

Influence of Fear and Humour Appeal in Advertising Among Selected Students of Olabisi Onabanjo University

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of fear and humour appeals in advertising among students of Olabisi Onabanjo University. A quantitative experimental design was employed, using questionnaires administered to Mass Communication students to evaluate their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional responses after exposure to both appeals. Grounded in Emotional Arousal Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the study explores how emotional stimuli influence consumer reactions and decision-making. Findings reveal that humour appeals significantly enhance engagement and purchase intention compared to fear appeals, which, although effective in attracting attention, often trigger mixed emotions leading to disengagement, particularly among male respondents. Conversely, humour fosters positive brand associations and immediate consumer action. While both appeals have distinct persuasive strengths, humour is especially effective with young audiences, whereas fear can instill urgency but may not resonate universally. The study recommends that advertisers use humour-based strategies to build brand engagement and positive relations with youth audiences. When employing fear, campaigns should provide clear, actionable solutions to sustain interest.

Keywords: *fear appeal, humour appeal, advertising, engagement, purchase intentions.*

INTRODUCTION

Advertising has evolved into one of the most influential tools for shaping consumer perception, attitudes, and behaviour. It goes beyond the simple act of promoting a product or service; it serves as the foundation for creating and sustaining brand loyalty. The term advertising is derived from the Latin verb *advertere*, meaning to turn one's attention toward something. This reflects the primary goal of advertising to capture the audience's attention and guide it toward a particular product, service, or idea. Cluley (2003) describes advertising as a form of learning, where consumers acquire new information about products or services, ultimately influencing their purchasing decisions. Through various media such as television, radio, print, outdoor platforms, and digital channels, advertising communicates paid messages that inform, persuade, and remind audiences of brands and their offerings.

To achieve its goals, advertisers use several creative strategies known as advertising appeals. According to MBA Skool Team (2025), an advertising appeal is "the

strategy used to attract attention from the customers ... influence their feelings and change their attitude in favor of the advertised product/service. These appeals are generally categorized into emotional and rational appeals. Emotional appeal targets the audience's feelings, while rational appeal focuses on logical reasoning and factual information. Keshari and Jain (2014) describe emotional appeal as a persuasive technique that elicits positive or negative emotions to motivate purchase behaviour. Such emotions—ranging from happiness to fear—are intentionally evoked to establish a connection with the consumer and create a lasting impression of the brand. Among the various forms of emotional appeals, humour and fear stand out as two of the most powerful yet contrasting techniques. Hornik, Ofir, and Rachamim (2017) found through a meta-analysis that emotional appeals tend, overall, to be more effective than rational appeals in advertising. Meanwhile, Riemer & Noel (2020) showed that emotional arousal may reduce immediate recall but improves delayed memory when aligned with the ad's claims. Kotler (1997) in Nadube & Isenah (2022) submits that advertising appeal is the theme of an advertisement.

Humour appeal employs wit, irony, and comedic elements to entertain audiences, making the advertisement more enjoyable and memorable. Strick, van Baaren, Holland, & van Knippenberg (2011) found that humour in advertising increases product liking through mere association, and a study on health ads also showed that humorous messages were better recognized and considered more persuasive than non-humorous ones. Similarly, Hameed, Khan, and Shahab (2020), perceived humor in advertisements can enhance attitudes toward the ad and the brand, which in turn lead to greater purchase intention. The effectiveness of humour in advertising, however, depends on its cultural appropriateness and audience understanding. What one individual finds amusing, another might consider offensive. Therefore, marketers must possess deep audience insight to use humour effectively (Wang, Lu, Tan, & Zhang, 2019).

In contrast, fear appeal operates by highlighting potential threats or negative consequences to influence behaviour. It emerged prominently in the 1980s through provocative campaigns by fashion brands like Calvin Klein, Benetton, and Richard James, whose bold imagery stirred public awareness. Subsequently, fear-based communication found significant application in social marketing campaigns addressing public health, safety, and environmental concerns. Kigatiira (2020), for instance, investigated the use of fear appeal in promoting COVID-19 preventive behaviours in Kenya and found it effective in motivating compliance. Fear appeal leverages the mirror effect, prompting audiences to visualize the possible dangers of certain behaviours and the relief offered by the promoted solution. Tannenbaum et al (2015) and Worthington (2021) explain that this process begins with a threat depiction, induces anxiety, and then provides a remedy thereby fostering trust and persuasion. Fear appeal has been widely used in campaigns promoting road safety, disease prevention, anti-smoking messages, and beauty products.

