

A Good Cry or Gratifying Revenge?

The effects of culture and mixed emotions on choice

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The effects of culture and mixed emotions on choice

ABSTRACT

Content marketers often employ mixed emotional appeals to engage viewers. Prior research suggests mixed emotions would appeal to collectivists, but not individualists. In contrast, the current research proposes that both individualists and collectivists choose content (in movies and comics, for example) intended to signal mixed emotions, if the mixed emotions align with their cultural values. Building on established theoretical links between collectivism and self-transcendence values, and individualism and self-enhancement values, the authors find that collectivists (individualists) process affection-sadness (pride-anger) more fluently, and that this relative fluency is consistent with their choices. Data from eight years of box office revenue (2015-2022) and six experiments (including three in the Web Appendix), along with an internal meta-analysis, are consistent with the hypotheses. Practically, the findings suggest that content platforms can increase recommendation effectiveness by personalizing emotional tags and images to match viewers' cultural orientations. The authors discuss implications for content personalization, consumer experience, and recommendation effectiveness.

Keywords: Culture, Individualism, Collectivism, Mixed emotions, Movies, Processing fluency

Marketers often signal mixed emotions when promoting media. Defined as two emotions of opposing valence (Larsen & McGraw, 2014), mixed emotions can characterize ‘slice of life’ situations in various content (Larsen et al., 2001; Trampe et al., 2015). Descriptive tags on Netflix, StoryGraph, Steam, and Itch cue dozens of combinations of mixed emotions for movies, books, games, and comic books, respectively. Despite its widespread use, past research has largely operationalized mixed emotions as happiness-sadness, and in doing so, has implicitly treated its appeal as generalizable, leaving open whether other mixed emotions might resonate differently across cultures. Our research challenges this premise by uncovering mixed emotions that resonate with collectivistic *and individualistic* cultural orientations.

For consumers, signals of mixed emotions can significantly influence decisions (Penz & Hogg, 2011; Yousef et al., 2021). Accordingly, mixed emotional appeals are common in marketing: in a pilot study, consumers estimated that over a third of tagged movies carry mixed-emotion cues, falling between all-positive (43%) and all-negative (23%) tags (see Web Appendix A). Consistent with this prevalence, Netflix found that compared to stoic or benign emotional expressions, complex or mixed emotional expressions in thumbnail ads increase viewing hours and browsing time (Segran, 2016), suggesting that marketers should present the same media content with different images to persuade different users (Barton, 2018). These practical examples motivate our broader thesis that cultural orientation shapes responses to emotional cues across consumer contexts. However, some research suggests that collectivists may respond more favorably to certain depictions of mixed emotions than individualists (e.g., Pang et al., 2017), raising the question of whether this reflects a general cultural asymmetry or depends on the specific emotions involved. We ask, if mixed emotions are common across

cultures (Miyamoto et al., 2010), are collectivists *always* more persuaded by mixed emotions than individualists, or might different mixed emotions affect persuasion?

Whereas past consumer research focused on cross-cultural differences in responding to signals of novel univalent emotions (Aaker & Williams, 1998), the current research focuses on culturally normative mixed emotions. We define culturally normative mixed emotions as emotion pairs that are both familiar and desired within a cultural group (Tamir et al., 2015). We focus on pride-anger and affection-sadness. Pilot data confirm that consumers consider both emotion pairs common in media content (see Web Appendix A), and prior research identifies that people in individualistic cultures desire pride and anger while those in collectivistic cultures desire affection and sadness (Tamir et al., 2015). From a theoretical perspective, both emotions within each pair share a culturally compatible motivational direction (see Table 1). Pride and anger orient toward self-enhancement whereas affection and sadness orient toward others, making each pair internally coherent with its respective cultural value system. In contrast, emotion pairs with conflicting motivational directions, such as happiness-sadness, do not satisfy this criterion of motivational compatibility and are therefore less likely to be perceived as culturally coherent. Crucially, rather than mere familiarity or perceived popularity, this cultural coherence is rooted in value alignment (Tamir et al., 2015). Together, cultural normativity and compatible motivation direction provide a systematic basis for identifying mixed emotion pairs that feel coherent within a given cultural value system.

To the extent that signals of culturally normative mixed emotions generate a sense of conceptual fit with one's cultural expectations, we suggest that people process them more fluently (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Schwarz, 2004), and that this fluency is consistent with

choices for both groups. Thus, the current work proposes a less effortful, fluency-based process through which culture shapes responses to mixed emotions for collectivists *and individualists*.

Data from eight years of box office revenue (2015-2022) and six experiments (including three in Web Appendices E–G) provide evidence in support of a culture–mixed emotions match-up effect. Additionally, an internal meta-analysis of these studies strengthen confidence in the findings, and mediation analyses are consistent with a fluency-based account. Theoretically, the findings suggest that mixed emotion perception is a sensemaking process that feels fluent when emotions fit cultural norms. Practically, depicting mixed emotions in various communications (e.g., descriptive tags or images) can help marketers personalize consumer experiences and improve recommendation effectiveness (Rodriguez, 2021).

Culture and Emotion Norms

Individualism and collectivism capture the broadest spectrum of ideological differences between cultural contexts (Hofstede, 1990; Triandis, 1995). Cultural differences in individualism and collectivism are often observed across geographic regions (e.g., Eastern versus Western countries), ethnic groups (e.g., Latinos versus European Americans), and individuals via measured cultural dimensions¹ (Oyserman, 1993; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Although conceived at the national level as ends of a continuum (Hofstede, 1990), individualistic and collectivistic tendencies can exist within each individual and vary across contexts (Oyserman et al., 2002). Therefore, to identify predominantly individualistic and collectivistic individuals, scholars often combine them into a single dimension (Lee et al., 2000; Riemer & Shavitt, 2011). People with predominantly individualistic tendencies often place individual concerns over group

¹ Although cultural notions can also be activated in the mind (Oyserman & Lee, 2007), prior work suggests that cultural priming may not shift movie preferences (Wu et al., 2019). Therefore, we isolate the roles of individualism and collectivism primarily through measuring the individual-level constructs.

concerns, whereas the opposite is true for predominantly collectivistic people (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman et al., 2002).

One consequence of these tendencies is that individualists prioritize self-enhancing information to advance their individual aspirations, while collectivists focus on self-transcendent information to maintain collective harmony in social settings (Lee et al., 2000). Emotions are one source of such information. Past research has shown that cultural differences in individualistic and collectivistic values shape which emotions are desired and normatively appropriate (Eid & Diener, 2001; Tamir et al., 2015). Thus, the focus on self versus others helps differentiate individualism–collectivism from other cultural dimensions, such as power distance, because other dimensions do not organize information to self-versus-other orientation. For example, compared to people from the U.S., who are predominantly individualistic, people from Japan, who are predominantly collectivistic, felt more fear of troubling others when imagining outperforming friends on exams (Miyamoto et al., 2010), reflecting the collectivistic value of self-transcendence.

