

BRAND AVOIDANCE – A SERVICES PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to gain insight into brand avoidance of service brands and to explore whether the different types of brand avoidance identified in a product context apply to service providers.

Design/methodology/approach: Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the Critical Incident Method and semi-structured interviews were used to achieve the purpose of the study.

Findings: The findings suggest that five types of brand avoidance, as identified in studies involving product brands, can be identified as impacting service brands. In addition, the findings show that advertising avoidance should be expanded to communication avoidance due to the multifarious communication influences that were identified. The study proposes a framework to deepen the understanding of the types of brand avoidance affecting service brands.

Implications: Since the different types of brand avoidance previously identified are also evident in a services environment, service providers should develop strategies to deal with the different types of service brand avoidance.

Research limitations: The findings are broad in scope due to the exploratory nature of the study and a detailed analysis of each type of service brand avoidance is still required.

Originality/value: This paper focuses on the various types of brand avoidance and their manifestation in the services context. The study contributes by showing that the broader concept of communication, not only advertising, should be considered when studying brand avoidance in a service context.

Type of paper: Research paper

Keywords: Service brands; brand avoidance; advertising avoidance; experiential avoidance; moral avoidance; identity avoidance; communication avoidance; deficit-value avoidance;

1. INTRODUCTION

Brands have long been regarded as critical in marketing and in building successful products. They continue to serve as a focus of marketing strategy due to their importance as a source of differentiation (McDonald et al., 2001). Brands are also critical for the success of service providers (Berry, 2000). Branding of services is complicated by the intangible nature of services (Berry, 2000, Grace and O’Cass, 2005). Despite their intangible nature, it is necessary for services to have strong brands (McDonald et al., 2001) since consumer behaviour (such as loyalty and brand love) are equally applicable to service brands.

Previous research has mostly focused on the positive aspects associated with branding, such as brand attachment (Cheong, 2013, Japutra et al., 2014, Thomson et al., 2005), brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013, Batra et al., 2012), brand strength (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013) and brand affection (Yim et al., 2008). The negative aspects associated with brands such as brand hate, brand rejection and brand avoidance have not received as much attention. While some investigation has been undertaken into anti-consumption (Cherrier, 2009, Hogg et al., 2009) and the role of ethical issues into this phenomenon (Rindell et al., 2014), the concept of brand avoidance has not been extensively researched (Dalli et al., 2006, Romani et al., 2012, Lee et al., 2009b, Khan and Lee, 2014, White et al., 2012). Consequently, understanding the negative aspects of brands is regarded as just as important as understanding the positive aspects (Hogg and Banister, 2001, Lee et al., 2009c), highlighting the need for this research.

Research in branding has primarily focused on consumer goods rather than services (Brodie et al., 2009) resulting in a limited body of knowledge available on service brands as compared to the branding of goods (McDonald et al., 2001, De Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003, De Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1999) and on brand avoidance of service brands (Kavaliauskė and Simanavičiūtė, 2015). Combined with this, research into the negative aspects associated with service brands has also received little attention. This paper aims at

contributing to the area of service brands and specifically brand avoidance by uncovering several brand avoidance types in a services context.

Initially the paper introduces the literature associated with brand avoidance and service brands where after the methodology is reported and the findings are presented. The paper concludes by suggesting implications and further research.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Brand avoidance is an everyday phenomenon in the lives of consumers. This behaviour negatively impacts on the organisation whose brand is being avoided as the organisation's sales are affected and consumers who avoid the brand, may spread negative WOM regarding the brand. Although research has predominantly focused on the avoidance of product brands, it stands to reason that brand avoidance is also relevant in service contexts. Service brands are central to the global economy, yet little research has focused on avoidance of these brands and specifically the reasons why these brands are avoided. The purpose of this research is thus to gain insight into brand avoidance of service brands and to explore whether the different main types of brand avoidance as identified in a product-related context apply to service brands and whether additional reasons for avoidance exist within this context.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A brand serves several important functions for an organisation. At its most basic, the brand serves as an identity (and logo) for the organisation's offerings (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). A brand also provides an indication of quality, reflects the organisation's values and portrays the functional and emotional characteristics of a product (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). Brands furthermore reflect the way in which consumers view products (Keeble, 1991). Despite organisations' efforts to promote their

products by emphasising these functions, consumers often make the decision not to purchase the product. Similar to Cherrier et al. (2011) and Lee et al. (2009b), this study views consumers as rational in their decision-making, using their experience and values to resist a particular brand.

