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Brand Betrayal: A Comprehensive Study to Examine the Indicators and Consequences of Brand Betrayal Towards Consumer Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Brand betrayal is induced by the brand itself when it fails to fulfill its promised moral obligations and involves the type of behavior that fractures the strong self–brand connection with the consumers. Brand managers must come across several negative types of consumer behaviors that depict their sense of dissatisfaction. Additionally, the effort of a brand to reduce the effects of brand betrayal is reflected by the sheer amount of customer apologies and compensation paid to the affected consumers. Having a sound knowledge about the primary indicators of brand betrayal encourages the brand managers to take necessary measures to deal with the challenges of the negative consumer-brand relationship. The resultant revenge behaviors depicted by the consumers include different types of activities such as spreading negative word-of-mouth and avoiding the brand itself, customer incivility, etc. The existing literature on the consequences of brand betrayal is insufficient to build the novel theory around the construct and differentiate it from brand dissatisfaction. The current research in brand dissatisfaction argues that it is a more generalized construct than brand betrayal that becomes the immediate cause of brand avoidance. The effect of these consequences needs to be addressed by the marketing theorists and practitioners to strengthen the consumer-brand relationship and manage the longer-lasting results of negative consumer behaviors.

Keywords: Brand Betrayal; Consumer-Brand Relationship; Consumer Reveange

INTRODUCTION

The marketing theorist and practitioners have observed a dramatic shift from the transactional perspective to a relationship-based perspective in consumer-brand relationships (Fournier et al., 2016). Consumers have subsequent different relationships with the brands, and the associations might be negative or positive based on the brand's value offered to the consumers. The consumers' relationships with the brands might sometimes result in extreme love or hate for the brand and the indifferent view of the interacting brands (Fournier, 1998). The proposition about consumers' actions towards building a brand relationship holds true when the brands are considered active in developing relationships with consumers.

According to Romani et al. (2012), insufficient research has been done in the last few decades, providing insights into consumers' negative emotional state towards brands. In parallel to the same argument, Fetscherin and Heinrich (2015) stated that further research should be conducted on the consumer-brand relationship's 'dark side.' The highly negative consumers' emotions significantly affect the brands' reputation as they encourage distinctive cognitive and behavioral responses towards the brands (Delzen, M. 2017).

Meanwhile, the phenomenon of positive emotions consumers has gained an immense amount of attention in the marketing literature. It includes all positive brand relationships such as brands' likeness, brand passions, brand devotion, brand passion, and brand love (Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, and Fetscherin 2018). The negative side of the consumer-brand relationship is getting increased spread and pertinent as the phenomenon is being substantially noticed by the researchers (Fournier and Alvarez 2013). Marketing scholars have investigated several negative consumer-brand relationships such as brand aversion, brand detachment, brand hate, and brand betrayal (Parmentier and Fischer 2015; Wiggin and Yalch 2015; Finkel et al. 2002; Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, and Fetscherin 2018).

Although, the academicians and practitioners have immensely disregarded the consumers' negative emotions towards the brand's personality and reputation, even though consumers consider the brand itself when making their buying decision to consume products and services. Consumers consider their emotions towards the brands before purchasing intentions (Romani, Grappi, & Dalli, 2012). The disregarded negative brand relationships can prove to be problematic for the companies in the organizational setting. To maintain healthy and long-term relationships with customers, companies must focus on the dark side of the consumer-brand relationship. As the hike of the internet has made it more accessible for the consumer to spread their word of mouth on a larger scale and these negative feelings, when expressed on the online platforms, can affect the brand's reputation (Hegner et al. 2017)

In the branding perspective, a brand betrayal exists when a brand violates the moral obligations towards the consumers (honesty, integrity). The obligations which are promised by the brand itself and are perceived to be fulfilled by the brand's performance. The said obligations are considered crucial in maintaining consumer-brand relations and are inspected to be primitive to the relationship. The violation of commitments promised by the brand results in pessimistic consumers' emotions and is considered inconvenient by the consumers. The negative consumers' emotions then take negative behavioral responses, and they try to seek revenge against the responsible brand. The retaliation may take the form of avoidance of brand contact in the future or negative word-of-mouth spread on virtual/traditional platforms (Reimann et al., 2018).

