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**AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF CONSUMERS' CATEGORIZATION OF
RESISTANCE BEHAVIORS**

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Abstract:

Research on consumer resistance emerged in the 70's and met an increasing interest, mostly through survey using a comprehensive and a qualitative approach of consumption. The research presented here focuses on categorization of resistance practices as defined by American, European and African consumers. A questionnaire survey comprising 25 behaviors considered as resistant in the academic literature has been administered to a convenience sample of 543 respondents. Results highlight three categories of practices (resistant, non-resistant, and ambivalent), and differences in behaviors categorized as resistant by respondents from different geographical and cultural origins.

AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF CONSUMERS' CATEGORIZATION OF RESISTANCE BEHAVIORS

1. Introduction and research question

Consumer's resistance to business practices has emerged as a major research field in marketing with contributions such as special issues in *Psychology and Marketing* (2002), *Journal of Business Research* (2009) and *Décisions Marketing* (2012), and a collective book (Roux 2009). In spite of its breadth and diversity, research on consumer resistance is dominated by qualitative designs and a lack of objective measures (Roux 2007). Behaviors are mostly studied through in-depth and socially or culturally situated approaches. Most research consider a single resistance behavior individually and as insulated from other practices, resistant or not. Research that tackle a plurality of behaviors are scarce (Dobscha and Ozanne 2001, Sugier 2012). Besides, the international comparative dimension has not been addressed apart from (Cottet and al. (2010).

Thus, we propose to carry on an exploratory and descriptive research regarding what is considered a resistant behavior from a consumer standpoint, relying on a quantitative and international comparative perspective. The aim is to answer the following questions: which consumer behaviors are categorized as resistance by respondents? Does categorization differ according to geographical and cultural origins?

2. Consumer's resistance literature

The concept of consumer resistance stems from Hirschman (1970) seminal work that distinguishes consumer's expression (voice) and defection (exit) powers apart from loyalty behavior. Peñaloza and Price (1993) as well as Herrmann (1993) qualified consumer's behaviors of mistrust, opposition or even rebellion as "resistance". Roux (2009, p. 131) defines resistance as "a motivational state that drives consumer to oppose to practices, logics or discourses perceived as dissonant". The concept of resistance implies the perception of a force exerted on consumer, that is categorized as unacceptable, and results in an intention to resist.

Research on consumer resistance behaviors encompass a wide array of activities such as boycott (Friedman 1985; Thébaud 1999; Cissé-Depardon & N Goala 2009), resistance to brands (Thompson & Haytko 1997; Duke 2002; Moisio & Askegaard 2002), to advertising (Rumbo 2002; Cottet & al. 2010, 2012), to brand placement in movies (Fontaine 2009), to selling techniques (Kirmani & Campbell 2004, Roux 2008), to loyalty programs (Pez 2012) and to distribution formats (Amine and Lazzaoui 2009). Other research focus on complaints (Roux 2012), on resistance to specific forms of markets such as alternatives forms of exchange (Robert-Demontrond 2009), consumption rejection and voluntary simplicity (Dobscha & Ozanne 2001; Shaw & Newholm 2002; Zavestoski 2002).

From a theoretical standpoint, Fournier (1998) conceptualizes consumer's resistance as a continuum stemming from avoidance behaviors to radical forms of active rebellion, such as complaining, boycott, dropping out or even ad busting or product destruction. Peñaloza and Price (1993) define resistance along four dimensions: collective versus individual behaviors, reformist versus radical behaviors, behaviors targeted towards firms offers versus firms signs, resistance behaviors from inside versus outside marketing institutions. Besides Roux (2007) distinguishes resistance targeted against firms' signs, discourse, strategies and behaviors, and global resistance to market logics and rationale (frugality, green consumptions...). From a more conceptual standpoint, Amine and Gicquel (2011) propose a framework that aims at articulating the concepts of resistant and anti-consumption behaviors through the notion of deviance. This research relies on an *emic* approach that defines resistance from the consumer standpoint, i.e. by the consumer himself and not from an external observer (Sitz 2009).

