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The effect of activity identity fusion on negative consumer behavior

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Abstract

Negative consumer behavior is an important research topic as it explores consumer behaviors that threaten a brand's image and financial stability. However, prior research offers conflicting findings on whether a strong consumer-brand relationship hurts or protects a brand after a market disruption or a brand transgression. To provide clarity on this issue, this work argues that disrupting the consumer-activity relationship motivates consumers to reaffirm and protect their identity, thereby leading to negative consumer behavior. The data reveal that, after a brand-initiated market disruption, consumers with high activity identity fusion are more likely to spread negative word-of-mouth, boycott the brand, and avoid repurchasing the brand in the future. Moreover, the data suggest that high brand identity fusion protects the brand during market disruptions; therefore, prior conflicting results may be due to the fact that the consumer-activity relationship was not accounted for. Theoretically, this work establishes that consumers' relationship with their consumption activities has significant impacts on consumer behavior. Brand managers and marketers are urged to develop strategies that focus on strengthening the consumer-brand relationship and not the consumer-activity relationship.

KEYWORDS
activity identity fusion, boycott, brand identity fusion, consumer-activity relationship, consumer-brand relationship, negative consumer behavior

1 | INTRODUCTION

Negative consumer behavior is an important research topic as it explores consumer behaviors that threaten a brand's image and financial stability. Negative consumer behavior can be passive, such as boycotting a brand, or active, such as spreading negative word-of-mouth (NWOM; Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009; Klein, Smith, & John, 2004). Within the negative consumer behavior domain, understanding consumer retaliatory behaviors has produced conflicting results. Some researchers have found that a strong brand relationship motivates consumers to retaliate against a brand for market disruptions and transgressions (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Thomson, Whelan, & Johnson, 2012). However, other researchers have found that a strong brand relationship protects the brand (Ahluwalia, Unnava, & Burnkrant, 2001; Lin &

Sung, 2014). This study helps to resolve current contradictions by investigating whether the consumer-activity relationship impacts consumer retaliatory behavior after a brand initiated market disruption.

Existing research has clearly established that the consumer-brand relationship plays an important role in consumer behavior (Fournier, 1998). Although advancements have been made, consumer-brand relationship research tends to assume that consumers do not form relationships with their consumption activities. Ignoring the consumer-activity relationship is potentially problematic as consumption-focused research consistently demonstrates that a consumer's consumption activities play crucial roles in identity construction (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Epp & Price, 2008; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007), for example, found that consumers actively participate in

community-supported agriculture to project a specific dimension of their identity, a market-countering dimension. Moreover, Carter and Gilovich (2012) demonstrated that consumers believe their prior consumption experiences are better representations of their self than their possessions. Therefore, the relationship consumers have with what they do may play a more significant role in consumer behavior than previously imagined.

Prior research suggests that consumers form relationships with what they do, but studies focused on the impact the consumer-activity relationship has on specific consumer behaviors are absent. Accordingly, a simple, preliminary study was conducted to gauge whether consumers would prefer to continue engaging in an activity or using a brand if they had to give one up. A class assignment asked students to identify one of their favorite activities to engage in and to identify a brand within this activity. They then wrote a short essay on how each of the four Ps (price, place, product, and promotion) impacted their decision to use the brand within their favorite activity. Approximately 2 weeks after the essay was submitted, the students were asked to voluntarily complete an ungraded online survey ($n = 63$; 55.6% were female; age $M = 21$). When asked "If you had to either give up using your focal brand or stop engaging in the activity you wrote about, which one would you choose?," 58 (92%) of the respondents indicated they would give up using the brand to keeping engaging in the activity. When asked "Please share any thoughts you have when making this decision," the responses included:

- Basketball is life, and Nike is not. (*Basketball, Nike*)
- Despite my loyalty to the brand, I would rather commit to the effort of researching and finding another brand with similar products. (*Playing Music, Apple*)
- I am more willing to give up the brand even though it would be tough for me because I like the quality of the brand and its convenience. (*Putting on makeup, Bare Mineral*)
- There is no way I would give up this activity, which is a much more integral part of my identity than a brand of marker. Other markers can also get the job done. (*Drawing, Sharpie Markers*)

While respondents focused on their favorite activity, this preliminary study supports the notion that consumers use their consumption activities to construct their identity.

This study operationalizes the consumer-activity relationship by drawing on the concept of identity fusion (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b; Gómez, Morales, Hart, Vázquez, & Swann, 2011a; Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009). Identity fusion conceptualizes relationships as a reciprocal feeling of connectedness with a group where both the individual's personal and social identities are merged with the group's (Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a; Lin & Sung, 2014). For example, a consumer may like drawing because it allows them to express themselves, and because their social interactions involve drawing or art. In this way, a consumer not only has a personal connection but also a social connection with the activity. Other relationship conceptualizations typically prioritize one identity domain, such as identification, where the primary connection is with the social image of the target,

while identity fusion embraces a multidomain connection with the target (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b; Swann et al., 2009). As minimal research has empirically investigated the consumer-activity relationship, if significant effects are found using a multidomain relationship conceptualization, this would indicate that single domain consumer-activity relationship measures should also discover additional impacts across the consumer behavior field.

Early work on identity fusion focused on predicting extreme behaviors. For example, Swann et al. (2009) found that individuals whose identity has fused with a country are more inclined to get revenge against or hurt someone for insulting the country. Gómez, Morales et al. (2011a) moved the research focus from protecting the group to staying in the group. Their work showed that highly fused individuals were more likely to demonstrate progroup behaviors to reaffirm their membership even after being ostracized by in-group members compared with those who only identified with the group, as identified individuals were more likely to leave the group after being ostracized. Lin and Sung (2014) introduced the fusion concept to retaliatory behavior research by demonstrating that brand fused individuals are more inclined to protect a brand after a market disruption. In fact, they show that brand identification has a positive relationship with spreading NWOM whereas brand fusion has a negative relationship. Thus, because fused individuals have integrated the target (i.e., activity, brand, country) into both their personal and social identities, they are more likely to protect the target and may exert extra effort to maintain the relationship. The current study investigates brand and activity identity fusion (AIF) together, providing clarity on prior contradictory research by showing that strong consumer-brand relationships protect brands, whereas strong consumer-activity relationships hurt brands during market disruptions.

To achieve this objective, an experimental survey was implemented, and the resulting regressions revealed that consumers with high AIF were more likely to spread NWOM, boycott a brand, and avoid repurchasing the brand in the future following a brand initiated market disruption. In terms of brand identity fusion (BIF), it was found that a strong consumer-brand relationship discouraged consumers from spreading NWOM and boycotting the brand as they intend to repurchase the brand and continue the brand relationship. Theoretically, this work demonstrates that the consumer-activity relationship has significant impacts on consumer behavior.

