

IDENTIFYING DRIVERS OF BRAND POLARIZATION FROM CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Brand polarization is a growing phenomenon where brands attract groups of strong supporters and opposers simultaneously. Despite its relevance for marketers and brand managers, brand polarization yet remains heavily under-studied among scholars, and the effects of it are widely unspecified. However, the growing number of studies regarding the topic indicate that the phenomenon is on the rise.</p> <p>The primary scope of this study was to expand the understanding of brand polarization by identifying its distinct drivers. Additionally, this study aimed to find out which meanings modern consumers give to brand polarization. As the third key objective of this research, it was examined how the current online environment influences brand polarization amongst consumers.</p> <p>The key concepts reviewed in the theoretical framework of the study were polarization, brand attitude, brand relationships, brand love, brand hate, brand experience and brand communities. These concepts were selected for further examination due to their interlacing with the focal phenomenon.</p> <p>The research philosophy adopted in this study was interpretivism. Moreover, this study followed a qualitative research approach, and the empirical findings were obtained via semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted for ten respondents and a total of 36 loved or hated brands were discussed by the interviewees. Thematic analysis, interpretation and analytic generalizing were utilized to analyse the findings of the research.</p> <p>The findings of this study demonstrated each key concept's driving role in the formation of brand polarization amongst consumers. Moreover, several key meanings of polarizing brands were established based on the respondents' reflections and judgements. Additionally, this study explicated the current online environment's undisputed effects in extremifying consumers' attitudes towards brands. Consequently, the theoretical and empirical findings of the study were synthesized into a conceptual model to better illustrate the development of brand polarization. Overall, this study extended the existing comprehensions of the subject and offered managerial implications regarding brand polarization.</p>	
Key words: Brand polarization, polarization, brand attitude, brand relationships, brand love, brand hate, brand experience, brand communities	
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TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Tiivistelmä:</p> <p>Brändipolarisaatio on kasvava ilmiö, jossa brändit saavat samanaikaisesti osakseen sekä vahvoja tukijoita että vastustajia. Vaikka ilmiö on merkityksellinen niin markkinoijille kuin brändijohtajillekin, sitä on toistaiseksi tutkittu vain vähän ja sen vaikutukset ovat laajalti täsmentämättömiä. Aiheesta tehdyt selvitykset ovat kuitenkin hiljattain lisääntyneet, mikä osoittaa kyseisen ilmiön olevan kasvussa.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen ensisijaisena tavoitteena oli laajentaa käsityksiä brändipolarisaatiosta identifioimalla siihen johtavia syitä. Lisäksi pyrittiin selvittämään, mitä merkityksiä nykypäivän kuluttajat brändipolarisaatiolle antavat. Tutkimuksessa käsiteltiin myös sitä, millä tavoin moderni online-ympäristö vaikuttaa brändipolarisaation kehittymiseen kuluttajien keskuudessa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä tarkasteltiin polarisaatiota, brändiasenetta, brändisuhteita, brändirakkautta, brändivihaa, brändikokemusta sekä brändiyhteisöjä. Nämä käsitteet soveltuivat osaksi laajempaa tarkastelua, sillä niiden havaittiin limityvän brändipolarisaation kanssa.</p> <p>Tutkimusfilosofiaksi valikoitui interpretivismi eli tulkinnallisuutta korostava ajattelutapa. Laadullisena tutkimuksena toteutetun selvityksen empiirinen aineisto kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla teemahaastatteluilla. Haastatteluihin osallistui kymmenen vastaajaa, jotka kuvailivat yhteensä 36:ta eri brändiä, joita kohtaan tunsivat brändirakkautta tai brändivihaa. Haastatteluaineisto analysoitiin temaattisen analyysin, tulkinnan ja analyytisen yleistämisen keinoin.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, millainen vaikutus ja yhteys keskeisillä teoreettisilla konsepteilla on brändipolarisaation kehittymiseen kuluttajien keskuudessa. Lisäksi tutkimus toi esiin erilaisia kuluttajien pohdintoihin ja käsityksiin perustuvia brändipolarisaation merkityksiä. Selvityksessä myös havainnollistettiin sitä, miten online-ympäristö kiistatta kärjistää kuluttajien asenteita brändejä kohtaan. Analysoidut teoreettiset ja empiiriset löydökset syntetisoitiin konseptuaaliseksi malliksi, joka kuvaa brändipolarisaation muodostumista kuluttajien keskuudessa. Yhteenvetona tutkimuksen tulokset laajensivat aiempia käsityksiä brändipolarisaatiosta sekä tuottivat liikkeenjohdollisia päätelmiä tutkittavasta ilmiöstä.</p>	
Asiasanat: Brändipolarisaatio, polarisaatio, brändiasenne, brändisuhteet, brändirakkaus, brändiviha, brändikokemus, brändiyhteisöt	
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the topic

In response to fluctuating market conditions and various challenges in environmental and technological aspects, branding has undergone radical evolving over the last 25 years by becoming multidisciplinary, universal, and more deliberate (Veloutsou, 2017). Researchers argue that the meaning of a brand is no longer influenced by just brand managers of organizations. Instead, it is developed and co-created with the surrounding society and various external actors who develop practices around the brand that may ultimately transform a brand's meaning (Cova, 2016; Veloutsou, 2017).

Previous studies emphasize consumers' significant role in not only forming brand meaning, but also brand experience (Merrilees, 2016; Schembri, 2009). The way that consumers experience brands eventually affects how they feel for them and how they respond to them. Moreover, it also affects how consumers interpret the information they have about brands (Karjaluoto, Munnukka & Kiuru, 2016).

Prior research also suggests that because consumers may experience profound, passionate affection towards brands (Albert, 2013), this phenomenon should be considered as a central area of focus also in brand management (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Along with consumers who have feelings of attachment and even love towards brands, or individuals with simply unbiased opinions, there are also people who possess negative feelings or even hate towards specific brands (Hegner, Fetscherin & van Delzen, 2017; Khan, 2014).

The type of brands that provoke largely divided attitudes, traversing from love to hate, are regarded as polarizing brands (Osuna Ramírez, Veloutsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2019). Brand polarization can be distinguished when objective feelings shift to extreme in consumers' relationship with a brand. Additionally, brand polarization occurs when notably large groups of people simultaneously express both love and hate towards a same brand (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). Researchers suggest that further comprehension of the phenomenon is called for to acknowledge the potential of such co-existing consumer positivity and negativity towards specific brands (Luo, Wiles & Raithel, 2013). Furthermore, recent literature accentuates that it is of high importance for brand managers to acknowledge and consider both extremities of consumer opinions when composing brand strategies (Mafael, Gottschalk & Kreis, 2016).

1.2 Key concepts

In this study, the central concept under examination is brand polarization. However, this concept is often defined and operationalized via concepts of other disciplines, which indicate some overlapping with this phenomenon. For instance, in prior research the conceptualization of the term is endeavored by inspecting e.g., brand rivalry and brand attitude (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019; Mafael et al., 2016). This is because according to Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019), the existing research maneuvering the term brand polarization often lacks in properly defining it. Therefore, in this study, other key concepts selected to further conceptualize the phenomenon are polarization, brand attitude, brand relationships (with a particular focus on brand love and hate), brand experience, and brand communities.

The term polarization can be described as a thought structure: us vs. them. Consequently, polarization itself is not about facts, but rather about how things feel, as it works at the level of instinctive emotional dynamics (Attias, 2018). Brand polarization, contrastingly, also obliges opposing, emotionally loaded opinions to appear (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). However, the occurring incendiary opinions are in this account directed towards designated brands. According to Alvarado (2014), brand polarization also enables plain brand positioning and segmentation strategies in a market environment, as it attracts versatile communities of consumers, as well as outsiders.

Brand attitude stands for the linked expectations and persistent beliefs people have about brands (Nayeem, Murshed & Dwivedi, 2019). Expressly, it is a thorough assessment of a brand's characteristics, where a viewpoint of a brand is formed based on, *inter alia*, the brand's attributes, empirical benefits, and performance (Nayeem et al., 2019). Considering this definition, discoursing the concept of brand attitude is important for identifying the drivers of brand polarization from consumers' perspective.

Brand relationship can be determined as a mental bond uniting a consumer and a brand (Alvarez & Fournier, 2016). For consumers, the forming of a relationship with a brand may sometimes resemble the act of forming a relationship with other people in social environments (Fournier, 1998). Since brand relationship is about the connections and interactions between consumers and brands, it serves as a relevant key concept to apply for researching brand polarization and extending its definition.

A concept that is soundly linked to brand relationship, and as Karjaluoto et al. (2016) stated, an utmost aspiration of the customer-brand relationship, is brand love. Previous research argues that brand love encompasses passionate and attached feelings, positive evaluating and emotions, as well as assertions of love towards a brand (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2013). On the other side of the coin lies a phenomenon that for one's part involves strict dissent and intense negativity towards brands: brand hate. As stated in prior literature, brand

hate can be identified as a drastically negative emotional state a consumer has in relation to a brand (Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi & Bagozzi, 2016). Thus, as brand love and hate are the two extremities of consumer emotions concerning brands, these concepts become central when examining the drivers of brand polarization and extending the knowledge of the concept.

Brand experience, in turn, is defined by Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009, 53) as “*subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments*”. Based on this characterization, examining brand experience could be of considerable assistance when outlining the drivers of brand polarization, as this concept quite rigorously laps over the essence of the brand polarization phenomenon, and strongly relates to consumer perceptions regarding brands.

Lastly, yet importantly, a venue that encompasses a group of consumers who share a common interest towards a brand, is called a brand community (Desart, Velotsou & Morgan-Thomas, 2015). The authors emphasized that especially brand communities which are established online are relevant to an increasing extent, as they maintain and support the brand community members’ engagement with the brand they admire without any geographical or time-specific boundaries. Since Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019, 626) also noted that “*people’s passion towards polarizing brands drives them to form community-like bonds*”, profoundly reviewing the concept of brand community could turn out worthwhile for pointing out the diverse drivers of brand polarization among consumers.

1.3 Research justifications

According to Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019), despite its importance and relevancy for contriving branding and marketing approaches, the phenomenon of brand polarization is heavily under-studied, and its effects remain widely unspecified. This research seeks to identify the drivers of brand polarization among consumers to advance the understanding of the simultaneous occurrence of both ends of consumer opinions towards brands. Examining the relation of consumers with brands that evoke strong feelings constitutes an interesting subject for research, as recent literature points out that a more adequate perspective of polarizing brands is in place, and that the concept of brand polarization requires more explicit defining (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019; Mafael et al., 2016).

What reinforces the appeal of researching brand polarization is the phenomenon’s relevance especially for brand managers. Scholars argue that managers need to pay sharper attention to brand polarization (Mafael et al., 2016), as it allows the deployment of more focused marketing actions and approaches for brands (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). According to Luo et al. (2013), marketers may use polarization as, e.g., differentiation, segmentation, and positioning strat-

egies. Thus, as brand polarization can be availed in detailing such distinct marketing approaches, this study aims to bring forth not only more extended insights of the concept, but also key implications for brand managers to benefit from.

Despite the strategical, marketing related advantages, brand polarization also entails negative effects, as it may for instance cause tenseness or induce opponents (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). Luo et al. (2013) emphasized that strategic responding is required from companies, as especially the social media environment enables rapid development and spreading of hate, which may even affect brands that have formerly enjoyed a consistent attraction and reputation in consumers' eyes. Hence, as brands' reputations are at risk of changing overnight due to the rapid information sharing in modern social media platforms, it is essential to profoundly examine how polarized consumer opinions can be managed accordingly, or even turned into assets within companies that face such situations. As Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019) also pointed out, a distinct interpretation of what brand polarization encompasses could be advantageous in realizing the essence of the negativity that consumers have towards brands.

Consequently, as further exploring of particularly the drivers of brand polarization was called for in the preceding study by Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019), this paper seeks to identify the prominent drivers of brand polarization from consumers' perspective, and thereby also expand the general understanding and conceptualization of the term brand polarization.

1.4 Research questions and study objectives

This study aims to provide contributions to the field of brand management by extending the existing knowledge and definition of the brand polarization phenomenon. The primary objective is to identify the distinct drivers of brand polarization from consumers' perspective in order to enhance and advance the understanding of simultaneous occurrence of extreme consumer opinions towards brands. Moreover, another area of focus is to expand the general comprehension and conceptualization of the term brand polarization, as further research of the topic has been necessitated in the preceding literature (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). In order to clarify the main objective of this research, the primary research question of the thesis is set to be the following:

RQ1: "What are the drivers of brand polarization from consumers' point of view?"

In addition, a secondary research question was specified in a way that it would provide key information for also further conceptualizing the brand polarization phenomenon:

RQ2: "What meanings do consumers give to brand polarization?"

The research questions were designed based on desk research about the focal phenomenon of this study. In order to profoundly answer the primary research question, the identified drivers of brand polarization were placed under different categorizing themes in the findings chapter to integrate them with each key theoretical concept. In addition, as some categorizable drivers of brand polarization emerged solely from the empirical data, these findings were also allocated and presented in the findings chapter of this research.

Moreover, to form a thorough response also to the second research question, the participants were asked to elaborate what meanings they give for modern brands with a polarizing nature. However, the drivers which were identified to answer the primary research question ended up providing vast contributions also for framing the response for the secondary research question of the study.

1.5 Research structure

This research is divided into five main chapters. In the first introductory chapter, the background of the study is introduced, after which the selected key concepts; polarization, brand attitude, brand experience, brand relationships, brand love, brand hate and brand communities are briefly defined and rationalized. Moreover, this chapter contains the research justifications, introduces the formulated research questions and objectives, and explains the structure of the study.

The second chapter examines the theoretical framework delineated for this study. For outlining the theoretical framework, the existing literature and journals of brand management and marketing were thoroughly explored to find relevant information about the selected key concepts. In addition, journals of social-, consumer- and user psychology were reviewed to find information and theories about the concept of polarization and its different forms. This chapter also contains a spherical research model, which binds together the theoretical disciplines as well as the research gaps and objectives.

In the third chapter, the complete research methodology, as well as the procedures of data gathering are thoroughly explained. This section also includes a background information table of the sample group who participated in the research, along with a list of the selected brands that the participants discussed about while being interviewed.

The fourth main chapter addresses the key empirical findings of the research. In addition to presenting the study findings via quotes and concluding paragraphs, the findings are exhibited under overarching themes that were construed on the basis of the reviewed literature and key concepts. Although the findings chapter focuses primarily on presenting the results of the study, the sub-chapters in this part are each consummated with a summary table that shows certain theoretical confluences, and demonstrates how each central concept overlaps with the focal phenomenon of the study - brand polarization.

In the fifth chapter, the research results are discussed, as well as analysed and interpreted by reflecting them towards the theoretical framework of the study. In this chapter, the selected analysis methods are utilized to reframe the theoretical and empirical findings into an interpretive synthesis. Furthermore, this chapter aims to outline thorough answers to both, the primary and secondary research questions of the thesis. In addition to the theoretical contributions of the study, the final chapter contains several managerial implications, research evaluations and limitations, as well as directions for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the thesis is introduced and constructed through a review of adequate literature related to the research topic. The key theoretical concepts to be examined are polarization, brand attitude, brand relationships (with a specific focus on brand love and hate), as well as brand experience and brand communities. These concepts are selected for further reviewing due to their relevancy and interlacing with brand polarization, which is the central phenomenon under observation in this research.

2.1 Polarization

Myers & Lamm (1976), in their early publications regarding the topic, discussed the definitions of polarization, and stated that in common use, the term demonstrates division inside a group of people. Furthermore, they described polarization as transference towards a favoured direction (Myers & Lamm, 1976).

Benoit & Dubra (2014) suggested that individuals may become polarized in surroundings where people's views about the views of others are considered meaningful. According to Leone (1996), a polarized attitude of a person results from a developed schema, which is a mental structure that serves as an originator for attitude-associated perceptions. Leone (1996, 383) argued that strongly developed schemas may have increasing effects on attitude polarization, because they strengthen the "*evaluative consistency of relevant beliefs*". Another definition of polarization by Dandekar, Goel & Lee (2013) is that polarization is an outcome of attraction to similarity. The authors also argued that based on prior empirical study results, a large interactivity of similar-minded people leads to polarization.

2.1.1 Polarization online

According to Evans (2017), studies over the decades have verified certain circumstantial risk factors that may enhance polarization. Evans (2017) mentioned that especially the online environment offers favourable surroundings for polarization to escalate. There are several reasons that Evans (2017, 204) listed as causes for polarized online comments:

- The absence of immediacy: people commenting online are both physically and mentally separated from one another
- People's predisposition: the biased opinions people might already have on certain matters

- Length of conversations: the longer a discussion continues online, the more polarized it becomes
- Importance of social groups: the need of belonging to a group, as well as differentiating from an out-group becomes heightened
- Imbalance of arguments: the online environment allows the hearing of only one-sided reasoning, instead of two-sided reasoning
- Encouragement of rivalry: people are instigated by others to be extreme in speaking for their own group
- Deindividuation: the difficulty of individually identifying people in the online environment

Dandekar et al. (2013) also stressed that along with the radio and news broadcasts, the growth of the internet's popularity has had an increasing influence on polarization, as the amount and versatility of information sources combined with their personalizing and targeting capabilities (e.g., recommendations), compose "echo-chambers", which enhance polarization. Bessi, Zollo, Del Vicario, Puliga, Scala, Caldarelli, Uzzi & Quattrociocchi (2016) also addressed the term echo-chambers and described them as groups consisting of like-minded individuals where views tend to polarize.

Bessi et al. (2016) researched polarization among users in two highly popular online platforms, Facebook and YouTube, and concluded that especially content serves as a driver for such echo-chambers to emerge in the foregoing social media channels. Moreover, by referring to a prior study by Zollo, Novak, Del Vicario, Bessi, Mozetič, Scala, et al. (2015), Bessi et al. (2016) suggested that one primary driver for users to become influenced by specific content is confirmation bias - a disposition which may ultimately cause polarization to surface. Confirmation bias stands for the subconscious tendency of choosing, favouring, and interpreting information that is in line with one's former beliefs (Bessi et al., 2016; Zollo et al., 2015). Another key finding that Bessi et al. (2016) pointed out in their research is that particularly the commenting patterns of users appear to be predictive signs for the development of echo chambers.

2.1.2 Group polarization

Burton, Collier & Tuttle (2006) characterized group polarization as an occurrence of a group's proneness to make choices that are more extreme and exposed to risks, comparing to the choices and risk taking that the group members would make individually. Thus, according to Burton et al. (2006), belonging into a group notably increases the degree of risk taking among individuals. The authors added that the literature regarding this occurrence also stresses the likelihood of groups

to come up with more extreme opinions and ideas due to the group's presence, comparing to people's individual opinions before interacting with the group.

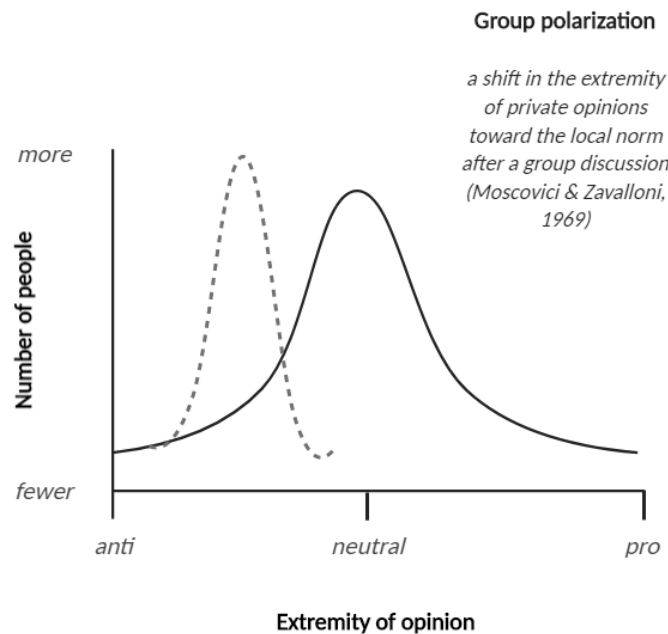


FIGURE 1 Group polarization (Evans, 2017, 203)

Figure 1 illustrates a study of Moscovici & Zavalloni (1969) where the participants' attitudes which were analysed post discussion turned out to be more polarized than they were prior to a discussion. In the figure, the dotted lines demonstrate the division of opinion shifts in the extreme direction after a group discussion had been conducted (Evans, 2017). The authors stated that a group conversation may shift the participants' opinions towards both, extremely negative or positive ends. In addition, Evans (2017) argued that this result entails "demonstrative reliability", as such instance can be reliably and consistently confirmed in live situations.

An early theory by Moscovici & Zavalloni (1969), which according to Burton et al. (2006) has coped successfully in the course of time gives two reasons for why groups tend to reach more extreme views than mere individuals: informational influence and interpersonal comparisons. Out of these two, informational influence is commonly assumed to be a stronger driver for a group's thinking to shift towards extreme, although interpersonal comparisons are also strongly influential in certain surroundings (Burton et al., 2006).

Concerning the theoretical viewpoint of informational influence, Myers & Lamm (1976) proposed that exposure to arguments in a conversation leads to response shifts. Thus, a conversation may produce arguments which are commonly new and likely to have persuasive effects on the individuals participating

in the discussion. Myers & Lamm (1976) emphasized that although it is confirmed that such arguments have convincing effects on individuals, it might be uncertain to determine whether an opinion shift is an outcome of the individuals' cognitive learning of something new (informational influence), or if it happens because the individuals possess some information about the beliefs and dispositions of other persons who express arguments in a group (interpersonal comparisons). However, by referring to prior studies regarding attitude changes (Eagly, 1974; Sears, 1969), Myers & Lamm (1976) affirmed that increased information tends to polarize opinions. Nonetheless, Burton et al. (2006) stated that there are three settings which need to be present for informational influence to affect groups' reactions: the information has to be new, it needs to be persuasive, and it needs to be internalized by the individuals.

The theoretical view regarding interpersonal comparisons describes group polarization as a form of social impact that includes "*social-emotional processes and concern for favorable self-perception and self-presentation*" (Myers & Lamm, 1976, 613). In other words, this view suggests that simply being exposed to other group members' preferences is the needed and adequate circumstance for an individual's belief or opinion to shift. This view by Myers & Lamm (1976) underlines that group polarization is affected by the source, not by the message (i.e., the new information and arguments generated through conversation).

