

Emotive Appeals in Charitable Advertisements: Investigating Visual Attention and Donation Intentions

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Cite as:

Sharma Arashdeep, Grohmann Bianca, Johnson Aaron, Bodur H. Onur (2020), Emotive Appeals in Charitable Advertisements: Investigating Visual Attention and Donation Intentions. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 49th, (63479)

Paper from the 49th Annual EMAC Conference, Budapest, May 26-29, 2020.



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Abstract

Previous studies measuring participants' visual attention to charitable advertisements have shown that negatively valenced images featured in such ads evoke more attention toward the negatively valenced images, whereas positively valenced images were associated with greater attention to charitable logos. These results emerged in the context of advertisements by well-known charities. The current study extends this research by examining eye movements and donor intentions elicited by advertisements for unknown charities featuring negatively valenced (i.e., children with sad facial expressions), positively valenced (i.e., children with happy facial expressions) or neutral images. This approach precludes possible effects of brand familiarity with the charity on visual attention and donation intentions. Charity advertisements associated with the sad faces (i.e., negatively valenced emotive ad appeals) were expected to elicit more visual attention and donation intentions toward the charity compared to those associated with neutral or happy faces (i.e., positively valenced emotive ad appeals). Results of an experimental lab study involving eye tracking and measurement of donor intentions in terms of willingness to donate and donation amount indeed show that logos associated with sad faces were fixated at faster, more frequently, and for a longer duration than logos associated with neutral or happy faces. Logos associated with sad faces also elicited higher donor intentions. These results have implications for relatively unknown charities and suggest that such charities would benefit from including emotive ad appeals, particularly in the form of negatively valenced images—such as sad faces—in their advertisements.

Keywords: *advertisements; donations; eye-tracking*

Track: Public Sector and Non-Profit Marketing