

PASSIVE CONSEQUENCES OF BRAND HATE: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF BRAND AVOIDANCE

CONSECUENCIAS PASIVAS DEL ODIO A LA MARCA: EL PAPEL MEDIADOR DE LA EVASIÓN DE MARCA

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the antecedents of brand patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate, demonstrating the mediating effect of brand avoidance on passive/flight consequences of brand hate, showing their impact on a firm's brand equity. A survey was carried out with a sample of 307 consumers of mobile phone operators. The structural model was analysed using SmartPLS3. The results demonstrated that brand hate is significantly relevant in its impact on patronage reduction and brand equity. The model explained 57,9% of patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate in a nomological explanation chain of constructs. The research demonstrated how passive/flight behaviours are generated by brand hate, indicating to managers that brand avoidance would be developed and must be prevented in order to reduce the negative impacts on patronage reduction and brand equity. Despite the relevance of negative consumer-brand relationships, no study has adequately explained patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate. Furthermore, this is the first study to demonstrate the relevant role of brand avoidance, acting as a mediator in the relationship between brand hate and its consequences, presenting negative impacts on patronage reduction and brand equity.

Keywords: brand hate, brand avoidance, brand equity, patronage reduction, mobile phone operator.

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo determinar los antecedentes de la reducción del patrocinio de la marca como consecuencia del odio a la marca, demostrando el efecto de mediación de la evasión de la marca en las consecuencias pasivas/fugas del odio a la marca, mostrando su impacto en el valor de marca de una empresa. Se realizó una encuesta con una muestra de 307 consumidores de operadores de telefonía móvil. El modelo estructural se analizó utilizando SmartPLS3. Los resultados demostraron que el odio a la marca es significativamente relevante para impactar la reducción del patrocinio y el valor de la marca. El modelo explicó el 57,9% de la reducción del patrocinio como consecuencia del odio a la marca en una cadena de constructos de explicación nomológica. La investigación demostró cómo el odio a la marca genera comportamientos pasivos/de huida, lo que indica a los gerentes que se desarrollaría la evitación de la marca y que se debe prevenir para reducir los impactos negativos en la reducción del patrocinio y el valor de la marca. A pesar de la relevancia de las relaciones negativas entre el consumidor y la marca, ningún

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estudio explicó adecuadamente la reducción del patrocinio como consecuencia del odio a la marca. Además, este es el primer estudio que demuestra el papel relevante de la evitación de la marca, actúa como mediador en la relación entre el odio a la marca y sus consecuencias y muestra los impactos negativos en la reducción del patrocinio y el valor de la marca.

Palabras clave: odio a la marca, evasión de marcas, valor de marca, reducción de patrocinio, operador de telefonía móvil..

Introduction

The marketing literature suggests that consumers develop relationships with brands similar to the way they do with people, presenting positive or negative feelings (Gois et al., 2022). This analogy arouses interest in consumer-brand relationships (CBR) (Mahlke et al., 2020). Fetscherin and Heilman (2015) define CBR as a consequence of repeated interactions between a brand and its consumers, which share characteristics similar to personal relationships, such as love and hate, attachment, interdependence, intimacy, and commitment, among others.

According to Odoom et al. (2019), a plethora of research seems to gravitate towards the negative nodes of consumer-brand relationships, but with fuzzy results, often inconclusive and inconsistent, and with little variety of contexts. An example is the way consumers develop and behave toward brand hate. Brand hate is considered an extreme emotional consumer reaction in opposition to the brand, of higher intensity and stability than mere dislike, which could be related to aversion (Hegner et al., 2017; Pinto & Brandão, 2021). Studies reinforce the strategy that companies need to prevent the motives of brand hate and try to carefully remedy the behaviours that consumers could adopt (Hegner et al., 2017; Kucuk, 2021). On the other hand, a significant number of studies have aimed to determine behaviours and consequences associated with brand hate such as the decline in consumption, avoidance, boycott, retaliation, revenge, churn, brand rejection, negative word of mouth, online complaints, complaint vindictiveness, brand aggression and patronage reduction (Gois et al., 2022; Gregoire et al., 2009; Hegner et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2008; Pinto & Brandão, 2021).

Due to the relevance of the topic, there has been an effort in the literature to propose taxonomies and classifications of the consequences of brand hate, such as evasion vs. fight (Gregoire et al., 2009) or passive vs. active (Hegner et al., 2017), avoidance, approach and attack (Zarantonello et al., 2016; Zarantonello et al., 2018; Zhang & Laroche, 2020) or instrumental, expressive

and instrumental+expressive (Kucuk 2019). Hegner et al. (2017) classified two categories of reactions, namely passive (brand avoidance) and active behaviour in relation to the brand (negative word of mouth and brand retaliation). This research focuses on passive/flight /avoidance/instrumental consequences of brand hate, specifically on the effects and relationships between brand hate, brand avoidance, patronage reduction, and brand equity.

Patronage reduction can be considered a customer's efforts to reduce the frequency of their visits, spend less per visit, and patronise competitors more intensively (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006, p.36). Grégoire et al. (2009) argue that customers may shift their patronage to other companies in order to avoid additional problems due to brand incidents. Therefore, patronage reduction represents the loss of sales opportunities, and the consequences could be severe as in the case of brand switching. In this sense, Lee et al. (2009) add that the non-patronage of brands in specific consumer settings may be due to consciously constructed avoidance mechanisms and antecedents. Hegner et al. (2017) point out that most existing studies focus on determinants or outcomes of adverse relationships without providing complete consolidated models. Therefore, besides focusing on the negative effects of patronage reduction and negative consumer-brand relationships, the existing research has failed to explain the impacts and relationships between brand hate and patronage reduction adequately (Zarantonello et al., 2016; Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Laroche, 2021).

