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# Why Do Brands Cause Trouble? A Dialectical Theory of Consumer Culture and Branding

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## Abstract

Brands are today under attack by an emerging countercultural movement. This study builds a dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding that

explains the rise of this movement and its potential effects. Results of an interpretive study challenge existing theories of consumer resistance. To develop an alternative model, I first trace the rise of the modern cultural engineering paradigm of branding, premised upon a consumer culture that granted marketers cultural authority. Intrinsic contradictions erased its efficacy. Next I describe the current postmodern consumer culture, which is premised upon the pursuit of personal sovereignty through brands. I detail five postmodern branding techniques that are premised upon the principle that brands are authentic cultural resources. Postmodern branding is now giving rise to new contradictions that have inflamed the antibranding sentiment sweeping Western countries. I detail these contradictions and project that they will give rise to a new post-postmodern branding paradigm premised upon brands as citizen-artists.

**Keywords:** [Brand Loyalty](#), [Critical Theory](#), [Cultural Theories and Analysis](#), [Postmodernism/Poststructuralism](#), [Historical Analysis](#)

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