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Brand Avoidance: Scale Development and Validation

Ajay Chandel
Mittal School of Business, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India.
E-Mail: ajaysinghchandel2@gmail.com

Rohail Hassan
Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business (OYAGSB), Universiti Utara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
School of Business, VIZJA University, Warsaw, Poland
E-Mail: rohail.hassan@uum.edu.my

Punam Mishra
Institute of Management, JK Lakshmipat University, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.
Email: punammishra@jklu.edu.in

Anurag Pahuja
Mittal School of Business, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India.
Email: anuragpahuja77@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study addresses the asymmetry in existing branding literature, which predominantly focuses on the positive outcomes of favorable consumer-brand relationships. It explores the consequences of negative brand assessments. This study identifies the key antecedents of brand avoidance and develops a validated scale to assess brand health. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, and collects data from millennial respondents using purposive sampling. As a result, we developed a brand avoidance scale and tested it for its reliability and validity. The study identifies five antecedents of brand avoidance: experiential, moral, deficit-value, identity, and oppositional brand-loyalty-based avoidance. The brand avoidance scale is quantitatively tested among millennials regarding their non-buying intention towards smartphones, which nomologically supports a positive relationship. This research contributes to the branding literature by providing a more balanced scale that incorporates both positive and negative outcomes. It is a practical tool for brand managers to assess and address their brand's health, particularly amid growing brand avoidance. The study is confined to millennials and their non-buying intentions towards smartphones. Future research could expand the application of the brand avoidance scale to other demographic groups and product categories. Brand managers may use this brand avoidance scale to evaluate and address the health of their brands, helping them understand and mitigate consumer brand avoidance behavior. This scale may help identify and address the negative perceptions that lead to brand avoidance.

Keywords: Brand avoidance, Experiential brand avoidance, Value deficiency avoidance, Identity avoidance, Moral avoidance, Oppositional brand loyalty, Brand avoidance scale

INTRODUCTION

According to a widely accepted concept in the branding literature, customers' patronage of a brand is driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. These elements can emanate from an array of sources, such as consumer and brand characteristics as well as external stimuli, and ideally result in constructive consumer-brand associations leading to phenomena such as brand love and loyalty (Odoom et al., 2019; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) and fondness and acceptance (Narteh et al., 2012).

While the positive outcomes of congenial consumer-brand relationships, as discussed above, warrant further investigation, the findings from negative brand evaluations still require attention. This lop-sidedness seems evident in the branding literature, as brand managers are keen to understand the real-world outcomes of fostering favorable consumer-brand relationships. However, scholars argue that understanding consumer–brand relationships requires attention to both positive and negative perspectives, as each offers complementary insights into consumer behavior. As a result, phenomena such as brand avoidance, hate, apathy, and rejection (negative consumer-brand relationships) must be highlighted (Wolter et al., 2016). An increasing number of consumers appear to be turning against and avoiding certain cosmetics and food brands because of formulations based on the assumption that some brands conduct animal testing or use animal-tested products (Logical Harmony, 2018).

Similarly, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 50 percent of the U.S. population consumes at least one sugary drink daily, with millennials most likely to do so. These sugary drinks are associated with a variety of health issues, such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and tooth decay. In light of such predicaments, consumers and activists create anti-brand pages/communities on social media, urging people to avoid such brands, thereby fuelling the phenomenon. Recent work also highlights ideological and geopolitical avoidance, in which consumers consciously distance themselves from brands associated with contested political or ethical positions, thereby demonstrating the expanding scope of modern avoidance behaviors (Efendi & Alfansi, 2025).

The existing literature on consumers actively avoiding or rejecting brands has many lacunae. Since a brand is a complex, multifaceted construct (Keller, 1993; Stern, 2006), it is logical to envision brand avoidance as a multi-dimensional construct. However, mainstream work in this domain focuses solely on unidimensional motives for brand avoidance behavior. In addition, the work conducted so far is not only insufficient (Albert & Thomson, 2018) but is inclined towards developing qualitative and exploratory perspectives (Knittel et al., 2016) that fail to elucidate the phenomenon and its determinants using consolidated models (Hegner et al., 2017) and hence lead to inconsistent and inconclusive results and findings (Demirbag-Kaplan et al., 2015; Kucuk, 2007). Although these studies provide valuable insights, the evidence remains fragmented because prior research has not integrated experiential, identity-based, moral, value-related, and oppositional loyalty motives into a unified framework to explain how brand avoidance develops. Despite growing instances of brand avoidance, no credibly recognized, widely verified procedures exist in the branding literature for understanding such negative consumer-brand responses.

Furthermore, according to researchers, there is still potential for empirical research in consumer research to expand our understanding of interactions between consumers and brands (Albert & Thomson, 2018). Following the development of explicit scenarios depicting consumers actively avoiding certain brands, it has become essential to develop a well-defined scale to assess the prevalence of brand avoidance across both academic and practitioner communities. Consequently, this study aims to develop a measurable scale to help brand managers identify the causes of past instances in which their brands were avoided and devise strategies to prevent such situations. Another limitation in existing scholarship is the absence of a validated multi-dimensional measurement scale, as most prior studies rely on exploratory insights or reflective indicators that do not align with the formative nature of brand avoidance.

Adding to the uniqueness of this work, this study has three primary goals. Based on existing conceptualizations, this study contributes to the development of an empirical measure to analyze the otherwise theoretical concept of brand avoidance. Furthermore, this study examines the impact of brand avoidance on consumers' non-buying intentions, a topic that has been previously unexplored in the existing literature. Finally, the study reports findings from a South Asian marketplace perspective that have not received empirical attention in the existing literature on consumer brand management. This asymmetry in understanding of the consumer-brand relationship from the perspective of developing countries needs to be bridged, as consumer behavior in the developing world differs considerably from that in developed countries. Moreover, empirical evidence on brand avoidance among emerging-market millennial segments remains scarce, limiting the generalisability of predominantly Western findings.

