LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY
THE RETAIL INSTITUTE

THE FUTURE CONSUMER: EMOTIONS, POPULISM & THE ENVIRONMENT

CONSUMER OF THE FUTURE
ANNUAL REPORT

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Introduction

Emotions influence our behaviour and our decisions. They help us to appraise and summarise an experience in order to inform our actions[1]. Although we are often unaware of the impact of emotions on our decisions, they are an important part of the shopping experience. What is less clear is the relationship between emotions and other factors that appear to be involved in our behaviour as citizens and consumers. For example, how do our values and preferences interact with emotions in different markets or other contexts?

Another question relates to how we use evidence in our decisions and how emotions either adjudicate between different evidence sources or override that evidence altogether. This is relevant to both our understanding of consumer behaviour in general as well as the specific context of packaging and the environment. Such considerations must take account of the influences on people's perceptions of products, brands and social issues. Some current social trends suggest that the way people form opinions and make decisions could be changing.

As we reported in our Consumer of the Future report in 2017, consumers in the UK and elsewhere are using the internet more, to research goods as well as buy them. The range of functional, ethical and value-based criteria that consumers use is, in some contexts, making purchase decisions more sophisticated. Sharing information with peers and interactions with manufacturers and retailers has also increased expectations and changed habits with regard to researching what to buy.

These trends have intensified the scrutiny on businesses, particularly with regard to sustainability issues. The distribution of stories and images of environmental problems helps to mobilise and intensify opinions. Demands on governments and businesses to act on climate change and pollution can sometimes appear to be based more on emotions than on a complete consideration of objective evidence.

This report looks at the role of emotions in individual behaviour and social trends. It draws lessons from the political world where emotions and evidence are in constant conflict in the struggle to decide on what we believe and what should happen. The increasing influence on international politics of populist ideas and methods is a strong example of that conflict. We also look at methods of researching emotions in the business context and at the ways that academics attempt to define and classify the relationship between emotions and a variety of consumer contexts. We use these learnings to understand how people consume products and use packaging in relation to the environment and the circular economy. An appreciation of how people form their views and the role that emotion plays in that process is key to packaging design and effective communication to consumers.

Politics, Populism & the Environment

Politics is about the resolution of conflicting views and the environment is a political issue. Conflict comes from competing interests and differences over the use of resources. Debates over the environmental advantages and disadvantages of using different packaging materials demonstrate this point. The advantages of recyclability and re-usability are up against arguments on energy consumption and the circular economy. Which side wins might depend on how effectively a person or group expresses their view. Although clear, objective evidence can be persuasive, values-based and emotional language are also effective. Whether or not this seems fair may depend on your own viewpoint. Nonetheless, if we are to communicate effectively with consumers and other stakeholders, it helps to appreciate how emotions interact with values and other, more practical, considerations. There are also global social, economic and political trends that are influencing how people understand and form opinions about the world.

Populism is a trend that is influencing public discourse in many countries. It is associated with both left- and right-wing political movements that tend to use anti-establishment rhetoric in calling for social and economic change. Arguably, populism follows, and runs counter to, the dominant governance paradigm of the 1980s onwards, which encouraged the use of networks, markets and other business-like processes in public administration. Populism approaches the task of government quite differently as it characterises networks and markets as blocking the will of the people.

Examples of attacks on mainstream ideas include US President Donald Trump's call for a "draining of the swamp" and UK Government minister Michael Gove complaining, "We have had enough of experts"[2].

"Populism needs to be challenged by moral, emotion and human arguments."

To some extent, populism rejects ideas associated with public education as it considers people as already sufficiently informed to make wise decisions. Populists, therefore, claim to trust people more than experts and distrust expertise because of its potential exploitation by politicians.

Selective use of evidence within governments and apparent close connections between policy and businesses contribute to this trend for disregarding evidence. In response to this analysis, Gerry Stoker, Professor of Governance at the University of Southampton, suggests, "Populism needs to be challenged by moral, emotion and human arguments. What is needed is mainstream political leadership that is willing and able to make the moral as well as the practical arguments"[3].

These issues are pertinent to environmental politics and the debate around plastic packaging. It is an area where scientific evidence has particularly important role. However, uncertainty associated with forecasting and the scepticism linked to vested business interests provides scope for each side of the argument to dismiss any evidence put forward.