2 | CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The analysis by Fournier (1998) on the types of consumer-brand relationships spawned a burgeoning stream of research. While prior work recognized that consumers attempt to transfer brand meanings (McCracken, 1986) in an effort to construct their identities (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995), Fournier's work anthropomorphized the consumer-brand relationship, bringing issues of relationship dynamics to the fore (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Grégoire et al., 2009; Sung & Choi, 2010). Conversely, the work by McCracken (1986) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995) prioritizes consumption activities, rituals, and use,

more generally. Their work serves as a foundation for consumer culture theory (CCT) research, which focuses on how consumption activities create meanings and markets (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This study merges the advancements made in CCT, regarding consumer's relationships with their activities, into the findings from consumer-brand relationship literature by arguing that consumers rely on their activities to construct their identity and this relationship impacts consumer behavior.

2.1 | Consumer-activity relationship and identity

A consumer's identity is the reflective view, impression, and opinion they have of themselves as an object while also considering how they are viewed by others (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Lin & Sung, 2014). To help construct their identity, consumers engage in consumption activities to represent or project particular dimensions of their identity (Celsi et al., 1993; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). For instance, Celsi et al. (1993) discuss how engaging in skydiving can be instrumental in developing a high-risk identity. Moreover, as others engage in this activity, some skydivers begin to engage in other risky activities, like base jumping, to continue representing high-risk identity dimensions. Murray (2002) details the case of Miquel who reluctantly engages in golf to construct a legitimate corporate identity. Accordingly, consumers can strategically engage in consumption activities to draw out specific dimensions of their identity.

Consumers construct their identity by associating with meaning-laden targets that balance personal views and social opinions. Meaning-laden targets include consumption activities (Celsi et al., 1993), possessions (Ferraro, Escalas, & Bettman, 2011; Mittal, 2006), and brands (Escalas, 2004), as well as groups like countries (Swann et al., 2009) or subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Identity fusion occurs when the consumer feels a relational connection with both the meaning-laden target and others who associate with the target (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b; Swann et al., 2009). Identity fusion extends the concept of identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) as fused individuals develop a sense of relation with others, while identified individuals only feel a connection with the target or group and not with those who associate with it (Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a). Moreover, individuals who feel a sense of fusion with a meaning-laden target believe the target has high self-relevance in both their personal and social selves (Lin & Sung, 2014; Swann et al., 2009).

Consumer-activity fusion occurs when the consumer feels a deep connection to the consumption activity and others who also engage in the activity. Consumers are inclined to connect with an activity for a few reasons. Prior research has found that consumers rely on organizations (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994) and brands (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005) to provide symbolic meaning to their life, especially when the consumer believes other members of their social groups value those meanings (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). For example, consumers interested in enhancing their risk-taking identity dimension might engage in base jumping (Celsi et al., 1993) whereas females interested in demonstrating toughness may engage in roller derby (Thompson & Üstüner, 2015). In addition, activities

that are engaged in public or with others should also encourage consumers to develop a relationship with the activity. Conspicuous consumption has been found to elevate anxiety levels because the consumer assumes that others are forming opinions about them based on what they are doing (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011; Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2009). The work by Sandikci and Ger (2010) further supports this notion, as they found that, for their sample, one of the motivating factors for engaging in veiling was the visibility of the act. This allowed them to more effectively communicate their moral or religious values. Other factors that may influence a connection or relationship with a consumption activity is feeling a sense of competency, success, or overall improved self-worth generated through activity engagement. Occasionally, consumers develop an internal or intrinsic desire to improve or master an activity (Celsi et al., 1993). Accordingly, engaging in an activity allows consumers to improve their social position, communicate their values, and enhance their self-worth, thereby facilitating the development of a personal connection with the consumption activity.

Connecting with others happens with formal membership, as in communities of practice (Wenger, 2000) and without formal membership, as is the case with brand users (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and in some subcultures (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and consumption tribes (Cova, 1997; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007). Fused consumers not only perceive similarity between them and the activity, but they believe they support the activity more than others (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b). Identified consumers belong to a group that is composed of prototypical or generalized group members who, although they are perceived to be similar, are interchangeable (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). However, fused consumers view group members as unique individuals worthy of protection (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b) and are more willing to engage in extreme behaviors to protect individual members as well as the group's image (Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a; Swann et al., 2009).

While the existing research demonstrates that consumers rely on what they do or the activities they engage in to construct their identity, little empirical evidence exists showing how the consumer-activity relationship impacts specific consumer behaviors. Conceptualizing this relationship through identify fusion would provide stronger support for the importance of investigating the consumer-activity relationship than using a more conservative, or single domain relationship conceptualization, such as identification. This is because a fused identity needs to meet two criteria: (a) the consumer uses the consumption activity to represent identity relevant values; (b) they have a connection with other members who they view as unique. In terms of the consumer-activity relationship, it is expected that high activity fused consumers will be more inclined to protect community members by retaliating against threats and to support the activity during challenging times.

2.2 | Consumer-brand relationship and identity

Fournier (1998) argues that consumers form strong relationships with brands that bring meaning into their life. In particular, just like

consumption activities, brands provide consumers with cultural resources and symbolic meanings to incorporate into their identity, allowing them to project desired identity dimensions and express their personal values (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). The consumer-brand relationship is not only dyadic but triadic, mediating the relationship consumers have with others (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). In other words, brands can also become self-relevant when their use links consumers together (Cova, 1997). Thus, the social dimension of the consumer-brand relationship allows consumers to express social aspects of their identity (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Kates, 2002) as well as form social relationships. Accordingly, the consumer-brand relationship has both personal and social dimensions.

BIF describes a relationship where the consumer's identity has merged with the brand's identity and the consumer feels a connection with other users (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b; Lin & Sung, 2014). BIF differs from other relationship measures, such as consumer-brand identification (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010) and self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003) because identity fusion asserts that there is no difference between the personal and social identity in relation to the fused target and its members. Other conceptualizations emphasize solidarity with the target or group but not a loyalty to group members (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b; Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a), as is the case for identity fusion. For instance, prior research has found that fused individuals were more likely to fight and die for the group than nonfused individuals (Swann et al., 2009), even when controlling for group identification (Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a). Therefore, as is the case with the consumer-activity relationship, BIF is an appropriate conceptualization of the consumer-brand relationship as it accounts for both the personal and social identity dimensions of the relationship.

