

PERSUASIVENESS OF ONLINE ADVERTISEMENT WITH FEAR APPEALS: THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-REGULATORY FOCUS AND INVOLVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of self-regulatory focus on the persuasiveness of online advertisement having fear appeals. The empirical survey results of 170 voluntary participants revealed that content with fear appeals could be used to persuade audiences with self-regulatory prevention focus.

Keywords: Self-Regulatory Focus, Fear Appeals, Online Advertisement

1. INTRODUCTION

Most advertisements persuade audiences by revealing the advantages of taking action. But contents with fear appeals may also be used to persuade audiences by revealing the disadvantage of not taking action. Unlike usual advertisements with positive messages, fear appeal advertisements contain contents that some audiences do not want to face. Advertisers may wish to learn which kinds of audiences would be persuaded by fear appeals since it is an uncommon way to communicate.

Higgins mentioned that some people tend to approach pleasure by pursuing positive outcomes, while others prefer to approach pleasure by avoiding negative outcomes. The former represents a self-regulatory promotion focus, and the latter corresponds with a self-regulatory prevention focus. Individuals having the prevention focus pursue goals related to security and protection¹. Adams, Faseur, Tineke and Geuens reveal that audiences' self-regulatory focus may determine the effectiveness of emotional appeals of advertisements². This study hopes to determine if fear appeals could be used in online advertising to persuade audiences to apply self-regulatory focus toward prevention.

2. METHODOLOGY

For this study we asked subjects to look at a webpage with an advertising banner. The advertising banner promoted pain-sensitive-relief toothpaste. The fear appeals in the advertisement revealed that the sensitive teeth may imply a serious problem that needs prompt care. The advertisement banner was composed of a GIF image with four layers that revealed the potential serious outcomes if people do not take care of their sensitive teeth. After subjects had browsed that web page, they were asked to fill out an online questionnaire survey composed of five parts.

The first part is the attitude toward ads scale used in Duncan, Calvin, James and Nelson³. The second part measured subjects' recall of the product and brand of ad by means of multiple choice items. The third part measured the subjects' intention to click the hyperlink for detailed information using the scale developed by Cho and Chang⁴. The fourth part measured self-regulatory focus utilizing eleven items modified from Carver and White⁵. The last part measured subjects' involvement to dental diseases.

This study recruited 170 volunteer subjects in an online community, with the average age 24 (SD=3.72). The Cronbach's alpha values were 0.88, 0.96, 0.96 and 0.83 for ad attitude, behavior intention to click for detailed information, promotion focus, and self-regulatory focus on prevention, respectively.

3. FINDINGS

This study divided subjects into high (n=98) and low involvement groups (n=72). For high involvement subjects, the relationship coefficients between self-regulatory (promotion and prevention focus) and persuasiveness (attitude, recall, and behavior intention) are significant;

these comparable coefficients were not significant for the low involvement group. The results revealed that involvement is a moderating factor for the influence of self-regulatory focus on persuasiveness of advertisements with fear appeals.

This study used the K-means method to cluster high involvement subjects into four groups according to the level of promotion and prevention focus of the self-regulatory response. Next, this study used ANOVA analysis to compare the differences among the four clusters. As table 2 indicates,

Group 1 included 31 subjects with high promotion and high prevention self-regulatory focus (promotion focus M=3.73, SD=0.23; prevention focus: M=3.75, SD=0.27). Group 2 included 34 subjects with high promotion focus (promotion focus M=3.82, SD=0.24; prevention focus: M=2.51, SD=0.47). Group 3 included 22 subjects with high prevention focus (promotion focus M=3.09, SD=0.26; prevention focus: M=3.52, SD=0.27). Group 4 included 11 responses with the low self-regulatory (promotion focus M=2.87, SD=0.23; prevention focus: M=2.84, SD=0.30).

Significant differences were found in ad attitude and ad click among the four groups. High prevention focus individuals (group 1 and group 3) displayed more positive attitude to the ad than others (group 2 and group 4). They also held higher behavior intention to click the hyperlink for detailed information. There are no significant differences among the four groups for ad recall.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients

	High involvement		Low involvement	
	Promotion focus	Prevention focus	Promotion focus	Prevention focus
attitude	0.36 (.04)	0.40 (.04)	0.06 (.59)	-0.07 (.56)
recall	0.20(.05)	0.23(.05)	0.05 (.68)	-0.01(.96)
click	0.32 (.05)	0.43(.04)	0.05(.69)	-0.05 (.65)

Table 2. ANOVA results

	Group 1 (n=31)		Group 2 (n=34)		Group 3 (n=22)		Group 4 (n=11)		ANOVA	
	High self-Regulatory		Promotion focus		Prevention focus		Low Self-Regulatory		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
attitude	4.60	1.62	4.01	1.40	4.39	0.89	2.68	1.75	5.21	<.01
recall	0.97	0.75	0.79	0.81	0.91	0.68	0.82	0.87	0.31	.82
click	3.63	1.87	2.88	1.44	3.43	1.20	2.23	1.49	2.86	.04

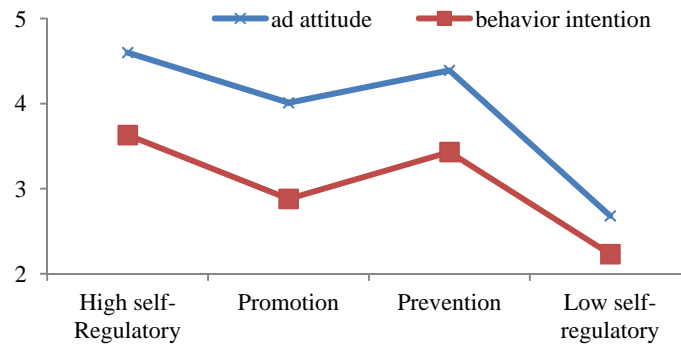


Figure 1. Persuasiveness on four groups

4. CONCLUSION

Advertisers may want to know if fear appeals could be used to increase the persuasiveness of advertisements. In the current study, we recognize that audiences' self-regulatory focus is an influent factor determining the persuasiveness of fear appeals. Nevertheless, involvement moderates the influence between self-regulatory focus and persuasiveness. Fear appeals are persuasive for involved audiences with self-regulatory prevention focus.

5. REFERENCES

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