# Why Do We Hate Brands?
## - A qualitative study of how the dark side of branding is influenced by group identification

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# Preface

We want to give our deepest regards to the men and women who decided to participate in our focus groups. Without you this thesis would not have been possible.

Another person that we would like to give our regards to is Anna-Carin Nordvall. In times of deep confusion and doubts, you have been a beacon of light and helped us through a few sticky passages.

At last, but absolutely not the least, our fantastic mentor and supervisor, Peter Hultén. Without your contribution to the field, and your passionate help, this thesis would have been much harder to do. You have been a great help and inspiration throughout this process, and for that you have our absolute deepest regards.

**Thank you!**

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# Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to gain a better understanding of the relatively new concept of Brand Hate. More specifically, how Brand Hate can occur in people with no to little experience with certain brands, so called non-customers.

We want to believe that humans are a rational being that takes decisions based on all the available information and does not jump to conclusions before all options have been exhausted. But upon closer examination theoretical concepts such as brand love can be found. A concept that argues that users of a brand utilize the brand itself in order to internally identify values he or she holds, as well as showcasing those values and personality traits externally to others. With this theory as a basis the relatively new concept of Brand Hate was born. The new concept, posits that there has to be another side of the brand love, where people actually hate or dislike the brand. Up to this point very little research has been done within the area, and that is where the authors of this thesis saw an opportunity to fill a research gap. There has been no previous research attempting to understand WHY these negative feelings comes to present themselves within people. But as soon as the work on the thesis had started another opportunity presented itself, it seemed as though people hate or dislike brands that they themselves does not even use. As a result non-customers became the focal point of investigation of this thesis.

The research itself included three different focus groups, with in total nineteen respondents that discussed a wide variety of topics. During the sessions the discussions touched upon what brands they disliked, why they disliked them and how the respondents identified with other groups of people. This gave the authors the ability to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological reasoning behind why certain brands the respondents did not use were severely hated or disliked.

The findings from the research seem to point in one very specific direction, group identification is an integral reason why non-customers started to hate or dislike brands. No matter how good companies are creating an appealing brand, that same brand will always risk to become distorted, as a result of the different targeted user groups. This research shows that people let their emotions and prejudices come between what they perceive a brand to be, and what companies want them to be. The result is people prematurely judging brands based upon the customers of that brand. If the respondents did not like the user group of a certain brand, that same brand would be inscribed with all the negative connotations with the user groups, thereby distorting the public brand image far from what the companies might intend them to be.

**Keywords:** Brand Hate, Non-customers, Group Identification, Reference Groups, Perception of brands, Brand Image

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# 1. Introduction Chapter

## 1.1 Background

> ”Did you mention on your Lg G2 vs S4 comparison on youtube that the LG has NO MHL LINK????? I’m searching for you with a shotgun!”
>
> Anonymous Fanboy (Anderson, 2014)

This is just one example of how the hate for brands can look online. In her article titled ‘Fanboys’ on the technology site The Verge, Leslie Anderson (2014) digs deep into the world of aggressive online behavior based around the love of one brand, and subsequently the hate for another brand. The phenomena of sorting people into different groups, and judge them based on their preferred choices, has been around for a long time. However, in her article Anderson goes to show that with the advent of Internet the availability and possibilities of spreading these negative stereotypes and emotions are easier than ever.

## 1.2 Introduction

The concept of a ‘self’ is a widely acknowledged idea that has been thoroughly researched over the years. The American philosopher James (1992, p.188) defines the self-concept as anything that the individual calls ‘me’. However, he does note that the difference between what is generally described as ‘me’ and ‘mine’ is a fine line as a person can define him or herself through ones possessions. This notion has later been called the extended self, and it is a subject that has also been greatly explored throughout the years. Preliger (1959, cited in Belk 1988, p.140-141) is just one of many that has confirmed the notion that external possessions can be incorporated into an individuals’ self-concept. In a review by Grubb & Grathwohl (1967) they look at the expressive power of the extended self. They find evidence that the different material aspects of the extended self has the ability to showcase an individuals personal beliefs about who he or she is, as well as a self-enhancing aspect of who they want to be.

The fact that external possessions can help define, and symbolize who, and what a person is, or want to be, is a fact that businesses has taken advantage of when they create a corporate identity and a corporate brand. The corporate identity is defined as ‘what the company is’ (Balmer, 1998, p.979) and is essentially trying to define what type of values the company have and stands for. These values could later be expressed through corporate communications, such as branding, in order to create a of mental image of the company (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p.699-700). A research by Bhattacharya & Sen (2003, p.86) suggest that a positive congruence between consumer identity and a corporate/brand identity could help the consumers self definition. Furthermore their research suggests that consumers tend to choose company or brand that matches the personal identity, once again pointing at the importance of extended self in external properties. This is something that is strengthened even further in a research by Lisjak et al. (2012) where they showcase that a threat to a brand that a person identifies with, garners the same response as if the threat was conveyed at the person itself.

Such a passionate relationship with a company or brand is defined as brand love (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p.81). This term describes a series of extreme positive emotional reactions with the customers when speaking or hearing about the brand in question. One thing that is important to note when it comes to brand love, is the difference between it, and satisfaction, as the two are not always interconnected. For example, where satisfaction needs to be a cognitive judgment, brand love is more focused on the affective response. When it comes to satisfaction there is a consensus that it is transaction-specific, while when it comes to brand love, rather is about an established relationship between the customer and the brand itself (Bryson et all, 2013, p.401)

Brand love could possibly have other benefits except for the personal identification process with customers. One such benefit could come from brand communities, which is defined as "*specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand*" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p.412). One important note to be made is that brand communities differ from reference groups in one important matter. In brand communities the brand is the central concept that ties people together, while reference groups is a more broad term (Muniz & O'Guinn, p.428). The concept of brand communities could be seen as an extension of the fundamental need for belongingness in humans. In a research by Baumeister & Leary (1995, p.520-522) they discuss the apparent desire to form interpersonal relationships between individuals, even though they apparently have very little in common.

However there is a different side to the identification process between customers and brands, called 'disidentification'. Whereby the consumer wants to show their uniqueness by distancing themselves from certain groups of people, such as customers of certain companies or brands (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001, p.406-407). This process of disidentification could also be taken one step further by some customers through brand avoidance, where they wish to distance themselves from unwanted associations (Lee et al. 2009a, p.173-174). When taking part in this brand avoidance the customers is not just distancing themselves from, negative brand associations but also strengthening their self-concept (Lee et al. 2009a, p.173-174).

Negative associations with the brand or its audience, is not the only way where incongruence between the customer and a brand can start. Another important aspect of negative aspects of brands is customer dissatisfaction. In their research Ward & Ostrom (2006, p.227-228) concludes that customers have different ways of framing their dissatisfaction that help them understand the 'betrayal' from the company or brand. Moreover, the research also indicates that the dissatisfaction could spark a need to find other dissatisfied customers in order to reinforce their disliking of the company itself.

The notion of customers looking for confirmation in their believes, is further backed with research by Kucuk (2008; 2010) who argues that the occurrence of consumer generated anti-branding sites on the Internet has become greater over the past years. These sites act as a mediator between dissatisfied customers who can voice their anger about the companies in question. However, in direct opposition to the above claims, in a research by Bougie et al. (2003, p.389-390) they claim that there should be a distinction between angry customers and dissatisfied customers. Their research presents the idea that anger is the motivator for customers to act upon, the authors discuss amongst other things how negative stereotypes of existing user base and customer dissatisfaction could be the basis for Brand Hate. While hate of a brand is not dependent only on these two factors entirely, they do seem to contribute.

## 1.3 Problem Discussion

Balmer (1998, p.979) defines the corporate identity as 'what the company is'. Olins (1995, p. 20-26) uses the same definition when it comes to branding, however he distinguished between different types of branding uses. He argues that there are different levels of brands, where some brands are so called monolithic, and goes through the entire company, and other companies uses sub-brands for their different products. Irrespective of what type of brand the company utilizes, the key objective of the brand itself is to convey an identity from the company to the customers through various source of corporate communication (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p.699-700).

If this communication is done the right way there are a multitude of positive effects for the company, amongst is customer-brand congruence (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003, p.86). Such congruence could help the customer to reinforce their self-concept and strengthen their perceived group identification to a certain reference group (Dolich, 1969, p.84). However, if the brand is not as successful in establishing congruence between the brand identity and the consumer identity, there is a possible negative effect. According to Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406-407) if the customer perceives incongruence between the brand or the user base of a brand, there is a possibility for that customer to disidentify with them in order to showcase what they are not.

The idea that customers can define who they are through the products or brands they buy was first established by the American philosopher James (1992, p.188). He argues that a persons self-concept is not just the physical and mental aspects of that individual, but also extends outside, to external objects that could be defined as 'mine'. Tucker (1957 cited in Sirgy 1982, p.287) agrees with that distinction but adds that the meanings and symbols of the products or brand also have a role in forming the self-concept.

Another aspect that influences the self-brand identification is congruence between the self and a reference group that severs as the user base (Wei & Yu, 2012, p.49-50). The self-brand connection in regards to different reference groups could include three different reference groups. The first is the membership group the consumer is in, the second is the aspirational group the consumer wants to join and the third is dissociative groups, which the consumer wants to avoid (Wei & Yu, 2012, p.39). In their research Muniz & O'Guinn (2001, p.427) argues that brands is a social construct, created between customers-company-customers, making brands and brand communities social in their very nature. Thereby making reference groups an integral part in creating associations with the brand.

The disidentification process between one customer and either a brand, or a certain reference group, could be taken one step further with brand avoidance (Lee et al. 2009a, p.173-174). In this state of mind the customer is trying to achieve a distance between negative associations, and at the same time strengthen his or her self concept. The fact that customers are willing to go to great lengths to find others that share their sentiment, could be seen as a confirmation of the findings from Baumeister & Leary (1995, p.520-522) which states that the feeling of social belongingness is a fundamental need that people are always striving for. In their research they argue that humans feel a need to connect and belong to others, or to be a part of a group, even if the reason that binds them together is not crucial to their current situation. This could once again be seen as a confirmation of the findings by Bhattacharya & Sen (2003, p.86) where the customers use their brand avoidance in order to strengthen their self concept and identify with the search for an anti-brand-community.

Whereas the positive aspects of branding has been researched and conceptualized, many of the possible negative aspects has remained unexplored. While researching the topic of branding for this thesis this problem became apparent. Most of the articles surrounding branding was not only just looking at the positive aspects of branding but were almost exclusively from the companies' point of view. Very few articles were exploring branding from a consumer point of view, especially within business studies. If one would like a better understanding for branding from the customers point of view there is a need to delve deeper into research from a psychology perspective. However, that literature is fundamentally different from business research studies in a number of ways, and are not always directly linked. This research therefore becomes a bridge between the two perspectives and fields in order to look at branding from a customers point of view.

In order to understand how some customers may like one brand and dislike another, there has to be an understanding of the cognitive processes that goes on within a customer when receiving a message. Petty & Cacioppo (1986) proposed a model to explain how an individual processes the message depending on their investment in the source and interest in the information; they called the model 'The Elaboration Likelihood model'. The model assumes that a person starts to interpret a message as soon as it reaches him or her. The message takes one of two different routes depending on different variables such as the source of information as well as how relevant the information is to the person. In this context it is not difficult to draw parallels to the positive group identification and self-concept strengthening proposed by Dolich, (1969, p.84), as well as the group disidentification process shown in the research by Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406-407). Depending on how the person feel about the information about the brand, and if it comes from a reference group that the person likes or not, it could alter ether the persons behavior or the affect of the object.

Whereas brand avoidance and disidentification are a negative aspect of branding, there is still one further step that has largely remained unexplored. Brand Hate is defined as intense negative feelings towards a brand (Bryson et al, 2010, p.32). These negative feelings often manifest itself through brand avoidance, rejection of the brand, and even acting out the negative affections (Bryson et al, 2013, p.395).

Thus far the research within the area of Brand Hate has been very limited. While the literature exploring this subject has focused on customers who are either dissatisfied or have a want to avoid the brand, there has been no research within the field of non-customers, i.e. people with no or little experience with a brand, and how Brand Hate could occur within them. In order to explain why non-customers are an interesting segment to look at, one does not have to look further than 'fanboyism' on the Internet. The occurrence of this phenomenon is especially prolific on various technology-sites. Esat Dedezade from the technology site Stuff.tv explains fanboyism as follows:

"… fanboys make it their mission to convert other people to their side like some sort of tech missionary. From consoles to smartphones, they'll happily tell you how terrible your purchasing decision was and recommend that you join them immediately, lest your soul is lost to the depths of inferior gadget hell." (Esat Dedezade, 2014)

Fanboyism is just one example of how non-customers have extreme negative feelings towards a brand where the person has no direct contact with the brand itself. Even though the example above is in an online context, there are no reasons why this behavior should not exist in non-customers offline as well. In order to research and understand the phenomena of negative feelings towards brands in these non-customers, there is a need to do this research from the customers' point of view. This is something that thus far has not been done, neither in the field of psychology nor the field of consumer behavior or branding.

As such, the discussion above clearly illustrates a gap of knowledge in the current literature surrounding Brand Hate, from several different perspectives. There is simply no current research exploring the 'why' these negative feelings towards brands in non-customers can exist.

## 1.4 Research Question

- Why does Brand Hate occur in people with no or little experience with a brand, and how do they justify their beliefs?

## 1.5 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is multifaceted. Of course there is the direct insight of gaining a better understanding of the psychological factors behind how Brand Hate can exist within people with no or little experience of a brand how they their feelings may guide the behavior. In concurrence with this objective there is also a wish to expand the understanding and knowledge about Brand Hate as a theoretical concept. By combining the different fields of consumer behavior, psychology and branding there is a possibility of building a new framework for a better understanding of this new concept.

# 2. Theoretical Chapter

*Below is a visualization of how the authors perceive that the different theoretical perspectives are all connected. It is important to note that some of the theories have explicit connections, while others have an implicit connection that is never stated, but nonetheless exist.*

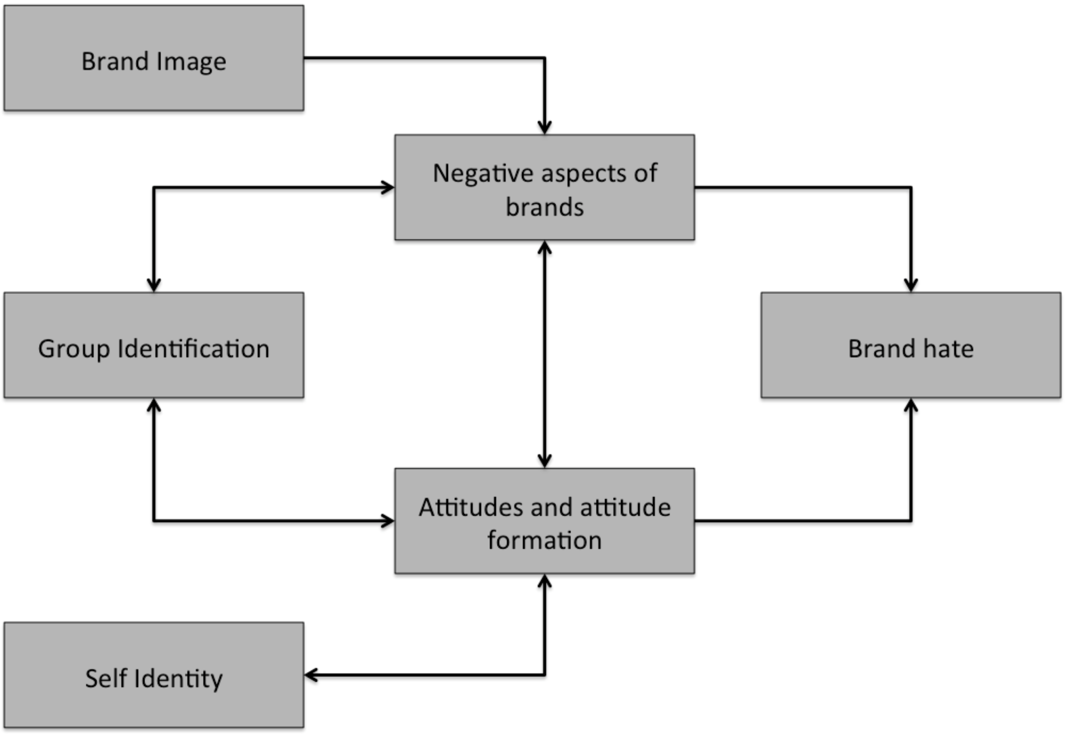


Figure 2.1 – A visual representation of the theory connections (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

## 2.1 Negative aspects of brands

### *2.1.1 Anti-Branding*

In their article Palazzo & Basu (2006, p. 333) identified that companies like Nike, Microsoft and McDonald's had two different types of consumers, one that was called Brand Believers and another named Anti-Brand Activists. The Internet has proven to be a powerful tool for Anti-Branding activities, giving them space to open websites containing visual expressions, memorable domain names, and critical language. All of these efforts have the propose to generate a negative online identity to a certain brand. Examples of anti-branding sites could be, killercoke.org, walmart-blows.com and starbucked.com. (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009, p.1119-1120) Each of this websites has their own structure and purpose, for example walmart-blows.com, only contains a white space with a simple and direct message to Walmart. Other domains are more complex like starbucked.com, this website offers what they called "starbucked TV show" where they expose videos and news that shows the negative side of the company, and even a link with Starbucks alternatives. Some domains obtain more delicate allegations and not only consumers opinions, like killercoke.org, this webpage accuses The Coca-Cola industry of murder, use of paramilitary security, torture, rape and other crimes. Besides all this efforts anti-branding activism has not yet reached a level that damage the corporations, but its potential to do so is well known (Palazzo & Basu, 2006, p. 342).

### *2.1.2 Brand Avoidance*

Brand avoidance is a recent topic in the field of Business, up until 2009 only two scientific articles used the term explicitly, and as a consequence finding a definition of the topic has proven difficult. Due to this lack of information Lee et al. (2009a, p.170) defined the concept of brand avoidance as *"the incidents in which consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand".* Brand Avoidance is characterized as an active rejection of a product, and as a consequence does not take in consideration situations where the consumers are abstinent of choice, for example when the product is above the person pay limit (Lee et al. 2009a, p.170).

