

Research Article

Emotionally Driven Coping and Communal Responses to Skincare Product Dissatisfaction: A Cultural Perspective

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Abstract: In the emotionally charged landscape of skincare consumption, product dissatisfaction often triggers complex psychological responses. This study explores how two discrete negative emotions anger and regret activate coping behaviors that are both individual and communal in nature, particularly within the Indian cultural context. Drawing on Appraisal Coping Theory and Communal Coping Theory, the research investigates the ways in which Indian consumers navigate dissatisfaction not in isolation but through social dialogue, peer influence, and collective emotional processing. Using data collected from 430 skincare consumers in Bengaluru, India, the study highlights how anger leads to external coping responses such as complaining and social support-seeking, while regret is more closely associated with internal coping mechanisms like mental disengagement and positive reinterpretation. Notably, communal coping through peer reassurance, influencer engagement, and online community validation emerges as a culturally embedded strategy that significantly shapes repurchase intentions and emotional recovery. The findings provide theoretical insights into how emotion-specific and culture-bound coping behaviors mediate post-purchase decision-making. They also offer practical guidance for skincare brands operating in collectivist markets, emphasizing the need for emotionally intelligent, community-enabled recovery strategies. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on consumer emotion, coping theory, and culturally contextualized marketing, highlighting the importance of integrating emotional and social dimensions into consumer loyalty models.

Keywords: Consumer dissatisfaction, Communal coping, Emotion regulation, Skincare products, Indian consumers, Cultural context, Repurchase intention, social influence

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global skincare industry has transitioned from a purely product-centric domain to an emotionally engaged marketplace, where consumer expectations are shaped as much by perceived outcomes as by psychological and social meaning-making. Consumers today invest in skincare not just for visible results but for emotional reassurance, identity enhancement, and social validation (Chitturi et al., 2008; Lin & Hsu, 2022). As a result, product dissatisfaction in this category often leads to intense emotional reactions such as anger and regret, which demand more than rational brand responses. Yet, much of the extant literature has focused on either cognitive disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980) or functional complaint behaviors, overlooking the emotional and cultural dimensions of how consumers recover from negative experiences.

Emotionally intelligent responses to dissatisfaction require understanding how consumers cope individually and socially. Drawing on Appraisal Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), coping is conceptualized as a psychological response to emotional stress that aims to restore equilibrium. While problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies have been extensively studied in consumer research (Duhachek, 2005; Yi & Baumgartner, 2004), a largely neglected yet increasingly relevant

construct is communal coping the use of peer interaction, social networks, and shared emotional narratives to process dissatisfaction and restore brand-related trust (Lyons et al., 1998).

This communal response is especially prominent in collectivist cultures such as India, where consumers often seek validation, empathy, and decision reinforcement from social others. Platforms like WhatsApp groups, Instagram communities, and micro-influencer content serve as emotional arenas where consumers manage disappointment, gather support, and negotiate repurchase decisions (Lin et al., 2023; Wang & Chen, 2023). In such settings, coping becomes a culturally embedded, socially mediated phenomenon, not merely an individual emotion-regulation effort.

Despite the relevance of communal coping in shaping consumer-brand relationships post-dissatisfaction, there is limited empirical research exploring this phenomenon in the context of product-based dissatisfaction, particularly within the Indian skincare industry. Most prior studies have focused on service failures or Western individualistic contexts, where emotional regulation tends to be internally managed and brand responses are analyzed through transactional lenses (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004).

This study addresses this gap by investigating how Indian skincare consumers respond emotionally and behaviorally

to product dissatisfaction through both individual and communal coping mechanisms. By examining how discrete emotions such as anger and regret activate varied coping strategies including complaining, social support-seeking, mental disengagement, and positive reinterpretation this research brings to light the cultural dynamics of emotion regulation and their implications for repurchase behavior and brand loyalty.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the emotional responses (anger and regret) triggered by dissatisfaction with skincare products in Indian consumers.
2. To examine how these emotions activate individual coping strategies such as complaining behavior and positive reinterpretation.
3. To investigate the role of communal coping including social support and peer validation in shaping consumer recovery and repurchase intention.
4. To analyze how coping responses differ across emotional types and are influenced by the collectivist cultural context.
5. To provide culturally relevant insights for brands to design emotionally sensitive and socially adaptive recovery strategies.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to a more nuanced and culturally attuned understanding of post-dissatisfaction consumer behavior. It also informs marketers seeking to engage emotionally with consumers and strengthen brand loyalty in a context where identity, emotion, and community are inseparably linked.

