

ADVERTISING MESSAGES – BEFORE AND AFTER COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Each period of time imposes the need for companies to use specific advertising messages. Advertising messages that aim to reach the consumer can be emotional, rational and moral. According to experts, the most influential are the positive emotional messages. Positive emotions, such as happiness, joy, pride, beauty, pleasure, youth, family, love, etc. have a strong impact on consumer decision-making and actions. If rational messages act on the conscious level of consumers and point to the functionality and benefits of products and services, emotional messages reach consumers more deeply, on an unconscious level. Moral advertising requires consumers to act in order to contribute to the common good. The question that is elaborated in this paper is whether it is better and more effective for companies to use rational or emotional messages during a pandemic, as well as how the pandemic changed advertising messages. So far, a small number of expert views, papers, and analyzes have been published on this topic, but they all indicate that in times of crisis and pandemics, people are more sensitive to emotional advertising messages. In time of pandemic, people are more influenced by positive, but also negative emotional messages, such as nurturance, affiliation, sorrow, nostalgia, excitement, fear, security, etc. The paper attempts to summarize several empirical studies by recognized well-known marketing agencies and marketing experts on this topic and to analyze them and draw appropriate conclusions.

KEYWORDS

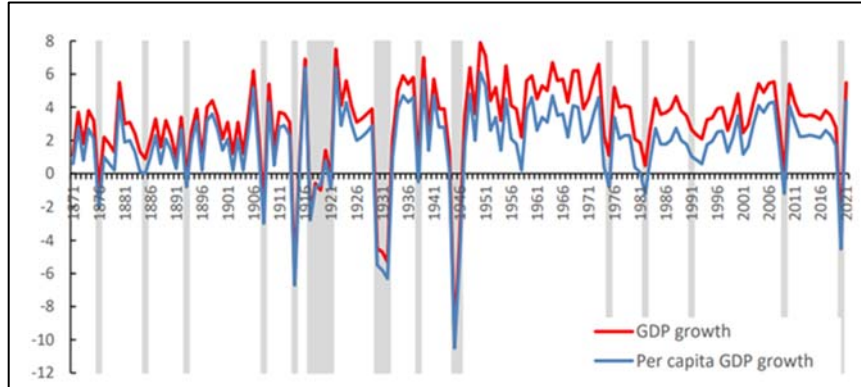
Advertising, advertising messages, emotional messages, rational messages, moral messages, consumer behavior, pandemic advertising

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES M31, M37, M39

1. INTRODUCTION

June 2022. It is hard to believe that the great pandemic Covid-19 that terrorized mankind in the previous 1.5 years is coming to an end. It is hard to believe that people all over the world are slowly coming out of that strong agony. The pandemic has shown the weaknesses and imperfections of globalization, open borders, market economies, free movement of people, goods, capital and services. The states (governments) were again called upon to protect the population, that lived almost two years in constant panic, fear and uncertainty. The most frightening part of the pandemic was the rapid loss of human life due to respiratory problems. Family members, friends, known and unknown people simply disappeared overnight. According to the WHO, the total number of deaths associated with Covid-19 worldwide from 2020-2021 is closer to 14.9 million. (World Health Organization, 2022)

Figure 1: Global GDP growth in a historical perspective



Source: Yeyati Eduardo Levy, Federico Filippini, (2021),” Social and economic impact of COVID-19”, Brookings Global Working Paper #158, Global Economy and Development program at Brookings, www.brookings.edu/global

On Figure 1, Global GDP growth in historical perspective is shown, where the shaded areas are showing global crisis. According to the IMF, and as it can be seen from the Figure, this pandemic is considered to be the second largest crisis in the world, after the World War II. It hit all the economies in the world, both developed and developing ones.

Figure 2: The most emotionally engaging Coronavirus campaigns

Rank	Territory tested	Campaign	EMO Index (% above regional norm)
1.	Japan	Google: "Thank You"	+214%
2.	Singapore	Gov.sg: "Together, We Can"	+124%
3.	Australia	Tourism Australia: "With Love From Aus"	+122%
4.	UK	ITV: "Apart. But Never Alone"	+101%
5.	UK	NHS: "Stay At Home"	+99%
6.	Singapore	Air Asia: "Keep Fighting, China"	+92%
7.	US	Google: "Thank You Healthcare Workers"	+91%
=8.	Singapore	Prudential: "Together, Let's #DOGOOD"	+86%
=8.	UK	Jack Daniels: "With Love, Jack"	+86%
10.	Singapore	Colgate: "Our Smiles Keep Us Together"	+77%
11.	UK	Dove: "Courage is Beautiful"	+72%
12.	US	Oreo: "Stay Playful"	+70%
13.	Australia	Coles: "Thank You"	+67%
14.	UK	Facebook: "Never Lost"	+65%
15.	UK	EE: "A Message For NHS Workers"	+64%
16.	UK	Nike: "You Can't Stop Us"	+55%
17.	US	Budweiser: "One Team"	+54%
18.	US	Nike: "You Can't Stop Us"	+53%
19.	US	Walmart: "Heroes"	+49%
20.	Germany	BfG: "Danke für Ihre Unterstützung"	+48%

Source: Unruly blog, 2020, <https://unruly.co/blog/article/2020/06/25/the-brands-whose-covid-19-ads-generated-the-most-positivity-around-the-world/>

However, all economic sectors were differently influenced by Covid-19. The industries that were worst affected by the Covid-19 and on the brink of extinction were leisure and hospitality, wholesale and retail trade, education and health services, government workers and manufacturing, professional and business services (Statista, 2020). On the other side, there were some industries that even made huge profits during the pandemic, such as pharmaceutical, software and services, food, beverages and tobacco industry, healthcare products, household and personal products, media and entertainment (OECD, 2021).

