Promoting consumer well-being: Examining emotion regulation strategies in social advertising messages

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ABSTRACT

Young adults are experiencing a marked increase in anxiety. Several environmental factors, including socially prescribed perfectionism, a form of perfectionism, may account for increasing levels of anxiety. This research examines how social advertising tools can be used to encourage the use of emotion regulation strategies to help promote psychological well-being. Specifically, the efficacy of two emotion regulation strategies is investigated: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Results from two experimental studies demonstrated that cognitive reappraisal was more effective than expressive suppression in mitigating the effects of anxiety. Findings also indicated that emotion regulation strategy and socially prescribed perfectionism interacted such that individuals who reported high levels of socially prescribed perfectionism and who were exposed to an advertisement promoting cognitive reappraisal exhibited better emotion management tendencies. This research highlights how marketing mechanisms, specifically social marketing and advertising, can aid in facilitating effective emotion regulation.

1. Introduction

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, almost 31% of adolescents have an anxiety disorder (National Comorbidity Survey, 2017). In a recent survey from 2018, 42% of young people revealed that they often feel stressed (GenYOUth, 2018), and 62% of undergraduate college students reported overwhelming anxiety—an increase from 50% of undergraduates in 2011 (American College Health Association, 2016). Despite these unsettling reports, it is suspected that these statistics may not capture the enormity of the problem since only approximately 20% of young people with a diagnosable mental health issue receive treatment (Child Mind Institute, 2015).

Several environmental factors may contribute to high levels of anxiety in young people (i.e., Generation Z, born after 1996; Millennials, born after 1980). Many young adults have a smartphone and are exposed to copious stimuli on a daily basis. Furthermore, these young people grew up during the Great Recession of 2008 and were subject to family financial stresses. They have also grown up in a society where terrorism and school shootings are ubiquitous. Moreover, young people feel the need to manage a social media identity in which their lives and experiences are documented online. At times their real and online worlds are almost indistinguishable (Schrobsdorff, 2016). On social networks, people are either debating strangers about points of disagreement or bombarded with images/videos depicting the perfect life. In addition to the statistics, there is an instinctive sense that cultural and societal trends are merging to erode collective psychological well-being.

In today's hyperconnected society, young people are particularly vulnerable (Worsley, Mansfield, & Corcoran, 2018).

Research demonstrates that compulsive social media use can result in elevated anxiety levels (Dhira et al., 2018). As young people navigate life on social media, they may begin to evaluate themselves using excessively high standards and may adopt perfectionism tendencies. This rising perfectionism is associated with external control, anxiety, neurosis, higher physiological reactivity (e.g., elevated blood pressure), negative affect, and a sense of social disconnection (Paik & Sanchagrin, 2013; Twenge, 2000). These are disturbing trends, and they suggest young people are increasingly more sensitive to perceived external pressures, lack the coping skills to manage anxiety effectively, and lack coping skills to effectively manage negative affect more so than previous generations (Curran & Hill, 2019).

Theories from psychology suggest that improvement in emotion regulation can contribute to enhanced psychological and emotional well-being (Gross & John, 2003; Gross, 2015). Emotion regulation

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refers to the ways people manage how and when they experience and express their emotions (Gross, 1998). The purpose of this research is to examine social marketing efforts that promote common emotion regulation strategies and how the use of these strategies in the face of perceived socially prescribed perfectionism influence subjective well-being. Findings from this research offer direction for social marketing initiatives, as well as public policy. Such efforts are especially important crucial since young people often manage their identities online through social media and are subject to perceived external pressures as well as harsh judgments from themselves and others. Learning to better manage negative emotions, which may surface in such contexts, can contribute to improved subjective well-being and reduced anxiety.

This research contributes to existing behavioral and social marketing literature in several ways. First, it examines how emotion regulation strategies can contribute to effectively managing anxiety when negotiating social contexts where excessively high standards are imposed. Anxiety is an emotion which plagues many young adults. Young adults may experience external pressures from their social environment, which can exacerbate feelings of anxiety. This research explores how anxiety can be mitigated by using adaptive emotion regulation strategies. Findings from this research also provide insight for social marketing and policymakers by contributing to discussions centered on better understanding the effects of advertising (Kim, Lee, & Choi, 2017) and emotion-based appeals (Estes, Brotto, & Busacca, 2018; Tanner & Ford, 2006; Tanner, 2006) pertaining to health decisions (Krishen & Bui, 2015; Kees, Burton, & Tangari, 2010). Institutions can implement such efforts to communicate a social consciousness around the deleterious effects of anxiety. Appropriate advertising campaigns that promote effective emotion regulation can then be developed to reach targeted audiences.

