



## **Fear as Psycho- physiological Strategy in TV Advertisements: Measuring Fear-arousal through Body Sensory Network in Youth**

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### **Abstract**

This study unveiled the effects of fear appeals and its psycho-physiological effects on consumers' observed self-efficacy and perception on the advertising content, brand and purchase intent of youth. In the state of Covid-19 when fear of infection and death from the virus constantly prevails across the globe, fear appeals in television advertisements reinforced to create psycho-physiological effects. For this purpose, a triangulation method is used to explore and find latent causation of fear with potential consumers. An experimental design on one group test (pre and post) from 110 respondents (11x10) on stimulus of two advertisement containing fear appeals and from the similar respondent their body temperature, pulse and blood pressure measured. Their psychological responses have taken on the well-structured questionnaire on the youth from age ranging 18-35 years.



The finding of study reveals that there are impulsive interim effects of fear appeals in advertising observed psycho-physiological situation of respondents.

**Keywords:** *Fear appeals, advertising, body sensory network, youth, Pakistan*

## **Introduction**

In the recent corporate environment, advertising industry captured significance in brand culture. The advertising spending is increasing every year and global spending on advertising in year 2020 reached to 586.5 billion US \$ and it will reached 691 billion \$ in year 2023 (Statistics, 2021). Big and small corporations, MNCs and TNCs attract their potential consumers with lucrative strategies and exposure of their advertisements. Primarily, advertisements furnish product information, recognition and retention of the brand, differentiate product from the competitor's brand. The success of the brand prevails how creatively a product message is planned and how much best talent is hunted for the placement and execution of the message (Drewniany & Jewler, 2013). Over the time, many psychological techniques are now commonly used to attract potential consumer on dynamically changing media environment. However, fear appeals in advertising are commonly used in advertising message strategy globally that creates bandwagon and propaganda effect (Soules, 2015). Advertising is combination of visuals, sound, animations and best talent that performs in the TVCs and it persuades to potential target market by the



message they generate. However, along the product's unique selling propositions, these ads also gave an emphasis on cultural, governmental, religious and customer-based issues (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). These ads that earlier were produce for conventional media, now find new media platform as potential vehicles which is relatively easy to disseminate and cheaper in comparison to conventional media.

The use of different appeals vary from culture to culture for instance fear appeals are varying in strategy that could cause physical fear, economic fear, social and self-esteem fear and the fear of harm from virus and disease. Bartikowski et al. (2019) evaluated cross country study where they explored 4155 Chinese, French and Canadian print advertisements and find that significant product type commonly use fear appeals. However, social and self-esteem fear appeal significantly appeared in the Chinese ads whereas physical appeals significantly appeared in France and Canada. Moreover, economic fear appeals are commonly appeared in the French advertisements. In the current global situation of Covid-19, fear appeals significantly appeared in the hygiene and personal cleanliness, beauty and cosmetics, food and nutrition, and drugs and pharma products. It is argued that fear appeals in advertisement can create the reinforcement impact on the potential consumers when there is significant dissemination in public service messages that indicate the potential contact with patient of Covid-19 that can cause infection. Addo et al. (2020) find that fear appeals promote anticipating behaviour among the consumers, in the Covid-19 occurrence in China caused the people to purchase online personal protective and hygiene



equipment which reveal the likeliness to receive information that persuade through fear. The psychological aspects of fear are very significant specifically when fear prevails all around. Pakpour & Griffiths (2020) argue that level of fear varying on socio-demographical variables (age, gender, education, ethnicity and religiosity).

### **Objective and rationale of the study**

Pakistani society is a network society that strongly adhere themselves with the cultural and religious values that prevail in the society. There are certain myths that also exists in the society that contribute in the concept of several type of fears. However, this study investigates fear as psycho- physiological strategy commonly used in advertising and marketing. This study is triangulation in nature that comprising on experimental design and survey research from the sample of 102 respondents. In the experimental design, the respondents are shown two advertisings as stimulus which carefully selected for this study. In the meantime, their blood pressure, pulse and temperature recorded through body sensory method. The psychological responses are taken on well-structured questionnaire. The respondents of this study are ranging age from age 18 to 35 years.

