How Consumers' Top Dog Antipathy Influences their Underdog Support: A Study of Boundary Conditions

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While the marketing literature boasts numerous studies on positive consumer attitudes and behaviors, scholarly attention to negative consumer sentiments and actions has been generally limited. This disparity represents an important gap in the marketing literature because despite companies' extensive efforts at improving their customer experiences, many consumers still end up having negative consumption experiences with their brands. Some recent studies on consumer brand negativity have linked consumer resentments for one type of companies to their patronage behavior towards another business entity. Yet, few studies have investigated how consumers' animosity toward top companies in an industry could translate into their support for underdog companies. We tackle this important issue by conducting an empirical examination of the boundary conditions influencing the impact of top dog antipathy on underdog business support. Our key findings show that the positive influence of top dog antipathy on underdog support will increase as consumers' balance maintenance, underdog orientation, empathic concern, need for uniqueness, and loyalty proneness increase. Research and managerial implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords: Top Dog Antipathy, Brand Negativity, Underdogs, Balance Maintenance, Underdog Orientation, Empathic Concern, Need for Uniqueness, and Brand Loyalty Proneness.

1. Introduction

In this article, we attempt to answer Fournier and Alvarez's (2013) call toward a science of negative brand relationships by studying how and when the consumer's disdain for market leaders could be translated into their support for business underdogs. We specifically examine the impact of top dog antipathy (TDA) on underdog support and what boundary conditions might moderate the relationship between TDA and underdog support. As indicated by Fournier and Alvarez (2013), the marketing literature is replete with studies on positive aspects of brand relationships but is less concerned with negativity, even though negative relationships are more common than positive relationships for consumers. Nonetheless, consumer research investigating ill-will and negativity toward brands has grown in recent years and existing studies in this area have discussed outcomes of negative brand associations as well as the emotions driving consumers away from brands. For example, Romani, Grappi, and Dalli's (2012) study on negative brand emotions demonstrates how fear and anger toward a brand might incite consumers to take action. Anger provokes complaints toward the company while fear leads consumers to avoid the company and switch to competing brands. Dislike also has a significant positive influence on negative word of mouth and switching. Zarantonello, *et al.* (2016) further link brand hate to consumer complaining, word of mouth, protest and patronage reduction and or cessation. In none of these cases, however, the brand or product to which they would switch, is specifically addressed.

In recent years, business underdogs have garnered a fair amount of attention in the academic literature across disciplines (Gao & McGinnis, 2020; Jun, *et al.*, 2015; Kim et al., 2008; McGinnis & Gentry, 2009; McGinnis, *et al.*, 2017; Paharia, *et al.*, 2011; Vandello, Goldschmied, & Richards, 2007). Research has revolved around identifying the motives for underdog support (McGinnis & Gentry, 2008; McGinnis *et al.*, 2017) and exploring how consumers show support, loyalty and patronage for brands with underdog biographies, or storylines built around companies' persistence and determination despite external disadvantages (Paharia *et al.*, 2011). The phenomenon of "underdog effect" (Paharia *et al.*, 2011) has also been explored in terms of underdog positioning and how such appeals are especially strong among those with empathic concern (Jun *et al.*, 2015).

Not only is the study of underdogs intriguing from an academic standpoint, but underdogs have long garnered the attention of the popular press, movies, and books (McGinnis & Gentry, 2009), as consumers fanaticize over their NCAA teams beating the blue bloods and cheer for underdogs such as Rudy and Rocky in their respective movies. Support for the underdogs is intriguing because it runs counter to the consumer expectation of supporting winners or basking in their reflected glory (BIRGing) (Cialdini *et al.*, 1976). But what has particularly been lacking is scholarly attention on the extent to which the love and support for the underdog is driven by consumers' dislike for the market leader. McGinnis *et al.* (2017) make an attempt at linking top dog antipathy to underdog support. While examining the motives for people's underdog support, they particularly address antipathy toward the top dogs as a measure of brand negativity. McGinnis *et al.* (2017) include the motives of underdog orientation, materialism, need for uniqueness, nostalgia proneness, and hope under the self-oriented perspective. Under the other-oriented perspective were the constructs balance maintenance, top dog antipathy, and empathetic concern. Importantly, their findings indicate that ill-will consumers hold for the top dog could find ways of being translated into their support underdog brands or stores.

