

# Fairtrade practices and consumer decision-making: the interplay of anticipatory guilt arousal, ad credibility and perceived manipulation

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of anticipatory guilt arousal on consumer attitudes and behaviour towards Fairtrade-certified products. Specifically, it examines whether self-efficacy moderates the relationship between consumers' anticipatory guilt arousal and their willingness to pay more. It also explores whether attitudes towards the advertisement and inferences of manipulative intent mediate the relationship between ad credibility and anticipatory guilt arousal for Fairtrade-certified products.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study used a  $2 \times 2$  factorial experimental design, using a consumer panel consisting of 717 participants exposed to different stimulus conditions. The collected data was further analysed using structural equation modelling in AMOS 24 to estimate the relationships within the structural model.

**Findings** – The study revealed a positive relationship between anticipatory guilt arousal and willingness to pay more for Fairtrade-certified chocolate. Inferences of manipulative intent were found to have a negative relationship with attitudes towards the advertisement and ad credibility in both the [Control] and [Statement] conditions. In addition, inferences of manipulative intent had a negative relationship with anticipatory guilt arousal. Self-efficacy was found to positively moderate the relationship between anticipatory guilt arousal and willingness to pay more, specifically in the [Statement] condition.

**Practical implications** – The insights gained from this study contribute to a better understanding of guilt appeals. The distinctions between systematic and heuristic persuasion cues in the context of marketing strategies can have implications for practitioners, academics and policymakers.

**Originality/value** – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to provide insights into the development and distinctions between consumer responses to heuristic and systematic persuasion cues, as well as their attitudes towards Fairtrade-certified products.

**Keywords** Advertising, Appeals, Anticipatory guilt, Attitudes, Fairtrade

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Fairtrade is a renowned certification body that verifies products aligning with the values of the "fair trade" movement. It ensures that producers in marginalised countries pay a fair price for specific commodities which is regulated through Fairtrade through the purchase of select



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commodities (Lyon, 2021; Fairtrade International, 2022; Witkowski, 2015). The popularity of Fairtrade is primarily driven by the rise of ethical consumerism, leading to its global recognition (Zhu *et al.*, 2021; Adams and Raisborough, 2010). Other countries, like Taiwan, have also integrated Fairtrade into their national policies to promote sustainable development and social equity (Fairtrade Australia, 2017). Similarly, Rio de Janeiro declared itself a Fairtrade town during the 2016 Olympics, illustrating how Fairtrade initiatives expanded its global reach (Buchanan, 2017; Voinea, 2016).

Despite the increasing support for Fairtrade, significant disparities exist in its adoption across different markets. For instance, while the UK has one of the highest Fairtrade penetration rates, Australia lags, despite similarities in culture, values and demographics (Charles, 2011; Fairtrade Annual Report, 2018). A major contributing factor to this discrepancy is the low recognition of the Fairtrade logo in Australia, where only half of the customers recognise it. Insufficient advertising efforts and limited awareness have likely impeded Fairtrade's penetration in Australia (Chesher, 2021). Therefore, understanding the role of advertising and consumer perception is crucial in bridging this gap, particularly through effective labelling strategies and promotional effects.

Packaging logos serve as labels that convey information, build product credibility and attract attention to stimulate purchases (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2020). These labels, in the form of logos or statements, are extensively studied from an advertising perspective to determine their effectiveness in influencing purchase behaviour (Mkhize and Ellis, 2020; Lefebvre *et al.*, 2019; Janssen and Hamm, 2012). In the realm of eco-labelling, labels are commonly used as advertising appeals. Therefore, understanding how statements or a combination of statements and logos can enhance the effectiveness of advertising and elicit purchase behaviour is an important research area that remains unexplored.

While consumer attitudes have been shown to influence purchase behaviour, attitudes alone are generally weak predictors of purchase intent (Hulland and Houston, 2021). The discrepancy between attitudes and ethical buying behaviour can be attributed to various factors such as limited availability of ethical products, scepticism towards ethical claims, feelings of manipulation and lack of information (Tarabieh, 2021; Gatti *et al.*, 2021). For example, some consumers refrain from purchasing Fairtrade-certified products because they believe the labels fail to evoke ethical considerations (Bürgin and Wilken, 2022). Others perceive Fairtrade-certified products as inferior in quality and, therefore, choose not to purchase them (Schouteten *et al.*, 2021). Cynicism also deters certain consumers who doubt that their purchase will make any difference in society (Pretner *et al.*, 2021).

In light of the above information, previous research has extensively focused on consumer attitudes towards Fairtrade products and their impact on purchase intentions (Pretner *et al.*, 2021), the effectiveness of eco-labels and Fairtrade logos in influencing consumer decisions (Lefebvre *et al.*, 2019; Mkhize and Ellis, 2020) and the role of ethical consumerism in driving Fairtrade product adoption (Bürgin and Wilken, 2022; Gatti *et al.*, 2021). While extant studies have also examined the relationships between ad credibility, attitudes toward advertisements and inferences of manipulative intent in general advertising contexts (Lwin and Phau, 2008a, 2008b; Sadasivan, 2019), there remains a gap in understanding how these factors interact specifically within the Fairtrade product marketing domain.

Fairtrade advertising often relies on ethical appeals, sustainability messaging and social responsibility narratives, which may shape consumer perceptions differently from conventional advertising. For instance, consumers may perceive Fairtrade advertisements as more credible due to their association with ethical business practices and third-party

certifications. However, the presence of persuasive techniques, such as emotionally charged storytelling or strategic framing of Fairtrade benefits, could lead to scepticism and heightened inferences of manipulative intent. This, in turn, may influence overall attitudes towards the advertisement and, consequently, consumer responses to Fairtrade products. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for marketers and policymakers aiming to promote ethical consumption. Hence, this research aims to explore the nuanced interplay between ad credibility, attitudes towards advertisements and perceived manipulative intent in this unique marketing context.

There is also a lack of studies examining the interplay between anticipatory guilt arousal and willingness to pay more (WTPM) for Fairtrade-certified products. Anticipatory guilt refers to the discomfort or unease individuals experience when they anticipate violating their personal or societal moral standards (Erlandsson *et al.*, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). In the context of Fairtrade consumption, this emotion may arise when consumers foresee potential regret or moral dissonance associated with choosing conventional products over ethically certified alternatives (Lindenmeier *et al.*, 2017).

While previous research has explored the role of guilt in ethical decision-making, the specific mechanism through which anticipatory guilt influences price sensitivity and premium payment decisions for Fairtrade products remains underexplored. Understanding this relationship is crucial, as Fairtrade goods typically command higher prices, requiring consumers to reconcile ethical considerations with possible economic constraints. Therefore, this study will address the identified gap by assessing the relationship between consumers' anticipatory guilt arousal and WTPM.

