

The genesis of brand hate and consumer avoidance behavior: A cross-cultural qualitative analysis in Palestine, Greece, and Bulgaria

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Abstract: This study investigates the antecedents, emotional forms, and behavioral consequences of brand hate across three distinct cultural contexts: Palestine, Greece, and Bulgaria. Drawing on 450 qualitative consumer narratives and employing thematic analysis, the research identifies four interrelated drivers of brand hate: (1) ideological, religious, and geopolitical animosity; (2) corporate deception, service betrayal, and monopolistic abuse; (3) functional failure and price-quality asymmetry; and (4) health anxieties, ethical concerns, and economic ethnocentrism. The findings reveal marked cross-cultural variation. In Palestine, brand hate is predominantly value-laden, tied to religious identity and political resistance against brands associated with Denmark, Israel, and the United States. In Greece, brand hate reflects the legacies of austerity, corporate disinvestment, and economic nationalism. In Bulgaria, hostility is driven primarily by deceptive contracts, poor service recovery, perceived monopoly power, and frustration with overpriced products. Across all contexts, global fast-food and FMCG brands evoke strong disgust rooted in health and ethical concerns. This study advances a culturally grounded account of brand hate that integrates brand avoidance, consumer animosity, and political consumerism. It offers critical implications for multinational firms operating in settings where brand meaning is inseparable from local histories of conflict, crisis, and economic transition.

Keywords: *brand hate, brand avoidance, consumer animosity, political consumerism, cross-cultural consumer behavior*

JEL Classification: M31, D91, Z13, D12, F51

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1. INTRODUCTION

For decades, consumer research has been heavily oriented toward the positive side of consumer–brand relationships, privileging constructs such as brand loyalty, attachment, satisfaction, and brand love (Fournier, 1998; Oliver, 1999; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). While this stream has generated important insights, it leaves comparatively underexamined an equally consequential reality: consumers can develop intense and enduring negative emotions toward brands. Such reactions are not reducible to simple dissatisfaction or indifference; they may involve anger, disgust, contempt, betrayal, and moral outrage, and can culminate in boycott, active avoidance, negative word-of-mouth, or retaliatory behavior (Zarantonello et al., 2016; Hegner et al., 2017; Fetscherin, 2019). Early qualitative explorations further demonstrate that negative brand emotions encompass a broad spectrum—ranging from dislike and anger to sadness, fear, and disappointment—and that specific antecedent conditions tend to generate specific emotional responses (Romani et al., 2009). Recent systematic reviews have consolidated this understanding, confirming that brand hate is a multidimensional construct with distinct emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components (Yadav & Chakrabarti, 2022; Rai et al., 2023). This diversity is theoretically significant because it implies that „brand hate“ is not a single undifferentiated state, but a family of related yet phenomenologically distinct responses. The salience of this „dark side“ has intensified in a marketplace characterized by hyper-connectivity, rapid diffusion of scandals, political polarization, and heightened expectations of corporate responsibility. In parallel, negative information often exerts disproportionate influence on judgment and behavior, making adverse brand experiences especially consequential (Watson & Spence, 2007). In these conditions, brand hate should be treated as a distinct relational state rather than merely the absence of positive feeling.

Although scholarly interest in brand hate has grown, much of the literature remains anchored in Western and relatively stable market en-

vironments. Considerably less attention has been devoted to contexts in which consumption is shaped by occupation, religious sensitivity, economic austerity, or post-socialist transition—conditions that plausibly alter not only which brands are hated, but why they are hated and how such emotions are enacted behaviorally. Research on non-Western consumer settings remains comparatively rare, and prior scholarship on Arab and Palestinian consumer behavior suggests that these contexts are still insufficiently mapped in consumer research, partly because they were not strongly exposed to Western consumption culture until relatively recently, and partly because their distinctive cultural, religious, and political character may require analytical frameworks not rooted in Western philosophical traditions (Dalli et al., 2010). Emerging research on Arab consumer behavior in boycott movements has further highlighted how geopolitical events, such as the ongoing conflict in Palestine, activate political consumption and brand rejection as forms of resistance (Zhang, 2026). This observation raises a broader theoretical problem concerning the reproduction–resistance dimension of consumption: in conflict-affected and politically charged environments, do consumers reproduce Western consumerist practices, or do they resist them and express antagonism toward consumption symbols for religious, political, and economic reasons?

This study addresses these gaps by conducting a cross-cultural qualitative analysis of brand hate and consumer avoidance in three sharply contrasting contexts: Palestine, Greece, and Bulgaria. Palestine represents a setting in which consumption is frequently politicized and closely intertwined with national struggle, religious identity, and boycott culture. Greece provides a context in which prolonged economic crisis, austerity, and unemployment have reshaped consumer perceptions of fairness, corporate loyalty, and national economic solidarity (Matsaganis, 2013; Theocharis & van Deth, 2015). Bulgaria, as a post-communist transitional economy, reflects a market environment marked by heightened skepticism toward corporate claims, concern over monopoly power, and sensitivity to value-for-money judgments (Coulter et al., 2003). By comparing these contexts, the study aims to extend understanding of how macro-environmental structures become psychologically and morally consequential in consumer–brand relationships, shaping the antecedents, emotional textures, and behavioral outcomes associated with brand hate.

Against this backdrop, the study pursues three objectives. First, it identifies the principal drivers of

brand hate across Palestine, Greece, and Bulgaria. Second, it examines how political, religious, and economic structures shape the emotional forms and behavioral consequences of negative brand relationships, with particular attention to consumer avoidance. Third, it distinguishes performance-based antipathy from value-based hatred grounded in ethics, identity, or politics. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the primary antecedents of brand hate in Palestine, Greece, and Bulgaria?

RQ2: How do macro-environmental factors shape the emotional forms and behavioral outcomes of brand avoidance?

RQ3: How do performance-based and value-based forms of brand hate differ phenomenologically and behaviorally?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptualizing brand hate and negative brand emotions

Brand hate has emerged as an important concept in the broader literature on consumer emotions and brand relationships. Unlike transient dislike, brand hate involves durable negative beliefs, intense affective responses, and action-oriented tendencies directed at the brand (Zarantonello et al., 2016; Zhang & Laroche, 2021). Prior research has shown that negative brand emotions may include anger, disgust, disappointment, fear, and contempt, each of which carries different behavioral implications (Romani et al., 2013). Anger is more likely to produce confrontation and revenge, whereas disappointment often produces withdrawal and abandonment (Bougie et al., 2003). More recent work has emphasized the emotional and formative aspects of brand hate, distinguishing between affective drivers (e.g., anger, disgust) and cognitive evaluations (e.g., perceived betrayal, value incongruence) (Khattoon & Pandey, 2026).

