

## **Conceptualising Anticipatory Guilt in a Non-Durable Consumer Goods Context**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of a specific type of guilt appeal. The literature suggests that there are three types of guilt appeals. However the effectiveness of each type of guilt appeal is unclear. This study will investigate the effectiveness of one type of guilt appeal, namely anticipatory guilt appeal using a non-durable consumer good advertisement. The study explores the relationships between anticipatory guilt, attitude towards the brand, inferences of manipulative intent and purchase intentions. Results show no significant relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions. However, attitude towards the brand increased the likelihood of purchase intentions. The research suggests that anticipatory guilt appeals are inappropriate for the non-durable consumer goods advertisements. It raises an interesting question why so many advertisers are utilising this type of guilt appeal to target consumers. Managerial implications and future directions radiating from the results are discussed.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The persuasive nature of guilt appeals can be a powerful tool for advertisers (Cotte et al. 2005). That is, guilt can act as a motivating, action oriented emotion due to the unambiguous nature of the linkage between feeling of guilt and actions that led to its elicitation (Lewis 1993). Ghingold (1980) suggests that when someone is anticipating the feeling of guilt or feeling guilty, they will attempt to reduce the feeling of guilt by making retributions. This phenomenon is also supported by the Negative State Model which suggests that individuals will seek to reduce these negative emotions (Cialdini and Kenrick 1976). A review of the literature shows that guilt construct has been demonstrated as an important variable in social marketing (e.g. Alden and Crowley 1995; Becheur et al. 2007; Bennett 1998; Hibbert et al. 2007; Lindsey 2005), marketing communications (Ghingold 1980; Pinto and Priest 1991) and advertising (Cotte et al. 2005;

Coulter and Pinto 1995). It has also been empirically shown to influence consumer decision making process (Burnett and Lunsford 1994), ad and brand attitudes (Coulter and Pinto 1995; Godek and LaBarge 2006), and donation intentions (Hibbert et al. 2007).

While researchers have primarily explored guilt appeal as a unified construct (e.g. Coulter and Pinto 1995; Ghingold and Bozinoff 1982), the literature has identified three types of guilt appeals namely; anticipatory, reactive and existential guilt appeals. As such, discrepancies between the findings have been reported with studies that have explored specific types of guilt appeals (Cotte et al. 2005; Hibbert et al. 2007). These findings are further questioned when the measurement of guilt is conceptualised using the unified construct despite the differences. There have been calls to develop specific guilt scales (such as Lindsey 2005).

This study is part of a larger study and it will attempt to bridge the gaps in literature by only focusing on anticipatory guilt appeal in a non-durable consumer goods context. Specifically, it will explore the relationships between anticipatory guilt, attitude towards the brand, inferences of manipulative intent and purchase intentions. In response to different measurements of guilt, this research also explores the development of a potential scale to measure anticipatory guilt.

## **RELEVANT LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

### **Three types of guilt appeals**

The following sections provide a brief background on the three types of guilt. Rawlings (1970) defined anticipatory guilt as guilt evoked when an individual contemplates a potential violation of one's own standards. Past research shows that this type of guilt is more positive than others, as it can lead to action as a mean to avoid the feeling of guilt (Godek and LaBarge 2006; Lindsey 2005; Rawling 1970). Due to this unique characteristic anticipatory guilt is used more than other types of guilt. In fact, research indicates that over 61% of guilt advertisements applied the use of anticipatory guilt (Huhmann and Brotherton 1997). Additionally, Huhmann and Brotherton (1997) showed that a majority of anticipatory guilt ads are used in the non-durable consumer goods advertisements. Research to date has only explored anticipatory guilt in the following contexts, organ donation (Lindsey 2005), obesity control (Wansink and Chandon 2006) and financial services (Godek and LaBarge 2006). Thus, empirical support for anticipatory guilt is limited and almost non-existent in a non-durable consumer goods context (Cotte et al. 2005).

