

Research Article

Just do it! Why committed consumers react negatively to assertive ads ☆

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Abstract

Research shows that assertive ads, which direct consumers to take specific actions (e.g., Visit us; Just do it!), are ineffective due to reactance. However, such ads remain prevalent. We reexamine assertive ads, showing that their effectiveness depends on consumers' relationship with the advertising brand. Across studies, we compare committed and uncommitted consumers' reactions to assertive ads. We find that because committed (vs. uncommitted) brand relationships involve stronger compliance norms, assertive ads create greater pressure to comply for committed consumers. Specifically, we propose and show that committed consumers anticipate feeling guilty if they ignore an assertive message, creating pressure to comply. Pressure to comply increases reactance, which paradoxically reduces compliance, ultimately leading to decreased ad and brand liking as well as decreased monetary allocations to the brand. Our results show the perils that assertive ads pose for marketers and their most valuable customers.

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Assertive ad language directs consumers to enact specific behaviors (e.g., “Buy now!” “Like us on Facebook!”), creating the impression that refusal is not an option (Dillard, Kinney, & Cruz, 1996; Dillard & Shen, 2005; Grandpre, Alvaro, Burgoon, Miller, & Hall, 2003; Kronrod, Grinstein, & Wathieu, 2012a, 2012b). As a result, assertive ads create pressure for consumers to comply. Intuitively, such pressure should increase compliance. However, prior work shows that pressure to comply can activate reactance (Clee & Wicklund, 1980; Wicklund, Slattum, & Solomon, 1970), a strong motivation to protect one's freedom (Brehm, 1966). Due to reactance motivation, consumers often disregard assertive ads, backlash against them,

and evaluate the communication and communicator negatively (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004; Grandpre et al., 2003; Kronrod et al., 2012a; Miller, Lane, Deatrick, Young, & Potts, 2007). Despite these negative effects, assertive ads remain prevalent. A content analysis of America's top ten print magazines revealed that 72% of ads contained assertive language (e.g., “Visit us”, “Call now”, “Shop now”). On average, each ad contained two assertive statements (see Table 1). Given their prevalence, the present work examines when and why assertive ads elicit reactance.

We identify a new moderator of reactance to assertive ads: consumer–brand relationships. We predict and show that compared to consumers in uncommitted brand relationships, consumers in committed brand relationships exhibit greater reactance and increased negative responses to assertive ads. We hypothesize that this occurs because committed brand relationships have stronger compliance norms than uncommitted brand relationships (Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998). While it may

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Table 1
Coding of print ads from America's top ten magazines by circulation.

Circulation (millions)	Magazine title	Total ads	Assertive ads		Average # of assertive expressions	Examples
			#	%		
8.30	Reader's Digest	62	44	71%	1.63	Send for it. You must own! Use every day. Register now. Visit...
7.70	Better Homes & Gardens	105	69	66%	1.58	Buy one. Now get... Visit us. Switch today. Use it regularly.
5.00	National Geographic	21	19	90%	2.62	Mail us...Order today! Call now. Visit...
4.70	Good Housekeeping	100	78	78%	2.21	Try it on. Us it. Visit... Switch. Call... Download... Get active... Look... Drive one. Go to Facebook.
3.90	Family Circle	132	105	80%	2.20	Go To Facebook. Visit [website]. Visit store. Switch to. Schedule today. Talk about it. Choose... Get...
3.90	Woman's Day	122	87	71%	2.25	Become a Fan. Visit... Get it now! Recycle. Hurry!
3.80	Ladies' Home Journal	59	47	80%	2.29	Try it. Visit... Email us. Buy at... Shop... Make an appointment today. Get started. Get up. Share it.
3.70	People	87	43	49%	1.25	Shop now! Step away. Get dressed. Pick one.
3.50	Game Informer	13	9	69%	1.85	Pre-order now! Prepare for... Sign up... Remember... Visit...
3.40	Time	17	14	82%	2.00	Stop in today. Smile. Go to... Visit... Tune in. Stand up. Donate...
	<i>Total</i>	<i>718</i>	<i>515</i>	<i>72%</i>	<i>1.99</i>	

Note: Circulation based on 2008 Audit Bureau of Circulations, Magazine Publishers of America. Content analysis was done using September 2010 issues for all magazines. All language in the ad, excluding the fine print, was analyzed.

seem that stronger compliance norms should increase compliance, we suggest that because compliance norms increase pressure to comply, they will instead increase reactance (Brehm, 1966; Wicklund et al., 1970). Paradoxically, increased reactance will reduce compliance (Brehm, 1966; Dillard & Shen, 2005; Pavey & Sparks, 2009), leading to an increase in committed consumers' negative reactions to assertive ads.

We propose that this effect is driven by a previously unidentified antecedent of pressure to comply: non-compliance guilt. Specifically, we posit that because committed relationships have strong compliance norms, non-compliance with an assertive ad's directive violates those norms, and can elicit guilt (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1995; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Tangney & Fischer, 1995). While guilt can increase compliance in human relationships (Freedman, Wallington, & Bless, 1967; Overall, Girme, Lemay, & Hammond, 2014), we predict that it will *reduce* compliance in brand relationships. Specifically, we argue that brands' use of guilt appeals can be perceived as an overt persuasion attempt, raising consumers' suspicion (Hibbert, Smith, Davies, & Ireland, 2007), activating their persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994), and making the brand's manipulative intent salient (Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005). When manipulative intent is salient, reactance increases (Clee &

Wicklund, 1980; Reinhart, Marshall, Feeley, & Tutzauer, 2007). Accordingly, we predict that in response to assertive ads, committed consumers will experience guilt, referred to here as "non-compliance guilt". Non-compliance guilt will increase pressure to comply, which will increase reactance, leading committed consumers to have more negative reactions to assertive ads than uncommitted consumers (see Fig. 1).

This research provides several contributions. Foremost, we bring reactance and consumer–brand relationship theories together via the shared construct of compliance. This contributes to reactance theory by introducing a new moderator of reactance: consumer–brand relationships. Moreover, we identify a new antecedent of pressure to comply: non-compliance guilt. Whereas prior work has focused on tangible, practical consequences of non-compliance as antecedents of pressure to comply (e.g., missing out on a deal; Lessne & Notarantonio, 1988; Kronrod et al., 2012a), we show that reactance can occur even without such tangible consequences. In addition, we extend consumer–brand relationship theory by identifying reactance as a novel outcome of relationship type. Finally, we draw out differences between human and brand relationships.

We begin with a brief review of relevant prior work, focusing on the nature of reactance and the role of pressure to comply across committed and uncommitted brand

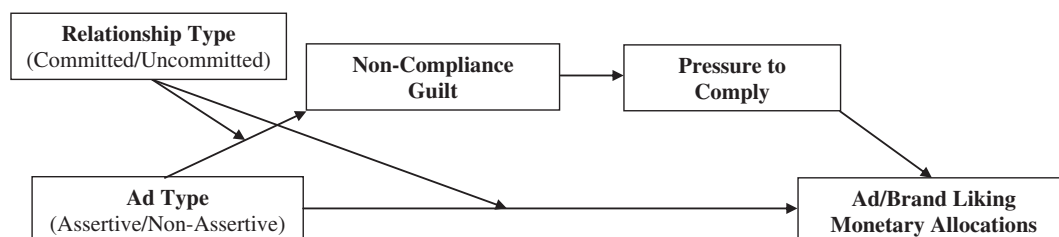


Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

relationships. We then detail our theory and hypotheses and present seven empirical studies.