High identity fusion indicates that the consumer has integrated the brand across multiple identity dimensions and is therefore highly self-relevant. Highly fused consumers select and use the brand because it represents personal aspects of their identity and because their affiliation with the brand and its users reinforces the social aspects of their identity (Swann et al., 2009). Lam et al. (2010) show that consumers may resist switching to a new brand because they are relying on their current brand to represent certain values. Furthermore, because brands represent symbolic meanings, branded products used in public (Escalas & Bettman, 2003) or with others (Beatty, Givan, Franke, & Reynolds, 2015) tend to be integrated into a consumers' identity more often than brands consumed in solitude. Consumers then become committed to a brand resulting in a strong (Sung & Choi, 2010) and enduring (Ahluwalia et al., 2001) relationship. A strong consumer-brand relationship has been shown to result in higher levels of distress when they loss the brand (M. Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005) and to motivate consumers to refute negative information about the brand (Ahluwalia et al., 2001).

In addition, because fused consumers have a deep connection with the brand, they are less likely to engage in negative consumer behavior after a market disruption (Lin & Sung, 2014). Brand fusion leads to brand protection because the brand is viewed as a part of the consumer's self. Prior research focused on market disruptions

and brand transgressions has found that consumers with a strong brand relationship exhibit higher intentions to engage in negative behavior (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2011). However, these studies anthropomorphize the consumer-brand relationship, thereby introducing concepts such as relationship norms, reciprocity, and betrayal (Aaker et al., 2004; Aggarwal, 2004; Thomson et al., 2012). Identity fusion reduces the focus on relationship norms or dynamics and instead focuses on the self-relevance of the identity target.

2.3 | Hypotheses

Drawing on identity fusion (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b; Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a; Swann et al., 2009), this work introduces and tests the AIF concept. BIF (Lin & Sung, 2014) is included in the resulting models to help resolve prior conflicting findings regarding what motivates consumers to engage in negative behaviors after a market disruption. Market disruptions are market-wide events that impact both consumer-activity and -brand relationships (Lam et al., 2010). Compared with service failures, market disruptions not only threaten brand-based identity dimensions (Trump, 2014) but also use-based identity dimensions. Moreover, market disruptions impact all brand users, as a group, while a product or service failure only impacts the individual consumer. Accordingly, identity fusion is an appropriate conceptualization of the consumer-activity relationship for this study, as a market disruption impacts both the social and personal dimensions of the consumer's identity as well as both their activity and brand relationships.

The core thesis is that AIF leads to higher intentions to continue engaging in the activity and that market disruptions lead high activity fused consumers to engage in negative consumer behavior. This study specifically addresses brand initiated market disruptions and not other sources of a market disruption such as product unavailability due to a store decision or importing bans. While not hypothesized, it is expected that BIF leads consumers to reaffirm their brand relationship by protecting the brand during market disruptions as previously found by Lin and Sung (2014). The following formally introduces the hypotheses to be tested in this work.

2.3.1 | Activity relationship continuance

The existing research indicates that consumers who are in a relationship with an activity are more likely to continue engaging in the activity despite potential barriers (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Celsi et al. (1993) investigated skydiving and high-risk identities, finding that those who are committed to the activity are more likely to continue skydiving after a fellow diver dies in an accident than those who are novices or outside the skydiving group. The research by Muñiz and Schau (2005, 2007) is less extreme, describing the efforts consumers exert to continue using a discontinued product, such as sharing tips on repairing their Newtons through online platforms as well as documenting their efforts to retaliate against the brand for discontinuing the product line.

Quitting consumption activities often results in the loss of activity-specific social capital (McAlexander, Dufault, Martin, & Schouten, 2014). This is because what is valued in one group may not be valued in another due to the group's sociohistorical development. Moreover, stopping a current consumption activity and engaging in a new activity involves learning that may lead to identity threats or decreases in self-confidence. Thus, to maintain social capital and avoid identity or reputational threats, consumers are inclined to continue an activity in which they are committed to and invested in. Moreover, Gómez, Morales et al. (2011a) found that even after being ostracized or excluded from a group event, fused individuals express less desire to leave the group than nonfused individuals even when the source of exclusion is fellow in-group members.

AIF is conceptualized as the merging of the self with the activity. Thus, notions of relationship reciprocity are less important compared with identity and partner protection (Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a; Swann et al., 2009). Moreover, market disruption is not initiated by the activity, but instead it is initiated by a brand. Accordingly, consumer retaliatory efforts are less likely to be directed toward hurting the activity through stopping engagement but instead be directed toward preserving the activity through the challenging time and, potentially, toward hurting the brand. Brand initiated consumption barriers do not lead to a sense of betrayal by the activity; thus consumers with high activity fusion should exert efforts to continue engaging in the activity as a way to maintain the consumer-activity relationship and protect the activity. The following hypothesis is, thus, proposed:

H1: *When facing a brand initiated market disruption, high activity fusion consumers will express higher intentions to continue engaging in the activity than low activity fusion consumers, while controlling for BIF.*

2.3.2 | Negative consumer behavior

Negative consumer behavior occurs when a consumer engages in actions that attempt to hurt or punish the brand (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Generally, consumers can engage in passive retaliatory actions such as boycotting or otherwise avoiding the brand or active retaliatory actions such as spreading NWOM (Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011; Lin & Sung, 2014). Prior research is contradictory on whether consumers with a strong or highly self-relevant relationship with a brand are more likely to engage in negative behaviors. Perhaps, investigating the consumer-activity relationship can bring clarity to this issue.

It is expected that consumers high in activity fusion will be motivated to engage in negative consumer behavior against the perceived source of the disruption. Disruptions to a consumption activity process can impact a consumer's ability to perform the activity at the desired level and in a socially legitimated manner. Legitimate activity performance is particularly important for sub-culture or group members who have to meet normative standards to accrual social capital and develop a sense of belonging (Kates, 2002; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The work of Leigh, Peters, and Shelton (2006) on the MG restoration community

demonstrates that consumers go to great lengths to inform others that they are doing the activity legitimately and correctly, such as photographically documenting the entire restoration process. Thus, the inability to continue to use a branded product can impact the consumer's identity by hindering their ability to engage in the activity in the desired or socially prescribed manner.

