

Towards a clarification of soft-sell and hard-sell advertising approaches: study of French consumer perceptions

Vers une clarification des approches publicitaires soft-sell et hard-sell : étude des perceptions des consommateurs français

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to highlight the perceptions of the French consumer towards the soft-sell and hard-sell approaches. An exploratory study by semi-structured individual interviews is carried out with a sample of 26 French consumers using an interview guide. The results indicate that the French consumer has a more favorable attitude towards soft-sell type messages and that he resists messages that extol the strengths of the product in a direct and aggressive way. The managerial contribution of this study lies in the light it can give advertising professionals on the persuasive potential of the dimensions of the soft-sell message in a French context as well as on the brakes that a hard-type message could generate. sell on intent to purchase. The conclusion shows the managerial implications and the research avenues that emerged from this study.

Keywords: Attitude towards the advertisement; soft-sell approach; hard-sell approach; French consumer; advertising.

Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est de mettre en lumière les perceptions du consommateur français vis-à-vis des approches soft-sell et hard-sell. Une étude exploratoire par entretiens individuels semi-directifs est réalisée auprès d'un échantillon de 26 consommateurs français à l'aide d'un guide d'entretien. Les résultats indiquent que le consommateur français a une attitude plus favorable à l'égard des messages de type soft-sell et qu'il résiste aux messages vantant les atouts du produit de manière directe. L'apport managérial de cette étude réside dans l'éclairage qu'elle peut apporter aux professionnels de la publicité sur le potentiel persuasif des dimensions du message de soft-sell dans un contexte français ainsi que sur les freins que pourrait engendrer un message de type hard-sell. La conclusion montre les implications managériales et les pistes de recherche qui ont émergé de cette étude.

Mots clés : Attitude envers la publicité ; approche soft-sell ; approche hard-sell ; consommateur français ; publicité.

Introduction

«Contrary to popular belief, there is no aversion to advertising: only 32% of respondents claim not to like advertising. Consumers even state that they appreciate advertising as long as it is personalized (78%) and prefer messages that align with their interests (64%). Moreover, 73% of them believe advertisers have improved in terms of communication. However, online advertising is the least accepted format by consumers (68%)¹. » As shown by the results of this quantitative study conducted by Kantar Media, concluding that consumers resist persuasive communication appears too hasty, and this finding must be nuanced by considering advertising, individual, and contextual characteristics.

Observing managerial practices allows for a dual assessment: qualitative and quantitative. On the one hand, in parallel with the expansion of the globalization phenomenon in markets, investments in media advertising continue to increase in value. In France, investments in the advertising sector are steadily rising, from \$15 billion in 2011 to \$16.04 billion in 2018 (Statista Research Department, 2019). On the other hand, actors within the same industry sector employ different advertising approaches to build relationships with their consumers. For example, consider the case of the retail sector. Intermarché was awarded the EFFIE Prize for the impact of advertising creativity with its ad, « Love, love » which, through a three-minute long format, tells « a love story between a customer who eats poorly and a cashier who only wants is best for him...».² On the other hand, let's mention the advertising campaign implemented by Système U. This aims to translate and promote all the commitments of the brand, such as local sourcing to favor short supply chains, the loyalty program with the U card, the recruitment of apprentices to support culinary professions, the same level of attention given to customers at the drive-through as in-store, and the maturation of meat to cater to all tastes through movies « posture » and movies « evidence ».

Research in persuasive communication (Mueller et al., 2010) has clearly distinguished two advertising approaches³ : the first is termed hard-sell, in which "sales orientation is emphasized

¹ <https://www.ladn.eu/nouveaux-usages/etude-marketing/les-consommateurs-et-leurs-sentiments-face-a-la-publicite/>

² <http://www.lefigaro.fr/medias/2018/12/04/20004-20181204ARTFIG00283-intermarche-remporte-le-prix-de-la-pub-la-plus-efficace.php>

