

USE OF GUILT APPEALS IN NPO CAMPAIGNS AND ITS ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Negative appeals and specially guilt appeals are quite common in non-profit advertisement as a persuasion technique to increase donations for their causes. However, these messages might not always be effective and even though it is widely known that guilt might lead people to donate more or engage into prosocial behaviour, the effects of guilt might be damaging for the public and for the brand (Graton & Mailliez, 2019). In this article we review the use of guilt in non-profit organizations advertising and how evoking these emotions and the over exposure to these emotions might be consider unethical, since they might increase distress and general discomfort in the public. For which, we advise marketers and advertisers to use these appeals with caution and consideration towards the donors.

KEYWORDS: Ethics, Non-Profit Organizations, Advertising, Negative valence image, Guilt.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is well known that Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs) use emotional images to persuade people to donate to their cause. One of the most common ways for NPO's to promote their cause is by employing emotional appeals in their advertising (Septianto & Tjiptono, 2019). Since NPO advertising tries to touch the desire of people of helping those less fortunate, this type of sector tend to use affective effect in their advertisings. It is widely recognized that emotional appeals are very effective tools for persuasion (Burt & Strongman, 2005; Bagozzi & Moore, 2006; Poels & Dewitte, 2009). Emotional appeals are instrumental in providing the creative punch to enhance persuasion (Bebko, Sciulli, & Bhagat, 2014), also emotions have the ability to capture attention, influence attitudes, and affect consumer behaviour.

But the problem is that some NPO have been collecting a huge amount of donations but maybe doing a lot of harm at the same time. Using images of people in developing countries that manifest suffering by starving people, begging eyes, and distended bellies, to gather donations. These types of biased images are known as the "Starving Baby Appeal" (Fine, 1990, p. 154). This kind of campaigns involves inherent ethical concerns and dilemmas.

Advertising of NPO that uses a guilt appeal are supposed to make the audience feel guilty and advertisers expect that the audience have some feeling of failing at their own ideals or ethical principles, but not always make them feel guilty (Cotte, Coulter, & Moore, 2005).

Several ethical dilemmas emerge in how NPOs request donations, because of a pressure between what the NPO needs to do for their beneficiaries (requesting in the most efficient and effective ways to guarantee enough money to help them) and what the donor wants (been asked less, asked in different ways, or simply not asked at all) (MacQuillin & Sargeant, 2018).

Thus, it is possible that advertising may have harmful effects for individuals and society that deserve ethical analysis. Furthermore, social marketers should notice that target viewers can have reservations about the ethicality of social advertising, even when they know their intentions are good (Hastings, Stead, & Webb, 2004).

So, the purpose of this paper is to examine how negative-valence images used by NPOs to communicate their causes may affect the public by making them feel guilty and how the saturation of this type advertising might create aversion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Advertising

Advertising can be defined as a mechanism that companies use to persuade, remind, and inform people about their brands. It is considered that advertising is a mean of communication that comprises all the actions in which companies present a visual or oral message regarding a service, product or idea (Stanton, 2000). Nowadays, due to digital technologies the way companies interact and communicate with consumers have change via digital media, this growth in digital advertising correlates with this increase in digital media consumption (Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2010).

There are many kinds of advertising: commercial consumer advertising, small ads as in the classified section, prestige, business and financial advertising, trade and technical advertisements and government and charity advertising. This last one is usually non-profit but often uses the persuasive techniques of commercial advertising (Dyer, 2008). The use of persuasion in advertising is adopted to motivate people into action by influencing desires and beliefs. So, advertisements should be able to connect with what concerns the public, and anything that concerns the public and impacts values or core concerns has the ability to arouse emotions (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003).

In advertising, the two most important benefits consumers perceive are utilitarian and emotional benefits. Utilitarian benefits are related to consumer's basic motivation levels, and information is one of the major utilitarian benefits consumers look for. While emotional benefits are linked to consumer's basic needs for personal expression, self-esteem, social approval and stimulation. Considering these benefits, advertising has developed two important message appeal strategies: rational and emotional appeals (Zhang, 2014). This last one is the most used by NPOs. According to a meta-analysis by Hornik, Ofir, & Rachamim (2017), approximately 76 percent of all advertisements use these type appeals.

On the other hand, the use of technology in advertising can be a powerful facilitator of development goals, because it can improve communication, can create new social and economic networks and can boost the exchange of information (Sheombar, Urquhart, & Kayas, 2018). That's why more and more, different formats of advertising are now propagating online. But is important to note that according to different studies, attitudes toward online advertising are more negative than to offline advertising (Drèze & Hussherr, 2003; Cho & Cheon, 2004; Ha &

Mccann, 2008; Howe & Teufel, 2014). For advertisers, this quick acceleration of usage of online media will provide both opportunities and challenges (Truong et al., 2010).

