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When relationships go wrong: insights from previous studies

Abstract

Purpose: This research provides a first systematic literature review on negative consumer-brand relationships (NCBR) issues in order to capture the main terms and factors employed in several previous studies.

Originality value: In recent years, the meaning of these negative relationships has attracted the attention of marketing practitioners, but little attention has been given in academia. The research conducted in this paper, represents the only systematic identification, examination and incorporation of negative relations factors identified through the existing literature and discusses promising aspects of NCBR for future research.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This paper analyses the main characteristics of 93 articles on NCBR published in the most relevant scientific journals within the period 2009–2014. Based on a systematic literature review, we have explored the topic as well as other relevant aspects of the research.

Findings: Four fundamental key thematic themes of NCBR have been identified: *Conflict attitude; Brand-self distance; Negative perceived emotions; Countercultural phenomena*. This review allows a comprehensive understanding of the nature and measurement of this flourishing research topic, and highlights the need for continuing research into additional conceptualization and validation of theories.

Practical implications: Our findings allow managers to be aware of the major factors that may significantly contribute to the negative relationships that consumers have towards brands. Thereby, it helps help marketing practitioners to take more efficient decisions and avoid strategies that increment negative relationships.

Key words: Negative relationships; brand avoidance; anti-consumption; brand hate; systematic literature review.

1. Introduction

The consumer-brand relationship phenomenon has been increasing in the last decades, arousing interest not only in the academia as well as among practitioners (Loureiro, 2012). The goal is to understand the consumers' motivation towards the brands and the increasing role of brands in the consumers' lifestyle. Wood (2000) has suggested that brand management should be strategic and holistic, as this is conducive to longevity, that is, the marketing-mix should operate in a way that supports the brand identity. Although the academy has much to offer regarding positive consumer-brand relationships but, as Fournier and Alvarez (2013) suggest, our theories have relied on assumptions that are more aligned with a positive brand relationship view rather than a negative brand relationship view. In the current century, several academics have been devoted to understand how positive and favourable relationships may be maintained. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that developing a science of negative relationships presents a challenge. Whatever the results might be, negative relationships would definitely operate under different and yet weak assumptions and pose different questions, as suggested by Fournier and Alvarez (2013).

In recent years, the meaning of these negative relationships (consumer-brand) has attracted the attention of marketing practitioners, but little attention has been given in academia. Although it has emerged an interest regarding the constructs of brand avoidance or anti-consumption, they are too fragmented, superficial and limited mainly on these topics. Brands are multi-dimensional constructs, but literature is no summarized and interrelated to provide a panoramic point of view. There is a need to clarify the negative consumer-brand relationships within a holistic perspective, built on a deep understanding of how consumers experience it.

Thereby, this research seeks to identify the characteristics of negative consumer-brand relationships (NCBR) in an effort to better understand the negative relationships or the negative feelings that consumers have towards brands. If the consumer can have real feelings of love towards a brand, from our point of view, is very likely that consumers can also have real negative feelings towards brands. Brands are multi-dimensional constructs, but literature does not yet summarized and interrelated to provide a panoramic point of view. Thus, the aim of this paper is to build a knowledge base for current and future monitoring and the translation of research into practice regarding negative consumer-brand relationships. For these reasons, based on an extensive and systematic literature review, this investigation proposes to analyse these core issues. As such, the paper consequently synthesizes the results into a NCBR preliminary model divided into four main categories: conflict attitude, brand-self distance, negative perceived emotions, and countercultural phenomena. It is contended that the conceptualization of the results, provides theoretical and practical implications that advances the current level of NCBR theories.

In sum, the structure of this investigation is as follows: section two presents a conceptualization of the key themes under analysis. In the following section, the methodology adopted is described and an analysis of the systematic literature review concept is fulfilled. The performed review is divided into three stages: 1) planning; 2) conducting; and 3) conceptualization that encompasses two sub-stages: i) a descriptive

analysis; and ii) a thematic analysis to identify key themes. Fourth section summarizes the key findings and challenges that we can draw from this investigation. Lastly, the limitations of the current literature review and challenges of future research are presented.

