



Sticks and stones: how resistance to negative information helps strong brands thrive

Melanie Wiese¹ · Tania Maree¹ · Charles R. Taylor²

Revised: 27 January 2025 / Accepted: 26 June 2025 / Published online: 19 July 2025
© The Author(s) 2025

Abstract

Once consumers become highly loyal to a brand, research has shown that they are less receptive to negative information conveyed online or via other media. This important concept, resistance to negative information (RNI), has been under-researched despite being an essential contributor to brand health. This study explores the role of brand respect and attitudes in building consumer resistance to negative information across two studies. Social identity and appraisal theories illuminate the critical drivers of consumers' RNI. A total of 364 and 312 responses (respectively) were received from online questionnaires distributed to shoppers in two retail contexts: quality and value brands, one local and the other global. Structural equation modelling results for both brands underscore the importance of building brand respect to develop resistance to negative information, suggesting that stimulating brand respect should be a priority for brand managers. Three ways to strengthen RNI were identified: directly via brand respect and attitudes and indirectly via the moderating role of self-brand connection. Further, resistance to negative information is a mediator between brand respect and purchase intention for the quality brand and between brand attitude and purchase intention for the value brand.

Keywords Brand respect · Brand attitude · Brand relationships · Resistance to negative information · Purchase intent · Self-brand congruence

Introduction

Exposure to information via social media and other digital platforms impacts consumer behaviour (Wang et al. 2012), and the impact is not always positive. For example, firestorms—the sudden discharge of negative information that spreads quickly between social media platforms (Lappeman et al. 2018)—are sometimes a reality for even the most loved brands. Often, brand managers are better equipped and more focussed on using digital platforms as a marketing tool rather than dealing with the negative side of social media, such as negative WOM (Lappeman et al. 2018). Yet, negative information can severely impact consumers' perceptions of the brand (Balaji et al. 2016).

Considering the influence of electronic WOM (eWOM) on the brand's value (Yuan et al. 2020), understanding resistance to negative information is essential for brands, as it can serve as a buffer against the unwanted consequences of negative information. Hence, this research explores how brands can drive RNI to protect their bottom line.

Despite its importance, resistance to negative information remains understudied (Merlo et al. 2023). Previous studies have shown that WOM is an important determinant of consumer choice and that negative WOM has a more substantial impact than positive WOM on consumers' brand evaluations (Kurtoğlu et al. 2021; Yu et al. 2019; Li and Wu 2018). Thus, it is essential to study specific factors influencing RNI and its impact on outcome measures.

A key concern in branding literature is developing an emotional bond or strong connection with the brand (Malär et al. 2011) and enhancing and strengthening consumer–brand relationships (Han et al. 2020). For brands to move beyond a mere transactional relationship with consumers, they should instead emphasise building a relationship upon brand love and brand respect, known as lovemarks (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021). Unfortunately, most lovemark

✉ Melanie Wiese
melanie.wiese@up.ac.za

¹ Department of Marketing Management, University of Pretoria, Hatfield, PO Box 14679, Pretoria 0028, South Africa

² Department of Marketing, School of Business, Villanova University, Villanova, PA, USA



research has focussed on one dimension, brand love (Song and Kim 2022), while brand respect has been understudied despite it being considered an important brand relationship dimension (Fortezza et al. 2022). Although research indicates that brand love is associated with brand loyalty and profitability, lovemarks only emerge if they are rooted in respect (Song et al. 2019). As a result, brand respect is a key variable in the study.

The paper proposes and tests a consumer–brand relational framework rooted in the branding literature that investigates the central role of RNI in the relationships between brand respect and dependent measures. The bottom-line outcome examined is purchase intention as a known and essential outcome, yet the paper brings new insights into how RNI interrelates within the framework. We test the model in a retail context for two brand types, quality and value brands, one a local brand and the other a global one amongst South African consumers, to determine if our conceptual model holds in more than one context.

As identification with brands is created through customer–brand relationships, the moderating role of consumer self-brand congruence, another key construct in the branding literature (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003), is also investigated. Given that brand loyalty is inherent in existing consumer–brand relationships (Khamitov et al. 2019), we also test its moderating effect on the relationship between RNI and purchase intent. As our focus is on RNI and to deepen our insights, consumers' scepticism in general towards WOM is also considered a potential moderator.

Consumers evaluate brands via cognitive processes, subsequently developing emotional connections to their favourite brands and adopting them as part of their social identity (McGowan et al. 2017). Therefore, this paper views the proposed consumer–brand relational model through the complementary theoretical frameworks of cognitive appraisal and social identity theory.

The study makes three contributions to the literature. First, at a theoretical level, a novel framework based on perspectives from cognitive appraisal and social identity theories is developed to enhance understanding of key factors affecting consumers' RNI and its effect on purchase intention. The study responds to calls for a better theoretical understanding of how brands can combat negative information's impact by examining key constructs mentioned by prior literature, including brand respect, self-brand congruity, brand loyalty, and brand attitudes. In particular, the paper proposes that brand respect (Merlo et al. 2023) is a primary driver of RNI. Additionally, RNI's mitigating role is examined and confirmed.

From a contextual perspective, the study also includes a global and local company and an upscale and value retailer to enhance the generalisability of the theoretical test. A second contribution is that the study highlights the nuances of

brand loyalty as a moderator and its complex role in consumer–brand relationships. It underscores the importance of continued research on so-called “well-established constructs” in new contexts (local versus global) and various brands. This study also extends the notion of scepticism to the general context of WOM communications, extending our understanding of scepticism towards WOM as a moderator in the relationship between RNI and purchasing intentions, adding to the scant research on WOM scepticism and its impact on consumer–brand relationships. A final contribution of the study is to provide managerial implications related to the impact of RNI. The study identifies clear advantages for companies if they develop RNI. Our discussion elaborates on how managers can work to ensure that RNI is increased and then employed to help the brand.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: a literature review followed by hypotheses development, a methodology section, discussion, and implications while concluding with limitations and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

Cognitive appraisal and social identity theories

The paper utilises an integrative approach combining cognitive appraisal (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) and social identity theory (Tajfel 1978) to develop a relational model. Cognitive appraisal theory argues that emotions influence consumer behaviour (Srivastava et al. 2023) via three mechanisms: 1) the integral characteristics of the appraisal subject; 2) the emotions (if any) that follow the appraisal; and 3) subsequent behaviour (Watson and Spence 2007). The main idea is that consumers cognitively evaluate a brand according to how well it meets their needs. If the appraisal is positive, their resultant behaviour should show a cognitive bias in favour of the brand. Abdelwahab et al. (2022) further explained that people may respond differently to events (for example, information about a brand), contingent upon their evaluation.

Tajfel (1978), who developed social identity theory (SIT), asserts that consumers hold a personal and social identity created by the groups they associate with. The theory explores the phenomenon of in- and out-group categorisation and comparison (Abdelwahab et al., 2022). Similarly, consumers position themselves and brands in the same social situation (Jeong and Kim 2020). The key tenets of SIT are apparent in consumer–brand relationships. Consumers tend to classify (*categorisation*) brands into groups considering traits such as quality, luxury, or value. They identify with brand categories representing their values (*social identification*)—thus building self-brand congruence. This connects with the brand and allows for social *comparison*—where



consumers assess their brand with societal norms or competing brands.

In the model, these complementary theoretical views are integrated as follows: Consumers cognitively appraise how well a brand fits their needs, influencing their view of the brand (brand respect) while simultaneously classifying brands to align with both their self-identity (self-brand congruence) and social group's (fellow shoppers) identity. When consumers identify the brand as aligning with their social identity (self-brand congruence), they connect emotionally with the brand (brand attitude). If they compare the brand (or their in-group) with others, their appraisal should be positive, further enhancing their relationship with the brand. Brand loyalty can be viewed as a form of social identity that could influence consumers' behaviour, such as their reactions towards negative information about the brand, as brands form an integral part of consumers' social identities.

Consequently, people who exhibit favourable cognitive biases towards the brand are likely to assess negative information in ways that help them minimise its impact by rejecting or countering negative information about a brand. Resistance to negative information, thus, is a favourable cognitive bias towards the brand, as consumers who have positive appraisals of the brand will reappraise negative information about the brand, protecting themselves from emotional discomfort. Brand loyalty can also assist consumers in appraising negative information in a way that reduces its negative emotional impact. For example, consumers sceptical of WOM will likely appraise the negative information as less threatening. Scepticism can thus act as a buffer, allowing the consumer to maintain their social identity and group affiliation with the brand.

Resistance to negative information

Negative word of mouth has garnered significant attention in marketing and crisis communication studies, as even a minor complaint about a brand can have extensive repercussions for its reputation (Kimmel and Kitchen, 2014; Qu et al. 2023). Social media often acts as a powerful "multiplier" for negative responses (Pace et al., 2017). A notable example occurred when United Airlines forcibly removed a passenger from a flight, prompting users on Twitter to launch the hashtag #BoycottUnited in protest.

However, despite reputation disasters and negative WOM, some brands still thrive—this relates to their customers' resistance to negative information due to cultivating positive relationships. For example, (a) Apple acknowledged bending issues with their phones (e.g. iPhone 6) after initially denying it, (b) they controversially excluded competitor-linked apps from their app store, and (c) used faulty camera lenses in the iPhone X that required expensive repairs. Despite negative press around these issues, Apple won the CMO Survey

Award for Marketing Excellence, even amidst an ongoing class-action lawsuit (Campbell 2023) in 2017.

With products becoming increasingly complex and customers having higher expectations, negative information will become even more common (Pontinha and Coelho do Vale 2020). In addition, the high level of information exchange on social media leads to commonplace negative information. As a result, RNI is a critical outcome for brand managers (Gumparthy et al. 2023). Two main types of negative information can be distinguished. Performance-related negative information typically involves product, brand, services, or quality failures, highlighting a brand's inability to meet consumers' expectations.

