

ARTICLE

Consumer Hypocrisy in Relationships with Brands

Bruno Eduardo Pereira¹bruno.eduardo@ufpr.br |  0000-0003-1504-6928Elder Semprebon¹elder.semprebon@gmail.com |  0000-0002-9201-3751

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to discover whether consumers' everyday actions that contradict the purposes of brands they consume constitute consumer hypocrisy in the judgment of third parties, including consumers who are more engaged with the brand. Additionally, it analyzed the desire for condemnation, and the judgment of hypocrisy based on the gravity of the action and the perceived immorality of the behavior. Through two between-subjects experiments, the results of the study proved that consumers are considered hypocritical when they act against the brand's purposes but that engaged consumers are not judged as more hypocritical. The condemnation of hypocrisy was confirmed and explained by the judgment of hypocrisy. The study provides original insights into consumer hypocrisy in actions related to brand purposes and contributes to helping managers better assess brand activism when consumers are being judged for not aligning with the brand's positioning in their daily lives.

KEYWORDS

Brand Activism, Consumer Engagement, Consumer Hypocrisy, Consumer Morality, Brand Purpose

¹Universidade Federal do Paraná,
Curitiba, PR, Brazil

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RESUMO

O estudo buscou identificar se as ações do consumidor no cotidiano e que vão contra propósitos de marcas que ele consome seria uma hipocrisia do consumidor no julgamento de terceiros, incluindo de consumidores mais engajados com a marca. Além disso, analisou o desejo de condenação e o julgamento da hipocrisia, por meio da gravidade de ação e imoralidade do comportamento. Por meio de dois experimentos entre sujeitos, os resultados demonstraram que o consumidor é considerado hipócrita quando age contra os propósitos da marca, mas que os engajados não são julgados como mais hipócritas. A condenação da hipocrisia foi confirmada e explicada pelo julgamento da hipocrisia. O estudo apresenta originalidade na compreensão da hipocrisia do consumidor em suas ações relacionadas aos propósitos de marca e contribui para que gestores avaliem melhor a atuação ativista das marcas quando possuem consumidores sendo julgados pelo não cumprimento de um posicionamento alinhado em seu cotidiano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Ativismo de Marca, Engajamento do Consumidor, Hipocrisia do Consumidor, Moralidade do Consumidor, Propósito de Marca

1. INTRODUCTION

Are all citizens considered hypocrites? At some point in their lives, do they engage in actions that are completely contrary to what they preach? For example, they may promote themselves as environmentally conscious individuals but choose unsustainable products due to price sensitivity (Yue et al., 2020). They may also seek better consumption habits but abandon this purpose due to social pressures from peers (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Thus, the question arises as to whether these contradictory actions could lead to perceptions of hypocrisy for people who observe, judge, and condemn consumers' everyday actions.

Brands aim to present their best versions through their purposes, which inspire consumers (Kramer, 2017), and are present in our society as a form of activism (Moorman, 2020; Sarkar & Kotler, 2018). These purposes have their advocates, making consumers' potential actions against these causes to be characteristic of consumer hypocrisy. Studies on possible consumer hypocrisies in the relationship with brands and their activist purposes are seen in research on sustainability (Fleet et al., 2021; Thorman et al., 2020), eco-tourism (Mkono, 2020), and food (Rothgerber, 2020). However, they are not explicitly framed as judgments of hypocrisy but are presented as part of social judgments (Galesic et al., 2018; Alicke et al., 2013). Thus, this study aimed to understand the gaps in consumer behavior studies about consumer hypocrisy when they do not represent the brand and its advocated purposes, considering their engagement with it. This hypocrisy is analyzed through the judgment of third parties who may condemn these contradictory actions, another aspect that the state of the art in brand purpose studies has yet to encompass. The study seeks to address these research gaps through the lens of the gravity of action, and the immorality of the behavior as drivers of this judgmental act.

To delve deeper into the analysis of this situation, this study examined whether consumers' everyday actions that oppose the purpose of the brand they use are considered hypocritical. Additionally, it sought to investigate whether those who are more engaged with the brand would

be considered more hypocritical in these actions against the brand's purposes. Furthermore, it aimed to find if these actions led to a desire to condemn hypocrisy and whether this condemnation would be mediated by the judgment of hypocrisy through the analysis of the gravity of action and the immorality of consumer behavior.

By exploring the perception, judgment, and condemnation of hypocrisy from the perspective of third parties who are analyzing these situations, the study contributes to a better understanding of hypocrisy in the consumer-brand relationship. Thus, the study offers originality in the examination of third-party perceptions of hypocrisy, moving beyond studies of participant-induced hypocrisy. The study also provides current insights into hypocrisy as a factor to reflect upon in brand activism actions and their advocated purposes, which can be influenced by hypocritical consumers. Finally, the study serves as a warning for brands engaged in activism with their consumers, highlighting the importance of consumer representation of these purposes, how they are judged in daily life, and how this hypocrisy affects individual consumers or the brand community. It also suggests the creation of more channels and forums for brand discussions on shared purpose and its application in the consumer-brand relationship.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. HYPOCRISY

Hypocrisy is related to practices that deviate from what is promised to be done (Stone & Fernandez, 2008) and to contradictory actions (Barden et al., 2005). Studies present factors considered antecedents (Alicke et al., 2013; Forehand et al., 2021; Resheteeva, 2020; Wang et al., 2021) and consequents (Powell & Smith, 2013; Jordan et al., 2017; Laurent et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2009) of possible consumer hypocrisy. Antecedent conditions may involve cognitive dissonance (Aronson, 2019), weakness of will (Alicke et al., 2013), identity conflicts (Forehand et al., 2021), and absence of surveillance (Resheteeva, 2020; Wang et al., 2021) as drivers of hypocritical actions. There are also social factors, such as usage and choice pressures (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006), moral licensing (Lasarov & Hoffmann, 2020; Hietanen & Sihvonen, 2021), and mimetic behavior (Scribano, 2015), as common justifications in situations of hypocrisy and that could be examined in consumer behavior studies.

