



MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL ADVERTISING

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Abstract:

Emotions arise through interaction with the social environment and influence interpersonal relationships. They differ across individuals and are influenced by situational factors and the prevailing social context. Emotions are conveyed through multiple channels of communication, including language, body posture, and gestures, all of which significantly influence interpersonal interactions. Companies promote their products through advertisements on social media, aiming to influence individuals' emotions and behavior through consistent and repetitive messaging. The overarching aim of advertisements is to elicit emotional responses and guide individual behavior. At the same time, individuals' preferences for particular advertising messages can reveal key aspects of their personality profiles and the emotion regulation strategies they employ. The purpose of the present study is to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discourse of recent years regarding young adults' perceptions of others' expectations, the emotion regulation strategies they adopt, and the extent of socially prescribed perfectionism they experience—examined through the lens of social advertising.

Keywords: emotions, emotion regulation strategies, social advertising, socially prescribed perfectionism

1. Introduction

Emotions are considered complex phenomena that involve interactions between subjective and objective parameters, influencing both the psychological and physiological state of the individual (Gross, 2002). Specifically, they are defined as affective experiences with intense hedonic content, typically triggered by external stimuli

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or internal thoughts. Emotions play a vital role in survival, as well as in social interactions, significantly shaping individuals' thinking, behavior, and decision-making. Research indicates that basic emotions, such as anger, sadness, and joy, possess biological underpinnings and are associated with activity in specific areas of the brain (Satpute, Shu, Weber, Roy, & Ochsner, 2013).

Moods, which are often conflated with emotions, differ fundamentally in terms of intensity and duration. More specifically, moods are characterized by lower intensity and longer duration, whereas emotions tend to be more intense and transient. Furthermore, language plays a pivotal role in the shaping, categorization, and expression of emotions. The linguistic recognition of emotions enables individuals to comprehend and articulate their emotional experiences, fostering both social and emotional connections (Lindquist *et al.*, 2015). Experimental data suggest that language influences the perception and externalization of emotions, thereby altering the way emotional stimuli are experienced and expressed (Barrett, 2006; Papakostopoulou *et al.*, 2024).

Notably, emotional suppression refers to strategies that limit the external expression of emotions, without necessarily reducing the internal emotional intensity. This process bears significant implications for both psychological and physical well-being and is commonly associated with negative outcomes, especially in cases of chronic stress or mental health disorders (Gross, 2002).

Socially prescribed perfectionism refers to a form of perfectionism that generates intense stress, stemming from high expectations and pressure imposed by an individual's social environment (Kemp *et al.*, 2020). According to Frost *et al.* (1990), anxiety constitutes a prevalent phenomenon impacting individuals across all age groups, with heightened intensity often observed among younger populations attributable to their pursuit of perfection and continuous self-improvement.

Furthermore, advertisements endorsing excessively thin body ideals may amplify tendencies toward perfectionism, thereby intensifying the pressure on young people to achieve comparable standards (Kemp *et al.*, 2020). Within the framework of socially prescribed perfectionism, individuals frequently experience intense pressure to meet the expectations of their social circles, leading to psychological consequences such as anxiety, neurotic tendencies, negative emotions, and, in severe cases, suicidal ideation. Emerging adults appear to be particularly susceptible to socially prescribed perfectionism, owing to their heightened sensitivity to social approval and external validation. Moreover, these individuals often encounter difficulties in regulating their negative emotions, thereby exacerbating their psychological distress (Curran & Hill, 2019). Cognitive reappraisal has been identified as a potentially effective strategy for mitigating the adverse effects of socially prescribed perfectionism (Curran & Hill, 2019; Kemp *et al.*, 2020; Ker & Kao, 2021).

2. Emotion and advertising

Social advertising constitutes a form of advertising designed to inform and raise public awareness about important societal issues, with the aim of changing attitudes and

behaviors to promote the collective well-being of society. In contrast to commercial advertising, social advertising is not motivated by profit but rather aims to advance social values and enhance the quality of life (Truss, 2010).

