


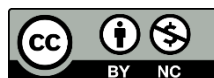
## Managing Brand Hate in the Airline Industry: Strategies for Mitigating Negative Consumer Perceptions

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: Business &amp; Economics</p> <p>Received: 20 March 2025 Revised: 03 April 2025 Accepted: 04 April 2025 Published online: 12 April 2025</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> brand hate, management strategy, negative emotion, netnographic study.</p>	<p><b>Background:</b> The airline industry is highly competitive and service-oriented, making it particularly vulnerable to customer dissatisfaction and brand hate. Brand hate, defined as intense negative emotions toward a brand, can lead to consumer retaliation, boycotts, and long-term reputational damage in airline context.</p> <p><b>Aims:</b> This study explores effective strategies for managing brand hate in the airline industry.</p> <p><b>Methodology:</b> Using a dual-method qualitative approach, we conduct (1) a netnographic analysis from the consumer perspective and (2) five semi-structured interviews with airline managers, analyzed using Lexico 3.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> Our findings identify five key strategies for mitigating brand hate. Consistent with prior literature, we confirm that management processes and brand recovery are valuable for addressing short-term customer complaints. Additionally, we propose novel long-term strategies, including benchmarking and competitive intelligence, workplace control, and enhanced security measures. In fact, by integrating insights from both customers and brands, this research deepens the understanding of hate management and highlights the severe repercussions of consumer attrition for airline companies.</p> <p><b>Conclusions:</b> Our study emphasizes the need for proactive interventions and equips managers with actionable strategies to reduce brand hate, repair customer relationships in digital environments, and enrich the literature on crisis management and relationship between consumer and brand.</p>

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## 1. Introduction

Consumers hold diverse emotional responses toward brands, ranging from positive attachments, such as love, to negative sentiments, such as hate (Fournier & Alvarez, 2013). Historically, brand hostility received limited attention, as dissatisfied customers rarely voiced their negative emotions (Kucuk, 2019). However, the advent of digital platforms has transformed consumer-brand dynamics, amplifying customer voices and reshaping business relationships (Ayertey & Okafor, 2024; Cooper et al., 2019; Grégoire et al., 2009). When brands fail to meet expectations, consumers now leverage online platforms to vocalize dissatisfaction and mobilize others against the brand, intensifying reputational risks.

Ignoring brand hate poses a severe risk for businesses, as demonstrated by the high-profile case of *United Airlines*. Two major incidents underscore how unchecked consumer hate can inflict lasting damage on both corporate reputation and financial performance. The first incident occurred in 2007 when musician Dave Carroll's guitar was damaged due to mishandling by United's baggage crew. After the airline refused compensation, Carroll released the protest song *United Breaks Guitars* on YouTube, which went viral and reportedly cost the company \$180 million in lost market value (Carroll, 2012). Carroll later expanded his critique in a 2012 book, *United Breaks Guitars: The Power of One Voice in the Age of Social Media*, illustrating how individual grievances can escalate into full-blown reputational crises in the digital era. Despite this costly lesson, United failed to implement effective brand hate management. In 2017, the airline faced another incident when a passenger was forcibly dragged off an overbooked flight—an incident that sparked global outrage and further eroded consumer trust. These cases highlight the critical need for proactive brand management to address negative consumer emotions before they escalate.

Furthermore, a viral video emerged in 2017 showing security officers forcibly dragging a passenger from an overbooked United Airlines flight, leaving him bloodied and traumatized. The graphic footage ignited immediate public fury, triggering an avalanche of negative word-of-mouth as outraged consumers shared personal grievances under hashtags like #BoycottUnited. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook became hubs of collective anger, with the incident amassing over 87,000 tweets within 48 hours (Smith et al., 2018). These back-to-back crises demonstrate how unaddressed brand hate can snowball into severe reputational and financial consequences. They underscore a critical lesson for modern businesses: proactive reputation management and swift, empathetic response systems are no longer optional—they're vital for survival in an era where consumer outrage can escalate globally within hours.

The study of brand hate management within consumer-brand

relationships is a relatively nascent area of research (Kucuk, 2019; Hashim & Ahmed, 2018). To date, only two studies have explicitly examined brand hate management strategies. Kucuk (2019) pioneered the conceptual exploration of brand-specific hate processes in digital environments, though this work lacked empirical validation. Complementing this, Hashim and Ahmed (2018) experimentally investigated brand hate management in offline settings, introducing brand recovery as a potential strategy for alleviating negative consumer emotions. Existing literature has predominantly focused on either the antecedents and consequences of brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017; Bryson et al., 2013; Bryson & Atwal, 2018) or the consumer personality traits associated with brand hate (Ali et al., 2020; Mednini & Damak Turki, 2024; Valenzuela et al., 2022; Chahal & Dolkar, 2024). Despite these contributions, a significant gap persists regarding empirically grounded strategies for managing brand hate. This study addresses this critical gap by identifying and evaluating effective brand hate management strategies, with particular emphasis on the airline industry. By integrating both consumer and managerial perspectives, our research aims to provide organizations with evidence-based approaches to mitigate brand hate and repair damaged relationships. Specifically, we investigate the following research question: What strategies can companies employ to effectively manage brand hate?