Conceptual development

Reactance motivation

Reactance is a fundamental motivation to protect one's freedom of choice, elicited whenever a threat to freedom is perceived (Brehm, 1966; Clee & Wicklund, 1980). Reactance occurs automatically, requires little cognitive deliberation (Chartrand, Dalton, & Fitzsimons, 2007), and is so strong it can cause consumers to make decisions that have negative consequences. For example, consumers react against medical advice although this risks their health (Graybar, Antonuccio, Boutilier, & Varble, 1989; Stephens et al., 2013), and react against product recommendations although this results in poorer choices (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004). Reactance is prevalent in marketing contexts, where it can be elicited by stock-outs (Fitzsimons, 2000), loyalty programs (Wendlandt & Schrader, 2007), warning labels (Bushman & Stack, 1996), retail environment design (Levav & Zhu, 2009), and ads (e.g., Bhattacharjee, Berger, & Menon, 2014; Edwards, Li, & Lee, 2002; Kronrod et al., 2012a; Lessne & Notarantonio, 1988).

The present work focuses on reactance to ads, specifically, assertive ads. Assertive ads direct consumers to act a certain way (e.g., "Use it regularly", "Floss daily", "You must conserve water!"); Dillard & Shen, 2005; Kronrod et al., 2012a, 2012b) by using verbs to give commands in a direct or imperative manner (e.g., buy, do, call, visit), creating the impression that refusal is not an option (Dillard, Wilson, Tusing, & Kinney, 1997; Grandpre et al., 2003; Kronrod et al., 2012a). Such ads are extremely common (e.g., "Just Do It!"; "Think Different." "Save Money. Live Better."; see Table 1), despite literature showing they can be ineffective.

Specifically, because assertive ads tell consumers what to do, they create pressure for consumers to comply. Such pressure to comply elicits reactance (Brehm, 1966; Dillard & Shen, 2005; Pavey & Sparks, 2009), which paradoxically reduces compliance and leads to negative reactions to assertive ads and to the communicating brand (Bhattacharjee et al., 2014; Edwards et al., 2002; Kronrod et al., 2012a, 2012b). For example, participants exposed to an assertive anti-smoking (Grandpre et al., 2003) or pro-exercise ad (Miller et al., 2007) disliked the ad and its source more than participants exposed to a less assertive version of the same ad. We extend prior work by proposing that the pressure to comply exerted by assertive ads will differ depending on consumers' relationship with the advertising brand, as discussed next.

Consumer–brand relationships

Fournier's (1998) seminal work showed that a key dimension that distinguishes different types of consumer–brand relationships is commitment (Aggarwal, 2004; Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008; Fournier & Yao, 1997; Sung & Choi, 2010). Committed brand relationships are

long-term relationships, characterized by a strong connection between the consumer and the brand (Fournier, 1998). These relationships can increase brand loyalty, brand liking, and purchase frequency (Aggarwal, 2004; Fedorikhin et al., 2008). Importantly, committed brand relationships go beyond loyalty and purchase frequency to include qualitative dimensions such as trust, reciprocity, intimacy, and behavioral interdependence (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Fournier, 1998, 2014; Fournier & Yao, 1997; Rossiter, 2012). Committed brand relationships are characterized by a deep emotional connection (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2014) where consumers feel obligated to support the brand (Fournier, 1998) and perceive not only that the brand owes them, but also that they owe the brand (Reczek, Haws, & Summers, 2014). These characteristics make compliance a norm in committed brand relationships (Fournier, 1998, 2014). As a result, assertive ads, which contain clear and direct demands for action, generate strong pressure to comply for committed consumers.

In contrast, uncommitted relationships are low in intimacy, and are characterized by sporadic engagement and few expectations of reciprocity. Uncommitted consumers have no emotional connection to the brand and feel no obligation to it (Aaker et al., 2004; Fournier, 1998, 2014). As a result, compliance is not a norm in uncommitted brand relationships, and when an assertive ad directs a certain behavior, uncommitted consumers feel little pressure to comply.

At first blush, because committed relationships are characterized by compliance norms, it may be predicted that committed consumers would find assertive ads more acceptable (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004) and therefore show less reactance to (and more compliance with) assertive ads. In contrast, we suggest that compliance norms create greater pressure to comply with assertive ads in committed (vs. uncommitted) brand relationships, leading to greater reactance (Brehm, 1966; Pavey & Sparks, 2009) and *decreased* compliance, as evidenced by negative reactions to the ad and brand. Specifically, we propose that increased pressure to comply will elicit reactance because it will activate non-compliance guilt.

Non-compliance guilt, pressure to comply, and reactance

Non-compliance guilt refers to the guilt that consumers anticipate feeling if they do not comply with a brand partner's demands, such as those in an assertive ad. We propose that non-compliance guilt in response to assertive ads will differ across committed and uncommitted consumer–brand relationships. Uncommitted consumers are not expected to comply with brand requests and are not emotionally connected to the brand (Aaker et al., 2004; Fournier, 1998, 2014). Thus, non-compliance with an assertive ad from an uncommitted brand partner violates no norms, and should elicit little guilt.

In contrast, due to compliance norms in committed brand relationships, non-compliance with a brand partner's demands (e.g., in an assertive ad) represents a "trespass of unwritten relationship rules, breach of trust, or failure to keep a promise" (Fournier, 1998, p. 363). Because committed consumers are

emotionally connected to the brand, such a trespass should elicit guilt (Baumeister et al., 1995; Fournier, 1998; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Tangney & Fischer, 1995). Once present, non-compliance guilt will increase pressure to comply with assertive ads because consumers seek to avoid guilt (Tice, Bratslavsky, & Baumeister, 2001; Zemack-Rugar, Rabino, Cavanaugh, & Fitzsimons, 2016), and compliance allows them to do so (Boster et al., 1999). Accordingly, in human relationships, guilt increases compliance. Specifically, guilt signals wrongdoing and compliance is used as a way to restore harmony and equality to the relationship (Baumeister et al., 1995; Freedman et al., 1967; O'Keefe, 2002; Overall et al., 2014). In contrast, we predict that in consumer–brand relationships, non-compliance guilt will reduce compliance, because it will make consumers suspicious of the brand's intent.

This prediction relies on key differences between human and brand relationships. First, at some level, consumers recognize that brands are commercial entities whose end goal is increased profit (Bengtsson, 2003). Thus, when non-compliance guilt exerts pressure to comply, consumers may feel that the pressure is driven by the brand's commercial interests, and not by the brand's concern about the relationship or the consumer. Second, consumer–brand relationships, even committed ones, involve some norms that are not as pronounced in human relationships, such as norms about reward distribution, acceptable contact avenues and frequencies, and even acceptable influence attempts (Fournier, 2014). Due to these norms, using guilt as a persuasion tactic may be viewed as a violation of how committed brand partners should behave (Fournier, 1998, 2014), causing consumers to become suspicious of the brand's intent.

