Effects of Brand Crisis on Consumers’ Brand Conversion Intention: An Example of Fashion Brands Boycott Xinjiang Cotton

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Abstract: In March 2021, H&M, Nike, Adidas and other brands maliciously spread rumors about Xinjiang and boycotted Xinjiang cotton, which aroused strong dissatisfaction among Chinese consumers. Patriotic Chinese consumers are abandoning foreign brands in favor of local ones. The popularity of the Internet, the improvement of e-commerce platforms and the diversification of social media have improved the convenience of online customer groups to share and exchange shopping experience, and online word-of-mouth has also provided great convenience for consumers to choose brands. However, Internet word-of-mouth is a double-edged sword, and the spread of negative Internet word-of-mouth has a huge impact on brands. Based on relevant literature, current researches on e-WOM focus on specific types and characteristics of e-WOM, such as the impact of positive (negative) e-WOM, source, quantity and quality of e-WOM on consumer behavior, but do not pay more attention to the cause and effect of e-WOM. Therefore, as college students are the most active group of fashion brand buyers, this paper takes them as the research object and uses empirical methods to study the influence of the perception of brand negative information, brand love reduction and negative online word-of-mouth on brand conversion intention, and explores the interaction between relevant variables. For the enterprise brand management and network communication strategy to provide theoretical guidance.

Keywords: Perception of brand information, Brand love, e-WOM, Brand conversion intention.

1. Introduction

In March 2021, H&M, Nike, Adidas and other brands maliciously spread rumors about Xinjiang and boycotted Xinjiang cotton, which aroused strong dissatisfaction among Chinese consumers and caused a great uproar on online media. Patriotic Chinese consumers are abandoning foreign brands in favor of local ones, causing sales of many foreign brands to fall off a cliff. H&M shares plunged 11%, wiping $2.4 billion off its market value; Adidas greater China suffered three consecutive sales declines; Nike China also suffered two consecutive quarters of negative growth. During the same period, the annual revenue of local brands such as Anta and Li Ning increased by 38.9% and 56.1% respectively. Anta surpassed Adidas China and became the second largest brand after Nike China.

The popularity of the Internet, the improvement of e-commerce platforms and the diversification of social media have improved the convenience of online customer groups to share and exchange shopping experience, and online word-of-mouth has also provided great convenience for consumers to choose brands. However, Internet word-of-mouth is a double-edged sword, and the spread of negative Internet word-of-mouth has a huge impact on brands, even a devastating blow. Based on relevant literature, current researches on e-WOM focus on specific types and characteristics of e-WOM, such as the impact of positive (negative) e-WOM, source, quantity and quality of e-WOM on consumer behavior, but do not pay more attention to the cause and effect of e-WOM.

Therefore, this study will focus on the following three questions: First, what is the perception of negative information about a particular brand make consumers less fond of the brand? Second, what is the impact of the perception of brand negative information and brand love reduction on the formation mechanism of negative online word-of-mouth? Third, what is the process and strength of the influence of brand negative information perception, brand affection reduction and negative online word of mouth on brand conversion intention? Therefore, as college students are the most active group of fashion brand buyers, this paper takes them as the research object and uses empirical methods to study the influence of the perception of brand negative information, brand love reduction and negative online word-of-mouth on brand conversion intention, and explores the interaction between relevant variables. For the enterprise brand management and network communication strategy to provide theoretical guidance.

2. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Perception of Negative Information

The concept of perception of negative information was first put forward by psychologists Folks and Kamins (1999). It refers to a person’s perception of negative events, including negativity, importance and severity, as one of the important factors affecting individual attitudes and behaviors. In the field of consumer cognition and behavior, when faced with negative brand information, consumers will first have a perception of negative brand information, which negatively affects consumers’ judgment of brand cognition, emotion and purchase intention. Yoon (2017), by using the method of empirical analysis to explore the influence of two kinds of negative information (immoral and incompetent) about sports stars on consumers’ perception of stars and sponsors’ perception, introduced the negative perception measure consumer perception of two kinds of negative information,
found that consumers’ perception of negative information has a significant negative impact on their stars and sponsors. Similarly, in the study of Hanna (2017), in order to explore the negative information of retailers’ own brands to own brand overall image and the influence of retail store image, the author verifies the negative relationship between the perception of negative information and retailer’s evaluation of private brand and retailer. In addition, by examining the relationship between consumers’ negative perception of entrepreneur charity scandals and their purchase intention, Edwards (2009) found that the more negative consumers’ scandal perception is, the less willing they are to buy enterprise products.