Alongside, the marketing theorists have stated that the strategies related to brand revitalization are fundamental to managing the rand relationship. In times of brand reversal, it is crucial. (Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011). It has been observed that brand managers try their best to facilitate the consumers while facing brand betrayal. In most cases, they even do not have an idea about brand betrayal and cannot do anything to seek consumers' forgiveness (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Intending to mitigate the risk of brand betrayal, brand managers seek to satisfy the expectations of their consumers (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008)

Consumers experience brand betrayal when they perceive that their preferred brand does not satisfy their expectations and engage in negative practices such as fairness violations, disloyalty, unethical behavior, and providing misleading information (Teck, 2018). Consumers might indulge in revenge-seeking practices in-service failure and feel helpless to change the encountered situation (Gelbrich, 2010; Tripp & Gregoire, 2011). The revenge behaviors are induced by the differential consumer perceptions, intentions, and recognition of blame, and it also depends on the type of publicity encountered by the brand itself. Consumers may indulge themselves in more general kinds of revenge behaviors, such as reviews, comments, and opinions related to products, services, and firms (Obeidat et al. 2017)

BRAND BETRAYAL

The sense of dissatisfaction the consumer feels after interacting with the brand is the root cause of brand betrayal (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008); The dissatisfaction can result from a service failure, fairness violations, disloyalty, unethical behavior, and misleading information provided by the brand itself (Ishaq 2011). The resultant negative feeling towards the brand is called brand betrayal (Teck, 2018). The sense of brand betrayal might be depicted by discontinuing customers' interaction with the brand for future purchases. The service failure encourages consumers to have prolonged disengagements with the brand and have an unpleasant experience. The perceptions of loyal customers might also change rapidly because of service failure because they are the ones who put their trust in the brand in the first place. The inability of a brand to fulfill its moral obligations towards the consumers by engaging in immoral practices (dishonesty, betrayal) (Tan, Salo, & Aspara, 2019a). Moreover, if the consumer-brand relationship develops for a more extended period, consumers' perceptions towards the brand's promise fulfillment get stronger. They respond quickly to the violation of all moral obligations which were promised by the brad initially. With the increasing consumers' experience with brand betrayal, the revenge motivation decreases (the brand avoidance increases) Gr'egoire et al., 2009).

According to the current brand betrayal literature, it is segregated into two primary indicators: failure severity and inferred negative motive (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Failure severity is defined as the inability of a brand to fulfill its promise, lack of customer support, and unable to meet customers' needs at the right time. (Finkel et al., 2002; Grégoire et al., 2009). In contrast, the concept of inferred negative motive is referred to as the extent of consumers' negative perceptions towards the brand. It accounts for the measurement of consumer's feelings of getting exploited, communicated misleading/false information, and taken advantage of by the brand itself (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Based on the results of brand betrayal's research, the negative word-of-mouth resulted from failure severity and inferred negative motive, and it is positively related to both indicators. Furthermore, the construct of consumer forgiveness has a significant negative relationship with the failure severity and inferred negative motive (Teck, 2018).

BRAND BETRAYAL VERSUS BRAND DISSATISFACTION

The construct of brand betrayal enables the researchers to strengthen their knowledge about the other brand-related variables such as brand perceptions, emotions, and self. There is a thin line between the phenomenon of brand betrayal and brand dissatisfaction as they are correlated constructs. The amount of resultant intensity expressed by brand betrayal and brand dissatisfaction is questionable.

Comparing the two constructs motivates the need to untangle them and study the construct of brand betrayal because of the limited amount of research done in the said area. Brand dissatisfaction is a more generalized construct as compared to brand betrayal. The distinction between the two constructs encourages the marketing researchers to motivate the field and originate the novel theory. It will also help practitioners avoid brand betrayal and take necessary measures when they face this challenge and retain their customers.

