

# Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Problem discussion .....	5
1.2 Research purpose .....	7
1.3. Delimitation .....	7
1.4. Key terms .....	8
2. Literature Review.....	9
2.1. Anti consumption .....	10
2.2 Brand hate .....	10
2.3 Brand rejection.....	12
2.4 Brand boycott.....	13
2.5 Brand avoidance.....	14
2.5.1 Experience Avoidance.....	15
2.5.2 Identity avoidance .....	16
2.5.3 Moral avoidance.....	17
2.5.4 Deficit-value avoidance .....	17
2.5.5 Advertising avoidance.....	18
2.6 Chinese Consumers.....	19
2.7 Chinese Consumer with Brand Avoidance .....	21
3. Methodology .....	23
3.1 Research philosophy .....	23
3.2 Research Approach .....	24
3.3 Research Design.....	24
3.4 Method .....	25
3.4.1 Data collection .....	25
3.4.2 Segmentation.....	26
3.4.3 Sampling .....	27
3.4.4 Construction of Focus Group.....	29

3.5 Secondary Data .....	31
3.6 Data analysis .....	31
3.7 Trustworthiness .....	33
4. Findings.....	35
4.1 Experiential Avoidance .....	35
4.2 Identity Avoidance .....	37
4.3 Moral Avoidance .....	37
4.4 Deficit-Value Avoidance .....	41
4.5 Advertising.....	42
5. Analysis.....	44
5.1 Experiential Avoidance .....	45
5.1.1 Poor Performance.....	45
5.1.2 Sales Training.....	45
5.1.3 Brand Relationships .....	45
5.2 Identity Avoidance .....	46
5.2.1 Negative Reference Group.....	46
5.3 Moral Avoidance .....	46
5.3.1 Political Positioning .....	46
5.3.2 Insulting Speech.....	47
5.3.3 Animal Test .....	47
5.3.4 Brand Plagiarism.....	48
5.4 Deficit-Value Avoidance .....	49
5.4.1 Unfamiliarity.....	49
5.4.2 Aesthetic Insufficiency.....	49
5.4.3 Price-performance Ratio .....	49
5.5 Advertising.....	50
5.5.1 Celebrity Endorsement.....	50
5.5.2 Content.....	50

6. Conclusion .....	52
6.1 Research Result.....	52
6.2 Suggestion for further research.....	52
Reference .....	54
Appendix.....	64

## Table of Figures

1) General brand avoidance model .....	15
2) Screenshot of tarte .....	39
3) Flyer from Peta .....	40
4) Previous model about Brand Avoidance.....	44
5) Model of brand avoidance amongst female Chinese consumers.....	44

## Tables

Table 1) Overview of the focus groups.....	29
Table 2) Focus group 1 .....	30
Table 3) Focus group 2 .....	30
Table 4) Focus group 3 .....	30

# 1. Introduction

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In this chapter, the author will present the reader with the background information of brand avoidance in order to have a general view of the main concept of this study. The motivation and the purpose will be explained. Furthermore, the delimitation and the key words will be outlined to ensure a deeper understanding of the subject

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## 1.1 Problem discussion

Companies generally believe that the most powerful tool for improving reputation and profitability is the positive relationship between brands and customers (Fournier, Breazeale & Fetscherin, 2012; Knittel et al., 2016). Generally speaking, the customer's positive experience can enhance good brand and customer relationships, and ultimately bring satisfaction and potential loyalty to the brand itself. (Ha & Perks, 2005; Berry, 2000; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Lau & Lee, 1999). In general, most customer and brand research focuses on exploring the positive aspects of brand consumption (Lee et al., 2009a), like brand awareness (Barreda, Bilgihan, Nusair & Okumus, 2015; Rossiter, 2014), brand loyalty (Fournier Et al., 2012; He, Li & Harris, 2012; Huang, Lin, & Phau, 2015; Khraim, 2011; Merisavo & Raulas, 2004; Nam, Ekinci & Whyat, 2011; Nezakati, Yen & Akhondi, 2013), brand affection (Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2012; Maxian, Bradley, Wise & Toulouse, 2013), and love of a particular brand (Tse & Chan, 2008). Consumers express their self-awareness by establishing their identity or self-image through those brands that are used by them (Aaker, 1999; Belk, 1988; Hogg, Cox and Keeling, 2000; McCracken, 1989). Conversely, the negative effects between brands and customers are rarely studied, such as anti-consumption, brand hate as well as brand avoidance (Khan & Lee, 2014; Lee et al, 2009; Lee et al, 2009a; Lee et al, 2009b). Li et al. (2009a) believe that downside brand promise is a very important aspect. In addition, they also found a four-brand avoidance framework based on four broad categories. These are experience, identity, ethics and deficit avoidance. The results of brand promises for each category are non-transitive and attractive, as well as harmful and inadequate. Knittel et al. (2016) extended this model and added a brand avoidance category, namely advertising. Further research on the future of product categories and a more in-depth study of advertising research in brand avoidance behavior are presented. Recently, interest in research on consumer topics has increased, such as brand avoidance and anti-consumption (Cherrier, 2009; Lee et al., 2009a). Some researchers

believe that it is equally important for companies to understand the positive and negative effects between consumers and brands or products (Banister and Hogg, 2004; Patrick, MacInnis and Folkes, 2002; Wilk, 1997).

For companies, the most important thing is to possess a thorough knowledge of brand avoidance so as to offer marketers with insights about customer and company or brand relationships (McColl-Kennedy, Patterson, Smith & Brady, 2009). As of today, the concept of brand avoidance is only poorly understood. The general perspective was investigated and it is extremely hard to define for different industries and product categories (Khan & Lee, 2014; Lee et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2009a; Lee et al., 2009b; Knittel et al., 2016). It is important, therefore, that future research increasingly emphasizes this gap in knowledge.

In this study, the author will conduct research on the Chinese market and focus on western cosmetics brand in China. In line with Hofstede's study of Chinese cultural dimensions, consumers in China show more diversified behavior than those in other nations (Kim et al., 2002). Most of the existing consumer literature focusing on the Chinese market is about the decision-making procedure, consumer value, demand and buying behaviors, brand trust and brand influence as well as brand loyalty (Kim et al., 2002; Schmitt, 1997; Zhou Et al, 2010; Kim & Monica, 2014). Nonetheless, different topics need to be examined, such as negative concepts, and more specifically, brand avoidance. To date, it seems that no research has been conducted focusing on the consumer brand avoidance for China's independent cosmetics brands.

China is currently the second largest economic entity (World Bank, 2017). In current years, as China's economy develops in a fast manner, a rapid growth has been in the industry of cosmetics. In the late 1980s, P&G and Unilever two global chemical giants, entered China followed by Avon, L'Oreal and other multinational companies who also entered the Chinese market. According to Euromonitor, the skincare industry's retail sales in 2017 attained 186.7 billion yuan (RMB), while make-up achieved 34.4 billion yuan (RMB). A 10.3% and 21.3% increase was seen respectively in skin care items and cosmetics in comparison with the same period in 2016.

60% of China's high-end cosmetic market is monopolized by foreign brands, and more than 90% of sales are controlled by foreign-invested companies.

After nearly 10 years of development, however, China's national cosmetics enterprises have become an important competitive force in the development of the cosmetics market what is in known in China as from a single to a group.

Despite the growth in Chinese brands, consumers are still more inclined to buy international brands of skin care products. The retail sales of high-end skin care products in 2017 is still lower than that of popular fast-moving products. Nonetheless, the market share of high-end skin care products has gradually increased, from 27% in 2012 to 31% in 2017. Therefore, researching and understanding the factors that make consumers decide not to choose certain brands, is the driving factor for brand avoidance. From the author's point of view, it will help to broaden the brand avoidance concept, ensure brand prevention reasons, and ultimately bring commercial success (HKTDC, 2018).

## 1.2 Research purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the main reasons why Chinese female consumers are engaged in brand avoidance concerning the consumption of Western cosmetic brands.

Therefore, the research question in this study is: What are the propelling forces behind the brand avoidance of female Chinese costumers concerning Western cosmetic brands?

## 1.3. Delimitation

In this study, cosmetics are defined as skin care and makeup products. Due to the wide variety of cosmetic products on the market, it is not possible to explore all the brands in this article. Therefore, as the research object the author will only select the brands mentioned by the participants. Both online and offline components will be examined. This is necessary in order to include also the service aspects of brands such as consulting and make up services.

Another delimitation is the origin of the investigated people. Only people from developed cities were considered for this thesis. These cities include Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Liaoning (Observer, 2016). People living in other

parts of china, especially people from more rural areas are not included in this study. As mentioned above, the consumer model may vary significantly from developed to still developing regions. The advantage of investigating developed cities is, that the gathering of information is more accessible and better researched. Furthermore, developed cities tend to have a similar culture.

#### 1.4. Key terms

##### **Anti-consumption**

"can be literally defined as" against "or "oppose "consumption." (Agarwal, 2013).

##### **Brand avoidance**

"A phenomenon in which people select to stay away from or decline the brand in a deliberate manner." (Lee et al. 2009, p. 170).

##### **Cosmetics**

"Cosmetics refer to the substances that are used to enhance the beauty of the human body in addition to simple cleansing products". (Schneider, Günther et al, 2005).

##### **Consumer Psychology**

"A study of why people buying this" (Sara O,2018).

##### **Chinese consumers**

In this study, Chinese consumers were defined as people living in developed coastal cities in China, namely Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guangdong, and Liaoning.

## 2. Literature Review

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This chapter describes the theoretical framework of this study. Extensive discussion of anti-consumption and brand avoidance of relevant literature ensures an understanding of brand avoidance and relationships with previous research. The existing brand avoidance model is the central theme of the study. Finally, we will introduce Chinese female's cosmetics consumers.

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It seen as a given, that consumers buy brands or products which will improve their situation or has a positive influence on them. People might buy products from a brand because of the perceived quality. Other people might buy brands because it is an integral part of their identity, etc. (Lee et al., 2009).

Relatively speaking, the adverse effects of brands or products on consumers may lead to customer avoidance behavior, thereby unnecessarily preventing people from adding value to a brand (Holt, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Muniz & Hamer, 2001; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006).