In addition, we aim to examine whether self-efficacy moderates the relationship between consumers' anticipatory guilt arousal and WTPM. Prior research suggests that self-efficacy (i.e. an individual's belief in their ability to achieve a desired outcome) plays a crucial role in shaping WTPM for ethical products (Wei *et al.*, 2018; Doran *et al.*, 2015). Given that anticipatory guilt can serve as a motivational force for ethical consumption, we propose that self-efficacy may either strengthen or weaken this effect.

For example, consumers with high self-efficacy may perceive themselves as more capable of making ethical purchasing decisions, thereby amplifying the effect of anticipatory guilt on WTPM. Alternatively, individuals with low self-efficacy may feel less capable of translating their moral concerns into action, potentially dampening the influence of anticipatory guilt on their WTPM. By examining this moderating effect, our study will provide deeper insights into how consumers' psychological resources shape their responses to ethical consumption cues, and consequently, their purchasing behaviour.

To address the earlier stated empirical gaps, this study draws on two key theoretical perspectives: the Heuristic-systematic model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980) and reactance theory (Brehm, 1966). HSM posits that consumers process persuasive messages through either a heuristic or systematic pathway, depending on their motivation and ability to engage with the message, while reactance theory suggests that when consumers perceive persuasive messages as overly manipulative or coercive, they experience psychological resistance against the intended message. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study provides a robust framework to explain how consumers process Fairtrade advertising and the influence of psychological resistance on their response to ethical marketing appeals.

Altogether, this study makes some important contributions to the literature on ethical consumerism, advertising effectiveness and consumer decision-making processes, thereby offering valuable insights for marketers and policymakers seeking to promote Fairtrade consumption.

## Theoretical framework and hypotheses development

### *Heuristic-systematic model and reactance theory*

The HSM and reactance theory provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how consumers process Fairtrade advertising and respond to ethical marketing appeals. HSM proposes that consumers process persuasive messages via two distinct pathways: heuristic processing and systematic processing (Xiao *et al.*, 2018). Heuristic processing relies on judgmental rules, known as knowledge structures, that are stored in memory (Wang, 2021). On the other hand, systematic processing involves comprehensive and analytical cognitive processing of information relevant to forming judgments (Lee and Bian, 2018).

This study leverages HSM to explore how consumers perceive Fairtrade advertising, particularly in terms of ad credibility, perceived manipulative intent and attitudes towards advertisements. This study therefore proposes that consumers who engage in heuristic processing may readily accept Fairtrade claims due to their association with ethical business practices, while those using systematic processing might scrutinise these claims, potentially leading to scepticism and resistance.

Currently, Fairtrade-certified products are primarily promoted using heuristic processing cues, such as logos. Although Fairtrade advertisements in billboards and print media may include systematic cues, guilt as an emotion is short-lived (Aigner *et al.*, 2019; Bürgin and Wilken, 2022). Given the fleeting nature of guilt, guilt appeals are more likely to be effective at the point of purchase, capturing the sale before the emotion dissipates. This suggests that a combination of statements and logos placed on product packaging, where the actual purchase occurs, may enhance guilt arousal effectiveness.

Furthermore, the reactance theory posits that individuals resist messages they perceive as overtly manipulative or coercive, leading to psychological reactance and counter-arguing against the message (Brehm, 1966). In the context of Fairtrade, if supporting Fairtrade became compulsory, it is likely to result in consumer backlash. Hence, emotionally charged storytelling, guilt appeals and persuasive framing may trigger perceptions of manipulation, thereby reducing ad credibility and negatively influencing consumer attitudes. Based on the reactance theory, this study examines how perceived manipulative intent influences consumer responses, helping to identify whether Fairtrade messaging strategies inadvertently provoke resistance rather than encourage ethical consumption.

In addition, this study extends the theoretical framework combining HSM and reactance theory, by investigating the role of anticipatory guilt and WTPM for Fairtrade products, as well as how self-efficacy moderates this relationship. This theoretical contribution is essential for understanding not only how consumers cognitively and emotionally process Fairtrade messages but also how psychological resistance can shape ethical consumption behaviours.

### *Ad credibility and attitude towards the ad*

Ad credibility refers to the extent to which consumers perceive the claims made about the brand in the advertisement to be truthful and believable (Hussain *et al.*, 2020). Positive ad credibility is also likely to elicit positive reactions to guilt appeals (Lim and Hong, 2022; Peng *et al.*, 2023). When consumers perceive an ad as believable and free from ill intentions, they are more likely to experience the intended guilt provoked by the advertiser (Singh and Crisafulli, 2020). Hence, this study argues that a higher ad credibility will lead to a significantly more favourable attitude towards the ad. Studies like Hasanah and Wahid (2019) and Nieuwenhuis (2020) have shown that positive ad credibility is more likely to result in favourable attitudes towards the ad.

According to [Ajzen and Fishbein \(1977\)](#), attitudes are learned predispositions of individuals, while [Kotler and Gertner \(2002\)](#) define attitudes as enduring evaluations, emotions and behaviours towards an object or idea that can be favourable or unfavourable. Attitudes towards an ad encompass emotional reactions, such as feelings of guilt evoked by an ad, and evaluations of the ad's credibility. In line with tenets of HSM, when consumers perceive an ad as credible, they are more likely to engage in systematic processing of the message, thereby leading to more favourable evaluations ([Fripp, 2025](#)). As further suggested by [Fripp \(2025\)](#), even when customers rely on mental shortcuts (e.g. credibility cues like expertise or trustworthiness), ad credibility serves as a positive heuristic cue, thereby triggering the "credibility equals quality" heuristic and leading to a favourable attitude towards the ad.

Building on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is presented:

*H1.* A higher ad credibility will lead to a significantly more favourable attitude towards the ad.

### *Inferences of manipulative intent*

Inferences of manipulative intent refer to individuals resisting the message source when they perceive the message as inappropriate, unfair or manipulative ([Cotte et al., 2005](#)). When consumers sense IMI, they do not experience the intended emotion but instead feel anxiety and form negative attitudes toward the advertisement ([Cotte et al., 2005](#)). IMI has been found to reduce advertising effectiveness, as measured by brand and ad attitudes as well as purchase intention ([Gräve et al., 2021](#)). This study argues that lower ad credibility will lead to significantly higher inferences of manipulative intent.

This hypothesis is supported by HSM's perspective on persuasion such that when ad credibility is low, consumers are more likely to engage in systematic processing, scrutinising the ad's content more closely. This increased scrutiny can lead to higher inferences of manipulative intent as consumers become more aware of persuasion attempts ([Cotte et al., 2005](#)).

