

Feeling guilty or ashamed? Think about your emotions before you shop

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Suppose you grabbed a few cookies before heading out to the grocery store and start to feel guilty or ashamed about breaking your diet. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, feeling guilty might find you comparing calories in different cartons of ice cream. Feeling ashamed might keep you from buying any ice cream in the first place.

"We examined the emotions of guilt and shame and found that when [consumers](#) feel guilty, they tend to focus on concrete details at the expense of the bigger picture. On the other hand, when consumers feel ashamed, they are more likely to think abstractly and form a more holistic view," write authors DaHee Han (McGill University), Adam Duhachek (Indiana University), and Nidhi Agrawal (University of Washington).

In one study, consumers were asked to write about a time when they felt either guilty or ashamed. After their responses were collected, the consumers were then asked to read an essay and choose whether they wanted to answer questions or demonstrate a task to test how well they understood the topic. Consumers who wrote about feeling guilty preferred to answer questions (focusing on the details), while consumers who wrote about feeling ashamed preferred to demonstrate a task (focusing on the bigger picture).

These results offer insight for companies in industries such as fitness or personal care that might allude to guilt and shame in their

advertisements. To combat any negative effects, mentioning a daily yoga class (detail) could offset feelings of guilt and promising improvements in overall health (big picture) could temper feelings of shame.

"Consumers who often experience guilt may want to stop and contemplate the larger implications of making a decision they may later regret. Similarly, consumers who are often burdened by shame may want to pay closer attention to the details and terms of offers and contracts before making a decision," the authors conclude.

Provided by University of Chicago

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