A foundational contribution to this area was made by Romani et al. (2009), whose cross-cultural study in Italy and Palestine identified that dislike and anger are the most prevalent negative emotions experienced toward brands, while sadness, fear, and disappointment—though present—are comparatively less frequent. Importantly, that study also identified three distinct antecedent conditions that systematically

give rise to specific emotional responses, thus providing an early structural account of how brand-related negativity is organized. Building on this foundation, subsequent research has confirmed that brand hate is not merely an extreme point on a dissatisfaction continuum. Rather, it reflects a qualitatively different evaluative state in which the brand is seen not simply as inadequate, but as offensive, exploitative, threatening, or morally unacceptable (Hegner et al., 2017; Fetscherin, 2019).

2.2. Cognitive appraisal, injustice, and betrayal

Cognitive appraisal perspectives help explain why certain brand-related events produce mild frustration while others trigger intense hatred. Consumers do not respond to objective events alone; they respond to how those events are interpreted relative to personal goals, values, and identity commitments (Watson & Spence, 2007; Nyer, 1997). When a service failure, political association, or moral violation is appraised as intentional, unjust, or harmful, negative emotions intensify.

This is especially evident in the literature on betrayal. Grégoire and Fisher (2008) and Grégoire et al. (2009) show that when firms are perceived to have broken an implicit relational contract—through deception, indifference, or repeated failure—consumers often shift from dissatisfaction to a sense of betrayal. Once the firm is seen as untrustworthy or exploitative, the emotional response becomes more enduring and retaliatory. Such reactions are amplified when the company fails at service recovery or appears dismissive of customer harm (Smith & Bolton, 2002; Joireman et al., 2013). Recent research in emerging markets has shown that income level and perceived embarrassment can escalate brand hate toward detachment, suggesting that economic vulnerability amplifies negative emotional responses (Farooqi et al., 2026). Conversely, studies on brand forgiveness indicate that under certain relational conditions, even strongly negative brand attitudes may be moderated, though such processes remain underexplored in high-hostility contexts (Gürce et al., 2022).

2.3. Brand avoidance, boycott, and consumer animosity

Brand hate frequently manifests behaviorally through brand avoidance. Lee et al. (2009) identify several relevant forms of avoidance, including experiential

avoidance, identity avoidance, moral avoidance, and deficit-value avoidance. This framework is particularly useful for distinguishing consumers who reject brands because they perform poorly from those who reject them because they symbolize disliked identities, political positions, or unethical conduct.

Relatedly, the consumer animosity model explains why consumers may refuse products from particular countries even when they recognize those products as functionally satisfactory (Klein et al., 1998; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007). In such cases, country associations activate historical, military, or political grievances that override utilitarian assessment. This logic overlaps with research on political consumerism and politically motivated brand rejection, where consumption becomes an expressive vehicle for moral identity and collective resistance (John & Klein, 2003; Sandıkçı & Ekici, 2009; Klein et al., 2004).

2.4. Culture, identity, and the moralization of consumption

Brands do not circulate in a cultural vacuum. They acquire meaning through social narratives, historical conflicts, and identity structures (McCracken, 1986; Holt, 2002). In some contexts, consumption choices become moralized, such that buying or avoiding a brand is understood as a declaration of loyalty, solidarity, or resistance. This is especially visible where religious commitments, anti-corporate sentiment, or national economic vulnerability are salient (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012; Abosag & Farah, 2014). Mednini and Damak Turki (2024) have further demonstrated that emotional intelligence can play a role in transforming brand haters into forgivers, suggesting that even intense negative brand relationships may be amenable to intervention under certain conditions.

This dynamic is particularly pronounced in the Palestinian context. Research on West Bank consumer–brand relationships has shown that these consumers navigate a complex terrain in which global brands simultaneously represent desired consumption objects and symbols of political and cultural threat, and that the positive and negative relationships they develop with brands are shaped by a distinctive cultural logic that cannot be adequately explained by Western-derived consumer theory (Dalli et al., 2010). The challenge of developing consumer research that is genuinely attentive to non-Western cultural logics—rather than simply applying Western frameworks to new settings—is therefore both methodologically and theoretically significant.

Accordingly, this study approaches brand hate not simply as an individual psychological reaction, but as a culturally mediated evaluative process. Consumers may hate brands because those brands are perceived to violate not only expectations of quality, but also the moral order within which consumption is embedded.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research philosophy and design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist design in order to capture the meanings, emotions, and contextual logics embedded in consumers' accounts of disliked brands. Such an approach is especially appropriate for examining brand hate, since intense negative emotions are often layered, socially situated, and difficult to reduce to standardized scales (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The use of introspective, narrative-based data collection in cross-cultural consumer research has been validated in prior work on negative brand emotions, which has demonstrated its capacity to surface the antecedent conditions and emotional forms underlying brand-related negativity across culturally diverse populations (Romani et al., 2009).

3.2. Sampling and data collection

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy combined with snowball technique to recruit participants in each country. In Palestine, recruitment was conducted through local community centers and university networks in the West Bank, facilitated by a Palestinian researcher with established local connections. In Greece, participants were recruited via online

consumer forums, social media groups focused on consumer rights, and word-of-mouth referrals in urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki. In Bulgaria, recruitment occurred through a mix of online platforms (consumer discussion groups) and in-person recruitment in Sofia and Plovdiv. Inclusion criteria required participants to be: (a) aged 18–50 years; (b) permanent residents of the respective country; (c) able to identify at least one brand they disliked or hated; and (d) willing to provide a detailed written narrative of their experiences. No further exclusion criteria were applied. The online/offline recruitment balance was approximately 100% offline across all three samples, with no substantial differences in narrative quality or depth observed between recruitment channels.

