

Impact of Emotional Advertising on Admission Intention for Non-State (Private) Universities in Sri Lanka: With Special Reference to Bachelor's Degree Programs

Emotional
Advertising

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of emotional appeals of love, humor, happiness, and excitement in shaping students' decisions to enroll in non-state universities, offering critical insights for enhancing institutional marketing strategies within a competitive higher education landscape. In a context, where state universities are traditionally favored for higher education, such as in Sri Lanka, non-state universities may face the challenge of distinguishing themselves through innovative branding. The study involved a quantitative, cross-sectional survey of 350 prospective students in the commercial capital, with multiple regression analysis used to assess the impact of these emotional factors on students' intentions to enroll. Findings reveal that out of emotional appeals, love, humor, and excitement significantly influence admission decisions, with love identified as the most impactful factor. Conversely, happiness showed no significant effect, underscoring the need for relational and dynamic emotional appeals in private university advertising. This study addresses a critical gap in higher education marketing by examining the underutilization of emotional advertising in student recruitment strategies. By focusing on Sri Lanka, a context where emotional appeals in education marketing remain largely unexplored, the research provides novel insights for private universities aiming to optimize institutional performance and competitiveness.

Keywords: Emotional Advertising, Admission Intention, Private Universities, Higher Education, Institutional Management.

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Background and Research Problem

Higher education operates globally under two primary management structures, as state-owned and non-state institutions (Marginson, 2018). Even though some countries preserve largely a state-driven higher education system, others have a mixed approach (Busia & Adjei, 2020). Other countries like the United States and Australia also rely heavily on non-state providers of higher education (Elken, 2020), with the colleges making up roughly 30% and 40%, respectively, of all enrollments (World Bank, 2021). On the other hand, countries with developing economies, such as India and Malaysia, have a more balanced share between state and non-state institutions (Mohamed & Chankseliani, 2023). When it comes to the Sri Lankan higher education landscape, World Bank (2021) records a literacy rate of 92.1%, and this, in addition to growing demand for non-state universities due to the limited capacity of public institutions, has placed private universities as major players in the education industry (Hossain et al., 2018). These institutions cater to students who are seeking alternatives to state universities after their Advanced Level examination and must navigate a competitive environment to attract and retain their student base. Irrespective of the structural differences, the duty of attracting high-quality students rests with the institutions themselves, unless the admissions are being coordinated through a centralized system (Xie & Teo, 2020).

In such situations, the role of communication becomes vital and very significant in attracting students (Meltareza & Tawaqal, 2023). Higher Educational institutes, particularly universities, depend to a great extent on a variety of marketing communication strategies focused on attracting and engaging prospective students (Camilleri, 2020). Advertising has been a very significant tool in that respect (Cordero-Gutiérrez & Lahuerta-Otero, 2020). Universities and other higher education providers use a variety of platforms to reach prospective students, including traditional media, digital campaigns, social media, and direct engagement activities (Kisiolek et al., 2021). However, a critical gap remains in understanding “What kind of appeal works most effectively with young people to make decisions about higher education?” Education is a product with high in credence qualities, as its true value is often difficult to assess even after consumption (Amrithesh et al., 2018). Further, for students and their families, seeking higher education is a high-stakes, consequential decision. The gravity of this decision stems from the long-term implications it entails for one's career path, financial commitments, and personal growth.

Literature on this shows that, due to the innately high-risk nature of education as a product, students engage in extensive cognitive decision-making models, adhering to predefined rational assessment models (McNicholas & Marcella, 2022). Such models involve problem identification, extensive information search, evaluation of options, and post-choice behaviors. In practice, the contrary can be seen. Promotion activities of leading private universities are frequently found to deviate from purely rational appeals, emphasizing the emotional aspects.

Before conducting the study, a web-based content analysis was carried out using promotional materials from the past three years of ten leading non-state universities in Sri Lanka. This analysis, grounded in the theoretical framework of advertising appeals, categorized the content into rational and emotional appeals (Zhang et al., 2014). It appeared that there is an

increased reliance on emotionally charged elements: bright colors, compelling narratives, and inspirational images, all designed to elicit strong emotional responses. The findings indicate that 70% of the materials predominantly rely on emotional appeals, suggesting that the underlying theme of these promotional strategies is emotion-driven. These insights informed the subsequent research by highlighting the significant role of emotional appeal in shaping admission-related perceptions. This led to the question: Is emotional advertising an effective way to influence the decisions of prospective students? Furthermore, among the range of emotional appeals of love, happiness, humor, and excitement, which of these is the most powerful in driving admission intentions? With this broad problem in mind, the study aimed to determine the following specific research questions.

