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# Reclaiming 'The New Public Spaces' Outdoor Advertising & The Resistance of the Albanian Consumer Movements

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**Abstract:** *This study investigated and contributed empirically and theoretically the Albanian consumer resistance movements toward the invading of the public spaces by advertising. The outdoor advertising, even in emerging countries as Albania, is inescapable and has grabbed the consumer and his incapability on avoiding it. The methodological considerations that directed this research was the interpretive paradigm using within-methods triangulation. The impacts of free trade effects on consumer culture and proper spaces in developing countries has resulted as a significant one, through the process of commercial usurpation of public spaces.*

*The study aimed to contribute in the theoretical literature on the consumer culture in the selected fields of study, in response due to the appeal and calls of the researchers to a further on the developing countries (Arnould & Thompson 2005) and facing these results with the ones applied on the western countries, with Albania as a developing country.*

**Key words:** *Public Space, Outdoor advertising, Usurpation, Resistance, Consumer Movements*

## I: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Social media as a strong tool the last years even in Albania was the tool that presented me with 2 movements in Albania. The first one named 'Stop Pemocidin ne Shqiperi'. The join in this group was purely out of curiosity and because of its provocative and playful name which in English means 'Stop the Treecide in Albania'<sup>110</sup>. The second movement named 'Shqiperia Ndryshon' (in English 'Albania Changes'), by the founder was reported that it counts over 2,000 activists all over Albania, who engage in numerous anti-advertising protests and campaigns.

Young Albanians started these movements to rebel to commercialization of public space by various forms of out-of home advertising that occupy legal and illegal places usurping every possible place of the public space: streets, buildings, walls, facades, parks, beaches and trees. This is a form of consumer resistance (Fischer 2001; Penaloza and Price 2003; Rumbo 2002; Zavetoski 2002a,b) to the advertising practices of businesses and organizations which dwell in the public domain, regardless of their claims on ethics, social responsibility and environmental friendly practices.

### 1.2 Recent Discourses

The online articles of Outdoor Advertising Associations in western countries and larger markets as UK, US talk about the benefits, effectiveness and social contributions of the medium. Quantitative data is used to support the latter. The latest articles

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<sup>110</sup> Various articles report the measured effectiveness of advertising such as (Kim and Cheong 2009; Yi-Cheon Yim et al 2010). Content and format variables of 80 outdoor ads were analyzed and a model was developed to measure creative appeal and brand/product recognition (Meurs and Aristoff 2009).

The article 'Use and effectiveness of billboards' reports a survey results revealing four primary reasons why businesses use billboard advertising: visibility, media efficiency, local presence, and tangible response (Taylor et al 2006).

from the industry report an increasing attention to OOH advertising. Recent academic papers on OOH advertising testify the effectiveness of the medium measured by new quantitative methods and techniques<sup>111</sup>.

Critical articles in social critical studies and psychology discuss the 'negative effects' of advertising on issues such as targeting of minorities with alcohol and tobacco ads (Taylor and Taylor 1994, Lopez et al. 2004). These studies have brought a critical voice to the discourse, but do not present clear gaps for broader critical analyses of OOH advertising.

Despite the ubiquitous presence of advertising and the 'creative' ways that reaches us as citizens and consumers, the increasing negative opinions on advertising and marketing (Smith 2006)<sup>112</sup> indicate that the fight between advertisers and consumers for the physical, discursive and psychic spaces persists. Rumbo (2002, p. 129) sees advertising's power as hegemonic and claims that the 'commercialization of public life has eroded the public-discursive space.' Nevertheless, anti-advertising, anti-brands and anti-consumption movements around the globe have attracted the attention of both marketers and academics in the last two decades (Austin, Plouffe and Peters 2005). The former have successfully converted some resistance efforts in niche markets, for example the torn jeans (Penaloza and Price 1993). The latter have researched such phenomenon enriching the body of literature of consumer research with various theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relations between consumer actions, the marketplace and cultural meaning (Austin et al 2005, p. 868). The body of scholarly literature on alternative OOH advertising is still young, reporting on the new techniques and their effectiveness.

