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Perceived advertising intrusiveness and avoidance in emerging economies: The case of China

Abstract

It is the purpose of this study to examine the perceptions of viewers in a major emerging economy (China) in the hopes of better understanding perceived advertising intrusiveness and advertising avoidance and to provide strategic insights for advertisers on the best ways to enhance the chances for positive consumer affect in this significant burgeoning economy. We argue that advertisements are avoided when the perception of advertising as intrusive generates negative emotions such as irritation or annoyance. The study involved a large national consumer survey in China, and instrument equivalence was assessed and ensured. Many of the hypotheses were supported by the data. A key contribution of this research is in the fact that evidence was found for the mediating role of ad annoyance on the relationship between perceived advertising intrusiveness and ad avoidance. The paper also points out that while demographics play a significant role in predicting ad avoidance, some of these effects (e.g. education) may not be as linear as assumed in previous studies. While education reduces both forms of ad avoidance, this is likely due to lower levels of ad annoyance generated by intrusive ads. A series of managerial implications are provided for advertisers.

Introduction

Consumers are constantly being bombarded with over 3000 media messages a week, which can create a feeling of information overload (Moriarty, 1991). Ad clutter has become a serious challenge for advertisers who are trying to reach a shell-shocked and over-stimulated audience of consumers. While television advertising has grown tremendously in developed

economies as advertisers have been fighting to attract consumers' attention, advertising in emerging markets has grown exponentially as well (O'Barr, 1998; WARC, 2005). Obviously with media overload, comes the danger of consumers avoiding exposure to advertising in general. Speck and Elliot (1997) raised a cautionary flag suggesting that consumer avoidance may be even greater for television ads than for print ads. With the advent of DVR technology, particularly seen in developed countries, viewers are able to speed through ads to get to the recorded program or to blank out the ad content completely. As a result, it has been noted that consumers in many different country settings are spending less time processing television ads (Krugman et al., 1995). This raises serious questions about the wisdom associated with advertisers using television as a medium of choice, especially in light of weakening levels of brand recall (Tse and Lee, 2001) increasing levels of ad irritation (Okazaki, 2004). While some researchers have attempted to examine such ad avoidance techniques as commercial "zapping" (Tse and Lee, 2001), little is known about advertising intrusiveness and the potential fallout from outright ad avoidance (Edwards et al., 2002). More research is needed to shed light on how and why ad avoidance occurs so that advertisers can improve the chances of their messages getting through to viewers with positive effects upon brand recall and preference.

It is also important to note that, while a considerable body of literature on consumer responses to advertising can be found being done in developed economies, there is a dearth of research from emerging economies. Given the fast pace of economic development, particularly in the BRIC economies, the growing number of affluent consumers in these markets (Scase, 2006) presents a significant potential target for advertisers. As an example, previous studies suggest receptiveness of consumers towards advertising in China. La Ferle et al. (2008), in their analysis of Chinese, Taiwanese and American consumers, found that

collectivistic consumers were less sceptical of advertising and therefore more open to advertising messages. More research is needed in this promising area.

Research on advertising intrusiveness and avoidance has relied heavily on measures developed in high income, industrialised economies (e.g. Rojas-Mendez, Davies and Madran, 2009). The call for departures from theoretical assumptions developed in the western world (Burgess and Steenkamp, 2006) is particularly relevant with regard to perceived ad intrusiveness and its emotional and behavioural effects.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the perceptions of viewers in a major emerging economy (China) in the hopes of better understanding perceived advertising intrusiveness and advertising avoidance and to provide strategic insights for advertisers on the best ways to enhance the chances for positive consumer affect in this significant burgeoning economy. This paper extends previous research by conceptualising perceived television advertising intrusiveness, ad irritation and ad avoidance using input from qualitative work conducted in the context of a major emerging economy.

Rationale for country selection

China represents a significant emerging economy (please see Table 1). China provides significant opportunities for globally-oriented marketers to penetrate fast growing consumer segments with new brands at a stage when consumers have not yet become jaded by advertising overstimulation. The point is to try to avoid the mistakes made in developed markets by strategically examining the potential for viewer alienation and taking corrective action before viewers become negatively affected.

[Place Table 1 about here]

Prior research has indicated that at earlier stages of economic development, consumers tend to perceive advertising more favorably (Andrews et al., 1971). This was supported in a

more recent study by La Ferle and Lee (2005) in a study of viewer attitudes toward advertising across South Korea, China, Taiwan, and the United States. It is interesting to note that, in particular, television advertising has been found to significantly aid in social development and supporting traditional values (Zhang and Harwood, 2004). This study showed that Chinese respondents had the most favorable attitudes towards advertising across all of the populations being studied. As can be seen in the data in Table 1, there is a high rate of penetration of televisions in Chinese households with the figure at above 89% (in 2008). We will now provide a clearer picture of the present state of advertising in China.

Advertising in China

With its large population and exploding economic growth, China is a highly attractive market for a vast array of consumer products and services (Chan and Cheng, 2002). Historically, Chinese advertising has been rigidly regulated. The Chinese central government has officially identified the goals of advertising in the country as a means of stimulating economic growth while supporting the Communist party's goals and strategies for economic advancement and social prosperity (Sin et al., 2000). Commercial advertising in the People's Republic of China employed almost one million people in 2005 and was responsible for approximately 0.78 percent of the country's GDP (Wang, 2008).

