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The guilty pleasure from hedonic consumption

When feeling bad makes chocolate taste so good

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Abstract

How can guilt appeals shape consumer behavior and decision-making and when are implicit versus explicit guilt appeals more effective? To date, research on the influence of consumer guilt has been scarce. Both positive as well as adverse effects of advertisements incorporating guilt have been reported. This study aimed to resolve inconsistent previous findings, by elucidating the influence of different guilt appeals on the acquisition of as well as the pleasure from chocolate consumption. One hundred and forty-five university students participated in a field study, with ad slogans differing in their degree of guilt serving as manipulated factor. After participants evaluated either explicit guilt slogans (e.g. “Guilty Delight”), implicit guilt slogans (e.g. “Devil’s Delight”) or no guilt control slogans (e.g. “Real Delight”), different measures of hedonic consumption were assessed. Consistent with hypotheses, both implicit as well as explicit guilt slogans led to less chocolate consumption than slogans containing no guilt appeal at all. Whereas implicit guilt appeals increased purchase intentions and consumers’ willingness to pay, explicit guilt appeals enhanced consumers’ pleasure from chocolate consumption. Altogether, this study stresses the importance of differentiating explicit and implicit guilt appeals in research for understanding the dynamics of guilt appeals in marketing communications.

Keywords: consumer guilt, pleasure, advertising, hedonic consumption

Imagine strolling through the supermarket while doing your grocery shopping, as someone offers you a mouthwatering chocolate treat on the go. Unless you are currently on a diet, or not fond of chocolate, it is a safe bet that you give in to the temptation and take one.

We all know these moments very well even if we do not want to admit them: those delightful distractions known as “guilty pleasures” that make us feel good and bad at the same time. Recent work in marketing research and psychology has started to examine the antecedents and outcomes of giving in to temptations, that is conflicts between current feelings of wanting to obtain something (desires) and an individual’s (long-term) goals and values (Hofmann & Van Dillen, 2012). Questions such as *what* makes us crave for things that interfere with our long-term goals and *how* can marketers elicit such a sense of longing and desire in consumers, have led to a growing body of research in this domain (e.g. Hofmann, Baumeister, Förster, & Vohs, 2012; Hofmann, van Koningsbruggen, Stroebe, Ramanathan, & Aarts, 2010; Kemps, Tiggemann, & Hollitt, 2014; Moore & Lee, 2012).

Kemps et al. (2014), for instance, showed that television food advertisements increased the activation of participants’ food-related cognitions and triggered their subsequent desire to eat. Moreover, Elder and Krishna (2010) were the first to extend these findings to actual sensory perception by showing that—in addition to intrinsic cues from the food item itself—taste is also susceptible to extrinsic cues such as advertising appeals. Very little research has been done, however, to explore the effect of different framings of advertizing appeals (i.e. promoting hedonic consumption as either positive or negative) on consumer judgment and decision making using behavioral measures such as

actual taste experience (Elder & Krishna, 2010; Moore & Lee, 2012). These taste perceptions from hedonic consumption often elicit both good (e.g. pleasure) as well as bad (e.g. guilt, shame, remorse) feelings, whereas a product's taste might in turn be influenced by prior positive versus negative emotional expectations. Either way, the relative strength of such contradicting feelings might depend on the salience of positive versus negative emotions as well as the explicitness of their interconnectedness (Goldsmith, Cho, & Dhar, 2012).

In today's society, the experience of food consumption is often associated with mixed feelings (Kuijer & Boyce, 2014). To illustrate the ambivalence of positive and negative emotions, let's stick to the prototypical example of chocolate mentioned in the beginning. The sweet taste of chocolate elicits a pleasurable experience while at the same time feelings of guilt are likely to arise when one gives in to this tempting stimulus. These contrasting feelings, characterized as "guilty pleasures" often coexist when we perform a certain behavior (i.e. give in to a temptation) known to have positive short-term but negative long-term consequences (Giner-Sorolla, 2001).

In the past, numerous leading brands in the food industry have started to implicitly as well as explicitly incorporate the concept of guilt into their advertisements. Some famous examples are "Once you pop, you can't stop" (Pringle's), "Give in to it" (Magnum's 'Seven sins' campaign), "Finger lickin' good" (KFC) and "Guilt free. Unless you steal one" (thinkThin protein bar), which show that marketers have intuitively incorporated the positive link between guilt and pleasure into their marketing-toolbox. Nevertheless, none of these brands knew at the time *why* these appeals might work so that their marketing strategy was—and still is—exclusively based on intuition rather than

scientific research on the underlying mechanisms that evoke a sense of longing in the consumer. So what accounts for the effectiveness of framing unhealthy snack products as something dangerous or guilty?

As previous research has shown, external cues such as haptic and visual characteristics of products can have a significant impact on not only pre-purchase attitudes and intentions, but also on the consumption experience itself (Krishna & Morrin, 2008; Raghunathan, Naylor, & Hoyer, 2006). In particular, Raghunathan et al. (2006) examined the effect of labeling a food item as either healthy or unhealthy on taste inferences, actual enjoyment, and food choices. Their results support an unhealthy-equals-tasty intuition, whereby different food items portrayed to be unhealthy (e.g. burger, pizza) led to higher choice preferences than food items portrayed to be healthy (e.g. apple, salad). In addition, these results were also found when the same food item (i.e. a milkshake) was portrayed as either healthy or unhealthy (see experiment 3). Consistent with previous findings, enjoyment ratings were significantly higher when the milkshake was portrayed as being unhealthy, suggesting that the unhealthy framing of an appeal may not only illicit better-inferred taste, but also more enjoyment during actual consumption. To my knowledge, however, there has not been any empirical study to date, which directly tested the effectiveness of advertising slogans on choice preferences and taste assessment simultaneously. If people infer better taste from unhealthy foods, could framing a tempting food item with a negative emotion such as guilt actually increase the attraction of this stimulus and influence consumer behavior?

As a matter of fact, recent empirical research has started to include the effect of different negative emotions such as guilt (Giner-Sorolla, 2001), shame versus guilt

(Chun, Patrick, & MacInnis, 2007), disgust versus guilt (Goldsmith et al., 2012), and sadness and guilt (Zemack-Rugar, Bettman, & Fitzsimons, 2007) on the choice of tempting stimuli as well as the actual experience from hedonic consumption.

Consumer guilt is generally defined as a discomforting, self-conscious moral emotion that results from the subjective feeling of having violated personal or social moral standards (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Watson & Spence, 2007). It is the type of guilt that is specifically related to the consumption decision context. In contrast to other moral emotions such as shame, guilt involves a negative evaluation of a *specific behavior*, for example giving in to a certain temptation, but not of the *global self* (Tangney & Dearing, 2002) and furthermore seems to be the more adaptive emotion as it elicits a motivation to act (Lewis, 1971).

