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The Emergence of the Anti-Branding Trend: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations

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To someone else

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

This thesis seeks to contribute to the extant knowledge about the relatively new problem of consumer's anti-branding actions. More specifically, it explores why consumers assume adversely behaviours towards brands and how brand managers should react when their brand is attacked online. Scholarly research in marketing has traditionally focused on positive emotions that consumers feel towards brands. Conversely, this thesis aims to explore the negative side of consumer brand relationship focusing on the anti-branding phenomenon. By adopting a multiple-case study research design, this thesis explores the whole anti-branding process focusing on its antecedents, outcomes and brand responses. Findings reveal that one of the main consumers' motivation to engage in anti-branding behaviour is related to ideological incompatibility or symbolic incongruity with a certain brand. Investigating the problem from the brand manager perspective it was possible to extrapolate an initial taxonomy of brand reaction strategies: (1) apologise; (2) change behaviour; (3) engage in conversation with "haters"; (4) ignore; and (5) remove negative comments (and likes) on social media.

Interestingly, engage in conversation with "haters" and change behaviour in the way to run a business appeared more effective in mitigating consumers' attacks. React quickly and with the adequate tone of voice should represent a winning strategy in order to protect online reputation and brand credibility.

Keywords: Anti-branding • Brand hate • Brand management • Consumer Brand Relationship (CBR) • Consumer empowerment • Cross-case analysis • Resistance to marketing

Introduction

"I hate Starbucks ☹ ☹ Don't y'all think it's time to boycott them?"

(Facebook User)

"I hate Nutella. Hate is not a word I use often. It is full of junk, like sugar, and worst of all it contains palm oil."

(Facebook User)

Scholarly research in marketing has traditionally focused on positive emotions that consumers feel towards brands. For example, exploring whether consumers are willing to buy or use a company's product has been more important than understanding why they are not inclined to do so. According to Dalli, Romani, and Gistri (2006), this asymmetry is difficult to justify on a theoretical level considering that, in order to better understand and explain purchase and consumption behaviours, the study of the relationships between consumers and brands must include both the positive and negative pole. Surprisingly, at the light of today's socio-economic and technological scenario, the study of negative brand relationships deserves even more attention. In fact, when the internet exploded, scholars began predicting a shift in power from the marketer to the consumer, suggesting a new form of consumer-brand relationship (Bernoff & Li 2008; Bruce & Solomon, 2013; Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, et al., 2010; Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013).

Empowered by search engines, social media, blogs, wikis, e-commerce platforms, and mobile instant messaging apps, consumers acquired a broad set of new capabilities that enable them: (1) to use the web to do research and collect information on products, services, brands and firms; (2) to easily compare prices

and seek discounts; (3) to make purchase using online and mobile payments; (4) to tap into social media to share opinions and experiences about products and firms with other consumers; (5) to digitally receive ads, coupons, and other marketing materials; (6) to interact actively with brands and marketers (Erdem, Keller, Kuksov, Pieters, 2016). Additionally, thanks to the internet and its interactive digital tools, consumers are able to influence other consumers' consumption activities on a level not previously seen, because they are more likely to trust their peers rather than sponsored commercial messages (Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2015; Kim & Johnson, 2016). Furthermore, thanks to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) evolution, consumers have at their disposal a number of tools to show the loyalty and love for a brand, and as well to share a view that is often in conflict with the image a brand wishes to convey.

According to Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009), "consumer empowerment" is one of the main antecedents of anti-branding trend. Such negative behaviour against brands, formed by large number of society members in order to spread the word of disapproval and dissatisfaction (Holt, 2002), was present even before the internet and online social media took place. Nevertheless, technological improvements, consumer empowerment, and ability to interact through online networking platforms facilitate formation of anti-branding communities, and accelerate the viralization of contents that can be very harmful for brands and companies.

0.1 Statement of the problem

As a consequence of today's digitally empowered consumers, traditional marketing world is facing a paradigm shift. Prior to the dynamic nature of computer and mobile mediated environments, marketing followed a lineal model approach, in which communication was a one-way path from the marketer to customers with some feedback flowing in the opposite direction (see Figure 0.1).

Nowadays, consumers can interact with each other exchanging opinions, but they also can initiate communication directed towards marketers (Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2015). The information asymmetry between consumers and firms that for several years worked in favour of brands has been reversed (Christodoulides, 2009). As predicted, a long time ago, by the authors of *The Cluetrain Manifesto* in thesis

12: "There are no secrets. The networked market knows more than companies do about their own products. And whether the news is good or bad, they tell everyone." (Levine, Locke, Searls, & Weinberger, 2001, p. XV)

Traditional model   *Social media model*
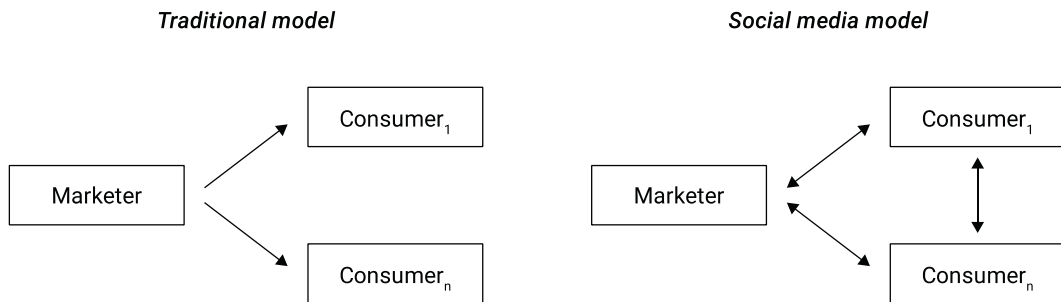
Figure 0.1 Communication models (Adapted from Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2015).

The internet facilitates consumers' increasing abilities to express their disappointment in products/services failures, or to punish corporate brands for actions or activities they perceive as negative. Other stakeholder, such as employees, can do the same and set up their own websites or use social media to reveal company's truths. This means that is getting difficult for brands to keep up their reputation.

Brand managers are losing control over their brands (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). They can no longer be considered the custodian of a rigid brand identity. Therefore, the conventional perspective depicted by Keller (1993) of brand as a firm-owned and controlled knowledge structure that can be built in the minds of the consumers through carefully coordinated marketing activities has no place in the digital era.

Branding exemplifies participation and co-creation of meaning and value (Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009). It is a continuous, social, and highly dynamic and interactive activity in which managers, consumers, and other stakeholders are involved in a dialectical rather than unilateral process (Christodoulides, de Chernatony, Furrer, & Abimbola 2006).

When thinking about the key strategies for building a successful brand image in today's economy, brand managers need to recognize the active role of consumers in co-constructing and sharing both positive and negative contents about the brand

with various stakeholders (including with other consumers). Specifically, understanding what motivates anti-branding behaviours like verbal animosity on social media, revenge, and boycott is crucial to avoid consumers to inflict harm on brands and cause business problems. Unfortunately, although the relevance of anti-branding phenomenon has been pointed out by several marketing scholars, the research on negative emotions towards brands is scarce. Moreover, the tactics that brand should adopt to manage consumers attacks have largely been neglected as an object of research.

0.2 Research questions and objectives

Against this backdrop, this thesis seeks to investigate the following research question:

RQ. *How* do consumers purposefully construct their conflict with brands and *why*, under certain circumstances, they are capable to achieve their anti-branding goals, or are doomed to fail thanks to specific reaction strategies adopted by brands?

In order to answer the posed RQ, four derived sub-questions (SQs) are formulated:

SQs$_1$. Why do consumers feel negative emotions towards brands?

SQs$_2$. What are the main antecedents of consumer anti-branding phenomenon?

SQs$_3$. What are the main outcomes of consumer anti-branding phenomenon?

SQs$_4$. How should brands strategically react to possible consumers' anti-branding activities?

Explaining *why* and *when* negative feelings towards brands happen, this thesis wishes to fill a gap in the extant literature and expand the knowledge about anti-branding as a theoretical construct. In concurrence with this objective, the research also intends to understand the antecedents of negative feelings against brands in order to provide significant practical contributions to the field of marketing in relation to the effective management of consumer-brand relationships. Conversely, focusing on the anti-branding outcomes this research will shed light on the real risks that the different semiotic strategies and forms of communication used by

consumers in their everyday life to attack the brands have on the performances of a certain brand or companies.

The output of this research consists of a new set of information able to illuminate the everyday and less visible forms of consumers' resistance towards branding and marketing practices. Specifically, this thesis aims to explore from a practical viewpoint how brand managers can react effectively to consumer anti-branding activities.

0.3 Organisation of the thesis

The structure of this thesis (see Figure 0.2) follows a typical research process.
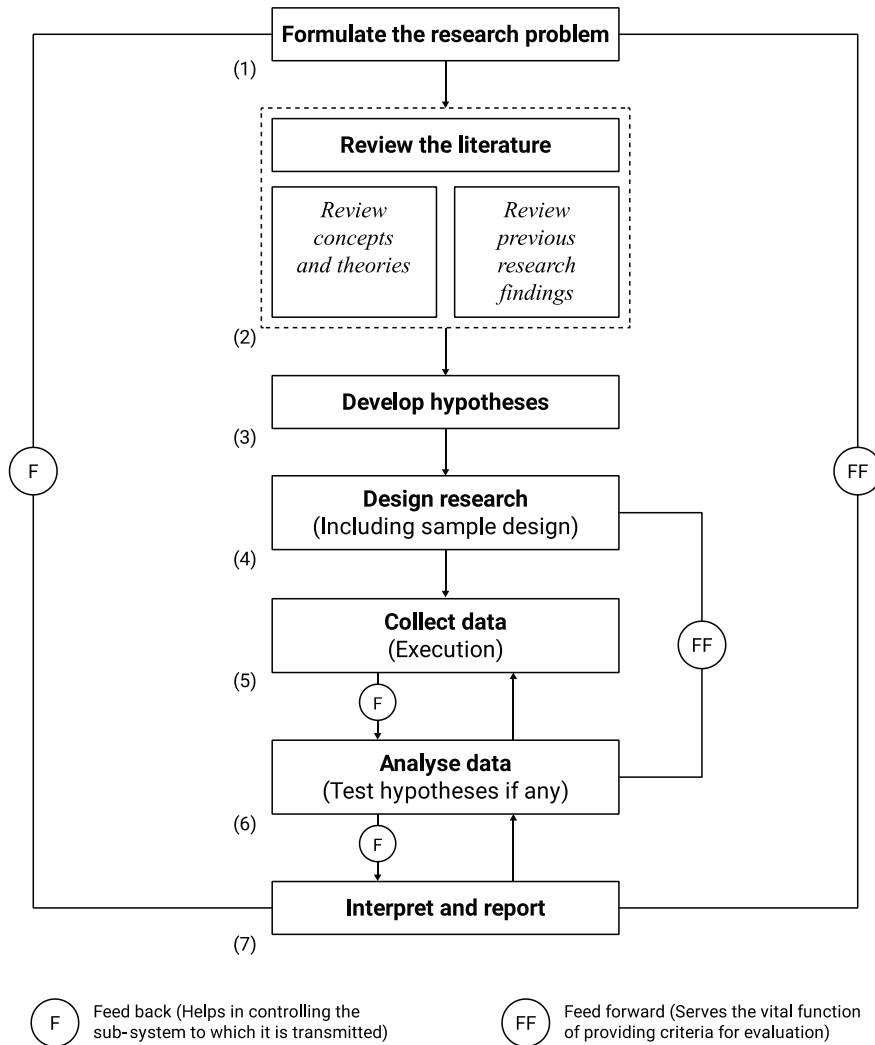
Figure 0.2 Research process (Adapted from Kothari, 2004).

According to Kothari (2004, p. 10), the research process "consists of series of actions or steps necessary to effectively carry out research and the desired sequencing of these steps."

As schematised in Figure 0.2, the research process consists of a number of closely related activities (as shown through 1 to 7), which overlap continuously rather than following a strictly prescribed sequence.

Chapter 1 reviews the literature on the anti-branding problem. The review process of academic articles, conference proceedings, and books allowed the author of this thesis to explore the main concepts and theories about consumer's negative emotions towards brands that lead to anti-branding activities. Moreover, identifying the main anti-branding outcomes and the seminal research on brand management strategies in response to consumer attacks was possible to look at the problem in a holistic way and develop a conceptual framework.

In Chapter 2, the reader is thrown into the fantastic land of methodology. This means that the research design to solve the problem statement is explained in detail by describing the overall process for data collection and data analysis. Furthermore, a particular attention will be paid to the illustration of the logic behind the methods used to conduct the research, that is, why the researcher is using a multiple-case study analysis and why he is not using other methods or techniques.

Chapter 3 provides a rich description of the six cases selected to explore the anti-branding problem. The results for each case will be first presented separately. Next, the author will provide a cross-case synthesis, otherwise known as a multiple case comparative analysis.

In the Conclusion Chapter, the author presents a summary of the study and analyses the findings in regards to the original research questions; he further provides theoretical implications for action in the field, suggestion for practitioners, and recommendation for future research about the anti-branding problem.

Chapter 1

The anti-branding trend: A systematic literature review

Summary

Chapter 1 explores the extant literature about the anti-branding concept. Specifically, the author discusses the principal antecedents that motivate consumers to adopt anti-branding behaviours. Furthermore, the attention focuses on the main anti-branding outcomes (i.e., anti-brand websites, negative word of mouth, online boycotts), and the strategies that companies should adopt when their brand is attacked online.

1.1 Introduction

According to Kapferer (2012), brands are everywhere. They penetrate all spheres of human life: economic, social, cultural, sporting, even religion. Brands give consumers meaning to their existences. They are not just symbols such as names, logos, slogan, and design schemes with the power to differentiate products/services and influence buyers, but they are treated as if they were human characters, and active partners of a relationship (Fournier, 1998).

Within the field of consumer brand relationship research, the attention has mainly focused on strong and positive emotions towards a brand, such as self-brand

connection (Cheng, White, & Chaplin, 2012; Escalas & Bettman, 2005), brand attachment (Belaid & Temessek Behi, 2011; Loureiro, Ruediger, & Demetris, 2012; Park, Maclnnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012), brand passion (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013), brand commitment (Kang, Tang, & Fiore, 2014; Lourerio et al., 2012; Walsh, Winterich, & Mittal, 2010; Shaari, Salleh, & Hussin, 2012), and brand trust (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Lourerio et al., 2012; Ong, Salleh, & Zien Yusoff, 2016).

However, highlighting only the more positive aspects of relationship development and engagement is a risk, because "just as medical science should understand both sickness and health, marketing science should understand both functional and dysfunctional relationships" (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 33).

It follows that examining *why* and *how* consumers develop negative relationship with brands will improve the understanding of both successful brand building process and brand management strategies. Specifically, defining the possible factors that lead to anti-branding phenomena will help companies to adopt effective strategies in order to maintain sustainable competitive power and satisfy consumers' needs.

Until now, no review study has focused on anti-branding concept. Therefore, this chapter addresses this need and contributes to the literature identifying, summarizing and discussing existing research on this underrated problem. Specifically, the objectives of the review are to:

(1) explore the literature which defines the anti-branding concept;

(2) establish the main antecedents that motivate consumer to cause harm to brands;

(3) compare the different forms of expression used by consumers to attack brands, that is, anti-branding outcomes;

(4) find information concerning how brands react to consumer anti-branding actions;

(5) identify areas for future research about anti-branding phenomenon.

In the following section is outlined the specific methodology adopted to identify the relevant literature for the review.

1.2 Review method

"A literature review is a systematic, explicit, and reproducible design for identifying, evaluating, and interpreting the existing body of recorded documents" (Fink, 2013, p. 3). In the academic research, literature review helps to summarize, in a rigorous way, the current knowledge about a specific research problem. Identifying the main conceptual content of the field can contribute to theory development (Meredith, 1993).

This review is based on the work of Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003). Their literature reviews process includes the following key points (Denyer & Neely, 2004, p. 133):

(1) the development of clear and precise aims and objectives;

(2) pre-planned methods;

(3) a comprehensive search of all potentially relevant articles;

(4) the use of explicit, reproducible criteria in the selection of articles for review;

(5) an appraisal of the quality of the research and the strength of the findings;

(6) a synthesis of individual studies using an explicit analytic framework;

(7) a balanced, impartial and comprehensible presentation of the results.

According with Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003, p. 215), "A systematic search begins with the identification of keywords and search terms". Prior to discussing this stage, a detailed description of the protocol regarding the inclusion and search criteria of this review is provided.

1.2.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The formal inclusion criteria in the search process included (a) English language, (b) primary study and (c) double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal publication with a marketing/management focus. To enhance the review and provide an intentionally broad view of the topic, conference proceedings articles and edited books with empirical findings or "robust theoretical and conceptual arguments" were included (e.g. Manroop & Richardson 2016, p. 207). Purely practitioner-oriented articles (e.g. magazine articles), and grey literature, that is documents not formally published for public consumption and not indexed in conventional indexing tools, were excluded.

1.2.2 Identification of the keywords and relevant literature

The research phase of relevant academic publications on anti-branding started in August 2018 and ended in September 2018. All publications until and including July 2018 were screened. The search was not limited to a specific date so as to identify all literature, including early work about this topic. The search was conducted via the Google Scholar search engine, and academic databases such as Science Direct, Scopus, and Web of Science introducing a primary keyword ("anti-brand*") and a set of secondary keywords ("brand hate", "brand attack", and "brand dislike"). Details about query results and selected materials at each step are provided in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Databases and keywords used for publications selection.

Database	Keywords	Searched for	Year	Results	Selected
Google Scholar	anti-brand*	Everywhere in the article	All years	693	26
Google Scholar	brand hate	Everywhere in the article	All years	257	12
Google Scholar	brand attack	Everywhere in the article	All years	90	3
Google Scholar	brand dislike	Everywhere in the article	All years	147	8
Science Direct	anti-brand*	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	88	14
Science Direct	brand hate	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	5	2
Science Direct	brand attack	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	17	2
Science Direct	brand dislike	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	3	2
Scopus	anti-brand*	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	14	7
Scopus	brand hate	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	8	6
Scopus	brand attack	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	6	1
Scopus	brand dislike	Title, Abstract, Keywords	All years	2	1
Web of Science	anti-brand*	Topic	All years	18	14
Web of Science	brand hate	Topic	All years	6	2
Web of Science	brand attack	Topic	All years	1	0
Web of Science	brand dislike	Topic	All years	3	2
Total				1358	102
Excluding the duplicates					53

Collected materials were initially screened by reading title, abstract and conclusion. Large amounts of materials were removed because: (a) did not deal with the topic of the study; (b) due to repetitions; (c) did not meet the above-mentioned selection criteria. Overall, 53 documents were selected and transferred

to Mendeley, a free reference-management software, for further content-based analysis.

1.3 Descriptive analysis

In this section, criteria for descriptive analysis have been defined. The collected materials were read in their entirety and analysed to extract a series of information. Initially, all 53 documents were categorized on the base of the type of publication (i.e., article, book, conference proceeding). Figure 1.3 shows that, besides 44 articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals, one book, focused on the concept of "brand hate" and consumer negativity in today's digital markets, and 8 conference proceeding were considered relevant and included in this review.
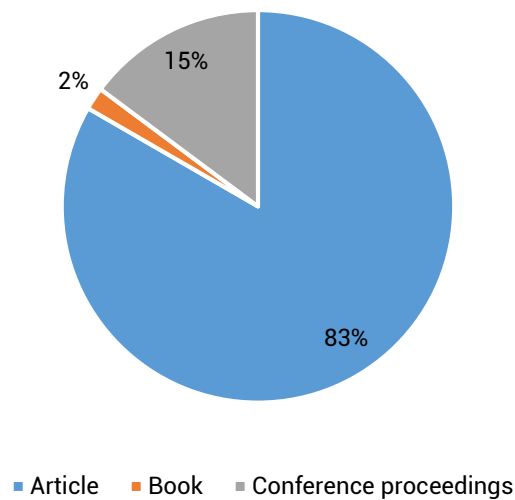
Figure 1.3. Collected materials by type of publication.

The second stage was to analyse the temporal distribution of materials, in order to identify emerging trends. Articles were further categorised on the base of their distribution across journals. Both articles and conference proceedings were separated based on research type (conceptual/empirical) and method used (qualitative/quantitative/mixed method). Additionally, authors' affiliations are studied to identify research dominance in terms of countries and continents (Garfield, 2004).

1.3.1 Distribution of materials over time

Figure 1.4 shows how the 53 selected documents are allocated over a time horizon. The first publication about the anti-branding topic date back to 2002. Publishing rate is not constant. There are peaks in the periods 2008-2010, 2012-2013, and 2015-2017.
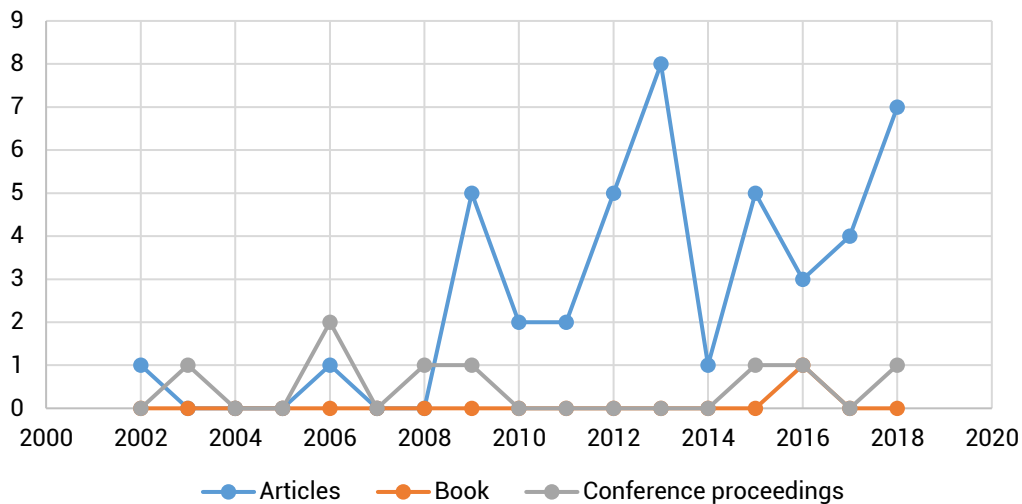
Figure 1.4 Publication of materials over a time horizon.

Interestingly, in the first-half of 2018 were published 7 articles and a conference proceeding. This means that, in recent years, the topic is becoming more significant among the academic community.

Besides, scholars' growing interest about anti-branding phenomenon, and other themes such as brand hate and brand relationship dissolutions, is confirmed by the recent special issue call for papers from *Journal of Product and Brand Management* untitled "Consumer negativity towards brands", whose deadline for submission expired on 31st march 2018.

1.3.2 Distribution of papers across journals

Table 1.2 shows the classification of the selected articles by journals. The major contributions in the field are made by the *Journal of Business Research* (6), *Journal of Brand Management* (6), and *Journal of Consumer Psychology* (4). Where possible the subject area of the journals was verified referring to the *Journal Quality*

List (Sixty-third Edition, 29 July 2018). In line with inclusion and exclusion criteria, results show that research about anti-branding phenomenon are published in journals that focus specifically in marketing area. Some articles appear, instead, in the following subject areas indicated by the *Journal Quality List*: General & Strategy (Gen & Strat); Operations Research, Management Science, Production & Operations Management (OR, MS & POM); Management Information Systems, Knowledge Management (MIS, KM); Organisation Behavior/Studies, Human Resource Management, Industrial Relations (OB/OS, HRM, IR).

Table 1.2 Distribution of the papers according to the journals.

Journal	Qty	Subject area	ABS 2018
Journal of Brand Management	6	Marketing	2
Journal of Business Research	6	Marketing	3
Journal of Consumer Psychology	4	Marketing	4*
Journal of Product & Brand Management	2	Marketing	1
Business horizons	2	Gen & Strat	2
European Journal of Marketing	2	Marketing	3
International Journal of Research in Marketing	2	Marketing	4
Journal of business ethics	2	OB/OS, HRM, IR	3
Journal of Consumer Research	2	Marketing	4*
Journal of Interactive Marketing	2	Marketing	3
Consumption, Markets and Culture	1	---	---
Computers in Human Behaviour	1	MIS, KM	3
Industrial Management and Data Systems	1	OR,MS, POM	2
International Business Research	1	---	---
IUP Journal of Brand Management	1	---	---
Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice	1	---	---
Journal of Marketing Management	1	Marketing	2
Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	1	Marketing	2
Journal of Marketing	1	Marketing	4*
Marketing Theory	1	Marketing	3
Organizations & Markets in Emerging Economies	1	---	---
Psychology & Marketing	1	Marketing	3
Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal	1	---	---
Wipo J. Intell. Prop	1	---	---

ABS 2018, Rank Interpretation. 4*: A world elite journal; 4: A top journal; 3: A highly regarded journal; 2: A well regarded journal; 1: A recognised journal.

In order to verify the presence/absence of the topic in high quality journals, the ranking proposed in the lists of the Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide March 2018 (ABS 2018) was considered. It is possible to notice that the presence of articles published in journals ranked 4*, 4 or 3 indicates that the anti-branding topic has an academic relevance although it is often underestimated.

1.3.3 Distribution of materials by type of research

As shown in Figure 1.5, 41 cases of the collected materials in this review are empirical research, that is, studies that analyse data, whether quantitative (numerical, e.g. statistics) or qualitative (non-numerical, e.g. interviews). The remaining 12 cases are conceptual, that is are studies that do not analyse any data. On the side, the book presents both conceptual and empirical chapters.
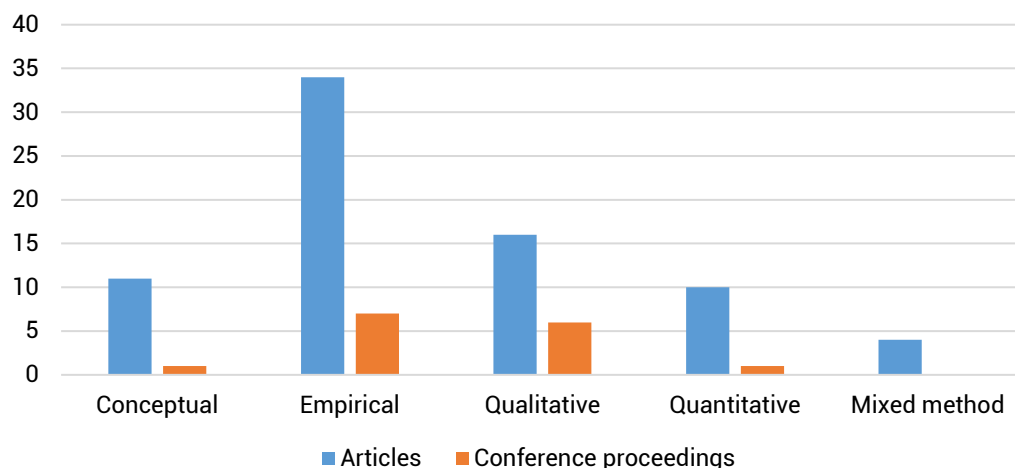
Figure 1.5 Trend of nature of studies and type of research.

Focusing on the nature of the data used in the respective research, 22 studies are classified as qualitative, 11 are quantitative, and 4 studies are based both on qualitative and quantitative data. The most widely qualitative techniques adopted in the selected materials are case study analysis, discursive analysis, sentiment and content analysis, qualitative interviews. In contrast, regression analysis, structural equation modelling, ANOVA, and experiment are the most commonly used quantitative techniques.