Consistent with this theorizing, influence attempts based on guilt often evoke suspicion (Basil, Ridgway, & Basil, 2006; Cotte et al., 2005; Hibbert et al., 2007) activating consumers' "schemer-schema" (Wright, 1985), engaging their persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994), and making salient the brand's manipulative intent (Cotte et al., 2005; Hibbert et al., 2007). Prior work shows that perceptions of manipulative intent tend to increase reactance (Clee & Wicklund, 1980; Reinhart et al., 2007). Accordingly, we predict that pressure to comply driven by non-compliance guilt will lead committed consumers to experience reactance and respond negatively to assertive ads.

Identifying non-compliance guilt as an antecedent of pressure to comply and a driver of reactance significantly extends prior work. In past work, pressure to comply has been driven by the tangible, practical consequences of non-compliance such as illness (Fogarty & Youngs, 2000; Stephens et al., 2013), monetary fines (Reich & Robertson, 1979), lack of critical resources (e.g., water; Kronrod et al., 2012a), or poor decision outcomes (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004). Here, we predict that reactance can occur even absent such tangible consequences, due to the intangible emotional consequences of non-compliance (i.e., non-compliance guilt). This extension is important because in most domains, marketers are unable or unwilling to impose tangible consequences on consumers. Marketers may offer limited time or

quantity deals (Inman, Peter, & Raghubir, 1997; Lessne & Notarantonio, 1988), but in general, imposing tangible consequences on consumers can damage the brand (Bolton, Kannan, & Bramlett, 2000; Zeithaml, Lemon, & Rust, 2001). Indeed, over 90% of the assertive ads in our magazine sample made no mention of potential tangible consequences. Our theorizing suggests that such ads can still elicit reactance, as summarized in our hypotheses below.

Hypothesis summary & overview of studies

We predict that consumer–brand relationship type (committed vs. uncommitted) will moderate the effect of assertive ads on reactance, such that committed consumers will show more reactance to assertive ads than uncommitted consumers. To rule out a main effect of relationship type, we include various non-assertive control ads across studies. Consistent with prior research, we predict that non-assertive ads will elicit little reactance, irrespective of relationship type, because they do not exert pressure to comply (Dillard & Shen, 2005). Specifically, we predict that in response to assertive ads, committed consumers will anticipate greater non-compliance guilt than uncommitted consumers, and as a result will experience greater pressure to comply. This pressure to comply will increase reactance, leading to more negative reactions to assertive ads from committed (vs. uncommitted) consumers. Thus, we propose that the effects of assertive ads on committed versus uncommitted consumers will be serially mediated by non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply (see Fig. 1).

We test these hypotheses in seven studies using multiple product categories, various dependent measures (i.e., ad liking, brand liking, and monetary allocations), and several assertive messages. We demonstrate our process via moderation, mediation, and the measurement of individual differences in reactance. Across studies, we show that the observed effects go beyond mere differences in purchase frequency or loyalty by including purchase frequency as a covariate. In addition, we rule out several alternative explanations, showing that there are no differences in attention to ads, communication expectations, or inferences regarding the tangible consequences of non-compliance across consumer–brand relationship types.

Study 1: consumer–brand relationship type moderates reactance

Study 1 tested how consumers in committed versus uncommitted relationships respond to assertive ads. Responses were measured using ad liking, which is commonly used to assess reactance (Edwards et al., 2002; Grandpre et al., 2003; Miller et al., 2007; Reinhart et al., 2007) and is strongly linked to brand liking and purchase intentions (Brown & Stayman, 1992). A control, non-assertive ad condition was also included. The non-assertive ad was not expected to elicit reactance, regardless of relationship type, because it does not direct behavior and therefore does not exert pressure to comply (Dillard & Shen, 2005). Thus, committed consumers should show lower liking for assertive ads than uncommitted

consumers, but similar liking for non-assertive ads. Further, committed consumers should like assertive ads less than non-assertive ads, while uncommitted consumers should like assertive and non-assertive ads equally.

Participants, method, and design

Participants (Mechanical Turk; $N = 162$; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.3$, 52% female) completed a 2 (Relationship Type: committed, uncommitted) by 2 (Ad Type: assertive, non-assertive) between-subjects study for pay. We manipulated relationship type by asking participants to identify a clothing brand with which they had a committed or an uncommitted relationship, using a multi-dimensional description (Aaker et al., 2004; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; see MDA Appendix A).

Participants then viewed an ad with their brand's name embedded in it. The non-assertive ad contained only the tagline "Winter Collection 2012", and the assertive ad included an additional tagline: "Buy now!" (see Appendix A). Ad viewing time was measured (in seconds) to address attention and elaboration as potential alternative explanations. After viewing the ad, participants reported ad liking on six 7-point scales (Unappealing/Appealing, Bad/Good, Likeable/Not Likeable, Negative/Positive, Do not like at all/Like very much, Unpleasant/Pleasant; Crites, Fabrigar, & Petty, 1994).

Next, participants evaluated their chosen brand's personality using Aaker's (1997) sincere and exciting dimensions of brand personality (5-point Likert scales). This measure did not affect the results in this or subsequent studies, and is not discussed further. As a manipulation check for commitment, participants responded to two established relationship commitment measures: the Investment Model's eight-item commitment subscale, modified for the brand context (8-point Likert scales; e.g., "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with [brand]"; Rusbult et al., 1998), and Aaker et al.'s (2004) six-item brand commitment measure (7-point Likert scales; e.g., "I am very loyal to [brand]"; see MDA Appendix B). Participants then reported on purchase frequency (covariate measure) for their identified brand (7-point scale: never, less than once a month, once a month, 2–3 times/month, once a week, 2–3 times/week, daily). Finally, to ensure there were no differences in the types of products purchased across relationship type, participants indicated the clothing sub-category (tops, bottoms, jackets, dresses, accessories, other) they purchased most from their brand.

Results

Manipulation checks

For parsimony, we standardized and averaged responses to the commitment items from both scales ($\alpha = .97$; $M = 0.00$, $SD = 0.84$). In all studies, the manipulation checks replicate when using each measure separately. Participants in the committed condition reported higher levels of relationship commitment than those in the uncommitted condition ($M_{\text{commit}} = 0.58$, $M_{\text{uncommit}} = -0.66$; $F(1, 160) = 196.56$,

$p < .01$). Relationship type did not affect the sub-categories of clothing purchased ($p > .39$).

Attention and elaboration

Ad viewing time (logged; Emerson, 1991) was not predicted by relationship type, ad type, or their interaction ($ps > .54$), and did not predict ad liking ($p > .44$).

Ad liking

An ANCOVA with purchase frequency ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.54$) as a covariate and relationship type, ad type, and their interaction as independent variables was used to predict ad liking ($\alpha = .95$; $F(4, 157) = 32.97$, $p < .01$).² Results held without the covariate (see MDA Appendix C). The model showed main effects of purchase frequency ($F(1, 157) = 103.48$, $p < .01$), relationship type ($F(1, 157) = 5.13$, $p < .03$), and ad type ($F(1, 157) = 10.46$, $p < .001$), qualified by the predicted relationship type by ad type interaction ($F(1, 157) = 3.66$, $p < .05$).

As predicted, participants liked the assertive ad less when it came from a committed brand partner ($M = 3.48$) than when it came from an uncommitted brand partner ($M = 4.24$; $F(1, 157) = 9.12$, $p < .01$). There were no differences in liking for the non-assertive ad across relationship type ($M_{\text{committed}} = 4.37$, $M_{\text{uncommitted}} = 4.46$, $p > .72$; see Fig. 2). As further predicted, for committed consumers, the assertive ad was liked less than the non-assertive ad ($F(1, 157) = 14.02$, $p < .001$). However, for uncommitted consumers, both ads were similarly liked ($F(1, 157) = .82$, $p > .37$). In sum, the assertive ad from the committed brand partner was liked less than ads in all other conditions ($ps < .01$), which did not differ from one another ($ps > .37$).

