

BRAND HATE AND NON-REPURCHASE INTENTION: A SERVICE CONTEXT PERSPECTIVE IN A CROSS-CHANNEL SETTING

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the brand hate phenomenon for service products in a cross-channel setting (offline/online environment). To reach this objective, structural equation modeling was employed on a sample of 265 consumers. Findings reveal that brand hate positively influences offline negative word-of-mouth (NWOM), online complaining, and non-repurchase intention. Furthermore, while offline NWOM has a positive effect on non-repurchase intention, online complaining has a negative one. Finally, a mediated path was identified, which starts from brand hate and ends with non-repurchase intention through online complaining and offline NWOM. The study provides implications for firms' marketers and practitioners.

Keywords: *brand hate; service brands; non-repurchase intention; online complaining; offline negative word-of-mouth.*

1. Introduction

In the last years, the key role of brands as principal agents of cultural marketplace phenomena has been increasingly emphasized by the consumer culture theory (Davvetas and Diamantopoulus, 2017). In this context, several studies (Davvetas and Diamantopoulus, 2017; Trump, 2014; Park et al., 2013a; 2013b; Fournier, 1998; Belk, 1988) have investigated consumer-brand relations from a positive perspective (Fetscherin and Sampedro, 2019), by especially analyzing constructs such as brand attachment (Park et al., 2013a; 2013b; Park et al., 2010), brand passion (Swimberghe et al., 2014; Albert et al., 2013), brand commitment, brand loyalty, brand advocacy (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012) and brand love (Zarantonello et al., 2016b; Batra et al., 2012; Rossiter, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Conversely, only

recently literature has begun to analyze the dark-side of consumer-brand relationships (Kucuk, 2018a) such as brand dislike (Dalli et al., 2006), brand avoidance (Odoom et al., 2019; Knittel et al., 2016; Khan and Lee, 2014; Strandvik et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009), brand divorce (Sussan et al., 2012), brand hypocrisy (Guèvremont, 2019) and anti-branding (Cambefort and Roux, 2019; Kucuk, 2010; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Kucuk, 2008). Notably, these negative emotions can memorably influence consumers (Kucuk, 2018a) since people tend to remember negative events more than positive ones (Hegner et al., 2017; Fournier and Alvarez, 2013; Zeki and Romaya, 2008).

In particular, among the different negative emotions, the brand hate topic represents a relatively new concept (Kucuk, 2018a), which deserves more attention from literature (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019; Zarantonello et al., 2016a). Indeed, this sentiment could become extremely dangerous since hate is today instantaneously and globally widespread through the Internet and social media (Cooper et al., 2019; Obeidat et al., 2018; Grégoire et al., 2009). In this networked scenario, the contents disseminated through brand hate websites (Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009) and social media platforms can easily damage the online reputation of brands and firms (VanMeter et al., 2015), by influencing consumers' perceptions and consequently their purchase decisions (Hegner et al., 2017; Kucuk, 2015; Sääksjärvi and Samiee 2011; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk 2009; Kucuk 2008). As a consequence, crisis management becomes a vital component of strategic branding (Hegner et al., 2014).

From the conceptual perspective, different studies have analyzed the brand hate outcomes without discriminating between their online and offline nature (Bryson and Atwal, 2019; Fahmi and Zaki, 2018; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Bryson et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2011).

In addition, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there is a lack of research focused on a specific target composed of consumers who hate a brand they have already used and experienced. In particular, this target is worthy of investigation since previous studies (Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016a) detected how negative experiences with brands lead consumers to hate them. Moreover, when consumers have a bad experience with a brand, they tend to adopt more active responses, such as complaints and negative word-of-mouth (Zarantonello et al., 2016a). Hence, by having had direct and real experiences with the brand, such consumers may be particularly harmful since they can better communicate negative aspects of it during their revengeful actions (Gensler et al., 2013).

At once, a further research gap is related to the limited number of studies - focused on negative emotions towards brands - which have specifically paid attention to the service environment (Jayasimha et al., 2017; Sweeney et al., 2014; Grégoire et al., 2009). Notably, within this context, negative word-of-mouth (in the online as well as in the offline sphere) assumes a key role since services rely more on this type of communication than products. This is particularly due to the intangibility of services, which transforms them into higher-risk choices than goods (Pongjitt and Beisezee, 2015; Bijmolt et al., 2014). Given this intangible nature, the offline/online negative word-of-mouth can also play a prominent task in the formation of consumers' non-repurchase intentions (Bijmolt et al., 2014).

Starting from these assumptions, the objectives of this study are two-fold. The first is to extend the brand hate outcomes in the service context, from the specific perspective of consumers who have already purchased and used the service brand they hate. In particular, the article analyzes the offline negative word-of-mouth (NWOM), online complaining, and non-repurchase intention as possible brand hate outcomes in the service context. The second is to test the possible serial mediation effect of online complaining and offline NWOM in the relationship between brand hate and non-repurchase intention.

By doing so, the research makes relevant contributions to the existing literature both methodologically – by investigating the role of brand hate in the service context from the specific point of view of consumers who hate a brand they have already used and experienced – and conceptually – by considering different brand hate’s outcomes and the mechanisms through which brand hate influences non-repurchase intention within the omnichannel environment.

To achieve these objectives and test the research model, structural equation modeling (SEM) has been employed on a sample of 265 Italian consumers.

Structurally, the remainder of this paper is organized into the following sections: (ii) the theoretical background and (iii) hypotheses development; (iv) the methodology; (v) the results and (vi) the conclusions, implications and avenues for future research.

