



How are we tempted into debt? Emotional appeals in loan advertisements in UK newspapers

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TABLES

TABLE 1
Coding framework

Appeal type	Appeals
Positive emotional appeals	Adventure (Escape, Freedom)
	Affiliation
	Beauty (Aesthetics, Ornamental)
	Excitement (Humour, Happiness, Joy)
	Nurturance
	Popular
	Relief (Relaxation)
	Security
	Sex
	Pride
	Nostalgia
Youth	
Negative emotional appeals	Fear (Danger, Embracement)
	Guilt
	Sorrow (Grief, Suffering)

TABLE 2
Initial Newspaper Sample Characteristics

Product	No. of adverts	%
Current Account	586	46.0
Mortgage	350	27.5
Personal Loan	158	12.4
Savings Account	88	6.9
Credit Card	26	2.0
Foreign Exchange / Travel	24	1.9
Insurance	20	1.6
Overdraft Facility	20	1.6
Total	1272	100

TABLE 3
Final Sample Of Loan Advertisements Featuring Emotional Appeals

Product	No. of adverts	%
Mortgage	172	72.0
Personal Loan	48	20.0
Credit Card	12	5.0
Overdraft Facility	4	1.6
Total	236	100

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TABLE 4
The Use of Emotional Appeals By Product Category

	Mortgages		Personal loans		Credit cards		Overdraft facilities		Total	
	N=172		N=48		N=12		N=4		N=236	
Appeal	No of ads.	%	No of ads.	%	No of ads.	%	No of ads.	%	No of ads.	%
Relief	123	71.5	16	33.3	10	83.3	2	50	151	63.9
Secure	98	56.9	18	37.5	8	66.7	2	50	126	53.3
Fear	57	33.1	2	4.1	0	0	0	0	59	25.0
Adventure	53	30.8	30	62.5	4	33.3	0	0	87	36.8
Guilt	49	28.4	2	4.1	0	0	0	0	51	21.6
Excitement	43	25.0	22	45.8	8	66.7	0	0	73	30.9
Nurture	36	20.9	2	4.1	8	66.7	2	50	48	20.3
Status	31	18.0	18	37.5	0	0	2	50	51	21.6
Popular	26	15.11	8	16.6	0	0	0	0	34	14.4
Affiliation	18	10.5	12	25.0	10	83.3	0	0	40	16.9
Youth	15	8.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	6.3
Beauty	10	5.8	4	8.3	4	33.3	0	0	18	7.6
Sex	2	1.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.8
Sorrow	0	0	2	4.1	0	0	0	0	2	0.8
Nostalgia	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	50	2	0.8

TABLE 5

Use of Emotional Appeal By Newspaper Type

Financial service advertised	Type of newspaper			Total
	Tabloid	Mid-market	Quality	
Mortgage	0	0	172	172
Personal Loan	0	0	48	48
Credit Card	2	6	4	12
Overdraft Facility	2	2	0	4
Total	4	8	224	236

Table 6
Findings From Semi-Structured Interviews

Themes	First-order statements
Product-appeal congruence	<p>“Advert should be simple enough for people to know what it is about.”</p> <p>“It didn’t give anything, it wasn’t no such hard sale, quite simple, childish, less of an effort you know, someone will look at it and think you know, who will actually put a child's painting on an advert, you are trying to sell serious business, something to do with money.”</p> <p>“It should be something we can easily know what the advert is all about.”</p> <p>“It’s left for individuals to decide how they interpret the images.”</p>
Relevance	<p>“I feel a bit indifferent really, yeah. For me, they are just adverts the banks are selling.”</p> <p>“We are not solely attracted by advertisements, there are other factors involved as well.”</p> <p>“Not at that time in my life where I will be thinking about that.”</p> <p>“This really old fashion fairy tale narrative – man and woman going to live in a perfect home, this is no longer relevant.”</p> <p>“Since I am not really looking for a mortgage this time around, this advert doesn’t resonate with me.”</p> <p>“It says a lot and it doesn’t really appeal to every customer.”</p> <p>“It speaks different tones to different people.”</p> <p>“It’s got a good message, more to the younger audience.”</p> <p>“If you are not aspiring to own your own home, this advert is not for you.”</p> <p>“For me to get an emotional attachment with something, I need something real, I don’t want anything imaginary.”</p> <p>“Credit cards are useful to people who need them when they travel or when they need extra money or buy online”</p> <p>“Credit cards are amazing when they have interest free transfer option”</p>
Trust	<p>“The issue of how trustworthy is the bank, they don’t have much experience.”</p> <p>“The trust might be a bit less, by saying 200 years, I can be deceived about that.”</p> <p>“You don’t build this trust by just advertisement.”</p> <p>“Well, I don’t trust them to make it come through.”</p> <p>“I don’t trust their claims.”</p>
Motivation	<p>“The advert makes you think of your child.”</p> <p>“This picture draws your attention to what I need to have my own house.”</p> <p>“10 per cent is fine if you have the saving but if you don’t they won’t give it to you, so that’s hard work.”</p> <p>“these ads make you think of the work you could do to your house with the money you borrow”</p>
Financial illusion	<p>“Such adverts make you think that it is very easy to pay the loan off, in reality it can take years but they create this illusion that everyone takes out loans”</p> <p>“It is easy to spend money on a credit card, and they want you to think that money can be used for pleasures, whilst it should be used only for emergencies”</p>

Table A1: Summary of selected empirical studies on financial services advertising in the UK

