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Effects of Emotional Intensity and Type of Appeal on Motivation

Dave Hibbs
Huron University College

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Evidence provided by theories of emotional advertising and of emotional psychological processes (Lazarus, 1991) supplies the foundation for this study of the effectiveness of emotional appeals and rational appeals in conjunction with individual differences in Emotional Intensity (EI). The study hypothesizes that emotional appeals will induce greater motivation for supporting the cause against global poverty than will rational appeals. Additionally, it is hypothesized that emotional intensity and appeal type will have an interaction effect and that the High EI-Emotional Appeal group will show the highest motivation out of all of the conditions. Following a 2X2 ANOVA, the main effect of appeal type was found to be significant ($F(1,28)=5.06, p<.05$, one-tailed) but the interaction effect of Emotional Intensity by Appeal Type was found to be insignificant. Limitations of this study and the potential implications of the results are discussed, as well as recommendations for future studies in this field.

Around the 1920s, advertisers began to realize that advertisements should not simply present the "utilitarian" value of a product, but rather to attach deeper meanings in order to create greater product appeal (Ewen, 2001, p. 34). As Stuart Ewen eloquently puts it, "the use value of 'prestige', of 'beauty', of 'self-adornment,' and of 'play' were all placed in the service of advertising's basic purpose—to provide effective mass distribution of products." (2001, p. 35) The success of these more symbolic and often emotional appeals led to greater utilization of these strategies, making advertising into the diverse field it is today.
The utilization of emotionally arousing stimuli has indeed become one of the steadfast techniques of advertisers in today's media environment as is easily confirmed by referring to television and magazine ads evoking fear, or appealing to a person's longing for love of a significant other. Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy explain that since approximately the 1960's, emotional advertising gained a lot more attention from advertisers because consumer "choices can be made as much on affective-emotional factors as on rational-factual inputs" and additionally because the "consumption experience includes major emotional components" that create a lasting bond between the consumer and the product or brand (1984, p. 46). Advertisers understand that the effectiveness of a rational or emotional appeal also depends partially on the type of product. For instance, rational appeals should be utilized for advertising "thinking" products and emotional appeals for "feeling" products (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1984, p. 54).

A rational appeal often provides realistic reasons why the message receiver should adopt the message or behave in a way prescribed by the appeal. Meanwhile, an emotional appeal does not focus on specific factual information but rather seeks to elicit an emotional feeling associated with the advertised product, which can, either immediate or subsequently, create pleasure associated with a product's purchase (Holmes and Crocker, 1987, p. 28). Emotional appeals can also be positive or negative, where a positive emotional appeal evokes more positive emotions (e.g. joy, happiness) and a negative emotional appeal evokes negative emotions (e.g. fear, anxiety). Indeed, emotional advertising is a great technique of persuasion.
The effectiveness of utilizing emotional appeals is partially explained by Lazarus's (1991) model of emotion and adaptation. He emphasizes "that emotions are primarily psychobiological" resulting from a person-environment relationship, where a person appraises or evaluates emotional stimuli and an appropriate emotion is elicited according to biological laws (1993, p. 193). The other big factor of Lazarus's theory is "coping", which he defines as "cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands." (1993, p. 112) Coping strategies can be either "problem-focused" or "emotion-focused". The former is essentially "action-centered forms of coping" where the individual will do something to change the environment to cope with the emotional response. Whereas, "emotion-focused" coping refers to internal changes within the individual, which "involve[s] mainly thinking rather than acting to change the person-environment relationship." (1993, p. 112) Emotional stimuli can thus be seen as a starting point of a chain of events leading to certain coping actions that could lead to specific actions in the environment, such as when a negative emotion such as fear is expected to motivate a person to escape the fear-inducing situation.

