Abstract

The current research examines the moderating effect of cultural background on the relationship between negative emotion appeals (fear, guilt and shame) and attitude towards public health advertisements. To this end, individuals from Turkey and the US participated in the survey. Results indicated that high (vs. low) fear, guilt and shame appeals induce a more positive attitude for Turkish and for American respondents. However, the results were only significant for Turkish respondents.

Keywords: Consumer Guilt, Advertising, Culture, Fear, Shame

Introduction

Kotler and Zaltman (1971, p.5) defined social marketing as ‘the design, implementation, and control of programs calculated to influence the acceptability of social ideas and involving considerations of product planning, pricing, communication, distribution, and marketing research’. As in other definitions of social marketing, the theory itself requires a social change effectively through mass media campaigns to communicate with consumers (Fox & Kotler, 1980; Peattie & Peattie, 2003). Mass media campaigns have been used to inform populations about various health-related topics such as cancer screening/prevention, child survival, tobacco use and heart-disease prevention (Randolph & Viswanath, 2004; Noar, 2006). In addition, for the past couple of decades, public educators have been using mass media to educate people about the dangers of substance abuse (Dejong & Winsten, 1990), which is also an important public threat to the general population. As the threat to public health is high, then the messages that try to communicate with consumers need to be embedded with strong factors such as emotions in order for the messages to be effective. Emotion has a key role in human social and economic decision making (Peters, Västfåll, Gärling, & Slovic, 2006). The quality and the intensity of an emotion depend on an individual’s subjective evaluation of the situation in terms of a set of appraisal dimensions (Schmidt, Tinti, Levine, & Testa, 2010). Early research contradicts the fact that the informational properties of messages are more influential than emotions in generating positive attitudes (Holbrook, 1978), however emotions can influence behavior independent of cognitions and accord greater importance to emotions’ role in determining advertising effectiveness (Brown, Homer, & Inman, 1998). Negative emotional appeals are used more frequently than other emotional appeals. Such appeals are usually used to persuade consumers to comply with health-related advertisements (Keller, Lipkus, and Rimer 2003; Keller & Lehmann 2008; Agrawal & Duhachek 2010) that can be considered part of public awareness advertising. Cultural transmission of negative emotion appeals is also a factor in advertisement effectiveness. Since research suggests that culture influences individuals’ capability to regulate their emotions (Ford & Mauss, 2015), understanding how individuals from different cultural backgrounds react to the public health advertising is an open ques-
tion. Thus, this study concentrates on the use of guilt, shame and fear appeals in advertising as a means of substance abuse prevention, investigating the role of cultural background as the moderator.

