

The Influence of Consumers' Emotions on Brand Disappointment Caused by the Nepo-Baby Issue in Fashion Brands -Focusing on Powerlessness, Unfairness, Relative Deprivation, and Loneliness-

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Abstract

The term ‘Nepo-baby’ refers to someone whose career benefits from family connections. Criticism of the so-called Nepo-baby issue is growing, especially among the MZ generation, who highly value fairness. In this study, we explored how fashion consumers perceive the Nepo-baby issue and its impact on fashion brands. Consumers are more likely to compare themselves to Nepo babies and may experience feelings of powerlessness, unfairness, relative deprivation, and loneliness. These perceptions can lead to negative feelings toward the brand, resulting in disappointment. Our research hypotheses were tested using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 23.0. Fashion brands promoting Nepo babies affect consumers' self-perceptions of powerlessness, unfairness, relative deprivation, loneliness, and negative feelings. Brand disappointment was tested using a structural equation model. Using a multi-group path analysis, we investigated consumers' perceptions of the Nepo-baby issue and general brand stories. Our research results reveal the significant impact of controversial Nepo babies on negative feelings toward fashion brands and brand disappointment.

Key words: Nepo-baby, Brand disappointment, Unfairness, Relative deprivation, Loneliness

I. Introduction

The Nepo-baby is someone whose career has benefited from family connections. As Delphine Arnault took over as the new Creative Director of Dior in 2023, allegations of nepotism have been leveled at her father, Bernard Arnaut, who is the CEO of Dior's parent company, LVMH (Cross, 2023). David Beckham's son, Brooklyn Beckham, is a photographer who has sparked controversy for having his photos used by Burberry despite not being highly skilled. Jude Law's son, Rafferty Law, has worked on the runway despite being much shorter than other fashion models and not having exceptional

walking skills. Lily-Rose Depp, the daughter of actor Johnny Depp and actress Vanessa Paradis, has acted as a muse for Chanel despite being only 160 cm tall. She has stirred up further controversy by claiming that she is not a Nepobaby, despite benefiting from her mother's role as a muse for Chanel.

Criticism of the so-called Nepo-baby issue is growing, particularly among the MZ generation, who highly value fairness (Jin, 2023). This is because they harbor negative feeling towards those who easily gain social recognition and accumulate wealth under the halo of prestigious parents, who they themselves did not choose to be born to. This discomfort stems from the notion that just as royalty and nobility enjoyed privileges based on nepotism in the past, modern celebrities are also passing on their wealth

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and fame. However, separate from these controversies, the Nepo-baby stars of Hollywood are often termed fashionistas, and their fashion styles attract considerable public interest (Kessler, 2023). Additionally, fashion brands seem not to hesitate employing such Nepo-babies, either by selecting them as brand muses or by using their work for brand photoshoots. Publicities on this nepotism and the controversy surrounding fashion brands that generously hire Nepo-babies, such as Christian Dior's Delphine, have become hot in the fashion industry (Cross, 2023). Publicities with a negative perspective generally influence consumers in forming negative attitudes towards brands (Henard, 2002; Kim et al., 2007).

In previous studies, research has been conducted indicating that negative publicity triggers service failure and, consequently, exerts a lasting impact on brand reputation (Akturan, 2011; Carrillat et al., 2014; Hussain et al., 2023). However, there is a scarcity of literature examining the influence of publicity in the context of fashion brands. Despite the increasing importance of publicity and its virality in modern society, research in the context of fashion retail and marketing is notably lacking. Particularly, there have been few studies investigating the negative emotions triggered by negative publicity, with a focus on the controversial phenomenon of Nepo-baby, which has recently gained significant attention. This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of negative publicity on the generation of adverse emotions, with a specific focus on Nepo-baby, within the context of fashion retail and marketing, where research addressing this issue has been notably absent. Therefore, this study aims to explore how fashion consumers perceive the Nepo-baby issue and what impact it has on fashion brands. When consumers encounter the Nepo-baby issue, they are likely to compare themselves to these Nepo-babies. In doing so, consumers may perceive feeling of powerlessness, as they can't change the situation, along with a sense of unfairness, relative deprivation, and loneliness, as if they are alone in society without anyone to assist them. Such perceptions are expected to lead to negative feeling toward the brand, potentially inducing a sense of disappointment towards the brand. In other words, if consumers experience Nepo-baby issues re-

lated to a specific brand and have negative emotions, those negative emotions transfer to their feelings about the brand, consequently leading to a negative attitude towards the brand. Particularly, negative issues related to nepotism delve into social problems associated with capitalism, such as social class and inequality, making them even more significant, going beyond simple negative issues like dissatisfaction with product or service failures.