Another suggestion based on the theory of interpersonal comparisons is a dependable determination that individuals who notice another group member expressing a more extreme response than they have (given that the response direction is similar to their own ideals) see this group member as more socially admirable than others, whose responses were not as extreme (Myers & Lamm, 1976). Furthermore, Myers & Lamm (1976) pointed out similar findings from literature about attitudes by Eisinger & Mills (1968) by stating that a person who is extreme in his or her communication, and devoted to a certain issue, is generally seen as more genuine and qualified than a person who is restrained.

While addressing the choice shifts caused by other people's responses, Myers & Lamm (1976) also brought up a study by Burnstein and Vinkour (1975), in which it was argued that even if only being exposed to other people's ideas did create some change in group members, it might have happened merely because the group exposure stimulates the people to think of arguments that others may have also contemplated.

Hence, as the rather mixed theoretical outcomes could not provide a crystal-clear synopsis of what causes people's choice shifts within a group, Myers & Lamm (1976) integrated their theoretical presumptions into a conceptual scheme of group-induced attitude change (figure 2):

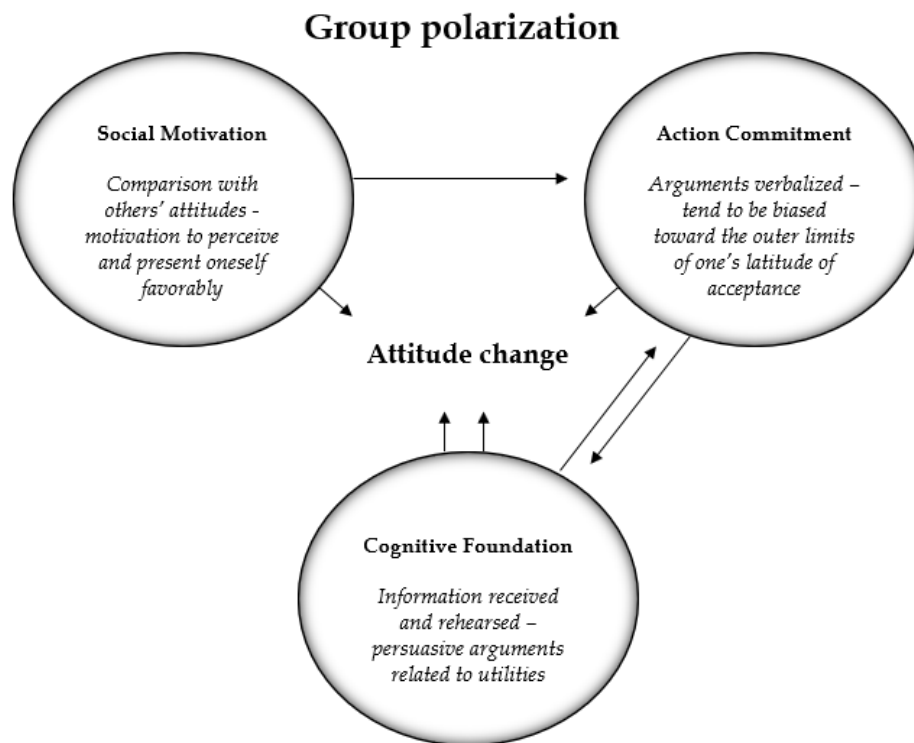


FIGURE 2 Group-induced attitude change (Myers & Lamm, 1976, 619)

Myers & Lamm (1976) explained that although informational influence and interpersonal comparisons both have their own effects on attitude shifts while they are set apart, in real life these variables do not function separately, but instead, they interrelate to and supply each other. Encouraged by studies of social influence, Myers & Lamm (1976) formulated a conceptual model which integrates the concepts of prior studies regarding group shift. Moreover, the conceptual scheme provides a more comprehensive view of the effects of group influence by capturing the affirmed drivers of group shift, and by inserting the group polarization phenomenon under the radius of attitude theory (Myers & Lamm, 1976).

According to Myers & Lamm (1976), social motivation, which is an ambition to consider and show oneself approvingly to other people, creates a slight but direct effect for an individual to verbally express his or her arguments which are in line with his or her idealistic views. Figure 2 illustrates that social motivation can cause an attitude shift (due to the interpersonal comparisons that arise in a group) and motivate individuals to communicate socially admired arguments (Myers & Lamm, 1976).

In the conceptual model, the actual verbal expression of arguments is called action commitment. By communicating verbal arguments, an individual experiments one's idealistic views and displays oneself approvingly within the group. Such expression of arguments surfaces because as stated by Myers & Lamm (1976), pointing out one's extreme idealistic views signals competency and knowledge to others within the group. The figure explains that the stating of such

arguments can have slight direct influence on attitude changes, but it also serves as cognitive practice for the individual who is communicating. In addition, the arguments comprise information which other group members can receive and answer to (Myers & Lamm, 1976).

In the figure, cognitive foundation stands for the state where group members are exposed to cognitive learning and practice through listening to persuasive arguments (Myers & Lamm, 1976). In the model, the double arrows demonstrate the strong verification of the effects of informational influence when it comes to group shift. The model also indicates with double arrows that cognitive learning caused by informational influence notably advances attitude changes.

Concerning the social influence on group shifts, another key presumption Myers & Lamm (1976) underlined by referring to Bishop & Myers (1974) and Ebbesen & Bowers (1974) was that conversational arguments are affected also by social context. Moreover, the authors stated that in general, people tend to be more polarized while discussing arguments with others than they are when writing down their arguments individually (Myers & Lamm, 1976).

2.1.3 Brand polarization

While polarization has been described as, e.g., the transference towards a favoured direction, or as a division inside a group of people (Myers & Lamm, 1976) brand polarization can be defined as the extremization of emotions in consumers' demeanours towards a brand (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). Furthermore, in a bi-modal fashion, brand polarization creates plain distinction between people who love or hate a specific brand (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019) argued that brand polarization is well connected to a social identity theory by Tajfel (1974), which suggests that when a person identifies himself with other in-group members, it increases his self-assurance. Furthermore, the theory explains that detachment from opposers, rivals or other out-group members further strengthens the person's association with his in-group. Hence, similar effects can be distinguished with brand polarization, as the supporters and opposers of a brand are likely to identify themselves with similar-minded customers and experience the sense of in-group belongingness, while concurrently disapproving the out-group customers who possess an opposite opinion about a specific brand (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

From a managerial point of view, brand polarization simplifies the recognition of individuals who love a brand, which allows the brand's strengthening of the consumer-brand relationship with the brand lovers. In addition, it allows the brand to more effectively react to the haters who criticize the brand (Luo et al., 2013; Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019) stressed that due to their polarized positioning, polarizing brands achieve fair benefits in terms of grasping consumer groups and consumers individually, especially if "all publicity is good publicity". One reason for this is that when it comes to polarized brands, consumers are hardly being passive about them. Instead, the need for

passionate expression of emotions arises on both sides – among the lovers and the haters (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

2.2 Brand attitude

Brand attitude, which by Keller's (2003) definition is a compressed understanding of brand-affiliated messages, has been widely inserted into marketing actions, and has therefore been largely underlined by the industry (Liu, Hu, Lin, Tsai, & Xiao, 2020). Prior scholars argued on behalf of brand attitude's importance by stating that it entails the combined characteristics and benefits that determine the significance of a brand, and by suggesting that brand attitude is of assistance for consumers when judging brand choices (Keller, 1993; Liu et al., 2020). Furthermore, the term brand attitude has been described as an inclusive apprehension of a brand, and as a judgement of the brand's symbolic advantages and non-product-specific features (Zeithaml, 1998; Percy and Rossiter, 1992).

Bao (2017) stated that if a person holds a good brand attitude towards a certain brand, the likelihood for him to use this brand increments. In turn, if the person has a bad attitude in relation to a brand, the odds for him to use the brand contrarily decrease. Walla, Brenner & Koller (2011) argued that from a company's perspective, forming a favorable and positive brand attitude is significant due to two reasons. First, because attitude directly influences a person's object-affiliated behavior, having a positive brand attitude presumably has positive effects on consumers' buying behavior and brand loyalty. Second, a consumer's positive cognitions towards a brand have increasing effects on a brand's value, since they serve as a basis for better brand equity and profitability. Thus, in the long term, the brand attitudes of consumers may significantly affect e.g., a company's financial state (Walla et al., 2011).

Howard & Gengler (2001), in their research regarding product attitudes, stated that awareness of emotional contagion and its consequences on consumer attitudes is seemingly relevant for better comprehension of different consumer behaviors. Moreover, the research by Howard & Gengler (2001, 198) confirmed the occurrence of "*attitudinal biasing via contagion effects*"; meaning that one individual's emotion can affect the judgements of another person. According to Walla et al. (2011), the concept of brand attitude likewise involves certain mental aspects in relation to brand associations, and it also entails strong emotional elements. Walla et al. (2011) who studied brand attitude from a cognitive perspective argued that brand attitude determines the range of a company's capability to establish mental bonds with its customers. Furthermore, the research by Walla et al. (2011) concluded that based upon physiological evidence, emotions and emotion-affiliated information handling are indeed in strong connection with brand attitude.

2.2.1 Brand attitude's effects on buying motives

Rossiter (2014) defined brand attitude with reference to Rossiter and Percy (1987; 1997) as the buyer's assessment of a brand regarding the brand's presumed capability to deliver a buying motive that is meaningful at the present moment. Rossiter (2014) claimed that brand attitude influences two different types of buying motives of people:

1. *Informational Buying Motives: "Product-focused, problem solving, therefore negatively reinforce purchase of the brand"*
2. *Transformational Buying Motives: "User-focused, experience enhancing, therefore positively reinforce purchase of the brand"*

(Rossiter 2014, 537).

This motive-based explanation suggests that a possible buyer may possess a variety of overall attitudes about the same brand, depending on his primary reasons for purchasing it at a certain time (Rossiter, 2014). The author added that such dissimilar attitudes towards a same brand commonly occur in everyday life yet remain utterly overlooked in the literature of marketing. Rossiter (2014) summarized the examples of different types of buying motives into a table, as seen below in table 1:

TABLE 1 Brand attitude defined and measured (Rossiter 2014, 537)

Brand attitude defined and measured
<p>Brand Attitude: Buyer's evaluation of the brand with respect to its expected capacity to deliver on a currently relevant buying motive</p>
<p>Informational Buying Motives: Product-focused, problem-solving, therefore negatively reinforce purchase of the brand</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Problem removal (anger or pain → calm) 2. Problem avoidance (fear → relief) 3. Mixed-approach avoidance (guilt → resolution) 4. Incomplete satisfaction (disappointment → satisfaction) 5. Normal depletion (mild anxiety that supply will run out → reassurance)
<p>Transformational Buying Motives: User-focused, experience-enhancing, therefore positively reinforce purchase of the brand</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Sensory gratification (neutral → elated) 7. Intellectual stimulation (neutral → mentally stimulated) 8. Power (neutral or mild lack of confidence → high self-efficacy, heightened sense of control) 9. Pride (neutral → sense of belonging to a valued reference group) 10. Social approval (neutral or somewhat negative social self-image → flattered)

The table by Rossiter (2014) contains five varying buying motives, both negatively reinforcing and positively reinforcing ones. The informational buying motives are product-directed motives that a buyer seeks to satisfy. These motives are problem-solving, meaning that the impulse of buying takes place because the product takes care of some problem a person might have - e.g., turns the feeling of disappointment into satisfaction (Rossiter, 2014).

In turn, the five user-directed motives are called transformational buying motives. The way these motives drive people to purchase is that they enhance some experience for the buyer. For example, a person gains social approval through purchasing something, which makes his or her social self-image to elevate from neutral towards flattered (Rossiter, 2014).

Rossiter (2014) explained that motivating buyers requires accomplishing an emotion shift. For instance, when it comes to the informational buying motives, the emotions seemingly shift from negative to neutral, as can be seen in the table. When it comes to the transformational buyer motives, the emotions mainly shift from neutral towards a more positive direction.

2.2.2 Factors affecting brand attitude in an online context

Due to the constant developments of technology and the internet, communication and interaction between brands and consumers increasingly takes place in the various online platforms. The online environment has become a prominent,

modern marketing tool especially as it is restricted by hardly any time and space limitations (Bao, 2017). According to Bao (2017), for example online brand communities (OBCs) are important facilitators for advancing the communication that takes place between corporations and consumers in digital channels. Furthermore, Bao (2017) added that user-generated content (UGC) produced by the online communities has a significant influence on not only brand communication, but also on consumers' attitudes regarding brands.

Kudeshia & Kumar (2017) examined how social electronic word-of-mouth (social eWOM) affects brand attitude in one of the dominant social media platforms: Facebook. The term social eWOM stands for non-formal, product-affiliated suggestions that users share among others, as well as look for in the diverse online applications and social platforms (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). The authors argued that because attitudes are steady inclinations of behavior, marketers consider brand attitude as a crucial predictor for anticipating customer behavior regarding products and services. With reference to a research by Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014), Kudeshia & Kumar (2017) stated that company-created communication influences brand attitude about products, and the content generated by users (UGC) notably affects people's purchase intentions of evaluated products and brand equity. In addition, the authors' research affirmed that social eWOM has a downright connection with brand attitude. Along with verifying eWOM's considerable influence on attitudes and buying intentions of users, Kudeshia & Kumar (2017) also underlined that engagement in social networking channels plays a central role in the establishment of brand relationships. Especially the encouragement of positive UGC and eWOM should be pursued by marketers, as it may convert to more favorable brand attitudes among customers (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017).

2.3 Brand relationships

According to Aurier & Gilles Séré (2012), many consumers form sentimental relationships with brands they favor. According to the authors, for the sake of showing loyal attitude towards a brand, consumers expect devotion and fostering of their own well-being from the brands in return. The consumers' expectations are directed at the conceived quality of e.g., the brand's products, but also at the consumers' own emotional condition, which holds the individual observations and attitudes they have towards a brand. Hence, from such relational viewpoint, customers emphasize both, the quality and future of a brand relationship, instead of weighing only their previous experiences regarding the quality of a brand (Aurier & Gilles Séré, 2012).

2.3.1 Consumer-brand relationship types

Fetscherin, Guzman, Veloutsou & Cayolla (2019) stated that relationships include a valence and are driven by contrasting feelings of e.g., being devoted, passionate or intimate. While discoursing about the relationships between consumers and brands (CBRs), Fetscherin et al. (2019) argued that CBRs possess similar qualities as regular relationships, both positive or negative ones: Consumers' emotions about brands determine their thinking, attitude, perception, and their general tendency of supporting or avoiding them (Fetscherin et al., 2019). Especially powerful positive and negative relationships with brands are driven by passion (Sternberg, 1986), and the degree of this passion indicates how strong the consumer-brand relationship actually is (Fetscherin et al., 2019). Thus, consumers might establish firm or unfirm relationships with specific brands, while completely ignoring some brands which they consider insignificant. Fetscherin et al. (2019) exemplified these different relationship types in the following matrix:

Sentiment Range	Positive	Brand love	Brand liking	Brand Indifference
	Negative	Brand hate	Brand disliking	
		Strong	Weak	None
		Passion Intensity		

FIGURE 3 Consumer-brand relationship types (Fetscherin et al., 2019, 134)

Figure 3 displays different positive and negative relationship types between customers and brands that have mainly been addressed by prior scholars (Fetscherin et al., 2019). For instance, according to Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi (2012), brand love can be defined as an impassioned, positive association a customer has developed towards a brand. In turn, brand liking is a more fragile form, but correspondingly, a positively inclined consumer-brand relationship (Fetscherin et al., 2019). The different outcomes that positive brand relationships can result in among individuals are e.g., brand loyalty, desire of co-creation, satisfaction, and brand acceptance (Fetscherin et al., 2019). Moreover, a person's strongly positive consumer-brand relationship can induce other customers to also disseminate positive word-of-mouth (WOM) to manifold audiences through diverse channels of communication (Wallace, Buil & de Chernatony, 2014; Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Strong brand relationships also drive the development of emotions in social

groups, as well as the eagerness for consumers to connect to and participate in brand communities (Iyer, Paswan & Davari, 2016; Wallace et al., 2014).

When examining the negative relationship types of figure 3, brand hate is generally known as a consumer's passionately negative relation with a brand, whereas the more fragile form of this negative brand relationship is named brand disliking (Hegner et al., 2017). While brand hate may cause repulsion among consumers and result in the act of brand divorce, the outcome of brand disliking for a consumer can be evading the brand or switching the brand to another (Fetscherin et al., 2019). The outcomes of negative brand relationships among individuals are for example growing complaints (Zarantonello et al., 2016), whilst among collective groups, they can be, e.g., accumulated negative word-of-mouth, protesting, and causing a stimulus for people to affiliate with anti-brand communities (Fetscherin et al., 2019).

The final relationship type presented in the figure, brand indifference, can be described as a state where a consumer completely lacks any positive or negative passion towards a brand (Fetscherin et al., 2019). Hence, when a consumer feels entirely disinterested about a brand, he or she might choose not to form any sort of relationship with it (Park C., Eisingerich & Park J., 2013). By pointing to a study by Veloutsou and Delgado-Ballester (2018), Fetscherin et al. (2019) specified that the incapability of creating purposeful relations with customers is, along with developing a negative relationship, the most unfavorable position for a brand to be placed in, because if a brand does not achieve a meaningful position in consumers' minds, the brand's potential customers are not willing to relate to or interact with the brand.

Since brand love and brand hate are the most intensive, opposite ends of the consumer-brand relationship types, these two are more profoundly examined in the following subchapters.

2.3.2 Brand love

The construct of brand love derives from theories of personal interrelationships and love, and it is considered as an essential concept concerning the relationships between consumers and brands (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). According to Albert et al. (2013), brand love is a deep and continual emotional attachment which makes the consumer feel that the brand he or she loves is indispensable. Bairrada (2018) argued that loved brands play a consequential role in consumers' everyday lives, because an individual tends to unify a loved brand as a part of his or her identity especially in occasions when he or she, e.g., shares a meaningful history with the brand, the brand has some changing influence on the person, or the brand expresses the person's selfdom. Karjaluoto et al. (2016) also acknowledged similar statements that both, the usage of a specific brand, along with signaling love towards it enables a way of social self-expressing for consumers.

According to Batra et al. (2012), preceding academic studies addressing brand love have acknowledged it to be firmly affiliated with, i.e., positively inclined WOM, desire to pay a premium charge, brand loyalty, and the readiness

to forgive brand failures amidst consumers. Batra et al. (2012) managed to capture a total of ten well-founded elements linked to consumers' brand loving.

As Batra et al. (2012) discussed about loved brands with consumers, the first element that was frequently referred to were brands' great qualities. Hence, the attributes of loved brands that consumers mentioned were largely the appealing features of brands, such as extraordinary performance, reliability, and attractive design. In addition, loved brands gained admiration due to being "the best possible". In other words, the brands described in this fashion were either perceived best in some crucial aspect, they offered the highest value for money, or the brands were simply distinguished as first-rate in all possible ways by consumers (Batra et al., 2012). The authors' study also showed that the only general criticism consumers had about their loved brands was the considerable charging of certain high-end brands. However, their findings indicated that as long as the higher costs were generally perceived justifiable, a high customer satisfaction remained even towards the costly brands (Batra et al., 2012).

The second meaningful element for customers was that their loved brand held firmly on their values and withheld some existential purpose (Batra et al., 2012). Hence, besides becoming loved due to offering certain benefits (e.g., pleasure, enjoyment, or relaxing effects), brands received love if they could be associated to something more profound by consumers, such as self-fulfillment, social relations, existential purpose, or societal identity (Batra et al., 2012). The third element Batra et al. (2012) discovered were "intrinsic rewards", which they characterized as joyful, cognitive states that a brand or product usage is capable of initiating in consumers' minds. Batra et al. (2012) explained that brands commonly provide also "extrinsic rewards" to consumers, which are granted external benefits based upon outcomes (Malek, Sarin & Haon, 2020). Nevertheless, consumers who received merely extrinsic rewards did not necessarily feel brand love, but instead, used such brand to gain something else that they actually felt love for (Batra et al., 2012).

As the fourth important element, Batra et al. (2012) distinguished brand love's connection to self-conception. The authors discovered that loved brands are to certain extent used for identity assertion by consumers, as well as for showing a preferred identity. Discussing about loved brands with others turned out to be an integral piece of identity building, which also ties word-of-mouth strongly to the formation of brand love (Batra et al., 2012). The fifth element found crucial by consumers was the loved brand's positive affect. This element was revealed through examining the interviewees' way of characterizing their loved brands: the use of positively inclined sentimental words and expressions was prevailing in most of the answers (Batra et al. 2012). The sixth element relevant for brand loving was that the brand in question was perceived naturally fitting and it was passionately desired by customers (Batra et al. 2012). The seventh element Batra et al. (2012) found out to be key in the brand love process was forming an emotional bond, along with an "expectation of a heartbreak". In more specific terms, the consumers' feelings of mental bonding, and a sense of distress

when being separated from a loved brand, were found evident in the authors' study (Batra et al., 2012).

The eighth element revolving closely around brand love was consumers' readiness to invest e.g., their time, enthusiasm, or funds onto their admired brand (Batra et al., 2012). As for the ninth element, continual usage and constant interaction turned out to be key indicators of how strongly the consumers were attached to their loved brands (Batra et al., 2012). The authors specified that this discovery relates strongly to consumers' attitude strength, since people's attitudes are commonly built on their frequent experiences with a brand. Thus, Batra et al. (2012) deduced that several common measures of attitude strength are also reasonable elements of brand love (e.g., considerable extremity of an attitude). Finally, the tenth essential element with contributions to brand loving was the longitude of using the loved brand (Batra et al., 2012). Thus, the significance of having a long history with a brand came up oftentimes in their interviews concerning brand loving. The way Batra et al. (2012, 5) explained this element was that *"shared history can give the loved brand an important place in the respondent's personal identity narrative"*.

2.3.3 Brand hate

Ahmed & Hashim (2018) discussed the construct of brand hate accordant with Gregoire et al. (2009) and described it as a craving for vengeance towards a selected brand caused by the feeling of being let down. Other conceptualizations of brand hate by Ahmed & Hashim (2018) referred to previous scholars (Johnson et al., 2011; Romani et al., 2012; Zarantonello, 2016; Hegner et al., 2017), explaining that it is a form of powerful resistance, severe negative sentiment or an excessive affectual response that surpasses mere disliking towards brands.

Due to being a multidimensional construct, brand hate entails varying levels of outcomes (Zhang & Laroche, 2020). By referring to multiple prior studies about the topic, Platania, Morando & Santisi (2017) underlined certain behavioral consequences of brand hate amongst consumers: exiting and rejecting, negatively oriented word of mouth, public criticizing on the web, revengeful complaining, and aggressiveness on a commerce place. Zhang & Laroche (2020) mentioned, inter alia, brand boycotting, brand switching and brand avoiding as prominent outcomes of brand hate. Kucuk (2019) also argued that the construct of brand hate has been connected to a wide spectrum of negative outcomes, i.e., anti-brand involvement, consumers' craving for vengeance, feelings of shame and repulsion, extreme shape of disliking, as well as disrespect and angeriness. According to Kucuk (2019), although many of such singular negative emotions are closely linked to each other, they can be distinguished and scaled onto different layers in the brand hate construct based on their severity.