When considering the consequences that hypocrisy could bring to consumers, implications may result in the willingness to punish them (Powell & Smith, 2013), feel moral outrage and distrust (Jordan et al., 2017), anger (Laurent et al., 2013), happiness with their misfortunes (Smith et al., 2009), and even hatred (Jordan et al., 2017) towards them. But consequences can also result in hypocritical consumers themselves, such as self-deception (Lönqvist et al., 2014), guilt and shame (Ran et al., 2016), and denial of their own identity (Forehand et al., 2021) due to the exposure of their hypocrisies. When evaluating these possibilities of conditioning consumer hypocrisy and how many could turn into a research opportunity, this study aimed to observe brand purpose and consumer actions against these purposes.

2.2. BRAND PURPOSE

Brand purpose is considered the essence of the brand, in other words, the inspiring reason for its existence (Kramer, 2017). Furthermore, it can become part of the consumer's identity (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2011), making possible situations of hypocrisy affect its meaning. Purpose is connected to the brand's culture and values (Mirzaei et al., 2021) and the desire to have influence in people's lives (Aaker, 2014).

Studies on brand purposes are becoming increasingly prevalent, with some related to moral values, such as support for diversity issues (Grier, 2019), social inclusion (Ashcraft et al., 2012), social responsibility (Golob & Podnar, 2018), gender equality (Ronda & Azanza, 2021), sustainability (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014), climate change (Koch, 2020), minimalist consumption (Pangarkar et al., 2021), and carbon footprint (Canavari & Coderoni, 2019), among others.

The understanding that hypocrisy is explained by a misalignment between preaching and acting, and that brand purposes seek alignment between promoting the defense of a cause and the actions of its consumers in favor of it, a consumer who, for example, does not hire LGBTQIA+ individuals for their company but consumes from a brand that consistently campaigns for diversity can be considered a hypocrite in the eyes of other consumers. Thus, it is proposed that consumer hypocrisy is sustained by consumers' contradictory actions against these brand purposes.

- **H1:** Consumers who engage in everyday actions contrary to the brand's purpose they use are considered hypocrites.

2.3. CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

Consumer engagement can be defined as a consumer's manifestation beyond the transaction (Verhoef et al., 2010), related to attitude, behavior, and the level of connectivity with the brand's actions (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), factors that can be established through habitual purchases, brand recommendations, and advocacy.

Understanding that engagement seeks a situation beyond the transaction, it also manifests itself in the intention to continue a relationship with the brand (Hepola et al., 2020), showing that habitual purchases can be a factor of engagement. Regarding recommendations, actions can occur through word-of-mouth (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), in which consumers are considered "pseudo-marketers" of the brand (Harmeling et al., 2017). Forms of consumer engagement in brand advocacy occur in the advocacy of its positioning (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) and evangelism of the brand and its products (Harrigan et al., 2021), mainly due to the affection consumers have for the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Understanding that higher engagement occurs when the brand has a purpose (Mirzaei et al., 2021) and that consumer engagement involves habitual purchases, recommendations, and brand advocacy, a consumer who, for example, does not hire LGBTQIA+ individuals for their company but consistently consumes, advocates for, and recommends a brand that constantly campaigns for diversity may be considered more hypocritical than consumers who only occasionally buy from the same brand, in the eyes of other consumers. Thus, the second hypothesis is presented:

- **H2:** Consumers who are more engaged with the brand and engage in everyday actions contrary to the brand's purpose are considered more hypocritical.

2.4. HYPOCRISY CONDEMNATION

Consumers tend to be condemned for their actions in their relationships with brands as a result of social judgment (Galesic et al., 2018). In this social judgment, individuals desire punishments for those who break a social norm (Helweg-Larsen & LoMonaco, 2008). Among these judgments, studies present consequences such as negative word-of-mouth against the transgressor (Sharma et al., 2020) and a quest for justice against misconduct (Do et al., 2020). These transgressions,

when related to third-party judgments, receive moral condemnation (Effron et al., 2015). When examining the factors that shape condemnation of consumer hypocrisy, they include the willingness to punish hypocrites (Powell & Smith, 2013; Laurent et al., 2013) and the assessment of guilt in the moral character of the hypocritical person (Effron & Monin, 2010).

Another point in condemnation is related to a desire for self-punishment by the hypocritical person as a way to punish themselves for preaching values and not executing them (Effron et al., 2015)—as a form of self-awareness of the hypocrite (Effron & Monin, 2010). Condemnation can also involve the desire for punishment by those affected by hypocritical acts (Effron & Monin, 2010), mainly because acting against values promoted by others also receives condemnation (Effron et al., 2015). Therefore, the construct of hypocrisy condemnation can encompass the hypocrite's feelings of guilt (Effron & Monin, 2010), the desire for punishment by affected third parties (Effron & Monin, 2010), and the hypocrite's self-punishment desire (Effron et al., 2015). For example, a consumer who does not hire LGBTQIA+ individuals for their company but habitually consumes products from a brand that consistently campaigns for diversity may be condemned by other people as guilty in their actions, with a desire to self-punish and distance themselves from the brand and have third parties affected by the hypocrisy distance themselves as well. Therefore, condemnation by interested third parties with justice against hypocrites is also estimated:

- **H3:** Consumer hypocrisy against the brand's purpose generates condemnation by other consumers.

