

## CONSUMER'S RESPONSE TO FEAR APPEALS AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IN ADVERTISING: CROSS-CULTURE COMPARISON OF FINNISH AND PAKISTANI CONSUMER'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THREAT APPEALS

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**Abstract:** *Fears appeals are widely used by marketers to change consumer attitudes and behavior across different categories. The effectiveness of fear appeals may vary across different cultures and product categories. This research undertakes how culture influences consumer response to fear appeals of high-involvement products such as an automobile between Pakistani and Finnish Consumers. Educating people on road safety and car manufacturers using fear-based messages to elicit efficacy and fear among individuals is important. This research paper examines the effects of fear-based messages on consumers' product attitude, Ad attitude, and buying intentions in the automobile industry across Finland and Pakistan. Both countries vary significantly in cultural orientation-Feminism vs Masculinity. The study uses a 2x2-independent group's factorial design showing two levels of fear- Low-High. A total of 120 participants were recruited from both countries, 60 from each country diving into four sub-groups. Two-way ANOVA findings reveal a significant difference between the two groups regarding their feelings/emotions towards the fear-based message. However, empirical results indicate a non-significant impact of fear-based appeals on the two groups' brand attitude, Ad attitude, and information-seeking and purchase intentions. The study has important implications for marketing professionals using fear-based messages under different cultural orientations a significant difference between the two groups.*

**Keywords:** *Fear appeals in advertising, threat appeals, cross-culture advertising, the effectiveness of fear appeals, Finnish and Pakistani consumer*

**JEL:** M31, M37.

## INTRODUCTION

Advertising and marketing communication plays a vital role in the formation of consumer brand attitude and loyalty intentions in highly felt purchase situations. Marketing professionals always face challenges in deciding which types of message appeals should be used to get the desired response such as romance, sex, humor, adventure, fantasy, friendship, competence, national heritage, joy, and fear. The use of either type of message appeals depends on the nature of the product, brand positioning strategy, benefits structure, and national culture. This study examines the effects of cultural dimensions (i.e., feminism vs masculinity) between Finnish and Pakistani consumers in response to fear or negative appeals. This study hypothesizes that culture plays a significant role in the evaluation of fear appeals and in turn, affects brand attitude and purchase intentions. The literature on fear appeals goes back to the early work of (Janis and Feshbach 1953) who measure the persuasiveness of fear messages. The inconsistencies in findings resulted in the emergence of countless fear management theories like the inverted U model (Janis 1967); the health belief model-HBM (Becker 1974), the parallel process model-PPM (Leventhal 1970) and the extended parallel process model-EPPM (Witte 1992); and protection motivation model-PM (Tanner, Hunt, and Eppright 1991). The use of fear appeals remained prominent in the healthcare industry, anti-smoking, safe driving, religious institutions, insurance companies, security services, energy, and environmental conservation issues. Several studies conducted to fear appeals include HIV prevention (e.g. Smerecnik and Ruiter 2010; Witte 1994); safe sex (Armitage and Talibudeen 2010); smoking (Laroche et al. 2011); road safety (Carey, McDermott, and Sarma 2013a; Carey and Sarma 2016a); fear appeals in charity (Cockrill and Parsonage 2016).

Despite contradictory results, researchers suggest the use of fear appeals to changing behavior of Smoking and drinking (Simpson 2017). Little attention has been paid to the evaluation of fear appeals in high-involvement products such as automobiles with few exceptions. For instance, the effects of product involvement and culture on the evaluation of fear appeals (Cochrane and Quester 2005a); the mediating role of culture and message types on fear appeals (Laroche et al. 2011); culture orientation and fear appeals (Park and Lee 2012). In fact, most of the cross-culture studies in relation to fear advertising are inconclusive and offer opportunities to fill in the gap. This research addresses the basic question of how effective is the use of fear appeal in the automobile industry and how the consumer responds to it in different cultural contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertising appeals can be defined as an approach or strategy to draw the attention of consumer and to influence their feelings about the product (Belch and Belch 2009). Tanner et al. (1991:36) define fear as "an emotional response to a threat that expresses, or at least implies, some sort of danger". Fear is a negative emotion, accompanied by a high level of arousal, and is elicited by a threat that is perceived to be significant and personally relevant (Easterling and Leventhal 1989; Ortony and Turner 1990). While, threat is considered as external stimulus and it can be perceived if an individual holds cognition about it. (Witte 1992). Fear appeals refers to the persuasiveness of a message that arouses fear in order to shape healthier behavior (Rogers, et al., 1983). Witte (1992) argued that fear and threat produce different outcomes. De-

