Exploring Consumers' Conflict Styles: Grudges and Forgiveness Following Marketer Failure

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ABSTRACT
To date, research has not extensively examined consumer conflict styles following a transgression of commercial relationship norms by firms. We examine instances of service failure between consumers and long-time service providers using critical incident interviews with 30 informants. The findings indicate that the decision to perpetuate grudges or forgive service providers following a transgression is moderated by consumers’ self- vs. other-orientation, emotional intelligence, and attachment style. The findings provide a new perspective on grudge holding and highlight the dark side associated with strong emotional bonds between consumers and service providers.

INTRODUCTION
One downside to close dedication-based relationships (relationships based on trust and voluntary membership; Bendapundi and Berry 1997) between firms and consumers is that customers in these relationships may react more negatively to severe service failures—“a violation of the implicit or explicit rules guiding relationship performance and evaluation” (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004, p.2). Bendapundi and Berry (1997, p. 33) propose that such violations lead to “ill-will and consequent negative repercussions.” Repercussions may include negative twist behaviors (“unwanted behaviors of resistance against the company”; Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan 2004, p. 784) including long-term grudgeholding, theft, vandalism, negative word-of-mouth, anti-brand websites, and in rare cases physical abuse of service personnel (Andreason 2001). These outcomes often occur even when seemingly reasonable efforts at service-recovery have been undertaken. Since many service organizations position themselves as sincere relationship partners that espouse consumer centricity (Bolton, Smith, and Wagner 2003) the betrayal of relationship norms potentially represents a significant moment in the consumer-brand relationship (Aggarwal 2004) because consumers place greater emphasis on negative events than on positive performances, and an “updating of expectations may take hold when disconfirmation exceeds a certain threshold” (Rust, Inman, Jia, and Zahorik 1999, p. 90). Such transgressions may result in counter factual thinking about the service provider resulting in a negative reassessment of the brands’ motives (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks 2003). Moreover, the literature suggests that relationships are renegotiated (for the worse) following a transgression regardless of whether service recovery efforts were successfully undertaken (Maxham and Netemeyer 2002).

We examine why some consumers continue to perpetuate grudges against service providers and why and how consumers come to forgive transgressing firms. This paper examines these questions by drawing on the relational conflict literature. Although service provider transgressions have been examined from the perspective of dissatisfaction and justice (Smith and Bolton 2002), research on interpersonal conflict reveals a broader range of conflict responses or styles, and a range of moderators that go beyond concerns of justice to include a complex range of post-betrayal outcomes and moderators. For example, research on the nature of betrayal by romantic partners covers a broad range of possible cognitive, emotional and behavioral outcomes (McCullough et al. 1998). In particular, this research focuses on explaining how and why betrayed partners may engage in acts that seek to repair or end relationships. Such research on helps to explain why some consumers perpetuate grudges following a transgression.

METHODS
Long in-home interviews were performed with consumers, focusing on service brand choice, usage, and instances of serious failure. Service brand consumption is a rich context in which to investigate topics of relationship realignment, dissatisfaction, and forgiveness because consumers establish ongoing relationships with brands or marketing organizations (Fournier 1998). Further, transgressions sometimes occur in marketers’ relationships with consumers (Aaker et al. 2004), and consumers adjust their meanings of, and relationships with them, accordingly. Our dataset consisted of thirty interviews with consumers (16 women and 14 men aged between 17 and 61) that had experienced failures in commercial relationships—thus theoretical sampling was employed. To probe into and elaborate on motivations for switching, types of transgressions, and eventual outcomes of transgressions, we employed some projective techniques by providing informants a range of images to help them elaborate on their reactions (Zaltman 2004). In each case we asked informants to discuss the nature of the relationship prior to the transgression, the nature of the transgression and the outcomes. Where relevant, we asked informants to compare the transgressing brand with any new brands that the informant switched to. As well, further probes into informants’ emotional responses to transgression addressed personal life themes.

Interviews lasted approximately sixty to ninety minutes and were subsequently transcribed. These interviews were then analyzed by classifying the types of transgressions, processes of dealing with transgressions, and the outcomes that occurred using coding methods described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Data was read over and analyzed independently by the authors, and then jointly discussed during face-to-face meetings and ongoing email correspondence. Overall, interpretive analysis was performed on the data in order to understand the rich details surrounding types of transgressions and their outcomes, and connecting data derived circumstances to constructs of interest such as relationship change and forgiveness. Finally, categories derived from the data were connected to and enriched by prior research, furthering our understanding of realignment in consumers’ relationships service providers. For building theory, attention was paid to those consumption stories that appeared to challenge and extend extant findings (due to space limitations we focus on four informants).