2. Theoretical background and conceptual development

2.1 Brand hate conceptualization

Among the multiple negative emotions, the brand hate construct within the literature is a very recent phenomenon and researches remain rare (Bryson and Atwal, 2019; Zarantonello et al., 2016a). Despite the scarcity of studies focused on the brand hate analysis, some authors have sought to conceptualize it in a systematic way.

A first attempt has been provided by Kucuk (2008) who identifies a new brand effect on the Internet called “Negative Double Jeopardy” (NDJ), according to which the most valuable brands may attract more anti-brand hate site attention than less valuable ones. By focusing on the online public complaining context, Grégoire et al. (2009) define hate as a desire for avoidance and revenge toward a brand. In their study, Johnson and colleagues (2011) identify brand hate as an emotion of shame, since it represents a critical mediator in the process that brings consumers to act hatefully. Subsequently, Bryson et al. (2013) claim, in their study, how the brand hate construct represents the exact opposite of brand love, by defining it as

“the extreme negative affective component of attitude towards a brand” (Bryson et al., 2013, p. 395).

By considering the entire set of brand hate emotions, Zarantonello and colleagues (2016a) go beyond the existing studies since none of the prior researches considered all the emotions, related to the brand hate concept, as well as their organization in consumer reactions.

Notably, through a series of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, the authors identify two brand hate components: an active one, including sentiments such as anger, contempt, and disgust, and a passive one, which comprises feelings related to fear, disappointment, shame, and dehumanization.

In the same line of definition, Hegner et al. (2017) conceptualize brand hate as a more intense emotional sentiment – which consumers feel toward a brand – than brand dislike.

By focusing on a broader perspective, Kucuk (2018a, p. 20) tries to propose a general conceptualization of brand hate, by defining it as a “psychological state whereby a consumer forms intense negative emotions and detachment toward brands that perform poorly and give consumers bad and painful experiences on both individual and social levels”.

Finally, the study of Kucuk (2019) represents the most recent brand hate contribution and one of the first attempts – together with the Zarantonello et al.’s paper (2016a) – aimed at empirically testing a multidimensional brand hate construct. Indeed, the author discusses the consumer brand hate hierarchy as a unidimensional and multidimensional level brand hate structure. In particular, while the unidimensional structure consists of a single hierarchical form composed of three different levels of brand hate (cold, cool, and hot), in the multidimensional one, these single-brand hate constructs can act together, thus leading to an elevated level of consumer hate.

Along with the brand hate construct itself, researchers also focus their attention on the identification and analysis of the brand hate antecedents (Bryson and Atwal, 2019; Kucuk,

2018b; Islam et al., 2018; Zarantonello et al., 2018; Hegner et al., 2017; Platania et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Bryson et al., 2013; Park et al., 2013a; 2013b), outcomes (Zarantonello et al., 2018; Hegner et al., 2017; Platania et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Romani et al., 2012) and strategies (Ahmed and Hashim, 2018; Zarantonello et al., 2018; Hegner et al., 2017; Popp et al., 2016; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Romani et al., 2012; Dawar and Lei, 2009). In particular, the present study focuses its attention on the outcomes' research stream with the final aim of (i) analyzing the brand hate topic in the service context; (ii) investigating different brand hate's outcomes; (iii) examining the mechanisms through which brand hate influences the non-repurchase intention within an omnichannel environment.

2.2 Brand hate in the service context

Overall, until recently, the majority of studies about brands have concentrated their attention on the products' context (Maroofi et al., 2012; Tsai, 2011). This scenario also characterizes the research specifically devoted to the negative consumers-brand relationships, with several authors focusing their attention on the products' brands (Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher, 2018; Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2017; Knittel et al., 2016; Popp et al., 2016; Relling et al., 2016; Trump, 2014; Kim et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2012; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Dawar and Lei, 2009) or at once on the products and services' brands, without making a strict distinction between the two categories (Japutra et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2018; Zarantonello et al., 2018; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Bryson et al., 2013; Fournier and Alvarez, 2013; Romani et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2009; Aaker et al., 2004).

With specific reference to the brand hate concept, only a few studies have investigated this topic in the services brands context. In particular, some authors have analyzed the brand hate antecedents towards service products by showing how consumers develop hate feelings when they are dissatisfied (Bryson et al., 2013) or experience episodes of service failure and firms'

failed recoveries (Japutra et al., 2018; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Jayasimha et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2011; Grégoire et al., 2009).

Moreover, literature has also examined the consumers' brand hate towards service products from the outcomes perspective by identifying different behavioral responses such as (i) punishing/causing harm to services' brands, (ii) withdrawing from any interactions with them (Grégoire et al., 2009), (iii) avoiding patronizing them, (iv) adopting switching actions, (v) talking badly about them through the offline NWOM and the online public complaining (Japutra et al., 2018; Jayasimha et al., 2017; Bryson et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2011; Grégoire et al., 2009).

