

Customers' Opinion About Perceived Threat Aroused Due to Fear Appeal Used in Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Fear appeal is one of the most popular advertisement appeals where marketers convince customers by arousing threat in their mind. The success of fear appeal is directly proportional to the intensity of threat aroused; if the advertiser fails to arouse a significant amount of threat then the fear appeal doesn't affect the buying behavior of customers. Keeping this in mind the current study is aimed to access the perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in sample advertisements. To serve the objectives 3 advertisements of traditional media and 3 advertisements of social media were selected. The population of the study consists of all the customers of Southern Rajasthan, so by using stratified purposive sampling method a sample of 323 customers has been selected. The data was collected with by using questionnaire and collected data was analyzed with the help of mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, one sample t-test and chi-square test. Results highlighted that significant threat has been aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements.

Keywords : Fear Appeal, Social Media, Traditional Media, Advertisement, Perceived Threat

Introduction

A common persuasive communication tactic in commercials is fear appeal, which aims to instill dread or worry in the viewer in order to encourage a particular behavior modification or product acceptance. Fear appeals have the ability to draw people in and inspire action, but they can also have negative effects, such as raising feelings of danger. Here are some key points to consider:

- **Immediate Defensive Reactions:** People may exhibit quick defensive responses, like psychological reactance, avoidance, or denial, when they are afraid. Instead of the intended behavior modification, this could result in the message being rejected.
- **Overwhelming Fear:** People may experience emotional anguish or paralysis if the message's level of dread is too great or overwhelming. In certain situations, the appeal to fear may backfire, and people may stop paying attention to the message or the promoted good.
- **Individual Differences:** Individuals differ in how much fear they can tolerate and how well they can handle it. What inspires one person could seem too menacing to another. Marketers should adjust their fear appeals to the diversity of their target group.
- **Perceived Severity vs. Perceived Susceptibility:** Fear appeals often focus on two key

components: perceived severity (how serious the threat is) and perceived susceptibility (individuals' perceived likelihood of experiencing the threat). The fear appeal might not work if these are overdone or unrelated to the audience.

- **Efficacy Information:** Fear appeals are more effective when they include information about how the recommended action can mitigate the threat. Providing a clear and feasible solution or course of action can enhance the perceived efficacy of the message.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Fear appeals are interpreted differently depending on cultural variables. In one culture, a certain degree of fear may be seen suitable, but it may not be appropriate or successful in another. Marketers must be conscious of cultural quirks and modify their messaging accordingly.
- **Long-Term Effects:** Fear appeals may alter behavior in the near term, but the results may not be consistent over time. When the dread goes away, people could return to their old habits if they do not get continuous support or positive reinforcement.

When using fear appeals into their advertisements, advertisers ought to give serious thought to these aspects. Effective fear-based advertising must strike a balance between instilling a sense of urgency and offering a simple, workable answer. In order to treat the audience with respect and avoid manipulating them unduly, fear appeals should also be used with ethical considerations in mind. Keeping all these things in mind the current paper deals with the customers' opinion about perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements.

Review of Literature

According to Kim Witte (2023), each individual evaluates the components of a message in

connection to his or her prior experiences, culture, and personality traits. As a result, the same fear appeal may elicit various perceptions in different persons, altering future consequences.

Shin (2022) found that the effectiveness of fear appeal messages used to arouse a threat in green advertising. An experiment recruited 175 participants to test the influence of the advertising appeal (fear vs. non-fear appeal), source (for-profit vs. non-profit organizations), and involvement with the environment on attitude toward the ad (Aad), attitude toward the product (Ap) and purchase intention (PI). Results revealed that a fear appeal in a green ad negatively affected Aad and Ap and that participants who were highly involved with the environment were more likely to have positive attitudes toward the green ad and advertised green product as well as a stronger intent to purchase it. The source type in the green ad did not affect ad effectiveness and involvement with the environment did not moderate the effects of either appeal or source.

Suthar (2021) concluded that a campaign's enchantment is its intended audience. Its goal is to use the advertiser to move the target market in the direction of a goal that has been specified. Many different types of commercial communications, such as the promotion of goods, services, social causes, and ideas, frequently use fear appeals. The main message is that "some specific dreadful effects will occur if you don't do this" (purchase, vote, believe, aid, learn, etc.). The dreadful repercussions of not using the product or the horrible consequences of engaging in risky behaviour, in other words, are used by advertisers to arouse fear.

Witte (2020) identified the sources of uncertainty over the employment of fear appeal advertising in social marketing. The first cause is the usage of similar but conceptually distinct concepts, fear and threat, which result in different effects. The

second issue is that little emphasis is placed on understanding individuals' reactions to fear appeals, as well as when and why fear appeals fail and when and why fear appeals work. Furthermore, even when employed for socially beneficial objectives, social threat marketing may be regarded unethical.

Williams (2012) defines fear appeal as demonstrating the risk of utilizing or avoiding a given product, service, or idea. It means that if you do not "buy" a product, a serious (bad) consequence may ensue. Fear appeals accept a threat to a person's well-being that motivates action, such as establishing control over a setting or preventing an undesirable consequence. An appeal to fear can be a story in which someone tries to gain support for a concept by presenting victimization, fraud, or knowledge about potential market injustice.