Bagozzi and Moore (1994) utilized Lazarus's theory of emotion to develop a study of emotional and rational appeals in public service ads about child abuse. They expand on Lazarus by focusing on negative emotional responses, which result in coping mechanisms of empathy and subsequently a "decision to help" (1994, p. 58). They tested this idea by creating both rational and emotional appeals for helping abused children. Their results suggest that the negative emotional appeal, compared to the rational one, did create predictable changes in emotions felt,
empathy, and decisions to help. Additionally, they found that participants exhibited greater empathic responses when the negative emotional appeal was stronger (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994, p. 66). Indeed, their results suggest that emotional appeals are more likely to create motivation to help a cause than are rational appeals.

In the spirit of advertising/communication research, it is also important to examine if there are individual differences that make some people more susceptible to emotional appeals. One personality trait that has received some research is Affective Intensity, otherwise known as Emotional Intensity (EI). It is assumed that someone with low EI is likely to experience emotions much less intensely than someone with high EI (Bachorowski & Braaten, 1994, p. 191). Additionally, individuals who intensely experience positive emotions will experience negative emotions as such, suggesting that individuals vary "along an intensity dimension but not along an emotional valence dimension" (Bachorowski & Braaten, 1994, p. 191).

Moore and Harris (1996) examined the relationship between emotional intensity and emotional advertisements on individual’s reactions to product advertisements. They found that "when the ads were emotional, whether positive or negative, individuals who were classified as high AI [Affect Intensity] had stronger emotional reactions than their low AI counterparts." (Moore & Harris, 1996, p. 45) This suggests that emotional intensity may be a good indication of whether individuals will respond better to an emotional or rational appeal for the same product.

Another study conducted by Moore, Harris and Chen (1995), examined the same hypothesis with public service ads. They found that individuals who scored
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high on an emotional intensity measure “manifested stronger emotional responses and attitudinal responses to the emotional advertising appeal” compared to those who scored low (Moore et al., 1995, p. 159). Additionally, they suggest that it is possible that “affectively charged stimuli may serve as the mechanism through which affect intensity influences attitude formation” (p. 162). They put forward this result with some word of caution however because they feel that the research may still be premature. But their results showing emotional ads as a mechanism for emotional intensity to influence attitude formation is indeed interesting for advertisers trying to reach individual consumers.

The present study aims to recreate the findings of the studies examined above, but with a focus on communicating the social issue of global poverty. This study will focus on three variables: Emotional Intensity, Appeal Type, and Motivation to act against issues of global poverty. It is expected that, in accordance with Bagozzi and Moore (1994), negative emotional appeals for supporting poverty reduction will elicit greater overall motivation than rational appeals. Additionally, it is expected that individuals who are classified as High EI, and receive an emotional appeal will show the greatest motivation to support the cause against global poverty compared to those receiving a rational appeal and classified as Low EI.

Method

Participants

The present study made use of 32 participants. The specific make-up of the participant pool is unknown since neither sex nor age was recorded. However, because the study was mostly conducted at an undergraduate Liberal Arts College...
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(Huron University College) in London, Ontario, it is likely that the majority of the participants were in an age range of 18 to 25 years. Casual observation by the researcher while administering the study suggests that the full age range is likely between 18 and 50 years, however this cannot be empirically shown.

Apparatus

The present study made utilized a survey design in order to gather data. Separate from the survey itself was a letter of information and consent form, which explained the purpose of the study and assured each participant that his or her participation was entirely anonymous and without any negative side effects. The consent form simply consisted of a place for the individual to put his/her signature.

