I love you, but you let me down! How hate and retaliation damage customer-brand relationship

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ABSTRACT

The literature on the dark side of the customer-brand relationship is still evolving. Admittedly, scholars have given it noteworthy attention in the recent past, yet gaps persist related to the products and services, antecedents, and consequents examined. Our study augments the understanding of the negative aspects of the customer-brand relationship by examining brand hate and betrayal as its two manifestations. Using online food delivery (OFD) platforms as the product/service under focus, we employ a mixed-method approach to identify the negative experiences (i.e., safety and hygiene grievances, dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload) that could stimulate the negative emotions of betrayal and hate in customers. Thereafter, we examine the desire for avoidance and retaliation as a response to these negative feelings. Our model is grounded in the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework and tested through analysis of data collected from 342 OFD users in the United States. The structural equation modelling results confirm a positive association of customer dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload with brand betrayal and hate. Betrayal and hate, in turn, associate positively with avoidance and retaliation. Brand love positively moderates the association of advertisement overload with betrayal and hate and safety and hygiene grievances with betrayal.

1. Introduction

Online Food Delivery (OFD) platforms represent a segment of online to offline (O2O) commerce that offers delivery of prepared meals at customers' preferred locations. OFD platforms comprise two broad mechanisms of operations: (a) platform/aggregator-to-customer delivery (e.g., GrubHub, DoorDash), and (b) restaurant-to-customer delivery (e.g., KFC, Dominos). There is no doubt that OFD platforms have become quite popular during the past few years (Ray et al., 2020). However, the use of food delivery services has increased tremendously since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sharma et al., 2021; Kaur et al., 2021). By all estimates, the usage of OFD platforms is anticipated to grow further, registering a worldwide user penetration of 17.8% in 2021 and growth in revenue to the tune of 8.4% in 2022 (Statista, 2021a). In the United States alone, the revenue growth is anticipated to

be 5.8% in 2022, with user penetration reaching 35.3% in 2021 (Statista, 2021b).

The pandemic control and prevention measures mandated by the World Health Organization (2020) have required people worldwide to work from home/study online from March 2020 onwards. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic is still ongoing, people continue to remain largely confined to their homes for extended periods of time. Furthermore, the need for social distancing, wearing a mask, and avoiding direct and indirect contact with others to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection (Wilder-Smith and Freedman, 2020) has also resulted in closing down or limiting the operations of restaurants and other food outlets. This has made individuals turn to ordering food for delivery more frequently while their movements are restricted. The guidance issued by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) has stated that the risk of contracting the COVID-19 infection by consuming food from restaurants

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and take-outs is very low; this has reassured people about the safety of the food ordered, further increasing the usage of OFD platforms.

As in the case of any story, there is a flip side as well. While the usage of OFD platforms has increased during the pandemic, so has the crescendo of complaints and negative reviews, which are available online for everyone to see. Indeed, scholars have observed several reports of customer boycotts online (Li et al., 2020). Accordingly, some recent studies have examined the negative perceptions and outcomes related to the use of OFD platforms during the pandemic. For instance, Sharma et al. (2021) noted that trust in FDAs results in the over-ordering of food, an acknowledged reason behind food waste. On the other hand, Talwar et al. (2021a) revealed that the economic and experience barriers faced during the pandemic reduced the trust of users in FDAs, which, together with the efficiency barriers, led the users to spread negative word of mouth against them.

These findings and media reports raise pertinent concerns about the extent of damage caused by the accumulated negative experiences of OFD users during the pandemic. These concerns span a variety of aspects, such as whether the issues related to food, delivery, and service have affected the continuation intentions of existing users, or whether popular brands have suffered for their laxity and service failure, with negative experiences and perceptions driving the users to reduce the frequency of usage. Furthermore, since OFD platforms not only offer a convenient way of ordering prepared meals but also provide employment (Li et al., 2020), changes in customers' preferences or usage can have a detrimental effect on a broader level. We thus argue that it is essential to acquire a deeper understanding of customers' responses to negative experiences with OFD platforms during the health crisis. Expressed differently, it is important for service providers and researchers to evaluate the extent of damage done by such experiences and issues as well as their long-term repercussions for the concerned brand and the entire segment. Our argument underscores the need for examining the outcomes of customers' negative experiences, in consonance with the contention that such experiences are important to understand as they can have a lasting impact on customers (Kucuk, 2018), due to the human tendency to retain negative events longer in one's memory (Hegner et al., 2017; Zeki and Romaya, 2008).

A comprehensive review of the consumer behaviour literature reveals that customers' negative experiences may cause them to develop adverse feelings towards a given brand, ultimately translating into a need for a covert response like avoidance or for overt aggression, such as seeking revenge. Giving credence to this observation, recent studies have examined the so-called dark side of the customer-brand relationship, elucidating its various outcomes, such as brand avoidance (Odoom et al., 2019). In this regard, a negative feeling or emotion that has attracted the attention of researchers in the recent past is brand hate. In the present, well-connected world, hate represents an extremely risky manifestation since it can be transmitted to others through social media (Cooper et al., 2019). Prior literature has suggested that brand hate can damage the reputation of firms (VanMeter et al., 2015) and adversely influence customers' decisions (Hegner et al., 2017). Due to this, we propose to examine how the negative experiences that users have with OFD platforms have impacted their perception of a brand in terms of developing brand hate. By doing so, we not only capture the changing contours of consumer behaviour during the pandemic but also answer calls for more research on the evolving topic of brand hate (e.g., Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

Our review of the past literature has further revealed that the extant scholarship has largely examined the nature and outcomes of brand hate by focusing on any hated brand rather than brands offering a specific product or service (e.g., Bayarassou et al., 2020; Fetscherin, 2019). This limits the takeaway for researchers and practitioners functioning in diverse milieus and handling unique products and services. We address this gap and try to offer more granular findings by spotlighting a specific product, i.e., OFD platforms, and their existing customers who have had real and direct experiences to draw upon.

Finally, while the research on brand hate has gained some momentum, how it is related to brand love and how the accumulated negative experiences lead to the evolution of brand love and brand hate is less understood. It would thus be quite informative and useful to understand whether the presence of one reduces the possibility of the other, i.e., love changing into hate with real and direct negative experiences with a brand or hate changing into love with successful recovery efforts initiated by the deviant brand. We address this gap to some extent by considering the role of brand love as well in our model.

In sum, our research objective in the present study is to examine the dynamics surrounding brand hate and the role of brand love. To achieve the objectives of our study, we seek to answer three research questions (**RQs**): **RQ1.** What are the key negative experiences that existing customers of a given brand of OFD platform have had during the pandemic, and how has it affected their perception of the brand they have been attached to in the past? **RQ2.** What are the coping responses of the customers to the negative emotions and feelings aroused by their negative experiences with a given brand of OFD platform during the pandemic? and **RQ3.** What is the role of brand love in affecting the outcomes of these accumulated negative experiences?

We conceptualised a model based on Stimulus-Organism-Response theory (SOR; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) to address these questions and achieve our research objectives. Theorising negative experiences with OFD platforms as stimuli (S), we first conducted a qualitative study to identify such experiences that existing users have had during the pandemic. Thereafter, we identified four barriers/negative experiences, namely, safety and hygiene grievances, customer dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload, that could potentially stimulate brand hate. Conceptualising brand hate as an organism (O), we extensively reviewed the literature to formulate our understanding of the concept. In consonance with prior studies that negative experiences may lead not only to hate but also a sense of betrayal where there is an existing relationship with the brand, we included brand betrayal as another internal state/organismic manifestation to capture the negative feelings of the customers. Theorising coping strategies/outcomes of hate and betrayal as a response (R), we drew upon the past studies to propose the desire for avoidance and the desire for retaliation to capture response. Finally, motivated by prior studies contending that brand love may reduce the ferocity of a negative response, we propose to test the moderation effect of brand love on the hypothesised associations. We collected data from 342 existing OFD platform users in the United States and analysed it through structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the proposed hypotheses.