2. Background

Consumer-brand relationships

Brands cannot act, think, or feel by themselves, but can live and evolve through their managers and exist as a partner in a dyadic relationship (Loureiro, 2012). In the last decades several academics have been devoted to understand how positive and favourable relationships may be maintained (Fournier 1998), find ways to generate satisfaction (Oliver, 1980), trust (Morgan and Hunt 1994), credibility (Erdem, Swait and Valenzuela 2002), and favourable image (Keller, 1993) on consumer's mind. Many potentially useful constructs emerged in the branding literature, such as brand personality (Aaker 1997), brand relationships (Fournier, 1998), brand love (Ahuvia, and Carroll, 2006) and brand tribalism (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009).

Fournier (1998) incorporated human characters in brand building and proposed a brand relationship quality model that was the tipping point to create the research field of the consumer brand relationship. Hence, it merged an attempt to define the relationship between customers and brands. Researchers also may denoted an intention to better understand not only a dyadic relationship (brand and consumer), but also how a group of particular consumer interact with a single brand (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Nevertheless, the idea of a group of consumers interacting each other and having a brand as a core reason for such interaction start to be studied by McAlexander, Muniz and their colleagues (e.g., Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002), under the umbrella of brand community. Actually, the process of establishing and maintaining the relationship between consumers and brands, which could evolve to multi-relationships, such as in brand community, is studied in consumer-brand relationships. "Consumers are known to form strong relationships with those brands that have values and personality associations that are congruent with their self-concept" (Swaminathan, Page and Canli, 2007, p. 248; based on Sirgy, 1982). Therefore, brand relationships can be viewed as expressions of consumers' identities (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Swaminathan, Page and Canli, 2007). Brand connections are "largely determined by the nature and quality of the interactions between a brand and its consumers" (Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Wong, 2009, p. 11) and the consumer employ both self and communal connections as a mechanism for bolstering their sense of security and to create and communicate their self-concepts. So, creating/boosting self/communal brand connections become crucial for brand managers (Chaplin and John, 2005; Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Wong, 2009). Recently, a deeper and emotionally stronger construct as emerged on the literature – Brand Love. Ahuvia (1993) argues that consumers can have real feelings of love toward an object and conceptualizes the love as having two dimensions: real and desired integration.

The growing academic and practical interest in the relationship phenomenon leads to the emergence of numerous constructs. Although, despite all investigation efforts, a conceptualization of the NCBR appears to be lacking and researchers still wondering if the same might be happening with antagonistic constructs, such as feelings, attitudes, desires, self-identity, etc.

Negative consumer-brand relationships (NCBR)

A considerable work has been done in academia regarding positive responses to brands and, obviously, we subscribe researchers that explain positive brand relationships. These frameworks are essential for understanding brand equity, for instance, and to help brand managers to be closer to their consumers. But, as earlier mentioned, perhaps our brand theories have adopted assumptions that are more aligned with a positive brand relationship view rather than a negative one.

Whereas the literature on the negative side of brand relationships, for instance, why people avoid certain brands is limited or narrowly defined (Khan and Bozzo, 2012). Although, in the past 10 years anti-consumption becomes an issue of concern for both academics and practitioners and new concepts emerged to explain niches of consumers behaviours less involved with brands or at least with certain brands (e.g., Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009; Hempel, 2012; Park, Eisingerich & Park, 2013; Loureiro, Pires & Cayolla, 2014). Actually, consumers could love some brands, be indifferent or express negative opinions towards other brands (Khan and Bozzo, 2012). Fournier and Alvarez (2013) suggest imagining a management situation in which a brand is followed by troubling relationships such as: marriages-on-the-rocks, enemies, one night-stand, dysfunctional addictions, abusive marriages, master–slave entrapments or secret affairs. However, these troubling relationships are not properly understood. The academia has much to offer regarding positive relations (consumer-brand) and helpful frameworks are also available for understanding and managing people's brand relationships, or to repair positive relations that have been transgressed, but beyond this, theoretically grounded literature for managing negative consumer-brand relationship is scarce.