Despite this progress, a significant gap remains in the literature. Several recent studies have examined brand avoidance as a downstream behavioral outcome of brand hate (Bryson et al., 2013; Romani et al., 2015; Hegner et al., 2017), demonstrating that moral violations, identity threats, and perceived injustice can escalate into intentional rejection and avoidance. However, these studies primarily treat avoidance as a consequence rather than an independent, multi-dimensional construct. Moreover, the existing scales used in these studies were designed to capture emotional hostility or boycott intentions—not the broader formative drivers of brand avoidance. This reinforces the need for a theoretically anchored and psychometrically validated scale that captures avoidance holistically rather than as a by-product of hate.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although several streams of research have explored negative consumer–brand relationships, the literature remains fragmented in its explanations of the multiple pathways through which brand avoidance develops. Prior work has examined experiential dissatisfaction, identity threats, moral conflicts, and value deficiency as separate antecedents, yet these strands have rarely been integrated into a unified conceptual framework. This lack of synthesis has led to inconsistent operationalization of brand avoidance, making it difficult to compare findings across studies. Recent scholarship continues to expand this space by examining brand avoidance in diverse contexts, including

B2B service settings, greenwashing responses, and sustainable fashion consumption, indicating that the construct's multidimensionality remains highly relevant in contemporary markets (Otoo et al., 2023; Sajid et al., 2024). Therefore, a consolidated review of these antecedents is essential to justify a multi-dimensional formative scale theoretically.

The explicit development of the 'brand avoidance' phenomenon warrants greater attention in mainstream branding literature and should be clearly defined. Only a handful of studies openly cite the emerging concept of 'brand avoidance' (Thomson et al., 2005; Oliva et al., 1992).

Hogg and Michell (1997) coined the term 'anti-constellation' for product groups that are not selected by consumers and encompasses dual classification of anti-consumption behaviors: 'non-choice' (product or service not being affordable, accessible, or available) and 'anti-choice' (products considered to be unsuited and fickle despite being within the financial means). Anti-choice encompasses three overlapping factors that gradually increase in strength: abandonment, avoidance, and aversion (Hogg, 1998). Oliva et al. (1992) describe this construct as the opposite of brand loyalty. Just as brand loyalty is an outcome of satisfaction, the literature considers brand avoidance an outcome of dissatisfaction.

Confirmation theory holds that customer expectations can be validated (confirmed) or refuted (disconfirmed) by comparing them with actual products or services (Halstead, 1989). Confirmation occurs when an actual offering meets customers’ requirements. On the other hand, disconfirmation occurs when events surpass or fall short of expectations. When a product/service falls short of customer expectations, it often leads to customer dissatisfaction, which may trigger brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009).

In addition, the 'brand attachment' theory defines two patterns, anxiety and avoidance, explaining the mechanism of how personal relationships seem to lead to corresponding consumer-brand relationship outlooks. Whereas anxiety encompasses an individual's perception of oneself (high anxiety suggests a negative perception), avoidance encompasses one's perception of others (a poor perception of others represented by high avoidance) (Whelan & Dawar, 2016).

Distinction Between Brand Avoidance and Other Related Constructs

Equally interesting, and closely related to yet distinct from, brand avoidance are the phenomena of brand boycotts and brand hate. This section explores the phenomenon of brand hate and love to foster a deeper understanding of the broader discipline of negative consumer–brand relationships and draw meaningful distinctions from the concept of brand avoidance.

Although boycotts are forms of anti-consumption and resistance, such as brand avoidance, they are typically carried out publicly, resulting in commercial penalties (Albrecht et al., 2013). Thus, a brand boycott is a community-based phenomenon, unlike avoidance, which is an individual-level phenomenon. The existing literature on brand hate can be classified into three distinct categories: social psychology (in the intergroup context), psychoanalysis (in the interpersonal context), and basic emotion research (Rempel & Burris, 2005). The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology defines hate as a "deep, enduring, intense emotion expressing animosity, anger, and hostility towards a person, group, or object" (Reber & Reber, 2001). Sigmund Freud (1915), a psychoanalyst, described hate as an ego state that seeks to eliminate the cause of suffering. Within this classification, many conflicting definitions of hate exist. Some characterize hate as a motive to abolish the welfare of the hated entity (Rempel & Burris, 2005). Many researchers have highlighted hate as an attitude (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000) or inclination rather than a momentary emotional state (Weingarten, 2006), because it is thought to persist over time and to require investigation into whether an object possesses inherently dangerous traits (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000). Amidst these contradictions, there is no mutually acceptable definition of brand hate. However, most researchers agree that hate can be characterized as an enduring, long-standing feeling (Rempel & Burris, 2005; Weingarten, 2006).

In a study at University College London, Bartels and Zeki (2000) proposed that most parts of the cerebral cortex involved in judgment and cognition become deactivated during love. Surprisingly, hate could also be a deep-rooted passion, just like love. However, in the case of love, a lover is often less judgmental and more cognizant of the loved person than in the case of hate, where haters might exercise strong judgment, employing manipulative strategies to damage, hurt, or exact vengeance. Interestingly, brand attachment (love) and aversion (hate) are assumed to represent opposing ends on a continuum. It was also proposed that an end-to-end swing would likely be possible with time (Johnson et al., 2011). The middle of these ends was calibrated as indifference, where the consumer-brand connection is neutral (Park et al., 2013). Brand avoidance could be assumed to lie between indifference and hate on the continuum, as it is not a state of indifference but an extreme negative emotion. This is because consumers' negative emotions towards brands may differ in strength (i.e., avoidance and hate).

While concepts such as brand hate, boycotts, and anti-consumption share similarities with brand avoidance, they differ significantly in scope, intensity, and behavioral expression. However, past studies have often discussed these constructs descriptively without systematically positioning brand avoidance within this broader nomological network. Addressing this gap is crucial because developing a valid scale requires clearly delineating what brand avoidance is and what it is not. The present study builds on these distinctions to clarify conceptual boundaries and justify the inclusion of specific antecedent domains in the measurement model.

Recent empirical studies further demonstrate that brand hate functions as a proximal antecedent of brand avoidance, with post-2021 evidence showing that moral violations, identity threats, and perceived injustice reliably translate into avoidance behavior across categories (Ul Hassan et al., 2026; Walter et al., 2023).

Additionally, prior research linking brand hate to brand avoidance (e.g., Bryson et al., 2013; Romani et al., 2015) employs instruments that focus on extreme negative affect or activism rather than avoidance per se. As a result, the measures used in these studies lack content coverage of experiential, value-related, identity-based, and oppositional loyalty motives, which are theoretically established antecedents of avoidance. This measurement misalignment further justifies the development of a comprehensive formative scale that reflects the construct's full nomological breadth.

Brand Avoidance and Its Antecedents

Building on the discussion above, brand avoidance can be defined as a motivational state that dissuades an individual from continuing a consumption relationship with a particular brand, leading to avoidance or outright rejection of the brand (Lee et al., 2009). In psychology, the term 'avoidance' refers to a motivational state characterized by behavior triggered by adverse or unwanted events or possibilities (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Elliot, 1999). This behavior occurs when customers deliberately shun brands even though they are available, accessible, and within their financial means.

