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Article

Media Fit Between Rational and Emotional Appeals: Advertising Information Framing and Placement Strategies from a Generational Difference Perspective

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Abstract: This paper examines how rational and emotional advertising appeals should be optimally matched to specific media environments when target audiences are segmented by generation. Drawing extensively on message framing theory, socioemotional selectivity theory, processing fluency, and media richness theory, the study develops a comprehensive theoretical account of why younger and older cohorts respond differently to the identical advertising message across various digital and hybrid media settings. The core argument posits that media effectiveness is not determined solely by message content or platform reach, but rather by the strategic fit between the cognitive-emotional demands of an appeal, the symbolic and interactive affordances of a medium, and the age-related motivational orientation of the audience. Specifically, younger cohorts are significantly more likely to respond positively to emotionally framed content placed in dynamic, socially visible, and fast-paced media environments. Conversely, older cohorts are more likely to value rationally framed content delivered through traditional or digital media that support clarity, credibility, and a lower interpretive burden. Based on this theoretical argument, the paper proposes an integrated framework for advertising information framing and media placement, identifies boundary conditions under which mixed framing can be highly effective, and outlines practical strategies for media planning across diverse platforms. Ultimately, this study contributes to contemporary advertising research by connecting framing effects with generational media use, offering a structured basis for designing differentiated communication strategies in increasingly fragmented media markets.

Keywords: advertising appeals; media fit; generational differences; information framing; media placement; consumer behavior

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1. Introduction

Advertising communication increasingly operates in an environment marked by platform fragmentation, accelerated content circulation, and persistent audience segmentation [1]. In such conditions, the question is no longer simply whether a message is persuasive, but whether a given type of persuasive appeal is suited to the medium through which it is delivered and the audience for whom it is intended. Rational and emotional appeals remain two of the most widely discussed approaches in advertising strategy. Yet their effectiveness has often been studied as if the message itself were the principal unit of explanation. In contemporary practice, however, the persuasive force of an appeal is deeply conditioned by media context and by audience differences in age-based experience, motivation, and interpretive habits.

This paper addresses that gap by examining media adaptation between rational and emotional appeals from the perspective of generational differences. The central proposition is that advertising appeals are most effective when message framing, platform characteristics, and generational orientations are aligned. A rational appeal emphasizes product attributes, functional benefits, evidence, and problem solving. An emotional appeal foregrounds mood, identity, social belonging, aspiration, nostalgia, or pleasure. Neither form is inherently superior. Their effectiveness depends on the medium's capacity to support elaboration, affective immersion, trust formation, and attention retention, as well as on the audience's age-related priorities and media routines [2].

The need for such an analysis is strengthened by shifts in media consumption across generations. Younger cohorts typically encounter advertising within highly visual, interactive, mobile-first environments where recommendation systems, peer visibility, and rapid scrolling shape attention [2]. Older cohorts often use digital media as well, but their evaluative standards and usage contexts may place greater weight on credibility, legibility, information sufficiency, and perceived utility. These tendencies do not imply rigid age stereotypes. Rather, they indicate patterned differences in motivational emphasis and media literacy that affect how advertising claims are interpreted.

This study therefore develops a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship among appeal type, media affordance, and generational response. It argues that rational and emotional appeals should be treated as communication forms with different processing demands, and that media planning should consider these demands together with generationally structured preferences. The paper makes three contributions. First, it synthesizes literature on advertising appeals, framing, generation, and media affordances into an integrated explanatory model [3]. Second, it proposes a placement logic showing when rational and emotional appeals are likely to achieve stronger fit across media channels. Third, it derives practical recommendations for differentiated advertising strategy in multi-platform campaigns.

The analysis proceeds as follows. The next section reviews relevant literature on appeal framing, generational differences, and media characteristics. The following section presents the theoretical framework [4]. The analysis section then develops a media fit logic and identifies key placement strategies. A discussion section considers boundary conditions and managerial implications. The paper concludes by summarizing the theoretical contribution and outlining implications for future research.