spite many controversies and inconsistencies over effectiveness of fear appeals, many scholars in the past concluded that fear appeals are highly persuasive and effective (Boster and Mongeau 1984). Witte & Allen (2000) conducted meta-analysis of 100 articles on fear appeals and found that fear appeal literature is diverse and inconsistent. Many notable scientists advocated the effectiveness of fear appeals, especially in public health (Bigsby and Albarracín 2022; Moussaoui, Claxton, and Desrichard 2021). Some researcher argue that threat appeals only produce short-term results (temporary arousal of fear) but little evidence to suggest that they actually change the behavior (-Carey, McDermott, and Sarma 2013).

Using fear appeals in green advertising produce negative effects on brand attitude and purchase intentions (Shin, Ki, and Griffin 2017). In the early stages, researchers remained focused only on fear as main emotion but later other emotions like guilt and shame were also incorporated to determine how the interplay between these emotions effects the message (Leshner, Bolls, and Wise 2011). Further, research on fear appeal gained more momentum after protection motivation model (PM) and extended parallel process model (EPPM) which explains how to increase the effectiveness of fear message. Laroche et al., (2001), emphasized the importance of conducting research on fear appeal in context of culture. For instance, Laroche et al., measured the effectiveness of fear appeals across-culture between China and Canada by using. Similarly, cross culture research on smoking between Korean and US customers reveals that smoking is considered a social norm and men's gender identity, while, smoking is increasingly stigmatized among US customer (Kim, Son, and Nam 2005). Further, Cochrane et al (2005) investigated the mediating role of product involvement level and national culture on fear appeals. They found that both factors did not have significant impact on consumer attitudes toward the brand. However, cultural background affects consumer evaluation of the advert itself, but not the brand attitude. Little literature focus on the role of culture on fear appeals and lack comparative studies in advertising across cultures.

### **Effectiveness of Fear Appeals**

Fear appeals are commonly used in health communication, how the research on the effectiveness of fear appeals is contradictory (Moussaoui et al. 2021)). Laroche et al., (2001) argue that fear appeal engages the consumer at both, cognitive and emotional processes level and both physical threats and social threats can lead to protection motivation. Many researchers believe fear-appeals are more effective in certain situations than positive appeal (Chung & Ahn, 2013); enhance brand recall (Hyman and Tansey 1990); adding disgust with fear increase the effectiveness of message (Halkjelsvik & Rise, 2015; Leshner et al., 2011). Higbee, (1969) first reported that research on threats level (low or high) used in fear appeal are inconsistency. For example, Janis (1967) concluded in his curvilinear theory that moderate fear appeals have optimal impact to persuade the customer, instead high or low level of fear message. Hastings et al., (2004) claim that the majority of evidence supports a linear model of fear arousal—the more you scare someone, the greater persuasion. While, Witte and Allen (2000) did not agree with this claim. There was general assumption that high threat manipulations evoke high fear in the audience, but later it was not supported with an objective manipulation check given the lack of consistency in defining fear, the way it is measured and interpreted across the studies. (Carey and Sarma 2016b).

The effectiveness of threat message start to decline after certain point and cause selective attention (Belch and Belch 2009); lead to selective perception and rejection (Jovanovic, Vlastelica, and Cicvaric Kostic 2016). The amount of fear aroused out of appeal message is the central point in fear appeals. The depicted fear level manifest characteristic of message's content, instead subjective evaluation of message based on recipient experience. As depicted fear increases recipient motivation to adopt the recommended actions (Kim Witte and Allen 2000). In contrast, the curvilinear model suggest that highly depicted fear negatively effects the message recipients and they disengage from the message by avoiding further exposure to the stimuli because of severity (Higbee 1969b; Janis 1967; Leventhal 1970). Consequently, the curvilinear theory suggests that high levels of depicted fear is least effective than moderate level of fear depicted in message. While, prospect theory suggests that feeling of loss is more impactful than foregone gains in equal magnitude. Thus, Fear appeals are designed in loss-framed messages as they have a strong psychological impact and loss-framed message makes are more persuasive than usual risks (Van 't Riet et al. 2014).

