

From Prestige to Protest: The Role of Social Media in Amplifying Luxury Fashion Brand Hate among Malaysian Millennials

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the formation and amplification of luxury fashion brand hate among Malaysian millennials in the Klang Valley. It specifically investigates how social media transforms individual negative sentiment into collective reputational pressure. Adopting a qualitative interpretive design, the research draws on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 Malaysian women aged 30 to 50 who reported negative encounters with luxury brands and subsequently expressed hostility online. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify the communicative and value-based mechanisms that shape the escalation of brand hate. The findings reveal that hostility in this context is driven by perceived corporate arrogance and elitism, where traditional luxury positioning is interpreted as socially exclusionary. Furthermore, distinct value incongruence regarding sustainability and authenticity generates significant evaluative tension. These interpretations are catalysed by high-intensity negative emotional encounters, such as perceived disrespect in retail settings, which motivate retaliatory communication. Crucially, the study identifies social media as an amplification infrastructure. Through mechanisms such as algorithmic visibility, peer validation, and identity signalling, digital platforms enable private grievances to escalate into performative outrage and public condemnation. The study contributes to strategic communication scholarship by clarifying how value-based dissonance translates into online escalation pathways. Practically, the results highlight the necessity for luxury brands to move beyond traditional prestige cues and adopt culturally attuned, verifiable ethical practices to maintain legitimacy among socially conscious millennial cohorts.

Keywords: *Brand hate, luxury fashion, millennials, social media amplification, value incongruence.*

INTRODUCTION

The global luxury fashion industry currently faces a volatile landscape characterized by intensified consumer backlash. This hostility extends beyond mere product dissatisfaction, evolving into value-based rejection and reputational contestation. Contemporary scholarship on luxury markets highlights a growing friction between the industry's traditional logic, predicated on exclusivity and prestige, and a rising consumer demand for sustainability, ethical conduct, and broader social legitimacy (Shukla et al., 2025). This tension is particularly acute in digitally mediated marketplaces, where audiences actively deconstruct and challenge brand meanings, often leading to severe reputational consequences.

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In this environment, "brand hate" has emerged as a distinct and consequential form of the consumer-brand relationship. Unlike simple dislike, brand hate involves enduring, high-arousal negative emotions that frequently translate into damaging behaviors, including negative word-of-mouth, protest, and boycott actions that threaten brand equity (Akrouf & Mrad, 2023; Mushtaq et al., 2024).

Historically, luxury fashion brands have successfully positioned themselves through scarcity, status signalling, and exclusivity (Al-Issa et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2024; Shukla et al., 2025). However, recent evidence from sustainable luxury research suggests that these traditional cues are increasingly being re-evaluated through the lens of moral legitimacy. When consumers perceive a discrepancy between a brand's promise of excellence and its ethical practices, such as sustainability or authenticity, the very exclusivity that once drove desire can trigger profound negative reactions. These shifts are particularly relevant for millennial consumers, who are frequently identified as drivers of responsible consumption narratives and possess a heightened sensitivity to value incongruence in luxury positioning (Mustafa Rivera, 2024).

Far from being a challenge unique to Western markets, this friction between traditional luxury positioning and evolving consumer values is a global phenomenon. However, it manifests with particular intensity in hyper-connected, emerging markets where digital infrastructure accelerates the spread of sentiment. The Malaysian context provides a timely and critical setting for examining these dynamics. Specifically, the Klang Valley functions as a nexus for consumption and fashion activity where global luxury discourses intersect with local cultural expectations (InvestKL, 2025).

It is within this specific context that the technological landscape plays a pivotal role. National statistics indicate pervasive internet access and exceptionally high participation in social networking activities among Malaysians (Department of Statistics Malaysia [DOSM], 2025). This high level of digital integration creates an environment where consumer experiences and anti-brand narratives can spread rapidly, transforming individual grievances into collective movements. Consequently, social media has fundamentally transformed how brand hate is expressed; negative sentiments no longer remain private experiences but escalate into networked episodes of outrage and collective condemnation. Research on online firestorms demonstrates that in such highly networked environments, negative sentiment and stakeholder engagement can surge instantaneously during controversies, with the immediate organisational response playing a critical role in shaping the outcome (Qu et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the specific affordances of social media have been shown to strengthen boycott intentions via psychological mechanisms such as perceived efficacy, illustrating how online environments actively convert sentiment into tangible action (Mady et al., 2025).