³ A parallel can be drawn with sales methods employed by sellers. Hard-selling corresponds to "an aggressive sales technique, also known as 'hard closing.' It involves securing the sale at all costs, using every possible argument in negotiation and often foregoing the usual minimum profit margin. In advertising, the term is used to characterize demonstration messages based on cognitive responses focused on the product, especially its price, and used insistently and repetitively. It contrasts with soft-selling techniques, which aim to limit the action of demonstrative marketing for more indirectly evocative messages" (Encyclopédie du marketing commentée et illustrée, JM Lehu, p. 375). Hard-selling methods can lead to detrimental long-term behaviors (customer overstocking, customer

here, specifying the brand name and product features. An explicit mention may be made of competitive products, sometimes by name, and the product's advantage depends on performance" (Mueller, 1987, p. 53), and the second approach is termed soft-sell, in which "mood and ambiance are conveyed through a beautiful scene or the development of a moving story. Human emotions are more clearly highlighted in the messages" (Mueller, 1987, p. 53). In this article, we try to understand how the advertising format impacts the response of the French consumer: is the latter more impacted by the style of informational advertising focused on reason and factual elements or rather by the style of advertising based on the emotions or the imagination that it arouses?

This contribution is structured as follows. The first part provides the conceptual framework for research based on persuasive communication as well as soft-sell and hard-sell approaches. The second part retraces the methodological choices of the qualitative study carried out using semi-structured interviews with 26 French consumers. The results are presented in a third part. The discussion highlights the contributions and lessons of this research. Managerial implications and future avenues of research are finally discussed.

1. Conceptual Framework of the Research

The literature review makes it possible to more precisely define the two advertising approaches identified (hard-sell and soft-sell) and to identify their specificities. Secondly, the question of the impact of these advertising discourses on consumer behavior will be addressed.

1.1 Toward a comprehensive understanding of the soft-sell and hard-sell approaches

The question of the effectiveness of soft-sell and hard-sell advertising styles has been a central point in debates surrounding advertising creativity and its overall effectiveness in the industry, dating back to the 1950s and 1960s (Haygood, 2016, p. 170; Butt et al., 2017). To analyze the impact of these two approaches on consumer behavior, a theoretical contextualization of these methods is essential.

Although both approaches seek to persuade the consumer to adopt behavior favorable to the issuer, the definitions converge on the fact that hard-selling is characterized by a more direct approach, highlighting the advantages of the product to stimulate a quick sale. On the other hand, soft-selling is based on a more subtle and indirect approach (Alden et al., 1999; Mueller, 1987; Okazaki et al., 2010).

dissatisfaction, feeling of being "duped," etc.) and even reprehensible practices (excessive discounting policies, promotional means exploiting impulsivity, encouragement of overconsumption, etc.).

This persistent opposition between "hard sell" and "soft sell" advertising approaches is not recent, having agitated the academic community and practitioners for several decades. As Haygood (2016, p. 170) has observed, the professional press has often captured this tension, which manifests itself under various names such as the conflict between "claimed school" and "image school". Other researchers have attributed special meaning to soft-sell and hard-sell approaches, calling them "emotional advertising" and "rational advertising." Yoo and MacInnis (2005); Charry and Pecheux (2011); Safraoui et al. (2010); Sabri (2012). However, it should be emphasized that this qualification, although useful, does not fully capture the scope of the two concepts.

An in-depth look at the soft-sell and hard-sell concepts was done by Okazaki et al. (2010) by identifying three dimensions often addressed by researchers in advertising approaches: feeling and thought, implicit versus explicit, and image versus fact. The first dimension concerns the emotional orientation of the soft-sell approach and the rational thinking of the hard-sell approach. The second dimension deals with the factual and direct nature of the hard-sell compared to the indirect and suggested aspect of the soft-sell. The third dimension concerns the highlighting of factual and objective elements in the hard-sell, as opposed to the creation of a symbolic and emotional image in the soft-sell.

These dimensions are not dichotomous. Advertisements may use hybrid formats where the dimensions of soft-sell and hard-sell approaches blend. This is notably the case with Carrefour's campaign titled "La qualité pour tous." Carrefour focused on three products: a pack of minced steak for 3.70 euros, a pack of diapers for 10.95 euros, and 200 grams of Comté cheese for 2.18 euros. The three TV spots are constructed according to the same logic: beautiful images, background music, an evocation of the product's manufacture or use, and finally, the focus on price, the quintessential buying argument.

This observation raises a question about the French consumer's perception of advertisements: do they prefer an approach based on the dimensions of soft-sell, hard-sell, or a combination of the two?

Before attempting to answer this question, we will first look in the following section at what the literature suggests about the effectiveness of soft-sell and hard-sell approaches.

