
Anti-consumption of Brands which Leads to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This paper elucidates detailed information on different forms of anti-consumption. People who are financially well to do (even others) and who are successful in their career with convictions they avoid some brands of purchasing, why do they do? It explores the thoughtful avoidance of brands by well-educated and wealthy people, myriads of anti-consumption practices that is shaped by their self-concepts, families, and occupations. This paper explains few types of anti-consumption that govern consumer's intention to avoid brands: like brand avoidance: experiential, identity, moral brand avoidance, sustainable consumption and societal issues like environmental concern. Experiential brand avoidance occurs because of negative first-hand consumption experiences that lead to unfulfilled expectations. Moral avoidance arises when the consumer's ideological beliefs clash with the negative impact of a brand on society. Sustainable consumption and societal issues are interconnected in many ways, first through the acquisition and use of green products, second of sustainable behaviour; it would make sense that consumers understand that in a world which we over consume that perhaps leads to rejecting and reducing and reusing are the most sensible responses. I have also enunciated ethical issues which are increasingly considered by consumers and may influence their brand choice and brand relationships, with potentially significant managerial implications. Finally, the purpose of anti-consumption of consumers is able to introspect their own rational attitudes and intention in having a better self-consciousness and self-actualization/realisation in life. I used semi-structured interviews at random a few of them, which were recorded, transcribed, analysed and narrated.

Keywords: *anti-consumption, brand avoidance, sustainable consumption*

Anti-consumption can be traced back at least as far as the fourteenth century and have contributed to some spectacular successes for relatively powerless groups. In the United States, boycotts were the key to unionization and the 1955 Montgomery bus boycott marks the beginning of the modern civil rights movement (Friedman 1999). Elsewhere, examples include Gandhi's boycotts of British salt and cloth before Indian independence and the British boycott of Barclays Bank before its withdrawal from apartheid South Africa (Smith 1990). In the 1990s, the business press agreed that boycotts were often successful and were occurring more frequently (e.g., The Economist 1990). Recent prominent consumer boycotts include the European boycott of Shell because of its plan to sink the Brent Spar oil platform at sea and the multi country boycott of Nike over alleged sweatshop conditions at Asian suppliers. As these examples suggest, boycotts today are more typically focused on corporate practices rather than on broader sociopolitical goals such as civil rights. This shift in boycott focus reflects both the increased power of the modern transnational corporation and, paradoxically, the heightened vulnerability of corporate reputation and brand image, and it is consistent with recent findings that a firm's CSR record affects consumer perceptions of the firm's brands and products.

The anti-consumption attitude emerged among the consumers from their own experiences they felt that they should reduce the consumption for their own set of reasons. Reasons are some feel it is because of the widening gap between the rich and the poor, whereas others think it is due to their spiritual reasons or personal convictions for the betterment of humanity. The rest may have the intention to reduce consumption so as to safeguard the environment they are living in such as turning off lights and not driving a car where

possible (environment concern about the well-being of the natural environment)¹, to ones that can be described as more involved and extreme such as attempting not to use fresh water to flush toilets or not using purchased pesticides but instead making their own mixtures. While others have aversion towards brand because they might have been betrayed of their brand expectations by the companies thereby creating an aversion which creates a negative mindset for reducing brand consumption. Every Individual will crave for newer and better products. We all know that “A person has endless desires which may vary in the form and type to every individual”. Mass productions, fake advertisements, income inequality, varying income classes, individual mindsets and the present corporate structures create a situation of over consumption.

The term **Brand Avoidance**² was developed by Olivia et al. (1992) in their paper: *A Catastrophe Model for Developing Service Satisfaction Strategies*. In their understanding it was a synonym for switching from one brand to another. Later on, Michael S. W. Lee (2007) explored this topic further in his doctoral dissertation “Brands we love to hate: An Exploration of Brand Avoidance.” He was investigating what reasons can cause Brand avoidance and came up with the four topics of Experiential, Identity, Deficit-Value and Moral Avoidance. This classification and the research behind it build a good base to differentiate the different causes that lead to a brand avoidance.

There was also sufficient discussion and the questions were raised on sustainability. The major issue is of sustainable consumption (Heiskanen and Pantzar, 1997). Sustainable Consumption is not a very familiar concept to understand and to define this notion. It is still vague in its official definition: ‘sustainable consumption is the use of goods and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardies the needs of future generations’. In addition to rejecting particular products, brands or consumption activities, the analysis shows that anti-consumption for sustainability incorporates practices of reducing.