3.1 Brand avoidance

Brand avoidance is regarded as a decision made by a consumer to reject a specific brand (Lee et al., 2009d, Lee et al., 2009b) and it can be considered as an attitude or as a behaviour (Cherrier, 2009). Thus staying away or moving away from a brand (or service) is considered as brand avoidance (Rindell et al., 2014) and can be regarded as a form of intentional non-consumption (Cherrier et al., 2011). More specifically brand avoidance can be described as a situation where a consumer actively rejects a brand even though it is available, accessible and financially affordable for the consumer concerned (Knittel et al., 2016). This reflects a situation of anti-choice (Hogg, 1998), where the brand is not perceived as being aligned with what is important to the consumer when selecting a product. Gaining insight into consumers who avoid brands is important due to the impact of brand avoidance on brand equity (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013, Lee et al., 2009b).

3.2 Perspectives on service and service brands

Service can be viewed from two perspectives. The first is as a category of marketing offerings while the other is as method of value creation for the organisation (Edvardsson et al., 2005). These perspectives are also apparent in the literature. Firstly, Service Dominant Logic (SDL) (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, Vargo and Lusch, 2016) proposes that all organisational offerings can be viewed as service (a process) rather than services (an outcome). SDL further proposes that service is the origin of organisational activities (Hultén, 2015), acts as the basis of exchange and that goods (products) are used to

bring about the distribution of need-satisfying services (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). It is also suggested that the service brand is the “off-balance sheet asset” reflected in SDL due to the ability of the service brand to build relationships (Brodie et al., 2006). In the Nordic School of Services (Service Logic approach), service is viewed as the use of resources to “support daily consumer practices”, thereby providing customer value-in-use (Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014 p. 208). Consequently, it becomes important for organisations to develop ways in which to understand customer practices. Further, the service provider can also influence the customer experience through the promises made and customer relationships (Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014). While these perspectives differ in their view on services, the importance of the service brand can be identified in both instances.

With the intangible nature of services, the service brand serves as a promise of satisfaction from the service provider to the consumer while it also contributes in building trust and an emotional connection between the customer and the service provider (Berry, 2000) and its employees (Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony, 2000). The service brand is thus found at the nexus between the service provider, its employees and consumers (Brodie et al., 2009). Since service brands also involve interactions with the service provider and its employees (McDonald et al., 2001), the consumer's perception of a service brand is affected by the attitudes and actions of employees (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997, Grace and O'Cass, 2005).

Although brands essentially serve the same purpose for products and services as they are used to project a unique image resulting in the building of trust and a relationship between the organisation and customer (Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony, 2000), the difference between product and service brands is evident in the implementation of the branding strategy (De Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003, De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999) When consumers evaluate service brands, they also evaluate the actions of employees as well

as the servicescape where the service is being delivered (Grace and O’Cass, 2005), indicating their importance for both the customer and the organisation.

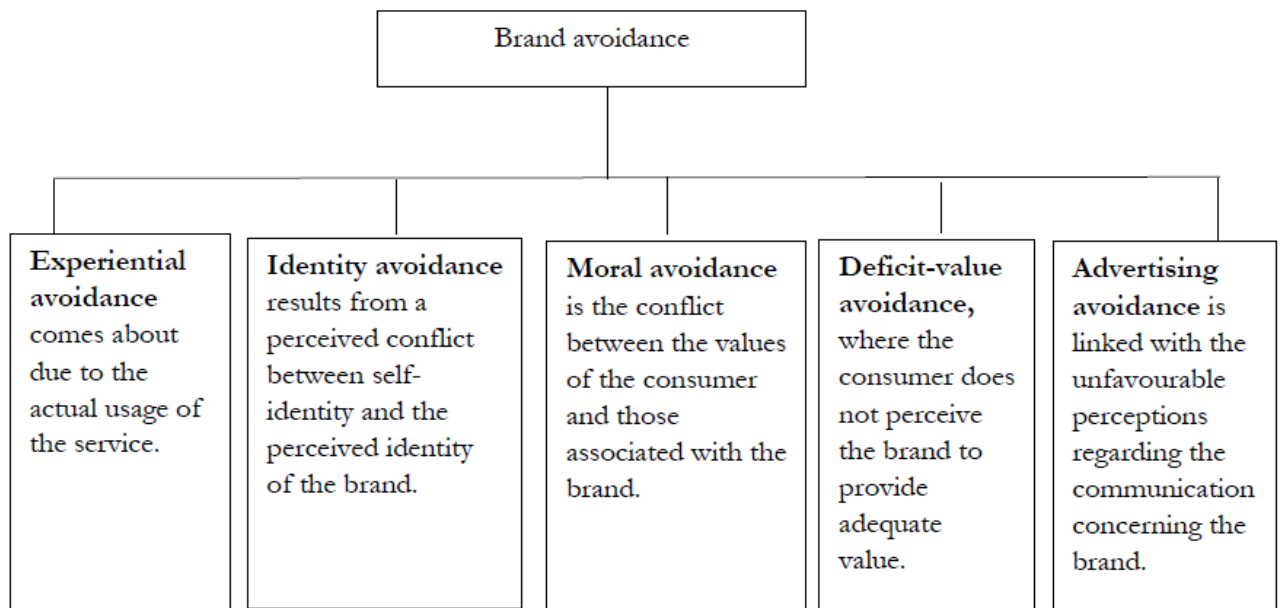
For the purposes of this study, a service brand is defined as the functional and emotional values associated with a service that are developed and presented by the service provider and its employees as perceived by the consumer (De Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1999) in the co-creation of value (Brodie et al., 2006). Drawing from the work of Lee et al. (2009b) and Knittel et al (2016), we compose the following definition for service brand avoidance that will be used in this study: service brand avoidance refers to consumers’ deliberate avoidance or rejection of a service brand, even when it is available, accessible and financially affordable.