### 1.3 Out-Of-Home Advertising in Albania

At the very beginning we must emphasize that on this study on advertising impacts in the public space and consumer resistance to the phenomena in an Albanian context was a challenge because of lack of official data, publicised surveys or academic papers in the country. In this research out-of-home advertising (OOH) as involved various forms of the medium; the standard ones (posters, billboards, street furniture) and alternative techniques (ambient, wrapped vehicles, graffiti, flyposting, street art and stickers). They are placed, glued, stapled in legal and illegal places, thus hoarding the public space. The medium is highly used in Albania since it is cheaper than other forms of advertising – television, radio, newspapers and magazines and it is believed that reaches a wider audience (Visual Outdoor Advertising 2010).

All entities that would like to launch product service information are members of the public space, in this study referred to as 'advertisers' or 'commercializers'.<sup>113</sup> The dominant power of commercializers' interest over the public space is aided by the lack of clear and undisputable legislation on 'public space' and the lack of structures in the Municipality of Tirana to retain advertising within the legal boundaries.<sup>114</sup> The title of this study 'Reclaiming the New Public Places' portrays the conflict between commercializers and activists over the traditional public places in the communist Albania (1944 till 1990)<sup>115</sup> - streets, beaches, parks, trees, walls- which under the post 1990's influences of liberalization and privatization<sup>116</sup> seem to have turned into a commercial landscape and serve more as private rather than public spaces. This study analyzes the Albanian activists' motives, perceptions and attitudes towards advertising practices. Their protests and guerrilla attacks against adverts in a struggle to reclaim the public space are conceptualized employing new social movement (NSM) theories as a framework of consumer ideology (Touraine 1981).

### 1.4 The Historical & Critical Perspective

Earlier works on OOH advertising (Agnew 1938, Frost 1941, Houck 1969) document in detail the medium's history, its various techniques, its effectiveness and positive role in the society. Understandably, these writings are about standardized outdoor advertising forms; billboards, posters and hoardings.

Frost (1939) argues that outdoor advertising thanks to its standardized images aided in the creation of a 'moral society'. At Turner's work (1952) the first signs of critical thought can be traced. He discussed how wealthy residents protected their public space because considered the medium to impair it (Turner 1952, p. 244).

Houck (1969, p. 183) stated that outdoor advertising had become a 'legally accepted system' that insults those who may be 'visually high strung'. Comparing outdoor to other media he states: 'Outdoor advertising is also a kind of propaganda. Both are used to produce an idea, a desire or a motivation which is designed to induce social habits for the benefit of commercial or

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<sup>111</sup> Smith 2006 reported the findings of a survey held by Yankelovich Partners that showed that 60% of the respondents' opinion on marketing and advertising had worsened over the last years.

<sup>112</sup> The term was adapted from a leaflet of the movement 'Stop Pemocidin', where the term 'commercializer' was used ironically as a synonym of 'colonizer'.

<sup>113</sup> This information was provided by Mr. Hantin Bonati, Director of Public Space in Municipality of Tirana, April 2011.

<sup>114</sup> CIA – The World Fact book Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

<sup>115</sup> The privatization process in Albania started soon after adoption of the new Constitution and of the Law "On sanctioning and protection of private property, free initiatives and privatization", in 1991. Under the Guidance of IMF and World Bank, large-scale privatization started in 1992. (see FDI, World Bank website <http://www.fdi.net/documents/WorldBank/databases/plink/factsheets/albania.htm>) The process continues to date.

<sup>116</sup> The term is used in the preview of Naomi Klein (2009), *No Logo: 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition*, Random House of Canada.

ideological interests whose objectives are not always evident or laudable' (Houck 1969, p. 190). Most of the books that I found from this period revolved around USA and Britain.

The available literature today is quite divided between the supporters and the opponents of the medium. David Bernstein (1997) positions himself as an advocate and presents the benefits of this exiting and dynamic medium that as he acknowledges has remained largely undocumented. While Naomi Klein (2000) has turned into the harshest critic of brands and advertising, and her book into "the movement bible"<sup>117</sup> that put the new grassroots resistance to advertising and corporatism into a clearer perspective. I am more interested in the latter, the body of critical literature that analyzes the medium in terms of its urban, social and cultural impacts on consumers.

The historical references by advocates and critics are relevant to this paper as they have documented the social values that were important in various periods in western societies. The contradictory opinions on the effects of the medium in society portray the battle of these values for power over public discourse.

This paper considers OOH advertising as a medium that through commercialisation of the public space affects consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards it negatively.