2.5. JUDGMENT OF GRAVITY OF ACTION AND IMMORALITY OF BEHAVIOR

Judgment serves as a pathway between the perception of hypocrisy and its consequent condemnation, considering factors that justify or mitigate its effects. This judgment tends to assess the seriousness of the consequences of hypocritical behavior (Alicke et al., 2013; Barden et al., 2005). Ways to understand how the judgment of the gravity of the action impacts the condemnation of hypocrisy can be seen in other studies, such as acting in contradiction to a pro-environmental public commitment, increasing the perception of hypocrisy (Rubens et al., 2015) and being considered more serious by people who work on and are committed to a cause (Davis & Fisk, 2014). There is also the judgment that highly competent people are considered more hypocritical when making mistakes in their actions (Karelaia & Keck, 2013) and that when they make mistakes publicly, they have a more severe judgment of hypocrisy than less competent people, even if the transgressions are identical (Kakkar et al., 2020).

In this way, the perception of consumer hypocrisy through everyday actions against the brand's purposes they consume—receiving a desire for condemnation (guilt, self-punishment, and third-party punishment)—can be mediated and explained by the judgment of hypocrisy, analyzing how genuinely serious this hypocritical action is, through the concept of action gravity (Barden et al., 2005). For example, a consumer who does not hire LGBTQIA+ individuals for their company but consumes products from a brand that constantly campaigns for diversity may have this act judged as serious and justify why their perception as a hypocrite leads to condemnation in the eyes of other consumers. Therefore, by understanding that the gravity of action is a factor that can mediate the relationship between the perception and condemnation of hypocrisy, the fourth hypothesis is formulated:

- **H4:** The gravity of action mediates the relationship between the perception of hypocrisy and the condemnation of this hypocrisy, in the judgment of other consumers.

2.6. MORALITY

Morality is also addressed concerning hypocrisy in consumption (Lawford-Smith, 2015). Consumers can also behave immorally, such as providing false support to other consumers who make mistakes (Monin & Merritt, 2012). However, their actions are not always perceived as a decisive factor for judgments of hypocrisy in consumption. For example, consumer moral licensing, where individuals who initially behave morally may later exhibit behaviors that are immoral, unethical, or problematic (Lasarov & Hoffmann, 2020). Considering that brands are concerned with morality in their purposes (Cardador & Pratt, 2006; Kay, 2006), there are many questions about whether consumers also care about morality when they are consuming (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005).

In this way, the perception of consumer hypocrisy through everyday actions against the brand's purposes they consume, which receives a desire for condemnation (guilt, self-punishment, and third-party punishment), can be mediated and explained by the judgment of hypocrisy. This analysis also considers how much this hypocritical action is considered an immoral behavior, through the concept of immorality of behavior (Barden et al., 2005). For example, a consumer who does not hire LGBTQIA+ individuals for their company but consumes products from a brand that consistently campaigns for diversity may have their behavior judged as immoral and justify why their perception as a hypocrite leads to condemnation of this hypocrisy in the eyes of other consumers. Therefore, the judgment of the immorality of behavior is also a factor considered to mediate the relationship between perception and condemnation of hypocrisy:

- **H5:** The immorality of consumer behavior mediates the relationship between the perception of hypocrisy and the condemnation of this hypocrisy, in the judgment of other consumers.

3. METHODOLOGY

Hypotheses testing was conducted through two between-subjects experimental studies. The first experiment aimed to understand if a consumer's actions, which are contrary to a brand's purpose (diversity) they consume, would be considered consumer hypocrisy according to the judgment of other consumers (H1). The experiment had a 2 (Brand: With Purpose vs. Without Purpose) X 2 (Consumer: positive behavior vs. negative behavior) + 1 control scenario (brand with purpose vs. behavior not aligned with the brand) design.

The second experiment also examined the perception of hypocrisy concerning another brand purpose (racial equality) that the consumer consumes (H1) and sought to advance knowledge in this situation by adding factors such as consumer engagement (H2), condemnation of hypocrisy (H3), and judgment of a hypocritical action, analyzed through the gravity of action (H4) and the immorality of behavior (H5). The experiment had a design with 2 scenarios (High Engagement Scenario: Brand with purpose + Highly engaged Consumer + Non-aligned Consumer) X (Low Engagement Scenario: Brand with purpose + Non-engaged Consumer + Non-aligned Consumer) + 1 control scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer Aligned with the brand purpose).

The data analysis technique used in Experiment 1 was multivariate analysis or ANOVA, including an analysis of variance homogeneity (Levene's Test) and post-hoc mean comparison (Tukey HSD). The model parameters for Experiment 1 were consumer's everyday actions and perception of hypocrisy. In Experiment 2, multivariate analysis (ANOVA), analysis of variance homogeneity (Levene's Test), post-hoc mean comparison (Tukey HSD), and the bootstrapping technique were also used to analyze moderated mediation. The model parameters for Experiment 2 included consumer's everyday actions, perception of hypocrisy, consumer engagement, condemnation of hypocrisy, and judgment of hypocrisy (gravity of action and immorality of behavior). Both experiments utilized IBM's SPSS software for their analyses.

3.1. STUDY 1

The objective of Experiment 1 was a between-subjects model, examining consumer hypocrisy perception through 5 scenarios aimed at analyzing whether consumers' everyday actions against a brand's purpose (diversity) would be considered consumer hypocrisy (H1). Each participant received only one version of each scenario, and the analyses aimed to determine in which scenario the perception of hypocrisy would be higher. The independent variable in the study was consumer's everyday action (in favor of the brand's purpose vs. against the brand's purpose), and the dependent variable was the perception of hypocrisy from the participants' perspective.

In the 1st scenario, it was presented that the fictional beer brand "New Times" had no purpose, and the consumer, Andre, was not aligned with any cause, besides having the negative behavior of not hiring LGBTQIA+ people for his company. In the 2nd scenario, the brand had no purpose, but the consumer hired LGBTQIA+ people for his company. In the 3rd scenario, the brand had a diversity-respect purpose, and the consumer was aligned by hiring LGBTQIA+ people for his company. The 4th scenario featured the brand with a diversity-respect purpose, but the consumer had the behavior of not hiring LGBTQIA+ people for his company, which was expected as the hypocrisy scenario.

