



Journal of Multidisciplinary and Translational Research (JMTR)

journal homepage: <https://journals.kln.ac.lk/jmtr/>



The impact of advertising appeal on customer purchase intention towards food supplement products in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Advertising has become one of the determinant activities in the competitive environment for commercial products, including food supplement products. It is a key activity that enhances the demand for a product of commercial value among consumers. The present study examined the impact of the appeal that advertising carries on the buying intention of consumers who buy food supplement products in the Sri Lankan market. Three independent variables and one moderating variable were considered in the study. Rational appeal, emotional appeal, and moral appeal were considered as the independent variables, while age was taken as the moderating variable. Customer purchase intention was considered as the dependent variable. The mixed research method was adapted as the research method and both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were employed for quantitative analysis. The thematic analysis was used in addressing the qualitative objective of the study. The data was collected, using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, from 188 existing and potential customers of food supplement products in Sri Lanka. Emotional appeal, rational appeal, and moral appeal carried in advertising were found to be positively related to the customer purchase intention of food supplement products in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Advertising appeal, Customer purchase intention, Food supplement products

Article info

Article history:

Received 25th January 2023

Received in revised form 22nd March 2023

Accepted 20th May 2023

Available online 30th June 2023

ISSN (E-Copy): ISSN 3051-5262

ISSN (Hard copy): ISSN 3051-5602

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.4038/jmtr.v8i1.62>

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Introduction

A global crisis struck the world in the shape of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of the year 2020. As a result, the consumer market experienced panic buying behavior resulting in empty store shelves, out of stocks of many consumer products, and a massive increase in online sales. Retailers, wholesalers, and producers had to adapt to consumers' changed buying behavior in consumer products, especially in foods including food supplements. Due to the resultant increase in competition among almost all the producers and sellers, the importance of marketing communication or advertising as a factor that determines the amount of selling kept increasing. The role of advertising as a tool of marketing communication is to inform potential consumers about the products so that they should be able to compare them with the other products in the competition, creating awareness among potential consumers that these products are acceptable for purchasing and to purchase in favour of the product which is being advertised (Vlastelica, 2007). Corporate, non-profit, and public sector all required an integrated approach in planning and realizing commercial activities (Holm, 2006). Advertising helps to create a keen awareness on a consumer brand (Ingavale, 2013). Food supplement products occupy a significant space in the Sri Lankan market. The appeal that comes with advertising, which is known as the advertising appeal, acts as a promotional marketing tool that increases consumer buying intention, including the intention to buy food supplements.

Through advertising, producers and sellers exert an appeal towards the consumer mind to impact their attitudes and to enhance the purchase intention. Creative strategies in advertising are marketing appeals that advertisers use to influence the way consumers perceive products and to convince them that they are useful for them, leading to create a purchasing intention (Zhanget al., 2010). Depending on the content of the message transmitted by the advertisement, appeals can be divided into rational and emotional (Lee & O'Connor, 2003). Since there is no general rule on what type of appeal should accompany the advertisement and on how to convey such an appeal to make advertising a successful endeavour, the current study aimed to evaluate the impact of the advertising appeal on the purchase intention of customers. The study examined the impact of rational, emotional, moral, and celebrity endorsement appeals on customer buying intention towards food supplement products in Sri Lanka.

Advertising appeals are different techniques and strategies that are used to attract customers. Usually, advertising appeals provide evidence or cause an emotional response that helps to convince the target audience to buy a certain product or service. Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) defined advertising appeal as suppliers' application of a psychologically motivating power to arouse consumers desire and action for buying, while broadcasting signals to change receivers' concepts on the product. Hence, advertising appeal is applied to attract the consumers attention, to change the consumers concept of the product, and to affect them emotionally about a specific product or service (Belch & Belch, 1998; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). Long-Yi Lin (2011) recommended that advertising appeals have strong positive impact on consumer's buying intentions. This theory is in line with the opinion of Lee and Hong (2016), who stated that advertising appeal can lead individuals towards the adoption of an attitude or behavior. Moreover, Nguyen (2014) opined that advertising appeals can lead individuals towards positive evaluation of a certain product or service. Moreover, Wardhani and Alif (2018) found in their

study that advertising appeals, especially emotional appeals, shaped a positive attitude among the consumers towards the brand and hence have a greater influence on driving purchase intentions of consumers. Verma (2009) investigated the impact of emotional and intellectual arguments on consumer purchase decisions. Lin (2011) investigated the influence of advertising appeals and spokespersons on advertising attitudes and purchase intentions. According to Geuens et al., (2011), emotional advertising has a significant influence on attitudes about advertising and buying.