Many consumer researchers have investigated the “positive consumption” of brands or products, while the “negative consumption” has still not been fully looked into (Banister & Hogg, 2004). Many researchers believe that understanding what consumers don't like is just as important as knowing what they do like (Patrick, MacInnis, & Folkes, 2002; Wilk, 1997).

In this article, the author will focus on brand avoidance. Because investigation on existing brand avoidance is rather limited, utilizing existing responses found in literature may be an important source of information in order to help identify possible reasons for avoiding brands (Lee et al., 2009).

By studying the available literature, three identified non-consumption categories of anti-consumption can be found: rejection, restriction and recycling (Li et al., 2011). Refusing to consume means that consumers exclude certain products or services from the consumption cycle. This rejection may be for functional, symbolic or based on moral reasons.

## 2.1. Anti consumption

Anti-consumption can be literally defined as “against” or “oppose” consumption (Agarwal, 2013). When consumers refuse to consume the products of a particular brand, this behavior might spread out to other consumers (Zavestoski, 2002). This manifests both as an activity and an attitude (Cherrier, 2009).

“Anti-constellation” serves as a significant theory of brand avoidance (Hogg and Bannister, 2001). The anti-constellation consists of two kinds of anti-consumption behavior, "non-choice and counter-choice." Non-choice consists of three conditions: affordability, availability, and accessibility. Non-choice refers to the fact that consumers are not intuitively buying brands and products because they are unavailable, inaccessible, and / or too expensive (Lee et al., 2009a). In other words, services or products may exceed consumer conditions due to shortage of funds or market unavailability. In contrast, "anti-choice" is because the service or product is not compatible with the consumer's preferences and therefore will not be selected even at the consumer's conditions. Anti-selection consists of three parts: disgust, giving up and avoiding (Hogg & Bannister, 2001).

## 2.2 Brand hate

Hate is probably the most intense negative emotion that consumers may have in general. It is therefore extremely damaging if hate of consumers is focused on a brand. Because of the strong subjectivity and volatility of this matter, brand hate tends to be ignored as a research topic most of the time, making this subject even more complicated to brands to avoid.

Some scholars believe that there are at least three kind of different research for brand hatred. They use the negative emotional adjustment of consumers to conduct a more in-depth study of the powerful influence of brand avoidance.

- Number one, brand relations:  
recent literature calls for more research on the negative impact of consumer and brand relationships (Fournier and Alvarez, 2013; Park et al., 2013).
- Number two, user generated internet content:  
there has been some literature on consumers which are creating forums to gather

other people with the same ideas (hatred of a brand) and will create and be active in “hate groups”. These “hate groups” are used by individuals to share their negative feelings on a brand and share these feelings with other individuals with similar opinions. This can escalate to planning and execution of actions against the target of the hatred. (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2009; Krishnamurthy and Kucuk, 2009). Generally speaking, the bigger more popular the brand, the more attention they will pay to this phenomenon. According to the so-called “negative dual” theory, consumers' perceptions have a very important impact on brands, because the support of consumers can make a brand well-known, but in return, dissatisfied consumers can destroy a brand as well (Kucuk, 2008; 2010).

- Number three, consumer services:  
the literature on service marketing shows why consumers generate hatred when they encounter unsatisfactory consumer services (Grégoire et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2011). These emotional factors can have a negative impact on companies and brands, and cause the result that consumers avoid spending or talking about it.

Grégoire et al. (2009) argue that brand hatred is divided into desire for revenge and desire to avoid. The desire for revenge is defined as "customers who punish the company for damages caused by the bad experience they have suffered, and the desire to avoid is defined as "the customer quits and refuses any interaction with the company." These two emotions lead to different behaviors. The desire for revenge is a positive confrontation against the company and the brand, related to punishment, and will produce real revenge. The desire to avoid is negative and non-confrontational, and even actively to avoid confrontation, consumers will firmly escape from their relationship with any of the company or brand, usually shows as consumers refuse to associate with the company or brand. Most of the reasons of these two desires come from a bad service experience, and these two can even coexist.

Johnson et al. (2011) define “hate” as the most powerful emotional factor for consumers from the current brand- or service-related adverse events. The main representative behavior is revenge. In their empirical research, Johnson et al. (2011) proved that brand hate can be also a manifestation of shame. They found that shame or feeling shame is a significant link in the process of making consumers show annoying emotions.

Alba and Lutz (2013) argue that brand hate is a condition in which consumers are “taken hostage” by companies. For example, due to high switching costs, regional monopolies or other aversion to the formation of barriers to expression. The result of this hatefulness is that consumers will show disappointment and dislike of the brand through social media, launch a negative discussion of the brand in specific forums on the Internet, and transmit the brand to other consumers in the daily interaction. The negative information thus affects more consumers. Therefore, "brand hate" is defined as "real brand aversion."

Romani et al. (2012) argue that hate is part of the consumer's negative sentiment in the emotional expression of the brand, so the feeling of hating should be seen to be a very extreme form of dislike of the brand.

Bryson et al. (2013) define brand hate as “a strong negative emotional impact of consumers on brands”. The literature describes four conditions that brand hate may generate: the country of origin of the brand, the negative evaluation of the products by the customer, the negative stereotype of the brand user, and the social performance of the company. Brand hate can lead consumers to start or deliberately avoid or reject brands, and even expressly reject them. Negative evaluations and bad brand image, the goal of resisting and destroying brands are typical brand hatreds.

Because of the above research on consumers' experience of brand hate, Hegner., et al. (2017) found that this led to three behavioral outcomes, namely negative word of mouth, brand retaliation and brand avoidance. Negative brand perception is harmful to both consumers and brand and can lead to economic losses for the company. It can be found more valued data from the negative information of the brand, so in order to avoid brand hate, it is necessary to effectively manage negative brand relationships (Fournier & Alvarez, 2013).

### 2.3 Brand rejection

Brand avoidance can be generally defined as the framework why consumers deliberately reject brands (Lee et al., 2009a). Brand rejection means the entanglement of undesired self as well as undesired eventual status (Hogg & Banister, 2001). Hogg

and Banister (2001) point out the conception of the undesired self, namely, the opposite of the ideal self.

"And consumers are expected to consider whether brands can enhance their self-image when they consume, so consumers will refuse products or services that do not add to their lives" (Lee et al., 2009a).

Ray (2009) believes that brand rejection can occur before and after purchase. The pre-purchase refusal is driven by understanding the psychological state of other consumers, which creates a negative judgment on the brand. This means that even before the purchase, the state of the consumer is not conducive to the brand in question. Again, this pre-emptive refusal may be a response to a collective analysis of "known" information. It may, however, even be possible that the brand is immediately rejected without any assessment. The refusal generated after purchase is based on an assessment of consumption. A bad consumer experience can eliminate any consumer's feelings about the brand, and even make the brand disappear forever as far as they are concerned.

Symbolic consumption expresses positive and negative implications associated with the decisions of the consumer. Whether a brand summons a positive or negative user self-image, can have an effect on symbolic consumption and brand rejection. The ultimate motivation for rejecting a brand is the undesired self (Hogg & Banister, 2001).

Consumers are more likely to buy brands that generate a feeling of unique self-identity. As the level of consumption rises, the ability of brands to create unique self-identification declines. Consumers may end up with a negative perception of the brand, which can lead them to an unwelcome self-concept, which in return leads to brand rejection.

#### 2.4 Brand boycott

Lee et al (2009a) believe that brand boycott and brand avoidance will occur simultaneously. Resisting a decision is sometimes considered to be due to a consumer's dissatisfaction with a service or product on the market. This occurs after having had a bad consumer experience and, therefore, the decision is made not to buy certain brands. Inappropriate business practices may also lead to service boycotts (Friedman, 1985). Human rights, failed business strategy decisions, and unethical business activities are

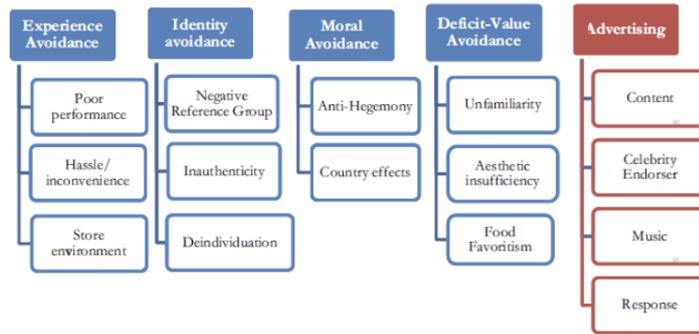
the main reasons for brand resistance (Makarem & Jae, 2015).

Consumers will resist companies that engage in unethical business activities. This is because service is a concept related to ethics and values. Consumption of services or products is one reason for consumers to resist brands (Makarem & Jae, 2015). More consumers who are concerned about corporate social responsibility will eventually lead to service boycotts. Consumers can participate in a variety of topics through social media in order to better understand their role in society. As a result, the reputations of brands and companies have become more sensitive and vulnerable (Makarem & Jae, 2015).

Because of the popularity of social media, consumers are free to build resistance organizations and effectively spread the message to millions of consumers (Makarem & Jae, 2015). Social media has become a platform for consumers to use their own consciousness to influence other consumers. Individuals can effectively and quickly spread the strategy and the reason for boycotting brands to family, friends and millions of social media users. Consumers use social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, and WeChat (a Chinese WhatsApp counterpart) as tools to disseminate information about the service providers they would like people around the world to resist.

## 2.5 Brand avoidance

Brand avoidance refers to “a phenomenon in which consumers deliberately choose to stay away from or reject a brand” even if the brand or product is available and affordable (Lee et al. 2009, p. 170). From a consumer perspective, this may be because the brand does not meet the consumer's requirements and expectations. According to known literature, Lee et al. (2009a) four aspects of brand avoidance are pointed out, namely experience, identity, ethics and deficit value. This model was extended by Knittel et al. (2016), adding a fifth aspect to the original model, advertising.