This article focuses its attention on the analysis of both the online and offline nature of the negative word-of-mouth (i.e., online public complaining and offline NWOM) since previous studies do not underline this distinction, by mainly concentrating on the online sphere (Japutra et al., 2018; Jayasimha et al., 2017; Grégoire et al., 2009). Moreover, in order to extend the analysis of the brand hate outcomes in the service context, the paper examines and tests a further construct, namely the non-repurchase intention since, to the best of the authors' knowledge, its role has been under-investigated.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1 Offline negative word-of-mouth

Offline word-of-mouth can be conceptualized as an oral and person-to-person conversation "between a receiver and a communicator, whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial" (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017, p. 1122). When this communication assumes a negative nature, it is defined negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) and identified as a consumer's oral message aimed at denigrating, complaining, or advising against products, services, brands, or firms (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). Based on the assumption that NWOM is considered harmful to firms (Philp et al., 2018), several contributions have deepened this topic (Keiningham et al.,

2018; Jayasimha et al., 2017; Relling et al., 2016; Sweeney et al., 2014) by especially focusing on the identification of the main antecedents that can lead consumers to adopt it. Notably, some studies (Kordrostami and Kordrostami, 2019; Zarantonello et al., 2018; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016a) analyze and corroborate the role of brand hate as a possible antecedent of NWOM.

With specific regard to the service context, literature underlines the greater influence of the NWOM for services' brands with respect to product ones. In particular, NWOM is more powerful for services' brands, because "services are intangible, difficult to evaluate before purchase, not covered by guarantees, and not standardized" (Sweeny et al., 2014, p. 338).

Moreover, there is a growing evidence that feelings of hate, deriving from episodes of service brand failure (Johnson et al., 2011; Grégoire et al., 2009), lead consumers to adopt offline NWOM in order to talk badly about the hated service's brand (Bryson et al., 2013).

Starting from the above discussion, it is expected that the more the consumers hate a service's brand, the more they will adopt offline NWOM communications. Hence:

H1. Brand hate, in the service context, leads to offline NWOM.

3.2 Online complaining

The complaint's concept can be defined as the act of expressing negative feelings and annoyance or communicating dissatisfaction to firms and/or third parties (Goetzinger et al., 2006). Notably, the relevance of this action had begun to grow since the early 1990s (Singh, 1990), when several authors analyzed the conditions and processes leading customers to complain about products, services, and businesses (Singh and Wilkes, 1996; Blodgett and Granbois, 1992).

With the advent of the new technologies, the act of complaining also acquires an online nature since consumers today can communicate their negative feelings instantly and globally

through the adoption of the Internet and the social media platforms (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017; Presi et al., 2014; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

In particular, consumers can complain in a variety of ways, such as by creating their complaining contents, posting or sharing them into anti-branding websites, blogs, forums or social media (De Almeida et al., 2018; King et al., 2014; Huang et al., 2011; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009; Brown et al., 2007; Ward and Ostrom, 2006).

In this context, literature (Grégoire et al., 2009; Mattila and Wirtz, 2004) conceptualizes online public complaining as an extra channel to voice customers' frustration in addition to the traditional ones (i.e., face-to-face, phone), which allows to lament through the adoption of the online platforms publicly. Overall, compared to the offline NWOM, online complaining is "mass-public oriented, reaches a larger audience, includes a clearer intent to get the firm in trouble" (Grégoire et al., 2010, p. 744) and adopts "online applications to alert the general public about the misbehaviour of a firm" (Grégoire et al., 2010, p. 743). For this reason, online complaining deserves special attention due to its damaging consequences for firms (Ward and Ostrom, 2006).

In the service context, when consumers feel victims of a series of brand failures, they tend more easily to experience vivid feelings of hate (Japutra et al., 2018; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Jayasimha et al., 2017; Bryson et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2011), by consequently becoming harmful online complainers (Grégoire et al., 2009). Based on the above, it is expected that the more the consumers feel an emotion of hate toward a service's brand, the more they will adopt the online complaining. In this regard, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H2. Brand hate, in the service context, leads to online complaining.

3.3 Non-repurchase intention

Recent research - focused on anti-consumption trends - demonstrates the influence of negative emotions on customer loyalty and consequently on the product/brand frequency of use, as well as repurchase intent (Zarantonello et al., 2018; Jayasimha et al., 2017; Bryson et al., 2013). From a managerial perspective, it becomes crucial for firms to effectively deal with the customers' brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017) since it, directly and indirectly, influences their repurchase decisions (Kucuk, 2008).

From a conceptual perspective, while the repurchase intention has been analyzed by several authors (i.e., Liang et al., 2018; Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2017; Wu et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2011; Chiu et al., 2009; Yi and La, 2004; Hellier et al., 2003; Palmer et al., 2000), the non-repurchase inclination has not received a lot of attention.

However, some studies have tried to define it. Notably, Liao and Keng (2013) conceptualize non-repurchase intention as a negative outcome caused by firms' failures. In other terms, it can be defined as the customers' willingness to avoid another purchase from the same firm, based on their previous negative experiences.

By following the taxonomy proposed by Singh (1988), Istanbulluoglu and colleagues (2017) define the non-repurchase intention with the term "exit". Moreover, the authors also underline the key relevance to analyze further the mechanisms which are behind this construct since it represents a customers' private action, which "does not give the company any feedback" (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017, p. 1112). Thus, the exit is not directly visible to brands since consumers decide to abandon them without communicating their dissatisfaction. Also for what concerns the identification of the main antecedents, literature has mainly focused its attention on the repurchase intention construct (Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2017; Kuo et al., 2009; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), thus detecting several factors leading customers to repurchase from the same firm.

In particular, Davvetas and Diamantopoulos (2017) and Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) corroborate the positive relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intention since satisfied customers who also love the brand are more committed to repurchase it. Furthermore, by specifically focusing on the service context, Kuo and colleagues (2009) find out that the services' perceived value and quality, as well as customers' satisfaction, positively influence their repurchase intention.