### **Theoretical Background**

There are several theories and model, which can be applied to study fear appeals. All these theories focus on one of three things: message content, intended behavior change recommended in the communication, and the characteristics of the audience. (Tannenbaum et al. 2015a). Two main models dominate the literature on fear appeal: the Parallel Response Model, which represents the relationship between fear and persuasion as an inverted-U-model (Janis 1967) and Protection Motivation Model according to which consumers respond to a threatening message by seeking to reduce the fear induced by the advertisement (Rogers et al. 1983). Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), explain how adaptive and maladaptive coping is a result of two appraisal process i.e., threat and coping. The PM theory asserts that self depends upon four factors: a) perceived severity of a threatened event; 2) perceived probability of the occurrence; 3) the perceived response efficacy; 4) perceived self-efficacy. First two items relate to threat appraisal; while later two relates with coping appraisal. Self-efficacy-refers to an individual capability to perform certain action and its fundamental component of behavior change theories mentioned above. Self-efficacy ensures the message recipients that he/she is capable of taking recommended actions and those actions will result in desirable outcome (response-efficacy). This study use Protection Motivation theory to investigate the underlying problem.

### **Criticism on Fear Appeal Experiments**

Literature in the past shows that fear appeals showing scary pictures like pictorial cigarette pack warnings are more effective than text warning but tit only effect intention, but not actual behaviour (Noar et al. 2016). Scary picture does not change behaviour, nor more effective, rather counterproductive leading to reactance effects (reduce positive effects of warning) (Hall et al. 2016). The counterproductive results of fear appeals are due to defensive reaction. Many researchers have ignored theory and misinterpreted that result of fear appeals falsely making people believe that fear appeals are effective in changing health behaviour (Kok et al. 2018). Despite extent literature advocate the persuasiveness of fear appeals ((Cockrill and Parsonage

2016; Tannenbaum et al. 2015b) but literature fails to address the utilization of fear appeals according to countries or cultures context (Bartikowski, Laroche, and Richard 2019). Main criticism came on the methods adopted to measure the effectiveness of fear appeals. For example, the laboratory experiments on fear appeals have many limitations i.e. force exposure, short-term measurement and student samples and ethical concerns of maladaptive responses (Hastings, Stead, and Webb 2004b). Such issues in experimental designs put the fear appeals in grey area and favor the use of positive motivation appeals.

### **Measurement Scale**

**Masculinity vs Feminism:** To measure the masculinity and feminism orientation, the study adopts (Stull and Till 1995) scale items 4, 16, 20, 24, and 36 to measure masculinity. For example, 4) It is very important for me to receive recognition for my work. 16) It is more important to me to be paid well than to have a close relationship with my boss. 20) It is important for me to keep my work life separate from my private life. Similarly, scale items 8, 12, 28, 32, and 40 were adopted to measure the feminism. For instances, 8) My job is only one of many parts of my life. 12) would rather work for a small company than a big one.

**Brand Attitude:** Brand attitude refers to individual's internal evaluation of the brand. This study uses Spears and Singh (2004) scales to measure brand attitude toward and purchase intention such as: do you think this brand is unappealing/appealing, bad/good, unpleasant/pleasant, unfavorable/favorable, and unlikable/likable.

**Ad Attitude:** Ad attitude refers to the way consumer respond toward a particular advertisement and it reflects consumer liking and disliking in general toward advertisement. To measure the attitude toward the advertisement. This study utilizes four items adopted from (Mitchell and Olson 1981) as: (1) dislike/like; (2) bad/good; (3) un-interesting/interesting; (4) annoying/pleasing.

**Ad Emotions:** Camras, et al., (1981) model is used to measure the emotional response of Stimuli on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much so). In terms of the language of subjective feelings, the eight primary emotions are as follows: 1) anticipation, 2) acceptance, 3) surprise, 4) joy, 5) fear, 6) anger, 7) sadness, 8) disgust

**Purchase Intentions:** Purchase intentions refers to consumer likelihood to buy the product or not in the future. Spears and Singh (2004) seven-point semantic differential scales were applied as: 1) rate your intention to purchase this brand: never/definitely.

### **METHODOLOGY**

To test the research hypothesis H1 and H2, a factorial design 2x2 was used with aims to measure two levels of threat (self vs others) and the subjects' country of origin (Finland Pakistan) as independent variables. Total one hundred twenty university students were recruited as participants in experiments from Finland and Pakistan. Total of 120-sample size, male participants (57.5%) and female participants (42.5%). The subjects recruited in the experiments represented regular university students (47%), executive students (9.2%), faculty (19.2) and staff (18.3%). Subjects randomly participated in one of the four groups: (1) Self threat appeal x Finland (2) Self Threat appeal x Pakistan, (3) Threats to other appeal x Finland, and (4) Threat to others appeal x Pakistan. These

