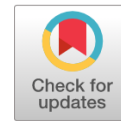




Scientific Annals of Economics and Business  
70 (4), 2023, 603-628  
DOI: 10.47743/saeb-2023-0040



## How Harmful Brand Hate Can Be: The Moderating Role of Neuroticism and Extraversion

Patrícia Marques dos Santos\*<sup>ID</sup>, Cristela Maia Bairrada\*\*<sup>ID</sup>,  
Arnaldo Fernandes de Matos Coelho\*\*\*<sup>ID</sup>

**Abstract:** This research analyses some of the antecedents and consequences of brand hate and examines the moderating effects of neuroticism and extraversion personality traits on behavioral outcomes. After collecting 375 responses, the data analysis was based on the structural equation modeling. Results show that symbolic incongruity, ideological incompatibility, and perceived value are predictors of brand hate, and that brand hate influences negative word-of-mouth, anti-brand actions and complaining. The relationship between brand hate and behavioral results are reinforced for consumers with high neuroticism traits and, in contrast, are attenuated in consumers with high extraversion traits. This investigation innovates by combining signaling theory and expectancy violation theories to explain the emergence of brand hate and its impacts on brand-related outcomes. It particularly explores the possibility of a curvilinear relationship, where brand hate tends to grow exponentially with the intensity of the signals.

**Keywords:** consumer brand relationship; brand hate; consumer personality; neuroticism; extraversion.

**JEL classification:** M31.

\* Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, Portugal; e-mail: [patriciamsantos0396@gmail.com](mailto:patriciamsantos0396@gmail.com).

\*\* Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, Portugal; e-mail: [cristela.bairrada@uc.pt](mailto:cristela.bairrada@uc.pt) (corresponding author).

\*\*\* Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra, Portugal; e-mail: [acoelho@fe.uc.pt](mailto:acoelho@fe.uc.pt).

**Article history:** Received 26 January 2023 | Accepted 15 December 2023 | Published online 18 December 2023

**To cite this article:** Santos, P. M., Bairrada, C. M., Coelho, A. F. M. (2023). How Harmful Brand Hate Can Be: The Moderating Role of Neuroticism and Extraversion. *Scientific Annals of Economics and Business*, 70(4), 603-628. <https://doi.org/10.47743/saeb-2023-0040>.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Emotions, whether positive or negative, are integral to the dynamics of marketing and the relationships formed between consumers and brands (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005). Consumers often establish emotional connections with brands, ranging from weak to strong and from positive to negative (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016). While much research has focused on positive relationships, there has been a notable gap in exploring negative connections (Fetscherin, 2019; Palusuk *et al.*, 2019; Joshi & Yadav, 2021; Roy *et al.*, 2022). Negative emotions can wield a more profound influence on customer attitudes and behavior, giving rise to negative relationships (Fetscherin, 2019). Consequently, brand hate, an intense negative customer response akin to seeking revenge is emerging because of poor consumption experiences or brands engaging in deceptive practices (Alvarez *et al.*, 2023).

In the digital age, consumers wield more power, and negative behaviors have gained prevalence and significance (Kucuk, 2019; Joshi & Yadav, 2021; Roy *et al.*, 2022). According to Baumeister *et al.* (2001), individuals are more inclined to share negative experiences or compose negative reviews than positive ones. Furthermore, negative information tends to carry more weight than positive information (Kanouse, 1984), and a single consumer's negative experience can sway both current and potential customers, leading to tangible losses for a brand (Kähr *et al.*, 2016; Bryson *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, negative relationships between consumers and brands can be detrimental, resulting in behaviors such as rejection and avoidance (Palusuk *et al.*, 2019; Kucuk, 2021; Pinto & Brandão, 2021). Even positive relationships may transform into hate and revenge (Grégoire *et al.*, 2009; Johnson *et al.*, 2011; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the exploration of this topic is undeniably relevant.

The burgeoning interest in brand hate, acknowledged as the most severe negative emotion consumers can harbor toward brands (Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Kucuk, 2019; Zhang & Laroche, 2020; Japutra *et al.*, 2021), underscores the need for more focused research. Despite existing literature, a lack of consensus on the causes and effects of brand hate persists (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Japutra *et al.*, 2021; Kucuk, 2021). Additionally, there is a demand for investigations into the role of various moderators to aid scholars and marketing managers in comprehending and categorizing different brand conditions (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Bayarassou *et al.*, 2020; Zhang & Laroche, 2020). Moreover, several aspects require further exploration, such as the essential study of how individual differences in personality relate to brand hate (Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Fetscherin, 2019; Islam *et al.*, 2019; Kucuk, 2019; Japutra *et al.*, 2021; Roy *et al.*, 2022). Understanding how certain consumers may be predisposed to revenge and engage in brand hate behaviors of varying intensities is crucial, considering the limited research on whether individual personality traits negatively impact brands, leading to anti-brand behaviors (Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Kucuk, 2019; Japutra *et al.*, 2021; Brandão *et al.*, 2022).

This study aims to further our understanding of brand hate by examining its possible causes and consequences, with a focus on the role of personality. Therefore, to fill these gaps, we propose a model that investigates how a set of cognitive dissonance factors like perceived value, ideological incompatibility, and symbolic incongruity, may impact brand hate, and, through it, lead to customer complaining, negative word-of-mouth and anti-brand actions. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the moderating effects of two consumer personality traits - neuroticism and extraversion - on the behavioral outcomes of brand hate.

Therefore, to address this objective, our study leverages two theoretical frameworks: signaling theory and expectancy violation theory (EVT). Signaling theory proves invaluable in comprehending behavior when two parties, such as companies and consumers, possess disparate information sets (Connelly *et al.*, 2011). The sender faces the decision of whether and how to communicate this information, while the receiver undertakes the task of interpreting the signal. On the other hand, EVT contends that deviations from anticipated actions significantly influence individuals' reactions to a company's behavior (Burgoon, 1993). Expectations function as benchmarks for consumer-appropriate behavior, serving as criteria to assess a company's conduct. When behavior strays from the expected norm, an expectancy violation occurs (Burgoon, 1993).

Our study aims to scrutinize how the interplay between signals and expectancy violations may lead to an intensified and unpredictable response, thereby establishing a curvilinear relationship between brand hate and its antecedents. While the impacts of these antecedents have been explored in various contexts, the precise intensity and direction of these effects remain unclear (Zhang & Laroche, 2020). Given the elusive nature of brand hate as an extreme emotion, our study seeks to test the nuanced impact of the antecedents on brand hate. Furthermore, existing research on brand hate has predominantly centered on English, American, and German consumers. To counteract this trend and enhance the cross-cultural understanding of brand hate, our study adopts a quantitative approach in a culturally distinct country: Portugal. Drawing on Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Portugal is characterized as a less indulgent and more restraint society, where desires and impulses are often controlled, allowing less room for extreme emotions (Hofstede, 2021). As Abdelwahab *et al.* (2020) aptly noted, "Studying consumer perceptions towards brands from different parts of the world has been a topic of great interest to marketing researchers" (p. 378). This study contributes to this global perspective by examining brand hate in a unique cultural context, shedding light on the universal and culturally specific factors that influence consumer-brand relationships.

