

Abstract

Few studies examine the impact of brand animosity on consumer behavior in the context of contemporary geopolitical and ethical controversies. This study investigates how different types of perceived brand betrayal (political, labor-related, and environmental) shape consumer attitudes and coping mechanisms, specifically boycott intention and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM), within the framework of brand animosity. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Dual Process Theory, we propose a model in which brand animosity and perceived betrayal influence boycott intention, which subsequently leads to NWOM as the primary behavioral outcome. Data collected from a convenience sample of 386 consumers in March 2024 was analyzed using structural equation modeling via SmartPLS. The results reveal that brand animosity is strongly associated with perceived betrayal ($\beta=0.67$) and boycott intention ($\beta=0.40$), while boycott intention is a significant predictor of NWOM ($\beta=0.20$). Theoretical and practical implications are discussed, with recommendations for brand management in politically and ethically charged environments.

Keywords: Brand animosity, Brand betrayal, Theory of planned behavior, Dual-process theory, Boycott intention, Negative word-of-mouth,

Introduction

Animosity is “anger related to previous or ongoing political, military, economic, or diplomatic events” (Klein *et al.*, 1990, p. 90) and is characterized as a hostile attitude aimed at national out-groups. Research suggests that consumer animosity may stem from various factors, including past and ongoing political tensions between countries, wars, and trade discords (Ettenson and Klein, 2005; Klein *et al.*, 1998). Most previous consumer animosity research is based on Klein’s *et al.* (1998) Model of Foreign Product Purchase (Khan *et al.*, 2019; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2023). However, no widely accepted theoretical framework forms the basis of studies conducted in consumer animosity-inducing contexts. This may account for inconsistencies observed in the literature regarding the relationship between animosity and judgments of product quality (Bozdağ & Durmuş, 2023; Ishii, 2009; Nakos and Hajidimitrou, 2007; Xie *et al.*, 2023). Hence, the employment of a widely accepted theoretical framework is warranted. One such theoretical framework, the Theory of Planned Behavior (henceforth referred to as TPB), has been used sparingly to conceptualize consumer animosity thus far (Kim *et al.*, 2023) and is seemingly a viable path forward.

TPB is the most prevalent psycho-social model utilized to comprehend, predict, and explain human behavior (see Figure 1) and is commonly used in consumer behavior research (Carfora *et al.*, 2019; Hoeksma *et al.*, 2017; Zhou *et al.*, 2013). Several scholars suggested further expansion and modification of TPB to account for context-specific phenomena (Soliman, 2019).

Figure 1. Goes about here.

While the existing literature on consumer animosity provides valuable insights, there is a notable gap in research addressing the impact of contemporary geopolitical events on consumer behavior, particularly in relation to specific brands. A particularly timely and relevant case study is SHEIN, a **fast-fashion** brand that has faced increasing scrutiny over labor practices, environmental concerns, and its association with broader political tensions.

The rise of consumer animosity towards global brands presents a unique opportunity to examine how geopolitical conflict and ethical consumerism shape consumer decision-making. Understanding the factors driving brand animosity can provide critical insights into the broader implications of international conflicts and ethical controversies on brand management in the global marketplace. By focusing on SHEIN, this study seeks to fill the research gap and contribute to the growing body of work on consumer animosity in the face of complex political and ethical challenges.

We propose a unique model expanding on the classic TPB and integrating it with the Dual Process Theory (see Figure 2). The Dual Process Theory provides a framework for understanding how emotional (System 1) and cognitive (System 2) processes interact in consumer decision-making (Sanjari et al., 2017). The core assumption of Dual Process Theory is that reasoning and decision-making are accomplished by the joint action of the emotional and cognitive processes (Thompson, 2009).

Figure 2. Goes about here.

