

**When Love Becomes Hate: The Dark Side of  
Consumer-Brand Relationships in Crisis Communication**  
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**Rationale**

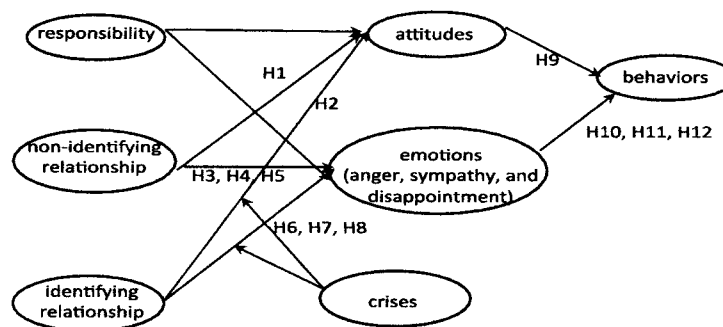
A lot of research in crisis communication has shown that if an organization has positive relationships with its publics, the positive relationships mitigate negative public reactions. This is what we call *buffering effects*.

This study was set to examine whether positive relationships can work against an organization when a crisis happens, or the so-called love-becomes-hate effects.

**Theoretical Framework**

I conceptualized OPRs into non-identifying relationships and identifying relationships and examined those relationships of consumers.

- Consumers equate the company or the manufacturer with the brand (Aggarwal, 2004).  
OPRs = consumer-brand relationships
- In the marketing literature, non-identifying relationships include trust, satisfaction, and commitment (Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2011).
- Identifying relationship, or consumer-brand identification, exists when a brand represents *who I am* for a consumer (Johnson et al. 2011). The consumer's "self-concept has many of the same characteristics he or she believes define" the brand (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994, p. 239).
- A crisis may or may not undermine the defining attributes of a brand (Greyser, 2009).



## Method

- Pilot study: to identify two brands that have clear and unified defining attributes that their consumers share with them.
  - Whole Foods: embracing of a healthy lifestyle
  - Apple: innovativeness
- Nearly 500 Apple consumers and 400 Whole Foods consumers in the main study
- All the participants were recruited on Amazon Mechanical Turk platform.

## Results/Findings

- The non-identifying relationships offered buffering effects by increasing positive attitudes and tempering anger and disappointment.
- The identifying relationships offered the love-becomes-hate effects by increasing anger and disappointment.
- Crises (i.e.: threat to defining attributes shared between consumers and a brand) did not moderate the effects of identifying relationships on attitudes and emotions.
- The identifying relationships had stronger effects on emotions than on attitudes.
- Sympathy increased NWOM intentions.

## Practical Implications

- Companies should build strong non-identifying relationships with their consumers by focusing on how their products can fulfill the functional needs of consumers.
- Companies should be cautious when they send out messages with meaning of “if you are this kind of person, you should use our products.”
- Companies should not attempt to make their consumers sympathetic toward them when the companies/brands are fully responsible for the crisis.

## References

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