Different interest groups also seem to find it difficult to get environmental issues discussed sufficiently at the governmental level. Following the recent strike by schoolchildren, which called for governments to act on climate change, only a small proportion of MPs attended the subsequent debate in the UK parliament[4]. The results of a recent study[5] of political speeches and interviews with politicians indicate that while most politicians understand the need for urgent action on climate change, they find it hard to make the case for it. The research by Lancaster University and Green Alliance suggests three reasons for this:

- Climate is not a mainstream political issue.
- Politicians feel very little pressure from their electorate to act on climate change.
- Climate change, as a complex, global issue, does not fit well within the daily practice of life in parliament.

The perception among politicians is that mostly affluent, educated city dwellers, are vocal advocates of climate action but climate change is a non-issue for the overwhelming majority of people. There is also a tendency for policy makers to favour immediate, technical solutions over the full implications of climate change for society.

Populism presents a further challenge for environmental campaigners and anyone seeking evidence-based decision making on such a complex issue. Researchers looking at the politics of sustainable energy observe that climate change policies and climate change science are now subject to 'post-truth politics', the notion that truth can be challenged and argued over[6].

Narrative story telling is an effective way to generate strong visualisation. More vivid imagined scenarios will create a stronger emotional response.

In addition, anyone seeking to have a voice in policy discourse must compete with other trends such as growing inequality, an increasingly fractioned media landscape and declining trust in science. By portraying climate change science as being part of the 'politics of consensus', populists discredit it as elitist political correctness as a way of distancing themselves from established political parties[7].

Politics and emotions

These insights show the importance of understanding the electorate in terms of both their attitudes and how they respond to different forms of communication. Emotions can also influence these processes depending on individual values and the way that problems and their associated solutions are articulated. A recent study of political behaviour uses sophistication level (political involvement) to distinguish between people, finding that the impact of emotions depends on individual political involvement. Specifically, shame was more likely to change the political behaviour of people with more sophisticated views while anger was more likely to change those with lower levels of prior involvement[8]. Those experiencing shame may have greater awareness of social norms whereas anger reduces thoughtfulness and risk-aversion.

Political communication that provokes such emotions, therefore, will be more or less effective depending on the depth of knowledge people have about the issue. With regard to the environment, it is possible to imagine situations where people could be 'shamed' into action (e.g. recycling or purchasing an eco-friendly product) by a demonstration of the negative impact of non-action.

Alternatively, stories of environmental damage or, conversely, the negative economic impact of switching to a pro-environmental alternative could anger someone with less environmental awareness. Political communication has many similarities with marketing, both in terms of the techniques used and the changes experienced in communication channel usage. We already know that social media has handed power to consumers by giving them the ability to scrutinise products, share experiences and interact directly with companies. It has also created a shift in the power of political interest groups by weakening the impact of traditional communication channels and enabling the mobilisation of grass roots campaign activities.

Recent research studying this trend has noted the growing pluralisation of the online media environment. The impact of this, combined with content sharing are key to understanding how fringe political actors can appear to popularise 'extreme' positions. However, this is just one phenomenon among many generated by the social media age and there are few universal truths and great inconsistency to be found when analysing relationships between social media use and political opinions[9].

There is more clarity when it comes to learning how to present political messages to the public. A study published recently in the International Journal of Advertising has noted the importance helping people to visualise potential outcomes[10].

This could either be the outcome of no action or the result of a proposed policy to avoid that outcome. The researchers expect that people experience emotional reactions to these imagined futures, which in a political context could relate to voting for a particular individual or party. These reactions will guide subsequent behaviour.

Narrative story telling is an effective way to generate strong visualisation. This may consist of chronological descriptions of events, establishing causality and adding superfluous contextual details. The research found that political information delivered in a narrative format was more persuasive than a non-narrative format because they could see the events within the 'story' as being more personally relevant.

Drawing people into such narratives stimulates emotions and more vivid imagined scenarios will create a stronger emotional response. In the political context of this research, narrative approaches generated by visualisation could inspire greater enthusiasm or anger about political candidates.

Emotional reactions are faster than cognitive appraisals, meaning they usually precede decision-making.

The authors of this study further highlight the importance of emotions in decision-making, observing that emotional reactions are typically faster than cognitive appraisals, which means that they usually precede decision-making. The emotional experience then guides subsequent behaviour, as a person tries to act in relation to a projected future. While some emotions such as enthusiasm and anger may drive action, others such as anxiety may encourage abstention. Apart from the narrative approach, other kinds of message that can encourage visualisation include sensory cues and specific words or phrases that are already loaded with meaning and associations.