### **Review of Literature** Advertising affecting positively and adversely

Television considered significant medium because of its power of moving pictures and quality of sound and viewers take substantial influence from the TV content. Studies (Pardun, 2013;Phillips, 199; Hyman et al., 1994) find that advertising affecting viewers positively and adversely. These



effects are studies from the perspective of society where advertising significantly contributes through its informational role about the innovation and launching of new products, good and ideas whereas on the other hand advertising adversely influence cognitive process of its potential consumers. However, the content of the ads comprising on puffery, absurdity, sexuality, fear, abusive language, courageousness, testimonial and public service messages. Moreover, social norms, civic issues and cultural perspectives are also seen in advertisements. The violence in advertising is increasing phenomenon among the advertisements. Violence and aggressive content in the advertising significantly influence the viewers and it is considered as common social norm.

The stereotypical manipulation of gender roles is also studies by scholars (Åkestam 2021; Liljedal et al., 2020) where male and female gender roles are undermined which adversely influence the viewers. Children are naïve subjects of advertising and much of the focus of products, brands and services shifted on children. Because of limited exposure and understanding children cannot avoid advertising messages. Methlouthi.and Nefzi (2021) argue that children are threaten on hygiene products (tooth paste, soaps, shampoos and other hygienegoogs) and find that there is significant effect of threat on children that cognitively persuade them to adopt hygiene with that particular product. Mehta & Bharadwaj (2021) explore Indian food advertisings and assert that there is significant portrayal of boys in food advertising than girls and emotional appeals are carried in the advertisements where mother approves the choice of food for children in the



ads. They also question on communication strategies use for children in India and raised ethical concerns.

### **Advertising appeals as a strategy**

Advertising appeals are deliberately planned as a strategy in the brand promotion activity. Advertising appeal is significant psychological stimuli that trigger the favourable change or desire of the goods or services in the target market of the exposed commercial. Dens & De Pelsmacker (2010) find that informational appeals in product categories cause high involvement whereas the emotional appeals reflect low involvement. However, in the new and existing brand, advertising appeals work as a strategy. Verma (2009) argue that advertising persuade potential consumers for exposure of their products and advertising campaigns help consumer in purchase intention. Advertising appeals significantly influence target audience in product awareness, retention and purchase decision. Okazaki et al., (2010) argues that both type of advertising appeals (soft sell and hard sell) are significantly used in advertising, hard sell technique is direct message technique in which the advertising contain information appeal whereas soft sell technique focus on indirect advertising appeal which employed psychological, emotional, fear and humour appeals. However, Okazaki et al. assert that hard sell and soft sell appeals can measured by using appropriate instruments. Advertising appeals are developed by the experts, psychologists, copy writers and media specialists for the persuasion of services and goods. However, brand image of the product, the unique selling propositions (USP) and information related to the product are key features that are related with the product. The connection



of the product with the target market and the individuals are created through advertising appeals in advertising. The consumers' purchase decision is not only for the uses the needs as described in USP but it also gratify the emotional needs of the consumers.

### **Fear as an instrument of advertising appeal**

Fear is the strong emotion which arouse caution in the individual that behold it. Buckley (2016) argues that the responses of fear and thrill are varied among individuals, fear increases performance and panic creates paralysis. He asserts that fear is encountered, measure and react and thrill appeared during or after the situation of fear. However, feared can be measured in upper and lower thresholds. Buckley (2016) finds that fear and other strong emotions can vanished when respondent pay high degree of attention and focuses on the issue which is causing fear. Advertisers use fear appeals in advertising as an instrument because of high degree of involvement of the fear which rise the exposure of the product or brand and it also increases the retention of the message of the ad. Studies(Algie & Rossiter, 2010; Tay & Watson, 2002) explore the fear pattern in term of fear arousal and fear reduction on the road safety advertisements. They find that road accident ads significantly arouse the fear among youth drivers and directs to follow road safety instructions which reveal various pattern prevail when consumers are expose to shocking or fear ads. Cochrane & Quester (2005) argue that in the persuasion of brand advertising, fear as an instrument accessed differently for high involvement and low involvement products. However, the impact of fear appeals also act differently. They suggest that



in the global advertising strategies, fear appeals carefully design and implement in advertising campaigns.