This study is expected that the finding will serve as foundational data for brand publicity strategies through revealing the effect of negative publicity related to the hotly-debated Nepo-baby issue in the fashion industry on consumer emotion and attitudes toward brand.

II. Literature Review

1. Brand-related Negative Publicity

In today's marketplace, consumers are often exposed to various brand information (Brown & Reingen, 1987), especially negative publicity. Negative publicity is one of the most important sources of negative information, as it refers to 'the non-compensated dissemination of potentially damaging information by presenting disparaging news about a brand story, product, service, or individual (Sherrell & Reidenbach, 1986). 'Non-compensated dissemination' indicates that it may be difficult to offset the serious impact caused by the negative information as the information has been circulated by media such as social media (Yu et al., 2019).

According to Henard (2002), articles about companies provided by the media are relatively more trustworthy, and consumers are influenced by such articles when evaluating specific brands. Negative publicity is argued to have a greater impact than other sources due to its perceived credibility and reach (Bond & Kirshenbaum, 1997; Kim et al., 2007). Therefore, since negative articles about a company can influence consumers to evaluate the company negatively, companies should be cautious to prevent the formation of negative press (Kang et al., 2015). With the rapid advancement of media and the increasing speed of information dissemination, the influence of publicities on consumer emotions and brand reputation is progressively growing. In this context, neg-

ative publicities are exerting a greater impact on consumer emotions and attitudes. Particularly, there is a need for theoretical examination of the negative emotions experienced by consumers due to the negative publicities associated with Nepo-babies, which wield significant influence in the fashion industry. Furthermore, it is essential to closely analyze the mechanism through which these negative emotions transition into adverse sentiments towards the brand, ultimately resulting in a sense of disappointment in consumers.

Prior research related to negative publicities includes studies on optimal company responses to negative events (Coombs 2007; Sturges 1994) and the categorization of events that lead to company crises (Barton 1992; Coombs 2001). Additionally, most research has focused on the effects of brand-related negative publicity on brand attitudes and purchasing intentions (Yu et al., 2018). However, there is little research specifically exploring which emotions consumers experience that are linked to negative emotions and attitudes towards a brand when exposed to negative publicity. Therefore, in this study, we aimed to investigate the impact of emotions that can be triggered in consumers when they encounter negative publicity related to a brand on the brand itself. Specifically, this study focused on publicity related to the Nepo-baby issue. Unlike brands' products or services that directly interact with consumers, brand CEOs are not directly correlated with consumers; rather, they are associated with brand management. However, publicity efforts, such as appointing Nepo-babies as brand CEOs, still evoke negative emotions among consumers. This is because consumers may perceive that Nepo-babies CEOs attained their positions due to their parents' influence and wealth, rather than personal effort. Thus, negative publicity about a brand linked to the Nepo-baby issue can influence negative emotions and attitudes toward that brand among consumers.

2. Emotions Perceived through the Experience of Nepo-baby Issue

1) Powerlessness

Powerlessness is an emotion associated with feeling a

lack of control over situations that one cannot influence, defined by a low sense of control over one's own income and the actions of others (Bunker & Ball, 2009; Seeman et al., 1988; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Powerlessness often arises in situations where individuals experience an actual or perceived loss of control over their own actions or the actions of others. It can be caused in various forms and contexts in our daily lives. For instance, it is a common emotional state that consumers may experience when they are unable to freely purchase desired items (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Generally, when consumers feel powerlessness in a given situation, they tend to have negative perceptions. Indeed, the absence of contingent control over one's environment is frequently linked to significant adverse consequences (Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Publicity about Nepo-babies who enjoy social privileges, is likely to induce a sense of powerlessness in consumers, making them feel that they cannot control their current circumstances through their own efforts.

2) Unfairness

Fairness is defined as "a nature that is impartial and just, without leaning towards one side when assessing the value, right or wrong, and disputes of an event". Recently in South Korea, there has been a growing emphasis on the notion of the class divide as also known as hierarchical social strata. Consequently, there is an increasing demand for fairness, especially among the MZ generation (Lee, 2017). The MZ generation places a significant emphasis on the perception of 'being fair' and holds a negative view towards 'discrimination' or 'privilege', expressing negative opinions toward these feelings actively (Kim, 2021). Furthermore, the MZ generation harbors strong grievances against the perceived lack of fairness in the evaluation of their efforts (Moore, 2019). However, people do not perceive fairness based on objective standards. In other words, individuals tend to evaluate fairness based on relative criteria, comparing themselves to others, rather than judging the fairness of their rewards based on an absolute standard of fairness (Greenberg, 1987). Hence, when consumers encounter Nepo-babies who enjoy social privileges based on their parents' fame and wealth, it is likely to trigger a feeling of unfairness

among them, rather than focusing on individual effort.