Covid-19 has brought big changes to people as consumers. According to the government's constant warnings and instructions, people couldn't move freely, lived in isolation, kept the social distance, wore masks and under the pressure they changed their buying habits. Their way out was being the increasing use of digital tools for communication and the purchase of products and services. Covid-19 has accelerated the employment of technology in

all aspects of consumers' lives. If the previous Industrial revolutions happened every 40-50 years, this Revolution, the digital one, happened in a short time. Both companies and consumers have switched from the traditional to the digital way of working and communicating almost overnight.

The most famous and encouraging message from the time of the pandemic is the one of Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres: "We are in this together and we will get through this, together". This message will be the leitmotif for the companies that will use it in their promotional campaigns.

On Figure 2, the most emotionally engaging Coronavirus campaigns are shown. As it can be seen the best advertising campaigns use the messages of solidarity, unity, affiliation, encouragement, care for the health of loved ones, nurturance, love, sympathy, i.e. emotionally positive advertising appeals. However, marketing experts are still divided on whether it is better and more effective to use rational, moral or emotional messages in times of pandemic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertising message is an idea that an advertiser wants to communicate to their target audience with a goal to inform, persuade and remind people to perform a certain action (buying the product). The central part of the advertising message is an advertising appeal that attracts the consumers' attention and influence their feelings towards a product or service. To make the audience receive a necessary message, advertisers have to put some driving power into the message. This driving power is appeal. Every advertising appeal represents an attraction, which arouses consumers' desires (Kotler, 2003). Advertising appeals are communication strategies that marketing and advertising professionals use to grab attention and persuade people to buy or act. Advertising appeals aim to influence the way consumers view themselves and how buying certain products can prove to be beneficial for them (IGI Global Dictionary).

The number of types of advertising appeals in different theoretical marketing texts varies from two to 25. But there are basically two types of advertising appeals, those based on ratio (rational messages) and those based on emotions (emotional messages). Some authors claim that these two basic advertising appeals are accompanied by the third important advertising appeal – moral one. Rational, emotional and moral appeals can have different influences on the consumers' attitude toward the advertisement, brand and purchase intentions.

Rational advertising messages encourage consumers to buy products and services because of their functionality, quality, benefits and performance. They are messages on a conscious level and rely on the logic and reason of consumers. The content of these messages emphasizes facts, statistics, learning, general data and information which describe the reason for the purchase. Rational appeals are also called informative or logical appeals, since advertisers use them in order to represent rational reasons for purchasing an advertised product (Sharma and Singh, 2006). According to the Keshari and Jain (2014) "if the advertisement contains one of these information cues: price of the product or service, quality, function, material, purchasing time and place, any research data about the product, packaging can be considered as rational appeals. Marketing experts believe that rational appeals are used more in B2B transactions, and in B2C transactions only when it comes to buying expensive products, technical products, IT products, household machines, and equipment, as well as when buying products and services that require higher consumer involvement. The downside of rational appeals is that they can be annoying, dull, tedious for consumers, technical, and uninteresting so they do not attract attention.

According to Kotler (2003), "emotional appeals attempt to stir up either negative or positive emotions that can motivate purchase. These include fear, guilt and shame appeals that get people to do things they should or stop doing things they shouldn't ...or communicators also use positive emotional appeals such as love, humor, pride and joy". According to Davies (1993), the aim of emotional appeal is to encourage consumers to get a positive reward or to avoid punishment, thus emotional appeals used in advertising can be classified into positive and negative. Positive and negative emotional appeals are considered to be more effective in B2C transactions, i.e. in the purchase of everyday products, clothing and footwear, cosmetics and hygiene products, and products that require lower consumer involvement. Emotional appeals help to reach the audience on a different, psychological, unconscious level. The downside of emotional messages is that they can be manipulative, and to, especially, the young population they can provoke health disorders such as depression, anorexia and bulimia, poor diet, and low self-esteem (for example, beauty as a positive emotional appeal). Also, different emotional messages are interpreted differently by individuals, regions, countries or cultures.

An appeal in an advertisement that is directed to the audience's sense of what is right and proper is called moral appeal. (Oxford dictionary). These are often used to exhort people to support social and ethical causes. Types of moral appeals are social awakening and justice, cleaner and safe environment, equal rights for women, prohibition of drugs and intoxication, adult literacy, fight against rare diseases, anti-smuggling and hoarding, protection of consumer rights and awakening, etc. Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999) provide a possible classification of advertising appeals, given in the figure below.