For most of us, it should be intuitively appealing to believe that the feeling of guilt—a negative moral emotion—would negatively affect the choice of and subsequent pleasure from a hedonic item such as unhealthy but delicious food. Indeed, some research shows that eliciting guilt is positively related to subsequent self-control, therefore reducing the likelihood of choosing an appealing yet unhealthy food (e.g. Giner-Sorolla, 2001; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2007). In contrast, more recent research has shown that inducing guilt might also amplify the pleasure of actual consumption. Specifically, Goldsmith et al. (2012) showed that activating guilt, by either priming the concept or the actual experience of this negative emotion, can increase the pleasure from subsequent consumption of a chocolate cake. The authors assume that guilt automatically activates pleasure-related cognitions that *increase* the pleasure from consumption. At first sight, these results seem to contradict prior studies showing that anticipating guilt *reduces* the

likelihood of choosing a hedonic over a non-hedonic product in a subsequent choice setting (Chun et al., 2007). Taking these conflicting findings into account, the present research aimed to address this inconsistency in the literature.

In doing so, one must first elucidate the link between guilt and pleasure in more detail. Apart from many other enjoyable experiences in our daily lives, food is probably one of the things that instantly come to mind when we are thinking about pleasure. This association is natural and inbred in all of us. We need food for our survival and our daily functioning. Moreover, and compared to other sources of pleasure, sugary food usually tastes good, is comforting, reliable, fast, easy, cheap and legal to accomplish. But it can also be guilt-provoking when taken to an extreme, because the (over-) consumption of food containing high amounts of fat and sugar is well-known to have detrimental effects on our health (see e.g. Bray, 2004). So how does this strong association between unhealthy food, pleasure and guilt evolve that may explain why chocolate tastes even better when we feel bad for giving in to it?

Primarily, associations between emotions and experiences are generated through personal experiences and reinforced by social observations. Developmental research has shown that newborn infants have a brainstem orofacial reflex that is unique to the taste of sugar (Nowlis & Kessen, 1976). In their study, Nowlis and Kessen (1976) found that by activating this innate reflex in response to sweetness, infants roll their tongues into a tube so that the transfer of fluid to the back of the mouth and down the throat is facilitated. Furthermore, Rosenstein and Oster (1988) even argue that such fixed action patterns appear to be the only innate appetite reaction in humans. Since sweet food is one of the first pleasures we experience soon after birth, we automatically start crying for it when it

is not available. As a result, we associate being fed with being embraced and a feeling that someone cares for us. Then, as toddlers and preschoolers, we are often rewarded with snacks like delicious desserts and candies, but only when our plates are fully cleaned. When we hurt ourselves, we get soothed with cookies and treats. Hence, the link between sugared food, physical comfort and love becomes ever more intertwined.

Then, when we become older, the tables turn: Suddenly, eating certain food items becomes less positively connected as parents, peers and the popular media start to encourage us to minimize and restrict our diet and we are constantly warned of getting fat when eating too much. If we look at current advertisements streaming on television, open a fashion magazine or glance at a billboard, the chances are high that we are confronted with an unnatural-skinny beauty: the “thin-ideal”. According to one study, of all females featured on television, 94 percent are slimmer than the average woman in the United States (Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac, & Posavac, 2005). Hence, we are being taught to value self-denial higher than pleasure. This message is constantly reinforced during adolescence, so that for many of us the simple act of eating develops into a dilemma between love and comfort, on the one hand, and feelings of guilt that accompany the pleasurable experience, on the other. As some researchers have suggested earlier, the link between guilt and pleasure may become automatic and nonconscious over time because of this repeated internal co-activation (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999).

Moreover, apart from this general learning effect that occurs early in life, we are further repeatedly exposed to external environmental cues that strengthen the cognitive link between pleasure and guilt. As the term “guilty pleasures” indicates, many food items that induce a feeling of guilt in us, such as fried fast food and sweet desserts, are

also associated with heightened enjoyment (which might be the reason why many diets do not work). Following this, a carry-over effect occurs as often when we experience guilt from consumption we also experience pleasure. The idea of activating emotion concepts and their subsequent spillover to associated emotions and experiences is consistent with prior research. Such research has argued that emotions are accompanied by knowledge structures and cognitive schemata (Lang, 1993; Schachter & Singer, 1962). These emotion schemata, in turn, are linked to a neural network in which memories, motivations, and behaviors are linked to other emotions and are activated whenever an emotion is consciously or subjectively experienced (Lang et al. 1998). That is, when pleasure is activated, guilt is activated and vice versa so that in our brains, over time, the two concepts become connected. Once such a neural connection has been developed, the mere activation of the concept of guilt may automatically trigger pleasure-related thoughts when one is confronted with unhealthy but tasty food, which might then elicit greater taste from consumption than when guilt had not been previously activated.

Based on this reasoning, Goldsmith et al. (2012) received support for the notion that the activation of (associated as well as self-experienced) guilt in consumers enhances actual pleasure from hedonic consumption (Study 1, 2, 3, 5, 6), whereas this effect could be explained by an increase in the accessibility of pleasure-related cognitions (Study 4). All studies followed a similar design that differed in the way of manipulating guilt. Invariably, a control group was given neutral tasks and then asked to sample a chocolate candy, while a treatment group was primed with guilt-inducing tasks before sampling the same candy and subsequently rating its tastiness. For example, in their first experiment, participants were randomly assigned to either a guilt-prime or a neutral-prime condition

and asked to unscramble the provided words (guilt related vs. guilt-neutral words) before testing a new chocolate in a second phase and reporting how much they liked it. The results showed that participants who were asked to unscramble guilt-words (e.g. guilty, remorse, sin) liked the chocolate significantly more than those who were asked to unscramble neutral words. In their second and third study, Goldsmith et al. (2012) further showed that this effect was not limited to unrelated guilt (as in Study 1), but could also be obtained when guilt was directly associated with the tempting stimulus (by activating a health goal, Study 2) or personally experienced by participants (using an emotion induction task, Study 3).

Despite these robust and conclusive results across all of the studies, there are many questions that yet need to be answered. Firstly, although manipulating guilt in numerous ways, none of the different guilt primes were related to the direct promotion of the tempting item. Moreover, none of these studies jointly investigated the role of guilt with regard to the acquisition of, versus the experience from, hedonic products. Thus, the main objective of this master thesis was to extend the existing research by further investigating the influence of different guilt primes (i.e. implicit versus explicit) in both a decision context, where people have the choice to buy a hedonic item, as well as in a consumption context, in which the product's taste is actually tested.

Taking the outlined reasoning and underlying research into account, I argue that activating the concept of guilt might operate in a very different manner on the choice of—compared to the experience from—hedonic items. On the one hand, when feeling guilty we might be less willing to purchase a tempting stimulus and to spend a premium on it, because we intuitively expect that eating something unhealthy will make the

experience less enjoyable. Indeed in a series of experiments, Goldsmith et al. (2012) found that almost all of their participants (94%) predicted that a dessert would be more enjoyable when they felt no guilt than when they had guilty feelings about indulging. On the other hand, a nonconscious reverse conditioning effect might also occur: As we usually feel bad about indulging in tempting actions such as eating unhealthy yet tasty snacks, the mere anticipation of feeling bad or guilty makes us assume the snack is indeed very delicious—as guilt automatically activates concepts that are associated with pleasure—leaving us craving even more for it. Thus, the present thesis suggests that, whereas the choice for a hedonic item decreases by priming guilt, the actual pleasure from consumption is likely to increase.