1.3.4 Analysis based on author affiliation

Authors' affiliations with a particular country or region help provide a clear picture of research and development trends in that region. Figure 1.6 shows that most of the studies on anti-branding were conducted in the United States of America (USA). Also Italian researchers have made significant contributions to the research on negative emotions and activities towards brands publishing respectively 3 articles and 4 conference proceedings. Specifically, the study of Romani, Grappi, and Dalli (2012) was published in the *International Journal of Research in Marketing* that is ranked 4 in the ABS 2018.
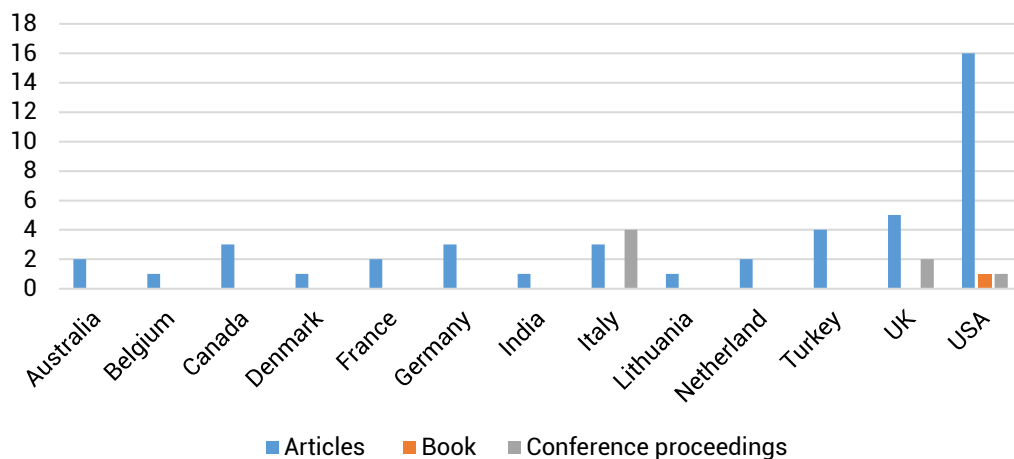
Figure 1.6 Author affiliations.

Other significant contributions in this field were made by researchers from United Kingdom, Turkey, Canada, and Germany.

1.4 Categorizing the literature: a content analysis approach

In this stage of the review, the collected materials were subjected to qualitative content analysis in order to understand the meaning of each unit of analysis (i.e., article, conference proceeding, book), and classify into the same category those units that share the same concepts or research themes. Codes were derived using an inductive approach. Therefore, an open coding was adopted. According with Elo and Kyngäs (2008, pp. 109-111), "Open coding means that notes and headings are

written in the text while reading it. The written material is read through again, and as many headings as necessary are written down in the margins to describe all aspects of the content […] The headings are collected from the margins on to coding sheets […] and categories are freely generated at this stage."

On the basis of the content analysis, were identified the following four categories: "Anti-branding concept", "Anti-branding antecedents", "Anti-branding outcomes" and "Managing anti-branding attack". Table 1.3 shows how the 53 selected documents for this review were sorted into the above-mentioned categories.

1.4.1 Anti-branding: defining the concept

Anti-branding represents a movement to reveal the truth and subvert marketing activities. It is a way to resist to "consumer culture", a sort of cultural authority that determines how people spend their money and "participate in a system of commodified meanings embedded in brands" (Holt, 2002, p. 71).

According to Ozanne and Murray (1995, p. 521), the possibility for consumer to emancipate themselves from this oppressive grid of imposed social meanings requires the "reflexively defiant consumer". Only consumers who are empowered to reflect on how marketing works as an institution are capable to take the distance from the marketer-imposed code, and free themselves from this cultural authority (Holt, 2002).

Naomi Klein's book *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (1999) played an important role on the anti-branding movement diffusion. The Canadian journalist and activist revealed many marketing techniques that companies use to increase the profit in their business. Specifically, she emphasises the nexus of cool brands like Nike and sweatshop labour.

As highlighted by Fontenelle (2010, p. 257), the anti-brand movement depicted by Klein "was configured as an anti-corporation movement that used company brands as the targets for criticism that aimed to affect their worth." This means that consumers by attacking institutional brands could force companies to be more responsible, for example by adopting better salaries and working conditions. Furthermore, the activist consumer can fight to unmask the obscene practices of the

Table 1.3 Collected materials sorted into categories.

Category	Collected materials
Anti-branding concept	Cherrier, 2009; Heath, Cluley, & O'Malley, 2017; Holt 2002; Szmigin & Carrigan, 2003
Anti-branding antecedents	Bryson, Atwal, & Hultén, 2013; Dalli, Romani, & Gistri, 2006; de Campos Ribeiro, Butori, Le Nagard, 2018; Demirbag-Kaplan, Yildirim, Gulden, & Aktan, 2015; Dessart, Morgan-Thomas, & Veloutsou, 2016; Duman & Ozgen, 2018; Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015; Fournier & Alvarez, 2013; Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009; Hegner, Fetscherin, & van Delzen, 2017; Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2018; Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2011; Kavaliauskė, & Simanavičiūtė, 2015; Kaynak, & Ekşi, 2013; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2016a; Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013; Park, Eisingerich, & Park, 2013; Park, Eisingerich, & Park, 2013a; Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2013; Romani, Grappi, & Dalli, 2008; Romani, Grappi, & Dalli, 2012; Romani, Grappi, Zarantonello, & Bagozzi, 2015; Romani, Sadeh, & Dalli, 2009; Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009; Sussan, Hall, & Meamber, 2012; Thomson, Whelan, & Johnson, 2012; Wong, Haddoud, Kwok, & He, 2018; Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2016; Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, & Fetscherin, 2018
Anti-branding outcomes	Awasthi, Sharma, & Gulati, 2012; Farshid, Ashrafi, Wallström, & Engström, 2015; Hansen, Kupfer, & Hennig-Thurau, 2018; Hegner, Fetscherin, & van Delzen, 2017; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010; Katyal, 2012; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2010; Kucuk, 2016; Kucuk, 2016a; Østergaard, Hermansen & Fitchett, 2015 Rauschnabel, Kammerlander, Ivens, 2016; van Den Broek, Langley, & Hornig, 2017
Managing anti-branding attack	Crijns, Cauberghe, Hudders, & Claeys, 2017; D'Arco & Marino, 2018; Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013; Hansen, Kupfer, & Hennig-Thurau, 2018; Horn, Taros, et al., 2015; Kay, 2006; Kucuk, 2016a; Melancon & Dalakas, 2018; Schroeder, 2009

brands, such as their misleading advertising tactics used to conquer the hearts and minds of people.

On the base of the relationship between resistance and power, Heath, Cluley, and O'Malley (2017) explain that anti-branding refers to a particular form of behaviour that consumers adopt, in their everyday life, to resist to practices employed by marketing. Identifying and satisfying people's myriad wants and needs, thus improving the quality of life and increasing social welfare, is at the heart of the marketing discipline (Kotler & Keller, 2009; Wilkie & Moore, 1999). Specifically, Kotler, Armstrong, Wong, and Saunders (2008, p. 7) define marketing as "the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return." Despite such aspiration of marketing, Heath, Cluley, and O'Malley (2017, p. 1281) highlight that consumer are cynical about this discipline, because they "consider marketing technologies to be manipulative, misleading and dishonest." Therefore, marketing is perceived as some kind of powerful entity to resist, for example engaging in anti-branding activities.

Drawing from Ritson and Dobscha's (1999) typology 'not futile' versus 'futile' resistance, Cherrier (2009, p. 188) maintains that "the 'non futile resistance' groups individual who reject particular aspect of marketing; their manifestations are public and include complaining to sponsoring organizations, boycotting a specific manufacturer or retailer, or creating anti-brands and practicing acts of anti-brand categories. In contrast, the 'futile resistance' includes individuals who choose not to act against the system; their manifestations are private, take place within the practices of everyday lives and involve controlling consumption."

The acts of resistance against marketing can involve a group or a single person. A prerequisite of resistance is the presence of visible acts, which are recognised by others and in particular by the target of that resistance (i.e., brand, company, and organization). Therefore, to be effective "resistance must be visible to power in some meaningful way." (Heath, Cluley, & O'Malley, 2017, p. 1285)

Examples of visible acts of resistance are anti-branding websites, anti-brand communities, negative word of mouth (WOM), boycotts, and online petitions. Such content-expression entities, that is, specific semiotic practices circulating in the culture, will be analysed deeply hereinafter.

1.4.2 Discovering the anti-branding antecedents

According to Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009, p. 1120), "consumer empowerment" and "consumer dissatisfaction" are the main antecedents of the anti-branding process. If consumer empowerment is a necessary condition to achieve consumer activism goals in markets, such as organize anti-branding sites, create a community, or post on social media negative product/service reviews, consumer dissatisfaction is the trigger.

Negative behaviour against brands was present even before the internet and online social media took place. Nevertheless, how writes Kucuk (2016a, p. 41): "in the past, consumers were more likely to share these negative feelings only with their family and friends (aka *private* responses). The majority of consumers were circumstantially far less likely to voice their complaints publicly. Therefore, most negative feelings and complaints faded away and were forgotten as there was no real and effective way of communicating and expressing dissatisfactions with companies and markets."

Nowadays consumers, thanks to technological improvements and ability to interact through online platforms, are less alienated because they can talk with other consumers, and express their complaints directly to brands and companies, for example writing on their social media channels (Kohli, Suri, & Kapoor, 2015).

As previously mentioned, resistance to be effective must be visible to power. This prerequisite was amply satisfied by the explosion of the internet and social media that, enabling consumer empowerment on technological, economic, social and communicating dimensions, led to a new level of everyday acts of resistance against brands and marketing practices.

1.4.2.1 Negative emotions literature

According to Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009), behind anti-branding activities there is a trigger, namely a negative emotion caused by negative consumer experiences and disappointments.

In contrast to the concept of love, negative emotions towards brands received less attention in the field of marketing and consumer research so far. Dalli, Romani, and Gistri (2006, p. 87), in fact, maintain that brand dislike can be considered as a

"dark side" of the consumer brand relationship. Specifically, in this research, they explore factors and levels of dislike. For example, people are unsatisfied with some products or services because of their quality, pricing and performance. Another factor of brand dislike is related to stereotypes that the brand carries and users do not want to be associated with. Finally, the last dislike factor regards the corporate brand, consumers tend to disapprove those brands which behave unethically, immorally, or illegally.

Romani, Sadeh, and Dalli (2009) using introspective essays with consumers in two very diverse cultural contexts (Italy and Palestine), find out that the negative emotions of dislike and anger are experienced to a much greater extent than others, such as sadness, fear, and disappointment.

Grégoire, Tripp, and Legoux (2009) investigate the construct of consumer hate towards brands in the context of service brands. Specifically, they describe hate as a form of desire for revenge, or desire for avoidance. That is, either consumers have a desire to punish the brand for what has been caused to them, or they want to withdraw themselves from the brand. "Whereas a desire for revenge is associated with punishment directed at firms, avoidance is more passive and relies on escape." (Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux 2009, p. 19)

Johnson, Matear, and Thomson (2011) define hate as a strong opposition of consumers to the brand, mainly represented by the concept of revenge, which can arise from negative past experience (product- or service-related). In their empirical studies, Johnson, Matear, and Thomson (2011) show that brand hate is also explained by the emotion of shame. They found, in fact, that felt shame acts as an important mediator in the process that brings people to behave hatefully.

Romani, Grappi, and Dalli (2012), in their construct of negative emotions towards brand, conceptualise hate as part of the dislike construct, together with the feeling of contempt and the feeling of revulsion.

With regard to luxury brands, Bryson, Atwal, and Hultén (2013: p. 395) define hate "as an intense negative emotional affect consumers experience towards the brand." They also identify possible causes for brand hate, including the brand's country of origin, consumer dissatisfaction, negative stereotypes of a brand's consumers, and corporate social performance.

The Attachment–Aversion (A–A) model, introduced by Park, Eisingerich, and Park (2013), offers a strong base to develop a science of negative relationship. This model is the first to present a unified and integrated theoretical account of the full spectrum of positive to negative relationships. Following this model, consumers are averse and negative towards brands that they perceive to be distant from them, and attached and positive towards brands that they perceive to be close to their self-concepts.

Fournier and Alvarez's (2013) commentary on the A–A model shows the merits of Park, Eisingerich, and Park (2013) regarding the study of negative brand relationship. Nevertheless, their commentary highlights how positive and negative brand relationships cannot be analysed as the flip side of each other, more specifically negative relationships are more complex and rich than positive ones.

Brand hate is not a polarized version of brand love. "People who do not feel love towards a brand do not necessarily feel hatred towards it but just feel neutral or show a lack of interest or are indifferent." (Kucuk, 2016a, p. 18)

Furthermore, emotions are not static dimensions. Hate is a multilayered concept. Stenberg's (2003) triangular theory of hate identifies three primary components that comprise hate: devaluation, negation of intimacy and anger. On the base of Stenberg's theory, Kucuk (2016a) introduces a brand hate conceptualisation and defines brand hate in three major constructs as follows: cold brand hate, cool brand hate and finally hot brand hate.

"Cold brand hate can be conceptualized as devaluing the hated brand and eliminating any sort of relationship with it, thus ignoring and leaving the hated brand behind." (Kucuk, 2016a, p. 20) Consumer tries to distance himself/herself from the hated brand, its associations and followers. In this kind of brand hate, consumers decide to avoid the brand because perceive it as criminal or socially irresponsible, and because it does not fit with their individual and social identification needs.

Cool brand hate is characterised by negative emotions such as repulsion, resentment, revolt and finally disgust towards a disliked brand. Consumers decide to escape literally from that brand or companies because they perceive a threat for themselves. Disgust, in fact, is a physical feeling, for this reason certain consumers do not want to repeat the same experience again.

Hot brand hate involves feelings of extreme anger and anxiety towards a brand. These kind of emotions, which can convert into explosive reactions towards the brand hated, emerge particularly after a service or products failure, or when consumers have the sensation of being cheated by the company. In addition, sometimes consumer dissatisfaction can be the consequence of socially irresponsible corporate actions.

According to Kucuk (2016a), cool and cold brand hate indicate more passive and attitudinal brand responses. For example, consumers might share these negative emotions with their close friends and family, or sometimes keep their feelings private. On the contrary, hot brand hate relates to more active and behavioural brand responses. Consumers to find some emotional resolution perceive the necessity to express negative emotions, antipathy and hate loudly towards a brand in public.

Similar to Sternberg's classification, cold, cool and hot components of hate combine with each other. For example cold and cool brand hate combination determines "simmering brand hate", while a cold and hot brand hate combination is "seething brand hate"; and cool and hot hate is "boiling brand hate". A combination of cold, cool and hot brand hate components can be defined as "burning brand hate". As pictured in Figure 1.7, cold, cool and hot brand hate constructs can also be defined as "mild brand hate" elements. Likewise, simmering, seething and boiling brand hate indicates "moderate level brand hate", while burning brand hate indicates the most "severe and ultimate level of brand hate" as it covers all the other hate constructs (Kucuk, 2016a, pp. 23-24).

"Burning brand hate" is the most dangerous and harmful form of brand hate. As highlighted by Kucuk (2016a, pp. 24-25), the majority of the attitudinal brand hate construct "are not only stronger indicators of losing consumers but also a sign that attacking behaviors, in the form of anti-brand activity, is about to happen. Each brand hate construct has the potential to fire up some level of anti-branding activity targeted at hated brands."

Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, and Bagozzi (2016) conceptualise and operationalise brand hate as a constellation of negative emotions towards the brand. In particular, through a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, they found that brand hate consists of two components: "active brand hate", which includes anger and contempt/disgust; and "passive brand hate", which comprises

emotions related to fear, disappointment, shame and dehumanization. Furthermore, they explain that brand hate is significantly associated with different negative behavioural outcomes and that these vary depending on the reason for brand hate. For example, brand hate related to corporate wrongdoings and violation of expectations are associated with "attack-like" (i.e., negative WOM) and "approach-like" strategies (i.e., consumer complaining and protest behaviours), whereas reasons related to taste systems are associated with "avoidance-like" strategies (i.e., patronage reduction/cessation).
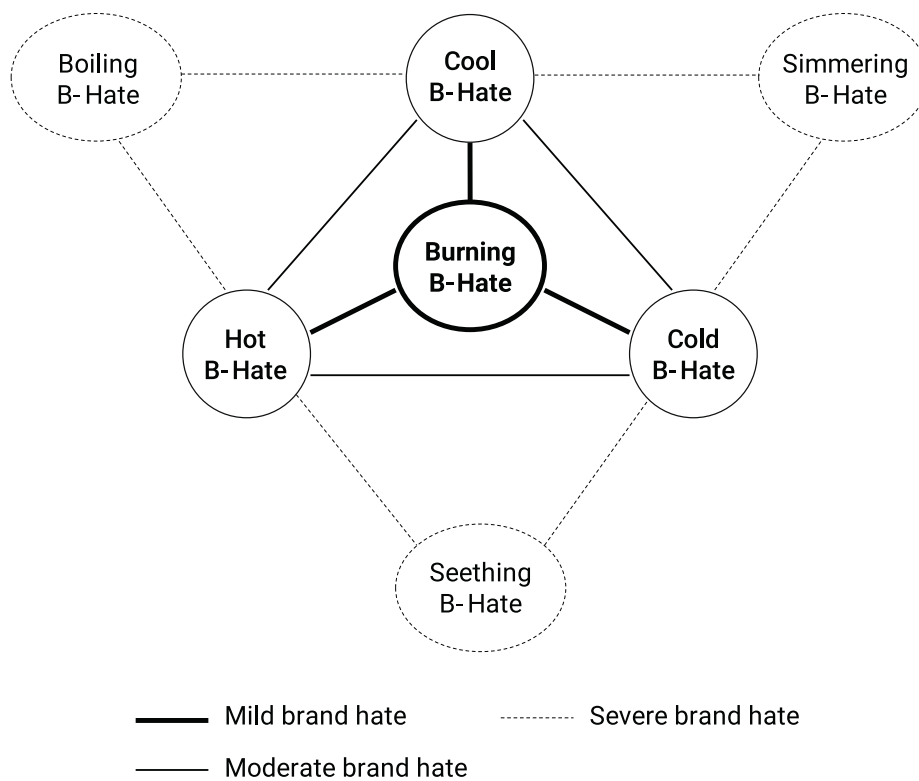
Figure 1.7 Anatomy of brand hate (Modified from Kucuk, 2016a, p.24).

Hegner, Fetscherin, and van Delzen (2017, p. 14) conceptualise brand hate as "a more intense emotional response consumers have towards a brand than brand dislike." They also explore empirically the determinants of brand hate, such as negative past experience, symbolic incongruence, and ideological incompatibility, and the main outcomes of brand hate, which include brand avoidance, negative word of mouth, and brand retaliation.

1.4.2.2 Brand hate and anti-branding

As depicted in Table 1.4, the literature about negative emotions towards brands presents different trajectories and conceptualisations.

Table 1.4 Summary of most relevant studies on negative brand emotions.

	Conceptualisation	Antecedents	Outcomes
Dalli et al. (2006)	Dislike	Quality, pricing and performance of products/services; negative stereotypes; corporate irresponsibility	---
Romani et al. (2009)	Dislike/Anger	Context of consumption	---
Grégoire et al. (2009)	Hate as desire for revenge or desire for avoidance	---	Need to punish and cause harm to firms, need to withdraw from interactions with the firm
Johnson et al. (2011)	Hate as consumer revenge	---	Anti-brand actions
Romani et al. (2012)	Hate as part of dislike construct	---	Complaining, negative WOM, and brand switching
Bryson et al. (2013)	Intense negative emotional affect towards the brand	Brand's country of origin, consumer dissatisfaction, negative stereotypes of the luxury brand, corporate social performance	---
Park et al. (2013)	Attachment-Aversion (A−A) model	Distance from consumer self-concept	---
Kucuk (2016a)	Hate is a psychological state ranging from simple "distancing" or "devaluation" of the hated person/item to intense "anger"	Product/service failures; corporate social irresponsibility; consumer personality	Negative WOM; consumer boycott; anti-branding activities
Zarantonello et al. (2016)	Hate as a constellation of (i) active negative emotions, such as anger and contempt/disgust, (ii) passive negative emotions, such as fear, disappointment, shame and dehumanization	Corporate wrongdoings, violation of expectations, and taste systems	Negative WOM, consumer complaining, protest behaviours, and patronage reduction or cessation
Hegner et al. (2017)	Hate is a more intense emotional response towards a brand than brand dislike	Past experience, symbolic incongruence, and ideological incompatibility	Brand avoidance, negative WOM, and brand retaliation

This thesis focuses in particular on brand hate. This sentiment is conceptualised "as a psychological state whereby a consumer forms intense negative emotions and detachment towards brands that perform poorly and give consumers bad and painful experiences on both individual and social levels." (Kucuk, 2016a, p. 20). When consumers get frustrated with a brand, they show negative emotions and hatred towards a brand, "a hatred that reveals itself with anti-branding activities." (Kucuk, 2018, p. 556)

As discussed previously, not all individuals feel brand hate at the same level. The lowest level of brand hate in the brand hate hierarchy consists of cold brand hate, while the highest level of brand hate is burning brand hate. Therefore, according to Kucuk (2016a), if there is a linear relationship between consumers' brand hate and anti-branding actions it follows that the lowest level of anti-branding activities will appear in cold brand hate, while the highest level of anti-branding activities in burning brand hate. Individuals who feel low-level hate are defined "faint-hearted haters", on the contrary, those who feel higher-level hate can be described as "wholehearted haters". "Faint-hearted haters" are also defined in Sternberg's classification "mild" level haters. Generally, these types of individuals hate a brand on a fashionable basis, or just to show loyalty to their friends and reference groups. This means that in some circumstances they do not even know why they hate a specific brand. On the contrary, "wholehearted haters" feel pride in their hate and define themselves with it. For these reason, they are called "true or raw haters", and can be placed in Sternberg's classification between the medium to severe hate level. If true haters' requests are not heard and problems are not resolved by the company, their hate can explode into extreme actions or even violation of law. These kinds of consumer, who cannot control their rage, as pictured in Figure 1.8, are called by Kucuk (2016a) anarchist.

Such types of haters can display different forms of anti-branding activities depending on the level of hate they feel. Specifically, according to Kucuk (2016a), consumer-generated anti-branding responses can be classified as follows: (1) anti-branding activities focused on "informing" fellow consumers about negatives of the brand; (2) anti-branding activities focused on "redirecting consumption", that is individuals try to convince other groups of social actors to stop buying the hated

brand; (3) anti-branding activities focused on "attacking" the brand with the purpose of hurting, harming or destroying it.
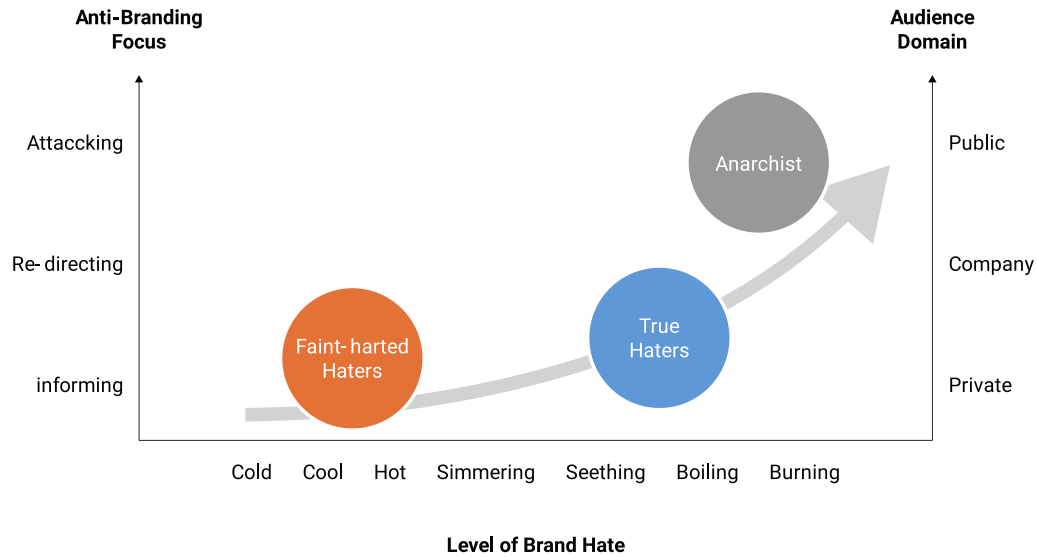
Figure 1.8 Brand hate and anti-branding (Modified from Kucuk, 2016a, p.27).

Speaking of the main determinants of consumer brand hate that implicate the emergence of anti-branding activities, Kucuk (2016a) analyses two major components: (1) company-related antecedents and (2) consumer-related antecedents.

Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009), in their research on anti-branding websites, found that there are three major company-related triggers of anti-branding:

(1) transactional, that is, consumer dissatisfaction is caused by product or service failures (e.g., buy a defective computer, or experience a bad restaurant service);

(2) market-industry, in this case consumers are discontent with irresponsible business practices (e.g., companies that use palm oil, or pollute the environments with their production process);

(3) ideological, that is, negative feeling towards the brand emerges when consumers are in search of social change through actions such as changing the economic system (e.g., hating Coca-Cola because this brand is the representation of capitalism).

40

Furthermore, company-related triggers of anti-branding can be analysed on two main levels: (1) individual level, if the attention is focused on the differences between consumer expectations and product or services performances; (2) social level, if the attention is focused on the differences between consumer expectations and companies' attention towards social, societal, ideological and business issues. Individual level antecedents are discussed extensively in "Consumer Complaint" literature; on the contrary, social level antecedents are most widely studied in "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) literature. Therefore, According to Kucuk (2016a), it is possible to assert that consumer are inclined to show brand hate in two primary situations: (1) product/service failures and (2) the lack of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Consumers perceive product/service failures as an injustice, because such incidents coincide with the loss of economic resources (i.e., money). If brands/companies do not adopt the right strategies to manage consumer dissatisfaction, they risk becoming the target of consumer hate and revenge.

The Corporate Social Responsibility asserts the integration of all company stakeholders, all social-beings, and the safeguard of the natural environment into a company's business philosophy. Consumers identify themselves with brands and companies that demonstrate a responsible and ethical way to run a business (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Conversely, research demonstrate that consumers start hating brands and companies that do not respect human rights, damage the environment, or engage in unethical business practices (Sandikci & Ekici, 2009; Bryson, Atwal, & Hulten, 2013; Romani, Grappi, Zarantonello, & Bagozzi, 2015; Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2016).

Kaynak and Ekşi (2013), in their research conducted on Turkish online anti-brand communities, try to test if ideological themes such as ethnocentrism, religiosity, environmental and health consciousness are main trigger of anti-branding activities.

The concept of ethnocentrism relates to those people who are against foreign brands, because they believe that purchasing products of foreign companies may harm their country's economy. For example anti McDonalds and KFC Online communities encourage consumers not to buy these brands.

Religiosity plays an important role in today's competitive global market. Religion, in fact, influence everyday life, values, attitudes, behaviours and preferences of individuals. Therefore, consumers are more inclined to attack those brands that do not reflect the beliefs of their religion.

Environmental consciousness can be described as the attention of individuals towards the environment and the sustainable development. Consumer may decide to avoid those brands that care only for their profits and do not consider the environmental problems that they cause. Environmentally conscious consumers are more likely to participate in boycotts towards certain brands.

Finally, health-consciousness consumers try to preserve their health and quality of life by reducing all those daily processes that represent a threat for the environment. Such consumers tend to avoid those brands that sell unhealthy products or promote materialism. Therefore, health conscious consumers participate actively in anti-branding activities and encourage other people having the same point of view towards those brands that harm society with their immoral conduct.

Kaynak and Ekşi's (2013) empirical findings show that health consciousness is the main motivator of anti-branding behaviours. In addition, ethnocentrism and environmental consciousness have significant effect in figuring out consumer activism against certain brands on the internet, in the specific Turkey context. Conversely, religiosity has a negative impact on supporting anti-branding activities.

Although company-related factors, such as failure of product/service and lack of Corporate Social Responsibility are key antecedents of anti-branding activities, some brand hate antecedents have nothing to do with the company but rather with consumer him/herself. This means that consumer brand hate could be also the result of consumers' personality problems (Kucuk, 2016a). Such consumer-related factor are the direct consequences of specifics consumers' psychological traits, such as egoism, selfishness, or narcissism. Therefore, if company-related factor are external to consumers most of the times, consumers-related factors are human characteristics and may vary a lot from consumer to consumer. According to Kucuk (2016a, p. 47), "in this context, scholars should realize that not all consumers are right all the time in their claims and with their hatred towards brands." For example, individuals with a highly entitlement personality can easy show extreme emotion and

aggression even in product/service purchasing situations where they have received the attention they deserved in exchange of their money.

