

Investigating Gender Differences in Consumers' Experience of Guilt: A Comparative Study

Abstract

The literature of guilt in the context of consumer behavior is notably limited. It is particularly limited with respect to examining gender differences across nations. Existing studies have only evaluated gender differences, in terms of consumer guilt, in the United States. In addition, those studies evaluated gender differences in specific consumption situations such as consumer boycotting and food consumption. Thus, they do not give a comprehensive understanding of gender variations in consumer guilt. Notably, gender differences with regard to consumer guilt were shown to be limited in countries other than the United States. These studies provided contradictory results to established findings in social psychology. In view of this, by using quantitative techniques, numerous consumption settings, and samples from two distinct countries, this study provides a holistic assessment of gender differences in consumer guilt across nations. The findings indicate that gender differences, with respect to consumer guilt, are predominately present in individualistic countries and notably absent in collectivist countries. Hence, marketers should consider gender as an influential variable when devising guilt related strategies in individualistic countries. In contrast, marketers may reconsider allocating resources, with respect to gender related marketing strategies, in collectivist countries.

Keywords: *Gender difference, Consumer guilt, Comparative study, Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom*

1. Introduction

“Show me a woman who does not feel guilty and I will show you a man”

Fear of Flying – Erica Jong

Researchers and practitioners have long acknowledged the importance of guilt in influencing individuals' behavior (Antonetti & Baines, 2015). However, due to the complexity of the cognitive processes leading to guilt, as well as the lack of a universally acknowledged facial expression that determines this emotion (Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007), researchers have encountered conceptual and methodological difficulties when examining this topic (Cohen, Wolf, Panter & Insko, 2011; Tracy et al., 2007). As a result, guilt-related research in marketing, especially in consumer behavior, is considerably limited (Antonetti & Baines, 2015). Specifically, there is a shortage of studies that assess gender differences in consumers' experience of guilt (Antonetti & Baines, 2015), despite the ease and significance of utilizing gender as a segmentation tool to target specific consumers (Hanks & Mattila, 2014) and to influence their decisions (Bakshi, 2012). For instance, women are found to experience more guilt than men (Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison & Morton, 2012); thus, they would have different attitudes and behaviors towards the market offering that triggered that emotion.

Notably, available literature in consumer behavior emphasizes that there is a difference between genders with respect to their feelings of guilt in consumption circumstances, and this

difference is statistically significant (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). However, most of these studies only examined consumer guilt in specific behaviors associated with consumption circumstances like boycotting behavior (Cruz, Pires Jr & Ross, 2013), impulsive behavior (Hanks & Mattila, 2014), and food consumption (Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). Hence, they do not provide a holistic understanding of gender's influence on feelings of guilt within the context of consumer behavior. Furthermore, the majority of these studies were implemented in the United States (US) (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). Thus, such findings cannot be utilized by marketers in other countries, due to empirical evidence in social psychology that found no significant difference between genders among participants of non-white ethnicity (Else-Quest et al., 2012).

Therefore, to resolve these issues, this study aims to 1) provide a comprehensive knowledge that determines gender differences in consumers' feelings of guilt and to 2) evaluate this difference across nations. To achieve these aims, this study begins by examining existing literature that clarifies the definition, forms, experiences, and applications of consumer guilt. Furthermore, literature that examines available research that sheds light on gender differences with respect to consumer guilt is evaluated, particularly the literature that assesses gender differences across nations. In view of that, the research hypotheses are developed and the methodology is described. The results are presented and their consequences are discussed. After that, the theoretical and practical implications of the findings are presented. Finally, the limitations of this study are examined, and future research directions are recommended.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Guilt

Kugler and Jones (1992, p. 318) defined guilt as “the dysphoric feeling associated with the recognition that one has violated a personally relevant moral or social standard”. Accordingly, guilt is experienced when an individual violates a personal standard, value, or rule (Lewis, Haviland-Jones & Barrett, 2010), or fails to self-regulate (Zemack-Rugar, Corus & Brinberg, 2012). That is why guilt is found to have an important influence on individuals' self-regulation processes and thus behaviors (Eisenberg, 2000). Specifically, individuals who experience guilt remain in a state of distress, which prompts them to attempt to resolve this state by confessing or apologizing (Tracy, Robins & Tangney, 2007).

Guilt has been classified as a personality trait and an emotional state (Kugler & Jones, 1992). Guilt as a personality trait reflects an individual's predisposition to experience guilt, whereas guilt as an emotional state exemplifies feelings of guilt in a particular moment (Cohen, Panter & Turan, 2012). Notably, marketing practitioners often emphasize the importance of guilt as an emotional state to their practice (Antonetti & Baines, 2015), because feelings of guilt in a specific moment allow marketers to implement guilt-related strategies in both advertising and consumer behavior. In the advertising domain, guilt appeals are designed specifically to cause a desired emotional reaction in consumers (Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999) and thus influence their attitudes and behaviors (Boudewyns, Turner & Paquin, 2013; Coulter & Pinto, 1995).