FINDINGS

Consumer Forgiveness
Forgiveness relates to the release of negative feelings associated with a transgression and overcoming such resentments for restoring the relationship to its original state (Sells and Hargrave 1998). In a comprehensive review of the literature Sells and Hargrave (1998, p. 28) identified six necessary conditions of forgiveness: a violation occurs that causes one partner emotional or physical pain; the violation results in a broken relationship between the parties; perpetuation of the injury is halted; a cognitive process is pursued where the painful event or action is understood or
reframed within a fuller context; there is a release or letting go of justifiable emotion and retaliation related to the event; and, there is a renegotiation of the relationship. Of the sampled informants, 16 forgave the transgressor, with nine remaining in the relationship and seven exiting.

In describing examples of forgiveness, informants recounted incidences in a calm manner and although engaging in negative word-of-mouth, they only did so when people asked them about certain service classes. In cases where negative word-of-mouth occurred, the focus was on poor service standards—a functional assessment of the partner’s performance. As well, these informants’ transgressions involved a pattern of constant failures and in some cases illegal behavior before the consumers decided that the relationship should be terminated. And, these informants often engaged in intense efforts to repair the relationship and reconcile with the transgressor during incidences of failure, often stating how they “followed the rules,” or “played their part”—characteristics absent in instances of grudgeholding. Thus, even when exit resulted, these informants met the six conditions of forgiveness identified by Sells and Hargrave (1998). For example, Peter (WM30) recounted his experience with the National Bank, identifying multiple small failures including sending credit cards to the wrong address, failing to send personal security codes for the card, and poor service-recovery efforts from the bank’s credit card center. Such failures had practical repercussions for Peter and his wife because all their credit cards and bank accounts were interlinked—therefore failures often made accessing money difficult, or in cases where new cards had to be sent out, account and internet banking details had to be constantly changed. However, despite these incidences of failure, Peter and his wife kept their anger under control, engaged in efforts to repairing the relationship, and were prepared to extend forgiveness. For example:

“Well their service was terrible! They were rude, unhelpful. Again, we tolerate mistakes, but if the service is good and they try and rectify it, you can be very forgiving, but if they continually, and they did, continually do the same thing and treated us very poorly and we sent them letters about granting my wife access to the accounts and they had it on system, but they always said she couldn’t deal with the account. So this went on and on and on, we had really, really had enough.”

Peter’s passage above was reflective of the stance of many of our informants experiencing small service slippages or failures (anger was followed by a reframing of the event, calming down, attempts to repair the relationship, and eventual exit when it dawned upon the informant that these efforts would not be reciprocated). Peter only sought to exit the relationship after it was clear that his generosity and benevolence within the relationship would not be reciprocated. Peter’s unwillingness to exit the relationship immediately was also moderated by his empathy with staff (he described many service personnel as “victims of the system” rather than being intrinsically rude individuals). As such, Peter ultimately attributed fault to the brand per se.

“Yes, the bank as an entity, because you can forgive one or two service failures, you know, you can have bad days, you can cop a bad one but generally you don’t have them all bad, but it was very consistent and we had enough and it was their system, whatever they did, it was their information system, they always got it wrong. And obviously they didn’t have the power to deal with it.”

Peter’s ability to explain one-off failures as poor timing or bad luck is evidence of his desire to empathize with service staff. However, ongoing failures led Peter to reconsider his stance. Peter’s instances of anger and frustration were therefore used to generate counter-factual thinking about the brand (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks 2003), and the likely future experiences—a reexamination of the likely future value of a continued relationship with the offending partner. As such, what were perceived as “one-off” service failures were seen as part of a wider systemic failure that undermined the ability of bank representatives to authentically deliver on their promises. Peter, who defined his expectations of the service provider in terms of “fast, prompt and friendly professional service,” realized that these expectations would never be met given the firm’s wider problems. However, during this period of time, Peter was still reluctant to leave the bank, describing himself as “too forgiving” and “very patient” and also identifying that although alternatives exist, switching costs in terms of changing account information with employers, suppliers of regular services, and the hassles involved with setting up new phone and internet banking were also involved. For example:

“No, no, we try and get it right. Too much hassle to keep changing banks. As long as they respond and they communicate the problem, or their explanation, and they are upfront about it and you know what’s going on. Even when it’s a human error, you can live with it, as long as they fix it properly.”