The study begins with an introduction and proceeds to provide a conceptual background and present the research hypotheses (Section 2). The research methodology, including the questionnaire design, data collection, and sampling, is then described (Section 3). The findings are presented in the research results Section 4. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research (Section 5).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND INVESTIGATION HYPOTHESES

### 2.1 Brand hate concept

Hate is the second most significant emotion (Fehr & Russell, 1984) and is considered one of the most negative emotions (Shaver *et al.*, 1987). Researchers have rarely identified hate as a primary emotion (Arnold, 1960). Most studies regard hate as a complex emotion that can include multiple components (Sternberg, 2003). Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Hate posits that hate encompasses multiple emotions that can manifest in different ways and on different occasions. According to Sternberg (2003), hate consists of three emotions: disgust, anger-fear, and devaluation-diminution, resulting in seven different types of hate (Table no. 1). The commonly considered dimensional emotions of hate include disgust, anger, contempt, and fear (Fetscherin, 2019).

Table no. 1 – Types of hate

Types of hate	Disgust (negation of intimacy)	Anger-fear (passion)	Devaluation-diminution (decision-commitment)
Cool hate	X	-	-
Hot hate	-	X	-
Cold hate	-	-	X
Boiling hate	X	X	-
Simmering hate	X	-	X
Seething hate	-	X	X
Burning hate	X	X	X

Source: adapted from Sternberg (2003)

The concept of brand hate was first introduced in the study by Grégoire *et al.* (2009), where the authors proposed that there are two types of consumer desires that can represent different expressions of brand hate: the desire for revenge and the desire for avoidance. Johnson *et al.* (2011) further defined brand hate as a strong consumer opposition to brands, primarily represented by the intention of revenge. Subsequently, Bryson *et al.* (2013, p. 395) characterized brand hate as an "extremely negative affective component of the attitude towards a brand." More recent studies, such as those by Zarantonello *et al.* (2016), Hegner *et al.* (2017) and Hashim and Kasana (2019), have regarded brand hate as an emotional construct. These studies have defined brand hate as the most intense negative emotion that consumers can feel towards a brand. For example, Zarantonello *et al.* (2016) proposed that brand hate includes two main dimensions: (1) active brand hate, which includes emotions such as anger and contempt/disgust and (2) passive brand hate, which comprises emotions related to fear, disappointment, shame, and dehumanization. Kucuk (2016, p. 20) defined brand hate as being "[...] a psychological state whereby a consumer forms intense negative emotions and detachment toward brands that perform poorly and give consumers bad and painful experiences on both individual and social levels." The concept of brand hate is mostly discussed from an emotional perspective in the literature (Kucuk, 2021).

Signaling theory and EVT offer valuable frameworks for understanding how personality traits influence the formation of expectations, which in turn can lead to brand hate and subsequent consumer actions. These theories highlight the dynamic interplay between consumer psychology, brand signaling, and the impact of expectancy violations on consumer behavior. Individuals use signals to convey information about themselves to others (Berger & Heath, 2007; Schweidel *et al.*, 2022). In the context of branding, consumers may use brands/products to signal their personality traits, values, and affiliations (Wernerfelt, 1990; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). EVT explores how individuals react when their expectations are violated in social interactions (Burgoon, 1993). In the context of brands, consumers form expectations about how a brand should behave or the experience it should provide (Krishnamurthy & Kumar, 2015). Therefore, certain personality traits may influence the signals individuals seek from brands (Lamb & Butler, 2018; Rajavi *et al.*, 2019). For instance, a person with a high need for uniqueness may be drawn to brands that signal individuality. At the same time, individual differences in personality can influence the formation of expectations (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). A person with a high need for security may have specific expectations from a brand related to product safety and reliability. Consequently, when signals are misleading and may frustrate customer expectations, a

unique and extreme reaction like hate may arise. The natural consequences may be the triggering of actions that may hurt the brand, like complaining, anti-brand actions and negative word-of-mouth. Based on the previous concepts, this study has developed a conceptual model using signaling theory and EVT. [Table no. 2](#) shows how literature is dealing with these variables and how we can integrate them in a singular model to test new understanding and a better comprehension of the brand hate.

**Table no. 2 – Underlying foundational theories**

Theory	Variables	References
Signaling theory	Symbolic incongruity	-
	Ideological incompatibility	Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2019) and Zhong <i>et al.</i> (2022)
	Perceived value	Biswas <i>et al.</i> (2002), Arslanagic-Kalajdzic <i>et al.</i> (2019), Wei and Ho (2019) and Christen <i>et al.</i> (2022)
	Negative word-of-mouth	Ivens and Schaarschmidt (2015) and Jin <i>et al.</i> (2023)
	Anti-brand actions Complaining	- Cronin and Fox (2010) and Hu <i>et al.</i> (2015)
Expectancy violation theory (EVT)	Symbolic incongruity	-
	Ideological incompatibility	Lin-Hi and Blumberg (2018), He <i>et al.</i> (2021) and Abbasi and Amran (2023)
	Perceived value	-
	Negative word-of-mouth	Sato <i>et al.</i> (2018), Nazifi <i>et al.</i> (2021), Bhaduri and Goswami (2022) and Brandão <i>et al.</i> (2023)
	Anti-brand actions Complaining	He <i>et al.</i> (2021) Nazifi <i>et al.</i> (2021) and Brandão <i>et al.</i> (2023)

## 2.2 Antecedents of brand hate

Most research classifies brand hate antecedents into three main groups (Hegner *et al.*, 2017): product-related, such as satisfaction; consumer-related, such as personal values and symbolic incongruity; and contextual-related, such as ideological incompatibility. The theory of hate has been used to support the impact of several brand hate antecedents (Hashim & Kasana, 2019). Thus, drawing from signaling theory and EVT, this investigation aims to analyze the effects of symbolic incongruity, ideological incompatibility, and perceived value, to better understand the nature of these effects.

