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Brand Dislike: the Dark Side of Consumer Preferences

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BRAND DISLIKE: REPRESENTING THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF CONSUMER PREFERENCES
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There has been a recent increase in consumer research on the topic of brand dislike: it can be defined as the negative judgment expressed by the consumer and/or implied in the choice not to buy. The sparse literature in this field is fragmented into different streams of research that will be reviewed in this paper: a) consumer criticism and resistance, b) dislike as a means of communicating and constructing self image, and c) consumer/brand relationship. After the literature review, the method and results from fieldwork will be presented. The data converge towards a unitary and consistent framework, in which various levels and factors can be interpreted in the light of the theoretical perspectives outlined above.

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Brand Dislike: Representing the Negative Side of Consumer Preferences

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ABSTRACT

There has been a recent increase in consumer research on the topic of brand dislike: it can be defined as the negative judgment expressed by the consumer and/or implied in the choice not to buy. The sparse literature in this field is fragmented into different streams of research that will be reviewed in this paper: a) consumer criticism and resistance b) dislike as a means of communicating and constructing self image, and c) consumer/brand relationship. After the literature review, the method and results from fieldwork will be presented. The data converge towards a unitary and consistent framework, in which various levels and factors can be interpreted in the light of the theoretical perspectives outlined above.

INTRODUCTION

Brand dislike can be considered as a “dark side” of consumer preferences because the literature has not dedicated the same effort to this topic as has been devoted to the analysis of positive attitudes and evaluations. The purpose of this paper is twofold: first of all, we will summarize extant, fragmented literature within a single framework. Secondly, relying upon qualitative data, we will give a descriptive picture of what brand dislike means, from the customers’ perspective.

FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

The research available on negative evaluations of products and brands is very limited, especially when compared to the research done on positive attitudes. This asymmetry is understandable, particularly in the marketing field: companies and institutions are very much interested in the practical consequences of positive forms of knowledge. They want to know what we want and are willing to buy (choose, vote, etc.).

On the contrary, this asymmetry is difficult to justify on a theoretical level considering that, in order to better understand and explain purchase and consumption behaviours, it is necessary to put both positive and negative aspects in the same framework. This statement will appear more relevant at the end of the literature review, reported below.

Actual research on negative attitudes towards brands and their related behaviours is fragmented in a number of perspectives, as emerges from the following examples.

Think about Disney from the point of view of the participants in the Burning Man event (Kozinets 2002, 25): they dislike this brand because of its overt commercialism; furthermore, activists dislike Nike because this company doesn’t respect some basic human rights: “the Nike campaign is about dignity and respect. And giving people enough money to live on” they specify (Kozinets and Handelman 2004, 695).

From another line of reasoning, Lara doesn’t like Kickers because it gives her the wrong image (Hogg and Banister 2001, 93).

A further different approach arises from Fournier’s research (1998, 363): Jean dislikes Bon Ami because she noticed that this brand started scratching the sink. After trying Comet, she discovered that this brand really is better.

These examples belong to different research traditions and perspectives and they will be reviewed in the following pages for the purpose of integrating them into a single frame.

Burning Man participants and activists can be observed from the perspective that Arnould and Thompson (2005) label consumption as a practice of ideological reproduction and resistance. Brand dislike appears if and when consumers opt for lifestyles that disregard dominant consumerist norms or directly challenge corporate power. Researchers have only recently started to pay attention to different strategies practiced by individuals or groups in response to marketplace ideology, perceived as a structure of domination.

These consumers explicitly reveal their skepticism toward the marketing system and they engage in resistance practices in order to distance themselves from structures and systems they consider oppressive and coercive. Several authors have tried to assess whether the results of resistance strategies are effective as emancipatory consumption practices (Firat and Dholakia 1998; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Murray and Ozanne 1991; Ozanne and Murray 1995) or whether they reproduce the dominant ideology (Holt 2002; Kozinets 2002).

Following Thompson (2004), we can take a slightly different position: do these practices affect the power structure within the marketplace? Moving from modernity to postmodernity, marketers realized that consumers are less willing to behave according to company-generated patterns, passively accepting their authority. Consumers don’t want to receive directions on how they should live or why brands should be central in their life (Brown 2004). They want to experience consumption as a context of personal fulfilment and self-creation. As a consequence, the branding paradigm used by marketers had to shift, from modern to postmodern.