Whereas experienced guilt, also labeled as consumer guilt, refers to feelings of guilt that arise as a result of violating moral, ethical, or societal norms in a consumption situation (Lascu, 1991), consumer guilt is experienced when consumers, for instance, buy junk food; refrain from making charity donations; and dispose of items given by someone important to them (Dahl, Honea & Manchanda, 2003). Notably, consumer guilt can be experienced in two forms: anticipatory and reactive (Lascu, 1991). With respect to anticipatory guilt, it is experienced when an individual thinks about potential negative outcomes that may occur in the future (Tracy et al., 2007). Reactive guilt arises as a consequence of an action that took place in the past and that caused a negative result (Burnett & Lunsford, 1994).

Furthermore, consumer guilt can be further categorized based on the consumption circumstances responsible for its elicitation (Dahl et al., 2003). These circumstances are associated with one's self (Dahl, Honea & Manchanda, 2005), others, and societal standards (Dahl et al., 2003). First, guilt associated with one's self reflects consumption situations where individuals failed to meet their personal standards or were unsuccessful in regulating their behavior, (Dahl et al., 2003) such as eating unhealthy food (Kemp & Grier, 2013; Cornish, 2012; Mohr, Lichtenstein & Janiszewski, 2012) or smoking cigarettes (Dahl et al., 2003). Second, guilt associated with others reflects consumption circumstances that include interpersonal concerns, such as making a complaint (Dahl et al., 2005) or being impolite to service providers (Dahl et al., 2003). Third, guilt associated with societal standards reflects consumption scenarios where a social standard is violated (Dahl et al., 2003), such as buying products that damage the environment (Gregory-Smith, Smith & Winklhofer, 2013).

Despite its negative nature, guilt is characterized as a functional emotion, because it drives individuals to acknowledge their responsibility in violating a personal or social standard (Tangney, Miller, Flicker & Barlow, 1996), and it prompts them to take reparative measures to resolve their feelings of guilt (Dearing & Tangney, 2002). Higher levels of guilt particularly influence purchase intention (Zielke, 2014) and lead to more change in behavior (Okeefe & Figge, 1997). In view of this, marketers utilize consumer guilt to influence consumers' consumption decisions (Antonetti & Baines, 2014). For example, consumer guilt encourages individuals to choose healthier food options (Cornish, 2012); save money (Soman & Cheema, 2011) and boycott unethical establishments (Klein, Smith & John, 2004). It deters complaining behavior (Soscia, 2007) and other unethical or impulsive consumption activities (Ayadi, Giraud & Gonzalez, 2013; Darrat, Darrat & Amyx, 2016; Sinclair & Green, 2016).

Despite consumer guilt's significance to marketers, it has not been comprehensively examined by researchers in consumer behavior (Antonetti & Baines, 2015). This is mostly due to guilt's complexity with respect to the cognitive processes required for its occurrence (Cohen, Wolf, Panter & Insko, 2011; Tracy & Robins, 2004; Tracy et al., 2007) and the lack of a universally recognized facial manifestation that portrays this emotion (Tracy & Robins, 2006). Researchers faced many obstacles when examining guilt (Tracy et al., 2007). As a result, there is a scarcity of research that evaluates guilt in consumer behavior, especially with respect to studies that examine gender differences in consumption situations that elicit guilt (Antonetti & Baines, 2015). Thus, due to evidence that suggests that gender differences exist between men and women (Else-Quest et al., 2012), as well as the fact that gender is considered to be one of the major factors that influences consumer behavior (Hanks & Mattila, 2014), this research gap should be inspected.

2.2 Gender Differences in Experiencing Consumer Guilt

With respect to the literature of guilt in psychology and social psychology, the research emphasizes that women and men significantly differ with respect to their experience of guilt (Else-Quest et al., 2012). It stresses that women feel more guilt in comparison to men (Baumeister, Stillwell & Heatherton, 1994; Else-Quest et al., 2012). In addition, empirical evidence illustrates that women are more predisposed to experiencing guilt than men, and they are more likely to engage in reparative actions (Cohen et al., 2011). In contrast, the literature states that even though there are significant differences between men and women regarding their feelings of guilt, men tend to experience more guilt than women (Kugler & Jones, 1992). Thus, the majority of the studies agree that there is a significant but marginal

difference between men and women with regard to experiencing guilt. However, they disagree on which gender experiences higher levels of guilt (Baumeister et al., 1994; Else-Quest et al., 2012; Kugler & Jones, 1992).

