE activities. (Schivinski *et al.* 2016). The following section will discuss the proposed conceptual framework for NCBE along with the antecedent and consequence.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presented in this research proposes (1) three CBE activities (i.e. consumption, contribution and creation), (2) the direct effect of brand betrayal on brand hate and (3) the link between the CBE and its activities, and brand betrayal and brand hate (see figure 1).
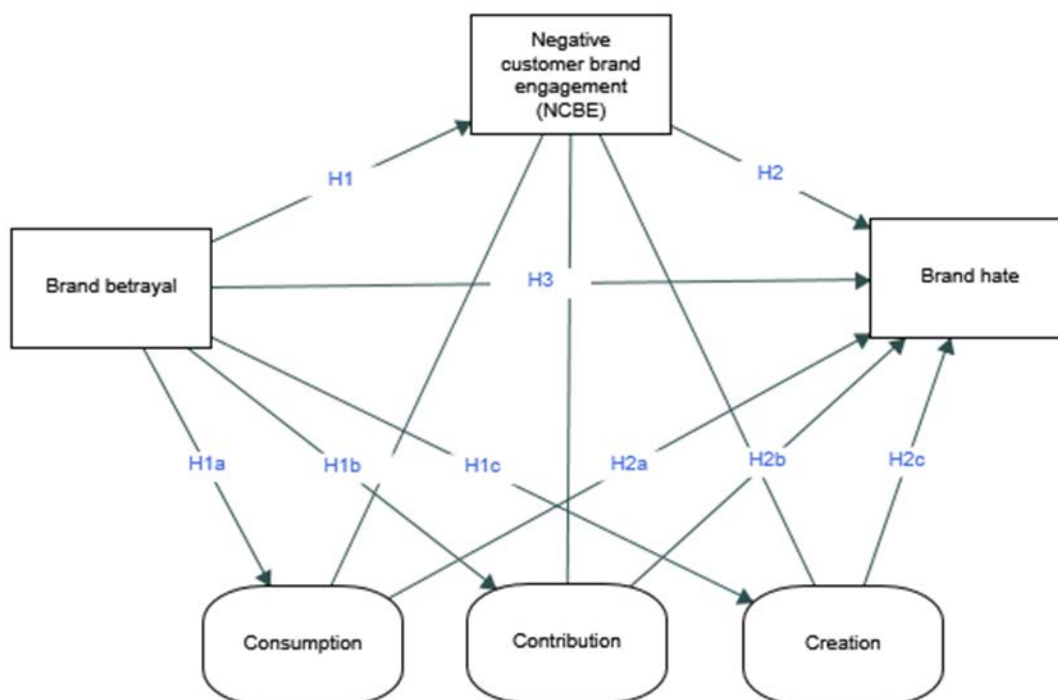

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Adopting COR theory, this study proposes Brand betrayal as an antecedent and Brand hate as a consequence of NCBE. According to Woodruff and Flint (2006) value is phenomenologically determined, as a value of a good or a service does not exist per se, but it is a function of the way customers perceive the contextual experiences enabled by this good or service. As such, it suggested that value is not only created but the value can also be destroyed, thus introducing the term value destruction, which can be interpreted as an engagement process that results in a decline of other customer's "well-being" (Ple and Chumpitas-Caceres 2010). In this perspective, NCBE occurs due to the brand service failure. (Smith 2013; Smith *et al*. 2013).

Thereby, COR depicts that individuals are motivated to acquire, protect and foster the acquisitions of those things they value (their resources) (Hobfoll 1998). COR acknowledges that in some circumstances, namely those that threaten or deplete resources are objectively stressful (Holmgreen *et al*. 2017). As such, under the threat of stress, individuals become increasingly motivated, dedicating more of their time, energy and attention to preserving their overall resource position (Hobfoll 1989). Thus as specified in the conceptual framework, COR underpins brand betrayal as a motivation for NCBE.

Overall by integrating COR, this study aims to capture the key construct that explains the antecedent (brand betrayal) and consequence (brand hate) of NCBE.

Brand Betrayal

Based on the COR theory, brand betrayal is considered as a potential antecedent for NCBE as brand betrayal occurs when the brand does not satisfy the customers' expectations (Gregoire and Fisher 2008). MacInnis and Folkes (2017) stated that customers feel more betrayed when they see that a brand has intentionally violated a relationship norm, which can result in individuals seeking to protect the resources they value and hold. As such, betrayed customers are more likely to have a retaliatory behaviour, which represents their efforts to punish and cause inconvenience to the firm/brand for the damages it caused to themselves (Walster *et al*. 1973). Prior research has indicated perceived betrayal had a positive and large effect on retaliatory behaviour (Gregoire and Fisher 2008). In this view, individuals protecting their resources, which occurred by value destruction will show retaliating behaviour through CBE activities. Thus, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand betrayal has a positive correlation on customer brand engagement and on (a) consumption, (b) contribution and (c) creation activities.

Brand hate

Brand hate in marketing and consumer behaviour literature refers to "an intense negative emotional affect toward the brand" (Bryson *et al*. 2013, p. 395), which can originate from four potential antecedents: country-of-origin of the brand, customer dissatisfaction with the product, negative stereotypes of users of the brand and corporate social performance. Furthermore, brand hate is linked to behaviours like voicing negative feelings, boycotting, or sabotaging company value, and is described as the extreme affective component of attitude towards a brand (Bryson *et al*. 2013). Hollebeek and Chen (2014), identified brand attitude as a key consequence of brand engagement in online brand communities. As such, NCBE with brand-related content can result in the development of hate, which is more than just disliking a brand (Batra *et al*. 2012). **Thus, we hypothesised that**:

H2: customer brand engagement and (a) consumption, (b) contribution and (c) creation activities, motivated by brand betrayal will have a positive correlation on brand hate.