1.2 The impact of soft-sell and hard-sell approaches on consumer response

For many decades, researchers have examined the influence of hard-sell and soft-sell approaches on consumer persuasion, with an emphasis on the cognitive, affective and conative aspects of advertising (Leroux, 2003). More specifically, these studies examined the impact of

hard-sell and soft-sell speeches on the persuasion process, including attention, memorization, attitude toward the ad, and attitude toward the brand. However, the conclusions are not necessarily convergent.

Thus, the soft-sell approach arouses a more positive attitude towards the ad compared to hard-sell messages, which results in stronger purchase intentions. However, the hard-sell message is perceived as more credible than the soft-sell message. Additionally, hard-selling significantly improves purchase intention through a compelling informational message, although it is likely to be more irritating than soft-selling (Okazaki et al., 2010). In the same sense, when an advertiser uses an informational ad, the creation of a positive attitude towards the brand seems to rely on the generation of favorable thoughts and the formation of solid convictions and beliefs (Yoo and MacInnis, 2005).

The emotional dimension, characteristic of the soft-sell approach, has been particularly explored in the marketing literature. For example, let us cite studies on the presence of nudity, taboo provocative advertisements, fear and humor (Clark and Isen 1984; Olney, Holbrook and Batra, 1991; Zhang, 1996; Charry and Pecheux, 2011; Dridi & Makhlouf, 2014).

Although the majority of studies indicate that the emotion experienced by an individual weakens message memorization due to poor cognitive processing (Lombardot, 2007), others have obtained more positive results. Olney et al. (1991) found that emotion promotes brand memorability. Furthermore, according to Yoo and McInnis (2005) as well as Geuens and DePelsmacker (2002), a positive emotion can arouse a positive attitude towards the ad. Zhang (1996) and Safraoui et al. (2010) demonstrated that emotion is effective in individuals with a low need for cognition.

Concerning attitudes, some researchers have observed that negative emotion leads to a negative perception of the ad, thus increasing the risk of advertising rejection (Charry and Pecheux, 2011; Manceau and Tissier, 2005; Gallopel-Morvan, 2006). Furthermore, research such as that of Janis (1967) and McGuire (1968) suggests that negative emotion can generate a favorable attitude towards the brand, potentially subsequently improving purchase intention (Charry and Pecheux, 2011).

Some researchers have explored how consumers' cultural profiles potentially influence attitude formation. In this sense Desmarais, Vignolles, & Mukherjee (2024) propose that the preference of soft-sell and hard-sell voice advertising messages by consumers depends on their previous culture and that international marketers should take into account the particularities cultural aspects when designing voice advertising strategies. In the same sense, Elers (2023) suggest

that the choice of advertising approach should consider the cultural orientation of the target audience. They conclude that soft-sell advertising leads to stronger emotional engagement and more positive attitudes toward advertising for consumers oriented towards an international culture, while hard-sell advertising is more preferred by consumers. local culture oriented.

Table 1 provides a synthesis of research on the effectiveness of soft-sell and hard-sell approaches.

Table 1: impact of “soft-sell” and “hard-sell” approaches

Authors	Results
Clark and Isen (1984)	The emotion felt by the individual after exposure to the message containing nudity leads to a distraction process that reduces memorization.
Gilligan and Bower (1984)	The memorization of the message containing nudity will be low due to the low cognitive processing that the receiver will perform.
Olney et al., (1991)	Strong emotions felt by the receiver when exposed to a message using nudity lead to brand memorization.
Lombardot (2007)	The presence of nudity of the opposite sex in an emotional advertisement increases the receiver's attention and memorization.
Zhang (1996)	Humor-based messages are more effective for individuals with low need for cognition.
Charry and Pecheux (2011)	Advertisements based on negative emotion lead to a negative attitude toward the ad.
Janis (1967)	Advertisements triggering negative emotion may be rejected if the intensity of the felt emotion is too strong.
McGuire (1968),	The stronger the intensity of the felt negative emotion, the higher the risk of ad rejection.
Simpson et al., (1996)	A message using nudity enhances attitude toward the ad if the image features an opposite-sex model.
Jones et al., (1998)	A message using nudity enhances attitude toward the ad if the image features an opposite-sex model.