Study	Objectives	Research method	Key findings
O’Loughlin & Szmigin (2006)	To explore attitudes, motivations and behaviours in relation to	Semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents	Students perceive debt as part of their lives by reporting tolerance

	student credit and debt consumption among British and Irish students		and normalisation of higher student debt levels
Tameme and Asutay 2012	To explore public perceptions of Islamic mortgages among the Muslim community in the UK	A survey among 250 respondents	Wider social factors and lifestyle choices are linked to the increasing demand for Islamic mortgages
Bennett and Kottasz (2012)	To examine public attitudes towards the UK banking industry following the global financial crisis	A survey among 1,066 respondents	Person's conservative political orientation, moralistic trust, and prior perceptions of the industry's reputation were related to positive attitudes. Respondents' level of knowledge of the crisis, anger at the bank's behaviour, and the extent to which blame for the crisis attributed to the banking industry determined negative attitudes.
Czarnecka & Evans 2013	To examine the presence of mathematical images in financial services advertising	Content analysis of newspaper advertisements	Mathematical images were used more often to target business consumers than individual consumers. The use of mathematical images was correlated with the social class profile of readership.
Sekhon et al. (2014)	To identify key antecedents and establish their relative importance in driving levels of customer trust towards financial services	A multi-stage survey.	Trustworthiness impacts both the cognitive and affecting dimensions of trust.
McNair et al. (2016)	To examine the extent to which levels of reported spending and borrowing in relation to Christmas could be predicted by sociodemographics, money management behaviours, coping style, locus of control, materialism, and spendthrift tendencies	A survey among 294 respondents	Spending was predicted by factors including external locus of control and spendthrift tendency. Emotional coping and denial coping predicted borrowing behavior, as did external locus of control. Money management behaviors predicted who borrowed, but were not related to amount borrowed. Spendthrift tendencies and materialistic

			values were predictive of less active money management.
Mogaji & Danbury (2017)	To examine the use of emotional appeals in banks advertisements, and to explore consumers' perceptions of these adverts	Content analysis of newspaper advertisements and semi-structured interviews with 33 respondents	Banks use emotional advertising appeals . Consumers do not feel strong connection to any of the brands.
Mogaji et al., (2018)	To analyse the use of emotional appeals in B2B bank advertisements, and to explore business owners' perceptions of such appeals	Content analysis of newspaper advertisements and semi-structured interviews with 17 respondents	Emotional appeals are featured in selected B2B financial services advertisements, business owners acknowledge the presence of emotional appeals but do not perceive them as convincing.

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How are we tempted into debt? Emotional appeals in loan advertisements in UK newspapers

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examined the use of emotional appeals in advertisements for loans and explored consumers' perceptions of advertisements featuring such appeals in order to explore how emotional meanings are transferred to consumers via advertising.

Design/methodology/approach: Study 1 employed content analysis to examine the use of emotional appeals in loan advertisements. Over 2900 editions of eight British newspapers were monitored for advertisements for loans containing emotional appeals. Study 2 employed 33 semi-structured interviews to explore consumers' perceptions of emotional appeals in loan advertisements.

Findings: Loans were positioned as services providing relief, security, and excitement. The use of negative emotional appeals such as guilt, fear, and sorrow was sporadic. Loans that carried the most risk were advertised with positive emotional appeals the most frequently. Five dimensions of perceptions of emotional loan advertisements were conceptualised from the reported data in Study 2.

Originality: This is the first study in the UK to examine the use of emotional appeals in loan advertising and to explore consumers' perceptions of loan advertisements featuring emotional appeals. The study identified five dimensions of perceptions of emotional appeals.

INTRODUCTION

When compared to levels of debt in similar European economies, UK personal debt remains one of the highest in Europe (OECD, 2017). Household debt has been steadily rising in the

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3 UK (The Money Charity, 2017, 2018; BBC, 2019), and the issue of household debt is an
4 important challenge for government policy (Adams and Smart, 2017; BBC, 2018). Debt was
5 the second largest advice category (behind benefits), with 126,429 queries made in April
6 2017, a 21% increase in the same month the previous year (Money Statistics, 2018; The
7 Money Charity, 2018). The abovementioned factors make the UK market an important
8 context to study factors that may contribute to these high levels of debt. In addition to serious
9 potential financial consequences, a growing body of research has shown that being in debt
10 may lead to serious health-related problems, including depression, stress, and anxiety
11 (Lazarov and Hinterschweiger, 2018).
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24 Despite potential negative consequences, loans of different types are essential
25 elements of modern economies (Wallace, 2018). In the UK, many businesses offer the 'buy
26 now, pay later' option of purchasing goods; personal loans are available for house projects,
27 car purchases or holidays, and debt is often described as 'a way of life,' with consumers often
28 concerned about their credit score (Moore, 2016; Edwards, 2006; Hughes, 2018).
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36 A number of factors influence such high levels of household and personal debt,
37 including the more positive attitude to being in debt in the UK (LSE, 2015). In turn, this
38 positive and relaxed attitude towards borrowing is also influenced by several factors,
39 including the regulatory context of lending, and media and advertising. First, the regulatory
40 context of lending in the UK has been dominated by the concepts of consumer empowerment,
41 consumer education and emphasis on primarily individual responsibility in financial decision
42 making (Williams, 2007, Shankar et al., 2006). The Anglo-Saxon approach to regulation
43 emphasises the freedom to obtain credit (Ramsay and Williams, 2009), and places
44 responsibility on individual consumers to obtain information and make informed decisions
45 (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014). One of the informational and educational tools available to
46 financial services providers is advertising (Brinol et al., 2015). Financial services advertisers
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3 in the UK are required by law to be fair, transparent, and give a balanced view of the products
4 (Directive, 2008; FCA, 2016), and advertisements for loans must include a statement that
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6 informs prospective consumers of the potential dangers of not making necessary payments on
7
8 time. Apart from that, financial services advertising is not constrained by any other
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10 limitations, unlike, for example, advertisers of alcohol or tobacco (Best, 2017; IAS, 2017).
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12 Financial services advertisers may use almost any creative strategy, including emotional
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14 appeals, to communicate with consumers.
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20 Whilst advertising is not the main or only factor to encourage borrowing money, and
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22 a range of other personal, situational, and environmental factors influence consumers' values
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24 and behaviour, the importance of advertising in shaping and cultivating consumers'
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26 perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour has been well-documented in academic research and
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28 noted by policy makers (Oxera, 2014, Gayle, 2017). Advertising in its many forms has been
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30 shown to be an important tool of attitude and behaviour change, and has been restricted for
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32 some products where consumers are seen as more vulnerable subjects (e.g. advertising to
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34 children) (ASA, 2018), or for products that are seen as harmful (e.g. cigarettes or alcohol)
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36 (Hastings et al., 2010, ASA, 2016). Financial services advertising, and loan advertisements
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38 specifically, have also come under scrutiny (Jones, 2014), and new, stricter guidelines for
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40 some types of lenders have been introduced (ASA, 2015). Discussions about how to support
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42 consumers to make beneficial financial decisions continue and include the role of emotional
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44 advertising (Adams and Smart, 2017) but there is no empirical or theoretical work to support
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46 such discussions.
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51 These restrictions have been put in place because advertising transfers meaning from
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53 the advertiser to the consumer as proposed by the cultural meaning transfer model, and
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55 advertising practitioners are therefore seen as 'cultural change agents' who influence
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57 consumers' knowledge and perceptions of advertised products and services (McCracken,
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3 1986). Hence, advertising is often called the most influential institution of socialisation in a
4 modern consumer society (McCracken, 1986; Lury, 2011). Recently, the Advertising
5 Standards Authority (ASA) has initiated efforts to review and restrict advertising for loans –
6 and especially payday loans, accusing advertisers of practices that lead to normalising debt.
7
8 Although there is some anecdotal evidence suggesting images that normalise debt have been
9 presented in advertisements (Debt Advice, 2013), there is no systematic study reporting on
10 how different types of loans are presented in advertisements in the UK to different consumer
11 segments of the market (for example, by looking at advertisements placed in media such as
12 newspapers which target a variety of consumer segments) and how consumers perceive the
13 meanings presented in them. As such, this paper builds on the proposition that emotions are
14 important elements of consumer decision making, and explore the use and perceptions of
15 emotional appeals in persuasive communication in the context of loan advertising.
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30 Hence, the paper focuses on the following research questions:

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33 **RQ1:** What emotional appeals are featured in loan advertisements in UK newspaper
34 advertisements?
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38 **RQ2:** Are there differences among newspapers and loan types in the use and
39 frequency of the use of emotional appeals?
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43 **RQ3:** What are consumers' perceptions and understanding of the emotional appeals
44 presented in advertisements featuring emotional appeals?
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49 To answer these questions, the study employs content analysis of newspaper advertisements
50 in Study 1, and semi-structured interviews in Study 2. Our study elaborates on the cultural
51 meaning transfer model in the context of loan advertising and, in addition to contributing to
52 new knowledge about the meanings presented in loan advertisements, it also makes a
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3 theoretical contribution by proposing five dimensions of perceptions of emotional loan
4 advertisements and hence extending the cultural meaning transfer model.
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10 11 12 **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

13 14 15 **The use and perceptions of emotional appeals in advertising**

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17 Advertising appeals are commonly classified as emotional or rational. Emotional
18 advertising appeals are emotive contents described as messages that stir up positive or
19 negative emotions, and may be often more effective than rational appeals in targeting
20 individuals' symbolic, social, or psychological needs (Marchegiani & Phau, 2013; Leonidou
21 & Leonidou, 2009).
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29 The importance of emotions in financial services advertising was noted in the
30 Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) paper that reviewed advertising research with a view to
31 recommending effective ways to advertise such services. However, because of a lack of
32 research on financial services advertising in the UK, the review drew on advertising research
33 of other services, not specifically financial services (Adams and Smart, 2017), which
34 suggests that this is an important area that lacks systematic research. The way loans are
35 presented in contemporary tools of consumer persuasion and how they are perceived is
36 important for many reasons. Usually, advertisers make choices about how to appeal to a
37 potential consumer and have a range of advertising appeals available. One of the strategies is
38 the use of emotional appeals. Such appeals are important for financial services
39 advertisements, and especially for loan advertisements, because they appeal to the more
40 irrational, emotional side of the consumer decision-making process via the peripheral route
41 (Bertrand et al., 2010), and may be responsible for creating unrealistic expectations that
42 consumers have towards being in debt. Emotions have been shown to be important factors in
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3 consumer decision making (Lerner et al., 2015), and some argue that the financial crisis of
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5 2008 demonstrated that the orthodox view that consumers are rational decision makers did
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7 not apply in the consumer credit context (Osovsky, 2013).
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10 Research from outside of the UK shows that bank services advertisers utilized
11
12 emotional appeals mainly in corporate branding advertising (Alt et al., 2019). Emotional
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14 appeals in advertising affect customers' reactions to advertisements, enhance their attention
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16 to advertisements and affect brand attitudes (Hornik et al., 2017; Panda et al., 2013).
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18 Deciding on which emotion to incorporate into an advertising strategy could greatly enhance
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20 its effectiveness, because affective responses evoked by an advertisement have been found to
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22 affect consumers' attitudes towards the advertisement, the brand, and purchase intention
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24 (Batra and Ray, 1986; Wu and Dodoo, 2017), and may be more effective than rational
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26 appeals (Hornik et al., 2017). Emotional appeals can be expressed through many aspects of
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28 advertising messages: colours (Lichtle, 2007), images (Small and Verrochi, 2009), copy, or
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30 positioning within the media context (Janssens and De Pelsmacker, 2005). Emotions play a
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32 crucial role in decision making when consumers can feel emotionally attached to the
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34 advertisement (Batra and Ray, 1986, Edell and Burke, 1987). For example, in a field
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36 experiment in South Africa, researchers found that for direct mail loans advertising,
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38 advertising content persuaded by appealing peripherally to intuition rather than reason
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40 (Bertrand et al., 2010), suggesting that emotional appeals may be powerful tools of
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42 persuasion in the context of financial services advertising. However, no such research exists
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44 in the context of the UK, despite the significant importance of such services to the British
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46 economy, and the significance and risk that such services carry for individual consumers.
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53 UK financial services marketing research is underrepresented with very few studies
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55 (Mogaji et al., 2018; Czarnecka and Evans, 2013). An overview of studies which focused on
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57 the UK market is presented in Table A1 (Appendix 1). For example, the *International*
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3 *Journal of Bank Marketing* gives 430 results under the search word 'advertising' (as of
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5 October 2019), this is then narrowed down to 213 under the search phrase 'advertising UK'.
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7 Further review of each of these studies revealed that only a few focused on advertising for
8
9 some types of financial services or on financial services consumer behaviour in the UK. For
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11 example, Mogaji et al. (2018) examined advertisements for financial services targeted at
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13 business consumers in the UK. Tameme and Asutay (2012) examined consumers attitudes
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15 towards Islamic banking services in the UK, and Bennett and Kottasz (2012) surveyed British
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17 consumers to examine their attitudes towards the banking sector following the 2008 financial
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19 crisis. Albers-Miller & Straughan (2000) analysed the content of advertisements for financial
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21 services but focused on non-English speaking markets. Rajaobelina et al. (2019) examined
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23 the effectiveness of experiential bank advertising in Canada. The *Journal of Financial*
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25 *Services Marketing* featured more publications that examined the content of advertisements
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27 for financial services, but the studies focused on the US market. Jordan and Kaas (2002)
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29 analysed how private investors are influenced by specific elements of print advertisements,
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31 while Jones et al. (2007) examined the relationship between advertising, quality, and price in
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33 the mutual fund market. Anh et al. (2011) content analysed financial serviced advertisements
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35 from the US to examine the impact of the financial recession on the type of advertising
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37 appeals used in financial services advertisements. The authors found that emotional appeals
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39 were used less frequently than rational appeals, and that advertising from the recession period
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41 featured fewer emotional appeals than advertising from the pre-recession period.
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49 Elsewhere, advertising appeals were the subject of analysis of financial services
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51 advertisements in the US (Swani and Iyer, 2017) to reveal that emotional appeals were used
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53 often but less frequently than functional appeals, and the use of such appeals was more
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55 frequent in advertisements targeted at individual consumers than business consumers. Lee et
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57 al. (2011) examined the content of financial services advertisements before and during the
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3 financial crisis of 2008. Alt et al. (2017) analysed bank advertisements from Hungary and
4 Romania. In the UK, Mogaji and Danbury (2017) analysed emotional appeals in financial
5 services advertisements and explored consumers' attitudes towards those adverts but did not
6 specifically focus on advertisements for loans. Czarnecka and Evans (2013) analysed
7 financial services advertisements to examine the execution of a rational appeal of wisdom
8 through the use of mathematical images. McNair et al. (2016) investigated individual-level
9 factors that affected consumers' financial behaviour at a time of high pressure, specifically
10 during Christmas. The authors surveyed British consumers to examine their behaviour and
11 attitudes towards spending and borrowing at a time of pressure, including how the level of
12 emotional coping affected their relationship with financial behaviour. Inability to mitigate
13 emotional stress led to higher borrowing suggesting that at a time of stress, consumers make
14 important financial decisions that are driven by emotions. This indicates that emotions are
15 important factors in consumer decision making with regards to financial services. Sekhon et
16 al. (2014) examined consumers' trust in financial services, including credit card providers,
17 and found that several factors, such as expertise and competence, integrity and consistency,
18 communication, shared values and concern, and benevolence affect consumers' trust in
19 financial services. Their study suggests that communication is an important aspect of creating
20 trust in financial services and hence should be carefully designed to encourage such.
21
22 O'Loughlin and Szmigin (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with British students to
23 explore their attitudes, motivations and behaviours in relation to student credit and debt
24 consumption. The findings revealed that British students held positive attitudes towards debt
25 and expected that this "debt-accumulating" (p. 340) would continue throughout their lives.
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56 **Cultural meaning transfer**

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3 Advertisements for such important products should be studied because they are
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5 important tools of consumer socialization (Mikeska et al., 2017, Lury, 2011). Advertisements
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7 are tools of transferring meaning from the culturally constituted world to the consumer – i.e.,
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9 the meaning that advertisers present in advertisements is drawn from the cultural
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11 environment, and is then transferred to consumers (McCracken, 1986). Advertising is
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13 therefore a tool for transferring cultural meaning from advertisers to consumers as proposed
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15 by cultural meaning transfer theory. Whilst studying the content of advertisements is
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17 important as it informs how advertisers position goods and services, it is crucial to investigate
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19 how consumers of such advertisements perceive the meanings featured of advertisements.
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21 Individuals consume the advertised products and it is assumed that they also ‘consume’ the
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23 meaning that those services and products are endorsed with in the advertisements. A three-
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25 stage cultural meaning transfer was proposed by McCracken (1986), and it posits that cultural
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27 meaning is transferred by means of marketing communications, amongst other tools, from the
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29 advertisers to consumers. The model proposes that the culturally constituted world is
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31 composed of a variety of meanings, which are then used by advertisers to construct
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33 advertising messages. By using the selected meanings to advertise products and services, the
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35 advertisers’ intention is to create associations between the presented meanings and advertised
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37 goods.
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44 Subsequently, consumers perceive and decode the advertised meanings, and the
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46 meaning transfer is reflected in consumer attitudes towards and beliefs about the advertised
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48 service (McCracken, 1989). The meaning transfer model has been widely applied in a variety
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50 of contexts such as the use of celebrity endorsers in advertising (e.g., Roy, 2018; Miller and
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52 Allen, 2012; Halonen-Knight and Hurmerinta, 2010), the use of animals in advertising
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54 (Spears et al., 1996), cultural values in advertising (Czarnecka et al., 2018), or fashion and
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56 beauty (Fowler et al., 2017). Jain and Roy (2016) identified meaning transfer dimensions in
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3 the area of celebrity endorsement in India, namely: personality, credibility, physical
4 appearance, feelings, performance, values, and cogent power. This present research
5 elaborates McCracken's cultural meaning transfer model in a new product category context
6 by investigating the emotional meanings presented in loan advertisements and how those
7 meanings are perceived.
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19 **RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