A 5th scenario was applied for control, in which the brand had a diversity-respect purpose, but the consumer had a negative behavior of mixing organic waste with recyclable waste, aiming to understand if the hypocrisy effect would appear due to simple negative behavior against any brand purpose.

The presentation of scenarios was followed by questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 – Strongly Disagree and 5 – Strongly Agree) to measure 3 hypocrisy items (Effron & Monin, 2010; Guèvremont, 2019) and 2 consumer alignment items. Control questions aimed to understand the degree of importance participants attributed to hypocrisy issues, brand purposes, and their alignment with LGBTQIA+, racial equality, and environmental causes, as well as sociodemographic data on gender and age. The items used in the study are in Appendix A.

4. RESULTS

The sample for Experiment 1 was collected randomly via the internet, through messaging apps, email, and social media, with participants from all over Brazil. It consisted of 189 valid responses, including 95 women (49.7%) and 94 men (49.2%), with an average age of 46.34 years. Participants received one of the five scenario versions and answered questions about consumer hypocrisy, brand purpose, control questions, and sociodemographic questions. The

survey was distributed using the Qualtrics tool, and there were no incentives provided to the participants.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, the hypocrisy scale exhibited a high degree of reliability ($\alpha = 0.866$). An ANOVA [$F(4,189) = 7.415$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$] confirmed the expected condition of hypocrisy in Scenario 4 ($n=39$; $M=2.76$; $SD = 0.79$; $\text{Sig.} < 0.005$), according to Table 1, compared to Scenario 1 ($n=38$; $M = 2.29$; $SD = 1.17$), Scenario 2 ($n=28$; $M = 1.85$; $SD = 0.94$), Scenario 3 ($n=41$; $M = 1.65$; $SD = 0.76$), and the control scenario ($n=43$; $M = 2.01$; $SD = 1.13$), according to Table 2.

Table 1

ANOVA Consumer Hypocrisy Perception (H1/Experiment 1).

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
Between-subjects	28,659	4	7,165	7,415	0,000
Within-subjects	177,794	184	0,966		
Total	206,453	188			

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Consumer Hypocrisy Perception (H1/Experiment 1).

Scenario	N	Mean	SD	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
MSP+CN	38	2,2982	1,17734	1,9113	2,6852
MSP+CP	28	1,8571	0,94902	1,4891	2,2251
MCP+CAP	41	1,6504	0,76721	1,4082	1,8926
MCP+CNA	39	2,7607	0,79820	2,5019	3,0194
CO+NAOP	43	2,0155	1,13844	1,6651	2,3659
Total	189	2,1235	1,04793	1,9731	2,2738

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

MSP+CN = 1st scenario (Brand without purpose + Negative behavior)

MSP+CP = 2nd scenario (Brand without purpose + Positive behavior)

MCP+CAP = 3rd scenario (Brand with purpose + Positive behavior aligned with purpose)

MCP+CNA = 4th scenario (Brand with purpose + Negative behavior aligned with purpose)

CO+NAOP = Control (Brand with purpose + Negative behavior not aligned with another purpose)

In addition to the perception of hypocrisy, the study examined whether participants understood the alignment between the consumer/brand and consumer/purpose ($\alpha = 0.889$), and the lowest mean was also found in the expected scenario, Scenario 4 ($M = 2.01$; $SD = 0.86$; $\text{Sig.} < 0.05$). An ANOVA test for the 5 groups confirmed the difference between the means [$F(4,189) = 23.657$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$], according to Table 1. A Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean difference was in the condition of Scenario 4 ($M = 2.01$; $SD = 0.86$) compared to Scenario 1 ($M = 2.59$; $SD = 0.86$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.005$), Scenario 2 ($M = 3.33$; $SD = 0.90$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$), Scenario 3 ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 1.03$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$), and also the control scenario ($M = 2.80$; $SD = 1.01$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.002$). A Levene's Test showed that there was homogeneity of variances in the groups ($\text{Sig.} = 0.975$). These results support Hypothesis H1, that consumers who engage in everyday actions contrary to the moral purpose of the brand they use are considered hypocrites.

Regarding the result of H1, the perception of hypocrisy was confirmed in Scenario 4, which presented the consumer and the brand with contradictions regarding a diversity-focused purpose. Another positive factor relates to the control scenario not presenting the condition of hypocrisy, which, even though caused by contradictory actions (Barden et al., 2005), does not consider that the moral values of brands and everyday actions against other consumer values constitute consumer hypocrisy. To complement the findings, the result shows that the consumer's misalignment (Anisimova, 2010; Corsaro & Snehota, 2011) with the brand and its purpose aligns with the perception of hypocrisy.

5.1. STUDY 2

The aim of the second experiment was to confirm consumer hypocrisy (H1) but using a purpose against racial inequality to verify if the perception of hypocrisy remained consistent with the change in the cause. Additionally, the study examined the hypotheses of consumer engagement (H2), condemnation of hypocrisy (H3), and judgment of hypocrisy, analyzing the gravity of action (H4) and the immorality of behavior (H5).

The study also employed a between-subjects design, conducted through 3 distinct scenarios aimed at determining which of the scenarios showed the highest perception, condemnation, and judgment of hypocrisy. In Scenario 1, Raphael is a consumer of the clothing brand "Go & Change," which has a purpose of fighting against racial inequality. However, he is misaligned with the brand's purpose by making racist jokes. Nonetheless, Raphael has a high level of engagement with the brand by making regular purchases, recommending products, and advocating for the brand on social media. In Scenario 2, the brand also has the same purpose, and the consumer exhibits the same prejudiced behavior, but has low engagement with the brand, making sporadic purchases only. A control scenario was also added, in which the consumer makes purchases and is aligned with the brand's purpose by advocating for punishments against people who engage in racism.