### **Advertising effectiveness and fear appeals**

Since the invention of television as medium, fear appeals in varied propositions had been employed in advertising for advertising effectiveness. Witte and Allen (2000) explored in a meta-analysis of fear appeals from the health communication perspective, find that strong fear appeals and strong message create strong sensibility and behavioural change whereas frail fear appeals and weak message create defensive responses. Advertisements with the fear appeals consider to be effective, cognitive influence of fear appear in the form of awareness level, retention and attitude toward product purchase intention. Fear appeal is studied in advertising and marketing literature from varied contexts. There are several aspects of the advertising effectiveness and fear appeals. Nabi & Myrick (2019) argue that in health communication, there are two postulates that emerged from the fear appeals effectiveness. First, hope that that emerged from fear appeal in behavioural intentions, second, self-efficacy which can predict the potential behaviour intentions. They assert that in response to fear appeals, the hope is significantly persistent in their two dataset respondent in the persuasive success. However, Wauters et al. (2014) assert that colour also considered effective fear and threat strategy in the creative strategy of advertising message. The fear appeal significantly influence the behaviour of target audience when this appeal appeared in background colour. Wauters et al. indicate that blue colour has appealing impact while yellow adverse effect. However, they assert that colour and fear appeals can create syndicate





effectiveness of the advertising message. Studies (Zheng, 2020; Ort & Fahr, 2020; Vargo & Hopp, 2019) reveal negative effect of fear appeals in advertising whereas studies (Nabi et al., 2019; Kok et al., 2018; Ruiter et al., 2001) positive and significant effect of fear appeals on advertising. It is argued that it exhibits a connection between fear and influence have not direct relationship whereas there are varied factors that influence this relationship. However, above studies state that preoccupied believes, religion, culture and demographical variables have significant influence on perceived fear from the TV advertising. Bartikowski et al. (2019) argue that in fear appeals appeared more frequently in Chinese and Canadian ads than French ads. Awagu and Basil (2016) find in an experimental study on the respondents of USA that individual responses are varying on threat orientation. Respondents verified the self-affirmation and self-efficacy in response to threat and responses can be predicted on the threat appeals. Abbasi et al. (2014) find that fear as an advertising appeal do not get affirmation with Pakistani respondents. However, purchase intention of potential consumers can be moved from emotional appeals.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) described the phenomena of how fear appeals are causing distinct effect on high and low involvement of target market in the advertising. This model is presented by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) which established conceptual frame of this study. Advertising message is triggered by the established advertising vehicle that create exposure to the target market and generate comprehension of the



advertising message that potentially trigger fear with unique selling propositions of the product. It develops two potential routes of the advertised message, peripheral and central routes. In the peripheral route, the individual's persuasion is relying on the individual's cues that he takes from the fear appeal as negative or positive. However, fear cue is judged by the individual in the merit of reasoning. There are several factors that contribute in the credibility if it is testimonial, face value of the source and the filming and editing quality of the TVC. The likelihood of perceive fear can be considered by the person's perceived stimulus and ability to evaluate the argument (See fig. 1). However, in central route information presented is thoughtfully processed and understood by the target audience on the merit of message. The reasoning and preoccupied believes contribute in the peripheral process. However, believe, behaviour and attitude change persist, resist and predict on the basis of quality of argument linked with the existing believes, thought and need connected with advertising message (Fig. 1). Studies (Boshoff & Toerien, 2017; Kannaovakun, 1999; Zheng, 2020) reflect that ELM as the conceptual model to study fear appeals.

