

**BRAND RESURRECTION: THE ROLE OF CONSUMERS' PSYCHOLOGICAL
REACTANCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVISM**

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Description: This research explicates the role of consumers' psychological reactance in social media activism in the context of brand deletion and resurrection.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research Question

Firms delete brands to augment the value of their brand portfolios and boost profits (Kumar, 2003; Shah et al., 2017; Varadarajan et al., 2006a). However, if the brand deletion strategy is not executed well and if the deleted brand has a loyal fan base, it has the potential to generate consumer retaliation (Shah, 2017a; Shah 2021) because consumers experience psychological reactance when their beloved brand is taken away from them limiting their freedom of choice to buy and consume their favorite brand (J. W. Brehm, 1966; Shah, 2020). With the advent and advancement of internet technologies, consumers can now mobilize an activism movement with relative ease and fewer resources (time, effort, money) using various internet platforms (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Kähr et al., 2016; Labrecque et al., 2013). If the brand deletion strategy is implemented considering what drives such consumer activism, consumer backlash can be mitigated, and the brand deletion process could become smooth-sailing and successful for the firm. Therefore, in this research, we aim to investigate the drivers of social media activism in the context of brand resurrection through survey data collection from loyal Surge fans who compelled Coca-Cola to resurrect Surge through their online activism efforts.

Method and Data

Based on the purpose of this research, it is ideal to collect data from consumers who have actually participated in a social media activism movement to bring a dead brand back to life. Thus, after designing a survey questionnaire in Qualtrics, using established measurement scales (Bagozzi et al., 2017; Davari et al., 2017; Dillard & Shen, 2007; Massi Lindsey, 2005; Pascal et

al., 2012; Yankah et al., 2017), the organizers of the Surge Movement were contacted in order to access their member base of Surge loyal fans who participated and succeeded in their social media activism efforts to compel Coca-Cola to resurrect Surge. The Surge Movement is a Facebook community of over 350,000 Surge fans, whose mission is the return of Surge Soda and making it a sustainable brand. The questionnaire link will be posted on the Surge Movement Facebook page in Spring 2022.

Once survey data is collected, measurement properties of the constructs will be investigated using confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS. Thereafter, structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation method will be used to test the hypotheses. A post-hoc mediation analysis will also be conducted.

Summary of Findings

Based on past literature, a conceptual framework of consumer motivation to engage in social media activism is postulated. Upon analysis of the survey data, we expect to find that when a brand is deleted, consumers who believe that brand to be superior than any other brand, who possess emotions of “love” for that brand (Batra et al., 2012), and who feel nostalgic about it (Holak & Havlena, 1998; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003a), experience psychological reactance (Clee & Wicklund, 1980a). They experience a threat to their freedom to buy and consume their favorite brand (Davari et al., 2017; Keller, 2001). These consumers who experience psychological reactance are then motivated to engage in social media activism to voice out and oppose the company’s decision to delete their favorite brand. Thus, psychological reactance is expected to mediate the relationships between brand love, brand nostalgia, brand superiority, and social media activism.

Key Contributions

Theoretical Contributions: This research fills a gap in the literature by examining the influence of brand love, brand nostalgia, brand superiority, and psychological reactance on social media activism. In addition, the sample of this survey comprises members of an actual social media activism movement that successfully compelled a company to bring back a dead brand. Past research focused mainly on brand resurrection from companies' perspective, however, this study focuses on consumers' psychological reactance and its role in social media activism.

Practical Implications: The findings will guide brand managers' brand resurrection decisions by aiding the evaluation of the relaunch strategy, and its feasibility and success. Furthermore, if consumers perceive the deleted brand to be superior relative to other brands in that category, brand managers should not tweak it while relaunching it. Finally, understanding consumer-centric variables will help brand managers in making an informed decision about resurrecting dead brands and bringing them back to life (for a limited time or for the long term) such that it not only brings back the lost consumer base and fan following but also a higher probability of a positive revenue and profit stream that the brand will generate.

Note: References are available upon request.