

TOWARDS A THEORY OF BRAND HATE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

This study advances the understanding of brand hate by developing an integrative Antecedents-Emotions-Behaviors (AEB) framework, drawing on empirical evidence from Mediterranean countries. Addressing critical gaps in brand hate literature, we investigate the multidimensional nature of brand hate—distinguishing between cold, cool, and hot brand hate—and examine how personal (negative experiences, symbolic incongruity, ideological incompatibility) and societal antecedents (subjective norms) shape these emotions. Using structural equation modeling (SEM-PLS) on data from 522 respondents, our findings reveal that brand hate serves as a pivotal emotional mediator, with strong indirect-only effects linking antecedents to behavioral outcomes such as avoidance, switching, private and public complaining, retaliation, and revenge. Contrary to existing literature, the moderation effect of culture on these relationships was insignificant, suggesting that brand hate operates as a universal phenomenon rooted in fundamental psychological mechanisms rather than cultural constructs. Theoretically, this study contributes to the brand hate literature by proposing a comprehensive model that captures both cognitive and emotional pathways. Managerially, our findings highlight the importance of proactive brand management strategies that address universal emotional triggers, offering insights for brands seeking to mitigate the adverse effects of consumer hate in diverse markets.

INTRODUCTION

In an era where brands not only shape consumer choices but also influence social and political values, the phenomenon of brand hate has emerged as a powerful counterforce. Unlike dissatisfaction, brand hate embodies deep-seated negative emotions, including anger, contempt, and disgust, which can escalate into active opposition through behaviors such as boycotts, negative word-of-mouth (NWOM), and brand retaliation (Sameeni *et al.*, 2024). The growing intensity of consumer backlash against brands is particularly evident in the Mediterranean context, where recent large-scale boycotts illustrate the power of consumer-driven activism. In 2024, a boycott campaign against Coca-Cola gained traction in Morocco, urging consumers to opt for local alternatives amid allegations of the brand's political affiliations. Similarly, widespread consumer protests in Tunisia and Egypt have led to calls to boycott multinational fast-food chains such as

McDonald's and Starbucks, perceived as aligned with controversial geopolitical positions. Additionally, countries such as Portugal and Spain showcase such consumerism. These events exemplify how brand hate manifests in real-world consumer behaviors, reinforcing the need to study its pathways and impact.

Prior research distinguishes different levels of brand hate. Kucuk (2019a) classifies it into two types: attitudinal brand hate, which reflects an emotional detachment and a negative perception of a brand without necessarily leading to action, and behavioral brand hate, which translates into active expressions of dislike, such as complaints, boycotts, or public shaming. A similar distinction is made by Bayarassou *et al.* (2021), who differentiate between active and passive brand hate: passive brand hate reflects disengagement and avoidance, whereas active brand hate involves stronger emotions that drive confrontational behaviors. Building on these classifications, Zhang and Laroche (2021) conceptualize brand hate as a multidimensional construct, emphasizing three emotional dimensions: anger, sadness, and fear. While anger is associated with retaliatory behaviors such as public complaints or social media activism, sadness and fear often lead to more passive responses, such as avoidance. Collectively, these perspectives underscore the complexity of brand hate and its varying intensities, illustrating how emotional underpinnings shape consumer responses.

Research Gap

Despite the advancement of brand hate as a field of research over the last decade (Assoud & Berbou, 2023; Stevens, 2023), significant theoretical and empirical gaps remain unexplored. First, while previous studies investigated the multidimensional nature of brand hate (Bayarassou *et al.*, 2021; Fetscherin, 2019; Kucuk, 2019c; Zhang & Laroche, 2021), they did so without explicitly linking brand hate dimensions to their antecedents. Second, an integrative theory encompassing antecedent-emotion-behavior is largely absent in brand hate studies. For instance, Yadav and Chakrabarti (2022) further advance this fragmentation in their systematic review of brand hate literature. Third, and most importantly, brand hate as a construct is primarily studied through the lens of the relational paradigm (Fournier, 1998), which posits that the relationship between consumer and brand is singular. Additionally, this paradigm further explains that the Consumer and the marketer engage in a relationship, with the brand as the central focus in the Consumer's inner reality. However, this paradigm failed to explain the differences observed among consumers across different geographic and cultural contexts. On this basis, a strong call for contribution regarding the role of culture in either shaping and explaining brand hate (Assoud & Berbou, 2023; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2023). In this regard, the Mediterranean region provides a compelling and underexplored setting to address this gap. This region embodies a unique intersection of collectivist and individualist cultural orientations, where consumer-brand relationships are influenced by strong social identity, moral symbolism, and historical traditions of consumer activism (Badot, 2014). Despite its cultural diversity, Mediterranean societies share common consumption patterns shaped by social cohesion and moral accountability, making it a suitable context for examining how cultural and geographical factors interact with emotional mechanisms of brand hate (Carù *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, focusing on Mediterranean countries enables us to capture cross-cultural variation within a coherent sociocultural cluster, directly addressing the third research gap related to cultural influences on brand hate.

Research Questions and Objective

Against this background, the current study aims to address the research gap and answer the following research question: ***How is brand hate felt, shaped, and expressed across different cultural and geographical contexts?*** First, the study seeks to examine the emotional dimensions of brand hate, capturing its multidimensionality and how consumers experience negative brand-related emotions. Second, it aims to analyze the antecedents that shape brand hate and how these factors vary across diverse cultural settings. Third, the research explores the behavioral manifestations of brand hate by investigating consumers' responses. In addition to these empirical objectives, the study endeavors to develop an integrative theoretical framework that links brand hate antecedents, emotional dimensions, and behavioral outcomes. Given the prevailing fragmentation in brand hate research, this framework will provide a holistic perspective that moves beyond the relational paradigm and considers cultural and geographical influences.

To achieve these research objectives, the paper is structured as follows. The next section, Literature Review and Theoretical Development, provides a conceptual foundation by examining brand hate, its antecedents, outcomes, and the role of cultural differences. The Methodology section outlines the research design, data collection, and analytical approach. The Results and Analysis section presents the key findings, followed by the Discussion, which interprets the results in relation to existing literature and highlights theoretical and managerial implications. Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the main contributions, acknowledges limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Brand Hate

The concept of brand hate first emerged implicitly in consumer-brand relationship research. Grégoire et al. (2009) examined how negative consumer experiences can transform brand love into lasting hatred, leading to behavioral responses such as avoidance and revenge. A subsequent study by Romani et al. (2012) investigated negative emotions, including hate, that drive consumers away from brands. This study classified brand hate as a primary emotion (Shaver *et al.*, 1987) under the broader category of dislike, marking an early attempt to conceptualize the construct. The first explicit definition of brand hate was provided by Bryson et al. (2013), who described it as “*an intense negative emotional affect towards the brand.*”

Despite these early contributions, the conceptualization of brand hate remains debated in academic and marketing literature (Yadav & Chakrabarti, 2022). However, there is a broad consensus that brand hate is neither unidimensional nor a primary emotion (Bayarassou *et al.*, 2021; Kucuk, 2021; Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Three key factors drive this shift in perspective. First, early definitions failed to distinguish brand hate from other negative emotions, such as anger or dissatisfaction. Second, scholars have applied Sternberg and Sternberg's (2008) triangular theory of interpersonal hate to consumer-brand relationships, reinforcing its multidimensional nature. Third, brand hate is associated with distinct consumer behaviors, including avoidance, switching, and revenge (Fetscherin, 2019). Consequently, Kucuk (2016, p. 19) redefined brand hate as “*consumers' detachment from a brand and its associations as a result of intense and deeply held negative emotions such as disgust, anger, contempt, devaluation, and diminution.*” This study adopts this definition.

Building on this multidimensional view, scholars have proposed various typologies of brand hate. Fetscherin (2019) identified five types of brand hate and their associated behaviors, while Kucuk (2019a) classified brand hate into attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. Bayarassou et al. (2021) introduced the distinction between passive and active brand hate, whereas Zhang and Laroche (2021), through five empirical studies, identified mild, moderate, and vigorous brand hate. These classifications are rooted in Sternberg and Sternberg's (2008) triangular theory of hate, which posits that hate emerges from varying combinations of the negation of intimacy, passion, and commitment (Assoud & Berbou, 2025). Given the theoretical alignment between brand hate and interpersonal hate, the present study applies Sternberg and Sternberg's (2008) framework and classifies brand hate into three distinct categories. This classification aims to provide a more structured understanding of the complexity of brand hate.

Cold Brand Hate. Cold Brand Hate is characterized by psychological detachment, devaluation, and emotional indifference toward a brand (Kucuk, 2019a). Consumers experiencing cold brand hate do not necessarily exhibit strong emotional reactions; instead, they reject the brand passively, disengaging from its products, messaging, or associations (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008). This form of brand hate is more about distancing rather than active opposition.