Social marketing programs, instituted primarily by non-profit and governmental agencies, exist to help initiate social change (Andreasen, 2002; Kemp & Kopp, 2011; Lee & Pounders, 2019). Social marketing involves crafting programs to induce volitional change at the individual level (Rothschild, 1999). Social marketing and health promotion campaigns have been used to promote change concerning major social problems, such as drug use, smoking, and sexual behavior. Social marketers use a wide range of health communication strategies, and advertising is a relevant and motivating medium (Alcohol and Drug Foundation, 2019). Social marketing research offers practical implications for advertising and message strategy (Lee & Pounders, 2019; Birau & Faure, 2018), as well as provides a conceptual understanding of how to promote socially responsible behaviors (Gordon, Dibb, Mageec, Cooperc, & Waitt, 2018).

The research which follows provides an overview of anxiety and emotion regulation strategies. It then discusses how anxiety levels may be elevated by socially prescribed perfectionist tendencies (Curran & Hill, 2019). In such contexts, individuals believe their social environment is excessively demanding and that others judge them harshly. Two experimental studies are conducted to examine how social marketing efforts can work to help individuals manage anxiety through adaptive emotion regulation.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

2.1. Anxiety

Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life. However, people with anxiety disorders frequently have intense, excessive, and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. Anxiety is characterized by anticipation of danger or misfortune, which is accompanied by muscle tension and avoidance behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2019). It is an unresolved fear or a state of undirected arousal. Anxiety may also be referred to as generalized anxiety, which can involve worrying about things such as personal health, work, social interactions, and everyday life circumstances. Because

anxiety involves excessive worry, hyperarousal, and fear, it is often counterproductive and debilitating (Simpson, Neria, Lewis-Fernandez, & Schneier, 2010). As a result, anxiety can cause significant problems in relationships, education, and employment (National Institute of Mental Health, 2019).

Anxiety has both psychological and physical features. Feelings of anxiety arise in the amygdala. As neurotransmitters carry the impulse to the sympathetic nervous system, heart and breathing rates increase, muscles tense, and blood flow is diverted from the abdomen to the brain. In the short term, anxiety readies individuals to deal with crises; however, its physical effects can be counterproductive, causing lightheadedness, nausea, diarrhea, and frequent urination. Anxiety has been implicated in numerous chronic physical illnesses, including heart disease, respiratory disorders, and gastrointestinal conditions. Ultimately, if anxiety persists, it can have deleterious effects on mental and physical health (Harvard Health, 2018).

2.2. Emotion regulation

Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, how they experience them, and how they express them. Emotion regulation involves the activation of goals to influence the emotion trajectory (Gross, Sheppes, & Urry, 2011; Gross, 2015). Deficits in emotion regulation are associated with multiple psychological health problems, including anxiety disorders (Gruber, Harvey, & Gross, 2012; Campbell-Sills & Barlow, 2007). Identifying specific, effective emotion regulation strategies will help to improve subjective well-being (Troy, Shallcross, Brunner, Friedman, & Jones, 2018). Emotion regulation strategies may be antecedent-focused, occurring before a full emotional reaction, or response-focused, taking place after a full emotional response has been prompted (Gross, 1998; Gross, 2015). Research shows that antecedent-focused strategies often accompany greater emotional well-being and are considered adaptive, whereas response-focused strategies are often associated with lower emotional well-being and are considered maladaptive (Gross & John, 2003). Academic research established that two of the most common and frequently used emotion regulation strategies are cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Srivastava, Tamir, McGonigal, John, & Gross, 2009; Gross, 2015; Chi & Liang, 2013; Knight & Ponzio, 2013; Wang, Chen, & Han, 2017; Ellisa, Pratherb, Grenenc & Ferrera, 2019; Tamir, Halperin, Porat, Bigman, & Hasson, 2019). Individuals use these strategies to avert negative emotions (Tackman & Srivastava, 2016).

2.2.1. Cognitive reappraisal

Cognitive reappraisal is an antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategy. It is a form of cognitive change that involves construing a potentially emotion-eliciting situation in a way that changes its emotional impact (Lazarus & Alfert, 1964; Gross, 1998; Gross, 2015). For example, if going on a job interview, one might look at the job interview as an opportunity to learn about an industry to help reduce any anxiety associated with going on the interview (Gross, 2015). Because reappraisal occurs early in the cognitive process, it has the potential to modify the entire emotional sequence before emotion response tendencies have been fully generated. The aim is to decrease negative emotions and make negative emotions more positive. Cognitive reappraisal is an effective way to modify the impact of an emotional experience, and it has been regarded as a highly adaptive emotion regulation strategy (Ford, Feinberg, Lam, Mauss, & John, 2019). Cognitive reappraisal reduces or down-regulates negative emotions, leading to decreased levels of negative emotional experiences. Several studies have shown that cognitive reappraisal is positively associated with psychological health (e.g. Balzarotti, John, & Gross, 2010) and reduced stress-related symptoms (e.g. McColl-Kennedy et al., 2017; Ford et al., 2019).