According to Fournier and Alvarez (2013) numerous psychological studies document that negative information is more memorable, more diagnostic, more salient, processed more deeply, and more likely to be shared than positive information. By analogy, negative brand relationships may weigh heavier in consumers' experiences and produce bad consequences that go beyond individual brands to affect perceptions of marketing more broadly as argued by the same authors. Managing negativity may be, eventually, more significant to develop brand value than managing positives associations and relationships, in a way that could help managers to reduce risks and in the end reinforce positive issues.

Thus, NCBR is an emerging concept that has not been yet truly explored in the literature and may express a strong feeling of dislike towards a brand. Although consumers can have real feelings of love towards an object (real and desire integration), as Ahuvia (1993) explained, we strongly believe that the opposite feeling may occur in the same modes. Consequently, this research aims to explore how NCBR might be characterized even before consumption.

3. Methodology

Our exploratory qualitative analysis is based on a systematic literature review. At this state of research, where the theme is merely blooming, the aim of the present method is to provide a systematic review of the existing literature on the NCBR issues, characteristics and terms employed. This review will allow a comprehensive understanding of the nature and measurement of this blooming research topic, and will highlight the need for continuing research into its conceptualization (Cook, 1997; Tranfield et al., 2003). To do

so, we draw on the literature in marketing, psychology and sociology in which fundamental key themes are addressed.

To identify and rigorously systematize the studies on negative consumer-brand relationships, a systematic literature review, based on reproducible steps that allow the linking of future research concerns posed by the past, has been considered suitable (Cook, 1997; Tranfield et al., 2003). The review process followed the steps of the systematic literature review suggested by Tranfield et al. (2003). Thus, a three-stage procedure (i.e., planning, conducting and conceptualization) has been applied and the conceptualization procedure encompasses two important sub-stages: 1) a descriptive analysis to provide an evidence base of the alignment issues; and 2) a theory driven thematic analysis to identify key themes, their commonalities and differences.

3.1. Planning

The intentionally broad scope of this literature review was to provide evidence and systematize current knowledge, and further to assess conceptual and methodological issues of NCBR.

In order to obtain a significant sample of articles, academic studies from top tier scholarly journals within the period of 2009-2014 that theorized or assessed the NCBR issue were searched for. The search strategy of the present systematic review was implemented by using an automated search. The paper language must be English, due to the language limitations of the researcher as mentioned by Christofi, & Kaufmann (2011). In this context the following English search terms were used in the corresponding electronic databases (*EBSCO Host or/and B-on; Emerald Insight and Science Direct*): *Negative consumer-brand* relationships*; brand* hate*; anti-consumption*; anti-brand* brand* rejection*; boycott*; doppelganger*; brand* retaliation*; dissociative* reference* group*; negative* word of mouth*; brand* avoidance**. The asterisk symbol allowed searches for different suffixes such as both singular and plural forms. Last search performed on September 2014. The need to analyse a vast scope regarding NCBR justifies the high number of researched terms. The selection of keywords reflected the topics and issues previous mentioned on the literature (Park, Eisingerich & Park, 2013; Fournier and Alvarez, 2013). In addition, the variety of search terms used enhanced the possibility to include as much as possible relevant literature. Moreover, we analysed the references from emerged articles in order to identify other articles that are relevant to the investigation. Papers outside the defined dates that are of most importance are also included. As referred by Christofi, & Kaufmann (2011), this reduced the possibility of missing research papers that could be relevant with the present study.

To avoid any possibility of ambiguity in the delimitation of the object of our work, we focused on those articles that have contributed to building and developing this line of research, ignoring those that do not explicitly examine any of the conceptual elements previous mentioned (Tranfield et al., 2003; Christofi, & Kaufmann, 2011; Mingione, 2014). Moreover, the selection process for identification and inclusion of the relevant research papers included the following steps: a comprehensive analysis of the titles of the citations retrieved from the literature search and extraction of the studies irrelevant with the present research. Of the remaining articles, abstracts were analysed and the previous procedure applied. Lastly, we held a detailed review of the remaining studies and selection of the most appropriate and relevant ones with the research interests. In addition, the following

exclusion criteria have been used: editorials; books, book reviews, and conference proceedings.