Post-test

We conducted a post-test to examine an additional alternative explanation whereby consumers expect brands to communicate differently, depending on their relationship with the brand (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kronrod et al., 2012b). If a brand violates these expectations (e.g., communicates assertively when they are expected not to), this might decrease ad liking. To test this alternative, as in Study 1, participants (MTurk; $N = 195$; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.3$, $SD = 12.4$, 52% female) identified a committed or an uncommitted brand partner in the clothing category. They viewed either a non-assertive ad or one of two assertive ads ("Buy now!"; "Visit us!"). Participants then rated how typical, expected, and standard the phrasing of the ad was (1 = Not at All; 5 = Very Much; Kronrod et al., 2012b). Results revealed that neither ad type, relationship type, nor their interaction affected communication expectations (all $ps > .12$; see MDA Appendix D).

² Analysis revealed no collinearity between the independent variables and the purchase frequency covariate in any of the studies (Belsley, Kuh, & Welsch, 2005; Rogerson, 2001). Detailed results are available in the MDA for each study.

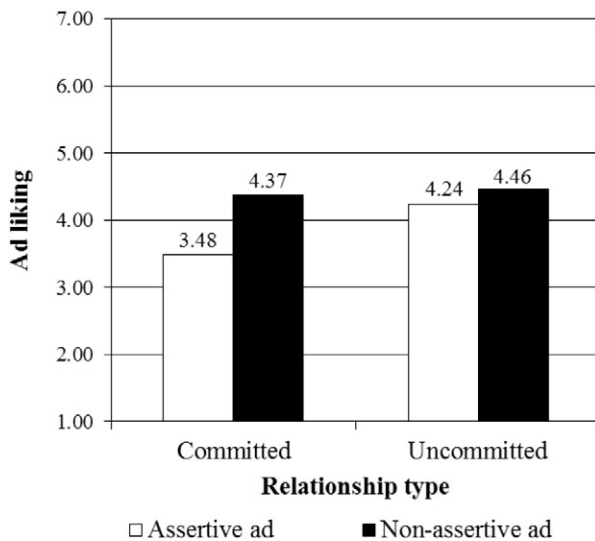


Fig. 2. Study 1: ad liking by ad type and relationship type.

Discussion

Study 1 showed that consumers in committed brand relationships responded more negatively to an assertive ad than consumers in uncommitted brand relationships. Committed consumers also responded more negatively to an assertive ad than to a non-assertive, control ad. Uncommitted consumers responded similarly to both assertive and non-assertive ads.

These findings were replicated in an additional study (Study 1A) which used a behavioral dependent variable, monetary allocations to the brand, and the most common assertive message in our magazine sample, “Visit us!” (see Appendix A). Committed participants (undergraduates, $N = 84$, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.3$, 57% female) allocated less money to the brand after viewing an assertive ($M = \$7.37$ out of a possible \$25 gift card) versus a non-assertive ad ($M = \$13.91$; $F(1, 80) = 5.10$, $p < .03$). Uncommitted participants allocated the same amount of money to the brand, irrespective of ad type ($M_{\text{non-assertive}} = \4.79 , $M_{\text{assertive}} = \$5.96$, $p > .70$; see MDA Appendix E).

Taken together, studies 1 and 1A show that brand relationship type moderates consumers’ responses to assertive ads, with assertive ads increasing committed (but not uncommitted) consumers’ negative reactions. The data also rule out alternative explanations based on attention, elaboration, and communication expectations. Study 2 addresses another alternative explanation, cognitive inferences, and extends these findings by testing additional ad language.

Study 2: replication and attenuation

We had three goals in conducting Study 2. First, we wanted to provide further generalizability by replicating our findings using a third dependent measure: brand liking. Second, we aimed to rule out cognitive inferences as an alternative explanation. It is possible that assertive ads cause consumers to wonder why the brand is communicating with them in an assertive manner, and to draw inferences about the reasons

for such communication. To address this possibility, we measured cognitive inferences. Third, we wanted to examine whether the negative effects of assertive ads could be attenuated by modifying the language in the ad, specifically, by changing the assertiveness of the ad. Since studies 1 and 1A showed negative effects only for committed consumers, Study 2 focused only on committed consumers. We retained the assertive and control ads from Study 1 and tested two new ads.

In the first new ad, we examined whether adding polite language to an assertive ad (i.e., “Please buy now!”) would mitigate reactance. In human relationships, politeness is a sign of respect or consideration and can increase compliance (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In contrast, we argue that despite the polite language, the ad remains assertive, and continues to explicitly direct behavior. Therefore, committed consumers should still to feel pressure to comply. Accordingly, a polite assertive ad should not attenuate committed consumers’ reactant responses.

The second new ad directed action, but did so in a non-assertive manner (“Now is a good time to buy!”). We predicted that because this ad was less assertive, and directed behavior less explicitly, it would exert little pressure to comply and elicit little reactance.

Notably, both of these ads—the polite assertive and the directive but non-assertive ads—address the possibility that in Study 1, the non-assertive control ad did not elicit reactance because it did not mention action. Both new ads include a call for action. Consistent with our theorizing, we predict it is not the presence or absence of such a call, but rather the assertiveness of the ad, that determines whether reactance occurs.

Participants, methods, and design

Participants (MTurk; $N = 219$; $M_{\text{age}} = 34.79$, 78, 52% female) completed a single-factor, four-level (Ad Type: assertive, polite assertive, non-assertive action, no-action control) between-subjects study for payment. Using the same procedures as in Study 1, participants identified a committed brand partner in the clothing category. They then viewed an ad containing the words “Winter Collection 2015” (see Appendix A). The ad included an assertive tagline (“Buy now!”), a polite assertive tagline (“Please buy now!”), a non-assertive action tagline (“Now is a good time to buy!”), or no additional tagline (no-action control). After viewing the ad, participants reported brand liking using three 7-point scales (“How much do you like [brand]?”; “How positive [negative] do you feel toward [brand]?”; 1 = Not at All, 7 = Very Much So). Participants then completed two cognitive inference items: “If I saw an ad from [brand] that asked me to do something, I would wonder why,” and “If I didn’t buy from [brand] after seeing this ad, I would feel like I missed out on a good deal” (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Finally, participants completed the two relationship commitment measures and reported their purchase frequency, as in prior studies.

Results

Manipulation check

Since this study included only committed consumers, we tested each commitment measure against the scales' mid-point. The means were above the mid-point of each scale (Rusbult et al., 1998, 8-point scale, $M = 6.12$, $SD = 1.36$, $t(218) = 17.70$, $p < .001$; Aaker et al., 2004, 7-point scale, $M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.14$, $t(218) = 11.70$, $p < .001$).

Cognitive inferences

The data revealed no significant effect of ad type on cognitive inferences (item 1: ($F(3, 215) = .14$, $p > .94$; item 2: ($F(3, 215) = .51$, $p > .68$).