Within the context of consumer behavior, the literature consistently emphasizes that women experience more guilt than men in various consumption settings. For example, research that examines consumer guilt in relation to self-indulgent behavior states that women exceeded men in their feelings of guilt (Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010). Furthermore, studies that investigate consumer guilt and boycotting behavior found similar results (Cruz et al., 2013). In addition, research that evaluates consumer guilt in terms of impulse buying behavior correspondingly stresses that women have a lower threshold for experiencing guilt than men, and they experience higher levels of guilt in comparison to men (Hanks & Mattila, 2014). Moreover, studies that examine guilt in food consumption highlight that contextual factors affect the level of consumer guilt in both men and women, stating that women feel more guilt when they care about their physical appearance while men experience more guilt when they are specifically concerned about eating healthy (Sukhdial & Boush, 2004).

2.3 Gender Differences in Experiencing Consumer Guilt across Nations

Notably, existing research highlights that gender differences with respect to guilt are fundamentally affected by one's ethnicity (Else-Quest et al., 2012) and culture (Tracy et al., 2007). The research states that for white individuals, significant differences are found between men and women (Cohen et al., 2011; Else-Quest et al., 2012); however, for non-white individuals, no significant differences are detected between them (Else-Quest et al., 2012). In the context of consumer behavior, the majority of the studies that examine gender differences recruited participants from the US who identified as white (Table 1) (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). There is limited research that has examined gender differences in other countries. The results of these studies indicate that significant differences are found between men and women in terms of their feelings of guilt (Cruz et al., 2013). Yet, the data provided by Cruz et al. (2013) contradicts established findings by Else-Quest et al. (2012), which found no significant differences, with respect to guilt, between genders in non-white ethnicities.

The examined literature presents a number of issues. In terms of assessing if there is a significant difference between genders in experiencing guilt, the literature confirms that statistically there is a significant difference between men and women, in particular with

respect to subjects who identify as white (Table 1). However, the literature is divided in terms of which gender experiences more guilt (Else-Quest et al., 2012; Kugler & Jones, 1992). Still, within the context of consumer behavior, the majority of the studies exemplify that women experience more guilt than men, especially if the market offering reflects their physical appearance (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). Nevertheless, the findings of these studies represent customers from American samples and white ethnicity (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). Moreover, each of these studies examines explicit consumption situations that induce consumer guilt from a narrow perspective, which does not provide a holistic understanding of gender differences in consumer guilt within the context of consumer behavior.

Furthermore, there is limited research that has examined gender differences, in terms of consumer guilt, in countries other than the US (Cruz et al., 2013), and the outcomes conflict with previous findings in established studies (Else-Quest et al., 2012). Therefore, to address these shortcomings, it is vital to investigate gender differences, with respect to consumer guilt, and present findings that give an all-inclusive view in consumption settings. In addition, because the majority of guilt-related studies recruited white samples from the US (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004), it is fundamental to investigate gender variations in experiencing consumer guilt in other countries. Accordingly, this study aims to provide a holistic knowledge of gender differences with respect to consumer guilt and assess distinctions found across nations.

3. Hypotheses Development

In order to provide a comprehensive outlook that determines gender differences in consumer guilt within the context of consumer behavior, it is important to examine consumption circumstances that induce consumer guilt. Therefore, Dahl et al.'s (2003) classification of consumer guilt, which is associated with specific consumption scenarios that induce consumer guilt, is utilized to achieve that objective. Two consumption scenarios from each category are used. First, when guilt is self-induced, consumer guilt is examined when consumers buy junk food and when they do not use a paid-for gym membership. Second, when guilt is societally induced, consumer guilt is assessed when consumers buy foreign products and when they refrain from donating to charity.

Third, when guilt is others-induced, consumer guilt is evaluated when consumers are insolent to an insistent salesperson and when they dispose of a shirt given by someone that matters to them. Notably, these consumption scenarios reflect various aspects of consumer behavior. For example, buying junk food, not donating to charity, and buying foreign products represent the stage at which a consumer is making a choice. Not using a gym membership and disposing of a shirt are examples of when a consumer disposes of a marketing offering. In view of this, gender differences with respect to consumer guilt are investigated in the previously discussed scenarios in two countries (the United Kingdom (UK) and Saudi Arabia (SA)) with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. According to the literature (Table 1), these countries were not previously examined by researchers in the field. In addition, the UK as a nation has similar characteristics to the US in terms of its individualistic nature (Hofstede, 2011). Whereas, the UK greatly differ from SA, as SA is a collectivist nation (Hofstede, 2011). Thus, the results can be compared and assessed accordingly.

