

Guilt Appeals in Primetime Network Television Advertising

Rationale & Research Questions

This study will seek to measure how advertisers use guilt as a tool in primetime television advertising. The mode of presentation of the guilt messages will be examined as well as the frequency of occurrence of guilt appeals in advertising. We will examine the types of programs that contain the most consumer guilt appeals and what type of guilt is used. The research questions for this study are derived from the study of consumer guilt in magazine advertising conducted by Huhmann & Brotherton (1997). These questions are as follows:

RQ1: How often do guilt appeals occur in primetime television advertising?

RQ2: What types of programs are most likely to contain guilt-related ads?

RQ3: Which types of products are most likely to use guilt appeals?

RQ4: What type of guilt appeal (reactive, anticipatory or existential) is used most often?

RQ5: What type of guilt statement (statement of fact, statement of action, suggestion or action) is used most often and what type of guilt statement is used?

Method

The method for determining the frequency and type of guilt appeals that occur in primetime television will be a content analysis of a one-week sample of advertisements. For purposes of this study, the time interval of 7 to 10 p.m. will be considered primetime. A one-week sample of a single week's programming (Monday through Friday) will be used because of time constraints realizing that this short period of study will not yield the same degree of accuracy as would an extended period of study. Only the major networks (ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC) will be studied.

The primetime programming for each day will be recorded on videotape and coding of data will be accomplished by extracting the advertisements from the videotapes and coding the data

there from. Data will be placed into several categories. The categories will include the type of program containing the guilt ad, the product type in which guilt appeal is used, and how the guilt appeal is presented.

How the guilt appeal is presented will be determined by which type of guilt appeal used in the ad and the type of guilt statement used to induce guilt.

Three types of guilt appeals have been identified in the literature. They are *reactive guilt*, *anticipatory guilt* and *existential guilt*.

Reactive guilt is a response to an overt act of violating one's own internal standard of acceptable behavior (Huhmann, & Brotherton, 1997). For example, a man who forgets his wife's birthday is told he can rectify the problem by purchasing the product or service mentioned in the advertisement as a gift of atonement.

Anticipatory guilt is caused by contemplating a potential violation of internalized standards (Huhmann, & Brotherton, 1997). Appeals of this type offer the consumer an opportunity to avoid guilt by purchasing a specific product or service. For example, a bank may encourage a parent to start a savings account now to prepare for their child's college education, thus avoiding the guilt of not being able to afford the expense later.

Existential guilt is a result of the awareness of a discrepancy between one's well-being and the well being of others (Huhmann, & Brotherton, 1997). This is one type of appeal used by charity organizations. For example, it is the viewer's responsibility to help feed starving children because he or she is well-fed and free of malnutrition and other associated concerns.

Vangelisti, Daly & Rudnick (1991) discuss 17 techniques used to cause guilt in face-to-face conversations. From these techniques, four guilt statements were identified by Huhmann & Brotherton (1997) to have application in advertising. These include a *statement of fact*, a *statement of action*, a *suggestion* and a *question*.

A statement of fact might be: "A leaky faucet could waste 2000 gallons of water per year." The implication is that you should have XYZ Plumbing fix your faucet to avoid feeling guilty about wasting water.

A statement of action suggests a behavior that should or should not occur ("Last night you wasted five gallons of water by not having your leaky faucet repaired").

A suggestion becomes: "You should get your leaking faucet repaired today."

Finally, a question asks about thoughts, feelings or behavior ("What have you done to help reduce the waste of water?").

Two people working independently will code the data from each day's advertisements. Differences will be resolved in conference through discussion between the coders.

After the coding has been completed, the data will be analyzed and the results will be reported. These results will reflect the frequency of guilt appeals; the type of appeal used most often and the type of products and services most likely to incorporate guilt appeals in their advertising.

References

- Huhmann, B.A. & Brotherton, T.P. (1997). A content analysis of guilt appeals in popular magazine advertisements. *The Journal of Advertising*, 26 (2), 35-45.
- Vangelisti, A.L., Daly, J.A., & Rudnick, J.R. (1991). Making people feel guilty in conversations: Techniques and correlates. *Human Communication Research*, 18, 3-39.

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Date _____ Program _____ Time _____ p.m.

Network: ABC (1) CBS (2) NBC (3) Fox (4)
Type of Program: Comedy (1) Drama (2) Game (3) News (4)
 Sports (5) Variety (6) Other (7) _____

Name of Product/Service _____ Ad Length _____

Type of Product/Service:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising Services (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Airline Services (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> Appliance Sales & Service (3) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attorney (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Parts/Service (5) | <input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Sales (6) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beauty Aids & Service (7) | <input type="checkbox"/> Boats, RVs and Campers (8) | <input type="checkbox"/> Building Supplies/Service (9) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bus, Taxi or Train (10) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cellular Phone Service (11) | <input type="checkbox"/> Childcare/Pre-school (12) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cleaning Supplies/Products (13) | <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing (14) | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Sales/Service (15) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction (16) | <input type="checkbox"/> Department Store (17) | <input type="checkbox"/> Dining (20) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education (19) | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Services (20) | <input type="checkbox"/> Furniture (22) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food & Groceries (22) | <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Fitness (23) | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Furnishings (24) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Maintenance/Repair (25) | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital (26) | <input type="checkbox"/> Hygiene Products (27) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insurance (28) | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet or Web Services (29) | <input type="checkbox"/> Jewelry (30) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Laundry/Dry Cleaning (31) | <input type="checkbox"/> Media Subscriptions (32) | <input type="checkbox"/> Movie Trailers (33) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office Supplies (34) | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Safety/Security (35) | <input type="checkbox"/> Pets/Pet Supplies (36) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmaceutical Products (37) | <input type="checkbox"/> Physicians/Surgeons (38) | <input type="checkbox"/> Power Tools/Equipment (39) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public Health (40) | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Service (41) | <input type="checkbox"/> Real Estate (42) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Religion (43) | <input type="checkbox"/> Resorts & Leisure (44) | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail Merchandise (45) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shipping/Cargo Services (46) | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Services (47) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports (48) |

Other (please specify) _____ (49)

Guilt Statement(s) used:

- | | | |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of Fact (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of Action (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion (3) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Question (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> None Used (9) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of Fact (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of Action (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion (3) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Question (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> None Used (9) | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Question (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> None Used (9) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of Fact (1) | <input type="checkbox"/> Statement of Action (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> Suggestion (3) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Question (4) | <input type="checkbox"/> None Used (9) | |

Guilt Appeal: Anticipatory (1) Existential (2) Reactive (3) None Used (9)