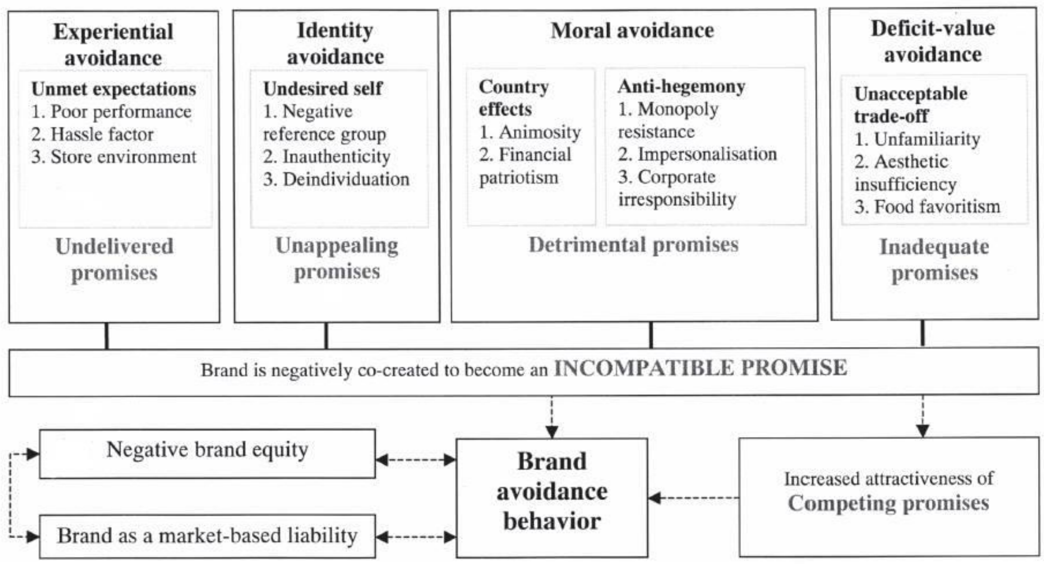


Figure 2.2 - Emergent Theoretical Model of Brand Avoidance (Lee et al., 2009b, p.423)

In another research by Lee et al. (2009b, p.422-426) they created a model, depicted above, distinguishing between four different types of brand avoidance. The first type is referred to as Experiential Avoidance, which equals to the classic avoidance that comes from a negative experience with a product or a brand. This type of brand avoidance demands an actual interaction gone wrong between the company and customer, and a promise that has been broken through this negative experience. The second type of brand avoidance is called Identity avoidance, and it is concerned with a negative congruence between the consumers' sense of self, and the portrayed identity of the brand, much in line with the thoughts by Dolich (1969, p.84). It could also be influence by negative stereotyping of the reference group associated with the brand (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001, p.406- 407). The third type of avoidance described in this research is called Moral avoidance, and it is concerned with a negative brand image because of more ambiguous resistance to the country of origin, or a cultural discrepancy against supporting a big brand. The last type of avoidance is called Deficit-value avoidance, and is concerned around negative emotions already from the first interaction with the brand itself. In these cases the consumers sees a negative trade off and are not willing to go along with it, and are therefore avoiding the brand because of this assumption.

As can be seen in the model all of these aspects may influence the attitude a consumer holds about the brand itself. In some cases these brand avoidance factors may lead to the consumers being attracted to competing brands in order to distance themselves further from the brand they do not like. From the companies perspective this could also have an effect on the brand equity (Lee et al., 2009b, p.426)

The research by Lee et al. (2009b) raised some concerns due to another research made by Anne Rindell and her colleagues at Henken School of Economics were they were able to test the moral avoidance among ethical consumers and the results were different. Rindell et al. (2013, p. 489) conclude that there are three different, but still interrelated, ways that ethical consumers rejects a brand, and they were not necessarily related to the brand promises, as Lee et al. (2009b, p. 423) suggested. The research by Rindell et al. (2013) have its limitations, like for example a small sample, but it is a reminder that the concept of brand avoidance is still in need of more research.

Kucuk (2008; 2010) also talks about the effect this brand avoidance might come to have in the peoples actual buying behavior. According to him, one distinct possibility that may come from a rejection of a brand is when customers actively seeks out anti-branding communities in order to reinforce their own beliefs. The affirmation process is something that Ostrom & Ward (2001, p. 228) argues is a way for customers to strengthen their negative feelings against a company. They argue that one consequence of affirming their negative beliefs against a certain company or brand, could be the inclusion into an anti-brand community. These anti-brand communities can often be divided into two common factions, either they are experts or symbolic haters. The main difference between the two groups is how well informed they are, and how they absorb the information (Kucuk, 2008, p.214-215). It is also argued that with the advent of internet, such anti-brand communities has had an easier time not just to sustain their operation, but also finding new members. In his revisit of the subject, Kucuk (2010, p. 156) argues that consumers today are not merely subjects of a company created message, but they are nowadays co-creating the value of the brand itself.

### *2.1.3 Brand Hate*

Brand Hate is a concept born from the idea of Brand Love, which was defined in previous chapters as "*a passionate relationship with a company or brand*" (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p.81). Brand Hate in other hand is defined by Bryson et al (2010, p. 32) "*as an intense negative emotional affect towards the brand*", it is also important to realize that Brand Hate does not occur only with extreme cases. In a research made with 450 participants, 93% of them had no troubles in identifies a brand they hates, and half of this mentioned brands were constituted by only 14 brands (Bryson et al 2010, p. 32).

Bryson et al  (2010, p. 32) identified in their research three main factor for a person to hate a brand, the first factor is the negative stereotypes that one person has about the consumers of a certain brand, each person has a mental idea of who are the consumers of a brand and that will influence themselves. The second factor that most generates Brand Hate between consumers is dissatisfaction, this negative state of emotions can get very intense (Bryson et al 2010, p. 32). Finally, the last factor identified by Bryson et al  (2010, p. 32) is that man and woman reacts in different ways when it comes to negative word of mouth, man seem to be less affected by other opinions, while women are more sensitive to it, especially if the negative word of mouth is coming from someone close, family, co-workers and friends.

Country of origin, social and environmental performance are not factor that leads someone to hate a brand (Bryson et al, 2010, p. 32) but it was also pointed out by Rindell et al. (2013, p. 488) that when a consumers realizes that a company has been insincere in their ethical actions brand avoidance will occur. Brand avoidance as discussed before can be seen as a first step, before it turns into Brand Hate.

## 2.2 Attitudes and Attitude formation

The term attitude could be defined as lasting general feelings for people, objects, advertisements or issues. And the object which humans hold an attitude towards is commonly known as the attitude object (Byron et al. 1974 in Solomon et al. 2013, p.292). Generally attitudes are said to be constituted by three different aspects; the affective, cognitive and conative parts (Ray et al., 1973, p.149)

### *2.2.1 Functions of Attitudes*

When discussing attitudes there is usually a distinguishing factor between different functions of the attitudes held towards an object. Daniel Katz (1960, p.170-175) identified four different types of functions of attitudes.

The first he called the utilitarian function, and it is concerning rewards and punishments. It states that a person will hold a certain attitude towards an object in order to maximize his or her own rewards, while at the same time minimizing the punishments. In connection with reference groups this attitude could be seen as an extension of the findings of Baumeister & Leary (1995, p.520-522) where the social belongingness are a central theme. If a consumer believes that holding a specific attitude towards an object in order to be a part of a social group, he or she will be less inclined to give that up, because that could turn into a social punishment where the person is ostracized, which as Van Beest et al. (2011, p.11-12) concluded seems to be something people want to avoid at any cost.

The second type of function is called the ego-defensive function. This type of attitude is held towards an object in order to defend the person’s identity against possible attacks (Katz, 1960, p.170). Parallels can be drawn to the conclusions by Grubb & Grathwohl (1967, p. 24) who stated that the self is everything a person knows about him or herself. The ego-defensive function of attitudes could help a person to better define and know who they are. The ego will not be studied in this thesis, however it was deemed important to note that it is a part of the different functions of an attitude.

The third type of function is the value expressive function, and it refers to an attitude that is held because the person wants to signify his or her personal beliefs. This is considered to be the total opposite of the ego-defensive function. In this case the attitude is formed in order to externally show the personal beliefs to others (Katz, 1960, p.173). This type of function could be seen as an complement to the theory of attractiveness of reference groups presented by Dolich (1969, p.84). If the individual finds a reference group attractive, he or she will try to display the same values in order to gain acceptance into this group, much like the aspirational reference group presented by Englis & Solomon (1995, p.17).

The last function described is called the knowledge function. This type of attitude in not just formed in order to give meaning to one specific object, but also helps the person to create order in his or her life. This type of attitude helps a person to categorize the world and make sense of everything within it (Katz, 1960, p.175-176).

### *2.2.2 The Three-orders Hierarchy model*

In this section the theory was developed by Ray et al. (1973, p.149-152), but in order to further illustrate the three different hierarchies and the fundamental differences between them, three different illustrations were made.

This model was developed by Ray et al. (1973, p.149-152) and it explores how humans tend to utilize all three aspects of the attitude concept, the affective, cognitive and conative parts, but in different ways in order to either influence how we feel, think or behave towards attitude objects. They classified three different hierarchies that a person could utilize.


Figure 2.3 - Learning Hierarchy Illustration (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

The first of which is called the Learning Hierarchy, and it argues that a person must learn about a new attitude object, before the attitude about it can change, and that could lead to a change in behavior towards the object in the future. This type of learning can only happen if the individual is actually involved in the topic and wants to learn about the different alternatives, there also have to be clear differences between the alternatives.


Figure 2.4 – Dissonance-Attribution Hierarchy Illustration (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

The second hierarchy is called The Dissonance-Attribution hierarchy, and it is seen as the complete opposite to the above-mentioned Learning Hierarchy. In this case the behavior towards the attitude object occurs first, which could influence a change the attitude towards the object, and lastly learning the difference between the chosen object compared to other possible alternatives. This is most likely to occur when there is little to no difference between different alternatives, even if the consumer has been involved in the topic itself.

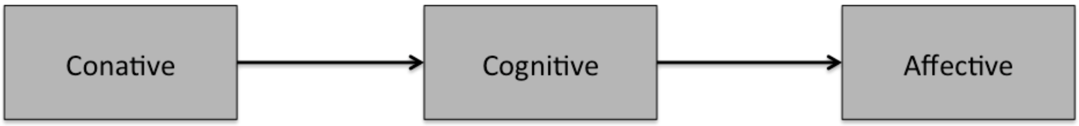


Figure 2.5 – Low-Involvement Hierarchy Illustration (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

The last type is called the low involvement Hierarchy and it was discovered by Krugman (1965, p.349-356) while he was making a research on the effects of TV-advertising. He concluded that most viewers are not involved or care much about the commercials on the TV. However, after enough repetition, they will have learned the name of the brand, and that could influence their buying behavior, which in turn might change the attitude the consumer holds towards that specific object.

Even though this model is widely accepted, and still used in various fields, it has seen a fair share of critique. In a review of much of the criticism against this model Barry & Thomas (1990) went through the most common points of content against the Three-orders Hierarchy Model. One of the main points of criticism of this model has been the ambiguity of a clear definition between affect and cognition. As the years has progressed, so has the definitions, and today cognitions are considered to refer to a mental activity that defines our beliefs towards an attitude object. Whilst affect has come to gain a meaning of the emotions humans gain towards the attitude object. Another criticism against the model has been the difficulty of knowing when the affective or the cognitive response comes first. Since the difference between them are decided on a fraction of a second there is much debate whether or not it should have a difference in the ultimate outcome.

*2.2.3 The Elaboration Likelihood model*

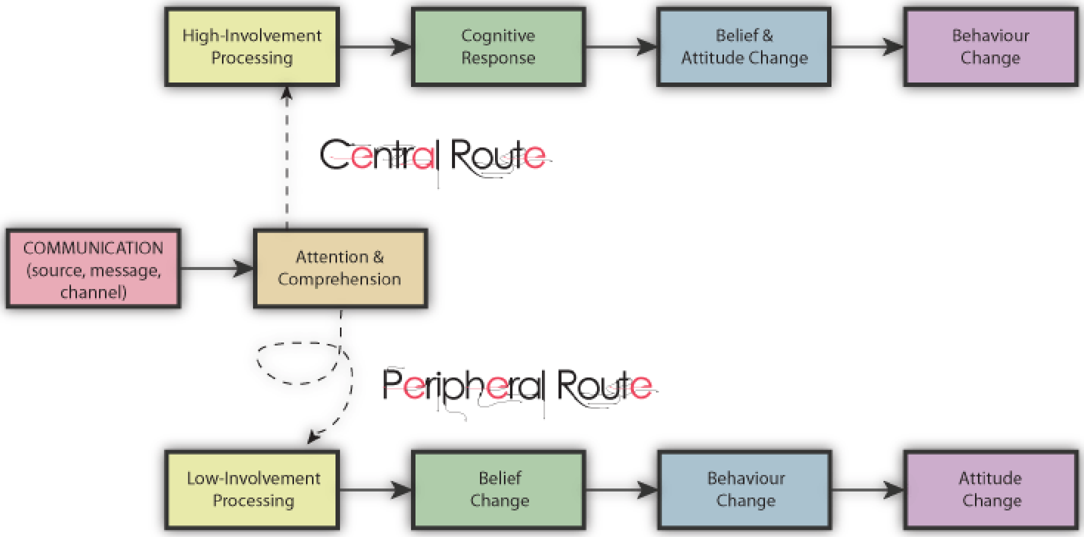


Figure 2.6 – The Elaboration Likelihood model (Solomon et al., 2013, p. 304)

This model was developed by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) in order to explain how humans tend to process information differently depending on if they have an investment in the sender of the message. Depending on the source, the message will either take the central route where the information is processed and elaborated on, which might in turn affect the behavior of the person. Not unlike the Learning hierarchy proposed by Ray et al. (1973, p.151) or the message could take the peripheral route, where the person will use peripheral cues in order to help to make up the mind of how to think about the object. This route is usually taken when the receiver does not care for, or hold much trust in the source of the message. During this route the behavior stays the same, however, this is a chance for the attitude towards the object to change. Much like the Low involvement hierarchy proposed by Krugman (1965, p.349-356) the ultimate goal is not to change the attitude, but it comes as a side effect of other things. What differs them is that in the peripheral route the consumer is not influenced by his or her own behavior, but rather other cues around him or her, that can help to understand if the object would fit into the life, thereby changing attitude.

## 2.3 Group Identification

Baumeister & Leary (1995, p.520-522) proposed in their research that social belongingness is not a mere want, but an actual need for human beings. They argue that this need should definitely not be taken lightly, rather be seen as one of our fundamental needs in order to survive. Their research showcased a willingness to attach to other people, independent on how little they actually had in common. Continuing in this vain Van Beest et al. (2011, p.11-12) researched the effect of ostracism between people. The basic idea for their test were to have the subjects 'playing' a game on a computer, where a bomb is passed around the subjects, however, one of them is ostracized, and the effects on their feelings are studied. Even in this purely theoretical setting people were found to be hurt by not being included in the group. The need of social belongingness was greater than the need for survival according to their tests.

This need to belong to a social group has deeper consequences in the human mind than just categorizing in- and out-groups. Turner (1991, p.5-6) distinguishes between different reference groups that the human mind divides people into. He argues that these reference groups are significant in the formation of a person's attitude towards objects. These groups help people to evaluate and compare things around them. As has been briefly touched upon in the introduction, there is a distinct difference between positive and negative reference groups, which a person could either identify with, or disidentify with.

Englis & Solomon (1995, p.17) distinguishes between three general categories of reference groups. First there is the aspirational reference group. This is the group that the consumer wants to be a part of, but is still not considered, either by him/her self, or others, as an in-group member. Dolich (1969, p.84) argues that if members in a group, or the values in that group, is perceived as positive or in congruence with the personal identity, that group will become more attractive to belong to. Such a perceived belongingness could have spillover effects and actually help the person gain a greater understanding of his or her self-concept. The second type is called the avoidance reference group, which is a group that the person itself has rejected. This reference group falls on the negative side of the concept of reference groups, as described by Turner (1991, p.6). This topic is something that Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406-407) delved deeper into and concluded that one reason for disidentifying with one group, thereby rejecting their inherent values, could be to showcases the individuals' uniqueness. In another research White & Dahl (2007, p.533) they distinguish between dissociative groups and out-groups. Whereas an out-group is merely a group that the consumer in not a part of, the dissociative group is rather a group which the consumer does not want to be a part of. The third type is simply called the membership group, and refers to the actual group the individual is a part of as of that moment (Turner, 1991, p.6).

Even though reference groups may have positive aspects to it, such as the previously discussed strengthening of the self-concept, as well as the creation of loyal brand community, it is not in the focus for this report. As this research is looking at negative aspects of branding, the negative effects of reference groups should be in focus.

The disidentification of reference groups has been researched extensively throughout the years. One such research was done by White & Dahl (2006) where they investigated how negative reference groups may influence buying behavior. Their findings suggest that the want to not be a part of one certain group could play a big role, and influence to a great degree, how people consume. In another research by White & Dahl (2007, p.533) they concluded that dissociative reference group might change consumers buying patterns in order to avoid negative brand association. Their findings seem to go hand in hand with the findings of Lee et al. (2009a, p.173-174) where they saw that customers are looking to distance themselves from certain negative associations, not just to showcase to others what they are not, but also showcase to themselves what they actually are, or aspire to be.

In their research Escalas & Solomon (1995, p.23-24) discuss the negative effects of the avoidance groups. Their findings showed that these negative reference groups are often mere stereotypes of what the current membership group believes them to be. One strong determinator for how a consumer thinks about a specific brand or group seems to be the level of congruence in the symbolism between the consumer and its group. If the consumer believes that the brand symbolizes something desirable he or she will be positive, but if the brand symbolizes something negative, that could become such a brand or group that the consumer wants to disidentify with (Esclas & Bettman, 2005, p. 388). Something that is further argued for by Bhattacharya & Sen (2003, p.86) where their findings seem to suggest that customers avoid certain brands not only because they want to strengthen their self concept, but also finding a connection with an anti-brand community.

## 2.4 The Self identity

### *2.4.1 Constituent of the Self*

As discussed in the introduction, the concept of the self is not recent. This topic can be found in documents that were written almost two centuries ago. Since then many scholars dedicated themselves in exploring and debating this area. In a broad way, the self can be defined as "*what one is aware of, one's attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and evaluation of oneself as an object*" (Grubb & Grathewohl, 1967, p. 24) but when analyzed more deeply, the self is constituted of the four sub-divisions, the material self, the social self, the spiritual self and the pure Ego (James, 1992, p. 188).

