

HOW CONSUMER BRAND SABOTAGE AFFECTS OTHER CONSUMERS – THE DIFFERENTIAL ROLE OF SELF-BRAND CONNECTION

Digitization has changed the ways consumers interact with brands and has led to increasingly empowered consumer markets, where some consumers engage in activities that deliberately try to harm a brand by impairing the brand-related associations of other consumers (called *consumer brand sabotage* or CBS). This phenomenon bears a high damage potential and the question arises how far-reaching the impact of a CBS activity can be in terms of whether and how it affects other observing individuals. An understanding of this phenomenon is critical to enable managers to intervene and take adequate measures to decrease the possible damage of CBS. We conducted three empirical studies in which we show that CBS significantly harms a brand by decreasing the brand evaluation of consumers who observe a CBS activity and this effect is stronger for *value-based CBS* as compared to *performance-based CBS*. Furthermore, we find a concurrent *buffering* and *amplifying* effect of consumers' self-brand connection depending on the type of CBS: consumers with a strong (vs. weak) SBC experience a stronger social identity threat after value-based CBS which decreases their brand evaluations. However, after observing performance-based CBS, they feel empathy toward the attacked brand which increases their brand evaluations. Thus, with our study, we shed some light on the negative consequences of the under-researched phenomenon of CBS. Furthermore, we contribute to the ongoing discussion on the "love is blind" vs. "love becomes hate" effects in the context of brand transgressions.