



A Comprehensive Study on the Impact of Emotional Appeals in Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Advertising agencies around the world spend a large part of their time coming up with campaigns for their client brands. Millions of dollars and man-hours are spent in order to come up with one brilliant campaign that will catch the eye of the potential consumer. Although these vast amounts of resources are invested in grabbing eyeballs, it is by no means the end goal of these advertisers. Merely the means to an end, once an advertisement attracts attention it most certainly attempts to invoke emotion and initiate action. What impacts these consumers the most? What elements should an advertiser include in an advertisement to ensure its success? How does an advertiser create maximum impact? While subjective and based on a variety of factors, these questions encourage us to delve deeper into consumer psychology in advertising. A superior understanding of this subject would be helpful for marketers, especially in light of the recently increased need to stand out and get noticed in the current market scenario.

Keywords: Advertising, Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Emotional Appeal, Brand Recall

1. Introduction

Advertising is an age-old practice which has changed form over the years, but it is no secret that the effectiveness of a good advertisement always lies in its content. Traditionally, advertising was radically different from what we see today. The first print ad dates back to 3000 BC in Egypt, and since then has evolved in leaps and bounds to become what we see today. While grabbing the attention of a consumer in today's fast-paced world is a task in itself, the real achievement is engaging them beyond this point. The impact that is created by an advertisement in the first 3-4 seconds after attention is captured is what the consumer will take away from the advertisement and most likely, from the brand as well.

The impact created by an advertisement may result in one of three behaviors. Firstly, the consumer may not be impacted at all and remain indifferent to the advertisement. Secondly, the consumer may be left with a negative impression, which may result in no further action. Or thirdly, the advertisement may leave a lasting positive impression which would extend to brand recall. If an advertisement is powerful enough to cause an individual to recall a particular brand over other competitor brands, then more than half the work is done. When a brand occupies even the smallest of spaces in the subconscious of an individual, the advertisement has been successful in creating impact.

The most effective advertisements create an emotional connection and appeal to consumer sentiment. The closely interrelated relationship of emotions and memory enable viewers to relate to an emotional advertisement on a personal level. Brands like Nike leverage emotional drivers through brand communication to keep their audiences hooked. Alternatively, lighter messages disseminated through humorous advertisements stimulate the audience's minds whilst lowering their defenses, leaving viewers with a satisfied, feel-good aftertaste and a heightened brand information recall. Notably, the utilization of shock in advertisements is a recent phenomenon, leveraged by players such as India Traffic Police, Cancer Society of India, French Connection, etc. Catering to a younger audience less likely to be sensitive to controversial material, the concept has become key in raising awareness at scale. This study seeks to examine the value of emotional appeals in advertising, the findings of which will provide advertisers, marketers and brands deeper insights into consumer behavior.

2. Literature Review

Emotions such as humor, shock or sentiment are popular themes in advertising and marketing communications. Each of these appeals affect the viewers in a different and subjective manner. Various studies have been conducted to understand the effects of these appeals in advertising.

Renáta Machová, Erika Seres Huszárík and Zsuzsanna Tóth, 2015, **The role of shockvertising in the context of various generations.** *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 13(1), 104-112: The study determines that shock advertising turned out to be effective despite the fact that it has been criticized because of its offensive style. Products or issues that require special attention are more likely to be advertised with negative shock rather than with positive. Provocation, which is another form of execution strategy, has been popular recently. Its aim is to shock and gain attention.

Kelly, J.P. and P.J. Solomon, 1975, **Humor in television advertising**. *J. Advert.*, 4: 31-35: The analysis aims to identify the role of humor as a motivational driver in advertising. The study categories humor into broadly seven categories including irony, surprise, misunderstanding, satire, parody, clownish and slapstick humor. The study enumerates the importance of humor in the fields of marketing, communications and psychology.

R.K. Srivastava, 2016, **A Comparative Study of Humor Versus Emotional Advertisements on Consumer Behavior**. *Asian Journal of Marketing*, 10: 8-21: The research undertaken highlights the role of emotional and humorous appeals on viewers, drawing parallels with an increase in brand recall and image, purchase intention and sales. The research concludes that emotion and sentiment emerge as more powerful emotional appeals in driving quantifiable results.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Problem Statement

Humor, emotion and shock are all appeals that are widely used in advertisements. The purpose of undertaking this research is to understand whether the use of such appeals in advertising actually generates quantifiable impact on the minds of the consumers? If so, which of these appeals create the most impact?