To sum up, in general, the brand negative information is a kind of objective events. In order to study the influence of negative brand information on consumers’ behavioral intention, it is necessary to convert the objective factor of negative brand information into consumers’ subjective cognition, that is, consumers’ perception of negative brand information, and then study its influence on consumers’ attitude and behavioral intention.

2.2 Brand Love

In the competitive market, product homogeneity is becoming increasingly obvious, and it is difficult for enterprises to achieve product differentiation (Ghodeswar, 2008). Therefore, enterprises often focus on strengthening brand value and make consumers have emotional dependence through brand effect (Akgün, 2013).

Brand love reflects consumers’ satisfaction with a brand, yet it differs from satisfaction in many ways. First, satisfaction with a brand is usually associated with a specific transaction or purchasing experience (Davood Ghorbanzadeh & Atena Raheghagh, 2020), while brand love is the result of a consumer’s long-term relationship and emotional connection with the brand (Fournier & Mick, 1999). Second, satisfaction is more concrete and conceptualized as a cognitive judgment, whereas brand love is more stable and reflected at the affect level (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore, prior research shows that brand love will influence consumers’ brand evaluation over the long-run, and thus is a more powerful predictor of brand loyalty and positive WOM than satisfaction (Fournier, 1998). Furthermore, brand love also enhances consumers’ willingness to pay price premium as well as resistance toward negative WOM about the brand (Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2012).

Positive brand image can promote consumers to have a positive recall and recognition of enterprise products or services, and then produce positive brand perception and attitude, have a potential and far-reaching impact on consumers’ brand decision-making behavior, and ultimately promote consumers’ loyalty and love for a specific brand (Hsiang, 2011). Therefore, it can be inferred that consumers’ emotions and attitudes towards brands will greatly affect their brand love. When consumers have negative impressions of brands, their brand love will be weakened.

Taken together, we propose that:

**H1**: Perception of negative information has a positive impact on brand love reduction.

2.3 Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth can be divided into positive and negative ones. Positive word-of-mouth can help enterprises establish a good brand image, while negative word-of-mouth can prevent consumers from choosing products of a certain brand, and is not conducive to enterprises establishing a good word of mouth image (Reichheld, 1990). The research on positive word-of-mouth has been mature, while the research on negative word-of-mouth is still the current hot spot.

Negative e-WOM is released by other consumers on the Internet about companies and products are not satisfied with emotions or disappointment consumption experience, when consumers browse to the related brand negative e-WOM, first to determine the authenticity of the word-of-mouth information, and to evaluate the brand new and cognitive, may fall to the brand’s goodwill and trust, And influence its brand choice, consumers are likely to give up buying the brand products, and turn to buy other alternative brands.

Richins (1984) defines negative WOM as telling others about your disappointing shopping experience and using dissatisfaction as a key explanation for negative WOM. Henning (2014) pointed out that consumers share their purchase experience through online platforms, which includes pleasant experience and can spread dissatisfied experience, negative e-WOM refers to consumers’ purchase experience of sharing and spreading dissatisfaction through the Internet. Li Xiaojing (2018) believes that negative online word-of-mouth is the product content with negative emotional color released by consumers on Internet platforms. Lee (2018) pointed out that when consumers are dissatisfied, they will spread their dissatisfaction through various channels and advise others not to consume related products or services. Howell (2020) believes that negative word-of-mouth refers to negative or malicious comments or feedbacks made by consumers who are not satisfied with the products or services they have purchased. Therefore, the perception of negative brand information is the source of negative e-WOM, and the brand love reduction will also increase the number of negative e-WOM. Therefore, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

