

Involvement as Moderator Between the Antecedents and Outcomes of Brand Avoidance

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ABSTRACT

With current research findings being inconclusive, this study establishes the antecedents, and non-repurchase intention and brand hate as outcomes of brand avoidance, and furthermore addresses a gap in anti-consumption research by exploring involvement as moderator between the antecedents and outcomes of brand avoidance. Data were collected from South African respondents who avoid doing business with a brand they used in the past. Findings show that only two of the five antecedents, namely identity avoidance and deficit value avoidance, predict brand avoidance, while experience avoidance, moral avoidance, and advertising avoidance do not. Brand avoidance, in turn, predicts non-repurchase intention and brand hate. Furthermore, except for identity avoidance, involvement moderates the relationships between all the brand avoidance antecedents and outcomes. We recommend that brand managers take note of the antecedents predicting brand avoidance and actively develop strategies to address any incongruence that could develop between consumers and the brand. By actively engaging with consumers, brands are better positioned to increase consumers' involvement with the brand, thereby resulting in greater customer loyalty and commitment.

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Introduction

The success of service businesses relies on satisfied existing customers repurchasing from the same service provider. Repurchasing customers are therefore beneficial to service brands while non-repurchasing customers are detrimental. Understanding the reasons behind non-repurchase is therefore crucial (Otoo et al., 2023). Hogg (1998) identifies two forms of negative consumer behavior within the non-repurchase strand of research, namely non-choice and anti-choice behavior. Within anti-choice behavior, brand avoidance is defined as the deliberate rejection of brands, despite their availability, affordability, and accessibility (Lee, Motion, et al., 2009) while brand hate as an affective phenomenon results in

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“attack-like,” “approach-like” and “avoidance-like” consumer behavior toward hated brands (Zarantonello et al., 2016, p. 11). Five antecedents underpin brand avoidance namely experience, identity, moral, deficit value, and advertising avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016; Lee, Motion, et al., 2009; Otoo et al., 2023). These antecedents have been explored across physical goods (e.g. Lin et al., 2020) and service contexts (e.g. Berndt et al., 2019) employing qualitative (e.g. Knittel et al., 2016) and quantitative (e.g. Mostert et al., 2021) methodologies. However, inconsistent findings suggest a theoretical gap concerning the universal applicability of these antecedents (Odoom et al., 2019). This paper contributes to this gap by giving a South African perspective on brand avoidance antecedents.

Another theoretical gap in the brand avoidance and consumer anti-choice behavior literature lies in the lack of insights into the moderating effect of customer involvement. Theoretically, it has been established that involvement moderates brand-related constructs like brand attitude and brand loyalty Suh and Yi (2006), consumer self-concept and brand choice (Xue, 2008), brand love and brand engagement (Samala & Singh, 2019), engagement in online brand communities and communication about brand-related experiences (Wirtz et al., 2013), and brand hierarchy-of-effects and several product, service and brand constellations (Mathew & Thomas, 2018). It has also been found that customer involvement moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand avoidance (Oliva et al., 1992). Despite past research hypothesizing that involvement influences the relationships between brand-related constructs, the theoretical gap remains as to how involvement affects relationships between antecedents of, and non-repurchase intention and brand hate as outcomes of, brand avoidance.

The purpose of this paper is accordingly to address these two theoretical gaps by establishing the antecedents (i.e. experience, identity, moral, deficit-value and advertising avoidance) and outcomes (i.e. non-repurchase intention and brand hate) of brand avoidance while also considering the moderating effect of involvement between the antecedents and outcomes of brand avoidance.

This paper answers the research questions by testing the antecedents and outcomes of brand avoidance for service brands in South Africa and further establishes customer involvement as a moderator between the antecedents and outcomes of brand avoidance. By establishing the antecedents of brand avoidance in a service context within an emerging market, this study contributes to the literature on brand avoidance (e.g. Knittel et al., 2016; Odoom et al., 2019) and brand hate (e.g. Kucuk, 2019; Zarantonello et al., 2016) as anti-choice behavior. It also extends the understanding of anti-choice behavior by demonstrating the direct impact of brand avoidance on non-repurchase intention and brand hate (Curina et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is the first study to explore involvement as a moderator between the antecedents of, and non-repurchase intention and brand hate as outcomes of, brand avoidance.

Next, the paper discusses the theory anchoring the study and reviews the literature on the study constructs, including brand avoidance, its antecedents and outcomes, and the moderating role of involvement. This will be followed by an explanation of the research methodology, results, implications, study limitations, and directions for future research.

Theoretical overview and hypotheses formulation

The triangular structure theory of hate

Sternberg (2003) conceptualized the duplex theory of hate to explain interpersonal or group hatred. This theory postulates that consumer animosity toward brands surfaces when their expectations are unfulfilled (Mushtaq et al., 2025). The duplex theory includes the triangular theory of the structure of hate and the story-based theory of hate (Ajina et al., 2025). Kucuk (2016) adapted the duplex theory to consumer-brand contexts to understand brand hate. For purposes of this paper, we focus on the triangular structure theory (Ajina et al., 2025; Sternberg, 2003), as adapted by Kucuk (2016, 2019). Triangular structure theory identifies three structural components, namely negation of intimacy, decision-commitment, and passion (Sternberg, 2003). Negation of intimacy involves a desire to distance oneself from an object of hate due to disgust or incompatibility (Sternberg, 2003). Decision-commitment involves cognitive devaluation and justification of enduring negative perceptions of the object of hate (Sternberg, 2003). Passion reflects intense emotions like anger or fear toward the object of hate (Rozin et al., 1999; Sternberg, 2003). Kucuk (2019) distinguished brand hate into cool, cold and hot varieties where Sternberg's (2003) negation of intimacy (i.e. cool brand hate) and decision-commitment (i.e. cold brand hate) components result in consumer brand avoidance and non-repurchase behavior, while the passion (i.e. hot brand hate) component results in brand hate behavior such as brand retaliation or negative word-of-mouth. This distinction positions brand hate as a more severe condition than brand avoidance, driven by strong emotional responses and reinforced through activist consumer actions (Bryson et al., 2013; Hegner et al., 2017; Tokmak Danişman & Kasapoğlu, 2025).

