

“I will always hate you”! An investigation of the impact of anthropomorphism in online anti-brand communities

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate whether brand anthropomorphism has a direct impact on brand hate and what are the prevailing factors that play a significant role in this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – This study provides insights on brand anthropomorphism phenomenon and negative consumer–brand relationships in the context of social media-based anti-brand communities. Using a quantitative analysis of the data gathered from an online survey, this study analyzes brand anthropomorphism in the three main online anti-brand communities toward Apple.

Findings – Findings indicated that brand anthropomorphism in itself does not impact on brand hate directly. Nevertheless, when it is used by consumers to express their negative feelings toward the hated brand, the consumers’ attribution of responsibility and intentionality to Apple brand’s behavior positively affects brand hate, and ideological incompatibility is a good moderator for brand hate.

Research limitations/implications – The results of this study are based on a limited number of survey respondents because anti-brand community members are very difficult to access, and thus, it was not easy to have their collaboration for this research.

Practical implications – This study highlights the power of social media as a tool for establishing negative consumer–brand relationships. Therefore, brand managers must recognize that consumer activists may be a serious threat to the company and deal with the consumers’ tendency to use anthropomorphism to express their hate.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors’ knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the link between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate, analyzed through a quantitative analysis.

Keywords Brand anthropomorphism, Negative consumer–brand relationships, Brand hate, Anti-brand communities, Social media

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

Previous literature on consumer behavior and consumer–brand relationships (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Belk, 2013) showed that such relationships are enhanced by anthropomorphism,

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meaning that consumers often perceive brands in human-like terms (Epley, 2018; Fournier, 1998; Waytz *et al.*, 2010; Puzakova and Aggarwal, 2018). Brand anthropomorphism emerged as a multidimensional concept in contemporary life in which consumers engage with products in complex relationships that mutually define the participants (Guido and Peluso, 2015; Lanier *et al.*, 2013). Researchers in this field have focused mostly on related issues such as antecedents and consequences of anthropomorphism (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Epley *et al.*, 2007; Epley *et al.*, 2008), positive effects of anthropomorphism in consume–brands relationships (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2017; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia, 2014) and purchase behavior (Aggarwal and McGill, 2012; Chen, 2017).

Brand anthropomorphism can be observed from two perspectives, the first being it is a *marketer-generated* phenomenon aimed at triggering a positive consumer–brand relationship (Aggarwal and McGill, 2012; Chandler and Schwarz, 2010) and developing a social and emotional relationship with the brand. The second perspective is a *consumer-generated* phenomenon, defined by Kucuk (2020) as “reverse brand anthropomorphism,” often aimed at demonizing the hated brand and damaging its image through a negative consumer–brand relationship. In its strongest expression, this reverse brand anthropomorphism focuses on “objectivizing an evil figure rather than personifying an object” (Kucuk, 2020, p. 652).

Marketing research literature has addressed anthropomorphism mostly for products (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Kim and Kramer, 2015; Kim and McGill, 2011) but less for brands, which are more abstract constructs. Thus, research on brand anthropomorphism is still in its early stage (Brandão and Popoli, 2022; Dessart and Cova, 2021; Tuškej and Podnar, 2018), and what exists to date has not focused on negative consumer–brand relationships. In this regard, MacInnis and Folkes (2017) suggest that more research is needed to gain a better understanding of why certain types of negative relationships prevail, what causes changes in relationships and what are the prevailing factors playing a role in the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and negative consumer–brand relationships.

Psychological literature describes that anthropomorphism is a cognitive automatic process that reveals a consumer’s tendency to attribute human-like characteristics to nonhuman agents (e.g. brands) and perceive them as having their own motivations, intentions and even the ability to experience emotions (Tuškej and Podnar, 2018). Moreover, several studies have shown the impact of brand anthropomorphism on positive consumer–brand relationships (Golossenko *et al.*, 2020; Portal *et al.*, 2018), whereas, to the best knowledge of the authors, there are no studies on the impact of the brand anthropomorphism on negative consumer–brand relationships. The pertinence for this topic was claimed in a very recent investigation (Brandão and Popoli, 2022).

Based on the above information, this paper addresses this gap in the literature by proposing that brand anthropomorphism is not just a method used by marketers for positively influencing consumers’ minds, but it is also a method used by consumers to increase the potential for active negative consumer–brand relationships and notably, brand hate. In this context, online environments, and more recently, social media, have become the perfect tools for sharing and discussing brand-related contents (de Campos Ribeiro *et al.*, 2018; Demar *et al.*, 2022; Cooper *et al.*, 2019; Melancon and Dalakas, 2018; Santos Corrada *et al.*, 2020), and for the development of multiple anti-brand communities wishing to express negative experiences with specific brands – in other words, social media based anti-brand communities (Popp *et al.*, 2016; Veloutsou and Black, 2020; Wong *et al.*, 2018). This paper, therefore, investigates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate in

the context of social media, with specific reference to online anti-brand communities. In particular, it strives to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1. Does brand anthropomorphism affect brand hate?

RQ2. What are the prevailing factors affecting the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate?

Methodologically, this study answers the research questions through a quantitative analysis of the data gathered from an online survey (from August 21 to September 1, 2018) carried out on a sample of 106 participants of the anti-brand communities complaining about Apple. Specifically, the study develops an empirical investigation of the three main anti-Apple communities: “I Hate Apple”, “Apple Sucks” and “Anti Apple (Brand)”. These three anti-brand communities have been investigated through a preliminary study based on the authors’ direct observation to detect the comments expressed by the participants, their purposes in participating in anti-brand communities, and the main reasons behind their negative feeling toward the Apple brand.

Therefore, the research hypotheses for the quantitative analysis were defined on the basis of both the literature on negative consumer–brand relationships and the authors’ observation of the contents of the three anti-brand communities examined. With regard to this second source of data, almost 3,500 comments and declarations made by members of the communities were analyzed between May 2016 and May 2018. This time period also covered the period when Apple was heavily criticized for removing the traditional 3.5 mm headphone jack from its iPhones in 2017. This direct observation made it possible to identify what are the main variables that affect the relationship between anthropomorphism and brand hate and, subsequently, to submit them to quantitative analysis to assess their role in that relationship.

