Will I Always Choose Champagne?: How Emotion Norms Shape Consumption Choices

Eugenia  Wu, Cornell University, USA
Gavan  Fitzsimons, Duke University, USA
Mary Frances  Luce, Duke University, USA
Patti  Williams, University of Pennsylvania, USA

This research examines how societally-held norms regarding emotion can have a surprising influence on our consumption choices. Across a series of four studies, we show that conforming to emotion norms can lead consumers to prefer products that elicit psychologically uncomfortable mixed emotions over those that elicit purely positive emotions.

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Will I Change My Emotion, Or Will It Change Me? Emotion Regulation and Emotional Processing in Consumer Behavior
Nicole M. Verrochi, University of Pennsylvania, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

“Will I Always Choose Champagne?: How Emotion Norms Shape Consumption Choices”
Eugenia Wu, Gavan Fitzsimons, Mary Frances Luce, Duke University, USA
Patti Williams, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Though emotion norms regarding when we should feel specific emotions and which emotions are appropriate to what situations provide a constant backdrop to everyday life, little research has examined how they might influence our consumption behavior. In this research, we begin to bridge that gap by exploring how emotion norms might encourage individuals to make nonintuitive consumption choices in an attempt to achieve or avoid specific emotional states. We focus specifically on how the emotion norm associated with feeling ashamed can lead individuals to make choices that are inconsistent with mood regulation and the hedonic principle. In particular, we propose that because shame is typically characterized by feelings of worthlessness and undeservingness (Tangney and Dearing, 2002), shame comes with an emotion norm that one does not deserve to feel positively. Furthermore, we suggest that this anti-positivity emotion norm, in combination with our basic desire to make hedonic choices and alleviate negativity (Gilbert, Wilson and Centerbar, 2003), leads ashamed individuals to prefer consumption products that elicit neither positive nor negative emotion but psychologically uncomfortable and aversive mixed emotions instead.

Study 1 validates that the emotion norm in shame is positivity avoidance. Participants were asked to rate how appropriate it would be for an individual who had done something he was ashamed about or sad about to engage in a series of positive and negative activities. Results revealed that individuals in the sad condition rated it as more appropriate for him to engage in mood-repair type activities relative to individuals in the shame condition. Thus, we find some confirmation that the emotion norm associated with shame is an avoidance of positivity.

In study 2, we examine how emotion norms might affect individuals’ consumption choices. Participants were primed to feel shame or in a control condition and asked to allocate 100 points among a positive, a negative and a mixed emotion-eliciting novel. Results revealed that relative to the control condition, participants in the shame condition allocated fewer points to the positive novel option and more points to the mixed emotion option. Of note, the behavior of the shame condition individuals is in direct opposition to the classic mood repair findings and occurs despite the fact that mixed emotions are psychologically uncomfortable and aversive.

In study 3, we set out to provide further support for the existence of an emotion norm in shame and to rule out an alternative explanation for our effects. Participants were first asked to read a short paragraph that encouraged, discouraged or said nothing about relying on their sense of appropriateness to make decisions. Then, participants completed either a shame or neutral prime before allocating points across four novel options (positive, negative, neutral and mixed) and completing a measure of shame-proneness. Results revealed that shame condition consumers continued to divert their points from the positive to the mixed option, despite the presence of the neutral option. This result rules out the possibility that ashamed participants chose the mixed emotion option because they expected the positive and negative components of the mix to cancel out and result in emotional neutrality. Furthermore, shame condition participants who were encouraged to rely on their sense of appropriateness allocated the most points to the mixed emotion option, suggesting that it is indeed emotional appropriateness that is driving our effects. Finally, these effects were moderated by individual differences in shame-proneness such that effects were exacerbated for individuals high in shame-proneness.

In study 4, we explore how the anti-positivity emotion norm in shame might lead individuals to prefer products that elicit specific combinations of mixed emotions over others. If emotion norms deter ashamed individuals from feeling purely positive emotions because they are undeserving, then we expect ashamed consumers would prefer mixed emotions where the positive component of the mix is other-focused rather than self-focused. Participants completed a shame or neutral prime and then allocated 100 points among novel options. In this study, the emotions characterizing the mixed emotion book were manipulated so that the focus of the positive and negative emotion components varied across conditions. The results of the study revealed that consistent with previous studies, shame condition participants allocated more points to the mixed option relative to control condition participants. Importantly, shame condition participants were especially likely to allocate points to the mixed option when the positive emotion component was other-focused rather than ego-focused. This result is consistent with the idea that positive other-focused emotions are more in line with the shame-related emotion norm than positive self-focused emotions.