The material self goes beyond the physical body, which represents the majority of this self, but there is more to it. Clothing, family and one's home also affect and helps to define our Selves, James (1992, p.188-189) wrote that "*We all have a blind impulse to watch over our body, to deck it with clothing of an ornamental sort, to cherish parents, wife and babes, and to find for ourselves a home of our own which we may live in and improve".*

Clothing and family is an important part of the material self, these items are not a part of an individual's body but still felt as such, this phenomenon is defined as the extended self (Preliger, 1959, cited in Belk 1988, p.140-141). Clothing falls into the category of commodities and goods, and today there is a new understanding that the concept of goods goes beyond the physical benefit. Goods can also work as symbols, things which stand for or express something else. A symbol must mean something to a group of person, doesn't matter if it is only two or an entire society. The essence of an object lies in the relationship between the purchaser and the object; it does not lie in the object itself (Grubb & Grathewohl, 1967, p. 24-25).

Furthermore, experiments by Rucker & Galinsky (2009, p.264-265) concluded that the objects of desire that people utilize to extend their own sense of self are often tied to perceived power. If a person perceives that a product or a brand can help to increase perceived power or wealth of that person, that object will become more desirable. Their experiments showcased how perceived powerlessness can impact how people consume, in order to extend their self to showcase certain values with themselves.

The social self is defined by James (1992, p.189) as "*the recognition which he [man] gets from his mates*". Human beings have a necessity to feel positively noticed by others, and the feeling of non-existence is painful. This was further developed and found to be true in the experiments on feelings of ostracism in people, done by Van Best et al. (2011, p.11-12). It is believed that this necessity for others recognition, this need to belong is felt by almost every human being, in all countries and all cultures (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 499). James (1992, p.189-191) argues that a person probably has multiple versions of social selves, every individual knows and interact with others, meaning that each one of this "others" will have a different mental view of this person. An individual present him- or herself in different ways depending on the group that they are interacting with. The social self that one present to a mother or a teacher will not be similar the social self presented to a close friend, and an attack to these different selves is an attack to the person itself.

An individual does not develop the self on his own, this happens through a process of social experiences, everyone desire to obtain a positive reaction from certain people, and as a result this person obtain some self enhancement. Meaning that the individual will shape his behavior in order to obtain a positive reaction. This interaction process between people does not happen by itself, but rather the environment and personal vestment also plays a significant role in this process. As a consequence individuals will try to control these elements in order to enhance their performance. (Grubb & Grathewohl, 1967, p. 24)

The spiritual self can be defined as the human subjective side, the most intimate part of the person. Thoughts can be found inside of the spiritual self, thoughts that can be classified as things that don't exist, such as pleasure, pain and emotions. Errors, fictitious ideas, abstract ideas and concepts can also be found in this part of the self. (James, 1992, p. 191-192)

The last element that makes up the self is the Pure Ego, this concept is inherently abstract, even James struggled with in providing one definition: *"...we may as well make up our minds in advance that it [approach to the pure ego] will fail to satisfy the majority of those whom it is addressed*" (James, 1992, p. 213). However even though the concept of Pure Ego is a part of the self-construct, it will not be further discussed in this research since it is too abstract to be measured practically in this thesis. For the purposes of this research the material, social and spiritual has been deemed enough to obtain tangible content.

### *2.4.2 Real, Ideal and Ought Self*

Higgins (1987, p. 320-321) argues that there are three different domains to the self, the Actual, Ideal and Ought self. The actual self, is the representation of the attributes a person think he or she possess. While the ideal self, represents the attributes that someone would like to have. Lastly the ought self, is the representation of the attributes that a person believe that he or she should, or ought to, possess. To better understand the difference between the ideal self and the ought self one should think about the figure of a "Hero", and the conflict between his personal interest [Ideal Self] and his Sense of Duty [Ought Self] (Higgins, 1987, p. 321).

## 2.5 Brand Image

### *2.5.1 Corporate Identity and Image*

In order to understand Brand Identity and Brand Image there first has to be an understanding of corporate identity and corporate image. These concepts in turn, are closely intertwined with the concept of corporate communication. According to Olins (1995, p.3) a company has to ask themselves four questions in order to understand their corporate identity; What is the company? What is the objective of the company? How does the company realise that objective? Where do the company want to go? Gray and Balmer (1998, p.697) argues that the corporate identity consists of four different dimensions; strategy, philosophy, culture and design. Once the company understands these different parts, they can begin to understand their own identity, and answer the types of questions discussed above. Olins (1995, p.20-26) distinguishes three types of structures in a company that helps define their identity even further. Endorsed, or multi-business identity, is a company that is build up by many different companies with their own identities, trying to create one spanning corporate identity. The second structure is called branded identity, which means that the same company owns and uses several different brands, each with their unique identity, but all under the same corporate identity. Lastly, he argues for the monolithic structure, where one identity goes through the entirety of the company and each of their brands.

However, knowing the corporate identity does not help with the corporate image, this concept refers to the mental image of the company, within a consumers mind (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p.696). Even though the ultimate goal is to get these two to aligned, this is not always the case. The mediator between the intended identity and the actual image of a company is the corporate communication, which includes a wide array of tools for the company to use, one of which is branding (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p.699). In a research by Gatewood et al. (1993, p.425) one of their findings was related to how different stakeholders are able to have a different image of the same company. This notion had previously been discussed by Abratt (1989, p.74) where he argues that different stakeholders will interact with different parts of the company, and therefore will create differing images in their own mind of the company. One of the many meanings for this is the challenge for a single company to try to convey the same image to a wide array of different stakeholders. He argues that since the image is not directly controllable, there is only one way of influencing it, and that is through adjustments in the corporate identity. Gatewood et al. (1993, p.425) discusses the reverse, instead of trying to convey the same image across all different groups, they argue that a company can convey differing images, depending on the recipient and thereby help their specific cause.

### *2.5.2 Brand Identity*

The need for distinguishing these types of corporate structures is important in order to understanding different brand identities, as the individual brands may not reflect the entirety of the corporate identity (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009, p.112). This is something that is discussed by Hatch & Schultz (2008, p.9) when it comes to the importance of distinguishing between corporate brands and product specific brands. There are differences in how the company manages them, and if not managed the right way, there might be a misalignment in how the company think the brand should fit into the business, and how it actually fit (Hatch & Schultz, 2008, p.12).

The brand identity is defined as a unique combination of three different components of that brand; the physical, social and mental components. The physical component refers to the external qualities of a brand, such as the symbols, packaging, stores, displays and offers, while the social component of the brand refers to the social membership or non-membership that comes with the brand. The last aspect, the mental component, refers to the values that are embedded in the brand itself. (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009, p.110-111)

In an effort to better understand how brands can be used, and their connection to customers, Kapferer (2008, p.183-186) developed 'The Brand identity Prism'. The model consists of a hexagonal prism that has six facets that represents different parts of what makes up brand. The model also utilizes two different dimensions, externalization and internalization. The two different dimensions try to separate which part of a brand is social and external at their very core, and which parts is internal, and are incorporate into the brand itself.

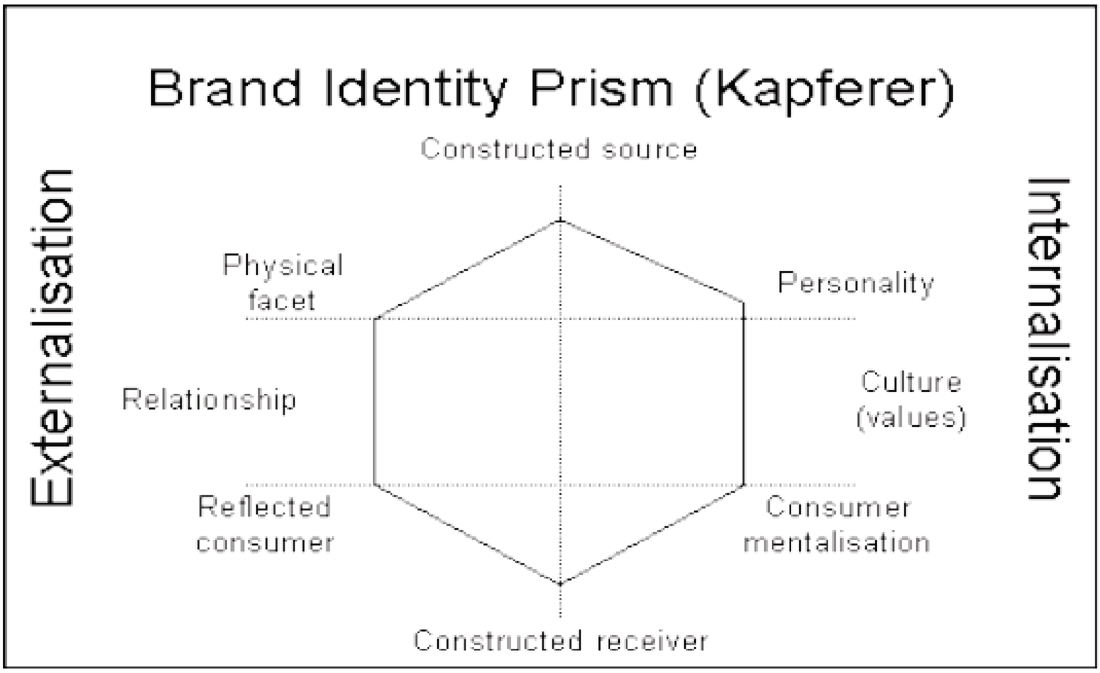


Figure 2.7 – Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008, p.183)

The first facet on the external side of the prism is the physical dimension of the brand, as was discussed by Franzen & Moriarty (2009, p.110) is the actual physical representation of the brand, such as products, packaging, and promotions. The second external facet is the relationship between the brand and its customers. Parallels can be drawn between this facet of the prism and the research by Muniz & O'Guinn (2001, p.426) where they explore brand community. Their research concludes that such a community is centered around the love one group of people hold for one brand. This relationship can in itself help to strengthen both the bond to the brand, and also to other community members. While the third facet on the same side refers to the reflection customers hold about the brand. In this case it refers to the brand image the customers holds in their mind.

On the internal side of the prism, the first facet refers to the personality of the brand. This part of the prism looks at the human personality traits that the company wants to convey as relevant for the brand. The second facet on the internal side is the culture aspect of the brand. Kapferer (2008, p.184) argues that the brand symbolizes a certain culture, however, here it is, once again, important to distinguish between the different corporate structures discussed by Olins (1995, p.20-26) that may inform the brand culture. A monolithic corporate structure would try to convey the corporate identity, and its culture, while for example a branded structure would let each brand have its own culture. The last facet on the identity prism is the self-image, which refers to how the customer looks at him or her own self through the brand. Dolich (1969, p.84) explains this through the self identification through congruence between the brand identity and the personal identity. He concludes that people tend to choose products that not only show who they are to others, but also helps the person itself to define who he or she is.

### *2.5.3 Symbolism of Brands*

The scientific field of studies of signs, is commonly referred to as Semiotics, coined by the American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce (Gripsrud, 2002, p.108). Pierce argues that there are three kinds of signs, likenesses, indications and symbols (Peirce, 1998, p.5). He goes on to explain the semiotic process as; "*A sign is a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to stand for or represent. This thing is called the object of the sign; the idea in the mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an interpretant of the sign."* (Peirce, 1998, p.13)

While the first two kinds of signs are elaborated on in his text, it is symbols that are of importance when talking about brands and their meaing. There have been several studies connecting Peirce's thoughts of symbolism to branding (Thellefsen & Sørensen, 2013; Santos, 2013). Thellefsen & Sørensen (2013, p.478) defines brands as symbol that is supposed to represent an object, which could be a company, a product or even a person. They continue to discuss how the meanings of the symbols are a co-creation between company and customers in an endless process.

While the traditional railway model (Gripsrud, 2002, p.99) assumes that there is a sender who sends a message to a recipient, Thellefsen & Sørensen (2013, p.479) argues that the model should be extended to include consumers' interaction with each other, and how that may alter the meaning of the symbol. Below follows a combination of the two models, where the gray square represent the original railway model by Gripsrud (2002,p.99), and the outer square represents the expanded model by Thellefsen & Sørensen (2013, p.479).

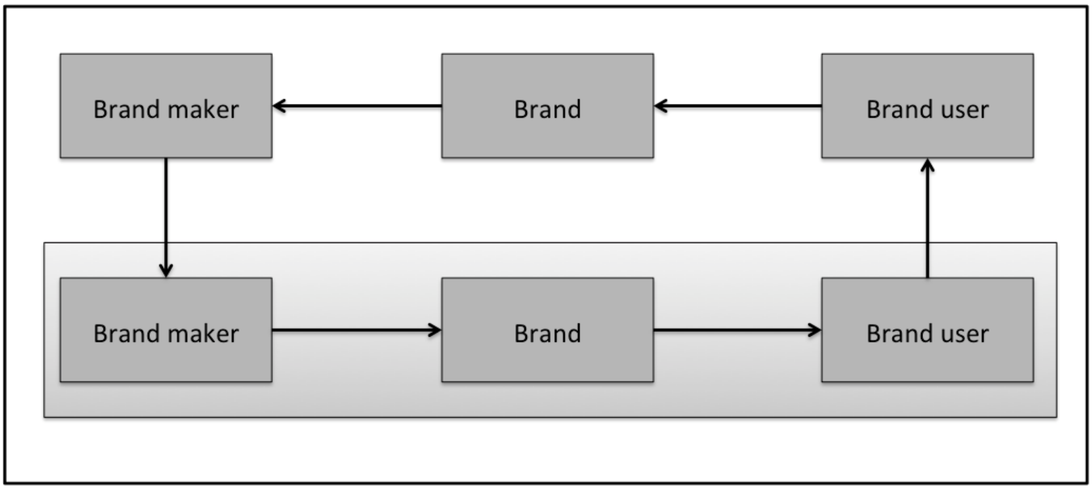


Figure 2.8 – Combination of original railway model, and the expanded model as illustrated by Karlsson & Rodrigues (2015)

As can be seen in the illustration, the original railway model is relatively straightforward. But the expanded model by Thellefsen & Sørensen (2013, p.479) assumes that the intended meaning might be altered through customer interaction. Therefore the company might have to adjust the new meaning to better fit with the intended message, and so it starts over again.

Grubb & Grathwohl (1967, p.24-25) also consider the fact that brands are symbols, and their essence is defined not by the object of the symbolism, but rather from the relation between the object and the individuals trying to classify it. Even though Santos (2013, p.514) is on a similar path, he discusses the possibility of a more elaborate system where signs, referents and responses are all closely interlinked and inform each other. However, there is a difference in the complexity of their models. In his model some semiotic messages of said symbol is influenced, not by its originator, but by other referents, such as customers, which may make an impact on the targeted subject of the sign. These create an interlinked web where it is hard to decode where and when the intended message could be changed.

Danesi (2013) on the other side explores how brands are semiotized through a series of interconnected activities from the company’s side. He argues that everything the company does from design, naming, logo creating, slogan and textualization comes together in the brand itself in order to create several different connotations that is used by the company to convey their message. In this type of theorizing he is not looking at the perceptual side of how the message could be changed by its receivers.

Gripsrud (2002, p.129-135) discusses the fact that different social contexts may influence how people interpret these connotations differently depending on for example country of origin or social groupings. Therefore it is incredibly hard to semiotize one brand in order to fit into all contexts, as humans tend to decode information differently depending on their individual surroundings and preferences. The scientific field of interpretation of messages is commonly known as hermeneutics. The ancient Greeks originally conceived this field in an effort to better understand and interpret the texts by Homer, but the term was first coined in 1654 by Dannhauer (Føllesdal, 2001, p.375).

However Grupsrud (2002, p.129) explains that the field is not only used on text anymore, but has also expanded into the interpretation of symbols as well. Føllesdal (2001, p.376) further explains that the difference in the old and new perspectives of hermeneutics lies in the subjective perspective of the interpreter and his or her subjective knowledge. In order to connect this to the area of branding Grupsrud (2002, p.129-135) argues that the receiver is not just simply receive a message from a company, but rather decode the sent message with his or her previously acquired knowledge about the subject. He argues that humans tend to bring their previous knowledge with them even in new encounters; thereby no two individuals will ever decode the same message in the same way.

# 3. Methodological Chapter

*This chapter starts out with a discussion about the authors epistemological and ontological viewpoints before moving on to the different methodological choices that have been made in order to make this study possible. Under each subheading there is a discussion about why the choice has been made, leading up to a decision. For visualization of the different choices, see Appendix 1.*

## 3.1 Research Philosophy

This section aims to discuss and further clarify the specific epistemological and ontological stances of the authors behind this thesis. As a result this is one of the few times where the authors steps out of the 'observer' role as silent authors and gives their explicit viewpoints in both these matters and thereby try to explain and argue for, their worldview.

The field of epistemology is concerned with what constitutes acceptable knowledge in a specific field of study (Saunders et al., 2007, p. 102). Audi (1998) goes to great lengths in his book to uncover and disclose the many variables that goes into this field. He argues that how humans define acceptable knowledge is influenced by many things. For example, there is outer perception, which relates to the actual physical reality and objects within it. Then there is the inner perception, which regards how we interpret information, and how that may change the knowledge that comes from an experience. Within the field of business research there are generally three different approaches considered within the field of epistemology; positivism, realism and interpretivism (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.15-20; Saunders et al., 2007, p.102-107).

Regarding the authors own epistemological stance for this research, after a great deal of careful consideration the chosen viewpoint has fallen towards critical realism, which is a specific, but its own, stance within the field of realism (Bhaskar, 1998, p.16-47). He argues that we can only understand experiences in the social world by understanding the social structures that invented them. His argument is that the objects in the world are independent of social constructs, but that social constructs helps to understand them. In a review about how critical realism influences case studies, Easton (2010, p.123) explains Bhaskars (1998) theory further, and how the critical realist believes that an experience is perceived in two steps. The first the actual sensation, and then a second, mental process begins, where the individual tries to understand what is going on. But as each person is different, there is the possibility to understand the sensation differently.

Ontology describes how and what constitutes the reality, if social entities actually can be considered objectively real, or just as a subjective feeling to its interpreter. The two polar opposites of this philosophical branch are objectivism and subjectivism (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.20-21; Saunders et al., 2007, p. 108-110). While objectivism argues that a social phenomena have an existence outside their social actors, the subjectivist view is its opposite and argues that all social phenomena exists solely in its interpreter. There are several points of views in between these two stances that argue to a varying degree for each concept (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.20-21; Saunders et al., 2007, p. 108-110).