Antecedents of brand avoidance

The significance of brand avoidance is that it leads to negative consumer-brand relationships, resulting in reputational and financial losses from current and potential customers (Jesse et al., 2025; Otoo et al., 2023). According to Lee, Motion, et al., (2009) & Lee, Conroy, et al., 2009 brand avoidance implies deliberate and active rejection of brands because of negative meanings consumers associate with the brands, even though such rejected brands are available, accessible, and financially affordable to consumers. Hegner et al. (2017) broaden the scope of brand avoidance to where consumers avoid brands by simply not purchasing them. Grégoire et al. (2009) also include withdrawal from any interactions with avoided firms as brand avoidance, whereas Thompson et al. (2006) argue brand avoidance is informed by sufficiently negative consumer attitudes, beliefs, and emotions toward brands to move consumers to deliberately reject brands.

Brand avoidance antecedents include experience avoidance because of negative customer experience and dissatisfaction (Grégoire et al., 2009), identity avoidance sprouting from conflict between the brand image and the consumer's self-concept or desired self-esteem (Mostert & Naude, 2022; Odoom et al., 2019), moral avoidance originating from the misalignment between the consumer and brand's moral values and views (Zhang

et al., 2023), deficit-value avoidance flowing from unfavorable comparisons by consumers of cost to brand utility (Berndt et al., 2019), and advertising avoidance when consumers develop negative feelings toward the brand's advertising (Knittel et al., 2016). Next, the relationships between these antecedents and brand avoidance are hypothesized.

Experience avoidance

Brands are bundles of functional and emotional utilities, packaged as explicit or implicit promises to consumers (De Chernatony & McDonald, 2003), thereby shaping consumer expectations (Dall'Olmo Riley & De Chernatony, 2000). However, when these expectations are disconfirmed due to disappointing brand experiences, such as failing product or service performance, consumer dissatisfaction arises (Ibrahim Nnindini & Dankwah, 2024; Liu & Lee, 2025; Odoom et al., 2019; Oliver, 1980), often culminating in brand avoidance (Jayasimha et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2006). Negative product or service experiences, whether caused by poor performance, hassle, or an unpleasant physical environment, are key drivers of unmet brand promises leading to consumer dissatisfaction and brand avoidance (Lee, Motion, et al., 2009 & Lee, Conroy, et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2020). In service contexts, experience avoidance occurs when a consumer interacts with a brand and encounters a core service failure or service encounter failure. This includes issues like inconvenience, hassles originating from service process difficulties, or displeasing service environments (Berndt et al., 2019). Such negative experiences damage consumer perceptions of the brand and increase the likelihood of brand avoidance.

Empirical evidence supports a strong link between experience avoidance and brand avoidance. Studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between these variables, highlighting the significant role of negative brand experiences in driving avoidance behavior (e.g. Kahn et al., 2019; Kavaliauskė & Simanavičiūtė, 2015; Lin et al., 2020). Based on this evidence, we hypothesize that:

H₁ There is a positive relationship between experience avoidance and brand avoidance

Identity avoidance

Consumers use brands not only to express their identity but also to differentiate themselves. Identity avoidance occurs when a brand's image is incompatible with a consumer's identity (Ibrahim Nnindini & Dankwah, 2024), often because the brand is associated with an avoidance group or dissociative out-group (White et al., 2012). Identity avoidance motivates consumers to actively distance themselves from brands that conflict with their self-concept or desired self-esteem (Hogg & Banister, 2001; Kaufmann et al., 2012). Symbolic unappealing brand promises resulting from brand associations with out-groups can evoke strong negative consumer reactions, prompting identity-driven brand rejection (Lee, Motion, et al., 2009 & Kaufmann et al., 2012; Zarantonello et al., 2016). Additionally, perceived brand inauthenticity, where emotional values held by consumers clash with the values projected by brands (Berndt et al., 2019) and deindividuation, wherein the use of brands undermines consumers' sense of individuality, also intensifies brand avoidance behaviors (Knittel et al., 2016).

Studies underscore the increasing importance of identity avoidance in understanding brand avoidance. Factors such as the rise of social media have amplified consumers'

ability to publicly critique brands and align their brand choices with their values (Kavaliauskė & Simanavičiūtė, 2015; Zhang et al., 2023). Moreover, globalization and the proliferation of brand choices have heightened sensitivity to symbolic and identity-related brand misalignments (Mostert et al., 2021). Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

H₂: There is a positive relationship between identity avoidance and brand avoidance

Moral avoidance

Moral avoidance stems from consumer resistance to brands perceived as engaging in unethical or socially irresponsible practices, often influenced by broader sociopolitical and economic contexts. Lee, Motion, et al., (2009) & Lee, Conroy, et al., 2009 identified country effects as a key driver, where animosity toward a brand's country of origin (COO) or financial patriotism leads consumers to avoid brands perceived as detrimental to their own country's economy (Khan & Lee, 2014). Similarly, anti-hegemony reflects resistance against dominant, multinational corporations associated with exploitative practices or hegemonic control, prompting avoidance due to perceived corporate irresponsibility (Rindell et al., 2014).

