

## MARKETING SCIENCE & INSPIRATIONS

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### ENVIRONMENTAL GUILT: HOW TO WORK WITH CLIMATE CONCERNS IN MARKETING

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Climate change has been far too omnipresent to ignore for policy makers, consumers, and businesses alike. Extreme weather events and disasters are now the norm in our news and media. Daily influx of information makes an impact and many of us have been worrying about the future for humanity, ourselves, and our children. Environmental guilt, anxiety or shame have been reported mostly in connection with younger generations and women seeking right and righteous behavioral patterns which would bring balance to modern lifestyle and its environmental impact. Guilty consumers try hard to curb negative environmental consequences of their lives. The most obvious reason for feeling guilty is wrongdoing, which causes psychological or physical pain. Individuals feel ashamed because they violated morals or ethical expectations.

Many customers use their wallets to show preferences. Dollar voting may individually seem instrumental in supporting desirable actions and initiatives. However, some customers may feel their individual actions cannot solve the gigantic systemic problems such as climate change. Some customers may hypocritically exercise conspicuous consumption only to display their morality. Robust changes of consumer behavior may lead to potentially even more harmful negative consequences: dismantling current supply chains, incurring job losses, or threatening local communities are just a few to name.

Either way distinguishing environmental right from wrong has become a tricky animal to guess. Some environmentally conscious individuals trust green outer representations such as labels, certificates, and declarations. Others seek advice from environmental groups. Clients dedicated to green change their daily routines, including eating habits or mobility patterns for instance. Most, however, never shake off their guilt completely. The evidence is puzzling and judging long-term lifecycle impact of products and services remains a discipline by itself. What is considered green one day, may be branded dirty another day.

Gradually, certain behaviors have been widely recognized for producing desirable outcomes. The virtue of 3R (reduce-reuse-recycle) has soaked in. Saving water, electricity, raw materials, and other precious sources is something children learn early on. Technology advancements and regulatory measures motivate proliferation of alternative materials, energy sources and products. Disposable items such as packaging, dishes or toiletries have been substituted by compostable alternatives (e.g., paper cups instead of plastic ones or plant-based bags instead of plastic ones), supplemented by recollection systems (e.g., for drink bottles or cans) or replaced altogether (e.g., re-fill water bottle instead of bottled water).

Emotional appeals in marketing communication are common and the temptation to use environmental guilt for advertising purposes might simply be hard to resist. Guilt marketing may work for social reasons, for instance NGOs wanting to derail people from craving for a cigarette or governments trying to reduce drink driving.

However, guilt appeals may easily backfire deterring customers who are already conscious about the issue. Those customers, who are not necessarily environmentally concerned, might be alerted to the issue but resistant to conclude a purchase with a provider, which caused negative emotion at the first place. Fear as a strong negative emotion differs from guilt significantly. Whereas one may shake off fear and/or avoid punishment, guilt is never put to the test. Guilt stays much longer – it is more an emotional attitude or personality trait. Selling a product or a service usually works better with creating positive emotions instead. Selling aspirations for easy life, brighter future, and lesser climate change shall be the way to go. When it comes to environmental consciousness, positive aspects are related to demonstrating the impact of a particular consumer choice. Showing prosperous future, alleviating environmental stress and providing therapeutic relief might be the right aspects for appropriate and effective marketing communications.

## RÉSUMÉ

### **Pocit viny za stav životního prostředí: Jak pracovat v marketingu s klimatickými obavami zákazníků**

Především mladší zákazníci a ženy bývají ve výzkumných studiích identifikováni s pocitem viny za stav životního prostředí a individuální příspěvek ke klimatické změně. Sebeobviňování není jen negativní emocií (s nimiž se jinak v marketingové komunikaci rutinně pracuje), jde spíše o emocionální či osobnostní nastavení, a proto se v případě komerčních služeb a produktů nejeví výhodné takové pocity u zákazníků dále posilovat. Cestou k efektivní marketingové komunikaci je naopak posilování vědomí o pozitivních aspektech a dopadech zákaznické volby.

## KONTAKT NA AUTOROVI/ADDRESS

doc. Ing. Pavel Štrach, Ph.D., Ph.D., ŠKODA AUTO Vysoká škola o.p.s., Katedra marketingu a managementu, Na Karmeli 1457, 293 01 Mladá Boleslav, Česká republika, e-mail: [pavel.strach@savs.cz](mailto:pavel.strach@savs.cz)