According to Holt (2002), the postmodern branding purpose is twofold: a) brands should not be presented as cultural blueprints, but as cultural resources, as useful components for creating and managing consumer self concept; b) branded cultural resources have to be perceived as authentic, “as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value”.

However, this postmodern branding paradigm is now running into trouble too, and the reason is not that brands don’t respect the search for personal sovereignty, as in the modern branding perspective, but because of a problematic interpretation of authenticity: “brands now cause trouble not because they dictate tastes, but because they allow companies to dodge civic obligations” (Holt 2002, 88). Activist organizations, but also mainstream consumers, even though with less commitment, call for a new idea of authenticity as a quality of the company and they especially ask for deeper integration between the values associated with the brand and the actions of the company. The focus of postmodern resistant consumers then is on the morals and ethics behind the brand and on the social and environmental implications of its use.

Turning back to Thompson (2004), the cultural struggle for authenticity is hard to fight for ordinary consumers given the complexity of a globalized and decentralized economy; only activists and their organizations are able to act effectively in this direction. They can play an active role in increasing consumers’ concern over contradictory marketing practices and inducing companies to cope with it. In Thompson’s view (2004), the most important aspect of this process is the redistribution of power within the market system. If activists are effective and mainstream con-

sumers receptive, companies can be forced towards the post postmodern branding paradigm: “brands will be trusted to serve as cultural source materials when their sponsors have demonstrated that they shoulder civic responsibilities as would a community pillar” (Holt 2002, 88).

Another perspective from which to look at consumer criticism towards brands is rooted in consumer identity projects, as identified by Arnould and Thompson (2005): consumers use brands and other marketing materials to create and manage a multifaceted and often fragmented sense of self. Dislike and distaste play a major role in this process (Wilk 1997). The creation of meanings and social relationships via consumption involves not only positive attitudes and choices but negative ones too. According to Bourdieu (1984, 56):

“In matters of taste, more than anywhere else, all determination is negation, and tastes are perhaps first and foremost distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance (‘sick-making’) of the tastes of others... Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes.”

Consumers use positive and negative meanings attached to their consumption choices to create and maintain social and cultural identities (McCracken 1986); consumers also use these meanings to establish similarity and differentiation and, thus, to ask for inclusion in and exclusion from specific social settings. Wilk (1997), for example, showed that distaste and refusal are often more important than taste and choice because they are more effective as social indicators, even though likes are much easier to communicate than dislikes.

In this stream of research, it is also important to consider Hogg’s contribution (1998) on consumers’ negative choices within and across product categories: this author differentiates between *non choices*, which include products and services that are not bought simply because of availability, accessibility and affordability, and *anti choices*, which include products and services that are explicitly refused because they are not compatible with other choices. As such, they are not consistent with the consumer’s sense of self.

In Hogg’s research, consumers are able to identify typical associations between branded products and social roles (e.g. Ralph Lauren and trendy students). According to such associations, they dislike and refuse brands if they refer to a group from which they want to keep their distance. Furthermore, consumers clearly identify wrong associations, that is to say branded products that could never be related to a specific social role. More recently, Hogg (Banister and Hogg 2004; Hogg and Banister 2001) focused her attention on the role of the undesired self in the determination of anti choices: it is through the formation of distaste and the associated negative stereotypes that consumers are able to define themselves.

In short, the findings of this second stream of research support the importance of negative consumption experiences as a means to create and manage self concept and as a source for brand dislike.

Finally, the last stream of research that deals with brand dislike is rooted within the general framework of Consumption Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005), but does not specifically fit into one of its four main areas: in her seminal article, Fournier (1998) introduced relationship theory into consumer research and demonstrated its usefulness for understanding the role brands play in consumers’ lives. From this perspective, this approach has contributed to the renewal of an old topic in consumer research (brand loyalty) according to a more socially oriented perspective.

According to Fournier (1988), sometimes brands get personal qualifications and, therefore, they become active partners of the consumer. As a consequence, consumers’ choices and behaviors regarding brands are based on affective factors and bonds rather than on cognitive cues: on the shelves in the supermarket, consumers can meet friends, enemies and acquaintances, and not objects to be evaluated in a comparative manner. Fournier’s (1998, 363) conceptualization of brand relationship quality is a definitive important construct for understanding the contribution of brands in the creation of meanings in every day life.