In the following sections, this study proceeds as follows. In Section 2, overall relevant literature on brand anthropomorphism and on brand hate was reviewed; in Section 3, methodology, research context, research model and data collection are described; and in Sections 4 and 5, results of the quantitative study are illustrated and discussed to explore whether a direct link between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate exists, and what are the prevailing factors affecting this relationship as mediator or moderator; finally, after the conclusions in Section 6, limitations of the study and directions for future research are presented in Section 7.

2. Literature review

2.1 Anthropomorphism and brand anthropomorphism

Brand anthropomorphism represents a growing phenomenon in the marketing domain (Golossenko *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2022; MacInnis and Folkes, 2017), and it has been recognized as an important construct within consumer–brand relationships. Aggarwal and McGill (2012) highlighted the tendency of people to humanize the brands, meaning that people perceive them as having human characteristics, both tangible and intangible, such as human forms, personality, ability to speak and mental state (Kim and McGill, 2011), Puzakova *et al.* (2009) attributed to the anthropomorphized brands even “various emotional states, mind, soul and conscious behavior” (p. 413). An important effect of brand anthropomorphism has been referred to the translation of the social standards and dynamics that run the interpersonal relationships between human people to the relationships between people and brands (Aggarwal, 2004; Brown, 2010; Fournier and Alvarez, 2013; Portal *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, to distinguish the way through which the

brand anthropomorphism phenomenon has been observed in the literature, three different perspectives could be identified: the *human-focused* perspective, the *self-focused* perspective and the *relationship-focused* perspective.

Anthropomorphism from a *human-perspective* refers to the perceptions of a nonhuman object as having human-like qualities, such as human-like physiognomy, a human-like mind and a human-like personality (Golossenko *et al.*, 2020; MacInnis and Folkes, 2017). Most earlier studies focus on a specific dimension of anthropomorphism according to the objectives of the study [for example, Kim and McGill (2011) anthropomorphized slot machines in Mr Slot to analyze the impact of anthropomorphism on risk perception]. As pointed out by Aggarwal and McGill (2007), this kind of anthropomorphism is only a partial representation of the phenomenon. Furthermore, many scholars (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Hart and Royné, 2017; MacInnis and Folkes, 2017; Wan *et al.*, 2017) have drawn attention to the fact that brand anthropomorphism does not only concern products that resemble human-like features and traits (e.g. names, gender and physical characteristics), and are ultimately more likely to be anthropomorphized by consumers; it is also a phenomenon that can occur for a variety of different reasons.

There are two types of humanizations studied in the context of advertising, subtle and overt. Subtle humanization happens when a nonhuman agent has indirect and subtle human characteristics and resemblances, such as attributing emotions to a spokes-character (e.g. when the user enters a wrong password on the iPhone and the phone shakes). Overt humanization is when a nonhuman agent has direct human characteristics in their appearance and marketing communication (e.g. spokes-characters talking and acting like humans) (Reavey *et al.*, 2018).

From a *self-focused perspective*, brand anthropomorphism also includes perceived congruity between the brand and the self and brand-self connections (Attiq *et al.*, 2022; Guido and Peluso, 2015; MacInnis and Folkes, 2017; Puzakova *et al.*, 2009). When consumers anthropomorphize a brand, a schema for the type of person is suggested and, therefore, people evaluate it considering how well the brand's features fit that schema (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Brandão and Popoli, 2022). In fact, believing in a nonhuman agent as having a human-like mind may result in the following:

- perceiving them as worthy of moral concern;
- perceiving them as capable of intentional action, translating into responsibility for them; and
- perceiving them as a source of normative social influence for the consumer (Waytz *et al.*, 2010).

Anthropomorphism from a *relationship-focused perspective* considers how consumer–brand relationships can resemble human relationships in its many types (Fournier, 1998; MacInnis and Folkes, 2017). In fact, previous research has stated that anthropomorphized brands are more prone to relationship-building than nonanthropomorphized brands (Puzakova *et al.*, 2009) and that humans are capable of both loving and hating their objects (Hart *et al.*, 2013).

When brands are anthropomorphized, consumer and brand interactions may assemble interpersonal interactions, and this ability also targets them for moral judgments, resulting in positive or negative evaluations (Alvarez and Fournier, 2016; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2017; Kucuk, 2016); for instance, if consumers perceive the brand actions as intentional, they will affect their attitudes toward the brand (Puzakova *et al.*, 2013a). Therefore, brand anthropomorphism could have both positive and negative effects on consumers'

preferences, and the relationships between consumers and brands are bilateral and mutually defining (Lanier *et al.*, 2013).

2.2 Brand hate and its antecedents

Brand hate is the extreme form of brand dislike (Pinto and Brandão, 2020; Romani *et al.*, 2012; Tuhin, 2019; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016) and the strongest negative consumer–brand relationship due to an intense feeling of anger or disgust (Alba and Lutz, 2013; Dessart *et al.*, 2020; Kucuk, 2019). Moreover, the feeling of hate toward a brand is not static but can change over time following different “trajectories of brand hate” (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018) and can start from either love or hate and continue with an alternation between hate, indifference and strong hate. Moreover, as stated by Sakulsinlapakorn and Zhang (2019), consumers often experience the “love-become-hate effect”, dramatically changing their initial positive feeling toward the brand.

Previous frameworks exposed three possible antecedents for brand hate: first, dissatisfaction related to a product or service based on negative past experiences (Fetscherin, 2019); second, associations and impressions of the brand and its users; and third, a corporate social performance that is against the consumer’s values (Bryson *et al.*, 2013; Dessart *et al.*, 2020; Kautish and Sharma, 2020). The last two aspects can also be presented as symbolic incongruity and ideological incompatibility, both of which have the strongest influence on brand hate (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Recently, Kucuk (2018) stated that the two primary situations leading to extreme negative emotions toward brands are the lack of corporate social responsibility and product/service failure. The consumer culture perspective allows skepticism toward brands (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004), especially when it includes high switching costs, a local monopoly situation, risk aversion, social pressure, ignorance, inertia and market constraints or barriers (Alba and Lutz, 2013). With the exception of negative past experiences (which obviously concern only those who have consumed that brand at least once), all the remaining motivations for hate can affect consumers and nonconsumers (Brandão and Popoli, 2022; Dessart and Cova, 2021; Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Indeed, many community members are not consumers of the hated brand. Obviously, different levels of intensity involve different degrees of willingness and interest of consumers to translate their feelings into negative behavior, such as from increasing complaints or reducing patronage (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Rodrigues and Pinto Borges, 2021) to increasing negative word of mouth, protesting or joining anti-brand communities (Dessart and Cova, 2021; Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Osuna Ramirez *et al.*, 2019; Pinto and Brandão, 2020; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2020). Hate is the basis on which the anti-brand communities are founded, and it is the key factor that drives consumers to join the community. That is not surprising because joining and participating in an online community requires cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement (Mirbagheri and Najmi, 2019) and a certain amount of time to devote, so the motivation for revenge or damage must be strong, as in the case of hate.

