



# Universal differences in advertising avoidance behavior: A cross-cultural study

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## ABSTRACT

The avoidance of TV advertising categories often include either mechanical (e.g., switching channels) or behavioral (e.g., talking to someone). Previous research seeking to explain avoidance with demographic and attitudinal factors shows conflicting results. Our aims are: to identify from these factors any that might consistently predict avoidance (by conducting surveys in three quite different cultures, the UK, Chile and Turkey), and: to compare the influence of demographic factors on avoidance with those of attitude to advertising. Males use more mechanical avoidance methods, whereas females use more behavioral avoidance methods. More educated people generally report higher behavioral avoidance. Family size and age help to explain avoidance in some countries but not in others. A negative overall attitude towards advertising is important generally in explaining mechanical avoidance. Behavioral avoidance is more important and is best explained by a combination of demographic and attitudinal factors. Country of residence is significant in predicting behavioral avoidance.

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## 1. Introduction

We are typically exposed to between 600 and 625 potential contacts with advertising every day (Media Matters, 2007). In the UK (where not every channel carries advertising), each person views, on average, 40 TV ads every day, a volume not seen previously (Broadcasters Audience Research Board, 2007). Such an intensity may disillusion consumers and may explain why those watching television (our focus here) pay less attention to the adverts than to the television programs themselves (Abernethy, 1991). A consumer's tendency to be distracted increases markedly during advertising breaks (Moriarty and Everett, 1994), leading to what has been labeled as advertising avoidance, specifically defined as “all actions by media users that differentially reduce their exposure to ad content” (Speck and Elliot, 1997: 61).

Avoidance is of considerable concern to advertisers (Zufryden et al., 1993). Some studies report that zapping affects more than 28% of advertising (Van Meurs, 1998) and involves between 8 and 36% of the audience (Stafford and Stafford, 1996). More recently, Tse and Lee (2001) found that 80.8% of viewers use various means to avoid advertisements. Prior research also suggests that advertising avoidance is higher for television than for other media types (Speck and Elliot, 1997).

There are many different ways for viewers to avoid advertising (Speck and Elliot, 1997), and various labels are used to distinguish between and to categorize them. What we label here as mechanical

avoidance, also known as “channel surfing”, “channel grazing” or “zapping” (Siddarth and Chattopadhyay, 1998), is defined as the viewer changing the channel or muting the sound in order to avoid the TV ad. Cognitive avoidance is a psychological defense mechanism involving the prevention of upsetting mental or emotional content; it is characterized by turning one's attention away from the TV as soon as the commercial break (which is considered a threat-related cue) starts. This is similar to what we label here as behavioral avoidance, sometimes called physical avoidance (Heeter and Greenberg, 1985) or physical zapping (Cronin and Menelly, 1992). Behavioral avoidance occurs when a TV viewer engages in other activities, such as talking to someone else or leaving the room, when advertising is broadcast. The viewer has then two main strategies for avoiding TV advertising, behavioral and mechanical, and we focus on these in the work we report here.

## 2. Why people avoid advertising

People may avoid watching TV advertising because they find the advertising annoying or intrusive or because of a negative attitude toward advertising (Edwards et al., 2002; Speck and Elliot, 1997). Negative beliefs may include such issues as believing advertising is deceptive and misleading, that it insults peoples' intelligence, or forces people to buy things they do not need and distorts values or promotes undesirable values (Pollay and Mittal, 1993; Shavitt et al., 1998). Positive attitudes towards advertising, on the other hand, decrease avoidance (Rojas-Méndez and Davies, 2005) and may include the notions that advertising can be informative and reduce future search time (Heyder et al., 1992).

People who avoid television advertising can have quite different motives for doing so (Schumann et al., 1990). People may avoid commercials (a) in search of relief from boredom and boring

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commercials, (b) due to the excess of television commercials, (c) as a result of their curiosity to see what else is on, and (d) because of their affinity with television, in which case the very process of zapping may be gratifying and serve as an enjoyable activity for the viewer. A useful way to summarize attitudes towards advertising is that such attitudes will be overall positive or negative, underpinned by the competing beliefs that advertising is inherently useful or that it promotes unwanted consumption (Rojas-Méndez and Davies, 2005).

Attitude towards advertising can explain avoidance behavior but avoidance also appears to vary with demographic variables such as age, gender, education and family size. However, findings related to the effects of demographic variables are conflicting (Speck and Elliot, 1997). For example, Zufryden et al. (1993) identify some relationships among household demographic characteristics and zapping frequency, but Siddarth and Chattopadhyay (1998) report no significant relationships between demographic characteristics and propensity to zap an ad. It is then unclear whether or not a viewer's demographics can be expected to influence advertising avoidance. One possible explanation is that the influence of demographic variables is culture-bound, so that in one society, certain demographics appear to influence behavior toward advertising, whereas in another they do not. Researchers and advertisers need to know which (if any) demographics can generally be expected to influence avoidance.