Activity fused consumers are also motivated to engage in negative behaviors because they feel a connection to other activity participants. Fused consumers are more likely to engage in extreme behaviors to protect their group members, such as volunteering to die for them (Swann et al., 2009). Fused consumers also feel they will do more for the activity than other members (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b). Boycotting a brand is a passive action from the brand's perspective but from the consumer's perspective, forgoing a brand is an active action that requires considerable effort in adjusting their consumption activity (Klein et al., 2004). The procedural costs of switching brands are not trivial as the consumer needs to learn about and evaluate alternatives (Burnham, Frels, & Mahajan, 2003; Lam et al., 2010). However, fused consumers are willing to put forth that extra effort to not only protect their identity but also the group and its members. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered:

H2a: *When facing a brand initiated market disruption, high activity fusion consumers will express higher intentions to boycott the brand than low activity fusion consumers, while controlling for BIF.*

Similar to boycotting the brand, activity fused consumers will be less likely to repurchase the brand than low activity fused consumers. This hypothesis builds on Lin and Sung (2014) who found that BIF has a positive relationship with repurchase intentions, while controlling for brand identification. Their findings suggests that a strong brand relationship protects the brand during market failures and is not a liability as other work suggests (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2012). To offer clarity to the contradictions in the literature, this work argues that disrupting a consumer-brand relationship also disrupts the consumer-activity relationship which then motivates the consumer to protect the activity and to punish the relationship threat, in this case the brand. Thus, the following hypothesis is offered:

H2b: *When facing a brand initiated market disruption, high activity fusion consumers will have lower brand repurchase intentions (BRI) than low activity fusion consumers, while controlling for BIF.*

Brand relationship continuance (BRC) intentions builds on H2 by investigating whether the consumer wants to continue the relationship with the brand. High activity fused consumers may want to repurchase the brand to continue engaging in the consumption activity. Furthermore, the brand may play an integral part in the normative or socially legitimated consumption activity process, thereby elevating repurchase intentions. However, because fused consumers are protective of the group and are willing to go to extremes to protect the target and its members, it is expected that activity fused consumers will be more willing to end the brand

relationship than low identity fused consumers. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered:

H3: *When facing a brand initiated market disruption, high activity fusion consumers will have lower intentions to continue their relationship with the brand than low activity fusion consumers, while controlling for BIF.*

Fused consumers are also more likely to spread NWOM regarding the brand than non-fused consumers. Spreading negative views about the brand offers consumers a way to retaliate against the brand (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), to demonstrate their desire to protect the group, and to rationalize or justify any resulting performance decreases. Moreover, complaining to others about a brand involves less risks and costs to the consumer than boycotting the brand and is, therefore, a relatively easy and costless identity protecting negative consumer behavior. Accordingly, it is proposed that:

H4: *When facing a brand initiated market disruption, high activity fusion consumers will be more likely to spread NWOM about the brand than low activity fusion consumers, while controlling for BIF.*

2.3.3 | Brand immunity

Overall, it is expected that AIF accounts for the conflicting findings on whether a strong brand relationship protects a brand. In essence, for activity fused consumers, the brand is not immune to negative information as is the case for brand fused consumers (Lin & Sung, 2014) or consumers with a strong brand commitment, more generally (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000). Specifically, consumers with a strong brand relationship discount negative information and generally try to see their relationship partner in a positive light. In terms of brand initiated market disruptions, brand fused consumers direct their attention to protecting the brand and to reaffirming their brand relationship, thereby making the brand immune to negative information (Lin & Sung, 2014).

For activity fused consumers, they should direct their attention to protecting the activity and reaffirming their relationship with the activity. This is because the consumer relies upon the activity to construct and project their identity. Committed consumers readily offer counterarguments to partner devaluing arguments and interpret events more positively than noncommitted consumers (Ahluwalia et al., 2001). They do this to prevent cognitive dissonance and to maintain a positive view of their relationship partner. In this case, the source of the relationship threat is not the relationship partner (activity); rather the threat is from an outside source they are not committed to. Accordingly, activity fused consumers should be motivated to protect the activity and not to protect the brand, as the brand's actions threaten their identity (Trump, 2014). Furthermore, because the relationship threat can be attributed to a specific source, the consumer should be open to changing their brand opinions and views, thereby making the brand susceptible to negative information. The following hypothesis is, then, proposed:

H5: *When facing a brand initiated market disruption, high activity fusion consumers will express lower brand immunity (BI) than low activity fusion consumers, while controlling for BIF.*

3 | METHOD

To determine if AIF leads to higher activity relationship continuance (ARC) intentions and predicts negative consumer behavior (i.e., NWOM, boycotting, lower repurchase intentions) as well as decreasing BI and BRC intentions after a market disruption, an experimental study was implemented. To contribute to the debate around: Why loyal consumers become bad consumers, BIF is included in the study. Furthermore, procedural switching costs (PSC), gender, and engagement frequency were controlled for to enhance validity.

3.1 | Study design and stimuli

Following Lin and Sung (2014), an experimental survey was developed that measured BIF using real brands. In addition, the study measured AIF using real activities that the participant indicated they engage in. However, Lin and Sung's study tested both personal- and societal-related market disruptions but found no significant relationship between transgression type and consumer behavior. Accordingly, this study used only the personal transgression type as the experiment stimuli.

The market disruption was manipulated through the presentation of a fictitious vignette presented in a *Consumer Reports* format. The vignette was modelled after Lin and Sung (2014) and is presented in Appendix A. However, there was one important modification. Participants were asked to "print the name of an *activity* you commonly *engage* in on your primary personal computer" and then they completed the AIF scale. Then, the respondents were asked to "print the *brand name* of your primary personal computer." The respondent completed the brand measures next. The vignette simulated a personal-focused market disruption by informing consumers that their personal computer brand had issued a recall notice due to a poor performing screen.

3.2 | Sample and procedure

Participants were composed of students in a Master's level marketing course at a central European international business school and completed the survey as part of an optional ungraded class activity ($n = 196$; 59.2% were female; age $M = 21$). The participants were different than those used in the preliminary study. Participants reported engaging in approximately 30 different activities using their computers. A total of 30 respondents wrote either surfing, searching, or using the internet but did not mention a specific site; 4 more respondents indicated they use their computer to engage in social media but did not list a specific site, whereas 8 respondents wrote Facebook, one wrote Skype, and one wrote MSM messenger. Another 27 respondents

indicated they watch or binge on videos, TV series, movies, or shows without mentioning a specific site, while 8 respondents specifically mentioned Netflix and 2 mentioned YouTube. A total of 19 respondents wrote they play games but did not mention a specific game with 5 respondents listing a specific game. Another 12 respondents mentioned studying, taking notes, or completing courses; 10 reported work; and 8 mentioned writing or typing essays but did not mention a specific brand. Another 8 indicated they use their computer to use Microsoft Office and 8 additional respondents specifically mentioned using Word. It is expected that for most participants' work, Microsoft Office, and writing are part of completing course work or doing other student activities. In terms of brands, a total of 18 different computer brands were reported along with one self-made computer: roughly 41% were Apple, 16% ASUS, 10% HP, 6% Dell and Toshiba, and 5% Lenovo.

