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A content analysis of guilt appeals in popular magazine advertisements

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Abstract (Summary)

Advertisers' application of guilt appeals as a method of influence is documented. A content analysis of guilt advertisements in 24 magazines reveals that: 1. Guilt appeals appear in advertising at a level comparable to that of other appeals. 2. Guilt appeals appear in every magazine type, but are most common in news and general editorial magazines. 3. The majority of guilt ads have anticipatory guilt appeals. 4. The single most common guilt statement is the statement of fact. 5. Guilt is typically employed in the ad copy or in both the copy and visual images. 6. Guilt appeals appear most often in ads for charities and health-related products. Implications of the content analysis are considered and research directions outlined.

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[Headnote]

The authors document advertisers' application of guilt appeals as a method of influence. A content analysis of guilt advertisements in 24 magazines reveals that (1) guilt appeals appear in advertising at a level comparable to that of other appeals (e.g., humor, sexual, and comparisons), (2) guilt appeals appear in every magazine type, but are most common in news and general editorial magazines, (3) the majority of guilt ads have anticipatory guilt appeals, (4) the single most common guilt statement is the statement of fact, (5) guilt is typically employed in the ad copy or in both the copy and visual images, and (6) guilt appeals appear most often in ads for charities and health-related products. Implications of the content analysis are considered and research directions outlined.

Negative appeals have long been recognized as an important method of persuasion, and advertisers have used such appeals for decades (e.g., Higbee 1969). However, most academic research on the application of negative appeals in advertising has focused on fear. For example, a search of *Journal of Advertising* issues from 1972 to 1995 uncovered three articles on fear appeals, but none on guilt appeals. Other negative appeals—anger, insecurity, envy, regret, and shame—also have been largely ignored.

Guilt appeals have begun to receive some attention from researchers of emotional appeals in advertising. Coulter and Pinto (1995) measured the effect of guilt appeals on ad and brand attitudes. Burnett and Lunsford (1994) conceptualized the role of guilt in consumer purchase decisions. Ruth and Faber (1988) demonstrated that consumers exposed to guilt appeals in ads have a higher intention to comply with suggested behaviors than other consumers. Those studies have confirmed that guilt is an identifiable construct that can be manipulated by advertisers, but they have not addressed the broader issues of how or how often advertisers are using that type of emotional appeal.

To understand advertisers' application of guilt appeals, researchers need to know how those appeals are executed and the frequency with which they appear in current advertising. The value of further research on the effects of guilt appeals is questionable without empirical documentation of their actual use in advertising. Moreover, specific knowledge of the application of guilt appeals can aid researchers in recognizing the guilt phenomenon, designing realistic experiments, selecting suitable variables and factor levels, and producing externally valid findings.

We therefore conducted a study to investigate the extent to which guilt appeals appear in popular magazine advertising, as well as their mode of presentation. Magazine advertising was chosen because it reaches a national audience, has verbal and visual components, and can present extended copy in which a variety of appeals may appear. After reviewing relevant literature, we report the results of a content analysis of the guilt advertisements in 24 popular magazines. We enumerate the kinds of guilt and the verbal and visual components of the guilt appeals found. We then consider the implications of our findings and propose an agenda for future research.

Literature Review

Guilt is one of the most common negative emotions across cultures (Izard 1977). Consumer guilt has been defined as an emotional state involving penitence, remorse, self-blame, and self-punishment experienced after committing a violation or contemplating a future violation of internalized standards of proper behavior (Lascu 1991; Mosher 1965). Izard (1977, p. 423) states: "Usually people feel guilty when they become aware that they have broken a rule and violated their own standards or beliefs. They may also feel guilty for failing to accept or carry out their responsibility." The guilt-inducing transgression may result from a decision to purchase an unapproved product or to not purchase a product "prescribed by moral, societal, or ethical principles" (Lascu 1991, p. 290). For example, a recent television ad told parents, "Saturday mornings-you can spend them catching up on your sleep or catching up with your kids over some Bisquik pancakes." A violation of the value of spending quality time with or properly caring for one's children would occur if a parent decided to sleep rather than make Bisquik pancakes for the family. The contemplation of that decision may cause guilt and lead the parent to adopt the behavior proposed by the advertiser.