Theoretical Background

Attitude is one of the constructs that receives the most attention in consumer research (Erevelles, 1998), covering a variety of dimensions such as affect or feeling, cognition of beliefs and behavioral intentions. Advertisement attitude is an attitude that leaves consumers with a feeling after processing the ad (Shimp, 1981), while generating subjective experiences like moods during an advertisement exposure (Aylesworth & MacKenzie, 1998). Early research focuses on the fact that individuals evaluate objective situations in a subjective way (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), and recent research backs this notion up by stating that it is the emotions that influence most of the subjective evaluations (Naqvi & Bechara, 2010). To prove this notion, a considerable amount of research has shown that advertising can reframe emotional responses from consumers (Shimp & Stuart 2004; Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Marketing communication specialists often use emotional appeals to accomplish their objectives to reach the consumer as effectively as possible. To this end, emotional appeals are tools to make consumers feel specific emotions such as warmth, envy, or guilt. For public health advertisements, mostly negative emotions are being used to meet the objective of the advertisement. This article discusses (1) fear, (2) guilt and (3) shame appeals’ effectiveness in advertising. Fear is an anxious state that is caused by a negative consequence (Ghingold, 1981; Burnett & Lunsford, 1994) if an individual engages in a certain behavior (Algie, 2010), and has been used for various social marketing topics (Manyiwa & Brennan, 2012). Fear aspects usually motivate individuals to prevent an unwanted outcome, therefore it is an effective emotion in reciprocating viewers’ attention (Hastings, Stead, & Webb, 2004; Brennan & Binney, 2010). Guilt, on the other hand, is the act of violating one’s internal ethical standards (Ghingold, 1981) after recognizing that one has acted immorally (Lee-Wingate, Sooyeon, & Corfman, 2010), and is commonly found in social marketing (Cotte, Coulter & Moore, 2005) that associates with feelings of high self-efficacy (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Shame, on the other hand, triggers a motivation to escape from the situation as well as other individuals (Chun, Patrick & MacInnis, 2007) because an individual does not feel in their comfort zone. Fear, guilt and shame are all negative emotions, therefore for this study, it is expected that individuals that feel such emotions after ad exposure may show more positive attitudes towards the advertisement. In another words, viewers’ felt emotions would match the aim of the advertisement, leading to a favorable comment on the advertisement. However, research has shown that the intended emotions associated with the appeal have no guarantees over viewers’ felt emotions (Cotte, Coulter & Moore, 2005). Therefore it is important to see viewers as individuals who are affected by various factors such as their current mood, educational background, social status, and even their cultural origin. In this research, the specific aim is to find the moderating effect of the cultural background of an individual to assess the relationship between felt negative emotions and ad attitudes. To do so, the concept of emotion regulation (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003) is an important tool to assess how certain emotional appeals (specifically; fear, guilt and shame) can be channeled through an individual’s mind-set to match the felt emotions aroused by an advertisement with negative content. Gross and John (2003) indicate that cognitive reappraisal helps individuals to alter negative emotions to positive ones, which helps them to escape from the negative situation that they are facing. After exposure to an advertisement that contains negative appeals, an individual may immediately feel certain emotions such as guilt, shame and fear. In order to escape such appeals, reappraisal strategy may be used so that they would not feel guilty, fearful or ashamed anymore. In other words, when felt emotions and the intended emotional appeal of the advertisement match in viewers’ minds, reappraisal acts as a savior to reduce negative emotional exposure. The level (or the ability) of the reappraisal technique then can explain how different individuals act more positively (or negatively) towards an advertisement with negative emotional content. The characteristics of individuals that may use different levels of reappraisal can vary according to several factors such as age, gender, or cultural background. Research suggests that understanding cultural characteristics of individuals can increase effectiveness of public health communication programs and services (Kreuter & McClure, 2004). Although culture is dynamic and adaptive (Kreuter & McClure, 2004), research has proven repeatedly that some cultures are formed distinctively differently. Established by Hofstede (1980), the terms individualism and collectivism refer to the degree to which members of society value individuals' concerns.
(independent) or society’s concerns as a whole (interdependent) more. Individualistic individuals are oriented more towards their self interests whereas collectivistic individuals value his/her society more than his/her own personal goals. The cultural background of individuals influences motivation whether or not to regulate their emotions (Ford & Mauss, 2015). Research suggests that emotions are powerful enough to assert one’s individuality by making other parties feel uncomfortable (Matsumono, 1990). One may assume that this discomfort may be felt more in interdependent cultures, due to their nature of putting society's needs first, thus reappraising one's emotions may be more effective than in independent cultures. However, prior research proved that reappraising emotions doesn't differ across cultures (Gross & John, 2003; Kwon, Yoon, Joorman, & Kwon, 2013). Ford and Mauss (2015) indicate that the internal experience of an emotion causes indifference on reappraising emotions across cultures. In general, regulating one's emotions successfully then can yield a better reaction towards an advertisement with negative emotional content. However, the differences between cultures may produce diverse reactions, such that interdependent cultures may show more positive attitudes towards negative content than independent cultures. For this study, participants from the US and Turkey are used to define a distinct cultural contrast. Research proved that individuals from the US are more individualistic than Turkish individuals (Cukur, Guzman, & Carlo, 2004). In light of these findings, the hypothesis of this study is as follows:

H1: Cultural background of participants will moderate the relationship between fear (guilt/shame) such that Turkish participants would show more positive attitudes when they feel more fear (guilt/shame) than participants from the US.