According to a recent study by [Vevo \(2024\)](#), ad credibility is a key determinant of consumer trust. When an ad lacks credibility – due to exaggerated claims, deceptive messaging or a non-reputable source – consumers are more likely to infer manipulative intent. Recent studies (e.g. [Wen et al., 2023](#)) show that ads from unreliable sources (e.g. influencers with undisclosed sponsorships) or inconsistent messaging, trigger scepticism, thereby reinforcing manipulative intent inferences. For instance, findings from a study on sponsored content and native advertising ([Van Reijmersdal et al., 2022](#)) indicate that consumers quickly infer manipulative intent when disclosure is unclear, especially when the ad mimics organic content but lacks transparency.

Conversely, this study argues that a lower inference of manipulative intent will lead to a significantly more favourable attitude towards the ad. This hypothesis is supported by tenets of the reactance theory such that when consumers perceive lower levels of manipulative intent, they are less likely to experience psychological resistance, leading to a more favourable attitude towards the ad ([Lwin and Phau, 2008a, 2008b](#)). Recent studies on personalised advertising (e.g. [Pineda, 2024](#)) suggest that when ads are less intrusive and more aligned with user interests without being deceptive, consumers infer manipulative intent and exhibit higher ad favourability. Relatedly, AI-driven targeted ads that respect user privacy and provide genuine value (rather than aggressively tracking users) generate more positive attitudes by reducing perceived manipulation ([Fazlioglu, 2024](#)).

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Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are presented:

- H2. A lower ad credibility will lead to significantly higher inferences of manipulative intent.
- H3. A lower inference of manipulative intent will lead to a significantly more favourable attitude towards the ad.

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#### *Anticipatory guilt arousal*

Emotion plays a significant role in marketing and has the potential to create long-lasting customer loyalty (Kim and Sullivan, 2019). It can attract consumers' attention, shape their reactions and influence their attitudes toward a brand (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Kim and Stepankova, 2018). Guilt, a negative emotion, has been identified as a powerful motivator (Coleman *et al.*, 2020). Individuals often seek to relieve feelings of guilt as a coping mechanism (Gallego-Alberto *et al.*, 2022). In addition, research suggests that individuals who find themselves in undesirable situations are more likely to *act* (Heller, 2020). The intensity of guilt may vary depending on the situation and type, but the feeling of guilt tends to be relatively short-lived. This suggests that guilt appeals in Fairtrade advertisements may be less effective at evoking purchase behaviour. Therefore, it may be more effective to evoke guilt at the point of purchase.

Anticipatory guilt, as defined by Rawlings (1970), refers to contemplating the potential violation of one's standards, considering the possibility of doing something wrong or failing to do something right. Previous studies have observed anticipatory guilt appeals as having low to medium intensity and being short-lived (Aigner *et al.*, 2019). Guilt appeals in advertisements have been found to affect attitudes toward the ad and subsequently influence purchase intentions (Turner *et al.*, 2018; Lwin and Phau, 2008a, 2008b).

Conversely, if an ad conveys a moral or ethical appeal (e.g. sustainability or social responsibility), a more favourable attitude towards it will increase the consumer's susceptibility to anticipatory guilt (Singh *et al.*, 2020). Research on prosocial and ethical advertising shows that when consumers view an ad positively, they are more likely to internalise its message and experience anticipatory guilt if they fail to act following the suggested behaviour (Antonetti and Baines, 2015). In line with HSM, a favourable attitude towards the ad will lead to higher anticipatory guilt arousal due to less critical processing (Ceder, 2017).

This research also argues that higher ad credibility will lead to anticipatory guilt arousal. Ad credibility has been empirically proven to have a positive influence on evoking guilt (Lwin and Phau, 2008a, 2008b). When consumers perceive communications as credible, their cognitive responses and attitudes towards the ad become more positive. Findings from recent studies (e.g. Berki-Kiss and Menrad, 2022; Gafor *et al.*, 2024) indicate that highly credible ads, especially those with strong moral or ethical appeals (e.g. Fairtrade), generate stronger emotional reactions, including anticipatory guilt. When consumers perceive an ad as credible, they feel more accountable for their decisions. This increases their likelihood of experiencing anticipatory guilt if they consider ignoring the ad's message (Antonetti and Baines, 2015; Ceder, 2017).

Relatedly, this study argues a lower inference of manipulative intent will lead to higher anticipatory guilt arousal. Extant studies (e.g. Kayal *et al.*, 2018) suggest that when an ad is seen as transparent and ethical, consumers are more likely to accept its moral framing, which heightens anticipatory guilt. Similar research findings from the prosocial advertising context (e.g. Lindenmeier *et al.*, 2017) also demonstrate that when ads are perceived as less

manipulative, consumers will feel responsible for the issue presented and experience anticipatory guilt.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are presented:

- H4. A more favourable attitude towards the ad will lead to higher anticipatory guilt arousal.
- H5. A higher ad credibility will lead to higher anticipatory guilt arousal.
- H6. A lower inference of manipulative intent will lead to higher anticipatory guilt arousal.

#### *Anticipatory guilt arousal and willingness to pay more*

Anticipatory guilt arousal is a powerful emotion that can influence consumer behaviour. Studies like [Zhang et al. \(2021\)](#) have shown that when individuals anticipate feeling guilty about a decision, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that alleviate that guilt. In the ethical consumer behaviour context, we predict that this feeling further translates to a higher willingness to pay for products or services that evoke anticipatory guilt. As shown by findings from [PwC Global \(2024\)](#) study, consumers experiencing anticipatory guilt about environmental harm are willing to pay premium prices for eco-friendly products.

WTPM refers to the amount a customer is willing to pay for a preferred brand compared to similar or lesser brands of the same size or quantity ([Aaker, 1992](#)). It occurs when the perceived value of the product exceeds the consumers' evaluation of its value ([Dean et al., 2012](#); [Keh and Xie, 2009](#)). Studies have shown that consumers are willing to pay a premium for brands that promise contributions to charity ([Carroll and Kachersky, 2019](#)).

Based on tenets of HSM, when anticipatory guilt is high, consumers are more likely to engage in systematic processing of information ([Lee and Hong, 2021](#)). This thorough evaluation of claims and evidence can lead to a higher willingness to pay for products that align with their values or assuage their guilt. Even in cases where consumers use mental shortcuts, anticipatory guilt can serve as a heuristic cue, prompting them to associate higher prices with ethical or sustainable products ([Fripp, 2025](#)).

In further relation to the reactance theory, high-trait reactant individuals may perceive guilt-inducing messages as threats to their freedom ([Schumpe et al., 2020](#)). To restore this perceived loss of freedom, they might be willing to pay more for products that align with their values, thereby effectively "buying back" their sense of autonomy. In the context of Fairtrade, not supporting farmers in marginalised countries may elicit guilt in some respondents, which is a negative state. Consequently, respondents are motivated to alleviate this negative state, potentially by being willing to pay more for Fairtrade-certified products.