20 **Study 1**

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22 Content analysis is a technique for an objective, systematic and quantitative
23 description of the manifest content of communication; it is a research technique for making
24 replicable and valid inferences from the data to their context. This is arguably one of the most
25 suitable methods for analysing advertisements as used by various other researchers (Karande
26 et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2009; Belch and Belch, 2013). Content analysis requires coding
27 systems that enable the researcher to observe the content of communication and categorise
28 them in order to observe trends and frequencies to make comparison and deduce meaning.
29 Content analysis is an effective research method because it provides data that is empirical,
30 systematic and objective (Kassarjian, 1977; Riff et al., 2019).
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47 *Coding Framework*

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49 Following the suggestion by Mortimer (2000), a literature review was conducted in
50 order to source a list of criteria used for coding the advertisements. In total, 15 emotional
51 appeals were included in the final framework based on the published frameworks of
52 advertising appeals sourced from the works of Hetsroni (2000), Moriarty (1991), Fowles
53 (1994), Pollay (1983) and Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999). Two researchers have
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3 compared the frameworks, and the appeals that have appeared in most of the frameworks
4 were included in the coding scheme for this study.
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8 These 15 appeals were divided into two appeal types: positive emotional appeals and
9 negative emotional appeals. In addition to these appeals, two other factors were included in
10 the coding framework, namely: product category (types of loans: mortgages, credit cards,
11 personal loans, overdraft facilities) and newspaper type. The final coding framework of
12 emotional appeals is presented in Table 1.
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22 >>Insert Table 1 about here<<
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29 Two coders of different genders, born and raised in the UK, served as the coders, independent
30 of each other, and coded all the advertisements for this study. Each of the coders was given
31 training and code books with operational definitions of the emotional appeals to be identified
32 and the other factors (product category and newspaper type) within the coding sheet. Trial
33 coding followed the training after which the main coding took place. The intercoder
34 reliability between the two coders was assessed using Cohen's kappa, which at 0.906
35 suggests that the quality of the coding was acceptable and that contents were evaluated in a
36 consistent manner (Neuendorf, 2017). Any differences in coding were discussed by the
37 coders to reach an agreement.
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51 *Sampling*

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53 Newspaper advertising is usually a part of larger integrated marketing
54 communications campaigns (Eagle et al., 2014), hence it usually displays the same images
55 and texts as other forms of advertising on other platforms, therefore analysing newspaper
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3 advertisements provides knowledge of the images of the whole campaign. Despite the drop in
4 newspaper readership numbers in the UK, some practitioners see newspapers as a viable
5 option to include in advertising campaigns (WARC, 2017). Newspapers may be considered a
6 better option for advertising financial services, giving the opportunity to use long copy and
7 allowing consumers to take their time to read it compared to TV. Some lenders have
8 highlighted the difficulties and practicality in providing so much relevant information during
9 a thirty-second radio or TV advertisement, which also identifies print media as a better
10 avenue to provide the key information prospective customers need to consider before making
11 a financial decision. Print advertisements were chosen because practitioners have found that
12 print advertisements are superior to digital advertisements in several ways (Tarantino, 2016),
13 namely they generate higher awareness and recall, they help increase effectiveness of other
14 platforms used in integrated marketing communications campaigns, and consumers trust
15 them more (Nielsen, 2015). Moreover, although newspaper and magazine sales figures show
16 declines in print edition readership, the digital subscriptions do not compensate for those
17 declines (Ponsford, 2015).

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Eight UK newspapers were divided into the frequently used categories of ‘quality’ (*The Guardian, Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*), ‘mid-market’ (*Daily Express, Daily Mail*) and ‘popular’ (*The Sun, Daily Mirror* and *Daily Star*) papers (Czarnecka and Evans, 2013), on the basis of their readership profile, and styles of presentation and level of reporting and commentary. The newspapers were examined for twelve consecutive months (April 2013 - March 2014) to control for seasonal differences. These eight newspapers have a combined circulation of over 4.9 million copies (Tobitt, 2018). Over 2900 newspaper editions were searched for financial services advertisements. Repeated instances of an advertisements were excluded. This procedure resulted in a sample of 1272 advertisements for financial services (Table 2).

>>Insert Table 2 about here<<

Out of these, 554 advertisements for loans (mortgages, personal loans, credit cards, overdraft facilities) were examined for the presence of emotional appeals. The emotional appeals presented in these adverts were identified through an assessment of the visual and copy (headlines and subheadings) presentation. After the initial coding, it was found that 236 advertisements featured an emotional appeal and they were retained for further content analysis. In order to answer RQ1 and RQ2, the sample of 236 advertisements was analysed for the type of emotional appeal featured by product category and by newspaper type.

Results

Table 3 presents the most frequently advertised product with emotional appeal was mortgages, followed by personal loans, credit cards and overdraft facilities.

>>Insert Table 3 about here<<

Positive emotional appeals were used as primary appeals in 95.4% (231) of loan advertisements, and negative emotional appeals were used as primary appeals in 11 advertisements. In six adverts, both types of appeals, negative and positive, were used equally as primary appeals. Further analysis revealed that the most often used appeals were: relief (63.9%), security (53.3%), and adventure (36.8%). The least used were nostalgia, sex, and sorrow. Table 4 shows the detailed overview of the use of the 15 emotional appeals.

>>Insert Table 4 about here<<

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3 Mortgages were the largest sub-set of loans, followed by personal loans, credit cards,
4 and overdraft facilities. When looking at the most used appeals by type of loans (Table 4),
5 mortgage advertisements featured 13 of the 15 appeals, with relief, security, fear, and
6 adventure being the most used appeals. Sorrow and nostalgia were not used at all, and sex
7 and beauty were used sporadically. Personal loans were associated with adventure appeal the
8 most, followed by relief and security. Credit cards were positioned as products providing
9 relief (83.3%), affiliation (83.3%), excitement (66.7%), and security (66.7%). Overdraft
10 facilities were associated with the smallest number of emotional appeals: only nostalgia,
11 status, nurture, security, and relief appeals were used (each in 50% of advertisements).

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24 The most frequently used appeals across all four types of loans were relief, security
25 and adventure; the least frequently used were: sex and sorrow. Eleven out of 15 appeals
26 differed in terms of usage by product type, suggesting that the use of emotional appeals
27 depends on the type of loan. Further examination of the patterns of these differences revealed
28 that loans which carried the highest financial risk (mortgages) were advertised with emotional
29 appeals the most frequently, followed by personal loans, credit cards, and overdraft facilities.