Yet, McGinnis *et al.* (2017) fall short of studying a direct link between top dog antipathy and they do not examine how the impact of top dog antipathy on underdog support varies under different conditions. The impact of top dog antipathy on underdog support in their study is mediated by the construct of underdog affection, which represents the propensity certain consumers carry to show favoritism toward underdogs in commerce. More specifically, commerce underdog affection is defined as a (1) positive, (2) emotional feeling toward underdog business entities as a whole, that is (3) not directly based on consumption experiences or comprehensive functional evaluations (McGinnis *et al.*, 2017). The conceptualization of this construct demonstrates that the positive feelings consumers hold toward underdog entities could guide them in their decision-making. Indeed, their study shows that underdog affection has a positive effect on underdog support behavior, indicating that people will match their heart with actions despite the many disadvantages the underdogs face.

Given the lack of prior research on the conversion of consumer negativity toward top brands into underdog business support, it would be worthwhile from both research and practice considerations to more closely investigate this relationship. Especially needed are studies that examine how the connection with top dog antipathy and underdog support will become stronger or weaker under various boundary conditions surrounding the focal purchase decision. In this regard, no published studies, including McGinnis *et al.* (2017), have explored the important issue of the boundary conditions impacting the translation of top dog antipathy into underdog support. In view of this notable gap in prior research, our key objective in the current study is to propose and test the boundary conditions related to consumer attributes for the positive impact of consumers' top dog antipathy on their support for underdog businesses. We organize the rest of the article as follows: a literature review on top dog antipathy, formulation of our conceptual framework, development of relevant construct scales, tests of the hypotheses, and discussion of the results.

2. Top Dog Antipathy: A Literature Review

Top dog antipathy can be defined as a learned disposition in which a person dislikes the top dog or advantaged entity (McGinnis *et al.*, 2017). Integral to the notion of antipathy is its opposition feelings, which makes this construct different from other consumer negativity constructs because antipathy is generated from the presence of another notable stimulus. In other words, antipathy needs to be juxtaposed against another brand or entity for it to be activated, such as the market underdogs. As stated in Zarantonello *et al.*'s (2016) review, brand hate is a theme that drives consumers to adopt certain behaviors, including the desire to hurt, destroy, and devalue the other. Top dog antipathy, we argue, will manifest its hurtful sentiments in such a way that support is given to the lesser competitor, or the underdog entity because it is in the presence of underdogs that the holders of top dog antipathy will likely recognize the most hurtful impacts caused by top brands.

According to Kukuk (2007), while stronger brands have multiple advantages over weaker brands in terms of more customers and more loyalty, they also attract more negativity than their weaker counterparts in the form of negative internet sites, which could be viewed as a new form of consumer boycotts and protests. Hegner, Fetscherin, and Delzen (2017) indicate that brand hate is triggered by negative consumption experiences, symbolic incongruity, and ideological incompatibility. These three determinants then lead to brand avoidance, negative word-of-mouth, and brand retaliation. In the latter case, brand retaliation causes harm to brands to get even, though no specific mention of what consumers do in terms of specific brand switching strategies. In our current study, we suggest that brand negativity may or may not be a direct result of bad personal consumption experiences. Instead, it can be viewed as a personality-type trait that persists and influences support for the non-market leaders or underdogs.

Additionally, what appears to be lacking in the literature is a focus on how negativity toward the top brands may actually lead consumers to support underdog businesses or those companies that are determined to succeed and enrich the market offerings despite facing considerable disadvantages. In other words, we address the question as to what extent the negativity about a brand, specifically the top dog, drives consumers to desiring a brand that is considered the underdog. Furthermore, what conditions will moderate the relationship between top dog antipathy and underdog support?

