

## What I think I Feel (What's Love Got to do With It?)

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### Emotions and Decision Making

Over the past few years, the field of Behavioral Economics has grown exponentially. Whether you are a fan or a critic, the notion of using the theories behind Behavioral Economic typically leads to spirited conversations. Until recently, one of the more understudied applications of Behavioral Economic theory is in the field of emotional response measurement. Robert Plutchik<sup>1</sup> and his colleagues put forth the notion of a two-component structure of emotion, specifically, basic and complex emotions. Plutchik considered there to be eight primary or basic emotions: anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy. However, Plutchik and his colleagues also recognized some emotions are more complex and occur based on a combination of emotions.

Similarly, in recent years, there has been considerable focus on the mental processes that influence decision-making, as described through the principles of Behavioral Economics. Daniel Kahneman (and his colleague, Amos Tversky) proposed that humans have two basic systems of thinking, and he called these two processes – appropriately enough – System 1 and System 2. Readers of this paper are doubtless familiar with this work, summarized beautifully in Kahneman's book, Thinking Fast and Slow. We will not go into detail here but will simply remind ourselves that...



**System 1** = fast, reactive, and instinctual (used to make simple decisions that require or necessitate little or no deliberation). Think fight-flight.

**System 2** = slow, rational, and deliberate (used to tackle the more difficult and time-consuming decisions that require our full attention). Think value/cost trade-off.

While this is nothing new to market researchers, we face the problem of being able to measure emotions and mental processes. There are several ways to measure emotions and mental processes through biometrics, such as EEGs, fMRIs, facial recognition software, etc. However, these require expensive equipment and require actual face-to-face contact with the subject - such as in a lab or a shop-along. Our emotional reactions to various stimuli occur spontaneously whenever and wherever we encounter those stimulus objects or events. Therefore, as we watch a television program or a Broadway play, we have an immediate, in-the-moment emotional response to that stimulus. However, if we are later asked about the TV show or the play, we have an emotional response that is based on our memory of the stimulus. Those memory-based emotional responses are critical to the decisions we make about all sorts of stimuli, including brands, products, creative advertising, disease states, concepts, treatments, and messaging.

You could also measure emotion through a survey, but these can be tedious and typically only assess one or two emotions at a time. If you wanted to measure multiple emotions, the length of the survey would become unsustainable, creating an undue response burden and lower quality data. Perhaps more importantly, these methods have focused almost exclusively on “in-the-moment” emotional response measurement. Although, many of the emotional responses we seek in marketing are likely to be “memory-based.”

### **Our Response to Limitations on Measuring Emotion**

Numerous social sciences, such as neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and physiology, have all attempted to measure emotions in their studies. Nevertheless, these studies are not scalable for the type of research most of us do to support marketing/advertising. Again, these assessments usually measure in-the-moment emotional response and do so one emotion at a time. Until now, there has not been a fun, engaging, scalable, and cost-effective way to measure emotion. KS&R and The Rational Heart (TRH) teamed up to create two distinct activities in response to these limitations for measuring emotions.