Moreover, I suspect that choice and pleasure may also be influenced by the explicitness (i.e. explicit versus implicit appeals) of the guilt-frame being used. In this regard, I suggest that the inconsistency of results concerning the choice of versus the pleasure from hedonic items can be best understood from a dual-process perspective. The *reflective-impulsive model* (RIM) is a recent example of an integrative dual-system theory, which assumes that human evaluations and behaviors are the joint outcome of two broad information-processing systems: the reflective and the impulsive system (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). The RIM suggests that both systems act in parallel but activate different behavioral schemata. Whereas the *impulsive system* that is assumed to be constantly active elicits quick, automatic evaluations and behavioral tendencies through a process of spreading activation, the *reflective system* that depends on capacity and motivation follows a more indirect pathway that relies on reasoning and regulations (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). In contrast to the impulsive or implicit system that progresses automatic

and spontaneous evaluations, reflective or explicit processes require high cognitive resources and are, therefore, disturbed more easily. Moreover, unlike other typologies of buying behavior, the RIM assumes that both reflective and impulsive mechanisms contribute to the act of purchasing whereas the subsequent decision depends on the relative activation and strength of each system (Strack, Werth, & Deutsch, 2006).

By taking the dual nature of the RIM into account, the model may also be adjuvant in trying to resolve the incongruent findings concerning how and when explicit versus implicit guilt appeals affect consumer behavior (Giner-Sorolla, 2001; Goldsmith et al., 2012). Based on the dual-process perspective, I propose that implicit as well as explicit guilt advertising slogans promoting high caloric food such as chocolate, for instance “Devil’s/ guilty delight”, elicit positive associations reflecting the incentive value of high-calorie, palatable food. In contrast to explicit guilt-slogans that directly link the hedonic product to the guilty experience by highlighting the temptation (i.e. inner conflict) in a palpable manner (e.g. “Give your day a *guilty* lift”), implicit guilt-slogans try to convey a more subtle message about the relationship between guilt and pleasure that might not directly be recognized by consumers (e.g. “Give your day an *irresistible* lift”). As unhealthy but tasty food is associated with positive affect in the impulsive system, implicit guilt-slogans may still trigger pleasure-related feelings making consumers more prone to indulge. These positive feelings should, in turn, according to the dual-process perspective, activate a behavioral motivation to approach the tempting stimulus as the impulsive system gains relatively more strength than the reflective system (Strack & Deutsch, 2004). In particular, I argue that the choice of, willingness to pay for

and subsequent purchase intention for the chocolate will be greater when guilt is evoked implicitly than when it is evoked on an explicit level.

On the other hand, I propose that explicit guilt slogans such as “Guilty delight” make the temptation (i.e. conflict between desirable short-term versus negative long-term consequences) more salient and thus consumers more cautious, which should lead to lower choice measures but also higher taste ratings. That is, when consumers are explicitly reminded of the feeling of guilt before indulging in chocolate their reflective system may refrain them from choosing too many chocolates, whereas the cognitive association between guilt and pleasure will become even stronger than when guilt is evoked on an implicit level, thus increasing the actual pleasure from consumption. More precisely, when consumers are explicitly reminded of a guilty experience the pleasurable, sweet taste of chocolate comes to mind more easily, which in turn, leads to higher ratings when they are asked to indicate the chocolate’s taste. At the same time however, an explicit reminder of guilt in a choice context—where reflective, explicit processes are stronger than implicit processes and thus guide consumer decision-making—may also make consumers take fewer chocolates, less willing to pay for it and decrease their purchase intention when giving in to the temptation is so explicitly linked to a negative, undesirable emotion. In such a case, it will be more likely that consumer behavior is based on deliberate and controlled decision-making rather than automatic, impulsive choices. Hence, the following hypotheses were derived:

H1: Both, *implicit* as well as *explicit guilt* advertising slogans will generate a smaller amount consumed of, lower willingness to pay for, lower subsequent purchase intention for but greater taste perception of the chocolate than control slogans.

H2: Advertising slogans containing an *implicit guilt* appeal will generate a greater amount consumed of, willingness to pay for and subsequent purchase intention for the chocolate than explicit guilt appeals.

H3: Advertising slogans containing an *explicit guilt* appeal will generate a greater taste perception than implicit guilt appeals.

With this master thesis I would like to contribute to the growing literature within (cognitive) psychology, and to an increasing extent, consumer behavior, by examining the interplay between emotions and their consequences on judgment and decision-making. This research contributes to prior research on the impact of emotions on consumer behavior by subjecting participants to an actual consumption experience where they evaluate a taste sensation (Goldsmith et al., 2012) and by directly comparing these sensual evaluations with purchase intentions. Moreover, with my thesis I would like to address inconsistent findings in the literature that show negative consequences of guilt on the acquisition of hedonic products, on the one hand (Giner-Sorolla, 2001), but positive effects of priming guilt on the experience of pleasure after consumption, on the other hand (Goldsmith et al., 2012).

Also, unlike previous priming studies conducted in a controlled laboratory setting where food-related words or sentences were often presented subliminally, this study exposed participants to real-world food primes, that is slogans promoting a new chocolate brand. Specifically, I investigated how food-primes that vary in their degree of guilt (implicit vs. explicit vs. no guilt control) influence the choice of—as well as the pleasure from—hedonic consumption. The setup of this experimental field study featured high

ecological validity because it controlled for a number of confounding variables (internal validity) in a more natural setting (external validity) than previous studies.

Moreover, the results of my master thesis have important practical implications for managers and marketers of leading snack food brands. This field study's findings show that guilt can be seen as a double-edged sword. In particular, a more *explicit* guilt appeal may decrease a brand's market share but increase consumers' pleasure from consumption. On the contrary, a more *implicit* guilt appeal may elicit just the opposite effect, so that the brand has to make a trade-off between maximizing its own profit and maximizing consumers' pleasure.

Method

Participants and Design

In order to answer the outlined research questions, a field experiment was conducted at the faculty of social sciences in Leiden. Hence, all participants we recruited were university students who were currently enrolled in one of the study programs offered by the four departments in this building (Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Education and Child Studies, Political Science, Psychology). Altogether, a sample of $N = 145$ students participated in the study, of which 61 percent were female ($n = 89$) with an average age of $M_{age} = 21$, $SD_{age} = 2.37$. The sample was distributed equally among the three experimental conditions, $n_{control} = 49$ ($M_{age} = 22.18$, $SD_{age} = .49$, $n_{female} = 32$), $n_{implicitguilt} = 50$ ($M_{age} = 21.16$, $SD_{age} = 2.31$, $n_{female} = 30$), $n_{explicitguilt} = 46$ ($M_{age} = 20.76$, $SD_{age} = 2.00$, $n_{female} = 27$). The field experiment was conducted using a one-factor between-subjects design, with divergent ad slogans that

differed in their emphasis on guilt (explicit guilt, implicit guilt, no guilt control) serving as the manipulated factor. Participants' taste perception, consumption of chocolate, willingness to pay, and purchase intention served as dependent variables.

