The Effects of Negative Emotions Provoke By a Shocking Ad on Drinking and Driving: Measurement of Emotions With Izard’s Scale

Imene Becheur, Wesford School of Business, Grenoble, France
Hayan Dib, Wesford School of Business, Grenoble, France
Pierre Valette-Florence, University Pierre Mendes France, IAE Grenoble, France

This research studies the effects of nine basic emotions activated by a shocking message on drinking and driving and measured by Izard's Scale. We assume that fear, shame, guilt, distress, anger, disgust, contempt, surprise and interest have positive and direct effects on persuasion. Results show that emotion measures constitute 4 dimensions. The first is called “primary emotions”, and is composed of items related to fear, anger, and sadness. The second, named “secondary emotions” is measured by items from shame and guilt. The third dimension is “contempt/disgust” and the fourth is “surprise”. Results show that primary emotions and “contempt/disgust” have direct effects on persuasion. Surprisingly, the effect of contempt/disgust on persuasion is negative. This research shows also that perceived self-efficacy favours persuasion.

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Imene Becheur, Wesford School of Business, Grenoble, France
Hayan Dib, Wesford School of Business, Grenoble, France
Pierre Valette-Florence, University Pierre Mendes France, IAE and Cerag, Grenoble, France

The purpose of this research is to study the effects of negative emotions elicited by a shocking anti-alcohol message on persuasion. The emotions tested correspond to the basic emotions defined by Izard (1977) excepting joy. The first part of this research is theoretical and allows us to define and understand the concept and way of action of the emotions in psychology then to present the different models having taken interest in fear appeals. The second part, of empirical nature aims to test different issued hypotheses based on the emotions literature.

Our work stands in the field of social marketing, especially public health. We focus on the use of negative emotions appeals in the case of advertising targeting an audience of young adults and directed towards prevention of physical and psychosocial risks linked to drinking and driving, which constitutes a major safety issue in many countries.

We build a conceptual model explaining persuasion. We suppose that fear, shame, guilt, distress, anger, disgust, contempt, surprise and interest have positive and direct effects on persuasion. We also hypothesize that for highly threatening messages, perceived ability to adopt the recommended solution has a positive impact on persuasion.

In order to test these hypotheses, an on-line questionnaire was answered by students belonging to different French universities. We collected 167 usable questionnaires. We verified scale dimensionality through exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. We also tested convergent and discriminant validities of the scales as well as reliability. A principal component analysis, with Promax rotation, performed on the 27 items of Izard’s scale (without the variable joy), resulted in four dimensions interpreted as: primary emotions, secondary emotions, contempt/disgust, and surprise.

A test of the model reveals a rather sufficient fit ($\chi^2(491)=1258.97; \text{RMSEA}=0.092; \text{AGFI}=0.745$). This test also shows that 3 of the 5 relations tested are verified (table 2). Thus, primary emotions, contempt/disgust, and self-efficacy have positive and direct effects on persuasion (H1a, H1c, and H2 accepted).

Contrary to our assumption, secondary emotions and surprise did not have the expected effects on persuasion. Meanwhile, recent studies maintain that threatening ads elicit a broad range of negative emotions such as fear, shame, or guilt which all have positive effects on persuasion (Becheur et al., 2007).

Moreover, even if the dimension contempt/disgust influences persuasion, this impact is surprising, because its negative.

Results support the theories of Leventhal (1970), Rogers (1983) and Witte (1992) considering that fear determines behavior, and extends findings on the role of fear to other emotions. This research also shows the importance of integrating solutions in threatening messages. Advertisers should recommend solutions perceived as efficient and easy to adopt (Rogers, 1983; Rothenberg, 1991; Witte, 1992; Block and Keller, 1997). Self-efficacy would, allow to lower the cost of the recommended solution (Hale and Dillard, 1995).

Of course, this research suffers from limitations, one of which being that emotions have been measured through questionnaires which may lead to an overestimation of the emotional states and to a difficulty for respondents to express their affective state (Derbaix and Poncin 2005). The expansion of this research to other populations and the use of other measurement instruments are highly recommended.

Moreover, to increase perceived self-efficacy, we used verbal persuasion which consists in providing to the individuals information on how to avert the threat. Practitioners can also enhance self-efficacy by vicariant learning (Gallopol, 2006). It would be interesting to test if the use of x-smokers or alcoholics testimonies increases self-efficacy.

The threat used in our study is both physical and social. Studies show that fear appeals are more persuasive among adults and that perceived susceptibility to physical threats increases with age (Smith and Stutts, 2003). Young people would then be more susceptible to social threats. It would be interesting to test the effect of our ad on an older target in order to study the moderating effect of age.

The expansion of this research to other populations and the evaluation of the moderating effects of gender are also highly recommended. In deed, women seem to react more intensely to emotional stimuli (Tangney, 1990) and experiment more shame, guilt, warmth, joy and fear than men. Block and Keller (1997) argue that fear appeals containing self-efficacy are more persuasive among women than men.

References


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