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You are so embarrassing, still, I hate you less! Investigating consumers' brand embarrassment and brand hate

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Abstract

Brand hate is an emerging concept representing the dark side of the consumer–brand relationship. This research investigates whether negative brand social self-expressiveness can significantly predict brand hate via creating perceived brand embarrassment in a social context, and also the moderating roles played by consumer's susceptibility to social influence and brand inner self-expressiveness. Data were collected from Nano car users in India and analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) and conditional process analysis (Hayes in the process macro for SPSS and SAS, 2018). The study results support that negative brand social self-expressiveness creates brand hate, and this relationship is mediated by brand embarrassment. Consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal influence positively moderates the effect of negative brand social self-expressiveness on brand embarrassment. On the other hand, the effect of brand embarrassment on brand hate is negatively moderated by brand inner self-expressiveness. Thus, the model shows a moderated mediation. The contribution of this research lies in empirically identifying the relationship between brand embarrassment and brand hate, and the distinctive roles played by brand social and inner self-expressiveness in shaping this relationship.

Keywords Negative brand social self-expressiveness · Brand embarrassment · Brand hate · Susceptibility to interpersonal influence · Brand inner self-expressiveness

Introduction

Consumer research has significantly focused on the negative aspects of branded consumption, namely brand embarrassment (Miller 1995; Dahl et al. 2001) and brand hate (Zarantonello et al. 2016; Hegner et al. 2017). Brand hate is posited to be an anti-construct of brand love investigated by prior research (e.g. Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Wallace et al. 2014). Zarantonello et al. (2016) state that both consumer researchers and the managers have recognized the relevance of brand hate as a darkside of brand consumption. Brand hate embodies individual's negative affect towards brand (Zarantonello et al. 2016). On the other hand, consumption embarrassment is also regarded as a negative consumption related emotion by the recent consumer research (e.g. Dahl et al. 2001; Tsao and Chan 2011). Brand embarrassment refers to consumer's feeling of awkwardness based on the perception of getting negatively evaluated by others while consuming a brand in a social context (Sarkar and Sarkar 2017a, b; Grant and Walsh 2009). Hence, brand embarrassment is necessarily a negative social emotion (Walsh et al. 2016). Walsh et al. (2016) posit that brand embarrassment is consumer's

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self-conscious emotion that impacts purchase decision. As both brand embarrassment and brand hate represent negative social consumption emotion, it is very likely that they would be related in brand consumer's perception. There is a paucity of research that investigates this inter-relationship.

Perceived negative association between the brand image and desired social image of individual is an important determinant of brand hate (Hegner et al. 2017). On the other hand, prior research maintains that brand embarrassment occurs when an individual perceives that the brand is negatively projecting his/her image to the society (Walsh et al. 2016; Grant and Walsh 2009). Thus, negative brand social self-expressiveness would be an essential factor causing brand embarrassment. From this perspective, brand embarrassment is expected to be a significant predictor of brand hate, as an individual is likely to hate such brand that causes social embarrassment.

According to Hegner et al. (2017), brand hate leads to negative brand related attitude and behaviour such as brand avoidance. Walsh et al. (2016) show that brand embarrassment negatively impacts brand purchase intention. However, Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a) maintain that even after finding a brand socially embarrassing, the consumer may still be willing to purchase the brand privately (like online buying) rather than buying it publicly. This implies that at times, even after finding a brand embarrassing, the consumer may still hate the brand less severely and may be willing to continue consuming the brand through private distribution modes. Such a consequence of brand embarrassment is possible, as both brand embarrassment and brand hate (mainly when it is caused by symbolic incongruity) are largely linked to consumer's awareness of the possible social evaluation (Dahl et al. 2001; Grant and Walsh 2009; Hegner et al. 2017). Thus, an absence of perceived social evaluation is likely to mitigate the negative consequences of brand embarrassment.

Prior research investigated the possible negative consequences of brand embarrassment (Walsh et al. 2016; Grant and Walsh 2009). However, prior research empirically investigating various factors that can alleviate the negative impact of brand embarrassment on brand consumption intention is scanty. Understanding this aspect is very important for the survival of many embarrassing brands in the marketplace. Prior research shows that brand inner self-expressiveness predicts brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Brand inner self-expressiveness is experienced by a consumer privately, and for this reason, it is likely that brand embarrassment would not be related to brand inner self-expressiveness. Hence, it is possible that for certain embarrassing brands, the effect of brand embarrassment on brand hate can be mitigated if the embarrassing brand is perceived to be highly inner self-expressive. Our research intends to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the role played by the brand's

inner self-expressiveness in mitigating the impact of brand embarrassment on brand hate.

The conceptual framework of this research has been tested by surveying the consumers of Nano car brand launched by the Tata Motor Company in India. Tata Motor launched Nano as an economical and compact car (Rediff.com 2008). The compactness of Nano would have created Nano brand's inner self-expressiveness among the specific target customers. Many people in India purchased Nano most likely due to its compactness at a modest on the road price. However, very soon Nano began to be perceived by many as the "poor man's car" (The Times of India 2012) generating a negative brand prestige value. Due to the "poor man's car" perception generated over time, Nano created a significant brand embarrassment among its actual users and started losing its market share rapidly (Sarkar and Sarkar 2017a). Hence, Nano was considered by us as an ideal brand to examine the inter-relationship between brand embarrassment and brand hate and other associated concepts in our research. The remaining paper describes relevant literature review, hypotheses formulation, methodology, study findings and discussion of the study results.

Literature review

Stimulation of brand embarrassment by consumer's susceptibility to social influence

It has already been defined that brand embarrassment refers to consumer's awkward feeling elicited based on the perception of being negatively judged by others in a social setting due to being associated with a brand having embarrassing attributes (Walsh et al. 2016; Grant and Walsh 2009). Consumption embarrassment occurs necessarily in a social context where perceived social evaluation is present, rather than in a private setting (Dahl et al. 2001; Tsao and Chan 2011; Miller 1995; Lunardo and Mouangue 2019). Hence, brand embarrassment is regarded as a negative social consumption emotion elicited while socially consuming a brand. Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a, b) show that a consumer when embarrassed with a brand will show a decreased propensity to consume the brand publicly. This finding implies two important aspects: (1) brand embarrassment is necessarily associated with an apprehension of being negatively evaluated by the public, and (2) it is not necessary that a consumer embarrassed with a brand will completely hate the brand, or stop buying it altogether. Instead, the consumer may take a strategy to consume the embarrassing brand privately to avoid public embarrassment. Any embarrassment motivates an individual to adopt distinct coping strategies to reduce the level of embarrassment (Verbeke and Bagozzi 2003).

Consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal or social influence (CSSI) is defined as one's concern for enhancing or maintaining the self-image in the eyes of others (Bearden et al. 1989). This is very similar to the need for a positive social self-expressiveness (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Individual scoring high on CSSI intends to get associated with an aspirational reference group in order to enhance self-image (Kelman 1961). Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a) show that a consumer scoring high on CSSI will be more prone towards brand embarrassment compared to another consumer scoring low on CSSI.

Brand embarrassment predicting brand hate

Sternberg (2003) identifies three core components of interpersonal hate emotion: (1) repulsion and disgust, (2) anger and fear, (3) devaluation through contempt. According to Zarantonello et al. (2016), analogous to interpersonal hate, consumers can feel a similar negative emotion of hatred towards certain brands. Thus, brand hate is posited to be an anti-construct of brand love, as brand love or attachment represents positive emotion and passion towards the brand (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Thomson et al. 2005; Zarantonello et al. 2016). As brand embarrassment is a negative emotion causing perceived damage to one's desired public image (Walsh et al. 2016; Grant and Walsh 2009), it is expected that one may hate such object (i.e. brand) that causes embarrassment. Prior research shows that brand's symbolic incongruity where "a brand represents an undesired image to the consumer" (Hegner et al. 2017, p. 14) is a predictor of brand hate. Zarantonello et al. (2018) also find that image incongruence is an antecedent of brand hate. Brand embarrassment can predict brand hate, as brand embarrassment occurs when the consumer feels that his/her association with the focal brand is negatively portraying his/her social image (i.e. symbolic self-brand image incongruity).

Brand self-expressiveness (social versus inner)

Consumers often use brands as the means to communicate their social and economic standing to the outside world (Cronje et al. 2016). Prior research supports that favourable brand image predicts consumer's positive behavioural intention towards brand (Sultan and Wong 2018). This implies that a brand with a favourable image will significantly motivate a consumer to consume the brand in social context compared to a brand with an unfavourable image. Individual often wants to express a desirable self-image to the environment through branded consumption (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Pichler and Hemetsberger 2007; Wang et al. 2018; Choi and Sung 2018). Thus, an individual is likely to love a brand that would create such desirable social self in

the eyes of the others (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Wallace et al. 2014). Also, an individual is likely to be embarrassed with a brand, if he/she perceives that the brand is creating a negative or undesirable social self (Grant and Walsh, 2009; Sarkar and Sarkar 2017a, b; Walsh et al. 2016). Thus, the perceived negative brand social self-expressiveness is likely to predict brand embarrassment.

Brand inner self-expressiveness, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which one feels that the focal brand is an extension of one's inner self and the brand mirrors what one really is (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Thus, brand inner self-expressiveness is conceptually distinct from brand social self-expressiveness (Wallace et al. 2014). Unlike brand social self-expressiveness which relates to a brand's ability to project one's desirable social image, brand inner self-expressiveness is related to consumer's private mental world. Sarkar and Sarkar's (2017a) study shows that a consumer embarrassed with a brand will show decreased intention to consume the brand publicly, but such a consumer may intend to continue consuming the brand privately. Hence, the authors (p.302) suggest, "marketers of embarrassing brands may adopt the strategy of enhancing in-store consumer privacy". This implies that even after getting socially embarrassed with a brand, the consumer may perceive that the brand stimulates his/her inner self-expressiveness and intend to consume the brand privately in order to satisfy the inner self-expressiveness. Thus, desirable brand inner self-expressiveness can stimulate brand love (Wallace et al. 2014; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006), or can convert a publicly embarrassing brand into a privately lovable brand, thus reducing brand hate. Thus, we posit that (1) brand inner self-expressiveness is not related to brand embarrassment which is a social emotion, and (2) brand inner self-expressiveness can act as a factor that can attenuate the positive effect of brand embarrassment on possible brand hate.

Hypotheses formulation

Brand embarrassment occurs in a social context (Miller 1995; Dahl et al. 2001). Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a) state, "embarrassment occurs when an individual feels that he/she has made an incompatible projection of himself or herself in front of others present in a social establishment, where the principle of compatibility is considered to be important" (p. 289). Individuals get embarrassed due to the perception of getting unfavourably judged by others (Miller 1995). Individuals often want to express their identities to the environment through their associations with certain brands (Pichler and Hemetsberger 2007; Sarkar et al. 2015). One reason why a consumer loves a brand is that the brand expresses a positive or desirable social self (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Wallace et al. 2014). Hence, it is proposed that a consumer

is likely to feel embarrassed with a brand, if the consumer perceives that his/her association with the brand projects a negative social self-image by violating the principle of compatibility in a social establishment.

H1 Negative brand social self-expressiveness positively affects brand embarrassment.

Hegner et al. (2017) state, "incongruity between the symbolic meanings of a brand and the consumer's sense of self could lead to negative emotions towards the brand. Individuals choose or deliberately do not choose brands in part to construct their self-concepts and to create their personal identities" (p. 15). Based on the dis-identification theory, Lee et al. (2009) argue "people may develop their self-concept by dis-identifying with brands that are perceived to be inconsistent with their own image" (p. 174). Such a brand dis-identification can predict brand hate (Hegner et al. 2017) when the dis-identification is due to the incongruity between the symbolic brand image and desired social self. A consumer is likely to hate such an embarrassing brand if he/she starts feeling that using the embarrassing brand is negatively impacting his/her desired social self due to poor brand prestige value (Sarkar and Sarkar 2017a), and such consumer is likely to develop a strong dis-identification (i.e. hatred) towards such an embarrassing brand. This is especially true for highly social self-expressive brands like car brands, as the main reason behind consumer loving such brands is to create a positive social self-expressiveness through using the brands in front of others (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Such a brand dis-identification caused by symbolic brand image and desired social self-incongruity is likely to make the consumer devaluate the embarrassing focal brand. Devaluating and contempt are the components of hate (Sternberg 2003). Based on this premise, it is largely expected that brand hate will be elicited among those consumers who are already using certain brands (after the purchase has already been made) in a social setting, and simultaneously perceiving them to be embarrassing. Hence, brand embarrassment can predict brand hate.