Most previous studies of avoidance have been made within a single culture. However, the nature of advertising varies substantially between cultures due to government regulation, self-regulation and "differences in information processing and communication style" (De Mooij, 2004: 216). In some countries, advertising is not allowed between programs. In others, virtually all TV channels have advertising, and still others have a number of channels that are free from advertisements. As an example, the Independent Television Commission in the UK has ruled that the total amount of advertising in any one day must not exceed an average of nine minutes per hour, equivalent to 15% of total broadcasting time of the non-BBC channels, whereas in Chile the average time for advertising by TV channels reaches 7%, with another 13% used for infomercials. Therefore, attitudes towards advertising and its avoidance could well differ as a consequence. Cultural norms may also be important. In, for example, countries where male and female roles are similar, gender effects may be less important than in societies where the female role is more focused on the family.

Our aim here is to investigate whether demographic and attitudinal explanations for avoidance can be marketing universals or whether, as indicated by the often conflicting results of research thus far, avoidance cannot be reliably predicted by such factors. Our objective is to test for demographic, country of residence and attitudinal effects in three different cultural contexts.

Our approach was to establish views as to what each relationship should look like based upon prior work and to use this as a straw

model when presenting our own results. This expected model of advertising avoidance when watching television is shown in Fig. 1. The two main avoidance types, behavioral and mechanical, are predicted by one or more of four demographic variables (gender, age, education level and family size), and overall attitude towards advertising. Overall attitude towards advertising is in turn determined by whether its role is seen as positive or negative. We now describe the relevant previous research on the effects of each variable.

### 3. Hypotheses formation

#### 3.1. Gender

Shavitt et al. (1998) observe that men have more positive attitudes toward advertising than women. Bush et al. (1999) find gender to be the only social structure variable other than race that correlates with attitude toward advertising, but they report that women have more positive attitude scores than men. Dutta-Bergman (2006) finds the gender variable to be the strongest predictor of attitude towards the regulation of advertising, suggesting that women have more negative attitudes towards advertising. Women are generally more polychronic than men (Manrai and Manrai, 1995); they multi-task, engaging in more than one activity at a time, which suggests that they may be more likely to do something else during ads. Regularly changing one's attention focus can be both desirable and productive for such individuals (i.e., *polychrons*) (Kaufman-Scarborough and Lindquist, 1999). Hence, we can propose:

H1a: Women engage in more behavioral TV advertising avoidance than men.

Some differences can also be anticipated in the relationship between gender and mechanical avoidance. Males are expected to have a dominant role in decision-making in many cultures; in this case, with regard to what will be watched on TV by being "in charge" of the remote control. As they are less likely to be doing a second activity, they will also be more focused on the choice of program. Hence:

H1b: Men engage in more mechanical avoidance than women.

#### 3.2. Age

Younger respondents, according to some studies, are more likely to have a positive attitude towards advertising (Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1994; Shavitt et al., 1998). They are less offended and insulted by advertising and are less often misled. Bush et al. (1999)

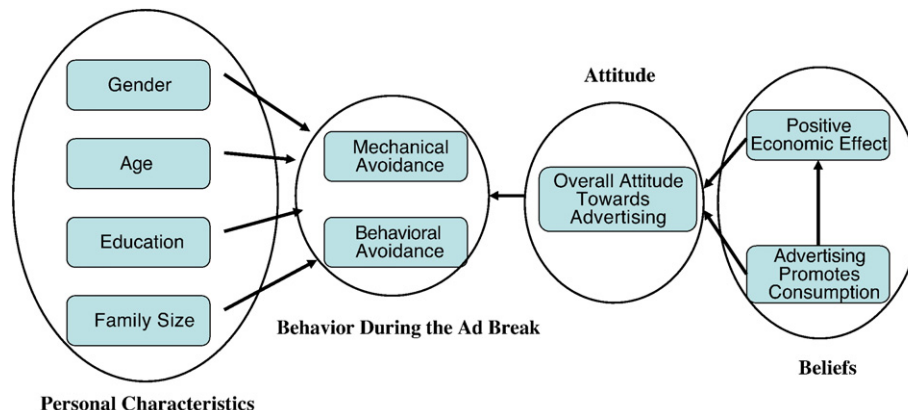


Fig. 1. Theoretical model explaining advertising avoidance behavior.

find no significant correlation between attitude toward advertising and age. However, according to the most recent study (Dutta-Bergman, 2006) older people tend to rely more on advertising for consumption decisions. As a significant relationship has been shown between age and avoidance, for the purposes of our straw model we can propose:

H2: There is a negative relationship between age and the use of advertising avoidance strategies.