**H2**: Perception of negative information has a positive impact on negative e-WOM.

**H3**: Brand love reduction has a positive impact on negative e-WOM.

2.4 Brand Conversion Intention

The term brand conversion was first put forward by Zahorik, and then many scholars put forward their own opinions on its connotation based on their own research. For example, Frederick (1993) defines it as when a consumer stops buying an existing brand and chooses another. Brand switching behavior can be understood as the decision-making process in which consumers themselves or others lose enthusiasm for existing brands and switch to other brands under the influence of other external factors. According to Keaveney (1995), the
intention of brand conversion is that consumers abandon the purchase plan of the products or brands they are currently using, or want to give up the brands they have been using and want to change to other brands. Consumer brand switching intention is a reflection and tendency of consumer psychology in brand choice. According to Keaveney and Susan (1995), consumer brand switching intention is an attitude intention of consumers to stop using or buying products or services of a certain brand if they are currently using and switch to buying or using another brand. Lin (2000), from the perspective of consumer brand loyalty research such as brand switching intention, he pointed out that the false loyal consumers to the brand attributes and the connotation is not enough to understand, therefore, when the other brand marketing activities such as advertising, sales promotion, they will easily be attracted in the past, and likely to turn to buy the brand, therefore, he put the brand switching intention is defined as: Consumers become less loyal to one brand and tend to use alternative brand ideas. Previous studies have shown that negative brand news, customer dissatisfaction, reduced loyalty and other factors will reduce customer stickiness, thus forming brand conversion intention. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: Perception of negative information has a positive impact on brand conversion intention.

H5: Negative e-WOM has a positive impact on brand conversion intention.

H6: Brand love reduction has a positive impact on brand conversion intention.

On the basis of theoretical analysis and hypothesis, we give the theoretical research model of this paper. This model reveals the possible influence paths and relationships among negative brand perception, decreased brand affection, negative online word-of-mouth, and brand conversion intention.

3. Methodology

3.1 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was designed as the survey instrument, including all the constructs in the proposed model to test the hypotheses of interest.

The main principles of our questionnaire design include: 1. Conciseness, that is, respondents can clearly understand the questions in the questionnaire in a short period of time and can answer them easily; 2. Adaptable, that is, the questions are designed to avoid psychological pressure on the respondents, and the questionnaire is designed to meet the psychological and ideological requirements of the respondents; 3. Objectivity. Our main purpose is to understand the information of the respondents and their situation at the time of purchase. The design of the questionnaire mainly revolves around research hypotheses and variables; 4. Targeted, that is, we should put ourselves in the position of the respondents to consider all kinds of difficulties. Avoiding the respondents giving up the response due to the difficulties caused by the questionnaire, so as to ensure the recovery rate of the questionnaire and the quality of the survey.

The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire presents participants’ demographic information (i.e. gender, age, and living expenses), online shopping experience, attitude towards online word of mouth and the brand with the most negative perception. Respondents had no online shopping experience will be thanked and end the questionnaire.

In the second part, participants were asked to think of a fashion brand that they rated this brand with the most negative impressions after foreign brands boycotted Xinjiang cotton, and then answer the measures of the four constructs in the conceptual framework: perception of negative information, brand love reduction, negative e-WOM, brand conversion intention. Measures of all the constructs in the study were drawn from established scales in prior research. Specifically, perception of negative information was adopted from Yoon Doyle (2010) and Nie (2019). Brand love reduction was captured using a scale developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). Negative e-WOM scale was revised from Liu (2006), Rabjohn (2008) and Erkan (2016). Brand conversion intention in this study was revised from Gilly (1998). All the items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale, with 1 = strongly agree and 7 = strongly agree. 35 graduate students from a large university in Southeastern China were recruited to pre-test the reliability and validity of all the scales. The measurements were finalized based on the results of pretest and focus group discussion (see Table 1).
3.2 Sample Design and Data Collection

This study was carried out in China using self-administered questionnaire. The target group is Chinese college students. The number of college students in China has reached tens of millions. At this time, the minimum sample size is not necessarily related to the total number of samples, but mainly affected by the level of error and confidence. In this study, we sampled with an allowable error of 5% and a confidence level of 90%, at which point the minimum total number of samples was 272. Here are the formulas used in our Sample Size Calculator:

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{c^2}$$

Where:

- \(Z\) = Z value (e.g. 1.64 for 90% confidence level)
- \(p\) = percentage picking a choice, expressed as decimal (.5 used for sample size needed)
- \(c\) = confidence interval, expressed as decimal (e.g., .05 = ±5)

In this study, questionnaires were collected offline and distributed in major commercial streets in Nanjing. At last, small gifts were given to those who filled in the questionnaire. A total of 344 questionnaires were sent to Nanjing university students. After removing invalid questionnaires (for example, those who have no online shopping experience, do not know about the boycott of Xinjiang cotton by foreign brands, do not pay attention to online word-of-mouth, etc.), 302 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective questionnaire rate of 87.8%. The final quantity meets the requirement of minimum sample size. Among them, 198 were female respondents, accounting for 65.6%. The average age of all the respondents was 22.7 years. Therefore, all the respondents in the valid questionnaire had experience of online shopping based on negative online word-of-mouth or negative comments, and all of them had their own conflicting brands involved. Therefore, the sample selection we made was highly targeted. Detailed demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 2.

