

THE PHENOMENON OF BRAND HATE: ANALYSIS OF PREDICTORS AND OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

Consumer behavior literature have traditionally focused on the positive aspect of consumptions, ignoring the negative forms and related implications, Our contribution try a first conceptualization of the entire phenomenon, focusing in detail on predictor motives (reasons influencing consumers and lead them to feelings of hatred against the brands), and negative behavioral outcomes, i.e. those particular actions of consumers in response to and as a result of the Brand Hate phenomenon. The study was conducted on a sample of 122 consumers whom defined themselves as haters of specific brands and we used a self-reported questionnaire, composed by three different scales: Brand Hate Scale, Motivations Scale and Behavioral Scale. Results emerged are very interesting not only in an academic way but also for a better planning of a corporate strategies.

KEYWORDS

Brand Hate, Consumer Behavior, Brand Management, Consumer-brand relationships

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays companies all over the world, regardless of their specific dimensions, understood the power that brands have for consumers, also confirmed by recent researches and reports that show up its importance considering it as the most influential resource among the firm's intangible assets.

Brands in fact are commonly explained as "a way of adding value and giving its products or services an individuality that sets it apart from the rest [i.e. the products and services of competitors]" (Roper & Fill, 2012, p. 108), and they are also consider as a resource that gives to companies the power to influence the market in many different ways.

To better understand this concept's nature many different definitions followed over the years, focusing on different aspects of consumer-brand relationship (Santisi, Platania & Hichy, 2014). According to AMA (American Marketing Association) for example a "Brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (AMA, 1960); but it is also a sort of promise that identifying and authenticating a product or service it delivers a pledge of satisfaction and quality (Landor, W.); and it is also a legal instrument (Crainer, 1995; Broadbent & Cooper 1987), a risk reducer guaranteeing a quality's standards (Bauer, 1960; Assael, 1995; Kapferer, 1995), an identity and value system (Balmer, 1995; Aaker, 1996; Clark, 1987; Engel et al., 1993), an image in consumers' mind (Martineau, 1959; Keller, 1993; Bates, 2006), and so on.

Moreover whereas some time ago every kind of economic actors' interest about bonds or alliances with consumers was considered a sign of weakness, today the situation is quite different. In fact, considering the changing nature of the economic market, for example from national target to international one, searching for alliances or building special bonds with consumers seems to be a very strong and successful strategy to be pursued with conviction by all the firms. Rifkin in fact states that "In the third millennium the real value of an enterprise and of its managers cannot be measured by the company's turnover but by the quality and the strength of alliances they can build" (Rifkin, 2005).

Current literature shows a lot of evidences and studies about consumer-brand relationship: one of them was that made by Fournier and Aaker in the late 90s, where they found a sort of similarities between consumer-brand relationship and relationship between humans; according to them in fact it seems possible and logic using the same tools used to test human relationships for all the other relationships. Fifteen meaningful relationship forms emerge from this consideration and they are described with words typically referred to humans: in fact we can find different forms of relating under the rubrics of friendship (e.g., compartmentalized or circumscribed friendships, childhood buddies, best friends, casual friends) and marriage (e.g., marriage of convenience, committed partnership, arranged marriage). Several "dark side" relationships are also noted (e.g. dependency, enmity, enslavement, and secret affairs), and there are also details about brand-level specification, refers to general concepts of addiction (Hirschman 1992) and compulsive consumption (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Rook 1987; Platania, Castellano, Santisi & Di Nuovo, 2017).

Because of the strategic importance of this theme, a lot of theories about consumer-brand relationship followed over the years, and they were separated into two distinct strands: the first one refers to the attitude towards brand (Aaker, Keller e Lehmann), and the second one refers to brand attachment (Park, Dalli). These studies contributed to better understand the nature of this relationship but also to identify the specific functions carried out by brands.

Nowadays brands all over the world have different and important roles for consumers, developing and modifying themselves according to their perspectives and point of views. Jean Noel Kapferer (2008, p.22) for example identifies eight different functions, that describes in a very good way how much is important the brand for both consumers and companies. These particular functions are: Identification, Practicality, Guarantee, Optimization, Badge, Continuity, Hedonistic Excitement and Ethical.

However scholars who have studied this issue over the years, are traditionally and exclusively focused on the positive aspects of consumer behavior, considering more interesting to analyze a positive relationship rather than the possible and unfortunately frequent negative implications that can be happened; actually they also wrongly influenced companies that is more useful understanding and knowing what consumers want and are willing to buy (use, choose, vote, etc.), rather than focusing on real reasons why consumers refuse to do the same actions (Dalli et al., 2006). Anyway have a complete knowledge of all the possible aspect of consumer-brand relationship, which includes so-called Brand Hate and its antecedents and the specific behavioral outcomes adopted by consumers, can be a valuable resource for all companies, to exploit to correct any failings and to maintain or create positive and long lasting relationships with its consumers.