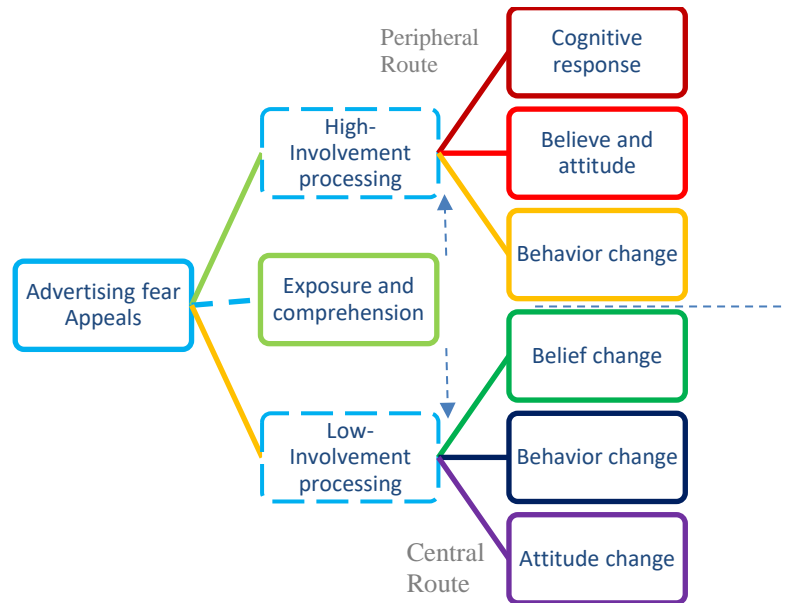


Fig. 1. Advertising fear appeals in Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Modified from Petty & Cacioppo (1986).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, researchers find the causation of fear with psycho-physiological impacts of advertising on the young respondents. The evaluation of fear measured through body sensory network process. The significant purpose of this study is to explore the short term influence of advertising fear appeals on physical and psychological responses, reactions and behaviour for a product or brand in the perspective of fear as advertising strategy used in the advertising. For this purpose, a triangulation study is designed with experimentation and survey research from the convenience random sample of 110 young respondents age between 18-35 years enrolled in University of Sargodha, Pakistan. In experimental design, 10 groups are selected and



each group comprised of 11 respondents. Two set of advertising are selected for the stimulus. The criteria for the selection of advertising is, it comprised on two varied fear appeals of advertising that easy to understand, not gender specific and reflect high fear appeal and moderate fear appeal. The one group experiment (pre and post-test) carried out in this study. For the evaluations of physiological short term response, each group test with body sensory gadgets where heartbeat ratio and pulse, body temperature, facial expressions and blood pressure is observed before and after the experiment. The model for experimentation is modified from Holbrook & Batra (1987). Second, psychological effect are measured through well-structured questionnaire from the similar respondents (N =110) that employed in the experimentation. The five point Likert scale is used to accesses the psychological responses. The reliability of the instrument is Cronbach alpha is 0.789.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This study fear as psycho- physiological strategy in TV Advertisements measure the fear-arousal through body sensory network process in youth age ranging from 18-35 years male and female. The level of education of respondents also ranging from undergraduate to post graduate students. Figure 1 reflects time spent of watching TV advertisements on daily basis. Significant respondents' frequently watching ads or they encounter to TV ads on their favourite programs (3.15) and there is significant deviation on watching ads (1.27). However, specifically there are not very significant respondents that watch TV for ads (1.19) and there is little variance on it



(0.3) whereas respondents spent more than two hours daily on watching TV and ads (2.56) and there is (.90) deviation on the watching time.