There is a saturation of advertisement exposure, everywhere we look at, we will find an advertisement, for which, institutions have created conduct codes to avoid unethical advertising. This concerns for unethical advertising begun since 1942, when the Advertising Federation of America created a 39-point code of ethics for advertising (Pratt & James, 1994). According to the British Code of Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing, 2010 they claim that to have responsible advertising it is necessary that marketing communications should be decent, legal, truthful and honest. And should be responsible for the consumers and for society (Hyman, 2009; CAP Code, 2010). Cunningham (1999) defined advertising ethics as: “what is right or good in the conduct of advertising function. It is concerned with questions of what ought to be done, not just with what legally must be done” (p.500).

2.2. Non-profit Sector Advertising

The non-profit sector has an important role in many countries, since they provide social services and community services that the government of those countries can't afford. These organizations help coordinate humanitarian activities for the less fortunate and attempt to build a humane society (Chang & Lee, 2009). Therefore, non-profit sector uses advertising to promote their cause. For which, NPOs advertisements aim to motivate people to donate either money or time (Reed, Aquino, & Levy, 2007).

The theory states that for messages of social causes to be effective, they must motivate some form of behavioural change (Sciulli et al., 2005) and it seems that emotion is better for encouraging behavioural change (Andreasen, 1994; Bagozzi, Baumgartner; Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2000). Different researches in advertising and marketing had conclude that emotions are important for human behaviour and decision making (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Poels & Dewitte, 2006). Based on that premise, there are two types of emotional framings that are most commonly used in non-profit advertisement: to increase the intention to donate or to enhance the attitude towards the ad (positive and negative).

According to the Prospect Theory people respond differently to the same information, and this may depend if the information is framed on positive terms, in which it emphasizes in the potential gain, or if it is framed in terms of loss, which emphasizes on potential losses (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992). This is known as the “message framing effect” (Randle, Miller, Stirling, & Dolnicar, 2016).

According to various researches the advertisements used by NPOs that elicit negative emotions contribute to more donations than the advertisements that elicit positive emotions. In the same way, if the negative emotion is stronger, the intention to donate will be greater (Burt & Strongman, 2005). Whereby, according to Dekker (2011) empathy and greater levels of guilt actually result into a greater amount of funds donated. Ford & Merchant (2010) analyzed the effect on donation intention when charity advertisement recall personal nostalgia, they conducted three experiments, and the results showed that using nostalgic charity appeals can provoke greater levels of emotions and also increase the donation intentions than using non-nostalgic appeals; also charity appeals that recall nostalgia has a better result if it recalls important memories for the consumer. Many NPOs have created a presence via websites, to generate awareness of their causes, for fundraising and for managing their brands. But now they

are also employing the potential of online social network sites (Quinton & Fennemore, 2013) to achieve their goals. There is no doubt that online social networks are now integrated into the daily lives of millions of people worldwide. In Spain 85% of the internet users from 16 to 65 years old are using social networks (ELOGIA, 2019). So, this is a very essential tool for NPOs to communicate their advertisement campaigns.

The transformation of advertising to the digital world began in the early '90s. NPOs also followed this transformation and in 1992 the first NPO started using email marketing, this NPO was Amnesty International. Nowadays, 92% of NPOs use digital advertising and have a website (Tonetti, 2019). The channels most used by NPOs to communicate with public, promote their campaigns, inform news regarding the organization and recruit volunteers are email marketing and social media. Among them, social media has the greatest potential for NPOs since it can help connect with others, create and share content, collaborate with other people and find, use, organize and reuse content (Sheombar et al., 2018).

2.3. Guilt

As mentioned before, the emotional appeal is the most used by NPO's. There are different types of emotion-based appeals; the most common are fear, shock and guilt appeals. The feeling of guilt is one of the most common negative emotions across cultures (Chen & Moosmayer, 2020; Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997), since guilt-induced messages not only arouse or emotionally activate consumers, but also positively influence their attitudes and behaviour (Chang 2011).

Consumer guilt has been defined as an emotional state in which people may experience self-blame, remorse or self-punishment after doing something that infringe or a future infraction of his own standards of acceptable behaviour (Lascu, 1991). When people feel guilty, they are concern of a real or potential negative situation and tries to reduce their level of guilt by making retribution (Chang, 2012).