Considering that, the aim of this paper is the description and conceptualization of the phenomenon of Brand Hate, which includes the analyses of its antecedents and behavioral outcomes, and their specific relations.

1. FOCUS ON HATE

Before starting the analysis and conceptualization of Brand Hate's phenomenon, it seemed appropriate to offer a brief overview about Hate as an emotion. A number of scholars in psychology explored the foundations of this emotion, and built their theories considering the particular and complex nature of the Hate. From centuries, several disciplines deal with the study of this concept in order to understand its nature and significance, taking into account that in the history of humanity, hate always had a significant role. Among the famous people who carried out these studies, we mention Freud, Allport, Fromm, Tajfel, Sternberg, McClelland and many others.

According to Eric Fromm, for example, there are two types of hate: a rational and reactive type, and one determined by personality (Magnano, Paolillo, Platania and Santisi, 2017). The difference between these two types of hate depends on the reasons why it emerged: in the first case after painful events, in the second one without any specific motivations and regardless of situations. In this sense, hate determined by personality is more dangerous and powerful than this one rational and reactive, because it could emerge everywhere and it had as target everything, like products or service of a particular brand.

More recently Sternberg (2003) also focused on this issue, stating a new theory known as The Triangular Theory of Hate. Typically hate is thought of as a single emotion, but according to Sternberg it's logic to believe that "hate has multiple components that can manifest in different ways and different occasions" (p. 306). Starting from the The Triangular Theory of Love he identified three components of hate: negation of intimacy, passion, and commitment. Negation of intimacy in hate is characterized by repulsion and disgust, and whereas intimacy refers to closeness, the negation of intimacy concerns distance; passion is expressed by an intense anger or fear in response to a threat, and as reactions on these kind of emotions people (and consumers) often adopt an avoidance behavior; finally decision/commitment is characterized by cognitions of devaluation and diminution through contempt for the targeted group.

1.1 Brand Hate

In recent years the concept of Brand Hate (or dislike), is often associated with words "dark side of consumer preferences" (Zaratonello et al., 2016, Dalli, 2006)), and this is particularly true considering the scarce modern literature. Despite this, some authors focused on this topic, and below we try to propose a brief review of their conceptualizations.

Consumer behavior literature in fact succeeded isolating three different strands of theories that interpret and describe the "dark side" of consumer preferences, and particularly distinguished: (1) an approach that considers the expression of negative attitudes as a tool for the deterioration of the relationship between consumer and brand (Fournier, 1998; Aaker, 2004); (2) an approach that interprets these attitudes as a key of social communication (Bordieu, 1979; Wilk, 1997; Fabris, 2003); (3) and finally an approach that sees the negative attitudes as a critique of modern consumerism (Murray e Ozanne, 1991; Firat e Venkatesh, 1995; Klein, 2004).

A first reference to the concept of Brand Hate is offered by Grégoire et al. (2009), that consider Hate as a sort of desire for revenge and avoidance. This kind of emotion doesn't remain only a desire, but it often transformed into real actions that lead consumers' behavior (e.g. negative word of mouth, complaints, ...).

A second perspective is offered by Johnson et al. (2011) that gave a central and active role to consumers. They affirm in fact that anti-brand behaviors depend on loss of self-esteem and the role of self-conscious emotions, as opposed to critical incidents; indeed brands who do not satisfy specific customers's expectations (regarding also the concept of Self), cause a profound sense of shame in the consumers and also a desire of revenge as reaction.

Another contribution comes from Bryson et al. (2013) whom define brand hate as "an intense negative emotional affect towards the brand" (p. 395); according to their conceptualization Brand Hate is "the purposeful and deliberate intention to avoid or reject a brand, or even to act out behaviors that demonstrate this rejection" (p. 395). They also identify four potential antecedents (country-of-origin, customer dissatisfaction, negative stereotypes and corporate social performance) and specific behavioral outcomes (negative word-of-mouth, boycotts and sabotage).

A more recent study is proposed also by Kavaliauskė and Simanavičiūtė (2015), whom focused on brand avoidance as a particular phenomenon of anti-consumption. From data collections emerged that the more dislike, anger, worry and embarrassment emotions grow up, the more consumers want to avoid brands: this depends on different motives, such as unmet expectations, ideological and symbolic incompatibility between consumers and brands or ethical unacceptable conduct adopt by companies.