3.2 Objectives

- To examine the individual impact of humor, emotion and shock appeals used in advertisements, on consumers.
- To understand the comparative impact of humor, emotion and shock appeals used in advertisements, on consumers
- To identify which emotional appeal creates more impact and subsequent purchasing behavior

3.3 Hypothesis

- *Null Hypothesis (H0)*: There is no significant association between the impact of different types of ad appeals and the preference for a specific type of advertisement.
- *Alternative Hypothesis (H2)*: There is a significant association between the impact of different types of ad appeals and the preference for a specific type of advertisement.

4. Data Methodology

Primary Data

The study comprises 100 respondents from different demographic profiles. They are selected based on convenience sampling and shown various advertisements in the emotional, humorous and shock genres. 100 responses are collected using this form of non-probability sampling. The present sample includes 87% respondents in the younger age group i.e., 15-30 years. 11% respondents lie in the 45-60 age group, and the remaining 2% are aged above 60 years. The sex ratio among the 100 respondents is closely divided with 55 females to 45 males.

- Sample Size = 100 respondents
- Sample Technique = Convenience Sampling; Non-Probability Sampling
- Sample Age = 0-60+ years

Secondary Data

This study uses secondary data sourced from various publications as mentioned below:

- Developing a typology of humor in audiovisual media. *Media Psychol.*, 6: 147-167.
- Humor in television advertising. *J. Advert.*, 4: 31-35.
- A model for predictive measurements of advertising effectiveness. *J. Market.*, 25: 59-62.
- Provocation in advertising: A conceptualization and an empirical assessment, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 14, pp. 177-192.
- Shockvertising - Method or madness, *Abhinav Journal*, 2 (6), pp. 43-46.
- The role of shockvertising in the context of various generations. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 13(1), 104-112
- The communication effects of warmth, eroticism and humor in alcohol advertisements. *J. Market. Commun.*, 2: 247-262

- A Comparative Study of Humor Versus Emotional Advertisements on Consumer Behavior. *Asian Journal of Marketing*, 10: 8-21.

5. Research Design

This research is descriptive and quantitative in nature, with the respondents being asked to fill an online survey. The survey includes 12 questions, 2 of which are related to the demographics of the respondent. The respondents were shown a set of three collective advertisements (one of each kind of appeal) of 'Cadbury Dairy Milk', 'Centerfruit Chewing Gum' and 'Antonio Federici Ice Cream', which were shown to the respondents collectively. (Each of these three advertisements belong to products from the candy/confectionery industry. This is intentional in order to fairly compare the relative impact of each advertisement on a common level.) After viewing the set of advertisements, questions were asked to the respondents to gauge the relative impact of each kind of appeal. The premise is that different appeals have different magnitudes of impact on the viewer of an advertisement. Once the required quantitative data is procured, analysis is done using the technique of Chi-Square (Non-Parametric Test), an aspect of Hypothesis Testing. The study is conducted in Mumbai, a major metropolitan city of India, with a diverse population.

5.1 Limitations of Study

Appeals like emotion, humor and shock are very subjective in nature. The usage of these appeals in advertisements may not affect each respondent in the same way. Hence, the impact created by these appeals may not necessarily be the desired outcome as intended by the advertiser. Apart from the emotional, humorous and shock appeals, there are various other factors which contribute to the impact of an advertisement. Medium of the advertisement, language of delivery, duration of the advertisement, and the actors in the advertisement all contribute differently to the experience of a viewer. Furthermore, earlier studies have indicated that appeal usage in different countries is influenced by regional factors such as level of economic development, advertising expenditure, regulation and culture as well. Hence, we cannot conclusively measure the impact of an advertisement based solely on these appeals.

5.2 Future Scope of Study

Advertising is a billion-dollar industry in India and is growing by the minute. Innovation and creativity is the name of the game in advertising with agencies frequently coming out with brilliant campaigns. This field has a lot of potential for further study and insights:

- A study could be undertaken regarding the impacts of these appeals on the different sexes.
- Each medium of advertising could be compared, with an initiative to find the one that creates the most impact.
- The disadvantages of humor, emotion and shock in advertising could be looked upon.
- People have a tendency to get tired of advertisements, insights could be gathered regarding the optimal time of an advertisement.
- The effect of emotional appeals on brand image could be delved deeper into.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The test done is by Chi-Square method, a part of Hypothesis Testing (Non-Parametric type), to test whether the hypothesis should be accepted or rejected.

- *Null Hypothesis* (H₀): There is no significant association between the impact of different types of ad appeals and the preference for a specific type of advertisement.
- *Alternative Hypothesis* (H₂): The alternative hypothesis would be that there is a significant association between the impact of different types of ad appeals and the preference for a specific type of advertisement.