Typically, companies aim to send out positive signals to individuals and avoid sending negative information deliberately in order to reduce information asymmetry and positively influence desired outcomes (Connelly *et al.*, 2011). However, in the interaction process, negative signals may be sent out unintentionally and confuse the receivers (Connelly *et al.*, 2011). Consumers interpret numerous signals, such as observability, cost, and consistency, and assess companies' behavior and brand-related values based on the expectations developed through companies' communicated positive signals. Signalers and receivers have conflicting interests, and an expectancy violation may cause serious conflicts in a relationship (Meyer *et al.*, 2019). The failure of brands to meet customers' expectations tends to generate negative feelings and experiences about brands (Roy *et al.*, 2022), leading to negative emotions such as hate.

Since we are dealing with extreme emotions, we posit that the relationship between antecedents and brand hate may be more complex than a simple linear relationship, and needs to be investigated.

### **2.2.1 Symbolic incongruity**

Symbolic incongruity occurs when there is a lack of coherence between consumers' self-image and the brand image, resulting in the brand representing an undesired image to the consumer (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). According to Zarantonello *et al.* (2018, p. 556), the incongruity can be primarily of two types: "either the company's brand image does not fit the self-image of the consumers, or the self-image of the consumer does not fit the company's brand image." Incongruity is related to the discrepancy between the symbolic meanings of a brand and the expectations and sense of identity of the consumers (Islam *et al.*, 2019; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2020). When the brand image does not align with the self-image that the consumer intends to project to the outside world, they may intentionally distance themselves from those brands, share their negative experience (Wolter *et al.*, 2016), and develop negative emotions (Romani *et al.*, 2012), including brand hate (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018; Hashim & Kasana, 2019; Islam *et al.*, 2019; Pinto & Brandão, 2021). Also, Attiq *et al.* (2022, p. 1) reveal that functional and symbolic incongruity predict brand hate and dissatisfaction, which is positively related with brand retaliation. Therefore, we predict that:

**H1:** *The symbolic incongruity has a direct and positive impact on brand hate*

### **2.2.2 Ideological incompatibility**

Ideological incompatibility refers to a discrepancy between the beliefs and values upheld by a brand and those held by consumers (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2020). This includes behaviors that individuals perceive as morally, legally, socially, or ethically unacceptable (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Consumers are not indifferent to company infractions. When they perceive irresponsible behavior, such as violations of human rights or community values, or environmentally harmful practices, they tend to develop negative emotions (Grappi *et al.*, 2013; Brandão & Popoli, 2022). These transgressions violate consumer expectations of corporate social responsibility and are a major cause of brand hatred (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018; Brandão *et al.*, 2022; Brandão & Popoli, 2023). Consumers tend to harbor negative feelings towards brands that go against their personal principles and moral values (Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Kucuk, 2018; Hashim & Kasana, 2019). The more severe the infractions, the stronger the feelings of brand hatred (Romani *et al.*, 2015) and the less likely the consumer is to forgive the brand (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015). Therefore, we propose that ideological incompatibility is a significant factor in the development of brand hatred:

**H2:** *Ideological incompatibility has a direct and positive impact on brand hate*

### **2.2.3 Perceived value**

In the context of branding, the perceived value of a brand represents a consumer's overall assessment of the usefulness of a product or service, based on the comparison between the benefits received (e.g. functional, experiential or symbolic aspects) and the monetary and/or non-monetary costs (e.g. time, effort) (Zeithaml, 1988). When the

individual perceives that the benefits received are disproportionately lower than what they expected, dissatisfaction increases (Vera, 2015). Perceived value has been shown to be systematically related to individuals' preferences and behaviors (Gounaris *et al.*, 2007) and is associated with important consumer responses (La *et al.*, 2009), including its potential to influence brand hatred. The perceived value also affects the emotional connection with brands (Junaid & Hussain, 2016). However, the relationship between perceived value and brand hate has not yet been tested. Song and Qu (2019) demonstrated that low perceptions or appraisals of utilitarian value evoke negative emotions. Therefore, and considering the paradigm that cognitive assessments lead to emotional responses (Bagozzi, 1992), it can be expected that:

**H3:** *Perceived value has a direct and negative impact on brand hate*

### 2.3 Consequences of brand hate

Brand hate may arise as a response to violations of expectations and, as it is an extreme emotion, it can result in various brand-related outcomes (Palusuk *et al.*, 2019). These outcomes can include the most disruptive and damaging, such as anti-brand actions, such as complaining and negative word-of-mouth (Zhang & Laroche, 2020), which will be the focus of our investigation. Other consequences of negative relationships triggered by brand hate include brand rejection, brand divorce, brand opposition, brand revenge, and brand sabotage (Fetscherin, 2019). However, as the Portuguese society is typically less tolerant and more controlled, we decided to focus on incremental negative anti-brand behaviors such as complaining behavior, negative word-of-mouth, and anti-brand actions.

#### 2.3.1 Complaining

Complaint behavior refers to when customers explicitly express their dissatisfaction to a company (Grégoire *et al.*, 2009). Some authors view this behavior as a form of direct revenge (Grégoire *et al.*, 2010) while others see it as a constructive punitive action (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018) that aims to change the company's practices or address the problem (Bougie *et al.*, 2003). Unlike other anti-brand actions, complaining provides the company with an opportunity to address and rectify the incident or underlying causes of the customer's extreme dissatisfaction, which is crucial for maintaining long-term customer relationships (Fox, 2008). Complaining behavior has been widely studied in the marketing literature (Wetzer *et al.*, 2007) as an indirect form of retaliation (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008). Studies have shown a relationship between negative emotions and complaining behavior (Tronvoll, 2011; Romani *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, Zarantonello *et al.* (2018) found that brand hate plays a decisive role in consumer complaints. Therefore, we predict that:

**H4:** *Brand hate has a direct and positive impact on complaining*

#### 2.3.2 Negative word-of-mouth

Negative word-of-mouth refers to when consumers share their negative experiences with friends and/or family (Singh & Wilkes, 1996; Bougie *et al.*, 2003; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008) in order to express their negative experiences, discourage others from using the brand/company in question, and recommend alternative options (Grappi *et al.*, 2013). Negative word-of-mouth is considered more credible than positive word-of-mouth and can

lead to more negative behavioral intentions (Kanouse, 1984). It is particularly damaging to the brand because it can be spread to a wide audience, leaving the company with limited opportunities to recover the customer and address the underlying causes of dissatisfaction (Fox, 2008). Research has shown that negative word-of-mouth can be intensified when the problem causing the dissatisfaction is severe (Singh & Wilkes, 1996). For example, negative emotions experienced by consumers such as anger, frustration, and irritation directly influence negative word-of-mouth (Grappi *et al.*, 2013; Yadav & Chakrabarti, 2022) and are linked to destructive goals such as venting feelings and taking revenge on companies (Wetzer *et al.*, 2007). Several authors have highlighted the impact of brand hate on negative word-of-mouth (Fetscherin, 2019; Curina *et al.*, 2020; Pinto & Brandão, 2021). Zhang and Laroche (2020) have also demonstrated that negative word-of-mouth can be caused by different emotions at different levels of brand hate. Therefore, we predict that:

**H5:** *Brand hate has a direct and positive impact on negative word-of-mouth*

### 2.3.3 Anti-brand actions

Anti-brand actions refer to consumers' obsessive actions against companies that engage in inappropriate behavior (Grappi *et al.*, 2013). When individuals perceive injustices, they tend to have negative emotions and adopt negative behaviors with the intention of punishing and damaging the brand and achieving a sense of social justice (Romani *et al.*, 2015; Kucuk, 2016). Anti-brand actions involve a desire to harm the brand and a decision to terminate all positive relationships with it (Johnson *et al.*, 2011). While anti-brand actions existed before the internet, the availability of online tools and social networks has increased the level of consumer activism (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). Today, with the existence of anti-brand communities, websites, social networks, or blogs, activists have more tools to take anti-brand actions, express their dissatisfaction, exchange anti-brand information, organize boycotts, and pursue legal action (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Grappi *et al.*, 2013; Brandão & Popoli, 2022, 2023). These actions are a strong behavioral indicator of brand hate (Johnson *et al.*, 2011; Romani *et al.*, 2015; Kucuk, 2018). Therefore, it is expected that:

**H6:** *Brand hate has a direct and positive impact on anti-brand actions*

## 2.4 The moderating role of neuroticism and extraversion

In marketing literature, personality traits are frequently utilized to investigate a range of emotional responses (Singh *et al.*, 2021). Personality has been shown to exert a significant influence on the attitudes and behaviors of individuals (Islam *et al.*, 2017). However, there is limited research on whether consumers' personality traits impact their negative behaviors toward brands (Japutra *et al.*, 2021; Brandão *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, understanding personality is relevant for creating a context and understanding the circumstances in which the relationship between brand hate and its consequences takes place, as it may differ across different traits. Additionally, understanding the characteristics of the recipients of signals is of crucial importance for signalers. This article focuses on two of the five major dimensions of personality, namely neuroticism and extraversion, as they have been recognized as the "Big Two" traits (Watson *et al.*, 1999). According to DeNeve and Cooper (1998), these traits have a strong affective component and deserve special attention: extraverts tend to experience positive emotions and exhibit positive behavior,



while neurotics tend to experience negativity and exhibit negative affect (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991; Watson & Clark, 1992; Verduyn & Brans, 2012).

#### **2.4.1 Neuroticism**

Neuroticism, also referred to as emotional instability, pertains to an individual's tendency to experience negative and distressing emotions such as anger, depression, frustration, anxiety, and vulnerability (John & Srivastava, 1999; Kucuk, 2019; Singh *et al.*, 2021). Consumers with high levels of neurotic traits tend to feel anxious, have difficulty coping with stress, and have lower levels of emotional attachment to a brand (Islam *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, they are often prone to negative emotional states, emotional instability, and heightened sensitivity or intensity in response to negative events (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). Personality traits have been shown to systematically influence the behavior of individuals (Aaker *et al.*, 2004; Islam *et al.*, 2017). Previous research has found that the vengeful attitude of consumers is associated with neuroticism (Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991). As such, it is believed that consumers with high scores in neuroticism are more likely to engage in negative behaviors when they dislike a brand than those with more stable personalities. Therefore, it is expected that neuroticism will strengthen the relationship between brand hate and negative behaviors. Based on this, we propose that:

**H7a:** *Neuroticism reinforces the relationship between brand hate and complaining*

**H7b:** *Neuroticism reinforces the relationship between brand hate and negative word-of-mouth*

**H7c:** *Neuroticism reinforces the relationship between brand hate and anti-brand actions*

#### **2.4.2 Extraversion**

Extraversion is a dimension of personality characterized by excitability, assertiveness, and high emotional expressiveness (Kucuk, 2019). Individuals with extraversion traits tend to express themselves through sociability, energy, optimism, confidence, and positive emotions (John & Srivastava, 1999). According to DeNeve and Cooper (1998), extraversion leads consumers to experience positive emotional states and feel good about themselves and the world. Individuals with high levels of extraversion tend to form strong emotional connections with certain brands and are more likely to express their opinions than introverts (Watson & Clark, 1992).

Research by Kucuk (2019) has identified that extroverted consumers can be associated with "cold hate," the lowest level of the hierarchical structure of brand hate. This reaction is characterized by distancing oneself from the brand without engaging in aggressive or vengeful actions (Sternberg, 2003; Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Kucuk, 2019). As a result, it is believed that consumers with high scores in extraversion may have less negative behavioral reactions when they dislike a brand. Therefore, it is expected that the relationship between brand hate and its consequences will be mitigated in the presence of extroverted individuals. Based on this, we propose that:

**H8a:** *Extraversion weakens the relationship between brand hate and complaining*

**H8b:** *Extraversion weakens the relationship between brand hate and negative word-of-mouth*

**H8c:** *Extraversion weakens the relationship between brand hate and anti-brand actions*

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 Conceptual model

The proposed conceptual model is illustrated in [Figure no. 1](#). The model innovatively examines the negative association between perceived value, a more functional variable, and brand hate, and explores the role of personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion as moderating variables.