Source: Knittel et al., (2016, p.37)

1) *General brand avoidance model*

2.5.1 Experience Avoidance

There are three main reasons for avoiding experience: poor product quality or performance, unsatisfactory prices, and poor store environments (Lee et al., 2009b).

A bad practical experience is often the cause of experience avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a). Dissatisfaction usually occurs when the product or service experience is lower than expected. The actual experience may be better or worse than expected, and uncertain negative effects can lead to brand avoidance in some cases (Lee et al., 2009b).

Brand building is therefore necessary to make commitments to customers and strive to meet all customer standards. This is especially important for popular brands, since bigger brands generally have higher customer expectations. (Berry, 2000; Balmer & Gray, 2003). Consumer expectations are determined by factors such as the product itself, the brand or previous product experience, brand connotation and symbolic elements (Oliver, 1980). Consumers form a negative view of the brand upon the basis of former hands-on experience of certain branded product or service (Lee et al., 2009b).

If consumers are not treated properly after having experienced a bad performance of a brand, they will, as a result be disappointed and may in future avoid the brand or the service entirely.

Another way of saying this is that when a consumer gets an unsatisfactory product or service, they did not get good after-sales service, cause it cost too much time and extra money, which means it does not worth to get this service. This is situation will cause brand avoidance as well (Knittel et al., 2016). Poor consumer service experiences which

can be the reason consumers avoid brands, include:

- Inconvenience
- Price
- Failure of critical services
- Corporate response and processing of service failure outcomes
- Ethical issues
- Attractiveness of competitors

(Keaveney, 1995)

These reasons can be drivers of consumer change or factors that lead to brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009a). Finally, Kotler et al (1973) argue that a well-designed store environment can appeal to consumers and may make them more willing to buy which is a counter-factor for brand avoidance.

### 2.5.2 Identity avoidance

Identity avoidance refers to the inability of a particular brand to fulfill the identity requirements of a particular consumer (Lee et al., 2009b).

Consumers build their identity by buying and using brands or products. Because of this, they buy products that not only meet their needs but also meet their identity requirements. Consumers will choose brands that appeal to them based on their own preferences. Brand promise is a factor that appeals to consumers. Unattractive brand promises will be avoided because consumers will not use them in order to not make themselves unpopular (Lee et al., 2009c).

Consumers will avoid brands associated with negative reference groups because these brands do not match the identity requirements they have built (Lee et al., 2009a). People will reject branded products or service that are considered to be overly popular and commercialized without realism and cultural uniqueness, as this is a bad feature for consumers (Holt, 2002; Beverland, 2006). Depersonalization occurs when consumers begin to avoid mainstream brands, thus avoiding personalization and losing self-identity (Lee et al, 2009a). When there is depersonalization, costumers will avoid these brands and maintain their own uniqueness.

### 2.5.3 Moral avoidance

The ideology of the brand will affect the society, and if the influence is negative, it will lead to moral avoidance. That is the moral avoidance in the field of politics, economy, faith, and social culture (Lee et al., 2009a). Some consumers even believe that it is their responsibility to avoid consuming these brands. Moral avoidance is divided into two parts: anti-hegemony and state effect (Lee et al., 2009c).

Anti-hegemony refers to consumers avoiding brands and companies with monopoly forms, or irresponsible brands and non-personalized brands (Lee et al., 2009a). On the other hand, consumers may reject companies that are considered to have a potential monopoly threat that counteracts the creation of a monopoly. They may also reject irresponsible brands, such those that do not fulfill social corporate responsibility (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). Non-personalized avoidance occurs when consumers believe that a large-scale company cannot establish brand relationships for individuals. This aspect is more obvious in multinational corporations because the services of multinational corporations are more likely to be concerned, people would like to exaggerate the defects of multinational corporations which means corporations will get more discussion.

The national effect expresses consumers' perceptions of the brand and the country of product's origin. When they reject or dislike a country of origin, they actively avoid brands from this country (Lee et al., 2009a). For example, due to historical reasons, the campaign to boycott Japanese brands in China has reduced the market share of Japanese brands. Another aspect is that consumers voluntarily choose their own brands for patriotism to prevent foreign brands from suppressing domestic brands and capital outflows (Sandikci & Ekici · 2009).

### 2.5.4 Deficit-value avoidance

When consumers believe that brands cannot provide acceptable prices for profit weighs, deficit-value avoidance suggests that this is an unequal exchange of values. Consumers avoid brands with insufficient price quality. A well-functioning brand cannot be guaranteed (Lee et al., 2009c). Therefore, first-hand experience is not a prerequisite for consumers, deficit-value avoidance merely focuses on the relations amid values and costs (Knittel et al., 2016). In general, consumers are influenced by the relationship

between price and quality in their purchasing intentions and behavior (Dodds et al., 1991). An example is when consumers avoid buying products that they think are of poor quality.

For the moment, deficit-value avoidance includes three aspects: unfamiliarity, lack of aesthetics, and food preferences. Unfamiliarity means that consumers do not take the initiative to buy brands and products that are unfamiliar to them because they believe that this will increase the risk of buying unsatisfactory products (Knittel et al., 2016). Insufficient aesthetics means that consumers use their own aesthetic preferences to choose whether or not to buy the brand or product. In short, whether the packaging of the product meets the aesthetic standards of consumers (Lee et al., 2009b). Food preference means that consumers are more rational in choosing foods so that they will avoid foods that may have deficit-value avoidance (Lee et al., 2009c).

#### 2.5.5 Advertising avoidance

Knittel, Beurer and Berndt (2016) have expanded the brand avoidance model and added advertising avoidance to this concept. Advertising avoidance includes content, celebrity spokespersons, music, and responses to advertising. It is considered a factor in promoting brand avoidance.

It has been confirmed that all four aspects can have a negative impact on the brand. (Knittel, 2016).

The definition of advertising is “any major communication target is information about brand awareness and brand attitude, regardless of the media used” (Rosenbaum-Elliott, 2015). According to the literature, advertising can cause consumer dissatisfaction and lead to brand avoidance (Knittel, 2016).

The content of an advertisement is the initial factor that may cause dissatisfaction and can even directly lead to the avoidance of a specific brand (Knittel, 2016). For example, the content of the advertisement contains taboo subjects of defamatory content, including violence, nudity and sex. Taboo topics can attract a lot of attention to the brand, but the risk of hostility will increase as well. Another aspect is that if the consumer does not understand or misunderstands the content of the advertisement, it may also lead to brand avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016). In addition, consumers will

avoid brands that are endorsed by celebrities they don't like. Celebrity endorsement is an undeniable and efficient marketing method which greatly enhances the brand's awareness and thus also enhances consumers' desire to purchase. It is only the duality of a celebrity spokesperson that prevents him from becoming a perfect marketing tool (Apéria & Back, 2004). The music in the advertisement also has two aspects. Positive influence will increase the consumer's desire to purchase and the negative influence will lead to brand avoidance (Apaolaza-Ibáñez, Zander and Hartmann, 2010). Finally, the response to advertising is that different consumers get different information from the same advertisement and react differently. If consumers get negative information, it will lead to brand avoidance (Knittel et al., 2016).

## 2.6 Chinese Consumers

This part examines how Chinese consumers interact within the cosmetics market and which attitude they have towards cosmetics brands. Also the differences of Chinese and foreign brands will be examined.

Cosmetics are applied to the human body (such as skin, hair, nails and lips, etc.) through smearing, spraying, sprinkling or other similar application methods to achieve cleansing, care, protection, beautification, modification and change of appearance, to correct the body odor or to maintain a state of well feeling. Depending on the application, cosmetics can be divided into color cosmetics, skin care, treatment, cleaning, hair care, hairdressing, solid hair, body and so on (Schneider, Günther et al 2005).

The development of China's cosmetics industry has a long history. It is roughly divided into four stages: the early stage, the slow development stage, the rapid development stage and the standardized development stage (CBO news, 2011).

- Early stage: China is one of the earliest countries in the world to apply cosmetics. According to academic records, the people in China have been using cosmetics as early as the Qin and Han Dynasties. This was initiated when people started to mix smooth and greasy products with water. This was the time, the idea of skin care products and cosmetics started to take shape.

- Slow development stage: During the times of the pre-industrialization, China's cosmetics production has been in the hands of small family workshops. In the early 20th century, China's cosmetics production gradually moved toward industrialization. However, due to the low standard of living of the people and the conventional concept of imprisonment, it develops slowly.
- Rapid development stage: In the 1980s, as the national economy rapidly develops and the people's living standards get continuously improved, the importance of the cosmetics industry has increased significantly, and has developed from a small artisanal industry to a complex system with links to biology, chemistry and pharmacy. The very concept of cosmetics started to change. Cosmetics started to change from being a luxury to become an essential part of daily life.
- Standardized development stage: After experiencing rapid development in the last stage, China's cosmetics market has created a situation of blooming flowers. In order to better satisfy the demands of consumers, the state has drafted related laws and regulations, which has put the cosmetics industry on the road of standardized development (CBO news, 2011).

In the early stage of the development of cosmetics, due to the constraints of economic development, only people in developed areas had access to cosmetics. The ability for common people living inlands to access cosmetics was highly limited.

With the development of the economy and the effective use of resources, cosmetics have gradually spread to all parts of the country. The research also revealed that women in mainland China formed makeup habits step by step. This can be seen among young female respondents in the age range of 20 to 30 years, where 88% percent of the demographic use make up. But also, more mature women have extensive makeup habits with 83% of 31-45 years old reporting the use of cosmetics. The main consumer groups of make-up products are born during the 80s and 90s. They focus more on the appearance and fashion statements of the products, with high sensitivity to product updates. Hence, many brands realize increasing sales through cooperation with celebrities, beauty bloggers, or through placing advertisements in movies and entertainment programs. Based on TDC's 2016 China Skin Care and Cosmetics Consumer Survey, "product efficacy/ effectiveness" (66%)", "brand" (64%) and "word of mouth" (60%) are top 3 considerations for female consumers in mainland China to

choose their cosmetic items. Young respondents paid more attention to “word of mouth” and “price” factors, while “natural/organic/herbs & plants” and “high-tech/biotech development” factors were more attractive to mature respondents.