3. Hypothesis Development

Main Effect of Top Dog Antipathy

Although McGinnis *et al.* (2017) find that commerce underdog affection mediates the relationship between top dog antipathy and underdog support, it stands to reason that this relationship should occur unmediated as well because of the tendency for people to act in ways that they feel (Loewenstein, 2007). Many consumers have a tendency to support the smaller underdog stores because they feel ethical to do so (Darden & Reynolds, 1971), or they do not want these shops to be overrun by the big stores (McGinnis & Gentry, 2009). In addition, people desire to be consistent with their feelings and actions and will therefore have their actions follow their heart to reduce potential dissonance (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Specifically, consumers tend to support underdog entities with purchase intentions (Paharia, *et al.*, 2011).

In addition, in most cases, the strength of antipathy is motivated by such strong ill-will, similar to the emotions of anger (Romani, Grappi, & Dalli, 2012; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994), that consumers should retaliate and support brands that represent the opposite side of such angst. While not all switching behaviors would mean that consumers should support underdog stores, they should at least side with other brands in the market space, which are most likely perceived as underdogs. Therefore, we propose that consumers' top dog antipathy will have a significant, positive main effect on their underdog support behavior.

Next, we examine the boundary conditions influencing the strength of the impact by top dog antipathy on underdog support. Drawing from McGinnis *et al.* (2017), we choose balance maintenance, underdog orientation, empathic concern, need for uniqueness, and brand loyalty proneness as the pertinent boundary conditions. As McGinnis *et al.* (2017) note, these consumer dispositions could have great relevancy to the study of consumers' underdog support behavior in commerce.

Balance Maintenance

Balance maintenance reflects the extent to which people desire to hold the powers in society in check such that no entity in society (i.e., government, business, or individual) has too much power, thereby allowing freedom of choice in the marketplace (McGinnis *et al.*, 2017). It is closely related to the notion of psychological reactance (Brehm, 1966; Brehm & Sensenig, 1966), or the motivational state when one's expected freedoms are threatened. In a consumer behavior context, Clee and Wicklund (1980) suggest that the importance of the freedom influences reactance effects, in that the more important the freedom, the more reactance is demonstrated due to personal and impersonal threats.

Balance maintenance should moderate the relationship between top dog antipathy and underdog support primarily because those who desire to level the playing field or reduce the power held by the most influential would want to redistribute power to the least influential. For example, if people show ill-will or anger, they will demonstrate their anger by supporting other, opposing entities. This will especially be the case when somebody inherently believes that those who have extreme power should not maintain that power.

Research has indicated that people will often overrule their own self-interests in the name of fairness in the marketplace (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1986). Vandello, Goldschmied, & Richards (2007) maintain that fairness, equality, and deservingness motivate underdog support. Therefore, we maintain that those desiring equality for all, justice, and more freedom as exhibited through balance maintenance should therefore be more inclined to support underdogs, whom by definition are deprived of power (Prell, 2011). If one further supports justice and balance in the world, the linkage between antipathy and underdog support should be intensified, as one is not only displaying his or her ill-will toward the market leader/obliterator but is also demonstrating a sense of fairness. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis.

H1: The positive effect of consumers' top dog antipathy on their underdog support behavior will be stronger as the consumers' need for balance maintenance increases.

Underdog Orientation

Underdog orientation is the extent to which one feels himself/herself as an underdog in life's pursuits, measured in the context of everyday life and not in any specific context such as sports, business, or career (McGinnis *et al.*, 2017). We maintain that those who have a high degree of underdog self-concept will show affection for other people and entities that are underdogs as well in order to maintain consistency (Sirgy, 1986). Those who perceive themselves to be underdogs, or have an underdog orientation, will be especially supportive of other entities they perceive as underdogs as well; that is, birds of the feather will flock together. As stated alternately, if higher levels of ill-will displayed toward market top dogs drive support toward underdogs, this relationship will be intensified among those who feel like underdogs themselves. Self-concept driving buying in symbolic similarities has been widely observed in the marketing literature (Sirgy, 1986).

