

## Usage of fear appeal for persuasive communication: Case of the Ministry of Health's public service announcements

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Article Info	Abstract
<b>Research Article</b>  Received: 12 March 2025 Revised: 18 August 2025 Accepted: 26 August 2025  <b>Keywords:</b> Communication, Persuasion, Fear appeal, Public service announcement	<i>This study investigates the use of fear appeals as a persuasive communication method in public service announcements supported by the Ministry of Health from 2006 to 2016. A sample of public service announcements was analyzed through content analysis based on topics, types of fear elements, persuasive techniques, and whether solutions were provided. The results indicate that both rational and emotional appeals were used, with fear appeals mainly appearing in emotionally driven messages, especially in situations involving direct health threats. Conversely, rational appeals were more common in informational or promotional PSAs.</i>

### 1. Introduction

Persuasion is defined as an activity and process (Gass & Seiter, 2003) that requires conscious efforts to influence the behaviour or thoughts of the recipient (Bettinghaus & Cody, 1994) and requires two or more people to bring together the activities of changing, reinforcing or eliminating behaviours, motivations, goals, attitudes, beliefs within the boundaries of a specific communication context. Persuasion aims to create a positive attitude towards a product, person, or opinion, or to change an existing attitude (Demirtaş & Andaç, 2004). It seeks to have a desired effect on the target (Yüksel et al., 2012).

The most prominent feature of persuasion is the absence of pressure or coercion, and the power to direct the attitudes of the masses without resorting to brute force or persuading them on specific issues is based on language. With the correct use of language, the desired behavior can be achieved without the need for coercion or brute force; otherwise, if coercion or brute force is used, the desired behavior may result in the opposite direction (Brown, 1980). In this respect, persuasion is of great importance in ensuring harmony with social control and preventing chaos. Due to all these characteristics, persuasion has been analysed as a skill, an art, and a science throughout human history (Anık, 2000). Today, persuasive communication is utilized in advertising campaigns, the political sphere, marketing, interpersonal communication, and in various other fields. It is known that the desired change or effect in persuasive communication depends on independent variables such as "source", "message", "medium", "receiver", and "target". Accordingly, the persuasive strategies necessary to bring about the desired behaviour in the receiver can be shaped by the elements of 'source', 'message', 'medium', and 'target', which also constitute the basic process of communication (Gürüz & Eğinli, 2010).

\* This study was prepared based on the master's thesis titled "Usage of fear appeal in persuasive communication: Case of Ministry of Health's public spotlights," which was conducted at Selçuk University Institute of Social Sciences in 2017.

This study has complied with the Research Publication Ethics stated in "Wager E & Kleinert S (2011) Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. A position statement was developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, Singapore, July 22-24, 2010. Chapter 50 in Mayer T & Steneck N (eds) Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore." For this reason, the authors state that they conducted the research within the framework of ethical principles. It is not a human study, so ethical approval is not required. All responsibility belongs to the author.

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Regarding the source, factors such as reliability, credibility, expertise, physical appeal, likability, similarity to the target audience, prestige, power, empathy, and communication skills are crucial for persuasion. In terms of tools, one key factor influencing communication effectiveness is related to the characteristics of the chosen channels. Among these tools, face-to-face communication is considered more effective because it allows for immediate feedback from the recipient. This enables the source to adjust the message based on the input, making it easier to influence the receiver. Conversely, mass media have the advantage of reaching a large audience quickly. Tools like newspapers, magazines, books, and television can reach millions simultaneously and have the power to influence opinions. The key consideration here is which mass media to use, which should depend on the subject matter of the message. When selecting a mass media channel, it is crucial to choose one that has the most significant impact, aligns most closely with the source's purpose, best matches the message content, and reaches the largest audience at the lowest cost (Gürgen, 1997). The third element, the receiver, is the group whose attitudes and behaviors are targeted for influence by an idea, product, institution, or person in the persuasion process. It is well known that the target's characteristics significantly influence other variables, such as source, message, and tools, within the communication process (Elden & Bakır, 2010).

Conducting various analyses before delivering the message to the target audience can improve the success of persuasion. Personal traits, including tendencies, attitudes, educational background, gender, abilities, self-confidence, attachment, and prestige, play vital roles in attitude change (Göksel et al., 1997). The message, which is the final component of persuasion, can be defined as the encoding of information, ideas, emotions, and attitudes transmitted from the source to the receiver. Generally, effective messages should feature clear and simple language, short sentences, avoidance of ambiguous concepts, consistency, and relevance to current issues (Usal & Kuşluyan, 1999). Factors that influence a message's persuasive power include whether it is one-way or two-way, the use of evidence, conclusions, repetition, sequencing, and the effects of fear, humor, positive-negative expressions, among others (Demirtaş & Andaç, 2012).

*One-way - two-way message:* In one-way communication, the source only presents their perspective without including a contrary view. In two-way communication, on the contrary, the opposing view is also included, but this opposing thesis is usually refuted (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1988). When preparing the message, it is necessary to decide whether it will be two-way or one-way by considering the subject to be persuaded and the characteristics of the recipient.

*Evidence:* The source, who initiates communication with the aim of persuasion, sometimes presents his/her message by basing it on facts, research findings, and statistical evidence, and sometimes by using a striking and colourful story to attract attention. If the target audience has a superficial understanding of the subject and low interest in it, narrative evidence will be more effective. However, for people with a high interest in the subject, the use of qualified, scientifically based evidence will be more effective (Demirtaş & Andaç, 2012).

*Linking to the result:* Deciding whether to clearly state the desired attitude change and its justifications at the end of the message is another message strategy. While explaining the result is generally a good approach, as with other methods, it's better to make a decision based on the target audience.

*Repetition:* In the advertising industry, it is understood that the message should be repeated often to ensure it is both understood and remembered. Repeated exposure to the message increases its effectiveness, making this approach attractive to advertising agencies seeking to boost profits (Hogg & Vaughan, 2002). Additionally, when a message is repeatedly shown, signs of liking the content also tend to develop. The repetition method, which effectively speeds up perception and learning processes, plays a vital role in engaging the receiver from different perspectives (Özerkan & İnceoğlu, 1997).