Meanwhile, value-related negative information pertains to moral and ethical concerns that often conflict with consumers' standards (Tong et al. 2022). However, regardless of the type, negative information has been shown to have an even larger effect than positive information on brand evaluation (Yu et al. 2019) and brand choice (Kurtoğlu et al. 2021). It also can evoke negative emotions, such as betrayal, and threaten customer loyalty (Mattila 2004; Zhu et al. 2023).

Resistance to negative information is the extent to which consumers refuse to allow negative information to change their perceptions of a brand. It is often a gauge of the consumer-brand relationship's strength (Lin et al. 2021; Bairrada et al. 2018). Resistance to negative information is more likely to occur when there is a good match between the brand and the consumer's identity (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003); further, it informs brand resilience (Kang et al. 2023). Consumers who identify with a brand and feel connected to it are disposed to hold a favourable brand attitude and respect it (positive appraisals), which can create a buffer against negative information, thereby creating RNI (Lin et al. 2021). Thus, when negative information targets a brand related to or consistent with the consumer's social identity, resistance can occur because the information threatens that identity, and the consumer wants to protect the in-group. RNI could also be employed as a coping strategy when consumers appraise the danger of negative brand information.

While previous research on negative information focussed primarily on how to strengthen brands (Keller 1993) or on recovery strategies when things go wrong (e.g. Ahluwalia et al. 2000), less is known about how brands can build consumers' resistance to future negative information (Merlo et al. 2023), a gap our study attempts to fill.

Brand respect

According to the brand connection matrix proposed by Marc and Daniel (2014), consumer-brand relationships may be founded upon functional, emotional, or a combination of connections. The consumer's propensity to build a strong emotional connection with a brand has led to the



term “lovemarks”, referring to brands bought not because of need but because of love and respect. While brand love represents a consumer’s feelings towards the brand (emotional attributes), brand respect refers to the consumer’s cognitive perceptions of the brand’s functional attributes (Shuv-Ami et al. 2018). Brand love is only possible when respect is present, and respect will determine if there will be a lasting relationship between consumers and a brand (Song et al. 2019). Roberts (2006a) proposes that brand respect forms the foundation for maintaining long-term relationships and is vital for business success as it strengthens consumer–brand relationships. Thus, without brand respect, the possibility of an intimate brand relationship diminishes.

Veloutsou (2019) underscores the duality of brand respect, which refers to the degree to which consumers feel respected by the brand or, conversely, the respect that a consumer feels for a brand. Though both notions of brand respect are adopted in the literature, the one that is more consistent with this paper’s model is the latter. As a result, the paper defines brand respect as the “perception of function and the performance attribute of a brand” (Roberts 2006b, p. 60; Song et al. 2019, p. 1051).

Respect centres on reliability, trust, and reputation (Montoya-Restrepo et al. 2020) and refers to the functional attributes that are reflected in the consumer’s positive attitude towards a brand, flowing from an evaluation of brand trust, performance, and reputation (Giovanis and Athanasopoulou 2018; Song et al. 2019). In addition to the three brand respect dimensions, brand acceptance has recently been proposed as a fourth dimension (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021).

However, the multi-dimensionality of brand respect requires defining the various dimensions in more detail. Brand performance is commonly defined as the success of a brand in the market (Yin Wong and Merrilees, 2008:375). In contrast, brand reputation is “the collective perception of a brand accumulated through consumers’ experiences with it” (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021, p. 117). Brand trust is “the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function, related to the credibility, integrity and benevolence” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2002, p. 82). Lastly, brand acceptance is “the degree to which consumers integrate a brand into their self-concept, reflecting their traits or values” (Jahanvi and Sharma 2021, p.119).

Brand attitude and purchase intention

Brand attitude and purchase intention are more established constructs than brand respect and have received much attention from research scholars. Brand attitudes refer to consumers’ comprehensive brand evaluation (Ramesh et al. 2019), resulting in a general liking or disliking. A favourable brand evaluation can thus result in a positive attitude towards the brand and purchase intention (Kemp et al. 2012). Purchase

intention is a consumer’s inclination to purchase brand offerings (Bagozzi and Burnkrant 1979).

Hypothesis development

Brand respect is modelled as a second-order construct that reflects trust, performance, reputation, and acceptance (Giovanis and Athanasopoulou 2018). These dimensions comprise consumers’ perceptions of the brand’s cognitive elements based on their evaluations (Giovanis and Athanasopoulou 2018). The degree to which a brand is liked directly corresponds to the degree to which consumers identify with the brand (Bradley et al. 2007). As previously highlighted, RNI occurs when customers experience a good fit between their social identity and the brand’s identity (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Consistent with SIT, due to consumers’ identification with a brand they trust and accept, given its performance and reputation (i.e. brand respect), a buffering effect is created, causing resistance to negative brand information. Further, following appraisal theory, consumers who evaluate brands favourably exhibit positive cognitive bias towards the brand, thus rendering them resistant to negative information and positive towards purchasing.

Stronger customer–brand relationships increase customers’ RNI (So et al. 2018). Given that brand respect strengthens consumer–brand relationships (Han et al. 2020), this paper deduces that it may also lead to RNI. Research has also shown that brand love contributes to a display of scepticism about negative information (Ponchina and Do Vale 2020) and RNI (Batra et al. 2012). Thus, given the under-researched nature of brand respect, this paper considers brand respect’s connection to brand love, its role in fostering customer–brand relationships, and the dual theoretical underpinning of the study to hypothesise that:

H1 *There is a significant positive relationship between brand respect and resistance to negative information.*

Positive brand attitude has been found to weaken the impact of negative information (Ahluwalia et al. 2000; Yu et al. 2019). In addition, consistent with appraisal theory, brand attitude parallels consumers’ comprehensive brand evaluation (Colliander and Marder 2018), leading to favourable cognitive bias and subsequent pro-brand behaviours (Watson and Spence 2007). When consumers favourably evaluate a brand in a way that leads to a purchase, the information they gather contributes to RNI (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Consumer attitudes towards the brand thus motivate brand advocacy behaviours (Xie et al. 2019), and therefore, brand attitude is expected to influence consumers’ RNI. Further, consumers with positive brand attitudes disregard negative information about the brand (Eisingerich et al. 2011).



H2 *There is a significant positive relationship between brand attitude and resistance to negative information.*

Purchase intention is influenced by a myriad of factors, including WOM (Yuan et al. 2020). Specifically, negative information can unfavourably impact purchase intention (Balaji et al. 2016; Yu et al. 2019). However, consistent with the theoretical foundations of the paper, cognitive favourability towards the brand is based on positive appraisals and an in-group relationship with the favoured brand results in RNI. This may help protect brands from negative consequences such as declining sales (Cleeren et al. 2013; Koll and Von Wallpach 2014). Consequently, the paper posits that RNI will reinforce purchase intention.

H3 *There is a significant positive relationship between resistance to negative information and purchase intention.*

Mediation

Interrelationships between brand respect, brand attitude, resistance to negative information, and purchase intention.

Prior research supports an association between brand attitude and purchase intention, direct or indirect (Wahid and Ahmed 2011; Yu et al. 2019). Therefore, brand attitude is an important predictor of consumer purchase intentions (Evans and Bang 2019). Similarly, prior studies have shown that brand respect is positively associated with purchase intention (Zacchilli et al. 2009; Han et al. 2020).

The integration of theories in this paper suggests that consumers may evaluate a brand as fitting their needs (appraisal theory) and being consistent with their identity (SIT), resulting in brand respect and a favourable brand attitude, which is perceived to reduce purchase risk (Kapferer 2012). Therefore, favourable appraisal and self-brand identification lead consumers to resist negative brand information,

which, in turn, is associated with higher purchase intention. RNI has been shown to mediate relationships between consumer–brand relational constructs (e.g. brand reputation and brand trust) and intentions (Gültekin and Kilic 2022; Kang et al. 2021). Therefore, in addition to examining the predictors (i.e. brand respect and brand attitude) and the outcomes (i.e. purchase intention) of RNI, the paper proposes RNI as a mediator that explains an underlying mechanism in consumer–brand relationships. Considering the relational development of the hypotheses (Fig. 1), it is predicted that brand attitude and brand respect are positively associated with RNI and that RNI is positively associated with purchase intention. These paths thus suggest mediation.

H4 Resistance to negative information mediates the relationship between brand respect and purchase intention.

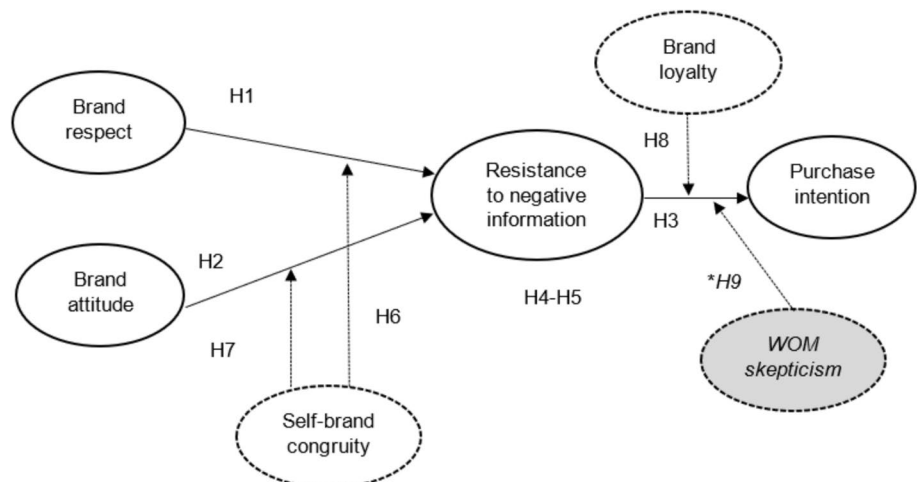
H5 Resistance to negative information mediates the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention.

Moderation

Self-brand congruence as a moderator of the relationships between brand respect and resistance to negative information and between brand attitude and resistance to negative information; and brand loyalty as moderator on the relationship between resistance to negative information and purchase intention.