Kotler (2003) divided advertising appeal into rational and emotional appeals. Most studies have focused on the impacts of advertising appeal on attitudes or purchase intentions. Few of them have compared rational appeal and emotional appeal and have determined which one creates a significant effect on the customers' attitude more effectively. Sharma and Sing (2006) emphasized that the choice of an adequate appeal is one of the most significant decisions to be taken in formulating a creative strategy of advertising. While defining appeals, Belch and Belch (2004) maintained that appeals in advertising refer to the approach used to draw the consumer's attention or/and to influence the feelings they have towards the product.

Puto and Wells (1984) referred to this rational approach as informational advertising. Cutler defined the rational appeal as the explanations which are given directly about the product benefits and create rational purchases (Lin et al., 2011). Accordingly, the purpose of the rational appeal is to influence the purchasers' thought. Rational appeal was defined by Stafford and Day as providing information in a direct and clear way by depicting the reality (Mortimer, 2008). There are a few characteristics of rational appeals, such as product/service quality, feature, economy, dependability, efficacy, efficiency, competitive advantage, health, durability, performance, favorable price, convenience, and popularity (Belch & Belch, 2012).

The impacts of moral arguments have been explored in a variety of contexts. Moral appeals have been shown in field studies to reduce tax evasion (Bott et al. 2017), as well as to encourage energy conservation (Ito et al., 2018), to have compliance with COVID-19 restrictions (Bos et al., 2020), debt repayment (Bursztyn et al. 2019), and towel re-use (Gossling et al., 2019). Some studies, however, revealed that moral appeals failed to persuade people to pay their TV licenses (Fellner et al. 2009), taxes (Blumenthal & Christian, 2001; Torgler, 2004, 2013), or honor box payments (Schlüter & Vollan, 2015). Some research even implied that moral arguments might be counterproductive by posing a psychological danger to individuals (Tauber et al., 2015).

Wardhani and Alif (2018) found in their study that advertising appeals, especially emotional appeals, shaped a positive attitude among the consumers towards the advertisement and the relevant brand and hence have a greater influence on driving purchase intentions of consumers. Researchers have argued that emotional experiences might often be more implicit or unconscious in nature (Kihlstrom, 1993), which suggested, in accordance with the encoding specificity principle, that investigations of the effects of such advertisements on implicit memory may shed light on previously conflicting results by tapping into the unconscious effects of emotions on memory. Emotions show an important role in decision making as proven in consumer research (Garg et al., 2007). As emotional advertising is considered as the most effective tool, the consumer ultimately gives an emotional response to that product (Brassington & Pettitt, 2005).

Consumer behavior has long been a study of interest for researchers. For the practitioners or researchers, understanding the consumer behavior was not an easy task. According to Schiffman & Kanuk (2007), consumers are viewed as rational decision makers, who are only concerned about their self-interest. In previous studies that many contemporary researchers have conducted on consumer behavior considered varied range of factors which impact on consumer and showed a consumption activity beyond purchasing. According to Mehta and Chugan, (2013), the consumption activities include need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, building purchase intention, act of purchasing, consumption and finally disposal.

The food supplement market in Sri Lanka is growing rigorously in the last few years, although Sri Lankan local products have a lesser demand when compared with the international brands. The popularity of food supplement products is due to the reason that people are increasingly health conscious about non-communicable diseases. The people derive information from doctors and as well as from advertisements and this motivates them to purchase food supplements. The food supplement industry is directly related to the healthcare industry as consumers have a deep concern for their health and safety. The X and Y Generations are more concerned with their food patterns. There are food supplement powders and food supplement capsules available in the market and it was the food supplement powders studied in this research as there is a significant market share for food supplement powders in Sri Lanka. Still there has been no organized food registration procedure under healthcare authorities and hence there is a need for government controlled regulatory plan for food supplement products. Until such a procedure is implemented, many such products are sold after a simple labelling registration done at a lower level of health authorities. Knowledge on the impact of advertising, such as the knowledge intended to create in the current study, would be helpful in formulating a proper regulation policy.