*Sequencing:* In persuasive communication, whether the essential points about the message should be given at the beginning or at the end is one of the factors related to the degree of impact of the message. There is no clear consensus on this issue; sometimes it is effective to present it at the beginning, and sometimes at the end, to influence the receiver. However, there are also opinions that if it is given at the beginning, the receiver can concentrate on the message better (Yüksel, 2005). Using this strategy in situations where the target audience has a low interest in the subject is more effective in terms of attracting attention.

*Positive and negative expressions:* It is essential to incorporate both positive and negative expressions in message structuring, particularly in the field of health. For example, a campaign aiming to change attitudes towards smoking can structure the same message in two ways with both positive and negative expressions; the use of an expression such as 'if you do not quit smoking, you will die more quickly' is an example of negative expression,

while the expression “*if you quit smoking, you will live longer*” is an example of positive expression. The effectiveness of both expressions varies depending on the subject, target audience, and motivation level (Demirtaş & Andaç, 2012).

*Effects of humour:* Politicians and advertisers think that a message containing humour is more effective in terms of attracting attention and retention than a message without humour (Demirtaş & Andaç, 2012). It is essential to design the message containing humour in such a way that it does not get in the way of the product or service, otherwise the message may not be a tool between the target and the source and may only function as entertainment (Göksel et al., 1997).

*Effects of fear:* The purpose of including stimuli that will cause anxiety in the message is to remind the individual of the need for self-protection and to emphasise that the service or product offered with the message will realise this protection. With the message presented in this way, a psychological tension is initially created in the person. Then they are more inclined to perform the desired behavior to alleviate this tension (Göksel et al., 1997). Today, it is evident that messages conveying fear and panic are frequently employed in advertising and propaganda techniques.

To achieve the desired effect on the target audience, various strategies under the heading of ‘appeal’ are employed in the messages. Strategies under the heading of appeal will be discussed below.

## 2. Literature

Appeal is one of the most critical concepts in persuasive communication, including commercial and political advertising campaigns (Balci, 2006). An appeal can be defined as an element that constitutes the essence of an advertising message, responding to emotional or rational needs that appeal to the mind or heart of the consumer. Within the scope of creative strategies, appeals can be divided into two categories: emotional and informational. In informational appeal, the practical, functional, or utilitarian needs of the consumer are addressed, and the benefits of the product are emphasized more. In emotional appeal, on the other hand, the social and psychological needs of consumers are addressed, and the emotions related to the brand are emphasized more than the product's characteristics in the purchasing decision (Uztuğ, 2003). A more general classification is made under three headings: rational, emotional, and moral (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001).

Messages containing rational appeals tend to be more realistic and logical (Burnett & Moriarty, 1998). Avoiding doubtful questions, generalizations, attacking those who do not share the same opinion, and refraining from making illogical analogies are key considerations when using this appeal (Gürüz & Eğinli, 2010). The key point in rational appeal is to convey the message within a logical framework by focusing on aspects that will benefit the person in practice, rather than providing detailed information about the product or brand. One of the critical elements in the use of rational appeal is the provision of evidence. The testimonies of public or private individuals, the use of government statistics, and statements based on other data to support the message or issue are essential in realizing communication in the desired direction (Balci, 2006).

Morality guides the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in regulating their relationships with others within society and with institutions. In this direction, advertisers who want to influence the attitudes and behaviours of the target audience have started to use the concept of morality as a message appeal (Elden & Bakır, 2010). While realising this, the audience's feelings about what is ‘right’ and ‘appropriate’ are directed. Social content, such as a cleaner environment, improved human relations, equal rights for women, and assistance for the disabled, is often incorporated within the scope of this appeal (Kotler & Armstrong, 2001). Additionally, religious references can be incorporated into discussions on specific issues, depending on the degree of importance to the target audience and the concepts of sin and good deeds (Elden & Bakır, 2010).

Emotional motives in communication mainly consist of subjective concepts with similar characteristics, such as happiness, love, pity, hatred, fear, and their equivalents (Usal & Kuşluvan, 1999). The effective use of emotional appeal varies depending on the listener's mood and the subject (Gürüz & Eğinli, 2010). While analysing the listener, the common idea is that educated people are more affected by rational appeals. In contrast, individuals with lower educational backgrounds are more susceptible to messages containing emotional elements, which should also be taken into consideration (Ustaahmetoğlu, 2010). Many emotional appeals can be used to develop attitudes or behaviours in the desired direction in the recipient. The most commonly used of these available appeals are fear, humour, animation, sexuality, music, imagination, and surrealism (Fill, 2005). The most frequently used of these appeals are explained below:

*Fear appeal:* A fear appeal can be defined as a persuasive messages that warn the recipient that their health, life, property, or other assets are under threat. The primary purpose of this persuasion method is to induce a change in attitudes or behaviors by triggering the recipient's fears with verbal or non-verbal materials that constitute fear appeals. In English, this term can also be used as 'threat appeal' or 'fear-based communication' (Jürgen & Jürgen, 2000). A message created for persuasion through fear is usually structured with statements such as 'if you do not perform behaviours or attitudes such as buying, voting, believing, supporting, or learning, you will face extremely negative and dangerous consequences' (Demirtaş & Andaç, 2012). The emphasis on fears in the message creates a psychological tension in the individual. To overcome this situation, individuals tend to accept the solution suggested by the fear content presented to them more readily than other options (Göksel et al., 1997).

While the messages in which fear appeal is used are threatening in terms of content, the words, visuals, and sounds used as style variables are essential. For example, when using language as a style variable, it must be intense and personalised. In high-fear appeals, the language used is vivid and intense, emphasizing the seriousness of the threat. In contrast, low-level fear appeals mitigate the severity of the danger by employing neutral language, a calm tone, or visuals that do not contradict the recipient (Balci, 2006). A powerful fear appeal may cause the recipient to feel helpless and out of control, which may lead to a decrease in the recipient's attention to the message. Another point to consider regarding the use of fear appeals is that reactions to fear vary from person to person. A stimulus that is perceived as very scary by one person may not be perceived as scary by another person. For this reason, determining who will be scared and how to scare them is of great importance in a fear-based campaign (Elden & Bakır, 2010).