In addition, as highlighted by Hegner, Fetscherin, and van Delzen (2017), consumer-related factors can be determined by symbolic incongruity between consumers' self-image and brand image. In fact, "Consumers have the tendency to buy those brands with images congruent to their self-concepts or those that will give desired meaning to their lives." (Khan & Lee, 2014, pp. 329-330) Therefore, incongruity between the symbolic meanings of a brand and the consumer's sense of self could be potential antecedents of negative emotion, such as hate, towards the brand.

Understanding the main motivators behind anti-branding is critical for companies and brand managers. Such information can help to develop strategies capable of satisfying consumers' needs and expectations related to these main factors and minimize the negative effects of online anti-branding activities (Kaynak & Ekşi, 2013).

1.4.3 Discovering the anti-branding outcomes

Krishnamurthy and Kucuk's (2009) paper is focused mainly on the outcomes of anti-branding actions. In particular, they analyse anti-brand websites as a specific communication channel that consumer can use to broadcast their negative emotions towards certain brands or companies.

Anti-brand sites are different from product evaluation and complaint forums. While the former display a language related to transactions and service situations, the latter focus on language pertaining to product quality and complaint. Specifically, anti-brand sites deal with topic such as labour rights (e.g., underpaid employees, unfair treatment of employees, discrimination, child labour, prison labour, long work hours), unfair treatment of animals (e.g., use of animals for product testing,), excessive profits (e.g., price gouging, CEO salary), harmful products and predatory competitive practices (e.g., monopoly pricing, destroying small competitors). Conversely, product evaluation and complaint forums are not likely to exhibit these arguments. Therefore, anti-brand sites may adopt one of the following three communication patterns: market, ideological or transactional speech. Specifically, according to Krishnamurthy & Kucuk (2009, p. 1124), anti-

brad websites "that adopt market speech act as strategic market agents using market-related expertise to criticize brands. Sites that adopt ideological speech focus on attacks that are personal or partisan in nature. Sites that adopt transactional speech showcase transaction-related failures. Market speech is more prevalent in comparison to the other two categories and correlates more strongly with brand value."

As highlighted by Kucuk (2010), consumers to insult the corporation's brand identity and to express anger and frustration utilise website domain names that contain the targeted corporation's brand name (i.e., Northwest Airlines becomes Northworstair.org; Safeway becomes Shameway.com; Starbucks become Starbucked.com; Coca-Cola becomes Killercoke.org). From a legal standpoint, including a trademark in domain names is not infringement if the site does not generate profit or make fraudulent defamatory claims (Petty, 2012).

A limitation of anti-brand sites regards their life cycle. The majority of such sites do not last long due to the opposition of the targeted brands. Nevertheless, during their time of activities online, anti-brand sites can be very harmful for brands. Such forms of communication influence consumers' perceptions of the targeted brand's identity and image, consumer purchase decisions and might eventually affect companies' market share.

Research about anti-brand hate sites (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2010) show that consumers are more inclined to attack most valuable brands rather than less valuable brands. Such phenomenon is conceptualised by Kucuk (2010) as "Negative Double Jeopardy", that is, brand with a higher awareness tend to have more disadvantages in comparison to weaker brands.

Online anti-brand communities represent another outcome of anti-branding activities. If a pro-brand community "is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412), it follows that anti-brand communities are non-geographically-bound consumer group resisting imposed meanings or values that are prescribed by a brand (Awasthi, Sharma, & Gulati. 2012).

Generally, anti-brand communities started to proliferate after the explosion of the internet. Previously, communities were limited to precise geographical and/or time zones, but now, thanks to the latest digital communication technologies,

consumers have the possibility to reveal companies' secrets and misconducts to a large social network.

Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010), analysing the case of the Wal-Mart anti-brand community (http://www.sprawl-busters.com), find out that the central task of anti-brand communities is the construction of a new collective identity in order to change the extant marketplace. This process requires a clear self-image and a collective brand meaning. At the base of the collective identity formation there is a storytelling process, that is, the different members of the community in turn contribute to the knowledge development by sharing personal beliefs and experiences embedded within a story.

Negative word of mouth is the most fast-paced and frequent anti-branding outcome. Such form of communication occurs when an individual speaks poorly about a brand (Bonifield & Cole, 2007) on social media platform (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and review website like TripAdvisor). Generally, consumers engaging in negative word of mouth to alert others about their negative experience with a brand, or to reveal the lack of social responsibility of a certain company. Occasionally, brands receive public offenses from a large number of internet users via social media platforms. The intent of such "collaborative brand attacks" (Rauschnabel, Kammerlander, & Ivens, 2016) is to force the targeted brand or company to change behaviour on the market.

A complex phenomenon such as large quantities of messages containing negative word of mouth and complaint behaviour against a brand or company in social media networks is also defined social media firestorms. This concept, introduced to the academic world by Pfeffer, Zorbach, and Carley (2014), has been adopted in marketing literature by Hansen, Kupfer, and Hennig-Thurau (2018) to indicate a typical case of brand crisis in the digital age.

From a semiotic perspective, word of mouth online is a particular form of multimodal text. According to Baldry and Thibault (2006, p 3), "Multimodal texts integrate selections from different semiotic resources to their principles of organisation. […] These resources are not simply juxtaposed as separate modes of meaning making but are combined and integrated to form a complex whole which cannot be reduced to, or explained in terms of the mere sum of its separate parts." This means that messages published by consumers on social media, blogs and other

digital platforms are not limited to written language, but represent the combination of written material, images, video, sounds, link to other external multimodal text (i.e., websites), and emoticons (i.e., icons such as :), :(and ;)), or emoji (i.e., ☺, ☹) representing a plethora of positive and negative emotions. All these messages, which contain multiple semiotic resources, "are created to be understood together as a single text, […] where the written and image components are to be read as one semantic entry." (Mehmet & Clark, 2016, p. 96)

The different forms of anti-branding outcomes described in this paragraph should be interpreted as examples of "semiotic democracy". This term, coined by the media scholar John Fiske, describes a world where individuals freely and widely engage in the use of cultural symbols in response to the forces of media (Fiske, 1987). A semiotic democracy enables consumers to "resist", "subvert" and "recode" certain contents produced by economic actors, thereby empowering consumers, rather than producers (Katyal, 2012).

The creation of anti-branding sites and anti-brand communities, as well as the proliferation of negative word of mouth, such as harmful messages, parodies, and doppelgänger images (Giesler, 2012; Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel, 2006), can dilute brand meanings and equity, influence the choice of other consumers, and negatively impact on the company's profitability. Therefore, is essential for brand and companies understanding how to manage negative relationship with consumers.

1.4.4 Managing anti-branding attacks

The marketing literature on branding increasingly suggests that brand managers have lost their pivotal role as authors of brand meaning (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013; Horn, Taros, Dirkes et al., 2015). With the explosion of the internet and the development of social media, individuals can easily generate, edit and share complaints and negative word of mouth about brands with large numbers of people. Such interactions and conversations can contribute to the proliferation of negative meanings in the marketplace, which affect the desired image, values and reputation of a brand.

Keller's (1993) conventional perspective of brand as a firm-owned and

controlled knowledge structure that can be built in consumers' minds through carefully coordinated marketing activities has no place in the digital era (D'Arco & Marino, 2018). Nowadays, branding means much more than identifying key points of difference and building unique, favourable and strong brand associations in the mind of consumers. It is much more than just an organizational activity. It is an organic process that brings two parties – brand makers and brand users – closer together to co-create value (Ind, Iglesias, & Schultz, 2013).

In order to explain the evolution of brand and branding in the digital era, scholars have adopted in their studies a certain number of theoretical frameworks, "that is a network, or 'a plane,' of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena" (Jabaren, 2009, p. 51). For example, Hennig-Thurau, Malthouse, Friege, Gensler, et al. (2010) introduce a "pinball" framework to describe new media's impact on relationships with customers. Managing customer relationships is like playing pinball. Firms serve up a "marketing ball" (brands and brand-building messages) into a cacophonous environment which can interfere with the companies' marketing messages (such as bumpers do when playing pinball) and make it more complex to control brand images and relationship outcomes such as customer equity.

Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) using the metaphor of improvisation (improv) theater performances, offer a semantic framework to understand brands in the social media arena. Specifically, the authors maintain that: "brand owners and users in social media interact with one another in the same impromptu and uncontrolled fashion that characterizes improv theater" (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012, p. 190). This means that brand owners do not tell the stories of their brand alone but co-create brand performances in collaboration with the consumers. The improv theater metaphor also shows that the audience roles in social media can vary during the performance from modest (spectator) to very overt (actor), depending on the degree of improvisation and tension offered by the brand. In particular, brand audience according to their euphoric or dysphoric states can assume the following roles: fan, evangelist, critic, or haker.

Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, and Wiertz (2013) to illustrate the impact of social media on brand management develop a conceptual framework in which consumers are considered "pivotal authors of brand stories". The contents created

by consumers using social media channels become central for a brand's meaning. But while firm-generated brand stories typically are consistent and coherent over time, consumer-generated brand stories are more likely to change over time and may represent a threat for brand's aspired identity. Therefore, brand managers need to listen and coordinate consumer-generated stories, as well as react to negative consumer-generated brand stories that harm the brand.

According to Kucuk (2016a), brand managers have the opportunity to see the first signals that are coming from the complaining consumers by developing listening tools with the help of technology. In order to find out negative and hateful conversation, some companies do listening manually putting negative words into search engines. Nevertheless, today's digital technologies allow companies to listen to the market with automated systems. Brand managers can now easily collect information about consumers hate and common satisfaction problems using intelligence systems, such as speech tracking and text analysis tools.

Once hateful speech is detected, the next step consists of developing the right communication styles to engage in a conversation with consumers and understand the root causes of brand hate. During the engagement process, brand managers should not be authoritative and demanding. They need to be sincere and focus on consumer experience. Understanding their point of view is the only way to solve the consumer problem. Most of the conversations between brand and consumers happen in social networking platforms and hence in front of other individuals. Therefore, brand managers should keep calm and respect the hateful or angry people, even in those cases the accusations might not reflect the actual truth about the brand that is the target of negative criticism.

The main objective of the engagement process is to understand consumer hateful behaviours and try to fix the problem through negotiating the right economic value that compensates the damage or loss suffered by consumers. If consumers do not receive the right compensations for their emotional and physical loss, they will share their negative story with other consumers. Such incapability or unwillingness of companies to negotiate with consumers will affect brand's reputation and image, as well as profitability due to the brand value erosion.

In sum, the brand hate management process proposed by Kucuk (2016a) consists

of three steps: (1) listening; (2) engaging; (3) negotiation and resolution (see Figure 1.9). Listening is only the first step to engage with consumers and understand the reasons of their dissatisfaction and hate.

Starting an engaging conversation help brand managers to find out the main antecedents and reasons of consumers hate. During this step, brand managers can determine if the nature of the brand attack is the consequence of company-related factors or consumer-related factors.

As highlighted by Kucuk (2016a, p. 131), "If the company realizes that the hate is a result of a consumer's personality traits, then the company might stop engaging with them as that is not company's fault but rather the consumer's own personal problem."

Companies cannot fix consumers' personality problems, thus brand managers need to find a way to leave the consumers peacefully. On the contrary, most company-related hate antecedents can be fixed through negotiation.
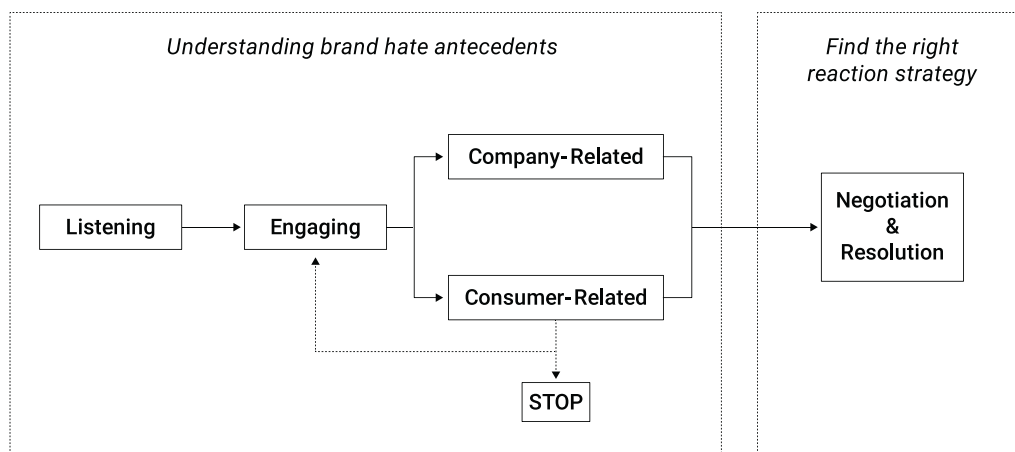
Figure 1.9 Brand hate management process (Modified from Kucuk, 2016a, p.131).

Traditional branding was "the exercise of a narcissist, the brand manager, who was preoccupied with creating a specific image for the brand, primarily through corporate communications shouting how wonderful the brand is, then passing on the desired image to consumers. Any voices diverging from this image had to be suppressed." (Christodoulides, 2009, p. 142)

In the contemporary marketing computer mediated environments, brands to achieve success need to stop conducting monologues like they used to do in the past

using traditional media, and recognise the importance of listening consumers, find out what they talk about, understand them, get into that conversation, enable interactivity, build relationships.

In the contemporary marketing landscape, a brand cannot be treated as a monolith. It is more like an *open source* cognitive construal embedded in a cultural conversation (Fournier & Avery, 2011). Therefore, social media platforms and other digital channels such as video sharing sites, blogs and wikis enable open source branding by empowering consumers to produce and share contents with their peers about brand experiences in their everyday lives. Furthermore, consumers "can easily develop their own version of brand images, slogans and even commercial to subvert the corporate creation of brand meaning and associations" (Kucuk, 2016a, p. 69). This means that brands are more exposed to criticisms, parodies, sabotages and consumer hateful behaviour.

In a world governed by social empowerment, hyper-criticism, and instant transparency, brand managers must focus on an ever-present need to protect brands from attack and demise. If in the past branding was a value-creating discipline focused on returns and revenue generation, now it is more appropriately be considered as a discipline focused on risk management and risk control (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

1.5 A conceptual framework of the anti-branding process

On the basis of the content analysis of the collected materials and the identification of four categories (i.e., "Anti-branding concept", "Anti-branding antecedents", "Anti-branding outcomes" and "Managing anti-branding attack") that systematise the fragmented body of literature about the anti-branding phenomenon, was possible to develop a conceptual framework (Figure 1.10).

The framework presents three different stages of the anti-branding process, which are called respectively:

(1) Anti-branding antecedents,

(2) Anti-branding outcomes,

(3) Anti-branding management.
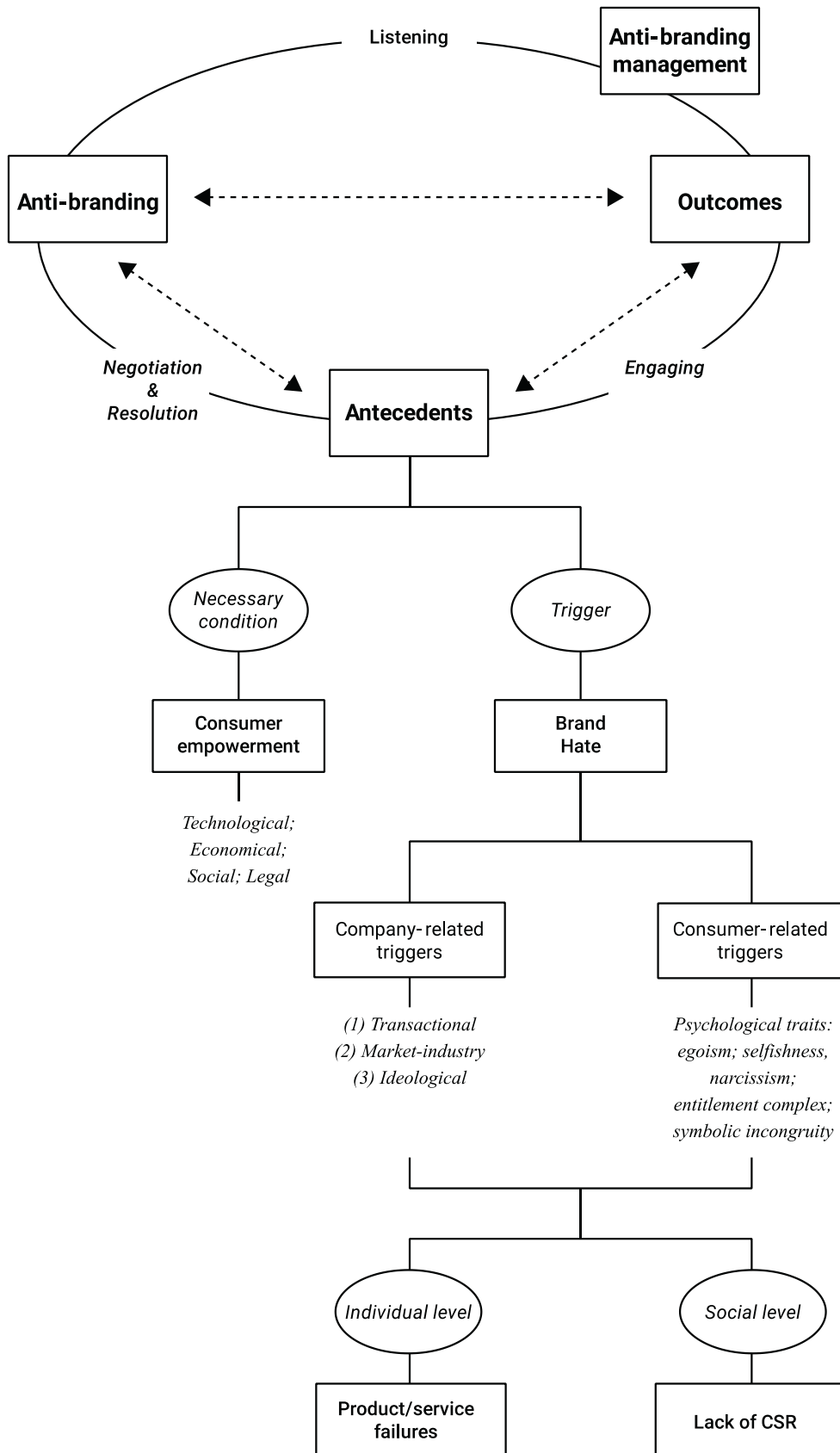
Figure 1.10 Conceptual Framework of the anti-branding process.

Listening

Anti-branding management

Anti-branding

Outcomes

Negotiation & Resolution

Antecedents

Engaging

Necessary condition

Trigger

Consumer empowerment

Brand Hate

Technological; Economical; Social; Legal

Company-related triggers

Consumer-related triggers

(1) Transactional
(2) Market-industry
(3) Ideological

Psychological traits: egoism; selfishness, narcissism; entitlement complex; symbolic incongruity

Individual level

Social level

Product/service failures

Lack of CSR

The first stage of the framework is concerned with the identification of the main antecedents of anti-branding activities. The literature provides two causal antecedents: "consumer empowerment" on technological, economical, societal and legal level as a necessary precondition to achieve consumer activism goal in the markets, and "brand hate" as an emotional trigger. Focusing on brand hate, the two major motives that transform consumer dissatisfaction and frustration into a strong and negative feeling such as hate are (1) company-related triggers and (2) consumer-related triggers. Company-related triggers can be classified as follows: (a) transactional (dissatisfaction as a result of product or service failures), (b) market industry (disappointment with a brand or discontentment with irresponsible business practices, such as producing products that are hazardous to the environment), and (c) ideological (consumer on the base of their beliefs perceive negative feelings because the brand adopts unethical business practices, or is suspected of corporate irresponsibility). Consumer-related triggers are the consequence of consumer's own personality features rather than company-related factors, such as psychological disorders (i.e., narcissism or self-entitlement), and incongruity between the symbolic meanings of a brand and the consumer's sense of self. These consumers when conflict appear reveal a low level of agreeableness and cooperation. Therefore, they should be treated differently.

Company-related triggers and consumer-related triggers can be usefully discussed in two main categories: (1) individual level and (2) social level. In the first case, consumer hate is triggered by service and product failures. In the second case, the determinants of consumer brand hate regard the impact of business on society, and in particular the lack of corporate social responsibility.

The second stage of the conceptual framework is concerned with the outcomes of the anti-branding behaviours, that is, the semiotic systems (i.e., written language, images, video) and the channels (i.e., anti-branding website, social media, and blog) utilised by individuals to express their hate towards certain brands. Specifically, the attention focuses on the nature of the communication processes, namely, "all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another" (Shannon & Weaver, 1963, p. 3), but also, on the main effects (i.e., damage to brand image, loss of reputation, and brand value erosion) that the meanings produced by consumers in the marketing

environment have on the brand semiotic system, that is, the meaning-making process from the brand point of view.

The third stage of the conceptual framework is concerned with the anti-branding management, that is, the set of tools and strategies that brand managers adopt to defend their brands from consumers attacks. The brand hate management process, as described in the paragraph 1.4.4, consists of three steps: (1) listening; (2) engaging; (3) negotiation and resolution.

The conceptual framework is also used to highlight gaps in the extant literature and to identify areas for future research. To date, the focus of research about anti-branding phenomenon has been primarily on the antecedents that motivate consumers to attack brands in the digital marketing environments. Furthermore, previous research enables an exhaustive understanding of the main forms of expression of the anti-branding activities, and the core mechanisms and risks of social media for brands, but does not explore in-depth the effective corporate response strategies in reaction to brand attack. Few rare exceptions are the research conducted respectively by Crijns, Cauberghe, Hudders, and Claeys (2017), and Melancon and Dalakas (2018). Both studies suggest that brand managers can protect the reputation of their brands by engaging in a personalized dialogue with consumers who post negative comments on social media. Nevertheless, Melancon and Dalakas (2018, p. 164) also highlight that the silence may be preferable in the case of troll posts and social activist posts. Furthermore, the authors maintain that marketers must not respond hastily, and that extensive delays can also be harmful and either create new problems or aggravate existing ones. "However quick responses that are automated may be worse than delayed responses".

D'Arco and Marino (2018) is another seminal research about how brand managers can react to brand attack. This PhD thesis, borrowing a concept of mass media terminology, can be considered a sort of *spin-off* of this conference proceeding.

To sum, the first obvious gap in the literature concerns the anti-branding management stage. Therefore, the overall intent of this thesis is to address this knowledge gap investigating the possible reaction strategies that brand managers can adopt to protect their brand reputation or limit the damages of the attack.

According to Awasthi, Sharma, and Gulati (2012, p. 49), anti-branding activities "have led to terms as 'brand rehabilitation strategy' and 'brand repair' to become common place in relation to attempts to avoid irreparable damage to a brand's culture." Hence, this research essentially seeks to analyse how brand try to rehabilitate themselves.

Chapter 2

Researching the anti-branding trend: Reflections on the methodology

Summary

Chapter 2 outlines the overall research process adopted to investigate the anti-branding phenomenon. In particular, it describes the specific methodological details to solve the research problem, that is, the methods and techniques used to gather, analyse, and process the data.

Keywords

Content analysis • Methodology • Mixed method • Multiple-case study analysis • Research process

2.1 Meaning of research

> *Who* is in search of truth? And what does the man who says "I want the truth" mean? Proust does not believe that man, nor even a supposedly pure mind, has by nature a desire for truth, a will-to-truth. We search for truth only when we are determined to do so in terms of a concrete situation, when we undergo a kind of violence that impel us to search. Who searches for truth? The jealous man, under the pressure of the beloved's lies. There is always the violence of a sign that forces us into the search, that robs us of peace. The truth is not to be found by affinity, nor by goodwill, but is *betrayed* by involuntary signs.
>
> (Deleuze, 1964 p. 15)

Research in common parlance designates a search for knowledge. Conversely, in a technical sense, the term refers to an academic activity, that is, according to Kothari

(2004, p. 1) "a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic."

The purpose of research is to generate answers to specific questions or to solve problems by formulating hypothesis, gathering and analysing the facts or data, making deductions and reaching conclusions that support the hypothesis. Research can offer "an original contribution to the existing stock of knowledge making for its advancement. It is the pursuit of truth with the help of study, observation, comparison and experiment." (Kothari, 2004, p. 1)

In short, in the academic context, the term research designates a rigorous scientific procedure and a systematic method to gain familiarity with certain phenomena that capture the attention of an individual or a group and force him/her or them to think and search for truth.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016, p. 51), an "important pathway to knowledge is via a framework called methodology." Typing the word "methodology" in the search window of the online version of *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (https://www.ahdictionary.com) is possible to find many ways of defining this term:

1.

> **a.** A body of practices, procedures, and rules used by those who work in a discipline or engage in an inquiry; a set of working methods: *the methodology of genetic studies; a poll marred by faulty methodology.*
> **b.** The study or theoretical analysis of such working methods.

2. The branch of logic that deals with the general principles of the formation of knowledge.

Research methodology deals not only with the research methods. It also indicates the logic behind the methods used in the context of a specific research study. The scope of research methodology is to explain why a research study has been undertaken, how the research problem has been defined, in what way and why the hypothesis have been formulated, what data have been collected, and why a researcher is using a particular method or technique, and why he/she is not using others so that research results are capable of being evaluated either by the researcher himself/herself or by others.

2.2 Research purpose

At the base of doing research, there is always a motivation. As highlighted by Kothari (2004, p. 2), some of the possible motives for doing research may be either one or more of the following:

(1) Desire to get a research degree along with its consequential benefits;

(2) Desire to face the challenge in solving the unsolved problems, i.e., concern over practical problems initiates research;

(3) Desire to get intellectual joy of doing some creative work;

(4) Desire to be of service to society;

(5) Desire to get respectability;

(6) Directives of government:

(7) Desire to satisfy curiosity about new things.

In addition to the desire of the author to achieve a prestigious qualification such as a Doctoral degree, what really motivates the research carried out in this thesis is to solve a problem of the marketing discipline concerning the difficulties to build strong brands in modern times.

Brand managers are losing control over their brands (Gensler, Völckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Wiertz, 2013). They can no longer be considered the custodian of a rigid brand identity, because consumers empowered by the internet and social media have the possibility to share with their peers negative stories about certain brands. Consumers also can attack brand pages on social network sites by publishing angry or hateful messages. Therefore, due to multiple forms of anti-branding activities, management of brands has run into difficulty.

Although several marketing scholars have pointed out the relevance of anti-branding phenomenon, the research about the tactics that brand should adopt to manage consumers attacks have largely been neglected as an object of research. Against this backdrop, this thesis seeks to investigate the following research question:

RQ. *How* do consumers purposefully construct their conflict with brands and *why*, under certain circumstances, they are capable to achieve their anti-branding goals, or are doomed to fail thanks to specific reaction strategies adopted by brands?

Conventionally, there are three different types of research: (1) exploratory research, which goal is to formulate problems more precisely; (2) descriptive research, which aims to describe the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group; and (3) explanatory research, which focuses on testing the hypotheses of causal relationships between variables.

Considering that the phenomenon to investigate is still new and not specifically defined, this research has an explorative nature. According to Yin (2017), the main purpose of exploratory studies is that of understanding what is happening in a specific phenomenon, to seek new ideas and insights. As such, the research design appropriate for this type of studies must be flexible enough to provide opportunity for considering different aspects of a problem under study (Kothari, 2004).

Generally, in order to carry out an exploratory study, Kothari (2004) suggests using one or more of the following methods: (a) the survey of concerning literature, (b) the experience survey, and (c) the analysis of "insight-stimulating" cases.

The survey of concerning literature is the most simple and productive method to collect information, concepts and theories about a specific research problem. Reviewing the extant literature also helps researchers to develop hypothesis where they have not yet been formulated.