Procedure

Students of the faculty of social and behavioral science were personally approached and asked if they would like to participate in a study on advertisement evaluation and taste perception of the (fictive) new chocolate brand 'Pure Pleasures'. The recruitment and experiment took part in the corridor of the faculty building on five consecutive days during one week between 9 and 12 o'clock in the morning. We made sure that each condition was set at the same time and that breakfast as well as lunch times were avoided as students are likely to be hungry or already satisfied from a meal during that time of the day, which in turn could have influenced the dependent study measures. Each day the conditions were rotated and their order was counterbalanced to minimize any day or time-of-day effects. The product selected as the experimental stimulus was a small chocolate bar, whereas the cover story was an evaluation of different advertisement slogans for and a taste test of a fictive new chocolate product 'Pure Pleasures'. Moreover, we claimed the experiment to be part of our internship for the Master in Economic and Consumer Psychology. To make the story even more authentic, we were always wearing a T-shirt promoting the new chocolate 'Pure Pleasures'.

Prior to the actual experiment, students were asked (a) if they were currently on a diet, (b) if they had any chocolate-related allergies, and (c) whether their comprehension level in the English language was appropriate enough to understand and fill in the questionnaires. Participants who answered with "no" to the first and/or "yes" to either or

both of the other questions were not allowed to take part in the experiment. All the participants who took part in the study were thus able to comprehend the questions and none of them were on a diet or had any chocolate-related allergies.

After selection, participants were provided with a booklet of nine pages containing four different parts. Part one consisted of the informed consent, which involved the information that participating in the study was voluntary and without obligation. Moreover, participants were also informed that they could raise any questions they had concerning the study by simply approaching one of the researchers at any time during the experiment.

Guilt manipulation.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: explicit guilt advertisement slogans (e.g. “*Guilty* delight”, see Appendix A), implicit guilt advertisement slogans (e.g. “*Devil’s* delight”, see Appendix B), and no guilt control condition (e.g. “*Real* delight”, see Appendix C). In each condition 6 colored pictures featuring the chocolate and different advertisement slogans were presented that only differed in their degree of guilt they elicited in the consumer. Whereas explicit guilt appeals directly referred to guilt-related feelings by using the word “guilt” in each slogan, implicit guilt appeals only emphasized that there might be a conflict between positive and negative feelings (e.g. guilt and pleasure) by using terms such as “irresistible” and “evil” instead of “guilt”. Nevertheless, participants in the implicit guilt condition should still derive a feeling of guilt as the words that were used in these slogans had a guilt-eliciting connotation such as “devil” and “desire” without explicitly mentioning the term “guilt”. In contrast to both guilt conditions, participants in the no guilt control condition should

not be reminded of guilt in any way by using words such as “real” and “tasty” instead of explicit or implicit guilt-related ones. In this regard, a pilot study¹ was run in advance to test whether the intended manipulation affected guilt without influencing the overall liking of the slogans.

Furthermore, several slogans, instead of just one, were chosen for each condition to control for the fact that participants could see the connection between our guilt manipulation and the dependent measures, that is participants’ taste experience and subsequent consumption choices (i.e. the amount of chocolate consumed, willingness to pay for and subsequent purchase intention for the chocolate). Thus, to ensure that the manipulation was properly but at the same time rather subtly implemented, participants were asked—as part of the cover story of a new chocolate brand trying to find a way to attract new costumers—to read the slogans carefully before indicating how much they liked each of them on a seven-point Likert-scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). These ratings were, however, not included in the final analysis. Nevertheless a manipulation check was construed to ensure that the three guilt conditions’ slogans only differed in the level of guilt they elicited in the consumer just as in the pilot study¹. After they evaluated all slogans in their booklet, participants were asked to approach the researcher in order to test the new chocolate.

Taste test.

Following the manipulation procedure, participants were provided with the third part of the booklet, which consisted of the dependent measures of the experiment. First, each participant was provided with one piece of chocolate and asked to try and rate the chocolate in a short questionnaire that consisted of questions concerning the overall taste

and sweetness, as well as questions about the impression of how rich and creamy the chocolate was perceived. Afterwards, participants were provided with a bowl that contained more chocolate pieces. Each student was informed that he or she could take as many chocolates as he or she wished in order to “get a really good impression of ‘Pure Pleasures’ and to help the brand find the perfect recipe that suits every consumer’s taste as best as possible” and was then asked how much he/she was willing to pay (WTP) for a bar of the new chocolate brand and about his/her intention to purchase the product in the future. At the same time, we also counted how many pieces of chocolate each participant took out of the bowl.

Demographics and controls.

In the forth part of the booklet, participants were asked to provide some demographical information (gender, age, body height, and weight). Also, this last part of the experiment involved a short emotion manipulation check, which asked participants to indicate how much guilt they were currently feeling after consuming the chocolate (1 = “not at all” to 7 = “very much”) as well as some control variables asking for current feelings of hunger, general dietary concerns and liking of chocolate. These controls were chosen as they could have influenced the dependent measures such that hungry participants and those who generally like chocolate may have indicated greater liking for the chocolate. Moreover, previous research has shown that restraint eating is strongly associated with chocolate-related guilt (e.g. Kuijer & Boyce, 2014). It is thus possible that participants with weight concerns were more likely to feel guilty when consuming the chocolate and less likely to choose and like it than their less concerned counterparts.

After the completion of the four parts of the booklet, participants were debriefed by informing them about the real purpose of the study. In addition, they were asked for permission to use their obtained data and kindly asked to not spread the actual purpose of the experiment among other students. If no further questions arose during the debriefing, students were thanked for their participation and dismissed.

Measures

Dependent variables.

Amount of consumption was calculated from the total amount of chocolate pieces participants took from the bowl.

Willingness to pay (WTP) was measured with the question: “How much money are you willing to pay (in Eurocents) for a bar of ‘Pure Pleasures’?” as an open-ended question (Miller, Hofstetter, Krohmer, & Zhang, 2011).

Purchase intention was measured with the item: “How likely is it that you would purchase ‘Pure Pleasures’ in the future”? On a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much* (Tudoran, Olsen, & Dopico, 2012).

Taste perception was indicated on a seven-point Likert-scale on four separate dimensions. Participants were asked to indicate how tasty, sweet, rich and creamy the chocolate was for them (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*).

Control variables.

Socio-demographic variables were measured with questions about age (years), gender (male vs. female), body-height (cm) and body-weight (kg); to assess participants’ body mass index ($BMI = \text{weight in kg} / \text{height m}^2$).

