

Consumer boycotts in brand crises: a brand hate perspective on intensity, attributions and motivations

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how brand crisis type translates into boycott intention through brand hate and how attributional and motivational patterns differ across hate-intensity levels in digital discourse.

Design/methodology/approach – This study adopted a sequential explanatory design. Study 1 used a scenario-based experiment ($n = 501$) to compare ethical and performance-related crises and test brand hate as a mediator, with personality traits and boycott motivations as moderators. Study 2 used netnographic analysis of 5,729 user-generated posts across social media platforms.

Findings – Ethical crises produced stronger brand hate and boycott intention than performance crises, with brand hate accounting for over half of the total effect. Neuroticism strengthened the crisis type-brand hate relationship, whereas agreeableness did not. In naturally occurring discourse, five antecedent categories of brand hate emerged. Ideological incongruence was most salient, and a distinct indirect category captured hostility extending beyond the focal brand to sponsors, celebrities, sub-brands and political parties. Brand hate was expressed across cold, cool and hot registers and varied by platform; at higher hate intensities, attributional focus was more brand-centred and expressive motivations more prominent than instrumental ones.

Originality/value – This study shows that crisis-induced brand hate is not a uniform affective state: the crisis type-brand hate relationship is trait-specific, and hate intensity is associated with systematic differences in consumers' attributional focus and how they justify boycotting. The netnographic study extends and explains the experimental findings.

Keywords Brand hate, Boycott intention, Brand crisis, Brand relationships, Social media, Netnography, Consumer behaviour, Crisis management, Anti-branding

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Why do consumers respond to brand crises in markedly different ways, sometimes moving towards forgiveness (Casey *et al.*, 2024) and at other times towards negative word-of-mouth and even boycott (Mahmud and Guzmán, 2025)? Such variation remains a persistent puzzle for brand management, especially in digital environments where crisis responses take shape through interaction in online brand communities (Casey *et al.*, 2024). To account for this heterogeneity, branding scholars have examined brand hate as an explanatory construct (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016).

Brand hate is a multidimensional negative emotional construct (Zhang and Laroche, 2020) that varies in intensity, from cold detachment to hot aggression (Kucuk, 2019). Different forms of brand hate are associated with distinct behavioural responses (Fetscherin, 2019; Tran *et al.*, 2026),

including boycott and brand sabotage (Sameeni *et al.*, 2024). In crisis contexts, brand hate is also shaped by the nature of the transgression and how consumers appraise it. Prior work distinguishes value-based from performance-based betrayal in predicting brand hate and boycotting (Sameeni *et al.*, 2023). Research on corporate crises further shows that moral foundations shape blame, anger and boycott intentions (Shim *et al.*, 2021). What these studies leave open is whether attributional focus and boycott motivations differ across hate-intensity categories. This matters for brand managers, because responses suited to one pattern may be ineffective for another.

Consumer personality represents a further source of heterogeneity in brand-hate responses. A systematic review calls for greater attention to personality as a moderator of brand-hate magnitude, identifying neuroticism and agreeableness as relevant traits (Mushtaq *et al.*, 2025). Recent work models the Big Five jointly as an antecedent of brand hate (Seth and Soch, 2026), while other studies test individual traits as moderators of antecedent-hate or hate-consequence

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relationships (Chahal and Dolkar, 2024; Sameeni *et al.*, 2024). These approaches do not directly examine whether specific personality traits condition the effect of crisis type on brand hate.

Taken together, these streams remain only partially integrated in explaining crisis-induced brand hate and boycott responses. Prior reviews have largely catalogued antecedents and outcomes rather than consolidated the field's conceptual structure (Khatoon and Pandey, 2026), and recent meta-analytic work further calls for a more categorical and structured treatment of brand hate's multidimensionality (Ladeira *et al.*, 2026). To integrate these strands, this study adopts the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), treating crisis type as the stimulus, brand hate as the organismic affective state (Tran *et al.*, 2026) and boycott intention as the response. Whereas prior work links brand hate to downstream anti-brand outcomes (Rahimah *et al.*, 2023), the present S-O-R positioning specifies crisis type as the upstream stimulus of brand hate. Study 1 experimentally tests the crisis type-brand hate-boycott pathway, examining personality traits as moderators of the crisis type-brand hate link and boycott motivations as moderators of the direct crisis type-boycott link. Study 2 extends Study 1 by examining how attributional focus and boycott motivations differ across hate-intensity categories in naturally occurring crisis discourse.

This study makes three contributions. Firstly, it shows that attributional focus and motivational orientation differ across levels of crisis-induced brand hate. Secondly, it locates personality effects at the crisis type-brand hate link. Thirdly, it broadens understanding of the antecedents of crisis-related brand hate by identifying indirect relational sources of hostility beyond the focal brand.

2. Literature review and theoretical background

2.1 Brand crises and the emergence of brand hate

Brand crises threaten consumer-brand relationships and trigger affective and behavioural responses (Khamitov *et al.*, 2020). Crisis typologies distinguish performance-related shortcomings from ethical or value-based violations (Baghi and Gabrielli, 2021; Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Fetscherin and Sampedro, 2019). Performance-related crises concern product defects or safety hazards that undermine functional benefits (Dutta and Pullig, 2011; Hegner *et al.*, 2018). Ethical crises involve perceived moral transgressions that question the brand's values (Baghi and Gabrielli, 2021) and elicit moral outrage (Kübler *et al.*, 2020). These differences carry through to consumer responses, with crisis type associated with distinct affective and evaluative outcomes (Hegner *et al.*, 2018; Kübler *et al.*, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2022).

To capture crisis-related affect beyond immediate event reactions, brand hate provides a useful construct: a deeply negative emotional state that can endure and shape subsequent behaviour (Kucuk, 2019; Woodside *et al.*, 2023; Zhang and Laroche, 2020). It differs from moral outrage, an emotional response to perceived moral violations (Kübler *et al.*, 2020), and from consumer revenge, a retaliatory response rather than the affective state (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008; Taqi *et al.*, 2025).

Drawing on Sternberg's (2003) duplex theory, Kucuk (2019) distinguishes cold hate (passive distancing), cool hate (active rejection) and hot hate (anger and retaliation), reflecting increasing hate intensity. These levels span avoidance, public complaint, negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) and boycott participation (Bryson and Atwal, 2019; Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Kucuk, 2019). Related research has likewise differentiated active and passive forms of brand hate and linked them to distinct behavioural responses (Tran *et al.*, 2026). Together, these distinctions differentiate brand hate by form and intensity, but provide limited insight into how consumers explain and justify crisis-related hostility at each level.

