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Hate is a Strong Word: The Influence of Hate-Acknowledging Advertising on Brand Outcomes

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Hate is a Strong Word: The Influence of Hate-Acknowledging Advertising on Brand Outcomes

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my hero, Dr. Brian Monahan, who taught me never to stop learning or laughing.
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ABSTRACT

Given a lack of tactics for addressing brand hate, most managers tend to ignore brand haters, and instead dedicate their resources towards consumers who like or love their brand. Similarly, relative to the volume of research on positive brand emotions, the academic literature exploring negative brand emotions is limited. Moreover, research indicates that compared to positive brand information, negative brand information is more diagnostic, and ultimately more damaging.

In contrast to such findings and practices, this dissertation proposes a strategy whereby using advertising to openly acknowledge that a brand is hated (i.e. hate-acknowledging advertising) can be advantageous for corporate polarizing brands. The findings suggest that, compared to a traditional ad (i.e., an ad which only focuses on positive brand attributes or information), a hate-acknowledging produces higher levels of brand trust through the mediating influence of ad credibility. This research also demonstrates that hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) has a stronger and more favorable influence on consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth, and that consumer brand emotions moderate this effect. Specifically, the favorable influence of hate-acknowledging on positive word of mouth intensifies with higher levels of consumer love towards a polarizing brand.
CHAPTER ONE: WHAT’S THE PROBLEM?

Have you ever tasted Miracle Whip dressing? You probably either love it or hate it. At least that’s the consumer insight behind a recent attention-grabbing campaign for the product brand. Prior to the campaign’s launch, consumer researchers at Kraft, Miracle Whip’s parent company, find that while many people love Miracle Whip, many others truly detest it (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel 2013). This finding gave way to a simple yet powerful insight. *Miracle Whip is a polarizing product brand.* It is this insight that spawns the creation of an advertising campaign touting the brand’s polarizing nature and communicating the extent that consumers hate Miracle Whip. Taglines such as, “Some people swear by us, others swear at us,” proudly acknowledge the existence of Miracle Whip’s brand haters, as well as its lovers.

The campaign attracts a good deal of attention from industry press. While some experts offer favorable reviews of the Miracle Whip campaign, others describe it using words including *risky, unusual* (Dellman, 2011), *provocative,* (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013), and *controversial* (Wong 2011). Justin Parnell, Miracle Whip’s Brand Manager, stands in firm support of the ads stating, “Miracle Whip tends to inspire a polarizing reaction in consumers. So, rather than deny this truth, we’re embracing it” (quoted in Wong, 2011). However, in the absence of empirical data, it is difficult for those outside of Kraft to make any determination regarding the campaign’s in-market success and its potential to prove useful for other brands.
The Miracle Whip advertising campaign represents the exception rather than the rule when it comes to risky and unconventional marketing tactics. In fact, despite the growth of the marketing vehicles available today, most managers and advertising agencies are risk averse, often deciding to play it safe and sticking to conventional ad techniques rather than taking a chance on testing riskier, more novel advertising communication approaches (Godin, 2002). In his best-selling book, *The Purple Cow*, Seth Godin (2002) explains why playing it safe is problematic. “The old stuff isn’t working. And we know why: because, as consumers, we’re too busy to pay attention to advertising” (p. 12). Even more problematic is the extent to which marketers bombard consumers with advertising. Research indicates that the average consumer will remember fewer than 5% of the nearly 400 ads he or she sees each day (Johnson, 2014).

The current research attempts to address this problem by empirically testing a new advertising technique that answers concerns related to the inability of many advertisements to “break through the clutter” and make an impression on consumers (Johnson, 2014). Specifically, this research introduces *hate-acknowledging advertising* (HAA) into the marketing literature. This technique, which takes inspiration from the Kraft Miracle Whip campaign, represents a type of advertising in which brands openly acknowledge that they are the target of consumer brand hate.

Hate-acknowledging advertising not only offers an opportunity to investigate a new and unconventional advertising tactic, but also addresses two existing and notable gaps in the marketing literature: brand hate and brand polarization. Currently, the quantity of research in the marketing literature exploring negative brand emotions pales in comparison to the quantity
exploring brand love, and other positive brand emotions (Bryson, Atwal, and Hultén, 2013; Zarantonello et al., 2016). Academics acknowledge this discrepancy and explain that, “The study of negative brand phenomena is in its infancy and needs further investigation” (Veloutsou and Guzmàn, 2017, p. 5).

This asymmetry between the volume of marketing literature exploring positive vs. negative brand emotions is somewhat puzzling given there is ample evidence to suggest that negative emotions, such as hate, can be hazardous to a brand’s success. In fact, brand hate is “perhaps, the most intense and consequential negative emotion that consumers may feel toward brands” (Zarantonello et al., 2016, p. 11). Brand hate leads to a number of damaging attitudinal and behavioral outcomes including negative brand evaluations (van Noort and Willemsen, 2012), vindictive word of mouth (Alexandrov, Lilly, and Babakus, 2013; Salvatori, 2006; Sheeran, 2002), revenge-seeking activities, and brand avoidance (Bryson, Atwal, and, Hultén 2013; Grégoire, Tripp, and Legoux, 2009). More importantly, brand hate is problematic for managers as strategies for managing or leveraging brand hate remain elusive such that most managers will outright ignore brand haters (Dooley, 2012; Veloutsou and Guzmàn, 2017). The current research seeks to address this challenge by offering an advertising tactic that encourages managers to confront brand hate head-on, rather than turning a blind eye and ignoring it.

Specifically, hate-acknowledging advertising provides managers of certain brands the opportunity to turn the problem of brand hate to their advantage by leveraging academic and practical findings suggesting that brand hate may not be all bad, but rather an indication of greatness that should be embraced rather than feared. Put simply, “If you’re remarkable, it’s likely that some people won’t like you. That’s part of the definition of remarkable,” (Godin, 2002, p. 49). Overall, there is practical evidence to suggest that when a brand experiences hate,
it is more likely to also experience above average levels of love (Kucuk, 2008), a phenomenon researchers term brand polarization (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013).

Brand polarization is by no means an uncommon phenomenon. In fact, it affects a wide array of brand types including product brands (e.g., Miracle Whip), corporate brands (e.g., Apple), sports teams (e.g., Yankees), political figures (e.g., President Trump), celebrities (e.g., Kim Kardashian), and so on. Despite its prevalence in the marketplace, brand polarization, like brand hate, receives extremely limited attention in the marketing literature (Jayasimha and Billore, 2015). In fact, research on brand polarization was almost non-existent in the marketing literature until recently. In 2013, two years after the launch of Miracle Whip’s campaign, Luo, Wiles, and Raithel (2013) first introduced the concept of polarizing brands into the marketing literature. These authors define such brands as those with a “large number of fervent supporters and passionate detractors” (p. 30). However, to date, research on the topic remains extremely scant despite the relevance and prevalence of brand polarization.

Although some researchers acknowledge the paradoxical tendency for brand hate and brand love to co-exist (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Holt, 2002), it is fair to say that academic research lags behind industry practice when it comes to exploring marketing strategies related to polarizing brands. In fact, Miracle Whip is not the only brand to highlight polarization through advertising.

In 1999, Marmite, a British product brand of food spread with a distinctive, strong, salty flavor launches a “Love it or Hate It” campaign. The campaign is a big win for Unilever, Marmite’s parent company, as it ultimately brings, “an end to five years of stagnating sales and a weakening brand” and also leads to “sustained, penetration-led growth of around 5% each year for the next five years” (Hollis, 2011).
Similarly, in 2014, Spirit Airlines, a low cost, no frills airline company, launches the “Hate Thousand Miles” campaign (Tuttle, 2014). Through this campaign, Spirit invites consumers to share the reasons they hate Spirit airlines in return for free airline miles. This initiative also includes a series of humorous online commercials, one of which begins by stating, “You wouldn’t believe all the hate Spirit’s heard.” The spot continues with examples of reasons why consumers express hate toward Spirit. For example, the Spirit commercial includes a tweet in which a customer writes, “I’d rather eat broken glass than ever deal with Spirit Airlines again. Worst customer service imaginable.” This campaign marks a bold attempt by Spirit Airlines to tackle brand hate at the broader, corporate (vs. product) brand level.

There is a lack of empirical evidence supporting the favorable outcomes company executives claim to achieve using such tactics. Thus, this research attempts to address this problem by bringing hate-acknowledging advertising into the marketing literature and empirically validating its favorable influence on brand outcomes. Specifically, two studies examine the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on brand trust and positive word of mouth.

This investigation addresses a number of current academic and managerial problems. First, it introduces a new, non-conventional type of advertising to both the marketing literature and to industry practitioners. This new advertising answers the call for more novel marketing tactics that allow communications to break through marketing clutter and capture consumer attention (Godin, 2002; Johnson, 2014). It also provides managerial tools for addressing brand hate and offers an alternative to current practices, which largely entails simply turning the other cheek and ignoring brand haters (Dooley, 2012). Finally, this dissertation provides much needed research on polarizing brands, which are not only prevalent in the market place, but also
deserving of attention in the marketing literature given the unique circumstances and challenges these brands bring to light.

Finally, the majority of industry examples (e.g., Miracle Whip and Marmite) confront brand polarization at the product vs. corporate level. In contrast, to offer greater academic and managerial impact, the current research focuses on examining this phenomenon and the corresponding appropriateness of a hate-acknowledging advertising strategy at the corporate vs. product brand level. The following section discusses this delineation in more detail.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The current research explores hate-acknowledging advertising in the context of polarizing corporate brands. The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a “name, term, sign, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers” (ama.org/resources). In practice, there are often two layers involved in a firm’s branding strategy: the corporate layer and the product layer (Magill as quoted in Bureau, 2014). The corporate brand, or the organization or institutional brand, “defines the firm that will deliver and stand by the offering the consumer will buy and use” (Aaker, 2004, p. 6), while the product brand represents the name that identifies the specific offering the consumer ultimately purchases and consumes (Thomas, Arora, and Shainesh, 2009).

The relative role of the corporate brand in marketing communications and product offerings varies by company. In some cases, firms universally brand their product or service offerings using the corporate name. Academics refer to this as monolithic branding (Berens et al., 2005). The majority of service companies employ a monolithic brand strategy such that the
corporation is the brand (Berry, 2000). One such example is Spirit Airlines, the polarizing corporate brand referenced earlier. While this research does not investigate service firms, it is important to note that corporations that offer tangible goods often differentiate themselves on service quality following the service model of branding by placing greater emphasis on the corporate brand in marketing communications. According to Berry (2000, p.128), “Brand impact shifts from product to company as service plays a greater role in determining customer value.” To clarify this point, consider the Starbucks brand. Starbucks offers many product brands (e.g., Starbucks Frappuccino, Starbucks Refreshers). “Customers patronizing a Starbucks store, however, buy the company brand. Their service experience with Starbucks figures prominently in their perception of the brand” (Berry, 2000, p. 128).

Starbucks represents an example of a firm employing a family branding strategy (Marshall and Johnson, 2015). Family branding describes instances in which individual company product offerings all bear the corporate name in some form (e.g., Heinz Ketchup, Heinz Mustard, and Heinz Relish). In such cases, scholars refer to the corporate brand as the parent brand (Marshall and Johnson, 2015, p. 248) and the product offering becomes the sub-brand. In some family branding structures, the corporate brand may play an extremely dominant role where it functions as a “master brand” (Aaker, 2004, p. 6) playing a highly significant part in corporate communications (e.g., Dell or UPS). In other cases, the corporate brand may be visible, but instead play a more subtle endorser role (i.e., Courtyard by Marriott) (Aaker, 2004; Marshall and Johnson, 2015).

In contrast, some firms, particularly those with multiple business units, choose to brand individual products with a name that is distinct from the corporate brand, a strategy known as stand-alone branding. Proctor & Gamble uses product brand names (e.g., Tide and Pantene)
that bear no association to the corporate brand name.

While, as noted, both product brands (e.g., Miracle Whip and Marmite) and corporate brand names (e.g., Apple, Coca-Cola) experience polarization (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013), the current research focuses exclusively on corporate (vs. product) brands. More specifically, the focal brands in this study represent corporate brands that employ a family branding strategy. Two factors motivate this deliberate decision: 1) research indicating that corporate brand polarization will lead to product brand polarization (as opposed to vice versa) and 2) findings at the corporate brand (vs. product) brand level provide greater managerial value.

Findings in the marketing literature indicate that associations and emotions toward corporate brands transfer to product brands bearing the same name. This is because a corporate brand creates associations in consumers’ minds that reflect “the values, programs, and activities of the firm and these associations, in turn, influence the consumer reception of its products or services” (Keller and Aaker, 1992, p. 356). Specifically, research in the corporate social responsibility literature indicates that the positive influence of consumers’ perceptions of a corporation’s commitment to socially responsible behaviors and motivations has a direct influence on the firm’s product brand evaluations (Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz, 2009).

Similarly, findings in the brand extension domain demonstrate that consumers transfer not only attribute-based associations, but also affect-based associations, from the parent brand to its brand extensions such that negative or positive emotions toward the parent brand are likely to carry over to the newly launched product(s) (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Bhat and Reddy, 2001). This suggests that in the case of polarizing brands, the dichotomy of positive and negative emotions that plague the corporate brand will transfer to products that bear the corporate name. In contrast, prior literature suggests that while brand polarization at the corporate level is likely
to transfer to the product level (when employing a family branding strategy), the reverse flow is less probable. In other words, associations or emotions are not as easily or readily transferable from product to corporate brand (Romeo, 1991). Keller and Aaker (1992) and Romeo (1991) both fail to find any significant dilution to a parent brand due to a product brand failure. Therefore, while corporate and product brand polarization represent the same phenomenon whereby the brand boasts significant populations of lovers and haters (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013), the implications are more far-reaching for polarization at the corporate brand level, particularly in the case of firms using a family branding strategy.

A recent industry example in the fashion sector provides a literal example of the ways in which polarization can transfer from a “parent” brand. In 2007, Ivanka Trump, daughter of President Donald Trump, launches a fashion brand. For some time post-launch, this brand (Ivanka Trump) enjoys significant year-over-year revenue growth driven by increasing consumer demand and distribution gains (Whattles, 2017). However, Ivanka’s brand begins to suffer in the last year as a direct result of negative emotions toward her father, President Donald Trump (D’Innocenzio, 2017).

In 2016, consumers launch a grassroots, multi-media marketing campaign called “Grab Your Wallet” to encourage consumers to boycott retailers carrying Ivanka Trump merchandise (Kramer, 2017). Following this large scale demonstration of vehement brand hate, major retailers drop the Ivanka Trump brand, which results in a strong backlash from enraged Ivanka Trump brand supporters. These brand supporters respond with counter-boycotts, such as the “#BuyIvanka” digital media campaign to voice support for the purchase and distribution of Ivanka Trump merchandise (D’Innocenzio, 2017). D’Innocenzio (2017) explains the dilemma retailers now face when confronting high levels of polarization associated with the Ivanka Trump
brand: “Carry the items and get grief from shoppers opposed to President Donald Trump and his daughter’s role in the White House, or pull the brand and risk facing the ire of Trump supporters.” Although today Ivanka Trump is one of the most polarizing brands in existence, it didn’t begin this way, but instead grew increasingly more polarized “with President Donald Trump’s rise to the White House” (D’Innocenzio 2017). More relevant to this research is the extent to which Ivanka Trump demonstrates the ease of transferring brand polarization from a parent brand to its namesakes.

In contrast, when firms employ a stand-alone branding strategy, it is unlikely that consumers’ positive and/or negative emotions will readily transfer to the product brands within the corporate portfolio. This is often intentional so that multi-brand companies can shield their individual brands from negative experiences, emotions, or information by maintaining distinct corporate and product brands (Marshall and Johnson, 2015). When firms employ a stand-alone branding strategy, consumers often remain unaware of the actual corporate brand that manufactures a loved or hated product. A qualitative survey confirms this phenomenon.

Fifty-seven MTurk respondents ages 18 or older and currently living in the U.S. (61% Male; $M_{Age}=33.91$) participate in this survey. This survey presents consumers with three product brands and asks them to indicate the name of the corporate brand that produces that product (a “don’t know” option was offered). For the first brand, Ben & Jerry’s, only two survey respondents correctly identify the corresponding corporate brand (Unilever). Similarly, just 3% of respondents are able to name Clorox as the parent company of Burt’s Bees, and only 5% of participants know that P&G is the corporate brand for Cover Girl cosmetics. In the majority of cases, consumers indicate that either they do not know the corporate brand or wrongly assume that the corporate brand and product brand are one in the same. These findings are consistent
with prior research suggesting “consumers often do not distinguish between brands and brand manufacturers” (Kim, Park, and Kim, 2014, p. 592).

These results provide further evidence that, in many cases, when firms employ a stand-alone branding strategy, consumers are largely unaware of the corporate brand producing many well-known product brands. In these cases, it is far less likely for brand emotions to transfer from corporate to product brands. Given industry evidence suggesting that brand polarization is likely to have a greater impact when there is a mental link between product and corporate brands (D’Innocenzio, 2017), this research focuses exclusively on the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising at the corporate brand level for family-branded firms.

Corporate (vs. product) brand polarization also has greater implications from a managerial perspective. While the limited amount of academic research on polarizing brands focuses more intently on corporate brand polarization (Luo, Raithel and Wiles, 2013), most industry examples feature polarizing product (vs. corporate) brands (e.g., Miracle Whip and Marmite). Undoubtedly, empirical evidence suggesting the appropriateness of such a tactic at a corporate brand level would be prove useful to practitioners as “a corporate brand provides the ultimate branded house and captures all efficiencies of dialing up a single brand” (Aaker, 2004, p. 10). Put more simply, leveraging the corporate brand in marketing communications creates synergies that improve the clarity of external communications and fosters internal organizational efficiencies. Thus, from a managerial perspective, an exploration of the effect of polarization at the corporate brand level in family branding contexts provides the most far-reaching and valuable implications.
This research explores the potential benefits of hate-acknowledging corporate advertising on two key brand metrics: brand trust and positive word of mouth (WOM), and investigates constructs that potentially explain any effect of HAA on these dependent variables. Specifically, this dissertation empirically tests the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on brand trust and positive word of mouth by comparing it to traditional advertising. Traditional advertising is advertising which, consistent with conventional practices, positions the advertised brand in a positive light and promotes only positive aspects of the brand. A control condition in which consumers do not see an ad provides a benchmark in the research studies. Overall, the objective of this research is to answer the questions below:

**RQ1: What is the effect of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising vs. control condition) on brand trust?**

**RQ2: To what extent does ad credibility mediate the relationship between ad type and brand trust?**

**RQ3: How does hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising vs. control condition) influence consumer intentions to engage in positive WOM on behalf of a polarizing brand?**
**RQ4:** How does brand trust influence the relationship, if any, between ad type and positive WOM?

**RQ5:** To what extent do brand love/hate emotions moderate the relationship between hate-acknowledging advertising and consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth?

David Ogilvy, who is widely regarded as the father of modern advertising, famously states that, “Advertising people who ignore research are as dangerous as generals who ignore decodes of army signals” (Ogilvy, 1983, p. 43). Decades later, this rings true more than ever, as both practitioners and academics continue the journey to understand what constitutes “good advertising” and acknowledge that, “despite our many pretensions to the contrary, there's an awful lot we don't know about advertising” (Hoffman, 2009). The five questions above, which drive the current research, offer a framework for exploring the role of advertising in contributing to relevant and important brand outcomes (i.e., brand trust and positive word of mouth). These questions continue to explore how and why hate-acknowledging advertising influences consumers and whether HAA represents a not yet explored tactic that may have valuable and practical managerial and academic implications.