It is possible to categorise the variables affecting the effect and success of fear appeals under the following headings (Gass & Seiter, 2003):

- Perceived threat: If the recipient approaches the message as 'this event will not find me', the appeal will not be successful. The receiver should be able to perceive that the threat given in the message can also happen to him/her.
- Clarity of suggestions: The situations to be avoided and the ideas to reduce the danger should be clearly defined.
- Placement of suggestions: The solution suggestion about the problem given to the recipient is less effective when it is given before the message. At the same time, it is more effective when it is given immediately after the message.
- Argument quality: High-quality arguments have more power to convince the recipients that the risk is real.
- Self-esteem: Recipients with high self-esteem are better able to cope with fear stimuli and the messages delivered through them.
- Anxiety level: People with high anxiety levels resort to fear control, which is an undesirable situation, instead of danger control, which is a desired situation, when faced with a fear-based message.

*Humour appeal:* It is possible to define humour in the most general sense as subtle mockery performed for purposes such as making someone laugh, entertaining, or touching someone without offending their behaviour. It is based on entertainment and tolerance, and humour in almost all societies is shaped by these two basic variables (Yardımcı, 2010). Another aspect of humour is related to its persuasiveness, but studies have shown that the persuasiveness of humour is not greater than that without humour. The two most essential points in the effect of humour and persuasion are the intensity of the message and the humour. While the message containing intense humour is more effective, low-level humour combined with a soft-selling approach is also effective (Bir, 1993). In addition, the use of humour can contribute to the persuasion of the buyer such as increasing the reliability and popularity of the source, increasing the attractiveness of the advertisement, creating an emotional environment suitable for persuasion, ensuring the comprehensibility of the message, creating behavioural change in line with the desired purpose, and this is the result that the advertiser expects when using this attraction (Bakır, 2006).

*Sexual appeal:* Sexuality is an element that emerged as a biological key for people to continue their generation or to meet their physiological needs, and has been a subject of social and cultural interest for years. It is possible to talk about concepts such as nudity, eroticism, and pornography in relation to sexuality. Especially nudity is a frequently used tool in the creation of sexual attraction (Elden & Bakır, 2010). It is possible to see that such concepts of sexuality are used in various advertisements as a message strategy, and this use is called sexual attraction. This type of attraction, which is commonly seen in products such as perfume, underwear, and alcoholic beverages, is now also present in advertisements for cheese, soft drinks, junk food, and even electrical goods

(Woodward & Denton, 2004). The use of sexuality as a message appeal is an effective method to attract the attention of the recipient. When using this appeal, it is essential to ensure that the message strategy and the product content are mutually compatible.

*Animation appeal:* In the face of intense competition, organisations and brands in many markets can utilise animation characters that evoke various emotions to create awareness among consumers and drive demand for their products and services. At the same time, these characters can also contribute to the formation of a positive bond between the product and service and the consumer (Yıldız & Deneçli, 2013). Animation techniques, whose primary target audience is primarily children, have made significant progress recently. However, there are also successful examples of animations used in advertisements targeting adults. The primary purpose of such advertisements is to create products that might be boring or lack interest, visually appealing, and remarkable. Additionally, it facilitates the easier understanding of complex products (Fill, 2005).

*Music appeal:* The music used in advertisements generally affects the subconscious mind and has a significant influence on our perceptions of the advertised product. Different types of music, such as music pieces written for commercial purposes, popular songs, and jingles, can be used in the background of advertisements. Famous advertising jingles ensure the repetition of the brand because the audience first establishes a relationship between the jingle and the brand. Instrumental music, on the other hand, appeals more to the audience's mood and emotions, creating an indirect effect in terms of advertising (Hoerberichts, 2012). It is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the music used in the message is in harmony with the pictures, background, words used, etc., in the advertisement. In other words, the music used should be able to create an atmosphere that fosters a confident attitude and behavior (Burnett & Moriarty, 1998).

All of these traditional forms of appeal are now widely used in digital media and artificial intelligence applications. It is estimated that approximately 5.56 billion people will use the internet by 2025 (We Are Social, 2025). Due to the rapid increase in digitalisation, many areas, particularly marketing, have shifted their focus to the digital sphere. In fact, this has become a necessity rather than a choice. Now, all companies and organisations, whether profit-oriented or not, communicate their messages to their target audiences in digital environments (Köse and Yeygel Çakır, 2019). This provides a framework for effective marketing strategies on digital platforms, encouraging interaction, driving conversions, and building brand loyalty by leveraging consumers' psychological predispositions (Pellegrino, 2024). BJ Fogg, a Stanford University faculty member, states that interpersonal influence is the most significant advancement in the field of persuasion through the use of new technologies (Fogg Social Media, 2010). Results obtained from big data are an essential factor in the implementation of designs aimed at digital persuasion. Using big data, designs suitable for digital persuasion can be created, and strategies and messages can be shaped for websites and social media platforms. This clearly demonstrates the importance of persuasion strategies in the digital environment (Odabaşı, 2022).

### 3. Methodology

This study was prepared based on the master's thesis titled "Usage of fear appeal in persuasive communication: Case of Ministry of Health's public spotlights," which was conducted at Selçuk University Institute of Social Sciences in 2017. This study has complied with the Research Publication Ethics stated in "Wager E & Kleinert S (2011) Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. A position statement was developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, held in Singapore from July 22 to 24, 2010. Chapter 50 in Mayer T & Steneck N (eds) Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore." For this reason, the authors state that they conducted the research in accordance with the framework of ethical principles. Since it is not a human study, ethical approval is not required.

#### 3.1. Purpose of the study

This study aims to contribute to the field of persuasive communication by providing insights into the use of fear attraction in public settings, which can be effectively incorporated into social marketing and has recently gained increased attention and discussion.