There may also be a spiritual or ethical component to the simplifiers’ anti-consumption beliefs; they believe that it is morally abhorrent to focus so much energy on self-serving consumption activities (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). According to Shaw and Newholm (2002), ‘ethical consumers are surrounded by important decisions of whether to consume with sensitivity through the selection of more ethical alternatives or whether to reduce levels of consumption to a more sustainable level through voluntary simplicity’.

As stated, ethical consumption generally focuses on three main concerns: the well-being of humans, animals and the environment. Some researchers (e.g. Chatzidakis and Lee, 2013) treat ethical concerns as separate from environmental ones. However, we share (Low and Davenport's (2007) view that environmental concerns are ethical concerns and that the former are thus embedded in the latter, broader phenomenon. This also means that "environmental consumption" is rooted in the overarching idea of "ethical consumption".

Therefore the question is what motivates the anti-consumption of brands? A number of studies suggest various reasons for anti-consumption of certain brands or also called brand avoidance. Study of dissatisfaction (Oliva et al. 1992) offer the concept of brand avoidance as the anti-thesis of brand loyalty, and use the term brand avoidance interchangeably with brand switching. Definitely the concept of brand switching and brand

¹ Environmental concerns about the well-being of the natural environment may, for example, result in consumers avoiding cars with internal combustion engines (and preferring electric or hybrid cars, bicycles or public transport), furniture made of wood from tropical trees (e.g. from the Amazon), products that have been transported over a long distance (preferring, instead, locally produced ones) or items wrapped in an unnecessary amount of plastic packaging (preferring ones that are not). Consumers who are concerned about social/human well-being will try to avoid products (and the companies that make them) that have, for example, been manufactured using child labour or in ways that otherwise violate human rights or workers' rights. Similarly, concerns about animal well-being may, for example, result in the avoidance of merchandise that consumers perceive to have been manufactured in a way that mistreats animals or that have used animals at any phase in the production process. However, these concerns may also be interrelated ([8] Connolly and Shaw, 2006; [15] Low and Davenport, 2007).

²Other definitions of Brand avoidance by [13] Lee *et al.* (2009a, p. 170) as "the incidents in which consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand". Specific brand avoidance has been classified based on whether it is due to the consumer's societal concerns or personal concerns ([11] Iyer and Muncy, 2009) etc.

avoidance may appear similar, yet we can distinguish it. Brand switching is a broad pattern of behavior that the American Marketing Association defines as the change from one brand to another but in contrast, brand avoidance to be more specific it is a deliberate, willfully chosen action to say no to brands.

Overall, we find that anti-consumption is an essential part of those consumers who are trying to live a more sustainable life and in particular, the extraordinary acts of rejecting, reducing and reusing consumption are key elements to sustainable consumption, which leads to better preservation of this ecological system.

The anti-consumption or the resistance towards the marketing system is very much seen both in past and present phenomena, especially in the 18th century Colonialists (Witkowski, 1989) and the 1960's American Cultural Revolution (Holt, 2002), and the “buy nothing day” movement. This could be deliberate from the part of the consumers’ resistance towards ecological crisis and anti-globalization movements (Holt, 2002.)

Inner motives for Anti-Consumption

Main Categories	Themes	Sub-themes
Experiential avoidance: Unmet expectations³	Negative product/service experience	Poor performance Hassle/inconvenience Store environment
Identity avoidance: symbolic incongruence⁴	Undesired self	Negative reference groups Inauthenticity; De-individuation
Moral avoidance: Ideological incompatibility⁵	Consumer cynicism Country of origin effects	Corporate irresponsibility/ power imbalance Financial patriotism/ preserving diversity
Fatigue anti-consumption	stress from excessive complexity and information	Pursues simpler consumption due to stress from excessive complexity and information
Trauma anti-consumption	Negative product/service experience	Refuses consumption of specific products or brands because of negative experience or prejudice
Enlightenment anti-consumption	Sustainable consumption	Reduces consumption entirely for improvement of society and the market
Activist anti-consumption		Protests against harm from particular products or unethical corporate behavior of a company

Global impact consumers express their pressing concerns in the form of anti-consumption are the ecological crisis and inequality that exists in unequal distribution of wealth. In modern consumption of current times people are strongly convinced that materialistic consumption causing severe damage to the earth's ecosystem or that over-consumption by the wealthier nations or classes is contributing to poverty problems in lesser developed nations or the poorer classes of society. Dobscha (1998) performed a two-year study of anti-

³ Bitner, 1992; Day and Bodur, 1978; Folkes, 1984; Kelley, Hoffman, and Davis,1993; Oliver, 1980; Swan and Combs, 1976.

⁴ Englis and Soloman, 1995; Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Hogg and Banister, 2001; Sirgy, 1982.