Brand liking

An ANCOVA with purchase frequency ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.34$) as a covariate and ad type as the independent variable was conducted; the dependent measure was brand liking ($\alpha = .89$; $F(4, 214) = 4.41$, $p < .005$). We found a significant effect of purchase frequency ($F(1, 214) = 4.26$, $p < .01$) and the predicted main effect of ad type ($F(3, 214) = 4.65$, $p < .005$). Results held when the covariate was removed (see MDA Appendix F).

Planned contrasts revealed that brand liking was lower after viewing the assertive ad ($M = 5.04$) compared to non-assertive action ($M = 5.62$; $F(1, 214) = 5.97$, $p < .05$) and no-action control ads ($M = 5.62$; $F(1, 214) = 5.48$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the polite assertive ad ($M = 4.92$) led to lower brand liking than the non-assertive action ($F(1, 214) = 8.43$, $p < .005$) and no-action control ads ($F(1, 214) = 7.84$, $p < .01$). Brand liking did not differ across the assertive and polite assertive ads ($p > .62$) or across the non-assertive action and no-action control ads ($p > .92$).

Discussion

Study 2 demonstrated our basic effect using another dependent measure: brand liking. This study also showed that making an assertive ad more polite did not attenuate committed consumers' reactant responses. However, reactance was attenuated when an ad directed action less assertively.

Study 2 also showed that ad type did not affect consumers' tendency to wonder why the brand was communicating with them a certain way, or their tendency to infer tangible consequences (e.g., missing out on a sale) of disregarding such communications. This demonstrates that the effects were not driven by cognitive inferences. Instead, we suggest that these effects are due to differences in non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply. Study 3 tested this reactance-based process directly.

Study 3: the mediating role of non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply

We hypothesized that because committed (but not uncommitted) relationships are characterized by compliance norms,

and because committed consumers are emotionally connected to the brand, considering non-compliance with an assertive ad would lead committed (but not uncommitted) consumers to anticipate guilt (Baumeister et al., 1995; Tangney & Fischer, 1995). We proposed that non-compliance guilt would exert pressure to comply, and that this pressure would backfire (because it would make salient the brand's manipulative intent; e.g., Cotte et al., 2005), ultimately leading to reactance (e.g., Clee & Wicklund, 1980).

These predictions suggest a two-step mediation process, whereby assertive ads increase non-compliance guilt, which increases pressure to comply, which increases negative reactions to the ad. We tested this serial mediation model in Study 3. In addition, Study 3 provided further generalization by using a different product category (snack bars) and two different (and ubiquitous) assertive messages: "Like us on Facebook" and "Follow us on Twitter".

Participants, method, and design

Participants (MTurk; $N = 115$ $M_{age} = 36.5$, 59% female) completed a single factor (Relationship Type: committed, uncommitted) between-subjects study for pay. Using the same procedure as in previous studies, participants identified a committed or an uncommitted brand partner in the snack bar category (e.g., energy or granola bars). Then they viewed an ad with a picture of snack bars, their embedded brand name, and two common assertive taglines: "Like us on Facebook" and "Follow us on Twitter" (see Appendix A). After viewing the ad, participants reported ad liking as in Study 1.

Subsequently, non-compliance guilt was measured using three items ("If I didn't follow the suggestion of this ad... I might feel guilty/I might feel bad", and "If I ignored this ad from [brand] I would feel bad"; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree). Pressure to comply was measured using three items adapted from prior work ("I felt the ad was attempting to dictate my behavior", "I felt like [brand] was trying to make me do what it wanted" and "I felt pressured to take a certain action given the ad"; 1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree; Pavey & Sparks, 2009; Dillard & Shen, 2005). Finally, participants completed the relationship commitment and purchase frequency measures from prior studies.

Results

Manipulation check

The commitment score ($\alpha = .94$; $SD = 0.72$) showed a main effect of relationship type ($M_{committed} = 0.29$, $M_{uncommitted} = -0.31$, $F(1, 113) = 23.47$, $p < .001$).

Ad liking

We conducted an ANCOVA with purchase frequency ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.63$) as a covariate and relationship type as the independent variable, predicting ad liking ($\alpha = .95$; $F(2, 112) = 22.34$, $p < .001$). Results revealed an effect of purchase frequency ($F(1, 112) = 44.47$, $p < .001$) and the expected main effect of relationship type ($F(1, 112) = 3.78$, $p < .05$); the main

effect was non-significant when the covariate was removed, and the mediation analysis (reported below) was marginal (see MDA Appendix G). As in Study 1, committed participants liked the assertive ad less ($M = 4.39$) than uncommitted participants ($M = 4.96$).

Serial mediation

A factor analysis indicated that the non-compliance guilt measures (Eigenvalue = 2.73) and the pressure to comply measures (Eigenvalue = 2.64) loaded onto two separate factors, suggesting they should be treated separately in the mediation analysis. Thus, we created a non-compliance guilt score ($\alpha = .87$) and a pressure to comply score ($\alpha = .89$). We conducted a two-step mediation analysis using bootstrapping (model 6; Hayes, 2013), with purchase frequency as a covariate, relationship type as the independent variable, ad liking as the dependent variable, and non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply as serial mediators.

As predicted, committed participants anticipated more non-compliance guilt than uncommitted participants ($b = 0.36$, $t(114) = 1.99$, $p < .05$). Greater non-compliance guilt led to greater pressure to comply ($b = 0.72$, $t(114) = 5.18$, $p < .01$), and greater pressure to comply decreased ad liking ($b = -0.29$, $t(114) = -2.91$, $p < .01$). Non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply serially mediated the effect of relationship type on ad liking (95% CI: -0.218 – -0.003). Critically, neither non-compliance guilt nor pressure to comply were significant mediators on their own, and the serial mediation was not significant when the order of the two mediators was reversed, providing strong support for the proposed model (Hayes, 2013).

Discussion

Study 3 confirmed the moderating role of consumer–brand relationships by replicating our prior findings: assertive ads from committed brand partners were liked less than those from uncommitted brand partners. The data showed that this effect was serially mediated by non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply, providing support for our reactance-based process.

To provide further support for the role of reactance, we conducted a follow-up study (Study 3A) where we measured trait reactance (Hong & Faedda, 1996). If reactance underlies our effect, committed consumers' negative reactions to assertive ads should be exacerbated as trait reactance increases. Consistent with this prediction, committed participants (MTurk, $N = 85$, $M_{\text{age}} = 37.5$, $SD = 11.8$, 53% female) who saw an assertive ad allocated less money to their brand the higher they were on the trait reactance scale ($t(80) = -2.06$, $p < .04$; see MDA Appendix H).

Our final two studies provide additional evidence for the role of reactance by using moderation to examine non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005).

Study 4: exacerbating non-compliance guilt

In studies 4 and 5, we identified variables that increased or decreased non-compliance guilt by affecting the degree to which non-compliance was perceived to violate committed

relationship norms. Greater perceived violations should increase non-compliance guilt (Baumeister et al., 1995), which should exacerbate reactance (Study 4). Lesser perceived violations should decrease non-compliance guilt, which should attenuate reactance (Study 5).