The survey package consisted of 3 different sections: a test of emotional intensity, an emotional or rational appeal for global poverty, and a measure of motivation to help the cause. The emotional intensity test was constructed based on a test created by Bachorowski and Braaten (1994). Their 30-item questionnaire asks people to rate how much thirty different emotional situations would affect them on a 5-point scale. In Bachorowski and Braaten’s questionnaire, there are questions pertaining to both positive and negative emotional situations. Their questionnaire was found to have significant internal consistency validity and test-retest reliability, and found to be highly correlated with other tests of Affect Intensity (1994, p. 193-194). For the present study, the 30-item questionnaire was determined to be redundant since the all of the questions ask of either positive or negative situations. As such, the questionnaire utilized for this study (see Appendix A) was a 2-item summarization of the Emotional Intensity questionnaire that asked
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people to rate how they are affected “when something positive happens to me” and “when something negative happens to me” on a 5-point scale. Neither the reliability nor validity of this 2-item measure of emotional intensity was tested.

The second section of each package was either an emotional or rational appeal for global poverty. Both appeals were text-based with pictures presented afterwards. The emotional appeal (see Appendix B) was constructed to elicit feelings of sadness and possibly disgust with the inequality of life conditions for people with wealth and those without. The hope was that the emotional appeal would elicit empathetic responses out of readers. The pictures used for the emotional appeal were chosen because they conveyed the suffering and sadness of impoverished life. On the other hand, the rational appeal (see Appendix C) was constructed to be devoid of much emotion. It presents the message of global poverty in terms of statistics and facts derived from various websites of global poverty activist groups. The pictures presented in this appeal are a statistical graph and chart that were chosen because charts and graphs are more associated with rationality than with emotion. Both appeals contained in the last paragraph an identical statement: “the time to act is now.” This was done to ensure that the reader would understand that the appeal was trying to motivate him/her to help the cause against global poverty. The reliability and validity of these appeals remains untested.

The last page of every questionnaire, whether preceded by an emotional or rational appeal, was a single-item measure of motivation to help the cause against poverty. Moore and Harris (1994) utilized a single-item measure that allowed their
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participants to rate on a 7-point scale how likely they were to help abused children in society (p. 62). The measure used in this study was similar to Moore and Harris's since it allowed participants to rate on a 7-point scale how motivated they felt to increase their knowledge about poverty and to help support the cause to eliminate it around the world. The 7-point scale ranged from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" in response to the statement of motivation. The actual measure is located at the end of this paper in Appendix D. This measure was not tested to be a reliable or valid measure of motivation.

The final material utilized in this study was a debriefing statement. This essentially thanked the participants for their participation in the study, outlined the overall rationale of the study and provided participants with a reference to the Moore and Harris (1994) article to gain more information on the topic. Also, the emails of the researcher and research supervisor were included to ensure that participants were able to contact them if needed.

Procedure

The survey was primarily distributed in public areas, and the majority of distribution took place in student gathering areas at Huron University College and the University of Western Ontario in London Ontario. Individuals and groups were asked if they were interested in participating in a psychological study. Those who agreed were provided with the letter of information and consent form. The surveys were shuffled together so that the emotional appeal condition surveys were mixed with the rational appeal condition.
After reading the letter and signing their consent, participants were asked to choose any out of a fanned pile of surveys in order to create some haphazard placement into either the emotional or rational appeal conditions. Once the participant picked a survey, he/she was asked to abstain from discussing his/her survey answers with others in the area, especially because many participants were recruited in groups and, as such multiple people were taking the surveys at once. Most participants took approximately 3-5 minutes to complete the entire survey. When participants were done, the surveys were collected, they were given debriefing statements and thanked for their participation.

Results

The scores of individual participants on the emotional intensity questionnaire (ranging from 4 to 10) were subject to a median split manipulation to create high and low EI groups. The median was established to be 6.5, thus creating an even split of 16 participants below the median that made up the Low EI group and the other 16 made up the High EI group. With this distinction, the Low EI group and High EI group were subdivided into the four experimental conditions depending on whether the participants received an emotional or rational appeal. Thus, the four experimental conditions were Low EI-Rational (N= 10), Low EI-Emotional (N=6), High EI-Rational (N=6), and High EI-Emotional (N=10).