However, the authors of this thesis personal stance on this topic are inclined to take a social constructionist stance. Originally conceived by Berger & Luckman (1966) this ontological stance argues that reality is something that is socially constructed and interchangeable between cultures and social groups. They argue that each human is constituted of its ‘here and now’ and that is as far as each persons reality goes. Their arguments build on the basis that we as humans in either a group or a society construct certain rules and norms, which we abide by, and interpret our own reality by. One of their main arguments is that the self is not given by birth, but rather formed by the family, and later in the society and different subgroups (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p.68-70) As different groups will have their own rules and norms, so would also their realities be interpreted differently from each others (Berger & Luckman,1966, p.67). Within these groups there becomes a set of roles, rules, norms, that are shared and experienced intersubjectively, and over time those become truths and institutionalized (Berger & Luckman,1966, p.87). They also argue that the first generation will be able to distinguish between these internalized rules and norms, however, for the next generation these will be an objective reality, and therefore they argue that once a norm is sedimented in a society, it becomes an objective truth, because everyone accepts it. Berger & Luckman (1966, p.102-103) also argues that these groups allows for subgroups to form, and the knowledge and reality in these will differ from the general knowledge. When talking about subgroups they also argue that people distinguish between in- and out-group members, and those new members have to re-learn some of their objective truths as they adapt to the new reality in one of these subgroups (Berger & Luckman,1966, p.161).

The authors of this thesis are aware that these two viewpoints could be seen as a bit contradictive. In fact, in his article, Easton (2010, p.123) is actually talking about this. He argues that while the critical realist accept the possibility of understanding and uncovering reality; the social constructionist would argue that it is impossible to understand reality. Because it differs between different actors, therefore one objective truth is not interesting; rather the focus would be on uncovering the social constructs that makes different truths. However, he also argues that both of these stances is build upon a basis of social constructs, and that the world will not have one objective reality (Easton, 2010, p.122).

Based on the theoretical framework chosen for this thesis, and the very nature of how feelings and attitudes can and is interpreted differently between people, the authors of this study argue that these two stances actually makes sense in this specific case. Even though this report is not looking into how different perceptual stimuli might change persons feelings, that same person would probably interpret the information differently than another, depending on a myriad of different factors, such as reference groups, self-identification, feelings about the object etc. Therefore confirming at least different social constructs and how they might differ.

## 3.2 Research Approach

The very first decision that has been made in order to realize this study is to do it in a qualitative manner. This has been deemed appropriate because it seem to be in line with the definitions given by Denzin & Lincoln (2005, p.10) as well as Merriam

(2009, p.14) as their description heavily relies on the fact that qualitative studies give a deeper understanding of the research topic. They both argue that the richness and deepness of the data collected, compared to a quantitative approach, gives the researcher a better chance of explaining a phenomena not just from the researchers point of view, but also from the respondents. Merriam (2009, p.14-15) further explains that a qualitative approach gives the researcher a chance to look at the different social constructs respondents' utilizes, and thereby gaining a more intimate knowledge about the phenomena in question. Denzin & Lincoln (2005, p.10) also argues that this intimate knowledge can help the researcher to look at 'soft' variables such as values, in order to gain an understanding of how these social constructs is created and given meaning.

After deciding to make the study qualitative, the next step is to decided how to conduct it. Up until the mid 1990's there were usually two ways to go about making research. Daft (1985, p.202) explained the two dispositions as deductive and inductive where the both were each others opposites. He explained that with a deductive approach the researcher stated out with a wide theoretical basis, and build his or her own study upon this. The inductive approach on the other hand, started with the findings, and build the theory up from that. Orton (1997) argued that there should be a middle ground between these two approaches, in order to facilitate the research that falls in neither of the categories. His study concluded with him proposing what he called 'iterative-grounded theory' whereby the researcher uses his or her previous knowledge to build a study on, and from the findings being able to make iterative improvements to the field in question. This had been discussed in part by Eisenhardt (1989, p.548) where she discussed how cases could researchers help build new theory where previous knowledge was either missing or not fitting. Another side of this story is the abductive school of thinking. This way was originally conceived by Pierce, but has gained more traction by researchers over the years (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p.169). This school of thought rests on the belief that older theory could help the researcher to gain new knowledge and from that construct new theories. The main difference between this and iterative-grounded theory, is the focus on creation of new theories with the help of older theories.

As for this research the decision has been made to do it using an abductive approach whereby previous knowledge from the fields of marketing, psychology and consumer psychology, could help to create a new framework in order to understand the phenomena of how Brand Hate could exist within non-customers.

## 3.3 Overview of Research Design

### *3.3.1 Research Design*

There are a few ways of designing a research, in order to make it answer the research question in the best possible manner. The researcher could either take a descriptive, explanatory or exploratory design in mind (Robson, 1993, p.42). The difference between them is regarding the purpose of the study. According to Robson (1993, p.42), a descriptive research tries to paint a clear picture of a person, event or situation. The explanatory research is concerned with finding casual relationships between variables. Lastly the exploratory research is concerned with gaining new insights to a specific phenomenon. In a slightly different approach to the same design issue, Malhotra & Birks (2006, p. 62-65) argues that there is usually two different routes for designing a research, either one design an exploratory or a conclusive research. He argues that the main difference between them two is either to gain insights to a specific issue, or test a hypothesis regarding the same. The exploratory gives deeper insight into the problem, while not giving a conclusive answer. Such a research could help further the understanding of a certain issue, while providing data about 'soft' variables such as feelings and values. This is something that the other types of research could not do, because they are not interested in finding the meaning. Although, Malhotra & Birks (2006, p. 62-65) argues that these two designs could actually be used in collaboration in order to gain an understanding, as well as finding relationships between different variables.

As for this research a lot of 'soft' variables are in play, and therefore it has been deemed as the most fitting choice to utilize the exploratory research design in order to gain as deep, and full knowledge possible about how Brand Hate can occur within non-customers.

### *3.3.2 Research Strategy*

| **Strategy** | **Form of Research** | **Requires Control of Behavioral Events?** | **Focuses on Contemporary Events?** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Experiment** | How, Why? | Yes | Yes |
| **Survey** | Who, What, Where, How many, How much? | No | Yes |
| **Archival Analysis** | Who, What, Where, How many, How much? | No | Yes/No |
| **History** | How, Why? | No | No |
| **Case Study** | How, Why? | No | Yes |

Table 3.1 – Relevant Situations for Different Research Strategies (Yin, 2003, p.5)

When it comes to the research strategy Yin (2003, p.1-17) argues that there are a lot of different ways to design the strategy of a research to fit the overall aim of the study depending on the type of research question posed. The table above gives an easy overlook of what kind of strategy to be used in order to answer what type of research question. After reviewing the different options for this thesis the most appropriate research strategy has been deemed to be the case study, in order to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena in question.

A case study is defined by Merriam (2009, p.40) as 'an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system'. Yin (1993, p.13) also uses a similar description but also focus on the fact that the case study investigates the phenomena within its real life context. He underlines that this is especially important when the boundaries between the phenomena and its context are not clearly defined. When considering a case study, the researcher also has to be well understood with the strengths and weaknesses with the format. There is the choice of making a single case study, or a multiple case study. Merriam (2009, p.49) argues that a multiple case study can help the researcher to construct better findings, as there will be more data from several different sources, as opposed to a single case study. As more data, from independent sources could help the external validity of the research itself and make the findings more generalizable. Yin (1993, p.53-55) argues along the same lines, and further expands on its implications on the study itself. The more data, from the more sources can give the research a higher credibility. However, he also argues that a single case study could generate theoretical knowledge, which might not be as generalize to a population (Yin, 1993, p.10).

As has previously been discussed, the field of Brand Hate has been somewhat underexplored up until now. Therefore it is in the best interest of this research to gather as much credible data as possible in order to construct as good knowledge as possible. As a result it has been deemed as an appropriate choice to utilize a multi-case study strategy with several sources of data, in order to strengthen the internal validity as much as possible. As for addressing the ethical aspects of the research, as this research is only focusing on the negative emotions surrounding branding, the authors are well aware that the study is skewed in its very essence. However, being aware that possible biases might come to play a role in how data is presented, the authors hope to avoid such problems by painting as a correct picture that can be assumed

## 3.4 Data Collection using Focus Groups

During the initial phase of the current research the authors have considered many forms of data collection methods in order to obtain the desired amount of data, as well as keeping the relevance high. At one point the main focus was directed at in-depth interviews. However, after careful consideration focus groups proved to be the most appropriate method, due to the fact that it is draw from three fundamental strengths of qualitative research methods, (1) exploration and discovery, (2) context and depth and (3) interpretation, this factors can be strongly explored because it create an environment of sharing and comparing (Morgan, 1998, p. 12).

"*Focus groups are group interviews. A moderator guides the interview while a small group discusses the topic that the interviewer raises. What the participants in the group say during their discussion are the essential data in focus groups. Typically, there are six to eight participants who comes from similar backgrounds*…" (Morgan, 1998, p.1)

Merriam (2009, p.94) adds that focus groups in its very core are exploring social constructs, as the information and knowledge gathered from the respondents gives a chance for the researcher to understand how the people sees the world. Thereby the choice of utilizing focus groups once again strengthens the choice of the ontological stance the authors have decided to take for this report. Merriam (2009, p.94) also adds that the best utilization for focus group topics are things that the respondents are encountering in their everyday life, and can easily understand or expand upon. Focus groups are a common tool when researchers want to learn more about people's behaviors and motivations. The participants are curious to know how other persons handle the same situation that they have, and why other do what they do.

But in many situation researches will discover that humans are not very logical and organized, it is common of the response “I really didn’t think about it. I just did it” (Morgan, 1998, p.58-59). Focus groups offer the researchers something that other methods cannot measure and that is the ability to see and observe how the respondents interact between each other, and how they construct collectively an line of thought.

With the development of the Internet, researchers are now able to operate focus groups in an online environment. It was thought that the visual anonymity and psychological distance of the online world could improve self-presentation to others, especially between persons that would hesitate in participating in a face-to-face focus group (Reid & Reid, 2005, p. 132). However, when the researchers compared online and face-to-face focus groups, the conclusion was that online based groups contribute less to the discussion when compared to a Face to face method, but there was no difference in the final amount of ideas generated, meaning that the online group contribution was no more relevant to the topic (Reid & Reid, 2005, p.154). It was also found that participants were more satisfied with a Face-to-Face method then an online one (Reid & Reid, 2005, p.157). As it stands, in this particular study it has been deemed as most appropriate to utilize Face-to-Face interviews, because most respondents have been in close geographical proximity to the researchers.

In order to guarantee a more accurate result the researcher need to define a number of focus groups. Generally one group is not enough in order to find enough data, but too many groups can be a waste of time. Calder (1997 cited in Bryman & Bell). Livingstone & Lunt (1994 cited in Bryman & Bell) concluded that the numbers of focus group should stop when theoretical saturation is reached, which means, when the researcher will be able to predict the responses of next group and little new information starts to appear. (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p. 507).

When respondents make inconsistent comments the researcher should not only take note of it, the person needs to be confronted and asked to elaborate on why the change of opinion. Vague comments should also be explored in depth, some words and phrases may sound obvious, but when are been used for a research the topic should be expanded. This has to be done during the focus group, and can later be helpful in the analysis part (Krueger, 1998, p. 46-47).

For this particular research it was decided to conduct two different focus groups. Two main sessions including a mix of men and women, from several different countries, all with one factor in common; their hate or dislike for certain brands. After the two main focus groups were conducted it was decided to conduct another, third group, this time as a control group. The control group would consist of people that previously did not fit the specific sample, because of their claims that they had no negative feelings towards any brands. The addition of this group was deemed interesting for two reasons. The first was to expand the pool of data, in line with the suggestions by Yin (1993, p.53-55) that the more independents sources of data a research has, the better it is for the external validity, and in the end help the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, after conducting the two sessions of haters it became apparent that feelings towards brands might lay dormant until a person is really confronted with it. With this as a basis third focus group was warranted by non-haters in order to see if they in fact did not hate any brands, or if their negative feelings might exist, deep down in their psyche.

## 3.5 Operationalization and Interview guide

*Below there are two different interview guides presented. Both guides have main questions, and if needed probing questions in order to let the respondents elaborate further if it is deemed needed. Furthermore, all questions are designed in order to correlate with a certain theory previously presented in the theoretical chapter, in order to ensure that the major themes are explored. It is important to note that the second interview guide was based upon the first, but tweaked in order to better fit with the non-hater sample.*

### 3.5.1 Interview with Brand Haters

| | **Question** | **Probing Question** | **Connection to theory** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **#1** | Is there any brand that you are currently not buying, but would one day like to become a customer to? | - What is it about these brands that you find attractive? | Connection to Reference groups (Englis & Solomon,1995) and Real and Ideal Self (Higgins 1987) |
| **#2** | Is there any brand that you are currently not buying, that you would never become a customer to? | - What is the critical component for your disliking?<br>- Looking at the different brands discussed here, did you come up with any new alternatives? | Connection to overall purpose of the thesis. |
| **#3** | How does your brand disliking present itself in your own opinion? | - Do you do something else than just avoiding the brand? | Connection to Brand Avoidance (Lee et al, 2009a) |
| **#4** | Did you form these negative feelings yourself, or did something or someone influence you? | | Connection to Attitude formation (Ray et al. 1973; Petty & Cacioppo (1986) |
| **#5** | Have you ever shared or received negative information about a brand? | - Why?<br>- How did you come in contact with it?<br>- Did it change your opinion? | Connection to Anti-Branding (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009) |
| **#6** | What do you think of when hearing about the brands you dislike or hate? | - After hearing everyone’s opinion, do you | Connection to Brand identity and brand symbolism |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | agree or disagree with someone? | |
| **#7** | Look back at the brands discussed, is there a certain group of people you associate with a certain brand? | - Do you see yourself as part of such a group? | Connection to Reference Groups (Englis & Solomon,1995; Dolich, 1969) |
| **#8** | Have you ever avoided a brand because of its customers? | - Which one?<br>- Why? | Connection to Group disidentification (White & Dahl 2007; Turner 1991) |
| **#9** | Of the brands discussed here, how do you perceive their advertising? | - What is the first word that comes to your mind when thinking about any of these brands? | Connection to Brand identity and Brand Symbolism (Kapferer 2008; Peirce, 1998) |
| **#10** | What are the main reasons for you to dislike a person? | | Connection to Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008) |
| **#11** | Have you ever avoided or started disliking someone because of his or her choice of brands? | | Connection to Group Identification (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) |

Table 3.2 – Brand Haters Interview Guide (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

### 3.5.2 Interview with control group

| | **Question** | **Probing Question** | **Connection to theory** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **#1** | Is there any brand that you are currently not buying, but would one day like to become a customer to? | - What is it about these brands that you find attractive? | Connection to Reference groups (Englis & Solomon,1995) and Real and Ideal Self (Higgins 1987) |
| **#2** | Is there any brand that you are currently not buying, that you would never become a customer to? | - What is the critical component for your disliking?<br>- Looking at the different brands discussed here, did you come up with any new alternatives? | Connection to overall purpose of the thesis. |
| **#3** | Do you ever avoid any brands? | | Connection to Brand Avoidance (Lee et al, 2009a) |
| **#4** | How do you form your opinion towards a brand? | Were you influence by | Connection to Attitude formation (Ray et al. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | something or someone? | 1973; Petty & Cacioppo (1986) |
| **#5** | Have you ever shared or received information about a brand? ( positive or negative ) | - Why?<br>- How did you come in contact with it?<br>- Did it change your opinion? | Connection to Anti-Branding (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009) and attitude |
| **#6** | Look back at the brands discussed, is there a certain group of people you associate with a certain brand? | - Do you see yourself as part of such a group? | Connection to Reference Groups (Englis & Solomon,1995; Dolich, 1969) |
| **#7** | Have you ever avoided or purchased a brand because of its customers? | - Which one?<br>- Why? | Connection to Group disidentification (White & Dahl 2007; Turner 1991) and Reference groups |
| **#8** | Of the brands discussed here, how do you perceive their advertising? | What is the first word that comes to your mind when thinking about any of these brands? | Connection to Brand identity and Brand Symbolism (Kapferer 2008; Peirce, 1998) |
| **#9** | What are the main reasons for you to dislike a person? | | Connection to Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008) |
| **#10** | Have you ever started liking or disliking someone because of his or her choice of brands? | | Connection to Group Identification (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) |

Table 3.3 – Control Group Interview Guide (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

## 3.6 Population and Sample

When looking at the population and sample frame for any study it is important for the researchers to be as clear as possible with how and why the specific sample has been deemed as the most appropriate. Merriam (2009, p.94) argues that when conducting focus groups it is in the researchers interest to gain as an informed or specific set of respondents' possible. This sampling method has many names, purposeful, holistic or judgment sampling is a few of these names. Judgment sample is a common sampling method and it is characterized by researchers actively selecting a part of the population, which they perceive to have the knowledge needed. Based on the researchers knowledge of a specific area, variables that will influence one's response should be raised; this is considered an intellectual strategy instead of a simple demographic separation. (Marshall, 1996, p.523)

In order to decide the population and sample for this particular study, the authors have looked at a research written by Walker (2001) where he looked at which people are most likely to complain. His research was a compilation of several other authors describing a demographic age span, between 25-34 years old as the most likely to voice their negative opinions. Furthermore, his report also stated that the complainers also were highly educated and with a higher average income than the general population. With this as a basis, students at Umeå University seem to fit quite well into at least a few of these categories. Even though the income of an average student does not coincide with one of the requirements, the authors argue that they do have future possibilities of reaching above average income. In line with the findings from Singh (1990, p. 61) the complaints within this group of people is higher because they have more access to information and self-confidence to deal with problems in the marketplace, and they tend to see less risk of embarrassment when complaining. As a result of these findings it has been deemed as appropriate to utilize Umeå University's pool of students as the population.

When it comes down to the sampling process a few requirements have been made in order to find people the authors believe could contribute with relevant data.

- The first requirement that was set up in order to find respondents was to eliminate people from the population that claimed that they did not have any feelings, positive or negative, towards brands. However, this decision was later revised in order to find people for the control group.

- The next step that had to be taken was weed out people with casual negative feelings towards brands, and find people that feel extreme negative affections towards certain brands. This was deemed necessary in order to find people who could give a deeper psychological reasoning for their dislike. One disclaimer that should be noted here is the extreme negative connotations that come with the word 'hate'. In order to work around this it was deemed appropriate to include people who dislike as well as hate brands.

- The third and last step was to make sure that these people had little or no experience with the brands in question, in order to fulfill the research purpose.

In total 68 subjects were approached to take part in the focus groups. The contact was made through a variety of different channels, such as social media, phone calls and face-to-face meetings. Out of the entire selection, 19 people, or 28 percent, agreed to participate. These people were told the subject of the thesis, and that it was examining their feelings towards brands they did not like but were not customers to.