Although advertising appeals are applied in Sri Lanka, there is a scarcity of detailed information on how they worked towards exerting a positive impact on consumers. Hence, it was imperative to launch an investigative study on advertising appeals that can be efficiently used in the marketing of food supplement products in Sri Lanka. This investigation aimed to pinpoint the aspects of advertising appeals that enhance customer buying intention and thereby assist food supplement industry marketing managers to be successful among heavy competition.

Further, the study also investigated how the pandemic affected the intention of consumers to buy food supplement products to maintain their good health. This research measured the extent of the impact advertising appeals exerted on customers' purchase intention towards food supplement products in Sri Lanka. In addition, the study also assessed the moderating impact of age on the relationship between advertising appeal and customers' purchase intention on food supplement products in Sri Lanka. The findings of the study can be used to recommend strategies to food supplement brands in enhancing the purchase intention of the customers through advertising appeals. Most of the large and medium scale businesses assign large budgets for advertising because it is very effective for increasing sales. This study will help to identify what types of advertising appeals are currently employed, and the extent of success of those promotions. The study will also help determine the perception of consumers towards food supplements in Sri Lanka, the areas that should be developed for promoting food supplement products and the areas that should be ignored.

The quantitative and qualitative methods on focus groups were employed in this research to examine the hypothesis coined for the research. For the quantitative analysis by means of a questionnaire survey, a structured questionnaire in a Google Sheet was distributed among 400 existing and potential customers, who are exposed to various advertisements on food supplement products. The secondary data was collected through journals, and books using sampling techniques. Initially, the profile of the questionnaire was described to obtain a basic understanding of the sample of customers. The reliability of data collected was verified prior to moving to the data analysis.

Methodology

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) and the hypotheses employed for the study are given below.