Specifically, Research Questions 1 and 2 explore whether hate-acknowledging advertising (compared with traditional advertising or control conditions) could be more effective in creating brand trust and whether ad credibility mediates this positive influence. The answers to these questions are important for many reasons, not the least of which is that they disrupt the paradigm that submits that advertising should offer only positive brand information.
Industry research confirms that consumers today are more skeptical than ever about advertising (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2013). In fact, a recent study indicates “that 84 percent of millennials don’t trust traditional advertising—outright,” and that over 75% of adults “see advertising as deliberately manipulative” (DeMers, 2016). In addition, consumer trust toward 

*brands* is at an all-time low (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2013). This is also true for corporate 

(vs. product) brands, given that many “corporations are seen as greedy, power-hungry, and uncaring of personal needs” (Hoffman, 2009, adcontrarian.com). This loss of trust is contributing to a profit decline for many polarizing corporate brands, such as Kraft and Kellogg’s, as consumers migrate from these large, well-known brands to smaller, niche brands, which they perceive (correctly or not) as being more transparent and trustworthy (Schultz, 2015).

“Quite simply, big brands are losing one of their most valuable assets: consumer trust” (Schultz, 2015). As such, the first research question in this dissertation explores whether HAA can improve brand trust perceptions toward a polarizing corporate brand.

Addressing the second research question posed in this dissertation will aid in determining whether credibility explains the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on brand trust. At a deeper level, empirical evidence investigating this question will provide valuable information concerning many widely-accepted principles dictating what constitutes credible and impactful advertising. Specifically, if consumers rate hate-acknowledging advertising as more credible, and if this ad credibility explains increases in brand trust, then managers of polarizing corporate brands would be well served to consider the implications of these findings in developing their message strategies. Similarly, such findings would offer an alternative perspective to current advertising research and practices by indicating that negative, but honest, information in marketing communications can be more effective in improving trust toward corporate polarizing
brands than the commonly accepted practice of using advertising to communicate *only* positive and flattering brand information (i.e., traditional advertising).

Research Questions 3, 4, and 5 investigate the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on positive word of mouth. There is no shortage of evidence indicating the power of word of mouth in favorably influencing a variety of consumer outcomes including purchase intent, brand attitude, and brand image (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998). However, marketers struggle to find proven methods for encouraging consumers to engage in positive word of mouth, often resorting to costly incentives to motivate this behavior including giveaways, coupons, and other discounts (Grauer, 2014). Therefore, understanding whether hate-acknowledging positively influences word of mouth will provide valuable insights to practitioners and academics who seek to understand forces that motivate this behavior. Additionally, while prior research provides evidence that love motivates many pro-brand behaviors, answering this final research question will provide much needed insight into specific and controllable marketing communication strategies that have the power to rally brand lovers in a manner that is advantageous to polarizing corporate brands.
CHAPTER TWO: HOW CAN HATE-ACKNOWLEDGING ADVERTISING HELP POLARIZING BRANDS?

The academic literature defines advertising as “any paid form of non-personal communication about an organization, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor” (Belch and Belch, 2015, p. 767). Firms spend nearly $20 billion annually purchasing advertising media to promote various aspects of their businesses including their corporate image, their brands, and their products and services (Statista, 2017). Advertising represents a “valuable tool for building company or brand equity” and a “powerful way to provide consumers with information to influence their perceptions” (Belch and Belch, 2015, p. 19). Despite the numerous message strategies and mediums available to advertisers today, the nature of advertising supports a general tendency of firms to use this marketing vehicle to provide their target audience with positive information to encourage favorable brand attitudes and behaviors. While it makes logical sense to assume firms would not use marketing dollars to create ad campaigns that did anything but provide positive brand information, the current research offers a less conventional approach to commonly accepted advertising practices.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

As suggested earlier, this research proposes that hate-acknowledging advertising, or
advertising that openly acknowledging a hated brand, will have a more favorable influence on certain brand outcomes than typical advertising that offers only positive brand information (henceforth termed traditional advertising). This research explores the potential impact of hate-acknowledging advertising in the context of corporate polarizing brands. The conceptual framework below (Figure 1) displays the specific constructs explored in this research: brand trust, positive word of mouth, ad credibility, and brand love/hate emotions, as well as the ad type manipulation driving the studies. Additionally, Figure 1 provides an overview of the testable hypotheses presented throughout this chapter following the relevant literature review and theoretical foundations.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model
According to the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer, consumers consider trust and transparency as the most important brand attributes, more important than even product quality (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2013). Similarly, a recent Nielsen survey produces a list of the top ten most trusted U.S. brands. While the list includes both corporate and product brands (e.g., Ghirardelli Chocolate and Q-Tips, respectively), researchers at Nielsen note the commonality among the winners as being those brands “with a long history of consistently delivering on their brand promise” (Nielsen, 2015) providing additional support for the importance of trust in creating and sustaining brands. Indeed, industry experts suggest that brand trust is the key to addressing numerous challenges brand managers face, particularly the challenge of brand hate (Thomas, 2014).

The literature often uses the term brand trust interchangeably when referring to trust toward a product brand, parent, or corporate brand. This is because the term is conceptually consistent regardless of which type of brand (corporate or product) is the target of the trust. Broadly speaking, brand trust represents a relational construct that develops under conditions of uncertainty and manifests as a consumer’s belief the brand will behave in ways that are consistent with the best interests of the consumer (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester, 2004; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Thomas, Arora, and Shaines, 2009).

Background on Trust

From an academic perspective, the study of trust has roots in social psychology where researchers categorize trust as an interpersonal construct and define it as the expectancy held by
an individual that the communication of another is believable (Rotter, 1967; Rotter, 1971). Trust represents a belief on the part of the trustor that the object of his or her trust will not harm or knowingly take opportunistic advantage of them (Rotter, 1980). Psychologists acknowledge the important role trust plays in developing healthy and productive relationships between individuals (Rotter, 1967, 1971) and social groups (Mirowsky and Ross, 1986), such that it is an “inherent characteristic of any valuable social interaction” (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001, p.1241).

Research examining the positive influence of trust extends beyond social relationships and into business contexts, such as organizational behavior (McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany, 1998), general management (Gulati, 1995; Lane and Bachman, 1996), politics (Newton, 2001), and economics (Williamson, 1993). For example, organizational behavior research indicates that trust within an organization (i.e., between employees) has a positive influence on numerous factors including team productivity, collaboration effectiveness, and strategic coordination (Doney, Cannon, and Mullen, 1998). Similarly, management scholars find that trust between or among organizations is crucial to building sustainable and productive business partnerships (Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2002).

Trust In the Marketing Literature

Not surprisingly, trust takes a prominent role in the marketing literature as well. Some scholars attribute the initial emergence of trust as a focus in marketing research to a heightened desire of scholars to expand business interactions to “include relational properties” (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990 p. 689). Trust is at the center of relationship building in marketing relationships as it is one of the key factors that distinguishes relationships from transactions
Relational exchanges describe partnerships characterized by cooperative actions and mutual adjustments of both parties, a sharing of the benefits and burdens of the exchange, and planning for future exchanges (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). In contrast, transactional exchanges are discrete, one-time occurrences in which participants do not anticipate future exchanges and, as such, do not feel a sense of obligation to the other party (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Relational exchanges, relative to transactional exchanges, are longer in tenure and more reflective of an ongoing process than a one-time event (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and are more valuable to firms. As such, academics examine the role of trust across a variety of relational exchanges (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol, 2002). Specifically, marketing scholars investigate the influence of trust in channel and distribution alliances (Andaleeb, 1995), service partnerships (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990; Johnson and Grayson, 2005), buyer/seller relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987), buyer/supplier interactions (Doney, Cannon, and Mullen, 1998), and consumer/firm relationships (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999).

Since scholars study trust across an expansive range of contexts, the marketing literature offers many definitions of the term (Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2002). Dwyer and Oh (1987 p. 347) examine trust between channel partners and define it as “a party’s expectations that another desires coordination, will fulfill its obligations, and will pull its weight in the relationship.” Additionally, these scholars indicate that opportunism and trust are “intricately related facets of channel relationships,” such that when one party trusts another, it is willing to risk potential opportunism and depend upon the other party to achieve a goal (Dwyer and Oh, 1987, p. 347). Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990, p. 70) conceptualize trust between a sales person and customer as “a confident belief that the salesperson can be relied upon to behave in such a
manner that the long-term interest of the customer will be served.” Consistent with these scholars, Doney and Cannon (1997, p.37) study the role of trust in relationships between buyer and seller firms and assert that trust represents “the perceived credibility and benevolence of a target of trust.” In their research on trust between firms, Anderson and Narus (1990, p. 45) echo this notion that trust entails perceptions of benevolence with the following definition: “the firm’s belief that another company will perform actions that will result in positive outcomes for the firm, as well as not take unexpected actions that would result in negative outcomes for the firm.”

One of the most popular and oft cited definitions of trust offered by the marketing literature comes from Morgan and Hunt (1994, p.23) who conceptualize trust as the “confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity.” Morgan and Hunt (1994) provide this definition with the intention of accommodating all forms of relational exchanges in marketing rather than a specific type of partnership. Like Morgan and Hunt (1994), other marketing scholars contend that regardless as to the nature of the exchange, the key dimensions of trust remain unchanged (Hess and, 2005). Thus, while the marketing literature offers numerous definitions of the term trust (Atuahene-Gima and Li, 2002), from a conceptual standpoint, commonalities emerge (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001). First, consensus exists that trust applies only in situations of vulnerability and uncertainty on the part of the trustor (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Moorman, Zaltma, and Desphande, 1992). That is, “regardless of the level of analysis, trusting parties must be vulnerable to some extent for trust to be operational” (Doney and Cannon, 1997, p. 36). Conceptualizations of trust almost universally indicate that trust represents a feeling of security or confidence on the part of the trustor (Moorman, Zaltman, and Deshpande 1992; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).
Additionally, central to the majority of conceptualizations is the trustor’s belief that the trusted party has positive intentions and is concerned for the trustor’s welfare. They will act in the best interest of the relationship and not purposefully seek to mislead the trusting party (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Ritter and Geersbro, 2012). Scholars describe this dimension of trust using a variety of terms including *altruism* (Frost, Stimpson, and Maughan, 1978), *integrity* (Hess and Story, 2005) and, most commonly, *benevolence* (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Geyskens, Steenkamp, and Kumar, 1998).

*Brand Trust*

A more specific form of trust, *brand trust*, emerges in the marketing literature following a robust stream of research documenting the tendency of consumers to form long-term relationships with both corporate and product brands as they do with people (Fournier, 1998). Today the prevailing view among marketing scholars is that consumers are capable of experiencing emotions and cognitions toward brands (e.g., love, trust, passion, attachment, etc.) that are consistent with those generally applied in interpersonal relationships (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Fournier, 1998).

Academic literature provides evidence that trust is a crucial ingredient in any type of relationship, and that the relationship between a consumer and a brand (corporate or product) is no exception (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Erdem and Swait, 2004). Hess and Story (2005, p. 313) explain, “Any personal relationship, whether interpersonal or between a person and a brand, is built on trust.” Academic scholars tout the importance of brand trust as an “essential ingredient” for cultivating successful consumer-brand relationships (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999, p. 71). Practitioners echo this sentiment with some industry experts even proclaiming that
trust is the most important attribute a brand can possess (Bainbridge, 1997; Prahaland, 2011). Both camps agree that brand trust is of paramount importance in developing fruitful consumer-brand relationships (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001) and sustaining competitive advantage (Ha, 2004). Put simply, “the ultimate goal of marketing is to generate an intense bond between the consumer and the brand, and the main ingredient of this bond is trust” (Hiscock, 2001, p. 32).

The literature examining brand trust reveals conceptual consistencies between trust in any marketing exchange and the trust between a consumer and a brand. First, researchers submit that brand trust, like interpersonal or inter-organizational trust, is relevant only under conditions of perceived risk (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001), meaning the trustor necessarily possesses some degree of uncertainty regarding “the motives and behaviors of the trustee,” as well as an inability to control the outcomes of the exchange (Sichtmann, 2007, p. 1,001). For brand trust to arise, the consumer must be vulnerable to some extent given a situation of imperfect information regarding a brand’s capabilities and motivations (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001). Brand trust represents the willingness of the trustor (the consumer) to be vulnerable to the actions of the trustee (the brand) and thereby functions as a mechanism to absorb the risk and uncertainty experienced by the consumer (Sichtmann, 2007).

More specifically, the outcome of the consumer’s vulnerability in the context of brand trust is the consumer’s hope or belief that the brand will not opportunistically take advantage of them through actions, such as making false or misleading claims or portraying an image that is not consistent with the brand’s true nature or capabilities (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Brand trust reflects the strength of a consumer’s belief that the brand is honest and will not attempt to lie or deceive (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001). When a consumer trusts a brand, they
have confidence that the brand will deliver desirable outcomes “rather than what is feared” (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001, p.188), a premise that is consistent with conceptualization of trust is any marketing exchange (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Doney and Cannon, 1997). Thus, brand trust serves to reduce “the uncertainty in an environment in which consumers feel especially vulnerable because they know they can rely on the trusted brand” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, p. 82).

Consistent with former conceptualizations of trust in the marketing (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990; Dwyer and Oh, 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and branding (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Hess and Story, 2005) literature, the current research conceptualizes brand trust as a consumer’s confidence in the honesty and intentions of a brand in situations entailing risk and uncertainty. This definition captures the “expectancy conceptualization” component of trust that prevails in the marketing literature, as well across other disciplines, as most scholars agree, “risk is a critical condition for trust to influence choice and behavior” (Delgado-Ballester, 2004, p. 574). Additionally, consistent with previous scholars, the current research considers brand trust a multi-dimensional construct that includes a cognitive belief that the brand is going to deliver what is expected and not lie or mislead the consumer (i.e., the brand is honest) and an affective assessment that the intentions of the brand are genuine (i.e. the brand is benevolent) (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Reast, 2005). The incorporation of both an affective and cognitive element implies two distinct dimensions associated with brand trust: the consumer’s assumption that the brand will hold true to its promises and the consumer’s belief that the brand will hold the consumer’s interests ahead of its own (Delgado-Ballester, 2004).
Although the current research specifically examines brand trust using corporate brands, the conceptualization of brand trust proposed is equally applicable to product or service brands. Previous scholars indicate that regardless of the unit of analysis, conceptualizations of trust remain consistent across the marketing exchange being examined (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Delgado-Ballester (2004) develops a brand trust scale that includes the affective and cognitive dimensions guiding the current conceptualization of trust and finds that consumers operationalize brand trust in the same way regardless of the product class in which the brand operates. As discussed, Fournier (1998) demonstrates, through extensive qualitative research, that consumers form relationships with brands as they do with people such that interpersonal constructs including love, commitment, and trust are applicable to consumer-brand relations. Fournier’s (1998) subjects further demonstrate that these relationships are equal whether they form between consumers and product brands (e.g., Jean and Progresso breadcrumbs) or consumers and corporate brands (e.g., Karen and Reebok). Similarly, scholars conceptualize trust in the same manner when it refers to product brands, corporate brands, or even retail brands (Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011; Lee and Lin, 2005). Thus, the unit of analysis may be any dyadic relationship between individuals or groups of individuals, such as organizations, firms, or brands (Becerra and Gupta, 1999). In the current research, the unit of analysis is polarizing corporate brands.

Often corporate brand trust influences product brand trust. “When an entity is trusted, smaller entities that come under its fold tend to be trusted as well because they belong to the larger entity” (Lau and Lee, 1999, p. 367). Additionally, brands may serve as a surrogate in cases where consumers cannot directly develop a relationship with the corporation. In other words, as far as the direct contact between consumers and companies or brand marketers is not
possible, consumers develop a relationship with brands (Sheth and Parvatiyar 1995). Thus, the brand trust conceptualization applies to the face of the company with which the consumer forms a bond, whether it is a product brand or a corporate brand.

Although some authors submit that brand trust emerges only because of consumption experience (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999), crucial to the current research is evidence suggesting that brand trust can develop not only from actual product consumption, but also from other forms of brand experience. Brand experience is the degree of familiarity with a brand obtained through experience with a brand-related stimulus, which includes exposure to any marketing communication vehicle, such as an advertisement, website, or package design (Garretson and Niedrich, 2004; Sichtmann, 2007). Therefore, brand trust is influenced by the consumer’s evaluation of any direct (e.g., consumption, trial, usage) or indirect (e.g., advertising, word of mouth) contact with the brand (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Keller, 1993; Lau and Lee, 1999). Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009) examine the role trust plays for consumers who may not have prior brand consumption experience, but who have to make a purchase decision for a service brand. These authors state, “Trust is a requisite in service marketing for maintaining the relationship between customers and service providers, because customers often have to make a purchase decision before they actually experience the service” (Kim, Kim, and Kim, 2009, p. 53). Thus, the proposed conceptualization of brand trust is necessarily broad in order to explore the aggregate effect of hate-acknowledging advertising on brand trust by including consumers who lack first-hand brand consumption experience (Kucuk, 2008).

Trust in an Agency Theory Framework

Agency theory is “directed at the ubiquitous agency relationship, in which one party (the principal) delegates work to another (the agent), who performs that work” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.
Agency theory applies to many relationships in the marketing literature as “the essence of marketing is exchange” and the agency relationship is a significant component of almost all transactions or exchanges (Bergen, Dutta, and Walker, 1992, p.2).

Agency theory is concerned with optimizing contracts (informal or formal) to govern the behaviors of these entities (principle and agent) in a manner that addresses the problems that arise in agency relationships (Eisenhardt, 1989). Specifically, problems arise in agency/principle arrangements when the principle and agent have differing goals or objectives, and/or when it is difficult for the principle to evaluate accurately the extent to which the agent is behaving in a manner that is in the best interest of the principle (Eisenhardt, 1989; Logan, 2000). Like trust, agency theory considers the motivations and behaviors of one of party (the principle) relative to the vulnerability and risk experienced by the other party (the agent) as a result of the nature of a relationship that operates under conditions of information asymmetry and potential opportunism.

While agency theory does not explicitly emphasize the role of trust in relations, scholars submit that it offers a framework for identifying and overcoming barriers to developing trust in partner relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Whitener et al., 1998). Whitener et al. (1998, p. 515) explain, “An agency theory lens …delineates factors that contribute to the risk of opportunism and identifies how the exchange relationship can be structured to minimize this risk” in ways that are conducive to promoting trust between the agent and principle. Therefore, scholars use an agency theory framework to explore trust across a variety of business disciplines including organizational behavior (Holmer, 1995), management (Beccerra and Gupta, 1999) and marketing (Logan, 2000). Specifically, agency theory proves useful to scholars who examine the role of trust between a consumer and a corporation or corporate brand (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000).
When scholars apply agency theory to examine trust between a consumer and a corporation, the corporation is cast as the agent, while the consumer is the principle (Chiou and Droge, 2006; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). This follows directly from the tenants of agency theory in which the principal serves as the “buying agent” who enlists the agent to perform work on his or her behalf (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 61). In the case of consumer-brand relations, the consumer is quite literally the “buying agent” who purchases goods or services from the brand (Grabner-Kraeuter, 2002). In this type of relation, a need for trust emerges when the principle (trustee) has the opportunity to behave opportunistically toward the agent (trustor) to further goals of self-interest (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). The nature of consumer-brand relations produces two specific agency problems that negatively affect the formation of brand trust: information asymmetry and opportunism (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000).

In consumer interactions with a corporate brand, this information asymmetry may refer to the lack of balance between the quantity and/or quality of the information related to products or services sold by the brand (Bergen, Dutta, and Walker, 1992; Chiou and Droge, 2006). Specifically, “the ultimate customer also can be viewed as engaging in an agency relationship as he or she attempts to gain accurate product information and desired product benefit from a supplier who may be viewed as his or her agent” (Bergen, Dutta and Walker, 1992, p. 1). However, more relevant to this research is the information asymmetry in a consumer-brand exchange, which limits a consumer’s ability to assess accurately the corporate brand’s character or the likelihood that the corporate brand will capitalize on the consumer’s vulnerability and behave opportunistically in ways that are pursuant of self-interest and harmful to the consumer (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). When a consumer engages in this type of assessment, the evaluation is less about the object of exchange (i.e., a specific product or service) “and more
about the character of partners involved in the exchange” (i.e., the corporate brand or the corporation) (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000, p. 151).

