

“It’s not you, it’s me”: When brands and consumers don’t match



As an intrinsic strategic element of organisational identification and differentiation, branding has allowed marketers to establish symbolic meaning to product and service offerings within the minds of the consumer. The causality of anti-consumption has primarily been linked to the deliberate rejection of brands by the end consumer based on inferred discrepancies or ‘disassociations’ between the individual self-concept and various intangible references. Consumers therefore choose to define themselves by excluding a brand from their self-concept.

A research study was conducted by Tiaan Naude, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), to investigate the reverse notion of consumer self-identification by exploring the construct of identity avoidance beyond routine consumption to a more service oriented model by means of a quantitative data collection methodology. An electronic self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from 241 respondents that currently make use of the services of a South African cell phone network provider.

This research provides a unique theoretical contribution to the social identity theory by advancing current understanding that demonstrates the manners in which consumers hold firm notions to withhold or avoid consumption in the pursuit of self-consistency.

Results indicate that consumers inherently evaluate service brands based on the level of identification with the brand's image as well as the lack of authenticity associated with the brand, both of which are central to the prediction of identity avoidance. Negative reference groups, de-individualisation and family influence have not been found to significantly predict aversion behaviour which contradicts previous studies. The findings finally illustrate that cell phone consumers will reject service brands when perceiving a brand promise to be symbolically unappealing.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in Marketing Management in 2016 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Tiaan Naude under the supervision of Prof [P.G Mostert](#).