3) Relative Deprivation

People commonly have a tendency to compare themselves to others for self-evaluation (Festinger, 1954). In South Korea, where there is a strong emphasis on external values, people tend to engage in social comparisons more frequently than in other countries (Yoo et al., 2019). Social comparisons occur more often in environments with frequent social interactions, and individuals with more social contacts tend to engage in comparisons more often. In particular, the current MZ generation, who are familiar with various media and internet usage, readily engage in comparisons with others through active online interactions. They experience upward comparisons by perceiving others depicted in the media as leading more glamorous and ideal lives, often seeing them as superior to themselves (Yang, 2015). Consumers, despite being aware that mass media often presents a distorted and exaggerated view of people's lives, often use it as criteria for comparison. Continuously making upward comparisons with individuals who appear outwardly superior can lead to feelings of relative deprivation (Yang & Song, 2010). Especially in recent times, various factors, including marketing, have encouraged conspicuous consumption, leading even relatively high-income individuals to experience relative deprivation when comparing themselves to others (Huh, 2016). Therefore, the exposure to Nepo-baby issues through the media is likely to trigger feelings of relative deprivation among consumers.

4) Loneliness

Loneliness is defined as the discrepancy experienced between the desired and actual social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1982). The understanding of loneliness is based on the need to belong theory, which suggests that people have a basic need to belong (Leary & Baumeister, 1995) and an absence of intimate or social relationships may lead to loneliness (Weiss, 1987). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers have increasingly grappled with feelings of loneliness. As a result, there is a rising societal awareness of the loneliness experienced by the younger generation, including

Millennials and Gen Z. This younger demographic, dealing with loneliness, tends to allocate more time to social media, inadvertently isolating themselves even further (Son & Heo, 2020). Most of the psychology literature on loneliness focuses on its negative psychological and physical effects on cognition, emotion, and behavior (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). According to previous research, individual loneliness has generally been found to have a negative impact on one's cognitive functions (Leary & Baumeister, 1995; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). When consumers come across news about Nepo-babies through the media, they are likely to compare themselves with Nepo-babies who have achieved wealth and fame based on the help of others within their social relationships. This can lead consumers to think that they cannot achieve a life similar to that of Nepo-babies without making an effort, and that there may not be people in society who will help them. Consequently, this is likely to induce feelings of loneliness among consumers.

3. Negative Feeling toward Brand

Negative publicities regarding specific companies' products are frequently encountered in our surroundings through media coverage. For consumers, media coverage is considered more trustworthy and influential than any other means of communication about other companies. (Klein, 1996; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). Therefore, negative publicities often inflict significant damage on companies (Pfeffer et al., 2014). Even if the content of negative publicities may seem trivial, they can have a substantial impact on consumers' perceptions and can significantly affect the image of companies and their products (Yoon & Cho, 2005). Therefore, negative publicity for fashion companies not only damages the fashion company's brand image but also has a severe impact on sales due to negative word-of-mouth about the products. Mizerski (1982) suggested that consumers pay more attention to negative information than positive information and that the effects of negative information also influence product evaluations. This can be explained by the 'Negativity Effect' which claims that negative information is weighted more heavily than positive information in-

formation processing (Yu et al., 2019). Furthermore, previous research has also shown that consumers tend to pay attention to negative word-of-mouth (Arndt, 1967; Richins, 1983). Thus, we have concluded that it is important to investigate the antecedents of consumers' negative brand perceptions through this study.

4. Brand Disappointment

Brand disappointment is a type of attitude formed by consumers towards a brand and refers to a violation of performance-related reasons, in such a way that the delivery of the brand promise does not meet the customers' expectations (Zafrani et al., 2023; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). Brand disappointment is a concept of significant importance within the context of the brand-consumer relationship, as it constitutes pertinent factors that lead customers to behave negatively towards a brand (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004; Zarantonello et al., 2016). It's essential to manage brand disappointment due to its impact on consumers' future behaviors towards the brand (Zarantonello et al., 2016). Brand disappointment can lead consumers to switch other brands and to negative word-of-mouth (Tan et al., 2021).

In multiple previous studies, the impact of brand disappointment induced by service failure on subsequent consumer behavior has been explored (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017; Khamitov et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2013). However, research on the antecedents of what triggers brand disappointment is relatively scarce. Therefore, researchers deemed it necessary to closely identify which consumer emotions lead to brand disappointment. Typically, the psychological aspects of consumers' positive/negative evaluations of a brand influence their attitude toward the brand (Bentler & Speckart, 1981; Kahle & Berman, 1979; Allen et al., 1992).