Findings from [Schumpe et al.'s \(2020\)](#) study further show that including a reactance-inducing message before a target message can increase persuasiveness. This suggests that strategically arousing anticipatory guilt could lead to a higher willingness to pay for a subsequent product offering. Research indicates that Fairtrade is the most significant ethical concern in consumer behaviour ([Zander et al., 2018](#)). Fairtrade brands or products with Fairtrade labels are reasonably accessible. However, the importance of the Fairtrade label and the factors influencing consumers' WTPM for Fairtrade products, such as WTPM, have not been thoroughly studied ([Schouteten et al., 2021](#)). Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is presented:

- H7. A higher anticipatory guilt arousal will lead to a significantly higher WTPM.

### *The moderating influence of self-efficacy*

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation or accomplish a task (Fuchs *et al.*, 2019). The level of self-efficacy can influence how individuals approach goals, tasks and challenges. According to the concept, if individuals do not believe their actions can produce desired effects, they may lack the motivation to persevere and overcome obstacles (Bandura, 2018). Research by Jeng and Tseng (2018) has demonstrated that self-efficacy influences purchasing behaviour. Therefore, this study suggests that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between anticipatory guilt arousal and WTPM for Fairtrade products.

Consumers with high self-efficacy are more likely to believe that their purchase of Fairtrade products can make a meaningful impact. When exposed to anticipatory guilt appeals, these individuals are more likely to engage in systematic processing of Fairtrade information, leading to a stronger WTPM for Fairtrade products (Ceder, 2017; Teah, 2017). Conversely, consumers with low self-efficacy may be less influenced by anticipatory guilt appeals. They might rely more on heuristic processing, using simple cues like price or brand familiarity to make decisions, resulting in a weaker relationship between guilt arousal and WTPM (Fripp, 2025; Lee and Hong, 2021). Findings from recent studies (e.g. Spence, 2015) confirm that ethical consumption depends not only on guilt but also on perceived self-efficacy.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H8.* Self-efficacy will moderate the relationship between anticipatory guilt arousal and WTPM for Fairtrade products.

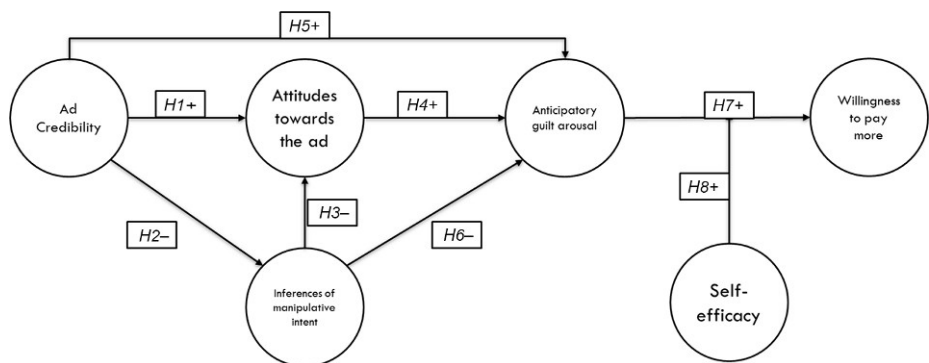
Figure 1 presents the research model for this study.

## Methodology

### *Research design*

To investigate the impact of Fairtrade logos and statements on consumer perception using different advertising appeals, a 2 (“logo” + “no logo”) × 2 (“statement” + “no statement”) factorial experimental design consisting of four cells is used. The four variations of visual stimuli correspond to the four cells of the factorial design: [Statement], [Statement + Logo], [Logo] and [Control].

Given the industry-driven nature of this study, collaboration with industry partners can foster a mutually beneficial relationship (Crick and Crick, 2020; Alrubaiee and Al-Nazer, 2010).



**Figure 1.** Research model  
Source: Figure by authors

Industry partners bring critical insights into market forces, while academics contribute to university research and discoveries (Mathisen and Rasmussen, 2019; Lee, 2000). Thus, to ensure the reliability, validity and relevance of the questionnaire, this study aims to establish a collaboration with an industry partner.

In this study, the industry partner will be Bahen & Co., a boutique chocolatier that specialises in artisan chocolates made from bean to bar, using vintage equipment and traditional chocolate manufacturing processes. Bahen & Co. seeks to measure the effectiveness of Fairtrade logos and statements on consumer perception, using various advertising appeals. Previous research by Avanzi *et al.* (2020) has indicated that non-durable products, such as chocolate, are particularly susceptible to guilt appeals. Furthermore, industry statistics published by Bennett (2016) demonstrate that chocolate represents 55% of all Fairtrade-certified products in the Australian market, followed by coffee at 34%.

### *Stimulus development*

After viewing a guilt-inducing video, each respondent was randomly assigned to one of four stimuli conditions. The guilt-inducing video was the same for all conditions. Following the video, respondents were presented with a survey corresponding to the stimulus condition they were assigned to. To ensure data collection consistency, four different sets of surveys were developed, each featuring a different stimulus.

All four stimulus variations included prominent chocolate packaging from Bahen & Co. To maintain neutrality, a gender-neutral and monotonous package design was selected. Along with the chocolate packaging, the stimuli conditions were as follows:

- [Statement]: This condition featured a short sentence highlighting the benefits of supporting Fairtrade.
- [Logo]: This condition included a conspicuous Fairtrade logo. Respondents were introduced to the Fairtrade logo during the video.
- [Statement + Logo]: This condition combined both the elements from [Statement] and [Logo].
- [Control]: This condition did not include either the statement or the logo, only featuring the Bahen & Co. chocolate packaging.

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of all four stimulus conditions.

### *Experimental procedure*

To ensure a comprehensive representation of the population, the survey instrument was administered through a consumer panel. The decision to use a consumer panel was driven by its ability to provide rapid access to a diverse pool of respondents while allowing for a controlled sampling procedure (Cleave, 2022). Despite its advantages, the use of panel data may lead to self-selection bias and limit the generalisability of study findings, as individuals who voluntarily participate in these panels may differ systematically from a broader population (Liza, 2025).

To mitigate this weakness, we applied a non-probability sampling technique, specifically quota sampling. Quota sampling was chosen to ensure that the sample reflected key demographic features of the broader population while maintaining feasibility within the constraints of the panel (Vijayamohan, 2024). Data collection spanned over two weeks, conducted in four separate batches. A total of 951 responses were collected, out of which 717 responses were considered suitable for analysis after the elimination of missing data. Initially, we determined our minimum required sample size using the 5:1 participant-to-item ratio (Gorsuch, 1983; Hatcher and O'Rourke, 2013). A "participant-to-item ratio" refers to



**Figure 2.** Four conditions for the four cells  
Source: Figure by authors

the number of research participants required per item on a survey. With 23 measurement items in our survey (see Table 2), a minimum of 115 participants was required.