Cool Brand Hate. Cool Brand Hate involves disgust, moral aversion, and a strong sense of incongruence with the brand's identity or perceived values (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008). It is marked by a deep-seated feeling of discomfort and repulsion, leading to an urge to express dissatisfaction. Unlike cold brand hate, which remains mainly passive, cool brand hate is more expressive and involves a clear rejection of the brand on an emotional level (Fetscherin, 2019).

Hot Brand Hate. Hot Brand Hate represents the most intense form of brand hate, driven by anger, frustration, and a sense of betrayal (Kucuk, 2021). It is a highly emotional response that fuels aggressive attitudes toward the brand. This type of brand hate is not only felt internally but often leads to heightened emotional reactions and an active sense of hostility, making it the most confrontational and potentially damaging form (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008).

Despite these theoretical and empirical advancements regarding the dimensions of brand hate, a significant gap remains in the literature. There is no empirical answer to the question of the association between the antecedents of each type of brand hate. For instance, previous studies demonstrated the effects on brand hate (by type) on consumer behaviors (Bayarassou *et al.*, 2021; Fetscherin, 2019; Zhang & Laroche, 2021; Zhang *et al.*, 2025) without identifying its root causes. This gap is critical, as it limits a more profound comprehension of what triggers each form of brand hate, echoing Kucuk (2021, p. 30) "*The differences between antecedents need to be carefully considered, as they can lead to different types of brand hate and different types of hate results.*" In the following sections, we address this gap by developing and testing hypotheses that establish explicit links between antecedents and behavioral outcomes for each form of brand hate. Specifically, we examine how distinct antecedents contribute to the emergence of cold, cool, and hot brand hate and how these emotional states subsequently drive consumer behaviors such as avoidance, switching, complaining, retaliation, and revenge. Through this approach, we aim to provide a more structured theoretical framework that clarifies the formation and consequences of brand hate.

Brand Hate Antecedents.

An antecedent is a precursor that influences the emergence of a particular psychological or behavioral response (Assoud & Berbou, 2023). In the context of brand hate, antecedents are the underlying factors that shape negative consumer emotions toward brands, ultimately influencing

how brand hate is felt, shaped, and expressed (Kucuk, 2021). These antecedents determine whether consumers experience cold, cool, or hot brand hate, each leading to distinct forms of disengagement, aversion, or hostility (Fetscherin, 2019). While prior research has extensively examined the consequences of brand hate, a systematic investigation of its antecedents remains limited (Bayarassou *et al.*, 2021; Kucuk, 2021; Zhang & Laroche, 2021).

Ideological Incompatibility. Ideological incompatibility occurs when consumers perceive a brand's values, beliefs, or actions as fundamentally misaligned with their own, leading to a sense of moral or ethical conflict (Assoud & Berbou, 2023). This disconnect fosters psychological distancing from the brand, in which consumers no longer see it as compatible with their personal identity or ethical standards (Kucuk, 2019b). As a result, ideological incompatibility is closely linked to Cold Brand Hate, which is characterized by emotional detachment and devaluation rather than intense emotional arousal (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008). Consumers experiencing this form of brand hate reject the brand passively, disengaging from it without necessarily expressing outward hostility (Fetscherin, 2019). Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H1. Ideological incompatibility leads to cold brand hate

Symbolic incongruity. Symbolic incongruity arises when a brand's image, identity, or symbolic associations conflict with a consumer's self-concept, leading to psychological discomfort (Assoud & Berbou, 2023). This incongruence can stem from a mismatch between the consumer's identity and the brand's perceived social meaning, making the brand an undesirable reflection of the self (Sirgy, 1986). Symbolic incongruity is linked to Cool Brand Hate, which is driven by moral aversion and a sense of discomfort rather than detachment (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008). Unlike cold brand hate, which reflects passive rejection, tremendous brand hate involves an active internal rejection of the brand due to the emotional discomfort caused by its symbolic misalignment (Kucuk, 2021). Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H2. Symbolic incongruity leads to cool brand hate.

Subjective Norms. Subjective norms refer to the influence of social expectations, in which individuals adjust their attitudes based on the beliefs and opinions of important social groups (Ajzen, 1991). Consumers may develop negative perceptions of a brand if it is seen as undesirable or inappropriate within their social or cultural environment (Sharma *et al.*, 2022). This form of social influence fosters Cool Brand Hate, as consumers experience a sense of moral discomfort or cognitive dissonance when engaging with a brand that does not align with social expectations (Kucuk, 2021). Unlike other antecedents, subjective norms shape brand hate through external pressure rather than personal experiences, reinforcing an emotionally driven rejection of the brand rather than simple disengagement (Sarkar *et al.*, 2020). Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H3. Subjective norms lead to cool brand hate.

Negative Experience. Negative experience occurs when consumers encounter dissatisfaction/disappointment (Nowak *et al.*, 2023), or perceived betrayal (Rasouli *et al.*, 2022) by a brand or its products (Assoud & Berbou, 2023). This may result from poor product performance, misleading advertising, or unfair treatment, creating an intense emotional reaction

(Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Jabeen, 2024). In simple terms, a negative experience is a cognitive evaluation in which the brand's actual performance falls short of the expected performance. Negative experiences are strongly associated with Hot Brand Hate, which is characterized by heightened emotional intensity, including anger and frustration, since the hater is already in an active relationship with the brand (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2008). Unlike previous antecedents, which may lead to detachment or moral/identitarian discomfort, negative experiences elicit strong emotional responses that intensify the consumer's rejection of the brand (Fetscherin, 2019). Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H4. *Negative experience leads to hot brand hate.*

Brand Hate Behaviors.

Brand hate manifests not only as a psychological or emotional response but also as a set of behavioral outcomes that shape consumer-brand interactions (Lee *et al.*, 2009). These behaviors reflect how consumers cope with, express, or act upon their brand hate (Costa & Azevedo, 2024; Sameeni *et al.*, 2024). Existing research suggests that brand hate behaviors vary depending on the intensity and nature of the emotional component. As brand hate intensifies, it shifts from disengagement and avoidance to expressive behaviors like complaining and ultimately to confrontational actions (Kucuk, 2021) as expected in the fight vs flight taxonomy (Hirschman, 1970). In the following sections, we examine the behavioral consequences of brand hate in detail and formulate hypotheses regarding their relationships with different types of brand hate.

Brand Vvoidance. Lee *et al.* (2009) define brand avoidance as “a *phenomenon whereby consumers deliberately choose to keep away from or reject a brand*”. Unlike mere dissatisfaction, which may lead to temporary disengagement, brand avoidance represents a sustained and intentional refusal to interact with a brand (Fetscherin, 2019). This behavior arises when a brand is perceived as failing to meet consumers' expectations, leading consumers to dissociate from it completely (Kucuk, 2019b). Previous research found that brand avoidance do not require an active consumer-brand relationship. Additionally, brand avoidance is strongly related to detrimental promises encompassing ideological incompatibility and corporate irresponsibility. Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H5. *Cold-brand hate leads to brand avoidance.*

Brand Switching. Brand switching occurs when consumers abandon a previously favored brand in favor of an alternative due to consumers' negative emotions and attitudes (Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Unlike brand avoidance, switching behavior is a post-purchase behavior that requires a previous experience with the brand (Ng *et al.*, 2024). This behavior often emerges when consumers feel betrayed by a brand but still require a similar product or service, prompting them to explore competitive offerings (Fetscherin, 2019). Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H6. *Cold-brand hate leads to brand switching.*

Private Complaining. Private complaining refers to consumer expressions of dissatisfaction directed toward personal networks rather than the brand itself (Romani *et al.*, 2012). This behavior manifests through informal conversations with friends, family, or colleagues, where

consumers share their negative experiences without engaging in public criticism (Fetscherin, 2019). Private complaining is often a coping mechanism that allows consumers to vent frustrations while seeking social validation for their grievances (Kucuk, 2019b). Unlike other forms of complaining and negative word-of-mouth, which involve direct confrontation with the brand, private complaining remains confined to interpersonal discussions, limiting its immediate impact on the brand's reputation (Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H7. *Cool brand hate leads to private complaining.*

Public Complaining. Public complaining involves consumers voicing their dissatisfaction in visible and accessible forums such as online reviews, social media platforms, or direct brand communication channels (Fetscherin, 2019; Naylor, 2016). This behavior is motivated by a desire for acknowledgment, resolution, or social influence, as consumers seek to warn others about their negative brand experiences (Kucuk, 2021). Public complaints can be particularly damaging to a brand, as they expose its shortcomings to a broad audience and may influence prospective customers' perceptions (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Unlike private complaining, which remains within a close social circle, public complaining is intended to elicit a response from the brand or its broader customer base, amplifying its potential impact (Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H8. *Cool brand hate leads to public complaining*

Brand Retaliation. Brand retaliation is an active consumer response aimed at harming or punishing a brand due to perceived wrongdoing or betrayal (Aron, 2016; Romani *et al.*, 2012). This behavior can take various forms, including boycotts or organized anti-brand campaigns designed to inflict reputational damage (Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Unlike brand avoidance or complaining, which primarily serve as expressions of dissatisfaction, retaliation reflects a more aggressive stance in which consumers seek to impose consequences on the brand (Fetscherin, 2019). The intensity of brand retaliation varies with the severity of the perceived offense, with highly engaged consumers more likely to engage in retaliatory behaviors. Thus, we will formulate a hypothesis as follows:

H9. *Hot brand hate leads to brand retaliation.*

Brand Revenge. Brand revenge is the most extreme form of negative consumer response, characterized by deliberate efforts to damage a brand beyond personal disengagement or complaints (Zhang & Laroche, 2021). This behavior stems from a strong sense of perceived injustice, leading consumers to take actions that undermine the brand's market position, reputation, or financial performance (Grégoire *et al.*, 2009). Brand revenge may include coordinated online attacks, legal action, or acts of vandalism in extreme cases (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Unlike retaliation, which may seek redress or acknowledgment, revenge is often fueled by enduring resentment and a desire to inflict harm, making it the most destructive outcome of brand hate (Kucuk, 2021). Thus, we will formulate the hypothesis as follows:

H10. *Hot brand hate leads to brand revenge.*

Mediating Effect of Brand Hate.