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45 The use of emotional appeals varied across types of newspapers. Emotional
46 advertisements for mortgages were found only in quality newspapers, the same as with
47 personal loan advertisements. Overdraft facilities were advertised in all three types of
48 newspapers, with mid-market featuring the most. Emotional advertisements for credit cards
49 featured in tabloid and mid-market newspapers, but not in quality newspapers. Overall,
50 quality newspapers featured the majority of emotional advertisements for loan advertisements
51 (95.3%).
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Study 2

Semi-structured interviews

In order to address RQ3, thirty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents residing in the UK, all of whom were bank services users, and either have used loans or intended to use loans in the future. The aim of employing such method in this study was to explore consumer perceptions of advertising which features emotional appeals (Belk, 2017). Participants were recruited by the two co-authors of the study by two methods: 1) notices inviting potential participants were posted off-line in places such as community centres and local shops in South-East of England; and 2) co-authors used their personal networks and disseminated invitation to the study via work and personal emails and social media platforms. In order to reach a sufficient sample, we have followed the ‘data saturation’ approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and specifically the procedure recommended by Francis et al., (2010). Initially, 30 interviews were conducted, and initial analysis was carried out. Afterwards, another three interviews were carried out. The first round of interviews took place between April 2015 and June 2015, and the second round of interviews took place between June and August 2018.

An interview guide was developed based on the review of literature. The guide focused on respondents’ perceptions of the presented advertisements for financial services. Five advertisements were randomly selected from the overall sample of loan advertisements as prompts for the interviews: 1) HSBC mortgage advert (“Make your dream home a reality”); 2) First Direct mortgage advert (“Everyone remembers their first time”); 3) Lloyds Bank mortgage advert (“It still feels like a fairy tale to walk through my own door”); 4) Lloyds TSB personal loan advert (For all your plans, big or small. Our loans will help you get there”); and 5) Lloyds TSB credit card advertisement (“Give yourself a break with 0% on

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3 purchases for the first 13 months”). These advertisements represented the categories of loans
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5 in the sample except for overdraft facilities advertisements, which were excluded from this
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7 sample because they were advertised as part of personal accounts.
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10 The interviews were carried out face-to-face and voice-recorded, then transcribed and
11
12 subsequently analysed. The interviews began with general questions about respondent’s
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14 views of advertising in general, the role of advertising in decision-making, and respondent’s
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16 favourite advertisements. Following these, the respondent was exposed to the selected
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18 advertisements for loans and asked first to describe those adverts, and then describe their
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20 responses to and opinions about the presented advertisements. Textual analysis of the
21
22 interview transcripts using the multi-stage coding approach was followed in this study aiming
23
24 for a thematic analysis following principles outlined by Kuckartz (2014). Data was coded
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26 independently by two coders. The data analysis is category-based thus, the analytical
27
28 categories are the focus of this analysis process. A multi-stage process of categorizing and
29
30 coding was used. The following procedure borrowed from Campbell et al. (2013) and
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32 modified to suit the context of this study was employed in order to ensure consistency in
33
34 coding. Each interview transcript was coded by two coders in the following way. Each
35
36 interview was transcribed and typed into a Word document. The coders used the “Review –
37
38 New comment” function in the Word file to assign and describe codes of the text. Each
39
40 section of the text that was coded was also colour-coded by highlighting the words to make it
41
42 clear which section of the text was treated as a unit of analysis. Once the text had been fully
43
44 coded by the two researchers, the two copies of each interview script were printed and the
45
46 codes compared. This procedure allowed for a relatively easy comparison of codes to see
47
48 whether there were discrepancies in the coding. Where there were disagreements, coders
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50 discussed their coding decisions and established an agreed code.
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3 Both coders followed the same principles of coding. First, first-order statements were
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5 extracted which unlocked meaning in the data but where it was necessary to uncover the
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7 deeper patterns in the data. A more structured second-order analysis provided a greater
8
9 degree of abstraction enfolded the literature in supporting the emerging categories. A third
10
11 analytical stage consolidated the categories into themes of perceptions of the presented
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13 advertisements that encompassed the data. These final themes (Table 6) are as follows:
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15 product-appeal congruence, relevance, trust, motivation, and financial illusion.
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26 *Product-appeal congruence*

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28 Respondents commented how the emotional appeal did not match the advertised
29
30 financial service or how it was not clear which product was advertised. Mortgages were
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32 described as important financial products and using “childish” images was not perceived as
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34 congruent with the advertised services and would not be taken “seriously” by consumers.
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36 Advertisements for such products, in the perception of the respondents, should be very clear
37
38 about what they advertise because money is “a serious business.” Images and text should
39
40 clearly reflect why they are relevant for the advertised product.
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46 *Relevance*

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48 The respondents’ comments can be divided into two categories: those who perceived
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50 the advertisements as relevant to them because they reported to be at a stage in life in which
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52 they were looking to buy a home or to take out a personal loan to buy a new car or do home
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54 improvements, and those who saw the advertisements as irrelevant because they were “not at
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56 that time of their life.” A respondent mentioned that the image of a man and a woman living
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3 together in a perfect home was a “fairy-tale narrative” that was “no longer relevant.”
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5 Advertisements need to be relevant to a prospective customer and grab their attention. Not
6 every advert will appeal to all consumers all the time because the advertised service is not
7 relevant to and not needed by them. For example, one respondent explicitly commented that
8 the advert for personal loan using emotions is not relevant to him because he does “not
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10 believe in borrowing money for holidays or cars” and “no emotion would persuade” him to
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12 do so.
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21 *Trust*