Guilt appeals can be influential in modifying consumer behavior, because guilt is the primary motivational factor in a mature conscience (Izard 1977). When feeling guilty, one is preoccupied with a violation or a potential violation, and wants to reduce the level of guilt by making retribution (Ghingold 1981; Izard 1977). If the advertiser shows that retribution can be made through the use of some good or service, the consumer may be persuaded to adopt that behavior to reduce the guilt induced through advertising appeals.

However, the types of goods and services that consumers might be persuaded to purchase by a guilt appeal is not known, because experimental research on guilt in advertising has typically pertained to charity and volunteer services. The experiments measured the effect of guilt appeals on willingness to volunteer for community projects (McMillen 1971; Yinon et al. 1976) or to donate to charities (Bozinoff and Ghingold 1983; Eayrs and Ellis 1990; Regan 1971). A couple of experiments have also investigated the effect of guilt appeals in hypothetical food and toiletry ads (Coulter and Pinto 1995; Pinto and Priest 1991). To determine which product classes are most often advertised with guilt appeals, an investigation of ads for a variety different goods and services is needed.

Guilt and Other Negative Appeals

Guilt is related to the negative emotions of shame, fear, and regret. Those negative emotions have often been confused in the literature, because all involve a negative outcome that has occurred or may occur as a result of an individual's action or inaction. Careful analysis requires that guilt be distinguished from the other three negative emotions.

Guilt and shame, for instance, both involve the perception that the self is at fault for a negative outcome. Guilt appeals focus on one's behavior as a past or future transgression or as a failure to care for others. In contrast, shame appeals center on other people's possible evaluations of the self should some goal not be attained (Niedenthal, Tangney, and Gavanski 1994; Wicker, Payne, and Morgan 1983). The shame arising from others' evaluations is associated with feelings of helplessness, self-consciousness, and inferiority (Gilbert, Pehl, and Allan 1994). In an advertising context, shame appeals can be used to imply that others will negatively evaluate a person who does not buy the advertised product. For example, Cascade dishwasher detergent commercials depict a scenario in which a party host is ashamed because another detergent left spots on the glasses. Such an appeal uses social embarrassment as a source of shame.

Guilt differs from fear in that guilt is an internal emotional response following the violation of a standard or the contemplation of violating a standard, whereas fear is an a priori anticipation of an external punishment or threat (Ghingold 1981; Rawlings 1970). Guilt and fear also differ in terms of the individual's level of control. Guilt is likely when one has some control over a situation, whereas fear occurs when one has little, if any, control over a situation (Burnett and Lunsford 1994). In addition, guilt and fear have different outcomes. Guilt compels one to make retribution for a transgression, whereas fear compels one to avoid an unwanted outcome (Ghingold 1981).

Regret can be distinguished from guilt in that regret does not involve knowingly violating a standard of behavior. Instead, one experiences regret when dissatisfied with a choice, because a better choice may have been made if more information or other alternatives had been available (Simonson 1992). For example, "I could have had a V-8!" evokes regret that something other than a V-8 was consumed, but not guilt. However, regret appeals occasionally are used in conjunction with guilt appeals. For example, "I wish I had started saving for my children's college education when they were young" evokes guilt for not having provided adequately for one's children and regret that action was not taken while there was still time.

Thus, the negative appeals might affect the audience in different ways. A shame appeal might lead a consumer to purchase the advertised product to attain a goal or to avoid disgrace. A fear appeal might result in a purchase that increases control over a situation or prevents an unwanted outcome. A regret appeal might foster dissatisfaction with previous choices and lead to a purchase of the advertised product. A guilt appeal might result in a purchase either to make retribution for or to refrain from committing a transgression.