Taken together, this work builds on and extends the existing research on motivated emotion, mixed emotion and emotion norms in 1) suggesting a novel reason for why individuals might seek out one emotional state or another 2) providing an explanation for why mixed emotion-eliciting products might succeed in the marketplace 3) demonstrating that not all negative emotions lead to hedonically driven behavior and 4) examining how this fundamental social structure influences consumption behavior.

“Emotions and Motivated Reasoning: How Anger Increases and Shame Decreases Defensive Processing”
Adam Duhachek, Indiana University, USA
Da Hee Han, Indiana University, USA
Nidhi Agrawal, Northwestern University, USA

Consumer research in recent years has explored how emotional experiences impact consumer attitudes and behaviors. While most early research focused on the role of valenced affective states (i.e., positive or negative mood), recent research has begun to look at the role of specific discrete emotional states in information processing and persuasion. This literature on information processing has assumed that emotion driven consumers are either motivated to form accurate attitudes (e.g., Teidens and Linton 2001) or are driven to regulate their mood (e.g., Agrawal and Duhachek forthcoming).

In this paper, we examine how emotions impact the processing of consumers driven by defense motivation. In the persuasion literature, consumers have been shown to process messages in a defense motivated manner when they have a preference or an attitude towards a product and are exposed to preference consistent versus inconsistent information. Consumers tend to be receptive toward...
preference consistent information but tend to discount or ignore preference inconsistent information (e.g., Jain and Maheswaran 2000). The present research examines how emotions will impact the processing of such information.

Bringing together the literature on emotional appraisals with the work on defensive processing in the Heuristic Systematic Model, we draw novel predictions about how emotions will influence information processing. We contrast the two emotions of anger and shame and show that their appraisals determine their influence on the processing of preference inconsistent information. Both anger and shame arise from negative outcomes/situations, but diverge in who is held responsible for the negative outcome. Anger holds other people in a negative role whereas shame casts the self in a negative light. In other words, anger says “I am right” whereas shame could prompt “I am wrong.” We suggest that these appraisals could serve as information when dealing with preference inconsistent information such that anger appraisals would prompt greater defensiveness against preference-inconsistent information whereas shame would prompt an acceptance of one’s existing attitude being incorrect and hence an openness towards preference inconsistent information. We further show that, for high involvement products, individuals are able to ‘correct’ for the effects of these incidental emotions on their judgments.

Three studies examined how incidental anger and shame influence the processing of preference consistent versus inconsistent information. In all three studies, participants were first primed with either anger or shame. Then they were exposed to information about a brand that convinced them that the brand was better than another competing brand. After a filler task, they saw follow-up information about the brands that either reinforced their initial favorable opinion of the brand (i.e., preference consistent information) or conflicted with their existing favorable opinion (i.e., preference inconsistent information). While emotions had no effect on the processing of preference consistent information, they systematically affected the response to preference inconsistent information. Consistent with our predictions, anger increased resistance to preference inconsistent information whereas shame led to an eagerness to accept preference inconsistent information. These effects manifested in attitude change (study 1) as well as cognitive responses (study 2) and only manifested under low involvement conditions (study 3).

Our findings contribute to research on emotion appraisal by showing that appraisals of self versus other blame can heighten or counteract defense motivation. We also extend the existing literature by identifying conditions emotional appraisals influence information processing (e.g., exposure to preference inconsistent information), when emotions have no effect on processing (e.g., exposure to preference consistent information), and when the effect of emotions on processing is corrected (e.g., high involvement conditions). Our finding that shame counteracts defensive processing by encouraging people to adopt preference inconsistent views makes a unique contribution to the literature on motivated reasoning and persuasion. While most past research has suggested that consumers tend indulge in motivated reasoning that helps them to maintain their preferred attitudes or helps them improve/maintain their existing emotion, we show that under some circumstances, emotions might work through appraisals to counteract or bolster the effects of such motivated reasoning. The implications of our findings for the literature on emotions, motivated reasoning, and persuasive communication will be discussed, as will the managerial implications for the placement of preference-inconsistent information.