3.3 | Measures

All measures are included in Table 1 along with their Cronbach's alpha and component loadings for each model. Building on Lin and Sung (2014) and Gómez, Brooks et al., (2011b), a seven-item scale was developed to measure AIF (e.g., I make this activity strong). BIF was measured using Lin and Sung's (2014) seven-item scale (e.g., I feel immersed with this brand). The first dependent variable, ARC was measured using three items (e.g., I intend to continue engaging in this activity) and was adapted from BRC scale Lin and Sung (2014) and Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann (2005) membership continuance scale (Model 1). In terms of negative consumer behavior, intentions to boycott were measured using two items (e.g., I will never buy this product again) based on Grégoire et al. (2009) patronage reduction scale (Model 2). BRI was measured using three items (e.g., I am likely to purchase this brand; Lin & Sung, 2014; Model 3). BRC, while similar to boycotting and repurchase intentions, focuses on relationship maintenance not merely repurchasing intentions and was measured using three items (e.g., it would be difficult for me to stop using this brand) from Lin and Sung (2014) (Model 4). Consistent with prior research (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009), NWOM was measured using three items (e.g., I will spread NWOM about this brand; Model 5). Then, the final dependent variable, BI focuses on susceptibility to negative information and was measured using the same four items from Lin and Sung (2014) (e.g., my relationship with this brand is not affected by negative comments about this brand; Model 6). All items were measured using a seven-point scale 1 (totally disagree) and 7 (totally agree), unless noted.

Control variables included PSC because it measures the risks and learning associated with using a new product, including additional outlays of time and effort (Burnham et al., 2003; Lam et al., 2010). Controlling for PSC helps ensure any observed effects address AIF levels rather than being attributed to the perceived costs and risks associated with finding a new product so they can continue engaging in the activity. This is because high switching costs increase brand dependence and reduce the likelihood the consumer will end the relationship (Sung & Choi, 2010). Furthermore, the preliminary study indicated that finding brand replacements requires effort. The five item scale was adapted from Burnham et al. (2003) and Lam et al.

(2010). Gender was also dummy coded 0 (female) and 1 (male) as prior research indicates that males may be more prone to engage in retaliatory behaviors (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). The third control variable was engagement frequency. This is because high investment leads to higher brand (Sung & Choi, 2010) and activity (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) commitment. The respondent's frequency of engaging in the activity served as a proxy for investment with the brand and activity (e.g., how frequently do you engage in the activity?; 1 [not very often], 7 [very often]).

A PCA was conducted for each of the six models to be tested. After two items were removed, one for activity and BIF (e.g., I make this activity [brand] strong) due to high cross-loadings, the four factor varimax rotated models all demonstrated internal consistency with high Cronbach's alphas and acceptable percentages of variance explained. Thus, a single measure was created for each variable by averaging the scores across each indicator. The resulting score was mean centered for all ordinal control and independent variables when running the hierarchical regressions.

Across all the models, the highest significant Pearson correlation for AIF, the main independent variable, was with ARC (0.34; $p \leq 0.000$). The highest Pearson correlation for BIF was with BRC (0.59; $p \leq 0.000$). Descriptives and correlations for each model are presented in Appendix B. Considering the presence of significant correlations, interpreting results could be problematic (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010), the variance inflation factors (VIF) were calculated. A general threshold of 10 is often applied, with more conservative thresholds of 5 or even 2.5 being advocated; all of which are higher than the maximum calculated figure. In addition, VIF can be divided by one to arrive at a tolerance coefficient (Moore, McCabe, & Craig, 2012). Multicollinearity does not appear to be problematic as this coefficient does not approach 0 (see Appendix C). Overall, the results of the PCA and VIF analysis suggest that collinearity is not an issue.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Manipulation check

Because the study used a fictitious manipulation vignette, the believability of the scenario was measured ([not]believable, [not]credible, [not]convincing, [un]likely) on a seven-point scale (Lin & Sung, 2014). The overall believability is comparable to prior research (M = 4.18; S.D. = 1.20). To further ensure the manipulation did not adversely impact the results the scale was dummy coded (high, low) using a mean cut-off. None of the resulting t tests for each dependent variable were significantly different based on the respondents' believability perceptions. As the scenario is sufficiently believable, the hypotheses were tested.

4.2 | Hypotheses testing

A series of hierarchical regressions were conducted to test each hypothesis. For each model gender, engagement frequency, and PSC were controlled for by being entered first. Then BIF was entered,

TABLE 1 Survey scales and component loadings

Variables	Model					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Activity identity fusion ($\alpha = 0.83$)						
I am one with this activity	0.627	0.601	0.643	0.570	0.636	0.622
I feel immersed with this activity	0.759	0.745	0.771	0.716	0.769	0.759
I have a deep emotional bond with this activity	0.824	0.791	0.805	0.766	0.812	0.813
This activity is me	0.820	0.821	0.814	0.836	0.808	0.824
I will do more for this activity than any other person who does this activity would do	0.690	0.732	0.696	0.771	0.699	0.707
I am strong because of this activity	0.598	0.681	0.641	0.732	0.640	0.642
Brand identity fusion ($\alpha = 0.91$)						
I am one with this brand	0.838	0.843	0.825	0.839	0.844	0.822
I feel immersed with this brand	0.853	0.859	0.834	0.879	0.850	0.835
I have a deep emotional bond with this brand	0.887	0.894	0.855	0.866	.882	0.879
This brand is me	0.850	0.841	0.817	0.790	0.850	0.845
I will do more for this brand than any other brand member would do	0.760	0.739	0.738	0.663	0.758	0.764
I am strong because of this brand	0.702	0.680	0.699	0.623	0.694	0.708
Activity relationship continuance ($\alpha = 0.74$)						
It would be very difficult for me to stop doing this activity	0.792					
I am willing to pay more to continue doing this activity rather than switching to another activity	0.784					
I intend to continue engaging in this activity	0.759					
Boycott intentions ($\alpha = 0.81$)						
I will never buy this brand again		0.897				
I will boycott this brand		0.900				
Brand repurchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.91$)						
I am likely to purchase this brand			0.848			
I will purchase this brand the next time I need a computer			0.887			
I will actively search to buy this brand			0.813			
Brand relationship continuance ($\alpha = 0.84$)						
It would be very difficult for me to stop using this brand				0.718		
I am willing to pay more to continue using this brand rather than switching to another brand				0.648		
I intend to continue using this brand				0.713		
Negative word-of-mouth ($\alpha = 0.70$)						
I will spread negative word-of-mouth about this brand					0.887	
I will bad-mouth this brand to my friends					0.883	
When my friends are looking for a new computer, I will tell them not to buy this brand					0.637	
Brand immunity ($\alpha = 0.66$)						
My relationship with this brand is not affected by negative comments about this brand						0.576
Negative comments about this brand do not change my general view of the brand						0.626
I will change my relationship with this brand based on negative comments about the brand (r)						0.764
Negative comments about this brand change the way I think about this brand (r)						0.783
Procedural switching costs ($\alpha = 0.84$)						
If I switch to another computer brand, I might have to learn new routines and ways to engage in the activity	0.656	0.684	0.661	0.678	0.707	0.671
If I switched to another computer brand, it might be a real hassle	0.695	0.718	0.701	0.702	0.738	0.688
If I switched to another computer brand, I might have to spend a lot of time finding a new computer	0.717	0.732	0.734	0.724	0.718	0.726
I cannot afford the time to get the information to fully evaluate other computer brands	0.575	0.537	0.593	0.567	0.497	0.556
There are a lot of formalities involved in switching to a new computer brand	0.755	0.742	0.735	0.723	0.728	0.736
Eigenvalue	1.43	1.32	1.44	1.24	1.50	1.65
Percent of variance explained	61.5	62.6	63.7	63.3	61.7	58.7

Note. r: reverse coded.

followed by the main variable of interest, AIF. In total, six different models were ran. Table 2 displays the keys statistics from the models.

