On the antipodes of love and hate: The conception and measurement of brand polarization

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ABSTRACT

Brand polarization represents a somewhat unorthodox approach to brand management. Rather than foster support and minimise opposition towards a brand, polarization maintains strong emotions at both ends of the spectrum, concurrently attending to the antipodes of brand love and brand hate. Although some emerging insights suggest that this paradoxical approach can effectively support brands, academic research on polarization in marketing is in its infancy. Integrating insight from political science, psychology and marketing, the study develops an enhanced theoretical conception of brand polarization and operationalises it through a multi-step procedure. Specifically, the paper builds on qualitative and quantitative data from six empirical studies in two contexts (UK and Colombia) to offer a 23-item scale for brand polarization. The new concept and the validated scale contribute to branding theory and marketing practice in several important ways.

1. Introduction

Brand polarization represents a somewhat unorthodox approach to brand management. Accepted wisdom dictates that managers should strive to enhance positive attitudes towards brands in order to develop deep and rewarding relationships with customers (Ahmad et al., 2021; Banerjee & Shaikh, 2022; Veloutsou, 2023). Conversely, management effort should actively prevent or minimise negative feelings and opposition towards a brand, as these undermine positive outcomes such as trust, satisfaction or loyalty (Curina et al., 2020). A polarizing brand is one which simultaneously invokes fervent support and equally intense opposition. Brand polarization entails strong emotions at both ends of the spectrum and denotes management's concurrent attention to, and maintenance of, passionate feelings on the antipodes of brand love and brand hate.

Paradoxically, some emerging empirical insights suggest that this positioning needs not be avoided because stoking hate can increase support for a brand (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019). Moreover, polarization has become a deliberate strategy for some brands (Kavilanz, 2021; Luo et al., 2013a) being beneficial for segmentation and targeting, and for building engagement and loyalty and in the design of the product offering (Weber et al., 2021). Although historically polarization was

limited to political (Banda & Kirkland, 2018; Pich et al., 2020; Spears et al., 1990) or football brands (Cobbs et al., 2017; Dalakas & Phillips-Melancon, 2012; Davies et al., 2006), now it seems to extend to other categories. In fact, evidence seems to point to a growing number of polarizing brands (Segran, 2021) which draw large numbers of lovers and haters simultaneously (Luo et al., 2013a; Thompson et al., 2006).

Despite its real-world prevalence, brand polarization as a theoretical phenomenon keeps evading academic research. One reason is the disconnect between different strands of theorising on positivity and negativity towards brands (Veloutsou & Guzmán, 2017). As a special case within this broader theme, academic studies on brand hate (e.g., Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2018; Zhang & Laroche, 2020) have evolved separately and independently from the scholarship on brand love (e.g., Ahuvia et al., 2022; Bagozzi et al., 2017; Coelho et al., 2019), somewhat precluding the possibility of integration between the two concepts. Although some studies have begun to explore transitions between the two states (Sakulsinlapakorn & Zhang, 2019), the question of coexistence remains underexplored. Moreover, branding research has conventionally been tasked increasing brand support (Veloutsou, 2023) and reducing opposition or eliminating hate (Zarantonello et al., 2018), rendering brand polarization as a rather counterintuitive and counterproductive approach (Luo et al., 2013a).

Considering past literature, the concept of brand polarization seems to be largely underdeveloped. Past studies have focused on the objects and outcomes of polarization: polarizing brands (Monahan et al., 2023), polarizing products (Rozenkrants et al., 2017) and even polarizing influencers (Koorank Beheshti et al., 2023). Such treatment has disregarded the brand polarization as a general phenomenon (Monahan et al., 2017; Rozenkrants et al., 2017), leaving its conceptualization and operationalization unexplored. Moreover, past attempts to empirically capture polarization have been largely limited to political science and psychology (e.g. Levendusky & Pope, 2011; Paddock, 2010; Rehm & Reilly, 2010; Strickler, 2018). Their explicit focus on the polarizing issues rather than polarization per se means that neither the past conceptions nor measurement can be readily extended to branding. The absence of a formal scale prevents the measurement of polarization (Bergkvist & Eisend, 2021) and hampers the examination of its relationship with other constructs.

The omission matters for several reasons. From a theoretical perspective, it seems valuable to revisit and potentially integrate the disjointed yet related concepts of brand love, brand hate and brand rivalry in a manner that supports research in multiple contexts, thus enabling comparisons and extensions. A reliable and valid measure of brand polarization offers the potential of accelerating research in multiple domains of brand sentiments. From a practical perspective, polarization seems to be commonplace, potentially affecting multiple brands. More research is needed to help managers acknowledge its merits or disadvantages and deal with the consequences. Reliable and valid measures for this emerging phenomenon can accelerate the production of relevant knowledge and therefore there is a requirement to operationalise it in an easier to use manner.

The paper aims to develop and operationalise the concept of brand polarization. Following an established development procedure (Churchill, 1979; DeVellis, 2017; Mackenzie et al., 2011; Rossiter, 2002), the paper maps out the dimensions of the concept and advances a novel measurement scale. Specifically, the process builds on systematic reviews of literature in five distinct fields of academic literature and six empirical studies deploying qualitative and quantitative data from two contexts (UK and Colombia). The key contribution concerns significant theoretical headway in how brand polarization can be conceived and captured empirically. The managerial relevance of this tool seems particularly valuable.

2. Polarization and its measurement

2.1. Existing conceptualisation of polarization

In the broadest sense, polarization refers to the division into opposing groups of people, beliefs or opinions (Carroll & Kubo, 2018). The concept has been extensively examined in political science with the objective of uncovering and exploiting differences between supporters and opponents of political parties or specific issues (e.g. Banda & Kirkland, 2018; Suhay, 2015; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). Similarly, social psychology examined polarization between groups of people and interventions, which may sharpen or close the divisions (Abril, 2018; Baliga et al., 2013). Although relatively new to marketing (Jayasimha & Billore, 2015; Luo et al., 2013a; Monahan et al., 2017), a few studies have examined polarization in the context of branding. For example, there have been some efforts to capture polarization outcomes in terms of dispersion in loyalty (Casteran et al., 2019), variance across ratings (Luo et al., 2013b) or in the attitude towards a brand (Mafael et al.,2016). Studies have also shown that companies can leverage polarization in segmentation to augment brand lovers (Kavilanz, 2021; Luo et al., 2013a) or in marketing communications to strengthen brand identity and solidify support (Needham & Glasby, 2015). In addition, acknowledging hate in communications may increase positive word of mouth (WoM) (Monahan et al., 2017). Furthermore, new product development may benefit from emphasising the unique characteristics of the brand that are strongly associated with the love and hate relationship with the brand consumers may have (Luo et al., 2013a).

Brand polarization has been defined as "affective phenomenon where beliefs and emotions of a significant number of people induce a simultaneous move to the extremes of positive and negative feelings and convictions towards the brand, like-minded consumers, and opposite-minded consumers" (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019, p. 620). As such, polarization can be considered both an outcome and an action. As an outcome, polarization is a property of a brand, where a polarizing brand causes sharp division into opposing groups of individuals (Luo et al., 2013a). Anecdotal evidence (Armstrong, 2017) and past studies (Rozenkrants et al., 2017) seem to imply that brands differ in their polarizing nature with some brands being more polarizing than others. As an action, polarization involves a set of activities that concurrently drive brand sentiments towards the antipodes of love and hate. Stoking hate through marketing communications (Monahan et al., 2017) or brand positioning that rests on stressing sharp differences (Jayasimha & Billore, 2015), denotes polarization as an action.

