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The Anatomy of Consumer Brand Sabotage:

Sadaf Amjad
Sadaf Tallia

University of Bedfordshire

Authors' Affiliation Details

Sadaf Amjad
Ph.D. Scholar and VL
Bahauddin Zakariya University,
Pakistan
sadafamjad25@gmail.com

Sadaf Tallia
Ph.D. Scholar and VL
Viscarage St, Luton LU1 3JU
University of Bedfordshire, England
Sadaf.Tallia@beds.ac.uk

The Anatomy of Consumer Brand Sabotage: "Exploring the Nexus of Negative Word-of-Mouth, Brand Hate, and Perceived Brand Betrayal"

Abstract:

In the recent decades, academicians and researchers from marketing have shown a profound interest in exploring the mechanism through which brand relationships can be conceptualized, measured, and studied. In conjunction with studies on positive brand associations, recent authors and practitioners are concerned with understanding the dark side of brand relationships and anti-brand behaviors. Consumer brand sabotage (CBS) is the most aggravating concern to deal with as it harms brand image and ruins consumer-brand relationships. Therefore, the aim of this study was to find the relationship between negative word of mouth (negative WoM) and consumer brand sabotage with mediating effect of brand hate and perceived brand betrayal with the help of affective event theory. Furthermore, this research study has investigated the effects of consumers' intention to sabotage a brand. Data were collected from 205 respondents through google forms. Various scenarios related to brand sabotage were added to the survey and consumers were asked to respond to the questions following the scenarios. Results through Smart PLS revealed a negative relationship between negative word of mouth and consumer brand sabotage intention (CBSI). The findings of this research have significant implications for understanding the complex dynamics of consumer brand sabotage. They highlight how brand hatred has a negative effect on negative consumer behaviours and how it plays a prophetic role in brand retaliation, anti-brand consumption, and brand alienation. Furthermore, they unveil the complex interplay between customer perceptions, emotions, and behaviours, highlighting the need for proactive initiatives to prevent brand sabotage and promote positive consumer-brand alliances.

Keywords:

Negative word of mouth, brand hate, brand betrayal, consumer brand sabotage.

Introduction:

In accordance with a thorough analysis of the consumer behavior literature, it has been evident that consumers' unpleasant interactions may lead them to form undesirable emotions about a certain brand. Such interactions may then necessitate a secret reaction for example avoidance or an explicit aggressive response, like looking for revenge (Jabeen et al., 2022a) and in more extreme cases brand sabotage (Kähr, 2016). Recent research has investigated the other side of the customer and brand association known as the “dark side”, clarifying its different consequences, like brand avoidance, lending validity to this concept (Odoom et al., 2019).

Marketing academicians, experts, and theorists have seen a remarkable change from the transactional viewpoint to a relationship-based viewpoint in consumer brand links (Fournier et al., 2016). Consumers have subsequent contrasting associations with the brand and these relationships might be undesirable or favorable because of what sort of value customers got from the brand. The consumers' relations with the labels might at times result in excessive love or hate for the label (Fournier, 1998). The proposition about consumers' actions towards building a brand relationship holds when the labels or the brands are honestly trying to develop relations with consumers (Rehmat, S., & Wasim, M. 2021).

In terms of how brand relationships are hypothesized, assessed, and examined, there has been a major advancement in marketing literature over the past few decades. There has been an increase in interest in studies on unfavorable brand associations and anti-brand actions, in addition to studies on positive brand associations including brand satisfaction (Keiningham, Morgeson, Aksoy, & Williams, 2014), brand attachment (Japutra et al., 2018), good word of mouth (Keller, 2009), brand love (Batra et al., 2012), brand evangelism (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013), and brand loyalty (Amine, 1998). The impact of adverse brand perceptions and behaviors on customer decision-making and overall brand performance is becoming a significant source of worry for researchers and marketers. Most research studies in this area have focused on specific negative brand-related behaviors, such as complaining, brand avoidance (Knittel, Beurer, & Berndt, 2016; Lee et al., 2009a), brand retaliation (Thomson, Whelan, & Johnson, 2012), and brand hate (Fetscherin, 2019, Zarantonello et al., 2018).

From the point of view of Romani et al. (2012), inadequate studies have been done over the past few decades, providing perceptions of consumers' adverse attitudes and behavior toward brands. By the prior argument, Fetscherin and Heinrich (2015) asserted that further investigation is needed on the other side of consumer brand associations which is regarded as the dark side. When consumers hold extreme and adverse emotions about brands, it significantly affects the prestige of the brand as they resulted in unique cognitive and behavioral responses (Delzen, M. 2017). Thus, along with the positive side of brand relations and behaviors, understanding the negative side is equally important rather critical for companies to earn higher revenues (Zhang, Dixit, & Friedmann, 2010) as well as to lower overall shareholder profit (Barker, Peacock, & Fetscherin, 2015).

Although academicians and practitioners have immensely overlooked the consumers' negative emotions towards the personality and reputation of brands, still consumers consider “the brand” when making their buying decision to consume products and services. Consumers consider their emotions towards the brands before purchasing intentions (Romani et al., 2012). The overlooked brand relationships which are negative in nature can prove to be problematic for the companies in the organizational setting. To maintain healthy and long-term relationships with customers, organizations must concentrate on the other aspects of buying brand name interactions regarded as the “dark side”. As the internet in general and the social media in particular has facilitated the consumer to spread their word of mouth on a larger scale and these

negative feelings, when expressed on online platforms, can affect the brand's reputation (Hegner et al. 2017).

From the branding perspective, negative word of mouth, hate towards a brand, perceived brand betrayal, brand retaliation, and eventually, consumer brand sabotage exists when a brand violates the moral obligations towards the consumers (honesty, integrity). The obligations which are promised by the brand itself 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 reason that consumers indulge in revenge-seeking practices in case of service failure as they feel powerless to alter the encountered circumstances (Gelbrich, 2010, Grégoire et al., 2010). These sorts of vengeance behaviors are induced by the differential user intents, attitudes, and recognition of blame, and it also depends on the type of publicity encountered by the brand itself.

