Avoidance Strategies Customers Use to Prevent Unwanted Online Advertising

Martin Istatkov, Valentin Krastev

Abstract— The text explores how consumers resist advertisements through various strategies and how marketers attempt to neutralize these behaviors. Consumers often avoid ads due to skepticism, using avoidance (physical, mechanical, cognitive), contesting, empowerment, and bias strategies. Avoidance includes ignoring or turning away from ads, while contesting involves challenging the ad's content or tactics. Empowerment strategies involve reinforcing their own beliefs, and bias strategies distort ad messages to fit pre-existing views. To neutralize these behaviors, advertisers use tactics like two-sided ads, distraction, personalized messaging, and subtle ad placement. The report concludes by emphasizing the need for tailored "omega strategies" to reduce consumer resistance and calls for further research to improve marketing effectiveness in different contexts.

Keywords— resistance, avoidance, contesting, bias, omega strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Advertisements are designed to attract customers by promoting the brand, the product or by highlighting the qualities and benefits of the given product. However, customers are not always receptive to advertisements and often try to resist their messages. This is not a new phenomenon, it was described already 30 years ago by (Calfee, J.E., and D.J. Ringold., 1994), proving that approximately 70% of consumers are skeptical and find the main purpose of advertisements to be to sell them things from that they don't need or want. This defense mechanism of thinking has been studied many times. This also led to the model of (Friestad, M., and P. Wright, 1994), which has become a key theory in marketing and is used to understand whether consumers would react defensively to an advertisement. In addition to this model, there is also a lot of research that looks at different topics that qualify as ad resistance. Unfortunately, all these studies do not provide a clear picture of how users resist or ignore ads and what strategies might be used to counter such behavior.

The purpose of this report is to show the different ways users can resist ads and show ways to avoid it.

II. AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

The avoidance strategy is a well-studied phenomenon. (Speck, P.S., and M. Elliot, 1997) studied it and divided it into three categories: physical, mechanical, cognitive. Physical refers to the user deliberately trying neither to see the ad nor to hear its content.

Received: 24.10.2024 **Published:** 09.12.2024

Martin Istatkov is with Faculty of Management, Technical university of Sofia (m_istatkov@tu-sofia.bg)

Mechanical is for the user to turn off or mute the entity broadcasting the ad.

Cognitive is that in which the user himself does not pay attention to the broadcast of an advertisement. This type of person may engage in "selective exposure" or "selective attention." The tendency to avoid or have reduced attention to more persuasive advertisements is probably related to the fact that they contain messages that contradict the consumer's preexisting beliefs or opinions (Freedman, J.L., and D.O. Sears, 1965). In other words, a person is more inclined to watch ads that support his opinion and vision.

Also according to (Olney, T.J., M.B. Holbrook, and R. Batra, 1991) viewers are more likely to watch advertisements that are entertaining or emotional than those related to a purely informative purpose. In addition, viewers are more likely to watch advertisements related to products they purchase frequently (Siddarth, S.A., and A. Chattopdahyay, 1998).

III. CONTESTING STRATEGIES

Contesting strategies include actively refuting the ad. The advertisement could be challenged on various criteria such as: the content itself; the source of the ad or the persuasive tactics used in the ad itself.

In the literature, contesting the content of advertising is described as counterarguing, as examples are: (Buller, 1986); (Jacks, J.Z., and K.A Cameron, 2003). Counterarguing is described as a thought process in which agreement with the source is reduced. People who use it come up with reasons to refute the arguments presented to them.

Contesting the source itself is called derogation of the source and occurs when users reject its validity. This can be expressed in questioning the expertise, reliability or motives of the source itself (Jacks, J.Z., and K.A Cameron, 2003). This phenomenon occurs frequently when a source is interpreted as biased (Wright, 1973). (Batinic, B., and M. Appel, 2013) proves that information from commercial sources is considered less reliable than information from non-commercial sources, such as user recommendations or from person-to-person recommendations.