In Study 4, we manipulated the strength of non-compliance guilt by using ads that referenced one of two relationship norms: loyalty or purchase timing. These norms differ in their centrality. In committed relationships, loyalty is an extremely central norm; it is the hallmark of committed relationships, and lies at the heart of their definition. Committed consumers are expected to be loyal to the brand, even in the face of obstacles (Fournier, 1998). In contrast, purchase timing is not as central a norm. When committed consumers purchase from the brand is less foundational to committed relationships.³ Accordingly, non-compliance with a central relationship norm (i.e., loyalty) should be perceived as a greater violation than non-compliance with a less central norm (i.e., purchase timing). Thus, we predict that assertive ads referencing loyalty should elicit more reactance from committed consumers than assertive ads referencing purchase timing. Further, for committed consumers, both assertive ads should elicit non-compliance guilt and reactance relative to a non-assertive ad, as seen in studies 1–3. Finally, since compliance is not a norm in uncommitted relationships, assertive ads referencing either loyalty or purchase timing should not elicit reactance for uncommitted consumers.

Participants, methods, and design

Participants (MTurk; $N = 287$; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.4$, 59% female) completed a 2 (Relationship Type: committed, uncommitted) by 3 (Ad Type: purchase timing, loyalty, control) between-subjects study for payment. Participants identified a committed or an uncommitted brand partner, as in prior studies. For generalizability, we used a new product category: personal hygiene. Participants viewed an ad for their brand containing the tagline “Always Fresh” (control). In the purchase timing condition (i.e., less central norm) the assertive tagline “Buy now!” was added, and in the loyalty condition (i.e., more central norm) the assertive tagline “Buy from us!” was added (see Appendix A). After viewing the ad, participants reported their brand liking as in Study 2. Participants also completed the cognitive inference measures from Study 2, allowing us to compare inferences across both ad type and relationship type. Finally, participants completed the relationship commitment and purchase frequency measures as in prior studies.

Results

Manipulation check

Commitment scores ($\alpha = .94$; $SD = 0.76$) showed a main effect of relationship type ($M_{\text{commit}} = 0.44$, $M_{\text{uncommit}} = -0.41$, $F(1, 281) = 123.87$, $p < .001$).

³ A pre-test showed that committed consumers found loyalty a more central norm ($M = 5.01$) than purchase timing ($M = 3.00$, $t(22) = 3.33$, $p < .003$; see MDA Appendix I).

Cognitive inferences

The data revealed no effect of ad type, relationship type, or their interaction on cognitive inferences (wondering why: $ps > .34$; tangible consequences: $ps > .24$).

Brand liking

An ANCOVA with purchase frequency ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.27$) as a covariate and relationship type, ad type, and their interaction as independent variables, was used to predict brand liking ($\alpha = .88$; $F(6, 280) = 4.90$, $p < .001$). The data revealed significant effects of purchase frequency ($F(1, 280) = 5.25$, $p < .02$), relationship type ($F(1, 280) = 4.27$, $p < .04$), and ad type ($F(2, 280) = 6.09$, $p < .01$), qualified by the predicted relationship type by ad type interaction ($F(2, 280) = 2.98$, $p < .05$; see Fig. 3). When the covariate was removed, the interaction was directional and the contrasts remained significant (see MDA Appendix J).

Planned contrasts revealed no differences in brand liking for uncommitted consumers across ad type ($M_{\text{control}} = 4.99$, $M_{\text{loyalty}} = 5.10$, $M_{\text{purchase timing}} = 4.81$; $ps > .28$). As predicted, for committed consumers, both assertive ads led to less brand liking than the non-assertive control ad ($M_{\text{control}} = 5.80$, $M_{\text{loyalty}} = 4.73$, $M_{\text{purchase timing}} = 5.32$; $F_{\text{control v. loyalty}}(1, 280) = 16.14$, $p < .001$; $F_{\text{control vs. timing}}(1, 280) = 3.74$, $p < .05$), and brand liking was lower in the loyalty than the purchase timing condition ($F(1, 280) = 5.18$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

We predicted that an ad referencing a central relationship norm would elicit particularly strong non-compliance guilt for committed consumers, exacerbating reactant responses. Consistent with this hypothesis, committed consumers responded more negatively to an assertive ad referencing loyalty than to one referencing purchase timing. As further predicted, neither

ad elicited reactance from uncommitted consumers. These findings support the proposed role of non-compliance guilt and show that reactant responses can vary not only across relationship types, but also within the same (committed) relationship.

Across studies, the data show that committed consumers react most negatively to assertive ads, especially when these ads demand the behaviors to which they should be the most amenable (e.g., being loyal). Thus, our final study examined how to attenuate these negative reactions.

Study 5: attenuating non-compliance guilt

Study 5 tested whether reactance to assertive ads could be attenuated by reducing the perceived violation that non-compliance represents, thus reducing non-compliance guilt and pressure to comply. To do so, we enabled consumers to affirm their relationship with the brand. Relationship affirmation involves focusing on a relationship's strengths and positive aspects. Affirmation increases confidence in the relationship (Lockwood, Dolderman, Sadler, & Gerchak, 2004; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Van Tongeren et al., 2014; White, Argo, & Sengupta, 2012), mitigates threats to the relationship (Lomore, Spencer, & Holmes, 2007), and makes individuals less defensive (Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, 2008).

Prior work shows that affirmation creates a buffer that makes potential violations less consequential (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; White et al., 2012). This buffer should make non-compliance with an assertive ad seem less consequential. Thus, compared to those who do not affirm their relationship, committed consumers who affirm their relationship should experience less non-compliance guilt, as they are engaging in a lesser perceived violation of the relationship. Reduced non-compliance guilt should decrease pressure to comply and ultimately decrease reactant responses to assertive ads by committed consumers. For uncommitted consumers, there should be no effect of affirmation, as uncommitted consumers are less concerned with compliance and experience little non-compliance guilt to begin with.

Notably, these predictions for committed consumers are inconsistent with an alternative account whereby affirmation increases commitment. If affirmation increases commitment, it should exacerbate reactant responses to assertive ads, because increased commitment implies greater compliance norms, increased pressure to comply, and increased reactance. Instead, affirmation is expected to attenuate reactance in committed relationships.

Participants, methods, and design

Participants (MTurk; $N = 148$; $M_{\text{age}} = 33.9$, $SD = 12.4$, 60% female) completed a 2 (Relationship Type: committed, uncommitted) by 2 (Relationship Affirmation: yes, no) between-subjects study for payment. They first identified a committed or an uncommitted brand partner in the personal

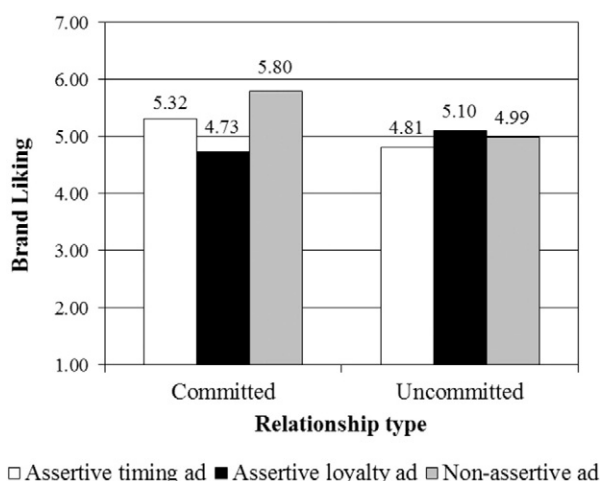


Fig. 3. Study 4: brand liking by relationship type and ad type.

hygiene category, as in Study 4. Using an established procedure, participants in the affirmation condition then ranked nine traits and values in order of importance for their relationship with the identified brand (White et al., 2012). We ensured that these traits and values included a mix of adjectives that could apply to various types of brand relationships (e.g., honest, fun, creative; see MDA Appendix K). After ranking the adjectives, participants wrote about a time when their brand partner upheld the highest-ranked trait in their relationship; this affirmed the most positive and important aspect of the relationship (White et al., 2012). Participants in the no-affirmation condition did not complete this procedure.