Objectives

1. To evaluate the customers' opinion about perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements across different media
2. To check differences in perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements with respect to demographic profile of respondents

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements
2. There is no significant difference in perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements with respect to demographic profile of respondents

Research Methodology

Research Design: Descriptive research design has been used to customers' opinion about

perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements across different media

Sampling: The population consists of all the customers of Southern Rajasthan, so by using stratified purposive sampling method a sample of 323 customers has been selected.

Sample Advertisements: Various advertisements containing fear appeal have been telecasted on traditional and social media, but due to time and cost constraints all those advertisements could not be studied, so to be precise total 6 advertisements were selected from traditional media and social media. The selected advertisements are as follows:-

- **Traditional Media :** RR Cable, Patanjali and Smoking Kills commercial
- **Social Media :** Sensodyne, TATA AIG and HDFC

Data Collection Tool: Data from advertisement viewers was collected with the help of questionnaire specially designed to serve the purpose of the study. Cronbach's Alpha was used on the data collected through pilot testing and it was found that questionnaire is reliable to collect data.

Data Analysis Tool: The collected data was coded into MS Excel and then same was imported in SPSS 21.0. To serve the objectives of research mean, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, one sample t-test and chi-square test were used.

Analysis of Data

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The first part of the questionnaire collected information about respondents' demographics, and the data pertaining to same is presented in table 1

- **Gender of Respondents:** It was observed that

in sample majority of respondents (64.09%) were females whereas 35.91% respondents were males.

- **Age of Respondents:** As per the age bifurcation depicted in table 1, majority of Respondents were aged between 20 to 40 years (52.94%) followed by below 20 years (22.29%) and 40 to 60 years (17.96%). Only 6.81% of the Respondents were aged above 60 years.
- **Area of Residence of Respondents:** Almost half of the respondents (49.54%) were residing in urban area whereas rest of the respondents were from semi-urban (26.01%) and rural area (24.46%)

- **Marital Status of Respondents:** It was found that more than half of the respondents (54.49%) were married followed by 29.72% respondents who were unmarried. Rests of the respondents were from divorced (10.53%) and widow (5.26%) category.
- **Occupation of Respondents:** As far as occupation of the respondents is concerned 1/4th of the respondents (25.39%) were private employees and another 1/4th of the respondents (25.08%) were government employees. Remaining 50% of the employees were students, part time employees, housewives and businessman.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	N	Percentage	Occupation	N	Percentage
Male	116	35.91	Government Employee	81	25.08
Female	207	64.09	Private Employee	82	25.39
Total	323	100	Self Employed/Businessman	57	17.65
Age	N	Percentage	Part Time Employee	30	9.29
Below 20 Years	72	22.29	Homemaker	7	2.17
20-40 Years	171	52.94	Student/Unemployed	66	20.43
40-60 Years	58	17.96	Total	323	100
Above 60 Years	22	6.81	Monthly Income	N	Percentage
Total	323	100	Up to Rs. 15000	94	29.10
Area of Residence	N	Percentage	Rs. 15001 to 30000	88	27.24
Urban	160	49.54	Rs. 30001 to 45000	66	20.43
Semi-Urban	84	26.01	More than Rs. 45000	75	23.22
Rural	79	24.46	Total	323	100
Total	323	100	Qualification	N	Percentage
Marital Status	N	Percentage	Higher Secondary	43	13.31
Unmarried	96	29.72	Graduate	71	21.98
Married	176	54.49	Postgraduate	115	35.60
Divorced	34	10.53	Professional	74	22.91
Widow	17	5.26	Others	20	6.19
Total	323	100	Total	323	100

- **Monthly Income of Respondents:** According to results 29.10% respondents were earning less than Rs. 15000 per month, 27.24% respondents indicated monthly income of Rs. 15000 to 30000 and 20.43% respondents reported income of Rs. 30000 to 45000 per month. The remaining respondents indicated income of more than Rs. 45000 per month.
- **Qualification of Respondents:** Data projects that 35.60% were postgraduate followed by 22.91% respondents who were professionally qualified like CA, CS, and PhD etc. It was observed that 21.98% respondents were graduates and 13.31% respondents have taken education up to 12th class only.

Customers' opinion about perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements.

The first objective of this research was to study customers' opinion about perceived threat

aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements. In relation to this respondents were given various statements and they were asked to indicate their agreement with those statements.

Table 2 is showing the count and percentages of agreement level of each statement; further table 3 is presenting the mean, standard deviations and coefficient of variations for each statement. Respondents indicated that advertisements based on fear appeal made them anxious and uneasy because they found these advertisements threatening. Respondents opined that these advertisements specifically made them aware about future threats which stress on avoiding negative consequences. Respondents highlighted that these advertisements arouse fear as they are selling products by emphasizing negative thoughts. In totality it can be said that fear appeal used in advertisements has threaten enough to respondents.