This paper is organized into five main sections. Section 2 conducts a comprehensive review of existing literature on brand hate, synthesizing current knowledge about its management strategies. Sections 3 and 4 detail the research methodology and present the empirical findings, respectively. The final section (5) concludes by discussing the study's theoretical contributions and practical implications for brand management, while also addressing research limitations and proposing actionable directions for future investigation.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### **2.1. Brand hate**

The conceptualization of brand hate draws upon fundamental distinctions between emotions and feelings. As established by Derbaix and Pham (1989), emotions are characterized by high intensity and short duration, while feelings exhibit moderate intensity and greater temporal persistence. Within this framework, Bottin (2016) notes that hate has been variously conceptualized across disciplines: as a discrete emotion (Ekman, 1992), as a stable attitude (Ben-Ze'ev, 2001), and as a motivational driver of destructive behaviors (Rempel & Burris, 2005). Sternberg's (2003) triangular theory of hate provides particular relevance to brand relationships, proposing that hate emerges from the interplay of three core components: (1) negation of intimacy (manifested as disgust), (2) passion (comprising anger or fear), and (3) commitment to devaluation. These elements, while distinct, interact

dynamically to form a holistic experience of hate. Despite these theoretical foundations, empirical research on brand hate has predominantly focused on its emotional antecedents, largely neglecting its consequential impacts on brands (Bryson et al., 2013; Bryson & Atwal, 2018; Hegner et al., 2017; Bottin, 2016). Kucuk's (2019: 20) definition captures this multidimensional nature, characterizing brand hate as "a psychological state marked by intense negative emotions and detachment toward brands that deliver poor experiences, generating both individual distress and social repercussions."

This conceptualization carries critical managerial implications. When customers develop hostile responses to brands following negative experiences, organizations must implement timely, strategic interventions. Effective management approaches can not only mitigate the immediate effects of brand hate but also prevent its escalation into lasting reputational harm.

## **2.2. Brand hate management**

According to the literature, Kucuk (2019) was the first to discuss brand hate management processes in an online context, identifying three key steps: listening, engagement, and negotiation. Each step encompasses various elements aimed at reducing brand hate. Similarly, Hashim and Ahmed (2018) examined brand hate management in an offline context through experimental research, introducing brand recovery as a strategy to mitigate negative emotions. This approach includes apology, explanation, and compensation. The following section will provide a detailed analysis of these strategies and their practical implementation.

### **2.2.1. Brand recovery**

Hashim and Ahmed (2018) investigated brand hate management strategies in the context of Pakistan. Their study introduced the concept of "Brand Recovery", which comprises three key strategies: excuse, explanation, and compensation. These strategies were tested on five groups of consumers who regularly visit fast-food restaurants in Pakistan. The findings revealed that the combination of excuse + compensation + explanation was the most effective in managing brand hate and fostering consumer reconciliation.

The concept of brand recovery is grounded in Sternberg's (1998) Balance Theory of Wisdom and his Theory of Hate (2003). However, the effectiveness of this approach is limited to cases where brand hate is triggered by a negative past experience. Other potential factors, such as symbolic and ideological inconsistency (Hegner et al., 2017; Bryson et al., 2013; Bryson & Atwal, 2018), poor relationship quality (Hashim & Kasana, 2019), or consumer personality traits (Ali et al., 2020; Kucuk, 2019; Mednini & Damak Turki, 2024; Valenzuela et al., 2022; Chahal & Dolkar, 2024), were not explored. Additionally, the study did not examine the specific conditions under which compensation

influences reconciliation or when it has no effect. Gelbrich et al. (2015) argued that financial compensation can improve satisfaction levels, but only up to a certain threshold. Moreover, the research is limited to the restaurant industry, conducted within a single country, and confined to an offline context.

### 2.2.2. Management process

Kucuk (2019) pioneered the investigation of digital brand hate management strategies, proposing a three-phase management framework: a) listening (systematic monitoring of digital channels), b) engagement (active response to consumer grievances), and c) negotiation (constructive conflict resolution). Grounded in relationship marketing theory, this approach aligns with contemporary Customer Relationship Management (CRM) principles, which emphasize proactive relationship-building as a mechanism for cultivating long-term consumer loyalty and brand commitment (Gazi et al., 2024). The framework's staged structure acknowledges the progressive nature of brand hate mitigation, where effective listening precedes meaningful engagement, ultimately creating conditions conducive to successful negotiation.

#### *a) Listening*

The literature demonstrates that active listening serves as a critical practice across diverse fields including psychiatry, nursing, advocacy, and communication (Ribeiro et al., 2025). In marketing research, social listening has emerged as an indispensable methodology, offering real-time access to comprehensive consumer data and global insights with direct practical applications (Boender et al., 2023). This approach aligns with Harrison-Walker's (2019) concept of "consumer voice", which highlights how enabling customers to express brand-related frustrations can increase forgiveness after service failures. Bennett's (1997) foundational work further emphasizes that companies should actively facilitate complaint expression to maintain positive brand perceptions.

For brand hate specifically, systematic listening performs two vital functions: First, it helps businesses assess whether negative sentiment stems from genuine customer experiences or external factors like competitor interference. Second, it enables real-time tracking of consumer attitude evolution through advanced monitoring systems (Kucuk, 2019). These capabilities make Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategies particularly valuable, as they significantly enhance customer satisfaction, improve retention rates, and streamline internal communications (Nethanani et al., 2024).

Effective listening extends beyond responding to direct complaints—it requires ongoing engagement with both vocal and silent customer segments. Companies that only acknowledge positive feedback while ignoring concerns risk exacerbating negative emotions.