Guilt was measured with one question: “How guilty do you feel after eating the chocolate?” and was rated on a seven-point Likert-scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*).

Current hunger was assessed by one item of the ‘Craving as a psychological state’-subscale of the FSQ-S (Cepeda-Benito, Gleaves, Williams, & Erath, 2000), “Are you currently hungry?” that was rated on a seven-point Likert-scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*, adapted) as well as one item asking for the last time participants had consumed any food (indicated in hours since the last consumption; Van Dillen, Papies, and Hofmann (2013)).

Liking of chocolate was measured by asking: “How much do you like chocolate in general?”, and was rated on a seven-point Likert-scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*).

Following Papies, Stroebe, and Aarts (2008) as well as Van Strien, Herman, Engels, Larsen, and Van Leeuwe (2007), *general dietary concern* was assessed as the last control variable using six items from the Concern for Dieting subscale of the Revised Restraint Scale. An example item is “Do you have feelings of guilt after overeating?” that was rated on a seven-point Likert-scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*, adapted).

Data Analysis

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess the impact of the three guilt levels (explicit, implicit, control) on participants’ scores on the seven dependent variables (amount of chocolate taken, WTP, purchase intention, and impression of how tasty, sweet, rich and creamy the chocolate was). A one-way MANOVA was chosen because it is designed to consider several dependent variables simultaneously to help protect against inflating the Type 1 error rate in follow-up comparisons (Cramer, 1973). Among four rival tests (Pillai-Bartlett trace criterion,

Wilks' likelihood ratio criterion, Hotelling-Lawley trace criterion, and Roy's largest root criterion) Pillai-Bartlett trace criterion (V) is reported as it may be the most robust statistic for general protection against departures from assumption violation (Olson, 1976). The MANOVA was followed up with a series of univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) for each dependent variable. Finally, post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test were computed after running the MANOVA to assess how the dependent variables discriminated between the three groups.

Results

Manipulation Check

As intended, the results of the manipulation check confirmed that participants in the experimental conditions anticipated different levels of guilt according to the slogans they were instructed to rate in the context of tasting the chocolate. These results support prior results of the pilot study¹. This is, whereas participants in the implicit guilt condition experienced the least guilt after eating the chocolate ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.03$) followed by participants in the control condition ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.11$), those students who were part of the explicit guilt condition reported feeling the most guilty ($M = 1.96$, $SD = 1.59$). However, these differences did not reach significance, $F(2,142) = 1.23$, $p = .295$, $\eta^2 = .017$, which is not a problem since consumer guilt was measured at the very end of the survey.

Moreover, an ANOVA on the mean score of slogan liking with guilt condition as the independent variable was run to ascertain that participants did not prefer the slogans of one condition to the others. The results confirmed that this was not the case, $F(2,142)$

$= 1.31$, $p = .736$, $\eta^2 = .004$. On average, participants' opinion on the slogans in the explicit guilt condition ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.04$) was similar to those in the implicit guilt condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.71$) and the no-guilt control condition ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.71$). The manipulation check thus supported the pilot study's¹ results: The conditions only differed according to the level of guilt participants experienced but not with regard to how much they liked the slogans.

Preliminary Data Preparation and Descriptives

Prior to hypotheses testing, a reliability analysis was conducted that confirmed the internal consistency of the dietary concern scale, $\alpha = .76$ (Papies et al., 2008; Van Strien et al., 2007). Hence, all 6 items of the scale were computed into one measure of dietary concern ($M = 16.94$, $SD = 5.98$).

Furthermore, a one-way MANOVA on the control variables (i.e. age, gender, BMI, current hunger, chocolate liking, general dietary concern) with guilt condition serving as independent measure was run to control for preexisting differences between the three conditions. The MANOVA yielded a significant effect of experimental group, Pillai's Trace $V = 0.20$, $F(16, 272) = 1.89$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .100$. The results of univariate follow-up ANOVAs revealed that there were no significant differences between the groups with regard to their gender composition, hours since they had last eaten ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 3.27$), current hunger ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.62$), BMI ($M = 21.58$, $SD = 2.42$), general chocolate liking ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 1.52$) and dietary concern ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.00$, all $ps > .120$). There was, however, a significant difference between the groups' age composition, $F(2,142) = 4.84$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .064$. Post hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) confirmed that participants in the control condition were significantly older ($M = 22.18$, $SE = .33$) than

participants in the explicit guilt condition ($M = 20.76$, $SE = .34$). Since the relationship between age and any of the dependent variables was non significant, the initial age difference between the groups did not seem to influence these measures and was thus not considered in further analyses.

Furthermore, additional regression analyses were carried out to check for influences of the control variables on the dependent measures with regard to the sample as a whole. As could have been expected, there was a significant positive relationship between general chocolate liking and liking of 'Pure Pleasures', $\beta = .27$, $F(6, 138) = 4.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .177$. Also, a t-test revealed that there was a significant influence of participants' gender on 'Pure Pleasure' liking, such that females liked the chocolate more ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.11$) than males ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 1.01$), $r = .20$, $t(143) = -2.42$, $p < .05$.

Hypotheses Testing

Consistent with predictions, a one-way MANOVA on the seven dependent variables (i.e. perception of taste, sweetness, richness, and creaminess, consumption of chocolate, willingness to pay, and purchase intention) revealed a highly significant multivariate effect of guilt condition, Pillai's Trace $V = 0.38$, $F(14, 274) = 4.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .188$. In particular, separate univariate one-way ANOVAs on the outcome variables revealed a significant main effect of guilt induction on chocolate liking (tastiness), $F(2, 142) = 3.94$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .053$, chocolate consumption, $F(2, 142) = 16.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .192$, and willingness to pay (WTP) $F(2, 142) = 6.05$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .079$. There was no significant effect of guilt condition on perceived sweetness, $F(2, 142) = 0.47$, $p = .629$, richness, $F(2, 142) = 1.53$, $p = .220$, creaminess, $F(2, 142) = 1.34$, $p = .265$, nor purchase intention, $F(2, 142) = .57$, $p = .568$. Moreover, a series of post-hoc analyses (Tukey's

HSD) was performed to examine individual mean difference comparisons across all three levels of guilt and all seven dependent measures. Descriptives and mean differences between the groups are depicted in Table 1.

Do guilt appeals lower consumers' acquisition of and heighten their experience from chocolate consumption?