Both humour and fear appeals, despite their differing emotional triggers, share a common objective to capture attention, enhance recall, and influence consumer

behaviour. Understanding how these appeals function, particularly among young adults who are constantly exposed to digital and mass media, is vital for advertisers and scholars alike. The university environment provides an ideal context for studying these effects, as students represent an informed yet emotionally responsive demographic that frequently engages with various media platforms. Advertising has increasingly relied on emotional appeal to connect with audiences (Otamendi & Sutil, 2020; Nadube & Isenah 2022). Among emotional strategies, humour is one of the most frequently employed (Núñez-Barriopedro, Goralczyk Klusek & Tobar-Pesántez, 2019), while fear appeal emerged later, especially as a response to promoting public awareness around harmful products and risky behaviours. Research indicates mixed outcomes for these appeals. Núñez-Barriopedro, Goralczyk Klusek & Tobar-Pesántez, 2019 and Warren, Percival Carter and McGraw (2019), found that humour-based advertisements are effective in increasing message retention, purchase likelihood, and emotional connection with brands. In contrast, fear-based ads tend to capture attention but may not always lead to sustained behavioural change. Tannenbaum et al (2015) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis by Melanie B. Tannenbaum et al. (2015) showed that fear appeals had positive effects on attitudes, intentions, and behaviours overall (average effect size $d \approx 0.29$) but that they were more effective for one-time behaviours than for repeated behaviours.

Although various studies (Núñez-Barriopedro, Goralczyk Klusek & Tobar-Pesántez, 2019; Warren, Percival Carter and McGraw, 2019; Otamendi & Sutil, 2020; Nadube & Isenah 2023) have examined humour and fear appeals, few have specifically explored their comparative impact on young adults—particularly university students who constitute a vital segment for many brands. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge that gap by investigating the impact of humour and fear appeal on students of Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU). It aims to determine how these appeals influence comprehension, behavioural intention, and emotional response, offering insights into effective advertising communication among young consumers.

The objectives of the study are to evaluate how fear and humour appeals influence behavioural intentions, to assess how fear and humour appeals affect students' comprehension of advertising messages, and to analyze gender differences in emotional responses to fear- and humour-based advertisements. The study will address questions on how fear and humour appeals influence behavioural intentions, how they affect comprehension of advertising messages, and how gender differences influence emotional responses to such advertisements. It hypothesizes that fear appeal will lead to higher behavioural intentions but lower liking of the advertisement, and that humour appeal in advertisements significantly influences consumers' intention to act on the advertised product.

This study focuses on the impact of fear and humour appeals in advertising among students of the Department of Mass Communication, Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU), Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria. The findings contributes to understanding how emotional appeals shape perception and decision-making among

young adults, offering valuable insights for advertisers, educators, and communication scholars interested in emotional persuasion in advertising.

LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Sun, Wang, and Jiang (2021) examined the effectiveness of fear appeals in shaping young people's perceptions of e-cigarette risks using the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM) and the Appraisal-Tendency Framework (ATF). Their findings showed that high-threat, high-efficacy fear appeals significantly increased perceived risk, evoked emotions such as fear and anger, and stimulated protection motivation. Age, gender, and smoking history moderated these effects: adults aged 25–35 reacted more strongly than younger participants, females showed higher efficacy and motivation, and non-smokers perceived greater risk than smokers. The study concluded that fear-based messages must be audience-specific to maximize behavioural change.

Similarly, Asghar and Zar (2021) explored the influence of humour, fear, and emotional appeals on consumer purchasing decisions in Peshawar. Using 500 respondents and SPSS analysis, they found that humour had the strongest positive effect on purchase intention. Emotional and fear appeals also influenced decisions but were less impactful. The study emphasized humour's ability to create positive moods, increase message retention, and strengthen brand connections, particularly on social media platforms popular with young consumers.

Tannenbaum et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 127 studies to evaluate the effectiveness of fear appeals in altering attitudes and behaviours. The results confirmed that fear appeals were more effective when accompanied by efficacy statements, vivid imagery, and messages emphasizing severity and susceptibility. The study also found fear appeals most effective among younger audiences, collectivist cultures, and female respondents. However, excessive fear reduced persuasiveness, indicating an optimal threshold. This research reinforces the idea that fear must be strategically balanced to avoid message rejection.

Weinberger and Gulas (1992) also found that humour remains a major advertising strategy, appearing in about a quarter of prime-time television ads. Their analysis confirmed humour's strength in capturing attention and generating positive attitudes toward both ads and brands. While its effect on comprehension and persuasion varies, humour generally enhances likability and recall, particularly when the humour relates directly to the product or message.