On the contrary, with regard to the non-repurchase intention, some studies identify how the perceived deception and dissatisfaction represent the main factors leading customers to adopt this action (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017; Agag and El-Masry, 2016; Riquelme and Roman, 2014; Kwon and Sung, 2012).

Overall, starting from the supposition that consumers, who are dissatisfied with a service's brand, develop an emotion of hate toward it (Fahmi and Zaki, 2018; Bryson et al., 2013), and that this dissatisfaction can also lead them not to repurchase this brand (Baghi and Gabrielli, 2019; Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017; Agag and El-Masry, 2016), it could be hypothesized that the more the consumers are dissatisfied with a service's brand, the more they will hate it by consequently manifesting a non-repurchase intention.

Based on that, the following hypothesis is stated:

H3. Brand hate, in the service context, leads to the non-repurchase intention.

In addition to the brand hate antecedent, also the word-of-mouth can assume a key role in affecting and shaping customers' attitudes and behavioral intentions (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017; Xia and Bechwati, 2008; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006).

Indeed, this type of communication can influence consumers' behaviors by creating awareness, changing or confirming opinions, and encouraging or discouraging repeat purchase (Lee et al., 2018; Pongjitt and Beise-Zee, 2015; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold,

2011). In particular, by focusing on the dark side of word-of-mouth, offline NWOM and online complaining can be particularly effective in changing purchase intentions and decision making (Jayasimha et al., 2017; Sweeney et al., 2014).

With regard to the offline NWOM, consumers adopting it often want to alert others about their brand negative experiences (Hegner et al., 2017) since they normally regret their purchase, by then deciding not to buy the brand again (Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2017).

In particular, by concentrating on the service context, Butt et al. (2016) identify a link between low service quality, NWOM and customers' purchase intentions.

For what concerns the online complaining, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there is a lack of studies analyzing the relationship between this construct and the non-repurchase intention in the services brands context. Indeed, the majority of researches examining online complainers take into consideration both services, products, and brands indiscriminately, without specifically focusing on the services brands topic (Instabulluoglu et al., 2017; Hsiao, 2011). In particular, these studies conceptualize complainers as a category of consumers who protest online about services failures (Bijmolt et al., 2014) "choosing not to put themselves in the same purchase situation again" (Instabulluoglu et al., 2017, p. 1115), thus hypothesizing a positive relationship between online complaining and non-repurchase intention (Hsiao, 2011). In other words, when consumers are dissatisfied with a service brand, they tend to be more inclined to complain in the online sphere, by consequently avoiding to repurchase it. For all these reasons, concerning the offline and the online spheres, it could be hypothesized that consumers, who adopt offline NWOM and online complaining toward a service brand, will develop a non-repurchase intention. Hence, the fourth and fifth hypotheses are the following:

H4. Offline NWOM, in the service context, leads to the non-repurchase intention.

H5. Online complaining, in the service context, leads to non-repurchase intention.

3.4 Mediation hypothesis

Overall, voicing an experience – be it online or offline – has long been considered an important form of market feedback (Cho et al., 2002; Fornell and Westbrook, 1984). In particular, different studies show how motives for adopting online or offline word-of-mouth can differ (Harris et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2002). Notably, Klesse et al. (2015) detect that one key difference in the adoption of the online or offline sphere lies “in the extent to which consumers deliberate about their word of mouth” (Eelen et al., 2017, p. 873). In particular, online word-of-mouth offers more opportunity for deliberation since it is more asynchronous with respect to the offline word-of-mouth (Berger and Iyengar, 2013). In fact, people posting, for instance, on social media, have more opportunities to think about their online comments by better building and refining their communication.

On the contrary, offline word-of-mouth tends to be more synchronous: in face-to-face conversations, individuals can talk about anything that comes to their mind by responding to one another through a continuous communication flow (Eelen et al., 2017).

Another difference between the online and offline environment is related to the different degree of need for deliberation (Eelen et al., 2017). More in detail, some researchers (Eisingerich et al., 2015; Berger and Iyengar, 2013) have noted that customers “feel a stronger need to deliberate on what they are sharing” (Eelen et al., 2017, p. 873) via online than via offline.

Starting from these differences characterizing the online and offline spheres, literature also underlines how motives leading to the adoption of the offline NWOM and online complaining can differ (Harris et al., 2013; Cho et al., 2002). Notably, compared to the offline NWOM, online complaining is specially adopted in order to alert a larger audience about the firms’ misbehaviors since its main intent is to get firms in more serious trouble (Grégoire et al., 2010; Ward and Ostrom, 2006).

Overall, even if different researches (Istanbuluoğlu et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2013; Grégoire et al., 2009; Mattila and Wirtz, 2004; Cho et al., 2002) tried to identify the specific characteristics and reasons leading to the adoption of the offline NWOM and online complaining, to the best of the authors' knowledge, only little research has attempted to identify and test a possible relationship between these two constructs. In particular, when customers perceive online information and rumors as truthful and useful to their decision making, they will be more inclined to spread these negative online comments to others also in the offline environment (Guo, 2015; Van Hoye and Lievens, 2009).

Based on that, it is likely to suppose that when customers spread negative experiences on the online channels, they could be more inclined to share, in turn, their negative complaints also in the offline sphere. In other words, online complaints can lead customers to not only spread these negative comments to unknown individuals via the Internet but also to report them to acquaintances in the offline sphere (Guo, 2015).

