

What we feel and why we buy: the influence of emotions on consumer decision-making

Chethana Achar¹, Jane So¹, Nidhi Agrawal¹ and Adam Duhachek²

Each specific emotion is associated with a set of cognitive appraisals that drives the influence of the emotion on decision-making through nuanced psychological mechanisms. We present an integrated view of the current literature on how emotions – both related and unrelated to the decision at hand – play an important role in shaping consumer decision-making. Emotions embedded in marketing stimuli influence decision-making via processes driven by cognitive appraisals. Emotions that are unrelated to the decisions influence decision-making via carried over appraisal tendencies. We present perspectives on why and under what conditions emotions serve as antecedents to decision-making, and call for future research to examine how emotional influences can both undermine and help consumer decision-making.

Addresses

¹ Foster School of Business, University of Washington, PACCAR Hall, Seattle, WA 98195, USA

² Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, 1309 East 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47405, USA

Corresponding author: Achar, Chethana (acharc@uw.edu)

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Introduction

Consider the following situations: Requesting a nicotine patch after seeing a fear-inducing anti-smoking flier in your doctor's office, donating money to a charity after eating a sinful chocolate cake, holding on tightly to your bottle of Coke (as an object of attachment) while watching a horror movie. Each of these situations provides an example of how emotions influence consumer decision-making. In some of these instances, marketing efforts create an emotional experience in hopes of influencing consumers, whereas in other instances, a consumer's incidental emotional state affects the decisions she or he might make. Before delving into the psychological processes by which emotions influence consumers, we review the current views on the nature of discrete emotions.

Nature of discrete emotions

Emotions are multidimensional feelings that reflect information about consumers' relationship to their social and physical surroundings as well as their interpretations regarding these relationships [1,2]. Each specific or discrete emotion is associated with a profile of cognitive evaluations called 'appraisals'. Early research on specific emotions was aimed at identifying and classifying emotional appraisals. Smith and Ellsworth [2] classified cognitive appraisals associated with fifteen common specific emotions along six dimensions (i.e., pleasantness, certainty, self-responsibility, anticipated effort, attention and situational control). The more recently developed Appraisal Tendency Framework (ATF) [3,4], suggests that appraisals associated with the experience of a specific emotion can 'carry over' by predisposing individuals' view of other unrelated events in line with the preexisting appraisals [5•]. For example, fear is an emotion that arises from the appraisal of low individual control over an unpleasant event whereas anger is associated with high individual control [2]. Thus feelings of fear or anger lead to different subsequent risk perceptions, such that fear leads to pessimistic risk perceptions (i.e., perceptions of low control) and anger leads to optimistic risk perceptions (i.e., perceptions of high control) [3,6].

Based on the source of consumers' emotional experiences and its relationship to the decision at hand, emotional influences are classified into two broad categories: Integral emotions and incidental emotions. Integral emotions are experienced when marketers embed emotions in the marketing stimuli or contexts with the intention of influencing a particular decision [7]. Incidental emotions arise from sources that are unrelated to a particular decision, yet their influence carries over to that subsequent decision [7]. This review is organized around such classification of emotions, beginning with an integrative model of how emotions influence consumer decision-making, followed by sections that detail the specific psychological processes.

Integrative model illustrating role of integral and incidental emotions in consumer decision-making

Appraisals associated with emotions influence judgments in two ways. One, the nature of marketing appeals and marketing contexts (i.e., advertising, brand, category) can elicit emotions (i.e., integral emotions), which influence consumers' decision-making processes via cognitive appraisals of the object or the event. Two, unrelated environmental factors, such as prior events, or consumer's

personality might elicit emotions (i.e., incidental emotions), which affect how consumers make that decision. Such incidental emotions activate appraisal tendencies related to the emotion and are carried over to decisions about another object or situation. Finally, integral and incidental emotions can jointly influence decision-making via interaction of cognitive appraisals. Figure 1 presents an integrative model of emotional influences on consumer behavior.

