What Makes Consumer-Brand Relationships Bad? 
Enlightening Relational Negativity

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What Makes Consumer-Brand Relationships Bad?

Enlightening Relational Negativity

The negativity (negative attitudes) that arise(s) within or because of consumer-brand relationships.
Negative Brand Relationships

More prevalent than positive ones (Fournier and Alvarez 2013)

More impactful than positive ones (Baumeister et al. 2001)

Far less researched than positive ones
Call for “a science of negative relationships concerning the negative outcomes, processes, states, and attributes of consumers’ relationships with brands.”

(Fournier and Alvarez 2013, 253)

Call for an overarching theory that will explain what “causes changes in relationships.”

(MacInnis and Folkes 2017, 366)
Research Questions

1) How does relational negativity come about? In other words, what makes relationships, however temporarily, bad? and

(2) What are the outcomes of the negativity within brand relationships?
Data Collection

image elicitation
in-depth interviews

informants
who were aware of
negative brand
experiences

29

25

103

75

brand experiences
discussed

images discussed
Which approach to classification of relationships would work best with our data?

**Dimensional**
- Fournier 1998
- Park et al. 2013
- Miller et al. 2012
- Novak and Hoffman 2019

**Categorical**
- Aggarwal 2004
Data Analysis

Which approach to classification of relationships would work best with our data?

- **Dimensional**
  - Fournier 1998
  - Park et al. 2013
  - Miller et al. 2012

- **Categorical**
  - Aggarwal 2004
  - Fiske 1992
Brand relationships could be understood in terms of four relational models. Each model implies different relational rules and expectations.

**communal sharing**

Relationship partners should treasure their commonalities and show **care** and **concern** for one another.

**authority ranking**

Relationship partner should be caring, reliable and competent, and should not exploit its position of power.

**equality matching**

Each relationship partner should expect to experience **equivalence** between what they give and what they receive.

**market pricing**

What consumers pay for the brand should be in proportion to **value** they expect or are being promised to receive in return.
Relational negativity takes three forms.

- **Within-model** negativity
  - Consumer and brand apply the same relational model. Brand directly violates relational rules.

- **Between-model** negativity
  - Consumer and brand apply the different relational models. Brand indirectly violates relational rules.

- **By-model** negativity
  - Downside of applying given relational model.
Relational negativity takes three forms.

**Forms of relational negativity**

- **Direct consumer-brand interactions**
  - *Within-model* negativity
  - Consumer and brand apply the same relational model. Brand directly violates relational rules.

- **Direct consumer-brand interactions**
  - *Between-model* negativity
  - Consumer and brand apply the different relational models. Brand indirectly violates relational rules.

- **Direct or No direct consumer-brand interactions**
  - *By-model* negativity
  - Downside of applying given relational model.
## Aspects bringing negativity into brand relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>communal sharing</th>
<th>authority ranking</th>
<th>equality matching</th>
<th>market pricing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Between-model negativity</strong></td>
<td>Brand’s lack of understanding of consumer’s needs</td>
<td>Manipulative brand</td>
<td>Brand taking consumer for granted</td>
<td>Pushy brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Within-model negativity</strong></td>
<td>Brand’s personality change</td>
<td>Over-controlling brand</td>
<td>Unequal reciprocity</td>
<td>Low value for money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brand’s unreliability &amp; loss of competence (performance complaint)</td>
<td>Brand taking advantage of consumer’s need to reciprocate</td>
<td>Product fault (performance complaint)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>By-model negativity</strong></td>
<td>Consumer’s hostile feelings towards rival brands</td>
<td>Consumer’s disregard for other brands/alternatives</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer’s high tolerance for brand’s mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consumer’s feelings of insecurity in relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Reactions to and outcomes of relational negativity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Communal Sharing</th>
<th>Authority Ranking</th>
<th>Equality Matching</th>
<th>Market Pricing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conative Reactions</strong></td>
<td>Negative WOM</td>
<td>Brand avoidance</td>
<td>Negative WOM, Brand switching</td>
<td>Negative WOM, Brand avoidance, Brand switching, Threatening remarks, Positive WOM for the rival brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affective Reactions</strong></td>
<td>Jealous, Angry, Rejected, Insulted, Distressed, of Contempt</td>
<td>Guilty, of Enmity, Abused, Powerless, of Gloating, of Contempt</td>
<td>Angry, Regretful, Abused</td>
<td>Stupid, Swindled, Disappointed, Angry, Guilty, Sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive Reactions</strong></td>
<td>Other users of the brand, Competitive brands, Users of competitive brands</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Self, Other users of the brand, Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Maintaining existing relationship, Not entering a relationship with the rival brand</td>
<td>Maintaining existing relationship</td>
<td>Maintaining or Terminating existing relationship</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
communal sharing
Meet Monica

Relationship partners should treasure their commonalities and show care and concern for one another.