The literature states that when it comes to guilt, men and women significantly differ in white samples (Else-Quest et al., 2012). Moreover, consumer researchers who examined gender differences in the US found similar results (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). Accordingly, the UK and the US are both individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 2011). Moreover, similar to the US (“2010 Census Shows America's Diversity,” 2011), the 2011 Census states that the majority of the population in the UK identifies as white (“2011 Census for England and Wales,” 2011). Therefore, it can be deduced that

H1: There is a significant difference between men and women in the UK when consumer guilt is self-induced

H2: There is a significant difference between men and women in the UK when consumer guilt is societally induced

H3: There is a significant difference between men and women in the UK when consumer guilt is others-induced

In contrast, the research exemplifies that there are no significant differences between genders in terms of their experience of guilt when individuals are from a non-white ethnicity (Else-Quest et al., 2012). However, on a country level, the limited research available in consumer behavior examined this difference in Brazil (Cruz et al., 2013), and, on the basis of the empirical data, it is clear that different regions in Brazil greatly differ in their cultural dimensions and ethnicity (Hofstede, Garibaldi de Hilal, Malvezzi, Tanure & Vinken, 2010). For instance, the data collected from different regions of Brazil shows that the south has more of an individualistic culture, whereas the north has a collectivist culture (Hofstede et al., 2010). Therefore, Cruz et al. (2013) implemented the research tool in Rio de Janeiro, in the south of Brazil, which is why their results contradicted the findings of Else-Quest et al. (2012). Therefore, the view of Else-Quest et al. (2012) will be adopted, and with the lack of empirical data that sheds light on gender differences, in terms of consumer guilt, in countries other than US, it can be postulated that

H4: There is no significant difference between men and women in Saudi Arabia when consumer guilt is self-induced

H5: There is no significant difference between men and women in Saudi Arabia when consumer guilt is societally induced

H6: There is no significant difference between men and women in Saudi Arabia when consumer guilt is and others-induced

4. Methodology

4.1 Sample and Procedure

Self-administered questionnaires were distributed randomly by the researcher to a matched sample of students in classrooms and around campus in two universities in the UK and SA. The British university is located in Wales, and the Saudi university is located in the Western region of the country. Notably, to increase representativeness of the ethnic groups and cultures chosen for this study, universities with a majority of British and Saudi students were chosen. For the Saudi sample, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic. It was then back translated into English in order to examine conceptual equivalence. Overall, a total of 770 questionnaires were circulated and 723 were returned. Approximately 223 questionnaires were not used due to missing data and low engagement. Thus, an equal number of questionnaires from both samples was selected, resulting in 500 questionnaires being used for analysis.

4.2 Measures

In order to measure consumer guilt in various guilt-inducing consumption scenarios, it is vital to utilize a scale that can be adapted accordingly. The consumer guilt scale created by Lee-Wingate and Corfman (2010) can fulfill this requirement, because it includes a statement that can be adjusted to various situations that elicit guilt. In addition, this scale has a Cronbach's alpha that exceeds 0.90 (Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010). A total of six adjectives are used to represent guilt, and these are used randomly in a specifically phrased statement: "How [adjective] would [focal consumer] feel about spending money on [item]?" (Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010, p. 389). Participants answered a 7-point Likert scale and the combined mean of the six items represent consumer guilt levels.

5. Results

5.1 British Sample: Descriptive Statistics

A reliability test was carried out prior to the calculation of descriptive statistics (Table 2). After confirming the reliability of the scales in the British data set, further analysis can be carried out. By calculating the combined mean of consumer guilt in the consumption scenarios (Table 3), it is evident that lower levels of consumer guilt are experienced when consumers buy foreign products (2.6) and junk food (3.2). In addition, not using a gym membership scored the highest level of consumer guilt (5.0), followed by disposing of a shirt given to a person by someone close (4.5); being rude to an insistent salesperson (4.3); and not donating to charity (4.2). The descriptive analysis illustrates that consumers did not feel that guilty when they bought junk food or when they bought foreign products. In particular, the level of consumer guilt was close to the (not at all) end of the scale when consumers bought foreign products instead of local ones. This clearly indicates that consumers did not feel that they had committed a transgression, and thus they would not need to self-regulate or cope as a result.

To achieve the aims of this study, descriptive statistics are examined to evaluate the levels of consumer guilt for men and women independently. After that, a one way (ANOVA) is used to decide if there is a significant difference between men and women in terms of their feelings of consumer guilt in those circumstances. The descriptive statistics showcase that women experience higher levels of guilt in comparison to men (Table 4). By calculating the mean of consumer guilt for women and men independently, it is evident that women (3.4) experience a higher level of consumer guilt when they buy junk food, as opposed to men

(2.9). Moreover, women feel guiltier when they do not use a paid-for gym membership (5.3) in comparison to men (4.7).