Moreover, as brand betrayal occurs due to not satisfying customers' expectations (Gregoire and Fisher 2008) and, according to Bryson *et al*. (2013), customer dissatisfaction is considered an antecedent of brand hate, thus we hypothesise that :

H3: Brand betrayal has a positive correlation on brand hate

Research Methodology

Data collection

Data will be collected from a sample of members from anti-APPLE brand communities in social media using an online survey. Apple brand is chosen as the context based on the intense competition to Apple and because it has the presence of both "Fan" and "Anti" Apple communities in social media, (Hollebeek and Chen 2014). Furthermore, Apple has a large list of critics, which is certain to create NCBE (Costello 2018). The survey will be posted, in Anti-Apple brand communities in social media for the targeted respondents. Prior research also demonstrated that as consumers' choice expands with such a highly competitive brand, understanding NCBE is important for the success of the brand, as the brand can lose their current and potential customers easily to their competitors (Juric *et al*. 2015).

Before conducting the main research, a pilot study will be conducted to test the scales and the framework. Data collected and analysed from the pilot study will be developed prior to the discussion/presentation at the conference.

Questionnaires	Created with the combination of three externally validated scales shown in the Appendix
Survey process	Seven-point Likert scale anchored on '1'- "strongly disagree/ not at all" to '7'- "strongly agree/ very much"
Sampling	Mixed gender, over 18 years old and are active users on Anti-Apple online band communities. Sample recruitment: Anti-Apple online brand communities in any social media platform. N= 250
Data Collection	Questionnaire created through Qualtrics, and collected data will be formatted to Microsoft Excel and exported to AMOS
Quantitative Technique	Structural Equational Modelling (SEM)

Table 1: Research method design

Potential theoretical contributions

This research will have both theoretical and managerial contributions. Its contribution to theory lies in adding to the existing customer engagement literature, by developing and empirically testing a conceptual framework, which identifies the antecedent and the consequence of NCBE. This framework will directly respond to the call made by Juric *et al*. (2015) that NCBE is more than just engagement with negative valence and needs further research. In addition, this framework will be tested in the context of the APPLE brand, which is considered to be a highly competitive brand. In addition, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by exploring further COR theory to customer brand engagement literature, which collectively provides a

coherent framework for developing and presenting the value-laden of negative customer-brand interactions. In terms of managerial contributions, this research will provide some insights for managers to protect losing a competitive advantage among their competitors in a highly competitive industry, where an accidental/intentional 'misuse' of customers could lead to brand hate and damage their customer base and market.

Conclusion

This study will set out to determine whether the negative construct: brand betrayal will influence customers to engage with brand-related content through behavioural activities on social media. In addition, this study will also evaluate if engagement does occur, which type of behavioural activity is influenced by brand betrayal. Moreover, this study will also evaluate if engagement motivated through brand betrayal will create brand hate through engagement if so, this will also evaluate the type of behavioural activity that will influence brand hate. The relevance of this study is to address the future research aims set out by several authors by introducing negative antecedent and consequence construct to the customer brand engagement framework (Verleye *et al* 2013, Bitter *et al* 2014, Hollebeek and Chen 2014, Vivek *et al* 2014 and Dessart *et al* 2015). Furthermore, this research can support managers, if engagement creates brand hate, as this is considered to be the strongest negative emotion a customer can have towards a brand which can result in the brand losing the customer, thereby, this study can provide insight for managers to take actions when brand betrayal engagement towards their brand is observed in social media, such as compensation without ignoring it (Bryson *et al*. 2013).

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Appendices.

Table.1

3-Item Brand Betrayal scale developed by Tan (2018)	
BB1	To what extend does Apple intent to take advantage of you?
BB2	To what extend does Apple intentionally mislead you?
BB3	To what extend does Apple try to exploit you?

Appendix 1: Brand Betrayal Scale

3-factor 17-item Consumers' Online Brand Related Activites scale developed by Schivinski et al. (2016)	
Consumption	
Cons1	I read posts related to Apple on social media
Cons2	I read fanpage(s) related to Apple on social media platforms
Cons3	I watch pictures/graphics related to Apple
Cons4	I follow blogs related to Apple
Cons5	I follow Apple on social media platforms
Contribution	
Contr1	I comment on videos related to Apple
Contr2	I comment on posts related to Apple
Contr3	I comment on pictures/graphics related to Apple
Contr4	I share Apple related posts
Contr5	I "Like/Dislike" pictures/graphics related to Apple
Contr6	I "Like/Dislike" posts related to Apple
Creation	
Creat1	I initiate posts related to Apple on blogs
Creat2	I initiate posts related to Apple on social media platforms
Creat3	I post pictures/graphics related to Apple
Creat4	I post videos that show Apple
Creat5	I write post related to Apple on forums
Creat6	I write reviews related to Apple

Appendix 2: Consumers' Online Brand Related Activities Scale

4-item Brand Hate scale developed by Zarantonello et al. (2016)	
BH1	I hate Apple
BH2	I extremely dislike Apple
BH3	I really detest Apple
BH4	I feel hostile towards Apple

Appendix 3: Brand Hate Scale