Consistent with past consumer behavior research, our Proposed Model includes brand animosity (Mandler *et al.*, 2023). However, few studies focus on the association between

brand animosity and behavioral intentions, e.g., boycott intentions (Xie *et al.*, 2023). Betrayal is the infringement of implicit or explicit trust entailing deception, disloyalty, or the breaking of promises (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998). Research points to compelling insights regarding the impact of perceived betrayal on consumer attitudes toward brands and boycotting (Rasouli *et al.*, 2023; Reinikainen *et al.*, 2021). Hence, **perceived betrayal is also integrated into the model.**

Recent advances in consumer behavior research highlight that brand betrayal is a multidimensional construct, with distinct types of betrayal eliciting different emotional and behavioral responses from consumers (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Reimann *et al.*, 2018; Rasouli *et al.*, 2023). In the context of global fast-fashion brands such as SHEIN, three primary forms of perceived betrayal are especially salient: political betrayal, labor practices betrayal, and environmental betrayal (see Conceptual Overview and Research Hypotheses section).

We argue that political betrayals (national identity threats) will elicit stronger animosity and behavioral intentions (e.g., boycott, NWOM) than labor or environmental betrayals, particularly among consumers for whom national identity is salient. Conversely, labor and environmental betrayals may have a stronger impact among consumers with pronounced ethical or environmental self-identities. This nuanced approach provides a more accurate understanding of how different types of brand betrayal interact with individual differences and social context to shape consumer behavior.

Despite the importance of perceived brand betrayal, most research explored its impact on consumer behavior in the context of the service sector. To the best knowledge of the others of

the present study, the possible consequences of perceived brand betrayal in the context of product consumption was overlooked. Lee *et al.* (2013) observed that customers feeling betrayed by service failure are less likely to patronize it again. This finding is consistent with studies suggesting feelings of betrayal are associated with immediate online revenge (i.e., third-party and venting) (Obeidat *et al.*, 2017). Empirical evidence suggests that consumers are more likely to be triggered by political betrayal than any other type of perceived betrayal. This, in turn, is likely to be associated with negative attitudes toward the brand consumers' feel they were betrayed by and intentions to boycott it. Hence, we propose incorporating perceived betrayal, attitude toward the brand, and boycott intentions into the TPB (see Proposed Model).

Although overlooked by most past studies, research suggests that brand animosity is associated with boycott intentions (Xie *et al.* (2023). Consequently, we opted to integrate brand animosity into the Proposed Model. Past studies imply that animosity is associated with negative word of mouth (Antonetti & Manika, 2022) and boycott intentions (Xie *et al.* (2023). However, few studies focus on animosity, with different studies exploring the effects of other negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, frustration, irritation, worry, tension, and fear, on NWOM (Harmeling *et al.*, 2015). Hence, the rationale to integrate NWOM into the Proposed Model.

In line with recent literature and the present study's conceptual model, negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) is designated as the sole dependent variable. NWOM is defined as consumers' sharing of unfavorable brand information as a behavioral outcome of animosity and perceived betrayal (Harmeling *et al.*, 2015; Rasouli *et al.*, 2023). In this model, boycott intention is conceptualized as a direct antecedent of NWOM, rather than as a dependent

variable. This positioning reflects empirical findings that boycott intentions often precede and give rise to NWOM, as consumers seek to express dissatisfaction and influence others (Lee *et al.*, 2021; Antonetti & Manika, 2022).

This structure is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that behavioral intentions (e.g., to boycott) are immediate antecedents of actual behaviors (e.g., spreading NWOM). By specifying NWOM as the outcome and boycott intention as its direct antecedent, the model captures the escalation from internalized intent to externalized action, reflecting the consumer's process of coping and retaliation (Harmeling *et al.*, 2015; Rasouli *et al.*, 2023).

This study seeks to answer the following primary research question: How does perceived brand betrayal (categorized into political, labor, and environmental forms) affect consumer attitudes and coping behaviors (boycott intention and NWOM) in the context of brand animosity? This question is explored through an integrated model based on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Dual Process Theory.

Conceptual Overview and Research Hypotheses

The Dual Process Theory

Research points to an interdependent and mutually reinforcing dynamic between beliefs and emotions, i.e., changes in the former can lead to changes in the latter and vice versa.

Longitudinal studies have shown that emotion beliefs can predict future psychological functioning (Kisley *et al.*, 2024). The relationship between beliefs and emotions accumulates over time, contributing to longer-term emotional health outcomes (Somerville *et al.*, 2024).