Despite the expanding literature on brand hate, empirical research explaining how these dynamics operate specifically within Malaysia, particularly among Klang Valley millennials and the luxury fashion sector, remains limited. While the tension between luxury and sustainability is global, the communicative processes that intensify this tension into brand hate within Southeast Asian digital cultures are under-researched. Recent reviews continue to call for context-specific and platform-aware evidence to clarify the drivers of brand hate and the specific mechanisms that amplify it (Mushtaq et al., 2025).

Accordingly, the present study addresses this gap by investigating how millennials in the Klang Valley perceive, experience, and express brand hate toward luxury fashion brands through social media. Anchored in cognitive dissonance theory and the theory of planned

behavior, this study explains how perceived inconsistencies between brand communication and behavior generate psychological discomfort, motivating intentional rejection behaviors such as anti-brand posting, avoidance, and boycotting (Hagger & Hamilton, 2025; Li et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Evolution of Brand Hate and Consumer Rejection

Brand hate is increasingly conceptualized within marketing scholarship as a complex and high-arousal affective state that is distinct from traditional customer dissatisfaction. While dissatisfaction typically arises from specific service failures or unmet functional expectations, brand hate is defined as a deep-seated negative emotion encompassing anger, contempt, and disgust (Akrouf & Mrad, 2023; Mushtaq et al., 2024). Unlike the transitory nature of dissatisfaction, which often results in passive avoidance, brand hate is identity-salient and durable. Consequently, it serves as a more potent precursor to retaliatory behaviours intended to inflict reputational or financial damage upon the focal firm (Ladeira et al., 2026).

Within the luxury fashion sector, these dynamics possess heightened significance. Research suggests that brand hate manifests through two primary behavioural trajectories. These consist of avoidance-based pathways, which are characterised by private exiting and psychological distancing, as well as approach-based attack behaviours, which include public denigration, digital shaming, and organised negative word-of-mouth (Rasouli et al., 2025). Recent meta-analytic evidence confirms that intense negative affect remains the primary driver of these outcomes, positioning brand hate as a significant systemic risk within digitally networked market environments (Ladeira et al., 2026)

Value Misalignment and Dissonance Pathways in Luxury Fashion

A critical antecedent of hostility in the luxury domain is the growing friction between traditional brand orthodoxies and evolving consumer normative expectations. Historically, luxury branding relied upon semiotic signals of scarcity, exclusivity, and social stratification. However, contemporary scholarship highlights a burgeoning tension between these conventional cues and a modern emphasis on authenticity, environmental sustainability, and social legitimacy (Al-Issa et al., 2024; Essiz et al., 2024; Shukla et al., 2025). In this context, prestige positioning risks becoming a cue for rejection if consumers interpret exclusivity as elitist or morally incongruent.

This misalignment is particularly acute when a brand's communicative strategy, such as corporate social responsibility signalling, diverges from the consumer's perceived reality. Investigations into greenwashing demonstrate that when environmental claims are perceived as symbolic or performative rather than substantive, it triggers a profound skepticism that erodes brand equity (Bladt et al., 2024; Ioannou et al., 2023). For luxury fashion, where the value proposition is anchored in superior quality and integrity, perceived inauthenticity can rapidly escalate into active rejection. Empirical data underscores this pathway, indicating that perceived greenwashing is a significant predictor of both brand avoidance and public condemnation (Sajid et al., 2024).

Ethical/Value-Based Decisions and Boycott-Related Outcomes

The transition from internal negative evaluation to collective resistance is frequently mediated by the consumer's perception of agency and efficacy. In digitally mediated contexts, negative

sentiments often coalesce into boycott intentions when consumers perceive their resistance as both logistically feasible and socially impactful. Mady et al. (2025) argue that social media environments amplify these intentions by strengthening psychological mechanisms such as perceived behavioural control and collective efficacy.

The visibility of peer-led resistance empowers individuals to participate in coordinated action. Furthermore, the contemporary luxury landscape offers a diverse array of alternatives, including local artisanal brands and circular economy resale platforms, which effectively lowers the barriers to exit. This increased market fluidity, combined with strong moral normative beliefs, intensifies the likelihood that value-based dissatisfaction will translate into permanent brand abandonment and active opposition (Al-Issa et al., 2024).

