

A quantitative exploration of service brand avoidance and its antecedents

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ABSTRACT

With consumers increasingly avoiding service brands due to a wide range of transgressions by organisations, it is surprising that research relating to service brand avoidance is lacking, with most studies focusing on positive brand associations. However, more recently researchers started exploring service brand avoidance by gaining insights into this phenomenon through qualitative research by identifying possible reasons as to why consumers would not only avoid service brands, but also terminate their relationships with brands. This paper furthers our understanding of service brand avoidance by being one of the first research studies to quantitatively explore the antecedents of service brand avoidance. Data were collected by means of convenience sampling from 299 South African cell phone users. Findings indicate that of those antecedents of service brand avoidance identified through previous qualitative studies, identity avoidance, moral avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and experiential avoidance predict service brand avoidance, whereas advertising avoidance does not.

Keywords: service brand avoidance; identity avoidance; moral avoidance; deficit-value avoidance; experiential avoidance; advertising avoidance

1. INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of 2015 the world learned about the Volkswagen (VW) emissions scandal when it became apparent that VW, the German automobile manufacturer, was dishonest by installing software in some of their diesel engines that could reduce emission readings when being tested (Hotten, 2015). This resulted in many consumers avoiding VW-branded vehicles, resulting in a reduction in sales, revenue and profits (Campbell, 2016; Cremer, 2016; Kollwe, 2016; Vincent, 2016). Tiger Brands, South Africa's largest

food producer, also experienced reduced sales and their market capitalisation falling by more than \$450 million when consumers avoided their cold meat brands linked to a deadly listeria outbreak (Business Report, 2018). Consumer avoidance and backlash is also evident within a service context as was seen when United Airlines' brand image was tarnished (Martin, 2017) and they experienced a drop in revenue and profits (Cox and Rodionova, 2017; Shen, 2017) after social media footage, showing a legitimate passenger being forcibly removed from an overbooked flight, went viral. Due to transgressions such as these and others, consumers are increasingly deciding to avoid brands (Knittel, Beurer and Berndt, 2016).

However, despite the apparent negative consequences due to brands' transgressions, it appears as though branding research predominantly focus on positive brand associations (Lee, Conroy and Moton, 2009a; Platania, Morando and Santisi, 2017; Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi and Fetscherin, 2018), including brand attachment (Japutra, Ekinci and Simkin, 2014), brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012) and brand affection (Tse and Chan, 2008). The negative associations with brands have received limited attention, and particularly so concerning service brands (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Veloutsou and Guzman, 2017), which are often characterised by their complexity due to service delivery processes (Franceschini and Mastrogiacomo, 2018).

Exploring the negative associations with brands and gaining an understanding of service brand avoidance, provides marketers with insights as to why customers would not only avoid, but also terminate their relationships, with service brands (McColl-Kennedy, Patterson, Smith and Brady, 2009). The purpose of this research is to fill this gap by exploring service brand avoidance together with the antecedents thereof.

This paper contributes to Service Marketing literature in general and to our understanding of brand avoidance in the context of service brands in particular. While

previous studies on service brand avoidance offered insights gained from qualitative research (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009a; Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009c), this study contributes by exploring service brand avoidance quantitatively. Specifically, with the lack of a validated measure to study negative brand reactions (Odoom, Kosiba, Djamgbah and Narh, 2019), we offer an attempt at developing a valid and reliable quantitative measuring instrument to measure service brand avoidance and its antecedents. Finally, we contribute by providing statistical evidence for the antecedents that predict service brand avoidance.

In the next section, literature on service brand avoidance and its antecedents are discussed and the hypotheses for the study are formulated. This is followed by an overview of the methodology guiding the study and a presentation of the research results. The managerial implications are offered next, while a conclusion, limitations to the study and recommendations for future research concludes the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Brand Avoidance

Early research on negative consumer-brand relationships identified two primary reasons why consumers would not buy a product or service brand, namely non-choice and anti-choice (Hogg, 1998). Non-choice relates to consumers not buying a product or service because it is not accessible or due to affordability issues. Anti-choice, the focus of this study, occurs when consumers deliberately choose not to buy a product or service due to a lack of compatibility with their values or self-image (Hogg, 1998). Service brand avoidance, a specific form of consumer anti-choice, refers to consumers deliberately rejecting a service brand even though it is financially affordable, accessible and available to consumers (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009a).