The survey included questions aimed at confirming the perception of hypocrisy using a Likert-type scale (1 – Strongly Disagree to 5 – Strongly Agree) to measure 3 hypocrisy items (Effron & Monin, 2010; Guèvremont, 2019), 3 consumer engagement items (Vivek, 2019; Anaza et al., 2021) assessing habitual purchases, product recommendations, and brand advocacy, 2 judgment of hypocrisy items, examining the gravity of action (Barden et al., 2005) and the immorality of behavior (Barden et al., 2005), as well as 3 condemnation of hypocrisy items (Effron & Monin, 2010; Effron et al., 2015). Control questions aimed to understand the degree of importance participants attributed to hypocrisy, brand purposes, and consumer engagement. It also assessed participants' alignment with social inclusion, LGBTQIA+, and racial equality causes. In addition to the experiment, participants provided sociodemographic data such as gender and age. The items used in the study are included in Appendix B.

5.2. RESULTS

The sample for experiment 2 was collected randomly via the internet, using messaging apps, email, and social media, with participants from all over Brazil. It comprised 222 valid responses, with 127 women (57.2%), 94 men (42.3%), and 1 other (0.5%), with an average age of 35.95 years. Participants received one of three scenario versions and answered questions about consumer hypocrisy, brand purpose, consumer engagement, condemnation of hypocrisy, gravity of the

action, immorality of behavior, control questions, and sociodemographic questions. The survey was distributed using the Qualtrics tool, and no rewards were provided to participants.

Regarding the confirmation of H1, the hypocrisy scale once again exhibited a high level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.909$). A between-subjects ANOVA revealed differences in scenario means for the perception of hypocrisy [$F(2, 219) = 196.723$; $\text{Sig} = 0.000$], according to Table 3, with the Levene's Test confirming variance homogeneity ($\text{Sig} = 0.155$), and Tukey HSD test showing that the mean differences occurred only between the control scenario without hypocrisy ($n = 65$; $M = 1.52$; $SD = 0.67$; $\text{Sig} = 0.000$) and Scenario 1 ($n = 75$; $M = 3.97$; $SD = 0.94$) and Scenario 2 ($n = 82$; $M = 3.85$; $SD = 0.79$), according to Table 4. These results once again support hypothesis (H1), indicating that consumers are considered hypocrites when they act in their daily lives contrary to the brand's purpose they consume, in this case, a cause against racial inequality.

Table 3

ANOVA Consumer Hypocrisy Judgment (H1/Experiment 2)

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
Between-subjects	262,027	2	131,013	196,753	0,000
Within-subjects	145,850	219	0,666		
Total	407,876	221			

Table 4

Descriptive Analysis of Consumer Hypocrisy Judgment (H1/Experiment 2)

Scenario	N	Mean	SD	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
MP+CAENA	75	3,9778	0,94652	3,7600	4,1956
MP+CBENA	82	3,8537	0,79106	3,6798	4,0275
CO+CAP	65	1,5282	0,67158	1,3618	1,6946
Total	222	3,2147	1,35853	3,0350	3,3944

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

MP+CAENA = 1st Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer High engagement + Non-Aligned)

MP+CBENA = 2nd Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer Low engagement + Non-Aligned)

CO+CAP (Brand with purpose + Consumer Aligned with the purpose of brand)

Regarding consumer engagement (H2), the scale exhibited an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.751$) for the item's habitual purchases, brand recommendation, and brand advocacy. The ANOVA results showed differences between scenarios [$F(2, 219) = 73.714$; $\text{Sig} = 0.000$], according to Table 5, with the highest mean appearing in the control scenario ($n = 65$; $M = 3.72$; $SD = 0.73$), where there is no hypocrisy, and it represents an aligned consumer. In comparison, Scenario 1 ($n = 75$; $M = 2.61$; $SD = 0.74$) and Scenario 2 ($n = 82$; $M = 2.27$; $SD = 0.74$) exhibited lower means, according to Table 6. However, the results regarding higher brand engagement leading to higher hypocrisy perception (H2) found no differences in means between Scenario 1 (high engagement) and Scenario 2 (low engagement), according to a Tukey HSD test ($\text{Sig} = 0.608$). Therefore, hypothesis (H2) was not supported, suggesting that individuals more engaged with the brand (repurchase, recommendation, and advocacy) were not considered more hypocritical compared to less engaged individuals (only make purchases).

Table 5
ANOVA Consumer Engagement (H2)

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
				73,714	0,000
Between-subjects	81,042	2	40,521		
Within-subjects	120,386	219	0,550		
Total	201,428	221			

Table 6
Descriptive Analysis of Consumer Engagement (H2)

Scenario	N	Mean	SD	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
MP+CAENA	75	2,6133	0,74342	2,4423	2,7844
MP+CBENA	82	2,2764	0,74223	2,1133	2,4395
CO+CAP	65	3,7282	0,73808	3,5453	3,9111
Total	222	2,8153	0,95469	2,6890	2,9416

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

MP+CAENA = 1st Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer High engagement + Non-Aligned)

MP+CBENA = 2nd Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer Low engagement + Non-Aligned)

CO+CAP (Brand with purpose + Consumer Aligned with the purpose of brand)

Concerning the condemnation of hypocrisy hypothesis (H3), the results found considerable reliability in the scale ($\alpha = 0.794$). The ANOVA test confirmed differences between means for guilt [$F(2,219) = 68.271$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$], self-punishment [$F(2,219) = 38.605$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$], and brand punishment [$F(2,219) = 17.911$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$], according to Tables 7, 9, and 11, respectively. The mean differences were evident in the control scenario (without hypocrisy), which had the lowest condemnation means for guilt ($M = 1.82$; $SD = 0.74$; $\text{Sig.} < 0.005$), compared to Scenario 1 ($M = 3.55$; $SD = 1.06$) and Scenario 2 ($M = 3.59$; $SD = 1.14$), according to Table 8. Additionally, self-punishment ($M = 1.69$; $SD = 0.63$; $\text{Sig.} < 0.005$) in the control scenario was lower than in Scenario 1 ($M = 2.93$; $SD = 1.10$) and Scenario 2 ($M = 2.90$; $SD = 0.98$), according to Table 10. Brand punishment ($M = 1.46$; $SD = 0.53$; $\text{Sig.} < 0.005$) in the control scenario was also lower compared to Scenario 1 ($M = 2.44$; $SD = 1.16$) and Scenario 2 ($M = 2.30$; $SD = 1.20$), according to Table 12.

