

# The Role of Guilt Emotion Inducement Towards Environment Oriented Communication; A Systematic Review Approach

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## Abstract

Guilt as an appeal have been extensively utilized in marketing and advertising under different context and research areas. In the current wake of environmental marketing, guilt appeal has been linked to studies concerning consumer attitude, and behaviour towards environment and green marketing and advertising. However, a periodic review on its relative role and applicability in environmental context role is lacking. This paper addresses this gap through a pioneer investigation of this appeal using systematic review to assess its role in environmental marketing and green marketing research. The systematic review findings reveal its relatively high direct and mediating influences on environmental communication and consumer choice but comparatively negligible utilization as a mediating variable.

**Keywords:** Guilt Emotion, Environment, Marketing Communication, Systematic Review, Message Appeal

## Introduction

The definite strength of the emotional appeal especially in terms of guilt emotion is envisaged in numerous advertisements that are directed towards environmental awareness or modifying environmental behaviour (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997). Though relatively delayed, researchers have been utilizing this appeal in different context, both as an individual component and with fear appeal. An evident exploration into past researches reveals that guilt as an appeal was dominant within the context of different study domains such as theology, philosophy, psychiatry and counselling, with limited applicability towards persuasive intent (Ghingold, 1981). The relative and explicit utilization of this appeal in environmental context cannot be refuted as over the last few decades various forms of guilt manipulation and studies concerning the same are evident across the academic literature (Elgaaied, 2012; Kabadayi et al., 2015a; Lee, 2013). Keeping up with the changing consumer attitude and in context of message design and manipulation, guilt appeal has gained quite a popularity across various forms of marketing communication (Coleman et al., 2020; Coulter & Pinto, 1995; Coulter et al., 1999). However, the use of guilt message requires an effective identification of the type of guilt to be utilized based on certain factors related to both the product or service and the degree of inducement required towards achieving the specific

purpose (Lindenmeier et al., 2017). It is ironical that very few studies have tried to observe the utilized of guilt message design in a systematic manner.

Also, it is evident that the recent influx of research on sustainable and environmentally oriented behaviour has focused on the relative importance of negative emotion (Amatulli et al., 2020; Muralidharan & Sheehan, 2018; Zwicker et al., 2020). This is not a new phenomenon and has time and again proved itself to be quite useful in forcing a definitive thought process. Definitive studies have linked the concept to theories such as appraisal theory (Lazarus & Smith, 1988) and established the relative strength of such association as the causal inference being created through the felt guilt towards action or inaction towards any situation (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014; McGraw, 1987; Peters, 2020). Therefore it is quite natural that marketers have utilized this appeal in a diligent manner across their communication, which is again evident from extensive studies related to use of guilt in sustainability and human environment related interactions involving attitude and behaviour (Onwezen et al., 2013; Theotokis & Manganari, 2015).

However, an effective summarization of the guilt as an emotion and its varied effect pertaining to environmental marketing towards consumer attitude and behavioral manipulation is not clear. This study tries to address this gap by undertaking a systematic review to assimilate the role of guilt appeal towards environment in both individual and organization context. The study also tries to address a gap in summarizing the applicability of guilt appeal message in marketing context, which also seems largely unexplored.

## **Conceptual Background**

### *Guilt Appeal and Environment*

In theoretical parlance guilt has been identified to consist of three types namely anticipated, existential and reactive (Huhmann & Brotherton, 1997), most of the prior studies have observed guilt as a unified construct with reference to its utility, with limited foray into individual effects of each guilt form (Lwin & Phau, 2014, 2008). Subsequently studies categorized guilt and defined anticipatory guilt as a form of guilt that precedes an action or an inaction, existential guilt is espoused from the felt differences across one's state of existence or wellbeing with others and reactive guilt as a reaction towards felt transgression of one's own behavior (Basil et al., 2001; Cotte et al., 2005; Coulter et al., 1999). Recent studies have substantiated this difference whereby the applicability of each type has been identified. It has been observed that similar communication can be presented from negative and positive perspective by utilizing different appeal. As an example, a recent study on effect of charity advertisement utilized reactive form to portray negative consequence of not donating and existential form to depict positive outcomes, with quite equal effects (Erlandsson et al., 2018).