Against this background, our study offers the following unique contributions: (a) It is one of the limited studies to examine the concept of brand hate with the O2O model, in general, and OFD platforms, in particular, as context. Furthermore, we have examined the negative experiences as antecedents and approach-avoidance as the coping responses/outcomes of brand hate in the same conceptual setting, which has rarely been undertaken in the past; (b) It is the first study to examine brand hate in the theoretical backdrop of SOR, a theory which has been noted for its versatility to capture multiple nuances of consumer behaviour; and (c) It is among the limited studies that have examined the moderation effect of brand love on the association of brand hate with its antecedents.

In the following sections, we present the theoretical background of the proposed model, explaining the constructs and relationships. Thereafter, we present the hypotheses, data and method, results, discussion, and conclusion.

2. Theoretical background: stimulus-organism-response theory (SOR)

The SOR framework (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) is rooted in environmental psychology and offers a sequential mechanism that captures the complexities of human behaviour. The model proposes that

the internal or organismic state (*organism*) of individuals is associated with cues from their environment (*stimuli*) on the one hand and approach/avoidance-like behavioural outcomes (*response*) on the other. In other words, the theory proposes that stimuli (S) impact individuals' internal affective states (O), which, in turn, garner approach or avoidance-like responses (R) (Floh and Madlberger, 2013). Appreciated for its versatility, SOR has been used by scholars in a variety of digital contexts, such as the association of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) and online interactivity on customers' decisions (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2017), virtual reality tourism (Kim et al., 2018), engagement with an online brand community (Islam and Rahman, 2017) and online social commerce loyalty (Wu and Li, 2018).

SOR theory is suitable for the current study due to the following reasons: (a) It has been utilised to successfully examine and explain complex consumer behaviours in various contexts, particularly in the digital milieu; (b) It allows us to theorise both the possibility of the covert avoidance behaviour of moving away from the brand as well as the overt behaviour of retaliating against it for bad treatment; and (c) The original conceptualisation of SOR supports the affective composition of internal or organismic states, making it suitable to capture negative emotions, such as the feeling of being betrayed and hate. Thus, the study provides a sound theoretical basis for understanding multiple aspects of consumer psychology and behaviour.

2.1. Adapting SOR conceptualisation to the study context

We used the qualitative research method suggested by Creswell and Clark (2017) to capture the users' negative experiences. We executed our qualitative study through semi-structured phone interviews with individuals who met our screening criteria of being OFD platform users who had faced issues during the COVID-19 pandemic while ordering food from their preferred platforms. The respondents were identified through snowball sampling. Of the 21 individuals who volunteered, only ten were interviewed, as data saturation was reached at that point. Each interview took between 12 and 25 min. Since the criteria for participant selection was the use of OFD platforms, no demographic restrictions were imposed in terms of age, and the gender balance was maintained. The key for interviews was developed through an extensive review of the existing OFD and customer-brand relationship literature (Hegner et al., 2017; Kaur et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2021a; Sharma et al., 2021; Zarantonello et al., 2016). In keeping with our research questions, the interview key largely focused on inquiring about problems faced by users while using various OFD platforms for the delivery of prepared meals during the COVID-19 pandemic. The key comprised the following six questions: (a) Do you think ordering food from OFD platforms during the pandemic is a better option than eating out? Explain your agreement or disagreement in detail; (b) Do you think the OFD platforms have been able to implement preventive and proactive measures to protect against the spread of COVID-19?; (c) What are your different grievances, fears, and worries related to using the OFD platforms during the pandemic?; (d) What are the different issues that you faced related to the use of the OFD platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic?; (e) What are the factors that affected your decision to use a particular brand of OFD platform or desist from using it?; and (f) Are you satisfied or disappointed with the use of OFD platforms during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? Please explain your reasons behind the satisfaction/disappointment in detail.

The authors manually coded the data collected by analysing, organising, and labelling the responses to identify the main themes (Creswell, 2014). This process of open and axial coding, as used by recent studies (e.g., Talwar et al., 2021a), helped us cluster the negative experiences of the OFD users under four heads: issues faced related to the safety of food for consumption, packaging, and hygiene, issues faced with the interface, customer service and delivery, poor feedback received from users' friends, peers, and social circle, and interruption and irritation caused by too many notifications and advertisements.

The author team gave a name to each negative experience based on the keywords and phrases used by interviewees. Accordingly, we grouped issues related to the safety of food for consumption, packaging, and hygiene together, naming them *safety and hygiene grievances*. Similarly, we named the issues faced with the interface, customer service, and delivery as *customer dissatisfaction*, poor feedback received from users' friends, peers, and social circle as *negative word of mouth*, and interruption and irritation caused by too many notifications and advertisements as *advertisement overload*.

Next, in consonance with the extant literature on the customer-brand relationship, we have proposed these negative experiences as antecedents of the negative feelings/emotions that customers develop due to accumulated bad experiences (e.g., Curina et al., 2021; Hegner et al., 2017; Kucuk, 2015; Zarantonello et al., 2016). In this regard, we contend that the experienced negative events, particularly those that accumulate and recur over time, are likely to arouse extreme negative emotions and feelings in actual customers. In the SOR setting, these bad experiences represent stimuli.

Such negative emotions can take various forms, but in the case of existing customers, such manifestations are likely to be stronger as they reflect a relationship history (e.g., Parmentier and Fischer 2015; Reimann et al., 2018; Wiggin and Yalch 2015). Due to this, we propose brand betrayal and brand hate as the negative effects of our model. In the SOR context, these two negative effects represent the organism, i.e., the internal states of the customers.

With regard to the outcome of the negative emotions/feelings represented by brand betrayal and hate, our review of the customer-brand relationship literature revealed that the reactions/coping responses are likely to be categorised as either approach or avoidance. This means that customers may react to the developed negative feeling through covert/passive and/or overt/active actions. Covert actions could be the cessation of patronage, and overt could be attacks and revenge (Curina et al., 2021; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016). Drawing upon the literature proposing brand avoidance as a key passive response (Bryson et al., 2013; Popp et al., 2016), we have identified it as an outcome/coping response. This represents the avoidance part of our model.

With regard to the approach part, past scholarship has revealed that negative experiences cause customers to develop a feeling of wanting to punish the brand in some way (Funches et al., 2009), indicating that brand retaliation is a likely outcome of the negative feeling harboured by customers (Grégoire et al., 2009; Marticotte etal., 2016). Accordingly, we identified retaliation as an approach outcome in our model. In the SOR milieu, these two outcomes/coping strategies, namely, the desire for avoidance and the desire for retaliation, represent a response.

Apart from the anticipated direct associations grounded in the classical SOR tenets, we have also considered the moderation effect of brand love, primarily to capture the study context completely and address the paucity of literature explicating the interplay and interaction of brand hate and love. Anticipating the moderation effect of brand love allows us to examine if the love that the existing customers have for their preferred brand is strong enough for them to manifest less adversarial emotions when faced with repeated instances of negative experiences. Conversely, it also allows us to investigate the possibility of such love being so strong that it raises customers' expectations, thereby causing them to develop even more ferocious negative feelings towards the said brand of the OFD platform after being let down. Our proposal to investigate the moderation effect of brand love is in agreement with prior studies that have considered such effects in various contexts (e.g., Amegbe et al., 2020; Nikhashemi et al., 2019).

Finally, in appreciation of the fact that socio-demographic factors can affect customers' behavioural outcomes in the context of OFD platforms, we have controlled the model for the potential confounding effect of age, gender, educational background, and household size on the desire for avoidance and retaliation, as contended by prior studies (Cho et al., 2019; Hwang et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2021a).

The variables identified in the preceding text are described from the

perspective of the current study in Table 1, and the proposed model is presented in Fig. 1.

3. Hypotheses development

Our conceptual model proposes direct associations and moderation effects grounded in SOR. The underlying hypotheses are as discussed below.

3.1. Stimuli-organism (negative experiences, brand betrayal, and brand hate)

Customers are impacted more by negative aspects of their relationship with any brand than the positive experiences, a manifestation consistent with the concept of 'negativity bias' discussed in the past literature (e.g., Kanouse and Hanson,1972). Such negative experiences and mounting dissatisfaction can lead to negative consequences for the brand, with customers developing negative emotions and feelings. Explained further, customers tend to compare their expectations from a

Table 1
The description of different variables of the study.