## 3.7 Data Analysis Method

When the data collection is done, the very first step in the analysis process is to transcribe what has been said during the focus groups (Kinze, 1998, p.85). The transcription process is divided into a few steps in order to make it easier for the researcher to separate relevant from irrelevant information.

The first step is to group the answers together into separate topics for each group, in order to find larger themes that were discussed during the focus groups. The second step is to compile the answers into one cohesive text that could act as a template for the researcher to extract differences and similarities between groups. The third step is to identify these differences or similarities, which could be common themes, trends or patterns, or lack thereof, between the groups. These in turn should provide meaningful context to what has been discussed. Merriam (2009, p.173-174) adds that this process should be done as quickly as possible in order to keep the information 'fresh' in the memory, and thereby not diluting the information.

When it comes to the actual process of analyzing, Casey (1998, p.80-85) argues that following questions should run through the researchers head in order to help finding above mentioned themes, trends or patterns.

- What are people saying?
- What are people feeling?
- What is really important?
- What are the themes?
- How do the groups compare?
- Are there any gems or bits of wisdom that were said only once but deserve to be noted?
- Which quotes really give the essence of the conversation?

As for this research, in order to identify themes amongst the immense load of data that the three focus group generated, a system was set in place where the comments of the respondents were categorized in one of five different topics, the same topics that was used in the theoretical chapter; Negative Aspects of brands, Attitude and Attitude Formation, Group Identification, Self identity and lastly Brand Image.

By looking at similarities and differences amongst the answers in each category, a pattern soon emerged, important and noteworthy information was discovered amongst the different answers. Even though only three focus groups were held, the authors would argue that data saturation was reached to some extent, as a majority of the themes was evident throughout all three focus groups. The results of this pattern matching system are presented in the next chapter with discussions under each subheading.

## 3.8 Validity and Reliability

When discussing validity there is a need to distinguish between two different types, internal and external validity of the report (Merriam, 2009, p. 213-228). Internal validity concerns how well the findings in the study match reality (Merriam, 2009, p.213). However, as Guba & Lincoln (2004, p. 205) argue, there is an important discussion to be had about what reality actually means. They argue that reality is not the same as objectivity, because there is a philosophical reason for reality to be different to different people. Take for example the ideas presented by Berger & Luckman (1966) about social constructionism and insert them into a discussion about reality and one can see how reality might change depending on the person. Another perspective of reality could be seen in the works by Bhaskar (1998) and through the critical realist, who would see one distinct objective reality, with social constructions that helps it makes sense. As a result of the difficulties with assessing one objective reality, validity should be seen as a goal rather than a product (Merriam, 2009, p.

214). In this study validity is most likely referring to how well the findings match our subjects' constructs of reality. This is also a part of the discussion by Guba & Lincoln, 2004, p.205-206) where they discuss how the term validity also includes how people will interpret the results. If the study holds a good internal validity they argue that the results will not be as susceptible to misinterpretation. A way of ensuring internal validity for the researcher is to utilize triangulation whereby for example the researcher tries to get data from multiple sources, utilize different research methods as well as using the number of researcher to the advantage of the study to make sure that the data is as representable as possible (Merriam, 2009, p.215).

External validity on the other hand regards how the findings of one study might be generalized to other settings (Merriam, 2009, p.223). However, as is pointed out by Guba & Lincoln (1981, p.115) "*there is no point in asking whether meaningless information has any general applicability*". In other words, external validity is useless of the study does not have internal validity to back up its findings. This topic has already been touched upon within the discussion of case studies. The more data, and from multiple sources, a researcher have, the more likely it is for that data to be generalizable. However, in the context of the chosen ontological stance, generalizability can be seen as hard to achieve as the authors argues for a reality built upon social constructs that differs between groups of people. Therefore generalizing results would become a hard task, since one truth is probably not going to fit all groups construct of reality. As for this study, the approach of a multi case study with several sources of data should provide a higher external validity to some extent. But as been discussed in lengths above, the research ontology has also allowed the authors to understand that the generalizability of the findings is limited.

Lastly there has to be a discussion regarding reliability of the study. This concept refers to whether or not the study itself can be replicated. However, as Merriam (2009, p. 220) argues, this concept is a problem within the social sciences because human behavior is never static. As Berger & Luckman (1966) would have argued, reality, norms and rules are ever changing between people and settings. Therefore the concept of reliability becomes hard to argue for.

What the researchers could do in order to ensure a higher reliability is to account for all the steps taken in the research in order for following researchers to follow these steps. As for this research, this methodology chapter has been designed and written as detailed as possible in order to account for all the choices and procedures that has been taken in order to arrive to the final formulation of the thesis.

## 3.9 Ethical Concerns

*The following topics were points of concern when developing the framework for this thesis. As such, the authors believe it is of importance that these ethical concerns should be discussed in order for complete transparency of the process.*

One very important ethical aspect that should not be glared by when conducting a focus group is for the researchers to offer the participants an oral summary of the discussion. This summary is an opportunity for the participants to verify and tell the researcher if everything is has been understood correctly and no misinterpretations were done, as well as add things that may have been overlooked (Krueger, 1998, p. 49). This is done in order for the researchers to not skew and misinterpret anything that has been said during the focus group. This was done in all three focus groups in order to give the possibility for the respondents to fill in any blank holes. As it were, the summaries in all three cases were deemed by the respondents as correct, however, in one instance the respondents added a few thought after the official ending of the session itself. These facts were shared with everyone in the room, and as such were decided to be included in the data set.

When it comes to the sample frame for this thesis, it is intentionally skewed in order to find people who hate or dislike brands. This means that the data coming from such participants should not be seen as conclusive, as it is decidedly one sided.

Merriam (2009, p. 52) argues that with the rich amount of data that comes with a case study, there is the possibility for the researcher to skew the results into one direction, and leave other aspects unexplored in order to further his or her objectives. He argues that both the reader, and the researcher have to be aware of the possible ethical pitfalls that may come from such a study. By being aware of this possible pitfall, the researchers have tried to be as objective as possible in order to present the data in a fair and neutral way.

## 3.10 Literature Selection Process

*Last but not least there is a need for transparency regarding the literature selected for use in this thesis. During the process of writing the authors have been intentionally critical towards the sources used. Many of the concepts and sources might at first glance seem to be dated, however, they are well-established theories and authors within their respective fields. As a result of their credibility they are repeatedly mentioned throughout the academic world.*

### 3.10.1 Theoretical Framework

The process of finding the literature started with utilizing the database EBSCO and Google Scholar, which is both reliable sources when it comes to find academically approved material. Since this thesis is inspired by a vast variety of different academic fields, the keywords used were specifically tailored to the respective field.

When looking for material within the respective fields different keywords were used:

- **Negative Aspects of brands**; *Anti-Branding, Brand Hate, Online Hate, Brand Avoidance, Identity Avoidance, Moral Avoidance*
- **Attitudes and Attitude Formation**; *Functions of Attitudes, The Three-order Hierarchy model, Elaboration Likelihood Model*
- **Group Identification**; *Social Belongingness, Reference Groups, Disidentification*
- **Self**; *Constituents of the Self, Material Self, Self Identity, Extended Self*, Real and Ideal Self
- **Branding Image**; *Brand Love, Brand Hate, Brand Image, Brand Identity, Symbolism of Brands*

After finding articles in each field, an assessment process started where each article was critically assessed in order to know that the information was relevant. The first step in this process was to look the journal or place of publication up in Ulrichsweb in order to see that the article was published in a peer-reviewed outlet. This was done to enhance the credibility of the material in the selected articles, as each of these publications are crucially assessing the articles up for publication. Another step that was taken, was to examine how well-established the authors were in their respective fields. This was done through Google Scholar, where number of citations for each article was clarified. This could also be assessed when reading the articles themselves, as well-established authors and concepts were continually mentioned in several different sources.

### 3.10.2 Methodology

The process of finding the literature started with utilizing the database EBSCO and Google Scholar, which is both reliable sources when it comes to find academically approved material. During these process methodological books proved to be more useful, as such, not as many articles were used. However, the books in question were found through the same channels.

When looking for material within the respective fields different keywords were used:

- **Research Philosophy**; *Epistemology, Ontology, Acceptable Knowledge, Critical Realism, Social Constructionism*
- **Research Approach**; *Qualitative Studies, Abductive*
- **Overview of Research Design**; *Exploratory Research, Case Study, Multiple Case Studies*
- **Data Collection**; *Data Collection Methods, Focus Groups, Online and Face to Face Focus Groups*
- **Sampling**; *Judgment Sampling, Sample Selection*
- **Data Analysis Method**; *Qualitative Data Analysis Methods, Focus Group Analysis, Transcribing Focus Groups*
- **Validity and Reliability**; *Internal Validity, External Validity, Generalizability, Reliability*

The sources that were ultimately used in this chapter went through a similar process of assessment as the ones in the theoretical chapter. Some of the sources used does have a substantial age, however they are still considered to be relevant and well-established.

# 4. Results from the Focus Groups

*This chapter is entirely devoted to presenting the findings from the different focus groups held. Instead of presenting each question, the chapter is divided through the broader themes that go throughout the thesis itself. Each subheading is effectively a summary, as these are not the full transcripts, individual quotes and or minor topics may have been overlooked, but not deleted or forgotten.*

## 4.1 Descriptive information about the informants

### *4.1.1 First Focus Group (Brand Haters)*

The first focus group was held on the 14th of April 2015 with in total seven participants as could be seen by the anonymous participant list presented below. The runtime for the session was approximately 90 minutes with about ten set aside to introduce the participants to how the procedure of a focus group is done. The entire session was audio recorded with the acceptance of all the respondents.

| Participant Number | Age | Nationality | Brand(s) Hated |
|---|---|---|---|
| Man #1 | 26 | Sweden | Macintosh |
| Man #2 | 26 | Pakistan | Apple |
| Man #3 | 22 | Sweden | Google |
| Man #4 | 24 | Sweden | LO |
| Woman #1 | 24 | Sweden | Fjällräven Konken |
| Woman #2 | 25 | Canada | Ed Hardy, Michael Kors |
| Woman #3 | 30 | Sweden | Ralph Lauren |

Table 4.1 First Focus Group Participants (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

### *4.1.2 Second Focus Group (Brand Haters)*

The second focus group was held on the 16th of April 2015 with in total eight participants as could be seen by the anonymous participant list presented below. The runtime for the session was approximately 70 minutes with about ten set aside to introduce the participants to how the procedure of a focus group is done. The entire session was audio recorded with the acceptance of all the respondents.

| Participant Number | Age | Nationality | Brand(s) Hated |
|---|---|---|---|
| Man #5 | 25 | Sweden | Elitsinglar |
| Man #6 | 23 | Sweden | Apple, Lidl |
| Woman #4 | 25 | Italy | Lancôme, Prada |
| Woman #5 | 22 | Ireland | Haribo |
| Woman #6 | 24 | Sweden | Nestle |
| Woman #7 | 25 | Sweden | Smsa Låna |
| Woman #8 | 24 | Sweden | H&M |
| Woman #9 | 22 | Spain | Desigual |

Table 4.2 Second Focus Group Participants (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

### *4.1.3 Third Focus Group (Control Group)*

The third focus group was held on the 21st of April 2015 with in total four participants as could be seen by the anonymous participant list presented below. This group was the control-group with participants that did not feel any strong or extreme negative feelings towards brands. As with the two previous focus groups the runtime for the session was approximately 70 minutes with about ten set aside to introduce the participants to how the procedure of a focus group is done. The entire session was audio recorded with the acceptance of all the respondents.

| Participant Number | Age | Nationality | Brand(s) Hated |
|---|---|---|---|
| Man #7 | 27 | Sweden | N/A |
| Man #8 | 26 | Germany | N/A |
| Man #9 | 24 | The Netherlands | N/A |
| Woman #10 | 22 | Sweden | N/A |

Table 4.3 Third Focus Group Participants (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

### *4.1.3 Brands that were discussed in focus groups (All three)*

| **Participant** | **Positive Brands** | **Negative Brands** |
|---|---|---|
| **Man #1** | COOP | Macintosh |
| **Man #2** | Android | Apple |
| **Man #3** | Apple | Google |
| **Man #4** | BMW/Audi | LO, Konken, Coop |
| **Man #5** | Sustainable Brands | Elitsinglar |
| **Man #6** | German Luxury Cars | Apple, Lidl |
| **Man #7** | Samsung | Lidl |
| **Man #8** | Audi | Teleshoping brands |
| **Man #9** | Alianware | Haribo |
| **Woman #1** | Nike | Fjällräven Konken |
| **Woman #2** | Kate Spade | Ed Hardy, Michael Kors |
| **Woman #3** | N/A | Ralph Lauren |
| **Woman #4** | N/A | Lancôme, Prada, Ferragamo |
| **Woman #5** | Apple, GAP | Haribo |
| **Woman #6** | N/A | Nestle |
| **Woman #7** | N/A | Ferrari, Smsa Låna |
| **Woman #8** | Sustainable Brands | H&M |
| **Woman #9** | N/A | Desigual |
| **Woman #10** | Apple | Lidl |

Table 4.4 - Brands that were discussed during the focus groups (Karlsson & Rodrigues, 2015)

## 4.2 Negative Aspects of Brands

When talking about the negative aspects of brands, both groups filled with haters had a lot of emotions and opinions to discuss. As a result of the purposive sampling process the researchers already had knowledge of the brand of disliking for each respondent. The range of brands associated with negative feelings was very wide, from political movements such as LO, the biggest Union in Sweden, to clothing brands such as Ed Hardy and technology companies such as Apple. Even though every participant in these two focus groups had one or several brands that they had these negative feelings towards, it has to be noted that not everyone seemed to be equally hateful towards their brand of choice.

LO was one of the brands where the participant did not just dislike it, but seemed to hate the entire institution and everything they stood for, and even went to such great lengths so to call them 'parasites'.

Other brands, such as H&M had a completely different type of hate. Whereas the person who hated LO with all of their heart, there was another person who claimed that she had a love-hate relationship with H&M. She was conflicted because she really disliked the brand on the basis of their, in her words, unethical production process. On the other side, as a student she has to come to terms with the fact that her budget is limited, and their stores offer affordable clothes. Therefore she claimed there was a conflict in her mind, any time she was looking for clothes.

In a lot of the other brands discussed, such as Elitsinglar (dating website for self described 'elites'), Fjällräven Konken (brand of outdoor bags), and Ed Hardy (clothing brand) the Brand Hate did not seem to go to such extreme lengths. Many times the respondents were aware of the initial cause of their hate, and it was very seldom in themselves, rather in third parties, which will be discussed further in following subchapters. One important note that was made during the first group of Brand Haters was how one girl stated that she used to have stronger feelings towards her hated brand when she was in her teenage years, but as she had come to grow and develop her mind, some of this hate had faded slightly.

In both groups of haters there was a lengthy discussion about how the respondents acted towards these objects of hate. First of all, almost everyone claimed that they, as far as it was possible, were trying to personally avoid the brands of dislike. In some cases that was not possible however, for example in the case of LO, where the participant once was hassled by their represents in his workplace. A big chunk of the discussion surrounding brand avoidance however, will be discussed below in the group identification subheading. As many of the participants were concluding, some brands were possible to avoid personally, but they were represented in the social surroundings of these people, and thereby impossible to avoid altogether.

Secondly, when the topic of a more active anti-behavior was discussed, all of the participants admitted that they had been a part of spreading negative information about the brands they disliked. For some of them this had stopped at badmouthing the company to their friends. However, other people, such as the woman who hated H&M had campaigned against the brand, in order to enlighten other people about the information that they did not like. Nevertheless, none of the participants had ever been a part of, or even seen any anti-branding sites or groups.

After discussing about the brands the participants hated, the mediator asked for them to recall all the brands mentioned in the group and say the first thing or word that came to their minds, here are a few responses in relation to the brand mentioned by the person.

[Michael Kors and Ed Hardy] "Really bad spray tans…" Woman #2

[Manchester United] "Assholes. They are more show-offs." Man # 2

[LO] "Yeah, I will say it, Parasites." Man #4

[Haribo] "No thank you." Woman #5

None of the participants gave a neutral response, everyone attacked the hated brand. It is important to note that the participants had no difficulties responding to the questions, the answer came in a natural way, without the need of much thinking. Almost all participants responded in a short manner, only a few felt the necessity to elaborate their answers.

However, as expected with the control group, there were no real strong negative feelings towards one single brand. The participants argued that they either could not be bothered with forming a negative opinion, or that it simply did not interest them to complain or put down any effort to really hate or dislike something they did not have a relationship with.

## 4.3 Attitudes and Attitude Formation

One of the biggest differences between the two groups of Brand Haters was seen through the contrast between how the groups discussed disliking people rather than brands. All three groups were fairly similar regarding the attributes that make them dislike a person, arrogance, unethical behavior, and differing values or opinions were mentioned. However, when asked if they have ever started disliking a person due to his or her brand choices there were two completely different reactions. While everybody on the first focus group claimed that they had, everybody in the second focus group claimed that they had never done that distinction. As one woman in group one put it:

"If they have brands I don't like I see them as representing the values I don't like. Like what they find positive I usually find negative. Even though that might not be true, that is how I judge them."
Woman #2

However, even though the respondents did judge people based on their brands, it could probably not be seen as blind hatred. Another girl from the first group of haters added as a counterweight to the above statement:

> "I think that is true, I think it definitely says something about that person but at the same time I really believe that it is not black and white and I think that everyone has nuances /…/ …it can say something about some of their values, but not everything."
> Woman #1

When the discussion turned towards how these negative feelings towards the brands had occurred there were a few different opinions. Some of the respondents were arguing that it was all their own doing; they have formed their own opinions, independently from other people. In one of the groups the family was cited as a primary source of influence on their negative feelings, especially in regards to political feelings. In the second group of haters the family was much less discussed, rather these people cited their close friends as primary influencers of negative feelings towards brands. In congruence with the second group of haters, the same discussion with the control group centered around close friends as a big source of influence. The arguments were made that it is in close friends interest to help each other out and provide positive as well as negative information about brands and products. The control group also argued that such information is seen as more reliable than many other forms of information, because friends does not have a vested interest in making each other choosing the 'wrong' brand, but other parties might have that interest in mind.