Social Media as Amplification Infrastructure for Brand Hate

Social media platforms function as a critical amplification infrastructure, facilitating the aggregation of individual grievances into dominant collective narratives. Cognitive research indicates that human attention is disproportionately captured by moralised and high-arousal emotional content. Platform algorithms exploit this bias by privileging outrage-eliciting discourse, ensuring that negative interpretations propagate with greater velocity and reach than neutral or positive content (McLoughlin & Brady, 2024). This phenomenon is further catalysed by emotional contagion, wherein high-arousal states diffuse through digital networks and influence the attitudes of users who may lack direct negative experience with the brand (Wilkie et al., 2025).

Content creators and influencers act as pivotal intermediaries in this escalation process. By framing brand controversies through relatable and personalised narratives, these actors guide audience attributions of blame and define the parameters of an appropriate social response. Rynarzewska et al. (2026) emphasise that these digital creators validate specific moral interpretations and accelerate the dissemination of moral emotions, effectively transforming idiosyncratic dissatisfaction into a performed and collective condemnation.

Theoretical Positioning and Research Gap

Building upon this contemporary scholarship, the present study conceptualises brand hate within the luxury fashion sector not merely as a transitory emotional reaction but as a sophisticated meaning-making process. This process emerges when consumers interpret luxury brand positioning as value-incongruent by viewing luxury narratives through the critical lenses of elitism, hypocrisy, or inauthenticity. This incongruence is subsequently internalised and processed into sustained negative affective states (Akrouf & Mrad, 2023; Sajid et al., 2024). Social media platforms serve as the primary catalyst in this progression, functioning as an accelerant for moralised discourse and facilitating rapid emotional transmission. This infrastructure increases the probability that private psychological rejection is transformed into public, collectively validated, and coordinated action (McLoughlin & Brady, 2024; Wilkie et al., 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative interpretive design to examine how Klang Valley millennials construct and negotiate luxury fashion brand hate and how these meanings are articulated and intensified through social media. An interpretive stance is appropriate because brand hate is treated as a socially constructed, context-dependent evaluation, produced through lived

experience, value judgements, and situated sense-making rather than as a stable, objectively measurable attitude (Lim, 2025; Pretorius, 2024).

While previous literature has identified general constructs of brand hate, this research adopts an exploratory approach to determine the applicability and specific manifestations of these concepts within the Malaysian context. Rather than merely confirming predefined categories, the study seeks to uncover new dimensions of value incongruence and rejection that may be unique to the intersection of Southeast Asian digital culture and global luxury positioning. This approach allows for the emergence of novel insights regarding how local cultural expectations shape the interpretation of global brand failures.

The study focused on interpretive accounts of elitism, disrespect, hypocrisy, and value contradiction in luxury branding and how these interpretations translate into rejection behaviours (e.g., avoidance, public criticism, and boycott-orientated talk). Consistent with qualitative guidance, purposive sampling was used to recruit information-rich participants aligned with the research aims, supplemented by snowball referrals to extend access through participants' networks (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Ting et al., 2025).

A total of 15 Malaysian women aged 30–50, residing in Klang Valley, participated. This sample size is consistent with contemporary empirical guidance showing that many qualitative analyses can yield robust thematic insights with relatively small samples, contingent on analytic approach, study focus, and the complexity of meaning patterns under investigation (Wutich et al., 2024). Data were generated using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This format enabled participants to narrate experiences and moral reasoning while allowing the researcher to probe for meaning, context, and justification. Interview probing was guided by established interview theory and practice recommendations to elicit depth, clarification, and explanatory detail (Robinson, 2023).

The study focuses on interpretive accounts of elitism, disrespect, hypocrisy, and value contradiction in luxury branding. It specifically examines how these interpretations translate into rejection behaviours such as avoidance, public criticism, and boycott-orientated discourse. To achieve this, the study utilised reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). This method recognises the active interpretive role of the researcher in coding and theme construction while ensuring coherence between research aims, epistemological stance, and analytic claims (Braun & Clarke, 2024a, 2024b).