### Table 1: Scale factor loadings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
<th>Cronbach α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception of negative information (BNI)</td>
<td>BN1 I think the Xinjiang Cotton incident is negative for the brand.</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td>72.921</td>
<td>0.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BN2 I think the Xinjiang Cotton incident is important for the brand.</td>
<td>0.809</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BN3 I think the Xinjiang Cotton incident is serious for the brand.</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand love reduction (BLR)</td>
<td>BLR1 The brand doesn’t appeal to me as much as it used to.</td>
<td>0.840</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BLR2 I feel embarrassed to use the brand.</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>72.196</td>
<td>0.865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BLR3 I feel less attached to the brand.</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BLR4 Using the brand makes me feel out of place.</td>
<td>0.842</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative e-WOM (NEW)</td>
<td>NEW1 I’ve seen negative reviews of the brand on many online platforms.</td>
<td>0.826</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEW2 Many people commented in support of the brand’s negative reviews.</td>
<td>0.910</td>
<td>75.427</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEW3 The negative online comments were generally objective and to the point.</td>
<td>0.860</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NEW4 The tone of negative online comments on the brand is firm.</td>
<td>0.876</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>65.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-21</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 24</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>20.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly living expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; RMB 1,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMB 1,000-1,500</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMB 1,500-2,000</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>53.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; RMB 2,000</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Analyses and Results

The relationships between perception of negative information, brand love reduction, negative e-WOM and brand conversion intention presented in the conceptual model were empirically tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) technique AMOS 23.0.

### 4.1 Construct Reliability and Validity

The most commonly used Cronbach’s α coefficient was used in this study to evaluate the reliability of samples. The statistical results are shown in Table 1. According to the α coefficient of the whole table is 0.923, the reliability and stability of the whole data table is very good, indicating that the scale has high reliability. The variable setting of this study is based on the existing theories and revised by referring to the scale of the existing literature. On the basis of discussions with relevant experts and scholars and predictive tests for master students, the variable setting is combined with the research background of this project. Therefore, this scale has a certain level of content validity. Exploratory factor analysis was also used to test the scale’s structural validity. SPSS26.0 statistical analysis software was used to conduct KMO (Kai-Ser-Meyer-Oklin) and Bartlett sphericity tests on the samples. The value of KMO was 0.928, indicating that the samples were sufficient for factor analysis. Bartlett sphericity test gave a concomitant probability of 0.000. It is less than the significant level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis of Bartlett’s sphericity test is rejected, indicating that the structure validity of this data table and its factor components.
is good.

4.2 Structural Equation Model and Indicators of Fit

To confirm that there is sufficient variation and covariance data. We add all the path coefficients, variances and the number of covariances to be estimated in the model to \( n(n+1)/2 \), and compare with the estimated parameter \( \lambda \) to obtain the degree of freedom of the model \( df \). Using the sample data selected in this paper, by running AMOS 7.0 software, \( \lambda = 36 < n(n+1)/2 = 120 \), Degree of freedom of model \( df = 84 + 0 \). The greater the degree of freedom, the more simplified the model and the more ideal the model. Therefore, the structural equation model in this study is over-identified and can be used to test the fit of the model and estimate the parameters in the model. Then, we establish a metric scale of latent variables, that is, when latent variables are independent variables (i.e., exogenous latent variables), the variance of latent variables is fixed as 1. When the latent variable is a dependent variable (endogenous latent variable), the regression coefficient is fixed as 1. At this point, the constructed model can be identified.