The study draws on 450 structured qualitative narratives collected from consumers in three contexts: Palestine (n = 150), Greece (n = 150), and Bulgaria (n = 150). Participants were asked to respond to an open-ended questionnaire that was administered in written form. The instrument was designed to capture structured yet rich qualitative data through four prompts: (1) „Please identify a brand you dislike or hate“; (2) „Describe the emotions you feel toward this brand“; (3) „Explain in detail the reasons for these feelings“; and (4) „Indicate what you plan to do in the future regarding this brand (e.g., continue buying, avoid, recommend against, etc.)“. Narratives typically ranged from 200 to 800 words in length, with an average depth of approximately 400 words per participant. All responses were collected in written form to ensure consistency across contexts and to allow participants time for reflective elaboration. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 1: Demographic summary of participants

Characteristic	Palestine (n=150)	Greece (n=150)	Bulgaria (n=150)
Gender			
Male	78 (52%)	72 (48%)	69 (46%)
Female	72 (48%)	78 (52%)	81 (54%)
Age group			
18-25 years	65 (43%)	58 (39%)	62 (41%)
26-35 years	55 (37%)	52 (35%)	54 (36%)
36-50 years	30 (20%)	40 (27%)	34 (23%)
Education			
Secondary school	45 (30%)	38 (25%)	42 (28%)
University degree	95 (63%)	102 (68%)	98 (65%)
Postgraduate degree	10 (7%)	10 (7%)	10 (7%)
Residence			
Urban	120 (80%)	115 (77%)	118 (79%)
Semi-urban	30 (20%)	35 (23%)	32 (21%)

Source: Authors

The questionnaire was originally developed in English, then translated into Arabic, Greek, and Bulgarian by native-speaker researchers with expertise in consumer behavior. Back-translation was performed by independent translators to ensure conceptual equivalence. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion among the research team. The Palestinian component of this study draws on an established tradition of qualitative research on West Bank consumer–brand relationships (Dalli et al., 2010), which similarly engaged young Palestinian consumers in structured discussions about brands they liked and disliked, conducted by a local researcher to minimize cultural bias and respondent reflexivity.

Given the politically sensitive nature of the Palestinian context—particularly the ongoing occupation and the prominence of boycott movements targeting brands associated with Israel, Denmark, and the United States—special attention was paid to researcher positionality. The Palestinian data were collected by a native researcher who shares cultural and linguistic background with participants, which facilitated trust and openness. However, to mitigate potential interpretation bias, the analysis involved regular debriefing sessions among the multinational research team, where interpretations were challenged and refined. Reflexive memos were maintained throughout the coding process to document how the researchers' own cultural assumptions might influence theme development. This approach aligns with best practices for cross-cultural qualitative research in conflict-affected settings.

3.3. Thematic analysis procedure

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. First, all narratives were read repeatedly to achieve deep familiarization with the data. Second, initial codes were generated line by line, focusing on emotional expressions, perceived causes, and future behaviors. Third, codes were grouped into broader categories reflecting recurring patterns such as political animosity, deception, quality failure, and health disgust. Fourth, these categories were reviewed across national datasets to identify both shared and context-specific dynamics. Fifth, themes were defined and refined to ensure conceptual clarity and internal coherence. Finally, the themes were organized into an analytic narrative that addressed the research questions and linked empirical patterns to theory.

3.4. Trustworthiness and rigor

To enhance trustworthiness, the analysis incorporated several qualitative quality strategies. Credibility was supported through close grounding in participant narratives and repeated comparison between codes and raw data. Dependability was strengthened by documenting coding decisions and theme development. Confirmability was pursued through reflexive memoing designed to limit the imposition of researcher assumptions on the data. Transferability was supported by providing sufficient contextual detail to allow readers to judge the broader relevance of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles et al., 2014).

4. FINDINGS

The Palestinian narratives in the current study were especially rich in ideological and religious language. The Greek narratives focused heavily on telecommunications, FMCG, and foreign corporations operating during the post-crisis period. The Bulgarian narratives centered on service failure, contract disputes, electronics, and monopoly-related frustrations. It is important to emphasize that the following findings reflect interpretive tendencies emerging from the dataset rather than statistically representative claims about national consumer cultures. The patterns described represent dominant themes within each national sample, but individual variation exists.

The analysis revealed four major themes driving brand hate and consumer avoidance across the three contexts: (1) ideological, religious, and geopolitical animosity; (2) corporate deception, service betrayal, and monopolistic abuse; (3) functional failure and price–quality asymmetry; and (4) health anxieties, ethical concerns, and economic ethnocentrism. While all four themes appeared across the dataset, their prominence varied sharply by context.

4.1. Ideological, religious, and geopolitical animosity: The Palestinian case

In the Palestinian dataset, the most intense forms of brand hate were not primarily performance-based. Rather, they were rooted in moral, religious, and political judgments. Brands associated with Denmark, Israel, or the United States were frequently evaluated as symbols of offense, occupation, or complicity, rather than as market offerings.

Narratives concerning Danish products were especially revealing. Several respondents explicitly stat-

ed that product quality had become irrelevant once those brands were linked to perceived religious insult. One participant remarked that he felt „hate and aggressiveness for every Danish production“ because of the offense caused to the Prophet Muhammad. Another participant noted that a previously liked product had become „a symbol of religious hatred.“ These accounts illustrate a form of value-based rejection in which the brand is transformed into a moral signifier. Consumption, in this context, becomes an act of religious loyalty and boycott becomes a form of collective discipline (Dalli et al., 2010).

In the Palestinian narratives, the perceived violation is not functional but symbolic and ideological: the brand offends not by failing to work, but by existing as a sign of hostile or disrespectful otherness.

A parallel pattern emerged with Israeli and some U.S.-associated brands. Respondents framed purchase refusal as a matter of national survival, political solidarity, and resistance. Even where consumers conceded that a product might be „good“, they rejected it because spending money on such brands was understood as materially or symbolically strengthening an enemy. Particularly important here is that the behavioral outcome extended beyond non-purchase to active mobilization: respondents reported persuading relatives, classmates, and peers to join the boycott (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012).

At the same time, the Palestinian data also revealed a subtler form of frustration directed toward local substitute brands. When local products failed to meet expectations during boycott periods, respondents sometimes described disappointment or cool resentment rather than ideological hatred. This suggests that even politically committed consumption remains vulnerable to performance evaluations when local alternatives are perceived as opportunistic or low quality.

4.2. Corporate deception, service betrayal, and monopolistic abuse: Bulgaria and Greece

In Greece and Bulgaria, negative brand emotions were more often generated by the way firms treated consumers than by their country of origin alone. The dominant emotional language centered on deception, helplessness, arrogance, hidden charges, and exploitative contracts. Telecommunications companies were particularly prominent targets.