The scores on the measure of motivation ranged from 1 to 7 with an overall mean of 5.25 (SD= 1.37). It appears that there is a main effect of Appeal Type, where the total mean for Emotional Appeal (M=5.75, SD= .86) is higher than the Rational Appeal (M= 4.74, SD= 1.61). Additionally, if somewhat unexpected, there also
appears to be a main effect of Emotional Intensity where the High EI group (M= 5.75, SD= 1.13) scored higher on the measure of motivation than the Low EI group (M= 4.75, SD= 1.44). The mean of the Low El-Rational Appeal group was found to be 4.30 (SD= 1.64) whereas the Low-EI-Emotional Appeal group mean was 5.50 (SD=.55). The mean of the High El-Rational Appeal group was calculated to be 5.50 (SD= 1.38), meanwhile the mean of the High El-Emotional Appeal group was found to be 5.90 (SD=.99). These data are expressed in a graph in Figure 1. The fact that the lines in the graph are almost parallel, suggests that there is no interaction effect between emotional intensity and appeal type.

The data were subjected to a 2X2 ANOVA. The main effect of appeal type was found to be significant (F[1,28]= 3.06, p< .05, one-tailed). The main effect for emotional intensity was not significant. Additionally, no significant interaction effect of emotional intensity X appeal type was found.

Discussion

The first hypothesis of this study, that emotional appeals would generate more motivation in individuals to support the cause against global poverty than would rational appeals, was confirmed to be significant, thus supporting the hypothesis. However, the second hypothesis, that the high EI-Emotional appeal group would exhibit higher motivation to help fight global poverty than any of the other group conditions, was not supported since the emotional intensity-appeal type interaction effect was insignificant.

The significance of the appeal type main effect provides support for the argument that emotional appeals can be better at motivating people to act than are
Figure 1: Summary of mean scores of the four experimental conditions on the 2-item measure of motivation. The top line represents the High Emotional Intensity group and the bottom line represents the Low Emotional Intensity group.
rational appeals. Thus, these results are directly in line with those of Bagozzi and Moore (1994). Just as they found in their study of public service ads, this study discovered that emotional appeals elicited more overall motivation to support a social cause than were rational appeals.

On the other hand, while Moore et al. (1995) and Moore and Harris (1996) were able to show an interaction between individual differences in emotional intensity and susceptibility to emotional appeals, this study was unable to support these findings. The conclusions contained in this study do not support the idea of Emotional Intensity as a predictor for motivation in response to certain appeal types. The insignificance of the interaction effect is likely explained by the many limitations of this study.

The first limitation to discuss is in the sample. The sample size was quite small for a survey experiment of this type, and as such the significance of results is difficult to discern. Additionally, the four different conditions were not evenly populated as discussed in the Results section of this paper. This was a result of utilizing a median split to categorize individuals as either High EI or Low EI. There was no control over this categorization process, thereby making it impossible to ensure that each group (High EI and Low EI) would receive an equal number of emotional and rational appeals in the surveys distributed to them. This inequality of the condition populations may have negatively impacted the overall results of the study. Another problem arises from this study's usage of the median split. Because the participants were sorted based on their self-rated scores on the emotional
intensity questionnaire, no causal connections could truly be drawn between the high EI or low EI group and their motivation scores.

The study also suffered from a significant lack of control in other areas. Participants were approached to participate in mostly public areas where many of them were busy either doing work or socializing with friends. This could have confounded the results in that participants could have been distracted while answering survey questions or reading the appeals. As such, participants may not have taken the study very seriously. Additionally, while some people participated individually, several other participants were in groups while filling out the survey, which could have skewed the results further.

There are also limitations that arise because of the apparatus used in this study. First of all, the measure of Emotional Intensity, while roughly based on Bachorowski and Braaten’s (1994) measure, was not tested for any reliability or validity. Thus, there is no way to know if the two-item questionnaire was even measuring emotional intensity at all. Also, though not mentioned in the Results section above, 21 of the 32 participants in this study scored either a 6 or a 7 out of 10 on this questionnaire, it is likely that the measure suffers from somewhat of a middling effect, suggesting that this measure may suffer from poor construction. While it served its purpose in this study to categorize the participants as either high or low in EI, it is likely that other reliable measures would have more accurately categorized participants.

