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Brand avoidance: underlying protocols and a practical scale

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Abstract

Purpose – The increased practitioner and academic interest in negative brand phenomena highlight the need for the development of practical scales to be used for empirical investigations. Therefore, this paper aims to draw on existing conceptualisations to provide a theoretically grounded yet practically oriented scale for examining brand avoidance and its protocols.

Design/methodology/approach – The study uses a sample of 575 consumers from two developing countries to create a parsimonious brand avoidance scale. Partial least squares structural equation modelling is used to analyse the data through a systematic formative measurement approach

Findings – This paper finds brand avoidance to be a multidimensional, second-order construct with five first-order dimensions: moral avoidance, identity avoidance, deficit–value avoidance, experiential avoidance and advertising-related avoidance. The paper further validates this scale by testing with non-purchase intention and identifies its positive relationship with brand avoidance.

Originality/value – This study fulfils the calls in the literature to provide a measurable scale for studying negative brand phenomena in consumer–brand relationship research.

Keywords Brand avoidance, Scale development, Anti-branding, Brand relationships

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

A widely held belief in the branding literature suggests that several intrinsic and extrinsic equities about brands trigger consumers' patronage. These factors may stem from either the innate characteristics of consumers and brands or those connected to external stimuli, ideally resulting in favourable outcomes such as brand preference and choice (Narteh *et al.*, 2012), love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) and loyalty (Odoom, 2016). However, the branding literature has relatively under-recognised, as well as under-researched, the other extremes of these outcomes that can emanate from consumer–brand interactions – such as brand apathy, rejection, hate, opposition and avoidance (Cromie and Ewing, 2009; Kucuk, 2008; Fournier and Alvarez, 2013; Romani *et al.*, 2015; Wolter *et al.*, 2016).

For instance, Samsung recently faced avoidance issues among a large section of its consumers owing to reports of

device explosions. This resulted in the brand's Galaxy Note 7 model being avoided by a section of consumers and even facing bans on some airlines (US Department of Transportation, 2016). Similarly, avoidance is being promoted against some cosmetics and food brands because of their compositions and based on presumptions that they either engage in animal testing themselves through a third party, as required by law, or use ingredients tested on animals (Logical Harmony, 2018). However, to the best of our knowledge, the branding literature seems to lack clearly established and comprehensively validated measures for studying adverse brand reactions. In the wake of firm/product issues causing some brands to be avoided, it has become imperative that a clearly defined scale be developed for evaluating instances of brand avoidance in both academic and practitioner communities. This is mostly because consumer–brand relationships rest on a continuum, with one end representing positive node elements and the other, negative node elements.

While a plethora of research seems to gravitate towards the positive nodes on this outcome continuum, the negative ones have been explored in fuzzy ways, often with inconclusive and

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inconsistent results, as well as in relatively fewer contexts (Charmley *et al.*, 2013; Kucuk, 2014; Demirbag-Kaplan *et al.*, 2015). Nonetheless, such negative brand relationship outcomes could stem from product-, consumer- or context-related factors (Hegner *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, Lee *et al.* (2009b) add that the non-patronage of brands in specific consumer settings may be owing to consciously constructed avoidance mechanisms and antecedents. Therefore, our attempt to develop and establish a measurable scale could help brand managers and organisations ascertain the mechanisms behind instances where their brands have been avoided in the past and create measures to eschew such cases in future.

From the literature, the analyses of negative brand phenomena are generally skewed towards exploratory and conceptual perspectives, with studies mostly using qualitative approaches (Lee *et al.*, 2009b; Knittel *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, Hegner *et al.* (2017) point out that most existing studies are focused on elucidating either the determinants or outcomes of such phenomena, without the provision of complete, consolidated models. Although previous calls from scholars have seen appreciable responses, the available bibliometrics also indicate that the studies that focus on negative emotional brand relationships are still insufficient (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014, 2015; Albert and Thomson, 2018). To date, only a few studies have systematically explored the exact dimensionality of brand avoidance, its precise composition still being unclear. Whereas some studies use a multidimensional approach to capture, for instance, brand hate and consider its components (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Hegner *et al.*, 2017), others adopt a unidimensional approach to explain brand avoidance along with other negative brand phenomena from consumer attachment theory perspectives (Thomson and Johnson, 2006; Whelan and Dawar, 2016).

However, such approaches have been deficient in empirically demonstrating the multidimensional relationship between the brand avoidance index and negative brand outcomes. In their historical and contemporary account, Albert and Thomson (2018) affirm that the field of consumer research still has opportunities for empirical research streams that will improve our understanding of consumer-brand relationships. The novelty and primary purpose of this study, therefore, is threefold. First, the study's initial contribution lies in an attempt to develop a brand avoidance scale from extant conceptualisations on the subject. Second, we test the effects of brand avoidance mechanism on (non)purchase intention – a hitherto unverified issue in the literature. Finally, we present results from a setting (sub-Saharan Africa) with little empirical representation in the brand management literature. Notably, this last issue has contributed to the insufficiencies in our current understanding of brand consumption because consumption patterns and dynamics in the developed world differ significantly from those in emerging, developing and/or less-developed markets (Odoom, 2016).

