Taking the Good with the Bad:  
Linking Mixed Emotions to Relational Outcomes in Consumption  
and Marketing

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ABSTRACT

Although emotions pervade marketing relationships, their impact has received limited research attention. This study focuses on the relationship outcomes associated with the experience and impact of mixed emotions in a consumer-to-consumer setting (C2C). The C2C context of gift receipt is used because it is highly relational and emotion-laden. Content analysis and analysis of variance procedures are used to assess the link between mixed emotions and a recipient’s perception of relationship quality. The results demonstrate that rather than the overall amount of felt emotions, it is the balance of positive and negative emotions that is associated with specific relationship outcomes. It also appears that coping processes are employed to allow individuals to realize an overall neutral or positive outcome for the relationship, even if negative emotions are experienced. These results have theoretical and practical implications for marketing relationships of all types including how individuals in business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) contexts experience their emotions and assess the state of their relationships.

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Taking the Good with the Bad:

Linking Mixed Emotions to Relational Outcomes in Consumption and Marketing

The concept of relationships has become a core tenet in marketing theory and practice. Some have even argued that in this new economy, marketing relationships are more important than the product a company sells (Martin, 2001). In a recent special issue of the Journal of Business Research presenting perspectives on marketing in the new millennium, Wilkinson and Young (2001) make the case that “[m]arketing, in essence, is about the management of the external relations of the firm and marrying of this with internal operations” (p.123). The arguments for relationship marketing are well diffused in the literature and generally observe that close relationships (1) allow parties to work out their differences more amicably (Anderson and Narus, 1990), (2) foster parties' selection of more participative and integrative approaches to managing conflict (Dant and Schul, 1992), (3) increase the commitment of the parties, which leads to positive relationship effects (Kumar, Hibbard, and Stern, 1994), and (4) allow parties to be more forgiving of destructive or negative developments in the relationship (Hibbard, Kumar and Stern, 2001). While there has been abundant research on relational exchanges (c.f., Fontenot and Wilson, 1997 for a review), most of the work has focused on inter-firm relationships. However, whether one considers business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C), or consumer-to-consumer (C2C) relationships, many constructs central to relationship marketing are interpersonal by nature: e.g., trust, commitment, shared values, or relationship quality. Even as research has shown that consumers may have strong relationships with product and brands (e.g., Fournier, 1998), it is useful to recognize that these relationships may lack the “concrete encounters between partners known personally to each other” (Fournier, 1998, p.368) and the
complexity and richness of interpersonal relationships (Cahill, 1998). Indeed, interpersonal consumer relationships take many forms, such as the broad Chinese concept of *guanxi* (a social concept composed of group orientation, obligation of reciprocity, friendship, and one’s social position within the group; Merrilees and Miller, 1999), consumers involved in gift exchange (Belk, 1976), partners involved in household decision making (Qualls, 1987), and amity between marketing agents and customers (Price and Arnould, 1999).