The negative consumers' emotions then take negative behavioral responses and they try to seek revenge against the responsible brand as they perceive that their preferred brand does not satisfy their expectations. Consumers may indulge themselves in more general kinds of revenge behaviors, such as opinions, reviews, and comments related to products, services, and firms (Obeidat et al., 2017). Apart from spreading negative word of mouth, they may also engage in negative practices such as brand avoidance, disloyalty, unethical behavior, and providing misleading information on virtual/traditional platforms (Reimann et al., 2018). In some extreme instances, consumers become hostile and extremely determined to bring about some harm to the company/brand. Consumers perceive the brand negatively which is almost similar to the saboteurs in warfare.

Within this frame of reference, consumer brand sabotage (CBS) is described as an intentional form of violent behavior from a customer that aims to damage or hurt the brand. The phenomenon of a complete breakdown in the association between consumers and brands, commonly referred to as 'burning bridges,' has received limited attention in previous studies (Kähr, 2016). This type of negative user behavior represents the end of the spectrum and is accompanied by a sense of disillusionment, frustration, and resentment toward the brand. Other forms of negative user behavior include customer retaliation, consumer boycotts, and negative word-of-mouth, which can be considered instrumental aggression aimed at expressing hostility towards a company or brand. These behaviors are significant in that they can have serious implications for brand reputation and customer loyalty.

The motive in such cases is not primarily to hurt the brand, but instead to accomplish other goals including efforts to rebuild equity or letting out anger, rage, and other negative feelings (Anderson and Bushman, 2002). In this regard, an important point is that when users show dissatisfaction or anger towards a brand, they are probably demonstrating instrumental aggression. On the other hand, there are significant incidences where users will be given potentially severe consequences, marketers must have a comprehensive understanding of a unique phenomenon: negative customer behavior. Such behavior has become increasingly challenging for organizations, as a single negative comment or rating can result in a loss of existing and potential customers, sometimes resulting in a loss of billions of dollars.

Marketing theorists have emphasized the importance of brand revitalization strategies in managing the brand relationship, particularly during times of brand reversal (Keller, 2009). engaged in an unusual type of conduct and attempt to harm the brand. Furthermore, it is incumbent upon both academics and marketing managers to gain a comprehensive understanding of this emerging phenomenon, including the underlying drivers of hostile

customer behavior. It is not sufficient to merely acknowledge its existence; one must delve deeper into the causes and motivations behind negative customer behavior.

Marketing theorists have highlighted the importance of brand revitalization strategies in managing the brand relationship, particularly during periods of brand reversal, emphasizing their critical role in safeguarding brand equity (Keller, 2009). Therefore, marketing professionals and academics alike must equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and tools to manage negative customer behavior effectively and develop successful brand revitalization strategies. It has been observed that brand managers try their best to facilitate the consumers while facing perceived brand betrayal. Intending to mitigate the risk of perceived brand betrayal, brand managers seek to satisfy the expectations of their consumers (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008).

This study offers several theoretical contributions to the literature on CBSI. Specifically, existing research used different consumer intentions and attitudes as antecedents of word of mouth. However, based on affective events theory, this study has taken this stream of research one step ahead by examining how receiving negative word of mouth spread by a different consumer shape his intentions to sabotage the brand. Moreover, this study has also developed an understanding of the role of negative WoM in consumer attitude by testing how receiving negative word of mouth may induce brand hatred among consumers. In addition, this study has also explained a mediation mechanism through which negative WoM strengthens CBSIs through brand hatred and perceived brand betrayal. The final unique contribution of this study is the use of affective events theory as we propose that negative WoM serves as a negative affective event that further shapes consumer perceptions and attitudes toward a brand to trigger a consumer's intentions to sabotage a specific brand.

Literature Review:

Although, word of mouth (WOM) is a strong driver of consumer attitudes (Herr et al. 1991), yet in this study, we argue that WoM also shapes consumer intentions. Word of mouth could be positive as well as negative or positive statements (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). However, this study focuses on negative word of mouth to argue that negative word of mouth about a specific brand also shapes and enhances adverse consumer intentions about the brand. We sought theoretical support for these hypotheses from affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) which emphasizes the causes and consequences of affective events. Considering negative word of mouth as a negative affective event we argue that customers may experience mentally upset when they receive negative WOM about their choice of a brand from others because they find it is against their attitudes and beliefs (Gilal et al., 2018).

Likewise, studies also indicates that negative word-of-mouth can have a big impact on consumer brand sabotage. Halim et al. (2022) asserts that the dissemination of unfavourable/negative electronic word-of-mouth (N-eWOM) lowers buying intentions, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Similar to this, Jabeen et al. (2022b) demonstrates that unsatisfactory encounters and negative word-of-mouth can cause customers to feel betrayed and hateful, which ultimately results in avoidance and retaliatory behaviours. According to Brandão and Popoli (2022), negative consumer-brand interactions might appear in online anti-brand networks, emphasising the necessity for businesses to develop "brand recovery strategies" to deal with negativity. Furthermore, according to Khan and Fatma (2023), customer views of corporate social responsibility (CSR) have a favourable impact on brand trust, which serves as a partial mediating factor in the interaction between CSR, brand image, and consumer word-of-mouth. Taken together, these studies show that negative word-of-mouth can hurt a brand's reputation and lead to consumer brand sabotage,

highlighting the significance of proactive negativity management and building consumer trust on the part of businesses.

Even some studies have shown that negative WOM strongly affects consumers' mindsets more than positive WOM (Pihlaja et al., 2017). Thus, customers facing unfavorable experiences or information about a product or service are more likely to threaten the apparent company by filing a complaint using social platforms media platforms (Stockman et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the consumer may not limit this negative reaction to social media platforms only as the power of the consumer to comment on a brand has expanded significantly (Bone, 1995). A consistent occurrence of negative affective events in the form of negative word of mouth may also trigger consumer intentions to retaliate (Bowden et al., 2017) or boycott (Peeroo et al., 2016, Friedman, 1991). These hostile behaviors demonstrate hostile aggression behaviors (Kähr et al., 2016) which may lead the consumer towards brand sabotage behaviors (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003). Hence, considering negative WoM as a negative affective event we hypothesized that negative WoM induces negative intentions among consumers to sabotage the recognition of a brand. Hence, we hypothesized that:

H1: Negative word of mouth is positively related to CBSI.