In contrast, Venkatesh and Senthilkumar (2015) reviewed the role of humour in advertising over four decades and found it present in 10–30% of global advertisements and even more in broadcast media. They concluded that humour enhances consumer recall, brand likability, and engagement by creating enjoyable experiences. It is especially effective in low-involvement products and services, reducing resistance to persuasion. Different humour types—such as satire, parody, and irony—were found to capture attention effectively and foster emotional connection with brands. In the same

way, Suka and Shimazaki (2023) tested humour appeals in Japanese health promotion posters and found that humour significantly improved persuasiveness for less familiar health topics like advance care planning but was less effective for familiar ones like cancer screening. The study concluded that humour works best when introducing new or sensitive health issues, but not when the topic already evokes strong associations.

Lennon and Rentfro (2010) analyzed the influence of fear appeal public service announcements (PSAs) among young adults using the EPPM. Through focus group discussions and regression analysis, they found that fear arousal was the strongest predictor of PSA effectiveness. Gender differences also emerged: men responded more to graphic content, while women were influenced by perceived consequences. The authors suggested that effective PSA design should balance emotional intensity with relevance to the target demographic. Similarly, Ferguson & Phau (2013) examined adolescents' and young adults' responses to anti-smoking fear appeals using data from 548 respondents aged 13–30. The study revealed that adolescents and non-smokers experienced stronger fear reactions than older participants and smokers. Factual and social ostracism appeals worked best for adolescents, while young adults were less responsive.

Collectively, these studies reveal that emotional appeals—whether fear or humour—are powerful tools in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours. Fear appeals motivate through perceived risk and urgency, while humour appeals engage audiences through enjoyment and relatability. For young audiences such as university students, humour tends to be more effective in generating positive emotions, sustaining attention, and fostering brand loyalty. The reviewed evidence suggests that advertisers targeting students should prioritize humour appeals while integrating moderate emotional cues to maximize both engagement and persuasion.

This study is anchored on three major theories: Emotional Arousal Theory, Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), and Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), each providing a distinct yet complementary understanding of how fear and humour appeals influence attitudes and behaviours.

The Emotional Arousal Theory explains how emotional intensity affects cognitive and behavioural outcomes. It posits that individuals are motivated to maintain an optimal level of arousal—neither too high nor too low (Cherry, 2023). Richard Lazarus's (1991) work expanded the concept to include emotional responses such as fear, excitement, and joy as drivers of behaviour. High emotional arousal enhances attention, memory retention, and decision-making, making it crucial in advertising. Missaglia, Mauri, Oppo, and Russo (2014) argue that emotional arousal influences brand attitude and advertisement effectiveness, as emotions shape how audiences process messages. Fear-based advertising uses arousal to evoke urgency or anxiety, motivating viewers to take preventive action, while humour creates positive arousal that increases enjoyment and brand recall. Among university students, who often face academic and social pressures, these emotions can strongly influence how they engage with media messages. Thus, Emotional Arousal Theory provides a foundation for understanding

how varying emotional intensities whether fear or humour affect attention, persuasion, and recall in advertising.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), developed by Petty and Cacioppo in the early 1980s, offers another perspective on persuasion. It describes two main routes through which individuals process persuasive messages: the central and peripheral routes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The central route involves deep, thoughtful engagement with message content, leading to long-lasting attitude change. The peripheral route, on the other hand, relies on surface cues such as the attractiveness or humour of the message, resulting in temporary attitude shifts (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Fear appeals often activate central route processing because they prompt audiences to critically assess the severity of a threat and possible solutions. For instance, students exposed to health-related fear messages may reflect deeply on their behaviour, leading to behavioural change. Humour appeals, however, tend to engage audiences through the peripheral route, eliciting positive emotions and short-term interest. Though they may not always lead to enduring behavioural changes, humorous ads are effective in enhancing brand likability and recall. ELM clarifies how emotional variables—such as fear or humour—can act as either central or peripheral cues depending on message relevance and audience involvement.

The Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), developed by Rogers in 1975 and later expanded in 1983, further deepens the understanding of how individuals respond to fear-based persuasion. PMT suggests that people take protective action based on two cognitive processes: threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal involves evaluating the severity of a danger and personal vulnerability to it, while coping appraisal assesses the perceived ability to manage or avoid the threat (Marikyan & Papagiannidis, 2023). The theory posits that the motivation to protect oneself arises when individuals perceive a significant threat coupled with an effective means of avoidance. In the context of advertising, fear appeals that clearly define both the risk and the solution are more likely to lead to behaviour change. For example, an anti-smoking ad that shows the dangers of lung disease (threat) and highlights quitting aids (coping mechanism) can effectively prompt self-protective actions. For young adults, who often underestimate risks, PMT offers insight into how fear messages can increase awareness and encourage responsible behaviour.