Self-congruity with a brand can influence important brand outcomes (Dwivedi et al. 2014). Jeong and Kim (2020) define self-brand congruence as the degree to which a consumer's self-view matches their view of the brand or other brand users. It is generally agreed that the higher the consumer's self-brand congruence, the more likely the consumer's behaviour towards the brand will be favourable (Kuenzel and Halliday 2010). Consistent with this study's foundations drawn from social identity theory, consumers'

Fig. 1 Conceptual model



self-brand congruence should create a conducive environment for brand respect and a favourable brand attitude. When there is high self-brand congruence, negative brand information could be perceived as detrimental to the individual (Cheng et al. 2012), which could result in the activation of the “self-defence” process through which consumers mentally try to “fight” the “threatening” information (Sherman and Cohen 2006).

Appraisal theory also suggests that individuals with positive evaluations of a brand will reappraise negative communication to defend their favourable view and connection with the brand. The unfavourable impact of negative information on brands is generally accepted and evident in marketing research. However, high self-brand congruence leads to defensive processing of negative information (i.e. resistance to negative information), resulting in positive behavioural responses (Wilson et al. 2017). Despite its significance, research findings indicate that self-brand congruence alone might not be sufficient to build RNI (So et al. 2017), suggesting that it might play an indirect role, acting as a moderator. Given that brand identification is a driver of supportive brand behaviours (Fortezza et al. 2022), it could be argued that a stronger congruence between the consumer and brand is associated with a stronger connection between the constructs of brand respect and brand attitude, respectively, as well as RNI about the brand. Thus, the interaction between brand respect and self-brand congruence is predicted to increase the effect on RNI and the interaction between brand attitude and self-brand congruence.

H6 The relationship between brand respect and resistance to negative information is moderated by self-brand congruence, which strengthens the relationship.

H7 The relationship between brand attitude and resistance to negative information is moderated by self-brand congruence, which strengthens the relationship.

Customers loyal to the brand are more likely to engage in positive cognitive appraisals and defend their social identity linked to the brand, leading to greater RNI and ongoing purchase intention. Oliver (1997) defines loyalty as a deeply held commitment to repurchase in the future, and consumers’ commitment towards a brand has been highlighted as a moderator of negative information effects (Ahluwalia, 2002). In addition, loyal consumers have a higher tendency to stay resilient to negative information (Torres and Augusto 2019; Cleeren et al. 2013). Thus, we argue that brand loyalty will strengthen the relationship between RNI and purchase intention. The more loyal consumers are, the more their RNI will be favourably associated with their intentions to purchase the brand.

H8 The relationship between resistance to negative information and purchase intention is moderated by brand loyalty, which strengthens the relationship.

Additional moderation—Study 2

WOM scepticism as moderator on the relationship between resistance to negative information and purchase intent.

For Study 2, another moderator, WOM scepticism, was introduced to further explore the relationship between RNI and purchase intention. It is commonly thought that modern customers are sceptical and do not believe everything they see or hear. In addition to traditional offline WOM, electronic WOM (eWOM) has become an influential factor affecting consumer behaviour. However, fake eWOM, paid-for reviews, and virtual influencers increase scepticism about this communication (Haugtvedt et al. 2018). Instead of focussing solely on scepticism towards social media as a potential moderator, we took a more holistic approach by considering both online and offline WOM, given how integrated WOM has become.

Scepticism refers to a person’s tendency to doubt, disbelieve, and question (Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998). In a corporate social responsibility (CSR) context, scepticism is negatively related to RNI (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Eisingerich et al. 2011) and consumer scepticism towards CSR can be detrimental to developing resilience to negative information (Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013; Amawate and Deb 2021).

According to attribution theory, individuals attribute causes to events, influencing their attitudes (i.e. scepticism) and behaviours (i.e. purchase intention). Consequently, scepticism affects consumers’ purchase intentions (Elving 2013; Diogenes et al. 2017). Furthermore, consumer scepticism reduces consumer RNI (Skarmeas and Leonidou 2013; Amawate and Deb 2021).

We anticipate that the more sceptical consumers are of WOM in general, the less susceptible they are to it, and the stronger the relationship between RNI and purchase intention will be. This is because people who believe WOM are less likely to resist negative information about a brand they support and, thus, be less likely to purchase. Figure 1 presents our conceptual model based on the hypotheses.

H9 The relationship between resistance to negative information and purchase intention is moderated by WOM scepticism in that low scepticism (highly susceptible to WOM) weakens the relationship.



Methodology

Population and sampling

Non-probability judgement sampling targeted South African adults who had shopped at Woolworths (Study 1) or SHEIN (Study 2) within the last year. For Study 1, respondents had to have been active on Facebook in the previous month, and sampling was conducted via Facebook advertising to Woolworths' customers to gain a sufficient sample size. Study 2's sample was drawn from a consumer panel from the Springvale Research Company.

Woolworths was selected because it is one of the largest retailers in South Africa and has the unique characteristic of offering store-branded Woolworths products that are widely considered good quality and, hence, are popular amongst consumers. Although the store carries other brands, it positions itself based on the quality of its Woolworths store brand (Woolworths Holdings Ltd 2023), which is widely considered a premium store brand by South African consumers. Facebook users were selected, as 29.5 million South Africans are platform members (Statista 2022), and Woolworths is an active brand (over two million followers) there.

SHEIN was selected because it is a value online retailer. Additionally, it is an international retailer operating in 150 countries with 74.7 million users globally at the end of 2022 (Buck 2024). This retailer is widely considered to offer value for money and various products and brands.

Data collection

Both studies used online surveys to collect the data. Study 1's survey was hosted on Qualtrics, and a hyperlink to the survey was posted on Facebook and boosted via Facebook advertising. For Study 2, Springvale hosted the survey on their panel platform. Before data collection commenced, the researchers' home university gained approval for the research projects' use of human subjects. Pilot studies were completed, and no additional changes were deemed necessary.

Questionnaire and measures

The survey instruments included screening questions (age, Woolworths/SHEIN shopper, Facebook user—Study 1), scale questions to measure the study constructs, and demographics (gender identity, race, income). The focal constructs were measured on multi-item 7-point scales sourced from the literature. Brand respect was measured with an 18-item Likert-type scale adapted from Jahanvi and Sharma (2021). A semantic differential scale adopted from Spears and Singh (2004) measured brand attitude (five items). Resistance to negative information (four items adopted from

Jain et al. 2021), purchase intention (four items from Spears and Singh 2004), self-brand congruence (three items from Jain et al. 2021), brand loyalty (Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Hess 1998), and WOM scepticism (adapted from Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998) were measured on Likert-type scales. In Study 2, we controlled for brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006) due to its association with brand respect (Roberts 2006b). Using established scales, checking scale item comprehensibility via pilot studies, and the assurance of anonymous participation supported efforts to avoid common method bias (Kurtoğlu et al. 2021).

Data analyses

After data cleaning and conducting descriptive analysis, the models were tested using two-step covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) in Amos version 28. Measurement models were run, after which reliability and validity were estimated. The latter aspects were assessed as follows (Fornell and Larcker 1981; Hair et al. 2014): convergent validity via Cronbach's alpha (α) and CR (both must exceed 0.7) and average variance extracted (AVE) larger than 0.5; discriminant validity by examining whether the correlations between constructs were less than the square root of the AVE; and all HTMT values below 0.85. After establishing reliability and validity by meeting these standards, SEM was conducted. Model fit was evaluated using a combination of incremental and absolute fit indices (Hair et al. 2014; Schumacker and Lomax 2010), with RMSEA < 0.08; CFI and TLI > 0.9; and CMIN/DF < 3.

Results

Sample profiles

For Study 1, the realised sample was 364 respondents with a mean age of 51.4 (SD = 16.1). The sample size was sufficient to ensure the stability of the results, considering the number of free parameters in the model (69) times five equals 345 (Bentler and Chou 1987). The sample represented key demographic groups: it was more mature, consistent with the age demographic of Woolworths shoppers, which skews towards being middle-aged (Reid 2018). Additionally, most identified as female (86.2%), which is consistent with most shoppers in South Africa being female (City Press 2022). Most reported their racial identity as white (78.1%), followed by black African (7.1%). The largest response category (22.7%) for monthly disposable household income was R25 001 to R45 000 (\$1 470 to \$2 647), which aligns with Woolworths being a higher-end retailer for South Africans (Woolworths Holdings Ltd 2022).



The Woolworths (Study 1) sample was appropriate, as it represented a group of shoppers with sufficient income to afford high-quality products and shop at higher-end retailers that carry many brands that invest heavily in marketing and building brand loyalty. Most (59.9%) reported shopping at Woolworths at least once a week. An open-ended word association question analysis revealed that most of the sample (53.3%) cited “quality” as the word they most associate with Woolworths, which is consistent with the brand’s positioning.

The SHEIN (Study 2) sample comprised 312 respondents, of which 26.3% identified as male and 73.4% as female. This was a sufficient sample size as the number of free parameters in the model (56) times five equals 280 (Bentler and Chou 1987). The mean age was 29 (SD=7.2), and the primary racial identity was black African (84.6%), followed by “mixed race” and Indian/Asian (both 5.4%). The largest response category for monthly disposable household income (39.7%) was R15 000 or less (approximately \$853). The demographics align with SHEIN’s global demographics (Oberlo 2024) and its reputation as a value retailer, as evidenced by its low prices (Buck 2024), attracting lower- to middle-income shoppers. Almost half (46.2%) of the respondents reported shopping from SHEIN sometimes (around every six months), and an open-ended association question revealed they view it as affordable.

Measurement models

As brand respect was measured with a new and relatively untested scale, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were run to examine its structure for both samples. The results for both studies showed multicollinearity between the proposed sub-dimensions. For Study 1, *trust* and *brand performance* correlated highly (0.997). The decision was made to combine these as one sub-dimension of brand respect, labelled “brand performance trust”.

