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| RGC Ref. No.: <u>UGC/FDS16/B02/16</u> (please insert ref. above) |
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**RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR**

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report

(for completed projects only)

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| <p><u>Submission Deadlines:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within six months of the approved project completion date. 2. Completion report: within 12 months of the approved project completion date. |
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Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1. Project Title

Halting wasteful consumption: The differential impact of guilt and shame

2. Investigator(s) and Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

| Research Team | Name / Post | Unit / Department / Institution |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Principal Investigator | CHU Maggie Ying-ying, Assistant Professor | Lee Shau Kee School of Business Administration, The Open University of Hong Kong |
| Co-Investigator | WAN Chun-ying, Assistant Professor | School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Chinese University of Hong Kong |

3. Project Duration

| | Original | Revised | Date of RGC / Institution Approval <i>(must be quoted)</i> |
|---|------------------|---------------|--|
| Project Start Date | 1 January 2017 | NA | |
| Project Completion Date | 31 December 2018 | 30 April 2019 | 4 October 2018 |
| Duration <i>(in month)</i> | 24 months | 28 months | 4 October 2018 |
| Deadline for Submission of Completion Report | 31 December 2019 | 30 April 2020 | 4 October 2018 |

Part B: The Final Report

5. Project Objectives

5.1 Objectives as per original application

- 1. To distinguish the motivational influences of guilt and shame on consumers' future behaviors.*
- 2. To examine the different cognitive antecedents that give rise to guilt and shame.*
- 3. To identify the boundary condition moderating the negative effect of shame on consumers' tendency to engage in waste-reducing behaviors.*
- 4. To provide insight into how to reduce wasteful consumption by influencing people's experience of guilt and shame.*

5.2 Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: NA

Reasons for the change:

5.3 Realisation of the objectives

(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

Three years ago, this research project was proposed in view of the increasingly serious waste problem caused by people's consumption activities. Many of our daily habits have significant environmental consequences. This issue becomes even more important in the recent one or two years. This project witnesses a couple of alarming climate events: super typhoons lashing the U.S. and Hong Kong and the deadly bushfire in Australia. The more recent pandemic has taught us that keeping the planet healthy is crucial to the health of all human beings.

Everyone has a role to play in preserving our fragile ecosystem. As a consumer, there is much more to do. In many resource-abundant countries, people often consume in a wasteful manner; even though people may feel guilty or ashamed for such a consumption-led lifestyle, very few people has taken the steps to change. The primary objective of this research is to examine how guilt and shame influence people's decision to correct their wasteful consumption habits. In this project, we have demonstrated that the two emotions although co-exist, they have very different implications for people's

behaviors (Objective 1). Guilt tends to motivate remedial actions but shame appears to offset it. As a result, the individual remains passive and does not take any action in particular.

To solve the problem arise by the dysfunctional nature of shame, in this research, we seek to identify the cognitive antecedents that gives rise to guilt and shame, so that the two emotions can be disentangled. We found that social comparison, as predicted, influences the emotions people experience over wasteful consumption (Objective 2). When the environment highlights cues about one's inferiority (e.g. not as environmentally-friendly as others), feelings of shame will intensify; this further undermines one's motivation to correct the problem. This finding provides immediate implications to policy makers on the development of communication messages; messages that implicate social comparison (e.g. how wasteful one is relative to others) may need to be used cautiously (Objective 4).

We have also identified the boundary conditions that moderate the negative impact of shame (Objective 3). Shame can undermine or enhance one's motivation to correct the problem depending on the situation. Given that the experience of shame is characterized by a sense of social exposure, if the situation requires further interaction with others, the negative impact of shame will be aggravated. Our findings reveal that if an environmental campaign is featured with a popularity appeal (i.e. interaction with others is likely), the likelihood of a shame-laden consumer to participate in the event will be greatly reduced. Interestingly, this effect can be reversed when the campaign encourages consumers to be "among one of the first" to join the event. This situation allows one to repair the damaged self-view (e.g. not as environmentally-friendly as others) without the need to interact with a large audience. These findings provide practical and important insights into the tactics used in the social marketing campaigns (Objective 4).