“Feeling Like My Self: Emotion Profiles and Identity”
Nicole M. Verrochi, University of Pennsylvania, USA
Patti Williams, University of Pennsylvania, USA

When do people want to change their emotional experience? Known as emotion regulation, individuals can self-manage their emotions by intervening in the ongoing emotional experience to adjust when, what, and how intensely they feel particular emotions (Gross 1998). Generally, people try to change their emotions when they feel bad, as when a person eats a chocolate bar after reading a sad story (Labroo and Mukhopadhyay 2009). However, there may be other reasons to experience emotions aside from simply “feeling good.” Emotions do have hedonic components (Higgins 1997), but emotions are more than just valence—the appraisal dimensions and action readiness tendencies may be leveraged in assistance of other goals. Perhaps individuals will regulate their emotions in order to achieve goal-related benefits—e.g., at the expense of feeling good (Cohen and Andrade 2004). The current work posits that there are associations between discrete emotions and specific social identities, and that individuals will choose to regulate emotion in order to maintain consistency between the active identity and the emotion experience. In this framework, emotions are integral to manifesting a given social identity, and thus can be used to achieve an identity-consistent experience.

Over the course of one pretest and four studies, this paper shows that there are associations between specific social identities and discrete emotions: giving rise to an emotion profile of each social identity. The pretest isolated two emotion profiles: athletes are associated with anger, but volunteers with sadness. In all studies, participants were first primed with either an athlete, volunteer or control identity. After activating the target identity, participants then experienced an emotion. In study 1, individuals exerted more effort when their emotion was consistent with their active identity, while in study 2 participants reported more positive attitudes and higher behavioral intentions for ads in which the emotion matched their identity.

While studies 1 and 2 established that individuals benefit from emotions which match the emotion profile of their active identity, Study 3 sought to evaluate whether individuals will actively manage their emotions in order to match their active emotion profile. Following the identity prime, participants engaged in an attention task which assessed emotion regulation. This task asked participants to quickly and accurately categorize the letter T, which was shown either right-side up or upside-down. Importantly, sad and happy pictures were interspersed within this perceptual task. As sadness is inconsistent with the athlete’s emotion profile, participants with an active athlete identity should divert their attention away from sad pictures in order to avoid experiencing the inconsistent emotion of sadness. Volunteers, on the other hand, should focus their attention on the sad pictures, as they want to experience the identity-consistent emotion of sadness. Volunteers, on the other hand, should focus their attention on the sad pictures, as they want to experience the identity-consistent emotion of sadness. This pattern of attention shifts was demonstrated: athletes were significantly slower and less accurate than volunteers when responding to sad pictures. No differences were found between athletes and volunteers following happy pictures. These results demonstrate individuals actively regulating their emotions to maintain consistency with the active emotion profile.

The final study presented participants with a product positioned as regulating their emotions: either enhancing or reducing emotional intensity. Again, participants were primed with an identity, and then emotions were induced via a film clip. Following the film, participants tried a beverage which was positioned as enhancing or reducing their emotional experience. As predicted, participants consumed (in grams) more of the beverage that aligned their emotions with the identity’s emotion profile. For instance, athletes drank
significantly more of the emotion reducing beverage when they were sad (inconsistent emotion), but more of the emotion enhancing beverage when they were angry (consistent emotion). This study both replicates the results of study 3 with consumption, and demonstrates that individuals will choose to experience an unpleasant emotion when it is valued by the active identity.

This research introduces emotion profiles, which constrain the emotions that are valid for each identity. This represents a new area of research, as well as suggests a new way in which the emotion regulation process may be initiated. Building on findings that demonstrate individuals approach products and enact behaviors which are identity-consistent, while avoiding those which are identity-inconsistent (White and Dahl 2007), this paper shows that individuals are motivated to regulate their emotions in identity-consistent ways. Specifically, people enhanced their experience of identity-consistent emotions, and reduced their experience of emotion profile-inconsistent emotions. This paper not only addresses a gap in the marketing literature by enriching our understanding of the concepts contained within an identity, but also provides an essential pre-condition to emotion regulation, furthering conceptualizations of the emotion management process. Beyond establishing that emotions are included within social identity structures, the current research suggests that identity-marketing appeals can be positioned as identity consistent without ever mentioning the salient identity, but rather by simply leveraging an emotion profile-consistent frame.