On the other hand, one concept associated with patronage reduction and brand hate in the literature is brand avoidance. When consumers feel negatively toward a brand, the expected behaviour is distancing and avoidance (Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016). Brand avoidance is a determined and deliberate rejection of a brand due to negative perceptions, encompassing a desire to cease any interactions with the firm by reducing, switching, or not consuming its products and services at all (Grégoire et al. 2009; Hegner et al., 2017; Lee, 2008; Pinto & Brandão, 2021). Therefore, higher brand avoidance levels should lead to patronage reduction of a brand. Accordingly, the literature demonstrates empirically that brand avoidance correlates to patronage reduction (Grégoire et al., 2009). However, previous negative consumer-brand relationship research did not consider the impact of brand avoidance on patronage reduction and could not explain the latter and its relationship with brand hate.

Therefore, apart from evidence that brand hate affects patronage reduction, the literature could not effectively explain this relationship, presenting non-representa-

tive empirical evidence that does not explain patronage reduction. Moreover, brand avoidance is a consequence of brand hate and the antecedent of patronage reduction (Hegner et al., 2017; Odoom et al., 2019; Zhang & Laroche, 2021). However, no research has examined these relationships comprehensively.

In this regard, the following research objectives frame the intended contribution of our study: (1) to determine the antecedents of brand patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate; (2) to verify the mediation effect of brand avoidance on passive/flight consequences of brand hate and (3) to verify the direct and indirect effects of brand hate on a firm's brand resources, represented by its brand equity.

This study thus contributes to the previous research as follows. First, we demonstrate the harmful effects of brand hate on brand patronage reduction, sustaining its direct and indirect effects. Second, we demonstrate that brand avoidance is a significant mediator of passive/flight brand hate consequences, improving the capacity to explain brand patronage reduction in brand hate research. Finally, we demonstrate that brand hate can reduce brand equity, implying managerial and theoretical insights which contribute to improving the understanding of the phenomenon.

Theoretical Background

The interaction between the consumer and the brand creates emotional bonds called Consumer-brand-relationships (CBR) (Gonçalves et al., 2021). CBR studies entail understanding the process by which sense creators (such as partners, media, and social networks) can generate meaning according to the needs, desires, and goals of consumers and brands. CBR research encompasses an interest in understanding how these meanings and wishes are translated into psychological and behavioural effects by the consumer during this relationship (Macinnis et al., 2009).

On the other hand, the marketing literature suggests that consumers relate to brands and develop relationships in the same way as they do with people. That means that this relationship between the consumer and the brand is not always positive. However, most studies focus on the positive impacts of relationships rather than on the negative consequences (Zarantonello et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand the effects of negative consumer sentiments such as brand hate and brand avoidance on brands (Fetscherin, 2019). Besides, companies need to know the consequences of brand hate in individual/muted reactions to public expressions of dissatisfaction with the company, depending on the severity of the brand hate felt by consumers (Kucuk, 2021).

Brand Hate

Consumers make purchases and choices based on feelings and emotions, which can affect brand perception and relationships, generate attachment and cause positive or negative feelings regarding a brand (Chinelato et al., 2021). Zarantonello et al. (2016) observed that the first conceptualisation of brand hate is presented in Grégoire et al. (2009), who define hate as a desire for revenge and avoidance that originated from a service failure. The desire for revenge would cause active and aggressive actions and a willingness to avoid non-confrontational and passive behaviours.

Kucuk (2016) states that hate is one of the most substantial human feelings. Humans can feel hate towards objects that represent meanings, such as signs. This kind of hate is not discussed in psychology but has been studied in marketing research. In this sense, consumers attach not only hate but also different emotions to different brands, and, as such, emotions can be elicited when they enter into contact with other brands. The widespread use of the internet has made negative feelings such as hate more commonly shared by way of online resources (Joshi & Yadav, 2020).

On the other hand, to interpret brand hate simply as the opposite of brand love can be misleading, as brand hate does not indicate a lack of brand love (Kucuk, 2016). According to Deltzer (2014), brand hate is a negative perception of a much higher intensity than merely not liking a brand and is more stable and enduring than anger. Hence, Delzen (2014) and Deltzer (2014) defined brand hate as an intense negative emotion towards a brand, which is permanent and long-term. Brand love is more intense than just liking a specific brand; brand hate follows the same path by being more extreme than just disliking a brand.

Brand hate can lead to behaviours that could hurt a brand's image and a company's reputation which may also be damaged by putting the company's staff under intense pressure. Moreover, it can occur with any brand or product category. High-level relationship-quality customers maintain their desire for revenge over a longer period of time, and their willingness toward brand avoidance grows more rapidly over time (Grégoire et al., 2009). Antecedents of brand hate might be product-related, consumer-related, and contextual-related (Hegner et al., 2017). It could be related to country of origin, consumer dissatisfaction with service, and negative stereotypes of luxury brand users' potential antecedents of brand hate (Bryson et al., 2013). Brand hate can be classified on a continuum based on its intensity (Fetscherin et al., 2020; Kucuk, 2019).