Even though much has been written with respect to the commercial and financial aspects of the relationship perspective (e.g., Hibbard et al., 2001), and while the emotions experienced by relationship partners pervade their exchange processes, only a few studies have focused on the impact of emotional experiences on relationship quality (Bagozzi, 1995; Guerrero, Andersen, and Trost, 1998; Lawler and Thye, 1999). In this article, we focus on examining the link between emotional experiences and perceptions of interpersonal relationship quality, a key indicator of relationship health (Wiseman and Duck, 1995). The goal of this paper is to contribute to the marketing literature by investigating the relational outcomes associated with the mixed emotions that marketing participants (e.g., consumers, marketing agents such as salespeople) experience in their interactions with others. We adopt the view of mixed emotions, or ambivalence, introduced by Otnes, Lowrey, and Shrum (1997), who define it as the co-occurrence or sequential experience of multiple positive and/or negative emotions in a relationship interaction episode. Consistent with evidence from psychology, where over 90% of day-to-day experiences involve mixed emotions (Ellsworth and Smith, 1988), it is clear that many marketing interactions involve mixed emotions (e.g., Celsi, Rose, and Leigh, 1993; Chaudhuri, 1997; Otnes, Ruth, and Milbourne, 1994).
To explore the impact of mixed emotions on perceptions of relationship quality, we investigate a C2C marketing context that is highly relational and emotion-laden: gift-receipt (Ruth, Otnes, and Brunel, 1999; Sherry et al., 1992, 1993). Giving and receiving gifts are common experiences in most cultures, serving as means of symbolic communication between individuals in social networks (Belk, 1976, 1979; Cheal, 1988) as well as performing certain sociocultural functions such as socialization (Belk, 1976; Mauss, 1954). Therefore, gift giving is central to the creation and maintenance of healthy relationships. Relationship quality is the extent to which the partner is held in positive or negative regard (Baxter and Wilmot, 1984). It can be conceptualized as a higher-order relationship summary construct determined by factors such as: confidence in the relationship partner, satisfaction with the relationship partner, length of the relationship, customer orientation and ethics (Bejou, Wray, and Ingram, 1996). In this research, our focus is to further unpack the inner processes of marketing relationships and show whether and how interpersonal emotional experiences are systematically associated with perceptions of interpersonal relationship quality. Not only do we wish to show that interpersonal relationship quality can be impacted by specific relationship episodes, but we investigate the role of emotional experiences in this process. Overall, our results provide an understanding of the types of emotions linking a broad spectrum of idiosyncratic, consumption experiences with specific relationship quality outcomes. While our results are derived from a C2C context, we discuss their applicability to B2C and other marketing contexts in the discussion section.
CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Relationships and Gift Exchange

People engage in gift giving as a means of maintaining interpersonal relationships. In his model of gift giving, Sherry (1983) discussed three major stages in gift exchange: Gestation, where the giver engages in search and creation activities; Prestation, where the giver presents the gift to the recipient; and Reformulation, where disposition of the gift occurs and perceptions of the relationship are realigned if necessary. Sherry also points to the importance of emotions experienced by givers and recipients. Although recipients may anticipate certain gift-giving activities during Gestation, and such anticipation can be the source of emotions (Baron, 1992), emotions are more likely to be experienced by the recipient during the second and third stages of the model, where gift presentation and evaluation occur (Sherry, 1983; Sherry et al., 1992). Thus, both giver and recipient are likely to experience emotions in this attention-focused situation, with the giver often waiting for the recipient to understand the meaning of the gift, verbally and/or nonverbally communicate an evaluation, and accept or reject the social role the giver is expressing in the relationship (Otnes et al., 1993).

From the recipient’s perspective, Ruth et al. (1999) defined and observed six different relational outcomes that are possible in the Reformulation stage:

1. *strengthening*, where gift receipt improves the quality of the giver/recipient relationship, and feelings of connection and shared meaning are intensified;
2. *affirming*, where gift receipt reproduces and validates the positive quality of the giver/recipient relationship but does not take it to a “higher level”;
3. *negligible effect*, where the gift-receipt experience is perceived to have a minimal effect on perceptions of relationship quality;
4. *negatively confirming*, where the gift-receipt experience validates an existing negative quality of the giver/recipient relationship, as well as a lack of connectedness and shared meaning;
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(5) *weakening*, where the gift-receipt experience harms the quality of the giver/recipient relationship by highlighting a newly evident or newly intensified feeling that the relationship is lacking in connection and shared meaning; or

(6) *severing*, where the gift-receipt experience so harms the quality of the relationship that the relationship is dissolved.

These outcomes reflect the course of the relationship’s trajectory, defined as the path that one or both partners anticipate the relationship to take, and are reflective of relationship quality (Ruth et al., 1999). Yet, the processes and possible mediating factors (e.g., emotions) through which relationship outcomes occur are not entirely clear and have not received systematic empirical attention to date.

**Emotions and Relationship Outcomes**

One indicator that should provide key information to relationship partners is the emotions experienced during interactions. Emotions direct attention toward significant events and mediate between the situation at hand and the potential behavioral responses that prepare and motivate the individual to cope with and adapt to situations such as whether and how to continue the relationship (Lazarus, 1991; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). As such, recipients’ emotions may be systematically associated with perceptions of relationship quality.

