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Competitive Short Paper

Nowadays, consumers extensively use the internet and social networking websites to freely express their opinions and speak up about any unethical/unsustainable corporate actions that can spark a public outrage, in particular a consumer outrage (Ward & Ostrom, 2006; Makarem, 2016). The dramatic increase in the usage of social media empowers customers to shape their relationships and reformulates power dynamics from a top-down approach to one that is more symbiotic in nature (Endersby, 2020). This can be attributed to the outbreak of COVID-19 as people cope with the anxiety and depression that were prevalent during that time by spending most of their time online (Király et al., 2020). Thus, the pandemic altered the consumers' mindsets and empower them to massively use the social platforms in achieving social justice and fighting against the discrimination (Bakhtiari, 2020). Hence, based on the literature, it is plausible to expect that the rate of brand cancellation is going to increase in the upcoming period because the pandemic had changed the people's perspectives and increase the customers expectations from their brands.

The increase in the rate of brand cancellation can also be associated to the consumers desires to restore their sense of control in the wake of the crisis (Di Crosta et al., 2021). Hence, brand cancellation can be defined as an action of completely boycotting brands as consumers withdraw their social media support (i.e., unfollowing/unliking the brands on social platforms) in response to unethical allegations or biased viewpoints made by the brands such as #BlackLivesMatter and #boycottoatly (Bakhtiari, 2020; Wilkinson, 2021). Therefore, spreading the boycotting campaigns and the “cancel Culture” movements could be explained as a protective measure or defensive mechanism to overcome the negative feelings (e.g., stress and depression) that were predominant during and after the lockdown period. Hence, to overcome the post-lockdown anxiety and social distress, people need to restore their sense of control over what happen in their lives by loudly expressing their opinions through inducing people to participate in brand cancellations and refuse any offensive view (Brown et al., 2021;

Kan et al., 2021). This could help them gain a sense of freedom and stability especially after going through the feelings of confinement and social isolation for almost two years. For example; some consumers inducing others to boycott Heineken after the brand showed its support to vaccinated people by saying “Cheers to the vaccinated. Time to join them” (Buckley, 2021). Thus, brand should be cautious because spreading negative word of mouth online, can be the start of the business failure (Bakhtiari, 2020). Hence, listening to “badvocates”, people who always criticise the brand, can negatively influence the relationship between consumer and brands (Bacile et al., 2014). In addition, this study predicts that the proliferation of brand cancellation will lead to a movement of a country cancellation as consumers will refuse to purchase from, consume from or even travel to a particular country due to its political or cultural situations to their own countries during the time of crisis (Suhud & Allan, 2021).

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