5. Hypothesis Development

Consumers are more likely to react sensitively to negative publicity related to a brand due to the 'Negativity Effect.' Nepo-babies are individuals born into affluent families, who have had a good environment and oppor-

tunities from the start. The reason Nepo-babies face social criticism is because they are perceived to have greater chances of achieving a high status with less effort compared to those born into ordinary families. Due to such inequality, negative emotions like unfairness, powerlessness, relative deprivation, and loneliness are likely to arise. These individual-level emotions are expected to transition into brand-level negative emotions (Mitchell & Nelson, 2018). Specifically, the more unfairness, powerlessness, relative deprivation, and loneliness perceived on an individual level, the stronger their negative emotions towards the brand will become.

H1: After encountering publicities related to Nepo-babies, perceived a) unfairness, b) helplessness, c) relative deprivation, and d) loneliness have a significant impact on negative emotions towards the brand.

Negative publicity about a specific brand negatively affects consumer attitudes towards the brand (Yoo et al., 2013). Negative information about one brand can have a significant impact that transfers to other brands within the same parent company (Kang et al., 2015). Thus, we expected that negative emotions towards a brand arising from negative issues would result in brand disappointment.

H2: Negative emotions towards the brand will have a positive impact on brand disappointment.

Furthermore, in this study, we aim to explore the differences between consumers who have experienced Nepo-baby issues and those who have experienced typical success stories. Recently, luxury brands have been unveiling their creative directors and officially reporting on their careers. We want to investigate how such publicities, success stories of individuals born in ordinary families with relatively fewer opportunities, which contrast with Nepo-babies, impact consumers. Humans have a fundamental desire to evaluate their own abilities based on the others. Additionally, they constantly compare themselves to others, judging their own situations based

on these comparisons, and this process triggers specific emotions (Festinger, 1954). Due to this fundamental desire in humans, consumers exposed to Nepo-baby publicities will naturally compare themselves with Nepo-babies and their situations. Therefore, this study anticipates that the influence between variables will differ between the group that has experienced Nepo-baby publicities and the group that has experienced typical success stories. H3 was derived, judging that there will be a difference in the pathways between the two groups.

H3: The groups that have experienced Nepo-baby publicities and those that have not will differ in the pathways of the structural models.

III. Research Method

An online survey was conducted on August 20, 2023, targeting 350 men and women in their 20s to 40s by Embrain, a professional survey company in Korea. The reason for targeting the survey participants to the MZ generation, aged 20 to 40, is as follows. There are press releases suggesting that the MZ generation is more concerned about social fairness compared to other generations (Jin, 2023). Additionally, as we enter a period of economic stagnation, there's a saying in Korea that this generation might be the first to be poorer than their parents, indicating a belief that they might not accumulate wealth as previous generations did, despite working hard. Given these common characteristics of the MZ generation, it was deemed appropriate to explore how this generation perceives emotions regarding the issue of 'Nepo-baby' and how this perception might influence their attitude towards brands.

Respondents were randomly assigned to two groups and watched a video stimulus before responding to the survey. The 1st group watched a 2-minute video about Christian Dior's new creative director, Delphine Arnault, and a famous Nepo-baby fashion model. The video includes Delphine, who, as the daughter of LVMH Group Chairman Bernard Arnault, became the youngest member of the LVMH board. It also features Lily-Rose Depp,

the daughter of Johnny Depp and Vanessa Paradis, who has been a Chanel model despite her height of 160cm, which is shorter compared to other models, since middle school. The 2nd group watched a 2-minute video about the growth story of the creative director of the luxury fashion brand Christian Dior and a story about a fashion model. This video features Dior's Creative Director, Maria Grazia Chiuri, and her journey to becoming the creative director of Dior through her efforts as a fashion designer. It also showcases the legendary Black model for Christian Dior, Naomi Campbell, and her hard-fought journey to the top in the fashion model industry. A common theme between the two is that both rose to the pinnacle of their fields through hard work, having come from ordinary backgrounds.

The two groups watched different videos and responded to four questions to confirm the manipulation of stimuli. The question, "I just saw an example of a 'golden spoon' (privileged upbringing)," showed a significant difference between Group 1 (mean = 6.18) and Group 2 (mean = 2.95) ($t = 21.922, p = .000$). For the question, "I had good opportunities in the fashion industry thanks to my parents," there was a significant difference between Group 1 (mean = 6.00) and Group 2 (mean = 3.06) ($t = 17.423, p = .000$). The question, "I saw someone in the video gradually reaching their desired position through consistent effort," revealed a significant difference between Group 1 (mean = 2.97) and Group 2 (mean = 5.81) ($t = -17.757, p = .000$). And for the question, "I just saw examples of people who succeeded through hard work," there was a significant difference between Group 1 (mean = 2.81) and Group 2 (mean = 5.93) ($t = -20.243, p = .000$). Thus, the difference in stimuli between the two groups was verified (Table 1).