Together, these three theories create a strong conceptual framework for understanding the impact of emotional appeals in advertising among university students. Emotional Arousal Theory explains the physiological and psychological basis of emotional influence; the Elaboration Likelihood Model clarifies how message processing determines the depth of persuasion; and Protection Motivation Theory provides insight into the mechanisms through which fear motivates behavioural change. Collectively, they highlight that both fear and humour appeals can be effective, but their influence depends on emotional intensity, message relevance, and audience engagement. This theoretical grounding enables a deeper understanding of how emotional appeals shape perception, comprehension, and behavioural intention among

Olabisi Onabanjo University students, making it essential to the study of advertising effectiveness in a youth-centered context.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative experimental research design to examine the effect of fear and humour appeals in advertising among students of Mass Communication at Olabisi Onabanjo University. According to Creswell (2012), experimental research seeks to determine whether a specific treatment affects an outcome by comparing groups that receive and do not receive the treatment. This approach allows for cause-and-effect examination under controlled conditions. In this study, participants were divided into control, fear, and humour groups, and their attitudes were measured before and after exposure to advertisements. The design enabled the researcher to identify changes in perception and behaviour resulting from the emotional appeals presented.

The population of the study comprised all Mass Communication students at Olabisi Onabanjo University, totalling 605 across all levels. A sample size of 236 respondents was derived using the SurveyMonkey calculator at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The simple random sampling technique was adopted, giving each student an equal chance of selection to reduce bias and enhance validity. Respondents were distributed evenly across four academic levels, with 59 participants drawn from each level and further divided equally into control, fear, and humour groups.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural responses before and after exposure to advertisements. The instrument included demographic questions, Likert-scale items, and multiple-choice questions to gather comprehensive behavioural data. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts for relevance and clarity. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.823, indicating high internal consistency and suitability for further analysis.

Three different video advertisements were used as stimuli in the study. The advertisements were existing video advertisements selected to represent three distinct advertising appeals: fear appeal, humour appeal, and a neutral/control appeal. The selected advertisements were comparable in terms of product category and general advertising purpose, while differing in the dominant appeal employed. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental conditions and were exposed to only the video advertisement corresponding to their assigned condition. The advertisements were presented under supervised conditions using a common playback device and viewing arrangement to ensure consistency of exposure. Each participant watched the assigned advertisement in its entirety, after which the post-exposure questionnaire was administered immediately to assess attitudes, message comprehension, and behavioural intention while the advertisement remained fresh in memory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results below are presented as descriptive frequencies and percentages across the three groups.

Table 1: Socio demographic information.

Question/Items	Response	Control group		humour group		fear group	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Ager/	18-20	44	57.9%	42	52.5%	45	56.3%
	21-23	21	27.6%	38	47.5%	31	38.8%
	24-26	9	11.8%	0	0	4	5%
	27 +	2	2.6	0	0	0	0
Gender	Male	13	17.1%	25	31.3%	22	27.5%
	Female	63	82.9%	55	68.8%	58	72.5
	other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Year of study	100 level	19	25%	20	25%	20	25%
	200 level	19	25%	20	25%	20	25%
	300 level	19	25%	20	25%	20	25%
	400 level	19	25%	20	25%	20	25%
How often do you engage with the media	Very often	58	76.3%	47	58.8%	60	75%
	Often	11	14%	22	27.5%	15	18.8%
	Occasionally	4	5.3%	8	10%	4	5%
	Rarely	2	2.6%	3	3.8%	1	1.3%
	never	1	1.3%	0	0	0	0

The table above represents, the socio-demographic profile of participants across the three experimental groups; Fear, Humour, and Control shows a generally well-balanced distribution. Most participants fall within the 18–20 age range, pointing to a predominantly younger sample. However, the Control group reflects slightly more variation across age brackets, suggesting a touch more diversity in that category. In terms of gender, females make up the majority in all three groups, with the Control group showing the highest proportion at 82.9% followed by fear group at 72.5 and humour group at 68.8. Educational levels are evenly spread across all groups, indicating a deliberate effort to balance the sample in terms of year of study. When it comes to media engagement, most participants reported engaging with media “very often,” especially in the Fear (75%) and Control (76.3%) groups, with slightly lower but still significant engagement in the humour group (58.8%).