Brand hate serves as a crucial mediating mechanism linking antecedents to consumer behavior. According to the Stimulus-Organism-Response (SOR) framework, external stimuli (antecedents) trigger emotional responses (brand hate), which subsequently shape behavioral outcomes (Zhang & Laroche, 2021). This mediation effect is essential to understanding how negative consumer experiences or brand misalignment evolve into concrete actions that impact brand equity and consumer-brand relationships. Thus, we aim to test the following mediation hypothesis:

H11a. *Cold brand hate mediates the relationship between ideological incompatibility and brand avoidance.*

H11b. *Cold brand hate mediates the relationship between ideological incompatibility and brand switching.*

H12a. *Cool brand hate mediates the relationship between symbolic incongruity and private complaining.*

H12b. *Cool brand hate mediates the relationship between symbolic incongruity and public complaining.*

H12c. *Cool brand hate mediates the relationship between subjective norms and private complaining.*

H12d. *Cool brand hate mediates the relationship between subjective norms and public complaining.*

H13a. *Hot brand hate mediates the relationship between negative experience and brand retaliation.*

H13b. *Cold brand hate mediates the relationship between negative experience and brand revenge.*

Brand Hate and Cultural Differences: The Mediterranean Context

Brand hate research has primarily been conducted in isolated market contexts, with a strong bias toward Western and East Asian consumer studies (Assoud & Berbou, 2023, 2025). Systematic reviews indicate a lack of cross-cultural comparisons, despite the increasing interest in understanding variations in consumer-brand animosity across cultures (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2023). This lack of cross-cultural studies can be explained by the paradigms used in empirical studies. Existing research has framed brand hate within two dominant paradigms. The relational perspective (Fournier, 1998) conceptualizes consumer-brand interactions as quasi-social relationships, where negative brand experiences—such as dissatisfaction, ideological misalignment, or symbolic incongruity—drive emotional rejection. This paradigm assumes that brand hate occurs within an individual's internal consumption reality. On the other hand, the cognitive psychology perspective suggests that brand personality perceptions influence consumer

responses (Aaker & Biel, 1993; Keller et al., 2002). In this view, consumers form cognitive schemas based on brand traits, which determine whether they develop positive (brand love) or negative (brand hate) affective responses.

While both perspectives have advanced brand hate research, they fail to account for cultural macro-structures that influence brand rejection beyond individual cognition. The relational perspective assumes brand-consumer interactions are universal, overlooking how cultural identity, social norms, and historical contexts shape consumer animosity (Liu *et al.*, 1997). Similarly, the cognitive perspective focuses on individual psychological processes, disregarding broader societal forces that condition negative brand perceptions. Given these limitations, a cultural branding perspective (Holt, 2006a) is necessary to capture the context-dependent nature of brand hate fully.

The Mediterranean region provides a compelling setting for investigating these dynamics. Unlike Anglo-Saxon or East Asian markets, Mediterranean consumer-brand relationships are profoundly shaped by collective identity, historical symbolism, and social traditions (Badot, 2014). Mediterranean consumers do not merely engage with brands through individual decision-making, but rather through relational consumption patterns, in which family, societal expectations, and national identity influence brand perceptions (Carù et al., 2014). In this context, brand hate is not only a reaction to product failures or service dissatisfaction but often stems from ideological, political, or cultural factors. Negative consumer-brand interactions frequently arise from perceived ethical misconduct, political stances, or symbolic misalignment, making brand hate a more socially embedded phenomenon compared to markets where brand engagement is more transactional.

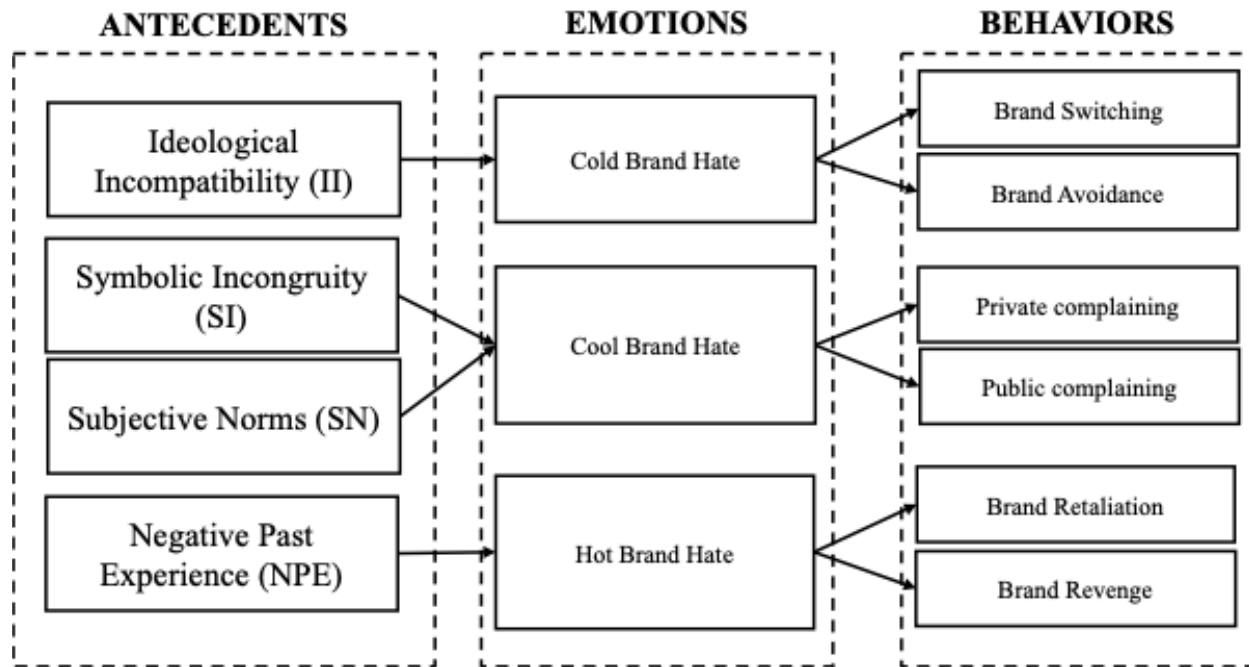
Branding in the Mediterranean extends beyond functional and hedonic benefits—brands serve as cultural artifacts, representing historical narratives, collective values, and socio-political meanings (Carù *et al.*, 2014). Prior research confirms that brand emotions vary across cultures. For instance, Pontinha and Coelho do Vale (2020) found that brand love is experienced and expressed differently in Portugal vs. the U.S., highlighting cultural variations in emotional attachment. Similarly, Saeed and Azmi (2018) demonstrated that brand switching behavior differs significantly between Pakistan and Indonesia, illustrating how social expectations and risk perceptions influence brand loyalty and rejection. Applying these insights to brand hate, this study explores whether the triggers and expressions of brand hate differ between Northern and Southern Mediterranean cultures.

To systematically capture cultural variations in brand hate, this study employs Hofstede's six-dimensional model of national cultures (Hofstede, 1993). Using Hierarchical Clustering Analysis (Agglomerative Clustering), Mediterranean countries are categorized into culturally distinct clusters, allowing for structured comparisons of how brand hate is shaped and expressed. This approach ensures that cultural differences are not treated as abstract concepts but as empirically measurable influences on brand hate formation and intensity. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H14: *There are significant differences in how brand hate is shaped and expressed across Mediterranean cultural clusters.*

As shown in Figure 1, the proposed conceptual framework illustrates the hypothesized relationships among antecedents, the emotional dimensions of brand hate, and behavioral outcomes.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework of the Study
(Antecedents–Emotions–Behaviors Model).