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23 Trust was another salient theme. Advertising was not perceived as a tool sufficient to
24 build trust in the advertised service, or to a customer of the advertised bank. Respondents
25 mentioned how they did not feel certain that they wanted to use the financial service just by
26 looking at an advertisement. They reported that other factors and “sources of information”
27 needed to be considered and advertisements were seen only as ‘prompts’ to make consumers
28 aware of a product or a service but not as sources of credible information. Some respondents
29 expressed their lack of trust in the advertised financial service because they had no
30 experience of the advertised bank. Many mentioned that using these emotional images of
31 home ownership or going on holiday paid for by the means of a personal loan was deceptive
32 and the choice of images did not encourage trust.
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49 *Motivation*

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51 The presented advertisements made the respondents think about how to achieve the
52 “dream of homeownership” because “they make you soft inside and you start thinking about
53 what you need” to achieve it. When the emotional appeals were perceived as congruent with
54 the advertised services, consumers found them motivating to take a particular action, such as
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3 starting to save for a deposit, or to be more ambitious in pursuing the objective of home
4 ownership. Some respondents noted the presence of emotions in the advertisements and
5
6 talked about emotional “push” to “achieve a dream of a home for a family.”
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10 11 12 *Financial illusion*

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14 Respondents commented that the advertisements for personal loans and credit cards
15 create an illusion that everyone takes out a loan or uses a credit card for “futile” purchases
16 such as holidays or a new TV. This illusion was said to be based on false premises that the
17 consumer will have the money in the future and be able to pay it off. Some respondents
18 mentioned that the adverts also motivate people to live in the illusion that everyone “lives in
19 debt” so it is normal to borrow and owe money, even for “unnecessary purchases such as a
20 new TV.” A few respondents noted that mortgage loans encouraged thinking that it was
21 possible for anyone to borrow money for a house, and that banks would lend money to almost
22 anyone.
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37 **DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSION**

