**Shocking People into Action – Does It Still Work?**

**An Empirical Analysis of Emotional Appeals in Charity Advertising**

Antje Cockrill

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

[antje.cockrill@uwtsd.ac.uk](mailto:antje.cockrill@tsd.uwtsd.ac.uk); (antje.cockrill@gmail.com)

Isobel Parsonage

S & C Electric Europe Ltd.

[isobel.parsonage@sandc.com](mailto:isobel.parsonage@sandc.com)

**Author bios**

Dr Antje Cockrill currently holds a position of Senior Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, and she is also the International Partnership Team Leader for the Faculty of Business and Management. She has a Master’s degree from Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt and a PhD in Marketing from Aberystwyth University. After several years of working in the public sector and financial services, she began her academic career in 2001. Currently her research focus is primarily on consumer behavior, especially in the area of technology adoption and consumption.

Isobel Parsonage nee Evans BA (hons.) MSc. graduated from Durham University in 2011 and went on to gain a MSc Marketing degree from Swansea University. After completing her education, Isobel joined S&C Electric Company, a specialist in the electric power switching and protection industry, as a Market Analyst. Isobel now runs the marketing department for the global company's European, Middle Eastern and African offices, travelling extensively, especially to Australia, where she supports global marketing efforts.

**Abstract**

How effective is shock advertising for charities? To address this question, an experimental research design based on a cross-sectional sample of three groups of adults was used. Respondents were exposed to either an advert using a shock, neutral or positive emotional appeal. All advertisements were for the same charity. The questionnaire explored the emotional effect of the advertisements on four behavioral intentions variables; the intention to donate to the charity, to volunteer for the charity, to agree to the charitable cause and to talk about the advert with family/friends. Key findings include that shock advertising does still work, but not by shocking. Surprise, interest and compassion are key emotions when it comes to engaging with a charity.

**Key words**

Shock advertising, Emotions, Charity advertising, Non-profit Advertising, Gender

**Management Slant**

* Shock advertising does work but not by shocking. *Surprise, compassion and interest* seem to be the key emotions to influencing behavioral intention; the creation of *shock* as an emotion was largely ineffective in this research.
* Positive emotions play a dual role. *Surprise*, *interest* and *compassion* were key drivers for behavioral intentions in this research.
* However, *hope*, *happiness* and *joy* acted as emotional deterrents and should probably be avoided altogether for charitable advertising.
* In this research, no one single set of emotions emerged that consistently evoked the same behavioral response towards the same outcome variables across all advertising types**.** This suggests that straightforward assumptions about the impact of emotions in the context of charity advertising are very difficult and that pretesting for best effectiveness has an especially important role in the context of charity advertising.

**Shocking people into action – does it still work? An empirical analysis of emotional appeals in charity advertising**

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the most challenging tasks for charities is to encourage donations and to obtain the services of volunteers. This has become even more difficult in the last few years – people are increasingly ‘time – poor’ and less ready to volunteer (Merrill, 2005), and at the same time the impact of the prolonged economic downturn has meant that many government services have been cut and the demands on charities have risen.

In order to raise funds and obtain the services of volunteers, charities have for the last twenty years or so used the tool of shock advertising. This relies on the unexpected to shock people into paying attention and change their behavior. However, recently the phenomenon of ‘compassion fatigue’ (gradual desensitization towards traumatic events, Figley Institute, 2013) seems to impact on the effectiveness of this advertising tool.

It is the intention of this paper to explore if the emotions aroused by shock advertising do indeed persuade people to change their potential behavior, i.e. give more time or more money or if by creating positive emotions they could be used instead to elicit money and time more effectively.

Given the wide use of shock advertising both by commercial and non-profit organizations since the 1960s, it is surprising how little this area seems to have been explored academically. Only a small number of research articles dealing with shock advertising directly could be found. Even extensive online literature searches returned only a small number of directly relevant articles, the most notable ones being the work by Dahl et al (2003) and Parry et al (2013). Given the extensive use of shock appeal in advertising, much more research seems to be warranted, and it is the aim of this study to contribute to this literature in order to expand the empirical research in this area.