four conditions were tested at alpha significance level .05. The participants were asked to indicate if they have a driving license and regularly drive family or personal car. To improve the quality of response, only those participants were recruited who were driving a personal car and showed high involvement level with automobiles and then were exposed to one of the two advertising stimuli. The participants were instructed to carefully view and read the stimulus and even can to go back to the stimulus page as often as they needed. After viewing the stimulus, participant measured the following variables using Likert scale point (1-7) as: 1) Emotions/feelings aroused after viewing the ad, 2) Attitude toward the ad, 3) Attitude toward the brand, 4) Information seeking, and 5) purchase intentions. In addition, the score for cultures orientation (Feminism-Masculinity) was measured on the scale from 1-10. Pre-check questions about consumer involvement level with automobile were inserted in demographic information section to reduce the biased/error in the experiments. For instances, do you have a valid driving license and drives your family car. Have you ever heard about the Volvo and easily recognize the brand. The average time taken by the participation to complete the survey form was 6. 30 mints. In order create the level of manipulation in stimulus, two different print ads were developed for Volvo, a Swedish automobile brand which contains different level of fear. The first stimuli contain high amount of fear which was labeled as "self-threat". The contents explicitly show physical harm and number of deaths/disability statistics caused by road accident every year followed by Volvo USP "Volvo can help to save your life". The second stimuli depicted low to moderate level of threat with emphasis on safety of family members that was labelled as "threat to others". The content in second stimuli shows a baby wrapped in wool in a little humorous way and Volvo is projected as death proof car and first choice for safety of your family.

### Message contents and manipulation checks

Previous research indicates that when people are exposed to the concept of death coupled with morality, it increase their motivation to reduce mortality related anxiety (Goldenberg and Arndt 2008; Shehryar and Hunt 2005). For example, fear appeals focusing on enhance self-esteem i.e., dieting can improve body image (Goldenberg and Arndt 2008). In line with previous literature, two print advertisements were developed that emphasized different level of fear as: a) Self-Threat, b) Threat to Others. Self-threat advert depicts high level of fear showing car crash (Not Volvo) with number of death/causalities in road traffic accident worldwide every year and slogan reads, "*Do not become statistics or ending up in wheel chair*" and "*Drive a Volvo because your life is so precious.* (see Annexure A) Second stimulus show a child wrapped up in cotton wool with a line "OR BUY A VOLVO" which indicates if you buy Volvo, you do not need to worry about safety of your family. The message also contains statements as "Volvo a death proof car" and "No one dies in a Volvo". *The manipulation check was performed to make sure two different stimulus presents different amount of fear and it verified from one of Marketing professor at Hanken School of Economics, Finland to unsure both stimuli exhibit different amount of fear and motivation level to induce behavior.*

### Research Hypotheses

**H1a:** Among Pakistani consumers, threat to family (other) will result in more positive brand attitudes and purchase intention than Finnish consumers.

**H1b:** Among Finnish consumer, self-threat will result into more positive brand attitude and purchase intention than Pakistani Consumers

**H2a:** Among Collectivists, family threat will have more positive impact on brand attitudes and purchase intention than individualists.

**H2b:** Among individualist, self-threat will be more effective than collectivists.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Factor Analysis was performed which produce KMO .829 and sig (.000). All the extracted values in commonalties table were above .5, so no item was needed to be removed. However, three items such as \_Advertisement feelings1\_ surprise; Advertisement feelings8\_ Joy and Masculinity4\_ “salary is most important to me” were removed to make the factors loading in more appropriate form and it resulted in 7-factor solution using Principal component method and Varimax rotation. These factors explain total 66.54 % of the variance in the model.

**Table 1:** Exploratory Factor Analysis Final Output

<b>Brand Attitude</b>	<b>Factors Loading</b>
1.unfavourable/favorable	.840
2.unlikable/likable	.815
3.unpleasant/pleasant	.796
4.unappealing/appealing	.783
5.bad/good	.776
<b>Purchase Intentions</b>	
1.Definitely not buy it	.860
2.Definitely do not intend to buy	.829
3.Very low purchase interest	.815
4.Probably not buy it	.781
5.Never but it	.699
<b>Involvement level</b>	
1.I usually spend a lot of time selecting a car brand	.775
2.I usually talk about car brand choices with other people	.738
3.I usually take many factors into account before selecting car brand	.692
4.I usually seek advice from other people prior to select a car brand	.671
<b>Feelings towards Ad</b>	
1.sadness	.832
2.disgust	.819
3.anger	.809