The final act of betrayal involved a serious violation of customer confidentiality, when a friend working at the bank accessed their account and gave details of their finances to other friends (an illegal act under Australian law). However, even here, Peter’s concern that informing the bank would result in the staff member losing their job (“we wouldn’t them to lose their job”) led him to quietly exit the relationship. Peter forgave because he saw that the outcomes of complaining would impact negatively on the service staff—a result he did not desire because of his empathy with staff. Peter’s post-transgression experience was typical of several consumers that emotionally moved on from a negative relationship, rather than ruminating on past events and bearing a grudge. Although Peter will not return to the National Bank in the future, the transgression effectively no longer plays any role in his life.

Peter chose his service providers on the basis of functional performance. In contrast the next example involves a stronger emotional bond between the informant (Tom) and the service provider. Tom (WM18) formed an emotional bond with his chosen service provider, a local retailer of surf equipment because one of his goals was to become a proficient surfer. When he used his new high performance wetsuits it failed dramatically. For example:

“Unfortunately it stretched while I was in the freezing cold water… and let everything in, the water, everything and I froze… came out shaking…and I was numb… I didn’t think it would stretch like that but it stretched quite considerably, which they are meant to do, but at the time, I think it was one of my first wet suits, and I didn’t think it would because my Rip Curl [wetsuit] hadn’t…it did something that was unexpected to me.”

Because of this failure, Tom returned to the Billabong retail store and was told most wetsuits stretch and it was necessary for him to buy a new suit. Tom could have reacted angrily (and switched back to Rip Curl or demanded compensation) at this point given that
this retailer prides itself on surfing expertise and could have been expected to advise him to buy a smaller suit first time (wetsuits are an expensive purchase and usually require customers to interact closely with retail staff in order to get the right fit). Instead, Tom reframed the experience and apportioned the blame to himself: “that was just my error that I didn’t know. I hadn’t researched it well enough and didn’t look.” He subsequently bought another Billabong wetsuit and vest. Tom has many choices of wetsuit providers and there is a wide range of high quality retail outlets that will ensure he gets a suit suited to his needs. As well, Tom had previously experienced an alternative as a child with his Rip Curl suit. So why did Tom forgive the brand and remain within the relationship?

First, Tom views this experience as part of a learning curve to become a proficient surfer and thus gains value from the experience because he is now better paced to make informed purchase decisions in the future and has actually gained a better wetsuit as a result. Second, although Tom experienced the Rip Curl brand, he did so as a youngster and thus views it as a “kid’s brand” rather than a high performance one. Third, retail stores are located close to beaches and therefore employ people who can provide equipment to deal with local wave and weather conditions (whereas stores away from beaches often focus on selling surf-inspired fashion accessories). Thus, by continuing to frequent the retailer he can improve his chances of achieving his goal. Fourth, because of his brand beliefs (partly formed due to his relative novice status as a surfer) he prefers to choose tried and tested brands like Billabong over others. Therefore, despite the seeming available of alternatives, for all intents and purposes, Tom perceives he has little choice of service provider. Research identifies that aggrieved partners extend forgiveness when they believe that there are benefits in doing so, the partner will reciprocate, and there are no alternatives (McCullough et al. 1997). In these cases, aggrieved partners may reframe the transgression and even accept some of the blame for its occurrence (Finkel et al. 2002). This helps explain Tom’s conflict style in this case.

### Consumer Grudge Holding

According to the literature, there are various forms of forgiveness and alternatives to forgiving a transgression (McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal 1997). For example, an individual may experience unforgiving responses such as harboring a grudge, rehearsing the hurt, perpetuating on negative emotions, seeking revenge, or maintaining estrangement from the transgressor. Unforgiveness and grudge holding following a transgression generally leads to vindictive behavior because transgressions create a “debt” that motivates a person to “get even” with the transgressor through seeking vengeance (Finkel et al. 2002). Unforgiveness could be reduced without explicitly promoting forgiveness, such as by accepting the hurt, reframing the events and circumstances around the offence, seeking justice, managing the stress related to the event, and controlling the anger resulting from the offence (Wade and Worthington 2003).