Baumeister et al. (2001) asserted that people are more inclined to share with others their negative vibes as compared to positive experiences or feelings. Research in consumer behavior (Lutz, 1975), psychology (Ito et al., 1998), and neuroscience (Zeki and Romaya, 2008) also shows that people recall unpleasant situations more vividly than pleasant ones.

Negative WoM is considered as a transfer of information by customers to their friends, personal and other contacts where the aim is to disparage a brand or an organization (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Negative word of mouth can be considered as Personal complaints. Through Personal complaints, people communicate their negative experiences with brands to acquaintances because they perceive these negative experiences as unfavorable. Consequently, the people who haven't experienced the said brand will also develop hatred towards it, though hate is regarded as a very personal emotion in the absence of any serious defects.

There are a lot of reasons why consumers criticize a brand in front of others. Some of them are to attain a level of contentment (de Matos and Rossi, 2008), to reestablish a lost relationship with the brand, or to deliver a productive response to the brand and their firms (Eisingerich et al., 2014). When a consumer speaks about genuine issues or unpleasant happenings to protect others from likewise happenings or to deliver a productive response to the firm, this does not weaken the marketing function.

On the contrary, the consumers who raise their voices to spread negative WoM, intend to hurt a brand by showing their resentment toward the firms. Such consumers aim to mobilize other consumers against the offending firm (Ward and Ostrom, 2006). Consumers receiving negative word of mouth from other customers may experience a mental setback because they find it is against their attitudes and beliefs (Gilal et al., 2018). Consequently, the experience may automatically develop negative sentiments about the brand or firm.

Furthermore, some recent studies also suggest that negative word-of-mouth about a brand might lead to brand hatred. According to Noor et al. (2022), aggressive marketing can lead to brand hatred and revenge among Muslim customers. Yang and Mundel (2022) noted that while compensation can create brand love, negative customer expectation violations brought on by negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can foster brand hate. According to Abbasi et al. (2023), brand hatred can be caused by ideological incompatibility, symbolic incongruity, unfavourable prior experiences, and corporate social irresponsibility. However, by resolving

complaints effectively, the effects of ideological incompatibility and symbolic incongruity can be lessened. According to Pantano (2021), when a luxury business uses offensive stereotypes in a marketing effort, it can lead to brand haters. Briefly, these studies highlight how negative word-of-mouth has a substantial impact on brand hatred, prompting businesses to be aware of the consequences of offensive advertising, negative WOM, and other elements that can lead towards brand hatred.

Existing marketing knowledge has also shown similar findings that when negative customer experience in the form of service failure episodes establish anti-brand sentiments that express hatred (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Hegner, Fetscherin, & van Delzen, 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016; Bryson et al., 2013). Hence, again considering negative WoM as a negative affective event, as viewed by affective events theory, we hypothesized that:

H2: Negative word of mouth is positively related to brand hate.

Favorable brand interactions have less of an impact on customers as compared to negative ones, which is in line with the concept of "negativity bias" established in earlier studies (Kanouse et al., 1972). Buyers may have unpleasant emotions and feelings as a result of such issues and rising dissatisfaction. According to R. L., (1980), customers compare their expectations with their actual user experience, and if there is a considerable disparity or deviation, they develop unfavorable emotions and sentiments. Such negative emotions can develop a feeling of perceived brand betrayal on behalf of the brand because of a mental setback experienced by the customer. The customers develop such feelings because they find it against their attitudes and beliefs (Gilal et al., 2018, Laczniak et al., 2001). In other words, when a loyal customer with a history of strong relations with a brand and positive past interactions, experiences negative instances (negative WoM), the relationship is harmed and customers feel betrayed (Reimann et al., 2018).

Perceived brand betrayal refers to the belief of a customer that a company has intentionally violated the norms of their relationship, as defined by Elangovan and Shapiro (1998), Koehler and Gershoff (2003), and Ward and Ostrom (2006). Initial investigations into the destructive facets of the association among customer and the brand have revealed that perceived betrayal by the brand occurs when a well-known label, having an established association, violates a ethical obligation or basic customer expectations (Anderson and Bushman, 2002, Finkel et al., 2002, Grégoire et al., 2018). Recent study has corroborated that when customers' fundamental expectations are not met due to negative experiences or breaches of trust, they perceive the brand to have betrayed them (Jabeen et al., 2022a, Parmentier and Fischer, 2015, Reimann et al., 2018, Wiggin and Yalch, 2015).

Therefore, a thorough understanding of perceived brand betrayal is essential for companies to maintain positive customer relationships and prevent brand damage. Another research study examined the extensive literature and identified negative experiences such as complaints regarding security and cleanliness, customer discontentment, destructive and harmful word-of-mouth, and excessive advertisements which positively correlate with the feeling of perceived brand betrayal (Jabeen et al., 2022a). Therefore, on the basis of this argument, we hypothesize that encounters of customers with the brand, product, service and delivery which are unpleasant in nature, along with negative response from others, can contribute to the development of a negative state of perceived brand betrayal, leading them to feel mistreated and betrayed by the brand (Jabeen et al., 2022a).

H3: Negative word of mouth is positively related to perceived brand betrayal.

Academic scholars are currently exploring brand hate, which has been widely observed phenomenon in the industry yet has received limited attention in academia (Hegner et al., 2017, Kucuk, 2018, Zarantonello et al., 2016, Zarantonello et al., 2018, Zhang and Laroche, 2020). Marketing concepts such as brand avoidance (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019), brand retaliation (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008), brand revenge (Grégoire et al., 2009), and brand sabotage (Kähr, 2016) can be used to study the phenomenon of brand hate. Although these constructs are related to brand hate, they also have unique features that distinguish them from it.