There were some differing opinions about whether the respondents shared negative information about the brands they hated or disliked. In one of the groups of haters they claimed that negative information is shared more often than positive information, due to the fact that it was more interesting to hear, and know about. The first group of haters concluded that it was beneficial to share negative information about brands with people who agreed with this opinion:

> "I guess that people pass along information that confirms your own world view"
> Man#1

While this reasoning found a consensus in the first group of haters, the second group of haters went in a slightly different direction. They argued that one may share negative information with close friends, but with some limitations due to the fear of been seem as an annoying person:

"Don't you also feel like you can't do that much as well [talking about sharing negative information], because then you end up looking like an ass or something, because like everybody else likes it so why should I try to bring down their happiness about a product that I hate, like, there is no real point doing that"
Man #6

Whilst there were some differences between the three groups, there were also some similarities. Both groups of haters agreed that competition between two camps was a key factor for their dislike for a brand. By liking, or using brands from one camp, it was seen as a first point of influence in order to disliking the other camp. This was also a topic that was discussed during the control group, where they largely agreed, but expanded the discussion by arguing that this phenomena is extremely visible on the Internet:

"…sometimes on the Internet, you just read some comments, and you can often detect some kind of, you know, brand loving or brand hating…"
Man #8

In congruence with this discussion was a discussion about being influenced by what others might think of ones choices of brands. One woman from the group of haters argued the fact that hating a brand could be related to self-security, because she felt it could be risky to show others who they might be as a person. Doing so could lead other people to judge ones self, based upon their choice of brands. Similar topics was touched upon, but not further developed in the control group, as they argued that they might be influenced by others thoughts, but ultimately tried to not let other peoples judgment impact their buying behavior.

Along this discussion in the second focus group with haters, the respondents reached a consensus that some brands that are more acceptable to hate then others. Brands that were used as examples were Macintosh and Haribo. It was concluded that Macintosh products were more acceptable to hate or dislike in comparison to Haribo, mainly because the Apple users in the room said there were used to hear critic regarding Apple. However the Haribo users reacted with surprise when one participant expressed her dislike for the brand. From that sprang a discussion of how certain brands, for example McDonalds were 'okay' and easy to hate for many people.

## 4.4 Group Identification

When the topic of discussion turned towards group identification there were a few interesting similarities and differences between the two groups of haters. Both groups agreed on the fact that they do have some stereotypes that exemplifies the typical customers of their specific brands. Ed Hardy and Michael Kors were two such brand where the respondent had a very visceral and specific stereotype of people associated with the brand, in her own words:

"Like the people who wear Ed Hardy, the guys wear Ed Hardy and the girls wear Michael Kors. I have really negative experiences with those people so I associate the brands with those terrible people/… / Ed Hardy, I imagine like the guys in Jersey Shore, like big, douche, muscle heads, who are womanizers and corrupt and arrogant assholes. And then with Michael Kors I imagine like the Kardashian type of girls that are again arrogant, and shallow, do things for attention…"
Woman #2

Not every brand had such strong negative stereotypes, but almost every brand discussed did come with some kind of negative stereotype for the person who disliked the brand itself. For example, when the stereotypes of Apple customers came up in one of the two groups of haters:

"I would say that is people that, in this industry is easy to fool, the ones that cares about looks, the ones that could, if they would, was to buy a dog would by a small Chihuahua or something, because it fits in a bag or whatever, and yeah people that care more about surface that content."
Man #6

One of the more unexpected findings from the control group came tied to the discussion about stereotypes to certain brands. Even though this group did not hate nor strongly dislike any brands, all of the participants could still conjure up negative stereotypes of customers to certain brands, for example:

"Lonsdale clothing, I think it is associated with, racists or something. That is the case back in Holland at least."
Man #9

"…even though I don't even know those groups, but American hillbillies drinking Blue Ribbon[Beer]..."
Man#8

Hate was not the only factor discussed in the first two focus groups, the participants did not have any difficulties in identifying brands that they liked and wanted to be associated with. There were some similarities in their responses, Germans saloon cars and high luxury cars appeared in all groups as something that at least one participant wanted to own. Ecological products that would allow a better future for the world was also discussed by all three groups, and turned out as very popular to be associated with.

"... I would really like to buy a nice German car or something like that but I can't because I don't have the income, but I like does brands without ever have to own them."
Man #6

"…As I would like a Lamborghini, I don't have money to buy it…"
Man #2

At the same time that participants recognized the brands they wished to purchase one day, they almost immediately identified the reason for why they could not purchase the brand at the moment. Many reasons were raised, geography problems, not having a use for the product, but the main and most common reason were lack of income.

"Well, if I would have the money to spend I would want to buy everything in that, like, environment and sustainable brands, more like that…"
Woman #8

"I though my limitations are not so much money, but that I don't have a practical use for the things that I want, like I would really like a certain dress that I want, but I have nowhere to wear it. Like it would be cool to have it but no practical use for it yet…." Woman #2

One big difference between the two groups of haters was how the topic of group identification morphed into a deeper and more personal discussion about personal values and identification in one of the groups (which will be discussed in the next subchapter), while the other group stayed on the track of stereotyping the customers.

Another big difference in the two groups of haters was the way politics was discussed in regards to how that may influence group identification and stereotyping. In one of the groups of haters it was simply stated that politics may influence how and what they might see in others, but that it will influence everyone in the background. As opposed to the other group of haters where the topic of politics became much more elaborate. In the words of one of the female respondents when talking about the brand she hated, Fjällräven Konken:

"…I think that the reason I think like this, and Man #4 (who disliked LO) thinks like that is because we have internalized our parents viewpoints. Sometimes that is why I think I don't like them [Konken] from the start. I was born in a very right-wing home, and from when I was little I heard a lot of bad things about the left-wing people. I guess at the start I hated Konken because of left-wing people…"
Woman #1

Something that was touched upon in all three groups was how these stereotypical customers all were inexplicably tied to a certain lifestyle. One participant in the first group of haters made the connection of how right- and leftwing people often were associated with vastly different lifestyles, and therefore had very different types of brands associated with them. One woman in the second group touched upon the same topic when talking about Ferrari. She believed that the brand was tied to rich people who wanted to 'show off' a certain lifestyle that she was not attracted by. As a result she stated that the brand had a very negative image in her mind.

Another such discussion came with one of the very few non-luxury brands discussed, namely Lidl. One man in the second group of haters stated that the store had a very negative image in his mind because of the cliental, which he did not like. As he developed his thought process he claimed that the local Lidl store where he grew up where associated with people with lower income, where it was often a lot of trouble. A very similar discussion was held in the control group as well, were a few of the respondents held a similar stereotype towards customers of Lidl.

As easy as it was to point out other groups of people, or stereotyping users of brands not liked, as hard did it seem to describe the group they belonged to themselves. Of all the participants in the two haters group, only one participant were able to identify the group where she belonged to herself;

"…'The basic white girl' that wear boots, leggings, a denim shirt and a scarf. And that is a brand of girl. And apparently I am that girl, and like when I was made aware of that, I wasn't trying to be, I just fit in it. It was just my taste."
Woman #2

Lastly, one of the biggest points of similarities between both groups of haters were the fact that they themselves said that they identified with some groups in order to NOT be in other groups. This will be further explained in the following subchapter, but it still sparked a debate in both groups. Throughout the discussion it became apparent that these brands occupied a negative space in the respondents mind. And were therefore to be avoided, not so much because of the brand itself, but rather the customers. The respondents seemed to be very adamant of not being associated with these brands, because they did not like to be compared with its customers.

## 4.5 Self-Identity

The self was openly discussed in the first focus group; one participant raised the point that self-security was related to our disliking or hating of a product. According to her it is a risk to be someone.

> "...I guess that if you are not so secure about yourself maybe it is a risk to like something, to be something, to have a certain style and a way to be, or like, because then you're going to expose yourself to the world and let people see who you are and then they can judge you. But then it is just much easier to just dislike things because then it is not really you who are these things, but you can just judge others and other things…"
> Woman #1

The second focus group did not openly engage in a discussion about the self, instead when the same topic was raised, the group shifted towards a discussion about society and close friends.

> "…we consume to much, ah, I think it is different between societies, how much it is ok to consume before it is too much or if you consume wrong and like here in Sweden it is ok to consume a lot…"
> Woman #8

This same participant also manifested an internal conflict that she had with the brand H&M and other worldwide companies. She did not appreciate the fact that she could not avoid certain brands, especially at this moment in her life, as a student.

> "…this love and hate that I have for a couple of brands, but uhm, I buy them very often, I'm a customer, I will still be a customer but I don't want to be a customer because I hate the brand
> …"
> Woman #8

Cultural factors and religion appeared in some of the discussions as valid factors for disliking certain brands. Two participants raised the idea that some brands and segments of the market should be avoided due to their religious beliefs; in this case both respondents were Muslims. Another participant the issue of differing cultures and how people belong to different clans, therefore everyone have different lifestyles and way of acting.

"Well, to use my example from before, if I would take my siblings to buy candy, and we don't eat pig, then I will avoid Haribo, because their products has gelatin in them." Man #9

"…I am a Muslim, so I might be restricted to buy some brands. Like, I don't eat pork. I don't consume alcohol…." Man #2

"…Different clans, or different people have different things and lifestyles, and therefore things that are connected to that lifestyle. And I would say that is too far from my lifestyle, I don't hate it, but it feels like it is crossing a border, not to the enemy, but outside my comfort zone." Woman #3

## 4.6 Brand Image

As can be seen in the table 4.4, the sheer width of the brands discussed in these focus groups spans several different industries. They are also aimed at vastly different target groups. One thing that has to be noted when looking at the table is the absentee of brands for some participants. This was to expected due to the natural flow of a focus group, where not everyone talks in every question, and therefore some information about his or her positive brands might be missing from the discussion.

The first similarity seen throughout both group of haters is the fact that most of the brands discussed during the sessions were high profile brands. Most of them were in some fashion considered premium brands, with widely known profiles and images. The only exception to this was the discussion about Lidl, which was the only notable exception as a budget or low-profile brand.

As has been explained throughout this chapter the reason for the respondents negative feelings towards a certain brand in many cases did not originate with the brand itself, but rather surrounding factors, such as group identification and attitudes formed in certain groupings. With only a few exceptions such as the 'Smsa Låna' commercial;

"…They had this TV commercial with this jingle that really got into your head, and everybody kind of knows it, and yea, I don't know, I just think all of their commercials are bad, like, it's yeah, unethical"
Woman #7

When asked if the participants could remember any commercials or ads by the companies, and if so, did the advertising work. One participant perfectly summarized the discussion surrounding the influence of advertising on Brand Hate:

“There are a lot of brands here [meaning in the session] that doesn’t have classic TV commercials; stuff like Marc Jacobs, LV, Konken. They just sort of live on their own merits. They are brands that everyone knows.“
Man #1

However, in one of the other groups one woman observed what she believed to be a general problem with advertising in this day in age. According to her, commercials, no matter if they are on TV, printed ads, or any other kind of medium, all upholds these, according to her, impossible images for their brands. If one wants to be a customer of one brand, there is a specific look, or quality that one should uphold to be the ideal customer. According to her, this might get the opposite effect since people might be turned off by the extreme standards. In her own words:

“… it is hard to be those people [talking about people in media]. But it is easy NOT to be them. It is hard to capture characteristics from one type, but it is quite easy to find things you don’t like”
Woman #2

The subject of brand loyalty was also discussed in the focus groups, and this discussion came in many forms. One participant talked about a rivalry between two hockey times in her home country, she stated the fact one city would never support the other and that the hate is mutual. Another participant said that she selects one brand and keeps herself to that choice, even though she was talking about brands she did not buy at the moment.

“… I am more of the person, you know, like one brand, and stick with it. So I don’t think that I care too much about you know, commercial. Of course I do that, you know, subconsciously, but I am more, you know, stick to a couple of brands that I really like”
Woman #3

# 5. Analysis Chapter

*This chapter aims to analyze the findings from the focus groups, against the theories put forward in the theoretical chapter. Each subchapter has its own discussion with relevant theories. In the end there is a summary of how all the discussions actually fit together in a greater sense.*

## 5.1 Negative aspects of Brands

### *5.1.1 Anti-branding*

One of the biggest surprises from the findings for this thesis was the non-existent usage of anti-branding amongst the respondents. A few of the respondents claimed that they had bad-mouthed the brands they did not like to their friends, and one of the participants argued that she indeed had actively campaigned against H&M. The complete lack of usage of so-called anti-branding websites came as a big surprise.

Many of the respondents did not even know what these sites were, or that they existed. That could be a sign of them not being so hateful after all, or it could point at a big cultural difference. Many of the previous researches done in this area has been looking at the American market, whereas the participants in this research were mostly European.

### *5.1.2 Brand avoidance*

However, brand avoidance as described by Lee et al. (2009a, p.170) were openly discussed and argued amongst the participants. Most participants, even the ones in the control group, admitted that there were some brands they actively avoided. In order to understand and put their brand avoidance in context another article by Lee et al. (2009b, p.422-426) helps.

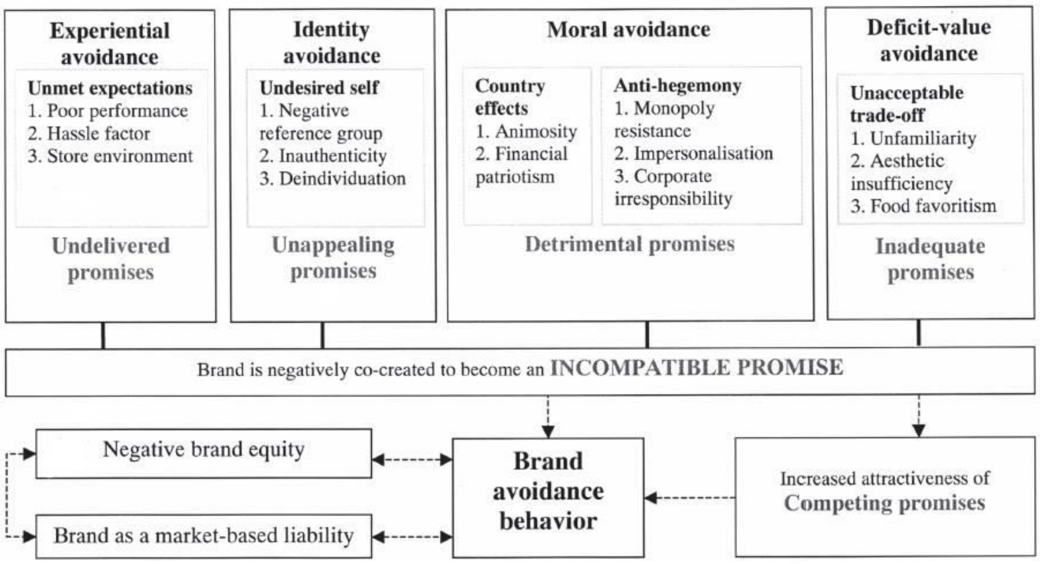


Figure 5.1 Emergent theoretical model of brand avoidance (Lee et al. 2009b, p.423)

In that article the authors put forward a model of different types of brand avoidance, and reasons for them. Naturally the first type, experiential avoidance, could not be observed in this research, as it was looking at non-customers of these brands. But throughout the discussions that followed, all of the other three types of brand avoidance could be observed.

Most notably was the identity avoidance, were the respondents simply avoided the brands because of incongruence between their own identity and the brand identity, or the identities of the consumers of a brand. The incongruence between the identity of the customers of a brand, and the identity of the respondents seemed to be the most central reason for avoiding a certain brand.

In the second group of Brand Haters there were a length discussion about ethical behavior by the companies. The most apparent examples was the discussions about H&M and Smsa Låna, where both brands were accused of doing their business in an unethical manner, which made a few of the respondents very angry, and not only avoided the brands themselves, but were also badmouthing them. In the context of the model by Lee et al (2009b, p.422-426) this would be categorized as moral avoidance.

In a few cases there were also evidence of the last type of brand avoidance, deficit value avoidance (Lee et al, 2009b, p.422-426). Where the dislike came from feelings that the brands did not offer what other brands could offer. One such example was a debate between which was the better operating system, Ios or Android. Two camps quickly formed amongst the respondents, and arguments were thrown, but no side ultimately won, because in the end it came down to personal preferences.

When it was apparent that most of the respondents were indeed avoiding certain brands, there was an interest of finding out what effects their avoidance might have, except for the obvious fact that they do not buy the brands. Lee et al (2009b, p. 426) discussed how the avoidance of one brand might lead the consumer to buy another brand, in direct contrast to the avoided brand. From the different discussions in the focus groups, this notion was partially confirmed, as a few respondents argued that it was easy to choose brands on a basis of 'us and them'. In order to not be one of 'them' the respondents defined themselves as part of a group by choosing a brand in direct competition. However, in direct contrast with the model by Lee et al. (2009b, p. 426) there was no evidence from the focus groups that the avoidance of the participants had any effects on their attitude towards the brand, since that seemed influenced by other factors, which will be discussed in further detail in the following subchapters.

Kucuk (2008; 2010) argues that one of the risks that come associated with brand avoidance is that people might find other people with similar negative feelings online, and actively participate in these anti-branding sites. While the anti-branding sites were not up for debate in the focus groups, sharing information with people with similar opinions were a central part of the discussions in the two groups of haters. One participant even stated that most people like to get their own worldview confirmed. Thereby spreading negative information to people who already had negative opinions about the brand before, letting that negative brand image get an even stronger hold. Also confirming the notion by Kucuk (2010, p.156) that customers are now co-creating the value of the brand to other customers.

### *5.1.3 Brand Hate*

Regarding Brand Hate, the concept has been quite a challenge throughout the entire process of this thesis. One of the main problems is that there is very little research around it, but by far the biggest problem is the extreme negative connotations that come with the word 'hate'. As per the definition by Bryson et al. (2010, p.32) that the person should feel an intense negative feeling towards a brand, there were some indications of this. Especially with brands that were appealing to values that are commonly tied to right- or leftwing politics, those were the brands that had the most aggravated Brand Haters.

As for most of the respondents they definitely had negative feelings towards brands, or the users of certain brands, confirming another notion from Bryson et al (2010, p.32) that negative stereotypes has a role to play in Brand Hate. But equaling their dislike of brands with the intense feeling of hate would be an overstatement.

It was noticeable that there was a discrepancy between the participant's answers and the reality, in the focus groups organized for this paper there was almost no respondents that openly admitted to share negative information about a brand. This called the researchers attention due to the fact the internet is full of trolls and Fanboys how are not afraid to expose their opinion and the examples are not hard to find.

## 5.2 Attitudes and Attitude Formation

### *5.2.1 Functions of attitudes*

In the findings from the three different focus groups it is possible to distinguish three of the four functions of attitudes laid out by Katz (1960, p.170-175). The only one that was not seen was the Knowledge Function. It seemed as people generally did have strong reasons form believing what they believed. The need to categorize and make sense of the world might not have been a central part of this discussion, but it is important to note that it was absent from any discussions.