However, we acknowledge that the participant-to-item ratio is a subjective guideline. To strengthen the methodological rigour and ensure the adequacy of our sample size, we further conducted a post-hoc power analysis using G\*Power 3.1 (Abbasi *et al.*, 2025; Henseler *et al.*, 2009). Assuming a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.5$ ), an alpha level of 0.05 and a desired power level of 0.8, the analysis indicated that a minimum sample of 128 participants would be required for data analysis. Our final sample of 717 respondents comfortably exceeded this threshold, thereby ensuring that our sample size is more than sufficient to ensure robust statistical analysis and reliable results.

Given the four experimental groups described in the previous section, an allocation strategy was used to ensure each condition had enough respondents to enable robust statistical comparisons. These included 210 responses for the [Statement] condition, 185 for [Logo], 168 for [Statement + Logo] and 154 for [Control].

The sample exhibited an equal distribution of genders, with 49.1% male respondents and 50.9% female respondents. Most of the respondents (25.9%) were within the age group of 55–64 years. In terms of income, most respondents fell into the lower-middle income group, with 40.3% earning AUD20,001 to AUD50,000 per annum. Regarding education, 37.9% of the respondents had completed secondary education, while 33.1% held a diploma or certificate. Collectively, these two categories accounted for 71% of the sample, indicating a

predominance of respondents with lower levels of education. Further demographic information is presented in [Table 1](#).

*Instrument development*

The survey consists of four sections, encompassing five established scales and one relatively new scale. In Section A, manipulation checks were conducted for Brand Familiarity ([Machleit, Allen, and Madden, 1993](#)) and Attitudes towards the Brand ([Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989](#); [Muehling, Sprott, and Sprott, 2004](#); [Pascal, Sprott, and Muehling, 2002](#)). Including manipulation checks in the survey design, as stated by [Oppenheimer, Meyvis, and Davidenko \(2009\)](#), helps reduce noise, increase the validity of the collected data, and enhance the statistical power and reliability of the data set.

Section B consists of a filler task, which involves a video ad with humour appeals and a modified Standard Emotional Profile ([Holbrook and Batra, 1987](#); [Lwin, 2010](#)). Filler tasks are used to prevent respondents from discerning the purpose of the study, which could potentially bias their responses ([Butler and Nolen-Hoeksema, 1994](#)). In addition, respondents were presented with a two-minute video ad that incorporated audio and visual cues to stimulate feelings of guilt. Given the enduring nature of guilt ([Kugler and Jones, 1992](#); [Lwin and Phau, 2014](#)), the stimuli needed to be longer than typical ad stimuli, as print advertisements may not evoke the same sentiment or effect ([Lwin and Phau, 2014](#)). Combining audio and visual cues is also essential to effectively induce guilt ([Kugler and Jones, 1992](#)). As per the factorial design, four stimuli were created, and each respondent was exposed to only one ad stimulus to avoid potential revelation and confusion.

**Table 1.** Sample demographics

Items	<i>n</i> = 795	%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	405	50.9
Male	390	49.1
<i>Age</i>		
18–24	24	3
25–34	88	11.1
35–44	132	16.6
45–54	146	18.4
55–64	206	25.9
65+	199	25
<i>Income (in AUD)</i>		
0–20,000	167	21
20,001–50,000	320	40.3
50,000–100,000	215	27
100,001–150,000	64	8
150,001–200,000	19	2.4
200,001+	10	1.3
<i>Education level</i>		
Secondary	301	37.9
Diploma or certificate	263	33.1
Bachelor degree	157	19.7
Postgraduate	67	8.4
Others	7	0.9

**Source(s):** Table by authors

In Section C, respondents provided their reactions to the stimulus they were presented with. The measures included Acr from Mackenzie and Lutz (1989), Aad scale (Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989), IMI scale (Campbell, 1995), AGA (Bozinoff and Ghingold, 1983; Lwin, 2010), SE (Basil *et al.*, 2008; Sherer *et al.*, 1982) and WTPM (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2004). Finally, Section D captured demographic information, such as age, gender, education level and income. To maintain anonymity, these items were collected in ranges, preventing individual identification.

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## Data analysis

### *Manipulation checks*

Before analysis, data was screened for possible outliers, responses that failed to pass manipulation checks, responses showcasing a lack of commitment in answering questions and responses that were not within a reasonable timeframe. AMOS SEM 24 was then used to analyse the data. All measures were analysed for reliability and validity following the guidelines set out by Dziuban and Shirkey (1974) and Nunnally (1967). Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess items' correspondence with their respective latent variables. All constructs within the model were regarded as separate reflective measures. Overall, the resulting global model goodness of fit indices indicated that the measurement model fitted the data well.

Composite reliability is used to explore the factorial structure of the items in a construct (Raykov, 1997). Composite reliability does not have a general underestimation of the property seen in Cronbach's alpha. Therefore, it is considered a better measure of reliability for structure equation modelling (Brown, 2014; Raykov, 1997). Composite reliability is calculated using AMOS 24. Calculated figures are above 0.7 across all constructs and conditions, indicating acceptable reliability (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2011).

Convergent validity and discriminant validity are used to determine whether a measure has high correlations with related items of the construct and low correlations with unrelated items (Peter, 1981). Convergent and discriminant validity are to be established together (Noar, 2003). Convergent validity is evidenced by significant factor loadings, and average variance extracted (AVE) figures above 0.5 (Bollen, 1989; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The AVE values were between 0.639 and 0.951, signifying convergent validity. Discriminant validity is examined to establish that the scale's constructs are statistically distinct and is evidenced by the square root of AVE being greater than any inter-factor correlation (Bollen, 1989; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In summary, the scales exhibited acceptable levels of reliability and validity. Table 2 provides sources, reliability and validity for the constructs in this study.

### *Hypotheses testing*

The results of the multi-sample structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis, as summarised in Table 3 below, provide empirical support for several hypothesised relationships between ad credibility, inferences of manipulative intent, anticipatory guilt arousal and consumer WTPM across different experimental conditions.