Research Questions

RQ1: Does emotion of love in advertisements has an impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs?

RQ2: Does emotion of humor in advertisements has an impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs?

RQ3: Does emotion of happiness in advertisements has an impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs?

RQ4: Does emotion of excitement in advertisements has an impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs?

RQ5: What is the most influencing factor of emotional advertising on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs?

Theoretical Framework

This research is primarily guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), a widely recognized dual-process theory of persuasion developed by Petty & Cacioppo (1986). The ELM posits that individuals process persuasive messages via two distinct routes: the central route, which involves thoughtful and effortful consideration of arguments and evidence when motivation and ability are high, and the peripheral route, which relies on superficial cues like emotional appeals when motivation or ability for deep processing is lower (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). While the prevailing literature (Ex: Reyna & Farley, 2006) suggests that high-risk decisions like university selection typically led to rational, central route processing, the preliminary content analysis of Sri Lankan private university promotions revealed a significant reliance on emotional appeals, with 70% of materials using emotionally charged elements. This apparent contradiction is precisely where the ELM provides valuable insight, suggesting that even in high-involvement contexts, peripheral cues can play a significant role.

The Sri Lankan higher education landscape is uniquely shaped by a strong cultural preference for state universities, driven by aspirations for social mobility and community approval (Gleason, 2018). This collectivist cultural context, where group harmony often influences major life decisions, means that emotional advertising appeals such as those invoking love, happiness, or excitement may resound more deeply (Jourabchi Amirkhizi et al., 2023). These emotions, being rooted in social bonds and shared aspirations, could act as powerful peripheral cues, significantly impacting prospective students' admission intentions for non-state universities, even for such a high-stakes choice (Aithal & Aithal, 2023).

Therefore, this study adopts the ELM to determine the overall impact of emotional advertising appeals (peripheral route cues) on student admission intentions and to identify which specific emotional appeals (Ex: love, happiness, humor, excitement) are most potent in driving these intentions, ultimately aiming to provide actionable insights for private universities in their marketing strategies.

Literature Review

Within this chapter, a foundational understanding of the key concepts relevant to this study was established and existing literature was synthesized, and accordingly, the study's hypotheses were systematically developed with the support of the literature.

Emotional Advertising (EA)

Numerous studies in the field of marketing provide empirical proof that emotional appeals are effective at influencing consumers' purchasing decisions by effectively influencing their needs and wants (Bishnoi & Singh, 2022; J. Wang et al., 2021). According to Vrtana & Krizanova (2023) emotional advertisements can influence a consumer's spending habits and aid in their memory. Emotions are thought to be the primary factor in the formation of sentimental attitudes and the key indicator of an advertisement's success (Alsharif et al., 2024). There has been an increased interest in consumers' affective reactions to commercials in addition to the cognitive reactions (Kang et al., 2020). According to (Borawska et al. (2020), it's critical to comprehend the mechanisms underlying emotion to employ it successfully in advertising campaigns. The degree to which brand-related signals and emotion-producing cues are closely coupled in the advertisement will determine how successful the learning process is if the only objective is to develop an affective reaction, attitude (Ex: like it or hate it) or picture of the brand (Ruiz & Sicilia, 2004). Mizerski & White (1986) had investigated how companies use a range of emotions in their advertising to increase their persuasiveness. Dursun & Gumussoy (2021) strongly suggest that these emotional strategies, when applied within the higher education sector, possess similar potential to shape stakeholders' attitudes towards the institution.

Emotion of Love (EL)

Emotions of Love shows how emotional appeal in advertising improves relationships with viewers and aids in brand memorization by creating associations between customers and the brand. One of the most popular emotional strategies employed by businesses to persuade consumers to purchase their goods is love appeal (Pang et al., 2009). When the perceived value

and quality of a brand you are advertising are high, love appeal works wonderfully (Barbara et al., 2006). A study by Khanna (2016) that focuses on the attractiveness of love found that when there is a strong emotional tie between two people, exhibiting excellence and enhancing that bond will probably impact people's purchasing decisions. As per Carvalhal et al. (2023) the strategic use of love as an emotion in marketing has the potential to establish deep emotional bonds between potential students and higher education institutions, which in turn influences their intentions to enroll. According to the findings of the literature, hypothesis 1 can be developed as,

H1: Emotion of love in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.