Table 2 : Frequency Distribution of Customers' opinion about perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements

Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	N	%age	N	%age	N	%age	N	%age	N	%age
The advertisements made me anxious	28	8.67	0	0.00	50	15.48	119	36.84	126	39.01
The advertisements made me uneasy	35	10.84	14	4.33	90	27.86	134	41.49	50	15.48
I found these advertisements threatening	28	8.67	21	6.50	37	11.46	125	38.70	112	34.67
These advertisements arouse fear	28	8.67	21	6.50	36	11.15	149	46.13	89	27.55
These advertisements stress on avoiding negative consequences	21	6.50	15	4.64	65	20.12	73	22.60	149	46.13
These advertisements are selling products by emphasizing negative thoughts	21	6.50	21	6.50	36	11.15	172	53.25	73	22.60
These advertisements specifically made me aware about future threats	29	8.98	0	0.00	79	24.46	116	35.91	99	30.65

Table 3: Mean, S.D. and C.V. about Customers' opinion about perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements

Statements	Mean	S.D.	C.V.	Level of Agreement
The advertisements made me anxious	3.98	1.153	0.29	Agree
The advertisements made me uneasy	3.46	1.14	0.33	Agree
I found these advertisements threatening	3.84	1.217	0.32	Agree
These advertisements arouse fear	3.77	1.175	0.31	Agree
These advertisements stress on avoiding negative consequences	3.97	1.199	0.30	Agree
These advertisements are selling products by emphasizing negative thoughts	3.79	1.069	0.28	Agree
These advertisements specifically made me aware about future threats	3.79	1.149	0.30	Agree

Table 4 is depicting the overall perceived threat aroused due to the fear appeal used in advertisements. Majority of respondents (80.50%) indicated that high level of threat was perceived by them due to the fear appeal used in advertisements and the mean score also concluded the same result. However around 1/5th of the respondents (19.50%) have perceived low level of threat or in other words the they felt not significantly threaten by these advertisements.

Although it has been observed that high level of threat has been aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements still to measure significance of

perceived threat, following hypothesis has been taken:-

H_{01} : There is no significant threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements

H_{a1} : There is a significant threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements

To serve this hypothesis one sample t-test was applied as presented in table 5. It can be seen that t-statistic is significant and the value of calculated mean is higher that the theoretical mean so it can be concluded that there is a significant threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements

Table 4: Overall Perceived Threat aroused due to Fear Appeal used in advertisements

Overall Perceived Threat	N	Percentage
Low	63	19.50
High	260	80.50
Total	323	100
Mean Score	26.61	
Result	High	

Table 5 : t-Test results

Variable	Test Value = 21.00				Result
	Mean	t-value	degree of freedom	p-value	
Threat aroused due to fear appeal	26.61	15.521	322	0.000	Significant

Level of Significance=5%

Further to measure impact of respondents' demographics on perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements following hypothesis has been taken:-

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements with respect to demographic profile of respondents.

H_{a2}: There is no significant difference in perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements with respect to demographic

profile of respondents

The table 6 is depicting the chi-square test results to measure impact of demographic variables on perceived threat aroused. The chi-statistic is not significant for gender, occupation and area of residence whereas it is significant for age, marital status, qualification and monthly income of respondents. So it can be concluded that age, marital status, qualification and monthly income of respondents has significant impact on their opinion about perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements.

Table 6 : Chi-Square Test Results

Demographic Profile		Overall Perceived Threat			Chi-Square Value	P-Value	Result
		Low	High	Total			
Gender	Male	28	88	116	2.475	0.116	Not Significant
	Female	35	172	207			
	Total	63	260	323			
Age	Below 20	8	64	72	16.95	0.000	Significant
	20 to 40	35	136	171			
	40 to 60	20	38	58			
	Above 60	0	22	22			
	Total	63	260	323			
Area of Residence	Below 20	33	127	160	5.055	0.08	Not Significant
	20 to 40	21	63	84			
	40 to 60	9	70	79			
	Total	63	260	323			

Marital Status	Unmarried	23	73	96	10.588	0.014	Significant
	Married	38	138	176			
	Divorced	0	34	34			
	Widow	2	15	17			
	Total	63	260	323			
Highest Qualification	Higher Secondary	2	41	43	22.061	0.000	Significant
	Graduate	16	55	71			
	Post Graduate	14	101	115			
	Professional	23	51	74			
	Other	8	12	20			
	Total	63	260	323			
Occupation	Govt. Employee	21	60	81	6.429	0.267	Not Significant
	Pvt. Employee	14	68	82			
	Self Employed	7	50	57			
	Part time Employee	7	23	30			
	Homemaker	0	7	7			
	Student/Unemployed	14	52	66			
	Total	63	260	323			
Monthly Income	Up to Rs 15000	14	80	94	29.211	0.000	Significant
	Rs. 15001 to 30000	28	60	88			
	Rs. 30001 to 45000	0	66	66			
	More than Rs. 45000	21	54	75			
	Total	63	260	323			

Level of Significance=5%

Conclusion

1. The results indicated that significant threat has been aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements.
2. Age, marital status, qualification and monthly income of respondents has significant impact on customers' opinion about perceived threat aroused due to fear appeal used in advertisements.

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