4.fear	.699
5.anticipation	.652
<b>Attitude towards Ad</b>	
1.bad/good	.774
2.dislike/like	.745
3.boring/interesting	.655
4.annoying/pleasing	.646
<b>Feminism vs Masculinity</b>	
1.People will achieve organizational goals without being pushed	.720
2.It is important to finish one interaction before rushing off to another	.647
3.My job is only one of many parts of my life	.643
4.I would rather work for a small company than a big one	.568
5.It is very important for me to receive recognition for my work	.566
6.It is important to shake hands before all business interactions	.544
7.It is more important to me to be paid well than to have close relationship with my boss	.544
<b>Information Seeking Behavior</b>	
1. I would be interested in reading other people's reviews of their Volvo experiences.	.779
2.I would be interested in reading more about Volvo	.732
3.I would be interested in comparing the features with other brands	.672

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Rotation converged in 8 iterations.

**Source:** Author's illustration based on SPSS output

### **Masculinity-Feminism Score**

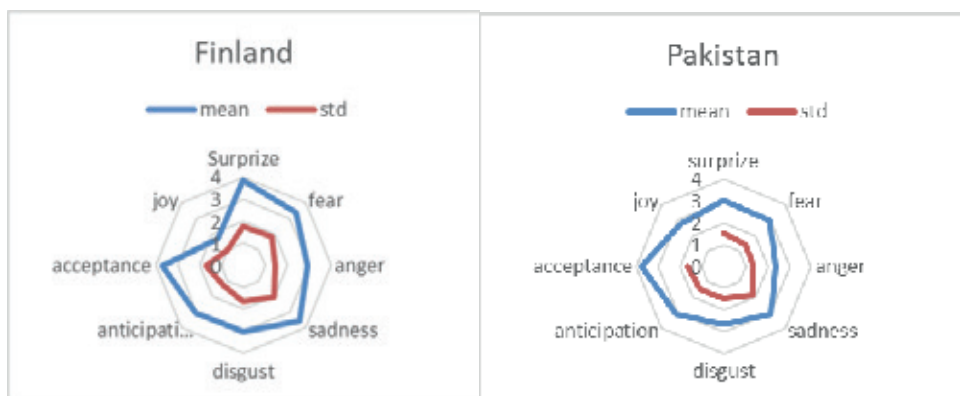
In this experiment, 5-point Likert scale were used to measure 10 items, five belonging to each perspective. Descriptive statistics shows that Feminism score for Finland ( $M=3.54$ ) is higher than Pakistan ( $M=3.33$ ). Similarly, the Masculinity score for Pakistan ( $M=3.76$ ) is higher than Finland ( $M=3.78$ ). The results correspond to the score at Hofstede insight which also indicates low score of masculinity for Finland (26) compared to Pakistan (50). Hence, according to individual results, Pakistan score for masculinity is little higher than Finland's but not significant as  $M=3.78$  compare to  $m=3.76$ . The difference is small as the mean value is calculated on scale 1-5 instead using a semantic differential scale 1-100. However, Pakistani people show little agreement with Feminism value ( $M=3.33$ ) compare to Finland ( $M=3.54$ ). This corresponds to Hofstede score on countries that Finland has high score on Feminism than Pakistan. Thus, the results indicates that both countries have different cultural values.



### Comparing Groups Feeling Against “Self-Threat”

The study specifically measures different types of feelings for each particular advertisement across two countries- Pakistan vs Finland. Descriptive statistics-arithmetic mean score shows different level of emotions/feelings between two groups after exposure to advert-self threat, which contains high amount of fear. Finns’ customers perceived high level of fear (M=3.4) than their Pakistani counter parts (M=3.0) for the same stimuli (self-threat). Similarly, empirical results also showed that feeling of being surprised was high among Finns (M= 3.86) than Pakistani (M=3.0), surprise (M=3.86) than Pakistan (M=3.0), sadness (M=3.6) than Pakistani (M=3.07), disgust (M=3.0) than Pakistani’s (M=2.66). However, feelings of acceptance were high in Pakistani’s people (M=3.79) than Finns (M=3.69).