Data is tested at a 5% level of significance which implies that 5% of the total responses might be wrong or incorrect as the survey could have been filled with biases or inappropriately.

Table 1 – Observed Frequency

Level of Impact	Preferred Type of Advertisement Appeal			Total
	Emotional	Humor	Shock	
Not Impactful	4	1	3	8
Slightly Impactful	9	8	5	22
Neutral	16	4	2	22
Very Impactful	14	7	4	25

Extremely Impactful	13	7	3	23
Total	56	27	17	100

Table 2 – Expected Frequency

Level of Impact	Preferred Type of Advertisement			Total
	Emotional	Humor	Shock	
Not Impactful	4.48	2.16	1.36	8
Slightly Impactful	12.32	5.94	3.74	22
Neutral	12.32	5.94	3.74	22
Very Impactful	14	6.75	4.25	25
Extremely Impactful	12.88	6.21	3.91	23
Total	56	27	17	100

Table 3 – Data Analysis

Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	(O-E) ² /E
4	4.1	0.002
9	7.79	0.188
16	8.61	6.343
14	13.12	0.059
13	7.38	4.280
1	1.2	0.033
8	2.28	14.350
4	2.52	0.869
7	3.84	2.600
7	2.16	10.845
3	4	0.250
5	7.6	0.889
2	8.4	4.876
4	12.8	6.050
3	7.2	2.450
Total		54.086

$$\chi^2 = \sum (O-E)^2 / E = 54.086$$

$$\text{Degree of Freedom} = (\text{Number of Rows} - 1) * (\text{Number of Columns} - 1) = 8$$

$$\text{Ideal Value} = \chi^2_{0.05, 8} = 15.507$$

$$\therefore \chi^2 > \chi^2_{0.05, 8} = 54.086 > 15.507$$

∴ Accept the Hypothesis

Since the derived Chi-Square value is greater than the Ideal value (54.086 > 15.507), we will **reject the null hypothesis**.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant association between the impact of different types of advertisement appeals and the preference for a specific type of advertisement. The individual impact of emotional appeal in advertisements is greater than the impact of shock and humour appeal in advertisement.

7. Findings and Suggestions

7.1 Findings

Emotional appeals in advertisements do **create an impact** on consumers. Advertisements that trigger emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, or fear can have a strong impact on consumers. Emotions create a connection between the product or service and the consumer, and the emotional resonance may increase brand recognition and loyalty. Emotional appeals can also create a sense of urgency in consumers, leading to immediate action. Emotional appeals in advertisements **may or may not lead to purchase behavior**. Although emotional appeals can generate a powerful response from consumers, it is not guaranteed that they will lead to purchase behavior. Consumers may appreciate the emotional appeal but may not necessarily feel compelled to make a purchase. Other factors such as product quality, price, and availability may also influence purchase behavior.

Humorous appeals in advertisements do **create an impact** on consumers. Humor is an effective way to capture a consumer's attention and create a positive association with a brand. Humorous advertisements can be memorable, shareable, and create a positive brand image. Laughter can also trigger the release of endorphins, which can create a positive emotional connection to the product or service. Humorous appeals in advertisements are **very likely to lead to purchase behavior**. Humor can be a powerful motivator for consumers to make a purchase. When consumers associate positive emotions with a product or service, they are more likely to feel inclined to buy it. Humorous advertisements can also create a sense of urgency to buy the product or service, leading to an increase in sales.

Shock appeals in advertisements can have **unexpected impacts** on consumers; either extremely positive or negative. Shock appeals are designed to surprise and evoke strong emotions in consumers, such as fear, disgust, or awe. While these advertisements can create a memorable impact on consumers, the response may not always be predictable. Some consumers may be attracted to the novelty or edginess of the advertisement, while others may be repelled and avoid the product or service. Irrespective of the impact of a shock advertisement being positive or negative, it is able **to convey its desired message successfully**. Shock appeals can be an effective way to convey a message and grab a consumer's attention. Even if the response is negative, the advertisement has created an impact and may have succeeded in getting the message across to the target audience.