2.2 The S-O-R framework: from crisis type to boycott mobilisation

The present study uses the S-O-R framework (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), positioning crisis type as stimulus, brand hate as organism and boycott intention as response. S-O-R suits this inquiry because the study centres on affect-driven boycott mobilisation, whereas situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) and attribution theory focus more directly on crisis responsibility and causal attribution (Coombs, 2007; Weiner, 2010). Brand hate occupies the organismic position because it represents an enduring negative affective state (Woodside *et al.*, 2023). Within this architecture, personality traits are treated as individual-level boundary conditions on the stimulus-organism relationship, consistent with evidence that selected Big Five traits can moderate antecedent-brand hate relationships (Chahal and Dolkar, 2024). Boycott motivations, in turn, are treated as response-side boundary conditions capturing heterogeneous reasons for participation (Cissé-Depardon and N'Goala, 2009; Hahn and Albert, 2017). This positioning is consistent with recent brand-hate research applying S-O-R (Tran *et al.*, 2026; Woodside *et al.*, 2023), including work linking online brand hate to brand misalignment and retaliation (Zahid *et al.*, 2026).

Consumer boycotts, the behavioural response in this framework, involve withholding consumption in response to perceived misconduct (Thelen and Shapiro, 2012; Yuksel, 2013), aiming to induce change or communicate a protest message (Sen *et al.*, 2001). Digital environments have transformed how boycotts are organised and voiced (Makarem and Jae, 2016; Seyfi *et al.*, 2023), with responses varying across platforms with different informational and relationship structures (Kwon and Park, 2023; Zhu and Chen, 2015).

Boycott participation is also shaped by instrumental and expressive motivations (Friedman, 1991; Klein *et al.*, 2004). Instrumental motivations are outcome-oriented: consumers join when they believe collective action can pressure firms to change behaviour (Ettenson and Klein, 2005; Sen *et al.*, 2001). Expressive motivations are affect-driven: consumers participate to voice anger or affirm moral values, regardless of instrumental success (Hahn and Albert, 2017; Klein *et al.*, 2004). This duality suggests that motivational patterns may vary with affective intensity: boycott participation entails personal costs (Sen *et al.*, 2001), whereas expressive participation can provide intrinsic benefits through emotional and value expression (Hahn and Albert, 2017).

3. Overview of studies

Responding to the scarcity of mixed-method designs in brand hate research (Taqi *et al.*, 2025) and calls for methodological diversity in capturing consumer emotions (Kapoor and Banerjee, 2021), this study adopts a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2009). Study 1 uses a scenario-based experiment to test the proposed S-O-R pathway, an approach still uncommon in brand hate research but valuable for supporting causal inference (Taqi *et al.*, 2025). It tests whether brand hate carries the effect of crisis type on boycott intention but does not reveal how consumers attribute the crisis or how boycott motivations differ across levels of hate. Study 2 therefore uses netnography to examine brand hate as expressed in naturally occurring discourse during an actual crisis (Kozinets, 2002). It identifies hate antecedents beyond manipulated crisis cues and examines how attributional and motivational patterns vary across hate-intensity categories and digital platforms. Together, the studies move from testing the aggregate crisis-to-boycott pathway to unpacking the heterogeneity within its affective mechanism.

4. Study 1

Study 1 uses a between-subjects experimental design manipulating crisis type (ethical versus performance-related) to test:

- which type of crisis generates higher levels of brand hate;
- the mediating role of brand hate in the crisis type-boycott intention pathway; and
- the moderating roles of personality traits (neuroticism and agreeableness) and boycott motivations.

4.1 Hypotheses development

4.1.1 Brand crises and brand hate

Brand crisis type shapes consumers' affective and behavioural responses in different ways. Because ethical crises engage symbolic and psychological benefits rather than purely functional appraisals (Dutta and Pullig, 2011), they may elicit different consumer responses from performance failures. Evidence on this crisis-type asymmetry is not uniform across outcomes: some studies report stronger negative brand evaluations for product-harm than moral-harm crises (Hegner *et al.*, 2018), whereas value-related crises generate greater moral outrage than performance-related crises (Kübler *et al.*, 2020). Related evidence also associates value-based brand betrayal with stronger brand hate and boycott responses than performance-based betrayal (Sameeni *et al.*, 2023). Given mixed evidence across crisis outcomes, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Brand crisis type influences brand hate.

H2. Brand crisis type influences boycott intention.

4.1.2 Brand hate, brand crises and boycott intention

Brand hate has been linked to anti-brand behaviours such as protest, avoidance and switching (Rahimah *et al.*, 2023), with consumer boycott identified as one such response (Sameeni *et al.*, 2024). Within the S-O-R logic, brand hate therefore

provides the affective mechanism linking crisis stimuli to boycott intention. Prior work documents both direct and affectively mediated pathways to consumption avoidance (Harmeling *et al.*, 2015) and shows that value-based misalignment can shape brand responses through brand betrayal (Vinales and Sheinin, 2026). Accordingly:

H3. Brand hate positively influences boycott intention.

H4. Brand hate mediates the relationship between brand crisis type and boycott intention.

4.1.3 The moderating role of boycott motivations

Brand hate captures the affective intensity triggered by a crisis, whereas boycott motivations reflect how this affect is channelled into boycott intention. Building on the instrumental-expressive distinction established above (Friedman, 1991; John and Klein, 2003; Makarem and Jae, 2016), boycott motivations may shape boycott engagement (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018). Such motivations have also been shown to moderate the relationship between perceived egregiousness and boycott participation (Klein *et al.*, 2004), suggesting that they may similarly condition the effect of crisis type on boycott intention:

H5. Boycott motivations moderate the relationship between brand crisis type and boycott intention.

H5a. The effect of brand crisis type on boycott intention is stronger for consumers with higher (vs lower) expressive boycott motivations.

H5b. The effect of brand crisis type on boycott intention is stronger for consumers with higher (vs lower) instrumental boycott motivations.