### 1.5 Public Sphere and Public Space

The literature review on answering the question 'what constitutes the public sphere and the public space?' will start with a revision of concepts as theorized by arguably one of the most influential social theorists of our times, Jürgen Habermas. The concept of 'public sphere' as defined by Habermas (1979) means a realm of our social life where the public opinion may be formed and citizens are influencing on it. Historically this public space emerged with the loss of power of traditional authority systems, and generated through the new means of communication that were not controlled by the state. 'The democratic of this model rests on participants being able to bracket their respective social and economic differences in order to deliberate as peers with equal dialogue chances' (Rumbo 2002, p. 128). Various media, such as television, radio and print media have been critically analyzed under the light of this theory. For Habermas the growth of commercial mass media is one of the fundamental reasons for the public sphere rotting. Consumerism is legitimated by advertising messages that are conveyed through a dominant mass media industry, 'that is virtually devoid of space for the articulation of dissenting views' (Rumbo 2002, p. 129).

The commercialization of many aspects of the public life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has contributed to the death of discursive and physical spaces where citizens can engage in rational discussions and interact with each other. Habermas calls this, the rise of the 'pseudo-public sphere': The concept of public sphere presented in here emphasises active participation of the citizens in various degrees. For Habermas, the main role of the public sphere is to create a *public space* where the participants can engage in public communication by mutually respecting each other. Public discourse and deliberation are the ultimate aims. These models of public sphere depict private and public spaces in a figurative way. 'They describe culturally constructed phenomena and are used to construct and legitimize relations of power in society' (Dahlberg 2006, p. 40).

The concept of 'public space' is theorised in various ways and its interpretation depends on the domain of research. To construct an analysis based on this concept becomes a complex task. The boundaries between 'private' and 'public' are vague and as Meijer (1998, p. 245) asserts 'billboards displayed in public places can lead to considerable debate among citizens' in determining and claiming these spaces. Clarke and Bradford (1998) claim that researchers' interest in accounting for consumption in terms of public and private has declined. This section addresses several questions that derive from the fields of inquiry. What is the public space? Is public space the same as public place? What roles play the consumers and producers in consumption of the public space? Who is responsible for creating meanings in public space?

*Space* is an abstract notion, it is air or atmospheric Vol. defined by physical elements and man's visual imagination (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010), whilst *place* is 'consumed space' that accounts for the meaningful experience of a given site (Visconti *et al.* 2010). The concept of public space is not unified yet.

### 1.6 Conceptualizing Resistance

'Scholars have used the term *resistance* to describe a variety of actions and behaviours at all levels of human social life (individual, collective and institutional) and in a number of different settings, including political systems, entertainment and literature, and the workplace' (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, p. 533). As a result, consensus on a sole precise definition of resistance is not reached among scholars who use the same term even when talking about different things. For the purpose of study *resistance* is defined in relevance to consumer research theory, as Penaloza and Price (1993, p. 123) term it, 'to withstand the force or affect of...'. The two forms of resistance investigated in Albania aim to withstand the affects of advertising as a medium that usurps the public space and promotes anti-values (i.e. consumption, drinking, smoking, arrogance, sexual

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<sup>117</sup> Data Centrum Research Institute-DCRI, Tiranë 2008

behaviour). The dominance of a consumer society exists with its antithesis; consumer movements against consumption, brands, products, marketing and advertising practices.

### **1.7 From Social Movements to Consumer Movements**

Sociological definitions of rebellion are based on resistance against institutionalized social structure (Austin et al 2005). Buechler (2000) defines social movements as activists' collective efforts to transform the social order. While for McKee (1969) rebellion means renouncing former goals and the social structure which legitimized them and then seeking to create a 'social structure in which a new set of cultural goals and institutionalized means are possible' (Austin et al 2005). Consumer movements that attempt to transform elements of the consumption and marketing structures are based on the same principles. Consumer movements are distinct from social movements as they view 'consumers and consumption as pivotal points for enacting change in the social order' (Kozinets and Handelman 2004). This study focuses on consumer movements where the activists' collective efforts seek to transform the social order of advertising.

A social movement' ideology consists of 3 core element, in which the activists portray their goal, their adversary and themselves (Touraine 1981), considered on this study. Several studies have confirmed the applicability of Touraine's framework of social movement ideology. Applied by Kozinets and Handelman (2004) to study consumer movements among anti-advertising, anti-Nike, anti-GE food activists. Bernstein (1997) to study lesbian and gay movements. In response to Kozinets and Handelman (2004) call for a need to expand the conceptualization of consumer movement ideology, my research is seeking to do this by studying two particular movements and their activists.