The SEM results show that higher perceived ad credibility is associated with a more positive attitude towards the ad for all four stimuli conditions (Statement –  $\beta = 0.382$ , SE = 0.077,  $p = 0.000$ ; Logo –  $\beta = 0.656$ , SE = 0.081,  $p = 0.000$ ; Statement + Logo –  $\beta = 0.588$ , SE = 0.074,  $p = 0.000$ ; Control –  $\beta = 0.459$ , SE = 0.076,  $p = 0.000$ ), thus providing empirical support for *H1*. Conversely, *H2* is supported, indicating that lower ad credibility is linked to higher levels of inferences of manipulative intent for all four stimuli conditions (Statement –  $\beta = -0.792$ , SE = 0.057,  $p = 0.000$ ; Logo –  $\beta = -0.718$ , SE = 0.057,  $p = 0.000$ ;

**Table 2.** Source, reliability and validity of measurement scale items

Construct	Items	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
Ad credibility ( <a href="#">Mackenzie and Lutz 1989</a> ; <a href="#">Pascal et al. 2002</a> )	1. The ad is believable 2. The ad is truthful 3. The ad is realistic	0.968	0.975	0.929
Attitudes towards the ( <a href="#">Lutz et al. 1983</a> , <a href="#">Olney et al. 1991</a> )	1. I have good attitudes towards this ad 2. My attitude towards the ad is favourable 3. My attitude towards this ad is positive 4. I dislike this ad	0.928	0.966	0.905
Inferences of manipulative intent ( <a href="#">Campbell 1995</a> )	1. The way this ad tries to persuade people seems acceptable to me 2. The advertiser tried to manipulate the audience in ways I do not like 3. I am pleased with this ad because the advertiser is trying to control the consumer audience appropriately 4. I didn't mind this ad; the advertiser tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative 5. The ad was fair in what was said and shown 6. I think that this advertisement is fair	0.940	0.937	0.752
Anticipatory guilt arousal ( <a href="#">Bozinoff and Ghingold 1983</a> ; <a href="#">Lwin and Phau 2008a</a> , <a href="#">2008b</a> )	1. I would feel guilty for purchasing non-Fairtrade products 2. I would blame myself for not supporting Fairtrade products 3. I would feel guilty for not supporting companies that advocate the Fairtrade agreement 4. I would feel guilty if I didn't purchase Fairtrade products 5. I would feel disappointed in myself if I bought a non-Fairtrade product 6. I would feel ashamed for buying non-Fairtrade products 7. I would feel irresponsible for buying non-Fairtrade products	0.965	0.961	0.780
Self-efficacy ( <a href="#">Sherer et al. 1982</a> ; <a href="#">Basil et al. 2008</a> )	I am capable of purchasing Bahen & Co. chocolates in the future I am confident that I will be able to purchase the Bahen & Co. chocolates in the future If it were entirely up to me, I would purchase Bahen & Co. chocolates in the future It is very likely that I will buy Bahen & Co. chocolates the next time I need it	0.953	0.936	0.770
Willingness to pay more ( <a href="#">Netemeyer et al. 2004</a> )	1. The price of Bahen & Co. would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to a non-Fairtrade chocolate brand 2. I am willing to pay a higher price for Bahen & Co. than for other non-Fairtrade chocolate brands 3. I am willing to pay a lot more for Bahen & Co. than for other non-Fairtrade chocolate brand	0.859	0.877	0.709

**Note(s):** \*All scales rated on a seven-point Likert scale

**Source(s):** Table by authors

**Table 3.** Global fit indices

	Global model goodness of fit						
	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	PClose
Statement	297.966	159.000	1.874	0.972	0.966	0.064	0.023
Logo	306.849	172.000	1.784	0.978	0.973	0.060	0.065
Statement + logo	278.432	154.000	1.808	0.979	0.974	0.061	0.060
Control	182.626	108.000	1.691	0.981	0.977	0.062	0.101

**Source(s):** Table by authors

Statement + Logo  $-\beta = -0.676$ ,  $SE = 0.057$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Control  $-\beta = -0.686$ ;  $SE = 0.062$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Also, *H3* is fully supported across all experimental conditions, reinforcing that lower inferences of manipulative intent are associated with more favourable attitudes towards the ad (Statement  $-\beta = -0.520$ ,  $SE = 0.078$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Logo  $-\beta = -0.269$ ,  $SE = 0.091$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ; Statement + Logo  $-\beta = -0.421$ ,  $SE = 0.082$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Control  $-\beta = -0.661$ ,  $SE = 0.097$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

However, contrary to expectations, our findings indicate that attitudes toward the ad do not have a significant direct effect on anticipatory guilt arousal in any of the four conditions (Statement  $-\beta = 0.203$ ,  $SE = 0.114$ ,  $p = 0.076$ ; Logo  $-\beta = 0.198$ ,  $SE = 0.109$ ,  $p = 0.069$ ; Statement + Logo  $-\beta = 0.071$ ,  $SE = 0.115$ ,  $p = 0.538$ ; Control  $-\beta = -0.001$ ,  $SE = 0.137$ ,  $p = 0.993$ ), thereby providing no empirical support for *H4*. Similarly, ad credibility has no significant direct effect on anticipatory guilt arousal in any of the four conditions (Statement  $-\beta = 0.001$ ,  $SE = 0.122$ ,  $p = 0.933$ ; Logo  $-\beta = -0.008$ ,  $SE = 0.133$ ,  $p = 0.951$ ; Statement + Logo  $-\beta = 0.228$ ,  $SE = 0.129$ ,  $p = 0.078$ ; Control  $-\beta = 0.253$ ,  $SE = 0.041$ ,  $p = 0.073$ ). Hence, *H5* is rejected.

Regarding *H6*, the study results reveal that inferences of manipulative intent negatively influence anticipatory guilt arousal in the [Statement], [Statement + Logo] and [Control] conditions. However, this effect is not statistically significant in the [Logo] condition, where the absence of a guilt-evoking statement may have led to lower emotional engagement (Statement  $-\beta = -0.390$ ,  $SE = 0.129$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ; Logo  $-\beta = -0.521$ ,  $SE = 0.138$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Statement + Logo  $-\beta = -0.311$ ,  $SE = 0.131$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ; Control  $-\beta = -0.316$ ,  $SE = 0.171$ ,  $p = 0.064$ ). Thus, *H6* is partially supported. In addition, the study finds full empirical support for *H7*, as higher levels of anticipatory guilt arousal led to a greater WTPM across all four conditions (Statement  $-\beta = 0.215$ ,  $SE = 0.041$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Logo  $-\beta = 0.267$ ,  $SE = 0.048$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Statement + Logo  $-\beta = 0.407$ ,  $SE = 0.050$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ; Control  $-\beta = 0.302$ ,  $SE = 0.054$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

Finally, *H8* is partially supported, as self-efficacy moderates the relationship between anticipatory guilt arousal and WTPM in all conditions except for the [Control] condition (Statement  $-\beta = 0.382$ ,  $SE = 0.040$ ,  $p = 0.039$ ; Logo  $-\beta = -0.164$ ,  $SE = 0.055$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ; Statement + Logo  $-\beta = 0.146$ ,  $SE = 0.050$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ; Control  $-\beta = -0.063$ ,  $SE = 0.051$ ,  $p = 0.213$ ). This suggests that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to increase their WTPM when exposed to guilt-inducing messages. However, when no such cues are present (as in the Control condition), self-efficacy does not play a significant moderating role. All the above hypotheses testing results are presented in [Table 4](#).