It was assumed that both *implicit* as well as *explicit guilt* advertising slogans would generate a smaller amount consumed of, lower willingness to pay for, lower subsequent purchase intention for but greater taste perception of the chocolate than control slogans (Hypothesis 1). Following up the significant results of the univariate one-way ANOVAs concerning the tastiness, chocolate consumption, and WTP by post-hoc tests showed that participants in the explicit guilt condition rated 'Pure Pleasures' as significantly more tasty ($M = 5.57, SE = .16$) than participants in the control condition ($M = 5.04, SE = .15$), $p < .05$ (see Table 1). Moreover and in line with predictions, the control group, on average, consumed significantly more chocolate pieces ($M = 2.18, SE = .10$) than both implicit ($M = 1.84, SE = .09, p < .05$) and explicit ($M = 1.39, SE = .10, p < .001$) guilt groups. Contrary to predictions, however, the implicit guilt condition was willing to pay the highest price for 'Pure Pleasures' ($M = 1.66, SD = .09$) compared to both the explicit guilt condition ($M = 1.32, SD = .09, p < .05$) as well as the control condition ($M = 1.25, SD = .09, p < .01$).

Do implicit compared to explicit guilt appeals heighten consumers' acquisition of chocolate consumption?

In Hypothesis 2, I proposed that advertising slogans containing an *implicit guilt* appeal would generate a greater amount consumed of, willingness to pay for and

subsequent purchase intention for the chocolate than explicit guilt appeals. As can be seen in Table 1, the implicit advertisement appeal generated a significantly higher amount of chocolate consumption ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .09$) than the explicit guilt appeal ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .10$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, participants in the implicit guilt condition were willing to pay a significantly higher amount of money for a ‘Pure Pleasures’ bar ($M = 1.66$, $SD = .09$) than those in the explicit guilt condition ($M = 1.32$, $SD = .09$, $p < .05$), and were also slightly more eager to purchase ‘Pure Pleasures’ in the future ($p = .907$).

Do explicit compared to implicit guilt appeals heighten consumers’ experience from chocolate consumption?

Hypothesis 3 proposing that advertising slogans containing an *explicit guilt* appeal would generate a greater taste perception than implicit guilt appeals did also find statistical support. Participants in the explicit guilt condition indicated a significantly greater taste experience ($M = 5.57$, $SD = .16$) than those in the implicit guilt condition ($M = 5.02$, $SD = .15$, $p < .05$). Although not reaching statistical significance, explicitly mentioning guilt in the advertisement slogans made the chocolate not just taste better but also made it sweeter, richer, and creamier than when guilt was only implicitly mentioned (see Table 1). Moreover, a separate MANOVA on the four measures concerning the taste experience from the chocolate (tastiness, sweetness, richness, and creaminess) was run to test for the overall effect. The effect did not reach statistical significance, Pillai’s Trace $V = 0.66$, $F(8, 280) = .57$, $p = .304$, $\eta^2 = .033$. In line with the results of the MANOVA where all dependent measures were included, a subsequent ANOVA on consumers’ taste experience revealed that only participants’ perception of ‘Pure Pleasures’ tastiness

significantly differed between explicit ($M = 5.57$, $SD = .16$) and implicit guilt conditions ($M = 5.02$, $SD = .15$), $F(2, 142) = 3.94$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .053$.

Table 1.

Post Hoc statistics and descriptives for the seven dependent variables and the three guilt conditions using Tukey's HSD test.

Measure	M	SE	Mean Differences ($X_i - X_k$)		
			Control	Implicit guilt	Explicit guilt
Tastiness					
Control	5.04	.15	-	.02	-.52*
Implicit guilt	5.02	.15	-.02	-	-.55*
Explicit guilt	5.57	.16	.52*	.55*	-
Sweetness					
Control	5.25	.17	-	.12	-.10
Implicit guilt	5.12	.16	-.12	-	-.23
Explicit guilt	5.35	.17	.10	.23	-
Richness					
Control	4.47	.18	-	.05	-.36
Implicit guilt	4.42	.17	-.05	-	-.41
Explicit guilt	4.83	.18	.36	.41	-
Creaminess					
Control	5.00	.19	-	.26	-.17
Implicit guilt	4.70	.18	-.26	-	-.43
Explicit guilt	5.13	.19	.17	.43	-
Chocolate consumption					
Control	2.18	.10	-	.34*	.79***
Implicit guilt	1.84	.09	-.34*	-	.45**
Explicit guilt	1.39	.10	-.79***	-.45**	-
Willingness to pay					
Control	1.25	.09	-	-.41**	-.07
Implicit guilt	1.66	.09	.41**	-	.34*
Explicit guilt	1.32	.09	.07	-.34*	-
Purchase intention					
Control	3.76	.18	-	-.26	-.16
Implicit guilt	4.02	.18	.26	-	.11
Explicit guilt	3.91	.18	.16	-.11	-

Note: $N = 14$. Means in the same row with different subscripts are significantly different (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$) from each other (Tukey's HSD test).

Discussion

The present field study was conducted with the objective to investigate whether activating the concept of guilt might operate in a different manner on the choice of—compared to the experience from—hedonic items such as chocolate. Based on conflicting results of previous studies and a theoretical background that is based on the reflective-impulsive model (RIM), it was proposed that eliciting consumer guilt in either an explicit or rather implicit manner leads to a reduction in the acquisition and consumption of, and an increase in the pleasure from chocolate compared to a neutral control appeal.

At the most general level, the results concerning *Hypothesis 1* seem to partially support these assumptions. On the one hand, both implicit as well as explicit guilt slogans led to less chocolate consumption compared to slogans containing no guilt appeal at all. That is, when feeling guilty we might indeed be less willing to purchase a tempting stimulus and to spend a premium on it, because we intuitively expect that eating something unhealthy will make the experience less enjoyable. On the other hand, priming participants with several slogans that explicitly state the term guilt (e.g. “*Guilty* delight”, see Appendix B) also increased the tastiness of the chocolate. In this study, explicit guilt appeals not only led potential customers to rate ‘Pure Pleasures’ as being tastier, but also as being sweeter, richer, and creamier than the other two appeals did. As has been shown in prior research by Goldsmith et al. (2012), the mere activation of the concept of guilt seems to automatically trigger pleasure-related thoughts when one is confronted with unhealthy but tasty food such as chocolate, which then elicits greater taste from consumption.

Contrary to predictions, participants' willingness to pay and purchase intention for 'Pure Pleasures' was greatest when evaluating the implicit guilt and not the control slogans as expected. It is important mentioning that previous research has found an inverted-U-relationship between attitudes, intentions, and cognitive responses to guilt appeals. Coulter and Pinto (1995), for example, suggest that high (explicit) guilt appeals may arouse feelings of anger, annoyance and irritation, whereas low-intensity (no guilt control) appeals may lead to low attention levels. Thus, it is possible that participants consumed the most when guilt was not mentioned at all (i.e. in the control group), but these slogans may at the same time also lead to fewer attention and arousal than the guilt appeals resulting in lower willingness to pay for 'Pure Pleasures'.