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

Deductive reasoning is adopted in the current study to test the potential hypotheses. In this spirit, the quantitative method is used, as it suits the research objective (Gavard-Perret, 2008). Primary data for the current study were collected via a web-based self-completion survey. In the first step, Mediterranean consumers were asked to think about a brand toward which they feel negative emotions. In the second step, they were asked questions related to the research constructs, and later, socio-demographic data were collected. All data collected for this study were handled with the utmost confidentiality and in strict compliance with data protection regulations. Participants were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and would be used solely for academic purposes. The data collection process adhered to the University of Algarve's Data Protection Policy, ensuring ethical standards in data privacy and security. Participants' personal identifiers were neither recorded nor stored, and all information was aggregated for analysis to maintain confidentiality.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The questionnaire was distributed through social networks such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and ResearchGate, and further disseminated via university professors who shared the survey with their academic and professional

networks across various regions. Additionally, data were collected from consumers in commercial centers located in Lisbon and Faro (Portugal), Sevilla (Spain), Casablanca (Morocco) and Toulouse (France), targeting individuals based on their availability and willingness to participate. The choice of Portugal, Spain, France and Morocco as in-person data collection sites was both methodological and practical. These locations were selected to ensure a balanced representation of different Mediterranean contexts while allowing the research team to directly supervise the data collection process, thereby ensuring response quality and procedural consistency (Hofstede, 1993). In addition to these field sites, the study included an online survey distributed across other Mediterranean countries—including Italy, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, and Turkey—through academic and professional networks. This mixed data collection strategy, combining in-person and online approaches, ensured broad geographic coverage, enhanced sample diversity, and strengthened the empirical validity of findings on brand hate across Mediterranean countries (Bethlehem & Biffignandi, 2011).

Beyond its cultural and social relevance, the Mediterranean region also represents a significant economic force and consumer market. According to data compiled by the World Bank (2024) and Datamed (2024), Mediterranean countries collectively have a population of roughly 480 million and an aggregate GDP (PPP) exceeding USD 9 trillion. Average GDP per capita in the region is around USD 38,000, reflecting strong purchasing power and rapid integration into global trade and retail networks. The region's expanding middle class and digital transformation have amplified exposure to global brands, intensifying both positive and negative consumer experiences. These dynamics make Mediterranean consumers an economically impactful and relevant population for examining how emotional and behavioral responses to brands—such as brand hate—develop and spread within this diverse yet interconnected market.

The scales used are Likert-type of 5 points featuring two anchor points: "totally disagree" and "totally agree." The questionnaire used scales previously employed and validated in prior research (Table 1). For instance, we adopted Kucuk's (2019b) scales related to cold, cool, and hot brand hate. For Negative experience, Symbolic incongruity, ideological incompatibility, and brand avoidance, we used Hegner et al.'s (2017) scale. We employed Fetscherin's (2019) scales for brand switch, private complaining, and public complaining. Romani et al. (2012) scale is used to measure the brand retaliation construct, while brand revenge was measured via Grégoire et al. (2009) scale, and subjective norms were measured via Joshi and Yadav (2021) scale. Additionally, prior to initiating the data collection, a pre-test was conducted with 25 participants to identify any errors or misunderstandings (Gavard-Perret, 2008). The feedback indicated no issues with interpreting the questionnaire, though there were some complaints about the perceived excessiveness of the number of questions. As a consequence, no modifications were made.

Following these procedures, 550 questionnaires were collected via Microsoft Forms between March 2023 and March 2024. However, upon preliminary analysis, 28 questionnaires were excluded for duplicate responses or inconsistent answers, characterized by a lack of variation across questions. Consequently, the final sample comprised 522 respondents. This sample effectively aligned with the research objectives, offering a theoretical testing of brand hate theory within the Mediterranean context, while also highlighting cultural differences. This approach provides a substantial foundation for further investigation into the phenomenon of brand hate. The demographic characteristics of the sample population are detailed in the following table

Table 1.
Respondents' Demographics

Socio-demographic characteristics	Categories	%
Gender	Female	50.06
	Male	49.94
Age	18-24	31.85
	24-34:	40.77
	34-44	15.77
	44-54	07.85
	54-64	06.00
	64+	02.77
Nationality	Portugal	17.24%
	Spain	10.92%
	France	11.88%
	Italy	7.66%
	Turkey	1.92%
	Cyprus	3.26%
	Greece	2.49%
	Morocco	21.07%
	Algeria	5.17%
	Tunisia	6.13%
	Egypt	7.66%
	Jordan	2.49%

Common Method Bias (CMB)

To address the potential risk of Common Method Bias (CMB), several precautions were taken. First, the questionnaire items were randomized and carefully mixed to reduce any systematic bias. Second, we ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents to minimize social desirability bias. Third, statistical tests were employed to assess CMB. Harman's single-factor test showed that the first factor accounted for only 46.35% of the variance, which is below the threshold of 50%, suggesting that CMB is not significant (Hair, 2017). Furthermore, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was computed to assess multicollinearity across all constructs. The results indicate that all VIF values are below the recommended threshold of 3.3 (Hair *et al.*, 2022), with the minimum VIF value being 1.236 and the maximum being 2.018. These results confirm that multicollinearity and method bias are not significant concerns in the model.

Cultural Clustering

Culture is a key determinant in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors toward brands (Holt, 2006b). Given the diversity of cultural backgrounds within Mediterranean countries, it is crucial to account for these variations when studying brand hate. To assess the role of cultural influences on brand hate, we employed Hofstede's six-dimensional model of national cultures. These dimensions—Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity,

Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-Term Orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint—allow for a systematic comparison of cultural patterns across different markets (Hofstede, 1993).

Table 2
Cultural scores via Hofstede Model

Dimension	Portugal	Spain	France	Italy	Turkey	Cyprus	Greece	Morocco	Algeria	Tunisia	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon
Power Distance	63	57	68	50	66	60	60	70	80	80	80	80	80
Individualism vs. Collectivism	27	51	71	76	37	20	35	30	25	25	25	30	40
Masculinity vs. Femininity	31	42	43	0	45	45	57	45	50	50	50	45	50
Uncertainty Avoidance	104	86	86	57	85	90	112	70	80	80	85	75	80
Long Term Orientation	28	48	63	34	46	60	45	18	20	20	20	30	25
Indulgence vs. Restraint	33	44	48	30	49	45	50	25	20	20	20	20	30

By collecting Hofstede's cultural scores for each country included in our study, we conducted a Hierarchical Clustering Analysis (Agglomerative Clustering), a statistical method that groups similar cultures based on their shared characteristics (Hair *et al.*, 2022). This clustering technique helps us classify countries into cultural groups that exhibit common consumer behavior patterns, particularly regarding negative brand sentiment. Based on our clustering analysis, we identified two distinct cultural groups within the Mediterranean region. Cluster one is North Med and Cluster two is South Med.

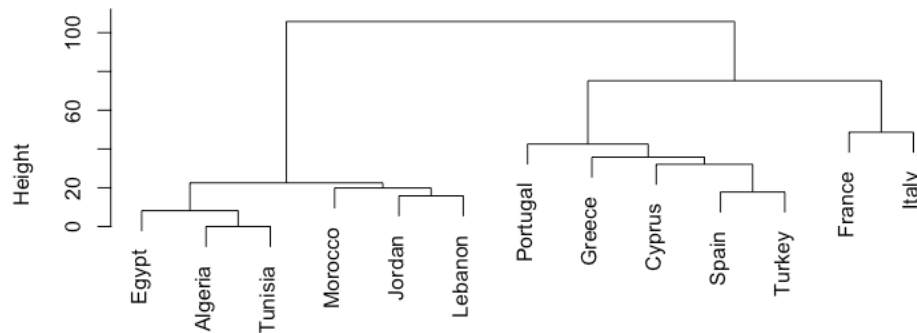
The division between North and South Mediterranean consumers emerged empirically from the Hierarchical Clustering Analysis (Agglomerative Clustering) performed on Hofstede's six cultural dimensions. As shown in Fig. 2, the analysis grouped the 13 countries into two clusters that align with the Northern and Southern Mediterranean subregions. The Northern cluster (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey) represents countries with relatively higher economic development, stronger individualism, and lower power distance, whereas the Southern cluster (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon) consists of countries characterized by more collectivist values, higher power distance, and moderate uncertainty avoidance. This clustering supports the North–South comparison adopted in the multigroup analysis, allowing for the examination of potential cultural differences in the formation and behavioral consequences of brand hate.

Data Analysis

To test the proposed theoretical framework, we employed Structural Equation Modeling using Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). SEM-PLS is particularly suited for exploratory research and theory testing when the research model involves complex relationships with latent constructs (Hair, 2017). This approach allows for simultaneous estimation of measurement and structural

models, ensuring robust analysis of the hypothesized relationships between antecedents, brand hate dimensions, and behavioral outcomes. The data analysis process involved three main steps: measurement model, structural model, mediation and Multigroup analysis. All these analysis were executed using the open source SeminR package.

Figure 2
Hierarchical Clustering of Countries



FINDINGS

Measurement Model

To ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs, a measurement model was assessed. The adequacy of the model was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and convergent validity metrics (Hair et al., 2017). All constructs demonstrated Cronbach's alpha values above the acceptable threshold of 0.6, ensuring internal consistency. Convergent validity was supported by AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values ranging from 0.616 to 0.883, indicating that the items within each construct were highly correlated. Furthermore, all factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.5, with most surpassing 0.7, as per Hair *et al.* (2017). These results confirm that the measurement model is reliable and valid, meeting the criteria necessary for hypothesis testing.