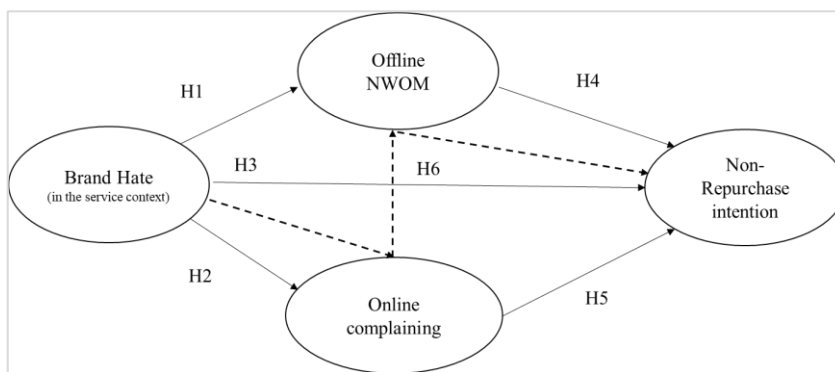
Starting from this relationship between online complaining and offline NWOM, and from the fact that these two constructs have been previously shown to be significant outcomes of brand hate in the service context (Japutra et al., 2018; Jayasimha et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016a; Johnson et al., 2011; Bryson et al., 2013; Grégoire et al., 2009) as well as relevant predictors of the non-repurchase intention (Davvetas and Diamantopoulos, 2017; Hegner et al., 2017; Butt et al., 2016; Au et al., 2014; Bijmolt et al., 2014; Breitsoh et al., 2014; Petzer et al., 2014; Goetzinger et al., 2006; Neale et al., 2006), it is then expected that the main effect of brand hate on non-repurchase intention is linked through offline NWOM and online complaining. For this reason, a mediation analysis will be conducted in order to investigate the way in which offline NWOM and online complaining may influence the relationship between brand hate and non-repurchase intention.

In particular, based on the above assumption concerning the influence of online complaining on both offline NWOM and non-repurchase intention, a serial mediation effect through online complaining and offline NWOM is hypothesized. Hence, the last hypothesis is the following:

H6. There is a serial mediation effect going from brand hate on non-repurchase intention through online complaining and offline NWOM.

Figure 1 depicts the overall model under investigation, with the research hypotheses.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



4. Methodology

Data were collected through a web-based self-completion survey. By following previous studies focused on the brand hate construct (Zarantonello et al., 2016a), a snowball sampling technique has been adopted (Goodman, 1961). In the first phase, Italian students were asked to think about a service’s brand - already used by them – toward which they feel an emotion of hate. Subsequently, they were also asked to send the questionnaire’s link to other people they knew. Notably, the snowball technique has been chosen since it allows “to approach subjects with greater variability in demographic attributes regarding factors such as age, education, occupation and residence” (Choi and Lotz, 2016, p. 542), thus also permitting to survey connected personal networks outside specific settings like schools, universities, or companies (Kowald and Axhausen, 2012).

The data collection took place from December 2017 to February 2018 by obtaining 265 valid responses. Therefore, our sample size is above the rule of 200 (Kline, 2011), and the sample-to-item ratio was 16.6, which is higher than the acceptable ratio of 5:1 (Gorsuch, 1983) and concludes we have an adequate sample size.

For what concerns the selected constructs, all of them have been operationalized using scales specifically developed for the analysis of the negative emotions towards brands. The scales proofed to be reliable. Appendix A contains the complete list of the items, factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha for each scale, and the source adopted for each construct. We calculated the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) as well as Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to measure sampling adequacy (Hutcheson and Sofroniou, 1999). The KMO is .871 (>0.5), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant at 0.000 ($p < 0.05$); therefore, the data are suitable for factor analysis.

5. Results

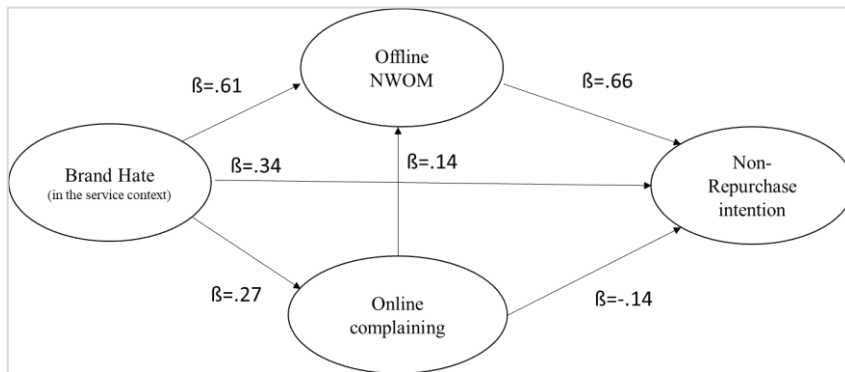
From a descriptive point of view, the survey's results allowed to collect information about the brands nominated by the interviewees. Notably, the different brand names have been grouped into specific categories in order to identify the sectors from which they mainly come. More in detail, the majority of hated service brands ($n=107$) belong to the transport and hospitality sector (in particular air, bus and rail services, and tour operator), followed by the telecommunication ($n=74$), and catering/restaurant ones ($n=61$) (in particular, fast food and food delivery services). The remaining brands ($n=23$) have been included in an additional category (denominated "other sectors") in which the following types of service products have been inserted: energy service, television service, e-commerce, bookmaking, security services, prepaid cards, university service.