3. Conceptual framework and research hypotheses

3.1 Research context

The empirical research seeks to explain the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate in social-media-based anti-brand communities. All anti-brand communities are created with the aim of expressing and sharing very negative judgments toward the brand among the community members (Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Iyer and Muncy, 2009), with the ultimate goal of revenge or harming the brand, impacting on its brand equity and reputation (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2008; Romani *et al.*, 2015).

Although social forms of anti-branding are still scarce in the literature (Dessart *et al.*, 2016), with most previous work focusing on traditional websites (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009), their influence on contemporary social movements is starting to be noted (Kozinets, 2015; Relling *et al.*, 2016). In fact, consumers are more and more moving from online review websites and blogs to social media (de Campos Ribeiro *et al.*, 2018). As a consequence, social media has established a new dynamic in marketing, allowing consumers to act out a consumer brand engagement process with brands (Bowden, 2009; Carvalho and Fernandes, 2018), both positive and negative.

3.2 Research model and hypotheses

It is relevant to determine first if a direct relationship exists between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate (*RQ1*); and thereafter determine what are the prevailing factors affecting this relationship and whether they play a role as mediator or moderator (*RQ2*). First, the authors themselves directly read the posts from all anti-brand community members to identify the factors and considerations of those individuals regarding these negative consumer–brand relationships and crossed them with a literature review.

3.2.1 Preliminary content analysis. To answer *RQ1* and *RQ2*, we first conducted an observation in a realistic environment through a non-intrusive direct observation of the comments posted by members of the anti-brand community. This was conducted prior to applying the quantitative methodology approach. The object of observation for the anti-brand community was the Apple brand. There was a total of about 3,500 posts. Based on our literature review, we defined the following four main categories for the coding process:

- (1) brand hate signals;
- (2) blame attribution with two sub-categories, i.e. perceived intention and perceived responsibility;
- (3) ideological incompatibility; and
- (4) negative previous purchase experience (Table 1).

Subsequently, we conducted an online survey (quantitative research methodology) with the members of the selected anti-brand communities. The online survey was used in *I Hate Apple*, *Anti Apple (Brand)* and *Apple Sucks*. Based on the literature review, this study proposes the research model and hypotheses that support and guide the quantitative study (Figure 1).

3.2.2 Brand anthropomorphism and brand hate. In all observed anti-Apple communities, there are many traces and forms of brand anthropomorphism used to express negative feelings toward Apple. In fact, anthropomorphism seems to be the best way to express disappointment, dissatisfaction, responsibility and intentionality. Generally, in marketing communication very often the brand itself has been the object of anthropomorphization by the company (Epley, 2018; Epley *et al.*, 2008; Golossenko *et al.*, 2020; Merchant *et al.*, 2018; Portal *et al.*, 2018; Puzakova and Aggarwal, 2018; Waytz *et al.*, 2010) and therefore consumers can use the same anthropomorphic elements that have been attributed to the product or service. For instance, Apple imbues their products with human features, such as the virtual assistant Siri for the iPhone, which is capable of understanding what users say and talk back (Wang, 2017). In other cases, anthropomorphization is a consumer's choice to express negativity, relating to the brand in the same way as he or she relates to human beings, especially when expressing strong negative feelings. In both cases, it was possible to find examples of brand anthropomorphism across all of the social media-based anti-brand communities observed; the intense recourse to anthropomorphism as a way of expressing

Table 1.
Categories anti-brand
community activity

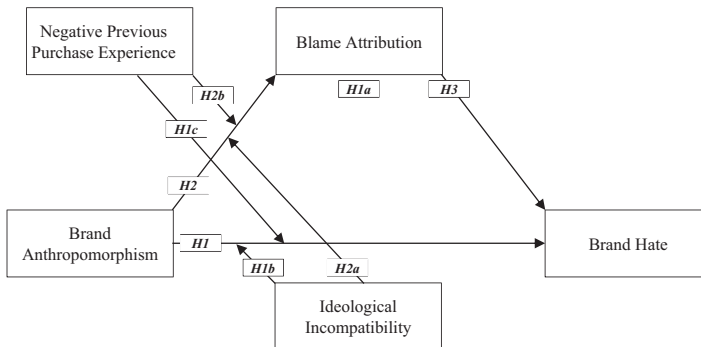
| Categories | Anti-brand communities |
|--|--|
| Brand hate | <i>@ I Hate Apple</i> : “This is why I hate Apple. It is evil to lie to people and this company thrives on deception.” (DD, July 28, 2017) <i>@ Apple Sucks</i> : “All they do is put everting in metal cases that’s all god I hate apple and I bought it years ago.” (MA, June 7, 2016) <i>@ Anti Apple (Brand)</i> : “I really hate apple. How can anyone settle for their be? apple is the tyrant of technology?” (RK, June 6, 2017) |
| Perceived intentionality in brand’s actions | <i>@ I Hate Apple</i> : “More consistent updates? Until Apple cripple the device with said updates intentionally slowing it down and forcing people to upgrade to the next iPhone.” (SJ, October 1, 2016) |
| Perceived responsibility in brand’s actions | <i>@ I Hate Apple</i> : “This will be brushed under the carpet as usual and the products will continue as they are. Or Apple will blame the user for having a phone in their pocket in the first place . . . or holding it with their hand and not a couple of fingers.” (CD, November 14, 2016) |
| Ideological incompatibility in brand’s actions | <i>@ Anti Apple (Brand)</i> : “Should be criminal when you consider that this amount could feed the world. There should be a law in place limiting the amount of money they can hoard unless it is being used for developing new products” (MM, October 6, 2016) <i>@ I Hate Apple</i> : “If you buy apple you back the violation of human rights, suicide, child labour, horrible work ethics.” (MR, May 4, 2017) |
| Negative previous purchase experience | <i>@ Apple Sucks</i> : “According to their prophet, Steve Jobs, it is sleek and great materials, hip, revolutionary, etc. In reality though, just like you said, it is shit.” (AA, December 18, 2016) <i>@ Anti Apple (Brand)</i> : “It always performed worse compared to stock android. There were many tests before that showed numbers of apps crashes, Apple was a winner in them” (MD, March 25, 2017) <i>@ I Hate Apple</i> : “I hate it because I owned one. If I am going to pay that much money for a machine it better work perfectly, mine had too many issues for a machine that costs 70% more than a similar PC.” (RB, February 23, 2018) <i>@ I Hate Apple</i> : “More evidence Apple overcharges and exploits its customers, tax laws, and its (among other things). It’s sad people keep paying 5–10 times more for Apple’s crappy, outdated products than they’re worth.” (ED, May 12, 2018) |

