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BRAND AVOIDANCE – A SERVICES PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The motive for 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 technique and semi-structured interviews were used to achieve its purpose.

Findings: The results 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 individual 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 services. 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

1. INTRODUCTION

Brands have long been regarded as critical in marketing and in building successful products. They continue to be a part of marketing strategies due to their importance as sources of differentiation (McDonald, de Chernatony, & Harris, 2001). Brands are also critical for service providers' success (Berry, 2000). The branding of services is complicated by the intangible nature of services (Berry, 2000; Grace & O'Cass, 2005). Despite their intangible nature, services need to have strong brands, since consumer behaviour (such as loyalty and brand love) are equally applicable to service brands (McDonald et al., 2001).

Previous research has mostly focused on branding's positive aspects, such as brand attachment (Cheong, 2013; Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2014; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), brand love (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012), brand strength (Strandvik & Heinonen, 2013), and brand affection (Yim, Tse, & Chan, 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 into anti-consumption (Cherrier, 2009; Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009) and the role of ethical issues in this phenomenon (Rindell, Strandvik, & Wilén, 2014) has been undertaken, the concept of brand avoidance has not been extensively researched (Khan & Lee, 2014; Lee, Conroy, & Motion, 2009a; Romani, Grappi, & Dalli, 2012; White, Breazeale, & Webster, 2012). Consequently, understanding the negative aspects of brands is regarded as being just as important as understanding the positive aspects, highlighting the need for this research (Hogg & Banister, 2001; Lee, Fernandez, & Hyman, 2009b).

Research in branding has primarily focused on consumer goods rather than services, resulting in a limited body of knowledge available on service brands compared to the

branding of goods (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; McDonald et al., 2001) and on brand avoidance of service brands (Kavaliauskė and Simanavičiūtė, 2015). Combined with this, there has also been little research into the negative aspects associated with service brands such as brand avoidance. This paper aims to contribute to the service brands area, 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, whereafter the methodology is reported and the findings are presented. The paper concludes by examining the implications of the findings and by suggesting areas for further research.

2.   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

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

3.   LITERATURE REVIEW

A brand serves several important functions for an organisation. At its most basic, the brand is like an identity (and logo) for the organisation's offerings. Furthermore, a brand provides an indication of quality, reflects the company's values, and portrays a product's functional and emotional characteristics (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). Brands also reflect the way in which consumers view products (Keeble, 1991). Despite organisations' efforts to promote their products by emphasising these functions, consumers often decide not to purchase the product. Similar to Cherrier, Black, and Lee (2011) and Lee et al. (2009a), this study views consumers as being 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., 2009a), and it can be considered an attitude or a behaviour (Cherrier, 2009). Thus staying away or moving away from a brand (or service) is classified as brand avoidance (Rindell et al., 2014), and can be seen 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 (Knittel, Beurer, & Berndt, 2016). This reflects a situation of anti-choice, where the brand is not perceived as being aligned with what is important to the consumer when selecting a product (Hogg, 1998). Gaining insight into consumers who avoid brands is important due to brand avoidance's impact on brand equity (Lee et al., 2009a; Strandvik & Heinonen, 2013).

3.2 Perspectives on service and service brands

Service can be viewed from two perspectives: as a category of marketing offerings, and as a method of value creation for the organisation (Edvardsson, Gustafsson, & Roos, 2005).

These perspectives are also apparent in literature. Firstly, Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) proposes that all company offerings can be viewed as a service (a process) rather than services (an outcome) (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016). SDL further considers that a service is the origin of organisational activities (Hultén, 2015), acting as the basis of exchange, and that goods (products) are used to bring about the distribution of need-satisfying services (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). It is also suggested that the service brand is the "off-balance sheet asset" reflected in SDL, due to the service brand's ability to build relationships (Brodie, Glynn, & Little, 2006). In the Nordic School of Services (Service Logic approach), a service is viewed as the use of resources to "support daily consumer practices", thereby providing customer value-in-use (Grönroos & 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 & 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 as well as its employees (Dall'Olmo Riley & De Chernatony, 2000). Therefore, the service brand is found at the nexus between the service provider, its employees and the consumers (Brodie, Whittome, & Brush, 2009). Since service brands also involve interactions with the service provider and its employees, the consumer's perception of a service brand is affected by the attitudes and actions of employees (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997; Grace & O'Cass, 2005).