Brand hatred is considered to be a potent negative emotion capable of inducing physical reactions (Bagozzi et al., 1999). These physical reactions can be classified into two forms: physiological and behavioral responses. Behavioral responses, such as brand retaliation, brand revenge, and brand sabotage, are examples of how brand hatred can manifest (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008, Grégoire et al., 2009, Kähr, 2016). Consumer brand sabotage is defined by Kähr (2016) as a conscious behavior where customers or non-customers aim to harm a brand by impairing the brand-related associations of other customers.

According to the academic researches, customer brand sabotage is negatively impacted by brand hatred. Attiq et al. (2022) asserts that brand hate predicts brand retaliation, which has a detrimental effect on customer wellbeing. Rahimah et al. (2023) discovered that anti-brand consumption behaviours, including brand avoidance and switching, are influenced by brand hatred. According to Brandão and Popoli (2022), firms may establish ways for brand recovery to efficiently manage negativity by understanding negative consumer-brand relationships. Brand managers should take proactive measures to lessen brand hatred and keep clients, according to Rai et al. (2023), who also offered a research agenda for the study of brand hatred. These studies collectively imply that bad brand encounters can cause consumer brand hate, which can result in consumer brand sabotage.

An instance of this is the online backlash against United Airlines following the viral video of a passenger being forcibly removed from one of their planes. People shared their similar experiences of overbooking and expressed their hatred for the airline through hashtags like "hate United Airlines" and "boycott United Airlines." The public apology email of United Airlines' CEO following a scandal in 2017 was deemed insufficient, further exacerbating consumer hatred towards the company. The negative press coverage and stock market losses sustained by United Airlines serve as a poignant example of the considerable impact of consumer emotions, which can rapidly lead to extreme responses such as brand retaliation, consumer revenge, and even brand sabotage (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008, Grégoire et al., 2009, Kähr, 2016). To reinforce our argument, we draw upon the affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), which highlights the causes and effects of emotional events. We contend that customers' brand hatred may provoke negative emotions in them, prompting them to take action against the brand.

Thus, we hypothesized that:

H4: Brand hate is positively related to CBSI.

The research explored Elangovan and Shapiro (1998) and Finkel et al. (2002) perceived brand betrayal in the aspects of close relationships and employee-employer interactions and as the process characterizing the motivation behind online user protest (Finkel et al., 2002, Ward and Ostrom, 2006). Perceived brand betrayal is exceedingly difficult when comes to forgiving and forgetting (Finkel et al., 2002). It is linked to harsher penalties in terms of jail time and punitive damages in the context of criminal situations according to the reviewed studies (Koehler and Gershoff, 2003).

When it comes to marketing, Perceived perceived brand betrayal occurs when clients feel that a company has misled them, exploited them, tried to take advantage of them, breached their trust, deceived them, broken promises, or revealed private information (Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998, Grégoire and Fisher, 2008).

Consistent with the studies, it has been evident that perceived brand betrayal can affect consumer brand sabotage. According to Lee et al. (2021), consumer ethnocentrism and hostility have a beneficial effect on the impression of betrayal when a brand is thought to violate fairness. According to Qasim (2021), the mediating function of negative emotions allows brand reputation to indirectly effect consumer brand sabotage. According to Baghi and Gabrielli (2021), perceived brand betrayal acts as a mediator between perceived brand betrayal and negative behavioural reactions when a brand is embroiled in a crisis related to values. Last but not least, according to Rasouli et al. (2022) found that in the restaurant industry, perceived brand betrayal and brand hatred might be negatively impacted by consumer forgiveness. Moreover, the lowest degree of brand love and the greatest motivation to punish are caused by perceived procedural injustice, according to Ahmad and Guzmán (2023), which has a more harmful affect on the phenomenon of brand love.

Furthermore, loyal customers are more likely to feel betrayed following unfair service failure and recovery (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Such clients have more options than simply walking away from a relationship or screaming about unsatisfactory service. The negative experiences may act as negative affective events that trigger customers' intentions to engage in more intense retaliation (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008, Koehler and Gershoff, 2003, Ward and Ostrom, 2006).

Some of these customers become enraged and take action to "get even" Bechwati and Morrin (2003) and Grégoire et al. (2010) to sabotage the brand. When consumer and brand relations are irrevocably shattered, people engage in antagonistic activity that is meant to hurt a brand (instead of demanding restitution or an explanation) (Kähr, 2016, Wilson et al., 2022). Thus, consumer brand sabotage signifies subversive behavior on the part of consumers intended to impair a marketer's ability to manage their brand.

In conclusion, sabotage and revenge actions start with a major incident, like a service failure or service termination (Haenel et al., 2019, Obeidat et al., 2017). Due to the perceived violation, the customer feels betrayed and acts in a way that is meant to hurt the marketer. Consumer brand sabotage is an act of retaliation by betrayed customers (Kähr, 2016). The intention is to hurt the brand beyond repair.

Hence, we can propose that

H5: Perceived brand betrayal is positively related to CBSI.

Similarly, it has been argued that the phenomenon of brand hate strengthens the impact of negative WoM on CBSi. We argue that customers' hate about a specific brand increases when they receive a negative WoM from other customers that further triggers their intentions to sabotage the brand. Particularly, negative WoM serves as a negative affective event that results provokes hate towards the brand. Brand hate itself is a negative affective vent that triggers customer intentions to sabotage the brand. There are a lot of reasons why consumers criticize a brand in front of others. Some of them are to achieve a level of contentment through expressing (de Matos and Rossi, 2008), restoring a lost relationship with the brand (Haenel et al., 2019), or delivering a productive response to brand and their firms (Eisingerich et al., 2014) (Eisingerich et al., 2014). When a consumer speaks about genuine issues or unpleasant happenings to protect others from likewise happenings or to deliver a productive response to the firm, this does not weaken the marketing function.