Source: Table by authors

brand hate confirms earlier research reporting that anthropomorphized brands are more likely for relationship building (Puzakova *et al.*, 2009, 2013a). Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H1. Brand anthropomorphism positively impacts brand hate.

3.2.3 Blame attribution as mediator. Previous authors have pointed out that anthropomorphism increases tendencies for humans to perceive nonhuman agents as capable of intentional actions and, therefore, to be responsible for their outcomes (Epley *et al.*, 2008). Very often, consumers tend to attribute intentionality and responsibility to a brand’s actions as direct consequences of brand anthropomorphism, and this indicates that consumers understand brands as having human-like minds (Waytz *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, consumers perceive nonhuman agents as capable of intentional actions because brands act according to reasons that are under their control and not the consumer’s (Waytz *et al.*, 2010). If a nonhuman agent is capable of intentional actions, it should be held responsible for its consequences.



Source: Figure by authors

Figure 1.
Research model

This phenomenon was detected in many comments across all of the anti-Apple communities studied, especially when consumers were faced with situations of negative purchasing experiences (such as product/service failure) and when the brand's behavior conflicted with their values. For instance, Apple is often accused of destroying the complexity and ability of technology to dumb it down into fashion accessories, becoming a "fashion company rather than a technology company" (*comment posted by a community member*). Moreover, Apple is hated for its hypocrisy because "it is evil to lie to people and to thrive on deception" (*comment posted by a community member*). Another blame attributed to Apple is that it designs its products in such a way as to generate planned obsolescence, according to which the products are progressively weakened, forcing consumers to replace them. Finally, Apple has been criticized for removing the traditional 3.5 mm headphone jack from its iPhones in 2017, forcing consumers to "buy an adapter if you want to charge your phone and listen to music at the same time" (*comment posted by a community member*). This generated further negative comments within the anti-Apple communities and was publicly denounced as "having no benefit to the consumer; it is purely a convenience for manufacturers who think there might be more sales in making devices even thinner" (*comment posted by a community member*).

Based on the above information, it is relevant to understand if consumers who anthropomorphize brands have a tendency to attribute blame to the brand and if that blame may mediate the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows:

H1a. Blame attribution positively mediates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate.

3.2.4 Ideological incompatibility and negative previous purchase experiences as moderators. According to the literature review, consumers' negative feelings toward brands can arise from two main reasons: ideological incompatibility and negative past experiences. From the authors' observation of the anti-Apple communities, consumers' dissatisfaction with the brand's practices and ethics (thus, leading to ideological incompatibility) and negative purchase experiences regarding product/service failure are considered in all of the anti-brand communities studied. Moreover, the first motive (ideological incompatibility) usually triggered longer publications and with many arguments by the authors of the posts, confirming that it is one of the main reasons for consumers' negative feelings, especially

brand hate. Indeed, previous research considers that brands showing socially irresponsible conduct, especially when incompatible with the consumer's ideological principles, are susceptible targets for hate. This occurs because the brand failed as a relational partner (Lee *et al.*, 2009; Popoli, 2011).

We found that consumers react worse to the brand's absence of ethical behavior than to negative purchase experiences. In this sense, the literature confirms that the proliferation of the internet and social media encourages individuals to express the need for changes in politics, markets and society (Kozinets, 2015). Also, the fact that consumers belong to a group that allows interaction with other consumers that may have experienced similar situations creates a sense of moral consciousness in an effort to improve social life (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). This tendency motivates this investigation's study of anti-brand communities on Facebook. In all anti-Apple communities observed, the reasons for ideological incompatibility and previous negative purchase experiences prevail over other antecedents of negative feelings toward brands.

This investigation seeks to determine if ideological incompatibility and negative previous purchase experience positively moderate the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate. Consumers in the anti-brand communities analyzed refer to nonidentification with the brand's policies. The second moderator (negative previous purchase experience) quantifies the regret felt by members of the anti-brand communities for having bought a specific product because of its failure and low value-for-money, along with the hatred practices regarding planned obsolescence. Both moderators were found in our research to be the major reasons for complaining about the brand, for joining anti-Apple communities, and for the development of consumers' feelings of hate toward the brand. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows:

H1b. Ideological incompatibility positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate.

H1c. Negative previous purchase experience positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate.

3.2.5 Brand anthropomorphism and blame attribution. Previous research specifies that attributing responsibility to a human brand could negatively affect consumers' evaluations toward it (Puzakova *et al.*, 2013a). The authors' observation confirms consumers' perception of the Apple brand for intentional and responsible actions and also found a negative impact on the relationship. Furthermore, as literature exposes consumers' attribution of responsibility and intentionality to nonhuman agents as a consequence of anthropomorphism (Epley *et al.*, 2008), it is hypothesized that brand anthropomorphism is a predictor of blame attribution:

H2. Brand anthropomorphism positively impacts on the moderator blame attribution.

3.2.6 Ideological incompatibility and negative previous purchase experience as moderators. Additionally, as ideological incompatibility and negative previous purchase experience may be antecedents of brand hate, those constructs also may moderate the mediation with blame attribution for consumers with tendencies to anthropomorphize the specific brand, respectively, leading to *H2a* and *H2b*:

H2a. Ideological incompatibility positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and the mediator blame attribution.

H2b. Negative previous purchase experience positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and blame attribution.

3.2.7 Blame attribution and brand hate. Finally, the last hypothesis checks if attributing responsibility and intentionality – measured with the scale for blame attribution – promote negative feelings of hate from consumers toward the targeted brands. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows:

H3. Blame attribution positively impacts brand hate.