What cultural norms shape responses to mixed emotions? A key distinction between univalent and mixed emotions is the latter's conflict between positive and negative valence. Past literature suggests cultural differences in tolerance for experiencing conflict (e.g., Williams & Aaker, 2002), and critical to the present research, cultural differences in *perceiving* conflict. For example, compared to collectivists, individualists may perceive conflict that can be resolved through direct confrontation as normative (Ting-Toomey et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2006). In ancient Western contexts (such as Greece), debating was the most important skill besides being a capable warrior (Nisbett et al., 2001). Evidence suggests this tradition continues to influence modern individualists. Ting-Toomey and colleagues (2001) showed that independent (versus

interdependent) self-construals—often linked to individualistic (versus collectivistic) orientations, respectively—predict preferences for confrontational (versus compromising) conflict resolution styles, suggesting different cultural norms for managing conflict. These findings suggest nuanced cultural differences in how people perceive conflict. We build on these insights and propose that mixed emotions can depict conflict in ways that appeal to individualists and collectivists.

To identify emotions with conflicting valence that align with cultural values, we focus on those that past research suggest are distinctively congruent with collectivistic and individualistic orientations (Eid & Diener, 2001; Heise & Calhan, 1995; Oishi et al., 1998; Tamir et al., 2015; Tsai et al., 2006).

Affection, Sadness, and Collectivism

Merriam-Webster defines affection as a feeling of liking and caring for someone or something. As a socially engaging positive emotion (Kitayama et al., 2006), affection is closely associated with feelings of social support and connectedness (Pourmand et al., 2021).

Importantly, affection can fulfill the universal motivation for self-expansion by including others in one's sense of self (Aron et al., 2013). This drive to incorporate others into the self aligns closely with a collectivist orientation, which emphasizes the development of an interdependent self (Triandis, 1995). Moreover, individuals in collectivistic cultures tend to prioritize expressing affection, as these behaviors help strengthen interpersonal closeness and reinforce social bonds (Chen et al., 2012). Thus, collectivism may drive desire for depictions of affection.

Sadness is a negative emotion with a core theme of loss that encourages connection and support seeking (Lazarus, 1991). Evidence suggests that despite its negative valence, sadness positively impacts interpersonal relationships. For example, prompting sadness increases the

importance of an individual's current level of social connectedness (Gray et al., 2011), which is consistent with universalistic values of transcending selfish concerns and connecting with others (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Moreover, feeling sad increases attention to negative consequences of morally questionable acts and reduces selfish behavior (Noval et al., 2024). Indeed, compared to individuals high in individualism, those high in collectivism showed greater appreciation for counselors who expressed other-focused emotions like care, empathy, and sadness (Seo, 2011), consistent with cultural norms that promote interdependence and maintaining social harmony in collectivistic societies (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Consistent with this in a media context, Oliver (1993) attributed the appeal of sad films to socially patterned norms surrounding other-directed sadness rather than a desire to feel sad.

This analysis suggests that the mixed emotional theme of affection and sadness (affection-sadness) will appeal to collectivists (vs. individualists) because both emotions align with collectivistic priorities. Formally:

H1: Compared to individualists, collectivists are more likely to choose a movie depicting affection and sadness.

Pride, Anger, and Individualism

Pride, a positive ego-focused emotion, fosters feelings of independence stemming from personal achievements (Aaker & Williams, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1994) or the reflected glory of self-relevant others (e.g., Cialdini et al., 1976). Pride increases a self-focused desire for dominance over others and pursuit of social status (Tracy & Robins, 2003). Notably, research has shown that cultures which endorse individualistic values of self-enhancement desire pride (Tamir et al., 2015; Seo, 2011), supporting the prevalence of pride as an individualistic emotion norm. For example, Fischer (1999) demonstrated cultural differences in pride norms by asking

Dutch (more individualistic) and Spanish (more collectivistic) participants to describe typical pride-related episodes. Dutch participants tended to emphasize personal achievements and self-focused appraisals, consistent with individualistic cultural values. In contrast, Spanish participants were more likely to suppress expressions of pride and highlight others' achievements, consistent with collectivistic values.

Anger is a negative ego-focused emotion arising when others obstruct an individual's own goals, motivating action to regain control (Aaker & Williams, 1998; Ellsworth & Scherer, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Anger's self-assertive orientation² aligns more closely with individualism than collectivism (Lench et al., 2024). Previous studies indicate that anger is often suppressed in collectivistic cultures, where people perceive it as threatening to interpersonal harmony (Adam et al., 2010; Mauss et al., 2010). In contrast, anger is viewed as a legitimate and effective emotional expression in individualist cultures (Adam & Shirako, 2013). For instance, anger expression elicited larger concessions from European (vs. Asian) American negotiators and experimentally manipulating anger to seem less appropriate reduced concessions among European Americans compared to Asian Americans (Adam et al., 2010). Consistent with this, people perceive situations eliciting culturally condoned emotions as more prevalent, such as anger in the United States (Boiger et al., 2013b). In line with this finding, anger is frequently embedded in popular children's books in individualist contexts such as the United States and Belgium (Boiger, De Deyne, & Mesquita, 2013a). Thus, in individualistic societies, anger is more normatively accepted and appears in the cultural products that individualists routinely

²Pride and anger are classified as self ego-focused, socially disengaging emotions, whereas affection and sadness are more other-focused and socially engaging (Kitayama et al., 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This classification concerns the relational orientation of each individual emotion rather than the attentional focus that combination of emotions induces. Consistent with this distinction, a pretest found that pride-anger and affection-sadness led participants to think about themselves and about friends/family to the same extent (all $ps > .29$; Web Appendix B). This indicates that the two pairs were equated on self-other attentional focus, limiting it as explanation of any observed differences (e.g., Aaker & Williams, 1998).

encounter. Importantly, our account does not require that individualists choose anger-depicting media to pursue instrumental goals; rather, as entertainment research finds that enjoying anger-based narratives depends on whether viewers sanction the depicted outcome (Raney, 2004; Zillmann & Bryant, 1975), anger's cultural normativity makes depicted anger feel coherent and fluent (Tamir et al., 2015).

Taken together, we predict that individualists (vs. collectivists) are likely to favor content that depicts anger and pride (pride-anger) because these emotions align with individualistic priorities. Formally:

H2: Compared to collectivists, individualists are more likely to choose a movie depicting anger and pride.

Illustrative Evidence

To illustrate how mixed emotions might correlate with cultural differences in choice, we explored the best performing movie genres in India and the United States. We collected the top 50 performing movies by domestic gross revenue in both countries from 2015 to 2022 ($n_{IN} = 397$ movies, $n_{US} = 400$ movies) from American and Indian box office databases. Because action and drama are two of the most popular genres (Bartsch et al., 2010) characterized by anger, pride, sadness, and affection (Aurier & Guintcheva, 2015; Plutchik, 1980), we focused on the proportions of those genres in India and the United States' top-performing lists. Consistent with H1, drama (i.e., a genre that a pretest revealed is associated with affection-sadness; see Web Appendix B) was the most common genre (51%) represented in the top-performing Indian movies, but it was less common among American movies (25%; $\chi^2(1) = 54.53, p < .001$). Consistent with H2, action (i.e., a genre associated with pride-anger) was the most common genre in the top-performing American movies (38%), but it was less common among Indian

movies (10%; $\chi^2(1) = 87.45, p < .001$; see Web Appendix C). While these patterns align with H1 and H2, we acknowledge their observational nature. Other factors could also have driven box office success in culturally distinct countries such as country-of-origin information (Russell & Russell, 2006), use of English language (Fu, 2006), or genre differences in arousal that are independent of emotional valence. Moreover, as in prior work (Lee et al., 2000; Riemer & Shavitt, 2011), we supplement these illustrative real-world trends across national groups with experimental studies providing individual-level tests of H1 and H2.

