

# Emotions in consumer behavior: a hierarchical approach

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## Abstract

A growing body of consumer research studies emotions evoked by marketing stimuli, products and brands. Yet, there has been a wide divergence in the content and structure of emotions used in these studies. In this paper, we will show that the seemingly diverging research streams can be integrated in a hierarchical consumer emotions model. The superordinate level consists of the frequently encountered general dimensions positive and negative affect. The subordinate level consists of specific emotions, based on Richins' (Richins, Marsha L. Measuring Emotions in the Consumption Experience. *J. Consum. Res.* 24 (2) (1997) 127–146) Consumption Emotion Set (CES), and as an intermediate level, we propose four negative and four positive basic emotions. We successfully conducted a preliminary test of this second-order model, and compare the superordinate and basic level emotion means for different types of food. The results suggest that basic emotions provide more information about the feelings of the consumer over and above positive and negative affect.

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## 1. Introduction

After a long period in which consumers were assumed to make largely rational decisions based on utilitarian product attributes and benefits, in the last two decades, marketing scholars have started to study emotions evoked by marketing stimuli, products and brands (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Many studies involving consumer emotions have focused on consumers' emotional responses to advertising (e.g., Derbaix, 1995), and the mediating role of emotions on the satisfaction of consumers (e.g., Phillips and Baumgartner, 2002). Emotions have been shown to play an important role in other contexts, such as complaining (Stephens and Gwinner, 1998), service failures (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999) and product attitudes (Dube et al., 2003). Emotions are often conceptualized as *general* dimensions, like positive and negative affect, but there has also been an interest in more *specific* emotions. Within the latter stream of research, some researchers use a comprehensive set of

specific emotions (Richins, 1997; Ruth et al., 2002). Other researchers concentrate on one or several specific emotions, such as surprise (e.g., Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003), regret (e.g., Inman and Zeelenberg, 2002; Tsiros and Mittal, 2000), sympathy and empathy (Edson Escalas and Stern, 2003), embarrassment (Verbeke and Bagozzi, 2003) and anger (Bougie et al., 2003; Taylor, 1994).

Despite this emerging body of research, progress on the use of emotions in consumer behavior has been hampered by ambiguity about two interrelated issues, viz., the *structure* and *content* of emotions (Bagozzi et al., 1999). First, with regard to *structure*, some researchers examine all emotions at the same level of generality (e.g., Izard, 1977), whereas others specify a hierarchical structure in which specific emotions are particular instances of more general underlying basic emotions (Shaver et al., 1987; Storm and Storm, 1987). Second, and relatedly, there is debate concerning the *content* of emotions. Should emotions be most fruitfully conceived as very broad general factors, such as pleasure/arousal (Russell, 1980) or positive/negative affect (Watson and Tellegen, 1985)? Alternatively, appraisal theorists (see, e.g., Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman et al., 1996; Smith and Lazarus, 1993) argue that specific emotions

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should not be combined in broad emotional factors, because each emotion has a distinct set of appraisals. The confusion concerning structure and content of emotions has hindered the full interpretation and use of emotions in consumer behavior theory and empirical research (Bagozzi et al., 1999).

The purpose of our paper is twofold. First, we integrate seemingly opposing research streams in psychology and consumer behavior by developing a hierarchical model of consumer emotions. We will show that the general dimensions with positive and negative affect are the superordinate and most abstract level at which emotions can be defined. The subordinate level consists of specific consumer emotions. We will develop an intermediate level with basic emotions that links these two levels. Second, we conduct a preliminary test of this proposed structure and compare the means for positive and negative affect with those of the basic emotions for four different food types.

## 2. Emotions in consumer research

This section will briefly discuss an illustrative set of consumer studies on emotions (see Table 1 for an overview).

Several studies focused on the emotional responses to ads. Holbrook and Batra (1987) developed their own emotional scale based on an in-depth review of the literature. They uncovered a pleasure, arousal and domination dimension in their data, and showed that these emotions mediate consumer responses to advertising. Edell and Burke (1987) also created their own emotion list and found that feelings play an important role in the prediction of the ad's effectiveness. They proposed three factors: an upbeat, negative, and warmth factor. Olney et al. (1991)

showed that the emotional dimensions pleasure and arousal mediate the relation between ad content and attitudinal components, and consequently viewing time of an ad. They used part of Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) scale. Derbaix (1995) replicated the research of Edell and Burke (1987) in a natural setting. His emotion words were based on a prestudy, and uncovered a positive and negative factor. Steenkamp et al. (1996) investigated the relations between arousal potential, arousal, and ad evaluation, with need for stimulation as a moderator. They based their arousal dimension on the scale of Mehrabian and Russell (1974).

In the satisfaction literature, Westbrook (1987) was one of the first to investigate consumer emotional responses to product/consumption experiences and their relationship to several central aspects of postpurchase processes. Oliver (1993) extended this work by showing that emotional responses mediate the effects of product attributes on satisfaction. Both studies relied on Izard's (1977) taxonomy of fundamental affects, and found positive and negative affect as underlying emotion dimensions. Mano and Oliver (1993) investigated the structural interrelationship among evaluations, feelings, and satisfaction in the postconsumption experience. They combined Watson et al.'s (1988) PANAS scale and Mano's (1991) circumplex scale. Both three dimensions—similar to the upbeat, negative, and warmth factors of Edell and Burke (1987)—and two dimensions—positive and negative affect—were uncovered, but only the latter dimensions were used in the studies. Dube and Morgan (1998) modeled trends in consumption emotions and satisfaction in order to predict retrospective global judgments of services. They used the PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988) and uncovered positive and negative affect. Phillips and Baumgartner (2002) confirmed the

Table 1  
Overview of consumer research using emotions as a main variable

Reference	Emotion measure used	Resulting structure
Edell and Burke (1987)	Edell and Burke (1987)	Upbeat, negative, and warm
Holbrook and Batra (1987)	Holbrook and Batra (1987)	Pleasure, arousal, and domination
Westbrook (1987)	Izard (1977)	Positive and negative affect
Olney et al. (1991)	Mehrabian and Russell (1974)	Pleasure and arousal
Holbrook and Gardner (1993)	Russell et al. (1989)	Pleasure and arousal
Mano and Oliver (1993)	Watson et al. (1988); Mano (1991)	Upbeat, negative and warm Positive and negative
Oliver (1993)	Izard (1977)	Positive and negative affect
Derbaix (1995)	Derbaix (1995)	Positive and negative affect
Steenkamp et al. (1996)	Mehrabian and Russell (1974)	Arousal
Nyer (1997)	Shaver et al. (1987)	Anger, joy/satisfaction, and sadness
Richins (1997)	Richins (1997)	Anger, discontent, worry, sadness, fear, shame, envy, loneliness, romantic love, love, peacefulness, contentment, optimism, joy, excitement, and surprise
Dube and Morgan (1998)	Watson et al. (1988)	Positive and negative affect
Phillips and Baumgartner (2002)	Edell and Burke (1987)	Positive and negative affect
Ruth et al. (2002)	Shaver et al. (1987)	Love, happiness, pride, gratitude, fear, anger, sadness, guilt, uneasiness, and embarrassment
Smith and Bolton (2002)	Smith and Bolton (2002)	Anger, discontent, disappointment, self-pity, and anxiety

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