**BACKGROUND**

It is notoriously difficult to get an accurate idea of the amounts of charitable giving as contradictory reports with conflicting results have been published (Hudson, 2013). For example in the UK, the UK Charities Aid Foundation publishes an annual report on giving, which maintains that in 2011/12 the proportion of people giving £25 or more has reduced from 32% in 2010/11 to 29% in 2011/12, and that although the percentage of donors giving between £25 and £100, and £100 or more have fallen by only 2% and 1% respectively, these small drops have had an impact on the total amount donated by the UK population. In particular, donors giving £100 or more accounted for 40% of total donations in 2011/12 compared to 45% in 2010/11 (CAF, 2012). At the same time, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) published data on charitable giving which suggests that the percentage of adults who have donated to charitable causes in a typical month has risen in comparisons to 2010/11 to 58% from 56% (NCVO, 2012). Whilst the picture on donations is not clear, there can be little doubt that charities have more difficulties in obtaining core funding from the government (Hudson, 2011), thus their dependence on charitable donation is rising.

**Shock advertising**

Shock advertising has been used widely since the 1960s by both commercial and non-profit organizations, including charities. In the late 80s and 90s, shock advertising was used to encourage donations to the severe famine crisis in Africa, to raise awareness of the plight of the Kurdish people in Iraq, and to find funds for the victims of a number of natural disasters (Moeller, 1999).

Shock advertising is based on the violation of social norms which is assumed to capture the attention of the target audience, and break through competitive advertising clutter (Dahl et al, 2003). The emotions evoked should stimulate a consumer response (Virvilaite and Matulevicienne, 2013). Tools to achieve such a response can include the visual display of obscene sexual references, profanity or gratuitous violence (Parry et al, 2013).

However, in this context, not-for-profit and for-profit advertising need to be distinguished. Manral (2011) maintains that for a brand, shock advertising can be ‘a little dangerous because of the potential negative fallout. But for a cause or an issue, using shock advertising can work by getting the attention the cause deserves and getting people interested in contributing or working for it. Or modifying their behavior accordingly’. Sometimes advertising goes too far and risks damaging the reputation of the very brand it seeks to enrich by undermining the products it is trying to promote (Colyer, 2002). In practice, these risks and the difference between non-profit and for profit organizations have long been recognized. Some commercial brands such as Bennetton have made shock advertising part of their brand image, but most shock advertising is used by organizations presenting charitable or social causes. Some charities maintain that shock advertising significantly increases their donations, for example UK donors told Save the Children they were more willing to give money after seeing the charity's more shocking images. This is supported by the financial figures from the charity (Magee, 2011). Barnardo’s claimed that their series of heroin baby adverts made a major contribution financially, and perhaps more importantly, established Barnardo’s brand reputation as a relevant, contemporary children’s charity (Quainton, 2013).

However, the extensive use of shock advertising since the 1980s in combination with a seemingly endless stream of disasters being reported in the news led to a situation where it became ‘routine to thumb past the pages of new images showing wide-eyed children in distress’ (Moeller, 1999, p.3). This phenomenon, the desensitization of the public towards the traumatic events depicted in the news and in advertisements, is known as Compassion Fatigue or Secondary Traumatic Stress (Figley, 2013). It is a recognized problem for people employed in the health services, armed forces and caring professions. More recently it has been associated with charity appeals. Gardner maintains that

*Shocking ads traditionally worked because the message became so deeply lodged in a person’s consciousness that they were eventually forced to act upon it. However, if the same message and same tactics are being used all the time, then it just becomes wallpaper to a person and makes it far easier to ignore* (Gardner, cited in Williams, 2009, p.11)

There is some current evidence that compassion fatigue is occurring when it comes to charitable appeals. A 2011 poll by PRWeek/OnePoll found that 47 per cent of the public said seeing shocking images or stories did not make them more likely to donate or support a cause (Magee, 2011). However, other research has shown that what people think and what they feel may be different things, and that donations are often given as a response to events that play on emotions (Magee, 2011).

**Emotions**

Shock advertising relies on evoking emotions to spur people into action or to change their behavior. It has been long recognized that emotions are a powerful motivator for behavior (Izard, 1991). Emotions and their role in human behavior have been extensively explored in academic research. There is no one recognized definition of emotions but there are three universal qualities of emotions that emerge out of current academic literature (Hill, 2008). Emotions have a feeling (affective) component which is manifested in physical sensations and chemical changes in the brain. In addition, emotions have a thinking component, expressed in conscious or intuitive ‘thought’ appraisals; and finally there is an action component which includes expressive reactions like smiles or scowls and coping behaviors such as ‘fight or flight’. Sometimes an additional sensory component is added, such as sights, sounds etc. which trigger the emotional response. (Hill, 2008). Therefore, a full emotion represents an integration of feeling, action, appraisal and wants at a particular time and location (Ortony et al, 2005).