Processing Fluency

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predict that a match between one's cultural orientation and depicted mixed emotions drives choice. To explain similar cultural congruity (or matching) effects, past research often adopts a fluency perspective (Briley & Aaker, 2006; Lee & Aaker, 2004; Mourey et al., 2015; Wang & Lee, 2006). Processing fluency, or feelings of subjective ease or difficulty when encountering a stimulus, is an important metacognitive cue that positively influences consumer judgments and decisions toward stimuli (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009; Schwarz, 2004). Theoretical accounts suggest that, as a metacognitive signal about the processing experience itself, fluency operates upstream of more evaluative constructs such as liking and familiarity, generating positive affect and preference through a felt sense of cognitive ease rather than conscious appraisal (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009).

Processing fluency can emerge because of a conceptual match between accessible stimuli (e.g., Novemsky et al., 2007), perceptual advantage when processing stimuli (e.g., Thompson & Ince, 2013), or due to a cultural match (e.g., by matching vs. mismatching a stimulus with culturally grounded predictions; Lin et al., 2019; Mourey et al., 2015). For example, consumers tend to prefer brands that embody values that match their cultural orientation (Torelli et al.,

2012) and advertising appeals that match their culturally-determined regulatory focus (Briley & Aaker, 2006).

Culturally congruent mixed emotions may be another source of processing fluency. Emotion appraisals often occur automatically (e.g., Ellsworth & Scherer, 2002), and some emotions are more culturally normative than others (e.g., Eid & Diener, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Tamir et al., 2015). An alternative explanation through cultural differences in dialecticism operates at the level of tolerance for valence conflict (Pang et al., 2017; Williams & Aaker, 2002). From this view, collectivists (vs. individualists) would asymmetrically favor *any* mixed emotion combination. In contrast, we propose that culturally congruent mixed emotions generate feelings of processing fluency based on cultural expectations, driving their appeal. Our theorizing advances the novel hypothesis that dialecticism does not anticipate: Collectivists *and individualists* may fluently process mixed emotions that cohere with their respective cultural value system. This predicts a crossover interaction rather than a main effect of cultural orientation.

H3: Processing fluency will mediate the relationship between cultural orientation, mixed emotions, and movie choice.

Maximizing as a Boundary Condition

Maximizing refers to the goal of attaining the best outcome (Schwartz et al. 2002). This goal can be chronically present or temporarily activated by specific contexts and decision settings (Ma & Roese, 2014; Mogilner et al., 2013). Once activated, maximizers' fixation on the best can override other influences on choice (Levav et al., 2012; Schwartz et al., 2002), such as cultural orientation. In contrast, low maximizers (or satisficers) often choose options that are good enough.

Compared to satisficing, maximizing involves investing substantial effort to consider more information about alternatives (Iyengar et al., 2006; Levav et al., 2012). We suggest that, at baseline, culture predicts the choice of content depicted with culturally congruent mixed emotions through a fluency-based process that is more similar to satisficing (Ma & Roese, 2014). In contrast, activating a maximizing mindset shifts individuals from a fluent choice process to a more deliberate process, disrupting culturally guided preferences (Briley & Aaker, 2006). Thus, the increased emphasis on seeking the “best” option associated with high (vs. low) maximizing should reduce reliance on cultural prescriptions when choosing content, thereby attenuating the matchup effect.

H4: The effect of cultural orientation alignment with mixed emotions on movie choice will be more likely to emerge under low (vs. high) maximizing.

Study Overview

Across studies, we examine the proposition that both collectivists and individualists prefer mixed emotions, so long as the mixed emotions are congruent with their salient cultural orientation. Study 1 demonstrates that consumers with a more predominant collectivistic cultural orientation are more likely to watch a movie described with mixed feelings of affection-sadness, whereas individualists are more likely to watch a movie described with mixed feelings of pride-anger. Study 2 provides initial insights into why this effect occurs, demonstrating that when the desired emotions are mixed (vs. univalent), consumers process culturally congruent mixed emotions more fluently. Consistent with, but not conclusive of, a processing fluency account, study 3 attenuates the matchup effect by priming a high (vs. low) maximizing mindset. Study materials, data, and preregistrations are available at

https://researchbox.org/194&PEER_REVIEW_passcode=GQOBKC.

Study 1: Choosing Between Mixed Emotions

To elicit specific emotional expectations, Netflix uses tags such as heartfelt, provocative, and inspiring alongside video content (Koblin, 2024). In a pilot study ($N = 147$), 74% of people were familiar with these kinds of emotion tags and, on average, people thought that 34% of movies would have tags that communicate mixed emotions (see Web Appendix A). Therefore, study 1 tested H1 and H2 using these managerially relevant cues to enhance external applicability. Specifically, participants chose between movies with pride-anger themes versus affection-sadness themes, depicted with descriptive emotion tags similar to those used on Netflix.

A pretest ($N = 99$) revealed that participants perceived *Tearjerker*, *Romantic*, *Heartfelt* to reflect affection-sadness more than pride-anger (see Web Appendix B for full pretest details). Participants also perceived the tag clusters of *Violent*, *Inspiring*, *Slow Burn* and *Inspiring*, *Controversial*, *Gritty* to reflect pride-anger more than affection-sadness.

Method

Four hundred and two adults (191 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 33.15$) from Prolific completed the study for financial compensation. The main study used a 2-cell between-subjects design such that half of the participants saw the tags *Violent*, *Inspiring*, *Slow Burn* to represent the pride-anger option, whereas the other half saw the tags *Inspiring*, *Controversial*, *Gritty* to represent the pride-anger option. All participants saw the tags *Tearjerker*, *Romantic*, *Heartfelt* to represent the affection-sadness option.

Participants read that we were interested in the types of content that people watch. Next, they imagined choosing a movie to watch and they saw one of two sets of movie tags. In one condition, participants chose between *Violent*, *Inspiring*, *Slow Burn* and *Tearjerker*, *Romantic*,

Heartfelt. In the other condition, participants chose between *Inspiring*, *Controversial*, *Gritty* and *Tearjerker*, *Romantic*, *Heartfelt*. To focus on the choice between our mixed emotions stimuli, we excluded 48 participants who chose neither movie, leaving 354 records for analyses.

After choosing Movie A, Movie B, or neither movie, participants completed a measure of cultural orientation (Oyserman, 1993) containing six items measuring individualism (e.g., “I determine my own destiny”; $\alpha_{\text{IND}} = .48$) and six items measuring collectivism (e.g., “Whatever is good for my group is good for me”; $\alpha_{\text{COL}} = .77$) on 7-point scales (1 = strongly disagree, and 7 = strongly agree).

Results and Discussion

Following prior work (e.g., Riemer & Shavitt, 2011), we created a single index for culture by subtracting the collectivism subscale from the individualism subscale, so that higher (lower) numbers on this index reflect a more individualistic (collectivistic) orientation. Reliability for the composite index was $\rho = .64$ (see Web Appendix H for details on computing the reliability for this index across studies).