It is to be noted in this context that the positive effect of brand embarrassment on brand hate will be operative when brand embarrassment is elicited specifically due to the perceived negative social self created by low brand prestige value (Sarkar and Sarkar 2017a). For example, in our study, the Nano brand created negative social self and subsequent brand embarrassment solely due to its poor prestige value. On the contrary, say a woman in her fifties may feel embarrassed while wearing a branded apparel largely targeted towards teenagers, but may not actually hate the brand simply because the apparel brand would be reputed in its respective target market. However, the old lady might simply attribute her felt embarrassment to her inappropriate

self-selection of the brand. Thus, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2 Brand embarrassment positively affects brand hate.

As per H1, negative brand social self-expressiveness affects brand embarrassment. As per H2, brand embarrassment affects brand hate. Together H1 and H2 indicate that the effect of negative brand social self-expressiveness on brand hate is mediated by brand embarrassment. When consumer perceives that the focal brand is creating a negative social self-expressiveness, it creates a symbolic incongruity between perceived brand meaning and individual's desirable social self. The symbolic incongruity makes the consumer feeling embarrassed about his/her association with the brand in front of others. As the individual perceives the brand to cause social embarrassment, the individual is likely to feel hate emotion towards such brand. Hence, we hypothesize:

H3 Brand embarrassment mediates the relationship between negative brand social self-expressiveness and brand hate.

Sarkar and Sarkar (2017b) show that consumers who are highly anxious or concerned about what other people think of their image are more likely to be embarrassed while consuming embarrassing objects in a social context. Dahl et al. (2001) maintain that perceived social presence and sensitivity towards social evaluation cause consumption embarrassment. The qualitative study conducted by Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a) shows that the effects of various factors causing brand embarrassment are positively moderated by consumer's susceptibility to social influence (CSSI). The psychological reason for this is that an individual scoring high on CSSI is likely to be more concerned about the judgments of others compared to another person scoring low on CSSI. The construct of CSSI mainly deals with an individual's willingness to enhance social self (Kelman 1961). Individual scoring high on CSSI strives to enhance his/her social image in the opinions of others (Bearden et al. 1989). That is why an individual having high CSSI will be more prone to embarrassment, as high CSSI is associated with high concern for social self. Hence, it is proposed that the effect of negative brand social self-expressiveness on brand embarrassment will be positively moderated or intensified by CSSI. Consumer's susceptibility to social influence intensifies the effect of perceived negative social self-expressiveness of brand as both concepts are related to perceived social judgment. Negatively perceived social judgement causes brand embarrassment which gets inflated due to the interactive effect of CSSI and NBSSE. When brand embarrassment is already elicited, CSSI has no more role to play. That is why CSSI is not likely to moderate the after effect of brand

embarrassment on brand hate. Thus, the next hypothesis formulated in this study is:

H4 Consumer's susceptibility to social influence positively moderates the relationship between negative brand social self-expressiveness and brand embarrassment.

A consumer can love a brand due to the brand's favourable inner self-expressiveness, whereas brand inner self-expressiveness refers to the degree to which the brand is perceived as an extension of one's inner self-concept (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Prior research distinguishes between brand inner and social self-expressiveness (Wallace et al. 2014). Brand inner self-expressiveness relates to individual's inner connection towards the brand image which is felt privately, whereas brand social self-expressiveness relates to one's perception of how the brand is projecting one's image in the eyes of others. For example, one brand inner self-expressiveness scale item used by prior research is "this brand is an extension of my inner self", and a brand social self-expressiveness item used in the same study reads as "this brand has a positive impact on what others think of me" (Wallace et al. 2014, p. 41). Wallace et al. (2014) show that brand inner and social self-expressiveness are two distinct concepts, which emerged as separate factors, but both can generate brand love. Thus, it is possible that a brand scores low on social self-expressiveness, but high on inner self-expressiveness for the same person. For example, one may be internally happy with his/her small, compact and economical car. However, at the same time, the person may feel socially embarrassed, as he may think that the economic image of his/her car would negatively impact his/her social status. Hence, it is posited that though brand embarrassment caused by undesirable social self-expressiveness of the brand may create brand hate, the impact of brand embarrassment on brand hate may be negatively moderated or weakened by the positive inner self-expressiveness of the same brand. The reason is that brand inner self-expressiveness is likely to attenuate brand hate by creating brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Wallace et al. 2014). As brand inner self-expressiveness is conceptually unrelated to individual's perceived social evaluation, BISE is not likely to play any role in moderating the effect of NBSSE on BE. Both NBSSE and BE are related to perceived social evaluation. Hence, the study postulates the following hypothesis:

H5 Brand inner self-expressiveness negatively moderates the relationship between brand embarrassment and brand hate.

In this context, it is also assumed to be important to hypothesize whether demographic variable like gender (male vs. female) would have any relationship with our focal study concept of brand embarrassment. Prior research shows that while getting exposed to nude and erotic pictures in front of others, females are likely to be more embarrassed than males (Costa et al. 2001). A prior study also shows that the females purchasing an embarrassing product like condom in the social presence would be lesser often compared to males indicating that females would be more prone to be embarrassed than males (Dahl et al. 1998). However, the study conducted by Edelmann et al. (1989) on examining the predictors of self-reported expression of embarrassment did not find any significant main effect of gender on the expression of embarrassment. Prior research maintains that women are more likely to conform with the opinions of majority (Eagly 1978) and get influenced by subjective norms prevailing in the society (Venkatesh and Morris 2000) compared to men. This indicates that women are likely to score higher on CSSI than men. For this reason, it is expected that the effect of NBSSE on BE will be stronger for women compared to men.

H6a Gender moderates the relationship between negative brand social self-expressiveness and brand embarrassment such that the moderation of female is more positive than male.

Prior research maintains that women are more disposed towards achieving interpersonal goals and success in interpersonal relationships than men (Carlson 1971; Venkatesh and Morris 2000). Females are more socially expressive compared to males (Taylor and Hall 1982). As women generally give more importance to achieving success in interpersonal relationships than men, it is expected that women would be lesser influenced by inner self-expressiveness of brands compared to men. The reason is that inner self-expressiveness of brand cannot fulfil consumer's need for social self-expressiveness through using brands, and women would have higher need for social self-expressiveness through consuming brands in order to maintain strong interpersonal relationships with relevant reference groups. As BISE is likely to be less important for women than men, it is expected that the effect of BE on BH is likely to be stronger for women than men.

