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**The Effect of Negative Emotion Appeals  
on Charitable Giving Behaviour**

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## **Abstract**

Individual donations contribute more than 70% of charitable giving each year, and up until now, the most dominant advertising appeal has been targeting negative feeling such as sadness and guilt even though the exact effect of such appeals is under researched. This review examines the potential disadvantages of negative appeals and according to the studies that being reviewed, negative appeals are not better at promoting prosocial behaviour than a mix of negative and positive appeals; also, when negative appeals are repeated to a certain degree, the targeted sympathy may be reduced. Studies have also found evidence that negative appeals may create distance between the beneficiaries and the potential donors. the predominant guilt-based appeals are also examined and showed different effect in groups and gender. One very interesting aspect to the negative appeals is the activation of persuasion knowledge such appeals cause due to their perceived manipulation intent. The results of this review support the unfavorable effect of negative appeals in charitable advertising.

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## **1. Introduction**

According to the GIVING USA 2021, \$471.44 billion was given to U.S. charities in 2020 and of which \$324.10 billion was given by individuals. Since individual giving comprised around 70% of total giving, it makes sense that charity organizations are targeting individual donors in various platforms and aiming at manipulating emotions of the viewer in order to secure a donation.

However, the majority of past research has focused on the effectiveness of negative approaches in advertising. Based on the limited number of studies on the drawbacks of negative approaches, we can see some disadvantages and four main aspects are brought to attention: firstly, negative appeals perform better when combined with positive appeals as both invoke helping behaviour; secondly, negative appeals are less effective in terms of inspiring motivation since such appeals can reduce sympathy and create distance between donor and beneficiary; thirdly, specific emotions used in negative appeals such as guilt have different domains and thus can misfire when utilized inappropriately; finally, the growing knowledge of persuasion against such advertisement.

The goal of this review is to assess the effectiveness of negative emotion appeals, specifically sadness and guilt, in a charitable giving marketing context. The review asked these questions: 1. What motivates individual to engage in donation behaviour? 2. Why do negative-appeals advertisement prevalent in modern marketing? 3. What are the disadvantages of a negative-appeal advertisement?

This review followed PRISMA guidelines and included 22 qualitative studies.

## 2. Theoretical background

Much research has been done in order to find out the determinants of helping behaviour, so far, there is no consensus. Many scientists agree on the role of empathy as proposed by Lazarus, and most of the studies specifically about charity donation intention are built on the empathy-helping theory, hence, this review is mainly focused on this model.

Little is known about individuals' charitable giving attitudes despite abundance research on the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. As to date, most researches are conducted based on "helping behaviour originates from empathy"; however, the question of whether empathy is egoistic or altruistic is not taken into account.

What is empathy? There are still some ambiguities when it comes to the definition. For example, Hoffman proposes that the modern definition of empathy is defined as an awareness of other peoples' internal states (Hoffman 1985); Lazarus (1991) proposes that empathy is an emotional process, and it is a process of placing oneself in another's circumstances; Levenson (1992) thinks that empathy is the ability to accurately comprehend the feelings of another person; and Batson (1983) believes that empathy is to respond to another person's distress in a compassionate way. To make matters more complicated, empathy in everyday use also implies pity, compassion and sympathy, thus a feeling to take action to lighten the others' plight. In order to conduct research and interpret the results, most research consider empathy in four dimensions (Bagozzi et al. 1994):

- *Perspective*: adopt the perspective of the person in need.
- *Compassion/pity*: feelings such as concern.
- *Protection*: desire to protect the person in need.
- *Fantasy elaboration*: go extra mile to develop emotional attachments.

### Helping model

Lazarus proposed a general theory of emotion and adaptation in which appraisals (evaluation the significance of what is concerning to an individual's welfare without awareness) lead to emotional responses thus induce coping strategies. Lazarus hypothesized that the appraisal processes would result in three potential outcomes depending on the situation: biological urges to act, subjective affect and physiological responses. And the resulted emotional response is determined by the combination of these outcomes. In a particular emotional response, two coping strategies then arise: (1) problem-focused coping strategy which consists of efforts to reduce the effect of an undesirable situation; for example, changing the environment physically, terminating a relationship or removing a perceived threat. (2) Emotion-focused coping strategy. It is a cognitive strategy to reduce or tolerate an undesirable situation, such as denial, avoidance or reconceptualizing; and with regard to negative emotions, the coping process takes two reactions into account: empathic processes and the decision to help.

Therefore, as an example, in response to an advertisement portraying a victim seeking for help, the general sequence of events would be: negative emotions (sadness, anger, fear) – empathic response – decision to help.

To support the helping model, Bagozzi and Moore (1994) found that exposure to negative feelings such as sadness or anger can elicit empathic reaction thus increase the intention to help; Similarly, Small and Verrochi supported Bagozzi's result by showing increased sympathy and donation in their study in 2009.

### **Inspiration-helping hypothesis**

Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004) define inspiration as a motivator that directs one's behavior. This motivator can be triggered by internal or external stimuli. When inspired, a compelled response would be activated towards a target. In simple words, a trigger object would motivate an inspired expression. Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004) also suggest that perceived competence, self-esteem, and optimism are associated with inspiration.

Liang (2016) proposes that an appraisal of the virtues demonstrated in donation adverts such as the courage and perseverance in dealing with unfortunate situation would provoke the feelings of optimistic and competent which in turn induce inspiration, thus increase donation behaviour.

### 3. Methodology

The charity sector has been relying on so called “sadvertising” to raise awareness of the issue at hand even though the effect of such negative appeals is still open to debate and insufficiently researched.

Negative appeals might be effective to potential donors according to past research. For example, previous studies have shown that sadness inspires people to take actions to heal emotional distress since sadness encourages individuals to act for reconciliation of the emotional conflict (Garg & Lerner, 2013). Thus, individuals are more likely to make a donation after seeing a sadness-evoking advisement. Small and Verrochi (2009) put the negative appeal to test in a charitable context. They found that a sad-faced victim generated more donation in comparison with happy or neutral-faced victim, and it is caused by the transfer of the feelings from the victim to the viewers. Similarly, as C. Daniel Batson explained in his empathy-altruism hypothesis, the key factor to helping behaviour is “empathic concern” which motivates people to achieve the goal of improving another person’s welfare, which means that viewing the suffering of others promotes sympathy/empathy/compassion which are strong pro-social behaviour predictors, and studies have found that exposure to sadness resulted in larger donations (Batson et al., 1997).