In the second phase, to test the proposed model, several analyses have been conducted. Exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling using SPSS AMOS are carried out to address the hypotheses. In the exploratory factor analysis, the 16 items loaded on the expected four factors explaining 81% variance in the data. The single method test of Harman was used to test for common method variance (Harman, 1976). The factor analysis produced neither a single factor nor one general factor that accounted for the majority of the variance. Each factor accounted for more than the viable cut-off of 5%. Thus, there is no indication that common method variance causes a problem. To assess multicollinearity, we ran a series of regressions models on the various constructs to calculate the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Kleinbaum et al., 1988). The VIF values ranged from 1.12 to 1.59, that can be considered unproblematic.

Convergent validity was examined by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) and the construct reliability (CR). AVE and CR values are above the recommended threshold (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Additionally, all AVE values are higher than the squared inter-construct correlation (SIC) estimates. Thus discriminant validity is established (see Appendix B). The results (Fig. 2) suggest acceptable model fit with $\chi^2=346.574$; $df=139$; $p=.00$; $\chi^2/df=2.493$; IFI =.953; NFI = .925 and CFI = .953; RMSEA=.070.

Brand hate, in the service context, positively influences offline NWOM ($\beta=.61$; $p<.001$), thus hypothesis H1 is confirmed. Additionally, brand hate also leads to online complaining ($\beta=.27$; $p<.001$) and non-repurchase intention ($\beta=.34$; $p<.001$), thus corroborating H2 and H3. Offline NWOM has a strong positive effect on non-repurchase intention ($\beta=.66$; $p<.001$), while online complaining has a weaker negative effect ($\beta=-.14$; $p=.012$), thus confirming H4 and disconfirming H5. Finally, online complaining has a positive effect on offline NWOM ($\beta=.14$; $p=.010$).

Figure 2. Structural model



To test for serial multiple mediation, we utilized Preacher et al.'s (2007) bootstrapping approach as a test of indirect effects. The model coefficients are summarized in Table 1. The coefficients correspond with our results from the structural equation model. Table 2 shows the indirect effects based on 10,000 bootstrap samples. The first indirect effect is that of brand hate on non-repurchase intention through online complaining. This effect can be interpreted as significantly negative as the bootstrap confidence interval is entirely below zero. The second indirect effect of brand hate on non-repurchase intention through online complaining and offline NWOM in serial, with online complaining modeled as affecting offline NWOM, which in turn influences non-repurchase intention is significantly positive. The same holds true for the third indirect effect of brand hate on non-repurchase intention through offline NWOM. This effect again is significantly positive. The total indirect effect as the sum of all indirect effects as well is significantly positive. Considering these results, our hypothesis H6 is confirmed.

Table 1. Regression coefficients, standard errors, and model summary information for the serial mediator model.

Antecedents	Online complaining			Offline NWOM			Non-repurchase intention		
	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p	Coeff.	SE	p
Brand hate	.37	.08	< .01	.61	.06	< .01	.39	.11	< .01
Online complaining	-	-	-	.14	.04	< .01	-.16	.06	.01
Offline NWOM	-	-	-	-	-	-	.45	.10	< .01
Constant	1.59	.37	< .01	1.96	.25	< .01	1.07	.43	.01
	R ² = .07			R ² = .37			R ² = .23		
	F(1, 263) = 19.27, p < .01			F(2, 262) = 77.29, p < .01			F(3, 261) = 26.15, p < .01		

Table 2. Indirect effects of the serial multiple mediator model

Indirect Effects	Coeff.	SE	BCa CI	
			LLCI	ULCI
IE1: BH → OC → NPI	-.06	.03	-.13	-.01
IE2: BH → OC → ON → NPI	.28	.07	.15	.43
IE3: BH → ON → NPI	.02	.01	.01	.05
Total IE	.24	.08	.09	.40

*Abbreviations: IE=Indirect Effect; BH=Brand Hate; OC=Online Complaining; ON=Offline NWOM; NPI=Non-repurchase Intention

6. Conclusions and implications for theory and practice

6.1 Discussion of the results

By specifically focusing on the service context, the study provides relevant contributions to the existing literature both from a methodological and a conceptual perspective.

Methodologically, it investigates the role of brand hate, in the service environment, from a specific target’s point of view, composed by consumers who have previously purchased and used the service brand they hate. Conceptually, the article considers different brand hate outcomes in the service context and the mechanisms through which brand hate influences the non-repurchase intention within an omnichannel environment (i.e., offline NWOM and online complaining). Notably, results show how the formation of hateful emotions toward a service brand leads consumers to talk badly about it, in the offline as well as in the online domain, and not to repeat the same choice. Furthermore, the study also analyzes the relationships between non-repurchase intention and both offline NWOM and online

complaining by confirming a positive relation with the first and a negative relation with the second one.

In particular, this last surprising result could be explained as follows: the nature of the context (online/offline) in which consumers complain about a service brand can influence their non-repurchase intention. More specifically, in the offline context, consumers usually complain about a service brand within their real and private networks. This personal exposition of their frustration could result in a higher non-repurchase intention in order to avoid making a bad impression in front of their acquaintances.

On the contrary, in the online domain, given that consumers can remain anonymous, they may feel less judged in the case that they want to purchase again the service they have criticized.