Previous research has examined some of the motivations for brand avoidance at the subjective and conceptual levels. The following section provides an in-depth discussion of these topics. The factors behind brand avoidance include experiential, moral, deficit value, identity, and oppositional brand loyalty-based avoidance.

Recent scholarship further reinforces the relevance of these antecedents by showing that avoidance behavior has increased in contexts such as sustainability violations, ethical transgressions, and identity misfit. Empirical work across digital services, retail brands, and fashion markets consistently demonstrates that consumers now disengage from brands more quickly and systematically than previously theorized (Alvarez et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2023; Odoom et al., 2019).

Experiential Avoidance

Consumers may start avoiding and eventually dislike brands due to an unpleasant experience with a product or service (Hempel, 2012). Making and meeting promises is at the core of successful branding (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2005). These claims lay the foundation for expectations, and it is undeniable that brand promise shapes them (Grönroos, 2006). For a consumer, the essence of a brand is primarily a set of expectations about what should follow after purchase (Dall'Olmo Riley & De Chernatony, 2000). Unmet expectations may lead to negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction (Halstead, 1989). Subsequently, a consumer may disengage from the brand and switch to competing brands due to dissatisfaction (Oliva et al., 1992).

Identity Avoidance

An individual's psychological self is their unique identity, representing cognitive and affective memories of their life, including their future (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The role of self-image can be traced back to Rogers' self-theory, which guides individual behavior. Social interactions enable a person to be conscious of their self-definition, known as 'me as I am' (Parker, 2009). By analyzing oneself against social benchmarks, however, one might want to change one's actual self-conception to the ideal self-concept: 'the good me' (Parker, 2009). Consumers buy and own brands that help bridge the distance between their actual and ideal selves, affect their psychological well-being (Parker, 2009), and help them avoid undesired stereotypes that certain brands may evoke. There is an equally important concept of the 'undesired self.' Psychologists suggest that the distinction between the 'unwanted self' and the 'true self' may be a more effective point of reference for consumer-brand experiences than the distinction between the 'real self' and the 'wanted self' (Ogilvie, 1987). The brand-self distance refers to the perceived difference between a customer's self and the brand. An adjacent association is considered constructive, whereas a distant, unfriendly association is considered harmful (Moscovici & Markova, 1998).

Furthermore, the academic literature suggests that customers may build their self-concept by associating with positive reference groups while isolating themselves from negative ones (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Another theme was 'de-individuation.'

Individuals in a state of de-individuation are likely to lose their sense of identity and become absorbed in the crowd. Existing research suggests that individuality is a characteristic and that some people perceive themselves as distinct from others (Fromkin & Snyder, 1980). Consumers with a higher need for individuality prefer exclusive products to stand out from the crowd (Tian et al., 2001) and, therefore, tend to avoid mainstream brands. Consumers may also witness a surge of fake and meaningless market offerings (Boyle, 2003). Consumers choose brands they perceive as relevant, original, and genuine to combat a sense of meaninglessness. In other words, consumers seek genuine products. These consumers may avoid brands they perceive as inauthentic (Beverland, 2005).

Value Deficiency Avoidance

Value deficiency avoidance is driven by the belief that a brand lacks value. Poor performance or emblematically unpleasant promises may not necessarily encourage this, but they may force consumers closer to their undesired selves. Instead, avoidance due to value deficiency stems from the expectation that the brand must perform poorly to meet practical needs. Therefore, the brand was deemed to have low value. Familiar brands have several advantages over relatively unknown brands (Aaker, 1997). Deeper levels of consumer awareness and familiarity may make the brand part of consumers' consideration set, whereas unfamiliar brands, perceived as high risk and low quality, may be avoided (Richardson et al., 1996). A brand's aesthetics may also lead to greater acceptance or circumvention. Some consumers consider a brand's appearance as a sign of quality. For this reason, fancy packaging, beautiful product designs, and attractive models are encouraged in promotional campaigns, with the hope that the positive associations people have with visually appealing things will transfer to the products (Chitty et al., 2017).

Moral Avoidance

Moral incompatibility may also motivate brand avoidance, also known as moral avoidance. An individual's moral philosophy is one's perspective on what is right or wrong (Portwood-Stacer, 2012). Therefore, some customers might avoid or hate a brand because they believe it is morally irresponsible and unethical (Kates, 2004). Stereotyped images of certain countries may be activated when appraising products from these countries (Han & Terpstra, 1988). According to the animosity model, products and services may be avoided if they originate from an offending nation engaged in warfare or political or economic actions that consumers find difficult to forgive and forget (Klein, 2002). A sub-theme closely related to the country-of-origin effect is 'financial patriotism.' Some customers have a strong patriotic attachment to local businesses that are part of their community, and they may resist buying foreign-made products because they believe it is unethical and disloyal (Sharma et al., 1995; Chandel & Mishra, 2022). Another sub-theme of moral avoidance involves avoiding brands perceived as unduly dominant within the marketplace, described as hegemonic. Some consumers also believe that dominant cultures overshadow other vulnerable cultures by exporting values, beliefs, ideas, products, people, and lifestyles (Tomlinson, 1999), thereby avoiding brands associated with these cultures/countries. Sometimes brand avoidance is triggered by a brand's unethical and dishonest practices, such as the mistreatment of employees and environmental degradation. A corporation's social responsibility (CSR) is related to its commitment to humanity (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Therefore, a multinational that runs its business dishonestly may create an adverse brand connotation that some consumers may wish to distance themselves from.

Oppositional Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to a consumer's commitment to a brand and their affinity for it (Aaker, 1991). It is often measured as consumers' reactions to brand marketing (Blackston, 1995) and as purchasing behavior (Dyson et al., 1996); brand loyalty means much more than this (McAlexander & Schouten, 1998). Loyalty to a brand can be expressed in various ways in different environments. Consumers may demonstrate loyalty by actively protecting and endorsing their favorite brand as superior to competitors. This is known as allegiance to the opposing company.