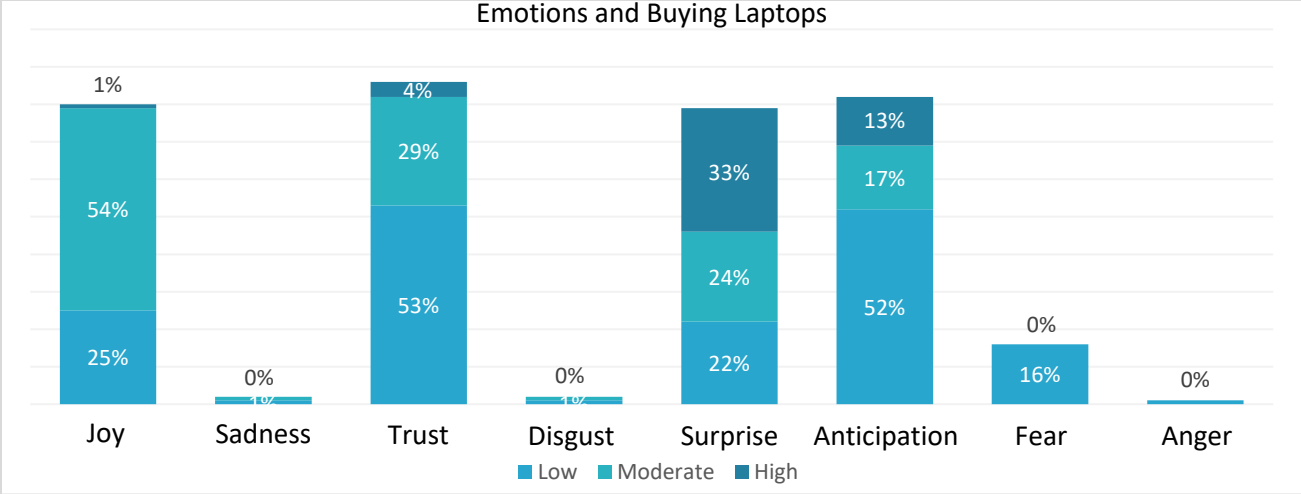
We generated these activities based on empirical data, creating the ability to test multiple emotions at once while still being useful in Market Research settings. One activity assesses emotions with the System 1 process (TRH) and the other assesses emotions with the System 2 process (KS&R). In both cases, we used a web-based survey and asked respondents about a specific brand, product, and buying occasion to frame the decision-making setting.

For our System 1 approach, we show respondents two emotions and ask them to select the one that is most related to a stimulus, but they have less than 3 seconds to answer. This technique in combination with the time limit gets the implicit, gut reaction from the respondent. For our System 2 approach, we show respondents four emotions and ask them to select the one that is most and least representative to stimulus. Here, we do not implement a time limit allowing the respondent to reflect back and slowly think about how they were feeling.

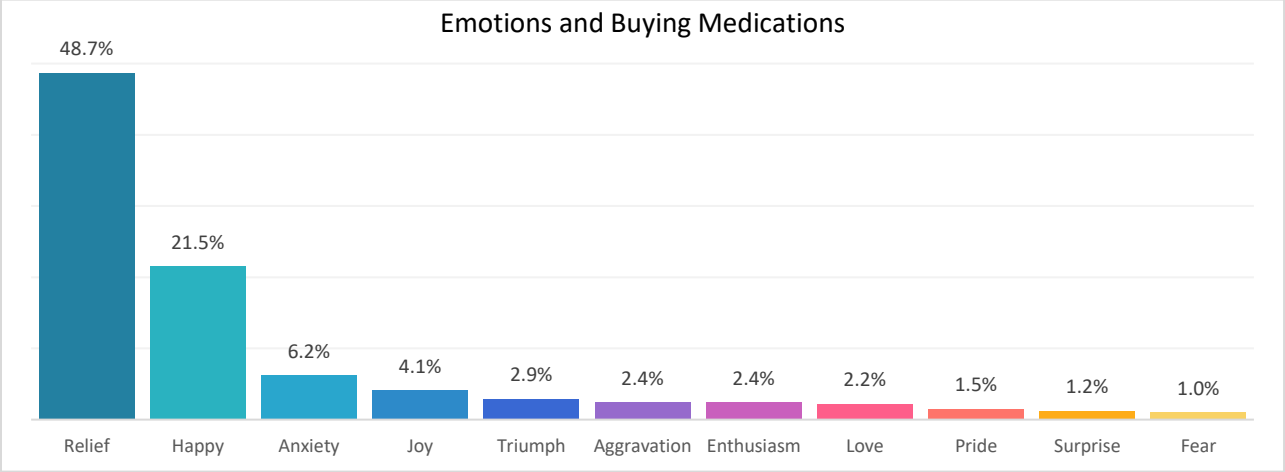
We surveyed nearly 2,000 consumers asking them to assess their emotion during specific purchase occasions – purchasing a cell phone (n = 439), new vehicle (n = 251), laptop (n = 398), picking up a prescription (n = 1,247), large home appliance (n = 235), food delivery (n = 827).