2. Literature Review

Research on advertising appeals has traditionally distinguished between message strategies that rely on cognition and those that rely on affect. Rational appeals are commonly associated with utilitarian products, information-rich messages, and evaluative comparison. Emotional appeals are associated with symbolic meaning, lifestyle association, and affective resonance [5]. Although this distinction is foundational, later studies have shown that the boundary between the two is not absolute. Many successful advertisements combine informational and emotional cues, but they do so in different proportions depending on category, platform, and audience expectation.

Message framing research adds a second layer to this discussion. Framing refers not only to what information is presented, but to how it is organized, highlighted, and made salient. A rational frame typically foregrounds evidence, performance indicators, risk reduction, or value calculation. An emotional frame organizes the message around feelings, narratives, identity affirmation, or social imagination [1]. These alternative frames activate different forms of attention and evaluation. Rational framing is more likely to encourage deliberate assessment when audiences have motivation and capacity to process information. Emotional framing is more likely to work under conditions of low elaboration, symbolic consumption, or identity-oriented decision making.

The media environment shapes these effects because platforms differ in what they allow users to perceive and do [6]. Media richness theory suggests that communication channels vary in their capacity to convey multiple cues, provide immediacy, and reduce

ambiguity. Social media platforms, short-video environments, branded communities, search results, livestream interfaces, and traditional digital display settings all structure user attention differently. A message that is persuasive in a long-form explanatory setting may lose force in a high-velocity feed. Conversely, a highly affective and visually driven message may thrive in media environments that reward rapid engagement and social sharing.

Generational research is also relevant because cohorts differ in their socialization into media systems and consumption cultures. While generation is never the sole determinant of behavior, cohort-based experiences shape expectations about credibility, interactivity, speed, and content value. Younger cohorts tend to be more accustomed to participatory, visually saturated, and algorithmically curated media ecosystems. Older cohorts may adopt digital tools broadly while still preferring more stable informational cues, clearer textual guidance, and less interpretive noise in persuasion contexts. These tendencies influence not only platform choice but also how advertising claims are read and trusted [4].

Socioemotional selectivity theory offers further insight into why appeal preferences may diverge across age groups. As perceived time horizons change, priorities in information processing also shift. Younger consumers often orient more strongly toward exploration, novelty, and self-expression, whereas older consumers may place greater value on emotional meaning in interpersonal life while also favoring decision contexts that reduce ambiguity and cognitive burden [7]. In advertising, this means age effects are likely to be mediated by product relevance, decision stakes, and the interaction between symbolic and functional value.

Studies of processing fluency likewise indicate that persuasion is affected by the fit between message form and audience expectation. When a message is easy to interpret within a specific medium, consumers are more likely to experience cognitive ease and respond favorably. This principle suggests that advertising effectiveness depends not merely on message creativity but on whether the appeal is delivered in a medium that supports its intended mode of processing. Rational appeals require conditions that sustain attention to reasons, comparisons, and evidence [8]. Emotional appeals require media settings that amplify atmosphere, immediacy, and identification.

Despite these insights, the literature often treats generational targeting and media planning as separate managerial domains [9]. Media research tends to focus on channel performance metrics, while advertising studies often isolate message effects in controlled conditions. Less attention has been devoted to the joint problem of how rational and emotional frames should be distributed across media when campaigns target audiences with distinct generational profiles. This paper addresses that problem by proposing a theory of media fit that links framing demands, media affordances, and generational orientation within a single analytical model.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework developed in this paper rests on three propositions. First, rational and emotional appeals impose different cognitive and affective processing demands. Rational appeals require evidentiary comprehension, comparative judgment, and confidence in informational sufficiency. Emotional appeals depend more on affective cue recognition, symbolic association, and experiential immersion. Second, media environments differ in the extent to which they support these demands. Some media privilege brevity, visual intensity, and social circulation, while others better accommodate explanation, deliberation, and credibility signaling. Third, generational differences influence the probability that a given audience will perceive a particular appeal-medium combination as fluent, relevant, and trustworthy.