Since its inception in 1958, the television industry in the People's Republic of China has grown rapidly. Lull (1991) has suggested that the development of television was probably the most noteworthy cultural and political phenomenon since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. There are two national television networks, China Central Television (CCTV) and China Educational Television. Apart from these networks, there are more than 370 provincial and local TV operators across the country. CCTV is by far China's largest and

most powerful state-controlled national television network, and it is under direct government control and is assigned the task to conform to the government's policies. Rivalries for advertising income and government-approved ratings have stimulated television operators to improve their broadcasts and advertising to better address the desires of their viewers. The amount of time allotted for advertisements on every TV channel is limited to a maximum of 20 percent of total daily broadcast hours. No more than 15 percent can be utilized for television advertising between 19:00 hours and 21:00 hours. The regulations also stipulate that there should be only one ad break during a specific film or drama program (excluding news programs) that can last no more than two minutes and thirty seconds (Wang, 2008).

Figure 1 shows advertising revenue growth in China for the period 2001-2009 both in absolute terms and in annual growth rates. TV ad spending rose dramatically from 2000 to 2009 (China State Industry of Trade and Commerce, 2007; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2010) and the majority share of advertising spending is allocated to television advertising (Nielsen Media Research, 2006). According to La Ferle, Edwards and Lee (2005), the advertising industry in China in 2004 was the third largest in the world after the U.S. and Japan. The systematic growth in Chinese advertising makes it one of the most significant advertisers in the world (US\$6.5bn in 2008). The Chinese advertising industry value is forecasted to continue growing in 2011-2013 at an average rate of 6.2% per annum (Datamonitor, 2009).

[Place Figure 1 about here]

Given the large amounts of spending on advertising against a background of sustained economic growth in China, a careful examination of the literature in China points out that little is known about how consumers in this emerging economy actually react to advertising. Zhang and Harwood (2002) have researched the reflection of cultural traditions in Chinese television advertising. In particular, Chan and McNeal (2003) studied the impact of

advertising on parent-child communication. While Wehmeyer (2007) explored the effects of message type and situation on the perceived intrusiveness of mobile advertisements in China, little is known regarding the extent to which Chinese consumers are embracing television advertising, or whether they regard it as intrusive. Does perceived intrusiveness of television advertising in China lead to negative emotions which can create negative affect regarding exposure to television ads? Could this actually cause key demographic segments to go out of their way to avoid exposure to ads? More research is certainly warranted.

Perceived Advertising Intrusiveness and Avoidance

There is little agreement on the role of demographics in predicting ad avoidance. Zufryden et al. (1993) reported that there was a greater propensity to zap TV ads in larger households, with high income and with a college-educated member of the household. Yet, Rojas-Mendez et al. (2009) found that family size and age could explain ad avoidance only in some countries, and Siddarth and Chattopadhyay (1993) found no significant relationships between demographic characteristics and the propensity to zap ads. Two types of advertising avoidance have been recognized in the advertising literature: mechanical avoidance, which includes switching channels or turning the television off (Danaher and Beed, 1994; Danaher, 1995) and behavioral avoidance, including leaving the room, engaging in another activity such as talking with other people, performing household tasks or going to the bathroom (Bloxham and Prieb, 2007; Rojas-Mendez and Davies, 2005; Tse and Lee, 2001). While the avoidance of advertising has been widely investigated in developed country settings (Danaher, 1995; Moriarty and Everett, 1994, Zufryden, Pedrick and Sankaralingam, 1993), few studies (Rojas-Mendez, Davies and Madran, 2009) have examined avoidance in emerging economies. Furthermore, while the impact of ad intrusiveness on ad avoidance is

well recognised, the role of ad irritation on ad avoidance has received weaker empirical support (Marimoto and Chang, 2009; Edwards, Li and Lee, 2002).

Cho and Cheon (2004) viewed ad avoidance as three-dimensional (cognitive, behavioral and affective component). It is our contention that the negative affect generated by perceived intrusiveness of advertising is distinctly different from ad avoidance. Feelings experienced while viewing television commercials are distinct from ad-related thoughts (Edell and Burke, 1987). Ad annoyance with respect to TV advertising is measured in our study with the aim of enhancing our understanding of ad avoidance in a major emerging market.

According to reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm, 1981), the importance of freedom and personal behavioral choice can cause individuals to rebel against stimuli that are perceived to invade an individual's personal space. Following this logic, when individuals are engaged in certain activities (i.e., watching TV), long or regular interruptions represent greater perceived threats than shorter or less frequent interruptions. Such interruptions could be seen by individuals as intrusive. In this study, ad intrusiveness is defined as the perception that advertisements interrupt television programs and the cognitive processes in which the audience is engaged in during the exposure to these programs (c.f., Ha, 1996; Li, Edwards and Lee, 2002). Bauer and Greyser (1968) suggest that such feelings can be induced by exaggerated ad claims, ads containing confusing information, ads judged as being irrelevant, ads perceived to be too loud or too long in duration and ads seen too often. It is our contention that the key issue here is the placement of advertisements that has the greatest effect upon perceived intrusiveness. As pointed out by Van Meurs (1998), zapping is not directly caused by the product category advertised or specific characteristics of the various advertising campaigns. Thus, individuals who perceive advertisements as interruptions or intrusions into their personal space are more likely to eliminate the ads in order to restore

their sense of personal freedom of choice. Ad avoidance would be the main mechanism for accomplishing this restoration.

The proposed conceptual model (see Figure 2) draws primarily upon reactance theory (Brehm and Brehm, 1981), which as previously discussed posits that consumer behavior is influenced by the perceived loss of freedom in the environment leading to psychological reactance. Individuals try to avoid negative or unpleasant consequences that accompany the perception of having little or no control over their own personal situation (Langer, 1983, p.83). It has also been argued (i.e., Oettingen et al., 1994) that the need for control may vary across cultures, as it can depend on the ability to produce desired outcomes either individually or as part of a group. A variety of responses to these intrusive stimuli can include hostility towards the perceived threat to freedom (ads in this case) and actions/behaviors aimed at restoring personal choice. The model focuses on one emotional response to advertising (annoyance created by perception of advertising intrusiveness) and one behavioral response (avoidance of exposure to ads).

