

# EMOTION RESEARCH

## A Primer of the Underlying Psychology



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Researchers fundamentally agree that emotions and rational thought are primary influencers of behavior. When it comes to emotion-based research, there are many perspectives for what approach one might take. While marketing research has recognized the value of emotions for some time, every new research project tends to open more questions about appropriate methods, strategies and interpretation of results. To that end, it can be quite confusing for the “beginner” in carving their way through the plethora of research options. Likewise, listening to consultants discuss various approaches can be difficult without a basic understanding of the psychology underlying different approaches.

To assist the researcher in assessing different approaches, this document provides a short overview of the psychology underlying different approaches to applying emotive research to solve consumer product and marketing research problems.

# Approaches to Emotive Research

**Two distinct philosophical approaches exist to measure and gain insights into how experienced emotions affect behavior, Dimensional and Discrete.** These two approaches stem from very fundamental differences (psychology theories and models) for how emotions are believed to drive behaviors.

## Dimensional States

Approach one is to focus on Emotions as DIMENSIONAL states. The best example of this approach is the PAD Model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). This model views emotions as psychological states comprised of three dimensions: pleasure (positive, negative), arousal (intensity), and dominance (freedom to act). Pleasure is believed to be the most important dimension in motivating approach-avoidance behavior. The standard 9-point hedonic scale can be viewed as an integrated measurement of pleasure and arousal. However, it falls short as an accurate measure of emotion (and motivation to behave) when dominance contributes to behavior.

The strength of this approach is in its simplicity. However, this is also its weakness. For example, research using this approach cannot distinguish between a person's mood and emotion as a motivation for behavior – they will be confounded in any research design. In application, this approach leads to research designs where many questions are asked to generate indices (e.g. averaging mean scores to several questions, each using the same agreement scale) that characterize each of these three emotive dimensions.

## Discrete States

Approach two is to focus on Emotions as DISCRETE states with specific emotions eliciting specific behaviors. Further, discrete emotions may be experienced concurrently and/or in sequence. Researchers who subscribe to this philosophy will design research to find the cause and effect relationships between specific emotions, their underlying causes or triggers, and their resulting motivations for behaviors. Some selected publications of psychology theory and/or application examples of the discrete approach follow:

- **Attributional Theory** (Weiner, 1985) characterizes specific discrete emotions to be elicited from the attainment or non-attainment of valued goals or expectations, whether the discrepancy is caused by the individual or someone else, the controllability of events, and the stability of situations to reoccur.
- **Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory** (Lazarus 1991) associates specific discrete emotions to specific action tendencies. This theory is based upon work by Frijda (1986) that views emotions as a felt state of



action readiness (i.e., approach, readiness, being with, protection, avoidance, attending, rejection, disinterest, antagonism, interruption, and inhibition) and that specific discrete emotions can be predicted from action readiness cues. Peter Desmet (2003) extended this theory into a framework where the immediate concerns and expectations at a point of appraisal elicit specific discrete emotions. Various emotive topologies (lists and definitions of discrete emotions) are summarized by Desmet (2005).