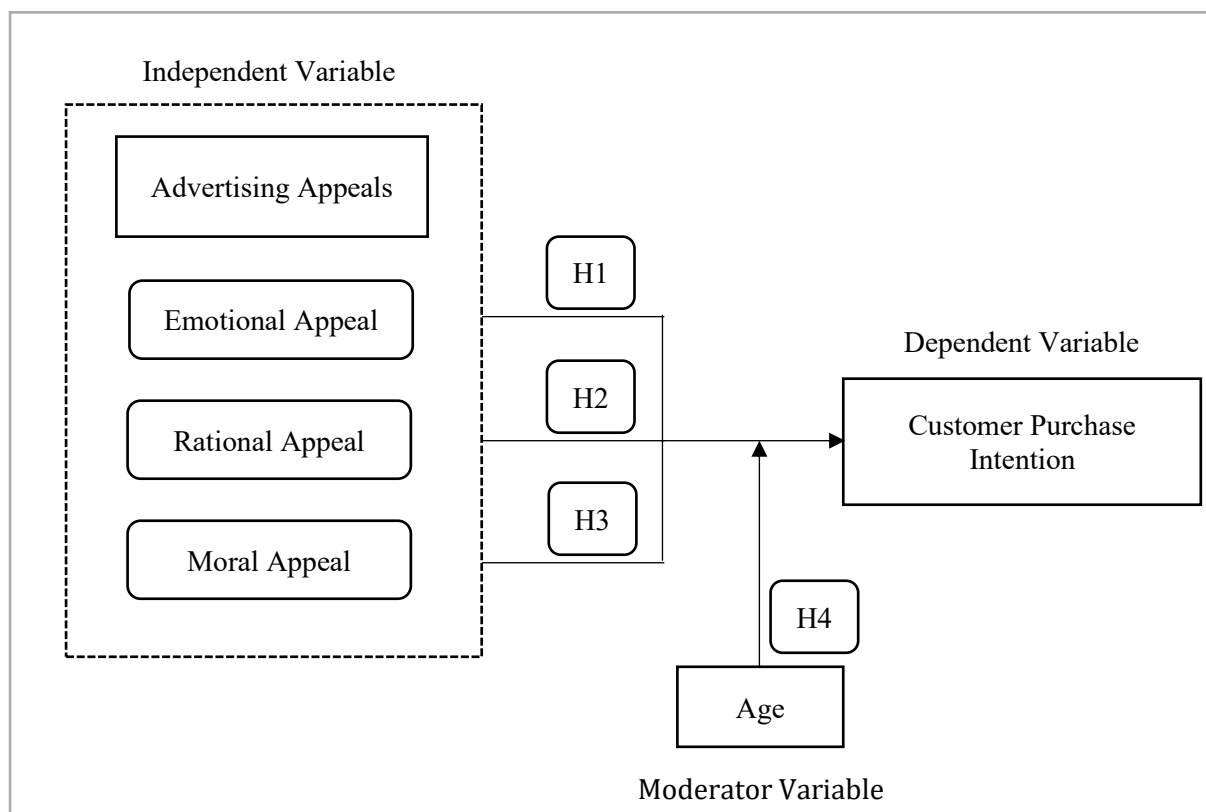


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

- H₁:** Emotional appeal has a positive impact on customer purchase intention of food supplement products
- H₂:** Rational appeal has a positive impact on customer purchase intention of food supplement products
- H₃:** Moral appeal has a positive impact on customer purchase intention of food supplement products
- H₄:** Age moderates the relationship between advertising appeal and customer purchase intention on food supplement products

A descriptive research methodology was used in this study. A survey was conducted among a selected sample of people from a specific population identified by the author. According to the Morgan Table on sample size, 385 existing and potential customers were chosen as the sample of the study at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The sample consisted of existing and potential customers for food supplement products. Further, a simple random sampling technique was used as the sampling method. Data analysis was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative data analytical techniques. SPSS 29 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) was used for data analysis. Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were used for quantitative analysis. Thematic analysis was the tool used in addressing the qualitative objective of the study. The researcher selects a sample of 10 customers who are purchasing food supplement products. Here, the researcher identified a parental theme as the strategies to enhance customer purchase intention and under that sub themes were developed based on the gathered data are as follows.

Table 1: Key factors of Thematic analysis

| Parental Theme | Sub Themes |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Strategies to enhance customer purchase intention | I. Pricing |
| | II. Quality |
| | III. Packaging |
| | IV. Accessibility on the market |

Results and discussion

Table 2: Model Summary^b

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | | Durbin-Watson |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|---------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change | |
| 1 | .589 ^a | .347 | .332 | .53873 | .347 | 24.264 | 4 | 183 | .000 | 1.899 |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Age Group, Rational Appeal, Emotional Appeal, Moral Appeal | | | | | | | | | | |
| b. Dependent Variable: Customer purchase Intention | | | | | | | | | | |

Emotional appeal had a strong positive correlation with rational appeal ($r = 0.70$) and moral appeal ($r = 0.72$). This suggested that, as emotional appeal increases, rational appeal and moral appeal tend to increase as well. Emotional appeal also showed a moderately positive correlation with customer purchase intention ($r = 0.57$), indicating that higher emotional appeal was associated with higher purchase intention. There was a weak negative correlation between emotional appeal and age ($r = -0.07$), suggesting that the lower the age group, the higher the emotional appeal.

Rational Appeal: Rational Appeal had a strong positive correlation with both Emotional Appeal ($r = 0.70$) and Moral Appeal ($r = 0.73$). This indicated that as Rational Appeal increases, Emotional

Appeal and Moral Appeal tend to increase as well. There was a moderately positive correlation between Rational Appeal and Customer Purchase Intention ($r = 0.47$), suggesting that higher Rational Appeal was associated with higher Purchase Intention. The correlation between Rational Appeal and Age Group was very weak and not statistically significant ($r = -0.03$).

Moral Appeal: Moral Appeal had a strong positive correlation with Emotional Appeal ($r = 0.72$) and Rational Appeal ($r = 0.73$), indicating that as Moral Appeal increases, Emotional Appeal and Rational Appeal tend to increase as well. There was a positive correlation between Moral Appeal and Customer Purchase Intention ($r = 0.43$), suggesting that higher Moral Appeal was associated with higher Purchase Intention. The correlation between Moral Appeal and Age Group was weak and not statistically significant ($r = -0.08$).

Customer Purchase Intention: Customer Purchase Intention had a moderate positive correlation with Emotional Appeal ($r = 0.57$), Rational Appeal ($r = 0.47$), and Moral Appeal ($r = 0.43$). This indicated that with the increase of any type of appeal, Purchase Intention tends to increase. The correlation between Purchase Intention and Age Group was weak and not statistically significant ($r = -0.11$). Age had very weak and mostly non-significant correlations with other variables. It had a weak negative correlation with emotional appeal and a very weak negative correlation with customer purchase intention indicating that emotional appeal tends to decrease slightly, and purchase intention tends to decrease slightly with the increase in age.