The first mentioned function he calls the utilitarian function, and it is concerning punishments and rewards. In the case of negative attitudes held towards different brands, these punishments and rewards would come from different social interactions. For example, in one group of the haters, it was discussed that it is okay to openly voice ones hate towards a certain brand, up to a point. Before that point the group was arguing that they did friends and family a service by letting them know how bad the brand was. However, after a certain amount of complaining, and maybe even campaigning, the group felt that the person could be seen as obnoxious or as one group member expressed it, 'be seen as an ass'.

This utilitarian function seen in the respondents can also be argued to confirm the notion from Baumeister & Leary (1995, p.520-522) who argue that social belongingness is a vital part of human needs. The respondents said they felt validated by having their friends best interests in mind, but did not want to take it too far, because that could be a risk concerning how other people might see them. This could be seen as a fear of being ostracized from the group, thereby confirming the findings from Van Best et al. (2011, p.11-12) saying that ostracism is a deeply uncomfortable feeling that humans want to avoid to almost any cost.

The second type of attitude function that could be observed in the focus groups is called the ego-defensive function (Katz, 1960, p.170). This function is there in order to protect the respondents' identity towards attacks. This could most easily be observed when the first group of haters was discussing politics, and how different respondents reacted and took a stance in one of two camps, the left- or rightwing. One of the respondents were rightwing, and as a result he strongly hated the biggest Swedish union, LO, with all his heart. He even went so far as to call them parasites. In line with the findings by Grubb & Grathwohl (1967, p.24) who argues that the self is everything a person knows about him or herself, this function helps to better define and preserve that notion. In the case of the man who hated LO, there might be an actual hate towards the brand, the organization and all the values they come with, but more importantly, his strong feelings tells as much about himself as it does about how much he dislikes the organization. Another member of that same focus group asked where he had gotten these extreme feelings from, and his answer was from his father. The extreme hatred towards the brand could then be argued to be there in order for him to pursue, or strengthen the values, and personality, which he got from his parents, their legacy.

This man was not the only one that showcased the ego-defensive function of attitudes. Most of the respondents in the second focus group of haters, but especially one, who disliked H&M, did showcase this function as well. The woman who had a love-hate relationship with H&M saw herself as a person who wanted to do ethically correct buying decisions, she wanted to be concerned about the environment and the workers rights. However, she also argued that she had limited funds, and H&M provided clothes within her price range. But she had an intense disliking towards the way H&M produce their clothes, which manifested in badmouthing the brand to friends and family and also campaigning against it. By doing so she felt validated as a person, because she was standing up to what she believed.

The third and last function of attitude that was observed in the focus group was named the value expressive function by Katz (1960, p.173). This function regards how people form attitudes towards objects because it is can showcase the values and beliefs the person holds. The majority of the findings regarding attitudes in the focus groups held for this thesis could be categorized under this type of function. Most respondents that held a negative attitude towards one or several brands did so because they believed that it also said something about their own values. In the first group of haters it became apparent that they also assumed that other people were doing the same. When the discussion came up regarding if they ever disliked a person based on that persons' choice of brands, everyone from that group agreed. They argued that the people they judged like this were assumed to have a different set of values and norms, and therefore incompatible with the respondents. However, there was a redeeming discussion about how some of the respondents believed that such a first judgment is not completely fair, because people have nuances.

Another aspect that was discussed in one of the focus groups was that by disliking or liking a certain brands, with its inherited values, it also meant that the person took a stance against something else. Even if some of the respondents did not even know what to take a stance for, they argued that it was easier to take a stance against something, because it was easier to know what they were not, rather that what they were. Meaning that this function, and the repercussions of it might tie into some of the findings from Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406- 407) who argue that people can disidentify with groups, not just to show to others what they are not, but also to showcase to themselves who the are, or want to be.

### *5.2.2 Learning attitude*

The findings from the three focus groups all points towards the first hierarchy in this model. It is called the learning hierarchy, and it assumes that a person has to learn about an attitude object first, before any feelings about it might come to exist. It is just after the feelings are formed that the behavior might change or stay the same (Ray et al. (1973, p.149-152).

All of the haters, and even some of the respondents in the control group, argued that many times they did not have a clue about the brand up until their first encounter with it. With that first encounter often came a judgment about not just the brand, but also the users of that brand. Which, at least for most of the Brand Haters, lead to a behavior where they either avoided, disliked or even in some cases, badmouthed or campaigned against the brand.

The fact that the other two hierarchies are missing is not at all surprising, as this thesis is looking at customers with little to no experience with brands they dislike, the other two hierarchies assumes a behavioral interactions with the brand, before an attitude can be formed (Ray et al, 1973, p.149-152). As a result of the purposive sampling the respondents were all non-customers to the brand they disliked or hated, and therefore thee cognitive step could never have happened before the affective step.

An interesting finding made in connection with the way the respondents were judging brand, was how one of the groups seemingly judged other people on the same grounds, with the same hierarchy. The first group of haters stated that they judged people on the grounds of which brands they used, and alter their behavior towards these people.

### *5.2.3 Information Source in attitude formation*

When it comes to how the respondents processed the information, whether it was negative or positive, all depended on the source. There was no clear tendency for negative information to be interpreted any differently from positive information. Granted, a lot of the negative feelings towards brands were attributed to their customers. These customer groups were often judged prematurely because of their values, pointing towards the peripheral route where the subjects uses peripheral cues, such as values, norms and beliefs, to consider their feelings towards a brand (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This might in the end impact both their behavior hand their attitude towards the brands.

However, the respondents did also argue that some of their negative feelings stemmed from sources close to them, such as family and friends. This is pointing towards the central route of information processing, where the subject is further elaborating on the information given, in order to in the end change their attitude and behavior (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). But there were of course some discrepancies in these arguments as well, for example, it seemed that information and values that had been handed down by parents were much less elaborated on than for example friends. This was exemplified with two respondents that came from right-wing families, and strongly disliked brands that were closely related to leftwing politics, such as Fjällräven Konken, and LO. One of these respondents even admitted that she had avoided further elaborating on these thoughts for a long time, but as she started university and got friends with these values, she had to reconsider her earlier stance. Showcasing how the central route might vary from who is the sender of the message.

In contrast with the findings form Bryson et al (2010, p.32) this thesis did not find any reasons to believe that man and woman reacts differently to negative information. The discussions around the topics were divided equally between the sexes, therefore no discernible difference could be observed.

## 5.3 Group Identification

In line with the theories by Turner (1991, p.5-6) regarding how the human mind has a tendency to not just categorize in- and out-groups, but rather several different reference groups, the respondents in the three different focus groups all did distinctions between different groups of people tied to different brands. Before going any further with this line of thought, there is an important disclaimer to be made. Even though the respondents all had different stereotypes of customers to certain brands, there were a definitive distinction between in- and out-groups. All of the haters were adamant of arguing that these negative stereotypes were very different from themselves, and that they saw them as adversaries in some regards.

Moving deeper into the real of reference groups, there were definitive signs of all three kinds of reference groups discussed by Englis & Solomon (1995, p.17). The aspirational reference groups were many times discussed in regards to what brands the respondents did not buy at the moment, but would like to buy in the future. With just a few exceptions these brands were targeted as a premium or a luxury brand, where money was a decisive factor. Many times these brands comes with a high level of status attributed to them, such as luxury cars, or high fashion handbags. These types of brands could function as a signifier of power or wealth in line with the findings by Rucker & Galinsky (2009, p.264-265), something most students do not have while in school. Therefore desires for brands that could signal these types of values could be attractive.

Another form of aspirational reference group spotted was attributed to the want to be ecological, sustainable and ethically correct. This was probably best demonstrated by the woman who had an internal struggle regarding H&M. She hated the brand based on ethical differences between how the company acted, and her own worldview. However, as she is a student, and therefore has limited funds, the brand is also targeted with her limited funds in mind. She did express a desire to shop ecological, and ethically correct made clothes as soon as she had enough money to do it. Other focus group members gave a very similar response about buying ecological brands in for example groceries stores. The fact that many of the respondents wanted to be more ecological or ethically correct, and use the brands that signal their behavior, could be seen as a confirmation of the theories laid out by Dolich (1969, p.84) who stated that a group that internalizes the same values as the person itself, will become more attractive.

The second type of reference group was observed in the focus group is called the avoidance group by Turner (1991, p.6). These are the groups that the respondents did not want to belong to. As described in great length in the previous chapter, almost all the respondents, even in the control group, had some kind of negative stereotypes of customers to certain brands. These findings confirms the conclusions reached by Bryson et al (2010, p.32) were it is argued that negative stereotypes are a determining factor for disliking a brand. Some stereotypes were more extreme than others, for example the woman who had a very vivid stereotype of the kind of people buying Ed Hardy and Michael Kors. According to her those people had influenced her so badly that she would not just avoid the brands themselves, but also prematurely judge people wearing them. The reason for her to have these extreme negative feelings goes in line with the findings of Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406- 407) where they argue that a person could disidentify with a group of people in order to show others how they differ from that rejected group. Something this woman with the clearest intent was trying to describe in her negative description of these people. She did not even want to talk to a person in a Ed Hardy shirt.

While others were not as extreme, most of the respondents did use their negative stereotypes of the types of people buying certain brands in order to define who they might be as individuals. Not just categorizing them as in- or out-group members, but also disidentifying them as people not to be associated with. Some members of the focus groups even stated that some groups of customers were not desirable to belong to, because they did not want to be judged as one of these people. Thereby confirming the findings by White & Dahl (2007, p.533) where there is a difference between just out-groups, where the person is not a part of the group, and disassosiative groups where the person do not want to belong to the group.

The third type of reference group described by Englis & Solomon (1995, p.17) is called the membership group. This proved to be the hardest one to find evidence of in the focus groups. This fact might come as a result of people less willing, or capable to closely examine themselves, or maybe because they truly could not see it. Whatever the reason for the lack of self-reflective associations, there were only one of the nineteen respondents that could define her own group association. The girl in question was able to describe a type of person from her home country, Canada, and how she knows that she fits in to that stereotype, because she likes the way it is. While the rest of the respondents could not define their own reference groups, beyond right- or leftwing in politics.

Moving away from the types of reference groups, and into the realm of how these reference groups seemingly influence the respondents. As mentioned earlier some of the respondents were adamant of distancing, or disidentify with a certain reference group, in order to showcase whom they are as a person. The woman disliking Fjällräven Konken for example, defined her own political stance through her disliking of the brand itself, since it has some connections to left-wing values. This is in line with both the findings of Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406- 407) and Lee et al. (2009a, p.173-174). Both of their studies conclude that disidentification is not just a tool for people to showcase to others what they are not, but also who or what they themselves might be, or aspire to be. There were several examples of this behavior amongst the respondents, where they used their negative associations with certain groups of people, in order to partly justify their dislike or hate towards the brand, but also in order to solidify their own identity.

Another more concrete way the negative reference groups were influencing the respondents was though their buying behavior. Since several of the respondents argued that they did not want to be associated with a certain group of people, the customers of a specific brand, their feelings influenced how and what they were buying. This is in direct congruence with the findings by Englis & Solomon (1995, p.24-24) where they argue that mere negative stereotypes might influence how people judge groups of people.

All of the respondents in the two groups of haters, and half of the respondents in the control group, stated that they indeed avoid certain brands as a result of their negative associations with the customer group of the brand. These findings are in congruence with the findings by White & Dahl (2007, p.533) where they argue that negative reference groups may actually change consumers buying patterns in order to not be associated with these negative groups. This seems to hold true in almost all the respondents in these focus groups, which also confirms the notion by White & Dahl (2006) where they argue that negative reference groups may have a great influencing power over not just what a person avoids, but also what a person might consume.

In line with the findings by Esclas & Bettman (2005, p.388) one of the biggest determinations of whether the respondents was negative towards a certain group of people seemed to be the level of congruence between the respondents and the group they were evaluating. If the group symbolizes something negative to the respondents that warrants negative prejudices of that said group. This was best described by one woman in one of the first groups of haters, where she pointed out the fact that different groups symbolized different values, for example right- or leftwing political values. She argued that one would try to avoid different values and lifestyles that did not go hand in hand with their own, a sentiment that echoed throughout the group. It was further solidified when the groups were talking about strengthening their own worldview, mostly trying to find others that felt the same negative feelings towards the brand in question. This fact also seems to confirm the notion by Bhattacharya & Sen (2003, p.83) that the disidentification serves not just as a way for the people to strengthen their own self-concept, but also to find other people that might share these negative feelings.

The last subject that should be addressed in this section is the fact that social belongingness seems to be vital in the process of hating or disliking a brand. As Baumeister & Leary (1995, p.520-522) discusses, social belongingness seems to be a vital need for humans. Being a part of a reference group, whether it is because the respondents wanted to disidentify with one group, or identify with another group, was found to be one of the most important variables when it comes to how Brand Hate could occur within these non-customers.

## 5.4 Self Identity

Throughout the focus groups the self was discussed openly in only one occasion but it was still present on a subliminal level in many of the other topics. As discussed in previous chapters the self can be divided into many sub parts, the material, social and spiritual self. The material self (James, 1992, p.188-189) was present when participants talked about their families and how they influenced their dislike of a product, family was present in both focus groups of haters with the difference that one group raised the topic and discussed more about close friends influencing their hate or dislike. The participants argued that some brands, for example Apple, are “sexy” James, (1992) explain that a person has a blind impulse for looking over their bodies and an individual can express that with clothes or other objects, when a person associate a brand with “sexy” that expresses their desire to transfer this quality to themselves. This value transfer that customer desire by obtaining a product is also influenced by hate, the focus groups raised the fact that brands may have “rivals” by loving one brand one could start hating another and avoiding their product, and as a result avoidance may start.

James (1992, p. 189) defined the social self as “the recognition, which he [man] gets from his mates”, and it became apparent during the focus groups that this part of the self was very much a reality for the respondents. As has been discussed previously, the participants showcased a will to purchase products in order to be associated with the values of the brands. It can therefore be argued, in line with the thoughts of both James (1992, p. 189) and Grubb & Grathewohl (1967, p. 24-25) that the participants, through these brands want to send a message about who they are to others. The need for “recognition” was also noticed in the focus groups, one participant mentioned his will to share negative information, but at the same time expressed the fear of been considered an annoying person by others, showing that the social self could work as a barrier for sharing negative information.

The spiritual self is considered the subjective side of a person, were his or hers sentiments are placed, happiness, pleasure, pain and much more (James, 1992, p. 191-192). These feelings where present throughout all three focus groups, for example, one participant explained the pleasure that he could feel if he could play a nice match of golf. Throughout the focus groups the sentiments of hate and “dislike” appeared several times. The participants demonstrated that these negative feelings are usually linked to the users of a brand, and in some cases related to the actions of a company if the respondent perceived them as been unethical or abusive.

Besides the constituent of the self some respondents presented clear signs of conflict between the real and ideal self (Higgins, 1987, p. 320-321), one of the participants had a strong relationship of both love and hate with the brand H&M. She was not happy with her real self, whom was tempted to buy products from H&M. She believed that her ideal self would be a person that could purchase products from a more ethical company, which would not exploit children in their production lines. However this was not her reality due to monetary concerns.

## 5.5 Brand Image

### *5.5.1 Corporate Identity and Image*

First of all, by looking at table 4.4 in the empirical chapter, the first thing that stands out is the width of different brands in different categories. Granted, a majority of the brands mentioned has some kind of premium or luxury connotation tied to them. The only exception was Lidl, which generally has more of a budget-connotation to it.
But more interestingly, all but one brands, comes from companies that are structured with a monolithic corporate structure. Which means that the corporate identity goes through the entirety of the organization, down to the brands as well (Olins, 1995, p.3). The only exception to this type of structure came in the form of Nestle, which is the only multinational conglomerate that is mentioned amongst these brands. There might be several explanations for these findings; one might be that these types of brands are more closely tied not just to the companies themselves, but also to a certain lifestyle. One woman in the second group of haters exemplified this with the brand of Ferrari, where she argued that the brand was implicitly tied to a lifestyle of 'show offs', a lifestyle that did not at all appeal to her. This is of course not ideal to the company, which would like anybody to have the same good or positive connotations of the brand as their customers. The discrepancy here demonstrates the problem of incongruence between corporate identity and personal identity, and how that could ultimately influence the corporate, or in this case brand, image. These findings are in line with the discussions by Gray & Balmer (1998, p.696) where they argue that even if the goal for every company is to get the identity of the company and the consumers aligned, it is not always possible.

As an interesting compliment to the discussion of discrepancy between identity and image, are the findings that different people had different image of many of the brands, because some of the people were customers to brands that others hated or disliked. Thereby showcasing the findings by Gatewood et al. (1993, p.425) where they argued that different stakeholders could have different images of the same company or brand. Abratt (1989, p.74) had already argued the same, as a result of how the different stakeholders interact with the company in different ways. In order to tie these findings into the discussion by the respondents in the three focus groups conducted in this thesis, consider the differing opinions one woman and one man had about the brand Ed Hardy. While the woman intensely disliked the brand, and mostly their customers, the man rather liked the brand. The two were met with the same corporate communication in the form of branding. But still their opinions differed. One explanation of this might be how they are different types of stakeholders, a non-customer that has to be convinced, and a customer that is already convinced about the greatness of the brand. They therefore interact with the brand in differing ways, and as a result judge the brands differently. These two were not the only examples of these differing opinions and differing interactions with the company and their brand. The same discussion could be observed with brands such as Haribo, Apple, LO, and H&M.

### *5.5.2 Brand Identity*

The second interesting aspect of how branding impacts the negative feelings towards brands is to look towards how the brand identity was considered in the focus groups. As one of the respondents was aware of, most of the brands discussed during the sessions were brands that did not use traditional marketing channels such as advertising; they were just living on their own merits. Strong brands that all comes with a strong social component, as is discussed by Franzen & Moriarty (2009, p.110-111).

By looking at the Brand Identity Prism by Kapferer (2008, p. 183) and comparing some of the themes discussed during the focus groups, there might be an insight of what aspects of a brand is decisive for the process of disliking. As discussed in previous subheadings, the reference groups tied to certain brands seems to be an integral part in the process of disliking a brand. These groups are many times tied to a certain lifestyle, or values that does not go hand in hand with the respondents. When looking at the Brand Identity Prism, the facet that is in direct connection to this is the second internal facet, the culture facet. The brand identity, or in many of these cases the corporate identity, is directly reflective of the values that is valued by one certain type of customers, that might also be off-putting to other non-customers.