4.1.4 The moderating role of personality traits

Brand crises constitute affective events in which emotional reactions are shaped by event characteristics and individual dispositions (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Among the Five-Factor Model dimensions (McCrae and Costa, 1991), neuroticism and agreeableness are particularly relevant here because of their links to emotional reactivity and interpersonal forgiveness. Neuroticism, characterised by anxiety and disturbing feelings, has been linked to deeper brand hate and stronger negative responses following service failure (Sameeni *et al.*, 2024). Because anger is shaped by perceived causal controllability (Weiner, 2010) and ethical crises are likely to involve blame-related appraisals, highly neurotic consumers are expected to respond more intensely to such crises:

H6. Consumer neuroticism moderates the relationship between brand crisis type and brand hate, such that the effect of crisis type on brand hate is stronger for consumers high (vs low) in neuroticism.

Agreeableness is expected to operate as a contrasting boundary condition. Moral violations evoke other-condemning emotions, including anger, contempt and disgust (Haidt, 2003), whereas agreeableness, characterised by empathy,

cooperativeness and forgiveness, may attenuate hostile reactions to brand misconduct (Chahal and Dolkar, 2024). Forgiveness is also more readily extended to performance failures than to ethical violations (Fetscherin and Sampedro, 2019). Agreeableness is therefore expected to weaken this effect:

- H7.* Consumer agreeableness moderates the relationship between brand crisis type and brand hate, such that the effect of crisis type on brand hate is weaker for consumers high (vs low) in agreeableness.

The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

4.2 Measures

Validated multi-item scales assessed the focal constructs on five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Brand hate was measured using six items adapted from Johnson *et al.* (2011), capturing hostile reactions towards the brand (e.g. I would be pleased if I harmed the company that owns this platform). Boycott intention was assessed using three items from Muhamad *et al.* (2018) (e.g. I would boycott this brand). Boycott motivations were operationalised as expressive (five items; e.g. I would want to punish the platform) and instrumental (six items; e.g. Boycotts are an effective way to change brand decisions) dimensions following Klein *et al.* (2001, 2004). Personality trait measures were adapted from Bansal *et al.* (2016): neuroticism (five items; e.g. I get stressed out easily) and agreeableness (four items; e.g. I sympathise with others' feelings).

4.3 Pilot study

The experimental scenarios were developed by integrating crisis theory with real market incidents. To minimise brand familiarity bias, both featured a fictitious streaming brand ("Watchly") in a standardised mock news report. The

performance crisis scenario described duplicate subscription charges as a competence-based failure. The ethical crisis scenario described environmental harm as a value-based transgression. A first pilot study ($n = 113$) assessed perceived realism (Appelman and Sundar, 2016) and severity (Laufer and Gillespie, 2004). Because the performance scenario was rated higher on both, the ethical narrative was refined and the manipulation check was converted to a forced-choice format. A second pilot study ($n = 123$) showed no significant differences in perceived realism or severity between conditions (all $p > 0.05$).

4.4 Main study

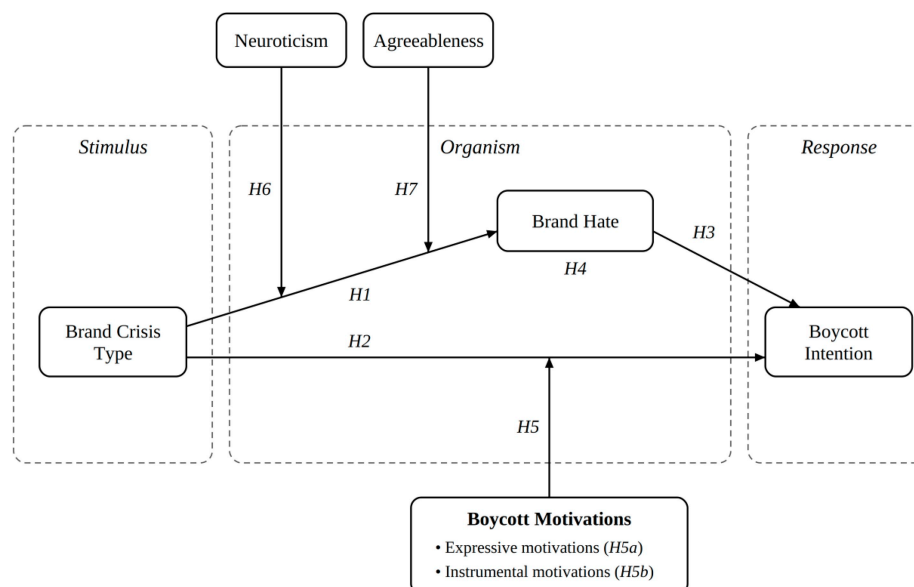
The main experiment employed a single-factor between-subjects design manipulating crisis type (performance vs ethical). Data were collected following institutional ethics approval. Participants aged 18+ in Türkiye were recruited online through social media and email invitations using convenience and snowball sampling. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained before completion. They were randomly assigned to a "Watchly" mock-news condition before completing the study measures. Although sampling was non-probability-based, random assignment supported internal validity. No prior streaming platform usage was required. Sample size was guided by comparable consumer research (Lim *et al.*, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2024). After excluding 71 incomplete or failed-attention-check responses, the final sample comprised 501 participants.

4.5 Analysis and results

4.5.1 Preliminary analyses

4.5.1.1 Sample and group equivalence. The final sample ($n = 501$) was predominantly female (58.5%), aged 18–34, single (65.9%) and university educated. Paid streaming

Figure 1 Research model



Source: Authors' own work

subscription ownership was 75.0%. Chi-square tests confirmed no significant demographic differences between conditions (all $p > 0.05$; income $p = 0.057$).

4.5.1.2 Manipulation checks. A manipulation check asked respondents to categorise crisis type. Perceived realism and severity were assessed to ensure stimulus equivalence. Independent-samples t -tests indicated no significant differences between conditions in perceived realism ($M_{\text{eth}} = 3.69$, $SD = 0.90$ vs $M_{\text{perf}} = 3.80$, $SD = 0.83$), $t(499) = -1.42$, $p = 0.158$, or perceived severity ($M_{\text{eth}} = 4.00$, $SD = 0.84$ vs $M_{\text{perf}} = 4.10$, $SD = 0.78$), $t(499) = -1.33$, $p = 0.185$.