2.2.2. Expressive suppression

In contrast to cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression is a response-focused emotion regulation strategy. It involves inhibiting the behavioral expression of an emotion, which may involve a positive or a negative emotion (Gross, 1998; Greenaway & Kalokerinos, 2017). Expressive suppression is used regularly in daily life, particularly in the presence of others (Tackman & Srivastava, 2016). For example, one might refrain from expressing anxiety before public speaking (Gross & John, 2003). Expressive suppression comes relatively late in the process of generating emotions and changes the behavioral aspect of the emotion response tendencies without reducing the experience of negative emotion. Expressive suppression requires the individual to consciously manage emotion response tendencies. These repeated efforts consume cognitive resources that could otherwise be used for optimal performance in the social contexts in which the emotions arise. Suppression may lead to negative feelings about the self and can alienate the individual from others, preventing the development of emotionally close relationships (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997; Gross & John, 2003; Srivastava et al., 2009; Tackman & Srivastava, 2016).

Using adaptive emotion regulation can promote healthy psychological functioning and emotional well-being. Cognitive reappraisal is an adaptive emotion regulation strategy, which involves cognitively transforming a situation to alter its emotional impact. Studies found that individuals engaging in reappraisal who watched negatively valenced films experienced decreased negative emotional responses (Cantor & Wilson, 1984; Dandoy & Goldstein, 1990). An emotion regulation strategy like expressive suppression may involve the inhibition of the expression of emotion but not the experience of the emotion itself. In studies where participants saw negatively valenced film clips and enlisted expressive suppression, participants showed much less expressive behavior, but they felt as much negative emotion as participants who watched the film clips without employing an emotion regulation strategy. These participants showed signs of greater physiological activation (Gross, 1998; Ford et al., 2019). Young adults experiencing heightened levels of anxiety may benefit from using an adaptive emotion regulation strategy like cognitive appraisal. Using such a strategy may assist them in the development of coping skills to effectively manage anxiety and negative affect (Mulki, Jamarmillo, Goad, & Pesquera, 2015). As a result, the following hypothesis is put forth:

- H1: Cognitive reappraisal will be more effective in mitigating anxiety than expressive suppression.

2.2.3. Socially prescribed perfectionism

Anxiety may be induced in young adults due to individual perfectionism proclivities. Broadly defined, self-perfectionism involves very critical evaluations of the self (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990). Perfectionism may also come from others and may manifest as socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP). When perfectionism is perceived to come from others, individuals believe their social context is excessively demanding, that others judge them harshly, and that they must display perfection to obtain approval (Curran & Hill, 2019). For example, the use of airbrushed thin-ideal body images in media and advertising promotes a beauty standard that cannot be realistically achieved by most people. Nevertheless, many viewers of these images experience negative emotion and body dissatisfaction due to their inability to meet these perfectionist standards. The use of such images has been cited for its role in inducing SPP that can result in negative emotions and body dissatisfaction (Bower, 2001).

SPP is associated with external control, anxiety, suicide ideation, neurosis, harsh self-criticism, higher physiological reactivity (e.g., elevated blood pressure), negative affect, and a sense of social disconnection (Paik & Sanchagrin, 2013; Twenge, 2000; Hewitt et al., 2003). SPP is positively related to maladaptive ways of coping and psychological burnout (Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2003; Hill, Hall,

Appleton, & Kozub, 2008). Socially prescribed perfectionists strive to attain standards which others impose on them. They believe that acceptance and approval are contingent upon reaching others' standards (Hill et al., 2008). In sum, SPP is a form of perfectionism closely associated with low subjective well-being and poor psychological adjustment.