H6b Gender moderates the relationship between brand embarrassment and brand hate such that the moderation of female is more positive than male.

The conceptual framework in Fig. 1 depicts the hypotheses formulated. Each arrow from any predictor constructs flows to respective outcome construct. An arrow from any moderator flows to the path being moderated. The positive or negative sign denotes the nature of the respective path relationship hypothesized.
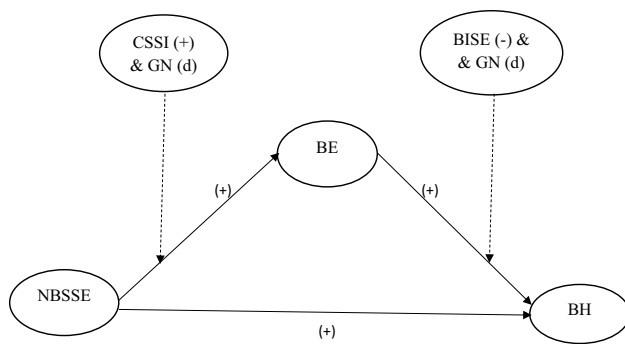
Fig. 1 Conceptual model of brand hate. *Note* The abbreviations of the constructs used are: *NBSSE* negative brand social self-expressiveness, *CSSI* susceptibility to interpersonal influence, *BE* brand embarrassment, *BISE* brand inner self-expressiveness, *BH* brand hate, *GN* gender. The dotted line (---) shows moderating relationships. The (+) sign indicates positive effect, (–) sign indicates negative effect, and (d) indicates differential effect

Research method

Data collection and sample profile

The qualitative study conducted by Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a) shows that the Nano car produced by Tata Company is perceived as an embarrassing brand by many consumers in India. Tata positioned Nano as a compact economy car (Rediff.com 2008). However, very soon Nano earned an image of poor man's car (The Times of India 2012), and this brand image made Nano a socially embarrassing car in the eyes of many who started perceiving that Nano would negatively impact their social status. For this very reason, "Nano users" in India were considered as the ideal population for our study. We visited several Tata Motor service centres in different metro cities in India. We collected the contact names, mobile phone numbers, addresses and e-mail ids of consumers who were getting their Nano cars serviced. We then prepared an online survey and e-mailed the survey questionnaire link to the consumers belonging to the collected contact list.

We sent the questionnaire link to a total of 1250 respondents. Out of that, we received 339 duly filled questionnaires within the stipulated response period of 60 days mentioned in the questionnaire. The self-reported gross annual family incomes of respondents ranged between INR (Indian National Rupees) 739,145 to 1,481,638 with an average of 929,735. Total 161 were males and 178 were females. The age range of respondents was 26 to 57 years with an average of 36 years.

Measures

All the scales included in the questionnaire were adapted from the existing literature. Four items measuring NBSSE were adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) by negatively wording the brand social self-expressiveness items given in that paper. Four items measuring BISE were also adapted from the same paper. Normative CSSI (Bearden et al. 1989), BE (Walsh et al. 2016) and BH (Zarantonello et al. 2016) measures were also adapted from the literature.

The number of items in the original BH (18 items), BE (12 items) and normative CSSI (8 items) scales were too large, and all items were not suitable to the context of car. Keeping this in mind, we conducted a content validity check of all the items in the original BH, BE and CSSI scales by an expert panel of two senior professors of branding from a business school. The professors finally approved four BH, six BE and four CSSI items from the original scales to be most appropriate in the context of car brand based on examining the content validity of items following the approach of Bearden et al. (1989). All the scales were reflective. All items were of seven-point Likert type (1: strongly disagree to 7: strongly agree). The wordings of few items were changed keeping the meanings intact to suit the context of car brand. All measurement items are shown in Table 2. Now onward, the abbreviations of the constructs given in the parentheses will be used in different places to maintain brevity.

Data analysis and results

Tools and techniques

The reliabilities of the scales in Indian context were checked through examining Cronbach's alpha values. Followed by this, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measurement items including all the study constructs was performed. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) estimates for each construct were computed to check for the convergent validity. Inter-factor correlations were also obtained. For all possible pairs of constructs, AVE estimates for any two constructs were compared with the respective squared inter-construct correlation, as discriminant validity can be established when both the AVE estimates would be greater than the squared correlation (Hair et al. 2009).

Later, structural equation modelling (SEM) technique was employed to test all the proposed study hypotheses. This technique was used to obtain the direct and conditional path estimates incorporating the latent constructs and its item-wise errors. Also, to understand the conditional moderated mediation effect, we performed a conditional moderated mediation model analysis following Hayes (2018)

PROCESS approach in SPSS based on a 5000 bias corrected bootstrapped samples generated from the original data set. This data analysis triangulation was conducted mainly for two purposes: First, the study aimed to validate the results generated from SEM using an equally comparable and competitive approach. Second, although SEM provides several required goodness of fit-indices and trust-worthy path estimates, a useful index explaining the conditional moderated mediation is not available in SEM analysis. Hence, Model 21 and 58 from Hayes (2018) template were used to run our study model. Model 21 tests two moderators (CSSI and BISE) each impacting either of the mediation paths, and Model 58 tests one moderator (gender) impacting both mediating paths (see Fig. 1). The average of the ratings given by each respondent for all indicators reflecting each latent construct was considered as input to the analysis, as PROCESS Macro in SPSS cannot handle multi-item constructs. Prior research supports conducting process analysis in SPSS taking item means for latent constructs (Sreejesh et al. 2018).

Data analysis results

We checked the descriptive statistics and the reliability of the proposed scale measures. Table 1 provides mean, standard deviations and Cronbach's alpha values for all the constructs. All Cronbach's alpha values were > 0.75 which are considered to be satisfactory (Hair et al. 2009). Hence, we inferred that the scales used were reliable in the Indian context.

Later, CFA using AMOS 25 was performed including all study constructs to check the measurement model fit. The sample size was 339. The overall measurement model representing the correlations between all the proposed study constructs achieved a good fit (CMIN/DF = 3.06; CFI = 0.93; NFI = 0.90; SRMR = 0.06). As reported in Table 2, the standardized loadings of these items were all significant at 5% level. All the composite reliability (CR) estimates were also found to be satisfactory establishing the convergent validity of all constructs (Hair et al. 2009).