3.2 Types of service brand avoidance

Previous research identified several reasons for brand avoidance leading to the identification of several types of service brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009b, Lee et al., 2009d, Knittel et al., 2016, Lee, 2008, Sandikci and Ekici, 2009, Khan and Lee, 2014, Hogg, 1998, Rindell et al., 2014). Due to a lack of research into brand avoidance and more specifically service brand avoidance, an initial framework developed in previous research has been used to guide the study (Refer Figure 1).

It is important to note that experiential avoidance implies previous interaction with the organisation, whereas the other types of brand avoidance do not necessarily require such interaction. Further, the relationship between the various types of brand avoidance has not been established, and the possibility of overlap between avoidance types cannot be excluded at this stage due to the exploratory nature of service brand avoidance.

Figure 1 Proposed framework of the Service Brand Avoidance types



Source: Adapted from Knittel et al. (2016), Keaveney (1995), Lee et al. (2009d), Lee et al. (2009b), Wilson et al. (2012).

3.2.1 Experiential avoidance

Services consist of two main components, namely the core service and the service encounter (Keaveney, 1995). The core service includes all the “events and actions” associated with the service while the service encounter relates to the interaction that takes place between the service provider, its employees and the consumer. Both these components are subject to failure. Examples of core service failure include poor service or errors in accounting while examples of service encounter failure is associated with the negative behaviour of the service provider (Coulter, 2009). Service encounter failures (including the actions of employees) come about when there is a failure in the process delivering the service, thereby affecting the perception of the quality of the service (Zeithaml et al., 1996) as well as the extent to which service promises will be fulfilled (Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony, 2000).

If the consumer experiences a service failure and complains to the service provider, there is potential for service recovery actions; however, should the consumer regard the service recovery as inadequate, there is an increased possibility of defection and subsequent avoidance (Boshoff, 1997, Berry and Parasuraman, 1992).

Services are also regarded as a form of co-production, as without the consumer being involved in the service process, the service is not delivered (Wilson et al., 2012). As part of the service delivery process, consumers learn how the service is delivered and the specific actions needed from them to facilitate the successful delivery of the service. When consumers do not fulfil their roles in the way expected (as required by the service provider), co-production failure may result, affecting the perception of service quality. While this may be mitigated by consumers' awareness of a failure to execute their role adequately (Zeithaml et al., 2006), this may still result in avoidance.

The delivery of a service can result in the development of a relationship between the service provider and the consumer. The final phase is the dissolution of the relationship, which tends to come about as a result of a trigger (Tuominen and Kettunen, 2003) and a service failure could be one of those triggers (Stewart, 1998).

Extant literature suggests specific aspects associated with a negative service experience including poor performance, inconvenience and an unpleasing store environment (Lee et al., 2009d). Poor performance of a service has previously been identified as a reason for brand switching (Keaveney, 1995). This is due to the evaluation of the performance against consumer expectations (Wilson et al., 2012) and poor performance indicates that the perceptions of the service experience is lower than initially held expectations (Bitner, 1990, Bolton and Drew, 1991). Negative disconfirmation thus results in future avoidance. For example, a consumer may expect an insurance company to settle a claim within a specific period and failure to do so is viewed as poor performance. Past experiences of the organisation can thus contribute to the development of an image heritage and subsequent avoidance

(Rindell et al., 2014). Inconvenience (or hassle) also serves a reason for avoidance (Keaveney, 1995) due to the fact that too much effort is required on the part of the consumer to acquire the service, making other service providers more attractive. An unpleasant store environment has also been shown to result in a reduced willingness to remain in the store environment, which could result in the avoidance of the store (Astous, 2000). More specifically, in the case of services, the service environment (including the servicescape) may also contribute to the negative perceptions of the consumer (Bitner, 1990, Zeithaml et al., 2006).

3.2.2 Identity avoidance

Consumers select brands that are associated with the image these consumers wish to project (Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony, 2000, De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997).

Should consumers perceive the brand as conflicting with their self-concept, avoidance of the brand may occur (Englis and Solomon, 1995, Khan and Lee, 2014).