Theoretical background and literature review

Anti-consumption and consumer attachment

The anti-consumption literature, which situates itself as part of the (dis)confirmation theory, underpins this study. According to Halstead (1989), consumer expectations can either be

confirmed or disconfirmed based on the comparison of their initial expectations with the actual product or service received. The confirmation scenario occurs when the experienced product or service matches the expectations. Conversely, disconfirmation occurs when experiences are either above or below expectations. The latter instance results in dissatisfaction, which, in some cases, triggers anti-consumption attitudes such as brand avoidance, dislike, hate or brand rejection (Oliver, 1980; Lee *et al.*, 2009b). Further, the brand attachment theory also delineates two attachment styles – anxiety and avoidance – that spell out how an individual's tendencies in personal relationships seem to lead to related tendencies in consumer relationships (Thomson and Johnson, 2006). Whereas anxiety captures one's view of the self (with high anxiety indicating a poor view), avoidance, on the other hand, embraces one's view of others, with high avoidance indicating a poor view of the others (Whelan and Dawar, 2016).

These two variables mutually capture a person's attachment style or chronic relational disposition, as well as predict or moderate the qualities of consumer-brand interactions (Albert and Thomson, 2018). Accordingly, Thomson and Johnson (2006) report that “consumers with higher scores on avoidance and anxiety have been found to experience, more positive emotions and greater satisfaction in commercial relationships” (p. 712). Hence, their expectations and experiences with brands may result in either attenuating or ameliorating the outcomes satisfaction levels, indicated by two extreme nodes on the consumer-brand relationship continuum. Generally, in the literature, compared to positive attitudes towards brands, limited studies are available on negative consumer-brand relationships (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016). However, consumption and purchase behaviour research will always evolve, given the changes in consumer dynamics and complexities over time. Therefore, it becomes increasingly imperative to understand negative attitudes, *vis-à-vis* positive ones, and thus delineate the various strands of research on consumer behaviour towards brands (Veloutsou and Guzman, 2017).

Brand avoidance and its protocols

Brand avoidance has been defined as the “phenomenon whereby consumers deliberately choose to keep away from or reject a brand” (Lee *et al.*, 2009b, p. 422). It describes a conscious and deliberate abstinence from the purchase and usage of a particular brand (Knittel *et al.*, 2016). This behaviour is applicable in situations where consumers intentionally avoid brands, in spite of having the financial capability to purchase their products and the brands being available in the market (Lee *et al.*, 2009a). Accordingly, incidents where consumers may not patronise brands based on their inaccessibility, unavailability or prices being high may not be considered as brand avoidance. Therefore, as opposed to the instances where consumers have no choice, brand avoidance dwells on the premeditated rejection of a brand within an anti-choice setting (Hogg and Banister, 2001).

Additionally, brand avoidance differs from other negative consumer-brand relationships (such as brand hate and boycotts) in several ways. For example, although boycotts are forms of anti-consumption and resistance, they are usually at a social/group level and constitute commercially discontent

punitive bans, whereas avoidance is rather individual-based (Albrecht *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, in brand avoidance, consumers only deliberately “keep away” compared to brand hate, where the consumer feels intense dislike or has a strong aversion/loathing towards the brand. Thus, firms arguably have better chances of gaining back avoiding consumers compared to those exhibiting hatred. Similarly, consumers might avoid a brand because of their beliefs or principles but may not necessarily hate or dislike that brand. As a multidimensional construct, past studies have qualitatively and conceptually explored some of the reasons, as well as types and dimensions, of brand avoidance. They span moral avoidance, identity avoidance, deficit–value avoidance, experiential avoidance and advertising-related avoidance (Lee *et al.*, 2009b; Knittel *et al.*, 2016) and are discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

Moral avoidance

This type of avoidance is often attributable to brand promises that are often socially or politically opposed to consumers’ set of beliefs (Lee *et al.*, 2009b; Sandıkcı and Ekici, 2009). Generally, brands that are avoided exhibit certain morally unacceptable behaviours in the opinions of consumers (e.g. discrimination, unfair trade practices, forced labour and non-transparency). For example, consumers may avoid certain brands on the basis of monopolistic (disempowerment owing to lack of choices), socially irresponsible behaviours (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004) or unethical practices (Rindell *et al.*, 2014) from manufacturing firms. At the broader international level, renowned brands that are iconic in their originating countries could even become targets if consumers have feelings of animosity towards these nations (Riefler and Diamantopoulos, 2007; Khan and Lee, 2014). In the consumer resistance literature, this is referred to as anti-hegemony (Holt, 2002; Thompson and Arsel, 2004) and is typically associated with consumers’ perceptions of brands at the ideological level. Consequently, this form of avoidance, according to Cromie and Ewing (2009), is motivated and exhibited by consumer actions aimed at reducing the overall consumption of the brand. Lee *et al.* (2009a, 2009b) posit that multinational brands suffer most from such avoidance, mainly because of their superior visibility, which puts them under greater scrutiny.