In addition, moral avoidance is increasingly linked to brand behaviors deemed unacceptable by consumers, such as discriminatory practices, non-transparency, or forced labor (Odoom et al., 2019). Consumers are also influenced by incompatibility between their personal moral values and those conveyed by brands, such as when consumers avoid brands they deem as subscribing to controversial political or religious ideologies opposed to their own beliefs (Berndt et al., 2019). Recent studies highlight the role of social media where consumers avoid brands they view as morally problematic (Mostert et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2023). Moral avoidance is further amplified by trends like cancel culture and the increasing expectation by consumers for corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Löfgren & Östlund, 2016). With moral avoidance emerging as a significant determinant of brand avoidance (e.g. Khan et al., 2019; Löfgren & Östlund, 2016; Mostert et al., 2021), it can be hypothesized that:

H₃ There is a positive relationship between moral avoidance and brand avoidance

Deficit-value avoidance

Deficit-value avoidance arises when consumers perceive an imbalance in the cost-benefit trade-off of a brand. This perception may stem from constellations such as low cost paired with low quality, high cost paired with high quality, or most significantly, high cost paired with low quality (Lee, Conroy, et al., 2009). These negative evaluations often lead to perceptions that a brand fails to deliver adequate utility or value for money, prompting avoidance (Berndt et al., 2019). Brand unfamiliarity also contributes to this effect by increasing the perception of low quality and higher risk (Green et al., 2003), diminishing perceived value.

Recent studies highlight that consumers incorporate both monetary and non-monetary costs, such as time, effort, and emotional investment, into their assessments of value (Berndt et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2020). Heightened consumer awareness of ethical and environmental concerns also add complexity to the value equation when consumers weigh elements such as sustainability and

corporate responsibility into their calculations (White et al., 2019). A mismatch in the cost-value equation leads to deficit-value avoidance, particularly in industries where price transparency and quality comparison tools are prevalent (Odoom et al., 2019). Additionally, brands that fail to meet functional promises or differentiate effectively in competitive markets are more susceptible to avoidance, especially when competitors offer better cost-benefit comparisons (Mostert et al., 2021).

In an environment of heightened consumer empowerment, deficit-value avoidance is amplified by online reviews and social media platforms, where negative perceptions of value spread rapidly (Kavaliauskė & Simanavičiūtė, 2015). Consumers demand brands not only justify monetary and non-monetary cost elements but also align with their expectations of performance and value. Accordingly, it can be hypothesized, as supported by recent research (e.g. Berndt et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2020; Mostert et al., 2021; White et al., 2019), that:

H₄ There is a positive relationship between deficit-value avoidance and brand avoidance

Advertising avoidance

Advertising avoidance develops from negative feelings associated with brand advertising (Ajina et al., 2025; Knittel et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2024), thereby diminishing the perceived authenticity and appeal of advertisements, possibly leading to brand avoidance. These negative feelings can stem from multiple sources, such as advertising content (including message, storyline, creative execution, provocativeness, and taboos), the use of disliked celebrity endorsers, music in commercials that evokes unfavorable emotions, or consumers' negative subjective interpretations of the advertisements (Ibrahim Nnindini & Dankwah, 2024; Knittel et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2024). Further, perceived advertising risks like privacy concerns, intrusive formats, and excessive personalization amplify advertising avoidance (Edwards et al., 2002). Irrelevant advertisements, digital burnout, clutter, and perceived advertising risk also result in consumer advertising avoidance (Cho & Cheon, 2004; Pahari et al., 2024).

Bjärvik and Rodillas (2017) extend the concept of advertising avoidance by including not only traditional advertisements but also direct marketing, interactive (internet) marketing, sales promotions, publicity, public relations, and personal selling components. Advertising avoidance may also arise from cognitive dissonance when advertisements conflict with consumers' values or social identity (Edwards et al., 2002).

The relationship between advertising avoidance and brand avoidance has been substantiated by empirical studies. Berndt et al. (2019) demonstrate that persistent exposure to undesired advertising increases negative brand associations, leading to brand avoidance. Löfgren and Östlund (2016) further corroborate the positive link between advertising avoidance and brand avoidance, attributing this to psychological reactance and brand disidentification. We therefore hypothesize that:

H₅ There is a positive relationship between advertising avoidance and brand avoidance

Brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention

Repurchase intention reflects a consumer's willingness to purchase a service again from the same provider based on prior positive experiences (Hellier et al., 2003). This intention is largely driven by consumer satisfaction, which depends on the ability of a service to meet or exceed consumer expectations (Hellier et al., 2003; Oliver, 1980).

While direct research linking brand avoidance and repurchase intention is limited, existing literature highlights connections between brand related concepts and repurchase intention. For instance, congruity between consumer self-image and brand-image positively correlates with repurchase intention, as does the perceived COO effect (Zenan, 2021). Other factors like positive attitudes toward advertising (Jiménez & San-Martin, 2017), advertising credibility, and brand authenticity (Safeer et al., 2021) have been shown to increase repurchase intention. Similarly, perceived customer value, encompassing benefit-cost tradeoffs, is positively associated with repurchase intention (Correa et al., 2021).

Given the positive relationship between these brand related concepts and repurchase intention, it is reasonable to infer the opposite effect for negative brand experiences. Specifically, brand avoidance, a form of negative consumer behavior, is likely to increase non-repurchase intention. This perspective aligns with anti-consumption research, which suggests that negative consumer evaluations, such as brand repulsion, preclude consideration of repurchasing a brand (Dassart & Cova, 2021; Kamboj & Sharma, 2023; Odoom et al., 2024). Brand repulsion, like brand avoidance, reflects a rejection of the brand and thus negates future purchase intentions. Based on this reasoning, we hypothesize that:

H₆ There is a positive relationship between brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention

Brand avoidance and brand Hate

Following Kucuk (2016), brand avoidance represents a passive coping mechanism, where consumers disengage from brands to distance themselves from dissatisfying brand experiences, identity conflicts, moral incongruity, deficit-value calculations or advertising transgressions by brands (Lee, Motion, et al., 2009 & Lee, Conroy, et al., 2009; Knittel et al., 2016). This behavior represents Kucuk's (2019) cool and cold forms of brand hate as it is often pragmatic and aimed at limiting emotional involvement. Brand avoidance satisfies the consumer's need for resolution without active brand engagement as the brand is avoided.