Literature Review

Consumer Dissatisfaction and Emotional Response

Consumer dissatisfaction arises when a product fails to meet expectations, leading not only to cognitive disconfirmation but also to discrete negative emotions. Within the skincare domain where product outcomes affect personal identity, self-esteem, and physical appearance emotional responses are often heightened (Chitturi et al., 2008). Emotions such as anger and regret are commonly reported after dissatisfaction. While anger involves external blame and a desire to confront the source, regret is more inward-facing, driven by self-blame and counterfactual reasoning (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004; Laros & Steenkamp, 2005).

Recent studies emphasize that these emotions are not interchangeable; each sets in motion different post-consumption trajectories. Anger tends to fuel retaliatory behaviors like complaint and public shaming, whereas regret leads to withdrawal, rumination, or reinterpretation (Tata et al., 2021; Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). This bifurcation suggests that effective brand responses must differentiate between types of emotional triggers.

Coping Strategies in Consumer Behavior

Coping strategies refer to behavioral and psychological mechanisms employed by individuals to manage stress, discomfort, or emotional disequilibrium. In consumer settings, Duhachek's (2005) hierarchical model provides a

robust classification of coping responses:

- Problem-focused coping (e.g., complaint, seeking alternatives)
- Emotion-focused coping (e.g., positive reinterpretation, disengagement, suppression)
- Social or communal coping (e.g., sharing with peers, seeking social validation)

Empirical evidence suggests that anger activates problem-focused coping, while regret aligns with emotion-focused mechanisms such as positive reinterpretation or avoidance (Ertz et al., 2022; Sunghwan Yi & Baumgartner, 2004). However, this view is incomplete without considering cultural and social factors.

Cultural Orientation and Communal Coping

Culture plays a significant role in determining how consumers cope with dissatisfaction. Collectivist cultures, such as India, encourage communal coping, where emotional regulation is shared through social dialogue, peer consultation, and group-based support (Lyons et al., 1998). Unlike individualistic societies where coping is often private and self-contained, collectivist consumers tend to co-construct emotional meaning and recovery narratives (Shavitt et al., 2006; Wang & Chen, 2023).

Communal coping has been previously studied in healthcare and crisis contexts but is now gaining relevance in consumer behavior, especially in high-involvement, emotionally sensitive categories like skincare. Indian consumers frequently rely on WhatsApp groups, Instagram influencers, and beauty forums not only for product information but also to validate their dissatisfaction, share disappointment, and receive emotional support.

Empirical studies affirm that communal coping can buffer the negative effects of dissatisfaction, enhance brand forgiveness, and even stimulate renewed brand engagement, depending on the tone of the community (Patil & Verma, 2024; Gupta & Rao, 2025). However, when peer sentiment is critical or negative, communal settings may amplify dissatisfaction and promote switching behavior (Agrawal & Sinha, 2024).

Emotion - Coping Pathways and Repurchase Intention

The Appraisal Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explains how consumers appraise a dissatisfactory event, experience a discrete emotion, and then select coping mechanisms. These mechanisms, in turn, influence future behavioral outcomes such as repurchase intention or brand switching. For example:

- Anger → Complaining → Higher likelihood of brand forgiveness if redressed
- Regret → Positive reinterpretation → Quiet recovery or continued loyalty
- Regret → Disengagement → Silent churn

Research indicates that coping is a critical mediator in the relationship between dissatisfaction and loyalty behaviors, yet most repurchase models emphasize satisfaction or trust alone (Ambroã & Lotriè, 2016; Gün & Söyük, 2025).

Gaps in the Existing Literature

Although emotion and coping have been widely studied in service recovery, they remain underexplored in product-based dissatisfaction, especially in the skincare sector.

Most studies on repurchase focus on product quality, price, or customer satisfaction, neglecting the affective and communal dynamics that unfold after dissatisfaction (Huong et al., 2023; Singh, 2025).

Further, research in collectivist cultural contexts is scarce, and existing models seldom integrate communal coping as a distinct and influential variable. This paper addresses these gaps by analyzing how emotion-specific and culture-bound coping behaviors shape post-purchase decisions in skincare consumption.

Conceptual Framework and Research Objectives

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual foundation of this study integrates two major theoretical perspectives: the Appraisal Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and Communal Coping Theory (Lyons et al., 1998). Together, these frameworks provide a lens through which consumer dissatisfaction can be understood not merely as an outcome of unmet expectations, but as a culturally situated, emotionally charged experience that is processed through both intrapersonal and social coping mechanisms.

