



ELSEVIER

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)

Current Opinion in Psychology 2016, 10:166–170

This review comes from a themed issue on **Consumer behavior**

Edited by **Jeff Joireman** and **Kristina Durante**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.01.009>

2352-250X/Published by Elsevier Ltd.

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.

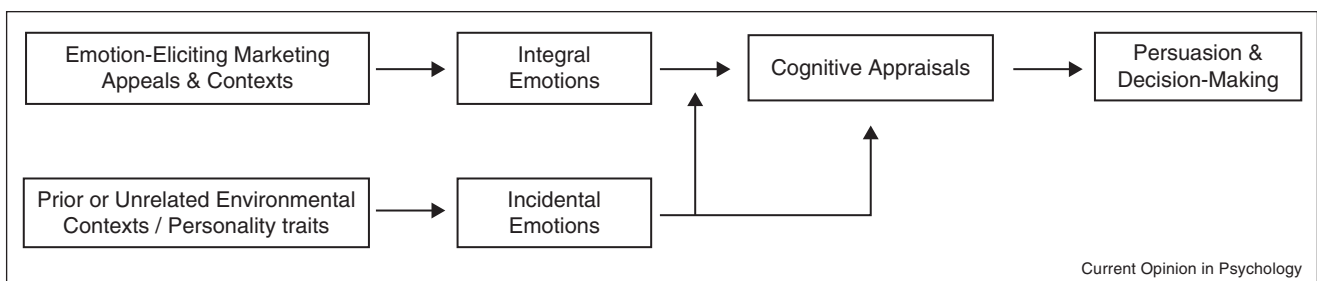
How do emotional appeals influence decisions? There is a wide range of psychological processes that drives consumer reactions to emotional appeals. Certain emotions increase the motivation to act in compliance with an appeal via accountability appraisals. For example, sunscreen ads that used specific 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.

(e.g., empathy) due to a sense of novelty [16]. In another demonstration of emotional stimuli interacting with consumer characteristics, Coleman and Williams [17*] show that individuals prefer emotional messages that are compatible with their salient self-identity. Individuals primed with their athlete identity were most persuaded by anger-based advertisements because anger is consistent with the stereotypical social identity of being an athlete.

In summary, emotional appeals influence decision-making by skewing consumers' thinking toward appraisals associated with those emotions such as higher self-responsibility (e.g., regret) and greater inclusion of other in self (e.g., love). Appraisals may also interact with decision contexts and consumer characteristics to enhance effectiveness of marketing through various processes such as identity-compatibility, reduced defensive processing, and novelty. While existing research has documented the effects of both compatibility and incompatibility of emotional appeals with culture [17*], future research could explore when compatibility versus incompatibility effects occur.

Impact of incidental emotions on decision-making

Emotional influences in the marketplace are not limited to those intentionally set up by marketers. Even incidental emotions may affect a variety of consumer responses such as perception, brand choice, information processing, risk taking, etc. [3,18*,19,20,21,22]. Incidental emotions evoked from a previous experience (e.g., watching an ad that portrays hope while watching TV) may influence subsequent, unrelated decisions (e.g., how many chips you may eat while watching TV). Recent research has documented effects such as incidental pride affecting consumers' uniqueness-seeking tendency when consumers attribute the feeling of pride to their personal traits (versus people who attribute pride to their effort) [23]. In this section, we review some current views on how and when such incidental influences occur.

How do incidental emotions influence decisions? ATF [7] has helped researchers understand the mechanism through which even unrelated (i.e., incidental) emotions influence decisions. The appraisals associated with incidental emotions predispose individuals to perceive unrelated events in ways that are consistent with appraisal dimensions. This influence of emotional appraisals can explain why effectiveness of the same message may differ, depending on the emotion being incidentally experienced. For example, among people incidentally feeling positive emotions (e.g. happiness, calmness), compatibility between emotional appraisals and referent in a message enhances message effectiveness [24]. In addition to some of the appraisals discussed previously, recent research has identified new appraisals to provide evidence for differential effects of the same incidental emotions. For example, guilt arises from a behavior-specific appraisal (e.g., I did

not study hard) whereas shame arises from a global self-appraisal (e.g., I am not an intelligent person). Thus, feelings of guilt lead consumers to adopt lower-level construals and value secondary features (e.g., direct camera upload in an MP3 player) whereas feelings of shame lead consumers to adopt higher-level construals and value primary features (e.g., storage capacity in an MP3 player) [25*]. Thus, guilt-laden consumers chose a product with unattractive primary features but attractive secondary features but shame-laden consumers chose the reverse. This illustrates that incidental emotions can influence the construal level of consumers' mindsets [25*]. Another example of an influential appraisal is the temporal focus of the emotion. Emotions associated with future-focused appraisals (e.g., hope) increase consumers' self-control and lead them to make healthier choices relative to emotions associated with present-focused or past-focused appraisals (e.g., pride) [26]. In summary, incidental emotions can influence unrelated decisions via processes such as enhancing message compatibility, changing temporal focus and mindsets.