The political behaviour of voting is comparable to forms of action in other domains. For example, similar types of message can generate responses that could lead to pro-environmental behaviour through similar mechanisms. Some of the literature that inspired this study is from research into consumer behaviour. It follows that the findings of this work are applicable to consumer contexts, although care is required in understanding which emotions are associated with particular circumstances.

Emotions, Consumers & Marketing

Salespeople understand that purchase decisions are naturally psychological and emotional. In his 1995 book on Advanced Selling Strategies, Sales guru Brian Tracy advocated highlighting those perceived benefits of a product that trigger an emotional response[11]. He contended:

> "All buying decisions are emotional because people are completely emotional in everything they say and do. They decide emotionally and justify logically. They usually make their decisions quickly, even instantaneously, and then spend a good deal of time rationalizing and justifying why they have decided to act in a certain way."

He also said that desire for gain and the fear of loss are the main motivators. These views are similar to findings of psychological research, which shows that people justify their choices even when manipulated into making that choice[12]. Turning intentions into desired behaviour, a process that does not always happen easily, is a common problem faced by retailers and brand owners. For example, behavioural scientist Bob Nease argues, "There is a persistent and sizable gap between our intentions and our brains" because of our unconscious brain operates much faster than the conscious part of our brain. His recommendations are to 1) 'make the right thing really easy' (or automatic), and 2) 'make the wrong thing really difficult', such as moving unhealthy food out of reach or social shaming[13]. Arguably, these solutions are ways of minimising loss or maximising gain and therefore appeal to those emotions of fear and desire.

Desire and fear are both emotions that are concerned with something that might happen in the future. Does this mean our current emotions or our anticipated emotions guide behaviour? A meta-analysis of research into the impact of emotions on judgement and behaviour looked at this question[14]. It adjudicates between the idea that behaviour follows from a current emotional state and the idea that people learn to anticipate what actions will result in which emotions. Anticipated emotion has received less attention from researchers, possibly because they are less obvious in the behavioural moment. The theory suggests that conscious emotion serves as a feedback system that highlights evaluative reactions to behaviours and drives retrospective thinking.

Anticipated emotion is more likely than current emotion to guide behaviour.

The findings of the meta-analysis supported both theories of current and anticipated emotion. While current emotional state does contribute to behaviour and judgement, anticipated emotion is more likely (87% of studies compared with 22% of studies for current emotion) to predict a relationship between a situation and a behaviour or judgement. Researchers suggest, "Instead of emotion driving behavior, behavior may seek and pursue emotional outcomes"[15].

There is evidence[16] of anticipated emotions influencing behavioural intention to consume filled chocolates. However, contextual factors such as local culture can still influence consumer behaviour and the study found different influences in a comparison of Belgian and Hungarian consumers.

Emotional and control beliefs were more likely to influence Belgian consumers while Hungarian consumers were also driven by the opinions of family and friends. The difference may be because filled chocolate is more associated with luxury and status in Hungary compared with Belgium. Nonetheless, anticipated emotion had a positive effect on intention for both nationalities. There are different suggested marketing approaches based on these findings on anticipated emotions in different cultural settings. The task in Belgium is to convince consumers of the pleasure derived from the moment of eating chocolate while the emphasis for Hungary should be on joyful shared experiences with friends and family.

The findings of marketing research into emotions are numerous and are often context dependent. They provide great insight into the feelings and thoughts of customers during the process of making purchase decisions. Three examples demonstrate the variety of settings in which emotion insight is applied. These include the emotions triggered in purchasing luxury items, the emotions involved in communications between consumers (i.e. in user reviews) and the emotions to target when attempting the creation of memorable shopping experiences.

Emotion contributes to the development of preferences, pre and post-purchase evaluation, quality ratings, willingness to buy and pay, attitudes towards a brand and purchase intent.