Therefore, following agency theory, the development of brand trust depends upon the ability of a firm to implement mechanisms that can credibly inform consumers about the reliability of the brand’s information and offerings, and assure the consumer of the altruistic nature of the brand’s character and motivations (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). The ultimate goal of these mechanisms is, of course, to alleviate the consumer’s perceived risk related to future interactions with the firm or corporate brand (Erdem and Swait, 1998; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Scholars submit that agency theory offers two such mechanisms to address information asymmetry and the potential for opportunism, which increase potential risk to the consumer thus impeding the formation of consumer trust toward a corporate brand: signaling and risk sharing (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000).

Signals are controllable attributes or activities that convey information about the characteristics of the sender (Erdem and Swait, 1998). A brand signal refers to all of the marketing activities performed by a specific brand to influence consumer brand perceptions (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Examples of such brand signals include advertising (Milgrom and Roberts, 1986), pricing (Spence, 1974), and warranties (Lutz, 1989). Two factors determine the effectiveness of a signal in reducing the information asymmetry present in agent/principle relations in a manner that promotes trust: clarity and credibility (Erdem and Swait, 2004). Clarity of the signal references the absence of ambiguity present in the signal, and credibility refers to its believability (Erdem and Swait, 1998). Consistent with agency theory, scholars submit that clear and credible signals foster trust by reducing consumers’ perceived risk in a “market characterized by imperfect and asymmetric information” (Erdem and Swait, 1998, p.
Consumers use these brand cues to reduce concerns of opportunism and uncertainty that hinder the development of trust (Chiou and Droge, 2006).

Another solution proposed by agency theorists to counter the agent’s proclivity to engage in opportunistic behavior and the resulting vulnerability experienced by the principle is risk sharing (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). As the name suggests, risk sharing represents a situation in which “the principal bears a portion of the risk to alleviate the problem of opportunism” (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000, p. 152). Organizational behavior research indicates that one method of risk sharing that reduces vulnerability thereby increasing the likelihood of establishing trust is the provision of accurate and complete information, even if such information is unfavorable (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Swift, 2001). This is because in a principle/agency relationship, the problem of information asymmetry arises because the agent is motivated to withhold negative information about them. Take, for example, the classic and oft examined agency relationship between a corporation (agent) and its shareholders (principle) whereby the shareholders entrust the corporation’s management (i.e., board of directors) to make day-to-day decisions related to the corporation’s goals and actions. In a consumer-brand relationship, the corporate brand may be similarly motivated to conceal negative information from the consumer. Consumers undoubtedly recognize this phenomenon and the extent to which this information asymmetry contributes to their uncertainty and vulnerability.

Following previous scholars (e.g., Grabner-Kraeuter, 2002; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000) who use an agency theory framework to examine trust between a consumer and brand, the current research proposes that hate-acknowledging advertising, relative to traditional advertising, will increase brand trust by leveraging mechanisms to counter information asymmetry and opportunism, both of which thwart the development of brand trust. Hate-acknowledging
advertising represents a relevant consumer communication that satisfies the two most effective strategies for creating trust by mitigating agency problems of information asymmetry and potential opportunism: signaling and risk sharing.

As discussed, the ability for a signal to create brand trust is dependent upon consumers’ perceptions of its clarity and credibility (Erdem and Swait, 2004; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Hate-acknowledging advertising is not only unambiguous in its message (i.e., clear), but is likely to be recognized as credible given a brand would have no conceivable motivation to lie when delivering negative information about itself. Additionally, prior research suggests that, in general, consumers tend to view negative information as more credible and trustworthy than positive information, particularly in cases where positive information may be construed as self-serving, as is the case in the majority of advertising executions that positively promote the brand (i.e., traditional advertising) (Ein-Gar, Shiv, and Tormala, 2012). Specifically, providing truthful and unflattering information “promotes transparency and reduces the potential for the occurrence and/or perception of opportunistic behavior, ultimately resulting in increased consumer trust” (Zillifro and Morais, 2004, p. 168). Thus, it follows that when a corporate brand employs a hate-acknowledging advertising strategy, consumers should have increased perceptions of brand trust due to the brand’s willingness to send a clear and credible signal.

Additionally, the content of hate-acknowledging advertising satisfies the requirements of risk sharing as an antidote to the problems of information asymmetry and opportunism. As noted, companies engage in risk sharing by demonstrating that they are willing to put themselves at risk just as consumers do when they choose to patronize brands (Zillifro and Morais, 2004). Hate-acknowledging advertising represents an attempt on the part of the brand to render itself vulnerable by divulging unflattering information. As such, it follows that consumers should
perceive such an overture not only as an honest and credible signal, but also as an attempt to engage in risk sharing. Drawing upon prior work exploring the intersection of agency theory and brand trust (Grabner-Kraeuter, 2002; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Zillifro and Morais, 2004), the current research proposes that hate-acknowledging advertising, which leverages the agency mechanisms of risk sharing and signaling, will have a more positive influence on brand trust than traditional advertising.

**H1: Hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising vs. control condition) will increase brand trust.**

**AD CREDIBILITY: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Consumers are skeptical of marketing efforts intended to persuade consumers to behave in ways beneficial to brands and firms (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore, 2005; Kavanoor, Grewal, and Blodgett, 1997). Advertising is no exception. In fact, industry research suggests consumers consider advertising as the least credible source of brand information. A recent Advertising Age survey uncovers that less than one-quarter of consumers trust print ads, and even fewer trust digital advertising (Doty, 2014). The Nielsen 2015 Global Trust in Advertising Survey finds consistent results regarding consumer mistrust of advertising, and reveals that respondents identify word of mouth marketing and branded websites as the most credible marketing sources (Nielsen.com, 2015). A lack of trust and credibility surrounding advertising is concerning to marketers in general, and advertisers specifically, particularly given that younger generations tend to be less trusting of ads than older consumers (Taylor, 2015).

The marketing literature defines *ad credibility* as the extent to which consumers perceive
claims made in an advertisement to be truthful, legitimate, honest, and believable and refers to a consumer’s interpretation of a particular advertisement during a specific exposure occasion (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). Ad credibility is comprised of three dimensions: perceived ad claim discrepancy, advertising credibility, and advertiser credibility (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). This construct plays a crucial role in consumers’ desire to evaluate ad claims that ultimately inform their purchase decisions (Kavanoor, Grewal, and Blodgett, 1997). Not surprisingly, ad credibility leads to a variety of favorable outcomes including more positive brand attitudes, higher levels of brand trust (Kavanoor, Grewal, and Blodgett, 1997) and increased product sales (MacInnis, Rao, and Weiss, 2002). As ad credibility increases, consumers become less concerned that the advertiser is manipulating or misleading them (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore, 2005). Ad credibility focuses specifically on the content of the advertisement itself and references the extent to which consumers judge this content as honest and truthful (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore, 2005).

The Influence of Negative Information on Ad Credibility

Hate-acknowledging advertising is not the first attempt to examine how negative information in advertising messages influences marketing-related outcomes. Two-sided ad messages represent the first and most well documented exploration of a brand voluntarily offering negative information about itself in an advertising context. A two-sided advertising message is one that presents the advertised product in a positive light on attributes that are salient or important to product purchase, but disclaims or limits information related to inferior performance on less important attributes (Kamins et al., 1989; Kamins and Marks, 1987). The objective of two-sided ad messages is to convince consumers that the product is favorable on the
important or primary attributes by admitting weakness on less crucial product dimension(s) (Pechmann, 1992). In contrast, a one-sided appeal in advertising presents only claims that positively support the brand or product (Kamins and Assael, 1987).

Two-sided advertising messages demonstrate superiority over more traditional, one-sided messages on a variety of outcomes including perceptions of argument strength and evaluations of the product the ad features (Etgar and Goodwin, 1982). While two-sided advertising messages and hate-acknowledging advertising share a common feature, the presence of negative information, they differ on several important levels. The first concerns the inclusion of positive brand or product information. While HAA offers only negative information about the brand, two-sided messages display both positive and negative information, the latter being less prominent than the former. The juxtaposition of negative and positive information is a defining criterion of two-sided advertising. The second point of difference concerns the nature or intensity of the negative information. Two-sided ads not only intentionally reveal negative information related to attributes of minor significance, but also place greater weight on the positive vs. negative ad claims (Kamins and Assael, 1987; Pechmann, 1992). In contrast, hate-acknowledging advertising offers more intensely averse information (i.e., the brand is hated), which is not offset by positive claims. Finally, two-sided advertising appeals focus on product-related attributes, while hate-acknowledging advertising explores negative information pertaining to the corporate brand.

Despite acknowledged differences, two-sided message appeals offer significant conceptual insights related to the influence of negative information on ad credibility. Research indicates that two-sided ad messages are more effective than one-sided messages in generating ad credibility (Kamins and Marks, 1987; Pechmann, 1992; Swinyard, 1981). In general, people
perceive communications that offer unflattering information to be less motivated by self-interest and, therefore, more credible. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in an advertising context where the consumer’s default assumption is that ad claims are motivated by self-serving agendas on the part of the advertiser (Kavanoor, Grewal, and Blodgett, 1997) and that “the advertiser is attempting to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means” (Campbell, 1995, p. 228). Inclusion of negative information in two-sided ad messages leads consumers to believe the advertiser is “telling the truth,” such that the claims are more credible (Crowley and Hoyer, 1994, p. 563). Given this, it follows that consumers will see a hate-acknowledging ad, which offers negative brand information, as more credible than a traditional ad, which focuses only on positive brand characteristics. The following section provides additional theoretical support for this prediction.

**Correspondence Theory in Advertising**

Some researchers find that there is a logical direct positive association between ad credibility and brand trust such that increased perceptions of ad credibility translate into higher levels of brand trust (Kavanoor, Grewal, and Blodgett, 1997). That is, when consumers judge an ad’s claims as honest and truthful, they transfer the honesty and truthfulness judgments to the brand, a phenomenon explained through correspondence theory. Correspondence theory attempts to explain the conditions under which an individual will attribute either an “internal” (a correspondent attribution) or “external” (a non-correspondent attribution) cause to an event (Kamins, 1990).

A consumer makes an internal attribution when they attribute an event’s causes to the true feelings or character of the communicator (i.e., brand) rather than to contextual or situational
constraints. For example, a consumer would likely make an external attribution in determining the motivation for a warning on a cigarette pack. That is, they would conclude that the company included the warning due to legal mandates. Alternatively, the consumer might make an internal attribution and determine that the warning appears because the brand is humane and concerned about consumer health risks. Though unlikely, this second scenario represents an internal attribution as the consumer credits the brand for disclosing the information and concludes the brand is honest and altruistic in nature. The positive influence of negative information on ad credibility and, ultimately on brand trust, is contingent upon the extent to which the consumer makes an internal attribution or believes that the brand is voluntarily disclosing negative information about itself as a measure of altruism. Consumers make an internal attribution when they believe the brand is choosing to reveal negative information, but not when they believe external circumstances are forcing the brand to reveal the information, as in the cigarette warning example.

Thus, the voluntary offering of negative information about the brand in an advertisement leads consumers to believe that not only are the claims more credible, but that “the advertiser is telling the truth” and is therefore trustworthy (Eisend, 2006, p. 199). The current research proposes that hate-acknowledging advertising, which voluntarily offers negative information, will enhance consumers’ perceptions of ad credibility such that ad credibility explains the relationship between hate-acknowledging advertising on brand trust. Formally stated:

**H2: Ad credibility mediates the positive influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) on brand trust.**
The second construct of interest in the current research is word of mouth. Word of mouth (WOM) is an informal, interpersonal mode of communication between private parties concerning their personal experiences and evaluations of brands, companies, or products (Chung and Darke, 2006; Richins, 1983). Word of mouth may occur in traditional forums, such as face-to-face conversations, or through internet or electronic vehicles including blogs or social media platforms (Goyette et al., 2010). Additionally, word of mouth has a valence, which may be positive, neutral, or negative, though it is most often extremely positive or negative (Mazzarol, Sweeney, and Soutar, 2007).

Few marketing scholars or practitioners will dispute the important role word of mouth (henceforth WOM) plays in influencing consumers’ brand perceptions and buying decisions (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Richins and Root-Shaffer, 1988). Word of mouth continues to be an increasingly important behavioral outcome given the ease and frequency with which consumers may disseminate both positive and negative thoughts and feelings regarding both corporate and product brands via online vehicles (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Keller (2007, p. 445) states, “The evidence is abundantly clear: word of mouth is the most important and effective communications channel.” Other researchers provide evidence that WOM marketing is often more effective in influencing consumers than traditional marketing vehicles (Nail 2005).

Although positive word of mouth (PWOM) is extremely beneficial to brands, it is not easy for managers to find techniques that universally increase this behavior. For this reason, one
of the most common tactics managers use to encourage positive word of mouth is to offer deals or incentives (Wirtz and Chew, 2002). For example, in today’s digital age, practitioners often offer discounts or freebies in exchange for a “like” or “share” on Facebook. However, motivating consumers through compensation is not necessarily effective in producing on-going and genuine word of mouth behaviors. Further, such initiatives are costly from a managerial standpoint, as they require the company to offer product or monetary compensation at an individual level, which may also decrease the perceived value of the brand (Sernovitz, 2012). An additional shortcoming of such tactics is that they tend to promote WOM related to a specific product, rather than the corporate brand.

Despite the importance and value of positive WOM, strategies to encourage this brand behavior are elusive given that, “the control lies not on the advertisers but on the consumers” (Keller, 2007, p.445). Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels (2009, p. 90) describe WOM as “the world’s most effective, yet least understood marketing strategy.” For these reasons, practitioners often overlook potential strategies for influencing WOM of any type, incorrectly believing it is out of their control (Wirtz and Chew, 2002). The good news is that younger generations (vs. older populations) are more likely to engage in positive WOM (Burns, 2015). According to industry reports, when it comes to any brand millennials love, they are more likely to talk about it, consider it, buy it, and, most importantly, tell their highly connected friends about it (Burns, 2015). Positive word of mouth is even more crucial to polarizing brands, which are often the target of vocal brand haters.

*The Influence of Brand Trust on Positive Word of Mouth*

As with any behavior, consumers engage in word of mouth to fill a need (Ditcher, 1966).
That is, consumers participate in positive word of mouth because of its social and/or psychological benefits (Cheema and Kaikati, 2010). Researchers emphasize the degree to which positive WOM is often largely self-motivated (Chung and Darke, 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998) and driven by a consumer’s desire to gain attention, or feel important (Gatignon and Robertson, 1986; Sundaram, Mitra, and Wester, 1998). Empirical evidence suggests that consumers use positive WOM as a means of self-enhancement, which is the tendency of people to seek experiences that improve or bolster their self-concept (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998).

However, despite these benefits, the act of engaging in word of mouth is not without costs. The transmission of any type of influence, including positive WOM, is a function of a cost/benefit analysis conducted by the potential influencer (Gatignon and Robertson, 1986). Though consumers rarely perform this cost/benefit analysis explicitly before engaging in positive WOM, they will consider the costs and potential risks (Gatignon and Robertson, 1986). Time and energy are the most universal and obvious of such costs. Other risks include the possibility of offering inappropriate or inaccurate information or relaying information that is poorly-received (Cheema and Kaikati, 2010; Gatignon and Robertson, 1986). Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol (2007) conduct a qualitative study and find that respondents often reference the social risk associated with providing poor advice. Whenever consumers offer advice or opinions via positive WOM, there is an underlying risk of being “wrong” that the individual is seeking to avoid (Mazzarol, Sweeney, and Soutar 2007). The discussion that follows proposes that in the current context, hate-acknowledging advertising produces increased levels of brand trust, which, in turn, reduce the risk associated with positive word of mouth, thus favorably influencing consumer intentions to engage in this behavior.
The current research proposes that hate-acknowledging advertising, through the mediating influence of ad credibility, will produce higher levels of brand trust. As discussed, brand trust represents a consumer’s perception that under conditions of uncertainty and vulnerability, the brand will behave in an honest and benevolent manner. Further, researchers indicate that consumers demonstrate perceptions of brand trust through a willingness to engage in actions that reflect this belief (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Jevons and Gabbott, 2000). Specifically, brand trust is “displayed by actions taken despite perceived risk, uncertainty, and/or vulnerability” (Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2011, p. 938). Therefore, brand trust leads consumers to engage in pro-brand behaviors, such as purchasing a brand, paying a premium for a brand’s products or services, and advocating for a brand and defending a brand, among others (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown, 2001; Jevons and Gabbott, 2000).

A number of marketing scholars demonstrate a link between brand trust and one specific type of pro-brand behavior, positive WOM. Kim, Kim, and Kim (2009) find that consumers who trust the reliability and integrity of a hotel are more likely to speak positively about the hotel and recommend it to others. Similarly, Ranaweera and Prabhu (2003) demonstrate that brand trust in a telephone provider leads to higher levels of positive WOM, and Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown (2001) determine that trust between a consumer and retailer produces an increase in consumers’ positive WOM behaviors. Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013, p. 374) explains this link as follows, “Brand related behavior, such as purchasing, praising, and/or defending the brand entails certain risks, which are alleviated by brand trust.” When it comes to behavior, such as positive word of mouth, which involve staking one’s reputation, consumers are far more likely
to promote a brand they trust (Beccerra, 2013; Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown, 2001; Reichheld, 2003).

Following this evidence, the current research proposes that hate-acknowledging advertising will positively influence consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth. Further, because brand trust increases pro-brand behaviors by alleviating risk, the current work predicts that brand trust will mediate the relationship between ad type and positive word of mouth. Said differently, when brand trust is included in the model, this research predicts that the relationship between ad type (HAA vs. traditional vs. control) will weaken or disappear. Formally stated:

**H3:** Hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising vs. control condition) increases consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth.

**H4:** Brand trust mediates the favorable influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising vs. control condition) on positive word of mouth intentions.

Negative Word of Mouth (NWOM)

The current research looks specifically at a tactic for increasing positive WOM on behalf of a polarizing brand. However, such a tactic would hardly be useful if it also increased consumer intentions to engage in negative word of mouth. This research does not propose any effect of hate-acknowledging advertising on negative word of mouth. This is because the literature related to negative WOM motivation does not suggest that hate-acknowledging advertising will have any effect on this construct.

Negative WOM and positive WOM are two separate constructs with distinctly different motivations (De Angelis et al., 2012; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998). As discussed, researchers emphasize the degree to which positive WOM is often largely self-motivated and
driven by a need to feel important and exhibit connoisseurship and achieve goals of self-enhancement (Chung and Darke, 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998). Unlike negative WOM, positive WOM achieves goals of self-enhancement such that people can maintain a positive self-view by linking themselves with positive information and outcomes (De Angelis et al., 2012). Specifically, Wojnicki and Godes (2011) use experimental design to demonstrate a positivity bias wherein consumers find positive WOM to be more effective in reaching goals of self-enhancement than negative WOM. Consumers may also engage in positive word of mouth as they have a desire to help the company or brand (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998). Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster (1998) conduct a qualitative study examining the motivation for positive and negative WOM and find that 18% of the positive WOM conversations (and 0% of negative WOM conversations) fall into this category. The intended effect is that the consumer’s communicative activities will contribute to the company’s continued success (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

Thus, the literature indicates that positive WOM satisfies goals of self-enhancement and a desire to help the company. In contrast, the literature treats negative WOM primarily as a reaction to a negative product or service experience (De Angelis, 2012; Richins, 1983). More specifically, negative word of mouth satisfies a consumer’s need to retaliate against a company for a negative experience, (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998) or a desire to seek advice on how to deal with a negative experience (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998). Additionally, some consumers engage in negative WOM to warn others about a negative experience (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998). In general, dissatisfaction with a specific product or service experience is the primary catalyst for negative WOM behavior. This research explores WOM in reaction to an advertising stimulus, rather than a particular
consumption experience and proposes no effect on negative WOM. Instead, this research proposes that hate-acknowledging (vs. traditional) advertising will increase positive WOM (PWOM) intentions by satisfying two primary consumer motivations: a desire to help the company and a need for self-enhancement. The next portion of this research explores the relationship between hate-acknowledging advertising and PWOM in more detail. Specifically, the subsequent section investigates how consumer emotions (i.e., love and hate) toward a polarizing brand play a role in the relationship between hate-acknowledging advertising and positive word of mouth.