Previous research has not clearly differentiated the negative emotional appeals. A careful definition of each appeal is necessary to ensure precision and accuracy in research on guilt appeals.

Kinds of Guilt

Three kinds of guilt have been identified in the literature: reactive guilt, anticipatory guilt, and existential guilt. They differ in the antecedents that lead to the experience of guilt. Reactive guilt is a response to an overt act of violating one's internalized standards of acceptable behavior (Rawlings 1970). For example, an ad might point out that the reader had previously forgotten his wedding anniversary and his wife had cried. A reader who had violated that personal standard might attempt to assuage the guilt by buying the product suggested by the ad.

Anticipatory guilt is experienced as one contemplates a potential violation of internalized standards (Rawlings 1970). Anticipatory guilt appeals offer consumers an opportunity to avoid a transgression, such as disappointing their children. Anticipatory guilt appeals may add that if the opportunity is neglected, an unwanted outcome will occur that the consumer could have prevented. Ads that arouse anticipatory guilt often pose future scenarios in which the reader will violate a standard of behavior if a certain action is not performed. For example, investment firms have tried to arouse guilt in parents by depicting negative outcomes that can be prevented by starting to save immediately for their newborn's college education.

Existential guilt is experienced as a result of the awareness of a discrepancy between one's well-being and the well-being of others (Izard 1977; Ruth and Faber 1988). Such a discrepancy occurs when one feels more fortunate than others and experiences an empathetic response to their plight. Charity ads often emphasize the reader's responsibility to alleviate the suffering of victims of poverty, famine, or natural disasters. Existential guilt appeals may also appear in conjunction with some social responsibility themes (Lill, Gross, and Peterson 1986).

Unfortunately, most research on guilt appeals in advertising, marketing, and psychology has not discerned which kind of guilt is being examined. For example, Unger and Stearns (1983) counted the number of fear and guilt ads in a sample of television commercials in July 1982. Their main focus was fear appeals, but they stated that guilt appeals appeared in 2.2% of their sample of ads. However, their operational definition of a guilt ad was an ad "attempting to elicit an a posteriori emotional response" (p. 18). Hence, they focused on reactive guilt appeals, but not anticipatory or existential guilt appeals. An advantage of our study is that it provides a more thorough examination of guilt appeals in advertising by analyzing all three kinds of guilt.

Verbal and Visual Components of Guilt Appeals

Techniques for verbally arousing guilt have been identified in the interpersonal communication literature. Vangelisti, Daly, and Rudnick (1991) uncovered 17 communication techniques used to arouse guilt in face-to-face conversations. From those techniques, we identified four guilt statements that may have wide applicability in print advertisements. The statement of fact reports circumstances or information that may produce guilt in some members of the audience. An example might be: "Last night, two million children in the U.S. went to bed hungry." The statement of action reports personal behavior that should or should not occur. It tells the readers that they violated or will violate a standard through an act of either omission or commission. The hungry children example can be rewritten as a statement of action: "Last night, you let a child go to bed hungry again." A suggestion recommends future action or proposes that one engage in a particular behavior. Rewritten as a suggestion, the example becomes: "You should donate money to help end hunger among our children." A question asks about one's thoughts, feelings, or behavior. Modified as a question, the example becomes: "What have you done this year to help end hunger among our children?"

Visual techniques designed to elicit guilt in print ads have not been identified in the literature. In general, visual elements in magazine ads are known to attract attention, create associations, or increase the impact of an ad (Moriarty 1987). Visual elements in guilt ads may direct attention to a guilt appeal. An illustration of a crying baby, for instance, tends to attract attention. Visual elements can also create a link between the reader and a guilt appeal. For example, an ad could show an overworked mother, like the reader, who feels guilty if she does not give her children a good breakfast. Finally, the combination of visual with verbal elements may heighten the impact of a guilt ad. For instance, a picture of a sad puppy could elicit the reader's sympathy, which might increase the reader's susceptibility to a verbal guilt appeal to donate to local animal shelters. McQuarrie and Mick (1992) found that verbal-visual combinations are common in print advertising, but researchers have not investigated whether those combinations are associated with emotional appeals, such as guilt.

