

“Choosing with Crying Smiles and Laughing Tears:
The Dual Effects of Mixed Emotions on Variety Seeking”

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Recent research shows that people who experience mixed emotions (i.e., they are happy and sad at the same time) are in a conflicting psychological state; and this feeling of discomfort in turn affects their judgment, resulting in less favorable attitudes. We extend this research by integrating the affect regulation literature and cognitive appraisal theories of emotion to examine the dual effects of incidental mixed emotions on consumer variety seeking. When people who experience mixed emotions engage in affect regulation, their desire to alleviate the conflicting feeling will prompt them to limit their choices and commit to fewer options; and this attempt to feel less conflicted is manifested as seeking less variety. In contrast, when people who experience mixed emotions do not engage in affect regulation, their information processing is likely guided by the appraisal tendency of their emotional experience. Because mixed emotions signal the presence of multiple goals and needs, we argue that the appraisal tendency of people experiencing mixed emotion is the recognition that people have multiple goals. This appraisal tendency in turn prompts people to engage in more variety seeking. In a series of studies, we provide support for our hypothesis that relative to a neutral affective state, mixed emotions lead to less variety seeking when people engage in affect regulation, such as when they feel conflicted, when they are prompted to focus on their feelings, or when they are dispositionally inclined to regulate their affect. Conversely, mixed emotions lead to more variety seeking when people do not feel conflicted, when they are prompted to focus on cognition, and when they are not inclined to regulate their negative affect. We provide further evidence that these effects on variety seeking are specific to mixed emotions and distinct from other negative emotions such as sadness.