Secondly, the construction of the appeals also suffers from lacking any tests of reliability or validity. While the intention was to construct a message to evoke
negative emotions such as sadness, it cannot be assumed that these emotions were truly evoked by the emotional appeal, nor can it be assumed that empathy was elicited by the appeal as Bagozzi and Moore (1994) were able to discern. Additionally, the rational appeals may have unintentionally been able to elicit emotional responses from individuals. Since there was no pre-testing of these appeals to see the emotional values of each, it is hard to suggest that they are truly emotional or rational in nature.

Similarly, the measure of motivation was not subjected to tests of reliability or validity. As such, it cannot be concluded that this test is a precise measure of motivation to support the cause against global poverty. Indeed, it is also difficult to discern whether people would answer this question with complete honesty. Utilizing the issue of global poverty may have confounded the results of the measure of motivation. This is because the topic is highly prevalent in mainstream media and messages of activist groups, suggesting that people may be desensitized to the message of global poverty. Thus, the motivation measure may not have measured motivation in response to the appeal itself, but rather individual attitudes on the topic may have been the basis for their motivation.

With these limitations in mind, some recommendations can be made for future research seeking to build off of this study. First of all, a more controlled setting should be utilized for administering the experiment to ensure a similar situation and environment for all of the participants. This would cut down on potentials for distractions by work and friends in public areas, and would also eliminate the confounding time of day factor. Also, the usage of the two-item
emotional intensity questionnaire should be done so with caution. Before conducting a study with this measure, it should be subjected to tests of reliability and validity. Otherwise, it is recommended that future researchers utilize a longer and reliable measure of emotional intensity, such as that constructed by Bachorowski and Braaten (1994). Additionally, the appeals utilized in this study and the measure of motivation should all be subjected to reliability and validity tests before being utilized in future research. Another recommendation is for future research to refrain from utilizing median split categorization to separate the high and low emotional intensity individuals into groups. This procedure can be replaced by a correlation design, which would obviously only allow for very conservative conclusions to be made, but it is perhaps better to be conservative when performing studies of personality trait effects since they are for the most part impossible to empirically support.

Additionally, it is recommended that future research look at different ways of creating the emotional or rational appeal. It would be interesting to utilize public speakers instead of text-based appeals. This type of study could be constructed so that one speaker would give a presentation that was very fact based and rational, while the other speaker would provide an emotionally charged presentation on the same social issue. Additionally, this more communicative type of appeal could be compared with text-based appeals to see which is more effective in creating motivation in individuals. It would also be interesting to discern if certain personality types are more likely to be persuaded by a text-based appeal or an appeal made by a human presenter.
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It would also be interesting to measure motivation in different ways. For instance, one such study could measure motivation not by a questionnaire, but by actual behaviour. One way of doing this would be to have each participant contacted by a global poverty fundraising organization asking him or her for a donation. The instances of donation, and perhaps the size of donations, could serve as the indication that the appeal had a motivating effect on participants. Also, this would be able to test whether motivation from emotional or rational appeals is able to withstand the passing of time, or if such motivation is only an immediate response to appeals.