Although brands 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, the difference between product and service brands is evident in the implementation of the branding strategy (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999; De Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003) When consumers evaluate service brands, they also analyse the actions of employees and the servicescape where the service is being delivered, indicating their importance for both the customer and the organisation (Grace & O'Cass, 2005).
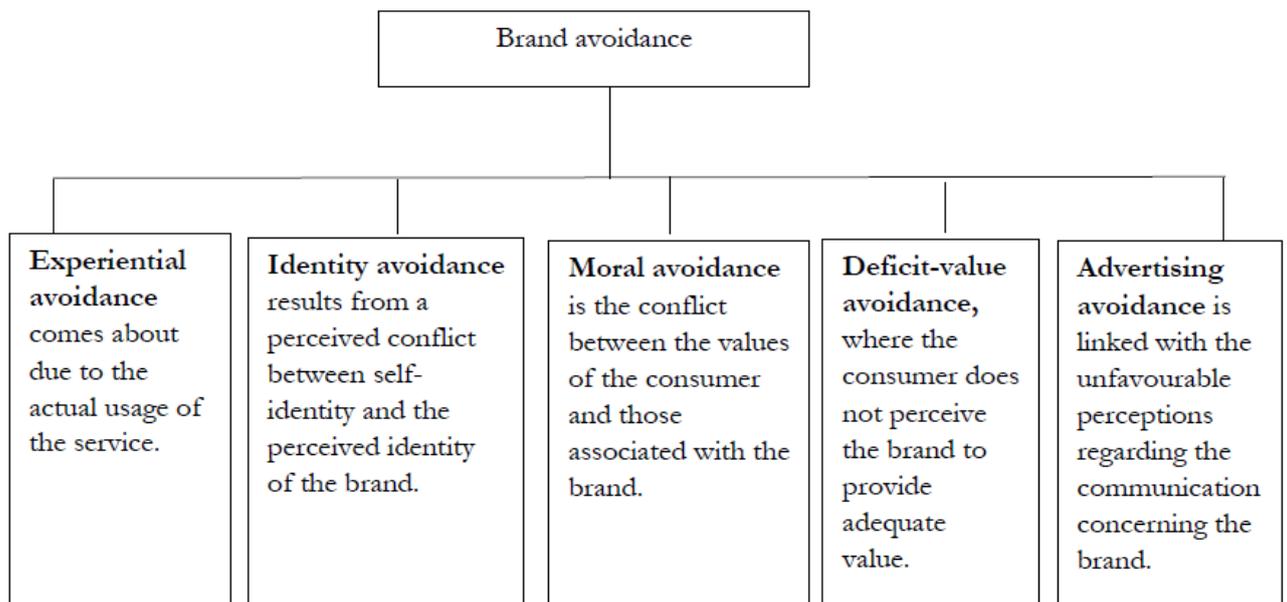
For the purpose of this study, a service brand is defined as the functional and emotional values associated with a service, which are developed and presented by the service provider and its employees as perceived by the consumer (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1999) in the co-creation of value (Brodie et al., 2006). Drawing from the work of Lee et al. (2009a) and Knittel et al. (2016), the following definition for service brand avoidance 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 numerous reasons for brand avoidance leading to the identification of several types of service brand avoidance (Hogg, 1998; Khan & Lee, 2014; Knittel et al., 2016; Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2009a; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009c; Rindell et al., 2014; Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009). 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 to 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 relationships between the various types of brand avoidance have 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

Brand avoidance				
Experiential avoidance comes about due to the actual usage of the service.	**Identity avoidance** results from a perceived conflict between self-identity and the perceived identity of the brand.	**Moral avoidance** is the conflict between the values of the consumer and those associated with the brand.	**Deficit-value avoidance,** where the consumer does not perceive the brand to provide adequate value.	**Advertising avoidance** is linked with the unfavourable perceptions regarding the communication concerning the brand.

