

Executive Summary

Determinants of Consumer Attitudes Toward Prosocial Products: A Focus on the Communication of Love (vs. Pride, Hope, and Compassion) Within Advertisements

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Fifty years ago, western societies donated to the people living in Biafra to reduce famine. The campaigns showed hungry children, and the message aimed at compassion. Over the decades, the number of crises increased: hunger in several countries, pollution of the environment with microplastics, CFCs and too much CO₂, refugees due to an increasing number of wars, the 2011 tsunami, climate change, cruelty to animals used for food etc. Many NGOs ask individuals in the role of consumers, citizens, car drivers etc. for donations. At Christmas time, we receive appeals to donate for various purposes. Many companies offer prosocial products, e.g., fair-trade products, environmentally friendly manufactured products and ask for a surcharge of the price.

The message often used in mass media to induce prosocial behavior consists in compassion appeals. The use of such appeals is obvious because people have learned the principle of charity through multiple sources (religion, ethics, films) and prosocial behavior is suitable to reduce compassion. However, compassion appeals are likely to suffer from a dilution effect since there are so many companies and NGOs using compassion appeals.

We argue that under these conditions, companies offering prosocial products and NGOs promoting prosocial behavior need to consider additional types of messages simply to differentiate themselves from other companies and NGOs.

We explored an alternative: the promise to experience positive emotions when behaving in the recommended prosocial manner. We created advertisements that promised the experience of love, or pride, or hope. Our findings show the following.

1. When persons in need are addressed in ads, the attitude toward the promoted prosocial product is higher when companies promise to experience love, pride, or hope than when there is no such appeal.
2. When persons in need are addressed in ads, the attitude toward the promoted prosocial product is higher when companies promise to experience love than when the promise the experience of pride or hope.
3. When animals in need are addressed in ads, only the love appeal (but not the pride appeal or hope appeal) affects product attitudes.
4. When the nature in need is addressed in ads, the love appeal is ineffective.