Companies need to prevent the motives of brand hate and try to carefully remedy the behaviours that consumers could adopt. Examples of these negative behaviours can be ceasing brand purchases, spreading negative word of mouth, making public online complaints, having aggressive reactions, or committing acts of revenge (Hegner et al., 2017). Since brand hate is an attitude that frequently results from accumulated negative feelings, companies need to allow consumers access to complain directly to them before the problem becomes uncontrollable. Moreover, companies should carefully consider the alignment of target segments and marketing strategies, thus disseminating the desired image.

Brand Avoidance

Research in psychology suggests that different emotions (positive or negative) can motivate individual cognitive and behavioural responses (Hegner et al., 2017). For example, positive emotions towards brands can generate greater attachment and closeness, but negative emotions cause distancing and avoidance (Zarantonello et al., 2016).

Thus, consumers who turn their backs on a particular brand, avoid it and switch to a competitor, or stop consuming a specific brand are practicing brand avoidance (Hegner et al., 2017). Lee et al. (2009, p. 422) define brand avoidance as “a phenomenon by which consumers deliberately choose to move away from or reject a brand”.

Grégoire et al. (2009) consider that brand avoidance is the consumers desire to stop interacting with a certain company. It is essential to highlight that this study’s concepts of avoiding a brand and switching to another brand are different. Although both lead to the same result (not consuming the brand), brand switching suggests that consumers have bought that brand in the past. In contrast, brand avoidance refers to the situation where one could “avoid” a brand without even buying it.

Brand Patronage Reduction

According to Grégoire and Fisher (2006), patronage reduction is a customer’s efforts to reduce their purchasing frequency, spend less per visit, and frequent competitors more intensively. Thus, patronage reduction consists of consecutive efforts that minimise and mitigate interactional, monetary, relational, and transactional exchanges between consumers and companies. It could be caused by many factors, such as lack of money, dissatisfaction, the arrival of a new competitor, and brand avoidance.

Although the decision to reduce one’s patronage can be motivated by reasons other than retaliation—for example, a customer can decide to avoid a firm because they do not want to repeat a negative experience—

this behaviour represents an accessible way to retaliate (Grégoire & Fisher, 2006).

On the other hand, Grégoire et al. (2009) observed that customers might shift their patronage to other companies due to brand incidents. In this sense, the desire for avoidance motivates customers to “take flight” by reducing their patronage of firms in order to avoid additional harm.

Brand Equity

Yoo and Donthu (2001, p. 1) define brand equity as “consumers’ different responses between a focal brand and an unbranded product when both have the same level of marketing stimuli and product attributes. The difference in consumer response may be attributed to the brand name and demonstrates the effects of the long-term marketing invested into the brand”.

According to Keller (2001), building a solid brand with significant equity is seen as providing benefits to a company, comprising higher levels of customer loyalty and less susceptibility to competitors’ marketing actions. Besides, there are larger margins, more favourable customer response to price oscillations, greater intermediary cooperation, and support, increased marketing communication effectiveness and licensing and brand extension opportunities.

Several approaches aim to explain Brand Equity (Lim et al., 2020). Some studies consider brand equity based on brand identification levels, highlighting the added value given to the product based on consumer perceptions (Datta et al., 2017). Other researchers have focused on social brand equity, where the focus is on the desired behaviour, and according to the evaluation of this behaviour, success is defined (Naidoo & Abratt, 2018).

On the other hand, some studies approach Brand Equity from a financial perspective. In this case, Brand Equity takes the point of view of the financial market where the brand’s equity value is evaluated (Schultz, 2016).

Hence, in this research, Brand Equity is a set of assets and liabilities related to a brand that can add or subtract from the value provided by a company’s service or product (Souki et al., 2022).

Development of research hypotheses

Brand hate Consequences

The literature suggests that different negative emotions can trigger two types of reactions in consumer behaviour, the first being when there is a passive behaviour towards the brand (brand avoidance). In this case, consumers do not want to interact with the brand, distancing themselves and preferring to switch to a competitor (Grégoire et al., 2009; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello

et al., 2016). According to Zarantonello et al., (2016), this desire toward brand avoidance occurs due to consumers' need to escape or avoid their relationship with a company and this is usually expressed with a patronage reduction. Grégoire et al. (2006) indicate that consumers' brand avoidance and patronage reduction reduce the harm caused by brands due to failures or incongruity.

The second behaviour is the active one, in which the consumer assumes a more active and negative reaction concerning the brand hate he feels (Hegner et al., 2017). In this case, the result of brand hate is expressed through negative word-of-mouth in order to communicate your negative effect to other consumers. Zarantonello et al. (2016) highlight that these consumers can use social media platforms and hate sites on the internet to share brand hate.

Fetscherin (2019) empirically demonstrated the consequences of brand hate, including brand switching, complaints, retaliation, and patronage reduction. More recently, Pinto and Brandão (2021) also suggested in their studies that brand hate may cause brand avoidance and negative eWOM. In addition, Pinto and Brandao (2021) highlight in their research that negative behaviours towards a brand can harm the brand and the company's reputation. Thus, the consequences of brand hate can lead to a devaluation of the company by means of a damaged reputation and consumer patronage reduction. These negative impacts affect the brand's finances, reducing its brand equity (Souki et al., 2022).