Source: Adapted from Keaveney (1995); Knittel et al. (2016); Lee et al. (2009a); Lee et al. (2009c); Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (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 between the service provider, its employees and the consumer. Both these elements are subject to failure. Examples of core service failure include poor service or errors in accounting, while examples of service encounter failure are 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, as well as the extent to which service promises will be fulfilled (Dall'Olmo Riley & De Chernatony, 2000).

If a 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 (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992; Boshoff, 1997).

Services are also regarded as a form of co-production, because 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 what actions are 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, it may still result in avoidance (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006).

The delivery of a service can cause a relationship between the service provider and consumer to develop. The final phase is the dissolution of the relationship, which tends to arise from a trigger, where a service failure could be one such trigger (Stewart, 1998).

Extant literature suggests specific aspects associated with a negative service experience include poor performance, inconvenience and an unpleasing store environment (Lee et al., 2009c). Poor service performance has previously been identified as a reason for brand switching (Keaveney, 1995). This is due to the evaluation of the performance against consumer expectations, and poor performance indicates that the perceptions of the service

experience is lower than initially held expectations (Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991; Wilson et al., 2012). Therefore, negative disconfirmation 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. An organisation's past experiences can contribute to the development of an image heritage and subsequent avoidance (Rindell et al., 2014). Inconvenience (or hassle) also serves as a reason for avoidance as too much effort is required on the part of the consumer to acquire the service, making other service providers more attractive (Keaveney, 1995). An unpleasant store environment has also been shown to cause a reduced willingness to remain in it, 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 consumers' negative perceptions (Bitner, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 2006).

3.2.2   Identity avoidance

Consumers select brands that are associated with the image they wish to project (Dall'Olmo Riley & De Chernatony, 2000; De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1997). Should consumers perceive the brand as conflicting with their self-concept, brand avoidance may occur (Englis & Solomon, 1995; Khan & Lee, 2014).

It is essential that a brand be regarded as real and genuine, contributing to a perception of authenticity (Beverland, 2006; Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014). When consumers purchase a brand for utilitarian reasons, it suggests authenticity, whereas a brand purchased for external approval is perceived as inauthentic (Ferraro, Kirmani, & Matherly, 2010; Kirmani, 2009). 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, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006).

The 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 suggesting that consumers purchase products to differentiate themselves from others, subsequently reflecting their uniqueness (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). According to Lee (2008), deindividuation is associated with a product being used by others 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 (Beverland, 2006; Holt, 2002).

While a brand is viewed as something that is developed and shaped in the consumer's mind, it can be seen further as a socio-cultural construction that is shared among consumer groups (Allen, Fournier, & Miller, 2008). Influence of others, including family and friends, has been identified as swaying behaviour through the need to belong to various groups, or to avoid association with a group (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2013). When dealing with complex purchasing contexts, consumers are known to prefer interacting with those closest to them, such as friends, parents and children, and rely on their evaluation of these services (Watne & Brennan, 2011). Furthermore, it has also been found that negative reference groups and a generalisation of the perception of a typical user result in brand avoidance (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002; Lee et al., 2009a). Thus, knowing that a service is used by a particular group of consumers can be 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., 2009a). A brand is avoided on moral grounds when it is believed to harm the