**BRAND LOVE: LITERATURE REVIEW, THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUALIZATION**

Consumers use the terms “love” and “hate” loosely when referring to brands, and although a consumer might exclaim, “I love this brand!” or “I hate this brand!” these statements, while indicative of intense feelings toward the brand, are not equivalent to expressions of interpersonal love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). While some research likens brand love to interpersonal love (Fournier, 1998), there is agreement among the vast majority of scholars that existing conceptualizations of interpersonal love should not be directly applied to brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Consistently, the current research views brand love as conceptually different from interpersonal love.

*Brand Love Conceptualization*

Following Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), this research defines brand love as a higher
order construct capturing the degree of passionate emotional and cognitive attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name. This conceptualization includes the following dimensions based upon the previous literature: positive emotions toward the brand (i.e., intense “liking”), declarations of love for the brand, and identification with the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). In the context of the current research, the final dimension, brand identification, not only represents the cognitive aspect of brand love, but also serves as the theoretical basis for the proposed influence of HAA on positive word of mouth.

**Brand Love and Positive Word of Mouth**

Consumers’ pre-existing feelings toward a brand will necessarily influence their desire and motivation to engage in positive word of mouth on behalf of the brand, such that brand love is a key antecedent to positive WOM (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012). Regardless of marketing efforts, those consumers who love a brand (henceforth “brand lovers”) are more likely to engage in positive WOM on behalf of the brand than the general population (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012). Brand lovers use a variety of vehicles to disseminate positive information about a brand including recommending the brand, speaking positively about the brand to others, or wearing apparel with the brand’s logo or name, to name a few. These activities represent various forms of positive WOM.

Recently, eWOM, or WOM that occurs through online platforms (Lee and Youn, 2009), offers an additional outlet for brand lovers to advocate on behalf of their brands. Brand lovers use internet-based platforms to show support for the brands they love. Industry reports estimate that fan membership on company Facebook pages has nearly tripled since 2010 with top brands, such as McDonald’s and Coca-Cola, boasting up to 60 million members on their Fan pages.
(Kalehoff, 2013). Notably, both Coca-Cola and McDonald’s are categorized as being polarizing brands (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013). Industry research also suggests that the majority of consumers who elect to become Facebook fans do so because of the positive emotional relationships they have with brands, as well as their desire to support the brands they like or love (Kalehoff, 2013). Not surprisingly, members of brand fan pages tend to be loyal, committed consumers who are more emotionally attached to the brand than non-brand fans (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Dholakia and Durham, 2010). Overall, the marketing literature and popular press provide evidence of a strong influence of consumers’ brand love on their tendency to participate in favorable brand-related activities.

*The Influence of Brand Love on Reactions to Negative Brand Information*

Brand love and other strong positive emotions can also bias the manner in which consumers react to negative brand information. While negative brand information generally causes consumers to either dismiss the information or use it as a signal to reduce their image of the brand, those with strong positive emotions toward the brand often experience the opposite effect (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Cheng, White, and Chaplin, 2012). The branding literature provides empirical evidence that consumers’ pre-existing positive emotions and attitudes toward a brand mitigate or reverse the influence of unfavorable brand information (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, and Unnava, 2000; Cheng, White, and Chaplin, 2012). Similarly, the quality of consumer-brand relationships increases consumers’ willingness to forgive mistakes made by the brand (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004). For some brands, a transgression on the part of the brand may even reinvigorate and improve an already positive consumer-brand relationship (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004).
Indeed, there is strong evidence of an association between a consumer’s love for a brand and their resistance to negative information about the brand (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012). Further, empirical evidence demonstrates that consumers’ positive emotions toward a brand increase their motivation to expend resources on the brand’s behalf (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012), particularly in the face of negative brand information (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004). These findings suggest that providing consumers with negative brand information may have positive outcomes, specifically when consumers already hold positive feelings toward the brand. The current research argues that when consumers who love a brand become aware of the existence of brand haters through hate-acknowledging advertising, they will rise to the brand’s defense and increase the intensity and frequency of their positive WOM activities.

Theoretical support for this prediction draws on identity theory, which views the self not as a distinct psychological entity, but rather as a social construct (Terry, Hogg, and White, 1999). Self-identities are multi-faceted and people use a variety of sources to create, enhance, and express those identities (Terry, Hogg, and White, 1999). Many such sources extend beyond the individual to include “close others and self-relevant inhuman objects” (Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner, 2012, p. 1120). According to the self-expansion model (Aron and Aron, 1986), a person in a close relationship will cognitively include their partner in the construction of their own self-concept. Thus, relationships serve as a mechanism for satisfying one’s desire to “expand” the self by including the resources, perspectives, and characteristics of another in the self (Aron and Aron, 1986; Aron et al., 2013). In fact, researchers (Aron and Aron, 1986) demonstrate that close others may inform and overlap with our own self-identity to such a degree that we treat these close others as we would ourselves (Gardner, Gabriel, and Hochschild, 2002). Another source of self-identity construction is group membership. According to social identity theory,
people create their self-concepts not only based on their individual characteristics or traits, but also on group affiliations such that an individual’s self-concept is informed by their “membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255).

Individuals also use non-human influence to construct and affirm their self-concept. Previous researchers indicate that consumers buy products not only for what they do, but also for what they mean (Levy, 1959), and empirical evidence supports the notion that consumers use possessions and purchases to enhance their own self-identities (Belk, 1988; Escalas and Bettman, 2003). This phenomenon also applies to brands. Consumers prefer brands whose images are congruent with their own (Dolich, 1969), and use these brands to define, create, and portray relevant aspects of their self-identity (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Lin and Sung, 2014). When consumers use a brand in the construction or expression of their self-concept, they form a connection with the brand some researchers expressively term as the *self-brand connection* (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) or *brand identification* (Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner, 2012).

*Brand identification* represents the degree to which consumers incorporate brands into their own self-concepts, derive meaning from the brand, and use the brand in the construction of their own self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; White and Dahl, 2007). Consistent with the conceptualization of brand love offered in the current research, scholars acknowledge that brand love implies not only an emotional component, but also includes an integration of the brand into the consumer’s own self-identity suggesting that brand identification is a crucial and cognitive component of brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Brand identification positively influences a variety of favorable brand outcomes. For example, strong levels of brand identification lead to increases in brand advocacy or the promotion of the
identified with company or brand (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, and Sen, 2012). Additionally, consumers who strongly identify with a company or brand have an increased tendency to engage in positive WOM activities, such as recommending the brand, making positive comments about the brand, and generally promoting the brand to others (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen, 2005).

Academic literature and life experiences undoubtedly teach us that people instinctually defend those they love against threat (Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner, 2012). The same is true for group affiliations. Stronger (vs. weaker) levels of in-group identification lead members to be more protective and defensive of the group such that they will dedicate significant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resources toward maintaining the group image as a means of bolstering or maintain their own self-image (Coull et al., 2001). There is substantial evidence to suggest that “when self-aspects are threatened, people feel the need to defend them as they would their own physical or psychological properties” (Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner, 2012, p. 1,120).

The current research proposes that consumers will respond to hate-acknowledging advertising in a manner consistent with this phenomenon. That is, when a consumer perceives a threat to a loved brand, they will be motivated to defend that brand by engaging in positive word of mouth. Previous research supports this prediction by demonstrating that when consumers love a brand, a threat to the brand elicits a response consistent with a threat to the self (Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner, 2012). Similarly, when consumers incorporate brands into their own self-concepts, they often interpret a failure on the part of the brand as a threat to their own self-esteem, a threat that motivates brand lovers to come instinctively to the brand’s defense (Cheng, White, and Chaplin, 2012). This leads to the following hypothesis:
H5: Brand love emotions will moderate the relationship between hate-acknowledging advertising and positive WOM such that the positive WOM intentions will increase with higher levels of love toward the focal brand.

The following chapter presents a series of pretests and studies that empirically test the hypotheses proposed in this chapter and depicted in the conceptual model shown in Figure 1.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The current research explores the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on brand outcomes for polarizing corporate brands. Specifically, Study 1 investigates whether exposure to a hate-acknowledging ad vs. a traditional ad will lead to higher levels of brand trust, and whether ad credibility plays a mediating role in this relationship. Study 2 investigates the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on positive word of mouth and examines the potential mediating influence of brand trust on this relationship. Study 2 also explores the role that consumers’ pre-existing brand emotions play on the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on intentions to engage in positive word of mouth.

The empirical phase of this research begins with a series of pretests. The purpose of Pretest 1 and Pretest 2 is to collect data to identify two polarizing corporate brands that will serve as the focal brands in this research. Specifically, the advertising stimuli in the main studies will feature these focal brands. Finally, the Pilot Study confirms the reliability and validity of the scales and procedures planned for use in Studies 1 and 2.

The overall target population of this research is adults 18 years of age or older who are currently residing in the U.S. This population is intentionally broad as nearly all consumers use advertising to inform their purchase decisions. Therefore, the inclusiveness of this target population will ensure the results are generalizable across broad consumer populations. Following traditional industry practices, respondents who indicate they, or any member of their
immediate family, work in advertising, brand management, market research, or any related field may not participate in this research. This is to avoid expert opinions from biasing the results.

**PRETEST 1: PRE-SCREENING OF POLARIZING BRANDS THROUGH QUALITATIVE DATA**

The objective of Pretest 1 is to collect qualitative data to aid in the selection of two polarizing corporate brands to serve as the focal brands in subsequent studies. Specifically, this pretest seeks to identify corporate brands both loved and hated by consumers. This qualifies them as polarizing brands. This qualification is consistent with the definition of polarizing brands in the marketing literature. Specifically, Luo, Wiles, and Raithel (2013) characterize polarizing brands as those brands with a “large number of fervent supports and passionate detractors” (p. 30).

**Design and Participants**

This exploratory pretest collects qualitative information from respondents using open-ended questions. One hundred ten Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) panelists (56.5% Male; $M_{Age} = 36.1$) participate in this survey in exchange for monetary compensation. To qualify for this study, respondents must 18 years of age or older and currently living in the U.S. Respondents must also pass a screening question confirming neither they, nor any member of their immediate family, works in marketing, marketing research, or any related field.
Procedure

This survey asks respondents to answer two open-ended questions. The first question reads, “Please write down the names of as many brands as you can think of that you LOVE.” The second question is identical to the first, except it asks respondents to identify brands they hate. In both cases, the instructions indicate that consumers may list either corporate or product brands. Although this research focuses solely on polarizing corporate brands, this question intentionally gives respondents as much leeway as possible when providing their responses, and takes into account the fact that the average consumer may not always be able to differentiate corporate brands from product brands.

Results

In total, the panelists provide a list of 842 brands that they either love or hate. Of these 842 responses, 636 reference corporate brands. The corporate brands are categorized by industry to aid in the selection process and ensure that the focal brands represent product/service segments that tend to have a high percentage of polarizing brands. This categorization also ensures that the two final focal brands operate in different industries. This refinement serves to improve the generalizability of the findings.

This list of industry categories that consumers reference most often and the corresponding percentage of total mentions each category represents is as follows: technology (30%), food and beverage (21%), fashion/retail (19%), airlines/automotive (18%), and home/personal care (5%). Approximately 7% of responses fall into the “all other” category, which includes various types of brands with low mentions, such as people, schools/universities, and sports teams. Given that the technology and food/beverage industries elicit the highest
percentage of consumer responses for loved and hated brands, the analysis continues by carefully reviewing the list of brands within these categories to determine the most suitable short list of brands to move onto Pretest 2. Specifically, further analysis serves to determine which brands have the greatest number of both lovers and haters.

Apple appears on the list of loved and hated brands more times than any other brand. Specifically, Apple accounts for 17% of all technology brand mentions. The second and third most popular mentions in the technology category are Samsung (11%) and Sony (12%). In the case of Apple, strong evidence of polarization emerges by examining the relative number of times respondents list as Apple as a loved vs. hated brand. Specifically, 45% of the time, consumers mention Apple as a loved brand, while 55% of the time they reference it as a hated brand. In contrast, Samsung does not emerge as nearly as polarizing. Instead, Samsung skews more toward being a loved brand, with 73% of brand mentions for Samsung falling under the “love” section of the survey.

The sector with the second highest number of mentions is the food and beverage category, which includes both corporate food and drink brands (e.g., Nestle and Coca-Cola), as well as restaurant/fast food corporate brands (e.g., Chick-fil-A and McDonald’s). The brands consumers mention most often in this category and the breakdown of love vs. hate mentions are as follows: Coke (13% of mentions, 14% hate), Starbucks (7% of mentions, 55% hate), McDonald’s (6% of category mentions, 88% hate), and Chick-fil-A (5% of category mentions, 50% hate). Thus, unlike the technology sector, no clear “winner” emerges in the food and beverage category in terms of both the number of times consumers reference the brand and the extent to which consumers love vs. hate it. Therefore, all of the preceding food and beverage brands also appear in Pretest 2.
Discussion

Pretest 1 represents a first step in identifying a “short list” of polarizing brands that could potentially serve as focal brands in the main studies. Additionally, this pretest serves to determine not only which brands are highly polarizing, but also which product categories tend to have the highest number of polarizing brands. This is important when guiding the decision on brand selection in a manner that is most relevant for the actual marketplace.

This study reveals a short list of five brands that are polarizing and is representative of categories that boast the greatest proportion of polarizing brands: technology, and food and beverage. This “short list” is as follows: Apple, Chick-fil-A, Coca-Cola, McDonald’s, and Starbucks. These brands participate in Pretest 2, which validates usable corporate brands for Study 1 and Study 2.

PRETEST 2: FINAL SELECTION OF POLARIZING CORPORATE BRANDS

Brand polarization exists on a continuum. In other words, some brands exhibit a high degree of polarization, while others less so (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013). Thus, Pretest 2 offers data to demonstrate the relative degree of polarization for each of the five potential focal brands. The purpose of Pretest 2 is to capture consumers’ love/hate emotions toward each of the brands from Pretest 1 using a mixed approach that includes both nominal and continuous scales. While Pretest 1 asks consumers to provide the names of brands they love or hate in an open-ended manner, Pretest 2 provides respondents with the list of pre-selected brands from Pretest 1 and asks them to indicate their feelings toward these brands on both nominal and continuous
Design and Participants

This exploratory pretest captures respondents’ emotions toward each of the polarizing brands from the “short list” resulting from Pretest 1. One hundred two MTurk panelists participate in this study in return for monetary compensation (58% Male; \( M_{\text{Age}} = 35.28 \)). Once again, to qualify for this pretest, respondents must be 18 years of age or older, living in the U.S., and not currently working in marketing or any related field.

Procedure and Measures

To begin, participants see the short list of the five polarizing brands from Pretest 1: Apple, Coca-Cola, Chick-fil-A, McDonald’s, and Starbucks. The participants view the following question: “Which of the following statements best describes your feelings toward the brands below?” To respond, participants choose one of three options: I love it, I hate it, or, I neither love nor hate it.

After respondents indicate the group with which they most identify (i.e., love the brand, hate the brand, or neither love or hate the brand), they complete a six-point, three-item semantic differential scale capturing their feelings toward the same list of brands. The scale includes the following items (\( CR = .97 \)): \( 1 = \) completely hate/6 = completely love, \( 1 = \) can’t stand/6 = can’t live without; \( 1 = \) strongly dislike/6 = strongly like. After completing this scale, respondents provide some basic demographic information (e.g., age and gender).
**Results**

The first portion of the pretest, which asks respondents to categorize themselves as a brand lover, brand hater, or neither, confirms Apple is a polarizing brand with 54% of respondents indicating they love Apple and nearly 20% indicating they hate this brand. The remainder fall into the “neither love nor hate” bucket. Therefore, these results demonstrate that, consistent with the definition of polarization, Apple has a significant population of both lovers and haters. In fact, overall, the percentage of respondents who indicate they love or hate Apple exceeds the percentage that indicate they have more neutral feelings toward the brand (i.e., neither loved nor hated). This analysis demonstrates the extremeness of consumer emotions toward Apple providing evidence of its standing as a polarizing brand.

More importantly, this pre-test serves to aid in the final selection of a brand from the second most popular category, the food and beverage industry. Specifically, the data from the nominals scales indicates that Chick-fil-A appears to have the highest degree of polarization among the food and beverage brands with 40% of respondents claiming to love Chick-fil-A and 20% claiming to hate it (40% did not identify as lovers or haters). In comparison, consistent with the results from Pretest 1, Coke skews very heavily toward lovers and neutral consumers with only 11% of respondents claiming to hate Coke. Similarly, McDonald’s and Starbucks show a relatively lower percentage of brand haters, 10% and 11% respectively, suggesting Chick-fil-A would serve as the most suitable choice for a focal brand in the upcoming studies.

The data from the continuous scales in the second part of this pretest supports this finding.

The standardized mean values of the consumers’ responses to three continuous scale items allows them to be classified as having either negative or positive emotions toward the focal brand. Specifically, consumers with scores at or below the midpoint of the scale (3.5) hold
negative emotions (i.e., hate) toward the brand, while consumers with scores above the midpoint of the scale hold positive emotions (i.e., love) toward the brand. Thus, the relative size of these two groups provides an indication of the level of polarization for each of the brands in this pretest.

This exercise provides further validation of the brand Apple’s level of polarization. Overall, 69% of participants have a mean score above the scale midpoint and 31% of the scores are at the midpoint or below ($M_{neg} = 2.04$ vs. $M_{pos} = 4.95$). Apple boasts a significant portion of consumers in both the positive and negative emotions groups, and is thus suitable as a subject for the advertised polarizing brand in Study 1.

Consumer responses from the continuous scales reveal that for Coke, 21% of respondents fall on the negative emotions side of the scale, meaning their responses are at or below the midpoint ($M_{neg} = 2.50$ vs. $M_{pos} = 4.91$). These results validate the findings from Pretest 1 and the initial portion of Pretest 2 by demonstrating the brand Coca-Cola has more lovers than haters within the consumer population at large. For McDonald’s, 30% of total respondents fall below the midpoint of the love/hate scale, thereby indicating negative emotions of the brand ($M_{neg} = 2.35$ vs. $M_{pos} = 4.80$). For Starbucks, 27% of respondents fall into the “hate” group on the brand emotions scale ($M_{neg} = 2.26$ vs. $M_{pos} = 4.90$).

Finally, for Chick-fil-A, 38% of respondents fall into the negative emotions class, while the remaining 62% express positive love emotions toward the brand with mean scores above the scale midpoint ($M_{neg} = 1.71$ vs. $M_{pos} = 4.78$). This provides further support for the data from the first section of this pretest where responses to the nominal scale indicate that Chick-fil-A has the highest and most equal number of lovers and haters. The percentages and means of the negative vs. positive emotion groups, in combination with the data from the initial portion of this pretest,
indicate that Chick-fil-A is the most polarizing food/beverage corporate brand of the five brands in this pretest. Specifically, Chick-fil-A has the most equal percentage of lovers and haters with the greatest difference between the means of the two groups.

Discussion

At the close of Pretest 2, two polarizing brands emerge as the most appropriate given the extent to which significant amounts of consumers claim to love or hate them. Thus, Apple will serve as the first focal brand for this research and Chick-fil-A will be the second.

