

MASTER'S THESIS

Responsiveness to affective appeals in public service advertising: the moderating and mediating roles of gender, age, and ad-evoked emotions

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**Responsiveness to Affective Appeals in Public Service Advertising:
The Moderating and Mediating Roles of Gender, Age,
and Ad-evoked Emotions**

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the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

Public Service Advertisement (PSA), which is an essential element of social marketing, plays an important role in the economy (Kolter, 1989). Despite its contribution to economy, there are only a few theories explaining the functions of PSAs. How do PSAs persuade people to act? What is the function of ad-evoked emotions in PSAs? Are there any differences between gender and age in relation to donation behavior after the public being exposed to PSAs? Besides demographic variables, how does the individual difference in emotional responsiveness influence the effectiveness of PSAs? These are the questions which this study attempts to answer.

In this study, the effectiveness of two most common affective appeals (*starving-baby appeal* and *happy-baby appeal*) and the rational appeal were examined. 385 subjects, grouped into 24 sessions, were invited to participate in an experiment consisting of two phases. In phase I, the subjects were asked to complete the Affect Intensity Measurement (AIM) scale. In phase II, the subjects were requested to watch one of three selected PSAs. Their ad-evoked emotions and the willingness to help were recorded and analyzed. The findings of the experiment showed that *starving-baby appeal* is more effective in persuading the students to make donation than the others.

The second objective of this study is to investigate whether there are any interactions between gender, age and ad conditions on the ad-evoked emotions and donating intention. Besides, the interaction between the individual differences in Affect Intensity (AI) and ad conditions on the advertising effectiveness was also investigated. The findings show that gender and age can moderate ad conditions on ad-evoked emotions and willingness to donate, while AIM cannot.

The third objective of this study is to investigate the role of ad-evoked emotion on the persuasion. Tested by a series of regression tests, the mediating role of ad-evoked emotions on the advertising effectiveness is confirmed.

This study confirms our hypotheses that age and gender moderate the effects of different advertising appeals on emotions and the willingness to help. Furthermore, ad-evoked emotions are found to mediate the intention effects of advertising appeals, gender and age on the willingness to help. The theoretical contributions and practical implications to social marketing and PSAs are discussed.

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