The connection between emotions and advertising constitutes a fundamental area of research, with numerous studies highlighting the crucial role that emotions play in shaping consumer behavior and determining the effectiveness of advertising messages. Emotions are fundamental in the processing of information and in shaping consumers' responses to advertisements. As Poels and Dewitte (2019) suggest, emotions evoked by advertisements exert a direct influence on consumer behavior, while contemporary methodologies and digital media offer novel opportunities for examining behavioral responses.

The emotional effectiveness of advertisements can be measured through tools that capture unconscious emotional responses, such as AFFDEX. This software analyzes facial expressions and demonstrates that advertisements which elicit high levels of emotional engagement—such as joy and attention—tend to be more effective (Otamendi & Martín, 2020). More specifically, AFFDEX is an emotion recognition software based on facial analysis that uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to analyze facial expressions and detect emotional responses in real time. It utilizes a camera to track facial micro-expressions and can identify basic emotions such as joy, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, and contempt (McDuff *et al.*, 2016). In marketing, emotions differ from moods and attitudes, playing a critical role in shaping consumer behavior by affecting cognitive processes, decision-making, and overall satisfaction. This underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of emotions within consumer behavior and advertising strategies (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999).

3. Methodology

For data collection, a quantitative approach was utilized through a questionnaire specifically adapted for the present study and coded for statistical analysis using SPSS 24 (Creswell, 2016; Panagiotakopoulos & Sarris, 2017; Robson, 2010). This method facilitated the analysis of relationships and correlations among the variables.

The research sample comprised individuals aged 16 to 18 years (adolescents) and 19 to 22 years (young adults). A non-probability sampling method was employed, utilizing convenience and snowball sampling techniques, whereby initial participants were asked to refer additional individuals to take part in the study. Given the characteristics of the sample, the findings cannot be generalized to the broader population. However, they provide valuable insights and serve as a basis for future research. Participation was entirely voluntary and conducted without any form of incentive (Creswell, 2016; Panagiotakopoulos & Sarris, 2017; Robson, 2010).

To collect quantitative data, an anonymous questionnaire was distributed to participants (Creswell, 2016; Panagiotakopoulos & Sarris, 2017; Robson, 2010). The tool was chosen due to its cost-effectiveness, ease of distribution, and brevity in completion time. It was based on the questionnaire developed by Kemp *et al.* (2020), which was

translated into Greek and adapted for the present study. Kemp *et al.* incorporated images and sketches with captions, presenting the questions as advertisements addressing everyday social issues. The questionnaire comprised two sections: the first collected demographic information (age and gender), while the second contained 16 questions examining the relationship between social advertisements and emotion regulation strategies aimed at psychological well-being. Questions 1 to 14 utilize a 5-point Likert scale, whereas questions 15 and 16 focus on exploring emotion regulation strategies and socially prescribed perfectionism.

To ensure content validity, a panel of three experts translated and evaluated the questionnaire. Additionally, a pilot study involving ten individuals was conducted to identify any potential comprehension issues (Panagiotakopoulos & Sarris, 2017).

The aim of the present study is to investigate young adults' perceptions regarding the expectations of significant others, their emotional regulation strategies, and the level of socially prescribed perfectionism as influenced by social advertisements. The research questions include:

- 1) What is the correlation between participants' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of the expectations that significant others in their daily lives have of them, (i) with the emotion regulation strategies they adopt as individuals, and (ii) with the level of socially prescribed perfectionism they exhibit as individuals?
- 2) What is the correlation between individuals' perceptions of the expectations that other significant people in their daily lives have of them, (i) with the emotion regulation strategies they adopt as individuals, and (ii) with the level of socially prescribed perfectionism they exhibit as individuals?

This study examines the relationship between emotions and advertising messages, with a particular focus on how social advertising promotes emotion regulation strategies and psychological well-being. The questionnaire consists of two parts: The first part records participants' gender (male, female, other) and age (16–18, 19–22). The second part includes fourteen questions using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) analyzing the relationship between social advertisements and emotion regulation strategies. Additionally, two questions present images of advertisements created with Artificial Intelligence tools, examining the validity of emotion regulation strategies (cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression) and levels of socially prescribed perfectionism (high or low).

4. Results

The reliability of the research was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.70$), a value considered acceptable for proceeding with the study (Panagiotakopoulos & Sarris, 2017; Robson, 2010). To ensure content validity, a panel of three experts translated and evaluated the questionnaire. A pilot study with ten participants was also conducted to identify any potential issues related to comprehension.