Of particular interest are the results concerning *Hypotheses 2* and *3*. As expected, we found that consumers' choice and pleasure also depend on the explicitness (i.e. explicit versus implicit appeals) of the guilt-frame being used. Whereas implicit guilt appeals generated a greater amount consumed of, willingness to pay for and subsequent purchase intention for the chocolate (*Hypothesis 2*), explicit guilt appeals generated a greater taste perception (*Hypothesis 3*). Overall, these results stress the importance of considering different levels of guilt that is evoked in potential customers as this helps in elucidating prior counterintuitive findings. On the one hand, the present study underscores that explicit guilt appeals may reduce consumption of, purchase intention for and willingness to pay a premium on chocolate as has been previously shown (Chun et al., 2007). On the other hand, explicitly emphasizing guilt in advertising may also amplify consumers' pleasure from hedonic consumption as has been illustrated by Goldsmith et al. (2012). Although I did not test for any underlying mechanisms, one idea

is that guilty forms of pleasure have been so engrained into our brain that feelings of guilt trigger thoughts of sin and remorse as well as desire and pleasure at the same time.

As has been suggested earlier, the reflective-impulsive model (RIM) (Strack & Deutsch, 2004; Strack et al., 2006) may provide the underpinnings for the different behavioral and perceptual reactions to varying levels of guilt appeals. When consumer guilt is elicited implicitly, through appeals depicting synonyms of guilt such as ‘temptation’, ‘sin’, or ‘desire’, unhealthy yet tasty food is associated with positive affect in the impulsive system that triggers pleasure-related feelings, thus making consumers more prone to indulge. These positive feelings, in turn, according to the dual-process perspective, activate a behavioral motivation to approach the tempting stimuli as the impulsive system gains relatively more strength than the reflective system (Strack & Deutsch, 2004).

The depiction of explicit guilt appeals in advertising, however, seems to trigger a more effortful, secondary process: Consumers might consider buying the product once again when guilt is evoked. When consumers are explicitly reminded of guilt before indulging in chocolate their reflecting system refrains them from choosing too many chocolates, whereas the cognitive association between guilt and pleasure becomes even stronger, thus increasing the actual pleasure from consumption. More precisely, when consumers are explicitly reminded of a guilty experience the pleasurable, sweet taste of chocolate comes to mind more easily, which in turn, leads to higher taste ratings. Furthermore, the present study shows that the neutral and implicit guilt condition reported similar taste ratings suggesting that unconsciously feeling guilty does not affect consumers’ taste impression either positively or negatively compared to neutral appeals.

This brings us back to the initial question of this thesis: whether guilt appeals used in advertisement can make a useful marketing tool. Although it seems intuitively appealing to most of us that guilt appeals do *not* depict useful advertising tools, taking the outlined research with regard to purchase willingness and intention as well as consumer experience into account, inconspicuously integrating the concept of guilt—for example by mentioning the seven sins (Magnum) or reminding consumers that they cannot stop eating once they indulge (Pringles)—may satisfy both, companies and consumers, at the same time.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

The present study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, this study focuses on the influence of different guilt appeals on only one particular hedonic product (i.e. chocolate). The implications of our findings can thus not be generalized to other hedonic domains such as cigarettes, alcohol, gambling or online dating at this state. For future research, it might be interesting to examine the effect of different guilt appeals across a broader array of hedonic product categories to investigate what types of products and services may be more or less susceptible to these appeals. On the basis of the present findings, guilt appeals that trigger cognitions related to pleasure could have devastating consequences concerning the consumption of drugs and other harmful behaviors.

Another limitation concerns the experimental setting of our field study. In contrast to previous studies, a major strength of this study is its high ecological validity of the setup since it controlled for a number of confounding variables (internal validity) in a natural setting (external validity). Nevertheless, the experiment was conducted in a

university building, which offers an opportunity to buy and consume chocolate bars, but where consumers usually do not intend to purchase hedonic products. For future research, conducting the field study in a supermarket could thus be a promising extension of the present study. Moreover and related to the before mentioned limitation, all of the study's participants were university students, who do not represent the entire target group of chocolate brands. Understanding the extent to which our findings are transferable to other target audiences than students, including children and adults, is hence another avenue for future research.

Equally important mentioning is the design of our experimental manipulation. Despite the fact that the advertising slogans used in this study were pretested¹ and also checked for their intended manipulation, it should be noted that each participant was asked to rate a total of six slogans. However, an ordinary appeal that consumers are confronted with on a daily basis does usually only depict one single slogan, which might not lead to the same effect we observed.

This research shows that consumer guilt can actually increase the pleasure from hedonic consumption. Additional research might introduce a “guilt-free” condition such as a slogan stating: “Guilt-free delight”. The present findings suggest that downplaying peoples’ feelings of guilt may actually deter, rather than enhance, consumers’ enjoyment. Because of the expected cognitive link between guilt and pleasure, when advertising a product as being “guilt-free” people might not expect it to be as good. Lowering the expectation of pleasure may then result in lower taste perceptions. The influence of such “guilt-free” appeals on consumers’ acquisition of and taste perception from hedonic products thus remains an interesting extension of the present research.

A final remark concerns the time frame in our experiment. Participants were exposed to the advertising appeals just before the depended variables were measured. In reality, exposure to advertising, purchasing and consumption usually happen at different times. Thus, a final, but worthwhile, direction for future research would be to investigate the influence of guilt appeals on choice and pleasure after a certain time period has passed.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Notwithstanding the limitations noted above, there are some potentially important theoretical and practical implications of the findings I obtained through the examination of the outlined research questions. To begin with, this research contributes to a growing body of literature examining the multifaceted nature of specific negative emotions and their implications for (consumer) behavior (e.g. Chun et al., 2007; Giner-Sorolla, 2001; Goldsmith et al., 2012; Zemack-Rugar et al., 2007). In particular, the present results suggest a more nuanced understanding of the heretofore one-sided perspective regarding the negative influence of guilt on hedonic products by implementing a different survey design and by measuring both consumer choice as well as pleasure at the same time.

Firstly, unlike previous priming studies conducted in a controlled laboratory setting where food-related words or sentences were often presented subliminally, this study exposed participants to real-world food primes (i.e. slogans promoting ‘Pure Pleasures’). It is also worth highlighting that this research is the first to examine measures of both consumption as well as taste perception simultaneously. Moreover, unlike earlier studies measuring *anticipated* pleasure and consumption (e.g. Chun et al., 2007; Moore &

Lee, 2012) in this research participants were allowed to rate a product's taste after being exposed to its advertising appeal (i.e. reading the slogans) and then actually testing the chocolate.

Overall, our research represents a step toward developing a better understanding of consumers' reactions to guilt appeals and provides some interesting avenues for further investigations. The first question that yet remains to be answered considers one of the study's limitations mentioned beforehand. Since this research only focuses on chocolate consumption, a task for future studies is to test whether the effect can be generalized beyond the context of food like chocolate to other types of hedonic consumption. Research might also explore whether the size of the transgression (e.g. a piece of chocolate vs. a chocolate cake) moderates the observed pattern of results. In this study, we purposefully used a relatively minor, everyday transgression (i.e. eating chocolate) to draw inferences relevant to consumers. However, it might be that for larger temptations such as an entire chocolate cake or a big fast food meal, the sheer magnitude of the act would evoke considerations that override any positive incidental carryover effects of guilt to pleasure. If someone is confronted with a whole chocolate cake instead of a piece of chocolate, for instance, negative feelings (e.g. remorse) might override positive feelings (e.g. pleasure) and the net effect would lead to negative thoughts about giving in to the temptation. In this case, the connection between guilt and pleasure may be weakened and choice and experience measures might diverge from the current findings. Introducing guilt into an advertising appeal for a big unhealthy meal or treat is then likely to backfire as consumers' pleasure, purchase intention as well as willingness to pay for the product

would decrease. Including different sizes of transgressions into the experimental setup thus seems promising for further investigations.