Table 7
ANOVA Guilt (H3)

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
Between-subjects	141,078	2	70,539	68,271	0,000
Within-subjects	226,274	219	1,033		
Total	367,351	221			

Table 8*Descriptive Analysis of Guilt (H3)*

Scenario	N	Mean	SD	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
MP+CAENA	75	3,55	1,069	3,30	3,79
MP+CBENA	82	3,59	1,143	3,33	3,84
CO+CAP	65	1,82	0,748	1,63	2,00
Total	222	3,05	1,289	2,88	3,22

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

MP+CAENA = 1st Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer High engagement + Non-Aligned)

MP+CBENA = 2nd Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer Low engagement + Non-Aligned)

CO+CAP (Brand with purpose + Consumer Aligned with the purpose of brand)

Table 9*ANOVA Self-punishment (H3)*

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
Between-subjects	69,006	2	34,503	38,605	0,000
Within-subjects	195,732	219	0,894		
Total	264,739	221			

Table 10*Descriptive Analysis (H3)*

Scenario	N	Mean	SD	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
MP+CAENA	75	2,93	1,107	2,68	3,19
MP+CBENA	82	2,90	0,989	2,69	3,12
CO+CAP	65	1,69	0,635	1,53	1,85
Total	222	2,56	1,094	2,41	2,70

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

MP+CAENA = 1st Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer High engagement + Non-Aligned)

MP+CBENA = 2nd Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer Low engagement + Non-Aligned)

CO+CAP (Brand with purpose + Consumer Aligned with the purpose of brand)

Table 11*ANOVA Brand Punishment (H3)*

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
Between-subjects	38,605	2	19,303	17,911	0,000
Within-subjects	236,012	219	1,078		
Total	274,617	221			

Table 12*Descriptive Analysis of Brand Punishment (H3)*

Scenario	N	Mean	SD	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
MP+CAENA	75	2,44	1,165	2,17	2,71
MP+CBENA	82	2,30	1,204	2,04	2,57
CO+CAP	65	1,46	0,533	1,33	1,59
Total	222	2,10	1,115	1,96	2,25

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

MP+CAENA = 1st Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer High engagement + Non-Aligned)

MP+CBENA = 2nd Scenario (Brand with purpose + Consumer Low engagement + Non-Aligned)

CO+CAP (Brand with purpose + Consumer Aligned with the purpose of brand)

In analyses continuation, the possibility of hypocrisy judgment based on the gravity of action mediating the effect between perception and condemnation of hypocrisy (H4) was examined. The results revealed high reliability in the scale ($\alpha = 0.923$). When analyzing the gravity of action in the judgment of hypocrisy, an ANOVA showed differences between scenarios [$F(2,219) = 135.69$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$], according to Table 13. This judgment was lower in the control scenario ($M = 1.54$; $SD = 0.12$; $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$) compared to Scenario 1 ($M = 2.37$; $SD = 0.16$) and Scenario 2 ($M = 2.42$; $SD = 0.17$).

Table 13*ANOVA Gravity of Action (H4)*

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
Between-subjects	264,429	2	132,215	135,690	0,000
Within-subjects	213,391	219	0,974		
Total	477,820	221			

To assess the mediation effect, the Bootstrapping technique (Hayes, 2013) was used to calculate the confidence interval and confirm the normality of the distribution. The results confirmed the total effect between consumer hypocrisy and condemnation of hypocrisy in Scenario 1, high engagement (Effect = 1.32; $p = 0.00$; LLCI = 1.05; ULCI = 1.58), and Scenario 2, low engagement (Effect = 1.27; $p = 0.00$; LLCI = 1.02; ULCI = 1.53). LLCI and ULCI values represent the lowest and highest values in the resampling of each scenario, respectively. Thus, the indirect effect of hypocrisy judgment through the variables of the gravity of action and the immorality of behavior was confirmed.

When analyzing the scenarios of hypocrisy and engagement (high engagement and low engagement) and comparing each of them with the control scenario (without hypocrisy), a significant indirect mediation effect was found in Scenario 1 (Effect = 1.07; LLCI = 0.84; ULCI = 1.32) and Scenario 2 (Effect = 1.10; LLCI = 0.84; ULCI = 1.38). Therefore, the direct effect between the perception of consumer hypocrisy and the condemnation of hypocrisy was reduced in Scenarios 1 (Effect = 0.24; LLCI = -0.06; ULCI = 0.55) and low engagement (Effect = 0.18; LLCI = -0.13; ULCI = 0.48), indicating complete mediation and confirming H4, i.e., the perception of the gravity of action is one of the mechanisms that explain the reasons for condemning hypocrisy. All these values can be seen in Table 14.

Table 14
Action Gravity Mediation (H4)

	Effect	Error	Sig	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Direct Effect</i>					
Non-Hypocrite vs. High-Engagement Hypocrite	0,24	0,15	0,11	-0,06	0,55
Non-Hypocrite vs. Low-Engagement Hypocrite	0,18	0,15	0,25	-0,13	0,48
<i>Indirect Effect</i>					
Non-Hypocrite vs. High-Engagement Hypocrite	1,07	0,12		0,84	1,32
Non-Hypocrite vs. Low-Engagement Hypocrite	1,10	0,14		0,84	1,38
<i>Total Effect</i>					
Non-Hypocrite vs. High-Engagement Hypocrite	1,32	0,13	0,00	1,05	1,58
Non-Hypocrite vs. Low-Engagement Hypocrite	1,27	0,13	0,11	1,02	1,53

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

Omnibus test of total effect: $R^2\text{-chng}=0.36$; $F=61.65$; $df1=2$; $df2=219$; $Sig=0.00$.