The analytical similarity between brand betrayal and brand dissatisfaction prompts a specific integration between them. Additionally, they are the collective states of negative brand experience (Giese and Cote 2000). Both encourage consumer anger and a sense of revenge by eroding the consumers' trust in the brand (Rotte et al., 2006). The collective indications of brand betrayal and brand dissatisfaction are hostile consumer-brand relations such as negative word-of-mouth, reduced brand loyalty, and demands for retribution (Reimann et al., 2018; Ishaq, 2012; Ishaq et al. 2014).

BRAND BETRAYAL FROM THE LENS OF SELF-CASTIGATION

The current literature on interpersonal betrayal provides insights into the relationship between self-castigation and brand betrayal; it assumes that consumers may also experience self-directed disappointment and blame while interacting with the brand. The extent to the consumers considers themselves responsible for the loss of economic, temporal, and social resources is referred to as the concept of self-castigation. The resultant self of blame occurs because consumers feel embarrassed or ashamed of their association with the brand. They blame themselves for choosing a brand that did not fulfill their moral obligation and eroded their trust (Rachman 2010; Reimann et al. 2018). As per the comparison between brand dissatisfaction and brand betrayal, there is an association between self-castigation and rumination (Teck, 2018).

The previous research showed that both betrayal and discontent could trigger consumer rage with a brand (Westbrook and Oliver 1991; Bougie et al. 2003; Grégoire and Fisher 2008). We can classify anger into several types (Russell and Fehr 1994). Indignation is a type of anger related to moral transgressions; it arises when people are shocked, indignant, humiliated, and possibly disgusted by the outcome of their offense (Storm and Storm 1987). Indignation is known for evaluating the rightness of an action and deeming it deserving of one's condemnation (Beardsley 1970). Indignation, often known as righteous indignation, has been connected to interpersonal betrayal (Finkel et al. 2002; Joskowicz Jabloner and Leiser 2013). Consumers are likely to be astonished, angered, and disgusted by the fact that the brand defied a relationship norm by misleading them, just as they would be by interpersonal betrayal (Rachman 2010). Consumers are inclined to form causal conclusions about the transgression and its implications for their future connection when betrayed (Wiggin and Yalch 2015). Betrayed customers are more inclined to wonder why they cross and if the brand planned to mislead them. Rumination is known as the amount to which a customer ruminates about a poor experience (McCullough, Bono, and Root 2007; Rachman 2010).

Consumers may consider how they came to be attracted by the brand first and how its behavior misled them to arrive at an internally consistent narrative of betrayal. These kinds of ideas are autobiographical. Rumination is described as obsessive thoughts on a transgressing incident, leading to a desire to talk about it to ease a negative internal mood. On the other hand,

rumination over a negative brand occurrence has significant consequences for marketers because it might encourage negative word-of-mouth and block relationship rehabilitation. Rumination about the brand, the self, or the brand–the self-relationship is not supposed to be induced by dissatisfaction. When items fail to meet consumers' needs, the outcome of the interaction becomes more important to them (Oliver 2015).

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND BETRAYAL & CONSUMER REVENGE

Previous research has linked brand betrayal to relational norm violations, which elicit sentiments of rage and emotional anguish (Boekhout et al., 1999). Both may create a desire for avoidance and retaliate a drive to disseminate the unfavorable word of mouth in customers' brand relationships. (Gr´egoire & Fisher, 2008; Gr´egoire et al., 2009). Consumers may take revenge in the event of service failures, particularly if they feel betrayed by the company and powerless to change the circumstances in which they find themselves (Gelbrich, 2010; Tripp & Gregoire, 2011). Different consumer perceptions, motives, and attributions of blame, as well as the type of exposure, sought, drive such revenge actions, as opposed to more general evaluations, comments, and opinions about products, services, and organizations (Gregoire, Laufer, & Tripp, 2010)