2.2. Polarization measurement

Close reading of the literature uncovers varied approaches to measuring polarization. In general, polarization tends to be captured indirectly, and most studies evidence it through significant differences between groups on issues of interest. For example, the political sciences may examine variance in opinions concerning political parties or ideologies (e.g., Banda & Kirkland, 2018; Paddock, 2010; Rehm & Reilly, 2010). Similarly, marketing studies have modelled polarization as dispersion in consumers' ratings for a specific brand (Luo et al., 2013b). Interestingly, the variance may take a bi-polar distribution with 0 and 1 denoting absence/presence of polarization (Levendusky & Pope, 2011).

Moreover, polarization may cover a broader spectrum of intensity. For example, "feeling thermometers" in political science (e.g., Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016; Strickler, 2018) ask respondents to express their feelings in terms of temperature, ranging from 0 (very cold - respondent dislikes the candidate, party or issue) to 100 (very warm - respondent likes the candidate, party or issue). One approach in marketing uses panel data on consumer brand loyalty to arrive at a polarization index with values between 0 and 1, where 0 indicates higher brand switching and lower loyalty (Casteran et al., 2019). Researchers in psychology have also considered a middle or neutral category in addition to the two extremes of polarization (e.g., Van der Pligt & Van Dijk, 1979; Wojcieszak, 2011).

Apart from capturing polarization at a point in time, variance proxies have also been used to show changes over time. For example, studies in psychology have typically deployed experimental design to test for differences in ratings before and after an intervention (e.g., Krizan & Baron, 2007; Liu & Latane, 1998; Spears et al., 1990), the purpose being to detect any change in the extremity of individuals' positions. The polarization index introduced in marketing covered data collected over six years providing important information about changes in loyalty over time (Casteran et al., 2019).

A final issue in measurement concerns the individual versus group dimension of polarization. The scholarly traditions in marketing and psychology conceive polarization as a phenomenon that relates predominantly to individuals and their attitudes and downplay any community or group dimension of the phenomenon. By contrast, some researchers in political science argue that polarization is a group phenomenon (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). Accordingly, polarization stems from a group conflict theory which emphasises that group membership is the reason behind negative feelings towards members and leaders of the opposing party (Dalton, 2006; Devine, 2012).

Despite much progress, existing approaches provide a somewhat imperfect measure of polarization. Variance models use idiosyncratic proxy measures developed specifically for a particular issue, politician or ideology (Paddock, 2010) and are thus context-specific and

timebound (Dixit & Weibull, 2007). As such, they lack generalisability, replicability or reliability: the measures cannot be used in other contexts, the estimates cannot be compared and have little meaning beyond the specific context. To enhance the understanding of polarization, its incidence in various contexts and its change over time, a new approach to measurement is needed (Bergkvist & Eisend, 2021).

3. Analytical approach

In line with accepted procedures (Churchill, 1979; DeVellis, 2017; Mackenzie et al., 2011; Rossiter, 2002), the current project followed a five-step process for scale development (Fig. 1). The process opened with definitions, dimensions, and an initial list of items from a literature review and a qualitative study. These were assessed by experts and then validated using three quantitative samples. The scale's nomological and discriminant validity were established. Finally, the scale was validated with a cross-cultural sample.

3.1. Step 1: Definition, dimensions, and item generation

The first step focused on the definition, dimensions, and the initial set of items for brand polarization. Two tasks served this purpose: (a) systematic engagement with the literature reviews (see Appendix A), (b) Study 1, which involved semi-structured interviews. The review of literature aimed to uncover existing definitions, dimensions, and measures of polarization in three different bodies of literature (marketing, political science, and social psychology). The literature search and analysis followed a systematic approach (Snyder, 2019), with pre-decided methods of collecting, appraising, and analysing the papers published prior to 2023 (Appendix A). To maximize coverage, this study adopted a broad search strategy for: (a) the sources the items were published and (b) keywords selection.

The semi-structured interviews utilised an interview guide aiming to capture consumers' detailed stories, experiences, and examples. To assure the polarizing nature of the discussed brands, participants were initially asked to report (a) brands they have strong positive and negative feelings for and knew people with opposite feelings (b) brands neutral to them but having consumer groups with simultaneous positive and negative feelings and (c) industries or sectors with brands having simultaneous passionate followers and detractors. In the second and third parts, participants reported their brand feelings, attitudinal and behavioural brand related outcomes and thoughts about other supporters and detractors of their chosen loved/hated brands. The fourth part focused on common and different features of all reported brands (loved, hated and neutral feelings). The 22 participants included UK residents with diverse backgrounds who reported their experiences and thoughts about self-reported polarizing brands that they either loved or hated (Appendix B). The qualitative data set in the form of interview transcripts amounted to 68,925 words (equivalent to 136 single line pages). The analysis followed an inductive process wherein existing literature on polarization and brand sentiment generated a set of initial codes. These initial codes were subsequently refined to create new codes when new insights emerged or the existing concepts insufficiently captured the meaning (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Through line-by-line coding these lower-level codes which were amalgamated into higher level dimensions. The qualitative findings significantly contributed to refining the definition, establishing dimensions, generating items, and augmenting the concept beyond the scope of existing literature.

The qualitative findings informed reconception of the brand polarization concept (see Appendix B). The definition reflects strong emotional connection with a brand where passionate feelings at both ends of the valence spectrum are shared by different groups of consumers. This conception differs in important ways from the related concepts of brand love, brand hate, and brand rivalry (Table 1). Unlike brand love and brand hate, which concern strong passionate feelings at only one end of the emotional spectrum (Bryson et al., 2013; Karjaluoto et al., 2016), polarization assumes the concurrent presence of both. Polarization is also conceptually different from brand rivalry, where rivalry necessitates the presence of an opposing brand. By contrast, polarization may occur irrespective of another brand, making rivalry a special case of polarization (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019).

The resulting conception of brand polarization consists of five

Steps	Methods	Data	Results
Step 1 - Definition, dimensions, and item generation	Systematic literature reviews on polarization in political science, polarization in social psychology, brand rivalry, brand love and brand hate	48 papers on polarization in political science, 30 on polarization in social psychology, 18 on brand rivalry, 54 on brand love, and 8 on brand hate selected using a systematic approach (Appendix 1)	Construct definition and dimensionality. Initial pool of 100 items
	Study 1 - Semi-structured interviews with consumers	22 consumers produced 68,925 words of transcription (Appendix 2)	
Step 2 - Initial item purification	Initial analysis for consistency, clarity, and parsimony	3 academic researchers in branding	Reduction of item pool to 59 items in 5 dimensions
	Study 2 - Academic experts panel	22 academic researchers in branding	Reduction of item pool to 27 items in 5 dimensions
Step 3 - Scale reliability and validity	Study 3 - Item reduction - Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)	UK sample collected in two stages using Prolific Academic (*N=181*) (Table 4)	Creation of a scale with 23 items in 4 dimensions
	Study 4 - Item properties - Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)	UK sample collected in two stages using Prolific Academic (*N=180*) (Table 4)	Convergent and discriminant validity confirmation
Step 4 - Nomological network and discriminant validity	Study 5 - Brand polarization relationship with positive/negative WoM	UK sample collected in two stages using Prolific Academic (*N=191*) (Table 4)	Scale behaviour in relation to other constructs (positive/negative WoM) confirmation
Step 5 - Cross-context scale validation	Study 6 - Brand polarization in a different national context	Colombian sample collected via snowballing (*N=190*) (Table 4)	Scale cross-context validation of the brand confirming configural and metric invariance between the UK and Colombian samples

Fig. 1. Brand polarization scale development process.