A total of one hundred and two individuals (n = 102) participated in the study. Of these, eighty-three (n = 83, 81.4%) identified as female, while nineteen (n = 19, 18.6%) identified as male.

Regarding age, sixty-eight participants (n = 68, 66.7%) belonged to the 19–22 age group, while thirty-four participants (n = 34, 33.3%) were in the 16–18 age group.

Table 4.1: Response Frequency of Questions 1–14

Questionnaire question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I find it difficult to meet others' expectations of me.	18	35	25	17	7
2. Those around me readily accept that I can make mistakes too.	2	18	16	46	20
3. The better I do, the better I am expected to do.	3	7	21	51	20
4. Anything that I do that is less than excellent will be seen as poor work by those around me.	20	41	25	13	3
5. The people around me expect me to succeed at everything I do.	7	26	20	35	14
6. Others will like me even if I don't excel at everything.	3	12	14	41	32
7. Others think I am okay, even when I do not succeed.	6	28	25	30	13
8. I feel that people are too demanding of me.	4	25	16	45	12
9. Although they may not say it, other people get very upset with me when I slip up.	7	20	41	29	5
10. My family expects me to be perfect.	26	32	17	18	9
11. My parent rarely expected me to excel in all aspects of my life.	16	48	21	12	5
12. People expect nothing less than perfection from me.	26	32	27	14	3
13. People expect more from me than I am capable of giving.	12	34	22	24	10
14. People around me think I am still competent even if I make a mistake.	3	7	19	50	23

The responses to questions 2, 3, 6, and 14 indicate that participants perceive a sense of acceptance and understanding from their colleagues, friends, and family environment, even in instances of personal errors or failures.

In response to question 4, participants report that their social environment does not exhibit judgmental attitudes toward their failures. Additionally, the responses to questions 10 and 11 demonstrate a general disagreement with the perception that their social environment imposes expectations of perfection. Similarly, in questions 12 and 13, participants indicate that their social network does not consistently expect them to achieve success.

Questions 1, 5, 7, and 9 examine the participants' perceived difficulties in fulfilling social expectations, the exertion of pressure to achieve success by their social environment, the anticipation of continual prosperity despite internal distress, and the manifestation of silent dissatisfaction resulting in social withdrawal. The prevailing response pattern reflects a stance of ambivalence or neutrality, with "Neither Agree nor Disagree" constituting the most commonly selected option. Question 8 addresses the perception of excessive demands imposed by the social milieu, eliciting a predominant response of "Agree". Collectively, the responses indicate a complex and variable experience among participants concerning the dichotomy of perceived "support" versus "pressure" emanating from their immediate social networks, including close colleagues, friends, and family members.

Subsequently, the four advertisements featured in questions 15 and 16 are presented, wherein participants are requested to choose the caption whose text most accurately corresponds to their individual strategy for dealing with issues that concern and trouble them.

Figure 4.1: Advertisements A and B of Question 15



"It's okay to feel a little stressed. Feeling a bit of stress sometimes helps us stay focused and motivated about the issues that concern us"



"Feeling a bit stressed? No one needs to know. Don't show it!"

Question 15, pertaining to the advertisement, aims to examine the validity of emotional regulation strategies through advertising messages. Specifically, Advertisement A is associated with the emotional regulation strategy of cognitive reappraisal, while Advertisement B represents the strategy of expressive suppression.

Figure 4.2: Advertisements A and B of Question 16



“Take part too. The strongest young business leaders under 30 are here – the boldest young entrepreneurs from around the world. From creating cow-free milk to driverless trucks, these innovative entrepreneurs are making an impact across the globe. The list includes pioneers who have been leaving their mark since their university years. Become one of them. Get on the list.”



“Many of the boldest young entrepreneurs around the world have experienced failure on their path to success. From creating cow-free milk to driverless trucks, these innovative entrepreneurs turned their mistakes into opportunities for growth, aiming for success. They made it through their actions and surprised the world. Don’t be afraid to fail – especially while you’re at university. You will become successful if you embrace failure.”