Emotion of Humor (EHU)

Humorous emotions have a propensity to increase brand preference, and leveraging emotional appeal enhances the likelihood that customers would remember the brand and use it when making a purchase (Zaitoun, 2024). According to Weinberger & Gulas (1992), hilarious advertisements have the power to grab viewers' attention and pique their interest in the product they are advertising. Baraquio & Kato (2017) emphasized that humor employed in university advertising can be a successful emotional frame for university brand videos on social media that can influence potential students' attitudes. According to the findings of the literature, hypothesis 2 can be developed as follows.

H2: Emotion of humor in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.

Emotion of Happiness (EH)

The emotion of Happiness shows a joyful life, uniting individuals and fostering customer loyalty. Such feelings exhibit a superb theme that appeals to its customers' hearts and encourages positive reactions. When regularly utilized, this feeling aids the greatest amount of conversions (Kamran & Siddiqui, 2019). In accordance with a study by Ambler & Burne (1999), advertisements with a happy theme get the most shares and conversions. The emotion of happiness, being an element of brand affect, has a significantly big role to play in the development of brand engagement among higher educational institutions (Farhat et al., 2021). According to the findings of the literature, hypothesis 3 can be developed as follows,

H3: Emotion of happiness in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.

Emotion of Excitement (EE)

The viewers' sensations of entertainment are sparked by emotions of excitement, attracting their attention and improving message comprehension (Pang et al., 2009). A certain

product or service's brand awareness and brand recall are primarily enhanced by excitement/fun appeal. Brands that use exciting appeals in their advertising encourage individuals to purchase the brand to feel something extraordinary and moving. The same emotional appeal that marketers employ to emphasize the benefits of their brands and improve message understanding (Khanna, 2016). Ng (2016) had recognized that the sense of excitement in higher education marketing is addressed indirectly through the idea of developing a "hottest brand" and "coolest pedagogy," which aims to generate enthusiasm and appeal among prospective students by promoting new approaches and an active institutional image. According to the findings of the literature, hypothesis 4 can be developed as,

H4: Emotion of excitement in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.

Admission Intention (AI)

Purchase intention typically correlates with consumer behavior, perceptions, and attitudes. Purchase behavior is a crucial factor in how consumers obtain and assess a given product (Park & Kim, 2003). The consumer's purpose while choosing a product is influenced by a variety of elements, and the final choice is influenced by significant external influences as well. (Keller & Keller, 2013). Purchase intention for an education institute such as private university is called "Admission Intention" (Thanh Khoa Ho Chi Minh et al., 2020). So that "admission intention" is used on behalf of "purchase intention", in this research study. Simply admission intention means the drive that motivates you to apply or join for a specific private university. According to Masroor & Khattak (2023) Admission intention is taken to be the outcome motivated by advertisements of universities, which are more and more governed by the "marketization of intellect."

Research indicates that emotional appeals impact consumer behavior in distinct ways. For example, love appeals foster strong brand connections by creating associations with personal relationships, enhancing brand affinity (Kamran & Siddiqui, 2019). Humor, on the other hand, increases brand recall and engagement by capturing attention and creating a memorable experience, which positively affects purchase decisions Weinberger & Gulas (1992). Happiness-related appeals have been shown to encourage long-term loyalty by connecting brands to positive life experiences and aspirational outcomes (Kamran & Siddiqui, 2019). Excitement appeals enhance brand recall and drive interest by arousing positive affect and capturing attention (Khanna, 2016). The use of emotions in university branding can help in the formation of strong relationships with potential undergraduate students and in their decision-making (Durkin et al., 2012). This leads to the final hypothesis:

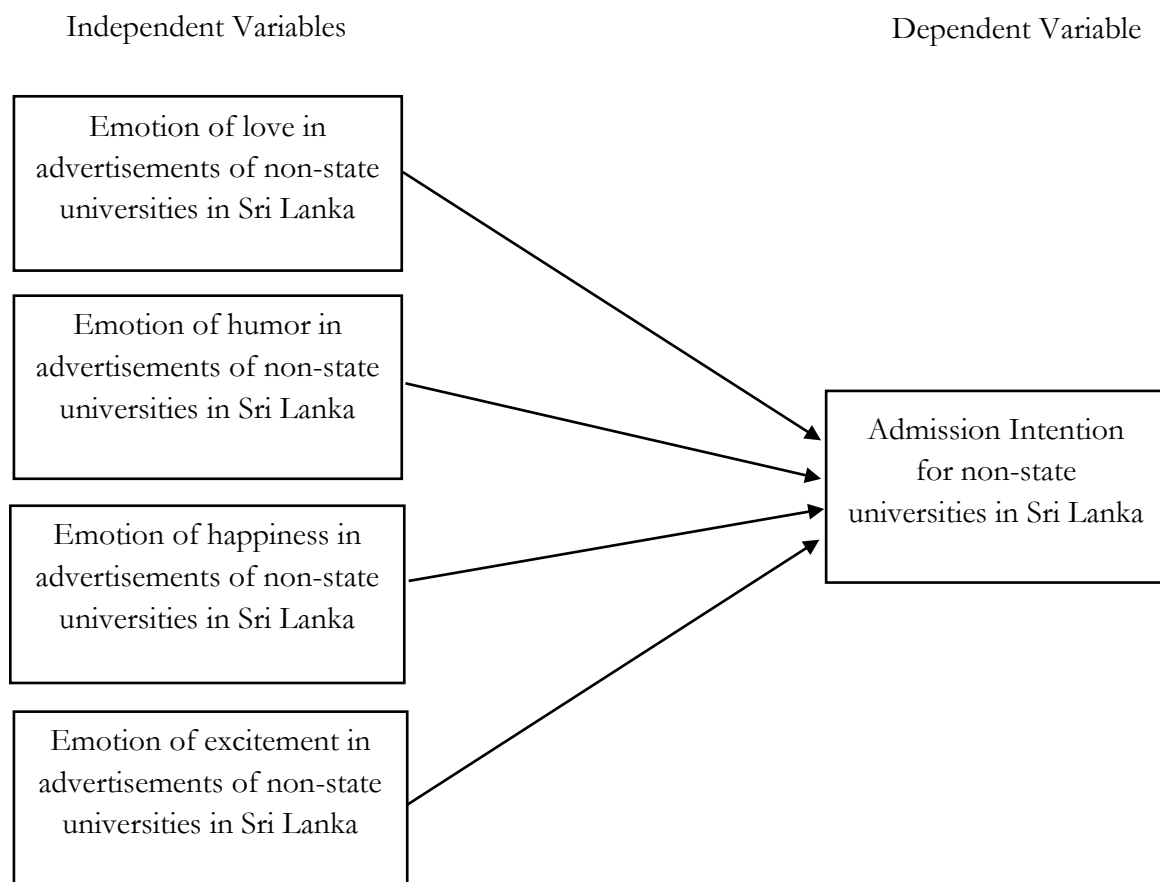
H5: Factors of emotional advertising do not equally influence the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.

While numerous studies broadly affirm the effectiveness of emotional appeals in influencing consumer purchasing decisions (Ex: Bishnoi & Singh, 2022; Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023; Wang et al., 2021), and their role in shaping attitudes and memory (Ex: Alsharif et al., 2024;

Kang et al., 2020), this research uniquely applies this general understanding to the specific, high-stakes domain of higher education admissions in a developing country. Although Dursun & Gumussoy (2021) suggest the potential for emotional strategies in higher education, and Durkin et al. (2012) acknowledge the role of emotions in university branding, this study delves deeper by systematically investigating the impact of specific emotional appeals as love, humor, happiness and excitement on admission intentions, a level of detailed analysis not extensively covered in previous studies within this sector.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study, as shown in Figure 1, illustrates the hypothesized direct impact of specific emotional advertising appeal and admission intention within the context of non-state universities in Sri Lanka. This framework suggests that emotional advertising appeals, specifically emotion of love, emotion of humor, emotion of happiness and emotion of excitement function as independent variables. Emotion of love aims to evoke feelings of warmth and connection. Emotion of humor uses comedic elements to engage. Emotion of happiness seeks to generate joy and contentment. Emotion of excitement strives to create feelings of enthusiasm and thrill. These four distinct emotional appeals are hypothesized to directly influence Admission Intention, which serves as the dependent variable, representing a prospective student's likelihood or willingness to apply for and enroll in a non-state university degree programs.



Source: Authors' construction

Figure I: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research Design

This study is descriptive research since it is focused on finding out the relationship between emotional advertising and admission intention for higher educational institutions. In this study the relationship between independent variables which relate to emotional advertisement and dependent variable which is the purchase intention is investigated, so that it belongs to correlational type of study. Findings are just explained with the collected and analyzed data. So, the involvement of the researcher is minimal. The study was being undertaken under the normal environment which can be classified as a study which is done in a non-contrived setting. The data is collected from individuals, which is the unit of analysis for the study. This study adopted a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time to analyze.

Population, Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

The population for the study comprises two distinct groups of students who demonstrate an intention to join non-state universities in Sri Lanka. The first group includes students who, due to their Advanced Level examination results, do not meet the eligibility criteria for admission to state universities and, therefore, opt for non-state university education. The second group consists of students who, despite possessing the academic qualifications necessary for state university admission, choose non-state universities based on their personal preferences and intentions. To ensure the feasibility and convenience of the research, the study will focus exclusively on students residing in the Colombo district. So, the population of the study can be defined as all the students in Colombo district, who are willing to join for a non-state university for their bachelor's degree.