Study
Methodology
The objective of the study is to provide evidence for the hypothesis. To this end, a large-scale study was set up with participants from Turkey and the US. Two-hundred and ninety-six Turkish respondents and 417 American respondents participated in the study. In total, 713 respondents are analyzed (29.1% women). The American sample is selected randomly by using the platform on Crowdflower. Participants received 15 cents as an incentive for taking part in this study. The original survey was prepared in English and then translated for the Turkish consumers. The Turkish sample was recruited by means of distributing a survey link to a convenience sample. After collecting the data, two datasets were merged into one data file to be analyzed via SPSS 20.0. To distinguish participants from the two different countries, a new nominal variable is created as “nation” (0=Turkish participants; 1=American participants). After a short introduction, participants were asked to view the advertisement that is aimed at focussing on the abused substance called Methamphetamine (Meth). The advertising is based on the popular mass media campaign by the Montana Meth Project (www.methproject.org) that evokes strong emotions, and in a short period of time, has gained international popularity especially amongst teenagers and young adults. The campaign itself has more than one form of printed ad, where the pictures are quite disturbing and are aimed at creating strong emotions amongst viewers, such as a picture of a mother who has been beaten, lying on the floor. For this study, a picture of a senior citizen, beaten for money is used. When the advertisement was shown to the participants, a small information box about the substance was shown in order to inform participants who may not be aware that such a substance exists. After exposure to the advertisement, attitudes towards the ad were shown (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989) using a 7-point Likert scale to measure participants’ agreeableness to 3 statements (unlikeable/likeable, unpleasant/pleasant, uninteresting/interesting), which were averaged to form one single variable (Alpha: 0.91). Then, participants were asked to indicate the strength of their feelings of guilt, shame and fear about the advertisement on a 7-point Likert scale. Lastly, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Results
PROCESS was used to analyze the data (Model 1; Hayes, 2012). First, an analysis of guilt appeal as the independent variable was conducted. The results show a significant main effect of both guilt (t=8.15; p<.001) and nation (t= 5.26; p<.001). More importantly, a significant interaction effect between guilt and nation emerged (t=-4.93; p<.001). Specifically, the conditional effect of guilt on attitude was positive for both Turkish (t=8.15; p<.001) and for American respondents (t=1.34; p=0.18). Thus, a high (vs. low)
guilt appeal induces a more positive attitude for the Turkish respondents, whereas, the same relationship is not significantly different for American respondents. Second, fear appeal as the independent variable was analyzed. The results show that both fear appeal (t=7.64; p<0.01) and nation (t=4.85; p<0.01) have a significant main effect on attitude. In addition, a significant interaction effect between fear and nation emerged (t=-4.82; p<0.01). Specifically, a high (vs. low) fear appeal induces a more positive attitude for Turkish (t=7.64; p<0.01) and American respondents (t=0.78; p=0.44), but the difference is again not significant for American respondents. Third, shame appeal was used as the independent variable for the last analysis. The results indicate significant main effects for both shame (t=8.55; p<0.01) and nation (t=4.58; p<0.01). Specifically, a high (vs. low) level of shame induces a more positive attitude for Turkish (t=8.55; p<0.01) and for American respondents (t=1.42; p=0.15). However, the results were not significant for American respondents.

In line with these three analyses, it can be concluded that the hypothesis is supported.

Results and Discussion
This research has examined the moderating role of culture on the relationship between felt guilt, shame and fear appeals, and advertising attitude. Early research conceptualizes individualism as the opposite of collectivism (Hui, 1988); social scientists indicate that it is a widespread issue that industrialized Western societies hold more individualism than developing countries which have a more traditional understanding of society (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). However, the results showed that individuals from culturally different countries (Turkey and the US) yield positive attitudes towards the negative ad content when they experience more guilt, fear and shame appeals. The after-effect of viewing the ad is further proof of that the hypothesis in this study is supported. Prior research indicated that interdependent cultures may benefit more from using reappraisal as their emotion management strategy (Kwon, et al., 2013), therefore felt negative appeals (fear, guilt and shame) may lead to more positive attitudes for both cultures, but may produce different outcomes depending on how they adjust these emotions to the social environment (i.e. actually protecting themselves and their loved ones from the dangers of substance abuse).

References