Previous qualitative research suggests four antecedents of brand avoidance, namely identity avoidance, moral avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and experiential avoidance, (Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2009a, 2009c; Lee, Fernandez and Hyman, 2009b; Odoom et al., 2019). More recently, Knittel et al.'s (2016) qualitative study suggested adding advertising avoidance as a fifth antecedent of brand avoidance. These antecedents are consequently discussed.

2.1.1. Identity avoidance

Identity avoidance refers to a brand's failed attempt to provide symbolic meaning to a consumer's self-concept (Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b). This implies that a brand's failure to appeal to a consumer's desired self-image could result in negative customer attitudes and intentions, and ultimately consumer behaviour (Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008; Islam, Attiq, Hameed, Khokhar, and Shaikh, 2019). Unappealing brand promises (Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b) are projected toward the undesired self (Ogilvie, 1987) and consumer disidentification emerges in the instance when brands are perceived to hold negative images or values different to that of the consumer (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002; Knittel et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009a). It is thus proposed that consumers' undesired self and their disidentification with the brand form the basis of identity avoidance (Khan, Ashraf, and Malik, 2019; Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b). According to Lee et al. (2009a), consumers' brand identity avoidance is formed because of negative reference groups, deindividuation and inauthenticity associated with undesirable service brands.

Negative reference group associations are formed when consumers hold negative perceptions of the stereotypical consumers of a brand (Englis and Solomon, 1995; Knittel et al., 2016; Khan and Lee, 2014). Consumers are thus willing to forgo purchasing certain products or services in order to avoid association with a negative reference group (Englis and Solomon, 1995). The anti-choice represented by this behaviour is in the interest of

consumers protecting their self-concept by distancing themselves from aspects that reflect their undesired self (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002; Hogg, Banister and Stephenson, 2009; Lee et al., 2009b).

In addition to often consuming or avoiding a brand to achieve social assimilation and approval (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Kim, Ratnshwar, Roesler and Chowdhury, 2016), consumers tend to seek brands to enhance their differentiation and uniqueness as an expression of self-identity (Kirmani, 2009; Snyder, 1974). Consumers may thus, in instances where their collective identity ceases to safeguard the expression of individuality, pursue independence within the collective by selecting less mainstream brands (Moon and Sung, 2015). This assumption is supported by Knittel et al. (2016) and Lee et al. (2009a; 2009b) who established that deindividuation occurs when brand consumption weakens consumer individuality, ultimately leading to brand avoidance.

Consumers increasingly expect brands to be real and genuine, thus contributing to a perception of authenticity (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland and Farrelly, 2014). Brands that become too popular (Bryson, Atwal and Hultén, 2013) or mainstream may thus be perceived as becoming diluted in the symbolic meaning represented by the brand (Charmley, Garry and Ballantine et al., 2013), thereby increasing the risk of brand inauthenticity (Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b). Since inauthenticity can cause loyal consumers to rebel and engage in negative behaviour such as anti-brand activism (Thompson and Arsel, 2004) or brand avoidance (Charmley, et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b; Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel, 2006), brands should be managed in such a way that it continuously gravitates away from undesired symbolic associations and closer to consumers' desired symbolic meanings (Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008; Thompson et al., 2006). It can accordingly be hypothesised that:

H₁ Identity avoidance is a positive predictor of brand avoidance.

2.1.2. Moral Avoidance

Specific to the consumer-brand context, Lee et al. (2009b) and Hegner, Fetscherin and van Delzen (2017) explain moral avoidance as the ideological incongruity that exists between the values associated with a brand and the personal values of the consumer. Changes in consumer values has given rise to the resistance of brands, which ultimately carries consequences for anti-consumption research (Rindell, Strandvik and Wilén, 2014).