We regressed movie choice (0 = affection-sadness, 1 = pride-anger) on the mean-centered cultural orientation index, the stimulus-replicate variable (-.5 = stimuli set 1, .5 stimuli set 2) and their interaction. As expected and consistent with H1 and H2, the main effect of culture emerged ($B = .50$, $SE = .15$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the more individualistic the person, the more likely they were to choose the pride-anger movie. Correspondingly, the more collectivistic the person, the more likely they were to choose the affection-sadness movie. A main effect of the stimulus effect dummy variable also emerged ($B = .63$, $SE = .23$, $p = .005$), but importantly, the culture by choice set interaction effect was not significant ($B = -.30$, $SE = .30$, $p = .321$).

Taken together, study 1 supports the role of cultural orientation in the choice between movies with mixed emotions. Consistent with our predictions, consumers with a more collectivistic cultural orientation were more likely to choose a movie described with affection-sadness cues. In contrast, consumers with a more individualistic cultural orientation were more likely to choose a movie described with pride-anger cues.

Study 2: Mixed and Univalent Emotions

This preregistered study had two objectives. First, to illustrate process, we tested the hypothesized processing fluency explanation (H3) against a heuristic account. For example, individualists may choose movies depicting pride and anger because they seem popular or familiar, and these feelings of perceived popularity may provide a decision heuristic that explains choice.

Second, to show the importance of perceived conflict between emotion pairs, we compared movie choices when the options were described with mixed versus univalent emotions. The current work does not seek to show that mixed emotions are uniformly superior to positive or negative univalent appeals. Rather, our central question is which mixed emotions resonate with which cultural groups, and why. We predicted that when choosing between movies depicting mixed emotions, culture will be correlated with choice such that individualists (collectivists) will be more likely to choose a movie depicting pride and anger (affection and sadness). As previously noted, such a pattern would be inconsistent with a dialecticism account. In contrast, when choosing between movies depicting univalent emotions, culture will not be correlated with choice in the same way. Our theorizing suggests that culturally normative mixed emotions generate fluency because they depict conflict between opposing valences in ways that cohere with cultural norms for perceiving and managing conflict (e.g., Ting-Toomey et al., 2001;

Zhang et al., 2006). Even if univalent emotions motivationally align with a cultural group's values, they lack this opposing valence and may therefore feel less diagnostically normative and less fluent.

Two pretests helped to calibrate stimuli (see Web Appendix B for details). The first pretest confirmed that the tags *Violent*, *Inspiring*, *Slow Burn* reflected pride-anger and the tags *Poignant*, *Intense*, *Romantic* reflected affection-sadness. The second pretest revealed that participants perceived greater emotional conflict among the mixed (vs. univalent) emotions tags.

Method

We recruited 401 adults from Prolific to complete the study for monetary compensation. After pre-registered exclusions (<https://aspredicted.org/nw8t-s3j3.pdf>), there were 359 participants (176 women, $M_{\text{age}} = 38.69$ years, $SD = 13.72$). The study randomly assigned participants to two between-subjects emotion type conditions (univalent vs. mixed) and measured cultural orientation.

Participants imagined choosing a movie to watch, and they saw one of two sets of movie tags. In the mixed emotion condition, participants chose between *Violent*, *Inspiring*, *Slow Burn* and *Poignant*, *Intense*, *Romantic*. In the univalent condition, participants chose between *Inspiring*, *Uplifting*, *Empowering* and *Intense*, *Heartfelt*, *Romantic*. As pre-registered and to focus on those who chose between the focal options, we excluded participants who chose neither.

Next, to examine process, participants completed measures of processing fluency and perceived popularity. Following prior work (Torelli et al., 2012), and corresponding to condition, we asked participants which option seemed easier to understand/process/imagine/required very little effort (1 = *definitely [TAG 1]*, 6 = *definitely [TAG 2]*; $\alpha = .93$). To measure perceived

popularity, we asked participants which option seemed more popular/familiar to you/similar to others you have watched before (1 = *definitely [TAG 1]* to 6 = *definitely [TAG 2]*; $\alpha = .81$).

Afterwards, participants completed the full measure of cultural orientation from study 1 ($\alpha_{_IND} = .61$; $\alpha_{_COL} = .79$) and demographics questions.

Results

Culture. We created the same index for culture as in study 1. Reliability for this index was $\rho = .72$.

Relative processing fluency. We regressed the relative processing fluency index on the mean-centered cultural orientation index, the emotions conditions ($-0.5 = \text{univalent}$, $0.5 = \text{mixed}$), and their interaction term. The analysis revealed a main effect of mixed emotions condition ($b = -.63$, $se = .16$, $p < .001$). Importantly, the analysis also revealed a culture by emotions condition interaction ($b = .43$, $se = .12$, $p < .001$). The main effect of culture was not significant ($b = -.01$, $se = .06$, $p = .907$).

In the mixed emotions condition, the cultural orientation index was positively related to relative processing fluency ($b = .21$, $se = .09$, $p = .020$), suggesting that the more individualistic (collectivistic) the person, the more fluently they processed the pride-anger (affection-sadness) movie. In contrast, in the univalent emotions condition, culture was negatively related to relative processing fluency ($b = -.22$, $se = .08$, $p = .009$), suggesting that the more individualistic (collectivistic) the person, the more fluently they processed the Intense, Heartfelt, Romantic (Inspiring, Uplifting, Empowering) movie.

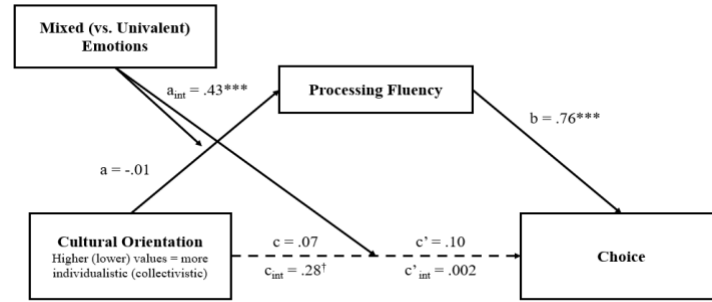
Movie choice. We regressed binary movie choice on the mean-centered cultural orientation index, the emotions conditions ($-0.5 = \text{univalent}$, $0.5 = \text{mixed}$), and their interaction term. The analysis revealed a main effect of mixed emotions condition ($B = -1.09$, $se = .22$, $p <$

.001) that, as predicted, was qualified by a marginally significant culture by emotions condition interaction ($B = .28, se = .17, p = .089$). The main effect of culture was not significant ($B = .071, se = .08, p = .399$).

Consistent with H1 and H2, in the mixed emotions condition, the cultural orientation index marginally predicted choice ($B = .21, se = .12, p = .079$), suggesting that the more individualistic (collectivistic) the person, the more likely they were to choose the pride-anger (affection-sadness) movie. In contrast, in the univalent emotions condition, culture was not significantly related to movie choice ($B = -.07, se = .12, p = .535$).