Digital activities and consumption have been scarcely addressed in resistance literature. However, the online environment offers a space of expression to resistance activities through access to content, high scale communication diffusion capacities (Kerr and al. 2012, McGriff

2012). Moreover, some digital activities, such as illegal copies or downloading, piracy and hacking, can be conceived as resistance behaviors (Cox and al. 2010, Garcia-Bardidia and al. 2012, Odou and Bonin 2014). International research is scarce apart from Cottet and al. (2012) comparative survey of French and Swiss consumers' resistance to advertising and boycott.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the research is to explore how consumers from different geographical and cultural origins categorize behaviors as resistant or not. This research is based on a convenience sample of 543 respondents coming from three major origins: Europe (i.e. France: 295), America (i.e. Canada: 167), Africa (81). These areas have been selected in order to provide diversity from a geographical and cultural standpoint. Regarding international research, equivalence and comparability are major issues (Van Raaij 1978, Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 2001; Craig and Douglas, 2006). In order to overcome these issues, Van Raaij (1978) suggests selecting samples according to functional equivalence. Therefore, this research focuses on samples of students that represent comparable groups across countries and can be considered as "transnational segments" (Houcine, 2005) or "universal subcultures" (Karsaklian, 2007). The choice of a convenience sample is justified by the exploratory dimension of the research. The sample comprises respondents (men: 49%, women: 51%) from 17 to 54 years old (mean: 30.88; standard deviation: 12.93). All respondents are native French speaker. The choice of a French-speaking context is deliberate. It allows avoiding bias and misunderstanding due to questionnaire translation.

The questionnaire comprises 25 behaviors considered as resistant in the literature. These behaviors have been selected thanks to a critical review of literature. We retained the two first dimensions proposed by Peñaloza and Price (1993): individual versus collective behaviors (individual versus collective complaint, individual versus organized piracy), reformist versus radical practices (complaint versus boycott). We also considered Roux (2007) dichotomy between targeted versus global resistance (product or advertising damaging versus alternative forms of exchange). Besides, the questionnaire includes recent digital practices which are seldom addressed in the resistance literature. (freeware installation or development, illegal copying and downloading, piracy and hacking)

For each selected behavior, respondents categorization judgements as resistant or not were measured on 5-point Likert scales (Strongly disagree - Strongly agree). Data have been analyzed using frequency tables and Chi square, as well as factor and discriminant analyses.

4. Results

The purpose of this research is to measure and analyze how respondents categorize the selected behaviors as resistant, and to explore differences in categorization among the respondents according to their geographical and cultural origin.

A frequencies analysis of the categorization judgements on the total sample allows defining three classes of behaviors (see Table 1):

- Behaviors categorized as resistant by more than 60% of respondents: negative word of mouth, complaining, protesting, boycotting, ad rejection.
- Behaviors categorized as non-resistant by more than 60% of respondents: piracy, hacking and counterfeit purchasing,
- Ambivalent behaviors that are rated as resistant and non-resistant in a similar way (balanced ratings of "agree/strongly agree" and "disagree/strongly disagree: ad busting, product damaging, participating in alternative consumption system, digital activities such as illegal copying and downloading, freeware installation and development.

A chi square test emphasizes differences according to geographical origins (see Table 1):

- Amongst resistant behaviors, Europeans, and to a lesser degree Americans, are more numerous than Africans to consider complaining, protesting, boycotting, digital WOM and collective ad rejection activities as resistant. Besides, Europeans are more numerous

than both Africans and Americans to consider individual complaining behavior as resistant.

- Amongst ambivalent behaviors, Americans are more numerous to consider product and ad damaging as resistant activities. The same is true for Africans regarding freeware development and installation, and for Europeans regarding collective illegal downloading and alternative forms of exchange.