Finally we introduce study carried out by Zaratonello et al. (2016), where they theorise that this kind of analysis can be useful not only in consumer research literature, but also in the marketing area: in fact understand consumer emotions would help companies to respond effectively and maybe even prevent the entire phenomenon of brand hate. They also found two components of Brand Hate: "active brand hate," which involves emotions like anger and contempt/disgust, and "passive brand hate," which instead includes fear, disappointment, shame, and dehumanization. They also identify three different types of negative behavioral outcomes: attack-like (negative WOM), avoidance-like (patronage reduction/cessation), and approach-like (consumer complaining and protest behaviors) (Platania & Santisi, 2016; Platania, Platania & Santisi, 2016).

1.2. Antecedents and Behavioral Outcomes of Brand Hate

What exactly are the reasons why consumers decide not to buy a particular product or brand, or even start to hate it? According to Hogg (1998) it's important the distinction between two forms of negative choices: no-choice and anti-choice. In particular if in the first case consumers don't have any influence or control, because it depends on affordability, accessibility and availability of products, in the case of anti-choice they are directly involved and they consciously choose to give up, to avoid and to reject the product or the specific brand.

Lee, Motion, & Conroy (2009) also focused on this topic identifying three different motives that lead consumers to Brand hate: they describe experiential avoidance-unmet expectations (Salvatori, 2007; Bryson, 2013), identity avoidance-symbolic incongruence (Sihna, 2011;) and moral avoidance-ideological incompatibility (Portwood-Stacer, 2012; Bryson et al., 2013; Salvatori, 2007).

Many scholars over the years stated that all the positive and negative attitudes towards brand are often associated with a particular emotional state which significantly affects all the actions adopted by consumers (Corr, 2013; Elliot, Eder, & Harmon-Jones, 2013). Some researchers in particular argue that as the positive stimuli evoke a typical approach behavior towards the brand, as the negative ones lead to an avoidance behavior (Chen & Bargh, 1999).

Funches et al. (2009) instead, identified several behavioral categories that consumers use in the case of so-called Consumer Retaliation, and in particular they describe: cost/loss, consumption prevention, boycott and purchasing slow down, and exit, voice and betrayal.

In addition, Grégoire et al. (2009) state that consumers' hate can be divided into two different behaviors: avoidance and revenge; they also found that revenge behaviors can turn into indirect behaviors (complaining), and direct behaviors (payback) (Grégoire et al., 2009; Thomson, Whelan, & Johnson, 2012; Buscemi et Al., 2016).

In the light of these findings, we mention as the main behavioral outcomes: exit and rejection (Evanschitzky, Brock, & Blut, 2011; Lee et al., 2009), negative WOM (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006; Grégoire et al., 2010), online public complaining (Grégoire et al., 2010; Ward & Ostrom, 2006), vindictive complaining (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire et al., 2010) and market place aggression (Douglas & Martinko, 2001; Grégoire et al., 2010).

2. METHOD

The aim of this paper is to investigate the nature of brand hate, including its antecedents (ie motivations behind consumers's hatred), and its outcomes (ie typical behaviors and actions adopted by consumers). This leads to the following hypotheses: Experiential Avoidance, Identity Avoidance and Moral Avoidance are positively influencing

brand hate and also Brand hate is positively influencing exit/rejection of the brand, negative word-of-mouth, online complaining and marketplace aggression. The data collection was carried out online using Google Drive Modules in the period between May and September 2016.

2.1. Participants and procedure

The study was conducted on a sample of consumers whom defined themselves as haters of specific brands. In detail, the sample analyzed is made up of 122 subjects, 87 females (71.3%) and 35 males (28.7%). The main values regarding the participants's age reporting a $M = 27.18$ and $SD = 8.6$; instead regarding nationality we had a percentage of 99.2% for the Italian and only 0.8% for the Russian.

The data collection was carried out through an anonymous online questionnaire proposed mainly on social networks and boycott sites, using those specific ones that showed openly hatred and contempt for brands. Moreover in order to obtain relevant information relating to the specific brand hated by consumers, it was placed an open question "Please indicate below, if there is a brand you hate, and if so, which brand", allowing them to answer freely, without any form of influence or advise.