Variable	Operational description
Safety and hygiene grievances (SH)	SH refers to the complaints that the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) had due to issues related to the safety, packing, and hygiene of the food delivered by the said brand during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Customer dissatisfaction (CD)	CD captures the discontent and displeasure of the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) related to the interface of the app/site while placing orders, the handling of delivery, the time taken, and the responsiveness and availability of customer service staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Negative word of mouth (NWOM)	NWOM represents the bad and adverse feedback that the friends, peers, and other members of the social group of the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) shared with them during the COVID-19 pandemic, to the extent of telling them not to order food from the said brand.
Advertisement overload (AO)	AO refers to the negative experiences of the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) on being inundated, overloaded, disturbed, and overwhelmed by the frequent promotional messages sent to them during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Brand betrayal (BB)	BB represents the negative affect, emotions, and feelings that the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) develop that causes them to feel cheated, lied to, and betrayed by the said brand.
Brand Hate (BH)	BH refers to the negative affect, emotions, and feelings that the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) develop that cause them to feel angry, annoyed, disgusted, mad, and aggravated with the said brand.
The desire for avoidance (DA)	DA captures the disillusioned, avoidance-like coping response of the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X), wherein they desire to refrain from patronising the said brand for ordering prepared meals.
The desire for retaliation (DR)	DR captures the aggravated, approach-like coping response of users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) wherein they desire to seek revenge and punish the said brand for its transgressions, bad treatment, and deviant behaviour.
Brand love (BL)	BL, used as a moderator in the present study, refers to the affirmative feelings, emotions, and sense of attachment that the users of a food delivery platform brand (Brand X) have based on their past positive interactions and user experience. It captures the passionate feeling of love that the users developed for the said brand, thinking it to be the wonderful, totally awesome, and delightful mode of ordering prepared meals.

product/service with the actual user experience (Oliver, 1980) and develop negative feelings/emotions if there is a discrepancy or deviation. Such negative emotions can take different forms that can coexist at the same time.

When the negative experiences are associated with a brand with which customers have a history of strong self–brand relationships built through previous positive experiences, they damage the relationship and cause customers to feel betrayed (Reimann et al., 2018). Early research on the dark side of the customer-brand relationship has noted that a sense of brand betrayal develops when a brand with an existing relationship breaks a moral commitment and violates certain fundamental expectations of its customers (Finkel et al., 2002; Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Relatively recent studies have also confirmed that disconfirmation of expectations, driven by negative experiences and infringement of customers' essential expectations, leads to brand betrayal as well (Parmentier and Fischer 2015; Reimann et al., 2018; Wiggin and Yalch 2015).

Since our study also examines the dark side of the customer-brand relationship of existing users of OFD platforms who have had a history of positive experiences, we draw upon the prior literature to anticipate the underlying associations in the present context. Thus, based on the preceding discussion, we speculate that customers' negative experiences related to product, service, and delivery, bad feedback received from others, and irritation caused by the bombarding of advertisements during the pandemic would stimulate a feeling of being badly treated and cheated by their beloved brand, causing them to develop a negative organismic state of betrayal. In other words, extrapolating the extended literature, we expect safety and hygiene grievances, customer dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload as negative experiences to correlate positively with the feeling of brand betrayal. Hence, we posit:

H1. Negative experiences represented by (a) safety and hygiene grievances, (b) customer dissatisfaction, (c) negative word of mouth, and (d) advertisement overload are positively associated with brand betrayal.

The existing scholarship on service marketing has provided evidence to show that upon experiencing service failure episodes that lead to negative experiences, customers develop anti-brand feelings that manifest as hate (Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011). Past studies have also argued that bad experiences in the context of product-related factors, such as dissatisfaction with the product offered and failures, can trigger brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017). In a similar vein, Zarantonello et al. (2016) argued that when customers' expectations are not met, it leads to brand hate. In addition, Bryson et al. (2013) contended that customer dissatisfaction stimulates brand hate in the case of luxury brands.

Although no prior studies have investigated the association of specific negative experiences and negative emotions in the context of OFD platforms, especially under the influence of an unprecedented situation, such as a pandemic, the existing evidence provides us sufficient basis to anticipate the association between negative experiences and brand hate. Put differently, negative experiences act as stimuli to develop customers' negative organismic state of hating the concerned brand of the OFD platform that they have been using in the past. Thus, we expect that safety and hygiene grievances, customer dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload serve as negative experiences that are positively correlated with feelings of brand hate. Hence, we propose:

H2. Negative experiences represented by (a) safety and hygiene grievances, (b) customer dissatisfaction, (c) negative word of mouth, and (d) advertisement overload are positively associated with brand hate.

3.2. Organism-response (brand betrayal, brand hate, the desire for avoidance, and the desire for retaliation)

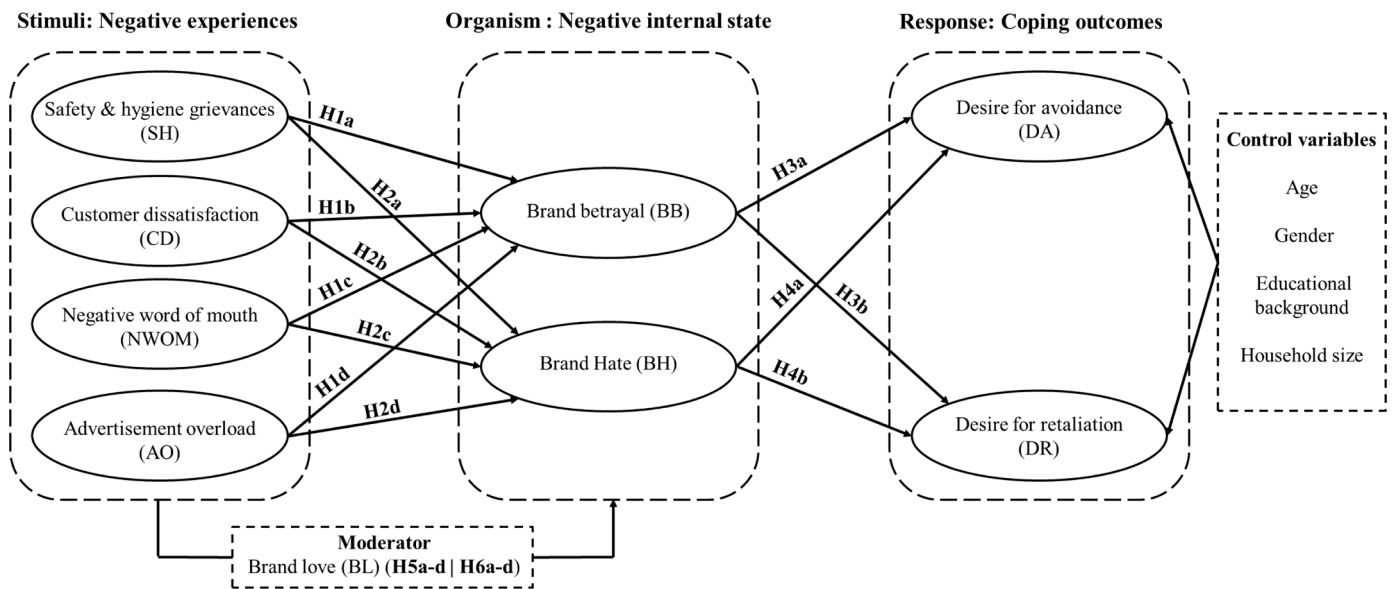Prior literature on psychology has contended that negative emotions

Stimuli: Negative experiences **Organism : Negative internal state** **Response: Coping outcomes**

Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

drive people to adopt certain behavioural responses as coping strategies to deal with them (Lazarus,1991; Wright, 1995). Similarly, the early literature on service reveals that such strategies to cope with negative emotions could include relationship termination (Hirschman, 1970) or retaliatory actions against the firm (Singh, 1988). The same manifestations have been found by existing scholarship in the context of the customer-brand relationship.