Table 2: Influence of fear and humour appeal on behavioural intentions.

Question/Items	Response	Control group		humour group		fear group	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
	Strongly Disagree	6	7.9%	9	11.3%	19	23.8%

The advertisement I was exposed to influences my intention to act (e.g., purchase, inquire about the product).	Disagree	6	7.9%	6	7.5%	8	10.0%
	Neutral	13	17.1%	13	16.3%	11	13.8%
	Agree	37	48.7%	40	50.0%	23	28.7%
	Strongly Agree	14	18.4%	12	15.0%	19	23.8%
When exposed to the advert, which of the following do you most likely do?	Ignore the advertisement	7	9.2%	12	15.0%	11	13.8%
	Act immediately	11	14.5%	9	11.3%	11	13.8%
	Research the product or brand further	42	55.3%	30	37.5%	21	26.3%
	Talk to someone about it	11	14.5%	24	30.0%	28	35.0%
	None of the above	5	6.6%	5	6.3%	9	11.3%
The advertisement makes me more likely to engage with the brand	Strongly Disagree	4	5.3%	5	6.3%	25	31.3%
	Disagree	4	5.3%	3	3.8%	18	22.5%
	Neutral	17	22.4%	12	15.0%	9	11.3%
	Agree	41	53.9%	49	61.3%	17	21.3%
	Strongly Agree	10	13.2%	11	13.8%	11	13.8%
How does the advertisement influence your behaviour	It increases my likelihood to act	51	67.1%	61	76.3%	34	42.5%
	It has no effect on my actions	17	22.4%	14	17.5%	36	32.5%
	I am not sure	8	10.5%	4	5.0%	5	6.3%

Table 2 provides a clear picture of how fear and humour appeals influence behavioural intentions among participants. When asked whether the advertisement influenced their intention to act, 52.5% of the Fear group agreed or strongly agreed, showing a notable level of impact. Interestingly, 23.8% also disagreed, indicating some resistance to fear-based messaging. The Humour group showed a stronger response, with 66.2% agreeing or strongly agreeing, suggesting that humour may be even more effective at prompting behavioural intentions. The Control group showed a more neutral response overall, with fewer leaning toward agreement. For actual behavioural responses, both the Fear and

Humour groups showed high engagement. In the Fear group, 26.3% said they would research the product further, and 13.8% would act immediately. The Humour group showed even greater engagement, with 37.5% opting to research more and 30% choosing to act immediately. The Control group leaned toward research as well, with 55.3% indicating they would explore further, reflecting a more measured yet still interested response. In terms of brand engagement, the Humour group stood out, with 75.1% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the ad made them more likely to engage with the brand. The Control group followed with 67.1%, while the Fear group showed lower engagement, with 53.8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing and only 34.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This suggests that humour may be more effective than fear in building brand connection. Item 8 supported these findings, showing that most participants in both experimental groups felt the ad increased their likelihood to act.

Table 3: Impact of fear and humour appeal on student comprehension of advertisement messages.

Question/Items	Response	Control group		humour group		fear group	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
After viewing the advertisement, how likely are you to act upon the advertised product?	Very likely	11	14.5%	11	13.8%	14	17.5%
	Likely	40	52.6%	45	56.3%	22	27.5%
	Neutral	21	27.6%	19	23.8%	19	23.8%
	Unlikely	4	5.3%	5	6.3%	15	18.8%
	Very unlikely	0	0	0	0	10	12.5%
I find it easier to remember the message disseminated by the advertisement.	Strongly Disagree	4	5.3%	6	7.5%	2	2.5%
	Disagree	3	3.9%	4	5.0%	2	2.5%
	Neutral	10	13.2%	10	12.5%	10	12.5%
	Agree	44	57.9%	39	48.8%	40	50.0%
	Strongly Agree	15	19.7%	21	26.3%	26	32.5%