Omnibus test of direct effect: $R^2\text{-chng}=0.01$; $F=1.28$; $df1=2$; $df2=218$; $Sig=0.28$.

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000.

Furthermore, the possibility of the immorality of behavior, also as part of the hypocrisy judgment, mediating the relationship between perception and condemnation of hypocrisy (H5) was also evaluated. To this end, an ANOVA showed differences between scenarios for the perception of the immorality of behavior [$F(2,219) = 154.86$; $Sig.=0.000$], according to Table 15, as this judgment was lower in the control scenario, without hypocrisy ($M = 1.58$; $SD = 0.12$; $Sig=0.000$), compared to Scenario 1 ($M = 2.43$; $SD = 0.16$; $Sig=0.000$) and Scenario 2 ($M = 2.45$; $SD = 0.16$; $Sig=0.000$).

Table 15
ANOVA Immorality of Behavior (H5)

Font of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Squares Mean	Z	Sig.
Between-subjects	273,893	2	136,946	135,690	0,000
Within-subjects	193,662	219	0,884		
Total	467,554	221			

The Bootstrapping technique was used again to identify the indirect effect. Examining the scenarios of hypocrisy (high engagement and low engagement) in relation to the scenario without hypocrisy, the indirect effect was significant for the high engagement scenario (Effect = 1.07; LLCI = 0.81; ULCI = 1.36) and the low engagement scenario (Effect = 1.08; LLCI = 0.81; ULCI = 1.39), compared to the scenario without hypocrisy. Thus, the direct effect between the perception of consumer hypocrisy and condemnation of hypocrisy was also reduced (not significant) in the high engagement scenario (Effect = 0.24; LLCI = -0.08; ULCI = 0.57) and the low engagement scenario (Effect = 0.19; LLCI = -0.13; ULCI = 0.51), compared to the scenario without hypocrisy, which characterizes complete mediation, confirming H5. All these values can be seen in Table 16.

Table 16
Immorality of Behavior Mediation (H5)

	Effect	Error	Sig	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Direct Effect</i>					
Non-Hypocrite vs. High-Engagement Hypocrite	0,24	0,16	0,14	-0,08	0,57
Non-Hypocrite vs. Low-Engagement Hypocrite	0,19	0,16	0,24	-0,13	0,51
<i>Indirect Effect</i>					
Non-Hypocrite vs. High-Engagement Hypocrite	1,07	0,14		0,81	1,36
Non-Hypocrite vs. Low-Engagement Hypocrite	1,08	0,15		0,81	1,39
<i>Total Effect</i>					
Non-Hypocrite vs. High-Engagement Hypocrite	1,32	0,13	0,00	1,05	1,58
Non-Hypocrite vs. Low-Engagement Hypocrite	1,27	0,13	0,00	1,02	1,53

Note: Confidence level for all confidence intervals: 95.

Omnibus test of total effect: $R^2\text{-chng}=0.36$; $F=61.65$; $df1=2$; $df2=219$; $Sig=0.00$.

Omnibus test of direct effect: $R^2\text{-chng}=0.01$; $F=1.10$; $df1=2$; $df2=218$; $Sig=0.34$.

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals: 5000.

5.3. RESULTS DISCUSSION

The results of the second experiment once again confirm consumer hypocrisy (H1), this time using a different cause, namely, racial inequality. This environmental triangulation format in research (Guion, 1969), in which the context and environment are altered, contributes to a higher validity of the findings.

Contrary to expectations, the engagement hypothesis (H2) did not find support, as there was no significant difference between scenarios with high and low engagement. The results indicate that actions such as repurchasing, recommending, and defending the brand do not make consumers more hypocritical than those who only make purchases. The results also show that consumer engagement assessment is higher in scenarios where there is alignment between the consumer and the brand's purpose, including in relation to the scenario considered to have high engagement (repurchase, recommendation, and brand defense).

The confirmation of condemnation of hypocrisy (H3) was supported by the differences between scenarios, revealing a sense of moral outrage toward hypocrites (Jordan et al., 2017), with condemnation seen as a quest for justice (Do et al., 2020). Being perceived as hypocritical increases the condemnation that people receive for their transgressions (Laurent et al., 2013), causing consumers to become more concerned about their hypocritical actions in everyday life.

In the analysis of the factors that lead to this condemnation, the results show the mediation of the judgment of hypocrisy. Regarding the gravity of action (H4), the discrepancy between action and behavior shows that the act itself is a key factor in condemning hypocrisy (Alicke et al., 2013), leading others to desire punishment for hypocrites. Therefore, the results show that much of what people think are isolated acts are considered points of hypocrisy judgment and lead to condemnation of the consumer, confirming H4.

Analyzing the immorality of behavior (H5), the results help demonstrate that consumers care about morality when consuming (De Pelsmacker et al., 2005) and that immorality carries weight in the judgment of a hypocritical consumer's actions (Barden et al., 2005), leading to greater moral condemnation of them (Effron et al., 2018), confirming H5. The results also support the

importance of morality as part of studies on consumer hypocrisy (Lawford-Smith, 2015) and the idea that brands should be concerned with morality in their purposes.

5.4. GENERAL DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

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The results presented contribute to advancing the study of consumer hypocrisy. While we currently understand the effects of hypocrisy on brands (Guèvremont, 2019; Jung et al., 2020; Baghi & Antonetti, 2021), there is room to study other possible effects of consumer hypocrisy against brand purposes, going beyond isolated consumption events (Rothgerber, 2020; Mkono, 2020; Thorman et al., 2020). Thus, a new avenue is presented, one that should consider how consumer hypocrisy and brand hypocrisy can receive greater joint attention in branding and consumer-brand relationship studies.