#### 3.2. Population and sample

In this study, a total of 113 PSAs published and supported by the Ministry of Health between 2006 and 2016 were sampled and analysed. In addition to the public service announcements published by the Ministry of Health alone, public service announcements supported or partnered by the Ministry of Health were also included in the study.

At this point, it was considered appropriate to collect the PSAs supported or co-sponsored by the Ministry of Health and refer to them as PSAs published by the Ministry of Health to avoid confusion during the research. While the number of PSAs published by the Ministry of Health alone was determined to be 78 according to the available data, it was found that the remaining 35 PSAs consisted of PSAs in which the Ministry of Health was a partner or supporter (Table 1).

### 3.3. Method of the study

The methods used were literature review and content analysis. Content analysis is a method that systematically determines content according to certain principles and considers its relationships to one another (Riffe et al., 2014). In this context, the literature review was initially used to determine how fear appeals were employed in persuasive communication within public service announcements broadcast by the Ministry of Health over ten years. Then, within the framework of the theoretical information obtained, the content analysis method was applied.

### 3.4. Data collection and processing

During the data collection phase of the research, 113 public service announcements (PSAs) broadcast and supported by the Ministry of Health between 2006 and 2016 were examined individually and entered into a coding table. The public service announcements were obtained through the Ministry of Health, General Directorate of Health Development, Department of Health Communication, RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council), and YouTube. The data in the coding table were entered into SPSS version 23 and analysed. Frequency analysis and cross-tabulation analysis were used.

The analyzed announcements were manually categorized, and a coding scale was created. Twenty announcements were selected as a sample, and two researchers coded them according to this coding scale. The reliability coefficient was calculated to be 0.9, which was deemed sufficient for the research's reliability.  $R = 2(C_{1,2}) / (C_1 + C_2)$   $0.9 = 2(18) / (20 + 20)$  ( $R$ =Reliability coefficient;  $C_{1,2}$ =Number of common coding by two researchers;  $C_1$ =Number of coding by the first researcher  $C_2$ =Number of coding by the second researcher)

Table 1. Public service announcements supported/partnered by the Ministry of Health

Red Crescent
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock
Ophthalmological Association of Turkey
Soap and Detergent Manufacturers Association
Turkish Green Crescent Society
Ministry of Education
UNICEF
HETADER (Haemophilia and Thalassaemia Association)
Healthy Generations Association
Confederation of Opticians and Opticians
ONKOD (Organ Transplant Coordinators Association)
HKD (Animal Protection Association)
Turkish Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Association
Child Endocrinology and Diabetes Association
Turkish Thoracic Society
GARD (Global Alliance Against Chronic Respiratory Diseases)
Ministry of Environment and Urbanisation
CFCU (Treasury Finance and Contracts Unit)
WYG (Socio-economic Consultancy Services)
Turkish Radiation Oncology
Sabri Ülker Food Research Foundation
TAPDK (Tobacco and Alcohol Market Regulatory Board)

## 4. Findings

In this study, a total of 113 PSAs were examined, with a total duration of 1 hour, 27 minutes, and 1 second. The shortest PSA was 21 seconds, and the longest was 2 minutes and 10 seconds. The longest PSA was released before 2012. This is because, according to the Public Service Announcement Directive of 2012, the maximum duration of public service announcements with audio or film features is 45 seconds ([www.rtuk.gov.tr](http://www.rtuk.gov.tr)).

It can be seen that emotional appeals are used more in public service announcements published or supported by the Ministry of Health (54.0%). The percentage of public service announcements using rational appeal is 46%. Examining public service announcements by sub-category, the use of fear appeal accounts for 36.3%. This is followed by animation appeal with 10.6% and music appeal with 7.1%. Humorous and sexual appeals are not used at all. Let's look at the topics covered by the public service announcements. It is seen that physical topics (various types of disabilities) are used at the lowest rate (5.3%), social issues (pollution, epidemics, organ donation, blood donation) at the highest rate (70.8%), and health topics (health services, various diseases; diabetes, obesity, cancer, etc.) at the highest rate. It can be seen that the Ministry of Health broadcasts informative public service announcements on general health issues at a rate of 31.9%. Examples of public service announcements that provide information on health issues include how a disease can be transmitted, how to protect yourself, precautions to take, and how to eat, among other topics. This is followed by similar proportions of PSAs on social issues (23.9%) and on reducing and preventing the use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc. (23.0%), which can be grouped under the heading of bad habits. Public service announcements on health services come third with a rate of 21.2%. These types of public service announcements include the promotion of services provided by the Ministry of Health (Table 2).

Table 2. Appeal types and problems covered in public service announcements

	f	%
Type of appeal		
Rational	52	46,0
Emotional	61	54,0
Total	113	100,0
Type of emotional appeal		
Fear	41	36,3
Animation	12	10,6
Music	8	7,1
Not Used	52	46,0
Total	113	100,0
Problems covered		
Physical	6	5,3
Social	27	23,9
Health	80	70,8
Total	113	100,0
Topics covered		
Use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs etc.	26	23,0
Informative about general health issues	36	31,9
Health Services	24	21,2
Social Issues	27	23,9
Total	113	100,0

It can be seen that rational appeal, which appeals to reason and logic, is used more frequently in public service announcements that provide information about health services (17.7%) and in informative public service announcements on general health issues (15.0%). Emotional appeal is used in public service announcements about the use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc., by 22.1% and in informative public service announcements about general health issues by 16.8%. The topics where rational appeal and emotional appeal are used in close conjunction are public service announcements on general health and social issues. This can be explained by the fact that informative public service announcements about health appeal to people's emotional side. In contrast, the instructive part appeals more to their logic, and social issues have both informative and emotional features. Statistically, there is a significant relationship between the subject of the public service announcement and the type of appeal used ( $\chi^2=32.458$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) (Table 3).