In the first example, a survey of luxury shoppers highlighted the value of high-end brands associating with arts projects. This is a way of deriving emotional value through engagement with individual passions and the need to stand out[17]. As hedonic value is integral to the luxury brand experience, arts activities can build emotional connections to the brand. In the second example, businesses (in this case, restaurants) learned about customer decisions through sentiment analysis of social media behaviour and online reviews[18]. Marketing researchers contend that this approach, which involves detecting positive and negative opinions in choice of language, is more effective than surveys for analysing emotions in clients' views on the services they use. The third example shows that appealingly designed shopping environments create positive emotional responses. These, in turn, generate positive behavioural intentions. In this case, researchers found that the use of natural features in a shopping mall – plants, trees, gardens and water fountains – created positive moods in customers, which is a strong predictor of purchase intention.

To increase shopping satisfaction, it is important that people associate their positive mood with the store environment. These brief examples show the diversity of settings where emotional engagement is important. The following case study provides a detailed example of the relationship between different stimuli and emotional responses.

Emotion valence and loyalty intentions

Marketing research often has to consider the part emotions play in the relationships that affect consumer decisions. Whether it is developing a brand affiliation, loyalty to a particular company or simply making a choice between products, it is possible to discern particular factors, or combinations of factors, that produce certain outcomes. A good example of this is the way that the effectiveness of service delivery interacts with consumer goals and effort to produce different degrees of emotional response (emotion valence). This effect determines future intentions to use the same product, service or brand again.

Research by The Retail Institute's Professor Raj Nath and colleagues from two other UK business schools[19] has investigated how goals, service efficacy and emotions interact to influence loyalty intentions. The study sought to adjudicate between two discrete theories.

Firstly, the goal-directed model states that consumers' effort, engagement and expectations of firms depend on the extent that they are able to achieve their goals through their relationship with the firm. The goal attainment of individual customers, therefore, is crucial to the way that firms influence emotions.

On the other hand, the theory of agency of causation suggests that goal attainment is not the determinant of emotion valence as the effectiveness of both consumers and firms during the interaction plays a major role. Agency of causation could relate to a positive/negative service experience delivered by the firm, such as delivering an item early/late or could be generated by the consumer, such as organising to get a car repaired (positive) or a losing a receipt when a clothing item needs to be returned.

The diagram in figure 1 shows how the two theories interact to hypothesise a range of positive (gratitude, trust and commitment) and negative (grudge and guilt) emotional responses, which, in turn, create different future intentions.

To test the model, Professor Nath and his colleagues undertook a controlled experimental scenario where 284 subjects participated in a study that involved different service delivery situations (positive and negative) with a hypothetical insurance firm. The scenario involved a fictitious firm that offered a 24-hour replacement service for laptop computers as part of its gadget insurance policy. The study found that the both the levels of goal attainment and agency of causation have a significant influence on how consumers develop emotion valence and subsequently influence behavioural intentions.

Professor Nath and his colleagues describe emotions as providing the fuel to bring about effective action. Positive emotions lead to continuous goal pursuit while negative emotions lead to people avoiding the undesired outcomes associated with recent goal failures. Not all positive emotions are strong enough to determine consumer intentions. The marketing literature defines emotions such as happiness, pride and satisfaction as too mild to produce such outcomes. Gratitude, trust and commitment are the positive emotions that are strong enough to enhance future intentions.

The implications of this research are that companies develop their services around customers' intrinsic motivation in pursuing a goal with a firm. This could mean investment in infrastructure or employee training to ensure positive emotional responses or customer education and compensation vouchers to avoid or limit negative responses. A strong understanding within firms of their customers' goal requirements aids the delivery of expected outcomes. Goal directed behaviour is highly emotional, meaning that it is important to consider the psychological mechanisms that enhance or reduce consumers' future intentions with a firm.