Inter-factor correlations were computed while doing CFA. The AVE estimates were also calculated based on the standardized CFA loadings obtained. Inter-factor correlations and AVE estimates are given in Table 3 which shows that for any pair of factors, both AVE estimates are greater than respective squared inter-factor correlation establishing the discriminant validity of all study constructs (Hair et al. 2009).

Next, SEM using AMOS 25 was run to test the hypotheses formulated. To examine the moderating effects, the study followed one of the most popular approaches recommended by Kenny and Judd (1984), known as the product indicator method. According to the product indicator method, the moderating effect can be analysed by looking at the estimate of the impact of the product of exogenous and moderator variables on the endogenous variable. However, in our study, we had latent exogenous and moderator constructs measured through multiple items. Hence, the construction of product terms using a large number of items reflecting the exogenous and the moderator constructs would create a very large number of product indicator configurations which would restrict the precision of the parameter estimates. However, the extant literature did not yet achieve any clear consensus concerning any specific type and number of product indicators to be considered to represent the latent product term. In this line, Marsh et al. (2004) proposed an item parcelling strategy which is a technique to reduce the number of product indicator configurations while multiplying several items. In marketing literature, several studies (e.g. Sultan and Wong 2012, 2014) suggest the usefulness of item parcelling as an effective technique for reducing a large number of items into smaller ones that can be handled more easily compared to a large number of direct multiplicative items. The extant literature also highlights several other benefits of using item parcelling approach. First, the formulation of item parcels helps to avoid the possible multi-collinearity problem due to probable linear relationships existing between items of exogenous and moderator constructs (Little et al. 2002). Second, it facilitates to retain the normal distribution of the collected data as far as possible (De Bruin 2004). Finally, by reducing the number of items needed to construct product term, this method helps to estimate the whole model by maintaining an optimum total items to sample size ratio (Bandalos 2002).

Following the above method, in this study we developed "parcels/groups of items" for each of the latent predictor and moderator constructs, such that both predictor and moderator constructs will have an equal number of parcels under each of them. However, the number of items in each parcel of predictor construct may be different from the number of items in each parcel of moderator construct. While doing this, first separate CFA was run for stand-alone predictor and moderator constructs. Then for each of the constructs, the items were arranged in the descending order of their standardized CFA loadings, and the parcels under each construct were formed by taking an equal number of items under each

Table 1 Descriptive and reliability statistics

Construct	Mean (SD)	Cronbach's alpha
Negative brand social self-expressiveness	4.27 (1.08)	0.82
Consumer susceptibility to social influence	4.07 (1.23)	0.83
Brand embarrassment	3.88 (1.69)	0.88
Brand inner self-expressiveness	3.27 (1.03)	0.83
Brand hate	3.89 (1.56)	0.80

Table 2 CFA results

Items	Standardized CFA loadings	CR
Negative brand social self-expressiveness		
1. My Nano negatively contributes to my image	0.75**	0.84
2. My Nano negatively portrays the social role I play	0.72**	
3. My Nano has a negative impact on what others think of me	0.84**	
4. My Nano degrades the way society views me	0.71**	
Brand embarrassment		0.89
5. I do not want my friends and acquaintances to see that I am driving my Nano	0.83**	
6. I generally avoid driving my Nano in the presence of friends and acquaintances	0.75**	
7. I find driving Nano embarrassing	0.77**	
8. I feel embarrassed when I believe that others think the worse of me because I own and use Nano	0.81**	
9. Driving Nano in the presence of friends and acquaintances is embarrassing to me	0.72**	
10. I try to avoid driving Nano as my friends don't approve of it	0.75*	
Brand hate		
11. I get disgusted about my Nano	0.70*	0.82
12. I experience a feeling of revulsion towards my Nano	0.73*	
13. I experience a feeling of contempt towards my Nano	0.77**	
14. I experience a feeling of loathing towards Nano	0.74**	
Brand inner self-expressiveness		0.84
15. My Nano symbolizes the kind of person I really am inside	0.77**	
16. My Nano reflects my personality	0.74**	
17. My Nano is an extension of my inner self	0.78**	
18. My Nano mirrors the real me	0.75**	
Individual's susceptibility towards interpersonal influence		0.84
19. It is important that others like the products and brands I buy	0.76**	
20. When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of	0.81**	
21. If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy in that product class	0.72**	
22. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	0.74**	

CR composite reliability

The significance levels are denoted as: **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Table 3 Inter-factor correlations and AVE estimates

	1	2	3	4	5
1. NBSSE	**0.57**				
2. CSSI	0.47*	**0.57**			
3. BE	0.53**	0.52**	**0.59**		
4. BISE	−0.51*	0.14	−0.44*	**0.57**	
5. BH	0.48**	0.47*	0.54**	−0.51**	**0.54**

The abbreviations of constructs used are: negative brand social self-expressiveness (NBSSE), consumer susceptibility to social influence (CSSI), brand embarrassment (BE), brand inner self-expressiveness (BISE) and brand hate (BH)

The significance levels are denoted as: $p < 0.01 = [**]$; $p < 0.05 = [*]$. No [*] mark represents an insignificant correlation value

The diagonal values in bold represent AVE

parcel following the descending order of items. Then for each parcel, the arithmetic mean of all item ratings given by the respondents was computed. This way through averaging, each parcel was converted into a single item which would be referred to as "single item parcel" for our discussion purpose in the remaining analysis. Then, each single item parcel of predictor construct was multiplied by the single item parcels of moderator construct in such a manner that no single item parcel under both constructs would be multiplied more than once. In our case, (1) four items of NBSSE construct were grouped into two parcels having two items in each parcel; (2) four items of CSSI construct were grouped into two parcels having two items in each parcel; (3) similarly, four items of BISE construct were grouped into two parcels having two items in each parcel; and (4) six items of BE construct were also grouped into two parcels having three items in each parcel. After computing the arithmetic means of the respective

Table 4 SEM estimates for the direct and moderation paths

Hypothesized paths	Standardized path values	T values
NBSSE → BE	0.71**	7.39
BE → BH	0.78**	8.44
NBSSE → BH	0.09^{ns}	0.88
NBSSE*CSSI → BE	0.56*	7.54
BE*BISE → BH	−0.53*	−8.11