### 3.3. Education

Zapping levels (mechanical avoidance) increase in households containing a college-educated member (Zufryden et al., 1993). Taking one's eyes off the screen (behavioral avoidance) also increases with education (Clancey, 1994). Shavitt et al. (1998) observe that less educated consumers are more likely to enjoy and to rely more on advertising as compared to more educated respondents. However, other studies report no relationship between education and zapping behavior (Heeter and Greenberg, 1985; Zufryden et al., 1993). Again, because we believe greater weight should be given to studies with a significant finding (as compared to those with no significant finding) we propose:

H3: The higher the educational level achieved by individuals, the higher will be both mechanical and behavioral avoidance.

### 3.4. Family size

Previous studies report that the presence of children under 18 within a household is positively related to commercial zapping propensity (e.g., Zufryden et al., 1993) and the likelihood of taking one's eyes off the screen seems to increase with household size (Clancey, 1994). However, no significant correlation is found between attitude towards advertising and family structure (Bush et al., 1999). For similar reasons as before, we propose:

H4: The larger the family size the higher will be both mechanical and behavioral avoidance.

## 4. Purpose of the study

Our primary focus is to explore the extent to which advertising avoidance can be consistently predicted by traditional demographic variables and to compare this with the effects of culture and attitude toward advertising. Cronin and Menelly (1992) provide evidence that advertising avoidance takes place as a result of attitudes toward advertising in general, rather than because of attitudes toward specific ad content; therefore, we focus on attitude toward advertising overall rather than towards individual ads. Finally, in testing such relationships in three countries, we also expect to contribute to existing knowledge in the underdeveloped area of international advertising. Our dependent variables are the two main types of the avoidance of television advertising: mechanical and behavioral. Our independent variables are classified into three types: demographics, advertising beliefs and attitudes toward advertising, and country of residence.

## 5. Countries as study sites

We selected three quite different countries for our study – the United Kingdom (UK), Chile, and Turkey – on the assumption that, if the same relationship between demographics and avoidance hold in these three different contexts, this provides strong evidence of a universal relationship between demographics and avoidance. Differ-

ences between the chosen countries exist at a cultural level and in ways that we can expect to observe an influence over the variables that we measure. The four traditional cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1991) (Power Distance, Individualism/collectivism, Masculinity/femininity, and Uncertainty Avoidance) vary significantly across the countries. The UK ranks lowest in power distance and uncertainty avoidance and highest in masculinity and individualism. Chile and Turkey score higher in power distance and uncertainty avoidance and lower in individualism. Chile ranks lowest in masculinity, and Turkey scores in the middle range.

According to Euromonitor International, Chile and the UK are both predominantly Christian societies (84.12% and 73.45% of the population, respectively), whereas Turkey is predominantly Muslim (99.53%). Turkey, although a secular society, has a different dominant religion, and attitudes toward advertising might be expected to vary between Christian and Moslem societies. For instance, Al-Makaty et al. (1996) find that a significant number of Moslems consider the values they profess are incompatible with those pervading television advertising.

Finally, the structure of the TV media differs between the three countries. In the UK, the BBC operates two widely available channels that are funded by a national television license and not by advertising, while in Chile and Turkey all channels carry advertising. Non-state owned television began in Turkey as late as 1990 and proved relatively popular; advertising breaks are relatively long and sports programs feature highly in the schedules of all channels. The average daily time spent watching television also differs across the three countries: UK, 3 h and 24 min; Chile, 3 h and 4 min; and Turkey, 5 h (Euromonitor International, 2007).

## 6. Method

Our aim was to obtain comparable samples for each country. The survey population was defined as all urban residents older than 18 years of age whose household owns a television. Three cities were identified: Manchester in the northwest part of England, Adana in the south of Turkey and Talca in central Chile. The samples were defined to include all social classes in Manchester and Adana, and middle and upper classes only in Talca, due to the difficulties and risks in reaching the lower class segment.