As argued above, high relational customers with a commitment to a said brand may develop dissonance in the form of brand betrayal when exposed to service failure episodes (Ahluwalia, 2000). This view is supported by other studies that underscore the link between betrayal and positive past relationships (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Indeed, the dissonance caused by service failures and a sense of being betrayed are negative emotions that are likely to trigger coping strategies in existing customers. Endorsing this view, Einwiller et al. (2019) and MacInnis and Folkes (2017) revealed that betrayal leads to a negative behavioural response in customers. In this regard, the past literature has suggested that betrayal may cause customers to seek revenge and/or cease patronage (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2009). In the specific case of food and service failures by employees, previous findings have indicated that betrayed high relational customers show a high desire to seek revenge and avoid the said brand (Lee et al., 2013). More recent studies have also suggested that feelings of betrayal can lead to the disengagement of existing customers with the brand (Tan, Salo, and Aspara, 2019) and a desire for retaliating and taking revenge (Obeidat et al., 2017).

Although there is no a priori evidence indicating an association of betrayal with approach-avoidance coping strategies (e.g., the desire for avoidance and retaliation) in the specific context of OFD platforms, the accumulated literature in the brand-customer relationship area provides a very strong base for us to presuppose a positive correlation between betrayal as an organismic state on the one hand, and the desire for avoidance and retaliation as behavioural/coping responses on the other. Hence, we propose:

H3. Negative customer emotions represented by brand betrayal are positively associated with (a) the desire for avoidance and (b) the desire for retaliation.

As discussed above, literature on psychology has posited that negative emotions engender several behavioural responses (Hegner et al., 2017). Hate, in particular, is a negative emotion that leads to a desire to retaliate in some way due to the injury caused to the ego of the individual (Sternberg, 2005; Kucuk, 2015. In concordance, scholars

researching the dark side of the customer-brand relationship have suggested that brand hate may trigger "*fight or flight*" like coping strategies to deal with negative emotions (Bayarassou et al., 2020). For instance, Zarantonello et al. (2016) argued that customers cope with the feeling of hate through approach-avoidance strategies, such as distancing themselves from the brand or retaliating by trying to attack/punish the brand. Reinforcing this perspective, Fetscherin (2019) also suggested that anger, a manifestation of brand hate, prompts the customers experiencing it to lash out and seek vengeance with the said brand. Interestingly, Hegner et al. (2017) categorised the brand hate coping responses as passive (e.g., brand avoidance) and active (e.g., brand retaliation), implying that retaliation is rather confrontational, being associated with a wish to punish the transgressing brand, whereas avoidance is non-confrontational and associated with the wish to cut off the relationship with the brand; furthermore, the two can coexist (Grégoire et al., 2009).

As in the case of betrayal and coping responses, to our knowledge, no prior studies have examined the approach-avoidance coping strategies in response to brand hate in the specific context of OFD platforms. Despite this, the prior findings on the dark side of the customer-brand relationship give us sufficient reason to speculate the presence of a positive correlation between hate as an organismic state on the one hand and the desire for avoidance and retaliation as behavioural/coping responses on the other. Hence, we hypothesise:

H4. Negative customer emotions represented by brand hate are positively associated with (a) the desire for avoidance and (b) the desire for retaliation.

3.3. Moderation effect of brand love

Various nuances of love in human relations have dominated the field of psychology for quite some time (Amegbe et al., 2020; Berscheid, 2010). In comparison, it is relatively recent that love has been researched in the context of customer-brand relationships (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 2017; Kaufmann et al., 2016). The interest in brand love has continued with recently published studies investigating it more intensely in the context of a variety of products and services (Kumar et al., 2021a; Kumar et al., 2021b; Zhou et al., 2020).

Defined as a passionate, emotional attachment to a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), brand love may be seen as a gauge to understand how customers in a strong self-brand relationship would respond in the event of negative experiences inflicted by the said brand. In this regard,

past studies have examined two perspectives. On the one hand, the existing marketing scholarship supports the '*love transitions into hate*' approach when high relational customers are faced with negative brand experiences (Grégoire et al., 2009; Grégoire and Fisher, 2006; 2008). On the other hand, the hospitality literature in this context reveals a '*love makes you forgive*' approach when high relational customers experience negative service events (Lee et al., 2021; Yang and Mattila, 2012). Despite these preliminary findings, a comprehensive literature review reveals that there is limited understanding of how brand love impacts the developed negative emotions of betrayal and hate when existing customers are subjected to negative experiences.

Motivated by prior studies that have confirmed the moderating role of brand love in different contexts, such as the banking industry (Amegbe et al., 2020) and the retail apparel industry (Nikhashemi et al., 2019), we propose to capture the brand love-hate relationship in the present context by examining the moderation effect of the brand love of the existing customers on the association of negative experiences with betrayal and hate. Since the interaction effect has not been examined in the past, and there are studies to support both perspectives, namely, '*love transitions into hate*' (Grégoire et al., 2009; Grégoire and Fisher, 2006; 2008) and '*love makes you forgive*' (Lee et al., 2021; Yang and Mattila, 2012), we stop short from speculating the direction of the moderation effect of brand love. This implies that although we anticipate that brand love will change the strength of the positive association between negative experiences on one hand and betrayal and hate on the other, we do not presuppose whether the effect will be positive or negative. Hence, we propose:

H5. Brand love significantly moderates the association of negative experiences represented by (a) safety and hygiene grievances, (b) customer dissatisfaction, (c) negative word of mouth, and (d) advertisement overload with brand betrayal.

H6. Brand love significantly moderates the association of negative experiences represented by (a) safety and hygiene grievances, (b) customer dissatisfaction, (c) negative word of mouth, and (d) advertisement overload with brand hate.

4. Data and methods

4.1. Measures

We developed the study measures by adapting pre-validated scales available in the extant literature. The safety and hygiene grievances construct was operationalised through a four-item scale adapted from Kaur et al. (2020) and Kaur, Dhir, Talwar, and Ghuman (2021), customer dissatisfaction through a five-item scale adapted from Bougie, Pieters, and Zeelenberg (2003), negative word of mouth through a five-item scale adapted from Hegner et al. (2017) and Talwar et al. (2020), advertisement overload through a three-item scale adapted from Talwar et al. (2021a), brand betrayal through a three-item scale adapted from Grégoire and Fisher (2008), brand hate through a five-item scale adapted from Zhang and Laroche (2020) and Zarantonello et al. (2016), the desire for avoidance through a six-item scale adapted from Grégoire et al. (2009) and Hegner et al. (2017), the desire for retaliation through an eight-item scale adapted from Grégoire, Lauferm, and Tripp (2010) and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and brand love through a nine-item scale adapted from Manthiou et al. (2018) and Khandeparkar and Motiani (2018). All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, recording responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

We tested the developed instrument for face and content validity through a panel of three experts (professors) from the field of consumer behaviour and brand management. We revised the items based on modifications suggested by the experts in the wording of the indicated items. Next, we piloted the instrument with 10 OFD platforms users representing the target sample to assess whether each item communicated the meaning it was intended to in simple language. Since the

respondents reported no difficulty in understanding the items, we concluded that the language used was unambiguous and easy to understand.

4.2. Data

Data were collected from respondents recruited through *Prolific Academic,* an online portal that has been used by recent studies for collecting data in varied contexts (e.g., Bhutto et al., 2021). To ensure that the responses collected were congruent with our research objectives, we employed certain screening criteria to recruit relevant respondents. Accordingly, we invited only the existing users of OFD platforms who had faced issues/problems in using these platforms during the past year (since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic) to fill in the survey. Next, we requested the existing users to participate only if they had such negative experiences while using a particular platform that they had frequently been using in the past. The data was collected from the US since it is one of the countries where the impact of the pandemic was most keenly felt, with most US states responding right at the beginning (mid-March 2020) by imposing '*stay-at-home orders*' and closing down most businesses, but keeping food take-out and delivery open (Gershman, 2020). Consequently, the usage of OFD platforms increased substantially, but with it also came issues and complaints from restaurants and customers (The National Law Review, 2021).