PRETEST 3A: APPLE ADVERTISING STIMULI

Two advertisements (hate-acknowledging and traditional) will serve as the stimuli to test the effects of hate-acknowledging advertising in the main studies. As such, it is important to verify that consumers rate these two ads equally such that a preference for one ad over another will not unduly bias the results of the experiment. To this end, Pretest 3A serves to confirm whether the two ads for Study 1 for the Apple brand fit this criterion. More specifically, prior to drawing conclusions regarding the relative influence of one ad vs. the other on the dependent variables, it is necessary to ensure that there are no statistical differences between evaluations of the two ads. Pretest 3A also includes a manipulation check to confirm respondents understand the distinct messages of the two advertisements.

Design and Participants

This pretest employs a one-factor, two-level design. Forty-four MTurk respondents
(68.2% Male; $M_{\text{Age}} = 34.89$) participate in return for monetary compensation. A screening filter ensures that respondents in this study did not participate in any prior studies related to this research, are over 18 years of age, living in the U.S., and not currently working in marketing or any related field.

**Stimuli**

Two advertisements created by the author (hate-acknowledging and traditional) function as the stimuli in this pretest. The traditional ad communicates positive aspects of the brand with a headline stating, “Smart” above a picture of Albert Einstein, and a sub-headline stating “Smarter” above a picture of an Apple logo. Because the ad communicates favorable information about the brand and positions it in a positive light, it is consistent with the definition of traditional advertising this research proposes. The second condition, the hate-acknowledging ad, has a headline stating, “Some people hate us” and a sub-head stating, “We appreciate the attention.” This ad fits the definition of a hate-acknowledging advertisement as the headline clearly communicates that some consumers hate the brand. To maintain stylistic consistency between the two ads, both use the same font type and size, as well as the same color scheme (black background and white font). Additionally, both ads contain the same size and iteration of the Apple corporate logo. See Appendix A for images of the ads.

**Procedure**

To begin, the survey platform randomly places respondents into one of the two ad conditions. In the first condition, respondents see the traditional ad and, in the second, they see the hate-acknowledging ad. After viewing one of the ads, participants complete the ad
evaluation scale and manipulation check questions. Finally, participants provide some basic demographic information.

**Measures**

*Ad Evaluation.* This research defines ad evaluation as the overall valence (positive/negative) of a consumer’s response to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion (Gorn, Pham, and Sin, 2001; MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). To capture ad evaluation, respondents complete a scale containing three, six-point, semantically differential items (adapted from Gorn, Pham, and Sin, 2001): *I strongly dislike — strongly like the ad; I think this is an extremely bad — extremely good advertisement; I completely hate — completely love the advertisement* (*CR* = .98).

*Manipulation Checks.* The purpose of the manipulation checks is to confirm that respondents comprehend the respective ads. In the case of the hate-acknowledging ad, the manipulation check verifies that participants understand the ad is communicating that some people hate the Apple brand. The scale assessing message comprehension contains three items (*CR* = .91) presented on a six-point scale (1 = strongly disagree / 6 = strongly agree): *This ad tells me people hate the brand Apple; this ad openly acknowledges the brand Apple is hated; this ad tells me some people have extremely negative feelings toward the brand Apple.*

Similarly, a manipulation check on the traditional ad uses a three-item (*α* = .88), six-point (1 = strongly disagree / 6 = strongly agree) scale with the following items: *This ad positions the brand Apple in a positive light; this ad gives me favorable information.* These statements capture the extent to which respondents understand that the traditional ad is communicating positive brand information.
Results

An ANOVA, using ad type (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional) as the independent variable and ad evaluation as the dependent variable, tests for any differences between the ads on the ad evaluation measure. The analysis yields no significant results between conditions ($M_{HAA}$ = 3.23 vs. $M_{Trad}$ = 3.03; $F(1, 42) = .167, p > .10$). Additionally, the means of participants’ responses to the manipulation check items confirm that respondents understand the message being communicated in the ad they viewed ($M_{HAA}$ = 4.63; $M_{Trad}$ = 4.30). In each case, over half of the 20 respondents strongly indicate (i.e., standardized mean of “5” or “6”) agreement with the manipulation check scale items.

Discussion

Pretest 3A accomplishes both of the objectives set forth. Specifically, the results of the ANOVA reveal that there are no statistical differences between the ads on the ad evaluation measure. Therefore, there should not be a concern that the quality or likability of one ad over another will cloud any conclusions related to the relative effect of the hate-acknowledging ad on the dependent measures.

Additionally, the mean values of the manipulation check scale items confirm that respondents understand the distinct messages of the two ads. Specifically, participants comprehend that the traditional ad provides positive brand information, while the hate-acknowledging ad asserts that some people hate the brand Apple. Given these findings, the ad stimuli in this study are acceptable for use in Study 1.
Pretest 3B has the same objectives set forth in Pretest 3A. However, Pretest 3B uses a different pair of stimuli for a different polarizing corporate brand. In this pretest, the advertisements are for Chick-fil-A. Once again, the purpose of this pretest is to confirm that consumers do not evaluate one of the advertising stimuli more or less favorably than the other, such that this bias could confound the participants’ responses to the dependent variable measures. Additionally, this study serves to verify that consumers understand the distinct message of each ad.

**Design and Participants**

This pretest employs a one-factor, two-level design. Forty-four MTurk respondents (70% Male; $M_{age} = 29.41$) participate in this pretest in return for monetary compensation. This data set excludes two participants who did not correctly answer the attention check questions. A screening filter ensures that all of the remaining 42 respondents in this study did not participate in any prior studies related to this research, are over 18 years of age, living in the U.S., and not currently working in marketing or any related field.

**Stimuli**

Two author-created advertisements promoting the brand Chick-fil-A serve as the stimuli in this pretest, a hate-acknowledging ad and a traditional ad. Consistent with the terminology throughout this research, the traditional ad communicates positive aspects of the brand Chick-fil-A with the following copy: “Why do our customers love us? Because we love them back.” In
contrast, the copy in the hate-acknowledging ad openly communicates that the brand Chick-fil-A is the target of brand hate with the headline, “Some people hate us. Have you ever seen a grown cow cry?” Both ads contain the brand’s corporate logo and feature the cow spokes characters that appear in all of the brand’s marketing efforts (Richards, 2016). Additionally, to maintain consistency between the two conditions, both ads use the same font and stylistic manipulations. See Appendix B for visuals of the stimuli.

Procedure

This survey follows the same procedure as in Pretest 3A. The survey software (Qualtrics) randomly places each respondent into one of two conditions that determines which ad stimuli they see. Respondents in the first condition view the hate-acknowledging ad, while respondents in the second condition see the traditional ad for Chick-fil-A. After seeing the ad, respondents complete the ad evaluation scale and manipulation check questions. The survey concludes by asking participants to provide some basic demographic information, such as age and gender.

Measures

Ad Evaluation. Respondents in Pretest 3B complete the same six-point, three-item ad evaluation scale from Pretest 3A (adapted from Gorn, Pham, and Sin, 2000). Once again, this construct demonstrates high reliability ($CR = .93$).

Manipulation Checks. As in Pretest 3A, participants completed the manipulation check measures for the ad they see. The items in both the traditional ($\alpha = .90$) and hate-acknowledging ($\alpha = .78$) manipulation check scales are identical to those in Pretest 3A, with the exception of the
focal brand (Chick-fil-A vs. Apple).

Results

An ANOVA, using ad type (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional) as the independent variable and ad evaluation as the dependent variable, confirms there is no statistical difference between the two ad conditions on the ad evaluation measure. $M_{\text{HAA}} = 3.35$ vs. $M_{\text{Trad}} = 3.98$; $F(1, 38) = 2.35, p > .1)$. Additionally, the means of the two manipulation check scales provide evidence that consumers understand what the ads are communicating ($M_{\text{HAA}} = 5.63$; $M_{\text{TRAD}} = 5.62$). In each case, over half of the 20 respondents strongly indicate (i.e., standardized mean of “5” or “6”) agreement with the manipulation check scale items.

Discussion

Pretest 3B confirms that the two Chick-fil-A ads planned for use in Study 2 present no differences on the ad evaluation measure that could confound future study findings. Additionally, the results of the manipulation checks verify that consumers understand that the traditional ad is providing positive brand information and, more importantly, that the hate-acknowledging ad is presenting consumers with claims that openly state the brand is hated. As a result, the ads in this pretest will serve as the stimuli in Study 2.

PILOT STUDY: SCALE VALIDATION AND CONSTRUCT VALIDITY

The purpose of the Pilot Study is to confirm the reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity of the scale items and measures that will appear in the main studies (i.e.,
Study 1 and Study 2). Additionally, this Pilot Study serves to confirm that there are issues related to the design and procedures for the main studies.

**Design and Participants**

The Pilot Study employs a single-factor, two-level design. Consistent with the target population of the pretests, participants in the Pilot Study must be 18 years of age or older and living in the U.S. Screening criteria also confirms that these respondents do not currently work in marketing or any related field and have not participated in previous studies related to this research.

One hundred five MTurk panelists participate in this study in exchange for monetary compensation. This sample excludes ten respondents who do not answer the attention check questions correctly. The final data set includes 95 respondents (51% Male; \( M_{\text{Age}} = 35.9 \)).

**Stimuli**

Chick-fil-A is the focal polarizing corporate brand for the Pilot Study. As in prior studies, two author-created advertisements serve as the stimuli in this Pilot Study with two conditions: a hate-acknowledging ad condition and a traditional ad condition. As before, the hate-acknowledging ad condition presents respondents with an ad openly stating that some consumers hate the brand Chick-fil-A. In contrast, the traditional ad contains positive brand information consistent with conventional advertising executions. See Appendix C for ad images.
Procedure

The Pilot Study follows the procedure of Study 2 since Study 2 contains all of the dependent variables of interest, while Study 1 only examines ad credibility and brand trust. At the start of the Pilot Study, participants complete the bipolar brand love/hate emotions scale that captures feelings toward the brand Chick-fil-A. After completing this scale, respondents must then complete a filler task (adopted from Laran, 2010) as follows: “Please list as many words as you can think of that have an ‘e’ in the middle. For example, apartment or met. We will give you three minutes to complete this task.” The purpose of this filler task is to prevent the responses consumers provide on the initial brand love/hate emotions scale from biasing their responses to subsequent measures. Following the filler task, respondents complete the scale items capturing the remaining dependent variables of interest: brand trust, ad credibility, and word of mouth.

Measures

Brand Hate/Love Emotions. This research predicts that the valence of consumers’ emotions (i.e., love/hate) toward the focal brand moderate the effect of ad type (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional) on positive word of mouth. Therefore, consumers report their pre-existing brand emotions upfront by responding to a six-point, semantic differential scale with the following scale descriptors: 1 = completely hate/6 = completely love; 1 = strongly dislike/6 = strongly like; 1 = can’t stand/6 = can’t live without. Construct reliability for this measure is acceptable \( M_{HTLV} = 3.87; CR = .95 \).

Brand Trust. This research conceptualizes brand trust as the degree to which consumers view the brand Chick-fil-A as honest and benevolent such that they do not believe the brand is
seeking to mislead them or capitalize on their vulnerability (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Delgado-Ballaster and Munuera-Aléman, 2001; Hess and Story, 2005; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aléman, 2001). A five-item Likert scale (adapted from Erdem and Swait, 2004) captures this measure using the following items (1 = strongly disagree / 6 = strongly agree): This brand is trustworthy; this brand is honest; this brand is sincere; this brand does not pretend to be something it isn’t; this brand is not seeking to mislead me. Cronbach’s alpha indicates acceptable reliability for this scale ($M_{\text{Trust}} = 4.17; CR = .95$).

Ad credibility is the extent to which consumers feel the claims made in an advertisement are truthful, unbiased, and not purposefully deceitful (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989). To capture this measure, respondents provide their assessment of the ad they see using a six-point rating scale (1 = strongly disagree / 6 = strongly agree) adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989). The scale presents participants with the following items pertaining to the Chick-fil-Ad: The claims made in this ad are honest; the information presented in this ad is unbiased; this ad is not attempting to mislead me; this ad is not lying to me ($M_{\text{AdCred}} = 4.11; CR = .83$).

Word of Mouth (WOM) is an informal, interpersonal mode of communication between private parties concerning their personal experiences and subjective evaluations of brands or products (Chung and Darke, 2006; Dichter, 1966; Richins, 1983). Word of mouth can be positive, negative, or neutral depending upon the nature of the content, but positive and negative word of mouth are most commonly the variables of interest to scholars (Mazzarol, Sweeney, and Soutar, 2007). The Pilot Study captures positive and negative word of mouth separately and, although it presents no hypothesized effects regarding negative WOM, it is important to confirm that consumers do not increase their intentions to engage in negative WOM as a result of seeing the hate-acknowledging advertisement.
Positive Word of Mouth (PWOM) Intentions. A five-point scale requesting that respondents indicate how likely they would be to engage in a series of positive word of mouth behaviors captures this measure (1 = definitely would not / 6 = definitively would). The specific items are as follows: (1) speak positively about Chick-fil-A to others, (2) encourage others to patronize Chick-fil-A, (3) advocate for the brand chick Chick-fil-A, (4) defend the brand Chick-fil-A, and (5) post positive comments on Chick-fil-A’s Facebook page. These items together capture traditional word of mouth behaviors (Items 1 and 2), digital word of mouth behaviors (Item 5), and brand advocacy behaviors (Items 3 and 4). Construct reliability reaches an acceptable level ($M_{PWOM} = 3.25; CR = .95$).

Negative Word of Mouth (NWOM) Intentions. A four-point scale captures respondents’ likelihood of engaging in behaviors related to negative word of mouth as a result of exposure to the advertising stimuli. Specifically, the survey asks respondents to indicate their likelihood of performing the following behaviors on a six-point scale (1 = definitely would not/6 = definitely would): speak negatively about Chick-fil-A to others, agree with someone speaking negatively about Chick-fil-A, encourage others not to eat at Chick-fil-A, and post a negative comment on Chick-fil-A’s Facebook page ($M_{NWOM} = 2.16; CR = .94$).

Results

Beyond capturing the reliability of the scales, the Pilot Study also confirms the discriminant and convergent validity of the measures. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity exists when the AVE for each of the individual constructs is greater than any of the squared inter-construct correlations between the measures. Since all of the squared inter-construct correlations in this Pilot Study were lower than .70, the lowest AVE of any
construct, discriminant validity exists among the measures. According to Hair, Bush, and Ortinau (2010), convergent validity exists when all construct AVE’s are .5 or greater. The measures in this study meet this requirement such that all AVE’s are .7 or higher. See Table 1.

Discussion

Overall, the Pilot Study confirms acceptable reliability for each of the scales planned for use in Study 1 and Study 2. Additionally, the Pilot Study confirms convergent and discriminant validity of the scale measures for use in Studies 1 and 2. Please see Table 1 for comparisons of AVE’s, construct correlations, and squared construct correlations. See Table 2 for construct scale items and descriptive statistics of the measures.
**Table 1.** Pilot Study AVE’s\(^a\), Construct Correlations\(^b\), and Squared Construct Correlations\(^c\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Brand Hate/Love Emotions</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Brand Trust</td>
<td>0.85*</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Ad Credibility</td>
<td>0.71*</td>
<td>0.81*</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Positive WOM</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
<td>0.75*</td>
<td>0.62*</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Negative WOM</td>
<td>-0.66*</td>
<td>-0.67*</td>
<td>-0.57*</td>
<td>-0.47*</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 3.79
Standard Deviation: 1.56
Construct Reliability: 0.96

\(^a\)AVE’s for all constructs denoted on diagonal in bold
\(^b\)Construct correlations noted below the diagonal
\(^c\)Squared construct correlations noted above the diagonal
* Correlation significant at \( p < .01 \)

**Table 2.** Pilot Study Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Loading</th>
<th>CR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Love/Hate Emotions</strong></td>
<td>1=Completely Hate/6=Completely Love</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please indicate how you feel about Chick-fil-A as a corporate brand</td>
<td>1=Strongly Dislike /6=Strongly Like</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1=Cannot Stand/6=Cannot Live Without</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ad Credibility</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The claims made in this ad are honest</td>
<td>1=Definitely Disagree/6=Definitely Agree</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This ad is not attempting to mislead me</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information presented in this ad is unbiased</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This ad is not lying to me</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand Trust</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This brand is trustworthy</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This brand is sincere</td>
<td>1=Definitely Disagree/6=Definitely Agree</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand doesn’t pretend to be something it isn’t</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand doesn't attempt to mislead</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This brand is honest</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PWOM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Something Positive on Facebook</td>
<td>1=Definitely would not/6=Definitely would</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak Positively to Others About the Brand</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend the brand to others</td>
<td>1=Definitely would not/6=Definitely would</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate for the brand</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage others to eat Chick-Fil-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative WOM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative on FB</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak Negatively to Others</td>
<td>1=Definitely would not/ =Definitely would</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree with others if they say something negative</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage others NOT to eat Chick-Fil-A</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDY 1: THE INFLUENCE OF HATE-ACKNOWLEDGING ADVERTISING ON BRAND TRUST AND AD CREDIBILITY

The purpose of Study 1 is to test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. Specifically, this study seeks to determine whether there is a favorable influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) on brand trust ($H1$) and whether ad credibility mediates this relationship ($H2$).

Design and Participants

Study 1 is a single factor, two-level, between-subjects design (ad type: hate-acknowledging ad vs. traditional ad). Seventy-six MTurk respondents participate in this survey in return for monetary compensation. As in the pretests and the Pilot Study, screening criteria ensure that respondents are 18 years of age or older, living in the U.S., and not currently working in marketing, market research, or any related field. Four respondents do not correctly complete the attention check question and are therefore not in the final data set. The final sample includes seventy-two respondents (42% male; $M_{\text{Age}} = 34.4$).

Stimuli

Two advertisements, a hate-acknowledging ad and a traditional ad, both for the brand Apple, serve as the stimuli in this study. Consistent with the definitions in this research, the hate-acknowledging ad informs respondents that the brand Apple is hated, while the traditional ad offers only positive information about the brand Apple. The stimuli in this study are the same as those that appear in Pretest 3A, where the analysis confirms no differences in ad evaluation
between them. Please see Appendix A for images of the stimuli.

**Procedure**

The survey software platform (Qualtrics) randomly assigns study participants to one of two conditions. This assignment determines which advertisement the participant sees. Respondents in the first condition view the traditional ad, while respondents in the second condition see the hate-acknowledging ad. After viewing one of the two ads, all respondents must complete the scales capturing the dependent variables of interest: brand trust and ad credibility. Finally, the study closes with questions requesting demographic information, such as age and gender.

**Measures**

*Brand Trust.* The standardized mean of a four-item, six-point scale (see Pilot Study) captures this measure. The scale contains the following items: *this brand is trustworthy; this brand is sincere; this brand doesn’t seem pretend to be something it isn’t; this brand is honest.* As in the Pilot Study, this construct demonstrates high reliability ($CR = .96$).

*Ad Credibility.* Study 1 captures ad credibility using the standardized mean of the same scale validated in the Pilot Study. Again, this scale utilizes the following items ($1 = $ strongly disagree / $6 = $ strongly disagree): *The claims made in this ad are honest; the information presented in this ad is unbiased; this ad is not attempting to mislead me; this ad is not lying to me.* As in the Pilot Study, the scale demonstrates high reliability ($CR = .91$).

As noted, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity of the measures exists if the squared correlation between the items is lower than the individual AVE’s of both
constructs. The AVE’s of brand trust and ad credibility are .79 and .71, respectively. Thus, because these AVE’s are higher than the squared bivariate correlation (.58), the constructs exhibit discriminant validity. Convergent validity also exists because the AVE’s of both constructs exceed .50 (Hair, Bush, and Ortinau, 2010). See Table 3.