3.3 Measures and sample

All of the scale's items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree (Table 2).

Brand hate: To consider brand hate for the anti-brand communities, this study adopted the proposed definition and scale of [Zarantonello et al. \(2016\)](#). The four-item scale presented

| Constructs | Items | Authors |
|---|--|---|
| Brand hate | I hate Apple I extremely dislike Apple I really detest Apple I feel hostile toward Apple* | Zarantonello et al. (2016) |
| Negative previous purchasing experience | This is one of the best brands I could have bought I am satisfied with my decision to buy this brand My choice to buy this brand was a wise one If I could do it again, I'd buy a different brand I feel bad about my decision to buy this brand* I'm not happy that I bought this brand I'm sure it was the right thing to buy this brand | Mano and Oliver (1993) |
| Ideological incompatibility | In my opinion Apple acts irresponsibly In my opinion Apple acts unethically Apple violates moral standards Apple does not match my values and beliefs Respecting ethical principles has no priority over achieving superior economic performance for Apple | Hegner et al. (2017) |
| Brand anthropomorphism | Apple has intentions Apple has free will Apple experiences emotions Apple has consciousness Apple has a mind of its own | Waytz et al. (2010) and further applied by Tuškej and Podnar (2018) |
| Blame attribution | I blame Apple for the situation that made me join the community I account Apple responsible for the situation that made me join the community I blame myself for the situation that made me join the community* I account myself responsible for the situation that made me join the community* | Griffin (1996) and further applied by de Campos et al. (2018) |

Note: *Item deleted from scale after the EFA

Source: Table by authors

Table 2.
Measurement scales

a moderate to high inter-item reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$). However, the test demonstrated that if the item "I feel hostile towards Apple" was excluded, Cronbach's α would rise to 0.931. Consequently, after removing the item, we carried on further analysis.

Negative previous purchase experience: For this construct, we used the scale proposed by Mano and Oliver (1993), which originally was designed to analyze positive previous purchase experience. Because we seek to evaluate negative experiences, it was decided to reverse the positive items, as the sample's tendency for responses in these items was tendentiously negative. Furthermore, following the Cronbach's α test, we eliminated the item "I feel bad about my decision to buy this brand" from the initial seven-item scale, which allowed an adequate level of inter-item reliability of 0.737.

Ideological incompatibility: This investigation adapted the scales provided by Hegner et al. (2017) and Herrero Crespo et al. (2005), as it was seen in Rodrigues et al. (2018). The result was a five-item scale with acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.783$).

Brand anthropomorphism: This study used the individual differences in anthropomorphism questionnaire (IDAQ) model presented by Waytz et al. (2010). Consistent with a previous study (Tuškej and Podnar, 2018), this investigation used the simplified version of this scale. Then, the resulting five-item scale also provided acceptable reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.740$).

Blame attribution: The scale to measure blame attribution was originally used by Griffin et al. (1996) and, more recently, by de Campos Ribeiro et al. (2018). A Cronbach's α analysis was conducted and it was found that the α level was 0.535. According to the analysis scores, we deleted two items, i.e. "I blame myself for the situation that made me join the community" and "I account myself responsible for the situation that made me join the community". Thus, the items were analyzed according to the blame attribution construct as defined in this paper, i.e. "I blame Apple for the situation that made me join the community" and "I account Apple responsible for the situation that made me join the community".

Finally, the α score was raised to 0.799, which is acceptable.

The survey obtained a total of 106 answers from effective anti-brand community members. This paper followed the requirements considered in the literature review regarding the applied methods. Although the sample size is slightly below the target of 200 participants (Hair et al., 2011), there is no absolute standard regarding adequate sample size (Muthen and Muthen, 2002), and this rule of thumb has been suggested by some to be simplistic (Wolf et al., 2013).

The survey was anonymous and comprised 13 closed questions and an open question regarding the participants' nationality. Most members were male (87.9%), aged 25–34 (under 18: 6.1%; 18–24: 18.2%; 25–34: 37.4%; 35–44: 24.2%; 45–54: 10.1; above 54: 4.0%), most frequent nationalities were USA and UK (USA: 34.3%; UK: 20.2%; Australia: 5.1%; Canada: 5.1%; other: 35.3%) and most had higher education (less than a high school diploma: 4.0; high school degree or equivalent: 23.2%; higher education: 72.7%).

Previous research has shown that negative consumer–brand relationships often originate from previous positive ones (Grégoire et al., 2009). In this study, when asked if they ever loved the Apple brand, 32% of the respondents answered "yes, in the past," 1% answered "yes, currently" and 66.7% responded "no." Thus, most of the respondents have never loved the brand before, but there remains a considerable number of respondents that we must assume to have loved the brand in the past. It is important to recall that earlier studies on negative consumer–brand relationships report that positive relationships may turn into strong negative ones when the brand acts in ways that are damaging to consumers (Grégoire et al., 2009).

Participants were also asked if they have ever owned Apple products. In this case, the results were 52.5% “yes, in the past,” 13.1% “yes, currently” and 34.3% “no.” This question is important because we wished to know if members of the anti-brand communities under investigation had all previously been Apple consumers. From these results, we find that the majority of respondents had Apple products at some point, but a significant percentage had never owned any Apple products. This is congruent with the responses obtained on the question intending to measure negative previous purchase experience, which from the total sample ($n = 106$) had 70 responses. Also, it is believed that a considerable number of members of the anti-brand communities have had negative relationships with the brand without having ever been consumers. Furthermore, this result is consistent with both literature and authors’ observation that provided an understanding that consumer’s ideological incompatibility with brands is one of the major reasons for participating in anti-brand communities and for developing feelings of hate. Likewise, ideological incompatibility between the consumer and a specific brand may be a predictor of a negative relationship without the need to own a product or experience a service.

4. Results

We conducted a regression analysis using Process macro (version 3.3) for SPSS by Hayes (Field, 2013). The direct effect results are presented in Table 3.