In today's digital landscape, social media platforms serve as primary channels for consumer expression, necessitating robust technological listening systems. These may include manual keyword searches, expert consultations, or specialized tools like *Geofeedia* for location-based sentiment tracking (Nguyen, 2024). Such systems enable proactive customer service interventions while providing marketers with unfiltered consumer insights that can inform future research questions, identify emerging challenges, and accurately gauge brand sentiment (Jayanti, 2010).

### ***b) Engagement***

Once hateful consumers are identified, it becomes essential for the business to develop effective communication strategies to engage with them. In such cases, service failure should be viewed as a learning opportunity, as consumers may be more inclined to help improve complaint-handling processes (van Vaerenbergh & Orsingher, 2016). The most crucial aspect is to maintain honesty and fully understand the customers' needs. Engagement should be structured around specific principles, including tone of engagement, channel of engagement, and timing of engagement.

#### **• *Tone of engagement***

This phase consists of four essential components which are the following: dialectic empathy, hate mirroring, authenticity verification, and lunatic discharging.

First, the company must demonstrate empathy, an emotional intelligence factor that enables individuals to understand and relate to the emotions of others (Goleman, 2001). Empathy helps mitigate negative emotions, such as resentment, by acknowledging consumer concerns (Gabbott et al., 2011). In the context of brand negativity, consumer anger cannot be managed solely by dismissing it. While empathy does not necessarily validate the customer's grievances, failing to show empathy can result in a loss of communication control, increasing brand hate and giving the impression that the company is indifferent to its customers' concerns (Kucuk, 2019).

Second, hate mirroring represents an effective strategy for managing dissatisfaction by reflecting consumers' emotional states back to them. This technique focuses not on directly managing emotions but rather on making customers aware of their behavior's impact, thereby resetting the emotional tone and establishing constructive boundaries for interaction.

Third, authenticity verification is crucial for distinguishing genuine complaints from potentially malicious ones, such as those originating from competitors (Mednini & Turki, 2022). This process increasingly relies on artificial intelligence to differentiate between legitimate consumers and bad-faith actors.

Finally, irrational discharge addresses cases where complaints stem from customer psychopathology rather than actual service failures (Abbasi et al., 2023). Effective management requires thorough investigation of complaint origins and professional disengagement when hostility is determined to originate from the customer's personality rather than brand interactions.

• ***Channel of engagement***

Channel selection plays a pivotal role in effectively addressing consumer dissatisfaction. Baer (2016) advocates for mirroring consumers' chosen complaint channels, noting that 75% of customers utilize three or more channels when voicing grievances. Kucuk (2019) supports this approach, demonstrating that response channel alignment increases meaningful engagement and resolution rates by up to 40%. The digital landscape offers numerous relationship-building tools—from corporate websites and mobile ads to social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016)—yet Hendriyani and Raharja (2018) emphasize the importance of omnichannel integration for creating emotionally resonant experiences.

Public responses on platforms like Twitter often appear less sincere than private resolutions (Kucuk, 2019). Private channel engagement not only demonstrates genuine concern but also strengthens brand attachment. For instance, addressing issues via direct messages or email signals dedicated, personalized attention—a key driver of loyalty according to recent CX studies (Sahni et al., 2018). This approach balances visibility with authenticity, particularly when handling sensitive complaints that risk reputational damage if managed publicly.

• ***Timing of engagement***

Time is a crucial factor for businesses, especially when dealing with customer complaints. Kucuk (2019) argues that the longer a company takes to respond, the greater the consumer's resentment grows. The most effective strategy, therefore, is to set clear deadlines for responding to customer complaints. For instance, the airline KLM has employed 150 people to address and respond to complaints 24/7, in 14 languages (Baer, 2016).

***c) Negotiation***

The performance of a complaint management system largely depends on how effectively customer concerns are addressed, ensuring that responses are clear, simple, and courteous (Agnihotri et al., 2021; Homburg et al., 2009). Complaint handling is regarded as a "formal organizational procedure for registering and processing customer complaints in a way that aligns with the needs of the complainants" (Abbasi et al., 2023). To mitigate consumer hate toward a brand, Kucuk (2019) suggests the following methods.

- ***Non-monetary compensations (Apology- process and policy change)***

Non-monetary compensation, such as an apology, is often viewed as an effective short-term strategy. The success of service recovery efforts, however, can vary depending on the service recovery entity, with the perceived sincerity of the apology being considered a critical factor (Hu et al., 2021). Generally, an honest apology serves to alleviate customer anger and is considered an essential first step in fostering a reliable and effective communication foundation. Previous studies have shown that apologies or explanations for unsatisfactory services that are perceived as insincere do not satisfy customers (Migacz et al., 2018).

Another form of non-monetary compensation is policy and process improvement. Some customers are not merely seeking short-term fixes but are advocating for long-term changes in company policies. This strategy is particularly effective for customers who have a moderate to severe level of hate and expect significant changes in corporate policy (Kucuk, 2019). Scholars suggest that firms should collect and maintain complaint data, analyze it, assess the costs of improvements, and implement changes in order to leverage customer complaints as a tool for process enhancement (Johnston & Michel, 2008).

- ***Monetary compensations***

Financial compensation serves as a critical mechanism for trust restoration following service failures, with empirical evidence demonstrating a positive correlation between compensation value and recovery outcomes (Albrecht et al., 2018). This strategy proves particularly effective for consumers exhibiting low-to-moderate brand hate intensity, as monetary redress directly addresses both the tangible and psychological costs of service failures. Research indicates that comprehensive complaint resolution requires dual-path compensation:

### **3. Methodology**

This study employed netnography as its principal research methodology, proving particularly effective for collecting authentic data on sensitive consumer-brand dynamics where traditional methods had demonstrated limited efficacy (Bernard, 2004; Kozinets et al., 2014). The systematic application of netnographic protocols, complemented by semi-structured interviews with Tunisair managers, enabled the generation of rich, triangulated insights into brand hate phenomena.