However, several other research suggested that negative-appeals may not be more effective than positive or neutral-appeals or even backfire in some cases. Studies have found that mixed emotions works better than negativity alone (Merchant, A., Ford, J. B., & Sargeant, A. (2010), reasoning will be provided later.

In line with C. Daniel Batson’s empathy-altruism theory, Aker found that intense and repetitive negative framing in advertisements can reduce sympathy thus discourage donation behaviour. In the inspiration model proposed by (J., Chen, Z., & Lei, J. (2016), negativity does not inspire people to engage in pro-social behaviour. Since the consensus of the aim of negative-appeal adverts is to elicit guilt, the effect of guilt has also been studied, the findings suggest that the types guilt and the groups of audience both play a role in the effectiveness of the negative-evoking adverts. And (Cotte, J. 2005) found that experiencing negativity such as sadness through images, clips or descriptions of victims can activate manipulation knowledge and thus evoke skepticism. For instance, in a qualitative study, many participants reported that they felt the messages are “excessively traumatic”, the “marketing overkill” makes them feel “manipulated” and “wretched for not doing more to help” (Nezhati, 2014; Seu & Orgad, 2014; Sher, 2011). Likewise, experiments conducted by Pancer and his colleagues (Pancer, 1988; Pancer, Deforest, et al., 1979; Pancer, McMullen, et al., 1979) show that potential donors decrease their giving when suffering victims are shown instead of absent despite reported perceiving sadness from the faces of the victims and the culprit seems to be the perceived threat to personal freedom or one’s self-control (Brehm & Brehm, 1981).

### **3.1. Search strategies**

This review followed PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2020). The literature search strategy was based on the search terms of a systematic review that studied the relationship between negative expressions in advertisements and donation behaviour. Terms such as “suffering”, “sad”, “donation”, and “charity” were used. The electronic databases SCOPUS, Elsevier, ScienceDirect were used to search the literature.

### **3.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

- Inclusion criteria

All types of empirical studies, including qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research to assess the effectiveness of images, videos and descriptions of victims on individual donation behaviour.

Studies where donation behaviour was primary outcome of the research.

Peer-reviewed literature published in English and Chinese.

- Exclusion criteria

Studies where only positive emotions such as happy and hope were researched.

Studies where only abstract was available.

Studies that were not in the final publish stage.

### **3.3. Articles selection**

All duplicates were removed before screening. The abstracts of retrieved studies were screened to identify potential papers that met the inclusion criteria. The full text of these potential eligible studies then was independently assessed for eligibility.

### **3.4. Data collection process**

A form was given by my guidance professor to extract required data from eligible studies. The following data was extracted from each study: bibliographic info, abstract, study method, type of participants, type of medium used, type of charity/donation behaviour involved, study hypotheses, dependent and independent variables, hypothesis results,

Study quality assessments

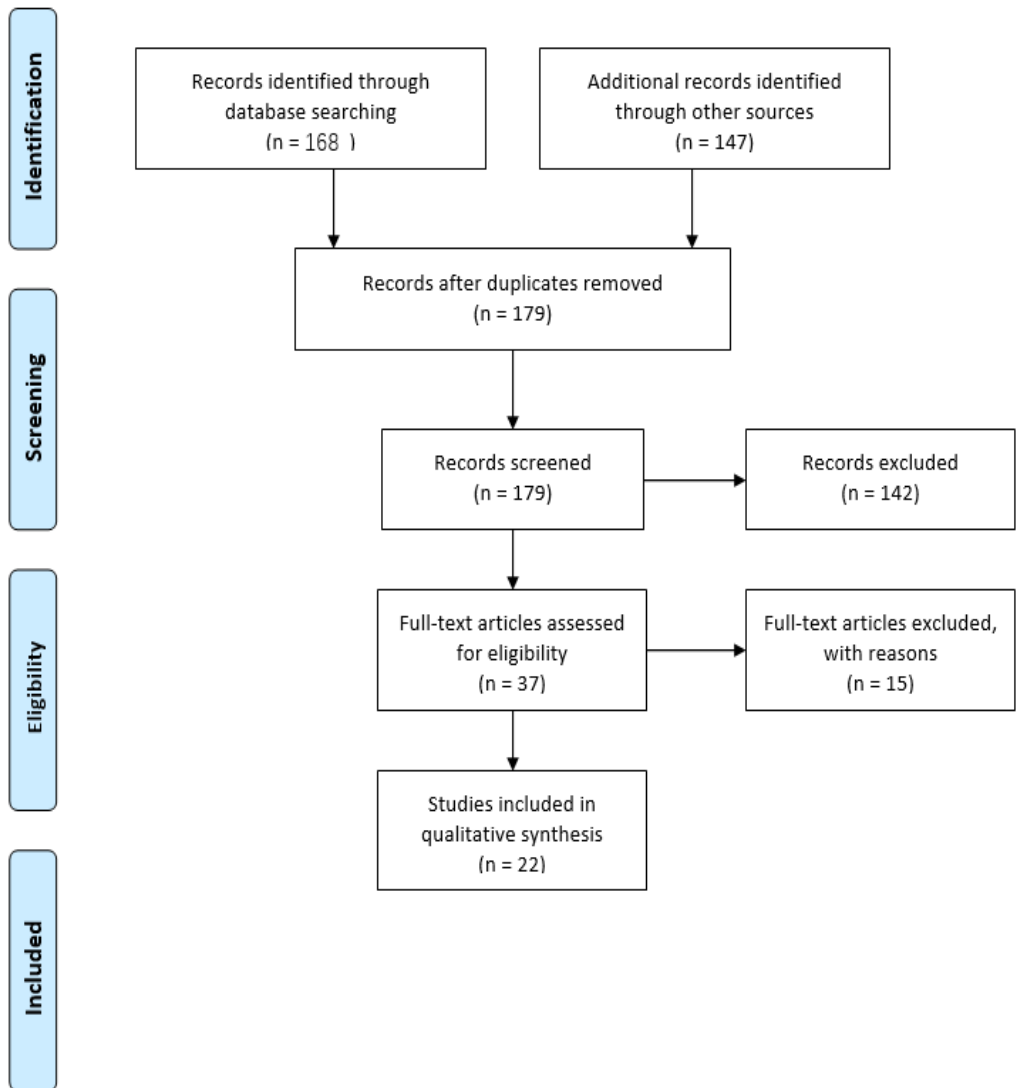
Because this review was conducted in a limited time with limited resource, there are several potential bias risks need to be considered: (1) Most eligible studies were found through references, the selection bias is rather obvious. (2) limited studies were specifically conducted in the target area; it is a rather under-researched area.