Figure 1: Hypothesized model to explore relationships between goal attainment, agency of causation, and consumption based emotions (reproduced from McKechnie et al, 2018)
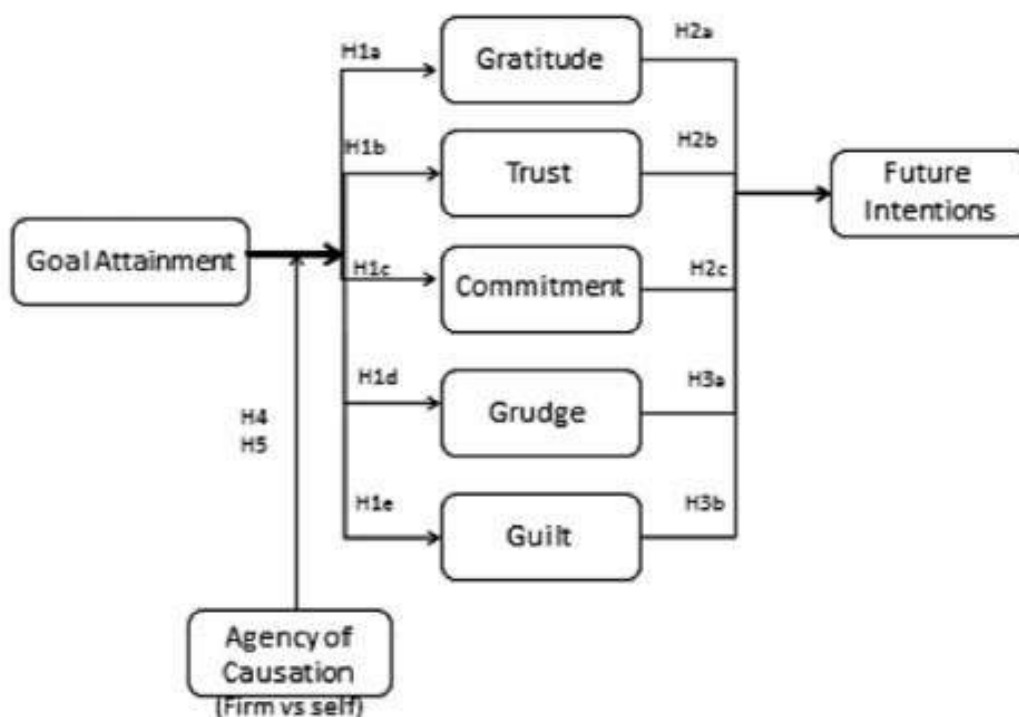
Emotions and Sensory Marketing

Charles Darwin in his "Origin of Species" describes emotion as an evolutionary communication mechanism that transcends both language and species. This has been examined within the product evaluation literature as academics capture facial expressions as an evaluative tool. However, one's perception of a facial expression may be subjective. For example, a person who may look bored during product evaluation may have a negative mood or be tired. Meanwhile, self-report measures of emotion may not always reflect a person's actual emotional state. This highlights emotion as a complex phenomenon that is difficult to observe. Despite this, most scholars view emotion in three parts: a subjective experience, an expressive component and a physiological component. Emotion is also often confused and the words affect, mood and emotion are used interchangeably when they actually describe distinct constructs.

Mood is a general feeling state that is not specific to an event whereas affect is specific to an event. Consider one of your shoppers entering a store. Prior to entering the store, this customer will have a specific mood; they may be happy, anxious or sad. While walking around the store this customer will experiences changes in affect as a result of what is experienced within that store such as excitement when they get a bargain or frustration when a product is out of stock. Emotion considers both affect and mood together; it is the total feeling state a person is in during the decision making process[20].

Early consumer behaviour theory suggested that emotional experience is generated through our perceptions of physiological sensations of the body[21], which has since been supported by a wide range of studies exploring emotion within the sensory marketing context.

Preferences form based on the emotional response to an object, environment or person. Negative emotion results in long-term avoidance behaviours.

However, the competing view in the neurobiology literature posits that is not our physiological sensations that triggers emotional responses but is instead the thalamus within the brain, which activates a subjective emotion experience triggering associated bodily changes[22].As this view has also received extensive support within the literature, it is likely that a synthesis of physiological and neurobiological factors contribute to our subjective emotional response. This article will take the physiological sensation view.

How does emotion affect buyer behaviour in the sensory marketing context?

Many academics support the view that emotion is an important factor contributing to the decision making process. Zajonc[23] even describes emotion as inescapable and irrevocable. Some even argue that most of our choices are based upon our emotional state[24]. It is clear that emotion is used as information in the decision making process but it has been difficult to establish which emotions influence what behaviour and how. This is because emotion is not a binary concept (such as happy vs sad); often, emotion is measured as varying degrees of pleasure and arousal, which together form the core of all emotional responses.

Emotion plays an important role in developing behavioural outcomes as a result of sensory stimulation. Sensory stimuli contribute an emotive response that influences quality ratings alongside more traditional indicators such as perceived reliability, workmanship, price and brand reputation. Emotional responses as a result of past brand interaction moderates the relationship between emotion and brand perception revealing that one's past emotional response with a brand impacted quality ratings. Therefore, improving the emotional experience for a product may not necessarily improve quality ratings if those prior ratings were negative. This suggests that the initial sensory experience must generate a positive emotion, as a negative emotional response is difficult for a brand to overcome.

