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Fear Appeals & Gambling – Gloucester Room

I HAVE TO WANT TO DO IT: GAINING 'VOLUNTARY' COMPLIANCE WITH FEAR, GUILT, AND SHAME APPEALS IN SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

ABSTRACT

This paper presents results from a qualitative study of income support recipients with regard to how they feel about advertising which overtly appeals to their sense of fear, guilt and shame. The motivation of the study was to provide formative research for a social marketing campaign designed to increase compliance with income reporting requirements. This study shows that negative appeals with this group of people are more likely to invoke self-protection and inaction rather than an active response such as volunteering to comply. Social marketers need to consider the use fear, guilt and shame to gain voluntary compliance as the study suggests that there has been an overuse of these negative appeals. While more formative research is required, the future research direction aim would be to develop an instrument to measure the impact of shame on pro-social decision-making; particularly in the context of social networks rather than the wider society

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BACKGROUND

Social marketing is used by many not for profit and government organisations to encourage behaviours which, while socially important, might not be germane to the personal motivations of the individual. This study was undertaken to assess the potential value of three common social marketing appeals – fear, guilt, and shame – in terms of their capacity to induce compliant behaviours. The context of the study was income support recipients who often need to comply with reporting of extra income. The research took place prior to the development of campaign material relating to compliance and was used to formulate the campaign strategy.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain which of the appeals might have the greater propensity to motivate such people to behave in a particular way; in this case, to adopt compliant behaviour. Whilst accepting that emotional situations are often imperfectly recalled, the research was designed to elicit people's recollections of campaigns that they believed were influential in motivating their personal behaviour(s) over time. The purpose was to ascertain if some emotional responses were more memorable or enduring than others and if people could associate self-reported memories of emotional response with subsequent 'compliant' outcomes (behavioural or otherwise). As a consequence, a qualitative study was conducted; primarily because the experimental designs usually associated with fear research do not allow for a retrospective consideration of people's responses.

The link between emotional arousal, attitude formation and behavioural compliance is still theoretically problematic with only tentative links drawn between attitudes and intent, and some still ambiguous findings relating to intent and eventual behaviour. Notwithstanding these difficulties, social marketing campaigns often use emotional appeals in an attempt to encourage compliant behaviour from the public.

Huhmann and Brotherton (1997) found that guilt appeals are as pervasive as fear appeals in the field of advertising. Others have found that guilt appeals are very effective under certain (but different) circumstances (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2004). There are many studies about guilt and its self-persuasive effects (Abe 2004; Huhmann and Brotherton 1997). However, it would seem that the relationship between guilt and fear may be studied at the expense of other negative emotions such as shame. Abe's (2004) research does connect guilt and shame although not in relation to advertising appeals. Abe's findings also showed that shame was more likely to elicit negative behaviours than guilt. In a further study of guilt, Bennett (1998) found that certain communications that are intended to invoke guilt might produce shameful responses among its target audience, and this ultimately results in negative consequences. Bennett found that guilt appeals are generally more likely to result in positive responses to advertisements and empathy. Conversely, shame appeals are unlikely to result in empathy and instead, they are more likely to result in negative attitudes. In order for a guilt appeal to be effective, Bennett advocates that potential shame-inducing properties need to be eliminated. Bennett's study did not find a correlation between guilt-intensive communications and psychological resistance, but other studies find that the degree of guilt evoked by an

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advertisement campaign could lead to anger and negative attitudes towards the corporate sponsor (Coulter and Pinto 1995; Cotte et al 2004).

How income support recipients react to the use of negative emotions such as fear, guilt, and shame in socially focussed communications is presented below.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were collected from 120 participants through a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews regarding their attitudes towards appeals in advertising and their self-reported emotional responses to these appeals. In 2006, there were almost three million Australians who receive welfare assistance, and 1.2 million of these people agreed to be researched when they signed for their benefits. From this pool of potential research participants, 270 people were initially contacted about the study by telephone, and 120 people agreed to be interviewed. The profile of those who agreed to participate is representative of the population of income support recipients.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participants were asked how they felt about negative appeals in advertising, whether or not they recognised such appeals and if they felt they had responded behaviourally to any appeals which had been made. Participants were not prompted to discuss particular campaigns and independently nominated what they wanted to discuss.

Of the negative emotions discussed, the participants were more likely to accurately recall advertisements that used fear as a major appeal, especially a fear of personal consequences, fear for others and fear of loss. As the participants described it, fear appeals in social marketing campaigns encouraged people to comply with rules and acceptable behaviour by scaring them about the potential legal, health and social risks associated with illegal, unhealthy or antisocial behaviour. Fear was seen as an unhealthy reaction to advertising and something to be avoided.

The participants defined shame as an emotion that individuals experience when other people who are significant to them become aware of their socially unacceptable behaviour. As they saw it, individuals do not feel ashamed unless they care what others think about them. The closer you are to the people who see your shame, the more likely you are to feel shame if you do something against the reference groups' principles. Shame appeals were generally thought of in a negative light and as an ineffective method for motivating people to do the right thing. They did not believe that shame appeals evoke the same 'escape' reaction as marketing messages that use fear appeals, but the consequences of public shaming were seen to be unacceptable.

