

# **RESISTANCE TO ADVERTISING AND BOYCOTT: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON**

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## **Extended abstract**

### **Purpose**

The development of forms of mistrust, opposition bordering on rebellious behavior, has been leading, since the 1990's, (Peñaloza and Price, 1993) to the emergence of a new field of research based on the study of the anti-consumption phenomenon and consumer resistance. If the framework of analysis of consumer resistance in general has recently been clarified (Roux, 2007), the concept of resistance to advertising is less studied. We believe that resistance to advertising can be manifested through real behavior, more than a simple maintenance of attitude. This constitutes an important difference with resistance to persuasion. Knowles and Linn (2004) have highlighted some characteristics of resistance to persuasion (inertia, reactance, distrust and scrutiny). But these characteristics do not cover the full spectrum of the manifestations of resistance to advertising. Some consumers develop "avoidance strategies" to advertising, which are not discussed in the literature on persuasion. Then, it seems appropriate to consider resistance to advertising from an approach more focused on behavior.

Because of its high visibility, boycotting is a form of anti-consumption and resistance which has often been analyzed. Boycotts are collective and organized actions in which consumers decide individually whether or not to take part (Cissé-Depardon, 2009). More precisely, a boycott is "a collective refusal to purchase goods or services from a company or distributor whose business or social practices are deemed unfair" (Friedman, 1999). This author has identified two types of motivation: instrumental expressive boycott. Klein, Smith, and John (2004) have identified two values associated with boycotting: intrinsic and extrinsic values. In spite of all the research on boycotting, it is surprising that the link between resistance behavior to advertising and boycotting has not yet been studied.

Thus, the purposes of this paper are to:

1. understand what the behavior of resistance to advertising is, from the consumer's perspective, and to suggest a scale to measure this variable,
2. check the stability of this scale by a comparison between two different cultural contexts,
3. study the relationship between resistance to advertising and brand boycotts.

First, a literature review enables us to offer a definition of the resistance to advertising behavior. The differences with resistance to persuasion and ad avoidance are underlined. Then, a scale is suggested and validated. Its stability is showed on an international level. We identify several groups of consumers that present varying degrees of resistance to advertising and categorizes them according to a boycott probability.

### **Design/methodology/approach**

Two qualitative studies have been conducted. First, we have opted for the collage projection technique in focus groups. Despite undeniable benefits, this technique is not often used in academic settings. It mitigates consumers' physical defence mechanisms and reveals representations and perceptions associated with a concept. Nine collages have been produced. To analyze these productions, we have conducted a decryption of photographs on the basis of a floating interpretation. Then, we have compared the decryption with the individuals' remarks to identify the themes relating to the perception of resistance to advertising. Secondly we have used the traditional semi-directive interview. Forty consumers have been interrogated. Their answers have been analyzed by content analysis.

At the end of this qualitative step, a final list of 35 items have been obtained to describe resistance to advertising.

Two quantitative studies have been conducted successively among 385 and 305 participants in France and in Switzerland, all aged between 18 and 86. We have followed the recommendations of Churchill (1979) and the usual practices in cross-cultural research (Marchetti et Usunier, 1990). A scale of resistance to advertising has been created using confirmatory factor analysis. It has been followed by a cluster analysis.

### **Findings**

The concept of resistance to advertising has been discriminated from similar concepts (for example a negative attitude toward the ad). A reliable, valid scale of resistance to advertising behavior is proposed. 5 dimensions have been found (avoidance, no impact, reject, back to values and Internet). Six groups of resistant consumers have been identified by means of cluster analysis. Their main characteristics are:

- The anti-epub: they don't resist except to the intrusion of ad message on Internet. They don't reject brands which advertise and aren't involved by a return to values.
- The non resistant: they appreciate advertising and recognize its impact on their purchase.
- The realist: they recognize the impact of advertising on their preferences, but tend to resist toward advertising following the impression of excessive intrusion of advertising in their life.
- The resistant: they tolerate only advertising on Internet.
- The pure resistant: resistant "par excellence" ; they resist any form of advertising.
- The ambivalent: rather not resistant they don't resist commercial intrusion. Only a return to values would incite it to resist.

The international stability of this scale has been checked. Results show that the more the consumer is resistant to advertising, the more he may boycott brands. The three resistant groups identified by the analysis conducted have already boycotted a brand.

### **Research limitations/implications**

In addition to a deeper study of the concept of resistance to advertising, it is the first time that a scale of the resistance to advertising behavior is suggested.

Moreover, academic research has not yet been able to identify different groups of consumers showing resistance to advertising. Finally, the relationship between resistance to advertising and brand boycott has not been established until now.

One limitation is that this paper studies self-reported behaviors (not observed behaviors).

### **Practical implications**

First, understanding the mechanisms of resistance to advertising communication, and especially the elements that trigger this resistance appears to be essential for the advertisers in order to be able to avoid the entry to resistance. Secondly, this research provides announcers with a tool allowing them to classify consumers according to their degree of resistance. And, finally when the consumer is resistant, this work will enable them to choose a more efficient communication, in order to avoid consumer resistance (i.e. less intrusive advertising).

### **Originality/value**

This paper is original because of its subject: the resistance to advertising behavior. Its originality is both conceptual and methodological because of its quantitative approach, most research on resistance concentrating on a qualitative approach.

### **Keywords**

Resistance toward advertising, confirmatory factor analysis, cluster analysis, boycott.

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