All the above studies follow scientific research methods, but the preferences of Chinese cosmetic consumers are still a difficult concept to define. At present, the researchers' different views on the problem, the relatively small sample is also an important reason for minor errors. China as a country should be seen as many markets, including all underdeveloped, developing and developed regions. People in different regions may have different consumption habits, different tastes and aesthetics (Fernandez & Underwood, 2006). under these circumstances. It is necessary to subdivide Chinese cosmetics consumers.

## 2.7 Chinese Consumer with Brand Avoidance

Klein et al. (1998) first proposed the concept of consumer hostility when studying the impact of the Nanjing Massacre on Chinese consumers' purchases of Japanese products. That is, the consumer's resentment or aversion to the current or past military, political, and economic conflicts in a country. Consumer hostility will reduce the willingness to purchase hostile products. Some studies have also shown that consumer hostility not only affects consumers' willingness to purchase, but also affects product quality judgment (Huang et al., 2010; Leong et al., 2008; Rose et al., 2009).

After the Diaoyu Islands incident, various cities in China held a massive boycott of Japanese goods, resulting in a sharp decline in sales of Japanese branded products in the Chinese market. According to statistics released by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers, the market share of Japanese cars in October 2012 has fallen to a historical low of 10%. According to data from the market research company Zhongyikang, sales of Japanese brands' TV sets in China have also fallen sharply. Other related industries in Japan, including travel to Japan, clothing, cosmetics, and supermarket chains, have also been seriously affected, and even Japanese-related companies have been affected. Similar scenarios have emerged in many countries and at certain times as a result of political events and historical memory that have made consumers hostile to specific countries and have reduced or

rejected the purchase of related products in the country (Shengjun Yuan,2013).

The information that can be collected about Chinese consumer and brand avoidance is very limited. Except for the large-scale boycott of the national territorial disputes, there is not enough theory to express the consumption avoidance behavior of Chinese consumers in other aspects. Investigators will conduct research on this theoretical vacancy.

### 3. Methodology

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This chapter will discuss how to design and conduct research. Based on research on brand avoidance behavior and Chinese female's cosmetic consumer segmentation, select qualitative research: Focus Group. The sample is determined using a pattern of natural sampling.

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#### 3.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is about the development of knowledge as well as the nature of knowledge, such as how we view the world. This is the process that must be experienced in starting a research and is the first step in research. Will be a guide to problem analysis, methods and data analysis. Research philosophy includes realism, positivism, interpretivism and pragmatism (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Realism can be classified into direct realism and critical realism. Direct realism holds the view that human beings can rely on feelings and experience to distinguish the world. Criticism realism considers feelings and experiences to be deceptive because they cannot truly describe the world. Positivism believes that human beings should learn by observing and measuring facts, so they need to study data and analyze them in order to be considered credible. Interpretivism is the need to complete investigations through research, because interpretivism favors understanding and believes that the world differs from a human perspective. Pragmatism is thought to be the study and understanding of data by collecting different perspectives through observable social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2012).

According to known research, positivism and interpretivism are two main aspects (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Positivism is a method of testing hypotheses based on experience. Researchers must ensure that data is independent and objective, and therefore requires a large amount of data to support. Interpretivism is the study of people's life experiences, such as human values and emotions, and therefore often requires qualitative research such as small samples.

Due to the current research on brand avoidance is not enough, therefore, this research is intended to complement this range of knowledge and functional deficiencies. Since

the research is intended for profound investigation of the fundamental reason of why Chinese female consumers create brand avoidance in western cosmetics brands, and these reasons are subjective and social phenomena, so the interpretative research philosophy is more suitable.

### 3.2 Research Approach

Research methods are divided into three types, inductive, deductive, and abductive (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Deductive methods rely more on data than theory, so more attention is paid to quantitative data rather than qualitative data, so a large number of samples must be selected to reach a conclusion. This approach requires constructing hypotheses based on theory and testing hypotheses along with research strategies (Saunders et al., 2007). Inductive methods focus on understanding rather than scientific principles. Qualitative data is structurally more flexible than models that use quantitative data (Saunders et al., 2007; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

The abduction method was created by combining deductive and inductive methods. This approach is based on the assumptions of existing empirical data and then tested on new empirical objects (Patel and Davidson, 2003). This study learns from existing theoretical research and then extends the known theory by learning existing empirical research, which means abductive research method. The knowledge gathered from literature reviews is the basis for building focus groups. By using Knittel et al. (2016) Existing models to validate previous findings and explore the topic further. Researchers will present open-ended questions to abduct participants to talk about their reasons of brand avoidance, which may confirm or deny existing theories and get new discoveries. An abductive method to collecting data to explore a phenomenon and identify topics to interpret patterns to develop new theories or modify existing theories (Saunders et al., 2012). This research method also demonstrates that the author is adopting an abduction method.

### 3.3 Research Design

Research design is like a guide for researchers. Researchers use different research designs for different purposes. Research design can be classified into three categories: exploratory research, descriptive research, and causal research (Saunders et al., 2012).

Exploratory research is designed to find unknown areas, often in situations where the research area is not yet complete or lacks a framework. In this case, the existing literature cannot really answer the research questions, and the exploratory research design is used to construct the theoretical explanation. Descriptive studies are used when there are already possible causes and facts in the literature but no data has been collected to prove the literature. Descriptive studies are designed to collect facts or data that apply to existing literature. Causal research is used to explore causal relationships between independent and dependent variables. Causal research is often used to answer questions about why research (Saunders et al., 2012).

As implied in the previous section, this study use a qualitative research design. Since the exploration of brand avoidance motivation is relatively new and requires additional exploration, the awareness of brand avoidance through open-ended questions clarifies that researchers can delve deeper into questions like how and when. Therefore, the research possesses exploratory nature of research. In order to test the brand avoidance of consumers in their daily lives and purchases, a case study strategy was adopted. Based on an understanding of the research design, the study should be incorporated into a descriptive research design. Descriptive studies can be further catalogued as cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies (Saunders et al., 2012). The cross-sectional study only involved data collected from the sample set once. Longitudinal studies involve data collected from a sample set two or more times. Longitudinal studies are based on timelines to describe faces (Saunders et al., 2012). So, this research will be cross-section instead of vertical.

### 3.4 Method

#### 3.4.1 Data collection

To overcome the limitations associated with the use of one data source, this study used first-hand and second-hand data. First-hand data refers to data generated from original sources, such as surveys, experiments, interviews, and focus groups (Carson, 2001). First-hand data helps to verify the purpose of the focus group interviews and to conduct an in-depth study of the focus group interview. The focus group is the first-hand source of data for qualitative researchers because of direct interaction with participants (Carson, 2001).

Because investigators face the inability to conduct interviews due to geographic barriers and the high cost of long distances, Internet focus group interviews have become the first choice for investigators for their convenience, accessibility, speed of data collection, and low cost (Saunders et al., 2012). According to a survey by CNNIC (2017), WeChat became the highest social media in the trial of Chinese Internet users, accounting for 79.6%. Therefore, the investigators chose to use WeChat as a tool for the focus group interview. The focus group interview collected data through three groups of focus group discussions. In order to not expose the age privacy of the participants before the interview, the investigators first conducted a simple interview with each investigator, including age, income and current status. To ensure that each participant can complete this discussion comfortably. Some general questions will be prepared in advance, and if the information provided by the respondent is insufficient, it can be further expanded.

#### 3.4.2 Segmentation

Segmentation is a type of common feature upon the basis of a diversified market of consumer or business activities, generally including existing and potential customers, for subgroups of consumers (called segments). When dividing or segmenting markets, researchers often look for common features like common needs, common interests, lifestyle-like and even similar demographics (Weinstein, 2004). The study here is for Chinese cosmetic consumers, using market segmentation to help brands understand consumers and establish appropriate assumptions. Weinstein (2004) lists subdivisions based on geography, demographics, usage, interests, behavior, and business psychology.

Geographical segmentation basically means dividing consumers into different parts based on the location of the consumer. For instance, consumers in China can be classified into consumers in primary, secondary or tertiary cities. Or it may be the main developed coastal area and any other area. The way in which consumers are divided and positioned will depend heavily on the business (Strydom, 2004).

Demographic segmentation means classification of customers into different groups by factors such as gender, age, income, as well as other demographic factors. In China, demographic segmentation has been broadly adopted when targeting groups of various income levels. Chinese consumers' "love of luxury" trend has caused a great number

of potential customers in the luxury market. The shrinking middle class and rising income are also the subject of this particular market study. nevertheless, this strategy may also target low-income groups. This depends greatly upon the nature of the product (Strydom, 2004).

China's market segmentation strategy is helpful to make identification, evaluation of target potential consumers. For every specific market, consumers are classified into different market segments according to various criteria according to business demands and nature. For instance, if it is the cosmetics market for luxury cosmetics, then high-income consumers will be identified. To be more specific, it can be the cosmetic market for aged skin. Then, for a specific age group. This strategy makes it possible to perform identification of the consumer groups needed and make assessment of their purchasing potential.

### 3.4.3 Sampling

The research is intended for exploration of the factors behind brand avoidance. According to the description of the previous interpretations philosophy, qualitative sampling methods are more suitable. Since investigators are unable to obtain information on all cosmetic consumers in the limited time, it is not possible to use overall probability sampling (too strict, time and capital consuming), which means that non-probability sampling methods will be used (Collis & Hussey, 2014). The essence of qualitative research is to better help researchers understand the topic is exploring (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, researchers use non-probability sampling techniques to facilitate sampling, also known as natural sampling (Collis & Hussey, 2014).

The focus group can be defined as “a group of individuals selected and assembled by the researcher, based on personal experience to discuss and comment on the subject of the research topic” (Powell & Single, 1996). During the focus group discussion, the researchers will encourage and guide the group to interact, which means that participants will discuss each other and answer each other's questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Therefore, researchers are not mainly concerned with collection of personal perspectives about a topic. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008) argue that focus group researchers are concerned with how participants talk about a topic, not just what they think about it, but also about emotions, tensions, disruptions, conflicts and body

language. However, since this focus group interview will become an online discussion, the researchers can't observe the participants' emotions face to face, so we have to omit this part. It is equally important to explore unspoken content. The main feature of the focus group is that it involves of five to ten participants, a facilitator and a topic to be discussed (Powell & Single, 1996).