Manceau and Tissier (2005)	Advertisements using taboo provoke a negative attitude toward the ad among women and seniors.
Sabri 2012	Attitude toward an ad using taboo depends on individual target criteria such as gender, age, religiosity, and personality traits.
Yoo et MacInnis (2005)	Informational ads result in much stronger beliefs than emotional ads. Informational ads create a positive attitude toward the brand by generating favorable thoughts and forming strong convictions.
Safraoui-Ouadrani and Guiot (2010)	Emotional advertising improves attitude toward the ad for elderly individuals.
McGuire (1968), cited by (Gallopel-Morvan, 2006)	Negative emotion improves attitude toward the brand (suggested behavior).
Charry and Pecheux (2011)	The message based on triggering negative emotion positively modifies purchase intention.
Safraoui-Ouadrani and Guiot (2010)	Emotional advertising improves attitude toward the brand among seniors.
Geuens and DePelsmacker (2002)	Advertising using humor improves attitude toward the brand for both individuals with low need for cognition and those with high need for cognition.

2. Research Methodology

The objective of the study is to provide an in-depth understanding of French consumers perceptions of informational and emotional approaches, their impacts on consumer response. To address these objectives, an exploratory study is conducted using semi-structured interviews with a sample of 26 French consumers. Constructed with diversity in mind, the sample consists of 14 men and 12 women, aged 19 to 69, with an average age of 28. The majority of respondents (88%) have a higher education degree. Various socio-professional categories are represented in our sample. We find business owners, students, professors, technicians, engineers, salespersons, secretaries, nurses, traders, gendarmes, insurance advisors, and retirees. The composition of the sample is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Description

	French Consumers	
Sex	Male	14
	Female	12
Education Level	Baccalauréat	3
	Bac+2	7
	Bac+3	7
	Bac+5	6
	Bac+6 or more	3
Age	28 years (range : 19 to 69 years)	

The interview guide is structured around three parts: firstly, the respondent is asked to recall and describe a memorable advertisement and one that made them laugh, as well as to discuss their familiarity with advertising. These initial questions allow the consumer to draw on their personal experiences. Secondly, the respondent is invited to describe the ideal advertisement in their view, and the two advertising approaches (hard-sell versus soft-sell) are discussed.

The interviews lasted between 35 and 70 minutes each and were conducted during the spring of 2019. Recorded to maintain the flow of the conversation, they were then fully transcribed. The final corpus comprises nearly 86 pages, approximately 45,000 words. After several floating readings, content analysis was conducted (Bardin, 1977; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). The researchers carried out thematic analysis by identifying and coding emerging themes from successive in-depth readings and documenting them in an analysis grid (Basit, 2003; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3. Results

The results are structured into five points. Firstly, attention is given to the perception of advertising in general. Then, the definition of "good" advertising in the eyes of the respondents is outlined. The third point addresses the question of the most memorized advertising approach by the respondents. The fourth point highlights the attitude of French consumers toward "soft-sell" and "hard-sell" approaches. Finally, the importance of using culture and values in advertising is discussed due to its significance in consumer persuasion (Elbardai, 2020; Meier, 2019).

3.1 The emergence of a generalized resistance to communication

All respondents were asked to express their relationship with advertising. Spontaneously, consumers express a dislike towards it. Overall, they find that advertisements invade all media

(television, magazines, internet, etc.). For instance, Mathieu states, "Overall, I'm not interested in advertisements, no matter the channel. The conception I have of advertisements doesn't encourage me to watch them...marketing doesn't always have a good reputation: making people buy" (Interview 4, Mathieu).

Three main grievances are addressed towards advertising: first, respondents consider it too invasive, especially in certain media (television, radio, internet); second, they emphasize its repetitive nature; third, they mention the intrusive nature of advertising. They consider it omnipresent and in certain situations such as watching or listening to a show, it can be undesirable.

In this context, respondents state that they implement strategies to avoid or bypass advertisements. Table 3 provides a description of these strategies.

Table 3: Strategies to avoid advertising

Description	Examples of Verbatim
Avoidance	"I don't like them on television, not because I choose to. In magazines, I hardly ever look at them. Same goes for the radio, and finally, on the Internet, never. Often there are advertisements that come up, and I immediately press the button to ignore the advertisement" (Interview 12, Luce).
Software to block advertisements	"It bothers me a lot. And since I watch a lot of series on streaming, and advertisements annoy me, I have software that blocks them. It saves me time like that" (Interview 8, Nordine).
Keeping busy during commercials	"We often take advantage of this time to do a couple of small things before the movie resumes, and now it's rare that I watch television! I spend a lot of time on Netflix" (Interview 15, Gaëlle).