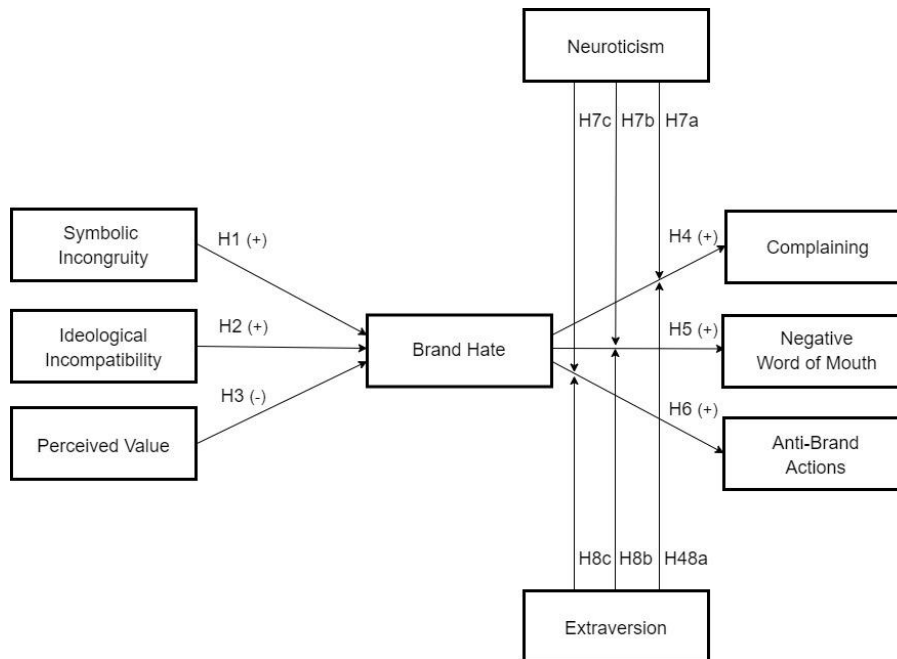


Figure no. 1 – Conceptual model

#### 3.2 Data collection and sample

The proposed hypotheses were tested using a quantitative research design and a structured questionnaire. A pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to evaluate the internal and external consistency of the questionnaire items, and identify potential issues. Data was collected online, through social networks Facebook and LinkedIn, using a snowball sampling technique, following the lines of research of [Curina et al. \(2020\)](#), [Zarantonello et al. \(2016\)](#) and [Tronvoll \(2011\)](#). The research focused on Facebook groups related to consumer protection, as it provided easy access to a large population of dissatisfied customers during the pandemic context. Each respondent was asked to identify five potential respondents. A total of 375 valid responses were collected from Portuguese consumers. Most of the investigations in the field are based on Anglo-Saxon countries, which may tend to be more open to risk and more indulgent. According to Hofstede's insights, Portuguese consumers are less indulgent, scoring 33, in contrast to the United Kingdom and the USA, which scored 69 and 68,

respectively. Portugal also exhibits double the level of uncertainty avoidance compared to these countries. The sample comprised of 50.4% women and 49.6% men, with an average age of approximately 36 years. In terms of profession, 56% were workers, 14.13% were workers/students, 19.47% were students, 4% were unemployed and 5.33% were retired. 62.66% of the respondents held a graduation. To control for non-response bias, we compared the answers collected during the first month to those collected later, using an independent samples t-test. No significant differences were found ( $p \geq 0.05$ ).

### 3.3 Measurement

Initially, the questionnaire asked respondents to recall a brand with which they had a very negative experience, following the same approach as Kucuk (2019), Zarantonello *et al.* (2016) and Romani *et al.* (2012). Variables were measured using metrics that had been previously developed and tested. Symbolic incongruence, ideological incompatibility and brand hate were measured using the scales developed by Hegner *et al.* (2017); perceived value was measured using the scale developed by Vera (2015); negative word-of-mouth and complaining were measured using the scales developed by Grégoire *et al.* (2009); anti-brand actions were measured using the scales developed by Japutra *et al.* (2018); and neuroticism and extraversion were measured using the scales developed by Islam *et al.* (2017). These scales were chosen because they are widely accepted, recognized, and used in the literature and because of their applicability to the research context. A seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree), was used to measure all variables.

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the psychometric properties of the scales and the fit of the measurement model. After purifying the model, which resulted in the elimination of three items (one from the symbolic incongruence scale and two from the brand hate scale), the final model showed a good fit, with IFI = 0.956, TLI = 0.948, CFI = 0.956, RMSEA = 0.064, and  $X^2/df = 2.550$ . Table no. 3 presents the results of the CFA.

**Table no. 3 – Results of confirmatory factor analysis**

Variable items	Standardized loading	Individual-item reliability	Definition adopted
<i>Symbolic incongruity:</i>			
The products and/or services of this brand do not reflect who I am.	–	–	It happens when there is a lack of coherence between consumers' self-image and the brand image.
The products and/or services of this brand do not fit my personality.	0.840		
I don't want to be seen with this brand.	0.844	21.524	
This brand does not represent who I am.	0.888	21.740	
This brand symbolizes the kind of person I don't want to be.	0.882	23.865	
<i>Ideological incompatibility:</i>			
In my opinion, this brand acts in an irresponsible way.	0.859		It occurs when there is a discrepancy between the beliefs and values upheld by a brand and those held by consumers.
In my opinion, this brand acts unethical.	0.900	23.699	
This brand violates moral standards.	0.891	23.271	
This brand does not match my values and beliefs.	0.862	21.912	
<i>Perceived value:</i>			
The products and/or services of this brand are useful.	0.903	22.928	Represents a consumer's overall assessment of the usefulness of a product
This brand has products and/or services that respond to my needs.	0.931	22.211	
	0.835		

Variable items	Standardized loading	Individual-item reliability	Definition adopted
When I buy this brand, I receive what I need.			or service, based on perceptions of what is received and what is given.
<i>Brand hate:</i>			
I am disgusted with this brand.	–	–	It is an extremely negative affective component of attitude towards a brand.
I do not tolerate this brand.	0.871		
The world would be a better place without this brand.	0.840	21.133	
I am totally irritated with this brand.	0.772	18.317	
This brand is horrible.	–	–	
I hate this brand.	0.874	22.699	
<i>Negative word-of-mouth:</i>			
I spread negative word of mouth about this brand.	0.904		It refers to when consumers share their negative experiences with others.
I speak ill of this brand with my friends and/or family.	0.980	32.557	
When my friends are looking for a product or service in this product category, I tell them not to buy that brand.	0.834	23.281	
<i>Anti-Brand actions:</i>			
Whenever I can, I will harm this brand.	0.836		Consumers' obsessive actions against companies that engage in inappropriate behavior. They involve a desire to harm the brand and a decision to terminate all positive relationships with it.
I could never again buy products and/or services from this brand.	0.812	19.131	
This brand is my enemy.	0.920	23.509	
I am a fanatic against this brand.	0.911	23.162	
<i>Complaining:</i>			
I have already complained about this brand:			It refers to when customers explicitly express their dissatisfaction to a company.
1 - to make your representatives have a bad time.	0.957		
2 - to be unpleasant with your representatives.	0.955	40.812	
3 - for someone in the organization to pay for their mistakes.	0.902	32.749	

**Table no. 4 – Standard deviation, correlations, cronbach's alpha, composite reliabilities and average variances extracted**

Variables	SD	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	AVE	CR
<b>X1</b>	1.409	<b>0.921</b>							0.746	0.922
<b>X2</b>	1.336	0.439	<b>0.930</b>						0.771	0.931
<b>X3</b>	1.183	-0.253	-0.069	<b>0.919</b>					0.793	0.920
<b>X4</b>	1.291	0.473	0.673	-0.336	<b>0.904</b>				0.706	0.906
<b>X5</b>	2.071	0.154	0.451	-0.093	0.495	<b>0.956</b>			0.880	0.957
<b>X6</b>	1.345	0.284	0.537	-0.158	0.567	0.324	<b>0.929</b>		0.824	0.933
<b>X7</b>	1.670	0.301	0.553	-0.306	0.794	0.654	0.547	<b>0.925</b>	0.759	0.926

Notes: X1 = Symbolic incongruity; X2 = Ideological incompatibility; X3 = Perceived value; X4 = Brand hate; X5 = Complaining; X6 = Negative word-of-mouth; X7 = Anti-Brand actions.