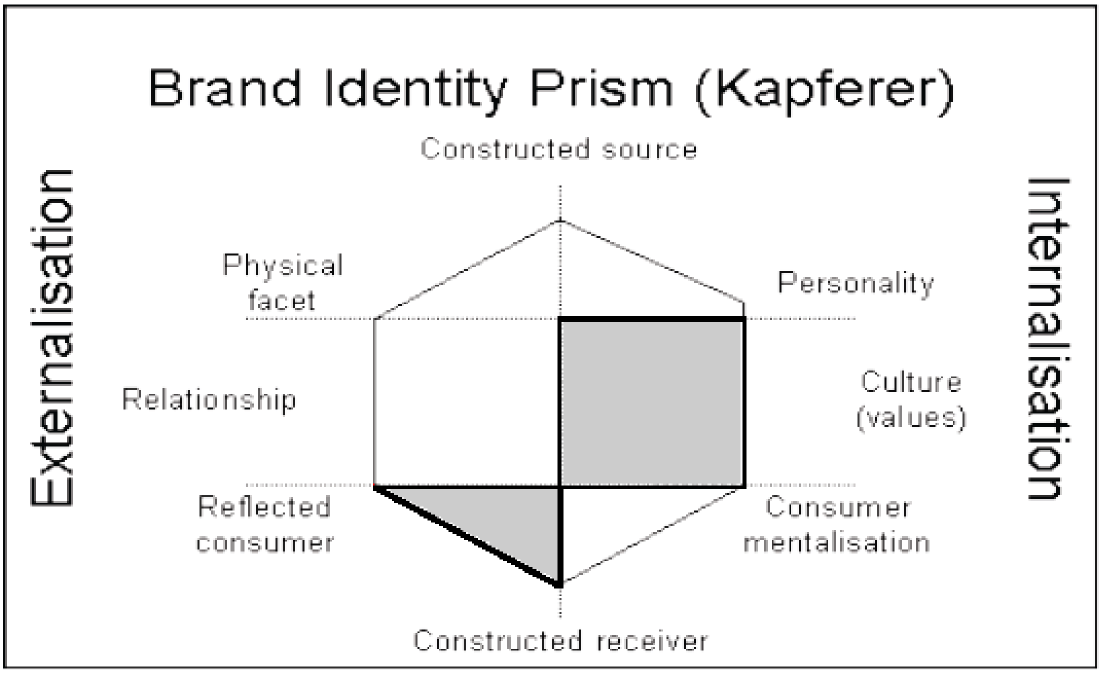


Figure 5.2 – Brand Identity Prism altered with authors highlights (Kapferer, 2008, p.183)

Another facet of the prism that seems to be integral when discussing Brand Hate is the third facet on the external side of the prism, the reflected customers. This facet looks to how consumers might see themselves though the brand, closely tied to the theories put forward by Dolish (1969, p.84) who stated that people can define themselves through the brand, or by not defining themselves through other brands. This has previously been discussed in earlier subchapters, whereby many of the respondents used the disidentification of one brand, in order to define themselves as a person.

While this prism might be an integral part of designing a brand that speaks to certain customers, it does not seem to be of a great importance when discussing Brand Hate, since a lot of the findings in the focus groups seem to indicate that the negative feelings towards certain brands did not originate with the brand itself, rather the reference group, or the values tied to the brand. These values, cultures and groups that are tied to certain brands might not always be what the company intended them to be.

#### *5.5.3 Symbolism of Brands*

That brings on the third part of the discussion of how branding ties in to the negative feelings towards brands. The third aspect that has to be discussed is regarding the symbolism of brands, and how that might change, outside of the control of companies. Not that companies themselves does not try to create their own symbolism in their brands. In line with the arguments by Danesi (2013), some of the respondents even discussed how they saw that some companies were trying to create a certain identity for their brands that were to connect with the customers. Apple was one such company, as well as different football clubs. This is usually seen through the straightforward railway model presented by Gripsrud (2002, p.99) where one company is trying to send a message to their could-be customers.

However, as has been discussed in both this chapter, and other subchapters, the intended message might be distorted as a result of the interaction between customers and different reference groups. These findings are in line with the conclusions by Grubb & Grathwohl (1967, p.24-25) where the authors argued for a more complex model, where consumers interact with each other, and therefore distort the intended message. Moreover the findings in this thesis might actually be more in line with the findings by Santos (2013, p.514) who argues that these interactions between consumers, non-consumers and intended message by the companies, together with a plethora of other factors, are all jumbled up in a complex web of interactions that might alter what the company set out to communicate. Even if the companies have an extremely precise notion of where and what to communicate, there is still the risk of that message changing, and the intended symbolism of the brand changing. As the findings in this thesis prove, there is a definitive risk of non-customers judging not only the brand itself, but also the users of a brand, because of interactions between each other, mush in line with the thoughts of Kucuk (2010, p.156) where he argues that consumers co-create value of the brand.

In line with the theories laid out by Gripsrud (2002, p.128-129) the findings from the focus groups conducted for this thesis seems to point at different social contexts may influence how people interpret connotations differently. The discussions in the different focus groups revealed that the respondents did originate from vastly different social settings, with their own individual cultures, and set of values. These also seemed to impact the way the interpreted the different messages from companies. Where one person disliked Fjällräven Konken because of its connotations to the left-wing movement, another person liked it because of the same reason. This goes to show that one single coherent corporate identity or brand identity, is only a valid thought in theory, but in reality it seems as impossibility. One theoretical solution for this problem could be to utilize the findings from Gatewood et al. (1993, p.425) where he argues that companies should try to utilize different images, and messages towards different stakeholders, instead of one solution for all different groups.

## 5.6 How it all connects

This thesis has gathered theories from a wealth of different fields and practices, that are all in some way or another implicitly connected, and influencing other parts. However, before this research there had not been any previous research exploring how these different aspects actually work together in order to influence Brand Hate.

The theories and concepts were all just assumed to play some kind of part, but how big of a part, and how they functioned together was a mystery. In order to make it clearer for the reader, as well as for the authors of this thesis, a visualization of how the different theories were connected in regards to each other was constructed for the theoretical chapter. However, after conducting the research, and analyzing all the different components of the model presented in the theoretical chapter, it became apparent that the model had to be adjusted to account for the findings. Below follow the updated model, and a discussion of how and why it has changed.

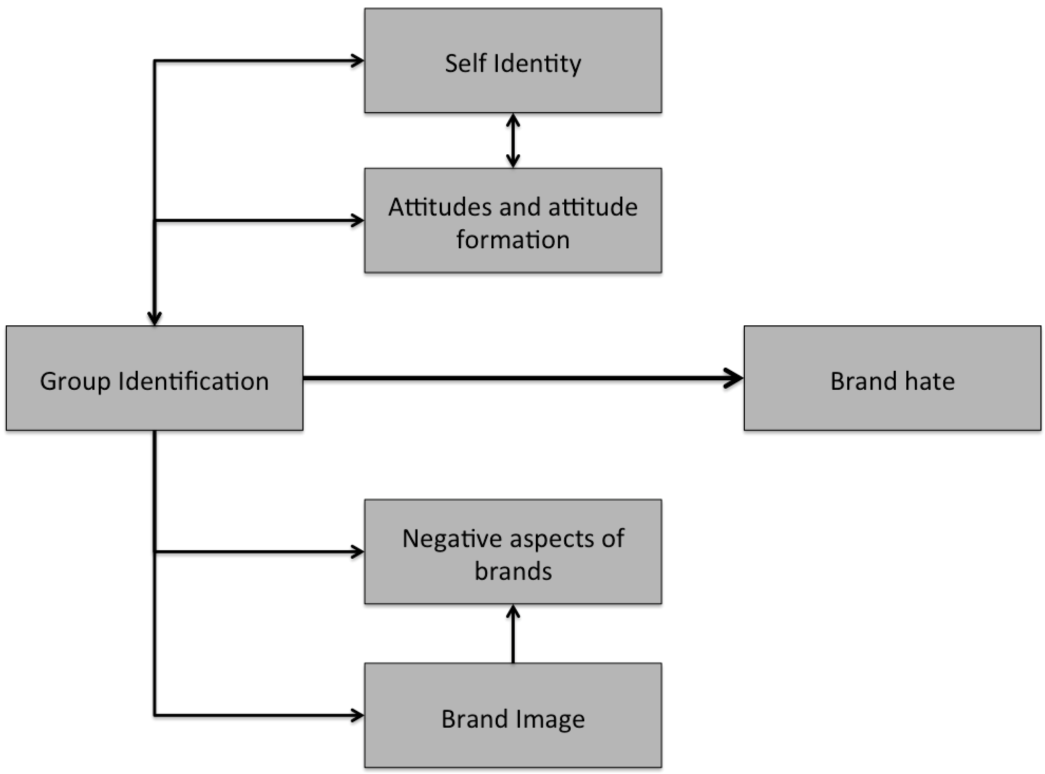


Figure 5.3 – Visualization of effects that influence Brand Hate in non-customers (Karlsson, Rodrigues, 2015)

As can be seen in the new model there has been some drastic changes how the different components affect each other. The biggest difference is the way group identification now has a central role in affecting all other aspects; furthermore it seemed to be the determining factor of Brand Hate in non-customers. This was one of the most notable findings from the different focus groups.

Moreover, the other four factors, originally thought to play a big role in Brand Hate, were divided into two distinct camps, depending on how the influenced each other. Self-identification and attitudes and attitude formation influenced group identification as much as group identification influenced them. In line with findings from Dolish (1969, p.84) group identification could also play a central role in helping the person understand who he or she is, thereby affecting the identity. But of course the identity also affects which reference groups are attractive, or to be avoided, in line with the findings from Englis & Solomon (1995, p.24-24) and Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406- 407).
The findings in this thesis also points at the fact that group identification affects the attitudes people hold towards brands, and how these attitudes form, findings that goes in line with the different functions of attitudes described by Katz (1960, p.173). However, this connection is also returned from the attitude point of view towards the group identification. The findings seem to point at a relationship where the attitudes inform the person what groups might be of interest, as is described by Dolish (1969).

However, on the other side, there is the negative aspects of brands, as well as brand image, that seems to only be influence by group identification, but not themselves influence group identification back. This represent one of the most notable differences is the finding that the different negative aspects of branding did not seem to influence group identification, rather only be affected by it.
It was also discovered that brand image was influenced by group identification; in the way people transferred values from the customer segments to the brand itself. However, the brand image did not seem to have a major impact on the way people perceived certain customer groups. Though, there was a link between brand image and brand avoidance, which is a key component in the negative aspects of brands.

It is important to note that this model only represents Brand Hate in people with no or little experience with the brand itself, as there are several other aspects to consider if the customers would have had experiences with the brands themselves. But the most important finding is how big of a part, and how central the group identification is to Brand Hate in non-customers.

# 6. Conclusions Chapter

This thesis set out to answer the research question "*Why does Brand Hate occur in people with no or little experience with a brand, and how do they justify their beliefs?*"
This chapter is meant to clearly answer the research question as well as highlighting the theoretical contributions made in the field of brand hate.

First of all, through this thesis a better understanding of which aspects and concepts actually do influence Brand Hate in non-customers has been achieved. Thereby greatly improving upon the understanding of the subject as a psychological concept. As was discussed in section 1.3 'Problem Discussion', the main issue surrounding the field of Brand Hate is a lack of understanding regarding what governs these negative feelings. In previous research, mainly done by Bryson et al. (2010; 2013) in this field there has been a focus on proving the existence of the concept itself, and to some extent look at the effects of Brand Hate. However, this thesis is the very first instance where anyone has tried to create a deeper understanding of what factors play a decisive role in creating these negative feelings, thereby extending and developing the results found by Bryson et al. (2010; 2013).

Moreover, besides providing a better understanding of the psychology that goes in to creating these negative feelings, it could be argued that this research has other novelty factors that puts it apart from previous research in the field. Most important is the focus on the non-customer segment of the market, showcasing not just that these feelings does not have to come from bad experiences, but can exist inside a person without any real experience with the brand. The findings also pointed at the fact that these individuals may influence others, potentially creating a snowball effect of negative feelings towards certain brands within his or her social grouping.
Another factor that helps this research stand apart from previous research in this field is the methodological choices made in order to facilitate focus groups as the data collection method. Previous research in the field of Brand Hate, again mainly Bryson et al. (2010; 2013) has utilized in-depth interviews, in order to collect data. However as is argued in section 3.4 'Data Collection using Focus Groups' the utilization of focus groups had a helping effect when actually collecting the data, since the respondents helped each other associate and describe feelings that laid doormat at the start of the sessions, something that would probably have been impossible through in-depth interviews.

The last big contribution that should be highlighted before discussing and answering the actual research question regards the utilization of several different psychological theories and how this research attempts to create an explicit connection between these. As was discussed in great detail both in the Theoretical and Analysis chapter, these different psychological theories are all connected, sometimes implicit, and sometimes explicitly. All of these theories and concepts have been well documented and researched over the years, such as Self Identity (James, 1992; Grubb & Grathewohl, 1967), Group Identification (Turner, 1991; Dolich, 1969; White & Dahl 2007,), Attitudes and Attitude formation (Katz, 1960; Ray et al., 1973: Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), making any new findings regarding these very hard to come by. However, using all of these together, in order to create a deeper psychological understanding of Brand Hate, has never been done before. Trying to provide explicit connections between how these concepts influence both each other, and negative feelings towards brands, should be seen as a contribution at least to he field of Consumer Behavior as it gives a deeper understanding of how these elements work together in order to negatively influence non-customers opinions regarding brands they do not even use.

Looking at the research question there are two aspects to this thesis, the ‘why’ and the ‘how’. The findings and the analysis of the data lead up to two interesting conclusions that can be made regarding both these aspects.

First, while the factors explored in this thesis all intertwine, it becomes hard to say exactly where one psychological concept stop influencing and another starts. But one factor that has come under no dispute to be the central aspect to influence Brand Hate seems to be group identification. Much in line with the findings by Dolish (1969, p.84) group identification seems to play a central role in helping people understand who they are through their preferred brands, playing an important role in informing and influencing the feelings towards brands in non-customers. Thereby explaining why non-customers seem to be able to hate or dislike certain brands.

Secondly, this thesis also showcases, to some extent, why people are inclined to be influenced by the group identification, thereby explaining how these people justify their beliefs. The fact that different groups holds different values and norms, plays a central part in the choosing of what is seen as attractive or unattractive in a brand. Being able to define ones self though the brand is also an important determiner of what brands are considered as attractive. As some people tend to use brands in order to identify, or disidentify, with certain groups. These findings are in line with the findings by Englis & Solomon (1995, p.24-24) and Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001, p.406- 407) where they state that groups perceived attractiveness is closely tied to the identity of the group.

Even though the primary objective of this thesis was to bridge the theoretical knowledge gap surrounding the subject of Brand Hate, there are a few managerial aspects of the findings that should not be overlooked.

The first important managerial aspect of the findings is that it is incredibly hard for companies to know which consumer groups might hate or dislike a brand. Even if the companies have a certain target group in mind, there are two major problems. The first is that it becomes near impossible to know what aspects of their target group that other groups may find unappealing. The second, maybe more problematic aspect, is how the symbolism of brands is in an ever changing flux, where the intended meaning of a message or a brand may be distorted by the target group. Which in turn might turn of other possible would-be customers
Another important managerial aspect that should be discussed is the fact that there is not much the companies can actually do if a brand is hated. As the findings in this thesis are pointing at; the hate is many times equally tied to the customers, their culture, and their behavior as it is to the brand itself. The brand becomes a symbol of something unattractive to certain groups, because of the inherent values of the targeted group.

# 7. Limitations and Future Research

*As with any academic research there were aspects that could have been further explored or altered in order to provide a better research. But because of time restrictions and a limited geographical reach some compromises had to be done. Below will follow a discussion of aspects that could have been improved or suffered in one way or another. These will lead in to future avenues this research may take.*

- One of the most obvious limitations with this thesis is the limited number of data points. With only three focus groups, and nineteen respondents this has been an issue that the authors have been wrestling with during the duration of the thesis process. Ideally, in order for the findings to be generalizable, there should have been more points of data. However, in line with the arguments by Yin (1993, p.54) even though the data points may not be enough to generalize the findings, there is still a theoretical value for this study, as it has been able to prove a theoretical concept.

- The next issue, as a result of a very narrow approach and subject to this topic, finding respondents that could say that they really hated a certain brand was harder than initially expected. In fact, that is the main reason why the group of 'strong dislikers' was ultimately also included into the sample frame. With enough time and resources it might be possible to find exclusively haters to conduct further tests on. But as the authors of this thesis was under both a time constrict and had a geographical boundary, this issue does exist in the final product. One could argue that the inclusion of respondents from various countries makes the geographical reach better, as well as strengthening the overall validity and generalizability of the findings.

- One minor note in the Empirical chapter that should be discussed is the notion that one of the respondents said that she used to have stronger feelings against her hated brand, when she was younger. Directly contradicting the age requirement and requirement for a higher education, that was set up as requirements for our respondents. The background to these requirements was based upon the research by Walker (2001) who argued that these prerequisites were the basis for people to voice their negative feelings more often. However, upon further examination, the likelihood of voicing negative concerns does not equal a bigger Brand Hate. Therefore the authors of this thesis are aware that the sample frame could be scrutinized as not optimal. But again, the average age of the respondents was 24,5 years old, which means that they are more developed and mature in their thinking, and therefore their opinions should be of higher regards than of a teenager, even though the teenager may have stronger negative feelings.

- After many long deliberations it was decided that focus groups were the best way of collecting data, because the authors believed that the deliberately open discussions could help open the minds of the respondents. However, upon talking to a third party, it was pointed out that the use of focus group could skew the results because the respondents may be inclined to conform to group thinking. But after conducting the focus groups no such behavior was observed, all three groups had a healthy debate amongst themselves, with people disagreeing about various topics.

- As for furthering the research in this area two interesting avenues has opened up after conducting this research. First of all, trying to confirm the findings in this research but in a quantifiable manner, would greatly improve the generalizability of the results given in this thesis. Secondly, as concluded Brand Hate is enormously hard for the companies to predict and influence. Therefore, within the area of branding it would be interesting to see if there is a way for the companies to combat negative associations with their target groups.

- Another interesting avenue that could be explored, maybe in the field of psychology, is to see if the values of the brands change the behavior and values of the individual. As has been explored in this research, people associate certain values and behaviors with certain brands. It would be interesting to find out of these people held these values and behaviors before they started using the brand, or if the choice of brand does not just showcase the individuals personality, but could rather change the values and the self of a person.

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# Appendix 1 – Visualization of Methodological choices made