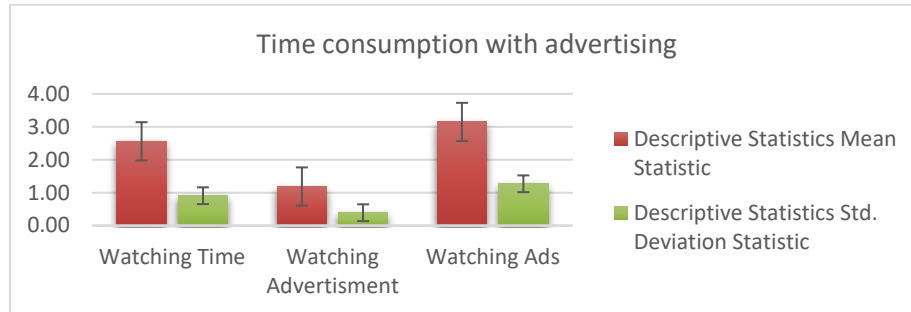


Figure1. Time spent on watching advertisements

However, watch an ad also influence the purchase intent. Figure 2 reveals that respondents spent more than two hours daily on watching TV and ads (2.6) and this frequency is very significant (3.2), they are frequently attentive during watching ads (2.9) and the respondents are potentially to purchase the product and brand in which they find interest (2.8). However, there are significant respondents (2.6) agree that advertisements are imparting information through its content and the story. The content and the story of the ad is the joyful for the viewers (2.9) and significant respondents seek information and new idea from the advertisements of product, brands or services (2.7). However, the standard deviation on the purchase intent and advertisements reflect high tendency of deviation among respondents that shows variation on respondents' attitude toward purchase intent after watching ads (see fig.2). The respondents' preferences of products, interest and attraction on various appeals varied.

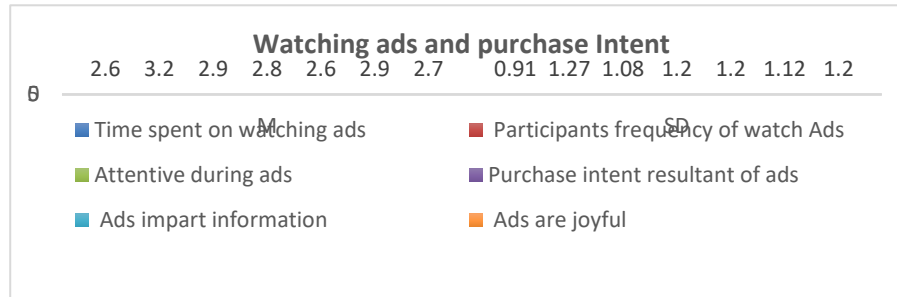


Figure 2. Watching of advertisements and purchase intent

Figure 3 shows that the intensity of paying attention on advertisements and purchase intent of product or brand. Respondents frequently spent money on security related brands (3.0). The interest of respondents in self-grooming, refining status and appearance significantly related with their watching of advertisements (3.0), similarly, interest in the purchase of physical and health improvement goods is also significant (3.0). There very highly significant respondents prefer quality over price (3.4) and it also observed that respondents significantly take the peer influence on purchase intent (3.1). Respondents feel passionate when they purchase a product or brand that they watch in advertising (2.7). However, when similar product or brand respondents' use that they see in advertising, significant respondents reveal that they act like model (2.4), whereas, there is significant retention of the TV advertisement (2.8). Significant respondents (2.7) believe that TV advertisements influence purchase while significant respondents also believe that the content presented in ads is correct (2.8).