One aspect that is viewed as essential for a brand is that it is perceived as real and genuine, contributing to a perception of authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014, Beverland, 2006). When consumers are perceived to purchase a brand for utilitarian reasons, it suggests authenticity (Kirmani, 2009, Ferraro et al., 2010) whereas a brand purchased for external approval is perceived as inauthentic. Inauthenticity is a concern when the underlying emotional brand values are abandoned, causing loyal consumers to rebel and engage in negative behaviour such as anti-brand activism (Thompson et al., 2006). Use of a service in this instance can be viewed by others in a negative light, leading to avoidance.

There is an extensive body of research that suggests that consumers purchase products to differentiate themselves from those around them, subsequently reflecting their uniqueness (Tian et al., 2001, Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967, Snyder and Fromkin, 1977). Deindividuation (Lee, 2008) is associated with a product being used by others such that the brand does not reflect the uniqueness of the consumer (or identity), resulting in avoidance of the brand.

Thus, a product that is perceived as “too mainstream” or “too popular” could be avoided (Holt, 2002, Beverland, 2006).

While a brand is viewed as something that is developed and shaped in the consumer’s mind, brands can furthermore be viewed as socio-cultural constructions that are shared among groups of consumers (Allen et al., 2008). Influence of others, including family and friends, has been identified as influencers of behaviour through the need to belong to various groups (or to avoid association with a group) (Solomon et al., 2013). When dealing with complex purchasing contexts, consumers are known to prefer interacting with those closest to them such as friends, parents and children (Watne and Brennan, 2011) and rely on their evaluation of these services. Furthermore it has also been found that negative reference groups and a generalisation of the perception of a typical user also result in brand avoidance (Bhattacharya and Elsbach, 2002, Lee et al., 2009b). Thus, knowing that a service is used by a particular group of consumers can serve as a reason for avoidance.

3.2.3 Moral avoidance

This reason for avoidance from a moral perspective is linked to consumer values, and a lack of compatibility between their values and those associated with a particular brand (Lee et al., 2009b). Brands are avoided on moral grounds due to the belief that the brand harms the environment or conflicts with consumers’ personal moral values and beliefs (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009, Chatzidakis et al., 2013, Kozinets and Handelman, 2004), including their ethical beliefs (Rindell et al., 2014). Other examples include avoidance due to anti-hegemony, where the consumer avoids brands due to a perception of an organisation’s monopoly and dominance in the market (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004), resulting in a consumer’s perception of an imbalance of power between the consumer and the organisation (Cromie and Ewing, 2009). By avoiding the brand, consumers believe that they can adversely impact on the market dominance of the organisation. Country effects are also associated with a

decision to avoid brands originating from a specific country, based on the image consumers hold of the country (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1999) or of those providing the service. The country of origin can also be used as a basis to evaluate the quality of the product and this can then serve as a reason for avoiding a certain brand (Bloemer et al., 2009). Supporting local brands can be seen as the antithesis of this, as the aim is to support local service providers, with the profits remaining in the area (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Political and religious factors may also influence brand avoidance (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009, Knittel et al., 2016). This refers to the association with various ideologies or perspectives which are contrary to the consumer's beliefs such as American Imperialism, (Sandikci and Ekici, 2009) or Nazi views (Knittel et al., 2016).

3.2.4 Deficit-value avoidance

Deficit-value avoidance comes about when consumers believe they do not receive adequate value for money paid for a product (Lee et al., 2009d) or service. Traditionally this is associated with the price-quality relationship but in the case of services, it refers more specifically to service value (Bolton and Drew, 1991, Hoffman et al., 2002). Service value reflects the perceptions of what is received in the light of what is given (Bolton and Drew, 1991) and serves as an indication of quality (Hoffman et al., 2002). The costs associated with the service include not only the financial costs but also the non-monetary costs, such as the search and time costs (Bolton and Drew, 1991). Unfamiliarity also impacts the perceptions of service value as being unaware of the brand, the consumer will not purchase it. Further, if consumers are unaware of the brand they may believe it provides less value than known brands.

It can also be argued that experience and deficit-value avoidance are aligned as both relate to the unmet expectations of consumers. Deficit-value avoidance is, however, not required to

include the personal experience and usage of the service but is rather focused on the relationship between what is received versus what is sacrificed (value).

3.2.5 Advertising avoidance

Advertising and the various components of an organisation's marketing communication mix may influence a consumer's decision to avoid a particular brand (Knittel et al., 2016).

Aspects that could contribute to the avoidance of a brand include the content (such as the copy), the endorser and the music associated with an advertisement. It has been established that some consumers would not buy a brand if the content or the copy could be viewed as distasteful (Harris Interactive, 2010). For example, the use of taboo themes in advertising can affect both brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Sabri and Obermiller, 2012), as can the use of provocative advertising.