⁵ According to Hodge and Kress (1993, p. 6), ideology is “a systematic body of ideas, organized from a particular point of view.” More specifically, the term ideology is used to refer to political and socio-economic sets of beliefs. Consumption and marketing, for example, may be understood as part of a broader capitalist ideology based on notions of a free market economy, consumerism and individualism.

consumers who felt consumption promoted “waste and environmental degradation” (1998, p. 91). She found that anti-consumers did not adopt the prevalent view that consumption was a major indicator of a nation's prosperity (Borgmann, 2000). Instead, they argued that it was over-consumption that created many of society's problems. Many of the participants even refused to be called consumers because of the negative connotations the term held for them. Some of them so passionately involved in opposition of materialistic world, they considered themselves as “enemies of global capitalism.” One special event that many socially concerned consumers look forward to each year is the “Buy Nothing Day” which coincides with one of the largest shopping days of the year in the United States, the day after Thanksgiving. The focus of “Buy Nothing Day” is to encourage consumers to consider why they buy and how it affects society and the environment (Carty, 2002).

The above table gives us the picture of participants of this movement avoid or refuse consumption for psychological or social reasons, including personal preference and conviction, rather than out of necessity. Encompassing both individual and group “non-consumption,” i.e. opting out of consumption oneself, and “counter-consumption,” i.e. actively discouraging consumption among others, anti-consumption is no longer a minor stream of niche consumers anymore. Indeed, it is becoming a major trend in the overall market.

According to the above table another reason for anti-consumption is poor performance. Consumers having experienced the failed product brands indicate having a strong negative attitude towards those brand products, and subsequently the intentional action leads to avoidance of, the retail brand and the product brand. Although conventional thought suggests that service recovery and/or warranties may overcome poor performance, the extra hassle involved in a failed consumption experience often compounds experiential avoidance of a brand. Indeed, it is becoming a major trend in the overall market. Consumption fatigue and preference for a simple life first appeared among high-income earners in advanced markets. Now, however, they are spreading to the consumers in emerging markets. This trend is also evident in Korea. Highly-educated, high-income earners are becoming tired of mass-production and excessive marketing, increasingly purchasing only what is needed. As this trend is likely to have a growing effect on markets, companies need to take a careful look at the anti-consumption movement to find new opportunities and consider strategic responses.

Added to the experiential avoidance another reason could be attributed to the unpleasant brand experiences within the brand's store environment. There are various factors that force the consumer to avoid the brand, it could be bad ambience, unhygienic, no proper service at stores etc. A customer goes for a brand with reasonable expectations and when his/her expectations are unmet causes experiential avoidance of both product and service brands. Moreover the added hassle/inconvenience of a failed consumption experience and unpleasant store environment may also compound brand avoidance. The confirmation of approval of a product or service depends upon the consumer. According to the performance of the product or the service, if they meet the consumer's expectations or not accordingly it can either be confirmed or disconfirmed. Confirmation is likely to result in satisfaction and occurs when consumer expectations of the product or service are equal to the experience. Disconfirmation occurs when consumer experiences are either above or below initial expectations and therefore can be positive or negative. Negative disconfirmation occurs when the consumer's experience with the product or service is below his or her expectations and is likely to result in dissatisfaction. Accordingly, it is reasonable to expect that negative disconfirmation may motivate some cases of brand avoidance.

Another major reason for brand avoidance is the inability of the brand to fulfil the individual's symbolic identity requirements. The concepts of undesired self and dis-identification are prevalent throughout the theme of identity avoidance. In addition to consuming desirable brands, a consumer also maintains his or her self-concept by avoiding the brands perceived to be incongruent with their desired or actual self-concept (Englis and Soloman, 1995; Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967; Hogg and Banister, 2001; Sirgy, 1982) Disidentification theory suggests that people may develop their self-concept by dis-identifying with organizations that are perceived to be inconsistent with their own image and values. Specifically, a person may avoid a brand because it represents an undesired self, a negative reference group (Englis and Soloman, 1995; Hogg, 1998; Hogg and Michell, 1997; a lack of authenticity, or the loss of individuality.

The moral avoidance is very deep seated understanding of people to resist the oppressive/dominating forces (anti-hegemony), a societal focus that extends beyond the needs of the individual, and the belief that it is a moral duty to avoid certain brands. For example, some educated and conscious of justice people avoid Nike for its exploitation of nonwestern workers. They have criticized the company for its unacceptable use of the capitalist free market system. Although the free market is based on freedom of choice, no one believes that the workers have been provided with any real opportunity to choose.

I used semi-structured interviews which were recorded, transcribed and analysed based on the ethical concerns expressed by the respondents. I have used in this paper only one or two transcribed and analysed interviews to authenticate my objectives of writing this paper and to substantiate the anti-consumption of consumers in terms of social issues, here there is a narrative of Jai (graduated student).