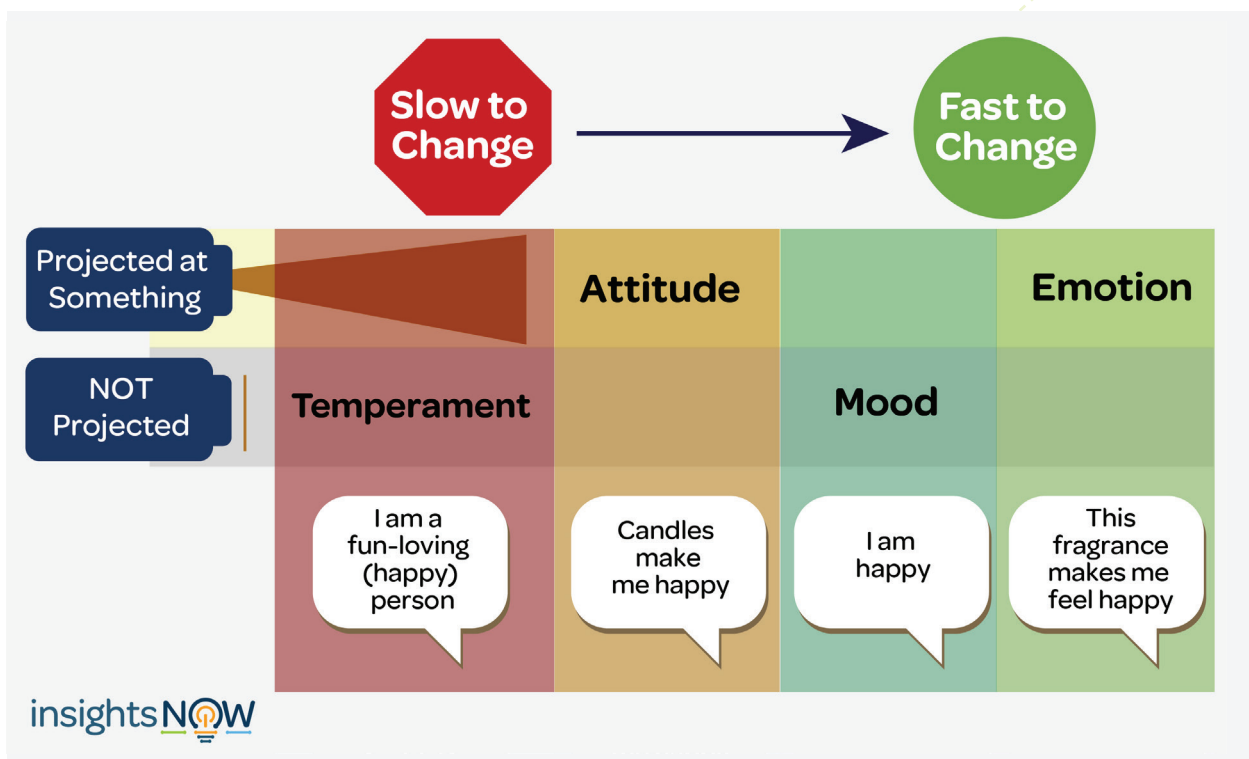
- **Communicative Emotive Theory** (Oatley and Johnson-Laird 1987) view discrete emotions to be elicited from conscious or unconscious appraisals that “alert” our cognitive system or others of a change in expectations or goal attainment, preparing us for action. Higgins (1997) has developed a theory for the development of promotional or avoidance personality traits with motivation to respectively approach desired or avoid negative end states or situations. Pleasure, for example, may be elicited by achieving or avoiding behaviors by those with promotional or avoidance personalities.

Recent work (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 1999) shows some discrete emotions such as regret (or rejoicing), disappointment (or elation) and dissatisfaction (or satisfaction) to be associated with the process of making choice decisions. These emotions have been shown to lead to switching behaviors and tendencies to complain.



# Emotions, Moods, Attitudes, and Temperament

**The discrete approach allows the researcher to separate emotions from other forms of human affect,** i.e. moods, attitudes and temperament (see Figure 1). Moods are diffuse feelings, not projected at any specific object or person, and not associated with specific behavioral intentions. For example, “happy” is a persistent state of feeling, and neither projected nor associated with behavioral readiness or intention to act. This is distinct from “enjoyment,” an emotion projected on an experience. Attitudes are different from discrete emotions as they are more persistent rationalizations (not fleeting) about specific objects or a person. You can rationally state a held attitude that you enjoy a specific experience without feeling an enjoyment emotion in the moment of the experience. Finally, temperament is a personality trait such as being a glass half full or empty type of person.



Temperament impacts the mood states that people find themselves in. Temperament can also orient people to various negative or positive attitudes about products, experiences, and social relationships. Attitudes and moods can also impact emotions through priming, i.e. context -specific factors that orienting people to experience specific emotions, and to indirectly influence the formation of expectations, perceptions and judgments (Frijda, 1993; Raghunatham and Pham, 1999). For example, a state of anxiety (a mood) might heighten feelings of fear and prime avoidance tendencies.

# Anticipated and Anticipation Emotions

In 1995, Gleicher et al. put forth a revolutionizing theory for how “prefactuals” lead to anticipation emotions. Prefactuals were defined as imaginations of what an experience might yield (i.e. regret if an alternative choice is made) and are shown to be important at the point of choice decisions. Regret may be associated with a decision that does not avoid a negative or fails to achieve a positive experience. This theory eventually replaced the behavioral intentions model (i.e. expectations drive behavior) based in part on what was called the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen; 1985, 1988, 1991).

This theory has since given rise to the field of prospection—the study of mental acts in simulating and anticipating the future (Seligman, et al., 2013). Research has long shown how prospective thinking involves anticipated emotions and anticipation emotions. Bagozzi, Baumgartner and Pieters (1998) developed a behavioral intentions model where anticipated emotions are elicited during appraisal of a goal situation. This model was being extended to include specific emotions that yield specific behavioral intentions. Bagozzi et al. (2005) proposed that positive and negative anticipation emotions lead to the formation of desires to take action and possess. This includes the anticipation emotions of hope for a desired functional, sensorial or social outcome, or intrigue that a desired outcome will be surprising or exciting. Therefore, anticipated emotions are desired outcomes of feeling such as desiring or expecting to feel pleasantly surprised when unwrapping a gift. This is distinct from anticipation emotions which are projected feelings elicited from prospection, i.e. feeling pleasantly surprised when unwrapping a gift.