### **3.5. Results**

Very limited number of studies were found through the initial keyword search on SCOPUS, and after removing the duplicates a further screening was conducted. More records were identified through backward and forward reference search based on the initial screening. Altogether, 315 studies were screened and a total of 179 studies were selected after the screening, of which 37



studies were selected after evaluating the abstract. The full text of these 37 studies were evaluated and of which 15 studies were excluded using the eligibility criteria. (See fig.1)



### 3.6. Articles summary

22 articles are chosen for this review, the summary of the emotional appeals used and the aim, along with the main findings most concerning this review is extracted as below:

Article	Emotional Appeals	Aim	Relative Findings
<a href="#">Stayman et al. 1988</a>	warmth, amusement, and irritation	Ad attitude	the direct effect of feelings appears to be strongest at lower exposure levels and appears to be totally mediated by advertisement attitude and/or prior attitudes at higher exposure levels.
<a href="#">Liang, J et al. 2016</a>	sadness, hope, strength	Donation intention	donation amount in the sadness-dominating condition was significantly lower than that in the combined condition but not different from the strength-dominating condition.  The combined and the strength-dominating conditions both evoked higher inspiration than the sadness-dominating condition.
<a href="#">Ong, J.C. (2015)</a>	guilt, sad, hope	Marketing ethics	. Media narratives are generally assumed to create either positions of maximal distance that cause only “compassion fatigue or a productive “proper distance” that cultivates relationships premised on mutual understanding and empathy
<a href="#">Nadezda K et al. 2014</a>	<i>Survey extracted emotions</i>	Marketing ethics	research shows that poverty porn practice appears to be reinforcing the distinction between the West and the non-West since the advertisements are directed towards the representation of “the inferior other” and is more likely to provoke financial donations rather than social involvement
<a href="#">Miller B et al. 1993</a>	Guilt, pity	Donation intention	1: Parents have the strongest reaction overall. 2: University students, school-children and parents were most likely to say that they would donate, while care-staff and the ‘general public’ were least likely to say they would donate
<a href="#">Brennan L. 2010</a>	Fear, guilt, shame	Marketing strategy	1. Fear: with high levels of repetition, participants were likely to respond with anger towards the issue rather than fear, guilt or shame. 2. Guilt: Without personalization of the message, people did not feel guilty although they could sense that the campaign was attempting to make them feel that way. 3. Shame: generally thought of in a negative light and as an ineffective method for motivating people to do the right thing.
<a href="#">Bagozzi, R. P et al. 1994</a>	Sadness	Prosocial behaviour	1: support the mediating role of overall empathy on helping; the findings show that neither a composite of other affective and cognitive responses nor their individual components account for the changes in the decision to help.
<a href="#">Faseur, T et al. 2010</a>	guilt, compassion	Prosocial behaviour	The hypothesis was only confirmed for the ad evaluation variables.
<a href="#">Elyria K. P et al. 2013</a>	Pride, sympathy	Prosocial behaviour	In the sympathy condition, females expressed greater intentions to give money than males did
<a href="#">Coulter et al. 1995</a>	Guilt	Ad attitude	as the intensity of the guilt appeal increases, more feelings of anger, annoyance and irritation are generated, and fewer upbeat feelings (happiness and amusement) are generated.

Article	Emotional Appeals	Aim	Relative Findings
<a href="#">Renner, S., et al. 2013</a>	Guilt	Prosocial behaviour	Anticipatory guilt appeals are more effective in promoting prosocial behavior than reactive guilt appeals
<a href="#">Cotte, J et al. 2005</a>	Guilt	Marketing strategy	A negative relationship exists between perceived ad credibility and perceptions of manipulative intent.
<a href="#">Merchant, A et al. 2010</a>	sadness, guilt, sympathy	Donation intention	The statement of the problem evokes higher levels of negative emotions than positive emotions. H2. The opportunity to donate will evoke higher levels of anticipated positive emotions than negative emotions
<a href="#">Barnett, J et al. 1999</a>	Pity, sadness, guilt	Ad attitude	agreement of the disabled group was greater than that of the public group on active scale. On the 'passive' scale, the 'disabled' group evidenced significantly less agreement than the 'public' group (passive considers pity, sadness, sympathy and guilt and the likelihood of donations being elicited)
<a href="#">Choi, J et al. 2021</a>	Sadness	Donation intention	When a sadness appeal is used to solicit a donation, an increase in skepticism and a decrease in sympathy
<a href="#">Obermiller, C 1995</a>	sadness	Prosocial behaviour	Well baby appeals will be more successful (relative to sick baby appeals) when prior salience of the issue is high; sick baby appeals will be more successful (relative to well baby appeals) when prior salience of the issue is low.
<a href="#">n-Hye Kang et al. 2018</a>	happiness, sadness	Marketing strategy	a sad-faced (vs. happy-faced or neutral-faced) image will lower ad/organization evaluations (H1) due to mediation by manipulative intent (H2). Inference of manipulative intent and sympathy will mediate the effect of facial expression on helping intentions,
<a href="#">Tineke Faseur et al. 2008</a>	sadness, hope	Prosocial behaviour	ads evoking positive emotions were evaluated to be more or equally positive than those evoking negative emotions under all conditions
<a href="#">Kawamura, Y et al. 2015</a>	Guilt	Prosocial behaviour	efficacy and necessity evoke similar emotional response; efficacy results in more donation than necessity; necessity results in more stress
<a href="#">Homer, P. M. (2021)</a>	sadness, hope	Donation intention	combining hope and sadness in a charity appeal generates both sympathy and inspiration, resulting in higher donations than the hope-dominant and sadness-dominant appeals.
<a href="#">Small, D. A et al. 2009</a>	happiness, sadness	Prosocial behaviour	when the source of emotion was a facial expression, participants in the sad condition were more sympathetic (M = 3.17, SD = 1.28) than those in the happy expression condition (M = 2.34, SD = 1.32; p < .05). However, there was no difference in sympathy between sad (M = 3.13, SD = 1.26) and happy (M = 3.24, SD = 1.42) when emotion was caused by an incidental source (p = n.s.).
<a href="#">Van Kleef, G. A et al. 2015</a>	sadness, happiness	Ad attitude	individuals only use the emotional expressions of others to inform their attitudes when they engage in sufficiently thorough information processing