Control variables activity engagement frequency ($\beta = 0.55$; $t(183) = 5.77$; $p \leq 0.000$) and PSC ($\beta = 0.38$; $t(183) = 3.91$; $p \leq 0.000$) showed a positive relationship with ARC, with those reporting they engage in the activity more often and/or perceiving

high PSC are more likely to continue the activity relationship. No significant direct relationship was found with BIF ($\beta = -0.02$; $t(183) = -0.16$; $p = 0.88$). H1 is supported as there is a significant positive relationship between AIF and ARC intentions ($\beta = 0.36$; $t(183) = 3.71$; $p \leq 0.000$). The full model was significant ($R^2 = 0.32$; $F(5, 183) = 16.61$; $p \leq 0.000$).

TABLE 2 Summary of multiple regression analyses

	Activity relationship continuance			Boycott intentions			Brand repurchase intentions			Brand relationship continuance			NWOM			Brand immunity		
	β	S.E.	t	β	S.E.	t	β	S.E.	t	β	S.E.	t	β	S.E.	t	β	S.E.	t
Gender	0.12	0.20	0.59	-0.68	0.25	-2.76*	0.57	0.24	2.42**	0.22	0.21	1.10	-0.46	0.29	-1.58	0.41	0.16	2.54*
Engagement	0.59	0.10	6.06***	0.05	0.12	0.44	0.26	0.11	2.21**	0.28	0.10	2.75*	0.03	0.14	0.24	0.07	0.08	0.81
PSC	0.44	0.09	4.69	0.29	0.12	2.47**	0.38	0.11	3.37***	0.52	0.10	5.26***	0.47	0.14	3.43***	0.02	0.08	0.29
R^2	0.27			0.07			0.11			0.18			0.08			0.04		
Model F	21.45***			4.72*			7.66***			13.00***			4.82*			2.33		
Gender	0.09	0.20	0.43	-0.54	0.25	-2.17**	0.28	0.22	1.29	-0.08	0.18	-0.43	-0.35	0.29	-1.18	0.32	0.16	1.94
Engagement	0.57	0.10	5.91***	0.09	0.12	0.79	0.17	0.11	1.63	0.19	0.09	2.19**	0.07	0.14	0.46	0.04	0.08	0.46
PSC	0.42	0.10	4.19***	0.40	0.12	3.30***	0.15	0.11	1.38	0.29	0.90	3.15*	0.56	0.15	3.84***	-0.06	0.08	-0.68
BIF	0.08	0.11	0.72	-0.36	0.13	-2.82*	0.75	0.11	6.54***	0.77	0.10	8.01***	-0.27	0.15	-1.78	0.25	0.09	2.93*
R^2	0.27			0.11			0.29			0.40			0.09			0.08		
Model F	16.19***			5.66***			17.80***			29.25***			4.45*			3.96*		
ΔR^2	0.00			0.04			0.17			0.22			0.02			0.04		
Incremental F	0.51			7.94*			42.80***			64.18***			3.18			8.55*		
Gender	0.05	0.20	0.26	-0.57	0.24	-2.33**	0.31	0.21	1.47	-0.06	0.18	-0.31	-0.38	0.29	-1.31	0.33	0.16	2.00*
Engagement	0.55	0.09	5.77***	0.07	0.12	0.58	0.20	0.10	1.93	0.21	0.09	2.44**	0.04	0.14	0.27	0.05	0.08	0.57
PSC	0.38	0.10	3.91***	0.37	0.12	3.05*	0.19	0.11	1.74	0.31	0.09	3.46***	0.53	0.15	3.62***	-0.04	0.08	-0.53
BIF	-0.02	0.11	-0.16	-0.44	0.13	-3.37***	0.83	0.12	7.24***	0.83	0.10	8.53***	-0.36	0.16	-2.27*	0.28	0.09	3.15*
AIF	0.36	0.10	3.71***	0.30	0.12	2.51**	-0.33	0.11	-3.11*	-0.23	0.09	-2.61**	0.32	0.15	2.19**	-0.11	0.08	-1.29
R^2	0.32			0.14			0.32			0.42			0.12			0.09		
Model F	16.61***			5.93***			16.87***			25.52***			4.59*			3.51*		
ΔR^2	0.05			0.03			0.04			0.02			0.02			0.01		
Incremental F	13.74***			6.32**			9.66*			6.80**			4.77**			1.66		

Note. BIF: brand identity fusion; NWOM: negative world-of-mouth; PSC: procedural switching costs; S.E.: standard error.

* $p \leq 0.01$.
** $p \leq 0.05$.
*** $p \leq 0.001$.

Boycotting intentions saw a significant relationship with gender ($ß = -0.57$; $t(183) = -2.33$; $p = 0.021$), indicating that females are more likely to boycott a brand following a market disruption. PSC was positively related to boycotting intentions ($ß = 0.37$; $t(183) = 3.05$; $p = 0.003$). BIF showed a significant negative relationship ($ß = -0.44$; $t(183) = -3.37$; $p = 0.001$), indicating that a stronger consumer-brand relationship protects the brand during challenging times. However, a stronger consumer-activity relationship appears to hurt the brand as AIF evidenced a significant positive relationship with boycotting intentions ($ß = 0.30$; $t(183) = 2.51$; $p = 0.013$). In addition, the overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.14$; $F(5, 183) = 5.93$; $p \leq 0.000$). Accordingly, H2a is supported.

BRI was then tested. None of the control variables were significant, but BIF showed a significant positive relationship with repurchase intentions ($ß = 0.83$; $t(183) = 7.24$; $p \leq 0.000$). This finding further supports the idea that a strong consumer-brand relationship protects the brand during challenging times. High AIF, on the other hand, appears to hurt the brand. This is because a significant negative relationship was found ($ß = -0.33$; $t(183) = -3.11$; $p = 0.002$). The overall model was also significant ($R^2 = 0.32$; $F(5, 183) = 16.87$; $p \leq 0.000$). Accordingly, H2b is supported.