Convenience sampling was employed by the researchers to select participants in this study. This selection of method was influenced by the fact that there is no extensive and available sampling frame for the targeted population of potential students for the bachelor's degree in Sri Lanka. Although convenience sampling has the danger of making selection biases and therefore restricting the immediate generalizability of the findings, its application in this context was a practical requirement to facilitate the possibility of data collection. It helped effective recruitment of respondents who were easily accessible and volunteered to take part. As such, the results of this research, however revealing they are regarding the intentions and perceptions of the sample, must be approached carefully.

350 individuals from the target population were considered as the sample size. According to Cohen (1992) chosen sample size of 350 respondents is considered to be acceptable, as it offers adequate statistical power for detecting a medium effect size for the intended multiple regression analysis at a conventional significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), in order to obtain a power of 0.80.

Data collection was enabled by a structured online questionnaire, facilitated primarily through Google Forms, as the main data collection tool. Respondents were selected based on a convenience sampling method. Survey links were distributed in various social media platforms with the potential university students, requesting voluntary participation. Out of the total first contact 493 possible respondents, 350 completed questionnaires were received, which reflected a response rate of about 71%, meeting the pre-established sample size needed for the intended statistical analyses.

The study operationalizes four emotional appeals in advertisements as love, humor, happiness, and excitement each with four indicators. The dependent variable, admission intention, is measured with five indicators. All items are adapted from Kamran & Siddiqui (2019) and assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). (Refer to Appendix 01 – Operationalization Table).

Data Analysis

Sample Profile

The study analyzed the demographic and behavioral characteristics of the respondents to understand their preferences and patterns related to private university enrollment. Among the 350 respondents, a majority were male, constituting approximately 61%, while females accounted for 39%, indicating that male students are more inclined toward private university education in the Colombo district. Regarding age distribution, the majority of respondents (60%) fell into the 19-22 age category, reflecting individuals who had recently completed their Advanced Level (A/L) examinations. The majority of respondents (60%) were aged 19-22, followed by 37% aged 23-26 and 3% aged 15-18. The education levels revealed that nearly 97% of respondents had completed their A/L examinations, highlighting the preference for higher qualifications before enrolling in private universities. Only a minority, around 3%, intended to apply with Ordinary Level (O/L) qualifications. The commerce stream emerged as the most popular A/L discipline, with 78% of respondents having followed this stream, while smaller proportions represented the mathematics, arts, biology, and technology streams. In terms of preferred degree programs, 74% of respondents expressed an interest in pursuing a management degree, aligning with the dominance of the commerce stream in their academic background. Other degree preferences, such as computer science and engineering, were less common, with less than 10% opting for these fields. Furthermore, NSBM was identified as the most preferred private university, chosen by 45.7% of respondents, followed by SLIIT with 26.9%. Social media was the primary advertising channel, influencing 77% of respondents.

Reliability

According to Table 1, we could observe that the Cronbach's Alpha related to all the variables considered are greater 0.7. Therefore, the study completes the reliability of the variables identified by the survey for further analysis.

Table 1: Reliability Measurement

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's
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		Alpha
Emotion of Love	04	0.895
Emotion of Humor	04	0.891
Emotion of Happiness	04	0.927
Emotion of Excitement	04	0.913
Admission Intention	05	0.933

Source: Authors' estimation

Validity

Face Validity

A panel of experts, including academics and marketing professionals familiar with the local higher education landscape, reviewed the instrument, which was based on the items adopted from Kamran & Siddiqui (2019) for the clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness, for the Sri Lankan context.

Construct Validity

Convergent Validity: The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure is needed to be higher than 0.5 to ensure the appropriateness of the sample, as specified by (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (BTS) is subjected to significance testing with a p-value needed to be less than 0.05, which shows that the inter item correlations were appropriate for factor analysis, according to Field (2005). In order to attain convergent validity, each of the constructs' Average Variance Extracted (AVE) needed to be higher than 0.5, while maintaining Composite Reliability (CR) values of more than 0.7, consistent with Malhotra (2008).

According to Table 2, it can be observed that with respect to all the variables considered KMO values are greater than 0.5, AVE values are also above 0.5 while the CR values are well above 0.7 satisfying the Convergent Validity of the respective variables studied.