Before collecting the data, we informed the participants that the study was purely academic and their identity would not be revealed in any reports. We also advised them that there were no right or wrong answers and requested them to respond freely and honestly. We compensated all respondents as per the policy of *Prolific Academic.* After deleting eight incomplete responses, we were left with 342 responses, which were taken forward for further analysis. Demographic details of the respondents are presented in Table 2.

4.3. Data analysis methods

We analysed data using structural equation modelling (SEM) in AMOS Graphics 27 and the Hayes PROCESS macro. We selected SEM for data analysis since it is a popular and robust method for hypothesis testing if the data conforms to the sample size requirements, absence of outliers, normality, and absence of multicollinearity, as discussed by recent studies (e.g., Talwar et al., 2021b). We executed SEM through the two-step process, wherein we first performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the validity and reliability of the study measures,

Table 2
Socio-demographic profile of survey respondents.

Variable	Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Age	26-30 years	103	30.1%
	31-35 years	116	33.9%
	36-40 years	95	27.8%
	41-45 years	1	0.3%
	46-50 years	27	7.9%
Gender	Male	163	47.7%
	Female	179	52.3%
Educational qualification	Less than high school	1	0.3%
	Completed high school	34	9.9%
	Completed/pursuing professional/vocational school	15	4.4%
	Completed/pursuing college	56	16.4%
	Completed/pursuing bachelors	130	38%
	Completed/pursuing masters	95	27.8%
	Completed/pursuing doctorate	11	3.2%
Household size	Living alone	59	17.3%
	Two members	102	29.8%
	Three members	82	24%
	Four members	70	20.5%
	Five members	24	7%
	More than five members	5	1.5%

followed by a path analysis to test the proposed hypotheses.

5. Results

5.1. Data screening

Before proceeding with SEM, we examined the data for its suitability for CFA and path analysis. To this end, we examined the data for normality and multicollinearity. The skewness and kurtosis values were within the recommended threshold, confirming that the data followed the required Gaussian distribution. Similarly, the variance inflation factors (VIF) values below five and the tolerance values above 0.10 confirmed the absence of multicollinearity in the data.

Thereafter, we assessed the data for common method bias (CMB). CMB may exist in data collected through a single self-report instrument at one point in time, as in our study. Due to this, it was essential for us to examine the data for this bias. In consonance with recent studies (e.g., Dhir et al., 2021), we applied Harman's single factor test to examine the potential influence of CMB. The results indicated that a single factor accounted for 38.27% of the variance (within the required cut-off of 50%), confirming that CMB is not a significant issue in our study. To further confirm the absence of CMB, we also applied the marker variable technique to estimate the level of method bias. In line with prior studies (e.g., Bhutto et al., 2021), we thus used a construct, *blue attitude*, as a variable that is theoretically unrelated to other variables in the study. The analysis confirmed that *blue attitude* did not correlate with other constructs, indicating the absence of CMB.

5.2. Reliability and validity analysis

The measurement model had a good model fit, as confirmed by the recommended goodness-of-fit-indices (χ^2/df = 1.92, *CFI* = 0.95, *TLI* = 0.95, *RMSEA* = 0.05). The loading of each item onto the related construct also conformed to the recommended threshold value (Hair et al., 2010), thus indicating convergent validity (Table 3).

With regard to other validity and reliability criteria, we first confirmed the reliability of the study measures by calculating composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha for all constructs. The calculated values exceeded the suggested cut-off of 0.70 for both indicators (Hair et al., 2010), confirming the reliability of the measures (Table 4). Similarly, we confirmed the convergent validity of the study measures by evaluating the values of the suggested indicator, average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE value for each construct also conformed to the recommended cut-off of 0.5, as presented in Table 4. Lastly, we assessed the discriminant validity of the measures by: (i) confirming that the square roots of the AVEs of all constructs exceeded their respective inter-construct correlations (Table 4), and (ii) conducting HTMT analysis to confirm that the correlation between pairs of study variables was less than the recommended cut-off of 0.85 (Table 5) (Henseler et al., 2015).

5.3. Control variables

We tested age, gender, educational background and household size for their confounding effect on the outcome variables. The results indicate that age (β = -0.09, $p < .05$) and gender (β = -0.22, $p < .001$) have a significant confounding influence on the desire for retaliation. In contrast, educational background (β = 0.06, $p > .05$) and household size (β = 0.03, $p > .05$) have no controlling effect on it. Furthermore, age (β = 0.01, $p > .05$), gender (β = 0.06, $p > .05$), educational background (β = -0.02, $p > .05$), and household size (β = 0.04, $p > .05$) have no confounding effect on the desire for avoidance.

5.4. Hypotheses testing

The structural model also returned a good fit ($\chi2/df$ = 1.98, *CFI* =

Table 3
Study measures, measurement items, and factor loadings.

Study measures	Measurement items	CFA	SEM
Safety and hygiene grievances (SH)	The safety of the food delivered by Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic worries me	0.67	0.67
	Food containers are often not packed properly, raising doubt as to whether the food ordered via Brand X is safe to consume during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.79	0.79
	I do not like to order food via Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic because it is not hygienically packed	0.85	0.85
	I do not like to order food via Brand X because it is not safe to consume during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.83	0.83
Customer dissatisfaction (CD)	I am dissatisfied with the service experience of using Brand X to order food during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.85	0.85
	I am discontented with the service experience of using Brand X to order food during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.90	0.90
	I am displeased with the service experience of using Brand X to order food during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.89	0.89
	I am displeased with the customer service of Brand X to order food during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.73	0.73
	I am displeased with the delivery experience of ordering food via Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.78	0.78
Negative word of mouth (NWOM)	My friends have been spreading negative word of mouth about Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.92	0.92
	Those who are important to me have been spreading negative word of mouth about Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.90	0.90
	People I know have been spreading negative word of mouth about Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.93	0.93
	When I am looking for a similar service during the COVID-19 pandemic, people I know tell me not to order food from Brand X	0.85	0.85
	My friends have been telling me about their feelings against Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic	0.86	0.86
Advertisement overload (AO)	Frequent notifications received from Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic irritate me	0.81	0.81
	The flooding of advertisements by Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic overwhelms me	0.83	0.83
	Frequent notifications by Brand X during the COVID-19 pandemic cause interruption in my work	0.89	0.89
Brand betrayal (BB)	I feel cheated by Brand X	0.77	0.77
	I feel betrayed by Brand X	0.86	0.86
	I feel lied to by Brand X	0.89	0.89
Brand hate (BH)	I am angry with Brand X	0.91	0.91
	I am annoyed with Brand X	0.77	0.77
	I am disgusted with Brand X	0.84	0.84
	I am mad at Brand X	0.91	0.91
	I am aggravated with Brand X	0.85	0.85
The desire for avoidance (DA)	I want (or wanted) to cut off the relationship with Brand X	0.72	0.72
	I do not order food from Brand X anymore	0.94	0.94
	I reject ordering food from Brand X now	0.91	0.91
	I refrain from ordering food from Brand X	0.94	0.94
	I avoid ordering food from Brand X	0.94	0.94
	I do not use Brand X to order food	0.94	0.94
The desire for retaliation (DR)	I want (or wanted) to do something bad to Brand X	0.88	0.87

Table 3 (*continued*)

Study measures	Measurement items	CFA	SEM
	I want (or wanted) to take actions to get Brand X in trouble	0.89	0.88
	I want (or wanted) to punish Brand X in some way	0.92	0.91
	I want (or wanted) to cause inconvenience to Brand X	0.87	0.86
	I want (or wanted) to get even with Brand X	0.88	0.88
	I want (or wanted) to get anger against Brand X off my chest	0.79	0.78
	I want to take vengeance upon Brand X	0.82	0.81
	My actions against Brand X help me to shake off frustration about bad treatment from Brand X	0.78	0.78
Brand love (BL)	In the past, Brand X used to be a wonderful OFD platform.		
	In the past, Brand X made me feel good while ordering food online.		
	In the past, Brand X was totally awesome for ordering food online.		
	I had positive feelings about ordering food online from Brand X in the past.		
	In the past, I felt very happy ordering food online via Brand X.		
	I loved ordering food online via Brand X in the past.		
	Ordering food online via Brand X used to be a pure delight in the past.		
	In the past, I was very attached to Brand X as a preferred OFD platform.		
	In the past, I was very passionate about Brand X as a preferred OFD platform.		