### Discussion of findings

This research aimed to explore the association between ad credibility, attitudes towards advertisements, inferences of manipulative intent and anticipatory guilt arousal. This study

**Table 4.** Hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Relationships	$\beta$	SE	<i>p</i> -values
<i>H1</i>	Ad credibility → attitude towards the ad			Fully supported
	Statement	0.382	0.077	0.000
	Logo	0.656	0.081	0.000
	Statement + logo	0.588	0.074	0.000
<i>H2</i>	Ad credibility → inferences of manipulative intent			Fully supported
	Statement	-0.792	0.057	0.000
	Logo	-0.718	0.057	0.000
	Statement + logo	-0.676	0.057	0.000
<i>H3</i>	Inferences of manipulative intent → attitude towards the ad			Fully supported
	Statement	-0.520	0.078	0.000
	Logo	-0.269	0.091	0.003
	Statement + logo	-0.421	0.082	0.000
<i>H4</i>	Attitude towards the ad → anticipatory guilt arousal			Rejected
	Statement	0.203	0.114	0.076
	Logo	0.198	0.109	0.069
	Statement + logo	0.071	0.115	0.538
<i>H5</i>	Ad credibility → anticipatory guilt arousal			Rejected
	Statement	0.001	0.122	0.993
	Logo	-0.008	0.133	0.951
	Statement + logo	0.228	0.129	0.078
<i>H6</i>	Inferences of manipulative intent → anticipatory guilt arousal			Partially supported
	Statement	-0.390	0.129	0.003
	Logo	-0.521	0.138	0.000
	Statement + logo	-0.311	0.131	0.018
<i>H7</i>	Anticipatory guilt arousal → willingness to pay more			Fully supported
	Statement	0.215	0.041	0.000
	Logo	0.267	0.048	0.000
	Statement + logo	0.407	0.050	0.000
<i>H8</i>	Self-efficacy × anticipatory guilt arousal → willingness to pay more			Partially supported
	Statement	0.082	0.040	0.039
	Logo	-0.164	0.055	0.003
	Statement + logo	0.146	0.050	0.003
	Control	-0.063	0.051	0.213

**Source(s):** Table by authors

further examined the relationship between anticipatory guilt arousal and WTPM for Fairtrade products, as well as the moderating influence of self-efficacy on this relationship. The findings of this research based on the hypotheses testing are therefore presented below.

First, higher perceived ad credibility is associated with a more positive attitude towards the ad for all four stimuli conditions. This finding aligns with the empirical suggestions of [Hasanah and Wahid \(2019\)](#), which posits that advertisements perceived as credible are more likely to evoke positive consumer responses. Hence, a credible ad fosters trust and receptiveness, making consumers more open to its persuasive message. In addition, the

findings reinforce the assertion (Singh and Crisafulli, 2020) that when consumers view an advertisement as believable and free from deceptive intent, they are more inclined to experience the intended guilt arousal elicited by the advertiser. This further underscores the role of credibility in shaping the emotional effectiveness of guilt-based advertising.

Related, the study findings show that lower ad credibility is positively associated with higher levels of inferences of manipulative intent across all experimental conditions. This suggests that when an ad lacks credibility, consumers are more likely to perceive it as manipulative, questioning the authenticity of the message. This finding is also consistent with that of Septianto *et al.* (2021), who argue that the intensity of guilt appeals can influence ad effectiveness, with excessive or insincere guilt messaging leading to consumer scepticism.

Third, our study findings show that across all experimental conditions, lower inferences of manipulative intent are associated with more favourable attitudes towards the ad. In other words, when consumers perceive an ad as less manipulative, they are more likely to respond positively. This finding supports that of Septianto *et al.* (2021), who discovered that reducing perceived manipulation in advertising can enhance consumer receptiveness, making guilt-based marketing strategies more effective.

Fourth, contrary to previous studies (Turner *et al.*, 2018; Lwin and Phau, 2008a, 2008b), the study results suggest that neither attitudes toward the ad nor ad credibility have a significant direct effect on anticipatory guilt arousal in any of the four conditions. These findings challenge the conventional wisdom, which assumes that a well-received and credible ad should directly influence the emotional impacts of guilt appeals (Lwin and Phau, 2008a, 2008b). The lack of a direct effect implies that other mediating variables or contextual factors may play a more prominent role in determining the extent of guilt arousal in guilt-based advertising.

Further study results reveal that inferences of manipulative intent negatively influence anticipatory guilt arousal in the [Statement], [Statement + Logo] and [Control] conditions. This suggests that when consumers perceive an ad as manipulative, they are less likely to experience the intended guilt response, likely due to psychological reaction or scepticism (Singh *et al.*, 2020). However, in the [Logo] condition, this relationship was not statistically significant. The absence of a guilt-evoking statement in this condition may have led to lower emotional engagement, reducing the overall effectiveness of the guilt appeal.

In addition, the study shows that higher levels of anticipatory guilt arousal are positively associated with WTPM for Fairtrade products across all four conditions. This suggests that guilt appeals, when effectively executed, can drive prosocial purchasing behaviours (Peng *et al.*, 2023). The result further implies that combining systematic processing cues, such as guilt statements, alongside heuristic cues, like the Fairtrade logo, may enhance consumer awareness and engagement with ethical products. Hence, the notion that dual-process persuasion strategies – where consumers process guilt appeals both rationally and emotionally – can be more effective in promoting ethical consumption (Singh *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, the study found that self-efficacy positively moderates the relationship between AGA and WTPM in the [Statement], [Logo] and [Statement + Logo] conditions. This suggests that individuals with higher self-efficacy – who believe in their ability to act following their moral values – are more likely to translate guilt arousal into actual purchasing behaviour (Hamann *et al.*, 2024; Rullo *et al.*, 2022). However, this moderation effect was not observed in the [Control] condition, where guilt-inducing elements were absent. This reinforces the idea that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in transforming guilt into action, but only when guilt is effectively elicited through advertising cues (Choi, 2024).

### *Theoretical contributions*

This study advances theoretical discussions in the ethical consumerism literature by integrating the HSM and reactance theory to explain consumer responses to guilt-based advertising. It further highlights the importance of ad credibility, dual-processing mechanisms and self-efficacy in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviour.

