



THE INFLUENCE OF MORTALITY FOCUS ON GUILT ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract

The current research examined the **influence of mortality focus on the effectiveness of guilt advertising** via two experiments.

Mortality focus and type of guilt advertising appeal interacted such that directing the focus of mortality on one's own death (vs. other) facilitated effectiveness of guilt-lessering (vs. guilt-magnifying) appeals.

The mediators of the influences were the motivation to boost self-confidence (vs. manage impression).

The findings contribute to the literatures on consumer guilt, mortality salience, and defensive processing, while offering practical implications for guilt advertising management.

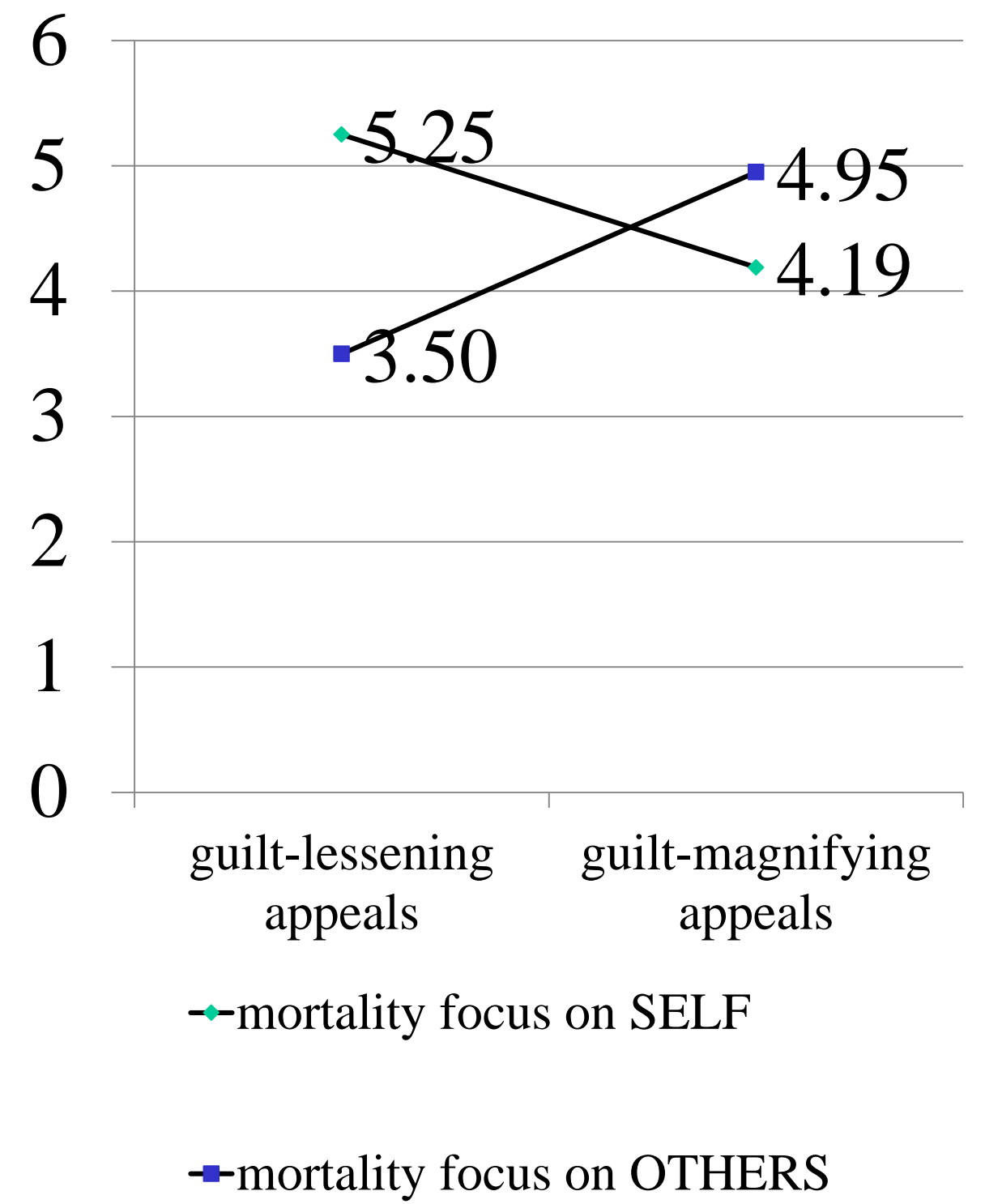
Mortality Focus and Guilt Advertising

Imagine you saw a program on TV that made you think about death, and subsequently you watched some commercials.

Which commercial would induce higher purchase intentions: a commercial for a college fund for your children, or one for a spa massage to pamper yourself?

Processing such commercials while influenced by thoughts of mortality may intertwine with feelings of guilt triggered by considering consumption of the object advertised. The nature of the guilt triggered is different in each commercial: the former triggers guilt related to not adequately supporting someone you are responsible for, and the latter triggers guilt regarding self-indulgent consumption.

Select Findings



Conclusions

We examined the influence of mortality focus on the effectiveness of guilt advertising via two experiments.

Focusing on one's own mortality increased the positive impact of guilt-lessering appeals on intentions to consume the advertised self-indulgent items (Study 1). This effect was mediated by the motivation to heighten self-confidence (Study 2).

On the other hand, when primed to focus on the mortality of others, the positive impact of guilt-magnifying appeals on intentions to purchase the advertised socially desirable items for others was amplified (Study 1). This effect was mediated by the motivation to manage social impressions (Study 2).

Theoretically, our findings extend research on mortality salience by identifying the role of mortality focus (on self or others) in triggering different types of motivations.

Conceptual Framework