Therefore, it makes sense that brand hate would foment brand avoidance, reducing brand patronage and brand equity. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Brand hate has a positive direct effect on brand patronage reduction

H2: Brand hate has a positive direct effect on brand avoidance

H3: Brand hate has a negative direct effect on brand equity

The relationship between brand avoidance and patronage reduction

Hegner et al. (2017) observe that brand avoidance is theoretically different from brand switching and patronage reduction. Although both lead to the same outcome of non-consumption, brand switching and patronage reduction suggest the consumer has purchased that brand. In contrast, brand avoidance refers to when one could 'avoid' a brand without buying another brand. When an

individual feels negatively toward a brand, the expected behaviour is distancing and avoidance (Grégoire et al., 2009; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016).

Empirical research regarding the relationships among brand hate consequences are scarce and inconclusive. Grégoire et al. (2009) demonstrated significant relations among the active/fight consequences of brand hate. They found that a desire for revenge was correlated with vindictive complaining ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$), negative word of mouth ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), and online public complaining related to help-seeking ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$) but was not correlated with patronage reduction ($r = 0.03$, $p > 0.56$). It means that active/fight consequences of brand hate present inter-correlational influences. However, the results found by those authors were not considered in any hypothetical model. Regarding passive/flight consequences, Grégoire et al. (2009) observed opposite results for a desire for avoidance, which was only correlated with patronage reduction ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), with R^2 at about 9%, but was not correlated with active consequences. Zarantonello et al. (2016) found an impact of 0.16 of brand hate on patronage reduction, with an R^2 of just 3%. Therefore, we observe significant relations among passive/flight brand hate consequences, proposing models with a low capacity to explain patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate.

On the other hand, many studies considered the negative word of mouth and brand consequences (such as brand retaliation) as consequences of brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017). Instead, recent research suggests that negative word-of-mouth could affect brand attitudes and behaviours (Souki et al., 2022). However, extant literature has considered that passive/flight behaviours derived from brand hate are independent and not correlated.

Zhang and Laroche (2021) observed that brand avoidance is a similar yet distinct construct of brand hate (Odoom et al., 2019). Branding literature suggests that several intrinsic and extrinsic equities regarding brands trigger consumers' patronage, and non-patronage of brands in specific consumer settings may be due to consciously constructed avoidance mechanisms and antecedents (Lee et al., 2009; Odoom et al., 2019). In this sense, Odoom et al. (2019) proposed a scale of brand avoidance to test nomological validity, and they measured the significant impact of brand avoidance on non-patronage intention. However, aside from this fact, literature on brand hate considers these constructs to be independent and does not explore how they would interact with brand hate in a nomological chain of consequents.

It makes sense that negative feelings and emotions would contribute to a decision to avoid a brand (brand avoidance), which is transformed into behaviours such as

brand switching and effective patronage reduction in the future (Lee et al., 2009). In this sense, brand avoidance would be an antecedent of brand switching and patronage reduction and is affected by brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017; Odoom et al., 2019).

Therefore, we observe empirical evidence that passive/flight antecedents of brand hate are interrelated, and no research has explored these relationships apart from empirical and theoretical evidence (Odoom et al., 2019; Zaran-tonello et al., 2016; Zhang, 2017; Zhang & Laroche, 2020). In this sense, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H4: Brand avoidance has a positive impact on patronage reduction.

The relationship between brand avoidance and brand equity

The relationships between brand avoidance and long-term brand resources (as brand equity) present theoretical foundations in the literature, indicating that brand equity drives consumer choices (Erdem et al., 1999; Keller, 1993). This is why there are organisational efforts to sustain and develop a brand's value as a strategic resource in the competitive market arena.

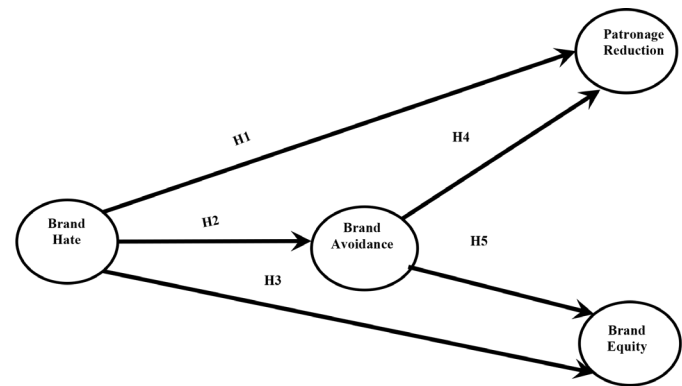
Thus, Lee (2008) argues that brands that have negative relationships with consumers and suffer from long periods of brand avoidance can develop negative brand equity, as customers react unfavorably to the brand. Another factor that can reduce brand equity is when no evasion factors prevent brand avoidance or if the brand does not seek to implement actions to transform, diversify, and restore negative relationships with the consumers (Hubert et al., 2010). In this scenario, the brand is more likely to develop negative general equity, and critical stakeholders (retailers, customers, distributors) would produce an unfavourable awareness of the brand. Therefore, the avoided brand generates a "depreciation" for the firm and its shareholders, resulting in harmful financial equity reduction.

Thus, as these negative situations are repeated, the brand can cause a competitive disadvantage for the company (Lee et al., 2008; Pinto & Brandão, 2021). Instead of adding value to the products and services, the brand can reduce cash flows and sales. Therefore, it makes sense that consumers' development of brand avoidance would negatively impact brand equity. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H5: Brand avoidance has a negative impact on brand equity.

In Figure 1. the proposed model is presented.