Table 1

Comparison of concepts.

	Definition	Main literature influencing the definition	Passionate feelings	Feelings Valence	Number of brands involved	Level of engagement	Intragroup identification	Intergroup alienation
Brand love	The degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name	Carroll & Ahuvia (2006, p.81)	Yes	Positive	One	Individual	No	No
Brand hate	An extreme form of brand dislike	Zarantonello et al., (2016, p.13)	Yes	Negative	One	Individual	No	No
Brand rivalry	Intense competition and a high degree of differentiation between two or more brands	Kuo & Feng (2013); Marticotte et al. (2016); Phillips-Melancon & Dalakas (2014); Verboven (1999)	Yes	Positive and negative	At least two	Group	Yes	Yes
Brand polarization	An affective and cognitive phenomenon where beliefs and emotions of a significant number of individual consumers induce a simultaneous split into the extremes involving positive and negative passionate feelings and convictions towards the brand, like-minded consumers, and opposite-minded consumers	Luo et al., (2013a); Luo et al. (2013b); Monahan et al. (2017); Osuna Ramírez et al. (2019); Park et al., (2013a); Park et al., (2013b); Rozenkrants et al. (2017); Webster & Abramowitz (2017)	Yes	Positive and negative	At least one	Group	Yes	Yes

Table 2
Dimensions of brand polarization.

Definitions	Main literature influencing the definition	Supporting quotes from the qualitative study	Number of items				
			Generated	1st item purification	2nd item purification	EFA	CFA
Brand passion: A psychological phenomenon constituted of excitation, infatuation, and obsession for a polarizing brand	Albert et al. (2013); Batra et al. (2012); Das et al. (2018); Füller et al. (2008); Herrando et al. (2017); Pourazad et al. (2020); Vallerand et al. (2003); Thomson et al., (2005)	"I'm a Roma fan and Lazio would be the crosstown city rival, so two brands where there's some strong feelings" (M9, 39). "So, a shop that I absolutely loathe is Tesco, and I know a lot of people who love Tesco and shop in Tesco and do online shopping from Tesco and they say Tesco is amazing. I just think it's a dreadful shop" (F7, 74). "I suppose the Tottenham would be very much against it and will have quite deep, you know, deep passions towards or against them" (M8, 21).	13	13	5	8*	8
Self-brand benchmarking: The degree consumers compare their self-identity with the identity of the polarizing brand	Davvetas & Diamantopoulos (2017); Hegner et al. (2017b); Dwivedi et al. (2015); Escalas & Bettman (2003); Lam et al., (2013a); Popp & Woratschek (2017); Stockburger-Sauer et al. (2012); Kemp et al. (2014)	"…they have worked strong on developing a brand that people can identify with… if you can identify yourself with the brand or you can't identify yourself with the brand you will create these strong positive or negative feelings towards this brand" (M4, 28). "So, I find the designs, the colours, the ranges of things that they provide, even the accessories I like the style much more, it's more me" (F2, 26). "[In the hated brand] You find coffees of all shapes and flavours that are very far away from the old style… which I find myself closer to" (M10, 42).	26	12	6	5	5
Intra-group identification: The extent to which an individual associates him or herself with people who share the same feelings for the polarizing brand	Dalakas et al. (2015); Dholakia et al. (2004); Ellemers et al. (1999); Bartels & Hoogendam (2011); Chiang et al. (2017); Becker & Tausch (2014)	"Yes, certainly that there's a camaraderie and a togetherness. And you know, I feel that certainly like me, they're, we're holding on to hope together, hope that things can turn around for the team, hope that our hopes will be vindicated. So, there's a unity I think of mutual respect" (M9, 39). "I feel like myself among them… when you talk to somebody of those you feel like, 'oh they share the same ideas'" (F10, 32).	15	11	5	5	5
Inter-group dissociation: The extent to which an individual detaches him or herself from people who have opposite feelings about the polarizing brand	Dalakas et al. (2015); Becker & Tausch (2014); Weiss & Lang (2012)	"…the thing I don't like about them [hated brand] most is the loyalty behind it, is the people who love it. I just think that they are a bit stupid to queue for to pay a thousand pounds for a phone… I think that the kind of people that attract or are attracted to Apple are the kind of people that I don't want to, you know, be associated with" (M7, 22). "So, at home I went to the University of Kentucky, and our big rival is the Indiana Hoosiers. And so, we have this perception that their fans are certain ways. So, I think that kind of goes back to identity, like they are going to be loud and obnoxious and they're like out of control. I think there's a certain identity that comes with associating when you have certain brands" (F6, 23).	15	11	5	5	5

Table 2 (*continued*)

Definitions	Main literature influencing the definition	Supporting quotes from the qualitative study	Number of items				
			Generated	1st item purification	2nd item purification	EFA	CFA
Generation of strong feelings for the brand's achievement/ misfortune: The extreme emotions felt by consumers in response to the polarizing brand' misfortune	Hickman & Ward (2007); Japutra et al. (2018); Berndsen et al. (2017); Cobbs et al. (2017); Dalakas & Phillips-Melancon (2012); Feather & Sherman (2002); Marticotte & Arcand (2017)	"[If the hated brand does not perform well] you feel very strong, very passionate about your own brand. Gives you even more support than before. Yeah, it basically feels good… because it's the rival you don't want to see success" (M8, 21)."It's not just that I root for the Redskins, it's that I will actively root against the Dallas Cowboys… maybe in an online, if I'm online, in like a chat group or sort of, you know, kind of a Redskins fan section I might express displeasure or say negative things about the Cowboys and their performance or some of their players" (M9, 39).	31	12	6	0	0
Total			**100**	**59**	**27**	**23**	**23**

*As the items of brand passion and generation of strong feelings for the brand's achievement/misfortune loaded in the same factor, brand passion was retained including the items of generation of strong feelings for the brand's achievement/misfortune

dimensions: brand passion, self-brand benchmarking, intra-group identification, inter-group dissociation and generation of strong feelings for the achievement/misfortune of the brand (Table 2). Brand passion encompasses intense emotions directed towards a brand. While previous research predominantly examined strong positive brand sentiments (Albert et al., 2013; Batra et al., 2012; Gilal et al., 2021), the potential for passion to carry negative valence (Zarantonello et al., 2016) has been often disregarded (Herrando et al., 2017). The results from Study 1 have unveiled the existence of both powerful positive and powerful negative emotions, thereby illustrating brand passion as a construct spanning across the entire emotional spectrum (Füller et al., 2008). The approach to passion adopted here attempts to register passion in both the negative and positive direction to permit concurrent capture of the intense positive and negative feelings and convictions associated with brands.