Table 2: Convergent Validity Measures

Variable	KMO	BTS		CR	AVE
		Chi square	Sig.		
Standard	>0.5		<0.05	>0.7	>0.5
Emotion of Love	.835	817.366	.000	.927315	.76102
Emotion of Humor	.813	838.176	.000	.925107	.75533
Emotion of Happiness	.856	1088.111	.000	.948276	.82075
Emotion of Excitement	.825	980.424	.000	.939389	.79453
Admission Intention	.898	1397.859	.000	.949214	.78902

Source: Authors' estimation

Discriminant Validity: According to Table 3, discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell & Larcker (1981) criterion, which compares the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for

each construct with the squared correlations (shared variance) between constructs. Discriminant validity is considered adequate when a construct's AVE exceeds the squared correlation it shares with any other construct ($AVE > r^2$). As indicated in Table 3, all constructs demonstrated AVE values greater than the corresponding inter-construct shared variances, calculated via Pearson's correlation coefficients.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Representation

Variable	Emotion of Love	Emotion of Humor	Emotion of Happiness	Emotion of Excitement	Admission Intention
Emotion of Love	.76102	.38394	.48164	.45968	.45968
Emotion of Humor		.75533	.34457	.46376	.42250
Emotion of Happiness			.82075	.51123	.35761
Emotion of Excitement				.79453	.42380
Admission Intention					.78902

Source: Authors' estimation

Normality

The most common way to evaluate normality is to see if the distribution's Skewness and Kurtosis are between +2 and -2 (Cain et al., 2017). It is said to be normally distributed if the values are within the range. Table 4 shows that values of skewness and kurtosis of all variables are with -2 and +2 range, so it can be concluded all the components are normally distributed and qualified for further studies of the research.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
			Statistic	Std. Err.	Statistic	Std. Err.
Emotion of Love	3.4229	0.92624	-0.627	0.130	-.070	0.260
Emotion of Humor	3.1205	0.94074	-0.226	0.130	-0.544	0.260
Emotion of Happiness	3.4843	0.99916	-0.448	0.130	-0.621	0.260
Emotion of Excitement	3.3414	0.95485	-0.396	0.130	-0.392	0.260
Admission Intention	3.2269	0.99516	-0.348	0.130	-0.482	0.260

Source: Authors' estimation

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity happens when two or more independent variables are strongly correlated. According to Gregorich et al. (2021) rule of thumb that there should not be correlation coefficients beyond 0.8 between independent variables to be free from this issue. According to the Table 5 all the correlation coefficients are below than 0.8. So that it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity issue.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix

Analysis Method		EL	EHU	EHA	EE	AI
EL	Pearson Correlation	1	.624**	.694**	.678**	.678**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	350	350	350	350	350
EHU	Pearson Correlation		1	.587**	.681**	.650**
	Sig.(2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000
	N		350	350	350	350
EHA	Pearson Correlation			1	.715**	.598**
	Sig.(2-tailed)				.000	.000
	N			350	350	350
EE	Pearson Correlation				1	.651**
	Sig.(2-tailed)					.000
	N				350	350
AD	Pearson Correlation					1
	Sig.(2-tailed)					
	N					350

Source: Authors' estimation

Multiple Regression Analysis

To analyze the impact of all the factors of emotional advertising on the admission intention of private universities and for the identification of the most influencing factor, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted.

Considering the fitness of the model, as shown in Table 6, the adjusted R square value is 0.563, which means that 56.3% of the variations in admission intention for private universities is explained by the factors of emotional advertising. Hence it is identified that 43.7% of other factors would explain the consumer attitudes towards functional food. Since the adjusted R square is greater than 50% it can be concluded that the substantial amount of admission intention for private universities can be generated with independent variables namely, emotion of love, humor, happiness, and excitement in advertisements.

Table 6: Model Summary of Multiple Linear Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.754a	.568	.563	.65803

Source: Authors' estimation

According to Table 8, Emotion of Love has an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.352 and a significance level of 0.000. Since the significance value is below 0.05, we conclude that the Emotion of Love has a statistically significant and positive impact on admission intention, supporting Hypothesis 1. The positive coefficient indicates that an increase in the emotional appeal of love in advertisements is associated with an increase in students' intention to apply to non-state universities. The Emotion of Humor shows an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.288 and a significance level of 0.000. As the p-value is less than 0.05, this result indicates that the Emotion of Humor significantly and positively impacts admission intention, supporting Hypothesis 2. This suggests that humorous advertising effectively engages prospective students and encourages them to consider applying to the institution. The Emotion of Happiness has an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.073 and a significance level of 0.186. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, this finding indicates that the Emotion of Happiness does not have a statistically significant impact on admission intention. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is not supported. The Emotion of Excitement has an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.199 and a significance level of 0.001. With a p-value below 0.05, this finding supports Hypothesis 4, indicating that the Emotion of Excitement has a significant positive impact on admission intention. This suggests that advertisements evoking excitement can effectively attract prospective students. The coefficient (Beta) values for each emotion as Love (0.328), Humor (0.272), Excitement (0.191), and Happiness (0.073). Given the variation in these Beta values and their significance levels, it is evident that the factors of emotional advertising do not equally influence admission intention. This supports Hypothesis 5.