[Place Figure 2 about here]

Intrusiveness in this study is viewed as an intrusion on the consumer's task performance and cognitive processing (Edwards et al., 2002). We argue that advertisements are avoided when the perception of advertising as intrusive generates negative emotions such as irritation or annoyance. As Li et al. (2002, p. 39) acknowledged, intrusiveness describes the mechanisms by which advertising may evoke negative emotions, but not the emotional reactions to the ads themselves. It is argued that the negative emotions generated by perceived advertising intrusiveness would lead to avoidance of the exposure to the ads (Edwards et al., 2002; Krugman, 1983; Soldow and Principe, 1981).

This study focuses on avoidance of exposure to television advertising. Ad avoidance is regarded as the actions of media users (TV in this study) to reduce their exposure to ad

content (Speck and Elliott, 1997). Tse and Lee (2001) analyzed the impact of switching channels (zapping) on the effectiveness of TV commercials, and they found that those who did not switch channels (non-zappers) were able to recall more of the brands advertised than those who did switch channels (zappers). They drew attention to the fact that perceived intrusiveness of advertising can favor negative emotions such as irritation and annoyance, which in turn will tend to lead to the rejection of the ads. Several other studies (Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Bauer and Greyser, 1968) found negative feelings (annoyance, irritation) emerging from advertising being perceived as too long or too loud. Edwards et al., (2002) reported that perceived intrusiveness of pop-up ads caused irritation in viewers. De Pelsmarker and Van den Berg (1998) found repetition of TV commercials as a major contributor to irritation. As a result, the following hypothesis is posited:

H1. The more intrusive television advertising is perceived to be, the more annoyed the viewer will be with television advertising.

Consumers avoid advertising because they find it intrusive (Cho and Cheon, 2004; Gauzente, 2008; Li et al., 2002) or irritating (Edwards et al., 2002; Krugman, 1983; Soldow and Principe, 1981). Although the irritation caused by advertising overload may not always affect viewing behavior, it may have a negative impact on the likeability and perceived effectiveness of television advertising. It can also be argued that consumer scepticism towards advertising (Ford et al., 1990) would reduce the credibility of advertising and predispose individuals towards feelings of irritation and ultimately ad avoidance. Scepticism about advertising messages (claims) and the advertising medium are significant predictors of ad avoidance (Kelly et al., 2010), but positive attitudes toward advertising are conducive to decreases in advertising avoidance (Rojas-Méndez and Davies, 2005). Hence it is hypothesised that:

H2. The stronger the perceived advertising annoyance associated with television ads, the higher the likelihood for the viewer to avoid exposure to television advertising.

H3. The stronger the perceived mistrust of television advertiser motives, the stronger the effect of intrusiveness on perceived advertising annoyance.

H4. The stronger the perceived mistrust of television advertiser motives, the stronger the effect of perceived advertising annoyance on advertising avoidance.

Consumers with lower levels of education and income have been reported to display more positive attitudes towards advertising, which has also been found for male respondents as compared with their female counterparts (Shavitt et al., 1998; Wolin and Korgaonkar, 2002). Certainly more positive attitudes towards advertising should be reflected in lower levels of advertising avoidance (Rojas-Mendez and Davies, 2005). It can also be argued that individuals with higher education levels would be able to detect inconsistent or exaggerated claims in advertisements and be more prone to negative feelings than viewers with lower levels of education. As a result, the following hypotheses are offered:

H5. Consumers with lower levels of education will display a weaker effect of perceived intrusiveness on annoyance than consumers with higher levels of education.

H6. Consumers with lower levels of education will display a weaker effect of annoyance on avoidance than consumers with higher levels of education.

There is little agreement in the literature with regards to the role of gender in influencing attitudes toward advertising. A study by Shavitt et al. (1998) found that men were more positive in their attitudes towards advertising, while Bush et al. (1999) found an opposite pattern. The relationship between gender and avoidance may be moderated by contextual factors. One thing that has been found is that men are more prone to zapping and ad avoidance in general (Heeter and Greenberg, 1985; Speck and Elliott, 1997). Certainly an examination of specific types of ad avoidance may provide a more fertile ground for analysis. As pointed out by Manrai and Manrai (1995), women are more polychronic in nature and are, therefore, multi-taskers. This would lead us to expect that women are more likely to do other things at the time that advertisements are broadcast in order to avoid them while men are

more likely to actually switch channels to avoid advertisements. As a result, the following hypotheses are posited for viewers in China:

H7. Men are more likely to engage in switching channels to avoid television advertising than women.

H8. Women are more likely to engage in other tasks/activities to avoid television advertising than men.

H9. Consumers with higher levels of education are more likely to avoid advertisements than consumers with lower levels of education.

Research has also shown that households with children were found more likely to zap commercials (Zufryden et al., 1993). Zapping or channel switching has been found to actually increase with household size (Abernethy, 1991; Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009). Zapping can be seen as a defence mechanism that can be used by parents to protect their children from exposure to what parents believe is inappropriate in advertising. Following the logic of these studies it is proposed that:

H10. The larger the size of the family, the more likely that television advertising viewers will utilize channel switching to avoid advertisements.