It cannot be argued that since last two decades environmental awareness has played a key role in moderating consumption patterns and inadvertently the marketing communications associated with it. Guilt, among others, has been identified as a self-conscious emotion (Agrawal & Duhachek, 2010), which can lead to retributive behaviour by consumers to reduce the guilt aroused (Bozinoff & Ghingold, 1983; Ghingold & Bozinoff, 1982; Lee, 2013). As a dominant negative appeal towards emotional persuasion (Brennan & Binney, 2010; Lascu, 1991), in environmental context, guilt is a common arousal in consumers when they do not act pro-environmentally or in recent context, unsustainably towards the environment (Jackson,

2005; Kim et al., 2016; Pelletier & Sharp, 2008). It can be inferred that the crux of any such advertising strategy lies in creating an environmental consciousness among the consumers, in which this appeal has been found to be quite influential (Chang, 2012a). However, utilizing it to a greater extent can be counterproductive as it may ignite different negative emotions such as anger, irritation and frustration among the consumers (Basil et al., 2001; Becheur et al., 2008; David et al., 2002; Roberts et al., 2014). Therefore, in summary an in-depth review on its execution method and the frequency of utilization by advertisers, is required to develop a clear understanding of this appeal.

#### *Systematic Review on Environment*

Systematic review has evolved since last few decades as one of the prominent methods of research assimilation. Although as an evidence based approach its major utilization has been in medical sciences and its related fields (Butler et al., 2016; Scurlock-Evans et al., 2014; Tranfield et al., 2003) and a few related to guilt clinical trials (Tilghman-Osborne et al., 2010). Subsequently, keeping in view of the utility of this method, it was also introduced within the field social science and management such as pedagogical learning (Aglen, 2016), learning policy implementation (Ubbink et al., 2013) and knowledge management practices (Oktari et al., 2020) among others. They are a method of mapping out areas of uncertainty, and identifying where little or no relevant research has been undertaken till date, but where new studies are evidently required (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008).

Systematic review and environmental studies are much intertwined under the broad umbrella of social science, which is evident from the earlier guidelines provided towards undertaking such reviews (Pullin, 2012; Pullin & Stewart, 2006). Limiting only to title of study, complex reviews concerning environmental policies and practices (Bayliss et al., 2016; Bilotta et al., 2014; Walker et al., 2013), environmental responsibility and sustainability (Sotiriadou & Hill, 2015) including educational policies relating to such practices (Aikens et al., 2016) have been duly observed. Further review studies pertaining to human environment interactions are also evident whereby the subject being covered includes environmental data and management, environmental awareness, and environmental knowledge (Bayliss et al., 2016; Pullin & Stewart, 2006). However, it is evident from the past academic literature that none of the systematic review tried to observe the guilt emotion and its relative utilization in environmental context.

#### **Research Methodology**

##### *Review Scope*

This paper is using systematic review (SLR) to review the related literature pertaining the guilt appeal. A preliminary study on the topic of “guilt appeal and environmental marketing” was being conducted to assess upon the requirement of this systematic review and also the availability of literature towards the same. In accordance with the prescribed guidelines primary requirement of undertaking a review is to establish a clear review scope (Thomas James et al., 2019; Wetzstein et al., 2016). Therefore in accordance with the given requirement, below table summarizes the filtration process and provides appropriate explanation for each of them.

Table 1

*Review Scope*

EXCLUSION CRITERIA	JUSTIFICATION
Books and book chapters	Inadequate towards maintaining the conceptual rigorousness and methodological description
Posters, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, editorial articles, newspaper and magazine articles	In both print and electronic media considered not relevant towards the scope of the review.
INCLUSION CRITERIA	JUSTIFICATION
Selection of scholarly academic work from referred journals and conference proceedings (according to the respective rating) using reputed search databases and publisher.	The primary source for reviewing the academic literature. Without any restriction towards geographic boundaries of the publication/author comparative study framework is available
English Language based writing	Researchers language limitation and accessibility limitation
Research conducted over past 20 years	Emphasis on the recent literature developments according to the research context.

*Review Protocol*

A review protocol was also developed, which helps to outline the details and the mechanism of the systematic review process and furthermore helps to ensure that the questions and research are developed in an effective manner. The review protocol outlines the process of fulfilment of the primary objectives pertaining to any systematic review exercise (Murphy, 2012; Seuring & Gold, 2012).

As a requirement towards this protocol, selection of research database was being undertaken. The justification pertaining to selection of the databases lies on their relative coverage of the subject matter, quality of the content and utilization of English as a medium. All the selected databases constituted reputed journals indexed in Scopus and ISI. Studies concerning systematic review which again is an essential criterion to establish the credibility of the study being conducted (Loureiro et al., 2014).