### **1.8 Resistance toward Advertising**

In the body of literature on criticism of marketing, advertising is singled out as 'the main propagandist for the pervasive logic of consumerism' (Rumbo 2002, p. 128). Pollay (1986, p. 21) notes that one of the influences of advertising on consumers is making consumption 'a top-of-mind behaviour' and portraying a world where consumption is commonplace.

The myriad of sophisticated advertising techniques aim to stimulate demand (Buchholz 1998) therefore consumers fear these manipulative and subliminal techniques (Pollay and Mittal 1993). Consumers in turn are raising doubts on advertising (Pollay and Mittal 1993) and lacking trust on advertisers as reported in the Gfk Customer Research's survey on trust (2008) where advertiser were the second least trusted group after politicians (Heath and Heath 2008). Heath and Heath (2008) studied the perceptions and attitudes of consumers towards various marketing aspects and found out that advertising attracted most negative associations and was perceived as 'misleading', 'dishonest', 'aggressive', 'irresponsible' and 'stupid'. The negative perceptions of consumers toward advertising have led them to employ ad-avoiding strategies to protect their physical and mental space from the advertising clutter (Speck and Elliot 1997). Consumer ad-avoiding strategies are studied for television, radio and print media, hence presenting a gap in the literature on strategies to avoid OOH advertising. Rumbo's (2002) article is particularly interesting as it analysis the case of Adbuster through the philosophical works of Habermas, Gramsci's notions on power.

Studying two Albanian consumer movements that employ ad avoiding strategies such as attacks to adverts to 'eliminate advertising' (Speck and Elliot 1997) and cultural jamming (Rumbo 2002) this study contributed to further knowledge on advertising resistance.

## **II: METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Methods applied**

The interpretive paradigm leads to the adoption of a qualitative method research strategy. The choice of qualitative approach for collecting, analyzing and interpreting data was informed by the character of the research problem. There are three reasons that can be attributed to such choice.

Firstly, the research is exploratory in nature, seeking to uncover complex processes that relate to symbolic activities against commercialization.

Secondly, using within-methods triangulation at the level of data collection (i.e. participant observation and interviews) provides a more holistic and a better understanding of the phenomenon (anti-advertising consumer rebellion) under study (Denzin 1978, p. 296-307). The 3 employed techniques, each within the qualitative paradigm contemplate each other and were of great benefit to the research process.

Thirdly, the insights that generated from the qualitative data collected in field were highly beneficial to the process of data analysis and interpretation. Triangulating the findings provided evidence for me as researcher to make sense of phenomenon under study (Mathison 1988, p. 15)

### **Data Collection Tools**

Primary data were collected in Tirana mainly where the activists dwell, commute and meet. The following methods were employed to carry out the research:

- a) Participant Observation (10 activist participants in the study, 5 for each movements)
- b) Semi structured Interviews (10 activist)
- c) Observation of Internet sites (website, blogs, Facebook, forums, photos) (similar to netnography, but simpler)
- d) Online survey – Questionnaire (138 respondents)

## 2.2 Challenges on the study & Limitations

*Accessibility* - The nature of some campaigns (i.e. the night attacks to demolish ads) was a barrier to getting personal access to activists' actions. They were aware of the 'illegal' aspect of such campaigns and felt reluctant to allow me observe, keep notes or take photos.

*Language Barrier* – It was the language of the 'community' that constituted a certain barrier as communication was with codified words. Decoding such terms provided a better and deeper analyses

*Time Barrier* - The short period of the study the ten interviewees are in Tirana (living and commuting there). It is not certain if similar or different themes would have emerged from observing and interviewing activists of other cities.

## III: ALBANIAN CONSUMER MOVEMENTS

### 3.1 Activists' Identity

**Positive Change Agents** - *'We believe in change, we all do'*. Founder of 'Stop the Treecide'

Since the early phases of this study, during field research it became apparent that most activists regarded themselves as 'positive change agents' (Touraine 1981). They considered themselves as people with high morals and sincere in their social concerns. Activism was considered a natural consequence of their true beliefs in 'change'. All the ten participants used the word 'change' explicitly when asked why they joined the movement. This word was used to express their strong beliefs that 'things can change' and to directly or indirectly portray themselves as positive change agents. The theme of 'positive change agents' reinforces previous finding of activists' identity. The Albanian activists openly portray themselves as people that fight for a positive cause. Social movement theorists such as Habermas and Castells (1976) refer to consumers as the oppressed class. Touraine (1981) theorized about the actors of social movements as people that consider themselves as the forces of good that protect the oppressed others. Their discourse on the positive impact and the support they do have by the citizens was shown even on the result of the survey where 51% responded positively to the question "Would you join them in these initiatives".