From this perspective, advertising effectiveness is best understood as a problem of triadic fit. The first dimension of fit concerns the relationship between appeal type and medium. A medium that is fragmented, highly visual, and interaction-heavy tends to be more favorable to emotional appeals because it supports fast impression formation and

affective contagion. A medium that allows detailed explanation, stable attention, and stronger informational architecture is generally more favorable to rational appeals. The second dimension concerns the relationship between generation and medium. Cohorts vary in their familiarity with media norms, tolerance for speed and ambiguity, and expectations of proof or authenticity. The third dimension concerns the relationship between generation and appeal type. Age-related motivations shape whether consumers prefer symbolic stimulation, novelty, reassurance, or concrete utility in persuasion contexts.

Figure 1 summarizes this framework. It shows that media characteristics and generational orientation jointly shape processing fluency, which then influences advertising response. The framework does not assume a fixed mapping between young consumers and emotional appeals or between older consumers and rational appeals. Instead, it predicts probabilistic tendencies that become stronger under particular product and media conditions [10]. For example, an older consumer may respond positively to emotional appeals in health, family, or nostalgia-related categories, while a younger consumer may value rational appeals in high-involvement purchases such as technology or education services. The framework therefore emphasizes contingent alignment rather than deterministic segmentation.

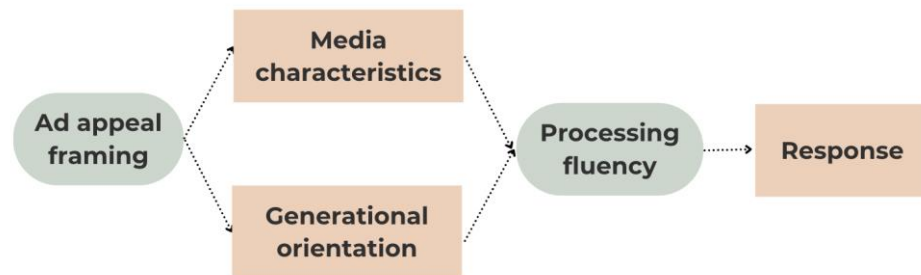


Figure 1. Integrated Framework Linking Appeal Framing, Media Characteristics, Generation, and Advertising Response.

A further implication is that mixed framing may be especially effective in transitional media spaces. In channels that combine entertainment, social proof, and informational depth, advertisers can use emotional cues to attract attention and rational content to stabilize credibility. However, the sequence and balance of these cues matter. When emotional stimulation dominates without informational grounding, the message may appear superficial in categories with higher perceived risk [4]. When rational detail appears without symbolic or affective engagement, the message may be ignored in crowded entertainment-oriented media. Thus, the framework highlights both fit and sequencing as key dimensions of strategy.

The framework also clarifies the role of context [11]. Product type, involvement level, purchase frequency, and cultural expectations can all moderate the relationship between appeal, medium, and generation. High-involvement categories, regulated industries, and trust-sensitive markets generally strengthen the value of rational framing and credible placement. Lifestyle, fashion, leisure, and low-risk impulse categories create more room for emotional framing in socially visible media. These contextual conditions do not replace generational effects, but they determine how strongly those effects shape strategic decisions.

4. Analysis

The analysis develops a media placement logic based on the idea that each medium favors a distinct combination of attention structure, sensory intensity, social visibility, and informational depth. Short-video platforms, image-first feeds, and highly interactive

mobile interfaces typically compress attention into a narrow time window. Under these conditions, emotional framing often performs better because it can generate immediate salience through music, color, movement, humor, aspiration, or identification. Younger cohorts, who are more accustomed to fast-paced feed navigation and socially visible self-presentation, are especially likely to respond to emotionally framed messages in such contexts. For these audiences, the medium itself amplifies the experiential quality of the message.