By-model negativity
Consumer’s feelings of insecurity in relationship

Conative
Negative WOM

Affective
Jealousy

Cognitive
Negative judgements towards other users of the brand

Relational Outcome
Maintenance of relationship

“I love Apple so much …”

“Apple is like me. Special and off-beat.”

“We Apple users …”
“Lately I have seen a lot of Apple owners who were more like the girl on the right side: boring, predictable, unimaginative, too normal! It just makes me sick. You can clearly see such people are not a good match with Apple and you start wondering: if Apple likes such ordinary people to hang out, does that mean I am ordinary, too?”
Communal sharing

Meet Monica

Relationship partners should treasure their commonalities and show care and concern for one another.

**By-model negativity**
- Consumer’s feelings of *insecurity* in relationship

**Conative**
- Negative WOM

**Affective**
- Jealousy

**Cognitive**
- Negative judgements towards other users of the brand

**Relational Outcome**
- Maintenance of relationship

“I simply began convincing the guy that actually Mac is not so great, that he could have huge problems with compatibility; maybe some accounting programs would not even work … that he should just go with the PC for convenience! … You can call me evil, but what could I do. I love Apple so much, that I’ve sent my snakes to convince him, that he should not bite into the Apple!”
Relationship partner should be caring, reliable and competent, and should not exploit its position of power.

Meet Mark

“I love Nike very much.”

“Just putting Nike shoes on makes me a better footballer.”

“Only Nike shoes make me quick, help me to dribble the ball like a pro and help me to be creative with the ball …”

“I assign Nike trainers so much power, so much influence over the quality of my game …”
Relationship partner should be caring, reliable and competent, and should not exploit its position of power.

**Within-model**
- **Brand’s unreliability (performance complaint)**

**By-model**
- **Consumer’s disregard for other brands/alternatives**

**Affective**
- Powerlessness, Guilt

**Cognitive**
- Negative judgements towards self

**Relational Outcome**
- Maintenance of relationship

“I was thinking: no this is not happening to me. No this is not happening to me ... That felt powerlessness, total misery, you know?”

“I knew I would never be able to play like before.”

“I may have noticed before that the trainers are slippery ... I was sure the problem was with the floors.”
As soon as I was back on the court, I wore the same trainers for a further six months. Until another injury …”

“They were almost unworn, you know? And I kinda need them to play better.”

“I wanted to buy Adidas trainers but I ended up buying Nike trainers again.”
Each relationship partner should expect to experience equivalence between what they give and what they receive.

“If Mercator [Slovenian retailer] does something good for me, I will try to do something good for him.”
equality matching
Meet Mark

Each relationship partner should expect to experience **equivalence** between what they give and what they receive.

- Between-model negativity: Brand *taking* consumer for granted
- Conative: Revenge
- Affective: Anger
- Relational: Maintenance of relationship
- Outcome: Maintenance of relationship

“*Is this how you repay me for being loyal? Thanks a lot.*”

“I spent my time driving there . . . but they did not appreciate my gesture . . . I guess this is just business as usual for them.”
equality matching

Meet Mark

Each relationship partner should expect to experience **equivalence** between what they give and what they receive.

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<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Conative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Outcome</td>
<td>Maintenance of relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I simply put the shopping basket on the fridge, hoping that everybody is looking at me and walked out of the supermarket. I wanted to do something: I wanted to create a scandal, not really a massive one, more a private scandal - like the one on the image. So I walked out and went to Mercator’s biggest competitor – Tuš . . . I felt relieved . . . for a while . . .
market pricing
Meet Tula

What consumers pay for the brand should be in proportion to value they expect or are being promised to receive in return.

“I’d just like to get what I paid for. Is this too much to ask?”
### Meet Tula

What consumers pay for the brand should be in proportion to **value** they expect or are being promised to receive in return.

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<tr>
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<th>Product fault</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Threatening remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Negative judgements towards employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“We waited 35 minutes for food . . . The restaurant wasn’t full. And then we get undercooked penne. **UNDERCOOKED!** . . . Then I look at the salad. What are the beans doing here? Where are grilled courgettes that were mentioned in the description of the dish???”
market pricing
Meet Tula

What consumer pays for the brand should be in proportion to \textit{value} he or she expects or is being promised to receive in return.

\begin{itemize}
  \item **Within-model negativity**
    \begin{itemize}
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    \end{itemize}
  \item **Relational Outcome**
    \begin{itemize}
      \item Maintenance of relationship
    \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

“I stood up and I went to the kitchen. I yelled: ‘where are my courgettes’? And ‘why are my penne undercooked’? . . . We’re never coming back. I’ve also told the lady: ‘Don’t work in a restaurant if you don’t know how to cook.’ It was obvious she was no MasterChef.”
All relationships between brands and consumers could be understood in terms of ‘just’ four relational models.

Knowing which model is applied tells you what you should do, what you must not do and what you can do (and get away with).
Dark side is not always dark in its effects

(Duck 1994)
Thank You!

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