Regarding emotional appeal and the topics covered, it is seen that fear appeal is used to a large extent in public service announcements on the use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc., with a total rate of 23.0%, and 21.2% respectively. Apart from this, animation appeal is most frequently used in informative PSAs on general health problems, with a rate of 7.1%; music appeal is used in social issues, with a rate of 4.4%, and in other areas, with a rate of 0.9%. In the public service announcements broadcast and supported by the Ministry of Health, fear appeal is mainly used. Among the fear elements, 10.6% disease, 7.1% physical and psychological disorders, and these are followed by death, regret, and threat elements in close proportions. The fear element related to disease is used more in public service announcements about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use than in others. Again, the fear of death, which is present in almost everyone, is used more in public service announcements about these bad habits

than in others. Second, the elements of fear that emphasise physical and mental disorders, which are used intensively, are more common in public service announcements about general health problems.

The fact that the solution to the specified problem is also clearly stated constitutes an essential point in terms of persuasion. It is seen that the public service announcements subject to this study, at a rate of 87.6%, clearly and explicitly present the solution proposal to the target audience. When using fear appeals, the presentation of the solution is as important as whether it is given before or after the fearful message in terms of the success of the persuasion it is intended to achieve. This is because the solution is more effective when it is given immediately after the message (Gass & Seiter, 2003:288). The Ministry of Health prefers to present the solution proposal after the fearful message in 35.4% of the public service announcements it broadcasts and supports (Table 4).

Table 3. Distribution of appeal types and subjects covered

Subjects according to appeal types	Type of emotional appeal	f	%
Use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs etc.	Rational	1	0,9
	Emotional	25	22,1
Informative about general health issues	Rational	17	15,0
	Emotional	19	16,8
Health Services	Rational	20	17,7
	Emotional	4	3,5
Social Issues	Rational	14	12,4
	Emotional	13	11,5
Total	Rational	52	46,0
	Emotional	61	54,0
Subjects according to emotional appeal types	Emotional appeal types		
Use of alcohol, tobacco, drugs etc.	Fear	24	21,2
	Animation	0	0,0
	Music	1	0,9
	No Use	1	0,9
	Fear	10	8,8
Informative on general health	Animation	8	7,1
	Music	1	0,9
	No Use	17	15
	Fear	0	0
Health Services	Animation	3	2,7
	Music	1	0,9
	No Use	20	17,7
	Fear	7	6,2
Social Issues	Animation	1	0,9
	Music	5	4,4
	No Use	14	12,4
	Fear	41	36,3
Total	Animation	12	10,6
	Music	8	7,1
	No Use	52	46
Fear elements			
Illness		12	10,6
Threat		4	3,5
Loss		1	,9
Regret		6	5,3
Death		7	6,2
Violence		3	2,7
Physical and psychological disorders		8	7,1
Not Used		72	63,7
Total		113	100,0

It can be seen that 78 public service announcements contain horror elements between 00 and 10 seconds. However, public service announcements that do not use horror elements are also included in this period. Therefore, it can be said that the public service announcements in this range contain a small amount of horror elements in terms of duration. It can be seen that 17 public service announcements contain horror elements in 22-32 seconds, 12 public service announcements contain horror elements in 11-21 seconds, 5 public service announcements contain horror elements in 33-43 seconds and 1 public service announcement contains horror elements in the longest duration range of 44-55 seconds. It can be said that the public service announcement in the last range contains horror elements in terms of duration (Table 4).



Table 4. Existence of solutions and times allocated for fear element

Solution	f	%
Existed	99	87,6
Not Existed	14	12,4
Total	113	100,0
Time of proposing solution		
Before	1	,9
After	40	35,4
No fearful messages used	72	63,7
Total	113	100,0
Time allocated to the fear element (sec.)		
00-10 sec.	78	69,0
11-21 sec.	12	10,6
22-32 sec.	17	15,0
33-43 sec.	5	4,4
44-54 sec.	1	,9
Total	113	100,0

Table 5. Sources of persuasive elements

Source of persuasive elements		f	%
Reliable and Expert People		8	7,1
Popular People		10	8,8
People Similar to the Target Group		81	71,7
Other		14	12,4
Total		113	100,0
Source of persuasive elements acc. to appeal type	Appeal type		
Reliable and expert people	Rational	7	6,2
	Emotional	1	0,9
Popular people	Rational	6	5,3
	Emotional	4	3,5
People Similar to the Target Group	Rational	36	31,9
	Emotional	45	39,8
Other	Rational	3	2,7
	Emotional	11	9,7
Total	Rational	52	46,0
	Emotional	61	54,0
Source of pers. elements acc. to emot. appeal type	Emot. app.type		
Reliable and expert people	Fear	0	0,0
	Animation	0	0,0
	Music	1	0,9
	No use	7	6,2
Popular people	Fear	2	1,8
	Animation	1	0,9
	Music	1	0,9
	No use	6	5,3
People similar to the target group	Fear	35	31,0
	Animation	4	3,5
	Music	6	5,3
	No use	36	31,9
Other	Fear	4	3,5
	Animation	7	6,2
	Music	0	0,0
	No use	3	2,7
Total	Fear	41	36,3
	Animation	12	10,6
	Music	8	7,1
	No use	52	46,0

Looking at the elements used to create fear and the durations, the fear elements in the 00-10 second range, which we define as mild fear appeals, consist of violence, disease, regret and loss. The sickness element is present in all but the longest duration, but is used more intensively in what we call the medium duration range. The only

PSA in the 44-54 second range, which we define as a strong fear appeal, emphasises the fear of regret. The small number of PSAs between 44-54 seconds should also be taken into account here.

Examining the characteristics of the people chosen as sources in the public service announcements studied reveals that those most preferred are individuals similar to the target, with a high rate of 71.7%. The reason for this can be attributed to the belief that similarity has a great effect (O'Keefe, 2002:199-200). Apart from this, it can be seen that famous people are used at a rate of 8.8% and reliable and expert people at a rate of 7.1%. The other category is public service announcements, which use animation, voice-over only, photographs, and children (Table 5).