A brand perceived to be engaged in immoral and unfair practices (Dalli, Romani, and Gistri, 2006), negatively impacting society (Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b) or damaging to the environment (Chen, Hung, Wang, Huang, and Liao, 2017; Widyastuti, Said, Siswono, and Firmansyah, 2019) invokes consumers to experience feelings of dislike towards a brand (Demirbag-Kaplan, Yildirim, Gulden and Aktan, 2015; Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher, 2018). This may result in consumer boycotts and moral avoidance, both indicators of anti-consumption behaviour. Whereas boycotting may result in consumers re-entering the brand-consumer relationship once certain conditions are met (Hirschman, 1970), customers who avoid the brand would in all likelihood never engage with the brand again (Grégoire, Tripp and Legoux, 2009).

Country of origin effects could also be an indicator of moral avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b). Research established a number of country-of-origin related factors that influence consumer decisions to buy foreign brands, including country ideologies on, for example, war and economic policies (Russell, Russell and Neijens, 2011), culture (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007) and political views or actions (Knittel et al., 2016; Duman and Ozgen, 2018). Consumers may thus decide not to buy products or services due to the country's image or the quality of products and services associated with it (Bloemer, Brijs and Kasper, 2009). More recently, research established that country-of-

origin effects acts as a driver of moral avoidance, where immoral actions tarnish consumers' perceptions of brands originating from the country in question (Khan and Lee, 2014; Knittel et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b;).

Moral avoidance can also be rooted in anti-hegemony, whereby brands are avoided due to an organisation's monopoly or dominance in the market (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). Moral avoidance is particularly prevalent where dominant brands engage in irresponsible business practices, resulting in such organisations becoming the target of consumer criticism (Holt, 2002), resistance, and anti-consumption behaviour (Knittel et al., 2016). It can accordingly be hypothesised that:

H₂ Moral avoidance is a positive predictor of brand avoidance.

2.1.3. Deficit-Value Avoidance

Research established a positive relationship between quality and value – also called the price-quality relationship – in consumer decision making and buying behaviour (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Parasuramann and Grewal, 2000; Zeithaml, 1988). In contrast, deficit-value occurs if consumers believe they did not receive value for what they paid for a service, possibly resulting in brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009c). Consumers judge the value received from a service by considering the cost incurred for the service (Bolton and Drew, 1991; Dharamdass and Fernando, 2018), including monetary as well as non-monetary costs (Bolton and Drew, 1991). Non-monetary costs incurred include, for example, effort by consumers (Zeithaml, 1988), including the time taken to search for information about a brand and its service offerings (Cronin, Brady, Brand, Hightower Jr and Shemwell, 1997).

According to Lee et al. (2009c), both unfamiliarity and aesthetic insufficiency contribute to deficit-value avoidance. Consumers respond more favourably towards

familiar brands due to increased brand awareness (Aaker, 1991), therefore decreasing their perceived risk (Goedertier, Dawar, Geuens and Weijters, 2015). Consequently, unfamiliar brands are avoided due to the perceived financial risk associated with the possibility of selecting an inferior quality brand in comparison to a known familiar brand (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee 2009a). Since aesthetic design is instrumental in communicating and enhancing brand quality (Liljander, Polsa and Van Riel, 2009), consumers may avoid aesthetically insufficient brands as it serves as an indicator that the brand may lack functional value (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee 2009a). It can accordingly be hypothesised that:

H₃ Deficit-value avoidance is a positive predictor of brand avoidance.

2.1.4. Experiential avoidance

Experiential avoidance is apparent once customers undergo negative experiences associated with a product or service, owing to unmet expectations (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal and Voss, 2002; Lee et al., 2009a). By underpinning the motives of experiential avoidance, service providers become equipped with the relevant knowledge to bridge the gap between customer expectations and brand performance (Lee et al., 2009c). It has been postulated that three factors influence experiential avoidance, namely poor performance, inconvenience and an unpleasant store environment (Lee et al., 2009c). Poor performance would probably lead to negative disconfirmation, implying that customer needs were not met (Higgins and Scholer, 2009; Lee et al., 2009c), thereby resulting in brand avoidance (Keaveney, 1995).