Based on this perspective, the consumer-brand relationship can deteriorate and generate negative feelings for two reasons: entropy and stress. In the entropy model, the relationship terminates because of the failure of both partners to maintain and rejuvenate it; in the stress model, on the contrary, relationships break up due to environmental, partner or relational episodic factors. Similar indications are also presented by Fajer and Schouten (1995).

More recently, analyzing the evolution of consumer-brand relationships, Aaker et al. (2004) show different development patterns for sincere versus exciting brands and particularly opposite consequences in case of transgressions. Whereas relationships with sincere brands suffer and deteriorate despite subsequent reparation attempts, relationships with exciting brands surprisingly show improvements in the wake of transgression.

In conclusion, we can observe that in this stream of research, interpersonal relationship theories are used to approach the topic of terminating person-brand relationships, illustrating the interplay of instrumental/functional and value-expressive/symbolic meanings that could cause them and lead to brand dislike.

Several explanations of brand dislike can be drawn from the literature reviewed above, ranging from ideological commitment against unethical practices to product failure episodes. It is possible to integrate these perspectives within a single framework: consumer criticism and resistance can be seen as an extreme of a continuum of brand dislike factors, on the other side of which we find consumer/brand relationship perspective. The former is a typical *collectivistic* approach to brand dislike: consumers take care of values, rights and individual wealth that are not strictly related to their own personal interests. The latter is a more *individualistic* perspective: consumers do not interact with brands that prove to be inadequate partners. Social communication through disliked brands is somewhere in between because there are collectivistic as well as individualistic reasons for keeping one’s distance from a brand in order to fix one’s role within a social setting (Fig. 1).

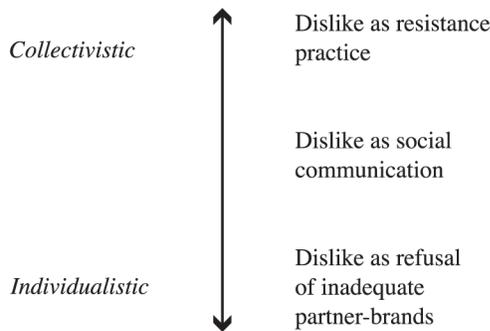
With this frame in mind, we have developed a research project to describe brand dislike from the consumer’s perspective.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

What is still lacking in consumer research is a phenomenological account of brand dislike. In this study, after reviewing the literature within a unitary frame, the second purpose is to describe brand dislike from the consumer’s point of view in order to fill such a gap. Starting from different theoretical explanations pooled together into the collectivistic-individualistic frame, our research goal is to provide a description of brand dislike. The focus is on the thoughts, feelings, and activities evoked by consumers when asked to reflect on and visually represent disliked brands, both as lived experiences and general opinions.

We employed two qualitative methods in the present study: collages and introspective essays. The main goal is to elicit factors of brand dislike from consumers’ experience by means of methods with different capabilities: collages were made as a group project and employ images, while introspective essays are individual verbal tasks.

FIGURE 1
A UNITARY MODEL OF BRAND DISLIKE



Collages are based solely on images and they are absolutely free: there is no bias or filter between the conceptualization and the representation of the meaning (Belk et al. 1997; Havlena and Holak 1996). Similarly, introspective essays allowed us to evoke consumers' experiences and feelings without being specifically directed by an interviewer (Lupton 1996).

Projective techniques, then, helped us to better understand the nature of brand dislike; in this phase of our research, in fact, traditional methods, both qualitative and quantitative, may be limited. They are simply not well suited to eliciting consumer fantasies or revealing characterizations of consumer brand dislike (Belk et al. 1997). Hence, the projective measures sought to evoke fantasies, dreams and visual imagination in order to bypass the reluctance, defense mechanisms, rationalizations and social desirability that seemed to block the direct verbal accounts of some of those studied (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003).