Table 6. Message types of persuasive elements

Type of message		f	%
One-way		38	33,6
Message containing numerical data		10	8,8
Positive statements		20	17,7
Negative statements		29	25,7
Fearful message		16	14,2
Total		113	100,0
Message types acc. to appeal types	Appeal type		
One-way	Rational	27	23,9
	Emotional	11	9,7
Message containing numerical data	Rational	9	8,0
	Emotional	1	0,9
Positive statements	Rational	13	11,5
	Emotional	7	6,2
Negative statements	Rational	3	2,7
	Emotional	26	23,0
Fearful messages	Rational	0	0,0
	Emotional	16	14,2
Total	Rational	52	46,0
	Emotional	61	54,0
Message types acc. to emot. appeal types			
One-way	Fear	0	0
	Animation	9	8
	Music	2	1,8
	No use	27	23,9
Message containing numerical data	Fear	0	0
	Animation	1	0,09
	Music	0	0
	No use	9	8
Positive statements	Fear	0	0
	Animation	2	1,8
	Music	5	4,4
	No use	13	11,5
Negative statements	Fear	26	23
	Animation	0	0
	Music	0	0
	No use	3	2,7
Fearful messages	Fear	15	13,3
	Animation	0	0
	Music	1	0,9
	No use	0	0
Total	Fear	41	36,3
	Animation	12	10,6
	Music	8	7,1
	No use	52	46

Examining the distribution of persuasive elements in relation to the source, by type of appeal, reveals that sources similar to the target are used in 31.9% of public service announcements employing rational appeal and 39.8% of those using emotional appeal. In the case of public service announcements in which famous people or persons are preferred as sources, there is again a slight difference of 3.5% for emotional appeal and 5.3% for

rational appeal. The source type where the difference is more noticeable compared to other elements is reliable and expert people. This source type is preferred more in the rational appeal type, which appeals to reason and logic, with a usage rate of 6.2%, than in the emotional appeal type, with a usage rate of 0.9% (Table 5). Let's look at the usage rates of persuasive elements related to the source in terms of emotional appeal. The highest rate for fear appeal is 31.0% among people similar to the target. For animation appeal, the other category is 6.2%, and it should be noted that this category also includes animated public service announcements. Finally, for music appeal, the use of sources similar to the target is preferred at a rate of 5.3%. (Table 5).

In the messages of the public service announcements examined, 33.6% were one-way messages, 25.3% negative expressions, 17.7% positive expressions, 14.2% messages containing fear, and 8.8% messages containing numerical data. The distinction between negative expressions and fear messages is made according to the predominant use of the fear element in the given message. For example, while the expression 'smoking kills', which directly and openly emphasises the element of death, is considered a fear message, the milder and indirect expressions, such as 'children's inactivity harms both their physical and social development', are considered negative expressions. An example of messages containing positive expressions is the expression 'quit smoking to live these precious moments more beautifully' (Table 6).

If the one-way message used is considered as a kind of informative message type, it can be considered as a suitable message type for rational appeal. In Table 18 we see that one-way messages are used at a rate of 23.9% in rational appeals. This rate drops to 9.7% for emotional appeals. It can be seen that, with the exception of one PSA, the rest of the messages containing numerical data are in PSAs where rational appeal is used. As expected, negative and fearful expressions are more frequent in PSAs using emotional appeal. There is a significant relationship between the persuasive elements used in the message and the type of appeal used ( $X^2=48.771$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). In public service announcements where emotional appeal was preferred, it was observed that all messages containing fear and most of the negative expressions were grouped under the heading of fear appeal. 2.7% of negative expressions were used in PSAs where rational appeal was used (Table 6).

Table 7. Evidence used in public service announcements

Evidence type	f	%
Research results	7	6,2
Expert view	16	14,2
Graphics and statistics	3	2,7
Images from life	34	30,1
Not used	53	46,9
Total	113	100,0
Evidences	Type of emotional appeal	
	Fear	3 2,7
Research results	Animation	3 2,7
	Music	0 0
	No use	1 0,9
	Fear	1 0,9
Expert view	Animation	0 0
	Music	0 0
	No use	15 13,3
	Fear	0 0
Graphics and Statistics	Animation	2 1,8
	Music	0 0
	No use	1 0,9
	Fear	13 11,5
Images from Life	Animation	0 0
	Music	5 4,4
	No use	16 14,2
	Fear	24 21,2
Not used	Animation	7 6,2
	Music	3 2,7
	No use	19 16,8
	Fear	41 36,3
Total	Animation	12 10,6
	Music	8 7,1
	No use	52 46

The proportion of public service announcements that used real-life examples was 30.1%. In addition, expert opinion was preferred by 14.2%, research results by 6.2% and graphics and statistics by 2.7%. Among the types of emotional appeal, the use of real-life scenes is more common in horror appeals (11.5%). The use of graphics and statistics, with a total rate of 2.7%, is preferred in animation appeal, with 1.8%. Again, as can be seen from the table, expert opinion with 13.3% and real-life sections with 14.2% are preferred more in the rational appeal type (Table 7).

Different tactics can be used to persuade the target audience, depending on the subject to be persuaded. In the public service announcements broadcast or supported by the Ministry of Health, the table shows that these tactics are not very much preferred. The tactics that are preferred more than others are 'not only that' (5.3%) and 'answering a question with a question' (4.4%). Examples of the 'not only that' tactic are statements such as 'smoking harms not only you but also your child'. As can be seen from the table, a very large proportion of the PSAs examined are in colour, 77.9%. While black and white and colour PSAs account for 16.8% of the total, black and white PSAs account for the lowest percentage at 5.3% (Table 8). Looking at the use of colour according to emotional appeal, black and white and coloured PSAs contain 8.8% fear appeal, while black and white PSAs contain 3.5% fear appeal and 1.8% animation appeal. Coloured PSAs used 23.9% fear appeal, 7.1% music appeal, and 8.0% animation appeal. Coloured PSAs used 38.9% rational appeal, which is rated outside the emotional appeal types. It was also observed that in both black and white and coloured PSAs, coloured parts were more likely to have solutions (Table 8). In Table 8, which also shows the visual style of public service announcements, it can be seen that 77.9% of the public service announcements broadcast on television use images. This is followed by 11.5% of PSAs supported by photographs and 10.6% of PSAs supported by animation. Figure 11 shows an excerpt from one of the examples of public service announcements supported mainly by various pictures (Table 8).