Self-brand benchmarking concurrently addresses a close alignment or a strong misalignment between the consumer's identity and the brand's identity. This concept shares similarities with, yet remains distinct from, three existing constructs in the literature: consumer-brand identification (Popp & Woratschek, 2017), self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), and symbolic incongruity (Hegner, Fetscherin, et al., 2017). Unlike consumer-brand identification, which is a positively valanced construct capturing a psychological state in which the consumer perceives, feels and values belongingness with a brand (Lam et al., 2013), self-brand benchmarking accounts for both identification and disassociation. It differs from self-brand connection (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), which ranges from positive to neutral and excludes negative feelings and perceptions whereas self-benchmarking registers both. In contrast to symbolic incongruity (Hegner, Fetscherin, et al., 2017), which primarily focuses on the negative sentiments arising when the brand projects an image undesired and contradictory with the consumer's self-concept, self-brand benchmarking also encompasses positivity. The qualitative findings revealed that the match or mismatch between the consumer's identity and the brand's identity helps to explain the strong positive or negative feelings. Therefore, self-brand benchmarking considers both the congruent and incongruent brand features with the consumer's self-concept (Davvetas & Diamantopoulos, 2017).

The intra-group identification and inter-group dissociation draw on Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory. Identification with an in-group demarcates the individual's sense of belonging to the group and the value derived from group membership (Chiang et al., 2017). Dissociation implies disconnecting or separating from groups the consumers do not wish to belong to, as they are perceived to be threatening to the self (Becker & Tausch, 2014). The interview data suggested that extreme positive and negative feelings towards a brand are shared within a group of like-minded consumers. Interviewees spoke of the need to identify with people who share the same feelings about a polarizing brand. Concurrently, they wish to dissociate from opposite-minded consumers.

The final dimension of brand polarization relates to the strong feelings derived from the achievement or misfortune of the brand. In the literature, a fairly similar term would be the German concept of *schadenfreude*, which denotes the pleasure felt by one party at the adversity of another (Berndsen et al., 2017; Dalakas & Phillips-Melancon, 2012; Marticotte & Arcand, 2017). At its extreme, *schadenfreude* may involve a "malicious pleasure" (Japutra et al., 2018, p.1190). Interviews have revealed that, in a highly competitive environment, pleasure is not only achieved through the good performance of the loved brand, but also from the hated brand's adversity, hardship or calamity.

The review of existing measures and the analysis of the interview data generated one hundred items (Table 2).

3.2. Step 2 – Item purification

To condense the one hundred scale items, they were mapped onto potential dimensions of brand polarization revealing redundancies, repetitions, and overlaps. Three researchers assessed the pool for consistency, clarity and parsimony (Gilliam & Voss, 2013) and reduced the items to fifty-nine within the five dimensions of brand polarization (see Table 3). The retained items included thirteen for brand passion, twelve for self-brand benchmarking, eleven for intra-group identification, eleven for inter-group dissociation, and twelve for generation of strong feelings for the brand's achievement/misfortune.

Study 2 involved a survey of academic experts. The concept definition, dimensions and fifty-nine items were shared with academic researchers who acted as judges (DeVellis, 2017; Hardesty & Bearden, 2004; Mackenzie et al., 2011; Rossiter, 2002). The sample of 42 internationally renowned academics in branding included the authors of studies from the systematic literature review and were approached via e-mail from an academic who is also publishing in brand management using a link to a Qualtrics-based survey with structured and open questions. The experts commented on the definition of brand polarization, the suggested dimensions and the specific fifty-nine items. A total of 22 experts who responded to the survey supported the definition and the suggested dimensionality. Considering the pool of items, the experts

Table 3
Items retained after experts' panel (study 2).

Item	Source
Brand passion	
I am passionate about this brand	Thomson et al. (2005)
I have extreme emotions for this brand	Interviews
This brand arouses intense feelings	Interviews
I have strong feelings for this brand	Interviews
I have almost an obsessive feeling for this brand	Adapted from Vallerand et al. (2003)
Self-brand benchmarking	
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to express my identity	Interviews
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to describe my personality	Adapted from Kemp et al. (2014)
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to present who I am	Adapted from Escalas & Bettman (2003)
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to reveal my values	Interviews
I can compare myself with this brand	Interviews
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to explain my character	Interviews
Intra-group identification	
I associate with the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	Interviews
I feel close to the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	Adapted from Becker & Tausch (2014)
I identify with the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	Adapted from Ellemers et al. (1999)
I relate to the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	Interviews
I have things in common with people who feel the same way I do about this brand	Adapted from Becker & Tausch (2014)
Inter-group dissociation	
I feel a distance between myself and the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	Adapted from Becker & Tausch (2014)
I dissociate from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	Interviews
I do not identify with the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	Adapted from Ellemers et al. (1999)
I am different from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	Interviews
I am disconnected from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	Interviews
Generation of strong feelings for the brand's achievement/misfortune	
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have strong feelings	Interviews
When I learn of this brand's achievement, I have strong feelings	Interviews
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have intense emotions	Interviews
When I learn of this brand's achievement, I have intense sentiments	Interviews
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have intense sentiments	Interviews
When I learn of this brand's achievement, I have intense emotions	Interviews

evaluated each question within the proposed scale for clarity and alignment with the dimension. These evaluations led to further purification of the scale, with poorly rated items being removed. As a result of this process, the measurement scale was reduced to twenty-seven items, as shown in Table 3.

3.3. Step 3 – Reliability and validity

The empirical test of scale reliability and validity involved an online survey. Acknowledging the interplay between product category and polarization, with or without the existence or rivalry, data were

Table 4
Survey samples demographics.

	Study 3 EFA Sample UK (N = 181)	Study 4 CFA Sample UK (N = 180)	Study 5 CFA nomological network Sample UK (N = 191)	Study 6 Colombian Sample (N = 190)
Gender				
Male	74 (41 %)	67 (37 %)	73 (38 %)	91 (48 %)
Female	107 (59 %)	113 (63 %)	118 (62 %)	99 (52 %)
Age				
18–24	39 (21 %)	36 (20 %)	37 (19 %)	91 (48 %)
25–34	61 (34 %)	64 (35 %)	67 (35 %)	36 (19 %)
35–44	38 (21 %)	40 (22 %)	46 (24 %)	32 (17 %)
45–54	23 (13 %)	23 (13 %)	28 (15 %)	27 (14 %)
55–64	13 (7 %)	16 (9 %)	9 (5 %)	2 (1 %)
65–75	7 (4 %)	1 (1 %)	4 (2 %)	2 (1 %)
Education				
High school	45 (25 %)	37 (21 %)	48 (25 %)	68 (36 %)
Technical / vocational training	20 (11 %)	16 (9 %)	21 (11 %)	5 (3 %)
Professional qualification / diploma	17 (9 %)	22 (12 %)	25 (13 %)	43 (23 %)
Undergraduate degree	67 (37 %)	71 (39 %)	68 (36 %)	68 (36 %)
Postgraduate degree	30 (17 %)	30 (17 %)	25 (13 %)	6 (3 %)
Other	2 (1 %)	4 (2 %)	4 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Employment				
Student	21 (12 %)	21 (12 %)	19 (10 %)	87 (46 %)
Self-employed	17 (9 %)	19 (10 %)	16 (8 %)	18 (9 %)
Working full-time	78 (43 %)	77 (43 %)	89 (47 %)	70 (37 %)
Working part-time	34 (19 %)	27 (15 %)	28 (15 %)	6 (3 %)
Out of work but looking for a job	10 (5 %)	9 (5 %)	10 (5 %)	5 (3 %)
Out of work and not looking for a job	7 (4 %)	13 (7 %)	18 (9 %)	0 (0 %)
Retired	10 (5 %)	7 (4 %)	7 (4 %)	4 (2 %)
Other	4 (2 %)	7 (4 %)	4 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Product category				
Football teams	49 (27 %)	47 (26 %)	76 (40 %)	67 (35 %)
Airlines	63 (35 %)	64 (36 %)	42 (22 %)	45 (24 %)
Music Artists	69 (38 %)	69 (38 %)	73 (38 %)	78 (41 %)