**Young and Intelligent** - *'We are the target that fights back...'* Activist in "Albania Changes"

The 10 participants on the study are relatively young, in between their 20s and 30s. This was true for all the other activists that were part of these movements; therefore the sample size is representative of the overall Albanian population. Being 'young' was seen as a factor that influenced their involvement in these movements and 'smart' as the reinforcing factor. It emerged spontaneously in eight out of ten interviews this self awareness of their young age and high intelligence. The young age doesn't constitute a barrier to them all being smart people.

The way repeated the word 'relevant' in the interviews implies that them and the other activists do not talk nonsense or discuss about irrelevant things. Because they are all 'intelligent and knowledgeable' they are part of the movement. Previous research on activists' ideology does not mention this aspect of activists' identity. It is a relevant theme to discuss as it probably is interlinked with an awareness of the young generation that advertising appeals more to them. Lewis (2003) reported that advert contents in four Asian cities appeal to young, educated, mainly female consumers. Old people have a tendency to be more negative about marketing practices than young adults in the study of Simpson and Licata (2007). The participant in Kozinet and Handelman's (2004) study were more diverse in terms of age, in between their 30's, 40's and above. This research is held in Albania and the different cultural and social background of its participants from the participant of previous research (Western countries) may be the cause for opposing findings.

The online survey is bringing same opinions of the Albanian consumer with a very different sociocultural sfond where do dominate the young ones (20-30 years), but 30% of the resondends are over 32 years old . same data are reported by a study

conducted in Albania during 2008<sup>118</sup>, eventhought not for the same porpuses as this study or Lewis one. The study of DCRI had the main goal to orient the advertisers toward the right target, demography,standard of life. The results for Albania were: t he target +16 years old, less attention toward OOH show the consumers with basic education(8 clases only) , the married ones and the ones +55 years old. Are more focused on OOH the young people, the ones who do have middle high standard of life(over +600 Usd/Person in a family), mainly the single ones, more the females than males.

**Nationalists** - *'We are Albanians, we owe this much to our country.'* Founder in "Albania Changes" The role that nationalism plays in the identities of Albanian activists is crucial in reinforcing their struggle against advertising's occupation of the public space. They consider commercialization of the public space as a 'foreign' phenomenon and express openly their disagreement to it. The name of the movement 'Albania Changes' delineates the nationalist ideology of its activists. The founder emphasis the importance of national culture to him. Strong nationalist feelings were expressed by seven out of the ten participants. They referred to advertising practices as 'new modern tools that don't belong to us' or 'excessive for me as Albanian' . They meant the ways applied for promoting business! It was clearly that activists' ideology is impelled by nationalism. They are keen to stress that their cause is beneficial for the country.

Nationalism as ideology has been strongly influential in Albanian culture since 1944 when the country fell under the communist regime. In Albania, all religions and religious rituals were prohibited by law till 1990. This seems to echo in the young activists' identities who consider nationalism as an important value (as the Albanians religion) and as a motivator of their mobilization.

### 3.2 The Advertising as an Adversary

Touraine (1981) theorized that the existence of an adversary makes the struggle of a social movement effective. The existence clearly of the adversary performs the motivation and mobilization of activists (Kozinets and Handelman 2004, p. 697). In various researches on consumer activism and consumer boycotts 'corporate elites' have been identified as their target (Friedman 1999, Kozinets and Handelman 2004). This section aims to reflect activist views' of advertising and commercialization in a developing country. To provide insights into the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of activists towards various aspects of advertising and commercialization. The findings are organized in correspondence to the order of the issues in the interview guide.

**Invader of the Public Space** - Both movements seek to fight advertising in the public space, therefore this was the first issue discussed with the participants. They were specifically asked about their perceptions of outdoor, ambient and guerrilla advertising in the public space since their protests and attacks were directed to those advertising forms.

The public space is perceived as *sacred* by the activists and a 'common good that should be protected'. The concept of 'public space' is closely related with the Albanian cultural and social background. Their activism was described as as 'a cause-consequence relationship', the cause being the excessive ways of advertisers. Wrapped vehicles(on move OOH), guerrilla marketing are all techniques that they struggle. They want to see the boundaries of private and public space.The advertising should be confined entirely within the private spaces such as commercial centers or shops. They are totally against form of public advertising that did not have informative or social messages, because otherwise none can escape from them

Same perception came in the study by the participants on the survey where over 90% are responded positively (Very important, Important) to the question "How Important is to you the Public Space".