Research suggests that SPP may also contribute to heightened levels of anxiety (Hewitt et al., 2003). Furthermore, researchers have found that young adults are reporting higher levels of SPP and attaching more importance to perfection than previous generations (Curran & Hill, 2019). These are disquieting trends and suggest that young people are gradually becoming more sensitive to perceived external pressures. In addition, they lack the coping skills to effectively manage anxiety or negative affect more so than previous generations (Curran & Hill, 2019). Subsequently, individuals experiencing high levels of SPP may benefit from actively using an adaptive emotion strategy like cognitive reappraisal. Efforts to enlist this strategy may successfully help to mitigate anxiety when compared to expressive suppression. As a result, the following is proposed:

- H2: Emotion regulation strategy and SPP will interact such that cognitive reappraisal will be more effective at emotion regulation management than expressive suppression for individuals experiencing SPP.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study 1

3.1.1. Pretest

In order to assess the validity of emotion regulation strategies in advertising messages, a pretest was conducted. Study participants included 34 students at a university in the Western part of the United States. Twenty-seven percent were male and 73% were female; the mean age was 21, ranging in age from 19 to 25. Participants viewed one of two randomly assigned advertisements, which promoted an emotion regulation strategy—cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression. The advertisement which promoted cognitive reappraisal included the following message, "It's okay to be anxious. Feeling a little anxious helps us stay motivated and focused." In contrast, the message which encouraged expressive suppression featured the following verbiage: "A little anxious? No one needs to know. Don't show it!" See Appendix B.

After exposure to one of the ads, participants responded to manipulation check measures which included one for the cognitive reappraisal conditions, "The message made me control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in," and one for the expressive suppression condition, "The message made me feel like I should suppress my emotions." Measures were assessed using a 7-point Likert Scale. There was a main effect for the cognitive reappraisal measure, M = 3.56 (cognitive reappraisal condition) and M = 2.33 (expressive suppression condition), $F[1,33] = 13.68$, $p < .01$. Similarly, there was a main effect for the expressive suppression measure, M = 3.04 (expressive suppression condition) and M = 2.0 (cognitive reappraisal condition), $F[1,33] = 11.21$, $p < .01$. Thus, the ads were successful in representing both desired emotion regulation strategies.

3.1.2. Procedure

To test the proposed hypotheses, a two factor (emotional regulation strategy: cognitive reappraisal and expressive) × (socially prescribed perfectionism: high and low) between-subjects design was conducted using an online, student-based, consumer panel (n = 91) from a University in the Eastern region of the United States. Thirty-six percent of participants were male, and 64% were female. Study participants belonged to the Millennial and Gen Z cohort; the mean age was 20, with ages ranging from 18 to 31.

Participants were first told to spend at least three minutes writing

about a public speaking appearance which made them anxious. The purpose of this exercise was to induce anxiety. Having an individual reflect and write about an episode which made them feel a specific emotion (autobiographical emotional memory task) has been commonly used to experimentally induce emotions (D'Mello & Mills, 2013; Joseph et al., 2020).

Study participants then viewed one of the two randomly assigned advertisements vetted in the pretest, which promoted an emotion regulation strategy—cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression. After exposure to one of the ads, participants responded to a two-item measure developed specifically for this research to assess their emotional state and the efficacy of the messages in fostering emotion management: "I feel like I can handle anxiety-inducing situations better" and "I can now deal with my anxieties in a positive manner." Measures were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale ($r = 0.91$, $p < .01$). The scale items are listed in Appendix A/B.

Finally, participants responded to items on the SPP scale (Hewitt & Flett, 1990). The subscale consists of 14 items (e.g., "I find it difficult to meet others' expectations of me" and "Those around me readily accept that I can make mistakes too") and was measured using a 7-point Likert scale (Cronbach Alpha = 0.91). See Appendix A for all subscale items.

3.1.3. Results

H1 predicted that cognitive reappraisal will be a more effective emotion regulation strategy in mitigating anxiety than expressive suppression. Findings indicated that individuals in the cognitive reappraisal condition (M = 3.24) exhibited more effective emotion regulation than those in the expressive suppression condition (M = 2.58), $F[1,87] = 4.39$, $p < .05$. H1 was supported (see Fig. 1).

H2 predicted that emotion regulation strategy and SPP will interact such that cognitive reappraisal would be more effective at emotion regulation management than expressive suppression for individuals experiencing SPP.

To test this prediction, we contrast coded the conditions and mean-centered all other variables for use in model 1 of the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2015). In support of H2, the interaction term (emotion regulation strategy by social prescribed perfectionism) was significant ($b = -0.5888$, S.E. $= 0.2872$, $t = -2.0499$, $p < .05$). Next, a spotlight analysis was conducted (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013) on the interaction, as shown in Fig. 2. For

individuals experiencing high levels of SPP, participants in the cognitive reappraisal (M = 3.78) condition were more effective than those in the expressive suppression (M = 2.58) condition in managing anxiety.