collected for brands in three sectors with somewhat different characteristics. Football brands have been chosen because past studies categorized them as highly polarizing and with high rivalry (Cobbs et al., 2017; Dalakas & Phillips-Melancon, 2012; Davies et al., 2006), feature supported by the qualitative analysis. This highly polarized category was coupled with two others: music artists and airlines. While human brands, such as micro-influencers and artists (Giertz et al., 2022; Koorank Beheshti et al., 2023), along with airlines (Luo et al., 2013a), can

Table 5
EFA: Final Pattern Matrix (Second Round Analysis).***

	Brand passion	Self-brand benchmarking	Intra-group identification	Inter-group dissociation
% of variance explained	**46.4%**	**16.0%**	**8.1%**	**5.8%**
Cronbach's α	**0.946**	**0.936**	**0.936**	**0.892**
I have extreme emotions for this brand	**0,722**	0,101	−0,014	0,072
This brand arouses intense feelings	**0,699**	0,007	0,090	0,035
I have strong feelings for this brand	**0,600**	0,197	0,052	−0,055
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have strong feelings	**0,681**	0,122	0,059	−0,029
When I learn of this brand's achievement, I have strong feelings	**0,668**	0,224	0,046	−0,137
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have intense emotions	**1,024**	−0,177	0,008	0,024
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have intense sentiments	**0,909**	−0,067	−0,009	0,062
When I learn of this brand's achievement, I have intense emotions	**0,835**	0,111	−0,023	−0,003
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to express my identity	0,028	**0,828**	0,036	−0,024
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to describe my personality	0,106	**0,817**	0,045	−0,074
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to reveal my values	0,040	**0,822**	−0,008	0,031
I can compare myself with this brand	0,060	**0,783**	−0,127	0,102
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to explain my character	−0,035	**0,948**	0,009	0,021
I associate with the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	−0,002	0,002	**0,797**	0,013
I feel close to the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,011	0,056	**0,844**	0,034
I identify with the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,052	−0,047	**0,902**	0,001
I relate to the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,046	−0,041	**0,892**	0,005
I have things in common with people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,042	−0,018	**0,811**	−0,024
I feel a distance between myself and the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	−0,053	0,046	0,162	**0,655**
I dissociate from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	−0,071	0,070	0,044	**0,811**
I do not identify with the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	0,196	−0,056	−0,249	**0,783**
I am different from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	−0,077	0,013	0,134	**0,777**
I am disconnected from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	0,024	−0,004	−0,010	**0,900**

also be polarizing, the qualitative data suggested that their polarizing nature is lower and with no reports from the literature or the qualitative data for rivalry. All quantitative data were collected via Qualtrics from Prolific Academic, a crowdsourcing platform. Prolific Academic was chosen for its highest penetration in the UK at the time of data collection (Peer et al., 2017; Prolific Demographics, 2019).

The instrument was pre-tested with a pilot study of 60 respondents from a convenience sample to address concerns about questionnaire design, response (Thabane et al., 2010) or sampling (Johanson & Brooks, 2010). As a result, several adjustments were made in the formatting of the instrument but all the retained items from Step 2 were kept.

The main data was collected using two samples of UK residents. The data collection included a pre-selection of respondents who could provide relevant information and, therefore, overcome issues related to sampling bias such as preconceived responses - "*cheating*" and "*speeding*" (Kees et al., 2017) and adopted a two-stage approach.

In stage one, potential adult respondents were presented with a choice of the three selected product categories and asked to choose the one they were most familiar with. Then, participants' product familiarity, experience and knowledge was captured with 7 point scale items, using one item of the brand familiarity scale adapted from Delgado-Ballester et al. (2012), one item of the brand experience scale adapted from Brakus et al. (2009) and one item of the brand knowledge scale adapted from Alimen & Cerit (2010). Within each category, the respondents were asked to identify their loved or hated brands they knew that other consumers had adverse feelings for. Over a period of seven days, a total of 1.254 responses were collected for stage one.

Stage two targeted a subset of 577 of the initial respondents, only stage one respondents who were lovers or haters of polarizing brands in the selected product categories, with high product familiarity, experience, and knowledge. This assured that the final sample included only pre-identified lovers and haters of specific self-reported polarizing brands. Sixteen respondents who failed to answer appropriately any of

the three attention checks and nine responses with missing data higher than 10 % were eliminated, leaving 552 usable responses for the analysis.

The final study instrument included twenty-seven items measuring brand polarization. In addition, the questionnaire contained four items capturing positive/negative word of mouth. Harrison-Walker's (2001) scale was used to capture respondents' willingness to tell other people positive or negative opinions about the brand. All items were measured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = completely disagree to 7 = completely agree).

The three waves of data collection in stage two resulted in three UK samples of 181, 180 and 191 responses. The first UK sample (Study 3) was used to empirically examine the patterns of data using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The second UK sample (Study 4) served as empirical material for Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The third UK sample was used to test the scale's nomological network and discriminant validity (Study 5). Table 4 outlines the samples' properties. Given the twenty-seven originally generated items to measure brand polarization and the four items to measure positive/negative WoM, each of the UK samples were chosen to generate sufficient ratio response cases per item (Hair et al., 2006), with 6.7:1 (first and second UK samples) and 6.2:1 (third UK sample). The samples meet the *Bartlett's test of sphericity (*$p < 0.001$*)* and exceed the *Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy* (KMO) recommended minimum of 0.6 (Green & Salkind, 2016) with 0.922 for the first, 0.926 for the second, and 0.918 for the third UK sample.

Study 3 involved exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to reveal the structure of the brand polarization scale (Costello & Osborne, 2005). The analysis deployed *Maximum likelihood with eigenvalues* greater than one (Henson & Roberts, 2006) and *Promax* rotation to reveal the simplest structure (Finch, 2006). Two rounds of EFA were performed with cross-loading and low loading items removed between rounds (four items). The data revealed that two dimensions of the original scale (brand passion and generation of strong feelings for the brand's

Table 6
CFA: Brand polarization.