Experience survey consists of collecting information from people who have had practical experience with the problem to be studied. As highlighted by Kothari (2004, p. 36), researchers need to prepare "an interview schedule for the systematic questioning of informants. But the interview must ensure flexibility in the sense that the respondents should be allowed to raise issues and questions which the investigator has not previously considered." An experience survey is a fruitful method to define the problem more concisely. Furthermore, such type of survey helps in the formulation of the research hypothesis, and provides information about the practical possibilities for doing different types of research.

Analysis of "insight-stimulating" cases is a useful method for evoking insights and suggesting hypotheses for research. This method consists of an exhaustive study of "selected instances of the phenomenon in which one is interested" (Kothari, 2004, p. 36). For this purpose, researchers may adopt different approaches such as unstructured interviews, focus group, non-participant direct observation, participant observation, and online research.

Whatever method or research design outlined above is adopted, the objective of an exploratory research is to transform the initial exploratory phase into something that is more general and conceptual in nature. The final result consists in introducing a theory, which is firmly based on empirical material, or developing hypothesis to test in future researche.

2.3 Research design

To gain insights and information about the research objective, the current exploratory research combines two of the three above-mentioned methods: (1) the survey of concerning literature, and (2) the analysis of "insight-stimulating" cases.

The literature review process and the communication of the findings have been widely discussed in Chapter 1. To briefly recap, the systematic review of the extant literature regarding the anti-branding phenomenon helped the author of this thesis to identify a conceptual framework, that is, "an argument that the concepts chosen for investigation, and any anticipated relationships among them, will be appropriate and useful given the research problem under investigation" (Lester, 2005, p. 460)

The conceptual framework provides a holistic view of the anti-branding phenomenon by introducing a "skeletal structure" that puts together the concepts, the theories and tested hypothesis relating the main antecedents and consequences of consumer anti-branding activities. Furthermore, the conceptual framework highlighting how the area referring to the anti-branding management theories is still in its infancy illuminates the focal point of the research.

After that an extensive literature survey helped the author to formulate the research problem in clear cut terms, the attention focused on the analysis of "insight-stimulating" cases. The finding and selection of units of analysis capable to furnish dimensions and ramifications of a specific phenomenon is a key factor in explorative research.

2.3.1 Case study analysis as a form of explorative research

According to Gummesson (2017), case studies are used in different ways in business and management disciplines for studying the complexity of the 'real' world. For examples, cases can be about the efficiency of an organisation, the

behaviour of financial markets, the success or failure of a manager, a single consumer or a community of consumers and citizens.

Case studies have received many definitions, nevertheless the most cited authors who wrote about this topic are Yin, whose book *Case study research: Design and methods* published for the first time in 1984 is currently with a sixth revised edition in 2017, and Eisenhardt, who in his article *Building theories from case study research* (1989) illustrates the use of case study for theory generation.

As highlighted by Yin (2017, p. 15):

(1) "A case study is an empirical inquiry that

- investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident

(2) The case study inquiry

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis".

The emphasis of a case study is on exploring a specific phenomenon within its context and thereby develop a deep understanding of how it relates to its context through an all-encompassing method that includes the logic of case study design, data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis. Therefore, this method helps researchers to explain 'why' and 'how' something happened, rather than offering statistical representativeness of a phenomenon.

Considered equivalent to a qualitative research method, case studies are usually viewed by academia as "non-scientific" because they may contain subjective bias, and are used as crutch when researchers cannot employ indexes, equations or put numbers on what they do (Gummesson, 2017). Specifically, case study is treated as a pilot research, and an exploratory prelude that researchers have to get over as quickly as possible so that they can pass to quantitative approaches and hypothesis

testing. The verbal narration of the case is also equalized to anecdotal accounts, journalism, and storytelling. Furthermore, case study is accused of "lacking rigour and reliability and that the results cannot be generalized". On the other hand, quantitative research "is presented as the epitome of great science." (Gummesson, 2017, p. 18)

The choice to adopt quantitative or qualitative research should not be guided by convention or convenience. According to Flyvbjerg, (2006, p. 242), good research "is problem driven and not methodology driven in the sense that it employs those methods that for a given problematic, best help answer the research questions at hand."

The decision to explore the anti-branding activities through case study research is justified by the fact that it is a complex phenomenon of fuzzy variables and relationships that cannot be solved in a typical positivistic manner by adopting survey method, but requires an "interactive research". According to Gummesson (2017, p. 13) case study is guided by the complexity paradigm and one of its axioms is the emphasis on interactive research, that is, to produce scientific results "close interaction between the researcher and the object of study, its data, the people involved, etc., is necessary."

The real scientific contribution of case study, or "case theory" paraphrasing Gummesson (2017, p. 9), "is the *conceptualization* of cases as the ground for theory generation, conclusions, reporting and practical application."

According to Perry (1998), there are two major approaches to theory generation, deductive theory testing and inductive theory building. The deductive approach represents the positivist paradigm; the inductive approach instead can be referred to the phenomenological paradigm, which in turn can be divided into critical theory, constructivism, and realism.

The more appropriate epistemological guide for case study research is realism. Compared to relativism, constructivism and critical theory, realism is more characterised by some researcher objectivity. Besides, the production of new knowledge by adopting case study can be evaluated through measures, like reliability and validity issues, careful evaluation of research topic and methodology, and through review by examiners. Conversely, this commensurability is less evident in constructivism and critical research. Moreover, if positivism requires that

only observable phenomena can and should be researched, realism admits that case study research may involve the collection of perceptions of unobservable facts, for example consumer motivations in anti-branding activities.

Nevertheless, case study research cannot be pure induction. Perry (1998) suggests that in the design of the case study it is impossible to go theory-free. This means that theory advancement requires continuous interplay between some deduction based on prior theory and theory emerging from data through inductive reasoning. This research follows Perry's (1998) recommendations presenting the right mixture of induction and deduction, that is, an abductive approach (Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017)

2.3.2 Designing case studies

After taking decision to adopt a case study research, there are some fundamental choices to be made. These choices relate to specific components of case study design.

Prior to any data collection, the first important decision to make regards the number of cases to select. Yin (2017) distinguishes single- and multiple-case designs. The single case study is an appropriate design if satisfies some circumstances, specifically Yin (2017) highlights the following five rationales:

(1) the case represents the "critical case" in testing a significant theory;

(2) the case represents an "extreme case" or a "unique case";

(3) the case is the "representative" or "typical case", that is, the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation (i.e., a manufacturing firm believed to be typical of many other manufacturing firms in the same industry, a representative school or hospital);

(4) the case is the "revelatory case", that is, represents phenomenon which is hardly accessible to scientific investigation;

(5) the case is the "longitudinal" case, that is, the same single case is studied at two or more points in time.

Multiple-case designs have some distinct advantages in comparison to single-case designs. Results from multiple-case are often considered more compelling,

thus the overall study is regarded as being more robust. At the same time, multiple case designs have some disadvantages, for example, they cannot satisfy the five rationales for single-case design. Furthermore, conducting a multiple-case study requires a huge commitment of time and energy, resources that sometimes researchers do not have.

As highlighted by Yin (2017), opting for a multiple-case design also raises a new set of questions with regard to how the units of analysis should be selected. Yin (2017) suggests that "multiple cases" should be treated as "multiple experiments" rather than "multiple respondents in a survey", and so replication logic and not sampling logic should be used for multiple-case studies.

A representative sample is not the criteria for case selection. Conversely, following Yin's (2017) advice, each case must be selected so that it either predicts similar results (that is literal replication) or produces contrasting results for predictable reasons (that is, theoretical replication).

Other researchers support the inappropriateness of random sampling for case selection too. For example, Eisenhardt (1989, p. 537) maintains that the "random selection of cases is neither necessary, nor even preferable."

So how should cases be selected? Perry (1998), basing on Patton's (1990) list, which comprehends 15 strategies of "purposeful sampling" (in contrast to "random sampling"), suggests that "maximum variation" (that is, contrasting and extreme cases) is the most appropriate for case study purposes, thus it is to prefer to other types of purposeful sampling such as "typical case", "critical case", or "homogeneous". Regardless of the 15 case selection strategies is used, the most productive strategy is "selecting information-rich cases", that is, "cases from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance. They are cases worthy of in-depth study." (Patton, 1990, p. 169)

With regard to the effective number of cases to be included in a multiple-case study design, the decision is left to researchers. Multiple-case study, according to Gummesson (2017, p. 9), "can be anything from 2 to 100s or even 1000s and there is no standard rules for the number; it is always contingent on what you are studying and why." However, considering the real constrains of time and resources of many researchers or postgraduates students who are working upon a research project is it possible to follow Eisenhardt's advice (1989, p. 545), who recommends between

four and ten cases. Specifically he maintains that "While there is no ideal number of cases, a number between four and ten cases often works well. With fewer than four cases, it is often difficult to generate theory with much complexity, and its empirical grounding is likely to be unconvincing."

Following the above-mentioned advantages, this research opted for a multiple-case study design. To explain similarities as well as variance in root causes of and reactions to consumers attacks towards certain brands this study adopts a theoretical replication logic. The author considered that for the purpose of this research six cases, which differentiate from each other under some respect, were an exact number of units of analysis.

Initially, the selection of relevant cases to include in the sample was based on the author's prior knowledge, such as information assimilated from press, online newspapers, and blogs. In the second stage to expand the sample size the author looked it up on the internet using search strings such as "brand and epic fail", "brands and social media attacks", "brand attacked on social media", "anti-brand*", and "consumer complaint". The different materials (i.e., articles, blog posts, and video) and information found online allowed the discovery of episodes and facts of everyday life worthy of attention in business disciplines context.

The second important decision to make during the planning of case study design regards the access to case data. According to Yin (2017), there are six possible sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts.

Gummesson (2017) in his attempt to make advance case study method in business disciplines suggests a series of techniques for data generation (Table 2.5). Among the different techniques to generate data suggested by Gummesson (2017), the most appropriate to reach the specific objective of this thesis seems to be online research.

Each selected case develops around a central event that focuses on consumers' activities that are not aligned with the best interests of the brand, namely, anti-branding behaviour. Such phenomenon emerge in a specific environment: the internet. "The internet is a social network with billions of users worldwide." The users (i.e. individuals, brands, companies, political institutions, and others) are the nodes. Some nodes have a special appeal and become hubs, that is, a node with a

number of links that greatly exceeds the average, it is the case of brands, famous people like actors, musicians, sports stars, or politicians (Gummesson, 2017, p. 247). Some hubs, for example a certain brand, may become a target of hate.

Table 2.5 Data generation techniques in case study (Adapted from Gummesson, 2017).

Existing material	Books, case reports, articles, archival records, notes, letters, mass media reports, audio recordings, videotapes, films, photos, statistics, organizational charts, diaries, emails, internet data, websites and social media are rich sources of information for cases.
Interviews ▪ Questionnaire surveys: ▪ Personal interviews ▪ Group interview (i.e. focus group, Delphi studies, scenario-writing)	A questionnaire survey is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions (or other types of prompts) for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. Generally, surveys claim to give statistically reliable answers to a series of questions by being rigorous and generalizable. Personal or group interviews can be formal (structured) or informal (unstructured), they generate qualitative data.
Observation: ▪ Direct observation ▪ Participant observation	It is a way of studying cultural phenomena such as customs, beliefs, behaviour and the social organisation of man in a natural context.
Management action research: ▪ Real-time action research ▪ Retrospective action research	Management action research goes a step further than participant observation by demanding that researchers actively influence the events they are studying by working in an organisation, taking part in decision-making and implementation, or studying something self-lived as a citizen or consumer. Action research has dual goals. One is to contribute to the solution of a particular problem; the other is to contribute to science.
Neuroscience	It is a multidisciplinary branch of biology that combines physiology, anatomy, molecular biology, developmental biology, cytology, mathematical modeling and psychology to understand the fundamental and emergent properties of neurons and neural circuits. Neuroscience gives to researchers in the business discipline the opportunity to peek inside the black box of customers, employers, shareholders and others.
Online research	Online research are new techniques made possible by the internet, such as surveys, and nethnography, that is, the possibility to explore the social behaviour and data available on blogs, social networking sites, and fan forum. It is a type of documented reality that allows researchers to do studies from the desk.

Generally real-time streams of social media, anti-branding websites, the blog and the social media profiles of a certain brand are the battlefield where consumers open fire against (dis)armed brands. The ammunitions that consumers have available are written texts, emoticons, emoji, visual texts, and other texts that combines various semiotic modes (ie, video, or written texts containing pictures). Vice versa, brands have exactly the same ammunitions to counterattack.

From the researchers' perspective, 'ammunitions' are the data to analyse and interpret in order to understand the motivations of the anti-branding behaviour, and the reaction, if any, of marketers.

2.3.3 Data collection procedure

The six identified case studies concern the following brands: (A) Carpisa, (B) Selex Group, (C) Pandora, (D) Buondì Motta, (E) Dolce & Gabbana, and (F) Gillette.

Different online sources were consulted to develop each case study. Initially, the attention focused on the digital environment wherein the conflict between consumers and the $brand_n$ took place, that is, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Instagram. To extract information from the above-mentioned $brand_n$'s owned media, were used both automatic data extraction tools (i.e., Netvizz Facebook App, and Facepager) and manual techniques (Villegas, 2016). Furthermore, the author of this thesis searched for materials published on the topic, that is, $brand_n$ under consumer attack, by economic and financial journalists, or marketing bloggers. Such information were useful to build the background of the case, and to understand if the $brand_n$ had financial or reputational repercussions after the social media firestorms.

Using multiple sources to develop a case study however involves certain risks. Therefore, data, rather than handled individually, were processed together building for each one of the selected case a specific database (Yin, 2017; Stake, 1995).

2.3.3.1 Obtaining data

In this section are explained the main techniques used to extract data from websites. According to Villegas (2016), data scraping can be classified as real-time (i.e., data from last minute, hours, or days) or retrospective (i.e., data published more than

seven days after). Besides, data can be collected manually or automatic via specific extraction tools. The selection of the better strategy to adopt in order to collect data from the web depends on the nature of the digital environment. For example to extract data from Facebook brand pages (or Fan pages), the author of this thesis preferred to use Netvizz. As indicated by its developer, "Netvizz is a simple Facebook application written in PHP that runs on a server provided by the Digital Methods Initiative. It is part of Facebook's app directory and can be found by typing the name into the platform's main search box. Like any other Facebook application, it requires users to log in with an existing Facebook account to be able to access any data at all." (Rieder, 2013, p. 349)

Using the Netvizz application researchers can setup different parameters (i.e. number of posts, publication date) and scrape data easily from three different sections of the Facebook platform: (1) personal networks, (2) groups, and (3) pages. Netvizz provides two types of data files: (1) network files, and (2) tabular files. Network files are used generally to conduct Social Network Analysis, that is, the mapping and measuring of relationships and flows between people, groups, organizations, computers, URLs, and other connected information/knowledge entities. The nodes in the network are the people and groups while the links show relationships or flows between the nodes. Tabular files can be adopted for more traditional statistical techniques, for example, they can be converted into a file Excel, or processed through content analysis software, such as NVivo or WordStat.

To extract tweets containing a particular hashtag from Twitter platform, was used Facepager. This open source software was made for fetching public available data from Twitter, and other JSON-based API. All data is stored in a SQLite database and may be exported to CSV (Jünger, & Keyling, 2018), that is, a comma-separated values file, which allows data to be saved in a tabular format.

To download all comments from a given YouTube video, was used YouTube Comment Scraper (http://ytcomments.klostermann.ca), a web client written in Node.js that uses the youtube-comment-api module to gain access to the comments. Given a YouTube video URL the client will request all comments for that video from the API. The results are displayed as nicely formatted JSON and CSV and can also be downloaded in those formats.

Finally, to collect data from Instagram, especially for the case study of Dolce &

Gabbana, were mixed both manual and automatic techniques. Specifically, Spatulah (https://spatulah.com/scraper) turned out to be a fun little piece of software that help researchers to download Instagram comments one URL at a time.

2.3.3 Data analysis and interpretation procedures: linking data to results

According to Eisenhardt (1991, p. 539), data analysis "is the heart of building theory from case studies, but it is both the most difficult and the least codified part of the process."

There are numerous approaches for analysing data. First of all, the choice depends on their nature. Generally, data can be quantitative or qualitative. Quantitative data is designed to collect cold, hard facts. Numbers. Quantitative data is structured and statistical. It provides support when a researcher needs to draw general conclusions from his/her research. Qualitative data, on the other hand, collects information that seeks to describe a topic more than measure it. For instance, when a researcher is interested in investigating the reasons for human behaviour (i.e., why people think or do certain things) he/she performs a particular type of qualitative research, which aims at discovering the underlying motives and desires, using in depth interviews for the purpose. Other techniques of such research are word association tests, sentence completion tests, story completion tests, and content analysis of texts and artifacts produced by individuals (i.e., books, articles, movies, reports, emails, and social media posts).

Researchers can also collect and analyse in the same study both quantitative and qualitative data. This multiple-case study research is a typical example of study that integrates quantitative (i.e., number of posts/tweets/comments, quantity of likes/dislikes, frequency of negative/positive sentences) and qualitative materials or evidence.

Since the majority of the collected data are texts, this research adopts content analysis techniques. Content analysis is a technique for analysing written, verbal or visual communication messages (Cole, 1988). Initially, content analysis was developed exclusively for a quantitative approach (i.e., frequencies analysis) and for this reason related to a positivistic paradigm (Berelson, 1952). Later commentaries indicate that content analysis has undergone comprehensive changes over time, moving from 'a counting game' to a more interpretative approach within

the qualitative paradigm (Schreier, 2012; Egberg-Thyme, Wiberg, Lundman, Graneheim, 2013; Lindgren, Sundbaum, Eriksson, Graneheim, 2014).

According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action. The main goal is to achieve a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis is concepts or categories describing the phenomenon. Therefore, the content analysis of written, visual, or multimodal texts implies the description of the manifest content, close to the text, as well as interpretations of the latent content, distant from the text but still close to the lived experience of the subject who produced the text. As highlighted by Graneheim and Lundman (2004), the latent content is interpretations of the underlying meaning or the 'red thread' between the lines in the text. From an epistemological perspective, "The descriptions and interpretations can be seen as emanating from phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches to the objects of the study." (Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017, p. 30).

Depending upon the purpose of the study, content analysis may be used with either qualitative or quantitative data (Elo, & Kyngäs, 2008). Furthermore, it may be used in an inductive, deductive, and abductive way (Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017).

Following the guidelines suggested in Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), and Oleinik (2011), this research opted for a mixed techniques that involves the sequential implementation of both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the data collected for each one of the selected case study. The mixed method was preferred because it offers the possibility to view the problem from multiple perspectives, to contextualise information, and also to compare, validate, or triangulate results. The qualitative content analysis was performed moving back and forth between inductive and deductive approaches (i.e. abduction). The researcher used the former knowledge about the research phenomenon as a code to interpret the collected data. In doing so hypothesis and theories emerged from the literature review were tested or verified following the conceptual framework. Conversely, the inductive approach, supported by an open coding, allowed the researcher to acquire knew knowledge from the data and fill the gap in the literature.

In detail, the process of analysis carried out on each one of the selected cases, schematised in Figure 2.11, is based on three main phases: preparation, organising, and reporting (Elo, & Kyngäs, 2008).
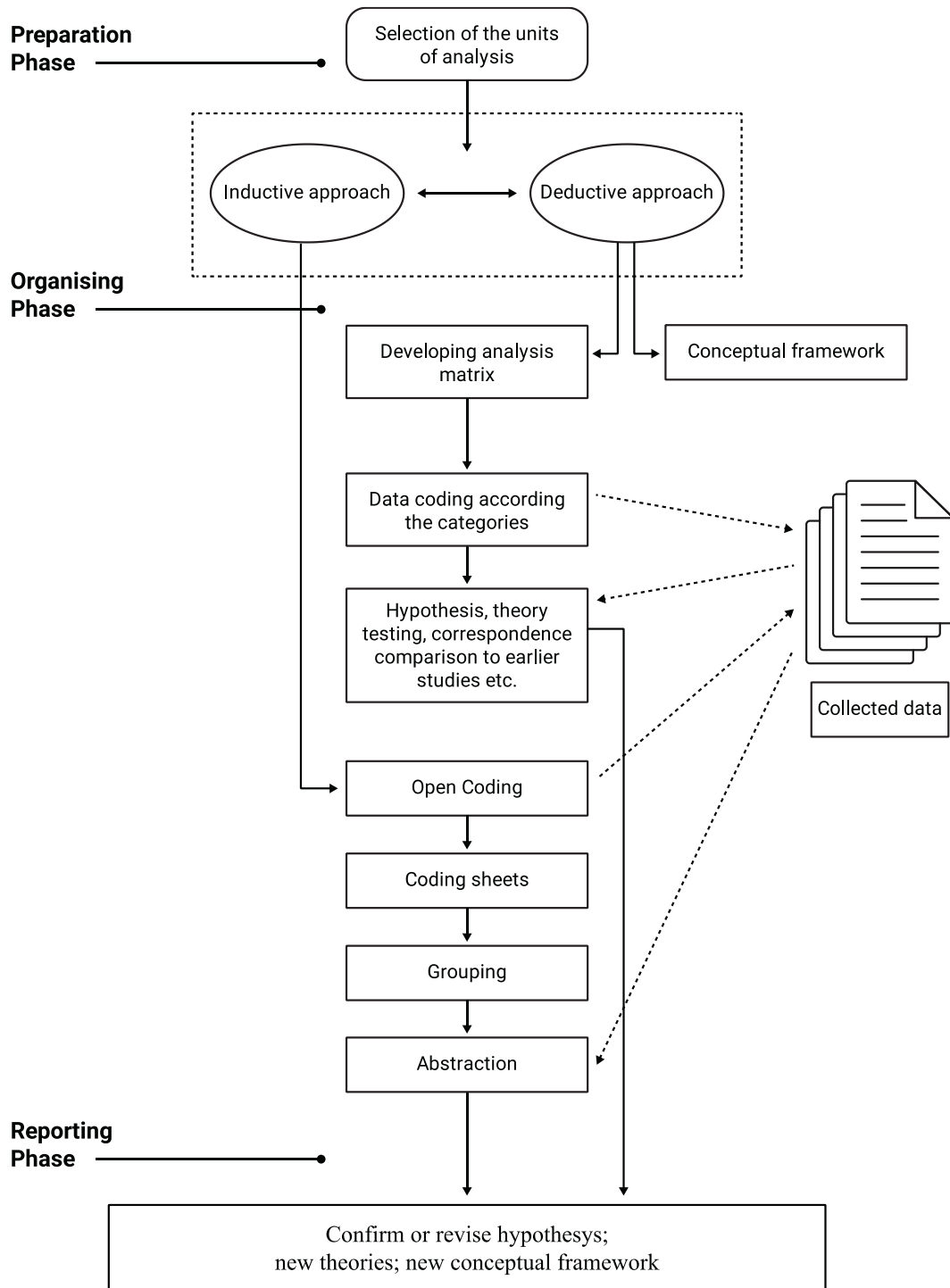
Figure 2.11 Content analysis process.

The preparation phase starts with the selection of appropriate unit of analysis. This can be a word, a sentence, an image, a social media post, a dialogue between social media users, the numbers of the vanity metrics (i.e., Facebook fans, like, Twitter followers, post views).

The next step is to organise the collected data. Since data extracted from the internet and social media have specific characteristics, the author of this thesis applied the social media analytics procedure (Abrahams, Fan, Wang, Zhang, & Jiao, 2015; Fan & Gordon 2014). Following this general schema social media content can be seen as consisting of the following components:

(1) linguistic features (i.e., unique words, phrases, noun phrases, or named entities);

(2) semantic features (i.e., words, topics and semantic relationships between linguistic entities);

(3) social features (i.e., the number of messages, posts, or comments);

(4) sentiment features (i.e., positive/negative valence of a post, user ratings);

(5) and its source (the author of the content).

The collected data was processed mixing both deductive and inductive approaches. Inductive approach includes open coding, creating categories and abstraction. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008, p. 109-111), open coding means that notes and headings are written in the text while reading it. After this open coding, the lists of categories are grouped under higher order headings. Grouping data is a way to reduce the number of categories by collapsing those that are similar or dissimilar into broader higher order categories. Creating categories helps researchers to describe a phenomenon and increase the knowledge. In addition, abstraction consists of formulating a general description of the research topic through generating categories, which are named with specific content-characteristic words.

Moving to the deductive approach, the first thing to do is to develop a categorization matrix. The next step is to code the data according to the categories. The categorization matrix is generally based on a conceptual framework, a model, or literature reviews. Using the code, is possible to verify if there is correspondence between the categories listed in the matrix and the data to analyse.

The last phase of the content analysis process consisting in reporting the results and drawing conclusions.

Focusing on the logic of the multiple-case study, for each one of the six collected cases was performed a content analysis following the process illustrated above. The final six reports were compared with each other in order to find differences and similarities among the case studies. The purpose of this cross-case analysis was to extract common concepts in order to better explain a complex phenomenon such as anti-branding activities.

This reporting phase follows the criteria of the scientific narratives. According to Gummesson (2017, p. 70-72), a case is a story, but it is different from a newspaper article or a book. A scientific text must be systematic, logical and rational. It is focused on specific themes related to a problem, a purpose and research question. Even if narrative strives to be descriptive, the most important thing of a scientific text is to start conceptualising data into something that offers meaning. Therefore, it is conceptual and factual, but it can include descriptions, illustrations, metaphors or fiction elements to facilitate readability and understanding.

In sum, when reporting the study results, the researcher must describe the analysis process in as much details as possible. Furthermore, he/she must demonstrate links between the results and the data clearly. Only in this way, the reliability of the study would increase (Elo, & Kyngäs, 2008).

Chapter 3

Researching the anti-branding trend: A multiple case study analysis

Summary

Chapter 3 provides a rich description of the six cases selected to explore the anti-branding problem. The author will first present the results for each case separately. Then, the different case reports will be compared with each other in order to find out similarities and differences about the main antecedents and outcomes of the anti-branding phenomenon, as well as the strategies adopted by the brand in response to consumer attack.

Keywords

Case study description • Cross-case analysis • Findings • Multiple case study

3.1 Introduction

The following six case studies were developed by combining the information extracted from the digital environments wherein the conflict between consumers and the brand$_n$ took place, and the reconstruction of such facts made by online newspapers and blogs.

Each of the case descriptions follows a similar format, with variation depending on the depth and breadth of information gathered in each particular case. They start

with a general illustration of the context and the dynamics of conflict. The second part of the case study description focuses on the main research question:

RQ. *How* do consumers purposefully construct their conflict with brands and *why*, under certain circumstances, they are capable to achieve their anti-branding goals, or are doomed to fail thanks to specific reaction strategies adopted by brands?

In order to answer the posed RQ, four derived sub-questions (SQs) are formulated:

SQs$_1$. Why do consumers feel negative emotions towards brands?

SQs$_2$. What are the main antecedents of consumer anti-branding phenomenon?

SQs$_3$. What are the main outcomes of consumer anti-branding phenomenon?

SQs$_4$. How should brands strategically react to possible consumers' anti-branding activities?

In each case study the data downloaded from the web were processed through content analysis to provide detailed answers to the above-mentioned SQs. Online materials, such as written or multimodal texts produced by consumers (that is, user-generated content), or the transcripts of the dialogues between marketers and consumers, are in fact key sources of information about the subjective perceptions and justifications (Oleinik, 2011). Moreover, texts can reveal human personality, behaviours, and the hidden choices behind certain actions.

The conceptual framework (see Figure, 1.10) was initially used to organise data collection and case study analysis.

3.2 Case study A: Carpisa

The first case study regards the brand Carpisa, an Italian manufacturer and retailer of luggage, handbags, wallets and accessories owned by Kuvera S.p.A. Born in 2001, Carpisa now boasts a franchising network of over 650 points of sale in Italy and worldwide, with over 500 workers employed between headquarters and home territory. Carpisa is a typical example of "fast fashion brand". The logo of the company is a small turtle. The headquarters building of over 12.000 square meters, the CasaCarpisa, is located in the Nola Interporto, Nola (NA).