When do incidental emotions influence decisions? Sometimes, the surprising effect of the same emotion having different effects can be explained by minor differences in the nature of incidental emotions and their interactions with contextual factors. For example, pride arising from different sources affects decision-making differently. Pride experienced when self-awareness is heightened leads to virtuous choices by motivating consumers to act in accordance with their goals. However, pride experienced due to the appraisal of self-achievement leads to indulgent choices because consumers disengage with the goal [27]. In a similar vein, presence of a goal can moderate the effect of incidental emotions on decisions [28,29]. Incidental sadness leads to more hedonic consumption because consumers are trying to regulate their feelings. However, this effect is mitigated when a hedonic eating goal is salient because consumers try to reduce further harmful consequences [28].

Features of consumption settings, such as who is involved in the decision making or where the product is displayed, moderate the effect of incidental emotions [30]. For example, incidental fear leads people to sell stocks early when individuals are led to believe that a peer decides the value of the stock; this effect of fear on stock-selling does not occur when they are told that a computer decides stock values [31]. This is caused by 'social projection' that is, people's tendency to judge others' state of mind based on their own state. Product display or physical placement can affect the evaluation of a product when consumers are feeling disgusted by a nearby, unrelated product [32]. When a disgust-eliciting product (e.g., sanitary napkin) was placed in such a way that it touches a target product (e.g., a package of notebook paper), consumers see the target product as contaminated and had less favorable

evaluations of it, relative to when it was not in contact with the disgust-eliciting product.

In summary, emotions can affect decisions that are seemingly unrelated via appraisal tendencies. Appraisals associated with each emotion shape consumers' decisions by processes such as influencing consumers' construal levels or temporal focus. The effect of incidental emotions varies by decision contexts such as source of the emotion, presence of goal or physical proximity.

Interaction of integral and incidental emotions

An important but relatively understudied area in emotions research is how and when integral emotions and incidental emotions jointly influence consumer decisions. Emotional stimuli could interact with incidentally experienced emotional states and influence the manner in which information is processed. Agrawal and Duhachek [33], for example, showed that anti-drinking appeals that exacerbate guilt or shame were less effective among participants incidentally feeling guilt or shame. When the emotional appeal exacerbated the emotional state participants were already feeling, they defensively processed the information. This finding demonstrated that negative emotional appeals could backfire when they were compatible with incidental negative emotions. There has been limited research on this area, but future research can explore how integral and incidental emotions can interact as well as how they can contrast.

Conclusions and discussion

We have presented a review of how emotions shape decision-making through appraisals; both when embedded in marketing efforts and when carried over to the decision-making context from an unrelated source. Under some conditions, the two forms may interact to jointly influence consumers. Future research should delve into studying the influence of integral emotions on consumers and contrast the effects of integral versus incidental emotions [7].

Possible future directions: When emotions help or hurt consumer decisions. A meaningful future direction is to explore when and why emotions help or hurt consumer decisions. A commonly held view is that emotional influences hurt consumers, such as incidental fear or anger leading to risky decisions [31,33,34,35]. However, many findings reported in this review show that emotions can have beneficial influences such as aiding self-regulation and encouraging healthier decisions [26,27,28,35,36,37].

This article has summarized recent research that views emotions as antecedents to decision-making. In contrast to this 'emotions influence decisions' approach, an important stream of literature has examined how emotions can be outcomes of decision-making and consumption [38–46]. Eating chocolates or buying gifts or purchasing

experiences rather than material products has been shown to make people happier [39–41]. Some of these findings hint that consumers strategically make decisions to manage their emotions. The prevalence of the phrase 'retail therapy' implies that consumers use consumption to manage their emotional states. Blair and Roese [47] show that consumers attempt to reduce embarrassment induced by purchase of embarrassing products (e.g., anti-diarrheal medicine) by purchasing additional unrelated products. A related idea is that negative emotions are undesirable and should be repaired where as positive emotions are desirable and should be increased or sustained [15,39–41]. A fruitful line of enquiry is to study why and when consumers may do the opposite, that is, try to reduce a positive emotion or hold onto a negative emotion.