Bulgarian respondents repeatedly described being trapped in opaque contractual relationships with major telecommunications providers. One respon-

dent explained that the company „deceived me and my mother“ by charging for calls that were allegedly never made, adding that she felt „like someone is lying to me but there is nothing I can do“. Another described a bait-and-switch experience in which a sales representative misrepresented internet limits during contract renewal. These accounts are emblematic of betrayal-based brand hate: the consumer no longer sees the firm as merely inefficient, but as intentionally manipulative (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Darke & Ritchie, 2007).

Greek respondents articulated closely related experiences with telecommunications companies. Poor network quality, rude staff, unexplained charges, and inflexible policies were interpreted as signs of disrespect. One participant complained that employees were „making a fool of their customers“, while another linked the company's conduct to a broader institutional culture of indifference and exploitation. Such narratives demonstrate that service failure becomes qualitatively different when accompanied by humiliation or perceived contempt. In these cases, what consumers hate is not only the defective service but the moral meaning of the interaction itself (Smith & Bolton, 2002; Grégoire et al., 2009).

Monopoly power intensified these emotions. Several Bulgarian respondents, especially in relation to fuel and telecommunications sectors, emphasized that dominant firms could set prices and lower standards because consumers lacked meaningful alternatives. Hate, in these accounts, was directed not just at a brand but at a market structure experienced as coercive and unfair.

4.3. Functional failure and price-quality asymmetry: A dominant European pattern

A third major theme concerned frustration with brands that charged premium prices while delivering weak performance. This theme was especially visible in Bulgaria and Greece and was most clearly articulated in relation to technology, clothing, and personal care brands. These narratives correspond closely to experiential and deficit-value avoidance, in which consumers reject brands because performance does not justify cost (Lee et al., 2009).

Bulgarian respondents expressed strong resentment toward several international consumer electronics brands. One participant described buying mobile devices after carefully comparing defect rates, only to experience repeated failures in both laptop and phone performance. The anger in this account did not arise

only from product malfunction, but from the sense that the company marketed „substandard products“ at unjustifiably high prices. The resulting sentiment was not simple disappointment but a durable refusal to repurchase and a desire to warn others.

Greek respondents voiced similar frustrations in relation to both global sportswear brands and local apparel retailers. These brands were criticized for offering style, reputation, or hype without corresponding quality. Here again, the emotional core was not merely that the product underperformed, but that the brand's pricing and symbolic positioning made consumers feel tricked or underestimated. The implication is important: when premium symbolism is detached from functional reliability, failure becomes morally charged.

Although less central than in Bulgaria and Greece, performance-based hostility also appeared in the Palestinian data, especially around pharmaceuticals and local substitute products. When health-related products failed to work as expected, respondents described anger sharpened by the belief that the product had violated a basic duty of care.

4.4. Health anxieties, ethical concerns, and economic ethnocentrism: A cross-cultural theme

A fourth theme cut across all three contexts: certain global brands—particularly in fast food, beverages, and packaged goods—evoked disgust because they were associated with unhealthy consumption, manipulative marketing, or broader ethical unease. Major global fast-food chains, beverage corporations, and packaged food companies featured prominently in these narratives. Unlike service-related anger, which was often hot and interaction-specific, this form of dislike was more frequently expressed as visceral disgust or chronic moral disapproval (Romani et al., 2013).

Respondents criticized such companies for selling „dangerous foods“, targeting children, or profiting from habits perceived as harmful to public health. These accounts suggest that health judgments are increasingly moralized. Consumers were not simply saying that a product is unhealthy; they were often framing the company itself as irresponsible, cynical, or anti-human (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001; Rindell et al., 2014).

In Greece, this theme intersected strongly with economic ethnocentrism. Some respondents expressed hostility toward multinational firms not because of

direct service failure, but because those firms were believed to have relocated production, cut jobs, or failed to support the national economy during crisis. A major beverage corporations became a particularly charged symbol in this regard. One respondent stated that continuing to buy the brand felt like „betray[ing] my country“. Similar sentiments were directed at international retailers by consumers who explicitly preferred Greek alternatives. This form of avoidance can be understood as a variant of moral avoidance shaped by macroeconomic injustice: the brand is rejected because it is perceived to have abandoned the host society at a moment of vulnerability (Hoffmann & Müller, 2009).

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that brand hate is not a monolithic phenomenon with universal antecedents. Instead, its architecture is profoundly shaped by the dominant social, political, and economic vulnerabilities of each context. This discussion synthesizes the findings by first presenting and comparing three distinct conceptual models of brand hate derived from the data. It then explores the broader theoretical implications concerning identity, moralization, injustice, and constrained agency.

Before presenting the models, it is appropriate to compare the findings with prior research. The Palestinian findings are consistent with the consumer animosity literature, which shows that country-linked resentment can override utilitarian product evaluation (Klein et al., 1998; Sandıkçı & Ekici, 2009). They extend earlier work demonstrating that Palestinian consumers display a distinctive form of brand negativity structurally different from service- or quality-based dissatisfaction documented in Western consumer research (Dalli et al., 2010). Specifically, prior research on the West Bank showed that Palestinian consumers' relationships with brands are shaped by a reproduction-resistance tension; the current study's findings corroborate and extend this dynamic by showing that value-laden negative responses can escalate into outright brand hate. From an emotional standpoint, the predominance of anger in the Palestinian accounts aligns with Romani et al. (2009) finding that anger is activated by perceived moral or normative violations rather than mere product underperformance. The collective, performative nature of politically motivated brand rejection in Palestine also echoes prior work on consumer movements (Kozinets & Handel-

man, 2004; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012). The disappointment expressed toward local substitutes resonates with the observation that disappointment represents a distinct emotional response tied to unmet expectations (Romani et al., 2013).

5.1. A contextual hierarchy of brand hate triggers: Comparing three models

The comparative analysis reveals a clear contextual hierarchy of triggers. To systematically unpack these structural differences, three distinct models are presented that illustrate the genesis and expression of brand hate in each country, starting with the most value-laden context.