One might posit a one-to-one parallel between the valence of emotions experienced in relationship interactions and their impact on partners’ perceptions of the relationship. With this view, when a negative (positive) emotion is experienced by one partner, that individual’s overall perceptions of the relationship would also be negative (positive). Yet, this assumption may not hold for at least three reasons. First, there is clear evidence that people often experience more than one emotion simultaneously or sequentially (Otnes et al., 1997; Williams and Aaker, 2002). Second, it assumes that the valence of an individual’s emotional experience is unitary – that in the same episode an individual does not experience both positive and negative emotion(s) – when,
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clearly, emotions are often mixed. Third, because emotions lead to some adaptive behaviors, theory would suggest that negative emotions could be experienced, but positive outcomes might occur when an individual adequately copes with the situation at hand. For example, a recipient might feel anxiety in accepting a gift in front of the giver, but also feel relief and joy upon successfully coping with the situation (Wooten, 2000). This resolution might contribute to a positive relationship assessment.

We extend previous research by investigating a mix of positive and negative emotions and focus on their association with relationship outcomes after the consumption incident. In sum, our three primary research questions are:

1. Is there a systematic association between the valence of emotions experienced and relationship outcomes?

2. Is there a systematic association between the overall amount of mixed emotions and relationship outcome?

3. Is there a systematic association between the balance of negative and positive emotions and relationship outcomes? That is, does the experience of negative emotions always foreshadow negative relational outcomes, and likewise does the experience of positive emotions always foreshadow positive relational outcomes? Or can the experience of positive emotions provide a counterbalance in terms of relationship outcome?

METHOD

Because of its proven usefulness in research on emotions, relationships, and gift-exchange, critical incident methodology was used to obtain information on the experience of emotions and relationship outcomes. One hundred twenty-one respondents were recruited via a newspaper read by faculty, staff and students at three large universities in the Eastern, Midwestern and Western United States. Respondents were asked to recall and describe in a written survey an actual situation where they had received a gift and had experienced one
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specific randomly assigned emotion. Based on past research on consumption emotions, gift exchange, and psychology, ten emotions were selected for use in this study: love, joy, gratitude, pride, fear, anger, sadness, guilt, uneasiness, and embarrassment. More specifically, the following studies identified these emotions in gift exchange: love (Belk and Coon, 1993; Cheal, 1988; Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Otnes, Ruth, and Milbourne, 1994), joy and delight (Belk 1996; Sherry, 1983), gratitude (Tesser, Gatewood, and Driver, 1968), pride (Mick and DeMoss, 1990), fear and uneasiness (Schwartz, 1967), anger (Otnes et al., 1994, Sherry et al., 1992, 1993), sadness (Belk, 1991b; Mick and DeMoss, 1990), and embarrassment and guilt (Sherry et al., 1992, 1993). These emotions can be seen as an encompassing subset of the larger constellation of consumption emotions investigated by Richins (1997). These emotions also correspond to a range of basic and subordinate emotions from a categorization perspective (Shaver et al., 1987).

About twelve respondents were asked to report on each emotion.

Respondents were asked to take a few minutes to picture the gift-receipt situation and to remember it as vividly as possible before providing open-ended responses to questions regarding the experience. Included in the questions prompting full description of the experience (e.g., “please tell us the story of the situation where you were given this gift”), respondents were asked to describe immediate and/or long-term impacts of the gift-receipt experience on their relationships with givers. Following these questions, which prompted recall of the incident, respondents were asked to complete scales gauging the ten emotions noted above. Upon completion, respondents were thanked, debriefed, and compensated $5 for participating.

Information was analyzed from 113 fully completed surveys. Eight surveys were eliminated because they did not provide sufficient information about the relationship, or had missing information. Sixty percent of respondents were female. Respondents’ ages ranged from
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20 to 79; the average was 37 years. Associated with a wide variety of holidays, events, and experiences, gifts included a diversity of personal, household, monetary, experiential, and other items.