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Mixed appeals VS negative appeals

Negative appeals such as sadness and fear are prevalent in marketing, whereas positive appeals seem to be overlooked. There is substantial evidence to support the effect of negative appeals, and some evidence to support the place of positive appeals in marketing. However, the negative/positive appeals are normally studied as a general negative/positive emotion rather than specific emotions (sadness, guilt, hope), and very limited research was done to explore the effect of positive emotions such as happy and hope in promoting donation behaviours, and the primary reason might be that the dominating donation appeals is negative emotions such as sad and fear up until now even though it is unlikely that negative emotions are exclusively conveyed in a donation advertisement. Thus, it is difficult to conclude which appeal is more effective in terms of promoting helping behaviour.

Since there are evidence supporting both negative and positive appeals on eliciting prosocial behaviour, some scientists suggest that a mix of negative and positive appeals is in fact the best way to promote helping intentions. For example, the Empathy-helping model (Bagozzi et al., 1994) supports that image of people suffering will evoke sadness which motivate people to empathize for the victims thus increase helping intention. On the contrary, based on the inspiration-helping model proposed by Liang (2016), the positive emotions such as hope and strength can inspire donation behaviour. Based on these theoretical backgrounds, P.M. Homer suggests that these two theories should be considered complementary instead of competing, hence, he proposes the sympathy+inspiration-helping model. Other theoretical insights are also considered to understand this model, for example, there is evidence to support that opposed feelings can simultaneously occur (Williams & Aaker 2002); R Adolphs (1999) suggests that positive and negative emotions activate different brain regions. Research also show that people regulate emotions differently, for example, some people experience positive arousal from aversive stimuli (one person's pain is another's pleasure); and positive outcomes can occur in certain negative feelings, for instance, sometimes sadness can provide a rational perspective, feeling sad about human suffering and hopeful about ending such suffering may motivate people to perform prosocial behaviors (e.g., donate to human-needs charities). Hence, P.M. Homer proposed that the mixed emotions of positive and negative feelings lead to best helping behaviour compare with negative/positive dominant appeals. The results show that "combining hope and sadness in a charity appeal generates both sympathy and inspiration, resulting in higher donations than the hope-dominant and sadness-dominant appeals" (P.M. Homer 2021)

Based on emotion regulation theories, studies also show that mix of positive and negative emotions leads to more favorable consumer evaluations of the advertisement, thus promote desired behavioural intentions. To elaborate, emotion regulation is defined as an intensifying or maintaining the current emotion (Gross et al., 2006), and negative states are mostly regulated. According to the negative relief model (Cialdini et al., 1973), it means human beings have an innate drive to reduce negative moods, and the negative moods can be reduced by any mood-lifting behaviour such as self-indulgent acts or helping behaviour. The role of positive emotions on reducing negative emotions effect was supported by previous studies (Fredrickson et al., 2000).

Emotional response evoked by an advertisement can influence the viewer's attitude towards the advertisement, subsequently, the attitude can affect behavioural intentions (Ajzen, Icek 1991). Using this line of reasoning, Kemp et al., 2012 propose that a mixed of positive and negative emotions will generate more behavioural intention and more positive attitude towards the advertisement than negative emotions alone, thus support the theories that positive emotions provide an outlet for lifting the negative effect, and consequently giving the advertisement a more favorable light.

Also, advertisements that use both positive and negative emotions are considered more interesting because they are processed with more attention; with only negative emotions, the viewers lose interest and develop an adverse attitude towards the advertisement (Ruth et al., 2002). This result was replicate in a study aimed to find out the gender difference in responding to sad emotions, it shows that high level of mixed emotions evoked by the advertisement attract more attention and deeper cognitive responses from the viewer.

Based on these findings, we cannot rule out the importance of positive-appeals and we should look into the exact influence of negative appeals on behavioural intention.

## **4.2. Negative appeals as a motivator on donation behaviour**

Negative appeals can have a positive effect on evoking helping behaviour, as explained by Bagozzi's empathy helping model, negative feelings such as sadness can induce empathy thus evoke prosocial behaviour (Bagozzi, R. P et al. 1994), but the exact mechanism behind the effect is still under-researched. According to the helping-model, negative appeals such as sadness and guilt can elicit empathy thus induce helping behaviour, however, the drawbacks of such appeals should also be considered. One of the disadvantages of negative appeals found is that when such negative emotions are being repeated, the felt sympathy will be reduced hence harm the desired outcome (Stayman & Aaker 1988); another disadvantage is the distance these negative-appeals created that makes the viewer separate their world from the world of the victim thus not relate to the issue (Nadezda K et al. 2014). One alternative theory on helping behaviour was provided by J. Liang and colleagues, they argued that helping intentions are stemmed from inspiration rather than empathy, and since negative emotions do not normally evoke inspiration, it is not effective when it comes to charity advertisement (Liang, J et al. 2016).