When one shows affection for something that resonates or corresponds with his or her identity, this feeling will significantly increase if negative sentiments toward the antagonist are also present. In sports, for example, it can be argued that underdog affection and fan intensity for teams such as the Boston Red Sox will strengthen when their archenemy and top dog (in every sense of the word) the New York Yankees plays them as opposed to the Red Sox playing any other team of regular import. Therefore, we contend that if a consumer feels antipathy towards the underdogs' enemy, his/her underdog identity will help channel more of that top brand animosity towards companies the consumer identifies with as like underdogs. Thus, we have the following hypothesis.

H2: The positive effect of consumers' top dog antipathy on their underdog support behavior will be stronger as the consumers' underdog orientation increases.

Empathic Concern

Empathic concern is an "other-oriented" emotion of having a positive, non-fleeting regard for the welfare of other people (Batson, 1991). Furthermore, it is about increased sensitivity to others' experiences and includes a constellation of emotions such as sympathy, compassion, sorrow, sadness, guilt, and grief, among others (Batson, 2011). People who are empathic can feel others' pain or plight, which certainly should apply toward the underdog, whose external disadvantages are often evident despite their determined spirit (Paharia *et al.*, 2011).

Hoffman (1984) finds that the more empathetic people are, the more they will favor moral principle. Ultimately, this means that people who are empathetic can feel others' pain or plight, especially when one is an underdog. Since the underdog is usually in need of help, the moral need manifest in empathy should make consumers feel morally good (Kim *et al.*, 2008) and translate to support for the underdog across contexts as indicated in a variety of underdog studies (Kim *et al.*, 2008; McGinnis & Gentry, 2009; Vandello, Goldschmied, & Richards, 2007).

According to Shaw and Newholm's (2002) research on ethical consumption, consumers may consider a range of ethical issues when making purchases, among which are integrity and fairness. These same consumers often engage in boycotts against big businesses (which are often top dogs) and will often seek out fair-trade products, favor small stores, or seek local purchases, or what we would assume is demonstrating support for the commerce underdogs. Therefore, we contend that the significant (positive) relationship between top dog antipathy and underdog support behavior will be intensified by one's empathic concern, such that those who are congruent with the perceived welfare of others will identify with the underdog business entity, thereby allowing more top dog antipathy to be translated into underdog support.

H3: The positive effect of consumers' top dog antipathy on their underdog support behavior will be stronger as the consumers' empathic concern increases.

Need for Uniqueness

The need for uniqueness is a consumer's need to avoid choices that are similar to others (Tian & McKenzie, 2001), reflecting a road less traveled (Ariely & Levav, 2000). These choices represent counter-conformity and often unpopular choices. Supporting the underdog often means that consumers are selecting choices that are against popular choices, as consumers may inherently like to be perceived as winners (Cialdini *et al.*, 1976). Additionally, underdog choices by definition are brands that have less market share (Hoch and Deighton, 1989), so they do represent less popular choices, which make them susceptible to less criticism as well per the negative double jeopardy hypothesis (Kucuk, 2008).

We contend that the relationship between top dog antipathy and consumers' underdog support will also be moderated by the need for uniqueness. While consumers showing disdain for the top dog stores (e.g., Wal-Mart and other big box stores) will want to shop at underdog stores out of retaliation, this relationship could be enhanced if they also feel that underdog stores, or locally owned mom-and-pops, are more inclined to stock unique items and afford one-of-a-kind consumption experiences (McGinnis, *et al.*, 2017). As past research shows, many consumers indeed may choose to shop at the smaller, locally owned stores (i.e., mom-and-pops) exactly because they have more unique items (Noble *et al.*, 2006; Gao & McGinnis, 2020), including rarity items that meet specific needs of their narrowly defined target markets (Brennan & Lundsten, 2000). Thus, we establish the following hypothesis.

H4: The positive effect of consumers' top dog antipathy on their underdog support behavior will be stronger as the consumers' need for unique increases.