Figure 3: Classification of advertising appeals

Rational appeals	Emotional appeals	
Effectiveness	Exclusivity	Popularity
Convenience	True to tradition	Magic
Cheapness	Pleasure	Relaxation
Naturalness	Youth	Maturity
Sophistication	Modesty	Morality
Productivity	Openness	Humility
Obedience	Adventure	Fragility
Independence	Freedom	Indomitable
Health	Abjection	Carelessness
Longevity	Status	Sexuality
Modernity	Upholding	Protection
Use of technologies	Family	Membership
Safety	Beauty	Assistance
Cleanliness	Intimacy	Sociality

Source: Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999)

This theoretical framework for classifying advertising appeals is not comprehensive and exhaustive, but it does show that emotional appeals outnumber rational appeals. The economic literature does not precisely define which appeals should be used for better, more effective and more useful advertising of products.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

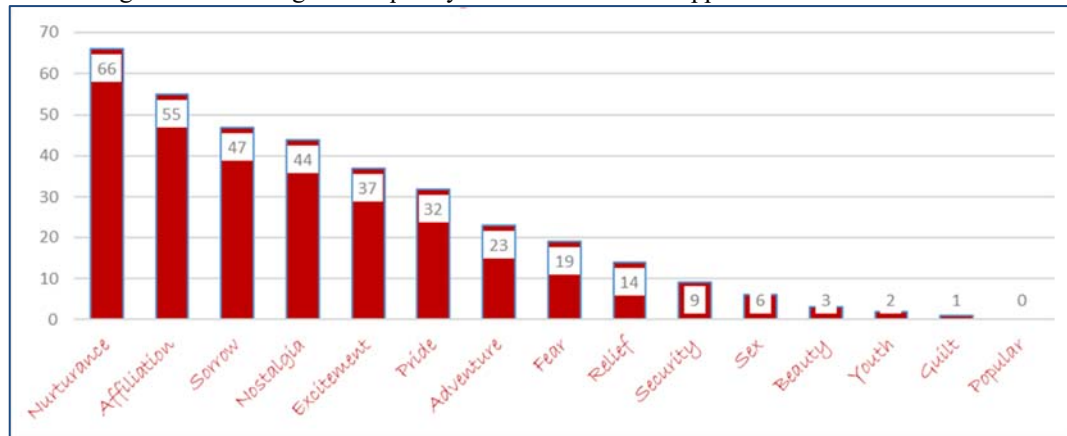
Recent research has been used for this paper, especially on the use of advertising appeals during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper is rich in secondary data, by explaining researches that have already been done for other purposes. However, it is interesting to note that different researches, to some extent, due to the different methodologies used, come to confusing, completely different findings. Hence, it can be concluded that this topic is not sufficiently developed and theoretically supported.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The first finding to be elaborated on in this paper was Mensa's research, based on a sample from the digital archive “Ads of the World”. (Mensa, M. & Vargas-Bianchi, L., 2020) They analyzed 376 Covid-19 advertisements, out of which 208 contained at least one emotional appeal. Most of them used positive appeals (72%), a smaller number (21%) used a mixture of positive and negative emotional appeals, and only 7% used only negative emotional appeals. Appeals with the highest frequency were nurturance, affiliation, sorrow, nostalgia, excitement, and pride.

During Covid-19, according to the research (see Figure 4), the preferred combinations were nurturance and affiliation (featured in 36 concurrent opportunities); sorrow–nostalgia (17 opportunities); nurturance–pride (16 opportunities); nurturance–nostalgia, and nurturance–sorrow, and fear–sorrow (14 opportunities); nostalgia–affiliation (12 opportunities). The findings show an increase in the usage of emotional appeals (positive ones) since the beginning of the outbreak.

Figure 4. Percentage of frequency of use of emotional appeals in advertisements



Source: Mensa, M. & Vargas-Bianchi, L. (2020) “Nurtured and sorrowful: Positive and negative emotional appeals in COVID-19 themed brand communications”, Instituto de Comunicación Social, Universidad Austral de Chile, p.7

According to the research of Long-Yi Lin (2011), which encompasses 450 questionnaires with an effective return rate of 91%, rational advertisements have a more positive effect on consumers during the pandemic than emotional appeals. The research reveals that rational advertisement has an important impact on consumers’ decision-making process for purchase.

According to the research of Bi Yang et al. made on a sample of 188 people, the congruence between the rational and emotional appeals was important for the purchase decision during the outbreak.

5. CONCLUSION

What can be concluded is that different researches, which cover different locations, demographic characteristics of the respondents give different, but also confusing results. According to some extensive research, during the pandemic emotional messages are more important, and according to others rational messages, given that health is a rational appeal. Some research, however, shows that mixes of rational and emotional messages are most effective. This is due to the small number of researches and theoretical support on this topic. In the future, we can expect more research that will be the basis for building theoretically sound opinions and views on the impact of rational, emotional, and moral messages on consumer behavior during and after the global crisis.

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