For Study 2, correlations were high between the *brand performance* sub-dimension and *trust* (0.952) as well as *acceptance* (0.899) and between *trust* and *acceptance*

(0.864). These were subsequently labelled “Performance-trust acceptance” as one sub-dimension of brand respect. This was done to test the validity of the full measurement model as discriminant analysis was conducted on a first-order level. Albert and Thompson (2023) alert scholars to the possible overlap between consumer–brand relational measures (amongst others, trust), with a request for rigour in validity testing, especially for untested scales. The initial validity assessments for both studies suggested that some items from brand respect be removed (see appendix for factor loadings). After ascertaining the structure of brand respect, the full measurement models were run. The final CFAs showed acceptable model fit: Study 1-RMSEA = 0.046; CFI = 0.967; TLI = 0.963; CMIN/DF = 1.758 and Study 2-RMSEA = 0.069; CFI = 0.922; TLI = 0.912; CMIN/DF = 2.485. The means, reliability, and validity of the studies are depicted in Table 1.

Convergent validity was established, as all Cronbach’s α , CR, and AVE values exceeded the recommended cut-offs, apart from reputation in Study 2 (0.495). The latter’s CR value was above 0.7; thus, it was deemed acceptable (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Discriminant validity was achieved, as all the inter-construct correlations were less than the square root of the AVE, except for brand performance trust and reputation for Study 1 and reputation and purchase intention for Study 2. As AVE is considered a strict measure of convergence validity, the HTMT measure was calculated (Henseler et al. 2015). A value less than 0.85 (0.9 for liberal criterion) indicates that discriminant validity can be assumed. As the HTMT values were below 0.9 (Study 1, 0.842; Study 2, 0.858), discriminant validity between the constructs was accepted for both studies.

Brand respect as a second-order construct

Given that the focus was not on validating brand respect’s sub-dimensions but on investigating its role in brand advocacy behaviours, it was handled as a second-order construct. This corresponds with the literature that suggests that brand respect can be considered a second-order construct

Table 1 Means, reliability, and validity

Constructs	Mean (SD)		Cronbach’s α		CR		AVE	
	Study 1	Study 2	Study 1	Study 2	Study 1	Study 2	Study 1	Study 2
Brand respect								
Reputation (both studies)	6.3 (0.74)	6.1 (1.02)	0.751	0.740	0.773	0.744	0.534	0.495
Study 1: Brand performance trust	5.5 (1.06)		0.929		0.930		0.572	
Study 1: Acceptance	3.9 (1.57)		0.867		0.868		0.622	
Study 2: Performance trust acceptance		5.37 (1.15)		0.926		0.907		0.552
Brand attitude	5.8 (1.19)	6.1 (0.95)	0.955	0.882	0.955	0.885	0.810	0.606
Purchase intention	5.4 (1.31)	6.0 (1.11)	0.955	0.893	0.955	0.894	0.841	0.678
Resistance to negative information	4.7 (1.49)	5.2 (1.45)	0.915	0.896	0.915	0.897	0.730	0.686



(Giovanis and Athanasopoulou 2018). Statistical testing was conducted to ensure rigour.

For both studies, the target coefficient for brand respect as a first-order construct versus brand respect as a second-order construct reflective of first-order dimensions was 1. The coefficient was obtained by dividing the Chi-square test statistics of the first-order models by that of the second-order models. The target coefficient has an upper value of 1 when the second-order factor fully accounts for the covariance between the first-order factor. Values of 0.9 and more imply that the first-order factor supplies a reliable explanation for the correlations (Marsh and Hocevar 1985) between the second-order constructs. Hong and Thong (2013) further note that a second-order construct permits the assessment of the relative strength of the first-order constructs. Thus, the results confirmed that brand respect could be used as a second-order construct.

Structural models and hypotheses testing

The structural models showed a satisfactory fit: Study 1: RMSEA = 0.063; CFI = 0.936; TLI = 0.931; CMIN/DF = 2.430; Study 2: RMSEA = 0.065; CFI = 0.918; TLI = 0.911; CMIN/DF = 2.295. We controlled for brand love in Study 2, considering the known theoretical association between brand love and brand respect as outlined in the literature review.

Relational hypotheses

Results for both studies support H1, as brand respect was positively related to resistance to negative information (both $p < 0.001$; Study 1, $Beta = 0.446$; Study 2, $Beta = 0.608$). Brand attitude only predicted RNI for Study 1 ($p = 0.049$; $Beta = 0.126$), as the Study 2 result was non-significant. H2 was thus only supported for Study 1, with attitudes towards the upscale brand positively correlated with RNI. H3 was supported for both samples, as RNI is positively associated with purchase intention (both $p < 0.001$; Study 1, $Beta = 0.451$; Study 2, $Beta = 0.242$).

Mediation hypotheses

A test of the indirect effect was conducted to test for mediation (Zhao et al. 2010.) Inspecting the generated bias-corrected percentile method confidence intervals determined whether the confidence interval (CI) for the indirect effect included zero, which would have indicated no mediation, owing to a non-significant result. If the confidence interval does not contain zero, mediation occurs. This aligns with the significance of the indirect term. If mediation occurred, the mediation type (full or partial) was assessed based on the guidelines of Zhao et al. (2010). If the CI for the direct

effect includes zero (i.e. a non-significant result), it indicates full mediation; if not, partial mediation occurs.

For Study 1, a significant indirect effect (indirect effect = 0.153; CI = 0.030–0.343; $p = 0.021$) of resistance to negative information on the relationship between brand respect and purchase intention (H4) was found, indicating mediation. As the direct effect was also significant, the findings showed that RNI partially mediates the relationship between brand respect and purchase intention (direct effect = 0.266; CI = 0.054–0.667; $p = 0.016$). Therefore, H4 is supported. However, RNI did not mediate the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention (indirect effect = 0.046; CI = -0.038–0.148; $p = 0.273$); thus, H5 is not supported.

The Study 2 results did not support H4 as the indirect effect of resistance to negative information on the relationship between brand respect and purchase intention was non-significant ($p = 0.284$). RNI was a partial mediator in the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention (indirect effect = 0.046; CI = -0.038–0.148; $p = 0.273$; direct effect = 0.558; CI = 0.451–0.644; $p = 0.014$); supporting H5.

Moderation hypotheses

To test the moderation hypotheses, we used Mplus version 8.6 to follow a latent moderated structural equations (LMS) approach (Daryanto and Lukas 2022), including a robustness check for the moderation effect. The strength and direction, through the use of conditional effects, were determined at three values of the moderator (1 SD below the mean, at the mean, and 1 SD above the mean).

SBC was not a moderator in Study 2 (no support for H6 and H7). The Study 1 results show that SBC moderated the relationship between brand respect and RNI ($Beta$ (interaction effect) = 0.132 $SE = 0.047$; $p = 0.005$). Please refer to Fig. 2 for the slopes.

Figure 2 shows that the moderation slopes are 0.345 (1 SD below the mean), 0.505 (mean), and 0.666 (1 SD above the mean), indicating that the relationship strengthens for higher values of SBC. Thus, as brand respect increases, RNI increases for higher SBC levels, supporting H6. However, SBC did not moderate the relationship between brand attitude and RNI ($p = 0.129$); thus, H7 was unsupported.

For Study 1, brand loyalty moderated ($Beta = 0.097$; $SE = 0.040$; $p = 0.023$) the relationship between RNI and purchase intent. An investigation of the slopes revealed that they are -0.149 (1 SD below the mean), -0.072 (mean), and 0.005 (1 SD above the mean), indicating that when resistance to negative information increases, purchase intention decreases for lower values of loyalty and slightly increases for higher values of loyalty. Therefore, as RNI increases, purchase intention decreases for lower loyal consumers;



Fig. 2 Moderation slopes: SBC on brand respect and RNI (Study 1)

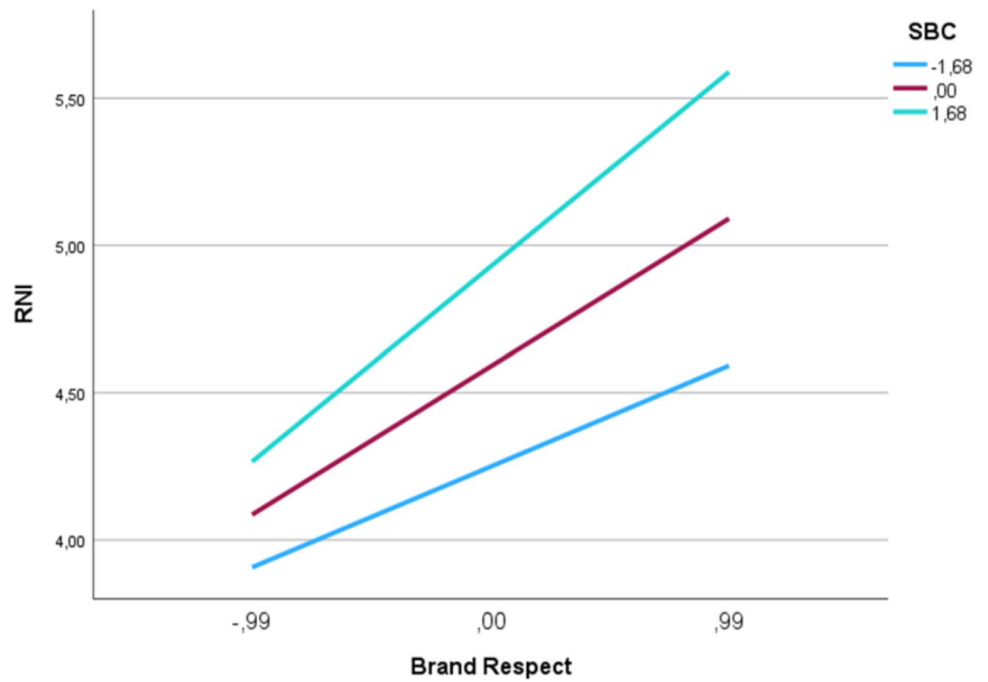
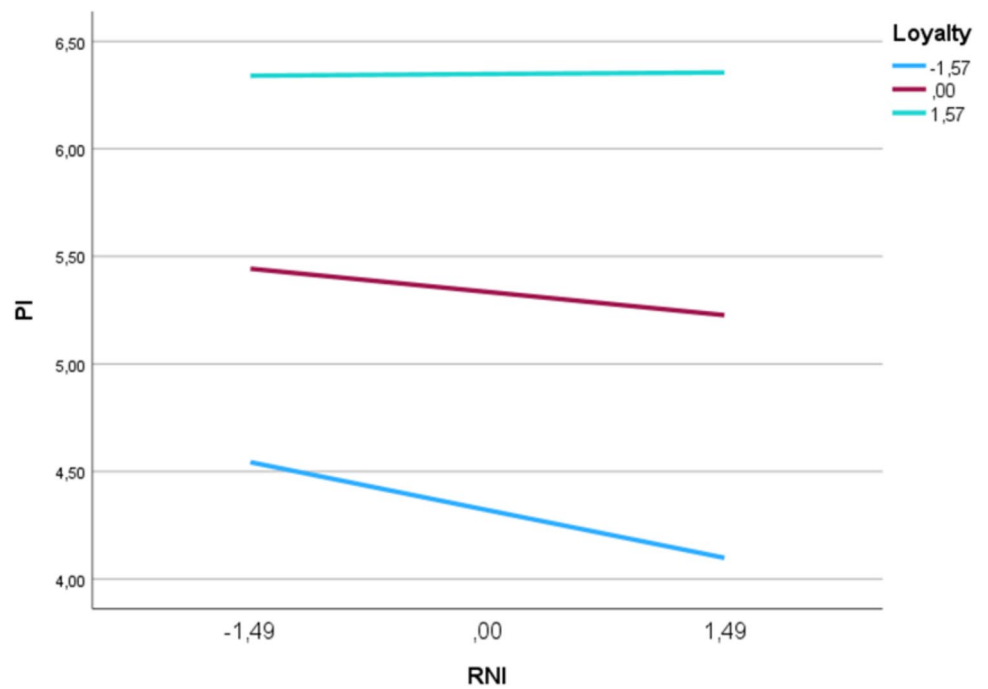