We also conducted a simple mediation analysis with a confidence interval of 95% and 5,000 bootstrapping samples with brand anthropomorphism as an independent variable, blame attribution mediator variable and brand hate as dependent variable (Table 4). The analysis was carried out with a sample of $N = 106/N = 70$, which is correct and sufficient

| Direct effects | Effect | SE | <i>p</i> -value |
|--|--------|--------|-----------------|
| Brand anthropomorphism – blame attribution | 0.0145 | 0.0806 | 0.8581 |
| Blame attribution – brand hate | 0.3279 | 0.0991 | 0.0013*** |
| Brand anthropomorphism – brand hate | 0.0405 | 0.0787 | 0.6077 |

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Table by authors

Table 3.
Direct effects of
independent on
dependent variables

| Mediation analysis | Coeff | SE | <i>p</i> | LLCI | ULCI |
|---|--------|--------|-----------|---------|--------|
| Mediation: blame | | | | | |
| <i>Outcome variable: blame attribution</i> ($R\text{-sq} = 0.182$; $p = 0.8581$) | | | | | |
| Constant | 4.2477 | 0.2667 | 0.0000*** | 3.7183 | 4.7770 |
| Brand anthropomorphism | 0.0145 | 0.0806 | 0.8581 | −0.1455 | 0.1745 |
| <i>Outcome variable: brand hate</i> ($R\text{-sq} = 0.1052$; $p < 0.01$ ***) | | | | | |
| Constant | 2.7181 | 0.4948 | 0.0000*** | 1.7360 | 3.7003 |
| Brand anthropomorphism | 0.0405 | 0.0787 | 0.6077 | −0.1156 | 0.1967 |
| Blame attribution | 0.3279 | 0.0991 | 0.0013*** | 0.1312 | 0.5245 |

Notes: Moderation. $N = 106$. SE: standard error; $p = p$ -value; LLCI: lower limit of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI: upper limit of the 95% confidence interval. *** $p < 0.01$

Source: Table by authors

Table 4.
Coefficients of the
mediation (blame
attribution)

enough to move forward with the statistical analysis, according to [Koopman et al., 2015](#). Hence, the 5,000 bootstrapping resamples process assures more confidence on the outcomes, so the researchers concluded that $N = 70/N = 106$ respondents would suffice for the current study ([Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019](#)).

The results showed that the direct effect of brand anthropomorphism on brand hate, ignoring the mediator, was not significant ($\beta = 0.0405$; $p = 0.6077$), not supporting *H1* ([Table 3](#)).

Hence, the impact of brand anthropomorphism on brand hate via blame attribution was not statistically significant, and thus, not supporting *H1a* ($\beta = 0.0047$) ([Table 5](#)).

Nevertheless, it was found that the mediator (blame attribution) has a positive and significant impact on the dependent variable, brand hate ($\beta = 0.3279$; $p < 0.01$), supporting *H3* ([Table 3](#)). In other words, blame attribution helps explain brand hate. Furthermore, the independent variable (brand anthropomorphism) has no direct impact on the mediator ($\beta = 0.0145$; $p > 0.05$) ([Table 3](#)), which could be the reason why the mediated relationship did not have significant values. These results do not support *H2*.

Next, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis with ideological incompatibility as the moderator of the impact of brand anthropomorphism on brand hate through blame attribution. This moderated mediation with the outcome variable brand hate was significant ($R^2 = 0.2632$; $p < 0.05$), and more specifically, ideological incompatibility has a significant impact on brand hate ($\beta = 1.3642$; $p < 0.01$). Considering the previous results, it is possible to validate *H1b*. Besides, the effects of ideological incompatibility in the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and the mediator (blame attribution) were not significant ($R^2 = 0.0404$; $p = 0.2687$). Furthermore, the effect of ideological incompatibility on blame attribution did not show a significant impact ($\beta = -0.2340$; $p = 0.5961$), thus, not supporting *H2a*.

Furthermore, we also conducted a moderated mediation analysis with brand anthropomorphism as the independent variable, blame attribution as the mediator, brand hate as the dependent variable and negative previous purchase experience as the moderator. These variables account for the two major reasons leading to brand hate in the anti-brand communities but do not necessarily need to occur at the same time, which means they could independently impact this moderated mediation. The moderation effect of negative previous purchase experience was not significant for either the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and blame attribution ($\beta = 0.5289$; $p = 0.2337$), not supporting (*H2b*) or for the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate ($\beta = 0.0969$; $p = 0.7932$), not supporting *H1c*. [Table 6](#) summarizes the findings.

The results did not show a significant impact of brand anthropomorphism on brand hate and also did not show a significant indirect effect with mediation from blame attribution. Moreover, in all tests performed, the mediator blame attribution always revealed a significant impact on the dependent variable (brand hate), even when the moderators were changed.

Regarding moderation variables, respectively, ideological incompatibility and negative previous purchase experience, it was possible to verify that the measure ideological incompatibility is a good predictor of brand hate, whereas negative previous purchase experience as a moderator did not show a significant impact for either brand hate or blame attribution. [Table 7](#) summarizes the general results for this study's hypotheses. We next

Table 5.
Indirect effect of X
(brand
anthropomorphism)
on Y (brand hate)

| Blame attribution indirect effect | Effect | BootSE | BootLLCI | BootULCI |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|----------|----------|
| Blame attribution (mediator) | 0.0047 | 0.0255 | 0.0548 | 0.0511 |