All abbreviations of constructs used are the same as Table 4

The significance levels are denoted as: $p < 0.01 = $[**]; $p < 0.05 = $[*]. The concepts connected using [*] mark represent multiplicative interaction terms
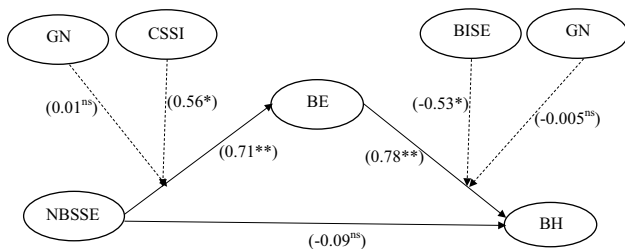
Fig. 2 The structural equation model path estimates and gender moderation results. *Note* All abbreviations of the constructs and denotations of the paths are same as Fig. 1. The significance levels are denoted as: $p < 0.01 = $[**]; $p < 0.05 = $[*]; and (ns) indicates insignificant effect. The dotted lines show moderating effects of specific moderators

ratings of all items (arranged in the descending order of the standardized CFA loadings) under each of the parcels the following structure was obtained—(1) the single item parcels of NBSSE were multiplied with the single item parcels of CSSSI to form the multiplicative interaction construct NBSSE*CSSI; and similarly (2) the single item parcels of BISE were multiplied with the single item parcels of BE to form the multiplicative interaction construct BISE*BE. The multiplication was done in such a way that no single item parcel was multiplied more than once. This way after multiplication, for each of NBSSE*CSSI and BISE*BE, two items were finally constructed to be used in the SEM.

The sample size for SEM was 339. The SEM achieved a good fit (CMIN/DF = 3.44; CFI = 0.96; NFI = 0.95; SRMR = 0.05). All standardized item to construct path values were significant at 5% level. The standardized values of the main hypothesized paths are reported in Table 4 as well as in Fig. 2. NBSSE positively impacts ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$) BE supporting H1. BE positively impacts ($\beta = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$) BH supporting H2. NBSSE has an insignificant direct effect ($\beta = 0.09$, p > 0.05) on BH. This supports that BE fully mediates the effect of NBSSE on BH supporting H3. The multiplicative interaction term of NBSSE and CSSI positively impacts ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.05$) BE supporting H4. The multiplicative interaction term of BISE and BE positively impacts ($\beta = −0.53$, $p < 0.05$) BH supporting H5.

Table 5 Conditional indirect effect test results

Outcome variable: BE				
Path	Coeff	CI at 95% level [lower CI, upper CI]	Effect of NBSSE on BE (at various levels of CSSI)	CI at 95% level [lower CI, upper CI]
Constant	−0.23*	[−0.31, −0.16]	At low level: 0.32**	[0.24, 0.40]
NBSSE	0.90**	[0.84, 0.95]	At medium level: 0.75*	[0.69, 0.80]
CSSI	0.81*	[0.75, 0.88]	At high level: 1.52**	[1.40, 1.61]
NBSSE×CSSI	0.47**	[0.42, 0.52]		
Path	Coeff	CI at 95% level [lower CI, upper CI]	Effect of BE on BH (at various levels of BISE)	CI at 95% level [lower CI, upper CI]
Constant	4.74*	[4.60, 4.80]	At low level: 0.54**	[0.45, 0.63]
NBSSE	0.008^{ns}	[−0.07, 0.05]	At medium level: 0.50*	[0.44, 0.57]
BE	0.49**	[0.43, 0.55]	At high level: 0.44**	[0.38, 0.50]
BISE	−0.43*	[−0.50, −0.35]		
BE×BISE	−0.03**	[−0.06, −0.002]		

The lower and upper confidence intervals are given within square brackets

The (**) and (*) marks show significance at 0.01 and 0.05 levels, respectively. Statistically insignificant estimates are denoted as "ns"

Next, we conducted Haye's ([2013](), [2018]()) moderated mediation analyses as a more robust test for all simultaneous moderations and indirect effect through mediation.

Tests of indirect and moderating effects

We used Model 21 of Haye's ([2013](), [2018]()) PROCESS approach for testing how the mediating role of BE in shaping the indirect (through BE) impact of NBSSE on BH gets simultaneously moderated or conditioned by CSSI and BISE. All the variables in the study were mean centred before the analysis. The number of the bootstrapped samples used for obtaining the bootstrapped confidence intervals is 5000. The results of moderated mediation regression tests are presented in Table [5]() and are explained below.

Mediating effect of BE

Table [5]() shows that NBSSE has a significant positive impact on BE ($\beta = 0.90$, $p < 0.01$). The effect of BE on BH is also positive and significant ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$). NBSSE has no significant direct effect on BH ($\beta = 0.008$, $p > 0.05$). This supports the fact that the effect of NBSSE on BH is fully mediated by BE.

Moderating effect of CSSI

Further, while analysing the moderating role of CSSI, we found (see Table [5]()) that CSSI positively moderated the effect of NBSSE on BE as shown by the significant interaction effect ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$). As a part of the detailed probing of this interaction, we conducted the "spotlight analysis" following the recommendation of Spiller et al. ([2013]()), where we considered the impact of NBSSE on BE at three different levels of the moderator CSSI (Low: 16th percentile; Medium: 50th percentile and at High: 84th percentile). The spotlight analysis shows that the effect of NBSSE on BE is high (Effect $= 1.52$, $p < 0.01$) when the level of a moderator (CSSI) is high compared to when the level of CSSI is low (Effect $= 0.32$, $p < 0.01$).