The fitting degree index of the overall theoretical model is shown in Table 3. It can be seen that the fitting ability of the structural equation model constructed in this paper, the effectiveness of the model for the structural analysis of the problem and the effectiveness of the model parameter estimation are significant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Relationship path</th>
<th>Path estimates</th>
<th>( p ) values</th>
<th>Test results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>PNI→BLR: Perception of negative information ( \rightarrow ) Brand love reduction</td>
<td>0.529***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>PNI→NEW: Perception of negative information ( \rightarrow ) Negative e-WOM</td>
<td>0.392***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>BLR→NEW: Brand love reduction ( \rightarrow ) Negative e-WOM</td>
<td>0.554***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>PNI→BCI: Perception of negative information ( \rightarrow ) Brand conversion intention</td>
<td>0.244***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>NEW→BCI: Negative e-WOM ( \rightarrow ) Brand conversion intention</td>
<td>0.294***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>BLR→BCI: Brand love reduction ( \rightarrow ) Brand conversion intention</td>
<td>0.333***</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** \( p < 0.001 \), ** \( p < 0.01 \), * \( p < 0.05 \).

Figure 2: Structural equation model and path coefficients

As can be seen from the detailed path coefficient results in Figure 2, in terms of the perception of negative brand information, consumers will regard the negative brand information involving political factors as serious, which reflects the importance of patriotism in the purchasing behavior of Chinese consumers. In terms of brand love reduction, consumers believe that using politically sensitive brands will make them feel very embarrassed, indicating that consumers are greatly affected by group factors in the process of product purchase and use. In terms of negative online word-of-mouth, the quantity and quality of negative online comments have the greatest impact on consumers. In terms of brand conversion intention, consumers tend to boycott politically sensitive brands and do not want to keep in touch with these brands, which also reflects that the negative brand information influenced by political factors has a very serious impact on brand conversion intention.

5. General Discussion

5.1 Managerial Implications

Based on the background of Xinjiang Cotton incident, this paper discusses college students’ choice and evaluation of fashion brands. Therefore, relevant research conclusions and inspirations will be carried out around this aspect.

First, the companies involved should sincerely apologize and re-create a positive social image. The empirical study of this paper shows that the three dimensions of consumers’ negative perception (negativity, importance and severity) will reduce their brand love, and promote them to spread negative public
opinion, and generate brand conversion intention or behavior. Therefore, after the occurrence of brand crisis, enterprises should timely and sincerely apologize for the understanding of consumers, re-establish a positive social image, build its brand values of fairness and responsibility, and take practical actions to resolve the negative perception of consumers.

Second, stay out of the political maelstrom. The political issue is a matter of principle. The stronger the national consciousness of a country is, the more likely its buying behavior is to be affected by political factors. Since the establishment of the Belt and Road, the Chinese nation has never been more confident and proud. On the whole, Chinese consumers are less and less enthusiastic about foreign brands and more and more inclusive of domestic brands. Once foreign brands are Mired in the whirlpool of public opinion due to political reasons, it will have a huge blow to brand influence. Therefore, brand owners should establish the image of global and international enterprises, keep a neutral attitude to politically sensitive issues, and avoid consumers’ large-scale brand switching behavior due to this influence. For example, on November 18, 2018, the trailer of Dolce & Gabbana, an internationally renowned brand, was suspected of discriminating against traditional Chinese culture on its official Weibo, Instagram and Facebook accounts, and was questioned and disapproved by many netizens once released. However, instead of apologizing, D&G designer Stefano Gabbana made even more outrageous comments about China. Although Chinese consumers, media and e-commerce platforms have expressed strong dissatisfaction and boycotted D&G, D&G did not admit its mistake and still went ahead with its own way, which ultimately led to D&G losing the Chinese market. Therefore, brands must try to stay away from politically sensitive issues and respect national conditions and cultures.

Finally, use the network word of mouth to reverse the brand crisis. Online word-of-mouth is a double-edged sword. Good online word-of-mouth can multiply product sales and brand influence, while bad online word-of-mouth is very likely to make the brand fall flat. Therefore, enterprises must rely on online media to do a good job in public relations, solve problems sincerely and quickly, and timely reverse the brand crisis. For example, on April 19, 2021, a female Tesla owner whose T-shirt was emblazoned with the words “Brake failure” defended her rights on the roof of her car, which attracted the attention of the whole Internet. Tesla’s arrogant and irresponsible attitude in the face of the crisis has not only failed to calm the public opinion, but also spread the focus of public opinion. The public has moved from focusing on quality to denouncing brand values. Under the dual pressure of continuous fermentation of public opinion and government intervention, Tesla realized the seriousness of the problem and provided a solution to open data. But the public mood has been damaged by a series of early missteps, and subsequent efforts have been unconvincing. Therefore, it can be seen that only by quickly solving problems and constantly maintaining and strengthening the network reputation can enterprises turn the danger into safety.

