When Feelings Influence Product Evaluations (And When They Do Not): Discrete-Affect-Validation and the Role of Consumption Motives

Anick Bosmans, Tilburg University
Hans Baumgartner, Penn State University

EXTENDED ABSTRACT - A considerable body of research suggests that consumers rely on their momentary feelings when they make product evaluations, even when these feelings are contaminated by unrelated external sources (such as, for example, in-store music). While this research has exclusively focused on the effects of good versus bad moods and is largely silent about consumers’ consumption motives, we claim that reliance on extraneous feelings during the formation of product evaluation is conditional upon these discrete feelings’ match with consumers’ current consumption motives. We assume that specific consumption motives are associated with a specific set of affective expectations. Therefore, discrete extraneous feelings should be more valid and informative when they match with motive-related affective expectations, resulting in more positive product evaluations. This discrete-affect-validation hypothesis was tested in two experiments. Shah and Higgins' (2001) work on the relationship between achievement and protection motives and discrete emotions was used as a framework to test our hypotheses. We activated consumers’ consumption motives by exposing them to an ad that appealed either to their protection or to their achievement motives. We assumed that achievement motives were associated with cheerful and dejected affective expectations, whereas protection motives were associated with quiescent and agitated affective expectations. Therefore, an achievement appeal was hypothesized to result in greater reliance on cheerful and dejected extraneous affect, whereas a protection appeal was hypothesized to result in greater reliance on quiescent and agitated extraneous affect. To test this, we manipulated participants' extraneous affect by asking them to write about a recently experienced life event that made them feel cheerful, quiescent, dejected or agitated. Afterwards, in an ostensibly unrelated study, either the achievement-based or the protection-based appeal was presented to them. As expected, consumers were more likely to rely on their discrete momentary feelings when these feelings were compatible with their consumption motives. Our results moreover suggest that the hypothesized discrete-affect-validation mechanism is a low-effort heuristic process that is most likely to occur when consumers have limited processing motivation. Our findings point to the importance of looking beyond valence when accounting for the effects of extraneous feelings on evaluation.

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