In high-conflict environments such as Palestine, brand hate is overwhelmingly driven by macro-level ideological concerns that can completely eclipse functional evaluation. As illustrated in Figure 1, the process begins with a macro-context defined by occupation, religious identity, and a culture of political resistance. These conditions frame consumption as a moral and political act. Consequently, the dominant drivers of hate are not performance failures but ideological animosity, where brands become symbols of religious offense or political oppression. The cognitive appraisal, therefore, centers on moral violation and identity threat, leading to intense emotional forms of anger and disgust. This culminates in highly active and collective behavioral outcomes, such as organized boycotts and community mobilization, reinforcing the macro-context in a powerful feedback loop. This finding corroborates and extends earlier research (Dalli et al., 2010) by modeling the specific mechanisms through which a conflict environment produces a durable, non-negotiable, and identity-linked form of brand hate.

5.2. The hybrid nature of hate in an austerity context: The Greek model

In contrast to the ideologically pure form of hate in Palestine, the Greek case presents a hybrid model where value-based judgments intersect with performance-based frustrations (see Figure 2). The macro-context of the sovereign debt crisis and economic austerity created a fertile ground for what is termed „economic moral avoidance“. Here, the drivers of hate are twofold. On one hand, they mirror the performance-based frustrations seen elsewhere, such as poor service and price-quality asymmetry. On the other hand, a powerful value-based driver emerges

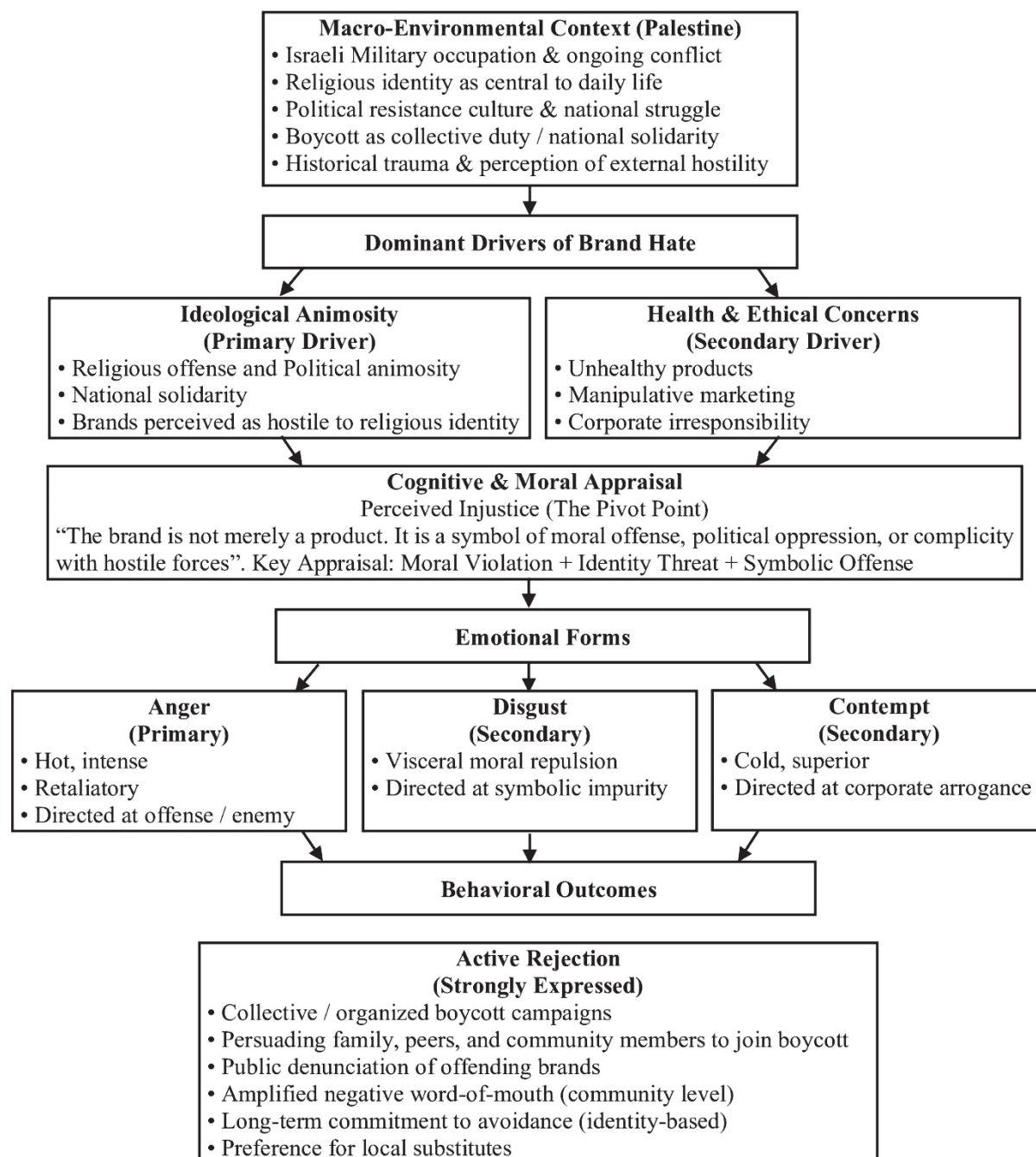
in the form of economic ethnocentrism, where foreign firms that disinvest or fail to support the national economy are perceived as committing a moral violation. This leads to a mix of emotional responses, including moral anger at betrayal and transactional frustration at poor service. Behaviorally, this results in both active rejection (e.g., boycotting disinvesting firms) and passive avoidance, demonstrating a more complex and multi-layered form of brand hate than in the other two contexts.

5.3. The dominance of performance-based hate in a transitional context: The Bulgarian model

Finally, the Bulgarian context exemplifies a form of brand hate rooted primarily in transactional and performance-related failures, which is characteristic of a post-communist transitional economy marked by deep market skepticism (see Figure 3). Here, the dominant drivers are not geopolitical animosity but rather corporate deception, monopolistic abuse, and a stark price-quality asymmetry. The cognitive appraisal pivots on perceived injustice in the form of contract violation or exchange failure. While this can generate anger, the primary emotional form is often a constrained frustration, coupled with a sense of helplessness against powerful monopolies. A key finding illustrated by the model is the prevalence of „reluctant consumption“, where consumers continue to use brands they hate due to a lack of alternatives. This model, while focused on performance, is distinct from simple dissatisfaction, as it is amplified by a macro-level distrust of corporate actors and market structures.