Contesting the persuasive tactics used in advertising are often addressed in the Knowledge Model of Persuasion (Friestad, M., and P. Wright, 1994). When consumers themselves become suspicious of manipulative behavior on the part of the advertiser, they tend to oppose the content itself. (Campbell, 1995) found that when marketers use consumers' interest in unrelated topics such

Valentin Krastev is with Faculty of Management, Technical university of Sofia (vkrastev@tu-sofia.bg)

as celebrities or dogs to attract interest in their product or service, this can lead to negative opinion. Likewise, consumers may become suspicious of an advertiser's motives when there are negative comparisons with the competition (Jain, S.P., and S.S. Posavac, 2014). Finally, consumers may derogate from the source when the advertisement is perceived as too expensive, such as when it is repeated too often (Kirmani, 1997).

IV. EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES

Empowerment strategies are more about the recipient of the message rather than the context of the message. These include supporting the existing point of view. Three different empowerment strategies have been described in the literature: attitude bolstering, social validation, and self-assertion.

Consumers who use the attitude bolstering method focus on defending their existing thinking or behavior rather than challenging the ad's message. To achieve this goal, they create thoughts that defend their behavior and thinking when exposed to a message that challenges them (Lydon, J., M.P. Zanna, and M. Ross, 1988). As an example, a person who does not support the legalization of marijuana may ignore a message that supports its legalization by thinking about arguments that support his position on the topic versus considering the arguments presented in the ad.

The second strategy is that of social validation, which is the thinking of someone to behave according to those important to him (Jacks, J.Z., and K.A Cameron, 2003). Users using this strategy actively seek out others who share their position in order to validate it. Social validation is related to the concept of "social proof" or in other words when people tend to imitate the behavior of others when they do not know how to behave (Cialdini, 2001). (Jacks, J.Z., and K.A Cameron, 2003) argue that people may use such tactics when they want to protect themselves from unwanted persuasion. They demonstrate that people who are presented with a persuasive ad inconsistent with their way of thinking think about others who share their beliefs. In this way, their thinking or behavior is confirmed, making them less susceptible to this type of advertisement.

In their research on resistance strategies (Jacks, J.Z., and K.A Cameron, 2003) observe a third strategy, asserting the self. Users who use it remind themselves that they are confident in themselves, in their thinking and behavior and that nothing can change this fact. Self-asserting provides a boost to self-esteem that reduces susceptibility to persuasive messages (Rhodes, N., and Wood, W, 1992). In addition, increased self-esteem reduces the degree to which consumers feel pressured to adhere to norms that are imposed by others (Levine, J.M., and R.L. Moreland, 1990).

V. BIASED STRATEGIES

To counter ads, users can also process the information so that the message matches their attitudes and behavior or reduce its relevance. A distinction can be made between three strategies that are used to get the message across. The first two strategies, weighting attributes and reducing impact, involve distorting information that is inconsistent with a particular attitude or behavior. The final strategy, optimism bias, is about rejecting the relevance of the message.

One strategy is Weighting Attribute. (Ahluwalia, 2000)shows that people can engage in biased message processing to counter ads, so as to give more weight to information that is consistent with their attitudes. An example of this is when people are attracted to a politician and even if he/she is having an affair and the focus of her sympathizers goes instead to her honesty and morality, to other sides like intellect and leadership.

The next strategy is reducing impact, where information that is inconsistent with the user's attitudes is isolated. An example of this is when a loyal customer of a particular phone brand receives negative information about one aspect of the phone (eg signal reception) they will only adjust their opinion on that single aspect. For less loyal customers, such information will have the effect that their opinion of other aspects of the phone (eg design or durability) will also be affected.

Another strategy for distorting the impact of inconsistent information is optimism bias. This resistance strategy is particularly important in the context of health information. It has been suggested that recipients of messages tend to believe that negative things are less likely to happen to them than to others (Weinstein, 1987); (Sharot, T., Korn, C. W., and Dolan, R. J, n.d.). As a result, they tend to downplay risks or exaggerate the perception of their own ability to control the situation (Chambers, 2004). When a message makes smokers, for example, aware of the harmful effect of this unhealthy behavior, they interpret all sorts of reasons why these threats do not apply to them personally and why they are less at risk than others. They could, for example, respond with, "While smoking can cause lung cancer, I don't think that risk is very high for me because it doesn't run in my family. After being presented with ad avoidance strategies in the following sections will present strategies and tactics that advertisers can use to neutralize them.