On August 24, 2017, Carpisa announced on its Facebook page the contest campaign "Vinci con Carpisa" to win a month internship (with an average salary of €500) in their Marketing and Advertising Department. In order to participate to the challenge people aged between 20 and 30 needed to buy a women's bag of the new collection 2017/2018, and then submit for free an 'effective' marketing plan using a dedicated landing page (see Figure 3.12).

Figure 3.12 Screenshot of Carpisa social media campaign about the launch of the contest "Vinci con Carpisa".

After the launch of this campaign, the Facebook page of Carpisa started to be flooded with negative messages published by angry and indignant people who

considered Machiavellian and immoral the idea behind the "competition", namely, that to get a job opportunity you have to "pay" something, in this case a bag. Furthermore, the internet users started posting on Twitter negative statements containing hashtags such as "#carpisaèilmale" (#carpisaistheevil), and "#boycottcarpisa", as the following excerpts illustrate:

> #BoycottCarpisa bags @carpisaofficial Buy a bag Get a 1mo internship! And you need to write a marketing plan Salary 500 euros maybe #Carpisa[1]
>
> <div align="right">(Female, September 8, 2017)</div>

> Ha ragione Eleonoire Ferruzzi...#carpisaèilmale #siamodovesei #filcams #stop #stage #stagetruffa (this tweet contains a link to https://t.co/2g5G6EiOIt)[2]
> (Eng. Trans.: Eleonoire Ferruzzi is right...#carpisaèilmale #siamodovesei #filcams #stop #stage #stagetruffa)
>
> <div align="right">(Male, September 5, 2017)</div>

> "#Carpisa è il male" ma questa volta non è una battuta. Quando ho letto questo il disgusto è stato irreversibile. https://lnkd.in/dyNpsS6
> (Engl. Trans: "#Carpisa is the evil" but this time is not a joke. When I read this news I felt an irreversible disgust. https://lnkd.in/dyNpsS6)
>
> <div align="right">(Male, September 5, 2017)</div>

Focusing on the Facebook page of Carpisa, the post published on 24 September, 2017 by the brand about the launch of the contest "Vinci con Carpisa" collected 286 comments. They are all negative. The quantitative content anlysis of the user interaction with this Facebok post reveals that the negative words with the higher frequency are "shame on you", "disgusting", "awful", "evil", and "shameful" (see Figure 3.13). Some top negative phrases are "I won't buy your products anymore" (2 occurrences), "Carpisa is the evil" (2 occurrences), "Take a look at yourself in the mirror" (2 occurrences), "It must be a joke" (2 occurrences), "You are awful" (2 occurrences). The most utilised negative emojy is the angry face with a frequency of 112.

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[1] Original tweet, no English translation.
[2] Elenoire Ferruzzi is an Italian gay icon who posted on her account Instagram an ironic video, dated 16 July, 2017, in which she is refusing a Carpisa bag as a present, and disgusted she yells: "But it is a Carpisa, Carpisa is the devil, is the devil… it make me sick. Carpisa make me sick."
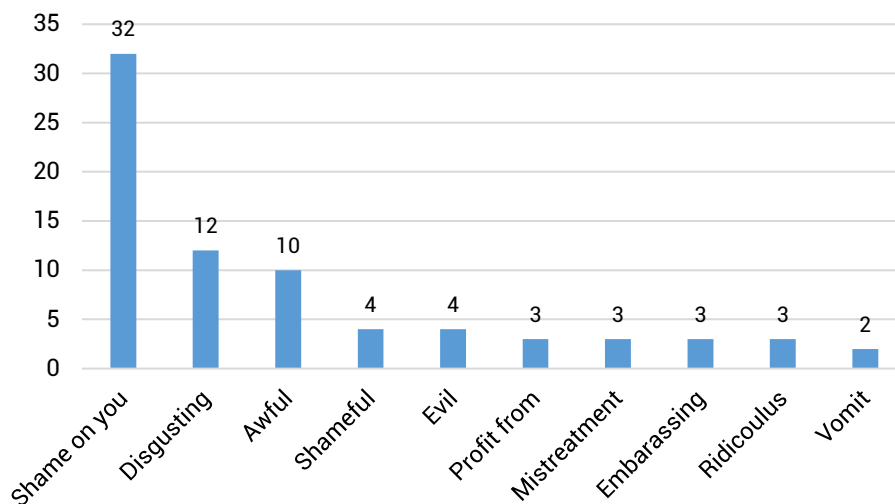
Figure 3.13 Top 10 negative words recurring in the 286 comments published by Facebook users in response to the Carpisa post (Number of words: 3833).

In the days following the launch of Carpisa contest, Facebook users continued to add negative comments on the diverse posts, mostly promoting pictures, published by the brand on its profile. Figure 3.14 shows how the percentage of the negative comments is higher than that of the positive or neutral ones.
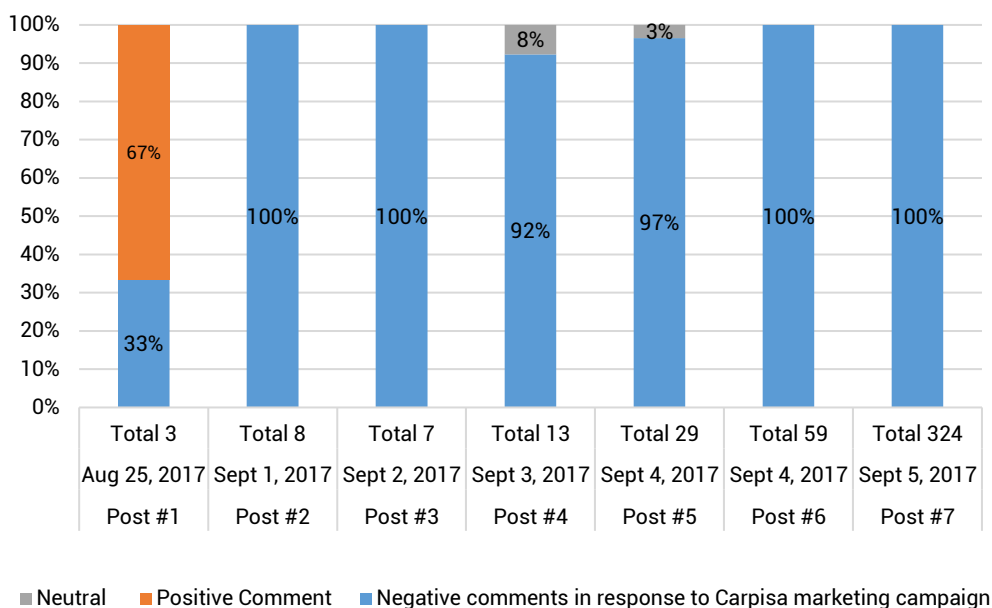
Figure 3.14 Sentiment analysis of Facebook users' comments on Carpisa page.

Analysing from a qualitative perspective the negative word of mouth shared by common people or potential consumers on the Facebook page of the brand Carpisa and other social media such as Twitter, was possible to retrace the overall anti-branding process.

Looking at the main antecedents of such consumers collaborative brand attack, the major motives that transformed people dissatisfaction and indignation into a strong brand hate is a company-related trigger based upon an ideological incompatibility. Furthermore, the nature of this anti-branding activity against Carpisa concerns the social level, rather than the individual level (that is, consumer complaining for product/service failures). Facebook users are disapproving the conduct of the company in the social context, its lack of Corporate Social Responsibility towards themes such as respect for young generations, work conditions, and human resource.

From the Italians standpoint, the idea that a job is a "prize to be won", or that people to get a job opportunity have to "pay" something, as if they were buying a lottery ticket, is unacceptable and amoral. Youth unemployment in Italy (in the under-35 age bracket) is a serious problem. Many young people feel humiliated by their life condition. Carpisa with its campaign continues to support the idea that work is a gentle concession, forgetting that every man has inalienable right to work, and in fair condition. In fact, another aspect that do not convince all those people who decided to attack publicly on social media the brand Carpisa is that, in order to participate to the contest, young persons aged between 20-30 years needed to buy a bag of the new collection 2017/2018, thus products not for sale, and submit without remuneration a marketing plan, an activity that requires skills and capacity that usually an aspiring intern does not own. Specifically, as illustrated below:

Per quale motivo un aspirante stagista dovrebbe saper redigere un piano di comunicazione? Oltre alla proposta in sé che è davvero umiliante, ci avete pensato che chi ha simili competenze è già molto più avanti di uno stagista?
(Engl. Trans: Why an aspiring intern should know how to write a communication plan? In addition to the proposal itself that is really humiliating, did you ever think that people with similar skills cannot be treated as an intern?)

(Female, September 4, 2017)

La Costituzione prevede una retribuzione "Proporzionata alla quantità e qualità del suo lavoro e in ogni caso sufficiente ad assicurare a sé e alla famiglia un'esistenza libera e dignitosa" Ve La Siete Scordata?? Col cavolo che invito le mie figlie a comprare una borsa per "elemosinare" uno stage!

(Engl. Trans: The Constitution provides a salary "commensurate to the quantity and quality of their work and in any case such as to ensure them and their families a free and dignified existence." Have you forgotten? There is no fu∗∗∗ing way that I invite my daughters to buy a bag to "beg" an internship!)

<div align="right">(Female, September 5, 2017)</div>

Oltre a commercializzare prodotti che fanno pena avete anche una strana etica del lavoro e pochissimo rispetto del capitale umano. Complimenti, fiero di non aver mai comprato roba vostra.

(Engl. Trans: In addition to the fact that your products suck, you have a questionable work ethic and very little respect for human resources. Congratulations, proud of never having bought your stuff.)

<div align="right">(Male, September 5, 2017)</div>

[…] Chiedete un piano di comunicazione che dovreste pagare migliaia di euro e in cambio offrite uno stage sottopagato. Però prima bisogna comprare una borsa. Ma vi rendete conto di quanto siete ridicoli? Siete degli sciacalli infimi. Lucrate sulla disperazione dei giovani disoccupati. Mai vista una cosa così ridicola. Spero vi ricada tutto in testa moltiplicato per mille. Auguri Carpisa!

(Engl. Trans.: […] You ask for a communication plan that you should pay thousands of euros and in return you offer an underpaid internship. But first of all, people have to buy a bag. Do you realise how ridiculous you sound? You are such a jackals. You profit from unemployed young people's despair. Never seen such a ridiculous thing. I hope you will pay for this. Congratulations, Carpisa!)

<div align="right">(Male, September 5, 2017)</div>

Furthermore, has highlighted by the Filcams-Cgil in an article published on its website, this contest seemed a subtle way to sell the new collection of women's handbags and to exploit ideas and labour without paying money. Specifically, as provided in Article 10 of the Contest Rules, the ideas of every participants become company properties, must be free of copyright and will not be returned.

Analysing the anti-branding outcomes, that is, the way through which consumers negative feelings towards certain brands take forms and are displayed on a

phenomenological plane, the case Carpisa represents a remarkable example of collaborative brand attacks on social media, also known as firestorm (Rauschnabel, Kammerlander, & Ivens, 2016), or "sh*storm"[3]. The characteristic of such anti-branding phenomenon is that it is inducted by a specific event, and that generally involves a large number of participants ("netizens") who spread a considerable amount of negative user-generated content in the online world.

The majority of such negative user-generated contents addressed to Carpisa are written texts, text containing a link to an external website, and different forms of multimodal texts such as meme GIFs (see Figure, 3.15).
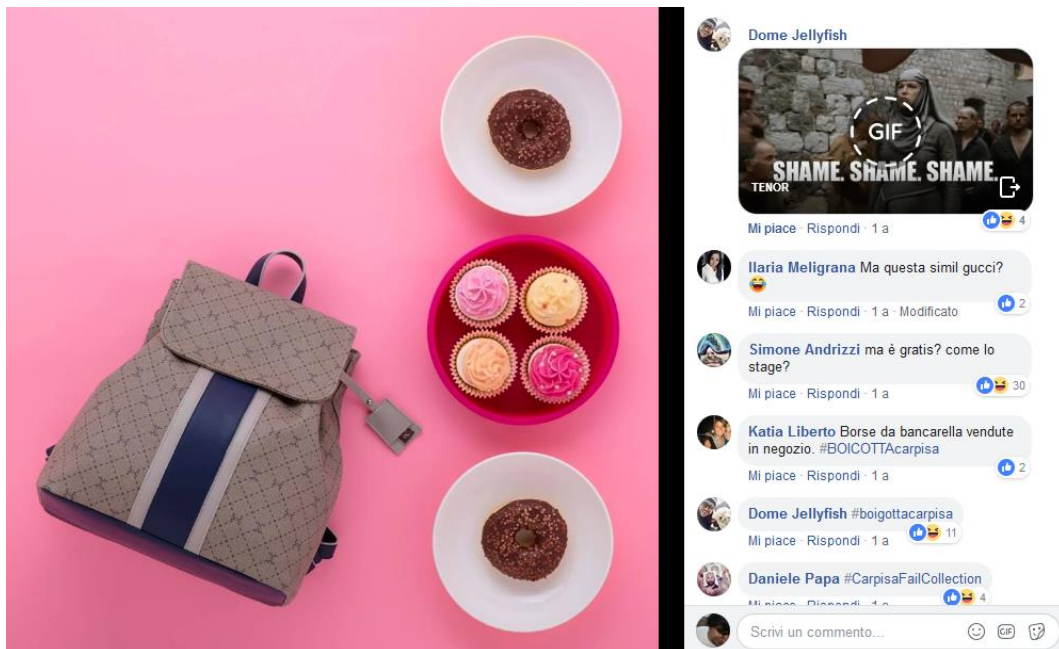
Figure 3.15 Screenshot of the meme GIF published on Carpisa Facebook page.

The tone of voice of such user-generated content is mainly offensive, but also ironical, as the following excerpts illustrate:

Ma anche Penelope Cruz ha prima comprato una borsa per diventare vostra testimonial?

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[3] A term frequently used in the German-speaking world when referring to collaborative brand attacks; see Faller and Schmit 2013.

(Engl. Trans: Did Penelope Cruz have to buy a woman's handbag to become your testimonial?)

(Female, September 5, 2017)

Io per un mese a 500 euro vi pubblico gattini. Foto di gattini, video di gattini, GIFs di gattini, canzoni sui gattini. Poi una volta anche una foto di un quokka sorridente. I quokka sono davvero dolci e coccolosi. Penso sia un piano di comunicazione adatto.

(Engl. Trans: For a month with a salary of €500 I will post for you kittens. Pictures of kittens, videos of kittens, GIFs of kittens, songs about kittens. Then also a picture of a smiling quokka, but only one time. Quokka are really sweet and cuddly. I think it is a suitable communication plan.)

(Female, September 5, 2017)

Concerning the anti-branding management phase, Carpisa replied to the criticisms with a long press release distributed by the most important Italian news agencies, and then published by the main newspapers. The press release is illustrated below:

Engl. Trans.: The company apologies for the superficiality with which an issue as delicate as that of work has been addressed. The message of the competition is in complete antithesis with an entrepreneurial reality made, instead, of employment and opportunities offered especially to the young generations. In the last three years, 50 young people entered the company with the experience of the internship. Carpisa, which today has over 700 employees and 400 stores only in Italy, ensures that the commitment in favour of young people will be even stronger, despite any interpretation of the message given. Even today, employees under 29 represent over 40% of the company's total.

Reading between the lines, is possible to perceive that the company, in part, blames the receivers (that is, common people or potential consumers) to have given to the message a wrong interpretation. This aspect denotes arrogance and a lack of style. Another thing that surprise regards the fact that this press release was never published on the Facebook page of the brand, namely, the main battlefield of the conflict between Carpisa and angry people. Consequently, the excessive silence of the brand on its Facebook fan page is perceived in a negative way. Netizens, in fact,

suggest to the brand that they deserve an apology or explanations, as the following excerpts illustrate:

Notare come non abbiano neppure le palle per scusarsi o per circostanziare questo vergognoso e pateticissimo tentativo di lucrare sulla disoccupazione giovanile.
(Engl. Trans: To notice they do not have the courage to apologise or give explanation about this shameful and pathetic attempt to exploit youth unemployment.)

(Female, September 4, 2017)

È una vergogna assoluta. Che qualcuno in azienda si prenda la responsabilità di rispondere ai tanti commenti di persone indignate. Il lavoro deve essere retribuito e valorizzato!!!
(Engl. Trans: It is an absolute shame. Somebody assume the responsibility to respond to the many comments of outraged people. Work should be paid and valued!!!)

(Male, September 4, 2017)

This case (summarised in Table 3.6) teaches that ignoring the negative user-generated contents posted on a Facebook fan page during a collaborative brand attack is less recommended, because consumers accusations may spread rapidly across the web, acquire credibility, authority, and negatively affect the brand's reputational and financial assets.

Table 3.6 Anti-branding process matrix applied to case study A.

Anti-branding Antecedents	Anti-branding Outcomes	Brand reaction
Company-related trigger based on an ideological incompatibility	Collaborative brand attack	- Press release apologise - No apologies on the Facebook page - The social media manager ignored the negative comments

The qualitative content analysis of the comments published on Carpisa Facebook fan page revealed three main themes: (1) people believe that after this event the company will face a huge reputational backlash; (2) the old customers confess their disappointment, and that they won't buy Carpisa products anymore in the future;

(3) those consumers who never bought Carpisa products are happy of their past choices.

3.3 Case study B: Selex Group

The second case study regards the Selex Group, the third-largest retail distribution group in Italy where, with a market share of 11.9% (Source: IRI), it generates a turnover in excess of €10 billion and employs more than 31000 people. It has issued more than 6 million customer loyalty cards, and the number of its branded products exceeds 5000.

The Selex Group's retail network encompasses a wide array of different formats, ranging from hypermarkets to discount stores. Each format is further differentiated according to the location of the store and the nature of the surrounding area. The most important retail channel is the supermarkets, which, numbering more than 1000, account for more than half the retail floorage of the Group.

The Selex Group in Italy operates under national brand name stores such as Famila, A&O and C+C, as well as through regional brands.

As in previous years, in 2018 the retailing companies of the Selex Group confirmed their top positions in the ranking of the best-value supermarkets of Italy as they continued their efforts to defend the purchasing power of families.

Value is at the heart of the Selex Group philosophy, which translates into a commitment to keeping prices as low as possible day in day out. Selex succeeds in its mission thanks also to the numerous promotions it organizes throughout the year and the many opportunities it affords shoppers to make savings without ever sacrificing quality and the assurance of safety.[4]

On November 22, 2017, "Essere animali", a not-for-profit organization, based in Bologna (Italy), that fights the various forms of violence and cruelty against animals, launched on Change.org an online petition addressed to Stefano Gambolò, the Marketing Director of Selex Group, to convince the company to stop selling foie gras in its sales channels (see Figure 3.16). Several activists of "Esseri animali" shared on Twitter the instructions to conduct their collective social action, which

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[4] All these information have been retrieved from Selex Group corporate website, http://www.selexgc.it/

consisted of signing the petition and writing under the statuses posted by Selex Group on its Facebook fan page a comment with the following message: "Selex, fai la scelta giusta! Metti il Foie Gras #ViaDagliScaffali" (Engl. Trans.: Selex, make the right choice! Take the Foi Gras #AwayFromTheShelves").

Figure 3.16 Screenshot of the online petition launched against Selex Group by "Essere Animali" via Change.org

Starting on November 27, Selex Group Facebook page began to be flooded with messages that supported the initiative promoted by "Essere Animali". As illustrated in Figure 3.17, many different posts were the target of attack.
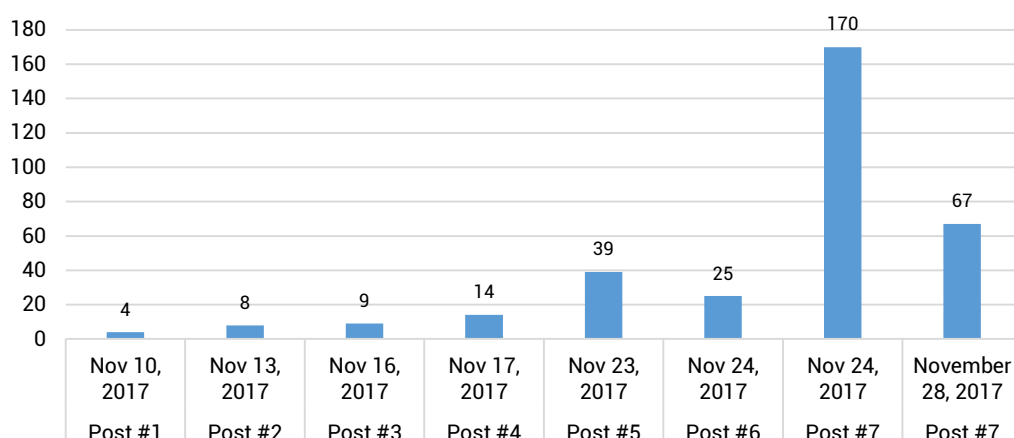
Figure 3.17 Number of comments posted by protesters on Selex Group Facebook page.

The qualitative analysis of the material downloaded from the Selex Group

Facebook fan page and Twitter revealed that the trigger of this anti-branding activity is company-related and based upon an ideological incompatibility. For animal activists foie gras production is controversial. Farm workers, especially in France, ram pipes down the throats of male ducks or geese two or three times a day and pump as much as 4 pounds of grain and fat into their stomachs. This cruel process known as "gavage" causes the birds' livers to swell to up to 10 times their normal size. They feel extremely ill, and many have difficulty standing or even breathing because of their engorged livers. Additionally, the birds are kept in tiny cages or packed into sheds. They may tear out their own feathers or attack each other out of extreme stress[5].

From responsible person's perspective, foie gras can never be acceptable because force feeding, as currently practiced, is detrimental to the welfare of the birds. Therefore, those shops or supermarkets that sell foie gras are considered amoral and deceiving because they put on the market a product whose production violates the animal's rights. Therefore, the main motive that forced this group of individuals to attack the Selex Group deals with issue connected to the lack of corporate social responsibility in food supply chain. They perceived that the sell of foie gras is connected to a type of business operating in the agricultural production systems that have a negative impact on animal welfare.

In this case study the outcomes of the anti-branding activity is represented by an online petition combined with a collaborative brand attacks to the brand's Facebook page. The aim of this anti-branding activity is to force Selex Group to change its behaviour. Mostly of the user-generated contents posted on the Facebook page of Selex Group follow the directive suggested by the activists of "Essere Animali", namely, leave a comment on Selex Group' posts containing a specific written text (see Figure 3.18). Occasionally, the protesters published multimodal texts, that it, text containing written material and a video or an image. Such type of texts, which explain the reason why foie gras production must be stopped, are to be read as one semantic entry.

Focusing on the anti-branding management phase, Selex Group replied to this

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[5] The information about foie gras production have been retrieved from the website of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), one of the most important animal welfare organizations, https://www.peta.org

collective attack posting on its Twitter and Facebook profile a simple image with these words:

A seguito delle numerose segnalazioni ricevute in questi giorni, teniamo a precisare che nell'assortimento dei PRODOTTI A MARCHIO SELEX non è mai stato presente il foie gras. Confermiamo inoltre che le insegne del Gruppo Selex si impegnano a non trattare più il foie gras. Eventuali giacenze presenti in un limitato numero di punti vendita verranno smaltite nelle prossime settimane e comunque non oltre il mese di dicembre 2017.

(Engl. Trans.: After numerous advisories received in recent days, we would like to point out that foie gras has never been present in the ASSORTMENT OF PRODUCTS LABELLED SELEX. We also confirm that the Selex Group's brands are committed to no longer dealing in foie gras. Any stocks in a limited number of points of sale will be disposed of in the next few weeks and in any case not later than December 2017.)

Figure 3.18 Screenshot of the comments left by protesters on Selex Group Facebook page.

The reaction of the protesters was positive, because they started to add comments to the Selex Group Facebook page expressing their gratitude for the decision made

by the Italian distributor. Furthermore, the social media manager of Selex Group Facebook page answered to any negative protesters' comment by attaching the image containing the statement of the company.

This case study (summarised in Table 3.7) teaches that having a dialogue with haters and showing the will to change behaviour in the way to run marketing activities should represent an effective strategy to mitigate consumers' attacks.

Table 3.7 Anti-branding process matrix applied to case study B.

Anti-branding Antecedents	Anti-branding Outcomes	Brand reaction
Company-related trigger based on an ideological incompatibility	- Collaborative brand attacks - Online petition	- An image published on Facebook and Twitter profiles containing a text message about the decision to stop selling foie gras

3.4 Case study C: Pandora Jewellery

Pandora is an international Danish jewellery manufacturer and retailer founded in 1982 by Danish goldsmith Per Enevoldsen and his wife, Winnie. The couple began on a small scale by importing jewellery from Thailand and selling to consumers. After a successful wholesale venture, in 1989 Enevoldsen hired in-house designers and established a manufacturing site in Thailand, where it is still located. With low production costs and an efficient supply chain, the Enevoldsens could provide affordable, hand-finished jewellery for the mass market. Pandora's collection grew to include an assortment of rings, necklaces, earrings and watches. Pandora started selling its iconic charm bracelets in 2000 after a patent and several years of development. Consumers embraced the concept, and in the following years, the company began to expand internationally.

For Christmas 2017, Pandora launched on billboards at Duomo Milan metro stations an ad that asked whether a woman would be happiest receiving an iron, pyjamas, an apron or a Pandora bracelet for Christmas. The metro station billboard was photographed and published on the Facebook fan page of Lefanfarlo (see Figure 3.19), a group of burlesque performers based in Milan, which says it empowers the voice of women through the dance. This picture combined with the

following words "Dear Pandora, for Christmas Lefanfarlo would like respect, rather than a beautiful bracelet", went suddenly viral capturing the attention of many netizens who started to leave negative comments on Pandora Facebook fan page, because they perceived the presence of sexism and gender stereotypes in the message of the advert.

Figure 3.19 A screenshot of the post published by Lefanfarlo on their Facebook fan page.

As illustrated in Figure 3.20, many different commercial posts published by Pandora on its Facebook fan page became the target of attack. The percentage of negative comments is higher than the percentage of the neutral or positive ones. The attack towards Pandora became harsher when the brand published two Facebook Notes in an attempt to explain the message behind the billboard campaign. The number of negative comments under the two statements exponentially increased, while the messages of those users who tried to defend the brand explaining that the text of the advertisement was just ironical and not sexist remained law (see Figure 3.21). Using the extraction tool Facepager were retrieved from Twitter several negative tweets towards Pandora (timeframe: December 2-3, 2017) containing the hashtag #boycottpandora (3 occurrences), #boicottapandora (4 occurrences), #sessismo (19 occurrences), #stereotipi (14), and #pandoraepicfail (44 occurrences).
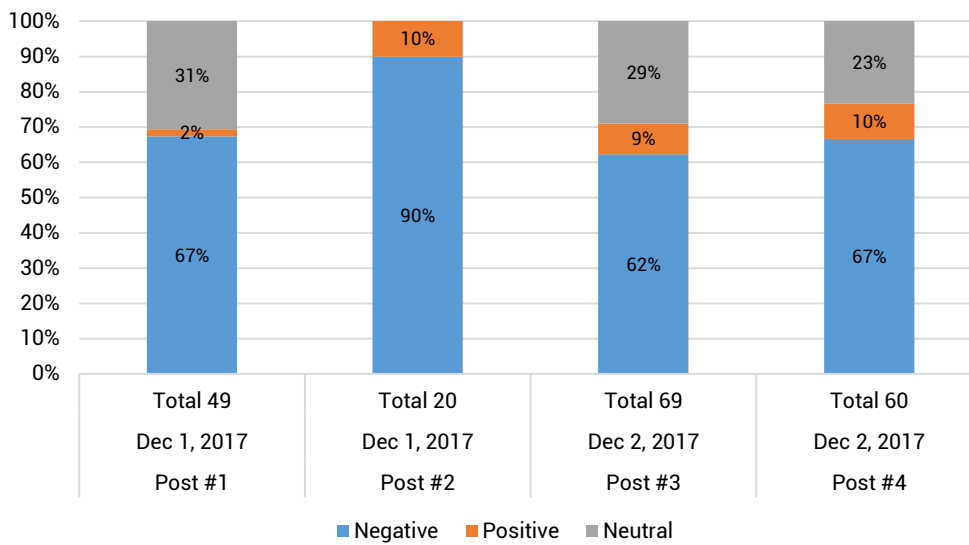
Figure 3.20 Sentiment analysis of Facebook users' comments on Pandora page.
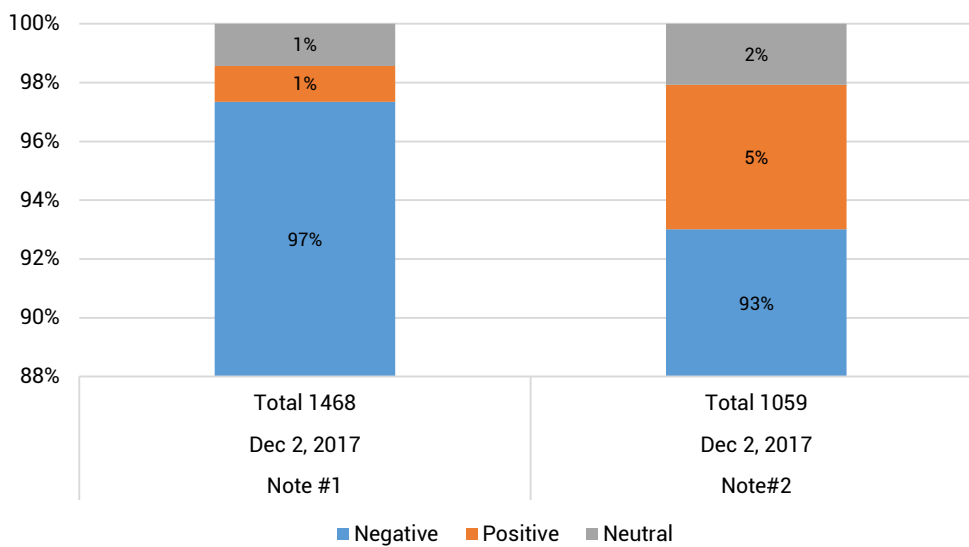
Figure 3.21 Sentiment analysis of Facebook users' comments in reactions to the two Facebook Notes published by Pandora.