The data from table 3 reveals interesting insights into how fear and humour in advertisements influence students' understanding and reactions. Looking at the Item which examine how likely students are to act on the advertised product, we see some notable differences. In the Fear Group, 17.5% of students said they were "Very likely" to act, while 27.5% felt "Likely," bringing the total agreement to 45%. On the other hand,

the Humour Group showed stronger enthusiasm, with 56.3% saying they were "Likely" and 13.8% feeling "Very likely," while only 6.3% were "Very unlikely." The control group response show that 40% indicates likely will 10% indicates very likely. This suggests that while the Control Group demonstrates a moderate level of engagement with the advertisement, it lags behind the Humour Group. Humour might be a more effective way to encourage students to consider making a purchase, showcasing its ability to engage and persuade. When turned to the item which assesses how easily students remember the advertisement's message, the differences become even clearer. A striking 82.5% of students in the Fear Group found it easier to recall the advertisement's message. This indicates that fear-based appeals can create a strong emotional impact, making the message stick. In comparison, the Humour Group also had a positive response, with 74.1% agreeing they remembered the message and Control Group, where 77.6% of students agreed they found it easier to remember the message proving that that, neutral advertisements can still be quite effective, potentially leveraging clarity and straightforwardness to aid retention. The humour group is slightly lower than the Fear Group, also suggesting that while humour is engaging, it may not create the same sense of urgency or memorability.

Table 4 Gender differences in emotional responses to fear and humour-based advertisement.

Question/Items	Response	Control group		humour group		fear group	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
How do you generally feel when you encounter an advertisement?	Engaged and interested	38	50.0%	40	50.0%	38	47.5%
	Disinterested	1	1.3%	3	3.8%	4	5.0%
	Overwhelmed			5	6.3%	5	6.3%
	Curious about the product	33	43.4%	23	28.7%	26	32.5%
	Indifferent	4	5.3%	9	11.3%	7	8.8%
What type of emotional reaction do you find yourself having most frequently when seeing advertisement?	Joy	27	35.5%	32	40.0%	20	25.0%
	Surprise	21	27.6%	19	23.8%	22	27.5%
	Confusion	3	3.9%	2	2.5%	5	6.3%
	Disappointment	0	0	0	0	2	2.5%
	None of the above	25	32.9%	27	33.8%	31	38.8%
Advertisements heighten my feelings of anxiety or stress.	Strongly Disagree	13	17.1	15	18.8%	8	10.0%
	Disagree	18	23.7%	17	21.3%	27	33.8%
	Neutral	28	36.8%	19	23.8%	25	31.3%
	Agree	14	18.4%	25	31.3%	13	16.3%
	Strongly Agree	3	3.9%	4	5.0%	7	8.8%
	Strongly Disagree	3	3.9%	1	1.3%	6	7.5%

The Advertisement generally make me feel more positive and at ease.	Disagree	5	6.6%	5	6.3%	11	13.8%
	Neutral	28	36.8%	25	31.3%	21	26.3%
	Agree	31	40.8%	41	51.2%	30	37.5%
	Strongly Agree	9	11.8%	8	10.0%	12	15.0%
How would you characterize your overall emotional response after viewing the advertisement?	I feel entertained	41	53.9%	54	67.5%	20	25.0%
	I feel satisfied	17	22.4%	8	10.0%	29	36.3%
	I feel confused about the message	6	7.9%	2	2.5%	1	1.3%
	I feel neutral	11	14.5%	13	16.3%	19	23.8%
	I feel indifferent	1	1.3%	3	3.8%	11	13.8%

Table 4 above shows that both the Fear and Humour groups displayed strong engagement, with nearly half of the Fear group (47.5%) feeling “engaged and interested” and another third expressing curiosity about the product. The Humour group slightly edged ahead, with 50% reporting engagement, suggesting that humour may be more effective at capturing attention than fear. In contrast, the Control group, lacking any emotional trigger, exhibited more scattered reactions, ranging from curiosity to indifference, highlighting how emotionally neutral content fails to grab attention as effectively. Delving deeper into emotional responses, a notable 38.8% of the Fear group chose “none of the above” when asked about their most frequent emotional reactions, indicating complexities that are difficult to define, while 27.5% reported feeling surprised, aligning with the shock often associated with fear-based ads. Conversely, 40% of the Humour group expressed joy, clearly signaling that humour elicits a more predictable and positive emotional response. The Control group demonstrated a mix of feelings, with mentions of both joy and uncertainty, reinforcing the idea that neutral content prompts more subdued reactions. Regarding stress and anxiety, reactions varied significantly; although 48.8% of the Fear group disagreed that ads made them anxious, 25.1% admitted to feeling stressed, creating an emotional tug-of-war. Humour had a mixed impact, with 40.1% of participants disagreeing that humorous ads induced anxiety, while 36.3% agreed, suggesting that humour can be interpreted in diverse ways. The Control group remained the calmest, with 40.8% disagreeing and 36.8% neutral, indicating that emotionally neutral ads cause the least disturbance. When examining whether ads foster positive feelings, humour clearly led the way, as 61.2% of the Humour group agreed or strongly agreed that ads left them feeling good, compared to only 37.5% in the Fear group. This underscores humour's ability to engage and uplift viewers, while fear tends to provoke thought without leaving a positive aftertaste. Finally, assessing overall emotional impact revealed that 67.5% of the Humour group