Table 3
Measurement Model

Construct	Loadings	Mean	SD
Negative Experience ($\alpha = 0.866$; AVE = 0.713)			
The performance of products of this brand is poor.	0.873	3.739	1.215
This brand products are inconvenient.	0.849	3.625	1.141
My hate for this brand is linked to the bad performance of this product.	0.838	4.207	1.042
I'm dissatisfied by this brand.	0.816	3.801	1.185
Ideological Incompatibility ($\alpha = 0.930$; AVE = 0.826)			
In my opinion, this brand acts irresponsible.	0.904	4.011	1.200
In my opinion, this brand acts unethical.	0.912	3.927	1.217

This brand violates moral standards.	0.926	3.824	1.273
This brand doesn't match my values and beliefs.	0.891	4.015	1.166
Symbolic Incongruity ($\alpha = 0.948$; AVE = 0.827)			
The products of this brand do not reflect who I am.	0.909	4.057	1.055
The products of this brand do not fit my personality.	0.908	4.046	1.093
I don't want to be associated with this brand.	0.884	4.073	1.111
This brand does not represent what I am.	0.937	4.157	1.067
This brand symbolizes the kind of person I would never want to be.	0.906	4.065	1.146
Subjective Norms ($\alpha = 0.886$; AVE = 0.814)			
Most people who are important to me think I should not purchase this Brand.	0.913	3.264	1.103
I should not purchase products of this brand when going for purchasing.	0.878	3.525	1.121
My family members do not prefer this brand.	0.914	3.410	1.131
Cold Brand hate ($\alpha = 0.906$; AVE = 0.842)			
I personally want to disconnect from this brand.	0.927	4.105	1.095
I want to distance myself from this brand.	0.944	4.207	1.040
There is no way this brand can express me.	0.879	4.096	1.165
Cool Brand hate ($\alpha = 0.885$; AVE = 0.814)			
I am so disgusted with what this brand represents.	0.895	3.854	1.212
I feel repelled when I think of this brand.	0.922	3.835	1.179
I am very averse to this brand.	0.887	3.950	1.056
Hot Brand hate ($\alpha = 0.949$; AVE = 0.868)			
I am so angry with this brand	0.944	3.931	1.157
I am so mad at this brand	0.921	3.958	1.150
I am so outraged by this brand	0.919	3.862	1.131
I am so furious with this brand	0.941	3.808	1.189
Brand avoidance ($\alpha = 0.969$; AVE = 0.889)			
I don't purchase products of brand X anymore.	0.922	4.272	1.104
I reject services/products of brand X.	0.942	4.318	1.071
I refrain from buying X's products or using its services.	0.947	4.322	1.035
I avoid buying the brands products/using its services.	0.951	4.372	1.039
I do not use products or services of brand X.	0.949	4.330	1.080
Brand Switching ($\alpha = 0.775$; AVE = 0.689)			
I buy this brand less frequently than before	0.827	3.973	1.170
I stop buying this brand and I will not buy it anymore	0.893	4.260	1.142
I switched to a competing brand	0.763	3.927	1.266
Private complaining ($\alpha = 0.908$; AVE = 0.845)			
I discourage friends and relatives to buy Brand X	0.919	4.008	1.087
I say negative things about Brand X to others	0.909	3.931	1.147
I recommend not to buy Brand X to someone who seeks my advice	0.927	4.065	1.055

Public complaining ($\alpha = 0.916$; AVE = 0.856)			
I became involved in organizations or clubs united against Brand X.	0.913	2.613	1.320
I complained to law enforcement about Brand X	0.912	2.418	1.158
I complained to external agencies (e.g., consumer unions) about Brand X	0.948	2.536	1.247
Brand Retaliation ($\alpha = 0.953$; AVE = 0.843)			
I have deliberately bent or broken the policies of this brand.	0.840	2.505	1.124
I have showed signs of impatience and frustration to someone from this brand.	0.888	2.961	1.390
I complained to this brand to give a hard time to the representatives of the company	0.957	2.800	1.387
I complained to this brand to be unpleasant with the representatives of the company	0.950	2.839	1.364
I complained to the brand to make someone from the organization pay	0.949	2.716	1.333
Brand revenge ($\alpha = 0.974$; AVE = 0.883)			
I want (or wanted) to take actions to get the brand in trouble	0.936	3.038	1.455
I want (or wanted) to punish the brand in some way	0.957	3.272	1.492
I want (or wanted) to cause inconvenience to the brand	0.956	3.153	1.474
I want (or wanted) to get even with the brand	0.962	3.100	1.468
I want (or wanted) to Make the brand get what it deserved	0.949	3.310	1.492

To establish discriminant validity, which means that items within one factor exhibit minimal correlation with items from other factors, the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) matrix and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were used. Since HTMT values were significantly below the threshold value (below 0.90), discriminant validity was confirmed. The discriminant validity was also supported by the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as the square root of each AVE exceeded its corresponding squared inter-construct correlations. These results indicate that all constructs achieved the required level of discriminant validity (Table 4).

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

To evaluate the structural model's fitness, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), standardized path coefficients, and R^2 values were assessed. VIF values below the recommended threshold of 3.0 indicated no multicollinearity concerns among the constructs, with the highest VIF being 2.018. The R^2 values represent the proportion of variance in the endogenous constructs that can be explained by the exogenous variables in the model. In this study, the R^2 values ranged from 0.253 to 0.438, indicating varying levels of explanatory power across the dependent constructs. Specifically, Hot Brand Hate ($R^2 = 0.265$), Cool Brand Hate ($R^2 = 0.394$), and Cold Brand Hate ($R^2 = 0.353$) demonstrate moderate levels of variance explained, suggesting that the identified antecedents are meaningful predictors of these brand hate dimensions. Additionally, the behavioral outcomes—Brand Avoidance ($R^2 = 0.438$), Brand Switching ($R^2 = 0.402$), Private Complaining ($R^2 = 0.393$), Public Complaining ($R^2 = 0.253$), Brand Retaliation ($R^2 = 0.263$), and Brand Revenge ($R^2 = 0.410$)—reflect substantial explanatory power, supporting the model's robustness in capturing consumer behavioral responses to brand hate. According to Hair et al. (2017), R^2 values

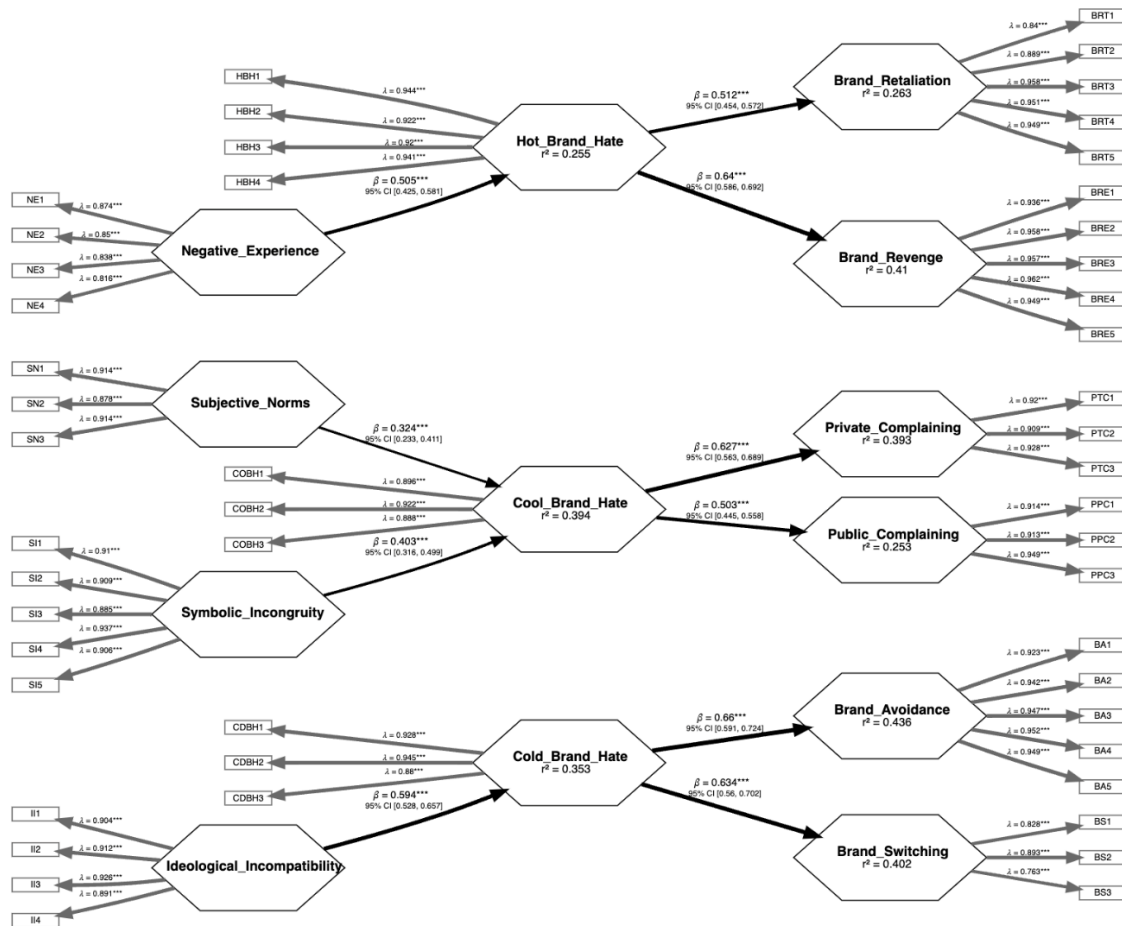
of 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75 are considered weak, moderate, and substantial, respectively. Thus, the obtained R^2 values suggest that the model exhibits moderate explanatory power overall.