Data were collected in two undergraduate classrooms in economics and humanities schools. One hundred fifty one (151) students participated: equally distributed between males and females, between 20 and 25 years old. Each subject filled out the retrospective essay first and then, a few weeks later, took part in the collage project. We asked students to write down one liked and one disliked brand and then provide a description of the reason for their choice.

Collage making is a group task: we asked each group of around ten people to negotiate a common set of meanings of the concept of brand dislike, which had to be represented as a joint project. We gave each group the same Italian magazines and they had to cut out any material they wished to use to make the collage, expressing the concept of brand dislike. For this reason, some images are repeated in more than one collage. They were encouraged to let themselves go and express their feelings, intuitions, imaginings, fantasies and associations. Following the completion of their collage, they publicly explained their interpretation of it.

Both reports and collages were coded with Atlas.ti. The interpretation was conducted individually and then collectively by three researchers.

RESULTS: FACTORS AND LEVELS OF DISLIKE

Data from written reports and collages were grouped into three distinct levels, according to the object against which consumers addressed critical statements:

- *product brand*: subjects criticize brands that show an unfair price/quality ratio, whose products perform poorly, and that do not provide effective customer care services, etc.;
- *user brand*: subjects criticize brands that are associated with user stereotypes they do not like and they do not want to be linked with, and that do not let them be viewed by relevant others as they would like to be;
- *corporate brand*: subjects criticize brands that belong to companies that pursue behaviors and activities that they judge illegal, immoral, unethical, etc..

Factors of Dislike: Product Brand Level

At the product level, brands have been criticized for different reasons, ranging from their disproportionate price or unfair price/quality relationship to performance drawbacks.

Andrea (m, Sky). Recently prices increased. [...] with the same amount with which I was able to see movies, sports, soccer, specialized and cultural channels, now I see half of the programs. And I have to fill their wallet, because state-owned television is so dull.

Andrea complains due to the violation of price fairness: the *give* component in this exchange process is not adequate (Zeithaml 1988). However, even though the exchange is definitely disappointing, the relationship is still alive, given the absence of alternative brands. In Fournier terms (1998, 362), this is a case of enslavement: the consumer has negative feelings but persists in the relationship because of circumstances.

Davide (m, Trenitalia¹). Price/quality relationship is not good, because the price recently increased with virtually no benefits from the point of view of the service.

In this excerpt also, the focus is on the exchange side of the relationship, with attention devoted to both *get* and *give* components. However, in this case also, the relationship between the consumer and the brand is still in progress, mainly for the same reasons: Trenitalia is a monopolist and there no alternatives.

¹The national, state owned railways.

Both Andrea and Davide dislike their brands because of poor and declining value compared to the monetary sacrifice they are asked for: they are locked into the relationship and they feel frustrated.

Brand dislike is also related to performance problems derived either from the product per se (e.g. technical problems, unhealthiness, and hideousness) or from customer care services.

Alessandro (m, Sony). I don't like it because in my experience with hi-fi and tv Sony products I often underwent failures and technical drawbacks. Customer care service has proved to be slow and expensive and, in one case, they were not able to meet my expectations: in fact, the failure occurred once again. In the end, compared with the safety and reliability reputation of the company, my requirements have not been adequately satisfied by Sony products.

Alessandro (m, Aprilia). Because of these problems, I often had to bring the scooter to an Aprilia Center to have it fixed. But until now they have not been able to solve the problem and—as a result—most of the time the scooter is not usable and is subject to continuous technical adjustments. Regarding excessive oil consumption, I got in touch with the Aprilia headquarters, because local works were not able to fix the problem. Well, they refused to help because they claimed it was not their fault, but the fault of the local Aprilia staff which was not capable of solving the problem!

In both cases (Sony and Aprilia), dislike depends on a relationship deterioration generated by dyadic stress factors (Fournier 1998). Failure to keep a promise (Sony) or perception of scarce attention from the partner (Aprilia) generates strong negative feelings towards the brand.

In summary: a) exchange unfairness and b) relational troubles may generate brand dislike. In both cases, dislike refers to functional/instrumental aspects rather than cultural, value oriented or expressive ones. In all of these cases, dislike is not necessarily followed by the dissolution of the relationship, although Sky and Trenitalia are monopolist and consumers have virtually no alternative.

Factors of Dislike: User Brand Level

Agnese introduces us to the user dimension of brand dislike.