Table 1: Categorization judgments of behaviors as resistant, total sample

	Africa	America	Europe	S/t Agree	χ^2 Pearson	df	Sig.
Individual Complaint	59	68	81	74	20,446	2	0,000
Collective Complaint	44	67	83	72	50,481	2	0,000
Organized Protest	46	66	79	70	35,712	2	0,000
Collective Boycott	38	66	81	70	57,198	2	0,000
Negative WOM to Relatives	65	65	74	70	4,286	2	0,117
Individual Boycott	44	68	78	70	33,103	2	0,000
Negative WOM on a Blog	49	63	75	68	20,656	2	0,000
Collective Ad Rejection	33	65	72	64	40,395	2	0,000
Individual Ad Rejection	52	60	64	61	4,034	2	0,133
Collective Ad Busting	43	62	48	52	11,177	2	0,004
Individual Ad Busting	43	62	43	49	16,641	2	0,000
Freeware Installation	64	38	47	47	14,677	2	0,001
Freeware Development	54	34	53	47	17,536	2	0,000
Collective Product Damaging	41	57	41	46	12,824	2	0,002
Alternative forms of exchange	28	37	55	45	26,315	2	0,000
Organized Illegal Copying	35	41	45	42	3,062	2	0,216
Individual Illegal Downloading	46	40	43	42	0,912	2	0,634
Individual Illegal Copying	43	39	43	42	0,965	2	0,617
Collective Illegal Downloading	26	38	46	40	10,800	2	0,005
Individual Product Damaging	38	57	31	40	29,103	2	0,000
Counterfeit Purchase	40	39	38	38	0,084	2	0,959
Organized Piracy	27	33	32	31	0,859	2	0,651
Individual Piracy	32	29	30	30	0,310	2	0,856
Organized Hacking	22	32	29	29	2,438	2	0,295
Individual Hacking	27	26	27	27	0,032	2	0,984
Total	81	167	294	543			

A factor analysis on categorization judgements highlights which behaviors are similarly categorized as resistant or non-resistant. A principal component analysis on the categorization judgements yields a clearly interpretable six factors solution ((67% of total variance):

- F1 Collective complaining and brand rejection behaviors: collective complaining, organized protesting, boycotting, collective ad rejection.
- F2 Marketing tools damaging activities: ad busting and product damaging, both individual and collective.
- F3 Individual digital behaviors such as freeware, copying and downloading activities. Although some of these behaviors are illegal, their consequences are limited. They have been labelled individual open-source digital activities.
- F4 Organized digital illegal activities: collective piracy and hacking.
- F5 Individual activities such as complaining, WOM and ad rejection. They have been labelled individual complaining and rejection activities.

- F6 Individual digital criminal activities: individual piracy and hacking.

A discriminant analysis, with geographical origin as the dependent variable, and the six dimensions from the factor analysis as independent variables, allows identifying on which behavioral dimensions groups of respondents differ. Three factors significantly contribute to the discriminant functions: collective complaining and brand rejection behaviors (F1), marketing tools damaging activities (F2), individual complaining and rejection activities (F5). Categorization judgements of groups of respondents significantly differ on these three dimensions. Two discriminant functions are significant.

In the first function (81% of explained variance), differences in categorization judgements are influenced by:

- The collective complaining and brand rejection behaviors (F1): these activities strongly and positively contribute to the categorization of a behavior as resistant
- The marketing tools damaging activities (F2): these activities negatively contribute to the categorization of a behavior as resistant.
- The individual complaining and rejection activities (F5): these activities slightly positively contribute to the categorization of a behavior as resistant.

In the second function (19% of explained variance), differences in categorization judgements are influenced by:

- The marketing tools damaging activities (F2): these activities strongly and positively contribute to the categorization of a behavior as resistant.
- The individual complaining and rejection activities (F5): these activities negatively contribute to the categorization of a behavior as resistant.
- The collective complaining and brand rejection behaviors (F1): these activities slightly positively contribute to the categorization of a behavior as resistant.