In contrast, brand hate is an emotionally charged and active response, characterized by anger, resentment, and even public opposition (Hegner et al., 2017). Brand hate arises from severe negative experiences, perceived betrayal, or moral outrage, requiring sustained emotional engagement (Grégoire et al., 2009; Zarantonello et al., 2016) and represents Kucuk's (2019) hot hate. Brand hate could develop in customers of brands as well as non-consumers of brands (Taqi et al., 2024).

Brand avoidance and brand hate, though related, operate on different emotional and behavioral spectrums. Brand avoidance entails disengagement, reducing the likelihood of the emotional escalation required for hate (Hegner et al., 2017). Consumers who passively avoid brands due to dissatisfaction are unlikely to engage emotionally as is required for brand hate (Kucuk, 2019). Conversely, brand hate requires intensely spending emotional energy on directly confronting the perceived transgressions of brands, making passive avoidance behaviors less likely (Zarantonello et al., 2016). We therefore hypothesize that:

H₇ There is a relationship between brand avoidance and brand hate

Involvement as a moderator between brand avoidance and its antecedents

Involvement theory provides a framework for understanding how consumers engage with brands based on the perceived relevance or significance of brands to their personal needs, values, and interests (Krugman, 1965; Zaichkowsky, 1985). It represents the motivational state of consumers influenced by their cognitive evaluations of brands' capacity to fulfill these personal needs and values (Smith & Godbey, 1991; Mathew & Thomas, 2018). High consumer involvement arises when brands align closely with consumers' values, goals, or self-image, leading to active information seeking, emotional connections, loyalty, and commitment (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Warrington & Shim, 2000). In contrast, low consumer involvement is characterized by minimal cognitive and emotional effort, with decisions driven by convenience or brand familiarity (Zaichkowsky, 1985). These differences necessitate tailored brand strategies, emphasizing quality and trust by providing detailed information for high-involvement (HI) consumers and leveraging visibility through repetition and emotional appeals for low-involvement (LI) consumers (Baker et al., 2009).

Involvement acts as a moderator of key consumer behaviors and brand-related constructs. It shapes the hierarchy-of-effects model, linking experience, credibility, commitment, and loyalty (Mathew & Thomas, 2018), and influences relationships such as those between brand love and engagement (Samala & Singh, 2019), self-concept and brand choice (Xue, 2008), and brand attitude and loyalty (Suh & Yi, 2006). Furthermore, Rindell et al. (2014) suggest that involvement moderates the effect of brand avoidance antecedents on brand avoidance, which complements Lee, Motion, et al. (2009) & Lee, Conroy, et al., 2009 framework for understanding LI consumers.

Negative experiences are a significant driver of brand avoidance, often manifesting as consumer advocacy, (e.g. negative word-of-mouth), following dissatisfactory service (Jayasimha et al., 2017). Negative customer engagement, including emotional and physical disengagement, typically arises from unmet service quality expectations (Do et al., 2020). Consumer self-concept also influences brand evaluations, particularly in LI categories (Chang, 2012). Additionally, moral decoupling, where consumers separate moral concerns from brand performance, is moderated by product involvement, regardless of credibility (Haberstroh et al., 2017).

The role of involvement extends to shaping customer value perceptions. HI consumers perceive greater value across price-value, social-value, emotional-value, and

quality-value dimensions compared to LI consumers (Bhaduri & Stanforth, 2017). Involvement also affects advertising strategies, where informational appeals are more effective for HI consumers, and emotional appeals resonate better with LI consumers (Dens & De Pelsmacker, 2010). This paper hypothesizes that:

Involvement moderates the relationship between brand avoidance and: experience avoidance (H_{8a}), identity avoidance (H_{8b}), moral avoidance (H_{8c}), deficit-value avoidance (H_{8d}), and advertising avoidance (H_{8e}).

Involvement as a moderator between brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention

The moderating role of involvement on the relationship between non-repurchase intention and other consumer behavior constructs has revealed mixed findings. Sun et al. (2022), for example, found no evidence that involvement moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intention. In contrast, Seiders et al. (2005) showed that customer involvement plays a crucial role in influencing repurchase behaviors, particularly in terms of repurchase spending. These discrepancies suggest that the impact of involvement may depend on specific contexts and variables. This paper hypothesizes that:

H_{8f} Involvement moderates the relationship between brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention

Involvement as a moderator between brand avoidance and brand hate

HI consumers are more likely to engage deeply with brands, forming stronger positive or negative cognitive and emotional reactions (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Conversely, LI consumers exhibit limited cognitive and emotional engagement, often viewing brands through a functional or utilitarian lens (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985).

As HI intensifies emotional responses, brand avoidance can potentially escalate into brand hate (Zarantonello et al., 2016) because HI consumers might project passionate responses to offending brands (Rozin et al., 1999; Sternberg, 2003). LI consumers with minimal emotional investment are more likely to avoid brands passively rather than escalate to hate as their lack of emotional engagement limits the emotional energy required for brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017). LI consumers are also more influenced by functional or situational factors, reducing the likelihood of emotional escalation (Bloemer & Kasper, 1995).