felt entertained, a powerful takeaway for marketers, whereas only 25% of the Fear group reported feeling entertained, although 36.3% felt satisfied, pointing to a more reflective response. The Control group, sitting in the middle, had 53.9% feeling entertained and 22.4% satisfied, yet they also reported the highest confusion levels at 7.9%. In summary, humour-based advertisements consistently generated the most positive, engaging, and relaxed emotional responses, particularly among those seeking joy and entertainment. Fear-based ads, while effective at grabbing attention, often elicited more complex and tense emotions, whereas control ads, lacking emotional direction, evoked neutral and less defined feelings. These findings highlight the emotional power of ad tone and its varied impact, especially regarding how different genders might process these emotional cues.

The findings reveal that both fear and humour have a significant impact on students' behavioural intentions, but they do so in different ways. For instance, 52.5% of the Fear group indicated that advertisements influenced their intentions to act, while the Humour group showed an even stronger response, with 66.2% expressing similar sentiments. This supports the work of Asghar and Zar (2021), who found that humour plays a crucial role in driving purchase intentions, suggesting that humorous ads may be more effective at prompting immediate consumer action.

In contrast, the Control group displayed a more neutral response, indicating that without emotional engagement, advertisements struggle to motivate behaviour. This observation aligns with Tannenbaum's (2015) findings that emotional arousal enhances persuasion but also points to humour's potential to foster positive associations, making it a more effective pathway to action. The higher engagement levels in the Humour group, with 30% opting to act immediately, further emphasize the importance of tailoring emotional appeals to achieve specific outcomes.

However, it's worth noting that fear appeals can evoke mixed emotions. A significant portion of the Fear group (23.8%) disagreed that the ad influenced their intentions, suggesting some resistance to fear-based messaging. This finding diverges from previous studies, such as those by Lennon and Rentfro (2010), which highlighted the strong predictive power of fear arousal. Here, the current study illustrates that while fear can be compelling, it may not resonate universally, potentially leading to disengagement among certain segments.

On how fear and humour appeal affect student comprehension of advertisement messages, the results indicate that fear appeals can create a strong emotional impact, with 82.5% of the Fear group reporting that they found it easier to recall the advertisement's message. This aligns with Ferguson & Phau's (2013) findings, which noted that fear appeals resonate well with younger audiences, enhancing message retention. However, while the Humour group also demonstrated significant recall (74.1%), it didn't achieve the same level of urgency or memorability. This suggests that humour engages audiences but may lack the intense emotional resonance that fear can provide. Interestingly, the Control group's recall rate of 77.6% shows that neutral advertisements can still be effective, using clarity to aid retention. This supports

Venkatesh and Senthilkumar (2015), who noted that while humour can enhance memory, it might not always lead to the best retention outcomes. Thus, while fear-based messages are memorable due to their emotional intensity, humour can also foster substantial recall through engagement, albeit in a different emotional context. A discrepancy arises in the effectiveness of humour versus fear. Although humour is often praised for its engagement capabilities, the findings suggest it may not create the same compelling urgency to act, evident in the lower engagement rates from the Fear group. This contrasts with broader research by Madden and Weinberger (1984), which argues that humour can enhance both comprehension and persuasion when executed effectively.

The findings regarding gender differences in emotional responses reveal significant trends. Both the Fear and Humour groups displayed strong engagement, yet the Humour group outperformed the Fear group in positive emotional responses, with 50% feeling engaged. This aligns with Sun, Wang, and Jiang (2021), who found that young women exhibit higher perceived efficacy in response to fear appeals, suggesting that gender influences how these emotional appeals are received.

Conversely, 40% of the Humour group expressed joy, while a notable portion of the Fear group (38.8%) chose "none of the above," indicating a complexity of emotions that are hard to categorize. This aligns with Tannenbaum's (2015) findings, which highlight that gender differences can significantly influence the effectiveness of fear appeals. However, the confusion and mixed emotions within the Fear group contrast with the more straightforward positive responses elicited by humour.