38
39 The marketing of loans is intended to offer a financial solution for consumers who do
40 not have the necessary funds in cash. Available research does not offer any systematic
41 findings on how such services are advertised in the UK, or how loan advertisements are
42 perceived by consumers. This study fills this important and surprising gap in knowledge. It
43 extends our understanding of the use of emotional appeals by UK banks in loan
44 advertisements, as well as consumers’ perceptions of advertisements featuring emotional
45 appeals. The findings provide an image of how advertisers in the UK use emotions to
46 encourage consumers to borrow money. The findings are discussed by looking at two aspects
47 of the cultural meaning transfer theory: the meanings presented in the cultural artefacts of
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3 consumer culture, that is advertisements for an important product, and how these meanings
4 are perceived by consumers.
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8 Theoretically, this study extends the cultural meaning transfer model (McCracken,
9
10 1986) by identifying meaning perception dimensions in the context of emotional appeals in
11 loans advertisements. Whilst the cultural meaning transfer model posits that meaning is
12 transferred through marketing communications, the model does not specify what factors are
13 important for successful meaning transfer and our study is an attempt to identify the factors
14 that may influence successful meaning transfer in this context. The dimensions identified in
15 this study may be further developed to measure the role of those factors (product-appeal
16 congruence, relevance, trust, motivation, financial illusion) in the extent to which meaning is
17 transferred successfully to consumers. That meaning transfer involves forming perceptions of
18 the meanings presented in advertisements. Further work should examine how these
19 dimensions can explain brand image perceptions or the effectiveness of emotional advertising
20 for loans. The five dimensions of perceptions of emotional loan advertising identified in this
21 study could form basis for creating a measure of loan advertising effectiveness by assessing
22 the five aspects perceived by respondents be important factors in loan advertising.
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40 First, the results of this study demonstrate that advertisers of loans use predominantly
41 positive emotional appeals such as relief, security, excitement and adventure. Negative
42 appeals such as sorrow, guilt and fear, were used only occasionally. If loans are seen as
43 financial instruments whose aim is to solve consumers' money problems, these
44 advertisements offer an easy solution: the advertised loans provide relief, a feeling of security
45 alongside excitement, and a sense of adventure. There is rarely any reason to feel guilty or to
46 fear that loans carry a financial risk. Drawing on research on negative advertising appeals,
47 such as fear or shocking appeals, we speculate that the use of predominantly positive
48 emotional appeals may be due to advertisers being concerned that those negative appeals
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3 would create negative associations with the brand or product (Evans et al., 2019). In addition,
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5 most of these advertisements were placed in quality newspapers, suggesting that advertisers
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7 perceive readers of such newspapers as more appropriate for such strategy than readers of
8
9 other newspaper types. Loans which carry the most risk were advertised with emotional
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11 appeals more often than low-risk products. It suggests that emotional appeals are seen by
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13 advertisers as more suitable for loans that help achieve long-term goals as opposed to
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15 financial instruments such as overdraft facilities which are meant to alleviate short-term
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17 financial difficulties.
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21 Advertisers emphasise the positive aspects of using loans more than negative:
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23 providing relief, security, or excitement. For example, one of the advertisements featuring the
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25 excitement appeal convinces consumers that: “It’s great to be able to borrow money to enjoy
26
27 a dream holiday, new car or home. And if you borrow well, you can enjoy those things
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29 sooner rather than later.” Indeed, non-governmental organisations have been discussing the
30
31 issue of advertisements being responsible for ‘normalising debt.’ For example, the Citizens
32
33 Advice Bureau (CAB) has tried to encourage the public to report irresponsible or misleading
34
35 payday loan advertisements and there has been effort to put much stricter regulations on such
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37 advertisements (CAB, 2015). Public policy could move in the direction of regulating such
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39 advertisements more by, for example, allowing only rational advertisements of loans rather
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41 than the appeals to emotions.
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47 Study 2 explored consumers’ perceptions of emotional appeals in loan
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49 advertisements. Five dimensions of emotional loan advertisements were identified: product-
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51 appeal congruence, relevance, trust, motivation, and financial illusion. The study results
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53 suggest that consumers do not perceive these advertisements as responsible for their financial
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55 choices, but do see them as tools that create expectations of easy credit and accessibility of
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57 loans. This indicates that in the long term, such advertisements may contribute to creating a
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3 consumer culture context in which availability of loans is expected, as noted by O'Loughlin
4 & Szmigin (2006). Consumers overall indicated that advertisements alone were not enough
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6 to persuade them to use a particular product or to choose a particular financial services
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8 provider, but it made them aware of such products. This finding is corroborated by previous
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10 research on the role of emotional financial services advertisements in business-to-business
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12 context: business owners were able to identify emotional aspects of advertisements but
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14 advertisements alone in their perceptions were not seen as sufficient to influence their
15
16 decisions (Mogaji et al., 2018). Loan advertisements were perceived as tools that raise
17
18 awareness and draw consumers' attention to the fact that such deals are available.
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20 Advertisements did not contain enough information about the financial products and were
21
22 merely signals of available deals. Many respondents commented how the emotional
23
24 appeals/messages were not congruent to advertise financial services that require long-term
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26 commitment and may have significant, negative consequences if repayments are not made on
27
28 time. Previous research suggested product-appeal congruence is an important element of
29
30 effective advertisements (Aydinoğlu and Cian, 2014). Trust was another aspect that