Table 2: Group Mean on the principal component analysis factors

Origin	Africa		America		Europe		Total	
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev
F1 Collective Complaining and Brand Rejection	-0,836	0,928	-0,088	0,972	0,332	0,861	0,003	0,998
F2 Marketing Tools Damaging	-0,038	1,021	0,316	0,988	-0,199	0,952	-0,001	1,001
F5 Individual Complaining and Rejection	-0,002	1,067	-0,175	1,059	0,117	0,924	0,000	1,001
Total	81		167		253		501	

The group mean on the six dimensions of the factor analysis highlights how each group differs from the others on the significant dimensions of categorization judgements (see table 2):

- Africans significantly differ from Europeans on the categorization of collective complaining and brand rejection activities (F1).
- Americans significantly differ from Europeans on the categorization of both the marketing tools damaging activities (F2) and the individual complaining and rejection activities (F5).

5. Discussion

This research aims at providing insights to the following questions: which consumer behaviors are categorized as resistance by respondents? Does categorization differ according to geographical and cultural origins? A frequency analysis of categorization judgements allows defining a typology of behaviors along three major classes: resistant, non-resistant and ambivalent activities.

Regarding the non-resistant activities, it highlights that behaviors, such as digital criminal activities (i.e. piracy and hacking) and purchase of counterfeits, considered as resistant in the

academic literature, are not categorized as such by respondents. Respondents from all origins agree on that matter.

Regarding resistant activities, respondents agree with literature and consider as resistant activities related to Hirschmann's "voice" power of consumer (i.e. complaint, protest, and negative WOM), activities related to voice as well as "exit" power of consumer (i.e. boycott), and advertising rejection. These activities are related to upward communication from consumers to firms, as well as horizontal communication among consumers, and downward communication from firms to consumers through advertising. Still, some differences between origins can be noticed: Europeans, and to a lesser degree Americans, are more numerous than Africans to consider all these activities as resistant, except negative WOM to relatives and individual ad rejection.

Regarding ambivalent behaviors, categorization judgements are more diverse on damaging activities (ad and products), alternative forms of exchanges, and open-source digital activities (freeware, illegal copying and downloading).

American respondents seem to include radical marketing tools rejection such as ad busting and product damaging within consumer's resistance behaviors. European respondents seem to conceive consumer resistance mostly as collective activities: such as collectively complaining, rejecting ad, participating to organized protests and boycotts. African respondents are more numerous to consider freeware activities as resistant.

These results confirm the relevance of Peñaloza and Price (1993) dimensions of resistance. It seems that groups of various cultural and geographical origins are positioned differently along these dimensions: Americans respondents seem to load more on the radical (vs reformist) dimension, while European respondents load more on the collective (vs individual) dimension. African respondents seem to position themselves on a so far overlooked dimension: digital activities, especially freeware ones. Regarding Roux (2007) distinction between global vs targeted resistance, it seems that European respondents focus more on a global conception of resistance through alternative forms of exchange than the two other groups.

This research makes several contributions to research about consumer resistance. On a theoretical standpoint, this research provides an insight into the categorization of behaviors as resistant from consumers' viewpoint. The results question the categorization proposed by external observers such as marketers or researchers. The research proposes a typology of these behaviors and identifies six dimensions consumers use to categorize several activities as resistant or not. On a managerial standpoint, it highlights the differences between Europeans, Americans and Africans' points of view about consumer resistant behaviors. It emphasizes the need for a differentiated approach to coping with resistant behaviors when the geographical and cultural origins are considered. Authorities as well as companies should take into account different targets according to the type of practice considered (individual versus collective, legal versus illegal, digital versus non digital, reformist versus radical) and design specific actions and responses depending on the target and the type of behavior considered.

This research bears several limits. It explores 25 behaviors selected from academic literature on consumer resistance, and therefore cannot be considered exhaustive. Besides, results are drawn from a convenience sample that cannot pretend to be representative. Therefore, results cannot be generalized to the entire population. From a comparative standpoint, only 3 origins have been considered, and cannot account for the diversity of geographical and cultural origins. Finally, the diversity of respondents from a national as well as sub segments standpoint is not accounted for. Future research paths involve the extension of the research to additional behaviors, more diverse cultural contexts, more representative samples and varied methodological standpoints, such as ethnographic ones.

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