Data Analysis and Measures

Content analysis of the open-ended verbatim comments was used to classify the recipients’ perceptions of relationship outcomes. Using the definitions of the six relational outcomes offered by Ruth et al. (1999), two coders independently coded the relational outcome reflected in each narrative. This content analysis resulted in 113 judgments including 19 disagreements between the coders. The resulting inter-judge reliability of .83 meets the threshold of acceptable inter-judge reliability for content analyses (Kassarjian 1977). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Ten seven-point semantic differential scales (e.g., not at all happy = 1/very happy = 7; not at all sad = 1/very sad = 7) measured the extent to which the assigned emotion (the “target” emotion) plus the nine other emotions had been experienced during or just following the gift-receipt episode. The purpose of these items was to capture the level of each emotion, and the aggregated emotions, each respondent experienced as a consequence of the gift exchange. From these ten items, we computed three scores for each respondent: the average amount of mixed positive emotions (i.e., the average of happiness, love, pride and gratitude items), the average amount of mixed negative emotions (i.e., the average of fear, anger, sadness, uneasiness, guilt and embarrassment items), and the overall average amount of mixed emotions (i.e., the average of all ten emotions). Since each emotion was measured on a seven-point scale, the maximum value for each average score is seven, indicating a very large amount of those emotions. The minimum is one, indicating that virtually none of the emotions comprising the scale were
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experienced by the respondent. Analysis of variance was used to determine if the level and type of emotions differ across relationship outcomes.

RESULTS

The Incidence of Emotions and Relationship Outcomes (Research Question #1)

Table 1 shows the incidence of the target emotion each subject wrote about, and the relationship outcomes associated with each. There were no incidents of severing, confirming that gift receipt rarely results in complete dissolution of a relationship. As expected, the overall chi-square was significant ($X^2_{(36)} = 109.452, p < .001$), indicating an association between the target emotion and relationship outcome. As Table 1 shows, when asked to describe a situation involving a positive target emotion, the relationship outcome never involved negative confirmation or weakening. In contrast, some incidents involving negative emotions were associated with positive relationship outcomes. Specifically, five instances were associated with strengthening and six with affirming positive relationship quality.

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While a systematic pattern exists between the type of emotion experienced and perceptions of the relationship, this association also demonstrates that there is not a simple link between one specific emotion and one relationship outcome. For example, five types of relationship outcomes were observed for fear, sadness and uneasiness, four for guilt, and three for the other target emotions.

Association of Mixed Emotions and Relationship Outcomes (Research Questions #2 and #3)

The second part of our analysis aimed at understanding how the mix of positive and negative emotions can explain the relationship outcomes in Table 1. Across all relationship
outcomes and target emotions, the average level of mixed positive emotions was 4.73 and the average level of mixed negative emotions was 2.94. It is important to understand what these scales refer to. If a respondent experienced only one of the four positive emotions investigated but experienced it at maximum intensity (7), the respondent’s overall level of mixed positive emotions would be 2.5 (3 emotions at 1 and 1 emotion at 7 = 10/4, or 2.5 on the seven-point scale). Even experiencing the one target emotion at a modest level (e.g., 4) would produce a relatively low mixed emotions score (3 emotions at 1 and 1 emotion at 4 = 7/4 or 1.75). Thus, a score of 4.73 implies that respondents experienced either a few emotions very intensely or a larger number of emotions felt somewhat modestly, either of which constitutes mixed emotions rather than the experience of a single, unblended emotion. Together, these data suggest that emotions are very rarely experienced in an unblended, isolated fashion.

Table 2 shows the level of positive, negative and overall mixed emotions for each relationship outcome. An analysis of variance of the overall amount of mixed emotions (that is, combining positive and negative emotions in one scale) by relationship outcome reveals that there was no significant difference in the overall amount of combined mixed emotions ($F_{(4,108)} = .36$, n.s.). That is, the average amount of mixed emotions was the same for each relationship outcome and ranged between 3.76 to 3.48 on the seven-point scale. In answer to Research Question #2, then, we find that there is no association between the overall amount of mixed emotions and relationship outcome.