Agnese (Prada). Every young consumer started buying and wearing Prada and my hate has increased until becoming absolute intolerance. This brand is the symbol of a generation of boys and girls that can afford a pair of shoes that costs more than 200?!

This is a classic case of prototypical role-to-product association (Hogg 1998) and Agnese's strong refusal of Prada is rooted in the negative judgment she expresses about a specific group that she doesn't like and doesn't want to be a member of.

However, while Agnese refers to brand meanings in negative terms in order to establish distinction and (in this case) exclusion from a specific social group, Irene's dislike for Nike is related to her desire to create a sense of self via consumption.

Irene (f, Nike). I believe that these shoes and garments have become a means of homologation instead of something to express one's personality.

This informant criticizes Nike's attempt to impose preferences and styles in the market and tends to portray herself as a real postmodern consumer, able to creatively play with brands.

As illustrated by Thompson and Haytko (1997, 35), critiques of mindless conformity or perceived manipulative techniques by marketers "help each participant to see his or her self as an active creator of a personally unique style, rather than as a passive, trend-following consumer".

More in general, in this section brand dislike is represented as something strictly related to the creation and management of self concept and oriented towards social communication: Agnese and Irene complain that certain brands are associated with bad people and/or are not effective for self representation within the social context.

Factors of Dislike: Corporate Brand Level

At the corporate level, a number of factors emerge, all of which converge towards a general line of criticism that can be labeled as ideological (Murray and Ozanne 1995): subjects do not necessarily experience direct drawbacks or disadvantages, but they take care of the effects of unfair behaviors on a more general level.

Firstly, consumers dislike brands due to the fact that they believe the company has infringed written or ethical norms. In this perspective, abuses related to exploitations and transgressions are very important.

Alphonse (m, Nike). It is a huge multinational, but because of this they cannot be justified when they take advantage of their power in less developed countries and, even worse, against children.

As well illustrated by Alphonse, consumers recognize that global companies wield extraordinary influence, both positive and negative, on society's well-being. They expect firms to address social problems linked to what they sell and how they conduct business (Holt et al. 2004). People may turn a blind eye when local companies take advantage of employees, but they won't stand for transnational players like Nike adopting similar practices.

In effect, it's the largest, most visible companies in any category that are frequently classified by their informants as labor rights abusers, monopolistic threats to competition, and/or cultural imperialists (Kozinets and Handelman 2004).

Alessandra (f, Nestlé). One of their most successful strategies is that of distributing free samples of powdered milk in Third World hospitals, increasing the practice of bottle-feeding.

Federico (m, Ferrero). It is a multinational that allowed the production of some of its products in China without asking for controls on job conditions, which are dramatic according to some witnesses. The company buys cocoa through distributive channels that do not provide proper economic rewards to farmers.

Multinationals per se are often considered unreliable and, in addition, subjects declare that they do not trust them. This holds for companies in general and relates to a general form of unreliability and even to more practical aspects of fallibility.

Fabrizio (Nestlé): As soon I was aware of what Nestlé did in Africa, then they said that they had stopped, but I don't believe it, I stopped buying. Fabrizio does not believe that Nestlé had really stopped the unethical behavior he criticized.

FIGURE 2
THE FISH WITH THE LETHAL SPIT



FIGURE 3
A “LEGNANO” BICYCLE PRINT ADVERTISING



In addition, brand dislike can be generated by an unfair use of marketing practices, especially advertising. One of the groups used a picture of a fish that hunts another (smaller) fish by *spitting poison* to catch it: it is used as a metaphor for the company trying to hook the consumer (Fig.2).

Consumers criticize product claims, perceived as fallacious and misleading and, in general, advertising for its deceptive nature.

Agnese (f, Cepu²). They represent studying in a wrong way: they let the consumer perceive a degree or a diploma as an easy task, easy to get without sacrifices. And it's not like that. Their slogans do not sound realistic and feasible.

Davide (m, Trenitalia). Their advertising campaigns are a pure insult to consumers, because they do not represent the real situation, full of delays and technical troubles.

From one of the collages,³ the detail reported on the right (bicycle manufacturer ad) is used to emphasize the redundant use (and abuse) of female features to increase arousal and attention, but that do not fit the context and/or are not relevant in terms of product attributes (Fig. 3).