Table 3. Study 1 Descriptives, AVE’s\(^a\), Correlations\(^b\) and Squared Construct Correlations\(^c\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Trust</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Ad Credibility</td>
<td>0.75*</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct Reliability</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)AVE’s denoted on diagonal in **bold**
\(^b\)Construct correlations noted below the diagonal
\(^c\)Squared construct correlations noted above the diagonal
* Correlation significant at \(p < .01\)

Results

ANOVA Assumptions. Most parametric statistical analyses assume normality of distribution of data such that results may be misleading if this assumption is not verified (Razali and Yap 2011). The quantile-quantile plot (Q-Q plot) is the most commonly used and effective diagnostic tool for checking normality of the data (Razali and Yap 2011). In cases where data is normally distributed, a Q-Q plot will produce a graphical depiction of a roughly straight, diagonal line (Ford 2015). Consistent with these criteria, the Q-Q plots of the data for the dependent variables of interest in this study (ad credibility and brand trust) indicate adherence to the normality assumption. Further, both of the constructs have skewness and kurtosis scores within acceptable range (+/-2.99) and close to zero which further confirms acceptability of the normal distribution assumption (Greene 2007). See Appendix J for Q-Q plots and details on skewness and kurtosis scores.
The assumption of homogeneity of variance implies that the variance within each of the populations is equal. Levene’s test of homogeneity of variance serves to validate this assumption (Brown and Forsythe 1974). For the data in Study 1, Levene’s test reveals an insignificant result on the dependent variable (brand trust), thus indicating that the assumption is not violated \((F (1,71) = .886, p > .10)\). For the ad credibility variable, this assumption is violated \((F (1,71) = 4.11, p=.05)\). However, this is not concerning given that this assumption is more relevant with respect to the downstream variable (brand trust) versus the mediator, and also because ANOVA is extremely robust with respect to both the normality and equality of variance assumptions (Mendenhall and Sincich 2003). See Appendix J for details on the assumption analyses in this study.

**Brand Trust.** A one-way ANOVA examines the main effect of ad type (traditional vs. hate-acknowledging advertising) on brand trust. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the hate-acknowledging ad produces significantly higher levels of brand trust among respondents than does the traditional ad \( (M_{\text{HAA}} = 4.01 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{Trad}} = 3.37; F (1, 70) = 4.15, p < .05) \). See Figure 2 below.

**Ad Credibility.** Prior to testing whether ad credibility mediates the effect of ad type on brand trust, an ANOVA tests the main effect of ad type (traditional vs. hate-acknowledging ad) on ad credibility, as this relationship must exist in order for mediation to be present. Indeed, this one-way ANOVA where ad type is the independent variable, and ad credibility the dependent variable, reveals that respondents find the hate-acknowledging ad to be significantly more credible than the traditional ad \( (M_{\text{HAA}} = 4.02 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{Trad}} = 2.97; F (1, 70) = 12.19, p < .01) \).

**Mediation.** PROCESS 4 (Hayes, 2013), bootstrapped with 5,000 samples, tests whether the effect of ad type (HAA vs. traditional) on brand trust is mediated by ad credibility. This
analysis again confirms a significant main effect of ad type on brand trust \((\beta = .13, \ SE = .06, \ p < .05)\), as well as a main effect of ad type on ad credibility \((\beta = .22, \ SE = .06, \ p < .01)\). However, when both ad credibility and trust are included in the full model, the direct effect of ad type on brand trust weakens to a point of insignificance \((p > .10)\). This finding provides support for the mediating effect of ad credibility on brand trust. The bootstrapping results of this analysis further confirm an indirect effect of ad credibility on the relationship between ad type and brand trust. Specifically, the PROCESS 4 analysis produces a confidence interval that excludes zero for the indirect effect of ad credibility on the relationship between ad type and brand trust \((\beta = .16, \ SE = .04, [95\% \ CI = .0736, .2590])\).

**Discussion**

The results of Study 1 provide support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 suggesting that for polarizing brands, advertising that proclaims the brand hatred may be more effective in generating brand trust than traditional advertising techniques that focus solely on positive brand information. Consistent with the literature on two-sided advertising (Eisend, 2006; Pechmann, 1992) that suggests that negative brand information can lead to favorable advertising outcomes, this study finds that the positive influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (HAA) on brand trust is driven by significantly higher perceptions of ad credibility for a hate-acknowledging (vs. traditional) ad. More importantly, the absence of a direct effect of ad type on brand trust when ad credibility is included in the full model provides evidence that ad credibility fully mediates this effect.
STUDY 2: THE INFLUENCE OF HATE-ACKNOWLEDGING ADVERTISING ON POSITIVE WORD OF MOUTH

Study 1 confirms the positive influence of HAA (vs. traditional advertising) on brand trust, and further implies that ad credibility mediates this effect. The first objective of Study 2 is to replicate these effects while also including a control condition in which respondents see no advertisement. That is, Study 2 investigates whether hate-acknowledging advertising produces a more favorable effect on brand trust than either a traditional ad or control (no ad) conditions and whether ad credibility mediates this effect. Please note that this study only examines the potential mediating influence of ad credibility when comparing a hate-acknowledging ad to a traditional ad. This is because it is not possible to capture ad credibility in the control condition where respondents intentionally do not see any stimuli.

In addition, Study 2 empirically tests Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5. Specifically, this study investigates whether hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising vs. control) produces greater consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth (H3). Further, Study 2 explores whether any potential influence of ad type (HAA vs. traditional vs. control) on
PWOM is mediated by brand trust (H4). Finally, this study examines the hypothesized moderating effect of brand love/hate emotions on positive word of mouth intentions (H5) by investigating whether consumers with brand love vs. brand hate emotions respond differently across conditions in terms of their intentions to engage in PWOM.

**Design and Participants**

Study 2 employs a single-factor, three-level (hate-acknowledging ad vs. traditional ad vs. control condition), between-subjects design with brand love/hate emotions as a measured variable. One hundred six MTurk respondents participate in this study in return for monetary compensation. Again, participants must bypass screening criteria to ensure they are 18 years of age or older, currently living in the U.S., and not working in marketing or any related field. Additionally, screening mechanisms make certain that participants in this study did not participate in any of the prior surveys related to this research project. Finally, it is necessary to exclude eight respondents from the data set as they incorrectly responded to the attention check questions. The final sample size is 98 respondents (61.2 % Male; M\text{Age} = 34.84).

**Stimuli**

Chick-fil-A serves as the focal brand in this study. As in Study 1, two author-created advertisements (a traditional ad and a hate-acknowledging ad) serve as the stimuli. Pretest 3B confirms that there are no differences in ad evaluation between these two stimuli. The manipulation checks in the pretest phase also confirm that consumers understand the messages of each of the ads. Specifically, consumers in the hate-acknowledging ad condition are aware that the ads tells them that the brand Chick-fil-A is hated by some people, while consumers in the
traditional ad condition are clear that the ad they see is providing them with positive information about Chick-fil-A. See Appendix B for images of the stimuli.

Procedure

At the start of the study, respondents complete the scale capturing brand love/hate emotions. As in the Pilot Study, directly following this, respondents must complete the three-minute filler task (adapted from Laran, 2010), which serves to prevent participants’ answers to the initial brand emotions scale from biasing their responses on subsequent depend measure scales.

After the filler task, the survey software (Qualtrics) randomly places participants into one of three conditions. Respondents in the first condition (control condition) do not see any ad. Instead, these respondents see a blank screen which simply states, “Press >> to continue.” The purpose of the control condition is to gage participants’ answers to the dependent measures in the absence of any manipulation. Respondents in second condition, the traditional ad condition, see the traditional ad. Finally, respondents in the third condition see the HAA ad. Following exposure to the condition stimuli, all respondents move to scales capturing the dependent measures of interest: brand trust, ad credibility, and word of mouth. At the close of the survey, respondents must provide some basic demographic information, such as age and gender.

Measures

Brand Love/Hate Emotions. The standardized mean of a three-point bipolar scale validated in the Pilot Study again captures consumer emotions toward the focal brand. Consistent with findings from the Pilot Study, this scale demonstrates high construct reliability ($CR = .96$).
**Brand Trust.** The same five-item, six-point scale tested in the Pilot Study captures brand trust in Study 2. Once again, this scale demonstrates high reliability (CR = .89) such that the mean of the scale items can fairly represent the construct.

**Ad Credibility.** Study 2 aims to replicate the mediating effect of ad credibility on the relationship between ad type and brand trust. Therefore, as in Study 1, respondents in the ad conditions (i.e., hate-acknowledging and control) complete a four-item scale capturing ad credibility. As in the Pilot Study and Study 1, this construct demonstrates acceptable reliability (CR = .89). Respondents in the control condition do not fill out this scale given they deliberately do not see any advertising stimuli.

**Positive Word of Mouth.** As in the Pilot Study, a five-item, six-point scale captures consumers’ intentions to engage in PWOM behaviors on behalf of the focal brand as a result of seeing the ad stimuli. Once again, this measure demonstrates acceptable reliability (CR = .94). The standardized mean of the five items therefore represent the construct in subsequent analyses.

**Negative Word of Mouth.** The mean of a four-item, six-point scale asking respondents to indicate their likelihood of performing negative word of mouth behaviors captures this construct. This scale again demonstrates acceptable reliability (CR = .93). Overall, consistent with the measurement results in the Pilot Study, the constructs in Study 2 (brand trust and ad credibility) demonstrate discriminant validity. Specifically, all construct AVE’s prove to be higher than any of the squared inter-construct correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity also exists as all construct AVE’s exceeded .05 (Hair, Bush, and Ortinau, 2010). See Table 4 for details.
### Table 4. Study 2 Descriptives, AVE’s\(^a\), Correlations\(^b\), and Squared Construct Correlations\(^c\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Brand Hate/Love Emotions</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Brand Trust</td>
<td>0.85*</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Ad Credibility</td>
<td>0.71*</td>
<td>0.81*</td>
<td>0.76*</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Positive WOM</td>
<td>0.72*</td>
<td>0.75*</td>
<td>0.62*</td>
<td>0.82*</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Negative WOM</td>
<td>-0.66*</td>
<td>-0.67*</td>
<td>-0.57*</td>
<td>-0.47*</td>
<td>0.71*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean | 3.79 | 4.00 | 3.90 | 2.79 | 2.30 |
Standard Deviation | 1.56 | 1.40 | 1.26 | 1.46 | 1.29 |
Construct Reliability | 0.96 | 0.94 | 0.89 | 0.94 | 0.93 |

\(^a\) AVE’s denoted on diagonal in **bold**
\(^b\) Construct correlations noted below the diagonal
\(^c\) Squared construct correlations noted above the diagonal

*Correlation significant at \(p < .01\)

### Results

**Assumptions.** Again, the Q-Q plots of the data for the dependent variables of interest in this study (ad credibility, brand trust, and positive word of mouth) produce a relatively straight diagonal line indicating that the data is normally distributed (Razali and Yah 2011).

Additionally, all the skewness and kurtosis scores are within acceptable range (+/-2.99), and most are close to zero, further confirming the construct data meets the normality assumption (Greene 2007). See Appendix K for Q-Q plots and descriptive statistics for skewness and kurtosis scores.

Finally, Levene’s test finds support for the equality of variance assumption for both brand trust (\(F (2,95) = 2.39, p > .05\)) and positive word of mouth (\(F (2,95) = .80 , p > .05\)). As in Study 1, ad credibility does not adhere to this assumption but this is not concerning given the extent to which ANOVA is robust with regard to this assumption (Mendenhall and Sincich 2003), and also because ad credibility serves as the mediator, not the final outcome variable in this analysis. See Appendix K for details.

**Brand Trust.** An ANOVA with brand trust as the dependent variable and ad condition (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional vs. control) as the independent variable tests the main effect
of ad type on brand trust (H1). As in Study 1, this analysis reveals a main effect of ad type on brand trust (M_HAA = 4.44 vs. M_Trad = 3.81 M_Con = 3.74; F (2, 95) = 2.59, p = .08). This analysis controls for alpha and indicates that there is a significant difference on the brand trust measure among the three conditions. Follow-up post-hoc contrasts more deeply investigate the source of these differences.

Specifically, post-hoc contrasts assess the differential effects of the three conditions on brand trust. These analyses indicate that the hate-acknowledging ad produces significantly higher levels of brand trust vs. the traditional ad (t (95) = 1.88, p = .07), as well as the control condition (t (95) = 2.17, p = .03). However, the tests do not find any statistical differences between the means of the traditional ad condition and the control condition for this variable (t (95) = .79, p > .10).

Ad Credibility Mediation. Study 2 also serves to replicate the mediating effect of ad credibility on the relationship between ad type and brand trust (H2). The mediation analysis assesses this potential effect only between the two ad conditions (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional), as respondents in the control condition do not see any ad and, as such, cannot respond to the scale for this measure.

An ANOVA again reveals a significant main effect of ad type (HAA vs. traditional) on ad credibility (M_HAA = 4.26 vs. M_Trad = 3.50; F (1, 63) = 6.45, p < .01). A PROCESS 4 (Hayes, 2013) mediation analysis bootstrapped with 5,000 draws provides further evidence that ad credibility plays a mediating role in the influence of ad type on brand trust. Specifically, the results confirm a main effect of ad type on brand trust (β = .63, SE = .33, p = .06), and demonstrate that when ad credibility is included in the full model, the effect of ad type on brand trust becomes insignificant (p > .10). Thus, this analysis provides additional support for the
mediating effect of ad credibility on the relationship between ad type (HAA vs. traditional) and brand trust. Further support for the indirect effect of ad credibility is evidenced by a confidence interval that excludes zero ($\beta = .67$, SE = .29; 95% CI = [.1444, 1.271]).

**Positive Word of Mouth (PWOM).** Hypothesis 3 predicts that hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising or control) will increase consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth. An ANOVA using ad type as the independent variable and PWOM intentions as the dependent variable reveals an overall main effect of ad type on positive WOM ($M_{HAA} = 3.32$ vs. $M_{Trad} = 2.55$ vs. $M_{Control} = 2.47$; $F(2, 95) = 3.52, p < .05$) indicating differences among the conditions’ effects on the dependent variable while controlling for alpha. Post-hoc contrasts provide a deeper understanding of these effects. Specifically, a post-hoc analysis demonstrates that the hate-acknowledging ad produces significantly higher levels of consumer intentions to engage in positive WOM compared to both the traditional ad ($t(95) = 2.15, p < .05$) and the control condition ($t(95) = 2.40, p = .02$). The analysis does not detect any difference on positive word of mouth when comparing the traditional ad condition to the control condition ($t(95) = .21, p > .1$). This outcome is not surprising given this research does not predict any difference between the traditional ad and the control conditions.

**Brand Trust Mediation.** The next analysis investigates whether brand trust mediates the main effect of ad type on positive word of mouth, as predicted by Hypothesis 4. A mediation analysis (PROCESS 4, Hayes, 2013) with 5,000 bootstrapping samples tests this relationship. Since PROCESS 4 cannot accommodate more than two independent conditions simultaneously, two separate mediation analysis are necessary (HAA vs. traditional and HAA vs. control).

The first mediation analysis compares the hate-acknowledging ad condition to the traditional ad condition and confirms the already established main effect of hate-acknowledging
advertising on PWOM intentions ($\beta = .76$, SE = .35, $p < .05$). However, when brand trust is included in the model, the effect of ad type on positive WOM is weakened to a point of insignificance ($\beta = .27$, SE = .25, $p = .27$) providing support for the mediating effect of brand trust on the relationship between ad type (traditional vs. hate-acknowledging) and positive WOM intentions. More relevant for this study are the bootstrapping results for the indirect effects. Ad type has a significant indirect effect on positive WOM through brand trust. A confidence interval that excludes zero further demonstrates this mediating influence ($\beta = .49$, SE = .25; 95% CI = [.0101, 1.0059]). Taken together, these findings offer support for the full mediation model (i.e., ad type$\rightarrow$ad credibility$\rightarrow$brand trust).

The second mediation analysis (PROCESS 4, Hayes, 2013) confirms a significant and positive influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. control) on PWOM intentions ($\beta = .41$, SE = .17, $p < .05$). The main effect of ad type on PWOM is no longer significant when brand trust is in the model ($\beta = .12$, SE = .11, $p > .1$) providing support for the full mediating effect of brand trust on the relationship between ad type and positive word of mouth. The bootstrapping results for the indirect effects of brand trust provide further confirmation of mediation as they reveal a confidence interval that does not include zero ($\beta = .30$, SE = .14; 95% CI = [.0420, .5779]).

Serial Mediation. PROCESS 6 (Hayes, 2013), bootstrapped with 5,000 draws, uses the data from Study 2 to confirm the serial mediation relationship in the conceptual model (see Figure 1) (i.e., ad type$\rightarrow$ad credibility$\rightarrow$Brand Trust$\rightarrow$PWOM). Specifically, this mediation analysis reveals a significant indirect effect of ad type (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional) on PWOM through the “ad credibility$\rightarrow$brand trust” pathway ($\beta = .52$, SE = .25; 95% CI = [.1251, 1.1217]). Reversing the order of the mediators leads to nonsignificant indirect effects ($\beta = .004$, .5779].
SE = .09; 95% CI = [-.1805, .2318]), thereby ruling out an alternative potential relationship among the constructs (i.e., ad type → brand trust → ad credibility → PWOM).

*Brand Love/Hate Emotions Moderation.* A moderation analysis aids in determining whether, as predicted by Hypothesis 5, brand love/hate emotions moderate the previously established effect of ad type on positive word of mouth intentions. Two separate PROCESS 1 models (Hayes, 2013), each bootstrapped with 5,000 draws compare the impact of brand love/hate emotions on the two relevant pairs of ad conditions (HAA vs. control and HAA vs. traditional ad).

The first analysis (hate-acknowledging ad vs. traditional ad) reveals that brand emotions moderate the influence of ad type on positive word of mouth. That is, consistent with Hypothesis 5, the positive influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) on intentions to engage in PWOM depends upon the valence and intensity of pre-existing consumer emotions toward the brand. Said differently, the favorable influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on PWOM intentions intensifies as consumer responses to the bipolar scale items capturing brand emotions move away from brand hate and toward brand love. Specifically, the moderation results demonstrate a significant interaction of brand emotions (hate/love) and ad type (hate vs. traditional) on the intentions of consumers to engage in positive WOM on behalf of Chick-fil-A (β = .33, SE = .18, p = .07).

A floodlight analysis offers additional insights into this moderation effect. A floodlight analysis allows for the identification of the regions in the range of the moderator variable in which the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is and is not significant (Spiller et al., 2012). A floodlight analysis also produces a Johnson-Neyman point representing the specific level of the moderator at which the influence of the independent variable on the
dependent variable becomes significant (Spiller et al., 2012). In this case, the floodlight analysis reveals a Johnson-Neyman point of 3.97 suggesting that the effect of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) becomes significant \((p < .05)\) at a level of 3.97 on the six-point brand love/hate scale. Recalling that a standardized mean of the three-item brand love/hate emotions scale classifies intense hate at a level of one and intense love at a level of six \((\text{scale mean} = 3.92)\), these results indicate that those consumers who like or love Chick-fil-A drive the effect of ad type on positive WOM.

A second moderation analysis that tests the interaction of brand love/hate emotions on ad condition (HAA vs. control) does not produce significant results \((\beta = .17, SE = .07, p = .13)\). Although the overall interaction is not significant \((p = .13)\), a closer look using a floodlight analysis demonstrates a directional effect consistent with the predicted influence of brand love/hate emotions on positive word of mouth intentions. Specifically, this analysis indicates that as levels of love intensify \((\text{i.e., standardized mean score of the three scale items moves away from a level one and closer to a level six})\), the positive influence hate-acknowledging advertising \((\text{vs. control condition})\) strengthens. Further, at a level of 4.50 on the brand love/hate emotions scale, the influence of HAA \((\text{vs. control condition})\) on PWOM is significant \((\beta = .20, SE = .11, p < .10)\). However, below this level there is no significant effect of brand love/hate emotions on the relationship between ad type and PWOM, thus the lack of overall significance of the PROCESS 1 model. Figure 3A below graphically displays the interaction of ad condition (HAA vs. traditional) and brand love/hate emotions on PWOM. Similarly, Figure 3B displays the moderating influence of brand emotions on the relationship between the hate-acknowledging advertising and control conditions on positive word of mouth.
Negative Word of Mouth (NWOM). The hypotheses in this research do not make any predications regarding the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on consumers’ intentions to engage in negative word of mouth. However, it is important to measure this variable to ensure that any favorable influences of hate-acknowledging advertising on brand outcomes are not offset by an increase in consumers’ negative WOM intentions. An ANOVA using NWOM as the dependent variable and ad type (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional vs. control) as the independent variable reveals a marginally significant difference on negative WOM intentions.
among the three conditions ($M_{HAA}= 2.00$ vs. $M_{Trad} = 2.30$ vs. $M_{Control} = 2.61$; $F (2, 95) = 4.29, p = .1$).