Regarding the judgment of hypocrisy, the study showed that the gravity of action and the immorality of behavior help explain why perceptions of hypocrisy lead to condemnation of hypocrites, assessing the weight of the consumer's grave daily actions and how much this hypocrisy against brand purposes is part of immoral behavior. This aligns with studies that seek to consider the consequences of hypocritical behavior (Alicke et al., 2013; Barden et al., 2005) and that failures against brand purposes should not become irrelevant. Concerning brand engagement, habitual purchase, brand recommendation, and brand defense are not sufficient factors for more engaged consumers to be considered more hypocritical than those who only make purchases and engage in the same actions in their daily lives. This shows that not every attitude and behavior toward brand actions constitutes engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016) and that engagement is not necessarily related to a brand having a purpose (Mirzaei et al., 2021).

Findings related to condemnation of hypocrisy also emerged, with the perception of guilt, desire for self-punishment, and desire for third-party punishment present in the evaluation of other consumers. These results align with the findings that transgressions, when related to third-party judgment, receive moral condemnation (Effron et al., 2015) and that others wish for punishments for those who violate certain types of social norms (Helweg-Larsen & LoMonaco, 2008). Therefore, it can be understood that brand actions in activism are choices, and many consumers may not be predisposed to align with the purpose and may face condemnation and a desire for punishment as a result.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrated that consumer hypocrisy and brand purpose are considered relevant topics, emphasizing the importance of research on consumer hypocrisy, and helping to better understand the context of brand purposes. This can be valuable for identifying their shortcomings or exploring how they are connected to consumer actions in their daily lives. With these findings, the goal of establishing a possible perception of consumer hypocrisy related to brand purposes by third parties has been achieved. Furthermore, the study showed that the context and the cause of hypocrisy are critical areas of analysis, as seen in the context of diversity and racial equality, both of which elicited perceptions of hypocrisy from the perspective of third parties.

In summary, the results of this study contribute to the discourse on consumer hypocrisy, aiming not to be a definitive model but to stimulate further inquiry into when consumers become hypocritical in their relationships with brands. In addition, this paper expands the discussion around to what extent brand hypocrisy can reflect its consumers and reciprocally.

7. THEORETICAL AND MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The results contribute to advancements in brand activism and brand purposes studies by highlighting the possible contradictions that consumer hypocrisy represents in the pursuit of brands becoming agents of social change (Mirzaei et al., 2021). Additionally, the results provide practical insights into consumer engagement, demonstrating that situations involving repurchase, brand recommendation, and brand advocacy (Hellier et al., 2003; Kumar & Pansari, 2016; Harrigan et al., 2021) do not increase the perception of hypocrisy. This prompts a reflection on whether consumer engagement with brands can be understood in other ways in the contemporary world, including alignment with brand purposes, as observed in Experiment 2.

Furthermore, the results offer practical contributions to brand managers, marketing professionals, and relationship managers, particularly for brands engaged in various forms of activism with their consumers. Among these contributions, it is important for brands to emphasize the role consumers play in representing their purposes and understand that their actions are being judged and condemned by other consumers. This highlights that self-awareness alone should not be the sole criterion in assessing their actions, but rather collective well-being.

Managers also need to analyze hypocritical actions concerning consumers who are more active within brand communities and those who make more habitual purchases. Mitigation of judgment and condemnation of hypocrisy occurs more frequently when the targets are from the same group rather than external groups (Barden et al., 2013). It is also essential for brands to alert consumers about these hypocritical actions, fostering reflection on how they are subject to judgment and condemnation by other consumers. This also serves as an opportunity to open channels for discussion, justification, and clarification on how to align with the brand's purposes.

As a complement to managerial and practical contributions, brands and their managers should consider hypocritical actions in relation to consumers who are highly engaged with brand communities and those who make more habitual purchases, emphasizing the need for awareness among all consumers to prevent selective judgment of brand consumers.

8. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of this study were identified in brand engagement field. The results, contrary to the proposed hypothesis, may be related to the scenarios of hypocrisy not stimulating participants' understanding of engagement. Evidence of this is that the control scenario, featuring a consumer aligned with the cause, had the highest means related to participants' perception of engagement. These results could stimulate more in-depth discussions regarding the current consumer-brand relationship and engagement issues.

Looking ahead to future research, studies could delve into how much the brand promotes these values of its purpose to understand if the perception of hypocrisy could decrease if the brand does not clearly communicate these values in its marketing. Another point to consider is whether brands that are also perceived as hypocritical (Guèvremont, 2019) could mitigate or nullify the judgment of hypocrisy by their consumers.

Future research could also explore whether the consumption of a product solely within the consumer's home, without public exposure, affects the perception of hypocrisy. Another aspect for potential analysis could be related to consumer involvement with the product, examining hedonic consumption versus utilitarian consumption. For example, whether the use of a product in an emergency (utilitarian) would be considered more hypocritical compared to consumers who genuinely love and desire the product.

Future research possibilities could seek to understand the learning process of these consumers, which is not linear and immediate, in relation to the judgment of hypocrisy. This would help understand to what extent consumers who act contrary to the brand's purpose can use the brand without facing condemnation. Concerning brand perception, studies could analyze the relevance of identifying that there are consumers purchasing from the brand and behaving differently, with the aim of assessing whether the brand recognizes the need to improve its brand purpose actions or whether it is a case of reevaluating its actions to avoid harming its relationship with consumers.

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

BP: Lead (Investigation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing); Equal (Project Administration, Methodology, Conceptualization); Supporting (Formal Analysis, Software, Validation, Data Curation). ES: Lead (Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Software, Validation, Supervision); Equal (Project Administration, Methodology, Conceptualization); Supporting (Writing – review & editing).

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix A. **Experiment 1.** Available in: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1e9U4sD-tDhp2sonJmN62UDMuzuXnjFWI/view?usp=sharing>

Appendix B. **Experiment 2.** Available in: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1uIYXP5a79QWWeWMAhFhB5YZ-ZG37HdWV/view?usp=sharing>