However, this aversion towards advertising displayed by respondents must be nuanced. Thus, some respondents state that in certain contexts, advertising can be appreciated. "Generally, I'm not very fond of advertisements. Let's say I listen to them more out of obligation. When I'm at the cinema, for example, I pay attention to them" (Interview 13, Lorraine).

Others appreciate advertising only in magazines for its visual and artistic aspect. "Magazines are one of the only mediums where I enjoy reading advertisements because it's more visual, and we have more time to look at the product, to learn about the information" (Interview 15, Gaëlle); "In magazines, it's different because I like photography in general, so I mainly look at the advertisement for the aesthetic aspect" (Interview 1, Virginie), or because they enjoy reading.

"I sometimes look at advertisements in magazines since I read them when I have free time" (Interview 17, Nicolas); "Yes, truthfully, I like reading them, sometimes it doesn't bother me" (Interview 25, Jeremy), or because there is no time constraint. "In magazines, I like them because they're usually nice, and besides, there are no time constraints. You can watch the ad for 2 seconds or several minutes, you're not obliged to anything" (Interview 16, Jeremy).

3.2 Tendency to idealize the soft-sell approach

During the interview, we prompted the respondents to describe what an "ideal" advertisement means to them. Table 4 highlights a frequency distribution of dimensions that could qualify an advertisement as "ideal" in the eyes of French consumers. Spontaneously mentioned by the respondents, these dimensions largely constitute elements of the soft-sell approach, with a frequency of 48 out of 70 dimensions cited, representing 69%.

Table 4: Characteristics describing the "ideal" advertisement according to the French consumer

Soft-sell dimensions	Frequency	Examples of verbatim
Sentiment (40%)		
To project oneself into the product/to dream	3 (4%)	"A commercial does not represent reality but should rather sublimate it. This is why we expect to see the ideal family, the ideal couple, or even the ideal society in an advertisement, even though everyone knows that it doesn't exist. But it should allow us to dream." (Interview 5, Soumia)
"Telling a story or scenario."	7 (10%)	"A good advertisement can also tell a story, which is often seen in car commercials; they are made like a movie, it's really captivating!" (Interview 15, Gaëlle).
Music	9 (13%)	"I have an auditory memory, so sounds are usually what I remember best and what captivates me the most. Creating a catchy melody that you don't forget, like in the Honey Pops advertisement (i.e., Kellogg's children's cereal), can be very effective, I think." (Interview 6, Camille).
To provide emotions	4 (6%)	"A good advertisement must absolutely contain emotions. The proof is, the Disney ad really moved me and that's why I love it, and the ad for Intermarché made me laugh a lot.

		For me, a good advertisement must play on emotions." (Interview 19, Mathilde)
Humor	5 (7%)	"If it makes us laugh, that's better. If we feel nothing, we won't pay attention to the product." (Interview 8, Nordine) "For me, it's completely about emotion, and more particularly humor." (Interview 25, Jeremy)
Implicite (7%)		
The message is indirectly conveyed	1 (1%)	"With a touch of originality, people who watch it will be more attentive because they'll want to discover the end of this famous advertisement that piques their curiosity."
Simple and not boring	4 (6%)	"A simple and concise presentation of the product in question, I find it ridiculous to see a naked woman for shampoo and a cartoon for a toilet product. While I acknowledge the imaginative and creative aspect of the ad, it's not what sells for me."
Image (21%)		
Attractive colors and images	3 (4%)	"I believe that a good advertisement should feature attractive colors, catchy music!"
Artistic side / beautiful visuals / colors	9 (13%)	"Then, a good ad is one that is pleasant to listen to on the radio or to watch if it's a visual medium, whether it's on TV or in a magazine, and that knows how to be appealing through colors, shapes, even sound, etc." (Interview 23, Jean).
Setting the product on stage	3 (4%)	"What attracts me in an advertisement are the actions, the staging, and an innovative context in a world that we know since it's our daily life."
Total 48 (69%)		

The table above reveals that the dimensions characterizing soft-sell advertising are quite frequent in the verbatim. Indeed, regarding the first dimension of sentiment versus thought, defining respectively the soft-sell and hard-sell approach, we observe a dominance of aspects of advertising focused on triggering consumers' emotions in the responses. This is reflected in the respondents' statements through the use of storytelling, music, and the stimulation of emotions in one way or another. However, for aspects that could appeal to the consumer's

reasoning, such as in the case of the hard-sell approach, we find scientific evidence in the verbatim as well as comparisons.