Identity avoidance

In most cases, consumers patronise brands that correspond to their self-concept and help maintain or harmonise their self-image (Belk, 1988). However, consumers may also shun some brands as a way of creating and enhancing their self-concept. Identity avoidance occurs when consumers avoid brands that are incongruent with their actual or desired self-concept (Hogg and Banister, 2001). Therefore, such brands are perceived as symbolically unauthentic in their promises (Charmley *et al.*, 2013) or associated with an unacceptable reference group (Kim *et al.*, 2016), thereby detracting consumers from their idiosyncratic feelings of individuality (Lee *et al.*, 2009a). As argued by Knittel *et al.* (2016), some brands may even undermine and weaken individuality, rather than adding meaning, when consumed. Consequently, their consumption could trigger a loss of identity among consumers, causing them to avoid such brands. Drawing on disidentification theory (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001) as well as self-image congruency (Sirgy, 1982; Heath and Scott, 1998), identity avoidance may refer to all instances when a brand is

unable to fulfil a consumer’s symbolic identity requirements (Knittel *et al.*, 2016).

Deficit–value avoidance

This form of brand avoidance resonates from functionally inadequate brand promises that occur when consumers hold the perceptions that a brand parades an unacceptable cost-to-benefit trade-off (Lee *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b). The deficit–value avoidance mechanism can be demonstrated in a number of ways: brands that are of low quality (Zeithaml, 1988), brands that are unfamiliar to consumers and hence pose high purchase risks (Richardson *et al.*, 1996; Green *et al.*, 2003), brands that are inexplicably expensive, brands whose packaging lacks relevant aesthetic details and brands whose promised value is perceived as deficient (Lee *et al.*, 2009b). Overall, it appears reasonable to surmise that, regarding deficit–value brand avoidance, consumers generally examine the cost–value relationship. Therefore, unlike the non-considerations stemming from prior experiences (Bogomolova and Millburn, 2012), this mechanism may not require any past personal experience or usage of the brand (Knittel *et al.*, 2016).

Experiential avoidance

Perhaps the most palpable form of avoidance, experiential avoidance relates to undelivered brand promises stemming from unmet expectations, unpleasant store environment, perceptions of poor brand performance or consumption hassles and inconveniences (Lee *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b). Drawing from the conceptualisation of de Chernatony and McDonald (2003), a brand represents a cluster of emotional and functional remunerations that extend a unique and welcomed (implicit or explicit) promise. Accordingly, consumers create expectations about the brand during purchase, which are expected to be delivered consistently with the brand promise (Dall’Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000). As a result, any disruption in the realisation of the brand’s functional and emotional benefits to a consumer often results in dissatisfaction and negative disconfirmation of brand expectations and experiences. Such experiences, according to Zarantonello *et al.* (2016), could even trigger hatred for the brand. The eventual consequence is that the consumer may avoid the brand (or its extensions) in future endeavours (Thompson *et al.*, 2006) and treat the brand as a liability (Lee *et al.*, 2009b).

Advertising-related avoidance

A more recent type of brand avoidance, identified by Knittel *et al.* (2016), emanates from advertising. Although this mechanism is complex in nature, the authors describe this form of avoidance as encompassing a state in which the contents of an ad (e.g. theme, music, endorser, images) undesirably affect consumers to the extent of subsequently avoiding the brand. Generally, advertising messages and storylines are effected via several executional frameworks (e.g. fantasies, animations, demonstrations, testimonials, slice-of-life) to trigger brand patronage. However, the content of an advertisement could elicit negative impacts and feelings, resulting in the formation of negative brand reactions. For example, consumers may form negative attitudes towards a brand based on their dislike for an endorser or celebrity (Louie *et al.*, 2001; Spry *et al.*, 2011), level of sensitivity and interpretations (Sabri and Obermiller, 2012), irritations produced by the ad (Knittel *et al.*, 2016) or the background music of the ad (Lantos and Craton, 2012).

Essentially, advertising, although aimed at arousing positive emotions and results for consumers, could have unintended effects on brands if its meaning is misconstrued, causing the brands to be avoided by consumers (Dolliver, 2010).

Methodology

Phase 1: item generation and questionnaire administration

Our research generated an initial pool of 34 items from the literature review and through explorative interviews to help us better understand the possible factors leading to brand avoidance (Bruhn *et al.*, 2008). In the explorative interview phase, 30 MBA students were asked to describe, in an open-ended format, the factors that could make them avoid brands. The interviews were then recorded, analysed and converted into items. The literature review (Lee *et al.*, 2009b; Knittel *et al.*, 2016; Hegner *et al.*, 2017) helped identify and categorise the items into five dimensions relevant to brand avoidance. These five dimensions are moral, identity, deficit-value, experiential and advertising-related avoidance. The researchers then developed the questions based on the categorisations and structured them into the respective dimensions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Next, following the approach of Yi and Gong (2013) on scale development and validation, 11 marketing faculty members and PhD students in their final year in a business school were asked to review and evaluate the 34 generated items. Such an approach has long been used in management research for checking face and content validity (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Bearden *et al.*, 1993). The rationale behind this choice in our specific analysis context is that faculty members and PhD students – although naïve to the overall purpose of the present study – should be expert judges of the relevance of items, clarity of wording and whether the items represent the topic of interest (Foroudi *et al.*, 2014).