**Inescapability** - By the all the participants considered out-of-home advertising as 'an intruder', 'usurping our streets' or 'invader'. The *inescapability* from advertising in public is an occurring negative perception through all the activists' narratives but even the citizens. Hence, inescapability emerges as a subtheme of the broader theme 'Advertising as Invader of the public space'. In the extracts of Martin, Erton and Blerta nuances of this negative perception can be grasped. Martin calls advertising vehicles 'bugs that appear everywhere', Erton is irritated by the presence of advertising campaigns in the beaches (public spaces) and seeks a 'mass boycott' to prevent them, Blerta feels she can't escape from ads, she asserts how impossible it is 'not to look at them'. Because it is impossible to visually or mentally avoid advertising in the public space, the ad avoidance strategies that activists' employ are 'eliminating advertising' (Speck and Elliot 1997) by removing posters, painting in white advertising graffiti, attacking ambient promotions (see Photo 2) or painting and defacing the advertising vehicles. They aim to protect the significance of public space in an Albanian socio-cultural context. Rumbo (2002) refers to advertising as a 'colonizer' of public, discursive and mental space and examines the case of *Adbuster* as a challenger to advertising's hegemonic control over these spaces. The participants share the same perception as they consider the presence of advertising in public space as invading both the public and the mental space. Previous research within the consumer culture theory has focused on the design and management of servicescapes and the way they affect consumer experiences (Price and Arnould 1999, Sherry 1990) and on the

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<sup>118</sup> LawNo. 9632, date 30.10.2006 'For the system of vendor taxation', Republic of albania

unpleasant store environments (Turley and Milliman 2000). These studies have focused more on built in servicescapes (retail stores) hence presenting a gap in research on the natural environment (i.e. public space) within consumer culture theory literature. The 'inescapable nature of outdoor advertising' is remarked by Rosewarne (2005), but her field of inquiry is women geography so she analyzed outdoor advertising's content in gendered terms.

Pollay (1989) asserts that the proliferation of media in our everyday lives makes advertising environmental in nature. The role that advertising plays in the public space from the consumers' perspective is only partially documented. I suggest that it is the participants' construction of advertising as *invader of the public space* and hence *inescapable* which motivates their activism as a form of resistance.

#### IV: OOH ADVERTISING: The most powerful medium

In Albania does exist a well defined law<sup>119</sup> on the OOH advertising and occupying the public space(As the law quotes), the prices applied, the obligations and rights of the companies that manages this spaces. On the Municipality of Tirana (capital city) differently from the other municipalities and communes ndryshe on 2010 was applied a taxation of 45.000 ALL(450 Usd)/square meter on year on billboards . On November 2010 the Ministry of Finances, Republic of Albania did the draft proposals to increase for 2011 the vendor taxations where are included even these taxes applied on OOH.

Meanwhile by the Albanian consumer the OOH advertising (online survey), was chosen as the second most favorite tool on advertising and second medium where they do get faster the information. A very high % (around 61%) responded they the frequency of outdoor they do face to get information is on daily basis. A very low % (less than 4%) responded they do never face/notice them.

It is important to note that OOH advertising was perceived by six out of ten participants of the study as the most powerful medium in transmitting commercial messages to consumers because it was almost impossible to avoid or ignore it.

But what does confront the activists is that strangely the OOH does not bother the consumers. Their perception on OOH in public space to them is mainly positive or neutral.

The importance and power of OOH is shown even by the publications of the official data<sup>120</sup> where we may notice that the incomes of the Local Government had on 2009 fiscal year an increase of 172% by the taxation of OOH in Municipalities of Albania and 168% increase on communes 2008 fiscal year. The price that the companies that manages these spaces notice an important increase since January 2010<sup>121</sup> as per the changes on law

By the official data made public one of the top 10 most powerful companies that is on market AMC (Mobile Company) 13.5% of the overall marketing budget in 2009 and 18% in 2010 has been spending in OOH<sup>122</sup>. Meanwhile from year 2000 in year 2011 we do have an increase of budget on OOH in Albanian market around 15 times bigger referring year 2000<sup>123</sup>. Marketingu i fasadave<sup>124</sup>(The Marketing of the Facades) is a fast growing trend in Albania as we see applied by the companies that operate in Albania<sup>125</sup>, for the OOH advertising. Often it emphasizes the very high effect vs. The low cost toward the other tools of mediums that may be applied by advertisers

The empowering of OOH advertising is shown even in official data<sup>126</sup>, which do report that the national roads in Albania are 100% covered by billboards, meanwhile in Tirana only we do face a main coverage with Wall banners<sup>127</sup> a most expensive price than billboards.