However, when separating out the amount of positive emotions and negative emotions, as shown in Table 2, significant differences across relationship outcomes are observed (for positive emotions, $F_{(4,108)} = 48.19$, $p < .001$; for negative emotions, $F_{(4,108)} = 23.40$, $p < .001$). The level of positive emotions ranges from 6.24, associated with affirming relationship quality, to 2.50,
associated with weakening relationship quality. In contrast, the level of negative emotions ranges from 1.92 for affirming relationship quality to 4.43 for weakening relationship quality. Taken together, these findings suggest that overall mixed emotions are present equally in these relationship outcomes, but that the amount of positive versus negative emotions is what differs across outcomes.

In order to further examine the pattern of positive and negative emotions across relationship outcomes, we collapsed strengthening and affirming into one category (called positive relationship outcome) and negatively confirming and weakening into another category (called negative relationship outcome). This decision was motivated by three factors: (1) the revised categories share definitional resemblance according to the valence of relationship quality; (2) there are no significant differences in means for the collapsed categories; and (3) this allows for larger cell sizes for subsequent analysis.

Overall, we observed a significant multivariate effect of the amount of positive versus negative emotions ($F_{(1,108)} = 37.19, p < .001$), a significant multivariate interaction of the amount of positive versus negative emotions by the relationship outcome ($F_{(2,108)} = 20.51, p < .001$), and a significant multivariate interaction of the amount of positive versus negative emotions by the valence of the target emotion ($F_{(1,108)} = 22.83, p < .001$). In order to further explain the observed effects, we focus our discussion of the remainder of the results on univariate effects.

An analysis across all target emotions (see Figure 1A) reveals that in positive relationship outcomes, many positive emotions are experienced intensely, as reflected by the extremely high level of mixed positive emotions ($M = 6.15$; see Figure 1A). Negative emotions are extremely
low (M = 1.97). In negligible relationship outcomes, where the recipient perceives “no effect” of gift receipt on the relationship, the levels of positive and negative emotions are comparable and do not differ significantly (M<sub>pos</sub> = 3.93 vs. M<sub>neg</sub> = 3.65). As expected, in negative relationship outcomes, however, negative emotions are greater than positive ones (M<sub>neg</sub> = 4.27 vs. M<sub>pos</sub> = 2.56). Statistical significance tests confirm that negative and positive emotions are experienced differently across these three relational categories. There is a significant difference in the level of positive emotions experienced by relationship outcome (M<sub>positive rel. effect</sub> = 6.15 vs. M<sub>negligible rel. effect</sub> = 3.93 vs. M<sub>negative rel. effect</sub> = 2.56; F<sub>(2,108)</sub> = 31.83, p < .001). The pattern of effects is reversed for the level of negative emotions across relationship outcome (M<sub>positive rel. effect</sub> = 1.97 vs. M<sub>negligible rel. effect</sub> = 3.65 vs. M<sub>negative rel. effect</sub> = 4.27; F<sub>(2,108)</sub> = 4.23, p < .019).

Our final analyses involve examining the pattern of positive and negative emotions by the valence of the randomly assigned target emotion. As discussed earlier and shown in Figure 1B, when people were asked to report on a positive target emotion, there were no instances of negative relationship outcomes. As Figure 1B shows, when recalling an incident involving a positive emotion, the level of positive emotions was quite high (M = 6.31 out of a possible 7), indicating that all measured positive emotions were experienced at a high level. In contrast, the level of negative emotions was quite low (M = 1.67), indicating that almost no negative emotions were felt. Similarly, for incidences involving a negligible impact on the relationship, positive emotions were high (M = 6.00) and negative emotions were low (M = 1.92).

In contrast, when asked to report on an incident involving a negative target emotion, the results are quite different (see Figure 1C). For individuals experiencing positive relationship
outcomes, their levels of positive emotions (M = 5.45) eclipse negative emotions (M = 3.27). For negligible relationship outcomes, positive and negative emotions are equivalent (M_{pos} = 3.77 vs. M_{neg} = 3.79). In contrast, in negative relationship outcomes, negative mixed emotions are higher (M = 4.27) than positive ones (M = 2.56). Analyses of variance confirmed that there are significant effects of the target emotion’s valence on amount of positive (F\((1,108) = 11.60, p < .001\)) and negative emotions (F\((1,108) = 18.06, p < .001\)) felt by our respondents. With respect to Research Question #3, then, we conclude that there is a significant association between the balance of negative and positive emotions and relationship outcomes.