3.1.4. Discussion

Findings from Study 1 indicate that cognitive reappraisal is a more effective emotion regulation strategy in mitigating anxiety than expressive suppression (H1). Furthermore, for those experiencing high levels of SPP, the effects of cognitive reappraisal are more pronounced in reducing anxiety than expressive suppression (H2). While the purpose of Study 1's lab experiment was to provide such evidence, efforts are made in Study 2 to establish further external and ecological validity so that findings have greater generalizability (Dipboye & Flanagan, 1979; Lynch, 1982). As such, the attempt to remedy issues of external and ecological validity are made by introducing a field study which allows for actual situational and personal relevancy. Specifically, participants were targeted during a very specific timeframe—university final exam period—a time when anxiety levels are high.

3.2. Study 2

3.2.1. Pretest

In Study 2, socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP) was manipulated. A pretest was conducted to test the efficacy of the manipulation. Study participants included 23 students at a University in the Southern region of the United States. Forty-eight percent were male and 52% were female; the mean age was 22, ranging in age from 20 to 35. Participants viewed one of two randomly assigned advertisements. The ad which represented the high SPP condition included the following verbiage:

"Get on the List. The Brightest, Leaders and Stars.

30 Under 30, are the brashest young entrepreneurs and change leaders across the globe. From creating milk without cows to trucks without drivers, these innovators are shaking up some of the world's stodgiest industries. The list features trailblazers who are making their mark in the world, even while in college.

Be one of these achievers. Get on the List"

In contrast, the ad which represented the low SPP condition contained the following text:
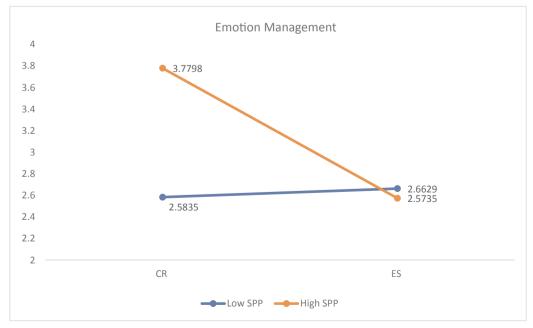
"Embrace Failure. We Are All Shining Stars.

Fig. 1. Study 1 interaction effect between emotion regulation and socially prescribed perfectionism.
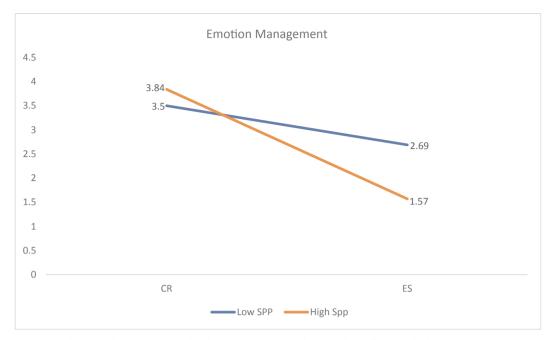
Fig. 2. Study 2 interaction effect between emotion regulation and socially prescribed perfectionism.

Many of the brashest, young entrepreneurs and change leaders across the globe experienced failure along their paths to success. From creating milk without cows to trucks without drivers, these innovators used their mistakes as growth opportunities. They went on to shake up some of the world's stodgiest industries. Don't be afraid to fail, especially while in college.

You will be an achiever if you Embrace Failure." See Appendix B.

After viewing one of the ads, participants responded to two statements as manipulation check measures: "The information would make others feel like there are very high expectations for them," and "The information would make others feel as if they are not living up to standards." (r = 0.76, p < .01) There was a significant main effect for SPP. Those in the high SPP condition (M = 4.46) indicated that the advertisement would make them feel there were high expectations for them compared to those in the low SPP condition (M = 3.33, F [1,21] = 5.15p < .05).

3.2.2. Procedure

To test the proposed hypotheses, a two factor (emotional regulation strategy: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) × (socially prescribed perfectionism: high and low) between-subjects design was conducted using students (n = 67) from a University in the Southern part of the United States. Twenty-five percent of participants were male, 73% were female, and 2% identified as gender diverse; the mean age was 25.

The experiment was conducted during the final examination period at a university in the southern part of the United States. Tension and stress levels were high among students. Thus, the situational context (final examination period) was used as the anxiety induction stimulus. First, participants were asked to write about their feelings during finals. Next, participants viewed one of the two randomly assigned SPP (high versus low) messages, which were tested in the pretest. Study participants then viewed one of two randomly assigned advertisements from Study 1, which promoted an emotion regulation strategy—cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression. After exposure to one of the ads, participants responded to the emotion management measure used in Study 1 (r = 0.87, p < .01).