One of the earliest seminal papers in this area was Izard’s (1971) paper on human emotions which identified ten primary emotions - anger, contempt, disgust, distress, fear, guilt, interest, joy, shame and surprise, each with their own distinct psychological and physiological expressions. Oliver continued this work by clearly establishing cognitive and affective responses as distinct (Oliver, 1993). In marketing terms, emotions have shown to play a key role for example in developing brands (de Chernatory and McDonald, 2003), in successful advertising (Christensen and Hansen, 2007) or as determinants of service quality or customer satisfaction.

There have also been a number of different attempts to measure emotions. Generally, they fall into two categories. Firstly, there are researchers who perceive emotions as dimensional; secondly there are those who maintain that emotions are distinct from each other. Based on Izard’s early work (1971), the latter school of thought is based on the assumption that all basic emotions are developed in early childhood, and that more complex emotions stem from these. Furthermore, these basic emotions are deemed to be universal across age groups, gender and culture (Power, 2009).

Currently there is no agreement on the number of such basic emotions or the relationship between them (Power, 2009). Other researchers, most notably Mehrabian and Russell, perceive emotions as dimensional (Mehrabian, 1980), along three dimensions - the dominance of an emotion in someone’s life, the pleasantness of this emotion, and the level of arousal the emotion evokes. All three are measured on a bipolar scale, and result in one of two behavioral outcomes, approach or avoidance behavior. Approach behavior implies ‘a desire for staying, exploring, and affiliating with others in the environment’ (Booms and Bitner, 1980). Avoidance behavior involves escaping from the environment and ignoring communication attempts by others (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982).

This model has been applied to several service and retail settings. Many researchers have used its principles to increase satisfaction, average spend, and time spent in store (Jang and Namkung, 2009). Pleasure and arousal positively influence consumers’ willingness to buy (Baker et al, 1992), and increase the degree of intended approach and actual approach behaviors (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). This suggests that an advert that makes a person feel good will increase their propensity to positively engage with a cause.

Positive and negative emotions are not necessarily easily distinguished as some emotional states such as *fear* (generally viewed as negative) and *thrill* (generally viewed as positive) are closely related, although physiologically, there are differences in the neural circuit systems which are activated by positive and negative emotions (Nezlek and Kuppens, 2008; Panksepp, 1998). This research can be used as the basis for a distinction between positive and negative emotions, for example positive emotions lead to increases in positive affect, self-esteem, and psychological adjustment, and it is these emotions which could be classified as ‘positive’ (Nezlek and Kuppens, 2008). The same authors found that when an individual tries to regulate their mood, negative emotions tend to be suppressed by not showing them outwardly; and positive emotions tend to be reappraised by construing a situation where the emotional impact is reduced (Nezlek and Kuppens, 2008). Therefore, positive emotions are emotions that make an individual feel good, and these tend to be outwardly expressed. Negative emotions are emotions that make the individual feel bad, and can be clearly identified as the emotions that people try not to feel, and are more likely to be suppressed.

As far as the measurement of emotions is concerned, probably the most widely used model is Mehrabian’s PAD (Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance) model (Mehrabian, 1996). It consists of a three dimensional bi-polar scale where emotions range from pleasantness to unpleasantness as part of their stimulus-organism-response model (Mehrabian, 1996). However, this model has been criticized as several limitations in its application to practical experiments have been found (Westbrook, 1987). A bi-polar scale causes problems when individuals feel positive and negative emotions at the same time, or conversely, felt no emotions at all (Westbrook, 1987, Babin et al, 1998). For example, someone may well feel *happy* and *sad* at the same time when feeling *nostalgic.* Therefore, in this current project a unipolar scale was used to allow respondents to state exactly which emotions they feel and to what extent they feel the stated emotions.

**Gender**

Previous research suggests that gender influences responses to advertising in this context. There is a general assumption among practitioners and academics alike that women are better at interpreting emotional appeals and more likely to respond to them than men (Baird et al, 2007; Moore, 2007; Wang 2008, Ort et al, 2010, Moore 2011). Recent research has shown that consumer reactions to shock advertising in particular are somewhat influenced by both religion and gender (Parry et al, 2013). Gender differences are also evident in the intention to give money to charitable donations when *sympathy* and *pride* conditions are applied, with men reacting more strongly to a *pride* appeal and women to a *sympathy* appeal (Kemp et al, 2013). A *sad* appeal rather than a rational appeal seems to be more effective to persuade women to make a donation (Wang, 2008; Kemp et al, 2013). The above literature review led to the following hypotheses being developed:

H1: The type of emotional appeal used in advertising influences the emotional response towards the four types of behavioral intentions (agreeing with the cause, donating time, helping financially and talking about the cause).