In conclusion, emotions have complex effects in various decision-making domains. There is rich scholarly potential in studying the processes through which emotions influence decision-making and persuasion.

References and recommended reading

Papers of particular interest, published within the period of review, have been highlighted as:

- of special interest
- of outstanding interest

1. Lambie JA, Marcel AJ: **Consciousness and the varieties of emotion experience: a theoretical framework.** *Psychol Rev* 2002, **109**:219-259.
2. Smith CA, Ellsworth PC: **Patterns of cognitive appraisal in emotion.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 1985, **48**:813-838.
3. Lerner JS, Keltner D: **Beyond valence: toward a model of emotion-specific influences on judgement and choice.** *Cogn Emot* 2000, **14**:473-493.
4. Lerner JS, Keltner D: **Fear, anger, and risk.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2001, **81**:146-159.
5. So J, Achar C, Han D, Agrawal N, Duhachek A, Maheswaran D: **The psychology of appraisal: specific emotions and decision-making.** *J Cons Psychol* 2015, **25**:359-371.
- This publication presents a framework of how appraisals associated with specific emotions may influence decision-making. The authors highlight some nuanced approaches of studying emotions and provide directions for future research in the domain of discrete emotions.
6. Han S, Lerner JS, Keltner D: **Feelings and consumer decision making: the appraisal-tendency framework.** *J Cons Psychol* 2007, **17**:158-168.
7. Pham MT: **Emotion and rationality: a critical review and interpretation of empirical evidence.** *Rev Gen Psychol* 2007, **11**:155-178.
8. Chen CY, Mathur P, Maheswaran D: **The effects of country-related affect on product evaluation.** *J Con Res* 2015, **41**:1033-1046.
9. Lee CJ, Andrade EB, Palmer SE: **Interpersonal relationships and preferences for mood-congruency in aesthetic experience.** *J Con Res* 2013, **40**:382-391.
10. Bagozzi RP, Moore DJ: **Public service advertisements: emotions and empathy guide prosocial behavior.** *J Mark* 1994, **58**:56-70.
11. Passyn K, Sujan M: **Self-accountability emotions and fear appeals: motivating behavior.** *J Cons Res* 2006, **32**:583-589.