Inconvenience is a common experience when engaging with service providers due to the service delivery process (Farquhar and Rowley, 2009). Competitors offering the same service could thus become more attractive when customers perceive that they have to invest too much effort to acquire the service (Knittel et al., 2016), thus leading to

service brand avoidance. The service environment, or servicescape, provides physical and tangible evidence to help consumers evaluate the service experience (Krystallis and Chrysochou, 2014). Store environments that meet customer expectations result in customer satisfaction (Zhao, Lu, Zhang and Chau, 2012). In contrast, prior research has recognised that an unpleasant store environment is a contributor of brand avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009a, 2009c). It can accordingly be hypothesised that:

H₄ Experiential avoidance is a positive predictor of brand avoidance.

2.1.5. Advertising Avoidance

In addition to other objectives, including creating awareness, offering information on their products and services and persuading consumers to purchase their offerings, marketers use advertising to build a positive image for their brands (Keller, 2009). However, despite marketers' efforts, research established that negative sentiments towards a brand and its advertising could lead to consumers avoiding a brand's communication across various media types, including radio, television, print (Prendergast, Cheung and West, 2010) and online media (Sheehan and Hoy, 1999). It has accordingly been proposed that advertising avoidance could be regarded as an antecedent of brand avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016). Specifically, the content (Knittel et al., 2016; Wilbur, 2016:70), endorser and music used in advertisements, as well as irritation with advertisements, could result in brand avoidance.

Research revealed that content could influence consumer behaviour towards advertisements (Anderson, Ciliberto and Liaukontye, 2013) as well as advertising avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016; Wilbur, 2016). For example, highly emotional (Swani, Weinberger and Gulas, 2013) or provocative advertising (De Pelsmacker and Van den

Bergh, 1996) content may lead to brand avoidance as consumers react differently towards contents of this nature (De Pelsmacker and Van den Bergh, 1996; Swani et al., 2013).

Marketers often attempt to elicit interest in their services by using celebrities in their advertisements to endorse their brands (Fill and Turnbull, 2016) as doing so could create a positive associations of the brand under consumers due to the perception of the celebrity (Knoll and Matthes, 2017). However, using celebrities can drive consumers away from a brand if they dislike the celebrity (Spry, Pappu and Cornwell, 2011). Knittel et al. (2016) therefore postulate that negative associations with a celebrity endorser could result in brand avoidance.

Research established that the music used in an advertisement improves the likability thereof (Knowles and Linn, 2004). It is furthermore believed that the use of popular music in advertisements improves the chances that consumers will remember the advertisement (Allan, 2006), with brand recognition and recall increasing with repeated mention of the brand as part of the song (Delattre and Colovic, 2009). However, using music in advertisements may lead to negative brand associations due to consumers disliking certain artists or entire genres (Craton, Lantos and Leventhal, 2017) or if the music is perceived as inappropriate or too loud (Lantos and Craton, 2012), thereby contributing to brand avoidance. Irritation resulting from advertisements perceived as untrustworthy (Bauer and Greyser, 1968) or being overexposed to a brand's advertisements (Bell and Buchner, 2018) can also lead to brand avoidance. It can accordingly be hypothesised that:

H₅ Advertising avoidance is a positive predictor of brand avoidance.