Table 8: Coefficients of Types of Emotional Advertising

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	.202	.147	1.367	.042
Emotion of Love	.352	.058	6.030	.000
Emotion of Humor	.288	.054	5.352	.000
Emotion of Happiness	.073	.055	1.325	.186
Emotion of Excitement	.199	.061	3.253	.001

Source: Authors' estimation

Table 9: Summary of Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Decision
1. Emotion of love in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.	Supported
2. Emotion of humor in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.	Supported
3. Emotion of happiness in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with	Rejected

special reference to bachelor's degree programs.	
4. Emotion of excitement in advertisements has a significant impact on the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.	Supported
5. Factors of emotional advertising have not equally influenced the admission intention for non-state universities in Sri Lanka with special reference to bachelor's degree programs.	Supported

Source: Authors' estimation

Discussion

This study highlights the significant role of emotional advertising in influencing prospective students' enrollment intentions for private universities, with love and excitement emerging as the most impactful appeals. The emotion of love, identified as the most influential, fosters relational connections and a sense of belonging. This aligns with the findings of Khanna (2016) on love appeals creating strong emotional ties that significantly shape decision-making. Carvalhal et al. (2023) reported that beyond general brand affinity, love appeals specifically build emotional commitment and foster a 'love brand' relationship between students and higher education institutions, enhancing their loyalty, which leads to admission intention. For prospective students, these appeals portray universities as environments that facilitate meaningful relationships, reinforcing their decision-making process. Excitement appeals resonate with students' aspirations for novelty, extracurricular activities, and personal growth. This finding aligns with Czarnecka & Mogaji's (2020) research, which highlighted the effectiveness of excitement in service-related marketing. Ng (2016) had observed that in the competitive higher education landscape, institutions strive to develop a 'hottest brand' and 'coolest pedagogy' to generate enthusiasm and appeal among prospective students, thereby indirectly leveraging excitement, which directly attract them. Humor also proved to be impactful, albeit secondary to love and excitement. Within higher education marketing demonstrates that humor, as an emotional frame in university-brand videos on social media, significantly influences positive attitudes of the potential students (Baraquo & Kato, 2017). For prospective students, humor may alleviate anxieties about the challenges of university life, making higher education appear more approachable. In contrast, happiness showed limited influence on admission intentions, diverging from findings of Kamran & Siddiqui (2019), where happiness significantly impacted consumer behavior. Prospective Sri Lankan students, who must contend with intense competition for scarce university slots, may place more value on emotions associated with security, academic rigor, career opportunities, or social status than on untouched cheerfulness. Within the particular cultural context involved, the worth of an ad that causes absolute happiness may be secondary to appeals that touch on more fundamental concerns or desires regarding future success and social status. In this case, students might consider relational (love) and aspirational (exciting) appeals more relevant to their higher education decision-making than a general conceptualization of satisfaction as happiness. This suggests that, in the context of university selection, students prioritize emotions addressing relational and aspirational needs over general pleasure. By confirming the power of love, excitement, and humor in emotional advertising, this study extends the understanding of their effectiveness from consumer goods to high involvement service

products like education, demonstrating their value in influencing prospective students' decision-making processes. It aligning with the finding of Dursun & Gumussoy (2021), which emphasize emotional appeals have been identified as a significant factors in enhancing a university's attractiveness among stakeholders, a crucial precursor to student attraction and admission decisions.