2.2. Measures

The questionnaire proposed is made up of a total of 56 items and three distinct scales:

- Brand Hate Scale

The items constituting the Brand Hate Scale derived from two different studies, carried out in detail by Zeki&Romaya (2008) and Salvatori (2007). Particularly, based on the first contribution, items are extrapolated starting from Passionate Hate Scale (PHS, Zeki&Romaya, 2008), who is, at the same time, referred to the Triangular Theory of Hate (Sternberg, 2003). Salvatori's study instead, allow us to have items correctly designed for brand hate's measurement. Overall the Brand Hate Scale consisted of 21 items with 5-point Likert scale ((from "Absolutely disagree" to "Absolutely agree"). The factors reliability of this scale is $\alpha = .86$.

- Motivations Scale

Also for the Motivations scale we refer to two different study: the first one is from Lee et al. (2009) and the second one is from Salvatori (2007). We decided to take into account and use both scales, because they add value to each other but especially because they focused on two different aspects: Lee et al. (2009) in fact are focusing specific on avoidance while Salvatori (2007) analyzed brand hate in general. Therefore the final scale consisted of 17 items divided into Experiential Avoidance (ME, 6 items), Identity Avoidance (MI, 7 items) and Moral Avoidance (MM, 4 items). All the items were represented on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 as Absolutely disagree and 5 as Absolutely agree. The factors reliability instead is $ME = \alpha .85$, $MI = \alpha .81$ and $MM = \alpha .94$.

- Behavioral Scale

The items related to behavioral outcomes adopted by consumers, have been developed from different studies and methods and depending on different type of actions. In fact regarding to exit (BE) and rejection (BR), items are designed from the definition of the construct, while regarding to indirect revenge and direct revenge we refer to the study carried out by Grégoire et al. (2010). Consequently, the final Behavioral Scale consists of 18 items, where we find: 4 items for Rejection (BR), 7 items for Negative Word-of-Mouth (NWM), 3 items for Online Complaining (BOC) and 4 items for Marketplace Aggression (BDR). All the items were represented on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 as Absolutely disagree and 5 as Absolutely agree. The factors reliability instead is $BR = \alpha .88$, $NWM = \alpha .90$, $BOC = \alpha .78$ and $BDR = \alpha .79$.

3. RESULTS

The first results show that the brands mainly hated are Apple (20,5%), Desigual (9,84%) and Mc Donald's (8,2%), whom point out that any brand and any product category may be involved in this phenomenon. To test hypotheses we used the mediation analysis of Baron & Kenny (1986), where we assumed that the mediator brand hate mediates the relationship between the predictor motives and the behavioral outcomes. This mediation analysis consists of four steps.

In the first step through a multivariate general linear model it was investigated the direct influence of the predictor motives on behavioral outcomes, ignoring in particular the effect of the mediator (Brand Hate). From results emerged that Experiential Avoidance has significant effect on Rejection ($B = .362$, $p < .001$) and NWM ($B = .352$, $p < .001$); moreover Identity Avoidance shows a significant effect on Rejection ($B = .546$, $p < .001$) and Moral Avoidance on NWM ($B = .379$, $p < .001$), Online Complaining ($B = .424$, $p < .001$) and Marketplace Aggression ($B = .301$, $p < .001$).

In the second step instead a simple linear regression was used in order to verify whether the three motives are able to influence the Brand Hate, as previously hypothesized. Results proved that all three motivations are indeed significant predictors of the Brand Hate ($p < .001$) and in particular we obtain ME ($B=.678$), MI ($B=.848$) and MM ($B=1.153$).

Step 3 with a multivariate general linear model tests whether the mediator brand hate is positively influencing all the behavioral outcomes. The results confirm that the Brand Hate is capable of influencing significantly all four behavioral categories, and in particular the highest values are obtained for NWM ($B=.750$, $p < .001$) and Rejection ($B=.598$, $P < .001$).

In the fourth and final step we analyzed the research model in its entirety, using again a multivariate general linear model. The table below shows the main results.

Table 1. Summary general linear model brand hate and motivations on behavior

DEPENDENT VARIABLE	PARAMETER	B	T	SIG.
REJECTION	Brand Hate	.315	2,082	.040
	ExperientialAvoidance	.285	3.149	.002
	Identity Avoidance	.469	4.442	.000*
	Moral Avoidance	.099	-1.273	.206
NEGATIVE WORD-OF-MOUTH (NWM)	Brand Hate	.855	6.428	.000*
	ExperientialAvoidance	.143	1,792	.076
	Identity Avoidance	.199	-2.149	.034
	Moral Avoidance	.152	2.214	.029
ONLINE COMPLAINING	Brand Hate	.553	2.345	.021
	ExperientialAvoidance	.077	.546	.586
	Identity Avoidance	.179	-1.085	.280
	Moral Avoidance	.227	2.280	.024
MARKETPLACE AGGRESSION	Brand Hate	.537	3.405	.001
	ExperientialAvoidance	.025	.263	.793
	Identity Avoidance	.164	11.487	.140
	Moral Avoidance	.159	1.952	.053