3. METHOD

The study population consisted of the customers of a large South African cell phone network provider (CNP). Only those customers who had previously used another CNP than their current provider were invited to participate in the study by completing a web-based questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics. Since the CNP did not keep a record (and therefore did not have a potential respondent list) of whether new customers have switched from a competitor, we had to use convenience sampling. Potential respondents therefore first had to answer a screening question to ensure they met the criteria (i.e. previously used another CNP) before completing the questionnaire. Because most previous studies on brand avoidance were qualitative and exploratory in nature, we developed a measure based on extant theory and by adapting items used in previous studies measuring brand avoidance and its hypothesised antecedents. The scale items used in Van Delzen's (2014) study were adapted to measure brand avoidance, experiential avoidance and moral avoidance. The items used to measure deficit-value avoidance and advertising avoidance were based on insights gained from Knittel et al.'s (2016) qualitative study. Finally, scale items for identity avoidance was compiled from studies by Escalas and Bettman (2003) and Van Delzen (2014). Similar to Fetscherin (2019), Fetscherin and Sampedro (2019) and Van Delzen (2014), all items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scales, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 24 for Windows was used to perform an exploratory factor analysis to determine the underlying structure of the dimensions and sub-dimensions in the data (Field, 2013) before a multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether the antecedents significantly predict service brand avoidance.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Respondent profile

A total of 299 respondents participated in the study, with most being female (58.4 per cent). The majority of respondents were younger than 30 years old (82.5 per cent), finished high school (52.1 per cent) and lived in Gauteng Province (81.8 per cent). Similar percentages were contract (51.4 per cent) than pre-paid (48.6 per cent) customers. Concerning monthly cell phone spending, most respondents spend on average between R 251 and R 500 (40 per cent), R 250 or less (30.5 per cent) or between R 501 and R 1 000 (22.8 per cent) per month. Almost 88 per cent of pre-paid customers' monthly cell phone spending was R 500 or less, compared to 54.1 per cent of contract customers.

4.2. Exploratory factor analysis, validity and reliability

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA), using principle axis factoring with Varimax rotation (Field, 2013; Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2014) was performed. The EFA yielded six factors based on the Eigenvalue (>1) criterion. The cumulative variance explained by the factors was 74.04 per cent. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) was 0.950 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.0001$) for all the constructs. The rotated factor matrix is shown in Table 1, illustrating the factor loadings for each item included in the analysis. From the results reported in Table 1 convergent validity can be deduced since all the items inter-correlated relatively high onto the same factor (Field, 2013; Hair et al., 2014). Discriminant validity is evident since no items cross-loaded onto other factors (Cole, Cho, Martin, Seroczynski, Tram and Hoffman, 2001). Once validity was established, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to establish the reliability of the measuring instrument. With all Cronbach's alpha coefficient values exceeding the suggested value of 0.7 (Field, 2013; Hair et al., 2014), it could be concluded that the measure used was reliable.

Table 1: Rotated factor matrix

Item	Factor loadings					
	AA*	EA*	IA*	SBA*	DVA*	MA*
I will not use CNP X's services due to their advertisements	.878					
I will not use CNP X's services due to the celebrities and actors used in their advertisements	.846					
I don't like the celebrities or actors used in CNP X's advertisements	.782					
I don't like the music used in CNP X's advertisements	.772					
CNP X's advertisements are too provocative	.755					
I will not use CNP X's service due to the content of their advertisements	.754					
I don't like the content of CNP X's advertisements	.633					
CNP X's performance was poor		.744				
My overall experience with CNP X was unpleasant		.743				
I didn't like CNP X's service environment		.710				
CNP X's service was poor		.698				
CNP X could not meet my expectations		.627				
CNP X's employees were unpleasant		.549				
CNP X does not reflect who I am			.751			
The CNP X brand does not represent who I am			.750			
The service of CNP X does not fit my personality			.707			
The service of CNP X does not reflect who I am			.696			
CNP X symbolizes the kind of person I would never want to be			.552			
I do not want to be seen using CNP X services			.545			
I cannot identify myself with CNP X			.543			
I prefer not to use CNP X in the future				.746		
If I can help it, I will not use CNP X again				.733		
I avoid using CNP X's service				.729		
I will not use CNP X again				.704		
I want nothing to do with CNP X				.666		
The price I paid for CNP X services was more than the benefits I received					.860	
I did not get value for the price I paid for CNP X services					.850	
The prices charged by CNP X exceeds the value I got from using their services					.761	
In my opinion, CNP X violates moral standards						.744
In my opinion, CNP X acts unethically						.707
In my opinion, CNP X acts irresponsibly						.562

*AA = Advertising avoidance; EA = Experiential avoidance; IA = Identity avoidance; SBA = Service brand avoidance; DVA = Deficit value avoidance; MA = Moral avoidance

4.3. Hypothesis testing

Multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study. Before running the multiple regression, we confirmed that none of the assumptions related to sample size, the presence of outliers, multicollinearity and the normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of variance were violated (Hair et al., 2014; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). The multiple regression was thus performed to determine whether the antecedents of brand avoidance, included as independent variables in the analysis (namely advertising avoidance, experiential avoidance, identity avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and moral avoidance) predict brand avoidance (dependant variable).