We accomplished the above objectives by using different experimental methodologies, from laboratory studies to field study (consumers' food wastage in the university cafeteria), from face-to-face session to online session, from bogus feedback (i.e. in the form of a fixed ecological footprint score) to genuine and individualized assessments of one's waste generation (i.e. by a real "plastic calculator"). The studies also covered consumption domains where wastage is a big problem, from food, plastic, to ecological resources in general.

5.4 Summary of objectives addressed to date

| Objectives <i>(as per 5.1/5.2 above)</i> | Addressed <i>(please tick)</i> | Percentage Achieved <i>(please estimate)</i> |
|---|--|--|
| 1. To distinguish the motivational influences of guilt and shame on consumers' future behaviors. | ✓ | 100% |
| 2. To examine the different cognitive antecedents that give rise to guilt and shame. | ✓ | 100% |
| 3. To identify the boundary condition moderating the negative effect of shame on consumers' tendency to engage in waste-reducing behaviors. | ✓ | 100% |
| 4. To provide insight into how to reduce wasteful consumption by influencing people's experience of guilt and shame. | ✓ | 100% |

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome

(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

This research looks into situations where people consume in a wasteful or environmentally-irresponsible manner. In five experimental studies, we investigate how the feelings of guilt and shame influence their decision to correct their existing consumption practices. The key findings of this research are summarized below.

- The divergent influences of guilt and shame – Our findings show that guilt and shame, despite their co-occurrence, have contrasting implications for people’s future behaviors. After engaging in wasteful consumption, the guilt people experience will increase their motivation to change their habits but shame appears to reduce it. This is true no matter whether these feelings are aroused by chronic disposition or merely incidental sources.

More importantly, we fill the void in the extant literature by investigating what caused such a divergence. We found that the dysfunctional nature of shame stems from the negative implications it imposes on the self. As the problem of wasteful consumption is viewed as a self-defect, the consumer becomes unmotivated to take any action to improve it.

- Cognitive antecedents that disentangle feelings of guilt and shame – Our findings show that by imposing social comparison on the individual (e.g. other consumers use way fewer plastic bags), feelings of shame will be intensified and the consumer will become even less likely to correct his or her existing wasteful consumption practices. On the contrary, when the non-social aspects of the wasteful consumption (e.g. the harmful environmental consequences) are highlighted, feelings of guilt will increase which then strengthen one’s motivation to undo the harm.
- Contingency governing the negative impact of shame – Our findings show that the negative impact of shame can be aggravated or alleviated by the communication tactics used in the social marketing campaigns. The sense of social exposure that accompanies the feeling of shame makes people want to hide from others. Therefore, when the campaign features how popular it is (i.e. 65% of the respondents have signed up the event), it further undermines a shame-laden consumer’s motivation to join the event. However, when the campaign encourages consumer to be “among one of the first” to sign up for the campaign, a shame-laden consumer becomes more motivated to participate in the event.

The findings that we obtained at different stages of our investigation were disseminated to the audience in the academic community in a timely manner through presentations at major conferences (see Part 9). The manuscript, which is currently under language editing, is to be submitted to a special section of the Management Science journal in early May 2020.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action (*Maximum half a page*)

In this research, we make use of social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) to identify the antecedents that gives rise to guilt and shame. Previous social comparison research has investigated the affective consequences of the comparison process and found that upward comparison tends to be emotionally unpleasant. Our research finding enriches the literature that the comparison process can lead to a *specific* emotional outcome – feelings of shame. The relationship between social comparison and different specific emotions may warrant further investigation.

The emotions that this research concerns are of negative valence (i.e. guilt and shame). Future investigation may expand to include positive emotions, for example, the pride experienced by consumer after engaging in downward comparison (i.e. comparing with others who are less environmentally conscious than oneself). My prediction is that out of the licensing effect (Merritt et al., 2010), this consumer will become less likely to engage in environmentally-responsible behaviors in the future. If this is the case, it may be worth re-thinking whether such a positive emotion (i.e. pride) is indeed positive.

Internal funding would be sought to conduct preliminary investigation on the above effects.

