

Appeal to Fear

Authored by
mohammad looti

November 19, 2022

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2022). *Appeal to Fear*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=39334>

An appeal to fear (also called argumentum ad metum or argumentum in terrorem) is a fallacy in which a person attempts to create support for an idea by using deception and propaganda in attempts to increase fear and prejudice toward a competitor. The appeal to fear is common in marketing and politics.

Logic

This fallacy has the following argument form:

Either P or Q is true.

Q is frightening.

Therefore, P is true.

The argument is invalid. The appeal to emotion is used in exploiting existing fears to create support for the speaker's proposal, namely P. Also, often the false dilemma fallacy is involved, suggesting Q is the proposed idea's sole alternative.

Example

"If you continue to drink, you will die early as your father did."

"If you cannot graduate from high school, you will live in poverty for the rest of your life"

"Voting for him is the same as voting for the terrorists."

"If you tell a lie, then no one will ever believe what you say again."

Fear, uncertainty and doubt

Fear, uncertainty and doubt (FUD) is the appeal to fear in sales or marketing; in which a company disseminates negative (and vague) information on a competitor's product. The term originated to describe misinformation tactics in the computer hardware industry and has since been used more broadly. FUD is "implicit coercion" by "any kind of disinformation used as a competitive weapon." FUD creates a situation in which buyers are encouraged to purchase by brand, regardless of the relative technical merits. Opponents of certain large computer corporations state that the spreading of fear, uncertainty, and doubt is an unethical marketing technique that these corporations consciously employ.

Image wars

Although FUD was originally attributed to IBM, the 1990s saw the term become often associated with industry giant Microsoft. The Halloween documents (leaked internal Microsoft documents whose authenticity was verified by the company) use the term FUD explicitly to describe a potential

tactic against open source software. More recently, Microsoft has issued statements about the "viral nature" of the GNU General Public License (GPL), which open source proponents purport to be FUD.

As persuasion

Fear appeals are often used in marketing and social policy, as a method of persuasion. Fear is an effective tool to change attitudes, which are moderated by the motivation and ability to process the fear message. Examples of fear appeal include reference to social exclusion, and getting laid-off from one's job, getting cancer from smoking or involvement in car accidents and driving.

Fear appeals are nonmonotonic, meaning that the level of persuasion does not increase in proportion to the amount of fear that is used. A study of public service messages on AIDS found that if the messages were too aggressive or fearful, they were rejected by the subject; a moderate amount of fear is the most effective attitude changer.

Others argue that it is not the level of fear that is decisive changing attitudes via the persuasion process. Rather, as long as a scare-tactics message includes a recommendation to cope with the fear, it can work.