Engagement frequency ($ß = 0.21$; $t(183) = 2.44$; $p = 0.016$) and PSC ($ß = 0.31$; $t(183) = 3.46$; $p = 0.001$) were both positively related to BRC intentions. Thus, the more frequently a consumer engages in an activity and/or the more difficult replacing the brand is perceived to be, the more likely the consumer will continue using the brand despite a market disruption. Similarly, high BIF increases the likelihood that the consumer will continue using the brand ($ß = 0.83$; $t(183) = 8.53$; $p \leq 0.000$). This finding deserves reservation as BIF and BRC are significantly correlated, as previously noted. However, as expected, high AIF increases the likelihood the consumer will *not* continue their brand relationship ($ß = -0.23$; $t(183) = -2.61$; $p = 0.010$). Therefore, H3 is accepted. The overall model was also significant ($R^2 = 0.42$; $F(5, 183) = 25.52$; $p \leq 0.000$).

Rounding out the tests on negative consumer behavior, spreading NWOM was inserted as the dependent variable. PSC showed a significant positive relationship ($ß = 0.53$; $t(183) = 3.62$; $p \leq 0.000$). BIF again appears to protect the brand as a significant negative relationship was found ($ß = -0.36$; $t(183) = -2.27$; $p = 0.025$). Conversely, AIF appears to hurt the brand as a significant positive relationship was found ($ß = 0.32$; $t(183) = 2.19$; $p = 0.030$). Thus, H4 is accepted. The overall model was also significant ($R^2 = 0.12$; $F(5, 183) = 4.59$; $p \leq 0.001$). Accordingly, all four hypotheses suggesting high AIF leads to negative consumer behavior are supported.

The last model tests if AIF impacts BI or the consumer's responsiveness to negative brand information. Gender was significant with males being more likely to resist negative brand information ($ß = 0.33$; $t(183) = 2.00$; $p = 0.047$). A strong brand relationship again appears to protect the brand as a significant positive relationship was found ($ß = 0.28$; $t(183) = 3.15$; $p = 0.002$). However, contrary to expectation, a strong activity relationship had no impact on the consumer's responsiveness to negative information ($ß = -0.11$; $t(183) = -1.29$; $p = 0.199$). While the overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.09$; $F(5, 183) = 3.51$; $p = 0.005$), H5 is not supported. The possible explanations for this unexpected outcome are offered in the following section.

5 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Significant attention has been directed toward understanding and managing consumers' relationships with brands (Aaker et al., 2004; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Lam, Ahearne, Mullins, Hayati, & Schillewaert, 2013; Sung & Choi, 2010). A strong consumer-brand relationship has been associated with viewing alternatives as less attractive (Sung & Choi, 2010), purchasing new brand extensions (Völckner & Sattler, 2006), and discounting negative information (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). But, there is contention over whether consumers with a strong brand relationship are more accepting of transgressions (Ahluwalia et al., 2001; Lin & Sung, 2014) or less accepting (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011; M. Thomson et al., 2012). This study asserts that prior confusion is resolved by considering the consumer's relationship with the consumption activity they use the brand within.

The consumer-activity relationship was conceptualized as a fusion or merging of the consumer's personal and social identities with the consumption activity (Gómez, Brooks et al., 2011b; Gómez, Morales et al., 2011a; Swann et al., 2009). In addition, the consumer-brand relationship was similarly conceptualized as BIF (Lin & Sung, 2014). The findings support the notion that the consumer-activity relationship has a positive relationship on negative consumer behavior following a brand initiated market disruption, while a strong consumer-brand relationship protects the brand.

Specifically, the findings revealed that AIF predicts four negative consumer behaviors following a brand initiated market disruption. (a) Consumer are more likely to boycott the brand. (b) Consumers express lower repurchase intentions. (c) Consumers are more likely to end the consumer-brand relationship. (d) Consumers are more likely to spread NWOM about a brand when it negatively impacts their consumption process. These negative behaviors occur because the consumer feels a strong bond with the consumption activity and others who engage in the activity. Highly fused consumers are willing to exert significant effort to protect fellow group members, even at their own determent (Swann et al., 2009). Moreover, because the consumption activity is highly self-relevant and dimensions of their identity rely on their ability to engage in the consumption activity, perceived threats to their ability to perform can provoke negative reactions from the consumer. This interpretation is strengthened as the results show that activity fused consumers are more likely to continue engaging in the consumption activity despite a market disruption. Engaging in boycotts and spreading NWOM can be seen as effective ways to demonstrate group loyalty and to rationalize or justify potential performance decreases.

Contrary to expectation, this study found that AIF does not impact BI. One explanation may be that the experimental recall notice did not warrant a change in brand opinions. Prior research asked respondents to read negative newspaper articles (Ahluwalia et al., 2000). A product

recall could be attributed to one specific product and may not have been attributed to the overall capabilities of the brand. Another explanation relates to the operationalization of BI. BI addresses a brand's resilience to negative comments and not product failures, as was the case in this study. Thus, the findings suggest that a strong consumer-activity relationship does not spill-over or necessarily lead to strong relationships with brands used in activity. However, similar to prior research, BIF has a positive relationship with BI.

In terms of prior research, a strong consumer-brand relationship was found to protect the brand during challenging times. As expected the findings closely match those of Lin and Sung (2014), who found that high BIF leads to higher intentions to repurchase the brand and to continue the brand relationship and lower intentions to spread NWOM. Collectively, the results suggest that a while a strong consumer-brand relationship protects a brand but a strong consumer-activity relationship does not necessarily extend to protecting the brand during product failures and brand initiated market disruptions. In other words, a strong activity relationship can motivate consumers to hate brands who negatively impact their consumer-activity relationship or their ability to continue engaging in the consumption activity.

In some models the control variables were significant and, thus, deserve a few comments. In terms of gender, females were more likely to express boycotting intentions than males. The findings may differ from Grégoire and Fisher (2008) because their study included consumer behaviors such as demanding reparations for the transgressions while the current work didn't involve firm contact. Males, on the other hand, were more likely to express repurchase intentions and appear to be more resistant to negative brand information due to higher BI ratings. Activity engagement frequency served as a proxy for investment and commitment to both the activity and brand. Consistent with prior findings, higher investments in the activity or brand leads to higher intentions to repurchase and continue the relationship, either with the activity (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) or brand (Sung & Choi, 2010). PSC was positively related to positive consumer behaviors, repurchase intentions and brand and ARC. However, switching costs also had a positive relationship with negative consumer behaviors, boycotting the brand and spreading NWOM. This finding enhances the core thesis that the consumer's relationship with the consumption activity is a primary driver in predicating negative consumer behavior following a brand transgression and not the consumer-brand relationship. This is because learning and evaluating alternatives to a brand places risks and costs on the consumer. Thus, consumers who want to continue to engaging in the consumption activity need to exert extra effort because of the brand's decisions. Therefore, negatively impact a consumer's activity process appears to have important ramifications on their behavior.