Process. To empirically assess the processing fluency explanation (H3), we conducted a moderated-mediation analysis (Model 8; Hayes, 2022), with culture as the independent variable, choice as the dependent variable, relative processing fluency as the mediator, and mixed emotions condition as the moderator (see figure 1). The analysis revealed significant moderated mediation (index = .33, SE = .11, 95% CI [.12, .57]). In the mixed emotions condition, processing fluency mediated the effect of culture on choice (conditional indirect effect = .16, SE = .08, 95% CI [.01, .31]), consistent with H3, though the CI width indicates suggestive rather than definitive evidence. In contrast, in the univalent emotions condition, processing fluency also emerged as a significant mediator (conditional indirect effect = -.17, SE = .08, 95% CI [-.33, -.03]), although as previously noted, the conditional effect of culture on choice in this condition was not significant.

Figure 1: Processing fluency mediated the relationship between cultural orientation and choice when choosing between movies depicting mixed (vs. univalent) emotions.



Note. $^{\dagger}p < .10$ and $***p < .001$

For comparison, we also examined a heuristic account by using the same moderated mediation model detailed above except that relative perceived popularity was the mediator. In the mixed emotions condition, perceived popularity did not mediate the effect of culture on choice (conditional indirect effect = .14, SE = .12, 95% CI [-.10, .38]). In contrast, in the univalent emotions condition, perceived popularity emerged as a significant mediator (conditional indirect effect = -.26, SE = .09, 95% CI [-.46, -.10]), although as previously noted, the effect of culture on choice in this condition was not significant. See Web Appendix D for details.

Discussion

By comparing choices between pairs of mixed and univalent emotions, the results of study 2 indicate that the observed effects are driven by greater perceived emotional conflict inherent in mixed emotions. Participants perceived higher emotional conflict in mixed (vs. univalent) emotions tags and, depending on their cultural orientation, processed the pride-anger or affection-sadness option more fluently relative to the alternative. Where this culture-by-condition association was observed with a relative fluency measure, Web Appendix F examines whether it emerges when fluency is measured for a single option in absolute terms. Notably, in the univalent condition, culture predicted relative processing fluency in the opposite direction, suggesting that without opposing valence to depict culturally normative conflict, univalent

emotions feel less diagnostically normative. The crossover interaction on choice and mediation models provide initial support for fluency explaining choice beyond a heuristic account (see Web Appendices F and G for supplementary studies addressing dialecticism and perceived popularity as alternate accounts).

Study 3: Maximizing attenuates the effect

Study 3 builds upon the process evidence in study 2 by using a moderation-of-process approach. Compared to low maximizing wherein people choose fluent options that are good enough to satisfy their needs (Iyengar et al., 2006; Schwartz et al., 2002), high maximizing shifts the decision threshold from good enough to the best available (Ma & Roese, 2014). Because high (vs. low) maximizing is more effortful, we predict that high (vs. low) maximizing might disrupt consumers from fluently choosing according to salient cultural prescriptions.

Method

We recruited 502 adults on Amazon Mechanical Turk for nominal payment. We manipulated mixed emotion and maximizing at two between-subjects levels (affection-sadness vs. pride-anger $\times$ low vs. high) and measured cultural orientation. We received 499 survey responses ($M_{\text{age}} = 40$, $SD = 11.74$, 249 women), which we considered for analyses.

First, participants completed the same measure of cultural orientation as in earlier studies (Oyserman, 1993) ($\alpha_{\text{IND}} = .59$, $\alpha_{\text{COL}} = .75$). Second, all participants saw five choices in unrelated domains (e.g., singers, pets). We randomly assigned participants to maximizing conditions such that those in the low maximizing condition chose options that were “good enough” but those in the high maximizing condition chose the best (Ma & Roese, 2014).

Third, participants saw three movie options (focal option based on condition, less emotional option, and neither). For the mixed-emotion option, we randomly assigned

participants to conditions where they saw either *Violent, Inspiring, Slow Burn* (pride-anger) or *Tearjerker, Romantic, Heartfelt* (affection-sadness). The other option was always *Witty, Psychological, Irreverent*; pretests confirmed this option was significantly less emotional than the focal tags (see Web Appendix B for full pretest details). The last option was neither. Unlike in studies 1 and 2 where choosing neither meant rejecting *both* of our mixed-emotion stimuli, participants in this study who chose neither rejected only one of our mixed-emotion stimuli. Therefore, we included participants who chose neither in the main analyses. The results are similar when we exclude those participants.

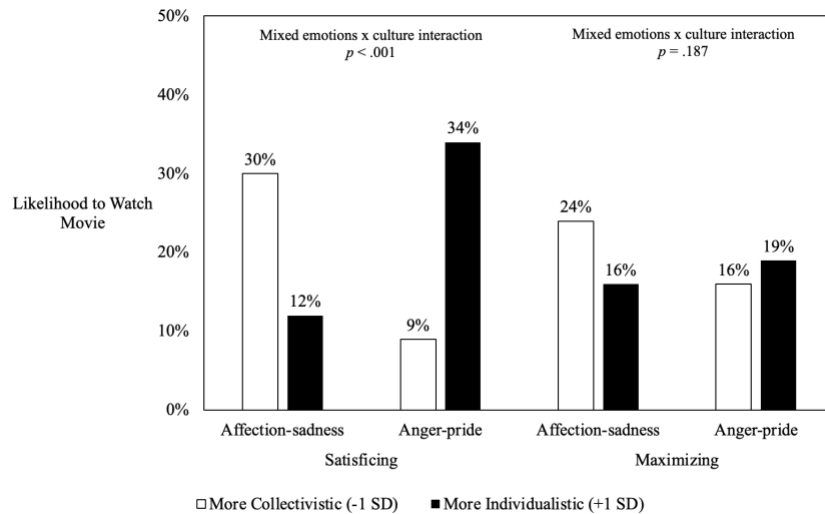
Results

Culture. We created the same index for cultural orientation as in earlier studies. Reliability for this index was $\rho = .70$.

Movie choice. We binary coded the focal mixed-emotion movie choice as 1 and coded all other choices as 0. We regressed the binary decision to choose the focal movie on emotion condition (-0.5 = affection-sadness, 0.5 = pride-anger), maximizing condition (-0.5 = low maximizing, 0.5 = high maximizing), cultural orientation index (mean-centered), and all possible interaction terms. The analysis yielded a culture $\times$ emotion interaction ($B = .75$, $SE = .20$, $p < .001$) that was further moderated by maximizing condition (3-way interaction: $B = -.86$, $SE = .40$, $p = .034$; see figure 2). All other effects were not significant, including the effect of emotion condition ($B = -.09$, $SE = .24$, $p = .692$), the effect of culture ($B = .03$, $SE = .10$, $p = .748$), the main effect of maximizing condition ($B = -.05$, $SE = .24$, $p = .821$), the emotion $\times$ maximizing interaction ($B = -.12$, $SE = .48$, $p = .804$), and the culture $\times$ maximizing interaction ($B = -.14$, $SE = .20$, $p = .501$).

