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## **The Role of Regulatory Fit on the Inclination to Forgive Or Seek Revenge Against Sellers Following a Product Failure in the Marketplace**

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When a product fails, the injured party may wish to forgive the transgressor (if the latter shows repentance), or punish the transgressor (if the victim is encouraged to seek revenge). We show that a fit between the victim's regulatory focus (promotion/prevention) and the repentance/revenge message-frames heighten such motivations.

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# The Role of Regulatory Fit on the Inclination to Forgive or Seek Revenge Against Sellers Following a Product Failure in the Marketplace

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In recent times, several companies have found themselves facing the wrath of the marketplace following the failures of their products. For example, Toyota had to recall more than 8 million vehicles worldwide following incidences of sudden unintended acceleration and faulty brakes in their different automobile models that added to an estimated \$3 billion loss for the automaker. In the aftermath of product failures, the injured party may wish to forgive the transgressor (if the latter shows repentance), or punish the transgressor (if the victim is encouraged to seek revenge). Santelli, Struthers and Eaton (2009) have found that apologies are more effective when there is a fit or match between the frame of the transgressor's message (emphasizing a gain versus minimizing a loss) and the victim's regulatory orientation (promotion versus prevention focus), relative to when there is a misfit between the two. Our research extends the Santelli et al. (2009) research in understanding how regulatory fit can affect a consumer's desire to forgive (or seek revenge) following a market transgression.

In Study 1 (the forgiveness study), we randomly assigned one hundred eighty five undergraduate students (93 females) from a university in Western Australia to one of the six cells of a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion or prevention focus) by 3 (frame: neutral, promotion-framed apology, prevention-framed apology) between subjects design. We primed promotion (prevention) focus by asking participants to write down their current hopes and aspirations (duties and obligations), and how these may have changed over time. After they had completed their essays, all participants read about a product failure scenario (their car breaks down all of a sudden, and they have missed a very important meeting), and depending upon their experimental conditions, read a promotion-framed apology, prevention-framed apology, or a neutral message from the CEO of the company that made the car. The promotion-framed message contained phrases like "I am hopeful that our relationship with our customers can move forward after this," and "I will strive to do whatever it takes to gain back your trust." The prevention-framed message contained phrases like "I feel it is my duty to repair our relationship with our customers," and "I am obligated to do whatever it takes to not lose your trust."

The two main dependent variables used for this study were "tendency to forgive" (TTF) and "future intentions" (FI). We measured TTF using two 9-point items anchored on "strongly agree" (scale value = 9) and "strongly disagree" (scale value = 1). They were (1) "After listening to the CEO, I am more inclined to forgive the company for my troubles," and (2) "After listening to the CEO, I will forgive the company for my troubles." We measured FI with four 9-point strongly agree / strongly disagree items. They were (1) "I am likely to do business with this company in future," (2) "I am likely to recommend this company to my friends," (3) "I am likely to trust this company in the future," and (4) "I am likely to be satisfied with the future car models of this company." We found that promotion-primed participants were more inclined to forgive the transgressor following a promotion-framed apology ( $M = 5.78$ ) than a prevention-framed apology ( $M = 3.82$ ), and prevention-primed participants were more inclined to forgive the transgressor following a prevention-framed apology ( $M = 5.83$ ) than a promotion-framed apology ( $M = 3.61$ ). Similarly, the promotion-primed participants

were more likely to do future business with the transgressor company following a promotion-framed apology ( $M = 4.98$ ) than a prevention-framed apology ( $M = 3.14$ ), and prevention-primed participants were more likely to do future business with the transgressor company following a prevention-framed apology ( $M = 4.69$ ) than a promotion-framed apology ( $M = 2.48$ ).

In Study 2 (the revenge study), we randomly assigned one hundred eighty three undergraduate students (89 females) from a university in Western Australia to one of the six cells of a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion or prevention focus) by 3 (frame: neutral, promotion-framed revenge, prevention-framed revenge) between subjects design. Similar to Study 1, we primed promotion (prevention) focus by asking participants to write down their current hopes and aspirations (duties and obligations), following which all participants proceeded to the next part of the study, wherein they read the same car failure scenario from the first study. However, this time instead of the CEO-seeking-apology scenario, participants read that a lawyer, on television, was inviting victims to join a lawsuit against the company. Depending upon their experimental conditions, the participants read a promotion-framed revenge message, prevention-framed revenge message, or a neutral message. The promotion-framed message contained phrases like "I am sad to note that the company did not do everything possible to ensure your trust," and "join in the lawsuit and help those who have suffered by the actions of this company get what is due to them." The prevention-framed message contained phrases like "I am sad to note that the company did not do what it was obligated to do," and "join in the lawsuit so that those who have suffered do not lose what they are due by the actions of the company."

The two main dependent variables used for this study were "desire to seek revenge" (DSR) and "future intentions" (FI). We measured DSR using a two 9-point items anchored on "strongly agree" (scale value = 9) and "strongly disagree" (scale value = 1). They were (1) "I want to take revenge on the company for my troubles," and (2) "I want to punish this company." We measured FI with three 9-point strongly agree / strongly disagree items. They were (1) "I will not do business with this company in future," (2) "I will not recommend this company to my friends," and (3) "I will not trust this company in the future." We found that the prevention-primed participants were more inclined to seek revenge following a prevention-framed message ( $M = 6.39$ ) than a promotion-framed message ( $M = 4.60$ ), but promotion-primed participants were only directionally more inclined to seek revenge on the transgressor following a promotion-framed revenge message ( $M = 5.61$ ) than a prevention-framed message ( $M = 5.05$ ). Similarly, promotion-primed participants reported more negative future intentions towards the transgressor company following a promotion-framed message ( $M = 8.01$ ) than a prevention-framed message ( $M = 5.59$ ), whereas prevention-primed participants were more inclined to avoid the transgressor following a prevention-framed message ( $M = 8.25$ ) than a promotion-framed message ( $M = 5.91$ ).