**Fig 1.** Comparison of Finnish vs Pakistani people’s response to “Self-Threat” appeal

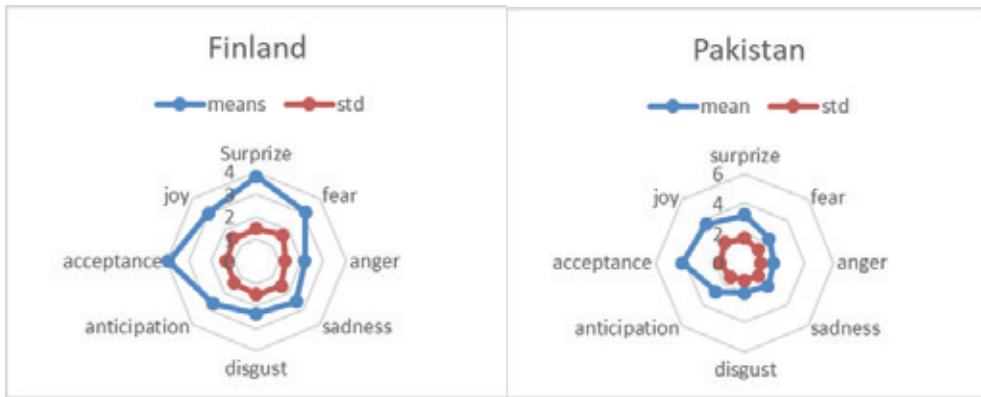


Source: Authors work

It can claim that self-threat had significant effects on feelings/emotions of Finns than Pakistani’s participants. Finns’ customer expressed high feelings (e.g fear, sadness, disgust, surprise) and low feelings such as joy and anger, which indicate feminism orientation. In feminism culture, people are more sensitive and value safety and risk aversion. Whereas, Pakistani consumer expressed low level of fear, anger, sadness, anticipation and surprise. It clearly shows high masculinity culture and little effects of high-fear contents on consumer feelings. The results indicate that high disgust coupled with fear, increased the effectiveness of message in Finn’s consumers.

### Comparing Groups Feelings Against “Threat to Others”

The second Advert “Threat to others” exhibits less amount of fear than “Self-threat” and it resulted in producing high fear level for Finns (M=3.1) than Pakistani’s counterpart (M= 2.32). The mean score shows low magnitude of fear aroused, which confirms the existence of manipulation check in Adverts.

**Fig 2.** Comparison of Finnish vs Pakistani people's response to "Threat to others" message appeal

Source: Authors work

Results clearly indicate that feelings of fear, surprise, acceptance, anticipation, sadness, and disgust is high among Finns than their Pakistani's counterparts. Based on the results, it can be argued that fear or threat appeals are more effective in culture with high femininity and soft values than masculinity.

### ANOVA Output Feelings towards Fear Appeals

The assumption of ANOVA is that the variance is equal in all conditions and in this case, we have 4 different conditions with 30 respondents in each. It is assumed that the spread or variability in the outcome variables is the same in all four conditions. Levene's test of equality indicates sig (.061) which means the variability among the groups is homogenous. The results indicates that there is significant difference between two groups. i.e. different level of feelings/emotions arises after exposure to fear appeals. Self-threat-Pakistan ( $M=2.860$ ) had lower score than self-threat-Finland ( $M=3.207$ ) and similarly, Threat to other-Pakistan (2.22) had lower score than Threat to other-Finland (2.55) which are statistically significant as illustrated in the equation.

$$F(3,115) = 4.008, p = .009, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .095.$$

Thus, there is statistically significant difference between two groups as the  $p < .05$ . It indicates that consumers in Pakistan and Finland had different feelings or perceptions (i.e., anger, fear, sadness, disgust, anticipation) after seeing two different stimuli depicting different level of fear. The results suggest that Finnish people showed high sensitivity/response after seeing the adverts than their Pakistani counterparts. It implies that culture orientation- (Femininity vs Masculinity) do influence consumer feelings and emotions in the assessment of threat appeals. It can be comprehended that countries with high Femininity culture such as Finland will be more sensitive or responsive to threat appeals than masculinity culture such as Pakistan.

### Attitude towards Fear Appeals

Levene's test of equality indicates that the spread is consistent and equal in all four conditions. The  $p$ -value or sig in the test is not significant (greater than .05) which

suggest that the variability among all four groups is equal and we met the condition of running ANOVA. There is no significant difference between the groups in relation to advertisement attitude ( $\text{sig}=.189$ ). When we compare the mean score for first group-Self threat-Pakistan ( $M=4.875$ ) had higher score than Self-threat-Finland ( $M=4.375$ ). Similarly, Threat to other- Pakistan ( $M=5.11$ ) is higher than Finland ( $M=4.59$ ). The results indicates that there is a difference between two groups but it is not statically significant.

$$F(3, 116) = 1.616, p = .189, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .040$$

Thus, there was non-significant effect of culture on consumer attitude towards fear appeals. Consumer response to fear had not significant difference between two countries Pakistan and Finland.