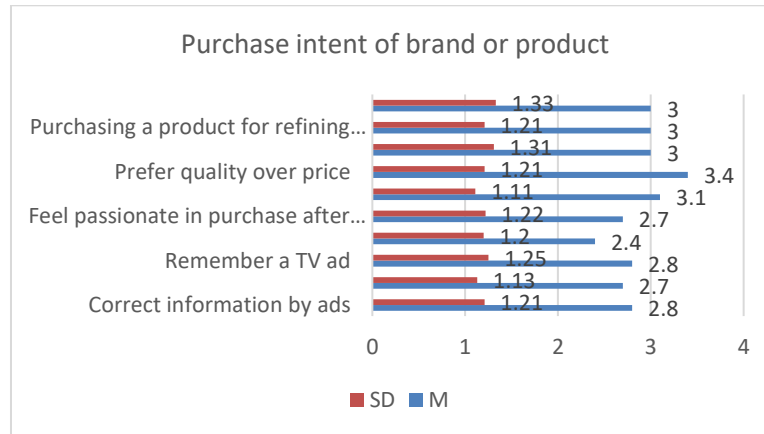


Figure 3. Purchase intent of product or brand and consumers' response

Fear appeals in advertising create frightening impact for the adverse consequences of not using that particular product. Figures 4 shows that respondents feel motivated after being aware of the adverse consequences (2.9) whereas there also significant deviation on their responses (1.14). When they were asked either feel repentance of not using antibacterial toothpaste the significant respondents agreeing (2.7) that they feel repentance on not using specific toothpaste. However, there is significant frequency of purchasing of anti-bacterial toothpaste (2.8).

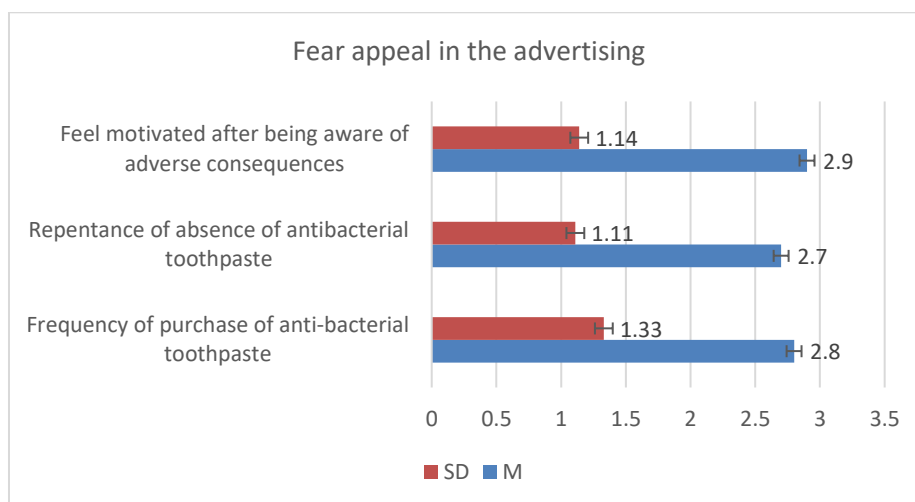


Figure 4. Impacts of fear appeals in advertising

Table 1 t-test of the pulse rate difference before and after stimulus indicate that before watching fear appeal ads is (80.07) and stimulus was given with showing them two ads comprising fear appeals and it slightly increased (83.14) and difference recorded (3.07) which reflect physical impact of fear appeal. However, t-value before (91.97) and after (122.85) indicate accumulative difference of (3.93) conclusively affirm that there is physiological impact observe of fear appeals of advertising.

**Table 1. t-test of pulse rate difference before and after stimulus**

Pulse Rate	M	SD	Std. Error Mean	t
Before stimulus	80.07	8.79	.87	91.97
After stimulus	83.14	6.84	.68	122.85
Difference	3.07	7.88	.78	3.93





**Table 2. *t*-test of Body temperature difference before and after stimulus**

Body Temperature	M	SD	Std. Error Mean	<i>t</i>
Before stimulus	98.37	1.34	0.13	741.10
After stimulus	98.61	1.07	0.11	934.79
Difference	0.24	1.45	0.144	1.67

In the analysis of physical impacts of advertising fear appeals are to gauge the body temperature of the respondents. The results reveal that before the stimulus, body temperature of the respondents is (98.37) and after stimulus it reached to (98.61) and there is the difference in temperature (.24). However *t* –value of the before watching ad is (741.10) and after watching it reached to (934.79) and difference observed is (1.67) that also reveal that there is physical impact of advertising on the body temperature after watching fear appeal in advertising (see Table 2).