5.4. Brand hate as identity work, moralization, and the centrality of perceived injustice

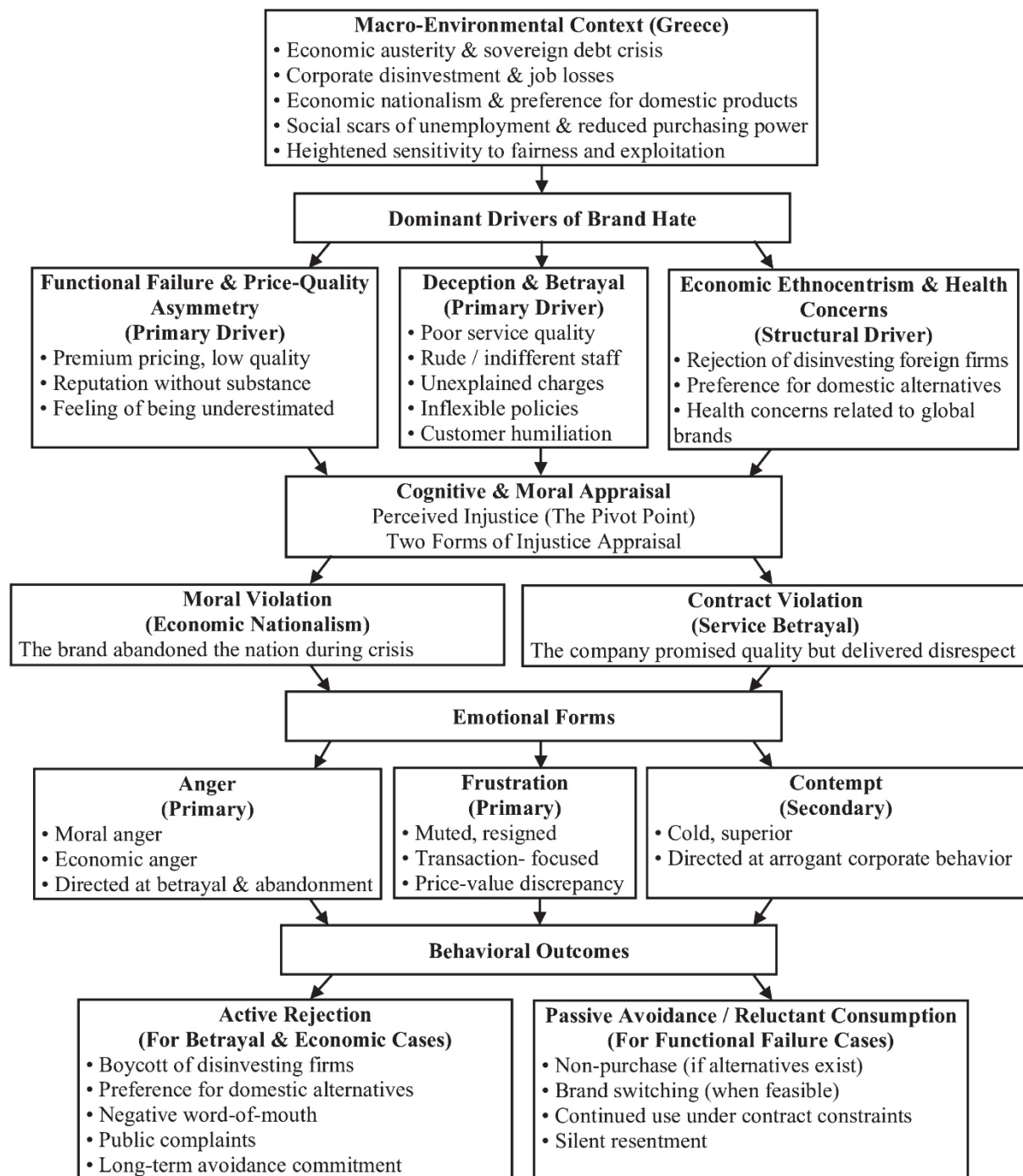
Across all three contexts, negative brand emotions served as a vehicle for identity work. Palestinian consumers affirmed religious and national identity through refusal. Greek consumers articulated economic patriotism and worker solidarity through rejection of foreign or disinvesting firms. Bulgarian consumers often positioned themselves as vigilant, skeptical consumers refusing to be deceived by corporate claims. In each case, avoidance was not only a market act but also a statement about who one is and what one stands for (Holt, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Figure 1: A conceptual model of value-based brand hate (the Palestinian context)

Source: Developed based on qualitative analysis and study findings

These findings also underscore the moralization of consumption. Consumers did not evaluate brands only on taste, durability, or convenience. They judged them in terms of loyalty, honesty, responsibility, and respect. As identified in prior cross-cultural research (Romani et al., 2009), the antecedent conditions driving negative brand emotions are not random but systematically structured: specific conditions give rise to specific emotional re-