4.5.1.3 Measure validation. Following item screening, one brand hate item and one instrumental boycott motivation item were removed due to weak factor loadings, following Hair *et al.* (2011). CFA in R/lavaan (Rosseel, 2012) yielded acceptable model fit: $\chi^2(309) = 848.97$, $p < 0.001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.75$, CFI = 0.939, TLI = 0.931, RMSEA = 0.059 (90% CI [0.054, 0.064]) and SRMR = 0.045. All retained loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$). Internal consistency, convergent validity and HTMT-based discriminant validity were supported across constructs (Hair *et al.*, 2011; Henseler *et al.*, 2015), with the highest HTMT of 0.791 between expressive and instrumental motivations (theoretically plausible given conceptual proximity). Detailed values are reported in Table 1; the full HTMT matrix is provided in the online Supplementary Material.

4.5.2 Hypothesis testing

Crisis type was coded as 0 = ethical crisis and 1 = performance crisis. After CFA-based measurement validation, composite scores from retained items were used in PROCESS analyses. PROCESS was selected because it directly implements the conditional process models tested here, including moderated mediation with continuous moderators, and provides bootstrap-based inference for indirect effects (Hayes, 2022). This choice reflected Study 1's inferential focus on estimating conditional indirect effects at specified values of continuous moderators. All models used 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals.

4.5.2.1 Direct effects and mediation (H1–H4). Crisis type significantly predicted brand hate ($b = -0.53$, 95% CI $[-0.71, -0.35]$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1, and predicted boycott intention ($b = -0.48$, 95% CI $[-0.67, -0.29]$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H2. Brand hate positively predicted boycott intention ($b = 0.53$, 95% CI $[0.45, 0.61]$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H3. PROCESS Model 4 indicated partial

mediation (H4). The direct effect remained significant ($b = -0.20$, 95% CI $[-0.36, -0.03]$, $p = 0.022$), and the indirect effect via brand hate was significant ($b = -0.28$, 95% CI $[-0.40, -0.18]$). Brand hate accounted for approximately 59% of the total effect.

4.5.2.2 Moderated mediation: personality traits (H6–H7). PROCESS Model 7 tested whether personality traits conditioned the indirect effect of crisis type on boycott intention through brand hate. Conditional effects were probed at ± 1 SD from the mean.

For neuroticism, the interaction with crisis type significantly predicted brand hate ($b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.09$, $t = -3.54$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.022$). The indirect effect was significant among consumers high in neuroticism ($b = -0.43$, 95% CI $[-0.61, -0.28]$) but not among those low in neuroticism ($b = -0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.23, 0.04]$). The index of moderated mediation was significant ($b = -0.16$, 95% CI $[-0.26, -0.07]$), indicating that neuroticism strengthens the affective route from crisis type to boycott intention. H6 was supported (see Figure 2).

For agreeableness, both crisis type ($b = -0.54$, $p < 0.001$) and agreeableness ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$) predicted brand hate, but the interaction was not significant ($b = -0.20$, $p = 0.094$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.005$). The index of moderated mediation was nonsignificant ($b = -0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.24, 0.02]$). H7 was not supported.

4.5.2.3 Moderation: boycott motivations (H5a–H5b). PROCESS Model 5 tested whether boycott motivations moderated the direct effect of crisis type on boycott intention. Both expressive motivation ($b = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$) and instrumental motivation ($b = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$) were strong predictors of boycott intention. Neither moderated the crisis type–boycott intention relationship (expressive: $b = 0.06$, $p = 0.395$; instrumental: $b = -0.01$, $p = 0.902$; both $\Delta R^2 < 0.001$). H5a and H5b were not supported.

4.5.2.4 Robustness checks. CFA-derived factor-score specifications yielded conclusions equivalent to composite scores (all $\Delta < |0.10|$: $H1 = 0.034$; $H2 = 0.028$; $H3 = 0.092$). The brand hate–boycott intention path held across crisis conditions: ethical crisis, $b = 0.585$, $SE = 0.051$, $p < 0.001$; performance crisis, $b = 0.477$, $SE = 0.064$, $p < 0.001$. The coefficient difference was not significant ($z = 1.33$, $p = 0.183$).

4.6 Interpretation of Study 1 findings

Ethical crises produced a 0.53-point higher level of brand hate (Cohen's $d = 0.52$) and a 0.48-point higher boycott intention

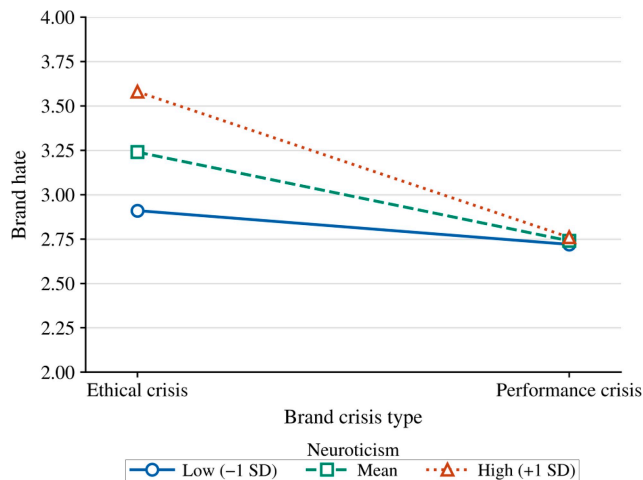
Table 1 Measurement model assessment

Construct	k	Loading range	α	CR	AVE	HTMT max
Brand hate	5	0.688–0.874	0.895	0.897	0.637	0.690
Boycott intention	3	0.912–0.965	0.962	0.963	0.896	0.784
Expressive motivation	5	0.615–0.792	0.838	0.839	0.511	0.791
Instrumental motivation	5	0.695–0.870	0.889	0.889	0.618	0.791
Neuroticism	5	0.660–0.833	0.876	0.877	0.589	0.352
Agreeableness	4	0.605–0.847	0.786	0.800	0.505	0.380

Note(s): k = retained items. α = Cronbach's alpha. CR = composite reliability. AVE = average variance extracted. HTMT = heterotrait-monotrait ratio. All standardised loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$. HTMT max is the highest HTMT value involving each construct. The highest overall HTMT was 0.791

Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2 Interaction effect of brand crisis type and neuroticism on brand hate



Source: Authors' own work

($d = 0.45$) than performance crises. The mediation model explained 29.0% of the variance in boycott intention, with approximately 59% of the total effect transmitted through brand hate, indicating that crisis type shapes boycott intention primarily through the affective route rather than directly. This pattern is consistent with evidence that hate mediates the effect of brand moral violations on anti-brand activism (Romani *et al.*, 2015) and with crisis research showing that negative emotions shape subsequent behavioural intentions (Ma, 2020). Neuroticism strengthened the crisis type-brand hate relationship ($\Delta R^2 = 0.022$), whereas agreeableness did not ($\Delta R^2 = 0.005$).