The reasons for the development of brand hate amongst consumers are manifold. Zhang & Laroche (2020) analyzed an extensive amount of separate brand hate incidents captured through exploratory interviews and via observing complaints on different online platforms. The authors' clearance of the reasons

of brand hating were placed into four categories: company-, product-, customer service-, and consumer-related reasons. The emerged company-related reasons for brand hating were, for instance, negatively perceived brand image, disliking of brands' marketing strategies, dissatisfaction towards CEOs or employees, negative experiences of store environments, and disapproval of an industry. As for product-related reasons, the judgements for brand hating involved dissatisfaction with either the cost, quality, or design of a product. Reasons for customer service-related hating had, in turn, stemmed from dissatisfaction towards the unpleasing quality of customer service and due to patronizing nature of brands. The consumer-related causes of brand hate singled out by the authors were e.g., ruined expectations, negative word of mouth, and having preferred alternatives on the market. Moreover, the authors also pinpointed consumers' personalities, perceived "special meanings", or cultural backgrounds as affective reasons for consumer-related brand hate development (Zhang & Laroche, 2020).

Zhang & Laroche (2020) also categorized three emotional dimensions of brand hate based on the severeness of negativity that occurs towards brands among individuals. In addition, the authors demonstrated a variety of negative feelings that are often involved in each of the three states of brand hate. These distinguished emotions were all in close relation with anger, sadness, surprise, and fear - the four basic human emotions that contain negative inclinations (Zhang & Laroche, 2020).

Zhang & Laroche (2020) described mild brand hate as a level where especially lower depths of anger- and sadness-related consumer emotions are coexisting. On this level of brand hate, Zhang & Laroche (2020) identified the occurrence of irritation, which is an anger-affiliated emotion. In addition, their empirical findings unveiled that sadness-affiliated emotions such as boredom, disappointment, and the state of being overwhelmed may exist among consumers on this level of brand hating.

Moderate brand hate, in turn, is a level that is accompanied with more intensively and extremely loaded emotions (Zhang & Laroche, 2020). On this state, the authors observed not only sadness- and anger-affiliated emotions among consumers, but also feelings that are in touch with sentiments of surprise and fear. Some of the anger-related feelings identified in this degree of brand hate were e.g., hate, frustration, disgust, anger, or obnoxiousness. The sadness-related feelings, on the other hand, were e.g., depression, hopelessness, shame, embarrassment, and regret. Concerning the fear-affiliated emotions, scared and frightful feelings were reported amongst consumers. As for the surprise-affiliated emotions, consumers claimed to feel either confused, odd, shocked, or surprised (Zhang & Laroche, 2020). Hence, on this level of brand hating, the findings by Zhang & Laroche (2020) indicated that the feelings are not only more extremified comparing to the state of mild brand hate, but a larger number of differing, negative emotions confirmedly took place on this state.

Ultimately, strong brand hate is the top level where the emotions of brand hating are the most constitutively connected to anger (Zhang & Laroche, 2020).

The authors detected anger, sadness and fear affiliated emotions to appear on this level, with high intensity and even ferocity. The specified anger-affiliated feelings which the authors marked down from their interview findings were e.g., fury and rage, as well as utmost frustration and annoyance. As the sadness accompanying feelings, the respondents reported severe disappointment and shame. From the fear-related emotions, being terrified was noted by the informants of the study (Zhang & Laroche, 2020).

2.4 Brand experience

2.4.1 Conceptualizations of brand experience

According to Zarantonello & Schmitt (2010), modern consumers are no longer eager to purchase products only due to their functional advantages, but instead, based on their experiential features. Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester (2018) agreed with the notion that consumer expectations towards brands have shifted, by mentioning that when consumers are reflecting brands, they no longer care about brands only as objects, but are rather interested in what kind of hedonistic or utilitarian experiences their preferred brands can provide them with.

Bairrada (2018) emphasized that brand managers should bring unpredictable offerings into the markets, such as fresh and innovative services and products, which convey whole new brand experiences. Veloutsou (2017) explained the concept of brand experience by referring to a prior study of retail brand experience by Khan & Rahman (2016), and stated that brand experience stems from the manifold interaction between a consumer and a brand, involving inter alia, the consumers' views of the brand's name, the charging of the brand, the impression created by mass-news medias, suggestions from friends and salespersons, emotion-based responses to instances, as well as interconnection of brand stories (Veloutsou, 2017; Khan & Rahman, 2016).

Thus, experiences have developed into key components for interpreting how consumers view, evaluate, and react to brands. Diverse senses are involved in people's interaction and evaluation regarding brands, and the need of co-creating experiences, as well as influencing others' perceptions about brands by e.g., sharing stories is typical among consumers (Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018).

Prior research has also demonstrated that positive brand sensory experience reinforces brands in the minds of consumers in a direct and indirect fashion via consumer engagement (Hepola, Karjaluoto & Hintikka, 2017), and it results also in e.g., elevated loyalty and equity (Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018). Brakus et al. (2009) mentioned that particularly emotional experiences stir up brand differentiation, and thereby influence brand loyalty and brand satisfaction amidst consumers.

2.4.2 Online brand experience

A positive online brand experience (OBE) has an essential role in establishing stronger consumer-brand relationships in the virtual environment (Simon, Brexendorf, & Fassnacht, 2013). Online brand experience involves a person's inner, personal reactions to both, brand exposure on the web and different brand-associated stimulants on webpages (Simon et al., 2013). While the concept of mere brand experience entails fourfold dimensions - sensory, affective, cognitive, and engagement (Brakus et al., 2009), Simon et al. (2013) incorporated two more dimensions in this list in order to thoroughly interpret the concept of online brand experience. The two additions by the authors were relational and usability dimensions. Thus, Simon et al. (2013) emphasized that online brand experience is a multi-dimensional construct, containing a total of six dimensions. The authors selectively focused on examining these six dimensions on the social media platform Facebook.

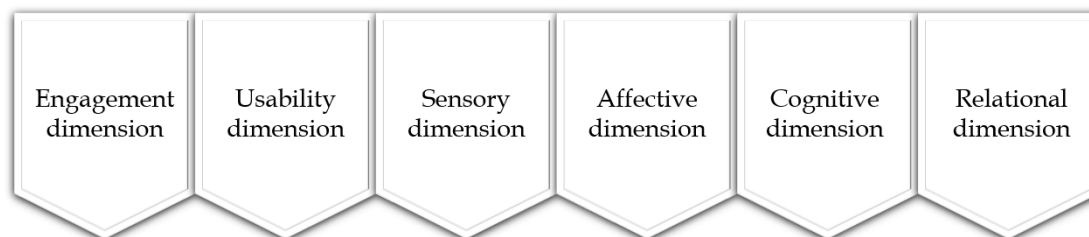


FIGURE 4 Dimensions of online brand experience (Simon et al., 2013, 57)

The key element that contributes highly to how online brand experience is formed is customer-brand engagement, also known as CBE (Simon et al., 2013). This concept was characterized by Hollebeek (2011, 6) as *"the level of a customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in brand interactions"*. Hepola et al. (2017) who examined the nature of CBE also stated that CBE typically comprises three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral ones.

Engagement, being the behavioral dimension of online brand experience, includes the various interactions taking place on brand pages between a consumer and a brand, as well as the communications from one consumer to another (Simon et al., 2013). According to Tsai, Huang & Chiu (2012), to enhance the online brand experience in eyes of consumers, a vital amount of activity is needed to increment the experienced value and appeal of a brand page.

The dimension of usability captures the utilitarian use of a brand page. In other words, usability is about how intuitively and effortlessly a person learns to use and is able to interact with an online page of a brand (Simon et al., 2013). The key components for increasing usability are, inter alia, surroundings which support users to open dialogues and socially interact on a brand page, feedback which encourages interaction, good information design, and ease of accessing and navigating on a webpage (Simon et al., 2013).

Simon et al. (2013) stated that sensory dimension involves the aesthetically pleasing and perceptual features of a brand's online page. To capture the focus and curiosity of users, the design of a brand page should be visually distinctive. Furthermore, enhancing the users' OBE via the sensory dimension requires a brand page to be vivid. Such vividness can be obtained through e.g., differing colors, images, and compelling animations (Simon et al., 2013). In sum, the content of a brand page should contain elements which stimulate the users' senses (Simon et al., 2013).

The affective dimension is centered upon the emotional states that a brand page invokes in consumers. Emotions tend to strengthen the online brand experience, and thereby the relevance and visual appeal of the brand page content should convert to positive emotions among users (Simon et al., 2013). Satisfying the affective dimension happens through sentiment attraction: For example, profound involvement of users via applications and games, by using videos and images to induce feelings, and by designing campaigns to captivate consumers' interest results in positive online brand experience through enhanced brand awareness (Simon et al., 2013).

When it comes to cognitive dimension, Simon et al. (2013) argued that users online are not just seeking to be entertained. Instead, they also expect to be intellectually stimulated by educating and informative content. Hence, the cognitive dimension includes the intellectual interests a brand page may bring forth for consumers. The ways to attract the cognitive dimension of people can be creating challenging contests, involving users for co-creation, or educating users via sophisticated material, i.e., topics with social or environmental relevance (Simon et al., 2013).

The final dimension proposed by Simon et al. (2013) is relational dimension, which focuses on different social practices a brand's online page may elicit. More specifically, this dimension examines the collective essence of online brand experience by concentrating on communities in the webpages of brands. Simon et al. (2013) stated that brand pages are able to make use of the relational dimension by uniting the user community through providing mutual exercises for people, and in general, by enabling conditions where users can build social connections with one another. As mentioned by Dholakia, Bagozzi & Klein Pearo (2004), consumers seek to fulfil the need of belonging through virtual community participation, since it contains sentimental and evaluative importance. Thus, brands can aid users to satisfy their need of belonging by supporting community involvement (Simon et al., 2013). The authors added that for instance multiplayer games tend to intensify the social dimension of online brand experience.

Consequently, as Simon et al. (2013) showed brand communities' pivotal role and effects in the relational dimension of online brand experience, the concept of brand community and its experiential meanings, as well as its effects on consumers are further discussed in a separate chapter.

2.5 Brand communities

2.5.1 Effects of brand community participation

Studies have confirmed that communities undoubtedly affect their members (Thompson & Sinha, 2008). Since consumers' purchase decisions are increasingly influenced by a networking society where other people's opinions, WOM and recommendations are well regarded, brand communities have grown into central places for consumers to find information about brands, to look for products and to communicate interactively with one another (Bao, 2017). Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek (2013) described online brand communities as forceful, interactive environments for engagement and endorsements between consumers. Moreover, Brodie et al. (2013) noted that brand communities serve as platforms for value creating and co-creating for both, members and guests of the community. The collaboratively created value, for one's part, can benefit individuals as well as organizations.

Tsai et al. (2012) stated that former research recognizes several outcomes for the existence of brand communities. By referring to findings by Thompson & Sinha (2008), the authors stated that bigger extent of participation increases customers' tendency to approve a new product from a brand they favour, and simultaneously reduces the tendency to take on new products from other competitive brands. Thus, participation, being a key attribute of brand community, means to what degree a person is engaged in the activities of a community, and how he or she interacts with other people within this group (Tsai et al., 2012).

Bao (2017) argued that brand communities attract users to participate because they contain user-generated content (UGC). One of the key benefits of UGC which Bao (2017) referred to is the convenient information the surrounding community proposes to a customer. As the pragmatic values that an online community may offer to people, Bao (2017) mentioned e.g., the ease to gain information, assistance for problem solving and goal achieving, as well as saved time and effort in conducting the aforesaid actions. In other words, if a person cannot learn enough about a product or a brand with one's own means, he or she may rely on the community's shared experiences to find relevant information more effectively. In this respect, the community's user-generated content, such as evaluations and feedback from others, are commonly used as references (Bao, 2017). Moreover, research has demonstrated that conversations between consumers online are more prominent factors in boosting people's interest and willingness to buy, comparing to company-produced information (Bao, 2017). Brodie et al. (2013) emphasized e-WOM's effects in brand communities to be venerable, mainly due to the fact that suggestions from consumer to another are received free of charge and they may disseminate swiftly both inside and outside the boundaries of a brand community. The authors added that customers are prone to look for and consent to negative e-WOM, particularly if they are lacking knowledge and experience (Brodie et al., 2013).

2.5.2 Online brand community engagement

Dessart et al. (2015) studied the experiences of online brand community (OBC) participants and confirmed that e.g., being informed by other people's assessments and input when engaging to a brand community may result in elevated brand loyalty. The way brand loyalty increments for individuals happens through several varying courses of actions, which are taking place in the person's interaction with the brand and other people within the community. Based on their research on the literature, as well as on interviews with social media users, Dessart et al. (2015) constituted an inclusive framework about the process of OBC engagement. The authors' framework comprises the drivers of OBC engagement, three core dimensions along with seven sub-dimensions of OBC engagement, and the outcome of engaging to an OBC, that being brand loyalty.

Dessart et al. (2015) noted that their illustration is not expressing a causal model, but instead, the connecting arrows in the figure merely signal the proposed relationships between the framework components, which were identified by the authors whilst analysing the empirical findings. The framework of OBC engagement by Dessart et al. (2015) is presented in figure 5 below:

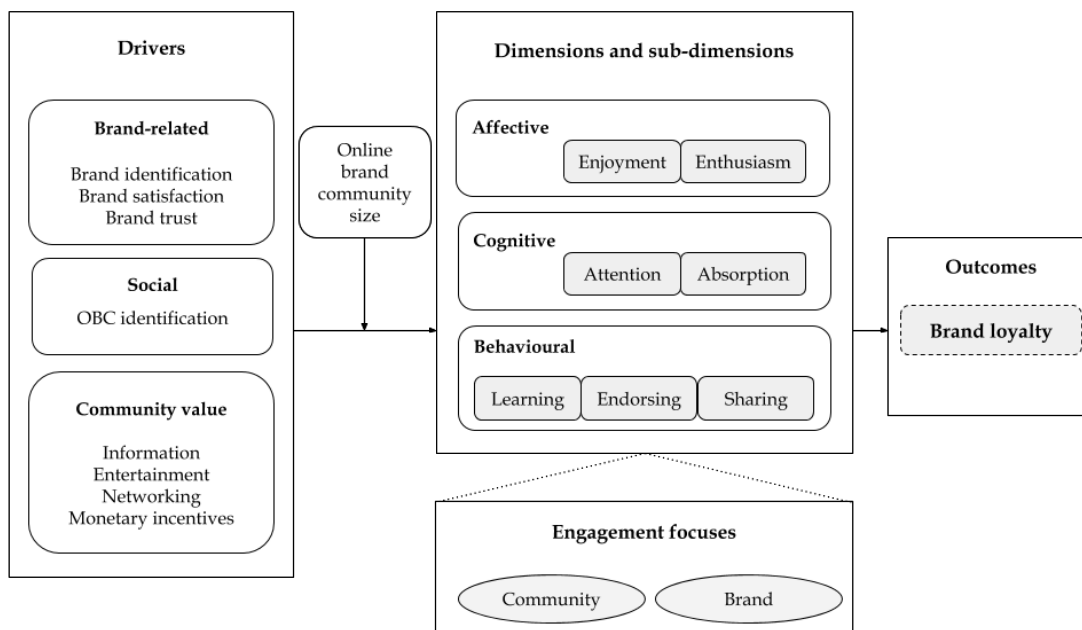


FIGURE 5 Online brand community engagement (Dessart et al., 2015, 38)

To break down the framework, Dessart et al. (2015) specified that OBC engagement is activated among consumers by several drivers which relate to the consumer-brand relationship, social aspects, and users' apprehension about the community value. The authors' findings also implied that the size of an online brand community has an effect on people's OBC engagement intentions. Dessart et al. (2015) then proposed three main dimensions including seven sub-dimensions, to

serve as trajectories for the OBC engagement drivers. More specifically, the figure demonstrates that people express their affective OBC engagement with emotions of enjoyment and enthusiasm they gain from 1) the brand they advocate for 2) the community involvement 3) the social interactions. The OBC engagement can also be distinguished well on a cognitive level, as OBC members actively devote their time and attention to the brand community, and additionally, absorb the manifold activities, information and content that is shared within the community (Dessart et al., 2015). Furthermore, the model explains that users take part in OBCs to e.g., learn, share and endorse different matters associated with their focal brand, which is why the behaviours of users also serve as powerful measures of OBC engagement (Dessart et al., 2015).

The framework also exhibits that OBC engagement involves two different types of focuses, meaning that the users' engagement can be more distinctively directed towards the surrounding community, or merely towards the focal brand. The findings by Dessart et al. (2015) showed that for the users, the engagement focuses differed based on which social media platforms they were using. As the final outcome, the framework by Dessart et al. (2015) proclaims that OBC engagement leads to elevated brand loyalty.

2.6 Summary of theoretical framework

This chapter focused on introducing several central concepts that showed overlapping with the brand polarization phenomenon. More specifically, the goal of examining these concepts was to advance the understanding of what generates extremified consumer opinions and feelings towards modern brands. As Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019) mentioned, the preceding research concerning explicitly the topic of brand polarization still remains narrow. Hence, further cultivation of this focal concept was pursued through exploring other appropriate terms, theories and disciplines that correspond to it.

As a result of thorough literature review on brand management journals, marketing publications and articles from specific fields of psychology, the key conceptions that showed promising applicability for greater interpreting of brand polarization turned out to be polarization, brand attitude, brand experience, brand relationships (with a spotlight on brand love and hate), as well as brand experience and brand communities. The aim of this study was to place these concepts under the same lens with brand polarization in order to grasp different drivers that may affect this focal phenomenon. The main objective of the theory chapter was to introduce varying yet fitting aspects of each concept which could be connected with the brand polarization effect amongst consumers. Moreover, since the modern consumer-brand interactions gradually takes place in online environments and applications, it seemed only relevant to examine the appearance of these central concepts also in the light of an online context.

In order to summarize the literature review, each key concept and their sub-concepts were placed in a table (table 2). This table encapsulates the key findings of the theoretical framework chapter, shows the key authors that were cited, and overall, provides a clarified summary of the articles that were referred to in this research. The table summarizing these areas is presented below:

TABLE 2 Summary table of theoretical framework

Key concepts & sub-concepts	Key scholars & year of publication	Key takeaways
Polarization	Myers & Lamm (1976) Benoit & Dubra (2014) Leone (1996) Dandekar et al. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polarization is a transference towards a favored direction. In common use, the term polarization demonstrates division inside a group of people • Individuals may become polarized in surroundings where people's views about the views of others are considered meaningful • Polarized attitude of a person results from a developed schema, which is a mental structure that serves as an originator for attitude-associated perceptions • Polarization is an outcome of attraction to similarity. Thus, a large interactivity of similar-minded people leads to polarization
<i>Polarization online</i>	Evans (2017) Dandekar et al. (2013) Bessi et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The online environment offers favorable surroundings for polarization to escalate • The internet's popularity has had an increasing influence on polarization, as the amount and versatility of information sources combined with their personalizing and targeting capabilities (e.g., recommendations), compose "echo-chambers" • Especially content serves as a driver for echo-chambers to emerge in social media channels
<i>Group polarization</i>	Burton et al. (2006) Moscovici & Zavalloni (1969) Evans (2017) Myers & Lamm (1976)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A group conversation may shift the participants' opinions towards both, extremely negative or positive ends • Informational influence (=exposure to arguments in a conversation) is commonly assumed to be a strong driver for a group's thinking to shift towards extreme • Interpersonal comparisons (=being exposed to other group members' preferences) is the needed and adequate circumstance for an individual's opinion to shift
<i>Brand polarization</i>	Osuna Ramírez (2019) Mafael (2016) Luo et al. (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand polarization can be distinguished when objective feelings shift to extreme in consumers' relationship with a brand • Marketers may use brand polarization as, e.g., differentiation, segmentation, and positioning strategies • It is of high importance for brand managers to acknowledge and consider both extremities of consumer opinions when composing brand strategies
Brand attitude	Keller (2003) Liu et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand attitude entails the combined characteristics and benefits that determine the significance of a brand, and is of assistance for consumers when judging brand choices

<i>Brand attitude's effects on buying motives</i>	Bao (2017) Howard & Gengler (2001) Walla et al. (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand attitude is a judgement of the brand's symbolic advantages and non-product-specific features • Emotional contagion and its consequences on consumer attitudes is seemingly relevant for better comprehension of different consumer behaviors
	Rossiter (2014) Rossiter & Percy (1987, 1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivating buyers requires accomplishing an emotion shift • Informational buying motives are product-focused and problem-solving, meaning that the impulse of buying takes place because a product takes care of some problem a person might have • Transformational buying motives are user-focused, and drive people to purchase because they enhance some experience for the buyer
	Bao (2017) Kudeshia & Kumar (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company-created communication online influences brand attitude about products, and the content generated by users (UGC) notably affects people's purchase intentions of evaluated products and perceived brand equity • Positive UGC and e-WOM should be pursued by marketers, as this may convert to a more favorable brand attitude among customers
<i>Brand attitude online</i>		
Brand relationships	Aurier & Gilles Séré (2012) Fetscherin et al. (2019) Batra et al. (2012) Wallace et al. (2014) Karjaluoto et al. (2016) Hegner et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many consumers form sentimental relationships with brands they favor • The consumer expectations are directed at the conceived quality of e.g., the brand's products, but also at the consumers' own emotional condition, which contains the individual observations and attitude they have towards a brand • Especially powerful positive and negative relationships with brands are driven by passion and the degree of this passion indicates how strong the consumer-brand relationship actually is
<i>Brand love</i>	Karjaluoto et al. (2016) Albert et al. (2013) Bairrada (2018) Batra et al. (2012) Malek et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand love is an impassioned, positive association a customer has developed towards a brand • The usage of a specific brand, along with signaling love towards it enables a way of social self-expressing for consumers • Affiliated with, i.e., positively inclined WOM, desire to pay a premium charge, brand loyalty, and the readiness to forgive brand failures amidst consumers
<i>Brand hate</i>	Ahmed & Hashim (2018) Platania et al. (2017) Zhang & Laroche (2020) Kucuk (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand hate is a craving for vengeance towards a selected brand caused by the feeling of being let down • Behavioral consequences of brand hate amongst consumers: exiting and rejecting, negatively oriented word of mouth, public criticizing on the web, revengeful