By integrating heuristic (Fairtrade logo) and systematic (guilt statement) cues, this study extends the HSM framework in ethical advertising contexts. Our study findings suggest that combining both types of cues enhances customer engagement with Fairtrade messaging. Specifically, the [Statement + Logo] condition generated the most positive effects, indicating that systematic processing cues can compensate for low Fairtrade logo recognition in certain markets (e.g. Australia). This underscores the importance of context in the effectiveness of heuristic cues.

Furthermore, this study provides new empirical evidence on how perceptions of manipulative intent influence ethical advertising outcomes, by reducing anticipatory guilt arousal. This nuance adds to the reactance theory by showing that consumers do not always resist persuasive ethical messages – when messages are balanced (i.e. not perceived as overtly manipulative), guilt appeals can still be effective. This study also adds to the self-efficacy research domain by demonstrating that it moderates the relationship between anticipatory guilt and WTPM in conditions where systematic or heuristic cues are present but not in the control condition.

Summarily, this study provides a significant understanding of how consumers process Fairtrade advertising. It makes key contributions to ethical consumerism literature by demonstrating the role of anticipatory guilt, self-efficacy and message framing in shaping consumer responses to Fairtrade products. By integrating HSM and reactance theory, these study findings offer both theoretical advancements and practical recommendations for enhancing ethical advertising effectiveness.

### *Practical implications*

The findings of this study offer valuable, actionable insights for businesses, marketing professionals and policymakers. Given the increasing demand for ethical and sustainable products, marketing executives are encouraged to take a strategic and responsible approach when designing promotional campaigns. Specifically, they should integrate ethical considerations into their messaging, ensuring that guilt appeals – often used to drive consumer engagement with Fairtrade and other ethical products – are balanced and carefully calibrated.

Guilt appeal can be a powerful tool, but its effectiveness depends on the intensity and framing. Excessive guilt can backfire, triggering defensive reactions, resistance and even consumer disengagement. Conversely, moderate guilt, when strategically used, can positively influence attitudes and purchasing behaviour. To maximise effectiveness, marketers should avoid high-intensity guilt appeals that might overwhelm consumers. Instead, a progressive approach – gradually increasing consumer awareness and emotional engagement – can foster a sense of responsibility without inducing excessive pressure.

Furthermore, marketers can leverage the findings of this study to fine-tune the intensity of guilt appeals based on the target market segment's sensitivity and responsiveness. Since guilt is a highly subjective emotion, consumer reactions will vary depending on individual predispositions, cultural contexts and socioeconomic factors. As a result, Fairtrade-certified products should be targeted toward consumer segments that demonstrate both an ethical inclination and the financial capacity to pay a premium for ethical products.

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For boutique brands, integrating Fairtrade messaging into their promotional strategies can enhance their brand narrative, differentiating them in competitive markets. The inclusion of Fairtrade statements in advertising and packaging can strengthen brand authenticity, reinforce ethical commitments and foster deeper emotional connections with consumers. Brands that use both the Fairtrade logo and supporting statements can appeal to different consumer segments, enabling dual processing: heuristic cues for those already familiar with Fairtrade and systematic cues for consumers seeking detailed information.

In the Australian market, where Fairtrade logo recognition remains relatively low, a combination of the logo and explanatory statements on packaging can improve consumer awareness, trust and association with the Fairtrade label. Over time, as recognition increases, brands may shift toward using the logo alone, optimising packaging space – a particularly important consideration for boutique brands with limited-label real estate. However, for companies aiming to cultivate a strong brand story, continuing to use Fairtrade statements alongside the logo may yield long-term benefits by reinforcing ethical positioning and deepening consumer trust.

Beyond business and marketing implications, this study also highlights critical considerations for policymakers. Regulatory oversight is necessary to ensure that guilt-based marketing practices do not cross ethical boundaries into coercion or misinformation. Policymakers should develop guidelines that prevent brands from exploiting consumer emotions unethically while still allowing the use of responsible, evidence-based persuasive messaging.

In addition, government bodies and non-profit organisations should invest in consumer education programs to improve public awareness and recognition of ethical labels and certifications. Greater consumer literacy regarding Fairtrade and sustainability labels can enhance trust, facilitate informed purchasing decisions and drive market demand for ethical products.

Finally, financial incentives such as tax benefits or subsidies for Fairtrade products can be considered to enhance accessibility and affordability. While Fairtrade products often carry a price premium due to the ethical sourcing practices involved, subsidies can help bridge the affordability gap, thereby encouraging broader consumer adoption. These measures would not only support the Fairtrade movement but also contribute to more sustainable and equitable global trade practices.

By implementing these insights, businesses, marketers and policymakers can work collaboratively to create a marketplace where ethical consumption is both encouraged and accessible, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and socially responsible economy.

### **Limitations and future research avenues**

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of Fairtrade logos and statements in influencing consumer perceptions and purchase behaviour, it is not without limitations. These limitations present opportunities for future research to enhance the understanding of Fairtrade advertising and ethical consumerism.

First, the study's samples predominantly comprised participants aged 55 and above, with a significant proportion having lower levels of education and falling into the lower-middle income bracket. This demographic distribution may limit the generalisability of the findings to younger consumers or those with higher levels of education and income, who may exhibit different attitudes towards Fairtrade products. Therefore, future studies should recruit a more diverse sample in terms of age, education, income levels and cultural background to enhance the generalizability of findings.

Second, the study was conducted in Australia, where Fairtrade penetration remains relatively low. Cultural and economic factors unique to Australia may have influenced

consumer responses. Future research should conduct similar research to other countries with different levels of Fairtrade market penetration that could provide insights into how the socio-cultural factors unique to these regions shape consumer responses to Fairtrade advertising.

Third, this study utilised a controlled experimental design with a  $2 \times 2$  factorial structure. While this approach allows for the identification of causal relationships, it does not fully capture real-world purchasing scenarios where multiple factors – such as competing ethical labels, retailer influence and word-of-mouth recommendations – affect consumer decision-making. Hence, future research could incorporate field experiments or longitudinal studies that track actual purchase behaviour over time, rather than relying on self-reported intentions in experimental settings.

Fourth, while this study examined the interplay between factors like anticipatory guilt and self-efficacy on consumers' WTPM for Fairtrade products, future studies could explore additional psychological factors like moral identity, perceived consumer effectiveness and ethical obligation, to understand their influences on ethical purchase decisions.

Given the rise of digital marketing, future research could examine the role of social media campaigns, influencer endorsements and online reviews in shaping consumer perceptions of Fairtrade product ads. Finally, future studies could analyse how Fairtrade certification ads compete with other ethical labels, such as organic, Rainforest Alliance or B Corporation certification, to influence consumer preferences in a multi-label context.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing these research directions, scholars can further extend theoretical frameworks and provide actionable insights for marketers and policymakers aiming to promote Fairtrade consumption more effectively.

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