Source: Table by authors

| Moderation variables | Coeff | SE | <i>p</i> | LLCI | ULCI | Impact of anthropomorphism | |
|---|---------|--------|-----------|---------|---------|----------------------------|--|
| Moderation 1: ideological incompatibility | | | | | | | |
| <i>Outcome variable: blame attribution (R-sq = 0.0404; <i>p</i> = 0.2687)</i> | | | | | | | |
| Constant | 5.2929 | 1.9637 | 0.0083*** | 1.3944 | 9.1914 | 457 | |
| Brand anthropomorphism | −0.6141 | 0.5873 | 0.2984 | −1.7799 | 0.5518 | | |
| Ideological incompatibility | −0.2340 | 0.4400 | 0.5961 | −1.1074 | 0.6395 | | |
| Interaction (BA × II) | 0.1422 | 0.1314 | 0.2821 | −0.1188 | 0.4031 | | |
| <i>Outcome variable: brand hate (R-sq = 0.2632; <i>p</i> < 0.05)</i> | | | | | | | |
| Constant | −3.0265 | 1.8591 | 0.1069 | −6.7177 | 0.6647 | | |
| Brand anthropomorphism | 1.2016 | 0.5389 | 0.0282** | 0.1316 | 2.2717 | | |
| Blame attribution | 0.2538 | 0.0936 | 0.0080*** | 0.0679 | 0.4397 | | |
| Ideological incompatibility | 1.3642 | 0.4021 | 0.0010*** | 0.5659 | 2.1625 | | |
| Interaction (BA × II) | −0.2664 | 0.1207 | 0.0297** | −0.5060 | −0.0268 | | |
| Moderation 2: negative previous purchase experience | | | | | | | |
| <i>Outcome variable: blame attribution (R-sq = 0.0615; <i>p</i> = 0.2516)</i> | | | | | | | |
| Constant | 1.9546 | 1.8147 | 0.2855 | −1.6707 | 5.5800 | | |
| Brand anthropomorphism | 0.3471 | 0.5297 | 0.5146 | −0.7111 | 1.4053 | | |
| Negative previous purchase experience | 0.5289 | 0.4399 | 0.2337 | −0.3500 | 1.4078 | | |
| Interaction (BA × NPPE) | −0.0734 | 0.1294 | 0.5724 | −0.3319 | 0.1851 | | |
| <i>Outcome variable: blame hate (R-sq = 0.1938; <i>p</i> < 0.05)</i> | | | | | | | |
| Constant | 2.5346 | 1.5155 | 0.0994* | −0.4940 | 5.5632 | | |
| Brand anthropomorphism | −0.2106 | 0.4399 | 0.6337 | −1.0897 | 0.6684 | | |
| Blame attribution | 0.2572 | 0.1035 | 0.0156** | 0.0505 | 0.4640 | | |
| Negative previous purchase experience | 0.0969 | 0.3682 | 0.7932 | −0.6389 | 0.8328 | | |
| Interaction (Blame × NPPE) | 0.0622 | 0.1074 | 0.5646 | −0.1524 | 0.2767 | | |
| Notes: Moderation 1. <i>N</i> = 106. SE: standard error; <i>p</i> = <i>p</i> -value; LLCI: lower limit of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI: upper limit of the 95% confidence interval. BA: brand anthropomorphism; II: ideological incompatibility. ** <i>p</i> < 0.05; *** <i>p</i> < 0.01; Moderation 2. <i>N</i> = 70. SE: standard error; <i>p</i> = <i>p</i> -value; LLCI: lower limit of the 95% confidence interval; ULCI: upper limit of the 95% confidence interval. BA: brand anthropomorphism; NPPE: negative previous purchase experience. * <i>p</i> < 0.1. ** <i>p</i> < 0.05. *** <i>p</i> < 0.01 | | | | | | | |
| Source: Table by authors | | | | | | | |

Table 6.
Coefficients for the mediation (blame attribution) and moderation (ideological incompatibility; negative previous purchase experience)

discuss the findings and the contributions of this investigation and derive implications for future research.

5. Discussion

We next discuss the findings referring to the two research questions. First, findings from the present investigation confirm that anthropomorphism in marketing goes beyond product design (Puzakova *et al.*, 2013a), advertising (Laksmidewi *et al.*, 2017; Puzakova *et al.*, 2013b; Reavey *et al.*, 2018), personification (Delbaere *et al.*, 2011) or even avatars and mascots (Brown, 2010). Brand anthropomorphism is a widespread method to address the brand, and it occurs also to express negative feelings toward brands. In the case of Apple, there are many traces of brand anthropomorphism that the authors observed in the comments published by consumers in the selected anti-Apple communities. In particular, the attribution of intentionality and responsibility in behavior in Apple's choices is very frequent. For instance, Apple is accused of:

- having intentionally created a closed system that is difficult for consumers to use;

Table 7.
General results for
the hypotheses

| Hypotheses | Results |
|--|------------------------------|
| <i>H1</i> . Brand anthropomorphism positively impacts on brand hate | Not supported (<i>H1</i>) |
| <i>H1a</i> . Blame attribution positively mediates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate | Not supported (<i>H1a</i>) |
| <i>H1b</i> . Ideological incompatibility positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate | Supported (<i>H1b</i>) |
| <i>H1c</i> . Negative previous purchase experience positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate | Not supported (<i>H1c</i>) |
| <i>H2</i> . Brand anthropomorphism positively impacts on the moderator Blame Attribution | Not supported (<i>H2</i>) |
| <i>H2a</i> . Ideological incompatibility positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and the mediator blame attribution | Not supported (<i>H2a</i>) |
| <i>H2b</i> . Negative previous purchase experience positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and blame attribution | Not supported (<i>H2b</i>) |
| <i>H3</i> . Blame attribution positively impacts on brand hate | Supported (<i>H3</i>) |

Source: Table by authors

- consolidating the planned obsolescence phenomenon; and
- removing the traditional 3.5 mm headphone jack from iPhones in 2017, which forces consumers to buy a special adapter if they want to use earphones or headphones from other brands and if they want to recharge the mobile phone while using the earphones.

According to [Waytz et al. \(2010\)](#), attribution of intentionality and responsibility is a way to express anthropomorphism. However, the findings of this study do not confirm the existence of either a direct relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate or indirect via blame attribution (*H1* and *H1a* not confirmed). However, it was very interesting to find that blame attribution is a good predictor of brand hate, as will be discussed below.

Second, members of the anti-Apple communities studied perceive a certain brand as capable of intentional and responsible actions, confirming that consumers perceive brands in anthropomorphic ways. Results for brands’ intentionality and responsibility were quantified through the scale of blame attribution used in the online survey. Thus, this study investigated the mediating impact of blame attribution on the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate. In other words, it was assumed that individuals’ tendencies toward brand anthropomorphism mediated by the perception of responsibility, intentionality and blame toward the brand would lead to brand hate; nevertheless, this hypothesis (*H1a*) was not supported because the direct impact of brand anthropomorphism on blame attribution was not significant. Other results from this study reveal that the attribution of blame from consumers toward brands has a significant impact on all of the mediated moderation analyses.

Ideological incompatibility was explored by previous authors regarding brand avoidance ([Berndt et al., 2019](#)) and reflects a wider consideration of society ([Strandvik et al., 2014](#)). Therefore, it was hypothesized that the absence of corporate social responsibility for anthropomorphic brands would increase the chances for brand hate. Also, members of the anti-brand communities report their concerns about corporate hegemony and monopoly, which is congruent with previous authors’ explanations for incongruencies between consumers and brands ([Grégoire et al., 2009](#)). This moderator was shown by quantitative analysis to have a significant effect on brand hate, thus, supporting *H1b*. Nevertheless,

ideological incompatibility did not have an impact regarding the moderation of the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and blame attribution.