To ensure that the journal articles being preselected based on the citation index meet the academic rigor, quality and relevance towards the scope and objective of the intended review, the study utilized a step by step application of the inclusion criteria, until the abstract reading stage. The inclusion criteria ensures that a set of related and identifiable data is being collected to ameliorate the review quality (Meline, 2006; Piso et al., 2016). It was observed that all the databases and especially Ebscohost Discovery Services returned the highest number of results under every filter/inclusion criteria being applied at subsequent stages. Aligning to the scope of this review, the "In text" search option was conducted on all the identified online databases. The final stage constituted of abstract reading through which the most relevant papers were identified for further review. The below table enumerates the journal identification process.

Table 2

*Database Search Results*

Criteria/Filter	Database	Citation generated
English Language	EmeraldPlus	1108
	Science Direct	326
	Springer link	862
	Ebscohost	71,139
<b>Total</b>		<b>73435</b>
Time Frame (Year): 1996- 2016 (20 years)	EmeraldPlus	225
	Science Direct	270
	Springer link	728
	Ebscohost	4824
<b>Total</b>		<b>6047</b>
Full Text Journal Paper (Availability)	EmeraldPlus	89
	Science Direct	147
	Springer link	227
	Ebscohost	2419
<b>Total</b>		<b>2882</b>
Using “In Text” search option for “Environmental Marketing” using the “AND” option for the key words “Guilt Appeal” AND “Environmental Marketing”	EmeraldPlus	2
	Science Direct	4
	Springer link	1
	Ebscohost	52
<b>Total</b>		<b>59</b>
Abstract Reading	EmeraldPlus	2
	Science Direct	4
	Springer link	1
	Ebscohost	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>

**Findings**

After performing an abstract reading of 52 journal articles, a total of twelve journal papers from different sources were found appropriate towards further review using the descriptive method. The below table provides the key summary and findings.

Table 3

*Review Summary*

S.no	Journal	Title	Author (s)/Year of Publication	Citation	Data Analysis	Key Findings/Summary
1	Environment and Behaviour (Med)	Responsibility and Environment Ecological Norm	Hunecke, M., Blobaum, A., Matthies, E., Hoyer, R./2001	(Blobaum, et al., 2001)	Quantitative: Principal Component analysis with varimax rotation;	An experimental research on relative interaction of ecological norm (EC) and fare and subway station range was conducted with

		Orientation and External Factors in the Domain of Travel Mode Choice Behavior			Multivariate Analysis; correlation analysis and path analysis	reference to travel mode choice behaviour. Guilt was measured in terms of ecological guilt, which was found to be an independent dimension affecting the personal norm and in functionality, as a predictor to it. The causality of their relationship was inferred as requiring further clarification as both were observed as domain and situation specific.
2	Journal of Business Research (Ind)	Fear, guilt, and shame appeals in social marketing	Brennan, L. and Binney, W./ 2010	(Brennan & Binney, 2010)	Qualitative; Hermeneutic method applied on semi-structured interview data	A comparative analysis of fear, guilt and shame as appeals reconfirmed the coping mechanism. However it was not a resultant of the depicted problem and as a result infused negative emotional responses. Guilt as an appeal was found to be more effective than fear in evoking thought and was considered a subjective appeal prone to personal choice. The appeal was also inferred to be ubiquitous in current advertising campaign scenario including campaign on environmental awareness.
3	Intercultural Communication Studies (Ind)	The Influence of Ethnicity on Consumers' Environmental Attitudes and Responses to Guilt Appeals in Green Advertising: An Experimental Study	Yang, K. C.C., Jimenez, M., and Kang, Y./ 2015	(Kenneth et al., 2015)	Quantitative: One way ANOVA and MANCOVA analysis was performed on collected data.	The study focused on two major areas namely ethnicity effects on environmental attitude and moderating guilt level and its effects on attitude towards a green advertisement and the brand. Guilt affected both the attitude towards ad and brand and inducing lower level of appeal was found to be more effective. However ethnicity and environmental attitudes played no significant role in influencing consumer attitude, when being induced as covariates in this study.
4	International Journal of Advertising (Ind)	Are guilt appeals a panacea in green advertising? The right formula of issue proximity and environmental consciousness	Chang, C.T./2012	(Chang, 2012b)	Quantitative: MANCOVA analysis was conducted on 2 different studies.	The primary objective of this study was to observe the relative nature of interaction between guilt appeal in advertising and issue proximity and environmental consciousness as moderators. Experimental design was undertaken and results indicated that guilt appeals are suitable for green advertising. However its effectiveness on consumer's attitude towards the product were found to be relative to the varying