As noted, 14 informants maintained grudges against the service provider, with eight exiting the relationship and six staying. For example, Jack (WM20s) discussed two poignant examples of exit that remained emotionally charged (these had occurred some time earlier), and in one case, engaged actively in negative twist behaviors. Thus, although the relationships were ended from a commercial standpoint, they still played a prominent role in his life. Jack’s examples are more emotionally charged, and he attributes moral failure to the brand and in the case of banks, the product class as a whole. For example:

“Basically what cemented my opinion of the Commonwealth Bank and what convinced me to leave it was the service I got from the staff member in the bank. I was waiting for quite a long time and the staff member was busy with another customer helping them with some new account, but she would dawdle and she wasn’t hurrying up at all and I was in the bank for over half an hour, just waiting for her. I was waiting and there was another woman there who was serving someone else as well and that customer actually walked out the door, leaving the one woman free and instead of that woman saying I will be with you in a moment or something like that, she just walked out the back and she didn’t come back. And, meanwhile the other person who was serving the one who’s dawdling with the new customer, wouldn’t look up at me, wouldn’t look up at me at all and finally the customer leaves and I walk over there and she didn’t apologize for the wait or anything and it’s like, well, okay, this is the service you should expect in banks anyway. That was more or less the attitude I got from her and I wasn’t impressed with that, so basically if her attitude had been different, then I guess I wouldn’t have been so harsh with the bank. But, basically it cemented my attitude and contributed to my decision to leave it.”

Jack’s response sits in stark contrast to Peter’s more tolerant attitude regarding episodes like this. Jack describes this event as “the straw that broke this camel’s back” and then described a long line of seemingly small service failures that were characterized by a lack of customer centricity including poor service in branches, lack of friendliness, and bureaucratic service rules. However, Jack also recognized that he may have been harsh with the bank by judging it based on his encounter with two staff members. Rather than reflect on this seeming rash act he generalizes from this incident first to the bank, and then to all banks as a class.

“I felt angry that the Commonwealth Bank as a corporation had allowed it to get to a stage where they purposely want you to wait in the bank with the aim of not going back to the branch, with you getting fed up with it, so you have to go and use your phone banking or your internet banking and I believe that that’s what it’s all about, that they are trying to deter you from going in the bank, that’s why they keep you waiting and that’s why they don’t provide the service and people in the finish just give up and don’t go into the branches anymore. [I. Do you explain a bit more about giving up?] People think, okay, this is the service that we can expect from banks, so we are not going to put up with it, so we will just, won’t go into the branch. [I. Do you think you just had her on a bad day, or do you think she is always like that?] No, no I think it is in regards to banks, yes. Yes, definitely. I think it’s, over the years because they have been closing branches and putting off staff, I think that the attitude of the staff and the banks has gotten worse, because they are putting up with so much abuse from the public and I did actually say something to the girl about waiting, about the length of time that I had to wait in the bank and I said, you know, it’s nothing against you, but I think it’s ridiculous that I had to wait so long and so on. And, she said well, yes I know, but the Commonwealth Bank has actually put off staff and this is the way they like things to be done now and we do apologize for the wait, but they are actually trying to get people to use the phone banking, instead of coming into the branches. And I said, well it’s just not good enough, I understand that, but it’s just not good enough. I said, you have lost me as a customer
and she, basically, yeah, okay, there goes another one. [I. How did she react, was she angry that you were leaving, or didn’t care?] No, she didn’t care. It was like okay, yeah, this is number 567 for today...."

Jack’s anger generated during the service encounter triggered a cognitive reappraisal of the brand, and then of banks per se. Like Peter, Jack engages in counterfactual thinking where he compared his experiences to his expectations of service (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks 2003), the result of which was a realization that there was little value congruence between him and the brand (value congruence is believed to moderate responses to transgressions; Aggarwal 2004; Macintosh and Stevens 2006). Jack considers the failures to be part of a wider systemic problem at the bank, but rather than simply attribute it to poor functional processes, Jack judges the bank’s (and product class’) motives—by blaming the failure on the greed of the banks and belief that the owners are conspiring to deliberately create a negative experience so they can increase profits by shutting down branches and laying off staff.

“Basically they have just become more money hungry over the years. Their profits are just out of hand, and the media keeps reporting on that obviously, saying that they are in the tens and millions of dollars and so on. And account keeping fees keep going up, they are closing branches all the time and they are trying to force people out of the branches and onto the phone network and the Internet network.”