By contrast, search-driven environments, long-form branded content, comparison pages, expert endorsements, and informational community platforms tend to reward rational framing [7]. These media offer stronger support for explanation, claim verification, and sequential reasoning. Older cohorts often show higher responsiveness to such environments because they place greater value on clarity, credibility, and practical relevance in advertising encounters. Rational appeals in these channels are more likely to reduce uncertainty and generate confidence, particularly in categories involving financial commitment, health, household management, or long-term use.

Table 1 presents the core differences between rational and emotional appeals across media conditions. The comparison shows that rational appeals are generally more dependent on media that reduce ambiguity and preserve informational integrity. Emotional appeals, in contrast, benefit more from media that intensify symbolic cues and encourage rapid affective inference. This distinction suggests that media planning should begin not with platform popularity alone, but with a diagnosis of what kind of processing a persuasive message requires.

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of Rational and Emotional Appeals Across Media Conditions.

Dimension	Rational appeal	Emotional appeal	Suitable media condition
Primary cue	Evidence and utility	Mood and symbolic meaning	Depth versus sensory immediacy
Processing mode	Deliberate evaluation	Affective inference	Explanation versus immersion
Best fit	Search, review, official site	Short video, social feed	Channel logic should match cue type
Key risk	Information overload	Superficiality or low trust	Mismatch reduces fluency

A second analytical point concerns the consumer decision process [12]. Figure 2 illustrates how generational differences may enter at multiple stages of advertising reception: attention, interpretation, memory, and action. Younger consumers may grant initial attention more readily to emotional novelty and visual stimulation, but their conversion to action still depends on whether the message achieves enough credibility. Older consumers may attend more selectively, yet once the message is perceived as relevant and reliable, rational framing can support stronger evaluative consistency. Thus, generation affects not only preference but the sequence through which persuasion unfolds.

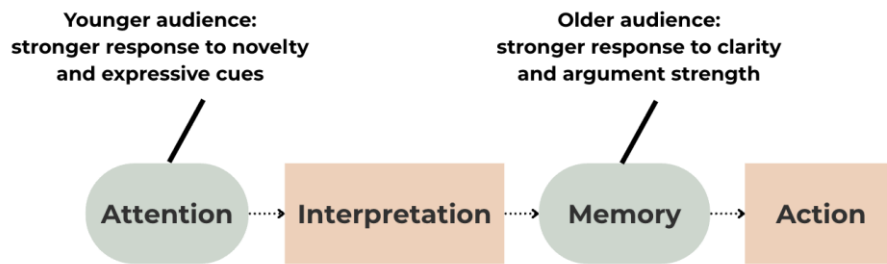


Figure 2. Generational Differences Across the Advertising Response Process.

The strategic value of mixed framing emerges most clearly in media formats that permit layered engagement. Livestream commerce, influencer reviews, branded mini-documentaries, and platform-integrated product pages can combine emotional attraction with rational substantiation. For younger audiences, a campaign may begin with emotionally resonant content in short-form social media and direct users toward pages that provide detailed evidence. For older audiences, an advertiser may lead with clear rational claims and then add moderate emotional elements that humanize the brand and enhance memorability. The point is not to mix appeals indiscriminately, but to calibrate the dominant frame and supporting frame according to audience and channel.

Table 2 outlines a generational comparison of likely responses to message frames and media affordances. The table emphasizes that younger cohorts are often more receptive to novelty, interactivity, and peer-visible emotional cues, whereas older cohorts are more likely to prefer informational sufficiency, interpretive ease, and credible source structure. These differences imply that the same creative material should not simply be resized across channels. Instead, it should be reframed according to the dominant logic of each medium and the audience segment using it.

Table 2. Generational Differences in Response to Advertising Frames and Media Affordances.