Research suggests that the impact of beliefs on emotions may differ across valence domains (positive vs. negative emotions) (Johnston, 2024) and that beliefs can have distinct effects on

different negative emotions (Beccera et al., 2020; Rakib et al., 2022; Vila-Henninger, 2021). However, few studies in the consumer animosity studies explore this relationship. Antonetti *et al.* (2019) demonstrate that extreme negative emotions (e.g., contempt and disgust) arising from animosity beliefs influence consumer attitudes. However, the study did not explicitly investigate the relationship between animosity beliefs and animosity emotions. Furthermore, the study is context specific (Sino-Japanese relations) and extrapolations to other contexts need to be treated with care. Previous research also suggests that animosity beliefs directly influence consumers' attitudes toward brands (Akhtar *et al.*, 2024). However, few studies explored this relationship. Thus,

H1a: Animosity beliefs will be associated with brand animosity.

H1b: Animosity beliefs will be associated with attitude toward the brand.

The Theory of Planned Behavior

According to TPB, perceived behavioral control (henceforth referred to as PBC) reflects the ease or difficulty of performing a behavior and directly influences intention (Ajzen, 2011). Attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC are defined as independent variables yet are theorized to be interdependent. The TPB model conceptualizes attitude, subjective norm, and PBC as predictors of intentions, which, in turn, is an antecedent of behavior. Attitude toward a behavior is the degree of evaluation or appraisal (favorable or unfavorable) of the behavior in question.

Past research suggests that consumer animosity influences product avoidance (Antonetti *et al.*, 2019; Harmeling *et al.*, 2015), reluctance to buy (Verma, 2022), and intentions to boycott (Ali, 2021; Kim *et al.*, 2022). Exploring the mediating role of agonistic emotions (angry, mad, frustrated, and irritated) and retreat emotions (scared, worried, and tense), Harmeling *et*

al. (2015) find that the two types of emotion are associated with product avoidance. Similarly, Antonetti *et al.* (2019) demonstrate that extreme negative emotions such as contempt and disgust, arising from animosity beliefs, play a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes and, consequently, particular behaviors such as product avoidance. This finding is consistent with that of Kim (2019), who points to a relationship between animosity beliefs and switching intentions.

Although product avoidance and switching intentions are not necessarily manifestations of consumer boycotts, a growing body of research demonstrates that animosity emotions are associated with the latter (Kim *et al.*, 2022). Despite the potentially major theoretical and practical implications, few studies explore the relationship between brand animosity and boycott intentions. A study conducted in the context of the “Xinjiang cotton ban” initiated by H&M, Xie *et al.* (2023) shows that the brand was the primary target of Chinese consumers’ boycott. The finding suggests that animosity toward H&M was the cause of the brand’s boycott. Thus,

H2a: Attitudes toward the brand will be associated with boycott intention.

H2b: Brand Animosity will be associated with boycott intention.

A large body of research explores the relationship between negative emotions and perceived betrayal (Fitness, 2001; Fitness & Peterson, 1998). The literature distinguishes between three betrayal typologies: Political betrayal, labor practices betrayal, and environmental betrayal.

Political betrayal

Political betrayal occurs when a brand is perceived as violating or threatening the consumer’s national or cultural identity. This may involve the brand’s associations with controversial

political regimes, actions that are interpreted as disrespectful to a nation's values, or stances taken in global conflicts (Hong & Yang, 2009; Antonetti & Manika, 2022). Political betrayals are particularly potent because they threaten core aspects of consumers' self-concept, especially when national identity is salient. Research demonstrates that political controversies often provoke intense animosity, anger, and collective action such as boycotts or negative word-of-mouth (NWOM), as consumers perceive the brand's actions as a direct affront to their in-group (Hong & Yang, 2009; Antonetti & Manika, 2022).

Labor practices betrayal

Labor practices betrayal refers to situations in which a brand is seen as violating ethical standards related to workers' rights, such as fair wages, safe working conditions, or humane treatment (Rasouli et al., 2023). While these issues are typically framed as moral or ethical violations, the intensity of consumer response depends on the degree to which consumers identify with the affected group (e.g., as workers themselves or as advocates for social justice). Studies indicate that labor-related betrayals can lead to anger, disappointment, and avoidance behaviors, but these reactions are often less intense and less widespread than those triggered by political betrayals, unless the issue is made highly salient or personally relevant (Reimann et al., 2018).