Involvement therefore influences the likelihood and intensity of consumers transitioning from brand avoidance to brand hate. HI amplifies the emotional consequences of perceived brand dissatisfaction or transgressions increasing the probability of brand hate. LI dampens emotional escalation, reducing the intensity of the negative relationship. We hypothesize that:

H_{8g} Involvement moderates the relationship between brand avoidance and brand hate

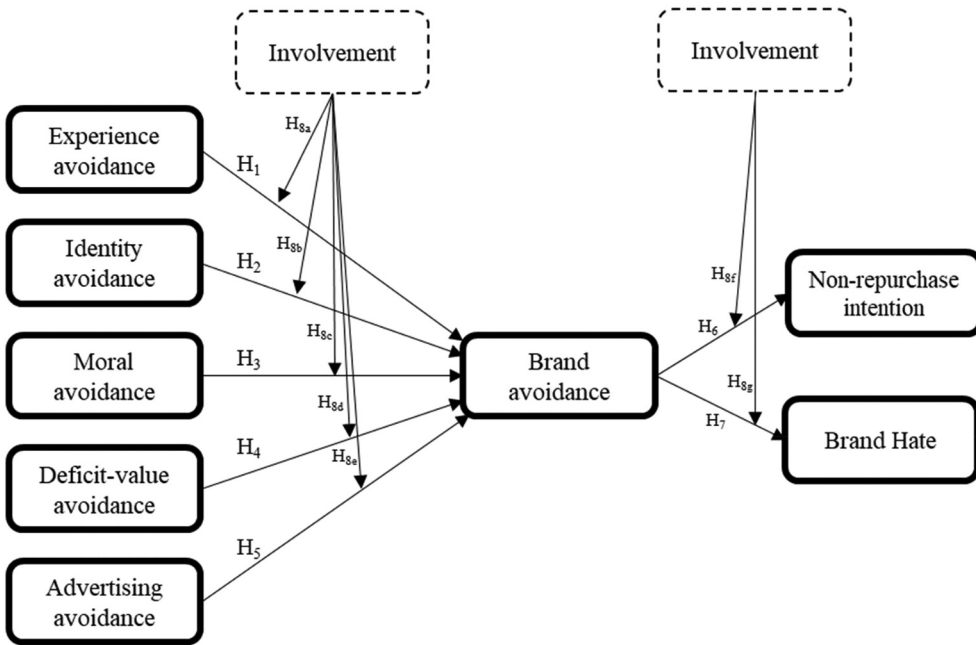


Figure 1. Conceptual Model.

The hypotheses are summarized in the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

Methodology

Study population, sampling and data collection

The study population comprised consumers who held negative feelings toward service providers they have used in the past. We collected data from students studying at one of South Africa’s largest universities using non-probability convenience sampling. University students were chosen since, unlike older consumers, this age group is emotionally more sensitive and passionate when brands don’t meet their expectations (Joshi & Yadav, 2021) and are thus potentially more hostile toward brands (Park et al., 2013). It has also been postulated that university-aged consumers hold different levels of customer involvement (Baker et al., 2009; Sang et al., 2018), thereby making this group ideal for this study. The researchers shared the link to the questionnaire (hosted on Qualtrics) at the beginning of classes visited by the researchers to encourage participation. The University’s Ethics Committee approved an incentive offered to participating students whereby those who fully completed the questionnaire stood a chance of winning two movie tickets in a lucky draw. Only students who wanted to be included in the lucky draw had to include their names and contact details. However, these details were removed from the questionnaires prior to data analyses to ensure respondent anonymity.

Questionnaire design and data analyses

The questionnaire commenced with a screening question to ensure that only the envisaged target population completed the questionnaire. Those respondents who met the criteria to participate in the study had to indicate the brand as well as the industry in which the avoided service provider operated. The study constructs were measured using 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) based on items sourced and adapted from: Hegner et al. (2017) and Van Delzen (2014) for experience avoidance, identity avoidance, moral avoidance and brand hate; Fei and Yucen (2017) for deficit-value avoidance and advertising avoidance; and Mostert et al. (2021) for brand avoidance. Involvement was measured on a 7-point semantic differential scale adapted from Zaichkowsky (1985). The questionnaire was pre-tested with the study population before commencing with data collection, leading to small linguistic changes to clarify some of the terminology used. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (version 28) and Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) (version 28.0).

Common method bias

To address the potential impact of common method bias, potentially resulting from collecting data by using a single data source self-reported measure, we considered a number of procedural remedies (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Respondents were requested to be honest when completing the questionnaire by assuring them there were no incorrect answers, and that their answers would be kept confidential. The sequence of the study constructs measured in the questionnaire was randomized, and through pretesting we ensured that respondents would be familiar with terminology used, instructions for completion, and the layout of the questionnaire. Finally, we performed a Harman's single-factor test by conducting an exploratory factor analysis (Podsakoff et al., 2003), resulting in a variance of 27.4% explained by a single factor. By being lower than the 50% threshold (Kock, 2021), we concluded that common method bias did not pose a major concern in the data.

Table 1. Sample Profile.

	Percentage		Percentage
Gender		Age category	
Male	47.3	18–20 years old	51.9
Female	52.3	21–24 years old	44.1
		25 years and older	4.0
Home language		Industry	
Afrikaans	27.2	Cell phone network operator	79.5
English	39.3	Banking	10.9
Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Ndebele)	13.7	Ride-hailing provider	3.3
Sotho (Sepedi, Sesotho, Tswana)	14.5	Other	6.3
Venda/Tsonga	2.0		
Other	3.3		

Results

Sample profile

The sample profile is summarized in Table 1. Most of the 395 respondents who participated in the study were female (52.3%) and between 18 and 20 years old (51.9%). Most respondents' household language was English (39.3%) or Afrikaans (27.2%). The industry in which the most avoided brands operate were cell phone network operators (79.5%), banks (10.9%) and ride-hailing providers (3.3%). The cell phone network operators avoided most were Telkom Mobile (22.3%); Vodacom (21.3%); MTN (17.2%) and Cell C (16%), while ABSA was the bank most respondents avoided (4.6%).