Figure 1. Hypothetical model



Methodology

This research is described as a quantitative and descriptive study that employs cross-sectional data collection. The researchers carried out a literature review to identify the factors determining the antecedents of brand patronage reduction and the consequences of brand hate. Thus, the hypothetical model of this research included the constructs of brand avoidance, patronage reduction, brand hate, and brand equity. In addition, four marketing specialists proceeded to present validity of the questionnaire (Gravetter et al., 2012).

The questionnaire created used scales with items already statistically validated in previous studies, as shown on Table 1. The scales had agreement or disagreement measured between 1 and 5 points, where the value 1 corresponds to the option "I totally disagree," and five represents "I totally agree." The DK/NA option was also included (don't know/not applicable).

To test the hypothetical model proposed in this research (Figure 1), the questionnaire consisted of 19 measurement items, according to Table 1.

This survey also included questions regarding the sociodemographic profile of the respondents and the brand of their mobile phone operator, as the questions should be answered about the company they patronise. This sector was chosen because, according to historical research, it is the sector with the highest number of complaints in Brazil (Estadão, 2020). Brazil is one of the largest consumer markets in the world, with 214 million inhabitants (IBGE, 2021). According to data from the National Telecommunications Agency (ANATEL, 2021), in recent years, the country has shown strong growth in access to mobile telephony, with the four largest operators (Oi, Vivo, Tim, and Claro) representing 96.9% of the total. In 2020 alone, there were 2340.07 million mobile accesses, a number higher than the country's population. However, brand hate towards mobile phone companies was manifested in the four brands: Oi (38%), Vivo

Table 1. Definition of the survey constructs and their measurement items

Constructs	Definition	Sample Items	Authors
Brand Avoidance	Reflects the extent to which a consumer deliberately avoids a brand due to negative perceptions, encompassing a desire to stop having any interactions with the firm by reducing, switching, or not consuming its products and services.	I do not purchase products of brand X anymore I reject services/products of brand X I refrain from buying X's products or using its services I avoid buying the brand's products/using its services I do not use products or services of brand X	Hegner et al. (2017)
Patronage Reduction	Refers to customers' efforts to reduce the frequency of their visits, spend less per visit, and frequent competitors more intensively.	I spent less money on this business I stopped doing business with this firm I reduced the frequency of interaction with the firm I brought my business to a competitor	Grégoire and Fisher (2006)
Brand Hate	Refers to an extreme emotional consumer reaction in opposition to the brand, of higher intensity and stability than mere dislike, related to aversion.	I am disgusted by brand X I cannot tolerate brand X and its company The world would be a better place without brand X I am totally angry about brand X Brand X is awful I hate brand X	Hegner et al. (2017)
Brand Equity	It is a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers.	It makes sense to buy X instead of any other brand, even if they are the same Even if another brand has the same features as X, I would prefer to buy X If there is another brand as good as X, I prefer to buy X. If another brand is not different from X in any way, it seems smarter to purchase X.	Yoo and Donthu (2001)

(26%), TIM (20%), and Claro (17%), which makes the study relevant in a Brazilian context.

To certify whether the questionnaire had errors or difficulties in understanding, 12 respondents participated in a pre-test. After verifying no problems or doubts, the questionnaire was published and distributed electronically. Research participants were selected by convenience and accessibility, reaching 307 valid questionnaires.

A frequent question in studies that adopt the quantitative approach involves sample size. Therefore, the criteria suggested by Hair et al. (2017) to calculate the sample size for a statistical power of 80% were analysed. Accordingly, the recommended minimum sample is 130 respondents (sig. level = 1%; min. $R^2 = 0.1$ and max arrows. = 2). A post hoc verification of the sample size adequacy was evaluated by calculating the statistical power using the software G*Power (Prajapati et al., 2010). We followed the procedures recommended by Ringle et al. (2015). The sample presented a statistical power of 95%, which is higher than the recommended threshold of 80% (Cohen, 1992; Hair et al., 2017).

The data obtained were statistically treated using the SPSS™ software, identifying any missing values and outliers. Also, as Hair et al. (2019) recommend, descriptive statistical analyses, EFA, and reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha), were conducted. However, concerning the structural equation model analysis, SmartPLS3 v.3.3.7. was used.

Data Analysis and Results

Sample Profile

The sample was a split division of men and women, 50% each, with 57% between 21 and 30 years of age, presenting 40% of the respondents with a monthly household income between USD 1.271 to USD 2.250. Concerning education, 51% have a predominantly high school education. On the other hand, marital status is split among 43% single and 42% married status. Table 2 presents the sample description.

Reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity

Regarding this topic, the first task is to check whether each construct is formed by only one factor: one-dimensional. Thus, exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) were carried out for each of the constructs that make up the hypothetical model. After the recommended procedures, all the constructs generated showed adequate commonality components and explained variance values and unidimensionality. Also, all correlations between the construct indicators were statistically significant at the 95% level. The Bartlett Sphericity test value reached a p-value equal to 0.000, and all KMO values were above 0.600. Therefore, all the scales were used as originally described on Table 1. Likewise, it is also necessary to check the reliability of each of the scales used to measure each construct.