#### 4.1 Social impacts

The perceived negative social and environmental impacts of OOH advertising are a strong motivator of consumer activism in Albania.

**Defacing Albania** - The impacts that advertising has on the environment and aesthetic of the country constitute a primary concern for activists. Blerta explained me that she chose to call the movement 'Stop the Treecide' inspired by activist Kalle Lasn's (1999) term 'ecocide – planetary death'. The other activists of this same movement shared the same concerns for the well-being of the trees. They applied even the culture jamming initiative in parodying the phenomenon.

<sup>119</sup> 'Advertising, Prices before elections', Gazeta Shqiptare Nr 5096, 3 November 2010, Tirana

<sup>120</sup> Info given by Mrs. Alkerta Berzani, Vice Director, Data Centrum Research Institute, Tirana.

<sup>121</sup> Official data by taxation office on annual spending of advertising Ogilvy Albania(Advertising Agency) for AMC client

<sup>122</sup> Albartex is the 1<sup>st</sup> and biggest company of OOH advertising in Albania. Founded in 1992, Tirana Albania.

<sup>123</sup> The title of a column published in the weekly economic 'Monitor'

<sup>124</sup> 'Marketingu i fasadave', Nr. 381, Weekly Economic Magazine 'Monitor'; Tirana 2009

<sup>125</sup> Data Centrum Research Institute, Tirana 2008

<sup>126</sup> Known in marketing terminology: wallscape. OOH applied buildings facades or fronts

<sup>127</sup> Nenovski, T. (2010) *Macroeconomics*, University American College Skopje, Skopje, p. 79.



'Albania Changes' see that companies are zealous to organize ambient campaigns (in beaches, parks or commercial roads) but almost always do not clean up the mess that is left behind. The negative environmental impacts were often associated with negative perception that foreigners have of Albania. They did emphasize the importance of their campaigns in raising consumers' awareness on the consequences of advertising on the aesthetics of the city. The \has strong nationalistic notes as figuratively he claims that advertisers are not Albanians.

*Defacing Albania* emerges as a subtheme of the wider Social Impacts of advertising and relates with the nationalistic identity of activists. They worry for the aesthetical side and environment of Albania particularly rather than the environment as a wider concept.

**Promoting anti-values** - The ten participants asserted in this study without hesitation that advertising promotes anti-values. They used different epithets to portray advertising's influences on Albanian culture. Advertising was considered to promote 'immorality' 'sexism' 'individualism', 'consumption' (by all of them) and its content was perceived as 'disrespectful' 'exaggerated' (2 of them), 'manipulative'. The sexual appeal of ads is deemed as having a bad influence on children and young people and offensive to the elders.

Pollay (1986) has listed the negative impacts that advertising has on social values in western societies. Heath and Heath (2008) report that all participants in their research were concerned for the negative social impacts of marketing and advertising.

#### **4.2 Activists' Goals - Explicit and Tactic goals**

The third core element of a social movement is the goal (Touraine 1981). The research methods applied demonstrated that the activists' goal is explicit and tacit in nature. The participants articulated differently their goal. But noticeable in their discourses was an emphasis on how their resistance should be disseminated and encouraged by everyone because it protects and promotes the Albanian values. The activists seek to transform the ideology of consumer culture by 'educating' them and raising their awareness, 'opening their eyes'. Nevertheless my activists did not have any negative perceptions towards other consumers. They do not perceive mainstream consumers as opponents. On the contrary my activists seek the encouragement of other consumers and mention the satisfaction of being appreciated by the others as a reason for their engagement in such movements. This finding opposes Kozinets and Handelman (2004) conclusion that consumer activists conceive mainstream consumers as ideological opponents. Explained on conclusions.