Research Questions

Our study was designed to measure the extent and the mode of presentation of guilt appeals in popular magazine advertising. On the basis of our literature review, we also examined the kinds of guilt, the guilt statements, and the visual component of guilt appeals used. We addressed the following research questions.

Q1 How often do guilt appeals appear in a sample of magazine ads?

Q2 Which types of magazines are most likely to contain guilt-eliciting ads?

Q3 Which product classes are most likely to be advertised with guilt appeals?

Q4 In ads with guilt appeals, what kind of guilt appeal (reactive, anticipatory, or existential) is most often used?

Q5 In ads with guilt appeals, which type of guilt statement (statement of fact, statement of action, suggestion, or question) appears most often?

Q6 In ads with guilt appeals, how often are the guilt appeals contained in the text, the visual elements, or both?

Method

We needed a method for enumerating how often guilt appeals appear in the content of popular magazine advertisements. Content analysis was chosen because it is the best at providing "a scientific, quantitative, and generalizable description of communications content" (Kassarjian 1977, p. 10). The sample for the content analysis was drawn from the population of advertisements more than one third of a page in size found in popular magazines published during 1992 and 1993. The sampling frame was constructed from a list of magazines by type in the Folio: Source Book 1991 for magazine publishers. For each of the 12 types, we selected the magazine with the largest circulation and another magazine judged representative because of its broad appeal among readers in the category and high ad volume (see Table 1).

The total sample analyzed consisted of 48 magazine issues. The 24 magazines used were assigned randomly without replacement and distributed evenly (i.e., two magazines each month) across the 12 months of each year studied (1992 and 1993). We thus created two "constructed years" to account for systematic variations in the type and number of ads due to seasonality. The primary benefit of a constructed sample is its close approximation of the true population mean (Riffe, Aust, and Lacy 1993).

We analyzed 2769 ads from the 48 magazine issues, from which 153 guilt ads and 131 fear ads were identified. As our focus was primarily on guilt appeals, four independent judges, after appropriate training, coded ads from the set of 153 guilt ads plus 29 other ads. Duplicate guilt ads ($n = 11$) remained in the sample to represent accurately how often the audience was exposed to guilt ads. The other ads contained a variety of appeals (e.g., shame, regret, etc.) and served as a check on the judges' training in distinguishing guilt from other appeals. Intercoder agreement was .99 for the guilt/not guilt decision ($n = 182$ ads).

Training began with an explanation of the content analysis method. Then guilt, fear, shame, and regret were defined and ads containing each appeal were presented to help the judges distinguish between the negative appeals they might encounter. Next, the specific coding process was explained, each category was defined as in the literature review, and examples were given. Special care was taken to instruct the judges in verbal and visual analysis. For the verbal analysis, the judges were trained to examine the text of the ad for guilt statements—statements of fact, statements of action, suggestions, and questions. To determine whether a visual appeal was present, the judges were instructed to look for body language and facial expression cues. They also examined the ads for pictures of someone requiring nurturing or sympathy for whom the reader would be responsible or for illustrations of guilt-producing situations.

Table 1

After the training, the judges coded a practice set of ads, and we answered their questions about the coding process. Then a pretest was conducted with 43 ads from magazine issues not included in the sample. Disagreements in pretest codings were discussed until a consensus was reached.

To ensure objectivity, the judges separately coded the advertisements, but could refer to printed definitions that we supplied. All ads in the sample were coded by at least two judges. Rust and Cooil's (1994) proportional reduction in loss (PRL) approach was used to calculate reliability. The PRL reliability levels for the category decisions across all guilt ads were .98 for product class, .97 for type of guilt statement, .96 for verbal or visual component, and .92 for kind of guilt.