The regression model shows that age group, rational appeal, emotional appeal, and moral appeal explain 34.7% of the variance in customer purchase intention ($R^2 = 0.35$). The relationship between these predictors and purchase intention is moderate ($R = 0.59$), with the model being statistically significant ($F = 24.26$, $p < 0.05$). The adjusted R^2 (0.33) confirms the model's validity, and the Durbin-Watson value (1.90) indicates minimal autocorrelation in the residuals. Overall, the predictors significantly contribute to explaining purchase behavior.

By analyzing the correlation table, key insights into the relationships between emotional appeal, rational appeal, moral appeal, customer purchase intention, and age group. Pearson correlation coefficients and corresponding p-values are used to evaluate these relationships, shedding light on the strength and significance of each connection.

Starting with emotional appeal, it has a strong positive correlation with both rational appeal ($r = 0.69$, $p = 0.00$) and moral appeal ($r = 0.72$, $p = 0.00$), both of which are highly significant. This indicates that customers who respond favorably to emotional appeals are likely to also perceive rational and moral appeals positively. Emotional appeal also shows a moderate positive correlation with customer purchase intention ($r = 0.57$, $p = 0.00$), demonstrating a significant role in driving customer behavior. However, the correlation between emotional appeal and age group is weak and not significant ($r = -0.07$, $p = 0.35$), suggesting that age does not play a substantial role in shaping how customers respond to emotional marketing.

For rational appeal, it is strongly correlated with moral appeal ($r = 0.73$, $p = 0.00$), another significant relationship, implying that rational and moral considerations are closely linked in the minds of consumers. The moderate positive correlation between rational appeal and customer purchase intention ($r = 0.47$, $p = 0.00$) is also statistically significant, indicating that rational

appeal positively impacts customer purchase decisions, albeit to a lesser extent than emotional appeal. The relationship between rational appeal and age group is weak and non-significant ($r = -0.03$, $p = 0.70$), meaning that age does not significantly influence how rational appeal is perceived.

Moral appeal exhibits a moderate positive correlation with customer purchase intention ($r = 0.43$, $p = 0.00$), which is significant but weaker than both emotional and rational appeals. This suggests that while moral considerations can influence purchase behavior, they are less impactful compared to emotional or rational messages. Similar to the other appeals, the correlation between moral appeal and age group is weak and not significant ($r = -0.08$, $p = 0.30$), implying that age group does not substantially affect moral appeal. When looking at customer purchase intention, it shows a moderate positive correlation with emotional appeal ($r = 0.57$, $p = 0.00$), rational appeal ($r = 0.47$, $p = 0.00$), and moral appeal ($r = 0.43$, $p = 0.00$). These significant relationships highlight the importance of all three appeal types in shaping customers' purchase intentions, with emotional appeal being the most influential. However, the correlation between age group and customer purchase intention is weak and non-significant ($r = -0.12$, $p = 0.12$), indicating that age does not significantly impact purchasing behavior in this context. Lastly, age groups do not show any significant relationships with the other variables like emotional appeal ($r = -0.07$, $p = 0.35$), rational appeal ($r = -0.03$, $p = 0.70$), moral appeal ($r = -0.08$, $p = 0.30$), and customer purchase intention ($r = -0.11$, $p = 0.12$). These high p-values suggest that age does not significantly influence how customers respond to these appeals or their purchase decisions.

To conclude, the analysis reveals that emotional, rational, and moral appeals all play a significant role in influencing customer purchase intention, with emotional appeal having the strongest impact. Age group, however, does not have a meaningful effect on any of the variables, suggesting that marketing strategies focusing on emotional appeal are likely to be effective across different age groups. Rational and moral appeals, though less influential, also contribute positively to purchase intentions.

Conclusions

Every food supplement brand intends to exert an effective advertising appeal through advertising, as advertising appeal leads to enhanced customer purchase intention. In summary, this study shows that emotional appeal, rational appeal, and moral appeal are positively correlated to customer purchase intention towards food supplements. Those findings which emphasized the importance of emotional, rational, and moral appeals in influencing customer purchase intentions, could serve as guidance to formulate marketing and advertising strategies as well as regulatory measures on food supplements.

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