Before evaluating the 34 scale generated items, all 11 participants read the definitions of the dimensions of brand avoidance identified in the literature, with detailed explanations and examples. After this, seven of them were asked to indicate if an item was “applicable” or “non-applicable” to an assigned dimension. Subsequently, we retained the items within the same category that were deemed applicable by at least six participants (Yi and Gong, 2013). Next, the remaining four marketing faculty members and PhD students were asked to indicate how well each of the 34 items reflected the dimensions they were assigned to, using the following scale: 1 = clearly representative, 2 = somewhat representative and 3 = not at all representative. Based on the five mechanisms, we retained only the items evaluated by three participants as clearly representative and a fourth one as somewhat representative (Yi and Gong, 2013). This helped in eliminating 11 items that were ambiguous and otherwise redundant, leaving 23 measuring items (see Table I).

We then administered the questionnaire to students from two business universities in Ghana and Nigeria. An initial set was created with Google Forms, which enabled us to generate a link that was forwarded via email. Before administration, introduction emails had been sent to the students, requesting their participation in the survey, and 607 of them agreed. Additionally, we targeted consumers at shopping malls with

printed versions of the instrument, using the intercept approach (Bush and Hair, 1985) to supplement our data. In both the online and offline situations, no specific time frame was imposed on respondents and, for the latter, the respondents were not influenced by the presence of the interviewers, thus allowing freedom of expression.

After two months, 420 responses were collected from the electronic version of the questionnaire, and the mall intercepts resulted in 203 responses. Thus, in total, we obtained 623 responses to the survey. The preamble to the questions in the questionnaire required the respondents to consider any brand they avoided (or had avoided) and indicate the extent to which the scale item statements reflected their reasons for the avoidance. After dropping 48 responses owing to various data incongruences, 575 valid responses were used for the analyses. The final sample consisted of 323 males and 252 females, the majority of which were between the ages of 19 and 35 years (approximately, 81.9 per cent).

Construct measurement

Construct measurement is a delicate issue in research, and a critical question that researchers contend with is whether a construct should be formative or reflective (Ranjan and Read, 2016). In highlighting the issues of measurement model misspecification, scholars suggest that the empirical findings reported in the literature in the event of construct misspecifications could be misleading (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2005). This misspecification of constructs as either formative or reflective increases the potential for both Type I (a false positive by declaring a path significant when it is non-significant) and Type II errors (a false negative by declaring a path non-significant when it is really significant) in the conclusions of the structural model (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, correctly specifying the measurement model is essential for theory development.

According to DeVellis (1991), formative and reflective items differ in terms of their conceptual viewpoints. Specifically, reflective indicators are often used for unidimensional measures in accordance with traditional measurement theory. As such, questionnaire items are indicators of the measured construct, are “caused by” the construct and overlap in meaning so that measures are expected to be correlated and possess internal consistency reliability (Baxter, 2009). However, formative scales (often called “indices” and being distinct from reflective scales) are suitable in circumstances where the indicators are independent “causes” of the construct being measured (thus, causality is from the measurement item to the construct) with little correlation between measures (internal consistency is not implied). Moreover, all items need to be present to adequately specify the measured construct (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003).

Our formative arguments are supported by the criteria established by Jarvis *et al.* (2003) in determining whether to use reflective or formative measures. The authors recommend the following arguments for assessment:

- Formative measures are the cause, and not a manifestation, of the construct, unlike reflective measures.
- Formative measures are non-interchangeable, but reflective measures should be.

Table I Measurement items

Item measures (code)	t statistics	p values
<i>Advertising-related avoidance</i>		
The content of the brand's advertisement was unpleasant (AV1)	12.84	0.00
I do not like the celebrity(ies) used in the brand's advertisements (AV2)	4.11	0.00
The music used in the brand's advertisements is not satisfactory (AV3)	2.28	0.02
I am unable to deduce any meaning from the brand's adverts (AV4)	4.03	0.00
<i>Deficit-value avoidance</i>		
The quality of the brand is low as compared to its cost (DV1)	5.11	0.00
The brand is not familiar (DV2)	6.28	0.00
The packaging of the brand lacks relevant details (insufficient aesthetics) (DV3)	6.09	0.00
The brand is deficient in terms of the value linked with it (DV4)	4.35	0.00
<i>Experience avoidance</i>		
Poor performance of the brand (EA1)	2.35	0.02
Inconvenience (hassle) associated in acquiring brand (EA2)	6.14	0.00
Negative/unpleasant store environment where the brand is sold (EA3)	10.68	0.00
The brand failed to meet its promised value (EA5)	3.17	0.00
Expectations of the brand were not met during my experience (EA6)	2.61	0.01
<i>Identity avoidance</i>		
Using the brand does not make me feel special (everyone uses it) (IA1)	1.68	0.09
The brand does not match with my personality (IA2)	3.12	0.00
The brand has a connection with a negative reference group (IA3)	8.29	0.00
The authenticity of the brand cannot be identified (IA4)	10.59	0.00
The brand is too common on the market (IA5)	4.08	0.00
<i>Moral avoidance</i>		
My personal beliefs are contradictory to that of the brand (MA1)	3.97	0.00
I do not have the freedom to choose other competing brands in that category (MA2)	5.41	0.00
The brand is not socially responsible (packaging and production process) (MA3)	8.48	0.00
The country of origin of the brand is not preferred to me (MA4)	9.13	0.00
The brand is associated with an opposing political ideology (MA5)	5.10	0.00

- Formative measures are not necessarily co-varying with the construct, but co-variation is a necessary condition for reflective indicators.
- Each measure captures a unique aspect of the construct for formative measures, while reflective measures depict the same underlying construct and can, therefore, be interchanged.