The second dimension, implicit versus explicit, was also expressed by consumers through what they called "simple or indirectly convey messages" versus messages that present the product, its quality, and its price. At this level, we notice that the explicit is more prevalent than the implicit in the verbatim.

Finally, for the third dimension, namely image versus fact, we observe that the product image is more repeated in the verbatim than the facts related to the product.

3.3 The impact of advertising approaches on consumer response

In this section, we sought to understand how hard-sell and soft-sell advertising approaches affect French consumers. To do this, we asked individuals in our sample to tell us about the last advertisement they saw that left an impression on them. It appears that 94% of the characteristics described in the advertisements align with soft-sell strategies (Table 5).

Table 5: Characteristics of the Advertisement That Made an Impression on French Consumers

Characteristics	Frequency	Examples of Verbatims
Characteristics related to hard-sell		
Presence of well-known personalities	1(3%)	"The last one that stood out to me was the one from SFR, featuring Sébastien Loeb, Omay Sy, Cristiano Ronaldo, and Louane. I think it stood out to me because of the presence of celebrities." (Interview 3, Hugo)
Price and promotional offers	1(3%)	"The company was offering a deal on Pirelli tires, with two tires offered for free, which amounted to approximately a 160 euro discount, if I recall correctly. There were also offers on brake pads." (Interview17, Nicolat)
Total 2 (6%)		
Characteristics related to soft-sell		
Raises awareness and triggers a negative emotion.	3(9%)	"Advertisements of this kind, relying on shocking scenarios, deeply impact me with their dramatic images." (Interview1, Virginie)
Tell a story.	6(17%)	"Well... the last advertisement I remember and that struck me is this year's Disneyland commercial where you see a duckling

		reading with admiration its idol Donald Duck and imitating him in all his gestures and cries. And at the end, it goes to Disneyland Paris and is moved to see its mascot in real life... I liked it because it's touching." (Interview 11, Nathalie)
Moving music.	7(20%)	"What struck me the most, I think, was the background music and the story it told, there was something nostalgic about it." (Interview 6, Camille)
An atmosphere that puts you in a good mood and evokes a positive emotion.	6(17%)	"But there's 'Personal Jesus' by Depeche Mode playing in the background. I love this band! I really liked the atmosphere of the commercial. It's dynamic, joyful, it lifts your spirits. Anyway, it puts me in a good mood." (Interview 7, Hélène)
Non-aggressive message / Absence of explicit message	1(3%)	"Also, there are no lyrics, no explicit advertising message. There's just music and images of an old person in their everyday life." (Interview 14, Clémentine)
Presence of the image.	4(11%)	"There are lots of hot air balloons, a variety of characters, beautiful colors, and the artistic level is surprising. It was very creative." (Interview 10, Françoise).
Presents a scene where one can relate.	4(11%)	"I was drawn to the content because they highlight different important moments in history like the French Revolution or even the war if I'm not mistaken. You feel somewhat connected to the advertisement when you see that." (Interview 15, Gaëlle).
Advertisement based on humor.	1(3%)	"It's an advertisement made with a sense of humor and based on comic repetition. In the ad, we see a father constantly repeating to his son, 'This is not Versailles,' to make him understand not to leave the light on unnecessarily." (Interview 26, Juliette).
Total 33 (94%)		