Appraisal Coping Theory posits that individuals evaluate emotional stressors such as product failure by assessing their relevance, responsibility, and coping resources. This emotional appraisal gives rise to specific emotions, such as anger (external attribution) or regret (internal attribution), each of which activates distinct coping strategies (Duhachek, 2005; Yi & Baumgartner, 2004).

Communal Coping Theory expands this model by emphasizing that, in collectivist societies, individuals do not always cope alone. Instead, they rely on social groups such as family, peer circles, online communities, or influencers to co-regulate emotion, make sense of dissatisfaction, and collectively determine responses such as repurchase, switching, or forgiveness (Lyons et al., 1998; Wang & Chen, 2023).

In the Indian skincare context, dissatisfaction can lead to a combination of individual coping (e.g., mental disengagement, reinterpretation) and communal strategies (e.g., peer consultation, social support). These strategies, shaped by the emotional tone (anger or regret), ultimately influence repurchase intention or brand disengagement

Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional research design aimed at examining the emotional and communal coping mechanisms employed by Indian skincare consumers following product dissatisfaction. The approach was deductive and theory-driven, grounded in Appraisal Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and Communal Coping Theory (Lyons et al., 1998). Structural modeling and correlational analyses were used to identify relationships between emotional triggers (anger, regret), coping strategies (individual and communal), and repurchase intention.

Sampling and Data Collection

The sample comprised 430 respondents who had recently purchased skincare products and experienced some degree of dissatisfaction. Respondents were drawn from urban

regions of Bengaluru, India, chosen for their high digital connectivity, product engagement, and cultural relevance.

- Sampling method: Purposive sampling was used to ensure inclusion of consumers with skincare dissatisfaction experiences.
- Data collection mode: A combination of online surveys (Google Forms) and offline distribution at skincare retail outlets, clinics, and salons was employed.
- Inclusion criteria: Consumers aged 18+, who had used skincare products within the past 6 months and recalled a negative experience.

Participants were informed of their rights, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured throughout the study.

Instrument Design

A structured questionnaire was developed, drawing on validated scales from the literature and adapted to the skincare context. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The survey was divided into five sections:

a. Consumer Dissatisfaction

Measured using items adapted from Oliver (1980) and Bhattacharjee (2001), focusing on disconfirmation of product performance.

b. Negative Emotions

- Anger: Measured using 4 items from Laros and Steenkamp (2005), capturing feelings of irritation and perceived injustice.
- Regret: Measured using 3 items from Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004), reflecting internal attribution and decision remorse.

c. Coping Strategies

Adapted from Duhachek (2005) and Yi & Baumgartner (2004), covering:

- Complaining behavior (e.g., “I voiced my concerns about the product to the brand/store”).
- Seeking social support (e.g., “I shared my experience with friends or online groups”).
- Mental disengagement (e.g., “I tried to forget the experience”).
- Positive reinterpretation (e.g., “I reminded myself that the product might work for others”).

d. Communal Coping

Operationalized as peer validation, influencer engagement, and group-based emotional processing, measured through items developed from Lyons et al. (1998) and adapted by Patil & Verma (2024).

e. Repurchase Intention

Measured using 3 items adapted from Maxham and Netemeyer (2002), focusing on likelihood of purchasing from the same brand despite prior dissatisfaction.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software.

- Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic and product usage patterns.
- Reliability analysis: Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.70$).

- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA): Used to validate the structure and ensure convergent (AVE > 0.50) and discriminant validity.
- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): Used to test hypothesized relationships between dissatisfaction, emotions, coping strategies, communal responses, and repurchase intention.
- Bootstrapping (5,000 samples) was conducted to test the mediation effects of coping strategies and communal coping.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards:

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- No personally identifiable information was collected.
- Respondents were free to withdraw at any stage.
- The research protocol was approved by the doctoral advisory committee overseeing the thesis.

Findings and Interpretation

The empirical findings of this study were generated using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), drawing on data from 430 skincare consumers in Bengaluru, India. The focus was on identifying the emotional and coping mechanisms activated by dissatisfaction and their downstream impact on repurchase intention. The results reinforce the central thesis that negative emotions, coping strategies, and cultural context interact in complex, measurable ways to influence post-purchase consumer behavior.