Environmental betrayal

Environmental betrayal involves perceived violations of environmental responsibility, such as contributing to climate change, pollution, or unsustainable resource use (Reimann et al., 2018; Antonetti & Manika, 2022). The literature suggests that while some consumers—particularly those with strong environmental or ethical identities—may react strongly to such betrayals, the broader consumer base may exhibit weaker or more ambivalent responses. This

is especially true in markets where environmental concerns are not yet central to the consumer's self-concept or daily decision-making (Antonetti & Manika, 2022).

The extant psychology and organizational behavior literature points to an association between negative emotions (for example, anger, sadness, disgust, moral outrage, etc.) and perceived betrayal (Fitness, 2001; Fitness & Peterson, 1998). Of all negative emotions associated with perceived betrayal, anger is deemed the most immediate response to perceived betrayal (Fitness & Peterson, 1998).

However, little is known about how animosity (considered a less transient emotion and more complex than anger) may be associated with perceived betrayal in consumer-related contexts was by and large overlooked in previous research. A study by Lee *et al.* (2021) conducted in the context of a perceived violation of fairness by a domestic brand suggests that animosity toward a brand is associated with perceived betrayal. Although the study was conducted in the setting of a domestic brand, it is reasonable to assume that a similar relationship is likely be observed in the context of animosity harbored toward an international brand.

H3: Brand animosity will be associated with perceived betrayal.

A large body of research examines the association between animosity, its antecedents, and its consequences (Harmeling *et al.*, 2015; Mandler *et al.*, 2023). Regardless, few studies explore the possible outcomes of animosity beyond behavioral intentions. Harmeling *et al.* (2015) observe that NWOM and product avoidance are consumers' main coping mechanisms for emotions of animosity. Nevertheless, Antonetti *et al.* (2019) find no association between animosity and NWOM. These contradictory findings may be accounted for by the context-specific effects of animosity on coping mechanisms Antonetti and Manika (2022). To address

these mixed findings and come to a more unequivocal conclusion regarding the relationship between animosity and NWOM, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Brand animosity will be associated with NWOM.

Brand betrayal triggers intense emotional responses such as indignation and rumination (Reimann et al., 2018). Perceived brand betrayal was also observed to be associated with negative brand evaluations and behavioral intentions (Rasouli *et al.*, 2023). These strong emotional reactions significantly impair consumers' attitude toward the brand, complicating companies' efforts to rebuild trust and loyalty. The effect of brand betrayal on trust can be accounted for by more recent research demonstrating how the former negatively affects consumers' trust and attitudes toward brands and purchase intentions (Reinikainen *et al.*, 2021). Brand betrayal leads to more profound and durable damage to the consumer-brand relationship and that perceived betrayal significantly worsens brand evaluation. Perceived betrayal is also positively associated with NWOM (Lee *et al.*, 2021). However, the abovementioned studies were not conducted in the context of consumer animosity which may reinforce the relationship between the two constructs. Hence,

H5a: Perceived betrayal will be associated with attitude toward the brand.

H5b: Perceived betrayal will be associated with NWOM.

According to Ajzen (1985), social norms are social pressures individuals perceive about an intended behavior. Norms set rules for expected behaviors (Reese *et al.*, 2019). A large body of research points to the influential role of social norms on behavioral intentions (Liu *et al.*, 2020; Zhuang *et al.*, 2021) due to their high predictive power (Ajzen, 2020). Research suggests that subjective norms are also associated with boycott intentions (Farah and Newman, 2010). However, few studies explore the relationship between subjective norms

and boycott intentions in a consumer animosity setting. Maher & Mady's (2010) study demonstrates that consumers' perceptions of social pressure is associated with boycott participation in the context of consumer animosity. Similarly, Klein *et al.* (2004) observe that when individuals strongly identify with a group supporting a boycott, they are more likely to conform to the group's expectations and participate in the boycott. Hence,

H6: Subjective norms will be negatively associated with boycott intentions.