Note. Brand X refers to the preferred brand of the OFD platform

0.94. *TLI* = 0.93, *RMSEA* = 0.05). The values of the variance explained for brand betrayal = 49.6%, brand hate = 60.5%, the desire for avoidance = 33.9%, and the desire for retaliation = 45.1% indicate that the proposed model has good explanatory power. The results of the hypotheses testing of direct paths, as presented in Fig. 2, indicate that except for H1a-b, all other proposed hypotheses are supported. Thus, the hypotheses supporting a positive association of grievances with betrayal (H1a; $\beta = 0.10$, $p > 0.05$) and hate (H2a; $\beta = -0.01$, $p > 0.05$) are not supported. In comparison, the results of the data analysis lend support for the positive association of dissatisfaction with betrayal (H2a; $\beta = 0.44$, $p < .001$) and hate (H2b; $\beta = 0.64$, $p < .001$); negative word of mouth with betrayal (H3a; $\beta = 0.22$, $p < .001$) and hate (H3b; $\beta = 0.22$, $p < .001$); and overload with betrayal (H4a; $\beta = 0.21$, $p < .001$) and hate (H4b; $\beta = 0.13$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the hypotheses proposing a positive association of betrayal with avoidance (H5a; $\beta = 0.27$, $p < .001$) and retaliation (H5b; $\beta = 0.23$, $p < .001$), and of hate with avoidance (H6a; $\beta = 0.39$, $p < .001$) and retaliation (H6b; $\beta = 0.47$, $p < .001$) are supported.

5.5. Moderation analysis

We used Model 1 of the PROCESS macro to perform a moderation analysis in SPSS. The results, presented in Table 6 and Fig. 3a-c, indicate that brand love positively moderates the association of grievances and overload with betrayal and overload with hate. Thus, H7a, H7d, and H8d are supported.

6. Discussion

We proposed and examined the association of the negative experiences of existing users of OFD platforms with brand betrayal and brand hate, and that of brand betrayal and brand hate, each with the desire for avoidance and retaliation. In addition, we examined how brand love moderated the positive association of negative experiences with betrayal and hate. The OFD platforms users' negative experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic were captured through safety and hygiene grievances, customer dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload. Our results reveal that except for the hypothesis proposing the association of grievances with betrayal and hate, all other hypotheses are supported. Furthermore, brand love positively moderates the association of grievances and overload with betrayal and overload with hate.

With regard to ***stimuli-organism*** associations, the absence of statistical support for **H1a** and **H2a** is not in line with our anticipation based on the prior extended literature that grievances related to the safety and hygiene of food delivered by OFD platforms impact customers' decision-making negatively (e.g., Parmentier and Fischer, 2015; Reimann et al., 2018; Zarantonello et al., 2016). This implies that worries related to packaging, hygiene, and the safety of prepared meals delivered by the OFD platforms during the pandemic did not cause customers to feel betrayed or develop hate for the said brand. A potential reason could be that the said brand would have been highly sensitive about the heightened health consciousness during the pandemic and replaced the meal whenever such issues arose, thereby softening the customers' feeling of being let down.

Table 5
HTMT analysis.

	SH	CD	NWOM	AO	BH	BB	DA	DR
SH								
CD	0.39							
NWOM	0.42	0.31						
AO	0.41	0.21	0.32					
BH	0.37	0.75	0.44	0.32				
BB	0.43	0.58	0.46	0.38	0.78			
DA	0.29	0.68	0.28	0.22	0.61	0.57		
DR	0.35	0.34	0.51	0.33	0.62	0.58	0.35	

Safety and hygiene grievances = SH, Customer dissatisfaction = CD, Negative word of mouth = NWOM, Advertisement overload = AO, Brand betrayal = BB, Brand hate = BH, Desire for avoidance = DA, Desire for retaliation = DR

Table 4
Descriptive statistics, validity, and reliability.

	Mean	SD	α	CR	AVE	DR	SH	CD	NWOM	AO	BH	BB	DA
DR	1.83	1.02	0.95	0.96	0.73	**0.85**							
SH	2.61	1.07	0.86	0.87	0.62	0.35	**0.79**						
CD	3.63	0.99	0.92	0.92	0.69	0.32	0.38	**0.83**					
NWOM	2.20	1.13	0.95	0.95	0.80	0.49	0.41	0.32	**0.89**				
AO	2.54	1.23	0.88	0.88	0.71	0.34	0.42	0.20	0.32	**0.84**			
BH	2.85	1.19	0.93	0.93	0.74	0.63	0.37	0.71	0.45	0.31	**0.86**		
BB	2.67	1.21	0.88	0.88	0.71	0.58	0.44	0.56	0.46	0.40	0.77	**0.84**	
DA	3.34	1.31	0.96	0.96	0.81	0.31	0.28	0.66	0.26	0.21	0.56	0.53	**0.90**

Note: Standard deviation = SD, Cronbach's Alpha = α, Composite reliability = CR, Average variance extracted = AVE, Safety and hygiene grievances = SH, Customer dissatisfaction = CD, Negative word of mouth = NWOM, Advertisement overload = AO, Brand betrayal = BB, Brand hate = BH, Desire for avoidance = DA, Desire for retaliation = DR

Stimuli: Negative experiences   **Organism : Negative internal state**   **Response: Negative outcomes**
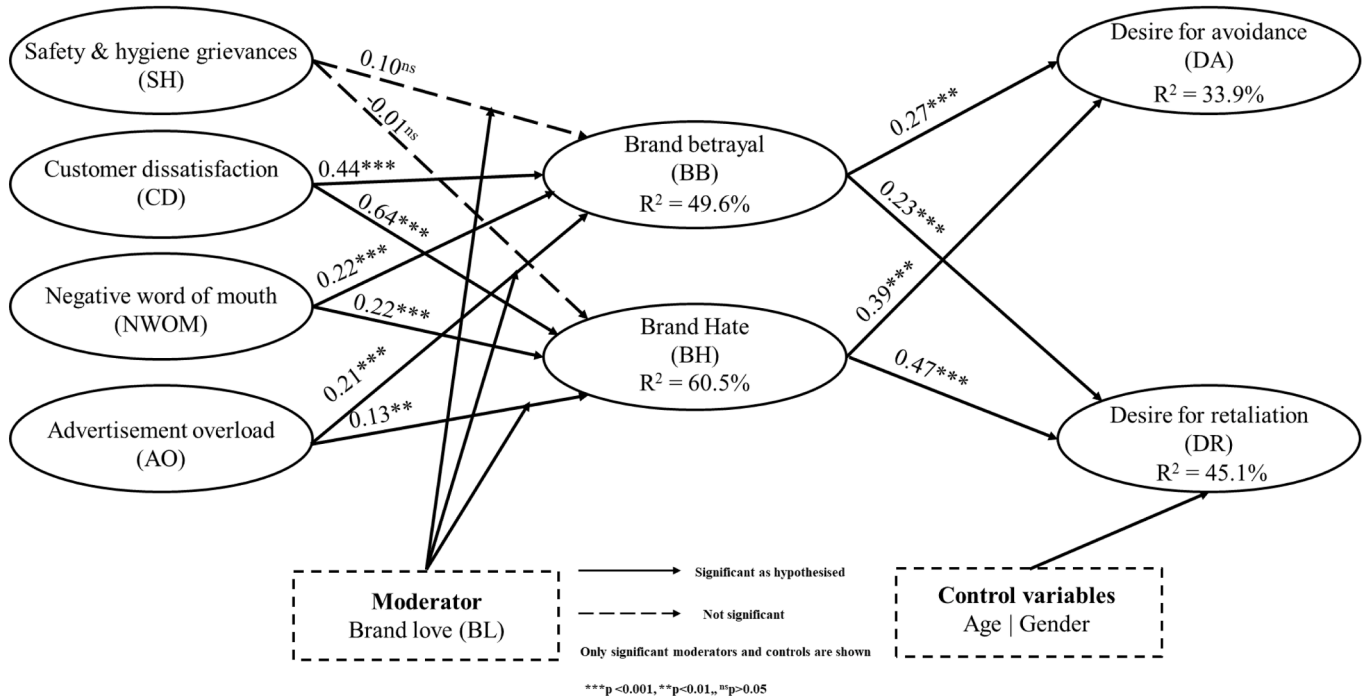

Fig. 2. Results of hypotheses testing.