						degree of the two moderators.
5	Journal of Consumer Marketing (med)	Exploring the role of anticipated guilt on pro-environmental behavior – a suggested typology of residents in France based on their recycling patterns	Elgaaied, L./2012	(Elgaaied, 2012)	Quantitative: Cluster Analysis and subsequently Correlation and Regression Analysis was conducted	Intentional towards recycling of products among French residents were observed when being influenced by anticipated guilt. Anticipatory guilt was found to mediate the relationship between environmental concern (completely), awareness of negative consequences (partially) and perceived facilitating conditions (partially) with recycling intentions. The study primarily relied on individual predisposition and perception.
6	Social Behaviour and Personality (ind)	The influence of message appeal, environmental hyperopia, and environmental locus of control on green policy communication	Lee, Y.K./2013	(Lee, 2013)	Quantitative: Median Spilt method and ANOVA was utilized	The study observed the inter-relationship between green appeal, Environmental Hyperopia and Environmental Locus of control (ELOC) in context of Green Policy communication. Guilt appeal was found to be effective in green communications however the variance of ELOC (external/internal) in consumers moderated the effect in terms of global (Environmental Hyperopia) or local issues being addressed. The difference between a guilt and non-guilt appeal were unimportant when external ELOC was stronger.
7	Journal of Economic Psychology (med)	The Norm Activation Model: An exploration of the functions of anticipated pride and guilt in pro-environmental behaviour	Onwezen, M.C., Antonides, G., Bartels, J./2013	(Onwezen et al., 2013)	Quantitative: Structural Regression Models (using Mplus); Correlation analysis	The role of anticipated pride and guilt within the Norm Activation Model (NAM) were explored in context of pro-environmental behaviour. Seven functional models depicting the association were drawn. The observed variables were found to be the mediating the personal norm and behaviour relationship. In context of an extended NAM, with integrated TPB variables, the influence was observed as indirect and further mediated by intentions.
8	Journal of Environmental Psychology (Med)	Environmentally friendly consumer choices: Cultural differences in the self-regulatory function of	Onwezen, M.C., Antonides, G., Bartels, J./2014	(Onwezen et al., 2014)	Quantitative: Structural Regression Models( using Mplus); Chi-Square analysis	The self-regulatory aspect of anticipated pride and guilt with respect to social and personal behavioral standards were explored in context of environmental choice behaviour. The aim was to compare individuals from the individualistic and



		anticipated pride and guilt				collectivistic cultural orientation within and across selective countries. The results confirmed presence of the self-regulatory function of the chosen variables concerning behaviour. Furthermore, the variation was across and not within individualistic and collectivistic countries.
9	International Journal of Social, Behavioral Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering (Ind)	The Use of Appeals in Green Printed Advertisements: A Case of Product Orientation and Organizational Image Orientation Ads	Ruanguttamanun, C./ 2014	(Ruanguttamanun, 2014)	Mix Method: two step K – Mean clustering; Content Analysis	The study explored the types of appeals being used in context of green Marketing. The ads containing two major orientation types namely product and organizational image were utilized. Guilt and shame were observed to appear concurrently in most of the identified ads under this category. The dominance of negative appeals were identified under the organizational image orientation.
10	Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences (Ind)	Green purchase intention of young Turkish consumers: Effects of consumer's guilt, self-monitoring and perceived consumer effectiveness	Kabadayi, E.T., Dursun, I., Alen, A.K., Tuger, A.T./2015	(Kabadayi et al., 2015b)	Quantitative: Confirmatory factor analysis using maximum likelihood estimation technique; Structural Equation Modelling	The relative effect of three factors namely, consumer guilt (CG) Self-Monitoring (SM) and perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) on consumer intention towards green consumption was studied. The context undertaken was a localized Earth Hour campaign. PCE is highlighted to be of most significant and SM with negligible direct effects. Competitive altruism as a variable has been suggested towards better evaluation of the interrelationship between SF and CG.
11	Journal of Experimental Social Psychology (Ind)	Reparation or reactance? The influence of guilt on reaction to persuasive communication	Graton, A., Ric, F., Gonzalez, E./ 2016	(Graton et al., 2016)	Quantitative: Factor analysis with varimax rotation; contrast analysis; ANOVA	The relative influence of incidental guilt on environmental attitude and behaviour within the domain of pro-social behaviour was observed. Results confirmed the influence. However, guilt does not necessarily trigger reparation mechanism, considered essential towards pro-social behaviour. In context of attitude the effects were non prominent.
12	Fashion and Textiles (Mod)	Spillover from past recycling to green apparel shopping behavior: the role of environmental concern and anticipated guilt	Ha, S., Kwon, S.Y./2016	(Ha & Kwon, 2016)	Quantitative: Confirmatory Factor Analysis; Regression Analysis	Spillover effects of performing recycling behaviour on the likelihood of green apparel purchase was examined, in context of pro-environmental behaviour. Anticipated guilt was inducted as a moderator.