**DISCUSSION**

The above findings provide new evidence on processes that are at the core of interpersonal marketing relationships. Overall, our research suggests that emotional experience is fundamental to interpersonal relationship interactions and consequences in consumer-to-consumer settings. Across a broad set of consumptions emotions and exchange episodes, we show that interpersonal relationship quality can be linked to the mix of emotions that are experienced by relationship members. While there is a systematic association between the types of emotions experienced and relationship outcomes, there is not a simple link between one specific emotion and one relationship outcome. Further, it is not the amount of mixed emotions that is associated with differences in relationship outcome. Rather, it is the blend or content of those mixed emotions – the overall balance of positive and negative emotions – that is associated with relationship quality perceptions. As shown in Figure 1A, the amount of positive emotions is very large relative to negative emotions in positive relationship outcomes such as strengthening and affirming. When the consumption experience results in a negligible impact on
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the relationship, the amount of positive and negative emotions is equivalent. When negative relationship effects such as negative confirmation or weakening occur, the balance of emotions is tipped toward more negative than positive ones.

One might ask: why are negative emotions sometimes associated with positive relationship outcomes? Five explanations can be advanced. First, negative experiences and emotions occur in all relationships, even relationships that would be characterized as quite positive overall (Berscheid, 1994). For example, one participant in Belk and Coon’s (1993) study of gifts and dating stated that love “can make you the happiest person alive… [a]nd it can hurt you with such a passion that you think you’re going to die” (p. 409). Second, negative emotions such as sadness often stem from a loss of a pleasant element of a relationship and therefore can still be associated with strong feelings of good relationship quality, and even can lead to positive relational change. Third, it appears that one negative emotional episode does not always, or often, call for a break or a marked shift in the relationship, since good, on-going relationships involve a “banked” supply of forgiveness for negative incidents (Wiseman and Duck, 1995). Fourth, we believe that positive outcomes out of negative emotions is possible when members have learned to cope with negative emotions in order to adapt to the situation at hand. In other words, allowing positive emotions counterbalance negative ones may be one way of coping with negative emotions (Lazarus, 1991). This is especially relevant to marketing relationship partners of all types, where either coping or effective recovery can lead to improved satisfaction even if the relationship encounter was negative. Finally, there might be a cultural and individual level effect that facilitates positive outcomes even in the presence of negative emotions. Research has shown that one’s propensity to accept emotional duality (the simultaneous experience of positive and negative emotions) may vary across cultures (e.g., high
in Chinese culture, low in the USA culture) and individuals, and it has been shown that “mixed emotions lead to positive outcomes for those with a relative high proclivity to accept duality” (Williams and Aaker, 2002, p. 647). Also, dialectic relationships are better valued and more prevalent for cultures and people with a high propensity to accept duality (Williams and Aaker, 2002).

Our results complement the view that consumer emotion management is at the core of relationship marketing (Stern, 1997). Indeed, the hallmark of relationships of all types is that the thoughts, feelings and actions of one person affect the thoughts, feelings, and actions of another through mechanisms such as reciprocity and interdependence (Duck, 1997). Much like the research on gift giving and its accompanying norm of reciprocity, where the gift process often reveals aspects of givers and recipients including their emotions (Ruth, 1996), service research has shown that reciprocal self-disclosure and shared feelings contributes to positive exchange satisfaction in commercial friendship relationships among service providers and clients (Price and Arnould, 1999; Crosby et al., 1990).