environment or conflict with consumers' personal moral values and beliefs, as well as their ethical beliefs (Chatzidakis & Lee, 2013; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Rindell et al., 2014; Sandıkcı & Ekici, 2009). Another reason why a brand is avoided is because of anti-hegemony, where the consumer avoids a brand due to his/her perception of an organisation's monopoly and dominance in the market, resulting in the consumer believing that there is an imbalance of power between him/her and the organisation (Cromie & 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 place, based on the image consumers hold of that country or of those providing the service (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999). The country of origin can also be used as a basis to evaluate the quality of the product, which can be a reason for avoiding a certain brand (Bloemer, Brijs, & Kasper, 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 & Sharma, 1987). Political and religious factors may also influence brand avoidance. This refers to the association with various ideologies or perspectives that differ from the consumer's beliefs, such as American imperialism (Sandıkcı & 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 or service (Lee et al., 2009c). Traditionally, this is associated with the price-quality relationship but in the case of services, it refers more specifically to service value (Bolton & Drew, 1991). Service value reflects the perceptions of what is received in the light of what is given and serves as a quality indicator (Hoffman, Turley, & Kelley, 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 & Drew, 1991). Unfamiliarity also impacts the perceptions of service value, because if consumers are unaware of the brand, they will not purchase it. Further, if consumers are unaware of the brand, they may believe it provides less value than known ones.

It can also be argued that experience and deficit-value avoidance are aligned as both relate to the unmet expectations of consumers. However, deficit-value avoidance is not required to include the personal experience and usage of the service, but rather focuses 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 is viewed as distasteful (Harris Interactive, 2010). For example, the use of taboo themes in advertising can affect brand attitudes and purchase intentions, as can provocative advertising (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012).

The use of a celebrity endorser creates both positive and negative associations in the mind of the target audience due to the way the famous person is perceived (Apéria, 2004; McCracken, 1989). Using music that is perceived as being too loud or inappropriate could also contribute to avoidance (Lantos & Craton, 2012). Liking an advertisement is regarded as being part of the advertisement's ability to influence behaviour, and the reaction to the advertisement can vary among viewers (Percy, 2008). Should an advertisement be disliked

or perceived as irritating, this can impact the decision to avoid the brand (De Pelsmacker & Van Den Bergh, 1999).

WOM generated on services is an important consideration for consumers, because of the risk associated with the acquisition of services (Weun, Beatty, & Jones, 2004). Therefore, it is possible that WOM has more impact on consumer decision-making than other communication channels (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). In a study conducted by Whitler (2014), 92% of respondents indicated that they trusted 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. Social media makes it possible for consumers to search for the information they desire when required, thereby increasing its trustworthiness (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). With the increased use of social media, negative WOM associated with a service experience influences a larger group of consumers (Khan & Lee, 2014; Kim, Wang, Maslowska, & Malthouse, 2016; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Ultimately, negative WOM can lead to consumers avoiding a specific brand.

4.   METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods are deemed more appropriate when conducting exploratory research (Keaveney, 1995). The exploratory nature of the study is evident as there has been limited research on the negative aspects of brand relationships, specifically brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a; Romani et al., 2012; White et al., 2012). For example, advertising avoidance has been established as a possible type of brand avoidance in just one previous exploratory qualitative study (Knittel et al., 2016). Qualitative methods are appropriate not only because of the 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, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012).

Two qualitative methods were used, namely a critical incident technique (CIT) and semi-structured personal interviews. The CIT was identified as a suitable method for discovering the underlying reasons for avoiding service brands. CIT is defined as a set of procedures for collecting direct observations about specific situations. Five steps are identified as associated with this procedure, including: 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 (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005; Flanagan, 1954). CIT is considered a useful tool for assessing service encounters (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990) and has been used in various services marketing studies (Derbaix & Vanhamme, 2003; Edvardsson, 1998; Gremler, 2004; Keaveney, 1995). 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 (for example, in person, telephonically, online); the specific circumstances of the encounter, including describing the actions; the overall satisfaction with the encounter; and the likelihood of going back to the service provider. A total of 120 critical incidents were collected, and content analysis was undertaken.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 consumers (nine in South Africa and the balance in Sweden) selected using purposive sampling, who actively avoid service brands in South Africa and Sweden. The participants ranged from 22 to 49 years old, although the majority were aged 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 well-known service brands was prepared, which could serve as a focus point during the interview. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Once this was completed, the transcripts were analysed and the themes 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. Furthermore, the interviewers spent adequate time in the field and a standardised interview guide was used. Finally, researchers reflected on possible bias to ensure the limitation thereof (Maritz, 2012).

