10-2024

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International Journal of Consumer Studies

WILEY

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

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Received: 16 March 2024 | **Revised:** 26 September 2024 | **Accepted:** 9 October 2024

Keywords: brand trust | ideological incongruity | negative word-of-mouth | perceived corporate social responsibility | symbolic incongruity

ABSTRACT

Drawing upon consumer–brand disidentification theory and balance theory, this study examines symbolic and ideological incongruity in consumer–brand relationships through an original conceptual model shaped by negative past experiences, brand trust, perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR), and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM). A preliminary study was conducted to explore the dimensions of consumers' negative past experiences by topic detection. Latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic modeling was undertaken to analyze online consumer reviews ($n = 6095$) about a coffee chain brand. The dimensions detected in this preliminary study were included in the research model and further analyzed in the main study. The main study, a cross-sectional consumer survey ($n = 522$), tested the original research model by way of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) on SmartPLS. The findings showed that negative past experiences consisted of product-related, service-related, and technology-related problems and negatively influenced brand trust. It was found that brand trust and perceived CSR negatively affected symbolic and ideological incongruity, while symbolic and ideological incongruity positively influenced NWOM. The findings provide empirical evidence for balance theory by showing that the three critical domains of consumer–brand relationships (ideological, symbolic, and experiential) provide a complex cognitive model that covers personal-symbolic and moral-societal aspects of consumer–brand disidentification and consequent NWOM intentions. In line with consumer–brand disidentification theory, the results contribute to the literature by demonstrating the direct negative impacts of brand trust and perceived CSR on symbolic and ideological incongruity, as well as the direct positive impacts of symbolic and ideological incongruity on NWOM.

1 | Introduction

Understanding negative consumer–brand relationships and negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) is essential for marketing researchers and practitioners (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Pinto and Brandão 2021; Markovic et al. 2022; Brandão, Ribeiro, and Gadekar 2023; Ribeiro and Kalro 2023). Marketing managers and academics must understand the factors leading to consumer–brand incongruence and NWOM, as NWOM can quickly spread among consumers and lead to the deterioration of a brand's image and competitiveness (de Campos Ribeiro, Butori, and Le Nagard 2018; Bhaduri et al., 2024; Mar García-de los Salmones, Herrero, and Martínez 2021). In a recent study, Sameeni et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of examining NWOM for brands as a means of understanding and managing the adverse impacts of brand hate, preventing its escalation into more damaging consumer behavior, and maintaining a positive brand

reputation, especially in the digital landscape. As a reflection of the symbolic and ideological incongruity between a consumer and brand, NWOM might be triggered and lead to protest behavior and brand avoidance (Kurtoğlu, Özbölük, and Hacıhasanoğlu 2022; Kamboj and Sharma 2023; Rahimah et al. 2023). Even though researchers have observed a substantial behavioral shift on a global scale with consumers experiencing brand hate more frequently than ever before, the existing literature primarily focuses on positive consumer–brand relationships. Thus, negative consumer–brand interactions continue to constitute a substantial lacuna in the research (Khatoon and Rehman 2021; Abbasi et al. 2023; Kamboj and Sharma 2023; Yadav 2024).

Ideological and identity mismatches between consumers and brands produce long-lasting and hazardous effects for the latter (Kucuk 2021). Consumers may avoid brands because of negative past experiences, the symbolic incongruity of the brand with the consumer's identity, and discrepancies between the consumer's ideological beliefs and the brand's values (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021). Consumers' negative emotions regarding brands can arise from previous instances of customer dissatisfaction, unfavorable associations in consumers' minds regarding the brand and its users, and negatively perceived corporate practices (Zarantonello et al. 2016). Corporate social irresponsibility, negative past experiences, symbolic incongruity, and ideological incongruity have been offered up as the underlying reasons for brand avoidance and brand hate (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021; Abbasi et al. 2023). However, positive emotions, such as moral emotions, may interact with or counteract brand hate (Brandão, Ribeiro, and Gadekar 2023; Taqi et al. 2024). Accordingly, brands might launch corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to reduce incongruity with their consumers (Curina et al. 2021) and to boost positive emotions and perceptions. CSR initiatives may lead to more favorable brand perceptions and make consumers more likely to spread positive WOM (Markovic et al. 2022). Despite the importance of perceived CSR in consumer–brand disidentification, few studies have been carried out that empirically demonstrate the impact of perceived CSR on ideological and symbolic brand incongruity (Swaen and Chumpitaz 2008; Curina et al. 2021).

CSR initiatives can be particularly salient in the coffee chain sector, which is quite popular among consumers, as exemplified by the farmer loan and tree donation programs launched by Starbucks, as well as community-building initiatives such as the children's foundation and minor sports programs initiated by Tim Horton's (Bianco 2020). Taking up an original perspective, the current study posits that perceived CSR might reduce symbolic and ideological brand incongruity since CSR actions can impact brand–consumer relationships and build a positive brand image that customers can identify with (Bianchi, Bruno, and Sarabia-Sanchez 2019). Within that context, by building on consumer–brand disidentification and balance theory, this study examines negative past experiences, brand trust, symbolic and ideological brand incongruence, and perceived CSR as antecedents of NWOM (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Heider 1958; Wolter et al. 2016; Han, Seo, and Ko 2017). The current study addresses the following research questions, among others: How do symbolic and ideological incongruities influence negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) in consumer–brand relationships, and what roles do negative past experiences, brand trust, and perceived CSR play in these dynamics? In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by simultaneously examining three important pillars of negative consumer–brand relationships (symbolic incongruity, ideological incongruity, and negative past experiences) together with brand trust and perceived CSR as a means of explaining NWOM.

This research addresses a gap in the literature by testing an original conceptual model regarding the antecedents (negative past experience, brand trust, and perceived CSR) and consequences (NWOM) of symbolic and ideological incongruity. Additional studies on ideological incongruity, symbolic incongruity, perceived CSR, and negative past experiences needed to be carried out (Joshi and Garg 2021; Valor, Antonetti, and Zasuwa 2022; Abbasi et al. 2023). Although some researchers have dealt with negative brand perceptions and brand hate in recent years, quantitative studies that focus on ideological and symbolic incongruity remain scarce (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Hashim and Kasana 2019; Joshi and Yadav 2021; Kurtoğlu, Özbölük, and Hacıhasanoğlu 2021; Rahimah et al. 2023; Abbasi et al. 2023). While some studies have focused on the relationships between negative past experiences and symbolic and ideological incongruity (Hashim and Kasana 2019; Abbasi et al. 2023) and others have investigated NWOM (Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021; Kamboj and Sharma 2023), the literature on consumer–brand disidentification, which is a relatively new phenomenon, is quite limited (Wolter et al. 2016; Anaza et al. 2021). Moreover, further research that specifies the brand context and sector regarding symbolic incongruity and NWOM (Pinto and Brandão 2021) along with negative experiences and symbolic incongruity (Islam et al. 2019) is needed given the relatively limited number of studies on consumer–brand disidentification.

This study extends the previous findings and makes four key theoretical contributions by (1) simultaneously examining three important domains of consumer–brand relationships (ideological, symbolic, and experiential) with a holistic research model based on balance theory and consumer–brand disidentification theory, (2) testing the dimensions of negative past experiences obtained via machine learning by way of a solid theoretical model, (3) extending the literature by including two cognitive variables, perceived CSR and brand trust, in a complex model that explains NWOM, and finally (4) testing the direct impact of symbolic and ideological incongruity on NWOM. Moreover, as another original contribution this study incorporates machine learning (topic detection) as a preliminary study to reveal the dimensions of negative past experiences reflected in online consumer reviews. The detected dimensions of negative past experiences were used as inputs in the main study that were to be tested by structural equation modeling. In the preliminary study, the dimensions of negative past experiences regarding a prominent coffee chain in Turkey were explored through social media and modeled by machine learning (latent Dirichlet allocation [LDA]/topic

modeling), thereby making a novel contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

Coffee chains were selected as the research context for three main reasons. First, they are very popular and have rapidly expanded in recent decades in Turkey; since Starbucks opened its first branch in Istanbul in 2003, the number of coffee shops (both global coffee chains and local coffee shops) has increased, and many Turkish consumers see specialty coffee consumption as being trendy and prestigious (Ünan Göktan and Uslu 2022). The volume of fresh and instant coffee sold to the on-trade food service sector increased from 6.4 billion cups in 2018 to 9.6 billion cups in 2023 (Euromonitor 2024), indicating that consumer demand is still growing in this sector. Second, service businesses generally have more consumer touchpoints than products, so it is crucial to investigate brand trust and negative past experiences and portray the consequences of perceived CSR (Markovic et al. 2022). Third, it would be useful to examine perceived CSR and NWOM in coffee chain businesses, which can act as a significant food and beverages retailers, since responsible choices made about food and drink businesses directly impact consumers' health and safety (Bhaduri et al. 2024). Compared to other sectors, consumers' negative evaluations regarding food and drink brands can be rather extreme (Curina et al. 2021) and may lead to NWOM. In addition, coffee chains are highly relevant for investigations of the CSR context because of their expansive CSR programs and CSR communications given the increase in discussions regarding their negative environmental impacts (Bianco 2020; Tosun 2022). These factors make coffee chains a prime service business for testing the current study's original research model. Within that context, the findings of this study may be valuable for many service businesses, including coffee shops, cafes, and restaurants.