3.2. Conducting

A total of 207 studies were identified in relation to the search topics. After removing duplicates and the title reviewed, a total of 130 articles were retained in the database. Potentially significant abstracts have been identified after being read and a sample of 105 papers remained. A meticulous examination of each article provided 80 potentially relevant papers. At this stage, we scanned the references included in the selected articles. 13 additional potentially relevant papers were identified. 93 articles have been retained.

A developed data extraction form was used in order to extract the data from selected studies and to document the data extraction process. Regarding the elements that have been extracted from the concerned studies we highlight: general details; features of the study; key results.

3.3. Conceptualization

As highlighted by Tranfield et al. (2003), the third and last stage encompassed two sub-stages: 1) a descriptive analysis to provide an evidence base of the alignment issues; and 2) a thematic analysis to identify key themes, their commonalities and differences. To allow data extraction and to increase consistency and transparency data were input into a spreadsheet as highlighted by Christofi, & Kaufmann (2011). In general, a thematic analysis involves the creation and use of codes to translate theoretical concepts into themes and can be data driven or theory driven (Boyatzis, 1998; Thomas and Harden, 2008). As suggested by Mingione (2014), this systematic review developed both inductive and deductive coding.

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive Findings

To provide a clear framework, the descriptive reporting of the 93 identified articles has been organized in two sections: i) Publication activity; and ii) Academic and practitioner contributions.

Publication activity

A total of 21 journals published on NCBR with 6 journals issuing 72% of the retrieved articles. In particular, the Journal of Business Research shows the highest number of publications (29%), followed by the Journal of Consumer Behaviour & the Journal of Consumer Psychology (11% each) and the Journal of Consumer Research (7%).

Furthermore, contributions to the field were included in a special issue of the Journal of Consumer Research, which focused on anti-consumption (2009). More deeply, the special issues provided 18% articles that highly contributed to the advancement of academics' knowledge on anti-consumption and NCBR.

Additionally, a total of 82% of the articles were published between 2009 and 2014. In particular, 2009 shows the highest number of articles (23%) followed by the year of 2013 with 16% of the articles.

Academic contributions

A total of 158 authors contributed to the field, with 14% of them publishing, conjunctly or separately, more than one article. There are no particular authors that have extensively written on NCBR. In particular, six authors (Lee, Conroy, Motion, Kozinets, Romani, Gregoire) published more than three articles as main or co-authors. Only a small margin of the articles was published by only one author (16%), followed by articles with 2 authors (43%) and 3 or more authors published 41% of the total articles.

Regarding country of origin, 46% of the articles have only authors from the USA, followed by 9% with authors only from Australia, 7% of the articles were published only by UK authors and 6% from Canada. Concerning cross-cultural publications (i.e., articles with authors from more than one country) it represents 25% of the total articles. Wherein, 95% (USA-55%; New Zealand-27%; UK-14%) of them have at least one author from Anglo-Saxon countries.

On the following section several thematic characteristics are explored and integrated in different categories, but at this point, it is important to highlight the main academic contributions from the most relevant investigations.

The definition of anti-consumption appears with the researchers Lee, Fernandez & Hyman (2009). From this high concentration of journals and authors, a fragmentation of contributions also emerged. In fact, several theoretical and empirical studies analysed different dimensions that might require alignment: anti-consumption area, mainly focusing on dissatisfaction with goods/services (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Oliver, 1980), boycotts (Klein, Smith & John, 2004; Kozinets & Handelman, 1998), consumer resistance (Cherrier, 2009; Hogg, 1998; Zavestoski, 2002) or brand antagonists and *doppelgänger* images (Giesler, 2012; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006). Anti-consumption can also comprise topics such as brand avoidance (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009) or consumer retaliation (Funches, Markley & Davis, 2009); Dissociative reference group (White and Dahl, 2006; Englis and College, 1997); Identity avoidance (Arnould and Thompson, 2005); Negative emotions, Romani, Grapp & Dalli (2012). *Doppelgänger* brand images (Giesler, 2012; Thompson et al., 2006); Counterculture phenomena (Clark, 1986). Recently, Park, Eisingerich and Park (2013) provided a model of attachment–aversion relationships that was highly comment during the past year.

