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Coping with Individual-Group Incongruity  Shuoyang Zhang, Indiana UniversityAdam Duhachek, Indiana UniversityShanker Krishnan, Indiana University Increasing attention has recently been given to the social aspects of consumer behavior. However, most studies have viewed consumers as subjects to group influence, and have not addressed the dynamic processes involved, including the coping strategies consumer use in stressful situations. The present research addresses this gap by formulating a model of individual coping with attitude change in response to social influence. Two studies provide evidence in support of the proposed model. This research contributes to extant literature related to cognitive evaluation, emotional appraisal, attitude change, social influence and specific coping responses.

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Introduction
It has long been recognized in social psychology and consumer research that decisions are context dependent and that groups have influence on the judgment and behavior of individuals. Most of the previous studies have focused on the influence of reference groups on product and brand decisions (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Childer and Rao 1992), and consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Netemeyer, Bearden and Teel 1992). More recent findings have suggested that mere anticipation of an approaching group discussion causes people to tailor their responses in a strategic manner and influence their product attitudes (Schlosser and Shavitt 1999, 2002). In such situations, consumers may experience stress due to anticipated group influence. While consumer research has implicitly explored a subset of coping behaviors, for example, revision and concession (Aribarg, Arora, and Bodur 2002), previous investigations have not systematically considered coping as a set of stress responses involved in consumer decision process under group influence.

Coping is defined as the process of managing internal or external demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Previous research has shown that cognitive and emotional appraisals interrelate to predict consumers’ choice of specific coping strategies. Additionally, Tetlock, Skitka, and Boettger (1989) argue that attitude change in anticipation of social interaction often result from cognitive process rather than being an automatic heuristic shift. Additionally, there is a high possibility that individuals have to cope with negative emotions generated by exposure to group feedback which is different from their own evaluations. Thus, it seems likely that both cognitions and emotions operate together to drive coping responses to social influence. This is especially likely to occur when consumers face controversial issues (e.g. products with favorable functional attributes but unfavorable norms or vice versa), which is common but understudied in the domain of consumer research.

In summary, the purpose of this study is to identify conditions under which participants change their attitude toward a product and engage in coping strategies upon exposure to group feedback. Tetlock et al. (1989) proposed a social contingency model of judgment and choice. The model assumes that when people know the view of the audience to whom they are accountable and unconstrained by past commitments, they tend to respond to the pressures by shifting their public positions toward the audience and adopt the salient, socially acceptable position. This argument leads to our prediction of a main effect for subjects to report more positive evaluation upon positive group feedback and to report more negative evaluation upon negative group feedback. We argue that when there is an incongruity between individual response and group feedback, consumers experience stress and anxiety and therefore engage in coping strategies.

Method
We employed a 2 (positive vs. negative individual response) x 2 (positive vs. negative group feedback) between subjects design and manipulated the incongruity between initial individual evaluation and group feedback. The experiment was conducted in a behavioral technology lab on the computer-based interface of MediaLab software. A total of 161 undergraduate business students (87 males and 74 females) participated in the study to partially fulfill a course requirement. Each participant completed the procedures individually in his or her own cubicle individually.

On arrival, participants completed a consent form and were randomly assigned to the four conditions. First, they received a review about a fictitious study guide for business students with positive and negative information. The study guide was chosen as the product material because it is highly relevant to students. Questions were then asked about their attitudes about the study guide. To reduce the likelihood that participants would perceive a connection between the initial evaluation and later questions, a filler task was provided during which participants were told to answer some unrelated questions. Afterwards, either positive or negative group feedback was provided according to the four conditions. Participants were again asked about their evaluation of the study guide. Participants were told that there would be a group discussion during which they could share their thoughts and opinion with other students. They could choose either to participate or not to participate the group discussion. They were asked questions measuring stress, coping, susceptibility, need for cognition, memory of their evaluation and confidence.

Preliminary Findings and Discussion
Data were analyzed using ANOVA with participants overall shift, stress and coping as the dependent variables. The shift measure was calculated by subtracting the initial evaluation from the later evaluation after exposure to group feedback. As predicted, when there is a high degree of individual-group incongruity, participants shift from their initial evaluation toward group feedback. Accordingly, they experience anxiety and engage in coping strategies.

Consumer coping behavior under group influence is an important issue and has profound implications in producing consumer well being. Our research examined how coping strategies may help individuals respond to individual-group evaluation incongruity. Further research involves identifying factors that may mediate and moderate this effect.