For reduction of the risk of main difficulties within the focus group, participants should be people possessing specific features, such as occupational or social activities. Therefore, each focus group is designed upon the basis of participants possessing the similar background, which already talked about in the front. The best time to focus groups is about two hours. Since the author must respect the specific timeline of one of the focus groups, all focus groups are limited to 60-90 minutes to ensure the comparability of the discussion (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

The shortcomings of focus groups are also widely discussed. For example, the focus group's materials cannot be used outside the group being conducted. Hence, the diversity of focus groups is very essential. Another major disadvantage of the focus group is that the dominant person may pull attention away from other participants (Harrell & Bradley, 2009), or the individual who realizes the highlight will affect the positive emotions of other participants (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). So, in order to avoid these risks, there will be a moderator to be the leader of the discussion to reduce these negative aspects, and to control the length of the speech and give the chance to those who do not have enough space in the discussion. One of the greatest strengths of the study was the use of moderator leadership in focus groups to reduce the risk of people being affected by other participants (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Focus groups are generally utilized to explore the behavior and attitudes of consumer (Holbrook & Jackson, 1996; Edmunds, 2000), which is the primary cause for involving focus groups in this research. Focus groups are also particularly useful when existing theories are limited, and thus become an exploratory study (Stewart, 2007).

The focus group's content is upon the basis of existing theories and data collected from interviews. Participants will be explained general brand avoidance and anti-consumption this two main perspectives.

The target audience for this focus group is 20 to 35 years old. In order to actively pursue

brand avoidance behavior, it is very important to have their own financial responsibilities, so the authors choose to exclude age groups under the age of 18, because these people usually do not have their own income and it is difficult to make their own purchase decisions. All the participants were from active users (female) in a cosmetics-related forum in China. The standard of being defined as active users is that they have the habit of using cosmetics daily and will take the initiative to gather information about cosmetics, at least one post about cosmetics or a discussion per day. Therefore, they have enough experience to participate in this focus group discussion. The selection of the participants was a random selection, and the investigator did not deliberately understand their likes and dislikes. The reason for not choosing snowball is that there is a prejudice when participants recommend other members, and there is no guarantee of sample diversity. Investigator hopes to show as many different segments as possible in the study to facilitate analysis of patterns and similarities between different consumer groups. This is to better understand the brand avoidance in the Chinese women's cosmetics industry. Convenient sampling methods provide great flexibility and autonomy in the sampling process, which is why it was used in this study. Therefore, it is crucial that researchers pay less attention to sampling and emphasize the results of analysis, because the time range of the study is about 4 months.

#### 3.4.4 Construction of Focus Group

*Table 1) Overview of the focus groups*

	<b>Focus group 1</b>	<b>Focus group 2</b>	<b>Focus group 3</b>
<b>Date</b>	18/10/18	6/11/18	12/11/18
<b>Duration</b>	01:25:37	01:37:44	01:14:54
<b>Place</b>	Online	Online	Online
<b>Participants</b>	5	7	6

Table 2) Focus group 1

Number	Age	Currently occupation	Education	Place	Budget per month/CNY
1	27	Home wife	Bachelor	Beijing	3000
2	25	Employee	--	Shenyang	2500
3	25	Accountant	--	Beijing	2000
4	24	Freelancer	--	Chongqing	--
5	32	Professor	PHD	Shanghai	3000

Table 3) Focus group 2

Number	Age	Currently occupation	Education	Place	Budget per month/CNY
1	20	Student	Bachelor	Shanghai	4000
2	21	--	--	Beijing	4500
3	22	--	--	Shanghai	2000
4	22	--	--	--	2500
5	22	--	--	Nanjing	2000
6	20	--	--	Guangzhou	--
7	24	Freelancer	Master	Shenyang	4000

Table 4) Focus group 3

Number	Age	Currently occupation	Education	Place	Budget per month/CNY
1	27	Home wife	Bachelor	Nanjing	2000
2	22	Student	--	Hangzhou	--
3	23	Photographer	--	Guangzhou	4000
4	33	Home wife	--	Beijing	2500
5	24	Employee	--	Shanghai	3000
6	25	--	--	Shenzhen	3500

### 3.5 Secondary Data

Secondary data is the result of investigator searching for existing literature related to research questions. The range of literature being searched is determined by qualitative data to illustrate existing theories related to anti-consumption and brand avoidance. Due to the limited number of documents directly related to brand avoidance, in this case, in order to get as much information as possible, the investigators also added sociology and psychology to the search. Search engines such as the school library and Google are the first search choices for investigators, ensuring the credibility of data and information. Lee and Conroy, the authoritative key researchers for brand avoidance, have become the guide for almost all students who study brand avoidance theory. The research by Knittel and Berndt et al. is a highly searched and used literature by researchers. Investigators can get a lot of useful data from the bibliography of the above researchers' articles. Determine the scope of your search results by searching for keywords in relation to the topic of the focus group interview. The keywords mentioned herein below were adopted in the literature search: anti-consumption; avoiding brands; Western cosmetics brands; Chinese consumers.

### 3.6 Data analysis

The content of this paragraph is to explain the strategy of analysis and why it is analyzed in this way (Williamson, 2002). The data analysis component is one of the most important and challenging parts of the writing process (Yin, 2009). When the author starts research, he will not ignore the analysis method they choose. The following questions were faced by investigators who selected qualitative research: reducing data, identifying categories and linkages, developing topics, and providing well-reported reflective conclusions (Suter, 2012).

According to Richard (2002), focus group interview can use the following strategy to analysis:

- Prepare the transcripts for analysis. Be sure about all the style is consistent.
- Make two copies of each transcript. One for cutting up and the other one for later reference.
- Arrange transcripts in an order. It will be easier for investigators to select all useful data from massive transcriptions.

- Read all transcripts at one sitting. Quick reading can help investigators know better about the location of information.
- Prepare large sheets of paper. Large paper is to make every category clear to see but in just one place.
- Cut and tape. During reading all responses from the same question, investigators should cut out relevant content, organize them and tape them to the large paper. In this step, investigators need to select all the useful content from the same question and tape them to the appropriate place.
- Write a statement about the question. After cutting and taping, investigators need to prepare an overview paragraph to describe that question, they can go to the next one until they finish this question.
- Continue until all the transcripts are reviewed.

Coding is used to analyze qualitative data. Code captures the main content of the data that researchers want to convey to others and is used to classify data with similar meanings so that researchers can place the data under relevant topics (Saldaña, 2015). The coding techniques used in this data analysis are upon the basis of: (1) reducing and simplifying existing data, (2) displaying data to find links and drawing conclusions, and (3) verifying data, and establishing a logical chain for collecting evidence (Williamson, 2002). After the focus group, the authors built references and other information shared during these meetings. The author then discussed and summarized the keynote speeches. In addition, through selective thinking, the authors selected certain citations and information revealed during focus group meetings that support existing theories, or aspects that add value to a common theme fixed in the study.

In discussing the existing literature and coding results, the authors identified accurate information that supports the purpose of the study and can further add to the creative value of new theories and models. The author hopes to communicate the findings in an organized manner. Inductive reasoning can use emergency information, and it can also allow researchers to focus on realistic experiments. Therefore, an induction method will be employed as it is based on observed phenomena and former researches (Saunders et al., 2012).

### 3.7 Trustworthiness

Transparency and systemicity are two key terms that should be recognized in qualitative research to ensure the quality of qualitative research. Transparency is based, for example, on the objectivity and sampling of research, while systematic recognition such as triangulation and coding processes (Meyrick, 2006). To ensure the transparency of this academic writing, the author focuses on guiding the reader through every step of the process to clearly present the previous literature, findings and analysis. In addition, transparency can be clearly outlined through the construction of focus groups. Systematicity was also included in the study to increase credibility.

Sanders and others. (2012) explored that although research is qualitative in nature, there is still a need to overcome the quality problems that result. These issues include reliability, interviewer and respondent bias, universality and effectiveness. Since brand avoidance is highly subjective and the drivers of different consumers may be different, it is not feasible to try to ensure the reproducibility of this study without destroying the advantages of this research method.

In addition, the investigator reduced the prejudice of interviewers and respondents by making a simple interview with each participant in advance (see appendix). By expressing appreciation for the participants' opinions, the enthusiasm of all participants is promoted, and the bias of the respondents is minimized. For example, at the beginning and end of the interview, the investigators expressed their gratitude for the participation. When the participants stated their opinions, they responded with enthusiasm and made the participants feel the greatest respect. An open and free question and answer can further demonstrate the interest and active listening of the participants. The investigator will only use the guiding question when the content is duplicated or digressed to ensure that the discussion is carried out correctly.

To address the general problem, the researchers realized that the study might not be a driving factor for brand avoidance across the population. However, this is not an intention because of the different views on this phenomenon. In addition, the study does offer some ubiquity because many of the previously discovered brand avoidance drivers are not industry specific and can be seen in the cosmetics industry.

When studying the level of effectiveness provided by this sresearch, one might think

that it is very effective. The research was intended for investigation of the drivers of Chinese women's cosmetic consumer brand avoidance. For instance, the sample only includes female Chinese cosmetic consumers, and questions raised during the interview explored the reasons for brand avoidance, which has a high level of effectiveness.

## 4. Findings

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This chapter shows the detailed response from focus group interview. The information follows the sequence of the existing model of brand avoidance.