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

This study employed purposive sampling to recruit 15 Malaysian women aged 30–50 who could provide information-rich accounts of luxury fashion brand hate and its expression on social media. Purposive sampling is appropriate for this inquiry, as it enables the deliberate identification of participants with direct experience of the phenomenon and the capacity to articulate that experience in depth (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

Participants were selected based on four inclusion criteria aligned with the study scope and interviewee profile. First, they were women aged 30–50 who represent the millennial consumer segment for this project. Second, they resided in the Klang Valley, covering areas such as Damansara, Ampang, Subang Jaya, Shah Alam, Kuala Lumpur, Cyberjaya, and Puncak Alam. Third, they had experienced a negative encounter when purchasing a recognisable luxury fashion brand. Fourth, they had posted critical or hateful commentary about the brand on at least one social media platform.

Recruitment followed a purposive snowball approach where initial eligible participants were invited and subsequently asked to refer others with comparable experiences. While snowball sampling can introduce network bias, several steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness and minimise homogeneity. All potential participants referred through networks were rigorously screened against the four inclusion criteria to ensure they met the objective research requirements rather than simply being personal acquaintances of previous interviewees. This verification process ensured that the final sample reflected the specific experiential phenomenon under investigation rather than social proximity (Ting et al., 2025).

A total of 15 participants were recruited. This sample size is justified by the principle of information power, which suggests that smaller sample sizes are sufficient when the study holds a specific aim, the sample is highly specific to the phenomenon, and the dialogue is strong. Contemporary empirical guidance indicates that rigorous qualitative analyses can yield robust thematic insights with relatively small samples provided the data is rich and the analytic approach is thorough (Wutich et al., 2024). Furthermore, data collection continued until the point where additional interviews provided diminishing returns on new thematic insights, adhering to the pragmatic standards of saturation in qualitative inquiry (Tight, 2024; Ahmed, 2025).

Data Collection

This study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore how Klang Valley millennials construct and articulate luxury fashion brand hate and how these sentiments are expressed and amplified through social media. The recruitment process ensured that informants had direct experience of negative luxury-brand encounters and were able to provide rich and experience-based accounts. Participants were selected to reflect variation in residential areas within the Klang Valley and patterns of social media use. A summary of participant characteristics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Informant characteristics

Informant/Age	Area	Post Hate to social media	Platform used
R1 (50)	Damansara	Yes	Instagram
R2 (30)	Ampang	Yes	Instagram
R3 (50)	Maluri	Yes	Facebook
R4 (32)	Subang Jaya	Yes	Instagram
R5 (35)	Shah Alam	Yes	Instagram
R6 (33)	Kuala Lumpur	Yes	Instagram
R7 (40)	Shah Alam	Yes	Instagram
R8 (43)	Kota Kemuning	Yes	Instagram / TikTok
R9 (45)	Subang Bestari	Yes	Instagram
R10 (36)	Damansara	Yes	Instagram / TikTok/Twitter
R11 (41)	Bukit Jelutong	Yes	Instagram / Facebook
R12 (39)	Puncak Alam	Yes	Instagram / Facebook
R13(40)	Cyberjaya	Yes	Instagram
R14 (45)	Shah Alam	Yes	Instagram/Threads
R15 (37)	Puncak Alam	Yes	Instagram

The interviews were designed to elicit interpretations, emotional responses, and moral evaluations of luxury fashion brands from the participants. They were encouraged to describe their encounters with luxury brands and the incidents that triggered negative reactions. They were also asked to explain how they interpreted luxury brand positioning, such as exclusivity

or social responsibility claims. Finally, the interviews explored how they engaged with and expressed brand hate online, including actions like posting, commenting, and boycott discussions. The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to ensure coverage of key topics while allowing participants to elaborate freely and introduce issues they viewed as salient.

Interviews were conducted individually and lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Audio recording was undertaken with participant consent to support accurate transcription. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation and were assured of confidentiality. Identifiers were replaced with participant codes in reporting to maintain anonymity. Interviews were conducted in the language most comfortable to participants, including English and Bahasa Malaysia. Any segments in Bahasa Malaysia were translated into English during transcription to maintain analytic consistency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

a) Perceived Brand Arrogance and Elitism as Drivers of Brand Hate

The analysis reveals a collective interpretation among respondents that luxury brands communicate arrogance and superiority. A recurring pattern across the dataset was the perception that luxury positioning often crosses the line from exclusivity to social exclusion. Participants consistently described marketing communications and retail environments as projecting a sense of detachment from the lived realities of non-elite consumers. This was not merely observed as a pricing strategy but was interpreted as a form of social sorting where brands signal that certain consumers are unworthy of access or respect.

