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BRANDS WE LOVE TO HATE: AN EXPLORATION OF BRAND AVOIDANCE.

Michael Shyue Wai Lee

ABSTRACT

Brands, and the process of branding, are of considerable importance in both marketing academia and practice. Although most research has focussed on the positive attitudes and behaviours that consumers have toward brands, there is a growing interest in anti-consumption. This thesis contributes to anti-consumption research by exploring the phenomenon of brand avoidance.

Earlier studies investigating the avoidance of brands have been one-dimensional, failing to account for the wide range of reasons underlying brand avoidance. Therefore, this thesis addresses the limitations of existing models by providing an integrative and comprehensive approach to understanding brand avoidance.

As an anti-consumption phenomenon, brand avoidance concerns the negative interaction between consumers, as social actors, and brands, as meaningful objects, within a social and historical context. Therefore, this thesis adopts an interpretive approach, a social constructionist epistemology, and historical realist ontology. Since research in the immediate area of brand avoidance is limited, this thesis employs a grounded theory methodology to analyse, code, and generate theory from the qualitative data gathered through 23 in-depth interviews.

Four main types of brand avoidance (experiential, identity, deficit-value, and moral) and the circumstances in which brand avoidance may be restricted or alleviated (avoidance antidotes) emerge from the data. Existing literatures are used to further inform these findings and an original negative brand promises framework is developed to help increase understanding of the brand avoidance phenomenon. The main components of this research are then integrated into an emergent theoretical model of brand avoidance. This model offers a synopsis of how the various brand avoidance constructs may relate to one another and to other pertinent branding concepts within a consumption system. Combined, the findings of this thesis provide a comprehensive appreciation of why consumers avoid certain brands in addition to potential insights that may be used in the management of brand avoidance. Overall, this thesis contributes knowledge to the growing field of anti-consumption research by providing an innovative overview and an integrative understanding of an under-explored domain, brand avoidance.
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