Emotional appeals in advertisements create the most impact on consumers, followed by humorous appeals and lastly, shock appeals. While all three types of appeals can be effective, emotional appeals tend to have the strongest impact on consumers. Emotions can create a lasting impression on consumers, and emotional resonance can lead to increased brand recognition and loyalty. **Emotional appeals in advertisements have the most brand recall** by consumers, followed by humorous appeals and lastly, shock appeals. Brand recall is the ability of consumers to remember a brand or product after seeing or hearing an advertisement. Emotional appeals are more likely to be remembered by consumers due to the strong emotional connection created by the advertisement. Humorous and shock appeals may also be memorable, but not to the same extent as emotional appeals. **Emotional appeals in advertisements have the most potential to lead to purchase behavior** by consumers, followed by humorous appeals and lastly, shock appeals. Emotional appeals can create a sense of urgency and connection to the product or service, leading to a higher likelihood of purchase behavior. Humorous appeals can also motivate consumers to make a purchase, while shock appeals may not have the same impact on purchase behavior.

7.2 Suggestions

Emotional appeals can successfully be used in advertisements **targeting all age groups**. Emotional appeals can be effective in reaching and resonating with all age groups, as emotions are universal. However, the emotions evoked and the approach used may differ based on the age group targeted. Advertisements targeting children may use simple, relatable emotions like happiness or excitement, while those targeting adults may use more complex emotions like nostalgia or empathy. Use emotional appeals while **promoting products or services which are special or hold value** to consumers. Emotional appeals can be particularly effective when promoting products or services that hold a special value or emotional connection for consumers, such as jewellery, a vehicle, real estate, a holiday experience, or even certain food products. Advertisements that tap into the emotional resonance of these products or services can create a stronger connection with the consumer, leading to increased engagement and purchase behavior. Emotional appeals **work better in slightly longer online advertisements**. Emotional appeals require more time to develop a connection with the audience. Longer online advertisements can provide the necessary space for advertisers to create a storyline and effectively convey the message to the audience. Furthermore, online platforms such as YouTube allow for longer advertisements to be played before videos, which provides an opportunity for advertisers to create more emotional appeals.

Humorous appeals in advertisements should be used while **targeting younger age groups**, who are likely to accept the message more easily than older age groups. Humor can be an effective tool for capturing the attention of younger audiences, who tend to have shorter attention spans and may be more receptive to playful, light-hearted messages. However, the humor should be carefully crafted to avoid being offensive or inappropriate, and should be in line with the values and attitudes of the target demographic. Humorous appeals are **best used for FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) products**. Fast-moving consumer goods are products that are consumed or used frequently and have a low cost per unit, such as snack foods, toiletries, and household items. These products typically have short purchase decision-making processes, and humor can be an effective way to capture the attention of consumers and create a positive brand image. Humorous appeals including sarcasm **work best for social media campaigns**. Social media platforms are often used

for entertainment and leisure purposes. This means that audiences are more likely to engage with content that is light-hearted and amusing, and sarcasm can be a useful tool in achieving this. Additionally, social media campaigns are typically short and to the point, making humorous appeals a good fit.

Shock appeals in advertising can be effectively used when it is **necessary to catch the eye of the consumer** and startle them into accepting the message of the advertisement. Shock appeals can be effective in breaking through the clutter of advertisements and grabbing the attention of the consumer. However, the use of shock appeals should be carefully considered, as it may alienate some consumers and create a negative brand image. The message should be conveyed clearly and the shock appeal should be relevant to the product or service being advertised. Shock appeals can be used effectively to **promote social causes/ public service announcements** such as anti-smoking advertisements in large enclosed spaces for maximum impact. Shock appeals can be an effective tool for creating awareness and driving behavior change around social causes and public service announcements. Advertisements targeting these issues should be crafted with sensitivity and relevance, and the shock appeal should be aligned with the message. Shock appeals can be used well to **promote products when taking advantage of surrounding controversy**. Controversy can create a heightened level of attention and engagement around a particular issue or topic. Advertisements that take advantage of the surrounding controversy can create impact and drive conversations around the product or service being advertised. However, advertisers should be cautious about crossing ethical or moral boundaries and ensure that the message is relevant and appropriate.

Duration of an advertisement should be kept shorter for maximum impact. Research has shown that shorter advertisements tend to have higher levels of engagement and recall compared to longer advertisements. Consumers have shorter attention spans and are likely to lose interest if the advertisement is too long. Therefore, advertisers should aim to convey the message in a concise and impactful manner within a short duration. The **choice of actors in an advertisement can impact the emotional resonance and relatability** of the message being conveyed. Actors used in the advertisement must be chosen carefully to resonate with the target demographic. Advertisers should consider the target demographic and choose actors who are relatable and representative of the target audience. This can create a stronger connection with the consumer and increase the likelihood of engagement and purchase behavior. The use of emotional appeals and humorous appeals in advertising requires careful **consideration of the target audience, the platform on which the advertisement will be displayed, and the product or service being advertised**. By understanding the preferences and behaviors of the target audience, advertisers can create effective emotional and humorous appeals that resonate with their intended viewers.