Sensory Mismatch & Emotion

Emotional responses to a retail environment shape attitudes. The work of Lunardo reveals that a sensory mismatch in a store generates an inference of manipulative intent. This reduces the perceived integrity of that retailer which in turn leads to significantly more negative attitudes toward that retailer[25]. An example of this in Lunardo's study is when a consumer could smell freshly baked bread upon entering a supermarket, an expectation was set that there would be a bakery in the store. When there is no bakery, or alternative explanation for the scent, the consumer might become confused or frustrated leading to negative attitudes.

Emotional responses to sensory stimuli also affect product evaluations. Ludden and colleagues attempted to induce a surprise response in their experiment by altering tactile attributes of products. The results revealed that while the surprise response improved interest in the product, it also generated emotions such as confusion and irritation. These emotions had an overall negative effect on satisfaction ratings, though this diminished over time and there was no difference in memory recall among the surprise conditions. We find that it is not product attributes that are remembered but it is in fact the emotional response generated during prior evaluations that is remembered and used in subsequent evaluation. This is in line with preference formation theories. It has been argued in the literature that the formation of our preferences are driven by our, mostly negative, emotional responses[26]. We have a tendency to reject or avoid those things we most dislike.

Product Reviews in the Sensory Marketing Context & Emotion

Elsewhere, the degree to which product reviews are perceived to be positive versus negative influences an emotional response. Pleasure and arousal has been found to be highest in product reviews perceived to be positive. The greatest pleasure and arousal ratings resulted in the highest willingness to pay and willingness to buy through quality[27]. This reveals that our perception of quality is influenced by our emotional response to stimuli and occurs in both offline and online contexts.

Sensory Attributes & Emotion

A positive emotional response to tactile stimuli has been found to be more persuasive. In one study, a positive tactile element was included on a brochure, which led to those who enjoy touch for hedonic reasons donating more time and money to a charity. Peck and Wiggins[28] associated this finding to a more positive emotional state. Elsewhere, a charity seeking donations with sign-ups on a clipboard with a rough texture induced greater feelings of empathy resulting in an increase in willingness to donate to the charity[29]. It is therefore clear that tactile elements influence emotion and subsequent behaviours.

The law of contagion states that when a person or object touches another the properties from that object or person are transferred and continue to influence the target even after contact ends regardless of rationality[30].

For example, if a person perceived to be unclean touches an item of clothing you would be much less likely to try that item of clothing on due to feelings of disgust but the opposite may be true if it was an attractive person[31].

The law of contagion influences our emotional response to stimuli and has profound effects on our approach and avoidance behaviours, quality ratings and purchase intent through emotion.

Sound also has a significant impact on emotion. In a meta-analysis on the subject, Garlin and Owen[32] determined that 41% of studies which examine music in the retail environment context have considered emotion and find that music impacts one mood, arousal, pleasure, emotions and nostalgia though this is dependent upon factors such as familiarity and liking of the music. Elsewhere scent has a profound effect on emotion with consumer research from Millward Brown revealing that 75% of our emotions are influenced by scent[33].

Manipulating scent, sound, tactile elements and colour can generate emotional responses.

Perhaps the easiest way to induce post-purchase emotions is with colour. The role of colour in the formation of emotions has been explored extensively. For example, advertisements with a high colour saturation induce feelings of excitement, which in turn increases likeability. Lower colour saturation induces feelings of relaxation and increased value perceptions[34]. Elsewhere, cool colours create a more relaxing atmosphere which increased the purchases made in that environment[35] and longer colour wavelengths (those closest to red) increase arousal while shorter wavelengths (those closest to blue) increased pleasure[36]. Interestingly, lower wavelength colours such as blue reduce the perceived loading times of websites through relaxation which in turn influenced recommendation likelihood[37]. The emotions generated by colour influence behaviours such as purchase intent and willingness to pay. However, Chebat and Morrin[38] found that colour influenced quality perception but not mood suggesting that colour may go through rational rather than affective routes.