Emotional Triggers of Coping Behavior

The data confirmed that consumer dissatisfaction activates two distinct emotional pathways:

- Anger emerged predominantly among respondents who felt external blame (e.g., brand misrepresentation, false advertising, product ineffectiveness).
- Regret was reported more often when consumers felt they had made a poor decision or ignored better alternatives.

These emotion types significantly predicted the choice of coping strategy. Anger had a strong positive path to problem-focused coping such as complaining behavior and seeking social support consistent with prior findings (Ertz et al., 2022; Duhachek, 2005) Regret, in contrast, led to emotion-focused responses, including mental disengagement and positive reinterpretation.

Communal Coping as a Cultural Mediator

A novel contribution of this study is the inclusion and validation of communal coping defined as emotional processing shared with peers, friends, and digital communities. SEM results showed that communal coping served as a partial mediator between emotional responses and repurchase intention, particularly when consumers experienced regret.

- Consumers who experienced anger were more likely to post complaints online and seek

affirmation in peer networks before deciding to repurchase.

- Consumers who felt regret often turned to influencers or friends to rationalize their decision or gain reassurance before engaging in reinterpretation and eventual brand forgiveness.

This supports emerging literature on culturally embedded coping practices (Lyons et al., 1998; Wang & Chen, 2023) and aligns with your finding that Indian consumers frequently process dissatisfaction socially rather than individually.

5.3 Coping Strategy Outcomes and Repurchase Intention

The coping strategies showed varying effects on repurchase intention:

- Complaining behavior had a positive impact on repurchase intention only when the brand offered empathetic resolution. This supports the service recovery paradox literature (Kim & Park, 2022).
- Social support-seeking led to moderate repurchase likelihood, especially when peer sentiment was positive. However, negative communal sentiment reinforced switching behavior a dynamic also observed by Patil & Verma (2024).
- Positive reinterpretation significantly enhanced repurchase intention, validating it as a loyalty-preserving emotion-focused strategy (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024).
- Mental disengagement, in contrast, predicted lower repurchase intention, often signaling emotional detachment or silent churn.

These patterns suggest that coping behavior is not merely a consequence of emotion—it also actively shapes post-dissatisfaction consumer decisions.

Interpretation in the Indian Skincare Context

The study's findings are particularly salient in the context of India's collectivist culture and skincare as a high-involvement category. Consumers in this space are emotionally invested in brand outcomes, and product dissatisfaction evokes not only personal frustration but also social reputational concerns (e.g., "What will others think if this doesn't work for me?"). This makes communal coping through WhatsApp groups, beauty blogs, and influencer content an integral part of recovery and repurchase logic.

Moreover, the integration of emotion-specific and communal coping pathways presents a culturally valid model of consumer behavior that addresses limitations in Western-centric literature. The interdependent self-construal that typifies Indian consumers amplifies the social dimension of coping and decision-making (Shavitt et al., 2006).

Summary of Core Empirical Relationships

Predict or	Mediator	Outco me	Path Coeffic ient (β)	Signific ance
Anger	Complaini ng	Repurc hase Intention	0.42	p < .01

Regret	Positive Reinterpretation	Repurchase Intention	0.37	p < .01
Regret	Mental Disengagement	Repurchase Intention	-0.31	p < .05
Anger	Social Support Seeking	Repurchase Intention	0.35	p < .05
Communal Coping (mediator)	—	Repurchase Intention	0.39	p < .01

These findings reinforce the study's theoretical premise that coping especially communal coping is the behavioral bridge between post-purchase emotions and future loyalty behavior.

Implications

The findings of this study yield several important implications for both academic theory and business practice. By uncovering how anger and regret elicit different coping pathways and how communal coping influences repurchase behavior, the study contributes to a more culturally attuned understanding of post-dissatisfaction consumer decision-making. The implications outlined here aim to bridge the gap between conceptual insights and actionable strategies in the skincare product domain.

Theoretical Implications

Expanding Emotion-Centered Consumer Behavior Models

This study reinforces the growing recognition that negative post-purchase emotions are discrete, not uniform, and that anger and regret activate functionally distinct coping mechanisms. In doing so, it adds nuance to traditional satisfaction-loyalty models, offering a multi-stage emotion coping behavior framework that builds on Appraisal Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and Consumer Emotion Theory (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005).

Introducing Communal Coping to Consumer Research

One of the paper's key contributions is its empirical demonstration that communal coping a process of shared emotional management through peer engagement and social feedback is a powerful cultural mechanism influencing consumer behavior. This supports the adaptation of Communal Coping Theory (Lyons et al., 1998) to the consumer context and encourages scholars to consider social emotion-regulation processes as part of post-dissatisfaction models.