Interestingly, the study found that humour fosters a more relaxed emotional state, while fear tends to provoke tension and can lead to disengagement, particularly among certain demographics. This observation aligns with Lennon and Rentfro (2010), who suggested that emotional responses to fear vary by gender. Yet, the current findings suggest that humour may engage both genders more effectively, indicating a need for marketers to consider these differences carefully when designing their campaigns.

The consistent advantage of humour over fear in this sample can be read through the three theories that anchor this study. Emotional Arousal Theory suggests that both appeals raised arousal, but humour generated positive arousal that participants experienced as pleasant and approach-oriented, while fear generated negative arousal that a portion of respondents found aversive enough to disengage from, consistent with the 23.8% of the Fear group who reported no influence on their intentions. Because positive arousal is intrinsically rewarding, it plausibly sustained attention and translated more directly into stated purchase intention and brand engagement than the negative arousal produced by the fear stimulus.

Viewed through the Elaboration Likelihood Model, humour appears to have operated as an effective peripheral cue: it made the advertisement likeable and shareable ("talk to someone about it" was the modal response in the Fear group but a close second in the Humour group), which is consistent with ELM's account of

peripheral-route persuasion producing attitude change through affect rather than argument scrutiny. Fear, in principle, should activate the more effortful central route by prompting threat assessment; the relatively high recall reported by the Fear group (82.5%) is consistent with this deeper processing. Yet deeper processing did not translate into stronger behavioural intention, which fits Protection Motivation Theory's requirement that threat appraisal be paired with a clear, efficacious coping response. Because the experimental fear advertisement emphasised the threat more than a concrete, actionable solution, participants may have registered the danger (high recall, high attention) without perceiving a viable coping pathway, which PMT predicts will produce defensive avoidance or disengagement rather than action — precisely the pattern seen in the 32.5% of the Fear group who reported the advertisement "had no effect" on their actions. Together, the three theories suggest that humour's advantage in this study was not that fear failed to engage students, but that the fear appeal as designed activated threat appraisal without sufficient coping appraisal, whereas humour's peripheral, affect-based route converted attention into a more consistently positive and actionable response.

These findings point to specific conditions under which each appeal is most appropriate. Humour appears best suited to low-risk, high-frequency purchase contexts aimed at young, digitally engaged audiences, such as consumer goods, entertainment, food and beverage, and social-media-led campaigns, where the goal is to build likeability, brand recall, and word-of-mouth sharing rather than to compel urgent action. Fear appeals appear more appropriate for contexts where the behaviour being promoted has serious, personally relevant consequences and where a clear, feasible coping response can be built into the message, such as health, safety, and public-service campaigns; consistent with Protection Motivation Theory, such campaigns should pair the threat with an explicit, achievable solution (for example, a specific product feature, helpline, or step) rather than threat depiction alone, to avoid the disengagement observed in this study's Fear group. Where budgets or campaign goals allow, a sequenced or hybrid approach using fear to establish relevance and urgency followed by a humour-toned resolution may combine the attentional strength of threat appeals with the positive affect and shareability associated with humour.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the importance of understanding emotional appeals in advertising. Humour emerges as a powerful tool that enhances consumer engagement and fosters positive brand associations, making it particularly effective for advertisers targeting young audiences. On the other hand, while fear appeals can create a sense of urgency that prompts immediate action, they may also lead to mixed emotional reactions and potential disengagement among certain demographic groups. This duality underscores the need for advertisers to carefully consider the emotional tone of their messages.

Additionally, the study supports the hypothesis that fear appeals can lead to high intentions to act, despite lower likability ratings, suggesting that consumers may respond positively to the urgency of fear-based messages even if they find them less enjoyable. Conversely, humour appeals, although not statistically significant in driving immediate purchase intentions, still create a favorable emotional atmosphere and enhance brand recall.

Overall, the findings stress that humour can generate engaging and positive consumer experiences, while fear can stimulate urgency but may evoke complex emotions. This emphasizes the necessity for careful crafting of advertisements that effectively balance these emotional appeals to resonate with the target audience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Advertisers: Utilize humour in campaigns aimed at young adults to foster engagement and enhance positive brand associations. When employing fear appeals, do so cautiously and ensure they are paired with clear, actionable solutions to prevent potential disengagement. By applying insights from this study, advertisers can create more effective messaging that resonates with consumers, ultimately boosting engagement and satisfaction.
2. For Future Research: Investigate the long-term effects of fear and humour appeals on brand loyalty and broaden studies to include diverse demographics for a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour.
3. For Educational Institutions: Integrate advertising psychology into communication curricula, providing students with valuable insights into effective marketing strategies that align with target audience preferences and emotional responses.

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