Fig. 3 Moderation slopes: brand loyalty on RNI to purchase intention (Study 1)



however, gradually, as loyalty values increase, the relationship strengthens slightly, becoming positive for values one SD above the mean. The results, thus, partially support H8 (Fig. 3).

For Study 2, both brand loyalty and WOM scepticism moderated the relationship between RNI and purchase intention (interaction terms: brand loyalty $Beta = -0.123$; $SE = 0.055$; $p = 0.025$; WOM scepticism $Beta = -0.208$; $SE = 0.073$; $p = 0.004$), suggesting that higher values of

loyalty and WOM susceptibility weakens the relationship (high values of scepticism in our study was reflective of high susceptibility to WOM, as the questions were positively framed with higher values indicating believing WOM). The brand loyalty slopes (Fig. 4) revealed that they are 0.186 (1 SD below mean), 0.141 (mean) and 0.095 (1 SD above mean). The results, thus, do not support H8.

The slopes for WOM scepticism (Fig. 5) were 0.548 (1 SD below mean), 0.421 (mean), and 0.294 (1 SD above



Fig. 4 Moderation slopes: brand loyalty on RNI to purchase intention (Study 2)

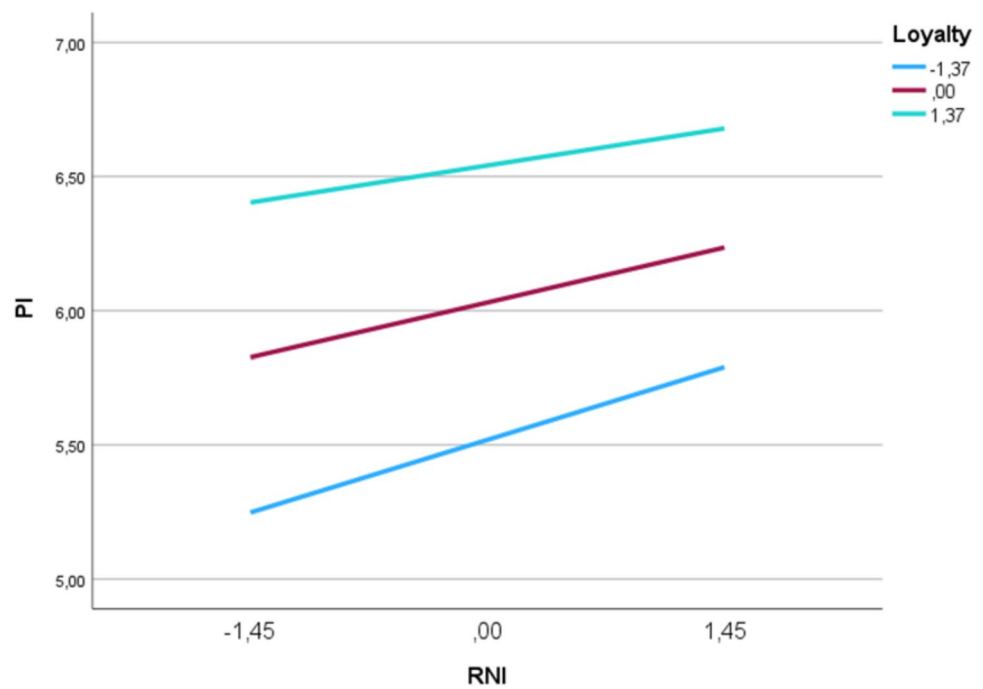
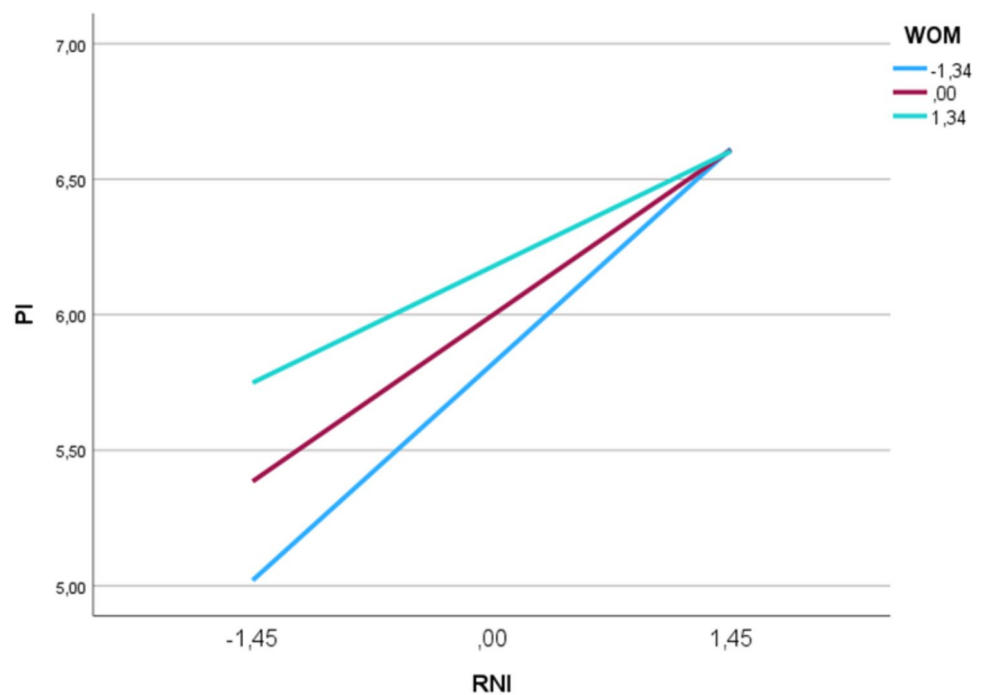


Fig. 5 Moderation slopes: WOM scepticism RNI to purchase intention (Study 2)



mean). This suggests that lower WOM scepticism (i.e. higher WOM susceptibility) weakens the relationship, supporting H9.

We followed the unconstrained product-indicator technique to control for spurious moderation, as Daryanto and Lukas (2022) advised. The latent quadratic terms (XX and ZZ) as covariates and one latent interaction (XZ) were included in a SEM model.

In Study 1, the following terms were statistically significant for the moderation effect of loyalty on the relationship between RNI and PI: quadratic term of loyalty, loyalty, and the moderation effect ($p = 0.052$), which is marginally significant (Daryanto 2019). The moderation effect for SBC was non-significant in the robust testing, which could indicate spurious moderation; however, the main effect (brand respect) was statistically significant. Considering



that there is no theoretical evidence that brand respect has a quadratic relationship with RNI and that the main effect of brand respect was significant in the main model, the moderating effect was still considered valid.

In Study 2, all the moderations were robust. For the moderation effect of loyalty on the relationship between RNI and PI, the following terms were statistically significant: loyalty, RNI, quadratic term of loyalty, quadratic term of RNI and the moderation effect of loyalty and RNI ($p=0.000$, $p<0,01$), which is highly statistically significant. The following terms were statistically significant regarding the moderation effect of WOM on the relationship between RNI and PI: WOM, RNI, quadratic term of WOM, and the moderation effect ($p=0.012$; $p<0.05$).

Six hypotheses were supported in Study 1 (H8 partially), whereas in Study 2, four were supported. Please refer to Table 2 for a summary of the hypotheses' results.

Discussion and theoretical implications

The study of resistance to negative information and its interaction with other consumer–brand relationship constructs is important for brands (Gumparthi et al. 2023) as it can serve as a buffer against unwanted consequences of negative information. Indeed, our results demonstrate that companies can build RNI by building brand respect with consumers and that RNI helps insulate companies from negative WOM and contributes positively to purchase intention.

The findings for both brands show that the brand respect construct helps to explain why consumers resist negative information about preferred brands. This is particularly true for the SHEIN brand, as the relationship was strong. For the local quality retailer, Woolworths, brand attitude also favourably influenced resistance to negative information, although this relationship was not as strong as the brand

respect relationship. These main effects reinforce the idea that building brand respect is essential in developing a customer base that resists negative information based on prior perceptions and experience with the brand. Indeed, a key finding of this study is that brand respect plays a more critical role than attitude towards the brand in building RNI. Resistance to negative information is also found to positively influence purchase intention for both brands, a key point made by this study.