Measurement and structural models

Assessing the measurement model

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to evaluate the psychometric properties of the measurement model. As can be seen in Table 2, the eight-factor model fits the data well when considering recommended fit indices (Hair et al., 2019).

Construct validity and reliability

Validity was assessed through convergent and discriminant validity, while composite reliability (CR) established reliability. With all average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5 (Hair et al., 2019), convergent validity was confirmed. Discriminant validity was confirmed with all the square root of the AVE values being greater than the corresponding correlation (Malhotra et al., 2017). With all CR values above 0.7 (ranging between 0.80 and 0.94), the scales showed sufficient reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Table 3

Table 2. Measurement model – goodness-of-fit measures.

CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
969.771	600	.000	1.616	0.873	0.819	0.931	0.922	0.30	0.060	0.069

Table 3. Validity and Reliability Assessment.

Construct	AVE	CR	Correlations								
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1) Experience avoidance	0.60	0.82	0.78								
2) Identity avoidance	0.66	0.90	0.57	0.81							
3) Moral avoidance	0.63	0.87	0.53	0.47	0.80						
4) Deficit-value avoidance	0.65	0.83	0.41	0.39	0.3	0.86					
5) Advertising avoidance	0.58	0.80	-0.12	0.09	0.24	-0.16	0.78				
6) Brand avoidance	0.75	0.92	0.29	0.26	0.14	0.39	-0.08	0.90			
7) Non-repurchase intention	0.78	0.93	0.43	0.41	0.36	0.45	0.04	0.65	0.88		
8) Brand hate	0.77	0.94	0.38	0.37	0.60	0.26	0.12	0.18	0.39	0.88	

Table 4. Structural model – goodness-of-fit measures.

CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
1369.81	611	.000	2.242	0.876	0.864	0.927	0.920	0.927	0.056	0.075

Table 5. Hypotheses Results.

Hypothesis	Exogenous Construct	Endogenous Construct	Regression Weight	Significance	Finding
1	Experience avoidance	Brand avoidance	0.087	0.192	Not supported
2	Identity avoidance	Brand avoidance	0.246	< 0.001	Supported
3	Moral avoidance	Brand avoidance	-0.015	0.818	Not supported
4	Deficit-value avoidance	Brand avoidance	0.184	0.003	Supported
5	Advertising avoidance	Brand avoidance	-0.094	0.088	Not supported
6	Brand avoidance	Non-repurchase intention	0.706	< 0.001	Supported
7	Brand avoidance	Brand hate	0.251	< 0.001	Supported

details the correlation matrix, AVE and CR, with the square root of the AVE indicated in bold on the diagonal.

Assessing the structural model

With adequate measurement model fit and validity and reliability established, the structural model was estimated using structural equation modeling (SEM). Table 4 shows the structural model had sufficient fit (Hair et al., 2019).

Hypotheses tests

It is clear from Table 5 that four hypotheses were statistically significant. Identity avoidance ($p < .001$; regression coefficient: 0.246) and deficit-value avoidance ($p = 0.003$; regression coefficient: 0.184) were statistically significant predictors of brand avoidance, thus supporting H₂ and H₄. In contrast, hypotheses 1, 3 and 5 were not supported due to the statistically insignificant relationships between experience avoidance ($p = 0.192$); moral avoidance ($p = 0.818$); and advertising avoidance ($p = 0.088$) and brand avoidance. The statistically significant relationships between brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention ($p < 0.001$; regression coefficient: 0.706) and between brand avoidance and brand hate ($p < 0.001$; regression coefficient: 0.251) were confirmed, thereby supporting H₆ and H₇. The five antecedents explained 16.6% of the variance in brand avoidance, while brand avoidance explained 49.8% of the variance in non-repurchase intention and only 6.3% in brand hate.

Moderation analysis

Involvement was tested as a moderator on the relationships between brand avoidance and its antecedents (H_{8a} – H_{8e}) and between brand avoidance and its outcomes of non-repurchase intention (H_{8f}) and brand hate (H_{8g}) using a multi-group CFA analysis. Respondents were categorized using visual binning and median involvement scores in two involvement groups: LI (58.6% of the respondents; median = 5.22) and HI (41.4% of the respondents; median = 6.96).

The moderation analyses revealed that, except for identity avoidance, involvement moderates the relationships between all the antecedents and brand avoidance. Thus, hypotheses H_{8a}, H_{8c}, H_{8d}, and H_{8e} are supported and H_{8b} is not. Concerning the brand avoidance antecedents, it can be observed from the gradients of the slopes for the different moderation analyses that the brand avoidance