The use of a celebrity endorser is associated with creating both positive and negative associations in the mind of the target audience due to the perception of the celebrity (Apéria, 2004, McCracken, 1989). The use of music perceived as too loud or inappropriate, could also contribute to avoidance (Lantos & Craton, 2012). Liking an advertisement is regarded as part of the ability of an advertisement to influence behaviour and the reaction of the advertisement can vary between viewers (Percy, 2008), and should an advertisement be disliked or perceived as irritating, this can impact the decision to avoid the brand (De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh, 1999).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) generated about services is an important consideration for consumers due to the risk associated with the acquisition of services (Weun et al., 2004). It is therefore possible that WOM has more impact on consumer decision-making than other communication channels (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004). In a study conducted by Whitler (2014), 92% of respondents indicated that they believed the recommendations from family and friends. In addition, communication no longer just takes place between the organisation

and consumers, but also between consumers through social media (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Social media makes it possible for the consumer to search for information they desire when it is required, thereby increasing its trustworthiness (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). With the increased use of social media, negative WOM associated with a service experience influences a larger group of consumers (Ward and Ostrom, 2006, Khan and Lee, 2014, Kim et al., 2016). Ultimately, negative WOM can lead to consumers avoiding a specific brand.

4. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods are generally deemed more appropriate when conducting research that is exploratory in nature (Keaveney, 1995). The exploratory nature of the study is evident from the fact that there has been limited research conducted on not only the negative aspects of brand relationships, but specifically brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a, White et al., 2012, Romani et al., 2012). For example, advertising avoidance has been established as a possible brand avoidance type in only one previous exploratory qualitative study (Knittel et al., 2016). Qualitative methods are appropriate not only due to limited knowledge on the topic, but also due to the ability of these methods to allow the researcher to collect rich data from participants (Malhotra, 2012, Saunders, 2012).

Use was made of two qualitative methods namely a Critical Incident Method (CIT) and semi-structured personal interviews. The CIT was identified as a suitable technique for discovering the underlying reasons for avoiding service brands. CIT is defined as a set of procedures for collecting direct observations about specific situations (Butterfield et al., 2005, Flanagan, 1954). Five steps are identified as associated with this procedure. These include having an aim for the activity being studied; making plans and setting specifications; collecting the data; analysing the data; and interpreting the data and reporting the results (Flanagan, 1954, Butterfield et al., 2005). CIT is considered a useful tool for assessing service encounters (Bitner et al., 1990) and has been used in various studies in services marketing

(Keaveney, 1995, Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003, Edvardsson, 1998, Gremler, 2004).

Further, as service brand avoidance may be triggered by an event, CIT is particularly appropriate in this study. The aim of the activity was to focus on critical service incidents asking participants (university students) to write up two critical service incidents covering the following aspects: the type of service (industry); how the encounter took place (e.g., in person, by phone, online); the specific circumstances of the encounter including describing the actions; overall satisfaction with the encounter; and the likelihood of going back to the service provider. A total of 120 critical incidents were collected for analysis, and content analysis was undertaken.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 consumers (9 in South Africa and the balance in Sweden), selected using purposive sampling, who actively avoid service brands in South Africa and Sweden. Participants ranged from 22 to 49, though the majority were under 40. The theoretical framework (Figure 1) was used to develop an interview guide. Prior to the interviews, the researchers identified potential difficulties for participants to focus on service brands. For this reason, a list of leading (well-known) service brands was prepared, which could serve as a focus point during the interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis purposes. Once this had been completed, the transcripts were analysed and themes within the interviews were identified. This enabled the researchers to make sense of the collected data (Malhotra, 2012). To ensure the results of the study were trustworthy and not fraught with errors, the trustworthiness model as described by Guba (1981) was considered. To achieve consistency, applicability, truth, value and neutrality, the researchers had protracted engagement with the topic of service brand avoidance, a purposeful sample was selected, the data was scientifically analysed, the data was subjected to peer checking and verbatim quotes were included in the analysis.

Interviewers furthermore spent adequate time in the field and a standardized interview guide

was used. Finally, researchers reflected on possible bias to ensure the limitation thereof (Maritz, 2012).

5. FINDINGS

Participants reflected on experiences with a wide range of service brands, including mobile phone network providers, retail stores, fast food outlets and hairdressers. Respondents held experiences similar to those identified by Lee et al. (2009b), Lee (2008), Lee et al. (2009d), Keaveney (1995) and Knittel et al. (2016) and could be classified within existing categories based upon the responses from the participants. Based upon the responses of the participants, no new categories could be uncovered within a services context. Some participants believed avoidance was a more complex issue when dealing with services in contrast with products.

“it is probably easier with products, that one could avoid certain products, services are probably a little more difficult in my opinion” (P19)

“It is easier with products” (P24)

Despite this complexity, participants could describe avoidance of service brands.

