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Personality factors and resistance to the manipulation of advertising

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Abstract

Advertising messages stimulate the potential customers' desires and train positive associations about the promoted product or company. The consumer's behavior has become a complex variable, and it is analyzed as a factor which influences the dynamics of the market and even its fluctuations.
The current study aims to investigate the personality factors that interrelate with the manipulation of advertising, the personality factors that are involved in people's resistance or lack of resistance to the manipulation of advertising, as well as to obtain a modal profile of personality for those who can be manipulated through advertising and for those who cannot.

1. Introduction

Numerous theories about manipulation through advertising are shown by Larson (2003): the narrative theory by Fisher (1987), the generic theory by Ware & Linkugal (1973), the theory of changing attitudes in a single shot by Hovland, Janis & Kelley (1953), the theory of social habbit by Bandura (1977), the theory of equilibrium by Heider (1946, 1958) and Newcomb (1953), the theory of social judgement by Sherif & Sherif (1965, 1967), the theory of the plausibility of elaboration by Petty & Cacioppo (1986), the theory of technological determinism by McLuhan (1964), the theory of use and gratification by Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch (1974), etc. All these theories explain that the strategies and the techniques of manipulation aim to obtain the control over the behavior, thoughts and feelings

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of people, in a certain social situation and along a certain period of time, in order to obtain some substantial advantages for the manipulators and in the detriment of those controlled. Advertising persuasion is based on the fundamental needs of people (the need for food, for shelter, for information, for integration in a social group). The individual becomes anonymous and therefore more docile and more willing to submit to the rules that authorities impose, no matter the way those rules are perceived. The more the individual is preoccupied not to be perceived as uneducated, boring or dull, the easier he can be manipulated by those who intentionally induce such concerns in order to distract him from his natural thoughts.

Ficeac (1998) shows a number of studies by professor Philip Zimbardo and Susan Anderson to discover some methods through which we can identify the moments when we are subjected to manipulation: *identifying the discontinuities* (discover lies hidden beneath an apparent normality); *observing the apparent normality* (use a minumum critical sense to reveal the false identity of the manipulator); *observing the false similarities* (circumspection regarding people that try to become our friends by sharing our same thoughts, ideals, fears); *identifying the apparent competence* (analysing someone's real credibility, competence, trust and self-confidence and refusing to say the answers that they expect from us); *identifying the cognitive confusion* (ask questions when we belive that an explanation is unclear or vague, that the messages we receive are rhetorical and inconsistent); *observing the emotional confusion* (not to show our vulnerabilities to strangers because manipulators try to exploit the most hidden desires and fears of an individual); *playing "choice"* (marketing strategies try to convince customers to be devoted to a certain brand. Merchants try to determine people to buy a product and to convince them that they made the best choice. A stable connection between buyer and brand is being raised. To avoid this kind of manipulation, we need to also take into consideration the options that we are not told of, or we simply need to adopt an opposite position and observe the reaction).

Advertising has become a part of our daily life and therefore this research is useful because it informs the readers about those personality factors that can expose them to the manipulation of advertising and it also informs marketing employees about those personality factors that they can use when choosing the target population for the promotion of goods and services.

2. Methodology

1. Objectives and hypotheses

The objectives that we set and constantly tried to achieve are:
Identifying the personality factors that interrelate with the manipulation of advertising;
Establishing the level of influence of these factors over the resistance to the manipulation of advertising;
Obtaining a modal profile of personality for people who can be manipulated through advertising and for those who cannot.

To achieve these objectives we developed the hypothesis that some personality factors predispose people to the manipulation of advertising. These factors were chosen based on the research available so far on the subject. The factors are: dominance, sociability, aggressiveness, inhibition, depression, excitability, calmness, openness, extraversion, emotional lability, feminity-masculinity, capacity of status, social presence, wellbeing, responsibility, self control, tolerance, achievement via conformity, flexibility, intelectual efficiency, empathy, social desirability, submission and emotional intelligence. We issued 24 hypotheses, one for each factor. The hypotheses appear in this form: "Dominance correlates significantly with the level of resistance to the manipulation of advertising".

2. Techniques and statistical methods

We used four questionnaires: California Personality Inventory (CPI 260) by Harrison G. Gough, Freiburger Personlichkeitsinventar (FPI-G) by Jochen Fahrenberg, Herbert Selg & Rainer Hampel, the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire by Mihaela Roco (2001) and the Questionnaire for Measuring the Resistance to the Manipulation (QMRM) by Claudia Dobrescu (2010).

The statistical work was conducted in SPSS 15. Depending on the nature of the data we collected and the objectives of this study, we used the following statistical methods: Pearson Coefficient to identify the personality