### **The Results**

Using the System 1 approach, we found the majority of respondents felt positive emotions, such as Joy, Trust, and Anticipation regardless of the purchase category, excluding prescription medications. As you can see, the positive emotion of Joy is felt more often in all cases except prescription medications. These are all emotions that your company can focus on, enhance, instill, and message to elevate your brand. On the other hand, some negative emotions need consideration, especially in regard to cell phones and large appliances. As you can see, a select few experience Apprehension for these purchase categories. In this case, you could lose a potential sale or new customer due to this emotion. Messaging about guarantees or worry-free returns could help reduce this emotion.

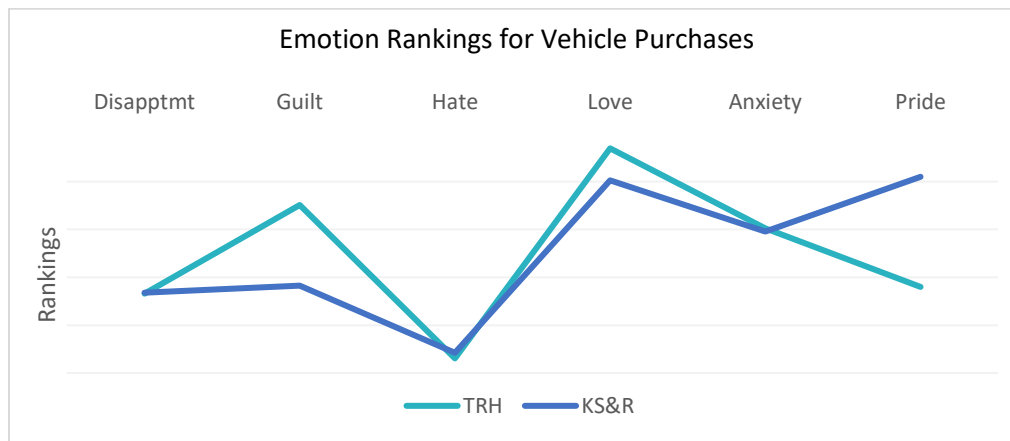


At the surface level, using the System 2 approach resulted in similar findings across the different emotions where Happy and Joy were the most relevant emotions to the buying occasion. Although, the prescription medication purchase category stands out from the others as Happy was not the top emotion. Of the respondents who recently purchased prescription medication, we found that Relief was felt as the primary emotion for almost half the time. Similarly, further analysis showed the reach with Relief and other emotions never dropped below 70%. Given the cost and difficulties associated with insurance interactions, this result is not surprising. Thus, a pharmaceutical company could position itself in providing Relief and reducing the anxiety that corresponds with purchasing prescription medications.



## Similarities and Differences

So, how are these two emotion assessment tools similar and different? That ultimately depends on the emotions and purchase category. For the “Basic” emotions, such as anger, fear, sadness, disgust, surprise, anticipation, trust, and joy, there is no substantial difference. In all six buying scenarios, respondents reported similar experiences with these emotions. Contrariwise, some of the complex emotions differ. For instance, we found differing results in Pride and Guilt when purchasing a vehicle. Using the System 1 mindset (represented by the TRH line below), respondents were more likely to report feeling Guilt and less likely to report feeling Pride. However, we found the exact opposite with the System 2 approach (represented by the KS&R line below). Here, respondents felt Proud and experienced little Guilt. This makes sense given at the time of purchase, you are experiencing buyer’s remorse, yet your System 2 reasoning/logic concludes that the purchase you made was the right one.



## Conclusion

In closing, we found interesting results on how emotions are associated with different purchase categories. Some purchase categories were more unique than others and there were distinct differences where some emotions occurred more often than in others. In addition, utilizing System 1 and System 2 returned unique findings for complex emotions. Depending on the point in the customer journey, it may be more beneficial to use the System 1 approach while other times the System 2 approach is more favorable. In any case, we can measure emotions that are suited to specific project goals.

Where do we go from here?

As we stated earlier, the two activities are scalable in the Market Research setting and based on empirical data. These activities easily append to any survey, minimizing the respondent burden while maintaining quality data. In addition, this data can be incorporated with additional Market Research analyses/studies that you are already familiar with, such as but not limited to, Brand Tracking, MaxDiff, Q-Sort, TURF, and Segmentations. By utilizing these activities, we can get a better understanding of feelings across the entire customer journey. The possibilities are endless.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27857503?seq=1>