Table 6
Results of moderation analysis.

	β	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	Moderation?
SH → BB	0.11	20.27	0.02	0.0152	0.2141	Yes
CD → BB	0.06	10.25	0.21	-0.0369	0.1645	No
NWOM → BB	0.03	0.55	0.59	-0.0731	0.1291	No
AO → BB	0.13	20.87	0.00	0.0401	0.2140	Yes
SH → BH	0.05	10.01	0.31	-0.0483	0.1502	No
CD → BH	0.05	10.10	0.27	-0.0372	0.1318	No
NWOM → BH	0.06	10.16	0.25	-0.0401	0.1565	No
AO → BH	0.11	20.40	0.02	0.0192	0.1932	Yes

Safety and hygiene grievances = SH, Customer dissatisfaction = CD, Negative word of mouth = NWOM, Advertisement overload = AO, Brand betrayal = BB, Brand hate = BH

All other hypotheses proposing a positive association of negative experiences with betrayal and hate are supported, in concordance with our expectation based on prior customer-brand relationship literature (e.g., Bryson et al.,2013; Hegner et al., 2017; Parmentier and Fischer 2015; Wiggin and Yalch, 2015). Support for **H1b** and **H2b** implies that disgruntlement with the service received from the platform, delivery process issues, and an ineffective customer service team during the pandemic caused the existing OFD platform users to feel cheated, betrayed, and lied to. In addition, such treatment at the hand of their loved brand caused them to feel angry, disgusted, mad, and aggravated with the said brand.

Next, statistical support for **H1c** and **H2c** implies that poor feedback and evaluation of their loved brand by their friends, peers, and trusted members of their social circle and the vociferous sharing of negative opinions against that brand during the pandemic caused the existing users of food delivery platforms to have negative feelings of being cheated, lied to, and angry, culminating into internal states of betrayal and hate. Similarly, statistical support for **H1d** and **H2d** implies that being flooded with frequent notifications and advertisements during the pandemic by the OFD platform brand that the users are quite attached to irritated and overwhelmed them so much that they felt betrayed and

annoyed with the said brand. The negative organismic state is probably heightened by the interruption in work that such messages cause.

Coming to ***organism-response*** associations, the results of the statistical analysis confirmed the positive association of both betrayal (**H3a-b**) and hate (**H4a-b**) with avoidance and retaliation. The results are in consonance with prior extended literature on the dark side of the customer-brand relationship in different contexts (e.g., Bayarassou et al., 2020; Einwiller et al., 2019; Fetscherin, 2019; Obeidat et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2019). The positive association of betrayal with avoidance and retaliation implies that feeling cheated and lied to causes such frustration, dissonance, and disappointment that the users emphatically start avoiding and ignoring the concerned OFD brand to order prepared meals. In addition, the organismic state of feeling betrayed arouses an aggressive response in the users, causing them to seek revenge with the concerned brand by taking actions to get it into trouble, causing it an inconvenience, and punishing it in some way to get even for the ill-treatment meted out to them. In a similar vein, the positive association of hate with avoidance and retaliation indicates that the negative state of anger, annoyance, disgust, and aggravation with the negative experiences they have had with their once-loved OFD brand arouses in existing users a need to lash out by rejecting/refraining from further use of that brand on the one hand and actively retaliating against it to seek vengeance and do some harm to it one the other hand.

We proposed the moderation effect of brand love on the association of negative experiences with betrayal and hate on the basis of prior extended literature (e.g., Amegbe et al., 2020; Grégoire et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2021; Nikhashemi et al., 2019) to assess if love was enough. The results of the analysis revealed support for **H5a, H5d, and H6d**, indicating that brand love increased the strength of positive association of grievances and overload, on the one hand, with betrayal, on the other, as well as between overload and hate. Statistically, the support for **H5a** and **H5d**, as presented in Fig. 3a-b, implies that brand betrayal is low when the grievances and overload are low for users with varied intensities of brand love. In contrast, as grievances and overload increase, brand betrayal also increases for different levels of brand love. Specifically, brand betrayal is highest for users with elevated grievances and
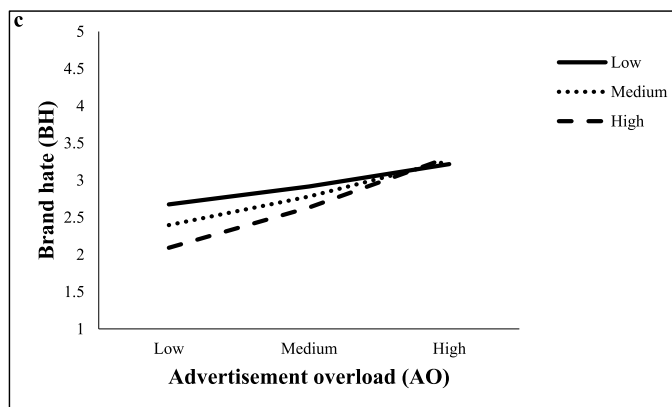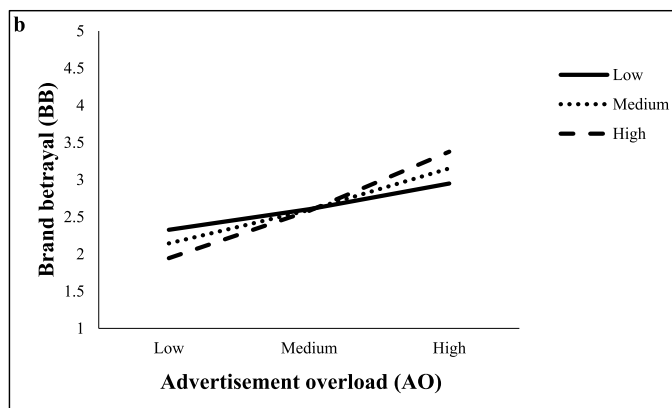
Fig. 3. a. Moderation effect of brand love (SH → BB) b. Moderation effect of brand love (AOD → BB) c. Moderation effect of brand love (AO → BH).

overload and the highest brand love.

Similarly, support for **H6d**, as presented in Fig. 3c, indicates that brand hate is highest for users with the highest overload and the highest brand love. In general, brand hate can be seen to be elevated as the intensity of overload increases for all strengths of brand love. However, the variation in brand hate is more in the case of low overload since the clear differentiation diminishes with the increase in the level of overload experienced.

Theoretically, these findings seem to indicate that love is not enough. On the contrary, love enhances the feeling of being let down since it increases the strength of association between negative experiences and negative internal states. Specifically, the results imply that the existing users who are attached with the said OFD brand do not like receiving frequent notifications and advertisements from it, and this becomes

obvious from the fact that their love for the brand further increases the positive association of overload with betrayal and hate. Data analysis also revealed a positive moderation effect of brand love on the association of grievances with betrayal, indicating that the sense of betrayal on being subject to safety and hygiene-related failures is high for users who are attached to the transgressing brand.

All other proposed moderation effects, i.e., the moderation effect of brand love on the association of dissatisfaction and negative word of mouth with betrayal, and the moderation effect of brand love on the association of grievances, dissatisfaction, and negative word of mouth with hate, are not statistically significant. These results are rather inexplicable and need to be explored further, perhaps through in-depth interviews with the respondents.