## **V: CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTE OF THE RESEARCH**

### **5.1 Main Findings and Research Contributions**

Under NSW theories as the framework for conceptualizing consumer movements, the Identity Projects of activists portray themselves as 'positive change agents' in line with Touraine's social activists and Kozinets and Handelman (2004) activists' identity projects as 'the people who care'. This research proposed a new dimension of activists' self-representation as 'young and intelligent' consumers/activists. We link this self-representation with an increasing awareness of the young generation that advertising appeals more to them. Nationalism as ideology is a strong motivator for consumer resistance to advertising. Considering mass advertising and commercialization as a 'foreign phenomenon' activists' ideology is impelled by nationalism. Studies of consumer movements in western countries do not report nationalism as part of activists' ideology. I argue that a nationalist ideology is an important dimension in constructing consumer identity projects manifested in postcolonial or post communist encounters. This finding contributes to expand the theorization on resistance, anticonsumption and ideology within consumer research. It also answers to calls within consumer culture theory literature to study the local responses to the global (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Activists' self-representation as young, intelligent and nationalist demonstrates that a new class of consumer identity projects is forming.

They present an unexplored and unarticulated challenge to brands/companies. For brands and marketers this presents a challenge that they may encounter among consumers of developing countries, who impelled by nationalism create their discourse of 'authenticity, which is made inaccessible to international brands' (Varman and Belk 2009, p. 696)

The other objective of study how advertising in public space was perceived by activists and their attitudes towards it, considering advertising as the adversary (within Touraine's NSM theory framework).

The first emergent theme was advertising perceived as adversary because *Invades the Public Space*.

The literature on criticism of advertising lacks qualitative approaches on discovering consumers' perceptions and explaining their behaviors. We argue that the negative perceptions of advertising are major towards OOH medium than the other advertising medium. This is a consequence of the entirely environmental nature of OOH advertising (hence making it inescapable) and the socio-cultural role that public space plays in Albanian culture. Its nature makes it almost impossible for consumers to deploy personal ad-avoidance strategies (as is the case with TV, radio or print) hence turns consumers in activists who mobilize in movements seeking change of the marketing order.

Speck and Elliot (1997) found that ad avoidance strategies are much higher for TV viewers than for print readers, but they did not include OOH in their research.

This finding brings a new perspective to the criticism of advertising scholarly thought and it is supported by the qualitative methods employed during the research. It contributes to consumer resistance and anticonsumption literature by studying anti-advertising movements that do not merely fall under the culture jammers category, as their adversary and goal is both tacit and explicit in nature. The limitations and areas for future research are discussed in Section 5.3.

Other emergent themes from the perceptions of activists were the *Social Impacts*. Activists perceive advertising to aid the process of commercialization. Activists consider both as western and foreign phenomena and their mobilization aids them to express their disapproval and resistance towards those forces.

The third core element of a consumer movement is the goal. The study aimed to uncover the nature of activists' goal and study how it affects their consumer identity projects. The goal is both explicit in nature (i.e. eliminating ads, culture jamming, cleaning) and tacit (raise awareness and educate other consumers). The activists seek to transform the ideology of consumer culture but they do not perceive mainstream consumers as opponents. On the contrary Albanian activists seek the encouragement of other consumers and mention the satisfaction of being appreciated by the others as a reason for their engagement in such movements. This finding opposes Kozinets and Handleman (2004) conclusion that consumer activists conceive mainstream consumers as ideological opponents. I argue that the different socio-cultural background of activists in this study versus those in Kozinets and Handleman is the reason for contradictory findings. In Albania the community is still strong and the public sphere very influential in shaping citizen's identity. The more individualist culture of western societies may be the reason for activist not feeling connected to mainstream consumers. Future research on consumer movements both in western cultures and developing countries can shed light on the reasons of such opposing findings.

In conclusion, this study focused on two consumer movements in Albania, applying the framework of New Social Movement (NSM) theories, which conceptualize a movement consisting of 3 core representational elements (self, adversary, goal).

We found that activists' identity is linked with a self-representation as 'positive change agents' and with a self-awareness on their intelligence. Nationalism as ideology shapes activist' identity and impels their mobilization in anti-advertising attacks and culture jamming practices. The advertising impacts on public space and social values are perceived as negative aspects of advertising, hence putting it in the role of adversary. The nature of the goal was found to be both tacit and explicit; categorizing these movements in the radical group of activism that seeks to change the ideology of consumer culture (see Kozinets and Handelman 2004). The local culture, values and norms were considered as threatened under the phenomena of globalization and commercialization, reinforcing so the nationalist identity of activists. This may present an unexplored and unarticulated challenge to brands from mainstream consumers.

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