Dimensions of hard-sell.	Frequency	Examples of verbatim
The thought (2%).		
Comparison using criteria	1 (1%)	"A good advertisement should highlight the advantages of the product while comparing it to other competing products. It's easy to say that it's the best product, but without a basis for comparison, this statement doesn't mean anything." (Interview 2, Pierre).
Scientific evidence	1 (1%)	"I find that the advertising for the Oral-B toothpaste is well thought out because the M6 presenter was hired to represent this brand. The customer will be more attracted to this brand because this presenter is somewhat seen as a scientist due to the themes of the shows he hosts." (Interview 18, Claire).
The explicit (17%)		
Present the product in question, its brand, and its quality.	7 (10%)	"For me, a good advertisement must already feature the flagship product in question, presenting it in a way that truly conveys the brand and its quality. The brand's codes should be strongly felt." (Interview 16, Benjamin).
Highlight the price, promotion.	5 (7%)	"If it's a promotion or if it represents a specific product, one should be able to find the selling price, the promotion, its start and end dates, and the location of sale, i.e., where I can buy the product." (Interview 17, Nicolas).
The facts (12%)		
Show the advantages of the product/performance	4 (6%)	"The advertisement must showcase all the characteristics of the product; it also needs to be captivating." (Interview 8, Nordine).
Concrete information.	4 (6%)	"For me, a good advertisement is a neutral advertisement. That means it should contain the essential information about the product without overplaying its effectiveness. It's up to the consumer to judge whether the product seems effective or not." (Interview 21, Nathan).
		Total 22 (31%)

These results clearly indicate that soft-sell advertising is better memorized by the French consumer than hard-sell advertising. It emerges that emotion is the most responded-to element in the advertisements memorized by our sample. This reinforces, on the one hand, the preconceived ideas previously held about the ideal advertisement in the eyes of the French consumer, and on the other hand, the statements of researchers regarding the effectiveness of emotional messaging. McGuire (1968); Charry and Pecheux (2011); Yoo and McInnis (2005); Olney et al., (1991); Lombardot (2007).

3.4 The attitude of the French consumer towards factual elements in advertising

The inquiry into the attitude towards hard-sell reveals that the French consumer is skeptical about aggressive advertising practices. Individuals' statements on this matter revolve around two main ideas: the credibility of advertising is formidable when the focus is on consumer or expert opinions. 'We know it's acting, and there's something to prove. It shouldn't give the floor to scientists because they're paid, it's biased' (Interview 22, Loic); 'I don't really trust ads that gather consumer reviews; I always doubt the truthfulness of the statements' (Interview 13, Lorraine); 'Yes, of course, but the problem with advertising is that we know its purpose is to sell, so how can we trust and not believe that the so-called consumers are paid to deliver a prepared pitch' (Interview 9, Michel); 'No for the appearance of consumers and experts because in any case, they will give a good image of the product, or else they wouldn't be there, so it's a bit useless and so false' (Interview 3, Hugo); 'As spectators, we see these people more as actors than reliable sources. On the contrary, the impression conveyed by this kind of advertising is that of actors reading their lines, and it doesn't instill confidence in the viewer because they feel deceived instead' (Interview 5, Soumia).

Detailed information and benefits in an advertisement bore the French consumer. 'You can just give me a regular presenter and a well-constructed speech; that's enough for me. If they start getting into technical details, it can quickly become tedious. At the moment, we may not want to know that much' (Interview 16, Benjamin); 'Yes, an advertisement can talk about the product's performance, but without overdoing it' (Interview 19, Mathilde); 'The important thing, in my opinion, is not to overdo it. It's important to talk about the product's performance but in a reasonable way for the product's credibility' (Interview 4, Matthieu); 'I don't think a good advertisement necessarily has to talk about all that, or if it wants to, it should be done in a more playful and less academic way' (Interview 26, Juliette).

3.5 The attitude of the French consumer towards emotion in advertising

The attitude of the French consumer towards emotion in advertising appears to be favorable for the majority of interview participants. Table 6 summarizes the distribution of responses.

Table 6: French consumer attitude towards emotion in advertising messages

Responses categories	Number of respondents
Respondents favorable to the presence of emotion	19 (73%)
Respondents favorable to hybrid advertising	5 (19%)
Respondents rejecting emotion in advertising	2 (8%)

The table indicates that the French consumer is favorable to the presence of emotion in advertising. They believe that memorization occurs better when the message brings joy, makes them laugh, creates empathy through compassion, or evokes dreams. 'Yes... emotions like joy, humor, happiness, sorrow... are important to me in an advertisement because they impact us and allow us to better remember the advertisement, brand, and product' (Interview 11, Nathalie); 'An advertisement should convey joy, make people laugh to connect with the consumer, or alternatively, create empathy through compassion, for example. I think we memorize an advertisement more easily when it touches our emotions' (Interview 17, Nicolas); 'Yes! It must evoke something, a positive emotion. Most often, advertisements seek to amuse the viewer or convey a message in situations that everyone can relate to' (Interview 22, Loïc); 'An advertisement does not represent reality but must, on the contrary, sublimate it. This is how we look for the ideal family, the ideal couple, or even the ideal society in an advertisement, even though everyone knows it doesn't exist, but it should allow us to dream' (Interview 5, Soumia); 'Well, as I said, for me, it's entirely about emotion and more particularly humor' (Interview 25, Jeremy); 'Yes, a good advertisement must absolutely contain emotions. The ad for Intermarché made me laugh a lot. For me, a good advertisement should play on emotions. A good advertisement is when you watch it, and it already attracts you without knowing what product it is for' (Interview 19, Mathilde).