From the quantitative content analysis of the data extracted from social media emerged that the high frequency words with a negative connotation are "Stereotype", "sexist", "mistaken", "sexism", and "excuses" (see Table 3.8).

The qualitative content analysis in line with the results of the quantitative content analysis reveals that the main trigger of this anti-branding activity against Pandora

regards the theme of the disrespect towards women, thus an arguable misconduct of the company on the moral and ideological plane. The billboard campaign is perceived to be sexiest, offensive, anachronistic, and "from the Middle Ages".

Table 3.8 Top 20 words recurring in the dataset with a negative connotation.

Word	Engl. Trans.	Frequency
Stereotipi	Stereotypes	168
Sessista	Sexist	158
Sbagliato	Mistaken	114
Sessismo	Sexism	89
Scuse	Excuses	77
Offese	Be offended	68
#boicottapandora	#boycottpandora	54
Vergogna	Shame on you	49
#pandoraepicfail	#pandoraepicfail	44
Offensiva (Campagna)	Offensive (campaign)	37
Rispetto	Respect	28
Bigiotteria	Costume jewelry	21
Ridicoli	Ridicoulus	21
Scusarvi	Say sorry	20
Medioevo	Middle Adges	18
Maschilisti	Chauvinist	16
Anacronistica	Anachronistic	14
Retrograda	Conservative	11
Rimuovere	Remove	9
Rabbia	Anger	8

Specifically, women disliked the juxtaposition, in the text of the advertisement, of words such as "iron", "pyjamas", "apron" and "Pandora bracelet". In their opinion, the role of women is not only to be a homemaker. This is only an old stereotype, as illustrated below:

Sembra una di quelle pubblicità anni 50. Siamo nel 2017 e ancora con questi messaggi sessisti? Ma non vi vergognate? […]

(Engl. Trans.: It looks like one of those 50s advertisements. We are in 2017, do still exist these sexist messages? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? […])

(Female, December 2, 2017)

Focusing on the outcomes of this anti-branding process, both women and men expressed their indignation and hate against Pandora utilizing written or multimodal texts shared on Twitter, and posted on the Facebook fan page of the Danish brand. The epic fail of the Pandora Campaign captured also the attention of some direct competitor, such as Swarovski, which shared a message on its owned media, in part

no less stereotypical, of a woman who does not need a man to give herself a jewel. More ironical ad parodistic are the real time marketing campaigns created by brands such as Pornhub in occasion of the inauguration of a temporary shop in Milan, Ceres, and Taffo Funeral Service that published a deliberately provocative message that refers to the debate on feminicide and gender-based violence (see Figure 3.22). The multimodal texts shared online by these brands were re-posted by several people on the Facebook Page of Pandora.

Figure 3.22 Examples of Pandora campaign's parodies.

In reaction to this collaborative brand attacks, Pandora posted on its Facebook fan page the following Note adressed to "Pandora Lovers":

Engl. Trans.: Many of you have seen our 2017 Christmas campaign, and the billboards across Italy. We note that the message has been misunderstood and

want to explain it better.

Pandora has always cared about women and this year we want them to find the perfect gift under the tree. How many of us receive presents we don't want? This initiative was borne out of research which showed that most women get the wrong gift at Christmas.

We wish all of you to receive just what you want most.

This post instead to mitigate people indignation and anger, had the opposite effect. Netizens, in fact, hearing that it was their fault if they misunderstood the message, started to comment harshly, as the following excerpts illustrate:

[…] La pubblicità l'abbiamo capita benissimo… siete voi che non avete capito la critica. Avete fatto una pubblicità che descrive una donna che anche negli anni 50 sarebbe stata anacronistica. Avete associato il sesso femminile a oggetti cliché di un immaginario sessista e retrogrado e non siete nemmeno capaci di scusarvi.
(Engl. Trans.: […] The meaning of the campaign is clear for us… it is you that can't understand the criticism. You have made an advertisement that describes a woman who even in the 50s would have been anachronistic. You have associated the female sex with cliché objects of a sexist and retrograde imaginary and you are not even able to apologise.)

(Male, December 2, 2017)

Avreste fatto più bella figura a chiedere scusa per la caduta di stile senza cercare giustificazioni che non stanno né in cielo né in terra! La vostra campagna è estremamente offensiva sia per le donne (stereotipate "lava e cucina") che per gli uomini (tutti trogloditi vero?).
(Engl. Trans.: You would have done better to apologise for the fall of style without seeking justifications that are neither Heaven nor Earth! Your campaign is extremely offensive for both women (stereotyped as housewives) and for men (all troglodytes, isn't it?)).

(Male, December 2, 2017)

As the condemnation became more widespread, the brand later published another Facebook Note, as illustrated below:

Engl. Trans.: Hello everyone, we have continued to read your comments on the Milan metro advertising campaign and we want to share our point of view with you.

> Our aim was to give a nod to the stereotypes we are all familiar with in an ironic and playful way, with the intention to make you smile and absolutely not to cause offense.
>
> In fact, we have seen that extrapolated from their context some passages of this communication have generated interpretations opposed to our intent, so we apologise to all those who felt touched in their sensitivity.

From the "haters" perspective, the company's excuses are not solid enough to prevent a reputation damage to the respective brand. Pandora campaign is the result of a superficial approach to marketing communication, there are no good excuses for this mistake, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> Cara Pandora, noi preferiamo i regali sbagliati ai messaggi sbagliati... i primi possono non essere particolarmente graditi, i secondi sono veramente sgraditi, ritirate la campagna [...].
>
> (Engl. Trans.: Dear Pandora, we prefer the wrong gifts to the wrong messages... the former may not be particularly welcome, the latter are really unwelcome, remove the campaign [. . .]);
>
> <div align="right">(Female, December 2, 2017)</div>

This case study (summarised in Table 3.9) teaches that marketing industry have to push harder for more progressive portrayals of women and men in advertising, and that exploring stereotypes with humor and irony can be detrimental.

Table 3.9 Anti-branding process matrix applied to case study C.

Anti-branding Antecedents	Anti-branding Outcomes	Brand reaction
Company-related trigger based on an ideological incompatibility	- Collaborative brand attacks	- Two Facebook Notes - Removal of the advertisement

Incongruity between the values and symbolic meanings transmitted by a brand and the ideological beliefs of the individual is one of the most important antecedents of negative emotions towards the brand. People deliberately do not choose brands that are distant from their ideology and moral self-image. Therefore, women with a strong consideration of themselves based on the emancipation and the

acknowledgement of an equal role in society tend to express disappointment and frustration with those brands that propose a male chauvinist view.

Furthermore, Pandora case reveals that apologies should be based on rational arguments to be effective, and that the arrogance do not pay, because people are engaged by those brands or companies that shows intellectual honestly.

3.5 Case study D: Buondì Motta

Buondì is an Italian snack invented in 1953 by Angelo Motta, whose intention was to produce a brioche based on the traditional Panettone. The product quickly became very popular. After a long story characterised by different changes of ownerships, in 2014 its production returned again under the control of Motta, a brand currently owned by Bauli, an Italian food group leader in the market of seasonal and everyday baked products in both sweet and savoury categories. Founded in Verona in 1922 by the pastry chef Ruggero Bauli, the company has been run by the Bauli family for more than 90 years and has now reached the third generation.

On August 27, 2017, Motta launched a controversial Tv advertising campaign to promote the breakfast snack Buondì. The video opens in a beautiful atmosphere, like in the best films: a smiling pretty little girl in a green meadow. In the centre, a table decorated with flowers, ready for the best breakfast ever. But when the kid asks the mother for a light but tasty and yummy breakfast the mother's answer is straightforward: "it doesn't exist. An asteroid may hit me if it existed". And what happens next? The mother is really hit by an asteroid.

After the video has been published on Facebook Buondì Motta fan page, it became suddenly viral on social media attracting the attention of everyone, and dividing the audience into two groups: the lovers and the haters. "It's horrible", "It's completely inappropriate in this period we are living in", "It's ironic", "It's awesome", "Genius", "Finally a TV commercial that doesn't make me change the channel", "They are brave, in a country with so many bigots". These are just some of the comments that were dividing Italians.

The effect was so viral that the company changed its marketing and communication planning and suddenly replied to the audience with a second and a

third part of the video. The main character of the second video is the daddy who has the same opinion of mum and becomes the target of the asteroid. In the third video instead is the turn of the postman who, due to his incredulity about the existence of a snack capable to combine lightness and yumminess, is hit by an enormous Buondì after his statement: "But such kind of breakfast can't fall from the sky!"

In order to develop this case study, the online press and the Buondì Motta Facebook page's activity regarding the period between August 27, 2017 to September 12, 2017 were principally analysed. Using the extraction app Netvizz, 100 posts, 57583 comments (575.83 average), and 86546 reactions (865.46 average) were retrieved. The most relevant posts and their respective number of comments to be explored performing both a quantitative and qualitative content analysis are illustrated in Figure 3.23.
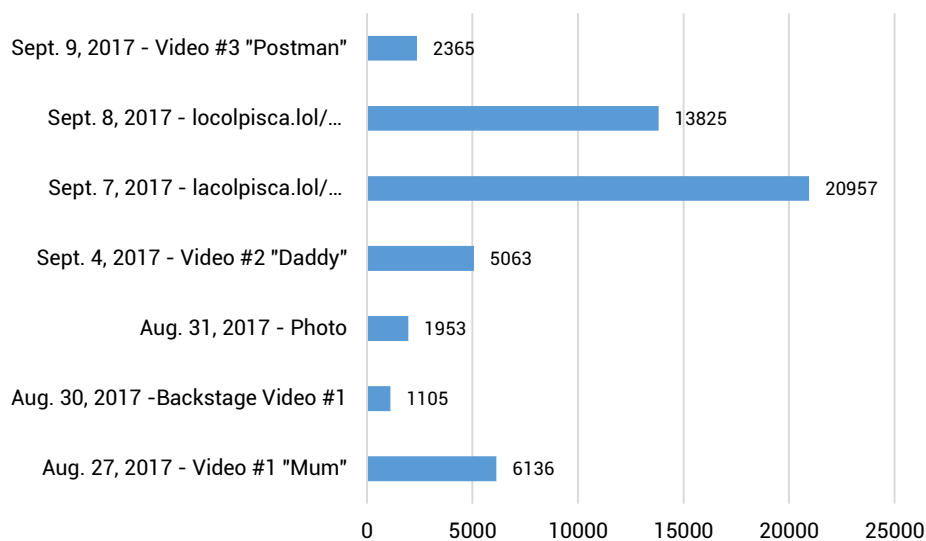
Figure 3.23 Most relevant Facebook posts shared by Buondì Motta on its page in the period from August 27, 2017 to September 12, 2017.

The content analysis reveals that the first video of this campaign published on August 28, 2017 was flooded with several negative comments. The backstage video of the first episode posted on August 30, 2017, to make people understand that was only fiction, was attacked, too. The main trigger of this sentiment of indignation, which exploded into hate speech on Facebook and other social media, relies on the

fact that the video commercial is violent or cynical, and that it can hurts children who tragically lost their mother, as the following excerpts illustrate:

> [...] Mia figlia ha 4 anni e si è spaventata, non può ancora capire che è finzione pubblicitaria. Non lo trovo ironico, ma splatter. [...]
> (Engl. Trans.: [...] My daughter is 4 years old and she got scared, she still doesn't understand that it is fiction. I don't find it ironic, it is just splatter. [...])
> (Female, September 28, 2017)

> Non è ironia è pochezza di contenuti!!! Siccome la loro merendina fa veramente schifo avevano bisogno di una sceneggiata per pubblicizzarla!!!! Comunque l'ironia è una cosa il cattivo gusto è un'altra!!!! Ironia e cattivo gusto insieme si chiama cinismo
> (Engl. Trans.: It is not irony but lack of content!!! Since their snack really sucks they needed an advertising campaign!!!! However irony is a thing and bad taste is another one!!!! Irony and bad taste mixed together can be called cynicism)
> (Female, September 28, 2017)

> Quando avete pensato allo spot non vi è venuto in mente che una bambina che ha perso tragicamente la madre potrebbe sentirsi male di fronte a queste immagini?
> (Engl. Trans.: When you conceived this TV commercial, did not even cross your mind that a little girl who tragically lost her mother would feel bad watching these images?)
> (Male, September 28, 2017)

In addition to the internet "haters", the Viewers Association – AIART deployed against the TV Commercial. The President of AIART, Massimiliano Padula, complained about the "bad taste of the advertisement regarding the way to tell an important moment of family relationship like that between mother and daughter." He then announced that AIART would have made a communication to the Institute of advertising self-discipline, to AGCOM (The Italian Communications Regulatory Authority), and to RAI television to evaluate whether such content could have been transmitted at any time of the day.

At the same time, various newspapers and blogs disseminated the news focusing principally on the hateful feeling triggered by the Buondì Video, and the indignation

felt by many mothers after its viewing. Nevertheless, the results of the sentiment analysis reveals something different (see Figure 3.24).
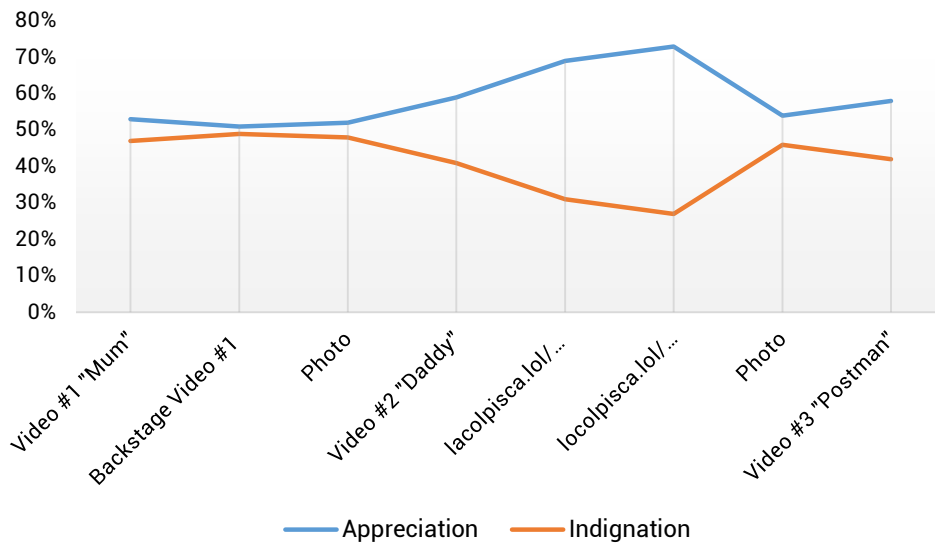
Figure 3.24 Sentiment analysis of Facebook users' comments in the period from August 27, 2017 to September 12, 2017.

Next to the countless negative comments to the videos published by Buondì Motta on its Facebook page, it is possible to retrieve a series of compliments about the creative work done by the brand, and the use of a politically incorrect humor. Furthermore, many commentators appreciated the ironical and surreal tone of voice of the campaign, that is, features often ignored by Italian advertisers in favor of a more "traditional" style, as illustrated below:

> Era ora di cambiare registro e di iniziare ad abbandonare le famiglie edulcorate delle pubblicità per le merendine, i bambini possono crescere imparando cos'è lo humour demenziale che male non fa
> (Engl. Trans.: It was time to change and leave behind the sweet families portrayed in the snack advertisements, children can grow up learning what really is the wacky humour that does not hurt)
>
> (Female, August 29, 2017)

Focusing on the anti-branding process, the content anlaysis reveals that its main antecedent is based on consumer-related factors dealing with personality problems

or symbolic incongruity between the consumer's sense of self and brand meaning. It follows that consumer brand hate towards Buondì Motta is not the consequence of a misconduct of the company or a product/service failure but it is the result of consumers' own personality traits. Several commentators as illustrated below make notice this aspect to the "haters":

È un mondo triste questo dove l'ironia non viene più percepita e si deve far polemica su tutto.
(Engl. Trans.: It is a sad world where irony is no longer perceived and we engage in all sort of polemics.)

(Male, August 28, 2017)

Chi critica tanto non ha capito due cose essenzialmente: l'ironia e il fatto che esiste la libertà di pensiero e parola. Questa pubblicità non ha danneggiato e non danneggia nessuno... Fatevi due risate daii
(Engl. Trans.: Those who criticise so much did not understand two things essentially: the irony and the fact that there is freedom of thought and speech. This advertisement has not damaged and does not harm anyone ... Have a laugh

(Male, September 4, 2017)

Ma da decenni nei cartoni animati ci sono personaggi che muoiono in ogni modo! Schiantati, sparati, squartati, disintegrati... allora dovrebbero censurarli tutti?? Siamo diventati tutti dei falsi che si indignano per delle cavolate dietro una tastiera ma poi dal vivo non aiutano nemmeno una vecchia se ha bisogno!
(Engl. Trans.: For decades, cartoons portrayed characters that die in every way! Crashed, fired, quartered, disintegrated... therefore, should they be censored?? Behind the keyboard, we have all become hypocritical who feel offended by stupid things, and then in the real world we do not even help an old person if she needs it!)

(Female, September 10, 2017)

The inability to understand irony and humour, both in verbal communication and textual materials varies from individual to individual, because it is tied to the lack of specific prerequisites such as cognitive abilities (McDonald, 1999) and emotional intelligence (Jacob, Kreifelts, Nizielski, Schütz, & Wildgruber, 2016). People started to attack publicly the brand sharing hateful comments on social media because they interpreted the Buondì campaign in a literal way, or evidently,

because the meaning expressed by the brand was distant from their moral self-image, as illustrated below:

La vostra pubblicità dell'asteroide che si schianta sulla madre del bambino è altamente diseducativa e immorale

(Engl. Trans.: Your advertisement that portrays an asteroid that crashes on the child's mother is highly unethical and immoral)

(Female, September 7, 2017)

Che schifezza di pubblicità… razza di mentecatti chi l'ha inventata… ragazzina isterica e genitori polverizzati… ma dove sta la morale e l'educazione verso i bambini? […]

(Engl. Trans.: This advertisement is rubbish... who invented it is a demented... hysterical girl and pulverized parents... but where is the moral and the education of children? […])

(Female, Septemper 8, 2017)

The outcomes of this anti-branding activity assumed the form of a collaborative brand attacks on social media. The "haters" used a direct language adopting prevalently written texts. The word cloud illustrated in Figure 3.25 shows the most

Figure 3.25 Word cloud of the most frequent words that occur in the textual dataset. The orange-coloured words are those most frequently used by "haters".

frequent words used by those Facebook users who, resented by the video commercial, decided to jeopardize the image and reputation of Buondì Motta by attacking publicly the brand.

After the explosion of the online controversy about the first Buondì video commercial, the internet started filling up with memes and parodies of the Buondì advertising campaign. On the one hand, these type of texts fostered the awareness around the brand, on the other hand they moved away from the tone of voice of the campaign, due to the politics thematic represented by some memes (i.e., the image of Dictator Kim Jong-un who think to use Buondì as an ultimate weapon of mass disruption, see Figure 3.26).

Figure 3.26 "The ultimate weapon", Buondì meme shared by Colorz by Spinoza.it.

In order to detach the attention of the netizens from the different memes created online, on September 7, 2017, Buondì launched on its Facebook fan page the challenge "lacolpisca.lol/…" This provocative example of interactive digital advertising invited people to decide what to drop on the head of the poor mother by writing in the comment box the text string lacolpisca.lol/ and the favourite object. This ad obtained a great number of interactions, and was followed by "locolpisca.lol/…" This time the game rotated around the smiling little girl's father.

Focusing on the anti-branding management stage, the community manager of Buondì Motta Facebook page paid attention to every comments, both negative and positive, and replied to each one with a personalised response in line with the tone of voice of the video campaign, as the following excerpts illustrate:

Facebook User: Questa pubblicità non mi piace. La bambina non è credibile neanche per il primo secondo.

Community Manager: Per una pubblicità incredibile, ci vuole una bambina incredibile

(Engl. Trans.: Facebook User: I don't like this advertising. The little girl is not credible even for the first second. / Community Manager: For an incredible advertisement, it takes an incredible little girl)

(August 29, 2017)

Facebook user: La vostra ironia è diseducativa. Cambiate agenzia di pubblicità. Come consumatore mi sento offesa.

Community Manager: Ci sono diversi modi di fare ironia: noi giochiamo con l'assurdo. Hai mai visto un asteroid colpire la terra?

(Engl. Trans.: Facebook user: Your irony is non-educational. Change advertising agency. As a consumer, I feel offended" / Community Manager: "There are many kinds of irony: we play on the absurd. How many times have you seen asteroids hit the earth?

(August 31, 2017)

Facebook User: Finalmente una pubblicità che mi ha fatto venite voglia di fare una bella colazione tutti i giorni

Community Manager: Una colazione golosa, ma leggera

(Engl. Trans.: Finally an advertisement that make me want to have a nice breakfast every day / Community Manager: A tasty but light breakfast)

(August 29, 2017)

According to the dialogic communication theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002) this case demonstrates that engaging in dialogue with Facebook users can indeed be an effective strategy to manage a brand crisis. More specifically: brands are able to protect their image and reputation by engaging in dialogue.

As highlighted by Crijns, Cauberghe, Hudders, and Claeys (2017, p. 629),

response personalisation to Facebook users comments "can have favorable effects because other individuals are able to watch the response of the company in crisis." As illustrated below:

> Motta la madre non mi stava antipatica. È un po' altezzosa. Ma si sopporta. Comunque grazie per le risposte a tutti. Va benissimo parlare e scambiarsi le idee. I social servono anche a questo
> (Engl. Trans.: Motta the mother was not unpleasant. She is a little bit haughty. But I can tolerate her. Anyway thanks to give an answer to everyone. It's good to talk and exchange ideas. This is the real purpose of social media)
>
> (August 28, 2017)

The case of Buondì Motta (summarised in Table 3.10) teaches that in order to manage consumer anti-branding activities the listening stage is essential to find out who is the "hater" and understand why he/she is attacking the brand, that is, which kinds of antecedents are playing the dominant role in influencing brand hate. After the listening stage, the community manager have to decide which comment deserves an answer, because it is impossible to respond to everyone especially when the attack is heavy. The community manager of the Buondì Motta Facebook page, despite the lack of time and the excessive velocity of the happening, tried to answer as many people as possible in a pertinent, fair, funny and professional way. This means that is the tone of the conversation to determine the nature of the engagement, namely, a positively valenced cognitive, emotional and behavioural dynamics that occurs during an interactive and co-creative experience between an individual and a specific focal agent/object, for example a brand, a community manager, another person or consumer (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric, & Ilic, 2011; Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013; Hollebeek, Glynn, & Brodie, 2014).

Table 3.10 Anti-branding process matrix applied to case study D.

Anti-branding Antecedents	Anti-branding Outcomes	Brand reaction
Consumer-related trigger based on personality problems and symbolic incongruity	- Collaborative brand attacks	- Engage a dialogue with Facebook users

Since in this case the main antecedent of the anti-branding process is the result of consumer-related triggers, the negotiation and resolution stage consists of finding a way to mitigate the haters' skepticism towards the community manager responses and avoid the risk of negative feedbacks that could make the situation worse.

To sum this case study shows that if a certain brand is capable to turn the tables in its favor during a collaborative brand attack, the brand awareness might even increase, because everyone is talking about the topic of that controversy, as illustrated below:

> [...] Lavoro in un negozio importante dove si vende solo biancheria di alte marche Italiane… si parla spesso genericamente di tutto con i clienti e ultimamente capita di parlare dello spot dell'asteroide [...]
> (Engl. Trans.: [...] I work in an important store that sells only high-quality Italian lingerie... we often talk about everything with our customers and recently we talk about the asteroid commercial [...])
>
> (Female, August 28, 2017)

3.6 Case study E: Dolce & Gabbana

Dolce & Gabbana is an Italian luxury fashion house founded in 1985 in Legnano by Italian designers Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana. The two met in Milan in 1980 while they were both working as assistant designers in a fashion studio. In 1982, they decided that the best way to express their unusual and extremely personal style was to work for themselves and open a design studio.

They presented their first women's collection in 1985 in Milan, where a year later their store would open its doors. In 1988, Dolce & Gabbana signed an agreement with the Onward Kashiyama group and started distributing their designs in Japan. In just a few years, the Italian brand expanded into Hong Kong, Singapore, Taipei and Seoul. In 1999, they opened their London studio, designed by British architect David Chipperfield: the result of the collaboration being a blend of the designers' Mediterranean roots and a hint of English taste.

In 1992 the Italian fashion label launched the first Dolce & Gabbana Parfum for women, to be followed by the men's version in 1994. In the 1990's, Dolce & Gabbana created the D&G line, starting with a men's collection in 1994. Aimed at

a young public, full of energy and creativity, the D&G logo differentiated the label and marked it out as belonging to a new, younger market. By the end of the 1990s, the company's revenues were around US$500 million and in 2003 their revenue reached $633 million. By 2005, their turnover was €600 million.

As at 31 March 2014, the brand is present in 40 countries worldwide with a network of 287 mono-brand stores.

The direct control of the entire value chain, from creation to sale, enables the Group to convey – in the most effective manner and through all the expressions of the brand – its strongly distinctive style and solid DNA, based on sartorial tradition and Mediterranean culture, with a special emphasis on Sicilian culture

The continuous development and consolidation of the Group at global level are ensured by coordinated management of the distribution policies, which combines the strategic vision of the headquarters in Milan with a widespread presence across the territory, through its branches in New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Sao Paulo which co-ordinate the management of the retail and wholesale distribution in their respective territorial areas.[6]

Dolce & Gabbana story is characterised by many controversial cases, with accusations mainly related with racism, sexism and homophobia. The most recent case is dated November 2018, and regards the Chinese population who accused the Italian fashion brand of discrimination.