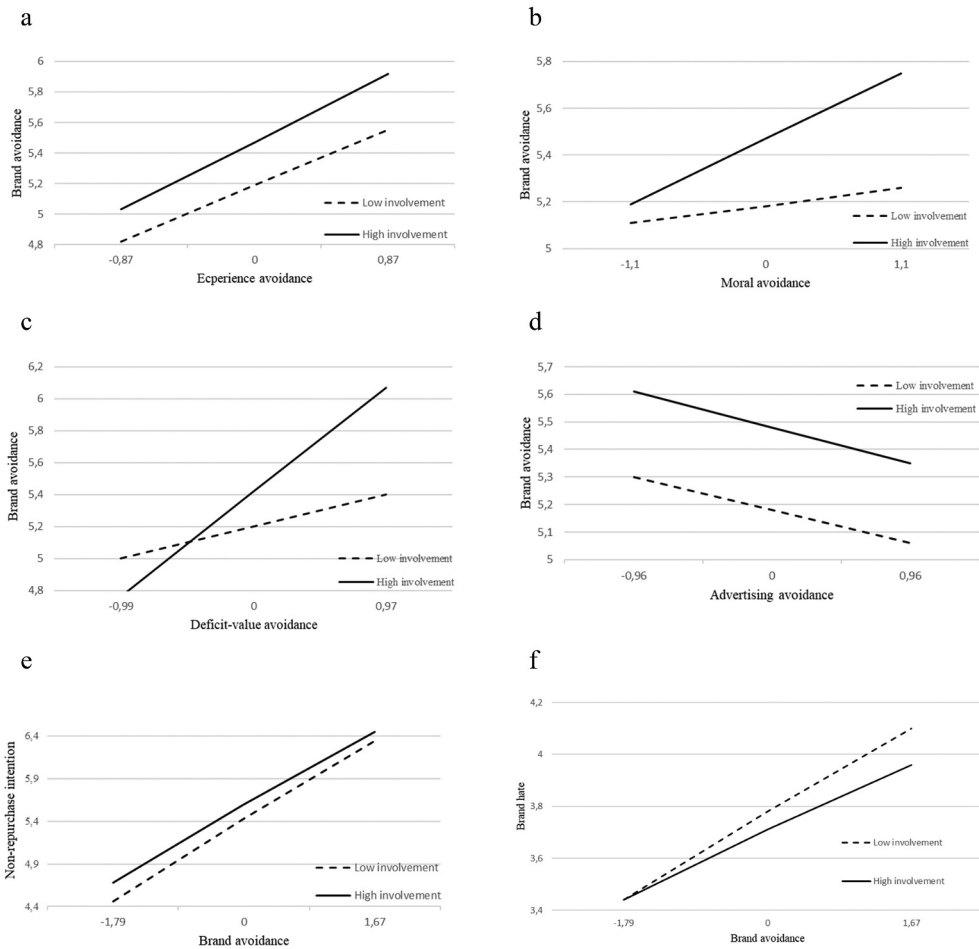


Figure 2. Slopes Showing the Moderating Effect of Involvement.

of respondents showing HI increased more rapidly than those respondents showing LI as their experience avoidance (Figure 2(a); slope gradient: HI = 0.51; LI = 0.43), moral avoidance (Figure 2(b); slope gradient: HI = 0.26; LI = 0.06), and deficit-value avoidance (Figure 2(c); slope gradient: HI = 0.67; LI = 0.20) increases. Interestingly, the brand avoidance for respondents displaying HI decreased more rapidly than those with LI as their advertising avoidance increased (Figure 2(d); slope gradient: HI = -0.14; LI = -0.13).

Finally, involvement moderated the relationships between brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention (Figure 2(e); slope gradient: HI = 0.51; LI = 0.42) and brand hate (Figure 2(f); slope gradient: HI = 0.15; LI = 0.19), thereby supporting H_{8e} and H_{8f} . From the slopes it can be deduced that non-repurchase intention increases faster for respondents displaying HI, whereas brand hate increases faster for those showing LI as their brand avoidance increases.

Discussion

A first somewhat surprising finding from our study was that, contrary to previous research, there were no relationships between experience avoidance and brand avoidance (e.g. Lin et al., 2020; Mostert et al., 2021) or between moral avoidance and brand avoidance (e.g. Kahn et al., 2019; Mostert et al., 2021). However, our findings support the positive relationships found in previous studies between identity avoidance and brand avoidance (e.g. Lin et al., 2020; Odoom et al., 2019) and between deficit-value avoidance and brand avoidance (e.g. Mostert et al., 2021; Odoom et al., 2019). While previous research findings were inconclusive regarding the relationship between advertising avoidance and brand avoidance, with some researchers confirming a positive relationship (e.g. Berndt et al., 2019), our findings support those of other researchers (e.g. Lin et al., 2020; Mostert et al., 2021) that advertising avoidance is not related to brand avoidance.

Concerning brand avoidance outcomes, our results firstly support studies by Dassart and Cova (2021) and Odoom et al. (2024), that brand avoidance predicts non-repurchase intention. Secondly, our findings also support studies by Curina et al. (2020) and Hegner et al. (2017) that brand avoidance predicts brand hate. Thirdly, our results indicate that brand avoidance was the strongest predictor of non-repurchase intention.

From the moderation analyses results, it could be firstly concluded that, except for identity avoidance, involvement moderated the relationships between all the antecedents and brand avoidance. Secondly, brand avoidance for those with HI increased more rapidly than for those with LI as their experience avoidance, moral avoidance, and deficit-value avoidance increased. Similarly, the brand avoidance of those with HI decreased more rapidly than those with LI as their advertising avoidance increased. Finally, involvement moderated the relationships between brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention and between brand avoidance and brand hate. An interesting finding was that the non-repurchase intention increased faster for respondents displaying HI, whereas the brand hate increased faster for those showing LI as their brand avoidance increased.

Theoretical implications

Findings from this study offer several theoretical insights. Firstly, support is shown for the triangular structure theory (Sternberg, 2003) and Kucuk's (2019) classification of hate as cool, cold, and hot. The results show that due to the negation of intimacy (cool brand hate) resulting from identity avoidance and deficit-value avoidance, consumers distance themselves from the brand (decision-commitment). This causes disconfirmation through brand avoidance and non-repurchase intentions (cold brand hate).

