



Emotions that drive consumers away from brands: Measuring negative emotions toward brands and their behavioral effects

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

First received in October 25, 2010 and was under review for 4 months
Available online 22 December 2011

Area Editor: Dirk Smeesters

Keywords:

Negative emotions
Brand
Consumer behavior

ABSTRACT

Consumers' appraisals of brand-related stimuli originating from both marketer- and non-marketer-controlled sources of information may evoke negative emotional reactions toward certain brands. We derive a scale that includes six distinct brand-related negative emotions (anger, discontent, dislike, embarrassment, sadness, and worry). Studies 1 through 4 demonstrate that our scale achieves convergent and discriminant validity and provides superior insight and better predictions compared to extant emotion scales. Study 5 manipulates specific negative brand-related emotions and reveals that they predict particular behavioral outcomes (i.e., switching, complaining, and negative word of mouth).

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1. Introduction

Research has largely ignored consumers' negative emotions toward brands, even though consumers increasingly consider the brand-related stimuli when deciding which products and services to consume. The premise that consumers experience strong negative emotions toward brands is interesting given that psychological theories on emotions (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006) suggest that the nature of the emotion experienced has a highly determinant effect on an individual's subsequent actions. For example, in general, individuals who experience anger verbally attack the perceived cause of this state, actively seeking a solution. Like anger, fear encourages individuals to take action, but unlike anger, fear motivates them to flee from the fear-evoking stimulus and/or to avoid further confrontation (Roseman et al., 1994). Thus, consumers' anger toward a brand is likely to be predictive of their decision to complain (e.g., file written complaints) to the brand's parent company and/or to participate in campaigns against the company. On the other hand, fear may predict an unwillingness to try the brand or, if the consumer previously used the brand, the decision to switch to a competing brand. To date, there is no empirically tested measure of negative emotions experienced by consumers when exposed to brand-related stimuli originating from both marketer-controlled and non-marketer-controlled sources of information. Consequently, it is difficult for both researchers and marketing

practitioners to understand the nature of these negative emotions and to predict possible negative consumer behaviors toward a brand.

In this paper, which builds on Zeelenberg and Pieters (2006) "Feeling is for Doing" approach and recognizes that the utility of emotions resides in their possible effect on actions, we develop and test a comprehensive scale for measuring specific consumers' negative emotions toward brands. Such a scale is necessary to document consumers' negative reactions to determine their nature, reliability, and construct validity. Moreover, a valid scale is a prerequisite for demonstrating that specific negative emotions are indeed predictive of behavior and, consequently, for a number of empirical and theoretical advancements with respect to emotions and related forms of behavior in a brand-related context.

2. Specific negative emotions and brands

Scholars have examined specific negative emotions generated by products (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005; Nyer, 1997), services (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; Soscia, 2007; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999, 2004), and purchase-related situations (Dahl, Manchanda, & Argo, 2001; Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). However, few have considered negative emotions toward brands. Although some brand research studies touch upon phenomena closely related to negative emotions and feelings (e.g., Dalli, Romani, & Gistri, 2006; Grant & Walsh, 2009), an explicit consideration of specific negative emotions toward brands and of the emotion-brand behavior link is still lacking in the literature.

In addition to product and service characteristics, consumers are constantly exposed to a variety of brand-related stimuli both from

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marketer-controlled sources of information and from other sources. First, consumers come into contact with brand elements (Keller, Apéria, & Georgson, 2008) such as the visual and verbal information that serves to identify and differentiate a brand. Consumers are also exposed to brand-related marketing activities (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). In these activities, marketing communications that function as the voice of the brand, through which it attempts to make contact with consumers, play a fundamental role. Examples of non-marketer-controlled sources of information about brands to which consumers are exposed include information communicated by other commercial or non-partisan sources, word of mouth, and direct personal experiences, as well as anti-brand websites. Finally, consumers autonomously link a brand with people, places, or other elements and consider these additional associations as brand-related stimuli when evaluating the brand (Keller, 2003).

We assume that consumers' appraisals of brand-related stimuli that are not directly related to product or service attributes and performance constitute the major sources of consumers' negative emotional responses, referred to here as "negative emotions toward brands" (NEB). We thus conceptualize NEB as consumers' negative emotional reactions evoked by the appraisal of brand-related stimuli. These stimuli differ from product- or service-related attributes and functions and originate from both marketer-controlled and non-marketer-controlled sources of information.