		<p>complaining and aggressiveness on a commerce place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three emotional dimensions of brand hate based on the severeness of negativity are mild, moderate and strong brand hate
Brand experience	<p>Zarantonello & Schmitt (2010) Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester (2018) Bairrada (2018) Veloutsou (2017) Hepola, Karjaluoto & Hintikka (2017)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences have developed into key components for interpreting how consumers view, evaluate, and react to brands • Brand experience stems from the manifold interactions between a consumer and a brand, involving e.g., the consumers' view of the brand's name, the charging of the brand, the impression created by mass-news medias, suggestions from friends and salespersons, emotion-based responses to instances, as well as interconnection of brand stories • Particularly emotional experiences stir up brand differentiation, and thereby influence brand loyalty and brand satisfaction amidst consumers
<i>Online brand experience</i>	<p>Simon et al. (2013) Brakus et al. (2009) Hollebeek (2011) Tsai et al. (2012)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online brand experience is a multi-dimensional construct, containing a total of six dimensions • A positive online brand experience (OBE) has an essential role in establishing stronger consumer-brand relationships in the virtual environment • OBE involves a person's inner, personal reactions to both, brand exposure on the web and different brand-associated stimulants on webpages
Brand communities	<p>Bao (2017) Brodie et al. (2013) Tsai et al. (2012) Thompson & Sinha (2008)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior studies have confirmed that communities undoubtedly affect their members • Online brand communities are forceful, interactive environments for engagement and endorsements between consumers • Pragmatic values of OBCs are the ease to gain information, assistance for problem solving and goal achieving, as well as saved time and effort
<i>Online brand community engagement</i>	<p>Dessart et al. (2015)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OBC engagement is activated among consumers by several drivers which relate to the consumer-brand relationship, social aspects, and users' apprehension about the community value • OBC engagement leads to elevated brand loyalty

2.6.1 Research model

In addition to summarizing the key theoretical concepts into a table, a research model was created to better define the purpose of this study. This illustration binds together the theoretical framework and the threefold research objectives of this study, which are filling the research gaps through answering the primary and secondary research questions, extending the conceptualization of brand polarization as a whole, as well as providing important implications for brand managers to make use of. The research model is presented below in figure 6:

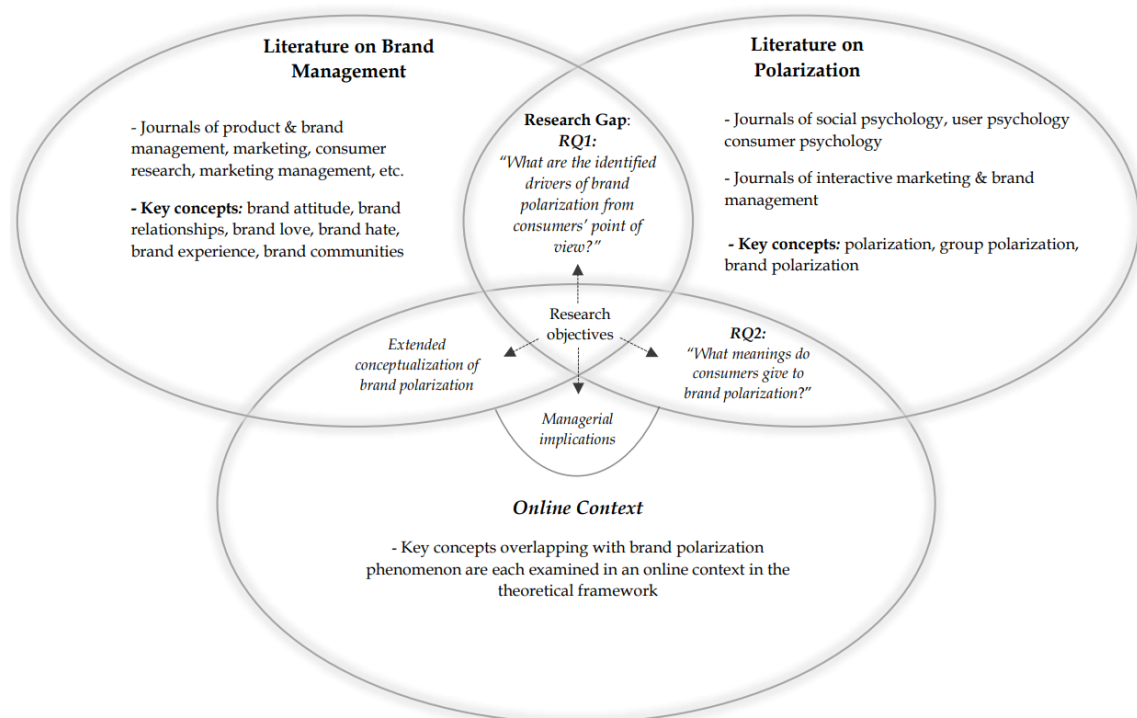


FIGURE 6 Research model

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains an overview of the methodology used in this study. The selected research philosophy, research approach, interview type, sampling procedures, as well as the analysing methods are introduced and explained. In addition, this chapter aims to rationalize why the selected methods are suitable for meeting the primary objectives of this research.

3.1 Research philosophy

In an academic research process, it is essential to outline a credible research philosophy, which means deciding the system of how to develop knowledge on a specific field of study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). According to O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2015), the purpose of determining the research philosophy is to better indicate to other researchers not just the arguments and assertions made in the research, but also the foundations on which the arguments are made on.

Determining the research philosophy requires selecting an adequate research paradigm to be followed. For this research, the fitting research paradigms were subjective ontology and interpretivist epistemology. According to O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2015, 57), subjective ontology examines facts as subject to “*different behaviours, attitudes, experiences, and interpretations – of both the observer and the observed.*” In general, this stance assumes that reality is constructed and shaped through the different perceptions and actions of people (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019) and that different individuals possess varying experiences about their personal reality (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). Interpretivist epistemology, in turn, stands for an approach where the research centres on, inter alia, developing an understanding of what takes place, finding meanings, and forming ideas via induction of the empirical data (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). To clarify the term epistemology, it means the created presumptions of knowledge, as well as the assumptions of what creates reasonable, proficient and rightful knowledge in a research (Saunders et al., 2009). In addition, epistemological presumptions dictate what kind of input for developing knowledge a researcher can offer as an outcome of his or her research (Saunders et al., 2019).

The research philosophy adopted in this research is interpretivism, which is one of the major research philosophies according to Saunders et al. (2019). Interpretivism focuses on examining meanings, and it is guided by the assumption that for instance people under different conditions, at different times, or with cultural variances may constitute different meanings due to their varying experiences of social reality (Saunders et al., 2019). According to O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2015), interpretivism is recognized as a paradigm of social sciences that aims to comprehend social phenomena through categorizing purposeful human

experiences. Thus, the aim of interpretivism is to examine the activities and behaviour produced by the minds of humans (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015), and to provide greater apprehensions of social worlds (Saunders et al., 2019). In addition, O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2015) stated that the scope of this paradigm is to acknowledge trends instead of laws. In other words, in this philosophy the focus relies more on understanding what is taking place in the context of the research, instead of measuring it (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015).

3.2 Exploratory research approach

Since this research seeks to clarify and identify the drivers of a focal phenomenon, an exploratory research approach was pursued, as it is commonly used to form greater comprehensions of business problems or opportunities (Hair, Wolfinbarger, Money, Samouel & Page, 2015) and allows the identification of key outcomes (Héroux, 2018). Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2012) characterized exploratory research as an effective technique for inquiring insights about a research topic. Saunders et al. (2012) added that an exploratory approach is exceptionally beneficial for clarifying an apprehension of a research problem when the nature of it remains inexact.

The ways to perform an exploratory research are manifold, but in general, the process contains a literature review regarding the subject, as well as thorough interviewing of individuals or focus groups (Saunders et al., 2012). According to Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler (2014), involving in-depth or semi-structured interviews into the research design is to be expected when proceeding with an exploratory approach. Due to the exploratory essence of the procedure, the performed interviews tend to be somewhat unstructured and rather dependant on the quality of input from the interview participants (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3 Qualitative research

In general, research methods can be divided into two different categories: qualitative and quantitative ones (Hirsijärvi, Remes & Sajavaara, 2007). To reach the primary objectives of this study, a qualitative research approach was pursued, as it is adequate for reaching an understanding and further interpretation of a research problem (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As stated by Metsämuuronen (2011), a qualitative research approach is suitable especially when exploring the meaning structures or detailed settings of occurrences. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) also mentioned that a qualitative strategy is especially applicable when the preceding knowledge about a phenomenon under examination is limited. Therefore, by its nature, the qualitative method is likely to be exploratory and adjustable due to the narrow insights of the research problem (Eriksson & Kovalainen,

2008). According to Adams, Khan & Raeside (2014), the objective of a qualitative research is to explore social relationships and to characterize the study participants' experiences of reality. Moreover, Hirsijärvi et al. (2007) pointed out that the goal of a qualitative research is often to describe and form a larger impression of the occurrence that is being researched.

Hence, selecting the qualitative research method for this research was convenient, since also the prior scholars studying brand polarization (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019) similarly relied on a qualitative technique and thus, demonstrated the suitability of the method in this study context. As this research aims to unravel the drivers of a central phenomenon, brand polarization, and seeks to broaden the awareness of the concept by recognizing its meanings in consumers' minds, the usage of a qualitative research approach can be considered well justifiable. As stressed by Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008), a qualitative research approach enables the possibility of centring on the complexness of a business-affiliated phenomenon, which also supports the convenience of this method selection for this study.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Semi-structured interview

According to Hair et al. (2015), interviews are a beneficial form of data gathering especially for exploring why something is happening, and for instance, when researching issues that possess a complex nature. The empirical data of this study was gathered via semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews usually include a "road-map" of guiding questions that steer the interviews. However, after each question, the interviewer may continue to ask more complementary questions after the initial reply from a respondent (Adams et al., 2014). Hence, although semi-structured interviews contain a pre-planned, guiding direction, the interviewer is able to add unexpected, additional questions into the interview, which may generate enhanced research findings (Hair et al., 2015). Thus, this type of interviewing does not contain ready-made response alternatives (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018), but instead, the semi-structured interviews pursue a rather dialogical, informal approach (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). However, when conducting a semi-structured interview, it is essential to prepare an outline of core themes, topics or issues to guide the interview through (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The interviews of this study included six guiding themes, which were determined based on the theoretical background of the thesis. Thus, several questions related to each prevailing theme were pre-set to guide the interview instances. The interview design was pre-tested with one voluntary participant to try out the clarity and overall structure of the questions, after which some minor adjustments were made to the phrasing and to the order of the themes.

3.4.2 Sampling technique

Sampling is a procedure performed by a researcher where subjects are systematically recruited from a pre-determined population to take part in a research (Sharma, 2017). In other words, the selected sample is a representative group of population that is considered suitable for participating in the study (Sharma, 2017). According to Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016), the existing sampling procedures can be different, and the chosen strategy should be based on the type, nature, and meaning of the study. In this study, the selected sampling approach was non-probability sampling, meaning that there was no random selection involved in the process, but instead, the choosing of the study participants relied entirely on the judgement of the researcher (Alvi, 2016). The author further claimed that non-probability sampling is well applicable precisely for exploratory studies that aim to extend the understanding of a population, or studies aiming to produce new insights.

From the different non-probability sampling methods, the actual sampling type applied into this research was purposive sampling; a process which Etikan et al. (2016) described as careful choosing of interviewees based on the qualities they have. Hence, individuals who possessed high interest and were well informed of the researched phenomenon were selected to take part in the study. Additionally, in purposive sampling it is important that the recruited participants are capable of communicating their experiences and views in a describing, communicative and reasoning fashion (Etikan et al., 2016). Thus, the participants selected for this research were individuals who claimed to have strong positive and negative emotions about their selected brands. Moreover, the respondents also showed eagerness to discuss their subjective reasons why these brands had evoked such strong feelings in their minds.

3.4.3 Sample overview

The interviews were conducted for a total of 10 individuals, who were asked to select 1-3 brands that they felt strong positivity or even love for, as well as 1-3 brands that they felt strong negativity or even hate for. The aim of this strategy was to discover the different driving reasons for extreme positivity and negativity towards brands among the participants, as they referred to their selected loved and hated brands when answering the interview questions. Consequently, extracting the drivers for brand loving and hating among the respondents was done to better comprehend brand polarization, as this phenomenon is strongly connected to intense consumer emotions regarding brands. Moreover, the respondents were also inquired specific questions about truly polarizing brands to find out which meanings they give to such occurrence where modern brands receive both love and hate simultaneously from consumers.

In total, the respondents discussed about 20 selected brands that they found strongly positive, and 16 selected brands that they found strongly negative. Before the interview, the participants were told that they can choose between any

brand type (e.g., a company brand, human brand, etc.), as narrowing their selection down to only a single brand type could have reduced not only the diversity of brands, but also the reasoning for the extreme emotions the respondents felt towards their selected brands. Therefore, allowing the participants to discuss any brands they desired most likely resulted in better reflections from the respondents, and enhanced the overall amount of information, as well as the flow of discussions.

The interviews were conducted until slight saturation of the data was reached, which according to Hennink, Kaiser & Weber (2019) indicates the point of data collecting where findings are becoming repeated. However, due to the exploratory nature of the study, each of the interviews produced new and valuable information, despite the certain saturated findings. Thus, as stated by Sebele-Mpofu (2020), when the data contains unprocessed perspectives and information obtained from the research respondents, it never becomes truly saturated due to the varying viewpoints and phrasing which are moulded by, *inter alia*, the respondents' experiences, views and comprehensions of the research subject.

The interview participants were also informed beforehand about the anonymity and other confidentiality aspects of the study. The relevant background information of the interviewees, as well as the selected brands, communication methods and interview durations are shown in table 3 below:

TABLE 3 Information table of interviewees

Respondent	Gender	Age group	Nationality	Strongly positive/ loved brands	Strongly negative/ hated brands	Contact method	Interview duration (min.)
R1	Male	25-36	Finland	ENCE (<i>eSports team</i>)	ENCE (<i>on a certain time period</i>) Valve	Zoom	59:59
R2	Female	25-36	Finland	Disney Finlayson	Nestlé	Zoom	51:26
R3	Female	25-36	Finland	Apple Adidas	Oatly Donald Trump (<i>human brand</i>)	Zoom	54:53
R4	Male	25-36	Finland	Patagonia Haglöfs	Zara Vladimir Putin (<i>human brand</i>)	Zoom	40:08
R5	Male	25-36	Finland	Nordea Fingersoft	Facebook Robinhood	Zoom	48:51
R6	Male	25-36	Germany	The nu company SV Werder Bremen (<i>football team</i>)	McDonald's	Zoom	42:19
R7	Male	25-36	Finland	Volkswagen FC Bayern Munich (<i>football team</i>)	Huono Äiti (<i>ready meal</i>)	Zoom	34:10
R8	Male	25-36	Finland	YouTube Waves	Electronic Arts (EA)	Zoom	43:29
R9	Female	25-36	Finland	Apple Fazer	Maria Nordin (<i>human brand</i>) Päivän Byrokraatti (<i>online publication</i>)	Zoom	43:42
R10	Female	25-36	Finland	Jungle Juice Bar Halla x Halla Foodin	Sara Sieppi (<i>human brand</i>) HK	Zoom	51:52
Total:	10	-	-	20 brands	16 brands	-	468 min

3.5 Data analysis

3.5.1 Thematic analysis and data coding

The conducted interviews were analysed with a thematic analysis, which is a process for recognizing, analysing and outlining themes from the research data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Hazée, Delcourt & van Vaerenbegh (2017) described thematic analysis as a repetitive procedure of evaluating and determining surging themes, which are useful for characterizing and arranging the obtained research data in a detailed manner. Braun & Clarke (2006) added that thematic analysis is a flexible and well-applicable analysis method that allows plenty of theoretical

freedom yet enables the gathering of diverse and specific information. Despite its flexible essence, O’Gorman & MacIntosh (2015, 145) stated that thematic analysis contains six common phases for a researcher to follow: 1) become familiar with the data 2) generate initial codes 3) search for themes 4) review themes 5) define and name the themes 6) produce the report.

Belk, Fischer & Kozinets (2013) noted that regardless of which qualitative data collection method is being used, data coding is at all times an essential part of such process. Cresswell (2007) described coding as an act of narrowing the data into relevant segments and allocating names for these segments. Belk et al. (2013) suggested that codes can be designated to e.g., single words, phrases or paragraphs, and that coding is used mainly to elaborate what the researcher means when he or she is determining important segments from the data set. Moreover, the process of coding is repetitive, meaning that after creating tentative codes, a researcher needs to check his or her set of codes to see if they need to be adjusted into more adequate codes when more research data is obtained (Belk et al., 2013).

In this research, coding was performed so that important codes arising from the interview transcripts were highlighted with separate colors. Hence, the similarities detected in the different interview responses were constantly marked with a same color, which aided the process of reframing the initial codes into wider, overarching themes. According to Bianco, Gasparini & Schettini (2015) when dealing with qualitative data, this procedure is called nominal color coding, as it aims to highlight important information from the data set with specific colors.

Although the interview structure included pre-set initial themes to guide the interview, the idea of thematic analysis in this research was to find more emerging themes also from the interviews, which were carried out and recorded via video communications software Zoom. Once the interviews were finished, the interviewees’ responses were transcribed verbatim and inductively coded.

3.5.2 Interpretation and analytic generalizing

According to Adams et al. (2014), interpretation and making affirmations about the findings is the final step when analysing qualitative research data: The researcher compares viewpoints and experiences, and seeks for relations and patterns which are of assistance in explaining the focal phenomenon. As Belk et al. (2013) stated, interpretation is about forming a description of what the patterns revealed from the research data actually mean. This stage of the research is steered by the primary research objectives and -questions of the study (Adams et al., 2014).

In addition to interpreting the research data, another procedure that may be involved into this stage of data analysis is called analytic generalizing. Polit & Beck (2010) described analytic generalizing as a process where the researcher can reach illuminating, inductive generalizations concerning the phenomenon under examination via precise analysis and confirming techniques that deal with the

credibility of the research findings. Halkier (2011) stated that generalizing may be done in different ways in qualitative studies, but commonly, certain theoretical concepts are used to provide a more generic perspective on the specified patterns found in the data. Polit & Beck (2010) emphasized with reference to Thorne et al. (2009) that if communicated in a fashion that is genuine and trustworthy to readers, the findings can mirror reasonable explanations with enough abundance and depth and thus, guarantee generalizability to the field of knowledge in question.

Hence, as a complementary analysis method, interpretation was adopted into this research protocol to provide more insightful explanations in an intuitive and subjective manner about the central phenomenon of the research (Spiggle, 1994). In addition, analytical generalizing was utilized to profoundly integrate and reflect the interpretations and findings into the theoretical background of this research. Moreover, through analytic generalizing, this study aimed to highlight different generalizable mechanisms that may influence the key phenomenon of this study, brand polarization.

4 RESULTS

In this chapter, the research results are examined. The findings are presented under several key themes, which were determined based on the key concepts of the theoretical framework as well as the empirical data set. In addition to demonstrating the identified key drivers, this chapter also contains the empirical findings about what meanings consumers give to brand polarization, to offer thorough explanations for both research gaps of the thesis.

4.1 Identification of the drivers of brand polarization

The research findings were obtained via semi-structured interviews which included a total of six guiding themes. The scope of this data collection method was to discover diverse driving reasons that create subjective, polarized feelings towards brands among consumers. To capture particularly the polarized consumer feelings and opinions, the interview questions encouraged the participants to describe e.g., their personal relationships, attitudes, experiences and other meaningful perceptions concerning their selected loved and hated brands in a detailed yet open-ended manner. Allowing the participants to separately describe their reasons for brand loving and brand hating (which are the two extreme poles of the brand polarization effect) enabled the distinguishing of the root causes that drive the positively and negatively polarized consumer opinions towards brands.

4.1.1 Conventional drivers

The first guiding theme of the conducted interviews focused on the participants' selected brands. The purpose of this theme was twofold: to hear which brands the respondents had intense feelings and opinions about, and also to discover the actual reasons for the respondents' extremely positive and negative feelings towards their designated brands. Hence, the questions of this theme aimed to identify what the conventional drivers of positively and negatively inclined consumer opinions towards brands are. The caption of this theme was set as such, because at this stage of inquiry, the respondents were encouraged to describe their reasons for subjective brand loving and hating in a rather conventional manner while simultaneously using their selected loved and hated brands as a context of the discussion.

As the participants were allowed to select any brand or brand type (for instance, a company brand, human brand, a sports team brand, etc.), a total of 36 loved and hated brands were discussed during the interviews, and therefore, the reasons for the perceived brand loving and hating were manifold. A few arguments for brand loving were described by some of the respondents as follows:

R1: "I have been a big fan of the brand (ENCE) for the past 3 years, as I personally enjoy eSports and also play it myself as a hobby. It is a domestic brand that managed to rise on the top of the competition on a global scale. (--) For the whole Finnish fan base, myself included, the admiration towards them simply exploded when the team managed to reach the finals of the world's biggest tournament (--)"

R2: "As a loved brand, Disney has been in my life since I was little, so I have watched their movies and characters throughout my whole life. (--) Now that they have the Disney+ streaming service, I have, in a way, found my way back to them. (--) I would say that the feeling of nostalgia is why I like them so much."

R4: "I would say Patagonia as the first one. My affection for this brand stems from the brand's impact when it comes to consuming, environmental choices, nature preservation, and in general, their questioning of the current, prevailing consumption trends. On top of that, their products for me are very purposeful and most of all, durable."

"(--) The second brand, Haglöfs, has very similar benefits for me, like practicality and durability, but they are also very down-to-earth and close to nature, which is obviously trendy nowadays... but those are the kind of values I wish to favour."

R8: "For the first one, I would say YouTube, which I have used for a very long time, almost daily. I can watch for example the recent highlights of NHL that I find interesting, or just find out any information whatsoever... I can watch something music related, like a learning video of how to create music. (--) It is a learning platform for me, and also good for spare time, because there are like podcasts and videos about basically anything."

At this stage of the interview, the respondents also specified which brands they felt extreme negativity towards and contemplated the key reasons for their negative perceptions. Some of the brought-up reasons for brand hating are quoted below:

R3: "The negative brand is Oatly, which is quite funny, because I used to be their customer, as I do like the flavour of their oat milk in a coffee. (--) I found out that the brand has been partially bought by a Chinese government-owned company, and I feel very strong negativity towards China's governmental actions and ethical values. I simply do not want to financially support a government whose actions I do not approve. So, it comes down to their value-base (--)"

"Secondly, the last straw was their anti-milk campaign. They (Oatly) sent flyers to people's houses, trying to educate customers and kids about why they should not drink milk. (--) I have always hated such marketing where one tries to benefit on the expense of others, or through downgrading other products, so that's where it turned into brand hate for me, I would say."