#### **3.1. Data collection**

##### **3.1.1. Netnography**

Netnography is a qualitative online research method used to study communities through their virtual interactions (Kozinets et al., 2014). We followed the netnography steps outlined by Kozinets (2002) to guide our study. This approach proved valuable for gathering information on sensitive topics, such as those explored in our research.



It allows customers to express their feelings authentically within anti-brand communities, a perspective often difficult to capture through traditional quantitative methods. To obtain rich data, we utilized Facebook, a social network known for its high interactivity, large user base, and diverse participants (Kozinets, 2002). Following Kozinets' (2002) netnography methodology, we adopted five steps. First, we began with the entry step, aiming to understand the antecedents and outcomes of brand hate within the context of anti-brand communities. For this purpose, we selected three anti-Tunisair communities. Tunisair, the national airline of Tunisia, provided an ideal case for this study. We selected different communities following Bernard's (2004) guidelines, as they align with the objectives of our research. The volume of traffic, the number of participants, and the descriptive richness of data (including negative community comments) all contribute to meeting our research goals. To understand consumer behavior and rituals, we logged into Facebook and engaged with the selected communities as illustrated in Appendix 1. During data collection, we adhered to two key sampling principles: diversification and saturation.

According to Bernard (2004), the netnography process involves both non-participating and participating observations. In our non-participating observation, we collected 250 comments from the three communities. For the participating observation, we initiated an online discussion group and invited individuals to join the conversation. Using the focus group technique, we reached out to 36 passengers from various nationalities across the three anti-Tunisair communities. However, only 10 members joined the focus group. Given the low response rate, we invited 16 additional passengers to participate in individual interviews. The details of our sample characteristics are outlined in Appendix 2. In the third step, to ensure proper data analysis and interpretation, we followed the guidelines of Decrop and Degroote (2015: 7). We coded the information through open coding (inductive coding applied during the first reading). Subsequently, we used the software Lexico 3, which allowed us to organize the verbatim into a theme grid and extract key themes from the verbatim responses of each participant as illustrated in Appendix 3. The fourth step involved obtaining permission from members to post their messages and comments. Finally, in the last step, as noted by Bernard (2004), this phase enabled us to gather more specific insights into the meanings that consumers attribute to their experiences. One of the comments we received during our qualitative study was: "You do good research, but I wouldn't recommend Tunisair as a research company. I dislike this airline company."

### 3.1.2. Semi-structured interview

To gain a broader perspective on brand hate management, we conducted five semi-structured interviews with marketing managers at Tunisair.

These interviews provided us with insights into the consequences of brand hate and revealed various management strategies employed by the company. Each interview lasted between 30 min to an hour. To ensure accuracy and facilitate analysis, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data analysis process followed the guidelines outlined by Wolcott (1994), which consists of three main phases: description, analysis, and interpretation. The description phase relied on verbatim quotes from the respondents to capture their perspectives. The analysis phase identified key factors, themes, and relationships that emerged from the data. Finally, the interpretation phase aimed to make sense of the meanings behind the responses within the broader context.

### **3.2. Data analysis**

We implemented a rigorous three-stage coding process to analyze our qualitative data, beginning with open coding to identify emergent themes through inductive analysis of the raw textual material. As Hollebeek and Chen (2014: 65) emphasize, initial themes often require deeper theoretical examination, prompting our transition to axial coding where we systematically grouped these preliminary codes into conceptually coherent categories aligned with our research objectives. The final selective coding phase enabled us to compare and synthesize findings across both studies. Throughout this process, we utilized Lexico 3 software to quantitatively support our qualitative analysis by identifying recurrent text segments and measuring word frequency patterns as illustrated in Appendix 4. This mixed-method analytical approach allowed us to: 1) develop a comprehensive thematic framework categorizing participant behaviors, 2) systematically extract and compare verbatim responses, and 3) empirically identify behavioral variables through emerging patterns rather than predetermined assumptions, thereby maintaining methodological rigor while remaining responsive to the nuances of our data.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### **4.1. Management process**

#### **4.1.1. Listening**

Customers' complaints are often seen as opportunities for businesses to enhance their complaint service. However, when companies refuse to listen to their customers, hostility intensifies, and their strategies ultimately fail. Virtual communities—spaces where users can engage in meaningful conversations—offer marketers valuable insights by providing "recent evaluations of the collective pulse of consumers" (Kozinets, 2002). Our qualitative research revealed that virtual communities play a crucial role in listening to customer complaints. This is reflected in the following verbatim comments: "There's no attention to address our complaints; the only response is that this is not my job" (Man, 42 years old), and "Hello, I can see why you deleted my

comments, you took my bag, and you stole my items. I await your response in reference to my request number X" (Woman, 33 years old). According to Baer (2016), many businesses view their haters as a major problem, but the true issue lies in choosing to ignore them. Therefore, Herhausen et al. (2019) emphasized that businesses must recognize and appropriately respond to customer negative sentiments within online brand communities.