### **Purchase Intentions**

Levene's test of quality indicates sig (.370) which suggest the consistency of variability among groups. The ANOVA results show non-significant difference between groups purchase intentions. Self-threat-Pakistan. Self-Threat-Pakistan ( $M=3.640$ ) had lower score than Self-threat-Finland ( $M=4.260$ ) for behavior outcome-Purchase intention. Similarly, threat to other-Pakistan ( $M=3.74$ ) had lower score than threat to other-Finland ( $M=4.11$ ). Findings indicate that Pakistani consumer had lower purchase intentions than their counterpart-Finnish consumers.

$$F(3, 115) = 1.323, p = .270, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .033$$

Based on the empirical results, it can be assumed that consumer in Feminism culture such as Finland tends to show high feeling to fear appeals, which in turn leads to higher purchase intentions. However, ANOVA results shows that two groups do not differ significantly in their purchase intention as the p-value is greater than .05.

### **Brand Attitude**

This test met the assumption of Levene's test of quality with sig (.994) which means homogeneity exist between groups. Self-Threat-Pakistan ( $M=5.26$ ) had higher score than Finland ( $M=4.96$ ), while threat to other-Pakistan is slightly lower ( $M=5.09$ ) is higher than Finland ( $M=5.007$ ). However, the difference between the groups is not statistically significant as illustrated in the equation below.

$$F(3, 116) = .362, p = .781, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .009$$

### **Information Seeking Intentions**

Results show non-significant difference between two groups in relation to information seeking behavior as a result of exposure to fear appeals.

$$F(3, 115) = .997, p = .397, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .025$$

*In addition*, results also indicate consumer involvement level in relation to purchasing of car had no much difference much between two countries.

### **DICOSSIONS**

Previous literature revealed that arousing of fear play an important for attracting attention, and behavior change among other factors, such as perceptions of vulnerability (Lewis et al. 2007). Other researcher concluded that there was no consistent evidence to claim that highly emotional threat appeals were effective to change behavior

(Donovan, Ed, and Pellegrino 1999). In fact, de Hoog et al (2007) found null effects of fear appeals on some outcomes. In addition, other researcher have found the negative effects of fear appeals (Peters, Ruiter, and Kok 2013), especially the use of fear appeals in green marketing has negative effects on some outcome such as attitude towards advertisement, attitude towards product and purchase intention (Shin et al. 2017). However, some high threat appeals performed well in particular context than others. Recent study reveals that presence of fear appeals in COVID-19 vaccine campaign posters elicited lower levels of perceived communication quality and vaccination intention than those without fear appeals (Liu et al. 2022). It clearly indicates the null effects of fear appeals in Covid-19 vaccinations campaign. Our study results are consistent with previous literature, which claim lower level of effects of fear-based appeals and only effective in eliciting feelings and emotions. Other study also claims fear-based appeals are effective and positively influence consumer attitude, intentions, and buying behaviors with exception to few circumstances under which they are not effective (Tannenbaum et al. 2015b). Cochrane et al (2005) reported no or least effect of fear appeals on consumer attitude in response to fear appeals. In fact, fear-based messages are most commonly used in health industry than other sectors. The effectiveness of fear appeals is well documented in texting and driving (Hayashi et al. 2019).

According to Extended Parallel Process Model (Witte 1992), threat appeals are only effective under two conditions: perceived threat and perceived efficacy. In this study, the perceived severity of threat (accident) by choice of car is low as compared to other situations. Similarly, recipients' perception of capability to perform a recommended actions (buying Volvo) is very low for Pakistani consumers. Therefore, the perceived effectiveness of fear appeals was low. In contrast, Finnish recipients elicited high response to basic fears) and disgust, which explain protection motivation. Thus, Finnish consumer perceived efficacy (buying Volvo) was high and it resulted into high emotional response. Pakistan automobile country is dominated by Japanese cars manufacturer like Toyota and Honda and Volvo is nonexistent. This might be one of the reasons that fear appeals did not have positive effects on certain outcomes such as consumer's information seeking and purchase intentions among Pakistani participants. Based on (Hofstede 2001) cultural dimension theory, status symbols appeals (luxury, prestige, power, strength) are most effective in countries with high score on power distance (i.e., China or the Arab world) than from cultures low on power distance (e.g., the US, or Nordic countries) (Albers-Miller and Gelb 1996). This is one of the reason consumer motivations to buy Volvo was relatively low than Nordic country (Finland. Further, Nordic countries have high score on uncertainty avoidance, whereas Pakistan has low score on uncertainty avoidance. It implies that fear appeals have more power to arrest audience attention and increase persuasion in countries with high uncertainty avoidance.