### **4.2.1. Repeated negative appeal may reduce sympathy**

In early research, Stayman and colleagues conducted an experiment to determine the mediating role of ad attitude on advertisement effectiveness. 30-seconds ads were used during a normal commercial break in a mock living room setting. The frequency of exposure (one, two or three exposures per program) and the execution type (warm, humorous or irritating) were manipulated and a seven-point scale was used to measure current and prior ad attitudes; feeling responses were measured also by scales to describe how the participants felt during the ad (informed, warm, irritated, amused and bored). The studies have found the feeling responses have a stronger effect on ad effectiveness when the exposure level is low; however, when the exposure level is high, the ad effectiveness appears to be mediated by current and prior ad attitudes, it seems that the feeling responses seems to be thrown out of the equation almost completely.

Possible explanations were provided by Calder, B. J., & Sternthal, B. (1980). The term “wearout” was coined to describe the relationship between repetition and advertisement effectiveness. Previous lab experiments have established two possible causes of “wearout”:

*Inattention:* Viewers may not pay attention to the advertisement when it is repeated at a certain level and thus forgetting its content.

*Active information processing:* message recipients go over two types of thoughts: thoughts directly stimulated by the message content and predominantly about the message content; and thoughts associated with the message. The first is termed “message-related thoughts” while the second “own thoughts” (Calder et al., 1974). Because message-related thoughts are normally more positive than own-thoughts by design, and when the message is repeated to a certain extent, own-thoughts increase and message-related thoughts decrease, thus creates this “wearout” effect. Such effect was also observed by Cacioppo and Petty in 1979.

Calder and colleagues provided evidence to the information processing theory, and their findings also suggest that the effect of wearout occurs despite the design of the advertisement to improve

attention. However, the studies could not find any direct cognitive support for the information processing mechanism.

Based on the information provided by Calder and Stayman and their colleagues, further studies were conducted and provided support showing that when negative emotions are repeatedly being used by charities, these negative emotions can intensify and lead to reduced sympathy (Felix et al. 2019).

#### **4.2.2. The distance created by sadvertising between two worlds**

Every so often, we see adverts on tv, phone or bus that portrait sad-eyed bony African children asking for help. Do these kinds of advertisements the most effective way to gain attention and encourage donation behaviour? Research have shown that such adverts can damage the image of the charity organization and their long-term goals (Ong, J.C. 2015). One reasoning is that this type of stereotyping (e.g., starving children) creates a feeling of “us and them”, thus disconnect the beneficiaries and the potential donors (Nadezda K et al. 2014). It is easier to accept that people are suffering when we think that we are different and we live in different worlds. Instead of promoting action, these ads may create apathy instead.

Nadezda K and colleagues explored the consequences of the popular “poverty porn” industry in their research. The studies found that poverty porn seems to strengthening the distinction between the West and the Non-west, as advertisements aims to portray "inferior others" and induces monetary donations rather than activism (Nadezda et al. 2014).

Postcolonial theory and narrative theory were introduced to explain the poverty-porn phenomenon. Colonization and decolonization have profoundly affected the relations of the world since Europe’s colonies constituted to almost 85% of the earth. Colonialism has a huge impact on the West’s perception of the non-West. E Said (1995) argues that West see non-West through an imperial lens and the postcolonial theory helps us to understand the dynamics in the western world.

“Orientalism” can be discussed when it comes to the relations between cultures. Said (1995) states that “orientalism” refers to “...the Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient”. Orient and Occident created divisions of the world when Occident implies modern and superior whereas Orient implies backward and inferior.

According to narrative theory, people are essentially storytellers. Storytelling is one of the oldest and most universal forms of communication and so individuals approach their social world in a narrative mode and make decisions and act within this narrative framework (W. R. Fisher 1984).

The combination of postcolonial and narrative theories helps us to investigate the marketing of poverty porn and the consumer’s position on such practices.

Nadezda K and colleagues conducted interviews and collected consumer positions towards poverty porn marketing, and a variety of positions have been identified, some interviewee stated that “...we are born here and we are privileged, and they are born there and they are fucked anyways”; "Proud that Europe finally managed to help them, African people, and we can see some results..." “us” vs “them”, “European” vs “African”, such terms support the hierarchical binarity by Said (1995). The negative perceptions of African society do not resonate with the western society thus fails to

create sympathy; when people do not relate to the cause, it is difficult for them to be motivated to act.

#### **4.2.3. The disadvantages of negative-appeals on inspiring donation behaviour**

Inspiration is a motivational state that directs one's behaviour (Thrash and Elliot 2003, 2004). Either internal sources such as ideas/goals or external sources such as nature/music can trigger this motivational state. According to the hypothesis, inspiration has two processes, "appreciation and accommodation" ("inspired by" process) and "express, actualize, concretize or transmit" ("inspired to" process). Past studies also have shown that appraisals of objects can generate emotional responses and following coping strategies Bagozzi & Moore 1994). For instance, one can be sad and develop empathy then a drive to help after witnessing a sad situation.

Based on these theoretical backgrounds, J. Liang et al., (2015) argue that a positive-appeal advertisement can evoke inspiration as an emotional response and thus proposed an "inspiring-helping" model to examine the relationship between positive/negative emotions and donating behaviour, and as suggested that specific emotions rather than general are important to conduct studies in this context, the negative and positive emotions are limited to sadness and strength respectively since they are typically depicted in charity advertisements. And since inspiration can be triggered internally or externally, the study used qualities and behaviour of others as source. More specifically, the donation advert used showed the perseverance and courage of the person in an unfortunate situation (e.g., natural disaster, poverty). The target emotional response is feeling strong which makes one competent and optimistic thus induce inspiration. (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). J. Liang et al., conducted focus group discussions and surveys to examine the effect of sadness/strength on inspiration and donation behaviour by using pictures with texts for a young children education foundation. The studies have found that both the combination of sadness and strength condition and strength-dominating condition elicited higher inspiration than sadness-dominating condition; and the donation amount in the combined condition was substantially higher than in the sadness-dominating condition. The results indicate a positive effect of inspiration.