5.1 Experiential avoidance

The critical incidents were specifically associated with experiential avoidance and seeking to understand it as a type of avoidance. The description of the experiences reflected incidents like those described in the semi-structured interviews. Core service failures and service encounter failures were both identified as contributing to the future avoidance of a service brand. Participants offered many examples of service failures that resulted in a “never again” mind set where the quality of the service offered was poor. In the case of mobile phone network providers which was specifically identified in the interviews, the core service is the network and problems with the core service were identified. In the case of a hairdresser, the

treatment (highlights) was not carried out correctly, resulting in dissatisfaction with the core service. Participants also described hotels with dirty rooms and restaurants with poor quality food, relating to the core service of the specific service provider.

“My problem is with the network. It is so poor” (P1; P5; P6; P7; P8)

“I was so angry. This was not what we had agreed to” (CIT39b)

“Because of all these bad experience [..in the hotel], I will never go back” (CIT55b)

“When I flew with SAS to China [...] the plane was old and bad [...] it did not live up my expectations, neither on service or entertainment” (P18)

In the case of service encounter failures, participants reflected on employees who were rude, uncaring, impolite or who were not able to undertake the service task as expected.

“The employees, they are so rude... especially those working on the tills” (P5)

“The employees.. they are not really helpful” (P2)

“The people – they did not take care of me” (CIT33a)

Further examples were supplied in the case of retail stores, highlighting the effect of store-specific issues including environment and layout.

“The music is so loud in the store, it’s like a disco” (P9)

“The system they are using. And you queue” (P9)

These quotes reflect the interaction that has taken place and refer to the various aspects of the service being offered, including the core and peripheral services. The service experience was consequently deemed to be poor, resulting in a decision not to support the service provider in the future. One participant also suggested that the nature of service recovery efforts implemented by the service provider would have impacted the decision to avoid the service provider in the future.

5.2 Identity avoidance

The image of the self, the brand, the service provider and image of other users has been identified as contributing to avoidance. The findings suggest that avoidance is largely

associated with the symbolic associations that consumers have of the service brand, which creates a negative perception towards the brand.

“Like Kappahl, I would never enter that store. It could be that one does not identify with oneself with their consumer [...] I do not identify myself with their image” (P11)

“[...] Also their image, they do not have a good image on the market” (P16)

“I would avoid 3 (mobile phone operator) as well, and it is not something I have experienced myself but it is perhaps the picture one has received from others who say 3 is lousy” (P13)

“If I have family or friends who say the service is terrible, then I will never go to Cell C because you trust what your family and friends say” (P7)

All these quotations suggest a disjunct between the self-image of the participants and the identity of the organisation as a provider.

5.3 Moral avoidance

The existence of moral reasons for avoiding a service was reflected in the findings to varying extents. Some participants considered the way a service provider executed its responsibilities while others considered the alignment between personal values and those reflected in the service operations as reasons for moral avoidance. Most commonly cited as an issue was the avoidance that would result from finding out that an organisation made use of child labour, but the identification of unacceptable practices was also mentioned.

“I do not support those shops in town – they use child labour.. so you stay away from those stores” (P6)

“When looking at Telia Sonera, one did not trust them after the scandals in Azerbaijan and Gibraltar [...] and if they lie about that, they can lie about anything” (P13)

The potential effect of context on this type of avoidance was identified by one of the participants, who suggested that some services may be less appropriate in “*first world countries*” than in other contexts (P22).

A political reason for avoidance was identified by South African participants, specifically when talking about one specific retailer (Woolworths) due to their merchandise originating from Israel. Avoiding the store was the consumer's response, though one participant acknowledged that this was of a short duration. Country-of-origin of products sold by this retailer was thus cited as a reason for moral avoidance of the retailer.

"I did avoid them for a while because of what they are doing [...] so I avoided them for like, 2-3 months"

(P7)

From these quotes, the ethical beliefs and actions from both customers and organisations were identified as reasons for avoidance.

5.4 Deficit-value avoidance

The price-quality relationship was mentioned by many participants, specifically where a low price was perceived to be of a low quality. The value received for the price paid for the service was mentioned by many participants, specifically where a low price was associated with one receiving less value from the service. Conversely, exceedingly high prices (of exclusive services) were perceived as being "too expensive" and hence not providing value-for-money.

"Sometimes you think it is cheap...I learned that cheaper things sometimes are an indication to show that service is bad" (P9)

"I try to cut my hair as cheaply as possible, but there is a bottom limit just as there is a top limit" (P16)

"It is probably nicer than Elite Hotel, but let us say it is twice as expensive. I do not think it is twice as good in quality and experience" (P13)

Unfamiliarity with the service offering also contributed to avoidance where one participant indicated that they would avoid a retail store due to higher levels of familiarity with the offerings of competitors. The quotes reflect a perception of value derived from the service.