On the contrary, there is also a category of consumers who raise their voices to spread negative WoM and the underlying intention is to hurt a brand. More and more consumers are creating and contributing to third-party complaining websites to show their resentment toward firms. Such customers aim to encourage other customers to boycott the offending company (Ward and Ostrom, 2006). These types of WoM are subversive since they intentionally aim to undermine the company (Wilson et al., 2022). Brand hatred is regarded as a powerful negative emotion that can elicit physical expressions (Bagozzi et al., 1999). Physiological and behavioral reactions make up the two forms of physical responses associated with brand hatred. Brand retaliation, brand revenge, and brand sabotage are examples of behavioral responses that can result from brand hatred (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008, Grégoire et al., 2009, Kähr et al., 2016). In light of such instances, we can propose that brand hate leads to consumer brand sabotage intentions. Hence, we can write that

H6: Brand hate mediates the relationship between Negative word of mouth and CBSI.

In the realm of customer-brand relationships, negative experiences can damage a loyal customer's connection with a brand and leave them feeling deceived (Reimann et al., 2018). Studies related to the darker aspects of this association has uncovered the notion of perceived brand betrayal, which occurs when a well-established brand violates moral commitments and basic customer expectations (Finkel et al., 2002, Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). It has been further confirmed that customers feel betrayed by a brand when their essential expectations are not met due to negative experiences and transgressions (Jabeen et al., 2022a, Parmentier and Fischer, 2015, Reimann et al., 2018, Wiggin and Yalch, 2015).

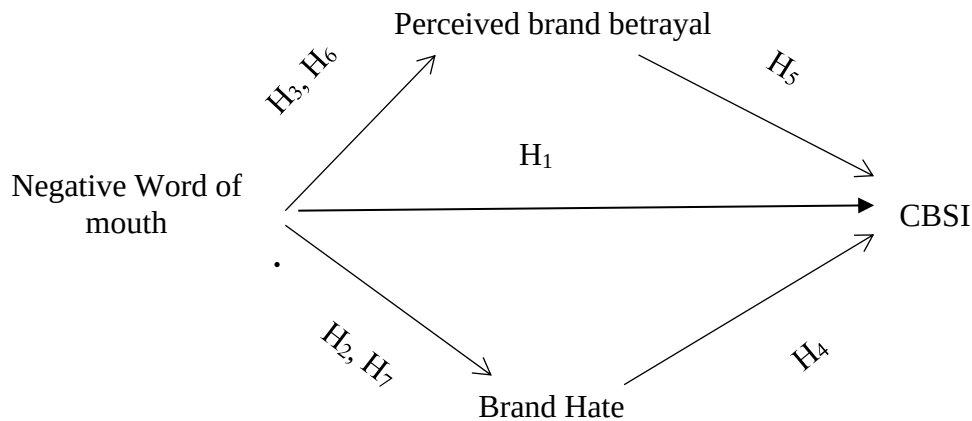
Drawing on the extensive literature on the subject, a recent study identified various unpleasant encounters that are positively associated with the perception of perceived brand betrayal caused by a brand, including complaints about security and cleanliness, customer discontentment, undesirable word of mouth as well as excessive advertising (Jabeen et al., 2022a). Building on this research, we argue that, in addition to negative experiences with a brand's product, service, and delivery, as well as negative feedback from other customers, customers are likely to feel mistreated and betrayed by their once-trusted brand, ultimately leading to a negative state of perceived brand betrayal.

Moreover, loyal customers are more prone to feeling betrayed in response to unjust service failure and recovery (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). These customers possess a range of options that go beyond simply severing ties or voicing displeasure regarding inadequate service. Rather, some may turn to more extreme methods of retaliation, such as engaging in brand sabotage. This is because these customers find it challenging to forget and forgive such a sense of perceived brand betrayal that engenders strong negative emotions (Grégoire et al., 2009, Koehler and Gershoff, 2003, Ward and Ostrom, 2006). In some instances, such customers become extremely angry and seek to retaliate or "get even" (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003). According to Grégoire et al. (2010) indicate that such individuals may intentionally sabotage the brand, which entails hostile behavior resulting from the rupture of a brand's connections with its customers, leading to customer actions that aim to inflict damage upon the brand (rather than seeking compensation or explanations) (Kähr, 2016, Wilson et al., 2022). In summary, sabotage and revenge behaviors stem from a significant event, such as service breakdown or termination (Haenel et al., 2019, Obeidat et al., 2017). The customer feels betrayed due to the perceived violation, which prompts them to take action that seeks to hurt the marketer. Consumer brand sabotage constitutes a retaliatory action by betrayed customers (Kähr, 2016) whose intention is to inflict irreparable harm upon the brand.

Hence, we can propose that,

H7: Perceived brand betrayal mediates the relationship between Negative word of mouth and CBSI.

Research Framework



III. Research Methodology

This research aimed to investigate the influence of unfavorable word-of-mouth communication on consumer intentions to engage in brand sabotage. To achieve this objective, the researcher utilized a sample of 250 individuals, including students, teachers, and others, and collected data via Google Forms. Of the distributed questionnaires, 205 were returned and considered for analysis. The data collection method employed was convenience sampling.

The quantitative methodology selected for this study uses a survey-based approach to gather data from respondents. Utilising surveys makes it possible to collect data quickly and enables the exploration of relationships between different variables. The study intends to look into the connections between negative word of mouth, brand hate, perceived brand betrayal, and customer brand sabotage. In order to record respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and intentions regarding these dimensions, a survey-based methodology is appropriate.

The study also used structural equation modelling (more specifically, Smart PLS) for data analysis and testing the proposed relationship among variables. This methodology offers statistical rigour to back up the results and enables for the assessment of complex relationship between variables. Additionally, it makes it possible to look at mediating effects, which is essential for comprehending the underlying mechanisms between negative word-of-mouth and consumer brand sabotage.

Gpower software was used to determine the sample size by using two-tailed option (Ramayah et al., 2017). The confidence interval was 0.95 and the effect size was 0.15. The minimum requirement for sample size was 138. However, the current study is based on a sample size of 205 which is already exceeded from the minimum requirement of 138 (Cohen, 1992).