The survey questions were restructured by the researcher, referencing existing scales from prior studies: powerlessness (Miller, 1992), unfairness (Kumar et al., 1995), relative deprivation (Callan et al., 2011), loneliness (Neto, 2014), negative feeling toward brand (Zafrani et al., 2023), brand disappointment (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). All items were answered using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "Strongly disagree," 7 = "Strongly agree"). The survey was composed of questions on demographic

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic	Range	n		Total n	χ^2	Prob.
		General (n=150)	Nepo (n=200)			
Gender	Men	34	36	70	1.167	.284
	Women	116	164	280		
Marriage	Yes	51	61	112	.483	.490
	No	99	139	238		
Age	20-29	75	100	175	.008	.996
	30-39	38	50	88		
	40-49	37	50	87		
Education	High school	23	20	43	5.303	.258
	University Student	12	28	40		
	University	101	138	239		
	higher	13	13	26		
	Etc.	1	1	2		
Occupation	Housewife	14	15	29	5.501	.789
	Student	24	31	55		
	Office worker	51	77	128		
	Professional	10	12	22		
	Skilled technician	13	17	30		
	Production worker	6	7	13		
	Service and sales worker	14	11	25		
	Freelancers	9	20	29		
	Etc.	5	7	12		
Monthly average household income (unit:won)	Under 1 million	8	8	16	7.785	.556
	1~2million	11	9	20		
	2~3million	41	46	87		
	3~5million	35	46	81		
	5~8million	31	56	87		
	Over 8million	24	35	59		

information, as well as items related to powerlessness, unfairness, relative deprivation, loneliness, negative feeling toward the brand, and brand disappointment. The research model and hypotheses were tested using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 23.0 statistical software.

IV. Results

1. Measurement Model Validation

With the pooled data (n=350; n=200 for Nepo-baby

fashion brand experience, n=150 for general fashion brand experience), the results of the confirmatory factor analysis on the entire measurement model showed that our measurement model had a reasonably good fit ($\chi^2(df = 137) = 243.721, p = .000$; Normed $\chi^2 = 1.779$; CFI = .959; TLI = .949; RMSEA = .065). We confirmed that the Cronbach's α coefficients for the constructs ranged from .795 to .935, as shown in <Table 2>. Cronbach's α coefficients above .7 represent the measurements of reliability (Hair et al., 2013). Validity of the constructs of the seven latent variables was also examined to check wheth-

Table 2. Results of the confirmatory factor analysis measurement

Factor	Items	Standardized Factor loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach' α
Powerlessness (P)	After watching the video, I wanted to avoid problems.	.800	.660	.929	.815
	The video made me feel I can't set daily goals well.	.831			
	After the video, I felt unsure about making decisions by myself.	.806			
Unfairness (UF)	After watching the video, I think that when making important decisions, relationships like family ties, social connections, and educational backgrounds play a role.	.870	.739	.978	.905
	After watching the video, it seems that the decision-maker's feelings and biases can change the decisions.	.911			
	After watching the video, I think that rules might change according to the decision-maker.	.794			
Relative deprivation (RD)	After watching the video, I feel uneasy seeing people live richly.	.795	.694	.928	.795
	When I see people who have an easy life, I feel like I am being ignored.	.801			
	After watching the video, I feel like I have less.	.090			
Loneliness (LN)	After watching the video, I felt like I don't have friends to be with me.	.750	.709	.943	.834
	After watching the video, I felt like I am disconnected from society.	.917			
	After watching the video, I felt like there aren't many people who truly know me.	.850			
Negative feeling toward brand (NF)	I don't like the brand from the video anymore because of how they act.	.770	.724	.967	.934
	I don't like how the brand in the video does things.	.893			
	If I see posts from the brand featured in the video online, I would likely leave negative feedback.	.826			
Brand disappointment (BD)	After watching the video, I don't support that brand anymore.	.907	.809	.972	.935
	I felt that the brand in the video deceived me.	.907			
	I think the brand in the video broke its fundamental promise with consumers.	.882			
	I felt disappointed with the brand featured in the video.	.909			
$\chi^2(df=137) = 243.721, p = .000$; Normed $\chi^2 = 1.779$; CFI = .959; TLI = .949; RMSEA = .065					

er the measurements of this study were appropriate. Convergent validity, which examines the degree to which two or more measurement tools have a correlation with a single factor, can be measured as average variance extracted (AVE) and construct reliability (CR). The factor loadings of all indicators were greater than .60, which indicates that the measures all had acceptable convergent validity for each construct (Hair et al., 2013). The CR ranged from .929 to .780, and the AVE ranged from .660 to .809, as shown in <Table 2>. Thus, we confirmed that the data met the required levels of the constructs as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981): .7 for the CR and

.5 for the AVE.