Anticipation emotions can also form an eliciting condition for different in-the -moment experience emotions. While hope can be elicited when the anticipation is pleasurable. At a point of experience, anticipated emotions for pleasure can lead to disappointment (from dashed hope). Conversely, fear can be elicited when the anticipation is unpleasant or even painful. At the point of experience, the avoidance of anticipated emotions can lead to relief (from unrealized fears).



# Desires and Disgusts

**The two strongest motivators of product purchase and use behavior are the anticipation emotions of desire and disgust.**

Desire is defined as an anticipation emotion with the eliciting condition to want something strongly, e.g. seeking to possess a product. Belk et al (2005) characterized desire as driven by social trends (fads and fashions), lack of self-control (indulgence), novelty, ambiguity, paradox affinity, deservingness and hedonism. Desire during prospection can be elicited from primes formed from past experiences leading to anticipated emotions of intrigue and excitement with the promise of a positive, unique experience. In addition, feelings of desire can lead to feelings of guilt when self-indulgence is perceived attitudinally as negative. At the point of experience, this guilt may turn to a feeling of shame.

Disgust is defined as an anticipation emotion with the eliciting condition to want to avoid something, e.g. seeking to distance oneself from a person or product. According to Curtis and de Barra (2018) cues that signal disgust can be categorized as projected on Animals or Insects, Atypical Appearances, Food Spoilage, Hygiene Displays, Lesions (i.e. visible forms of infection) and Sexual Behaviors.



# Measurement of Emotions through Implicit Testing

**The strength of the discrete approach is in the ability to gain insights into the causes and effects of behavioral motivations by relating specific situations, product attributes, attitudes and temperament to emotions.** This allows researchers to gain insights to impact how product developers and marketers develop and market consumer products.

Lundahl and Stucky (2020) broke through the challenge of capturing fast and fleeting discrete emotions with the Implicit / Explicit Test™. This method calibrates a person's reaction time to semantic stimulus and then uses metaphor projections to ensure recall of the experienced emotions can be provided. This further extended the field of emotions research by moving past just the rational explanation of how a product makes a person feel to identifying which emotions each person feels implicitly when having an experience.

In application, the discrete approach leads to the formation of rich themes that characterize the possible causes and effects leading to behavioral motivations through the formation of specific emotions selected from a topology of standard emotions with known causes and motivational effects.





# Summary

**A review of the psychology literature shows a wide range of emotions can be formed during consumer product experiences.** The marketing and consumer product researcher is challenged to select an approach to emotive research that is both simple in design, yet sufficient to capture meaningful insights. Empirical evidence is growing that distinctly different processes are involved in the formation of specific, discrete emotions. These processes are complex, depending on expectations, concerns, and perceptions that are often mitigated by mood, personality, self-social identity, time-style and/or the anticipation of emotions. In application, a dimensional approach is proving itself insufficient to capture this complexity for meaningful insights. For this reason, the psychology field has moved strongly in favor of a discrete approach to gain insights into consumer behavior (see Lazarus, 1991; Frijda, 1993; Bagozzi et al., 2000).

A discrete approach requires direct or indirect measurement of discrete emotions and a framework to convert results into meaningful insights. In order to capture emotions we must either use a physiological approach using technology like facial recognition to capture valence combined with some generalized discreteness, OR we need a semantic approach that allows people to quickly characterize their emotions. Physiological techniques that attempt to read facial expressions, track changes to the eye, and monitor physiological change are still advancing to be able to capture a full set of discrete emotions. Rational semantic -based questionnaires are poor at assessing what discrete emotions are elicited at the point of a product experience.

To get to a more complete read of discrete emotions we need to identify the implicit nature of the emotion and we need to do this quickly. If your study allows you to record emotions while experiencing the stimulus then an implicit/explicit semantic approach works well. When you can't be completing a questionnaire while experiencing the product, then projecting your emotions (to an image) is a well -proven psychological approach to improving the clarity of recalling and rating those fast fleeting and less impactful emotions (InsightsNow 2021).

Relating discrete emotional experiences to behavioral, attitudinal, sensory cues, and other underlying factors driving discrete emotions is proving itself as a valuable approach to achieve the level of meaningful insights required by brand owners and product developers.

A discrete approach to emotive research is enabling a more strategic product development process. Emotive research changes the product development paradigm for how decisions are made by gaining insights into the "whys" of consumer behavior. A discrete approach allows for the formation of "emotive themes" that are built from expressed cause and effect relationships among discrete feelings and underlying factors such as concerns, expectations, and perceptions of product qualities. By gaining emotional insights into the whys of behavior, strategy is developed leading to more accurate decisions in the design, development, and marketing of consumer products.

*Reach out to us to learn more!*



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