Moderating effect of BISE

Also, supporting the study postulation, the results in Table [5]() show that the positive effect of BE on BH gets negatively moderated by BISE ($\beta = -0.03$, $p < 0.01$). This negative interaction coefficient indicates that the positive effect of BE on BH gets reduced with the increase in the level of BISE. Then, the detailed probing using "spotlight analysis" supported that the effect of BE on BH was reported as high when the strength of BISE is low (Effect $= 0.54$, $p < 0.01$);

Table 6 Conditional indirect effect of NBSSE on BH at different values of CSSI and BISE

Levels of CSSI	Levels of BISE	Effects	Boot-CI at 95% level [lower CI, upper CI]
Low: -1.21	Low: -1.41	0.17	[0.11, 0.25]
Low: -1.21	Medium: -0.41	0.16	[0.10, 0.22]
Low: -1.21	High: 1.58	0.14	[0.09, 0.19]
Medium: -0.31	Low: -1.41	0.40	[0.30, 0.55]
Medium: -0.31	Medium: -0.41	0.38	[0.30, 0.50]
Medium: -0.31	High: 1.58	0.33	[0.26, 0.40]
High: 1.31	Low: -1.41	0.82	[0.61, 1.10]
High: 1.31	Medium: -0.41	0.77	[0.60, 1.03]
High: 1.31	High: 1.58	0.67	[0.54, 0.84]
Index of moderated mediation			
Index $= -0.015$			[-0.03, -0.001]

The values represented in column one and column two at low, medium and high denotations represent the 16th, 50th and 84th percentiles of the respective constructs. The lower and upper confidence intervals are given within square [] brackets

however, the effect is reported as low when the strength of BISE is high (Effect $= 0.44$, $p < 0.01$).

Conditional indirect effect analysis

In Haye's ([2013](), [2018]()) PROCESS approach, the conditional indirect effect analysis shows how the indirect effect of the predictor on the final outcome through certain mediator gets moderated or conditioned simultaneously by selected moderators. Following this analysis, we examined the combined effect of NBSSE on BH through the mediation of BE, where CSSI positively moderates NBSSE to BE relationship; and BISE negatively moderates BE to BH relationship. The results are shown in Table [6](). The results indicate that the conditional indirect effect of NBSSE on BH is highest when CSSI is reported as high and BISE is reported as low (Effect $= 0.82$, 95%-BootLLCI $= 0.61$, 95%-BootULCI $= 1.10$). On the contrary, this conditional indirect effect is reported as lowest, when CSSI is low and BISE is reported as high (Effect $= 0.14$, 95%-BootLLCI $= 0.09$, 95%-BootULCI $= 0.19$). This finding is also supported by the index of moderated mediation (Index $= -0.015$, 95%-BootLLCI $= -.03$, 95%-ULCI $= -0.001$). Thus, the results indicate that the positive indirect effect of NBSSE on BH via BE gets positively moderated by CSSI and simultaneously gets negatively moderated by BISE.

In addition, to understand the effects of the significant moderators better, we also plotted and analysed the moderating effect of CSSI on NBSSE to BE relationship, and the moderating effect of BISE on BE to BH relationship.

(a)

(b)
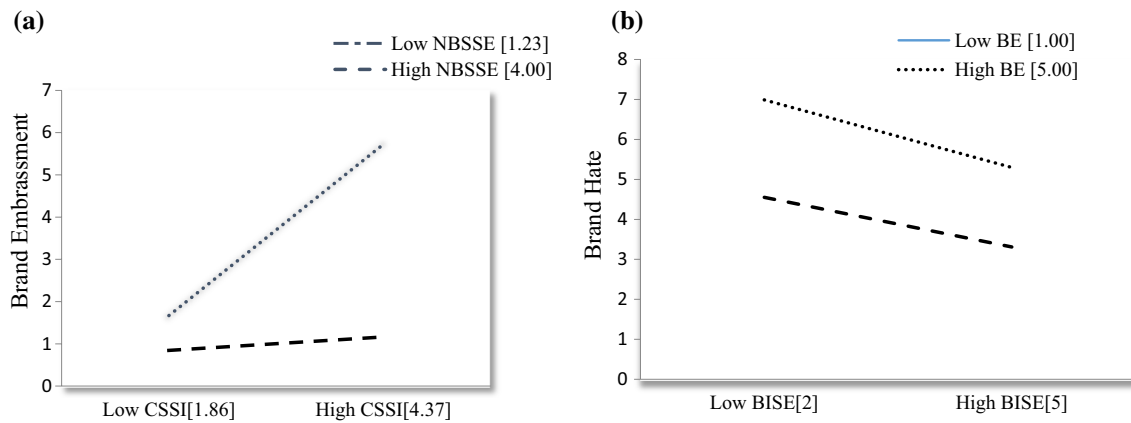
Fig. 3 **a** The NBSSE×CSSI interaction effect on BE. **b** The BE×BISE interaction effect on BH. *Note* High and low denotations, respectively, denote the values at 16th and 84th percentile of the respective variables. The calculated values of the effects at these two levels are given within the parentheses []. All abbreviations representing the constructs are same as Fig. 1

Table 7 Moderation analysis of gender

Parameter	Dependent variables	
	BE	BH
	Coefficients	Coefficients
Constant	−0.001	4.67
NBSSE	1.09**	−0.08*
Gender	−0.03[ns]	0.15[ns]
BE	–	0.24**
NBSSE*gender	−0.01[ns]	–
BE*gender	–	−0.005[ns]

ns insignificant estimate

*Significant at 0.05 level

**Significant at 0.01 level

Figure 3a, b pictorially shows the directions of the moderations. Figure 3a shows the direction of the CSSI moderation between NBSSE and BE. In support of the results, the upward sloping lines indicate the positive moderation of CSSI. Further, it also shows that when CSSI is on the lower side, NBSSE carries a little impact on BE. However, when the CSSI is on the higher side, NBSSE is critical in developing BE. Similarly, as shown in Fig. 3b, downward sloping lines indicate the negative moderation of BISE between BE and BH. From the plot, it is visible that when the BISE level is low, BE carries a powerful impact on BH. However, when the BISE level is high, BE exerts a relatively less effect on BH.

Gender moderation test

We also conducted a separate moderation analysis of gender between both NBSSE to BE and BE to BH relationships (Model 58, Hayes 2013, 2018). Model 58 is applicable when one moderator moderates both mediating paths. This analysis was performed to verify the existence of any kind of probable confounding effect exerted by the gender differences on the stated relationships as hypothesized in H6a and H6b. Gender moderation test results are shown in Table 7. As shown in Table 7, one regression is run examining the moderating effect of gender on the effect of NBSSE on BE; as well as another regression is run examining the moderating effect of gender on the effect of BE on BH. However, the results of the moderation analysis did not provide any statistical support for the moderating effect of gender on both NBSSE to BE ($\beta = -0.01$, $p > 0.05$), and BE to BH ($\beta = -0.005$, $p > 0.05$) path relationships. This non-significant effect of gender is in line with the findings of Edelmann et al. (1989). The blank values in Table 7 were not relevant for analysis. Hence, H6a and H6b were not supported.