Sometimes consumers engage in acts of anti-brand equity (Dobscha 1997; Dobscha and Ritson 1998): the more money the manufacturer spends on advertising and brand building, the less I like that brand, as explained by Riccardo in regard to Vodafone.

Riccardo (m, Vodafone). Vodafone campaigns are obsessive. They broadcast even three ads in the same sequence.

Individuals also dislike brands because of the nature of company advertising that tries to exercise an authority over consumers' choices, proposing and often imposing an ideal lifestyle, a sort of "ought-to-be" realm.

²The company provides training and support services to students who do not pass university courses.

³The majority of pictures and concepts in the collages is related to product brand level factors: in this sense, the collective nature of this task (compared to the individual nature of introspective essays) may have exerted a significant role in knowledge elicitation: collages best represent factors that are related to the collectivistic pole of the continuum described in fig 1.

FIGURE 4
TELEVISION PASSIVE VIEWERS



Svetlana (f, Mulino Bianco). They have created an image of an "ideal household" which is not plausible. It is too sugary and grotesque to have any real relation with actual families.

Filippo (m, Nike). I do not agree with their effort aimed at convincing us that if we wear their products, we are different from those who don't, and better.

In *modern time*, advertising was asked to present detailed instructions on how to live; such instructions were potentially important to consumers because they provided them with valuable information on desirable manners, styles, entertainment, and lifestyles.

Knowing what was new or popular might have been a means of gaining prestige and acceptance or might have facilitated social mobility. As reported by Holt (2002), in *postmodern time* consumers don't like to accept corporate impositions and, when exposed to them, they might react with a negative feeling of dislike.

Such a stance is clearly implied in the representation that one of the groups gave of the typical family, made of plastic dummies entirely dominated by the TV. They explicitly urge us to make "better use of our heads" (Fig. 4).

Finally, consumers criticize brands because of the presence of counter values in the advertising used to build them.⁴

Federica (f, Armani). Armani ads represent the elit, as opposed to simplicity, freedom, comfort and moderateness.

Themes involving having or terminal materialism have also increased lately at the expense of doing or instrumental materialism. On the basis of these findings, it appears that ads did not show an escalating image of the good life as much as they increasingly employed pleasure, luxury, and terminal materialism to sell their products and services.

One of the groups represented such a theme with a sort of pyramid on top of which there is a *perfect woman*, who is considered as a sort of target for the young girl in the middle of the picture:

⁴From one of the collages, subjects list their preferred values as follows (no priority order): courage, friendship, family, love, nature, joy, culture.

advertisements show her products (luxury cars, watches, jewels) and models (top models, tv show stars) that portray the road to the top. Underneath there are obscure images of crowds of hardworking men and children and poor people (Fig. 5).

Factors that emerge from the data can thus be ordered according to three different levels that are strictly related to the framework that emerged from the literature review (Fig. 6).

In summary, looking at brand dislike from the consumers' perspective produces a number of possible factors that can be positioned on the continuum between *collectivistic* vs. *individualistic* orientations. At this point, without any further and more in-depth analyses, it's a matter of context and personal characteristics, which can explain the emergence of such factors. In the final section, some directions for future research will be proposed to obtain a more thorough understanding of these results.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The main result that emerges from the analysis is a complex but coherent framework that is broken down into three levels. In this sense, the paper's purpose of giving a descriptive picture of the consumers' perspective on disliked brands has been achieved. Moreover, this picture is strictly integrated in the theoretical framework proposed above.

From a descriptive point of view, the first group of brand dislike factors fits in the product brand level: subjects are unsatisfied with some product or service characteristics and they end up disliking the brand. While some of these problems reveal a sort of mismatch between expectations and performance, others are more related to the monetary exchange that sometimes may produce a sort of skepticism towards the company and its brands.

The second factor is related to the user brand level: subjects often associate the disliked brand with a sort of negative stereotype, someone who they do not want to be involved with. For instance, consumers criticize a brand because of its elitism: it is not targeted at them; it's for someone else, someone more affluent. In other cases, the brand is criticized for its commonness: subjects are convinced that that particular brand is not capable of portraying them how they really want to be.