Following the preliminary study, the main study tested the original research model which took into account negative past experiences, brand trust, perceived CSR, symbolic and ideological incongruity, and NWOM. The research model and hypotheses were tested with partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) on SmartPLS.

2 | Conceptual Background

2.1 | Negative Past Experiences

Negative past experiences may consist of unpleasant incidents or events consumers deal with while consuming a brand (Hashim and Kasana 2019). While favorable brand experiences can make a strong impression on consumers and positively influence brand trust, negative past experiences can worsen the relationship between a customer and brand by leading to unmet customer expectations, dissatisfaction, and mistrust (Chylinski and Chu 2010; Khan and Fatma 2019). The most common reasons for negative past experiences are product and service-related problems (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017), dissatisfaction with offerings, and product failures (Hashim and Kasana 2019). Low product performance that fails to meet expectations is an example of negative past experiences with a brand (Zarantonello et al. 2018). In addition to product failures, service dissatisfaction may result in a negative brand experience (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017).

2.2 | Consumer–Brand Disidentification Theory and Consumer–Brand Incongruence

Consumers purchase brands for functional benefits, symbolic meanings, and self-expression (Sirgy 1982). Consumers use brands to develop and maintain their identity, as previously indicated by streams of research on the extended self, brand personality, and consumer–brand identification and disidentification (Belk 1988; Aaker 1997; Wolter et al. 2016). The theory of disidentification is grounded in cognitive consistency and posits that consumers' identification and disidentification are realized through the actions and ideologies of organizations (Heider 1958; Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002). Dissimilarities between consumers and products may be related to consumer–brand disidentification and non-consumption of the focal brand (Gerhart and Ogbanufe 2022). Consumer–brand disidentification occurs when consumers reject and feel separated from a brand (Ruppel and Einwiller 2021). Consumers may feel a sense of disidentification with brands as a consequence of symbolic incongruity, as they might feel the brand does not reflect their identities, and ideological incongruity, as they might object to immoral company actions that go against their ethical values (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017).

In addition, consumers may disidentify with brands when they perceive an incongruence between their and the brand's values and when they dissociate their identity from the brand's (Anaza et al. 2021). Symbolic and ideological incongruities play a significant role in triggering brand hate, which significantly influences NWOM (Mohammed et al. 2022). In parallel, Sajid et al. (2024) reported that greenwashing significantly affects brand hate and brand hypocrisy, resulting in NWOM. As Sirgy (1982) indicated, it is not just functional benefits that consumers expect from products but also the symbolic value of the brand, which points to what a brand's products represent beyond their functional capabilities. A brand's symbolic value significantly impacts how consumers perceive and interact with it (Anaza et al. 2021). For example, an environmentally conscientious consumer may refuse to purchase a brand's products if they perceive that the brand does not value sustainability, bringing about a sense of symbolic incongruity between the brand and herself/himself.

A brand can be attractive or repulsive for consumers as a consequence of consumer–brand identification and disidentification (Wolter et al. 2016). Identifying/disidentifying with an organization is a way for consumers to preserve or enhance their self-concept (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002). Consumer–brand identification and disidentification stem from the cognitive self-categorization that leads consumers to accept a brand if it represents their self-concept or reject a brand that contradicts their sense of identity (Wolter et al. 2016). In parallel with consumer–brand disidentification theory, the self-congruity theory states that consumers prefer brands that align with their self-concept since they

seek congruence between a brand's image and their own self-concept (Sirgy 1982; Islam et al. 2019). Consumers may disidentify with brands as a result of conflicting values or the perception that the brand misrepresents them (Anaza et al. 2021). Within that context, this research draws upon the theories of self-congruity and consumer–brand disidentification. It defines consumer–brand incongruence as a cognitive appraisal in which consumers see a brand as not reflecting their identity (symbolic incongruence) and going against their values and beliefs (ideological incongruence).

2.2.1 | Symbolic Incongruity

Symbolic incongruity is a consumer's disidentification with a brand that is inconsistent with their personal image due to a mismatch between the brand's symbolic meanings and the consumer's self-concept (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017). Consumer–brand disidentification occurs when consumers reject a brand's symbolic attributes (Wolter et al. 2016). According to the disidentification theory, people develop their self-concept by disidentifying with brands that are not compatible with their self-image (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009). Symbolic incongruity may occur when a brand is associated with a negative reference group (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017) and an undesired self (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009). A brand's symbolic meaning arises from a self-brand connection and the influence of reference groups, where a consumer does not attribute high symbolic meaning to a brand used by dissociative reference groups (Hammerl et al. 2016).

2.2.2 | Ideological Incongruity

Ideological incongruence refers to a state of incompatibility between the beliefs and values of consumers and a brand, and it reflects a consumer's moral sensitivity to perceived socially irresponsible corporate behavior; for example, avoiding a brand because it mistreats its workers or displays irresponsible behavior regarding societal welfare (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Valor, Antonetti, and Zasuwa 2022). The mismatch between a consumer's and a brand's values, or value incongruence, results in consumer perceptions of self-brand dissimilarity and consumer–brand disidentification (Wolter et al. 2016; Anaza et al. 2021). Ideological incongruity extends beyond the symbolic match between a consumer's self-concept and a brand, and it covers moral and contextual issues such as corporate wrongdoing (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Kamboj and Sharma 2023). When a consumer's ideological beliefs conflict with a brand's actions and values, consumers may engage in moral avoidance as a consequence of the perceived negative influences that a brand's actions have on society (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009).

2.3 | Brand Trust

Brand trust is a cognitive factor and a belief about a brand's honesty, capability, and performance in terms of providing its stated functions (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Becerra and Badrinarayanan 2013; George et al. 2023). The safety, reliability, and honesty of a brand build up brand trust, which is a carefully considered belief that results from a cognitive process (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). According to the trust-commitment theory of relationship marketing, trust creates highly valued relationships and positively influences purchase intentions, attitudinal loyalty, purchase loyalty, and brand loyalty (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Becerra and Badrinarayanan 2013; Khan and Fatma 2019). The expectation is that brand trust positively influences consumer–brand identification as the basis of long-term and satisfactory consumer–brand relationships that depend on mutual commitment (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

2.4 | Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a company's voluntary commitment to community issues (Kotler and Lee 2005; Magnusson, Westjohn, and Zdravkovic 2015). According to the stakeholder theory, a company has responsibilities that extend beyond economic and legal responsibilities, such as creating profit and acting in compliance with the law, and those responsibilities apply to all stakeholders who influence or are influenced by the company's business dealings (Freeman 1984; Swaen and Chumpitaz 2008). CSR perceptions stem from a company's behavior regarding its employees and customers, actions related to social issues and community development, and a commitment to ecological problems (Bianchi, Bruno, and Sarabia-Sanchez 2019). While perceived CSR is linked to corporate reputation, brand image, and positive WOM, corporate social irresponsibility leads to negative feelings and NWOM (Swaen and Chumpitaz 2008; Zarantonello et al. 2016; Bianchi, Bruno, and Sarabia-Sanchez 2019; Husnain et al. 2020; Markovic et al. 2022; Rahimah et al. 2023).