Table 4
Discriminant Validity

	II	SI	SN	NE	CD	CH	HT	BA	BS	PRT	PPC	BRT	BR E
II	0.90	0.52	0.40	0.48	0.64	0.72	0.70	0.59	0.66	0.60	0.48	0.46	0.62
9	9	0	6	1	0	8	3	4	8	8	3	7	7
SI	0.49	0.90	0.52	0.53	0.70	0.60	0.47	0.65	0.62	0.66	0.31	0.22	0.37
9	9	9	6	9	6	7	4	8	7	5	7	7	5
SN	0.37	0.48	0.90	0.58	0.50	0.58	0.48	0.45	0.46	0.60	0.45	0.33	0.35
5	5	5	2	7	8	4	6	1	0	2	5	1	4
NE	0.43	0.49	0.51	0.84	0.49	0.52	0.55	0.51	0.62	0.57	0.32	0.42	0.34
9	9	9	3	5	8	8	2	0	2	5	0	9	5
CD	0.59	0.65	0.45	0.44	0.91	0.74	0.62	0.70	0.74	0.65	0.39	0.33	0.51
4	4	4	3	6	8	6	6	4	0	6	5	4	5
CH	0.66	0.56	0.51	0.46	0.66	0.90	0.78	0.67	0.64	0.69	0.55	0.45	0.64
4	4	4	9	8	7	2	3	6	8	9	4	6	3
HT	0.65	0.45	0.44	0.50	0.57	0.71	0.93	0.55	0.62	0.62	0.58	0.53	0.66
9	9	9	6	5	9	8	2	6	5	0	4	7	4
BA	0.56	0.63	0.41	0.47	0.66	0.62	0.53	0.94	0.87	0.68	0.37	0.29	0.43
6	6	6	9	6	0	7	3	3	1	4	4	2	0
BS	0.57	0.54	0.39	0.53	0.63	0.54	0.54	0.77	0.83	0.65	0.46	0.43	0.57
3	3	7	2	2	4	7	5	1	0	0	3	9	4
PR	0.55	0.62	0.53	0.51	0.59	0.62	0.57	0.64	0.54	0.91	0.39	0.38	0.46
T	9	0	9	4	3	7	5	1	7	9	8	8	2
PP	0.44	0.30	0.41	0.28	0.36	0.50	0.54	0.35	0.39	0.36	0.92	0.76	0.76
C	7	2	7	7	2	3	9	4	2	7	5	1	8
BR	0.43	0.21	0.30	0.39	0.30	0.41	0.51	0.28	0.37	0.35	0.70	0.91	0.77
T	9	8	3	0	9	7	2	2	2	9	8	8	8
BR	0.59	0.36	0.33	0.32	0.48	0.59	0.64	0.41	0.49	0.43	0.72	0.75	0.95
E	5	6	0	1	4	7	0	8	8	5	9	0	2

Fornell–Larcker criterion (below the main diagonal) and HTMT (above the main diagonal)”.
Main diagonal: in bold, square root of the AVE”.

Figure 2
Estimated Model



The standardized path coefficients for the direct links were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), confirming the strength and direction of the hypothesized relationships. These results collectively confirm the structural model's adequacy and predictive relevance, as illustrated in Figure 2.

The standardized path coefficients (β) provide critical insights into the strength and direction of the hypothesized relationships within the structural model. All direct relationships between antecedents, brand hate dimensions, and behavioral outcomes were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, as indicated by high t-statistics and corresponding p-values of 0.00.

Starting with the antecedents of brand hate, Ideological Incompatibility exhibited a strong positive influence on Cold Brand Hate ($\beta = 0.594$, $t = 18.037$), suggesting that misalignment between a consumer's values and a brand's ideology significantly fosters emotional detachment and devaluation toward the brand. Similarly, Symbolic Incongruity ($\beta = 0.403$, $t = 8.630$) and Subjective Norms ($\beta = 0.324$, $t = 7.094$) were positively associated with Cool Brand Hate, indicating that discrepancies between a brand's symbolic meaning and a consumer's self-concept, as well as social pressures, drive moral aversion and discomfort toward brands. Furthermore, Negative Experience had a substantial positive effect on Hot Brand Hate ($\beta = 0.505$, $t = 12.715$), underscoring the role of dissatisfaction, perceived betrayal, or negative encounters in eliciting intense emotions such as anger and frustration toward brands. When examining the behavioral

outcomes of brand hate, Cold Brand Hate strongly influenced both Brand Avoidance ($\beta = 0.660$, $t = 19.489$) and Brand Switching ($\beta = 0.634$, $t = 17.408$). This finding indicates that emotional detachment and devaluation lead consumers to actively distance themselves from brands, either by avoiding them altogether or switching to competitors. Likewise, Cool Brand Hate demonstrated a significant impact on both Private Complaining ($\beta = 0.627$, $t = 19.736$) and Public Complaining ($\beta = 0.503$, $t = 17.286$), suggesting that consumers driven by moral aversion are more likely to express their dissatisfaction both privately and publicly. Finally, Hot Brand Hate was a strong predictor of aggressive behaviors such as Brand Retaliation ($\beta = 0.512$, $t = 16.832$) and Brand Revenge ($\beta = 0.640$, $t = 23.366$). These results highlight that intense negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, can motivate consumers to take actions that harm the brand's reputation or operations. See Table 5.

Table 5
Hypothesis Testing

Path	β	T-statistics	P-values
Ideological Incompatibility -> Cold Brand Hate	0.594	18.037	0.00
Symbolic Incongruity -> Cool Brand Hate	0.403	8.630	0.00
Subjective Norms -> Cool Brand Hate	0.324	7.094	0.00
Negative Experience -> Hot Brand Hate	0.505	12.715	0.00
Cold Brand Hate -> Brand Avoidance	0.660	19.489	0.00
Cold Brand Hate -> Brand Switching	0.634	17.408	0.00
Cool Brand Hate -> Private Complaining	0.627	19.736	0.00
Cool Brand Hate -> Public Complaining	0.503	17.286	0.00
Hot Brand Hate -> Brand Retaliation	0.512	16.832	0.00
Hot Brand Hate -> Brand Revenge	0.640	23.366	0.00

Overall, the high β values and significant t-statistics confirm the robustness of the hypothesized relationships, emphasizing the pivotal role of the emotional dimensions of brand hate in shaping diverse consumer behaviors. These findings underscore the complex interplay between cognitive, emotional, and social factors in the formation of brand hate and its behavioral consequences.

Mediation Analysis

The mediation analysis, conducted using PLS-SEM with bootstrapping procedures, reveals significant direct and indirect effects across most hypothesized relationships, confirming the pivotal role of brand hate dimensions as mediators. Specifically, complementary (partial) mediation is observed in six out of eight hypotheses (H11a, H11b, H12a, H12c, H12d, H13a), where both direct and indirect effects are statistically significant ($T > 1.96$) and aligned in the same direction, indicating that brand hate partially explains the relationship while a direct effect persists. In contrast, indirect-only (full) mediation is evident in H12b (Symbolic Incongruity \rightarrow Public Complaining) and H13b (Negative Experience \rightarrow Brand Revenge), where the indirect effects are highly significant ($T = 5.778$ and $T = 9.295$, respectively) while the direct effects are non-significant, suggesting that brand hate fully accounts for the observed relationships. The indirect effects are notably strong, with confidence intervals consistently excluding zero, underscoring the

robustness of the mediation pathways. These findings highlight that negative consumer behaviors, such as avoidance, switching, complaining, and revenge, are not solely driven by cognitive evaluations but are significantly influenced by emotional mechanisms, particularly the dimensions of cold, cool, and hot brand hate. This underscores the importance of considering both cognitive and affective pathways in understanding the dynamics of brand-related consumer behavior.