Dimension	Younger cohorts	Older cohorts
Attention trigger	Novelty, visual intensity, peer visibility	Relevance, clarity, source credibility
Preferred processing	Fast scanning with selective depth	Measured evaluation with stronger verification
Likely frame fit	Emotional or emotionally led hybrid	Rational or rationally led hybrid
Media tendency	Short video, social feed, creator content	Search, review, community information, official site

The final analytical issue concerns campaign design across multiple media. Figure 3 proposes a strategic mapping between channel type and appeal emphasis. Short-video and feed-based social media are best used for emotional or emotionally led hybrid frames, especially when targeting younger cohorts [13]. Search, expert review, community information spaces, and official brand sites are better suited to rational or rationally led hybrid frames, especially when targeting older cohorts or high-involvement decisions. Cross-channel campaigns should therefore be sequenced rather than duplicated. Emotional content can function as a gateway to attention, while rational content consolidates trust and action. In other cases, rational content can establish legitimacy first, and emotional cues can later maintain recall and relational value.

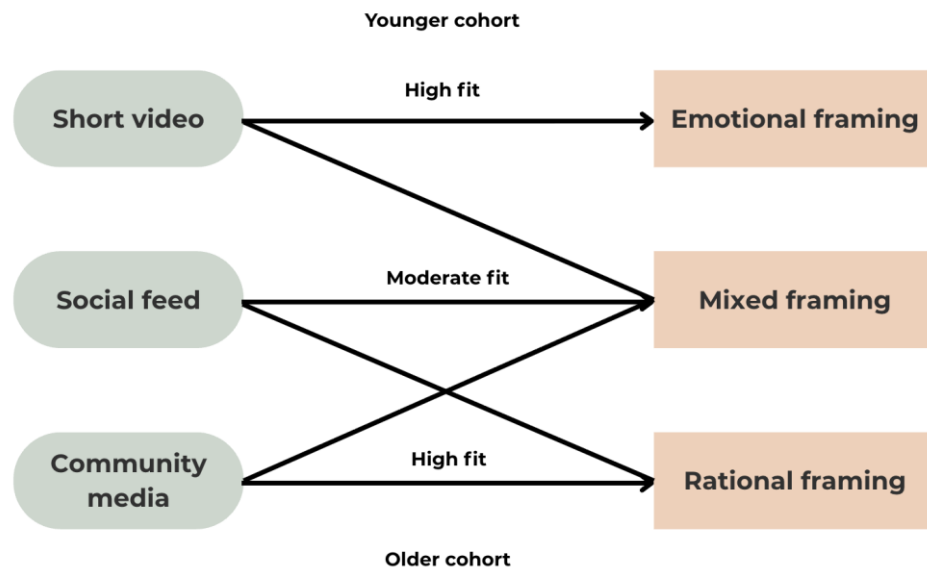


Figure 3. Strategic Mapping of Media Channel Type and Appeal Emphasis by Generational Fit.

Table 3 translates this logic into concrete placement strategies. It proposes that advertisers classify platforms according to their dominant communication affordance and then assign frame emphasis accordingly. Such a strategy is more efficient than applying a single creative logic everywhere, because it recognizes that media are not neutral containers. They co-produce persuasion by shaping how audiences interpret and value advertising signals.

Table 3. Recommended Media Placement Strategies by Appeal and Generation.

Target segment	Primary medium	Dominant frame	Strategic note
Younger cohorts	Short video and social feed	Emotional	Use vivid entry cues and social visibility
Younger cohorts	Product page after social exposure	Mixed	Add proof after attention capture
Older cohorts	Official site and expert review	Rational	Stress clarity, evidence, and trust
Older cohorts	Community media and CRM touchpoints	Mixed to rational	Use affect as reinforcement, not substitute

Taken together, the analysis suggests that media adaptation should be based on fit among frame, platform, and generation. Emotional appeals tend to perform best when the medium supports speed, visibility, and affective immersion, particularly for younger cohorts. Rational appeals tend to perform best when the medium supports detail, verification, and stable interpretation, particularly for older cohorts. Mixed framing is most useful when media architectures allow sequential processing or when campaigns aim to move audiences from awareness to evaluation and then to action.