To conclude, evidence from publication activity and academics' contributions, clearly assessed the existence of an established academic conversation regarding NCBR.

4.2. Thematic Findings

The thematic findings from the systematic review shown potential dimensional characteristics of NCBR and have been organized into four sections: “conflict attitude”, “brand-self distance”, “negative perceived emotions”, and “counterculture phenomena”.

Conflict attitude

This is perhaps the category that most interest has aroused in the academia. The conflict attitude, which indicates confrontation against an object, is especially relevant for the subset of negative consumer-brand relationships as Fournier & Alvarez (2013) referred and that we already mentioned too. It might reflect the competitive versus cooperative/friendly character of a brand relationship and we can include topics such as: revengeful associations, brand retaliation or boycott (Giesler, 2012; Thompson et al., 2006; Berry and Seiders, 2008; Fisk et al., 2010) or anti-consumption mainly regarding dissatisfaction with brands (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Oliver, 1980).

The closest concept is avoidance, which is characterized by a negative perception of relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Brand avoidance in Park et al.'s (2013) model has been associated with two causal variables: poor product performance and symbolic incongruence (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009). However, Park et al. (2013) do not seem to use only the term brand avoidance in their model, since other terms are also broadly employed such as: “aversion”, “averse to,” “distant from,” and “anti-” indistinctly, seemingly encompassing two constructs that have been treated separately in previous consumer research studies: “avoidance” and “revenge” (Grégoire et al., 2009) or “attack” (Johnson et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, when looking to the existing literature, major studies can be found under anti-consumption theme. The anti-consumption studies are mainly focusing on dissatisfaction with goods/services (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Oliver, 1980), boycotts (Klein, Smith & John, 2004; Kozinets & Handelman, 1998), consumer resistance (Cherrier, 2009; Hogg, 1998; Zavestoski, 2002) or brand antagonists and *doppelgänger* images (Giesler, 2012; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006). Anti-consumption can also comprise topics such as brand avoidance (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009) or consumer retaliation (Funches, Markley & Davis, 2009). However, the more relevant studies have emerged in recent years. For instance, the definition of anti-consumption appears with the researchers Lee, Fernandez & Hyman (2009) where they define anti-consumption as being the reasons against consumption. It is also important to add that the term brand avoidance was not properly explained before Lee (2007) that defined it as follows: “the conscious, deliberate, and active rejection of a brand that the consumer can afford, owing to the negative meaning associated with that brand” (Khan and Bozzo, 2012, p. 4). Besides this definition, brand avoidance was also introduced as “the incidents in which consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand” (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009, p. 170).

Regarding consumer retaliation, the term deals explicitly with consumer’s rowdy behaviour that results in loss for the company, consumption prevention, boycott or purchasing slow down (Funches, Markely and Davis, 2009, p. 233). According to previous literature and along the study, we might be able to say that consumer retaliation is just another way of how to express brand a NCBR.

Thereby, we combine the several mentioned characteristics that might be further articulate in the conflict attitude construct. In summary, we postulate that conflict attitudes toward brands will help to characterize NCBR.

Brand-self distance

Another theme lightly introduced in the literature is the identity avoidance. According to Arnould and Thompson (2005) it is based on the psychological construct of self-concept and consumer culture theory. The core idea is that consumers choose brands to build their own identities. This insight is also shared by Sirgy (1982), who argues that only those brands with an image being in congruity with the consumer's self-concept are likely to be purchased. Moreover, the fact that a certain reference group is consuming a certain product can influence other individuals to avoid the product in order to not be associated with the mentioned group (Hempel, 2012). The theory behind the explanation of this phenomenon is called dissociative reference group (White and Dahl, 2006; Englis and College, 1997). Escalas and Bettman (2003) defend that brands used by members of groups or aspiration groups members can become connected to consumers' mental representation of self as they use these brands to define and create their self-concepts.

Researchers are moving in the same direction and recent investigations are aware that understanding motivations not to choose a certain brand is just as valuable as comprehending why it is chosen (Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009; Banister and Hogg, 2004). However, most of the topics has sought to study the conflict (resistance, retaliation, anti-consumption, etc.) that exists between the consumer and the brand leaving aside, for example the emotions that trigger brand hate or even seen from another perspective, such as the influence that dissociative reference groups could have on the foundation of brand hate (White and Dahl, 2006) as suggested by Hempel (2012). However, an academic consensus has not yet been reached.