The study of emotional appeals and individual differences has many practical implications. The advertising industry, for instance, goes to great lengths to try to understand what motivates people to purchase products. As such, if emotional intensity can be established to be a predictor of one’s motivation to act in response to an emotional or rational appeal, advertisers would be able to more directly advertise to specific individuals. Thus, people determined to be emotionally intense would be subject to advertisements of an emotional nature, meanwhile those who are not emotionally intense would be subject to a non-emotional ad. Indeed, this type of research also has implications outside of the commercial realm. Social groups and activist groups might also benefit from this type of research in the same ways that advertisers benefit. Activist groups trying to reach a larger audience with important social messages might be able to construct a more appealing message by following results from studies such as this one.
The significant results of the main effect of appeal type suggest an important strategy for social activist groups. Emotional appeals should be utilized, as it is likely that they will create more motivation amongst the audience to support the cause. Indeed, activist groups with very small budgets for advertising should utilize the motivational effectiveness of emotional appeals if they want to enlist more people to support their causes. Additionally, social organizations seeking to increase voter turnout to elections might also create greater motivation amongst the non-voting population to enact their democratic rights. This might be especially useful in Canada as voting turnout, especially amongst young voters, is often claimed to be quite low. Overall, organizations and individuals trying to convey a motivational message should make use of the effectiveness of emotional appeals. As a closing remark, however, some caution should be enacted by organizations. It is possible that utilizing over-stimulating emotional appeals may cause desensitization to the message. As such, it is recommended that communicators ensure that an emotional appeal is appropriate for the messages they convey, and that the appropriate emotion is communicated in accordance with the intended message.
References


Appendix A

Questionnaire #1

1. When something positive happens to me, I feel:
   I. It has little effect on me
   II. Mildly pleased
   III. Pleased
   IV. Very Pleased
   V. Ecstatic- on top of the world

2. When something negative happens to me, I feel
   I. It has little effect on me
   II. A little upset
   III. Upset
   IV. Very upset
   V. Extremely upset
Appendix B

We all want so much. We want a nice house and money to buy things and go to nice restaurants. We want other people to respect us. We want the latest iPhones and computers so that we can keep up with new technologies and new clothes to keep up with fashion trends.

But, for the most part, we forget about countless other people; people who can't even get enough food to stay healthy or to even expect to live half the duration of our average life span. While we want to get that new iPhone or designer clothing, we forget that millions of people will go to bed tonight without a meal. We take for granted how fortunate we are while obscene amounts of people suffer everyday. And most importantly, we forget that we all share something in common: We are all people who want to LIVE.

We need to remember, that across the globe, from Nigeria to our own city streets, there are too many people who suffer while we can live without worrying about whether we will still be alive tomorrow. It is time to think whether it is fair that we have so much more than the vast majority of the human race. The time to act is now! It is time to give people what they want and need: A Better Chance to Live.
Appendix C

Poverty is a big issue on a local and global scale. Today, approximately 1.7 Billion people live in absolute poverty, meaning 1.7 billion people live in the absence of enough resources (such as money) to secure basic life necessities. In many African countries, 40%-80% of the population lives on less than $1.25 a day; meanwhile the percentage in Canada and the United States living on that amount is less than 2%. Also, 2.7 billion people in the world live on less than $2 a day. Approximately 50,000 people die every day from poverty-related causes such as access to food, water and shelter. Every night, 800 million people around the world go to bed hungry. There are approximately 2.2 billion children in the world, and 1 billion of them live in poverty. Even in Canada, 1 in 10 children lives in poverty.

1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water, and 2.6 billion lack basic sanitation. Additionally, the poorest 10% of the world's population accounts for 0.5% of the overall consumption, meanwhile the wealthiest 10% account for 56% of overall global consumption.

Changes must be made to ensure that there are fewer people suffering poverty around the globe. The time to act is now so that we can help ensure a better life for billions of people in the world.

![Fig. 1: % of population living on less than $1.25 a day (Blue = 2%, Dark Red = 41-60%)](image1.png)

![Fig. 2: Amount of overall global consumption in relation to wealth.](image2.png)
Appendix D

Questionnaire #2

1. Overall, I feel motivated to increase my knowledge about global poverty and do what I can to support the cause to eliminate poverty around the world.

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Appendix E

Table 1.

*Analysis of Variance of Emotional Intensity and Appeal Type*

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*p< .05*