5. Discussion

The findings of this theoretical analysis have both conceptual and practical implications. Conceptually, the paper extends research on advertising appeals by shifting

attention from message content alone to the interaction between message framing and media environment. The contribution lies in treating persuasion as a situated process rather than an isolated content effect. This perspective aligns with broader developments in media studies that emphasize affordances, platform logics, and audience practices as constitutive dimensions of communication outcomes.

The generational perspective also adds nuance to conventional segmentation models. Instead of assuming that age groups are defined only by demographic traits, this paper interprets generational differences as structured variations in media socialization, motivational emphasis, and processing habits. This approach avoids simplistic claims that one age group is emotional and another is rational. What matters is the fit between age-related tendencies and the demands of a given communication setting. In that sense, generation operates as a mediating condition that shapes the likelihood of response to different appeal-medium combinations.

For practitioners, the study suggests that media placement should be integrated into creative strategy from the outset. Advertisers often adapt campaign materials late in the planning process, after the core message has already been fixed. This paper argues that such a sequence is inefficient because the persuasive meaning of an appeal changes across media. Creative and media planning teams should therefore work from a shared segmentation framework in which platform choice, message dominance, and audience age profile are designed together [14].

Several managerial implications follow. Platform selection should be based on communication fit rather than exposure metrics alone. Mixed framing should be used strategically, with a clear understanding of which appeal leads and which supports. Generational targeting should inform both creative execution and channel sequencing. A campaign aimed at younger consumers may prioritize emotional engagement in entry-point media and then deploy rational substantiation at later stages. A campaign aimed at older consumers may reverse this logic by foregrounding concrete value and then introducing affective reinforcement. Brands should avoid assuming that one successful appeal on one platform can be replicated without modification across the entire media ecosystem.

At the same time, the framework has limitations. Generational categories are heterogeneous and may intersect with education, class, gender, urban context, and digital skill [15]. Media habits also change over time, which means that cohort differences should not be treated as fixed. In addition, product category and purchase risk strongly moderate the appeal-medium relationship. Future empirical studies should test the framework using comparative experiments or platform-based field data, paying attention to how different age groups move across media touchpoints in actual campaign settings.

Despite these limitations, the framework offers a useful basis for future research. It encourages scholars to examine persuasion as a sequence distributed across channels, rather than as an isolated exposure event [5, 10]. It also suggests that the study of advertising appeals can benefit from deeper engagement with media affordance theory and age-based audience analysis. Such integration is especially important in fragmented communication environments where the same brand message may appear in radically different forms across platforms.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the effectiveness of rational and emotional advertising appeals depends on their fit with media environments and generational audience characteristics.

By integrating message framing theory, media affordance analysis, processing fluency, and generational differences, the study develops a triadic model in which persuasion emerges from the alignment among appeal type, medium, and audience orientation.

The analysis shows that emotional appeals are generally more effective in media that support rapid attention, symbolic display, and affective immersion, especially when

targeting younger cohorts. Rational appeals are generally more effective in media that support informational clarity, verification, and stable interpretation, especially when targeting older cohorts or higher-risk decisions. Mixed framing becomes valuable when media formats allow sequential engagement or when campaigns need to connect awareness, credibility, and action across touchpoints.

The broader implication is that advertising strategy should move beyond the assumption that creative content can be separated from media placement. Media are active environments that shape how message frames are processed and trusted. Generational differences further influence this process by affecting what kinds of persuasion feel relevant, fluent, and credible. A more effective advertising strategy is therefore one that matches framing logic to both media affordance and audience generation, rather than relying on undifferentiated cross-platform repetition.

In increasingly complex media markets, such a fit-based approach can help advertisers allocate messages more precisely, improve communication efficiency, and build stronger audience resonance. Future empirical work can refine this framework, but the conceptual argument is already clear: persuasive success depends not only on what an advertisement says, but on where it appears and to whom it speaks.

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