Note: * $p < .001$

Moreover in order to verify the mediating effects of Brand Hate, the bootstrapping procedure was used (Hayes&Preacher, 2014). As shown in Table 2 we state that Brand Hate effectively has a role of mediator in the relationship between predictor motives and behavioral outcomes, especially for NWM ($B=.855$, $p < .001$), Online Complaining ($B=.553$, $p=.035$) and Marketplace Aggression ($B=.537$, $p=.005$). In addition it emerged that Identity Avoidance and Moral Avoidance are the strongest predictor of Brand Hate, whose presence is often linked with all the typical behavioral outcomes of Brand Hate.

Table 2. Bootstrapping procedure with brand hate as mediator between motivations and behavioral outcomes

DEPENDENT VARIABLE	PARAMETER	B	STD. ERROR	SIG.
REJECTION	Brand Hate	.315	.173	.075
	ExperientialAvoidance	.285	.101	.006
	Identity Avoidance	.469	.118	.001
	Moral Avoidance	.099	.099	.314
NEGATIVE WORD-OF-MOUTH (NWM)	Brand Hate	.855	.135	.000*
	ExperientialAvoidance	.143	.088	.100
	Identity Avoidance	.199	.091	.031
	Moral Avoidance	.152	.080	.062
ONLINE COMPLAINING	Brand Hate	.553	.256	.035
	ExperientialAvoidance	.077	.158	.619
	Identity Avoidance	.179	.138	.195
	Moral Avoidance	.277	.126	.034
MARKETPLACE AGGRESSION	Brand Hate	.537	.172	.005
	ExperientialAvoidance	.025	.091	.790
	Identity Avoidance	.164	.087	.058
	Moral Avoidance	.159	.077	.039

Note: *p= < .001

CONCLUSION

This study has followed a specific path with the aim to provide a first description and conceptualization of the phenomenon of Brand Hate in the Italian context, including its predictor motivations and negative behavioral outcomes. In order to access this information we formulated seven hypotheses, from which we obtained interesting results.

About motivations, from statistical analysis emerged that all the three motivations are reliable and significant predictors of Brand Hate, and this seems particularly true for two antecedents. In fact it emerged that Identity Avoidance and Moral Avoidance play a more decisive role in the emergence of the typical Brand Hate behaviors compared to Experiential Avoidance. In addition these data seems to be specific for the Italian sample, as shown in other studies where Experiential Avoidance is the strongest predictor (van Delzen et al., 2014) or in general negative past experience and consumers's dissatisfaction with the product can cause brand hate (Salvatori, 2007; Bryson et al., 2010). Therefore this specific result highlighted that a brand is more easily hated not for the specific performance of the products and services related to it but especially for the great importance of values and symbolic impact that is always linked to the brand. This means that the more the company's values differ from those of the consumer, but especially the more a brand betray the consumers's expectations (also related to the concept of Self), the more a brand had the chance to be hated and the consumer to perform those specific behaviors as rejection, NWM, online complaining and marketplace aggression. These results are also interesting from the psychological perspective: in fact they confirm the important role that psychology plays in the consumer behavior's analysis, because considering data related to values and identity, psychology seems to be the perfect discipline for a better analysis.

Instead, about behavioral outcomes like expected, the study found evidence that brand hate strongly influences all the outcomes considered. In particular the highest values are obtained for NWM (B = .750, p = < .001) and Rejection (B = .598, P = < .001). These results are in line with other studies (Sundaram et al., 1998; van Delzen et al. 2014) which suggest, especially for NWM, that consumers used it to retaliate against the company, to easing anger or frustration, to reduce dissonance, to ventilate more extreme feelings and attitudes, etc. In addition this type of behavior is consider one of the most dangerous for the companies, because it is hard to control, takes place outside of the firms' borders and also contributing to create a negative image for the concerning brands.

It is also necessary to stress that the analysis and description of this phenomenon also leads to inevitable and important implications from a managerial point of view (Magnano P., Platania S., Ramaci T., Santisi G., Di Nuovo S., 2017). In fact, our research suggests that all companies can take advantage of the knowledge and study of Brand Hate in order to early identify those potential sources of risk (antecedents), reinforce and defend itself, increasing at the same time consumers's satisfaction.

At the end, considering positive and encouraging results obtained from this first research, but especially identified limitations and possible adjustments, we are quite confident to pursue the study of this phenomenon in this direction.

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