2.5 | Negative Word-of-Mouth (NWOM)

NWOM, which involves saying negative things about a brand to relatives, friends, and others, is a behavioral reflection of negative emotions such as brand hate (Grappi, Romani, and Bagozzi 2013; Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021; Kurtoğlu, Özbölük, and Hacıhasanoğlu 2021; Pinto and Brandão 2021; Rahimah et al. 2023). It is "attack-like" consumer behavior arising as a response to negative brand emotions (Zarantonello et al. 2016). NWOM includes interpersonal communication and social influence (Grappi, Romani, and Bagozzi 2013). The NWOM process traditionally involves spoken communication, as well as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) which can take various forms such as skeptical, passive-aggressive, or warrior online reviews (Amezcua and Quintanilla 2016; Siqueira Jr et al. 2019; Wakefield and Wakefield 2018; Wang, Wang, and Wang 2018). Customers can also share their negative service experiences online through user-generated content as a means of getting revenge (Presi, Saridakis, and Hartmans 2014; de Campos Ribeiro, Butori, and Le Nagard 2018). By way of the internet, consumers can easily share their experiences and product brand evaluations on review websites, forums, instant messaging, and blogs, as well as with virtual communities (Hornik et al. 2015; Relling et al. 2016). NWOM is more influential for consumers than positive word-of-mouth because negative information has a stronger

impact on decision-making (Ahluwalia 2002; Williams and Buttle 2014). The reason for this is that negative emotions lead to higher engagement with NWOM among consumers during the consumption process (Zeelenberg and Pieters 2004). This tendency is influenced by factors such as ideological beliefs (Casidy et al. 2021). Moreover, NWOM engagement is also higher for services than goods (De Matos and Rossi 2008). Additionally, when a company receives negative publicity, its CSR fit and CSR history can also negatively affect NWOM (Chung and Lee 2022).

2.6 | Balance Theory and NWOM

Balance theory can be utilized for examining brand–person relationships, as it states that a consumer's beliefs and attitudes toward a brand may depend on consumer–brand, consumer–reference group, and brand–group relationships (Heider 1958; Hammerl et al. 2016). According to Heider's balance theory, consumers try to balance their values and behavior and attempt to maintain a state of consistency between their attitudes, affections, and perceptions since they strive to achieve a harmonious state of being (Heider 1958; Han, Seo, and Ko 2017). This perspective considers the importance of the brand's symbolic meaning, representing the consumer and symbolizing aspirational groups and their congruence with the consumer's identity (Hammerl et al. 2016). When they do not share the same identity with a brand, consumers may align their attitudes and behavior regarding the brand so they can strike a balance in their relationship with it (Anaza et al. 2021). NWOM is a behavioral consequence of negative brand-related emotions such as brand hate (Brandão, Ribeiro, and Gadekar 2023). Thus, consumers may spread NWOM as a behavioral reflection of the symbolic and ideological incongruity of the brand with their self-concept (Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021). In this way, consumers behave in a consistent manner with their negative relationship with the brand, and NWOM and consumer–brand incongruity form a unit relationship (Woodside 2004; Han, Seo, and Ko 2017). Here, the consumer has balanced their attitudes, values, and behavior around a negative consumer–brand relationship, as spreading NWOM is in harmony with a negative relationship. Within that context, this study posits that symbolic incongruity and ideological incongruity are positively related to NWOM.

3 | Hypothesis Development

Through the lens of balance theory and consumer–brand disidentification theory, this study proposes an original research model that covers symbolic incongruity, ideological incongruity, negative past experiences, brand trust, and perceived CSR to explain NWOM. The research model is illustrated in Figure 1. The hypotheses will be explained in the following paragraphs.

Brand trust is formed as a result of a cognitive process regarding a consumer's assessment of a brand's safety, reliability, and honesty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). Brand trust is positively linked to brand experience (Khan and Fatma 2019) and affects purchase intentions and positive referrals (Becerra and Badrinarayanan 2013). According to brand disidentification theory, consumers can disidentify with brands that do not reflect their identities as a consequence of symbolic incongruity (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009). However, consumers would be less likely to disidentify with a trusted brand. A trusted brand would more likely reflect a consumer's identity and ideal self. Thus,

H1a. *Brand trust is negatively related to symbolic incongruity.*

Brand trust leads to positive referrals and purchase intentions (Becerra and Badrinarayanan 2013). Brand trust is positively linked to brand loyalty since consumers are more likely to repurchase from brands they trust (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Khan and Fatma 2019). In addition, brand loyalty and self-congruence are related concepts; consumers' self-congruity positively influences brand loyalty (Sirgy et al. 2008). Since self-congruity and brand loyalty are positively correlated, and brand trust is positively linked to brand loyalty (Sirgy et al. 2008; Khan and Fatma 2019), brand trust is expected to have a negative influence on ideological incongruity in the consumer–brand relationship. According to brand disidentification theory, consumers may disidentify with brands when they perceive an incongruence between their values and the brand's values and actions (Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002). As such, brand trust is expected to reduce ideological incongruity. Therefore,

H1b. *Brand trust is negatively related to ideological incongruity.*

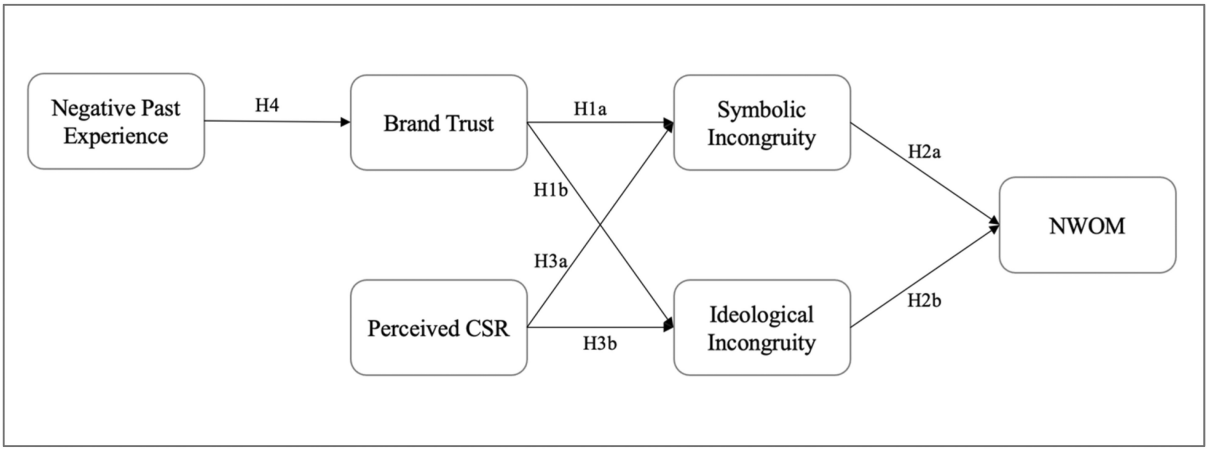

FIGURE 1 | Research model.
Source: Illustrated by the authors.

Symbolic incongruity develops when consumers find that a brand and its symbolic meanings are inconsistent with their self-concept (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017). Image incongruence occurs when a consumer does not like a brand's communications, marketing offerings, or meanings because of its current users (Zarantonello et al. 2018). Self-brand connection, that is, the extent to which a consumer is attached to and identifies with a brand, is a significant predictor of consumer attitudes and behavior, such as engaging in NWOM (Sayin and Gürhan-Canlı 2024). When consumers reject a brand's symbolic attributes and disidentify with them, they may spread NWOM about the brand to show their rejection of the symbolic brand meaning (Wolter et al. 2016). While a favorable corporate image can reduce the tendency to spread NWOM (Mar García-de los Salmones, Herrero, and Martínez 2021), symbolic incongruity leads to brand avoidance and retaliation (Pinto and Brandão 2021) and brand hate, which leads to NWOM (Zarantonello et al. 2016; Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Hashim and Kasana 2019; Islam et al. 2019; Rahimah et al. 2023). The incongruence between the brand's image and the consumer's self-image results in negative brand emotions, which may lead to NWOM (Zarantonello et al. 2018; Kurtoğlu, Özbölük, and Hacıhasanoğlu 2022; Pinto and Brandão 2021). Thus,

H2a. *Symbolic incongruity is positively related to NWOM.*

Value incongruity affects the severity of consumers' cynical behavior, such as rebelling against firms or warning others not to purchase those brands (Chylinski and Chu 2010). For example, when bystander consumers support another consumer's revengeful online message and assign the blame to the company, which indicates an ideologic incongruence with the brand, they are more likely to spread NWOM by forwarding the message (de Campos Ribeiro, Butori, and Le Nagard 2018). In parallel, perceived corporate hypocrisy significantly predicts NWOM (Bhaduri et al. 2024). A brand's moral misconduct induces negative feelings and motivates consumers to exhibit anti-brand behavior, such as blogging in opposition to the brand (Romani et al. 2015). Ideological incongruity leads to brand hate, and negative emotions may lead to NWOM (Grappi, Romani, and Bagozzi 2013; Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Hashim and Kasana 2019). Therefore,