Revenge behavior is observed frequently in public postings on social media sites (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube), third-party complaint sites (e.g., consumeraffairs.org), and anti-corporate Websites. Negative reviews, including revenge, have a much higher potential for causing damage to businesses in online environments, not only because of the availability of technologies and their widespread use but also due to their ability to "go viral" and reach a large audience in a short time (Tripp & Gregoire, 2011). According to the previous research, in comparison to brand dissatisfaction, brand betrayal has a more considerable beneficial influence on the need for brand avoidance and retaliation and the motivation to disseminate the lousy word of mouth. This finding is consistent with earlier research showing that brand betrayal negatively affects the brand relationship (Balaji, Khong, & Chong, 2016; Gr'egoire & Fisher, 2008: Gregoire et al., 2009; Joireman et al., 2016; Reimann et al., 2018).

FORMS OF CONSUMERS REVENGE BEHAVIORS

A Desire for Revenge (DR) explains customers' feelings of needing to exact revenge on a firm that has wronged them in some ways (Gregoire et al., 2010). It asks the question of how DR will influence the context and nature of online retribution intentions. Gregoire et al. (2010) argue that emphasizing DR is critical because customers cannot always translate their wants into action, depending on the context. Because of the widespread use and accessibility of the internet, social media, and mobile platforms, several venues for vengeful consumers have emerged (Berger, 2014; Gregoire et al., 2010).

According to past research, consumer revenge behaviors include immediate-emotion-focused revenge, venting-focused revenge, and third-party enabled internet revenge. The main distinction between three sorts of online retaliation is the consumer's anticipation of a specific outcome (e.g., immediate emotional release, need for support, and problem-focused revenge).
Firstly, **Online Immediate Revenge** intentions are motivated by emotions and used as an aggressive coping method to release bad feelings quickly. Such revenge intents emerge soon when a customer encounters a service failure. Because of the widespread availability of mobile devices, any consumer can use their phone to browse the internet. Customers could use social

media platforms for nasty posts about the organization, use blogs, or post to numerous complaint sites as part of this coping method, which requires no customer effort.

Secondly**, Venting Focused Revenge** is more intense, requiring more time and effort on the part of the customer, who creates Web sites, Facebook pages, and films that attack firms or negatively portray them in the hopes of going viral. The goal of revenge by venting online, like proactive problem-focused coping mechanisms, is to address a problem by sharing a tale with the public and alerting other consumers not to interact with the misbehaving corporation. The difference between online complaining and venting-focused vengeance is that. Venting-focused revenge is primarily to ruin the firm's or brand's reputation through confrontation. In contrast, online complaining aims at informing the public about unpleasant service experiences and occurrences.

Thirdly, **Party-Focused Online Revenge** intentions emerge when angry consumers aim to get revenge by posting vindictive reviews and complaints on consumer advocacy platforms such as complaintsboard.com and consumeraffairs.com. Like support-seeking coping strategies, consumers in this category would like to take direct action against the misbehaving firm through third parties (Stephens & Gwinner, 1998). The primary goal is to enlist the help of a powerful third party to either directly address the problem or publicly shame the company into taking some action.

When it comes to service result failures, DR is more likely to be converted into online revenge intentions than when it comes to service process failures. One reason could be that in service outcome failures, consumers have suffered a practical (economic) loss and perceive that the firm has taken advantage of them. Thus, online revenge behaviors may be consumer attempts to right a wrong such that firm's future revenues and profits are adversely affected.

ANTECEDENTS OF BRAND BETRAYAL

Brand betrayal defines as the violation of relationship standards because of being misled. Relationship-related dimensions may be critical antecedents or moderators of brand betrayal (but not brand dissatisfaction). Attachment style is one such characteristic, which refers to individual variances in how people interact in relationships. Individuals who have a "fearful" attachment style are more prone to react hostilely and negatively to a brand they have previously split up (Thomson et al., 2012).

