

In Richard Lutz, editor, Proceedings of Division 23, 89th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Nashville, TN: Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, 1981.

EMOTION: A NEGLECTED ASPECT OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

The term "emotion" is mentioned on five pages out of the four thousand or so found in seven Consumer Behavior texts with publishing or revision dates in 1978, 1979, and 1980. Yet emotion is an aspect of behavior and experience which basic psychologists have studied using a variety of approaches: physiological, expressive/behavioral, phenomenological/experiential, communicative, cognitive, conditions of arousal, and adaptive. Questions asked include: How many emotions are there? Which functions do they serve? Are they inherited, learned, or both? Does each emotion have its own unique physiological response pattern? What are the dimensions of emotional expression? How well do we judge emotion from facial expression? Is the distinction between positive and negative emotions useful and all inclusive? Are there more negative than positive emotions? What is the relation between cognition and emotion? What is emotion? By and large, psychologists who study emotion tend to theorize about emotion itself rather than address the question likely to be of prime interest to consumer psychologists namely, How does emotion help explain behavior?

Basic psychology offers the consumer psychologist not only a wide range of perspectives on the subject of emotion but also a variety of positions on the range of emotional experience--from the eight, to twelve, to fourteen, "fundamental emotions" studied by some theorists, to a dictionary of emotional meaning comprising 50 terms, to a semantic atlas of about 560 "emotional concepts." Taking the last-mentioned, a content analysis disclosed the following six major categories, each with multiple subcategories (number of terms shown in parentheses): Social behaviors/feelings (145), Information processing effects (80), Energy disposition (31), Other unpleasant experience (170), Other pleasant experiences (86), Miscellaneous (52). Clearly, the range of psychological functioning which may be considered emotional is wide. Our theories and research in consumer psychology have some way to go before they will have accommodated all of the aspects of human experience that these emotional concepts refer to.

Consumer psychologists should study emotion for a variety of reasons:

- a) It's an important and pervasive aspect of behavior and experience that received some very intense and continuing study by basic psychologists.
- b) If we are to act on the combined experience of basic and consumer psychology in regard to the poor performance of generalized person descriptors (e.g., traits, attitudes) in explaining behavior, we will turn our attention to constructs such as emotion that refer to states rather than traits.
- c) "Affect" appears in a number of important contexts in consumer psychology,

for example, in discussions of involvement, attitude, and the "hierarchy of effects" model of advertising effects. All of these discussions seem to consider a unidimensional affect--approaching/withdrawing or liking/disliking. Our dialogues and theories will be enriched if we substitute the multi-faceted concept of emotion for affect.

d) Another way of expressing the previous point is to ask where emotion belongs in our models of behavior. Putting aside the 560 "emotional concepts" as likely to contain overlap and duplication typical of everyday language, we can still ask: Where do the three dozen or so subcategories of human experience, which my content analysis of the 560 concepts yielded, belong in our behavioral models? With an eye to encompassing these varied human experiences within my own behavioral model (Fennell 1980a, b, 1981), I ask questions such as:

- 1) Is susceptibility to behavioral activation lessened/augmented in the presence of certain emotional states? Which states? Which motivation classes?
- 2) How are the various emotional states coordinated to the seven motivation classes?
- 3) How are search and judgment processes affected by mood? By motivation class?
- 4) Which motivational states accompany the outcomes of search and judgment?
- 5) Which states may characterize the search and judgment processes?
- 6) Which states accompany perception/evaluation of behavioral outcome?
- 7) What are the antecedent conditions for various pleasant emotional states?

e) Marketing practitioners recurringly turn to physiological measurements for diagnostic and evaluative purposes. Psychology's work on the physiological correlates of emotional experience is relevant background for judging the state of the art.

f) A final reason for studying emotion is to move our work as marketing practitioners from its present heavy reliance on empiricism to greater use of conceptual frameworks and the systematic approaches such frameworks make possible. If marketers are to find in our behavioral models a useful guide to exploring consumer wants and understanding consumer decision processes, our models must move closer to reflecting the richness and variety of human behavior than they do at present. Bringing to bear our perspectives as consumer psychologists and the useful pressure of real-world accountability, we are well-situated to make a contribution to the psychology of emotion. Both interest and potential for contribution are present in regard to topics such as:

1. Emotion and cognition. Is a meaning analysis (good/bad/neutral for me) part of perception or does it take appraisal in addition to perception to arise emotion? If the latter, what motivates us to appraise some stimuli? Which stimuli? Is the process of meaning analysis symmetrical for harmful and beneficial stimuli? Such questions may benefit from being pursued in a context that includes affective arousal as a means of engaging attention (Fennell, 1979).

2. Emotion and motivation. Consumer psychologists will be interested to read the arguments supporting each of the widely diverging positions to be found on the similarity/difference between emotion and motivation. From our perspective,

each term can serve its own distinctive purpose: Emotion in representing the meaning to the person of events in the person's environment, events that may have implications for any aspect of the behavioral decision process--motivation, search, judgment, evaluation; Motivation in representing conditions activating forms of behavior. Consumer psychologists interested in implementing the marketing concept will want to study, in particular, those conditions that may be expected to arouse unpleasant emotion yet do not result in overt behavior.

3. Emotion and action tendency. While retaining the distinction between emotion and motivation, is it possible to include the arousal of an action tendency in the definition of emotion? Possibly, if by action tendency we mean "action implications" and understand that when the indication is that action is required (as distinct from an indication that no action is required) it may be the end state of action rather than the specific responses appropriate to present circumstances that is at issue. The "wish" should be considered in this connection and is of particular interest to marketers who may be the means of effecting technological realizations of consumers' unmet wishes.

4. Positively toned emotions. Some students of emotion note psychologists' neglect of pleasant emotional experiences. Consumer psychologists have an interest in remedying this state of affairs. In addition to "consumer satisfaction" as a goal, why not think in terms of consumer delight, joy, elation? We must, then, address ourselves to uncovering the antecedents of different pleasant states?

5. Emotion and behavior. The consumer psychologist's interest in studying emotion as a contemporaneous determinant of behavior brings a perspective to the study of emotion which, if not unique, has not been stressed by students of emotion up to now. Specifically, an approach to emotion that associates particular emotional experiences with aspects of the behavioral decision process, in the manner I described, has not been proposed before.

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