Table 8. Tactics, colours, and visual types used

Strategies	f	%
Yes-yes	3	2,7
First small then big	1	0,9
First big, then small	1	0,9
Increasing requests	2	1,8
Answering a question with a question	5	4,4
Not only that tactic	6	5,3
Give first, take later tactic	1	0,9
Taking place	4	3,5
Not used	90	79,6
Total	113	100,0
Colours Used		
Black-white	6	5,3
Colourful	88	77,9
Black & white and colourful together	19	16,8
Total	113	100,0
Colours used acc. to emotion. appeal types	Type of emotional appeal	
Black&white	Fear	4 3,5
	Animation	2 1,8
	Music	0 0
	No use	0 0
Colourful	Fear	27 23,9
	Animation	9 8
	Music	8 7,1
	No use	44 38,9
Black & white and colourful together	Fear	10 8,8
	Animation	1 0,9
	Music	0 0
	No use	8 7,1
Total	Fear	41 36,3
	Animation	12 10,6
	Music	8 7,1
	No use	52 46
Visual types		
Photographs	13	11,5
Animation	12	10,6
Video/Film	88	77,9
Total	113	100,0

Table 9. Slogan and emblem usage in public service announcements

Slogan and emblem usage	Frequency	Percentage
Only Emblem	53	46,9
Only Slogan (Visual)	1	,9
Slogan (Visual) and Emblem Together	59	52,2
Total	113	100,0
Usage of fear in slogans and emblems		
Yes	16	14,2
No	97	85,8
Total	113	100,0
Location place of announcements		
Outdoor	12	10,6
Studio	67	59,3
Both	34	30,1
Total	113	100,0
Use of fear element in the venue		
Yes	37	32,7
No	76	67,3
Total	113	100,0

Table 10. Emotion given by the sound

The emotion of sound		f	%
Enthusiasm		15	13,3
Sadness		28	24,8
Fear		23	20,4
Other		47	41,6
Total		113	100,0
The emotion of sound acc. to appeal type		f	%
Enthusiasm	Rational	4	3,5
	Emotional	11	9,7
Sadness	Rational	3	2,7
	Emotional	25	22,1
Fear	Rational	0	0
	Emotional	23	20,4
Other	Rational	45	39,8
	Emotional	2	1,8
Total	Rational	52	46
	Emotional	61	54
The emotion of sound		f	%
Enthusiasm	Emotional appeal type		
	Fear	0	0
	Animation	9	8
	Music	2	1,8
Sadness	No Use	4	3,5
	Fear	18	15,9
	Animation	1	0,9
	Music	6	5,3
Fear	No Use	3	2,7
	Fear	23	20,4
	Animation	0	0
	Music	0	0
Other	No Use	0	0
	Fear	0	0
	Animation	2	1,8
	Music	0	0
Total	No Use	45	39,8
	Fear	41	36,3
	Animation	12	10,6
	Music	8	7,1
		52	46

It can be seen that in the public service announcements studied, the slogan and emblem together were preferred in 52.2% of cases, the symbol alone in 46.9% of cases, and the slogan alone without the emblem in 0.9% of cases. In short, emblems were used extensively in the PSAs, and the research also found that the vast majority of these

were the institutional emblems of the Ministry of Health and its partners (Table 9). Table 9 also determines whether the element of fear is included in slogans and emblems. The slogans used verbally in the public service announcements were also examined, and it was found that the element of fear was used in both slogans and emblems at a rate of 14.2%. For example, in the slogan 'there is death at the end' in the public service announcement on hookah use and in the slogan 'neglect, not stove, kills' in another public service announcement on stove poisoning, the word death appears as an element of fear (Table 9).

When looking at the location preference in the corresponding PSA analysis, 59.3% used a studio, 30.1% both outdoor and studio, and 10.6% only outdoor. In the public service announcements published or supported by the Department of Health, the visual element of fear was used 32.7% of the time. Considering that the total rate of use of fear appeal was 36.3%, it can be interpreted that the presence of a visual element of fear in the venue was widely preferred in terms of fear appeal. Rational appeal, animation appeal, and music appeal were also included, and there was no visual element of fear in the venue at a rate of 67.3%. It was observed that the visual aspects of fear used in the venue were generally created by individuals who were harmed by the problem addressed and the situations and environments that caused the problem (Table 9).

In all the public service announcements studied, the use of sound in different characters that are appropriate to the message given, supportive, and aimed at influencing the audience was preferred at a rate of 100%. When the preference rates of these sounds were examined according to emotions, 24.8% preferred sounds that made the audience feel sad, 20.4% preferred sounds that made the audience feel afraid, and 13.3% preferred sounds in happy and hopeful tones. The neutral option, with a rate of 41.6%, mainly includes sounds that do not reflect a character, sounds accompanied by an informative sound-over, and various ambient sounds (Table 10).

When examining the distribution of different sounds used in the public service announcements studied, they were categorized by their type of appeal. It is observed that joyful, enthusiastic sounds are used in 9.7% of cases, sad, emotional sounds in 22.1%, and fearful sounds in 20.4%, primarily in the emotional appeal type. Neutral sounds are used more in rational appeals at a rate of 39.8% and, as mentioned above, informative external voices dominate the neutral category. There is a statistical correlation between these two variables. In other words, the emotion conveyed by the sound varies according to the type of appeal used. ( $\chi^2=82.701$ ;  $p<0.05$ ) (Table 10).

When looking at the characteristics of the sounds used according to the emotional appeals, we can see that the happy emotional sounds are used in 8.0% of animations, 1.8% of music, and 3.5% of rational appeals, since they are not used in these emotional appeal types. It can be seen that the sad emotional sounds are mainly used in 15.9% of fear appeals, 5.3% of music appeals, and 2.7% of rational appeals. As expected, the sound type that gives a sense of fear is used in fear appeal with 20.4% (Table 10).