Such people are more inclined to complain about others, obsess (meditate) about the brand and how it has harmed them, and seek vengeance against it. Surprisingly, the impact of a scared attachment style on anti-brand acts mediated by decreased self-esteem and a perceived loss of relationship benefits—elements of loss that we connect with brand betrayal (versus brand dissatisfaction). While certain attachment styles may exacerbate feelings of brand betrayal, they may have minimal effect on dissatisfaction.

Brand betrayal has received a lot of attention recently. Until now, only a limited amount of study has investigated whether the motivational drivers that encourage consumers to think of brands in human terms increase the depth of brand betrayal. According to one study, when a brand committed a transgression, anti-brand sentiments were higher because the attachment type characterizes by higher degrees of anxiety and avoidance. As a result of the brand's violation,

consumers who scored high on these attachment style variables lost more benefits and self-esteem than other consumers (Thomson, Whelan, & Johnson, 2012). However, there is still a lot to learn about what makes customers feel betrayed by brands and how businesses may recover from this negative affective state. Firms risk losing their most significant customers (and stirring them to take revenge) if their offenses regard as betrayals and if a strong brand connection moderates the relationship between a brand's behavior and betrayal. Future research into when and why customers will betray and how businesses might recover is undoubtedly necessary to better understand how consumers interact with brands in human-like terms.

Since the research of brand betrayal is still in its infancy, there are several opportunities to expand our understanding of it and its relationship. When customers form anthropomorphic inferences about brands as having a human-like mentality and acting with intention, feelings of brand betrayal may be more likely to occur. To put it another way, the brand makes worse the sense of betrayal purposefully misled them (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015), exploited them (Sayin & Gürhan-Canli, 2015). Also, by violating fairness-related relational norms (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), acting unethically (Schmalz & Orth, 2012; Trump, 2014), or by showing disloyalty toward them (Luedicke & Pichler-Luedicke, 2015)

This study also presented and evaluated a preliminary model of betrayal antecedents. Customers had a significant level of betrayal when they perceived insufficient levels of fairness in both the outcomes and the recovery process, which is consistent with justice theory (Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996). We discovered that distributive fairness interacted with procedural and interactional fairness in predicting betrayal. The findings imply that the severity of the failure and the attribution of blame are crucial predictive variables that will be explored in future studies.

CONSEQUENCES OF BRAND BETRAYAL

A recent study has looked at more extreme reactions like betrayal and retribution. It claimed that views of justice and the severity of the transgression could also help explain customer behavior responses (Gre'goire and Fisher 2008; Ward and Ostrom 2006). According to one interpretation, this study subtly captures unfavorable ties between customers and brands. According to Fournier (1998), brand enmity describes as an intimately engaging relationship characterized by negative affect and the desire to avoid or inflict suffering on the other. Similarly, the "enemy ship" is a personal malice relationship in which one person wishes to demise (Adams 2005). Others have investigated harmful symbolic consumption (Banister and Hogg 2004), brand avoidance (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009). We contribute to this research by looking into whether a poor customer connection can develop from a favorable one and what role the consumer's self-concept plays in predicting anti-brand behaviors.

The feeling of psychological loss is an act of betrayal that can destroy a strong tie between the brand and the self, prompting feelings of psychological loss in consumers who have previously built a strong relationship between the brand and the self. Consumers may opt not to continue a relationship if they believe their relationship partner has misled them by breaking the partnership's core norms (for example, trust) (Rachman 2010). Notably, consumers may question their judgment for believing in the betraying brand and regret their previous efforts to create relationships. If solid relationships enhance the apparent magnitude of betrayal

(Grégoire and Fisher 2008), one may expect feelings of loss because of betrayal to increase as the strength of the relationship grows. Strong ties to a brand, on the other hand, can broaden one's sense of self (Reimann and Aron 2009; Park et al. 2010; Reimann et al. 2012), violated relationship norms may threaten one's sense of self.