Brand Loyalty Proneness

Brand loyalty proneness is defined a consumer's tendency to continued support a specific brand (Lichenstein, Netemeyer, & Burton, 1990). Brand loyalty can apply to specific categories, or in some cases, it can span across categories in what is best categorized as a general tendency or consumer trait to be loyal (Burton, *et al.*, 1998). We argue that brand loyalty proneness, for its focus on staying loyal to a brand irrespective of market forces, should moderate the relationship between top dog antipathy and underdog support behavior. An underdog by its very nature is one that is externally disadvantaged (Paharia, *et al.*, 2011), so it stands to reason that supporting it often comes at a sacrifice in terms of price, features, and other aspects that one might get in supporting the market leader or top dog. Therefore, we propose that higher brand loyalty tendency could allow the consumers to channel more of their animosity toward the top dogs into supports for the underdog. Thus, we advance the following hypothesis.

H5: The positive effect of consumers' top dog antipathy on their underdog support behavior will be stronger as the consumers' brand loyalty proneness increases.

4. Methodology

Research Context

Our study context was the contrast between large national companies such as Wal-Mart and local retail businesses. Local merchants are often placed as the antithesis of Wal-Mart (Noble *et al.*, 2006; Sobel & Dean, 2008), therefore making them underdogs. Paharia *et al*. (2011) note that consumers generally view brands as representing the weak side of dichotomies, such as local (vs. national) businesses and independent (vs. corporate conglomerate) businesses as underdogs. Numerous reports in the business media (e.g., Showalter, 2012) further link local businesses with underdogs and national chains with top dogs. Past research has associated local businesses with the two defining characteristics of underdog business entities, disadvantaged positions and perseverance, lending credence to the choice of local businesses as a research context for consumers' underdog affection in commerce. In their qualitative study, McGinnis and Gentry (2009) find that consumers indeed typically associate business underdogs with small local firms.

Sampling Method

To test the conceptual model, a survey study was conducted involving respondents drawn from a 7,100-person electronic alumni association list from a medium-sized Midwestern university in the United States. The online survey via Surveymonkey.com yielded 365 total responses in two waves. Based upon the newsletter open rate as reported by the alumni organization, the response rate was 34.8 percent. Readership of alumni newsletters is relatively low in general, with those reporting reading most issues ranging from 20 to 30 percent (Jaschik, 2010). Potential non-response bias was checked using the test suggested by Armstrong and Overton (1977) and found no significant differences in any demographic variables between early and late responders.

Scale Development

We developed measures for our study constructs by drawing on relevant prior literature. Specifically, several antecedents for consumers' underdog support behavior were operationalized based on previous interpretive work by McGinnis and Gentry (2009), from which was generated the items for balance maintenance and underdog support behaviors. Top dog antipathy emerged as a possible motive based upon the McGinnis and Gentry (2009) study that revealed the voting against behavior consumers often exhibited when supporting an underdog. Underdog orientation emerged as an antecedent because the background qualitative interviews indicated that many consumers support underdogs because they themselves feel like underdogs. Each construct was represented by multiple scale items and measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale where 1 is "Strongly Disagree" and 7 is "Strongly Agree." All scale items and their appropriate sources are shown in Table 1.

Once all the initial items for all constructs were created or adapted from the extant literature, we submitted them along with their corresponding definitions to three consumer behavior scholars in the areas of psychometrics and measurement to ensure that the items matched conceptual definitions and to ensure proper wording. Several additional modifications, deletions, and additions were made because of these reviews. The questionnaire was further pre-tested among 158 undergraduate business students at the same Midwestern university that supplied the alumni sample discussed previously. All scales were purified by going through a process investigating item-to-total correlations and exploratory factor analysis (see Gerbing & Anderson, 1988).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

We followed the two-step procedure of Anderson and Gerbing (1988) to test scale validity at both the factor-level and across-construct levels. This was done in a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using LISREL 9.30 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1999). This process allowed us to identify some poor performing reversely coded items for the EC scale, which were subsequently removed from further analyses. Table 1 reports outcomes of the overall CFA including fit indices, Cronbach's Alphas (α's), construct reliabilities (ρ's), and average variances extracted (AVEs) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The measurement model fits reasonably well with the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Table 1 *Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses*