As discussed earlier, consumers borrow part of their identity from what they consume and how they consume (Belk & Costa, 1998). Consumers may also derive their identities from what they do not consume (Englis & Solomon, 1997). In other words, loyal users can express their brand loyalty by emotionally opposing competing brands while defending their favorite brands. Moreover, contemporary branding scholarship increasingly emphasizes the need for validated scales to measure negative consumer–brand relationships, with several recent papers calling for more rigorous construct development in this space (Zhang & Laroche, 2020)

Despite rich conceptual discussions across domains such as dissatisfaction, identity construction, moral judgment, and loyalty dynamics, the literature lacks a validated, multi-dimensional scale that captures brand avoidance holistically. Existing studies examine these antecedents in isolation, use inconsistent measures, or rely on reflective operationalizations that do not align with the construct's formative nature. Additionally, several recent studies have called for more rigorous measurement approaches to negative consumer–brand relationships, reinforcing the need for validated, multi-dimensional scales to examine avoidance in contemporary consumer environments (Haase et al.,2022). These gaps underscore the need for a robust, theory-grounded scale that incorporates all significant antecedents and facilitates consistent empirical assessment. The present study responds to this gap by developing and validating a comprehensive formative index of brand avoidance.

Hypothesis Development

Building on the reviewed literature, the present study conceptualizes brand avoidance as a higher-order formative construct comprising five lower-order dimensions: experiential avoidance, identity avoidance, value-deficiency avoidance, moral avoidance, and oppositional brand-loyalty-based avoidance. Prior research establishes that negative usage experiences, self-concept misalignment, perceived lack of value, and moral or ideological conflict are potent triggers of distancing behaviors towards brands (Halstead, 1989; Lee et al., 2009; Beverland, 2005; Klein, 2002). Furthermore, loyalty dynamics may manifest as oppositional behavior, in which a strong preference for a focal brand fuels the deliberate avoidance of rival brands (Aaker, 1991; McAlexander & Schouten, 1998). Guided by these theoretical insights and the formative structure underpinning the construct, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Experiential avoidance has a positive and significant effect on the brand avoidance index.

H2: Identity avoidance has a positive and significant effect on the brand avoidance index.

H3: Value-deficiency avoidance has a positive and significant effect on the brand avoidance index.

H4: Moral avoidance has a positive and significant effect on the brand avoidance index.

H5: Oppositional brand-loyalty-based avoidance has a positive and significant effect on the brand avoidance index.

H6: Brand avoidance has a positive and significant effect on consumers' non-buying intention towards the focal smartphone brand.

These hypotheses align with the multi-dimensional conceptualization of brand avoidance and establish the empirical structure required to validate its antecedents and behavioral consequences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Item Generation and Questionnaire Administration

The overall procedure for developing the brand avoidance scale was guided by Churchill's (1979) paradigm for construct measurement, which emphasizes domain specification, systematic item generation, expert judgment, and empirical purification.

Twenty-three respondents (12 males and 11 females, with an average age of 24 years) from India and Nepal were selected following a brief, informal interaction in which they were asked whether they had ever avoided any brand and whether they were willing to participate in an exploratory interview. Respondents explained the context and meaning of brand avoidance. Before the interviews began, respondents were asked to name the brands they currently avoid or have avoided in the past. These participants were purposively screened to ensure prior experience with brand avoidance, and the interviews followed a semi-structured format to capture detailed accounts of their avoidance episodes.

Later, respondents were asked to describe the predicament that led to brand avoidance in the first place. The respondents repeatedly intervened to address the triggers of the brand-avoidance response. Apple, Samsung, Coke, Facebook, and McDonald's were the brands most frequently avoided. Although respondents mentioned diverse product categories during the exploratory phase, these examples were used only to understand the broader phenomenon of brand avoidance. The quantitative phase of the study specifically focused on smartphone brands, and only smartphone-related items were included in the scale testing. Multiple drivers and reasons for negative consumer-brand relationships that lead to brand avoidance were identified and correspond to the antecedents of brand avoidance unearthed in the literature review. Respondents avoided brands when their functional needs were unmet, expectations were unfulfilled, physical attributes and functions were inadequate, the experience was poor, the country of origin was undesirable, the brand was associated with an undesirable group, or the brand image was inconsistent with an individual's values, morals, or personality traits. Respondents also exhibited strong negative emotions toward a brand when it conflicted with their values or self-concept. In some instances, a transition from earlier congenial consumer brand relations to negative ones, leading to avoidance, was also observed. In conjunction with a literature review, the processes yielded 68 items. This approach ensured that the emerging item pool combined themes directly expressed by participants with theoretically grounded indicators from prior research on negative consumer–brand relationships.

A questionnaire containing 68 items (five-point Likert scale) was presented to 12 experts for content validation. Before the review, the experts were provided with basic definitions of pertinent concepts involved in the study. Eight academicians with extensive experience in teaching and research in marketing and branding, and four industry experts from various managerial levels who specialize in core marketing and branding domains, were selected for content validation (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1999). However, the concept of brand avoidance has yet to be well discussed in academia and industry, and it was expected that experts could help evaluate the relevance and wording of items to be incorporated into a later questionnaire (Foroudi et al., 2014). This exercise resulted in the deletion of 17 items. However, according to the experts' suggestions, some items were modified to make them easier to understand. According to eight experts, a questionnaire should be specific to a particular brand or, at the very least, to a product category. As found in the interviews and literature review, respondents avoided smartphone brands, and the questionnaire was designed specifically for the smartphone product category.

The questionnaire was electronically circulated to 500 respondents from two private universities in India and Nepal. A purposive sampling approach was employed to target active smartphone users in Generation Y, and the survey was administered online, with voluntary, anonymous participation. Generation Y, commonly called 'Millennials,' was selected as the respondent group. Selecting Generation 'Y' was considered meaningful for this study, as Generation 'Y' represents a sizeable global market segment (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003; Aquino, 2012; Lazarevic, 2012; Parment, 2012), making it a representative of the consuming class. Selecting Generation Y was deemed appropriate due to its ease of approachability. Generation Y (also known as Millennials) prefers to provide feedback directly to brands through various channels (e.g., social media), thereby co-creating brand experiences.

Furthermore, Generation Y has grown up in a brand-saturated era, so they have a deep understanding of brands (Lazarevic, 2012). 84 questionnaires still needed to be completed, and 72 were found to require completion. Thus, the sample comprised 356 respondents (162 males and 194 females; average age, 27 years). The process was completed over approximately six months from January to June 2020.

The final sample consisted of 356 millennials (Generation Y), including 162 males and 194 females, with an average age of 27 years. All respondents were from two private universities in India and Nepal. This demographic profile aligns with the study's rationale for selecting Generation Y as a relevant and accessible consumer segment for examining brand avoidance behaviors.