H2: The emotion of shock has a significant positive impact on the four types of behavioral intentions.

H3: Positive emotions have a significant positive impact on the four types of behavioral intentions.

H4: There is a gender effect on the key emotions evoked for each advert type.

H5: There is a gender effect in the emotional responses to the three different adverts.

H6: Gender will significantly impact on the four outcome variables.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Design and Measures**

In order to test these hypotheses, the authors decided to use an experimental approach based on Dahl et al’s (2003) work. A range of advertisements with different emotional appeals was shown to different respondent groups and their emotional impact assessed. Furthermore the impact on behavioral intentions was explored. As a charity, the authors decided on the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), a UK children’s charity that aims to stop cruelty to children. This organization was chosen as it is very well known in the UK, has a history of using shock advertising but also uses other types of advertising appeals.

Based on the scales to measure emotions developed by Dahl et al (2003), Babin and Zikmund (2003), and Izard (1971), a survey was developed which measured the emotional impact of a charity advert on four types of behavioral intentions relevant for charities.

Three different versions of the survey were developed, one contained a shocking advert, one contained a positive advert and the final questionnaire acted as a control and included a neutral advert (Table 1). All advertisements were carefully chosen to represent a different appeal.

**INSERT TABLE 1 HERE.**

**Table 1: Descriptions of Adverts**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Type of advertisement** | **Description** |
| Neutral | This ad consisted of the letters NSPCC in large green capitals followed by a large green full stop. Underneath, there is in black bold letters the slogan ‘Cruelty to Children must stop. FULL STOP’ |
| Positive | Image of a field and forest in the background with the profile of a young girl blowing the seeds of a dandelion. Background overlaid with white outline text ‘Keep kids safe from harm this summer’, underneath in smaller letters ‘Worried about a child? Call 0808 800 5000. |
| Shocking | Image of the head of a very young baby crying hard. Both eyes are very badly bruised. Black background. At the bottom, in white large capital letters ‘CRUELTY’. In the left upper corner, in smaller white capital letters ‘WHY WONTiT BE QUIET i DON’T WANT TO HURT iT. |

The first section of the questionnaire analyzed whether or not the allocated advert corresponds to its assumed characteristics, i.e. shocking, positive or neutral. It was important to ensure that the positive advert was rated more positive than the shocking and neutral adverts; that the shocking advert was rated more shocking than the positive and neutral adverts; and that the control advert was rated most neutrally. Respondents were asked on a 1-7 Likert type scale running from *not at all* to *extremely* how *shocking*, *positive*, *memorable*, *informative*, *frightening*, *calming*, *pleasant* or *sad* they found the advert they were looking at.

The second section of questions analyzed the behavioral intentions induced by the advert. As mentioned above, four highly relevant variables were chosen here, namely how likely the respondent would be to *agree with a charitable cause, to donate time or money or to talk about the advertisement with a friend or family.* Here again 1-7 Likert type scale running from *not at all* to *extremely* was used.

The next section of the questionnaire asked the participant to indicate the emotions they felt whist studying the advert. Based on scales used by Izard (1971) and Babin and Zikmund (2003), 21 key emotions were identified. *Happiness, joy*, *love, compassion*, *pity*, *hope*, *relief*, *thrill*, *surprise*, *interest* and *pride* were identified as positive emotions; and *fear*, *regre*t, *shame*, *disgust*, *anger*, *contempt*, *guilt*, *shock*, *distress*, *sadness* as negative emotions. Respondents were asked ‘how strongly did you experience the following emotions when you saw the advert’ and they could rate their emotional response on a 1-7 Likert type scale running from *not at all* to *very much* (see also Jang and Namkung, 2009, for this scale).

The experiment aimed for a sample size of around 300. Three questionnaires were shown to separate groups of approximately 100 people of similar demographics. All questionnaires were identical except for the image of the advertisement.

In total, 312 fully completed questionnaires were received from a cross sectional sample of the adult UK population. Respondents were mainly recruited via mall intercepts at a major superstore, and via the employee databank of a large local government organization. Both were located in the same medium-sized UK city (Swansea, Wales). Furthermore, the contact list of a charity committee list was made available to the authors. All respondents answered only one survey and did not see the other two surveys or the attached adverts. This research was conducted during June - August 2012. Key demographics are presented below in Table 2.