Based on the recommended criteria, our brand avoidance dimensions satisfy the rules for formative indicators. Additionally, all the measuring items that make up the construct dimensions satisfy the criteria for formative indicators. Therefore, we identify brand avoidance as a second-order formative construct, composed of first-order formative dimensions (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003).

Phase 2: index construction

Given that formative measures capture unique aspects of the construct and require no necessary co-variation, we used partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse the data. PLS-SEM is well suited to handle highly complex predictive models with formative constructs (Jöreskog and Wold, 1982), as is the case in our model. Compared to covariance-based structural equation modelling, PLS-SEM is suitable when analysing predictive research models that are in the stage of theory development (Gimbert *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, PLS focusses on the model's ability to predict rather than explain

the variability of the dependent variable. Further, PLS-SEM analysis can be designed as a hierarchical component model that includes observable lower-order components (LOCs) and unobservable higher-order components (HOCs) to reduce model complexity and make it more theoretically parsimonious (Lohmöller, 1989).

Consequently, PLS-SEM was appropriately used in treating brand avoidance as an HOC, with its LOCs being moral, identity, deficit-value, experiential and advertising-related avoidance. The hierarchical component model is advantageous for reducing bias stemming from collinearity and eliminating potential discriminant validity problems (Hair *et al.*, 2013). According to Hair *et al.* (2014), PLS-SEM path modelling analyses and interpretations involve a multi-stage process with three key steps:

- 1 model specification;
- 2 outer model evaluation; and
- 3 inner model evaluation.

Thus, the first step was to create a path model that connects variables and constructs based on the arguments made in the literature review.

Steps 1 and 2: model specification and outer model evaluation

Some studies (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 2008) argue that the applicability of statistical processes is restricted, as the choice of

formative indicators determines the conceptual meaning of a construct. Rossiter (2002) rejects any validity assessment for formative measures, arguing that “all that is needed is a set of distinct components as decided by expert judgment” (p. 315). Other researchers (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000) disagree with this argument by stressing that “if measures are specified as formative, their validity should still be established. It is bad practice to [...] claim that one’s measures are formative, and do nothing more” (p. 171). Although “there is no overall fit index in PLS path modeling” (Ranjan and Read, 2016, p. 302), scholars propose that, owing to the unavailability of convergent and discriminant validities (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2006), the primary statistic for assessing formative indicators is their weight, and collinearity diagnostics is used for evaluating the quality of formative measures (Hair et al., 2012). Consequently, the quality of formative outer measurement models for first-order factors was assessed to determine construct validity and reliability of the measurement items using outer model weights and multicollinearity.

After assessing the formative outer weights, we identified that one of the items – “Using the brand does not make me feel special (everyone uses it)” – was not significant ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, we conducted further analysis to assess whether to drop this item. This is because with formative constructs, “[o]mitting an indicator is omitting a part of the construct” (Bollen and Lennox, 1991, p. 308), which is equivalent to restricting the domain of the construct (MacKenzie et al., 2005). As a result, the elimination of formative items from the item pool has to be theoretically justified rather than based on statistical properties (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer, 2001). So as not to eliminate valid measures erroneously, Hair et al. (2013), as well as Cenfetelli and Bassellier (2009), suggest a rule for maintaining formative indicators that are insignificant. That is, formative indicators with insignificant weights can be kept if their loadings are meritoriously high. Table II indicates that all items have factor loadings above the acceptable 0.5 value (Hulland, 1999).

Furthermore, we checked for multicollinearity among the indicators using the variance inflation factor (VIF), as its presence could result in an insignificant model (Cenfetelli and Bassellier, 2009). According to Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2006), VIF values below 3.3 are an indication of the absence of multicollinearity. The VIF values for the brand avoidance dimensions were between 1.481 and 2.515. Hence, multicollinearity was not an issue in our formative construct model. Additionally, in considering population heterogeneity, because of our data sources, we followed the stepwise procedure of Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) to ensure that country (Ghana and Nigeria) and collection approach (online vs mall-intercept) differences did not bias our results. Consequently, full scalar invariance [$\Delta\chi^2(14) = 0.129$; $\rho > 0.50$] and full metric invariance [$\Delta\chi^2(52) = 0.071$; $\rho > 0.50$] confirmed the approach and country differences do not present any form of bias for our results. The results shown in Table II indicate acceptable outer model weights.