According to Suhud (2020), negative attitudes toward a brand's marketing communication are associated with intentions to participate in a boycott and reluctance to purchase. These observations are corroborated by Palacios Florencio *et al.* (2019) who find that the perceived legitimacy of the behavior, ethical idealism, and ethical relativism are associated with consumer attitudes toward boycott behavior. Similarly, a study by Sen *et al.* (2001) suggests that negative consumer attitudes toward a brand over ethical concerns or dissatisfaction with corporate practices are more likely to have an intention to boycott the brand in question. Hence,

H7: Attitude toward buying the brand will be associated with boycott intention.

According to TPB, PBC can, directly and indirectly, influence behavior through intention (Ajzen, 2005). The more favorable the attitude, subjective norm, and PBC towards a behavior, the stronger the intention to perform a behavior and, in turn, the chances of actually performing the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Past research suggests that PBC is associated with boycott intentions. Farah & Newman (2010) observed that PBC predicted Lebanese consumers' intentions to boycott American products over the US policy in the Middle East. A

study conducted by Kim *et al.* (2023) in the context of Japan's economic sanctions on South Korea points to a similar relationship. Hence,

H8: PBC will be negatively associated with boycott intentions.

Research demonstrates that negative word of mouth significantly lowers the likelihood of consumers purchasing a product (Bachleda & Berrada-Fathi, 2016). This effect is, however, notably less substantial than the impact of positive word of mouth, suggesting that consumers are more likely to be influenced by positive word of mouth (East et al., 2008). This relationship is mainly due to the higher impact of positive information on consumers' attitudes and decision-making processes. Negative experiences shared by others often lead prospective buyers to reconsider their purchase decisions to avoid potential dissatisfaction (Luo *et al.*, 2018). Although the relationship between NWOM and boycott intention was mostly overlooked in previous research, past studies suggest this is quite likely. Thus,

H9: Negative word of mouth will be associated with boycott intention.

The Research Setting

The Swords of Iron War broke out following an attack on October 7, 2023, by Hamas on Israeli towns bordering Gaza. The war prompted negative reactions toward Israel from the international community including MNCs, among them Shein (Walla fashion system, 2023). SHEIN is a global Chinese online fashion company valued at roughly \$45 billion (Chen *et al.*, 2024). It has offices in 19 countries, a presence in over 150 countries, and a 11K workforce globally (SHEIN, 2024).

The brand was at the epicenter of several controversies particularly regarding exploitative business practices and environment-related issues (Haviv Waldhorn, 2023; Guterzon, 2023).

At the outset of the Israeli-Hamas war, SHEIN offered for sell on its website Palestinian flags and cancelled free shipping to Israel (Atmag system, 2023). Israelis perceived these as lack of support for their country, prompting calls to boycott the brand (Dovrat, 2023). Consequently, purchases among Israelis decreased by 61% (Sapir, 2023).

Methodology

Study Design

A convenience sample of 386 Israelis was elicited for participation in March 2024 with the assistance of a panel firm. The questionnaire was translated and back-translated (Douglas and Craig, 1983) and seven-point Likert scales adapted from previous research were employed.

Perceived betrayal was measured using a scale adapted from Gregoire & Fisher (2008).

Animosity beliefs were measured with items adapted from Harmeling *et al.* (2015). *Subjective norm*, *perceived behavioral control*, *attitude toward the brand*, and *intention* were measured using items adapted from Carfora *et al.* (2019). *Attitude toward buying the brand* was measured using items adapted from Han (2016). *Boycott intention* was measured with a scale adapted from (Lee & Chon, 2021). Finally, *NWOM* was measured with a scale adapted from Zhang *et al.* (2014).

Results

Sampling Profile

The sample ($n = 386$) comprises 30.1% males, 69.7% females, and 0.3% who refused to say.

The sample is roughly equal in number of baby boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials (Table 1). Gen Zs comprise a relatively small proportion of the sample (7.5%). Most respondents are married (67.4%), have advanced degrees (53.1), and are employed full-time (61.4%).

Table 1. goes about here.

Descriptive Statistics on Measurements

This section describes the sample data, focusing on item mean scores, standard deviations, Skewness, and Kurtosis. The scores presented are based on a 7-point Likert scale (see Table 2).

Table 2. goes about here.