Latent factors and items	Brand polarization, UK sample 2 (study 4)		Brand polarization, UK sample 3 (study 5)		Brand polarization, Colombian sample (study 6)	
	St. loading	*t*-value	St. loading	*t*-value	St. loading	*t*-value
Brand passion	Alpha = 0.95, AVE = 0.68 CR = 0.94		Alpha = 0.94, AVE = 0.66 CR = 0.94		Alpha = 0.95, AVE = 0.70 CR = 0.95	
I have extreme emotions for this brand	0,695	29,47	0,813	29,56	0,750	25,42
This brand arouses intense feelings	0,676	29,52	0,768	28,87	0,734	34,24
I have strong feelings for this brand	0,792	30,20	0,799	32,16	0,877	29,51
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have strong feelings	0,799	32,57	0,711	35,96	0,774	30,26
When I learn of this brand's achievement, I have strong feelings	0,848	28,57	0,873	32,78	0,892	32,98
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have intense emotions	0,905	26,66	0,821	29,77	0,817	28,05
When I learn of this brand's misfortune, I have intense sentiments	0,899	24,57	0,832	28,35	0,917	27,30
When I learn of this brand's achievement, I have intense emotions	0,923	24,18	0,885	27,96	0,927	29,09
Self-brand benchmarking	Alpha = 0.95, AVE = 0.79 CR = 0.95		Alpha = 0.93, AVE = 0.71 CR = 0.93		Alpha = 0.93, AVE = 0.72 CR = 0.93	
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to express my identity	0,842	23,72	0,837	26,68	0,791	25,60
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to describe my personality	0,932	21,27	0,871	24,90	0,851	23,66
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to reveal my values	0,890	25,28	0,861	25,36	0,898	24,84
I can compare myself with this brand	0,833	21,69	0,746	23,77	0,765	22,38
When I think about myself, I can use this brand as a means to explain my character	0,928	21,88	0,895	24,34	0,922	23,56
Intra-group identification	Alpha = 0.93, AVE = 0.72 CR = 0.93		Alpha = 0.93, AVE = 0.70 CR = 0.92		Alpha = 0.93, AVE = 0.70 CR = 0.92	
I associate with the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,811	31,10	0,804	32,09	0,678	37,88
I feel close to the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,913	30,99	0,911	31,55	0,927	37,55
I identify with the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,888	37,80	0,866	33,39	0,905	34,95
I relate to the people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,853	37,45	0,841	33,38	0,811	33,72
I have things in common with people who feel the same way I do about this brand	0,763	39,98	0,754	39,23	0,829	38,41
Inter-group dissociation	Alpha = 0.89, AVE = 0.62 CR = 0.89		Alpha = 0.87, AVE = 0.56 CR = 0.87		Alpha = 0.81, AVE = 0.52 CR = 0.84	
I feel a distance between myself and the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	0,652	25,13	0,735	25,89	0,689	20,66
I dissociate from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	0,759	22,61	0,707	22,23	0,624	21,55
I do not identify with the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	0,789	23,79	0,747	24,07	0,605	23,94
I am different from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	0,813	25,86	0,793	26,43	0,682	22,97
I am disconnected from the people who feel the opposite way I do about this brand	0,904	23,59	0,767	24,46	0,937	21,38

achievement/misfortune) load onto the same factor. After reviewing the redaction of the items belonging to both dimensions, it was observed that all of them were related to intense or strong feelings and emotions, so the label "brand passion" was retained for the factor that included items originally developed to capture "brand passion" (three items) and "Generation of strong feelings for the brand's achievement/misfortune" (five items).

The revised scale after the EFA's second round (Table 5) includes four dimensions and twenty-three items: brand passion (eight items), self-brand benchmarking (five items), intra-group identification (five items) and inter-group dissociation (five items). The four factors explain 76 % of the overall variance each with an *eigenvalue* higher than one. The items across dimensions have loadings over 0.60 with no cross loadings. The dimensions exhibit good reliability, with Cronbach's α values above 0.89, higher than the advocated cut-off point of 0.70 (Santos, 1999).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was contacted using sample 4 estimated the regression coefficients between the items and the latent constructs (Schreiber et al., 2006). Table 6 summarises the results of CFA on two UK samples (UK samples 2 and 3 - Studies 4 and 5) and non-UK (Colombian) sample (Study 6). Considering Study 4, the analysis shows acceptable model fit with a CMIN/DF value at 1.776, CFI at 0.956, SRMR at 0.048, and RMSEA at 0.059. All the standardised regression

weights are above the acceptable threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2006).

Several indicators evidence that the scale meets acceptable standards (see Tables 7 and 8). The dimensions of brand polarization attain good composite reliability exceeding the recommended level of 0.7 (Bacon et al., 1995; Hair et al., 2006). Convergent validity with the average variance extracted (AVE) ranges from 0.62 to 0.79, exceeding the minimum acceptable value of 0.5. The value of the AVE is higher than any of the associated squared correlations for each dimension, and the HTMT analysis shows values lower than 0.9 (see Table 7), evidencing discriminant validity (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Voorhees et al., 2016).

No multicollinearity issues are observed between the scale's dimensions, as the variance inflation factors show values below 3.0, as presented in Table 8 (O'Brien, 2007).

3.4. Step 4 – Nomological validity

To verify that the brand polarization scale meets nomological validity, Study 5 tested the psychometric properties of brand polarization in relation to another construct, a voicing behavioural intention, the positive/negative WoM. Positive WoM is the extent to which a consumer expresses warm approval or admiration of the brand to others (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) whereas negative WoM involves spreading adverse information (Marticotte et al., 2016).

Table 7
Brand polarization CFA model – assessment of reliability and validity.

		CR	AVE	Brand passion		Self-brand benchmarking		Intra-group identification		Inter-group dissociation
UK sample 1	Brand passion	0,94	0,68	**0,822**						
	Self-brand benchmarking	0,95	0,79	0,79***	0.74	**0,886**				
	Intra-group identification	0,93	0,72	0,68***	0.62	0,55***	0.50	**0,847**		
	Inter-group dissociation	0,89	0,62	0,14*	0.16	0,11	0.12	0,45***	0.44	**0,79**
UK sample 2	Brand passion	0,94	0,66	**0,813**						
	Self-brand benchmarking	0,92	0,71	0,75***	0.68	**0,843**				
	Intra-group identification	0,92	0,70	0,57***	0.52	0,63***	0.55	**0,836**		
	Inter-group dissociation	0,87	0,56	0,30***	0.29	0,29**	0.26	0,47***	0.42	**0,75**
Colombian sample	Brand passion	0,95	0,70	**0,839**						
	Self-brand benchmarking	0,93	0,72	0,71***	0.69	**0,847**				
	Intra-group identification	0,93	0,70	0,42***	0.44	0,54***	0.51	**0,835**		
	Inter-group dissociation	0,84	0,52	0,33***	0.29	0,37***	0.30	0,50***	0.46	**0,72**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. The diagonal shows the square root of the AVE. The number after the correlations corresponds to the HTMT analysis.

Table 8
Variance inflation factors.