Results and Discussion

Of the 2769 magazine ads examined, 153 contained guilt appeals and 131 contained fear appeals. Nine contained both fear and guilt appeals. The incidence of fear ads in the sample was obtained to provide a point of comparison for the relative frequency of guilt appeals. Given the greater attention to fear in academic research, it was interesting to find that guilt appeals were as prevalent as fear appeals.

Examination of the data relating to the first research question, which asked how often guilt appeals appear in a sample of magazine ads, uncovered (1) the number of ads with guilt appeals and (2) the total number of guilt appeals in those ads. Of the sample magazine ads, 5.8% contained at least one guilt appeal, about the same proportion as ads with fear appeals (4.8%) in the sample. Comparison with past research findings on advertising appeals in U.S. magazines showed that guilt and fear ads appeared less often than ads with testimonials (11.0%), humor (10.8%), comparisons (10.0%), or sexual appeals (8.6%), but more often than ads with aesthetic (4.1%) or before and after appeals (4.0%) (Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet 1992; Cutler, Javalgi, and Erramilli 1992; Pollay 1985). Because its usage was comparable with that of other recognized appeals, guilt appears to be another important type of advertising appeal.

A total of 218 guilt appeals appeared in the 153 guilt ads analyzed, an average of 1.4 guilt appeals per guilt ad. That number is consistent with the average number of emotional appeals per print ad in U.S. magazines found by Biswas, Olsen, and Carlet (1992) and Hong, Muderrisoglu, and Zinkhan (1987), who found means of 1.3 and 1.7 emotional appeals per ad, respectively.

Although all types of magazines contained guilt ads, some contained a higher percentage than others. Addressing research question 2, we found that the magazine types differed in the proportion of guilt ads. The proportion ranged from 14.2% of all ads in news and opinion magazines to 1.6% in male-oriented magazines. The proportion of fear ads did not differ significantly across magazine types (see Table 2).

Interestingly, the magazine types with the largest proportions of guilt ads appeared to have an informational editorial mission, whereas those with the smallest proportions of guilt ads appeared to have an entertainment editorial mission. To test that finding, a panel of 23 independent judges (consisting of nine faculty members, 11 graduate students, and three other individuals) indicated the six magazines with the strongest editorial mission to inform their readers and the six magazines with the strongest editorial mission to entertain their readers (see Table 1). The six most informational magazines contained 50 of the 153 guilt ads, significantly more than the 22 guilt ads found in the six most entertaining magazines ($\chi^2 = 10.89$, d.f. = 1, $p = .001$).

A possible explanation for the disparity may be magazine executives' decisions to include or exclude certain types of ads as an extension of their editorial mission (Ninivaggi 1992). The entertainment editorial mission involves hedonic pursuits: entertainment, sports, performing arts, leisure activities, and recreation (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Magazines such as *Penthouse* and *People Weekly* appear to be designed for an audience that escapes into hedonic pursuits to avoid tension-producing stimuli. Previous research has shown that negative appeals are not very effective with such readers (Ghingold 1981; Goldstein 1959). Hence, entertainment magazines may not be as effective in delivering guilt appeals as less hedonic vehicles, such as informational magazines.

Addressing research question 3, we found that certain product classes were more likely than others to be advertised with guilt appeals ($z = 22.4$, d.f. = 7, $p = .002$). Of the 153 guilt ads found, 21.6% were for charities or public service announcements (PSAs) and 17.6% were for health care goods and services. For further analysis, many of the other guilt ads were collapsed into the category of consumer nondurable goods (41.2%), which included food and cleaning products (11.1%), cosmetics (8.5%), and pet care products (6.5%).