The second major reason for brand hate is negative previous purchase experience because many consumers regret buying products or using services from specific brands. Even though negative previous purchase experiences were commonly found in publications of the anti-brand communities during the authors' observation, this impact was not supported by the moderated mediation analysis performed. Negative previous purchase experience did not show significance on either brand hate or on blame attribution, thus, not supporting hypotheses *H1c* and *H2b*.

6. Conclusion

This paper investigated the brand anthropomorphism phenomenon with reference to the negative consumer–brand relationships in the particular context of social media and online anti-brand communities. In particular, the aim was to empirically verify, through quantitative analysis, whether brand anthropomorphism has a direct impact on brand hate and what are the prevailing factors that play a significant role in this relationship.

Though anti-brand communities have been studied by several authors during recent years, literature assessing this negative relationship in social media is still in its early stage. Moreover, research on brand anthropomorphism is still insufficient (Brandão and Popoli, 2022; Dessart and Cova, 2021; Tuškej and Podnar, 2018), and in particular with reference to the negative consumer–brand relationships. In addressing this research gap, this paper provides helpful insights about the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate, conducting an empirical analysis for assessing the connection between the two constructs. This study used an online survey applied in the three main anti-Apple communities based on a sample composed of 106 respondents.

The first important result of this study is that brand anthropomorphism does not reveal a direct impact on brand hate, and not even indirectly via blame attribution, answering *RQ1*. Regarding the hypotheses related to *RQ2*, this study found that consumers' attribution of blame to brands' actions has a positive effect on brand hate (*H3*) and also that ideological incompatibility is a good moderator for brand hate (*H1b*). The other hypotheses were not confirmed, demonstrating the primary role played by blame attribution in determining brand hate without other factors. In fact, only hypotheses *H1b* (ideological incompatibility positively moderates the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate) and *H3* (blame attribution positively impacts on brand hate) were confirmed by the quantitative analysis carried out.

Moreover, our observation of the anti-Apple communities was useful in gaining two interesting insights about the way consumers express their negative feelings and evaluations toward the hated brand, adding extra value to the analysis. First, this study highlights the power of social media as a tool for establishing negative consumer–brand relationships. The rise of the internet has enabled consumers to easily communicate with each other and to complain publicly and share at a worldwide scale negative experiences with brands (Kucuk, 2014; Meek *et al.*, 2019). Social media-based anti-brand communities reveal a high potential for interaction among users and easy accessibility to information (Melancon and Dalakas, 2018). Moreover, the characteristics of social media, especially their high interactivity and reach allow consumers to gain power when fighting incompatibilities with brands. Anti-brand activists can freely and publicly represent themselves while sharing with other users the reasons and experiences that lead them to build negative relationships with brands (Kucuk, 2014).

Second, even though negative speech from anti-brand consumers is creative and resourceful, technological advances are facilitating the identification of those same messages, especially because they often use semiotic codes similar to those used by the companies, allowing them to report the content (Kucuk, 2016). Therefore, consumer activists need to be acknowledged by brand managers as they may be a threat to companies (Kucuk, 2016).

As far as managerial implications are concerned, brand managers should monitor the ways in which consumers anthropomorphize the brand and express negative feelings toward it. This is crucial toward understanding why consumers hate the brand and to preventing the long-term negative impact on brand equity deriving from the reverse anthropomorphized brand. Brand managers, in particular, should prevent this and, if necessary, counter the most extreme forms of negative brand reverse anthropomorphism, which are “demonization” and, even worse, “Hitlerization” (Kucuk, 2020).

Therefore, it is essential for brand managers to understand and thoroughly analyze the type of anthropomorphization used by haters (name, gender, physical characteristics, personality, motivations, intentionality, etc.) and the link between these various forms and the motivations for negative feelings. By focusing on these real motivations, brand managers can engage with consumers to address negative consumer–brand relationships and avoid the propagation of a negative brand image and reputation within the market, which today is made much easier and more effective by the increasing development of social media and online anti-brand communities.

Brand managers should develop customer communication according to the real motivations of hate. For instance, intentionally and consciously pursuing economic interests to the detriment of consumers’ interests could mean there needs to be more emphasis on a true customer-oriented approach aimed at maximizing customer satisfaction, which would also better explain the reasons for certain business choices (e.g. traditional 3.5 mm headphone jacks being removed from iPhones).

Similarly, as ideological incompatibility emerged from this study as a good moderator of the relationship between brand anthropomorphism and brand hate, brand managers should be aware that a negative consumer–brand relationship for an anthropomorphized brand, both positive and negative, is more likely to be formed, especially in the context of social media (Wan and Aggarwal, 2015).

7. Limitations and future research

The main limitation of this study is the small number of respondents of the survey – 106 in total. However, it was verified during this investigation that it is not easy to approach anti-brand communities, and it is even more difficult to get feedback and responses to online surveys. Another factor is that the main anti-Apple community (*I Hate Apple*) is a closed community.

Furthermore, this study refers to a technological brand that generally generates higher engagement for males than females, for young and middle-age adults than young and elderly, coinciding with what was discovered by a recent study on identifying the personal member profiles in the anti-Apple communities (Brandão *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it would be desirable that future investigations could apply this research model to other social media-based anti-brand communities that are targeting different brands and involve a greater number of individuals of different ages, gender, countries of origin and other differential characteristics.

Therefore, it would be desirable that future investigations could apply this research model to other social media-based anti-brand communities that are targeting different brands. Even though a change of brand is not expected to influence the output, a different

population may be more receptive and participative, allowing the collection of a more significant volume of answers.

Additionally, as previous literature reveals, cultural differences may also be significant regarding individuals' tendencies to anthropomorphize brands and play an important role regarding interaction preferences and consumer participation. Thus, future studies could also aim to understand the impact of cultural perceptions on social media-based anti-brand communities. Scholars may also consider other types of products and services because different brands are more capable of establishing stronger relationships with consumers than others. For example, hedonic brands may be more susceptible to brand hate than utilitarian products and services.

Finally, this study focused on one of the biggest global brands (Apple), but future studies could consider, for instance, smaller companies to further the discussion started by this investigation.

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