Common Method Variance

Common method bias Harman's single factor is a common technique to test common method bias post-hoc (Huang *et al.*, 2019; Wu *et al.*, 2023). However, the technique is criticism due to its perceived ineffectiveness (Aguirre-Urreta and Hu, 2019). Hence, we test CMB post hoc by examining variance inflation factor values (i.e. VIF). Consistent with Graham (2003), the VIF values in the inner model are below the 3 cutoff (see Table 5).

Assessment of the Measurement Model

We used SmartPLS (v.3.3.3) and AMOS 28 to test the fit of the proposed model. Consistent with Hair *et al.*'s (2017), we assessed indicator and construct reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity to estimate the reflective measurement model (see Table 3 & Table 4). Consistent with Hair *et al.* (2006), items with factor loadings below the recommended 0.7 cutoff (i.e., SN4, PB2, PB3, and BA6) were omitted from further analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2006). As can be seen in Table 3, convergent validity was assessed by estimating the average variance extracted (i.e. AVE). AVE of all constructs was at or above the 0.5 threshold recommended by Hair *et al.* (2010). The square root values of the constructs exceed the correlation coefficients observed in paired constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Hence, discriminant validity is demonstrated (see Table 4).

Table 3. goes about here.

Table 4. goes about here.

For path analysis, we used SmartPLS (see Table 5). Bootstrapping (sample of 5,000) was performed to calculate t-statistics and strength of the relationships between the endogenous and exogenous constructs in the proposed model (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 5. goes about here.

To assess the predictive relevance of the PLS path model, Stone Geisser's Q2 was estimated (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The analysis results corroborate the predictive relevance of the model for all the variables in the Empirical Model (see Table 6 and Figure 3).

Table 6 goes about here.

Figure 3 goes about here.

The following section presents the study findings. We focus on whether path analysis using SmartPLS supports or refutes the study hypotheses and present construct means and standard deviations where necessary.

We hypothesized (H1a) that animosity beliefs ($M=4.712$; $SD=1.446$) would be associated with brand animosity ($M=3.775$; $SD=1.813$). This is corroborated by the data ($\beta = 0.45$, $t = 11.654$, $p < 0.001$). Consistent with H1b, we observed a significant relationship between animosity beliefs and attitude toward the brand ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 5.434$, $p < 0.001$). The mean score on the latter construct ($M=4.285$; $SD=1.908$) points to a proclivity toward a negative

attitude toward the brand. According to H2a, attitude toward the brand ($M=4.285$; $SD=1.908$) would be associated with boycott intentions ($M=4.603$; $SD=1.974$). This is supported by the data ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 4.934$, $p < 0.001$).

Regardless of the relatively low mean score observed in the brand animosity construct ($M=3.775$; $SD=1.813$), the study findings support our hypothesis (H2b) that brand animosity will be associated with boycott intention ($\beta = 0.43$, $t = 8.668$, $p < 0.001$). In line with H3, brand animosity was observed to be associated with perceived betrayal ($\beta = 0.67$, $t = 19.358$, $p < 0.001$). In support of H4, the study findings suggest that brand animosity will be associated with negative word of mouth ($\beta = 0.20$, $t = 2.931$, $p < 0.001$).

According to H5a, perceived betrayal will be associated with attitude toward the brand. This is corroborated by the data ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 2.760$, $p < 0.05$). The mean score observed in NWOM ($M=3.80$; $SD=1.797$) is below the midpoint (4). This may explain the lack of association between perceived betrayal and negative word of mouth ($\beta = 0.08$, $t = 1.388$, $p > 0.05$) and lack of support for H5b. Contrary to H6, no significant relationship was observed between subject norms and boycott intentions ($\beta = -0.05$, $t = 1.116$, $p > 0.05$). This may partially account for the relatively low mean score observed in the subject norms construct ($M=3.060$; $SD=1.635$). We hypothesized (H7) that attitude toward buying the brand would be associated with boycott intention. The mean score observed in the attitude toward buying the brand construct ($M=3.550$; $SD=1.406$) is below the midpoint. This may account for a lack of significant association between the constructs ($\beta = -0.02$, $t = 0.518$, $p > 0.05$).