7. Conclusion

Responding to the calls for more research insights on the association of brand hate and betrayal with their antecedents and consequents, our study proposed and examined the negative experiences of existing users of OFD platform brands during a pandemic as antecedents and the desire for avoidance and retaliation as the consequents of brand betrayal and hate. Specifically, we sought to address three research questions rooted in the SOR framework. In response to **RQ1.**, we identified and examined four negative experiences (i.e., safety and hygiene grievances, customer dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload) as stimuli for brand betrayal and hate. The results of the analysis of data collected from 342 existing food delivery users residing in the US, with a history of self-brand relationship with their preferred delivery brand, revealed support for a positive association of all but one negative experience (i.e., grievances) with betrayal and hate. We addressed **RQ2.** by uncovering a positive association of the organismic states of hate and betrayal with approach-avoidance coping responses represented by the desire for avoidance and the desire for retaliation. Finally, to respond to **RQ3.**, we examined the moderation effect of brand love on the association of the accumulated negative experiences with betrayal and hate. The results indicate that brand love positively moderates the association of grievances with betrayal and overload with both betrayal and hate. Furthermore, we controlled the model for the confounding effect of age, gender, educational background, and household size. The results indicated that only two socio-demographic variables, namely, age and gender, have a confounding effect on the desire for retaliation.

7.1. Theoretical implications

The study makes four key contributions: First, it contributes to yet-embryonic literature on brand hate by taking forward its conceptualisation through the examination of both its antecedents and outcomes in the same conceptual settings. Very few existing studies offer such a broad perspective (e.g., Zarantonello et al. 2016, Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2018), with most studies discussing either antecedents or outcomes of brand hate, thereby avoiding incorporating both aspects in the same framework. In addition, by incorporating brand betrayal as an internal state along with hate, the study offers a clearer conceptualisation of the negative feelings of existing users who have had a history of positive association with the given brand. The incorporation of brand betrayal, which has reference to relationship norms (Palusuk et al., 2019), is also more realistic from the perspective of the evolution of feelings of revulsion for a brand that one was attached to in the past.

Second, our study identifies the specific negative experiences faced by the users of different brands of OFD to capture four stimuli of brand hate, namely, safety and hygiene grievances, customer dissatisfaction, negative word of mouth, and advertisement overload. By doing so, it adds variety to the literature, wherein studies have largely proposed and examined generic negative aspects, such as symbolic incongruity and ideological incompatibility (Pinto and Brandão, 2020; Hegner et al., 2017). Identification of product-specific antecedents is important since

prior studies have noted differences in brand hate levels, antecedents, and outcomes depending on the sector (Curina et al., 2021). Not only are our efforts in consonance with recent calls for examining brand hate at the product level (e.g., Jayasimha et al., 2017), but they are also timely due to the COVID context that has altered consumer behaviour considerably (Laato et al., 2020). In addition, by using the specific context of OFD platforms, our study opens another area of research and encourages researchers to examine brand hate in the e-commerce domain, which has remained under-researched from the perspective of negativity bias.

Third, the study uses the approach-avoidance response to explain the outcomes or the coping strategies that existing customers may use upon being subjected to a series of negative experiences by a particular OFD brand. In this regard, we used the SOR framework to propose and examine the desire for brand avoidance as an avoidance response and the desire for brand retaliation as an approach response. Such conceptualisation helps crystalise the diverse nature of customers' coping responses, with a passive and covert ignoring of the deviant brand on one side and an active, aggressive, and overt desire to punish the brand in some way for its transgression on the other. In addition, by pinning the model to the SOR framework, we provide it legitimacy and strong theoretical grounding, making the approach-avoidance rationale plausible and justifiable in this context.

Finally, our model brings together brand hate and love, the two aspects of the customer-brand relationship, which have been largely examined in isolation (Samala and Singh, 2019), despite the acknowledgement that transition from love to hate is common (Gumparthi and Patra, 2019). By exploring hate and love in the same model, we shift the attention of future researchers to an area that is insufficiently developed yet important to understand. Particularly, by revealing the positive moderation effect of brand love on the strength of the association between the antecedents on one hand and betrayal and hate on the other, we show how existing love can aggravate negative states even further, underscoring the fact that, just as in love relationships, customers do not like to be let down in the brand relationship as well.

7.2. Practical implications

Our study offers four key implications for managers to address the issues related to the continued usage of their brands of OFD platforms. First, since customer dissatisfaction is positively associated with both betrayal and hate, the OFD platforms need to increase focus on the same. In this regard, one of the key strategies that these platforms can adopt is the constant monitoring of customers' interactions with front-line employees, be it delivery or customer service, as suggested by prior studies (Hegner et al., 2017; Popp et al., 2016). One way to achieve this is to have proactive tracking software with built-in alerts and apology messages for inadvertent service failures.

Second, since NWOM received by users is positively associated with both betrayal and hate, OFD service providers need to focus on and strengthen their grievance handling process such that their existing users do not feel frustrated and spread negative word of mouth to reduce their dissonance. One way could be to respond to each online review captured on the platform by explaining how the issue was handled. This could require dedicated resources and meeting the incidental cost, but given how NWOM reverberates and creates a negative perception that, in turn, causes other users to feel betrayed and hate the brand, the expense and the effort could be worthwhile, more so because NWOM has been found by prior studies to cause discontinuation in usage, thereby adversely affecting repurchase intentions (Turel, 2015; East et al., 2017). In sum, our study indicates that the NWOM spread by others can adversely affect the sustenance of positive customer-brand relationships, despite a history of continued usage and attachment.

Third, since our results reveal that advertisement overload is positively associated with both betrayal and hate, and the associations are further strengthened by a higher level of brand love, service providers and marketers need to rethink their notification and advertisement strategies, which are probably machine-driven plans akin to carpet bombing (Mckee, 2019) and linked to users' usage patterns. A simple strategy in this regard could be to rationalise the number of notifications and alerts to maybe once in two days. A specific plan should be evolved by testing and then rolling out a frequency that does not create an overload for the existing users.

Finally, our study uncovered the positive association of brand betrayal and hate with two coping strategies, namely, avoidance and retaliation, highlighting the fact that even for customers in a positive self-brand relationship, transgressions by service providers can be harmful as they damage the customer-brand relationship with possible long-term consequences (Reimann et al., 2018). Thus, we try to underscore the fact that because brand love is not enough, letting down customers could easily translate into negative emotions that could: (a) reduce or cease usage, on the one hand, thereby hurting the brand financially, and (b) cause customers to lash out and seek vengeance, on the other hand, thereby hurting brand reputation and equity.

7.3. Limitations and future research potential

Our study makes a useful contribution to theory and practice, but at the same time, it has certain methodological and theoretical limitations that need to be acknowledged and discussed to identify future research directions, which offer exciting avenues for further study.

At the methodological level, as in the case of any single instrument, cross-sectional survey-based study, the collected data may suffer from biases, such as common method bias and self-response bias. We took several procedural precautions, such as assuring anonymity, informing the respondents that there were no right or wrong answers, and focusing on the questionnaire design to control these biases. We suggest that in addition to adhering to these procedural remedies at the time of data collection, future researchers can also plan and collect data in multiple waves to further reduce biases. In addition, our study is based on a single-wave survey. However, since customer perceptions, evaluations of experiences, and responses vary with time (Nikhashemi et al., 2019), a study based on longitudinal data might provide more interesting inputs on how hate and betrayal evolve over time.

At the theoretical level, our study has used the SOR framework comprising four stimuli as antecedents, two internal states, and two response outcomes. Although the conceptualisation is theoretically sound and in line with prior studies using SOR (e.g.,Kumar et al., 2021a), other variables at each level can be explored, such as cold versus hot hate (Fetscherin, 2019).

Another theoretical limitation of our study is that we have not captured the continuation intentions, which may coexist with retaliation against the transgressing brand. However, it would be informative for theory and practice to understand how approach-avoidance behaviours make this transition and evolve into repurchase intentions. Future studies can incorporate this aspect as well by using a four-step sequential mechanism of Stimulus-Organism-Behaviour-Consequence (SOBC; Davis and Luthans, 1980). In addition, future studies can use theoretical lenses, such as Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) and Innovation Resistance Theory (Ram and Sheth, 1989), to add theoretical depth to the area, which is quite shallow at this point in time.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Fauzia Jabeen: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Puneet Kaur:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Validation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing. **Shalini Talwar:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Validation. **Suresh Malodia:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Project administration. **Amandeep Dhir:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

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