Rawlings (1970) defined reactive guilt as a response to the past and over an act of having violated those standards. It is less common than anticipatory guilt as it evokes past transgressions and it evokes more negative emotions. Therefore it creates a short term negative mood (Godek and LaBarge 2006). Additionally, reactive guilt appeals produced higher inferences of manipulative intent due to consumers reacting negatively towards the ad (Godek and LaBarge 2006). Consumers process reactive guilt ads systematically and every detail of the ad is questioned (Godek and LaBarge 2006). This enhances negative reactions towards the ad and

consequently, advertisers tend to avoid the use of reactive guilt appeals (Huhmann and Brotherton 1997).

Existential guilt is defined as a comparison between one's own well being to the well being of others and encourages action to bring the two closer together (Izard 1977). Charities often use this type of guilt appeal because their strategy fits well with the philosophy of existential guilt (Huhmann and Brotherton 1997). Hence charitable ads often attempt to evoke existential guilt to gain donations (e.g. Hibbert et al. 2007). Literature shows 21.6% of charitable ads used guilt appeals and 85.7% of these ads used existential guilt appeals (Huhmann and Brotherton 1997).

The study is part of a larger study and it will only present the finding from one section. The results from anticipatory guilt appeal will be discussed. Further, this type of guilt appeal has been chosen for the study due to its prevalence in non-durable consumer goods advertisements (Huhmann and Brotherton 1997).

### **Persuasion literature**

However, changing consumers' behaviour through evoking guilt is a difficult task. Literature indicates that blatant attempts to arouse guilt simply do not work (Coulter and Pinto 1995). Past research suggests that highly intensive guilt appeals evoked anger, irritation and annoyance, hence consumers responded negatively towards the ad (Coulter and Pinto 1995). It is suggested that moderate levels of guilt appeals are most effective (Coulter and Pinto 1995). Their findings were consistent with Bennett's (1996) research in fear appeals which suggested that there is an inverted-U relationship between ad intensity and ad effectiveness. That is, ad effectiveness will

increase with ad intensity only to a certain degree. Once ad intensity reaches its threshold, ad effectiveness will face diminishing returns because the ad is viewed as being manipulative. More recently, Cotte et al., (2005) have shown that guilt appeals will have a positive effect on attitude towards the brand if audiences do not find the ad manipulative.

Previous studies indicate anticipatory guilt has a positive effect on behaviour (Lindsey 2005). However, there are conflicting results. It has been suggested that guilt and behavioural intentions are not related in a consumer non-durable goods context (Coulter and Pinto 1995). However, their research explored guilt as a uniform construct. Therefore, it is possible that specific type of guilt appeals could be more appropriate under this context. The ambiguity between the results suggests that there could be a latent relationship between guilt and behavioural intentions. Further, the lack of a specific scale to measure anticipatory guilt (in place of the generic guilt scale) may have contributed to these inconsistencies (Cotte et al. 2005).

Campbell's (1995) findings suggest that there is a positive relationship between attitude towards the brand and behavioural intentions. The theory of planned behaviour supports Campbell's argument and suggests that favourable attitudes towards the behaviour results in favourable behavioural intentions (Ajzen 1991). Furthermore, researchers have shown that attitude towards the brand can moderate the relationship between consumers' reaction to emotional advertisement and behavioural intentions (Chattopadhyay and Basu 1990). Based on this concept, the relationship between anticipatory guilt and behavioural intentions could be moderated by attitude towards the brand. In this study, purchase intention will be measured to capture behavioural intentions.

It is reflected in the literature that inferences of manipulative intent (IMI) emerged to have a significant influence in the relationships involving guilt appeals in advertising. The construct of IMI is defined as advertisers' attempt to persuade audiences by inappropriate, unfair or manipulative means (Campbell 1995). IMI has a direct and indirect impact on behavioural intentions and the importance of IMI has been clearly identified by researchers (Cotte et al. 2005; Hibbert et al. 2007). Furthermore, IMI has a negative effect on guilt (Hibbert et al. 2007; Cotte et al. 2005) and attitude towards the brand (Campbell 1995; Cotte et al. 2005). Reactance theory can be used to explain these findings and verifies that forceful messages are rejected by audiences due to perceived loss of freedom to choose their own course of action (Brehm 1966).