5.2 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

First, before foreign fashion brands boycotted Xinjiang cotton, college students were the main buyers of brands such as Nike and H&M. After the incident, college students are also the main source of negative online word-of-mouth. Therefore, when analyzing the four factors of perception of negative information, brand love reduction, negative e-WOM and brand conversion intention, this study takes more into account the personal behavioral characteristics of college students and ignores the influence of social relations and reference groups. Therefore, taking into account the network of relationships will shed lighter on the above behavior of consumers.

Secondly, in the selection of control variables, we should take into account the family economic level and the city where the sample is surveyed in future studies. Obviously, household income level will directly affect the consumption behavior of fashion products and brands, and the location of the city will affect the information acceptance degree of consumer groups. In first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, information spreads quickly, and consumer resistance to brands is fierce. Consumers are more likely to be exposed to negative brand information, thus influencing their brand choice. The information in third-tier and fourth-tier cities is relatively closed, and there are few cases of collective boycott by consumers. Consumers have insufficient impression of negative brand information, so it has little influence on their brand selection.

Thirdly, although many fashion brands are designed in the questionnaire, there are differences among these fashion brands. For example, Nike and H&M have different brand values, and consumers’ comments on these brand images may affect the results. We plan to conduct classified experimental research in the next research.

Finally, the concept of brand love was formally proposed by Carroll and Ahuvia in 2006. Although there are abundant psychological and sociological literatures related to this, there are few theoretical research achievements directly related to brand or consumer behavior. Therefore, the inspection and improvement of the brand love measurement scale will be one of the goals of our further research in the future.

Acknowledgement

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References


Questionnaire

On March 24, 2021, H&M Group issued a statement that it would refuse to use and boycott Xinjiang cotton under the pretext of “forced labor”. Later, Nike, Adidas, Uniqlo and other major manufacturers also issued statements that they refused to use Xinjiang cotton, and asked their cooperative suppliers not to allow the use. This way of ganging up to suppress China has aroused the anger of many netizens, who have boycotted major foreign brands. CCTV News also commented that “H&M Group has made a wrong bet and wrong calculation, and it will pay a heavy price for its wrong behavior”.

In order to study the impact of “Xinjiang Cotton Incident” on Chinese consumers’ attitudes, we will ask you to fill in the questionnaire for about two minutes, so as to understand your views on this incident. Thank you for your active participation, we will keep your answers confidential, thank you for your cooperation and support!

1. Your gender is:
   □ Male    □ Female
2. On average, your monthly living expenses are:
   □ Less than RMB 1000 □ RMB 1000-1500 □ RMB 1500-2000 □ More than RMB 2000
3. Have you had any online purchasing experience?
   □ Yes (continue) □ No (end of the study)
4. When purchasing online, did you make any decision based on customer reviews or other online WOM information?
   □ Yes (continue) □ No (end of the study)
5. After the Xinjiang Cotton incident, which fashion brand do you have the most negative impression on?
   □ Yes (please specify____________) □ No (end of the study)

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the fashion brand you have a negative impression of. (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
1. I think the Xinjiang Cotton incident is negative for the brand.
2. I think the Xinjiang Cotton incident is important for the brand.
3. I think the Xinjiang Cotton incident is serious for the brand.
4. The brand doesn’t appeal to me as much as it used to.
5. I feel embarrassed to use the brand.
6. I feel less attached to the brand.
7. Using the brand makes me feel out of place.
8. I’ve seen negative reviews of the brand on many online platforms.
9. Many people commented in support of the brand’s negative reviews.
10. The negative online comments were generally objective and to the point.
11. The tone of negative online comments on the brand is firm.
12. After knowing the negative online word-of-mouth information, I tend to buy the products of domestic brands.
13. After knowing the negative online word of mouth information, I did buy the products of domestic brands.
14. I don’t want to be associated with the brand’s products after learning the negative online word of mouth information.
15. After knowing the negative online word-of-mouth information, I will not recommend my friends to use the products of this brand.

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Appendix

Questionnaire