And, finally, the last dislike factor is related to the corporate brand level: no matter what the product characteristics are, consum-

FIGURE 5
“PERFECT WOMAN” COLLAGE

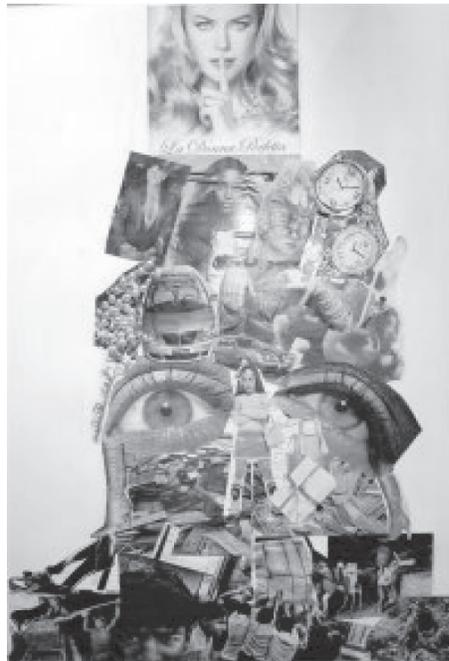


FIGURE 6
LEVELS AND FACTORS OF BRAND DISLIKE

<i>Collectivistic</i>	Dislike as resistance practice	Exploitation and transgression Fake and persuasive communication	<i>Corporate brand level</i>
	Dislike as social communication	Negative stereotypes (materialistic, snobbish, elitist) Poor self expression properties	<i>User brand level</i>
<i>Individualistic</i>	Dislike as refusal of inadequate partner-brands	Price/quality relation Product performance Customer services	<i>Product brand level</i>

ers criticize companies because of their supposedly unfair behaviors and abuses.

The main implication from a descriptive point of view is that consumers develop negative brand attitudes for a number of reasons, some of which are more individualistic (functional, egotistic) and others which have a more collectivistic and ideological nature (social, cultural, ethical). For instance, poor product performance belongs to the individualistic realm, while the exploitation of third world children belongs to the collectivistic one. Besides, consumers can also fall somewhere in between: sometimes they criticize brands because they are not able to express their personality (individualistic), while in other cases they are associated with

negative, materialistic and snobbish stereotypes they do not want to be associated with (collectivistic).

From the point of view of theoretical implications, this analysis of brand dislike both supports and integrates the evidence available in consumer research. We found that informants experience the different dislike factors illustrated in the literature review; nevertheless, the subjects' descriptions also integrate previous contributions in that—within the same analysis—we can find very different dislike factors at the same time, all of which can be rooted in different levels of ideological sensitivity (collectivistic vs. individualistic). This result seems interesting in the light of consumer resistance research. Until now it has been empirically analyzed with

the help of individuals and groups strongly involved in social and/or environmental issues (Dobscha and Ozanne 2000; Holt 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004); the fact that the results of this research study come from ordinary consumers gives new insights into the relevance of this trait in the mass market.

Another interesting implication that arises from this study, which needs to be better developed, is that in some cases consumers tend to separate product from brand relationship: they keep up the relationship with the brand despite negative evaluations of the product. Sometimes this occurs because of a lack of alternatives, but in general the relationship with the brand can be strong enough to consider product drawbacks insufficient reason to switch brands. Research on brand community (McAlexander et al. 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2000) strongly supports this line of thinking.

In the same perspective, the opposite case has to be carefully analyzed, even though we did not come across it directly in our data: sometimes consumers express very negative opinions about brands (even at the corporate level), but still buy and use the product.

This research presents some specificities and limitations, dependent on the nature of the (convenience) sample in terms of age (20-25), social role (students), and culture (Italy). Moreover, the study is essentially descriptive and needs to be developed further in three directions:

- a) after the qualitative research, quantitative methods are actually employed to measure brand dislike (in general and at the brand level) and to identify the weight of its three groups of factors. Only preliminary results are available at the moment;
- b) data will be collected on a larger and diversified scale (international comparisons and multiple stratified samples are going to be developed);
- c) further empirical analyses will address the relationship between dislike and behavior, with particular reference to the strength of this relationship, according to the different levels of the construct (corporate, product, user).

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