We separately tested the culture $\times$ mixed emotions interaction in each maximizing condition. In the low maximizing condition, the culture $\times$ mixed emotions interaction was significant ($B = 1.19$, $SE = 0.31$, $p < .001$). Consistent with H1, the culture index was negatively associated with choosing the focal movie in the affection-sadness condition ($B = -.49$, $SE = .23$, $p = .031$), suggesting that the more collectivistic the individual, the more likely they chose the affection-sadness movie. In contrast, and consistent with H2, the culture index was positively associated with choosing the focal movie in the pride-anger condition ($B = .70$, $SE = .22$, $p = .001$), suggesting that the more individualistic the individual, the more likely they chose the pride-anger movie. Consistent with, but not conclusive of, a fluency account, the culture $\times$ mixed emotions interaction was attenuated for participants in the high maximizing condition ($B = 0.33$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = .187$).

Figure 2: Culturally matched mixed emotions increased choice likelihood under low (vs. high) maximizing.



Discussion

This study provides moderation-of-process evidence by showing that, in the low maximizing condition (i.e., when primed to choose an option that is “good enough”), people

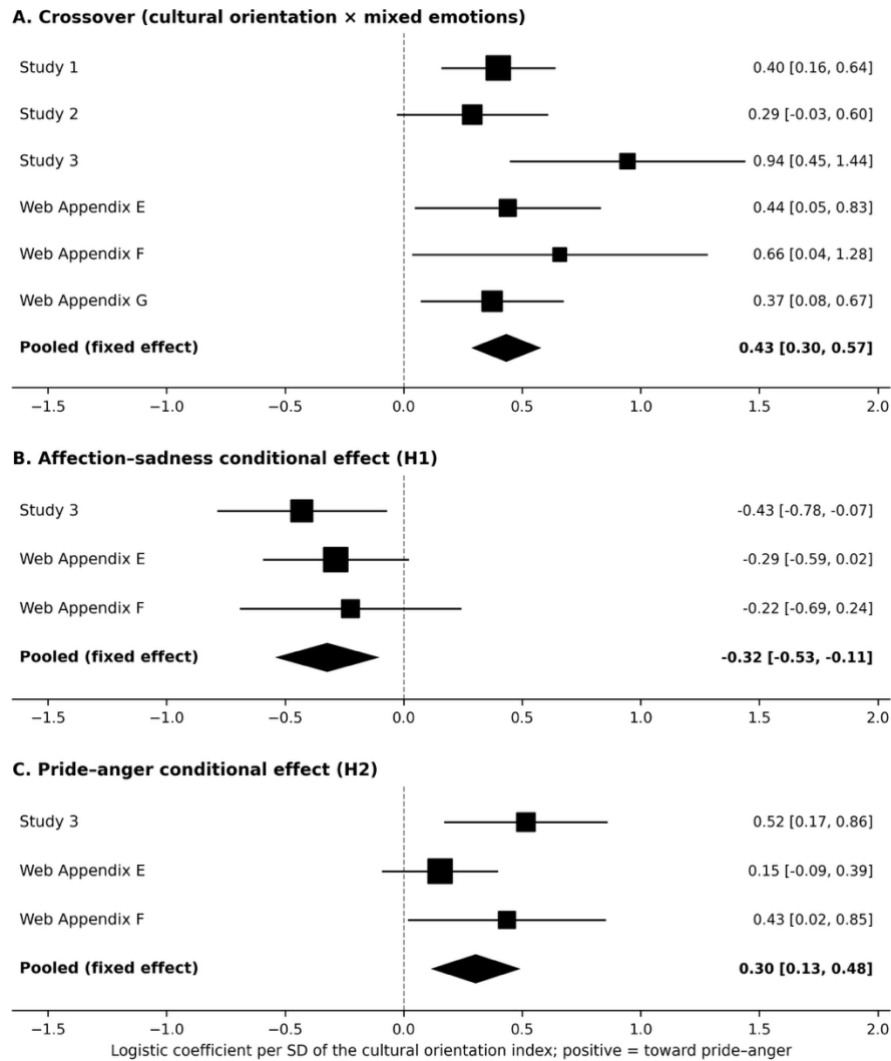
were more likely to choose culturally aligned mixed emotional content. In contrast, in the high maximizing condition (i.e., when primed to maximize their decisions), people were less likely to be guided by culture when choosing mixed emotional content that aligned or not with their cultural orientation.

Supplemental Studies and Internal Meta-Analysis

To further evaluate the robustness and boundaries of the hypothesized matchup effect, we report three additional preregistered supplemental experiments examining the effect with image-based emotional cues, absolute fluency measures, and an attempted fluency source attribution manipulation. We then summarize all reported studies in an internal meta-analysis following the standard meta-analysis procedures reviewed by Grewal et al. (2018). We report the details for all supplemental studies in Web Appendices E–G.

For consistency, we calculated the independent effect size associated with the culture $\times$ mixed-emotions crossover in each experiment. These were the interaction contrast in designs employing a common low-emotion alternative (Study 3, Web Appendix E, and Web Appendix F) and the coefficient for cultural orientation in designs employing a direct choice between the two focal options (Studies 1–2 and Web Appendix G). Because studies used two instruments for cultural orientation, log-odds coefficients were rescaled to per-standard-deviation units before pooling; the pooled estimate is also expressed as Cohen's d for comparability. Figure 3 summarizes the culture $\times$ mixed-emotions crossover and the two conditional effects across all reported studies, using fixed-effect inverse-variance pooling.

Figure 3: Internal Meta-Analysis of the Culture $\times$ Mixed Emotions Effect



Note. Squares are study-level logistic regression estimates (area proportional to inverse-variance weight); whiskers are 95% CIs; diamonds are fixed-effect pooled estimates. Panel A: crossover estimates (culture × mixed emotions interaction in designs with a neutral alternative; culture coefficient in head-to-head designs). Panels B–C: conditional effects of cultural orientation within each mixed-emotions condition (available for designs with a neutral alternative). Positive values indicate effects toward the pride-anger option. For ease of interpretation, study 3 estimates are at the mean of the maximizing manipulation.

The average weighted effect of the crossover is $b = .43$ ($SE = .07$, $Z = 6.15$, $p < .001$; $d = .24$), indicating a significant effect size. Estimates were highly consistent across the two instruments (Oyserman studies: $b = .44$, $p < .001$; Triandis and Gelfand studies: $b = .43$, $p < .001$). Decomposing the crossover into its constituent conditional effects reveals that H2 was supported two times in the three studies that yield the relevant estimates, whereas the affection-sadness effect was supported once and marginally supported once in the same three studies. This suggests relative symmetry between effects that is further corroborated by the comparable and opposing estimates in the affection-sadness ($b = -.32$, $SE = .11$, $Z = -3.04$, $p = .002$) and pride-anger ($b = .30$, $SE = .09$, $Z = 3.35$, $p < .001$) conditions, consistent with H1 and H2 respectively. Moreover, Cochran's Q test of heterogeneity of effect sizes (Borenstein et al. 2009) shows that the effect sizes across studies are homogenous in nature (crossover: $Q(5) = 5.68$, $p = .339$; affection-sadness; $Q(2) = 0.57$, $p = .750$; pride-anger: $Q(2) = 3.35$, $p = .187$). Overall, the results of the internal meta-analysis render confidence that the findings reported in the paper are unlikely due to chance (see Web Appendix I for additional details on this meta-analysis).