An examination of demographic antecedents of attitudes towards advertising has shown that older consumers tend to rely to a greater extent on advertising for their consumption decisions than younger consumers (Dutta-Bergman, 2006). This study is in direct contrast with the findings of Shavitt et al. (1998) and Alwitt and Prabhaker (1994) who reported more positive attitudes towards advertising among the younger generation. We argue that in emerging economies, with a more limited legacy of advertising as compared to developed nations, the older generations may not be as open to advertisements as their younger counterparts. Studies conducted in emerging economies from Eastern Europe found less openness to advertising among older more tradition-bound consumers (Marinov et al., 2008). Hence it is proposed that:

H11. There is a positive relationship between age and advertising avoidance.

Sample and measures

In the first stage, in-depth interviews with consumers from Beijing were conducted in 2012 (N=21). The aim was to elicit thoughts and emotions relating to TV advertising intrusiveness and scepticism toward advertising. The second stage involved a large consumer survey of adults in China. The questionnaire was written in English then translated into Mandarin Chinese and then back-translated into English to increase instrumentation equivalence (Brislin, 1986). Of course every effort was undertaken to qualitatively as well as quantitatively allow for a proper assessment of conceptual equivalence (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). In order to accurately assess construct equivalence, a pilot study in a tier 3 city (Jiaozuo) (N=80) was conducted in order to improve, amend and adjust the questionnaire to the cultural and linguistic specifics in relevant areas of China. To circumvent research bias, a combination of positively and negatively phrased items was utilized (Bagozzi, 1994). The sampling frame was the adult population living in major urban areas. The refined questionnaires were administered to individuals in the national capital of Beijing, a city with a population in excess of 20 million along with the capital city of Henan province with a population in excess of 8 million. Data collection was conducted via stratified random sampling as this method reduces sampling error. A list of residential addresses in each city was created after household stratification in selected residential neighborhood areas was undertaken, and then addresses in each district were randomly selected. The sample was balanced in terms of numbers of male and female respondents. When necessary, the interviewers paid subsequent visits in order to finalize the interviews with the selected respondents. The final sample consisted of 517 respondents. The piloting of the questionnaires (N=80) pointed out that the seven-point scales were most adequate to capture

the variability of attitudes and opinions. The breakdown of the sample by respondents' education and gender is described in Table 3.

[Place Table 3 about here]

While gender balance across the samples was ensured, the one potential drawback was that the sample contains a higher proportion of university graduates. All latent constructs were measured using seven-point Likert-type scales with anchors of 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. Each construct will now be discussed in detail.

Advertising Intrusiveness

The perceived intrusiveness of advertising was measured with three items concerned with the exposures to the advertisements from a validated scale: "there are too many ads on TV and there is no choice" (Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1994), "I feel overwhelmed by ads that appear at inappropriate times" (Nan, 2000; Yang, 2000) and "I am not bothered by advertisements which interrupt programs" (Laczniak and Teas, 2002). Given the focus of the study on TV advertising in general rather than specific ads, consumer concerns about specific aspects of ad execution or ad content were not measured.

Advertising Annoyance

Advertising annoyance is a construct which emerged from the literature on advertising intrusiveness (Speck and Elliott, 1997; Fennis and Bakker, 2001) as well as from in-depth interviews with consumers in China. Again, previous validated scales served as the basis for the measure with additional qualitative work used to properly adapt to Chinese consumer participation: "I lose my patience when advertisements interrupt TV films;" "I am irritated when there are advertisements at the same time on several channels/stations;" and "Advertising annoys me."

Advertising Avoidance

Advertising avoidance is measured with the following items: “I change the channel;” “I do something else during commercials” (Danaher and Beed, 1994; Danaker, 1995; Tse and Lee, 2001), “I ignore ads” (Bellman et al., 2010) and a more generic item generated from personal interviews conducted in China: “I avoid television advertising.”

Skepticism towards Advertiser Motives

Skepticism towards advertiser motives was adopted from Boush et al. (1994) and Obermiller and Spangenberg (1998) and included items which also emerged during personal interviews: “I often notice tricks in advertisements to make me buy the product”; “Firms try to influence too much through advertisements”; “Most ads are not the products themselves, they just try to create an emotional mood”.

Findings

The items related to Intrusiveness, Annoyance and Avoidance were first subject to a reliability analysis based on the pilot sample. The constructs indicated a good reliability with Cronbach Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.62 for ad intrusiveness to 0.73 ad annoyance. The items were then subject to Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the validity (convergent, discriminant) and reliability of the latent constructs. The examination of modification indices identified just the one item, “I ignore TV ads,” as problematic, so it was eliminated from the analysis due to its redundancy. The remaining items can be viewed as deliberate actions aiming to avoid any form of exposure to commercials (audio or video), as opposed to keeping the channel switched on when consumers can still hear or glimpse commercials even though they may be engaged in another activity. Therefore, this latent construct is therefore labelled direct avoidance as opposed to cognitive avoidance when the

attention may be split between the ad and other activity. The descriptive statistics of the investigated latent variables are displayed in Table 3.

[Place Table 3 about here]

It is important to note that the reliabilities for the various constructs were all above the minimum acceptable level of .70 (Nunnally, 1978), and the CFA model was found to have sufficient fit levels (Table 3). The average variance accounted for by each construct among the individual items exceeds the amount of variance the construct shares with the remaining constructs providing evidence of discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The moderating influences of the relevant demographic variables were tested using Lisrel 8.8. Table 4 displays the maximum likelihood estimates for the full sample.