A multi-stage random sampling procedure was followed in each country. In the UK, the first stage consisted of a random selection of post-codes belonging to each urban life style group in the 'MOSAIC' classification, which categorizes the population by housing type. A second stage involved producing a list of houses in each selected post-code using [www.royalmail.com](http://www.royalmail.com). In Chile, because of the lack of a similar sample frame, the first stage consisted of randomly choosing blocks (buildings bounded by four streets) believed to represent middle and upper class housing. A second stage involved counting all the houses in each selected block, then deciding how many households would be contacted for each block. A third stage involved visiting the households identified to fulfill the quota of households. In Turkey, a similar sampling approach to that in Chile was used. First, the representative number of questionnaires for each socio-economic group was estimated according to their ratio in the population. Then, the districts were selected according to their socio-economic status. Finally, the surveyed streets in each district were selected randomly. In the UK, the final response was 452 representing a response rate of 55.7%. In Chile, the final response was 457, equivalent to a response rate of 69.2%. In Turkey, the final response was 463 with a response rate of 80%. Samples in each country were skewed toward female respondents, but otherwise included a wide representation of all age groups and educational levels (Table 1).

### 6.1. Measures

Age was measured by a question with eight age ranges. Education was measured in five groups ranging from 1 = illiterate to 5 = university

**Table 1**  
Demographic profile (%).

Demographic variables	UK		Chile		Turkey	
	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population
<b>Social class</b>						
High			15.8	10.0	9.5	15.0
Middle			84.2	45.0	47.9	30.7
Low			0.00	45.0	42.5	54.3
<b>Life styles</b>						
High income families	5.3	9.9				
Suburban semis	24.1	11.0				
Blue-collar owners	6.5	13.0				
Low rise council	7.8	14.4				
Council flats	6.0	6.8				
Victorian low status town houses and flats	19.4	9.4				
Stylish singles	11.1	5.2				
Independent elders	7.1	7.4				
Mortgaged families	10.2	6.2				
<b>Gender</b>						
Males	38.8	49.2	38.7	49.5	47.8	49.0
Females	61.2	50.8	61.3	50.5	51.7	51.0
<b>Age</b>						
Less than 20	7.3	25.3	10.1	37.2	9.3	38.9
20–29 years	26.8	13.1	28.0	16.4	30.6	17.1
30–39 years	25.3	16.0	18.8	16.0	26.3	14.2
40–49 years	14.2	13.1	17.9	12.1	20.3	11.8
50–59 years	9.3	12.0	14.7	8.3	9.1	8.3
60–69 years	8.9	9.2	6.3	5.5	2.6	5.3
70–79 years	6.4	7.4	4.2	3.2	1.7	3.4
80 +	1.8	3.9	0.0	1.3	0.0	1.0
<b>Educational level</b>						
Illiterate	0.00	0.7	0.0	3.9	3.2	17.2
Primary school	24.5	14.2	9.2	34.5	46.1	54.2
Secondary school	33.4	58.4	34.0	45.9	41.8	8.2
Post-secondary technical education	0.0	0.0	29.4	4.1	0.0	12.6
University Degree	42.0	26.7	27.4	11.6	8.6	7.8
<b>Family size (average number of people)</b>						
Single families	2.7	2.36	4.4	3.6	4.1	4.1
Families of 2 or more	22.6	25.6	2.4	7.1	2.8	1.6
	77.4	74.4	97.6	92.9	97.2	98.4
<b>Language spoken most at home</b>						
English	95.7		0.4		0.0	
Spanish	0.4		99.4		0.0	
Turkish	0.0		0.0		97.0	
Other	3.9		0.2		3.0	
Total sample size (n)	452		457		463	

degree. Finally, family size was measured by a single item that simply asked the respondent for the number of people living in the household, classified into adults (aged 18 years or above), teenagers (aged 12–17 years), and children (aged less than 12 years). For the purpose of the statistical analysis an additional variable was created to differentiate single from multiple households.

Beliefs about advertising were conceptualized using two factors: advertising as a positive economic effect and advertising as a vehicle to promote consumption. Items were measured with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The respondent's view of the positive economic effect of advertising consisted of three items (see Table 2). The second factor, that advertising promotes consumption, included four items. In addition,

global or overall attitude toward advertising was measured using two items: 'Overall, I consider advertising a good thing', and 'Overall, I (1) strongly dislike, (2) somewhat dislike, (3) feel neutral, (4) somewhat like, (5) strongly like ... advertising'.

Three types of mechanical (e.g., zapping) and four types of behavioral (e.g., leaving the room) avoidance were included from Danaher (1995), and Rojas-Méndez and Davies (2005). Respondents were asked to indicate whether they typically used each type during an ad break. The propensity to use each avoidance type was measured with a rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (very often). Scores for each of the two strategies were computed by summing the scores for all the types used in each strategy. So, for example, if a respondent 'never' used any form of mechanical avoidance, they would receive the lowest score of 3; if they used all three 'very often', they would receive the maximum score of 21.

Bilingual persons who were native speakers of Spanish and Turkish translated the measures that existed only in English into Spanish and Turkish, respectively. The questionnaire was then translated back into English by bilingual persons whose native language was English to ensure item equivalence. Inconsistencies with the original version were analyzed and resolved to minimize idiomatic problems.