General Discussion

Content marketers are increasingly seeking to personalize user interfaces to provide fluent user experiences and influence choice. Culturally-aligned mixed emotions are a powerful, yet overlooked, driver of consumer choice. Data from eight years of box office revenue (2015-2022) and six experiments (including three in Web Appendices E–G; see Web Appendix K for a summary of all studies) showed that depicting culturally normative mixed emotions can materially influence consumer choice, contributing to personalized user experience. A meta-analysis of these studies further strengthened the confidence in these findings. Extending prior

research, we find that collectivists and individualists choose movies with mixed emotions: Collectivists were more likely to choose movies described with affection and sadness, whereas individualists were more likely to choose movies described with anger and pride. We also found that processing fluency is consistent with differences in choice (study 2). Consistent with, but not conclusive of a fluency-based account, the tendency to choose according to one's salient cultural orientation was attenuated when consumers were primed with high (vs. low) maximizing (study 3). Importantly, perceived popularity never accounted for the culture–emotions matchup effect in any condition in which the matchup effect emerged (see Web Appendix J for the results of all alternative mechanisms examined across studies).

Theoretical Implications

Culturally novel versus normative emotions. Previous work focused on single emotions that were relatively novel to individualistic and collectivistic groups (Aaker & Williams, 1998). In contrast, the current research focuses on culturally normative mixed emotions. The results of a pilot study (see Web Appendix A) suggest that the mixed emotions studied here are common, not novel, to consumers. Moreover, measuring cultural orientations within a single country helped reduce the possibility of differences in novelty across individualists and collectivists. Building on prior work, we find a consistent matchup effect with culturally normative mixed emotions: individualists prefer pride-anger whereas collectivists prefer affection-sadness.

Our work also contributes to the literature on culturally normative emotions. Past cultural congruity findings suggest that individualists prefer high arousal emotions and collectivists prefer low arousal emotions (Tsai et al., 2006; Tsai, Louie, et al., 2007; Tsai, Miao, et al., 2007). This research stream has focused on positive, univalent emotions (e.g., excitement, calmness). Our findings extend this research stream to mixed emotions: individualists favored pride-anger

(typically higher arousal) while collectivists favored affection-sadness (typically lower arousal). As we did not independently manipulate arousal, future work could disentangle its contribution from the emotions' content. More broadly, the present findings suggest that identifying culturally normative mixed emotions may require attending to two criteria: whether the emotions are familiar and desired within a cultural group, and whether they share a compatible motivational direction.

Our results also add to the relatively sparse literature on how mixed discrete emotions influence us in everyday life. Prior research has overwhelmingly focused on the happiness–sadness pairing (e.g., Ersner-Hershfield et al., 2008; Williams & Aaker, 2002), leaving other normative mixed emotions underexplored. However, more recent evidence indicates that mixed emotions can be more nuanced beyond happiness-sadness or poignancy (Chaudhury et al., 2022; Trampe et al., 2015) and have significant downstream consequences (Gray et al., 2011; Tamir & Ford, 2009, 2012; Tracy & Robins, 2003). We theoretically contribute to emotions research by showing how common, yet understudied, mixes of pride-anger and affection-sadness can influence choice as a function of cultural orientation.

Effortful versus effortless processes. Past research explains cultural differences in responses to unfamiliar univalent emotions (Aaker & Williams, 1998) and ambiguous mixed emotions (Williams & Aaker, 2002) through effortful processing. In contrast, we find that interpreting signals of culturally normative mixed emotions requires less effort relative to motivated elaboration or emotion regulation and the results are consistent with, but not conclusive of, processing fluency underlying the effect. For example, in study 3, the tendency to choose according to cultural prescriptions was attenuated in a more demanding context (i.e.,

when primed with high maximizing), consistent with fluency accounts (Briley & Aaker, 2006; Riemer & Shavitt, 2011).

This study is the first, to our knowledge, to provide initial evidence that different mixed emotions can influence processing fluency as a function of culture (see Yoo & Miyamoto, 2018 for a theoretical discussion of this possibility). Beyond effects that arise from conceptual or perceptual fluency on brand evaluations (Lee & Labroo, 2004) and advertising campaigns (Kuo & Rice, 2014; Shapiro, 1999), more recent work has begun exploring how processing fluency influences response to culturally relevant stimuli (e.g., Mourey et al., 2015; Torelli et al., 2012). This latter stream shows that culturally relevant perceptual and conceptual cues (e.g., stars and stripes vs. white plate; Mourey et al., 2015) can affect processing fluency. Our work advances the discussion of processing fluency, suggesting that it can also emerge from viewing culturally normative mixed emotions.

Practical and Managerial Implications

Customizing emotional cues. Marketers across industries use a variety of emotional cues to persuade consumers, yet most overlook a fundamental insight: cultural emotional alignment significantly amplifies persuasiveness. Our research reveals that customizing the emotional cues associated with content, specifically using pride-anger themes for individualistic audiences and affection-sadness themes for collectivistic audiences, can meaningfully enhance processing fluency and strengthen consumer choice. The findings highlight a practical and strategic tool for marketers seeking to improve engagement across diverse markets.

Emotion tags represent one such customizable cue that content platforms such as StoryGraph, Steam, and Itch increasingly use without customizing. Moreover, among leading streaming services in the U.S. (e.g., Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Hulu, HBO Max), only

Netflix has invested meaningfully in this approach, and they are planning to redirect their investments from other persuasion tactics to tags in the near future (Koblin, 2024). Notably, Netflix has not, to our knowledge, customized these tags across users. Our studies suggest that personalizing these tags to match viewers' cultural orientations may be a promising direction for content platforms seeking to increase recommendation effectiveness.

Designing fluent experiences. Our findings also suggest an important caveat: mismatching emotional cues with consumers' cultural orientations may inadvertently introduce processing disfluency, thereby reducing recommendation effectiveness. Therefore, before deploying culturally targeted emotional cues, organizations should assess their internal capabilities (e.g., cultural segmentation) and ensure that the selected cues do not contradict ways in which their target segments appraise content. Platforms lacking the necessary capabilities or a clear understanding of their audience may risk misaligned implementations that undermine fluency instead of enhancing it.

Study 3 suggests a practically relevant tactic for persuading consumer choice. To reinforce cultural preferences, the findings suggest that marketers could encourage satisficing behavior through low-effort messaging that may allow processing fluency to guide choice (e.g., "Perfect choice for you"). In contrast, to override cultural preferences, marketers could encourage maximizing behavior through comparative messaging (e.g., "Top 10 in the U.S."). This additional cognitive effort may disrupt the preference for culturally aligned alternatives. Importantly, this implies that maximizing cues are not universally beneficial; rather, their utility depends on whether marketers seek to reinforce or disrupt culturally patterned preferences.

In sum, our findings underscore that effective emotion-based personalization requires a careful assessment of consumers' cultural orientations, calibration of decision mindsets, and

contextual alignment. By doing so, organizations can meaningfully enhance consumer engagement, improve recommendation efficacy, and design communication strategies that resonate across culturally diverse audiences.