A. Measures

In this study, existing scales were adopted and used from the following scholarly papers. Consumer brand sabotage was assessed utilizing a five-point scale that ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). To gauge the participants' level of perceived brand betrayal,

we utilized criteria proposed by Grégoire and Fisher (2008) on a Likert scale that also ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Additionally, we measured brand hate using a Likert scale adapted from the brand hate scales introduced by Zhang and Laroche (2020) and Zarantonello et al. (2016), Hegner et al. (2017), also ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Finally, we assessed negative word of mouth using a five-item scale adapted from Hegner, Fetscherin, and Delzen (2017) and Talwar et al. (2021). The reliability of these measures is presented in Table 2.

IV. Results

The data analysis was performed using Smart PLS 04 with the application of the structural equation modeling technique. The screening of the data involved descriptive, demographic, and missing value analysis, and the outliers were identified and replaced with the average values of the variables. The validity and reliability of the variables were checked using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability tests. The subsequent section showcases the preliminary outcomes of the data screening and regression of the variables. The demographic information of the participants is given below.

A. Demographic Profile

The participants of the current study were university students, enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, MPhil and PhD. Programs studying in Pakistani Universities. As mentioned earlier, in total 250 questionnaires were distributed among students, teachers, and individual through google form to collect the data. Out of them 205 were received. The response ratio was 82%. Since English is the official language in Pakistan, we administered all the questionnaires in English. The sample consisted of 64.6% female and 35.4% male respondents. Respondents holding bachelor's degree were 68%, 30% respondents held master's degree, 2% respondents had PhD degree and the rest of respondents held MPhil degree. The average age of the respondents was 25 years.

Variable		Percentage
Gender	Male	64.6%
	Female	35.4%
Education		
	Bachelors	68%
	Masters	30%
	PhD	2%
Age	Average # of years	25

B. Measurement Model Assessment

By Hair et al. (2011) guidelines, we assessed the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model in Smart PLS. Figure 2 displays the measurement model. To assess reliability, we utilized individual item reliability and computed internal consistency reliability using composite reliability. According to Hair et al. (2011), the average variance extracted (AVE) should exceed 0.5 to establish convergent validity. Therefore, values greater than 0.5 indicate acceptable convergent validity, as evidenced by the data presented in the table below.

Figure 2: Measurement Model

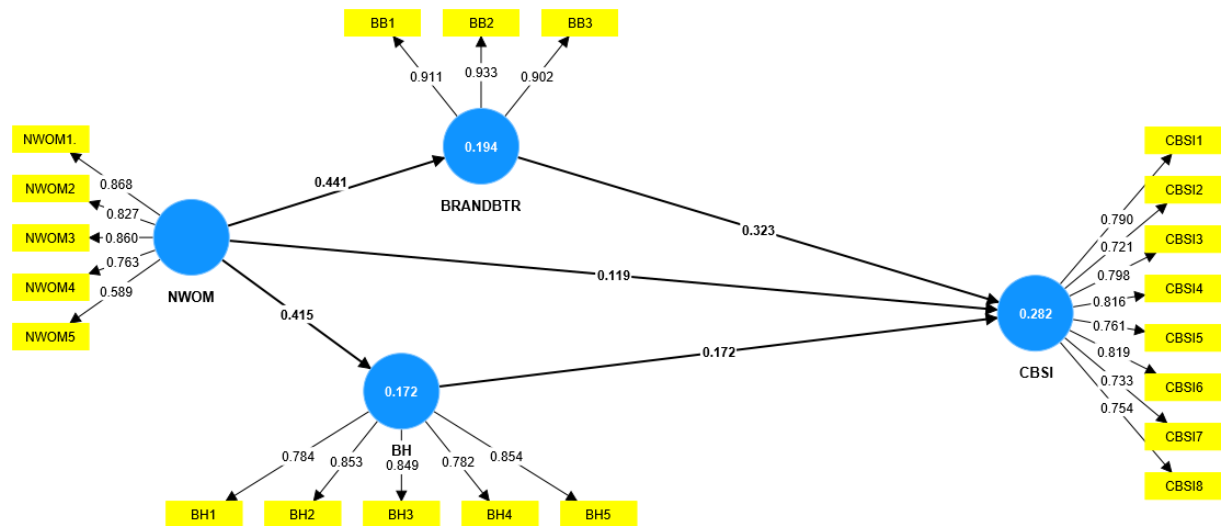


Table 2: Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Cronbach`s Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Negative WOM			0.843	0.861	0.621
	NWOM1	0.868			
	NWOM2	0.827			
	NWOM3	0.860			
	NWOM4	0.763			
	NWOM5	0.589			
Brand Hate			0.882	0.887	0.681
	BH1	0.784			
	BH2	0.853			
	BH3	0.849			
	BH4	0.782			
	BH5	0.854			
Perceived Brand Betrayal			0.904	0.908	0.839
	BB1	0.911			
	BB2	0.933			
	BB3	0.902			
Consumer-Brand Sabotage Intension			0.905	0.910	0.600
	CBSI1	0.790			
	CBSI2	0.721			
	CBSI3	0.798			
	CBSI4	0.816			
	CBSI5	0.761			
	CBSI6	0.819			
	CBSI7	0.733			
	CBSI8	0.754			

To assess the degree of differentiation between constructs, discriminant validity is evaluated. To accomplish this, the criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981) was used to verify validity. The square root of Average Variance Extracted is presented in Table 3, indicating that the AVE square root is greater than the correlations of each construct, indicating a clear distinction between the constructs.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

	Brand Hate	PBB	CBSI	NWOM
Brand Hate	0.825			
PBB	0.746	0.816		
CBSI	0.462	0.504	0.775	
NWOM	0.415	0.441	0.332	0.788

Table 3 illustrates the interrelationships among the variables that were examined in this study. The table unveils the connections existing among the constructs of negative word-of-mouth, brand hate, betrayal, and consumer brand sabotage intentions (CBSI)