VI. RESISTANCE-NEUTRALIZING PERSUASION TACTICS

Advertisers have a range of persuasive techniques at their disposal to achieve successful advertisements. These tactics often focus on making the message more appealing, using humor, celebrities, or music. (Knowles, E., and J. Linn, 2004) call these traditional persuasion techniques "alpha strategies", which are the strategies focusing on the approach to the object. They also suggest the term "omega strategies" for those reducing consumer resistance to persuasion. They specifically focus on reducing ad avoidance. Therefore, omega strategies aim to neutralize the resistance that people may experience when exposed to advertising.

These types of strategies will be most effective when tailored to the specific avoidance strategy used by the client. In the next section, for each of the avoidance strategies, the most effective methods of reducing resistance or improving the effectiveness of advertising will be described.

VII. NEUTRALIZING AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

Avoidance strategies are perhaps the most difficult to counter, for the reason that they involve the user trying to avoid communication with the ad. One way to avoid this is to use "Forced Exposure". An example of this is when users are forced to watch or listen to ads when watching a video. (Hegner, S., D. Kusse, and A.Th.H. Pruyn, 2014) found that this type of advertisement was found quite intrusive by people and was not perceived very well. Another form of forced exposure is the so-called horizontal advertising blocks, where televisions broadcast advertisements at the same time, they can be intrusive and this can lead to a negative image.

Although some studies have shown that forced exposure can lead to negative attitudes toward the advertiser (Edwards, S.M., H. Li, and J. Lee, 2002), there are also studies that suggest that any ad can be beneficial. (Greyser, 1973)'s work on annoyance in advertising suggests that marketers believe that annoying advertisements help brand recognition. This shows the possibility that consumers can have a negative reaction to an ad, but still have a positive reaction to the brand or product itself. However, it should be noted that some of the users who cannot avoid the ad may find different ways to ignore it.

Another strategy of marketers can be to disguise the message of the ad or the sender himself. A wide range of strategies have been developed to achieve this. One strategy is to reduce the persuasive side and embed it in a context where users may find it less intrusive. This type of advertisement can appear on television, on the radio, in movies or in video games. There are also some ethical concerns in this practice, with the EU even creating a regulation that requires marketers to inform consumers of the intent of such ads.

Marketers can also avoid advertising opposition by getting consumers to share brand or product-related messages with others. Generally, consumers trust information provided by acquaintances more than information provided by marketers. Customers can share opinion related to the brand online or through word of mouth, which can be stimulated through marketing programs. The effectiveness of this way of sharing is closely related to consumers finding enthusiasm to share about the brand or product. Because of this, marketers should aim for an informal and friendly nature of messages, rather than using ulterior motives.

In addition to sharing information, marketers can try to encourage consumers to share branded content. When crafting broad marketing campaigns, marketers often use humorous, surprising, or otherwise engaging content (Golan, G.J., and L. Zaidner, 2008). However, it is important that such campaigns also convey brand-related information in order to achieve marketing communication goals (Akpinar, E., and J. Berger, 2014).

VIII. NEUTRALIZING CONTESTING STRATEGIES

Several techniques are available to advertisers seeking to reduce consumer challenge to their messages. A straightforward and well-established strategy for dealing with counterarguments is two-sided advertising. It includes both positive and negative elements. When people are exposed to negative features of a product or service, they are less likely to come up with counterarguments themselves. Additionally, an ad is perceived as more credible when it includes negative information, then the overall impact of the ad increases (Eisend, 2006). In a classic paper on one-sided versus twosided advertising, (Kamins, M.A., and H. Assael, 1987) proved that two-sided is effective in reducing source derogation. In practice, however, the use of two-sided advertising is not very common, for the reason that marketers are wary of spreading negative information about their products. An exception is product failure, where brands often admit their mistake (i.e. a negative element) and then present their solution (i.e. a positive element). This prevents users from coming up with negative arguments (Fennis, B.M., and W. Stroebe, 2013).