We also checked the discriminant validity (i.e., one factor differs from another) by calculating the square of the correlation coefficients between the AVE of each latent variable and each of the two variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity is demonstrated when the AVE is larger than its squared correlation coefficients in the rows and columns. The square of the correlation coefficients between all the latent variables in our model ranged from .039 to .637 and were smaller than the AVE index for each variable with a range of .660 to .809 (Table 3). Thus, we concluded that our measures sat-

Table 3. Discriminant validity of measures the squared correlation and AVE of variables

Variable	P	UF	RD	LN	NF	BD
P	.660 ^a					
UF	.039 ^b	.739 ^a				
RD	.226	.047	.694 ^a			
LN	.280	.029	.237	.709 ^a		
NF	.188	.159	.249	.165	.724 ^a	
BD	.147	.141	.241	.200	.637	.809 ^a

a) Numbers on the diagonal are AVE.

b) Numbers off the diagonal are the squared correlation between the variables.

ified discriminant validity.

2. Result of Structural Equation Model

After consumers experience the Nepo-baby issue arising in the fashion brand, the influence of perceived powerlessness, unfairness, relative deprivation, and loneliness on negative feeling towards the brand and brand disappointment was tested using a structural equation model. It was found that perceiving unfairness ($\beta = .128$, $p < .05$, Fig. 1), relative deprivation ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$), and loneliness ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$) has a positive effect on negative feeling towards the brand. On the other hand, powerlessness ($\beta = .053$) did not show a significant effect on negative feeling towards the brand. Thus, hypotheses 1-a, 1-b, and 1-c were accepted. Negative feeling was confirmed to have a positive effect on brand disappointment.

ment ($\beta = .828$, $p < .001$). Therefore, hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Prior to that, to ensure that the primary variables across the two groups were equitably recognized, a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis was performed. The results indicated that the unconstrained model demonstrated good fit ($\chi^2 = 513.527$, $df = 274$, CFI = .949; TLI = .937; RMSEA = .050), confirming measurement invariance across the groups. However, the χ^2 test of the constrained model 1 indicated significance at the $p < .05$ level, suggesting that measurement invariance of factor loadings between latent variables and observed variables was not established across the two groups. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

However, there is a difference in the pathways between the two groups, and the results are as follows (Fig. 2). It was anticipated that powerlessness perceived

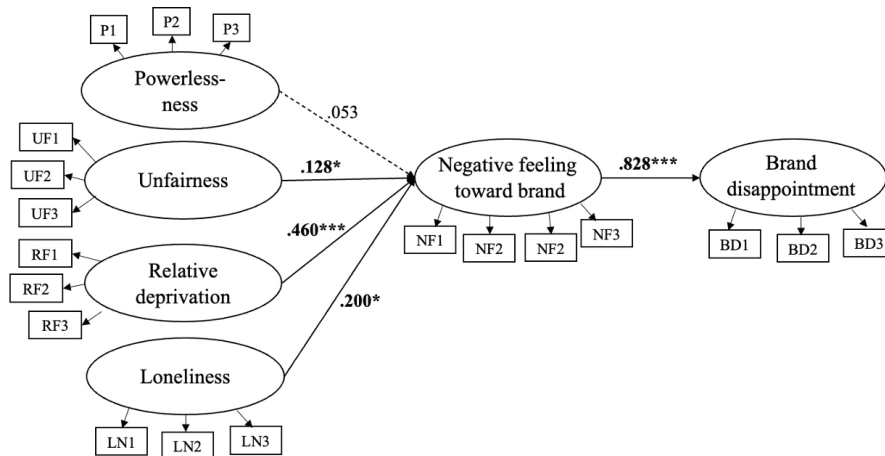


Fig. 1. Result of the SEM for the group of watching the “Nepo-baby fashion brand” stimulus (Group 1).

Table 4. Result of measurement invariance test

Model	χ^2	df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	χ^2 differences	df differences	<i>p</i>
Unconstrained	513.527	274	.937	.949	.050			
Constrained ¹⁾	545.256	287	.935	.945	.051	31.998	13	.002
Constrained ²⁾	844.300	327	.885	.890	.067	252.964	32	.000

¹⁾ A model that constrains factor coefficients equally between groups.

²⁾ A model that constrains covariance equally between groups.