Understanding that the consumer-activity relationship impacts consumer behavior contributes to the debate around what drives consumers to engage in negative behavior following a brand transgression. Prior research indicates that brand actions may be perceived as violating relationship norms thereby motivating consumers with a strong consumer-brand relationship to lash out against the brand (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2012).

However, other studies indicate that a strong brand relationship protects the brand during brand initiated market disruptions (Ahluwalia et al., 2001; Lin & Sung, 2014). However, extant literature treats brand consumption or why the consumer uses the brand as unproblematic. Consumption is not just something consumers do. Consumers rely on their consumption activities to construct their identity. They rely on their consumption activities to form relations with others. Thus, threats to the consumer-activity relationship have the potential to provoke negative consumer behavior as this study shows.

Accordingly, this study contributes to existing literature by resolving prior contradictions. It does this by demonstrating that a strong consumer-brand relationship, operationalized through BIF, protects the brand during transgressions (Lin & Sung, 2014). But, a strong consumer-activity relationship hurts the brand during transgressions. These findings held even with controlling for PSC. However, as the first study to investigate the consumer-activity relationship, researchers are encouraged to continue exploring the consumer-activity relationship. In regard to the preliminary study's limitation, investigating favorite activities as well as favorite brands should offer additional insights into the protective power of strong consumer-brand relationships and potential threats posed by strong consumer-activity relationships. The main study did not direct respondents to focus on their favorite computer related activity or brand, thus this limitation is reduced for the main findings. Moreover, in theory, all the activities listed could be engaged in using a different brand of computer but there may be certain activities that are impossible to engage in without the brand. For instance, some online activities are only available through specific websites (e.g., online game) and some niche activities may be monopolized or dominated by one brand. Thus, researchers are encouraged to continue to explore the consumer-activity relationship across different contexts.

Another limitation of this study is the use of a modified scale to measure AIF. While the PCA demonstrated divergent validity, researchers should continue to test alternative measures of the consumer-activity relationship. Researchers have multiple scales to adapt that measure the consumer-brand relationship, such as consumer-brand identification (Lam et al., 2010) and self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Different operationalizations of the consumer-activity relationship may be needed to investigate market situations that do not simultaneously impact a consumer's social and personal identity dimensions, as a market disruption does. Moreover, researchers are encouraged to develop a specific consumer-activity measurement scale that should not only predict important consumer behaviors but also demonstrate external validity against similar scales. This study provides encouragement that the consumer-activity relationship offers a fruitful research stream warranting its own measurement scale.

Managerially, this study supports prior research in arguing that brands should develop strong consumer-brand relationships to protect the brand during challenging times (Lin & Sung, 2014), to insulate the brand from negative information (Ahluwalia et al., 2000), and to take advantage of increased commitment and brand loyalty (Lam et al., 2010; Sung & Choi, 2010). However, this study suggests there is a delicate balance to be struck between promoting the

consumer-brand relationship and the consumer-activity relationship. Managers need to craft marketing programs and messages that strengthen the consumer-brand relationship without unintentionally strengthening the consumer-activity relationship. This is important because this study suggests there is no positive spillover effect from an activity relationship to brands used within the activity. In this effort, managers should consider collecting data related to the consumer's relationship they have with the consumption activity they use the brand within. And, when the brand is going to initiate market disruptions marketers should consider informing consumers how to continue engaging in their consumption activity without the brand. Perhaps, brands can offer potential alternatives to purchase. Or perhaps, the brand can develop an online platform where consumers can share ideas on how to continue using the product despite being abandoned by the firm (Muñiz & Schau, 2005, 2007).

Lastly, This study demonstrates that the developments within CCT can offer novel insights into relevant consumer issues. It has been established that consumers use their possession and brands to communicate who they are. This study argues that brand use and the relationship consumers have with their consumption activities also have important roles in identity construction and negative consumer behavior.

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APPENDIX A: EXPERIMENTAL VIGNETTE

Product Recall Notice

January 10, 2017

The European Union Consumer Affairs along with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission have issued a recall for your primary personal computer.

Their report indicates that a faulty screen demanded the recall. Problems associated with the screen design flaw included single-pixel lines spanning the length of the screen, and display colors being too light/washed out. Affected individuals find the display quality in this condition to be unusable, as many consumers spend a significant amount of time using their personal computers engaging in multimedia work. The E.U. Consumer Affairs and U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission urge all users to *immediately* bring your computer to an authorized repair store.

The brand apologies for this inconvenience and has decided to discontinue making this specific product line. In addition, they urge you to be patient during the repair time which may take several weeks due to demand.

APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTIVES AND CORRELATIONS

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Control variables								
Gender			1					
Engagement frequency	5.21	1.55	−0.06	1				
Procedural switching costs	3.76	1.25	0.02	0.11	1			
Independent variables								
Brand identity fusion	2.98	1.45	0.18*	0.11	0.34**	1		
Activity identity fusion	3.87	1.31	0.09	0.12	0.21***	0.30**	1	
Dependent variable								
Model 1								
Activity relationship continuance	4.19	1.49	0.03	0.46**	0.34**	0.16***	0.33**	1
Model 2								
Boycott intentions	2.89	1.62	−0.20***	0.09	0.18*	−0.15***	0.14	1
Model 3								
Brand repurchase intentions	3.56	1.62	0.16*	0.15*	0.25**	0.50**	−0.02	1
Model 4								
Brand relationship continuance	3.48	1.47	0.06	0.20***	0.37**	0.57**	0.06	1
Model 5								
Negative word-of-mouth	3.57	1.93	−0.10	0.08	0.24***	−0.08	0.15*	1
Model 6								
Brand immunity	4.13	1.10	0.18*	0.02	0.03	0.23***	−0.01	1

Note. S.D.: standard deviation.

*$p < 0.05$.

**$p \leq 0.001$.

***$p \leq 0.01$.

APPENDIX C: VARIANCE INFLATION FACTOR TEST RESULTS

	VIF	1/VIF
Control variable		
Gender	1.05	0.95
Engagement frequency	1.04	0.96
Procedural switching costs	1.14	0.88
Independent variable		
Brand identity fusion	1.26	0.80
Activity identity fusion	1.13	0.88

Note. VIF: variance inflation factors