5.5 Advertising avoidance

Aspects associated with advertising such as the celebrity endorsement evident in the advertisement, the music and the frequency with which the advertising was repeated were suggested as reasons for avoidance.

“Like Justin Bieber, it feels very girly and no, that would never appeal to me” (P14)

“I remember this advert... the song was so irritating...the advert was so irritating... when I was walking past this store and I thought “it’s Dodo’s – I am not going in” (P6)

“I am going to ignore it because they send me so many...they are bombarding me with just too much information” (P9)

Participants suggested that avoidance was not linked only to the advertising of service providers, but could rather be linked to the communication around the service, which did not only emanate from the service provider but also from other consumers.

“what others say - WOM – that is why I avoid it” (P6)

Reactions to the advertising of the service brand are seen in these quotes, with the effect of the celebrity and music indicated, though other communication aspects also contributed to avoidance.

6. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into brand avoidance of service brands and to explore whether the different types of brand avoidance identified in a product-related context apply to service brands. While focusing on service brands was regarded as more complex by the participants as opposed to product brands, five types of service brand avoidance could be identified, as suggested in previous research (Knittel et al., 2016, Lee, 2008, Lee et al., 2009b, Lee et al., 2009d, Khan and Lee, 2014). Thus, the interviews show support for the proposed framework (Figure 1) with each of the types being evident from

the results of the study. Support for these types was found in both Swedish and South African participants, supporting the findings of Khan and Lee (2014) who also found evidence of brand avoidance in developing economies.

6.1 Experiential avoidance

Participants could all identify service brands where their experience was the reason for their avoidance of the brand. As suggested in previous research (Keaveney, 1995), the study found that both core service failures and service encounter failures were critical to consumers and consequently these failures serve as a reason for avoidance. The unmet expectations and consequential disappointment of consumers was also identified as contributing to the decision to avoid a brand, consistent with previous research (Khan and Lee, 2014). Participants could also identify a specific event which resulted in their avoidance. Experiences with service personnel such as rudeness, being ignored or aspects with relation to information (such as not receiving the right information) support findings of Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony (2000) regarding the importance of employees in representing the brand to consumers.

6.2 Identity avoidance

Identification with the service, either as a result of the use (or non-use) of the service by others or the desire to acquire the service was identified by the participants, supporting the research of Lee et al. (2009d), Lee et al. (2009b) and Knittel et al. (2016). Driving this avoidance was the negative images that were projected by the brand or users of the brand. These findings are consistent with those of Englis and Solomon (1995) and Tian et al. (2001) regarding the avoidance of brands due to perceptions of other users of the brand.

6.3 Moral avoidance

The potential for avoidance based on a disjunct in values was also identified for service brands, as suggested in previous research (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004, Lee et al., 2009b, Lee et al., 2009d, Rindell et al., 2014). Some participants focused on the actions of the organisation (with regards to ethical issues) while others mentioned their personal values. General moral issues such as child labour as well as ethical issues were identified (Rindell et al., 2014, Khan and Lee, 2014) , but the link to the ethical views of the participants was not determined. Political avoidance associated with another country was also identified in this study, as found in earlier research (Knittel et al., 2016, Khan and Lee, 2014, Sandikci and Ekici, 2009). While one example of avoidance was short-term in nature, this can still be viewed as brand avoidance, described by Rindell et al. (2014) as transient brand avoidance.

6.4 Deficit-value avoidance

The value provided by the service also impacted on the decision to avoid a brand, linking the perception to the price and the perception of value (Lee et al., 2009d), which is particularly relevant for services (Bolton and Drew, 1991). The price was used as an indication of the level of service that was offered by the service provider, as suggested by Hoffman et al. (2002).