## 7. Results

Results are presented in different sections. The first section discusses the relationship between TV advertising avoidance and individual demographic and attitudinal variables. The second section offers the results of different multiple regressions at a country level in order to determine which group of independent variables (i.e. demographic or attitudinal variables) has the bigger impact on mechanical and behavioral avoidance. These first two sections are based on country-specific regression results (shown in Table 3). The final section is devoted to analyzing the combined sample from the three countries to identify the impact on avoidance of not only traditional demographic variables and attitudes toward advertising, but also country of residence (see the last two columns in Table 3).

### 7.1. Regression analyses by country sample

To test the relative contribution of demographic variables, advertising beliefs and attitude towards advertising to TV advertising avoidance, hierarchical multiple regression analysis, enter procedure, was used. The independent variables were grouped into two separate blocks. Demographic variables (gender, age, education, family size, and the dichotomized variables single household, presence of

**Table 2**  
Measurement Items.

Question	Dimension
- Overall, I consider advertising a good thing	Overall attitude toward advertising
- Overall, do you like or dislike advertising?	
- Advertising is making us a materialistic society, overly interested in buying and owning things	Advertising promotes consumption ( $\alpha = 0.77$ )
- Advertising makes people live in a world of fantasy	
- Advertising makes people buy unaffordable products just to show off	Advertising has a positive economic effect ( $\alpha = 0.66$ )
- Because of advertising people buy a lot of things they do not really need	
- Advertising tells me what people with lifestyles similar to mine are buying and using	Advertising has a positive economic effect ( $\alpha = 0.66$ )
- Advertising helps raise our standard of living	
- Advertising results in better products for the public	Behavioral avoidance
- Leave the room	
- Read a book, magazine, newspaper, etc.	Behavioral avoidance
- Talk with other people in the room	
- Make phone calls	Mechanical avoidance
- Switch to another channel	
- Switch the television set off	Mechanical avoidance
- Mute the sound	



**Table 3**  
Hierarchical multiple regression explaining television advertising avoidance.

Independent variables	Country						Combined sample (adding country of residence)	
	UK		Chile		Turkey		Mechanical avoidance	Behavioral avoidance
	Mechanical avoidance	Behavioral avoidance	Mechanical avoidance	Behavioral avoidance	Mechanical avoidance	Behavioral avoidance		
<b>Demographics</b>								
Gender (male = 1)	-0.025	-0.204***	0.121**	-0.107**	0.093**	-0.102**	0.069**	-0.127***
Age	-0.235***	-0.157***	0.004	-0.008	0.140***	-0.060	-0.016	-0.062**
Education level	0.014	0.159***	-0.024	0.176***	-0.023	0.154***	-0.020	0.165***
Family size	-0.162**	-0.234***	0.068	0.008	0.066	0.018	0.047	-0.026
Children at home (<12)	-0.077	0.042	-0.016	0.021	-0.061	-0.047	-0.052*	-0.006
Teenagers at home (12–18)	0.074	0.070	-0.035	-0.026	-0.008	-0.070	0.004	-0.012
Single vs multiple household	0.001	-0.122*	-0.023	-0.056	0.005	-0.022	0.017	-0.035
R <sup>2</sup>	0.071	0.118	0.017	0.041	0.076	0.032	0.015	0.040
<b>Attitude toward advertising</b>								
Promotes consumption	0.093*	0.206***	-0.015	0.005	0.048	-0.050	0.034	0.033
Positive effect of advertising	-0.055	0.036	0.020	0.063	0.014	0.088*	-0.009	0.068**
Global attitude	-0.184***	-0.054	-0.164***	-0.073	-0.352***	-0.251***	-0.257***	-0.139***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.063	0.048	0.023	0.005	0.121	0.048	0.063	0.024
<b>Country of residence</b>								
Chile							-0.002	0.224***
UK							-0.126***	0.394***
R <sup>2</sup>							0.011	0.094
Total R <sup>2</sup>	0.134	0.166	0.040	0.046	0.197	0.080	0.090	0.158

\*Significant at  $p < 0.10$ .  
 \*\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ .  
 \*\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

teenagers [12–18 years of age], and presence of children [under 12 years of age]) were entered in the first block. Constructs related to advertising beliefs and attitude toward advertising (advertising promotes consumption, importance of advertising, and overall attitude toward advertising) were entered in the second block.

Two separate regressions were run for the dependent variables “behavioral avoidance” and “mechanical avoidance”. Results are presented by country sample in Table 3.

