



The Role of Facial Expression in resisting enjoyable Advertisements
P.L. Lewiński

Abstract in English

The role of facial expression in resisting enjoyable advertisements

This thesis on consumer resistance to enjoyable advertisements is positioned in the areas of persuasive communication and social psychology. From the literature on consumer behavior, much is known about how consumers can resist advertising by adopting resistance strategies, such as counter-arguing and selective exposure (e.g., Fransen et al., 2015; Knowles & Linn, 2004). However, the role of emotion regulation and bodily expression in resisting persuasion is so far understudied. This is a surprising observation, if one considers that at least 40% of advertisements use positive emotions (i.e., happiness) to persuade consumers to like the ad, brand and product (Weinberger et al., 1995).

In the present thesis, we argue that consumers can resist persuasion by controlling their facial expressions of emotion when exposed to an advertisement. Following the embodiment literature and the facial feedback hypothesis (Buck, 1980), we propose that controlling the expression of emotions elicited by an ad (for example refusing to smile) might be a fruitful way to resist the ad's persuasive potential. We focus on resistance toward persuasion as mediated by facial expression demonstrated in emotion regulation (Gross, 1998) and facial mimicry (Bush et al., 1989) in response to amusing ads. We propose that embodied emotion regulation in the service of resistance can be extended from the individual to social situations in which consumers watch ads in the company of others.

In Chapter 1, we present the tenets of our model of Embodied Resistance to Persuasion where we build on Scherer's componential process model of emotions (2004, 2009) and focus specifically on facial expression. We argue that facial expression of emotion is a privileged point of application for embodied resistance because of its inherent links with emotion regulation

(Izard, 1990) and appetitive attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007; Frijda, 2007) as explained by the facial feedback hypothesis (Buck, 1980).

In Chapter 2, we first present a validation study of our main research instrument FaceReader (Noldus, 2014). Since we study embodied resistance to persuasion through facial expression, we first need to establish the validity of the automated facial coding tool we use in the subsequent chapters. We showed that, on average, FaceReader recognized 88% of the target basic emotion expressions (Ekman, 1972; Ekman & Cordano, 2011) and reached a 0.69 FACS index of agreement (Ekman et al., 2002). This warranted the use of this software in the experiments in Chapters 3-5.

In Chapter 3, we establish the core premise of our embodied resistance to persuasion model in our first facial coding experiment. In this study, emotional action readiness -- i.e., approach and be-with tendencies (Frijda, 2007) -- were operationalized as ad (Phillips, 2000) and brand liking (Chattopadhyay & Basu, 1990). Participants were video-recorded while watching three popular video commercials designed to elicit high, medium, and low levels of amusement. Facial expressions during exposure to the advertisements were coded using FaceReader. Ad and brand liking were measured afterwards. In the high and medium amusement conditions, but not in the low amusement one, positive correlations were found between facial expression of happiness scores and ad and brand liking. We propose to have found initial support for the hypothesis that facial expression predicts positive consumer attitudes in response to enjoyable advertisements.

In Chapter 4, across seven facial coding experiments, we thoroughly test consumer resistance to persuasion through embodied emotion regulation. We showed that response- and antecedent- focused emotion regulation (Gross, 1998) decreases or increases both negative and positive responses to a variety of advertisements. In five experiments with amusing

advertisements, we demonstrated a causal mediation path (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) from emotion regulation to facial expression and further down to attitude change. This path was not fully replicated for disgusting ads.

In Chapter 5, we investigate the situation where a consumer watches an ad together with a co-viewer. While people often watch advertisements in company, our previous experiments had individual consumers watching an ad in isolation. Across three experiments, we build on our prior results and demonstrate that shared emotion regulation, manipulated through facial mimicry (Bush et al., 1989), modified consumers' happiness during exposure to an amusing ad and subsequently their attitudes.

Finally, Chapter 6 recapitulates major findings and discusses implications and considerations for future research. Showing the viability of Embodied Resistance to Persuasion is relevant in view of the fact that ads trying to persuade us by addressing our positive emotions are ubiquitous (e.g., Weinberger et al., 1995). Embodied resistance helps consumers to cope with these induced positive emotions in order to resist advertisements. In this thesis, we provide innovative evidence that one way to resist the persuasive effects of an ad is to regulate the emotions experienced and expressed when exposed to that ad. Overall, we suggest that embodied emotion regulation might be a novel and effective strategy to resist persuasion.

Companies exploit powerful emotional techniques, such as the elicitation of enjoyment, when creating their advertising campaigns. This thesis therefore aims to empower consumers with some additional "tools" resistance to persuasion that counteract deliberate persuasive attempts used in such marketing communication strategies.