Table 2. Sample Description

	Variable	Number	%
Age groups	<= 20	24	8%
	21 – 30	95	31%
	31 – 40	80	26%
	41+	108	35%
Gender	Women	154	50%
	Men	153	50%
Monthly Household Income	Less than US\$ 634	29	10%
	US\$ 634 to US\$ 950	49	15%
	US\$ 951 to US\$ 1.270	50	16%
	US\$ 1.271 to US\$ 1.580	54	18%
	US\$ 1.581 to US\$ 1.900	36	12%
	US\$ 1.901 to US\$ 2.250	30	10%
	US\$ 2.251 to US\$ 2.500	22	7%
	US\$ 2.501 to US\$ 3.000	26	8%
Marital status	More than US\$ 3.000	11	4%
	Married	126	41%
	Divorced	48	15%
	Single	130	43%
	Widower	3	1%

The values obtained for Cronbach’s Alpha are above the value of 0.700 recommended by Malhotra et al. (2017), pointing out the reliability of the four scales used. Table 3 shows the data related to the validity and reliability of the constructs.

Table 3. Measurement Item Properties

	Cronbach’s Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Brand Avoidance	0.947	0.947	0.966	0.904
Brand Equity	0.945	0.949	0.961	0.859
Brand Hate	0.849	0.852	0.908	0.768
Patronage Reduction	0.849	0.867	0.909	0.769

The results indicated that all the items presented significant loads ($p < 0.01$) on each construct, that is, whether the items form a construct. Two parameters contribute to checking the convergent validity: the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR). In the case of the AVE, it corresponds to the average of the factorial load squared divided by the number of items that make up the construct, and its value must be at least 0.500. Regarding the CR, in addition to considering some of the AVE parameters, it also considers the error value of the construct items, and its value must be at least 0.700 (Hair et al., 2019). Concerning rhoA, an indicator that evaluates the internal consistency of the items and presents values greater than or equal to Cronbach’s Alpha

(AC), values considered adequate, of at least 0.700 (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015). In this sense, it is concluded that the constructs have sufficient reliability; that is, they are free from random errors.

The following analysis concerns discriminant validity, which indicates whether the constructs are distinct from each other, unlike convergent validity. In this case, the verification occurred using the criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981), in which the value of the correlation between a pair of constructs must be less than the square root value of the stroke of each of them (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4. Discriminant Analysis

	Brand Avoidance	Brand Equity	Brand Hate	Patronage Reduction
Brand Avoidance	0.951			
Brand Equity	-0.348	0.927		
Brand Hate	0.554	-0.301	0.876	
Patronage Reduction	0.735	-0.337	0.573	0.877

Note: the value in bold in the main diagonal of the table represents the value of the square root of the AVE

According to Table 4, this measurement model has discriminant validity.

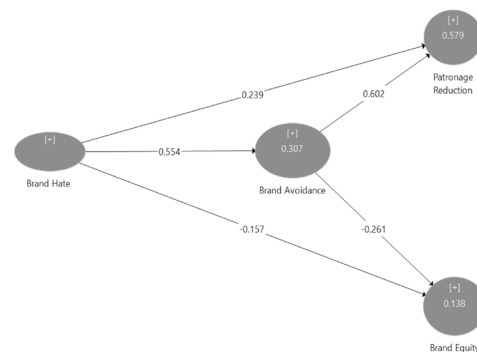
Nomological validity

In this section, in order to explain the consequences of brand hate, the researchers tested two competitive models. The first model is the hypothetical model, considering the mediating effects of brand avoidance, and the second model (alternative model) considers only the direct effects of brand hate. Finally, they compare both models in order to evaluate their properties and fit.

Test of Hypothetical Model

According to the model’s results (Figure 2), we observed that the model could explain 57,9% of patronage reduction. This explanation capacity with just two antecedents suggests that a small number of variables can explain the construct under negative consumer-brand relationships.

Figure 2. The survey’s structural model



The standardised coefficients of the hypotheses of the hypothetical model are presented on Table 5:

Table 5. Standardised weights – Hypothetical Model

Hypotheses	Path Coeff.	Standard Deviation	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Brand Avoidance -> Brand Equity	-0.261	0.066	3.974	0.000
Brand Avoidance -> Patronage Reduction	0.602	0.067	8.958	0.000
Brand Hate -> Brand Avoidance	0.554	0.052	10.674	0.000
Brand Hate -> Brand Equity	-0.157	0.068	2.302	0.021
Brand Hate -> Patronage Reduction	0.239	0.067	3.587	0.000

According to the results, brand hate presented a direct negative impact on patronage reduction ($\beta = 0.239$; $p < 0.000$), a positive and relevant impact on brand avoidance ($\beta = 0.554$; $p < 0.000$), and a direct negative impact on brand equity ($\beta = -0.157$; $p < 0.02$). On the other hand, brand avoidance (BA) demonstrated a high effect on patronage reduction ($\beta = -0.602$; $p < 0.000$) and a significant impact on brand equity ($\beta = -0.261$; $p < 0.000$), suggesting that it would moderate the influence of brand hate on these constructs. Brand hate and brand avoidance caused negative impacts on brand equity, explaining 13,8% of its variation, demonstrating a moderate capacity to impact the brand. In this sense, an analysis of the total effects of brand hate was conducted and presented on Table 6.

Table 6. Total effects of Brand Hate

	Brand Equity	Patronage Reduction
Brand Hate	-0.301***	0.573***

Note: *** = sig. $P < 0.000$.

According to Table 6, the total effect of brand hate on patronage reduction is significantly higher than the indirect effect, demonstrating that brand avoidance mediates the relationship between these constructs ($\beta = -0.573$; $p < 0.000$). Similar results can be observed regarding the total impacts of brand hate on brand equity ($\beta = -0.301$; $p < 0.000$).