						<p>Though spillover effects were existent, guilt was not found to moderate the observed relationship between past recycling behaviour and green apparel purchase. On the other hand environmental concern was found to mediate the said relationship.</p>
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## Discussion

### *Guilt: As a Direct Influencer*

Most of the studies involved observing the direct influences of guilt. As a message appeal, guilt can generate more positive responses to advertisements through conscience arousal and is considered a more personalized feeling (Brennan & Binney, 2010; De Luca, 2016). However consumers do perceive similarity and pervasiveness of this appeal with shame which is again a secondary emotion considered to arise in duality in certain circumstances (Ruanguttamanun, 2014). This establishes that as a message appeal the role of guilt is more on individualistic influences, that can affect the self-thought process.

Furthermore, it is also being observed from the above review that pro-environmental behaviour was adopted when guilt persuasion was coupled with reparatory cues. However, its blatant presence created negative results (Graton et al., 2016). While considering green advertising, varying the guilt level can differ its relative effects on consumer's attitude, both towards the ad and the brand which again reflect the encompassing effect of this emotion (Yang et al., 2015). Furthermore, their intention to consume green is also being influenced either directly or indirectly through their perceived effectiveness of such consumption by the consumer (Kabadayi et al., 2015b). In context of environmental consciousness, guilt affects are stronger with local issues/low proximity issues than global/high proximity issues when people are less conscious and can backfire when the same is used for highly conscious people (Chang, 2012b; Lee, 2013). Finally, it is also being observed that while exploring anticipated guilt with pride does prove the direct influence of guilt emotion on ecological behaviour in recycling context (Elgaaied, 2012).

### *Guilt as a Mediator*

Guilt is also found to be an effective mediator. In reference to Norm Activation Model it is found to be an independent dimension of personal ecological norm (Hunecke, Blöbaum, et al., 2001) and also mediate the influence of personal norm variable on intentions and behaviour (Onwezen et al., 2013). In studies conducted on anticipated guilt, it was found to completely mediate environmental concern and recycling intention and partially mediate the awareness of negative consequences and recycling intention (Elgaaied, 2012). While considering individualistic and collectivistic cultural orientation, the self-regulatory function of anticipated guilt mediated attitude and social norm effects on organic purchase intentions (Onwezen et al., 2014).

### *Guilt as a Moderator*

Only one research being included in the table analyzed the moderating effects of guilt appeal in context of spillover of past recycling on green shopping. The study conducted by Ha (2016) and Kwon (2016) explored anticipated guilt in motivational form to explore its relative strength in moderating environmental concern and shopping behaviour in context of past recycling behaviour (Ha & Kwon, 2016). The results did not conclude any moderating effects on the observed relationships.

## Conclusion

In summary, the inference from this systematic review process clearly indicates that guilt appeal has been utilized and its effects have been observed in context of environmental marketing and advertising. The appeal has been found to either directly influence

environmental consciousness, behaviour and consumer choices or mediate variables associated to it. Furthermore, though the applicability duly vary from consumer choice, intention and purchase to environmental attitude, behaviour, and norm, they are grounded mostly on relationship identification, as their primary research objective. This resonates with the fact that guilt is yet to reach substantial exploration on its relative influence on environmental marketing and its deeper related fields. Especially in context of moderating effects, the relative influence of this appeal is still unexplored. This has been also reflected in recent studies whereby even though guilt does act as an intervening variable in case of medical related issues such as trauma (Norman et al., 2014) and child behaviour (Malti, 2016) among others, its moderating effects have usually restricted to observations coupled with other variables (Lancellotti & Thomas, 2018).

This review highlights on a pertinent fact that guilt as an individual construct, has received limited application in context of environmental marketing and green marketing. The concurrent use of this appeal in magazine advertisements along with other appeals especially shame and fear, establishes this claim

The review helps to further envisage the gradual proximity of researchers to focus on “green” as an agenda when exploring message appeal and environmental marketing. This aspect substantiates the findings during literature review, whereby green consumption and marketing manifests environmental awareness and communication respectively. The fact that they have been intrinsically linked, whether from consumer or marketing/advertising research perspective, in context of message appeal calls for further introspection on the nature and direction of their inter-relationship.

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