J. Liang and colleagues found some evidence that negative emotions do not induce inspiration thus demote donation behaviour as an alternative theory to the mainstream model. However, it should be noted that the studies elicited inspiration by only specific target.



### **4.3. The effect of Guilt-focused appeals**

Government organizations utilize social marketing tools just like any other sectors nowadays to encourage the public to comply with rules or standards. Nonprofit organizations do the same to promote donating behaviour and guilt-appeal has become more and more popular as a persuasive technique among other negative emotion appeals such as fear and shame. Previous research has found support for the effect of guilt appeals (Coulter et al., 1999; Cotte et al., 2005; Burnett et al., 1994).

Guilt is defined as a feeling that results from one's conflicting knowledge of one's moral or ethical standards and action (Freedman et al., 1967). Macker found evidence to support that guilt comes from a violation of internal standards and this regretful feeling led to lessened self-esteem.

On the other hand, dissonance was defined as an inconsistency among beliefs or behaviours can cause psychological discomfort (i.e., cognitive dissonance), which encourages individual to change inconsistent elements to reduce the negative inconsistencies or avoid situation/information that might increase the dissonance (Festinger L. 1957).

Guilt and dissonance not only have similarities in their definitions, but the courses of action to reduce the feeling of guilt and dissonance are similar as well. To alleviate the feeling of guilt, an individual would do good deeds, undo harm or self-criticism/punishment. In other words, when one feels guilty, one would be more likely to comply to rid/reduce the inconsistency feeling.

These theoretical backgrounds offered some explanation to the mechanism of guilt-appeal marketing, and the actual effect of such appeal was examined (Pinto et al., 1995). Their studies have found that certain advertisements which intend to invoke guilt might actually induce irritation or anger among recipients thus bring negative consequences for advertisers.

In the studies conducted by Coulter and Pinto, the effect of guilt appeals in advertising was examined, and the results show that with the increase of the level of guilt, more anger, annoyance and irritation are generated whereas less upbeat feelings such as happiness and amusement are generated. It indicates that low to moderate level of guilt may effectively communicate with audiences, but annoyance and irritation start to surface when the attempts are excessive. IZARD (1997) suggests the reason might be that blatant guilt-appeals are essentially attacking on one's actions and ethics, thus become offensive and irritating.

#### **4.3.1. The effect of different types of guilt**

Guilt appeals are receiving more and more attention in a marketing context as techniques to induce feelings of guilt to motivate individuals to conduct certain behaviours.

As research point out that empathy and self-efficacy are the determinants on the effectiveness of guilt. Such research also takes advertisement credibility, message framing and perceived manipulation intent into account (Cotte et al., 2005; Agrawal et al., 2010). Verbal and visual messages can both bring guilt according to research (Huhmann e., al 1997), and based on the source, the feeling of guilt is typically categorized as existential, anticipatory and reactive guilt in research. (Enhancing or disrupting) Existential guilt occurs when an individual wrestles with who he/she is, what he/she is and his/her place in the world. For example, the commonly known "white

guilt”, it refers to a white person feels guilt about being white because he/she is aware that he/she is part of the dominant racial group and part of the problem that non-white people deal with on a daily basis. Reactive guilt refers to the feeling of guilt after a fact, and it is a reaction to what has been done. In contrast, anticipatory guilt appears when a person knows that there might have negative impacts to what the acts they are going to commit. Anticipatory and reactive guilt appeals are common in marketing therefore more focused in research.

According to past studies, anticipatory and reactive guilt may elicit prosocial behaviour (Lindsey et al., 2007), however, the actual effect of the appeals or which type of guilt is more favorable is not understood.

In the experiments conducted by Renner and colleagues (d), the results suggested that when it comes to promoting prosocial behaviour, anticipatory guilt appeals are more effective than reactive guilt appeals. Possible reasons were provided by LaBarge, in his opinion, reactive guilt induces higher levels of felt guilt and unintended emotions such as irritation; and anticipatory guilt enable the recipients act to avoid violating social standard since it is concerning the future. In other words, recipients are more interested when there are possibilities of guilt-reducing behaviour whereas when an individual feel incapable of changing something, it may result in emotional inaction and burnout. Secondly, high-involvement increases motivation to process information, this is a recognized concept in marketing research, and it is because persuasion knowledge is active when a specific topic is involved; therefore, it is considered effective to present negative information when the mental focus is elsewhere.

It is also found that two-sided messages are more effective than one-sided messages. According to inoculation theory, it is because two-sided messages can enhance attitude stability and are more persuasive since counterarguments are reduced.

Hence, anticipatory guilt is found to be more effective than reactive guilt appeals.

To draw conclusions from the studies, when presenting a negative emotional ad, which guilt is intended to evoke? Is it persuasive or just causing emotional burnout and inaction?

#### **4.3.2. The effectiveness of guilt-based appeals on different audience. (Group and gender)**

Negative-appeals advertising especially guilt-based advertising has different effect when it comes to different groups and gender (Van Rijn, J 2017). Fasseur and colleagues found some evidence that when the advertisement is concerned with connected people (i.e., people in your home country), a positive-appeal leads to more positive ad attitude than a negative-appeal advertisement. (Cialdini et al., 1997) propose that one of the reasons is that when people feel a connection with the people portrayed in the ad, they relate to the people in need and feel the problem will potentially affect them, and therefore are more concerned about the situation. Similarly, Obermiller (1995) conducted an experiment using sick back and well baby posters, the results indicate that when the issue is regarded as rather important, a sick baby appeal may not offer advantages, whereas when the issue is regarded as unimportant, a sick baby appeal may offer advantage.

Gender difference in guilt-based advertising appeals was also found in past research. Elyria and colleagues conducted experiments to examine the potential moderator role of biological sex and

gender in charitable appeals; sympathy was used as an emotional appeal in the experiments. The results support that female have higher intentions to give money than male do in sympathy-appeal advertising and individuals scoring high on femininity also expressed greater charity-giving intentions than individuals scoring high on masculinity (Elyria K et al., 2013). Thus, an interaction of sympathy and gender and gender identity was found.