Boycott motivations explained boycott propensity but not crisis-type sensitivity (both $\Delta R^2 < 0.001$). Unlike Klein *et al.* (2004), where motivational factors moderated the egregiousness-participation link, the present findings suggest that they may matter more in translating appraisals into action than in responses to crisis type itself.

5. Study 2

Study 1 leaves open whether brand hate appears uniformly or across intensity levels, how consumers justify their responses, and how boycott motivations align with these intensities in public mobilisation. Study 2 addresses these questions through a netnographic analysis of an actual ethical crisis. The following research questions guide the analysis:

- RQ1. How do consumers express brand hate at different intensity levels (cold, cool, hot) across digital platforms?
- RQ2. What factors drive the emergence of brand hate in response to ethical brand crises?
- RQ3. What motivates consumers to participate in boycotts, and how do these motivations relate to brand hate intensity?

5.1 Method

Netnography adapts ethnography to interpret online communities and their meanings (Kozinets, 2002). Following Kozinets and Gretzel (2024)'s framework, the procedure incorporated four stages: research focus, data collection, analysis and interpretation and communication.

The research context was the Disney+ crisis in Türkiye. The decision not to release the planned "Atatürk" series, which concerned the founder of modern Türkiye, was widely interpreted as disrespect towards national identity and triggered boycott calls across digital platforms. The case was selected because it represents an ethical crisis, aligning with the crisis type that produced stronger brand hate in Study 1, and because it generated substantial social media discourse.

5.2 Data collection

5.2.1 Platform selection

Consumer-generated data were collected from three platforms: X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and Ekşi Sözlük (a Turkish collaborative dictionary and discussion platform). Guided by social media platform schema theory (Kwon and Park, 2023) and Zhu and Chen (2015)'s classification, platforms were selected to capture diverse modes of expression. Using multiple platform categories provides a richer empirical basis (Kundu and Chakraborti, 2022). X was selected for real-time opinion sharing and hashtag-driven mobilisation, Instagram for identity signalling through visual and textual commentary and Ekşi Sözlük for its anonymous discussion environment.

5.2.2 Procedures

Data were collected from June 30 to September 30, 2023, covering the pre-crisis period, crisis peak and aftermath. Turkish posts and comments were retrieved using relevant search terms and hashtags: tweets via Apify, Instagram comments from Disney+ Türkiye's official posts via Comment Exporter, and Ekşi Sözlük entries through an R-based application. After removing duplicates, irrelevant content, and non-Turkish material, the final data set comprised 1,341 tweets, 2,331 Instagram comments and 2,057 Ekşi Sözlük entries ($n = 5,729$).

5.2.3 Immersion

Following data collection, all entries were read multiple times to develop familiarity with discourse patterns and identify emergent themes. Only public content was analysed, and personal identifiers were removed following ethical netnographic standards.

5.3 Analytical procedure

5.3.1 Coding and interpretation

A hybrid deductive-inductive approach combined initial categories from brand hate (Zhang and Laroche, 2020) and boycott motivation literature (Klein *et al.*, 2004; Makarem and Jae, 2016), with inductive coding for emergent patterns (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Three independent coders received structured training on the coding scheme and decision rules before analysing the data. An initial 10% subsample was independently coded by all coders, yielding strong agreement (Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.84$). Discrepancies were resolved by consensus against the operational definitions before full corpus coding. Multiple category assignments were permitted for

overlapping themes. Hate intensity was classified into cold, cool and hot levels following Kucuk's (2019) brand hate hierarchy, with emotion profiles adapted from Zhang and Laroche (2020). Each entry was assigned a dominant emotional intensity based on predefined criteria and illustrative examples.

5.3.2 Quantitative support

Descriptive statistics and correspondence analysis complemented qualitative interpretation by identifying systematic patterns in the data. Chi-square tests examined associations between platform type, hate intensity and boycott motivations. These quantitative analyses corroborated and extended the interpretive findings rather than testing hypotheses.

5.4 Emergent themes

Four interconnected pillars structure the findings: factors associated with brand hate (*Pillar 1*), which manifests across an *expression spectrum* shaped by platform affordances (*Pillar 2*). Boycott participation is examined through distinct motivational patterns (*Pillar 3*), with the relationship between intensity and motivation revealing a systematic association (*Pillar 4*).

5.4.1 Pillar 1: The triggers of brand hate

The first pillar captures factors triggering brand hate in response to the Disney+ crisis. Thematic analysis identified five antecedent categories: brand-related, product-related, individual-related, situational and indirect factors. Indirect factors captured secondary influences and spill-over effects surrounding the focal crisis (see Table 2).

Attribution narrowing. Chi-square tests indicated significant associations between hate intensity and antecedent categories across platforms [X: $\chi^2(12) = 90.59$, $p < 0.001$; Instagram: $\chi^2(12) = 141.67$, $p < 0.001$; Ekşi Sözlük: $\chi^2(12) = 124.33$, $p < 0.001$]. In the correspondence analyses, the first dimension explained 96.2%, 85.4% and 71.9% of variance, respectively. Although ideological concerns appeared across hate levels, attribution narrowed towards the brand as hate intensified: hot hate clustered with brand-centred causes, cold/cool hate occupied intermediate positions and neutral expressions aligned with situational or indirect causes. Full coordinates are reported in the online Supplementary Material.

5.4.2 Pillar 2: the expression: How brand hate manifests

Drawing on Zhang and Laroche (2020)'s intensity-based conceptualisation of brand hate, each message was coded by emotion and hate intensity levels, with neutral and positive responses coded separately. The hate-intensity coding scheme and illustrative quotes are provided in the online Supplementary Material. Manual sentiment analysis was used to capture sarcasm and irony (Makarem and Jae, 2016). Human coding also helped preserve contextual nuance and semantic ambiguity (Matthes and Kohring, 2008), particularly in Turkish-language expressions. Brand hate appeared across the cold-cool-hot spectrum, while neutral and positive expressions were infrequent; positive sentiment accounted for less than 7.5% across platforms.