All participants then viewed an assertive ad for their brand with the taglines “Always fresh” and “Buy now!”, as in Study 4 (see Appendix A). After viewing the ad, participants completed the ad liking, relationship commitment, and purchase frequency measures from prior studies, and reported what personal hygiene products they bought from their brand (hair care, oral care, facial care, body care, makeup).

Results

Manipulation check

The commitment measure ($\alpha = .93$; $SD = 0.84$) showed a main effect of relationship type ($M_{\text{commit}} = 0.46$, $M_{\text{uncommit}} = -0.47$, $F(1, 144) = 66.87$, $p < .001$) but was not affected by the affirmation procedure ($p > .20$) or by the affirmation by relationship type interaction ($p > .35$). Product sub-category did not vary by relationship type, affirmation, or their interaction ($ps > .78$).

Ad liking

An ANCOVA with purchase frequency ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.52$) as a covariate and relationship type, affirmation, and their interaction as independent variables, was used to predict ad liking ($\alpha = .94$, $F(4, 143) = 15.08$, $p < .001$). We found significant effects of purchase frequency ($F(1, 143) = 57.52$, $p < .001$) and relationship type ($F(1, 143) = 15.29$, $p < .001$), qualified by the predicted relationship type by affirmation interaction ($F(1, 143) = 6.17$, $p < .01$; results were non-significant without the covariate; see MDA Appendix L).

As predicted, committed participants in the affirmation condition liked the ad marginally more ($M = 3.92$) than those in the no-affirmation condition ($M = 3.30$, $F(1, 142) = 3.25$, $p = .07$). For uncommitted participants, ad liking did not differ in the affirmation ($M = 4.31$) and no-affirmation ($M = 4.88$) conditions ($p > .10$). Committed/affirmation and uncommitted/affirmation consumers liked the ad equally ($p > .23$). However, committed/affirmation consumers liked the ad less than uncommitted/no-affirmation consumers ($F(1, 142) = 7.69$, $p < .01$), suggesting that affirmation attenuated, but did not fully eliminate, reactance to the assertive ad (see Fig. 4).

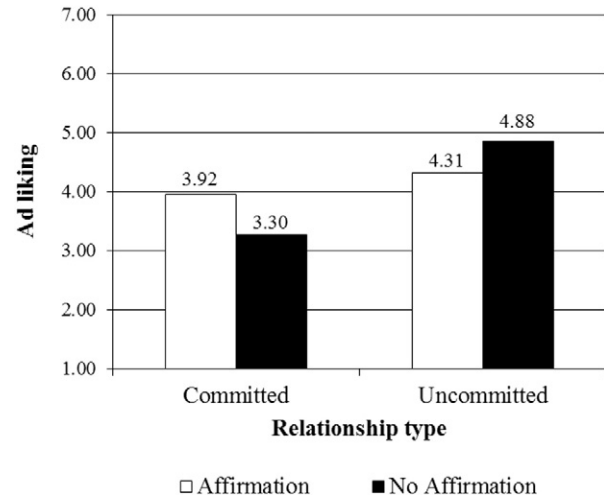


Fig. 4. Study 5: ad liking by relationship type and affirmation.

Discussion

Study 5 showed that the negative effects of assertive ads on committed consumers can be attenuated via relationship affirmation. Notably, affirmation did not entirely eliminate reactance, suggesting that even when the relationship was affirmed, consumers still had some concerns about violating its norms. This finding is consistent with the strong bonds that characterize committed brand relationships (Fournier, 1998).

General discussion

Seven studies using multiple product categories (i.e., clothing, snack bars, and personal hygiene), various dependent measures (i.e., ad liking, brand liking, and monetary allocations), and several assertive messages (e.g., “Like us on Facebook”, “Visit us!”, “Please buy now!”) showed that assertive ads elicit more reactance from committed than uncommitted consumers. We provided evidence for this reactance-based process via both mediation and moderation. A serial mediation test showed that non-compliance guilt increased pressure to comply, which increased reactance, as evidenced by negative reactions to an assertive ad (Study 3). In addition, high trait reactance exacerbated consumers’ negative reactions to assertive ads (Study 3A). Finally, when non-compliance guilt was increased or decreased via manipulation, reactant responses to assertive ads increased or decreased accordingly (studies 4–5). Taken together, our studies reveal that marketer’s most loyal and valuable consumers—those who are committed to the brand—react the most negatively to a common and prevalent marketing practice: the use of assertive ads. These findings contribute to theory and practice and provide directions for future research.

Theoretical contributions

First, we bring reactance and consumer–brand relationship theory together via the shared construct of compliance. Making this connection allows us to extend reactance theory by identifying a new moderator of reactance—consumer–brand relationships—and to extend consumer–brand relationship theory by identifying a new outcome of consumer–brand relationships—reactance.

Second, we extend reactance theory by identifying a new antecedent of pressure to comply: non-compliance guilt. In prior work, pressure to comply has been driven by the potential tangible consequences of non-compliance, such as making a poor choice (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004). We find that reactance can occur even absent such tangible consequences.

Third, we deepen the field's understanding of guilt and advertising. To date, guilt has been shown to play a role in consumers' reactions to advertising when the ad itself contains an emotional appeal (Agrawal & Duhachek, 2010; Cotte et al., 2005). Here, we find that consumer guilt can emerge even when ads contain no explicit emotional content.

Fourth, we respond to calls for further work on how consumer–brand relationships are similar to and different from human relationships (Bengtsson, 2003; Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001). We show that there are indeed some similarities; for example, compliance norms in brand relationships echo those in human relationships, as theorized (Fournier, 1998).

However, we also identify important differences between human and brand relationships. Specifically, while prior work shows that guilt leads to compliance in human relationships, we find that it leads to reactance in brand relationships. We proposed that this occurs because brands are commercial entities. That is, while guilt is a normative tool of influence in human relationships (Baumeister et al., 1995), it may be non-normative in brand relationships. The use of this non-normative tool elicits reactance and non-compliance. Interestingly, it has been theorized that when guilt is used non-normatively in human relationships (e.g., when it is used repeatedly over time, with clear manipulative intent), it can lead to resentment and the eventual dissolution of the relationship (O'Keefe, 2002; Overall et al., 2014). Thus, guilt may have negative effects in human relationships too. However, the negative effects of guilt appear to occur more quickly in brand relationships, perhaps due to their commercial nature.

In addition, in human relationships, compliance following guilt is designed to restore equality in the relationship by increasing the wronged partner's power (Baumeister et al., 1995). It is possible that in brand relationships, restoring equality and power is less of a concern. First, consumers may perceive a consistent power differential in brand relationships, where the brand always has more power. Second, consumers may feel that their actions cannot restore power, as the net effect of one customer making a purchase is negligible. These differences may emerge from another under-studied difference between committed human versus brand relationships: human

relationships are commonly one-to-one, while brand relationships are one-to many (Bengtsson, 2003). These fundamental differences may highlight the commercial nature of brand relationships and contribute to the divergent effects of guilt described above.