The role of cognition

While it is clear emotion has a significant impact on consumer behaviour it is important to also recognise the role of cognition, or rational thought in the decision making process. Traditional consumer behaviour models suggest a hierarchy-of-effects such that rational evaluation is followed by emotional evaluation, which together contribute to behavioural change; rational thought both mediates emotion and directs it[39]. This may be true for higher involvement decisions such as the purchase of a car or mortgage but it is argued that lower involvement decisions such as the purchase of a chocolate bar or our groceries or expressive purchases require little rational thought and as a result are mainly driven by emotion. In fact some scholars argue that the role of cognition in the decision making process is often overstated. This is because people believe that they should act rationally and rationalise decisions post-hoc to deal with post-decision/purchase feelings of guilt, anxiety and regret when looking in hindsight[40].

Emotions & Sensory Marketing - Summary

It is clear that emotion plays a key role in the consumer decision-making process both at pre- and post-purchase stages. A wide body of literature suggests that emotion is the greatest contributor in the development of preferences, product/service evaluations and perceived quality to name but a few. While there remains competing views as to what generates our emotions it is clear that physiological sensations have an impact. Retailers and product manufacturers can build sensory elements into their stores, packaging and marketing communications to induce positive emotions associated with the brand. Doing so could create the "right first impression" and develop a preference for your brand.

Consumer Emotions and the Environment

This report has so far discussed how the environment consists of political, value-laden and emotional issues. It has also demonstrated how people's emotions interact with stimuli in making decisions about goods and services. The relationship between packaging and the environment, especially concerns about consumer ethics and recycling, brings political and marketing research together. The two areas already share ideas about communication. For example, research on political communication shows that engaging emotions helps people to visualise potential futures. People may find some environmental issues, such as global warming, particularly hard to visualise, especially in terms of the relationship between everyday activities and outcomes that may take decades to unfold. Other issues – such as ocean plastic pollution – are now much easier to visualise and this has created an emotional response among many people.

This raises the question of how important pre-existing values are to attitudes and behaviour. How do values relating to the environment interact with emotions? In addition, what does our understanding of consumer emotions and environmental ethics suggest about the best way to communicate the eco-friendly attributes of products and the most environmentally friendly domestic practices?

Concepts used in marketing research, such as anticipated emotions, can help to explain issues such as the slow adoption of sustainable products. Research supports the notion that anticipated emotions are strongly relevant to pro-environmental decision-making. In one study in the travel and tourism context, the anticipated feeling of pride was particularly significant in choosing an environmentally friendly option[41]. A survey on a very different context of high-involvement purchasing showed that anticipated emotions influence the effect that moral norms have on consumer adoption[42]. This study investigated the likelihood of consumers adopting Alternative Fuel Vehicles (electric cars). These offer enhanced energy efficiency but consumer adoption is slow to take off, even among those holding pro-environmental views. The purpose of the investigation was to address the knowledge gap on the interplay of emotions and moral norms. In this kind of consumer scenario, it is likely that positive and negative anticipated emotions will be present simultaneously as the customer weighs up the value of purchasing a product with a potentially large positive environmental impact against any concerns there might be about the car's functionality or aesthetics.

Moral norms strengthen pro-environmental behavioural intentions indirectly through anticipated emotions.

The study built on previous research[43] on low involvement products (such as fast moving consumer goods) which suggested that moral norms strengthen pro-environmental behavioural intentions indirectly through anticipated emotions. In that study, anticipated guilt and pride simultaneously influenced the purchase of sustainable low-cost products (such as organic food) in a positive way. It follows that communication of emotional messages regarding the environment could encourage pro-environmental behaviour.

For example, the sadness and pain associated with losing rare species, the pleasure and excitement in protecting them and the pride/guilt associated with reducing/not-reducing plastic bottle usage are emotions that such messages could seek to evoke. There is evidence of the effectiveness of techniques like this in charitable fund raising[44].An important part of the moral norms that people develop about the correctness, or incorrectness, of a particular behaviour is the recognition of responsibility for actions that could be harmful in some way. Awareness of the consequences of one's own behaviour is a pre-requisite of feeling the need to engage in pro-environmental action. In the case of electric cars, awareness of environmental problems and recognition of individual responsibility for those problems is likely to activate adoption of this eco-friendly, high-end product. The study found that the stronger the personal moral norms, the less likely people are to anticipate negative emotions such as regret, embarrassment or nervousness. Individuals holding an attitude but not positive anticipated emotions are less likely act pro-environmentally and adopt a pro-environmental product. This suggests a role for engaging emotions in environmental arguments alongside more technical evidence. As the authors contend:

"This study suggests that policymakers and environmental organizations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), not only communicate the scientific results of their research on environmental issues by presenting facts and moral arguments, but also use emotional arguments and promote the positive emotions that can be associated with using sustainable products."[45]

As always with consumer research like this, there are caveats about the applicability of the findings for different categories and types of consumer. However, anticipated emotions are significant in both high- and low-involvement product categories. In terms of consumer diversity, individual attitudes, norms and responses to emotions are likely to make a difference.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is an individual-level variable that is likely to influence the relationship between personal feelings and subsequent behaviour. EI consists of the awareness of, and ability to manage, the feelings of yourself and others. These abilities have a role in ethical decision-making in that there is a proven link with beliefs about engaging in positive social actions[46]. However, the same study found that the effects of emotional intelligence on beliefs regarding pro-environmental buying are not always the same. This could be because people do not consider pro-environmental buying as ethically positive compared with pro-social behaviour. This suggests a need for more research to understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and attitudes to the environment.

Awareness of the consequences of one's own behaviour is a pre-requisite of feeling the need to engage in pro-environmental action.

Some research into the determinants of pro-environmental behaviour seek to understand relatively widespread and persistent climate change scepticism despite consensus within the scientific community. Those who are unwilling to change their pre-existing beliefs resist attempt to educate the public about human impact on the environment. Evidence suggests that individuals' ideology, rather than their knowledge, is a better predictor of climate change attitudes and behaviour[47]. This calls for emotional, rather than informational, approaches to persuasion. Research has looked at whether messages framed around hope (for a potential gain) or fear (of a potential loss) would be more effective.

Participants in the experiment read either a 'threat' message about the impact of the environment on public health or a 'control' message about the history of climate change reports. Both groups then read a second message about policies that could mitigate climate change. The solutions message produced different responses depending on which message participants read previously.

Interestingly, the solutions message evoked more fear when prefaced by the (more neutral) control message than the threat message. This is probably because those reading the threat message were relatively de-sensitised to fear compared with the control message group whose fear was aroused in the explanations of the solutions message.

Overall, the research demonstrated the importance of emotions, particularly hope, in persuading people about climate change. Framing messages about gain and loss evoke hope and fear respectively and prefacing messages with emotionally evocative content intensifies those emotions[48]. Further research published in 2018 follows a gain/loss approach to inducing emotions, showing how it is possible to influence emotions to more sustainable resource consumption[49].

REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Emotions are essential to the decisions we make and to the way we manage our relationships. Marketers, politicians and campaigners target our feelings to persuade us to behave a certain way. How we respond also depends on how our emotions interact with experiences, values and goals. Understanding this key to the design of products and retail settings and strategies for effective communication to consumers.

Within both political and marketing communications, it is important to communicate clear, objective evidence. However, values-based and emotional language are also effective, not just in trying to win an argument but also in explaining the value of objective evidence. The populist trends shows that there can be a distrust of expertise and science because of the way businesses or politicians could use it for their own gain. Those wishing to demonstrate the value of genuinely positive policies and products need to tackle that scepticism, possibly with their own moral and emotional arguments.

This report has highlighted some techniques that could be effective, depending on an appreciation of the target for communication. This includes strong visualisation and sensory engagement to stimulate the necessary emotions.

Demonstrating competent and trustworthy service ensures positive experiences and repeat custom. Articulating future emotional experiences may bring consumers closer to a purchase decision.

Researching emotions is challenging and complex. Multiple social, psychological and physiological disciplines offer different perspectives on emotional origins. An individual's emotional past, present and future all contribute to decisions, along with brands, product involvement and purchase setting. Research has highlighted the lasting importance of the initial sensory experience on emotions and the potential impact on emotions of sensory mismatch, tactile stimuli and colour. We know that people remember emotional responses to product evaluations better than they remember product attributes.

Finally, the report has considered how our knowledge of politics and consumer emotions applies to environmental issues. Research shows that emotions have a significant role in closing the attitude-behaviour gap as anticipated feelings drive decisions that fit with moral norms and attribution of responsibility. If this is the case, and if individual ideology is more likely to predict ecological attitudes than knowledge, then messages conveying the value of a product must aim to inspire positive emotions, most of all, hope.

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