7.1.1. Gender

In the UK, only behavioral avoidance shows a consistently significant difference by gender, with females avoiding ads more than their male counterparts. In Chile and Turkey, significant differences exist for mechanical and behavioral avoidance, with males reporting more mechanical avoidance than females, and females reporting more behavioral avoidance. Therefore, H1a (behavioral avoidance is higher for females) is totally supported. H1b (mechanical avoidance is higher for males) is partially supported, but only for the Chilean and Turkish samples.

7.1.2. Age

Age is not significantly related to mechanical or behavioral avoidance in Chile. However, the situation is different in both the UK and Turkey. Behavioral avoidance is negatively related to age in the UK, as predicted in H2. But whereas mechanical avoidance is also related to age in the UK and Turkey, the relationships are in a different direction. In the UK, the relationship is again negative, indicating that younger viewers tend to zap or switch TV channels more frequently, supporting H2. In Turkey, however, the relationship is positive, implying that the influence of age on mechanical avoidance is not universal. One possible explanation is seniority, which is more respected in Turkey; younger viewers may be deferring to older members of the household, who control what is watched. Thus, H2 is supported for mechanical and behavioral avoidance

but only in the UK. We can conclude that age is not a reliable predictor of mechanical avoidance.

7.1.3. Education

In all three countries there is a positive relationship between education level and behavioral avoidance but not for mechanical avoidance. The more educated the audience, the higher the number of activities that tend to be performed. The more educated seem to be busier, or at least have a greater sense of time scarcity, which leads to pressure to participate in other activities when TV channels are showing advertisements. H3, that avoidance of both types would increase with educational level, is completely supported for behavioral avoidance.

7.1.4. Family size

The relationship between family size and advertising avoidance (both mechanical and behavioral) is not significant in both Chile and Turkey. However, in the case of the UK there is a significant negative relationship, indicating that respondents from smaller families tend to engage more in both mechanical and behavioral avoidance. Therefore, H4, that avoidance increases with family size, is not supported.

From a demographic point of view, TV advertising avoiders differ by country. In the UK, mechanical avoiders are younger and belong to smaller households, however behavioral avoiders are younger, more educated, belong to smaller households and are more likely to be female. In Chile, mechanical avoiders are more likely to be male, and behavioral avoiders are more educated and more likely to be female. Finally, in Turkey, mechanical avoiders tend to be male and older, and behavioral avoiders are more likely to be female and better educated.

In summary, the relationship between gender and education with behavioral avoidance is significant across all three samples. Only partial support exists for other hypotheses, the results for age and family size in particular vary across the country samples, suggesting

significant cultural effects on the influence of these demographics on avoidance.

### 7.2. Demographic versus attitudinal variables as predictors of advertising avoidance

Table 3 contains data on the relative power of attitudes towards advertising and demographics in explaining avoidance. Across all subsamples overall attitude towards advertising is useful in explaining mechanical but not behavioral avoidance. However the relative effects of demographic and attitudinal variables vary by country.

#### 7.2.1. United Kingdom

Demographic variables explain 7.1% of the variance in mechanical avoidance and attitudinal variables another 6.3% giving a total of 13.4%. Among the demographic variables, only age and family size are significant. Younger respondents from smaller families appear to show greater advertising avoidance. The belief that advertising 'promotes consumption' and overall attitude toward advertising contribute significantly to explaining mechanical avoidance. The more the respondent thinks that advertising promotes consumption, the greater the tendency for mechanical avoidance. The higher the score in overall attitude towards advertising, the lower the mechanical avoidance tendency. Demographic and attitudinal variables make a similar contribution to explain variations in TV advertising avoidance in the UK.

Demographic variables account for 11.8% of variation in behavioral avoidance, while advertising beliefs and attitudinal variables account for an additional 4.8%, thus achieving a total explanation of 16.6%. Five of the seven demographic variables are significant in explaining variation in avoidance (gender, age, education level, family size, and multiple households as opposed to single households). For the UK, demographic variables are more important than attitude in explaining avoidance.

#### 7.2.2. Chile

The only demographic variable significantly affecting mechanical avoidance in Chile is gender. Men tend to report more mechanical avoidance than women, but the impact of gender is quite limited, explaining only 1.7% of mechanical avoidance variance. Advertising beliefs and attitudinal variables explain only 2.3% of the total variance of avoidance, and among those, global attitude toward advertising is the only one that affects mechanical avoidance. Only 4% of mechanical avoidance is explained by demographic and attitudinal variables.

The block of demographic variables explains 4.1% of the variance in behavioral avoidance. Only gender and education level have a significant impact, albeit limited, on avoidance. Males report less avoidance, and more educated people report more behavioral avoidance. Advertising beliefs and attitudes toward advertising have no effect on behavioral avoidance. In Chile, but only for the case of mechanical avoidance, demographic variables (at 1.7%) predict less variance than attitudinal variables (at 2.3%) although the  $R^2$  values are extremely low.