Hate intensity across platforms. Chi-square analysis of the platform x hate intensity association revealed significant variation [$\chi^2(4) = 21.10$, $p < 0.001$]. X showed the highest

proportion of neutral and cold hate expressions. Instagram was associated with hot hate, possibly reflecting its visual, high-engagement environment, and Ekşi Sözlük aligned predominantly with cool hate, consistent with its discursive culture.

5.4.3 Pillar 3: the response: What drives boycott participation

Following Cissé-Depardon and N'Goala (2009)'s framework, two categories emerged: instrumental motivations – comprising call-to-action, make a difference, promoting alternatives and raising awareness – and expressive motivations – comprising self-protection, self-defence, self-enhancement, symbolic support and punishment desire. Hybrid motivations blending strategic and affective elements were common (see Table 3).

5.4.4 Pillar 4: the escalation: Hate intensity and boycott motivation

The fourth pillar reveals the systematic relationship between brand hate intensity and boycott motivation type. Chi-square tests confirmed significant intensity x motivation associations across all platforms [Ekşi Sözlük: $\chi^2(6) = 49.96$, $p < 0.001$; Instagram: $\chi^2(6) = 313.87$, $p < 0.001$; X: $\chi^2(6) = 324.68$, $p < 0.001$]. Higher hate intensity was associated with a greater relative prominence of expressive over instrumental motivations. This pattern varied across platforms: instrumental motivations remained comparatively prominent at higher intensity levels on X, expressive motivations were most prominent on Instagram, and expressive motivations predominated across intensity levels on Ekşi Sözlük.

5.5 Interpretation of Study 2 findings

The netnographic findings extend Study 1 by unpacking its overall pattern: brand hate appears across cold, cool, and hot registers, with distinct attributions and boycott motivations. Study 2 also helps interpret the nonsignificant moderation of boycott motivations: their association with hate intensity (Pillar 4) suggests that motivations shape how participation is justified and expressed rather than whether crisis type becomes more influential.

Beyond Study 1's aggregate findings, the netnographic analysis extends prior brand hate intensity work (Kucuk, 2019; Zhang and Laroche, 2020) in three ways. Firstly, neutral emotional states frequently co-occurred with boycott participation, consistent with non-affective motives for digital activism such as responsibility and staying up-to-date (Ertekin and Dilek, 2022). Secondly, attributions were more brand-centred at higher hate intensities, which aligns with SCCT (Coombs, 2007). The antecedent structure differentiated the sources and targets of hostility: ideological incompatibility was the most prominent source, consistent with evidence that it increases boycott intention (Wang et al., 2021), while the indirect category extended hostility beyond the focal brand to sponsorship partners, celebrities and sub-brands, paralleling evidence of spill-over to affiliated brands and organisations (Rynarzewska et al., 2026). Thirdly, expressive motivations were more prominent relative to instrumental motivations at higher hate intensities, aligning with moral-emotional accounts of punitive action (Haidt, 2003; Romani et al., 2015). Neutral and cold hate reflected instrumental motives, including awareness-raising and promoting alternatives. Cool hate

Table 2 Antecedents of brand hate

Category	Antecedent	Description	Illustrative quote
Brand-related	Country-of-origin	Hostility toward brand's country of origin leading to brand avoidance; consumer animosity as a cognitive decision factor (Bryson and Atwal, 2019; Little and Singh, 2015); patriotic consumption tendency (Song, 2020); cultural imperialism concerns (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009)	"Why pay foreign companies like Disney? Let's support our own platforms instead"
	Negative brand personality	Erosion of established brand personality dimensions (Roy et al., 2022)	"Two-faced, lying organisation"
	Poor brand management	Managerial errors across organisational levels; inadequate crisis management lacking agility and sensitivity (Keskin et al., 2024); insufficient brand hate management strategies (Hashim and Kasana, 2019); failed response strategies (denial, evasion, mortification)	"One of the worst crisis management examples I have ever witnessed"
	Poor service quality	Inaccessible customer service channels; unresponsive representatives; unresolved complaints fostering cumulative brand hate (Abbasi et al., 2023)	"They overcharge and are impossible to reach-thieves, really"
Product-related	Poor performance	User interface problems; technical failures including freezing, slow loading, subtitle errors and interface glitches damaging brand reputation and loyalty	"The TV app is utterly disgusting garbage"
	Content inadequacy	Insufficient content library; repetitive storylines; limited new releases; weak local productions	"Same reheated topics on a mediocre content palette-why would anyone subscribe?"
	Deficit value	Unacceptable cost-benefit ratio (Lee et al., 2009); inconsistency between price and consumer monetary/emotional investment (Nguyen, 2021); perceived price unfairness relative to competitors (Ali et al., 2020; Kaura et al., 2015)	"Cancelled due to the exorbitant price increase and empty content"
Individual-related	Ideological incongruence	Identity loss when brand ideology conflicts with consumer beliefs (Odoom et al., 2019); contextual and societal focus beyond product performance (Hegner et al., 2017); anti-hegemonic resistance to cultural dominance (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Bryson and Atwal, 2019)	"Atatürk is our red line. This isn't just a show-it's about who we are as a nation"
	Moral concerns	Ethical consumption concerns related to human, animal and environmental welfare (Rindell et al., 2014); rejection of unethical brands (Lee et al., 2009); discrimination and injustice perceptions (Odoom et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2023); inadequate CSR performance (Vredenburg et al., 2020)	"Disney treats China one way, Turkey another"
	Dissatisfaction	Expectation-disconfirmation producing negative affect (Oliver, 1977), temporary negative emotions due to unmet expectations (Weitzl et al., 2024)	"Regardless of the Atatürk series, Disney+ never delivered any excitement-what a disappointment"
	Symbolic incongruity	Self-congruity theory: rejection of brands conveying unwanted meanings (Hegner et al., 2017); negative reference group associations (Lee et al., 2009); identity mismatch between consumer self-image and brand image (Abbasi et al., 2023)	"Supporting Disney means betraying myself"
	Perceived betrayal	Betrayal triggering brand hate (Zarantonello et al., 2016); deceptive advertising creating false expectations (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2021); loyal customers becoming strongest brand haters (Hegner et al., 2017; Kapoor and Banerjee, 2021)	"We subscribed only for Atatürk. Now you say it won't be streamed? Shameful"
Situational	Rumours and gossip	Contextual triggers activating latent animosity (Mushtaq et al., 2025); strongest brand hate influencers even for global brands (Hashim and Kasana, 2019)	"Word in the industry is that Disney+ Turkey executives have been laundering money. . ."
	Competitor presence	Unfavourable comparisons with competitor offerings generating negative attitudes (Husnain et al., 2021)	"Netflix releases projects non-stop while I'm paying this much for Disney?"
	Social influence	Sociological forces shaping identity and preferences; herd behaviour and subjective norms; stronger effects in collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 2001)	"Everyone around me cancelled, so did I"
	Information scarcity	Lack of official information fuelling distrust (Faulkner et al., 2015); delayed explanations losing relevance	"They're so shameless they won't even make a statement-wrong move"