Winer, Brown, and Michaels (1971) recommend that researchers perform planned contrasts regardless as to whether an overall F-test produces statistically significant results. As such, this research offers further insight related to the influence of HAA on negative WOM. Specifically, post-hoc contrasts reveal no significant differences in intentions to engage in negative word of mouth between the hate-acknowledging and traditional ad conditions ($p > .10$) or between the traditional ad and the control conditions ($p > .10$). However, there is a significant difference in NWOM intentions when comparing respondents in the hate-acknowledging ad condition to those in the control condition ($t (95) = 1.96, p < .05$). In other words, respondents who see the hate-acknowledging ad report a lower likelihood of engaging in negative word of mouth behaviors related to the Chick-fil-A brand than respondents who do not see any ad at all (i.e., control condition).

![Figure 4. Study 2 Results for Brand Trust, PWOM, and Ad Credibility](image)

The results of Study 2 replicate the effects established in Study 1 using a different polarizing brand. Specifically, respondents who view the hate-acknowledging ad express significantly higher levels of brand trust toward Chick-fil-A than respondents who see the
traditional ad. Ad credibility mediates this effect.

The Study 2 results also provide support for Hypotheses 3, 4, and 5. That is, the hate-acknowledging advertisement produces higher intentions to engage in positive word of mouth than the traditional ad (H3), and the analyses indicate that brand trust mediates this effect (H4). Additionally, the results of Study 2 support a serial mediation pathway such that hate-acknowledging advertising produces higher levels of ad credibility, which, in turn, favorably influence brand trust and, ultimately, consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth.

Finally, consistent with Hypothesis 5, the results of Study 2 indicate that brand emotions moderate the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) on consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth on behalf of the focal brand. Specifically, a comparison of the hate-acknowledging and traditional ad conditions demonstrates that consumers who have positive emotions toward Chick-fil-A (i.e., a standardized mean score of 3.97 or higher on the six-point brand emotions scale) report higher intentions to engage in positive word of mouth after seeing the hate-acknowledging ad vs. the traditional ad. Said differently, the results indicate that the favorable influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) intensifies as consumer brand love increases.

A second PROCESS 1 analysis tests the same interaction (brand emotions * ad type) on positive word of mouth, this time comparing the hate-acknowledging ad to the control condition in which respondents do not see an ad. This analysis does not reveal a significant interaction of ad type and brand emotions on PWOM. However, a follow-up floodlight analysis finds directional effects consistent with Hypothesis 5.

Study 2 also includes a control condition, which serves to capture the dependent measures in the absence of any advertising stimuli. While the hate-acknowledging ad produces
significantly more favorable results for the brand trust and positive word of mouth measures vs. the control condition, no significant differences exist between the traditional ad and control condition on either of these measures. The discussion that follows speculates on the factors that could contribute to this lack of significance.

Discussion

In summary, Study 2 finds support for all hypotheses investigated in this study. Based upon the results, hate-acknowledging advertising positively influences ad credibility, brand trust, and positive word of mouth. Additionally, the findings from this study suggest that for some brand outcomes, such as positive WOM, the strength of the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising depends upon consumer emotions toward the brand.
CHAPTER 4: GENERAL DISCUSSION, CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Researchers indicate that all brands, at some point, will likely be the subject of negative information and emotions and “that perhaps marketers should embrace, rather than fight, this reality,” (Ein-Gar, Shiv, and Tormala, 2012, p. 857). It is not uncommon for brands, particularly corporate brands, to be the subject of vocal brand hate (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). This research explores how advertising can play a mitigating role in addressing this phenomenon. Most notably, this dissertation introduces hate-acknowledging advertising into the marketing literature in general, and to the branding and advertising literatures specifically. There is a scarcity of recent research examining the role of negative information in advertising, and an absence of academic research exploring whether communicating brand hate through advertising could serve to leverage brand hate to a firm’s advantage. More broadly, the investigation of hate-acknowledging advertising contributes to the branding literature by demonstrating the favorable impact of this new advertising tactic of important brand outcomes (i.e., brand trust and positive word of mouth). Finally, from a managerial perspective, this research suggests that instead of shying away from or ignoring, managers should consider embracing it through more risky, less conventional advertising messages.

While it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that there are potential advantages to running advertising that contains self-incriminating, negative information, this dissertation
demonstrates just that and offers insights into fostering consumer brand trust and positive word of mouth. Specifically, two studies evidence that for polarizing corporate brands, hate-acknowledging advertising can be more effective than traditional advertising in generating certain favorable brand outcomes.

*The Influence of Hate-Acknowledging Advertising on Brand Trust*

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, this research finds that hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) has a stronger positive influence on trust toward a polarizing corporate brand. Specifically, in Study 1, consumers report higher levels of brand trust toward Apple in the hate-acknowledging ad condition than they do in the traditional ad condition ($\beta = .63$). Study 2 provides further support for this hypothesis in that the hate-acknowledging advertisement (vs. the traditional advertisement or the control condition) again leads to higher levels of brand trust toward Chick-fil-A ($\beta = .13$).

Establishing this main effect of ad type (hate-acknowledging vs. traditional) on brand trust is crucial in determining whether, as predicted, voluntarily offering negative brand information in advertising promotes brand trust toward polarizing corporate brands. The validation of this relationship also serves to provide support for the legitimacy of hate-acknowledging advertising as a marketing tactic for managers of polarizing corporate brands who are struggling to find effective messaging strategies to communicate with both lovers and haters. Specifically, establishing the main effect of HAA (vs. traditional advertising vs. control) on brand trust demonstrates the universality of the effect in that both lovers and haters report increased levels of brand trust after seeing the HAA (vs. traditional) advertisement.
Brand trust is one of the most important, if not the most important, asset a brand can possess (Hiscock, 2001). Research suggests that brand trust leads to numerous positive outcomes that determine a brand’s potential for success including purchase intent (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999) and competitive advantage (Ha, 2004). Traditionally, practitioners use advertising only to offer positive brand information. Contrary to conventional practices, the results of this dissertation indicate that when a polarizing corporate brand uses hate-acknowledging advertising to communicate to consumers, the positive influence on brand trust is stronger than when the same brand runs advertising containing only positive brand information.

Additionally, and somewhat surprisingly, the results of Study 2 find no statistical difference between the influence of the traditional ad and the control (i.e., no ad) conditions on brand trust. This would suggest that for corporate polarizing brands looking to incent consumer trust, traditional advertising techniques are not as effective as one might think. Managers would be well-served to consider alternate strategies, such as hate-acknowledging advertising, when seeking to foster brand trust through marketing efforts.

The Mediating Influence of Ad Credibility

The results of both Study 1 ($\beta = .76$) and Study 2 ($\beta = .22$) demonstrate that consumers rate hate-acknowledging advertising as significantly more credible than traditional advertising, and that it is this influence that fully mediates the favorable impact of hate-acknowledging advertising on brand trust. This finding is important as it provides support for both the empirical and theoretical implications of this work. Specifically, the aforementioned evidence that ad credibility mediates the relationships of ad type on brand trust essentially explains the process in which hate-acknowledging advertising achieves positive results. In other words, these studies
empirically demonstrate that the payoff in portraying a hated brand to consumers is an increase in the perception of ad credibility, and, ultimately, brand trust. This finding offers particularly crucial evidence for managers who may struggle with the idea of using advertising to promote negative brand information.

The Influence of Hate-Acknowledging Advertising on PWOM

Hypothesis 3 predicts that hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) will produce significantly higher consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth on behalf of a polarizing corporate brand. The results of Study 2 confirm this hypothesis. Specifically, consumers who see the hate-acknowledging ad report higher intentions to engage in positive word of mouth related to the brand Chick-fil-A than do consumers who see the traditional ad ($\beta = .76$) or consumers who see no ad at all ($\beta = .42$). While perceptual implications, such as brand trust, are important in any advertising research, behavioral outcomes provide a greater indication of the potential for research-related findings to apply in “real world” settings. Therefore, these results, which demonstrate a main effect of hate-acknowledging advertising on positive word of mouth, offer managers additional support for the effectiveness of hate-acknowledging advertising and also expands the academic relevancy of this work.

The Mediating Influence of Brand Trust

The results of Study 2 demonstrate that, consistent with Hypothesis 4, brand trust mediates the positive influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on positive word-of-mouth. Additionally, further analysis provides support for a serial mediation model such that the positive influence of ad type (hate-acknowledging ad vs. traditional ad) on ad credibility positively
influences brand trust, which, in turn, motivates higher intentions to engage in positive word of mouth. These findings are important as they offer a more complete framework for understanding the interdependent relationships among the constructs in this research. Additionally, the mediating influence of brand trust provides conceptual evidence of the process by which hate-acknowledging advertising motivates consumers to engage in positive word of mouth.

_The Moderating Influence of Brand Love_

Consistent with the previous literature documenting the extent to which brand love emotions bias reactions to negative brand information (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Cheng, White, and Chaplin, 2012), Hypothesis 5 predicts that brand love/hate emotions will moderate the influence of ad type (hate acknowledging vs. traditional vs. control) on intentions to engage in positive word of mouth. The results of Study 2 support this prediction as stronger levels of brand love strengthen the positive influence of hate-acknowledging advertising (vs. traditional advertising) on consumer intentions to engage in positive word of mouth for the brand Chick-fil-A.

This finding is crucial to the current research as it offers a more in-depth understanding as to how distinct consumer populations (i.e., brand lovers and haters) differentially respond to hate-acknowledging advertising. While other outcomes this research explores (i.e., brand trust and ad credibility) are universally affected by hate-acknowledging advertising, regardless as to consumer love/hate emotions toward the polarizing corporate brand, the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising has a stronger impact on positive word of mouth for brand lovers. This is important from a theoretical standpoint as it demonstrates the extent to which hate-acknowledging advertising motivates brand lovers to defend the brand they love as they would
defend themselves or a close other. Specifically, confirming that brand lovers will increase their intentions to engage in positive word of mouth when they see an ad stating that the brand they love is hated offers support for the theoretical underpinnings guiding this research. This is because this research employs a positive word of mouth scale that incorporates behavioral elements (i.e., defend or advocate for the brand) that are directly linked to the cognitive or self-identification aspects of brand love (Lisjak, Lee, and Gardner, 2012).

**CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

This research contributes to the advertising and branding literature in a number of ways. First, it introduces hate-acknowledging advertising into the marketing literature as a tool for fostering brand trust and encouraging positive word of mouth. In so doing, it challenges commonly accepted principles that dictate that advertising should focus exclusively on persuading consumers by positioning the brand in a positive light. Hate-acknowledging advertising departs from conventional forms of advertising in that it contains strong, negative information, which the corporate brand offers voluntarily. This unique quality lays the foundation for the theoretical and conceptual contributions of this dissertation.

Overall, there is very little research regarding negative information in advertising, simply because, at the surface, it does not make intuitive sense for advertisers to deliberately expend time and resources to convey negative information about a brand. Therefore, only a limited number of academics and practitioners broach this topic. In fact, the research on negative information in advertising is limited almost exclusively to two-sided advertising. This stream of literature is relatively narrow in its context and its lifespan, as it received attention for
approximately a five or ten year period some decades ago and has not since. While at a general level, the findings of the current research empirically validate findings related to two-sided advertising (i.e., that negative information in ads improve ad credibility), this research goes beyond the work done in the arena of two-sided advertising from a conceptual and empirical standpoint.

Recall that two-sided advertising messages represent a deliberate attempt on the part of the advertiser to include a limited amount of negative, and relatively benign, product information to improve ad credibility and perceptions of the advertised product (Etgar and Goodwin, 1982; Kamins et al., 1989). Hate-acknowledging advertising contains negative information that is drastically different in form and purpose from the negative information in two-sided advertising. Specifically, HAA offers only direct and incriminating negative information (i.e., the brand is hated) and focuses on the corporate brand vs. a specific product brand or collection of product attributes. Further, this research proposes that hate-acknowledging advertising will positively influence brand trust and intentions to engage in positive word of mouth. In contrast, research on two-sided messages is primarily limited to outcomes associated with the ad itself or product-specific evaluations (Kamins and Marks, 1989). Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, this work is the first of its kind to demonstrate the positive influence of negative information in advertising on brand outcomes. Additionally, to the best of this author’s knowledge, it is the first to use an agency theory framework to explain how negative information in advertising can elicit brand trust. Specifically, leveraging the agency mechanisms of risk sharing and signaling, the current research proposes and confirms that consumer trust increases as a result of hate-acknowledging advertising exposing the brand’s vulnerability (risk sharing) through a believable form of communication (signaling). While a limited amount of prior research in marketing uses agency
theory to motivate trust between a consumer and a corporation (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000), this research is the first to extend agency theory into an advertising context where negative information serves to create trust between a polarizing corporate brand and a consumer.

This research also contributes to the literature exploring negative brand information of a different variety. Previous research in the consumer-brand relationship domain demonstrates a counterintuitive phenomenon whereby consumers who have favorable emotions or cognitions toward a brand dismiss or dispute negative brand information, often reacting to such information with increased attachment to the brand or more favorable brand perceptions (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004; Cheng, White, and Chaplain, 2012). The current research affirms this favorable influence of negative information on certain brand outcomes (e.g., trust and positive word of mouth), specifically in cases where consumers have strong and positive pre-existing brand emotions. However, this research departs from the majority of the previous literature that explains this reaction using theories of culpability/attribution (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004; Hess, Ganesan, and Klein, 2003) or message persuasion (Ahluwalia, 2000). Instead, this dissertation enhances a more underdeveloped stream of the literature by exploring the role of brand identification in positive reactions to negative brand information (Cheng, White, and Chaplin, 2012). Specifically, through the development of a robust positive word of mouth scale, this research validates the extent to which hate-acknowledging advertising motivates brand lovers to rise to the defense of a brand they love when it comes under attack.

As discussed, the majority of existing positive word of mouth scales (e.g., Carol and Ahuvia, 2006) tend to neglect brand defense and advocacy behaviors in a word of mouth context. Similarly, scales that do capture such behaviors treat word of mouth motivated by a desire to advocate for or defend the brand as a separate entity altogether, and distinctive from positive
word of mouth as a broad behavioral construct (Wallace, Buil, and De Chernatony, 2012). In contrast, the current research offers a more robust positive word of mouth scale that accounts for both traditional and brand advocacy-related PWOM behaviors. Recall that following prior research (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012), this dissertation conceptualizes brand love as having two dimensions: an affective component and a cognitive component, the latter of which is operationalized as the consumer’s level of brand identification. Unlike previous research, the current work measures positive word of mouth using a scale that captures both affectively-driven brand love behaviors, such as recommendations and Facebook “liking,” as well as cognitively-motivated brand love behaviors (i.e., behaviors driven by brand identification and assault to the self-concept) including brand defense and advocacy. In so doing, this research empirically demonstrates that the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on positive word of mouth intensifies as brand emotions become more positive (i.e., move from hate to love). Finally, at the most general level, this dissertation contributes to two underexplored areas of the marketing literature: brand hate and brand polarization. Brand hate and other negative emotions receive far less attention in the literature than positive brand emotions. Traditionally, “most research on branding focuses on the development of positive customer feelings and company or brand outcomes” such that “the study of negative brand phenomena is in its infancy and needs further investigation” (Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017, p. 2). Although researchers acknowledge the extent to which brand love and brand hate often co-exist, particularly for large and well-known brands (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013), the unique market circumstances experienced by these brands remain significantly under-explored in that “there is scarcity of literature available on polarizing brands” (Jayasimha and Billore, 2015, p. 105). This work addresses this gap in the literature by demonstrating that hate-acknowledging advertising, which simply alerts consumers
in an advertising context of the hatred of a brand, has the power to prompt higher levels of brand
trust and intentions to engage in positive word of mouth. Additionally, this research offers
empirical evidence that consumers who love a brand will rise to its defense when told that the
brand is under attack.

MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Academics repeatedly note the importance of relevancy in research endeavors (Kumar,
2015; Wilkie, 2005; Wind, 2008). Both academics and practitioners agree that a less delineated
approach to marketing, whereby academics and practitioners act collaboratively to address
marketing’s evolving challenges, plays a crucial role in advancing the field. Wind (2008. p. 22)
explains, “The more researchers and practitioners are in separate worlds, the less impact rigorous
academic marketing research and modeling will have on practice, and the less relevant will be
the problems posed to academic researchers.” Similarly, Kumar (2015, p. 5) states that,
“practitioner-relevant challenges” ensure that research topics are “of academic importance and
merit formal inquiry.”

Consistent with this call for a more symbiotic relationship between academic research
and industry practice, the topics addressed in this dissertation are borne from the author’s nearly
15 years of experience working at multiple U.S. Fortune 500 companies and managing many
polarizing brands. Further inspiration for this dissertation draws from the author’s interviews
with high-level employees across a variety of marketing-related disciplines including general
management, brand management, supply chain/logistics, digital marketing, and creative services.
These interviews were conducted with executives across a variety of companies including Coty
Beauty (product brands include Sally Hansen, Cover Girl, and Philosophy), Hanes Brands (product brands include Maidenform, Hanes, and Bali), and L’Oréal. In all of these interviews, employees echoed the need for innovative strategies to address brand haters. Similarly, industry press expresses the extent to which brand hate represents a serious managerial challenge with few solutions (Whitler, 2014). The purpose of this research is to offer executives a potential solution to challenges faced by those managing polarizing brands: hate acknowledging advertising. Notably, a handful of leading industry companies, such as Kraft and Unilever, have attempted to explore how acknowledging brand hate through marketing communications could prove beneficial to brands. However, to date, the efficacy of such tactics lacks empirical validation, as does the underlying explanations for how and why consumers might react positively to such strategies.

The current research contributes to the marketing literature, as well industry knowledge, by examining the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on two key brand outcomes: brand trust and positive WOM. In keeping with the objective of providing managerially relevant insights, industry experts continually cite these outcomes as two of the most crucial and hard to achieve in the modern marketplace. A Harvard Business Review piece entitled “Why Trust Matters More Than Ever for Brands” states that brand trust, “is not simply a nice thing to have, but a critical strategic asset,” (Prahaland, 2011, hbr.org). However, brand trust, like interpersonal trust, is not always easy to cultivate, particularly in an advertising context as most consumers inherently distrust ads (Doty, 2014).

Industry research suggests that large, polarizing corporate brands are increasingly losing consumer trust and, subsequently, consumer dollars (Schultz, 2015). This is because many consumers are migrating away from large brands toward smaller, less well-known brands...
believing, correctly or not, that these brands are more honest and transparent (Schultz, 2015). Therefore, the current research offers an important step in addressing these precarious circumstances plaguing corporate brands by suggesting a potential tactic for increasing consumer brand trust through advertising communications. Specifically, the current research suggests that hate-acknowledging advertising is more effective at creating brand trust than traditional advertising.

Similarly, although word of mouth is widely regarded as one of the most effective marketing tools, managers struggle to find ways to entice consumers to engage in this behavior. This is because although managers recognize how influential word of mouth is, they are often at a loss when it comes to mastering techniques that prompt this behavior. To demonstrate this gap, consider the following statistics from a collaborative study between the American Marketing Association (AMA) and the Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA):

“Sixty-four percent of marketing executives indicate that they believe word of mouth is the most effective form of marketing. However, only 6% say they have mastered it” (Whitler, 2014).