R6: "There's one I kind of really hate, it's McDonald's. (--) I have the kind of feeling that they are affecting the whole world with something negative, with fast food (--) (--) they were also like supporting football clubs and sports events, but I just do not think that matches (--) it is like they are associating an unhealthy product with positive aspects."

R7: "I have to say Huono Äiti ready meals, because I have been annoyed by that brand from the start. I have never bought their products and I never will, only because of the feeling I get from the brand. I have no rational reason for hating it, my hate only comes from the idea of how the brand is built."

“(--) they have clearly tried to create some fun, cleverish, or trendy brand that some mothers need to be good, so some can be bad, but I think they have miserably failed that. First of all, they are excluding half of their potential buyers – men... I do not see any reasons why men would buy this, and the only segment they can probably succeed with is when a mother-in-law buys her daughter-in-law this as some kind of a humour gift.”

R9: “What came to my mind is this one human brand, Maria Nordin. What she speaks is just against all general healthcare recommendations, so I am extremely annoyed how she is misleading people with her nonsense, and also that she has managed to get quite wide networks in her background with that stuff.”

During the first theme of the interview, it was also inquired from the respondents which general reasons may cause consumer opinions to shift towards extremely positive or negative direction regarding brands. The purpose of this question was to accentuate which general reasons for brand polarization the respondents could reveal in addition to describing their own loved and hated brands. The different reasons obtained with this particular question are found below in table 4. It could be deduced from the answers that the general reasons which may cause positively and negatively polarized consumer opinions were often facilitated by primarily three different sources: 1) by the brand itself 2) by the personal reasons of individuals 3) or by the media. Thus, each brought-up key reason that the respondents mentioned was placed under the according, driving facilitator in the following summary table:

TABLE 4 General reasons for consumers opinions to polarize towards brands

General reasons for consumer opinions to polarize towards brands (by respondents)		
Facilitator of the polarized opinion	Reasons for positively polarized opinions	Reasons for negatively polarized opinions
<i>The brand</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being the best in the market • Sudden skyrocketing success • Professional behavior from the brand • Great quality • Great customer service • Positively triggering marketing & brand communication • Open, humane, dialogical, warm communications from the brand • Multi-channel contacting possibilities • Supporting local activities and other small operators • Disseminating information through services, seminars and events • Operating locally • Efforts in improving sustainability • Positive content marketing • Ecological public image and pursuing actions to support and prove it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionable managerial practices • Failed products • Failed service • Associations with negative events or activities • Negatively triggering marketing & brand communication • Lying • Absurd behavior • Hypocrisy • Crisis situations • Poor crisis communication • Unclear and non-transparent use of consumers' personal information • Failure to inform the secureness of consumers' personal information • Illegal actions • Setting sudden restrictions for consumers • Falsifying customer reviews • Unethical practices • Not being sustainable • Attempts to reach bigger profits on customers' expense • Discriminating output • False promises
<i>The individual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becoming a fan of the brand • Strong positive user experiences with quality and customer service • Finding aligned values with a brand • Positive experiences from friends and families (word of mouth) • The brand suddenly fits the lifestyle of a person • Sudden personal benefits from the brand • Getting informed of one's own benefits from the brand • Sensing a relaxed atmosphere in the brand's operations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person no longer supports the values of the brand • Strong negative user experiences with quality and customer service • Feeling of being cheated • Receiving and considering some influential information from activist groups concerning the brand • Feeling of being abused • Feeling of being let down • Experiencing the brand's marketing as too "sharp-pointed" • Experiencing greediness in the brand's actions
<i>The media</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive visibility of the brand in the news medias • Media-created positive mental image of the brand • Frequency of positive reportage about the brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative visibility of the brand in the news medias • The personal agenda and approach of the news source • Untruthful content • Underrating readers in reported content • Frequency of negative reportage

As mentioned earlier, one of the approximations in this study was to also explore the brand polarization phenomenon in the light of an online context. In this theme, the respondents were requested to describe factors in online channels which they believe may affect consumers' strong positivity or negativity towards

brands. For clarification, it was specified for each respondent that online channels stand for any platforms they can think of on the internet, e.g., social media channels, the brands' webpages, etc. Some of the positive online factors are demonstrated with the following quotes:

R10: "They (Halla x Halla) manufacture swimming suits and surf clothing. So, it is a Finnish company that produces everything from recycled plastic waste that is picked up from the seas."

"(-- the way they have stories in like Facebook and Instagram, like, how they create the brand's marketing by showing that they create their products from recycled materials, and they use a lot of colours and their products are just visually attractive for me. But also, their models in the shown advertisements are in all sizes, like very regular people, which makes it easy to relate to and easy to welcome their products, in a way. (-- I do not even own any of their products yet, but I am planning to get some for the summer. So, I would say that through social media they have succeeded really well."

R5: "They (Nordea) practice open dialogue in the discussion. (-- they never like close off in any conversation, but instead, they put a lot of effort to openness in customer service, which I think is very humane, and also very rare from a bank. They are like very warm-hearted in that sense. (-- recently they have been reachable through Facebook, Instagram, Jodel, Twitter, like anywhere, which is what I really like about them."

"(-- when I go to like Facebook and Instagram, they (Fingersoft) have very positive and inspiring atmosphere in their own online platforms. Even when they cannot participate in every discussion themselves, the consumers there will always do so, which is very interesting to see."

Additionally, some negatively aggravating factors taking place in the online context surfaced in the responses:

R5: (due to a recent stock-market scandal) "Robinhood would have lost like tens of billions, but they basically, half-illegally restricted people's ability to buy stocks, which is against the basic principles. (-- Like, of course they tried to save their own economy from collapsing, which is fine, but how they reacted to it was horrible (--"

"(-- their PR was miserable and not at all up to date. (-- they continued to lie, and they continued illegal restrictions to buy stocks up to this day, and they have at least tens of lawsuits incoming in the U.S. (-- they did not respond to criticism at all, and the brand got crushing reviews in Google, but then they had paid Google to delete the negative reviews to manipulate their own reputation online, and Google even did it at that time. (-- so, their online presence has been devastatingly negative."

R1: "My example relates to online gaming. (-- like, what kind of outbursts there can be from the management and even from the players of the team (ENCE) into different social media channels, in articles, in interviews, which is like a really fragile field (--"

"(-- When they (ENCE) turned from the amateur-level into a globally recognized, professional eSports organization during only a few years span, I don't think they realized the rules of law regarding communication (-- and probably they did not have like an established division to handle their communication properly, like big corporations should have (--"

Moreover, follow-up questions were also inquired regarding how other people's presence and comments, and in turn, how anonymous and "remote" commenting online can affect the positive and negative escalation of consumer opinions towards brands. Some of the interviewees described these effects in the following way:

R7: (other people's presence & comments) "Very big effect I would say, because I have noticed it in my personal life. Like, my brand love for Volkswagen basically came from my father. (--) so, especially people's inner circles and close persons - their attitudes and opinions affect heavily. (--) probably every person is somewhat influenced by this so called "herd mentality", that if your friends love, for example some football team, your own opinion may also incline towards that direction simply because of your friends."

R3: (other people's presence & comments) "I think it is strong. (--) especially if I read reviews from online channels from other people, I would say that it definitely affects my buying decisions, and therefore strengthens my brand liking... because it can practically validate my liking towards it."

R7: (anonymous comments & commenting "remotely" online) "I see that it influences quite heavily, especially when it comes to brands that are still unknown to a person. (--) If the brand is unknown, and anonymous commenting always tends to be about negative things, it might create negative first image to a person, and changing this negative image can be hard afterwards."

R1: (anonymous comments & commenting "remotely" online) "I think the main factor is the amount (of comments). (--) if you see a brand being thrown at a lot of either positive or negative comments, anonymously or without anonymity, it can affect people's beliefs about the brand... so yes, even if the identity of the commentators is not anyhow known."

All in all, the addressed questions of the first theme managed to produce extensive number of singular reasons for positively and negatively polarized consumer opinions. Furthermore, the responses showed that several touchpoints in the online channels were seemingly contributing to the occurrence of positively and negatively climaxed consumer opinions about brands. Despite the outcome that the questions of this theme already produced rich and miscellaneous drivers of strong brand love and hate, the purpose of the first theme was to serve merely as a warm-up for the respondents before discussing the other themes. As stated, the caption of the theme, conventional drivers, was formed based on that the first guiding questions allowed each participant to introduce and talk about their selected brands in a rather free and conventional form.

4.1.2 Attitudinal drivers

The second theme of the interview revolved around brand attitude. Brand attitude was selected as one of the key concepts to further define brand polarization in this study, because as stated in the theory section, brand attitude is formed through a person's firm beliefs about the brand (Nayeem et al., 2019) and it is strongly connected to e.g., object-affiliated behaviour (Walla et al., 2011) which

are both aspects that intersect with the key phenomenon of this study. Furthermore, the concept of brand attitude has been explored also in previous studies (Mafael et al., 2016) when examining the brand polarization effect. Consequently, this theme of the interview aimed to identify the attitudinal drivers of brand polarization among the study participants, and specify brand attitude's role and influence in instances where consumers' opinions about brands may intensify, for better or worse.

The steering questions of this theme requested information about how the interview attendees perceived their own brand attitude, how their attitude was when the positively or negatively triggering brands were doing something good or bad, how other people influenced their personal brand attitude, and lastly, which kind of factors in online channels influenced their personal brand attitude. The personal brand attitudes were reflected by some respondents as follows:

R10: "For me, Jungle Juice Bar... I am almost like having withdrawal symptoms if I do not buy from them, their products are simply the best in the world in my opinion. I just love them."

"(-- then about HK... I was just in the store one day, and many HK vegan options were nicely organized in a shelf and even on sale, and I was tempted to buy them, but I did not... I just felt somehow negative enough not to buy from them or support them."

R5: "I would say that my attitude towards them (loved brands) is in a way different.

(--) I like their posts more, I might share them more, I talk about them more, I read their news more. (--) I mean, I am interested in them in more than one level: on a product-level, on a company-level... there are not many brands whose annual reports I read with interest, except for Nordea and Fingersoft."

The respondents were then asked about their brand attitude when their loved brand performs well or poorly, to advance the understanding of possible scenarios of attitude shifts. The common opinions pinpointed by the interviewees were that good performances from loved brands solidified and boosted initial positive emotions, increased trust and respect, evoked the feeling of pride in consumers, affected buying behaviour incrementally, boosted self-expression with the brand, produced spreading of positive word-of-mouth, incremented cheering for the brand, created "over-excitement", and boosted the following and personal analysing of the brand.

Poor performances from the loved brands had, in turn, slightly decreased the respondents' interest to follow them, as brand love was considered by no means "blind" according to some responses, but more like changing over time. However, a common response was that in the loved brand's case, the poor acts needed to be quite catastrophic to make the respondents completely abandon their loved brands. It was also pointed out that poor acts from loved brands did make the consumers more aware and even suspicious about the brand's public image. Some also specified that because no brand can always succeed, the poor acts from loved brands would be often ignored. Thus, the respondents did claim to commonly reflect and reason the poor acts by their loved brands, but it was

evident that single bad acts did not cause too much fluctuation in their strongly positive attachment towards their selected loved brands.

Consecutively, when the hated brands had performed something well, the majority of the respondents agreed that it slightly mitigated the perceived brand hate, especially if the brand had managed to fix some of the defects that the respondents found important. Some reflected that they respected the negative brands' steps to right direction, but such acts still did not fully remove their views of distrust about these brands. Some respondents emphasized that once the hated brand had lost them as a customer, it was going to be permanent. Also, some respondents claimed that their opinions were not going to change, simply because they had stopped to follow the hated brands' actions in any way. All in all, the evident outcome was that with single good acts, the hated brands could not alter the firm negative perceptions of consumers, because the initial drivers of brand hating had often been so strong. However, it could be deduced that in cases of mild or moderate brand hate, the chances to win the haters over still existed for these brands. As for the opinions when the hated brands had performed something poorly, the respondents claimed that it confirmed and boosted initial brand hate and caused e.g., avoidance, rejecting, and repulsion towards their offerings. Moreover, some also claimed to be entertained, as they received an opportunity to discuss and laugh collectively with their friends to the poor actions of disliked brands. Furthermore, a frequent opinion was that negative things always tend get more attention in the news medias, and thus, the hated brands' negative actions had regularly come to the respondents' attention with a stronger and deeper effect.

As the second last question, the respondents were asked to describe how other people's attitudes affected their personal brand attitude. A common agreement in most responses was that particularly the attitudes of friends, relatives and trusted people were found significant. A finding that was also mentioned repeatedly was that while other people's attitudes were not absorbed blindly, they oftentimes created interest and drove the individuals to find out if they would agree or disagree with others' attitudes. Finally, a question was posed which factors in the online environment may affect the respondents' brand attitude. The responses showed that especially comments and likes in social medias, as well as reviews and ratings online were found to be influential, specifically if there were a large amount of them. Furthermore, targeted advertisements which created mental images, visuality, electronic word-of-mouth, brand's online behaviour, and signals of supporting minorities or sustainable causes turned out to be factors that distinctly affected the attitudes of the respondents in the online platforms.

In sum, the purpose of the second interview theme was to extract the attitudinal drivers which can extremify consumer emotions and opinions, and to utilize the concept of brand attitude while researching the brand polarization phenomenon. Hence, the following table summarizes the key quotes from respondents about how brand attitudes can influence polarized consumer opinions. Furthermore, the table indicates touchpoints from the theoretical framework of

this study to demonstrate brand attitude's connection with brand loving and brand hating, which are the two opposite ends of the brand polarization effect. Although the connections between the attitudinal drivers and the literature is already shown in this table, these connections will be further analysed in the discussion chapter. The summary table (table 5) is presented below:

TABLE 5 Summary table of attitudinal drivers

Summary table of attitudinal drivers (Demonstrating brand attitude's role in driving polarized consumer opinions)			
Personal brand attitudes described by respondents	Literature support	Author & year	Descriptive statement from theoretical framework
Attitudes on loved brands:			
R1: "I felt deep interest to follow them as a fan. (→) when they succeeded globally, it was the most triggering factor for my excitement"	✓	Nayeem et al. (2019)	→ (brand attitude) is a thorough assessment of a brand's characteristics, where a viewpoint of a brand is formed based on, inter alia, the brand's attributes, empirical benefits, and performance
R2: "It is my first choice"	✓	Walla et al. (2011)	→ Because attitude directly influences a person's object-affiliated behavior, having a positive brand attitude presumably has positive effects on consumers' buying behavior and brand loyalty
R6: "I would say that I am loyal. (→) if something is going bad, I am always supporting them, doesn't matter what they're doing"	✓	Rossiter (2014)	→ "Transformational buying motives: user-focused, experience-enhancing" Pride (neutral → sense of belonging to a valued reference group)
R6: "I feel maybe a little bit proud if they accomplish something that is recognized. I feel like this is my brand, or the one I'm supporting"	✓	Howard & Gengler (2001, p. 198)	→ "Attitudinal biasing via contagion effects"
R7: "Friends' opinions on brands have a huge influence I would say, particularly the personal experiences they have about them"	✓	Kudeshia & Kumar (2017)	→ Social eWOM has a downright connection with brand attitude
R8: "(→) maybe it affects on a subconscious level"	✓		
Attitudes on hated brands:			
R2: "I avoid their products and services"	✓	Bao (2017)	→ If a person holds a bad attitude in relation to a brand, the odds for him to use the brand decrease
R1: "I want to see what they are messing up this time"	✓	Rossiter (2014)	→ "Transformational buying motives: user-focused, experience-enhancing" Sensory gratification (neutral → elated)
R4: "The brand represents incapability to understand the world from other perspectives"	✓		
R3: "I don't think I'd forgive them even if they did a lot of good"	✓	Nayeem et al. (2019)	→ Brand attitude stands for the linked expectations and persistent beliefs people have about brands

4.1.3 Relational drivers

The third theme of the interview focused on brand relationships. As described by Alvarez & Fournier (2016), brand relationships are mental bonds between consumers and brands. What also relates essentially to consumer-brand relationships are the emotions of consumers, which according to Fetscherin et al. (2019), determine consumers' thinking, attitudes, perception, as well as the general tendency of supporting or avoiding a brand. Thus, in this theme, the respondents were asked to describe their own brand relationships regarding their selected loved and hated brands. Since the purpose of the theme was to piece together how brand relationships are contributing to consumers' polarized emotions such as intense brand loving and hating, the findings under this theme were titled as relational drivers.

The first addressed question was how the interviewees would describe their personal relationships with their selected brands. For clarification, this question was exemplified to the respondents by inquiring how they are interacting with these brands, and in turn, how the brands are maintaining a relationship towards them as consumers.

Some respondents reasoned that maintaining the brand relationships with their loved brands was done through e.g., liking, sharing and commenting on the brand's activities in social media channels and other online platforms. Also, some stated that they showed their positive brand relationship through endorsing these brands by mirroring their own good experiences to others. Other mentioned initiatives by the respondents were e.g., communicating with the brand through their websites and via emails. However, many respondents stated that they were not too active on social media, which is why from their behalf, there was no activity to maintain any visible relationship even with their loved brands. Consequently, the relationship with even the loved brands was showing merely in their consumption habits towards the brands (e.g., buying from the brand, watching the brand on television or via online broadcasts, etc.) Also, because some of the loved brands were globally wide, some respondents felt that there was no existing "relationship" to maintain with such brands. From the brand's behalf, in turn, the relationships were cultivated through content, such as interesting posts and stories in social medias, via personal calls to consumers (from e.g., a banking brand), via different marketing gimmicks, by providing small surprises, by sending sale codes or thank you notes personally for the customers, or merely by maintaining the good quality of products and services. Additionally, it was mentioned that especially smaller companies had provided highly personal customer service as a response to even very detailed problems and questions some interviewees had faced. Some brands had even contacted the respondents with the purpose to lower their invoices and costs due to being regular customers, which was found delightful and surprising by some respondents.

After describing the relationships with loved brands, the consumer-brand relationships with the hated brands were likewise characterized by the respondents. For instance, in the case of one hated brand (Valve), it was explained by a

respondent that although the person kept paying for the brand's games, the relationship with the brand was negatively loaded due to bad and irrespective interaction and communication from the brand's part. Also, especially in the cases where the respondents spoke about some human brands they disliked, some mentioned that they became highly provoked by their appearances and messages in different communication channels. Some interviewees also stated that they aimed to disseminate their personal negative image of their hated brand to the people close to them. Moreover, one respondent described that her aim was to minimize all possible clicks, direct or indirect attention, or any information sharing, which could help the hated brand (Päivän Byrokraatti) to expand or to gain any sort of extra visibility. On top of these varying descriptions, the most frequent response was that the negatively perceived brand relationship simply affected the respondents' desire to consume contrariwise: They intentionally avoided consuming any products or services from brands with whom they experienced a negative relationship with.

The second guiding question requested the interviewees to consider and reflect in what ways the following reasons (company-related-, product related-, customer service-related-, and consumer-related reasons) may cause brand loving or hating among consumers. These areas were brought up from the reviewed literature of brand relationships, with the purpose to discover the respondents' open-ended reflections on how these different areas can impact the strong emotions of consumers towards brands. Some differing, positively and negatively inclined reflections about the company-related reasons are shown in the following quotes:

R2: "It effects how the brand acts in the market (--) are they ethical, what kind of working conditions they have, what their values are - those affect surely. And their mission, like what are they reaching for with their actions (--)"

R7: "The first example that comes to mind is Volkswagen's emission scandal. (--) they got caught for manipulating their emission measuring results, which shifted many people's general opinion of the brand into more negative, and even caused huge operating losses for them."

R8: "I would say the constant increasing of advertisements (in YouTube). (--) I understand that they need to make money, but I just feel like they are really testing their limits on how many ads can be forced into some five-minute videos. (--) like forcing too many ads, which just shows greediness, that really starts to annoy me personally (--)"

R10: "I think corporate responsibility has a quite huge role nowadays. (--) Companies can always do something to improve themselves when it comes to climate and other ethical aspects. (--) it is not even tied to the industry anymore, for example, airline companies nowadays are trying to compensate for their pollution and emissions in other ways.

(--) So, I would say it really affects the image of a company, if they try to act better in some way (--)"

Some of the product-related reasons were, in turn, reflected as follows:

R9: (causes brand loving) "The products need to be best in their category, or at least among the top positions. (--) their quality-promise must be firm (--)"

R4: (causes brand loving) "Durability of the product (in use), but also the product's durability in terms of sustainable development"

R5: (causes brand hating) "If the customer is not completely aware of what the product or service is for or does not understand it. (--) like, this is the case in many situations with these brands I spoke about, with Facebook and Robinhood."

R1: (causes brand hating) "It would be nice to see, that the company (Valve) would recognize all these external operators who push their product forward in terms of popularity. (--) for instance, if these external parties give public feedback about Valve's product (eSports game), Valve should then take part in the discussion and continue to develop the product based on that."

Some customer-service related reasons were portrayed followingly:

R5: "To my mind, brand loving can be caused by good accessibility, diversity and the speed of the customer service. (--) hate can be caused with slowness, or if the customer-service is hard to reach. Also, if they lack the attitude of fixing the problems at once and for good, that can cause hate."

R1: "In any company, slowness, passiveness and carelessness of customer service can cause even hate in customers, so the level of communication needs to be smart, and a lot of bad things can even be forgiven with the right words and timely reacting to feedbacks (--)"

Finally, the consumer-related reasons which may cause brand loving and hating (on which the brands have a little control over) were described as follows:

R2: "What is reported in the media; are those reportages positive or negative - that can really affect consumers' views about a brand (--)"

R4: "Naturally, people's personal values have influence on both (brand loving or hating) (--)"

R9: "For example, if false information of the brand is spread online by consumers, like, related to the brand or its products, and it is not true, this can affect. (--) if something positive is spread about user-experiences, that can amplify people's image of the brand in a positive way."