(continued)

Table 2

Category	Antecedent	Description	Illustrative quote
Indirect	Sponsorship alliances	Negative attitudes toward brands collaborating with the boycotted brand	"We cancelled our subscription, yet the so-called Atatürkist municipality still runs their ads"
	Celebrity hostility	Hate extending to celebrities collaborating with brand; silence interpreted as complicity (Kumar <i>et al.</i> , 2023); scrutiny of influencers' inaction	"Our artists proved themselves hollow patriots, not a word from any of them"
	Sub-brand spillover	Brand hate generalising from focal product to entire brand family (Hegner <i>et al.</i> , 2017); spillover contingent on hate source	"Any self-respecting Turkish citizen should terminate their Disney subscription and all Sub-brand connections"
	Hostility toward political parties	Political consumerism shaping boycott decisions (Neilson, 2010); political party hate resembling consumer brand hate (Banerjee and Goel, 2020)	"You wouldn't stop praising Party X – so why the silence now?"
Source(s): Authors' own work			

introduced self-enhancement motivations consistent with Klein *et al.* (2001) "clean hands" motivation, while hot hate was dominated by punishment desire, including schadenfreude-like responses (Phillips-Melancon and Dalakas, 2014) and moral distancing (Sharma *et al.*, 2022).

6. Discussion and theoretical contributions

This research shows that brand crises do not translate uniformly into boycott behaviour. Using a sequential explanatory design, Study 1 provides experimental evidence for the crisis-to-boycott pathway through brand hate and identifies a trait-specific boundary condition on the crisis type-brand hate link, while Study 2 reveals attributional and motivational heterogeneity across intensity levels. Neither design alone captures both: the experiment identifies the aggregate pathway, whereas the netnography unpacks the heterogeneity within it.

The research contributes to the brand crisis, brand hate and boycott literatures in three ways. Firstly, the experimental findings confirm that ethical crises exert stronger effects on brand hate and boycott intention than performance crises, contrasting with Hegner *et al.* (2018). Within the affective-events logic (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), this stronger response may reflect moral-emotional appraisals (Haidt, 2003), with causal attributions shaping subsequent affect (Weiner, 2010). The contribution lies more specifically in identifying trait-specific boundary conditions. Neuroticism amplified the effect of crisis type on brand hate, consistent with Yadav (2024), where it was the only Big Five trait to moderate brand personality–brand hate relationships, but contrasting with Chahal and Dolkar (2024). Agreeableness, by contrast, did not moderate this relationship. Recent evidence similarly suggests trait- and pathway-specific moderation: Seth and Soch (2024) found that only extraversion and conscientiousness moderated the brand hate–forgiveness relationship, while Sameeni *et al.* (2024) found stronger brand hate effects on NWOM and boycott at lower levels of agreeableness. The present findings therefore point to trait- and pathway-specific rather than uniform personality-related boundary conditions.

Secondly, the findings extend intensity-based conceptualisations of brand hate. Prior work documents variation in emotional composition across intensity levels (Zhang and

Laroche, 2020), in active and passive forms and their consequences for brand equity (Brandão *et al.*, 2026), and in these forms' behavioural implications (Tran *et al.*, 2026). Yet, the relationship between hate forms and the reasons underlying hate has been identified as an open question (Brandão *et al.*, 2026). A recent social-media boycott study links antecedents and consequences to hate severity but does not link boycott motivations to intensity (Tokmak Danişman and Kasapoğlu, 2025). The netnographic analysis indicates that higher-intensity categories are associated with a greater relative prominence of expressive over instrumental motivations, extending Cissé-Depardon and N'Goala (2009)'s framework by showing how these motivational categories vary with affective intensity in crisis settings. This complements Study 1's null moderation, where both motivation types significantly explained boycott propensity but did not condition crisis-type effects. The presence of hybrid motivations further suggests that strategic and affective logics coexist within boycott participation rather than forming a strict binary. Treating crisis-induced brand hate as a monolithic state therefore obscures meaningful heterogeneity in boycott motivations.

Thirdly, the study broadens the antecedent architecture of brand hate by identifying five categories, including an indirect category capturing hostility beyond the consumer–brand relationship towards sponsorship partners, celebrities, sub-brands and political parties. The relative weight of these categories varies across hate-intensity levels.

7. Managerial contributions

The findings indicate that crisis type is critical for managing backlash. Ethical crises generate stronger brand hate than performance crises and are better approached as value- and identity-sensitive disruptions than as technical problems. This is especially so where violations threaten established relationships and heighten betrayal (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Ethical-crisis responses should prioritise transparent acknowledgement and visible corrective action over purely technical explanations. Crisis type also had a stronger effect on brand hate among consumers high in neuroticism, so psychographic segmentation may help anticipate which consumers react most intensely.

