



## Green Advertising Using Sick-, Well-, and Healed-Appeals

Dooyoung Choi, Old Dominion University, United States of America  
Ha Kyung Lee, Chungnam National University, Republic of Korea

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**Significance.** The *sick*-baby appeal that focuses on the severity of a problem is a common approach in environmental social marketing. However, a few researchers (e.g., Ellen et al., 1991) proposed a *well*-baby appeal featuring a good state (e.g., a clean environment) as the better alternative in changing consumer behavior to be more environmentally friendly. Obermiller (1995) compared the two appeals and concluded that the effectiveness of the advertising appeals varies by the relative saliency of the issue of concern, meaning the consumer's position on the prominence of the particular environmental issue. The significance of this study is extending the previous studies by including a *healed*-baby appeal as the third appeal type while examining the interaction effect of the saliency of environmental issues in the fashion industry on consumer responses. The research model is developed based on the stimulus–organism–response model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) that advertising appeals as stimuli influence emotional states (positive and negative emotions), leading to consumers' behavior response (purchase intentions).

**Application of literature.** Although some evidence indicates that healed appeals are superior in generating positive consumer responses (e.g., Choi & Lee, 2020), the saliency of the environmental issue was not considered in the previous studies. According to Obermiller (1995), a sick appeal could offer an advantage when the particular issue of concern is considered less salient, while a well appeal could be better when the issue is considered salient. Thus, we hypothesized that a sick appeal works well for those with low salience regarding the issues. In other words, for consumers who think of the environmental problems in the fashion industry as not a salient issue, addressing the pollution occurring in the fashion industry with a sick appeal can convince them of the need for green products. For consumers who consider the environmental issues in the fashion industry prominent, heightening the salience through a sick appeal should have little effect on them. Thus, we hypothesized no significant difference in the effectiveness of appeal types on them.

Hypothesis 1: (a) For consumers with low salience for environmental issues in the fashion industry, a sick appeal will work better than other appeals. (b) For consumers with high salience for environmental issues in the fashion industry, all appeals will work well.

We also hypothesized that sick appeals would lead to purchase intentions through negative emotions (e.g., guilt, fear, regret), while well and healed appeals will lead to purchase intentions through positive emotions (e.g., happiness, pride, hope). When consumers are exposed to an

environmental crisis message through sick appeals, thinking of not choosing a green product may evoke anticipated negative emotions (e.g., not buying the green product will make me feel bad), and the anticipated negative emotions can motivate consumers to buy the green product. Equivalently, exposure to positive messages by well and healed appeals may help thinking that buying the green product will make them feel good (e.g., buying the green product will make me feel good), motivating consumers to buy the green product.

Hypothesis 2: (a) A sick appeal will positively influence purchase intentions through anticipated negative emotions. (b) A well appeal and (c) a healed appeal will positively influence purchase intentions through anticipated positive emotions.

**Methods.** The stimuli advertisements were created for a fictitious zero-waste fashion brand. While keeping its advertisement image constant, the stimuli were manipulated using headlines containing “A Sick Earth” for a sick appeal, “A Healthy Earth” for a well appeal, and “A Healed Earth” for a healed appeal. Participants were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk and randomly assigned to one of three stimuli conditions. The individual’s position on the saliency of environmental issues in fashion, positive and negative emotions, and purchase intentions were adapted from previous studies and measured on Likert scales. A total of 195 usable responses were collected.

**Results.** The stimuli manipulation of the three appeal types was successful ( $F(2,192)=10.946$ ,  $p<.001$ ). A 3 x 2 MANOVA was conducted with the appeals (i.e., sick vs. well vs. healed appeals) and the salience for environmental issues in fashion (i.e., low vs. high) as independents and positive and negative emotions as dependents. The results revealed significant main effects of appeal types ( $F(2,189)=3.250$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and salience for environmental issues ( $F(1,189)=38.562$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The moderating effect of salience ( $F(2,189)=3.631$ ,  $p<.05$ ) on positive emotions were also significant. However, the main and moderation effects on negative emotions was not significant. In terms of the main effect, a healed appeal was the most effective in generating positive consumer emotions, followed by a well appeal and then a sick appeal. Regarding the moderation effect, for consumers with low salience for environmental issues, the effect of a sick appeal on positive emotions was not greater than that of well and healed appeals, rejecting Hypothesis 1(a). Consumers with high salience for environmental issues showed high positive emotions regardless of advertising appeals, supporting Hypothesis 1(b).

Hypothesis 2 was tested through PROCESS macro with Model 8 (1,000 bootstrap samples). The results revealed the insignificant mediation effect of negative emotions between a sick appeal and purchase intentions, rejecting Hypothesis 2(a). The mediation effect of positive emotions between well and healed appeals and purchase intentions was significant, supporting Hypothesis 2(b)(c).

**Discussion.** Unlike Obermiller's (1995) claim, a sick appeal was not effective regardless of the consumer's position on the saliency of environmental issues in the fashion industry. In addition, a sick appeal did not increase negative emotions from not buying the green product. Thus, it had no influence on purchase intentions. These findings support the claims (e.g., Choi & Lee, 2020; Ellen et al., 1991) that markers should convince consumers in a positive manner (e.g., featuring a clean environment or showing the resolved state [e.g., plastic bottles turned into a jacket]) and promote positive emotions that consumers can have (e.g., feeling proud, hopeful) from buying their environmentally sustainable fashion products.

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