Ahuvia's (2005) study recognizes that two partners relationship is more than a two-way relationship, since others can also influence the relationship. The consumer employs both self and communal connections as a mechanism for support their sense of security and to create and communicate their self-concepts as suggested by Escalas & Bettman (2003). Although, consumers form their self-concepts and identify their social reference groups through what they choose to consume as well as what they choose not to consume.

Ogilvie (1987) suggests that undesired self is a set of associations and values with which people do not want to be linked nor incorporate into his self-concept. Lee (2007) and Ogilvie (1987) argue that in comparison of what people want to be, they may have clear idea about what they do not want to be, and this deviation from undesired self might be more effective than the approach towards the ideal self.

The phenomenon of consumers developing their self-concepts by identifying with positive reference groups, while misidentifying with negative reference groups, is supported in academic literature (Elsbach & Bhattacharya 2001; Englis & Soloman 1995; Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). Undesired self is a psychological construct and might be the most relevant to influence brand hate.

Recently, following this line of thinking, Park and colleagues (2013) introduced a potential construct that offers a sensible theoretical frame for clarify the problems of negative brand relationships as highlighted by Fournier & Alvarez (2013). It is called brand-self distance and seeks to define the perceived distance between one's self and the brand. Moreover, based on Hempel (2012), the fact that a certain reference group is consuming a certain product can influence other individuals to avoid the product in order to not be associated with the mentioned group - dissociative reference groups.

Consequently, according to the literature, this brand-self distance category includes characteristics such as: e.g., incongruence of self-brand image, dissociative reference groups, or brand tribalism avoidance.

Negative perceived emotions

Regarding negative emotions, Romani, Grapp & Dalli (2012) propose a scale that includes six distinct negative emotions towards brands (i.e., anger, sadness, worry, embarrassment, discontent, and dislike). They highlight that anger is associated with “attack” actions (e.g., complaining and negative word-of-mouth), whereas worry and discontent were associated with “avoidance” and sadness was associated with inactivity.

As highlighted by Rajeev, Ahuvia & Bagozzi (2012), at that time, the literature did not adequately distinguish between the love emotion and the love relationship. As argued by the authors, the love emotion, which like all emotions, is short term, in contrast, the love relationship can last for decades and involves numerous affective, cognitive, and behavioural experiences (Fournier 1998). If we look at the opposite feeling of love, we face the same situation regarding hate emotions and hate relationships. The hate emotion itself was rarely mentioned as part of that brand hate relationship. Therefore, we will consider that brand hate emotion refers to the emotional state of hate toward a brand that will influence the brand hate relationship – a longer-lasting negative consumer brand relationship. The premise that consumers experience strong negative emotions toward brands is interesting given that psychological theories on emotions suggest that the nature of the emotion experienced has a highly determinant effect on an individual's subsequent actions as claimed by Romani, Grappi & Dalli (2012). Theories of emotion are centrally implicated into negative relationships and much opportunity for development exists here. In this line of thinking, Romani, Grapp & Dalli (2012) present a scale that includes six distinct negative emotions towards brands (i.e., anger, sadness, worry, embarrassment, discontent, and dislike). Most relevant to our point, in this study, anger was associated with “attack” actions (e.g., complaining and negative word-of-mouth), whereas worry and discontent were associated with “avoidance” and sadness was associated with inactivity.

Insight into the dimensionality of relationship negativity can also be obtained by leveraging existing knowledge concerning emotions, a construct with direct relevance to the notion of relationship valence. Drawing from the appraisal theory of emotions (Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990), we can expect that consumer–brand relationships may become negative not only because of the way consumers feel about the brand, but also because of the way consumers feel about themselves when in the relationship with the brand as highlighted by Fournier & Alvarez (2013).

Based on the above discussions, this theme emerged from our research and includes items such as: anger, discontent, dislike, among others.