[Place Tables 4 about here]

As can be seen from the table, the effects of intrusiveness on annoyance and the latter on ad avoidance were found to be significant. The fit statistics for the structural models in Table 4 were all seen to be good, so the model provides a good fit with the data. The negative responses were unexpected due to the more reserved nature of the Chinese people. The Chinese are profoundly affected by Confucian values, where the maintenance of harmony in personal relations is sought and protected. This and the collectivist orientation of the Chinese would be expected to temper potentially extreme responses to scale items. Negativity, while certainly apparent in these responses, is restrained for the Chinese when compared to respondents from western cultures. Yet, Tellis and Chandrasekaran (2010) found high levels of socially desirable responses in China as well as the US.

To examine the mediating role of ad annoyance in the relationship between perceived ad intrusiveness and ad avoidance we used the mediation test proposed by Baron and Kenny (1980). The results in Table 5 reports this test using OLS regression.

[Place Tables 5 about here]

Based on the regression results, ad annoyance plays a mediating role in the relationship between perceived ad intrusiveness and ad annoyance.

Table 6 reports examines the moderating effects by reporting the path estimates in each subgroup.

[Place Tables 6 about here]

Testing of the Hypotheses

With regard to H1, the results from Table 4 indicate that there was a significant positive impact of intrusiveness on annoyance. In other words, higher levels of perceived intrusiveness produced higher levels of perceived annoyance. If ads were seen as intrusive, they were found to be annoying. As a result, **H1 was supported**.

H2 focused on the connection between annoyance and avoidance, and again the relationship was significant and positive. Higher levels of perceived ad annoyance resulted here in higher levels of ad avoidance. If ads were perceived to be annoying, they resulted in the individuals avoiding exposure to them. As a result, **H2 was supported**. This result contrasts other studies where feelings of irritation were not significantly related to ad avoidance (Cronin and Menelly, 1992; Edwards et al., 2002) but adds support to the notion that interruption of cognitive processing validly describes how negative feelings are elicited from advertisements (Li et al., 2002).

H3 examined the impact of perceived mistrust of advertiser's motives on the link between intrusiveness and annoyance, and the results can be seen in Table 6. The results indicated that here is no difference in the effect of intrusiveness on ad annoyance according to the trust in advertiser's motives (**H3 was not supported**).

H4 examined the impact of perceived mistrust of advertiser's motives on the link between annoyance and avoidance. Among respondents with high mistrust in advertiser's motives, ad annoyance was found to lead to higher levels of ad avoidance, while the lower mistrust group was somewhat less prone to avoidance. Hence, **H4 was supported**.

H5 examined the linkages given the levels of education attained by the respondents. In this case there was a clear indication that consumers with lower levels of education showed a stronger effect of perceived intrusiveness on annoyance compared to consumers with higher levels of education attainment. Therefore **H5 was rejected**. It is likely that the weaker persuasion knowledge (Freistadt and Wright, 1995) in these demographic groups may lower their tolerance of ads perceived as intrusive. The results may reflect the fact that the sample by nature was more skewed towards higher levels of education. More study is warranted.

H6 examined the link between perceived annoyance and avoidance as moderated by the level of education. Slightly higher coefficients were found for the higher education groups, but the differences were small. **H6 is inconclusive**.

Demographic differences in advertising avoidance strategies

In a second stage of analyses, the demographic characteristics of respondents were regressed against two types of ad avoidance strategies. As the aim was to understand the role of personal characteristics on specific types of ad avoidance strategies, two sets of regression models were estimated using channel switching as mechanical ad avoidance and being engaged in another activity during the commercial breaks as a form of behavioral ad avoidance (see Table 7). H7 focused on the effects of gender on avoidance behavior with the expectation that men would be more likely to switch channels. Table 7 indicates that men in China are less likely to engage in behavioral avoidance than women but no significant effects

emerged with respect of mechanical avoidance. As a result, **H7 is inconclusive**. H8 then addressed the expectation that women are more likely to engage in other behaviors than men, and there was an indication that men in China are more likely to do other things than men. Hence, **H8 was rejected**.

[Place Table 7 About Here]

H9 examined the role of the level of education on the type of avoidance mechanisms utilized, and Table 6 indicates that there are significant effects for education. The opposite result was found from what was hypothesized. In this case the higher education group were less prone to both types of avoidance mechanisms than the lower education group. As a result, **H9 is rejected**. This finding makes China a unique case, as the effect of education on avoidance is in contrast with findings from both some developed (UK) and some emerging economies such as Chile and Turkey (Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009).

H10 focused on the impact of family size on avoidance behavior with the expectation that larger families would be more likely to switch channels than would be the case for smaller families. The larger the family size, the more likely the willingness to avoid ads both mechanically and behaviourally. **H10 was supported**. Results are consistent with other studies (West et al., 2010; Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009) which reported the presence of others as a significant predictor of ad avoidance provide evidence of the role of household size in predicting ad avoidance across emerging markets.

Finally, H11 examined the relationship between age and avoidance behavior, and in this case there was a significant effect found for older Chinese consumers. There is a positive relationship between age and the likelihood to engage in both mechanical and behavioral avoidance. **Thus H11 was supported**. The effect of age on mechanical avoidance is similar to that found for other emerging economies Turkey (Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009).

General findings

It was also found that sample demographics were able for this Chinese sample to predict the variation in mechanic avoidance than has been found in other studies (Rojas-Mendez et al., 2009) with the strongest effects accounted by family size, followed by respondent's age and education. Results from in-depth interviews conducted with consumers in China (N=42), done after the survey was completed, point out that ads generated negative emotions among the majority of interviewees. The perceived low quality of local ads in China emerged as a contributing factor. This was compatible with a strong preference for foreign ads in China. Tai and Pae (2002) found that Chinese consumers generally prefer foreign sourced to localised commercials. Male interviewees perceived that the majority of ads are targeted at female shoppers, hence perceived relevance may reduce their motivation to process information from ads and enhance resistance to ads. Marketers need to increase their effort to improve the perceived quality of ads in China in order to increase the exposure of TV audiences to ads and brand recall. Another interesting result here was found in the role of age on ad avoidance, which is in sharp contrast to what has been found from studies in developed economies.