The third and fourth questions of the theme inquired which different emotions the selected loved and hated brands evoked in the respondents. Due to the diversity of the emotions that were elicited by the loved and hated brands, they are presented in below in table 6:

TABLE 6 Different emotions caused by the respondents' selected brands

Different emotions caused by the respondents' selected brands	
Positive emotions and reasoning	Negative emotions and reasoning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxation and enjoyment due to following the brand's activities on spare-time, genuineness of the brand's actions and content (ENCE) • Joy & enjoyment of buying a new product (Finlayson) • Joy, nostalgia due to watching the brand's old content on streaming services (Disney) • Excitement, admiration and stress-relief due to success of the brand & practicality of products (Apple) aesthetic attraction, comfort (Adidas) • Excitement, expecting feeling, aesthetic attraction (Patagonia & Haglöfs) • Functional, caring (Nordea), relaxed, innovative, and inspiring due to being a local business (Fingersoft) • Happiness, satisfaction (The nu company), joy, excitement during games (SV Werder Bremen) • Positiveness due to functionality (Volkswagen), enjoyment, excitement (FC Bayern Munich) • Good feeling, enjoyment (YouTube), excitement, enthusiasm (Waves) • Satisfaction and joy due to great taste (Fazer), trustfulness due to knowing what to expect from their products (Apple) • Healthiness, energizing (Jungle Juice Bar & Foodin), responsibility, good feeling due to supporting a good cause (Halla x Halla) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrespect, hate, annoyance due to not reacting to defects and feedback from the public (Valve), conflicting, negative and disappointed due to bad decisions, communication and managerial actions (ENCE) • Loathing, confused, surprised due to actions that are against the respondent's values (Nestle) • Anger, hate, annoyance due to actions and communication that are against the respondent's values (Donald Trump), rage, frustration, annoyance due to hypocrisy and unethical actions (Oatly) • Disliking, repulsion due to non-sustainable consumption culture (Zara), antipathy, negativity due to undemocratic governing and discrimination of human rights (Vladimir Putin) • Abused, irrespective due to useless services and not knowing how personal information is used (Facebook), negativity, confusion, amazement due to bad PR, lying, manipulating reviews and illegality (Robinhood) • Hate, disappointment, anger due to unhealthy products and greenwashing (McDonald's) • Hate, annoyance, amusement, shared sense of shame due to the selected branding strategy (Huono Äiti) • Hate, disappointment due to greediness and carelessness towards the quality of games (EA) • Anger, unreal feeling due to publishing misleading content and public provoking (Maria Nordin & Päivän Byrokraatti) • Disinterest, ignorance, annoyance due to image processing and unnatural content (Sara Sieppi), negativity due to the brand's managerial actions (e.g., suing a citizen who published material of the company's pig transportation) (HK)

As the final question of this theme, the respondents were asked to describe how other people's actions and presence in online channels affected their personal brand relationships. Some key answers to this question are presented with the following quotes:

R1: "It affects subconsciously. (--) If I hear something negative about the brand that I am following, I feel the need to go and see for myself if the allegations are right. (--) similarly, if some brand's popularity is bursting from many different directions, it creates the feeling that they must be doing something right. (--) but I always tend to find out myself first if that is the case (--)"

R2: "(--) Seeing what other people think of the brand through likes, comments, or seeing the number of followers a brand has, I think it enhances the initial judgement what a person has."

R3: "Product reviews from others do affect my purchase decisions. (--) then again, other people's personal opinions online do not affect me whatsoever (--)"

All in all, this theme was set to designate what the relational drivers contributing to polarized consumer emotions and opinions are. The title, relational drivers, refers to the different aspects in consumer-brand relationships that are linked with brand polarization. In a similar fashion with the previous theme, a summary table (table 7) was formed at the end of this chapter, which points out brand relationships' role in the formation of extreme positive or negative consumer opinions towards brands:

TABLE 7 Summary table of relational drivers

Summary table of relational drivers (Demonstrating brand relationship's role in driving polarized consumer opinions)			
Personal brand relationships described by respondents	Literature support	Author & year	Descriptive statement from theoretical framework
Relationships on loved brands:			
R4: " <i>(--) they are also very down-to-earth and close to nature, which is obviously trendy nowadays, but those are the kind of values I wish to favour</i> "	✓	Fetscherin et al. (2019)	→ Consumers' emotions about brands determine their thinking, attitude, perception, and their general tendency of supporting or avoiding them
R9: " <i>I endorse the brand forward by mirroring it to my own experiences (-)</i> "	✓	Wallace et al., (2014); Karjaluoto et al. (2016)	→ A person's strongly positive consumer-brand relationship can induce other customers to also disseminate positive WOM to manifold audiences through diverse channels of communication
R10: " <i>It is easy to relate to them and kind of embrace their products (-)</i> "	✓	Karjaluoto et al. (2016)	→ The usage of a specific brand, along with signaling love towards it enables a way of social self-expressing for consumers
R6: " <i>(-) I feel like this is like my brand, or the one I'm supporting</i> "	✓	Batra et al. (2012, p. 5)	→ " <i>Shared history can give the loved brand an important place in the respondent's personal identity narrative</i> "
R2: " <i>It is a brand that has been in my life since I was little</i> "	✓		
Relationships on hated brands:			
R1: " <i>I have paid for their product, so I'm expecting developments to the publicly stated defects (-)</i> "	✓	Aurier & Gilles Séré (2012)	→ For the sake of showing loyal attitude towards a brand, consumers expect devotion and fostering of their own well-being from the brands in return
R9: " <i>Their actions, that I find totally absurd, just deepen my principles and make me hope I do not have to be in any connection with them</i> "	✓	Park C., Eisingerich & Park J. (2013)	→ When a consumer feels entirely disinterested about a brand, he or she might choose not to form any sort of relationship with it
R7: " <i>Basically I do not have any rational reason to hate them, it just comes from how the brand is built (-)</i> "	✓	Zhang & Laroche (2020)	→ The authors pinpointed consumers' personalities, perceived "special meanings", or cultural backgrounds as other affective reasons for consumer-related brand hate development

4.1.4 Experiential drivers

The fourth theme of the interview concentrated on brand experience and its role in the formation of passionate consumer opinions regarding brands. As mentioned by Velotsou & Delgado-Ballester (2018), the consumer expectations today are more and more directed towards the different hedonistic and utilitarian experiences brands are able to provide customers with. Consequently, the findings obtained with this theme of the interview were labelled as experiential drivers.

At first, the respondents were inquired which kind of experiences their selected loved and hated brands provide them with. For the loved brands, the findings showed that when it came to especially sports and electronic sports brands, the respondents described the fan experiences, such as being excited and entertained to cheer for the teams, social gatherings, and relaxed viewing experiences on one's spare time to be the most meaningful. However, another key contributor to the respondents' brand experience in this context was to eagerly follow the individual players of the teams, who had established their own human brands outside of the team brand. Other revealed key experiences were that the respondents experienced e.g., inspiration when purchasing the brands' items, convenience of daily living and exercising when using these brands, experiences of succeeding and joy in free-time hobbies, fluency in the services of the brand, experiences of making a difference through consumption choices, forming social events around their loved brands, learning new things and seeking information via the brand's services, investing in one's own health via the brands products, and acting responsibly through supporting the brand.

As for the negative brands, the respondents had experienced e.g., incoherent signals from the brand, negative effects on moods when reading about the brands, disappointment on the brands' actions, stressful and unsettled atmosphere in the brand's facilities, experiences of amusement due to reading about the brands' bad actions, as well as moments of collective joking about the negative brands. Furthermore, a common statement from many respondents was that with the hated brands, the experiences were non-existent due to intentional avoiding of such brands.

After clarifying the general brand experiences of the respondents, another objective of this theme was to acquire information about the online brand experiences of the sample group. Hence, the next question utilized a few key terms that had surfaced in the literature review of online brand experience. The respondents were asked to describe the influence of the following online factors to their personal online brand experience: 1) usability 2) brand's visual design 3) content purpose 4) interactivity and 5) communality. The following quotes indicate the respondents' common opinions regarding usability in the online channels:

R3: "All channels need to function fluently and quickly. (--) It feels like in the current world's time nobody really has time to wait, and all information must be accessed immediately... So, the better those (fluency and speed of use) are, the more positive the experience is."

R6: “(--) they (online channels) should be easy to navigate. I want to find what I’m looking for, and if I cannot find it, I’m not satisfied.”

Next, the role of brands’ visual design in creating online brand experience was described as follows by the participants:

R7: “The impact is actually quite big. (--) even if the visual design is not perfect, but it looks so that time and effort are put into creating it, it just creates a credible mental image (of the brand).”

R4: “It is essentially important what kind of aesthetical experience there is, like, if it pleases the eye. (--) but simultaneously, it needs to connect somehow to some reasonable content. (--) if those two things meet, then there is something particularly tempting (--)”

Opinions about the purpose of the content were, in turn, considered followingly:

R1: “Very strong effect. (--) the audiovisuality, but also written text that you see in social media channels, live streams, video services, and just everywhere online (--) That is just how it is nowadays - it is important that those things are versatile, and that the quality is high.”

R5: “Very big (effect) if the brand’s content is something more than just storytelling. (--) if all the storytelling has some real foundations, like, if I am seeing that the brand is doing something societally meaningful, that gives a good feeling.”

The role of interactivity in the formation of online brand experience was contemplated by some respondents along these lines:

R2: “(--) if the brand is commenting or thanking the customer for something, or just pays some attention to a customer through interaction, of course it creates a positive feeling that the brand actually cares (--) so interaction verifies that.”

R1: “(--) especially now during the corona-pandemic, if there has been some chance to somehow get to know the organisation more (ENCE) in some of their accounts (--) like, seeing the players and seeing them chatting there, this kind of interaction has been really important for me. (--) like, it would not be of that much importance in the outside world, but especially now on the internet, it is.”

Finally, the role of communality was speculated by some respondents in the following terms:

R2: “If there is some communality, for example, people are sharing tips (--) (--) or people discuss the brand and share experiences, it can enhance one’s image about the brand, if such communality shows on the web.”

R7: “There’s a big influence I would say. (--) they (FC Bayern Munich) include their fan community a lot, which just shows their appreciation towards the fans. (--) even as a brand that is worth billions, they still manage to notice those kind of things (--)”

As the final part of this theme, a table containing a summary of the experiential drivers was formulated to suggest brand experience’s linkage with intense and

polarized poles of consumer opinions towards brands. The composed summary of the experiential drivers is exhibited below in table 8:

TABLE 8 Summary table of experiential drivers

Summary table of experiential drivers (Demonstrating brand experience's role in driving polarized consumer opinions)			
Personal brand experiences described by respondents	Literature support	Author & year	Descriptive statement from theoretical framework
<i>Positively affecting experiences:</i>			
R9: "If an influencer who I trust endorses e.g., some flax towel, I might also praise it forward to my friends by saying that I have heard this brand's products are really good (-)"	✓	Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester (2018)	→ Diverse senses are involved in people's interaction and evaluation regarding brands, and the need of co-creating experiences, as well as influencing others' perceptions about brands by e.g., sharing stories is typical among consumers
R7: "I follow them (FC Bayern Munich), and I run into their content constantly on my social media feed, which highly affects my stance also"	✓	Tsai et al. (2012)	→ To enhance the online brand experience in eyes of consumers, a vital amount of activity is needed to increment the experienced value and appeal of a brand page
R10: "For Halla x Halla, my interest came purely from their visuality (-) I just saw them in social media and thought to myself: what is this brand (-)"	✓	Simon et al. (2013)	→ To capture the focus and curiosity of users, the design of a brand page should be visually distinctive
R8: "It (YouTube) is a learning platform for me, but I also use it for many other purposes"	✓	Simon et al. (2013)	→ Users online are not just seeking to be entertained. Instead, they also expect to be intellectually stimulated by educating and informative content
<i>Negatively affecting experiences:</i>			
R6: "(-) they (online channels) should be easy to navigate. I want to find what I'm looking for, and if I cannot find it, I am not satisfied"	✓	Simon et al. (2013)	→ Usability is about how intuitively and effortlessly a person learns to use, and is able to interact with an online page of a brand
R1: "If it is extremely hard to find information about the team or about their players and so on, it becomes pretty hard to make yourself a fan of that team"	✓		
R5: "Experientially it (Facebook) barely offers me anything anymore. (-) I would describe it as an exercise ball in the closet that I never use"	✓	Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester (2018)	→ When consumers are reflecting brands, they no longer care about brands only as objects, but are rather interested in what kind of hedonistic or utilitarian experiences their preferred brands can provide them with

4.1.5 Communal drivers

The final theme of the interview aiming to discern the drivers of brand polarization focused on the concept of brand communities, which Brodie et al. (2013) characterized as forceful, interactive environments for engagement and endorsements between consumers. Brand communities were placed within the scope of studying brand polarization in this study, since the indications in the literature of polarization claimed groups to be more prone to come up with more extreme opinions and ideas (Burton et al., 2006). Additionally, the preceding authors studying brand polarization argued that *“people’s passion towards polarizing brands drives them to form community-like bonds”* (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019, 626). Thus, the objective of this theme was to separate the communal drivers that may advance polarized consumer opinions.

The first question of the theme inquired if there were any strong communities, or in turn, anti-communities formed around respondents selected loved and hated brands. The following quotes demonstrate which kind of formal or informal communities the respondents had witnessed around their loved brands:

R4: “These brands (Patagonia, Haglöfs) are mostly used in people’s hobby activities, so there are certainly some enthusiast-groups who are into extreme-sports.”

R1: “They (ENCE) created name for themselves globally, so from different countries, there are many fan communities. (--) those who stand for the brand, they often have the ENCE logo as their profile picture (in a gaming application Steam) and this way they want to message that they are part of the fanbase.”

R3: “If you just look at when Apple’s new iPhones are launched - those queues there are in front of stores all around the world... I think they have a very strong community.”

R5: “For Fingersoft, there is definitely this certain community that follows it. (--) maybe like the players, people interested about the game-industry, coders... Even the city of Oulu follows them because it is a really visible brand there.”

When it came to the hated brands, some evidence of either informal or formal communities, or in this case, “anti-communities” were specified followingly:

R2: “I think different organizations have actively raised awareness of the drawbacks of Nestlé - like Greenpeace, WWF, and other environmental organizations (--) so I think those would be the so-called anti-communities against Nestlé.”

R9: “By personally belonging to these kinds of opposer-groups (against Päivän Byrokraatti & Maria Nordin), I would say that the communities simply verify my opinions (--)”

R7: “There definitely is. In Ylilauta, (anonymous Finnish discussion forum) people talk about this Huono Äiti brand a lot, and basically laugh at it. It is like a third-party forum just filled with negative followers. So, this would be a good example of an anti-community.”

R8: “(--) there are these discussion chains, like tens of pages of **** affiliated with this whole brand (Electronic Arts), and the discussion of course gets so off the rails there.”

R5: “(--) only because of such communities, I am aware of what the situation currently is with for example Robinhood, so these communities spread tons of information. (--)
The whole Wall Street probably feels pure hate towards Robinhood right now (--)”

The next questions inquired the respondents’ observations on what kind of actions and behaviour takes place in these different types of communities, and how the respondents are affected by such communities personally. In the supportive communities, the key mentions were that particularly in sports and esports brand communities, people published frantic and positive comments, created activities and events, and expressed “all sorts of craziness” that was found compelling and uplifting according to some responses. Other key mentions regarding the supporter communities were that they offered new information to learn for the participants, affected people’s purchase decisions, verified people’s mental images of brands, provided tips and help for users who faced problems, offered discussion platforms about the different features of the brands, enabled the sharing of personal experiences, offered sense of belonging and fellowship to some extent, and simply produced entertainment through interesting content.

The witnessed behaviour in anti-communities, in turn, was mainly described as anonymous and faceless negativity in the comment sections, public criticizing towards the brands’ values, spreading of negative information, insulting of rival brands’ fans, aggressive behaviour, ironic comments, laughing and throwing dirt at brands, spreading of inappropriate and unfounded rumours, targeting of individuals who thought differently than the community, and opposing of unethicity and non-sustainability of brands.

The way all the positively and negatively inclined communities had affected the respondents personally is demonstrated with some differing quotes:

R10: “(--) If there’s like some HK hate group where they mock the brand, I’m not leaving their products on the shelf based on that (--)
in the end, my decision not to buy comes from my personal conclusion about the brand, how I see them, and how I have rationalized it to myself (--)”

R3: “I do not feel that they affect me personally.”

R4: “I think they can affect, if they bring forth something that I have not yet noticed or discovered myself. So, it is possible that they affect (--)”

R1: “Maybe not directly, but they steer me to find out more about the situation, if the allegations are true (--)
there are so many opinions on the internet, so you need to have source criticism (--)
so, they do not form my own opinion, but they keep me on track of things.”

R7: “They do affect, because I can say that I would have never heard about this brand (Huono Äiti) if I had not come across with such (anti-community) discussion. When I ended up reading it, those attitudes and opinions were transmitted to me, and that’s how my opinion about the brand is pretty much built.”

Finally, it was asked from the respondents if these communities had a different influence on different online platforms. Some of the key findings were stated followingly:

R1: "In Twitter you can retweet something with one click (--) if someone tweets a vivacious opinion, then all the sudden, a thousand other people have shared that opinion, which creates like a collective opinion in one direction or the other (--) In YouTube, the amount of likes and the comment section clearly indicates if people like it or not. (--) those two are the clearest visual channels where the liking or disliking of brands just flourishes (--)"

R8: "Facebook must be the worst, as so many people still use it. (--) everything just comes to people's attention easily there, and you can also go and directly comment on some community's feed (--) I can guarantee that you don't have to scroll too far to find the first negative comment there (--)"

R6: "I would say the strongest aggressive behaviour is on Facebook (--) there are a lot of people just saying stupid comments and trying to provoke, and usually it's not really fact driven (--)"

R9: "I think there's more group-lynching especially on Twitter, but also cases where people defend something collectively (--)"

In a similar fashion with the preceding themes, a summary table was composed to demonstrate brand communities' role in the formation of polarized consumer opinions about brands. Hence, the communal drivers contributing to the brand polarization effect are drawn together below in table 9:

TABLE 9 Summary table of communal drivers

Summary table of communal drivers (Demonstrating brand communities' role in driving polarized consumer opinions)			
Descriptions of brand communities by respondents	Literature support	Author & year	Descriptive statement from theoretical framework
Supportive communities' effects:			
R3: "Product reviews (in communities) in one direction or the other - those do affect my purchase decisions"	✓	Bao (2017)	→ Consumers' purchase decisions are increasingly influenced by a networking society where other people's opinions, WOM and recommendations are well regarded
R2: "(communities) can confirm personal views. (-) people share information and experiences, and discuss there (-)"	✓	Bao (2017)	→ Brand communities have grown into central places for consumers to find information about brands, to look for products and to communicate interactively with one another
R4: "(-) these extreme-sport enthusiasts, they raise awareness of the brands' impact and act as kind of ambassadors (-) (-) they raise their visibility, but also their environmental values and their acts on the world's development"	✓	Tsai et al. (2012); Thompson & Sinha (2008)	→ Participation increases customers' tendency to approve a new product from a brand they favor, and simultaneously reduces the tendency to take on new products from other competitive brands
Anti-communities' effects:			
R6: "With McDonald's, I am more in the anti-community myself. So then of course it is affecting me, because they share the same values"	✓	Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019, p. 626)	→ "People's passion towards polarizing brands drives them to form community-like bonds"
R7: "I would have never heard about this brand (Huono Äiti) if I had not come across with such (anti-community) discussion. (-) those attitudes and opinions were transmitted to me, and that's how my opinion about the brand is pretty much built"	✓	Bao (2017)	→ The community's user-generated content, such as evaluations and feedback from others, are commonly used as references
R8: "(-) there are these discussion chains, like tens of pages of **** affiliated with this whole brand (EA), and the discussion of course gets so off the rails there (-)"	✓	Dessart et al. (2015)	→ OBC engagement can also be distinguished well on a cognitive level, as OBC members actively devote their time and attention to the brand community, and additionally, absorb the manifold activities, information and content that is shared within the community
		Brodie et al. (2013)	→ eWOM's effects in brand communities are venerable, as suggestions from consumer to another are received free of charge and they may disseminate swiftly both inside and outside the boundaries of a brand community

4.2 Consumer-identified meanings of brand polarization

While the first five interview themes aimed to bring forth the identified drivers of extreme consumer positivity and negativity towards brands in relation to brand attitude, -relationships, -experiences and -communities, and centred on producing meaningful information in that regard, the sixth final theme focused on specifying what meanings the respondents give to actual brand polarization. The last theme was different from the other themes so that this time, the respondents were asked to describe in their own words what makes a polarizing brand (that many people both love and hate simultaneously). As mentioned earlier in this study, the identification of the drivers was approached so that the respondents could discuss their loved and hated brands separately, as this approach was sufficient for designating the various, single reasons that influence the evoking of extreme consumer emotions and opinions. Thus, inquiring this information was relevant to better understand why people's opinions and attitudes may become polarized towards brands, but it did not provide a full response to what creates a truly polarizing brand that seizes clearly divided groups of lovers and haters at the same time. Hence, the respondents outlined certain differing reasons, but also some common divisors of truly polarizing brands in the following way:

R8: "First of all, the brand needs to be big. The bigger it is, the more people start to divide. (--) usually when there are so many customers, you get the image of such company that there is nothing personal involved anymore, it just feels like their service is coming from an assembly line, so to speak. Maybe that can create this phenomenon."

R10: "Being a very big operator, I think, since they have so many customers, such a big status, and everybody knows them (--)"

R6: "I think it is the brands who are like active on a controversial topic. Like McDonald's fast food - it has positive sides, but also strongly negative aspects. And I think the same thing is happening with like the car industry or oil production or something like this, those are very controversial fields (--)"

R2: "Controversial companies. Controversy is something that creates it (--)"

R5: "Probably brands that get involved societally into some controversial themes."

R1: "People follow it based on the brand's sensational communication, or their controversial actions. (--) then, both positive and negative mental images drive people at the brand, and this way the number of followers of such brand remains constant."

R9: "The brand has one clear opinion that they support and push forward (--) and they are not ready to make compromises on that (--)"

R7: "(--) When there is a clear, sharp edge that the brand proceeds with (--) something they use to strive forward their marketing (--)"

R4: "There is usually something that evokes a person to think in a new way (--)"

R3: "If a brand represents some specific values, I think that can cause very strong supportive reactions in some people, but opposing reactions in other people (--)"

4.2.1 Benefits and risks of brands' polarizing nature

The next question of the final theme asked the respondents to reflect what benefits a polarizing brand can achieve with such divisive status and nature. Due to the broadness of the question, it was further clarified to some respondents to reflect what possible benefits there are for polarizing brands in terms of e.g., visibility, marketing, and customer segments. Some of the varying benefits were described followingly:

R6: "I think they can lead a discussion of a topic (--) or have like open discussions about problems. (--) and maybe they can get a lot of customers because of the big interest they create with their brand."