In addition, when buying foreign products, women (2.6) felt slightly more guilt than men (2.5). Furthermore, it is apparent that when they do not donate to charity, women (4.6) experience a higher level of consumer guilt in comparison to men (3.8). Also, when they are rude to an insistent salesperson, women (4.9) felt more consumer guilt than men (3.5). Finally, when disposing of a shirt given to them by someone close, women (4.8) experienced more consumer guilt than men (4.0). This is in accordance with the combined mean of the following consumption scenarios: buying junk food and buying foreign products; lower levels of guilt were experienced by both genders. However, consumers buying foreign products does not qualify as a guilt-inducing consumption situation, due to its lower than average score and its proximity to the (not at all) end of the spectrum. In addition, for guilt to emerge, the event has to be important to one's identity goals (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Thus, it was decided to exclude this scenario from further analysis.

5.2 British Sample: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The descriptive statistics clearly indicate that men and women feel different levels of consumer guilt. However, it is vital to verify if this difference is statistically significant. Thus, the results of the ANOVA indicate that there is a significant difference between men and women with respect to their feelings of guilt when they buy junk food ($F(1,248)=6.144$, $P=0.014$); do not use a paid-for gym membership ($F(1,248)=9.24$, $P=0.003$); do not donate to charity ($F(1,248)=19.980$, $P=0.000$); are rude to an insistent salesperson ($F(1,248)=42,684$, $P=0.000$); and when they dispose of a shirt given to them by someone close ($F(1,248)=16.399$, $P=0.000$) (Table 5).

5.3 Saudi Sample: Descriptive Statistics

For the Saudi sample, the reliability of the scales were satisfactory (Table 2); thus, further analysis can be undertaken. The combined mean of consumer guilt was calculated for each guilt-inducing scenario used in this study (Table 6). The results indicate that others-induced consumer guilt scenarios scored the highest in comparison to self-induced and societally induced guilt. Specifically, being rude to a salesperson had a combined mean of (5.1); a similar result was found when consumers got rid of a shirt given to them by someone close (5.0). With respect to societally induced guilt, buying foreign products had the lowest score (2.5) compared to other scenarios. In addition, not donating to charity had a combined mean

of (4.4). In terms of self-induced guilt, buying junk food had a combined mean of (3.2), while not using a paid-for gym membership had a combined mean of (4.5). In accordance with the British sample, buying foreign products had the lowest score among other scenarios, and it is similar in value to the combined mean of the British sample.

To examine consumer guilt for each gender in the Saudi sample, the combined mean was calculated respectively. For self-induced guilt, men and women had similar means. Specifically, consumer guilt when Saudi men bought junk food was (3.3), which is quite similar to the mean of Saudi women (3.2). Likewise, when men did not use a paid-for gym membership, they scored (4.5), while women scored (4.4). In terms of societally induced guilt, Saudi men's level of consumer guilt when buying foreign products (2.5) was very similar to that of Saudi women (2.6). However, if they didn't donate to charity, Saudi men's level of consumer guilt (4.1) was lower than that of Saudi women (4.6). With respect to others-induced guilt, Saudi men had a mean of (4.9) when being impolite to a salesperson, while Saudi women scored slightly higher (5.3). When disposing of a shirt given to them by someone close, Saudi men experienced marginally lower levels of consumer guilt (4.8) in comparison to women (5.0) (Table 7).

These results are comparable to the results of the British sample. Buying junk food and buying foreign products had lower scores. However, buying foreign products was close to the (not at all) end of the scale. Therefore, for the same reason as noted above, this scenario was excluded from the British sample; it will be excluded from the Saudi sample too.

5.4 Saudi Sample: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The ANOVA test was carried out to determine if there is a significant difference between genders in the Saudi sample. First, when consumer guilt is self-induced, the results were not significant when consumers bought junk food ($F(1,248)=0.458, P=0.499$) or when they did not use a paid-for gym membership ($F(1,248)=0.064, P=0.800$). Second, when consumer guilt is societally induced, the results were significant when consumers did not donate to charity ($F(1,248)=3.880, P=0.050$). With respect to consumer guilt in scenarios where guilt is others-induced, the results were not significant for being rude to a salesperson ($F(1,248)=3.023, P=0.083$). In addition, the results were not significant when consumers disposed of a shirt given to them by someone close ($F(1,248)=0.878, P=0.352$). All in all, for Saudi consumers, there was no significant difference between genders in the majority of the consumption situations (Table 8).