SD = standard deviation; diagonal entries are cronbach's alpha coefficients; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted

Composite reliability (CR) and the average variance extracted (AVE) were examined. As seen in Table no. 4, all values are in accordance with the literature recommendations.

There is evidence of discriminant validity, since the square correlation between each pair of variables is lower than their corresponding AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

### 3.4 Common Method Bias

To identify the common variance among all variables in the conceptual model, a Harman's single factor test and a common latent factor analysis were performed in accordance with the recommendations of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003). The Harman's test revealed that six factors were extracted, and that the first factor explained only 20% of the variance. However, it should be noted that the Harman's test should be used in conjunction with other assessments of common method variance (CMV) (Hulland *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted, restricting all items of the model to load on a common single factor (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The resulting fit indices indicated that the model did not provide a good fit for the data, with IFI = 0.458, TLI = 0.407, CFI = 0.457, RMSEA = 0.217, and  $\chi^2/df = 18.55$ . Therefore, it seems that common method bias is not a problem as we used a combination of methods to assess it (Coelho *et al.*, 2020).

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Hypotheses testing

The adjustment of the structural model is within the appropriate standards, with IFI = 0.944, TLI = 0.936, CFI = 0.944, RMSEA = 0.071 and  $\chi^2/df = 2.882$ . In Table no. 5 shows the results of the hypothesis test, through which it is possible to support all the research hypotheses previously presented.

Table no. 5 – Results of hypotheses test

Hypotheses			$\beta$	<i>p</i>
H1	Symbolic incongruity	→ Brand hate	0.114	**
H2	Ideological incompatibility	→ Brand hate	0.625	***
H3	Perceived value	→ Brand hate	-0.259	***
H4	Brand hate	→ Complaining	0.546	***
H5	Brand hate	→ Negative word-of-mouth	0.599	***
H6	Brand hate	→ Anti-brand actions	0.820	***

Note: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$

Regarding the antecedents of brand hate, and as predicted, it was found that symbolic incongruity (H1:  $b = 0.114$ ;  $p = **$ ) and ideological incompatibility (H2:  $b = 0.625$ ;  $p = ***$ ) are positively related to brand hate and that perceived value (H3:  $b = -0.259$ ;  $p = ***$ ) has a negative impact on brand hate. Moreover, results show that ideological incompatibility is the variable that has the strongest impact on the formation of brand hate. Brand hate has a direct and positive impact on complaining (H4:  $b = 0.546$ ;  $p = ***$ ), negative word-of-mouth (H5:  $b = 0.599$ ;  $p = ***$ ) and on anti-brand actions (H6:  $b = 0.820$ ;  $p = ***$ ). Of these hate outcomes, the anti-brand actions stand out as the consequent in which the brand hate has a greater effect.

## 4.2 Moderating effects

The evaluation of the moderating effects was performed using a multigroup analysis, using AMOS. Two groups were created for each moderator based on average: neuroticism ( $\bar{x} = 3.6048$ ); and extraversion ( $\bar{x} = 4.9232$ ). Multigroup analysis allows researchers to compare the structural models across different groups. This is particularly useful when examining moderation effects to determine if the relationships between variables differ significantly between groups (Byrne, 2004). At the same time, it helps assess measurement invariance, ensuring that the constructs are measured consistently across groups (Van De Schoot *et al.*, 2015). This is essential for drawing valid comparisons and making accurate interpretations of moderation effects (Yu & Shek, 2014). Finally, multigroup analysis provides a way to test the robustness of moderation effects. By examining how well the moderation holds across diverse groups, researchers can increase the generalizability and robustness of their findings.

Metric invariance was tested to proceed with the multigroup analysis. For this purpose, it was developed for each moderating variable a CFA with the groups described above. In the case of extraversion, the free model presents a CFI of 0.948 and the restricted model a CFI of 0.945. As for neuroticism, the free model presents a CFI of 0.939 and the restricted model a CFI of 0.937. Following Cheung and Rensvold (2002), a CFI difference below 0.01 is indicative of equivalence, which supports the expected metric invariance.

Regarding neuroticism, as shown in Table no. 6, it was found that the positive impact of brand hate on the complaining appeared to be higher for consumers with high neuroticism traits ( $b = 0.593$ ;  $p = ***$ ) than for emotionally stable consumers ( $b = 0.424$ ;  $p = ***$ ), supporting H7a. Similarly, the impact of brand hate on negative word-of-mouth is stronger for individuals with high levels of neuroticism ( $b = 0.607$ ;  $p = ***$ ) than for individuals with low levels of neuroticism ( $b = 0.557$ ;  $p = ***$ ), therefore supporting H7b.

In the case of anti-brand actions, the group of neurotic consumers contributes more to explain anti-brand actions ( $b = 0.808$ ;  $p = ***$ ) than the other group under test ( $b = 0.783$ ;  $p = ***$ ), thereby supporting H7c.

**Table no. 6 – Results of neuroticism moderator**

Hypotheses	Global sample (N = 375)		Low neuroticism (N = 191)		High neuroticism (N = 184)	
	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$	$\beta$	$p$
H7a: Brand hate → Complaining	0.546	***	0.424	***	0.593	***
H7b: Brand hate → Negative word-of-mouth	0.599	***	0.557	***	0.607	***
H7c: Brand hate → Anti-brand actions	0.820	***	0.783	***	0.808	***

Note: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table no. 7, in relation to the complaining, it was found that the effect of brand hate is higher for consumers with low extraversion traits ( $b = 0.593$ ;  $p = ***$ ) than for extroverted consumers ( $b = 0.456$ ;  $p = ***$ ), thus supporting H8a. Similarly, introverted individuals contribute more to explain negative word-of-mouth ( $b = 0.649$ ;  $p = ***$ ) than extroverted consumers ( $b = 0.568$ ;  $p = ***$ ), supporting H8b.

Finally, the group of consumers with low extraversion traits also revealed to be more prone to anti-brand actions ( $b = 0.856$ ;  $p = ***$ ) than the high extraversion group ( $b = 0.774$ ;  $p = ***$ ), therefore, **H8c** is supported.