Reference:

Festinger, L. (1954). A Theory of Social Comparison Processes. *Human Relations*, 7(2), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202>

Merritt, A.C., Effron, D. A. and Monin, B. (2010). Moral Self Licensing: When Being Good Frees Us to Be Bad. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 4(5), 344-357. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00263.x>

7. Layman's Summary

(*Describe in layman's language the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words*)

In many resource-abundant societies, the consumption-led lifestyle has created many problems (waste generation, carbon emission and depletion of natural resources). Despite a common understanding that waste must be reduced by changing consumer behavior, very few have taken the action to change their lifestyle. This research explained why consumers keep engaging in behaviors that are detrimental to the environment; we address this issue by investigating how guilt and shame associated with overconsumption influence people's decision to correct their consumption practices. Five experimental studies were conducted to examine the proposed effects.

Our findings show that guilt and shame, despite their co-occurrence, have contrasting implications for future behaviors. While guilt motivates corrective responses but shame tends to offset such a tendency and make the consumers less inclined to correct the problem. We also found that shame is more likely to emerge in situations that impose social comparison on the individuals. This research also identified the conditions where the negative impact of shame can be mitigated. When the situation provides an opportunity to repair one's self-image, the consumer who experience shame may also become motivated to embrace the change. The above findings provide important insights into the development of social marketing campaigns and environmental messages.

Part C: Research Output**8. Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising Directly From This Research Project**

(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

| The Latest Status of Publications | | | | Author(s) (denote the corresponding author with an asterisk*) | Title and Journal / Book (with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified) | Submitted to RGC (indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report) | Attached to this Report (Yes or No) | Acknowledged the Support of RGC (Yes or No) | Accessible from the Institutional Repository (Yes or No) |
|-----------------------------------|--|--------------|---------------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|---|
| Year of Publication | Year of Acceptance (For paper accepted but not yet published) | Under Review | Under Preparation (optional) | | | | | | |
| | | | ✓ | CHU Maggie Ying-ying*, WAN Chun-ying | Do Moral Emotions Make People Responsible Consumers? / <i>Management Science</i> | No | Yes [Attachment 1] | Yes | Yes |
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Remarks: The manuscript is currently in the process of language editing and expected to be submitted in early May 2020 to a special section of *Management Science* which opens for papers that address timely topics and appeal to a broad audience (see the attachment for details).

9. Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered

(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

| Month / Year / Place | Title | Conference Name | Submitted to RGC <i>(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)</i> | Attached to this Report <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Acknowledged the Support of RGC <i>(Yes or No)</i> | Accessible from the Institutional Repository <i>(Yes or No)</i> |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|---|
| June/ 2017/ Los Angeles | Don't Be A Big Waster! Regulating Consumer Behaviors Through The Experience of Guilt and Shame | 39th Annual ISMS Marketing Science Conference | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| June/ 2017/ Busan | Encouraging Green Behaviors By Evoking Guilt and Shame Emotions in Social Advertising | The Asia Pacific Tourism Association (APTA) 2017 Annual Conference | Yes | No | Yes | Yes |
| July/ 2018/ Tokyo | Do Moral Emotions Make People Responsible Consumers? A Preliminary Investigation of Incidental Guilt and Shame | 2018 Global Marketing Conference | No | Yes [Attachment 2] | Yes | Yes |
| Dec/ 2018/ Taichung | How Emotions Turn People into Irresponsible Consumers: The Negative Implications of Chronic and Context-induced Shame | International Conference and Workshop on Experiential Approach to Consumer Decision Making | No | Yes [Attachment 3] | Yes | Yes |
| May/ 2019/ Vancouver | All Hands on Deck: Motivating or De-motivating Responsible Consumption? The Divergent Influences of Moral Emotions | 2019 Academy of Marketing Science Annual Conference | No | Yes [Attachment 4] | Yes | Yes |

10. Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning

(Please elaborate)

NA

11. Student(s) Trained*(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)*

| Name | Degree Registered for | Date of Registration | Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------|--|
| NA | | | |
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12. Other Impact*(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)*

13. Statistics on Research Outputs

| No. of outputs arising directly from this research project | Peer-reviewed Journal Publications | Conference Papers | Scholarly Books, Monographs and Chapters | Patents Awarded | Other Research Outputs (please specify) | |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------|---|-----|
| | | | | | Type | No. |
| | 1* | 5 | NA | NA | NA | |

*Manuscript in preparation for the submission to *Management Science* in early May 2020.

14. Public Access Of Completion Report

(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

| Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access | Reasons |
|--|----------------|
| NA | |