#### 7.2.3. Turkey

Here age and gender are the only demographic variables that significantly explain mechanical avoidance. Older respondents and men report more mechanical avoidance. Altogether, demographic variables explain 7.6% of the variance in mechanical avoidance. Factors related to advertising beliefs and attitudes toward advertising account for 12.1% of mechanical avoidance variance. The only, though very strong, attitudinal variable in explaining avoidance is overall attitude. The more favorable the overall attitude towards advertising, the less mechanical avoidance is reported by the viewer. This may be due to the more recent introduction of commercially-owned broadcasting, longer advertising breaks and effective roadblocking practices. Road-

blocking is very common in Turkish television as there are a few, large monopolistic media holdings owning many highly rated channels. Overall, demographic and attitudinal variables explain 19.7% of the total variance in mechanical avoidance.

Regarding behavioral avoidance in Turkey, gender and education level are significant predictors, but the aggregated impact of the demographic variables on the variance of behavioral avoidance is only 3.2%. The factors relating to advertising beliefs and attitudes toward advertising explain 4.8% of behavioral avoidance variance, giving a total of 8%. Although some of the demographic variables are significant predictors in the sample from Turkey, the main issue revealed by the analysis is that avoidance, both mechanical and behavioral, is more a function of the respondent's attitude toward advertising.

### 7.3. Regression analyses for the combined sample

To examine the effects of demographic variables, attitude toward advertising, and country of residence upon television advertising avoidance, a hierarchical multiple regression, enter procedure, was used again (see the last two columns in Table 3). Dichotomized country of residence variables were entered in a third block. For example the variable labeled "Chile" meant Chileans = 1 and all the others (i.e., British and Turkish) = 0, and the variable labeled "U.K." meant British = 1 and all the others (i.e., Chileans and Turkish) = 0.

The regression analyses results are quite different for each type of avoidance. Almost 16% of behavioral avoidance is explained by the variables included in the analysis, whereas the same independent variables explain only 9% of mechanical avoidance. Country of residence explains only 1.1% of the total variance of mechanical avoidance. The impact of the significant demographic variables is quite low. Overall, mechanical avoidance seems to be an issue related more to attitudes toward advertising, rather than demographic variables or country of residence.

Different results were obtained for behavioral avoidance. Demographic variables (gender, age, and education) account for 4%, advertising beliefs and attitude toward advertising explain only 2.4%, and country of residence account for another 9.4% of avoidance variance. Women, more educated people and younger adults report more behavioral avoidance. The two dichotomized variables for country of residence are significant in explaining behavioral avoidance, confirming that people living in different countries react in a different way to TV advertising. The British are more inclined toward behavioral avoidance, followed by Chileans and then Turks. The other four demographic variables are not significant (single household, existence of teenagers and children younger than 12 years of age, and family size).

Overall, the aggregated results from this study are quite similar to those reported by Speck and Elliot (1997) based on a US sample. They report 7.6% and 15.3% of the variance of advertising avoidance as being explained by demographic and attitudinal variables, respectively. However, looking at specific demographic variables, some differences are apparent. For instance, Speck and Elliot (1997) find that the only demographic variables related to TV advertising avoidance are age and income, but here gender, age, and education are consistently associated with at least one type of avoidance strategy.

## 8. Theoretical implications

The main purpose of our work is to identify whether the four demographic factors commonly used in previous work consistently predict the two main categories of avoidance behavior. The simple answer is that they do not. However, we can draw some general conclusions. Gender is significantly related to avoidance in the same way across all countries, Females report significantly more behavioral avoidance; probably as a result of their responsibilities in the

household, females tend to do something else during advertising breaks other than watch the ads. This is typical polychronic behavior where the use of time reflects a series of overlapping activities (carrying out two or more activities at the same time), and women are generally more polychronic than men (Manrai and Manrai, 1995). There is also evidence that males use more mechanical avoidance, although this is not true not in Britain. This suggests some cultural effects. Further work is necessary with, for example, samples of single males and females to help distinguish between gender and role effects and to test the potential of differences in polychronicity to explain gender differences.

The higher the level of education, the higher the level of reported behavioral, but not mechanical, avoidance. This effect holds across all three countries. During ads, the better educated find something else to do, such as reading a book, talking to other people or making phone calls (activities which can be expected to differ with education level). Previous findings also demonstrate that an individual's polychronic orientation is positively related to educational level (Kaufman et al., 1991), emphasizing its potential importance in understanding television advertising avoidance. It follows from this and the results for gender, that better educated females are the most likely to avoid advertising and to do so by behavioral means, irrespective of context. While demographic variables help to explain behavioral avoidance, mechanical avoidance is more related to the respondent's attitude toward advertising. Respondents' overall attitude to advertising explains more variance in mechanical avoidance than any other factor in the combined database and is either the first or second most important variable at the level of individual countries.