Building on the preceding discussion, this paper presents a number of hypotheses relating to the key constructs of anticipatory guilt appeal, attitude towards the brand, inferences of manipulative intent, and purchase intentions. They are as follows:

- H1: A positive relationship exists between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions.
- H2: A positive relationship exists between attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions.
- H3: Inferences of manipulative intent will moderate the relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions.
- H4: Attitude towards the brand will moderate the relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A convenience sample consisting of two hundred and thirty eight respondents from a large Western Australian suburb participated in the study. A total of 219 valid responses were collected. A total of 19 responses were excluded from the analysis due to incompleteness and major errors. The sample consists of 47.5% males and 52.5% females. The majority falls in the age bracket of 18 to 19 (44.7%), and majority of whom are Australian citizens (56.2%). Further, a large percentage of respondents had an annual income between 0-\$5000 (31.1%). A real broadcast ad from an unknown brand (East Midland Designer Outlet) lasting thirty seconds was used as the stimulus. It has been suggested that prior brand knowledge may have an impact on emotional response (Chattopadhyay and Basu 1990) thus a brand with limited knowledge was used for the study. The choice of the ad was tested using a focus group of 7 members which rated the ad highly as evoking anticipatory guilt. The ad shows that all the designer clothes and shoes are on sale for the coming Christmas and asked viewers to spoil someone special. After viewing the ad, respondents were asked to imagine that their brother or sister whom they haven't seen for a very long period was coming home for Christmas. Respondents were told that they need to buy a present (such as a designer T-shirt) with limited amount of money. Choosing not to buy a present or not to spoil the sibling would evoke anticipatory guilt. Thus the respondents recorded their reactions to the ad based on a number of scales on a self administered survey.

Three established scales namely attitude towards the brand (adapted from MacKenzie and Lutz 1989), inferences of manipulative intent (adapted from Campbell, 1995), and purchase intentions (adapted from Putrevu and Lord 1994). Further, brand familiarity was measured using one item "I am very familiar with this brand". All the scales were measured on a seven point Likert scale.



The anticipatory guilt scale was developed for this study. This scale was developed following the guidelines by DeVellis (2003), Churchill (1979), and Wells et al. (1971). The initial 48 items were reduced down to three factors namely, State Guilt (Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient = .795), Trait Guilt (Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient = .491) and Financial Guilt (Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficient = .387). The other statistics are all deemed acceptable (KMO and Bartlett's test = .772, Approx Chi-Square = 489.397, Df = 45, Sig. = .000, M = 4.378, SD = 1.145). The model was analysed using only State Guilt as the other two dimensions did not meet the required reliability tests. Further analysis of scale reliability using Cronbach's alpha value shows that, attitude towards the brand scale was 0.838 (M = 4.634, SD = 0.772), inference of manipulative intent scale was .869 (M = 4.930, SD = 0.878) and purchase intentions was 0.917 (M = 3.352, SD = 1.407), all of which are unidimensional and statistically deemed acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Additionally, results indicate a low brand familiarity (M = 1.991, SD = 1.192) for the East Midland Designer Outlet.

## **RESULTS**

Regression analysis of the model indicates that no significant relationship exists between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions ( $R^2 = .153$ , Beta = -.022, Sig. = .730) hence H1 is rejected. Results from the second regression shows that there is a positive relationship between attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions ( $R^2 = .153$ , Beta = .395, Sig. = .000). Hence H2 is also supported.

Further, the results did not reflect that IMI moderated the relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions, thus rejecting H3 (Table 1). In addition, attitude towards the brand did

not moderate the relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions (Table 2), hence H4 was rejected.