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# Coping with Mixed Emotions: Exploring the Temporal Arousal of Positive Emotion Relative to Negative Emotion

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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

People often rely on their past experiences as guide for their future decisions. Positive experiences are repeated, negative ones avoided. However, rarely are our memories purely positive or purely negative, but instead they are filled with both ups and downs. Rather than feeling pure happiness from a successful negotiation (Thompson, Valley, and Kramer 1995), financial windfall (Levav and McGraw 2009), or visit to “the happiest place on earth” (e.g., Disneyland; Sutton 1992), people often endure mixed emotions from such experiences presumed so clearly positive. Despite their ubiquity, complex experiences comprised of both positive and negative emotions have been studied much less than their single-valenced emotion counterparts, with existing mixed emotions research mostly focused on demonstrating that positive and negative emotions may arise simultaneously or sequentially within the duration of a given experience (Otnes, Lowrey, and Shrum 1997), identifying how and when they may be triggered (Kahneman 1992) and linking them to feelings of discomfort (Priester and Petty 1993; Thompson, Zanna, and Griffin 1995).

More recent research shows that people typically react negatively to mixed emotions unless they acquire the necessary skills to cope with or overcome the discomfort associated with them. For example, those more prone to accepting duality due to their own experiences with conflict accumulated over a lifetime appear better equipped to cope with and thereby respond more favorably to mixed emotions than those with far fewer experiences with facing conflict. The elderly (vs. young), East Asians (vs. westerners) and biculturals (vs. monoculturals) represent such individuals likely associated with higher duality acceptance and thus lower feelings of discomfort with mixed emotions (Kramer, Lau-Gesk, and Chiu 2009; Williams and Aaker 2002).

Beyond examining individual differences, the literature is largely silent about moderators of the relationship between judgment and mixed emotions. Moreover, specific coping processes underlying more favorable reactions to mixed emotions have yet to be pinpointed. Thus, the present research aims to achieve three main objectives. First, it identifies properties that underlie recalled sequential mixed emotional experiences that may bolster or hinder successful coping. Specifically, we explore the temporal arousal of positive emotion relative to negative emotion, and how this property may facilitate coping processes. Varying the temporal arousal of positive, relative to negative, emotion leads us to our second objective of examining sequential patterns of mixed emotional experiences that range in valence and intensity. Most investigations of sequential mixed emotions have focused on two emotion events (i.e., one negative and one positive) and therefore two experiential patterns (negative to positive; positive to negative). In contrast, we focus on far more complex and previously unexamined mixed emotion sequences because of our focus on temporal arousal of positive, relative to negative, emotion. Third, this research pinpoints the specific coping processes involved that lead to more favorable reactions to mixed emotions that arise sequentially.

Specifically, we examine consumers’ overall evaluations of mixed emotional experiences varying in temporal arousal of positive versus negative emotion. We argue that relatively close (vs. distant)

temporal arousal of positive emotion relative to negative emotion provides cognitive resources necessary to cope with mixed emotions and hence lower the discomfort otherwise associated with it. This in turn leads them to evaluate mixed emotional experiences favorably.

Four studies across a variety of contexts test our main thesis that greater cognitive resources become available to construe mixed experiences in a favorable light with close (vs. distant) temporal arousal of positive emotion relative to negative emotion. In particular, we rely on far more complex sequential mixed emotional experiences than previously investigated, ones that are comprised of multiple emotional events of either valence that vary in emotion intensity levels so that temporal arousal manipulations occur in the middle of the entire experience rather than at the beginning, end or both. This allows us to isolate any effects that may arise from temporal arousal. Indeed, prior studies have used at most three sequential events that vary on valence only (e.g., good and bad events: Linville and Fischer 1991; negative, neutral, and positive events: Lau-Gesk 2005). Specifically, we examine the effect of temporal arousal of the most intense positive emotion relative to the most intense negative emotion, given their robust influence on overall evaluations (Fredrickson and Kahneman 1993).

Study 1 relies on arcade patrons who experience sequentially close (vs. distant) temporal arousal of positive emotion relative to negative emotion, while playing a videogame. Study 2 manipulates temporal arousal of positive emotion relative to negative emotion, through a movie night experience. Results of these two studies show that consumers evaluate sequential mixed emotional experiences more favorably when the temporal arousal of positive emotion is close (vs. distant) to negative emotion. The next two studies examine reappraisal likelihood as the driver of the temporal arousal effect on evaluations of mixed emotional experiences. Study 3 manipulates reappraisal likelihood by imposing cognitive load on half of the study participants and finds differences in evaluations of a mixed romantic relationship experience due to close (vs. distant) temporal arousal of positive emotion relative to negative emotion, eliminated in these conditions. As further support for our theory, we measure reappraisal likelihood in study 4 and show that cognitive load will not moderate the effect of temporal arousal of positive, relative to negative, emotion on evaluation of a mixed emotional experience in a jelly belly sampling context, for those participants high in reappraisal tendencies because of their chronic use of reappraisal as their coping strategy. A suppression coping strategy is ruled out as well (Gross and John 2003).

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