Finally, Table 7 shows the summary results of testing all our hypotheses, whether the hypotheses were finally accepted or rejected (Table 8).

Table 8 Summary of hypotheses testing results

Hypotheses	Supported/not supported
H1: Negative brand social self-expressiveness positively affects brand embarrassment	Supported
H2: Brand embarrassment positively affects brand hate	Supported
H3: Brand embarrassment mediates the relationship between negative brand social self-expressiveness and brand hate	Supported
H4: Consumer's susceptibility to social influence positively moderates the relationship between negative brand social self-expressiveness and brand embarrassment	Supported
H5: Brand inner self-expressiveness negatively moderates the relationship between brand embarrassment and brand hate	Supported
H6a: Gender moderates the relationship between negative brand social self-expressiveness and brand embarrassment such that the moderation of female is more positive than male	Not supported
H6b: Gender moderates the relationship between brand embarrassment and brand hate such that the moderation of female is more positive than male	Not supported

Discussion and implications

Theoretical implications

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in examining the connection between brand embarrassment and brand hate, two recently researched negative consumer–brand relationship concepts, in the context of consuming an embarrassing brand (like Nano). The empirical findings show that brand embarrassment and brand hate are largely connected through consumer's perceptions of brand inner and social self-expressiveness. Study results empirically support that the mediation of brand embarrassment in the relationship between negative brand social self-expressiveness and brand hate is conditionally moderated by brand inner self-expressiveness and individual's susceptibility to interpersonal influence. For example, a consumer might have purchased Nano due to its compactness (Rediff.com 2008) representing brand inner self-expressiveness, and later while driving Nano in front of others experienced a negative social self-expressiveness which might be due to Nano's poor man's car image (The Times of India 2012) or low brand prestige. Experiencing such negative social self-expressiveness leading to brand embarrassment would be intensified by individual's susceptibility to interpersonal influence. However, the effect of brand embarrassment on brand hate would simultaneously be mitigated by perceived brand inner self-expressiveness. All the proposed inter-relationships are both theoretically and empirically supported by our research.

Though Walsh et al. (2016) show that brand embarrassment negatively impacts brand purchase intention, our study findings support that this negative impact is context specific, and in the context of a highly inner self-expressive brand, this negative impact would be mitigated. The study findings support that a negative social self-expressive brand can also have a positive inner self-expressive attributes, as social self-expressiveness and inner self-expressiveness of brand are two distinct constructs (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Wallace et al. 2014) as validated through the discriminant validity test in this research. Our study shows that negative brand social self-expressiveness can predict brand embarrassment due to the incongruity (Hegner et al. 2017) between brand image and desirable social self-image that individual wants to portray through his/her association with the brand. The study findings empirically validate that brand embarrassment can generate brand hate when the embarrassing brand hurts individual's desirable social self, and the individual will like to dis-identify (Lee et al. 2009) with such a brand. However, the positive effect of brand embarrassment on consumer's possible brand hate can be attenuated by the negative moderation of a brand's inner self-expressiveness. The theoretical model tested also supports the fact that brand inner self-expressiveness cannot be the reason behind brand embarrassment, as consumption embarrassment is a publicly (rather than privately) felt negative emotion (Dahl et al. 2001; Grant and Walsh 2009). The study findings support this aspect also by quantitatively examining the role played by susceptibility to social influence in positively moderating the effect of negative brand social self-expressiveness on brand embarrassment. In summary, the theoretical contribution of the study model mostly lies in empirically examining the relationship between brand embarrassment and brand hate under the conditional moderation of brand inner self-expressiveness.

Managerial implications

Our model has a significant relevance for the marketers of embarrassing brands like Nano car. The study findings suggest that an embarrassing brand also can survive in

the market by enhancing its inner self-expressive value. The marketers of such embarrassing brands must target consumers who score low on susceptibility to social influence (psychographic segmentation variable) and high on perceiving the brand to be inner self-expressive (lifestyle based segmentation variable). Individual scoring low on susceptibility to social influence will not be greatly impacted by the negative social self-expressiveness of the brand, and as such, their felt brand embarrassment will be low. These are the people who do not care much what others are thinking about them. The bull's eye market segment of such an embarrassing brand should also give much importance on enhancing brand inner self-expressiveness while purchasing and consuming the brand, where brand inner self-expressiveness refers to the degree to which an individual feels that "the brand mirrors the real me" (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006, p. 84). Consumer's tendency to ignore social evaluations (low CSSI), and a strong focus on brand inner self-expressiveness (compared to social self-expressiveness) will attenuate the indirect positive effect of negative brand social self-expressiveness on brand hate via eliciting brand embarrassment. Targeting low CSSI consumers will ensure a lesser elicitation of brand embarrassment, and the brand embarrassment elicited this way will not lead to severe brand hate if the brand is highly inner self-expressive. Thus, these target customers will not completely hate or contempt (Sternberg 2003) the embarrassing brand, but remain loyal to such brand, and continue consuming the embarrassing brand till the brand remains strongly inner self-expressive in spite of being ridiculed by others in the society.

Limitations and future research directions

Though we proposed product approach and the item parcelling as a useful technique in analysing moderating relationships, it also has some limitations. Firstly, it has been indicated that while creating the products using the items parcels to generate parameter estimates, there is a possibility that the products of these parcels may not be normally distributed (Marsh et al. 2004). Hence, the standard estimation techniques (e.g. MLM) are not appropriate in this situation. Our model has tested the role played by only consumer susceptibility to social influence in shaping the impact of negative brand social self-expressiveness on brand embarrassment. There can be several other moderators as shown by Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a) the roles played by which should also be quantitatively tested. Our study model is applicable largely when negative social self is created due to poor brand prestige value. The model may not be significantly applicable in situations where negative brand social self-expressiveness is created due to any

factor other than poor brand prestige value as mentioned by Sarkar and Sarkar (2017a). The model should also be tested across different genders, age groups and social classes to understand how brand embarrassment can be shaped differently by the moderators identified across different social groups. We have tested the model for a single brand; however, testing the model across various brands in different product and service categories will shed more light on the generalizability of our study model.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest All authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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