The results of the semi-structured individual interviews revealed that the company had failed to recognize the existence of brand hate among its passengers. In fact, the company's responsible managers were unaware of the anti-brand communities associated with the airline. Management's lack of awareness regarding these anti-brand communities underscores a critical failure in active listening and systematic customer complaint analysis. For them, they argued that these communities were created by competing private companies, rather than by disgruntled passengers with negative experiences. The following quotes illustrate this viewpoint: "These are lies that aim at creating an environment of mistrust around our national company" (Tunisair Manager, 40 years old). This aligns with the work of Mednini and Damak Turki (2024), which suggests that hate can stem not only from true consumers haters but also from individuals associated with rival companies and search to diffuses negative WOM.

#### **4.1.2. Engagement**

Effective customer engagement is essential for understanding and meeting customer expectations. Our netnographic analysis reveals that Tunisair demonstrates insufficient engagement with its customer base, particularly regarding linguistic accessibility. The airline's exclusive reliance on French-language communications fails to accommodate its international passengers, including speakers of Italian, German, Arabic, and English. Given language's critical role in service interactions, this monolingual approach—despite serving a substantial international customer base—likely contributes to negative brand perceptions. The findings suggest that Tunisair's language policy creates communication barriers that may exacerbate customer dissatisfaction and hinder effective relationship management. This point is reflected in the service manager's statement: "It's natural because French is our country's second-most spoken language, behind Arabic, yet occasionally there are conversations in both French and English... Although English is the most common language used in the aviation industry, our page is in French, and we very occasionally use English" (Tunisair Manager, 36 years old). Specifically, according to Holmqvist and Grönroos (2012), language is essential in service contexts, particularly during interactions between consumers and company representatives. Two main points highlight the need for a deeper understanding of language in services. In fact, direct communication in service encounters greatly influences

the outcome; the way consumers and service personnel interact is a key determinant of the experience (Bitner et al. 1997).

- **Tone**

The findings from the qualitative study revealed that employees' lack of professionalism and disrespectful interactions with customers contribute to brand hate. This assertion is supported by several extracts from the interviews with individuals involved: "Tunisair, like many Tunisian businesses, lacks a sense of relational engagement. When there is a delay, at least employees should apologize or notify the passenger... Instead, they are too disagreeable; they speak to us like criminals" (Man, 36 years old). In align with Herhausen et al. (2019), managers need to enhance their use of empathy and justifications to prevent further intensification of negative signals toward the brand. From the company's perspective, the manager pointed out that in-person claim authentication checks are conducted at the airport before passengers leave. This is reflected in the following statement: "The majority of complaints are made at the airport before the passenger leaves... there is a service for claims made on the spot... and if the passenger does not make the claim immediately, the request will be rejected" (Woman, 48 years old).

- **Channel**

Effective consumer communication requires careful selection of engagement channels. Our qualitative findings reveal that customers strongly prefer private, direct interactions—particularly via phone, email, and face-to-face communication—when engaging with the company. These channels provide a sense of personal attention and confidentiality, which is critical for addressing sensitive concerns. For many, receiving a response to their complaint is the most important factor: "By phone, always better" (Man, 19 years old); "It's similar for me, public or private, the most important thing is having a response" (Woman, 29 years old). From the company's perspective, although they use all available communication channels—phone, email, face-to-face, and social media—email remains the most frequently used method of communication with passengers. This is supported by the manager's statement: "Email is the most popular channel since it is more reliable and secure. ... The most effective method is email because it is anonymous and gives the appearance that the customer is sincere and isn't looking for publicity like they might on Facebook posts and comments" (Tunisair Manager, 60 years old). Consistent with this statement, mails effectively drive sales responses for several reasons. They allow marketers to reach customers at a low cost, often prompt quick responses, and foster interactive communication, as customers can immediately reply using their computer or mobile device (Valenti et al., 2024).

- ***Time of engagement***

When a brand fails to respond, customers tend to become increasingly frustrated, as seen with 'Tunisair' and its passengers. The airline frequently ignores repeated requests from its customers, further exacerbating their dissatisfaction. For example: "After six emails and several hours on the phone... I've never received anything" (Man, 28 years old), and "I sent emails to the concerned service and still got no response" (Woman, 38 years old). However, the results of the semi-structured interviews revealed that "Tunisair" does respond to its passengers in a reasonable timeframe, typically ranging from 15 days to a month. As one manager explained: "No more than a month, given the large number of complaints" (Tunisair Manager, 55 years old). However, studies indicate that both a rapid initial reply and a swift final resolution contribute to higher satisfaction with how complaints are managed (Istanbulluoglu, 2017).

#### **4.1.3. Negotiation**

##### ***a) Non-monetary Compensation***

- ***Apologize***

The findings of the qualitative study revealed that the company rarely employs an apology strategy, which contributes to the growth of brand hate. This is illustrated by the following statement: "We've experienced a significant delay without any justification, and after waiting for at least three hours with Tunisair" (Man, 48 years old). According to literature, Radu et al. (2019) noticed that using an apology to repair communication between the victim and the offender is an effective strategy.

- ***Explanation***

The findings reveal that the company seldom provides customers with transparent explanations regarding the root causes of brand hate. This lack of communication about the origins of negative sentiment represents a missed opportunity for constructive dialogue and relationship repair. This is reflected in the following statement: "When there's a delay, no information is provided, and no action is taken, particularly with regard to dependent individuals" (Woman, 36 years old). Referring to van Dael et al. (2020), different key communication strategies can be employed when responding to individual complaints. These responses may include elements that are important to complainants, such as providing an explanation for inadequate service, accepting responsibility, and detailing any lessons learned or actions taken.