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study is to contribute to the field of persuasive communication with findings on the use of fear attraction in public spots, which can be incorporated into social marketing and which have recently been encountered and discussed more frequently. In this study, the public service announcements published and supported by the Ministry of Health were examined to see how and to what extent scare tactics were used. A total of 113 public service announcements were analysed.

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

Rational appeals were more likely to be used in health services and in informative public service announcements about health. Looking at the fear elements, internal diseases, physical and psychological disorders were used slightly more than other elements. The element of death was used in 6.2% of the messages. At this point, it can be said that the Ministry of Health and its partners have implemented a correct strategy for young people in terms of the use of fear elements by including more disease elements in the public service announcements where they use fear appeals. If we look at the priority and continuation of the solution suggestion in terms of fear appeal; it was found that within the total 36.3% of fear appeal, solution suggestions were offered at a rate of 35.4% after the message containing fear.

The study analysed fear appeal in terms of persuasive communication. It was found that persuasion can be achieved with different appeal strategies, both message-related and source-related. In the public service announcements published and supported by the Ministry of Health, the highest rate of persuasive elements used regarding the source was people with similar characteristics to the target at 71.7%. The reason for this is that people tend to be more influenced by the group they belong to or by people they think are similar to them (Sakallı, 2001).

Again in this direction, the real-life sections were presented as evidence with a rate of 30.1% compared to other elements. We can say that this was the most used element for the same reason as similarity. No evidence was used in 46.9% of the public service announcements. However, it was observed that an effect was created with various fictions based on real life. 7.9% of the PSAs examined were in colour, while 5.3% were in black and white. Of the public service announcements broadcast in black and white, 3.5% were public service announcements that used scare tactics. The proportion of PSAs broadcast in both black and white and in colour is 16.8%, and the study found that when PSAs were broadcast in both black and white and in colour, there was a greater use of colour images together with solutions. The rate of inclusion of elements of fear in the slogans and emblems used is 14.2%. The proportion of fear elements visually present in the room is 32.7%. This ratio appears to be high when we look at the total use of fear appeals (36.3%). In public service announcements using fear appeal, 15.9% of sad sounds and 20.4% of fear-inducing sounds are used to reinforce the effect by supporting the visuals and messages in the same direction.

In the research, both fear and rational appeals were preferred in close proportions, mostly depending on the topic and purpose, in public service announcements broadcast and supported by the Ministry of Health. While fear appeal was most preferred in public service announcements about the use of harmful substances such as tobacco and drugs, rational appeal was more preferred in public service announcements about the services provided by the Ministry of Health. Public service announcements have tried to achieve the desired effect by using different elements of fear, sometimes with sound, sometimes with colours, and by using other persuasive strategies in different proportions.

There are various studies based on different methods and topics related to fear appeal. In the field of politics, Balcı (2006) conducted a study in his doctoral thesis on the use of fear appeal in negative political advertisements in terms of persuasive communication. Gürdin (2016) measured the effectiveness of fear appeal in anti-smoking advertisements using brain imaging techniques in his doctoral thesis. Çubukçu (2011) analysed the effects of fear appeal used in anti-smoking advertisements on young people in their adolescence. The common result of these impact studies is that fear appeal is effective on the target audience but may vary depending on various variables. Another study in this field was conducted by Çakar (2009) in his master's thesis, which analysed the use of fear appeal in insurance advertisements using content analysis. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the literature on persuasive health communication by showing that in public spot announcements rational and fear-based appeals are equally preferred. In doing so, it helps to fill a gap in existing literature that has often focused on either fear appeals or rational appeals. The findings also extend theories of persuasive communication by illustrating how visual and auditory elements (such as color, sound, and realism) act as complementary cues that strengthen the overall persuasive impact.

## *5.2. Practical implications*

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study also intends practical insights for health communication practitioners, campaign designers, and policymakers. The findings indicate that audiovisual elements (such as color, sound, and the balance between fictional and real-life scenarios) in messages that use fear appeals are frequently used to enhance the effectiveness of persuasive appeals. In the future, ministries can allocate resources more efficiently, achieve higher audience engagement, and achieve better health outcomes by systematically analyzing which appeals are most effective for different health topics.

## *5.3. Limitations and future research directions*

This study has attempted to evaluate how fear appeals have been used in public service announcements broadcast or supported by the Ministry of Health in terms of persuasive communication. The main limitation of this study is its restriction to public service announcements published by the Turkish Ministry of Health between 2006 and 2016, and its limited scope with regard to practices in Turkey. More comprehensive and comparative results regarding health communication strategies would be provided by future studies that analyse broader time periods, particularly more recent ones, and compare public service announcements from different countries. In this context, different studies can be conducted to investigate the target audience, the role of fear appeal or other appeals in such use, and whether the persuasion achieves its purpose. In addition, different variables can be studied, such as the direction in which the appeals used in these public service announcements have an effect when the necessary environment is provided, and what type of appeal is more appropriate and effective at what level. In addition, evaluating fear appeals or other appeals from different perspectives in terms of persuasion can provide resources for sectors wishing to use these appeals more effectively and accurately. While fear appeals are preferred in areas

related to the basic fears of individuals, studies on which situations and sectors, and to what extent other appeals are preferred can also develop different perspectives in this area.

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#### **Author contribution statements**

The authors equally conducted the research design and implementation, analysis, and article writing without using AI applications.

#### **Disclosure statement**

The authors reported no potential competing interests.

#### **Ethical committee approval**

This study was prepared based on the master's thesis titled "Usage of fear appeal in persuasive communication: Case of Ministry of Health's public spotlights," which was conducted at Selçuk University Institute of Social Sciences in 2017. This study has complied with the Research Publication Ethics stated in "Wager E & Kleinert S (2011) Responsible research publication: international standards for authors. A position statement was developed at the 2nd World Conference on Research Integrity, held in Singapore from July 22 to 24, 2010. Chapter 50 in Mayer T & Steneck N (eds) Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment. Imperial College Press / World Scientific Publishing, Singapore." For this reason, the authors state that they conducted the research in accordance with the framework of ethical principles. Since it is not a human study, ethical approval is not required.