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### 4.1 Experiential Avoidance

Experiential avoidance is the first concept brought forward by each group of participants. Experiential avoidance occurs, when a consumer has had a bad experience with a brand and/or not fulfilling a customer's expectations

Because consumers have high expectations for brands and real-life experiences tend to let them down, it is possible to create bad feelings or even avoid consumption of a brand. The following examples show the negative experiences that consumers experience due to unsatisfied expectations or unreasonably high expectations of the brand:

*Lancôme is a relatively high-end brand in cosmetics. The price is not cheap, but the actual effect is very disappointing. I know that a lot of people like this brand, there are many hot products, but none of them suit me. I can only endure it or give it to others. From then on, even if someone recommends it to me, I will not buy any product of Lancôme brand.*

G2-1

*Like the friend in front, I am also very disappointed with Clarins. Because the price is not cheap, but the effect is not the same as the price of the brand. And I also tried almost all of the hot products, including cleansers, skin oils, and foundations etc. No one product makes me feel that it is really worth buying or worth it. I can only barely use it, and then warn myself not to buy Clarins products anymore.*

G2-5

*YSL is a brand that I personally don't like because its product packaging can't be equal to the price. The reason I will buy it is because I like its packaging, and the price is not cheap, but the packaging of such expensive products will soon fade and wear, which*

*makes me very surprised and very angry. Because the product itself is not irreplaceable, packaging has become a major advantage for brands to attract customers. But the quality of the packaging is unsatisfactory, I am very disappointed with YSL.*

G1-3

The examples above highlights the experiential avoidance caused by dissatisfaction with products, which is most common reason for brand avoidance. But there are other participants who have mentioned different points of view on this subject.

*I personally don't like Armani. Because I always go to its counter, the sales staff will help me to try out its products on the face, and every time I feel that my skin is very beautiful. Therefore, I will buy it. But when I arrive at home, I figured out that there was no way to reproduce the beautiful skin at the counter. I thought it was my own method of usage. So, I went to the counter several times again to try and buy the product, but I couldn't reproduce what I saw in the store. I realized that the Armani counter used a special light to make the skin look very beautiful, and when I left the light, the desired effect disappeared immediately. I think this is a fraudulent act that makes me very angry, so I won't buy Armani products anymore.*

G3-2

*I don't know why, I always come across sales with very bad service attitudes. The typical brand is MAC, I personally do not object to MAC products, on the contrary I think the products of MAC are great. But no matter which city I go to the MAC counter, the attitude of the salespeople is always very bad. I don't care if they will say hello to me, but when I have questions, they are not willing to answer me, which makes me very dissatisfied. I am not willing to buy their products again.*

G3-5

The service attitude of the brand's staff is also an important reason for consumers to avoid buying from a brand. The attitude of the service staff is an unstable control factor. In addition to the service attitude, the after-sales attitude is also mentioned by the participants:

*My mother had a severe allergic reaction after using Lancôme's facial cleanser and had to go to the hospital for examination, which took a lot of time. And when I gave this*

*information forward to the Lancôme store, I didn't get any useful answers. The brand staff even avoids answering my questions, just stressing that their products are unlikely to cause allergies. But even after showing the hospital certificate, it is of no use. This made me very angry with the brand store. So, I no longer choose Lancôme.*

G2-4

#### 4.2 Identity Avoidance

Identity avoidance is the result of consumers being unable to demonstrate their identity or match their identity by using a brand or products of a brand. Consumers will not choose brands that do not match their identity, but in this discussion, only one participant clearly expressed this view:

*I won't buy some Western drugstore brands, such as Maybelline and Max Factor, because the packaging of these brands looks too cheap and doesn't fit my taste. But I don't ignore all the drugstore brands. Of course, there are brands with low prices but excellent packaging and products. I just don't like with these two brands I mentioned before, so I won't buy them.*

G3-4

However, two participants mentioned identity avoidance unrelated to Western brands, and the investigators briefly summarized them here.

*The Korean brand's make-up packaging is very bright and girly, more suitable for younger girls. After becoming 25 years old, I have never bought a Korean brand again.*

G1-5

*I agree with the last person, and the Korean brand is not only very bright in packaging, but the content is no longer suitable for women over the age of 25 years. The effect and color are no longer suitable for my age and identity.*

G1-1

#### 4.3 Moral Avoidance

In theory, moral avoidance is divided into two parts: anti-hegemony and state effect. The investigators mentioned earlier that due to historical reasons, Chinese consumers

have initiated activities to avoid the consumption of Japanese brands, which is a national effect. However, since this focus group interview chose Western brands, the investigators got new discoveries:

*For me, the main reason for avoiding the consumption of a brand is the political position of the brand. The brands The Body Shop, KIEHL's, LUSH, and Anastasia all meet the Dalai in public and promote the support of the Dalai Lama. This is totally unacceptable to me. Regardless of whether the brand is misled by the Dalai Lama, I can't accept and resolutely resist these brands.*

G1-5

*I heard that the Dalai Lama is promoting peace in Western society, but the essence of the Dalai Lama is to split China. I don't believe that these brands have never heard of this information. Now that the network is so developed, everything can be researched, so even if the brand clarifies its behavior, I can't accept it.*

G1-2

*I don't buy any brands that meet Dalai and promote on social media, for example, TBS, LUSH, Anastasia, etc. I don't understand why cosmetic brands want to participate in political topics, but since they are involved, they have to bear the consequences. I won't force other people to not buy these brands, but I am determined not to buy them myself.*

G2-3

*The brands mentioned are more active on social media, so the speed of communication is fast. I want to say that Too faced also published their support to split China in the official media, but since the brand is not known to the Chinese, there are not many people who know it. And the brand has not explained this behavior so far, so I will not buy it again.*

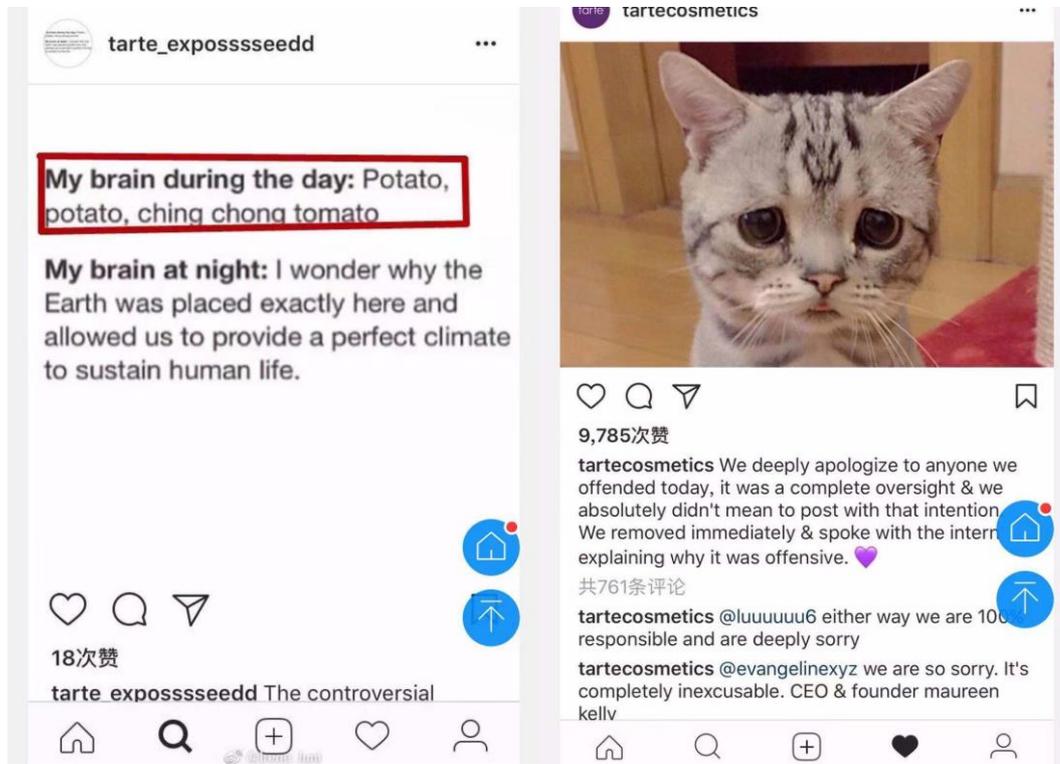
G3-2

In addition to the issue of political positions, many participants also mentioned the insults mentioned by brands in social media or conferences:

*I am also determined not to buy a brand related to Dalai, but in addition to these, I want to add Tarte. Previously, Tarte's official social media posted an insult to Asians on the Internet, which led to a very wide-ranging discussion. Although the brand*

*official apologized for it, the apology was very weak and unconvincing. I can therefore not accept this apology.*

G2-5



2) Screenshot of tarte

## Resource from Instagram

Since the content of the participants was very similar, the investigators selected some of the answers and wrote them down. In fact, only one of the participants said that they did not care about political positions or speech, and the rest of the participants made it clear that they would not buy the brands that had these behaviors.

Animal test are also a topic frequently mentioned by participants. The cosmetics industry is different from the pharmaceutical industry, and animal test are not mandatory activities. Therefore, some brands choose animal test, many brands say that based on humanitarianism they will not test on animals. In this regard, participants expressed different views:

*In my opinion, animal test is necessary because I can't trust brands which do not test products on animals. I have a picture here that writes all the brands that don't do animal experiments, and I will avoid them.*

G2-6



3) Flyer from Peta

*I can't accept products from brands that have not been tested by animals. These products can make me feel uncomfortable. I don't know how the brand guarantees that the product is truly harmless to humans without animal testing.*

G3-6

Of all the participants, only one person said she did not care about animal testing in the cosmetics industry, even supported and encouraged not to test on animals.

*I have read the literature related to animal testing, which makes me understand that animal testing is not necessary in the cosmetics industry. I have a cat as a pet, so I don't want to see animals sacrifice for these unjust tests, so I encourage the cosmetics*



*industry to stop animal testing.*

G1-5

Two participants mentioned that they would not buy again when they discovered that the brand copied other brands.

*I am studying intellectual property law, so I can't accept brand plagiarism. When I discovered that Huda Beauty's products copied the products of beauty bakerie, I decided not to buy Huda beauty again.*

G1-5

*I think plagiarism is a very serious problem, which means that the brand does not respect other brands property and is not willing to do research for their own products. Whether it is an expensive or cheap brand, every original product is worthy of being respected. Brands that steal the results of other brands should be punished.*

#### 4.4 Deficit-Value Avoidance

Deficit-Value avoidance concerns more about the price, like whether consumer will avoid a brand by price.