Another potential area for future research is to test the underlying mechanism of the observed effects. Although I have argued that the counterintuitive effect of guilt on pleasure can be explained by an effect of repeated co-activation of these two emotion concepts after which the mere activation of one concept spills over to associated emotions and experiences (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1998; Schachter & Singer, 2001) and the present results support these assumptions, this study did not directly test the underlying theoretical framework. Future research should test whether the positive effect of guilt on pleasure is indeed driven by a learned cognitive association between these emotions. In this regard, a word completion task could be implemented in the experiment to test the mental accessibility of different concepts (Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006). Building on the existing results, participants in the guilt conditions should identify more pleasure-related words than participants in the neutral control condition.

Finally, I like to encourage future research to investigate and further deepen our understanding of the impact that guilt appeals have on corporate image and the extent to which attributions about a company are transferred to attitudes about other brands and products that the company produces. In this case, for example, it would be interesting to explore whether advertising ‘Pure Pleasures’ chocolate with guilt also spills over to other products of the company and heightens pleasure that people derive from its consumption. The strength of the connection between attitudes towards a company and its brands also seems to depend on whether the brand is paired with guilt slogans across different

products (e.g. chocolate bars) and product categories (e.g. food and beauty products). Whereas for some product categories, such as chocolate, a guilt appeal might work very well, for others, such as beauty and health products, a guilt appeal might just be the wrong way to get consumers to purchase and use these items. Balancing and finding the right way to advertise a certain product highlights the importance of further thorough investigations.

Apart from these theoretical propositions, the results provide some interesting implications for practice as well. Marketing and advertising practitioners are continually looking for more effective ways to persuade consumers to buy their products and services. The present research provides empirical support that marketing strategies applying guilt appeals for advertising hedonic items such as chocolate may decrease consumption but at the same time increase the willingness to pay for and the purchase intention for the chocolate (using an implicit guilt appeal) or intensify the pleasure from consumption (using an explicit guilt appeal). When designing market communications for pleasurable products or services, companies might benefit from highlighting the guilty aspects of their goods in addition to, or even instead of, the pleasurable aspects associated with consumption.

Nevertheless, companies should also consider the explicitness of their guilt appeals and re-think their marketing strategies. When it comes to practical implications, this research shows that guilt is indeed a double-edged sword: From a consumer perspective, marketers are advised to use an explicit guilt appeal as it increases the tastiness of the product; taking the view from the company's perspective, however, an implicit guilt appeal may be most effective in finding a balance between gaining

consumers' attention and implicitly eliciting guilt to boost their willingness to pay for and subsequently purchase the item.

It is interesting to note that consumers' willingness to pay for 'Pure Pleasures' was assessed after participants rated the taste of the chocolate, which highlights the fact that higher pleasure ratings after reading the explicit guilt appeal did not translate to greater purchase intentions. If marketers have an interest in enhancing the pleasurable experience, an implicit guilt appeal could first be introduced to increase purchase intentions before an explicit guilt appeal is implemented. A combination of both appeals might just be the best solution to enhance consumers' acquisition of as well as experience from hedonic food items.

Taking everything into account, combining implicit as well as explicit guilt tactics might also be a suitable way to increase both parties' benefits. I suggest that when advertising a hedonic product or service *implicit* guilt appeals such as "Get the evil sensation!" should be implemented to get consumers' attention as well as to maximize their purchase intention and willingness to pay for the hedonic product. These tactics can then be paired with guilt-inducing palpable cues during actual consumption to maximize consumers' pleasure. A chocolate bar, for example, could depict an explicit guilt slogan (e.g. 'Guilty Pleasure') or describe the guilty experience somewhere on its packaging (e.g. "Indulge into this whole bar of rich, creamy chocolate and you will get the guiltiest sensation.") to boost consumers' pleasure during the time of actual consumption.

Conclusions

Overall, the current study contributes towards understanding peoples' experiences of pleasure in a choice and consumption context and offers implications for both—them and marketers. The present results stress the importance of discriminating between different levels of guilt appeals as this helps in elucidating prior contrasting findings. Although our findings may seem counterintuitive to psychologists long schooled in the negative effects of guilt on consumer behavior, the commercial world already instinctually seemed to know what experimental psychologists are just now discovering: that a genuine negative emotion such as guilt may actually evoke positive feelings and purchase intentions. So the next time you are in the supermarket, and someone is offering you a mouthwatering chocolate treat on the go while the slightest feeling of guilt arises: Go eat it! Trust me, you will enjoy it.

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Footnotes

¹ To test the intended guilt manipulation—presenting participants different advertisement slogans—a pilot study was run using the online research software Qualtrics version 2.331s. Forty-four participants ($n_{\text{female}} = 25$, $M_{\text{age}} = 22.98$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 4.76$) rated a total of 18 slogans (6 implicit guilt, 6 explicit guilt, and 6 no guilt control slogans) on the 4 dimensions of slogan liking, chocolate liking, happiness when consuming chocolate, and guilt from chocolate consumption. The survey was conducted using a within-subjects design and the order of the slogans was counterbalanced for each participant between each question. In particular, explicit and implicit guilt slogans as well as no-guilt control slogans were never ordered in the same way reassuring that response patterns were prevented. Participants' indication of how much they liked each slogan and how guilty they would feel consuming the chocolate that was advertised on a seven-point Likert-scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) served as main dependent measures.

The results of a repeated-measures analysis of variance of slogan liking and guilt from chocolate consumption with slogan category (explicit guilt vs. implicit guilt vs. no-guilt control) as factor confirmed that the intended manipulation was successful. Whereas the three slogan categories did not significantly differ with regard to their general liking, Pillai's Trace $V = 0.04$, $F(2, 41) = 4.54$, $p = .414$, $\eta^2 = .042$, participants indicated feeling the most guilty when consuming the chocolate that was promoted with an explicit guilt appeal ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.90$), followed by an implicit guilt appeal ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.52$, $p < .001$), and the no-guilt control appeal ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.26$, $p < .001$), Pillai's Trace $V = 0.57$, $F(2, 41) = 26.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .566$. Also, the implicit guilt slogans elicited significantly more guilt than the control slogans, $F(1, 42) = 47.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .530$.

Appendix A

Example of an advertisement slogan in the explicit guilt condition.



Appendix B

Example of an advertisement slogan in the implicit guilt condition.



Appendix C

Example of an advertisement slogan in the control condition.