The results from the multiple regression showed that advertising avoidance, experiential avoidance, identity avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and moral avoidance explained 65.2 per cent of the variance in service brand avoidance. An ANOVA was performed to test the fit of the regression model with the overall data. The results yielded a p-value of <0.001, thus indicating that the regression model is statistically significant. The standardised regression coefficients for each independent variable in the regression model is shown in Table 2.

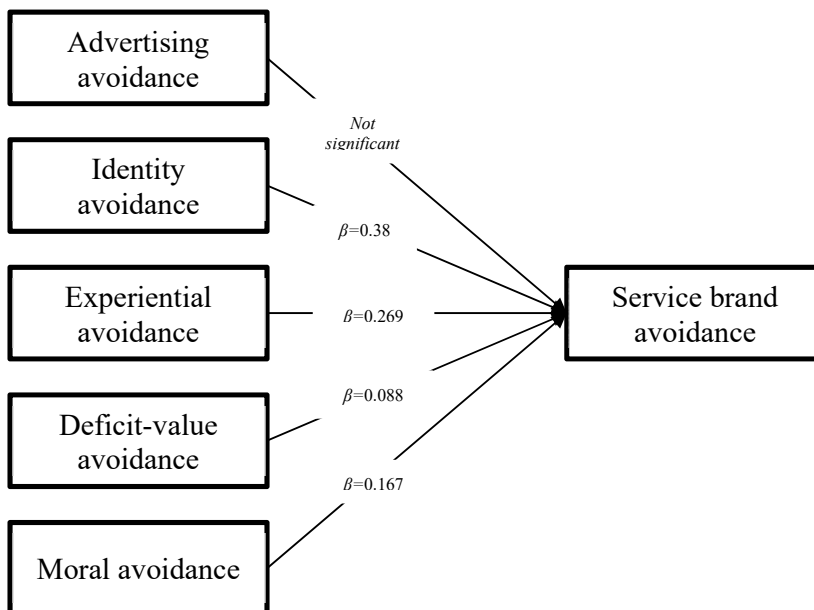
Table 2: Regression analysis results

Model	Standardised Coefficients	t	p-value
	Beta		
Constant		-2.795	0.006
Advertising avoidance	.053	1.070	0.286 n.s.
Identity avoidance	.381	6.819	0.000*
Experiential avoidance	.269	5.272	0.000*
Deficit-value avoidance	.088	2.043	0.042*
Moral avoidance	.167	2.963	0.003*

*p<0.05; n.s. not significant

In Table 2 it can be seen that identity avoidance ($p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.381$), experiential avoidance ($p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.269$), deficit-value avoidance ($p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.088$) and moral avoidance ($p < 0.01$; $\beta = 0.167$) statistically significantly predict service brand avoidance. However, advertising avoidance did not statistically significantly ($p > 0.05$) predict brand avoidance. It can furthermore be seen from Table 2 that identity avoidance and experiential avoidance were the strongest predictors of service brand avoidance. From these results it can be concluded that hypotheses H₁, H₂, H₃, and H₄ is supported, while H₅ is not supported. The results from the multiple regression is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Predictors of service brand avoidance



5. DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Most previous studies explored service brand avoidance by means of qualitative research (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2009a, 2009c). The purpose of this study was to offer new insights into service brand avoidance by performing a quantitative study. The first objective was thus to establish a valid and reliable measuring instrument to

measure service brand avoidance as well as the suggested antecedents thereof, namely advertising avoidance, identity avoidance, experiential avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and moral avoidance. The second objective was to determine whether the antecedents proposed in previous qualitative studies predict service brand avoidance.