The findings for RNI as a mediator were interesting. It was confirmed to partially mediate the relationship between brand respect and purchase intention for Woolworths, but not SHEIN. Conversely, it partially mediated the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention for SHEIN but not Woolworths. The latter finding is inconsistent with earlier studies that suggest a relationship between brand attitude and purchase intent, whether directly or indirectly (Wahid and Ahmed 2011; Yu et al. 2019).

Higher self-brand congruence strengthens the relationship between brand respect and RNI for the local retailer viewed as a quality brand. This result confirms self-brand congruence's ability to yield positive outcomes for the Woolworths brand. This was not the case for the global, value-oriented brand SHEIN. This interplay implies that the underlying attributes of quality and locality, rather than value and “globalness”, may inform consumers' perceived congruence with the brand, concurring with the principles of SIT.

For Woolworths, brand loyalty's strengthening effect on the relationship between RNI and purchase intention was confirmed for higher levels of loyalty. This implies that for the quality brand, loyalty can strengthen the relationship between RNI and purchase intention—highlighting the importance of brands using incentives such as loyalty programmes (e.g. retail shopper reward cards) and incorporating

Table 2 Summary of hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Study 1	Study 2
H1: Brand respect positively predicts resistance to negative information	Supported	Supported
H2: Consumers' brand attitude positively predicts resistance to negative information	Supported	Not supported
H3: Resistance to negative information positively predicts purchase intention	Supported	Supported
H4: Resistance to negative information mediates the relationship between brand respect and purchase intent	Supported	Not supported
H5: Resistance to negative information mediates the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intent	Not supported	Supported
H6: The relationship between brand respect and resistance to negative information is moderated by self-brand congruence, which strengthens the relationship	Supported	Not supported
H7: The relationship between brand attitude and resistance to negative information is moderated by self-brand congruence, which strengthens the relationship	Not supported	Not supported
H8: The relationship between resistance to negative information and purchase intention is moderated by brand loyalty, which strengthens the relationship	Partially supported	Not supported
H9: The relationship between resistance to negative information and purchase intention is moderated by WOM scepticism in that low scepticism (high WOM susceptibility) weakens the relationship	Not tested	Supported



“is me” appeals in their communication to sustain these relationships.

The overall results mainly support the proposed conceptual framework, providing clear evidence that brand respect is an essential customer–brand relationship dimension that drives brand advocacy behaviours, such as RNI and subsequent purchase intention. This premise held for a local, quality-oriented retailer and a global value retailer brand. The findings support the principles of appraisal and social identity theories in the context of retail and consumer–brand relationships. Both brands' favourable appraisal (brand respect) led to RNI (positive cognitive bias) and favourable purchase intentions. Finer nuances in the results support that self-brand congruence with a local brand perceived as high-quality supports tenets of SIT. At the same time, the buffering effect of WOM scepticism was confirmed, allowing consumers to maintain their social identity and affiliation with the brand.

In summary, this paper makes multiple theoretical contributions. It tests the relatively new brand respect measure in a different context (both geographical—South Africa and industry—retail) while considering both a local and global brand. It confirms tenets of appraisal and social identity theories, as the findings verify that a brand is valued (respected) and gains positive brand attitudes when it is appraised to be a good fit with the consumer's needs and aligns with their self-identity. Consumers' shared sense of belonging and emotional connection with the brand results in resisting negative communication about the brand, resulting in high purchase intentions. Thus, the consumer–brand relational model tested in this study is confirmed.

This research also contributes to a better understanding of the growing yet underexplored marketing phenomena of resistance to negative information and brand respect (Song et al. 2019) and expands our knowledge of consumer–brand relationships. It highlights these newer constructs' relationships with established constructs, such as brand attitude and purchase intentions. A primary contribution pertains to finding three potential ways (directly via brand respect and brand attitudes and indirectly via the moderating role of self-brand connection) to strengthen RNI, subsequently increasing purchase intention amongst shoppers. Empirically examining this phenomenon also adds valuable new insights into its drivers and outcomes, answering calls for research highlighting the process that underscores RNI. In addition, it highlights the critical role of brand respect in driving resistance to negative information across different brand contexts—quality and value brands. The study accentuates the importance of brand respect, given its applicability to consumer–brand relationship theory (Bairrada et al. 2018) and its key role in transforming a brand into a lovemark (Song et al. 2019).

Practical implications

From a managerial perspective, the results have several implications for practitioners. Given the need for brands to develop strategies to buffer consumers against negative information (Torres and Augusto 2019), stimulating brand respect should be a priority. Although both brand attitude and brand respect enhance consumers' RNI, given that brand respect makes a more substantial contribution to forming resistance to negative information, it should be the initial focus of brands and marketing managers. Doing so can allow for situations like the one in the previously mentioned example of Apple, where consumers dismiss negative WOM and instead side with the brand.

As social media is a valuable information source for many consumers, these platforms can facilitate customer–brand interactions and enhance self-brand congruence. Marketers are well positioned to facilitate interactions on the brand's social media pages, such as interactive activities like contests and quizzes, the ability to interact with other brand loyalists, and chat rooms to create a sense of belonging for customers. In addition, social media can be used to communicate information on the brand's performance, including testimonials (e.g. underscoring trust), to enhance brand respect.

Given the significant role of brand respect in this study, brand managers should prioritise improving brand respect by enhancing trust in the performance of the brand, its reputation, and its acceptance. In dealing with existing consumers, ensuring consistent brand performance and upholding the brand's reputation are key elements supporting brand respect and may be achieved by strengthening the focus on quality control and favourable brand communication. Brands must showcase their values in a way that aligns with their consumers' values to aid brand acceptance. Thus, another suggestion is to partner with influencers and community leaders to orchestrate campaigns with themes that emphasise a connection with the consumer using themes such as “If it's important to you, it's important to us”. Brands are also well advised to communicate stories and testimonials from their customers who embody the brand's traits and values by supporting causes that matter to them.

The findings also highlight the need for brands to develop RNI to enhance purchase intention. Resistance to negative information provides a dual benefit to brands: consumers are less affected by negative information, and consumers who have this resistance are more likely to purchase the brand. The findings suggest that brand respect and positive brand attitudes offer brand protection against negative information owing to greater levels of RNI. In particular, brand respect shields the brand from negative information while increasing the likelihood of purchasing via RNI.



Brand managers should take heed of these findings. Instead of only focussing on preventing negative information or trying to limit the damage of negative information, the results suggest a more proactive focus on enhancing brand respect to dampen the effects of negative WOM when it occurs. Rather than engaging in damage control, it may make sense to communicate values in advertisements and social media posts, as this can help contribute to brand respect. A proactive approach does not negate the need to respond to negative information in a crisis. Still, RNI could be a buffer for firms during actual or perceived crises when negative information (true or false) is making the rounds. Finally, the findings imply that practitioners anxious about negative information's effects on their brands' health should consider incorporating self-brand congruence into their monitoring regime and actively implement strategies to ensure consumers feel connected with their brand. Self-brand congruence strengthens the relationships between brand respect and RNI, suggesting that brands may be protected against negative information. Fortifying the positive aspects of customer–brand relationships, such as enhancing self-brand congruence, may diminish the impact of negative brand information on customers (Merlo et al. 2023). Practitioners should, therefore, use strategies that lead to elevated levels of self-brand congruence, such as marketing communications focussed on how the brand aligns with the consumers' needs and values (outcome desirability) or extend the self-view in keeping with SIT.

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite this study's contributions, there are some limitations. First, the study used a non-probability sample, limiting generalisability. However, despite the sample's contextual delimitations, the consumer–brand relational concepts and the relationships between them were grounded in theory and the literature, and it is important to test general marketing theory in various parts of the world. The research used the new brand respect scale of Jahanvi and Sharma (2021) in a particular context, and future research should further examine this measure for validation in broader industry and geographical contexts. Testing of its sub-dimensions is recommended.

Appendix A

See Tables 3 and 4



Table 3 Study 1 Factor loadings

Constructs	Items	Loading	
Brand respect: Acceptance	I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing from Woolworths as it is the same store that others purchase from	0.833	
	It is important that others like that I purchase from Woolworths	0.754	
	I feel confident when my Woolworths brand makes good impressions on others	0.764	
	I generally identify with others by purchasing from Woolworths as they purchase from Woolworths	0.801	
Brand respect: Reputation	Woolworths is reputable	0.800	
	Woolworths is well known	0.633	
	Woolworths is amongst leading retail brands in the market	0.727	
Brand respect: Brand performance trust	Woolworths is sincere with its shoppers	0.787	
	I totally trust Woolworths' quality	0.784	
	Purchasing Woolworths' goods is a guarantee	0.820	
	Woolworths products makes me feel safe	0.762	
	Woolworths is honest with its consumers	0.767	
	Woolworths offers good value	0.755	
	I use Woolworths as a sign of consistent quality for purchasing products	0.764	
	Woolworths fulfils the basic functions of a retailer	0.598	
	I find Woolworths brands durable	0.810	
	Woolworths' service is efficient (in terms of speed, responsiveness)	0.691	
	Brand attitude	Unappealing/Appealing	0.911
		Bad/Good	0.907
Unpleasant/Pleasant		0.892	
Unfavourable/Favourable		0.897	
Unlikeable/Likeable		0.892	
Purchase intention	I will definitely shop at Woolworths	0.947	
	I definitely intend on buying from Woolworths	0.942	
	In future I will purchase from Woolworths	0.910	
	Woolworths is a shop I will probably purchase from	0.868	
Resistance to negative information	Negative information about Woolworths does not change my general view of the brand	0.865	
	I do not easily change my view of Woolworths based on negative information about it	0.861	
	Negative information about Woolworths has no effect on me	0.790	
	Negative information about Woolworths does not change the way I think of the brand	0.898	



Table 4 Study 2 Factor loadings

Constructs	Items	Loading
Brand respect: Reputation	SHEIN is well known	0.726
	SHEIN is amongst leading online retail brands in the market	0.772
	SHEIN is easily recognisable	0.602
Brand respect: Performance-trust acceptance	SHEIN is sincere with its shoppers	0.808
	I totally trust SHEIN's quality	0.780
	Purchasing SHEIN' goods is a guarantee	0.851
	SHEIN products makes me feel safe	0.791
	SHEIN is honest with its consumers	0.833
	I use SHEIN as a sign of consistent quality for purchasing products	0.787
	I find SHEIN brands durable	0.753
	I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing from SHEIN as it is the same store that others purchase from	0.682
	It is important that others like that I purchase from SHEIN	0.584
	I generally identify with others by purchasing from SHEIN as they purchase from SHEIN	0.669
Brand attitude	Unappealing/Appealing	0.745
	Bad/Good	0.761
	Unpleasant/Pleasant	0.849
	Unfavourable/Favourable	0.799
	Unlikeable/Likeable	0.732
Purchase intention	I will definitely shop at SHEIN	0.870
	I definitely intend on buying from SHEIN	0.862
	In future I will purchase from SHEIN	0.782
	SHEIN is a shop I will probably purchase from	0.776
Resistance to negative information	Negative information about SHEIN does not change my general view of the brand	0.854
	I do not easily change my view of SHEIN based on negative information about it	0.775
	Negative information about SHEIN has no effect on me	0.806
	Negative information about SHEIN does not change the way I think of the brand	0.874

Acknowledgements “The authors wish to thank the anonymous participants for their involvement in this research, K Hugo and C Satiah for assisting with the data collection, and Dr Pohl statistical assistance”.