Men and women are not fundamentally different in terms of helping intentions based on previous research. However, generally, women are more sensitive to emotional stimuli and have stronger emotional responses than men. Women are more responsive to feelings of others and better at expressing feelings and interpreting feelings according to research (Noller P 1981). It has also been found that women have significantly higher empathic tendency due to more sensitiveness to the trouble of others, and since empathy plays an important role in helping behaviour, it is not baseless to the gender difference in prosocial behaviour.

Further, women have been found to be more greatly affected by sympathetic emotional reactions than men when judging whether to help a needy stranger (Hoffman, M. L. 1977).

Especially in western culture, males are associated with assertiveness and aggressiveness whereas females are more socialized with caring and nurturing (Eagly et al., 1991), and this kind of gender-appropriate behaviours and gender identity are expected from early childhood.

Other research also found evidence to support gender difference in donation behaviour. In a study conducted by Van R and colleagues, the results show that in a control group, the average donation in male is 40% higher than female, but the outcome is significantly reversed when in a guilt-based treatment with female donated almost twice as male did (Van R et al., 2017); (Wang L 2008) found that females show higher helping intention in a sad appeal comparing to a rational appeal whereas male show no significant difference in the two appeals. Gender difference in prosocial behaviour induced by guilt-based appeals is recognized through these studies.

#### **4.3.3. Guilt appeals may result in shame or irritation**

Lazarus's general theory of emotion and adaptation has been the inspiration for a substantial amount of research on helping behaviour. For example, Bagozzi and colleagues confirmed the mediating role of empathy in donation behaviour in their studies which showed that participants in the empathy condition (ads designed to induce sadness) expressed higher donation intention than participants in the control condition. However, the results also indicate that when the advertisement aims to evoke negative emotions such as fear or sadness, these negative feelings can be intensified after repeated viewings and lead to emotional wear-out and causing distress to viewers. The exact mechanism was not examined in this study. Previous studies found that certain advertisement intend to elicit guilt may actually invoke shame instead (Bennett R 2015).

According to past research, two common emotional responses after seeing another person suffer are empathy and personal distress. As studies suggest, empathy is a mediator in donation behaviour, but personal stress may play the opposite role in such cases. Personal distress is a self-focused emotional reaction which aims to alleviate personal discomfort. For example, if you see a suffering stray dog laying in a street corner, you can either feel empathic and take the dog to a vet and get involved; or, if personal distress is the dominant emotional response, you may pick up the pace

and avoid looking at the stray and simple walk away. It is supported by past studies that personal distress motivates individuals to alleviate personal discomfort by escaping the victim (Batson et al., 1983).

#### **4.4. Persuasion knowledge in advertising.**

Advertisers try to use different tactics to get the viewers to process the ad with more attention thus enhance persuasion, however, these processing-raising tactics may also increase the persuasion knowledge activation which means the more active processing sometimes leave viewers more attention to think about what is the motive of the advertiser, therefore increase the probability of negative consequences, such as inference of manipulative intent.

Inference of manipulative intent is interpreted as consumer inference that the advertiser is using unfair, inappropriate, or manipulative measures to persuade the consumers. But what would be considered unfair, inappropriate or manipulative? According to previous research, perception of unfairness is built on the comparison of oneself to others involved (Adams J.S. 1965), it means when an individual compares their personal benefits and investments to those of others, they sense inequity when it is out of balance. In other words, consumers also take the advertiser's benefits and investments into account, thus, when consumers perceive low ratio of personal benefits to investments compare to the ratio of the advertiser's, they may infer an inappropriate, unfair or manipulative intent from the advertiser.

Past research also suggests that when a viewer suspect manipulative intent from the advertiser, the message would likely be rejected (Eagly et al., 1978). To support this hypothesis, Coulter and colleagues conducted an experiment on working mothers' response to guilt-appeal ads. The results show that the mothers felt rather angry than guilty in high level guilt-appeal advertisements (Coulter et al., 1995). It is believed that the reaction is caused by evaluating the ad as inappropriate and unfair thus invoke negative attitude towards the ad.

In a study which examines the role of advertisement credibility and perceived manipulative intent, the results confirm that "when consumers perceive more unfairness, inappropriateness, or manipulative intent, they are less likely to feel guilty and more likely to feel angry" and a negative relationship exists between perceptions of manipulative intent and donation behaviour (Cotte J et al., 2005). As discussed before, guilt has a positive impact on helping behaviour whereas anger has the opposite effect; and the perceived manipulative intent would disrupt the intended objectives by the advertiser.

There are several explanations for how these inferences lower ad attitude. For example, these inferences may increase counterarguing, which decreases persuasion (Petty et al., 1981); also, consumers resist the message when they recognize the biased message and the intention to persuade (Eagly et al., 1978); and an inference of inappropriate or manipulative could harm the advertiser's credibility hence lower the attitude towards the ad and brand (R.J. Lutz et al., 1985).

All these explanations support that the inferences of manipulative intent will lower ad effectiveness and decrease the effect of advertising persuasion.

##### **4.4.1. The effect of negative appeals on activating persuasion knowledge**

Recently, a group of scientists conducted a series of experiments to examine the impact of sad facial expressions on advertisement effectiveness (Marijke et al., 2018). They proposed that a sad-faced image would evoke consumers' manipulation inference from the advertiser. They suggest that the reason behind it is that consumers have a goal to maintain positive feelings and reduce

negative feelings (Lazarus et al., 1984), and when consumers see a sad image, they interpret that the advertiser is forcing a negative emotion on them to achieve their advertising goals; also, from an anthropological perspective, images of others' suffering is considered as an attention-grabbing tactic, hence more manipulative intent will be inferred by viewers (Kleinman 1996). Indeed, their results show that compare to happy and neutral conditions, ad evaluations were substantially lower and inference of manipulative intent was higher in sad condition.