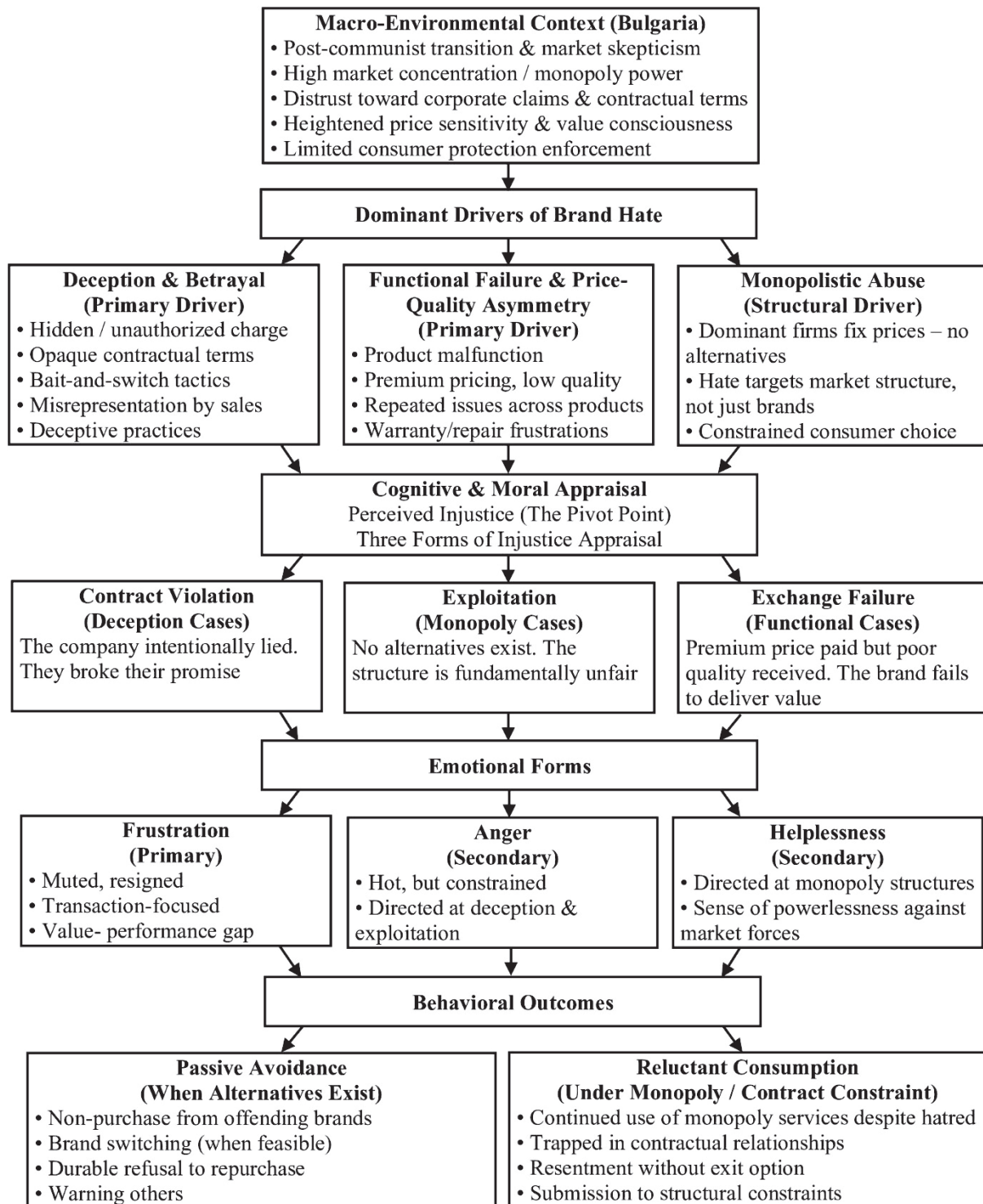
sponses. The current study confirms and enriches this insight by showing that, at the cross-national level, the dominant antecedent conditions are themselves culturally determined. This helps explain why certain negative experiences produced hatred rather than mere dissatisfaction: once the brand was interpreted as violating a moral norm, the relationship shifted from evaluative disappointment to ethical condemnation.

Figure 2: A conceptual model of mixed (value & performance) brand hate (The Greek context)

Source: Developed based on qualitative analysis and study findings

A consistent pattern across the dataset is that brand hate tends to emerge when consumers perceive injustice rather than simple failure. A defective product may disappoint, but deception, insult, exploitation, or symbolic harm are more likely to generate durable hostility. This supports the argu-

ment that hate is phenomenologically distinct from dissatisfaction. The key transition occurs when the consumer attributes malevolent intent, moral indifference, or structural unfairness to the brand (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Schoefer & Diamantopoulos, 2008).

Figure 3: A conceptual model of performance-based brand hate (The Bulgarian context)

Source: Developed based on qualitative analysis and study findings

5.5. Constrained agency and reluctant consumption

The data also reveal an important complication: consumers do not always stop buying brands they hate. In service sectors characterized by monopoly, low competition, or economic constraints, some respondents described continuing to use disliked brands out of necessity. This suggests that brand hate and purchase behavior may diverge under structural constraint. Avoidance, therefore, should not be treated as the only valid indicator of hate. In some contexts, what emerges is reluctant consumption accompanied by resentment, complaint, and negative word-of-mouth.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that brand hate is not a universal reaction with universal causes. Rather, it is a culturally situated response shaped by the intersection of market experience, political meaning, moral judgment, and historical context. Through the analysis of 450 qualitative consumer narratives across Palestine, Greece, and Bulgaria, this research has identified four interrelated drivers of brand hate: ideological, religious, and geopolitical animosity; corporate deception, service betrayal, and monopolistic abuse; functional failure and price–quality asymmetry; and health anxieties, ethical concerns, and economic ethnocentrism. While these four themes appear across all three contexts, their prominence and configuration vary sharply, yielding three distinct contextual models of brand hate.

Returning to the three research questions that guided this study, the findings provide clear answers. Regarding the primary antecedents of brand hate, the study demonstrates that they are not uniform: in Palestine, ideological and religious violations dominate; in Greece, a hybrid of service failure and economic nationalism prevails; in Bulgaria, deception, monopoly power, and value-for-money asymmetry are paramount. Regarding how macro-environmental factors shape emotional forms and behavioral outcomes, the findings reveal that occupation and political conflict in Palestine produce collective, mobilized avoidance; economic austerity in Greece generates moral anger combined with reluctant consumption; and post-communist transition in Bulgaria fosters constrained frustration and, in many cases, continued usage of hated brands due to lack of alternatives. Regarding the phenomenological and behavioral differences between performance-based and value-based

brand hate, the study establishes a critical distinction: performance-based hate is transactional, potentially reversible through service recovery, and often results in passive avoidance; value-based hate is identity-constitutive, morally absolute, largely irreversible, and manifests as active boycott, negative word-of-mouth, and community mobilization.

The study's most significant theoretical contribution lies in the articulation of three empirically grounded models. First, the Palestinian model of value-based brand hate demonstrates that in high-conflict environments, ideological animosity can completely eclipse functional evaluation. Here, consumption becomes an act of religious loyalty and national resistance, and boycott functions as collective discipline. Brands associated with Denmark, Israel, or the United States are evaluated not as market offerings but as symbols of offense, occupation, or complicity. The emotional response is predominantly anger and disgust, and the behavioral outcome extends beyond non-purchase to active mobilization of others. Second, the Greek hybrid model reveals a context where value-based and performance-based hate intersect. The sovereign debt crisis and subsequent austerity created what this study terms „economic moral avoidance“. Consumers reject foreign firms not only because of poor service or price–quality asymmetry, but because those firms are perceived to have abandoned the national economy—relocating production, cutting jobs, or failing to support local welfare. The emotional texture is mixed: transactional frustration coexists with moral anger at betrayal. Behaviorally, this produces both active boycotting of disinvesting firms and passive avoidance of others. Third, the Bulgarian model of performance-based brand hate exemplifies a context characteristic of post-communist transitional economies. Here, brand hate is driven primarily by deceptive contracts, poor service recovery, perceived monopoly power, and frustration with overpriced products. The emotional response is often constrained frustration combined with a sense of helplessness against powerful corporate actors. Critically, this model reveals the phenomenon of „reluctant consumption“—consumers continue using hated brands because structural constraints leave them no viable alternative, challenging the assumption that brand hate necessarily translates into brand avoidance.