Construct Measurement

Construct measurement is one of the most critical research challenges. As a result, determining whether a construct is reflective or formative is critical. According to MacKenzie et al. (2005), the findings in the literature may be misleading if the nature of the construct requires clarification. Incorrectly characterizing constructs as formative or reflective can lead to Type I and Type II errors when concluding about the structural model (Jarvis et al., 2003).

DeVellis (1991) states that formative and reflective constructs vary in conceptual orientations. According to classical test theory, a reflective indicator is often used in unidimensional procedures. As a result, questionnaire items indicate the measured concept; they are "caused by" the concept, and their interpretations converge, implying that concepts should have correlation and reliability (Baxter, 2009). On the other hand, formative scales are appropriate when the indicators are independent "causes" of the construct of interest and lack internal consistency. Furthermore, all items were required to accurately characterize the measured construct (Jarvis et al., 2003). The norms established by Jarvis et al. (2003) in deciding whether a researcher should adopt reflective or formative procedures support this study's formative arguments. Unlike reflective constructs, formative constructs focus on the concept under observation rather than its expression.

Furthermore, unlike reflective measures, formative measurements should be noninterchangeable. Formative measurements are not always co-variant with the construct; however, co-variation is a reflective trait. For formative measurements, each measure captures a distinct feature of the construct, whereas reflective measures illustrate a similar primary construct and can thus be interchanged. The brand avoidance dimensions proposed in this study meet the practical guidelines for formative indicators. Furthermore, all measurement items constituting the construct's dimensions met the formative indicator criteria.

Consequently, brand avoidance is envisaged as a formative second-order construct (Jarvis et al., 2003). Since formative measures capture distinct aspects of the construct and do not involve any covariation, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to analyze the data. Furthermore, as noted by Jöreskog and Wold (1982), PLS-SEM excels at handling complex prediction-based models with formative measures. Moreover, PLS-SEM is better than covariance-based SEM because it predicts, rather than explaining, the variation in the dependent variable. Therefore, it is more suitable for predictive models in cases of theory development (Gimbert et al., 2010).

In the model, brand avoidance functions as a higher-order latent construct, while its antecedents are specified as lower-order observable components. The study uses a "hierarchical component model," which reduces collinearity-induced bias and thereby eliminates potential problems related to discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2012). Model specification, outer model evaluation, and inner model evaluation are the three essential phases in this study's multiphase procedure.

Model Specification and Outer Model Evaluation

There needs to be greater clarity regarding the application of statistical tools to formative constructs, as they are believed to determine a concept (Diamantopoulos et al., 2008). Some researchers also believe that formative constructs do not require statistical validation and that experts' judgment is sufficient to indicate validity (Rossiter, 2002). In contrast, researchers such as Edwards and Bagozzi (2000) do not support this belief and emphasize that formative constructs should be validated. Partial least squares (PLS) path modeling does not include an 'Overall fit' (Ranjan & Read, 2016) and, therefore, does not assess convergent and discriminant validity (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). Hair et al. (2012) suggest assessing the weights and collinearity diagnostics of formative indicators when evaluating their quality.

Consistent with Churchill's (1979) recommendations, the construct's initial domain was defined through an extensive review of theory and related negative brand-relationship constructs. The resulting item pool was refined through expert assessment to ensure content adequacy. The subsequent statistical evaluation of items—including indicator significance, multicollinearity checks, and purification—is aligned with Churchill's emphasis on empirical assessment, retaining conceptually essential indicators that are statistically weak when theoretically justified.

While evaluating the outer weights, three of the 51 items were found to be insignificant ($r > 0.05$). As Bollen and Lennox (1991) noted, removing an indicator is akin to removing a part of the measurement itself, which may restrict the construct (MacKenzie et al., 2005). Instead of directly dropping these items based on statistical results, it was decided to seek theoretical justification for any action.

Upon reviewing the existing literature, we found that item loadings were examined not for elimination, but to ensure that even statistically weak indicators were retained when they captured essential facets of the formative construct (Hair et al., 2012). Items with high loadings were retained despite their insignificant weights. As shown in Table I, all items had factor loadings well above 0.5 (Hulland, 1999) and multicollinearity (VIF) values below 3.3 (ranging from 1.105 to 2.726), indicating the absence of multicollinearity. A careful examination of metric invariance [$\Delta\chi^2$ (52) = 0.078; $p > 0.50$] and scalar invariance [$\Delta\chi^2$ (14) = 0.127; $p > 0.50$] established the research method, and responses from different countries did not cause any bias.

RESULTS

The Results section follows PLS-SEM reporting conventions by first evaluating the outer measurement model and subsequently examining the inner structural model. To evaluate the measurement quality of the proposed formative brand avoidance construct, both outer and inner model criteria were examined. The results of the outer model assessment, including indicator loadings, multicollinearity checks, and significance tests, are reported first. Table 1 presents the item-level diagnostics for all five formative dimensions. This is followed by the inner model results, which assess the relationships between second-order constructs, predictive relevance, and nomological validity.

Table 1 *Item loadings, VIFs, T statistics, and p-values*

Dimension	Statement	Factors							
		MA	IA	EA	VDA	OBL	VIF	T statistics	p Value
MA1	I avoid this brand because it follows unethical practices.	0.897					1.311	3.27	0
MA2	I avoid this brand because it conflicts with my moral values.	0.887					1.327	11.07	0.01
MA3	I avoid this brand due to concerns about its environmental practices.	0.885					1.513	2.37	0
MA4	I avoid this brand because I believe it mistreats employees.	0.869					1.783	3.11	0.02
MA5	I avoid this brand because it supports causes I disagree with.	0.867					1.543	3.18	0
MA6	I avoid this brand because I believe it harms society.	0.863					1.662	3.21	0