3.2.3. Results

After writing about their feelings during the final examination

period, participants were asked to rate "how anxious they felt" on a 5-point scale with anchors "Not Anxious at All" to "Extremely Anxious". This measure was developed specifically for this research and adapted from the Emotion Report Form (Ekman, Friesen, & Ancoli, 1980; Fredrickson, Mancuso, Branigan, & Tugade, 2000). The mean was 4.1. H1 predicted that cognitive reappraisal will be a more effective emotion regulation strategy in mitigating anxiety than expressive suppression. Findings indicated that individuals in the cognitive reappraisal condition (M = 3.69) exhibited more effective emotion regulation than those in the expressive suppression condition (M = 2.16), F[1,65] = 17.38 p < .01. H1 was supported.

H2 predicted that emotion regulation strategy and socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP) would interact such that cognitive reappraisal will be more effective in emotion regulation management than expressive suppression for individuals experiencing SPP. This interaction was supported F[1,61] = 3.70, p < .05, as shown in Fig. 2. Cognitive reappraisal was a more effective emotion regulation strategy than expressive suppression for both the high and low SPP conditions. Individuals in the cognitive reappraisal and high SPP condition exhibited the highest level of emotion regulation tendencies.

4. Discussion

Anxiety affects approximately 40 million adults in the United States, 18.1% of the population, and young adults are experiencing a marked increase in anxiety (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2019; Child Mind Institute, 2015). Findings from this research demonstrate how social advertising tools can be used to encourage the use of emotion regulation strategies to help promote psychological well-being. This research investigated the efficacy of two emotion regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Results from both studies in this research indicate that cognitive reappraisal was more effective than expressive suppression in mitigating the effects of anxiety. This was especially true for subjects who experienced high levels of SPP.

Anxiety levels in young people may be exacerbated by SPP. Research suggests that young adults are reporting higher levels of SPP than previous generations (Curran & Hill, 2019). In this research, SPP was examined in relation to emotion regulation strategy. Findings indicated that emotion regulation strategy and SPP interacted.

Individuals who reported high levels of SPP and were exposed to the cognitive reappraisal emotion regulation strategy exhibited better emotion management tendencies than individuals who reported either high or low levels of SPP and who were exposed to the expressive suppression emotion regulation strategy. Individuals experiencing high levels of SPP benefited from actively using an adaptive emotion strategy like cognitive reappraisal.

5. Theoretical implications

Emotions are an integral part of human existence. Enlisting emotions in decision making can promote discernment and guidance; however, yielding to emotions can result in impulsive and destructive behavior (John & Gross, 2004). It is desirable for most individuals to identify, manage, and regulate their emotions in ways that promote well-being. This research examined emotion regulation strategy in the context of a discrete emotion, anxiety, as opposed to general valence or negative affect, which is a central contribution of this investigation. Previous researchers have established that specific emotions result in distinct meanings and appraisals of an individual's environment and have unique motivational implications on choice and decision-making (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). Specific emotions should be examined for their unique characteristics and impact on behavior, rather than studying valence.

Two common forms of emotion regulation, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression, were examined for their impact on anxiety. Cognitive reappraisal was an effective emotion regulation strategy for the reduction of anxiety. Although expressive suppression is prosaically used by individuals to reduce negative emotion, it lacked efficacy in mitigating an individual's experience of anxiety. Thus, findings complement previous research in demonstrating that cognitive reappraisal is the more adaptive emotion regulation strategy for an emotion, such as anxiety.

Moreover, this research makes a further contribution to behavioral literature by examining a form of perfectionism, socially prescribed perfectionism (SPP), and its relationship to emotion regulation strategy. SPP has been consistently associated with emotional, bio-behavioral, and physiological manifestations of stress (e.g. Wittenberg & Norcross, 2001). The psychology literature has considered the many antecedents and correlates of SPP (Smith et al., 2019). Yet, the current research is one of the first to investigate and propose a method to manage anxiety associated with SPP. Cultural and environmental changes influence reported levels of SPP over the years (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), particularly with younger adults reporting higher levels than previous generations (Curran & Hill, 2019). Thus, the study of SPP merits attention, given its cultural relevance and its potentially maladaptive effects (e.g., heightened anxiety, suicide ideation, harsh self-criticism, sense of social disconnection). This research demonstrated that for those experiencing high levels of SPP, cognitive reappraisal was a more effective emotion regulation strategy than expressive suppression. The outcomes suggest that a person can alleviate the anxiety associated with the excessive demands, harsh judgments, or perfectionist standards of others by cognitively reframing the situation in a manner that helps to reduce the experience of negative emotions. The research outcomes suggest a proactive approach that may prevent or reduce the formation of negative emotions associated with SPP. Enlisting an adaptive emotion regulation strategy such as cognitive reappraisal can thwart the proliferation of negative emotions, which manifest as a result of such an orientation. This approach should yield healthier outcomes than suppressing the outward emotional expression that might occur in these circumstances. Further, well-orchestrated social marketing and advertising campaigns can play a vital role in reminding the public, especially young adults, that perfectionism is not required nor expected.