R5: "They get media presence. It is like effective content-marketing. (--) and probably they could get a lot of statistics on specifically what kind of people like their brand, what are the customers like, and what interests them (--)"

R7: "Even bad publicity is still publicity, so even if many people hate a brand, it has at least managed to raise into people's awareness."

R4: "It creates reactions in people, and that way, gives them awareness. (--) if people have emotions about the brand, it increases their overall awareness and possibly the consumption towards the brand."

R9: "It raises confrontation, discussion, and interest in people. (--) if some love the brand and some hate it, people want to find out why."

R3: "Many benefits, if they are just able to conversate with the opposing side. (--) (--) For example, if Oatly would recognize that there are people like me who are highly irritated about their anti-milk campaign, I really hope that they could listen to the feedback and stop creating such advertising. (--) so, it could be a great resource for the brand to realize why some people experience them negatively in order to turn the opposers' heads."

"(--) It is also said that all publicity is good publicity, in a way. (--) Some companies' tactic is to gain visibility through provoking (--) it creates a fuss, and then the mass-news media reports about it, so basically, they get free promotion."

Next, the respondents were asked to contemplate what are the risks for a brand that has a polarizing nature. The different risks were pointed out as follows:

R2: "There is a certain risk that they cannot really stay in control of how people see them. (--) a lot of sudden negativity can ruin their business, and in turn, a lot of sudden positivity can boost the brand, their turnover, etc. (--) There is also a risk on the employer-side (--) like, do people even want to work for them, if the brand is being continuously negatively discussed in e.g., social media (--) this can affect their profitability, actions and image, if they cannot get professional people there (--)"

R6: "If the brand is polarized, it can end up into the medias, and get a really bad reputation. This of course can make the customers leave the brand, and in general, get them in trouble (--)"

R9: "A risk is to basically cut off the whole hater-side of the brand. (--) then, there is also the risk that the people who like them may change their minds too. (--) so, there are increased chances to fail (--)"

R10: "It is like a scale than can swing strongly from one side to the other, if the brand's image is divided (--)"

R5: "There is a risk if they say something controversial (--) if they publish statements about divisive matters, people might get upset and stop following or being a customer to them (--) so they need to really precisely consider what they state (--) what kind of values they pursue, because those things can have disastrous effects."

R1: "Their sales may drop if the masses aren't satisfied with the brand. That is one very concrete risk (--)"

R7: "The biggest risk I see is that it creates an ideology that people would not, under any circumstances, buy their products (--)"

R8: "The risk can be such that if you see people talking about them negatively, that opinion might start to grow on you, and suddenly you agree on the negative things."

At the very end of the interview, the respondents were inquired if there was anything they wanted to add to the discussion of such phenomenon where modern brands receive love and hate simultaneously from customers. The key quotes regarding this matter are shown below:

R1: "Especially in the online culture it is more and more common that the brand is somehow distinctive, instead of just being stable. It probably has something to do with staying relevant, if the brand has different viewpoints and it creates division in terms of opinions."

R3: "I believe that social media feeds this polarization as a phenomenon quite much, because it does not just polarize brands, but also like the society, politics, and so on (--)"

R4: "The discussion nowadays is much bolder and more interactive in online and social media channels (--) so maybe people's voices become more heard through the current platforms."

R9: "Maybe the internet and social media have provided a platform for all this. Before, most discussions probably remained in smaller circles as people were not so closely in connection with each other, so I think this phenomenon results from that."

R10: "In social medias, maybe the opinions and decisions stem more from emotions than reasoning for many people (--)"

R2: "If people are lacking media literacy, perhaps the social media discussions can falsify or increase polarization towards brands."

4.2.2 Divisive drivers

Although the primary focus of the last interview theme was to capture which meanings the respondents give to brand polarization in the true sense of the term, one final summary table was formed to demonstrate what drives consumers to express intensely divided emotions and opinions towards a specific brand simultaneously. Thus, the last summary table, captioned as divisive drivers, connects the theories of polarization with the respondents' divided views regarding polarized brands, and represents an additional, overarching theme that derived

from the empirical findings of the study. The divisive drivers are presented below in table 10:

TABLE 10 Summary table of divisive drivers

Summary table of divisive drivers (Demonstrating the driving reasons for consumer opinions to become divided towards polarizing brands)			
Meanings of polarizing brands by respondents	Literature support	Author & year	Descriptive statement from theoretical framework
R5: <i>"I think it relates to this thought-process that the brand is something that a person him/herself desires to be (--)"</i>	✓	Myers & Lamm (1976)	→ Polarization is transference towards a favored direction
R4: <i>"(--) There is usually something that evokes a person to think in a new way (--)"</i>	✓	Eagly (1974); Sears (1969)	→ Increased information tends to polarize opinions
R9: <i>"The brand has one clear opinion that they support and push forward (-- and they are not ready to make compromises on that (--)"</i>	✓	Burton et al. (2006)	→ Informational influence is commonly assumed to be a strong driver for a group's thinking to shift towards extreme
R8: <i>"(--) The brand needs to be big. The bigger it is, the more people start to divide"</i>	✓	Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019)	→ Brand polarization creates plain distinction between people who love or hate a specific brand
R4: <i>"The discussion nowadays is much bolder and more interactive in online and social media channels"</i>	✓	Dandekar et al. (2013)	→ A large interactivity of similar-minded people leads to polarization
R10: <i>"In social medias, maybe the opinions and decisions stem more from emotions than reasoning for many people (--)"</i>	✓	Dandekar et al. (2013)	→ Along with the radio and news broadcasts, the growth of the internet's popularity has had an increasing influence on polarization
R1: <i>"All publicity probably brings, at least to some extent, more revenue and growth (to a polarized brand) (-- that is in a way, a good thing, but also risky (--)"</i>	✓	Evans (2017)	→ The online environment offers favorable surroundings for polarization to escalate
R3: <i>"(A polarizing brand) is not going get those people's money who find it negative. (-- for example, at least half of the Americans are probably never going to vote for Donald Trump, or even visit his real-estates (--)"</i>	✓	Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019)	→ Due to their polarized positioning, polarizing brands achieve fair benefit in terms of grasping consumer groups and consumers individually, especially if "all publicity is good publicity"
	✓	Leone (1996, p. 383)	→ Strongly developed schemas may have increasing effects on attitude polarization, because they strengthen the "evaluative consistency of relevant beliefs"

5 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the research findings are being discussed and further reflected within the context of the study. Moreover, this chapter contains the analysing of the results with the three selected approaches: thematic analysis, interpretation and analytic generalizing. In other words, each of the key concepts that were converted into overarching themes in the findings chapter are explicated and analysed more profoundly by interpreting their connections with the empirical findings of the study. Hence, as stated by Adams et al. (2014), this chapter aims to seek and explain different relations and patterns which are of assistance in explaining the focal phenomenon of the study, brand polarization. Along with the analysing process, another aims of this chapter are to carefully demonstrate generalizability of the results to this field of study through inductive and reasonable explanations (Polit & Beck, 2010), and to present a synthesis that filters the respondents' views through the theories, aims and objectives of this research project (Drisko, 2020).

5.1 Theoretical contributions

In this study, brand polarization was approached by placing certain key concepts from the literature of brand management and psychology under the radius of the focal phenomenon. As a result of preliminary desk research, the concepts of polarization, brand attitude, brand relationships, brand love, brand hate, brand experience and brand communities were selected for further reviewing, as each of them displayed promising interlacing with brand polarization: a concept which according to prior scholars yet remains scarcely defined (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019; Mafael et al., 2016). Demonstrating how the different effects of the key concepts contribute to the formation of consumer-perceived polarization towards brands was carried out by interviewing a carefully selected sample group with a fitting angle of incidence. The respondents were inquired to thoroughly reflect their brand loving and hating, the manifold effects of brand attitudes, -experiences, -relationships, and -communities, and also to consider meanings of brand polarization in the literal sense of the term.

5.1.1 Development of brand polarization among consumers

Brand love and hate

As the first contribution of identifying the drivers of brand polarization, this study explored the singular reasons that make consumers love and hate specific brands. This approach is rationalized with reference to Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019), who suggested that a stronger validating and operationalizing of brand

polarization's dimensions is in place, and that the phenomenon's intersection with the concepts of brand love and hate requires more reviewing (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

Thus, the first findings chapter, captioned as conventional drivers, revealed that the formation of consumers' brand loving and hating was facilitated often by three main sources: by the brand, by the individual, or by the media. Many of the subjective reasons for positively polarized consumer opinions (e.g., brands' skyrocketing success, being the best in the market, favouring the brand's aligned values, feelings of nostalgia, etc.) showed factual connections with various prior studies examining brand love. For instance, Karjaluoto et al. (2016) argued that consumers indicate their self-expression through brand usage and expression of love towards specific brands, while Batra et al. (2012) emphasized that brand love was received by brands that were perceived "the best possible" by consumers. Moreover, the empirical findings of this study showed that with certain brands (i.e., Disney) the perceived brand loving had derived from viewing the brand's content since early childhood. Such element of brand loving was verified by Bairrada (2018), who claimed that sharing a meaningful history with a brand tends to unify a loved brand as a part of the person's identity.

On the opposite side, the extracted subjective reasons for negatively polarized consumer opinions (e.g., questionable managerial practices, failed service, feeling of being let down and cheated, etc.) also indicated various connections with the preceding literature of brand hate. For example, Gregoire et al. (2009) claimed that brand hate stems from the craving for vengeance caused specifically by the feeling of being let down, while Zhang & Laroche (2020) pinpointed e.g., dissatisfaction towards brands' staff and marketing strategies, unpleasing quality of brands' products and services, as well as patronizing nature of brands as driving reasons of brand hate. Moreover, Kucuk (2019) suggested that the feelings of shame and repulsion, as well as disrespect and anger were undisputed in cases of brand hating. Similar feelings were described repeatedly also in this study, as the respondents described their personal reasons for brand hating.

In sum, it is evident that the various drivers of brand loving and hating convert to significant, underlying drivers of brand polarization amidst consumers, as polarized brands capture both, brand lovers and haters, and seize their feelings, as well as their reasoning (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). The extracted reasons for brand love and brand hate in this research context are diverse, but as exhibited in table 4 of the findings chapter, it could be interpreted that either the brand, the individual itself or the media can facilitate brand loving and hating in a number of ways. Thus, the chapter containing the conventional drivers provided a wide range of driving reasons for brand loving and hating amongst modern, brand-conscious consumers. Furthermore, as this study also examined the online context's role in the development of the drivers of brand polarization, a firm deduction can be made that the online environment induces widescale drivers of brand loving and hating in the current era.

Brand attitude

The second contribution of the study was to bring forth brand attitude's role in the development of brand polarization. Brand attitude has been previously used to actualize brand polarization, since the concept strongly affiliates with brand-related judgements and consumers' behavioural desires (Mafael et al., 2016). Moreover, as the early scholars (Myers & Lamm, 1976) characterized the term polarization mainly as an attitude shift and manoeuvred it by referring to early attitude theories (Eagly, 1974; Sears, 1969; Eisinger & Mills, 1968), examining brand attitude in the context of this study was well-grounded.

The attitudinal drivers chapter exposed fairly strong connections between consumers' attitudinal traits and their intense opinions of brands. When exemplifying their personal brand attitudes, the sample group described their loved brands as e.g., their first choices, showed high interest to follow these brands due to their success, expressed e.g., pride and loyalty for their loved brands, and emphasized friends' and relatives' attitudes to be meaningful to them, among other things. In sum, the study findings showed several touchpoints with the theories of brand attitude and attitude polarization. As stated by Leone (1996), a polarized attitude of a person results from a developed schema, which is a mental structure that serves as an originator for attitude-associated perceptions. Furthermore, Nayeem et al. (2019) defined brand attitude as a thorough assessment about e.g., the brand's characteristics, benefits and performance. Based on these statements, it is reasonable to presume that a variety of consumers' attitudinal attributes contribute also to the development of brand polarization. As argued by Rossiter (2014), different buying motives play a key role in causing attitude shifts amongst consumers. Rossiter (2014) exemplified that e.g., transformational buying motives can elicit pride in consumers, if the brand succeeds in elevating a consumer's sense of belonging to an esteemed comparison group. As observed in the findings chapter, some respondents felt proud about being associated with their positively polarizing brands, which correlates with the prior implications by Rossiter (2014).

In turn, the described negative attitudes of the respondents, (e.g., negativity that causes avoiding of the brands' products and services, unwillingness to forgive a brand, and having unaligned values with a brand) also intersected with many of the brand attitude theories reviewed in this study. As stated by Bao (2017), holding a bad brand attitude towards a brand evidently reduces the usage of it. Nayeem et al. (2019) argued that brand attitude stands for the linked expectations and persistent beliefs people have about brands. Considering the findings of this study, Nayeem's (2019) statement is particularly true especially when such persistent beliefs are negatively inclined, as it came up repeatedly in the findings that single good acts by the hated brands could not fully remove the consumers' feelings of distrust and negativity towards them. Moreover, Platania et al. (2017) underlined certain behavioural consequences of brand hate to be for instance negatively oriented word of mouth and public criticizing on the web. The study respondents claimed that they were influenced by information provided by their

friends and inner circles, as well as by certain formal and informal communities on the web. Thus, it is safe to suggest that the attitudes of other people do affect consumers' brand attitudes in certain scenarios. This observation was verified also by Howard & Gengler (2001, 198) who argued that other people's emotions can affect the judgements of a person through "*attitudinal biasing via contagion effects*", and by Burton et al. (2006), who claimed that interpersonal comparisons are strongly influential drivers of attitude shifts in specific surroundings.

Based on the empirical findings and the reviewed literature, this study underlines that brand attitude plays an integral part in the formation of brand polarization amidst modern consumers. The different intrinsic and extrinsic attitudinal drivers evidently steer consumers' opinions about brands and cause them to shift and divide in various instances. As noted by Mafael et al. (2016), the concept of brand attitude is specifically fitting for exploring the separate poles of consumer opinions towards brands, which this study also affirms. Moreover, the findings confirmed that the current online channels and social media discussions have their own undisputed effects on modern consumers' attitudes towards brands.

Brand relationships

The third key concept leveraged in this study was brand relationships. Brand relationships determine consumers' general tendency of supporting or avoiding a brand (Fetscherin et al., 2019), which makes it a salient concept to look into when studying brand polarization – a phenomenon that creates plain distinction between lovers and haters of a brand (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

The relational drivers presented in the findings chapter confirmed brand relationships' relevance on this subject. For instance, Aurier & Gilles Séré (2012) stated that consumers expect devotion and fostering of their own well-being from brands for the sake showing loyalty towards them. The empirical findings showed that brands who did not foster their relationship with consumers whatsoever ended up as hated brands (e.g., Valve, a gaming-industry brand that did not fix the defects of their products despite public complaints). The findings also revealed instances where the consumers had endorsed their loved brands to their friends by mirroring their personal experiences forward. These findings correspond with prior studies claiming that strong positive brand relationships can induce customers to disseminate positive word-of-mouth to manifold audiences, through diverse communication channels (Wallace et al., 2014; Karjaluoto et al., 2016). The findings also showed some intriguing aspects of consumers' relationships with their hated brands: It came up oftentimes in the responses that some customers did not want to have anything to do with the brands they felt hate for. Such state where a consumer feels entirely disinterested about a brand is called brand indifference (Park et al., 2013), which Fetscherin et al. (2019) described as one of the most unfavourable positions for a brand to be placed in.

Consequently, this study suggests that the concept of brand relationships, as well as its sub-concepts (brand love and brand hate) become essential for scholars who examine brand polarization. The findings chapter also provided key implications on how the online environment affects modern consumer-brand relationships. As stated by Sternberg (1986), powerful positive and negative relationships with brands are driven by passion, and when it comes to brand polarization, passionate expression of emotions arises on both sides - among the lovers and haters (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

Brand experience

The fourth key concept explored in this research setting was brand experience. As stated by prior scholars, modern consumers are increasingly looking for experiential features of products when making purchase decisions (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester (2018) agreed that modern consumers' expectations are more and more directed to what kind of utilitarian and hedonistic experiences brands are able to offer. Hence, as particularly emotional experiences stir up brand differentiation (Brakus et al., 2009), brand experience becomes a central concept when studying brand polarization - a phenomenon where extreme emotions towards brands are of the essence.

The findings chapter of experiential drivers displayed firm connections between the respondents' personal brand experiences and their polarized views towards brands. For example, Facebook was perceived as a hated brand by one respondent due to the brand's shady policies regarding users' personal information, but also because it could not offer any experiential stimulus for the respondent anymore. This finding is compatible with the statement that experiences have developed into key components for interpreting how consumers view, evaluate and react to brands (Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018). Moreover, when considering the brand experiences that take place in the online environment, one respondent pointed out that his brand love towards YouTube had derived from the brand's versatility as a learning platform. This corresponds with a notion by Simon et al. (2013) that users also expect to be intellectually stimulated by educating and informative content, as this activates the cognitive dimension of their online brand experience. The findings also revealed that poorly functioning brand pages resulted in downright dissatisfaction towards brands among the respondents. This finding relates to the usability dimension of online brand experience, which according to Simon et al. (2013) captures the utilitarian use of a brand page. In other words, the better the usability of brand pages, the more satisfied the users are with such brands.

In summary, this study highlights the importance of brand experience, as well as online brand experience for researchers examining brand polarization. As diverse senses are involved in people's evaluation regarding brands (Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018), particularly the online brand experiences of users are a central area of focus for future scholars who aim to extend their understanding of polarized consumer opinions.

Brand communities

The fifth key concept integrated in the interpretation of the brand polarization phenomenon was brand communities. The idea to review brand communities more profoundly within the context of this study is rationalized with a quote from prior scholars researching brand polarization, who argued that “*people’s passion towards polarizing brands drives them to form community-like bonds*” (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019, 626). Thus, as brand communities are forceful, interactive environments for engagement and endorsements between consumers (Brodie et al., 2013) and they have grown into central places for consumers to find information about brands (Bao, 2017), there are reasonable grounds to explore brand communities’ contributions in the development of brand polarization among consumers.

In the findings of this study, the communal drivers section disclosed different effects of informal and formal communities on consumers’ brand loving and hating. In one respondent’s case, the perceived brand hate had developed based on reading an anonymous discussion forum where a brand (Huono Äiti) was discussed with a collective, negative tone by the users. The respondent pointed out in the interview that the informal anti-community’s negative messages were transmitted to him and thus, triggered his initial brand hating. As Dessart et al. (2015) noted, one outcome of online brand community engagement is to absorb the content, activities and information that is shared within the community, which was evident in this particular study finding. Moreover, it was agreed by some of the study respondents that communities can confirm personal views. For example, one respondent’s brand hate towards Nestlé had derived from the brand’s unethical actions. The respondent agreed that the brand hating had enhanced, as the brand’s actions were also publicly criticized by different environmental communities. This finding correlates with Bao’s (2017) statement that communities’ user-generated content, feedback and evaluations from other people are commonly used as references among consumers. Based on the study findings, communities are at least able to verify both, positively and negatively polarized consumer opinions, although the actual brand loving and hating ultimately derives from subjective motives and judgements of individuals.

In consequence, this study proposes that brand communities, and especially communities existing in different online channels can have major consequences on extremifying consumer opinions towards brands. As the information and suggestions from other consumers can disseminate swiftly inside and outside the boundaries of brand communities (Brodie et al., 2013), this likely creates so called “echo-chambers” where views tend to polarize among like-minded individuals (Bessi et al., 2016).

Polarization

For the purpose of better understanding brand polarization, the concept of mere polarization was also reviewed within the theoretical framework of this study. After all, polarization is a widely recognized phenomenon in the field of psychology, and being the predecessor of the more recently conceptualized brand polarization, it becomes a fundamental concept to examine in this study.

Although the respondents were inquired mainly brand-related questions, the findings showed strong similarities with the early theories of polarization addressed in different articles of social- and consumer psychology. For example, a finding that brand communities share information, and can therefore verify one's opinions, relates directly to observations by Burton et al. (2006) that informational influence and interpersonal comparisons are commonly assumed as strong drivers of group- and attitude polarization. Furthermore, the attitudinal drivers -chapter of this study showed that most respondents were influenced by the opinions of their friends, relatives and inner circles, as they perceived these people as trustworthy sources. This finding is consistent with the theory of Myers & Lamm (1976) about group-induced attitude change, where e.g., social motivations, verbalized arguments and received information from others may result in attitude shifts among individuals.

5.1.2 Interpretive synthesis of the identified drivers

Consequently, to identify the prominent drivers of brand polarization and to extend the conceptualization of the focal phenomenon, each theoretical concept was revised, analysed and interpreted in comparison with the findings of this study. As a result of the analysis, the empirical and theoretical findings were synthesized into a conceptual framework to illustrate the formation of brand polarization through its distinct drivers.