- ***Process and Policy change***

When customer dissatisfaction emerges, organizations must demonstrate strategic adaptability by revising policies to align with

evolving consumer expectations. However, our findings reveal that Tunisair has maintained a static approach despite clear signals of market dissatisfaction. The following quotes illustrate this: "I have not noticed any change in policy, and I believe the answer is NO" (Man, 49 years old). Additionally, "Yes, it's true that they changed their policy, but in a negative way, as evidenced by today's events. Everyone detests it as well" (Man, 55 years old). Referring to earlier marketing studies, Kucuk (2019) highlighted that many social issues have arisen due to political problems, highlighting the company's irresponsibility toward its customers.

#### ***b) Monetary compensation***

Failure to provide compensation has intensified brand hate. The findings of the netnographic study revealed that 'Tunisair' does not offer compensation to its customers. This is illustrated by the following statement: "Due to a lack of professionalism in Tunisair services, I canceled my reservation on June 22 and have yet to receive compensation despite numerous reminders and emails" (Woman, 52 years old). In fact, consumers expected the company to compensate them for their losses and resolve their issues, indicating their desire for a more customer-focused approach. Bitner et al. (1990) highlighted that compensation is a common service recovery strategy that helps to reduce consumer anger and satisfy customers after a company failure. Additionally, others studies such as Silvestro (2023) addressed that compensation is more effective when it follows an explanation or an expression of empathy.

#### **4.2. Brand recovery**

While some customer complaints can be effectively resolved with a single strategy, businesses can also use multiple approaches to mitigate customer resentment. Individual interviews revealed that the airline company had not use multiple strategies for reducing customer hate. This is reflected in the interviewees' statements, such as: "Yes, it apologizes, it occasionally explains, it rewards, but no, there hasn't been a change in policy" (Woman, 26 years old). According to Hashim and Ahmed's (2018) study, the combination of three interventions—excuse, compensation, and explanation—was found to be the most effective in reducing consumer hostility toward a brand and fostering their desire for reconciliation.

#### **4.3. Benchmarking and competitive intelligence**

Our qualitative interview analysis revealed several verbatim quotes that highlight the significance of benchmarking strategies and competitive intelligence: "Benchmarking and competitive monitoring are also a driving force in achieving customer satisfaction... follow the lead of the best airline companies..." (Woman, 25 years old). According to

Drew (1997), comparative analysis helps meet customer needs, set business goals, accurately assess productivity and competitiveness, and ensure that industry best practices are integrated into work processes (Camp, 2024).

#### 4.4. Control over workplace

Hate is not always directed at the brand itself but can also be aimed at its employees. Some interviewees stressed the need for the company to exercise better control over its staff. This is illustrated by the following verbatims: "It's necessary to assess the backgrounds of employees and increase the number of surveillance cameras" (Man, 39 years old). Additionally, "We'll solve the issues with this company by disciplining the employees, punishing wrongdoers, and conducting regular employee checks if necessary" (Man, 44 years old). Research supports these views by demonstrating that employees play a critical role in shaping the workplace environment and contributing to organizational success (Kim et al., 2010). Furthermore, studies have revealed that higher levels of work control are associated with improved job satisfaction, job performance, and psychological well-being (Yiming et al., 2024; Hill et al., 2024). Research findings that emphasize the importance of employee control and behavior in influencing organizational success and customer satisfaction (Dormann & Kaiser, 2002). In fact, organizations that require employees to exhibit kindness and friendliness toward customers are likely to achieve higher customer satisfaction compared to those that do not enforce such standards (ibid).

#### 4.5. Security

The suggestions gathered from interviews highlight a lack of security within 'Tunisair.' This is evident in the interviewees' comments, such as: "Make a contract with a security agency to safeguard customers' bags... Create a customer service department that can address their needs while improving quality, safety, and environmental services" (Man, 24 years old). The responsible individual at "Tunisair" mentioned a step taken by the company to address customer dissatisfaction with outsourcing the baggage service to a private company. In this regard, Sagahyroon et al. (2007) emphasized the importance of developing and implementing a prototype baggage handling system in airports to improve baggage management and tracking, while simultaneously enhancing airport security. Additionally, if a customer reports the complete loss of their luggage, the company investigates whether it was mistakenly sent to another location. In such cases, 'Tunisair' disclaims responsibility for losses occurring outside its premises. Passengers are required to prove that the loss occurred within the airline's domain.

## 5. Implications

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

The current study enhances academic understanding of brand hate by identifying management strategies that reduce hate during consumer-brand interactions. The presence of brand hate can lead to significant brand crises. This research, therefore, introduces new strategies for managing brand hate, including benchmarking and competitive intelligence, workplace control, and security, while also reaffirming existing strategies such as process management and brand recovery. In fact, while the Duplex Theory of Hate emphasizes the emotional and psychological aspects of hate, our study bridges this perspective with managerial actions, showing that consumer resentment can be alleviated through targeted brand strategies such as apology mechanisms, customer engagement, and enhanced security measures. Overall, this research enriches the Duplex Theory of Hate by shifting the focus from passive hate to active resolution, demonstrating that hate in consumer-brand relationships is not static but a dynamic phenomenon that can be managed through strategic brand interventions.