C. Structural Model Assessment

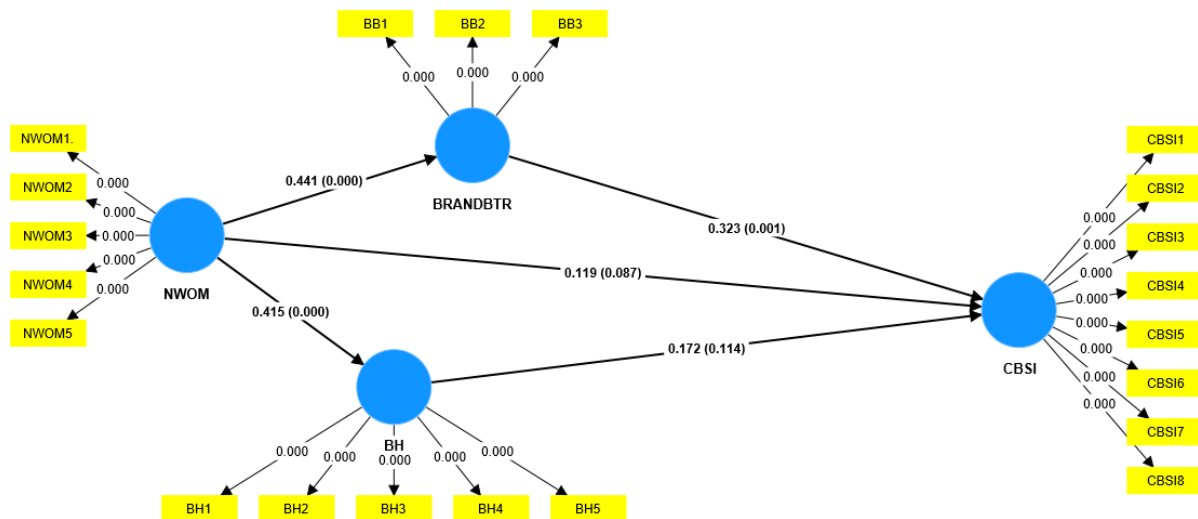
Once the measurement model's validity has been established, the subsequent step is to assess the Structural Model Hair et al. (2011). The Structural Model aims to test hypotheses by examining the direct relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Path coefficients were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The significance of the relationships between the hypotheses was examined through the bootstrapping procedure. During bootstrapping, 5000 samples of data were utilized for the Structural Model.

Table 4: Hypotheses Results

		Standard Beta	T Value	P Value	Decision
H1	NWOM -> CBSI	0.119	1.712	0.087	Not Supported
H2	NWOM -> BRAND HATE	0.415	5.871	0.000	Supported
H3	NWOM -> Perceived brand betrayal	0.441	6.629	0.000	Supported
H4	Brand Hate -> CBSI	0.172	1.582	0.114	Not Supported
H5	Perceived brand betrayal-> CBSI	0.323	3.187	0.001	Supported
H6	NWOM-> Perceived brand betrayal ->CBSI	0.142	2.842	0.005	supported
H7	NWOM->BH->CBSI	0.071	1.479	0.139	Not Supported

Notes:**p<0.01, Results are significant with 1 tail where: T values >2.33 (p values < 0.01)

Figure 2: Structural Model



The statistical analysis indicates that the relationship between negative word of mouth and consumer brand sabotage intentions (CBSI) is not significant (β . 0.119; $t=1.712$; $p>0.01$). Hence, the first hypothesis (H1) is not supported. However, the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted, as there is a significant association between the negative word of mouth and brand hate (β . 0.415, $t=5.871$; $p<0.01$). The results also reveal a positive and significant relationship between negative word of mouth and perceived brand betrayal ($\beta=0.441$; $t=6.629$; $p<0.01$), which supports the third hypothesis (H3). The fourth hypothesis (H4) is not supported, as the results indicate an insignificant relationship between brand hate and CBSI (β . 0.172; $t=1.582$; $p<0.01$). On the other hand, the fifth hypothesis (H5) is supported, showing a positive and significant relationship between perceived brand betrayal and CBSI (β . 0.323; $t=3.187$;

$p < 0.01$). The findings also support the sixth hypothesis (H6), revealing the positive influence of perceived brand betrayal as a mediator on negative word of mouth and CBSI (β . 0.142; $t=2.842$; $p < 0.01$). H7 isn't supported which exhibits that the relationship between negative WoM and CBSI is not mediated by brand hate (β . 0.071; $t=1.4792$; $p > 0.01$). The relevant results can be seen in Table 4 above.

V. Discussion

The primary objective of this research is to enhance our comprehension and gain insight into a less-researched phenomenon known as consumer brand sabotage (CBS). The distinguishable characteristic of CBS from other related constructs is the type of aggression which consumer exerts. These types include instrumental vs hostile aggression. Examples of instrumental aggression includes customer retaliation, boycotts, and negative word-of-mouth etc. In instrumental aggression, consumers take unpleasant actions against a brand or business to achieve other goals rather than solely harming it, such as restoring equity or venting their frustrations (Anderson and Bushman, 2002). On the contrary, in hostile aggression a brand saboteur deliberately plans and expends significant effort to alter how other users perceive and view the offending brand. This is a deliberate attempt by the brand saboteur to change other consumers' perspectives towards the brand (Kähr, 2016). Hence, CBS is a form of hostile aggression that is more dangerous than other types of negative consumer behavior. This is because in CBS, users aim to penalize brands to "get even" with them (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003; Grégoire, Laufer and Tripp, 2010).

The primary hypothesis of this study examined the relationship between negative word of mouth (WOM) and consumer brand sabotage intention (CBSI). Negative WOM is defined as the negative informal communication between consumers regarding their evaluations of goods and services to other consumers. Previous research suggests that customers often engage in negative WOM to vent their negative emotions or to restore equity. However, the lack of statistical support for this hypothesis may be attributed to the fact that Consumer Brand Sabotage represents a novel construct that is distinct from other forms of negative consumer behavior discussed in the literature, such as negative WOM, customer retaliation, and consumer boycott. These behaviors fall under the category of instrumental aggression. Here, the consumer behaves aggressively against the brand to achieve other objectives, such as restoring equity or venting negative emotions. In contrast, CBS involves hostile aggression, where the consumer has the conscious desire and dominant motive to harm the brand. The consumer does not seek to re-establish any relationship or receive compensation or apology from the brand. As a result, it can be argued that negative WOM is not related to CBSI because the motives behind both constructs differ significantly.