**INSERT TABLE 2 HERE.**

**Table 2: Key Sample Demographics (Table 1)**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Positive Survey | Neutral Survey | Shocking Survey |
| Female | 61% | 58% | 71% |
| Male | 39% | 42% | 40% |
| Employed/in work | 83% | 72% | 80% |

**Data Analysis and Findings**

The authors used Dahl et al’s (2003) research design as a basis for this research, and these authors used the mean scores reported from each questionnaire as proof for different effects. We followed this example to establish that the shocking advert was perceived as more shocking than both the positive and neutral adverts; that the positive advert was perceived as more positive than both the shocking and neutral adverts; and finally, that the neutral advert was perceived as more neutral then both the positive and shocking advert (Table 3).

**INSERT TABLE 3 HERE.**

**Table 3: Variable Means of 1-7 point Likert Type Scale**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Means Associated with Variable** | | |
| **Variable** | **Shocking Questionnaire** | **Positive Questionnaire** | **Neutral Questionnaire** |
| Shocking | **6.31** | 1.45 | 1.85 |
| Positive | 2.09 | **4.53** | 3.20 |
| Memorable | 5.42 | 3.31 | 3.58 |
| Frightening | 5.55 | 1.58 | 1.81 |
| Calming | 1.09 | 3.81 | 1.73 |
| Pleasant | 1.20 | 3.69 | 1.76 |
| Sad | 6.13 | 2.72 | 3.50 |

An ANOVA was conducted to establish that the differences in means were statistically significant. All differences in means were significant at the 0.001 level. The results imply that the shocking advert was deemed more *shocking*, *frightening* and *sad* than both the positive and neutral advert. The positive advert had the highest means for *positive*, *pleasant* and *calming* variables; and the neutral advert had lower means for all variables. However, despite their distinctive emotional impact, it is important to note that the shocking questionnaire was deemed much more shocking than the positive questionnaire was deemed positive.

All data was then used to establish the key emotions impacting on the four output variables. This was done by using multiple linear regressions (Table 4). The model fit for all regressions was good for cross sectional data. All of the R square and adjusted R square values for the regressed emotions against the four forms of behavioral intentions implied that substantial amounts of the variance can be explained by the outcome variables. The best model fit occurred for ‘Talk about the advert with friends/family’ with an R squared value of 0.57, suggesting that for this behavior the independent variables had a higher explanatory power than for the other models.

**INSERT TABLE 4 HERE.**

**Table 4: Emotions Regressed Against All Behavioral Intentions, Full data set (only significant results presented)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Behavioral Intention**  **(Output Variable)** | **R Square** | **Adjusted R Square** | **Impacting Emotions** | **t Value** | **Significance Value** | **Advert with the highest mean for the emotion** |
| Talk about the advert with friends/family. | 0.57 | 0.54 | Fear | 3.265 | 0.001 | Shocking |
| Compassion | 2.388 | 0.018 | Shocking |
| Hope | -3.103 | 0.002 | Positive |
| Relief | 1.997 | 0.047 | Positive |
| Pride | -2.187 | 0.030 | Positive |
| Shock | 2.635 | 0.009 | Shocking |
| Interest | 3.462 | 0.001 | Shocking |
| Anger | 2.031 | 0.043 | Shocking |
| Surprise | 3.378 | 0.001 | Shocking |
| Help the charity financially. | 0.52 | 0.481 | Regret | -2.142 | 0.033 | Shocking |
| Compassion | 3.155 | 0.002 | Shocking |
| Relief | 2.048 | 0.042 | Positive |
| Interest | 4.435 | 0.000 | Shocking |
| Surprise | 3.829 | 0.000 | Shocking |
| Shame | 2.142 | 0.033 | Shocking |
|  |  |  | Guilt | -1.866 | 0.063 | Shocking |
| Agree with the charitable cause. | 0.42 | 0.381 | Happiness | -1.50 | 0.050 (M) | Positive |
| Compassion | 4.148 | 0.000 | Shocking |
| Pride | 2.059 | 0.059 (M) | Shocking |
| Interest | 2.509 | 0.013 | Shocking |
| Regret  Interest  Sadness  Surprise  Joy | -2.971  3.283  1.994  3.189  -1.791 | 0.003  0.001  0.051 (M)  0.001  0.074 | Shocking  Shocking  Shocking  Shocking  Positive |
| Volunteer for the organization. | 0.34 | 0.294 |

M= Results with p > 0.05 and p < 0.10

For the combined data set, a relatively narrow range of emotions impacts on the four outcome variables, and it is clear that the shocking advert had the largest emotional impact overall. Out of 25 emotions having a significant impact on the four outcome variables, 19 were most strongly created by the shocking advert. The type of advertising appeal used does impact differently on the emotions evoked, and the shocking advert has the strongest impact for the whole data set.