Moreover, the study provides fresh insights by using two qualitative methods to address key research questions from both the consumer and company perspectives. The central idea of investigating brand hate from these two viewpoints is to understand the management tactics from the brand's perspective, while confirming them through consumer feedback. Additionally, examining brand hate highlights the financial risks businesses face when consumers boycott a brand and switch to alternatives (Abbasi et al., 2023). Our research contributes to the development of strategies that help businesses satisfy consumers and restore the consumer-brand relationship. This paper discusses recovery strategies that assist scholars in the fields of complaints management, recovery strategies, and consumer-brand relationship literature. In fact, the literature on brand hate has largely overlooked the significant motivations and satisfaction measures that encourage consumers to repurchase, as businesses often see recovery costs as a burden. This paper reveals that neglecting brand hate results in significant losses, while losing consumers is even riskier for the brand.

### 5.2. Managerial implications

This paper offers several managerial implications for managers and practitioners. First, this research highlights the significant negative impact of brand hate on companies and underscores the importance of effective management processes. Marketing managers should proactively identify and address the root causes of brand hate to prevent reputational damage and customer loss. Second, marketers should actively involve consumers in every stage of the complaint management process. The findings suggest that companies should implement short-



term recovery strategies—such as apologies, explanations, and compensation—to address consumer dissatisfaction and reduce brand hate. These three strategies have been identified as particularly effective in restoring trust and improving customer relations. Third, a well-structured brand hate management process is crucial for improving complaint handling. This includes three key steps: listening, engagement, and negotiation, all of which provide practical solutions for mitigating negative consumer emotions. By implementing these processes, businesses can foster a more responsive and customer-centric approach to managing brand hate. Fourth, beyond short-term measures, long-term strategies are essential for addressing persistent consumer dissatisfaction. In the airline industry, for example, brand hate can stem from poor workforce management, operational inefficiencies, or security concerns. Companies should therefore prioritize initiatives such as benchmarking, competitive intelligence, and enhanced security measures to improve service quality and minimize customer frustration. Fifth, a significant portion of brand hate arises from negative interactions with front-line employees. To address this, companies should invest in employee training programs, internal service quality improvements, and stronger customer service protocols. Well-trained employees who exhibit professionalism and empathy can play a critical role in defusing customer frustration and preventing brand hate escalation. Finally, ethical business practices play a vital role in mitigating brand hate. Organizations should focus on transparent communication, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, and ethical marketing strategies to build stronger consumer trust. A company that prioritizes honesty and accountability is more likely to maintain a loyal customer base and reduce negative sentiment.

### 5.3. Limitations and Future research

The current study focuses on brand hate management strategies but is limited by its scope. It is crucial to understand the antecedents of brand hate in order to effectively address it through appropriate strategies. Some strategies, for example, controlling employee behavior, may mitigate hate directed at employees but not necessarily at the brand itself. Furthermore, the study is confined to airline companies, and future research should consider other industries and brands to gain a broader perspective. A longitudinal study would be valuable to track how consumer emotions evolve over time and to identify appropriate management strategies based on these changes.

Additionally, this study examined strategies for managing brand hate without considering its intensity. Kucuk (2019) notes that anger can range from mild to intense, and future research should explore how the intensity of customer hatred affects the choice of management strategies. Our study also did not account for the personalities of the individuals expressing hate. A customer's personality may influence

their animosity toward the brand, making it essential to consider these differences when developing management strategies. Understanding each consumer's personality would be key in tailoring an effective response.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

### Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

### Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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### Appendices

#### Appendix 1. Communities' characteristics

Online community selected	Number of memberships	Observation duration
Tunisair	342 622	One year (from December 13, 2023 to December 13, 2024)
Scandales Tunisair لخطوط التونسية فضائح	4172	One year (from September 10, 2023 to September 10, 2024)
Boycottons Tunisair et ses tarifs indécents	2 036	One year (from December 13, 2023 to December 13, 2024)
Boycottons Tunisair et ses tarifs indécents	1 064	One year (from February 8, 2023 to December 14, 2024)

#### Appendix 2. Consumers' characteristics

Age (year)	Number	Frequency %	Gender	Number	Frequency %
Between 20 and 25	1	3.85%	Female	10	
Between 26 and 30	9	34.62%	Male	6	
More than 30	16	61.53%			

Profession	Number	Frequency %	Nationality	Number	Frequency %
Student	7	26.92%	Tunisian	9	34.61%
			Tunisian-French	10	38.48%
Employee	9	73.07%	Tunisian-Italien	2	
			Tunisian-Austrian	1	3.85%
			Tunisian-British	1	3.85%
			Tunisian-Canadian	1	3.85%
			Tunisian-German	1	3.85%
			Egyptian	1	3.85%

### Appendix 3. The result of the observation of Tunisair's virtual communities

Category	Comments
Use of a special language by members	pffff, hhhhh, wlh, nn, svp, la gazelle, nchlh, Vu, mmm, bb
Frequent use of exclamation marks (!) and question marks (?)	«يوليو؟؟؟», «une compagnie de M....!!!!!!», «quel service !!!!!!!», «comment ??», «A shame for Tunisia !!!!!», «Fucking useless!!!!!!»
Frequent use of capital letters	«RIEN!!!!», «AUCUNE RÉPONSE!!!!», «HORS VACANCES SCOLAIRES!!!!!!!!!!», «LAMENTABLE SERVICE CLIENTÈLE», «DEPUIS DEUX ANS JE AI RÉCLAMÉE MA CARTE MALHEUREUSEMENT AUCUN RÉPONSES DEPUIS 40 AN JE AI TOUJOURS J ACHETE MES BILLETS QUE CHEZ TUNIS AIR»
Words used to express hate towards "Tunisair"	mauvaise compagnie, Trop déçue, Aucun respect, c'est horrible, C'est un scandale, the worst company, Aucun professionnalisme, c'est ironique, fucking airline, catastrophe, politesse 0, pas de service, c honteux, Pffffffffffff, شعبة توريه منكم, حالة مزريّة, Tunisair la misère, Incroyable, Boycott, compagnie nulle, aucune excuse, j'en ai marre, un terrible service, Grave, Une honte!, c'est nul, je suis en colère, سرقة لجيوبنا, la plus mauvaise compagnie, يا غالة راک, درت للعمر, Incompetentes, Amateurisme lenteur, Mépris, pauvre tunisair, 9alaba, akber kedheba
Use of emoticons and acronyms	☺, lol, mdr
Word limitation and abbreviation	«Ya» instead of «il y a», «BSR» instead of «Bonsoir», «Psk» instead of «Puisque», «nn» instead of «non»