The kind of guilt used was associated with the product class advertised, as shown in Table 3. Many of the ads using reactive and anticipatory guilt were for consumer nondurable goods. The reactive guilt ads often tried to convince buyers to switch brands by fostering dissatisfaction with their current brand. The ads using anticipatory guilt typically offered a product to prevent a problem from affecting someone for whom the consumer is responsible. Most existential guilt ads were for charities or PSAs, as is consistent with the notion of existential guilt as concern about helping the less fortunate.

Table 2

The fourth research question asked what kind of guilt appeal is most common. Of the three kinds of guilt appeals, anticipatory guilt appeals appeared most often. As Table 4 shows, 61.9% of guilt appeals were anticipatory, 29.4% were reactive, and 8.7% were existential. It is not surprising that anticipatory guilt was the most often used because advertising appeals are typically future-oriented (Berger 1972). The anticipatory guilt appeals studied tended to offer goods or services that could prevent negative outcomes from occurring sometime in the future, whether tonight at dinner or when the baby is old enough to attend college.

In examining research question 5 about the frequency of the four guilt statements in the sample ads, we found that the most commonly used guilt statement was the statement of fact (48.2%). One statement of fact found in the sample was Instant Quaker Oatmeal's assertion that it was "For moms who have a lot of love, but not a lot of time." The suggestion was the second most commonly used guilt statement (29.8%), such as Save the Children's "Help stop a different kind of child abuse." The question represented 16.5% of the guilt statements and the statement of action represented 5.0%. Other guilt-eliciting statements that did not fit into one of the four categories were less

than 1% of the sample. The statement of fact was common across all three kinds of guilt, but the other guilt statements were more often associated with specific kinds of guilt (see Table 4). Many reactive guilt appeals were questions about current circumstances (e.g., satisfaction with the current brand), whereas anticipatory guilt appeals often were suggestions of goods and services that could prevent negative circumstances. Existential guilt appeals frequently were suggestions to help the less fortunate, but did not use statements of action that might assign personal responsibility for the misfortune.

For research question 6 about the degree to which guilt appeals contain visual and verbal components, we found that of the 92% of guilt ads containing some visual element, only half used the visual element as part of a guilt appeal. About 3% of all guilt ads had guilt appeals that were entirely visual, whereas 43% contained guilt appeals incorporating both visual images and text. When visual elements were used in guilt ads, they often presented images designed to trigger a nurturing or sympathetic reaction from the reader (e.g., a baby or a lost puppy). The guilt appeals frequently combined a verbal description of negative but preventable circumstances with a visual depiction of the object of sympathy.

Almost all guilt ads had a verbal component in their guilt appeals. Although some had a combination of text and visual elements, 54% of all guilt ads contained purely verbal guilt appeals. When guilt appeals appeared only in the headline or the text, the ad either contained no visual element (9.8%), used the visual element to display the product (42.6%), or related the visual element to a different type of appeal (47.5%).

Table 3

The use of verbal components or image-text combinations in guilt appeals did not vary across product classes ($\chi^2 = 4.2$, d.f. = 4, $p = .38$) or magazine types ($\chi^2 = 16.3$, d.f. = 11, $p = .13$). The few purely visual guilt appeals were concentrated in ads for consumer nondurable goods in women's magazines. Likewise, the specific guilt statements used did not vary across product classes ($\chi^2 = 9.9$, d.f. = 12, $p = .62$) or magazine types ($\chi^2 = 26.6$, d.f. = 33, $p = .78$). Hence, similar executions of guilt appeals seemed to be used regardless of the product class advertised or the type of magazine.

Implications

Our findings have some profound implications for researchers of negative appeals in advertising. Although previous research had begun to investigate the effectiveness of guilt appeals in print ads, the frequency with which guilt appeals actually appear in print ads was not known. Our content analysis of advertising in 24 popular magazines covering a two-year period found that guilt appeals appear about as often in print advertisements as many other advertising appeals. As one of every 20 ads contains a guilt appeal, the continued exploration of the effectiveness of such appeals seems justified.