*Compassion* and *interest* impact significantly on all outcome variables and *surprise* on three. For the combined data set, these three emotions have the strongest impact.

The remaining six emotions were all most strongly linked to the positive advert. None of the emotions impacting significantly were most strongly associated the neutral advert. This has significant implications for marketers, as it means that emotionally neutral advertisements have limited emotional impact and are therefore less likely to entice people to donate money or time to charities, or to agree with their cause or talk about them.

The authors explored the data further, this time by using the individual data sets and regressing them against the four outcome variables (Table 5).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 4: Emotions Regressed Against All Behavioral Intentions, Separate Data Sets (only significant results presented)** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Talk about the advert with friends/family.** | **Neutral Advert** | | | **Positive Advert** | | | **Shocking advert** | | |
| R Square = 0.46 | | | R Square = 0.41 | | | R Square = 0.49 | | |
| Adjusted R Square = 0.31 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.25 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.38 | | |
| **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** |
| Regret | -1.95 | 0.055 | Fear | 2.521 | 0.014 | Hope | -1.891 | 0.062(M) |
| Anger | 2.640 | 0.000 | Contempt | -2.077 | 0.041 | Interest | 2.186 | 0.031 |
| Shame | -2.328 | 0.023 | Guilt | 1.743 | 0.085(M) | Surprise | 1.662 | 0.10 |
|  |  |  | Interest | 2.234 | 0.028 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | Shame | 2.237 | 0.020 |  |  |  |
| **Help the charity financially.** | **Neutral Advert** | | | **Positive Advert** | | | **Shocking Advert** | | |
| R Square = 0.626 | | | R Square= 0.531 | | | R Square = 0.457 | | |
| Adjusted R Square = 0.525 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.406 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.329 | | |
| **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** |
| Shock | 2.239 | 0.028 | Contempt | -2.20 | 0.031 | Regret | -2.631 | 0.010 |
| Interest | 2.161 | 0.034 | Interest | 2.157 | 0.034 | Interest | 2.081 | 0.040 |
| Surprise | 2.57 | 0.012 | Disgust | 2.008 | 0.048 | Surprise | 2.314 | 0.023 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Shame | 3.260 | 0.002 |
| **Agree with the charitable cause.** | **Neutral Advert** | | | **Positive Advert** | | | **Shocking Advert** | | |
| R Square = 0.515 | | | R Square = 0.516 | | | R Square = 0.413 | | |
| Adjusted R Square = 0.384 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.387 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.274 | | |
| **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** |
| Thrill | -2.090 | 0.040 | Pride | 2.138 | 0.036 | Regret | -2.527 | 0.013 |
| Guilt | -2.024 | 0.046 | Interest | 3.479 | 0.001 | Compassion | 1.706 | 0.091(M) |
| Disgust | 1.96 | 0.053(M) | Love | -2.024 | 0.046 | Pity | 1.876 | 0.064(M) |
|  |  |  | Shame | -1.736 | 0.086(M) | Thrill | 2.064 | 0.042 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Relief | -1.746 | 0.084(M) |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Anger | 2.117 | 0.037 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Joy | -1.971 | 0.052(M) |
| **Volunteer for the organization.** | **Neutral Advert** | | | **Positive Advert** | | | **Shocking Advert** | | |
| R Square = 0.567 | | | R Square= 0.346 | | | R Square = 0.403 | | |
| Adjusted R Square = 0.450 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.173 | | | Adjusted R Square = 0.262 | | |
| **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** | **Emotion** | **T-value** | **Significance** |
| Hope | 2.257 | 0.027 | Relief | 1.686 | 0.096(M) | Thrill | 2.620 | 0.010 |
| Relief | -1.836 | 0.070(M) |  |  |  | Interest | 2.000 | 0.048 |
| Shock | -2.015 | 0.047 |  |  |  | Surprise | 2.533 | 0.013 |
| Surprise | 2.107 | 0.038 |  |  |  | Joy | -1.687 | 0.095(M) |

M= Results with p > 0.05 and p < 0.10

For the individual datasets, the range of significant emotions is wider, but *interest* and *surprise* still emerge as key impact factors. These results also show that the use of the emotions of *relief*, *regret* and *joy* only show negative significant relationships, implying that they act as emotional deterrents, rather than predictors, of the behavioral outcome variables. Some emotions impact both negatively and positively, depending on the context, for example *shame* impacts negatively on the likelihood to talk about the advert with family or friends for the neutral advert but for the same outcome variable, it shows a positive relationship for the positive advert.