References
Alleviating Mommy’s Guilt: Emotional Expression and Guilt Appeals in Advertising
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Extended Abstract

Guilt results from “essentially private recognition that one has violated a personal standard” (Kugler and Jones 1992); Its anticipation influences people’s behaviors (Baumeister, Stillwell, and Heatherton 1994). Guilt appeals have been studied in marketing (Ghingold, 1980; Pinto & Priest, 1991; Ruth & Faber, 1988a, 1988b). Though not as their main focus, numerous studies implicitly assume the influence of guilt behind impulsive buying (Rook 1987), overspending (Pirisi 1995), pre-commitment to reward programs (Kivetz and Simonson 2002), compulsive consumption behavior (O’Guinn and Faber 1989), and donating to charities (Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). More specifically, some examined advertising campaigns that attempt to arouse guilt (Wheatley & Oshikawa, 1970; Huhmann and Brotherton, 1997); others investigated consumer reactions to advertisements containing guilt appeals (Ghingold, 1980).

Guilt is intrapersonal, mainly arising from transgressions of personal values or societal norms (e.g., McGraw 1987), but also interpersonal, arising from inequities in social comparisons (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994; Walster, Berscheid, and Walster 1976). Consistent with this main distinction, self-reported guilt in consumption contexts is categorized into guilt arising from either actions or inactions related to: a) others in close and distant relationships, b) societal standards, and c) oneself (Dahl, Honea, and Manchanda 2003).

One group of those who are affected by the experience of such guilt is mothers. Their guilt involves all three categories of the consumption guilt, not just one. It entails the children who are in an extremely close relationship to themselves. The society idealizes the Madonna, the symbol of the perfect mother as the perfect standard which every mother should strive to equal. Every mother, moreover, has her own goals and ideas of being a mother, which influences her own self-esteem. Divorced mother (Boney 2002), working mothers (Elvin-Nowak 1999), and mothers of handicapped children (Natale and Barron 1994) all suffer from the inherent maternal guilt they experience.

Especially, working mothers are influenced by guilt appeals in advertising. Coupled with this inherent “it goes with the territory” kind of maternal guilt, there is the potentially manipulative survival tendency of the babies, not to mention their helplessness and dependency. Even infants under a year of age possess ability to use the mere information about an adult’s direction of gaze and emotional expression to predict action (Phillips, Wellman, and Spelke 2002). Given this, it becomes more difficult for the working mothers to manage their negative emotions. Since the baby must spend most of the daytime with caretakers, it may only be natural for these mothers to feel compelled to compensate for their absence in other ways. One particular kind of ways is shopping for their children (e.g., to buy the very best for the children). The advertising effects of guilt appeals on working mothers have been studied (Coulter and Pinto 1995), using print stimuli of every day products (bread and dental floss, but not with products directly related to the baby); their results indicated that moderate guilt appeals elicited most felt guilt in the working mothers. However, there have not been any moderators that may alleviate the guilt in them.

The purpose of this research is to introduce one such moderator, drawn from the emotional disclosure literature in clinical psychology. Since early 1990’s there has been much research on why talking or writing about emotional events can influence mental and physical health (e.g., Pennebaker 1990; 1995; Pennebaker and Seagal 1999). Expressing one’s emotions regarding traumatic or stressful events in life leads to both psychologically and physically healthier state. Specifically, writing about emotional experiences produces improvements in immune function, drops in physician visits for illness, and better performance at school and work (e.g., Esterling, Antoni, Fletcher, Margulies, and Schneiderman 1994; Pennebaker 1993; Spera, Buhrfeind, and Pennebaker 1994). Consistent with this stream of research, I hypothesize that writing about their maternal guilt related to their career choice for the working mothers can strengthen their ability to resist the guilt appeals in advertising.

Proposed studies involve a sample of employed mothers of infants under a year of age, and a stimuli set of baby products that are used by infants, in addition to everyday products. Planned design for the first study is 2 (writing about maternal guilt vs. control group of not writing) X 3 (level of guilt appeals: low, medium, and high) X (baby products vs. everyday products). I hypothesize that for the controls for everyday products, the previous research results will be replicated, such that moderate guilt level is most effective in inducing purchase; but for those who write about their maternal guilt, the effect will show a different pattern. Their guilt will be more resolved and will not be as influenced by the guilt appeals in advertising. This effect will appear across different domains, but in different magnitude, such that it will be significantly greater for the baby products but not for the non-baby products, since the maternal guilt is specifically targeted to the baby-related domain.

Subsequent studies will examine various practical ways that may serve a similar role to that shown by emotional expression. The second study will examine whether showing a sponsor or a spokesperson who expresses her maternal guilt in advertising will show equivalent effects to emotional expression, though vicariously; and whether this effect will show a similar pattern in baby-related domain.