Previous literature also reveals that strong graphic threat message has high effect on unfamiliar than for a familiar issue (De Pelsmacker, Janssens, and Mielants 2005). Based on the research findings, it is argued that cultural differences play an important role in eliciting feelings/emotions in response to fear advertising. However, feelings and emotions evoked out of fear appeals do not automatically translates into actions and behaviour. As the study findings shows null effect or little difference exist between two countries on outcomes variables such as ad attitude, product attitude and

purchase intentions. The only significant difference between two countries is the level of emotions/feelings arise. Fear is one of the primary emotions that is felt universally, however, its effects on the consumers' behavior varies according to the cultures (Laroche et al. 2011). It also suggests that consumer perception and brand image of Volvo is consistent across culture and consumer response is similar. Volvo brand image as safest car is clear and consistent all over the world and it is least affected by the use of fear appeals. Based on the empirical evidences, it can be concluded that use of high fear level decreases the effectiveness of message used in advertising. Literature and empirical evidences suggest that both the content of the message (fear level) and personal variables determine the persuasiveness of the fear appeal and can produce adverse effect if not properly applied (Demirtaş-Madran 2021).

## **CONCLUSION**

The effectiveness of fear appeals in advertising is much dependent on the content of the message, audience characteristics and product involvement level. Consumer response to fear appeals do not vary significantly across culture (Finland vs Pakistan) and have not profound effects on consumer brand attitude and behaviors. However, study have found positive effects on fear appeals on consumer feelings and emotions which were significantly different across cultures. High level of fear used in message is less effective and produce null or even negative results. Emotional responses have potential to persuade the customer and leads to positive behavioural change. Consumers in feminism culture (i.e., Finland) show high emotional responsive to fear appeals than masculine culture (i.e., Pakistan). Fear appeals may produce high emotional response and prove to be more effective in a culture with high feminism values. Cultural differences are importance to consider when using threats appeals and the effectiveness of fear appeals is linked with product types (low or high involvement product), contents of fear appeals (physical, social, self-esteem) and audience characteristics. People response to fear appeals is often dependent on cultural contexts in terms of emotional response but necessarily not through behavioural outcomes.

## **Significance and Scope**

This study examine how cultural orientations effects consumer evaluation of fear appeals and consumer response to fear appeals is subject to level of threat level as well cultural values. Results have profound implications for advertiser and marketing communication executives. This research opens the avenue to explore the impact of different dimensions/ orientation of cultures on fear-based- advertising and their impact on consumer. Cultural differences accounts in when using fear appeals and explains the level of changes required to make fear appeals more appropriate and effective in different countries.

## **Theoretical and Managerial Implications**

However, results show positive effects of fear appeals on consumer feelings and emotions that drives consumer actions and behaviour. The consumer evaluation of fear appeals was almost similar in both cultures (Finland vs Pakistan) except differences in emotional response. It is evident that fear appeals have null or no effects on consumer attitude and behaviour. Therefore, it is not sufficient to only focus on the content of the

message (level of threat), rather the audience characteristics and communication style also play important part in perceived effectiveness of the message. The effectiveness of fear appeals is subject to numerous factors and culture is not the only factor that effects the consumer evaluation of fear appeals.

### Limitations

Experimental research design used in this study can be criticized for practical limitations of using fear appeals. The selection of product (Volvo cars) is also main limitation in measuring the effectiveness of fear appeals in context of Pakistan. Volvo is not practically operating in Pakistan in personal car category which reduce the perceived risk efficacy. In addition, not availability of product may reduce customer motivation and biased reporting on behavioral outcomes. Buying a personal car goes beyond functional benefits (safety) to social or status symbol and therefore use of fear appeals may be more productive in non-emotional products such as condoms, smoking, drink driving etc.

### Future Research Directions

Extent literature exists on the effectiveness of fear appeals but little is known how to use fear appeals in different cultural context. Measuring the effects of fear appeals on various outcomes variables such as attitudes, intentions and behaviour, separately is little problematic and thus demands to investigate these variables into one single effect. Fears appeals tends to have more positive effects on attitude than behaviour outcomes.

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## ANNEXURE- A

### 1. Advert-Self Threat

Did you know about 1.3 million people are killed each year in road traffic accident worldwide?



“Drive a Volvo because your life is so precious”

Do not become statistics or ending up in wheel chair

### 2. Advert-Threat to Others

“Volvo a death proof car. No one dies in Volvo”



“Buy it for the safety of your family”