Practical contributions and future directions

Practically, we provide new insights for marketers regarding when and how to use assertive ads, and we highlight some previously unknown risks of doing so. First, our data show that assertive ads can elicit reactance even when they contain no tangible consequences of non-compliance. Second, these findings reveal that assertive ads negatively affect marketers' most valuable consumers. Third, our studies suggest that these valued consumers react negatively to assertive content, no matter how common or innocuous. For example, polite assertive ads ("Please Buy Now!"; Study 2) as well as ubiquitous assertive ads ("Like us on Facebook"; Study 3), elicit reactance. These robust effects of assertive ad language are likely driven by the strong and automatic nature of reactance (Brehm, 1966; Chartrand et al., 2007). Accordingly, we expect our findings to hold across various types of assertive messages, such as recommendations or warnings (Bushman & Stack, 1996; Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004). This suggests that mitigating reactant responses to assertive ads may be challenging.

We offer marketers two potential remedies. First, when ad copy can be used to affirm the relationship, ads are less likely to elicit reactance (Study 5). Second, phrasing ad copy to direct behavior less assertively can reduce reactance. Study 2 shows that in order to avoid reactance, marketers need not remove any mention of desired action from their ads. Instead, they can create a call to action that is less explicit. Future research could examine other practical factors that attenuate committed consumers' reactant responses.

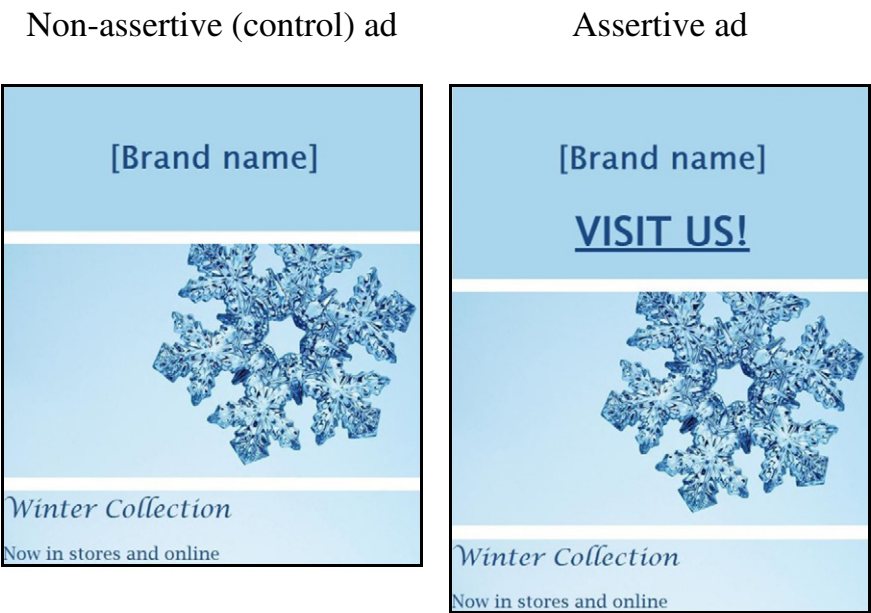
Future research could also pursue theoretical avenues that stem from our framework, such as revisiting the emotional antecedents of reactance. Prior work shows that reactance is driven by anger or frustration (Brehm, 1966; Clee & Wicklund, 1980; Moore & Fitzsimons, 2014). Here, we find that it can also be driven by guilt. Future work might consider the impact of different discrete emotions on reactance, and whether other emotions play a role in reactance. Additional research could examine the duration of consumer's negative responses to assertive ads. Negative responses to assertive ads might be cumulative, such that they continuously erode consumers' brand relationships, which may lead to relationship dissolution (O'Keefe, 2002). Alternatively, assertive ads might have time-limited effects—despite temporary dislike and non-compliance, committed consumers may forgive their brands or seek out ways to repair their relationship after exposure to assertive ads (Fournier, 1998; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Finally, future work could continue to focus on the similarities and differences between human and brand relationships, providing further insights into the unique characteristics of consumer behavior.

Appendix A. Ads

Note: Ad size in the studies was approximately 500 pixels high by 700 pixels wide.
Study 1 ads



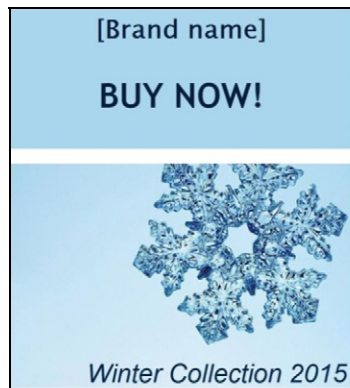
Study 1A ads



Note: Ads used in the Study 1 post-test were the same as the Study 1A ads, except the assertive ad read either “Buy now” or “Visit us”, depending on condition.

Study 2 ads

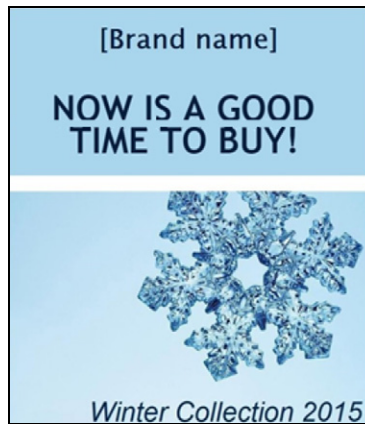
Assertive ad



Polite Assertive ad



Informative ad



Control ad

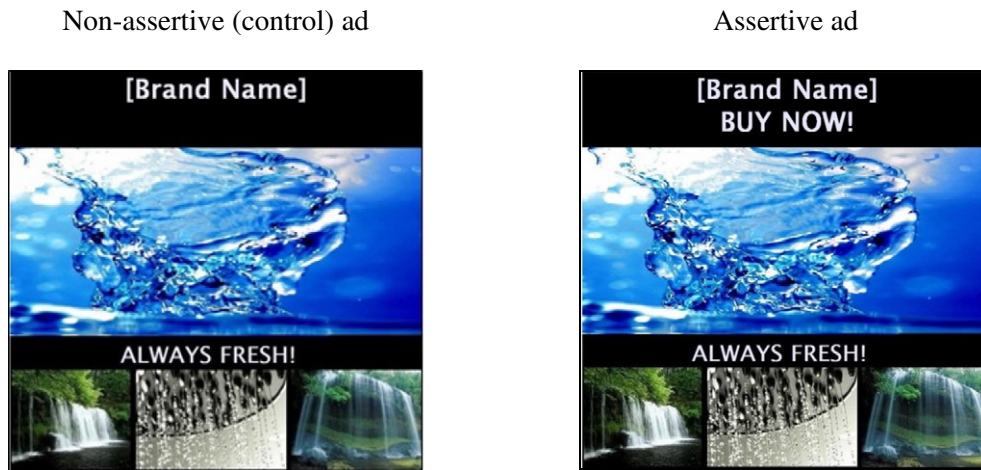


Study 3 ad

Assertive ad



Study 4 & 5 ads



Note: In Study 5, only the assertive “Buy Now!” ad was presented.

Methodological Details Appendix. Supplementary materials

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2017.01.002>.

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