Step 3: inner model evaluation and nomological estimations

We applied the same procedure used in examining the formative outer measurement models for first-order factors to evaluate the second-order factor. As a result, the significance

values of the outer model weights and multicollinearity were assessed using the latent variable scores of the items of the second-order factor. The analyses revealed that all weights were significant and there were no issues with multicollinearity (Table III and Figure 1). Furthermore, the quality of the inner model was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, effect sizes (f^2) and cross-validated redundancy (Q^2) as in past studies on formative measures (Hair et al., 2012; Ranjan and Read, 2016; Taheri et al., 2016). We used the Stone–Geisser test criterion Q^2 , which represents the blindfolding procedure in SmartPLS (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974).

The rule of thumb is that R^2 values should be substantial (0.67), moderate (0.33) or weak (0.19), and a $Q^2 > 0$ indicates the predictive relevance of the model (Chin, 2010; Hair et al., 2014). For Q^2 , there could be a weak effect ($0.02 \leq Q^2 < 0.15$), moderate effect ($0.15 \leq Q^2 < 0.35$) or strong effect ($Q^2 \geq 0.35$). According to Cohen’s (1988) guidelines, f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15 and 0.35 represent small, medium and large effect sizes, respectively. Based on the above criteria, we obtained an R^2 value of 0.907 and a Q^2 value of 0.885 from the mechanism of the brand avoidance index. Moreover, the f^2 values were 0.260, 0.251, 0.424, 0.441 and 0.322 for advertising-related, deficit-value, experience, identity and moral avoidance, respectively. Using 5,000 bootstrap resamples, we found that advertising-related avoidance ($\gamma = 0.277$; $\rho < 0.001$), deficit-value avoidance ($\gamma = 0.214$; $\rho < 0.001$), experience avoidance ($\gamma = 0.250$; $\rho < 0.001$), identity avoidance ($\gamma = 0.263$; $\rho < 0.001$) and moral avoidance ($\gamma = 0.265$; $\rho < 0.001$) exhibited significant formative path coefficients. These results confirmed the formative index structure of the brand avoidance construct.

For nomological estimations and further external validity, Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer (2001) suggest linking the index construct to the reflective constructs with which they may typically be associated. Consequently, we linked the index of brand avoidance with the “non-patronage” intention, which was adapted from a previously developed and tested scale item by Fullerton (2005). Using Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) approach, Cronbach’s alpha (α) was 0.874. Moreover, the composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were within the acceptable ranges of 0.7 and 0.5 respectively, with factor loadings ranging between 0.804 and 0.878 for the items measuring the reflective construct (Table IV). Further tests revealed that the Stone–Geisser criterion returned a Q^2 value of 0.240 (moderate) for brand avoidance on non-patronage intention with a Cohen’s f^2 value of 0.581 (large effect size) and an R^2 of 0.367 (moderate). The regressed path coefficient results also showed a positive relationship between the brand avoidance construct on the “non-patronage” intention ($\beta = 0.98$; $\rho < 0.001$, t -value = 8.204). This offers the basic explanation that consumers will most likely not patronise brands they avoid.

Discussions and conclusions

Academic and practitioner interests on negative brand relationships have spawned in the past decade. However, the highlights in the topic area include an equivocal understanding of conceptual boundaries and the empirical constituents of the various facets of negative brand phenomena (Park et al., 2013).

Table II Individual item loadings and VIFs

Items	Advertising-related	Deficit-value	Experience	Identity	Moral	VIF
AV1	0.911					2.111
AV2	0.686					1.835
AV3	0.725					1.968
AV4	0.773					1.899
DVA1		0.761				1.991
DVA2		0.779				1.796
DVA3		0.863				2.164
DVA4		0.772				2.112
EA1			0.850			1.478
EA2			0.607			1.265
EA3			0.809			1.560
EA4			0.727			2.513
EA5			0.637			2.382
IA1				0.530		1.482
IA2				0.625		1.607
IA3				0.788		1.897
IA4				0.806		1.662
IA5				0.543		1.454
MA1					0.612	1.625
MA2					0.674	1.429
MA3					0.789	1.607
MA4					0.800	1.791
MA5					0.657	1.672

Table III Second-order variable assessments

Items	t statistics	p values	VIF
Advertising-related avoidance	4.644	0.000	2.203
Deficit-value avoidance	13.021	0.000	2.382
Experience avoidance	10.616	0.000	1.739
Identity avoidance	12.731	0.000	2.108
Moral avoidance	4.076	0.000	2.505

Our study investigated the conceptual and theoretical aspects of brand avoidance and its mechanism. Previous literature on the subject (Lee *et al.*, 2009b; Knittel *et al.*, 2016) focussed on conceptual explorations, with limited studies on scale development. As a result, extant studies in the area have not pragmatically provided an integrated, useable measurement index for empirically assessing the concept. We attempted filling this gap by generating and testing, based on existing conceptualisations, a comprehensive second-order brand avoidance scale, composed of five first-order variables and 23 measuring items. Guided by the literature and using a step-by-step approach, we identified and established a brand avoidance scale using a formative measurement procedure. Our final construct is a composite of indicators and items that are rigorously validated via the recommended processes.