This sense of symbolic distancing was frequently cited as a primary trigger for resentment. Participants broadly agreed that when brands frame their products as unattainable, it creates an antagonistic relationship with the consumer. Rather than generating aspiration, this exclusionary positioning was viewed by the majority of respondents as an affront to their dignity. Consequently, participants evaluated luxury legitimacy not only through tangible metrics like price and quality but also through the relational dimension of fairness in brand–consumer interaction. This collective sentiment is illustrated by Informant R4, who emphasised that judgment depends on the holistic treatment of the customer.

...depends on the issues, such as price, quality, and how they treat their customers. (Informant R4)

Furthermore, retail encounters emerged as a critical site where this elitism is performed. Multiple participants recounted experiences where sales personnel treated customers dismissively based on appearance or attire. These shared narratives highlight a pattern where the store environment functions as a venue for class-based discrimination. Such treatment generated high-arousal emotions across the sample, including humiliation and moral outrage. Similarly, social media portrayals of excess were interpreted by the group as evidence that brands are out of touch with economic inequality. This shared perspective suggests that social media does not merely display luxury but intensifies moral evaluation by highlighting the disparity between brand values and the everyday hardship experienced by broader populations.

Finally, this perceived elitism was found to drive action-oriented rejection rather than just private dislike. A consensus emerged among participants that withdrawal and resistance behaviours, such as boycotting, were necessary responses to arrogant positioning. Informant R10 articulated this shared resolve to enact collective consumer action:

...we boycott from buying anything from the brand. (Informant R10)

b) Value Misalignment Between Brand Messaging and Practices

The data indicate that value misalignment functions as a salient driver of brand hate when the communicated identity of a luxury brand is perceived to conflict with its actual conduct. A dominant theme across the interviews was the interpretation of this incongruence as a moral contradiction rather than a minor service failure. Participants collectively framed brands that signal responsibility while acting unethically as hypocritical. This perception triggered strong emotional responses, ranging from disappointment to anger, which served as a precursor to rejection.

Specifically, participants identified a disconnect between progressive public stances and the brand's operational reality. For instance, several respondents pointed to inconsistencies regarding empathy toward women and caregiving demands. Informant R9 captured this sentiment by criticising brand owners for disregarding the resources required for family life, a view that resonated with the broader sample's concern for authentic social responsibility:

...being a woman myself, I would say that women who gave birth shouldn't be taking long breaks... Disregarding the fact that they are well off and have the resources, such as maids and all. (Informant R9)

In addition to social values, participants consistently highlighted the gap between the promise of prestige and the reality of product performance. The expectation that luxury pricing implies superior quality was central to the participants' definition of value. When this expectation was violated, the group interpreted the brand's prestige claims as unjustified. This shared logic reinforces the finding that quality failures in the luxury sector are not treated as accidents but as breaches of trust. Informant R3 provided a representative account of this betrayal.

...one would think that expensive luxury brands have better quality. However, it is not the case... there is a bag from a luxury brand literally melted even though one pays tens of thousands of ringgits. (Informant R3)

Participants further described a shared reliance on social media to validate these evaluations. The data shows that digital platforms serve as a visibility mechanism where consumers actively seek reviews to confirm their suspicions. This collective verification process allows consumers to frame perceived contradictions as legitimate grounds for rejection, as noted by Informant R6.

...can reach a wide audience; can find more reviews/other people's opinion about the brand... If there are complaints, we might get immediate clarification/fast action from the brand itself.' (Informant R6)

Overall, the theme suggests that brand hate intensifies when participants interpret luxury branding as inconsistent—projecting socially desirable values while communicating positions or producing outcomes that participants perceive as contradictory to those values.

c) Emotional Triggers and Negative Brand Encounters

The interview data indicate that luxury fashion brand hate is consolidated through high-intensity emotional responses to adverse encounters. Participants universally reported that direct experiences of disrespect or inequitable treatment served as catalysts for their hostility. Rather than viewing these as isolated incidents, the respondents described them as accumulating over time to shape a stable, negative interpretation of the brand.