This research offers a valuable managerial tool for increasing positive word of mouth on behalf of a polarizing corporate brand. More importantly, this research suggests that unlike brand trust, which is affected by hate-acknowledging advertising, the influence on positive word of mouth is stronger for brand lovers. Specifically, the influence of hate-acknowledging advertising on positive word of mouth grows stronger as levels of like or love toward the focal brand increase. To illustrate, consider the floodlight analysis in Study 2, which demonstrates that at a level of 4.0 on the brand hate/love scale (standardized mean of the six-point three scale item), the influence of HAA (vs. traditional advertising) is represented by \( \beta = .32 \), while at a level of 6.0, the effect of HAA vs. traditional advertising is represented by \( \beta = 1.0 \).
Considering this, advertising managers seeking to encourage positive word of mouth using hate-acknowledging advertising should focus on media placement that accesses consumers with the highest levels of brand love. For example, Facebook fan pages, targeted email campaigns for loyal consumers with high historical brand spending, and retail store signage intercepting customers who seek out the brand’s brick and mortar locations all represent ideal outlets for hate-acknowledging advertising to connect with brand lovers.

Currently, the marketing literature offers extremely limited research on polarizing brands with only a handful of scholars who explore this topic (Luo, Raithel and, Wiles, 2013 and Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013). In comparison, brand polarization is by no means an uncommon occurrence. In fact, research indicates that brand polarization is a prevalent phenomenon that most often affects the most well-known and profitable U.S. brands. For example, in their work, Luo, Wiles, and Raithel (2013) provide numerous examples of polarizing brands, all of which are also major U.S. corporations (e.g., McDonald’s, T-Mobile, Walmart, and BP). Additionally, the pretests associated with the current research demonstrate that brand polarization is far from being isolated to a few brands and is instead a widespread phenomenon. Further, brand polarization is not a binary categorization, but rather exists on a continuum, such that most brands, in their lifetime, will experience some level of polarization (Luo, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013). However, to date, researchers have yet to test the validity of hate-acknowledging advertising from an empirical standpoint. Similarly, while a handful of corporations (e.g., Spirit and Kraft) have tried using related tactics, the results of these campaigns are anecdotal at best and offer only industry metrics, such as sales figures, without explanations for the consumer processes during the reported results. To this end, the current research provides valuable insights and, more importantly, an empirically tested marketing tactic to aid executives tasked with
managing and growing polarizing corporate brands. By providing empirical evidence that hate-acknowledging advertising increases brand trust and positive word of mouth, this work offers the first empirical evidence that addressing brand polarization in a forthright manner can positively influence brand outcomes.

This research does not predict any significant effects between traditional advertising and the control conditions. However, logic would suggest that traditional advertising should have a more favorable influence on positive word of mouth and brand trust than no advertising at all. While the results of this research provide directional support for this prediction, the influence of traditional advertising (vs. control) on the dependent measures of interest fails to reach a level of significance. This finding, although not within the scope of this research, provides valuable information to managers. While this lack of statistical difference should by no means lead to conclusions suggesting that traditional advertising is not effective, it does necessitate the speculation as to why traditional advertising (vs. no advertising) fails to produce a more favorable influence on brand trust and positive word of mouth in this research.

The lack of difference between the influence of traditional advertising and the control conditions relates to the fact that Chick-fil-A is a heavily advertised, well-known brand. Chick-fil-A launched its signature cow advertising in 1994 and since this time its media spend, focused heavily on outdoor media, reaches an estimated $73 million annually. In fact, it is this advertising that industry expert’s credit with helping to “catapult Chick-fil-A to its perch as the top chicken chain in the U.S.” (Wohl, 2016). Both researchers and academics acknowledge that advertising can exhibit a diminishing returns effect such that its influence diminishes when the frequency of consumer exposure reaches a saturation point (Belch and Belch, 2015). Therefore, the ubiquity of Chick-fil-A advertising is one possible explanation for the lack of impact
traditional advertising exhibits in this research. Said differently, it is possible that some consumers are somewhat immune to traditional advertising for Chick-fil-A since they have seen it so often and for so long. In contrast, the hate-acknowledging ad represents a departure from Chick-fil-A’s traditional ad messages in that consumers will not discount it as readily as traditional ad executions.

A short survey on Amazon Mechanical Turk seeks to examine this reasoning more deeply by confirming consumers’ high level of familiarity with not only the Chick-fil-A brand, but also with Chick-fil-A’s marketing execution. This survey asks 31 respondents (64% Male Mage=34.5) whether they have heard of the brand Chick-fil-A. The participants respond to this inquiry by checking either “yes” or “no.” One hundred percent of the respondents indicate that they have heard of the brand Chick-fil-A, and 90% of these respondents report seeing an advertisement for Chick-fil-A at least once in the past year. More importantly, this survey asks respondents to name the animal that Chick-fil-A uses in its advertising. An overwhelming 81% of survey respondents could correctly identify “cow” as Chick-fil-A’s spokes character species. Thus, this study provides significant evidence that Chick-fil-A is a heavily advertised, well-known brand and that a large number of consumers are intimately familiar with Chick-fil-A’s advertising. This is likely the reason why traditional advertising demonstrates little difference vs. no advertising at all on the dependent variables driving this research. This finding offers an additional reason for managers overseeing marketing efforts for polarizing corporate brands to consider a more impactful hate-acknowledging advertising strategy as an alternative to more traditional advertising tactics.
LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Like all research, the current work has several limitations that yield opportunities for future research. First, as discussed, brand polarization exists across numerous brand types and product categories. The current research explores two specific brands in two distinct product classes. Thus, while the focal brand selection process includes rigorous pretesting, the generalizability of this research would improve with subsequent studies featuring additional brands in alternate product (and service) categories. Additionally, this research focuses specifically on polarizing corporate brands, and while there is no reason to suspect that the findings would not apply to product brands as well, confirmatory empirical data to this effect would be valuable to this research stream.

Further, brand polarization exists on a continuum (Lue, Wiles, and Raithel, 2013) such that almost any brand will have some amount of both lovers and haters. As a first step in this area of study, this research explores only highly polarizing brands and it is not possible to draw firm conclusions related to the level of polarization required for the results to hold. Because hate-acknowledging advertising relies upon consumer perceptions that the information offered in the ad is truthful and credible, it is likely that if consumers do not believe it is a hated brand, the favorable outcomes of HAA will not apply. For example, Pretests 1 and 2 find evidence that while the brand Coca-Cola is polarizing to some degree, there is more love for the brand than hate. Thus, a brand like Coca-Cola might not benefit from hate-acknowledging advertising, as consumers might not fully believe that it is struggling to combat a high volume of brand hate.
As such, managers should proceed with caution when applying the findings of this research to brands that are dissimilar to those this research examines. Specifically, managers should consider engaging in marketing research efforts (surveys, focuses groups, etc.) to determine the extent to which their brands exhibit characteristics consistent with brand polarization prior to implementing hate-acknowledging advertising strategies. The second pretest in this dissertation offers a framework for assessing brand polarization through consumer surveys.

In addition, this research explores the influence of hate-acknowledging using one specific media form -- print. Today advertisers have a variety of media vehicles to choose from when communicating with consumers. Thus, future research could investigate how hate-acknowledging advertising messages fare when depicted in alternate advertising media forms, and managers should take caution when considering hate-acknowledging advertising in forms other than print advertising. This limitation is more problematic for certain media vehicles. Specifically, vehicles, such as outdoor advertising, digital banner advertising, and in-store signage, could easily lend themselves to ad execution similar to those presented in this dissertation. In contrast, the creative execution offered in this work would not as easily transition to media forms such as television, and managers should consider the adaptability of hate-acknowledging advertising in these circumstances.

Moreover, this research examines only two consumer outcomes related to hate-acknowledging advertising: brand trust and positive word-of-mouth. Future research could consider the influence of HAA on other brand outcomes. While hate-acknowledging advertising would likely have a similar impact on perceptual outcomes such as brand image and brand attitude, managers should take caution when applying the findings to behavioral outcomes not investigated in this research including purchase intent and willingness to pay.
Finally, the author conducted all of these studies in this research via Amazon Mechanical Turk. While some scholars express concern regarding “the external validity of inferences made drawing upon MTurk samples” (Huff and Tingley, 2015, p. 1), a significant body of research demonstrates that “MTurk is a viable avenue for collecting survey data” and that “participants on the site are quite attentive” (Hauser and Schwarz, 2016, p. 406). In fact, some research indicates that Mturk populations are significantly more attentive than the student populations often employed in academic research (Hauser and Schwarz, 2016; Huff and Tingley, 2015). At a broad level, scholars call into question the generalizability of student samples to the population at large indicating that “college students are not equivalent to non-student consumers on a number of dimensions” (Espinosa and Ortinau, 2016, p. 3,126). To this end, other researchers find that MTurk samples are not only often more attentive than student samples, but also more representative of the U.S. population at large (Berinsky, Huber and Lenz, 2012). However, as with any research, additional data collection in alternate platforms (e.g., lab settings, Qualtrics, etc.) would undoubtedly improve the external validity of the results.

Despite these noted limitations, this work represents a first step in understanding how consumers, especially those who love a brand, react to hate-acknowledge advertising. The conceptual and practical implications build upon research examining consumer reactions to negative brand information and offer both conceptual and practical insights into improving ad credibility and fostering brand trust. Finally, it is the author’s hope that this research will inspire additional studies examining the unique market circumstances facing polarizing brands.
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Appendix A: Stimuli for Pretest 3A and Study 1

Hate-Acknowledging Ad

There are people who hate us. We appreciate the attention.

Traditional Ad

Smart. Smarter.
Appendix B: Stimuli for Pretest 3B and Study 2

Hate-Acknowledging Ad

Traditional Ad
Appendix C: Stimuli for Pilot Study

Hate-Acknowledging Ad

Traditional Ad
Appendix D: Survey for Pretest 1

**[INSTRUCTIONS]** The following survey asked you to think about brands you love and hate. Of course there are no wrong or right answers, so just be honest. This survey consists of just two open-ended questions, so we ask you to give each one a few moments of thought and to provide as much information as you can. You will also be asked just a few general demographic questions at the conclusion of the study. Please keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers, so please just be honest. If you have any questions about this survey at any time you may consult the researcher at lmonahan@usf.edu. Thank you again for your time.

By clicking on “>>” at the bottom of this page, you are verifying that you have read the above information and agree to participate in this survey.

(1) Please write down the names of as many brands as you can think of that you LOVE. *(These may be product brands, or names of specific products, such as Kellogg’s Corn Flakes or Ford Fusion, or corporate brands, such as Kellogg’s, Ford, or American Airlines).*

(2) Please write down the names of as many brands as you can think of that you HATE *(These may be product brands, or names of specific products, such as Kellogg’s Corn Flakes or Ford Fusion, or corporate brands, such as Kellogg’s, Ford, or American Airlines).*

(3) What is your gender?

(4) What is your age?

(5) Do you, or any member of your immediate family work in marketing, advertising, market research or any related field?
Appendix E: Survey for Pretest 2

[INSTRUCTIONS] Thank you for participating in this survey, which should take you about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may stop this survey at any time. There are no right or wrong answers, so please just be honest. You will also be asked some general demographic questions at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions about this survey at any time you may contact the researcher at lmonahan@usf.edu. By clicking on “>>>” at the bottom of this page, you are verifying that you have read the above information and agree to participate in this survey.

(1) For each of the corporate brands below, please indicate which of the statements best describes your feelings toward this brand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>I love it</th>
<th>I hate it</th>
<th>I neither love nor hate it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coca-Cola</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starbucks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Please indicate your feelings toward the corporate brand, Apple* [Chick-fil-A/Coca-Cola/McDonald’s/Starbucks] on the scale below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Hate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Completely Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Dislike</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Strongly Like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot Stand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cannot Live Without</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Question was repeated for each of the brands in [parentheses].

(3) What is your gender?

(4) What is your age?

(5) Do you, or any member of your immediate family work in marketing, marketing research or advertising?
Appendix F: Survey for Pretests 3A and 3B

[INSTRUCTIONS] Thank you for participating in this survey, which should take you about 5 minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may stop this survey at any time. Please keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers, so please just be honest. You will also be asked just a few general demographic questions at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions about this survey at any time you may contact the researcher at Imonahan@usf.edu. Thank you again for your time! By clicking on “>>” at the bottom of this page, you are verifying that you have read the above information and agree to participate in this survey.

You will now be shown an ad. Please review the ad and answer the questions that follow.

(1) Please provide your evaluation of the ad you saw using the items below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dislike very much</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Like very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Unfavorable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Extremely Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Hate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Completely Love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Please indicate your level of familiarity with the brand Apple (Chick-fil-A).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all familiar</th>
<th>Somewhat familiar</th>
<th>Familiar</th>
<th>Very familiar</th>
<th>Extremely familiar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3) Please tell us your gender.

Male _____ Female _____

(4) Please tell us your age (in years).

(5) Do you, or any member of your immediate family work in marketing, advertising, market research or any related field?

Yes _____ No _____

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Appendix G: Survey for Pilot Study

[Text in brackets not displayed to respondents]

[INSTRUCTIONS] Thank you for participating in this survey, which should take you about 15 minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may stop this survey at any time. Please keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers, so please just be honest. You will also be asked just a few general demographic questions at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions about this survey at any time you may consult the researcher at lmonahan@usf.edu. Thank you again for your time! By clicking on “>>” at the bottom of this page, you are verifying that you have read the above information and agree to participate in this survey.

| (1) Please indicate your feelings towards the corporate brand Chick-fil-A on the scales below. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Completely Hate | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Completely Love |
| Strongly Dislike | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Strongly Like |
| Cannot Stand | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Cannot Live Without |

(2)[FILLER TASK] Please list as many words as you can think of that have "e" in the middle. For example, apartment or met. We will give you three minutes to complete this task.

You will now be shown an ad. Please review the ad and answer the questions that follow.
(3) After seeing this ad, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements related to the brand Chick-fil-A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is a trustworthy brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is a sincere brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A does not pretend to be something that it isn’t.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[Attention Check]</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is a brand of electronics.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A does not attempt to mislead consumers.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is an honest brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) Thinking about the ad you just saw, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>This ad is not attempting to mislead me.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The claims made in this ad are honest.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>This ad is telling the truth.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The information presented in this ad is unbiased.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>This ad is not lying to me.</em></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(5) After seeing this ad, please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to engage in the behaviors listed below.
(6) After seeing this ad, please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to engage in the behaviors listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Definitely would not</th>
<th>Most likely would not</th>
<th>Probably would not</th>
<th>Probably would</th>
<th>Most likely would</th>
<th>Definitely would</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post something negative on Facebook about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak negatively to others about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[Attention Check]</strong> The American flag is red, white and blue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree with others if they are speaking negatively about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage others not to eat at Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(7) Please provide your evaluation of the ad you saw using the items below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dislike very much</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely Unfavorable</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completely Hate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8) Please tell us your gender.

(9) Please indicate your level of familiarity with the brand Chick-fil-A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(10) Please indicate your level of familiarity with the brand Chick-fil-A.</th>
<th>Not at all familiar</th>
<th>Somewhat familiar</th>
<th>Familiar</th>
<th>Very familiar</th>
<th>Extremely familiar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(11) Please tell us your age (in years e.g. 22). _____________ Years

(12) Do you, or any member of your immediate family work in marketing, advertising, market research, or any related field?
Appendix H: Survey for Study 1

[Text in brackets is not displayed to respondents.]

[INSTRUCTIONS] Thank you for participating in this survey, which should take you about 15 minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may stop this survey at any time. Please keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers, so please just be honest. You will also be asked just a few general demographic questions at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions about this survey at any time you may consult the researcher at lmonahan@usf.edu. Thank you again for your time! By clicking on “>>” at the bottom of this page, you are verifying that you have read the above information and agree to participate in this survey. You will now be shown an ad. Please review the ad and answer the questions that follow.

(1) After seeing this ad, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements related to the brand Apple.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple is a trustworthy brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple is a sincere brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple does not pretend to be something that it isn’t.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Attention Check] Apple is a brand of clothing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple is an honest brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) Thinking about the ad you just saw, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This ad is not attempting to mislead me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The claims made in this ad are honest.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This ad is telling the truth.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information presented in this ad is unbiased.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(3) Please tell us your gender.

Male ____ Female ____

(4) Please tell us your age (in years).

(5) Do you, or any member of your immediate family work in marketing, advertising, market research or any related field?
Appendix I: Survey for Study 2

[Text in brackets not displayed to respondents.]

Text in italics was not displayed in the control condition.

[INSTRUCTIONS] Thank you for participating in this survey, which should take you about 15 minutes to complete. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may stop this survey at any time. Please keep in mind, there are no right or wrong answers, so please just be honest. You will also be asked just a few general demographic questions at the conclusion of the study. If you have any questions about this survey at any time you may consult the researcher at Imonahan@usf.edu. Thank you again for your time!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) Please indicate your feelings towards the corporate brand Chick-fil-A on the scales below.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completely Hate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot Stand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2)[FILLER TASK] Please list as many words as you can think of that have "e" in the middle. For example, apartment or met. We will give you three minutes to complete this task.

You will now be shown an ad. Please review the ad and answer the questions that follow.
(3) After seeing this ad, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements related to the brand Chick-fil-A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is a trustworthy brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is a sincere brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A does not pretend to be something that it isn’t.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is a brand of electronics. [Attention Check]</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A does not attempt to mislead consumers.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chick-fil-A is an honest brand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(4) Thinking about the ad you just saw, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the statements below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This ad is not attempting to mislead me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The claims made in this ad are honest.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This ad is telling the truth.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information presented in this ad is unbiased.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This ad is not lying to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(5) After seeing this ad, please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to engage in the behaviors listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Definitely disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Definitely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post something positive on Facebook about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak positively to others about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defend the brand Chick-fil-A to others.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocate on behalf of the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage others to eat at Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(6) After seeing this ad, please indicate how likely or unlikely you would be to engage in the behaviors listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Definitely would not</th>
<th>Most likely would not</th>
<th>Probably would not</th>
<th>Probably would</th>
<th>Most likely would</th>
<th>Definitely would</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post something negative on Facebook about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak negatively to others about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>[Attention Check]</strong> The American flag is red, white and blue.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree with others if they are speaking negatively about the brand Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage others not to eat at Chick-fil-A.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(7) What is your gender?

(8) What is your age?

(9) Do you, or any member of your immediate family work in marketing, advertising, market research or any related field?
Appendix J: Study 1 Validation of Regression Assumptions

Q-Q Plots:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Normality</th>
<th>Equality of Error Variances (Levene's Test)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad Cred</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Trust</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-0.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K: Study 2 Validation of Regression Assumptions

Q-Q Plots:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Normality</th>
<th>Equality of Error Variances (Levene’s Test)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad Cred</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Trust</td>
<td>-0.47</td>
<td>-0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWOM</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-1.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L: IRB Approval Letter

May 25, 2017

Lisa Monahan
Marketing
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB#: Pro00030536
Title: The Influence of Hate-Acknowledging Advertising on Brand Outcomes

Study Approval Period: 5/25/2017 to 5/25/2018

Dear Ms. Monahan:

On 5/25/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
Study Protocol 000030536

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:
Informed consent for 000030536.docx

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent documents are valid until the consent document is amended and approved. The online consent form is not a stamped form.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:
(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your study qualifies for a waiver of the requirements for the documentation of informed consent as outlined in the federal regulations at 45CFR46.117(c) which states that an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects if it finds either: (1) That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of confidentiality. Each subject will be asked whether the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the research, and the subject’s wishes will govern; or (2) That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. (Online consent).

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board