The participants described feeling saturated by negative emotional appeals. Many felt that even when they take notice of marketing campaigns, they would 'switch off' from the message because of the negativity depicted within the message and any subsequent call to action. Advertising that was designed to generate voluntary compliance, therefore, had great obstacles in reaching their target audience, especially in regards to overcoming apathy. This study found that positive emotion appeals in social marketing campaigns had a greater potential to not only 'get people talking' about an advertisement (as was the case with the fear appeals), but also in motivating people to act upon the call for voluntary 'compliance'.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the use of fear, guilt and shame in a qualitative sense. While there is a significant amount of research supporting theory development in the fear and guilt domain, these results show that a theory of shame in advertising is under developed. Future research could investigate concepts of shame and how it might be usefully deployed within 'normal' populations. Any future affective typologies could include the concept of shame. While more formative research is required, the future research direction aim would be to develop an instrument to measure the impact of shame on pro-social decision-making; particularly in the context of social networks rather than the wider society.

The use of fear appeals has been demonstrably successful in other studies. However, the sheer number of emotive messages being sent limits the emotional energy able to be invested by an individual. In this sample, the emotional energy required to feel fearful or guilty is already attenuated. While there is a focus on television advertising in these responses, the most enduring campaigns in this study are those that have been integrated across a variety of media. Negative campaigns aimed at generating enduring behavioural change need to consider that people develop very sophisticated (but maladaptive) coping strategies to ensure that their core emotional and psychological well being is not influenced. As a consequence, advertisers could embed suggested coping strategies within the advertising that linked the desired behavioural outcome to socially positive consequences.

Guilt can be motivating but only when accompanied by some hope that individual action is both needed and capable of making the requisite social change. The participants in this study were overwhelmed by guilt, and messages invoking guilt were likely to invoke self-protection rather than encourage action. This study shows that for social marketing to be successful, the size and scope of the problem people are being called upon to resolve with their actions must also be within the capacity of individual achievement. Much advertising, in

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delineating the international or global scope of the problem(s), decreases the self-efficacy of the individual and therefore decreases the likelihood of action. Furthermore, the indiscriminate use of negative appeals by many marketers in the social and consumer domains is resulting in emotional 'burn out' and therefore a decreased likelihood of acceptance of any messages – even the important ones.

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The Use of Fear Appeals in Social Marketing: Analysing the Influence of Racial Characteristics on Attitude Formation in HIV/AIDS Communication

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1. Introduction

Social marketing programmes address various pandemics, and anti-social behaviour, where citizens are not acting in-line with accepted social conduct. The use of fear as a motivation in advertising places emphasis on the severity of the threat. In South Africa, specific research to guide marketing managers in social-issue related communication remains under explored. South Africa's population is characterised by different racial groups, and advertising is often targeted at fairly heterogeneous groups.

This study investigates whether the use of fear increases the likelihood of adopting appropriate behaviour and if different racial groups perceive fear appeals pertaining to HIV/AIDS communication differently. The role of fear, attitude, threat and efficacy are examined to ascertain the influence of different levels of fear appeals. The findings of this paper indicate differences among racial groups pertaining to levels of fear and attitude towards advertisements, as well as differences in threat and efficacy experienced after exposure to high fear appeals compared to other appeals.

Keywords: Social Marketing, Marketing Communication, Advertising, Fear Appeals

2. Literature Review

Fear is a negative emotion and is associated with a high level of arousal. It is caused by a threat that is perceived to be substantial and personally relevant to individuals (Easterling & Leventhal, 1989; Ortony & Turner, 1990). Fear appeal literature indicate that fear can be described by mood adjectives, including feeling frightened, anxious, or nauseous, and also via ratings of concern or worry (LaTour & Tanner, 2003; LaTour & Rotfeld, 1997; Henthorne, LaTour & Nataraajan, 1993; Rogers, 1983).

Different models to improve the effectiveness of fear appeals in advertising have been proposed. Tay, Ozanne and Santiono (2000: 1248) recommend the utilisation of fear appeals should be segment specific as fear appeals have been found to influence different population segments differently (Quinn et al., 1992; Burnett and Oliver, 1979 cited in Tay et al, 2000, p. 1248).

Growing evidence suggests that well-designed, well-targeted, theory-based behaviour change interventions can be effective in reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS (Fishbein, 2000). Culturally sensitive interventions have also been found to influence behaviour changes in high-risk populations (Levinson, Sadigursky & Erchak, 2004).

Based on Leventhal's danger control/fear control framework, the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM) is an expansion of previous fear appeal theoretical approaches (Janis, 1967; Leventhal, 1970; Rogers, 1975, 1983). According to the EPPM threat motivates action, and perceived efficacy determines whether the action taken controls the danger (protective behaviour) or controls the fear (inhibits protective behaviour). Individuals typically weigh their risk of actually experiencing the threat against actions they can take that would minimise or prevent the threat (Witte, 1992, Witte, 1994, Witte, 1998).

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