Does Suspense Spur Or Hamper Consumer Creativity?

Sungjun (Steven) Park, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), Korea
Yong J. Hyun, KAIST, Korea
C. Page Moreau, University of Wisconsin, USA

Little is known about how mixed emotions influence consumer creativity. Four online experiments find that suspense, a mixed emotion comprising hope and fear, facilitates creativity. Felt conflict arises from experiencing suspense, then a flexible mindset is adopted to reduce the conflict, and eventually this mindset leads to consumer creativity.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1021449/volumes/v44/NA-44

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A mixed emotion arises from simultaneously experiencing two or more discrete emotions opposite in valence (Aaker, Drolet, & Griffin, 2008). Any time consumers decide to engage in a creative activity (i.e., when they solve an ill-defined problem), they are accepting ambiguous conditions that often foster mixed emotions. Then, their creativity may be influenced by such mixed emotions.

Past research focuses mainly on the effect of univalent emotions on creativity. Positive emotions facilitate creativity (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005; Baas, De Dreu & Nijstad 2008; Isen & Daubman, 1984) while negative emotions do so under certain circumstances (Baas, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2008; Van Kleef, Anastasopoulou, & Nijstad, 2010). Little effort has been made, however, to examine how mixed emotions influence creativity (for exceptions, Amabile et al., 2005; Fong, 2006). This research examines the relationship between consumer creativity and suspense as a mixed emotion.

Suspense is a mixture of hope and fear (Alwitt, 2002; Madrigal & Bee, 2005) which is coupled with “a cognitive state of uncertainty” (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1990, p.131), frequently arising in consumption settings (Alwitt, 2002; Madrigal & Bee, 2005; Mouland, Kroff, & Folse, 2012). For example, when assembling an IKEA do-it-yourself product, h/she may feel hope (a positive emotion) in the prospect of successfully assembling and benefiting from the product. At the same time, h/she may feel fear (a negative emotion) as h/she is uncertain of how to assemble the product.

Suspense may bring about a psychological discomfort or conflict as its two components, hope and fear, are opposite in valence (Hong & Lee, 2010; Williams & Aaker, 2002). To resolve the felt conflict, the consumer may adopt a flexible mindset, which enhances his/her creativity (Huang & Galinsky, 2011; Miron-Spektor, Gino, & Argote, 2011).

Four online experimental studies were conducted, using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). In Study 1, 92 participants were randomly assigned to either of the two conditions (suspense vs. control) in a between-subjects design. The suspense group read a scenario, recalled similar life events, and described them in writing. Then, creativity was measured by using the method of Duncker’s candle problem (Duncker & Lees, 1945). Results show that the suspense group felt hope, fear, suspense, and emotional ambivalence more than the control group. A logistic regression analysis indicates that more participants correctly solved the candle problem in the suspense condition (23/44, 52%) than the control condition (15/48, 31%; χ^2(1, 92) = 4.21, p < .05).

Study 2 differs from Study 1 in the ways of mood induction and creativity measurement. 122 participants were randomly assigned to either of the two conditions (suspense vs. control) in a between-subjects design. A gambling task was applied to arouse suspense. The winning probability and amount differ between the two groups. Then, the participants were asked to list in writing as many creative uses for a block of brick within three minutes. The creative uses listed by each participant were evaluated in terms of novelty, meaningfulness, and fluency (Amabile et al., 2005; Moreau & Dahl, 2005). Results show that the suspense group is higher in novelty (M_suspense = 3.07 vs. M_control = 2.97; p < .05) in the suspense condition (23/44, 52%) than the control condition (15/48, 31%; χ^2(1, 92) = 4.21, p < .05). A mediation analysis reveals that felt conflict significantly (CI = -.22 to -.06) mediates the effect of suspense on consumer creativity (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Foundings of the four studies indicate that suspense enhances consumer creativity via felt conflict. Results provide a basis for further work on how mixed emotions relate to consumer creativity. In this aspect, it is important to discuss shortcomings of the four studies and directions for future research. This discussion is developed mainly in four ways as follows.

First, online experiments compromise internal validity and thus laboratory experiments should be considered in future studies. Second, mediators between felt conflict and creativity need to be examined. For example, a flexible or an abstract mindset to resolve felt conflict could be a mediator. Third, future studies should attend to mixed emotions other than suspense (e.g., guilty pleasure, bittersweetness). Lastly, mixed emotions may be felt and interpreted differently across cultures (Williams & Aaker, 2002), and thus cultural factors should be considered in future studies.

REFERENCES