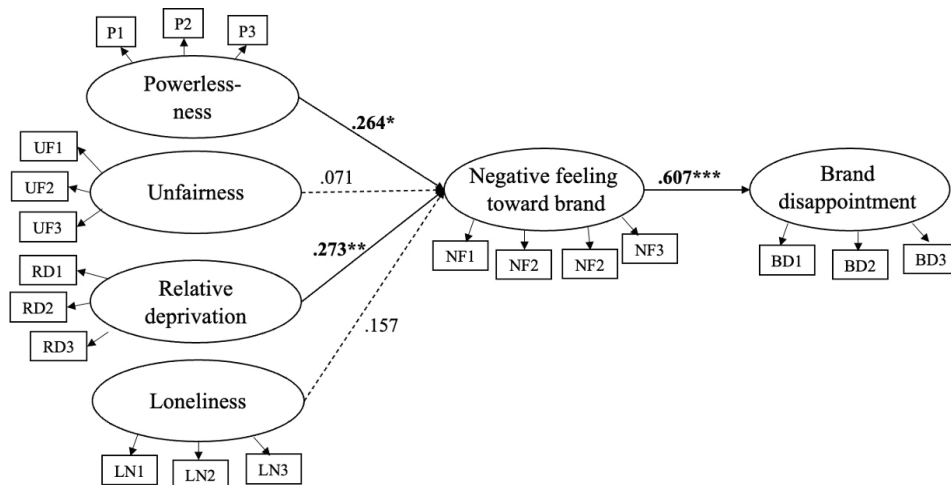


Fig. 2. Results of the SEM for the group of watching the “general fashion brand” stimulus (Group 2).

through the experience of the Nepo-baby issue would positively affect negative feeling towards a brand. However, contrary to expectations, it was rather found in the group 2, who were exposed to stories of someone from an ordinary family succeeding as a creative director of a luxury fashion brand or of a model succeeding through hard work. They felt a significant sense of powerlessness affecting their negative feelings towards the brand. If ordinary people consider those born into high status (like Nepo-babies) as individuals from an entirely different world, they might not feel powerlessness. On the contrary, seeing someone from a similar background achieve success can invoke feelings of “I might not be able to achieve like that,” leading to a relative sense of powerlessness. This aligns with the direction of a prior study that suggests when one feels awe towards a person or a situation, it negatively impacts feelings of power-

lessness (Liu et al., 2023). Relative deprivation is a subjective concept that arises from the gap between expectations and actual achievements, and occurs when individuals perceive a realistic difference between themselves and people in higher social positions. This leads to the experience of negative feeling. Therefore, it can be interpreted that in both groups, recognizing the difference between themselves and the individuals appearing in the video affects negative feeling. Additionally, negative feeling toward the brand was shown to act as a mediator between the 4 independent variables and brand disappointment in the both groups of this study. On the other hand, in the case where a general brand story was presented (Group 2), only powerlessness ($\beta = .264, p < .05$) and relative deprivation ($\beta = .273, p < .01$) had a significant effect on brand disappointment through negative feeling toward brand.

Table 5. Indirect effect of negative feeling toward brand (Group 1)

Path	Indirect effects significance	95% C.I	
		Lower	Upper
Powerlessness → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.549	-.102	.188
Unfairness → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.050	.022	.220
Relative deprivation → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.004	.206	.612
Loneliness → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.012	.035	.359

Table 6. Indirect effect of negative feeling toward brand (Group 2)

Path	Indirect effects significance	95% C.I	
		Lower	Upper
Powerlessness → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.041	.360	.327
Unfairness → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.389	-.037	.143
Relative deprivation → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.032	.530	.325
Loneliness → Negative feeling toward brand → Brand disappointment	.280	-.047	.241

3. Assessment of the Mediating Effect of Negative Feeling toward Brand

In this study, the variable of negative feeling towards brand is applied as a mediator. To verify mediating effect of the relationship between emotion after experiencing the Nepo-baby issue and brand disappointment, bootstrapping in AMOS was conducted. The results of the significance of the mediating effect are shown in <Table 5-group 1> & <Table 6-group 2>. For significance test, two-tailed significance was conducted.

In the result of the group 1, negative feeling toward brand did not mediate powerlessness and brand disappointment, which aligns with the result that powerlessness did not affect negative feeling toward brand. In the group 2, the mediating effect of negative feelings toward brand was not evident in the path of unfairness and loneliness, which also corresponds with the results of the research model.

V. Conclusions

Consumers are ultimately the ones who interact with the brand, so it is important to pay attention to their perceptions and emotions. This study was conducted to provide insights into the Nepo-baby issue from the per-

spective of fashion brands and is significant in revealing the impact on negative feeling toward the brand and brand disappointment when controversial Nepo-babies are employed. Additionally, the study adds depth by comparing it with the conventional marketing method that create content to communicate brand success stories with consumers.