We also tested for gender effects. For the **neutral advert**, there were no statistically significant differences between men and women concerning any of the outcome variables. There was also no difference in the key emotions associated with the advert. Out of the 21 emotional responses tested, there were marginal differences for compassion (t=1.96, sig = 0.53, (women) = 3.81,  (men) = 3.02) and for pity (t=2.19, sig = 0.31,  (women) = 3.67,  (men) = 2.55). This implies that the neutral advert was marginally more effective in appealing to women.

The **positive advert** showed a marginal difference between men and women on the likelihood to talk about the advert. (t= 2.05, sig = 0.04,  (women) = 2.00,  (men) = 2.55, equal variances not assumed as Levene’s test sig= 0.02), so men were slightly more likely to talk about the positive advert. This advert also had a more calming effect on women than on men (t=3.60, sig = .000,  (men) = 2.97,  (women) = 4.34).

Women found the **shocking advert** somewhat more informative than men (t=2.21, sig = 0.09,  (women) = 4.21,  (men) = 3.35) and it was marginally more likely to impact on women’s likelihood to volunteer (t=2.02, sig = 0.05,  (women) = 3.82,  (men) = 3.03). These results are in line with previous research which suggests that women respond better to emotional appeals (e.g. Moore, 2007).

**Discussion**

Our first hypothesis (H1) asked if the type of emotional appeal used in advertising influences the emotional response towards the four types of behavioral intentions. All of our findings clearly indicate that this is the case, this hypothesis is thus supported.

The differences between the combined (Table 4) and individual (Table 5) data sets imply that the overall emotional impact of charity advertising across a range of adverts can be very different to the impact of individual advertisements. For the combined data set (Table 4), *surprise*, *interest* and *compassion* are key emotions which are likely to evoke an emotional response. However, for the individual data sets (Table 5) these three emotions are not evoked equally by all advert types. *Interest* appeared as a key impact factor for the positive and shocking ads, but much less so for the neutral advert. *Surprise* seems to be a key factor for the shocking, and to a lesser extent, neutral adverts. *Compassion* only features marginally significantly for the shocking advert, and none of the others when the data sets are separated, implying that when it comes to emotions that impact on the outcome variables overall, this is an important factor, but it is a less important contributor for individual adverts. Intuitively, one could have expected that the shocking advert would evoke a strong compassionate response, but it does not seem to have done this, indicating that perhaps indeed many respondents are affected by a level of desensitization or compassion fatigue towards shocking images.

Our second hypothesis intended to find out if the emotion of *shock* increased the likelihood of respondents to engage in the four types of behavior investigated. This was only partially supported as *shock* only impacts positively and significantly one type of behavior, namely ‘talk about the advert with friends/family’ for the whole data set; and for ‘helping financially’ for the neutral advert. In the combined data set, *shock* alone had no impact on the intention to volunteer or to donate, but it had a significant *negative* impact on the intention to agree with the charitable cause. It had the same effect when the data set for the neutral advert was used. This means that H2 was only very partially supported.

Our third hypothesis explored the role of positive emotions, trying to establish if positive emotions increased behavioral intentions. 17 out of the 21 emotions influencing the four variables significantly for the combined data set were classified as ‘positive emotions’ even though most of these were experienced strongest in the shocking advert. Here we can state that H3 was confirmed as positive emotions have a significant impact on all four types of behavioral intentions.

*Compassion*, *surprise* and *interes*t appeared as the emotions with the strongest positive influence on behavioral intentions. *Interest* has a positive impact on all four positive behavioral intentions, and compassion and surprise on three respectively. This implies that ideally charity adverts should contain these elements as they seem to be effective in influencing behavioral intentions.

However, the results also show that for each advert type the set of emotions impacting on the behavioral intentions variables is different, therefore it cannot be assumed with certainty that there is one single set of emotions that will consistently evoke the same behavioral response towards the outcome variables across all advertising types**.** In this research there is no straightforward relationship between desired outcome variable, evoked emotions and advertising appeal across all three types of advertising and therefore pretesting becomes an even more important aspect in the design of a charitable advertising campaign. Valuable resources can be saved if an effective relationship between evoked emotions, desired behavior and type of advertising can be achieved before a campaign is released.

Furthermore, the results have also shown that some emotional reactions should be avoided altogether because they only negatively or largely negatively impact on the suggested output variables, in other words, these emotional reactions are behavioral deterrents, rather than predictors. Three emotions have been identified which only displayed negative relationships to the outcome variables both for the whole data set and for the individual adverts. These three are *regret*, *happiness* and *joy*. In addition, *hope* only displays one positive relationship and several negative relationships. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, three of these variables are defined as ‘positive’ emotions. A likely explanation here is that if people feel *happy*, *joyful* and have *hope* they see less need to support the charitable cause or to engage with it. It therefore appears that while some positive emotions are strong positive predictors for behavioral intentions in this context, others act as deterrents.