There are also ways to deal with contesting strategies that reduce the ability, opportunity, or motivation to generate counterarguments or engage in other contesting strategies. (Knowles, E., and J. Linn, 2004) demonstrated consumers generated significantly fewer counterarguments to a target message when it was presented at the end versus the beginning of a sequence of several persuasive messages. Their finding illustrates the possibility of using cognitive depletion as a tactic to reduce users' ability to challenge messages. Similar results were obtained by (Janssen, L., M.L. Fransen, R. Wulff, and E.A. van Reijmersdal, 2014), who demonstrated that mentally exhausted consumers were less able to resist advertising, even if they had been warned about persuasive intent of the ad.

In addition to cognitive exhaustion, marketers can use distraction to reduce consumers' ability to engage in contestation strategies. An example of this is the "disrupt then reframe" technique that is often used in personal selling (Fennis, B.M., E.H.H.J. Das, and A.T.H. PruynFennis, B.M., E.H.H.J. Das, and A.T.H. Pruyn, 2004). This technique uses a slight, unexpected twist in the ad's script that grabs people's attention and is followed by the persuasive conclusion of a message (i.e., the rephrasing). For example, when you sell apples, you can say: "These apples are 100 cents, that's only 1 lev, that's a bargain!" This simple interruption (ie, 100 cents) combined with the rewording (ie, it's a deal!") distracts people and thus reduces their effort to challenge the message.

Finally, to reduce the motivation to use contestation strategies, marketers can offer safety cues and warrants to minimize the perceived risk associated with the purchase. Research by (van Noort, Kerkhof, and Fennis, 2008) shows that the presence of safety guarantees on websites provides people with a sense of safety. When people feel secure, they are less likely to challenge information on a website. Another way to provide a sense of security is by postponing the payment, eg "Buy now, pay later". This type of offer reduces resistance and the use of counterarguments, especially when the distance between purchase and payment is increased (Knowles, E., and J. Linn, 2004).

IX. NEUTRALIZING EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES

To neutralize resistance strategies that involve asserting oneself or an existing attitude, marketers must focus on the consumer rather than the message. Interestingly, (Jacks, J.Z., and M.E. O'Brien, 2004) found that people who were confident were actually more receptive to persuasive messages, suggesting that selfassertion can also be used to enhance, not to reduce persuasion. For example, an ad that urges consumers to stop smoking. Smokers may perceive such advertising as a threat to their self-image because it reminds them of their unhealthy behavior. However, this threat can be mitigated by reminding them of their past successes or important values (Steele, 1988). When people are self-asserting, they are more open to messages that are dissonant with their attitudes and behaviors because they do not feel the need to defend their point of view. Following this logic, it is possible for advertisers to focus on increasing consumers self-esteem and self-efficacy. One strategy could be to emphasize the experience and knowledge of consumers when addressing them: "As a father, you know that...". Several studies have shown that assigning expertise and reinforcing positive self-views of people can reduce perceptions of persuasive intent and reduce resistance (Dolinski, D., M. Nawrat, and I. Rudak, 2001). Another way to neutralize empowering strategies is to give users

way to neutralize empowering strategies is to give users	
Strategies to resist	Strategies to counteract
advertisment	advertisement
	resistance
Avoidance strategies	Neutralizing Avoidance
 Physical 	Strategies
 Mechanical 	"Forced
 Cognitive 	Exposure"
_	 Disguise the
	message
	 Other users
	sharing the
	message in the
	ad
Contesting strategies	Neutralizing Challenge
 Counterarguing 	Strategies
 Contesting the 	 Two-sided
source	advertising
 Contesting the 	 Cognitive
persuasive tactics	depletion
used	 Distraction
	 Security cues
Strategies of	Neutralizing strategies
empowerment	of power
 Attitude 	• Self-
bolstering	affirmation
 Social validation 	 Control over
• Self-assertion	the situation
Bias Strategies	Neutralizing Bias
 Weighting 	Strategies
attributes	 Personalized
 Reducing impact 	messages
 Optimism bias 	 Support
-	advertising
	with data and
	facts