Question 16, pertaining to the advertisement, examines the construct of socially prescribed perfectionism among individuals. Specifically, Advertisement A corresponds to the condition of high socially prescribed perfectionism, while Advertisement B represents the condition of low socially prescribed perfectionism.

Table 4.2: Frequency of Responses to Questions 15–16

Questionnaire question	Advertisement A	Advertisement B
Question 15	82	20
Question 16	25	77

In question 15 of the survey, the majority of participants indicated a preference for cognitive reappraisal as their emotion regulation strategy by selecting Advertisement A.

Regarding question 16, the predominant response suggested that most participants exhibited low levels of socially prescribed perfectionism.

Regarding the nominal variables of the questionnaire and the investigation of the existence of correlations between them, the Chi-Square test (χ^2) was employed, a statistical method commonly used to examine relationships between nominal variables. Concerning the first research question, *"What is the correlation between participants' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of the expectations that significant others in their daily lives have of them, (i) with the emotion regulation strategies they adopt as individuals, and (ii) with the level of socially prescribed perfectionism they exhibit as individuals?"*, it was found that gender is not statistically significantly correlated with either the emotion regulation strategies ($\chi^2(1) = 0.67$; $n = 102$; $p > .01$) or the socially prescribed perfectionism of the participants ($\chi^2(1) = 0.04$; $n = 102$; $p > .01$). Similarly, age does not show a statistically significant correlation with emotion regulation strategies, nor with socially prescribed perfectionism ($\chi^2(1) = 1.30$; $n = 102$; $p > .01$). Additionally, age is not correlated with the specific emotion regulation strategy adopted by individuals ($\chi^2(1) = 0.03$; $n = 102$; $p > .01$). Regarding the second research question, *"What is the correlation between individuals' perceptions of the expectations that other significant people in their daily lives have of them, (i) with the emotion regulation strategies they adopt as individuals, and (ii) with the level of socially prescribed perfectionism they exhibit as individuals?"*, it was found that views on psychological pressure arising from expectations are associated with both emotion regulation strategies and socially prescribed perfectionism. Specifically, expressive suppression strategies are linked to increased anxiety, while socially prescribed perfectionism is associated with the perceived pressure to meet environmental expectations.

5. Conclusions

Regarding the answer to the first research question, which investigates the relationship between individuals' demographic characteristics (gender and age) and their perceptions of the expectations of significant others in their daily lives, as well as the emotion regulation strategies they adopt and the level of socially prescribed perfectionism they exhibit, the findings of the present study indicate the absence of statistically significant relationships. Specifically, participants' gender did not appear to significantly influence their perception of social expectations, their chosen emotion regulation strategies, or their levels of socially prescribed perfectionism. Similarly, age was not found to be significantly associated with any of the aforementioned variables.

These results diverge from findings in previous research. For example, Pascual *et al.* (2016) and Kwon *et al.* (2013) highlight the importance of gender in the selection of emotion regulation strategies, suggesting that men and women tend to adopt different approaches in managing their emotional responses. Likewise, Vitulić & Prosen (2016) emphasize the impact of age on emotional regulation strategies, while Masumoto *et al.* (2016) and Esmaeilinasab *et al.* (2016) support the existence of associations with both gender and age. Concerning socially prescribed perfectionism, Stoeber & Stoeber (2009)

and Sand *et al.* (2021) confirm its correlation with individuals' demographic characteristics.

Regarding the second research question, the results of the present study reveal a statistically significant association between how individuals perceive the expectations held by significant people in their social environment and the emotion regulation strategies they adopt, as well as the level of socially prescribed perfectionism they exhibit. These findings are supported by a number of studies indicating that emotion regulation strategies play a crucial role in individuals' mental health and their ability to manage stress (Kemp *et al.*, 2020; McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, the use of expressive suppression as a strategy is linked to increased anxiety and reduced social functioning (Cutuli, 2014). Additionally, socially prescribed perfectionism is positively associated with perceived pressure stemming from high social expectations (Kemp *et al.*, 2020). The studies of Minichiello *et al.* (2024), Hayatbini *et al.* (2021), and Guerreiro *et al.* (2024) confirm these associations, highlighting that psychological pressure resulting from social expectations affects both the adoption of emotion regulation strategies and the reinforcement of socially prescribed perfectionism.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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