#### **4.4.2. The role of regulatory focus on activating persuasion knowledge against negative appeals**

Theories on emotions provide support that a sense of helplessness is associated with sadness because sadness arises from a misfortune which is beyond one's control, and the helpless feeling would subsequently increase one's sensitivity to the elements threatening one's personal control; Previous research suggest that viewers activate persuasion knowledge which evaluates the persuasion tactics and motivations of the advertiser to maintain control over the attempt (Friestad et al., 1994). Thus, it is likely to activate the viewer's persuasion knowledge if an advertisement increases viewer's sensitivity to the manipulative intent.

Based on these findings, J Choi and colleagues propose that viewing a sadness-appeal charity advertisement would increase viewer's sensitivity to advertiser's manipulative tactics because these tactics pose a threat to the viewer's control over donation decision (J Choi et al., 2021).

However, it is not expected that each and every viewer would activate persuasion knowledge against a certain appeal, and as suggested by some research, one factor behind this is the individual's regulatory focus.

Regulatory focus theory suggests that people pursue goals with either a promotion or a preventive focus (Higgins 1997). It is basically how people approach pleasure but avoid pain and it is focused on desired end-states; In other words, the regulatory focus is the approach to go from current state to the desired state. Individuals with a promotion-focus concentrates on gains such as accomplishments and hopes, and individuals with a preventive-focus concentrates on non-losses such as safety and responsibilities. In simpler words, promotion-focused individuals pursue goals eagerly while prevention-focused individuals pursue vigilantly. As a result of the difference in their goal-attaining strategies, it was proposed that the regulatory focus would determine to a certain degree that prevention-focus individuals are prone to sense manipulative intent and subsequently activate their persuasion knowledge when exposed to a sadness-appeal advertisement, and it is because sadness increase viewers' sensitivity due to low self-control caused by the manipulative tactics, and since prevention-focus individuals tend to be vigilant against losses, persuasion knowledge is activated to prevent loss of control over donation decision. Consequently, prevention-focus individuals are more likely to be skeptical of the advertisement and consider it inadequate, hence decrease donation.

However, it is also suggested that prevention-focus (vs promotion-focus) individuals act differently to sadness-appeal against a guilt-appeal.

J Choi found that a prevention focus discourages donation behaviour in a sadness appeal. Study 3 confirmed the proposed multi-chain process. Specifically, a prevention (vs. promotion) focus

increased skepticism against a sadness appeal, which in turn decreased feelings of sympathy and charitable giving (H2). However, these differences in skepticism, sympathy, and charitable giving were not observed for a happiness appeal. and more important, we do not have explanation based on the past literature regarding why this effect would occur. However, we acknowledge that we cannot completely rule out the possibility that there exist past findings based on which the effect can be predicted and that our individual studies may have been underpowered to detect the effect because of the insufficient samples size.

## 5. Conclusion

Inconsistent results were shown in the past decades regarding the use of negative appeals in marketing. This review focuses on the disadvantages of negative appeals featuring emotions such as sadness and guilt. First of all, we cannot rule out the positive aspects of negative appeals in evoking prosocial behaviour, potential explanation is that negative emotions such as sadness and guilt would induce empathy thus urge people into helping behaviour to resolve inner states inconsistency (Bagozzi et al., 1994); and positive emotions such as hope and strength would bring inspiration and encourage people to act. But as P.M. Homer 2021 found, a mix of positive and negative emotions works better at inducing donation behaviour than negative emotions alone. According to past research, empathy would increase prosocial behaviour (Bagozzi & Moore 1994), and since human-needs appeals assume the effect of eliciting sadness/empathy, it is common for charities to use suffering images as a campaign approach. As Bagozzi and colleagues also pointed out that intense or repeated negative feelings can cause distress, negative appeals may become less popular since it is an already exploited area. Indeed, best donation results come from appeals which also elicit hope as viewers are more likely to act when they saw evidence that the charity has achieved some success in the past and felt hopeful. One thing worth noting is that the effect of mixed emotions become less significant when the consumers' cognitive resource was constrained. Hence, potential ad campaigns should try avoid ad-clutter and distracting contexts for a better result.

On less positive notes, Stayman and colleagues found that repeated negative appeals reduce sympathy due to "wearout" effect, meaning when the message is repeated to a certain level, the viewers become inattentive and increase "own thoughts" rather than message related thoughts, thus creates "wearout" effect. Also, as pointed out by J.C. 2015 and Nadezda et al. 2014, advertisements using negative appeals such as sadness and guilt create distance between the viewers and the victims portrayed. Because such stereotyping gives a feeling of "us and them" and makes it easier to accept that people are suffering since there are different worlds.

Since guilt is one of the main negative appeals used in marketing, its effect has also been examined. Coulter and Pinto found that more anger, irritation and annoyance occur with the increased level of guilt, and its cause is that blatant guilt-appeals are essentially attacking one's ethics and actions. Similarly, Batson et al., 1983 found that after repeated viewings of guilt-based advertisement, personal distress may occur and thus motivates viewers to alleviate personal discomfort by escaping the situation. The effect of different types of guilt was also found to be different. According to Renner et al., 2013, anticipatory guilt appeals are more effective than reactive guilt appeals in promoting prosocial behaviour due to the incapability of changing the situation caused by reactive guilt thus result in emotional inaction and burnout. Group and gender difference in guilt appeals are also evident. Study found that when the issue is seen as important, a negative appeal may not be the better option (Obermiller 1995); Elyria K et al., 2013 found a significant difference in gender when it comes to guilt-based advertising; the studies showed that females express greater sympathy and helping behaviour because females are more sensitive to emotional stimuli and have stronger emotional responses comparing to males.



An undeniable flaw of negative appeals was found to be its perceived manipulative intent. Past research also suggests that when a viewer suspect manipulative intent from the advertiser, the message would likely be rejected (Eagly et al., 1978). When viewers perceive manipulative intent, they are less likely to feel guilty and more likely to feel angry (Cotte J et al., 2005); and viewers activate persuasion knowledge if advertisements increase their sensitivity to the manipulative intent.

Therefore, more targeted emotion research needs to be conducted to examine the effect of negative emotions on prosocial behaviour.

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