6.5 Advertising avoidance

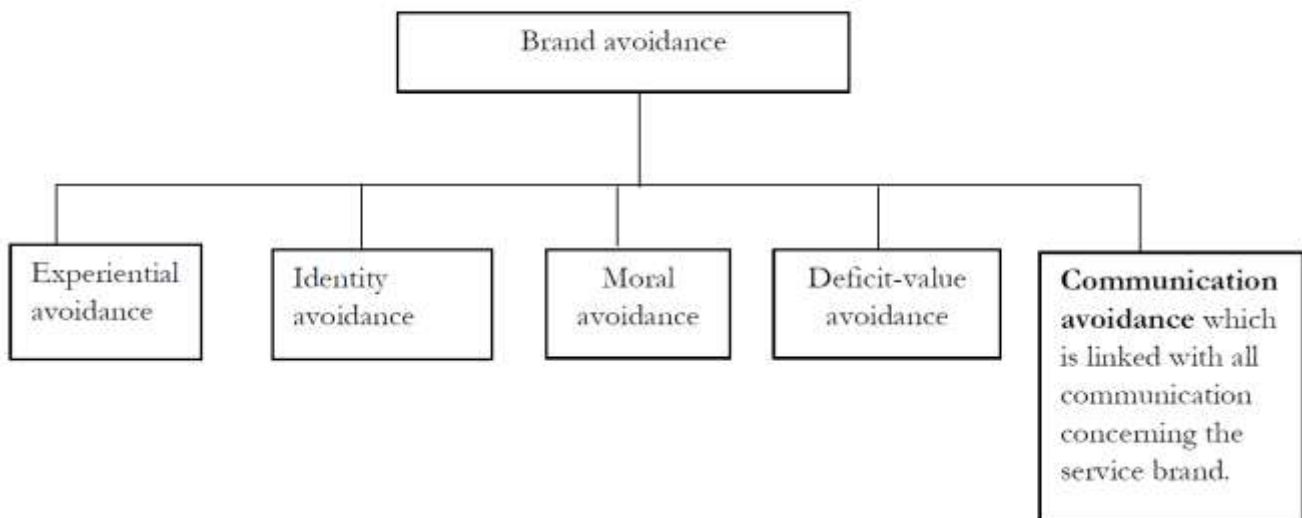
Previous research has identified the potential role of advertising in brand avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016, Harris Interactive, 2010, Dolliver, 2010). Aspects such as the content, celebrity endorser used, music used and the frequency of the advertisements have been identified as contributing to irritation with them (De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh, 1999), consequently impacting the purchase decision. Additionally, social media and electronic word-of-mouth were also identified by participants, similar to other studies (Knittel et al.,

2016). Negative word-of-mouth about the service can also contribute to avoidance, as suggested in a previous study (Kim et al., 2016).

With respect to the use of celebrity endorsers, their use in an advertisement is to project their image to the product (McCracken, 1989). There is thus a transfer of celebrities' recognition to the product. If the organisation was to use another celebrity, brand avoidance may not result.

Further, the use of the term "advertising" can be regarded as too narrow when describing the flow of information from the organisation to the consumer. For this reason, the updated framework suggested (see Figure 2) reflects the use of the term "communication avoidance", where this is regarded as all communication associated with the service brand.

Figure 2 Revised framework of the types of Service Brand Avoidance



There are several *managerial implications* associated with the findings of this study. The role of experiences in brand avoidance emphasizes the importance of managing the service experience. It implies that decisions made within services regarding the service process, the servicescape and the service providers have a strategic role in the development of consumer brand equity and consequently, the long-term profitability of the service provider. This suggests that these aspects need to receive the necessary attention from all levels of

management, as suggested in previous studies (Keaveney, 1995). Employment of the most qualified and suitably trained employees also plays a role in the prevention of avoidance. Suitable communication and smooth service recovery processes can also contribute to reducing the possibility of avoidance of a service brand. The Brand Ethos model (De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006) suggests how service providers can manage their service brands, specifically as it relates to service employers and their ability to influence perceptions and subsequent potential brand avoidance. Creating a clear and meaningful brand identity is one way to keep the brand honest and trustworthy while also ensuring a positive brand image. Organisational integrity and commitment to ethical values can also contribute to reducing the possibility of this being a cause of avoidance. Communicating value-for-money to the consumer can improve the perception of consumers, while advertising and marketing communication about the brand and the associated brand values in all forms of media can contribute to clarity of the service brand. Determining the size of the consumer group avoiding a service brand is important since it may not be economically feasible to try to reverse the brand avoidance of small groups (Khan and Lee, 2014).

Future research possibilities are extensive due to the lack of research into this specific area of services marketing. Not only is a quantitative study a possible area of research, but also investigating the various types of avoidance in different categories of services, such as personal and online services. Further research into the specific avoidance types themselves would also contribute to a deeper understanding of the effect thereof on the avoidance decision. The effect of cultural perceptions among consumers is widely acknowledged (Bochner, 2013, Reichert and Gill, 2004), and hence a study among service brand avoidance in various cultures can also be considered.

The study does contain, as with any exploratory study, *limitations* such as a lack of generalizability and small sample size (Malhotra, 2012). Use of CIT is not without its disadvantages (Gremler, 2004) yet it provided additional insights into experiential avoidance.

In general, participants had a better understanding of product brands than service brands (Dall'Olmo Riley and De Chernatony, 2000), requiring the interviewers to ensure that the focus remained on service brands. The study also did not focus on specific types of service brands, and the avoidance of an airline may differ from that of a banking service, in turn, creating the potential for further research into avoidance of specific services. Latent brand avoidance has also been identified as a possible reason for brand avoidance (Rindell et al., 2014), but this possibility was not addressed in this research.

7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the types of brand avoidance, specifically for service brands. These brands were the focus due to the importance of services in the global economy and the lack of research in service brands. The study found that brand avoidance is manifested in the case of service brands, and that the types of avoidance suggested in the case of products in previous studies can also be identified in the case of service brands.

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