Customers who were once passionate about a brand may become devoted to injuring the organization, causing a headache for the related firms in addition to the lost money from forgone purchases (Lee 2007; Nussbaum 2008). Anger, wrath, and vengeance define this type of "anti-brand" conduct (Bechwati and Morrin 2003; Gregoire and Fisher 2008). Because facilitating technologies continue to make it simpler for customers to injure others (Ward and Ostrom 2006), it's critical to understand what drives anti-brand conduct. A recent study has looked at more extreme reactions like betrayal and retribution. It suggests that views of justice and the severity of the transgression are also helpful in explaining customer behaviors (Gre'goire and Fisher 2008; Ward and Ostrom 2006).

NEGATIVE SERVICE EXPERIENCE

According to several studies, positive relationships may play a role in anti-brand actions, but the results are mixed. Similarly, according to some research, there is a relationship between them. Taking the example of the previous users of a brand may hold more persistently negative beliefs about it than those who have never tried it (Maxwell and Romaniuk 2008). Similarly, customers who had previous positive experiences with a brand are frequently its harshest critics (Gregoire and Fisher 2008). Following the collapse of some buyer-seller partnerships, previously devoted consumers' emotional responses are more damaging than those of less committed customers (Hocutt 1999). Prior experience with a brand, such as that reflected by some measures of customer-brand relationships, on the other hand, may help to attenuate the negative consequences of poor service (Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekaran 1998). Similarly, brand equity predicts favorable appraisal after a product or service failure (Brady et al. 2008; Ishaq, 2020; Ishaq & Di Maria, 2020; Ishaq et al.2014), implying consumer-brand solid relationships (Liljander and Roos 2002; Rust, Lemon, and Zeithaml 2004). According to Gregoire and Fisher (2006), no effect was found of prior relationships on revenge intent in the context of service failures.

CONCLUSION

The previous research shows that brand apology and through compensation and the brand efficiently recovers the customer–strong relationship by dissolving resentment and unhappiness after a service failure (Grewal, Roggeveen, and Tsiros 2008; Mattila and Patterson 2004). Furthermore, research shows that a combined apology and compensation is more beneficial than either intervention alone (Mattila 2001).

As a result, we hypothesized that combining an apology with compensation would be more effective than delivering "an apology alone" or "compensation alone" at creating a view of positive motives, reducing anger, reducing the want for revenge, and raising the desire for reconciliation. The findings show that while apologies and compensation have some value when employed alone, combining these interventions is the only way to effectively reduce the want for revenge while increasing the desire for reconciliation and ensuring that reconciliation outweighs retribution. Due to their potential to diminish unfavorable perceived corporate

intentions, the study appears to be a practical approach for firms to lessen negative customer responses to double deviations.

A substantial amount of research has been done in a consumer-brand positive relationship, and the phenomenon of negative consumer-brand relationships has been overlooked. The extensive amount of marketing literature indicates that the revenge behaviors depicted by consumers prove to be harmful to the brands. Still, the researchers have not put their maximum efforts into the said area. The managerial implications of brand betrayal show how it becomes difficult for the brand managers to know the existence of brand betrayal and take the necessary actions to mitigate negative brand perceptions in the market. We have addressed the phenomenon of brand betrayal from different perspectives and dimensions to provide insights into the overlooked constructs. The previous research shows a need to develop a novel theory to explain the phenomenon of brand betrayal because it has immense adverse outcomes (consumer revenge and brand avoidance).

Today's marketing is all about building long-lasting relationships with consumers. In contrast, brand betrayal still lacks a significant amount of research crucial for building positive consumer-brand relationships. The relationship between self-castigation and brand betrayal is a leading construct that can attract future researchers to investigate the phenomenon from the lens of self-castigation. Companies look for solutions after facing brand betrayal by offering the compensation amount sheer amount of apology to its customers. Future researchers can take the lead in this area to explain how consumers' (victims) behavior changes (positively or negatively after getting the compensation from the brand (culprit).

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