**Table 1:** Moderated Regression Results for IMI (H3)

Independent Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change	df	Sig.
Anticipatory Guilt	.004	.805	1	.004	.805	217	.371
Anticipatory Guilt + IMI	.006	.642	1	.002	.481	216	.489
Anticipatory Guilt + (Anticipatory Guilt + IMI) + (Anticipatory Guilt x IMI)	.007	.471	1	.001	.135	215	.714

*Dependent variable: purchase intentions*

\*Sig at  $P < 0.05$

**Table 2:** Moderated Regression Results for Attitude Towards the Brand (Abr)(H4)

Independent Variables	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df	R <sup>2</sup> Change	F Change	df	Sig.
Anticipatory Guilt	.004	.805	1	.004	.805	217	.371
Anticipatory Guilt + Abr	.153	19.449	1	.149	19.128	216	.000*
Anticipatory Guilt + (Anticipatory Guilt +Abr) + (Anticipatory Guilt x Abr)	.153	12.908	1	.000	1.285	215	.946

*Dependent variable: purchase intentions*

*\*Sig at  $P < 0.05$*

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The finding supported Coulter and Pinto's (2005) conclusions and contradicted the results from Lindsey's (2005) organ donation research. The results show that there is no relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions in the context of non-durable consumer goods. In Coulter and Pinto (2005) study, fictitious brands were used to explore the effectiveness of a unified guilt construct and found no relationship between the two variables. The current study has further confirmed their conclusions using one specific type of guilt appeal. This phenomenon is explained in detail in the following sections.

Firstly, the study investigated the effectiveness of anticipatory guilt for an unknown brand. It is possible that consumers' brand familiarity is influential to the effectiveness of anticipatory guilt appeals. This suggestion is supported from Lwin and Phau (2008) that showed the moderating impact of prior attitudes toward the brand on donation intentions. Thus it may be a requirement for a brand to achieve familiarity and favourable attitudes before utilising guilt appeals. Secondly, the measurement for anticipatory guilt is still in development and it needs further refinement. Thus this may have influenced the results. Thirdly, consumers may view anticipatory guilt appeal as an inappropriate method to advertise non-durable consumer goods (such as designer clothes). If this is the case, the current findings and also Coulter and Pinto (1995), it questions why a majority of advertisers are using anticipatory guilt in a non-durable consumer goods context. However, more empirical support is needed before validating the findings.

In addition, a significant relationship was observed between attitudes towards the brand and purchase intentions. The finding is inline with the literature and shows that a favourable attitude towards the brand predicted purchase intentions (e.g. Campbell 1995).

However, in contrast to suggested beliefs (such as Cotte et al. 2005), IMI does not moderate the relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions. This confirms past studies (Lwin and Phau 2008). However, Cotte et al. (2005) and Hibbert et al. (2007) did suggest that IMI have an indirect effect on guilt thus IMI could act as a mediator. Analysis of attitude towards the brand showed that it did not moderate the relationship between anticipatory guilt and purchase intentions. That is favourable attitude towards the brand did not enhance the likelihood of purchase intention. As suggest above, brand familiarity could be a key factor in the persuasiveness of anticipatory guilt appeals.

This research has explored a scale to measure anticipatory guilt appeals to assist academics and practitioners with manipulation checks as well as to measure this specific guilt appeal. For example, the scale could be used to ensure that the advertisements are only evoking intended emotions (Coulter and Pinto 1995). However, the scale is still in the development stage, and further validation of the scale is necessary.

Findings of this research are limited to purchase intentions in a non-durable consumer goods context (i.e. designer clothes) and future research should extended this to other products and contexts. Further, the research is part of a larger study and it is limited only to one type of guilt appeal. Future research should compare which type of guilt appeal has the strongest influence on

purchase intentions by measuring all three types of guilt in one study. One of the contributions of this research is the development of the anticipatory guilt scale. However, validation of the scale through other forms of products and services is also needed. The convenience sample may have its merits in this context, but a larger non convenience sample with more variation in demographic profiles should also be pursued for future studies.

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