The findings support our *second* hypothesis regarding the association between negative word of mouth and brand hate. This is because negative word of mouth can be seen as a personal complaint in which individuals communicate their negative experiences with a brand to others. This shapes and enhances adverse intentions about the brands in other consumers. We sought theoretical support for the hypotheses from affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) that emphasizes the causes and consequences of affective events. Considering negative word of mouth as a negative affective event we argue that the customers may experience mentally upset when they receive negative WOM about their choice of brand from others because they find its against their attitudes and beliefs (Laczniak, DeCarlo and Ramaswami, 2001; Gilal *et al.*, 2018).

As a result, those who have not had any direct experience with the brand may also develop a sense of hatred towards it. The third hypothesis examined the connection between negative word of mouth and the perception of brand betrayal, which was confirmed by the findings. The results showed that negative feedback from others can cause customers to feel mistreated and betrayed by their favorite brand, resulting in a negative perception of brand betrayal(Jabeen *et al.*, 2022).

The fourth and seventh hypotheses examine the relationship between brand hate and CBSI, and negative WOM, brand hate, and CBSI, respectively. However, the lack of statistical evidence may be attributed to the fact that brand hate is associated with a desire for retaliation, as shown in previous research(Kucuk, 2015) and as discussed above. Retaliation is considered instrumental aggression, where the consumer acts aggressively against the brand to achieve specific goals, such as restoring equity or venting negative emotions. This is different from CBSI, which involves hostile aggression where the consumer has no interest in re-establishing a relationship or receiving compensation or an apology from the brand(Kähr, 2016). The fifth and sixth hypotheses pertain to the relationship between perceived brand betrayal, Customer-Based Service Injustice (CBSI), and negative word of mouth. These hypotheses have been accepted based on evidence that when customers experience negative incidents related to product quality, service delivery, or otherwise, and they also hear negative word of mouth from others, they may feel mistreated and betrayed by their preferred brand. Consequently, they may develop a negative perception of brand betrayal. Studies have shown that loyal customers may feel betrayed when service recovery is unfair, and this sense of perceived brand betrayal can be difficult to overcome. As a result, customers may engage in more vivid revenge and take hostile actions intended to harm the brand.

The intension is to engage in a type of hostile behavior that occurs when consumer-brand relationships are severely damaged and consumers seek to harm the brand rather than seeking compensation or apologies. This behavior is characterized by a desire to "get even" with the brand and it may include actions intended to sabotage the brand's reputation. Researchers have found that such actions are more likely to occur when customers feel that their relationship with the brand is irreparable. Therefore, it is crucial for marketers to be aware of the factors that may lead to brand betrayal and take measures to prevent or address such incidents.

Theoretical & Practical Implications:

Theoretical implications of the study are in the following.

The study adds to the body of knowledge by examining the unfavourable facets of brand connections, with an emphasis on consumer brand sabotage. The study adds to earlier research on positive brand connections by examining the causes and effects of this behaviour in order to advance theoretical understanding of the "dark side" of consumer-brand relationships. In addition to that this study uses Affective event theory to examine how consumer attitudes and intentions towards brand sabotage are affected by negative word-of-mouth. The study deepens our understanding of how affective events, such as negative word-of-mouth, affect consumer perceptions and behaviours. Moreover, the study investigates the mediation mechanisms by which negative word-of-mouth affects consumer intention to sabotage brands. The study offers insights into the underlying psychological mechanisms that connect negative word of mouth to consumer sabotage behaviours by analysing the roles of brand hatred and perceived brand betrayal as mediating variables.

Below are the practical implications of the study.

The research provides brand managers with useful insights into identifying and controlling unfavourable customer behaviours, particularly consumer brand sabotage. Managers can create plans to reduce the risk of consumer sabotage and safeguard brand equity by recognising the importance of negative word of mouth, brand hatred, and perceived brand betrayal. Likewise, this study emphasises the significance of preserving positive consumer-brand relationships and staying away from actions that can result in unfavourable word of mouth and subsequent sabotage intentions. These insights can be used by brand managers to concentrate on developing strong brand relationships, fulfilling consumer expectations, and avoiding circumstances that might result in unfavourable feelings and consequent sabotage behaviours. Also, it clarifies the potential aftermaths of negative word-of-mouth and customer brand sabotage. This knowledge can assist brand managers in creating efficient communication and crisis management plans to identify and resolve problems that might cause unfavourable consumer reactions. The risk of consumer sabotage can be reduced and brands' reputations can be safeguarded through proactive management and response to undesirable situations. Additionally, this research places a strong emphasis on the necessity of brand revitalization tactics during times of brand reversal and unfavourable customer perception. By understanding the drivers behind negative consumer behavior, brand managers can implement appropriate revitalization strategies to rebuild consumer trust, repair brand relationships, and regain brand equity.

In conclusion, while the practical implications of the research offer actionable insights for brand managers to effectively manage negative consumer behaviours, safeguard brand reputation, and create successful brand revitalization strategies where as the theoretical implications of the research contribute to an understanding of consumer brand sabotage and its underlying mechanisms.

Limitations & Future Research Directions:

The sampling technique employed in this research is Convenience sampling. Future researchers must use some different technique in likewise studies. Furthermore, mix method approaches can be used in order to explore some outstanding dimensions. Similarly, experimental studies can be conducted in order to explore some unique insights. This study is limited to some specific variables. Future studies may incorporate some other variables as independent variables or mediating variables to get unique findings. Last but not the least, the same study can be replicated in a different country having different culture to analyze the impact of independent variables on consumer brand sabotage.

Conclusion:

In summary, this research indicates that negative WoM spread by other consumers can adversely affect the positive association of consumer and the brand till the limit that it can harm the brand beyond repair in extreme instances. One of the very important strategies that organizations and their brands can adopt is to keep on monitoring the interaction between frontline employees and customers. For said purpose, tracking software having built in alerts which are proactive in nature can be used. Moreover, apology messages can be forwarded in case of some mis happening.

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