The effectiveness of a guilt appeal may depend on the kind of guilt used. Three kinds of guilt have been identified in the literature, but most reports of experiments on guilt appeals in advertising, marketing, and psychology have not indicated which kind of guilt was being manipulated. Our content analysis showed that guilt ads predominantly employed anticipatory guilt. Researchers need to be aware of the kind of guilt manipulated in their experiments, because (1) results for the effectiveness of one kind of guilt may not be applicable to other kinds and (2) a confounding effect could occur if an experimenter does not control for the kind of guilt manipulated.

The effectiveness of a guilt appeal may also depend on the context in which the appeal appears. For example, although we found some guilt-eliciting ads in almost all magazines examined, they appeared more often in informational magazines, such as Time and Newsweek, than in entertainment magazines, such as Rolling Stone. The implication is that some magazines audiences may be unreceptive to ads with guilt appeals, and those magazines may reject guilt ads to avoid upsetting their readers. Moreover, some advertisers may believe that certain magazines are more appropriate vehicles for their guilt ads than others.

Our findings also have implications for the execution of guilt appeals in print ads. Guilt appeals were found most often in ad copy alone or in a combination of verbal and visual components, rather than solely in an ad's visual images. We found that 54% of all guilt ads contained purely verbal guilt appeals, but only 3% of all guilt ads contained purely visual guilt appeals. Executing a guilt appeal solely through visual cues may be difficult, perhaps because of the challenge of visually assigning responsibility for a transgression.

The four types of guilt statements accounted for 99% of the verbal guilt appeals in the popular magazine ads analyzed. Hence, the four guilt statements may be useful in (1) content analyses of guilt in other media, cultures, or time periods and (2) designing authentic experimental guilt ad stimuli that reflect subjects' previous experience with advertising.

Future Research

We believe the ultimate goal of research on guilt appeals should be to develop a model of consumer reactions to those appeals in advertising, similar to the fear appeal models (e.g., Henthorne, LaTour, and Natarajan 1993; Tanner, Hunt, and Eppright 1991). As a starting point for building such a model, we document the kinds of guilt used, the presence of verbal and visual components, and the differences across product class and magazine type.

Additional research is needed, however, as a basis for developing the model. First, researchers should determine which kind of guilt is most effective. Anticipatory guilt appeared more often in our content analysis than existential or reactive guilt. Does that finding indicate that anticipatory guilt appeals are more effective than the other kinds in a print ad context?

Second, researchers should investigate which type of verbal guilt statement is most effective in eliciting guilt. The statement of fact was most common in our magazine ads, whereas more personally accusatory statements (e.g., statements of action) are most common in interpersonal communication (Vangelisti, Daly, and Rudnick 1991). Perhaps more personal statements are not as suitable in magazine ads because of the greater interpersonal distance of the print medium.

A third issue is how do visual elements, either alone or in conjunction with ad copy, arouse guilt. The visual elements found in our study included depictions of another person feeling guilty with whom the reader might identify, another person blaming the reader for some transgression, and situations in which someone was going to suffer because of the reader's action or inaction. We found no studies that examined the role of a visual element in the execution of negative appeals.

A fourth issue is whether guilt appeals are more effective in ads for certain product classes or within certain types of magazines. Our study documented significant differences in usage across both factors. A limitation of most previous research is that it examined guilt appeals in ads for a single product class, such as charities.

Finally, researchers should explore how guilt is used in other cultures, media, and time periods. Our content analysis documents the use of guilt appeals in popular U.S. magazine ads. Izard (1977) pointed out that guilt is a common emotion in many countries. Is it also a common advertising appeal in other countries? What about other media or time periods?

We believe the continued study of guilt appeals would benefit both practitioners and academicians. Guilt appeals are important, as they appear to be used in about one of every 20 popular magazine ads. Our content analysis has advanced the research stream by documenting the frequency and the form of guilt appeals used in ads in many current popular magazines. Our findings should provide an impetus for further research leading to an even greater understanding of the use and influence of guilt appeals in advertising.

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