The mean score on the PBC construct ($M=4.403$; $SD=1.748$) suggests that Israeli consumers at least perceive that they have control over whether they can buy from the SHEIN brand vis-

a-vis competing brands. Nevertheless, in line with H8, we found a significant relationship between PBC and boycott intentions ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 5.405$, $p < 0.001$). According to H9, boycott intention will be associated with negative word of mouth. The findings corroborate the hypothesis ($\beta = 0.37$, $t = 6.626$, $p < 0.001$).

Post-Hoc Analysis

Animosity beliefs were observed to be indirectly associated with NWOM via boycott intention ($\beta = 0.16$, $t = 5.129$, $p < 0.05$). Another indirect relationship was found between PBC and NWOM mediated by boycott intention ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 4.292$, $p < 0.001$).

General Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the consequences of attributing betrayal to a brand on consumer attitudes and emotions toward the brand and the underlying mechanisms consumers employ to cope with the provoked attitudes and emotions. The higher observed mean score on the animosity beliefs construct vis-à-vis the brand animosity construct suggests that perceived betrayal on the part of consumers had a greater impact on consumer cognition than affect. The impact of strong emotions on attitudes was observed to be more substantial than its influence on behavioral intentions. Furthermore, the study suggests that animosity beliefs are directly associated with emotions (animosity) and indirectly with behavioral intentions. Finally, the observation that boycott intention mediates the relationship between PBC and NWOM suggests that the influence of PBC is beyond and above what is hypothesized by the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Theoretical Implications

The present study makes several theoretical contributions. First, perceptions other than behavioral control (i.e., perceived betrayal) play a role in predicting attitude and behavioral

intention. Furthermore, the empirical model points to the integration of emotion into TPB.

Our empirical model also suggests that incorporating more than just a single construct designed to measure a very specific behavioral intention, but rather multiple constructs (boycott intention, NWOM) may shed further light on the effects of exogenous variables and enhance our understanding of consumer behavior. Furthermore, in contrast to the assumptions of TPB, the present study suggests that subjective norms are unrelated to behavioral intention.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study offer several practical implications, particularly for multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in ethically sensitive sectors such as fast fashion. First, the results suggest that consumers with strong positive attitudes and high loyalty to a brand are less likely to participate in boycotts, even when they are aware of the brand's negative actions. While this has clear implications for brand management, it also underscores the ethical responsibility companies carry in cultivating such loyalty.

Rather than using loyalty-building strategies to deflect accountability, MNCs should leverage this insight to foster more transparent, responsible, and responsive corporate practices. For instance, reassessing customer interaction policies to emphasize two-way communication, especially through structured feedback channels, can ensure that consumers feel heard and respected. Empathetic responses to consumer concerns, particularly in times of crisis, can help repair trust and reorient brand behavior toward more sustainable and ethical practices (Ma, 2020; Jain & Sharma, 2019).

Moreover, the study suggests that brands must invest in meaningful engagement with stakeholders, not merely as a marketing strategy, but as a foundation for more ethical conduct. Feedback mechanisms, focus groups, and influencer collaborations should be used not to mask negative impacts, but to genuinely understand and respond to consumer expectations for fairness, transparency, and sustainability (Reinikainen *et al.*, 2021). In this

light, loyalty is not a shield against criticism, but a platform for co-creating higher standards of corporate responsibility.

Finally, the findings highlight the need for brand managers to consider how negative commentary, especially in ethical or environmental contexts, can influence immediate purchase intentions. Rather than mitigating this through superficial image management, brands should aim to address the root causes of such criticism, thereby aligning commercial success with positive societal outcomes.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the Proposed Model incorporates several previously unexplored interactions in TPB (e.g., perceived betrayal, NWOM, boycott intention), other constructs such as ethnocentrism, patriotism, and perceived cultural similarity may also account for the variance explained in the Proposed Model. The dominant culture in a country plays a crucial role in shaping consumer reactions to betrayal, influencing perceptions, coping mechanisms, emotional responses, and emotional expression. Expressive cultures, such as those in Latin America, may exhibit overt dissatisfaction, while restrained cultures, like Japan, might respond more subtly but harbor long-term discontent (Matsumoto, 1990). Hence, future research will benefit from **examining how cultural context may moderate consumer responses to brand controversies.**

Finally, the present study was conducted in a very particular context. Replicating the study in other contexts, consumer segments, and cultures will contribute to the cross-cultural validity of the Empirical Model.

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