Huhmann & Brotherton (1997) suggested three types of guilt: (1) anticipatory, (2) reactive and (3) existential. The anticipatory guilt is the guilt experienced when there is a potential violation against one's own standard of acceptable behavior. The reactive guilt refers to the guilt felt when violating one's internalized standards of acceptable behavior. Finally, existential guilt is when one becomes aware of the discrepancy between one's fortune or contentment and others, and one may feel more fortunate than others which results in feeling empathy.

The existential guilt, also known as social-responsibility guilt, is experienced as a consequence of a discrepancy between one's well-being and of others (Cotte et al., 2005). It is used in persuasive communications of NPOs since in the context of donation, the desire to reduce feelings of guilt are associated to the egoistic motives for helping, which NPOs benefit from (Hibbert, Smith, Davies, & Ireland, 2007).

On the other hand, Chang (2014) identified three forms of guilt based on the analysis of where the guilt comes from: (1) existing guilt, an enduring affective state that exists prior to the ad exposure; (2) integral guilt, aroused by ad content; and (3) incidental guilt, which is elicited by contextual messages (i.e. preceding magazine articles).

Despite the different forms to classify guilt, it is important to differentiate guilt from other negative emotions such as shame, since both include the feeling that the person is responsible for a negative outcome, but guilt is focused on the personal feeling for failing others or violating

his own standards. In contrast, shame is centred on how other people may evaluate the failure. Another feeling that is related to guilt is regret, but the difference is that someone may feel regret when is not satisfied with a choice, and a better choice could be made.

Fear is also an emotion usually related to guilt. However as Pinto and Priest (1991) point out there are differences between these two constructs because while guilt is defined as a posteriori emotional reaction, fear represent a priori response. Thus, fear is an anticipatory feeling related to danger while guilty inform us that we have transgressed a moral, social or ethical principle (Ghingold, 1980).

According to Izard (1977), the use of guilt appeal can lead to change in consumer behaviour, since in a mature conscience, guilt is the primary motivational factor. Because as aforementioned when someone feels guilty, he will want to reduce the level of this feeling by making a compensation. So, advertisers use this primary motivation factor by showing that the compensation can be made and persuade them to adopt a behaviour to reduce the guilt feeling.

Symbolic self-completion theory (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981) states that if one's self-identity or self- defining is perceives as incomplete, it will trigger a restorative action to remedy the situation (Lalot, Quiamzade, Falomir-pichastor, & Gollwitzer, 2019). This restorative actions leads to pro-social behaviour to compensate a transgression (Chen & Moosmayer, 2020). As a result, many advertisements are designed to evoke the feeling of guilt and promote a restorative action to reduce that feeling. This relationship between guilt and pro-social behaviour demonstrate why NPOs advertisements use this emotion.

In the same line, Hibbert et al. (2007) pointed out that the more guilt a charity ad arouses, the greater people's donation intentions. However, other studies have shown that guilt not always lead to restorative actions. Coulter & Pinto (1995) suggested that the influence of guilt on persuasive message and consumer behaviour was described by an "inverted U" curve. Thus, high levels of guilt may create reactance because people will feel forced to experiment the guilt through the ad so, they will reject the message and will feel anger and irritation (Lwin, 2011).

2.4. Ethical Issues

As mentioned before there are some ethical issues in advertising of NPOs. Mimi Drumwright (2012) examined ethical issues in advertising in three levels, micro-meso-macro level. The "macro" perspective focuses on advertising's effects on society, the "meso" perspective evaluates actions of advertising agencies, while the "micro" perspective focuses on the individual effect- individual advertising practitioners, individual ads, individual consumers (Tellis & Ambler, 2007). The evaluation of ethics of advertising in these three levels suggests that the influence of advertising is extensive, as anyone is likely to be exposed and, as a result, have a reaction to advertising (Sheehan, 2013). This article focuses on the "micro" perspective effect of NPO advertising on the individual consumers.

According to MacQuillin & Sargeant (2018) fundraising ethics have received little scholarly attention. There is sparse work of ethical theorizing by scholars in philanthropy and fundraising which haven't proposed a coherent normative theory that might inform the ethics applied in this profession. But the problem is not new, there have been critics that while images of suffering and desperate people may capture the attention, move emotions and promote donations, they also illustrate people from developing countries as hopeless and helpless, without the support of these organizations (Nathanson, 2013). The term 'degree zero images'

refers to those images that want to illustrate a given portion of reality in an precise way (Grancea, 2015).