12. Cavanaugh LA, Bettman JR, Luce MF: **Feeling love and doing more for distant others: specific positive emotions differentially affect prosocial consumption.** *J Mark Res* 2015, **52**:657-673.
- This work demonstrates the differential effects of positive emotions in the context of prosocial behavior. The authors demonstrate psychological processes through which specific positive emotions may increase or decrease prosocial behavior towards different beneficiaries.
13. Small DA, Verrochi NM: **The face of need: facial emotion expression on charity advertisements.** *J Mark Res* 2009, **46**:777-787.
14. Keller PA, Block LG: **Increasing the persuasiveness of fear appeals: the effect of arousal and elaboration.** *J Cons Res* 1996, **22**:448-459.
15. Duhachek A, Agrawal N, Han D: **Guilt versus shame: coping, fluency, and framing in the effectiveness of responsible drinking messages.** *J Mark Res* 2012, **49**:928-941.
16. Aaker JL, Williams P: **Empathy versus pride: the influence of emotional appeals across cultures.** *J Cons Res* 1998, **25**:241-261.
17. Coleman NV, Williams P: **Feeling like myself: emotion profiles and social identity.** *J Cons Res* 2013, **40**:203-222.
- This work brings together the literatures on consumers' self-identity and emotions. This is a good example of integration across contemporary research streams.
18. Agrawal N, Han D, Duhachek A: **Emotional agency appraisals influence responses to preference inconsistent information.** *Org Behav Hum Decis Proc* 2013, **120**:87-97.
- This research brings together the literature on discrete emotions and biased processing of information. Studies provide evidence that incidental emotions differ in their response to preference-inconsistent (vs. preference consistent) information due to their differences in agency appraisals.
19. Dunn L, Hoegg J: **The impact of fear on emotional brand attachment.** *J Cons Res* 2014, **41**:152-168.
20. De Mello G, MacInnis DJ, Stewart DW: **Threats to hope: effects on reasoning about product information.** *J Cons Res* 2007, **34**:153-161.
21. Herrald MM, Tomaka J: **Patterns of emotion-specific appraisal, coping, and cardiovascular reactivity during an ongoing emotional episode.** *J Pers Soc Psychol* 2002, **83**:434-450.
22. Maheswaran D, Chen CY: **Nation equity: incidental emotions in country-of-origin effects.** *J Cons Res* 2006, **33**:370-376.
23. Huang X, Dong P, Mukhopadhyay A: **Proud to belong or proudly different? Lay theories determine contrasting effects of incidental pride on uniqueness seeking.** *J Cons Res* 2014, **41**:697-712.25.
24. Agrawal N, Menon G, Aaker JL: **Getting emotional about health.** *J Mark Res* 2007, **44**:100-113.28.
25. Han D, Duhachek A, Agrawal N: **Emotions shape decisions through construal level: the case of guilt and shame.** *J Cons Res* 2014, **41**:1047-1064.
- This paper shows that specific emotions can systematically alter individuals' construal level (i.e., abstract from shame and vs. concrete from guilt) due to the appraisals associated with those emotions. This is a demonstration of how emotions not only provide information and motivate, but affect general psychological processes.
26. Winterich KP, Haws KL: **Helpful hopefulness: the effect of future positive emotions on consumption.** *J Con Res* 2011, **38**:505-524.
27. Wilcox K, Kramer T, Sen S: **Indulgence or self-control: a dual process model of the effect of incidental pride on indulgent choice.** *J Cons Res* 2011, **38**:151-163.
28. Salerno A, Laran J, Janiszewski C: **Hedonic eating goals and emotion: when sadness decreases the desire to indulge.** *J Con Res* 2014, **41**:135-151.
29. Salerno A, Laran J, Janiszewski C: **Pride and regulatory behavior: the influence of appraisal information and self-regulatory goals.** *J Cons Res* 2015, **42**:499-513.
30. Garg N, Inman JJ, Mittal V: **Incidental and task-related affect: a re-inquiry and extension of the influence of affect on choice.** *J Cons Res* 2005, **32**:154-159.
31. Lee CJ, Andrade EB: **Fear, social projection, and financial decision making.** *J Mark Res* 2011, **48**:121-129.
32. Morales AC, Fitzsimons GJ: **Product contagion: changing consumer evaluations through physical contact with "disgusting" products.** *J Mark Res* 2007, **44**:272-283.
33. Agrawal N, Duhachek A: **Emotional compatibility and the effectiveness of antidrinking messages: a defensive processing perspective on shame and guilt.** *J Mark Res* 2010, **47**:263-273.
34. Kugler T, Connolly T, Ordóñez LD: **Emotion, decision, and risk: betting on gambles versus betting on people.** *J Behav Decis Making* 2012, **25**:123-134.
35. McFerran B, Aquino K, Tracy J: **Evidence for two facets of pride in consumption: findings from luxury brands.** *J Con Psychol* 2014, **24**:455-471.
36. Gardner MP, Wansink B, Kim J, Park SB: **Better moods for better eating? How mood influences food choice.** *J Con Psychol* 2014, **24**:320-335.
37. Laran J: **Consumer goal pursuit.** *Curr Opin Psychol* 2015, **10**:22-26.
38. Chandran S, Menon G: **When a day means more than a year: effects of temporal framing on judgments of health risk.** *J Con Res* 2004, **31**:375-389.
39. Dunn EW, Aknin LB, Norton MI: **Spending money on others promotes happiness.** *Science* 2008, **319**:1687-1688.
40. Dunn EW, Gilbert DT, Wilson TD: **If money doesn't make you happy, then you probably aren't spending it right.** *J Con Psychol* 2011, **21**:115-125.
41. Bhattacharjee A, Mogilner C: **Happiness from ordinary and extraordinary experiences.** *J Con Res* 2014, **41**:1-17.
42. Krishna A, Herd KB, Aydınoğlu NZ: **Wetting the bed at twenty-one: embarrassment as a private emotion.** *J Con Res* 2015, **25**:473-486.
43. Lee S, Winterich KP, Ross WT Jr: **I'm moral, but I won't help you: the distinct role of empathy and justice donations.** *J Con Res* 2014, **41**:678-696.
44. Luce MF, Payne JW, Bettman JR: **Emotional trade-off difficulty and choice.** *J Mark Res* 1999, **36**:143-159.
45. Lau-Gesk L, Drolet A: **The publicly self-conscious consumer: prepared to be embarrassed.** *J Con Psychol* 2008, **18**:127-136.
46. Goldsmith K, Cho EK, Dhar R: **When guilt begets pleasure: the positive effect of a negative emotion.** *J Mark Res* 2012, **49**:872-881.
47. Blair S, Roese NJ: **Balancing the basket: the role of shopping basket composition in embarrassment.** *J Con Res* 2013, **40**:676-691.