Another potential explanation might be due to the fact that online complainers can receive more rapid and satisfactory responses and recoveries from firms (Lee and Cude, 2012), thus mitigating and reducing their dissatisfaction, and consequently their intention not to repurchase. This result would confirm the key role played by the firms' effective online recovery strategies (Harun et al., 2018; Park and Ha, 2016; Casidy and Shin, 2015) in the reduction of the non-repurchase intention (Bijmolt et al., 2014). Conversely, in the offline context, consumers usually vent their negative feelings only within personal and restricted networks, without therefore having direct contacts with brands and firms, as happens in the online sphere. Overall, our findings underline how online complainers express a lower attitude not to repurchase the brand, potentially because they have been satisfied by the responses provided by firms, in real-time, in the online sphere.

Moreover, an additional motivation, concerning the identified negative relationship between online complaining and non-repurchase intention, could be related to the fact that complaining propensities tend to be influenced by situational, personality, behavioral, and

cultural factors (Gursoy et al., 2007; Liu and McClure, 2001). In particular, by specifically focusing on the cultural aspects, our results could be explained in the light of the fact that the Italians are very friends- and family-oriented (Helmreich, 2017), thus leading them to have more pressure when they adopt the offline channel. Indeed, since in the offline context, customers usually have direct contacts with family and friends, they could tend to reduce their intention to repurchase a criticized service in order to ensure maintaining honest and transparent relations with their personal and private networks.

Finally, by focusing on the mediation analysis, results identified a serial mediation effect going from brand hate on non-repurchase intention through online complaining and offline NWOM. In particular, this finding allowed us to detect a significant indirect effect of brand hate on non-repurchase intention through online complaining and offline NWOM in serial, with online complaining leading to offline NWOM, which in turn positively affects non-repurchase intention. This result suggests a mediated path in the service context, which starts from brand hate leading to customers' non-repurchase intention through the adoption of online complaining and the diffusion of negative online comments in the offline sphere.

6.2 Theoretical and managerial implications

The study offers both theoretical and managerial contributions.

Theoretically, it extends the existing research related to consumer-brand relationships by focusing on the service context since a limited number of studies have specifically paid attention, until now, to services and their brands (Jayasimha et al., 2017; Sweeney et al., 2014).

Moreover, the paper examines the brand hate phenomenon for service products in a cross-channel setting (online/offline environment) by analyzing offline NWOM, online complaining, and non-repurchase intention as possible outcomes. The study also investigates

the relations between non-repurchase intention and both offline NWOM and online complaining by identifying respectively a positive and a negative one. These results allow examining some of the mechanisms behind the non-repurchase intention, thus enriching extant literature. Indeed, Istanbuluoglu and colleagues (2017) underline the key relevance to analyze this construct further since it represents a customer's private decision, which does not give any feedback to firms. Thus, given that (i) customers' non-repurchase intention is not directly visible; (ii) consumers deciding to abandon a brand often do not communicate their dissatisfaction, the identification of three antecedents of the non-repurchase intention in the service context (i.e., offline NWOM, online complaining, and brand hate) represents a relevant contribution for better analyzing the dynamics behind this construct.

The research also detects a positive relationship between online complaining and offline NWOM, enriching the existing literature since only a little research has tried to identify and test a possible connection between these two constructs. Furthermore, the article provides an additional element of novelty by suggesting a mediated path in the service environment. In particular, it begins with the formation of brand hate toward a service product and ends with an intention not to repurchase it. Moreover, this path is connected by customers' adoption of online complaints and the diffusion of these negative messages in the offline sphere, in order to alert their personal networks about their negative emotions toward a specific service brand. In addition, from a methodological perspective, the study analyzes a specific target composed of consumers who have already purchased and used a service brand they hate.

For what concerns the managerial contributions, the article provides implications for marketers and practitioners. In particular, firms are recommended to put high attention to the omnichannel environment since dissatisfied consumers will adopt both online complaints and offline NWOM in order to communicate their brand hate. In this way, a brand hate path, in the service context, is triggered. Notably, this negative emotion leads customers to adopt

online complaining, which in turn can lead to diffusion of these negative comments also in the offline sphere, thus inducing to the increase of non-repurchase intention.

For this reason, firms should carefully monitor online and offline discussions concerning their services and brands.

Obviously, in the online context, this action becomes more immediate since the interactive nature of this environment allows firms to track and respond to customers' complaints promptly. As a result, the online interaction with dissatisfied customers requires less investment in terms of organizational and managerial efforts with respect to the management of offline relationships.

However, despite a lower investment in the online context, the recruitment of skilled resources, responsible for the management of online relationships with customers, remains a firm's priority. In particular, it becomes crucial to manage customers' online complaints properly. In order to achieve this objective, firms could invite consumers to fill out online post-purchase questionnaires with sufficient space to report any complaints. In this way, firms will be able to undertake a prompt online service recovery process. Notably, the first phase should consist of giving consumers promptly explanations about what went wrong in order to assure them that a similar negative experience will not be repeated in the future. The subsequent stage should be related to the creation of a good second impression, which may allow mitigating or deleting consumers' previous discontent, as well as reducing their propensity to diffuse this state of mind in the offline environment. This could lead to a decrease in customers' non-repurchase intention, thus interrupting the brand hate path identified by the present study in the service context.

Moreover, online complaints could also allow firms to collect valuable feedback, thus helping them to improve their services.

Managerially, all these online actions require the inclusion of specific and qualified skills specialized in communication, content development, and real-time interactions with users who can be included within the company or recruited externally (e.g., marketing and web agencies).

By focusing on the offline environment, the process related to the management of the customers' hate responses is more difficult to monitor, due to the typical silent nature of the offline complainers (Bijmolt et al., 2014), which needs more investment in terms of costs and organizational-managerial efforts.