6. Discussion

With respect to the British sample, the results verify the hypotheses that there is a significant difference between men and women in terms of their feelings of guilt in the proposed consumption scenarios. The results were consistent in situations where guilt is related to the self, society, and others. In addition, the results suggest that women feel more guilt than men in consumption settings that induce consumer guilt. Therefore, the results support previous findings in consumer research regarding gender differences in experiencing consumer guilt in nations that have an individualistic culture and a population with a white ethnicity. Sustaining that gender is a vital component to consider when employing guilt-related strategies in marketing practices in the UK.

In terms of SA, the results clearly showcase that men and women do not differ greatly in their feelings of consumer guilt. Moreover, the results indicate that for the majority of the consumption scenarios, the difference between men and women is not statistically significant. However, when consumers do not donate to charity, the result of the analysis indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between genders. This result can be attributed to the fact that for Muslim men, religious charity is mandatory (Kochuyt, 2009). Hence, Saudi men have less feelings of guilt in that scenario as they are required to make donations annually. However, women are not required to make annual donations; thus, they may feel more guilt as a result of not donating to charity. Overall, the results indicate that gender-related strategies, in terms of consumer guilt, are not going to be effective in SA. In addition, significant inferences can be deduced from the results. By comparing the levels of consumer guilt in females from the UK and SA, it is evident that British women feel higher levels of guilt in comparison to Saudi women when guilt is self-induced, which affirms to their individualistic values. However, Saudi women exceed British women in their feelings of guilt when guilt is related to others, which corresponds with their collectivist values.

Likewise, Saudi men had higher levels of consumer guilt in comparison to British men when guilt was related to others. Concerning consumption situations that induce societal guilt, women from both countries felt equal levels of guilt when not donating to charity. However, Saudi men marginally exceeded British men in their feelings of guilt in that situations. All in all, the results confirm that variations in consumer guilt exist between genders, mostly in individualistic countries (Table 9). However, this difference is generally absent in collectivist countries. Moreover, variations in consumer guilt can be detected between countries for both

women and men. Not only do women exceed men in their feelings of consumer guilt but also notable differences can be detected when comparing genders from different countries.

6.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Previous studies emphasized the need for additional research that evaluates consumer guilt in general, and demographic variables in particular (Antonetti & Baines, 2015). This recommendation was the result of limited research that examines gender differences in consumer guilt, as well as the unavailability of a comprehensive guideline that defines this difference in various consumption situations associated with guilt. Furthermore, previous research utilized white samples from individualistic nations, such as the United States of America, to evaluate gender differences in terms of consumer guilt (Hanks & Mattila, 2014; Lee-Wingate & Corfman, 2010; Sukhdial & Boush, 2004). However, limited research evaluated this difference in other nations, and the results that were presented contradicted established findings in the literature (Cruz et al., 2013).

In view of this, by using quantitative methods, various consumption settings, and samples from two distinct nations, this study provides a holistic view of gender differences in consumer guilt across nations, and thus adds new insight to the literature of consumer guilt. In particular, this study confirms previous findings that consumers from individualistic nations differ on their feelings of guilt based on gender. Notably, the consistent results across six scenarios that represent consumer guilt categories emphasize the likelihood that gender differences will indeed be present in various consumption situations that induce guilt. Furthermore, this study has examined hypotheses that determine gender differences with respect to consumer guilt in other nations besides the US that have never been tested before. The results contradict previous findings, which only examined gender differences in consumer guilt and boycotting behavior (Cruz et al., 2013); notably, the application of the research tool in a region that has similar characteristics to individualistic countries is argued to be the reason for the contradiction.

Besides theoretical contributions, this study provides practical implications for marketing practitioners that utilize guilt-related strategies. In individualistic countries, women feel guiltier than men; thus, in the marketing process, any guilt-inducing stimuli have to be accounted for. For instance, in the case of gym membership, women can be motivated to attend the gym if they know that their lack of attendance will affect not only their health goals but also future promotional offers. Therefore, because higher feelings of guilt have a

more significant impact on behavior (Okeefe & Figge, 1997), women would be motivated to attend the gym more. In contrast, if a woman wants to cancel her gym membership because she feels guilty about not attending, she can be offered flexible membership deals or free gym sessions, which give her justification to reduce her feelings of guilt and dissuade her from feeling that she needs to cancel the membership.

Moreover, for international marketers who use consumer guilt in their strategy, gender cannot be used as a segmentation tool in collectivist countries. The results indicate that in a collectivist country like SA, men and women do not differ in their feelings of guilt. The one exception to this was when guilt was societally induced. Despite its statistical significance, the difference was marginal. Such knowledge is essential to avoid ineffective allocation of resources to target men or women independently. Moreover, knowing that gender is not a vital component of the guilt process in collectivist countries prompts marketers to evaluate other components that might affect consumer guilt, such as guilt proneness (Arlı, Leo & Tjiptono, 2016).