H2b. *Ideological incongruity is positively related to NWOM.*

Corporate social irresponsibility is a significant predictor of brand hate (Abbasi et al. 2023). Brands can invest in CSR to build a positive image, brand reputation, and customer satisfaction (Bianchi, Bruno, and Sarabia-Sanchez 2019; Markovic et al. 2022). The social responsibility of a brand negatively influences the brand hate–NWOM relationship (Rahimah et al. 2023). Moreover, CSR activities influence brand attitudes (Cheng et al. 2021). CSR communication can reduce symbolic and ideological incongruity with customers (Curina et al. 2021; Kucuk 2021). Since CSR perceptions strongly influence a brand's perceived credibility and integrity, they can reduce symbolic incongruity (Swaen and Chumpitaz 2008). Therefore,

H3a. *Perceived CSR is negatively related to symbolic incongruity.*

CSR activities significantly influence consumers' attitudes (Cheng et al. 2021). CSR disclosure may reduce the risk of developing moral incongruity with consumers (Curina et al. 2021). In contrast, corporate wrongdoing and irresponsibility are the antecedents of negative emotions regarding the brand (Zarantonello et al. 2018; Abbasi et al. 2023). A company's sense of philanthropic responsibility may include giving back to society through donations and charity, which can increase the positivity of consumers' brand perceptions (Markovic et al. 2022). CSR perceptions can diminish ideological incongruity by creating a more positive brand perception. Thus,

H3b. *Perceived CSR is negatively related to ideological incongruity.*

3.1 | Preliminary Study and Hypothesis Development for Negative Past Experiences

A preliminary study was conducted to explore the dimensions of negative past experiences by topic detection. Negative consumer experiences occur when consumers experience an unpleasant situation with a product, brand, or service or when their expectations exceed what the product or service offers (Zarantonello et al. 2018; Hashim and Kasana 2019). Several studies have pointed out that negative past experiences are a potential antecedent for brand avoidance, brand retaliation, and brand hate (Zarantonello et al. 2016; Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Hashim and Kasana 2019; Pinto and Brandão 2021; Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021). Additionally, negative past experiences result in negative emotions, such as anger, disgust, and anxiety (Mak and Song 2019; Baghi and Gabrielli 2019). For example, consumers who have engaged in NWOM in the wake of a negative past experience may face anxiety as a result (Wakefield and Wakefield 2018). However, many of these studies manifest the negative experience as a unidimensional construct and measure it with items such as "the performance is poor" or "I am dissatisfied with the brand" (Joshi and Yadav 2021).

The aim of the preliminary study was to obtain a better understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of negative experiences and explore different types of negative experiences (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Roy et al. 2022). Based on the premise that post-purchase reviews, customer reviews, and evolving NLP techniques provide a deeper understanding of the customer experience, this initial study employed latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) topic modeling to online customer-compliant data of a large multinational coffee chain (Sheth and Kellstadt 2021). A prominent coffee chain was selected for the study as coffee chains are very popular among consumers in the context of the research area, Turkey (Ünan Göktan and Uslu 2022; Tosun 2022). Curina et al. (2021) have reported that the food and drink-related sector is quite relevant for analyzing consumer–brand incongruence and NWOM, and also that consumers in this sector tend to be the most extreme brand haters. Since consumers' negative past experiences can vary greatly across sectors, the current research involved a preliminary study to explore consumers' negative past experiences regarding coffee chains. Coffee chain businesses are a prime service sector for

investigating consumer–brand disidentification, perceived CSR, and NWOM as their (responsible or irresponsible) choices directly impact consumers' health and safety (Bhaduri et al. 2024). Moreover, the increase in discussions regarding the environmental sustainability and CSR initiatives of coffee businesses means that they are part of an important service sector with regard to studying perceived CSR (Bianco 2020).

Due to its ability to explore "hidden" topic structures quickly and powerfully, LDA is one of the most popular topic modeling techniques (Maier et al. 2018). First, with the help of a web scraper, we gathered all the complaints about a large multinational coffee chain on the most popular e-complaints site in Turkey, "sikayetvar.com" and obtained 6095 reviews. In the preprocessing step, Knime's related nodes, such as stop word filtering, punctuation erasing, case conversion, number filtering, and RegEX filtering were used. After preprocessing through the use of Knime's related node, we applied LDA topic modeling. We then tested different combinations of the number of topics (K), document-topic density (α), and topic word density (β). Of all the combinations, the most representative model was achieved with the following parameters: $K=3$, $\alpha=0.02$, and $\beta=0.0$. Topic detection revealed three dimensions of negative past experiences: products, services, and technology-related problems.

As discussed above, negative past experiences are significant predictors of brand avoidance, brand retaliation, and brand hate (Zarantonello et al. 2016; Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Hashim and Kasana 2019; Pinto and Brandão 2021; Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021). A negative past experience can destroy brand trust because it arises from unmet expectations and consumer dissatisfaction (Chylinski and Chu 2010; Khan and Fatma 2019). Low quality and product/service failures are also associated with negative past experiences (Zarantonello et al. 2018). In light of the earlier literature and the topic detection study explained above, negative past experiences were examined within the scope of three dimensions: product-, service-, and technology-related problems. As brand trust is based on prior experiences and interactions between a brand and consumer (Keller 2012), the hypotheses were formulated as follows:

H4a. *A consumer's negative past experience regarding product problems is negatively related to brand trust.*

H4b. *A consumer's negative past experience regarding service problems is negatively related to brand trust.*

H4c. *A consumer's negative past experience regarding technology-related problems is negatively related to brand trust.*

4 | Main Study

4.1 | Data Collection and Sampling

The research model was tested by way of a quantitative study conducted as a consumer survey. The survey form was distributed online using Google Forms in July and August of 2023. A survey company, bilimselanketler.com, which is owned by a private company located at the Mersin University (a public university in Turkey) Technology Development Zone, was employed by the researchers for the purposes of data collection (Bilimselanketler.com 2024). The online survey link was sent to adult Turkish consumers via social media and websites in Turkey. Internet usage and social media adoption rates are very high in Turkey; internet penetration is 86.5%, social media users comprise 66.8% of the total population, and 86.8% of the total population over 18 years of age use social media platforms (Kemp 2024). This prevalence indicates that selection bias, which can occur when a sample is not representative of the whole population, is relatively low in the case of the study (Bethlehem 2010). In addition, as an initial remedy for observation errors, which are defined as non-random measurement errors caused by the data collection method, this study avoided complex response options that had the potential to increase participants' misunderstanding of the questions (Spencer et al. 2022).

The sampling method involved convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that can be used when researchers can access participants in the target population who are available during data collection and are willing to participate in the study (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim 2016). Participants were asked to answer the questions while thinking about the coffee chain they frequently visit. Considering the prevalence of coffee chains, the availability of many local and foreign coffee chain brands in Turkey (i.e., Starbucks, Tchibo, Kahve Dünyası, Espresso Lab, Caffé Nero, Gloria Jeans, Caribou Coffee, etc.), and their popularity in society, no specific profiling restrictions, such as gender or education, were used. Because of the purpose of the research, the popularity of coffee chains in Turkey, and the prevalence of internet and social media usage, it was anticipated that acceptable results would be obtained using the convenience sampling method and online data collection.

The participants were informed that they could exit the survey anytime, that data would be collected only for academic purposes, and that the data would be analyzed anonymously as a total data set. The survey form started with a consent statement and a statement indicating that the participant agreed to voluntarily take part in the online questionnaire. Participants were asked to answer the questions by thinking of a coffee chain that has numerous coffee shops from which they had previously received services. The online survey form continued with scale items regarding the research constructs and ended with demographic questions. The scale items are clarified in the following section, and the measurement items are listed in Table 1. All questions were mandatory, so there was no missing data. Five hundred twenty-two ($n=522$) surveys were collected.

4.2 | Scales

Negative past experience items were adapted from the studies of Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen (2017), Curina et al. (2021), and Joshi and Yadav (2021). Brand trust items were adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Lassar, Mittal, and Sharma (1995). Symbolic incongruity, ideological incongruity, and negative WOM items were adapted from Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen (2017). Perceived CSR scale items were adapted from La and Choi (2019). The scales are applied as five-point Likert scales.

TABLE 1 | The measurement items.

Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Factor loadings	*t* statistic	*p*
Negative past experience, product (NPE_Product)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.780; CR(rho_a) = 0.789; AVE = 0.695					
In those coffee shops ...					
2. ... the coffee tastes great (Reverse)	2.226	1.172	0.832	40.571	0.000
4. ... the food is great (Reverse)	2.318	1.152	0.874	64.271	0.000
6. ... products such as thermos and mugs are of very high quality (Reverse)	2.308	1.131	0.792	32.801	0.000
Negative past experience, service (NPE_Serv)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.796; CR(rho_a) = 0.825; AVE = 0.616					
In those coffee shops ...					
1. ... the service is generally excellent. (Reverse)	2.280	1.156	0.851	66.452	0.000
2. ... I don't like the service environment	2.362	1.325	0.713	18.783	0.000
3. ... I am not satisfied with the service	2.238	1.285	0.747	20.958	0.000
4. ... employees provide extremely meticulous and good service. (Reverse)	2.190	1.118	0.821	41.159	0.000
Negative past experience, technology (NPE_Tech)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.754; CR(rho_a) = 0.809; AVE = 0.553					
Regarding that coffee chain					
1. Its mobile app is not useful	2.684	0.887	0.710	13.623	0.000
2. I am dissatisfied with its digital services	2.611	0.884	0.761	16.852	0.000
3. Its mobile app works perfectly. (Reverse)	2.743	0.846	0.786	31.778	0.000
4. I am unsatisfied with its digital loyalty applications like points or gifts	2.720	0.997	0.716	19.002	0.000
Brand trust (B_Trust)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.914; CR(rho_a) = 0.917; AVE = 0.744					
These coffee shops where I have received service before ...					
1. ... offers everything I'm looking for	3.400	1.013	0.836	43.006	0.000

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Factor loadings	*t* statistic	*p*
2. ... fully meets my expectations	3.533	0.998	0.906	93.219	0.000
3. ... offers products that I consume safely	3.688	0.979	0.871	60.432	0.000
4. ... never disappoints me	3.364	1.084	0.876	65.504	0.000
5. ... strives to ensure my satisfaction	3.613	1.013	0.822	42.102	0.000
Symbolic incongruity (Sym_Inc)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.866; CR(rho_a) = 0.868; AVE = 0.714					
This coffee brand I have received service from before ...					
2. ... doesn't fit my personality	2.374	1.299	0.866	57.118	0.000
3. I wouldn't want to be seen with ...	2.017	1.249	0.851	51.123	0.000
4. ... does not represent me	2.600	1.426	0.801	38.411	0.000
5. ... symbolizes the type of people I never want to be like	2.247	1.336	0.860	56.472	0.000
Ideological incongruity (Ide_Inc)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.926; CR(rho_a) = 0.928; AVE = 0.820					
This coffee brand I have received service from before ...					
1. ... behaves socially irresponsibly	2.140	1.281	0.873	48.880	0.000
2. ... I think he is not acting ethically	2.090	1.223	0.941	105.008	0.000
3. ... does not act ethically	2.071	1.240	0.912	59.378	0.000
4. ... does not match my beliefs and values	2.038	1.212	0.893	62.545	0.000
Negative WOM (NWOM)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.920; CR(rho_a) = 0.922; AVE = 0.759					
1. I have shared my negative information about ... with my friends before	2.607	1.197	0.817	44.449	0.000
2. I have disparaged ... to my friends	2.172	1.047	0.915	103.749	0.000
3. I have told my friends not to go to ...	2.119	1.080	0.890	69.428	0.000
4. I have shared my negative feelings about the ... brand with those around me	2.446	1.206	0.871	58.822	0.000

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Factor loadings	*t* statistic	*p*
5. I have tried to influence people around me not to buy ... products	2.084	1.019	0.859	52.086	0.000
Perceived CSR (P_CSR)					
Cronbach's alpha = 0.878; CR(rho_a) = 0.886; AVE = 0.732					
This coffee chain brand I have received service from before ...					
1. ... treats consumers honestly	3.625	1.125	0.876	65.442	0.000
2. ... operates in an environmentally friendly manner	3.467	1.119	0.841	40.296	0.000
3. ... acts in compliance with applicable laws and regulations	3.879	1.013	0.830	42.712	0.000
4. ... guarantees the health and safety of employees	3.653	1.049	0.874	61.755	0.000

4.3 | Descriptive Statistics

The mean age of the participants was 33, with a standard deviation of 10. The Turkish Statistical Institute reports that the median age of consumers is 33.2 and 34.7 for men and women, respectively, so the sample's age range can be considered to be similar to that of the Turkish population as a whole (TUIK 2024a). 18% of the participants were male, and 82% were female. Although the gender distribution of the sample was uneven, this does not create a bias because the research model and constructs did not include or assume gender differences. The participants' education levels were distributed as follows: 8% primary school, 39% high school, 46% undergraduate studies, and 7% graduate studies. Considering the general population statistics (educational level rates of the population over 25 years of age: 92.9% above primary school, 48.3% above upper secondary school, and 24.6% above tertiary education), the education distribution was also close to that of the general population (TUIK 2024b). Income levels were distributed across income segments as follows: 37% minimum wage, 32% between the minimum wage and twice the minimum wage, 17% between two and three times the minimum wage, and 13% with a higher income. The sample distribution regarding income levels indicated an acceptable and balanced distribution.

The similarity between the sample and the characteristics of the general population also points to a remedy for nonresponse bias, which can be a problem in research conducted with survey data due to potential differences between respondents and nonrespondents (Berg 2005). Nonresponse bias was also evaluated by examining the differences between the first 25% ($n = 130$) and the last 25% ($n = 130$) of the questionnaires to look for possible differences regarding the time sequence of return (Armstrong and Overton 1977; Menidjel et al. 2017). There was no significant difference between the two subsamples in terms of age ($p = 0.187$) as a demographic variable and also the research constructs NPE_Product ($p = 0.123$), NPE_Serv ($p = 0.350$), NPE_Tech ($p = 0.177$), B_Trust ($p = 0.358$), Sym_Inc ($p = 0.737$), Ide_Inc ($p = 0.428$), NWOM ($p = 0.723$), and P_CSR ($p = 0.850$). Thus, the nonresponse bias problem was excluded.

4.4 | Validity and Reliability of the Measurement Model

Data were imported in SmartPLS for structural equation modeling (SEM). PLS-SEM is appropriate for examining complex relationships among multiple research constructs in consumer behavior (Hair et al. 2019). It provides robust data analysis with normal or non-normal distribution and is widely adopted by researchers for testing models in the fields of marketing and consumer behavior (Menidjel and Bilgihan 2022; Olya et al. 2022). SmartPLS software allows for the analysis of complex relationships in a conceptual model composed of latent variables (Cheah, Magno, and Cassia 2024). Before the research model was examined, the validity and reliability of the measurement items were assessed in SmartPLS (Paul 2024). Three items from negative product experiences (NSE_Product_1: I don't like their products in general, NSE_Product_3: I don't like the taste of the drinks they offer, NSE_Product_5: The food they sell is tasteless) and one item from symbolic incongruity (Symbolic_1; The coffee brand I have received service from before does not reflect who I am) were removed from the model due to low factor loadings. All the other items were satisfactory, and the factor loadings of the model indicated a good fit with all the loadings that were higher than 0.70. As shown in Table 1, the measurement items were reliable since Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70, and the constructs indicated convergent validity with AVE scores higher than 0.50 (Hair et al. 2019). When the cross-loadings were examined, it was found that each indicator had the highest loading to its related variable (Table A1). The model's discriminant validity was also assessed with the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT)

ratio. When the HTMT values for each pair of constructs were examined, two comparisons (NPE_Serv and NPE_Product; Sym_Inc and Ide_Inc) were reported in the 0.85–0.88 range. However, in light of the conceptual difference between those constructs, findings in the earlier literature reporting their distinction, and the generally accepted threshold of 0.90, discriminant validity was established in the model (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2015; Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017). HTMT values were below 0.90, and discriminant validity was present in the model, as outlined in Table 2 (Hair et al. 2019).

In addition, a non-experimental design must address endogeneity problems to report relations and correctly test the theory (Antonakis et al. 2014). Endogeneity occurs when an explanatory variable is correlated with the dependent variable's error term and it mainly occurs due to the omission of one or more predictors in the path model (Sarstedt et al. 2020). This research used cross-sectional data, and the research context does not suggest a potential for endogeneity as a result of simultaneity or omitted variables; thus, endogeneity was not a major concern (Sande and Ghosh 2018).