To understand Jack’s viewpoint one also needs to consider his attachment to bank. Jack had stronger emotional ties to the Commonwealth Bank. As a schoolboy he had banked his weekly pocket money with this bank as part of a national scheme to encourage savings. As such, the relationship is full of rich self-relevant meanings and memories (cf. Thomson et al. 2005). As a result, Jack built up an expectation that the bank would care for him because of his long loyalty.

“I have always actually banked with them from primary school, that’s when my first account started and I was sort of disappointed that with the service I received, they were just prepared to allow me to close my accounts, without any queries with, nothing. I guess because I had been with them for so long that I sort of had a trust that the Commonwealth Bank would be there for me, when I say be there for me, that they wouldn’t be as harsh as what I thought they could be, as what I had learnt to believe banks were.”

Jack’s belief in the benevolence of the Commonwealth Bank as a brand partner was challenged when despite a long period of loyalty, he realized that the bank simply did not care about him either way—reinforced by the service worker’s lack of surprise or emotional concern at his request to close his accounts. Such an experience was described by Jack as a “wake up call” to the true nature of banks as commercial entities (despite their espoused rhetoric of partnership). Jack realized that he was not truly in a genuine relationship, and had little influence on the bank, or value to it.

Veronica (WF20s), who describes herself as “not very forgiving” discussed a number of instances of “instant exit”—cases where a small infraction led to immediate exit, at much emotional and practical cost to her. For example, despite knowing that requests for large sums needed to be made 24 hours in advance, Veronica wanted the bank to wave this requirement. Following an initial rebuff from a service provider and Veronica’s anger, a manager relented and waved the wait period as part of a service recovery effort. Yet, Veronica exited.

“I said, “I give you my money and I really don’t want to be treated like this.” It wasn’t about money, it was more about the attitude... It’s like they’re a bank, but “please don’t bank with us, just give us your money.” Anyway, I spoke to the manager and I explained that I needed this money urgently, and she said, “that’s no problem, you can come back in about an hour and a half and you will have the cash.” I was shocked and surprised, because I could not understand on what basis she actually made this decision because all of a sudden I could have anything and in that afternoon I came back, I got my cash and I said, “can I please close the account?” “Oh, why are you doing this?” And I said because I was not treated the way I wanted to be treated.”

This seemingly rash decision to exit following one-off “failures” characterized all of Veronica’s examples, including product and service providers. For example, she dropped L’Oreal as a brand partner despite many years of preference due to one small failure and a recognition that alternatives are difficult to find in cosmetics given the intimate nature of the product (after two years of searching for a satisfactory alternative to no avail Veronica returned to L’Oreal). Veronica recognizes that she has a lost a sense of perspective in her responses yet nevertheless constantly exits relationships following seemingly small slights.

“She was really sorry and she apologized and I was kind of sorry. She was the nice person and I didn’t want to be nasty or anything to her. I just said this has happened once and I just— you know, I don’t want to deal with you guys, that’s it, so she was really upset that I closed the account and afterwards I got a letter from her, where she actually tried to win me back as a customer and I said it’s too late, because you could have prevented this from happening that day and now it’s just too late, I’m not interested.”

Even allowing for the lack of procedural justice, Veronica did not view what was a one-off encounter as the result of a bad experience, or perhaps a trainee staff member’s inexperience. Veronica’s experience and reaction is also highly emotive. For example:

[I. What was it about that particular situation that prompted the all or nothing decision?] As a customer, you should actually have access to your funds all the time. I knew about the 24 hours notification, but after I asked for a cheque and she said no, then I thought something was wrong, because this is not right and then five minutes later, I speak to her manager and all of a sudden, I get a completely different service and that’s what I didn’t like. [I. What did you attribute this to?] Maybe lack of knowledge by this person. She should have actually told me I’m not sure or can you come back later and I’ll find out, but not just, no, you can’t. I just said if I actually have to put in requests 24 hours in advance, then I just don’t bank with you, it’s that simple... although she kind of didn’t deserve that response, they kind of provided this overall image and that’s what I associate with the St George Bank. Again, sometimes just individuals standing behind a counter or a person are having a bad day, but I’m a customer and this is a bank and that’s all I know. I don’t really want to deal with their individual problems or their bad days....”
Veronica’s choice of the St George bank is not coincidental. This particular bank positions itself as the “non-bank, bank” (banks within Australia are regularly placed last in consumer satisfaction surveys). In contrast, St George has adopted an emotional branding strategy, positioning themselves around authentic service, customer centricity, friendliness, and at a time when many banks are closing branches, this bank is expanding their branch network. For Veronica, the choice of banking partner was driven by the emphasis they placed on her value as an individual, the strong sense of service and customer centricity and their flexibility in responding to customer needs. Therefore, Veronica’s action (identified by her as “unreasonable”) can be explained partly by her high sense of entitlement (Exline et al. 2004) and her belief that she has a number of other alternatives in the product class. Thus she reacts to conflict by seeking to dominate the offending partner (Macintosh and Stevens 2006). By exiting, Veronica reaffirms herself as a powerful consumer, even though later on (as with her car repair agency and L’Oreal) she returns to the relationship after failing to find an alternative (in the projective techniques, Veronica referred to a picture of a boxer in a fighting pose to characterize her attitudes to brands). Veronica’s use of a fighting metaphor suggests she will be perpetually disappointed in commercial relationships, thus increasing her search and trial costs.

**DISCUSSION**

Based on the informant passages above we suggest three moderators of consumers’ post-transgression conflict style: self-vs. other-orientation, emotional intelligence, and attachment style. First, research on conflict styles suggests aggrieved individuals may respond to transgressions in one of four ways: integration (cooperative behavior with transgressor), dominating (aggressive behavior towards transgressor), obliging (acquiescence to transgressor) or avoiding. These outcomes are moderated by concern for self and others (Macintosh and Stevens 2006; Rahim 1983; Twomey 1978). For example, both Jack and Veronica have a high degree of self-orientation and as such seek to dominate the offending partner, whereas Peter exhibits a high degree of other-orientation and seeks integration and obligation.

Peter’s actions may be explained by their over emphasis on other-orientation at the expense of self-orientation. Rahim (1983) proposed that individuals exhibiting a high concern for self and other were likely to engage in genuine efforts at repairing the relationship in order to maximize the benefits to both parties. In cases where other orientation dominates, the aggrieved party may be more forgiving of the aggressor and seek to understand and rationalize the aggressor’s actions so they can move forward. This suggests that self-vs. other-orientation may moderate forgiveness outcomes. For example, Sells and Hargrave (1998) suggest that cessation of injury is necessary for forgiveness to occur, yet Peter engages in many actions consistent with a forgiving stance even though he continued to suffer ongoing hurt. By way of contrast, Tom exhibits greater balance in self-vs. other-orientation and strong emotional processing results in forgiveness. Veronica’s relationships were also characterized by less rich (in comparison with Tom and Jack) emotional attachments (e.g., her response to strong emotional campaigns such as St George’s friendly customer centric bank advertisements and L’Oreal “Because You’re Worth It”) although unlike Tom and initially Jack, she believes that such brands are easily replaced (Twomey 1978).

Such findings enrich our understanding of consumer grudgeholding and contribute to emerging debates on consumer conflict styles (Macintosh and Stevens 2006). In regards to self-vs. other-orientation we identify that for consumers at either extreme, reconciliation is likely to be difficult. In cases where self-orientation dominates relationships are terminated quickly following a transgression, with the aggrieved party unlikely to seek reconciliation or respond to service recovery efforts. This is particularly so for high self-oriented consumers with low levels of emotional intelligence. In contrast, high self-oriented consumers with stronger emotional intelligence are likely to remain within relationships because they engage in some level of emotional processing that result in them placing the transgression within a wider context of benefits. Consumers high on other-orientation are more likely to tolerate constant errors, forgive small failure, and in cases of severe transgressions (such as Peter) simply exit relationships without holding a grudge (and engaging in costly negative behaviors for the brand).

Research is necessary to confirm the findings herein by using attachment scales (Thomson et al. 2005), conflict orientations (Rahim 1983), and emotional intelligence (Yang and Mossholder 2004). Experimental scenarios of transgressions could be devel-
oped to examine the relationship between personality type and propensity to forgive could be developed. These scenarios could also take into account perceived switching costs (choice of alternatives). Research could also examine barriers to forgiveness such as narcissism. As consumer culture can be characterized by an entitlement mentality (Boyd and Helms 2005), research could draw on narcissism scales to assess consumers’ proneness to forgive (Exline et al. 2004).

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