Negative Emotions As Motivators of Consumption

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Emotions constitute a key component of consumer decision making and have been examined widely in the context of marketing. However, most studies on the role of emotions in consumption have focused on positive emotions and emotions as a consequence of consumption or marketing stimuli. The present study explores the role of negative emotions as motivators for consumption.

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Emotions are central to human experience and greatly affect us on a day-to-day basis in making all types of decisions, including consumption decisions. In a famous and often quoted article, James (1884) raised the issue, “What is an emotion?” This question has been repeatedly asked by philosophers and psychologists (and marketers as well!) for more than a century now with limited. Defining and measuring emotions remains a challenge as they rarely are either fully present or absent at any given time and tend to be highly individual and context specific (Ben-Ze’ev 2000). There is a lack of unanimity on the definition and measurement of emotions, and more importantly, differentiate it from other affective states.

The importance of the role of emotions in marketing is well understood (see Bagozzi et al 1999 for a review) and have been studied under a variety of contexts, such as, advertising (Aaker et al 1986; Batra and Holbrook 1990), attitude (Bagozzi 1992; Batra and Ahtola 1990), product usage (Holbrook et al 1984), brand evaluation (Yeung and Wyer 2005) and consumption (Havlena and Holbrook 1986; Richins 1997). These studies have largely examined how various types of consumptions invoke different emotions in the form of consumer response, as well as, how to measure emotions in a marketing context using scales and measurement techniques developed in psychology. Limiting the focus of research to emotions as a response to some marketing stimuli restricts the understanding of the role of emotions as it treats them as an outcome while ignoring the role of emotions as an antecedent or motivator to a behavior. Emotions, be they positive or negative, are more than appraisals of events and include action tendencies (Frijda 1986), therefore, their role should be examined involving all stages of consumer decision making.

At the same time, a survey of the marketing literature suggests that most research in the past has focused on examining the role of positive emotions and the measurement issues associated with them in consumer decision making. The role of negative emotions in consumer decisions has largely been ignored with a few exceptions, such as (Andrade and Cohen-in press) where they examine the consumption of negative feelings. The positive as well as negative emotions can serve as motivators for setting consumption goals and consumer decisions has largely been ignored with a few exceptions, such as (Andrade and Cohen-in press) where they examine the role of emotional states.

A content analysis of the data was conducted to identify the motivations for engaging in the consumption, the type of consumption experience, the intensity of the emotions involved, and consequences of the consumption. The consumption situations described by the subjects covered a very wide range of activities from purchasing simple products out of envy to spiteful behaviors targeted at family members, friends and, in some cases, at strangers. Though envy and jealousy were often mentioned as the motivation, it is noteworthy that a very large proportion of the respondents used the words such as “spite” and “revenge” to express their primary motivation for
consumption. The end goal, according to many, was to assert a control over a situation even at the cost of suffering more pain, both physical and emotional, accompanied with financial losses. Such behavior is contradictory to the hedonic assumptions underlying most consumer behavior that individuals seek to maximize their pleasure and minimize any associated pain/losses. This suggests that there is more to negative emotions than identified in the extant marketing literature and the concept of spite must be examined as a motivator.

In identifying the Consumption Emotions Set (CES), Richins (1997) identified seventeen categories of emotions out of which Envy is one category comprised of envy and jealousy as its dimensions. However, the findings from the present exploratory research suggest that among the negative emotions, spite may be a much stronger emotion than envy and jealousy and might be the primary motivator behind some of the consumption decisions resulting from negative emotions. Literature in psychology has differentiated between envy and jealousy and examined their role on individual actions and feelings—schadenfreude (Hareli and Weiner 2002; Smith et al 1996; Smith and Kim 2007). Surprisingly, to the best of our knowledge, no distinction has been made among envy, jealousy and spite or the role of spite has been examined in consumption. “Spite implies a particular kind of hostile motivation,” (Lazarus 1991, p. 227), and appears to be a more intense negative emotion than envy and jealousy and its role on consumption and public policy implications must be examined more systematically.

References
James, William (1884), “What is an Emotion?” Mind, 9 (34), 188-205.

Narrative Transportation in Concept Tests for Really New Products: Are All Protagonists Equally Convincing?
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When consumers are asked to evaluate really new products, they are helped by mentally simulating product use (Hoeffler 2003). Here we apply this finding to early concept testing, in which really new product concepts are presented to consumers. We propose that presenting such concepts in a narrative format may stimulate mental simulation. While reading a narrative of another consumer (the protagonist) who uses a new product, consumers are thought to place themselves in the events taking place. The result is a melding of attention, imagery and feelings, known as narrative transportation (Green and Brock 2000).

Narratives evoke imagery more easily than non-narrative formats (Deighton, Romer, and McQueen 1989), including bulleted lists of product characteristics (Adaval and Wyer Jr 1998). Applied to concept testing, we propose that a narrative format will enhance transportation and, through this process, to a more empathic (i.e., higher) evaluation of the new product. A potentially moderating factor is the portrayal of the protagonist, whose (mis)match or similarity to the reader might influence the degree of connection that is felt, and thus of the level of transportation (Green 2004). We will investigate this with senior consumers in two experiments that both make use