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

This paper brings several contributions to the literature. First, it validates the constructs of perceived intrusiveness of television advertising, ad annoyance and ad avoidance in China by being informed by qualitative input from this major world economy. Second, we provide evidence for the mediating role of ad annoyance on the relationship between perceived advertising intrusiveness and ad avoidance. Our findings corroborate the results of Van Diejen, Donkers and Franses (2009). Individuals feel irritated by the number and frequency of ads. Nevertheless, in contrast with their study, irritation is also a significant

negative emotional driver of stated exposure to advertising. The receptiveness of viewers in China to television ad exposures is an important area for study, and we now understand the relationship among these important constructs and their impact on consumer perceptions. The paper also points out that while demographics play a significant role in predicting ad avoidance, some of these effects (e.g. education) may not be as linear as assumed in previous studies. While education reduces both forms of ad avoidance, this is likely due to lower levels of ad annoyance generated by intrusive ads.

So what does this mean for advertisers? First of all, it is important to note here that if ads are perceived to be intrusive, this will create perceptions of annoyance and ultimately lead to avoidance behavior. This is obviously a red flag for advertisers aiming at these markets, but it is encouraging as well in that if ads are properly pretested with viewers in China, it is possible to correct ad execution strategies to reduce the potential for perceived intrusiveness, annoyance and avoidance. Unfortunately, there is a mistrust of advertiser motives that is present in these respondents which may be difficult for individual advertisers to alleviate, but it is at least possible in this case to weed out executions that might be perceived by Chinese viewers to be intrusive, which would potentially reduce the chances for the ads to become annoying and ultimately for the viewer to behaviorally take corrective action by avoiding the ads. The interactions between demographics and ad annoyance have specific features in China which raise the importance of a tailored approach when segmenting this market and designing advertising strategies.

One concern in particular here is that there is a greater potential for negative affect for less educated viewers, so depending on the target audiences for the advertisements, care must be put into assessing the proposed ad executions so that particularly if the ad is aimed at less educated audiences, every effort is made to eliminate the potential for negative consumer reactions. The findings are in contrast with findings from developed economies where

viewers with higher levels of education were more critical of ads (Mehta, 2000; Shavitt et al, 1998). It was quite interesting to note that education did not seem to have an effect upon the potential for ads seen as annoying to lead to avoidance behaviours. Another contrast with developed nations (Danaher, 1995; Speck and Elliott, 1997) is that women rather than men are engaged in behavioral avoidance of TV ads.

Finally, age did have an effect here as older viewers were more apt to engage in avoidance behaviors if they found ads to be intrusive and then annoying. The point here is that there is the potential for corrective action for advertisers if they properly pretest their ads. The drawback, however, is that some audiences may already have concerns about the motives of advertisers in general, which may lead to negative processing. If advertisers at least can eliminate the potential for ads being perceived as intrusive, then they have a greater chance that the ads do not result in perceived annoyance and lead ultimately to viewer avoidance.

Marketers targeting new generations of consumers with new brands can capitalize on the openness of these segments towards TV advertising. According to socialization theory (Abramson and Inglehart, 1995), the fundamental values of one's personality reflect the socio-economic and cultural conditions of childhood and adolescence. Members of Generation X born between the mid 1960s and 1970s experienced economic expansion in China and were exposed to global values and practices. Older generations, whose childhood and adolescence were before the Cultural Revolution, experienced more planned economic policies and collectivistic goals.

Today's youth are more likely to be bicultural (Gao, 2005) and respond more favorably to advertising focused on individualism and modern values (Zhang and Shavitt, 2003), while older generations may be better targeted with collective and traditional values. Yin (1999) points out a mix of localized and standardized advertising strategies in China. It is possible that older generations perceive TV advertising as less relevant for them in general,

since it often deals with values which they do not embrace. The tendency of older generations to avoid ads seems prevalent in other emerging economies (Marinov et al., 2008), where a similar phenomenon of embracing collective values is prevalent in generations before the fall of communism. At a broader level, the study sheds light on the role of age in predicting the receptivity towards advertising in emerging markets.

Limitations and future research

Finally, as with any international comparative study, the sample may not reflect the views of all relevant target audiences. Broader sampling across a wider variety of adults from a variety of demographic segments will shed important additional information on the advertising constructs involved. Attempts to branch out from major cities will also yield interesting new information regarding the reach of advertising in this high-growth economy. The addition of other psychological constructs may also be instructive in painting a more complete picture of the various perceptual linkages involved. It should also be noted here that while most of the research done involving ad annoyance, ad avoidance and intrusiveness have involved general perceptual scales, it will also be important to develop ad treatments that can properly test particular ad depictions to examine perceptions and behaviors. It may also be possible that ad content for certain types of ad executions may either intensify or alleviate the linkages between perceived intrusiveness, annoyance and avoidance. Finally, while China is a vital emergent economy, it would be valuable to expand this research to other emerging economies (e.g., India and Brazil). Global advertisers have much at stake in winning over their viewers, and this important research will provide needed strategic information that will enhance their chances of success in global advertising campaigns while avoiding consumer alienation.

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Table 1. Key statistical indicators in China

Population (mln) census 2008	1,325
Urban population in % (2005)	69.9
Per capita GDP US\$ mln (PPP) (2009)	9,046,990
Percentage of households with TV sets	89.2 (in 2008)

Sources: IMF (2010), National Bureau of Statistics of China (2010), UN (2006) and World Bank (2010).