Funding Open access funding provided by University of Pretoria.

Declarations

Conflict of interest On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Abdelwahab, D., S. San-Martín, and N. Jiménez. 2022. Does regional bias matter? Examining the role of regional identification, animosity, and negative emotions as drivers of brand switching: an application in the food and beverage industry. *Journal of Brand Management* 29 (1): 111–126.
- Ahluwalia, R., R. E. Burnkrant, and H. R. Unnava. 2000. Consumer response to negative publicity: The moderating role of commitment. *Journal of Marketing Research* 37 (2): 203–214.
- Ahluwalia, R. 2002. How prevalent is the negativity effect in consumer environments? *Journal of Consumer Research* 29 (2): 270–279.
- Albert, N., and M. Thomson. 2023. Epistemological jangle and jingle fallacies in the consumer–brand relationship subfield: A call to action. *Journal of Consumer Research* 51 (2): 383–407.
- Amawate, V., and M. Deb. 2021. Antecedents and consequences of consumer skepticism toward cause-related marketing: Gender as moderator and attitude as mediator. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 27 (1): 31–52.
- Bagozzi, R. P., and R. E. Burnkrant. 1979. Attitude measurement and behavior change: A reconsideration of attitude organization and its relationship to behavior. *Advances Consumer Research* 6 (1): 295.



- Bairrada, C. M., F. Coelho, and A. Coelho. 2018. Antecedents and outcomes of brand love: Utilitarian and symbolic brand qualities. *European Journal of Marketing* 52 (3/4): 656–682.
- Balaji, M., K. W. Khong, and A. Y. L. Chong. 2016. Determinants of negative word-of-mouth communication using social networking sites. *Information and Management* 53 (4): 528–540.
- Batra, R., A. Ahuvia, and R. P. Bagozzi. 2012. Brand love. *Journal of Marketing* 76 (2): 1–16.
- Bentler, P. M., and C.-P. Chou. 1987. Practical Issues in Structural Modeling. *Sociological Methods and Research* 16 (1): 78–117.
- Bhattacharya, C. B., and S. Sen. 2003. Consumer–company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing* 67 (2): 76–88.
- Bradley, S.D., Maxian, W., Laubacher, T.C. and Baker, M. 2007. In search of Lovemarks: The semantic structure of brands In: Proceedings of the American Academy of Advertising. Eugene, Oregon
- Buck, A. 2024. Shein revenue, growth, usage and download statistics for <https://www.mobiloud.com/blog/shein-statistics>, Accessed, 30 September 2024
- Campbell, K. 2023. How to survive a reputation crisis. <https://blog.reputationx.com/companies-that-survived-crisis>, Accessed 9 February 2024.
- Carroll, B. A., and A. C. Ahuvia. 2006. Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. *Marketing Letters* 17 (2): 79–89.
- Chaudhuri, A., and M. B. Holbrook. 2002. Product-class effects on brand commitment and brand outcomes: The role of brand trust and brand affect. *Journal of Brand Management* 10:33–58.
- Cheng, S. Y., T. B. White, and L. N. Chaplin. 2012. The effects of self-brand connections on responses to brand failure: A new look at the consumer–brand relationship. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 22 (2): 280–288.
- City Press 2022. Are women better shoppers than men? Well maybe study shows. <https://www.news24.com/citypress/news/are-women-better-shoppers-than-men-well-maybe-study-shows-20220826>, Accessed 16 October 2022.
- Cleeren, K., H. J. Van Heerde, and M. G. Dekimpe. 2013. Rising from the ashes: How brands and categories can overcome product-harm crises. *Journal of Marketing* 77 (2): 58–77.
- Colliander, J., and B. Marder. 2018. 'Snap happy' brands: Increasing publicity effectiveness through a snapshot aesthetic when marketing a brand on Instagram. *Computers in Human Behavior* 78:34–43.
- Daryanto, A. 2019. Avoiding spurious moderation effects: An information-theoretic approach to moderation analysis. *Journal of Business Research* 103:110–118.
- Daryanto, A., and B. A. Lukas. 2022. Controlling for spurious moderation in marketing: A review of statistical techniques. *Journal of Business Research* 144:180–192.
- Diogenes, A., M. Da Silva, and J. S. Costa. 2017. The effect of skepticism on attitude and purchase intention of green products. *Revista Brasileira De Marketing* 16 (4): 520–534.
- Dwivedi, A., R. E. McDonald, and L. W. Johnson. 2014. The impact of a celebrity endorser's credibility on consumer self-brand connection and brand evaluation. *Journal of Brand Management* 21 (7–8): 559–578.
- Eisingerich, A. B., G. Rubera, M. Seifert, and G. Bhardwaj. 2011. Doing good and doing better despite negative information?: The role of corporate social responsibility in consumer resistance to negative information. *Journal of Service Research* 14 (1): 60–75.
- Elving, W. J. 2013. Scepticism and Corporate Social Responsibility Communications: The influence of fit and reputation. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 19 (4): 277–292.
- Evans, N. J., and H. Bang. 2019. Extending expectancy violations theory to multiplayer online games: The structure and effects of expectations on attitude toward the advertising, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intent. *Journal of Promotion Management* 25 (4): 589–608.
- Fornell, C., and D. F. Larcker. 1981. Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research* 18 (1): 39–50.
- Fortezza, F., F. Checchinato, and D. Slanzi. 2022. The relationship between brand constructs and motivational patterns in crowdfunding decisions: Evidence from university crowdfunding. *Management Research Review* 46 (4): 557–578.
- Giovanis, A., and P. Athanasopoulou. 2018. Understanding lovemark brands: Dimensions and effect on brand loyalty in high-technology products. *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC* 22 (3): 272–294.
- Gültekin, B., and S. I. Kilic. 2022. Repurchasing an environmental related crisis experienced automobile brand: An examination in the context of environmental consciousness, brand trust, brand affect, and resistance to negative information. *Sosyoekonomi* 30 (51): 241–260.
- Gumparathi, V.P., D. Jog, and P. Sharma. 2023. I am addicted to you my love: exploring the crucial significance of brand addiction. *Vision: The Journal of Business Perspective*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09722629231168758>.
- Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J. and Anderson, R.E. (2014) *Multivariate data analysis*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Han, H., J. Yu, and H. Lee. 2020. Lovemarks and effect of in-flight product performance on airline passengers' purchase intention. *Social Behavior and Personality: An International Journal* 48 (4): 1–10.
- Haugtvedt, C. P., P. M. Herr, and F. R. Kardes. 2018. I know what you're doing and why you're doing it: the use of persuasion knowledge model in consumer research. In *Handbook of Consumer Psychology*, ed. Margaret C. Campbell and Amna Kirmani, 553–575. London: Routledge.
- Henseler, J., C. M. Ringle, and M. Sarstedt. 2015. A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 43 (1): 115–135.
- Hess, J. S. 1998. *A multidimensional conceptualization of consumer-brand relationships: The differential impact of relationship dimensions on evaluative relationship outcomes*. Boulder: University of Colorado.
- Hong, W., and J. Y. Thong. 2013. Internet privacy concerns: An integrated conceptualization and four empirical studies. *MIS Quarterly* 37 (1): 275–298.
- Jahanvi, J., and M. Sharma. 2021. Brand respect: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Business Research* 132:115–123.
- Jain, K., I. Jajodia, P. Sharma, and G. Singh. 2021. Brand bravery: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 30 (8): 1212–1228.
- Jeong, H. J., and J. Kim. 2020. Human-like versus me-like brands in corporate social responsibility: The effectiveness of brand anthropomorphism on social perceptions and buying pleasure of brands. *Journal of Brand Management* 28 (1): 32–47.
- Kang, J., T. Slaten, and W. J. Choi. 2021. Felt betrayed or resisted? The impact of pre-crisis corporate social responsibility reputation on post-crisis consumer reactions and retaliatory behavioral intentions. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* 28 (1): 511–524.
- Kang, J., A. A. Faria, J. Lee, and W. J. Choi. 2023. Will consumers give us another chance to bounce back? Effects of precrisis commitments to social and product responsibility on brand resilience. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 32 (6): 927–941.
- Kapferer, J. N. 2012. *The new strategic brand management: advanced insights and strategic thinking*. London: Kogan Page.