6. Practical implications

Social marketing has been widely used to influence health behaviors and promote social change (Andreasen, 2002; Evans, 2006). One of the primary stages in developing a social marketing campaign is developing plans and strategies using behavioral theory (Evans, 2006). The current research suggests that engendering effective emotion regulation can help reduce the rising levels of anxiety in young adults. Emotion regulation strategies like cognitive reappraisal have adaptive qualities that can assist young people in dealing with socially imposed ideals. The successful responses evoked by the research stimuli suggest it may be advantageous to develop advertising messages disseminated via social media and mobile platforms to target Gen Z and Millennials (Hodak, 2018). These social marketing campaigns can consist of commercials, online advertisements, and interactive forums which promote cognitive reappraisal as a means of mitigating anxiety. For instance, a practical application of the research outcomes may lie in the development of advertising campaigns that teach simple emotion regulation practices. Mental health agencies can develop advertising campaigns encouraging Gen Zers and Millennials to focus on the positive aspects of life in a format similar to the Federal Drug Administration's "Fresh Empire" advertising campaign which associated tobacco-free living with desirable lifestyles rather than the detriments of tobacco use (Madge, 2019). Conversely, since expressive suppression is an emotion regulation strategy also commonly used by individuals, social marketing campaigns can warn against the suppression of emotions. Instead, the acknowledgement and reframing of negative situations should be encouraged.

Findings from this research can be used to influence public policy as well as urge institutions (e.g., schools, non-profit agencies, consumer brands) to communicate a social consciousness, an important factor used by young adults in connecting with organizations (Hutchins, 2019). Countries within the European Union and China have stringent legislation governing social media access and content. In the United States, there is extensive debate over the need for such regulatory oversight (see, e.g., Zuckerberg, 2019). Congressional deliberations have considered the scope of social responsibility that should be borne by social media platforms (see Napoli, 2019). This paper contributes to these conversations by offering insight into the effects of social media content on its users.

An example of social consciousness can be seen on Instagram, who recently joined with The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to launch a mental well-being campaign using the hashtag #RealConvo, which ignited a closely followed conversation about mental health (Armano, 2019). The goal is to encourage openness and honesty about everything on social media, particularly mental health. The collaborators' long-term objectives were to remove social stigmas regarding mental health and to take a proactive stance in promoting healthy coping behaviors to address negative emotions (Armano, 2019). Study 1's results strongly indicate that other organizations can garner goodwill and positive consumer evaluations by mirroring this tactic.

Previous research has found that aligning with social media influencers is an effective way to appeal to young adults (Hodak, 2018). Unlike previous generations, this age group prefers their influencers to be peers and average people, rather than celebrities. Seventy-nine percent of consumers prefer to conduct business with a company that operates with a social purpose, and 73% of Millennials feel they must to guide friends and family toward smart consumption decisions (Hutchins, 2019). Organizations who are passionate about mental wellness should align with social media influencers to share cognitive reappraisal messaging with followers, who can also share the information with their networks. Burger King provides a prime example of how this can be done with their "Real Meals" campaign, a line of mood-inspired meals that were meant to recognize "No one is happy all the time. And that's OK,". The campaign acknowledges the pervasive nature of social media and the immense pressure to always appear

happy and perfect. With Real Meals, the Burger King brand celebrates being yourself and feeling however you want to feel with #FeelYourWay (Valinsky, 2019).

Social media platforms and mental health experts alike are increasingly concerned with the way metrics, such as likes, shares, and follower counts, affect users' mental health. Social media platforms have begun to recognize their role in perpetuating SPP, and some are taking steps to reduce the effects. YouTube changed the way it displays subscriber counts on channels, and Twitter no longer reports its "monthly active user" metric. Instagram's decision to hide 'likes' may seem minor, but it is designed to help users improve their mental health by reducing downward social comparisons. The social media giant concedes that these issues are acute, particularly with young people in a mobile-first world. The company has vowed to "make decisions that hurt the business if they're good for people's well-being and health" (Pittman, 2019). Instagram's definitive stance on this issue serves as a beacon to encourage other social channels to follow suit. Brands must appear authentic in the creation of advertisements to promote mental well-being. The challenge and opportunity for organizations are beyond merely starting a dialogue about mental health. It lies in making a meaningful commitment to an issue that aligns with the corporate identity or brand image and that can be sustained.