Some emotions both impact negatively and positively, lending support to the argument that the same emotion can have both a positive and negative role at the same time. For example, *shock* contributes positively to contributing financially, but negatively to the likelihood to volunteer (neutral advert). Similar *shame* had a significant positive relationship to the likelihood to talk about the advert and a significantly negative relationship with the likelihood to agree with the cause (positive advert). This is another pointer towards the fact that for charity advertising using emotional appeals, pre-testing is critical – the impact of emotions is not straightforward and not necessarily predictable - but in order to ensure maximum effectiveness, appropriate trigger emotions need to be found.

As reported above, we found some gender differences in this research, and thus hypotheses H4-H6 are partially supported. Altogether, the impact of gender on this research is limited as there were only marginally significant effects on a small number of variables, with only one strongly significant finding, namely that women found the positive advert more calming.

**DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this project have substantial managerial implications for marketing charitable organizations. The first issue to raise here is that in comparison with the other two adverts, the advert classified as neutral did not create any strong emotions that have any significant impact on influencing any behavioral intentions. Taken by itself, the neutral advert did have an emotional impact but only one of the emotions impacting on all four of the outcome variables was highly significant. Therefore, using neutral adverts to elicit an emotional response and thus potentially impact on behavioral intentions does not seem to be a good use of resources as their effectiveness seems to be limited.

Shocking advertisements do have a strong effect on emotions – but not all of these emotions impact positively on the four different behavioral variables. The emotion of *shock* itself only impacts on likelihood to talk about the advert for the overall data set but has very limited effects otherwise. Taken together, this means that shock advertising **does** work **but not by shocking**. *Surprise, compassion and interest* seem to be the key to this, and not *shock*. The creation of *shock* as an emotion is largely ineffective.

Positive emotions play a dual role. *Surprise*, *interest* and *compassion* are key drivers for behavioral intentions in this research. However, at the same time, *hope*, *happiness* and *joy* act as deterrents and should probably be avoided altogether for charitable advertising. In addition, some emotions such as *shame* have both positive and negative impact when looking at different output variables even for the same advert.

Perhaps the most important finding of this research is there does not seem to be one single set of emotions that consistently evokes the same behavioral response towards the same outcome variables across all advertising types**.** These complexities suggest that straightforward assumptions about the impact of emotions in this context are very difficult and that pretesting for best effectiveness has an important role – perhaps even more important than with other types of advertising since charitable organizations can afford ineffective advertising even less than for profit-organizations.

The gender effects observed in this research were limited, but broadly confirm previous research. However, the only strongly significant gender effect was that the positive advert was perceived as more *calming* by women than by men. This is likely to be linked to the fact that women react more strongly to emotional appeals and therefore found the image of the child blowing dandelion seeds more peaceful and calming then men.

**Limitations and further research**

As with any research project, there are some limitations in this project that need to be mentioned. Although the sample size with over 300 respondents was not small, each survey was only taken by about 100 respondents. This means that the results can only be taken as indicative for the UK adult population and ideally would be substantiated by a much larger survey, especially since recent research has shown that socio-demographic factors influence the responses to shock advertising (Chan et al, 2007; Parry et al, 3013; Virvilaite and Matuleviciene, 2013).

Another interesting aspect concerned the positive advert used. Even though the positive image consisted of a happy scene depicting a young girl blowing dandelion seeds, the advert still appeals for donations to stop child abuse. One respondent asked ‘how could you possible find that positive?’ referring to the implied looming threat of child abuse. Ideally, a truly positive advert had been used but by their very nature the majority of charities deals with negative, and often shocking causes, so creating truly positive adverts does often not reflect the cause of a charity.

Another potentially rewarding area of research would be to explore further why some emotions have both positive and negative impact for the different output variables, and to identify the ‘correct’ context for a positive effect for these emotions.

In conclusion, shock advertising works, but not by shocking. This type of advert evoked the strongest emotional response. However, the emotion of *shock* itself is relatively ineffective in this research. Out of the whole range of emotions investigated, only a relatively limited range of emotions had any significant impact on influencing behavioral intentions. *Interest* positively influenced every type of behavior, *compassion* and *surprise* had a significant effect on three forms of behavior each. *Regret*, *hop*e, *happiness* and *joy* act as behavioral deterrents in this research.

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