In addition to irritation or annoyance experienced due to brand slogans (Rosengren & Dahlén, 2006), consumers may also feel distaste toward specific brands because of the undesirable image that the brand's symbolic meanings project (Hogg & Banister, 2001). Alternatively, the consumers can feel aversion toward a brand based on the identification of that brand with its parent company if the latter is believed to disregard certain basic human rights (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Thus, our focus is on negative emotional reactions to brand-related stimuli not directly associated with the actual products or services or with the functions of that product that consumers seek. Although much past brand research has concentrated on tangible, product-related information for brands, branding in recent years has increasingly been about more abstract, intangible, general considerations. These streams of research help to uncover overlooked or relatively neglected facets of consumer-brand knowledge that have significant theoretical and managerial implications (Keller, 2003).

To date, brand research has provided scant information on the negative emotional states that consumers experience in relation to brands. It is not known, for example, if consumers experience predominantly classical emotions such as dislike and anger or if they also experience such emotions as sadness, fear, and shame in relation to brands. Therefore, to identify the full range of negative emotions most frequently experienced in a brand-related context and to construct an appropriate scale for measuring these emotions, it is essential to focus on the common emotion-behavior links in brand-related situations. Consumer behavior scholars have based much of their work related to consumption-related emotions on the Consumption Emotions Set (CES) introduced by Richins (1997). Although this scale has proven useful in the contexts for which it was developed, its usefulness for the study of brand-related negative emotions is limited in several ways that are examined below.

3. CES and negative emotions toward brands

The CES plays a central role in the assessment of consumption-related emotions. This scale contains a set of positive and negative descriptors that represent the range of emotions directly experienced by consumers when considering the purchase of a product/service, actually making the purchase, and consuming or using a product/service. Although this measure arguably captures the diversity of emotional states related to consumption experiences better than previous measures in consumer research (Izard, 1977; Plutchik, 1980) or

advertising research (Batra & Holbrook, 1990; Edell & Burke, 1987), it is of limited relevance in this study due to the significant differences between negative emotions induced by consumption experiences in general and those arising exclusively in relation to brands.

First, it is unnecessary to consider purchase and actual consumption to assess the emotional states that brands elicit. In fact, some brand-elicited emotions are experienced vicariously rather than directly: consumers may have negative reactions to certain brands of which they are aware but have never personally used. In turn, the nature of the negative emotions experienced toward a brand could partially differ from that of the negative descriptors included in the CES. Thus, the entire range of negative emotions resulting in an unwillingness to try a brand is excluded from the CES.

Second, the negative emotions included in the CES refer to a combination of different situations, actions, and stimuli related to both products and brands. For example, examining the emotions directly experienced during the actual purchase of a specific product requires considering not only the product and possibly the brand (in the case of a brand-focused purchase) but also the interaction with a store's physical environment, its personnel, and its policies and practices. Under such circumstances, the events and the beliefs about actual or possible causes of these and other product or brand stimuli combine to elicit emotions. The emotional focus of this study is much more specific and limited. We focus on brand-related stimuli that consumers encounter and choose to appraise because of their relevance to the consumer's well-being (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). In the case of direct experience with a brand, the emphasis is also on the brand, as such, and all of its properties rather than on the various consumption processes involved (such as shopping or usage). For example, together with the depiction of a brand's target market as communicated through brand advertising, consumers' own experiences and contacts with brand users can contribute to the formation of a brand-user image that may generate negative emotions toward the brand. However, all that matters for our purposes are the resulting general, unfavorable brand-related associations, not the specific incidents or negative experiences that may contribute to these associations. Given the difference in the referents of emotions, it is reasonable to suggest that the range of negative emotions elicited by brands is more restricted than that elicited by specific consumption experiences. Furthermore, the range of the negative emotions elicited by brands differs partially in terms of the nature of the emotions involved. In fact, the presence of a broader range of emotion elicitors (as in consumption-related rather than brand-related experiences) can make these elicitors interdependent (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000), thus affecting the evaluative patterns and, in turn, the nature of the negative emotions experienced.

In addition, the CES was designed as a comprehensive measurement of the full range of emotional states associated with consumption in numerous contexts; consequently, it is not well suited for the task of addressing specific theoretical issues about negative emotions that are only relevant to brands and potential related emotion-behavior links. It is therefore apparent that the CES has significant shortcomings with respect to assessing negative emotions in relation to brands.

The empirical work presented in this paper is motivated by the desire to identify a more appropriate measure relevant to this issue. This measure's development is guided by the following objectives: to identify the range of negative emotions most frequently experienced toward brands; to measure these emotions with an acceptable level of reliability; and to test their effects on behavioral outcomes related to brands.

4. Consumers' conceptions of negative emotions toward brands

Before turning to the development of the scale, we present the results of an explorative qualitative study designed to investigate the types of negative emotions that consumers may experience in

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