Construct/Items	Reliability and Validity Checks
Balance Maintenance (BM) (Based on McGinnis and Gentry 2009)	(CR=.82; α=.81; AVE=.53)
No business should have too much power.	.74
I believe that those in power should have limits on their influence.	.76
Monopolies of any sort have a negative impact on society's welfare.	.74
We need to make sure that the 'little guy' can compete.	.67
Top Dog Antipathy (TDA) (Based on McGinnis *et al.*, 2017)	**(CR=.74; α=.72; AVE=.59)**
When I go shopping, I try to avoid the large national chain stores.	.76
I hate it when the big national chains displace the locally owned stores.	.78
Underdog Orientation (UO) (Based on McGinnis *et al.*, 2017)	**(CR=.86; α=.82; AVE=.61)**

I identify with those who have to try harder to succeed.	.75
I have always had to try harder to succeed compared to others.	.80
When I see an underdog in society, I generally see myself.	.82
I see myself as an underdog in many of life's pursuits.	.72
Empathic Concern (EC) (Based on Davis, 1983)	**(CR=.82; α=.80; AVE=.53)**
I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me.	.75
When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.	.67
I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.	.82
I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person.	.63
Need for Uniqueness (NFU) (Based on Tian and McKenzie, 2001)	**(CR=.90; α=.90; AVE=.68)**
When products or brands I like become extremely popular, I lose interest in them.	.87
I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population.	.85
As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily purchased by everyone.	.76
When a style of clothing I own becomes too commonplace, I usually quit wearing it.	.81
Underdog Support in Commerce (CUS) (Based on McGinnis *et al.*, 2017)	**(CR=.87; α=.84; AVE=.63)**
I shop almost exclusively at locally owned businesses.	.86
If given the chance, I always prefer to shop at the stores that are owned by members of my community.	.70
Even though the selection may be less at locally owned mom-and-pops, I still shop at them rather than the national chains.	.74
Most of my weekly allowance for groceries is spent at the locally owned stores.	.81
Brand Loyalty Proneness (BLP) (Developed for this study)	(CR= .90; α = .90; AVE =.69)
Generally, I am someone who likes to be a regular customer of a restaurant and/or retail store.	.88
Generally, I am someone who wants to be a steady customer of the same restaurant and/or retail store.	.92
Generally, I am someone who is willing to "go the extra mile" to buy at the same restaurant and/or retail store.	.76
I would classify myself as store loyal.	.76
Model Fit Indices: χ^2 = 1,108.84 (d.f. =278), p = .00, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .95, NFI = .95.	

Notes: *CR (Construct Reliability) and AVE (Average Variances Extracted) are Computed using LISREL Outputs (Fornell and Larcker 1981). α is Cronbach's Alpha.*

Next, discriminant validity among the constructs was assessed using three standards. First, discriminant validity among the constructs is evident since all correlations are significantly different from 1.0 (the correlation coefficients plus two times the standard errors were smaller than 1; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Second, we tested the discriminant validity of the construct measures with a series of two-construct CFA models for all possible pairs of constructs. In each model, the Φ coefficient was constrained to unity and then freed, and a Chi Square-difference test was performed. Discriminant validity was obtained for all constructs this way. Third, as Table 2 shows, none of the inter-construct correlations is higher than the square root of the average variance explained, as shown in numbers in the diagonal. This information provides further evidence for the discriminant validity of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 *Inter-Construct Correlations and Descriptive Statistics*

	UO	**NFU**	**BM**	**TDA**	**EC**	**BLP**	**CUS**
UO	.78						
NFU	.12*	.82					
BM	.14**	.01	.73				
TDA	-.01	.11*	.31**	.77			
EC	.08	.01	.27**	.09*	.73		
BLP	.07	.11*	.03	.08	.20**	.83	
CUS	.08	.25**	.33**	.33**	.17**	.12*	.79
Mean	3.64	2.83	4.77	2.61	5.41	4.88	4.19
SD	1.24	1.02	1.06	.85	.87	1.10	1.08

Notes: **: $p < .05$; **: $p < .01$. The responses were captured on 7-point Likert-type scales where 1 was "Strongly Disagree" and 7 was "Strongly Agree". The numbers in the diagonal are the square roots of the average variances explained of the corresponding constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981).*