Table 6
Mediation Analysis

	Path	Direct Effect	T-stat	95%CI	Indirect Effect	T-stat	95% CI	Mediation Type
H11a	II → BA	0.27	6.718	[0.191, 0.347]	0.295	9.787	[0.237, 0.356]	Complementary (Partial Mediation)
H11b	II → BS	0.308	6.581	[0.219, 0.400]	0.266	7.679	[0.200, 0.334]	Complementary (Partial Mediation)
H12a	SI → PTC	0.335	6.705	[0.237, 0.433]	0.134	5.706	[0.092, 0.184]	Complementary (Partial Mediation)
H12b	SI → PPC	-0.032	-0.578	[-0.140, 0.075]	0.164	5.778	[0.114, 0.224]	Indirect-only (Full Mediation)
H12c	SN → PTC	0.205	4.744	[0.120, 0.289]	0.108	5.262	[0.069, 0.149]	Complementary (Partial Mediation)
H12d	SN → PTC	0.222	4.567	[0.125, 0.318]	0.132	6.056	[0.090, 0.176]	Complementary (Partial Mediation)
H13a	NE → BRT	0.18	3.934	[0.092, 0.272]	0.212	7.67	[0.160, 0.269]	Complementary (Partial Mediation)
H13b	NE → BRE	-0.003	-0.077	[-0.080, 0.076]	0.323	9.295	[0.257, 0.392]	Indirect-only (Full Mediation)

Multigroup Analysis (MGA)

The Multigroup Analysis (MGA) results indicate no statistically significant differences in the structural path coefficients between North and South Mediterranean consumers at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level (see Table 7). None of the examined paths exceeded the critical t-value threshold of ± 1.96 , suggesting that the relationships between antecedents, dimensions of brand hate, and behavioral outcomes are relatively consistent across both cultural contexts. However, one path (Cool Brand Hate → Public Complaining) showed borderline significance ($t = -1.972$, $p = 0.049$), suggesting that Southern Mediterranean consumers may be slightly more likely to engage in public complaints in response to Cool Brand Hate than their Northern counterparts. Other relationships, such as Ideological Incompatibility → Cold Brand Hate ($t = -0.200$, $p = 0.846$) and Negative Experience → Hot Brand Hate ($t = -0.020$, $p = 0.984$), exhibited negligible differences, reinforcing the robustness of these brand hate mechanisms across regions. Similarly, behavioral outcomes such as Brand Avoidance, Brand Switching, Private Complaining, Retaliation, and Revenge did not show

significant differences between the two groups, indicating a universal reaction pattern to brand hate.

Table 7
Multigroup Analysis

Path	β (north)	β (south)	Difference (N-S)	T- statistic s	P- values
Ideological Incompatibility -> Cold Brand Hate	0.584	0.598	-0.014	-0.200	0.846
Symbolic Incongruity -> Cool Brand Hate	0.343	0.402	-0.059	-0.611	0.556
Subjective Norms -> Cool Brand Hate	0.335	0.371	-0.036	-0.392	0.705
Negative Experience -> Hot Brand Hate	0.505	0.507	-0.002	-0.020	0.984
Cold Brand Hate -> Brand Avoidance	0.632	0.682	-0.050	-0.703	0.500
Cold Brand Hate -> Brand Switching	0.676	0.610	0.066	0.948	0.368
Cool Brand Hate -> Private Complaining	0.565	0.669	-0.104	-1.406	0.193
Cool Brand Hate -> Public Complaining	0.437	0.552	-0.115	-1.972	0.049
Hot Brand Hate -> Brand Retaliation	0.528	0.502	0.027	0.450	0.663
Hot Brand Hate -> Brand Revenge	0.620	0.657	-0.037	-0.654	0.530

DISCUSSION

Taxonomy of Brand Hate

Our findings reveal a multidimensional structure of brand hate, distinguishing between cold, cool, and hot brand hate, which aligns with theoretical frameworks proposed by Sternberg (2008) and empirical classifications by Fetscherin (2019). These results demonstrate that brand hate is not a monolithic construct but encompasses varying emotional intensities and cognitive appraisals, each with distinct behavioral manifestations. In our study, cold brand hate is characterized by emotional detachment and indifference, aligning with Sternberg's (2008) concept of the negation of intimacy, in which passion and commitment are absent, indicating a rational rather than emotional rejection of the brand. Kucuk (2021) similarly described cold brand hate as a cognitive disconnection from the brand, characterized by a lack of strong emotional reactions. Our results also indicate that cool brand hate involves aversion and disgust, often triggered by perceived ethical violations, reflecting a more effective response where consumers maintain some cognitive association with the brand but are dominated by feelings of repulsion. The emotional distance observed in cool brand hate differentiates it from the intense hostility characteristic of hot brand hate. Yet, it reflects a strong affective response tied to moral judgment, as Zhang and Laroche (2021) emphasized, linking cool brand hate to symbolic incongruity and ethical dissonance. In the case of hot brand hate, our findings align with Kucuk's (2021) framework, demonstrating that intense emotional responses, including anger, contempt, and a desire for retaliation, characterize

this type of hate, rooted in high levels of passion and commitment, often resulting from personal betrayals. Additionally, recent studies provide further insights into the multidimensional nature of brand hate. Tolunay and Veloutsou (2025) emphasize the dynamic interplay between brand passion and transgressions, particularly highlighting how perceived betrayal can intensify brand hate, mainly when brand love existed prior to the transgression. Their findings suggest that the severity and source of betrayal (e.g., functional vs. symbolic wrongdoings) influence the transition from brand love to different types of brand hate, with functional transgressions often triggering more intense emotional responses, aligning with our observations of hot brand hate, where emotional intensity is rooted in personal betrayal and high involvement. Conversely, Zhang *et al.* (2025) explore destination brand hate, identifying antecedents such as management failures, social injustices, and cultural degradation, highlighting that hate can also stem from systemic or contextual factors rather than personal experiences, which resonates with our findings on cool brand hate, where moral dissonance and symbolic incongruity play significant roles. These comparative insights underscore that while brand hate manifests through varying emotional intensities, its triggers can range from deeply personal betrayals to broader societal or cultural grievances.

Towards a Theory of Brand Hate

Our study presents an integrative Antecedents-Emotions-Behaviors (AEB) framework that deepens the understanding of how brand hate originates, develops, and manifests in consumer behavior. Drawing from both marketing and psychological literature, we differentiate between personal and societal antecedents to capture the multifaceted nature of brand hate triggers. Our findings reveal that personal antecedents, such as negative experiences, symbolic incongruity, and ideological incompatibility, reflect individual cognitive and emotional evaluations. While negative experiences are grounded in functional dissatisfaction and perceived betrayal, symbolic incongruity arises when a brand's image conflicts with a consumer's self-concept. Interestingly, our results show that ideological incompatibility, though often framed as societal, also holds a deeply personal dimension rooted in moral and ethical values. This aligns with Kucuk's (2021) assertion that ideological incompatibility can provoke intense emotional responses when consumers perceive brands as violating deeply held beliefs. Additionally, Sternberg's (2020) psychological perspective reinforces the idea that ideological conflicts are internalized, creating emotional dissonance that fuels brand hate. In terms of societal antecedents, our results highlight the influence of subjective norms, illustrating how collective social pressures can amplify brand hate. We observed that disapproval from peers or cultural groups often intensifies negative sentiments toward brands, consistent with Zhang and Laroche's (2021) emphasis on the role of social identity in shaping consumer-brand relationships. This is further supported by Sternberg's (2020) FLOTSAM model, which explains how hate can spread through mechanisms such as social belonging, obedience to authority, and cultural narratives. Together, these findings underscore that brand hate can emerge from both deeply personal experiences and broader societal influences, often interacting to reinforce each other.

Our study also extends the traditional "Voice vs Exit" Framework (Hirschman, 1970) commonly discussed in brand hate literature. Our results support a tripartite model of behavioral outcomes: flight (avoidance, switching), complaint (private and public), and fight (retaliation, revenge). This broader framework captures the diverse coping mechanisms consumers employ when faced with brand-related grievances. Specifically, we found that while some consumers disengage passively through avoidance or switching, others actively voice dissatisfaction or

engage in retaliatory behaviors. This aligns with Zhang et al.'s (2025) findings, which demonstrate that consumer responses to brand hate vary based on emotional intensity, and with Kucuk's (2016) distinction between passive and active resistance against brands. Importantly, our findings highlight strategic opportunities for brands to manage hate effectively, as proactive complaint management can prevent escalation into more damaging behaviors. Psychologically, Sternberg's (2020) perspective supports this, suggesting that hate is a dynamic process influenced by both individual predispositions and external social factors, reinforcing the need for adaptive strategies that address both cognitive and emotional triggers.

Moreover, our results reveal the pivotal role of brand hate as an emotional conduit linking antecedents to behavioral outcomes. Our results show strong indirect-only effects, particularly in the pathways from symbolic incongruity to public complaining and from negative experiences to brand revenge. These findings indicate that brand hate is not just a mediator but often the sole mechanism through which antecedents influence consumer behavior. This is consistent with Kucuk's (2021) demonstration of how brand hate mediates the relationship between brand transgressions and consumer retaliation, as well as Yadav's (2024) emphasis on the emotional pathways through which dissatisfaction transforms into brand sabotage. From a psychological standpoint, Sternberg's (2020) theory of hate—integrating cognitive (commitment), affective (passion), and relational (negation of intimacy) components—explains how brand hate functions as an emotional lens through which consumers process negative experiences, ultimately driving behavioral responses. Our findings suggest that without the emotional activation of brand hate, negative antecedents alone may not trigger adverse behaviors, emphasizing the critical role of emotional regulation in brand management.