Results from our analyses confirmed that the measuring instrument used in this study was valid and reliable to measure service brand avoidance and its antecedents. It was furthermore established that identity avoidance, experiential avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and moral avoidance (Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2009a, 2009b, 2009c) predicted service brand avoidance. However, no support was found for Knittel et al's. (2016) hypothesis, based on their qualitative study, that advertising avoidance should be considered as a fifth antecedent of brand avoidance.

Since identity avoidance was found to be the most important predictor of service brand avoidance, marketers should, through marketing research, identify the best match between their brand's image to that of their target market. By doing so, marketers may be more successful by positioning their services closer to consumers' desired self-images (Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008; Thompson et al., 2006). Furthermore, by positioning their brands as authentic (Beverland, 2006; Napoli et al., 2014), marketers stand a greater chance that customers would not avoid their brands.

Experiential avoidance, occurring when customer service expectations are not met (Baker et al., 2002), was found to be the second most important predictor of service brand avoidance. Marketers can reduce avoidance behaviour due to experiential avoidance by ensuring customer and service environment expectations are met (Astous, 2000; Bolton and Drew, 1991). Marketers can also reduce the influence of experiential avoidance by making it easier for customers to complain to the service provider, thereby offering them the opportunity to implement service recovery strategies (Wang and Mattila, 2011) in an

effort to restore customer trust in (Du, Fan and Feng, 2010) and satisfaction with the service provider (Magnini and Ford, 2004).

Marketers should acknowledge that, although of lesser importance than identity and experiential avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and moral avoidance also predict service brand avoidance. Marketer actions to reduce deficit-value avoidance include ensuring offering customers value for money (Bolton and Drew, 1991). Marketers can, for example, increase customers' value perceptions by reducing the non-monetary costs incurred by reducing customer efforts to deal with them (Zeithaml, 1988) and by ensuring information about their brands and service offerings are readily available (Cronin et al., 1997). Brand avoidance flowing from moral avoidance can be reduced by matching the brand's values to that of their target market's values and beliefs and ensuring the brand does no harm to the environment (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004).

6. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study contributed to theory and practice in a number of ways. Firstly, by opting for a quantitative approach as opposed to previous studies exploring service brand avoidance qualitatively, the study offer insights into this new area of interest. Secondly, we developed a valid and reliable measuring instrument to measure service brand avoidance that can be used in future quantitative studies. Thirdly, the study provided quantitative support to the hypotheses by Lee (2008) and Lee et al. (2009a, 2009b) that identity avoidance, experiential avoidance, deficit-value avoidance and moral avoidance predict customer' service brand avoidance. Finally, despite qualitative research suggesting that advertising avoidance influences customers' service brand avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016), this research established that advertising avoidance does not predict service brand avoidance. Marketers can thus use the findings from this study to focus on those

antecedents predicting service brand avoidance and specifically so on the largest predictors.

Despite the contributions this study offers, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. A first limitation is that the study was exploratory in nature and only considered one service, namely cell phone service providers. Secondly, the study was limited to a single country within a developing country context, with most respondents living in only one of the country's nine provinces. A third limitation lies in the sampling method used. By using convenience sampling implies that results are representative of those who completed the questionnaire and not the entire study population. It can accordingly be suggested that future studies replicate this study in more geographic areas and under a greater variety of service providers, for example banks, insurance providers and airlines. A fourth limitation is that the study did not consider the possible behavioural outcomes of service brand avoidance. Future research could thus consider, for example, the effect of negative emotions due to service brand avoidance on customer complaining, negative word-of-mouth and switching (Romani, Grappi and Dalli, 2012). Finally, the South African CNP market is oligopolistic in nature, implying that the market is dominated by a few strong competitors. Future research should thus consider replicating the study in other countries characterised by fierce competition from many CNPs to establish whether the same, or different, antecedents predict cell phone users' brand avoidance than what was found in the South African study.

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