A key pattern identified in the analysis is the distinction participants made between routine dissatisfaction and brand hate. The majority of respondents associated dissatisfaction with passive outcomes like switching, whereas brand hate was expressed as a stronger, moral refusal grounded in the perception of wrongdoing. This transition from dissatisfaction to hostility was frequently linked to the intensity of the emotional response during the service encounter. Informant R7 highlighted how these multiple factors converge to trigger a negative reaction:

...it can be sudden. Depends on the issues. Price, quality, and how they treat their customers. (Informant R7)

Notably, the language used by participants to describe their rejection was action-oriented. The terms used across the sample implied ethical disengagement and a deliberate withdrawal of support. Informant R2 explicitly framed this stance as a boycott, illustrating the collective tendency to view rejection as a form of moral punishment.

...we boycott buying anything from the brand... people will say other terms like 'boycott. (Informant R2)

In sum, the findings suggest that negative encounters operate as emotional catalysts that, when interpreted through relational and moral expectations, contribute to sustained anti-brand orientations.

d) Social Media as Infrastructure for Brand Hate Expression and Amplification

The analysis indicates that social media operates as an amplification infrastructure that intensifies and aggregates luxury fashion brand hate. Across the interview accounts, participants described social media not merely as a communication tool but as a strategic environment that enables negative evaluations to move from private sentiment to visible rejection. Four interrelated mechanisms emerged from the collective data.

First, the respondents viewed public posting as a mechanism for digital outrage and public shaming. There was a shared belief that platform affordances such as high visibility and audience interaction were essential for holding brands accountable. Informant R12 articulated

the common view that public complaints are a necessary tactic to force a response from the organisation.

...can reach a wide audience... If there are complaints, we might get immediate clarification/fast action from the brand itself. (Informant R12)

Second, influencer- and peer-led narratives were identified as critical interpretive frames. Participants generally agreed that content creators accelerate sense-making by packaging issues in morally resonant terms. The consensus was that influencers validate critical judgements and encourage the wider audience to adopt a rejectionist stance. Informant R14 explained how these figures shape public sentiment.

...those influencers... play a powerful role in shaping public sentiment, as they are able to gain lots of audience... (Informant R14).

Third, the viral spread of content was seen as a way to turn isolated incidents into broader controversies. Finally, the data reveals that anti-luxury identity signalling allows users to align with like-minded communities. Participants described how the perceived anonymity and support found in online groups lowered the cost of expressing hate. Informant R15 noted that this environment facilitates the finding of agreement and validation

...absolutely because it will be anonymous... easy to find more audiences or groups who agree... (Informant R15).

Discussion

The findings underscore the analytical value of theorising luxury fashion brand hate as a value-based and socially mediated process. By synthesising the participants' collective narratives, this study demonstrates that brand hate develops through a specific sequence involving perceived value violations and intention–action pathways that are reinforced by social media environments. This aligns with recent evidence indicating that brand hate is a durable and high-arousal negative state that predicts both avoidance-oriented and attack-oriented responses (Mushtaq et al., 2024; Rasouli et al., 2025).

First, participants' narratives suggest that hate escalates when luxury brands' symbolic positioning (e.g., "ethical", "inclusive", "premium quality") is interpreted as inconsistent with perceived practices or outcomes. This pattern aligns with recent empirical work showing that perceived betrayal and value-based violations can heighten brand hate and activate downstream avoidance-like and attack-like strategies (Rasouli et al., 2025). Related consumer-behaviour evidence further supports the role of psychological discomfort in morally charged marketplace judgements, where dissonance processes can operate as a mechanism linking perceived wrongdoing to boycott-orientated intentions (Jedicke et al., 2025).

The analysis reveals that hate escalates when luxury brands' symbolic positioning is interpreted as inconsistent with their practices. Participants consistently identified a gap between the promise of "ethical" or "premium" status and their actual experiences of elitism and quality failure. This pattern supports empirical work showing that perceived betrayal and value-based violations can heighten brand hate (Rasouli et al., 2025). Furthermore, the moral outrage expressed by participants regarding class-based discrimination in retail settings

illustrates how psychological discomfort in marketplace judgements acts as a mechanism linking perceived wrongdoing to boycott-orientated intentions (Jedicke et al., 2025).

Crucially, the findings clarify how intention translates into action in digitally mediated contexts. The participants' reliance on social media to validate their anger and coordinate boycotts suggests that online environments strengthen boycott intention by enhancing perceived behavioural control and efficacy (Mady et al., 2025). Once a negative moral evaluation is formed, social media supplies the social proof and mobilisation cues that help convert private rejection into observable behaviour. This observation is consistent with Malaysian communication scholarship, which highlights how social media empowers users to challenge mainstream narratives and participate in alternative public spheres (Azlan et al., 2023).