According to Drisko (2020), forming a synthesis of manifold qualitative research studies is a useful approach to expand insights and theories. The synthesizing approach utilized in this study was interpretive synthesizing, which Drisko (2020) described as a technique that commonly looks to reinforce or improve preceding theories and conceptualizations. In other words, an interpretive synthesis aims to infer the findings of previous qualitative works, and this method can be implemented for interpreting both, larger or smaller parts of prior research efforts (Drisko, 2020). The specific synthesizing technique applied to this study was line of argument -synthesis (LOA), in which the interpretations are formed in order to connect and explicate a group of parts (Thomas & Barnett-Page, 2009). According to Drisko (2020), forming several lines of arguments offers researchers miscellaneous approaches of comprehending the same area of study. Moreover, the LOA synthesis may generate an overarching definition of a phenomenon across different researches and study settings. If the findings of the synthesized studies are incommensurable, the LOA synthesis requires the constructing of a multi-dimensional model of the differing results regarding the same

topic (Drisko, 2020). Hence, a conceptual model was construed for this study to demonstrate the identified drivers of brand polarization as separate, synthetic constructs, which transform into synthesizing arguments of how brand polarization is developed (Thomas & Barnett-Page, 2009). The interpretive synthesis is presented below in figure 7:

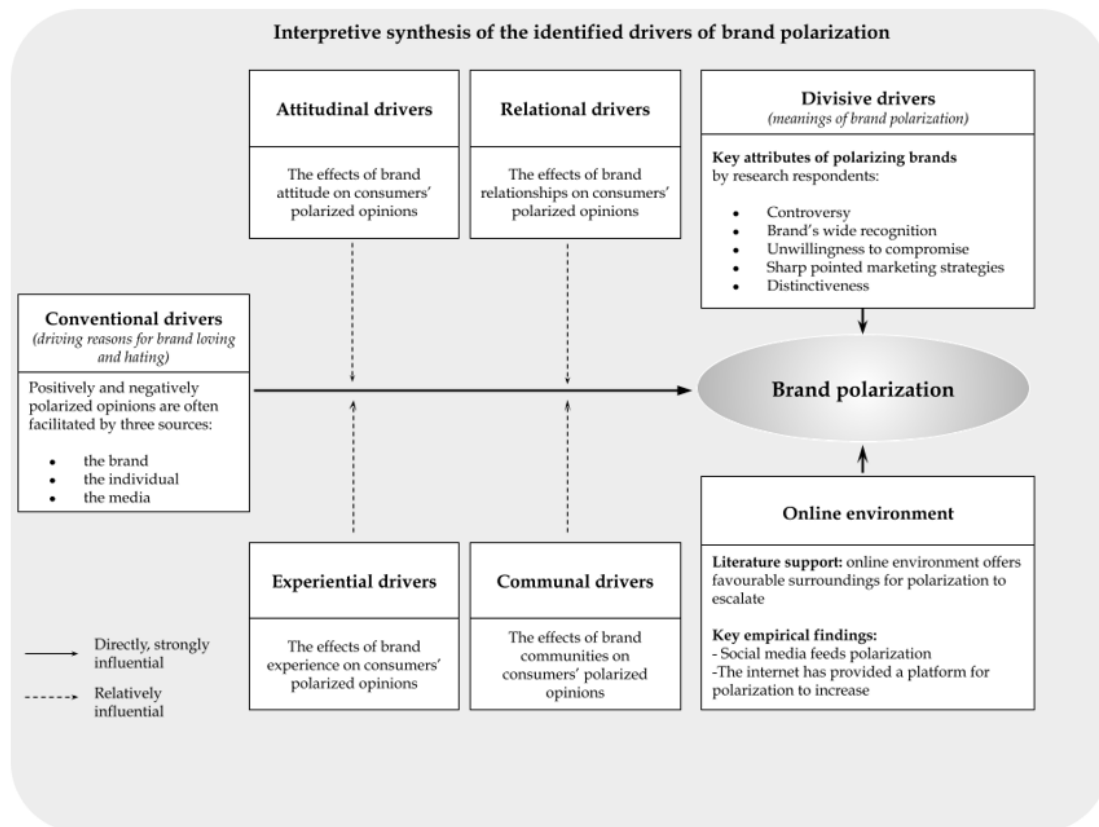


FIGURE 7 Interpretive synthesis of the identified drivers

This conceptual model synthesizing the identified drivers of brand polarization is not illustrating a causal model, but merely the connections between each driver and the focal phenomenon of the study. The bolded arrows demonstrate which drivers are strongly influential in the brand polarization effect according to this research. For instance, when it comes to the conventional drivers that are the general, underlying reasons for brand loving and hating amongst consumers, this research suggests that those are strongly influential in evoking polarized consumer opinions towards brands. Although this study managed to extract a number of driving reasons for brand loving and hating amongst modern consumers, only a small portion of such drivers were enclosed, as it became clear that brand loving and hating always derive from subjective, miscellaneous thought processes of individuals. Moreover, the reviewed literature, as well as the empirical findings, showed firm indications that the modern online environment is strongly influential in terms of advancing brand polarization among consumers.

The divisive drivers, in turn, were extracted through examining the early literature of polarization and by inquiring the meanings of polarizing brands from the sample group. As a result, the empirical findings revealed a set of common traits that truly polarizing brands commonly possess. As the essence of brand polarization is to divide customers who examine and evaluate the same brand into groups of lovers and haters (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019), the attributes pinpointed by the respondents are perceived to be strongly influential, as the bolded arrow indicates. The dotted arrows show which drivers have relatively influential effects on brand polarization, but they also demonstrate that these effects are not as evidently direct. It was underlined in this study that the concepts of brand attitude, -relationships, -experience and -communities all contribute to consumers' polarized views to a certain extent, but it is fair to acknowledge that the connection between these concepts and the focal phenomenon needs more detailed verification before declaring them as directly influential and strong drivers. Thus, this synthesis highlights that brand attitudes, experiences, relationships and communities have their own effects on consumers' brand loving and hating, which in turn, are central contributors of the brand polarization phenomenon.

All in all, the outlined synthesis aimed to produce an answer to the primary research question of this study:

RQ1: "What are the identified drivers of brand polarization from consumers' point of view?"

Due to the diversity of the findings, a plain, direct answer to this question cannot be stated in one sentence. However, the preceding analysis, explanations, and the interpretive synthesis of the identified drivers offer a combined response to what drives polarized opinions towards brands amongst modern consumers. In addition, versatile arguments, assertions and foundations were established in this study for future scholars who wish to extend the research on the topic of brand polarization.

5.1.3 Extended meanings of brand polarization

On top of identifying the drivers of brand polarization from consumer perspective, the secondary research question of this study was set as follows:

RQ2: "What meanings do consumers give to brand polarization?"

Framing a response to the secondary research question turned out to be simpler, as the information to this question was obtained with a set of specific questions about what meanings consumers give to brand polarization, what are the benefits of polarizing nature of brands, and lastly, what the possible risks of a brand's polarized nature are.

The findings chapter containing the divisive drivers displayed several viewpoints of what the common attributes of polarizing brands are from consumers' perspective. A frequent description of polarizing brands was that they are controversial. More specifically, acting controversially, participating into discussions about controversial themes, or merely operating in controversial business fields turned out to be common elements of polarizing brands according to this study. Other definitions by the respondents were that polarizing brands possess a clear opinion or specific values which they are not willing to compromise on, and that polarizing brands tend to strive forward their marketing with a sharp and clear "edge". These findings correlate with statements by Luo et al. (2013) that commonly a single attribute is accountable for the division between a brand's supporters and opposers when it comes to brand polarization. Luo et al. (2013) also underlined that some businesses aim to amplify their differentiation with the intention of strengthening the received loyalty from their supporters.

Moreover, other central meanings described by the respondents were that polarizing brands strive to be distinct for the sake of staying relevant, and that big, widely recognized brands are more likely to become polarized. The distinctiveness and high recognition of polarizing brands were pointed out also in the study by Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019), which verifies the relevance of these meanings. The key benefits of polarizing brands according to consumers were that polarizing brands are able to create interest, raise into people's awareness, elicit reactions, gain media presence and free promotion, boost their turnover, and turn the perceived negativity into a resource by reacting to feedbacks adequately. The central described risks, in turn, were getting in trouble due to bad publicity, losing sales, having increased chances to fail, dealing with uncertain future prospects due to uncompromising strategies, receiving widespread negative word-of-mouth, and not being able to recruit proficient workers due to their divided public image. Finally, the key empirical findings about the online context's influence on brand polarization were that modern online platforms feed brand polarization, as people are more closely connected, bolder in their communication and interaction, more reclined on emotions than reasoning in their output, and more prone to become polarized due to lack of media literacy.

In order to conclude answers to both, the primary and secondary research questions of this study, the key answers are presented below in table 11:

TABLE 11 Summarized answers to research questions

RQ1:	Answer:
<p>“What are the identified drivers of brand polarization from consumers’ point of view?”</p>	<p>Conventional drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Underlying drivers of brand loving and hating • Facilitated by the brand, the individual, or the media <p>Attitudinal drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traits of consumers’ subjective brand attitudes that drive polarized views <p>Relational drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traits of consumers’ subjective brand relationships that drive polarized views <p>Experiential drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traits of consumers’ subjective brand experiences that drive polarized views <p>Communal drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of brand communities that drive polarized views <p>Divisive drivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attributes of polarized brands that divide consumers into groups of lovers and haters <p>Online context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platforms of modern online environment that increase and feed the brand polarization phenomenon
RQ2:	Answer:
<p>“What meanings do consumers give to brand polarization?”</p>	<p>Common attributes of polarizing brands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Controversy, possessing a clear opinion and specific values, sharp-pointed marketing, unwillingness to compromise, distinctiveness, wide recognition <p>Key benefits of polarizing brands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create interest and raise into people’s awareness, elicit reactions, gain media presence, gain free promotion, to boost their turnover through increased awareness, to turn received negativity into a resource with adequate reactions to feedback <p>Key risks of polarizing brands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting in trouble due to bad publicity, losing sales, increased chances to fail and uncertain future prospects due to uncompromising strategies, receiving widespread negative WOM, inability to attract and recruit proficient employees due to divided public image <p>Online context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The online environment increases brand polarization by providing platforms where interaction and communication are bolder, and more emotion based. Social media discussions may falsify reality and thus, increase brand polarization

5.2 Managerial implications

As the empirical contributions, this research aimed to provide key implications for brand managers on how to handle brand polarization. This study underlined that brand polarization among consumers can be agitated by not just the actions of a brand, but also by the intrinsic reasons of individuals, and by the extrinsic

impressions created by the media. According to the findings, the distinct drivers that contribute to the intrinsic formation of brand polarization among individuals are especially the attitudinal, relational, experiential and divisive drivers, which mainly stem from consumers' subjective inferences of brands. Moreover, it became evident in this research that the communal drivers, as well as the online environment both generate noticeable extrinsic stimuli that may advance consumers' polarized opinions. As suggested by Luo et al. (2013), brand managers should strive to comprehend the full spectrum of attitudes that consumers hold towards brands, instead of counting on averages. While agreeing with the statement of Luo et al. (2013), this study emphasizes that brand managers should not only strive to understand the spectrum of consumer attitudes, but also the range of varying, intrinsic and extrinsic factors that actually drive consumers into polarized, attitudinal states in relation to brands.

As mentioned previously in this study, a distinct interpretation of what brand polarization encompasses could turn out beneficial in realizing the essence of the negativity that consumers have towards brands (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). The theoretical and empirical findings of this study verified that the modern online environment allows continuous observation, evaluation and bolder reacting to brands without any time or space specific barriers, which feeds the brand polarization phenomenon. Thus, as consumer judgements towards brands are more and more formed purely on the basis of e.g., online comments and reviews, this study stresses that a constant assessment of a brand's online presence is pivotal for today's brand managers.

Managers who oversee a polarizing brand may use their brand's polarizing status to capture the interest of specific customer segments, or simply for the purpose of causing a rift in the market (Luo et al., 2013), but without sharp evaluation of their actions, this study stresses that they possess a higher risk of e.g., losing their supporters, sales, as well as potential future recruitments. Thus, if polarizing brands make potential employees second-guess their willingness to work for them (due to the brand's controversial image), similar effects are likely to occur also in collaborations between companies and human brands: A human brand with a truly polarizing nature can, contrarily, drive business partners away from oneself, and thereby limit his or her options of commercial collaborations. In sum, despite having fair benefits in terms of e.g., brand strength and positioning (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019), this study implies that brand polarization is by all means not a risk-free aspiration for brands from a managerial viewpoint.

Nevertheless, based on the exploratory findings of this study, a few practical implications are suggested for brand managers hoping to manoeuvre brand polarization strategically. Luo et al. (2013) exemplified that a brand's intentional attempts to increase polarization can result in increased sales (as happened in Strongbow's case as described by the authors). With the support of the findings of this study, it can be argued that pursuing brand polarization as a marketing strategy can indeed be beneficial for brands who aim to raise their revenue, awareness or media exposure. The knowledge acquired with this study implies

that brands seeking to become more polarized should aim to amplify their distinctiveness and controversy, and thereby reach for a wider recognition amongst consumers. In addition, their selected marketing strategies should contain a clear edge - meaning that the brands should also be well prepared to face opposition from the publics, and even leverage it to fuel their operations. As discovered in the findings of this study, being unwilling to compromise is one of the key attributes of a truly polarizing brand, and thus, this could be availed by brands that intentionally seek for a polarized status.

Contrariwise, the findings of this study also suggest that brands who wish to have a steadier control of their own public image, and who are not fully prepared to deal with incendiary opinions of the publics should dissociate themselves especially from e.g., highly controversial business fields, discussions, or partner collaborations. As the findings of this study demonstrated, once loved brands can turn into hated brands at a very short notice in consumers' eyes, if e.g., the managerial actions, communication, or marketing approaches are not deliberately thought through by the brands in question (e.g., in the cases of ENCE and Oatly, as described by the interviewees).

A familiar expression that surfaced in prior research about brand polarization by Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019), as well as in the interviews of this study, was that "all publicity is good publicity". In many ways, this phrase encapsulates the essence of brand polarization: Although polarizing brands tend to attract wide negativity and opposition, the by-products that this phenomenon may offer for brands (such as increased awareness and revenues) are undoubtedly beneficial for any brands who wish to succeed and grow. Hence, while it is fair to acknowledge that brand polarization entails higher risks when used as a branding strategy, it also encases the possibility of reaching high rewards, as prior studies have demonstrated (Luo et al., 2013).

5.3 Evaluation of the study

In a scientific research process, it is important for a researcher to convince others that the research at issue is scientifically justified, but most of all that it is trustworthy (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). To enhance the trustworthiness of a qualitative research, a researcher needs to ensure e.g., the epistemological comprehension, the profundity of the examined literature, a fitting placement of arguments, appropriate selection of data collection- and analysing techniques, as well as the relation of the empirical data to wider theoretical explorations (Rose & Johnson, 2020). In addition, the researcher needs to demonstrate how these afore-said aspects interlace with one another (Rose & Johnson, 2020). Moreover, an integral part of increasing trustworthiness is to assess the reliability and validity of a study (Rose & Johnson, 2020), which Saunders et al. (2019) described to be pivotal for estimating the quality of a research. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) also

stated that there are three concepts which offer a common frame for evaluating business studies: validity, reliability and generalizability.

The suitable epistemological approach for this study was interpretivist epistemology, as this approach focuses on developing an understanding of what takes place, finding meanings, and forming ideas via induction of the empirical data (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). Thus, the selected approach of this study relied strongly on interpretivism, which O’Gorman & Macintosh (2015) described as comprehending a phenomenon through categorizing purposeful human experiences.

It is certain that the selected research paradigms were implemented adequately in this research process, as this study managed to bring forth newly established drivers and meanings of the brand polarization phenomenon in an exploratory fashion. When assessing the arguments and interpretations outlined in this study, it is reasonable to claim that the understanding of the brand polarization phenomenon was extended in a relatively trustworthy manner.

5.3.1 Limitations

Even though the overall trustworthiness and quality of the study were ensured with a suitable approach and thorough justifications of the research design, there are also some limitations in this research protocol that need to be acknowledged.

It is certain that more data from a larger sample group is required before the key findings can be generalized into this field of study in a reliable and convincing way. Although some of the saturated findings of this research showed promising generalizability to the field of brand management (as similarities were found from other studies concerning the same topic), it needs to be acknowledged that the current amount of the empirical data remains insufficient for establishing valid analytic generalizations, which means extending the study results into a wider context (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Another noteworthy limitation of the study is that the majority of the interview participants were Finnish consumers, aged between 25 to 36 years. Thus, it needs to be realized that the findings of this clearance represent mainly the views of people from this specific age group and nationality. Moreover, it is fair to recognize that the findings of this study derived from each respondents’ subjective views of reality, and thus, they should not be considered as firm, measurable facts, but merely as interpretive, extended comprehensions of the subject.

5.3.2 Validity and reliability

According to Rose & Johnson (2020), validity as an evaluation criterion indicates how accurate the findings are from the viewpoints of the researcher and the participants. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) specified that valid findings correctly correspond to the research phenomenon in question, and they are supported with evidence. Due to the explorative nature of this study, the key phenomenon under research was approached by reviewing several key concepts that showed

promising connections with it. However, as many of the utilized concepts in this study had not been previously availed to interpret brand polarization, more research is undoubtedly required to validate their significance for this study context. Nevertheless, as the key objectives of this study (identifying different drivers and meanings of brand polarization) were elaborately reached, the findings of this research can be considered somewhat valid, regardless of the limited number of interviews.

Reliability is commonly assessed in quantitative studies, as it demonstrates the repeatability of the study results (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As this study followed a qualitative and exploratory approach with the focus of producing fresh information and interpretations, measuring the repeatability of the results is fairly irrelevant in this research setting. However, according to Rose & Johnson (2020), a proper reasoning of the selected research methods and the coherence of the analytical procedures are ways to enhance the reliability of a research, which is why reliability is briefly assessed also in this qualitative research setting.

In this study, reliability was enhanced through following the selected research paradigms and methods systematically and coherently, and by describing each part of the research protocol in detail. As stated by Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2018), when assessing reliability, the focus should be steered on the internal consistency of the study. Hence, the justifications, data collection, analyzing and reporting were each carried out in a consistent manner throughout this research project. As Rose & Johnson (2020) also noted, in order to increase reliability, a coherent documentation of the methodologies, as well as a detailed research protocol should be provided, so that others are able to follow similar strategies.

Other factors that likely increased the validity and reliability of this study were e.g., the anonymity of the participants, the objectivity of the interviewer and the open-ended interview questions, and also the fact that the research topic was not too sensitive by any means. Hence, it can be presumed that the study respondents were fully honest in their responses during the conducted interviews. Furthermore, reaching slight saturation in the research findings, and finding various connections between the empirical data and the theoretical framework indicated that the selected research endeavors were measuring the correct things. In sum, despite the acknowledged limitations and lacks in generalizability, validity, and reliability, this study managed to produce a richer understanding of a brand polarization - a phenomenon that still remains scarcely discoursed among scholars of brand management. However, as stated in previous studies, the reports of the topic are increasing, which implies that the phenomenon is on the rise (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

5.4 Directions for future research

As stated in the limitations chapter, although different drivers of brand polarization were identified in this study, more research on the topic is necessary before

the findings can be credibly generalized and rooted into this field of knowledge. Similarly, as the meanings of polarizing brands were inquired only from a rather small and specific sample (adults with similar demographics), more meanings of brand polarization should be obtained from people with differing cultural, demographical and geographical backgrounds in order to enrich and validate the acquired insights. All in all, it is recommended that future scholars continue the process of identifying the diverse drivers and meanings of brand polarization, as it is not only a growing phenomenon, but also a highly relevant occurrence for today's brand managers to understand and monitor.

An interesting point that surfaced in the findings of this study was that brands with a polarizing nature may face the risk of not attracting professional workforce, as potential employees might be reluctant to work for brands that face opposition and negativity from the masses due to their divisive brand images. Inspired by this thought, it was also contemplated in the managerial implications chapter to what extent a human brand's polarizing nature can limit partner collaborations with companies, if the potential partners do not wish to become associated with a human brand that evokes incendiary public reactions. Hence, as professional workers are generally considered to be the most valuable assets of any company, and the partner collaborations between human brands and businesses have skyrocketed during the recent century, these two repercussions of brand polarization constitute intriguing avenues for future scholars to explore.

Another presumption that transpired in the findings of this study was that it is more common for modern brands to be somehow distinctive instead of just being stable, as it helps brands to "stay relevant" in the current era. Moreover, the reviewed literature showed evidence that some brands have strategically manoeuvred polarization as segmentation, positioning and differentiation strategies (Luo et al., 2013). Hence, future research could examine what the outcomes have been for brands who have intentionally reinforced their brand's polarizing nature as a strategic act. Finding out how the intentional efforts to divide customers into supporters and opposers has influenced e.g., the financial state, visibility, media exposure and other performance metrics of such brands would be fascinating to review as an academic publication.

Lastly, since this research observed many different brand types, such as company brands, sports brands and human brands within the same study setting, future researchers could focus on studying brand polarization in specific fields. For example, exploring what the drivers and outcomes of brand polarization are for specific brand types, or comparing the effects of brand polarization between e.g., company brands and sports brands could constitute interesting research topics, and turn out to be valuable for unfolding a wider understanding of the phenomenon.

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APPENDIX 1 Semi-structured interviews part 1/3

Theme 1: Brand love and hate

1. You were told to select brands that you feel strong positivity or even love for. Could you describe these brands, and the reasons for your positive feelings?
2. You were also told to select brands that you feel strong negativity or even hate for. Could you describe these brands, and the reasons for your negative feelings?
3. Generally speaking, which reasons can you think of that may cause intense brand loving or brand hating towards brands?
4. How do you feel that other people or their presence can affect either brand love or brand hate of individuals?
5. Can you think of any factors in online channels that may affect a person's brand loving or brand hating?

- How do you think it effects on brand loving and hating, when people can comment remotely and even anonymously online?

Theme 2: Brand attitude

6. When it comes to your selected loved brands, how would you describe your attitude towards them?
7. In turn, how would you describe your attitude towards your selected hated brands?
8. Can you describe your attitude towards your loved brands when they do something well?
-What about when your loved brands do something poorly?
9. Can you describe your attitude towards your hated brands when they do something well?
-What about when your hated brands do something poorly?
10. How do you think that other people's attitudes affect your personal brand attitude?
11. Which factors in online channels can affect your brand attitude?

APPENDIX 2 Semi-structured interviews part 2/3

Theme 3: Brand relationships

12. When it comes to your selected brands, how would you describe your relationship with them as a consumer?

-For example, how do you maintain your relationship through interaction with these brands, and vice versa?

13. Next question utilises a few constructs from the theoretical framework concerning brand relationships. Could you describe reasons that can cause brand love and hate in consumers, if you specifically think about:

- 1) *company-related reasons?*
- 2) *customer service-related reasons?*
- 3) *product-related reasons?*
- 4) *consumer-related reasons (that the brand has little control over)?*

14. Which emotions are your loved brands evoking in you, and why?

15. Which emotions are your hated brands evoking in you, and why?

16. How would you describe the influence of other people's actions online on your personal brand relationships?

Theme 4: Brand experience

17. Can you describe what kind of experiences your selected loved brands provide you with?

18. Can you describe what kind of experiences your selected hated brands provide you with?

19. Next question utilises a few constructs from the theoretical framework. Could you describe how the following factors affect your personal online brand experience?

- 1) *Usability*
- 2) *Brand's visual design*
- 3) *Purpose of content*
- 4) *Interactivity*
- 5) *Communality*

APPENDIX 3 Semi-structured interviews part 3/3

Theme 5: Brand communities

20. When you consider your selected loved and hated brands, are there any communities or noticeably strong supporters formed around them?

-In turn, are there any anti-communities or strong opposers formed around your selected brands?

21. What kind of behaviours or actions have you witnessed in brand communities or anti-communities?

22. Can you describe how these communities or anti-communities affect your personal opinions about your selected brands?

23. In your experience, do these communities or anti-communities have different influence on different online channels?

-For instance, where is the influence strongest in your experience?

Theme 6: Meanings of brand polarization

24. Could you describe in your own words what creates a “polarizing brand” that receives both love and hate from many people simultaneously?

25. What do you think a polarizing brand can achieve or benefit with such divisive status?

26. In your opinion, what are the risks of being a brand with a polarizing nature?

27. Do you have anything to add to the discussion about such phenomenon where modern brands are receiving both love and hate simultaneously from consumers?