control over the situation. For example, by users deciding which ads they want to see. This strategy can also reduce other forms of resistance, of course. The online TV platform Hulu, for example, offers viewers the ability to choose the ads they want to watch. Permission-based advertising is another way to give users more freedom. (Tsang, M.M., S. Ho, and T. Liang, 2004) demonstrated that advertisements that were received with permission were evaluated more positively than advertisements that were received without permission (eg, spam). Asking users for permission gives them control, which encourages adoption and reduces resistance.

X. NEUTRALIZING BIAS STRATEGIES

To address bias strategies, marketers face challenges related to prejudices that can influence consumer behavior and decisions. To overcome these challenges and create effective campaigns, marketers can use different strategies.

One of them is personalized messages, in this way marketers can use data about user behavior and preferences to personalize their messages. In this way, they can deliver content that is relevant and personalized to users' individual interests, which can reduce the impact of bias and increase advertising effectiveness.

Another method is to back up the ad with data and facts, so consumers can be convinced of the correctness of their proposition. Providing statistics, research or other objective evidence can help users overcome their preconceptions and make more informed decisions.

XI. CONCLUSION

Marketers can use a wide range of tactics to counter consumer resistance to persuasion. (Knowles, E., and J. Linn, 2004) suggest using the term "omega strategies" for persuasion strategies that specifically address the resistance consumers may experience when exposed to unsolicited advertising.

This report shows that such resistance-neutralizing tactics will be more effective when tailored to the specific resistance strategy adopted by consumers as shown it the table below. Specific coping tactics for the various strategies that users use to resist persuasion are discussed. This review should be useful to marketers interested in implementing communication strategies that improve persuasion by reducing consumer resistance. To further develop such strategies, more research is needed to better understand the different ways in which consumers resist persuasive messages. There is a particular need for research that goes beyond the study of individual strategies and attempts to identify personal and situational characteristics that favor one strategy over another. Such research could ultimately help predict which types of resistance are likely to be elicited by a particular message or in a particular market context. This knowledge, in turn, allows marketers to design communications that avoid these types of resistance. Research is needed to establish the extent to which specific marketing tactics can effectively counter strategies of avoidance, contestation, and empowerment that differ from those shown in this report.

REFERENCES

- Ahluwalia, R., 2000. Examination of psychological processes underlying resistance to persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, pp. 217-232.
- Akpinar, E., and J. Berger, 2014. Valuable virality.
- Batinic, B., and M. Appel, 2013. Mass communication, social influence, and consumer behavior: two fields experiments. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, pp. 1353-1368.
- Buller, D., 1986. Distraction during persuasive communication: A metaanalytic review. Communication Monographs, pp. 91-114.
- Calfee, J.E., and D.J. Ringold., 1994. The 70% majority: Enduring consumer beliefs about advertising. *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, Tom 2, pp. 228-38.
- Campbell, M., 1995. When attention-getting advertising tactics elicit consumer inferences of manipulative content: The importance of balancing benefits and investments. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, pp. 225-254
- Chambers, J. R. a. W., 2004. Bias in social comparative judgments: the role of nonmotivated factors in above-average and comparative-optimism effect. *Psyhological Buletin*, p. 813–838.
- Cialdini, R., 2001 . *Influence: Science and practice*. 4th ред. Boston : неизв.
- Dolinski, D., M. Nawrat, and I. Rudak, 2001. Dialogue involvement as a social influence technique. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, pp. 1395-1406.
- Edwards, S.M., H. Li, and J. Lee, 2002. Forced exposure and psychological reactance: Antecedents and consequences of the perceived intrusiveness of pop-up ads. *Journal of Advertising*, pp. 83-95.
- Eisend, M., 2006. Two-sided advertising: A meta-analysis. . *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, pp. 187-198.
- Fennis, B.M., and W. Stroebe, 2013. Softening the blow: Company self-disclosure of negative information lessens damaging effects on consumer judgment and decision making. *Journal of Business Ethics*, pp. 109-120.
- Fennis, B.M., E.H.H.J. Das, and A.T.H. PruynFennis, B.M., E.H.H.J. Das, and A.T.H. Pruyn, 2004. 'If you can't dazzle them with Brilliance, baffle them with nonsense': Extending the impact of the disrupt-then-reframe technique of social influence. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, pp. 280-290.
- Freedman, J.L., and D.O. Sears, 1965. Warning, distraction, and resistance to influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, pp. 262-266.
- Friestad, M., and P. Wright, 1994. The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, pp. 1-31.
- Golan, G.J., and L. Zaidner, 2008. Creative strategies in viral advertising: An application of Taylor's six-segment message strategy wheel. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, pp. 959-972.
- Greyser, S., 1973. Irritation in Advertising. *Journal of Advertising Research*.
- Hegner, S., D. Kusse, and A.Th.H. Pruyn, 2014. In press. Watch it! The influence of forced pre-roll video ads influence on consumer perceptions.