On November 18, 2018, Dolce & Gabbana released a now-deleted post on Weibo, a social media platform similar to its American counterpart Twitter but used only exclusively in China, to promote its upcoming runway show in Shanghai (on November 21, 2018), with hashtags #DGLovesChina# and #DGTheGreatShow#. In that and related videos, a young Asian model in a red sequin Dolce & Gabbana dress appears to have trouble eating Italian foods such as pizza, pasta, and cannoli with chopsticks but finally figures it out. In a particularly garish error in tone, in the video featuring cannoli, a male narrator asked the model "it's still way too big for you, isn't it?" (see Figure 3.27)

Many social media users in China accused Dolce & Gabbana's multi-video online campaign to be stereotypical, racist and disrespectful for Asian female upon

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[6] The information to recostruct the story of Dolce & Gabbana have been retrieved from the Facebook profile of the fashion brand, its website (http://www.dolcegabbana.com), and Wikipedia.

its release. The anger has spread so quickly across the Weibo platform that Dolce & Gabbana deleted the three posts featuring the videos less than 24 hours after its release. But that has not calmed down the angry crowd at all. In fact, the online crisis get worst after that *Diet Prada*, an Instagram account dedicated to bringing light to brand issues, shared screenshots from an alleged private conversation between Stefano Gabbana and fashion writer Michaela Phuong Thanh Tranova, in which the Italian designer appeared to make derogatory comments about Chinese people and Chinese culture. Specifically, the messages purportedly written by Gabbana said the Italian designer had never wanted to delete the video, and it was removed because of his "stupid" office. "China Ignorant Dirty Smelling Mafia," the message added, referring to China as "the country of (poop emojis)".
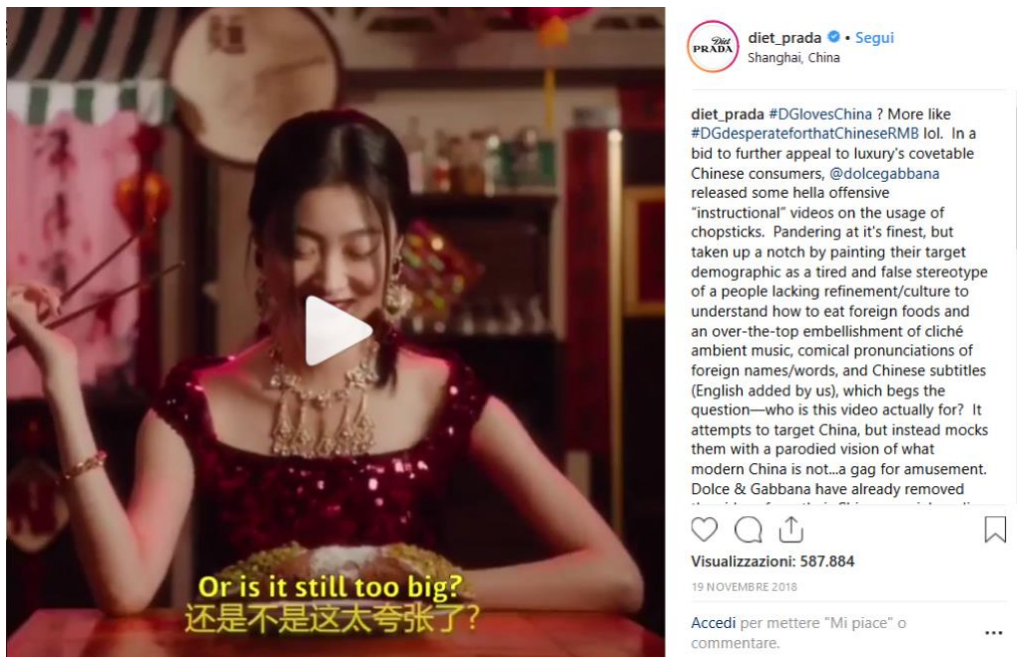
Figure 3.27 A screenshot of Dolce & Gabbana video.

This sequence of events increased the indignation. Main Chinese celebrities vowed to boycott the night show scheduled to take place on Wednesday, November 21, 2018. "I love my mother country," actor Li Bingbing wrote on Weibo. Zhang Ziyi, who starred in *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon*, said on social media the Italian brand had "disgraced itself." The director of *Vogue* China Angelica Cheung cancelled her presence, and the China Bentley Modeling agency, which represented

a number of models that were to walk in "The Greatest Show," announced that 24 models refused to participate. Other models took to social media to resign from the runway.

Following the backlash that it received, Dolce & Gabbana was forced to cancel "The Great Show" catwalk.

Focusing on the anti-branding process, the content analysis of the different material (see Table 3.11) retrieved online about Dolce & Gabbana case, reveals that the main antecedent of the attack that has been launched to the Italian luxury fashion brand is represented by a company-related trigger depending on the ideological incompatibility between the symbolic meaning expressed by the brand and the Chinese people. Furthermore, the anti-branding antecedent regards the social level rather than the individual level, because it is an entire population who felt resentment for wounded pride.

Table 3.11 Case study E: collected materials.

Source	Type of material	Volume
Instagram (Period: 2018-11-18 to 2018-12-02)	Dolce & Gabbana posts User-generated comments	22 147854
YouTube	Apology video to China published by Dolce & Gabbana User-generated comments	1 2647
Facebook (Period: 2018-11-18 to 2018-12-31)	Dolce & Gabbana posts User-generated comments	75 1985
Google (Keyword: "Dolce and Gabbana crisis")	News	79

According to the online news published on November 19, 2018 by the *Jing Daily*[7] Dolce & Gabbana video campaign was viewed as racist and discriminatory by a Chinese audience, first of all, because the look of the Asian model starring in the video – tiny eyes and childish smile – is a typical Oriental type that is understood in the Western culture. Secondly, most of the Chinese cultural symbols and element like lanterns and couplets, which appeared in the messy background of the video,

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[7] Jing Daily is the leading digital publication on luxury consumer trends in China, the article about Dolce & Gabbana Chinese crisis is available at the link https://jingdaily.com/dolce-gabbana-racism/

were outdated and stereotypical. Furthermore, the subtitle referred to chopsticks as a "small-stick" tool while called Italian food great and tasty, which made many people feel the brand is arrogant about its cultural roots.

The original video was attempted humour, albeit in very poor taste. It was widely considered as offensive and disrespectful, but probably not enough to cause a crisis of this scale. What really made the Chinese netizen upset, was what came after; instead of clarifying the context of the advert, the brand's co-founder Stefano Gabbana offended an entire country on Instagram and his emoji (see Figure 3.28) cannot really be misunderstood, no matter what language someone is speaking.

Figure 3.28 A screenshot of Stefano Gabbana private conversation on Instagram.

The following user-generated comments scraped from the Instagram profile of Dolce & Gabbana support the consideration made before:

hnguyenchris Is there any other reason? The founder of D&G should learn how to respect people, not once, he made many same mistake.

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

daniel_liu_dada if you do not like China and Chinese people, please take your poor design and garbage productions out of my country!

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

minicyn_ I've always preferred Italians over French but I knew that Italy is also a very racist country. Sadly you've now publicly revealed yourselves representing ALL Italians.

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

torippu Throwing away all your clothes! Not only you offended Chinese people, you offended all Asians! I think you guys forgot we have a huge buying power of luxury brands! I am also #boycotting your brand! Shame on you!

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

The comment of the user called "torippu" introduces the question regarding the outcomes of this anti-branding activity. As shown in Figure 3.29, one of the most frequent term recurring in the large quantities of messages containing negative word of mouth and complaint behaviour against Dolce & Gabbana is "boycott". Jing Daily reported that "Boycott Dolce" has been mentioned on Weibo more than 18000 times as a result.

Figure 3.29 Word cloud of the most frequent words and phrases that occur in the textual dataset.

The main objective of this collaborative brand attacks on the Chinese social media is to damage the fashion brand both on the reputational and financial plane. According to the disseminated negative word of mouth about the hated Italian fashion brand, on Thursday November 20, 2018, major e-commerce platforms across China, including Tmall, JD.com, Suning Tesco, Netease Koala and Vipshop, removed Dolce & Gabbana products.

Luxury specialist online retailer Secoo joined the boycott and took down all of the brand's products on its platform, stating that the company would "always regard social responsibility as a foremost goal to serve [their] consumers." Fashion rental app Y-closet also stopped loaning pieces from the brand, and Sephora stores in China pulled the brand's beauty products from their shelves. Later the same day, global e-commerce giant Yoox Net-A-Porter also announced its intention to stop selling Dolce & Gabbana products in the Greater China region, and that they would be monitoring the situation closely and keep further decisions under review. [8]

The backlash, as proved by the several photos of empty Dolce & Gabbana stores posted online by many Chinese netizens, had an effect on the Italian brand's brick and mortar locations in China. In the brand's boutique inside Shanghai's Daimaru department store, two salespeople were working alongside six security personnel to serve a single client, close to an Alexander McQueen boutique with over 10 customers.

As reported by the online journal *The Business of Fashion*, no Chinese customers purchased any of the brand's bags at Parisian department store Galeries Lafayette on Thursday. Conversely, the brand's New Bond Street location in London was empty on Thursday morning, and store managers declined to comment on the shopping activity of Chinese shoppers.

The Washington Post, on November 23, 2018, reported the statement of Andrew Keith, the president of Lane Crawford, a retail company with speciality stores selling luxury goods in Hong Kong and China, that is, "We believe that brands need to be aware of the cultural implications of their actions and understand the potential backlash when customers feel their values have been disrespected. Customers have been returning Dolce & Gabbana products to our stores. With respect to our

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[8] Information retrieved on *The Business of Fashion* website, https://www.businessoffashion.com

customers, we have taken the decision to remove the brand from all stores in mainland China, online and in Hong Kong."

The American newspaper, according to Chinese reports, wrote also that Chinese students in Italy held a small protest in front of the flagship store in Milan.[9]

In addition to the numerous written texts that Chinese netizens shared online, the brand has been subject of videos of consumers burning, destroying and otherwise renouncing their Dolce & Gabbana products. Furthermore, on Instagram is possible to retrieve thousands hilarious, disapproving, caricatural and offensive images containing the hashtag "#boycottdolcegabbana" (see Figure 3.30).

Figure 3.30 An example of user-generated images posted on Instagram against Dolce & Gabbana.

Focusing on the anti-branding management process, after the publication of the screenshot of comments attributed to Stefano Gabbana went viral on Wednesday

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[9] Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/chinese-campaign-to-boycott-dolce-and-gabbana-mounts-as-co-founders-issue-apology/2018/11/23/2ff1e69e-ef07-11e8-9236-bb94154151d2_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.70e2a16109fe

November 21, 2018, the co-founder of the Italian fashion brand published a post on Instagram in which he stated that his account had been hacked. The post contained an image with the words "NOT ME" written across one of Tranova's screenshots. The company similarly claimed to have been hacked in a statement posted on its official Instagram page (see Figure 3.31).

Figure 3.31 Messages published by the fashion designer Stefano Gabbana and his co-owned brand Dolce & Gabbana on their respective Instagram profiles.

The justification message published by Dolce & Gabbana on its Instagram profile on November 21, 2018, collected 73800 comments. The content analysis reveals that the majority of the people considered this statement untrue, as illustrated below:

servicerobotwaitress D&G, do you think we Chinese are stupid enough to believe your superficial posts here?

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

asterkitty Liar liar pants on fire 🔥

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

i_gloria_ Not a single word believed.

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

sunnysunny619 The hackers not hacked the ID, they hacked the designer's head.

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

little_tea_biscuit You are the hacker who hack your own account.

zoeexiao Your account isn't hacked! If you want to apologize! Do it in a sincere manner

timmydidntwannawakeup Get out of China! You clearly know China is definitely your largest market, so why do you insult and humiliate Chinese and our culture. Your account was hacked? Don't you feel a little bit ashamed for this apology. How simple! Now you keep on "explaining" like NOT ME, it'd never make us forgive but make us hate and loath you more and more! I don't mean I don't trust and you really lack of mind. 敢做敢当乃君子! Get lost, D&G

Someone called the two fashion designers "cowards", other instead invited them to be more respectful towards Chinese people and to apologise sincerely, as the following excerpts illustrate:

cmba8 Hacked. U two are cowards.

miniminismini "Hacked" 😄😄😄 People aren't stupid, at least admit your own mistake you coward.

luis_ballon Gurllll come on, more respect.

lsz0920 Your ins account has been hacked should not be your excuse, you need change your attitude, dude!!

rauansu Now the D&G(Dog&Gou)'s intention released. They just want to go on making money rather than apologizing. Shame on you!

On Friday afternoon, China time, Dolce & Gabbana released an apology video on its official Weibo account. The video shows Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana sitting at a table with grave expressions on their face (see Figure 3.32). The two speak in Italian as they say that they "feel very grieved" over what their "statements and actions" have brought about "for Chinese people and their country" over the past few days, and that they hope they can be forgiven for their "misunderstanding of [Chinese] culture." They end the video by apologizing in Chinese, saying "dui bu qi".

Before midnight, the video had received more than 166000 comments and more than half a million shares. Over 100000 people "liked" the post. According to *What's on Weibo*, an independent news site reporting social trends in an ever-changing China, among the most popular comments, there were those inquiring if Gabbana's Instagram had been hacked or not, since the video does not mention it. "Were you hacked or not, because if you weren't, then I won't accept your apology," one of the most popular comments said.[10]

Figure 3.32 A screenshot of Dolce & Gabbana apology video.

Dolce & Gabbana shared their apology video both on their Facebook page and YouTube Channel, collecting a huge quantity of negative comments and insults

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[10] Available at https://www.whatsonweibo.com/understanding-the-dolcegabbana-china-marketing-disaster-through-weibo-hashtags/

once again. Specifically, from the content analysis of these comments emerged essentially two themes. Firstly, Dolce & Gabbana apologies are considered forced, fake and insincere. Instead to look in the camera it seems they are using a teleprompter is the insinuation moved by someone on YouTube. Secondly, the brand is perceived as racist and disrespectful towards Chinese culture and population. The impression is that this feeling of indignation of Asiatic population towards the Italian fashion brand will not go away easily. As illustrated below:

As a Chinese, I don't need your apology, I do believe you don't mean to say sorry! We Chinese welcome people from all over the world who respect China and Chinese with heart! Every country have different cultures, you shouldn't judge us without knowing us! Maybe China is not the only market you have, also DG is not the only brand we can choose!

(Facebook, Female, November 23, 2018)

I'm afraid I can't accept your apologies. Things are not so easy as you expected, We don't want to forgive. We don't think your actions deserve it. You just have to get out of China […]

(Facebook, Male, November 25, 2018)

'IF' we have made mistake. Obviously they don't know what mistake they have done. This is fake apology. They made it just because they suddenly realize this will hurt their pocket.

(YouTube, Male, November 23, 2018)

道歉還需要一直瞄提詞機？誠意？先去背完再來說吧！ All I see is "your apology needs keep watching your autocue", if you wanna be more respect, then get the words in your head first!! My mom reads better than you

(YouTube, Male, November 23, 2018)

Let's keep boycotting this brand! No one should support a racist brand

(YouTube, Male, November 24, 2018)

The case of Dolce & Gabbana (summarised in Table 3.12) teaches that for many brands creating impactful ads in a market of very different cultural traits can be

difficult. Dolce & Gabbana's use of clichés and misrepresenting Chinese culture was their biggest mistake. This means that for brands is vital to understand the cultural differences of a country before to create specific marketing and communication strategy focused on international market penetration.

Table 3.12 Anti-branding process matrix applied to case study E.

Anti-branding Antecedents	Anti-branding Outcomes	Brand reaction
Company-related trigger based on ideological incompatibility	- Collaborative brand attacks - Boycott	- Removal of the multi video online campaign from their social media profiles - Instagram post about the story that both Dolce & Gabbana and Stefano Gabbana Instagram accounts were hacked - Deletion of some user generated comments written in English from their Instagram profiles - Apology video

According to *Business Insider Italia*, Dolce and Gabbana posted revenue of 1.29 billion euros in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2018, of which 25% came from the Asia-Pacific region. Although it remains unclear just how much the brand will lose after Chinese boycott, it is possible to say that this situation represents a significant setback for D&G, because it affected sales. Many celebrities stepped away, consumers returned goods and all major e-commerce platforms in China stopped selling their products. This is unprecedented.

The most surprising thing regards the incapacity of Dolce & Gabbana to manage the entire anti-branding process triggered by Chinese people on Weibo and then exploded on an international scenario after that the fashion industry watchdogs *Diet Prada* shared on its Instagram profile both the video with translation of the Chinese woman eating cannoli and the screenshots of the private conversation between Stefano Gabbana and Michaela Phuong Thanh Tranova. In fact, some activities implemented online by the Italian Fashion brand contributed to intensify people's outrage. Specifically, netizens perceived their explanation messages about the hack and the subsequent apology video not enough to cancel their mistake.

Moreover, the brand deleted many user-generated comments written in English from their Instagram profile, probably because such comments were more

comprehensible to a wider audience than Chinese ones, as illustrated below:

miss_cammiii you deleted my comment! racist! hope you get bankrupted!

jimmy_jun Tens of thousands of English messages have been deleted by them. The disgusting behavior of the D&G brand is not the first time. In 2012, similar behaviors took place in Hong Kong. If you resist the brand, you can close the door!

mannymannycat They kept deleting my message !
mannymannycat They deleted my message in 1s
junminlin_jimi 💩💩💩💩💩💩
mannymannycat And deleted again
mannymannycat @seanoring they keep deleting it
mannymannycat @filippo_inflorence they keep deleting the message

whcvcur Then why did you delete so many comments written in English? To stop people from knowing the truth? I feel sick

(Instagram, November 21, 2018)

According to Melancon and Dalakas (2018, p. 164), "deleting negative feedback could potentially generate further negative attention either by the person who posted the original post or by others, and is typically not the best approach for handling such comments."

Dolce & Gabbana denotes a lack of authenticity, but most of all arrogance. Besides, how reported by *The Business of Fashion*, on November 23, 2018, "according to sources, members of Dolce & Gabbana's local team in China warned the Milan-based company not to proceed with the marketing campaign that sparked the uproar but were overruled."[11]

In order to build engaging dialogues, both in social media and offline, companies needs to listen, learn and truly take the time to understand the audience. Dolce & Gabbana brand image has taken a massive hammering after Chinese population huge anti-branding activity. They have consumers elsewhere and the question is if they still have a deep brand affinity and trust.

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[11] Information available on https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/professional/dolce-gabbana-cultural-stupidity-can-be-costly

3.7 Case study F: Gillette

Gillette is a brand of men's and women's safety razors and other personal care products including shaving supplies owned by the multi-national corporation Procter & Gamble (P&G). The Gillette Company was founded in 1901 by King C. Gillette and is based in Boston, Massachusetts.

In January 2019, Gillette began a new marketing campaign, "The Best Men Can Be", to mark the 30th anniversary of the "Best a Man Can Get" slogan. The campaign, in contrast with the traditional image of the brand focused on the alpha men who uses Gillette's razors, was introduced with one minute and 48 second online video commercial entitled "We Believe", and aims to promote positive values among men, condemning acts of bullying, sexism, sexual assault, and toxic masculinity.

The ad, directed by Kim Gehrig, begins by showing images of children being bullied, women harassed in the workplace, women harassed in media, fathers repeating "boys will be boys" as they watch their children fight. About midway through, there' is a shift in this Gillette-made universe and men begin holding other men accountable. A man on the street tells another man that objectifying a woman passing by is "not cool." A father breaks up a fight in order to set an example for his son. In a call to be "the best men can be," the video concludes with a narrated reminder that "the boys watching today will be the men of tomorrow." As the screen fades to blue, a message appears: "It's only by challenging ourselves to do more that we can get closer to our best."

This campaign includes a companion website, and a pledge by Gillette to donate $1 million per-year over the next three years to organizations, such as *Boys & Girls Clubs of America*, that "[help men] achieve their personal best". In the aforementioned website, Gillette explains the campaign by stating "as a company that encourages men to be their best, we have a responsibility to make sure we are promoting positive, attainable, inclusive and healthy versions of what it means to be a man."

Upon its introduction in United States, the campaign received praise for its acknowledgement of the #MeToo movement, and for promoting positive values of masculinity, but it also faced a negative response – including from right-wing critics

– being called left-wing propaganda, accusatory towards its customers, and misandrist. Figure 3.33 illustrates the key video metrics. The most surprising things are the high number of views, and the large amount of dislikes that the video received on YouTube.
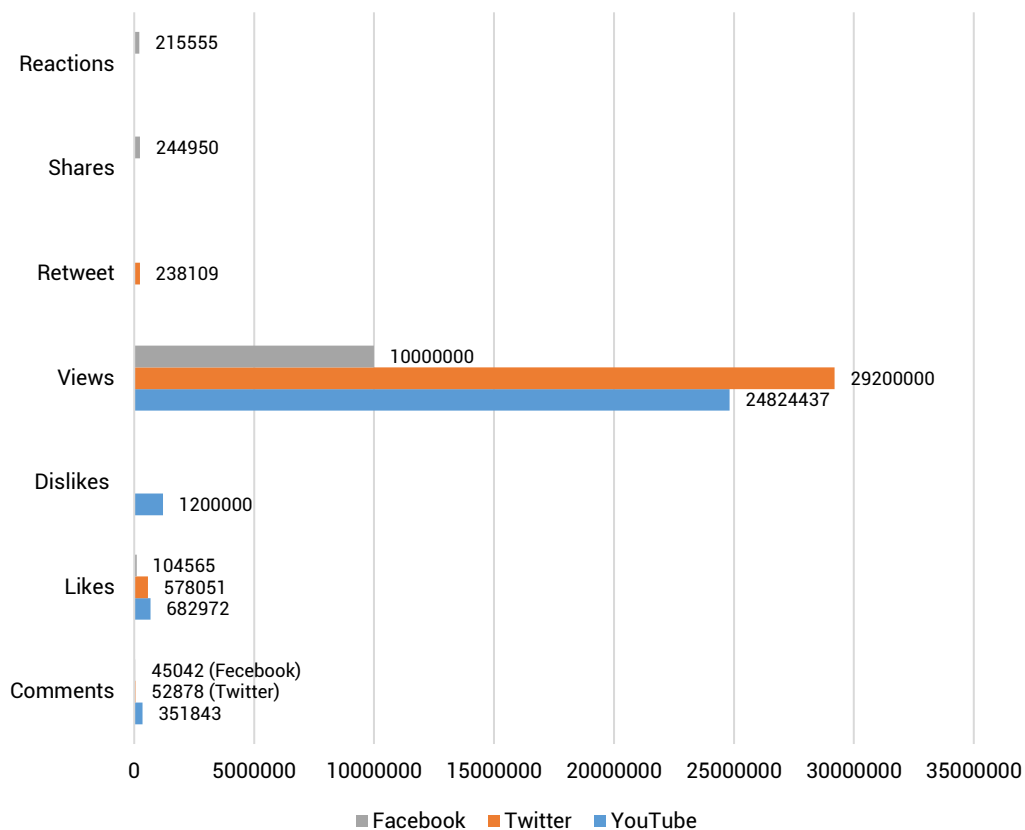
Figure 3.33 Gillette video commercial: social media metrics for the period between January 13, 2019 to January 21, 2019.

In order to develop this case study, the activity on social media profiles of Gillette, regarding the period between January 13, 2019 to January 21, 2018, was principally analysed. Using the extraction app Netvizz, 11 posts, 116142 comments (10558.363636364 average), and 223677 reactions (20334.272727273 average) were retrieved from the Facebook page of the brand. With the support of YouTube comment scraper (http://ytcomments.klostermann.ca/scrape) 357829 comments to the video commercial were downloaded. Finally, 52878 comments to the tweet containing the video commercial were collected using Facepager.

From the content analysis of the collected materials emerges that the main antecedents of the collaborative brand attacks towards Gillette deal with a company-related trigger based upon a symbolic incongruity between the brand meaning and consumer's self-images.

Male consumers disapprove the fact that the campaign is focused on anti-male stereotypes, such as misogyny and aggressiveness. This is a small unrepresentative minority of the target of the brand, which is composed prevalently by a vast number of normal, decent, everyday men who feel alienated by this portrait, and feel no resonance with the way the message is being communicated. As the following excepts illustrate:

NPR's Tovia Smith described your commercial accurately: "The first half of the ad portrays males as boorish, sexually harassing women, mansplaining and bullying." The second half says "some" men were woke by MeToo, so most remain bad. It's nothing but anti-male stereotypes.

(Twitter, male, January 14, 2019)

Dear @Gillette: Some men are violent misogynists. Most are willing to die to protect our liberties and freedoms (including those of women). It is grotesque to repeatedly ascribe collective guilt onto half of humanity known as men. Being a man is not a disease nor a pathology.

(Twitter, male, January 14, 2019)

It equates all masculinity with bullying and abuse. That's just not true.

(Twitter, male, January 16, 2019)

Other consumers highlight the inauthenticity and hypocrisy of a brand that, through the years, has celebrated masculinity in its branding and TV adverts and sexually objectified women. For example, several tweets and Facebook comments to the video commercial show images dated 2011 of women wearing tight, shiny, blue bodysuits with Gillette brand name stamped in large letters across the women's buttocks (see Figure 3.34). Ironically, some Twitter user has commented "The butts a man can get."

Figure 3.34 Screenshot of a tweet that displays a Gillette advertising strategy in the Netherlands in 2011 for a motorsports event.

In addition, consumers are furious with Gillette because they do not need a preacher who tells them how to behave, as in the following:

I just purchased my last Gillette product. You job is to make a product not preach to people and shape society. Done with you all.

(Twitter, male, January 14, 2019)

Well. Guess I will have to find a different brand for my husband. Why can't companies just make a good product and not virtue signal? #getwokegobroke

(Twitter, female, January 14, 2019)

Sell razors and don't preach, because the vast majority of us are good men, we don't need to hear how to behave from a conglomerate like P&G. Be respectful to your customers.

(Twitter, male, January 20, 2019)

Especially, consumer do not want to be moralised and judged by a company whose Corporate Social Responsibility activity to contrast "toxic masculinity" is

only a façade, or a marketing strategy to boost the reputation of the company and to sell products to younger audiences who appreciate brands associated with a progressive social cause[12], as illustrated below:

> So everyone knows Gillette was purchased by the multinational chemical company Proctor & Gamble. They are not virtuous.
>
> (Facebook, Male, January 14, 2019)

> I mean, really? What makes this so odious, isn't the message; its the clear and evident financial motivation. A multinational company, with a dubious corporate history (google it) does not have the moral authority to judge social behaviour.
>
> (Facebook, Male, January 14, 2019)

> Thanks for the moral advice, multi-national company that was recently caught profiting off forced child labour and price fixing.
>
> (Twittter, male, January 19, 2019)

Focusing on the outcomes, this anti-branding activity assumed the form of a collaborative brand attacks on social media. The "haters" initially attacked the post featuring Gillette video commercial published on the different social media profiles owned by the brand. In a few time the video of the ad on YouTube collected a lot of views, but, as highlighted by an article published on January 21, 2019 on Breitbart.com, excluding music videos, Gillette's commercial has become the 12th most disliked YouTube video of all time.

On January 15, 2019, the National Coalition For Men Carolinas (NCFMC), a 501(c)(3) registered non-profit organization formed in July of 2013 by parents of college-aged men who had been falsely accused of Title IX related sexual misconduct, launched the #BoycottGillette social media campaign which went viral quickly becoming an overnight global sensation. The NCFM Carolinas chapter president sent a letter to Gary Coombe, head of Gillette stating "in the strongest terms my disappointment, disgust, and contempt for Gillette's "We Believe" ad

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[12] According to the 2015 Cone Communications Millennial CSR Study, more than nine-in-10 Millennials would switch brands to one associated with a cause (91% vs. 85% U.S. average). The document is available to http://www.conecomm.com/research-blog/2015-cone-communications-millennial-csr-study

which depicts males as sexual predators and bullies." The letter goes on imploring Gillette "to stop the hostilities aimed against men and boys by your company. A good place to start would be by immediately removing the "We Believe" ad followed by the issuance of a public apology along with a mea culpa for releasing such an insensitive, biased and harmful ad."