**Table 3*t*-test of Diastolic and Systolic mm Hg BPdifference before and after stimulus**

mm Hg BP	M	SD	Std. Error Mean	<i>T</i>
DiastolicBefore stimulus	80.42	8.02	.79	101.33
Diastolicafter stimulus	82.50	9.71	.96	85.82
Difference	-2.07	7.42	.73	-2.82
SystolicBefore stimulus	120.33	8.54	.85	142.32
SystolicAfter stimulus	122.98	10.86	1.08	114.34
Difference	-2.65	7.79	.771	-3.43



Diastolic and Systolic mm Hg BP is third instrument that used for the measurement of physical impacts. The selection of the respondents made with careful selection that none of the hypertension patient ought to be part of this experiment which defined by experts. Results reveal that diastolic mm Hg BP before stimulus of advertising is (80.42) and diastolic mm Hg BP after stimulus (82.50) and difference observed (-2.07). However, *t*-value before stimulus (101.33), after (85.82) and difference (-2.82) in diastolic mmHg BP. whereas, systolic before stimulus is (120.33) and after (122.98) and difference (-2.65). However, *t*-value of the systolic mm Hg BP is (142.32) and after (114.32) and difference is (-3.43) which indicate physiological impact of advertise fear appeal on the respondents (see Table 3).

Results of this study reveal that young people of Pakistan perceive the latent effects of advertising and results affirm that people misdirect after the exposure of advertising. Intervening factors also significantly contribute in purchase intent in the form message of advertising, peer recommendation, product search, medium of ad consumption, quality of the product and unique selling proposition of the products. The results here are in line with (Nam & Kannan, 2020; Okazaki et al., 2010). However, fear appeal is significant in appeal threshold in which it incites for adverse consequences if consumer is not using particular product. It also create potential repentance on absence of that product. Soules (2015) argue that fear appeals create bandwagon effect in advertising which trigger potential sales of the product. However, it has the potential to create high involvement and low



involvement effect in advertising which indicate in Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) that refers the peripheral route which inline to Boshoff & Toerien(2017),Kannaovakun(1999) and Zheng(2020).However, physiological impacts results reflect the variance in pulse rate, body temperature and diastolic and systolic mm Hg BP difference before and after stimulus in pre and post experimentation. Results reveal that fear appeals in advertising have significant physical impact on the respondents. Pulse rate is slightly raised before and after stimulus where similarly slightly difference observed in body temperature. However, diastolic and systolic mm Hg blood pressure slightly decline when exposed to advertising contain fear appeals and it in line on Roberts &Weerts (1982) on fear as psychological appeal. It is argued that the tendency of perceived fear is considered on the respondents ability of argument present in the stimulus antibacterial toothpaste which possessed peripheral route that potentially bring latent change in attitude, behaviour and cognition of the respondents that reflect in physical impact. However, the merit of the content in advertising fear appeal in advertising link with the preoccupied believed on lethal impact of viruses in the recent Covid-19 situation, where believe, behaviour and attitude change continue, repel and predictable on the basis of quality of argument linked with the existing believesof virus, thought and need connected with advertising message presenting in the stimulus of this study. Hence, it is argued that in TV advertisements, advertising agencies, strategists use fear as psycho- physiological strategy that arouse fear among youth of Pakistan.



## **Conclusion**

This study affirms that advertisers use fear appeals as a strategy in advertising campaigns that confirm that fear triggers psycho-physiological impacts on the young potential consumers. Subsequent impact of this appeal, self-efficacy and high involvement processing bring temporal change in attitude and belief, cognition and behaviour of the youth which cause purchase. However, in the pandemic situation fear infused in the social environment and fear appeals of viruses may reinforce the effects of advertising. Fear appeals in advertising influence youth by low involvement processing which refers to reasoning in message strategy and high involvement processing which refers to shock and potential harm in the absence of utility of particular product or brand. Hence, impulsive interim effects of fear appeals in advertising observed psycho-physiological situation of respondents.

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