Legend:
UO: Underdog Orientation
NFU: Need for Uniqueness
BM: Balance Maintenance
TDA: Top Dog Antipathy
EC: Empathic Concern
BLP: Brand Loyalty Proneness
CUS: Commerce Underdog Support

We tested common method variance (CMV) by rerunning the final CFA with a same-source factor added, with this extra factor having as indicators all of the measures (see Podsakoff *et al.,* 2003). The impact of this additional CMV factor on factor loadings and inter-factor correlations was minimal. Thus, partialing out the effects of common method variance did not have substantial effect on the measures.

5. Results

The hypotheses in the conceptual model were tested with a structural equations model method using LISREL 9.30 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1999). Because the five hypotheses all involved interaction effects, we adopted Ping (1995)'s technique for estimating interaction effects in LISREL. The involved variables were first mean-centered in both the measurement model and the latent structural model. Then the coefficients from the interaction terms to their indicators and the error variances of the indicators were calculated accordingly. Besides all the structural equations hypothesized in the study, the main effect paths from the independent and moderating variables to the dependent variable were also added to the latent model, which step was statistically necessary to properly analyze the interaction effects between the moderators and the independent variable. The fit indices (χ^2 = 1,441.29, d.f.=373, p = .00, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .95, NFI = .95) collectively show adequate fit between the conceptual model and the data, despite the large χ^2 size and small p value, which are associated with large sample sizes (Hu & Bentler, 1999). As the results in Table 3 indicate, all five moderating hypotheses received significant support at the level of $p < .05$.

Table 3 *Hypotheses Testing Results from Structural Equations Modelling Analysis*

Hypotheses	**Dependent Variable**
	CUS
Main Effects	
TDA → CUS	.23**
BM → CUS	.15*
UDO → CUS	.17*
EC → CUS	.12*
NFU → CUS	.09*
BLP → CUS	.06
Hypothesized Moderating Effects	
H1: TDA*BM	.15*
H2: TDA*UDO	.18*
H3: TDA*EC	.21*
H4: TDA*NFU	.12*
H5: TDA*BLP	.16*
R^2	.41

Notes: *: *p < .05; **: p < .01; ***: p<.001.*
All parameter estimates are standardized coefficients.
Model Fit Indices: χ^2 *= 1,441.29 (d.f. =373), p = .00, RMSEA = .06, CFI = .95, NFI = .95.*

To enhance confidence in the findings about the boundary conditions for the impact of top dog antipathy on underdog support, two alternative measures for consumers underdog business support were used to retest the conceptual model. They were shopping frequency (Question: How often do you shop at locally owned stores?) and share of wallet (Question: To what extent are the products you consume purchased from locally owned stores?). The initial model testing results were confirmed in this sensitivity analysis.

6. Conclusion

Research Contributions

While prior studies have linked consumer resentments for one type of companies to their patronage behaviors towards another (Fournier & Alvarez, 2013), our study was the first to empirically examine the boundary conditions of how negative brand sentiments against top companies could be translated into support behaviors toward business underdogs. Our key findings show that the positive influence of top dog antipathy on underdog support will increase as consumers' balance maintenance, underdog orientation, empathic concern, need for uniqueness, and brand loyalty proneness increases. These findings indicate that the role of antipathy or consumer ill-will in developing consumer emotional attachment should not be underestimated, validating Zavestoski's assertion that when consumers are stating both *for* and *against* preferences in making purchases (2002). The findings also indicate that consumers view underdog businesses as a place to purchase unique products, potentially giving such companies more legitimacy and more effective ways to market themselves.