6.1. Theoretical contributions

This study makes four main theoretical contributions. First, it extends the brand hate literature by showing

that negative brand relationships are culturally and politically constituted, not merely psychologically generated. Second, it demonstrates the value of integrating consumer animosity, brand avoidance, and betrayal frameworks into a single account of brand hate. Third, it refines the distinction between performance-based and value-based hate, showing that the latter is especially durable because it is tied to identity and morality rather than isolated transactions. Fourth, it introduces the idea of economic moral avoidance, whereby consumers reject brands for macroeconomic actions—such as relocation, labor abandonment, or monopolistic abuse—that are interpreted as morally illegitimate.

More broadly, the study reinforces the call made by Dalli et al. (2010) for consumer research to develop frameworks that are less dependent on Western philosophical and cultural roots. The Palestinian findings in particular demonstrate that theories developed in stable, secular, liberal market environments may fail to capture the emotional and behavioral logics that operate in settings defined by occupation, religious identity, and political mobilization. Brand hate scholarship must therefore remain open to cultural revision and expansion.

6.2. Managerial implications

The findings also carry important implications for managers and multinational corporations.

First, firms operating in politically sensitive markets must recognize that brand meaning can be redefined by religious or geopolitical events beyond the firm's immediate control. Cultural and political risk assessment is therefore not peripheral, but strategic.

Second, companies in telecommunications, utilities, and retail should treat transparency as a core trust-building mechanism. Hidden fees, opaque contracts, aggressive upselling, and poor complaint handling may generate not only churn but enduring hate.

Third, premium pricing must be matched by demonstrable quality. In markets marked by economic pressure, consumers are especially sensitive to discrepancies between symbolic value and actual performance.

Fourth, global FMCG firms must take health and ethical perceptions seriously. Consumers increasingly interpret harmful products, manipulative child-directed marketing, and weak CSR performance as evidence of corporate irresponsibility rather than routine commercial practice.

6.3. Limitations and future research

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the findings are based on qualitative narratives and are therefore analytically rich but not statistically generalizable. Second, the data rely on self-reported accounts, which may be shaped by recall bias, moral posturing, or social desirability. Third, the data capture attitudes within specific historical moments and may not fully reflect subsequent shifts in national politics, market structure, or brand strategy.

Future research could build on these findings through mixed-method or quantitative designs that test the relative strength of ideological, functional, and ethical drivers of brand hate. Longitudinal studies would be especially valuable in examining whether hot, retaliatory hate cools into passive avoidance or becomes institutionalized through sustained boycott. Furthermore, cross-cultural research on brand forgiveness and its antecedents—such as corporate apologies, improved service recovery, or emotional intelligence interventions—could clarify whether value-based brand hate is more resistant to repair than performance-based hate (Gürce et al., 2022). Experimental research could also compare how different apology, recovery, or localization strategies operate across politically volatile, economically strained, and transitional market contexts. Additionally, extending this line of inquiry to other under-researched non-Western markets—consistent with the agenda proposed by Dalli et al. (2010)—would further advance a more culturally inclusive consumer research tradition.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that consumers do not merely dislike brands because products fail. They hate brands when those brands are perceived to violate dignity, justice, identity, or collective well-being. The emotional forms this takes—from anger and contempt to disgust and moral outrage—are not arbitrary but are structured by the specific antecedent conditions operative in each cultural and political environment. In Palestine, brands become entangled with religion, resistance, and national survival. In Greece, brand hostility reflects the social scars of austerity and corporate disinvestment. In Bulgaria, it is rooted in deception, poor service, monopoly power, and unmet expectations of value. Understanding brand hate therefore requires moving beyond narrow models of satisfaction and toward a more context-sensitive, culturally grounded account of how brands become moral and political objects in everyday life. This study offers a step in that direction,

while recognizing that much work remains to be done across the diverse and complex landscape of global consumer cultures.

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Apstrakt

Geneza mržnje prema brendu i izbegavanja brenda od strane potrošača: međukulturalna kvalitativna analiza u Palestini, Grčkoj i Bugarskoj

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Ova studija istražuje uzroke, emocionalne oblike i bihevioralne posledice mržnje prema brendu u tri različita kulturna konteksta: Palestini, Grčkoj i Bugarskoj. Na osnovu 450 kvalitativnih narativa potrošača i primenom tematske analize, identifikuju se četiri međusobno povezana pokretača mržnje prema brendu: (1) ideološki, verski i geopolitički animozitet; (2) korporativna obmana, izdaja u pružanju usluga i zloupotreba monopolskog položaja; (3) funkcionalni neuspeh i nesrazmera između cene i kvaliteta; i (4) zdravstvene zabrinutosti, etički problemi i ekonomski etnocentrizam. Rezultati ukazuju na izražene međukulturalne razlike. U Palestini, mržnja prema brendu je pretežno vrednosno utemeljena i povezana sa religijskim identitetom i političkim otporom prema brendovima povezanim sa Danskom, Izraelom i Sjedinjenim Američkim Državama. U Grčkoj, ona odražava posledice mera štednje, korporativnog dezinvestiranja i ekonomskog nacionalizma.

U Bugarskoj, neprijateljstvo proizlazi iz obmanjujućih ugovora, lošeg oporavka usluge nakon problema, percipirane monopolske moći i frustracije zbog precejenjenih proizvoda. U svim kontekstima, globalni brendovi brze hrane i robe široke potrošnje izazivaju snažan osećaj gađenja utemeljen u zdravstvenim i etičkim brigama. Ova studija unapređuje kulturno utemeljeno razumevanje mržnje prema brendu koje integriše izbegavanje brenda, animozitet potrošača i politički konzumerizam. Ona pruža značajne implikacije za multinacionalne kompanije koje posluju u okruženjima u kojima je značenje brenda neraskidivo povezano sa lokalnim istorijama konflikta, krize i ekonomske tranzicije.

Ključne reči: mržnja prema brendu, izbegavanje brenda, animozitet potrošača, politički konzumerizam, međukulturalno ponašanje potrošača

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