Implications of the Study

Theoretical Implications

This study extends the understanding of emotional advertising by demonstrating its relevance and effectiveness in the context of high-involvement service products, particularly private higher education. Traditionally, emotional advertising theories have been applied to consumer goods and low-involvement purchases, but this research validates their applicability in influencing complex decision-making processes, especially as university enrollment. The findings reveal that emotional appeals such as love and excitement significantly impact admission intention, underscoring the critical role of emotions in shaping perceptions even in rational, high-stakes decisions. By identifying the differential impact of these emotional appeals, the study refines theoretical frameworks, highlighting the nuanced effectiveness of specific emotions in influencing consumer behavior. Furthermore, this research offers culturally specific insights, particularly in the Sri Lankan context, where relational and aspirational emotional appeals (love and excitement) resonate more strongly than generic emotions like happiness. These findings enrich the limited body of literature on emotional advertising in higher education marketing and provide a foundation for further research that integrates marketing theories into educational management and policy studies. This study significantly advances emotional advertising theory by applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to the high-involvement context of private higher education. The findings challenge traditional ELM interpretations, showing that emotional appeals like love and excitement deeply influence admission intention of potential buyers (Students). This suggests emotions are not simply peripheral cues in high-stakes decisions, rather they can actively motivate deeper cognitive processing or serve as direct experiential arguments. The research further provides crucial cultural insights, demonstrating that the effectiveness of specific emotional appeals is culturally mediated within the ELM framework. The validated conceptual framework offers a strong tool for future theoretical development in marketing and educational studies.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide actionable insights that inform higher education policy, institutional management, performance, and branding strategies for private universities and similar institutes, particularly in the area of marketing communications. Institutions need to focus on bringing relational connections to the forefront. This can be achieved through short video love commercials on social media sites like TikTok and Instagram Reels featuring actual testimonials of alumni success stories emphasizing mentorship opportunities and positive student associates. User-generated content initiatives requesting current students to share their 'university family' stories or 'best friends on campus' tales can also solidify institutions as nurturing spaces that enable the formation of personal and professional networks. Excitement appeals can

emphasize lively university life and future opportunities. This becomes engaging YouTube pre-roll advertisements featuring extracurricular life, state-of-the-art facilities, and career-enhancing possibilities in the form of rapid-fire medleys of student success and innovation laboratories. Live interactive campus tours on Instagram or Facebook Live can also depict the institution as lively and aspirational, with potential students able to virtually feel the energy. Humor, though a secondary element, is essential in the alleviation of anxieties related to university life and in building a memorable and friendly brand identity. Higher education institutions may use this to their advantage by producing short, relatable comedic vignettes for social media platforms (Ex: Instagram Stories and TikTok) that lightheartedly tackle typical issues affecting students or academic problems, thus making higher education more accessible and eliminating intimidation feelings. In contrast, happiness, which showed no significant impact, should receive less focus, allowing resources to concentrate on more effective emotional drivers. By aligning advertising strategies with emotions proven to influence admission intention, institutions can enhance brand equity, boost enrollment rates, and align their performance with national education policy objectives. These communication approaches not only reinforce institutional competitiveness but also contribute to the broader sustainability and reputation of the higher education sector.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study provides valuable insights into the influence of emotional advertising on admission intentions for non-state universities in Sri Lanka; however, it is subject to several limitations. The research examined only four emotional factors as love, humor, happiness, and excitement, while excluding other potentially impactful emotions, such as pride, fear, hope, and nostalgia, which may further enhance the understanding of emotional advertising's effects. Geographically, the study was confined to the Colombo District, which may limit the applicability of findings to other regions in Sri Lanka, with differing socio-economic and cultural contexts. The sample of 350 participants, selected using a convenience sampling method, raises concerns regarding representativeness, as it excludes other key stakeholders, such as parents and guardians, who play a critical role in students' university choices. Furthermore, the reliance on a quantitative, cross-sectional design offers a snapshot of the phenomenon at a single point in time but does not account for temporal changes or evolving preferences. Additionally, as the study primarily focused on students' perspectives, it overlooks the potential influence of parents' views, which could provide distinct and valuable insights into educational decision-making. The study's cultural specificity, rooted in Sri Lanka's unique higher education environment, further limits the generalizability of its findings to other international contexts.

To address these limitations, future research could adopt a more comprehensive approach by incorporating a broader range of emotional factors, including pride, fear, and hope, to provide a more nuanced understanding of emotional advertising. Expanding the sample size to include participants from diverse geographic and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as incorporating the perspectives of parents and guardians, would enhance the generalizability and depth of the findings. A dedicated exploration of parents' viewpoints could reveal different priorities or emotional triggers influencing educational decisions, complementing the insights gained from students. Longitudinal research designs could offer valuable insights into how the effectiveness of emotional advertising evolves over time. Additionally, qualitative methodologies,

such as focus groups or in-depth interviews, could uncover deeper motivations behind students' and parents' responses to emotional advertising, particularly in understanding the minimal impact of happiness. Comparative studies conducted across countries would further contribute to identifying universal versus culturally specific elements of emotional advertising in the context of higher education marketing. These future research directions would contribute significantly to advancing theoretical and practical knowledge in this domain.

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