5.   FINDINGS

The participants reflected on experiences with a wide range of service brands, including mobile phone network providers, retail stores, fast-food outlets and hairdressers. Respondents had experiences similar to those identified by Keaveney (1995), Knittel et al. (2016), Lee (2008), Lee et al. (2009a) and Lee et al. (2009c), and could be classified within existing categories. Based on the participants' responses, 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. The participants offered many examples of service failures that resulted in a "never again" mindset, 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 (hair 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 to 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 interactions that have occurred and refer to the various aspects of the service being offered, including the core and peripheral services. Consequently, the service experience was deemed to be poor, resulting in the 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 the other users have 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 of these quotations suggest a disconnect between the participants' self-image 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. The avoidance resulting from finding out that an organisation used child labour was most commonly cited as an issue, 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 the participant acknowledged that this was short-lived. The country of origin of the 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 to 3 months." (P7)

From these quotes, the ethical beliefs and actions from 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-priced product was perceived to be of poor 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 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, with one participant indicating that she would avoid a store due to higher levels of familiarity with competitors' offerings. The quotations 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 only linked to the advertising of service providers, but could also 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 (Khan & Lee, 2014; Knittel et al., 2016; Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2009a; Lee et al., 2009c). Therefore, the interviews support the proposed framework (Figure 1), with each type evident from the results of the study. Both Swedish and South African participants supported these types, affirming the findings of Khan and Lee (2014), who also found evidence of brand avoidance in developing economies.

6.1   Experiential avoidance

The participants could all identify service brands where their experience was the reason for avoiding them. As suggested in previous research, this study found that both core service failures and service encounter failures were critical to consumers, and consequently these failures serve as reasons for avoidance (Keaveney, 1995). 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 & Lee, 2014). Participants could also identify a specific event that resulted in their avoidance. Experiences with service personnel, such as rudeness, being ignored or aspects with relation to information like 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 Knittel et al. (2016), Lee et al. (2009a) and Lee et al. (2009c). Driving this avoidance were 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

As suggested in previous research, the potential for avoidance based on a disjunct in values was also identified for service brands (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Lee et al., 2009a; Lee et al., 2009c; Rindell et al., 2014). Some participants focused on the actions of the organisation (regarding ethical issues), while others mentioned their personal values. General moral issues like child labour and ethical issues were identified, but the link to the participants' ethical views was not determined (Khan & Lee, 2014; Rindell et al., 2014). Political avoidance associated with another country was also found, as in earlier research (Khan & Lee, 2014; Knittel et al., 2016; Sandıkcı & 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, which is particularly relevant for services (Bolton & 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).
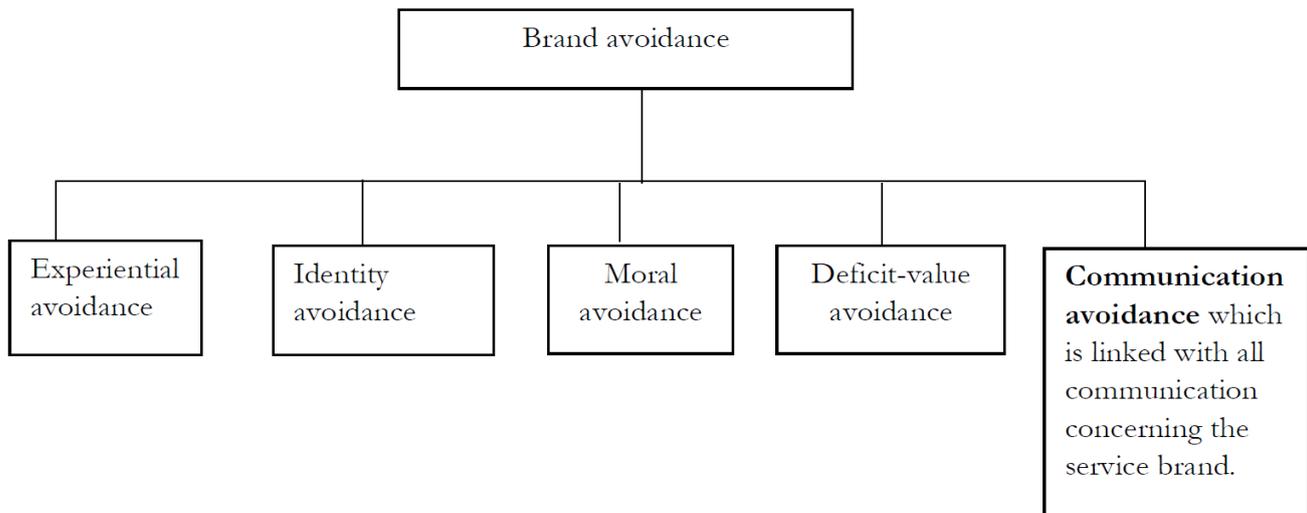
6.5 Advertising avoidance