Another of the ethical dilemmas of NPO advertising is that the images used in their campaigns makes that people have a view of the Third World as a place of misery. The extensive sense of hopelessness, which is strengthen by the news and NPO campaigns, understandably incite responses that range from indifference to aversion (Nathanson, 2013).

So, negatively-valence images that present victims of different social problems may suggest ethical problems. The accusations most frequently appealed include, increased anxiety among vulnerable viewers, increased satisfaction from those not affected by the problem, lack of respect for the dignity of the people presented in the advertisement (Grancea, 2015).

As stated in the Association of Fundraising Professionals' International Statement on Ethical Principles in Fundraising (2018) "Funds will be collected carefully and with respect of donor's free choice, without the use of pressure, harassment, intimidation or coercion." This statement presents another ethical problem since a person might consider felt pressured because they saw an advertisement where they made him feel guilty by the use of explicit images and threatening messages and felt they must do something but couldn't afford it, making him feel guilty about it. So, the general ethical question of whether it is appropriate for donors to feel guilty if they decide not to donate to a cause, might be considered a form of pressure (MacQuillin & Sargeant, 2018). This is the aspect we are going to focus in this paper.

As mentioned before NPOs advertisements use negative-valence images to elicit negative emotions such as guilt to increase the willingness to donate, it is a question that is important to aboard if it is appropriate for donors to feel guilty when they are requested for a donation through advertising. MacQuillin & Sargeant (2018) aboard this question through different ethical theories (trustism, donorcentrism and service of philanthropy). According to the trustism it is not acceptable for a donor to feel guilty for not donating, since it could suggest that in the long-term making donors feel guilty will weaken public trust, which will affect lon-term incomes. From the donorcentrism (consequentialist) point of view it is not adequate making donors feel guilty, since this might generate short-term benefit, in the long-term people less likely donate. Also from the donocentrism (deontological) point of view it is not adequate since this might evoke negative emotions in donors and it is wrong to make people feel guilty. And according to the service philanthropy it is not ethical, considering that donors won't experience significance in their charity if they are been pressured to make a donation.

So, even though the use of the feeling of guilt may be effective in some cases or in short-term to promote pro-social behaviours and increase the donations for NPOs, it is important to consider that the use of guilt may make people experience distress and discomfort (Graton & Mailliez, 2019).

Another aspect to consider is that as mentioned before with the increase of digital advertising, NPOs have also increased their presence in social media, websites and email marketing. This makes that people is always exposed to negative advertisements of NPOs without permission. Exposing a person to against their will to harmful images may create unnecessary consumer anxiety (LaTour & Zahara, 1989; Hastings et al., 2004). Also, according to Reactance Theory, forceful messages are rejected by audiences due to perceived loss of freedom to choose their own course of action (Lwin, 2011) so, an over exposure to guilt advertising may create aversion or rejection of the message (Coulter & Pinto, 1995).

3. CONCLUSIONS

Even though there is evidence that guilt appeals are persuasive and negative emotions could contribute to more donations than the advertisements that elicit positive emotions, marketers and advertisers should use these appeals with caution. Since it is still not clear the relationship between guilt and pro-social behaviour and taking into account that the results might be more negative than positive, levels of guilt must be controlled because as aforementioned if guilt surpasses the tolerable limits it might have reactance effects.

There are genuine concerns about the ethical issues these guilt-inducing advertising may have, considering ethical theory and ethical codes that suggest there is potential danger and discomfort for individuals in the use of guilt appeals. It is important for marketers and advertisers to examine the negative effects and the long-term effects these appeals may have on donations and pro-social behaviour.

Social marketers must re-examine their preference for negative appeals in advertising and consider also the welfare of the donors and not only look at the immediate results of donations, since after all, these donations may be affected in the future because guilt may encourage avoidance and reactance effects. And the continuous exposure to these types of advertisements may reduce its attention and thus its effectiveness. It is a fact that NPO provides well-being and that they work to improve the lives of many people but in the end, the question is does the end justify the means?

4. FUTURE INVESTIGATIONS

Following up with the fact that there is no systematic link between guilt and donations or pro-social behaviours, it is necessary to go deeper into the analysis of the guilt. In order to clarify if it is possible to make ethical and responsible management of this resource, it is necessary to study the cognitive processes involved in guilt appeal and how factors like the implication with the cause, its proximity to people or even the ethical position of the individual could be mediators in the relationship between guilt and consumer behaviour. Besides, although the present study is focused on guilt, it would be interesting to examine how unethical could be other advertising resources. Our goal as marketers must be making advertising more effective but also more ethical.

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