However, at a practical level, the spreading of brand hate of service products in the offline sphere, could be anticipated or mitigated in several ways, such as (i) improving the offline communicative approaches according to defined targets; (ii) following the consumer during all the fruition phases of the service; (iii) enhancing the communication crisis management; (iv) establishing an efficient organizational structure able, for instance, to coordinate the sales network (in order to detect the main complaints expressed by customers in the offline sphere), to manage the pricing and promotion policies in a flexible manner, and to provide rapid responses to the market.

Through the adoption of these actions, it could be possible to anticipate or moderate the majority of the reasons leading customers to hate service brands (e.g., disorganization/inefficiency, possible service inconveniences, scant regard towards contracts, lack of ethics and transparency, excessive unsolicited advertising, lack of staff availability and professionalism), by also attempting to monitor the brand hate conversations taking place in the offline context.

Moreover, by also considering the wide range of service sectors covered in the online survey (transport/travel, telecommunication, catering/restaurant, other sectors), it is necessary to add

that the higher the level of competition within a specific category of services, the more important and necessary these actions will be.

In this respect, while services belonging to monopolistic or oligopolistic sectors may have less need to develop these types of policies, these actions could become of vital importance for those services pertaining to sectors characterized by a high level of competition. Indeed, in these sectors (e.g., catering, hotels), it will be much more likely that customers, who hate a certain service brand, decide not to repurchase it anymore, by consequently choosing another one. However, today, in many sectors, considered until now as monopolistic or oligopolistic (e.g., transport), the level of competitiveness and potential substitutes (e.g., cheap airlines, cheaper long-distance bus services compared to trains) are on the rise. This means that also, for these sectors, the recovery policies will probably become a prerogative in the future.

The same consideration can be made with respect to the price of the service: in particular, when services are rather inexpensive, customers' non-repurchase intention is not particularly high. On the contrary, when services are costly, dissatisfied customers will rather tend to exchange them with alternative ones, as customers have more to lose.

Overall, in the online as well as in the offline context, firms should assume a proactive behavior through the acquisition of specialized resources with both a promptly reactive capacity in the crisis management, and the ability to manage the long-term relations with customers through constant interactions on both the online (e.g., continuous monitoring of customers' complaints on websites, chats, social media platforms, and realization of prompt responses) and offline sphere (e.g., identification of the existing offline complaints through constant interactions with the sales network, organization of focus groups, and interviews in order to evaluate the offline customer dissatisfaction).

6.3 Limitations and future research

The study of the dark side of consumer-brand relationships represents an emerging topic with several issues that still need to be addressed (Hegner et al., 2017). The present paper attempted to provide a response to the call for more research into this field, specifically in the service context.

The major limitations concern the adopted sampling technique and the final sample. In particular, the snowball sampling technique is a non-probability method, whose main disadvantage is related to the impossibility of fitting the criterion of a random sample, thus restricting potential generalizations of our study (Kowald and Axhausen, 2012).

For what concerns the final sample, as argued by Hegner and colleagues (2017), love and hate represent social and cultural constructs. Given that Italian consumers compose our sample, it will be interesting to investigate, in future studies, if our model could be applied in other geographical contexts (e.g., collectivistic vs. individualistic countries), with the final aim of identifying possible similarities and differences in brand hate motivations and behaviors in the service context.

Furthermore, future research might focus on the effects of consumers' characteristics (e.g., age, sex, employment situation) on their service brand hate behaviors, or include moderators like service category (e.g., higher/lower risk services) and involvement with the service category (Sweeney et al., 2014). Finally, the analysis of additional mediating motives for service brand hate, such as self-enhancement (Engel et al., 1993), could provide a deeper understanding of the context.

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APPENDIX A. Construct Operationalization

Constructs	Factor loadings	Cronbach α	Main sources
Brand hate			
1. I am disgusted by this brand	.74	.90	Hegner et al., 2017
2. I do not tolerate this brand and its company	.77		
3. The world would be a better place without this brand	.75		
4. I am very angry about this brand	.75		
5. This brand is awful	.88		
6. I hate this brand	.84		
Offline NWOM			
1. I spread negative word-of-mouth about the brand	.74	.91	Hegner et al., 2017
2. I denigrated the brand to my friends	.74		
3. When my friends were looking for a similar service, I told them not to buy from the firm	.89		
4. I try to influence many people in not purchasing this brand	.92		
Online complaining			
1. I complained online to make the behaviours and practices of the brand public	.93	.96	Grégoire et al., 2010
2. I complained online to report my experience to other consumers	.96		
3. I complained online to spread the word about my misadventure	.96		

Non-repurchase intention

1. I do not purchase products of this brand anymore	.91		
2. It is very likely I will buy this brand in the future*	.83	.93	Davvetas and Diamantopoulos 2017; Hegner et al., 2017
3. I will buy this brand the next time I need a product from this category*	.88		

*Reverse question

APPENDIX B. Reliability and validity tests

Construct	Mean (SD)	AVE (> .40)	CR (> .60)	SIC			
				1	2	3	4
1. Brand hate	4.19 (1.24)	.62	.91	1			
2. Offline NWOM	4.96 (1.40)	.68	.90	.41	1		
3. Online Complaining	3.14 (1.76)	.90	.97	.07	.09	1	
4. Non-repurchase intention	4.45 (1.97)	.77	.91	.17	.32	.01	1