Future Research

Our results should be interpreted in light of some limitations, which also suggest avenues for future research. To economize resources, we focused on two specific pairs of mixed emotions: affection-sadness and pride-anger. However, many emotions permeate content. Future research could explore the efficacy of our framework with a wider range of mixed emotions. Not only are there numerous possible mixed emotions to consider (e.g., threat-awe), but mixed emotions could also contain more than two discrete emotions (e.g., affection-sadness-pride). Moreover, future research could test how content type interacts with mixed emotions and culture. Producers have commonly used genres to communicate emotion expectations. As a result, people may have formed strong genre preferences (e.g., Desai & Basuroy, 2005). Our illustrative example showed that the top-performing genres in India and the U.S. were associated with culturally consistent emotions. However, it is possible for a movie in each genre to evoke, or at least promote, mixed emotions that challenge genre norms. Consider an action movie with an unusually prominent romantic subplot. Which would have a stronger influence on choosing the movie: genre preferences or emotion expectations? Future work could explore if changing the mixed emotions that accompany movie genre could shift preferences away from genre and toward the mixed emotions. Additionally, examining the effects of mixed emotions on choices in other product domains would provide valuable insights into the generalizability of the findings.

Our research examines the role of culture using national group differences and stable individual differences in cultural orientation, not through contextual salience (priming) of one's

self-construal. Although both independent (individualistic) and interdependent (collectivistic) self-construals can exist within each individual and vary by context (Hong et al., 2000; Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009), evidence suggests that priming cultural self-construal does not influence movie preferences (Wu et al., 2019). Past data, in combination with the current studies, suggest that movie preferences may differ more reliably as a function of chronic differences in cultural orientation. Future research could explore the conditions under which situational differences in cultural self-construal and mixed emotions influence movie choice.

The effect of culture on processing fluency emerged on relative measures in Study 2 but not on absolute measures in Web Appendix F. Future research might investigate whether fluency in choice contexts is inherently comparative. Furthermore, it remains open whether the relative measure of processing fluency in Study 2 shared method variance with the relative choice outcome.

Whereas prior work has linked culture to single emotions and assumed the cultural appeal mixed emotions as one-sided, our findings show that culturally normative mixed emotions — pride-anger for individualists, affection-sadness for collectivists — influence relative processing fluency and choice. As marketers seek to reach increasingly diverse audiences, identifying which mixed emotions feel culturally fluent offers a concrete lever for personalizing content and enhancing consumer experiences worldwide.

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Table 1. Prior Literature on Culture and Mixed Emotions

Theme	Literature	Core contributions	Identified research gaps	How the present study addresses these gaps
Mixed emotions as a construct and consumer influence	Larsen & McGraw (2014); Penz & Hogg (2011); Yousef et al. (2021)	Mixed emotions, the simultaneous experience of emotions with opposing valence, are common in everyday consumer contexts; signals of mixed emotions significantly influence decisions, approach-avoidance conflicts, and persuasion outcomes.	Prior work treats mixed emotions as a unitary category without examining whether specific emotion pairs differ in their appeal across consumers. The conditions under which particular mixed emotion combinations drive choice remain underspecified.	Moves beyond mixed emotions as a unitary category by identifying specific mixed emotion pairs (pride-anger; affection-sadness) and testing whether their appeal varies systematically as a function of consumers' cultural orientation.
Diversity and nuance of mixed emotion pairings	Ersner-Hershfield et al. (2008); Chaudhury et al. (2022)	Mixed emotions extend beyond the happiness-sadness (poignancy) pairing that has dominated prior research; discrete mixed emotion combinations such as threat-awe have distinct phenomenological profiles and downstream consequences that differ from co-activation of undifferentiated positive and negative affect.	Research on specific mixed emotion pairings focuses on phenomenological experience and emotional structure but does not address whether distinct pairings carry culturally differentiated meaning or drive consumer choice as a function of cultural fit.	Extends the logic of discrete mixed emotion research to a cultural context, showing that pride-anger and affection-sadness carry culturally differentiated meaning and can influence choice through processing fluency.
Cultural emotion norms and desirability	Eid & Diener (2001); Tamir et al. (2015); Markus & Kitayama (1991, 1994)	Cultures differ systematically in which emotions are normatively appropriate and desirable; individualists prioritize self-enhancing emotions (e.g., pride) while collectivists prioritize self-transcendent emotions (e.g., affection); these norms predict well-being and behavior.	Prior work focuses on single, univalent emotions and how emotion norms shape experienced or regulated affect. It does not address whether culturally normative emotions influence processing fluency and choice when presented as mixed pairs in consumer contexts.	Extends emotion norm research to mixed emotion pairs in a consumer choice context, showing that culturally normative mixed emotions (affection-sadness for collectivists; pride-anger for individualists) drive choice consistent with a fluency-based process.

Socially engaging vs. disengaging emotions across cultures	Kitayama et al. (2006); Miyamoto et al. (2010)	Collectivistic cultures elicit more socially engaging emotions (e.g., affection, shame); individualistic cultures elicit more socially disengaging emotions (e.g., pride, anger); mixed emotions co-occur more frequently in Japanese than American daily life.	This research establishes cross-national differences in naturally occurring mixed emotion co-occurrence but does not examine whether these cultural emotion patterns shape consumer preferences for content signaling specific mixed emotion combinations.	Translates cultural differences in naturally occurring mixed emotion co-occurrence into predictions about consumer choice, providing experimental evidence that culturally congruent mixed emotions drive content preferences.
Action tendencies and emotion-goal alignment	Frijda et al. (1989); Lench et al. (2024); Tamir & Ford (2012)	Emotions are associated with distinct action tendencies that prepare organisms to respond; anger facilitates goal-pursuit in competitive contexts; people strategically prefer emotions that help them attain situationally relevant goals.	Action tendency research focuses on how discrete emotions motivate behavior in real-life conflict or goal-pursuit contexts. It has not been applied to explain why specific mixed emotion pairs might be culturally normative or resonate with consumers in media choice contexts.	Uses action tendency logic to justify the theoretical pairing of pride-anger with individualism (goal attainment, dominance) and affection-sadness with collectivism (social connection, harmony), grounding emotion pair selection in established motivational theory.
Effortful processing of cross-cultural emotional appeals	Aaker & Williams (1998)	Individualists (collectivists) respond more favorably to novel other-focused (ego-focused) emotional appeals; processing culturally novel emotions requires effortful elaboration, moderating persuasion across cultural groups.	Focuses on univalent emotions that are culturally novel, with effortful processing as the mechanism. Does not address how culturally normative mixed emotions influence choice, nor whether a less effortful, fluency-based process may operate for normative stimuli.	Suggests that culturally normative mixed emotions can drive choice through effortless fluency processing rather than the effortful elaboration required for culturally novel emotional appeals; this effect is disrupted by deliberative mindsets (high maximizing), consistent with a fluency account.

Cultural differences in mixed emotion tolerance	Williams & Aaker (2002); Pang et al. (2017)	Collectivists are more comfortable with mixed emotional experiences than individualists, who tend to find the co-occurrence of positive and negative feelings uncomfortable; dialectical thinking moderates tolerance for attitudinal ambivalence.	Prior work examines a single mixed emotion pairing (happiness-sadness) and treats collectivism as uniformly more tolerant of mixed emotions, leaving open whether individualists might prefer different mixed emotion combinations rather than rejecting mixed emotions per se.	Demonstrates that individualists also prefer mixed emotions (i.e., pride-anger), suggesting the prior finding reflects emotion-culture mismatch rather than a general intolerance of mixed emotions among individualists.
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