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, when consumers encounter a negative publicity like the Nepo-baby issue, they tend to form negative feeling towards the brand, which in turn influences brand disappointment. Brand disappointment, which is one of attitude variables toward brand, serves as a precursor variable that can predict consumers' future negative actions towards the brand, and it is an important variable that the brand must manage carefully (Hussain et al., 2023). Therefore, even if many consumers are interested in the fashion style of Nepo-babies, the fashion brand needs to reconsider employing them as brand models or muses. Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, highly value fairness. Therefore, publicities that trigger negative emotions like "unfairness" should be carefully considered. Additionally, in the current situation where Christian Dior's management system, which exemplifies nepotism, is under criticism, strategies related to promoting

individuals to senior management positions without proper verification of their capabilities should also be revisited.

Secondly, the antecedent leading to negative feeling towards the brand due to the Nepo-baby issue were identified as unfairness, relative deprivation, and loneliness. While product and service failures can lead to negative feeling towards the brand due to the direct harm they cause to consumers (MacInis & Folkes, 2017; Khamitov et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2013), the Nepo-baby issue doesn't necessarily inflict direct damage on consumers. However, when consumers encounter the Nepo-baby issue in a certain brand, they perceive unfairness, relative deprivation, and loneliness. These negative emotions subsequently transfer to negative feelings towards the brand. The emotions triggered by the Nepo-baby issue do not derived from consumers' direct brand experiences but rather from indirect brand experiences, which arise from encountering various issues associated with the brand. Therefore, from the brand's perspective, there is a risk of losing potential consumers even before they have a first-hand experience with the brand. Therefore, brands need to be cautious to prevent consumers from encountering such negative publicity that can indirectly influence their perceptions.

Thirdly, Fashion brands often share their success stories with consumers, viewing their successful history as their heritage. In this study, unlike the Nepo-baby issue, it was found that when consumer groups were exposed to stories of a fashion designer who was born in an ordinary family and achieved success as a creative director of a luxury brand through hard work, and the journey of a Black individual becoming a successful fashion model, they perceived feelings of powerlessness and relative deprivation. This subsequently influenced negative feeling towards the brand and with brand disappointment. Consumers, upon seeing individuals in similar situations succeed, felt a sense of powerlessness due to the fear that they might not achieve the same, and recognized a sense of relative deprivation, feeling they lacked in comparison. While it is appropriate to praise and admire those who have worked hard and reached the top, if individuals compare themselves and feel lacking, it can evoke neg-

ative feeling which can then transfer to negative feelings towards the brand. Therefore, it seems necessary for brands to minimize content related to their business and operational strategies and instead focus on products and services that directly provide satisfaction to consumers.

Fourthly, brand disappointment has been studied as a significant antecedent influencing consumers' future behavior. However, there has been a lack of prior research on which emotions in specific situations lead to consumer disappointment. Nonetheless, this study is meaningful in that it highlights the various negative emotions experienced by consumers who have encountered the Nepo-baby issue as antecedents to brand disappointment.

This study makes several important contributions. First, this study is theoretically significant in that it extends research on nepotism to the strategy of fashion brand publicity by identifying the effect of recent Nepo-baby issues, a hot topic in the fashion industry, on consumer emotion. Additionally, by examining the emotions of consumers in situations opposite to that of Nepo-baby and the effect on brands, this study provides foundational insights into the direction brands should build their publicity strategies. This study will be useful to establish marketing strategies through brand storytelling, creating owned contents, and managing reputation.

This study has the following limitations. First, this study measured the 'negative feeling toward brand' and 'brand disappointment' factors after measuring the negative emotions perceived by consumers at an individual level. There is a limitation in that consumers recalling negative emotions first may influence the measurement of subsequent variables. Also, the extent to which individuals perceive their social stratum varies, influencing consumer attitudes and behaviors (Turner, 1984; Kraus et al., 2011). Therefore, the degree of negative emotions triggered based on an individual's perception of their social stratum may differ. Future research should explore how negative emotions induced by Nepo-baby publicity vary in their impact on attitude formation based on subjective social stratum levels. Additionally, this study focused on Korean consumers. To generalize the results, further research should be conducted with a global consumer base.

1. Acknowledgement

Not applicable

2. Ethics and consent

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Institution Kunsan National University (1040117-202401-HR-003-02).

3. Availability of data and materials

The data used in this study cannot be disclosed for reasons of personal information protection. However, it can be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Institution.

4. Conflicting interests

Not applicable

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6. Authors' contributions

HY was mainly responsible for data analysis and interpretation, and WJ was mainly responsible for data collection and manuscript preparation of this study. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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