7. Conclusion

This study investigates gender differences, in terms of consumer guilt, across nations. The results provide a comprehensive understanding of this variable across various consumer guilt categories and scenarios. Moreover, the results affirm previous findings that identify significant differences between genders, with respect to consumer guilt, in individualistic countries. Furthermore, the findings of this study present empirical evidence that verifies the absence of gender differences, in terms of consumer guilt, in collectivist cultures. Nevertheless, a number of limitations must be taken into account, and potentially addressed in future research.

7.1 Limitations and Future Research Agenda

This study contains a number of limitations. First, this study examined gender differences across nations by distributing the research tool to a matched sample of students in two universities in SA and the UK. The questionnaire included screening questions to ensure that respondents were citizens of the countries chosen for this study. However, this study did not examine ethnic backgrounds or cultural norms that define guilt experiences for the participants. It only relied on statistical information that clarifies ethnic and cultural specifications of British and Saudi citizens. Therefore, future research should consider

including questions that define ethnic and cultural attributes and identify which norms, if violated, trigger feelings of guilt in consumption circumstances.

Second, the results of this study represent individuals from the same age group as the respondents. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other age groups because feelings of guilt significantly differ with age. Accordingly, future research should consider recruiting participants from other age groups to determine if gender differences are consistent across nations in various age groups. Third, this study compared gender differences between Saudi and British consumers in specific regions. Therefore, future research should replicate this study in other regions in SA and the UK, to assess if regional differences are influential in these countries. Moreover, future research could consider replicating this study in other individualistic and collectivist countries to verify if gender differences are only present in individualistic cultures and are not present in collectivist cultures.

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Appendices

Table 1: Studies on gender differences in psychology, social psychology and consumer behavior

| Academic Discipline | Focus | Country/Ethnicity | Method | Highlights | Source |
|---------------------|--|---|--------------|---|--------------------------|
| Psychology | Examining gender differences with respect to self-conscious emotions | White Non-white Unspecified or mixed | Quantitative | Small differences between genders were found with respect to guilt Women experience higher levels of guilt than men Gender differences were significant for white samples and not significant for | Else-Quest et al. (2012) |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| | | | | non-white samples | |
| Social Psychology | Understanding guilt as a social phenomenon | Not specified | Qualitative | Minor but significant differences are found between men and women in terms of their feelings of guilt Women experience higher levels of guilt than men | Baumeister et al. (1994) |
| Social Psychology | Guilt proneness/guilt repair | The majority of the sample were white | Quantitative | Women are more predisposed to feeling guilty and taking reparative action than men | Cohen et al. (2011) |
| Social Psychology | Measuring guilt as a state | The majority of the sample were white | Quantitative | Significant differences are found between men and women with respect to their feelings of guilt Men scored higher than women in terms of their feelings of guilt | Kugler and Jones (1992) |
| Consumer behavior | Consumer guilt and self-indulgence | Not specified | Experimental Design | Women experienced more consumer guilt than men | Lee-Wingate and Corfman (2010) |
| Consumer behavior | Guilt and consumers' boycotting behavior | Brazil | Quantitative | Significant differences are found between men and women with respect to their feelings of guilt Women felt guiltier than | Cruz et al., (2013) |

| | | | | men | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Consumer behavior | Consumer guilt and impulse buying | United States The majority of the sample were white | Experimental Design | “Women appeared to experience more consumer guilt, have a lower threshold for experiencing such guilt, and internalize the guilt more so than their male counterparts” | Hanks and Mattila (2014, p. 631) |
| Consumer behavior | Consumer guilt and food consumption | United States | Quantitative | Women experience more consumer guilt when they are self-conscious of their appearance Men experience more consumer guilt if they are interested in healthy eating | Sukhdial and Boush (2004) |

Table 2: Reliability test of the British and the Saudi datasets

| Consumer guilt scenario | British dataset | Saudi dataset |
|--|-----------------|---------------|
| Buying junk food | 0.93 | 0.91 |
| Not using a paid-for gym membership | 0.92 | 0.93 |
| Buying foreign products instead of local ones | 0.96 | 0.94 |
| Not donating to charity | 0.94 | 0.94 |
| Being rude to an insistent salesperson | 0.96 | 0.95 |
| Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | 0.96 | 0.94 |