Age is often related to avoidance of both types, but inconsistently so. In Britain, age is negatively related to both avoidance strategies (the older the respondent, the lower the level of avoidance), whereas in Chile there are no significant results. In Turkey, age is positively related to mechanical avoidance; we argue a cultural explanation for this clear difference. Not surprisingly, in the combined sample there is no significant relationship. Claims that age is consistently related to avoidance are then unlikely to be valid.

The results for family size show no consistently significant association with either avoidance strategy, although when considered alongside other variables, family size is significant for only the British sample. In this culture, family size explains variance in avoidance that is not explained by other variables. We conclude that even though it can be important, this is not a universal predictor of avoidance.

Avoidance has a clear cultural and contextual dimension. Different levels of both types of avoidance are predicted at a country level by the two types of independent variables. Demographic variables are more important in the UK, and attitudinal variables are more important in Turkey. There are differences in the amount of advertising content during programs in each country, but further work is needed to explain these findings using actual (rather than reported) mechanical avoidance. Behavioral avoidance is more difficult to assess directly, but our results emphasize the relative importance of behavioral over mechanical avoidance. Thus far work on avoidance has focused mainly on the latter, and our results imply that greater attention needs to be paid to non-mechanical avoidance. Observation of individual and group behavior could be useful in explaining the differences noted above.

The relative importance of context is emphasized in understanding avoidance. While advertising beliefs and attitude toward advertising explain 2.4% of variance in the overall sample, and all the demographic variables together account for another 4.0% of reported behavior, country of residence is responsible alone for 9.4% of variance. Results from this study should encourage researchers to explore further the relationship between cultural dimensions and behavioral avoidance, particularly if future studies include different countries.

## 9. Managerial implications

There are a number of issues relevant to practitioners that can best be summarized by posing and answering a number of questions. Is it correct to generalize the reasons for avoiding TV advertising across cultures? The results of this study show that this is not always possible. Among the few consistent findings across the three countries are that female viewers are more inclined to behavioral avoidance, and that the higher the standard of education, the more behavioral avoidance can be expected. One implication of these results is that advertisers should look for alternative media to TV when targeting females and higher educated people with their messages, since TV advertising is avoided by these individuals, possibly due to their tendency toward polychronic behavior. For instance, print media could be a good alternative because audiences can have more control over the length and time of exposure, and it is more difficult to multitask when reading. Other findings were, however, not consistent across countries. For instance, in the UK, age is negatively related to both mechanical and behavioral avoidance. However, in Turkey, the age variable plays a positive role with regard to mechanical avoidance and a negative role with regard to behavioral avoidance. Age is not significant in Chile in explaining either type of avoidance. We conclude that strategies for combating avoidance should be country-specific.

Who are the TV advertising avoiders? In the UK, mechanical avoiders are younger and more educated, whereas the behavioral avoiders are younger, more educated, and female. In Chile, mechanical avoiders tend to be male, and behavioral avoiders are more educated. Finally, in Turkey, mechanical avoiders are more likely to be older and male, and behavioral avoiders to be younger and more educated. The results for mechanical avoidance are similar to those in previous studies, which have found that zappers tend to be male, younger, and more affluent (Danaher, 1995; Heeter and Greenberg, 1985; Zufryden et al., 1993). However, as none of these findings can be regarded as universal laws, these apparent relationships can also be expected to change over time as a society evolves.

What are the main explanations for why people avoid TV advertising (demographics, attitude toward advertising, and/or culture)? In the UK, advertisers should recognize that both demographics and attitudes toward advertising are more or less equal contributors to mechanical and behavioral avoidance. In Chile, the emphasis for counterbalancing avoidance should be placed on demographics, albeit to a limited extent. Modifying attitudes toward advertising is not expected to produce any significant effect on TV advertising avoidance. In Turkey, TV advertising avoidance is clearly a matter of attitudes developed toward advertising. Therefore, if advertisers want to reduce avoidance, they should develop campaigns whose objective is to improve Turkish attitudes toward advertising overall.

Is zapping the more important issue? In the three country samples, far higher behavioral avoidance was reported than mechanical avoidance. Differences between countries are more significant in behavioral avoidance. It appears that too much emphasis has been placed on measuring mechanical avoidance, a relatively passive measurement of the viewing habits of TV audiences. New techniques for collecting viewing information that are more focused on the viewer's behavior during advertising breaks are needed.

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