Table 2. Sample breakdown by key demographics (percent of total sample)

Gender	%	Education	%
Male	54.3	Primary and secondary	10.5
Female	45.7	High school	39.2
		College	29.9
		University	20.4

Table 3. Construct Analysis

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std loadings	CR	AVE
Intrusiveness (IV)				0.73	0.49
There are too many ads on TV	4.97	1.35	0.71		
I am not bothered by advertisements which interrupt programmes (reversed)	4.59	1.29	0.71		
Ads appear at inappropriate times	4.53	1.01	0.60		
Ad annoyance (AN)				0.76	0.52
I lose my patience when advertisements interrupt TV films	4.67	1.42	0.85		
I am irritated when there are advertisements at the same time on several channels/stations	4.63	1.65	0.63		
Advertising annoys me	4.36	1.41	0.62		
Ad avoidance (AV)				0.75	0.50
I avoid Tv ads	4.60	1.34	0.78		
Do something else	4.89	1.31	0.57		
Switch TV channel	4.67	1.46	0.69		
Mistrust in advertiser's motives				0.72	0.48
I often notice tricks in advertisements to make me buy the product	4.98	1.17	0.62		
Firms try to influence too much through advertisements	5.06	1.16	0.84		
Most ads are not the products themselves, they just try to create an emotional mood	4.86	1.21	0.51		

Normed chi-square=2.32; NFI=.946; CFI=.967; GFI=.964; RMSEA=.052

Note CR: Composite reliability. AVE: Average Explained Variance.

Table 4. Path estimates of the model of advertising avoidance.

	Full sample (N=517)
Path coeff.	
Intrusiveness>Annoyance	0.47**
Annoyance>Avoidance	0.66**
Fit indices	
Squared Correlations Annoyance	.22
Squared Correlations Avoidance	.44
Normed Chi-square	3.66
NFI	.95
RFI	.92
TLI	.94
CFI	.96
RMSEA	.072

** Significant at $p < 0.05$; *** Significant at $p < 0.01$.

Table 5. Mediation tests

	Test 1 (AV=α+β1 AV)	Test 2 (AN= α+β1 IV)	Test 3 (AV=α+β1 AV +β2 AN)
Intrusiveness (p-value)	0.23(.000)		.09(.132)
Ad Annoyance (p-value)		.36(.000)	.40(.000)
F value (p-value)	30.13(.001)	77.21(.000)	60.46(.000)

IV = Perceived intrusiveness; AN = Ad annoyance; AV = Ad avoidance.

Table 6. The role of trust in advertiser's motives and demographics

	Female (N=218)	Male (N=276)	Low Trust (N=239)	High Trust (N=272)	Low education (N=246)	High education (N=260)
Path coeff.						
Intrusiveness> Annoyance	0.39**	.53**	0.47**	0.47**	0.52**	0.45**
Annoyance> Avoidance	0.69**	.61**	0.70**	0.62**	0.64**	0.67**
Fit indices						
Squared Correlations Annoyance	.15	.28	.22	.22	.26	.20
Squared Correlations Avoidance	.47	.37	.49	.38	.41	.45
Normed Chi- square	1.75	2.33	2.19	3.13	3.15	2.46
NFI	.94	.94	.94	.91	.91	.94
RFI	.92	.91	.91	.87	.88	.91
TLI	.96	.95	.95	.90	.91	.94
CFI	.97	.96	.96	.93	.94	.96
RMSEA	.059	.07	.071	.089	.09	.07

** Significant at $p < 0.05$; *** Significant at $p < 0.01$.

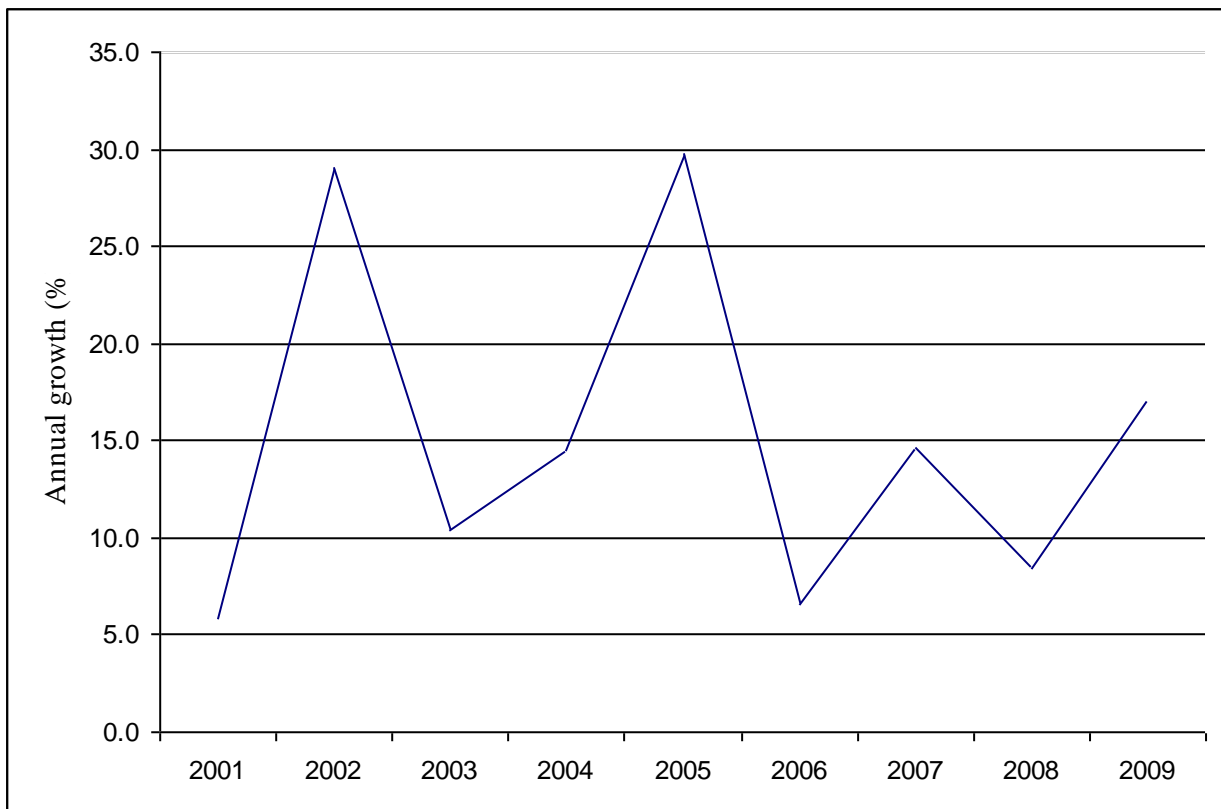
Table 7. Demographic determinants of TV ad avoidance