*I personally don't like Kiehl's very much, because compared to the same price of Origins, Kiehl's is very overpriced. Because the effect of the Kiehl's product is really simple due to the commercial content, but the price is not cheap, I will not choose Kiehl's.*

G2-3

*I won't buy any low-priced products, such as wet and wild, I can't believe that low-priced products can be of high quality. I have strict requirements on the products I use, so I will choose high-end brands because I feel that the quality is more secure.*

G3-4

In addition to the price, several participants mentioned personal aesthetics which make them avoid some brands.

*I have heard people talk about the self-owned brands created by Network influencer Jeffree Star, but I am not interested in personal brands. I even don't want to know, so I won't choose to buy this brand.*

G1-3

*..... Too faced packaging is too exaggerated, not suitable for my aesthetic, so I never want to buy....*

G3-2

#### 4.5 Advertising

Advertising is also frequently mentioned as an important reason for participants to avoid brands. Every participant mentioned the relevant aspects. The most apparent factor being the content of the advertising:

*... Unconventional advertising really makes me dislike a brand, advertising is an important way for consumers to quickly understand the brand and products. But some brands, such as Estee Lauder, always use similar content, and after seeing it for too long, I really don't want to see it again.*

G2-4

Celebrity endorsements are the most mentioned answer by participants.

*The reason I no longer buy NARS is that NARS Taiwan officially invited a celebrity who is drug addict to promote the brand. I can't accept that drug addicts continue to appear in front of the camera. So, I firmly resist the NARS.*

G1-4

*The endorsement of drug addicted celebrities is completely intolerable to me, so the advertisement NARS did, completely violated my limit. And the NARS headquarters even ignored the dissatisfaction of mainland Chinese consumers, which made me very angry. Even if the NARS mainland officially stated that the NARS Taiwan cannot represent the attitude of the mainland, I will not purchase NARS products until the NARS headquarters has issued a statement.*

G3-1

*Lancôme invited a celebrity who announced that Hong Kong should be independent at an event which made me feel so disappointed in Lancôme. I believe that the brand knows what she is saying, but Lancôme still invited her to participate in the event, so I think Lancôme does not care about the feeling of mainland Chinese consumers and does not care whether it will lose the support of mainland Chinese consumers.*

G2-7

With the rapid development of social media, endorsements are no longer limited to only celebrities, but also many Internet influencers begin to use products placement.

*I can't understand why brands like to use a lot of internet influencer to promote the same product, and ask them to post the same content at the same time. I have decided not to buy Lancôme, Estee Lauder and Chanel for this reason. Because of all the Internet influencers which will regurgitate everything a brand posts in order to make money, so I can't trust these products and start to resist such brands.*

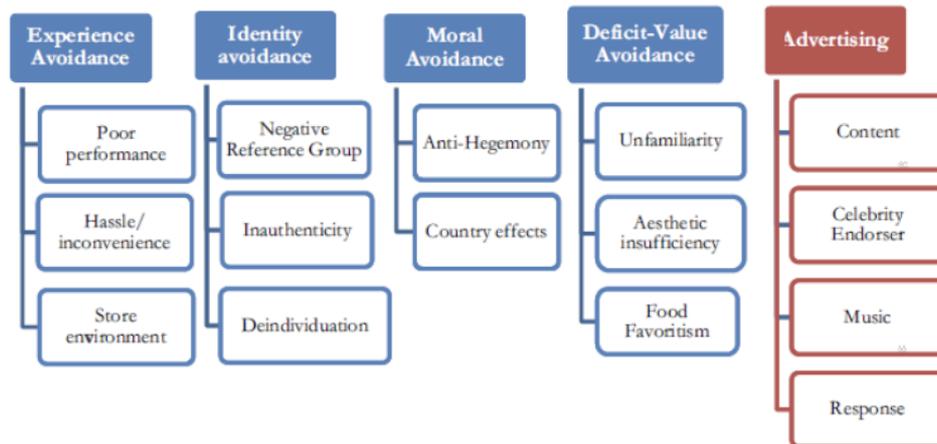
G2-2

*Estee Lauder and Lancôme are probably the brands I have seen that like to pay for a lot of internet influencers to promote. It is really annoying to see tons of same content advertising at the same time, which made me felt that I was not respected. This kind of boring content makes me cannot feel the sincerity of the brand, and will destroy the image of the brand.*

G3-5

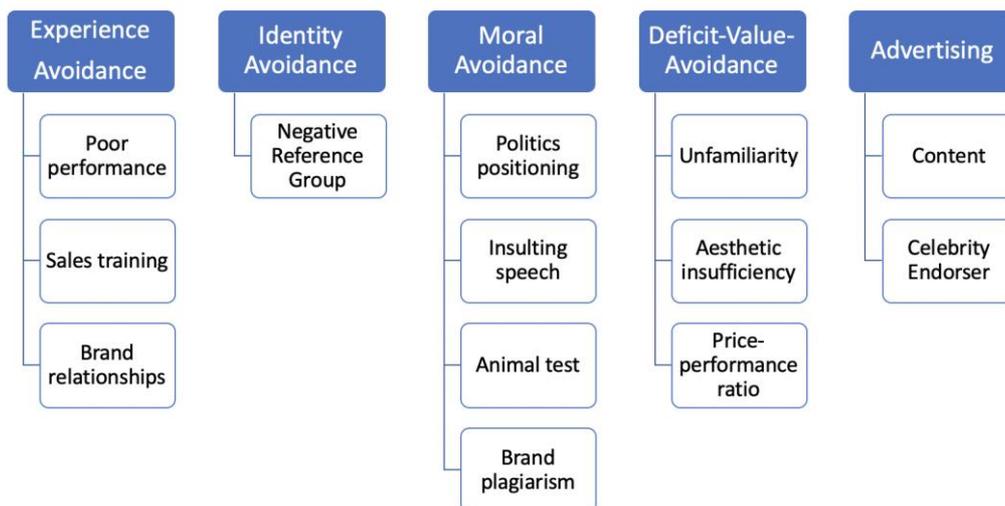
## 5. Analysis

This chapter shows the result of analysis. Based on the model of Knittel et al., (2016), create a brand avoidance model for Chinese female consumers.



Source: Knittel et al., (2016, p.37)

### 4) Previous model about Brand Avoidance



### 5) Model of brand avoidance amongst female Chinese consumers

## 5.1 Experiential Avoidance

### 5.1.1 Poor Performance

According to the results of the focus group interviews, every individual has avoided a brand based on a bad experience. The participants explained that the performance and quality of a product are the main reasons for their attitudes towards a brand. Not only the quality and performance of the content, but also the quality of the packaging are identified as potential drivers. These results confirm the theory of the existing literature about poor performance.

### 5.1.2 Sales Training

However, the attitude and behavior of the employees of a brand has also become a reason for some consumers to avoid consumption of a particular brand. Since the salary system of China's cosmetics service industry is determined by profit (commission), sales are incentivized to serve consumers with large purchases and neglect many casual and potential customers. Brands should pay more attention to the training of their sales staff.

### 5.1.3 Brand Relationships

After-sales services are also an important service for consumers. Poor after-sales services can make consumers feel disrespected. It therefore becomes another factor why customers avoid the consumption of a brand. Brand after-sales service is an important aspect for establishing consumer brand loyalty. Good after-sales services can build consumers' goodwill towards the brand and eventually become a loyal customer. After-sales services requires a lot of money and time to build a functioning system. Despite this major initial investment, brands should focus on after-sales service to win more customers in the long run.

After the brand sells the product, it is necessary to establish a good after-sales service. According to the existing literature, consumer dissatisfaction with the brand can cause brand hate, and brand hate is also an important reason for brand avoidance. Therefore, the brand should get to know the consumer's feelings after the purchase and avoid that consumers spread negative opinions and influence on the Internet. Lastly, a good after sales service can strengthen the relationship between consumers and brands and

establish a good brand relationship.

## 5.2 Identity Avoidance

### 5.2.1 Negative Reference Group

Identity avoidance is the least mentioned aspect in focus group interviews. According to the literature, consumers will avoid a brand because the product does not conform to their identity concept. The brand rejection mentions that consumers will not buy brands that cannot produce self-identity and this negative judgment can appear before or after purchasing. Most of participants said that cosmetic products are not as expensive as jewelry and bags, so they cannot be used to show their identity. Only one participant is very concerned about the packaging of the product. She would not choose a brand which has bad packaging, exclusively because of identity issues. Due to price restrictions, the price of the pharmacy brand cannot reach the same level of quality as the high-end brand. However, the advantage of the pharmacy brand is that the price is lower, and this participant is not the target consumer group of the pharmacy brand. Nonetheless, this participant proved the anti-consumption behavior mentioned in the existing literature about brand avoidance. This result shows, that among Chinese female consumers, the possibility of identity avoidance becoming a driving force for brand avoidance is low.

## 5.3 Moral Avoidance

### 5.3.1 Political Positioning

Lee et al. (2009a) believes that brand boycott and brand avoidance will occur simultaneously. Moral avoidance is an area involving politics, economy, faith, and social culture. If the brand's ideology has a negative impact, and the brand's unethical business activities are the main reason for brand resistance and moral avoidance (Makarem & Jae, 2015). The focus group interview did not show that anti-hegemony and state influence became the driving force for moral evasion, but the investigators found that almost all participants mentioned the brand's political positioning. In fact, when discussing topics related to political positions, the participants were very excited and made it clear they would not buy from brands which have opposing political views regarding the domestic politics in China.

At this point the investigators need to explain that, in the eyes of many Chinese people, the Dalai Lama is the head of an organization that tries to split Tibet out of China which is also an illegal organization in China. "Tibet is an inalienable territory of China" is written in textbooks and is part of education. In theory, the Dalai Lama is head of a religion, but his behavior is seen as completely illegal according to the Chinese government and many Chinese citizens. For example, the establishment of the Tibetan government in exile is attempting to make Tibet independent. Chinese citizens do not accept any act of splitting China. Due to cultural differences, Western society perceives the motivation and act in a different manner especially the Dalai Lama's concept of peace is promoted in Western society. Therefore, different opinions can be understood can be formed, depending on the culture people grow up in. Since this research is about Chinese female consumers, this is a good opportunity to explain the influence of the Dalai Lama on Chinese citizens.