Brand Hate: Beyond Cultural Boundaries and Toward Psychological Foundations

Our findings challenge the prevailing notion that brand hate is predominantly contextually constructed, as the moderating effect of culture on the relationship between antecedents, emotions, and behavioral outcomes was largely insignificant. This result suggests that brand hate is not inherently shaped by cultural contexts but instead follows a more universal psychological mechanism. From the perspective of basic emotions theory, our finding of no significant structural differences across North and South Mediterranean consumers aligns with the logic of Ekman's (1999) basic emotions framework. Ekman posited that a set of core emotions, such as anger, disgust, fear, sadness, surprise, and happiness, are universally experienced and recognized across cultures (Ekman, 1999). Under this view, brand hate—which centrally involves anger, disgust, and moral contempt—may tap into evolutionary emotional systems that transcend cultural boundaries. The uniformity in emotional pathways suggests that when brands violate core expectations (e.g., fairness, identity, authenticity), they trigger emotional responses grounded in shared human affective mechanisms.

While the Multigroup Analysis revealed no significant differences in structural path coefficients between North and South Mediterranean consumers, the only exception was a marginal difference in the link between Cool Brand Hate and Public Complaining, indicating that consumers in Southern Mediterranean countries may be slightly more likely to express their dissatisfaction publicly. This may be attributed to the collectivist nature of Southern Mediterranean cultures, in which public complaining serves as a mechanism for group signaling and moral enforcement. In such settings, voicing discontent becomes a socially accepted way to alert others about a brand's perceived transgressions. Despite higher power distance norms, brands are not exempt from criticism, and public complaint offers a safe, culturally endorsed outlet for consumer

frustration (Putra & Lee, 2022). This observation resonates with recent evidence from Moroccan consumers during the 2023 Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Assoud & Berbou, 2026), which revealed that ideological and socio-political tensions significantly amplified brand hate and intensified public complaints and boycotts.

On the other hand, the absence of significant cultural moderation in our study contrasts with Mesquita and Boiger’s (2014) sociodynamic model, which posits that emotions are closely tied to sociocultural contexts. While their model emphasizes the situational emergence of emotions, our findings suggest that brand hate operates on a deeper psychological level, relatively independent of external cultural variables. The fact that key antecedents—ideological incompatibility, symbolic incongruity, subjective norms, and negative experiences—predict brand hate similarly across cultural contexts suggests that brand hate may be a fundamental emotional response rather than a culturally constructed phenomenon.

From an evolutionary psychology perspective (Durante & Griskevicius, 2018), this universality of brand hate can be explained through fundamental human emotional responses to perceived threats or moral violations. Zalaf and Apostolou (2025) argue that emotions such as anger and contempt evolved as protective mechanisms against social betrayal and exploitation. In this sense, brand hate could be viewed as an extension of these deep-rooted mechanisms, triggered when consumers perceive brands as violating personal, ethical, or societal expectations. This aligns with the idea that betrayal-induced anger and moral outrage are not simply socially learned emotions but innate psychological responses that transcend cultural boundaries. Moreover, while Greenaway *et al.* (2018) highlight the role of cultural context in shaping emotional expression, they also acknowledge that some core emotional responses remain stable across different environments. Our findings support this dual perspective: while cultural variations may influence how brand hate is expressed or regulated, the underlying emotional and behavioral mechanisms remain largely consistent. Goor *et al.* (2025) similarly emphasize that historical and social contexts can shape consumer behavior. Yet, our findings indicate that the fundamental antecedents and outcomes of brand hate operate beyond these contextual boundaries.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to address key gaps in the brand hate literature by developing an integrative framework that links antecedents, emotional dimensions, and behavioral outcomes across Mediterranean contexts. Our findings offer new insights into the multidimensional nature of brand hate, its antecedents, mediating mechanisms, and the role of cultural influences.

Theoretical Implications

Our study advances brand hate literature through an Antecedents-Emotions-Behaviors (AEB) framework. First, we confirm the multidimensional structure of brand hate (cold, cool, hot), which aligns with Sternberg’s (2008) model, showing distinct emotional intensities and behaviors. Second, we differentiate personal (negative experiences, symbolic incongruity, ideological incompatibility) from societal antecedents (subjective norms), with ideological incompatibility revealing both personal and societal dimensions. Third, brand hate acts as a key emotional mediator, particularly between symbolic incongruity and public complaining, and between negative experiences and revenge. Finally, the insignificant role of cultural moderation suggests brand hate is a universal phenomenon rooted in fundamental emotional responses, challenging context-dependent models. Finally, the insignificant role of culture as a moderator provides strong

evidence for the universality of brand hate's psychological underpinnings. Despite diverse sociocultural contexts across Mediterranean countries, the core emotional and behavioral mechanisms remain stable. This challenges the prevailing contextualist view that brand hate is culture-bound (Veloutsou & Guzmán, 2017) and instead suggests it operates through universal emotional structures rooted in moral psychology. Only one marginal variation was observed—Southern Mediterranean consumers expressed a greater likelihood of public complaining in response to cool brand hate, reflecting cultural norms of communal resistance and moral signaling (Putra & Lee, 2022). Overall, the AEB model contributes to a next-generation theory of brand hate that captures both emotional complexity and behavioral outcomes. By distinguishing types of hate and contextual drivers, the model offers a multi-layered explanation that transcends the limitations of past relational paradigms (Fournier, 1998) and bridges the cognitive and cultural perspectives.

Managerial Implications

Our study offers valuable insights for brand managers by translating the Antecedents–Emotions–Behaviors (AEB) framework into actionable strategies. First, understanding the multidimensional nature of brand hate (cold, cool, hot) enables firms to develop differentiated response strategies tailored to the emotional intensity and behavioral risk. Cold brand hate, marked by passive disengagement and symbolic incongruity, can be mitigated through re-engagement campaigns and identity-based repositioning to realign the brand with consumer self-concept. In contrast, cool and hot brand hate—rooted in perceived injustice, ideological incompatibility, and anger—demand more proactive and transparent approaches, including ethical realignment, public acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and value-based communication. As Kucuk (2019a) suggests in his brand hate management model, these responses must also account for the metamorphosis of the brand hater. This process begins with dissatisfaction and may escalate to activism or retaliation if not addressed early. Hence, it becomes essential for firms to deploy both proactive strategies (e.g., symbolic listening, brand audits, issue sensitivity monitoring) and reactive tactics (e.g., service recovery, brand negotiation, online redress systems). Second, monitoring both personal antecedents (e.g., negative experiences) and societal pressures (e.g., subjective norms) enables brands to anticipate the evolution of brand hate and intervene at the appropriate stage. Third, the use of digital sentiment analysis and real-time feedback loops can support early detection of emotional escalation, preventing the shift from cold or cool hate to hot, behaviorally destructive forms. Finally, the finding that brand hate mechanisms are largely unaffected by cultural moderation suggests that global brand strategies should focus on universal emotional triggers, such as fairness, dignity, and trust, rather than relying solely on culturally tailored campaigns. Nonetheless, the tactical expression of recovery should remain context-sensitive, especially in societies where communal values and public signaling play a stronger role. Ultimately, by aligning emotional typologies with tailored managerial interventions, the AEB model offers a roadmap to navigate consumer negativity and transform it into strategic opportunities for brand resilience, trust restoration, and long-term equity protection.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the analysis of brand hate over time; future longitudinal studies could explore its evolution. While focused on the Mediterranean region, replicating this framework in other contexts would test its generalizability. Self-reported data may introduce biases; future research could incorporate behavioral data. Lastly, exploring the interplay between cognitive dissonance, emotional regulation, and brand hate could deepen

understanding. In conclusion, this study provides a robust framework that integrates antecedents, emotional mechanisms, and outcomes, highlighting both the universal nature of brand hate and strategic approaches for managing its impact. Future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to explore how brand hate escalates—particularly transitions from cold to cool and eventually hot brand hate—under conditions of repeated injustice, unresolved complaints, or external triggers such as social crises or scandals. Second, this study is contextually grounded in the Mediterranean region, offering valuable cross-national insights from culturally diverse, yet historically interconnected, societies. Nevertheless, brand hate is a global phenomenon, and future studies should replicate the AEB framework across non-Mediterranean and non-Western contexts, such as Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America, to assess the model's cross-cultural robustness and detect context-specific antecedents or behaviors. Comparative studies could further explore whether the relative intensity of brand hate types, or the role of specific antecedents (e.g., symbolic incongruity vs. ideological incompatibility), varies across cultural value systems, levels of economic development, or media environments.

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