4.5 | Common Method Bias

As most research on self-reported data bears the risk of common method bias, the current study employed several procedures to deal with it (Paul 2024). Common method bias is a systematic measurement error that detracts from the research findings as a consequence of variance related to the measurement method rather than the research constructs (Podsakoff et al. 2024). As an initial remedial approach, the participants were informed that their answers would be anonymous. Respondent anonymity reduces the tendency to give socially desirable, compliant, and lenient answers to survey questions (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Moreover, the survey items were kept clear and concise to ease processing (Kock, Berbekova, and Assaf 2021). Second, reverse-coded (negatively worded) items were used in the survey form to reduce automatic information processing and consequent response patterns and to support more controlled cognitive processing (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In addition to those remedial procedures, common method bias was checked in SmartPLS. The variance inflation factor (VIF) values of all items in the model were below 3.3 (Table 3), indicating that the latent variables in the model did not show signs of collinearity, and so common method bias is not a major concern in this study (Kock 2015).

4.6 | The Structural Model and Hypothesis Tests

Since the measurement model was satisfactory, the structural model could be assessed (Hair et al. 2019). The structural model produced significant results (Table 1 and Figure 3). Bootstrapping across 5000 subsamples revealed that the *t*-values and the factor loadings were adequate and all hypotheses were supported (Figures 2 and 3, and Table 3).

5 | Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 | Discussion and Theoretical Contributions

The current study extends the literature on consumer–brand disidentification and negative consumer–brand relationships by making several contributions. Its first theoretical contribution is that it simultaneously examines three essential domains of negative consumer–brand relationships (ideological, symbolic, and experiential) with perceived CSR and brand trust to explain NWOM. This study proposed an original research model that describes how symbolic and ideological incongruity and negative past experiences influence NWOM and the role of perceived CSR in this complex model. Moreover, topic detection conducted by way of machine learning revealed three dimensions of negative past experiences: product-, service-, and technology-related problems. The dimensions revealed by topic detection fit well in the structural model and produced significant results. The findings provided empirical evidence for balance theory and showed that symbolic and ideological incongruity positively influenced NWOM within a complex cognitive model (Heider 1958).

Previous research has examined the negative aspects of consumer–brand relationships from the perspective of brand avoidance and consumers' negative emotions, such as brand hate (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Curina et al. 2021; Hashim and Kasana 2019; Brandão, Ribeiro, and Gadekar 2023; Rahimah et al. 2023; Kamboj and Sharma 2023). This study makes an original contribution by examining symbolic and

TABLE 2 | HTMT matrix.

	P_CSR	Ide_Inc	NPE_ Product	NPE_Serv	NPE_Tech	NWOM	Sym_Inc	B_Trust
P_CSR								
Ide_Inc	0.560							
NPE_Product	0.739	0.539						
NPE_Serv	0.710	0.675	0.868					
NPE_Tech	0.479	0.467	0.496	0.577				
NWOM	0.518	0.720	0.530	0.633	0.532			
Sym_Inc	0.546	0.886	0.577	0.724	0.526	0.756		
B_Trust	0.797	0.538	0.838	0.841	0.532	0.548	0.594	

TABLE 3 | Hypothesis test results.

Hypothesis	Result	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	*t* statistics (|O/STDEV|)	*p*	VIF (inner model)
H1a: Brand trust ➜ Symbolic incongruity (–)	Supported	−0.386	−0.385	0.064	6.020	0.000	2.048
H1b: Brand trust ➜ Ideological incongruity (–)	Supported	−0.274	−0.273	0.061	4.467	0.000	2.048
H2a: Symbolic incongruity ➜ NWOM (+)	Supported	0.399	0.398	0.059	6.806	0.000	2.716
H2b: Ideological incongruity ➜ NWOM (+)	Supported	0.349	0.350	0.059	5.893	0.000	2.716
H3a: Perceived CSR ➜ Symbolic incongruity (–)	Supported	−0.203	−0.205	0.060	3.358	0.001	2.048
H3b: Perceived CSR ➜ Ideological incongruity (–)	Supported	−0.313	−0.316	0.058	5.402	0.000	2.048
H4a: NPE_Product ➜ Brand trust (–)	Supported	−0.342	−0.339	0.047	7.219	0.000	2.083
H4b: NPE_Serv ➜ Brand trust (–)	Supported	−0.421	−0.422	0.042	9.912	0.000	2.200
H4c: NPE_Tech ➜ Brand trust (–)	Supported	−0.166	−0.169	0.028	5.826	0.000	1.289

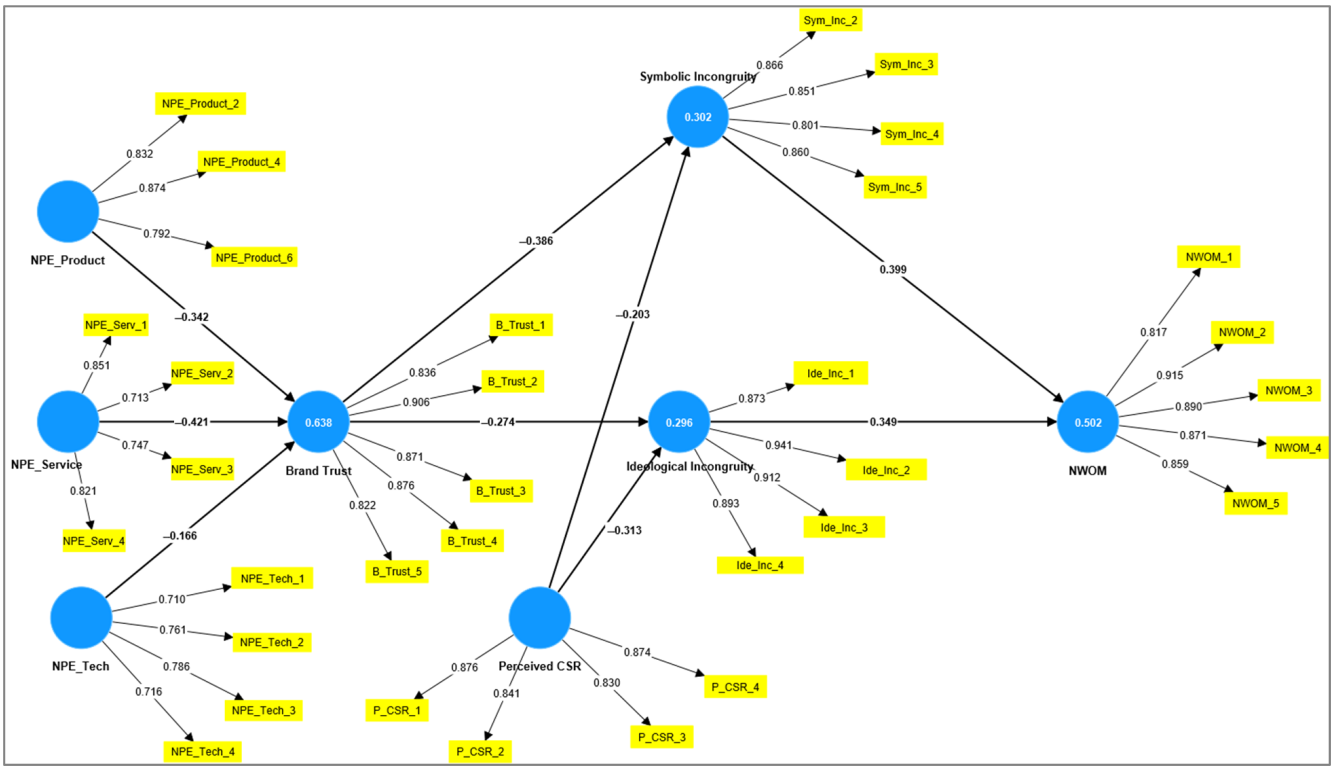

FIGURE 2 | Factor loadings, *R* square values, and path coefficients.

ideological incongruity together with two cognitive variables: brand trust and perceived CSR. The findings showed that brand trust, as a personal variable, influences both symbolic and ideological incongruity. The same dual impact is seen for perceived CSR, which is more related to moral and societal issues. According to the findings, symbolic and ideological incongruity are shaped by brand trust as a personal variable and by perceived CSR, which is a variable more related to societal