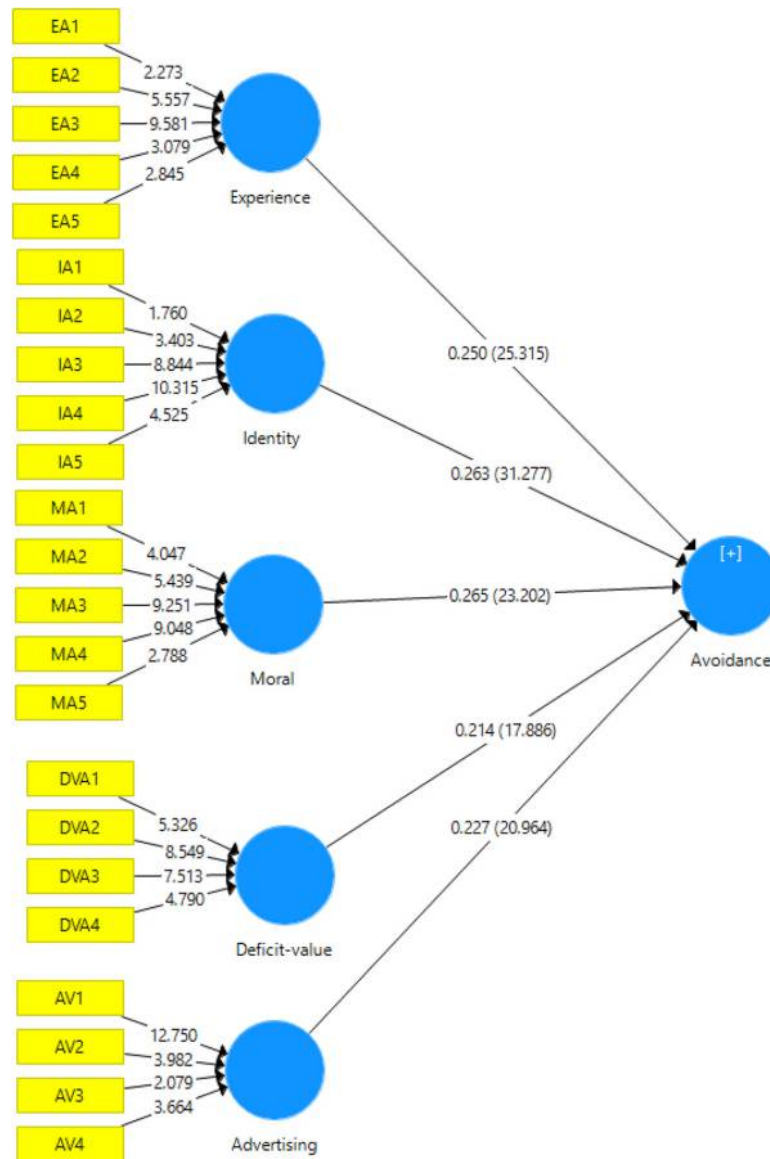
Furthermore, our empirical investigation (i.e. a test of the mechanisms on non-purchase intention) reveals that each of the mechanisms, as independent variables, exhibited statistical relationships with the dependent variable. Such a finding provides palpable congruence with past exploratory and unidimensional studies (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Thompson *et al.*, 2006; Spry *et al.*, 2011; Rindell *et al.*, 2014;

Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016) that have theorised possible relationships for each of the mechanisms on anti-consumption outcomes. In effect, the undesirable contents of ads, undelivered brand promise emanating from unmet expectations, unfair cost-to-benefit trade-offs or brand promises that are socially or politically opposing consumers' self-images and belief sets trigger negative implications for consumer-brand relationships. Furthermore, at a composite level, these mechanisms also cumulatively exhibit negative consequences for brands. This ongoing discussion offers contributions and warrants implications for both academic and practitioner communities.

Contributions

The study progresses the current understanding of negative brand phenomena in several ways: consolidation of mechanisms, use of formative approach in the scale development, nomological validation test and different empirical setting. First, we respond to the calls for further investigations into this area by identifying, from a quantitative approach, the taxonomical dimensions/mechanisms underlying brand avoidance. These mechanisms have been typically studied in isolation in existing studies and are yet to be empirically tested in a consolidated manner, primarily owing to the absence of a comprehensively established brand avoidance scale. Our study thus adds to the literature an initial attempt to not only provide scale measures but also empirically examine, in an amalgamated manner, the avoidance mechanisms that have only been qualitatively conceptualised with limited, fragmented empirical tests.

Second, scholars argue that applying wrongly specified measures results in problems of estimation that affect the inferences in hypotheses testing and, subsequently, lead to

Figure 1 Examination of the proposed formative measure**Table IV** Relative measure, reliability and validity

Items	Loading
<i>Non-patronage intention</i> ($\alpha = 0.874$; $CR = 0.913$; $AVE = 0.725$)	
I will not purchase this brand	0.865
This brand is not my choice in their product category	0.878
I will not patronise this brand in the near future	0.857
I will not choose this brand over others	0.804

mistakes in management decisions (MacCallum and Browne, 1993). Our proposed brand avoidance index, although seemingly simple, was generated in a robust and parsimonious manner. For most reflective measures, their arbitrarily developed nature often results in decreased accuracy, as well as constrained comparability (Rossiter, 2002). As such, by adopting a formative approach towards the development of a

brand avoidance index, such lapses have been significantly curtailed. We present a multidimensional construct, with sub-mechanisms that can be examined on several negative brand outcomes in varied settings, as well as being empirically testable at disaggregated levels in future studies.