Table 3 Categories of instrumental and expressive motivations

Type	Motivation	Mechanism / description	Illustrative quote
Instrumental	Call-to-action	<i>Peer coordination</i> : Social influence from family, friends and reference groups (Yener, 2017)	"I convinced everyone around me to cancel their Disney+ accounts"
		<i>Collective mobilisation</i> : Horizontal movement with shared goals; participation signals critical mass (Carty, 2018; Klein et al., 2004)	"This is not just about us. Turkish people in Europe and the US should also boycott"
		<i>Tactical diversification</i> : Star ratings, refund demands, cancellation documentation	"Leave a 1-star review. . . demand a refund"
	Make a difference	<i>Institutional targeting</i> : Regulatory pressure through licensing, bans or sanctions (Kumar et al., 2023)	"Government should suspend Disney+'s broadcasting licence"
		<i>Perceived efficacy</i> : Belief in impact through cumulative financial pressure (Braunsberger and Buckler, 2011)	"Don't think your cancellation doesn't matter. 1,000 people cancelling 1,000 liras is still 1 million"
	Promoting alternatives	<i>Conditional patronage</i> : Purchase contingent on reversal of decision	"I cancelled my subscription and won't return until the issue is resolved"
	Raising awareness	<i>Market reallocation</i> : Redirecting demand to rivals or illegal sources	"Let Netflix or Prime Video air the Atatürk series instead"
Expressive	Self-protection	<i>Informational activism</i> : Sharing context, updates and factual details (Ertekin and Dilek, 2022)	"Disney announced the cancellation without even having the courage to broadcast the Atatürk series"
		<i>Comprehensive boycott</i> : Exposing sub-brands and affiliates for total disengagement	"We should boycott all of Disney -theme parks, cruise ships, movies, everything"
		<i>Hashtag signalling</i> : Symbolic participation without elaboration	"#BoycottDisney #RespectAtatürk"
	Self-defence	<i>Moral distancing</i> : Preserving moral integrity and reducing dissonance (Sharma et al., 2022)	"They didn't even release a condolence message after the earthquake. That's when I cut ties"
		<i>Hypocrisy rejection</i> : Moral disgust from perceived inconsistency or discrimination	"Disney cancels Atatürk but supports others - it's hypocrisy at its finest"
		<i>Deception aversion</i> : Betrayal due to unfulfilled promises and misleading ads (Nguyen, 2021)	"You ran all those ads and then didn't deliver - that's fraud"
	Self-enhancement	<i>Cultural identity protection</i> : Preserving national/collective identity (Markus and Kitayama, 1991)	"Atatürk is our red line. This isn't just a show -it's about who we are as a nation"
		<i>Self-esteem threat response</i> : Intense reactions when brands hurt self-concept or loyalty	"I was a total fanboy -Marvel, Star Wars, Pixar. But if they confirm this, I'm out immediately"
		<i>Moral cleansing</i> : Boycott as moral purification and dissociation from wrongdoing (Klein et al., 2001)	"Cancelled my subscription. I'll watch with my honour intact elsewhere"
	Symbolic support	<i>Downward comparison</i> : Shaming non-participants to boost own moral standing (Vogel et al., 2014)	"Anyone who still pays for this platform is a traitor"
		<i>In-group/out-group demarcation</i> : Emphasising group loyalty and exclusion through moral language (Kennedy et al., 2023)	"Now we see who the real Atatürk supporters are"
		<i>Digital moral signalling</i> : Minimal visible action conveying solidarity (Ertekin and Dilek, 2022)	"Cancelled. That's it"
	Punishment desire	<i>Solidarity expression</i> : Alignment with group values through hashtags or brief affirmations	"#Disneyboycott-I'm out"
		<i>Schadenfreude</i> : Enjoyment of brand's misfortune; adversarial pleasure (Phillips-Melancon and Dalakas, 2014)	"Hope you go bankrupt"
		<i>Retaliatory aggression</i> : Moral outrage fusing with desire for revenge	"You disrespect Atatürk? Then get out of Türkiye!"

Source(s): Authors' own work

Responses should also reflect hate intensity, consistent with recent work recommending distinct responses to different manifestations of brand hate (Tran et al., 2026). Kucuk's (2019) cold-cool-hot distinction offers a managerial lens: cold hate may warrant clarification, cool hate engagement and value alignment and hot hate attention to both the issue and its symbolic meaning, given stronger expressive motivations at higher intensities. Attributions were also more brand-centred at

higher intensities, so responses should acknowledge the brand's role where affective repair may help (Fan et al., 2025). Timing may be particularly important at this end of the spectrum, as hot hate was most common in a comparable social-media boycott involving perceived corporate silence (Tokmak Danışman and Kasapoğlu, 2025).

Managers should also move beyond aggregate sentiment tracking and monitor anger, distancing, attributional focus and

boycott-oriented expressions. Consumers with prior brand connections may express greater anger in value-related crises (Mosley *et al.*, 2024). Differences across Instagram, Ekşi Sözlük and X further underscore the need for platform-specific monitoring (Zhu and Chen, 2015), while crisis responses should also adapt to changing online discourse across crisis stages (Wilk *et al.*, 2025).

Finally, crisis management may need to extend beyond the consumer-focal brand dyad. Study 2 showed that hostility extended beyond the focal brand to sponsorship partners, celebrities, sub-brands and political parties. Crisis assessment should therefore consider potential spill-over across the broader network of actors associated with the focal brand, as part of a continuing alignment with evolving consumer values (Narayanan and Singh, 2025).

8. Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations suggest directions for future work. Firstly, neither study was longitudinal; future research could trace how brand hate and boycott behaviour evolve over time and whether managerial interventions at particular points can interrupt this development. Boycott participation itself has been shown to decline over time (Lasarov *et al.*, 2023), underscoring the value of such research. Secondly, future research could incorporate all Big Five traits beyond neuroticism and agreeableness, investigate forgiveness as a buffer (Fetscherin and Sampedro, 2019) and manipulate crisis responsibility attribution. Thirdly, the quantitative phase used a fictitious brand and relied on non-probability convenience and snowball sampling in Türkiye, while the qualitative phase focused on a single real-world case in the streaming sector. Future research should test whether pre-crisis relationship strength conditions crisis-type effects, given evidence that brand passion differentiates post-transgression hate responses (Tolunay and Veloutsou, 2025). Comparative research across brands, cultures and product categories, particularly collectivist versus individualist contexts (Hofstede, 2001), would clarify boundary conditions.

Fourthly, qualitatively identified indirect factors warrant quantitative validation to establish their relative weight and generalisability. Fifthly, because PROCESS relies on observed composite scores without simultaneous measurement and structural estimation, future studies could re-estimate the full moderated mediation model using latent-variable SEM. Finally, configurational approaches such as fsQCA could complement the linear S-O-R model (Woodside *et al.*, 2023). Personality traits, boycott motivations, crisis type, hate intensity and pre-crisis relationship strength (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008) could be examined in terms of how they jointly relate to different levels of brand hate and boycott engagement.

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Ethics statement

This study was approved by the Haliç University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Istanbul, Türkiye. All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection; participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of anonymity and advised of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Authors' contributions

Elif Guner led the research design, data collection, analysis and manuscript preparation. Ozgur Cengel contributed through scholarly supervision, interpretive feedback and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

About the authors

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