- Jacks, J.Z., and K.A Cameron, 2003. Strategies for resisting persuasion. Basic and Applied Social Psyhology, pp. 145-161.
- Jacks, J.Z., and M.E. O'Brien, 2004. Decreasing resistance by affirming the self. In Resistance and persuasion. OT: E. Knowles, peg. Resistance and Persuasion. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 235-257
- Jain, S.P., and S.S. Posavac, 2014. Valenced comparisons. *Journal of Marketing Research*, pp. 46-58.
- Janssen, L., M.L. Fransen, R. Wulff, and E.A. van Reijmersdal, 2014. When forewarnings backfire: Self-control depletion increases persuasion by brand placements after disclosure, неизв.: неизв.
- Kamins, M.A., and H. Assael, 1987. Two-sided versus one-sided appeals: the cognitive source per spective argumentation, disconfirming change. *Journal of Marketing Research*, pp. 29-39.
- Kirmani, A., 1997. Advertising repetition as a signal of quality: If it's advertised so much, something must be wrong. *Journal of Advertising*, pp. 77-86.
- Knowles, E., and J. Linn, 2004. . Resistance and persuasion. 1st ред. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Levine, J.M., and R.L. Moreland, 1990. Progress in small group research. Oт: *Annual Review of Psyhology* . неизв.:неизв., pp. 585-634.
- Lydon, J., M.P. Zanna, and M. Ross, 1988. Bolstering attitudes by autobiographical recall: Attitude persistence and selective memory. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, pp. 78-86.
- Olney, T.J., M.B. Holbrook, and R. Batra, 1991. Consumer responses to advertising: The effect of ad content, emotions, and attitude towards the ad on viewing time. *Journal of Consumer Research*, pp. 440-453.
- Rhodes, N., and Wood, W, 1992. Self-esteem and intelligence affect influenceability: The mediating role of message reception. *Psychological Bulletin*, pp. 156-171.
- Sharot, T., Korn, C. W., and Dolan, R. J, н.д. How unrealistic optimism is maintained in the face of reality. *Journal of Nature Neuroscience*.
- Siddarth, S.A., and A. Chattopdahyay, 1998. To zap or not to zap: A study on the determinants of. *Marketing Science*, pp. 124-138.
- Speck, P.S., and M. Elliot, 1997. Predictors of advertising avoidance in print and broadcast media. *Journal of Advertising*, pp. 61-76.
- Steele, C., 1988. The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, pp. 261-302.
- Tsang, M.M., S. Ho, and T. Liang, 2004. 4. Consumer attitudes toward mobile advertising: An empirical study. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, pp. 65-78.
- van Noort, Kerkhof, and Fennis, 2008. The persuasiveness of online safety cues: The impact of prevention focus compatibility of web content on consumers' risk perceptions, attitudes and intentions, неизв.: неизв.
- Weinstein, N. D., 1987. Unrealistic optimism about susceptibility to health. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, pp. 481-500.
- Wright, P., 1973. The cognitive processes mediating acceptance of advertising. *Journal of Marketing Research*, pp. 53-62.