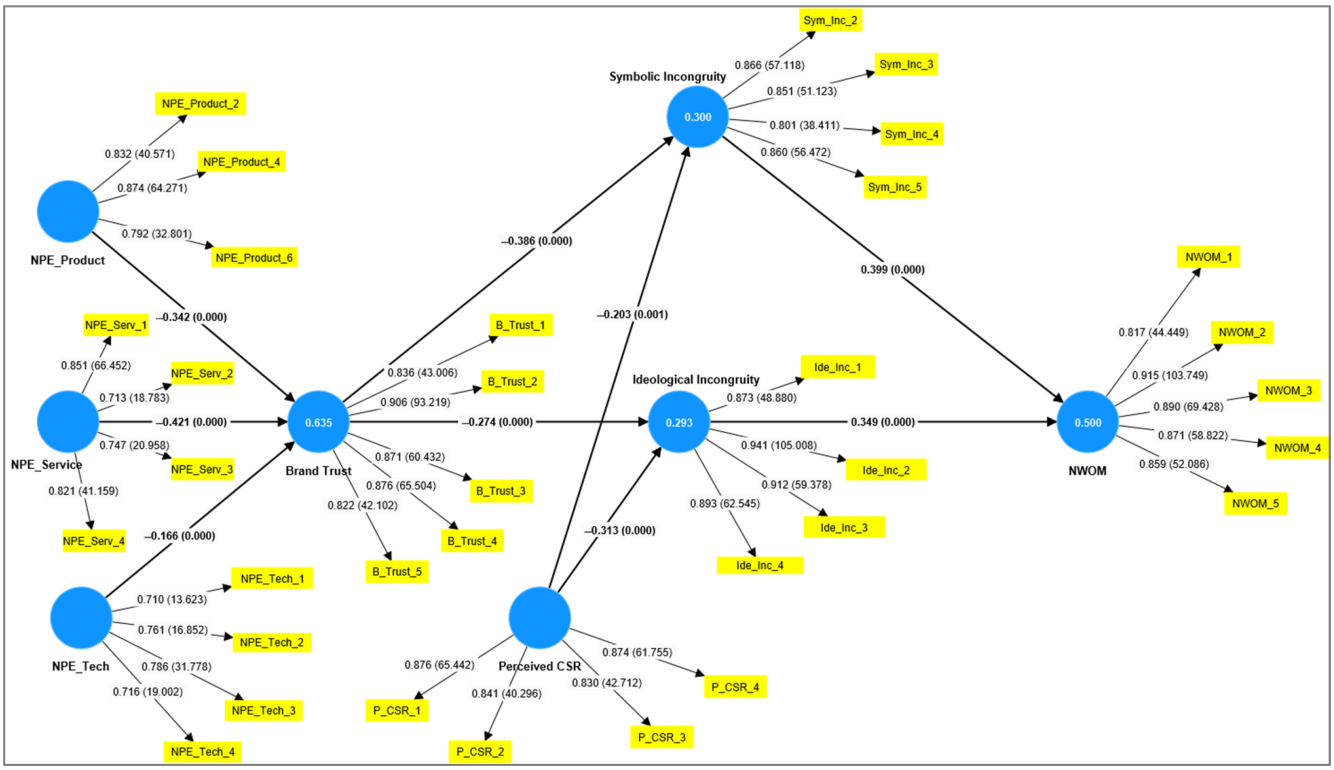

FIGURE 3 | Factor loadings with *t* values, path coefficients with *p* values, and adjusted *R* square values.

and moral issues. Symbolic incongruity is associated more with a consumer's self-concept and a brand's symbolic meaning, while ideological incongruity is associated more with morality and broader social issues (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Kamboj and Sharma 2023). The current study showed that brand trust influences symbolic incongruity related to personal meaning and symbolic attributes and also ideological incongruity associated with morality. In addition, these findings demonstrated the significant role of perceived CSR in predicting symbolic incongruity and ideological incongruity, which consequently affect NWOM. This finding makes a contribution to the consumer–brand disidentification literature by showing the complex structure of consumer–brand incongruity and NWOM in both personal-symbolic and societal-moral contexts.

The results indicate that examining negative past experiences with symbolic and ideological incongruity encapsulates symbolic, ideological, and experiential aspects and provides a holistic assessment of consumer–brand incongruence and consequent NWOM intentions. Moreover, previous studies on negative past experiences have generally investigated the impact of symbolic and ideological incongruity on NWOM through emotions such as brand hate (Zarantonello et al. 2018; Kurtoğlu, Özbölük, and Hacıhasanoğlu 2021; Rodrigues, Brandão, and Rodrigues 2021). The current study demonstrated the direct impact of symbolic and ideological incongruity on NWOM.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b were supported, showing the negative impact of brand trust on symbolic incongruity and ideological incongruity. The findings also contribute to the literature by showing that brand trust is an antecedent of symbolic and ideological incongruity. To the best of our knowledge, this study is among the first quantitative studies to report a direct link between brand trust and symbolic incongruity. In alignment with consumer–brand disidentification theory, the findings showed that consumers disidentify with brands they do not trust since those brands are symbolically inconsistent with their actual or ideal selves (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009). The concept of brand trust is generally studied from a customer loyalty perspective and linked to consumer identification via loyalty (Sirgy et al. 2008; Min, Kim, and Yang 2023). The current study showed the direct impact of brand trust on symbolic and ideological incongruity.

Hypotheses 2a and 2b were also supported. Symbolic incongruity and ideological incongruity are significantly and positively associated with NWOM. The findings support consumer–brand disidentification theory and show that customers are likelier to engage in NWOM for brands they perceive as being inconsistent with their image (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Wolter et al. 2016). The current study further contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence regarding the direct positive impact of symbolic incongruity on WOM (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen 2017; Islam et al. 2019; Pinto and Brandão 2021). The findings also support Romani et al. (2015) and show that ideological incongruity, as a reason for brand avoidance, is positively associated with NWOM (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009). The findings also support balance theory, as consumers balance their values and behavior to ensure a state of harmony between their opinions and behavior (Heider 1958; Han, Seo, and Ko 2017). Previously, Pinto and Brandão (2021) demonstrated the

indirect effect of symbolic incongruity on NWOM. The current study shows that consumer–brand disidentification, expressed as symbolic and ideological incongruity, has a direct positive influence on NWOM.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b were also supported. Perceived CSR has a significant negative impact on symbolic incongruity and ideological incongruity. The findings support Curina et al. (2021) and show that consumers' CSR perceptions can help establish a symbolic and ideological congruity with brands. Consumers shape their beliefs or opinions about a brand's symbolic meaning to maintain consistency in their brand–consumer relationships and to preserve their positive self-identity (Hammerl et al. 2016). The findings indicate that perceived CSR is negatively associated with ideological incongruity. This might be because CSR activities demonstrating that a brand engages in ethical and responsible behavior may reduce moral avoidance (Lee, Motion, and Conroy 2009; Curina et al. 2021). This finding coincides with previous findings indicating that greenwashing, which is seen as a form of deception, results in brand hate, which consequently leads to brand avoidance (Sajid et al. 2024). Moreover, it also parallels Cheng et al. (2021), who stated that CSR activities influence brand attitudes.

Finally, the results supported Hypotheses 4a–4c. Negative past experiences regarding products, services, and technology have a significant negative influence on brand trust. This finding extends the previous literature by adding another component, the technology-related factor, to brand experiences (Chylinski and Chu 2010; Khan and Fatma 2019). In addition, as its original contribution, this study revealed three dimensions of negative past experiences, namely product, service, and technology-related problems in the coffee-chain sector, through machine learning. Those dimensions constituted an aspect of consumers' negative past experiences and were found to be significantly associated with brand trust.

5.2 | Managerial Implications

The findings point to the essential role played by brand trust for consumers in building symbolic and ideological congruity with a brand. Brands must establish trust by reducing the possibility of negative consumer experiences. According to the findings, product-, service-, and technology-related experiences constitute the three essential domains of brand experience in the coffee chain sector. Therefore, brand and service managers should ensure a smooth and efficient consumer experience by providing the best in all those domains. Trust must be re-established through relationship marketing when inevitable service, product, or technology failures occur. This point highlights the importance of effective service recovery policies and the proper training of service staff so they can approach customers with empathy and solve their problems. In addition, product return policies must be employed. Regarding technology-related services, easily accessible helpdesks should be established to ensure that problems can be resolved quickly. Brands can also keep track of negative service experiences as consumers raise them and implement customer retention and win-back programs to ensure satisfaction and favorable past experiences. Finally, negative customer feedback can be used as an input for customer experience design, and product and service failures can be monitored by expert customer service teams specializing in products, services, and technological issues.