Counterculture phenomena

The rarity of the brands makes them non-ordinary (Clark, 1986) but this rarity cannot be mixed with the ordinary otherwise rareness is lost. Although branded objects are not rare, their exclusive and unique details and ideology distinguishes them from other brands. As suggested by McGinnis & Gentry (2009) based on Tian, Bearden & Hunter (2001), brands that become classified as being outside of the norm may serve as recognizable symbols of uniqueness. The same author describes this desire of uniqueness in three different dimensions: The first, creative choice counter-conformity, concerns the deliberate

attempt to buy clothes and other consumer goods that are different from the established norm, but are still viewed as socially acceptable. The second dimension, unpopular choice counter conformity refers to the selection of brands that deviate from group norms in a way that seeks social disapproval. The third, avoidance of similarity, is the intentional avoidance of commonly used brands, irrespective of whether these choices meet social approval.

Based on Ziller (1964), Tian, Bearden & Hunter (2001) suggested that if individuals fail to see a means of differentiating themselves from others in a socially appropriate manner, they may prefer acts that negatively distinguish them over more subtle distinctions that are available within the domain of positively valued acts. Breaking rules or customs or challenging existing consumer norms risks social disapproval, including evaluations that one exhibits poor taste. Hence, we decided to classify this construct as “counter culture phenomena”.

The term counterculture phenomena is attributed to Roszak (1968) that defined it as a subculture whose values and norms of behaviour differ substantially from those of mainstream society. It might oppose mass culture or values and is sometimes conceptualized in terms of generational conflict and rejection of mass values. Countercultures tend to peak, and then go into decline, leaving a lasting impact on mainstream cultural values. Their life cycles include phases of rejection, growth, partial acceptance and absorption into the mainstream. We believe that, in one of these phases, the consumer can feel hate for certain brand over another. Therefore, we include this construct that aggregates characteristics as subculture or underground attributes, brand niche, counterculture elements, counter conformity, brand rarity, etc.

5. Conclusions

Strong positive brand relationships can easily be transformed into hateful and revengeful associations (Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011), which further highlights the importance of managing negative brand relationship. As Fournier and Alvarez (2013) explained, they can dilute brand meanings and equity and even destroy valuable company assets in retaliatory response (Luedicke et al., 2009). Several studies are presenting a strong base for extending theory on negative brand relationships in meaningful ways (Park & colleagues, 2013; Fournier C Alvarez, 2013; Romani Grapp & Dalli, 2012; Lee, Motion & Conroy, 2009; Hempel, 2012; Khan & Bozzo, 2012). We may find different terms with different designations, but none of them could clearly demonstrate and aggregate the reasons of NCBR.

This investigation introduces important findings and contributes with an original approach into the branding literature. It also provides a better understanding of the negative relationships between consumers and brands. The preliminary conceptual themes proposed is a tentative to explain the effects and relations between different types of variables which may support a more comprehensive theory for NCBR. In this vein, the themes add useful insights for understanding the nature and process of NCBR and contribute to the existent literature in order to enable a further theorizing of the subject. The thematic findings from the systematic review shown potential dimensional characteristics of NCBR and have been systematized into four sections: “conflict attitude”, “brand-self distance”, “negative perceived emotions”, and “counterculture phenomena”.

On the practitioner's side this investigation may help managers to take more efficient decisions regarding brand management.

6. Limitations and Future research

This paper aims to describe and analyse the main characteristics of existing literature on NCBR published in the most relevant journals within the period 2009–2014. It determines the evolution of this current issue of research over recent years and improves our understanding of the subject. From the review, themes have been aggregated into four main categories. Moreover, it has been showed that research on NCBR is scarce and it is definitely a flourishing topic.

The present study does not analyse in depth all the identified categories. In addition, the presented themes might have commonalities that need to be considered on a later investigation. Other relevant themes regarding sustainability issues must be included in order to explore all consumer perspectives. Besides that, it is suggested that future research should focus on testing other consumers' perspectives through qualitative and quantitative analyses to provide additional knowledge to the ongoing topic. It must also be highlighted the need for continuing research into additional conceptualization and validation of theories in order to achieve deep insights. This research looks forward to break new ground for subsequent stages of related research regarding NCBR.

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