17 of the 18 people who participated in the focus group interview made it clear that they would not buy any brands related to Dalai, which means that if Western cosmetics brands want to win the Chinese market (Chinese female consumers), they must pay attention to the behavior of the brand in political positions. Therefore, the political position of the brand is an important driving factor for Chinese female consumers to avoid consumer brands.

### 5.3.2 Insulting Speech

In addition, participants said that insulting speech, including racist speech, should not be done by brands. Brands that discriminate against Asians or people of color should be resolutely resisted. There have been many brands that have experienced backlash for insulting or racial discrimination, not only for Chinese consumers, but for the entire Asian community. Therefore, brands must understand that these are forbidden areas and should not be touched at all.

### 5.3.3 Animal Test

Next to political positions and insulting speech, animal testing is also a topic of intense reaction among participants. According to the CFDA (China Food and Drug Administration) regulations, all Western cosmetic brands that want to enter the Chinese

market must undergo animal testing, so many Chinese consumers believe that products that have not been tested by animals cannot be safely used. In June 2014, CFDA no longer mandated “non-special use” cosmetics made in China for animal testing. “Non-special use” cosmetics include hair growth, hair dyeing, perming, hair removal, beauty, bodybuilding, deodorization, freckle, sun protection. However, CFDA still requires other cosmetics, as well as all imported products for animal experiments to ensure product safety. In July 2018, CFI (Cruelty Free International) and CFDA related departments reached a cooperation to exempt imported cosmetics brands which do not test on animals, helping more “non-animal testing” international beauty brands enter the Chinese market.

But from this focus group interview it is clear that, most of the participants were not aware of the new policy on animal testing. Therefore, Western cosmetics brands that do not do animal test can first try to enter the Chinese market, then try to eliminate Chinese women’s consumers’ prejudice against “non-animal testing”.

#### 5.3.4 Brand Plagiarism

Brand plagiarism is not a new topic. However, in the cosmetics industry, it is rare to see two companies have conflicts due to the issue of property rights. Even if they are pointed out by consumers, the brand only posts a statement and explanation, only a few brands will be attacked of product plagiarism.

Only two participants mentioned this topic, proving that brand plagiarism can affect the attitude of at least some consumers. Investigators searched for information about cosmetic brand plagiarism and did not see brands being punished for plagiarism. There is no official brand statement, only some consumers have pointed out that there is brand plagiarism on the Internet and urged everyone not to buy brands suspected of plagiarism.

The brands does not seem to realize that product plagiarism is a serious behavior, because there is no brand that has been stopped because of plagiarism. This may lead to brands not paying more attention to the brand image. Brand plagiarism is a difficult behavior to define because it is not pirated, but the product packaging is similar. For example, Huda Beauty imitated the product packaging idea of Beauty Bakerie. In theory, brand plagiarism should be defined as illegal according to intellectual property law.

According to the different legal definitions in each country, the degree of punishment varies. As long as the brand is not sued, it can continue to produce. However, due to the complicated prosecution process and lengthy time, it also requires a lot of financial support, to this date no cosmetics brands got prosecuted for plagiarism. As consumers gradually understand the information of intellectual property, this may become a potential factor for brand avoidance in the future.

## 5.4 Deficit-Value Avoidance

### 5.4.1 Unfamiliarity

According to the existing literature, consumers do not take the initiative to buy brands they are not familiar with, because this will increase the risk of buying unsatisfactory products. One participant mentioned that she would not buy unfamiliar brands. Therefore, brands should increase their publicity by using a more life-like approach to increase brand awareness. In addition, another participant said that she could not believe that the drugstore brands can make a good quality product. But since she never tried these kinds of brand, she does not have factual information to support her opinion. Therefore, these two participants proved the previous literature about unfamiliarity.

### 5.4.2 Aesthetic Insufficiency

Lee et al (2009b) believes that consumers will choose whether to consume a brand according to their own aesthetic preferences. Only one participant said she would not buy Too Faced because of the packaging. Which means the possibility of aesthetic insufficiency as the driving reason of brand avoidance is low.

### 5.4.3 Price-performance Ratio

Lee et al (2009c) mentioned in the literature that consumers will avoid brands whose price and quality relationships are not equal and that cannot achieve the promised function. There is only one participant said that she would avoid consuming Kiehl's items because the price and effect are in no correlation. She mentioned that she prefers the brand which offer a product at a similar price but with a better quality and effectiveness. Therefore, price-performance ratio can be a reason of deficit-value avoidance.

## 5.5 Advertising

### 5.5.1 Celebrity Endorsement

According to previous theories, advertising avoidance is a new concept proposed by Knittel et al. in 2016. There are currently four categories. In this focus group interview, only celebrity endorsements and content were mentioned by participants. From the participants' responses, it can be found that Chinese female consumers attach great importance to the character of celebrities and once a brand endorses a celebrity which are known for talking or acting in a negative way, the brand will be avoided. Therefore, if Western cosmetics brands want to get the support of Chinese consumers, they should pay more attention to the control of celebrity characters when choosing celebrity endorsements. Choosing more represents a positive and optimistic celebrity to endorse, celebrities who have a history of drug abuse or bad political speech should be avoided as much as possible.

### 5.5.2 Content

Due to the rapid development of social media, brands are increasingly choosing to use social media to post their ads. The ads on social media are divided into official brand advertisements, advertisements posted by brand spokespersons, and advertisements posted by internet influencers. From the participants' responses, it can be found that the advertisements published by the internet influencers are the most mentioned and become the driving factor for the participants to avoid consuming a certain brand.

But brand advertisement by influencers can be risky. When many Internet influencers post the same content at the same time, even without any individual changes, many participants felt disrespected. Uncreative content made participants lose their expectation and enthusiasm for the brand. As the standards of internet influencers decrease, anyone who has a certain number of subscribers has the opportunity to be hired by the brand to advertise, and even some influencers who are completely unaware of make-up have begun to post the same content for money. These behaviors were still tolerated well in the early days, but as consumers approach more and more similar marketing methods, this is no longer an excellent marketing strategy. Brands should be aware of this trend early on and be prepared to avoid this and use new marketing strategies that are more acceptable. Not relying on using many internet influencers to

post overlap content strategies, changing to high-quality and creative content will have a good impact on the brand's image.

Since the response to the ad overlaps with what has just been discussed, the response to the ad is no longer discussed separately. However, no participants in this study mentioned the music of the advertisement, so it is impossible to prove whether the music has a negative impact on consumers.

## 6. Conclusion

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This chapter presents the conclusion of this research, including the future discussion from the investigator.

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### 6.1 Research Result

The purpose of this study is to investigate in depth the root causes of Western cosmetic brands' brand avoidance among Chinese female consumers. In the course of the research, a framework is established based on existing theories, and the existing theories are proved or denied by the responses of the consumers participating in the focus group interview. Due to the differences in thinking among participants, the reasons are full of personalization and difficult to generalize, requiring more detailed explanation.

In addition, this study is only for Chinese female consumers, based on cultural differences, this focus group interview results only represent some Chinese female consumers, cannot be used to understand European consumers.

In terms of experience avoidance, the brand sales service was proposed to strengthen the relationship between brand and sales and strengthen management. And the brand should get to know the feelings and reactions of consumers after purchase, and establish a good brand relationship. In moral avoidance, investigator did not obtain information about anti-hegemony and state effects, but got new results: political stance, insulting speech, animal testing and brand plagiarism. These results are based on the different consumers in the context of Eastern culture, and there are large cultural differences that cannot be generalized. In the process of researching advertisement avoidance, it can be found that Chinese female consumers pay more attention to celebrity personality and unwise marketing strategies.

### 6.2 Suggestion for further research

Due to brand avoidance is still a relatively new theory, it takes a long time and more research to improve. Here, the investigators write down some suggestions based on the results of this study.

The first is about the Chinese market. At present, there are only few researches on brand avoidance in the Chinese market, especially for the cosmetics industry. Therefore, the investigators suggest that more researchers should explore the entire Chinese market. As the world's second largest economy, China has a large number of business opportunities, but this study only accommodated a few regions, and there are still vast markets waiting to be discovered, not just the cosmetics industry. A deeper understanding of the Chinese market has a positive impact on Western companies entering and striving for the Chinese market.

Secondly, the investigators mentioned intellectual property. Intellectual property in China are not yet a complete law and have not yet been familiar to the masses. Intellectual property is not valued in China, but investigators hope that in future research, intellectual property can be used to investigate the impact of brand plagiarism. Not only in the Chinese market, it should be a worldwide topic.

Last but not least, the investigator wants to make comments based on the existing theory of brand avoidance. Brand avoidance itself is a theory that is not rigorous enough. The brand itself is a very broad concept. The current brand is no longer a single enterprise that only produces one type of products, but a comprehensive enterprise with several kinds of products. Therefore, the theory should also change with the development of the times. Investigators should not use a series of products of a certain brand to deny the entire brand. Therefore, the investigator suggested that in the future research, the brand avoidance theory can be further improved and become a more rigorous model.

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# Appendix

## Short interview guide

Can you introduce yourself (age, education, income and budget)?

## Guidelines to Focus group

Hello everyone.

Thank you for taking your time to discuss your opinions with me. During this focus group interview, I will focus on your opinion regarding cosmetics brands, especially regarding western cosmetics brands. The purpose of this discussion is to understand in depth what you think of some western cosmetic brands and the reason why you do not buy. Therefore, it is important to me that you answer as openly and honestly as possible.

The information I get from you will be used for my master thesis, and you will be anonymous there, thus your name will not be visible. To be better for me to arrange our discussion easily, I will record this discussion through sound recording. If there is anything you don't want to be recorded you can tell me anytime and I will stop recording.

Thank you for your participation!

## Overview of Opening Questions:

Could you talk about which western cosmetic brands do you use?

Could you talk about any bad experience of western cosmetics brands recently?

Could you talk about the Western cosmetic brands you avoid?

Could you talk about the reason that you avoid cosmetic brand x?

Could you talk about some future opinions about the brand that you avoid at the moment?