8. Conclusion

Humor, emotion and shock are great tools to use in advertising and each of them have strong benefits which allow viewers to remember the advertisement for a longer period of time. Emotion makes the consumer vulnerable and more likely to relate to the brand and remember it. If an advertisement can make a person feel things, it can also make them buy things. Humor brings out the light-hearted side of any consumer and may leave them feeling amused. The ability of an advertisement to elicit even a smile, if not a laugh, can go a long way in creating brand recall. The element of shock is perhaps the most underestimated weapon an advertiser can use. If he can startle a consumer into accepting the message of the advertisement in this chaotic world where brands constantly compete for attention, then that's half the job done. While each of these appeals can lead to advertising success, they must be used carefully. The use of shock while promoting a controversial topic or the use of humor in a delicate situation can backfire very quickly. Emotion, if used more than needed, may not have the desired effect. The brand must be in touch with their product positioning and target market in order to advertise impactfully.

Cadbury Dairy Milk has always been ahead of its times with its campaign illustrations and unforgettable taglines that continue to strike a chord with the consumers, even today. The **'Kuch Meetha Ho Jaaye' Campaign** (*Advertisement 1* shown to respondents, representing **'Emotional Appeal'**) follows the life of an everyday Indian consumer, tying in Cadbury with occasions such as post-dinner dessert, successful exam results to celebrating friendships. The campaign is centered around age-old Indian traditions such as eating sweets on important events. While it contains a strong element of culture and traditions, it ensures to feature and resonate with individuals across age groups. The campaign aimed to highlight the values of celebrating something new or important every single day. The campaigns were very effective as they resonated deeply with the sentiments of the viewers.

Credited to bringing out one of the more successful humorous advertisements, **Center Fruit Chewing Gum** is positioned on irresistibility and has been making tongues wag for over 4 years now with a plethora of flavors, and a signature goopy center mouthfeel. A notable advertisement titled **'Jugalbandi'** (*Advertisement 2* shown to respondents, representing **'Humorous Appeal'**) highlights the presence of Center Fruit amongst a singing battle between a table player and a classical singer. With both parties trying to win, the singer's supporters decide to distract him by showing him a huge poster of Center Fruit gum, setting his tongue wagging and resulting in his victory. Commenting on the campaign, Abhijit Awasthi, national creative director, Ogilvy & Mather said, "We've been working on the kaisi jeebh lapalayee platform for quite a while and they've been working well for us. The basic thought was to extend it further and present it in a manner that makes it more interesting and appealing to the masses. That is how we created the idea for the 'Jugalbandi' campaign."

An example of one of the most controversial shock advertisements, an ice cream company **'Antonio Federici'** banned from using an **advertisement showing a pregnant nun** (*Advertisement 3* shown to respondents, representing **'Shock Appeal'**). The company has a history of using shock appeal for stimulating conversation and brand awareness through its advertisements- all playing along the lines of sin, temptation and religious imagery. The advertisement campaign was launched in UK prior to the Pope's London visit, and was banned subsequently. The advertisement, which appeared in *The Lady* and *Grazia* magazines in UK in 2010, showed the heavily pregnant nun standing in a church with an ice cream tub with the advertisement copy stating "Immaculately conceived" and "Ice cream is our religion". According to company representatives, the concept represented the innovation and

continual development of the brand, whilst utilizing strong feelings to drive brand awareness. The utilization of satire and heavy hypocrisy of religion and religious concepts aimed to appeal to a youthful audience and generate a sensational product appeal.

This research concludes that the use of emotional appeals such as sentiment, humor and shock are effective in advertising in terms of brand impact, advertisement recall and inducing purchasing behavior amongst consumers. Framing an answer to the questions put forth initially, the researcher would venture to say, yes, each of the appeals: humor, emotion and shock do create an impact on consumers, with emotion creating the most impact comparatively.

Appendix A

Featured Advertisements

- **Emotional Appeal Advertisement** (Cadbury Dairy Milk 'Shubh Aarambh- Child's Play'): <https://youtu.be/rFq7M1vUIgU?feature=shared>
- **Humorous Appeal Advertisement** (Center Fruit Gum 'Jugalbandi'): <https://youtu.be/fJytPAMs2U4?feature=shared>
- **Shock Appeal Advertisement** (Antonio Federici Ice Cream 'Conception'): <https://static.independent.co.uk/s3fs-public/thumbnails/image/2010/09/15/09/453342.jpg>

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