Cultural Grounding of Consumer Decision-Making

By studying Indian consumers a population rooted in collectivist values the study validates the idea that coping is socially constructed and culturally moderated. It aligns with cross-cultural theories (Hofstede, 2001; Shavitt et al.,

2006) and enriches global marketing literature by showing that consumers do not always cope in isolation, especially in emotionally charged product categories like skincare.

Managerial Implications

Emotion - Sensitive Complaint Handling

Marketers must recognize that anger and regret require different service recovery strategies. For angry consumers, swift and personalized complaint resolution such as live support or immediate redressal is key. Regretful consumers, however, need emotionally supportive communication, such as empathetic follow-up messages or educational content that validates their concerns and reduces self-blame.

Activate Peer-Based Brand Support Systems

The strong predictive power of communal coping suggests that brands should facilitate peer engagement as part of their recovery and loyalty strategies. This can include:

- Creating brand-hosted community forums for skincare users.
- Encouraging user-generated testimonials about dissatisfaction and recovery.
- Promoting micro-influencers who demonstrate how to process dissatisfaction constructively.

By supporting emotional repair in social contexts, brands foster shared trust and resilience.

Leverage Positive Reinterpretation to Retain Loyalty

Since positive reinterpretation enhances repurchase intention, brands can actively foster this through:

- Follow-up emails reframing dissatisfaction as a learning step ("Here's how to make it work for you").
- Content marketing that shares stories of "initial disappointment turned success."
- Brand tone that encourages experimentation and acknowledges human variability in product experience.

This turns emotional discomfort into a brand loyalty opportunity.

Monitor and Engage in Online Peer Narratives

Given the role of social validation in consumer emotion regulation, brands must actively monitor conversations on forums, WhatsApp groups, Reddit, and beauty platforms. When communal sentiment is positive, it can be leveraged for word-of-mouth amplification. When it's negative, timely intervention through brand ambassadors or customer care teams is vital to avoid echo-chamber discontent and switching behavior.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusion

This study investigated how emotion-specific coping strategies, particularly communal coping, mediate the relationship between consumer dissatisfaction and repurchase intention in the Indian skincare context. Drawing on Appraisal Coping Theory and Communal Coping Theory, the research demonstrates that negative emotions like anger and regret activate distinct coping pathways ranging from complaining and seeking social

support to mental disengagement and positive reinterpretation.

The findings underscore that coping is not only emotion-specific but culturally embedded. Indian consumers, shaped by collectivist norms, frequently rely on social dialogue and peer engagement to process dissatisfaction. This communal response plays a vital role in either facilitating repurchase or amplifying dissatisfaction through shared narratives. Notably, strategies such as positive reinterpretation and peer reassurance emerged as powerful predictors of brand forgiveness and continued loyalty.

By introducing communal coping as a mediating mechanism, the study enriches existing post-purchase behavior models and offers a more holistic, culturally grounded understanding of how consumers emotionally and socially navigate dissatisfaction in high-involvement categories like skincare. It also offers actionable insights for marketers seeking to design emotionally intelligent and socially responsive brand engagement strategies.

Future Research Directions

While the current study adds new layers to emotion - coping research, it also opens avenues for further inquiry:

1. Cross-cultural validation: Future studies can replicate this model in individualistic cultures (e.g., the U.S. or Europe) to examine how communal coping varies by cultural context and self-construal.
2. Additional emotional variables: Expanding the emotional lens beyond anger and regret to include disappointment, shame, or anxiety could offer a richer understanding of consumer experience.
3. Longitudinal research: Coping and loyalty are dynamic; tracking emotional and behavioral responses over time would provide insights into sustained brand engagement or switching behavior.
4. Qualitative exploration: In-depth interviews or digital ethnography could explore the nuances of peer influence, particularly how opinions formed in social media groups shape consumer emotion and action.
5. Platform-specific analysis: Future work may assess the differential impact of digital communities (e.g., Reddit, WhatsApp, Instagram) in moderating dissatisfaction outcomes.
6. Coping segmentation models: Using cluster analysis or latent class modeling, researchers can identify distinct consumer segments based on dominant coping styles and emotional triggers.

In sum, this paper not only underscores the emotional complexity of post-purchase behavior but also reinforces the need for culturally responsive consumer research frameworks that integrate emotions, coping, and social context as central constructs in consumer decision-making.

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