Concerning the fit of the hypothetical model, the original SRMR value was 0.050 lower than the threshold of 0.08 in the estimated model suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) and 0.10 proposed by Ringle et al. (2015). The NFI value was 0.905, above 0.9, representing an acceptable fit (Ringle et al., 2015).

Observing the model fit indices, the confidence interval of SRMR included the original value of SRMR for the estimated model (99%), indicating adequate fit. Addi-

tionally, different tests may produce different results; therefore, other tests were carried out and it was observed that the model fits well for d_G (est. = 0.175; limit. 99% = 0.176). The model, therefore, presents adequate results (Henseler et al., 2016), considering the analysis of the structural model (R^2 ; coefficients significance); the overall model fit (SRMR < 0.08 and d_G; Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$; AVE > 0.5 ; Fornell–Larcker criterion).

Test of the Alternative Model

Therefore, considering the significance of the mediation effects of brand avoidance observed in the hypothetical model, an alternative model was tested, excluding the mediation hypotheses. According to the literature, in models with fewer paths and with the same sample size, the model fit would be superior, as there are fewer parameters to estimate with the same sample size.

Figure 3. Alternative model

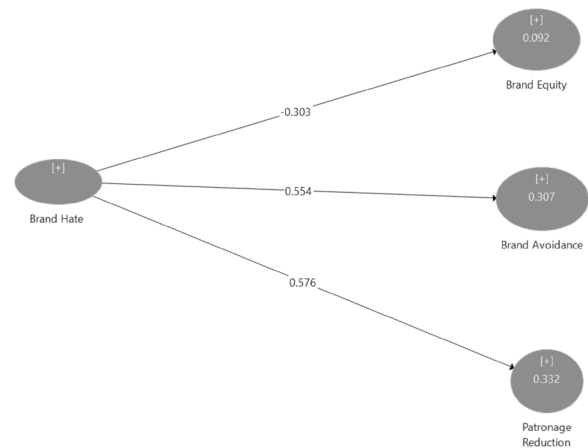


Table 7. Standardised weights – Hypothetical Model

Hypotheses	Path Coeff.	Standard Deviation	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Brand Hate -> Brand Avoidance	0.554	0.052	10.641	0.000
Brand Hate -> Brand Equity	-0.303	0.062	4.883	0.000
Brand Hate -> Patronage Reduction	0.576	0.043	13.502	0.000

In order to compare rival structural models, Hegner et al. (2017) tested an alternative model that verified the mediation effects of brand hate, its antecedents, and consequences. The results demonstrated that the rival model, without the mediation of brand hate, presented lower explained variance of the outcomes variables and less significant path coefficients. Therefore, these authors concluded that the hypothetical model with mediation is more adequate than the rival model. In this sense, to

verify the mediation effects of brand avoidance between brand hate and its consequences, we applied a similar approach, using a compound criterion suggested by Morgan and Hunt (1994), comparing the models by means of: (1) overall exact model fit measured by standardised root mean square residual (SRMR). This is based on transforming both the sample covariance matrix and the predicted covariance matrix into correlation matrices (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015); (2) incremental fit measure measured by the NFI. The NFI is then defined as 1 minus the χ^2 value of the proposed model divided by the χ^2 values of the null model (Bentler & Bonett, 1980); (3) d_G (geodesic distance). The d_G criterion builds on PLS-SEM eigenvalue computations (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015); (4) percentage of explanation of the outcomes of interest as measured by the squared multiple correlations of the variables of interest (Hair et al., 2017).

In this sense, the alternative model is presented in Figure 3.

The standardised coefficients of the hypotheses of the rival model are presented on Table 7.

According to Table 7, coefficients of determination R^2 of Patronage Reduction (33.2%) and brand equity (9.2%) are lower in this model than in the original model. These results suggest that brand avoidance would significantly explain brand patronage reduction and brand equity as a mediator. On the other hand, concerning the hypothetical adjustment, the original SRMR value was 0.139, higher than the threshold of 0.08 in the saturated model suggested by Hu and Bentler (1999) and 0.10 proposed by Ringle et al. (2015). The NFI value was 0.862, below the limit of 0.9, which represents an acceptable fit. (Ringle et al., 2015). Observing the model fit indices, we maintain that the confidence interval of the SRMR was not included in the original value of the SRMR for the estimated model (95% or 99%). Additionally, different tests may produce different results; therefore, other tests were carried out, and we observed that the model does not present adequate d_G fit (est. = 0.293; limit. 99% = 0.179). Therefore, the alternative model (no mediation of brand avoidance) offered a worse fit than the hypothetical model (Henseler et al., 2016).

Thus, considering the rival model analysis, compared to the hypothetical model (with mediation), we observe: (a) lower overall exact model fit measured by SRMR (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015); (2) lower incremental fit measure measured by NFI (Bentler & Bonett, 1980); (3) d_G (geodesic distance) not included in confidence interval after bootstrapping (Dijkstra & Henseler, 2015); (4) a lower percentage of explanation of the outcomes of interest – brand equity and patronage reduction (Hair et al., 2017).

In this sense, we conclude that the hypothetical model (with brand avoidance mediation) presents a better fit and nomological validity than the rival model (Hegner et al., 2017; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Conclusions

Brand hate is one of the most intense results of negative consumer-brand relationships. Its significant and negative impacts on patronage reduction and brand equity are relevant topics to study and manage. Aside from the facts presented herein, previous studies could not explain these relations, providing a low ability to explain patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate (Zarantonello et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2021). In the same sense, the effects of brand hate and brand avoidance on brand equity remained obscure.