**Table no. 7 – Results of extraversion moderator**

Hypotheses	Global sample (N = 375)		Low extraversion (N = 172)		High extraversion (N = 203)	
	b	p	b	p	b	p
H8a: Brand hate → Complaining	0.546	***	0.593	***	0.456	***
H8b: Brand hate → Negative word-of-mouth	0.599	***	0.649	***	0.568	***
H8c: Brand hate → Anti-brand actions	0.820	***	0.856	***	0.774	***

Note: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$

#### 4.2.1 Investigating the brand hate antecedent's curvilinear relationship

At the same time, we performed a hierarchical linear regression testing the possibility of a curvilinear relationship between brand hate and its antecedents. We split the data base in subsets regarding high and low neuroticism and high and low extraversion. Results on **Table no. 8** show that ideological incompatibility and perceived value seem to have a pure curvilinear relationship with brand hate, and these relationships were tested in these subgroups.

**Table no. 8 – Results of hierarchical linear regression: The curvilinear effects**

	Brand hate							
	b	p	b	p	b	p	b	p
Intercept	2.823	***	3.095	***	4.129	***	2.305	***
Symbolic incongruity	0.111	***	-0.034	n.s.	0.122	***	0.105	***
Ideological incompatibility	0.482	***	0.483	***	-0.206	n.s.	0.482	***
Perceived value	-0.219	***	-0.215	***	-0.216	***	0.106	n.s.
Symbolic incongruity squared	-	-	0.016	n.s.	-	-	-	-
Ideological incompatibility squared	-	-	-	-	0.076	***	-	-
Perceived value squared	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.042	**
Adjusted R2	0.495		0.494		0.520		0.500	
F	123.019 (***)		92.412 (***)		102.406 (***)		94.526 (***)	

Note: \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; n.s. =  $p > 0.1$  (not significant)

## 5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The brand is one of the most valuable and influential intangible assets that organizations possess (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Therefore, it is essential for companies to understand the signals that influence consumers' interpretation and expectations in order to effectively address brand hate, which is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon that can harm a company's reputation and influence the entire market (Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Kucuk, 2021).

In terms of antecedents, the results of this study show that symbolic incongruity (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Hashim & Kasana, 2019; Islam *et al.*, 2019), ideological incompatibility (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018)

and perceived value (Song & Qu, 2019) can trigger brand hate. Ideological incompatibility appears to be the most significant predictor of brand hate. When individuals perceive a company's behavior as morally, legally, socially or ethically unacceptable, they develop negative feelings and hate towards the brand. In addition, companies must ensure that their brand identity aligns with consumers' identities to avoid discrepancies. Furthermore, this study provides empirical support for the relationship between perceived value and brand hate. Specifically, it shows that a low perception of value can trigger brand hate, which is a novel finding in the literature on brand hate.

Additionally, the relationship between brand hate and its antecedents may be curvilinear (Figure no. 2). The role of extraversion and neuroticism appear to play an important role in modifying and even reversing the impact of these antecedents on brand hate. Brand hate increases due to symbolic incongruity and ideological incompatibility at a faster rate when extraversion is high and neuroticism is low, and at a slower rate in the opposite situation. Brand hate tends to remain higher in the case of high neuroticism, and increases faster in the case of low neuroticism when the switching point is surpassed. Brand hate tends to remain higher in the case of low extraversion (Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Kucuk, 2019) and increases faster when the switching point is surpassed. In terms of the impact of perceived value, brand hate tends to decrease when value increases. This decrease is stronger in the cases of low extraversion and high neuroticism. Extraversion leads to a stable relationship with a functional aspect such as value (Kucuk, 2019), while neuroticism tends to produce a stronger reaction (Islam *et al.*, 2017).

Extraversion appears to lower reactions, even if they tend to increase faster when the inflection point is surpassed, and neuroticism seems to boost reactions in terms of brand hate (Robinson, 2007).

The results of this study indicate that brand hate has a significant impact on negative word-of-mouth (Curina *et al.*, 2020; Zhang & Laroche, 2020), anti-brand actions (Romani *et al.*, 2015; Kucuk, 2018) and complaining to the company (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018). Brand hate leads to severe behaviors such as anti-brand actions, but it also encourages individuals to share their negative experiences with friends and/or family, increasing the number of complaints. However, the study found that anti-brand actions are the consequence in which brand hate has the greatest effect, even though Portuguese consumers are generally considered to be more controlled and less prone to such actions (Hofstede, 2021).

These conclusions can be valuable for companies, highlighting the areas that marketing professionals should pay greater attention to in order to prevent negative expectancy violations and consumer antagonism, and improve brand management. When the reasons that contribute to brand hate are well understood, managers can create and implement different signaling strategies to convert that feeling into at least neutrality, and to address the resulting detrimental behaviors. Interactivity, a signaling theory in information and dialogue, can be used by companies to provide more specific information to customers. Additionally, the practice of setting expectations low so that products and services result in positive expectancy violations can also be implemented.