	VIF		
	UK sample 1	UK sample 2	Colombian sample
DV: Brand passion			
Self-brand benchmarking	1,35	1,45	1,37
Intra-group identification	1,65	1,65	1,58
Inter-group dissociation	1,27	1,22	1,27
DV: Self-brand benchmarking			
Intra-group identification	2,03	1,55	1,46
Inter-group dissociation	1,28	1,23	1,27
Brand passion	1,67	1,39	1,26
DV: Intra-group identification			
Inter-group dissociation	1,03	1,10	1,11
Brand passion	2,21	1,91	1,91
Self-brand benchmarking	2,19	1,90	1,92
DV: Inter-group dissociation			
Brand passion	2,70	1,97	1,92
Self-brand benchmarking	2,20	2,06	2,10
Intra-group identification	1,63	1,54	1,39

The concept is well suited for the nomological test. WoM allows consumers to pass positive or negative information and thoughts about a brand, product or company in an informal, person-to-person fashion (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Ismail & Spinelli, 2012; Roy et al., 2013; Wallace et al., 2014). WoM is reported to be one of the outcomes of polarization resulting in brand hate (Hegner, Fenko, et al., 2017) or brand love (Bairrada et al., 2018) accordingly. Activism, entailed in WoM, supports ideologically extreme positions, reinforcing the division between supporters and opponents (Layman et al., 2006).

Using a third UK sample (N = 191, see Tables 4 & 6), Study 5 estimated a CFA model with two constructs (brand polarization and WoM) and twenty-seven indicator variables or items (twenty-three for brand polarization and four for WoM). The items to measure positive/negative WoM were borrowed from Harrison-Walker's (2001) four item WoM scale (*I mention this brand to others quite frequently; I've told more people about this brand than I've told about most other brands; I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about this brand; When I tell others about this brand, I tend to talk about it in great detail*). The model indicates good fit, with CMIN/DF = 1.785, CFI = 0.949, SRMR = 0.065 and RMSEA = 0.064. All factor-loading estimates were statistically significant (p < 0.001) and ranged from 0.707 to 0.912. The Cronbach's α values for each construct ranged from 0.868 to 0.943 and composite reliabilities varied from 0.866 to 0.939, indicating internal consistency of the scales.

The AVE values ranged from 0.563 to 0.711 and were greater than the squared correlations of the underlying constructs demonstrating discriminant validity. The path between brand polarization and positive/negative WoM has a β = 0.95, p < 0.001.

3.5. Step 5 – Cross-cultural scale validation

In the final step, Study 6 examined cross-context validity of the scale using data from Colombia. Cultural indexes show that Colombians significantly differ from British respondents in power distance, individualism, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation (Hofstede Insights, 2022; Soares et al., 2007), thus providing a suitable choice for validation. The data collection deployed the instrument in Spanish and equivalence was ensured through the adapted etic instrument and parallel translation (Douglas & Craig, 2006). Data was collected through a Qualtrics-based online survey from a convenience sampling using snowballing (Dragan & Isaic-Maniu, 2013; Etikan et al., 2016). To access the questionnaire respondents had to answer to two screening questions: *"Is there a [selected product category] brand you love and you know other people hate?"* and *"Is there a [selected product category] brand you hate and you know other people love?"*. A total of 339 responses were collected with 224 relating to loved or hated polarizing brands. Twelve respondents who failed attention checks and twenty-two responses with missing data higher than 10 % were eliminated, leaving 190 usable responses (see Table 5). Considering the twenty-seven items employed in this study (twenty-three for brand polarization and four for positive/negative WoM), the Colombian sample generates sufficient ratio of 8.3:1 response cases per item (Hair et al., 2006). Results of Study 6 show good model fit for the Colombian sample with a CMIN/DF value at 1.943, CFI at 0.950, SRMR at 0.063, and RMSEA at 0.070. All the standardised regression weights are above the acceptable threshold as shown in Table 6.

Cross-context validation involved multi-group CFA analysis using the Colombian sample (Study 6) and data from Study 4. The model estimated differences between the samples with both groups unconstrained and displaying good fit, with CMIN/DF = 1.749, CFI = 0.960, SRMR = 0.049 and RMSEA = 0.045, demonstrating configural invariance. Further, the model proved to be metrically invariant between the two samples with the p-value of the measurement weights in the multigroup analysis at 0.111, i.e., greater than the 0.05 suggested threshold (Teo & Noyes, 2010). Therefore, the results confirmed the configural and metric level invariance between the UK and the Colombian samples, indicating the applicability of the brand polarization scale across cultures.

4. Discussion and theoretical contribution

This study offers a novel operationalisation of the brand polarization phenomenon as a multi-dimensional construct. Given the importance of brand relationships in today's competitive marketplace and the existence of brand polarization, the study offers a non-brand-specific approach to polarization, which facilitates comparative study of the phenomenon that moves away from objects, such as polarizing brands (Monahan et al., 2017) or polarizing products (Rozenkrants et al., 2017). Through an extensive scale development process, the study enhances the conceptualisation and operationalisation of brand polarization, providing new theoretical and applied directions.

Overall, this research contributes to the branding literature in three significant ways. The first contribution concerns a novel operationalisation of an emerging concept. Integrating insights from diverse literature including psychology, political science, and marketing, the study conceptualises brand polarization and identifies its distinct dimensions. In doing so, the study constitutes a first attempt to develop a comprehensive and multidimensional conception of brand polarization. Admittedly, two of the originally suggested dimensions comprising brand polarization - brand passion and generation of strong feelings for the brand's achievement/misfortune - were amalgamated during the scale development engagement. Nonetheless, the resulting four-dimensional concept, including brand passion, self-brand benchmarking, intra-group identification and inter-group dissociation, encompasses the intended theoretical domain. Compared to existing conceptions (Luo et al., 2013b; Monahan et al., 2017; Rozenkrants et al., 2017), a key headway concerns its robust and comprehensive nature.

The second contribution concerns specific dimensions of the measure. For example, in terms of emotions, the measure taps into multifaceted notions of affect capturing directly passionate positive and negative emotions towards the brand, like-minded consumers, and opposite-minded consumers. The multifocality of affection has been acknowledged in other areas of branding (e.g., Dessart et al., 2015), and this study extends it to polarization but also potentially to rivalry (Berendt et al., 2018) and hate (Zarantonello et al., 2018). In addition, the conception of polarization acknowledges concurrent importance at a different level including individual and group level (Mannarini et al., 2017). In particular, the collective nature of brand polarization has not yet been explored, to the authors' best knowledge. The findings of this work strongly support that like-minded consumers play an important role in the extremization of feelings towards a brand extending the findings from studies concerning other constructs (Fraering & Minor, 2013; Sierra et al., 2017). Finally, the dimension of self-brand benchmarking enhances past literature by integrating two different concepts. In past studies, consumer-brand identification and consumer-brand dis-identification have been treated as two different constructs (Hegner, Fetscherin, et al., 2017; Popp & Woratschek, 2017; Wolter et al., 2016). The newly identified construct captures the willingness of an individual to compare oneself with the brand regardless of the direction of sentiment.

The third contribution concerns the advantages of a brand agnostic instrument to measure brand polarization. Past efforts to capture polarization typically involved either brand-specific items or context where brands were named. Although valuable, such an approach prevents comparative assessment of polarization across multiple brands or examination of incidence of polarization in multiple product categories. From a managerial perspective, it is difficult to account for market entry of new brands, as these distort the measurement. This study offers a novel non-context-specific operationalisation of brand polarization as an opening pathway to analysing it across different product and brand categories and within different time-horizons, including longitudinal studies. In essence, the scale lays the foundations for future empirical studies (Bergkvist & Eisend, 2021).