Accordingly, this research established three objectives. Firstly, it aimed to determine the antecedents of brand patronage reduction associated with brand hate. According to the results, the model explained 57,9% of patronage reduction, presenting a model that has brand hate as a conductor of consequences. Brand hate presented a total effect of 0.573 on patronage reduction, demonstrating its impact on passive/flight consequences of brand hate. Therefore, this is the first study able to explain patronage reduction adequately as a consequence of brand hate, contributing to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

The second objective of the research was to determine the effects of brand hate on the passive/flight consequences of brand hate, considering brand avoidance as a central construct in the nomological chain, in addition to analysing empirical evidence that brand avoidance is an antecedent of patronage reduction (Hegner et al., 2017; Odoom et al., 2019; Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Similarly, in extant research, brand avoidance is highly impacted by brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017). However, our results also demonstrated the relevance of brand avoidance as an antecedent of the brand hate consequences in passive/flight behaviours, presenting two effects: a highly positive and significant impact on patronage reduction and a negative impact on brand equity. This evidence allows for a considerable capacity to explain patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate for the first time in the literature.

Finally, this research aimed to verify the direct and indirect effects of brand hate on a firm's brand resources, represented by its brand equity. In this sense, the results demonstrated the harmful effects of brand hate on brand equity, with a total weight of -0.301 and an R^2 of 13.8%,

supporting Lee's (2008) hypotheses, and indicating its properties in the generation of negative brand equity.

Theoretical implications

This study presents academic contributions to the literature on negative CBR. Despite the relevance of negative relationships between consumers and brands, this is the first research that has adequately explained their impacts on patronage reduction. In addition, this study presents academic contributions to the literature on negative CBR. Despite the relevance of negative consumer-brand relationships, no study adequately explained patronage reduction as a consequence of brand hate. Furthermore, this is the first study to demonstrate the relevant role of brand avoidance, acting as a mediator in the relationship between brand hate and its consequences, showing negative impacts on patronage reduction and brand equity. The model presented and tested proposed two antecedent constructs explaining about 60% of patronage reduction. These results enable a better comprehension of the consequences of the brand hate/avoidance phenomenon and provide the basis for developing more robust models and evidence that contribute to advances in the consumer-brand relationship theory.

Secondly, this is the first study that demonstrates the relevant role of brand avoidance as an antecedent of passive/flight behaviours (such as patronage reduction), acting as a mediator of brand hate. This fact enables a better explanation of patronage reduction, besides revealing a hypothetical path that leads brand hate to affect the brand equity of firms, a finding that generates a promising alternative to link negative CBR and brand equity.

Therefore, this research contributes to expanding studies on negative consumer brand relationship antecedents and consequences, providing evidence of new significant hypothetical paths of related theoretical constructs, and increasing the capacity to explain two relevant consequences related to the phenomenon.

Managerial Implications

More recently, firms have attempted to create dashboards and execute surveys/pool research that provide resources to measure positive consumer-brand relationships, behavioural intentions, and brand equity. However, it is unusual to observe companies that measure and manage negative consumer brand relationships such as brand avoidance. Negative indices such as brand avoidance, brand rejection, and patronage reduction are emotionally more challenging for managers to work with and control as KPIs, OKRs, or goals and present in meetings to the "C" level board.

The risks associated with the mismanagement and avoidance of all the flight/passive behaviours are associated with the fact that they are different from active/fight behaviours (such as complaining/vengeance). The consequences can be seen and observed more clearly in the short term. Passive/flight behaviours such as brand avoidance can cause slow and painful losses and significantly decrease the brand's patronage, reducing its revenue, sales, and cash flow.

On the other hand, the accumulated effects of negative consumer brand relationships on brand equity, associated with patronage reduction, would be extremely harmful to firms. This indicates the relevance of a continuous process of analysis, planning, and deployment of actions to control and mitigate the causes of brand hate and negative consumer-brand relationships regarding their passive and active consequences.

Finally, it is also recommended that managers understand and know the antecedents that lead to brand hate: the first one concerns the negative experience that is related to the failures of products and services (packaging, quality, communication, and information). The second involves symbolic incongruity, which occurs when the consumer does not want to be associated with a brand and is related to brand avoidance. The third refers to ideological incompatibility, which refers to a set of beliefs that are incompatible with the consumer and are based on corporate social, legal, or moral irregularities (Gois et al., 2022; Hegner et al., 2017; Pinto & Brandão, 2021).

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This research is not exempt from limitations, which can motivate further research. First, this study was limited to mobile phone operators, and future research would benefit from including and comparing other products and services from various industries. Besides, this research's sample included only one emerging country. It would be interesting to conduct a cross-cultural analysis to validate the results in different contexts.

As a suggestion for further studies, it is relevant to explore how brand avoidance would act as a more comprehensive antecedent of all passive/flight consequences of brand hate. Research could also explore the relations between the active/fight consequences of brand hate, as posited by Grégoire et al. (2009), a desire for revenge, vindictive complaining, negative word of mouth, and online public complaining.

Future studies can also explore how models of negative consumer-brand relationships would operate regarding gender differences, as suggested by (Gois et al., 2022).

Finally, future research could explain the impacts of negative consumer brand relationship constructs more oriented to long-time evaluations, such as brand equity, given that the capacity of explanation of most models is restricted at the time of this research.

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