Dimension	Statement	Factors							
		MA	IA	EA	VDA	OBL	VIF	T statistics	p Value
MA7	I avoid this brand due to its association with countries I dislike.	0.862					2.113	4.08	0
MA8	I avoid this brand because it represents dominant cultures I disapprove of.	0.856					1.798	4.14	0
MA9	I avoid this brand because its country of origin makes me uncomfortable.	0.85					2.145	4.53	0.07
MA10	I avoid this brand because buying it feels disloyal to local producers.	0.846					2.132	4.76	0
MA11	I avoid this brand because it exploits vulnerable communities.	0.846					1.345	4.89	0.09
MA12	I avoid this brand because I disapprove of its political stance.	0.842					1.543	3.08	0
MA13	I avoid this brand because it behaves dishonestly.	0.839					1.654	10.03	0
MA14	I avoid this brand because it manipulates customers.	0.833					1.673	5.94	0
MA15	I avoid this brand because I consider it hegemonic.	0.827					1.997	5.87	0.08
MA16	I avoid this brand because its practices run counter to my ethical beliefs.	0.798					1.776	4.52	0
IA1	I avoid this brand because it does not align with who I am.		0.896				1.746	4.03	0
IA2	I avoid this brand because it does not reflect my personal identity.		0.827				1.332	5.09	0
IA3	I avoid this brand because it is associated with groups I do not want to belong to.		0.813				1.213	5.51	0
IA4	I avoid this brand because using it would make me feel less like myself.		0.811				1.342	5.69	0
IA5	I avoid this brand because it does not fit my lifestyle.		0.792				1.902	5.31	0
IA6	I avoid this brand because its values differ from mine.		0.783				1.402	4.33	0.01
IA7	I avoid this brand because it is too familiar and makes me feel less unique.		0.779				1.832	2.31	0
IA8	I avoid this brand because too many people use it.		0.775				2.332	2.01	0

Dimension	Statement	Factors							
		MA	IA	EA	VDA	OBL	VIF	T statistics	p Value
IA9	I avoid this brand because it is inauthentic.		0.769				2.892	10.1	0
IA10	I avoid this brand because it lacks originality.		0.769				2.198	3.34	0
IA11	I avoid this brand because it makes me feel stereotyped.		0.764				2.102	3.39	0.02
IA12	I avoid this brand because it makes me feel like part of an undesirable group.		0.75				1.552	3.38	0
EA1	I avoid this brand because I had a bad experience with it.			0.824			1.55	2.21	0
EA2	I avoid this brand because it failed to meet my expectations.			0.822			1.345	2.27	0
EA3	I avoid this brand because its services disappointed me.			0.822			1.432	2.38	0
EA4	I avoid this brand because it broke its promises.			0.815			1.532	10.09	0
EA5	I avoid this brand because its products are of poor quality.			0.81			1.003	6.78	0
EA6	I avoid this brand because it did not function as expected.			0.805			1.182	6.89	0
EA7	I avoid this brand because its features were not satisfactory.			0.789			1.195	6.03	0
EA8	I avoid this brand because my experience with it was frustrating.			0.767			1.902	6.11	0
EA9	I avoid this brand because I found it unreliable.			0.749			2.003	5.13	0
VDA1	I avoid this brand because it is low-value.				0.883		2.198	5.17	0
VDA2	I avoid this brand because it is not worth the price.				0.833		2.142	9.11	0
VDA3	I avoid this brand because it does not offer good value for money.				0.817		1.761	3.93	0
VDA4	I avoid this brand because I perceive it as low quality.				0.814		1.117	9.03	0
VDA5	I avoid this brand because it looks inferior compared with others.				0.812		1.119	9.87	0
VDA6	I avoid this brand because its design is poor.				0.803		1.836	9.35	0
VDA7	I avoid this brand because I am unfamiliar with it.				0.78		1.492	8.11	0

Dimension	Statement	Factors							
		MA	IA	EA	VDA	OBL	VIF	T statistics	p Value
VDA8	I avoid this brand because I worry it will not perform well.				0.776		1.893	8.09	0.03
OBL1	I avoid this brand because it competes with my favorite brand.					0.937	2.189	8.23	0.01
OBL2	I avoid this brand because I am loyal to another brand.					0.919	1.034	8.33	0
OBL3	I avoid this brand because it threatens my preferred brand.					0.881	2.048	3.34	0
OBL4	I avoid this brand to show support for the brands I like.					0.823	1.249	3.14	0
OBL5	I avoid this brand because I want to defend my favorite brand.					0.814	1.659	2.1	0

Note. MA = moral avoidance; IA = identity avoidance; EA = experiential avoidance; VDA = value deficiency avoidance; OBL = oppositional brand loyalty.

VIF values < 3.3 indicate no multicollinearity. All indicators are significant at p < .05. Item-level diagnostics indicate that all formative indicators have acceptable loadings and low VIF values, suggesting multicollinearity is not a concern. These results confirm that each item contributes uniquely to its respective formative dimension.

Inner Model Evaluation and Nomological Estimations

Similar research protocols were followed while investigating the outer measurement models for the first- and second-order factors. In the statistical analysis, the weights were substantial, and no multicollinearity concerns were reported (as shown in Table II and Figure 1). Following the pertinent literature on formative constructs (Ranjan & Read, 2016; Taheri et al., 2016), the quality of the inner model was measured using cross-validated redundancy, path coefficients, effect sizes, and the coefficient of determination. To assess the blindfolding results, the Stone–Geisser test criterion Q2 (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974) was applied using a sample-reuse technique. The important results are as follows:

Table 2 *Second-Order Variable Assessments.*

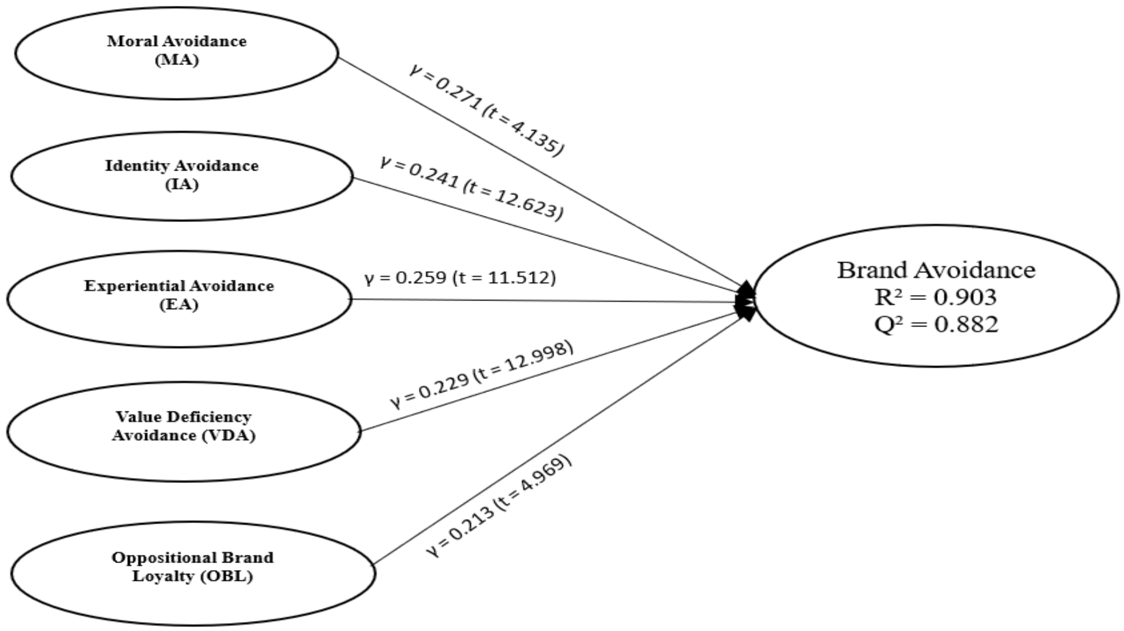
Items	t- Statistics	P Value	VIF

Moral avoidance	4.135	0.03	1.197
Identity avoidance	12.623	0.02	1.288
Experiential avoidance	11.512	0.01	2.726
Value deficiency avoidance	12.998	0.02	1.105
Oppositional brand loyalty	4.969	0.04	1.499

Note. All second-order dimensions show significant contributions to the higher-order construct. VIF values are below 3.3, indicating no multicollinearity.

All five first-order dimensions significantly contribute to the higher-order brand avoidance construct, supporting the validity of the hierarchical model. The t-values and VIF scores indicate stable and meaningful second-order relationships.

Figure 1 *Measurement Model (Author's illustration)*



Based on the criteria discussed in the relevant literature, the R^2 and Q^2 values were 0.903 and 0.882, respectively. Furthermore, f2 was 0.268, 0.255, 0.423, 0.449, and 0.302 for moral, identity, experiential, value deficiency, and oppositional brand loyalty-based brand avoidance, respectively.

$\gamma = 0.271$ and $p < 0.001$ for moral avoidance; $\gamma = 0.241$ and $p < 0.001$ for identity avoidance; $\gamma = 0.259$ and $p < 0.001$ for experiential avoidance; $\gamma = 0.229$ and $p < 0.001$ for value deficiency avoidance; and $\gamma = 0.213$ and $p < 0.001$ for oppositional brand loyalty were found to display significant formative path coefficients while using bootstrap (5000) resamples, thereby confirming the nature of the brand avoidance construct to be formative with which it is commonly correlated for estimation of nomological and external validity. Researchers endorse integrating the index construct and reflective constructs. Accordingly, the brand avoidance index was linked with 'non-buying' intention toward smartphones, adopting a scale established and tested by Fullerton (2005).

The procedure followed was supported by a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.878, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) values falling well within allowable levels of 0.7 and 0.5 (0.909 and 0.728, respectively), and factor loadings (0.802 to 0.897) for statements belonging to reflective constructs (Table III).

Table 3 *Reliability, validity, and Relative measure*

Items	Loadings
‘Non-buying’ intention (α= 0.878, CR= 0.909, AVE= 0.728)	
I avoid buying this brand because of the bad experience I had with it.	0.897
I avoid buying this brand as it does not reflect who I am	0.873
I avoid buying this brand as I find it to be unethical	0.859
I avoid buying this brand as it is deficient in value	0.823
I avoid buying this brand as it competes with my favorite brand	0.802

Note: α = Cronbach’s alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. All values exceed recommended thresholds (α > .70, CR > .70, AVE > .50).

Cohen's f2 was 0.584 (significant effect), whereas R was 0.370 (moderate effect). Stone–Geisser criterion Q2 produced a moderate value (0.247) for brand avoidance on 'non-buying' intent. The regressed path coefficient results showed a positive association between brand avoidance and 'non-buying' intention ($\beta = 0.95$; $p < 0.001$; t-value = 8.218), indicating why some consumers do not purchase brands they choose to avoid.

Overall, the results demonstrate that the proposed brand avoidance construct is statistically robust, exhibits strong predictive validity, and is consistent with theoretical expectations. The significant positive path from brand avoidance to non-buying intention provides the required nomological evidence, confirming that consumers who score higher on brand avoidance are indeed less likely to purchase the focal brand.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The growing interest in negative consumer-brand relationships between industry and academia has recently gained momentum. However, critiques of existing research indicate that these studies are qualitative (Knittel et al., 2016), theoretically weak, and empirically insufficient (due to the lack of a parsimonious scale) (Park et al., 2013). This study addressed these critiques by examining the theoretical facets of brand avoidance and its operational mechanisms, and by developing a thoroughly authenticated second-order scale using recommended procedures.

The results reveal that all independent variables exhibit statistically significant relationships with non-buying behavior, namely moral avoidance, identity avoidance, experiential avoidance, value-deficiency avoidance, and oppositional brand loyalty-based brand avoidance. This is in congruence with the existing literature, which focuses on exploring the phenomenon using a unidimensional approach (Zarantonello et al., 2016).

These results also validate all hypothesized relationships in the study, confirming that each antecedent uniquely contributes to consumers' non-buying intention. The pattern of effects is consistent with the underlying theoretical arguments linking each driver of avoidance to downstream behavioral rejection.

Unique Contribution of The Study

The findings offer several theoretical contributions by demonstrating that brand avoidance operates as a formative, multi-dimensional construct rather than a unidimensional reaction. By empirically consolidating five antecedents into a validated second-order structure, this study strengthens the conceptual foundations of negative consumer–brand relationships.

Responding to the call to investigate brand avoidance in the extant qualitative literature, this study offers a new perspective on negative consumer-brand relationships by revealing the operational mechanism of brand avoidance through a quantitative research approach. Other quantitative approaches in this domain have adopted unidimensional frameworks to study brand avoidance, believing the brand is a unidimensional construct. Due to the lack of a practical and parsimonious scale, brand avoidance has yet to be empirically tested using a consolidated/multi-dimensional approach. This study sought to develop a brand avoidance scale and empirically examine its operational mechanism, an area that has been explored only qualitatively to date, with few fragmented empirical studies.

This brand avoidance scale was developed parsimoniously to reduce the risk of using inappropriate measures, thereby minimizing estimation problems that could hamper hypothesis-testing inferences (MacCallum & Browne, 1993) and, consequently, lead to incorrect management decisions. Furthermore, as noted by Rossiter (2002), the arbitrary nature of reflective constructs diminishes accuracy, an issue that has been addressed by using a formative method to develop the brand avoidance scale.