Given the important role of emotions in all relationships, and that past marketing research has pointed toward the importance of emotions in customer-service provider relationships, the findings observed in our C2C study context are expected to apply in B2C and B2B relationships as well. For example, just as our results have pointed toward a balancing of positive and negative emotions in effecting perceptions of relationship quality, those participating in personal selling or organizational buyer-seller relationships may also attempt to balance out negative felt emotions with considerations of positive ones in assessing relationship quality. Understanding what elicits positive and negative emotions, and the process of balancing these emotions, may prove to be useful in identifying better predictors of clients’ views of relationship quality and its
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effects (see Crosby et al., 1990). Moreover, our knowledge of satisfaction and relationship marketing can be improved through a deeper understanding of the dynamics of emotions and their behavioral consequences (Schneider and Bowen, 1999).

This study also confirms that emotions should not be studied in isolation because unblended emotions appear to be rare both in daily life and consumer behavior, pointing to the notion that exploring the overall constellation of emotions can be more informative. While one emotion might be the focus of investigation for theoretical reasons (e.g., anger; Folkes, 1984), theoretically and empirically important information may be omitted if consumers are experiencing multiple emotions and only one emotion is measured or controlled for in the study.

Further, these quantitative results, obtained across a broad set of emotions and respondents, are consistent with more narrowly focused narrative interpretations that have argued that consumers have a desire for relationships based on overall emotional satisfaction (Stern, Thompson and Arnould, 1998). Our results may also apply to some extent to non-person-to-person relationships such as consumers and their brands, since emotions are also prominent in these settings (Fournier, 1998; Ruth, 2001).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While we have demonstrated an association between mixed emotions and relationship outcomes, we have not shown direct evidence that emotions unequivocally mediate the effect of a giver’s appraisals of the situation on the relationship outcome. Mediation studies to investigate cause and effect are a natural next step for research on mixed emotions in interpersonal marketing relationships. Research should not only focus on establishing that emotional experience is a mediator between the relationship episode and relationship quality change, but
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also show that it is the actual amount of positive versus negative emotions that mediates this effect on the change in relationship quality. In addition, research should investigate the difference between a few emotions experienced very intensely versus a larger number of emotions experienced moderately, both representing quite distinct moderate levels of mixed emotions. Also, our approach investigates only one partner’s experience of emotions, and our methodology required respondents to recollect and report past experiences. Together, these limitations point to the opportunity in conducting this type of research in real time involving both partners to determine how the feelings of one partner influence not only their own views of the relationship but the partner’s perceptions. Because interpersonal marketing relationships, especially the types that we studied in this article, are usually ongoing with multiple episodes over time, future investigations should also take into account the age of the relationship, as we know that older relationships tend to lead to greater relationship quality (Lagace, Dahlstrom, and Gassenheimer, 1991), but at the same time returns from incremental relational efforts may reduce as the relationship endures (Hibbard et al. 2001). Understanding the longitudinal aspect of these relationships and the over time dynamics appear to be key. Finally, studies in other contexts and cultures and with different consumption emotions should attempt to replicate and further understand how the mix of emotions partners experience in one consumption episode influence their perceptions of relationship quality. This is especially important given the recent cross-cultural work on the propensity to accept duality that we discussed above (see Williams and Aaker, 2002). As a whole, we hope that our research fosters investigations of mixed emotions in service and retail settings, interactions in e-commerce environments, and other marketing contexts where relationship interactions are key.
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TABLE 1

NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS FOR RELATIONSHIP OUTCOME BY TARGET EMOTION CONDITION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Emotion Condition</th>
<th>Relationship Outcome</th>
<th>Strengthening</th>
<th>Affirming</th>
<th>Negligible Effect</th>
<th>Negatively Confirming</th>
<th>Weakening</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>113</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ X^2_{(36)} = 109.452, p < .001 \]
### TABLE 2
**AVERAGE AMOUNT OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS BY RELATIONSHIP OUTCOME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotions</th>
<th>Strengthening</th>
<th>Affirming</th>
<th>Negligible effect</th>
<th>Negatively Confirming</th>
<th>Weakening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All emotions</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive emotions</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>6.24</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative emotions</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 1
AVERAGE AMOUNT OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS BY RELATIONSHIP OUTCOME

A. All Target Emotions

B. Positive Target Emotions

C. Negative Target Emotions