Secondly, contrary to expectations set by existing research insights (e.g. Kahn et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2020; Mostert et al., 2021; Odoom et al., 2019), neither experience avoidance nor moral avoidance (as indicators of negation of intimacy) were predictors of brand avoidance. Thirdly, brand hate as an outcome of brand avoidance supports the notion that brand hate is more severe than brand avoidance (Hegner et al., 2017), and that brand avoidance and brand hate, though related, operate on different emotional and behavioral spectrums.

Fourthly, while multiple previous studies (e.g. Curina et al., 2020; Hegner et al., 2017; Zarantonello et al., 2016) established a positive relationship between brand hate and brand avoidance, this is the first study to our knowledge showing the opposite, where brand avoidance predicts brand hate. However, it is important to note that the relationship between brand avoidance and non-repurchase intention was much stronger (explaining almost 50% of the variance) than the relationship between brand avoidance and brand hate. Despite being a significant relationship, brand avoidance explained only 6.3% of the variance in brand hate.

Finally, our findings furthermore provide unique insights relating to involvement theory in an anti-consumption study context. Involvement theory posits that HI consumers are more likely to engage deeply with brands, forming stronger positive or negative emotional reactions (Zaichkowsky, 1985), whereas LI consumers exhibit limited emotional engagement, often viewing brands through a functional or utilitarian lens (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985). Literature accordingly hypothesizes that, as involvement intensifies emotional responses, brand avoidance can potentially escalate into brand hate (Zarantonello et al., 2016), whereas those showing LI are more likely to avoid brands passively rather than escalate to hate as their lack of emotional engagement limits the emotional energy required for brand hate (Hegner et al., 2017). However, our findings contradict these views by showing that those consumers exhibiting HI have higher non-repurchase intentions, whereas those with LI are more prone to hate the brand. Thus, despite their higher emotional involvement, consumers displaying HI will punish the brand less severely (i.e. only repurchase less of the brand) than those consumers with LI (who will hate the brand).

Managerial implications

Marketers should be aware that consumers will refrain from supporting brands that are incongruent with their desired self-concepts (Hogg & Banister, 2001; Kaufmann et al., 2012; Odoom et al., 2019). We therefore recommend that service brand managers continually conduct marketing research to establish consumers' perceptions and ideal positioning of their brands. Marketers can also, through research, try to identify a typical profile of their customers and use this to develop or strengthen a brand persona closely linked to that of their current and potential customers. By narrowing the gap between consumer self-image and the brand image, consumers will probably be less inclined to avoid the brand.

Since deficit-value avoidance predicts brand avoidance, brand managers should ensure that their prices are competitive and that the perceived benefits offered by the service exceed the perceived costs for consumers. Furthermore, since brand unfamiliarity results in consumers holding lower quality and higher risk perceptions of the brand (Green et al., 2003), it is important that brand managers continue to create awareness of their services by specifically communicating the benefits and value that the service holds. By doing so, consumers could be persuaded not to avoid the brand as they will be assured they receive value for the money they pay for the service (Berndt et al., 2019).

A promising finding from this study was that, despite brand avoidance predicting non-repurchase intention and brand hate, it was a much bigger predictor of non-repurchase intention than brand hate. Brand managers should thus take heart that it is

possible to win customers back since their anti-consumption reaction to the brand is not as extreme as brand hate. Through research, brand managers can identify those factors keeping consumers from repurchasing the brand and adapt operational and marketing strategies to offer greater value and entice customers to purchase the brand in the future.

Finally, since involvement moderated all but one relationship in this study, brand managers should attempt to actively engage with their customers since research has shown that consumers with HI are more committed to brands and exhibit higher brand loyalty than LI consumers (Baker et al., 2009; Warrington & Shim, 2000). Also, results showed that consumers displaying HI are more inclined (than LI consumers) to not buy from the brand than they are to hate the brand. This should be very encouraging to brand managers since it would be easier to win back HI consumers who are buying less, rather than LI customers hating the brand. Brand managers should thus reposition their service offerings by adding value to their offerings and communicating the true value (relative to the cost) offered by the service. Brand managers should also closely link the image of the brand to the self-image of HI consumers. Moreover, efforts should be increased to elevate customer involvement. To accomplish this, brands could explore how social media engagement can be used to increase customer involvement. For example, brands can communicate with consumers using the same social media platforms their target markets use and can also identify and partner with social media influencers with personalities, beliefs, and values complimentary to those of the brand. Brand managers can also consider creating their own or partnering with existing virtual social media influences (Kim et al., 2023), as doing so will enable the brand to more closely control the fit between the brand and the virtual influencer.

In conclusion, it is recommended that brand managers take note of the antecedents predicting brand avoidance and actively develop strategies to address incongruence that could develop between consumers and brands. By actively engaging with consumers, brands stand a greater chance of increasing consumers' involvement with brands, thereby inoculating their brands against brand hate.

Limitations and future research

This study is subject to some limitations. Firstly, non-probability, convenience sampling was used which limits the generalizability of the results. This probably contributed to the skew industry distribution of the sample. While cell phone network operator brand managers could gain valuable insights from our findings, brand managers operating in other service industries, although possibly covered in the study, should interpret the findings cautiously. Future studies could consider replicating the study in specific industries, thereby enhancing the potential to generalize the study's findings. Furthermore, a cross-sectional research design was used which provides a snapshot of the sample without considering possible longitudinal changes in sample attitudes and behaviors.

Bigger research budgets and the availability of sample frames can address the limitations related to non-probability convenience sampling and a cross-sectional research design. Reproducing the study in other emerging markets and later developed markets will improve the generalizability of the research findings. Additional constructs, for

example, negative brand action (i.e. hot hate) can also be added to the model to develop a more integrated and complete understanding of the relevant constructs associated with brand avoidance and its impact on service customers' behavior.

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