This study's findings can help marketing managers better understand the complex cognitive mechanism that shapes NWOM. Brands can simultaneously attract and repel various customer segments through consumer–brand identification and disidentification (Wolter et al. 2016). The current study shows that CSR communication is a proper strategy for establishing symbolic and ideological congruity with consumers. In addition to brand trust, perceived CSR contributes to stronger consumer–brand relations by reducing symbolic and ideological incongruity between the consumer and the brand. By focusing on communication initiatives, brand managers can identify potential sources of incongruity. As part of this effort, brands can align their messaging with the values of their consumers. In addition, brand managers can integrate positive reference groups into their marketing communication to establish symbolic congruity with their target market and reduce the likelihood of NWOM in case of a service failure (Curina et al. 2021). In this way, brand managers can also strengthen consumer–brand identification.

Markovic et al. (2022) have pointed out that CSR can foster brand authenticity as a differentiation mechanism when alternative brands are perceived as attractive. The current study shows the contribution of CSR initiatives as a building block of consumer–brand congruence. It is particularly important in the food and drink sector since consumers' sensitivity and negative emotions regarding brands in this sector can reach higher levels than in other sectors (Curina et al. 2021). Thus, brands should be dedicated to investing in CSR activities and communication campaigns to disclose their responsible actions and eliminate ideologic/identity mismatch (Kucuk 2021). For example, some global coffee chains disclose their CSR initiatives, such as the foundations they have established, the climate change and sustainability programs they have launched, and human rights policies (Gloria 2024; Starbucks 2024). CSR disclosure makes consumers more likely to establish ideological congruity with the brand because they see that it is trying to contribute and give back to society. In addition, CSR initiatives can contribute to the establishment of a decent and sensitive brand image. Perceived CSR contributes to symbolic congruity with consumers because CSR activities can symbolize the ideal self and can be associated with the desired behavior of reference groups.

5.3 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to some limitations. Firstly, the research model was tested in only one sector, and a convenience sampling technique was used. Researchers could focus on different sectors and employ random samples to increase the generalizability of the results. By comparing different sectors, researchers could identify which sectors are more susceptible to symbolic and ideological incongruities and what CSR initiatives are most effective in building consumer–brand identification in

those sectors. However, consumers evaluate the fit between a brand's actual performance and CSR communication (Amezcua and Quintanilla 2016). Thus, CSR perceptions may be different across brands and CSR action types. In this vein, the research model could also be expanded to include perceived corporate hypocrisy or brand sincerity. The three sub-dimensions of negative past experiences, that is, product/service/technology-related problems, could also be tested in other service sectors. In experimental studies, service failure severity and service recovery efforts could be tested with negative past experiences and NWOM intentions. The research model could also be expanded by including emotions such as brand hate and forgiveness. In addition, brand-related factors such as brand personality, brand image, and CSR communication elements could be included in the research model to examine NWOM. Future studies could also consider consumers' values and personal characteristics.

5.4 | Conclusion

This study focused on NWOM, which comes about due to consumer–brand disidentification shaped by symbolic and ideological brand incongruity. Consumer–brand incongruence arises when consumers cognitively interpret that a brand does not reflect their identity (symbolic incongruence) and contradicts their values (ideological incongruence). The motivation behind this research was driven by the prevailing importance of consumer–brand disidentification and NWOM for almost all consumer products and services, and also the increasing importance of CSR in both developing and developed countries. The current study examined the impact of brand trust, negative past experiences with a brand, and perceived CSR as antecedents of symbolic and ideological brand incongruity. The preliminary study carried out via LDA topic modeling of online consumer reviews showed that negative past experiences arise as a result of product-related, service-related, and technology-related problems. These three dimensions were further analyzed with PLS-SEM as part of the original conceptual model in the main study, which was designed as a cross-sectional consumer survey. The results showed that product-related, service-related, and technology-related negative past experiences were negatively associated with brand trust. In alignment with the research hypotheses, brand trust and perceived CSR were found to be significantly and negatively related to symbolic and ideological incongruity. Finally, symbolic and ideological incongruity were significantly and positively associated with NWOM. The original research model examined the ideological, symbolic, and experiential domains of negative consumer–brand relationships. The results revealed that NWOM is shaped in a complex cognitive structure consisting of personal-symbolic and moral-societal aspects of consumer–brand disidentification. Drawing on consumer–brand disidentification and balance theory, the results showed the direct negative impact of perceived CSR and brand trust on symbolic and ideological incongruity, and the direct positive effect of symbolic and ideological incongruity on NWOM.

Ethics Statement

This research was assessed and approved by the Kadir Has University Ethics Committee in February 2023 (approval document no: E-82741295-604.01.01-54800).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendix

TABLE A1 | Cross loadings.

	B_Trust	Ide_Inc	NPE_Product	NPE_Serv	NPE_Tech	NWOM	P_CSR	Sym_Inc
B_Trust_1	0.836	−0.355	−0.593	−0.591	−0.400	−0.348	0.568	−0.378
B_Trust_2	0.906	−0.441	−0.647	−0.666	−0.448	−0.464	0.624	−0.477
B_Trust_3	0.871	−0.504	−0.635	−0.634	−0.421	−0.453	0.637	−0.521
B_Trust_4	0.876	−0.397	−0.622	−0.636	−0.445	−0.454	0.658	−0.422
B_Trust_5	0.822	−0.438	−0.565	−0.666	−0.435	−0.452	0.594	−0.480
Ide_Inc_1	−0.460	0.873	0.413	0.530	0.357	0.603	−0.443	0.718
Ide_Inc_2	−0.487	0.941	0.462	0.563	0.360	0.633	−0.478	0.754
Ide_Inc_3	−0.450	0.912	0.412	0.507	0.299	0.582	−0.467	0.701
Ide_Inc_4	−0.405	0.893	0.373	0.466	0.353	0.592	−0.456	0.704
NPE_Product_2	−0.594	0.414	0.832	0.599	0.315	0.404	−0.522	0.421
NPE_Product_4	−0.645	0.386	0.874	0.630	0.354	0.382	−0.539	0.413
NPE_Product_6	−0.532	0.347	0.792	0.557	0.356	0.338	−0.471	0.350
NPE_Serv_1	−0.704	0.473	0.750	0.851	0.384	0.422	−0.607	0.463
NPE_Serv_2	−0.428	0.441	0.376	0.713	0.330	0.439	−0.318	0.457
NPE_Serv_3	−0.480	0.527	0.433	0.747	0.349	0.461	−0.368	0.593
NPE_Serv_4	−0.651	0.388	0.598	0.821	0.381	0.390	−0.584	0.383
NPE_Tech_1	−0.226	0.287	0.244	0.290	0.710	0.320	−0.218	0.288
NPE_Tech_2	−0.263	0.331	0.269	0.337	0.761	0.351	−0.255	0.361
NPE_Tech_3	−0.526	0.223	0.393	0.370	0.786	0.287	−0.429	0.262
NPE_Tech_4	−0.325	0.343	0.244	0.351	0.716	0.392	−0.278	0.377
NWOM_1	−0.393	0.522	0.364	0.412	0.311	0.817	−0.349	0.562
NWOM_2	−0.515	0.618	0.442	0.540	0.435	0.915	−0.458	0.619
NWOM_3	−0.452	0.601	0.413	0.489	0.398	0.890	−0.425	0.605
NWOM_4	−0.441	0.567	0.379	0.453	0.391	0.871	−0.417	0.558
NWOM_5	−0.397	0.588	0.358	0.425	0.373	0.859	−0.396	0.599
P_CSR_1	0.628	−0.500	−0.557	−0.557	−0.368	−0.468	0.876	−0.476
P_CSR_2	0.600	−0.399	−0.520	−0.513	−0.376	−0.382	0.841	−0.381
P_CSR_3	0.591	−0.410	−0.487	−0.510	−0.332	−0.365	0.830	−0.404
P_CSR_4	0.628	−0.420	−0.534	−0.550	−0.396	−0.384	0.874	−0.365
Sym_Inc_2	−0.471	0.668	0.408	0.518	0.369	0.606	−0.386	0.866
Sym_Inc_3	−0.427	0.694	0.419	0.486	0.338	0.583	−0.396	0.851
Sym_Inc_4	−0.448	0.575	0.394	0.465	0.365	0.505	−0.426	0.801
Sym_Inc_5	−0.451	0.745	0.385	0.515	0.341	0.588	−0.415	0.860