31
32 respondents consistently mentioned – advertisements using emotional appeals were not
33
34 perceived as creating the feeling of trust. Previous research identified consumer trust as an
35
36 important predictor of advertising effectiveness (Minton, 2015), and studies found that
37
38 advertising, in fact, may increase consumers' trust in the advertised brand, although
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40 respondents in our study perceived it as not sufficient to create trust in the advertised product
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42 (Li and Miniard, 2006). Trust has been found to be an important factor that can be conveyed
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44 via marketing communications in the context of financial services (Sekhon et al., 2014) but
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46 our study suggests that advertising using emotional appeals may not be perceived as the most
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48 effective approach to build trust in the context of loan advertisements.
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3 Relevance was an important factor perceived to affect the respondents' interest in the
4 advertisements. If a product was perceived as relevant to the respondent's life stage,
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6 respondents commented that they would be inclined to follow up with a further information
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8 search about the advertised service. Previous research indicated that personal relevance
9
10 (Foxall and Pallister, 1998) is indeed one of the drivers of customer engagement with an
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12 advertisement. For advertisers, this is an important insight – targeting consumers when they
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14 need a product is key to advertising effectiveness.
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19 The findings of this study provide new knowledge for practice, policy, and consumer
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21 education. The content analysis study provides a cross-sectional description of the current
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23 advertising practices in the area of loan advertisements in the UK and, in combination with
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25 the results of the interviews, may be useful to financial services advertisers in informing how
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27 to design socially responsible and effective advertising strategies for loans. Further work
28
29 would need to be conducted to quantitatively measure the effects of emotional appeals on
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31 consumers' perceptions, attitudes and behavioural intentions in this product category. For
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33 example, in order to be socially responsible, advertisers should consider how the use of
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35 emotional appeals in loan advertising may contribute to creating the impression of financial
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37 illusion. Advertisers should adjust the advertising practices to avoid disheartening consumers
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39 who find such emotional advertisements unappealing. Insights from the semi-structured
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41 interviews suggest several important practical implications. Loan advertisers should make
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43 advertisements relevant to the target audience by demonstrating where and how the service
44
45 can be used, and to target consumers at the time when they may need it. In addition, the
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47 product-appeal congruence should be ensured but this needs to be investigated further as
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49 some research shows incongruity may, in fact, lead to higher effectiveness of some
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51 advertising. Trust should be built outside of marketing communication but loan advertising
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53 may be used to motivate consumers to achieve an aim with the use of loans. Advertisers
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3 should also be cautious not to create an image of financial illusion as this may decrease the
4 trust that consumers have towards such service providers. Future research should focus on
5 testing the effectiveness of emotional versus rational appeals in advertisements for loans.
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10 The findings could inform financial literacy programmes to raise awareness of the
11 techniques that advertisers use and how it can influence consumers' perceptions of debt
12 (Jones, 2018; OECD, 2006). Regulations to limit the propensity of advertisers to create
13 financial illusion by simplifying advertising and using only rational and factual appeals. A
14 solution may be to regulate loan advertising so that only factual, rational, non-emotional
15 approaches are allowed.
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24 This study should be viewed within its limitations. First, it is a cross-sectional study
25 of one particular creative strategy, that is emotional appeals in one media type, and although
26 we covered the eight biggest national newspapers covering over 70% of circulation, it may be
27 that TV advertisements are better suited to convey emotional appeals. Therefore, including a
28 wider range of media - magazines for print advertisements (because they can use colourful
29 images more often than newspaper advertisements), TV commercials, and
30 digital/online/social media advertisements - will provide a more complete image of the use of
31 emotional appeals (Arli, 2017). Other elements of advertisements and appeals, such as
32 rational or informational appeals, should be studied. As cross-cultural differences in the use
33 of emotional appeals were previously reported (Albers-Miller & Stafford, 1999), another
34 important investigation would be a cross-national comparison of images used to advertise
35 loans, as growing levels of personal debt is an important global issue (Moyo, 2017). An
36 important next step is to conduct experimental studies to test the effectiveness of emotional
37 appeals for the purpose of advertising loans and their impact on purchase intention or product
38 perceptions (Chang et al., 2016).
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Conclusion

This research contributes to the public debate on debt and advertising by examining the use of emotional appeals in loan advertisements and consumers' perceptions of such advertisements. The findings reveal that emotional appeals in loan advertisements are used most frequently for loans that carry more risk, such as mortgages, than those that carry less risk such as personal loans or credit cards. Advertisers, when employing emotional appeals, usually position loans as products that provide relief, security, adventure, and excitement. Consumers perceive such adverts as sources of motivation on one hand, and images of financial illusion on the other. They report that adverts employing emotional appeals lack product-appeal congruence and are not sufficient to build their trust towards the bank or the advertised service, but may be effective in arousing their interest if the advertised product is relevant to their needs at the time.

Whilst our study is exploratory and cross-sectional, and must be viewed within limitations of such research, it is an important first step in understanding which emotional appeals are featured in loan advertisements and how consumers view and understand such advertisements and contributes to building a systematic body of knowledge on the important topic of financial services marketing.

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24 APPENDIX

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