Managerial Implications

One immediate implication to managers of underdog businesses is their need to realize the potential for identifying consumers who possess or have displayed resentment over top industry players and channel such negative brand feelings to their own competitive advantages. To do this, the underdog companies should look beyond their current customers and collect data on indicators for top dog resentment and develop targeted communication strategies to tap into that branding potential. The small companies could also experiment with different targeting and communication strategies on how to effectively reach these new potential customers (Gao & McGinnis, 2020). The underdog businesses should also realize that while it is possible for them to benefit from the negative feelings toward top brands, the consumers' eventual buying decisions are likely based on their comprehensive evaluations of various attributes of the potential purchase including product quality, price, service, and availability. Thus, small companies should seek to develop a concerted marketing strategy to better communicate with potential customers and effectively retain them after initial purchases. These companies should also recognize that they might not be the only underdog businesses trying to strategically capitalize on customer resentments toward top brands and that they need to effectively differentiate themselves from like-minded business underdogs.

Another relevant implication from our study is related to the development of proper coping strategies by leading players of various industries toward brand animosity among their current customers and the general market. Top companies should pay particular attention to the issue of brand resentments and seek to identify sources of such negativities and develop retention and defense strategies to both enhance their customers' brand experience and prevent them from switching to competitors of various sizes. For example, they could try to understand if consumer resentments are caused by company size factors, consumption experience factors, competitive moves by opposing businesses, or attributes about the consumers themselves. When armed with such findings, they could develop better ways of identifying customers and consumption contexts where negative brand feelings are more likely to emerge and effectively address such challenges.

7. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The boundary conditions included in our study largely pertain to the consumers' own attributes, while other potential moderators could exist. Thus, future research could explore the existence and impacts of other boundary conditions such as customer retention programs adopted by top dog companies and attributes of target business underdogs. Future research could also extend the research context to include more variations of business underdogs such as those outside the retail sector (e.g., family-owned manufacturers and technology start-ups). Our sample was geographically restrictive in the sense that it measured only one group of respondents in the United States. However, the institution sample used has a high degree of "blue collar" and industry workers due to its location and mission, thus probably giving it more representativeness than a typical alumni list. Additional research efforts could be undertaken to broaden the representation of the survey respondents and further include cross-market comparisons of the hypothesized relationships in different country markets.

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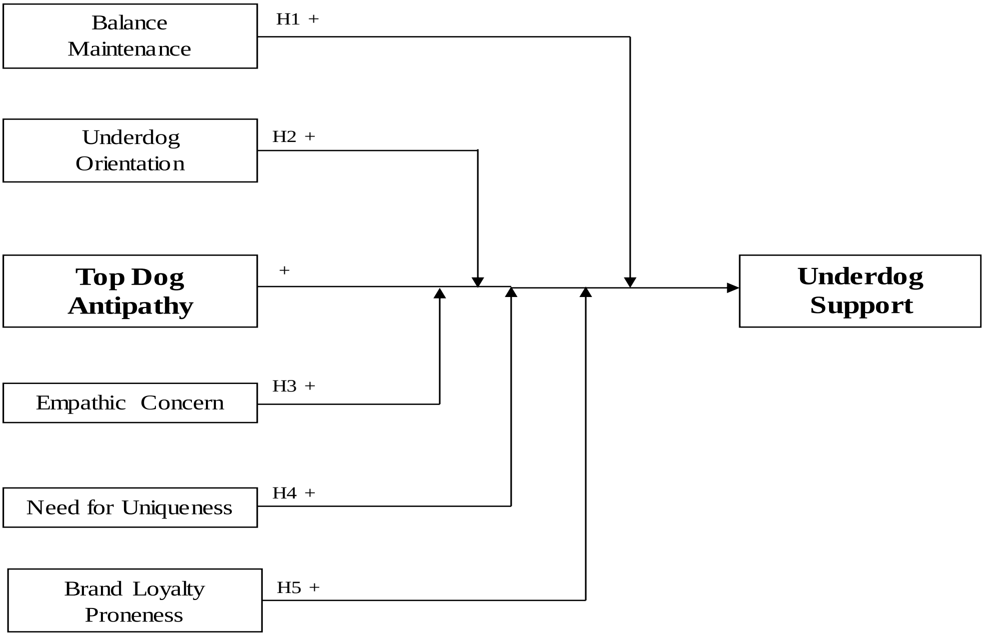

Figure 1 *Conceptual Model on the Effects of Consumers' Top Dog Antipathy on Their Underdog Support*

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