“I Couldn’T Help But to Cry!” “I Couldn’T Help But to Yell “Yes!”” Dimorphous Expressions Inform Consumers of Users’ Motivational Orientations

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Sometimes happiness is displayed not only with smiles but also with tears or aggressive shouts. These dimorphous expressions (i.e. happiness + sadness and happiness + aggression) send unique signals about expressers’ motivational orientations. Here experimentally manipulated depicted users’ expressions alter judgments about users’ motivational orientations, product preferences, and product values.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT
Product messaging that provides information about the emotional experience associated with a product is particularly important when the emotional experience is part and parcel to the product’s value (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Therefore, emotional expressions displayed by users in advertising campaigns or reviews might be particularly relevant in communicating the emotional experience associated with products, and subsequently, the value of said products to prospective buyers.

Normatively, expressions of emotion are monomorphous, that is, one expression broadly represents one category of emotion (e.g., smiles represent happiness, Eckman & Friesen, 1971). Sometimes however, expressions are dimorphous (Aragón, 2016; Aragón & Bargh, 2016; Aragón & Clark, 2016; Aragón, Clark, Dyer, & Bargh, 2015), that is, two alternating or scrambled expressions represent and communicate one category of emotion (e.g., “tears of joy,” both smiles and tears represent happiness). For examples of dimorphous expressions, some people smile when sad (Frederickson & Levenson, 1998), smile when embarrassed (Ambadar, Cohn, & Reed, 2009), display aggression when tender (Aragón, et al., 2015), cry when happy (Fernández-Dols & Ruiz-Belda, 1995), and aggress when triumphant or adventurous (Aragón & Bargh, 2016).

In dimorphous expressions, the incongruent emotional expressions (e.g., aggressive shouts or tears when happy) represent and communicate both the expressers’ emotional experiences and motivational orientations. Research by Aragón and Bargh (2016) found that happiness expressed through both smiles and aggression (fist pumping, yelling, showing of teeth, loud vocalizations) represented and communicated appetitive orientations, i.e., “feelings of wanting to go,” “to move,” and “to accelerate.” In contrast happiness expressed with both smiles and sad displays (tears, crumpled body posture), represented and communicated consummatory orientations, i.e., “feelings of wanting to pause,” “to stop,” and “to rest.”

Multiple conceptually overlapping theories converged on these activation-type dimensions to the experience of emotion (e.g., Bradley & Lang, 1994; Feldman Barrett, 1998; Frijda, Kuipers, & Terschure, 1989; Russell, 2003). Cultural and individual differences factor into the expression of, and value given to, emotions based upon these dimensions (Mogilner, Kamvar, & Aaker, 2010; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). Moreover, these activation-type dimensions are effective predictors of consumer preferences and consumption (Alba & Williams, 2013; Nenkov & Scott, 2014).

Participants were provided with dimorphous or monomorphous expressions in online reviews for a vacation resort. Hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Shouts versus tears of joy would transmit differential messages about reviewers’ emotional-motivational experiences and subsequent preferences for vacations, over and above what a smile communicates.

Hypothesis 2: The fit between emotional expressions (shouts versus tears of joy), inferences of motivational orientations (appetitive versus consummatory) and inherent product qualities (action or relaxation packages) will align for participants’ own desires and this alignment will increase subjective product values.

In Study 1 (N = 200, MTurk) participants read a review of a luxury resort vacation in which the emotion was expressed as: “so happy I smiled”, “so happy I yelled, yes!” and “so happy I cried.” When happiness was expressed through yelling “yes!” participants inferred the reviewer was in an appetitive state and preferred an action package. In contrast, when participants read happiness expressed through crying, participants inferred the reviewer was in a consummatory state and preferred a relaxation package.

Study 2 (N = 284, MTurk) replicated Study 1 with additional questions into participants’ own desires for similar emotional experiences and subsequent value placed on products. This investigation also probed present versus future focus. Here highlighted are findings from present-focus, meaning participants’ desires and judgments in the moment. Cry condition participants inferred consummatory states for the reviewer, subsequently wanted that same consummatory experience in the relaxation package over the action package, and placed a higher value on the relaxation package than the action package. In contrast participants in the yell-yes condition inferred appetitive states for the reviewer, subsequently wanted that same appetitive experience in the action package over the relaxation package, and placed a higher value on the action package than the relaxation package.

When happiness was presented with yelling “yes!” participants inferred that the reviewer was in an appetitive state and preferred an action package. In contrast when happiness was presented with tears of joy, participants inferred that the reviewer was in a consummatory state and would prefer a relaxation package. Participants not only took the expressions provided by the reviewer to infer the reviewer’s emotional-motivational state and preferences, but also participants aligned their own desires for appetitive and consummatory experiences with action and relaxation vacation packages respectively. Products that aligned with these emotional-motivational states were subsequently given higher values.

REFERENCES