Previous research has identified the potential role of advertising in brand avoidance (Dolliver, 2010; Harris Interactive, 2010; Knittel et al., 2016). Aspects like the content, celebrity endorser used, music selected and the frequency of the advertisements have been identified as contributing to irritation with them, consequently impacting the purchase decision (De Pelsmacker & Van Den Bergh, 1999). Additionally, similar to other studies, social media and electronic WOM were also identified by participants (Knittel et al., 2016). Negative WOM on the service can also contribute to avoidance, as suggested in a previous study (Kim et al., 2016).

Concerning celebrity endorsers, their use in an advertisement is to project their image to the product (McCracken, 1989). Therefore, there is 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", which is regarded as all communication associated with the service brand.

Figure 2   Revised framework of the types of Service Brand Avoidance

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                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │   Brand avoidance   │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                                  │
   ┌──────────┬──────────────┬────┴──────┬──────────────┬──────────────┐
┌──────────┐┌──────────┐┌──────────┐┌──────────────┐┌──────────────────┐
│Experiential││ Identity ││  Moral   ││ Deficit-value ││ Communication    │
│ avoidance  ││avoidance ││avoidance ││  avoidance    ││ avoidance which  │
└──────────┘└──────────┘└──────────┘└──────────────┘│ is linked with all│
                                                     │ communication     │
                                                     │ concerning the    │
                                                     │ service brand.    │
                                                     └──────────────────┘
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There are several *managerial implications* associated with this study's findings. The role of experiences in brand avoidance emphasises 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 previously shown (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 contribute to reducing the possibility of avoidance of a service brand. The brand ethos model 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 (De Chernatony & Cottam, 2006). 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 may also contribute to reducing the possibility of this being a cause for avoidance. Communicating

value for money to the consumer can improve customers' perceptions, while advertising and marketing communication on the brand and the associated brand values in all forms of media may contribute to service brand clarity. 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 & Lee, 2014).

Future research possibilities are extensive due to the lack of research into this area of services marketing. Not only is a quantitative study a possible area of investigation, but also the various types of avoidance in different categories of services, such as personal and online services. Further research into the specific avoidance types themselves could 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 & Gill, 2004), hence a study among service brand avoidance in various cultures could also be considered.

As with any exploratory study, this paper has its *limitations*, such as a lack of generalisability and a small sample size (Malhotra, 2012). The use of CIT is not without its disadvantages, yet it provided additional insights into experiential avoidance (Gremler, 2004). In general, the participants had a better understanding of product brands than service brands (Dall'Olmo Riley & De Chernatony, 2000), and the interviewers had to ensure the focus remained on service brands through the interview process. Moreover, the study 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, but this possibility was not addressed in this research paper (Rindell et al., 2014).

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 manifests in service brands, and that the types of avoidance suggested in the case of products in previous studies can also be identified in service brands.

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