The amplification pattern observed in this study also corroborates the argument that social media infrastructures convert individual dissonance into collective condemnation. Platform affordances enable users to consolidate shared interpretations and align with reference publics. This dynamic echoes findings in the context of Malaysian digital culture, where online platforms have been shown to facilitate the rapid formation of public opinion and collective identity among youth (Rahim & Pawanteh, 2023). This is further supported by work on online firestorms, which demonstrates that engagement dynamics influence the escalation of negative sentiment (Qu et al., 2023).

Finally, the salience of the Klang Valley as a digitally intensive consumption environment provides contextual grounding for these dynamics. The pervasive internet access and high social networking participation in Malaysia create an ecosystem where consumer experiences are verified and amplified through peer-to-peer circulation (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025; Kemp, 2025).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research is subject to several limitations that merit acknowledgment. First, the sample size of 15 participants, while appropriate for qualitative phenomenological inquiry, limits the generalizability of the findings to broader millennial populations beyond the Klang Valley. Future research should employ larger and more geographically diverse samples to assess whether the identified themes and mechanisms operate similarly across different regional contexts.

Second, the focus on women aged 30 to 50 limits the understanding of brand hate dynamics among younger millennials and excludes male consumer perspectives entirely. Future research should examine whether brand hate expressions differ by gender and age within the millennial cohort. These demographic variations might reveal important nuances regarding how identity, consumer socialization, and social media engagement patterns shape brand rejection.

Third, the reliance on semi-structured interview data does not capture the actual social media artifacts through which brand hate is publicly expressed. Future research combining interview data with a systematic content analysis of social media posts, comments, and videos could provide a more detailed understanding of how brand hate narratives are linguistically constructed and rhetorically amplified.

Fourth, the current study is exploratory and qualitative. To validate the relationships identified here, future research should consider alternative methodological approaches. Specifically, quantitative or mixed-methods designs could be employed to measure the

prevalence of these sentiments and to test the strength of the correlations between value misalignment, emotional arousal, and boycott intentions. Such studies would help to determine the generalisability of the findings to the wider Malaysian population.

Finally, the discussion could be strengthened by further exploring the specific cultural factors that influence these dynamics. Future studies should investigate how local cultural values, such as "face" or religious ethical expectations, interact with global luxury positioning to shape consumers' lived experiences of brand hate. Integrating these cultural dimensions would provide deeper contextual insights into why certain brand behaviors trigger such intense rejection in the Malaysian context.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that luxury fashion brand hate among millennials in the Klang Valley is a complex, value-driven phenomenon rather than an irrational or disproportionate consumer response. The findings reveal that this hostility emerges from a specific convergence of drivers, including perceived corporate arrogance, distinct value misalignment between brand promises and actual practices, and high-intensity negative emotional encounters. Far from being a simple expression of dissatisfaction, brand hate in this context reflects a mature moral judgement exercised by consumers who have internalised deep expectations regarding ethical production, environmental sustainability, and social inclusivity.

A central contribution of this study is the conceptualisation of social media as an amplification infrastructure. The analysis shows that digital platforms do not merely serve as transmission channels for complaints but actively systematise isolated experiences of cognitive dissonance into coordinated consumer movements. Through mechanisms such as digital outrage, influencer validation, viral circulation, and identity construction, social media enables individual grievances to scale rapidly into collective condemnation. This process creates permanent digital records that can severely undermine brand recovery efforts.

The theoretical implications of this work are significant. By integrating cognitive dissonance theory with the dynamics of digital amplification, this study advances the understanding of how private psychological discomfort is translated into public reputational risk. It highlights that in hyper-connected markets like Malaysia, the path from value incongruence to hate is accelerated by the affordances of the platform economy.

Practically, the findings suggest that luxury fashion brands can no longer rely solely on traditional positioning strategies based on scarcity, status, and aspiration. Such approaches risk irrelevance or active hostility if they remain indifferent to the ethical concerns that increasingly define millennial consumer consciousness. To survive this shift, brands must move beyond superficial reputation management. Success in this era requires a genuine alignment of corporate practices with stated values, a culturally attuned engagement with local expectations, and the adoption of transparent response protocols. By taking the ethical concerns that drive brand hate seriously, luxury brands have the opportunity to transition from being targets of coordinated rejection to becoming companies that millennials respect and support.

BIODATA

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