Impact of integral emotions on decision-making

Consumers are exposed to emotion-inducing marketing in the form of advertisements, product packaging, positioning, events, etc. [8,9]. Brands and marketing contents systematically portray and evoke emotions that encourage desired consumer responses. There is a small stream of research that explores how integral emotions influence decision-making. Here, we review this area of research in the hope that it will serve as a call for more scholars to examine the role of integral emotions in decision-making. Early literature documented the effect of emotions on consumption by contrasting emotion-laden marketing appeals to non-emotional or rational appeals. In a field experiment, anti-child abuse public service announcements that used empathetic (vs. rational) appeals were more effective [10]. Following multiple demonstrations that emotional appeals could be effective alternatives to rational appeals in influencing consumer behavior, most research has focused on understanding how and when integral emotions make marketing appeals effective.

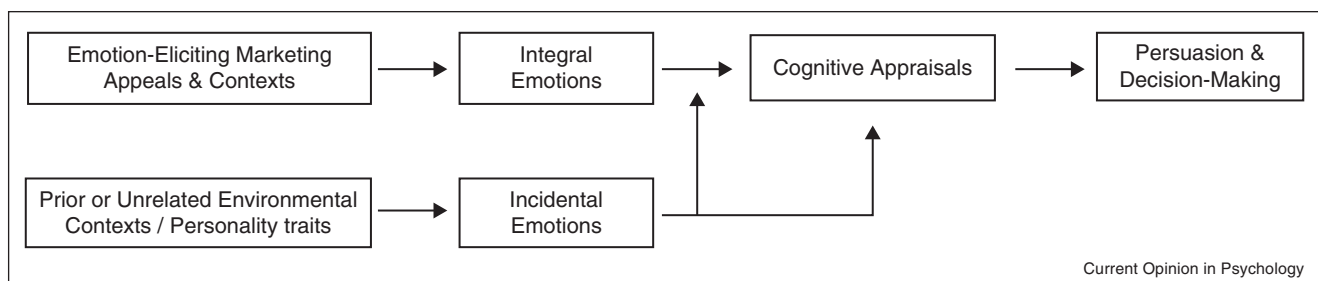
How do emotional appeals influence decisions? There is a wide range of psychological processes that drives consumer reactions to emotional appeals. Certain emotions increase the motivation to act in compliance with an appeal via accountability appraisals. For example, sunscreen ads that used specific emotions with appraisals of self-accountability (such as regret, guilt, and challenge) increased individuals' intentions to use sunscreen, relative to appeals that used emotions with low self-accountability (e.g., fear,

hope) [11]. Emotional appeals could also influence subsequent decision-making through modifying one's concept of self relative to others. For example, love expands the boundary of caring toward others and extends feelings of connection. Therefore, seeing a love-inducing advertisement made participants more likely to donate to an international (versus local) charity [12*]. Emotions may also influence consumer behavior through contagion effects; individuals experienced more sadness when viewing a charitable appeal with victims' faces showing sad (versus happy) expressions and hence were more likely to feel sympathy [13].

Some emotional appeals influence consumers by changing how the information provided in the appeal is processed. For example, high fear-arousing appeals (e.g., anti-smoking ads) are likely to be defensively processed by consumers. Hence, they were effective only when the message reduced the problem elaboration by using others as references [14]. Another processing mechanism that could enhance the effectiveness of emotional appeals is metacognitive fluency facilitated by message framing [15]. A guilt-inducing anti-drinking appeal cast in a gain (rather than loss) frame was processed more fluently and was consequently more effective in decreasing binge drinking intentions. This is because guilt functions through problem-focused coping — as facilitated by a gain frame — and shame functions through emotion-focused coping, facilitated by a loss frame [15].

When do emotional appeals influence decisions? Effectiveness of emotional stimuli may depend on their compatibility with many consumer-related factors, such as culture, consumers' salient self-identities, and their incidental emotional states. The influence of different discrete emotions across people belonging to different cultures varies; emotional appeals that are not compatible with the participants' culture may be more effective due to their novelty [16]. For example, members of a collectivist (versus individualist) culture were more persuaded by emotional appeals that were ego-focused (e.g., pride) rather than appeals that used other-focused emotions

Figure 1



Integrative model of emotional influences on consumer behavior. Both integral and incidental emotions influence decision-making via cognitive appraisals.

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