## Appendix 4. Verbatim and repeated segments using Lexico 3

The screenshot displays the Lexico 3 software interface. On the left, a list of segments is shown with columns for 'Segment' and 'Freq'. The segments are categorized by author, age, gender, and profession. The main window on the right shows the verbatim text for each segment, with some segments highlighted in yellow. The segments are:

- Auteur=B.F.-Age=27->Genre=homme->S=cadre\_ingenieur\_en\_telecom->N=franco-tunisien:** « 1 / Pas de considérations des clients autant dire que le sens du service est incertain. Prévalence en amont du problème complètement inexistant. Quand il y a retard aucune information donnée et aucune prise en charge notamment des personnes dépendantes... 2 / Aucune suite ni même un mail... 3 / Ils se tentent pas les réclamations... 4 / e-mail et réseaux sociaux... 5 / Plutôt privé... 6 / A / non en tout cas je n'en ai jamais eu une excuse... B / Aucune explication ni avant le retard ni après... C / Je ne sais pas répondre concerne le fait de compensation. Le fait est que personnellement je n'attendais pas de récompense mais uniquement que le service payé soit rendu. A défaut, si retard il y a (ce qui peut arriver) à moins que soient données des infos fiables et une prise en charge voire une compensation pour la gêne occasionnée... D / concerne le changement de politique. J'ai cru comprendre qu'il y avait eu beaucoup moins de retard cet été du fait d'une organisation modifiée des vols (certaines lignes arrêtées pour se concentrer sur les lignes les plus importantes)... 7 / Non je n'ai voyagé plus depuis 2ans avec cette compagnie et je fais en sorte que plus personnes de ma famille ne prenne cette compagnie. J'en arrive même à penser que la maintenance des avions n'est plus correctement assurée... 8 / Mettre le client au centre de sa politique. Le prévenir en amont que le vol est retardé afin qu'il ne se déplace pas pour rien. Assurer autant que possible le service prévu avec ponctualité et avec sens du service »
- Auteur=M.B.-Age=25->Genre=femme->S=étudiante->N=Tunisienne:** « 1 / Vol retardé plus de 9h... 2 / Je n'ai pas réclamé parce que je le savais à l'avance y'aura pas de suite... 3 / Les plaintes sont sans suite... 4 / Face à face... 5 / Privé... 6 / A / Oui elle s'excuse... B / Parfois elle explique... C / pas de compensation... D / Pas d'amélioration considérable pour sa politique... 7 / Peut-être, je voyagerai avec cette compagnie un jour... 8 / La satisfaction Clients doit être inscrite au cœur de la stratégie commerciale de la compagnie et pour y arriver il faut être à l'écoute de ses clients et les impliquer pour améliorer ses services. Le benchmarking et la veille concurrentielle sont aussi un moteur pour arriver à la satisfaction du client »
- Auteur=L.D.-Age=41->Genre=femme->S=responsable\_Backoffice\_dans\_un\_Hôtel->N=Tunisienne\_et\_Autrichienne:** « 1 / Des retards et annulations arbitraires (dernier en cours 4 heures de Vienne Tunis et 8 heures en retour / Avril 2019)... Ignorance totale, aucune information fiable... 2 / Oui, une réclamation par courriel auquel j'ai une réponse qui m'informe que Tunis air ne rembourse pas les retards des vols surtout si le départ est de Tunis... 3 / Au bout d'un mois à peu près... Juste après la réclamation, ils ont refusé de m'attribuer une carte fidélité avec laquelle je bénéficie de 10kg de plus... 4 / Par courrier recommandé / Preuve tangible... 5 / Peu importe privé ou public... 6 / Aucune stratégie appliquées... 7 / De Vienne à Tunis, on n'a de choix que « Tunisair »... 8 / Baisser les prix + Un personnel plus compétent et surtout amable + Éviter au maximum les retards et les annulations des vols + Une prise en charge en cas de retard... »
- Auteur=S.R.-Age=30->Genre=femme->S=fonctionnaire->N=Tunisienne:** « 1 / retard injustifié, impolitesse incroyable... 2 / j'ai fait une réclamation, aucune réaction sérieuse... 4 / face à face et même par téléphone. Mais sans résultat... 5 / privée ou publique. La plus importante est de répondre à ma réclamation... 6 / absolument non, elle n'a fait pas ces stratégies... 7 / oui quand je n'ai pas le choix je suis obligé de voyager avec cette compagnie aérienne... 8 / pas de réponse »
- Auteur=B.B.-Age=25->Genre=femme->S=étudiante->N=Italo Tunisienne:** « 1 / Retard injustifié (Si de retard), impolitesse incroyable, ils ont décidé de faire des révisions techniques alors que nous étions déjà à bord et sur le point de »

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