- Keller, K. L. 1993. Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing* 57 (1): 1–22.
- Kemp, E., C. Y. Childers, and K. H. Williams. 2012. Place branding: Creating self-brand connections and brand advocacy. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 21 (7): 508–515.
- Khamitov, M., X. S. Wang, and M. Thomson. 2019. How well do consumer-brand relationships drive customer brand loyalty? Generalizations from a meta-analysis of brand relationship elasticities. *Journal of Consumer Research* 46 (3): 435–445.
- Kimmel, A. J. and P. J. Kitchen. 2014. WOM and social media: Presaging future directions for research and practice. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 20 (1-2): 5–20.
- Koll, O., and S. von Wallpach. 2014. Intended brand associations: Do they really drive consumer response? *Journal of Business Research* 67 (7): 1501–1507.
- Kuenzel, S., and S. V. Halliday. 2010. The chain of effects from reputation and brand personality congruence to brand loyalty: The role of brand identification. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing* 18:167–176.
- Kurtoğlu, R., T. Özböyük, and P. Hacıhasanoğlu. 2021. Revisiting the effects of inward negative emotions on outward negative emotions, brand loyalty, and negative WOM. *Journal of Brand Management* 29 (1): 72–84.
- Lappeman, J., M. Patel, and R. Appalraju. 2018. Firestorm response: Managing brand reputation during an nWOM firestorm by responding to online complaints individually or as a cluster. *Communication* 44 (2): 67–87.
- Lazarus, R. S., and S. Folkman. 1984. *Stress, appraisal and coping*. Newyork: Springer publishing company.
- Li, X., and L. Wu. 2018. Herding and Social Media Word-of-Mouth: Evidence from Groupon. *Management Information Systems Quarterly* 42 (4): 1331–1351.
- Lin, J., Z. Zhou, and C. Leckie. 2021. Green brand communication, brand prominence and self-brand connection. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 30 (8): 1148–1161.
- Malär, L., H. Krohmer, W. D. Hoyer, and B. Nyffenegger. 2011. Emotional brand attachment and brand personality: The relative importance of the actual and the ideal self. *Journal of Marketing* 75 (4): 35–52.
- Marc, F., and H. Daniel. 2014. Consumer brand relationships: A research landscape. *Journal of Brand Management* 21:366–371.
- Marsh, H. W., and D. Hocevar. 1985. Application of confirmatory factor analysis to the study of self-concept: First- and higher-order factor models and their invariance across groups. *Psychological Bulletin* 97 (3): 562–582.
- Mattila, A. S. 2004. The impact of service failures on customer loyalty: The moderating role of affective commitment. *International Journal of Service Industry Management* 15 (2): 134–149.
- McGowan, M., E. Shiu, and L. M. Hassan. 2017. The influence of social identity on value perceptions and intention. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 16 (3): 242–253.
- Merlo, O., A. B. Eisingerich, and W. D. Hoyer. 2023. Immunizing customers against negative brand-related information. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 52 (1): 140–163.
- Montoya-Restrepo, I. A., J. A. Sánchez-Torres, S. P. Rojas-Berrio, and A. Montoya-Restrepo. 2020. Lovemark effect: Analysis of the differences between students and graduates in a love brand study at a public university. *Innovar* 30 (75): 43–56.
- Oberlo. 2024. Shein d: Age and gender. <https://www.oberlo.com/statistics/shein-demographics>, Accessed, 30 September 2024
- Obermiller, C., and E. R. Spangenberg. 1998. Development of a scale to measure consumer skepticism toward advertising. *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 7 (2): 159–186.
- Oliver, R. L. 1997. *Satisfaction: A Behavioral Perspective on the Consumer*. New York: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.
- Pace, S., B. Balboni, and G. Gistri. 2017. The effects of social media on brand attitude and WOM during a brand crisis: Evidences from the Barilla case. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 23 (2): 135–148.
- Pontinha, V. M., and do Coelho Vale, R. 2020. Brand love measurement scale development: an inter-cultural analysis. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 29 (4): 471–489.
- Qu, J. G., J. Yi, W. J. Zhang, and C. Y. Yang. 2023. Silence is golden? Mitigating different types of online firestorms of Fortune 100 corporations on Twitter. *Public Relations Review* 49 (5): 10239.
- Ramesh, K., R. Saha, S. Goswami, Sekar, and R. Dahiya. 2019. Consumer's response to CSR activities: Mediating role of brand image and brand attitude. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management* 26 (2): 377–387.
- Reid, B. 2018. Getting to know the ES SEMs 8–10 (Part 1). <https://themediainline.co.za/2018/02/getting-to-know-the-es-sems-8-10-part-1>, Accessed 29 October 2022.
- Roberts, K. 2006a. *The lovemarks effect: Winning in the consumer revolution*. Brooklyn, NY: PowerHouse Books.
- Roberts, K. 2006. *Lovemarks: The future beyond brands*. Brooklyn: PowerHouse.
- Schumacker, R. E., and R. G. Lomax. 2010. *A beginner's guide to structural equation modeling*. New York: Routledge.
- Sherman, D. K., and G. L. Cohen. 2006. The Psychology of Self-defense: Self-Affirmation Theory. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38:183–242.
- Shuv-Ami, A., D. Vrontis, and A. Thrassou. 2018. Brand lovemarks scale of sport fans. *Journal of Promotion Management* 24 (2): 215–232.
- Skarmees, D., and C. N. Leonidou. 2013. When consumers doubt, watch out! The role of CSR skepticism. *Journal of Business Research* 66 (10): 1831–1838.
- So, K. K. F., C. King, S. Hudson, and F. Meng. 2017. The missing link in building customer brand identification: The role of brand attractiveness. *Tourism Management* 59:640–651.
- So, K. K. F., L. Wu, L. Xiong, and C. King. 2018. Brand management in the era of social media: Social visibility of consumption and customer brand identification. *Journal of Travel Research* 57 (6): 727–742.
- Song, S., and H.-Y. Kim. 2022. Is social media marketing worth it for luxury brands? The dual impact of brand page satisfaction and brand love on word-of-mouth and attitudinal loyalty intentions. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 31 (7): 1033–1046.
- Song, H., S. Y. Bae, and H. Han. 2019. Emotional comprehension of a name-brand coffee shop: Focus on lovemarks theory. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 31 (3): 1046–1065.
- Spears, N., and S. N. Singh. 2004. Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions. *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising* 26 (2): 53–66.
- Srivastava, V., A. D. Kalro, G. Raizada, and D. Sharma. 2023. Beyond stars: role of discrete emotions on online consumer review helpfulness. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 32 (2): 137–157.
- Statista 2022. Distribution of Facebook users in South Africa as of March 2022, by age group. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1028389/facebook-user-share-in-south-africa-by-age/>, Accessed 27 October 2022.
- Tajfel, H.E. (1978) Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations: Academic Press.
- Tong, Z., J. Feng, and F. Liu. 2022. Understanding damage to and reparation of brand trust: A closer look at image congruity in the context of negative publicity. *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 32 (1): 157–170.



- Torres, P., and M. Augusto. 2019. Building resilience to negative information and increasing purchase intentions in a digital environment. *Journal of Business Research* 11:528–553.
- Veloutsou, C. 2019. Conceptualising and operationalising respect in consumer brand relationships an abstract. In *Finding new ways to engage and satisfy global customer proceedings of the academy of marketing science*, ed. P. Rossi and N. Krey, 229–230. Newyork: Springer.
- Wahid, N. A., and M. Ahmed. 2011. The effect of attitude toward advertisement on yemeni female consumers' attitude toward brand and purchase intention. *Global Business and Management Research* 3 (1): 21–29.
- Wang, X., C. Yu, and Y. Wei. 2012. Social media peer communication and impacts on purchase intentions: A consumer socialization framework. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 26 (4): 198–208.
- Watson, L., and M. T. Spence. 2007. Causes and consequences of emotions on consumer behaviour. *European Journal of Marketing* 41 (5/6): 487–511.
- Wilson, A. E., M. D. Giebelhausen, and M. K. Brady. 2017. Negative word of mouth can be a positive for consumers connected to the brand. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45:534–547.
- Woolworths Holdings Ltd 2022. Integrated Annual Report 2022.
- Woolworths Holdings Ltd 2023. Our purpose, vision and values. <https://www.woolworthsholdings.co.za/overview/our-purpose-vision-and-values/>, Accessed 29 October 2022.
- Xie, C., R. P. Bagozzi, and K. Grønhaug. 2019. The impact of corporate social responsibility on consumer brand advocacy: The role of moral emotions, attitudes, and individual differences. *Journal of Business Research* 95:514–530.
- Yin Wong, H. and B. Merrilees. 2008. The performance benefits of being brand-orientated. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 17 (6): 372–383.
- Yoo, B. and N. Donthu. 2001. Developing and validating a multidimensional consumer based brand equity scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 52 (1): 1–14.
- Yu, M., F. Liu, and J. A. Lee. 2019. Consumers' responses to negative publicity: The influence of culture on information search and negative word-of-mouth. *Journal of Brand Management* 26 (2): 141–156.
- Yuan, Y.-H., S.-H. Tsao, J.-T. Chyou, and S.-B. Tsai. 2020. An empirical study on effects of electronic word-of-mouth and Internet risk avoidance on purchase intention: From the perspective of big data. *Soft Computing* 24:5713–5728.
- Zacchilli, T. L., C. Hendrick, and S. S. Hendrick. 2009. The romantic partner conflict scale: A new scale to measure relationship conflict. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 26 (8): 1073–1096.
- Zhao, X., J. G. Lynch Jr., and Q. Chen. 2010. Reconsidering Baron and Kenny: Myths and truths about mediation analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research* 37 (2): 197–206.
- Zhu, F., S. Lu, C. Groening, and J. Kang. 2023. The relationship between individual customer satisfaction and loyalty: The moderating role of firm-level signals. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior* 36 (2): 15–40.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Melanie Wiese has a Ph.D. in Marketing and is a Professor in the field of Marketing Management (University of Pretoria, South Africa). Her research interests focus on consumer behaviour. Her research has appeared in a range of international journals including, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Management*, and *Journal of Business Research*, amongst others.

Tania Maree (PhD) is an Associate Professor in the Department of Marketing Management (University of Pretoria, South Africa). Her research focus includes marketing communication and consumer behaviour. Her research has been published in journals such as *Journal of Business Research*, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, *European Business Review*, and the *Journal of Promotion Management*.

Charles R. Taylor is the John A. Murphy Professor of Marketing at the Villanova School of Business, Villanova University. He currently serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Advertising*. His research interests include advertising and its effects, international marketing and advertising and legal and societal issues in marketing.