The hashtag #boycottgillette started to propagate among the netizens becoming a Twitter trend. In particular, several customers to protest against Gillette started filming themselves throwing away razors, shaving foam and other products, as illustrated in the Figure 3.35.

Figure 3.35 Screenshot of a tweet containing the hashtag #boycottgillette.

Other consumers posted images showing their new purchase, that is, a Gillette low priced competitors such as Dollar Shave Club, Harry's or Bic (see Figure 3.36).

After the launch of the commercial, different types of texts started to propagate into the web, such as memes, parodies about Gillette (i.e. Kool-Aid parody), and a video concerning the existence of a "toxic femininity". Furthermore, Ilan

Srulovicz, CEO and founder of Egard Watch Company, replied to Gillette campaign launching a powerful video on YouTube aptly titled "What is a man?". In the video, Srulovicz asks, "What is a man?" and then answers this question by posing a series of additional questions ("Is a man brave?") alongside a statistic that indicates the answer is yes. For example, men are clearly brave because they account for 93 percent of workplace fatalities. The statistics are meant to educate people about the hidden realities of men's lives. After several questions and statistics, the ad ends with the statement, "We see the good in men."

Figure 3.36 Screenshot of a tweet containing the hashtag #boycottgillette.

Egard's message received a positive response with more than 200000 likes on YouTube and only 4140 dislikes, and its link was posted by several consumers on the social media profiles of Gillette in response to the horrendous male-bashing video commercial.

The word cloud illustrated in Figure 3.37 shows the most frequent words used by those consumers who, resented by the video commercial, started to spread their hate and disappointment online. The most frequent terms used to explain the sentiment behaviours are "boycott", "#boycottgillette", "not buy", "never buy",

"offended", and "throw away". Looking at the sentiment emotions the prominent negative terms are "insulting man", "no good product", "lost a client" and "hate your ad".

Figure 3.37 Word cloud of the most frequent negative words that occur in the textual dataset.

In the face of outrage and outrageous overreaction, Gillette remained resolute about its standpoint and did not yield to the request for an apology of those indignant consumers. As reported by Fast Company on January 17, 2019, Pankaj Bhalla, Gillette's North American brand director, stated "I wouldn't say any of the response is not expected. Masculinity is a complex and layered topic, so we definitely expected debate and conversations. I want to be respectful to the folks who didn't necessarily like the ad and had a point of view on it–they are absolutely entitled to it. But the ad is not about all men being bad. It's the exact opposite of that. There's a part where we say, 'We believe in the best in all men.' It's literally right there in the ad! The intention is to say, 'All of you guys are great; how about you be an even better role model for your kids?' That's it. That's the ad."[13]

Analysing the conversation on Facebook and Twitter between Gillette social media manager and netizens, consumers who did not agree with the Tv commercial

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[13] The article is available at https://www.fastcompany.com/90293402/gillette-responds-to-the-backlash-against-its-woke-viral-ad

experienced a feeling of alienation, because their comments were ignored, as illustrated below:

Gillette Notice how this Gillette Admin has no real answers for the critical comments on here? But instead kisses up to the positive comments only!

(Facebook, male, January 14, 2019)

Gillette ...I notice you only answer the comments from people who agree with your insulting advertisement. How challenging and courageous of you. But then again, I guess having the courage to stand up to those who disagree with the tone and appropriateness of an advertisement from some silly razor company, who has the nerve to attempt to define morality for us, is to masculine...eh? Oh, but paying poverty wages to 3rd world production workers and lying to the country as to where those products are produced is moral? What hypocrisy.

(Facebook, male, January 14, 2019)

As reported by many "haters" Gillette isn't so authentic and trustworthy, because it deleted people comments from Facebook and YouTube, and also erased dislikes from the video commercial shared on its YouTube channel:

Why you guys need to delete some people comments? shame on you Gillette! They have a freedom to say their opinions you posted it in Facebook which public.

(Facebook, male, January 17, 2019)

Interesting that #Gillette are deleting negative comments on their YouTube #GilletteAd but people like me are having to repost them. @Gillette #BoycottGillette

(Twitter, male, January 18, 2019)

Wow, so you just delete all the comments that shows the utter disgust the vast majority of people have in this? Just look at the YouTube thumbs down. Massive shot in the foot.

(Facebook, male, January 16, 2019)

People, use your first amendment rights. If they delete your comment, point that out on a new comment. Anyways, they may delete comments, but they will not change people's feelings and mind. By changing the ratings and deleting comments, they

show that they can't be trusted as a company or business. I don't buy stuff from dodgy, untrustworthy brands.

(Youtube, male, January 18, 2019)

Gillette keeps deleting dislikes so that it remains at 1.2M, they have deleted mine everyday for the past few days. Such a joke

(Facebook, male, January 21, 2019)

The Gillette case study (summarised in Table 3.13) reveals that the negative sentiment is coming from the very consumers Gillette has always served (i.e., "@Gillette you've juste lost a 30 years client. #BoycottGillette #PCiscancer #collapseoftestosterone #Gillettegate", Twitter, male, January 16, 2019).

Table 3.13 Anti-branding process matrix applied to case study F.

Anti-branding Antecedents	Anti-branding Outcomes	Brand reaction
Consumer-related trigger based on symbolic incongruity	- Collaborative brand attacks - Boycott	- Deletion of likes from YouTube - Deletion of comments from YouTube - Deletion of comments from Facebook

Putting a polarizing social issue at the heart of an advertising campaign is always a risk, because one segment of a certain brand audience might understand its goal and applaud it, but another (or several) can feel alienated, because the image expressed by the brand is incongruent with consumer's self-concept. This mistake could have been avoided, if the brand had listened not just how the audience feels about the brand, but also how they feel about *everything*. Social sentiment analysis is a straightforward way to explore the attitudes, interests, and feelings of a major audience segment.

Furthermore, this case study teaches that if a brand want to make social change for real, and not just co-opting a movement such as "#MeToo" to sell more products, it must be authentic. This implies listening all those consumers who are skeptics and engage with them a critical conversation. From the content analysis emerged something different, that is, Gillette started having a conversation only with those people who appreciated the campaign. The "haters" were relegated to

the corner with too much unheard questions. Another mistake committed by Gillette regards the anti-branding management strategies adopted on its profiles such as the deletion of negative comments and YouTube dislikes. Deleting negative feedback is not a good approach because could be interpreted in a negative way either by the person who posted the original comment or by others (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018). All these strategies for a company who promotes a blaming campaign, that is, a campaign that stigmatises negative behaviour, sound a little bit hypocritical.

3.8 Analysis and findings across the case studies

The case studies described in sections 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, and 3.7 illustrate the complexities of the anti-branding phenomenon. The findings, deduced by examining each case study independently, are now compared with each other to ascertain similarities and differentiations, and to reconfirm or advance previous knowledge about the research topic.

Looking at the findings emerged by applying for each case study the anti-branding process matrix, the results are included in Table 3.14, is possible to extrapolate and compare information about the possible antecedents and outcomes of the anti-branding phenomenon, as well as the strategy adopted by the brand to face the crisis, that is, the brand reactions.

3.8.1 Anti-branding antecedents

Comparing the findings of the cases Carpisa (A), Selex Group (B), Pandora (C), Buondì Motta (D), Dolce & Gabbana (E), and Gillette (F) it follows that the main consumers' motivation to engage in anti-branding behaviour is related to ideological incompatibility or symbolic incongruity with a certain brand.

The hateful feeling can be triggered by brand's irresponsible business practices, such as exploitation of young workers (case A), commercialisation of products that are not in line with Corporate Social Responsibility issues (case B), and disrespectful behaviour of the brand towards women (case C) or different cultures (case E).

In this context, the conflict between a certain brand and individuals regards the social level, rather than the individual level, because people perceive the brand or

company as the main protagonist of a damaging effect on the environment and society in general.

Table 3.14 Anti-branding process matrix applied across the case studies.

Case	Anti-branding Antecedents	Anti-branding Outcomes	Brand reaction
A	Company-related trigger based on an ideological incompatibility	- Collaborative brand attacks	- Press release apologise - No apologies on the Facebook page - The social media manager ignored the negative comments
B	Company-related trigger based on an ideological incompatibility	- Collaborative brand attacks - Online petition	- An image published on Facebook and Twitter profiles containing a text message about the decision to stop selling foie gras
C	Company-related trigger based on an ideological incompatibility	- Collaborative brand attacks	- Two Facebook Notes - Removal of the advertisement
D	Consumer-related trigger based on personality problems and symbolic incongruity	- Collaborative brand attacks	- Engage a dialogue with Facebook users
E	Company-related trigger based on ideological incompatibility	- Collaborative brand attacks - Boycott	- Removal of the multi video online campaign from their social media profiles - Instagram post about the story that both Dolce & Gabbana and Stefano Gabbana Instagram accounts were hacked - Deletion of some user generated comments written in English from their Instagram profiles - Apology video
F	Consumer-related trigger based on symbolic incongruity	- Collaborative brand attacks - Boycott	- Deletion of likes from YouTube - Deletion of comments from YouTube - Deletion of comments from Facebook

Hateful feelings towards a certain brand can also be triggered by consumers-related factors, such as consumers' psychological traits. In this context, the nature of brand hate is not an evident consequence of the brand but it depends from the individual subjective interpretation of a specific brand behaviour, event or situation.

Generally, as highlighted by Kucuk (2016a, p. 40), brand disappointment and anger triggered by consumers-related factors deals with the individual level, and specifically the main cause is the "difference between consumer expectations for products or services and the product or service quality provided by the company". Cases D and F reveals that, in certain circumstances, consumers-related triggers do not depend on product/service failures but are the consequence of symbolic incongruity with a brand, that is, the brand represents an undesired image to the consumer.

The most relevant finding that emerges from the cross-case analysis reveals a new marketing phenomenon that can be added to previous research on anti-branding. For example, Kucuk (2016a) explains that most anti-branding activities appear to be motivated by consumer product/service failures complaints or by company wrongdoing or wrong-standing on one or more of the many social issues that matter to consumers. Conversely, this research illustrates that people tend to hate and publicly attack or boycott brands for how ads make them feel rather than how product/service performs or are made by companies. Specifically, as the following tweet confirms:

> What does it say about a society when we boycott for how ads make us feel rather than how products are made? Why not back #gilletteboycott because of animal testing or #BoycottNike for exploiting labor or boycott @Hersheys for profiting from child slavery
>
> (Male, January 17, 2019)

This marketing phenomenon is in line with Fournier's (1994) consumer-brand relationship framework, and confirms that consumer attitudes towards brands are shifting from a mere transaction to an almost-human relationship. Modern-day consumers care about how their favourites brands make them feel and sometimes, putting too much of their identities into these relationships, tend to feel negative emotions towards a brand because it transmits a meaning or a value contrary to consumer's sense of self and beliefs. For example in case F consumers attachment to Gillette was severed when the brand invalidated their personal belief system introducing a new vision and cultural image through the ad campaign "We believe".

3.8.2 Anti-branding outcomes

Comparing the findings of the cases A, B, C, D, E, and F it follows that the "haters" develop different types of textual materials to express their hate towards brands. Many anti-branding haters sometimes use straight text containing only written language. Others, instead, create complex visual or multimodal texts whose tone of voice can be serious, dramatic, incriminatory, hilarious and parodic.

The purpose of such anti-branding outcomes is to influence other people's perceptions and create negative word of mouth or negative consumption trends in the market in order to jeopardize the reputation and the financial value of the brands.

Negative word of mouth is the easiest form used by individuals to express anti-branding messages. Furthermore, it is fast-spreading than anti-branding websites and anti-branding communities, because such virtual spaces need to be promoted or expressly researched by netizens on search engines or social media to be found.

In the six collected cases, generally, consumers posted negative contents directly on the social media profiles of the hatred brands and originated forms of collaborative brand attacks.

In case study B, consumers started a petition online on the platform Change.org and forced the hatred brand, namely, Selex Group, to change behaviour in the way to run the business. Cases E and F distinguish themselves because consumers using social media started a boycott. According to Kucuk (2016a, p. 61), boycotts "are used to influence the behaviour of a firm by refusing to purchase or make use of its products". In case studies E and F consumers to make an economic pressure and image pressure on the target brand, shared on social media images featuring products thrown in the trash. Specifically, in the case E some consumers documented on social media that they returned D&G products back to stores and asked for refunds, others instead published images featuring destroyed purchases by cutting them up or burning them on the stove.

3.8.3 Brand management

Comparing the findings of the cases A, B, C, D, E, and F it follows that brands do not react at the same way when anti-branding consumers attack them. For each one of the different brand reactions identified in the six selected case studies was

assigned a verbal label in order to develop an initial taxonomy. The labels associated to each one of the brand response strategy are the followings:

(1) Apologise;
(2) Change behaviour;
(3) Engage in conversation with "haters";
(4) Ignore;
(5) Remove negative comments (and likes) on social media.

Table 3.15 shows the one or more strategies adopted by the $brand_n$ to counteract people/consumers attacks via social media activities.

Table 3.15 Anti-branding strategies adopted across the case studies.

Case	Apologise	Change behaviour	Engage in conversation with "haters"	Ignore	Remove negative comments (and likes) on social media
A	●			●	
B		●			
C	●				
D			●		
E	●			●	●
F				●	●

Engage in conversation with "haters" and change behaviour appeared more effective in mitigating consumers' attacks. React quickly and with the adequate tone of voice should represent a winning move in order to negotiate with brand haters and protect online reputation and brand credibility. Many individuals can be calmed down if they notice that the brand managers responds to their specific comments and answers. Generally, a one-to-one communication approach is mostly more effective than a one-to-many communication. Furthermore, responses that are automated or standardised are not a good solution, because some users could resent. The case D shows that brand awareness might even increase, when people/consumer perceive the brand's reaction as fair, pertinent, and professional, as illustrated below:

Comunque grazie per le risposte a tutti. Va benissimo parlare e scambiarsi le idee.
I social servono anche a questo

(Engl. Trans.: Anyway thanks to give an answer to everyone. It's good to talk and exchange ideas. This is the real purpose of social media)

<div align="right">(August 28, 2017)</div>

The case C teaches that showing to brand haters the will to change behaviour on the market is an effective strategy to resolve the conflict. Selex Group after having been attacked by the activist group "Esseri Animali" announced with an image on Facebook and Twitter that they would change their marketing behaviour and stop selling foie gras. This strategy immediately stopped the group of activists who started commenting this post with positive statements, as following:

Complimenti Selex per aver fatto la scelta giusta e aver tolto il Foie Gras dagli scaffali #ViaDagliScaffali!"
(Engl. Trans.: Congratulations Selex for making the right choice and removing Foie Gras from the shelves #AwayFromTheShelves)

<div align="right">(November 29, 2017)</div>

Grazie Selex per aver fatto la scelta giusta. In qualità di clienti vigileremo che l'impegno sia rispettato #ViaDagliScaffali"
(Engl. Trans.: Thanks Selex for making the right choice. As customers we will ensure that the commitment made will continue to be respected #AwayFromTheShelves)

<div align="right">(November 29, 2017)</div>

Ignoring negative consumer-generated content like in the cases A, E, and F is less recommended, because anti-branding individuals perceiving a sense of injustice towards the brand can continue with their revenge and hateful actions. Sometimes such type of individuals ask only for understanding and attention, or sincere apology. Therefore, is fundamental paying attention and listening to "haters" in order to understand the nature of their hostility and negotiate a conflict resolution that satisfies both parts. According with Melancon and Dalakas (2018, p. 164) a case where silence may be preferable to posting a response regards the troll posts. For these kinds of post "that the marketer does not delete, there is not much benefit in interacting with the person posting it. Often, such posts are made
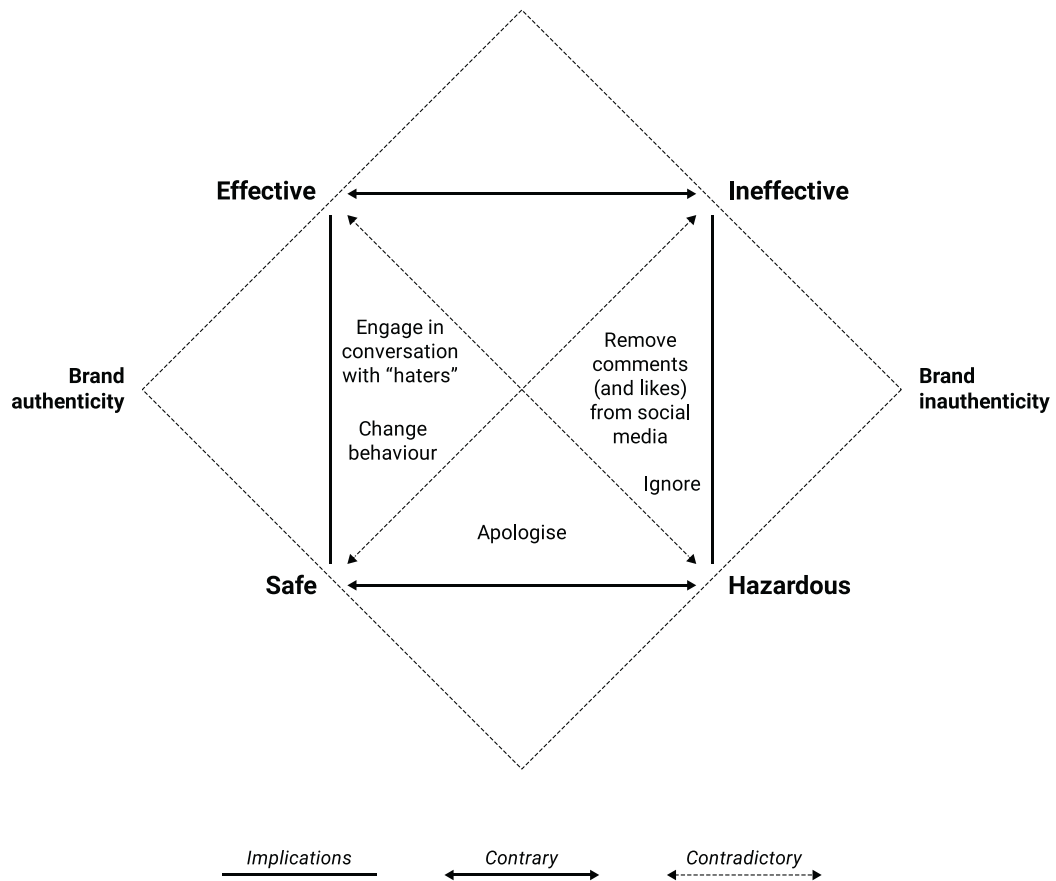
with the intention of stirring the pot and getting a reaction, which is why silence may be a wise reaction."

Remove negative comments (and likes) on social media is a controversial way to manage the social media crisis and the conflict with anti-branding individuals. Someone, in fact, could perceive this move as inauthentic and misleading. Brands must keep all feedback posted on their social media pages for people to see, not just the positive. Adjust the vanity metrics (i.e. subscribers, likes and dislikes, number of followers, number of views and social shares) as in the case F is only another way to lose brand credibility and make people angrier.

Finally, a strategy that includes an apology as in the cases C and E should work if the excuses are based on rational arguments and are sincere. Pandora's excuses are not solid enough to make people change idea and prevent a reputation damage to the respective brand. Neither Dolce & Gabbana launching its advert apology video resolved the conflict with the "haters". Chinese population, in fact, not convinced by the video, said on social media that the two co-owners of the brand were "insincere" and that they do not "love China," but rather they "love money." Furthermore, several Chinese social media users expressed that the apology could not repair the damage caused in the country by the brand. Other also noted that the video was never posted directly to the Dolce & Gabbana Instagram feed and that it was only mentioned with a link in bio.

The different results emerged from the cross-case study analysis highlight that choose the right strategy to counteract anti-branding activities is essential to restore a brand's reputation or even prevent reputation damages from occurring altogether. The semiotic square, depicted in Figure 3.38, introduces a sort of topographical representation of the response strategies that can support brand managers in successfully managing anti-branding activities. This tool, also known as the "Greimas Square", is used for the representation of a micro-universe of actions built through the oppositions of concepts. Assuming that a strategy can be "effective" or "ineffective", "safe" or "hazardous" the semiotic square offers a visualisation of the efficacy or inefficacy of a specific reaction strategy to leapfrog anti-branding activities. The semiotic square is not a static structure. It illustrates how certain strategies, such as apologise, which from the case study analysis proved to be a hazardous strategy, may transform into a safe strategy under some circumstances

(i.e., sincerity of the brand, truly willingness to change marketing behaviour). Furthermore, the semiotic square suggests a set of strategies that could help the brand to conserve its authenticity, that is, a prerequisite to build strong and long-lasting consumer-brand relationship.

Effective ⟷ **Ineffective**

Brand authenticity

Engage in conversation with "haters"

Change behaviour

Remove comments (and likes) from social media

Ignore

Apologise

Brand inauthenticity

Safe ⟷ **Hazardous**

Implications   *Contrary*   *Contradictory*

Figure 3.38 Semiotic square of the anti-branding strategies.

Conclusion

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb "to be" but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction," and ... and ... and..."

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1988 p. 25)

Scholarly research in marketing has traditionally concentrated on positive emotions that consumers feel towards brands. Conversely, this thesis explore the negative side of consumer brand relationship focusing on the anti-branding phenomenon. By reviewing the extant literature about this relatively new marketing problem was possible to identify (1) the main anti-branding antecedents that motivate consumers to attack brands in the digital marketing environments, and (2) the different anti-branding outcomes, that is, the forms of expression used by individuals to communicate their disapproval and hate towards brands. Furthermore, some seminal research on brand management strategies in response to consumer attacks, allowed to the author of this thesis to derive a conceptual framework (see Figure 1.10) and look at the anti-branding process in a holistic way.

The empirical research, conducted using a multiple-case study analysis, confirmed the extant theories about the anti-branding triggers identified by Krishnamurthy and Kucuk (2009), Kucuk (2016a; 2018), and Hegner, Fetscherin, and van Delzen (2017). Specifically, the findings reveal that one of the main consumers' motivation to engage in anti-branding behaviour is related to ideological incompatibility. This means that people tend to hate and publicly attack or boycott a brand due to its misconduct on the social level (i.e., lack of Corporate Social Responsibility). Another recurring trigger is related to a symbolic

incongruity between brand meanings and the individual self-image. An astonishing fact is that episodes of anti-branding activities related to product/service failures tend to remain less evident, because they regard mainly the individual level rather than the social level. A rare exception is the revolt in 2016 of Chinese consumers against Samsung due to the explosion of Samsung Note 7s' phone batteries.

To sum, the perception is that, in the actual marketing landscape, anti-branding activities are generally caused by inappropriate communication strategies by a brand or company. Communicating brand's principles and values to a vast audience is not easy, because people interpret reality in a subjective way. This means that people's values, beliefs, emotional intelligence and previous knowledge affect the interpretation of messages, and the attachment or aversion of an individual towards brands.

A first important assertion that is derived from this research is the following:

(1) People have the tendency to hate and attack those brands with images incongruent to their self-concepts, those brands that are associated to corporate social irresponsibility, and those brands that will not give desired meaning to their lives.

Thanks to the rise of the internet and social media, it has become very easy for brand-haters, but also for competitors, to make anti-branding initiatives that can break brands and company images. Spread negative user-generated content and influence the opinion of other people against a certain brand is the most frequent outcomes of the anti-branding process. The realisation of such forms of expression is simpler than that of the anti-branding websites or communities. Furthermore, negative user-generated content can spread very quickly on social media, especially when online journals, blogs and other traditional media report the news. Several case studies analysed in this research support such aspects.

From the cross-case study analysis emerges that individuals to attack a certain brand utilise different types of texts such as straight comments, memes and parodies. At the same time direct competitors or brands operating in different sectors can create instant marketing campaigns containing obvious references to the situation of crisis that a certain brand is experiencing (see Figure 3.21). The semiotic signs and visual or multimodal texts created by anti-branding individuals

can also affect the brand identity system of a certain brand, such as the brand logo, brand name, and brand slogan (see Figure 3.28). Sometimes brand-haters uses specific colours (i.e., black), symbols and words that often symbolise death, opposition or rebellious feelings. On the base of such reflections is possible to derive a second important assertion, that is, the following:

(2) People construct their conflict with a certain brand using the different communication channels and tools made available by the interactive digital environment. The user-generated contents spread across the internet may assemble different features. Every individual is like a "bricoleur"[14] who combines different signs to create new meaning or to subvert the extant ones. Specifically, the anti-branding individuals put together the visual and cultural signs of a certain brands with other cultural, societal, and ideological signs to express their hate, and thus damage the brand reputation or to convince the brand to change on the ethical or behavioural plane.

There are, however, ways to leapfrog anti-branding initiatives against a certain brand. The whole intention of this thesis revolves around the attempt to understand *how* and *why*, under certain circumstances, brand "haters" are doomed to fail thanks to specific reaction strategies adopted by brands.

The six case studies analysed in this research illustrate that brands do not react at the same way when anti-branding consumers attack them. For each one of the different brand reactions identified using the cross-case study analysis was assigned a verbal label in order to develop an initial taxonomy. The labels associated to each one of the brand response strategy are the followings: (1) apologise; (2) change behaviour; (3) engage in conversation with "haters"; (4) ignore; (5) remove negative comments (and likes) on social media.

Interestingly, engage in conversation with "haters", and change behaviour in the way to run a business appeared more effective in mitigating consumers' attacks. React quickly and with the adequate tone of voice should represent a winning

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[14] The concept of "bricoleur" – there is no adequate English translation – has been introduced by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1966) in order to explain how societies create novel solutions by using resources that already exist in the collective social consciousness. Specifically, the metaphor of the bricoleur is used to contrast the "science of the concrete" of pre-literate society with the analytic methodology of Western science and engineering.

strategy in order to protect online reputation and brand credibility. Conversely, apologise and ignore or remove the user-generated contents are less recommended. An apology to be effective must be sincere. Brands sometimes follows the logic of pursuing profit maximisation, thus their excuses usually appear forced or insincere (i.e., the cases C and E). Deleting negative comments could potentially generate further negative attention of the brand "haters". Brands, in fact, may appear as inauthentic and misleading.

On the base of the analysis of the different anti-branding management strategies adopted by the six selected brands is possible to derive a third and final assertion, that is, the following:

(3) When an anti-branding campaign begins and the mistake has clearly been made, brands should admit their faults, make amends, and engage in conversation with "haters" in order to negotiate together a resolution. After a social media crisis, brand should avoid any media coverage for a while, and just craft an official statement on the incident. To avoid anti-branding initiatives brands must stay authentic, follow stunning values and be associated with specific corporate responsibility goals. Finally, strong brands listen not just how the audience feels about the brand, but also how they feel about everything. Understanding the human being is the only possibility for brands to: (a) have a compelling value proposition to its customers, (b) evolve, (c) become cultural icons, and (d) co-create value with their customers and other stakeholders.

The findings of this thesis have some managerial relevance and practical implications. Firstly, the anti-branding process conceptual framework gives to practitioners a holistic representation of the peculiar aspects and variables that determine the emergence of this complex phenomenon. Secondly, the reports of the different case studies can teach to practitioners *how* and *why* other brands committed mistakes. Thirdly, this thesis introduces a sort of roadmap (see Figure 3.38) representing those response strategies that can support brand managers in successfully managing anti-branding activities.

From a theoretical standpoint this thesis has empirically verified some of the previous theories about the anti-branding problem. Furthermore, investigating the

strategies that brand managers can adopt to leapfrog anti-branding initiatives this study filled a gap in the extant literature and provided the basis for further discussions about this field of research.

Some limitations of this research deal with the fact that findings are the results of observation of events and actions. In order to test the robustness of the findings, future research could utilise financial data to forecast the consequences of anti-branding phenomena and the effective validity of the strategies that could help the brand to mitigate consumers attack on social media. Finally, searching and exploring other case studies could enrich the knowledge about a phenomenon that is hard to isolate from its context.

The only way to understand the anti-branding phenomenon is to make maps, not photos. Because reality is not static. After all, according with Deleuze and Guattari (1988, p. 24) knowledge structure is not a tree, but a rhizome. All we can do is "Run lines, never plot a point!"

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