3.6 Influence of culture and values

The French consumer seems to agree with the importance of seeing their culture and values reflected in advertising. They believe that it allows individuals to find themselves or what they can be through the advertising message. 'Obviously, everyone is shaped by their culture and upbringing' (Interview 13, Lorraine), 'I think it allows for identification with the product' (Interview 3, Hugo), 'This is why I am particularly moved by advertisements featuring families with traditional values of sharing, solidarity, and the continuity of family ties' (Interview 5,

Soumia). Several respondents mentioned examples of advertisements that play on environmental protection values to connect with the consumer. 'Like eco-friendly products, for example. If I'm going to buy a car, I would find it important for it to mention CO2 emissions' (Interview 16, Benjamin).

In the same vein of the importance of identifying with the message, the French consumer states that they would reject messages with a religious connotation. 'If someone offers me a halal ad, I don't feel concerned at all because it's not my religion' (Interview 23, Jean), 'Buying a carpet with an integrated compass to pray towards Mecca is of no use to me. I couldn't care less about it' (Interview 2, Pierre).

The statements of the French consumer regarding the consideration of culture and values align with research advocating for communication adaptation (Buzzels, 1968; et al., 1986).

Conclusion, contributions, limitations, and avenues for future research

This research aimed to explore the use of soft-sell and hard-sell approaches and understand their persuasive potential in a French context. The underlying goals were firstly to understand the dimensions defining soft-sell and hard-sell approaches and secondly to comprehend the attitude of French consumers towards both approaches and which approach is most likely to be memorized. The review suggests that the soft-sell approach is characterized by emotion, implicit elements, and image, while the hard-sell approach is characterized by reasoning, facts, and explicit elements (Okazaki et al., 2010).

Through qualitative research using interviews with 26 French consumers, it appears that they display resistance towards advertising, leading to various avoidance strategies, except in certain contexts such as cinemas where individuals are predisposed to watching advertisements or for certain non-intrusive platforms like magazines. Additionally, interview results indicate that the attitude of French consumers is more favorable towards messages containing emotions such as joy, laughter, humor, fear, and compassion. The findings also suggest that, for the French consumer, emotionally-driven messages are better memorized than fact-based messages. Similarly, for advertisements that appeal to the consumer, it is evident that emotions and soft-sell elements are most appreciated. However, factual elements are rejected by customers when presented aggressively.

This research aimed to explore the mechanisms of the persuasion process in advertising using two types of discourse (hard sell and soft sell) with French consumers. The results indicate that, despite the French consumer's general aversion to advertising, they are responsive to advertisements employing a soft sell discourse as it stimulates the emotional aspect of the

individual. Consequently, the memorization of the advertising message is more effective when the content is playful and emotional.

Indeed, 69% of the characteristics spontaneously mentioned by the respondents to describe their expectations towards an advertising message fall under the soft-sell approach. Moreover, 94% of the advertisements remembered by the interview participants are emotional advertisements. From a managerial perspective, this research could contribute to assisting advertising professionals in designing messages that appeal to the French consumer and facilitate persuasion.

One major limitation of this study lies in its qualitative methodology, which has a highly exploratory nature, and its results need confirmation through the implementation of a larger-scale quantitative study.

Furthermore, in order to highlight certain contingent factors that could impact the effectiveness of "soft-sell" and "hard-sell" approaches, such as culture and the values of the individuals interviewed, it is necessary to interview other targets from a different cultural background. It should be noted that the results of this study cannot be generalized since it utilized a limited sample. Moreover, increasing the number of interviewees could enhance the reliability of the obtained results. Similarly, regarding the methodology used, it would be interesting not to limit the study to qualitative research and to continue with quantitative research to validate the findings.

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