When NGO Advertising Meets Doomscrolling: Ad Effectiveness and Brand Safety Risks Across the Advertising Funnel

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Social media feeds have become emotionally volatile environments, giving rise to doomscrolling—the continuous consumption of predominantly negative content. Meanwhile, NGO advertising frequently relies on negative emotional appeals to raise awareness, mobilize support, and motivate donations. Yet it remains unclear whether such environments create advertising effectiveness challenges or brand safety risks. We present two complementary studies. Study 1 analyzes 1,068 Instagram posts from 123 NGOs and shows that negative emotional appeals increase user engagement (likes and comments). Study 2 (N = 176) examines how feed valence, appeal valence, and NGO familiarity shape attention, attitudes toward the ad and NGO, and donation intentions in a simulated Instagram feed experiment. Negative appeals attract more attention than positive appeals across feed environments. Familiar NGOs receive more attention in doomscrolling contexts. Neither negative appeals nor negative feed environments harm attitudinal outcomes. At the conversion stage, negative appeals increase donation intentions, whereas doomscrolling reduces them.

Keywords: Doomscrolling, NGO Advertising, Social Media Advertising, Emotional Appeals, Brand Safety, In-context experiments.