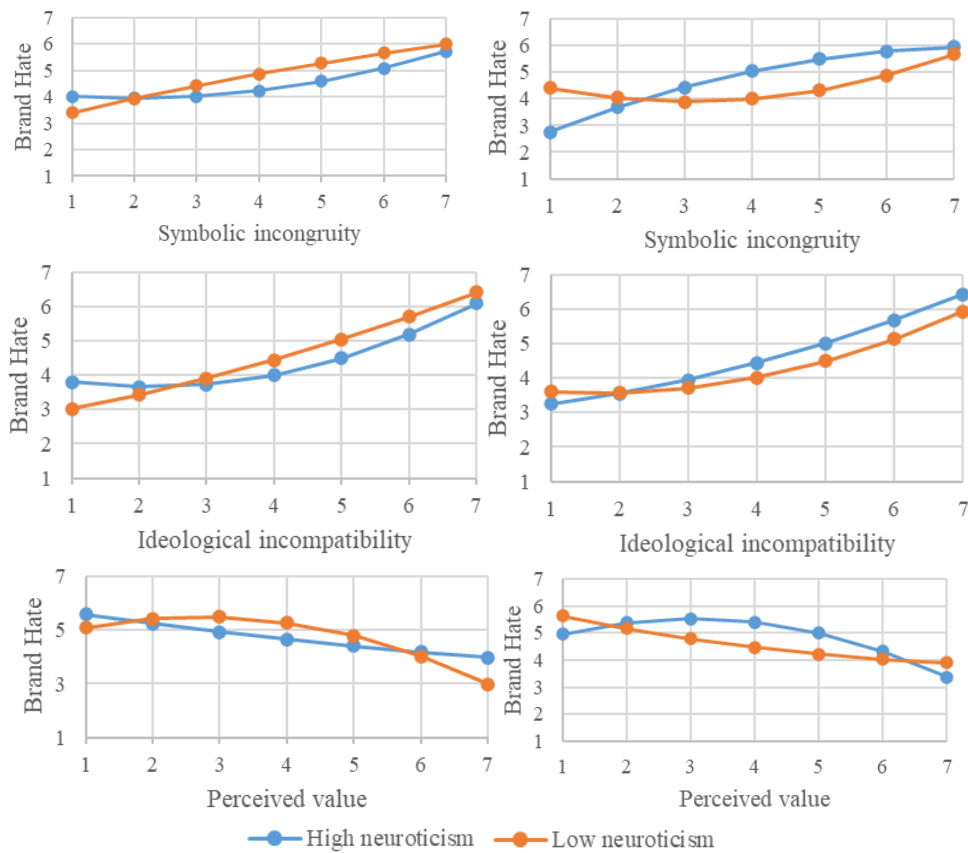


Figure no. 2 – Curvilinear effects

Finally, with respect to the moderating effects on outcomes, the results showed that the relationships between brand hate and its behavioral outcomes were strengthened in the presence of individuals with high levels of neuroticism. The opposite was observed in the case of individuals with high extraversion levels. Consumers with high neurotic traits are more likely to engage in behaviors such as negative word-of-mouth, anti-brand actions, and complaining. Conversely, consumers with high extraversion levels are less likely to engage in these behaviors. These findings contribute to an understanding of how consumers with different levels of personality traits cope with brand hate.

### 5.1 Theoretical implications

This paper mainly contributes to expanding the existing literature on negative consumer-brand relationships, using signaling theory and EVT. The study makes five major theoretical contributions. First, it addresses the call for more research on brand hate (Zhang & Laroche, 2020; Japutra *et al.*, 2021), helping researchers to progress towards a more complete and profound understanding of the brand hate. Research literature available is

quite dispersed (Yadav & Chakrabarti, 2022). There is no general agreement in the literature about the causes and outcomes of brand hate (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Japutra *et al.*, 2021; Kucuk, 2021) and with this investigation we were able to counterbalance this gap. Second, it expands upon existing research by providing a quantitative study in a culturally distinct country, linking individual perceptions to negative behavioral outcomes in the context of brand hate. Carrying out this study in Portugal has made it possible to acquire insight to perform cross-cultural analysis in academic research. Third, it highlights the importance of the moderating role of two consumer personality traits - neuroticism and extraversion - in how they influence behavior in relation to brand hate. This research demonstrates that the links between different constructs can differ under a large number of circumstances caused by differences in consumers' personality traits. Fourth, it tests for the first time the relationship between perceived value, a more functional variable, and brand hate. This study found that when consumers do not perceive a good balance between what is given and what is received from the other part in a transaction, they tend to develop brand hate. Lastly, it innovates testing the possibility of a curvilinear relationship linking an extreme emotion such as brand hate with the variables that may lead to it. It demonstrated that brand hate tends to grow exponentially with the intensity of the signals, namely when there are violations of expectations regarding ideological compatibility and perceived value.

## 5.2 Managerial implications

In practical terms, this research offers insights on how to prevent and manage brand hate as well as the negative behaviors that may result from it. Understanding the antecedents and consequences of negative consumer-brand relationships enables companies to identify “brand recovery strategies” for managing negativity appropriately (Brandão & Popoli, 2022). Companies should have systems in place to identify potential sources of brand hate and understand the reasons for it to address or avoid potential failures. By upgrading brand hate to a neutral state, managers can aim to instill positive affective feelings. Utilizing customer-centric technologies and tracking systems can help reduce the issues that lead to brand hate. To prevent brand hate, companies should focus on the main triggers such as the value they offer, the brand's symbolic congruence with customers' identity, and their legal and ethical behavior. It is also crucial for companies to constantly monitor and measure consumer interactions and relationships, and act early and be agile in customer recovery to avoid escalation of feelings that lead to brand hate. By collecting signals through customer interactions, companies may better understand their expectations and take steps to enhance and prolong the relationship (Schweidel *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, brands must find the right balance between value and cost and maintain authenticity to avoid negative symbolic meaning. Consumers should feel that they took the right purchase decision and that what they are getting is fair and valuable. Delivering superior customer value enables a company to achieve favorably behavioral intentions (Gounaris *et al.*, 2007). At the same time, the brand should be genuine and not represent a negative reference group or incorporate a negative symbolic meaning, such as lack of authenticity, loss of individuality or representation of an undesired self (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). The use of market research and data mining or machine learning methods are recommended to closely monitor the needs, expectations, and preferences of the target groups and the negative associations made to the brand. Moreover, companies need to monitor their social responsibility practices and

prevent any social, legal, moral or ethical violation. A permanent assessment of their behavior and effective communication, with convincing explanations that reverse possible negative interpretations of consumers, help to develop a strong signaling environment with signals flowing efficiently between the company and its consumers. The adoption of several social responsibility practices (such as respecting the environment and having ethical business practices), might help to deal with these difficulties and preserve the company's image, credibility and reputation (Brandão & Popoli, 2022).

Companies should provide adequate customer support and use the complaints to demonstrate their commitment to customers and the transparency of their operations. Listening to complaints is a way of taking corrective actions, restoring past problems and proactively anticipate consumers' concerns. When checking websites and blogs or searching for the brand hashtag, the companies can find relevant information allowing them to develop activities to face these actions. Furthermore, companies without an online brand community should develop and maintain it, because community identification elicits positive behaviors for the company, such as word-of-mouth (Woisetschläger *et al.*, 2008).

Marketing professionals should use personality traits to segment consumers and develop customized strategies. For this, they can use internal databases of consumers and social media websites to obtain psychographic information of consumers to understand them. These could be utilized for engage consumers and developing specific messages adapted to the level of empathy of these consumers.

### 5.3 Limitations and future research

The limitations of this research include the use of a snowball sampling technique, which may limit the ability to generalize results to the larger population. Additionally, this study is based on cross-sectional data which does not capture variations over time, making it difficult to establish causality and understand the long-term consequences of brand hate. Another limitation is that only two consumer personality traits were analyzed as moderators, future research should include more personality traits to deepen the discussion. It would also be beneficial to analyze other moderating variables such as importance of the brand, advertising, price and social environment to gain a better understanding of different brand conditions and adapt coping strategies accordingly. Future research could also explore the effect of brand hate on different categories of products and services, and compare the extent of brand hate between specific brands. Additionally, the effect of brand hate in business-to-business relationships and co-branding alliances should be studied.

#### Acknowledgements

This work has been funded by national funds through FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., Project UIDB/05037/2020..

#### ORCID

Patrícia Marques dos Santos  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5946-7260>

Cristela Maia Bairrada  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1750-7177>

Arnaldo Fernandes de Matos Coelho  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4345-1349>

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