He expressed his deep concerns on the impact of consumption and sustainable development. We have “one beautiful earth and it is our right and duty to make it livable for generations to come”. Because of “mall culture, consumeristic attitude” we have destroyed the ecological environment. I’m very conscious and I “think twice of what I consume and what I buy”. Anything that is extravagant or I feel the need of not to buy those products that affects the environment, I make all the effort not to consume or to buy. He is very much perturbed by the fact people are “careless without considering the impact of consumption” on our ecological environment. He totally resists of any sort of that is excessive and that creates artificial needs.... And moreover he says most of us are not aware that what we are enticed to consume by these commercial industry isn’t renewable at all, and that's scary. (Jai)

In addition to the idea of living the risks of unpredictable and incalculable dangers, the anti-consumption discourses claim that global consumerism creates social inequalities, destroys cultures, and gradually reduces all values to those of a global hamburger/Coca-Cola society. The “local” consumer is portrayed as massified and serialized, subject to the power and domination of uncontrollable “global” producers. The awareness among the people is revealed through the narrative of Smirti.

Smirti (Teacher): ...for many years I used to print a lot of articles and case studies for my students for learning in my classes. One fine day I realized that all these printing is not environmentally sound. I’m exploiting the natural resources. It was a shocking realization. Immediately I yielded to my consciousness and reduced printing to the minimum by sending the soft copy of materials to students, where they can read from their electronic gadgets.

Quite a few of them said how they part took in some way or the other to reduce the ecological crisis in their mundane activities like usage of water judiciously, doubly cross checking the closing of water tap for leakage of water. Using eco-friendly products and saying no to plastic, going for public transport rather than exotic cars which pollute, buying things from those industries which promote safe environment, reusing products rather than encouraging use and throw culture etc.

We can draw inference from above narratives is that for people who oppose overconsumption and wasteful use of resources is a genuine concern of anti-consumers. Companies need to foster advanced consumption habits, including eco-friendly and pro-social consumption campaigns to address inequality in consumption and environmental issues.

The anti-consumption thinking is substantiated with a question of Sustainability. This is often discussed around issues of sustainable consumption (Heiskanen and Pantzar, 1997). The understanding of ‘sustainable consumption is the use of goods and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations’. This definition is debatable but at the same time it gives in gist the importance of anti-consumption due to issues of sustainable consumption. Many understand sustainable consumption in numerous ways. Some think in terms of green products, others it is a matter of eco-friendly products or consumption of products which are renewable ones, which do not haphazard the environment. All these understandings are significant to sustainability.

The significance development of sustainable development thinking includes rethinking of the social and cultural function of material consumption and affluence (Schumacher, 1974). This alternative view entails

downscaling consumption and reframing the normative framework based on material prosperity and wealth to an ‘anti-consumerist ethic’ (Press and Arnould, 2009). Here consumers are environmental consciousness and impose deliberate moral restraints on consumption choices to uphold the value of sustainable development. Following this perspective consumers are ‘ecological citizens’ who share personal commitments to sustainability and take actions in their daily lives to reduce their impacts on others and on the environment

Conclusion:

Leading a simple and a complete life is much better than creating a social deficiency. We have a system at unrest which creates problem directly or indirectly for everyone. Anti-Consumption can be a solution to have inclusive growth. The Smarter the Consumer, the better is the Marketing Strategies of companies, as eventually Customer is the King in any market and the companies have to do something good to attract these anti-consumers and make them their customers. This trend, thus will have a global impact on the Societal, Environmental, and Economical condition of every nation. The world is now a globally connected village, a small change in any part of the world will create another change in other part of the world. The Media, the technology available must be used for a better cause so as to show how an individual can be a part of these by following Anti Consumption. Awakened for a social cause will make the great population of youngsters and the general public more educated regarding this. To develop a better nation, we need to educate people. Education is the only tool which can make everyone united for any cause and create a lasting impact on the society. Thus, Anti Consumption can be an effective measure to solve social disparity.

Another important aspect need to be considered by the companies is that, to recognize today’s anti-consumerism is not a fad but rather constitutes a genuine change in the managerial environment. Once consumers lose interest in consumption, markets will stagnate, and consumer antipathy towards products and brands can expand. Companies can reach out to these newly minted “anti-consumers” by shifting away from shortsighted and exploitative views. To win these people over, companies should pursue a “less is more” philosophy in their products and services. They need to be careful not to oversell their product value when trying to create sentimental and symbolic attachments through their branding and marketing. In addition, companies should contribute to the qualitative improvement of consumption by setting consumer happiness as the ultimate goal of their marketing, rather than blindly pursuing bigger market share and higher customer satisfaction.

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