5. Managerial implications

This work offers useful insights for practitioners. Given that brand polarization is reported to be the chosen positioning tactic for some brands (Kavilanz, 2021; Luo et al., 2013a; Needham & Glasby, 2015), this work offers a valid and reliable scale of the phenomenon that practicing managers can leverage to intentionally develop polarizing brands, i.e., to assess the degree to which they have achieved this positioning. The data collected at an individual level (consumer) can be aggregated and reported at different levels. Individual customers can be targeted to permit in-depth qualitative explorations but also customisation. Individuals may be grouped according to the strength and valence of their feelings to form segments, for example, of supporters and detractors.

At the most aggregate level, the scale can be used to measure the magnitude of polarization and its trends over time. For example, the scale can also be used as a long-term diagnostic tool to track the consistency and effectiveness of the brand polarization positioning over time. Longitudinal measure of brand polarization may help monitor positioning choices and provide estimates for the consistency of the brand meaning. For managers, such data will aid understanding of the effectiveness of marketing strategies and guidance for the refinement of the brand identity and signalling.

The scale can also assist managers in examining the effects of their marketing tactics on consumer behaviour, by examining brand polarization's interactions with other constructs. Given that polarizing brands have lovers and haters, managers can gain insight into the effectiveness of their decisions in the different consumer segments and identify possible unintentional or unwanted effects of a brand's polarizing positioning.

6. Limitations and directions for future research

This paper has some limitations that provide future research opportunities. One limitation concerns sampling and, specifically, the use of convenience samples, as the adoption of non-probability sampling reduces the generalisability of the findings. Future research should replicate this study in a naturalistic setting.

The brand polarization phenomenon relies on the coexistence of different consumers that have opposing strong feelings towards a brand. Though this study captures the perceptions and attitudes towards brands, it offers limited insight into their implications for consumers' intended or real behaviour. Future research may explore intentional and behavioural similarities and differences between passionate positive and negative sentiments towards a brand.

Although this work tests the nomological validity of brand polarization vis a vis WoM, this is but one relationship in a wider nomological network. Future research could extend the number of concepts by embracing, for instance, potential antecedents and consequences of brand polarization. An exciting opportunity concerns longitudinal studies carried out at different points in time through multiple waves of data collection in different contexts.

The current study evidences scale stability over two cultural contexts but interesting opportunities concern extending this work. For example, polarization as a strategy may generate dissimilar effects in different cultures. It is possible that such positioning might be less effective in cultures that avoid confrontation compared to those that more easily accept competition and conflict. Future studies on brand polarization in different cultural contexts could examine both the generalisability of the scale and the impact of polarization as a positioning strategy.

This study aimed to develop a scale to measure brand polarization as perceived by consumers. Future research could examine the perceptions of different actors. For example, the managerial perspective including the reasons behind this positioning strategy, or the unintentional brand polarization is largely missing. Furthermore, future investigations could explore the scale's performance when applied to different categories of

polarizing brands.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sergio Andrés Osuna Ramírez: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Cleopatra Veloutsou:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Anna Morgan-Thomas:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Literature review – Inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Political science	Social psychology	Brand rivalry	Brand love	Brand hate
Inclusion criteria					
Database(s)	Worldwide Political Science	EBSCO's Psychology and Behavioral Sciences collection	EBSCO & Emeraldinsight	EBSCO & Emeraldinsight	EBSCO & Emeraldinsight
Search term(s)	"Polarization"	"Polarization"	"Brand rivalry", "team rivalry" and "rivalry"	"Brand love"	"Brand hate"
Document type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Peer-reviewed journal articles
Language	English	English	English	English	English
Time period	1970 – 2020	1970 – 2020	1989–2020	N.A.	N.A.
Initial No of identified articles (inclusion criteria)	2.528	1.046	1.542	137	26
Exclusion criterion # 1	Articles about polarization in areas different than political science	Articles about polarization in areas different than social psychology	Articles about rivalry outside the scope of the branding/marketing areas	Articles outside the scope of the branding/marketing areas	Articles outside the scope of the branding/marketing areas
Excluded	1.942	857	1.337	8	3
Retained	586	189	205	129	23
Exclusion criterion # 2	Editorials, duplicated articles and articles having polarization as a peripheral theme	Editorials, duplicated articles and articles having polarization as a peripheral theme	Editorials, duplicated articles and articles having brand rivalry as a peripheral theme	Editorials, duplicated articles and articles having brand love as a peripheral theme	Editorials, duplicated articles and articles having brand hate as a peripheral theme
Excluded	457	141	159	75	15
Retained	129	48	46	54	8
Exclusion criterion # 3	Articles that did not present a definition of polarization	Articles that did not present a definition of polarization	Articles that did not present a definition of brand rivalry/ team rivalry	N.A.	N.A.
Excluded	81	18	28	0	0
No of articles survived exclusion criteria (final sample)	48	30	18	54	8

Appendix B. Semi-structured interviews

Name	Gender	Age group	Nationality	Loved brand(s)	Hated brand(s)	Way ofcontact	Interview duration (minutes)
F1	Female	26–35	Ukraine	EasyJet	Pepsi, Ryanair	Face-to face	50
F2	Female	26–35	Iran	Mango, Zara	Mourinho, Primark	Face-to face	65
M1	Male	26–35	Pakistan	Hassan Nisar (Pakistani journalist)	Nawaz Sharif (Pakistani politician)	Videocall	32
F3	Female	26–35	Slovenia	Fat Face	Pizza Hut	Face-to face	32
M2	Male	26–35	China	Liverpool Football Club	Manchester United	Face-to face	16
M3	Male	26–35	Italy	Apple, Waitrose	Samsung, Iceland	Face-to face	39
M4	Male	26–35	Colombia	Harry Potter	Samsung	Face-to face	35
M5	Male	36–45	Colombia	Coca-Cola	Claro (Colombian telecommunications brand)	Face-to face	32
M6	Male	56–65	UK	Royal Mail	Ryanair	Face-to face	20
F4	Female	26–35	UK	ASDA	Pepsi	Face-to face	17
F5	Female	26–35	UK	McDonald's	Nestlé	Face-to face	17
M7	Male	18–25	UK	Rangers FC, Nike	Starbucks, Apple	Face-to face	30
M8	Male	18–25	UK	Arsenal FC	Tottenham FC	Face-to face	30
M9	Male	36–45	USA	Washington Redskins	Dallas Cowboys	Face-to face	37
F6	Female	18–25	USA	Apple	Lululemon	Face-to face	25
M10	Male	36–45	Malta	Classic FM (radio station), Roma FC	Starbucks, Facebook	Videocall	42
M11	Male	18–25	Romania	Real Madrid	McDonald's	Face-to face	28
F7	Female	66–75	UK	Scottish Power, Frasers	Tesco, PC World	Face-to face	31

(*continued*)

Name	Gender	Age group	Nationality	Loved brand(s)	Hated brand(s)	Way of contact	Interview duration (minutes)
F8	Female	66–75	UK	Rangers FC	Celtic FC	Face-to face	51
F9	Female	46–55	UK	Celtic FC	Rangers FC	Face-to face	27
M12	Male	26–35	UK	Nike	BP	Face-to face	25
F10	Female	26–35	Egypt	Underground music group in Egypt	Nike	Face-to face	21

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