Furthermore, although earlier studies examined brand avoidance as a reaction to brand hate, they relied on reflective, affect-heavy measures that do not align with the formative structure of avoidance. The present study advances the literature by addressing the misfit between existing scales and the conceptual nature of brand avoidance. By integrating five theoretically grounded antecedents into a unified formative index, the study offers a psychometrically sound instrument that overcomes the limitations of prior hate-based or unidimensional measures.

This study further distinguishes itself from prior research by quantitatively examining the relationship between the brand avoidance scale and millennials' non-buying intention towards smartphones, thereby providing nomological validation of this positive relationship. This systematic investigation of negative consumer-brand relationships in developing South Asian economies has been ignored in the mainstream literature. Furthermore, cross-validation of the brand avoidance scale sanctions its applicability in other studies. The empirical evaluation in this study was conducted on millennials from two developing economies in South Asia. Given the heterogeneous consumer base and fundamentally different marketplace dynamics from those of Western and European counterparts, this study aims to highlight the peculiarities of the branding literature across regions worldwide (Sheth, 2011).

Implications of The Study

This study will enable brand managers to understand the reasons for negative brand evaluations and their unfavorable outcomes. It can help brand practitioners in three ways.

Identify: The lack of academic literature on brand avoidance, a domain that has traditionally focused on brand love and attachment, creates a significant information gap. Traditional brand management research needs to offer more strategies for addressing brand avoidance behaviors and attitudes from a managerial perspective (Thompson et al., 2006). This is partly due to the need for a clear understanding of the antecedents of brand avoidance. However, by identifying and empirically validating the antecedents of brand avoidance, this study can provide practical insights for brand managers, empowering them to understand and potentially mitigate its triggers. Moral and experiential avoidance were found to have the highest explanatory power in brand avoidance. In contrast, oppositional brand loyalty had the lowest level, providing brand practitioners with a clear understanding of the antecedents most likely to predict brand-avoidance behaviors.

Implement: Awareness of what leads to brand avoidance can help devise appropriate brand strategies to turn negative consumer-brand relationships into a pleasant one. As previously discussed, consumers can transition from brand love to indifference, then to avoidance, and ultimately back. Experiential avoidance can be addressed by providing high-quality products and superior service. Identity avoidance can be mitigated by associating the brand with positive associations that reflect a positive self-concept and align with social norms. Value deficiency can be addressed by fostering familiarity, attractive packaging, and encouraging customers to believe they are getting the best bargain in terms of benefit-to-cost ratio. Moral avoidance can be addressed by raising awareness of ethical brand practices. Oppositional brand avoidance can be achieved not by having a head-on collision with most-loved brands, but by identifying points of difference (PODs) and positioning the brand around them. Identifying and improving these areas can help brand managers prevent consumers from moving towards the negative side of the consumer-brand relationship, from love to indifference, and from indifference to avoidance. This can also facilitate the movement from avoidance to indifference and then to love.

Communicate: Brand managers must identify the causes of brand avoidance. This understanding can be used to design effective brand communication strategies that address specific antecedents of brand avoidance, thereby improving brand positioning in consumers' minds. By taking the lead in addressing these areas and communicating these improvements to consumers through effective advertising strategies, brand managers play a pivotal role in facilitating consumers' movement toward positive consumer-brand relationships. Taken together, these implications provide a structured pathway for managers to diagnose the specific form of avoidance driving rejection and to design targeted interventions grounded in empirical evidence. The study, therefore, links theoretical clarity with actionable managerial guidance.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

First, this study was limited to a few South Asian countries. Future research may test the scale across multiple constructs in various cultures and contexts. This is because selected countries in the South Asian region may not fully explain the negative consumer-brand relationship across a diverse global consumer base. A better understanding of negative consumer–brand relationships could be developed by adopting this scale to empirically test the mechanism of brand avoidance across related and unrelated product and service categories. Furthermore, as a limitation, this study should be viewed as an attempt to empirically test brand avoidance. It must not be confused with other related constructs such as brand hate, brand dislike, and brand boycotts. While a few studies have explored the impact of advertising and negative electronic word of mouth on brand avoidance, this study uses only five determinants of brand avoidance. Future studies could integrate these antecedents into a more parsimonious scale.

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Dr. Ajay Chandel is currently an Associate Professor at the Mittal School of Business, Lovely Professional University, specializing in Strategy and Brand Management. With 15 years of experience, he brings expertise in Strategic Management, Business Simulation, and Social Entrepreneurship. He has published extensively in SCOPUS and UGC-listed journals on topics such as Branding, Social Media Marketing, and SDGs. His case studies on SMEs and Social Entrepreneurship are featured in The Case Center in the UK, and he reviews for esteemed international journals.

Dr. Rohail Hassan (Corresponding Author) is an Associate Professor of Corporate Governance and Finance and Director of PhD & D. Mangement Program at Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia. He is also a Chartered Manager Fellow (CMgr FCMI) of Chartered Management Institute (CMI), UK. In addition, he serves as an Adjunct Professor of Management at the VIZJA University, Warsaw, Poland. He also serves as an expert at the European Commission for the evaluation of proposals under the HORIZON-MSCA-2023 call. His research interests include corporate governance, board diversity, gender diversity, ESG,

Blockchain, and Artificial Intelligence in business, big data and analytics, and strategy. His research has been published in leading management and top-tier peer-reviewed journals, including Journal of Business Research, Asia Pacific Journal of Management, IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, Technological Forecasting and Social Change, International Journal of Information Management, Journal of Management and Organization, Maritime Policy & Management, Journal of Cleaner Production, Journal of Intellectual Capital, and Thunderbird International Business Review. He is a Series Editor for “Big Data for Industry 4.0: Challenges and Applications,” published by Taylor & Francis Group.

Dr. Punam Mishra is currently an Associate Professor at the Institute of Management, JK Lakshmipat University, Jaipur, with over 18 years of experience in academics and industry. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, and has expertise in marketing. Herteaching, research, and training focus on consumer behavior, digital marketing, and communication skills. Dr. Mishra has presented her work at prestigious conferences and published extensively in national and international journals.

Prof. Anurag Pahuja is currently a Professor at the Mittal School of Business, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara. She serves as the chief editor of the International Journal of Business Ethics in Developing Economies. With more than 24 years of academic experience, she has served as a Visiting Professor in the Delhi-NCR region. Before this, she served as an Associate Professor at IMS Ghaziabad and an Assistant Professor at AIMTC, Jalandhar. Her academic contribution has been recognized through the Certificate of Excellence for "Faculty for Exemplary Research in Corporate Governance and Financial Management,” awarded by The Education Post and CIAC-Global, in association with CIHF, on August 22, 2016.