Table 3: Combined means of consumer guilt in the British sample (# of cases: 250)

| Consumer guilt category | Consumer guilt scenario | Combined mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------|--|---------------|----------------|
| Self-induced guilt | Buying junk food | 3.19 | 1.57 |
| | Not using a paid-for gym membership | 5.05 | 1.57 |
| Societally induced guilt | Buying foreign products instead of local ones | 2.57 | 1.49 |
| | Not donating to charity | 4.25 | 1.54 |
| Others-induced guilt | Being rude to an insistent salesperson | 4.27 | 1.78 |
| | Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | 4.47 | 1.52 |

Table 4: Comparing levels of consumer guilt between men and women in the British sample

| Consumer guilt category | Consumer guilt scenario | Men | | | Women | | |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------|------|----------------|-----------------|------|----------------|
| | | Number of cases | Mean | Std. Deviation | Number of cases | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Self-induced guilt | Buying junk food | 123 | 2.94 | 1.60 | 127 | 3.43 | 1.50 |
| | Not using a paid-for gym membership | | 4.75 | 1.72 | | 5.34 | 1.34 |
| Societally induced guilt | Buying foreign products instead of local ones | | 2.51 | 1.51 | | 2.62 | 1.47 |
| | Not donating to charity | | 3.82 | 1.51 | | 4.66 | 1.46 |
| Others-induced guilt | Being rude to an insistent salesperson | | 3.58 | 1.75 | | 4.94 | 1.54 |
| | Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | | 4.09 | 1.56 | | 4.84 | 1.39 |

Table 5: Results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the British sample (# of cases: 250)

| Consumer guilt category | Consumer guilt scenario | F | Sig. |
|--------------------------|--|--------|-------|
| Self-induced guilt | Buying junk food | 6.144 | 0.014 |
| | Not using a paid-for gym membership | 9.248 | 0.003 |
| Societally induced guilt | Not donating to charity | 19.980 | 0.000 |
| Others-induced guilt | Being rude to an insistent salesperson | 42.684 | 0.000 |
| | Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | 16.399 | 0.000 |

Table 6: Combined mean of consumer guilt in the Saudi sample (# of cases: 250)

| Consumer guilt category | Consumer guilt scenario | Combined mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------|--|---------------|----------------|
| Self-induced guilt | Buying junk food | 3.28 | 1.61 |
| | Not using a paid-for gym membership | 4.51 | 1.86 |
| Societally induced guilt | Buying foreign products instead of local ones | 2.56 | 1.58 |
| | Not donating to charity | 4.43 | 1.94 |
| Others-induced guilt | Being rude to an insistent salesperson | 5.19 | 1.74 |
| | Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | 5.01 | 1.65 |

Table 7: Consumer guilt between men and women in the Saudi sample

| Consumer guilt category | Consumer guilt scenario | Men | | | Women | | |
|-------------------------|---|-----------------|------|----------------|-----------------|------|----------------|
| | | Number of cases | Mean | Std. Deviation | Number of cases | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Self-induced guilt | Buying junk food | | 3.36 | 1.49 | | 3.22 | 1.70 |
| | Not using a paid-for gym membership | | 4.54 | 1.86 | | 4.48 | 1.86 |
| Societal-induced guilt | Buying foreign products instead of local ones | | 2.51 | 1.49 | | 2.60 | 1.64 |

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|-----|------|------|-----|------|------|
| | Not donating to charity | 108 | 4.16 | 1.86 | 142 | 4.64 | 1.97 |
| Others-induced guilt | Being rude to an insistent salesperson | | 4.97 | 1.79 | | 5.36 | 1.69 |
| | Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | | 4.90 | 1.69 | | 5.10 | 1.63 |

Table 8: Results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the Saudi sample (# of cases: 250)

| Consumer guilt category | Consumer guilt scenario | F | Sig. |
|--------------------------|--|-------|-------|
| Self-induced guilt | Buying junk food | 0.458 | 0.499 |
| | Not using a paid-for gym membership | 0.064 | 0.800 |
| Societally induced guilt | Not donating to charity | 3.880 | 0.050 |
| Others-induced guilt | Being rude to an insistent salesperson | 3.023 | 0.083 |
| | Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | 0.870 | 0.352 |

Table 9: Results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for both samples

| Consumer guilt category | Consumer guilt scenario | British sample | | Saudi Sample | |
|--------------------------|--|----------------|-------|--------------|-------|
| | | F | Sig. | F | Sig. |
| Self-induced guilt | Buying junk food | 6.144 | 0.014 | 0.458 | 0.499 |
| | Not using a paid-for gym membership | 9.248 | 0.003 | 0.064 | 0.800 |
| Societally induced guilt | Not donating to charity | 19.980 | 0.000 | 3.880 | 0.050 |
| Others-induced guilt | Being rude to an insistent salesperson | 42.684 | 0.000 | 3.023 | 0.083 |
| | Disposing of a shirt given by a close individual | 16.399 | 0.000 | 0.870 | 0.352 |