Third, by nomological validation, we quantitatively test our brand avoidance index on “non-purchase” intention and find a positive relationship. To the best of our knowledge, such an investigation on negative brand relationships is almost inexistent in the literature. The cross-validation of our brand avoidance index confirms the usability of our model in other studies. Additionally, we present our empirical test using data collected within two developing economies in sub-Saharan Africa. Sheth (2011) stresses that such settings present unique idiosyncrasies for the marketing literature, because of their heterogeneous consumer and market characteristics, which

differ radically from those in traditionally industrialised, capitalist societies in Western and European contexts.

Finally, our research brings together extant conceptualisations and offers a new scale for examining brand avoidance. We have thus provided the academic community with a framework to develop nuanced theorisations for further empirical efforts, as to create a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying brand avoidance and other negative brand relationships. Ultimately, we enrich the current theoretical literature strands on anti-consumption and consumer attachments with additional perspectives from brand avoidance.

Managerial implications

In our attempt to develop and establish a measurable brand avoidance scale, we have offered a practical tool to help brand managers and organisations ascertain the mechanisms underlying situations where their brands have faced possible avoidance stints from consumers. The provided scale is also concrete and relevant for carrying out industrial investigations to implement future measures for eschewing negative brand relationships. Therefore, by addressing the exigencies of such negative brand phenomena, organisations and brand owners will be better able to understand and promptly address the triggers of negative brand outcomes. Consequently, our study complements the strategic approaches undertaken by firms to increase the positive corollaries of their brands.

From our parameter estimates of explanatory power (based on coefficients) in terms of brand avoidance, advertising-related and moral avoidance were the highest dimensions, while the least was deficit-value. As such, brand managers assessing the performance of their brands in a similar vein may consider, to relative extents, the implications of sub-mechanisms when planning and executing brand campaigns. Given that consumers are most likely to share their negative personal experiences about brands than positive ones (Baumeister *et al.*, 2001), it is imperative that firms minimise the triggers of these brand avoidance mechanisms as best as possible. For example, brand managers need to carefully ensure that the contents of ads (including themes, endorsers, props and music) do not elicit any negative connotations to contextual audiences. Additionally, brands should not be seen in any way to be associated with entities that are politically or socially detested. Moreover, brand promises (both performance and value) should be impartially worth consumers' cost-benefit trade-offs, as well as offer positioning points that enhance consumers' self-images.

Practically, the five avoidance mechanisms may offer different implications for different brands within different industries. For example, brands operating within the hospitality (accommodation, catering, etc.) and tourism (destinations, events, creatives, religious, etc.) industries, as well as those that offer other (in)tangible customer brand experiences may prioritise the triggers of experience avoidance. Further, for businesses operating in the fashion industry, identity avoidance may be a crucial area of consideration, as issues relating to authenticity and uniqueness and emphasis on personality and reference groups (which enforce the sense of identification) underlie this mechanism. Moreover, for brands within industries where ethical and moral considerations underpin their core brand images (e.g. The Body Shop, TOMS,

Everlane, Dr Bronner's, Wild Oats Marketplace), moral avoidance dimensions may be a vital concern to management. For the deficit-value and advertising-related avoidance mechanisms, the nuances of the implications may cut across all retail brands, irrespective of the industry.

Implications for future research and limitations

Based on the limited nature of the literature, it becomes an opportune call for scholarly investigations to:

- clearly identify and measure brand avoidance;
- fully validate a comprehensive brand avoidance construct; and
- explore the hierarchical dimensionality of brand avoidance.

Similar to other domains in the field of marketing (e.g. service quality and market orientation), the availability of a viable measurement instrument often gives rise to coherent theoretical and empirical research activities and debates. Therefore, the contributions of scale development studies to the respective research streams continue to be significantly appreciated in academic communities. Similarly, our study opens new theoretical and empirical avenues for further studies on brand avoidance. Particularly, future studies may test the scale on more than one construct, as well as compare our scale for different countries, cultures and contexts. Studies that intend to examine our brand avoidance scale in specific product and service industries could also provide a better understanding of the literature on consumer-brand relationships.

Notwithstanding our contributions, the study has some limitations to be addressed by future research. Given that our research was carried out within a specific region, we do not assume that the data analysed from the two countries reflect the views of the general, worldwide consumer audience. We also recognise the testing of our scale on only one outcome (non-purchase intention) as a limitation to be taken into consideration by future research. Moreover, our scales only explain brand avoidance mechanisms (devoid of other negative consumer-brand relationships such as brand hate/dislike and boycotts) and should be strictly treated in avoidance situations. It will also be enlightening to have validations of possible additional mechanisms that may have been missed out in our research, as well as of multiple outcomes (e.g. negative WOM). This will help delineate the nomological validity of the scale and progress the debate in the consumer-brand relationship literature with more parsimonious measurements for brand-marketing research.

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