7. Future research and conclusion

This research makes contributions to understanding how to manage negative emotions like anxiety effectively. Findings from this research provide a foundation on which future studies can begin to investigate how effective emotion regulation can help in reducing the rising levels of anxiety in young adults. For example, one avenue of research might involve creating an anxiety regulation scale. Such a measurement would help in assessing how individuals can effectively manage anxiety levels.

Each year, almost 1 in 11 adolescents and young adults have a major depressive episode (Mojtabai, Olfon, & Han, 2016). Investigating how emotion management techniques might work to reduce other negative emotions, including feelings of sadness, anger, fear, and depression, would be insightful (Lerner & Keltner, 2000). Additional research might examine how other emotion regulation strategies (e.g., situation modification, distraction) can be used to regulate negative

emotions, particularly for SPP. Research exploring more adaptive emotion regulation capabilities that can be fostered in young adults will be a welcome contribution to academic literature.

In this research, a direct causal relationship regarding the effect of believability and/or persuasiveness on emotion regulation strategies was not tested. Future research might include ways to definitively assess the believability of messaging which include emotion regulation strategies. However, in addition to self-report measures, physiological measures (e.g., cardiovascular reactivity, galvanic response) might be used to measure emotional response as well as the effectiveness of emotion regulation techniques (Fredrickson et al., 2000; Bell et al., 2018).

In this research, participants received a single exposure to advertising, which encouraged emotion regulation. Future research might take a longitudinal approach to the study of emotion regulation. Participants might be exposed to a series of advertising messaging promoting adaptive emotion regulation techniques over a period of time. This would help in providing a robust assessment of how social marketing can be used to mitigate destructive negative emotions. Further, while this research attempted to provide external and ecological validity in Study 2's field experiment, it's limitations included a less than ideal sample size due to the exam periods and equal distribution among demographics of participants during the specified timeframe. While typical field studies are live settings that help to provide external and ecological validity, drawbacks may include a smaller cell sizes (which was our case in Study 2), unequal distribution in demographics, and missing identifying information—also encountered by other field experimenters (Angle et al., 2016; Brewer, 2000). Given the limitations of our sample size, we encourage future research to examine emotional regulation strategies along with SPP in other field contexts to complement the robustness of the effects demonstrated in our research.

It may be advantageous to research the impact of emotion regulation within the context of consumer responses to service failures when they occur (e.g., Cowart, Ramirez, & Brady, 2014). Emotion regulation is a timely issue worth addressing in the current social climate that is primed to eradicate the remnants of lingering social stigmas. If marketers can muster enough empathy and openness, they may make a much-needed positive impact on a society that is ready to begin the hard work of addressing psychological well-being.

Appendix A

I find it difficult to meet others' expectations of me.
Those around me readily accept that I can make mistakes too.
The better I do, the better I am expected to do.
Anything that I do that is less than excellent will be seen as poor work by those around me.
The people around me expect me to succeed at everything I do.
Others will like me even if I don't excel at everything.
Others think I am okay, even when I do not succeed.
I feel that people are too demanding of me.
Although they may not say it, other people get very upset with me when I slip up.
My family expects me to be perfect.
My parent rarely expected me to excel in all aspects of my life.
People expect nothing less than perfection from me.
People expect more from me than I am capable of giving.
People around me think I am still competent even if I make a mistake.

Appendix B

Studies 1 & 2: Emotion Regulation Advertising Stimuli

It's okay to be a little ANXIOUS...

Feeling a little ANXIOUS sometimes helps us to stay focused and motivated.

Another Slay, Inc.

Cognitive Reappraisal

A little ANXIOUS?...

No one needs to know. Don't show it.

Another Slay, Inc.

Expressive Suppression

Study 2: Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (SPP) Advertising Stimuli

GET ON THE LIST

The Brightest Leaders and Stars

30 Under 30, are the brashest young entrepreneurs and change leaders across the globe. From creating milk without cows to trucks without drivers, these innovators are shaking up some of the world's stodgiest industries.

The list features trailblazers who are making their mark in the world, EVEN WHILE IN COLLEGE.

Be one of these achievers. GET ON THE LIST.

High SPP

EMBRACE FAILURE

We Are All Shining Stars

Many of the brashest, young entrepreneurs and change leaders across the globe experienced failure along their paths to success. From creating milk without cows to trucks without drivers, these innovators used their mistakes as growth opportunities. They went on to shake up some of the world's stodgiest industries. Don't be afraid to fail, ESPECIALLY WHILE IN COLLEGE.

You will be an achiever if you EMBRACE FAILURE.

Low SPP

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