	Mechanical avoidance	Behavioural avoidance
Gender	-.08	-.06**
Education	-.19***	-.13***
Family size	.25***	.18***
Age	.12***	.10**
R ²	.14	.08

** Significant at $p < 0.05$; *** Significant at $p < 0.01$

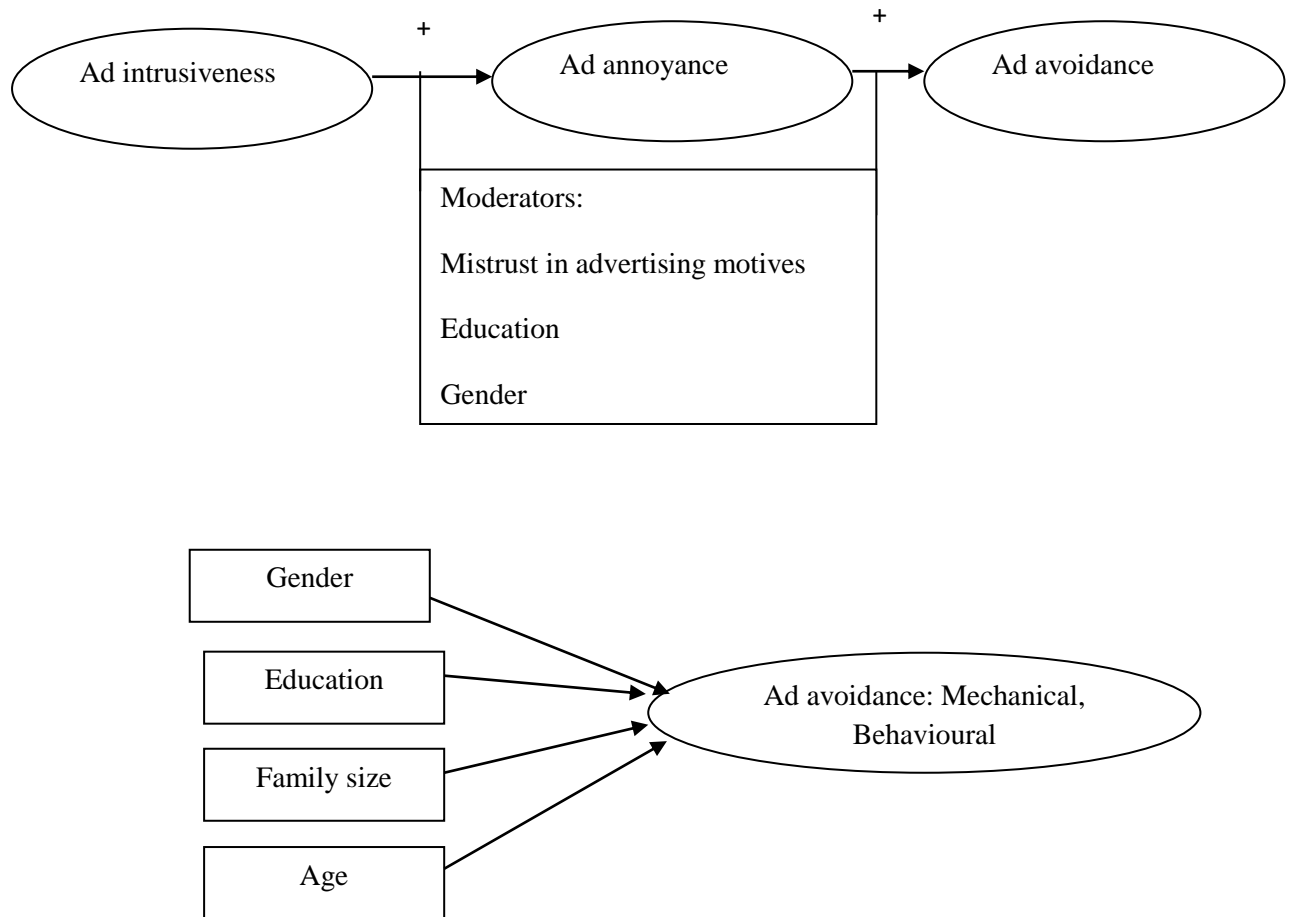
Note: Gender: 1=Male.

Figure 1. Trends in advertising spending in China, 2001-2009.



Sources: China State Administration for Industry and Commerce (2010).

Figure 2. Proposed model of advertising avoidance



Source: Adapted from Boush et al. (1994), Edwards et al. (2002), and Royas-Mendez et al. (2009).

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